On their arrival in their new home of California, Brenda and Clark Triton suddenly die in a car crash. One thing leads to another, and Luke and his new friend Apollo end up joining Phoenix's family and becoming Trucy's older brothers.

Slice of life stories about the Wright family, from Luke's arrival in America to AJ:AA.

AU from end of Lost/Unwound Future / Turnabout Succession (past)
The car sped down the quiet road, trees whipping past too quickly to focus on in the dark night. The bright headlights shone tirelessly on the asphalt ahead, the only source of light on the entire stretch of woodland road.

"You're sure you'll be alright if I take a nap?" the passenger in the front seat asked, hands fiddling with a string of wooden beads around one wrist as she watched her husband nervously.

The driver smiled, shooting his wife a quick grin. "I'll be fine!" he cried, making efforts to stay quiet. "It's the middle of the day for us still, right?"

"Even so," the passenger mumbled, turning to peek into the seat behind them. "It's still dark enough to trick the brain into realising otherwise."

There was a short pause, and the driver raised an eyebrow. "How is he?"

The passenger smiled at her teenage son slumped against the car window, teddy bear clutched tightly in his hands and mouth hanging open slightly, drooling on his sleeve. "Fast asleep still." She giggled softly to herself. "He'll be the only one of us awake when we arrive at the next hotel!"

"Poppycock," the driver replied with a smile. "That's the whole reason we decided to drive this last part of the way, isn't it?"

"I thought that was to get us used to driving on the 'wrong' side of the road?" the passenger shot back with a smirk.

The driver shrugged. "Same thing, isn't-," he began to say, but cut himself off as he noticed an anomaly in the silhouette of the road ahead. "What the-!?"

With a roar, a dark mass slammed into view, giving the smaller car enough time only to swerve rapidly to the left before it was upon them.

With a short squeal of tires, the woodland road was silent once more.

August 26, 2:36PM

Courthouse Library

Phoenix Wright sighed as he collected his printout from the library printers. 'Hours of searching, and this is all I find on her?' He shot a glare at the fifteen-year-old article in his hands before shoving it into his suitcase, trying to ignore the fact that said suitcase was far more empty and lightweight than it used to be. He self-consciously pulled the blue beanie on his head down over his eyebrows as he turned and headed for the door, hoping he hadn't been recognised. But, of course, who was likely to notice the famous blue-suited, spiky-haired lawyer underneath the loose hoodie and cyan hat?

Said ex-lawyer had come here straight from the detention center, and had the strong feeling he would be going back there very soon. Valant wouldn't be held there forever, and everyone knew it. There simply wasn't nearly enough proof as to which Gramarye had ultimately done the deed, and it
seemed certain Magnifi's murder would go unsolved forever... that is, unless Phoenix was able to talk a confession out of the only one that was still around. Valant had been very informative as to what had happened to Thalassa Gramarye, Trucy's mother, so he knew it was possible to coerce information out of him. If only more of it was helpful, though.

As he strode out onto the streets, Phoenix thought over the article he had found. It was a short biography on the lone daughter of the great Magnifi Gramarye, headed by a picture apparently taken by her husband, Zak... or, rather, her second husband. The article itself had little more than rumours on her first one, so Phoenix wasn't going to take it to heart without further proof first. It was a pity Trucy was so young when she'd died, and kept in the dark as to what happened for that matter, or he could ask her his remaining questions about the mysterious Thalassa. 'I just know this whole Magnifi case has something more to do with her than blackmail material... If only I had more evidence!' For now, though, he had a little girl to pick up from school. "Thank goodness for Trucy... if it weren't for her, I don't think I'd be able to continue this investigation..."

August 26, 3:02PM
Summer Boulevard Elementary School
Front Gate

"Daddy!"

Phoenix laughed as the boisterous eight-year-old pounced on his shoulders, clinging to his neck with a tight hug. "I take it you had fun today?" he asked with a grin, hugging his daughter back.

"Uh-huh!" Trucy replied, jumping back and grabbing Phoenix's hand as they began their walk to the nearest bus-stop on their way home. "There's been another attack by the demon of Forest Road!"

"Oh really?" Phoenix asked, resisting the urge to roll his eyes. "Every story of this so-called demon sounds more and more like a Scooby-Doo episode..."

"Jinxie says it claimed two people this time," Trucy excitedly continued, tugging at her collar where her red cape usually rested, "and there was a kid who just barely escaped with their life!"

Phoenix nodded, barely listening. "Uh huh. And the police still haven't found anything on this case, I presume?"

Trucy tapped her chin in thought. "Yeah, I think so. Jinxie says they'd have to, um, 'exercise' the road to stop the disappearances."

"I think you mean 'exorcise', Truce," Phoenix corrected with a gentle smile. "It's what you call getting rid of demons."

"Right! That was it!" the eight-year-old cheered. "Jinxie's so smart about these kind of things!"

Phoenix decided not to comment, thinking on the more serious news that somewhere out there was another child now parentless. "The poor kid," he mused aloud. "It would be terrible to lose both your parents at the same time like that, no matter how old you are."
"It's okay, Daddy," Trucy assured her adoptive father, stopping him dead in his tracks as she hugged his waist tightly. "The police will exercise the demon for them, won't they?"

Unable to resist a smile, Phoenix petted his daughter's bare head, looking down on the bright brown eyes gazng back up at him. "I'm sure they will," he replied, then reached down and picked Trucy off the pavement, getting a squeal of delight from the girl in return. "Now, a change of subject!" he announced. "Daddy has another secret mission tomorrow, so you have to be a good girl and go to bed on time, okay?"

Trucy rolled her eyes with an exaggerated sigh, clinging to her father's neck and looking back the way they'd come. "Sure, Daddy," she mumbled in a monotone, adding with a whine "Why can't I go on your secret missions too?"

"Believe me, I'd let you if I could," Phoenix replied, patting the girl's back where her brand-new school blouse still bore creases. "But you have school, so I can't." 'Not to mention, it's for your own safety if my suspicions about Kristoph are correct...'

"Fiiiiiiine," Trucy sighed dramatically, and said nothing the rest of the way to the bus-stop.

August 27, 8:56AM
Wright Talent Agency
Phoenix's Office

"You're sure you can't have a word with them over the phone?"

"Sorry, pal," Detective Dick Gumshoe's voice echoed through the phone line. "I could do it for you yesterday because I was there to talk 'em 'round in person, but I ain't got the time for that today!" He sighed the world-weary sigh Phoenix had heard far too many times since the incident in April. "I'm really sorry, pal. This case is really important, and it just came up yesterday...! I... really wish I could help..."

Even though it couldn't be seen through the phone, Phoenix shook his head. "No, it's fine, Detective." He felt a little guilty for playing to poor Gumshoe's lingering guilt to call in favours like this, but he couldn't see any other way to continue his investigation without his badge. "I'll find some other way to talk to Valant again." 'It's not like I have nothing but time to work on this investigation, anyway.' "Good luck on your case, by the way. Is Edgeworth working on it with you?"

Gumshoe huffed. "You know I can't tell you that, pal! Even if you were still a lawyer!" He suddenly paused, sounding nervous. "Er, not that I'm rubbing that in or anything..."

"Please, it's fine," Phoenix insisted, unconsciously reaching for the spot on his chest where his badge used to sit as he leaned back in the chair behind his desk. "Oh yeah, Edgeworth isn't even in the country at the moment, is he? Of course he's not working with you. And von Karma is probably still working with Interpol, huh?"

Gumshoe chuckled, and Phoenix could imagine the trenchcoated detective shrugging with that wide grin of his. "We don't have a prosecutor assigned yet anyways! This one's been going on so long, I actually replaced the previous detective on it. Something about fresh looks finding new evidence."
'And there is Gumshoe's classic running of the mouth... too bad it's not helpful to me anymore. At least I know he's not working with Gavin the Younger.' "I'll let you get back to work. Say hi to Maggey for me, will you?"

"Sure thing, pal!" Gumshoe replied cheerily. "You give your kid a hug from Uncle Gumshoe!"

'I might if she'd ever met you properly,' Phoenix wryly thought to himself as he hung up the phone, pushing himself off his chair as he began to pace his small office. 'Dammit. No trip to the detention center today after all.' He dropped his cell phone on the coffee table next to Mia's old office phone, something he still resisted using due to the lingering memory of the time it had been tapped, and its owner found dead not far away. 'What should I do now, Chief? What did you do when your investigation into Bluecorp stalled?' Very little about this room had changed since Mia's death, from the desk and bookcase of legal books to the movie poster on the wall. Perhaps the most dramatic was when Trucy had determinedly dragged Charley the plant out into the front room to provide a 'cheerful atmosphere' for their customers. Said front room was already drastically different from the days when Phoenix had used it himself as Mia's junior partner, or even when Maya claimed it as hers in the years inbetween (The piano she'd added was certainly proving useful, however). Not that Phoenix was going to stop his eight-year-old self-proclaimed 'professional' from trying to attract new clients; On the contrary, he was finding the rapid changes to their small apartment upstairs and the reception area he'd once worked in were helping ease the transition from 'lawyer' to 'pianist/professional poker player'. 'If only I could bring myself to do something about this room, too.'

Phoenix was startled out of his thoughts by a ringing phone, which he quickly identified as the office phone. 'Please don't be a reporter. I don't want to have to unplug this thing again!' He grabbed the handset off the hook in one smooth motion and brought it to his ear. "Wright Talent Agency, can we help you?"

'Please don't ask for "the Forgin' Attorney". I will hurt someone.'

"Mister Wright?" said a smooth voice with a distinct English accent. "I hope I have not called at an inconvenient time for you."

Giving a sigh of relief as he recognised his caller, Phoenix shook his head. "No, now's perfect. I'm literally doing nothing important." He frowned in thought. "Actually, why are you calling, Professor Layton?"

Hershel Layton gave a rare sigh of his own. "I'm not sure if my last letter to you has arrived yet. Are you aware of the Tritons' plans to leave England?"

"Oh, it arrived just the other day," Phoenix replied, rubbing his chin in thought. "I haven't written a reply yet. They're moving to America, right? You said soon-ish?"

"I watched them sail off just last week," the Professor explained. "Luke was rather hurried packing his things, but he promised to mail me their new address once he got off the boat, and I thought it rather prudent to pass it on to you."

At this, Phoenix had to scratch his head. "Um, not to be rude Professor, but shouldn't Luke do that himself?"

There was a pause. "I'm afraid I must ask a favour of you, Mister Wright."

'Wait... what?"

"The Tritons are scheduled to be moving in around now. I looked up a map from the library, and their new home doesn't appear to be too far from Los Angeles."
Phoenix raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Wow, there's a co-incidence."

There was another short pause before the Professor continued. "I admit, I worry about Luke, especially in these first few weeks while he will be settling in to his new home. I trust his parents to look out for him - his father is a good friend of mine - but, and I tell you this in the strictest of confidence, Luke and Clark have not been getting on very well as of late."

'Clark being Luke's father, I presume,' Phoenix thought, and couldn't resist a smile as an image came to mind from only last year, of young Luke running to his beloved mentor, tears in his eyes of pure relief to see him made of flesh and not gold. Not that they would realise until a little later that he had never been made of gold, but that was neither here nor there. "You want me to drop in on them?" he asked. "Check Luke's okay?"

"If you could," Professor Layton asked, sounding slightly relieved. "I'm sure Luke has told his parents about our adventure together in Labyrinthia, and I have informed Clark myself that I have friends in America I might ask to offer help should they need it."

Phoenix chuckled. "Glad to be of assistance." He thought for a moment. "I should bring Trucy 'round with me; I'm sure she'd love to meet him."

"Indeed," the Professor replied, a smile in his voice. "I don't believe Luke has read your last letter to us, so you may have to explain to him your new circumstances."

"Right," Phoenix muttered, resisting a wince. 'I knew I shouldn't have waited so long to write...' It was difficult enough explaining things to himself, let alone a twelve-year-old friend. Or, would Luke be thirteen by now? "I'll grab my notepad and get that address off you."

Professor Layton softly laughed. "Much obliged, Mister Wright."

View the Court Record
"So your friend might be going to my school?" Trucy asked, bouncing along the pavement at just the right pace to make her tiny cape flap behind her like open wings.

"Possibly," Phoenix replied, smiling down at his daughter and patting her red silk hat, which was jammed tightly on her head so it didn't fly off. "They might not even be there yet. We'll have to see when we get there."

Trucy grinned. "That's okay! I can always hand out flyers for the Wonder Bar while we're here!" She patted the small satchel at her waist, full of home-designed flyers for her regular weekly performances. "Then this won't be a wasted trip!"

Phoenix chuckled, once again marvelling to himself how business-savvy his little magician was at such a young age.

"What was his name again?" Trucy added.


"Unless he's had a growth spurt in the past ten months," Phoenix said with an amused smile, "he shouldn't be. He's short, but he is about four or five years older than you, after all."

The numbers on the houses they passed were getting closer to their target, and Trucy began to read them aloud. "Eighteen-thirty-eight... eighteen-forty... eighteen-forty-two... Are we close yet?"

"Eighteen-forty-six," Phoenix muttered, pointing to a blue house just up ahead, in front of which was a policeman and two civilians, loudly arguing. "That must be it. The policeman isn't a good sign, though..."

As the Wrights got closer, the raised voices of the trio ahead slowly became legible. "I sold this house to them, and I am handing the keys only to them, not to some namby-pamby moron dressed up as a cop!"

"Whether they had the keys yet or not," the policeman argued with an amazing calm, "this house was their legal property and thus now belongs to the state! You are obstructing justice, ma'am!"

"Obstructing justice my behind!" an angry woman in red shouted. "This house ain't got nothing to do with the police! How can I trust anything some rando waiting for me on the street says!?"

The woman's friend, a balding man in a green jogging suit, nodded firmly. "We need more proof than just your word. We're not leaving until the appointed time for the handover is up."

Phoenix patted Trucy in a silent instruction to stay put, and stepped towards the trio, clearing his
"throat. "Excuse me? Can I help?"

"Unless you're Clark Triton," the woman angrily spat, "then no."

'Triton... So this is Luke's house. I was afraid of that.' "I'm not Mister Triton, true, but I am a... friend of the family," Phoenix explained. "Has... something happened to them?"

The man and woman stalked off to a nearby car while the policeman sighed. "I apologise you had to find out this way, sir," he said. "Have you heard of the recent accident on Forest Road?"

Phoenix's eyes widened in shock, and he heard Trucy gasping behind him. "That was the Tritons?" he breathed.

The policeman nodded, grimacing in sympathy. "Mister and Missus Triton are officially considered dead." He shot an angry glare at the couple sitting in their car nearby and added, "My job was to follow the schedule we found in their belongings and add up their possessions for processing."

'Frankly, I couldn't care less about their stuff!' "What about Luke?" Phoenix asked, trying not to sound frantic. "How is he? Where is he?"

"The boy is alive," the policeman assured the ex-lawyer. "I'm afraid I don't know where he is, though. You'd have to talk to the detective in charge, I think."

Phoenix nodded. "And who's that? I might have to call in another favour with Gumshoe after all...'

Shaking his head, the policeman only said, "Can't tell you that, sir. This case is a matter of total secrecy!"

"But that's not fair!" Trucy piped up, charging to Phoenix's side and holding her hands on her hips with a pout on her lips. "You tell us to talk to someone, but won't say who they are!? How are we supposed to find him?"

"Sorry, miss," the man said, not sounding sorry at all. "Not my job."

Trucy growled in frustration, but Phoenix calmly turned and guided her back down the road with a hand on her shoulder. "No use arguing with him," he told her.

"But what do we do?" the eight-year-old asked. "Your friend is missing! How are we supposed to find him?"

Phoenix grinned. "Never underestimate your Daddy, Truce. I'll find him. You can count on that."

August 27, 9:24AM

LA General Hospital

Ward 278

"Ah, you're awake! Welcome back to the world of the living! We were worried about you!"

"W... Where am I? What happened!?”
"A hospital, kiddo. Los Angeles. Do you know where that is?"

"Y-yeah, of course... Where's my mum and dad?"

"..."

"Miss? What... what happened to my parents!?"

"... There'll be a detective along to speak with you in a moment, kiddo. He'll explain everything."

Luke Triton fidgeted nervously in his hospital bed, alone in the quiet room. His left arm itched under the thick plaster cast that had been set on it, and his head felt cold without the familiar weight of his blue cap. None of this was enough to distract him from the dark feeling of dread that had been building in his stomach since he woke up only minutes earlier. *This is not how I imagined my first day in my new hometown going...'*

The door on his left creaked open, and Luke looked up to see a tall, dark-haired man with wide shoulders peeking his head in, grinning widely in the boy's direction. "Hey there!" he said, and sidled into the room, tugging his dirty brown-green coat away from the door as he carefully closed it behind him. "I guess I've been left with the job of explainin' what's going on to you, pal."

Luke frowned and looked away, then mentally admonished himself for his terrible manners and forcibly softened his glare. "I guess," he mumbled.

The man pulled a chair up to Luke's bedside and sat himself down, looking a little more nervous now than cheery. "My name's Dick Gumshoe. I'm a detective," he said, holding out his right hand to shake.

Forcing a small smile, Luke returned the gesture. "Luke Triton," he replied. He found himself mentally comparing this American detective to the ones he'd met back home, and decided he was about as openly friendly as Grosky but much less energetic about it, like Chelmey. *Not that I can say anything for sure after less than a minute knowing him, of course.*

"Yeah, I know who you are, pal," the detective replied, looking sad. "Listen, the nurse said you don't remember what happened. Could you tell me what you do remember?"

Luke frowned to himself in thought. "We were driving to our new home... Mum said we were going to stay in a hotel until our furniture arrived. We were driving through the night. I went to sleep in the car..." He paused, his hand going to his face as he felt tears burning at the corners of his eyes. "I... I don't..."

"Hey, hey, it's okay, pal!" Gumshoe interrupted, patting Luke's shoulder in a comforting gesture. "I figured you might not remember anyway, but I had to ask, y'know?" When this apparently failed to comfort the now-sobbing teen, he began to visibly panic, clutching his hands together in his lap. "Uh, kid, I'm really sorry about this..."

"They're dead, aren't they?" Luke managed to ask in shaky breaths, face hidden in his one free hand.

Gumshoe froze in shock, and took a few moments to recover, returning to patting Luke's shoulder above his cast. "I really am sorry, pal."

Luke just nodded. After a moment to compose himself, he took a deep breath and asked, "What happened to them?"
"Car accident," Gumshoe replied softly. "We're still working out the details, though."

'That makes sense,' Luke thought. 'I can't think of anything else it could have been.'

"The other car disappeared from the scene long before we arrived," Gumshoe continued, his hand moving to rest on Luke's right hand. "We got you and your stuff out of there, but there wasn't any sign of your mom and dad, pal."

At that, Luke paused. "No sign...?" he repeated.

"It doesn't look likely we'll find 'em, either," Gumshoe sadly added with a shrug. "There's been loads of accidents a lot like this one on that road, all in the past year. Not one's been solved yet."

"How many?" Luke asked, snapping his determined gaze up to meet the detective's. "How many are missing?"

Gumshoe shook his head, giving Luke a suddenly stern look. "Hey, pal, this is an ongoing police investigation! I can't tell you that kind of stuff!"

"Just 'cause you didn't find 'em," the boy insisted, gesturing wildly with his right arm, "doesn't mean they're dead! My mum and dad might still be out there!"

The detective shook his head, standing up from his chair. "I'm sorry, pal. I didn't want to share the gory details cuz these are your parents 'n all," he said, "but we found a lot of blood at the scene, more than enough for two adults to have bled out. We aren't gonna find them alive."

Luke's determination faded, and he returned to staring at his lap sadly.

"I won't bug you anymore, since you don't remember anything," Gumshoe continued in a sadder tone. "Good luck, pal." With that, he turned and left the room.

Thirteen-year-old Luke Triton curled up into a ball and wished desperately he was back in England. 'If this is a nightmare... I want to wake up now... Please...’

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Luke never saw the friendly detective after that first terrible day in the hospital. The nurses, as nice as they were, tried to keep him company between all their other duties, and a series of social workers came by to ask him questions and fill out paperwork and tests while they decided what to do with him. As it turned out, their eventual answer was a local boarding school, which Luke had more than passed the test for applying to. He wasn't sure what exactly that would mean, since this would be his first time in a public school after being home-schooled since nursery.

A short woman came by at the end of Luke's week in hospital to take him to his new, albeit temporary, 'home', packing up Luke's massive suitcase with his clothes and scarce personal items that had been recovered from the car, including two much smaller suitcases with small paper tags labelled "Clark Triton" and "Brenda Triton" respectively.

"You can call me Nanny K, dear," she said. "Or if you're uncomfortable with that, Nancy, since that's my name."

"Um, alright Miss Nancy," Luke had replied as he struggled to pull on his shirt over his cast.

Nancy laughed. "Oh, dear, no-one calls me that! Just Nancy is fine!"

With one of Luke's arms out of action, Nancy carried the bags herself on their way out of the hospital (Luke insisted on carrying his teddy however), and piled them into a small, yellow car. Once she had ensured her young charge was buckled into the passenger seat, she set off down the road.

Twenty minutes later, Luke found himself staring up at an iron gate, adorned with the words "TURNER BOARDING SCHOOL". Beyond, a rectangular building three stories tall, resembling a block of flats except for its lack of balconies. He found himself gulping in trepidation.

A bell rang from somewhere in the distance, and Nancy looked at her watch as she came up beside Luke with his larger trunk. "Oop, ten o'clock," she narrated. "That'll be third period starting over in the classrooms." She reached over to a small speaker box on the brick wall surrounding the gate and pressed the button. "Hugo, I'm back with our new student!"

"Gotcha, Ms. K!" came the voice of a young man through the scratchy speaker, followed by a loud buzzing noise. Nancy pushed the gate open and gestured for Luke to follow her, the buzzing sound quitting as the gate began to swing closed again behind them.

"You did very well on your entrance exam, young Mister Triton," Nancy said as they walked towards the large building before them.

Luke hugged his teddy tighter. "Um, thank you."

"The Principal decided, instead of putting you in Eighth Grade with your age group," Nancy explained with a cheery smile, "you're going to be going in with the Sophomores! You're a
surprisingly intelligent lad, aren't you? Skipping two grades at once!"

"Uh..." Luke mumbled. 'Eighth grade would be Year 8, I suppose. That was the year Mum thought I might go into, right?' "Mi-, um, Nancy, what's a 'sophomore'?'"

Nancy laughed. "Tenth Grade, dear!" she answered. "I forgot those are terms we only use here in America!"

Luke blinked in surprise. 'Tenth...!? The headmaster thinks I'm that good?'

Nancy led Luke into an elevator, and they travelled in silence up to the third floor. Luke looked around in wonder as they exited into a long hallway, polished black doors lining the walls at regular intervals for almost the entire length of the building. Below his tattered brown shoes was a soft yellow carpet, and fluorescent lights dotted the white ceiling. The doors were labelled with plaques, each displaying a three-digit number, and Luke quickly noticed they all began with 3. Every sixth room on his left was instead labelled with a shower-head symbol, with the door next to it displaying a stick figure indicating a toilet. His mind already wandering back to London, Luke found he had to restrain himself from thinking up a puzzle about the door numbers to send back home.

To their right, almost at the end of the hallway, Nancy stopped in front of a door and pulled out a key from a pocket, which she used to open the door. "Here we are, dear," she announced. "Your new room!" She stepped back and gestured for Luke to go in ahead.

Stepping into the room, Luke was first struck by how similar it was at first glance to his old room back in Misthallery. The entire room was decorated in shades of pastel blue, with a medium-sized window on the opposite wall and a single, small bed taking up about a third of the room's total width. Opposite the bed was a small desk and accompanying chair, a set of wooden drawers, and a plastic rail with a handful of wire coathangers dangling from it. Luke walked to the middle of the empty space, clutching his teddy tightly. 'My new home, I guess. Better get used to it.'

Nancy set Luke's suitcase down by the drawers. "Why don't you start getting settled in, and I'll bring up the rest of your bags, dear." Smiling at the boy, she plucked a small key off the top of the drawers and held it out for him to take. "And by the way, this is your room key. If you lose it, you come talk to me."

Luke watched the kind lady leave, then sat down on the bed, clutching the key in his fist and his teddy in his arms. 'I should probably start unpacking my clothes,' he told himself. Even so, he didn't move from his perch.

September 3, 12:03PM

Sirius Turner Boarding School for Boys

Cafeteria

The hallways were busy and loud, full of boys anywhere between the ages of eleven and eighteen all hanging out and chatting with each other. Lockers lining the walls clanged as their owners opened and closed them, and the crowds slowly but surely emptied in the direction of the second-largest room in the entire school building.
Fresh off a busy morning deciding on his class schedule, Luke warily picked his way through the queues for food that circled the cafeteria. He couldn't help but feel out of place in his blue cap and jacket when everyone else was in black uniforms, but Nancy had said they'd find him a uniform from their storeroom after lunch, so he was still in his old clothes for now. As he grabbed a tray and picked a line, he could feel the stares he attracted as an out-of-uniform stranger with a broken left arm, especially one towards the younger end of the age range.

It was difficult to find a place to sit among the crowded tables, especially while holding his tray one-handed, but Luke eventually found an empty corner to sit at. While normally he would have been trying to make friends and allies, he found he didn't want to deal with any more social interaction than he had to today, so he ate alone, doing his best to ignore the stares burning into him from all sides.

A body dropped into the chair opposite Luke, and he looked up to see an older teenager, arms crossed and resting on the table as he leered down at the boy through a thick fringe of black hair. "You new, kid?" he said, more of an observation than a question. "You can't be local, you gotta be a dormer. What happened to your arm?"

Luke instinctively held his broken arm closer to his body, but tried to keep up the gentlemanly demeanour the Professor had taught him. "I broke it," he said simply, returning as quickly as he could to his food.

The older teen scoffed. "I can see that," he cried. "What'd you do? Some colossal accident that pissed off your parents so hard they packed you off to boarding school?" He laughed, unnoticing of Luke's wince at the fictional scenario. "We've had that happen here before! Was it crashing a car? It's usually crashing a car."

"Y'see," Fringe continued, "I saw you haven't got a uniform yet, so I figured you were put here in a hurry, and the school year's only just started too, so there had to be a good reason you were moved here of all places! And you're a rich kid, right? Only rich kids get transferred to boarding school!" He laughed again, leaning back in his chair with his arms behind his head, grinning smugly. "The broken arm gave the whole story away, though. Yep, I am a genius at figuring these things out! C'mon, tell me how right I am!"

Luke was still frozen with his fork resting on his plate, too focussed on keeping outwardly calm and above all tear-free to react.

"Hey, ignoramus!"

The older teen quickly stood, chair scraping across the floor loudly, and Luke looked up to see two other boys about the same age as Fringe rapidly approaching.

"Can't you see the new kid wants to be alone right now?" one of the approaching boys cried, pointing fiercely at Fringe as he stepped up to the table end between the other teen and Luke.

"This ain't got nothing to do with you, Space Cadet!" Fringe retaliated, waving the two boys off. "We're just talking!"

The second boy, brown hair sticking up at the front like a pair of antennae, crossed his arms. "Didn't look like it from where we were sitting."
Space Cadet nodded, adjusting the visor sticking out of his mop of black hair. "Looked more like you making hurtful assumptions again. *Sherlock* Holmes you are not, Ernest."

"You can both can it!" Fringe cried with a snort. "You're just jealous I'm descended from the greatest detective of all time!" Even so, he stepped away from the table and stalked off, throwing a hand at them dismissively. "Ah, screw you guys!"

Immediately, Antenna Hair turned to face Luke, concern in his eyes. "Are you okay?"

Luke nodded, steadying his breathing as he noticed how rapid it had become in the tense moment.

Space Cadet looked around, frowning in thought, then leaned on the table where Fringe had been sitting. "Hey, is it alright if my friend and I sit here? We won't talk if you don't want to."

"Yeah, no-one talks to us," Antenna Hair added with a chuckle. "You won't have to worry about people approaching you anymore."

"Mm-hmm," Luke muttered, before taking a deep breath and nodding more energetically. "I would appreciate that. Thank you."

Space Cadet grinned, giving Luke a thumbs up. "Cool!" He plopped down in his seat and waved at his friend, leaning back in the chair. "Apollo, go get my tray, will you?"

"Why do I have to go get the trays?" Antenna Hair protested with a frown. "'Cause you're standing up," Space Cadet explained, holding his arms behind his head cockily.

Rolling his eyes, Antenna Hair, or rather Apollo, walked off. "Be back in a bit."

There was silence for a few moments as Luke returned to his food. Space Cadet shifted in his seat to lean on the table, staring off after his friend with amusement, and Luke supposed Apollo was having as much trouble carrying two trays as Luke had with just his one. 'I suppose that would be an amusing sight,' he thought, but stuck to his own lunch rather than turn to watch.

Eventually Apollo returned, dropping a tray with a half-eaten lunch in front of his friend with no small amount of resentment. Space Cadet grinned and gave a mock bow. "Why, thank you Jeeves!" he said in an exaggerated Queen's English accent, which Apollo muttered darkly at as he took his seat beside his friend. Luke restrained a giggle.

"You just did that to watch me struggle, didn't you?" Apollo said to his friend. "You can be such a jerk, Clay."

Space Cadet, Clay, scoffed, saying "You know you love me!" before shoving a piece of toast into his mouth.

Luke smiled. *I like these two,* he decided. *They seem trustworthy, and they aren't treating me differently... They helped even though they know nothing about me.*' Having enough of his food, he placed his fork down on his plate and looked across at the pair, hands in his lap. "Are you two always like this?"

"As in, Clay annoying the ever-loving hell out of me?" Apollo asked dryly.

"Ha!" his friend cried. "You take everything so seriously, Apollo! You're just asking to be made fun of!"
Luke restrained another giggle, then held out his hand. "I should introduce myself. My name is Luke Triton!"

Clay didn't hesitate to reach out and shake the offered hand, grinning widely. "Clay Terran!" he replied, then gestured to his friend. "This is Apollo Justice. He's a bit stuck-up, but I like him."

"I'm not stuck up!" Apollo protested.

"Where are you from, by the way?" Clay continued, ignoring Apollo as he gazed curiously at Luke. "You sound English."


Both Clay and Apollo reacted with surprise, Apollo's eyes bugging out while Clay's eyebrows shot up. "Huh," Clay muttered.

"If you're English," Apollo asked in confusion, "what are you doing in California!?"


"Ah!" Clay cried, his smile returning to his face. "That explains Einstein's terrible trainwreck of assumptions earlier!" He laughed heartily.

"So which grade are you in?" Apollo asked, attention still on Luke. "Sixth? Seventh?"

Luke had to think a moment to translate the question in his head and retrieve the answer. "Um, tenth, actually."

Apollo sputtered, almost jumping out of his chair in surprise. "You're a-!?"

Clay gave a more subdued, thoughtful tap on his chin. "You don't look our age," he mused.

"I'll be fourteen in November," Luke boasted, puffing out his tiny chest. "But I took a test, and the headmaster thinks I belong in Yea-, I mean, Tenth Grade."

Clay grinned. "Thought so. You're one of them smart cookies."

Luke smiled in silent thanks. "I'm still moving in to the dormitory," he said. "Do you two also stay there?"

Apollo looked confused, but obviously elected not to say anything. Clay nodded. "Yep, we're dormers. If you're a sophomore, you'll be on the same level as us, too." He snorted in laughter through his cocky grin, then added "Actually, come drop by my dorm after school's finished! Room three-twelve! Apollo and I can show you around!"

"Sure," Apollo agreed. "That sounds like fun."

Luke nodded. "Alright, it's a deal!"
The colour scheme of Clay Terran's room was almost impossible to see past the multiple space-themed posters placed on every flat vertical space within reach (Luke was beginning to suspect this was the origin of the 'Space Cadet' nickname). Although his room, layout identical to Luke's, had a window on the wall opposite the door, it looked out onto the school building itself, the open square full of students and parents on their way home at the end of the day. A fold-up stool sat in the middle of a sea of books and papers, and the space on top of the drawers was full of handmade models of various types of spacecraft, both fictional and non-fictional. It was almost impressive how quickly it had become so messy, given school had been back from summer break for only a week or two.

Apollo was the first to sit down as Clay gestured them in, claiming the stool and kicking away the papers under his feet to make room for himself, clearly at home in his friend's room. Luke followed more gingerly, trying to find spots where he could see glimpses of carpet to put down his feet, while Clay just bounced over to his bed and flopped down on the unmade sheets, laughing as his door closed itself with a thud. "Don't worry about the floor!" he cried, patting the space next to him. "Come sit down, Luke!"

"Seriously," Apollo added with a wry smirk. "It's his own fault he leaves stuff everywhere, so if you ruin something by stepping on it, nobody will blame you."

Luke considered this for a moment before carefully stepping over the crowded floor and sitting on the bed next to the grinning Clay.

"So," Apollo said with a clap of his hands, "has Nanny K given you a tour? It didn't occur to us until later that she might do that."

"A bit," Luke admitted, not wanting to hurt their feelings by admitting Nancy had given him a full tour. "She took me all over getting my classes and uniform sorted out, of course."

Clay shrugged. " Eh, that's fine," he said with a smile, leaning back on his arms. "It's real busy right now anyway, what with the local kids heading home."

"But 'boarding school' is in the name," Luke pointed out with some confusion, looking out the window. "Why are there local kids coming here?"

"It got opened up to them a few years back," Apollo explained, kicking at the papers at his feet. "Apparently they don't get as many dormers as they used to."

Nodding sagely, Clay added "Most of us are either orphans or don't get on with our parents or guardians. Apollo here's one of the former."

Luke blinked in surprise. "Really?"

Apollo sighed. "I have a foster home I go to over breaks, but otherwise I pretty much live here."

"I see," Luke quietly muttered to himself, not noticing the suspicious look Apollo gave him in return.
"Lucky me," Clay laughed, "I get to spend my weekends and breaks back at home, while my Dad asks me questions and tries to be 'hip'." He rolled his eyes exaggeratedly, and Luke giggled. "Not that I go home every weekend, though. Someone needs to entertain Apollo, or he gets lonely." He winked at his friend, who just shook his head in amused exasperation.

"You two must be really close," Luke mused aloud. "How long have you been friends?"

Apollo smiled. "A few years now," he explained. "Clay drags me to the Space Center every so often, and I drag him to the courthouse occasionally, but somehow we're still friends despite all that."

Clay nodded, then turned to Luke. "By the way, you're still moving in, right? We could help you out."

"Thank you," Luke replied with a grateful smile, "but I didn't have much with me. I'm already done." It had been a bittersweet hour or two emptying his few bags and placing his meagre belongings around the small room. Most of what he had was clothes, and the mindless task had given him a lot of time to think, which was the absolute last thing he'd wanted to have to do.

"What about your classes?" Apollo cut in. "You're in our grade. Maybe we share some?"

"That's a good point," Clay agreed.

Luke thought. "I'd have to get my schedule." He slid off Clay's bed and stood on the messy floor. "Would you like to accompany me to my room?"

Apollo smirked in amusement at the phrasing, but restrained himself from outright laughing. "Um, sure," he said.

The sound from outside had died down to only the occasional passing car. After a long discussion working out which classes they shared ("Looks like we share Chemistry." "Yep, you may need to tutor Apollo in that one. He's terrible at it!") and which teachers to be extra careful with ("Hey, isn't that the same English class as you, Clay?" "Uh-oh, you're stuck with the Major! She's ultra strict; Ex-army, they say!"), the three teens had turned conversation again to themselves. To Luke's relief, apart from a quick comment by Clay on the cuteness of the teddy bear on Luke's pillow, his new friends were happy to continue not asking questions about Luke himself, although it was clear to the younger boy that they were quickly growing more and more curious about their new friend.

"Apollo here may be loud," Clay was saying as they discussed an incident during which the two were kicked out of school choir for overuse of their 'Chords of Steel', "but it's really because of his loudness that we even became friends."

"Really?" Luke asked with surprise, seeing Apollo nodding sagely despite the dig at his voice.

"Here's something you won't know:" Clay explained, and Luke noticed his jovial exterior seemed to have vanished for the time being. "A few years back, my mom suddenly got really sick and died."

Luke gasped. "Oh, I'm so sorry!" he cried instinctively.

"I'm fine," Clay insisted, shaking his head. "I was still here when I found out. I got the day off class, but I had to wait for my dad to come get me before I could leave, so I was stuck." He stood up from
his seat on Luke's bed and looked out the window over the front gate below. "That night, I went outside for some air... and Apollo came to check up on me."

Apollo shrugged from the desk chair, blushing in embarrassment as he rubbed the back of his neck. "There were stories all over school of what had happened, and when I saw Clay all on his own, I had to see if he was alright."

Clay turned from the window, giving his friend a sincere smile of thanks. "That was our first ever Chords of Steel workout!"

"Yeah," Apollo mumbled, crossing his arms. "Since we both knew what it was like to lose a parent."

Luke's gaze turned to his violin case, propped up against the wall below the window. "So, um," he said as he turned his attention back to the conversation, "your 'Chords of Steel'... I don't mean to be rude, but isn't it just shouting?"

"Guess so," Apollo admitted, "but it really helps with motivation and getting yourself pumped up for something."

"Mostly we just shout 'I'm fine' until we believe it," Clay added with a smile. "Apollo here plans to use it in his future career, though."

Apollo grinned. "Gotta shout to be heard in a noisy courtroom!"

Luke nodded, remembering the loud and very messy witch trials he'd sat in on back in Labyrinthia. No doubt trials in a more modern-day courtroom were nowhere near as bad as those. They were lucky Mister Wright had been talented enough to make it all work out their way in the end regardless. 'Wait a second...' "Apollo?" he asked. "You want to work in a courtroom?"

"Uh-huh!" Apollo replied, grinning widely. "I'm gonna be a defence lawyer!"

Luke felt his jaw drop open in surprise.

Clay laughed. "Just don't do as badly as your hero did, huh?"

Apollo frowned. "Yeah, yeah, hilarious." He looked back at Luke with a deadly serious look. "One day, I'm gonna be famous and have my picture in all the papers... Then my family's gonna see me and regret letting me go."

Luke cocked his head to one side. "Your family?"

"They abandoned me," Apollo explained, nose crinkling in disgust, then reached into an inside pocket in his uniform's jacket and pulled out a golden bracelet, decorated with an intricate pattern that seemed to resemble repeated eyes. "This is all I have left from them. I'm gonna wear it in court when I grow up and show them what they sent away."

Luke leaned forward in his seat to inspect the bracelet closely, making sure not to reach out to touch it without express permission. "It looks pretty."

"Yeah," Apollo agreed, looking at it fondly before placing it back in his pocket. "They don't let me wear it in class, though."

"As for me," Clay interrupted, "I'm gonna be an astronaut!" He bounced over to Luke, sitting back down on the bed next to him. "My mentor works at the Cosmos Space Center, but they're still working on their first space mission." He puffed out his chest proudly. "When that happens,
everyone will know Mister Starbuck's name!" He looked down at Luke. "What about you? What do you want to be when you grow up?"

Luke thought for a long moment, staring into the distance. "I... haven't really decided," he admitted. "I always thought I'd get to stay in London, solving puzzles and mysteries with the Professor, even once I'd grown up, but..." He shook his head. "I never worked out what I'd be doing outside of that." He sighed. "I don't even get to solve mysteries with the Professor anymore."

"Who's the Professor?" Apollo asked.

Immediately Luke cheered up, fixing his new friends with an excited smile. "Professor Hershel Layton!" he exclaimed. "He's famous back home! He teaches archaeology at a university, but he's the world's best at working out puzzles and mysteries!" He chuckled. "We helped out Scotland Yard with loads of difficult cases! There was the Masked Gentleman of Monte D'Or, and the mystery of the Elysian Box, and most recently the kidnapping of the Prime Minister!"

"Hey, I heard about that one!" Clay cried in astonishment. "You mean to say you were one of the people who found him?"

"Yep!" Luke proudly proclaimed. "I also helped the Professor when he discovered the Golden Garden of Misthallery, and the lost Kingdom of Ambrosia, and the ruins of Akbadain!"

Apollo laughed. "I've never heard of any of those, but it sounds really impressive!"

"It's very impressive!" Luke insisted, arms crossed. "Professor Layton is the best archaeologist in the world!"

"I didn't know you could be this animated!" Clay said with an amused smile. "You must have loved working with this Professor of yours!"

Luke nodded. "Naturally!"

"How did you end up working with this guy, anyway?" Apollo asked.

"He's a-!" Luke began to explain, only to stop and suddenly deflate, all his excitement gone as he stared at the floor. "He... was... a friend of my dad's..."

There was a short silence, Clay and Apollo watching their friend sympathetically. Eventually, Apollo moved from his chair to sit next to Luke, opposite Clay, and rested his hand on Luke's shoulder. "You lost both of them, right?" he asked. "Your mom and dad?"

Luke sniffed and nodded. "Car accident. You worked it out, huh?"

Apollo smiled. "You looked like you were going to have a breakdown the way Ernest was carrying on back in the cafeteria," he explained, "and I keep seeing you look at me since you learned I was an orphan, like you wanted to say or ask something."

"I was?" Luke asked in surprise. "Sorry, I didn't mean to-"

"Don't apologise," Apollo interrupted, sounding slightly exasperated. "I know, it's weird that I notice people's habits. That's just me."

Clay stood up off the bed. "You know what this calls for?" he announced, turning to his friends, with arms held wide. "A Chords of Steel workout session!" He grabbed Luke's upper arms (taking care with the left arm in its cast) and pulled him off the bed, grinning. "Here's what you say: 'I'm
Luke Triton and I'm fine!' At the top of your lungs! You got that?"


"It's not very healthy to keep everything bottled up either," Apollo pointed out, standing to join his friends, and Luke had to admit he had a point. "Clay and I can go first to show you how it's done."

Grinning, Clay released Luke and stood back, clenching his hands into fists. "Let's go!" He pointed his face at the ceiling and, at an impressive volume for an unassisted voice, shouted "I'M CLAY TERRAN AND I'M FINE!"

Luke winced at the loud noise, but couldn't resist a smile when he saw Clay laughing, almost bouncing on the spot in excitement.

Apollo also smiled, spreading his feet apart in a pose similar to Clay's, then also turned his face upwards. "I'M APOLLO JUSTICE AND I'M FINE!" As he also began to laugh, he turned to Luke. "Your turn," he prompted.

Luke thought for a few moments, then smiled. "I'M LUKE TRITON AND I'M FINE!"

View Luke's Notebook
Dear Professor Layton,

It's been a while since we said goodbye. How have you been? I've arrived in California and my new home safely. This is my first night in my new room actually, so I thought I would take the time to write before I start school tomorrow.

A lot has happened since I sent you my new address. For a start, it looks like I won't be living there after all. Mum and Dad decided to drive the last part of our journey, and we had an accident. I was rescued with a broken arm, but the police didn't find my parents. They've declared them deceased, but since their bodies were never found, I've decided I don't believe the official word. The detective claims there was enough blood to prove they were dead without any bodies, but he wouldn't tell me anything else, and I don't know where the accident even happened, since I was asleep at the time and I don't know the area yet. I want to look up what the newspapers are saying about it, or any other information, but it doesn't look like the school library keeps stores of papers, so I don't know where to start.

I've made some new friends at least. Their names are Clay and Apollo, and they're very nice. I'd even say they're gentlemanly in their own way, although they don't look it at first. They're a little older than me, but since I've been skipped ahead a few years, we're taking the same classes. Clay wants to be an astronaut, and has promised to take me to a local space centre where his mentor works. Apollo wants to be a lawyer (like Mr. Wright!), but every time he brings it up, Clay teases him about something that apparently happened to his 'hero', so he doesn't talk about it. I wonder if I should ask if he knows of Mr.Wright, or if we're too far away from where he works for Apollo to have heard of him.

Attached is my new address. According to Apollo, we spend school terms in the dormitory, but go to a foster home over the holidays. I expect that may cause some issues in communication around summertime.

Tell Flora I'm fine, and I miss her already.

Please write back soon.

Your friend and apprentice,

Luke Triton

3rd September, 2019

September 7, 10:20AM

Cosmos Space Center

Luke marvelled at the large, round building as it came into view from behind the trees. 'No wonder Clay was so eager to take me here!' It was taller than Luke had any ability to estimate, with two towers off to either side connected to the main building via walkways high off the ground. The road the trio were riding down on their bicycles curved down a gentle slope to meet a pair of out-buildings
not far from the cylindrical base in the middle of the gigantic expanse of grass in the valley. Luke was finding it hard to believe a place as seemingly isolated as this one was only a forty minute bike ride from a city as big as Los Angeles.

"Amazing, isn't it?" Clay called from his position at the head of their group. "Just wait 'til I introduce you to Mister Starbuck!"

With Clay and Apollo to support him, Luke's first week at Turner Boarding School had turned out great. The teachers did little to advertise his arrival outside of catching him up on the week he'd unintentionally skipped of the beginning of the school year, and anyone who tried to ask prying questions was chased off by Clay and Apollo, one of whom was (almost) always in Luke's classes alongside him (although he shared more with Apollo than Clay). Outside of school, the trio of boys would hang out together, doing homework, talking, and assuring each other they were fine if one of them felt down for some reason. Luke particularly had to be reminded he was fine on a regular basis, and had firmly decided 'Chords of Steel' was the lone exception to his mental guideline of gentlemanly behaviours he strove to follow.

All week, Clay had been excited for Saturday to come, and ran to check on Apollo and Luke the moment he woke up to make sure they'd be ready to head out with him. It had taken some convincing to let Nancy lend Luke one of her bikes, what with his broken arm and all, but once Luke had ridden in circles around the courtyard a few times to demonstrate his unhindered ability to grasp the handles (even if he couldn't use the handbrake on that side), she'd allowed it. Clay had once again boasted how there'd be regular buses they could take once the Center launched their first mission into space, Apollo had rolled up his uniform sleeves (he didn't have any other clothes he could wear) to wear his bracelet, and then the trio had taken off on their short journey.

As they approached the twin outbuildings, Luke noticed they housed between them a large metal gate, left slightly open. Above, on the connected roof, the words "Cosmos Space Center" were proudly displayed in green, with a circular GYAXA logo sitting in the middle, and the massive centre itself towered just beyond. Clay and Apollo pulled their bicycles to a halt and immediately propped them against the gate.

Luke slowly ground to a halt and hopped off his bike. "Are we allowed to do that?" he asked.

"Sure we are!" Clay cried, walking over to take Luke's bike from him and walking it over to the gate himself. "Apollo and I come here all the time, and no one's told us off for this yet!"

"In other words," Apollo cut in with an amused smile, "we haven't gotten permission perse, but no one's exactly complained about it."

As the pair led Luke through the gap in the gate and down the open path to the Center's main building, they decided to give Luke some advice.

"First of all," Clay explained, "we're not allowed on the fourth floor or higher. The robotics lab is up there, and people's living quarters, and they apparently don't trust us around those."

"Yup," Apollo agreed with a sage nod. "We try going up there, the scientists who work in the lab chase us off." He frowned. "They always seem to know the moment we try heading up the stairs on the third floor. I think they've got a camera hooked up or something."

Luke thought back to his last adventure with the Professor in London. "Or maybe an infrared sensor," he mused aloud.

Clay suddenly charged ahead, dashing to the glass double doors that served as the entrance to the
Space Center's main building. He spun around, hands behind his back on the door handles, and grinned at Luke. "Luke Triton," he announced, "welcome to the Cosmos Space Center!" With one swift move, he swung the doors open and ushered Luke and Apollo inside.

The foyer of the Cosmos Space Center was very impressive, Luke had to admit. The large windows all around, coupled with the high ceiling and glass walls, meant the sunlight streamed in from every direction, glistening off the glass panels and the white tiled floors. To either side of the doors, curving up the rounded walls, were metal stairs leading to the floor above, and Luke could see them extending up a few more floors if he craned his neck back. A curved white desk sat directly in front of them, but it was unmanned, leaving the Center open for anyone to enter. Behind it was an elevator, but it appeared to be out-of-order.

"Huh," Apollo muttered. "I wonder where Missus Racer is?"

"Aha!" came a cry from above, and Luke looked up just in time to catch a glimpse of red hair before he heard the metal ringing as an adult began walking down from the third floor. "I thought I heard you two coming in!"

Clay ran to the bottom of the staircase on their left, waving at the floor above as the man came into view on the level directly above. "Mister Starbuck! We brought a new friend today!"

"Oh?" the man replied, coming down the last segment of stairs and fixing a curious gaze on Luke. "He a brother?"

"He's in our grade at school," Apollo explained, putting a hand on Luke's shoulder. "Transferred in this week."

Clay smirked. "Skipped a few grades, though," he added.

Starbuck nodded as he reached the ground floor, then held out his hand to Luke. "Nice to meet you," he said. "I'm Solomon Starbuck. You can just call me Sol if you want."


"C'mon, Mister Starbuck!" Clay cried as he bounced at his mentor's side. "Let's show Luke around the Space Center!"

Sol grinned. "Sounds good to me!" He gave a 'follow me' gesture to Luke, adding "Come on, then," before heading back up the stairs.

Luke quickly learned that there was a lot of similarities between Sol and Clay, aside their passion for space. Although more calm and mature about his love for his job, Sol couldn't resist bragging about the Space Center's grand plans for the future at every opportunity, and even snuck the three boys into the restricted access area of one of the boarding lounges to the twin launch pads to give Luke an impassioned lecture about how amazing space travel was. It wasn't until Sol and Clay had left to fetch something to illustrate their point of just how big space was that Apollo told Luke the 'restricted access' areas had long been open to the two friends... with the previously mentioned exceptions of everything on the fourth floor and above.

As Sol and Clay enthusiastically continued their demonstrations with the help of a large beachball and a plate of peas, the door behind them opened to let in a small, red robot. "Hello Clay! Hello Apollo!" it announced, face screen glowing green as it displayed a smiling face. "Welcome to the Space Center, guest!"
"Oh hey, it's Ponco!" Apollo cried, grabbing Luke's wrist to drag him over to the small bot. "Luke, this is Ponco, the first of the Space Center's robots!

Luke nodded a greeting. This was not the first robot he'd met by far, but he had to admit it was rather refreshing to meet one that wasn't disguised as a human. The bolts on top of its ovoid head resembled pigtails somewhat, and now he was closer he could see eyelashes on the face displayed on the now-blue screen.

"Do you want me to register your friend?" Ponco asked in a cheerful tone.

Sol came up behind the boys, running a hand through his mop of red hair. "Ponco," he ordered, "register Luke Triton here, will you?"

"Of course, Mister Starbuck!" Ponco replied, and sat quietly for a moment until something in its hardware beeped. "Done! If you need any help, feel free to ask me, Luke Triton!"


Ponco's face turned a deeper blue as it displayed a sad frown, slumping into a miserable-looking posture. "Oh no! I will remember to call you 'Luke' from now on!" Its face again turning green and happy, the little robot danced for them, declaring "We are now officially friends! Nice to meet you, Luke! I'm so happy! So very happy!"

Clay laughed, slapping Luke on the back before slinging his arm over Apollo's shoulders, cockily. "Ponco's the creation of the robotics engineers," he explained. "Robots with emotions. Apparently they're in the process of making a whole army of them!"

Sol shook his head, laughing. "Say that to their face and you won't dare say it again!" he warned good-naturedly. "They take their work very seriously, and for good reason."

"I gotya, Mister Starbuck," Clay replied, laughing as he noticed Apollo rolling his eyes at the statement. "C'mon Luke, let's get back to our tour!"

View Luke's Notebook
'Clay was right about Missus Major making everything boring,' Luke thought to himself. 'I don't think I've ever been so disinterested in one of my favourite hobbies...'

Today, English class consisted of everyone in the room taking turns reading aloud a paragraph of their selected reading material; in this case, To Kill A Mockingbird. Luke had never heard of the book before, but apparently it was a classic story that their teacher was very fond of, to the point that she stopped the reading after every second sentence to analyse something or other for her students. Luke was glad she seemed to be happy, but it made absorbing the story difficult and tedious. Not to mention, he didn't agree with her thoughts on the Finch children calling their father by his name. 'Babies are too young to 'decide' if they call their father 'Daddy' or not! They call people what they are told to call them!' He wasn't brave enough to voice his disagreement, though.

They had entered the last ten minutes of the class, and the tension in the room as the thirty-odd students waited for lunchtime was almost palpable. Ernest Holmes, the boy who had accosted Luke in the cafeteria on his first day, was reading a passage about the local 'spook' Boo Radley, and Luke had to force his eyes to stay open lest he fall asleep to Ernest's droning monotone. A glance to his left revealed Clay was in much the same position, book open on his desk but eyes firmly closed.

A creaking sound rang through the room, and Ernest stopped talking as he and everyone else in the room turned to look at the door, about half of them jumping in shock as they did so. The classroom door opened only about halfway before Nancy's head leant in, giving Mrs. Major a bright smile.

"What is it, Miss Kindly?" Mrs. Major asked, a single eyebrow raised.

"I was just wondering if I could take Luke Triton from you today," Nancy replied, eyes glancing around the room until she spotted Luke near the back, and she gave him a smile. "I'm afraid he's needed elsewhere."

The English teacher had to think for a moment, but then nodded and turned to Luke. "Master Triton, you may go. Check with me later for homework."

"I will, Missus Major," Luke promised, closing his book and shoving it and his notes into his satchel. He could feel the class's stares on him as he cleared his desk and walked across the room to join Nancy at the door, and was as curious as them to find out what he was needed for. He wasn't in trouble, was he?

Once they were both outside the classroom, door closed behind them, Nancy placed a hand on Luke's shoulder and led him towards the stairs. "The Principal has called for you in his office," she explained.


"Don't worry," Nancy laughed, "you're not in trouble, dear! You have a visitor!"
'A... visitor?' Luke's mind began to race as he wondered who his 'visitor' was, and why they had come now. 'Is it someone from the Space Centre? Are they banning me from coming back? They didn't want Clay, so it can't be a total ban on all three of us... Or maybe it's that detective I met in hospital! Does he have more questions for me? Maybe he's found Mum and Dad! I knew they were still alive!' As he reached the top of the stairs at the third floor, not far behind Nancy, his thoughts turned to perhaps more realistic possibilities. 'Maybe the Professor and Flora have come to help! I suppose they could have got my letter by now... The Professor might have a lead on how to find Mum and Dad! I knew I could count on him to save me!'

After what seemed like an eternity, Nancy and Luke reached the door of the Principal's office. Smiling at Luke, Nancy placed her hand back on his shoulder and opened the door, walking them in side-by-side. "Mister Turner," she announced, "I have young Triton here."

The room was rather large, a converted classroom, and looked about as posh as Luke recalled it being when he'd been in here on his first day. The biggest difference was that, instead of sitting behind his massive desk, surrounded by certificates and trophies, Principal Turner was standing in his usual purple suit by the opposite wall, which was a floor-length window the width of the entire room. He turned to face the newcomers, scratching his chin in a show of wisdom beyond his years. "Ah, Miss Kindly, thank you for fetching him."

Luke's eyes were immediately drawn to the only stranger in the room, a man stood at the Principal's side. He was dressed much less smartly, in jeans and a grey hoodie, and he turned to face the door as he heard it open. Above his smiling face (which was vaguely familiar) was a blue beanie, with the word 'Papa' written in purple along the side.

Nancy guided Luke further into the room and left, closing the door behind her. Luke half-wished she would stay, frantically trying to wrack his brain for clues as to who the stranger before him was. "As I'm sure Miss Kindly told you," the principal continued, "you have a visitor, Triton." As he spoke, the stranger reached up to his head and pulled off his beanie, revealing spiky, and rather messy, black hair.

Luke gasped in sudden recognition. "Mister Wright!" he cried, and dashed across the room, throwing his arms tightly around Phoenix's waist and burying his head in the loose hoodie as he burst into tears.

"Whoa there, Luke," Phoenix said, patting Luke's bare head as he leaned down a little to be more on his young friend's level. "Wanna leave some room for me to breathe?"

Struggling to hold back his tears, Luke released Phoenix and stepped back, rubbing at his tear-filled eyes. "I'm sorry," he mumbled.

"No, no, don't be," Phoenix insisted with a shake of his head, kneeling down. "It's been a while since you've seen a familiar face, huh?" Over Luke's shoulder, he noticed the principal quietly leaving the room, and was glad his young friend had proven beyond a doubt that they indeed knew each other without even having to say anything. "I'm glad it turned out in my favor to mention that!" "It's alright to cry, I understand."

Luke nodded, leaning into Phoenix again for another hug, which the ex-lawyer was glad to give.

Phoenix found himself being reminded once again of the emotional reunion he and Luke had shared with Maya and Professor Layton in the ruins below Labyrinthia, although the circumstances this time couldn't have been more different. He decided to give the teen some time to calm down before trying to start a conversation; They had a lot of important stuff to discuss.
Finally, Luke's breathing returned to normal and he pulled away from Phoenix, rubbing the last of the moisture from around his eyes. "How did you find me, Mister Wright?" he asked in astonishment. "I didn't think you lived near here!"

Phoenix laughed. "I'm a Los Angeles native, born and bred!" he said. "Professor Layton got your new address, both of them, and asked me to check up on you when he noticed you'd be close by."

Luke frowned, realising this would have been the first address he sent home, fresh off the boat on the other side of the country. "But I never even got to see the new house!"


"It's fine," Luke said, even managing a smile. "They never found their bodies, after all. I don't think they're dead."

Phoenix laughed. "Of course! 'Just like when we thought the Professor was dead... Too bad I wasn't here to help when he was still in mourning, though.' The perfect puzzle for the apprentice of Professor Layton, huh?"

"Uh-huh!" Luke agreed with a big grin, putting his hand up to his head as if to grip the blue cap he wasn't allowed to wear during school. "By the way, thank you for coming to visit, Mister Wright." He shrugged, blushing. "I really appreciate it."

Phoenix rubbed the back of his head in embarrassment. "Uh, sure," he bashfully replied. "About that..."

"Oh!" Luke cried, interrupting Phoenix as he looked around the office. "Where's Maya? Didn't she come with you?"

Restraining a wince, Phoenix looked away. "Yeah, about that too..."

"And why aren't you wearing your suit?" Luke continued, crossing his arms. "You looked so smart in that! Unless this is how you dress when you're not in court?"

Phoenix sighed, staring at the floor. Luke suddenly noticed his older friend's change of mood and halted his flow of questions. "Mister Wright?"

"It's a long story," Phoenix sighed. "To every one of your questions. He looked up, meeting Luke's concerned gaze. "Basically, I... left my job. I don't work as a lawyer anymore. Maya's very busy with her own job, so she can't be here to see you today." He thought a moment. "She says 'hi', by the way. And hopes you're okay."

"I'm fine," Luke almost instinctively replied. "Why'd you leave your job, though? I thought you were a great lawyer!"

"Thank you," Phoenix said with a grateful smile, "but, as I said, it's a long story. I can tell you it another time. We have other things to talk about now."

Although Luke wasn't satisfied with the given answer, he decided to let it slide for now and reluctantly nodded in agreement. "What did you want to talk about?"
Phoenix took a deep breath as he searched for the right place to begin this conversation. "Well," he said, "as much as we may disagree with them, officially the state has decreed you an orphan, correct?"

Luke nodded. "And I have to stay here or in a foster home from now on," he added.

"Unless," Phoenix interrupted with a wary smile, "someone adopts you, of course."

Luke paused. "I... hadn't thought of that," he admitted, then frowned as he rubbed his chin in thought. "I don't think I like the idea of a couple of strangers taking me in and trying to replace Mum and Dad..."

"Any adoption going through would be entirely up to you," Phoenix assured the boy, patting his shoulder. "You get final say. Believe me, I've been through all these hoops adopting Trucy."


Phoenix grinned. "My daughter," he proudly explained, then reached into the pocket in the front of his hoodie and pulled out a small photo. Luke took it for a better look and saw a cheery young girl with a bob of brown hair, wearing a red top hat and cape. "She's eight," Phoenix added. "You could say it's because of her I got my current job."

"She's cute!" Luke agreed, handing the photo back before changing the subject. "So they won't just hand me off to people and say they're my new parents? That's a relief..."

Phoenix shuffled uncomfortably, an impressive feat considering he was still kneeling to be closer to Luke's eye-level. "Luke, that's partly why I came today. I want to make you an offer."

Luke looked over at his friend suspiciously. "Offer...?"

After a moment's pause, Phoenix stood back up to his full height. "To give you a place to call home, and all the help finding your parents I can get," he proclaimed, "I can adopt you into my family, alongside Trucy." He thought a second more, then added, "I already checked with the state, and they'll be happy to let it go through. Only if you want to, of course."

Luke was too shocked to react at first. 'A-adopt me!?’. He took a small step back, staring off into the distance as he processed the offer. 'Mister Wright... wants to adopt me!?'

"You don't have to answer now," Phoenix assured him. "Take your time, think about it. If you decide not to, I can still offer my help, if you want it."

Still unable to formulate a response, Luke mutely nodded.

Phoenix reached into a pocket and pulled out a small white card, which he looked over before kneeling down again and holding it out for Luke. "Here. If you want to find me or contact me. You can call any time."

Luke took the offered card. On one side, scrawled in pen, was a series of numbers obviously belonging to a phone, while the other side had 'Wright & Co. Law Offices' neatly printed above an address and a separate phone number. "I thought you weren't a lawyer anymore...?" Luke muttered.

"It's an old card," Phoenix replied with a shrug. "Don't have any new ones, but I haven't changed my address or phone number, so it still works." He paused. "You just call me when you make your decision... or just want to chat, I don't mind."
Despite all his worry, Luke managed a smile and nodded. "I promise, Mister Wright."

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Despite his ongoing uncertainty over the things they had talked about, Luke couldn't resist a wide smile of happiness at having seen Phoenix again. It felt like the universe was reminding him the world he used to know was still out there, unchanged, and he didn't have to fret that he would lose total contact with all his old friends, despite the sudden loss of his parents. It was reassuring that, despite all the unexpected changes in his life that he was still settling in to, he had friends both new and old to help him through it.

"Luke!" came a distinctly 'Chords of Steel' cry from across the hall, and Luke looked up to see Clay and Apollo, sat near the middle of the cafeteria at the end of a table. Apollo was standing, waving frantically as he added "Over here!"

Grinning, Luke waved back to his friends to let them know he'd seen them, and, after quickly grabbing something to eat, hurried to meet them.

"Finally!" Clay cried in false exasperation as Luke jumped into a chair next to Apollo. "What took you so long? And what did they need you for, anyway?"

"Whatever it is," Apollo remarked, "you're obviously really happy about it."

Luke laughed. "An old friend of mine lives near here! He came to find me!"

Clay and Apollo both gasped in delighted surprise. "Wow!" Clay said, clapping his hands. "That's awesome! I didn't think you had friends here!"

"I didn't either," Luke replied, embarrassed. "I had no idea where in America he lived."

"Good thing he found you, then," Apollo pointed out. "He came by just to see you?"

Luke paused only half a second before fixing his friends with a big smile. "Yep!"

Apollo's eyes narrowed. "You're lying."

"N-no I'm not!" Luke replied, shocked to be called out so confidently.

Clay rolled his eyes. "Oh, come off it, Apollo. How is he lying?"

"But he is!" Apollo insisted. "I don't know how I know, but I know he's lying!"

"In other words, you're making all this up. Again."

Luke looked around them nervously to assess how likely the trio were to be overheard by other students. "Alright, I admit it," he quietly said, interrupting the argument.

"See?" Apollo muttered in a surprised Clay's direction.
"I just don't want to talk about it here, okay?" he continued, giving Apollo a pleading look. "Can we bring this up again later?"

Apollo blinked in surprise. "Uh, sure," he answered, looking uncomfortable. "Look, I'm sorry for accusing you, but--"


Clay scoffed. "Personally, I think Apollo just makes it up and lucks out a lot of the time."

"Whatever," Apollo replied, giving Clay a playful glare. "You're just jealous."

"At how transparent you are?" Clay joked. "Hardly!"

September 10, 3:41PM
Sirius Turner Boarding School for Boys
Dormitory, Room 321

Once again, the three boys found themselves in the tidiest of their three rooms, Luke's. While Apollo and Clay had immediately sat on the bed as they joked around, Luke had taken his time placing his homework on his desk, sitting in his chair as he went through his bag.

"Oh, hey," Apollo suddenly realised, "weren't we meeting in here for a reason?"

"Luke's friend!" Clay remembered, turning towards their English friend. "You were gonna give us the full story!"

Luke laughed, pulling out the last of the books from his satchel. "It's not all that exciting!" he insisted. "Really!"

"Tell us anyway!" Clay eagerly insisted, leaning forward so far he was only barely sitting on the bed. "C'mon, Triton!"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "You could try showing some restraint, Clay."

"Restraint is for sissies!" Clay replied.

The smile on his face slowly fading, Luke picked up his blue cap on the corner of his desk, putting it on his head as he pulled Phoenix's business card from a pocket in his black uniform. He looked at the printed text on the front of it thoughtfully for a few moments. "My friend," he quietly explained. "He's offered to adopt me."

There was a very long silence. Clay slowly straightened back up in his seat, while Apollo simply stared at the floor in thought.

"That's why you didn't want to talk about it in the cafeteria," Clay thought aloud as he connected the dots.

"Mm-hmm," Luke replied with a nod, looking over to his friends. "He left it to me to decide, but I'm
not sure what to say." He sighed, musing over his options aloud. "If I turn him down, he'll still be my friend and offer help, but I'll be stuck in foster homes when I'm not here, and I'll never have a place to call my own. On the other hand, if I accept, I'll probably have to transfer schools again, and I only just made two of the best friends in the whole world." He blinked away tears as he looked over to a surprised Clay and Apollo. "I'd hate to have to leave you guys so soon!"

"It's okay, Luke!" Apollo said, standing up and crossing the room. "You're fine! We'll find a solution!" As Luke smiled back, Apollo placed a hand on his friend's shoulder. "I'm sure if you ta-!" Mid-word, Apollo froze, and Luke realised after a moment that he had caught sight of the business card in Luke's hand. "I-is... is that a Wright and Co. Law Offices business card!?" he stuttered.

Clay looked up in shock. "What!?" He jumped to his feet and ran over to the desk, peering at the card as Luke held it up. "How'd you get a card from the Forgin' Attorney!?"

"Don't call him that!" Apollo immediately objected. "It's not true!"

Luke looked up at his friends with growing concern. "F-forging attorney...? What do you mean?"

"The papers started calling him that," Apollo explained, crossing his arms as he glared off into the distance. "It's all lies!"

Clay turned and sauntered back towards the bed. "They call him that because it's true," he said with a shrug of the shoulders, reaching his destination and flopping down on Luke's mattress casually. "He was caught using forged evidence in court, so they banned him. There was all sorts of uproar over how many of his 'miraculous' cases were faked, too."

"He was stripped of his badge, not banned," Apollo clarified, sternly facing Clay as though this was a conversation they'd had a few times already. "And none of his verdicts were overturned either, which just proves he was framed."

"So," Luke began to ask, already dreading the answer, "who is the Forging Attorney?"

Apollo turned to look down at Luke with surprise. "You haven't heard of Phoenix Wright?" he asked.

Luke felt his insides go cold.

"Of course he hasn't!" Clay cried. "Luke only moved here a couple weeks back, and the For-, I mean, Wright got caught back in... what, April? May?" He rolled his eyes, laughing. "It's not like he was world-famous!"

Apollo was still watching Luke, who had turned his worried gaze back to the card in his hands. Ignoring Clay, he placed a hand on the back of Luke's chair. "Luke? Are you okay?"

Clay stopped laughing as he realised his friends weren't paying attention. "Huh? Something wrong, Luke?"

Luke blinked rapidly to hold back the tears. "He said he wasn't a lawyer anymore," he whispered. "He didn't tell me why..."

Above his head, Luke heard Apollo take a sharp intake of breath. "M-mister Wright... He's your friend, isn't he?"

"Uh..." Clay muttered from across the room, going pale. He stood up, raising his hands. "L-look, Luke, I didn't mean any of what I said, okay? I got nothing against the guy, I swear!"
"It's fine," Luke whispered, not moving. "You didn't know he was my friend."

There was an awkward silence for several long moments.

Clay nervously laughed. "Well, hey, you heard what Apollo said! He was framed, right? It wasn't his f-!"

"How did you become friends with Phoenix Wright!?" Apollo cut in, giving Luke a wide-eyed and excited stare. "That's so cool! I'd have given anything to get to meet him!"

Luke blinked in surprise, looking up at his friend. "Huh?"

"He's the best defence lawyer alive today!" Apollo continued to gush, grinning. "I went to some of his trials when I could, and no matter how bad it gets for him, he always turned everything around and won in the end!"

Clay rolled his eyes. "Great, we've set Apollo off..."

"I've read all of his case-files in the courthouse library, too!" Apollo continued, not noticing his friend's interruption. "Did you know he once cross-examined a parrot to prove who the murderer was!?"

At this, Luke suddenly laughed. "Yeah, he's the world expert on cross-examining parrots!"

Apollo laughed. "You could say that, I guess!" he agreed. "The last trial of his I went to, he even performed an exorcism in court!"

"What!?" Luke replied, both shocked and highly confused. 'I bet Maya had something to do with that...'

Clay shook his head. "He's making it up," he assured Luke, ignoring Apollo's glare. "You have no idea how long I've had to endure him gushing about his 'hero' after spending a weekend at the courthouse."

"It was only a full weekend twice!" Apollo weakly protested. "Out of, like... four trials I got see in person!"


Apollo shrugged, flustered. "Well, I didn't see the entire trial for the first one, a-and Mister Wright wasn't even the defence lawyer on the first day of the last one I went to!"

Luke just laughed. 'I'd love to see Apollo's face if I brought up the witch trials I helped Mister Wright with!' "Well Apollo, do you want to meet him?"

"Huh?" Apollo asked, confused. "M-meet...?"

"Nancy has a phone, right?" Luke asked Clay, who nodded with a smirk. "Then I'll just go and call him!" Clutching the business card in his hand, Luke dashed out of his room and down the hallway to the stairs. Behind him, he heard Apollo beginning to protest as he belatedly chased after, and Clay laughing loudly at the impromptu low-stakes chase scene.

As the adrenaline pumped through Luke's veins, he began to laugh loudly, his voice echoing through the concrete stairwell as he charged down the steps. Through his mind raced memories of his adventures back home in England with the Professor, running from, or sometimes even towards,
danger in their never-ending quest to solve the mysteries of the world and save the innocent. 'I'm going to keep doing our good work, Professor! Just watch! I'll make you proud of me!'

September 10, 4:01PM

Wright Talent Agency

Trucy's Bedroom

"Can't I take a break?" Trucy whined, tugging her red silk hat over her head as she slumped in her chair.

"You only just finished your last break," Phoenix pointed out, pushing the piece of paper on the desk in front of her closer to the protesting eight-year-old. "You're almost done, anyway. Don't you want to get it over with now, so you can go and play?"

Before Trucy could reply, a chiptune rendition of the Steel Samurai theme buzzed from Phoenix's pocket, and the ex-lawyer sighed as he reluctantly stood up. "You get to work," he warned his daughter. "I'll be right back."

Once out in the hallway, Phoenix pulled his phone from his pocket and checked the screen, a routine he had become used to since the incident in April. It wasn't a number he recognised, but since the ringtone was nearing its end, he only had a second to debate whether he should answer it or not. He decided to answer. "Hello?"

"Mister Wright!" came the familiar voice of a teenage boy through the scratchy phone lines.

"Luke!" Phoenix cried in surprise. "I wasn't expecting you to call so soon!"

Luke laughed, and Phoenix noted he seemed out of breath. "I thought maybe we could meet up this weekend!" he offered. "I'd love to meet Trucy!"

In the background, a second voice came into hearing range, shouting loud enough to be picked up by Luke's phone. "WAIT, YOU'RE ACTUALLY CALLING HIM!?"

"Uh, sure," Phoenix replied, deciding to ignore the background noise for now. "Is Saturday good? We're not doing anything that morning."

"LUKE, IF YOU SERIOUSLY SET THIS UP, I AM GOING TO KILL YOU!" the voice in the background shouted. It was abruptly joined by a third voice, which was simply laughing at the top of its lungs.

"That's great!" Luke laughed, apparently well aware of the noise but choosing to ignore it. "Is it alright if I bring along a friend of mine? He'd love to meet you!"

"I AM SERIOUSLY GOING TO DIE OF EMBARRASSMENT IF YOU MAKE ME MEET HIM!" the voice in the background protested.

Phoenix paused in thought. "Are you faking this to annoy your friend back there?"

"No!" Luke cried, offended. "I do really want to meet Trucy!" The laughter returned to his voice as he continued, "Annoying Apollo is a bonus!"
"I AM GOING TO MURDER YOU, TRITON!"

Phoenix laughed. "Then, it's a deal! Meet you at the school gates around ten?"

"Ten!" Luke repeated. "It's a deal!"

"THEY'LL NEVER FIND YOUR BODY, LUKE!"

The phone hung up with a click.
As annoyed as Apollo pretended to be after being set up on a 'date' to meet Phoenix Wright, Luke could tell he was secretly excited. The biggest clue was perhaps the fact that he had talked non-stop about his favourite defence attorney the entire rest of the week.

"I first heard of him when he was defending the hero of this TV show we used to watch, the Steel Samurai," Apollo had said, nudging Clay as a prompt to back him up. "I wanted to go see the trial, but it was during school, so I had to hear about it after. And then there was this big, important case just after Christmas where a famous prosecutor was accused of murdering a defence attorney! And Mister Wright not only proved he didn't, he found the true murderer of that case as well as the murderer of a case that happened over a decade ago!"

"Everyone seemed to love him after that," Clay remarked.

"That's when I became a fan!" Apollo boasted. "I wasn't able to go to all his trials because they were during school, but I caught the end of one where he caught out the Chief of Police and the Chief Prosecutor for two murders, accomplice to murder and forging evidence! That was the first time I got to see him in person, too! And then there was the Berry Big Circus one, where everyone thought the magician had flown away from the murder scene, but it was actually the acrobat, hiding the murder weapon in his wheelchair!"

"And the Mask DeMasque case," Clay cut in. "Took Apollo days to shut up about that one."

"It was really awesome!" Apollo protested. "Plus, it was technically two trials that time, cuz the guy was legally proven innocent of the Mask DeMasque thefts, then was accused of a murder, and Mister Wright proved it was this other fake 'detective' guy both times!"

"Hey, I heard about Mask DeMasque!" Luke cried. "I didn't know Mister Wright solved that case!"

Clay was surprised. "You heard about Mask DeMasque? I didn't think that news got to England."

"He stole a lot of valuable, historical artefacts," Luke pointed out. "If it wasn't in the news, the Professor or my parents would have told me about it." He laughed. "That was not long before I met Mister Wright!"

Of the last case he'd watched in court, Apollo couldn't say much... at least, not much Luke could understand. It was apparently very convoluted and confusing, heavily featuring spirit mediums (which made Luke worry for Maya's safety) and an exorcism in court. There hadn't been a single person in the case that was in the courtroom both days either, with the prosecutor and judge switching between days and someone else apparently standing in for Phoenix on the first day. Even the defendant was somehow switched with another person overnight. The whole crazy trial had resulted in the conviction of the second day's prosecutor for murder, the defendant getting charged as his accomplice despite the efforts of her dead (and evil) twin sister to blame someone else that she'd been unknowingly possessing the entire time.
All in all, that particular story made Luke's head hurt.

"So, how did you end up meeting Mister Wright in England, Luke?" Apollo asked.

Luke thought for several long moments. "It's... really complicated," he explained. "The Professor and I ran into him and his assistant on a case... a really confusing and complicated case..." He sighed. "Like most of the stuff the Professor took on, it's difficult to believe without a lot of explanation. This one more than most, probably. I'd rather not talk about it yet, actually."

Clay had left for home on Friday afternoon, making Luke and Apollo promise to tell him all the juicy details of their meeting with 'The Forgin' Attorney' the moment he returned on Monday. Although Apollo had rolled his eyes, Luke promised to fill Clay in on their 'adventure', and the pair thus found themselves sitting on a bench that Saturday morning, not far from the front gate.

Apollo was looking pale, hands white as he gripped the bench beneath them. As he did every weekend, he had rolled up the left sleeve of his uniform jacket to wear his family's bracelet. His usually impeccably styled hair was also looking a little limp. "Do you think Mister Wright would mind if I cancelled?" he asked, voice much higher in pitch than normal. "I mean, I never wanted to meet him anyway, right?"

"You're fine, Apollo!" Luke cried, tugging his blue cap on his head determinedly. "Mister Wright's going to pick us up, and we're going to have a great time together!"

"Yeah," Apollo breathed in reply, nodding fiercely as he repeated the words to himself as loudly as he dared. "We're gonna have fun today! This is gonna be awesome!"

There was a metallic tapping sound, and Luke and Apollo looked up to see a man in jeans and a hoodie, knocking on the barred gates as he smiled at them from under his ever-present beanie. Beside him, watching them curiously, was a little girl in a red magician's outfit.

"Mister Wright!" Luke cried, jumping to his feet and racing to the gate.

"I am so gonna die of embarrassment," Apollo muttered to himself as he morosely followed his friend.

Luke bounded straight to the talkbox mounted next to the barred gates, reaching up to push the button eagerly. "Mister Thrume, Apollo and I are going out for the morning!"

"You got it, kiddo," Hugo replied through the scratchy speaker, and a moment later, the buzz of the deactivated locks sounded from above.

Without wasting a second, Luke pushed open the gate, and Apollo caught up in time to catch it as his friend dashed straight through to reunite with Phoenix, stopping just short of a hug. "Thank you for coming, Mister Wright!"


Immediately, Luke turned to face the young girl, who was narrowing her eyes as she inspected the odd boy in blue with one arm in a cast. He tipped his cap. "And you must be Trucy! Pleased to meet you!" He held out his cast-free hand. "My name's Luke Triton!"

Trucy stared at him a moment longer, then broke out into a smile, giggling as she took his hand to shake. "Pleased to meet you!" she parroted back in an imitation of Luke's accent. "I'm Trucy Wright!" She giggled again at the formality of the greeting, but Luke didn't seem to mind.
Phoenix looked over to the gate, still being propped open by a nervous Apollo. "And your friend?" he prompted Luke.

"Ah!" Luke cried, dashing over to Apollo and grabbing his arm to drag him away from the gate. Apollo meekly protested, but eventually allowed himself to be pulled firmly out of the school grounds, the gate clicking shut rather ominously behind him. "This is Apollo Justice!" Luke announced in greeting. "He's in some of my classes, and one of my best friends!"

"Nice to meet you, Apollo," Phoenix said with a small nod.

Apollo soundlessly opened and closed his mouth several times before he was able to stutter a stunned "H-hi," in return.

Trucy began to giggle again, and Luke was unable to resist a smile, glancing at Trucy as he tried to hide it behind his right hand.

Phoenix watched the boy for a moment or two. "You seem to be turning red," he pointed out in concern. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine!" Apollo suddenly shouted, then slapped his face with his left hand as he realised how awkward he sounded. 'Please ground, swallow me up right now before I do anything more embarrassing!'

While Trucy and Luke began to giggle more loudly, Phoenix's attention was brought to Apollo's bracelet, glinting in the sunlight as the boy's wrist moved. 'Wait... is that...?'

"You're funny, Apollo!" Trucy told the older boy, who lowered his hand to glare at her. "Actually, can I call you 'Polly'? 'Apollo' is so hard to say!"

"Don't call me 'Polly'," Apollo muttered, crossing his arms.

"Thanks, Polly!" Trucy chirped, either not noticing or just ignoring Apollo's eye rolling in response.

Luke patted Apollo's back in commiseration, still trying to hide his giggles. "Don't worry, Apollo! You've only been telling me all week," his composure faltered and Luke began to laugh, "about how Mister Wright is your idol and all!"

Apollo grunted. "You're a cruel, cruel kid, Triton."

"I heard 'cool, cool'!" Trucy replied, giving Apollo her biggest grin.

"You don't count," Apollo shot back.

Phoenix shook his head, chuckling at the kids' antics. "Alright, why don't we get moving?" He waved his hand at them to follow him and began to walk down the path. "I thought we'd drop by my place and then have a picnic at a park not far from us. Sound good?"

"That's great!" Luke cried, running up alongside his older friend. "I must admit, I've been curious to see where you live!"

"It's not that far from here, considering," Trucy assured him, skipping happily on her father's other side. "Maybe I could show you some of my tricks while we're there!"

Apollo, lagging behind the trio, sighed. "Tricks?" he repeated. "I think I've seen enough of those already."
"We're hoooome!" Trucy sang out as she pushed through their front door the moment Phoenix unlocked it. While her father merely smiled and quickly followed her, Luke took his time coming in to look around the room.

Fittingly, it reminded Luke most heavily of an office. There was a long and thin reception desk by the front door, opposite an aging black leather sofa. Against one wall was a bookcase full of what looked like legal books, and nearby was a upright piano, decorated with various magic-themed trinkets and a large black-and-white portrait of a man in an outfit similar to Trucy's. A coffee-maker sat on the piano stool, indicating the instrument saw little use. In a corner was a tall plant in a round, white pot. A small writing desk against another wall was covered in paper and writing utensils, and the drawings tacked up on the wall around it indicated it was in heavy use by Trucy.

Apollo paused at the door to read the black letters written on the glass. "This still says 'Law Offices'," he pointed out.

"Haven't got around to changing it," Phoenix quickly replied with a nonchalant shrug, though he was already at the door leading further inside. "Trucy, why don't you show the boys around? I have some stuff to grab before we head out again."

"Sure, Daddy!" Trucy cried with a wave, and Phoenix disappeared through the door, leaving it open behind him. Trucy immediately turned towards the two teen boys standing by the reception desk and fixed them with her largest smile. "And now for the grand tour of: our home!" she announced, throwing her arms out wide. "This is the reception! It's our front door, and where our customers come if they want to hire one of our talents!"

Apollo frowned. "Talents?"

"Me and Daddy!" Trucy replied. "I'm the CEO!"

Luke laughed. "Oh, because Mister Wright isn't a lawyer anymore! Of course you can't run a law office here!"

Trucy nodded. "We're a talent agency." She pulled open a drawer in the desk and pulled out two identical flyers that she quickly handed off to Luke and Apollo, who quickly noticed the title 'Wright Talent Agency' in bold letters on the hot pink background. "Daddy plays the piano, and I'm a magician! We're hoping to get more talents for our agency soon."

Apollo glanced up at the portrait on top of the piano. "If you're a magician, I guess that explains the 'Troupe Gramarye' ripoff outfit. And that portrait."

Trucy frowned, putting her hands on her hips. "My outfit is not a ripoff! My daddy made this for me before he disappeared! And that," she pointed at the portrait, "is a picture of him for when he comes back!"

"Whoa, sorry!" Apollo quickly apologised with a frown, rounding the reception desk to approach the
piano and get a closer look at the portrait he had accidentally offended.

Luke scratched his chin in thought. "You call your biological father and your adoptive father 'Daddy'?” he said. "That's a recipe for confusion if I ever heard one."

Apollo blinked as he belatedly realised what Luke had voiced, that the 'daddy' in the portrait was most definitely not Phoenix. Even so, he still looked vaguely familiar. "Trucy?” he asked. "Have we seen your dad somewhere before?"

"That Daddy?” Trucy replied, smile less wide than it had been before. "Yeah, he and Mommy and Grandpa were all in Troupe Gramarye."

Apollo froze.


Apollo slowly turned away from the piano. "Luke,” he sternly answered before Trucy could, "Troupe Gramarye is the reason Mister Wright lost his badge.” As Luke gasped at the news, Apollo looked down at Trucy, who was sadly staring at the floor and hiding her face behind her hat. "I didn't know Zak Gramarye had a daughter, though. Why'd Mister Wright take you in after what your father did?” he continued.

Trucy didn't answer.

"Does it really matter?” Luke asked Apollo, stepping around the desk and awkwardly placing his cast-covered hand on Trucy's shoulder. "Mister Wright cared enough about Trucy to take her in and call her his daughter, despite having lost his job.” He gave Trucy a sympathetic smile. "I think we've seen enough of this room, don't you? Let's continue with the tour.”

After a short pause, Trucy looked up at Luke, a smile plastered on her face that was betrayed only by the tears sitting in the corners of her eyes. "You bet!” she said, then headed for the door Phoenix had disappeared through. "Daddy's office is next! Follow me!”

Luke gave Apollo a warning glare before following Trucy, and Apollo stood for a few moments in thought before reluctantly rejoining the 'tour'.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
After the confrontation in the reception of the office, Trucy's tour of her little home had been a very quick one. They'd only glanced at Phoenix's office (a much less cluttered space than Trucy's reception area), before Trucy hurried them through a side-door leading to a kitchen, where Phoenix was packing a small backpack with supplies. From there, the trio went up some stairs into the actual 'home' part of the apartment, where the bedrooms and main bathroom were. Phoenix's was off-limits, but Trucy proudly showed off her cluttered little room and the guest room nearby, where she told Luke he would be staying should he decide to "become my big brother! I always wanted a big brother!" Apollo had rolled his eyes and muttered something about annoying little sisters, but Luke and Trucy only ignored him.

Phoenix had had to hurry the children out after that, wanting to get to the park before too many other people took up valuable grass-space. Luckily, it was only a block away, and an easy walk. Trucy ran ahead with their blanket, throwing it down protectively on a patch of empty grass that wasn't too cluttered with dropped twigs and seeds from the tree above.

"I've never been to this park before," Apollo said as they settled into their claimed spot.

"Understandable," Phoenix replied with a friendly smile. "Gourd Lake tends to be more popular, I find."

"Oh yeah!" Apollo cried with a grin. "You had that big case at Gourd Lake once!"

Phoenix laughed, "Yes, yes I did!" Having finished dropping weights strategically on the corners of the blanket to keep it from moving in the breeze, he dropped to the ground and crossed his legs. "Luke said something about you being a fan of mine earlier, didn't he?"

Luke nodded, giggling. "You should have seen his face when I told him who the friend who visited me on Tuesday was!"

"Shut up," Apollo muttered with a glare. "I'm not the only person who was a fan of Mister Wright!"

"Really?" Trucy asked curiously, sitting cutely on the blanket next to her father. "Daddy has fans?"

Phoenix shook his head. "Not anymore, Truce," he said, patting her shoulder. "Don't think I had that many when I was still practising law, either."

"You still have Polly!" Trucy pointed out.

Apollo turned red again, turning steadfastly off to the side. "Yeah, well, the fanclub was massive. I'm sure there are others still out there, too."

"Fanclub?" Luke repeated, and quickly noticed Phoenix was also giving Apollo a surprised look.

"What fanclub?" Phoenix asked.
"You didn't know?" Apollo replied, looking confused. "The founders claimed it was semi-official."

Phoenix thought for a moment, scratching his chin, then returned his gaze to Apollo. "Did they ever say their names?"

"No," Apollo said with a shake of the head. "My-Fairy and Precious-Fairy were their usernames, though."

"'Fairy'...?" Luke repeated again, now even more confused.

Phoenix laughed. "No, no, I think that clears up who was behind it. Have you heard much from them since February?"

Apollo had to think for a moment. "Well, they were apparently going on vacation and missed the big case you had then... Actually, yeah, they kinda disappeared after that." He crossed his arms, pondering on the mystery of his former online associates. "They always knew when you had a case before that too, then they just stopped. I wonder what happened to 'em?"

Luke similarly crossed his arms (rather awkwardly around his cast), nodding to himself. "Now that's a puzzle if I ever heard one!"

Phoenix laughed. "Not a difficult one, I'm afraid," he said, "not if you know them like I do." Before anyone could reply, he poked Trucy. "Hey, you wanna show the boys around? We've got two whole hours here, after all."

"Yay!" Trucy cried, jumping to her feet and rushing at Luke, grabbing his free arm. "C'mon Luke, I'll show you where the play equipment is!"

"Cool!" Luke replied, and the pair ran off down the path.

After watching the pair run off, Apollo sighed and sat down on the blanket, opposite Phoenix. "No offence," he said, "but I'm way too old for that kind of stuff."

"None taken," Phoenix replied, shrugging. "To be honest, I wasn't sure how old you'd be until we met you this morning. Luke didn't say anything about you."

Apollo laughed. "That's fine, Mister Wright. I didn't exactly give him a chance to, after all."

Phoenix nodded, giving the teen a smile.

There was silence for a minute or two. Apollo watched the clouds through the branches of the tree nearby, while Phoenix was idly sorting through the small supply of food and crockery he'd packed, deliberately taking his time. In the park around them, a few other small groups had set up picnic blankets, and there was even a group of people who were flying kites in the largest tree-free space they could find, on the side of a nearby hill.

Phoenix finally finished his sorting and sat quietly for a few moments. "Say, Apollo?" he spoke up, breaking the silence.

Apollo jerked in surprise as he was pulled out of his thoughts, looking over to the ex-lawyer. "Huh?"

"I don't mean to pry, and feel free not to answer this if you don't want to," Phoenix continued, before gesturing to Apollo's left wrist, "but I was just wondering about your bracelet there. Where'd you get it?"
Right hand instinctively going to said bracelet on his wrist, Apollo had to think for a few moments. "It... was left with me," he eventually decided to reply. "When my dad died and... and my mom disappeared. When I was a baby."

Phoenix nodded sagely. "I see."

"When I become a lawyer," Apollo continued, staring off into the distance, "I'm gonna wear it in court, so my mom might recognise me by it."

"A noble cause," Phoenix replied, smiling. "When a moment, he laughed, adding incredulously, "Did you just say you want to be a lawyer!?"

Apollo nervously rubbed the back of his neck. "Um, yeah," he admitted, more confidently continuing, "I want to protect people in court, like you do! Er, did."

Phoenix laughed a moment more, shaking his head. "Fine, that's fine!" he said. "But that's what you want to do! Don't think it's so easy, though. If you've seen any of my trials, you should have figured that out on your own."

"Yeah," Apollo replied, blushing. He decided not to bring up the few of Phoenix's trials he'd seen, to save himself further embarrassment.

"Incidently," Phoenix continued, scratching his cheek in a show of idleness, "you're not jealous of my offer to Luke, are you?"

Apollo was surprised at the question, shifting in his seat on the blanket. "Why?"

"You were put in foster care as a baby, and you're still there," Phoenix pointed out, "plus in a boarding school instead of with a more permanent foster home. I know you'll be an adult yourself in a few years, but have you never wanted to be adopted by someone? Have a stable home, at least?"

Apollo found himself rubbing at his bracelet in thought as he stared at the blanket beneath him. "I... wouldn't say no to the right offer, I guess," he admitted. "It's... just never worked out that way for me."

Phoenix mulled on the answer for a few moments before only nodding, and leaving the conversation at that.

"If you're not too exhausted, we could always discuss the offer I made you now."

Luke and Trucy had returned from their 'tour' of the park, which had consisted of about thirty or so circuits of the play equipment at the top of the hill. The moment they had returned to the safety of the blanket, they had dropped to the ground and were lying on their backs, hats off as they panted in their happy exhaustion. Claiming it was "too hot" to wear her cape, Trucy had feebly managed to unpin it, though hadn't pulled it out from underneath her, and was now pouting at the tree branches above them as she gripped the diamond-shaped pin in one hand. Phoenix had insisted they sit and rest for a while before he got out their food for lunch, which the pair had complained about inbetween their own panting for air.

Luke attempted to push himself into a sitting position, but was unable to support his upper-body.
weight without his left arm and was forced to flop back down on the blanket. "Alright," he eventually answered to Phoenix's question, staring at the sky through the tree-branches. "Discuss what, exactly?"

"Good points, bad points," Phoenix suggested with a shrug. "Making compromises and such. We don't have to if you don't want to."

"It's fine," Luke replied, smiling. "I only have two problems with it actually."

Phoenix nodded. "Lay 'em on me, then."

Luke pointed into the sky with his right pointer finger. "Firstly, what happens when we find my parents? Does that nullify the adoption?"

"I'm sure it would be possible to arrange something, should they turn up," Phoenix replied with a shrug. "I don't see why there wouldn't be."

Apollo smiled. "You used to be a lawyer; Shouldn't you know?" he asked jokingly.

"I dealt in criminal cases only and you know that," Phoenix said, giving Apollo an amused smile regardless.

Luke added his second finger to his pointing, making a 'two'. "Secondly!" he announced. "I don't want to leave Clay and Apollo at Turner Boarding School." He dropped his hand back on his chest. "Would it be possible for me to stay there if I was adopted? I could do what Clay does and come home for holidays and most weekends."

Phoenix thought for a moment. "I could make it work," he eventually decided. "It's definitely too long a journey to be doing twice a day, so you'd have to be certain you want to stay in the school most of the year."

"But that's not fair!" Trucy complained, balling her hands into fists at her sides. "I want a big brother!"

Luke laughed. "You'll still get one!" he replied. "I'll just be with my friends most of the time!"

"Plus," Phoenix added with a grin, "he'd only distract you from your homework. More than you're already distracted from it."

Trucy pouted. "Am not distracted," she muttered, crossing her arms.

Apollo smiled at the conversation, but looked away to hide that it wasn't entirely genuine. 'Luke's gonna go through with it, then.' He couldn't deny a part of him was envious of his friend's new, loving family, but he refused to let it show, not wanting to ruin Luke's good time. 'He's just lost his parents, he deserves something good to happen to him. I'm fine where I am.'

"Hey, Apollo," Phoenix called, shocking the teen into paying attention to the conversation again. "I didn't mean to leave you out of the conversation. What are your thoughts?"

Apollo frowned. "Huh?"

Luke was also confused. "But I'm still going to be at school...?"

"Hypothetically, of course," Phoenix continued, giving the boys an enigmatic smile, "if you were in Luke's situation, Apollo, what would be your concerns about being adopted? It's bound to happen
For an instant, Phoenix could see excitement in Apollo's eyes, but it was quickly overtaken by a pessimistic frown. "That would never happen," he pointed out. "I've got three years left before my time is up, and anyway, most people want babies when they're adopting. I missed that chance." He shook his head, forcing a smile. "I'm fine where I am."

Trucy frowned, pushing herself up into a sitting position to face Apollo. "No you're not." she replied.

Apollo glared at her. "Yes, I am," he insisted.

"I can tell when people lie," she said, utterly serious. "And you're definitely lying about something."

"Wow, really?" Luke cried, rolling onto his right to enable himself to also sit up. "Apollo can do that, too!"

Apollo only blinked in surprise, glancing at Luke before returning his gaze to Trucy, who was still staring sternly at him. After a moment's silence, he sighed, looking away. "I don't want to talk about it," he said.

"That's fine," Phoenix said, having watched the small confrontation with a carefully guarded expression. He waited a moment for Trucy and Apollo to calm down, then pulled open the small picnic bag beside him. "Now, who's up for lunch?"

"Ooh, me!" Luke cried, suddenly finding the energy to scramble over to Phoenix's side. Trucy, similarly excited, followed close behind.

Apollo, although smiling, waited patiently where he was. 'If I was in Luke's situation... I'd be looking forward to becoming a Wright, too.'

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"SO?" Clay demanded impatiently as they sat down with their lunch trays. "Tell me what happened on Saturday, already! I've been waiting all morning!"

Apollo shrugged nonchalantly, hiding a smile behind his food. "We had a picnic."

Luke similarly restrained his own amusement, biting his lip. "Yep!"

Clay groaned exaggeratedly, falling onto the table around his food. "Guuuuuys!" he whined. "I've been waiting for this all weekend! The suspense is killing me!"

"I thought you just said you'd only been waiting since this morning?" Apollo asked with a sly grin.

"Just tell me, you jerk!" Clay shot back behind a fake pout, making a feeble swipe at Apollo's food that the other boy easily dodged. "Or I won't be your friend anymore!"

"Hey, no more being insulted every five minutes!" Apollo replied cheerfully, shooting the now-giggling Luke an exaggerated grin. "Awesome!"

Clay whined a few seconds more before Luke finally decided to put their over-dramatic friend out of his misery.

"Mister Wright came to pick us up with his daughter, and took us to their home on our way to have a picnic!" he explained. "They run a talent agency now!"

"Really?" Clay asked in surprise. "What's an ex-lawyer doing running a talent agency?"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Trucy says she's the one who runs it."

"Trucy being his kid?" Clay specified, Luke giving him a quick nod. "And after seeing his home, you just went on a picnic together?"

"Mm-hmm!" Luke replied. "It was fun! Trucy totally tired herself out playing on the monkey bars!"

Apollo smirked. "You did too, you big kid."

Luke looked embarrassed. "Uh, well... it's only gentlemanly to accompany a lady, you know... even to play on the equipment."

"Mister Wright hashed out the details with Luke to adopt him," Apollo continued for Clay. "He's gonna stay at this school."

"Wow, awesome!" Clay replied, giving Luke a thumbs-up. "It's great to have you sticking around!"

Luke giggled. "I couldn't leave you guys behind! I'll be over at their place for some weekends and over school breaks, like you!"
Clay nodded. "Makes sense. Just make sure you're here on the weekends we go to the space center, okay?"

"Deal!" Luke replied.

Apollo stared at his food, hoping his friends wouldn't make a habit of going home on the same weekends. He'd gotten used to always having a friend around.

Later that day, Luke was working alone at his desk in his dorm room, books and papers spread out before him.

"Knock knock!" came a call from outside the door, and, a moment later, Nancy opened it, smiling as she spotted Luke working hard at his desk. "Ah, getting a head start on our homework, are we?" she asked as she entered the room.

Luke smiled sheepishly, standing up from his chair. "Um, yes. Did you want something, Nancy?"

"Letter for you, dear," Nancy replied, holding out a plain envelope in her hand. "From England, apparently."

"The Professor!" Luke gasped, almost ripping the letter out of Nancy's hand in his excitement. "He wrote back!" He dashed back to his desk, throwing a belated "Thank you!" over his shoulder.

Chuckling to herself, Nancy left the room.

My dear Luke,

I was greatly saddened to read your letter and learn what had come of you and your mother and father. Hopefully, by the time you receive this, Mr. Wright will have met up with you. I gave him a call to let him know where you were, as it seems your parents happened to make their new home in the city he lives in. He should be able to assist you with finding information, as he assisted us in Labyrinthia.

Your new friends sound very exciting. In fact, I'd hazard a guess that you might learn something very interesting if you asked this Apollo about his hero, that is, if you have not already learned what I speak of from Mr. Wright himself. Clay also sounds like a smart boy; Not just anyone can become an astronaut, after all. He will have to be dedicated to make it that far.

I will be sure to keep in mind over the holidays that your letters may be delayed in finding their way to me. Over the summer months, it may be best that I temporarily write to the address where you are staying then, in order for us to keep in touch.

Flora misses you also. She has turned to baking to distract herself. I fear I will have to replace our oven before too long. It was perhaps a mistake to start spending more of my time at home, where the smell of burnt pastry has begun to permeate the apartment. Flora appears to have charmed our neighbours into offering their help instead of complaining, which is a blessing. We are both doing well, otherwise. Life continues as usual.
I have enclosed a few puzzles I discovered recently that may interest you. Do remember to reply when you are able.

Your friend,

Professor Hershel Layton

9th September, 2019

September 18, 5:32PM
Sirius Turner Boarding School for Boys
Dormitory, Room 321

Clay had dragged his fold-up stool into Luke's room, and, at Luke's insistence, they were doing homework before moving on to more fun things to do. Luke was at his desk, while Clay and Apollo used textbooks to write on, Clay on his stool and Apollo on the bed.

There was a knock on the door, quickly followed by a voice calling, "Knock knock!" Luke got up to attend to the door, only to stop as they heard the sound of Nancy's master key turning in the lock.

"Hi, Nancy!" Luke called as his door creaked open.

The middle-aged dorm-mother poked her head into the room with a smile, then slowly made her way in. "Got a letter for you, Luke."

"Ooh!" Luke cried, eagerly taking the proffered letter from Nancy's hand. "Thank you!" He dashed off to his desk, grabbing a pen lid in the absence of a letter-opener to carefully open the envelope.

"Oh, and you're here too, Apollo!" Nancy added, surprising the teen as she pulled another letter out of the bundle in her hands. "There's one for you as well."

Apollo took the letter with some reluctance. "One... for me?" he repeated in disbelief.

"Well, I'll leave you boys to it," Nancy cheerfully said, turning and leaving the room with a wave.

"Who'd write you a letter?" Clay asked Apollo, placing his makeshift textbook-desk and homework on the floor as he stared at the paper in his friend's hand.

"I dunno," Apollo replied, staring at the front of the letter to confirm it was indeed 'Apollo Justice' that it was addressed to. Giving his friend a shrug, he grabbed a corner of the flap on the back of the envelope and ripped it open, creating a jagged hole roughly along the top. As he tugged the letter from its prison, Luke similarly finished opening his envelope and slid his own letter out.

There was an ominous silence as the two boys read their letters, Luke smiling and Apollo staring in shock as his eyes ran down the paper in his hands.

"Whoo-hoo!" Luke cheered, dropping his letter on his desk and turning in his chair to grin at his friends. "Mister Wright must have put through the request to adopt me! There's a social worker coming to-!" Noticing Apollo's expression and similar letter, he halted his cheers rapidly. "Apollo?"

Apollo continued to stare at his letter.
Clay held out a hand towards his friend, then reconsidered and pulled it back. "Apollo? What's it say?"

"This has to be a cruel joke," Apollo muttered.

Clay frowned, then snatched the letter from his friend's hands, to no protests, and read it himself. After a few moments, he gasped. "No way!"

"What!?" Luke cried, standing up from his chair. "What is it!?"

"Someone wants to adopt Apollo!" Clay announced in disbelief, holding the letter up for Luke to see.

"What!?" Luke cried again, rushing to Clay's side to similarly snatch away the letter and read it himself. He frowned as he read it, glancing back at his own letter on the desk. Aside from their names at the top, the letters were practically identical, saying that a request had been processed to adopt them and a social worker would be coming by to discuss it with them, although at a different scheduled time for Apollo than Luke. 'Hmm, another puzzle! And I think I know the answer, too.' "Apollo, how many adults do you know outside school?" Luke asked.

Apollo, still staring stunned into space, shook his head. "I dunno," he mumbled. "The people at the Space Center, Mister Wright... But why would any of them be adopting me?" He sighed, turning to stare at the wall behind him. "It's probably some weird couple who's asked to adopt any fifteen-year-old so they don't have to look after me for too long."

Clay frowned, then stood up from his stool and lightly whacked his friend on the head. When Apollo protested, giving the other boy a glare, Clay crossed his arms and stood tall. "Stop being so pessimistic!" he ordered. "It's not like that would stop us being friends, would it? Besides, can't you refuse an adoption if you don't like the parents?"

"Of course you can!" Luke cut in with a nod. "Mister Wright told me that last week!" 'Not that he'll want to, if my deduction is correct...' Apollo shook his head. "Mister Wright isn't an adoption lawyer," he pointed out, "he can't know for certain." He sighed again. "I'll have to wait until this social worker comes to figure out what I can do... and if I'll be transferred out of this school or not."

"Even if you are," Clay insisted passionately, "we're not going to stop being friends! We'll find a way to keep in touch!"

"Yeah!" Luke agreed with a nod. "You'll be fine, Apollo! Just you watch!"

Apollo sat in silence for a few moments before looking up at his friends and smiling. "You're right. Thanks, guys. I'm glad you two are my friends."

Clay suddenly squirmed, then pulled Luke and Apollo into a tight hug. "I love you guys!" he declared.

"Yeah, we love you too," Apollo mumbled with a glare. Luke just giggled and returned the hug.

September 20, 2:00PM
Sirius Turner School for Boys
Private Office
"Come on in, Mister Justice!"

Apollo nervously entered the room, pausing in the doorway for a moment before he continued in. It was a small room, populated with only a single desk against the wall and two chairs, one of which was occupied by a short woman in a scarf, blouse and pencil skirt, who gave Apollo a friendly smile as he passed through the open door.

"Could you please close the door behind you, dear?" the woman asked. "Don't want this conversation to be overheard, after all."

Apollo nodded, reaching behind him to push the door closed, then pushed his hands into his pockets as he ambled over to the empty chair, unsure if he should sit or not.

The woman stood up, holding out a perfectly manicured hand. "It's nice to meet you, Mister Justice. I'm Miss Order, but you can call me Lauren."

She seemed genuinely friendly, but even so Apollo hesitated before reaching out to shake her hand, half-worried her long nails would scratch him.

"Sit down, dear," Lauren requested, gesturing to the empty chair as she sat back down in her own. "We have quite a bit to talk about."

Apollo nodded as he reluctantly lowered himself into the seat, his hands gripped together nervously in his lap. "Someone wants to adopt me," he stated.

Lauren laughed to herself. "Indeed!" she said. "I'm taking on your case as a favour for him." She turned to the paper on the desk beside them, running her hands over them. "It doesn't look like your previous case worker did very much for you after putting you here, did he?"

"He found me places to stay over breaks," Apollo mumbled with a shrug, but had to admit to himself the older man who still ferried him between school and his various foster homes had never really seemed to care about Apollo... especially after his age reached double-digits.

"Mmm," Lauren hummed to herself critically, then looked back up at Apollo with a perky smile. "Well! Hopefully we can do something to change that today, yes? If nothing else, I can least see to getting you a transfer to someone else."

Apollo thought for a moment before shrugging. "Doesn't seem like there'd be much of a point."

"Maybe so," Lauren agreed, looking concerned as she registered the teen didn't look too happy. "Are you alright, dear?"

"I'm fine," Apollo insisted, staring at the papers on the desk. "Who's trying to adopt me, anyway? Is it even someone I know?"

Lauren seemed confused for a moment, then laughed. "Oh dear, no wonder you looked so concerned! He didn't tell you?"

Apollo frowned, looking up at the woman in confusion.

"He must have wanted it to be a surprise," Lauren muttered to herself, rolling her eyes. "Honestly, you'd think he'd've learned better with Trucy..."
Trucy!? Apollo blinked in surprise. "Wait, you mean... Mister Wright is the one adopting me!?”

"Phoenix Wright, yes," Lauren answered, smiling. "I was beginning to wonder if he’d given me the wrong name there! He said you went with him on a picnic last Saturday?"

Apollo nodded. "Yeah, we did! H-he asked me what I thought about adoption, but...” He shook his head, still in shock. "Why’s he adopting me, though? Luke was already his friend, but... I’m just some kid!”

Lauren shrugged. "Search me,” she replied. "He only told me he had his reasons, but not what they were."

There was a short silence while Apollo slowly pulled himself together, steadfastly hiding away his excitement at the prospect of getting to know his idol more. A part of him wondered if this was an elaborate and cruel joke, but he quashed the thought with the more rational point that Phoenix didn't seem cruel enough to go so far on something clearly so important to the teen.

"Would you like to get started?” Lauren asked. "Or do you want to block the request and end things here? It's up to you."

Apollo shook his head. "N-no, we can keep going," he insisted, forcing a smile and finding it was genuine despite his lingering nervousness. "After all, we've got fifteen minutes until you have to see Luke, right?" He shrugged. "May as well fill up the time somehow!"

Fifteen minutes later, Luke was waiting patiently beside the closed door into the room he was scheduled to meet the social worker, leaning against the wall. After he and Clay had seen Apollo off from the cafeteria, Luke had worried about their friend, who had been highly distracted ever since they received their letters two days ago. Although Luke suspected who it was trying to adopt his friend, he hadn’t wanted to say anything without knowing for sure, just like the Professor always does!, and thus waited in hope that Apollo would be leaving the room happy.

The door suddenly swung open, and Apollo bounced out of the room, grinning. "Hey, Luke!" he cried as he noticed his friend. "Good luck in there!"

Luke grinned to mirror his friend, the pair fist-bumping before Apollo thrust his hands in his pockets and strolled off down the hallway.

"Come on in, Mister Triton!” a voice called from within the room.

Giggling, Luke headed into the office. 'Something tells me Apollo will be fine after all!'
"In other news, magician Valant Gramarye was today released from police custody. Officials say all suspicion of him has been lifted regarding his involvement in the murder of his mentor, Magnifi Gramarye, founder of the world-famous Troupe Gramarye magic act. Valant said in a press release that he looks forward to returning to the stage, performing as the last surviving member of the Gramarye group."

Phoenix sighed as he clicked a button on his remote and turned off the television. "Well, there goes my chance to question Valant again," he grumbled to himself, lying across the black sofa and propping his legs up over the armrest. "So much for finding out more about Thalassa's bracelets from a reliable source..."

Silence reigned in the apartment for only a few moments before a familiar ringtone sounded from the low table, where Phoenix had left his phone. Sighing loudly, Phoenix pulled himself back into a sitting position and grabbed the noisy device off the glass, checking the screen to see the number. His face immediately fell. "Uh oh." Wincing, he pressed the button to answer and held the phone to his ear, putting on his best bluffing game. "Hey, Edgeworth," he casually greeted his friend. "Isn't it the middle of the night for you right now?"

"Highly amusing, Wright," Miles Edgeworth replied from the phone speaker, sarcasm dripping from his tone. "I'm currently in Canada; The time-zones aren't more than a few hours' difference."

"Tch!" Phoenix rolled his eyes. "Can you blame me? You're usually off in Europe or Asia. I never know where you are when you leave the country." He smirked. "What am I, your babysitter?"

Edgeworth sighed a long-suffering sigh. "No, but I'm apparently yours," he pointed out. "I just received an interesting call from Trucy's social worker."

Phoenix bit his lip. 'Honestly, I'd forgotten Lauren only put Trucy through with your help,' he thought about saying, but restrained himself. "I didn't want to bother you, y'know?" he said instead. "You being off on another of your trips and all."

"You got caught up in your investigation into Kristoph Gavin and forgot, didn't you?" Edgeworth interrupted, a harsh tone to his voice.

Restraining a growl, Phoenix nodded, briefly forgetting Edgeworth couldn't see it.

"I'll take your silence as a yes," Edgeworth replied, sounding more calm. "The only opinion I can express with the knowledge I have now is that three children to look after might be a sufficient distraction for you. None of us want you destroying yourself with this investigation of yours."

"Yeah, yeah," Phoenix muttered, partly glad his friends had refused to abandon him and partly still wishing they'd gotten far away from him when they still could. He hated the thought that, just by talking to him, any one of them could have their reputations and careers demolished just like his in
the blink of an eye. 'That's it, no more asking favours from Gumshoe.'

Edgeworth paused before continuing. "Wright, why don't you tell me about these boys you're insisting on taking under your wing?" he asked. "And then you can tell me what Maya thinks of all this."

Phoenix grinned at the mention of his former assistant. "She seemed on-board with it when I spoke to her last," he said, teasing his childhood friend. "She has more faith in me than you do, Edgeworth!"

The man on the other end of the phone line sighed, and Phoenix could imagine him shaking his head in exasperation. "Just tell me about the boys, Wright."

A part of Phoenix longed to waste as much of Edgeworth's time as he possibly could, but in this case he decided to be kind. It was in everyone's interest they get this ball rolling as quickly as possible.

September 19, 1:20PM
Wright Talent Agency
Kitchen

Phoenix was moving dirty plates and cutlery from the sink to the dishwasher when he heard his phone ringing in the distance. After hurriedly drying his hands on the dishtowel, he raced through the door to his office, where he'd left the blue device on his desk. He took only a glance at the number calling, but it was a long enough look for his brain to register who it was as he clicked to answer.

"Why hello there, oh great Master of Kurain!" Phoenix announced over-exaggeratedly into his phone, restraining a laugh. "Why is a great spirit medium like you calling a lowly pianist such as myself?"

Maya giggled on the other end of the line. "Not pianist, lawyer!" she corrected despite her laughter. "It feels wrong to call you anything other than that!"

Phoenix laughed, relaxing as he sank into the black sofa he and Maya had spent so many nights on as she subjected him to endless Steel Samurai marathons. "Alright then, 'lawyer'!" he conceded. "Honestly, I'm surprised you were able to call this week. You said you'd be busy until November!"

"I found some time alone," Maya airily explained, and Phoenix could imagine her shrugging nonchalantly. "Somewhere with a signal." She giggled again. "Plus, I just had to get an update on what's going on with Luke! Is he alright? You were able to meet with him, weren't you? Has he decided what he wants to do yet?!"

"He's fine, don't worry," Phoenix assured her. "I took him and his friend out on a picnic with Trucy."

"Ooh, I forgot about his friend!" Maya cried, suddenly turning stern as she continued, "Was he a nice kid? Tell me honestly, Nick. I'm not letting Luke hang out with jerks. I don't care how many of Kurain's elders I piss off in the process!"

Phoenix laughed. "Don't you worry about Apollo, he's a nice kid." 'Speaking of Apollo...' "By the
way, Maya, was there something you forgot to tell me about?"

There was a brief silence on the other end of the line. "I... can't think of anything," Maya eventually replied, sounding confused. "You'll have to be more specific."

"Something on the internet," Phoenix continued, smiling as he imagined the look on Maya's face as she realised what he was talking about. "That you and Pearls ran, apparently. I think Apollo said your usernames were 'Fairy-Mine' and 'Fairy-Pearl'?"

"My-Fairy and Precious-Fairy!" Maya angrily corrected, before realising her slip and quickly stammering an excuse. "I mean, I don't know who they were, but Pearly and I knew about the fanclub! I wasn't a part of it, and, honestly, there weren't that many people, so I didn't want to hurt your feelings by telling you about it, and..." She trailed off and sighed in resignation. "This 'Apollo' told you all about it, huh?"

"He told me enough," Phoenix replied, feeling sorry for putting Maya on the spot. "Apparently you two were posting about my cases the moment I got them? I think it was a bit of a stretch claiming to be 'semi-official', though."

Maya scoffed. "Why? I'm your assistant, anything I do related to the office is semi-official!"

After a brief, confused pause, Phoenix shook his head and decided to leave the topic at that. "Back to Apollo, I think you'll be hearing a lot more about him soon."

"Oh? Why?"

"I've offered to adopt him."

There was a pause as Maya processed the small bombshell. "Okay," she eventually said. "Are you developing a problem here, or...?"

Phoenix laughed. "You'll agree with me when you hear my reasoning: I think he might be Trucy's long-lost older half-brother. On their mother's side."

"Really?" Maya asked, surprised. "Oh, wait, you said you were researching Trucy's mother! Did you find something?"

"Yup," Phoenix replied with a grin. "Thalassa Gramarye had rather unique bracelets, an heirloom made especially for her bloodline. Two of them, actually. But, and this is the kicker, all the pictures from before her death to about fifteen years ago have her wearing only one."

Maya hummed in thought. "So he and Trucy have matching bracelets?"

"No, actually," Phoenix admitted. "What got me interested in them was that Trucy hadn't inherited one. I found a single article showing Thalassa with both, and it claimed she had married a stage performer and was expecting a kid. Nothing else I've found mentions them as anything more than rumours, but I wouldn't be surprised if there was a grain of truth in there, considering this article's not that much older than Apollo."

"Ah!" Maya cried as she saw Phoenix's reasoning. "I see! And only a lawyer like you could have connected those dots, huh?"

Phoenix rolled his eyes at her teasing. "Apollo told me himself he was left with the bracelet as a baby and has nothing else to connect him to his family. I don't know if he'll accept my offer yet, but if he does, I plan to tell him and Trucy what I've found out. It's only fair."
"Aw, poor kid," Maya sighed. "Is he a lot like Trucy? I bet they get on like proper siblings already! Oh, and does Trucy get on with Luke? I can't see why she wouldn't, but..."

"Don't worry," Phoenix laughed, "all three of them get on just fine! Trucy's looking forward to getting an older brother or two, although she is upset that they want to stay at their current school, so she won't be able to see them all the time."

Maya thought for a moment. "You said they were at a boarding school, right? Why'd they want to stay there?"

"Friends, mostly," Phoenix replied with a shrug. "Luke plans to stay at ours some weekends, and I suppose Apollo will do whatever Luke does. They'll be here over school breaks, too."

"They'll have to share a room," Maya sighed nostalgically. "Sis and I did that for a while, before she decided to become a lawyer." She laughed. "There aren't nearly enough bedrooms in that apartment of yours to fit you all!"

Phoenix scoffed playfully. "We'll see!" he insisted. "If there was enough room for me and three Feys at once, I say there's enough for me and three kids!"

"Mia doesn't count!" Maya protested. "Besides, she might still be there occasionally! You need all the help you can get, becoming a single father of three in only..." She paused to mentally go over how much time had passed since May. "Five months!"

"And what about you?" Phoenix shot back, finding he was being serious in response to Maya's joking objection. "You're the Master of Kurain now. Every time we talk, you always sound like you're having so much trouble making Kurain a better place..." He paused to rub his forehead. "I worry about you sometimes," he admitted.

Maya was silent for a few moments. "I worry about you, too," she quietly replied. "Hey, there hasn't been any mention of you in the papers for a few weeks now, right? Maybe, the next time I have a day off, we could arrange to get those three kids of yours up here. Have a family vacation?"

Phoenix smiled. "Not much of a vacation, only one day," he pointed out, cheering up already. "But, yeah, that would be great." *How long has it been since I last got to see you in person? I miss having you around the office every day. And Pearls too, of course.*

"Oh heck, I gotta go," Maya suddenly cried, sounding harried. "I'll call you the next moment I have free, okay Nick?"

Phoenix nodded. "Of course, I'll talk to you later."

"Bye!" Maya added, just before her line went dead.

Sighing, Phoenix lay down on the sofa. It would be a while before he felt motivated enough to get up and resume his household chores.

*View the Court Record*
"She said we have to have two 'supervised' meetings with him first," Apollo was explaining to Clay as they entered his room, "and then it goes through officially."

"Huh, weird," Clay mumbled, dropping onto Apollo's unmade bed as though it were his own. "I guess I can see why they have to do it, though."

Luke closed the door behind him and held his arms across his chest as he leaned against Apollo's empty drawers. He had been in Apollo's room only a few times since befriending him, but even so it was abundantly clear that not even Apollo liked to spend time in his room. As the teenager owned nothing but his bracelet and the uniforms and school supplies the school provided him with, it was a barren place that felt more like a hotel room than a place to call one's own. "I'm sure Trucy had to go through all this too," Luke mused. "I wonder if she'll be allowed to come?"

Apollo scoffed, sitting on his bed beside Clay. "Still, who'd've thought Mister Wright would want to adopt me!? How many kids get to be adopted by their idols like that!? This is so cool!"

Clay laughed, patting his friend on the back. "Calm down there, Bessie! You can fanboy over your future dad to his face in these meetings. Then they'll let you through for sure!"

"Ha ha," Apollo deadpanned with a roll of his eyes, only to add after a pause, "Actually, that's a good point. We can't call him 'Mister Wright' once he's adopted us."

Luke tapped his chin with his right hand. "Maya calls him 'Nick'. Or we could just call him 'Phoenix'."

"Who's Maya?" Clay asked.

"Yeah, you and Mister Wright have mentioned her before," Apollo pointed out, frowning in thought. "She a friend?"

Luke nodded. "She was Mister Wright's assistant when he was a lawyer," he explained, grinning. "The Professor and I met her in England, with Mister Wright!" He decided not to mention the time Maya covered him in phosphorescent moss and he was left sopping wet in a dank, underground cave after washing it off. "She said she was a spirit medium, too!"

Apollo's eyebrows shot up. "Really!?" he asked. "Do you think she was involved in Mister Wright's big trial in February?"

"I've been wondering that myself," Luke admitted with a shrug, moving over to sit in Apollo's desk chair. "I forgot to ask Mister Wright on Saturday."

"But you were there," Clay pointed out to Apollo, poking him in the shoulder. "Shouldn't you remember if there was a 'Maya' involved?"
Apollo crossed his arms, giving his friend a glare. "I'm not \textit{that} good with names," he grumbled. "Besides, that trial was so weird I was focusing more on what was \textit{going on} than who the people were."

"That's understandable," Luke agreed, recalling how confusing Apollo's recap had been. "We'll have to ask Mister Wright when we next see him. Oh, and about what we should call him, too."

"Do you not want to call him 'Dad'?' Clay asked, resting his head in his hands as he leaned forward, elbows on his knees. "That's always an option. Or 'Father', 'Papa', 'Pops', 'Old Man', 'Male Parent'..."

Apollo smiled. "I like 'Dad'. Trucy calls him 'Daddy'.'

Luke winced. "I... can't call him those. I already have a father. No offence to Mister Wright."


"Yeah, I mean, he offered to stay your friend even if you didn't want to live with him," Clay pointed out, then elbowed Apollo as he straightened up in his seat. "Hey, do you think Mister Wright's parents are around? You might get grandparents too!"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Yeah, cuz I really want to get to know smelly old people..."

"That's not nice, Apollo!" Luke objected, crossing his arms awkwardly around his cast. "The elderly are generally wiser, and full of good stories and life experiences we can all learn from!"

Clay raised an eyebrow, staring at Luke incredulously. "Did you rehearse that or something?"

"Nevermind," Apollo muttered, frowning as he raised his hands in surrender. "I'm sorry, okay? I'm sure Mister Wright's parents are lovely."

Luke smiled and nodded, proud to have changed his friend's mind.

\textit{Dear Professor Layton,}

Thank you very much for getting in contact with Mr. Wright for me! He met up with me only a few days before your letter arrived, and has indeed promised to help me with the mystery of what has happened to my parents. He has also offered to make my life here until then a little easier by offering to adopt me, and extended the offer to my friend Apollo too. Also, Apollo did finally tell me the story about what happened to his 'hero', so I do know now that Mr. Wright isn't a lawyer anymore and why. Clay was adamant in calling him by a nickname the media gave him, 'The Forging Attorney', until he found out Mr. Wright was my friend and apologised. Apollo seems to be in shock over meeting his idol, not to mention said idol offering to adopt him. Speaking of, we both accepted. It will make my search for Mum and Dad a lot easier.

Clay says he's very aware of the work he needs to do to become an astronaut, then he lectured me on everything he's learned about space travel from his mentor, Mr. Starbuck. He's also very close to everyone else at the Cosmos Space Centre, which isn't far from here, and seems to love showing off just how much he knows whenever we go there.

You already have Mr. Wright's address, don't you? I think it might be easiest you send me letters there from now on, since I will be spending my school breaks there (and some weekends - exact days are impossible to give) with Trucy and Apollo. Has Mr. Wright told you about Trucy already? He adopted her in May, and she's very sweet. She's promised to get me to one of her magic shows one
of these days!

Perhaps we should buy Flora a cookbook of some kind? I don't know if she would resent not being allowed to experiment with her cooking, not after the "fish cake" she made before I left. Either way, I hope she continues doing well. And you too, of course! If you ever are able to visit me here, I'm sure Flora would love to see the Space Centre herself: They have robots there that are specifically programmed to recognise and respond to emotions, for the purpose of one day being companions for humanity's ventures into space! Clay is very excited about it, and I'm sure he'd love to recount every detail for her.

Thank you for the puzzles! They were great fun to work on during a break in my homework! I thought up a few myself since I arrived here, and have included them in this letter. I hope you enjoy them!

Your friend and apprentice,

Luke Triton

20th September, 2019

September 23, 5:32PM
Sirius Turner Boarding School for Boys
Classroom 310

"'Nick' is fine with me," Phoenix mused, leaning back in his chair in the empty classroom. "Or any variant on 'Daddy', since Trucy already calls me that anyway. Whatever you're comfortable with."

Apollo grinned, lying more than leaning on the desk he had sat at. "Great!" he chirped. "Thanks, Mister Wright!"

Lauren smiled to herself. "You should have seen Trucy when Mister Wright here suggested she call him 'Daddy'. Picked it up immediately, she did."

Phoenix chuckled. "Trucy is very unique like that. In the best way possible, of course."

"By the way," Lauren continued, turning to Apollo, "I do apologise I couldn't organise to get us out of your school for this first meeting. Once we have all four of you together next week, it should be a lot easier to get you out of here."

"It's fine," Apollo assured her with a shrug. "I'm sure Trucy's having fun keeping Luke busy, running all over this place. Besides," he grinned, "I have plenty of things I can talk to Mister Wright about!"

Phoenix couldn't resist a smirk. "Lemme guess, some of my old trials?"

Apollo straightened up in his chair in surprise. "How'd you know?"

"I guess I'm getting to know you," Phoenix somewhat sarcastically replied, laughing. "Go ahead, talk to me. I'm curious to know which of my trials you sat in on."
Rubbing the back of his neck in embarrassment, Apollo began to talk.

Outside, Clay was laughing his head off as Luke chased Trucy in circles around the courtyard.

September 24, 5:31PM
Sirius Turner Boarding School for Boys
Classroom 307

Luke looked out the window in delight, watching Trucy show off her magic tricks to a delighted Clay while Apollo stood nearby, pretending to be disinterested. *I'm glad they get on so well!*

"Apollo said yesterday you were curious about Maya?" Phoenix asked, sitting nearby.

"Uh huh," Luke said with a nod, turning in his chair to face his friend and trying not to look too worried. "Especially since Apollo said you had a big case about spirit mediums in February?"

"Don't you worry," Phoenix assured him with a smile, "Maya is perfectly happy and alive." He laughed. "She's just... inherited a rather important position back in her home town. She had to quit being my assistant full time to take care of it."

Luke thought for a few moments, recalling a conversation the four of them had had back in Labyrinthia about where they came from. "Didn't she say something about her town being full of spirit mediums like her?"

Phoenix chuckled to himself and nodded. "They take it all very seriously up in Kurain. The Feys are a highly important family, and Maya's the head of it now."

Lauren looked up from the book she was reading in interest.

"The head!?" Luke repeated in disbelief, jaw dropping open. "How'd that happen?"

"It was always going to, eventually," Phoenix explained with a sigh. "We just thought we'd have another few years before it became a problem. It all kinda came out of nowhere."

Luke pulled his feet onto his chair, hugging his knees. "Did the previous head of the family suddenly die?"

Phoenix couldn't resist a short, bitter laugh. "She came out of hiding specifically to die, apparently."

"Huh?" Luke asked, cocking his head to one side.

"It's a long story," Phoenix sighed, rubbing his face with one hand. "Maya's mother, the previous Master of Kurain, went into hiding about... eighteen years ago now. If she didn't reappear, Maya was going to inherit Mastership once twenty years had passed."

Luke hummed to himself in thought. "They must have both been something very important."

"What was, dear?" Lauren asked.

"Whatever made her go into hiding," Luke explained, "and whatever made her reappear before she
Phonix smiled to himself. "Yeah," he muttered. "They were."

September 27, 11:24PM
Wright Talent Agency
Phoenix's Office

"You should have ordered it last week," Edgeworth coldly reminded his friend over the phone. "It would be arriving now, and you wouldn't be having this problem."

"And how are you planning to move them and the suitcases they inevitably have from their school to your apartment?" Edgeworth added. "Possibly during peak hour, I might add."

"I'm serious," Edgeworth continued. "I'll pay for it myself, if I have to."

Phoenix blinked in surprise, sitting up in his desk chair. "Really...?"

"I may as well," the prosecutor admitted. "I'm essentially acting as your financial guardian now." He paused, then added in a more serious tone, "Just don't get any ideas of 'charitably' taking on more children. Three is more than enough."

"Ha ha," Phoenix deadpanned.

"Trucy always saves seats in the front row," Phoenix explained as he led Lauren and the two teenage
boys through the crowded bar. "Be careful," he teased, "she may pick one of you to be her 'lovely assistant' tonight."

Apollo frowned. "Why are you looking at me!?!"

Luke smiled. "That sounds like fun! I can't wait to see what she can do!"

"I'll admit," Lauren said, "I have been curious to see Trucy's talent in her family business. I never got to see a Troupe Gramarye act live."

"You'll certainly enjoy yourself, I can guarantee that," Phoenix assured her with a smile, then paused and pointed at a table by the stage with a grin. "Ah, looks like our seats!" He snatched the small 'reserved' sign from the centre and dropped into one of the chairs. Luke excitedly dragged Apollo over to take the two seats closest to the stage, and Lauren gingerly lowered herself into the last remaining of the four chairs.

Apollo turned to face Phoenix. "Do you see Trucy's show a lot, Mister Wright?"

Phoenix nodded. "I try to come by every week, but sometimes they want me at work on Saturdays."

"Goodness!" Lauren gasped. "Does Trucy go home on her own!?"

"Oh no," Phoenix explained, shaking his head. "I drop her off before her show, then she comes and meets me at my job. It's not far away, so one of the adults usually walks her over."

Lauren sighed in relief. "That's good to hear!" she nervously laughed. "I was worried for a second there!"

Phoenix laughed. "Honestly, Trucy is always begging for more shows." He gestured around the full house. "As you can probably see, her act is already really popular, so her boss certainly wouldn't say no."

"Why don't you let her, then?" Apollo asked.

"Since her family always travelled, she hasn't had consistent schooling," Phoenix sighed. "I've restricted her to one show a week until she's caught up, and even then, I've told her no shows on school nights." He frowned darkly at the stage. "Not that it helps making her do her homework every night, though."

The lights began to dim, and Luke bounced in his seat as the crowded bar began to suddenly quieten. "It's starting!" he hissed.
For Apollo and Luke, the adoption process was over in a flash. After seeing Trucy's magic act the previous Saturday (Apollo was indeed called up on stage as Trucy's latest 'victim', in his words) and finishing off their second supervised meeting with their future parent, Lauren had pulled out some forms to hash out the final details with the boys and Phoenix on their adoption. To Phoenix's surprise, although Luke wanted to keep his surname, Apollo was eager to change his and take on the 'Wright' name. Since they would be staying at their current school, it was agreed they would hold off on moving in to their new home until the following Friday (although Apollo was quick to point out he had nothing to move, but was looking forward to it regardless).

Clay was feeling a little put out as he helped the new brothers move Luke's handful of suitcases out into the courtyard. "You guys aren't gonna run off and forget me, are you?" he asked as they sat on the benches. "We're still gonna go to the Space Center together on most Saturdays?"

"Of course we are," Luke assured him, holding his teddy with his broken arm and the handle of a suitcase with the other. "I wouldn't miss hanging out with you for anything!"

Apollo smiled, idly tapping the bracelet on his left wrist. "Except, you know, the process of being adopted. That's all over now, but it was more important, unfortunately."

Clay shrugged. "I guess I can't blame you. Trucy is pretty incredible." He pouted. "I can't believe I didn't get to go and see her magic act!"

"You can come tomorrow!" Luke suggested. "You know where we live now, you can meet us there before the show!"

"Would that be okay?" Clay wondered. "With your new dad, I mean?"

"It should be fine," Apollo pointed out. "We're already planning on going to see it again, anyway."

One of the many cars parked by the dormitory gate drove away, and the open spot was immediately filled by a small van, painted along the side with the name and number of a local cab company. The side door flung open and a small girl with a bob of brown hair bounced out, wearing a school uniform consisting of a pale-yellow blouse and checked skirt.

"They're here!" Apollo cried, leaving the suitcase he'd been carrying and dashing over to the gate. Luke and Clay shot each other a look and decided to wait where they were.

Phoenix was just closing the passenger door behind him when a teenage boy slammed into him, gripping him tightly in a hug. He looked down to see brown hair, lovingly arranged into spikes at the front. "Apollo?" he asked in surprise.

Apollo spoke quietly, and, although his words were muffled by Phoenix's chest, they were still perfectly understandable. "Thanks, Dad."
A part of Phoenix was tempted to snarkily ask what he was thanking him for, but mostly he was shocked at the choice of name the teen had suddenly given him. He decided to take the comment as a general thanks and smiled, returning Apollo's hug. "You're very welcome."

After a moment, Apollo and Phoenix separated, and Apollo dashed off to the gate, which Trucy had rushed to hold open when she saw Apollo running through a few moments before. She glared at her new brother as he approached. "Hugs later! We have work to do!" she admonished him sternly.

Apollo rolled his eyes, muttering "Alright, alright," as he walked through the gate. "You're on gate duty anyway..."

Trucy stuck her tongue out at Apollo as he passed.

Phoenix and Apollo walked together across the quiet side of the school's courtyard to where Clay and Luke were sitting with Luke's re-packed suitcases. "Hi, Mist-, I mean, Nick!" Luke called, waving as he stood up, teddy trapped tightly between his cast and chest. He had been struggling to switch to Phoenix's nickname since the adoption process started, and Phoenix couldn't help but smile every time the younger teen messed it up.

Clay threw Phoenix a quick salute against his ever-present visor, standing up and grabbing the largest of Luke's suitcases. "We putting them in the cab out there, Mister Wright?"

Phoenix nodded. "Yes, thank you, Clay." As Clay headed off, Apollo took one of the remaining two suitcases and Phoenix grabbed the last, to Luke's consternation.

"I can carry it, Mi-, uh, Nick!" he cried.

"I'd rather I do it," Phoenix replied with a smile. "You're already carrying that bear, aren't you?"

Luke opened his mouth to reply, but couldn't think of a comeback, so he hugged his bear tighter as he closed his mouth again.

The cab driver opened the back of his van to let the small family load Luke's bags inside, and, once they were done and back on the sidewalk, Clay moved to his two friends to pull them into a sideways hug. "See you tomorrow for this magic show?" he asked.

Trucy, having abandoned her post at the gate, gasped in delight. "You're coming to see my show!?"

Clay smirked. "Duh. It's the best magic act in town, isn't it?"

Phoenix smiled as Trucy bounced on the spot with joy. "We'll see you tomorrow then," he said. "Six-thirty would be best, if you're planning on meeting us at the office."

"I told you it would be fine," Luke whispered to his friend, grinning.

Clay released his friends with a laugh. "Seeya then, Wrights!" He strolled back towards the gate, giving Trucy a pat on the head as he passed.

Phoenix piled his three children into the back of the cab, taking his seat back in the front with the driver. As they peeled off back into peak hour traffic, Phoenix heard Apollo, Luke and Trucy already deep in their own discussion about something he couldn't quite hear over the engine. He smiled, happy they were keeping themselves entertained for now. It would be another hour and a half before they would arrive back at the boys' new home.
"I can't believe I forgot to introduce you guys to Mister Charley!" Trucy shouted as she shoved the front door of their home open, brandishing the keys Phoenix had given her wildly. "He's such an essential part of this office!"

Phoenix rolled his eyes in amusement as he entered after her, carrying the largest of Luke's suitcases straight through further into the apartment.

Apollo frowned, dropping his one suitcase at the end of the reception desk. "What, you have a pet?"

"Yep!" Trucy chirped, bouncing in place next to the plant by the door into Phoenix's office.

Luke carefully closed the front door behind him, dragging his suitcase carefully so as not to lose his grip on his teddy bear. "If you have a pet, why didn't you mention him before!?" he asked, almost indignantly, leaving his final small suitcase where it sat and walking over to join Apollo and Trucy. "I'm brilliant with animals!"

Trucy giggled. "Well, he's not an animal, really." Before her brothers could protest, she gave a grand gesture towards the tall palm lily at her side. "Ta-da! This is Mister Charley! He's our mascot!"

Apollo's face fell. "It's a plant."

"Yep!" Trucy cried, hands on her hips.

Luke gave her a polite smile. "He's... a very nice plant!" he said, one hand at the brim of his cap.

Trucy giggled. "You don't have to pretend," she muttered, then instantly brightened up again, crying, "That's okay! You'll learn to love him!" She petted one of Charley's leaves fondly. "Daddy says Mister Charley's been here longer than him! He's seen an awful lot for a mere plant!"

"That he has," Phoenix said, and the three looked up to see their father appearing in the door through to his office. "I'll tell you the whole story sometime," he promised the boys, then cast a glance to the abandoned suitcases behind them. "Right now, we should get you two settled in first. Do you remember where your room is?"

Apollo and Luke glanced at each other worriedly, while Trucy only continued to grin. "I can show them!" she chirped.

"Before you go up, though," Phoenix interrupted, hand up to keep Trucy from running off, "I have to warn you, there's only one bed up there right now. I've ordered a second, but it hasn't arrived yet." He shrugged in apology. "I've set out a sleeping bag for one of you to use until then, if that's alright."

"That's fine," Apollo and Luke said in unison, pausing to blink in surprise at each other as Trucy giggled. Apollo shook his head and continued, "I'll sleep in it. It's been ages since I got to go camping!"

Trucy clapped her hands together. "C'mon, I'll show you guys where your room is!" she cried, then raced past Phoenix into his office.
Without the sunlight streaming in through the large windows, Phoenix's office was bathed a deep blue tint, hiding the details of the shelves of legal books and casefiles that covered the walls. Nestled in the wall opposite the windows, hidden between the shelves, were two doors; One led to a small toilet, while the other marked the entrance into the residential section of the apartment, leading to the kitchen and dining area. From there, next to a laundry area and back door, was a staircase to the upper floor, which led to an open landing and corridor that lined the way to the bedrooms and bathroom. Phoenix's room was the furthest away at the end of the corridor, next to the bathroom that Trucy warned them had a second door inside they had to lock when they were using it, as it was also connected to the main bedroom. Trucy's room was next to it, the closest door to the stairs, and Apollo and Luke's new room was inbetween, opposite the bathroom.

As they entered the room, Trucy hanging back in the doorway, Luke and Apollo paused to look around. It had changed a bit since their first visit over two weeks ago now, with the single bed moved up against a wall, along with its bedside table. The cupboard by the doorway was left open, Luke's large suitcase and an innocent-looking letter sitting in front of it, and, against the opposite wall to the bed, a sleeping bag was laid out, a second bedside table sitting beside it.

Apollo shrugged, smiling. "It'll look much better once we get my bed in," he pointed out, strolling over to the sleeping bag and dropping down to sit on it, to Trucy's amusement.

Luke nodded, walking over to the bed and carefully arranging his teddy against the pillow. "I've never shared a room with anyone on a permanent basis before," he said. "Only hotel rooms." He decided to wait to investigate his suitcase, feeling too drained to face it right now.

"I always shared rooms with my parents and Uncle Valant," Trucy replied, crossing her arms in thought. "Until Daddy adopted me, of course."

"I've shared rooms before," Apollo said with a shrug. "Most foster kids do at some point." He grinned. "Don't worry, Luke. We'll be getting on each other's nerves like real siblings before too long."

Luke giggled, sitting on the bed. "I hope it's a long time before that happens!"

"Everything okay in here?" Phoenix asked as he entered the room from behind Trucy, carrying Luke's last two suitcases. "I'll leave these by the cupboard for you to unpack in your own time, Luke. Oh, and don't forget this letter that arrived for you from the Professor."

"Thank you M-, Nick!" Luke cried, making a mental note to check out the letter before he went to sleep.

Trucy tugged at Phoenix's sleeve as he placed the suitcases in his hands by the other two. "Daddy, I'm hungry! Is it dinnertime yet?"

"You're always hungry," Phoenix replied, ruffling Trucy's hair. "But it is probably time to eat, I'll admit."

"Oh, good!" Luke cried, jumping to his feet. "I'm starved!"

Apollo rolled his eyes as he dragged himself back to his feet. "You're always hungry, too," he mumbled.

Phoenix laughed as he headed off down the corridor. "Well, Hungry and Starved, I'll see what I can do for you, shall I?" Trucy cheered as she followed after, while Luke and Apollo only smiled, walking to the kitchen at their own pace.
My dear Luke,

I am happy to hear of the rapid progress you are making already! Although, I must admit, I did not expect Mr. Wright to offer to take you in as his own, nor for you to accept such an offer. Regardless, I am sure your parents would be happy to hear you have someone who cares about you as he does to look after you. I can imagine your friend Apollo must be over the moon to also be taken into Mr. Wright's family, if he still idolised him after the incident in April.

Tell your friend Clay I apologise for offending him in expressing my concerns. He sounds very enthusiastic and well prepared to follow his dream to its fruition, and I wish him the best of luck.

I am well aware of young Trucy, as you suspected. Mr. Wright has told me about her in his own letters, although I did not learn about her until shortly before you left England, and I regret I was distracted and unsure of how to tell you of Mr. Wright's predicament myself. I hope you'll forgive me saying I think we were both a little distracted at the time.

Both Flora and I are doing very well. I do not think a cookbook would be the solution to Flora's experimentation. As you say, she would resent being made to follow a list to the letter, although if I can convince her to stick to only minor changes from a trusted recipe, it may help her cooking instincts down the road. She tried experimenting with my tea set last week, and I'm afraid I had to crack down on her. She apologised only an hour later, but I still regret the little spat regardless. I'm sure Flora would appreciate seeing the robots at the Space Centre you spoke of, and certainly seemed intrigued when I told her of them. I'll keep them in mind should we ever visit.

The Ascots came to visit the other day, and Flora had great fun asking them all about Monte d'Or and old Stansbury, and playing with young Sherry. Randall claims he is thinking of surprising Henry by leaving the city in his care and simply going on holiday, although I suspect that is more likely to give poor Henry a heart attack than anything else. They asked after you, so I told them you were doing well.

The puzzles you sent were very enjoyable! I let Flora take a crack at them, although she needed a hint or two to find the answers (through no fault of the puzzles, I can assure you). I've included a few more for you, should you need a break from your studying.

Your friend,

Professor Hershel Layton

25th September, 2019

October 5, 9:12AM

Palm Tree Shopping Mall

"But I hate shopping!" Apollo complained as he lagged behind his family, wandering down the aisles of the first clothing store the Wrights had spotted in the local mall. "Can't I go back home?"
Phoenix laughed. "Wouldn't that defeat the purpose of specifically buying you clothes?" he asked. It had become his personal mission for that day once he learned of Apollo's meagre belongings, wanting the boy to feel more at home no matter how much he was fighting the idea right now. "You can't always wear that uniform, y'know!"

Apollo pouted, crossing his arms. "Watch me!"

Trucy, once again dressed in her magician's outfit all ready for her show that evening, skipped to Apollo's side and stared at him with a big grin. "Okay, I will!" she cried gleefully.

"You know what I meant!" Apollo objected, making a swipe at Trucy's hat that she ducked to avoid with a giggle.

Luke looked around at the racks of shirts they were currently inspecting. "What's your favourite colour, Apollo?" he asked. "That would give us something to start with, at least."

Apollo thought for a moment. "I've always liked red, I guess," he admitted.

"Me too!" Trucy cried, flapping her red cape, then tapped her chin in thought. "Although, I've been thinking of making my next stage outfit in another colour, just to try it out. Like, I could try my Grandpa's black outfit, or Mommy's blue. Or come up with my own colour, like purple! Or green!"

She grinned at Apollo. "What do you think?"


Phoenix pulled a pair of red shirts, identical except for their differing sizes, off the racks and held them out to Apollo. "These look interesting?" he asked. "You might need to try some on to find your size."

Apollo gave a long-suffering sigh and took the proffered shirts. "I'll be back in a bit," he muttered darkly.

"You don't want to collect more than two first?" Phoenix called after him, but Apollo didn't reply.

October 5, 12:58PM

Wright Talent Agency

Phoenix's Office

Luke waited until after lunch to approach Phoenix and ask for somewhere he could write his return letter to the Professor (Trucy and Apollo were using the kitchen table to play a particularly heated game of Monopoly), and Phoenix immediately led him through into his office.

"I totally forgot you'd want desks of your own," he said apologetically as he walked over to pull out the chair behind his desk, hurriedly collecting the loose papers that littered its surface. "I'll have to look into that, but in the meantime, you can just use mine."

"Thank you, Nick," Luke said with a smile, clutching his letter from the Professor close to his chest. "I'll be sure not to leave a mess!"

Phoenix laughed, stepping back to allow Luke to sit down. "No worries, I leave it in a mess"
anyway.” He opened a drawer to shove the papers in his hand in, pulling out a small tablet computer to make room for them.


"This?" Phoenix clarified, holding up the small tablet, and when Luke nodded, he placed it on the desk. "It was my job computer, when I was still a lawyer. We used to nickname it 'the Court Record' because that's primarily what it was used for."


"Sure it does!" Phoenix cried, holding a small, circular button along the long edge of the device until the screen lit up, a brown and red log-in screen asking for Phoenix's password. "I'm still in the habit of using it to keep up with notes and interesting stuff I notice, actually. These things are specially designed to slot into our benches in the courtroom, so they automatically update with all new evidence, and let us control the holograms we use to display it to the court."

Luke stared at it a moment in surprise. "Wow, an actual modern courtroom is real different to witches court, isn't it?"

Phoenix laughed. "Yeah, real different," he agreed, holding the button on his tablet down again until the computer began to shut down. "I'd offer to show you, but I don't have access to a courtroom anymore. You'd have to ask Apollo."

"That's fine," Luke replied, nodding. He finished adjusting the chair and started work on his letter. "I keep notes on things myself, in my notebook. I've always found it's a good habit to have!"

"Yeah, I suppose it is," Phoenix said under his breath, ruffling Luke's hair. "Let me know if you need anything else, huh?" Leaving Luke to his writing, the ex-lawyer left the room.

Dear Professor Layton,

Apollo and I moved in to Nick's, Mr. Wright's, apartment yesterday. We have to share a room because it's not all that big, but we're fine with it, since we won't be here all the time except during the holidays. I've never got to share a room before! Apollo says we'll start to annoy each other eventually, but he was just joking. I think. Apparently there's a hold up on his bed getting here, so he's using a sleeping bag for now. Trucy was really excited for us to get home, and keeps boasting of her 'two new big brothers'. She and Apollo are always teasing and annoying each other, but I think they've gotten really close deep down.

I'll pass your apologies and well wishes on to Clay when I see him next. He's coming by this evening to see Trucy's show, and I think he's worried that Apollo and I are going to forget him because we have a new family and home. We very specifically wanted to stay at Turner Boarding School to keep being his friend, so I hope to show him there was no need to worry in the coming weeks.

It was very distressing to learn of what happened to Nick to force him to quit being a lawyer, but I can understand why I didn't hear about it until I was over here. I don't blame you for anything, Professor. It was just bad circumstances all around.

I'm sorry to hear that you and Flora had a fight. Is she missing me terribly? Tell her I miss her too, but we'll be fine, both of us. Saying that to myself has helped a lot when I've felt down these past few weeks, so it might help her. I learned it from Clay and Apollo actually, and it's almost become a catchphrase between the three of us! It's amazing to think I've already been in America over a
month; I think I'm even beginning to miss Flora's unique sandwiches, if you can believe it.

I hope the Ascots are doing well? I remember seeing Sherry when she was only a few months old, but that was only just after we found Flora, so she'll be much bigger now I suppose. Has Angela passed down that necklace yet, or is it still too early for that? If you see them again, it's okay to tell them about my parents. I have a new home and I'm fine, so there's no need to worry about me.

That reminds me, I still need to write to Arianna. I promised her I would once we arrived, but I think I got distracted.

Thank you for the extra puzzles! I've put them to one side to look at later, once I have some time. I already prepared some of my own to send with this letter; I hope you and Flora enjoy them!

Your friend and apprentice,

Luke Triton

5th October, 2019

"Wow, I almost didn't recognise you in that!" Clay laughed, poking Apollo's brand new red shirt and brown pants, which the teen had changed into without prompting once the family returned from their shopping trip. "You've actually got something to wear now!"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Well done, you've noticed that people change clothes occasionally. The phrase 'babies have no concept of object permanence' comes to mind."

"Aw, you don't need to be so negative about it, Polly!" Trucy chirped with a smile, bouncing on her heels. "You look great without that stuffy uniform on!"

"It doesn't matter how many times you say that," Apollo sighed, crossing his arms, "you're not going to win any points with me." He turned to Clay and added, "Seriously, she said that about every single thing I tried on this morning."

Clay laughed, leaning on the reception desk behind him. "Hey, it's a little sister's job to annoy their older brother, isn't it?"

Apollo immediately turned to Trucy. "Take that seriously and I'll kill you."

Trucy smiled and shrugged. "Why would I do that?" she innocently asked.

"Suddenly I'm glad I'm an only child," Clay said with a grin.

Apollo shook his head in exasperation, hiding a small smile.

"Is everyone ready to go?" Phoenix asked as he entered the room, looking around at the three there. "You got everything for the show, Truce?"
Trucy tapped her chin. "I think so." She reached a hand into the pink, heart-shaped bag hanging off her hips, rifling through the contents rapidly.

"Everything except these!" Luke called, entering the room behind Phoenix and holding aloft a pair of oversized blue bloomers, decorated with soft pink hearts.

"My panties!" Trucy cried, rushing forward to take the prop from her brother. "Thanks, Luke!"

Apollo closed his eyes. "Magic panties," he corrected under his breath. "It's not that hard to say!"

"Then, if we've got everything," Phoenix announced, waving the collected children towards the front door, "let's get out of here so the show can go on!"

"Yay!" Trucy cheered, rushing ahead. Luke and Clay followed with their own cheers. Apollo waited until Phoenix placed a hand on his shoulder with a chuckle to follow at a slower pace, but was nonetheless excited to be seeing his new sister showing off for the crowds again. Not that he would ever admit it out loud, though.

Once they got outside, Phoenix called to the trio ahead, "Trucy, you'll let me know if you spot Eldoon's, won't you?"

"Sure, Daddy!" Trucy replied with a wave. "I know the drill!"

Apollo looked up at Phoenix curiously. "Eldoon's?" he repeated.

"Noodle stand," Phoenix explained with a smile, "Trucy and I get dinner there every Saturday." He laughed to himself. "Didn't get a chance to introduce you and Luke to him last week, since Lauren insisted on meeting at the Wonder Bar 'n all."

"Is that it, Mister Wright?" Clay called from ahead, and Phoenix and Apollo looked up to see a wooden pull-cart sat on the corner ahead, being slowly walked away from them by an old man in white, wearing a red bowl on his head that gave him the appearance of stringy, blond hair, betrayed only by his natural whitened locks visible beneath.

Trucy gasped, racing towards the cart and waving wildly. "Mister Eldoon!" she cried. "Mister Eldoon!"

Clay and Luke glanced at each other before running after her, laughing.

The cart stopped and the old man looked around, adjusting his thick glasses as he spotted the small group approaching him. "Is that young Trucy?" he asked.

"It's me!" Trucy replied, catching up to the cart with Clay and Luke close behind her. "I brought my brothers this time!"

"Ah, I see!" Eldoon said, smiling proudly down on the two boys behind her. "And what fine young men they are!"

Clay laughed nervously, blushing. "N-not me, sir, I'm just a friend."

"Second one's here," Phoenix added, ruffling Apollo's hair as the teen whined "Daaaaad!" in protest.

"Ah, I see!" Eldoon said again, examining Apollo through his glasses as the last two members of the group arrived at the cart. "And what would your name be, young man?"

Apollo rubbed the area around his bracelet nervously. "Apollo," he muttered.
Eldoon clasped his wrinkled hands together. "Apollo! The Greek god of music, truth, and the sun itself!" he announced, chuckling as he explained, "Among other things, of course! I used to be quite the fan of Greek mythology as a boy, you know."

Apollo looked away, well aware of his ancient namesake.

Luke held out his hand. "And I'm Luke!" he introduced himself. "Pleased to meet you!"

"Pleased to meet you too, Luke," Eldoon replied, shaking the boy's hand good-naturedly. "Now, I understand your little family, and friend, are here for some food?"

"Five bowls, but not too salty tonight," Phoenix said with a grin. "Don't want to kill them, after all."

Eldoon gave a hearty laugh, walking around to the back of his cart. "You've got it, Mister Wright!"
With Trucy privately showing off some of her more complicated magic tricks to Apollo (who everyone could tell was only faking his extreme reluctance to go along with it), Phoenix and Luke headed to the office. Luke had been eager to get started on the investigation into his parents' disappearance, and Phoenix had assured him he had already gathered some of the necessary research they needed, all ready for once the adoption process was over and Luke was settled in to his new home.

"I tried looking for newspapers myself," Luke explained as he sat on the black leather sofa, "but there weren't any in the school library and I didn't know where I could look after that."

Phoenix nodded, grabbing his tablet computer from his desk and quickly powering it up to log in. "Even if there were, I'm sorry to say you might not have found anything anyway."

Luke frowned. "What do you mean?"

"The police said barely anything about it to the press," Phoenix explained, navigating to a specially prepared folder in his 'cases' program as he said down beside Luke. "There wasn't much to report on." He opened up a scan of an article and handed the tablet off to his younger son. "That's the most I saw, if you want to see it."

Luke took a few moments to read the article in silence.

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**YET ANOTHER ACCIDENT ON "DEMON PATHWAY"**

August 26

Forest Road, a woodland road in the mountains not far from the city and nicknamed "the Demon Pathway", has claimed two more victims in a hit-and-run car accident late last night, police report. A car containing a couple in their thirties was hit by something much larger and forced off the road, where the driver and passenger lost their lives, sources say. "They had a minor with them, who has survived and is in the hospital for treatment of his injuries." The victims have yet to be officially identified, but police say more information will become clear as their investigation continues. They urge anyone with any further information on the accident to please come forward.

*Pictured: The mountains in which Forest Road lies, seen from Grand Tower. Photo credit: Lotta Hart.*
"No," Phoenix agreed solemnly, leaning back on the sofa. "It says a lot more than any other articles I found did, though."

Luke sighed, also leaning back as he looked up at Phoenix. "That's not good."

Phoenix shook his head, then smiled. "It's a good thing newspapers aren't my only source of information."

"They aren't!?!" Luke asked in surprise, sitting up straight.

"I used to be a lawyer, remember?" Phoenix said with a chuckle. "I still have friends in high places, even if they won't always talk to me."

"That's brilliant!" Luke proclaimed, holding the tablet in his hands tighter in his excitement. "Were you able to find out anything?"

Phoenix shrugged. "A little," he admitted. "Firstly what you told me, about the bodies not being there. Secondly, that this is only the latest in a long line of accidents on that road." He sat up. "Every few months, a car mysteriously crashes somehow in the middle of the night, and there's always at least one person from the car missing, with enough blood left to indicate they almost certainly died. The police are totally stumped. 'Thank goodness for Gumshoe's inability to keep secrets... and his willingness to do anything for a kid.'"

Luke tapped his chin in thought. "No wonder they won't talk about it to the press," he mused aloud. "You're telling me," Phoenix laughed. "They're so embarrassed about it, they keep switching detectives, and they haven't involved the Prosecutors' Office at all, even though they highly suspect it's some grand serial murder case on their hands."

Luke sighed. "If only the Professor was here..."

"We're not totally out of ideas," Phoenix assured Luke, gently taking back his tablet computer and flipping through his few assorted notes and pieces of evidence. "One thing I haven't done yet is go to Forest Road itself. We likely won't find anything there by now, but it can't hurt to have a look around."

"Agreed," Luke said with a nod. "The only possibility I can think of is that my parents walked or were dragged away from the car." He crossed his arms. "Although, I don't know why they would have left me behind..."

"They likely didn't have a choice," Phoenix pointed out. "They would have been injured like you. Probably knocked unconscious. I'd say someone else removed them." He shrugged. "Can't say why that someone else left you behind, though."

"And then there's the question of what hit us!" Luke added as the thought occurred to him. "It must have been something big and strong to force our car off the road and still be able to drive off!"

Phoenix nodded, then placed his tablet computer on the low table in front of them. "Gumshoe's already thought of that. Miraculously," he said. "Boasted he was doing a search for any trucks or other large vehicles needing repair."

Luke frowned a moment, then nodded in recognition. "Detective Gumshoe?!" he confirmed. "I spoke to him in the hospital!"

"He told me," Phoenix replied, smiling. "Gumshoe's a friend of mine, actually. Very good at sharing
information, if you know how to talk to him."

Luke giggled. "That's good for us, then!" He looked at the computer on the table, tapping his chin. "So, what's our first move in the investigation?"

"A trip to Forest Road, I think," Phoenix answered, leaning back in his seat and smiling. "Do you think Apollo will mind babysitting Trucy for this afternoon?"

Apollo gasped in amazement, sat on the floor beside his new younger sister, an abandoned deck of cards strewn in front of them. "And he just let you go?"

"Yep!" Trucy giggled. "He was so embarrassed that Daddy wasn't in there, he even got his handcuffs caught on his collar!" She held her hands over her mouth in an effort to keep from laughing too loudly. "He almost choked himself!"

Apollo snickered, also hiding his mouth behind a hand. "Poor guy!" he said between giggles. "You might have cost that bailiff his job, you know!"

A showing off of magic had quickly led to an explanation of how a simple card trick worked, which had somehow led to the young pair discussing Trucy's former life as a Gramarye, via her newest and most difficult trick, Mister Hat.

"It was my very first public performance!" Trucy protested, hands on her hips. "Daddy said we'd really impress everyone if we made him disappear!" She paused and pulled her hat down over her eyes slightly, looking down to the cards on the floor. "I miss him sometimes. Him and Mommy."

Apollo frowned, then, after a moment of thought, reached out a hand to rest on the girl's caped shoulder. "I never met them," he admitted, "but sometimes I miss my parents, too. And I wonder what my life might have been like if they'd... never left me."

Trucy turned her gaze up to her new brother, giving him a small smile. "My mommy always told me never to waste time on 'what ifs'," she said. "You can't do anything to change 'em. Besides, if Mommy and Daddy hadn't disappeared, I wouldn't have our Daddy and two amazing big brothers!" She jumped up on her knees and threw her arms around Apollo's neck in a tight hug, surprising the older boy. "We're all gonna look after each other, and find Daddy a new Mommy for us, and help Luke find out what happened to his parents, and maybe find my Mommy and Daddy and your Mommy and Daddy too!"

Apollo winced. "A-actually, my dad died when I was a baby," he admitted. "And doesn't finding our existing families defeat the purpose of creating a new one with each other...?"

Trucy released Apollo, looking up in surprise. "Oh... I'm sorry."

"It's fine," Apollo insisted, shaking his head. He forced a small smile. "My mom's still out there somewhere, though."

"Just like mine," Trucy replied, giving him a grin. She promptly jumped to her feet. "Oh yeah! And when you become a lawyer like Daddy used to be, you'll let me help you with your investigations, won't you? The way Daddy tells the stories, they sound so exciting!" She pouted and crossed her arms. "He won't let me help with his secret missions at all!"
Apollo bit his lip, hiding a smile. "I'll... think about it," he agreed, then raised an eyebrow. "Wait, what secret missions?"

Sighing, Trucy sat back down on the carpet. "Daddy thinks I have no idea, but there's nothing else he could be investigating right now except for who really killed my grandpa and who framed Daddy for forgery!" She fiddled with the diamond brooch holding her cape on. "He leaves me with Uncle Larry or Uncle Edgeworth, or goes off when I'm at school, and I don't get to help! It's so unfair!"

"We have uncles?" Apollo muttered.

"But Luke's helped him with an investigation before," Trucy continued, "and you're a lot older! Maybe he'll let you help, and you can convince him to let me help, too!" She reached out and grabbed Apollo's shirt, looking him fervently in the eyes. "You'll do that, won't you Polly?"

Apollo frowned, pushing his younger sister away from his face. "Hang on a second," he said insistently. "We don't even know if Dad'll let Luke in on this 'secret mission' of his. He might have a good reason to leave us all out of it!"

"Don't be so boring!" Trucy protested, crossing her arms. "This'd be good practise for you, since you wanna be a lawyer 'n all!"

At that moment, there was a knock at the door, and it creaked open a little way before Phoenix stuck his head into the room with a smile. "You two having fun in here?"

"Yes, Daddy!" Trucy chirped, standing up and giving her father a wide grin.

Apollo nodded. "Did you want something, Dad?"

Phoenix hummed in thought, entering the room fully as Trucy eagerly ran to his side. "Luke and I were planning to go out this afternoon and start our search for his parents. Will you two be okay on your own here?"

Trucy and Apollo glanced at each other in shock, Trucy smiling while Apollo was more wary. "Let us come with you!" Trucy cried loudly, grabbing Phoenix's arm and tugging on it firmly. "We want to help!"

"Huh?" Phoenix asked in surprise, gazing blankly at his daughter. "You want to come?"

Apollo sighed internally, but decided Trucy's earlier pleading had convinced him and approached his father. "We want to help out Luke. Besides, if I'm going to be a lawyer when I grow up, I'm gonna need some practise in investigations, right?"

Phoenix looked between Apollo's calm face and Trucy's determined one, then shook his head with a sigh. "Alright, fine, if you two are sure."

"Yay!" Trucy cheered, twirling on the spot.

"Don't blame me if you find this trip boring, though," Phoenix continued, then turned and began to leave the room. "I'm going to make a call, then we'll get ready to leave, okay?"

"We'll be fine, Dad!" Apollo replied with a smile.

With Phoenix now out of the room, Trucy bounced up to Apollo, giving her brother a hug. "See?" she said. "We're gonna prove ourselves useful, and then Daddy has to let us help him with his secret missions!"
Apollo chuckled. "Yeah, I guess so," he admitted.

Ring ring... ring ring... beep!

"Oh, hey pal!"

"Hey, Gumshoe. You're not busy right now, are you?"

"Nope! Hey, how are your kids? Everything go fine?"

"Yes, everything's fine. Just getting the boys settled in this weekend, before they head off back to school tomorrow. You and Maggey doing well, I hope?"

"Sure, sure, pal! Uh... look, you're not gonna ask for another favour, are you?"

"Oh, no, I promise, no more favours. I think you've done more than enough for me already. It's just, I was gonna take Luke to look around Forest Road, but I'm having trouble finding it on my map. You wouldn't be able to give me some simple directions, would you?"

"... You know what? I can do better than that, pal!"

"Huh?"

"I'm not doing anything today, and that Triton kid really touches my heart, still believing his mom and dad are out there somewhere! *sniff* I'm gonna give you a lift!"

"Um, not to insult your generosity, but my other two kids are wanting to come along too. Is there even room for all four of us in that old car of yours?"

"Sure there is, pal! You guys hang tight, I'll be there in twenty minutes!"

Click!

"... Well, that didn't go the way I was expecting."
"The detective's here!" Trucy shouted as she charged out of the Agency's reception area, down the stairs to the street below. Not far behind her was Luke, his satchel slung over his shoulder as he rushed to follow his younger sister.

Phoenix and Apollo were the last to arrive down on the sidewalk, Apollo nervously hugging one of his new sweaters tightly as it failed to completely protect him from the cold breeze. Phoenix gave his friend a wave, distracting Gumshoe from his excited greeting of Trucy to direct a grin in the ex-lawyer's direction.

"Gumshoe!" Phoenix cried.

"Hey there, pal!" the detective replied, giving Phoenix a quick and small salute.

Phoenix chuckled, holding Trucy back from bouncing all over Gumshoe's ramshackle car. "Thanks again for doing this. You didn't have to."

"I know!" Gumshoe replied, looking proud. "I wanted to, pal! Now come on, everyone in!" He opened the side door, gesturing the children into the back seats.

"I bags the middle!" Trucy cried, climbing in.

Luke, despite his excitement, more calmly walked around to enter the back-seat from the other door, laughing to himself. Apollo rolled his eyes and followed Trucy in.

After some time getting the car to start, Gumshoe peeled off from the parking spot outside the Agency and into the intermittent traffic of the street. "So, I've met two of you," he said to his rear-view mirror, addressing the back-seat. "I'm guessing little dark-hair is Apollo, right?"

"Uh, yeah," Apollo mumbled, unsure what to think of the spontaneous nickname.

Phoenix smiled from the front passenger seat. "He said yes," he translated, then decided to run his friend through the names of the rest of his children as a refresher. "Luke has the cast on his arm, and Trucy's the girl."

"Daddy!" Trucy giggled. "He's already met me and Luke!"

"Luke and me," Luke corrected, pointing a finger into the air. "You always put the 'me' or 'I' last."

Apollo couldn't resist a smirk. "Yeah, we Americans just can't handle the Queen's English, can we?" he asked, gently elbowing Trucy between them as she grinned.

Luke laughed. "Neither can most of the English, to be honest!"

Gumshoe snickered from the front seat. "Man, you guys remind me of my brother and me when we
were kids! Those were good times, pal!"

October 6, 11:12AM
Forest Road

'It looks like just a normal stretch of road,' Luke thought to himself as he climbed out of the car. A stretch of tarmac surrounded by trees as far as the eye could see, with only faint tire marks on the road to indicate there had even been any kind of incident at all. There was only a small area of grass before the trees, just large enough to park a car like Gumshoe's.

Trucy climbed out onto the road behind Luke, giving him a tight hug from behind as she buried her face into the back of his shoulder. "Are you okay?" she quietly asked.

Luke just nodded, giving his sister a smile as she pulled away. "I'm fine, Trucy. Thank you."

Phoenix looked around as he joined Gumshoe at the side of the road. "They've cleared everything up already?" he asked.

"It's been over a month, pal," Gumshoe pointed out with a smile, hands in his pockets. "Needed to open up the road again, anyway." He leaned in close, holding up a hand to whisper, "I'll be honest, you're not gonna find anything. We scoped the place out good."

"It's still possible, though," Apollo said from behind the detective, giving Gumshoe a shock and causing him to jump away with a shout.

"D-don't sneak up on me like that, pal!" Gumshoe cried, brushing his coat off as he calmed down. "Whaddya mean by that, anyway?"

Apollo shrugged. "The police missing something," he replied. "Isn't that how Dad won most of his trials, because of stuff the detective on the case missed?"

Gumshoe looked hurt, and Phoenix grinned sheepishly, rubbing the back of his neck. "Nothing against you of course, Gumshoe," the ex-lawyer said, walking around to rest his hand on his older son's shoulder. "Apollo was a bit of a fan of mine." Seeing Apollo's confused look, he leaned down to whisper, "Gumshoe was the detective on almost all of my cases, believe it or not."

"Oh!" Apollo cried in shock, then gave Gumshoe his best apologetic smile. "Sorry sir, I had no idea..."

"S' alright, pal," Gumshoe mumbled.

Luke and Trucy approached from the other side of the car, and Luke tipped his hat with a polite smile. "I didn't mean to eavesdrop," he said in the detective's direction, "but please don't take it personally that I want to investigate the area myself, Detective."

Gumshoe grinned, waving off Luke's concerns. "Aw, don't you worry, pal! I understand!"


Phoenix nodded proudly. "A good philosophy to have, in my opinion." He then turned to Gumshoe.
"So, where was the car found?"

"Right over here, pal!" Gumshoe replied, turning with a swish of his trenchcoat and striding over to a patch of grass not far away, the Wright family close behind him. "It was all smashed up in the front and side; Some of the tires had even come off!" He crossed his arms as he regarded the area, seeing in his mind's eye the car as he had first found it. "Honestly, I was surprised we even found one survivor in that mess!"

Apollo looked over to Luke, who was glaring at the patch of grass as though it had personally caused the accident. "You recognise anything, Luke?"

"Mm-mm," Luke mumbled in the negative, shaking his head. "I was asleep at the time, and the accident knocked me out anyway. My memories of the journey to the hospital are too fuzzy to recall anything specific."

Trucy walked over to the tree line, hands on her hips. "So if Luke's mommy and daddy weren't in the car, they must be in the woods somewhere, right?"

"Good idea, Trucy," Luke said, although this was a conclusion he had already come to on his own. He looked up to his adoptive father. "Are we allowed to search the forest, Nick?"

"Sure," Phoenix agreed. "But we can't go too far. It's easy to get lost out here."

October 6, 11:18AM

Woods near Forest Road

The group of five wandered carefully through the forest, always keeping the road and Gumshoe's car in sight through the trees (which was more difficult than it sounded). Luke stayed in the lead, carefully watching the ground for any sign his parents may have left behind, and Phoenix stuck close behind, redirecting him if they strayed too far from the road and offering his more experienced eye to the search. Gumshoe, Apollo and Trucy lagged behind, mostly keeping their attention on their surroundings so the group wouldn't get lost.

Apollo, bored out of his skull, decided to pass the time in his own way. "Is this like any of your other cases?" he asked.

"Who, me or Gumshoe?" Phoenix asked, looking over his shoulder as he began to lag behind Luke.

"Both, I guess," Apollo answered with a shrug. "You worked together a lot, right?"

Gumshoe laughed. "Well, I guess this forest does remind me of that murder at Gourd Lake, right pal?"

Phoenix thought a moment. "Well, there's no lake," he pointed out, "and a lot more mountains, but I agree there are a lot of trees." He smiled. "It's more like Hazakura Temple, if you ask me."

"Except there's no snow here," Gumshoe replied, gesturing to the orange foliage and occasional bare branch above them. He gave Apollo a grin. "But, yeah, Mister Wright and I worked together a lot over the past three, four years, didn't we pal?"
"Like I said, almost every trial I've ever been involved with," Phoenix repeated, having now fallen far enough behind Luke to be more alongside Gumshoe.

"That's how you became friends, right?" Trucy asked brightly.

Gumshoe grinned, reaching out to pat Trucy's head before remembering she was wearing a hat and patting her shoulder instead. "You bet, pal! We made almost as good a team as me and Mister Edgeworth do!"

Phoenix smiled wryly. "If only that had mattered for anything in the Gramarye trial. We weren't much of a 'team' that time."

Apollo looked up at the embarrassed detective in surprise. "You were the detective on that case?" he asked.

"Yeah, well," Gumshoe muttered, scratching his neck as he looked over to Phoenix. "If you'd just spoken to me before that trial, pal, you wouldn't have had to forge that page..."

There was a horrible silence as Phoenix (quickly followed by the rest of the group) stopped dead in his tracks, staring sternly into the distance. Trucy similarly stared sadly at the ground, hiding her face under her hat.

"Uh, sorry, pal, I-I didn't mean..." Gumshoe stuttered as he realised what he'd said. "Y-you know I-!"

"Forget it," Phoenix muttered darkly, and he stalked off ahead to catch up to Luke.

Gumshoe wilted as Phoenix disappeared behind a tree. "Aw, me and my big mouth," he sighed. After a moment's pause, Apollo reached up and patted Gumshoe's arm. "D-don't worry," he said in an attempt at comfort. "I mean, the whole world is accusing Dad of forgery, he's probably used to it..."

"You wouldn't say that if you'd seen 'im that day," Gumshoe muttered sadly, then shook his head determinedly. "No worries, pal! We're gonna finish this investigation here, okay!?" With that, he stubbornly started following Phoenix's path.

Apollo and Trucy glanced at each other and shrugged in unison before hurrying after the detective. "So I guess you met the detective during the Gramarye case?" Apollo quietly asked his sister.

Trucy nodded. "He wanted to know where Daddy was on the night Grandpa died," she explained. "I didn't see him again until the trial, though." She grasped Apollo's hand, to the teen's surprise. "That was a pretty terrible day for all of us, as much as Daddy jokes about it..."

**View the Court Record**
FLASHBACK: Disbarment

- Six Months Earlier -

April 20, 9:15AM

Wright & Co. Law Offices

Phoenix's Office

Phoenix slumped forward in his seat on the black lounge chair, elbows on his knees and head hanging between them. His white dress shirt and blue pants were crumpled from having been slept in, and made the lawyer - former lawyer - look far more unkempt than he normally would be. Hanging off his nearby desk was his red tie and blue jacket, a dark spot on its lapel marking the spot where his defence attorney's badge had once sat. The blinds on the window were pulled tightly shut, letting in only thin lines of sunlight at their edges and blocking the view beyond of the Gatewater Hotel across the street. The office phone, sat on the low glass table in front of him, had been unplugged the moment it began to ring the previous night, and sat eerily silent, the headset resting off the hook, to the side of its base.

In the distance, Phoenix heard muffled voices and the opening of his front door, and sighed. 'Knew I should have locked that.' He listened as the voices got closer, refusing to move from his position, until finally the door leading from his office to the reception area was flung open with a bang.

"Mister Wright!" Gumshoe cried in surprise, dashing around to stand by the low table nervously. "You came back, pal!"

"As I suspected he would," came a familiar voice, and Phoenix looked up to level a glare at Edgeworth as he followed Gumshoe. Behind him was a teenage girl with long black hair held in a ponytail over her head, looking curiously around the room as she fiddled with a blue scarf pinned around her neck. Phoenix gave her only a cursory glance before returning his glare to his red-suited friend. "Don't give me that look," Edgeworth continued to Phoenix, wagging a finger in his friend's direction. "I'm not here to condemn you, and you should know that full well."

Phoenix sighed and dropped his head again. "You shouldn't be here," he mumbled.

"And why not?" Edgeworth asked, only then noticing a mostly-full wine bottle dangling from one of Phoenix's hands. "If anything, we can keep you from making terrible decisions such as trying to drink." He leaned forward and gently removed the bottle without a fight from the ex-lawyer, who had found it in his kitchen and not examined what it actually was until he took a swig and despised the taste, lacking the motivation to put it away again afterwards.

"Geeze, where did you go to?" the teenage girl asked, arms crossed. "Gummy said you'd disappeared when he woke up."

"He told us what happened yesterday," Edgeworth added, placing the wine bottle on the far end of the table from Phoenix, just in case he tried to grab it again. "Something about a forged diary page and the removal of your badge." He cast a glare to the suit jacket hanging across the messy desk. "I see it wasn't entirely hysteria."
Gumshoe groaned to himself. "Aw, c'mon, sir!" he mumbled. "I was up most of last night tryin' to look after him!" He shook his head sadly. "Least I could do after what I said in court..."

"I'm an adult," Phoenix growled, looking up only to shoot another glare in the detective's direction. "I can look after myself, and I'm allowed to leave my own home for a few seconds without people panicking about me." He left unsaid that he had gotten as far as the furthest entrance to People Park before someone had recognised him and he'd fled back to his office, hanging his head again so he didn't have to look his two friends (and the strange girl they'd brought with them) in the eye. "Just leave me alone. It's for the best."

Edgeworth grunted, crossing his arms and tapping his fingers firmly. "No, it is not. You are our friend, Wright. We refuse to abandon you in a time of need."

"Yeah!" the girl cried, pumping a fist into the air with a cheery grin. "Besides, it's not all that bad! Mister Edgeworth lost his prosecutor's badge two weeks ago, but the P.I.C. gave it back to him a few days later!"

"I'm afraid this is an entirely different situation, Kay," Edgeworth interrupted, shaking his head at the girl. "I gave up my badge temporarily. Wright has been stripped of his. Dishonourably, at that."

Phoenix scoffed under his breath, moving his hands to rest his head in them, propped up against his forehead. "Rub it in, why don't you."

Kay huffed. "Well, the least we can do is let some sunlight in here," she said, and skipped over to the blinds. Gumshoe awkwardly followed to help her with the cords that controlled them.

"Quite frankly," Edgeworth continued, lowering himself politely onto the lounge next to Phoenix, "I didn't think it possible that the Bar Association would strip you of your badge within a day of a forgery accusation. Yet apparently, it has happened."

"It was more than an accusation, Edgeworth," Phoenix replied, looking up with only a sad expression instead of the glare he'd been wearing previously. "The prosecution proved it was forged beyond all doubt. Gleefully." He dropped his head back into his hands, his palms covering his eyes. "They cast a vote. Only one person thought I deserved another chance, and he was the brother of the friggin' prosecutor who accused me." Sunlight suddenly filled the room, and Phoenix shot a quick glare in Kay's direction before having to avert his eyes from the bright light. "I had those closed for a reason!"

"And as you said to me in return," Edgeworth countered, "you should not blame yourself for a mistake that was not yours."

Edgeworth was silent for a few moments. "But it was not you who forged it?" he asked in a neutral tone, ignoring the outburst to Kay.

"Like anyone cares about that," Phoenix spat. "Like you said about SL-9, all that matters is I presented evidence that was forged. I was responsible for it."

Kay had her face pressed to the glass, looking at the street below. "Huh, that girl's got weird clothes on," she muttered. Gumshoe quickly followed her gaze and placed a hand over his mouth, looking worried.

"But it was!" Phoenix shot back, looking up at his friend in exasperation. "I knew there was something off about that page, but I presented it anyway! I didn't even think about it!" He sighed, trying to hide the hitch in his voice as he buried his face in his hands again. "If only Maya'd been
"there, she'd've stopped me..."

"Um," Kay quietly cried, pointing out into the street and glancing back at the two lawyers on the couch. "I think someone's..."

"Sir?" Gumshoe meekly tried to interrupt.

Edgeworth looked around the room. "Speaking of, where is Maya?" he asked. "You have spoken to her, have you not?"

Phoenix shook his head with a groan. "No, no, the absolute last thing Kurain needs right now is for its Master to be associated with..." He suddenly found himself unable to talk, and had to pause to catch his breath. "A forger like me."

"Pretty sure you're too late on that," Kay said, her back now to the window.

Edgeworth looked over to the pair. "What do you mean?" he asked.

Gumshoe winced. "She's-"

The front door slammed open, making everyone in the room jump, and a moment later, a young woman in purple formal robes appeared in the office door. "Nick!" she cried, quickly locating her friend and charging around the couch to drop at his side. "I saw what happened in the paper!" she added, throwing her arms around Phoenix and giving him a tight hug.

Phoenix had to fight to keep from breaking down. "Maya, you shouldn't be here," he managed to whisper, feebly trying to pull away from her grip.

"And why not!?" Maya shot back, releasing Phoenix from the hug and giving him a glare, fists on her hips. "And don't say it's because of some dumb title, because the Master of Kurain refuses to believe you did anything wrong and doesn't care what people think about it!"

'Well, she should care,' Phoenix thought, but couldn't bring himself to say, instead only shaking his head. "Maya, please..."

Maya's glare faded, and she brought a hand up to her face. "Nick, remember what Sis always said? And Mister Armando?"

Phoenix didn't even have to think about it before the saying ran through his head once again. The only time a lawyer can cry is when it's all over.

"It's not over yet," Maya continued, gripping Phoenix's hands and staring pleadingly into his eyes. "You can find a way to undo this and turn it all around, like you always do!"

"Not this time," Phoenix whispered, leaning unconsciously towards Maya as he fought off the tears. "It's over, Maya."

Maya pulled Phoenix into another hug, and this time he returned it, clinging to her as she clung to him. "I'm sorry I wasn't here earlier, Nick," she said, close to tears herself.

There was a short silence as Phoenix quietly sobbed into Maya's shoulder. A part of him registered that Maya seemed to have not brought Pearl with her, which Phoenix was eternally grateful for. The last thing I want right now is for little Pearls to see me like this..."

"I don't mean to interrupt," Edgeworth interrupted, "but Maya is right."
'Damn, I forgot he was here.' At first, Phoenix refused to move, unwilling to break the hug just yet, but relented when he felt Maya gently pulling away. He took the chance to discreetly wipe his face with a sleeve before looking up to find Edgeworth had stood up from the couch at some point and was standing near the window with Kay and Gumshoe.

"This whole situation is sounding more and more suspicious to me the more I hear about it," Edgeworth continued, arms crossed and fingers tapping away in thought. "If nothing else, we need to investigate and determine exactly how this farce of a trial of yours even happened."

"So what do we do first?" Maya asked.

"You go back to Kurain," Phoenix insisted.

Maya crossed her arms and shook her head firmly. "No way! Not until we get you back on your feet, at least!"

"We start," Edgeworth interrupted, a touch frustrated, "by investigating this forgery. Who made it, if it was commissioned, how it got into your hands."

Phoenix winced. "Let's forget that last part."

"Why?" Kay asked. "Isn't it kinda important?"

"It was specially given to me via an innocent party," Phoenix explained, not wanting to bring up young Trucy Enigmar to someone he didn't even know. "There's nothing to look at there."

"And we know it was commissioned, sir," Gumshoe brought up. "Prosecutor Gavin had the guy in the courtroom, though he didn't know who had ordered it from him."

Edgeworth closed his eyes in thought. "So Klavier Gavin was the prosecutor?" he mused aloud.

"Do you know him?" Kay asked, starting to look a little bored as she leaned against the window behind her. "Is he one of those corrupt guys we're still trying to weed out?" Suddenly she looked excited and sprang up. "Do we need to steal the truth from him!?"

"Settle down, Kay!" Edgeworth ordered, to Kay's disappointed groans. "As far I can tell, Gavin is one of the more honest prosecutors I've met, but I admit I've only met him the once so far." He thought for a few moments more. "That would make the brother who wanted to give you a second chance Kristoph Gavin, I imagine?"

Phoenix only nodded.

"Hm." Edgeworth frowned. "I've faced him in court a few times. They call him the Coolest Defence in the West for a reason."

Maya smiled. "Did you win?" she asked, cheekily.

"I found the truth and had the guilty declared guilty," Edgeworth only said.

"That means yes," Kay translated with a grin.

Edgeworth ignored his assistant. "In that case, our best bet is to find this forger and see if they were telling the whole truth in the courtroom. They may give us further clues as to who the commissioner was."

Phoenix frowned, deep in thought. "Actually," he said, "as much as I appreciate your help... I should
"What!?!" Gumshoe cried, distraught. "But we wanna help, pal!"

Maya, on the other hand, looked excited. "You have a plan?"

"Sort of," Phoenix replied, giving Maya a tired smile. "We're gonna need more information first, though."

With a squeal of delight, Maya gave Phoenix a bear-hug. "See? I told you it wasn't over yet! That's the Nick I know!"

Edgeworth cracked a small smile. "In that case, you can question this forger, and I will look into Klavier Gavin." He signalled Kay towards the door, and she seemed happy to finally be leaving. "Don't hesitate to contact me if you require help, Wright."

"Sure," Phoenix promised, watching as Edgeworth and a reluctant Gumshoe left the office.

Maya gave Phoenix another quick hug. "Hey, I know I've been real busy lately," she quietly told him, "but you call if you need someone to talk to, huh?"

Phoenix nodded. "Don't worry about me," he replied. "I'll be fine." He paused a moment. "But seriously, I was recognised on the street this morning. At least for now, it's a bad idea for us to be friends in public."

Maya sighed. "Sure," she admitted sadly. "Don't think I like any of this, though!" Huffing to herself, she stood up and took a moment to straighten out her robes. "I can't believe I never get to be your legal assistant again! This is so unfair!"

Phoenix chuckled to himself. "There are worse things," he pointed out, standing up and jokingly poking his friend in the direction of the door. "Now get out of here! Say hi to Pearls for me!"

"Alright, alright, I'm going!" Maya cried, throwing her hands in the air with a smile. "I'll be back though, mister! You can count on that!"

Left alone in his office, Phoenix looked over to where the sunlight fell on his abandoned suit jacket and tie. 'Say goodbye to your beloved suit, Phoenix,' he told himself. 'You won't ever be wearing it again, after all...' He sighed. 'I think I have some kind of hooded sweater or a hat somewhere I can wear.'
Luke was so focussed on his visual search of the forest floor, he never noticed the conversation between the rest of his group, nor how far behind they fell from him. Although he knew full well too much time had passed to find any remains of tracks his parents might have left in their flight from the crashed car, he still hoped beyond reason to find some sign that the police might have missed. At one point, he had happened upon a local squirrel, but the poor thing was so skittish of humans, it had only told him it knew nothing of any accidents before running off. After that, Luke had, on a hunch, started specifically looking under low bushes and other ground-covering foliage, thinking it was unlikely the police had looked under every single one.

"Any luck?" Luke heard Phoenix ask, and he looked up to see the hoodie-wearing ex-lawyer approaching quickly, looking slightly tense.

"No," Luke replied with a shake of his head. Deciding not to question whatever had happened while he wasn't paying attention, he moved to the nearest cluster of ferns and shuffled through the lowest branches to examine the forest floor below. "I'm currently running on the assumption there might be clues hidden under the plants. It would be great if there were any animals around to talk to, but wild ones don't tend to want to talk much."

Phoenix nodded. "Ah, yes, almost forgot about your 'gift' with animals," he said, looking around before heading to the nearest bush and pulling the branches up. "Of course, any local wildlife was just as likely to be scared off by all the loud-" He suddenly paused. "Aha..."

Luke stopped his search, looking up to see Phoenix slowly kneeling by the small bush, peering at something hidden under the branch he was holding aside. "What?" the thirteen-year-old asked. "Did you find something?"

Not taking his eyes off the hidden object he'd found, Phoenix waved Luke over. "Do you recognise this?"

Luke walked over and kneeled beside Phoenix, then gasped in shock as he finally saw what his adoptive father had found: a small bracelet made up of square wooden beads, each one carved with intricate designs on the four outwards faces. The metal clasp that was designed to hold it tightly around the user's wrist was broken and covered in dirt, and a large plastic charm was tied to one end with a ribbon, heart-shaped and with the letters 'NY' printed on it in a bold black font. Most troubling of all, a multitude of the beads in the middle of the fragile thread were caked in a suspicious-looking brown substance. "Th-that's Mum's!" Luke cried, and moved to grab the item before Phoenix threw out an arm in front of the boy to halt him in his tracks.

"Don't touch it," the ex-lawyer instructed. "It's valuable evidence." He jerked his head towards Luke's satchel. "You brought the Court Record, right?"

Luke nodded, reaching into his small bag to retrieve the tablet computer. "You want to take notes?" he asked as he handed it over.

"Sort of," Phoenix answered with a smile. "Hold this branch aside for me, would you?" As Luke
complied, Phoenix quickly typed his password on the touchscreen and held the computer up in front of the bracelet, adjusting it back and forth a little before Luke heard a loud 'click' from the device's speakers.

"You're taking a picture?" Luke realised as Phoenix returned to fiddling with the touchscreen.

"Yup," Phoenix answered, shooting Luke a grin. "Advantage of having this thing on hand at all times. Although it was easier when I had an excuse to carry my suitcase everywhere with me." Quickly locking the screen, he shoved the thin computer under an arm and started searching through his pockets. "Can you get out that spray-bottle and glasses I gave you earlier?"

Luke nodded, again reaching into his satchel with his free hand.

"Did you guys find something?" Luke heard Apollo call, and he glanced up to see his siblings running towards them, closely followed by Gumshoe.

"You bet we did," Phoenix replied, carefully avoiding directing his comment in Gumshoe's direction as he abandoned the search in his pockets. "We're just documenting where we found it for now."

While Trucy and Gumshoe hung back (Trucy not wanting to get in the way and Gumshoe out of pure guilt), Apollo raced to Phoenix and Luke's sides. "What does that involve?" he asked, an excited smile on his face. "You take a picture of where you found it, right?"

"Nick just did that," Luke replied, finally finding the requested items and pulling out of his satchel an unmarked spray-bottle (except for the words "Ema Skye" scrawled in pen near the bottom) and a pair of white-rimmed glasses with red lenses. "What are these for?" he asked as he held them out.

"You'll see," Phoenix answered with a smile, placing the glasses on his face and carefully spraying the ground around the bracelet, then the bracelet itself. His smile slowly widened to a grin. "Aha."

Gumshoe jumped forward. "What'd you find, pal!?" he cried. "It's covered in blood, right!?"


Phoenix pulled the glasses off, holding out the spray-bottle matter-of-factly. "This bottle contains Luminol," he explained. "Luminol reacts to blood, among other things, but you can only see the reaction with one of these," he held up the glasses. "A friend left me them a few years back, but I've never really needed 'em before now. See for yourself." He offered Luke the glasses, and reached up to take hold of the errant branch, only to be beaten to it by Apollo.

Warily, Luke took the offered glasses and placed them gently on his face. Immediately after noticing how the world was suddenly bathed in a red tint, he saw the bright blue glow of the bracelet on the ground, and similarly tinted specks all through the dirt. He gulped nervously. "A-and the blue stuff is blood?"

"Most likely," Phoenix replied. "Like I said, there's lots of other things it can react to besides blood and other bodily functions, but I doubt in this case it's anything else."

"Wow," Apollo breathed, still grinning excitedly. "How did it even get here?"

Luke handed the glasses to his brother, looking slightly queasy. "Mum bought it in New York, when we got off the ship. She must have left it here as a deliberate clue."

While Apollo put on the glasses himself to view the Luminol reaction, Phoenix went back to his pockets and finally pulled out a crumpled-looking plastic bag. "Now we've documented where it
was," he explained, putting his hand into the bag like a glove, "it's time to collect it." He grabbed the bracelet, then expertly turned the plastic bag inside-out around it, securing the opening shut as he stood up. While Apollo released his branch, Luke got to work replacing the Luminol bottle and the glasses Apollo was still wearing in his satchel.

Phoenix walked over to Gumshoe, holding out the bag with the bracelet inside. "You'll make more use of this than us," he said.

Gumshoe nodded, taking the offered bag. "Hey, uh, pal, about earlier..."

"Forget it," Phoenix insisted, walking off towards the road. "We all make mistakes."

Luke stood, watching curiously as his adoptive father left. "What happened?" he quietly asked Apollo.

Apollo shook his head, looking uncomfortable. "Believe me, you don't want to know."

Phoenix made it all the way back to the road before he remembered the tablet computer he still had under his arm. 'Oops.' He carefully removed it and idly turned it on for something to do with his hands as he waited for Gumshoe and the kids to catch up. 'Hmm, actually, now that I think about it...'

There was a crashing of branches as Luke and Trucy exited the forest and came back onto the road. "Oh, do you want me to put that away again, Nick?" Luke asked as he noticed the computer in Phoenix’s hands.

"No need," Phoenix replied with a shake of his head. "Not yet, anyway." Spotting Apollo and Gumshoe also joining them, he jerked his head in the direction of the road. "Do you three want to stand together somewhere? I want to take a picture of you all."

"Ooh, a picture!" Trucy cried with a smile, bouncing towards her father.

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Really?" he asked, but didn't object, quickly walking after Trucy. Luke giggled as he joined them.

Gumshoe laughed as he watched Trucy arranging her brothers at the roadside, to Apollo's protests and Luke's happy smiles. "Aw, you guys are so cute together!"

Throwing her arms around her brothers' necks, Trucy dragged them down to her level and directed a grin in Phoenix's direction. "We're ready, Daddy!"

Apollo groaned as he awkwardly kneeled to make his pose more comfortable. "Could have consulted us on this, first..."

"Smile, Apollo!" Luke reminded him, awkwardly throwing his cast-covered arm over Trucy's shoulder to match hers over his. Apollo moved to help support it with a spare hand. "This is our first family photo!"

Phoenix grinned as he held up the computer, ready for the picture. "Everyone say 'Apollo is a dork'," he joked.
"Not funny!" Apollo cried, but he smiled anyway.

A moment later, the camera went off with a loud click.
"Wait, you didn't change your name!?” Clay cried, dramatically throwing up his hands as he fell against the railing. "Why didn't you say that when I was going on about 'Luke and Apollo Wright'!? 'The Wright Brothers'!? 'Look at Luke Wright and his brother Apollo'!!?"

Apollo grinned, sitting on the stairs that led to the fourth floor above them. "We just felt like letting you make a fool of yourself."

"Well, technically," Luke giggled, "I count as a 'Wright' even though it's not in my name!"

The trio of boys were hanging out on the walkway by the stairs on the third floor, waiting patiently for Starbuck to return with a promised lunch for them. They had spent that morning in Cosmos Space Center following around various workers and, for Apollo and Luke, watching Clay help out and gush about the moon mission set to happen soon as well as his two friends now being adopted into the same family. For now though, they were happily taking a break while Clay dramatically pined having talked up the newly-adopted brothers as both being named 'Wright'.

"But why didn't you change your name!?” Clay demanded, sliding to the ground and pouting. "I had all these jokes lined up on 'Luke Wright', and now I can't use 'em!"

Luke thought for a moment, then burst into laughter. "Oh wow, I didn't even notice my name would have become 'look right' if I'd changed it! That's amazing!"

Apollo shook his head in amusement. "You do know the saying about what happens when you assume something, don't you Clay?"

"You can shut up," Clay mumbled in reply, crossing his arms as Apollo laughed.

"If you're that upset about it," Luke said, "you can go ahead and still use your jokes. Even though I didn't change my name, they'll still make sense considering the circumstances!" He gripped the brim of his cap and nodded. "I'm looking forward to hearing them, actually!"

"Don't do that," Apollo advised with a smile. "You'll never hear the end of it."

Clay simply stared up at Luke for a few moments. "You're a saint, Triton," he said, then grinned and gave him a thumbs-up. "I guess it's in your name to look on the right side, isn't it?"

Luke giggled, while Apollo rolled his eyes, telling his friend, "That was terrible. I hope your other jokes have more thought put into them than that."

"You're just jealous," Clay replied, giving Apollo a wink.

"Of what?” Apollo shot back with a smirk. "Your inability to tell a clever joke?"

"Aw, come on," Clay needled his friend, "be like Luke and look right past my flaws!"
Apollo pulled a disgusted face, ignoring Luke's laughter. "Is that seriously your best shot?"

Clay grinned. "You want my best shot? Look, Wright, you can't handle my best shot!"

Luke was now doubled over in laughter, while Apollo just facepalmed. "Why are you my friend?" he asked.

"It even works with you, Apollo!" Luke pointed out in delight, still giggling to himself.

"Yeah!" Clay cried. "This works way better than the Greek mythology jokes!"

"Don't remind me," Apollo mumbled, crossing his arms.

Luke tilted his head in confusion. "Greek mythology jokes?"

"My name," Apollo pointed out. "Y'know, from the Greek god Apollo?"

"We looked it up on Wikipedia one time," Clay explained with a shrug. "He's a lot like our Apollo, too!"

"He's nothing like me," Apollo objected. "For one thing, he had, like, a million lovers."

Clay laughed. "Male and female!" he gleefully added.

Luke smiled. "Wow, sounds like a busy guy!"

"He was also, I think, the god of medicine and plague, and the sun, and music of course," Apollo continued, counting off on his fingers, "and probably justice too, given my old name."

"Oh yeah, there was a cool story about that!" Clay cried, turning to Luke. "There was this myth about where the court system originated, where some guy was accused of something and ran to the goddess of wisdom, Athena, for help!"

Apollo nodded as he recognised the story. "Yeah, and Athena created the first court to sort out what had happened. She was the judge, and Apollo was the defence lawyer."

"Wow!" Luke gasped. "That is a fitting name, considering you want to be a lawyer n' all!"

"Yeah, I guess," Apollo mumbled, hiding a smile.

Luke thought for a moment, then asked, "What happened in the court case?"

"Uh," Clay muttered, then shrugged. "Don't remember, actually."

"Athena sided with Apollo, of course!" Apollo boasted. "Although, it's been a while since we looked all this up. We might be wrong on some points."

Clay gave Apollo a cheeky grin. "Yeah, Apollo probably lost."

As the two old friends descended into a light-hearted slap fight, Luke's attention was distracted by movement on the floor above. He turned his gaze up the stairs, and found himself locking eyes with a young girl, maybe a little older than Trucy, peering around the wall. Her bright orange hair was pulled into a ponytail on the left side of her head, and she was wearing a set of massive pink headphones with odd antenna sticking out of them. Luke and the girl stared at each other for a moment before the girl gasped and disappeared.
"Wait!" Luke cried, attracting Apollo and Clay's attention as he dashed past them and directly up the stairs.

"Hey, we're not allowed up there!" Apollo cried.

Clay wasted no time in following his friend. "Luke, come back!" Apollo jumped to his feet to join the chase.

As Luke stepped off the metal stairway and into the hallways of the fourth floor, he frantically looked around for where the girl he'd seen had gone. Seeing a glimpse of yellow disappearing around a corner to his left, he quickly turned and continued the chase, calling out, "Wait, I won't hurt you!" As he approached the corner he'd seen the girl run down, suddenly he found his path blocked by a tall woman in a labcoat walking in the opposite direction, and bumped into her before he was able to stop, falling backwards onto his behind with a cry of surprise.

Apollo and Clay, not far behind Luke, stopped dead in their tracks, staring up at the woman in fear. "Uh..." Clay mumbled.

Luke rubbed his head to ease the pain of his fall, and looked up warily to see the dark-haired woman regarding the three boys with a stern expression. Under her labcoat was a yellow kimono, and in one hand she was holding a screwdriver, which she tapped against her other hand in an undoubtedly ominous way.

"What are you three doing up here?" the woman asked.

"We were trying to stop Luke!" Apollo immediately answered, before crying in pain as Clay elbowed him in the side.

"We're really sorry, Doctor Cykes," Clay continued, edging slowly forward towards his downed friend as the scientist stared him down. "We promise this was a one-time thing, we won't do it again."

With Clay's help, Luke got to his feet. "I'm really sorry," he added to the woman, ignoring Clay's subtle nudgings to return downstairs. "This was my fault. I saw a girl up here, but she ran away, so I wanted to talk to her. Clay and Apollo were just trying to stop me."

The woman's eyes widened at the mention of the girl, and Luke noticed her posture slightly stiffen. "If I catch you up here again," she warned in the same calm tone of voice, "or anywhere near where you've been strictly forbidden from going, I will not hesitate to have all three of you banned from the Center, do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," Luke replied, while Clay and Apollo both nodded. "We won't come up here again."

"See that you don't," the scientist replied, and she held out her free hand towards the boys in a clear signal that it was time for them to leave.

October 12, 12:31PM

Cosmos Space Center

Boarding Lounge 1
"There you boys are!" Starbuck proclaimed as he strolled into the room, a plastic container under one arm. "Why didn't you stay where I..." He trailed off, regarding the three boys on the comfortable lounge chairs alongside the holographic windows. Although spread out by the fixed placement of the chairs around the tables, they were making no effort to socialise despite it, slumped in their seats and sullenly avoiding eye contact. Starbuck frowned. "Oh geeze, you guys wouldn't have something to do with why Metis is so upset, would you?"

Apollo looked up. "Metis?" he repeated, quietly.

"Doctor Cykes, y'know, labcoat, yellow kimono," Starbuck explained, placing his plastic container on the table and giving the three a serious look. "What happened?"

Clay and Apollo gave each other a glance. Luke adjusted his cap. "Mister Starbuck," the young gentleman asked, "do you know anything about the girl on the fourth floor?"

Starbuck looked confused for a moment, then opened his mouth in a silent gasp of realisation. "Ah, you met the robotics' kid, did you? No wonder..." He moved to the empty seat and sat down. "She lives here, but she has ear problems or something. Doesn't get on with strangers well, so she mostly stays up around the lab."

Clay frowned. "What do ear problems have to do with strangers?"

"She was wearing strange headphones," Luke pondered aloud, tapping his chin in thought. "If she has ill-health, I suppose Doctor Cykes was very worried about her, and that's why she threatened to kick us out."

Starbuck grimaced. "Sorry, guys. I should've got you to wait away from the stairs..."

"It's no-one's fault but ours," Apollo insisted, giving the astronaut a smile. "Let's forget about it for now, huh?"

October 12, 1:29PM

Cosmos Space Center

Entrance

There was a solemn silence as the three teenage boys collected their bikes from the gates at the front of the Space Center. Luke paused, rubbing the thick plaster cast on his left arm, then turned to his friends. "Clay, I'm afraid I think it might be best I not return here after today."

"What?!" the budding young astronaut cried, dropping his bicycle back against the metal gates with a clang. "Why not?!"

"We really upset that scientist today," Apollo pointed out. "Actually, I agree with Luke. The two of us should stay away for a little while, at least until she calms down."

Clay slowly looked down to stare at the stone walkway below their feet.

"It's not like we're never coming back," Luke continued, "and we certainly don't hate coming here!"

"It isn't as important for us to be here all the time," Apollo picked up, placing a hand on Clay's
shoulder, "not like it is for you. She won't object to just one of us running around, like she did to all three of us."

There was a short silence, then Clay looked up to return his friends' worried gazes. "I hate to admit it, but you guys are right." He then paused and smirked. "Or Wright, I should say."

Apollo rolled his eyes, crossing his arms in disgust, while Luke simply smiled.

"Actually, this was something I was planning to bring up before Luke arrived," Clay continued to Apollo. "You used to drag me to the courthouse all the time before Mister Wright got done in for forgery, and I didn't enjoy it but I went anyway because we were friends." He shrugged. "I didn't see the point in dragging you here if it was just as enjoyable for you as the courthouse was for me."

Apollo's glare softened. "I've never minded, Clay."

"It's fine," Clay insisted with a smile. "I'm gonna be an astronaut, right? I belong here!" He gestured grandly to the large, round building with a proud grin. "You? You're gonna be a lawyer, so you belong in the courthouse!" He then turned to Luke. "And you! You... have never said what you're gonna be, have you?"

Luke sheepishly grinned and shrugged. "I haven't decided yet. I do know it probably won't be an astronaut or lawyer, though."

"Well, there!" Clay said, slapping Apollo on the shoulder. "I'll keep coming here, you go back to your courthouse visits with your new dad, and Luke can decide what he wants to be!"

"And we'll still all be best friends, right?" Luke asked.

"'Course we will," Apollo said with a smile, pulling Clay in for a one-sided hug. "Nothing's gonna get between the three of us!"

Clay laughed, pulling a giggling Luke into their group hug. "Man, we need to make friendship bracelets or something!" he joked. "Make this official!"

View the Court Record
"Y'know, I realised something last night!" Trucy announced as she sat at the table with her bacon-and-egg breakfast.

Apollo raised an eyebrow as he turned his head towards his sister at his side. "What?" he asked, fiddling with his knife and fork.

"You guys don't make your own costumes, do you?" the eight-year-old asked sternly, crossing her arms. "I haven't seen any of you preparing for Halloween!"


Phoenix looked over from the kitchen counter, where he was busy cleaning up around the cooling hot plate. "Don't tell me you haven't at least heard of Halloween, Luke!"

Luke shrugged, stabbing at his egg-covered toast with his fork. "Sure, I've heard of it, when I was living in London. It isn't really a thing we do in England though, so I don't know all that much about it."

Apollo smiled. "Oh boy, you're in for a treat, then!"

"I'll make your costume!" Trucy insisted, bouncing in her seat. "I'm gonna dress up as a magic bunny!"


"You know what the traditions of Halloween are, don't you?" Apollo asked, taking pity on his younger brother. "Everyone dresses up, kids walk around the streets and get candy?"

Luke thought for a moment, embarrassed to ask the main question on his mind. "Um... when exactly is this?"

Trucy burst into laughter. "The last day of October!" she cried. "We've got... um... ten days left!"

Apollo frowned in thought. "It'll be the middle of the week this year," he mused. "I don't think we'll get to celebrate together."

"Nonsense," Phoenix replied, making his way to the table to sit down beside Luke. "Sure, it's a long way between here and your school, but you can make it for one night on special occasions like this. You'd just have to get up super early the next morning." He gave Apollo a grin. "Clay can come too, if he wants to come trick-or-treating with us."

"O-oh, uh," Apollo muttered, blushing, "that's nice of you to offer, Dad, but Clay and I are a bit old to trick-or-treat."
Trucy stuck out her tongue and blew a raspberry to indicate her opinion on Apollo's claim. "You both come!" she insisted. "I'll make your costumes, too!" She tapped her chin in thought. "What do you think Clay wants to dress up as this year?"


Luke shook his head, silently eating.

"I'd suggest a certain someone," Phoenix continued with a knowing smile, "but I think this year, you'd be better off with something that makes use of that cast on your arm."

'Certain someone...?' Luke mused to himself. *What does he mean by that?*

Apollo leaned back in his seat, putting down his cutlery momentarily to tap on his forehead with an index finger. "I don't know about you guys, but I can't really think of any characters with arm casts."

"Ooh!" Trucy cried. "How about someone with a robotic arm, or an arm-cannon?" She squealed. "Or there's all sorts of characters with armour we could hide a cast under!"

"I think Luke would prefer something simple for his first Halloween," Phoenix pointed out, giving the worried boy a sidelong glance.

"A character with a cape?" Apollo asked Luke. "You could wear it so it hangs over your left arm and hides it from view."

Luke thought for a moment. "Does it have to be an existing character or person I dress up as?" he asked.

"Not necessarily," Phoenix answered with a smile. "You got something in mind?"

"I like Apollo's idea," Luke admitted, "but I can't think of anything it would fit with. Maybe I could just dress up to look nice?"

"I could design you a fantasy-themed outfit!" Trucy suggested, clapping in her excitement. "Like, a ranger or something!"

Luke nodded, beginning to smile. "That sounds nice. Thank you, Trucy!"

"No problem," Trucy boasted, tapping her bare head where her silk hat normally sat.

Phoenix turned to Apollo. "And what do you have in mind to dress up as, Apollo?"

Apollo shrugged. "I dunno," he admitted. "It's been years since I was last able to dress up as anything at all."

Trucy grinned. "You could dress up as Daddy!"

"N-no way!" Apollo immediately recoiled, turning red as Phoenix and Luke burst into laughter. "Who dresses up as their dad, anyway!? That'd just be weird!"

"Tell the truth, Polly," Trucy teased, poking her brother's arm as he glared at her. "You've dressed up as Daddy before, haven't you?"

"No, actually," Apollo pointed out. "Did you not hear me when I said I haven't dressed up for Halloween in years?"
"I wasn't a lawyer that long, Truce," Phoenix added, his laughter dying down as his mood turned more serious. "Besides, it would be a bad idea for anyone to go out dressed as me, especially so soon after what happened in April."

Trucy looked away guiltily.

"What about the Greek god Apollo?" Luke suggested, trying to quickly move on from the sombre tone of Phoenix's comment. "Have you dressed up as him?"

Apollo wrinkled his nose in disgust. "But that guy was always naked!"

Trucy giggled while Luke blushed, returning to his food. "Bad idea, then," he admitted.

"Ooh, I know!" Trucy suddenly cried, pointing to the ceiling. "We could all wear matching costumes!"

"Aren't you almost done with yours, Truce?" Phoenix asked, eyebrow raised.

"I'll be Luke's pet rabbit!" Trucy replied, grinning as Luke laughed in agreement. "Daddy, Polly, one of you can be, like, a mage, and the other can be a knight or a warrior or something!"

Apollo thought for a moment, then looked to Phoenix. "I'll be the mage if you're happy being a fighter, Dad."

Phoenix shrugged. "Fine with me."

Trucy cheered, jumping in her seat. "Yaaay, we're all gonna match!"

"Are you putting together your own costume, Nick?" Luke asked.

Phoenix nodded. "I'm sure I-"

"No!" Trucy interrupted, fists on hips. "I'm making yours too, Daddy!"

At that, Phoenix was struck dumb for a moment. "Trucy, you're busy enough making your brothers'-"

"I can do it!" Trucy insisted.

"On top of your homework?" Phoenix pointed out with a stern glare.

Trucy was unfazed. "Yes!"

"Seriously honey," Phoenix continued, tapping the beanie on his head, "this was more than enough. You don't-"

"I'm making yours!" Trucy interrupted again, then gave her father a grin. "It'll be easy!"

Phoenix sighed, then shrugged. "Alright, if you insist." He got up from his chair and headed to a small calendar hanging from a cabinet door in the kitchen. "But, you're leaving mine till last, and I reserve the right to cancel it if this interferes with your homework."

Trucy pouted, gripping the edges of her chair seat. "It woon't!" she whined insistently. "I promiiiise!"

Apollo smirked. "Man, Truce, Luke and I do our homework without complaining. What's the matter
"You're just boring!" Trucy shot back, giving her elder brother a glare.

Luke grimaced guiltily. "Don't... drag me into this, okay?"

Phoenix returned to the table, placing the calendar down and circling the 31st with a pen from his pocket. "And the deadline is set," he announced, then thought a moment and flipped the calendar over to November. "Your birthday is coming up after that, isn't it Luke?"

"Mm-hmm," Luke replied with a nod. "The tenth of the eleventh, the day before Remembrance Day!" He giggled. "It was fun on my seventh birthday back in twenty-twelve, because then the date was ten-eleven-twelve!"

Apollo looked confused for a moment, then gasped in realisation. "Oh yeah, you say the date differently in England, don't you?"

"It's only us that does month-day-year," Phoenix explained, giving the still-confused Trucy a smile. "It's why I prefer to not use numbers to indicate the month, especially given the number of prosecutors I worked with who were trained in Europe."

"Oh, yes," Luke said with a smile, embarrassed. "I keep forgetting the switch, to be honest. My homework is always being returned with the date in the corner 'corrected'...

Phoenix chuckled, marking the tenth of November on the calendar.

Trucy turned to Apollo, giving him a curious smile. "When's your birthday, Polly?"

"May," Apollo replied, resting a hand on the table. "Not for a long while."

"Not as long as mine!" Trucy giggled. "Mine's the end of August!"

Eyebrows raised in surprise, Apollo laughed. "Wow, that is a long time!" He looked over to Phoenix. "Actually, when's yours, Dad?"

"December," Phoenix replied, flipping the calendar to the last month of the year and spinning it on the table for Apollo to see the already-labelled date there. "Twelfth of the twelfth." He gave Luke a grin. "Back in twenty-twelve, it was the twelfth of the twelfth of the twelfth."

Luke giggled. "How old were you then?" he asked.

Phoenix had to think for a moment, rubbing his chin with one hand. "I was turning twenty, I think," he eventually answered, then grimaced. "Larry dragged me out to all the 'end-of-the-world' parties he could find. Somehow managed to pick up yet another girlfriend while he was at it, too."

"Uncle Larry?" Trucy asked, then giggled as she turned to her brothers. "That'll be really funny once you meet him!

Apollo frowned as he recognised the name, then looked up at Phoenix. "Uncle Larry?"

"He's an old friend of mine," Phoenix explained. "Babysits Trucy occasionally."

"Uncle Edgeworth, too!" Trucy added, giving a curious Luke a grin. "I bet he didn't want to go to parties with you and Uncle Larry, huh Daddy?"

Phoenix tensed, looking vaguely uncomfortable. "Uh, he was living in Germany at the time." He
paused, frowning in thought. "I think. We weren't exactly in contact with him."

Trucy blinked in surprise, her amusement gone. "Oh."

After a short pause, Luke gave Phoenix and Trucy a polite smile. "So, do Apollo and I get to meet our new uncles, then?" he asked. "They sound very interesting!"

"They are!" Trucy exclaimed, perking up again immediately. "Uncle Edgeworth said they've been friends with Daddy since they were my age!"

"That long?" Apollo asked in surprise.

Phoenix frowned. "I'm not that old."

Apollo blushed, frantically backtracking. "Oh, uh, I-I didn't mean-!"

"Hey, it's alright!" Phoenix laughed, walking around the table to pat Apollo's shoulder. "I was kidding, don't worry about it."

"R-right," Apollo muttered, looking embarrassed as he stood up, grabbing his empty plate. "I need to..." Trailing off, he shuffled past Phoenix to the kitchen sink.

"Oh, and I need to get started on everyone's costumes!" Trucy cried, jumping out of her chair and running off towards the stairs behind her.

Phoenix jumped and ran after Trucy. "Trucy, you need to put your plate in the sink, first!"

Luke shook his head in amusement, then went ahead and took care of his sister's plate himself. 'It's only gentlemanly to help a lady out when she needs it!'

View the Court Record
"I think I made a bad decision..." Luke whined into his pillow.

Apollo resisted the urge to roll his eyes, buttoning up his uniform jacket from his bed opposite Luke's. "You bet you did," he muttered.

"I did warn you," Phoenix said, sitting on Luke's bed and rubbing the sick boy's back. "Not even Maya can handle all that candy at once, and she has an iron stomach."

Luke frowned as he remembered the fish-and-chips eating contest he and Maya had in London, now almost a full year previous. To his eternal annoyance, Maya had won, and Luke had suffered a stomach ache as a result... however, that loss was not nearly as painful as the over-abundance of sugar in his system right now. "I think I'm going to throw up..."

"I'll get you a bucket," Phoenix offered, standing up.

"I'll get it," Apollo cut in, jumping towards the door in his eagerness to not be around if Luke followed through on his claim. "It's in the laundry, right?"

Phoenix nodded as he sat back down, watching the elder boy disappear out the door. "You stay home from school today," he told Luke. "It's Friday, so I don't think you'll miss much. Consider it a long weekend."

Luke weakly nodded, clutching his tummy tightly under his blankets, which was quite difficult around his bulky arm cast. He cursed his inability to resist the urge to scarf down all the sweets he had gained the moment the family returned home the previous night (even Trucy had been surprised when his little pumpkin-shaped basket had ended up empty), and groaned again as he recalled thinking the at-the-time minor stomach ache would die down overnight.

"Maybe next year you'll think twice before eating that much at once?" Phoenix said with a smile.

Apollo reappeared at the door, holding out a small plastic bucket. "This is it, right?"

"Perfect," Phoenix said, getting up only for a moment to take the offered item and placing it next to Luke's head. "Luke, if you need to throw up, do it in this, okay?"

Luke nodded, reaching out to grip the brim of the bucket awkwardly with his left arm.

Phoenix looked up to Apollo. "Need company to the bus stop?"

"I'm fine," Apollo said with a shake of his head, giving Luke a worried look. "Do you need me to tell the teachers, or...?"

"You can if you want," Phoenix replied, smiling at Apollo's show of concern. "I'll be giving the school a ring, anyway."

"She's still as asleep right now," Apollo pointed out, confused.

"I will be leaving to take her to school later," Phoenix answered, patting Luke's shoulder. "It shouldn't take more than forty minutes. I'll let you know when we leave."


Phoenix smiled, then quickly ruffled Luke's hair and stood up off the bed. "I'll check up on you later, okay?" Waving to Apollo to follow him, Phoenix left the room.

Left alone with his thoughts, Luke distracted himself from his self-induced predicament by thinking back on the previous evening, his first Halloween. It had gone much as he expected a night of trick-or-treating would, given his little experience with it through imported American popular culture, with Trucy mostly leading their little group of four house-to-house in the streets Phoenix took them to, excitedly screaming "Trick or treat!" the moment she saw the door begin to move. Apollo, to Trucy's annoyance, tended to hang in the back of their group with Phoenix, waiting on the street and insisting he was fine when Trucy would shout her assurances that she was getting some of the offered treats for him too. His little basket ended up with barely half the amount of sweets in it that Luke and Trucy had, although both had offered him shares of their own baskets inbetween houses.

Clay had not ended up joining them that night. Although he was happy to accept Trucy's offer to make him a costume (she had only just finished them all in time), he much preferred the idea of running around the dorm, attempting to scare people. Apollo had been surprised when Clay decided he would dress as a vampire, saying he expected his space-obsessed friend to want to be an astronaut instead. Clay had simply scoffed. "Pfft, I dressed up as an astronaut almost every year as a kid! Don't I deserve to do something different once in a while?"

The night had already begun by the time Apollo and Luke arrived home after school. Trucy had hurriedly helped them change into their costumes before they went out, and the group had finally returned, exhausted, an hour later. Luke had immediately dropped into a chair at the kitchen table and starting munching on the sweets in his little basket, carefully unwrapping them with his one free hand while still eating the previous one he'd tossed into his mouth.

"No offence, Truce," Apollo mumbled as he sat in his chair at the table, dropping his basket in front of him with a thud, "but I really am too old to trick-or-treat anymore."

"The way you acted, you certainly were!" Trucy objected, fists on her hips and a scowl on her painted rabbit-face. "You didn't even try to have fun, did you, Polly?"

Phoenix tapped Trucy on the head, between her rabbit-ears, as he walked past. "Hey, Apollo is allowed to decide what he finds fun. Most kids his age tend to have costume parties for a reason."

Pulling the hooded cape off his shoulders (Trucy had made matching ones for all three of them), he disappeared into the laundry.

Luke paused in his eating, struggling with a particularly difficult wrapper. "That's a good point. I didn't see all that many kids my age out there tonight."

"Don't know why," Trucy said with a shrug, pulling off her rabbit-paw mittens and opening Luke's candy for him. "You get to dress up and get free candy out of it. Why wouldn't you go trick-or-treating?"

"Believe it or not," Apollo replied with a wry look, "candy loses its appeal as you grow up. Plus," he
leaned back in his chair, arms crossed, "most people won't hand it out to teenagers. And by the time you're an adult, you can just buy your own if you want it."

Luke frowned, popping a piece of chocolate in his mouth and quickly swallowing it. "So I'll only get one or two trick-or-treats before I'm too old?"

"No!" Trucy insisted, clinging to Luke's cape. "You have to keep coming with me, since Polly is being boring and won't!"

"We're not making anyone do anything," Phoenix called as he re-entered the room, back in a casual shirt and sweatpants after removing his costume. "If Luke or Apollo want to come again next year, that's up to them." He paused as he noticed Luke still chowing down on his candy. "Slow down, Luke, you'll make yourself sick."

Apollo frowned, having twisted in his chair to look up at Phoenix and focussing on his hair. "Wow, Dad, I've never seen you without a hat before."

Phoenix laughed, running a hand through his spiky black locks. "Yeah, I tend to find not wearing one makes me look like a lawyer." Before Apollo could respond, Phoenix was waving at Trucy. "C'mon, Truce, time to get all that paint off your face."

A floorboard creaked out in the hallway, startling Luke awake, and he looked up from his pillow blearily as he realised he'd fallen asleep. 'When did that happen? And what time is it?' There was sunlight streaming in through the bedroom window, which overlooked an alleyway below and other apartments opposite them, so Luke reasoned it had been a few hours at least since Apollo left for school, allowing for the sun to get high enough in the sky for the amount of light he could see. He caught a glimpse of the bucket Phoenix had left him, where it had fallen on the floor, and suddenly felt queasy again as he was reminded why it was there. Lying back down so he couldn't see the bucket, he tried to find something else to think about to distract himself. Had Trucy gone to school yet? And if she had, was Phoenix back from taking her? 'Today's Friday... that's the last day of the school week. It's also... wait, what is the date today?'

It suddenly occurred to Luke that, with Halloween over, today was the first of November, and thus the countdown to his fourteenth birthday had begun. He wondered how different this birthday would be to his previous ones: Would everyone be wearing poppies for Remembrance Day, or was that not a tradition here? Had he and Apollo been in the Wright family long enough to get any gifts this year (gift-giving was still a birthday tradition in America, wasn't it)? Would Luke suddenly find he missed his parents... or, that he didn't miss them at all? At that thought, Luke shivered. 'I don't even know which would be worse, missing them or not!' He could remember all the times he'd been sick when he was younger, and his mother had sat at his bedside looking after him until he got better. During the months in Misthallery when she was 'on holiday', Luke had often cried himself to sleep out of missing her, feeling alone in the world and thinking it had been his father to blame for her sudden disappearance. The rumours around town that his parents had had a fight hadn't helped.

Luke regretted now more than ever his arguments with his father on the move to America. It had been exactly the opportunity Clark was looking for, and Luke knew his parents had both been excited for it, even if he had been steadfastly against leaving London from the start. 'If only they'd listened to me...' He found himself gripping the cast on his left arm, and a part of him wondered if he'd been fooling himself, believing so intently that they were still alive out there. You went ahead with the adoption, after all, a voice in the back of his head pointed out. If you truly believed your mum and dad were still alive, you would have turned Nick down. You'd be doing your investigation with him as friends, not as father-and-son, and you wouldn't be so happily ignoring it to do
schoolwork and hang out with friends.

Feeling hot tears pricking at the corners of his eyes, Luke fiercely shook his head, hugging himself tightly despite the ache in his tummy making the action painful. 'No! I'm not happy, I'm trying to find a new life here, for after Mum and Dad get back!' he told himself. 'And they're still alive out there, I know they are! I... just don't have any proof of anything yet...'

There was a creak as the bedroom door slowly opened, and Luke hurriedly wiped his eyes before looking up and seeing Phoenix poke his head in, hair hidden once again beneath his cyan beanie. "Oh, you're awake!" the older man said as he stepped into the room. "Feeling any better?"

Luke nodded, quickly rubbing at his nose in a feeble effort to disguise a sniff. "I'm fine."

Phoenix frowned, properly entering the room. "You and Apollo have been here long enough that I know saying that usually means the opposite," he pointed out, then moved over to sit on the bed by Luke's feet. "This isn't just the stomach-ache, is it?"

"I'm fine," Luke insisted again instinctively as he sat up, rubbing at his nose and eyes. "I just... I guess I'm just missing Mum and Dad."

After a moment's silence, Phoenix leaned forward and pulled Luke into a hug, which the boy accepted as the tears returned to his eyes. "If you need anything," Phoenix reminded him, "don't hesitate to ask, okay? Even if you just want a sounding board to talk about them, or something. I want to help, if I possibly can."

Luke nodded, clinging tightly to the loose black hoodie that had become Phoenix's new 'uniform'. "I know," he mumbled into his adoptive father's chest. "Thank you, Nick."

View the Court Record
Taking a deep breath of anticipation, Luke opened the small suitcase tagged 'Clark Triton'.

It had taken a lot of thinking and avoiding and preparing and putting off, but finally Luke had closed himself up in the room he shared with Apollo, dragged the two suitcases rescued from the car crash out of the closet, and sat on the floor with them to finally open them up. He told himself it was fitting he do so on his birthday, as it was as good a time as any to admit to himself, despite his own vocal insistences to the contrary, that he might never find his parents alive, and allow himself to truly start over with his new life.

If only he could make himself open his eyes and look at them.

'This is ridiculous,' Luke told himself. 'It's not like you're the only kid in the world who's lost their parents. Apollo and Trucy were orphans too, and they certainly don't drag things out like you're doing right now!' Shaking his head in self-directed anger, Luke gripped the edges of the small suitcase and forced his eyes open.

On one side of the collection of personal items retrieved from the car were Clark's prized autographed archaeology books, the ones that he had repeatedly boasted had been the catalyst to persuade him to apply to Gressenheller, where he met both Brenda and Professor Layton. Close by was a spare tie, rolled up and held firmly in place with a hair-tie borrowed from his wife. Underneath a small collection of pens and novelty erasers was a notebook, which Luke recognised as his father's journal. To one side of that, held together with a rubber band, was a stack of business cards, sitting on top of what looked like Clark's passport and various travel papers. A fake poppy flower made of hard plastic and silk sat crumpled in a corner, one Luke remembered seeing appear in his father's lapel every first of November, only to be almost ceremoniously removed again as the sun set eleven days later.

Luke found his vision getting blurry, so he quickly wiped at his eyes to clear the accumulating water. 'I'm not crying... I just had my eyes open too long and dried them out a bit.'

To his right was Brenda's matching suitcase, and Luke had already grabbed the lid of the unlocked trunk before realising what he was doing and stopping in his tracks. 'Is it a wise idea to open them both now...? Maybe I should wait a bit before...' He frowned and shook his head determinedly. 'No. I need to stop putting this off.' With a flick of his hand, Luke now sat between the two open cases containing the last remaining belongings of his parents.

Brenda's suitcase was much more cluttered than Clark's, and full of what looked like her growing collection of strange American souvenirs she had picked up on their cross-country trip, as well as a few of her smaller favourites from her existing collection of ordinary strange objects. Underneath, her passport, papers and a journal much like Clark's was barely visible, as well as whatever else of hers was hiding in the small trunk. Right on top, a shiny pin immediately caught Luke's attention, emblazoned proudly with a heavily stylised cartoon phoenix from the city of the same name.
"Ooh, Clark, look at this state here, Arizona! Let's start the drive from there!"

"I think you're underestimating how big the distance is from their capital to Los Angeles, dear."

"Nonsense! Look, they have a town called 'Brenda'! We can stop and look at it on the way!"

"Uh, Brenda, darling, I don't think it will be exciting enough to-"

"Hey, and there's a 'Clarkdale' over here! I wonder if there's a 'Tritonville' or a 'Luketown'?"

"I think you need to put the map down."

"Are you telling me you seriously don't want to see a town named after you?"

"They're not. It's a co-incidence."

"Aw, c'mon, grumpy-gills! Look, they have a town called 'Nothing'! How can you not want to see that?"

"Darling-"

"Hey, Clarkdale has a 'Luke Lane'! Are you sure you want to move to California and not Arizona? It's looking better by the minute!"

"Darling, you can't judge a place by its names. Besides, my job is in Los Angeles."

"... Can we at least stop over there? We could get a train or bus into California from Phoenix."

"From what?"

"Phoenix. It's the name of Arizona's capital city. Neat, huh?"

"... Fine."

"Great! I'll try and find one that passes town-Brenda!"

"..."

Luke blinked away the tears as he slowly reached out for the small pin. At the time the decision had been made, he had been sulking in a corner about his helplessness in preventing the move from going ahead, too busy wrapped up in his own world to even notice that the city shared the name of his current caretaker. His eyes drifted to his father's suitcase, and he remembered when he and the Professor had introduced themselves (the second time) to Phoenix and Maya in the front hall of Labyrinthia's courthouse. It had been the first time he'd seen Phoenix's suit without an apron or desk in the way, and he remembered thinking to himself at the time that it wasn't often he saw someone dressed in a blue suit and red tie who wasn't his father. 'Cruel foreshadowing by the universe at large, or massive co-incidence?' Regardless, Luke snatched up the spare tie from Clark's trunk, pulling the hair-tie off it with a snap. He had already unravelled the tightly rolled up piece of fabric and slung it over his neck before he remembered he had no idea how to tie a tie, despite all the times he'd watched his father do it over the years. 'And even if I did know, I don't suppose I could do it without my left hand.' He clumsily attempted to clip the tie together using the phoenix pin, but was forced to admit defeat after accidentally pricking his thumb with the pointy bit. Dropping the pin into
his lap, Luke shook his hand to distract himself from the sharp pain. *This isn't going well.* He pulled the tie off his shoulders with a sharp tug, letting it fall to the ground with a sigh. After a moment of thought, he instead reached for the silk-and-plastic poppy in his father's suitcase, and carefully tried to see if he could make it attach to the phoenix pin in his other hand.

"Luke?" Apollo called from outside, knocking on the door. "Are you planning on coming back downstairs, or not?"

Luke jumped in surprise, almost dropping the small items in his hands. "Coming!" he called. *How did I get distracted from my own birthday celebration!?

The door opened, and Apollo looked in to see his younger brother trying to re-roll the tie that had fallen to the floor between the two open suitcases. "You're going through your parents' things?" he asked, confused, walking over to take a peek himself. "Why? Didn't you already do that?"

Luke shook his head, abandoning the tie with a sigh. "I've been putting it off. At least it's over with, now." He then held up the pin and fake poppy. "Could you help me put these on my jumper, Apollo?"

Apollo thought for a moment, then nodded, kneeling opposite Luke to pin the cartoon phoenix to his brother's woollen sweater, carefully ensuring the red flower was held in the middle.

"Thank you," Luke said, a sad smile on his face.

"No problem," Apollo quietly replied.

November 10, 9:07AM
Wright Talent Agency
Phoenix's Office

"Ooh, pretty flower!" Trucy said from the corner of the black lounge as her brothers entered the room. "Why you wearin' that, Luke?"

Luke smiled and shrugged. "Oh, well, I guess it's not a tradition here, but back in England we wear poppies like this one for Remembrance Day tomorrow." He remembered too late that Trucy could see the slight lie of distraction when she frowned suspiciously at him in response.

Apollo cut off any objections Trucy might raise as he made his way to one of the chairs dragged into the office from the kitchen table. "But that's tomorrow?"

"Dad would put his on at the beginning of November," Luke explained sternly, fiddling with the red flower. *Everyone* would be wearing them by today!"

"Okay, okay!" Apollo replied, throwing his hands into the air in surrender from the impassioned lecture.

"I still think it's pretty!" Trucy said, smiling again.

Phoenix laughed to himself as he emerged from behind his desk. "I'm terrible with flowers, myself," he said, grabbing a plastic bag from behind his chair. "Everyone sit down, and we can get this
Luke rushed to Trucy's side, trying not to look excited at the prospect of presents in case it was seen as greedy or selfish. "Honestly, I'm happy just being here for my birthday!" he said in an attempt to be humble, sitting on the couch beside his sister.

"Oh?" Phoenix laughed, sitting in the second kitchen chair, next to Apollo's. "Well, in that case, you won't be needing these!" He pulled a wrapped box-shape from the bag, a card taped to one side.

Apollo leaned forward, looking at the card taped to the side of the gift. "Oh, that one's mine!" he cried before anyone could reply, and took the box from Phoenix's hands. Before Phoenix could jokingly misinterpret the older teen's meaning, Apollo had stood up and was offering the present to Luke with a grin. "Happy birthday, bro."

Luke smiled and took the gift with a grateful nod. "Thank you, Apollo!" he made sure to say, before placing the gift on his lap to read the card.

Trucy bounced in her seat impatiently. "Open it already!" she demanded.

"I have to read the card!" Luke insisted with a frown. "It's polite!"

"Let Luke open them the way he wants," Phoenix gently reminded Trucy. "When it's your birthday again, you can rip them open at the speed of light to your heart's content."

Trucy crossed her arms. "I don't open them that fast!"

Having finished looking at the card, Luke flipped the box over and began undoing the tape, taking care to cause as little damage to the wrapping as possible.

"Just rip it!" Trucy cried. "We're throwing out the paper anyway!" She then paused uncertainly and looked over to Phoenix with a worried expression. "We are throwing it out, right?"

Phoenix laughed. "Be patient, Truce."

A matter of minutes later, Luke had in his hands two brand new books, one a book on puzzles that Trucy had admitted (after her hurry to have Luke open it, no less) Phoenix had picked out for her to give him, and the other a book of sheet music for the violin. "I found this really cool Doctor Who music book," Apollo had explained with a shrug, "and I figured, since it's like some English cultural icon, it was the one you'd be least likely to hate. You did say you were gonna start playing your violin again, after all." Luke had made sure to thank them both and even gave Trucy a hug to assure her he loved her gift regardless of who picked it out.

When it came to Phoenix's gift, the patriarch of the family paused for thought as he extracted the final present, larger than the other two, from the bag. "This... is less of a 'gift'," he explained carefully. "More of a 'returning', really." He held it out for Luke to take. "They're still going through everything else, but I got Gumshoe to sneak this out early for you."

Curiosity piqued, Luke unwrapped Phoenix's gift a little quicker than the other two, and was astonished to discover a third book, larger than the other two and much thicker.

"What's that?" Trucy asked, staring confused at the patchwork cover.

"It's..." Luke had to pause and take a deep breath. "It's one of my family's photo albums. The most recent one."
Apollo gasped, giving Phoenix an astounded glance. "Woah, how'd you manage to get that, Dad!?"

"Like I said," Phoenix explained with a mysterious smile, "I... persuaded Gumshoe."

Luke ran a hand over the scraps of fabric and other bits and bobs on the cover, unsure if he wanted to open it just yet. "Mum always loved decorating the books when we filled the old one up. I helped her with this one, actually. It was a long time ago," He frowned in thought. "We stopped taking as many pictures as we used to when Dad became mayor of Misthallery. He was just too busy. And, after that, I was away with the Professor a lot, too."

Trucy crossed her arms as she regarded the wider-than-it-was-tall photo album. "What did they look like?" she asked. "There are pictures of them in there, right?"

There was a short silence as Luke thought for a moment, then he gave his sister a smile. "I'll show you," he promised, then flipped the album open to a random page in the middle...
"It's already the end of the day for us," Professor Layton said with a soft laugh, "but I imagine your birthday has been pleasant so far this morning?"

"Yep!" Luke chirped in reply, still beaming from the chair behind Phoenix's desk as he held the office phone tightly to his ear. "We aren't doing anything special, but after everything that's happened over the past few months, I don't really want to!" His legs swung back and forth gleefully, making the chair softly sway side to side with his excited movements. "I also found my dad's special poppy that he always wore this time of year, and Apollo helped me put it on!"

"That's good to hear," the Professor replied, a smile in his tone.

"And Nick managed to get one of Mum's photo albums!" Luke continued. "I was just showing it to Trucy and Apollo when Nick called you!" He paused thoughtfully. "It's funny, I don't remember there being so many photos that were so recent. Mum had pretty much filled it up."

The Professor hummed in thought. "She must have wanted to start over after the move, with a new album. Either that, or switch to a digital one."

Luke frowned to himself. "Oh yeah, Nick said something about physical photos not being a 'thing' so much anymore here..." He looked over to the black couch, where Trucy was humming to herself as she leafed through the pages of photos on her own. He was surprised to find Apollo had disappeared already, and supposed he'd followed Phoenix shortly after the man had handed Luke the phone with a warning not to extend the special long-distance phone call for too long.

"I don't imagine my parcel has arrived yet," the Professor chuckled.

"Parcel?" Luke repeated, curiously. "No, we haven't got a parcel. I did get your letter last week, though!"

Layton laughed again. "Oh yes, I received your reply, thank you!" He hummed in thought. "It clearly takes a little longer for a parcel to get through the post than a letter. I shall keep that in mind for next time."

Luke giggled to himself, wondering what the Professor and Flora might have sent him as a birthday gift. "I can't wait to get it!"

"Would you like to talk to Flora while we're on the line with you?" the Professor asked.

"Oh, yes please!" Luke cried. "It would be lovely to catch up with her, too!"

"I'll go get her then," Layton replied, as cheerfully as it was possible for him to sound. "I shouldn't take too long."

Luke heard the sound of the phone on the other end being placed gently on the Professor's desk, and
sat patiently while he waited to speak with Flora. It occurred to him that he had acquired some similarities with the young woman since they last spoke, in that she had lost her mother and then her father to sickness when she was still a girl. 'Wow, how many people do I know who were orphaned and happily adopted into new families?' Not that Flora's adoption had ever been official, of course; The Professor had decided to keep her origin quiet, and as she was almost an adult when they met her, there had seemed little point. 'I should make a list. Me, Apollo, Trucy, Flora, the Professor... Wait, does the Professor count as 'orphaned', though? ... Do I count as orphaned?'

"Luke?" a squeaky voice called from the phone speaker, and Luke jumped as he was startled out of his thoughts. "Are you there?"

"Hi, Flora!" Luke said with a laugh. "How have you been?"

"Luke!" Flora cried in delight. "It's been ages since we've got to talk! The Professor's been telling me what's in your letters, but it's not the same!"


"But it's okay," Flora continued, "since you found a new family and all!" She laughed. "When will you visit? I'd love to meet them!"

"I don't know," Luke admitted. "There's four of us, and I don't think we have a lot of money to go around. You might have to come to us, I think."

Flora thought a moment. "That might be a better idea," she agreed. "Then I can see those robots you mentioned, from that space centre your friend goes to!" She huffed. "Of course, this time last year I went to go visit Saint Mystere, and then you and the Professor went and had another adventure without me!"

Luke winced. He'd almost forgotten that Flora had been away on the week they'd been kidnapped to Labyrinthia, and thus had just missed meeting Phoenix and Maya in the day they'd had left to explore London before going back home. She hadn't been at all happy when she heard the story upon her return, although Luke had hoped their final adventure together in the so-called 'Future London' had sated her. "I've said I'm sorry about that..." he mumbled.

"Oh, it's fine," Flora insisted, calming down with a sigh. "Anyway, you should have seen how big Sherry Ascot's getting! She's walking and talking now!"

"Really?" Luke asked, amazed. "Wow! It's hard to imagine baby Sherry doing that!"

Flora laughed. "That's why you need to see her! And when she was here, I got thinking about what happened with Clive and all those refugees from Future London and the area that got flattened by the mecha..."

Luke frowned. "What about them?"

"Well," Flora explained, "long story short, people did die in the chaos, and some of them were in all likelihood parents to kids like us or Clive."

"And after the way he lost his own mum and dad," Luke mused, balling his left hand into a fist.

"So I'm trying to talk the Professor into looking into it!" Flora continued. "I mean, there might be a cute little baby like Sherry, waiting for a family to take them! And the Professor gets along great with her, and I'd look after them, too!"
Luke was too surprised to reply for a moment. "Wait, you want a baby brother or sister? Don't babies... y'know, cry all night?"

"Oh, sure," Flora said dismissively. "That's why I'd help out! The Professor tends to be up all night anyway, so I'd look after it during the day and he could look after it at night!"


"I know that!" Flora cried, offended. "I'd even cook boring old regular recipes for them, and everything!"

At that, Luke paused. "Have you mentioned that to the Professor?" he asked.

"Huh?" Flora replied, confused. "No, why?"

Before Luke could respond, he felt a tug on his right sleeve and turned the chair around a little to see a pouting Trucy, holding out the heavy photo album and pointing at a particular photo. Frowning, Luke mumbled "Hang on a second," into the phone and held it against his shoulder to block the microphone. "What is it, Trucy? I'm on the phone!"

"Who's this?" Trucy demanded, tapping the page next to a photo of two young women, one in a red cape and sporting twin blonde braids over her shoulders, and the other with dark hair, wearing two small cones on her head that resembled cat ears. "That's the only photo of them I could find, and it isn't labelled!"

Luke smiled. "Oh, that's Espella and Miss Belduke, when they visited London in February!"

Trucy tilted her head to one side, curiously. "And who's Spella and Miss Bell-duk?"

"Espella and Miss Belduke," Luke repeated. "Ask Nick about them if you have to know now. He and Maya met them in England." He started to move the phone back to his ear, only to be cut off by Trucy's dramatic groan as she dropped her arms to dangle the photo album by her knees.

"Seriously, when are we going to meet this Maya person!?" Trucy cried. "You and Daddy are always talking about her!"

"Not always," Luke corrected, but the eight-year-old wasn't listening.

"This is so unfair!" Trucy complained, and stomped off towards the kitchen. "DADDY!"

Luke sighed, then placed the phone back against his ear. "Sorry, Flora, Trucy wanted to ask me something. What were we talking about?"

November 10, 2:43PM

Wright Talent Agency

Reception

After a morning full of loud discussion, Phoenix was glad to see his kids finally settle down and quietly watch the TV for a while. Thus, with the three in his office, television blaring, Phoenix was taking momentary refuge in reception, sitting at the desk that had been his once upon a time. "I can't
believe it's been three years this September... It still feels like I only just joined Mia's office as her assistant.' He frowned, leaning back in the chair. 'Of course, it also feels like it's been forever, with all the crap that's happened since. Even ignoring this year on its own.'

Phoenix idly picked his phone off the desk and re-read the conversation by text message still displayed on the screen.

Since I am back in the country, I feel I should make an effort to introduce myself to your new charges. Are you all home today?

    Hey fantastic timing! My son turns 14 today. They grow up so fast :(

Wright, they have only been 'yours' just over a month. I'm assuming they are indeed home today?

    Don't mock my empty nest syndrome. It's a serious condition. I've locked them all up in my office to appease it

I can very easily forward this conversation out-of-context to certain people and have them all taken away from you, you know.

    Of course they're all home. Law Child and Magic Child are introducing Puzzle Child to Steel Samurai in the office

    You do know how to take a joke right?

Then I will drop by to introduce myself to them. Which one had the birthday today?

    Luke

    The English one

That is indeed excellent timing, then. I have something he may appreciate as an expatriot.

    Don't make up words Uncle Edgeworth. You'll confuse the children ;)

Don't blame your poor vocabulary on me. I'll be there in ten minutes.

Phoenix smirked to himself and placed the phone back on his desk. As fun as it was to mess with Edgeworth, he had to remind himself sometimes that his friend didn't always take it well. Not to mention, he owed the prosecutor a great deal for his behind-the-scenes help on all three adoptions, convincing the powers-that-be that the famous "Forgin' Attorney" was capable of being a parent. Although, the moment Trucy had met him, she had dubbed him 'Uncle Edgeworth', and the thought of the prosecutor's face as the name had instantly stuck would always make Phoenix laugh. He hoped the nickname would stick with the boys too, but he wasn't going to get his hopes up too high.

There was a gentle rapping at the door, and Phoenix looked up to see a familiar silhouette beyond the smoked glass. Smiling, he jumped to his feet and rounded the desk to unlock and open the door, greeting the burgandy-suited man beyond with a wave. "Edgeworth! Nice of you to join us!"

Edgeworth raised an eyebrow as he entered the office, but obviously elected not to say anything. "Did you tell them I was coming?" he asked idly.
Phoenix shook his head, closing the door behind his friend and explaining "I didn't want to disturb them." He gestured towards the office door, trying not to smile too widely. "Please, guests first."

Sighing softly to himself, Edgeworth shook his head and headed through into the office beyond.
At the sound of the door opening, Trucy was the first to look away from the television, and gasped as she recognised the visitor. "Uncle Edgeworth!" she cried, jumping off the couch and running to cling to the man in a tight hug. "It's been ages since you last visited!"

Not entirely used to the young girl's method of showing affection just yet, Edgeworth gingerly patted her head, ignoring Phoenix's snickering behind him and hoping it didn't give the two teenage boys now staring at him too terrible a first impression. "It's nice to see you too, Trucy."

Apollo moved to turn off the TV, while Luke simply got to his feet with a polite smile, watching the man gently extricate himself from the eight-year-old.

Phoenix edged into the room around Edgeworth, guiding Trucy away with a smile. "Alright Truce, out of the way now." He flashed Edgeworth a grin. "Wanna introduce yourself to the boys?"

"Fine," Edgeworth replied with a barely repressed sigh, and turned to the two curious teenagers standing by the couch and television. "I understand Wright - your father, that is - has mentioned me to you. My name is Miles Edgeworth." He gave them a small bow, one hand on his burgundy jacket and the other firmly at his side.

"Oh, yeah," Apollo replied with a nod, "Trucy's talked about you, too!"

"It's nice to meet you, Mister Edgeworth!" Luke added, a hand to his cap in greeting.

Edgeworth looked over the two critically, and turned his gaze to Luke. "Judging by the poppy on your chest, you must be Luke, correct?"

Luke was surprised, but nodded. "Yes, that's me."

"Which makes you Apollo," Edgeworth continued, turning to the older boy.

Apollo nervously rubbed his bracelet. "Yes, sir," he said.


"In August, yes," Luke replied, then frowned as he detected a faint English accent in Edgeworth's voice. "Are you...? No, Nick said you lived in Germany for a while, right?"

"Indeed I did," Edgeworth replied, a faint smile on his face as he held his hands up to either side as though putting himself on display. "In fact, that is partly why I wanted to talk to you once I returned from my trip. It's a sad fact of life that we are rarely tourists in our own hometowns. I was only eight when I discovered so myself."

Luke glanced quickly behind him to Apollo, then to Trucy, and got only confused looks in return.
Phoenix, however, was looking off into the distance, lost in thought.

"Much to my disappointment," Edgeworth was already continuing, "I had no concrete reminders of my home after I left for Europe, only my own memories. That is why I thought you might appreciate this." He reached into a pocket in his jacket and pulled out a small plastic object, a black clamshell with blue coverings shaped into a handle opposite the hinges.

Luke took the offered object gingerly, and noticed it made loud, distinct rattlings of small objects inside it as it moved. As he tried to open the clamshell, the blue sections slid, and he realised they were storage drawers of some kind.

"I bought this myself on a trip to London back in two-thousand-and-four," Edgeworth explained. "It's a travel board game, themed on the London Underground. It served myself and Franziska well on many a long trip."

Finally, the clamshell opened with a click, and Luke was greeted with the very centre of the familiar Tube map, the yellow bottle-shape of the Circle Line dominating the small space as it nestled next to a simplified version of the familiar path of the river Thames. Most of the stations listed were, strangely, greyed out against the white background, and Luke quickly noticed a lonely station on a branch of the Piccadilly line that he never recalled seeing on any other map. One of the drawers slipped open in Luke's hands, and he could see twin packs of small cards held together with a rubber band, as well as a stack of small red magnets and a bunch of brightly coloured figures, clearly meant to be individual markers for the players.

Apollo peeked over Luke's shoulder, looking over the colourful lines of the map with a smile. "Two-thousand-and-four, huh? That thing's as old as me!" he said.

Luke looked up to Edgeworth with a smile. "Thank you very much, Mister Edgeworth," he said gratefully.

"You're very welcome," the prosecutor replied.

Trucy, having wormed her way out of Phoenix's grip, bounced at Luke's shoulder as she tried to get a look at the small game. "Ooh, we should play it! I want the pink person!"

"There isn't a pink person," Apollo pointed out with a wry look, crossing his arms. "You've got purple, yellow, green, or dark blue."

"What?" Trucy complained, fists on her hips. "What kind of game doesn't even have a red person!?"

"That would get confusing with the red markers," Luke explained, holding the game to show Trucy the pile of magnetised red circles in the drawer. "How about you be purple, and I'll be dark blue, okay?"

Trucy dramatically sighed, but nodded. "Fiiiiine."

Phoenix gave Edgeworth a grin. "I think they like it," he whispered.

Edgeworth restrained a smile. "That was the idea."

Before Edgeworth left once again, he pulled Luke aside for a short lecture on culture differences. "You'll have probably worked a lot out on your own," he acknowledged, "but when I noticed the poppy on your chest, a few things came to mind that aren't as obvious. Firstly, we refer to tomorrow
as Veterans Day, not Remembrance Day. Our Last Post is slightly different to yours, and we don't use the poppy as a symbol for the war dead."


"More generally, there are a few pronunciation differences no-one really thinks about," Edgeworth continued. "Route is 'rowt', the letter Z is 'zee', herb is said without the H, some words like 'penchant' and 'lieutenant' are said the way they're spelled." He thought a moment, arms crossed. "Word differences: 'holiday' here refers strictly to public holidays, Christmas, and the like; Leaving home for a time is called a 'vacation'. All the differences surrounding cars would take an hour to elaborate on, so I'll pass on that for now. What you call chips, we call fries, same for crisps with chips. A water tap is called a faucet. A queue is a line. We call trousers pants and underwear... well, underwear. One you might find humorous is that we call our homeless people 'bums'."

Luke resisted a smirk at that comment.

"Perhaps one of the strangest differences is 'mobile' and 'cell' phone, though," Edgeworth said with a shrug. "That's all I can think of off the top of my head. Oh, and don't make the mistake of calling an 'eraser' a 'rubber'. You won't hear the end of it."

Luke decided not to ask about that last one. He'd learned his lesson the day he asked to go to the toilet in class and was punished by the teacher for being rude. Who'd've thought Americans would prefer a euphemism like 'bathroom'? 

"Culturally," Edgeworth continued, "food portion sizes are a lot larger here than in Europe. Also, if you buy something in a store, prepare to pay more than what the tag says, since sales tax isn't added to the displayed price."

"What!?" Luke cried. "Isn't that false advertising!?"

Edgeworth shrugged. "It's the way things work here. I don't understand it either." He glanced at the watch on his wrist and the door back out to the reception. "I'm afraid I'll have to be going now. Happy birthday."

Luke gave the man a smile. "Thank you again, Mister Edgeworth!"

Phoenix made sure to catch his friend before he disappeared, giving him a quick hug before the prosecutor could object. "Thanks for dropping by, Edgeworth!"

"It was my pleasure," Edgeworth replied with a polite smile. "Give my regards to Maya when you next speak to her."

"Of course!" Phoenix agreed.
game to have a go at it. Although greatly annoyed to end up last in the initial turn order, she was excited to try out the game and determined to win, teaming up with Apollo to (accidentally on his part) box in Phoenix's yellow figure and directly cut off access to two of his in-game destinations. Despite a lucky roll early on, Phoenix quickly found himself boxed in again at the other end of the board, and spent many turns unable to move his figure anywhere as his three children rapidly advanced on their own goals.

"Oh, the card says I can send anyone to anywhere!" Luke announced as he read a Hazard card he had drawn from the deck.

Apollo sighed. "I'm already skipping a turn, I don't think you can screw me over any more than I currently am."

Trucy gave Luke an intense glare from across the table. "Do. Your. Worst." She spun a finger cockily over the board. "I'd recommend you send me to somewhere on this green line. It's exactly where my last destination isn't!"

Apollo rolled his eyes as he quickly noticed his sister's bluff. "You're being a bit obvious, there."

Luke smiled apologetically. "Well, actually, I was going to move Nick somewhere."

"Huh?" Phoenix said as he looked up from the board. "Move me where?"

The teen thought a moment, then smiled. "I know! Baker Street! It's where Sherlock Holmes lived!"

As Luke moved the pieces, opening the station and closing another as the rules stated, Phoenix broke into a smile and laughed. "Aw, thanks Luke! You didn't have to do that!"

"Yeah," Trucy pointed out, "the whole point of the game is to screw everyone else over!"

"I don't think so," Luke replied. "Besides, I'm almost certain Nick misread that card and should have never become stuck behind a closed station anyway."

Phoenix suppressed his laughter. "Actually," he cut in, flipping over one of the facedown Souvenir cards in front of him, "Baker Street was one of my destinations! That was a great help, Luke!"

"Oh!" Luke cried in surprise, giving his father a smile. "That's good, then!"

"We're not supposed to be helping each other!" Trucy complained, but was silenced by a quick elbow from Apollo.

To Trucy's further annoyance, when her next Hazard card forced her to skip a turn, Phoenix's next card also allowed him to send any player to any station of his choosing, and he quite gleefully announced he was sending Trucy back to her starting point. "Hey," he argued as Trucy loudly complained, "you're the one who said we're supposed to be stopping each other, right? And you're winning, aren't you?"

"It's doesn't FEEL like I'm winning!" Trucy cried.

Four turns later, the same thing happened again.

"Why are you sending me over there!?" Trucy whined as Phoenix moved her purple figure according to the instructions on the Hazard card. "Luke's the one winning!"

Luke shifted uncomfortably in his seat.
"Because Luke didn't gleefully box me in at the start," Phoenix replied with a neutral expression, "and Apollo has been sent all over the place by these cards enough. Do you need to take a break from this?"

"No!" Trucy shouted, hands clutching the table edge. "I can still get second!"

Despite being forced to skip a turn, Luke ended up winning the game in the end, with Apollo a close second and Phoenix third place after them.

"But I was almost at my last destination!" Trucy complained, grabbing the tiny die from her father and rolling it to get a six. "Ha! See?" she cried, moving her magnetic figure to the last station on the line and flipping her final Souvenir card. "I finally got there! And now I have to get back to King's Cross!"

Apollo and Luke gave each other wary looks before sneaking off towards the stairs.

Phoenix shook his head as he watched Trucy frantically continue to roll the die and move her figure, then snatched the white cube as it was flung once more across the board. "That's enough, Trucy. I think it's time you went to bed."

Trucy whined. "But Daddyyyyy!"

"'But Daddy' nothing," Phoenix sternly replied, placing the die down and plucking his daughter off her chair to carry her off. "Bedtime."

"I'm not tireeeeed!" Trucy complained as she gripped Phoenix's neck, although made no effort to fight his grip on her as he took her upstairs. "I was winniiiiiing!"

Phoenix only ignored her as he carried her to her bedroom.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"Feels weird to have it off after all this time, huh?" Phoenix laughed.

Luke blushed from his seat on the benches overlooking the lake, quickly removing his hand from where it had been rubbing his newly cast-free left arm. "Haha," he mumbled with an embarrassed smile. "I guess I was thinking that, yes."

As Luke's appointment to remove his cast had ended up in the middle of the day, Phoenix had decided to arrange for the teen to have the entire day off, as he would only have an hour or two on either end of the school day anyway. Thus, after leaving the hospital, they had dropped into the nearby Gourd Lake Park for a late lunch.

"Why are those things called 'Samurai Dogs', anyway?" Luke mused as he handed the empty paper wrappings to his father. "They've got nothing to do with samurais, let alone the Steel one."

Phoenix smiled as he combined Luke's rubbish with his own to toss in the nearby bin. "They used to be called 'Gourd Dogs'."

Luke crossed his arms, frowning in thought. "See, that's a much better name! It fits the shape, it fits the location, and there's a pun in there to boot! Why'd they change it?"

At that, Phoenix couldn't resist a short laugh. "Blame a friend of mine for that. Although, he did say they became a lot more popular after he changed the name."

"I guess that's fair," Luke sighed, "even if it doesn't make much sense." As Phoenix sat back down next to him, Luke eyed the suitcase sitting on the ground between them. "Not to change the subject, but there is something I noticed when we left the hospital and... Nick, don't take this the wrong way, but if you don't want to be recognised, wouldn't a less conspicuous bag be a good idea?"

"Probably," Phoenix admitted, then reached out and pulled the suitcase into his lap, flipping the locks open. "That reminds me, something arrived for you yesterday."

Luke's eyes widened. "From the Professor!?" he asked.

Phoenix just smiled in answer. "And to think, if it weren't for the public holiday, you might have received it in time for your birthday!" He opened the case and pulled out a box, only just small enough to fit inside. "For you." He held it out with a grin.

Luke excitedly took it, looking over the postage marks and address on the top. "I've been waiting for this!" He paused as he realised the cardboard flaps were, understandably, all taped down. "Wait, how am I supposed to open it?"

Phoenix chuckled as he pulled a small pair of scissors out of an inside pocket of his suitcase. "Thought you might need these," he explained as he offered it to his son.
A minute later, Luke was excitedly pulling open the top of the box in his lap, eyes glued to the bubble-wrapped insides as he passed the scissors back to Phoenix. "Wow, they must have worried that whatever this thing is would break!"

Phoenix held the scissors in his hand for now, just in case they were needed again. "Take care not to let any of that fly off," he warned.

"I will," Luke promised, pawing through the layers of plastic to get a glimpse of the somewhat weighty object within. "It looks pretty dark," he narrated, and tried shoving his hands down the sides to lift the whole thing out at once, only to stop as he hit paper on one side. "Oh!" He paused and dug out the obstructive paper, smiling as he recognised it was an unsealed, unmarked envelope. "The Professor must have decided to send his letter with it!" Giving Phoenix a brief grin of excitement, Luke moved the box onto the bench beside him, and pulled out from the envelope a brightly coloured birthday card (signed inside by both Flora and the Professor) and a letter, which he quickly unfolded to read.

My dear Luke,

I'm glad to hear you are continuing to settle in to your new home. Even as I write this, your Halloween has been and gone, so I hope to hear that everything went well. If possible, I would love to see a photo of how Trucy's costumes turned out, as your descriptions make them sound simply wonderful.

I would agree that staying away from the Space Centre for a while sounds like the right thing to do. You were instructed to keep out of the way of this girl for a reason, and I don't doubt her caretakers worry for her health greatly. I'm glad your friend Clay seems to understand this as well, and I'm sure this will have no effect on your friendship in the long run.

I'm sure any suggestions I may have for Mr. Wright's birthday would pale in comparison to anything you think of yourself. You know him better than I, after all. And, speaking of birthdays, I do hope you like the gift Flora and I put together for you. She was the one who suggested it actually, and I'm sure you'll recognise why when you unwrap it, if you haven't already.

On that note, I do not doubt your family would be greatly entertained by stories of our exploits over the years. My thanks for keeping Claire out of it, although this ability of Apollo's and Trucy's sounds very intriguing. Do either of them know how it works?

With all the time we've been spending in Future London helping sort out what happened down there, Flora has begun taking an interest in the refugees. I managed to persuade her they didn't need any food, so she resurrected her old sewing habit to try and put together clothes, and, before I knew it, she was returning home with tales of potential orphans of Future London we should check up on. She doesn't know quite where they might be, but is convinced they are out there and that we have to find them. I've tried dissuading her, but she is quite persistent.

I've suggested to Flora she start writing to you as well, since she has complained of missing you. She simply says for now that she is thinking about it, but has never been the best at writing letters.

I will end this letter here, on the assumption you have yet to open the rest of the parcel. There are the usual puzzles included in the envelope, and I do hope this managed to arrive in time for the 10th.

Your friend,
Professor Hershel Layton

1st November, 2019

Luke giggled in glee, folding the letter back up and making a mental note to write a reply as soon as he could.

"Everything going well?" Phoenix asked, holding out a hand in a silent offer to hold the envelope for a while.

"Yup!" Luke replied, handing the paper to his father. "Though the Professor did write this back at the beginning of the month, so I already knew they were fine!" Pulling the box back into his lap, Luke peered eagerly at the bundle of bubble wrap inside. "I can't wait to find out what it is!"

Phoenix laughed. "Then get it out of the box and find out!"

Luke didn't need any more prompting. He thought for only a moment how best to handle the situation before moving the box back onto the bench next to him and again shoving his hands down the sides, weaselling his way to the bottom of the box and getting a firm grip on the underside of the bulky wrapped object. Very carefully, Luke raised the heavy gift out of the box, pausing to shift his grip every time the bubble wrap caught on the box and tried to lift the whole thing. Finally, he had the dark-coloured gift, only barely visible through the plastic covering, in his lap, and had to request the scissors back to cut open where the wrapping had been securely taped together to keep from unravelling, which it quickly began to do once it was loosened. Fighting to keep the plastic from flying off in the breeze, Luke was too busy shoving the bubble wrap back into the box to even look at his opened gift for a minute or two, Phoenix grabbing it when it almost fell off Luke's lap and onto the ground in the teen's haste to keep from littering.

"Ugh, I think that's the last one," Luke sighed as he shoved the last of the bubble wrap into the box, even temporarily closing it again for good measure.

"I imagine you would know what this is supposed to be from," Phoenix spoke up, looking at the figures in his hands as his son turned in his seat. "I know what it looks like, but..." He held it out, ready for its recipient to take.

Luke froze as he instantly recognised the bronze statuette, although it was much smaller than he remembered it being; It was of two figures, one an adult man in a top hat, scarf, and moustache, a cane in one hand, and the other a small boy in a hat not unlike Luke's favourite cap, holding an open book and looking up at the man with a large smile. "Y-yeah," Luke managed to say, still stunned. "I know what that's from."

Phoenix held the statuette out a little further, prompting Luke to finally take it in his own hands. "Do you want to say?" he gently asked.

"S-sure," Luke stuttered, still staring at the heavy object now in his lap. 'I may as well... after all, I told everyone the story a few weeks back, and was telling the Professor about it in my last letter, and how I tried to go with Claire's cover story until Apollo saw through the lie and I had to argue the truth was a personal thing and I wasn't going to tell it.' He shook his head to bring himself back on topic. "You remember how I was telling you all about the Professor's and my adventure in Future London, right?"

"You were, yes," Phoenix replied with a slow nod. 'Just as I remember you warning us it was
difficult to believe until you got to the end of the story... Apollo wouldn't stop pointing out impossibilities the entire time. That was almost half the fun of it, though.'

Luke was silent for a few moments before he continued, looking up at Phoenix. "One of the parts I left out because it didn't seem important," he forced himself to explain. "There was this statue in a park. The sign said it was of an author who used his stories to befriend a boy who was terminally ill, but it wasn't." He looked back to the statuette in his lap. "It turned out Clive made it, in memory of how the Professor comforted him after his parents died." He felt tears beginning to prick at the corners of his eyes. "And since Clive looked a bit like me, so does the boy in the statue."

Phoenix moved to rest a comforting hand on Luke's back, getting a small smile in return.

"Before we crossed the river," Luke continued, "I had a small argument with Flora, and she was complaining how the Professor and I were always together, and it reminded me that Dad was moving us overseas, so I ran off." He rubbed at his wet eyes with a sleeve. "The Professor found me by this statue. He said we were true friends, and that wouldn't change no matter how far apart we were."

"Very true," Phoenix said with a smile, rubbing Luke's back as the teen forced himself to calm down. "It's the same with me and Maya, even though she's so busy nowadays we barely get to even talk."

Luke giggled. "That just reminds me of when Trucy was demanding we meet her the other day."

Phoenix couldn't help a small laugh himself. "Yeah, I think Trucy's got her sights set on making Maya her new mother or something. She and Pearls would get along great!"

"Pearls?" Luke repeated. "You and Maya mentioned her in England, didn't you?"

"Maya's cousin, yes," Phoenix replied, quietly removing his hand from Luke's back now he was sure the teen was okay. "She's convinced Maya and I are 'special someones' for some reason." He rolled his eyes as Luke laughed. "Only a year older than Trucy, too."

Luke decided not to mention that he'd been convinced for a day or so after initially meeting them that Maya and Phoenix were actually a couple, until he noticed how the pair did nothing more romantic than holding hands. The way Phoenix had broken down after Maya's 'death' was pretty convincing on its own, too. 'Thank goodness that all turned out to be a trick, though.'

Phoenix put the scissors back in his suitcase. "Incidentally, a year ago today, Maya and I arrived in England. I had a surprise court case thrown on me the day after that, defending some young woman." He grinned. "I don't remember her name, of course. Spella something. I think she may have introduced me to a certain English professor and his apprentice, too."

Luke giggled, then sighed as he remembered the events of that day. "This time last year, the Professor and I were in his office when Espella arrived with a note from one of the Professor's former students. We were trying to help her escape from the witches when we got kidnapped on London Bridge."

"Nothing good can come of witches and kidnappings," Phoenix joked.

"Oh, I don't know," Luke replied airily, failing to hide his smile. "We made some good friends in the end!"

"None of them lawyers, I hope!"
The two broke down into giggles, giving each other a one-armed hug as they remembered all the
good of their days in Labyrinthia.

Ruffling Luke's hair, Phoenix gestured to the box sitting on the bench beside him. "Why don't you
put that away for now? I can take it home and you can show it off to your siblings on Friday."

Luke nodded, unable to stop the massive grin planted on his face. "Sure, Nick!"

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"What kind of things do you even get an adult?"

"We'll think of something."

"Except we've been saying that for...! How long has it been?"

"A couple weeks n-"

"A couple weeks now! At this rate, we may as well jump to Christmas!"

"I'm making Daddy a scarf. I'm done for Christmas."

"Unfortunately, Apollo and I aren't handy with knitting like you are, Trucy."

"... Luke, we're terrible sons. We have no idea what to get Dad for his birthday, the first birthday of his since he took us in."

"Apollo?"

"We deserve to be thrown out on the street."

"Apollo, I think you're taking this a bit too seriously..."

"Think about it, Polly! Is there anything Daddy needs? Maybe you and Luke could team up and get it for him!"

"... What does Dad need?"

"Um... I'm sure he needs something..."

"That's it. We're dead."

"Um, actually, Apollo... I think I might have an idea of something he needs."

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December 2, 4:08PM

Palm Tree Shopping Mall

"Yes!" Clay cried, punching his fist into the air as he entered a high score into the arcade machine. "I am the king of Asteroids!"

Apollo rolled his eyes, standing nearby with arms crossed. "Yeah, you and, like, nine other people."

Eyes focussed on the Tetris clone he was engrossed in, Luke giggled to himself from a neighbouring machine. "Gee Clay, asteroids aren't that big. I don't think a kingship over them would be something anyone would want!"

Apollo shot Luke a glare. "Of all the things to pick up from Dad, you choose his terrible sense of humour?"
Clay grinned as he left his game to move over to Luke. "Well, Luke isn't going to pick up his career like you are, Apollo."

"I-!" Apollo stuttered, turning red. "I-I was always going to be a lawyer! Dad has nothing to do with it!"

"You said Nick inspired you to be one, didn't you?" Luke asked, barely paying attention as the uncleared blocks began to clutter his screen. "That still counts."

"Doesn't," Apollo muttered, but decided not to argue any further at the sight of Clay's disbelieving grin. "Anyway, we need to get moving. We were going to get the thing for Dad's birthday today, remember?"


Clay pouted. "But I wanted to have a go at the Tetris ripoff after Luke was done!"

"You can still go on after me," Luke replied, then grunted as his pile of tetronimos reached the top of the screen and the game ended. "Git!" he muttered at the machine with a glare, resisting the urge to kick it, then turned towards his friend with a smile. "You don't have to come with us, Clay. Nick's not your dad, after all."

"Nah, it's fine," Clay sighed, waving a hand. "It's boring hanging around here on your own, anyway." He flung an arm over an unimpressed Apollo's shoulder. "So, where we goin'?"

"To find a place that sells bags," Apollo replied, removing Clay's arm and heading towards the arcade's exit, his two best friends close behind him. "We're getting Dad something more inconspicuous, to replace his suitcase he still carries everywhere."

Clay frowned. "He does? Like, everywhere everywhere?"

"Out everywhere," Luke specified. "He doesn't to get Trucy from school, but anywhere else we need to go, he generally has the suitcase." He shrugged. "I think maybe he took it everywhere when he was a lawyer, so he's still in the habit."

As they reached the wide thoroughfares of the shopping mall, Apollo began to scan all the shops in sight, wondering which way to look first. "And it's only one part of the whole gift, too."

"Wow, what else are you getting him?" Clay asked with a smirk. "Backpacks can get pretty expensive, and we did just spend a few dollars back in the arcade. It better be a cheap gift!"

"Don't worry!" Luke said with a laugh, shaking his head. "We've got some money set aside!"

"We pooled our funds with Trucy," Apollo added, making a decision and turning to his right. "We have enough."

Luke skipped after his brother. "We thought about what we were going to do for ages!" He then frowned in thought, returning his walk to normal as he turned to Clay. "And Apollo and Trucy were explaining this 'Black Friday' thing to me. Is that an actual thing that happens?"

Clay crossed his arms. "People going crazy, injuring if not outright crushing each other and the poor employees stuck serving them all for the sake of getting stuff for super-cheap? Sad but true."

Luke winced. "Oh. That's terrible." He shook his head. "Anyway, we're only spending money on the bag. The rest of it is all homemade stuff."
"Uh-oh," Clay said with a cheeky grin, advancing on Apollo to jokingly elbow him. "I'm picturing children's artwork for the fridge!"

"It's nothing like that," Apollo told his friend, waving him off.

Luke suddenly jumped, rushing to Apollo's side. "Oh, Apollo! We still haven't worked out when we're giving this to Nick!"

"On his birthday...?" Clay asked, a single eyebrow raised.

"We have school," Apollo explained. "It's next Thursday."

"Oh," Clay muttered, tapping his chin and thinking to himself. "If you won't want to wait 'til the weekend," he eventually suggested, "I guess you'd just have to sneak out of school."

Luke frowned incredulously. "Sneak out!?" he repeated. "I thought you'd suggest something more sensible, like spending the evening at home!"

Clay gave Luke a grin. "Since when am I sensible?" he pointed out.

"We are not sneaking out!" Luke fiercely insisted.

"Don't I get a say in this?" Apollo asked, eyelids lowered.

"We're not sneaking out!"

December 12, 2:30PM
Sirius Turner Boarding School for Boys
Front Gate

"I can't believe we're sneaking out."

Clay laughed as he casually led his friends to the dorm-side gate, against the flow of students heading back inside at the end-of-lunch bell. "Do you have a better idea, Wrights?" he asked. "You had over a week to think of one!"

Apollo gave his brother a smile and patted his shoulder. "C'mon, cheer up! It's not like we'll be doing this again." He briefly paused before jokingly adding, "This year."

Luke sighed, shaking his head. "You're not helping, Apollo."

As the trio reached the talkbox mounted next to the gate, they slowed to a stop. Apollo adjusted the bag on his back, trying to look casual, and elbowed Luke into looking a little less guilty, just in case a teacher came across them.

Clay cleared his throat, gave his friends a confident grin, then slammed a finger into the button below the speaker. "Hey, Hugo! My pals the Wright brothers need to leave! It's an emergency!"

There was a short pause before the speaker fizzled to life. "That's probably the weirdest prank call I've ever heard."
Clay put his free hand on his hip indignantly. "Have you seriously forgotten about Luke and Apollo Wright? They need to get out of this gate right now, man!"

"I haven't heard anything about an emergency," Hugo drawled, disbelief evident in his tone. "The gate's not opening until school's over."

"Wait, they haven't told you!?" Clay cried with a large gasp, hamming up his shock as much as he possibly could. "Their great-uncle is dying, he might be gone within the hour! They have to go and say goodbye to him!"

Hugo sounded incredulous as his voice crackled from the speaker. "Great-uncle...?"

"He rocked them to sleep when they were babes!" Clay dramatically explained. "He taught them not to stick forks in power points! He helped them learn the alphabet!"

"Y-yeah, whatever," Hugo interrupted, "but I still can't let you out without a note from a teacher or the principal."

"But that would take too long!" Clay continued, waving his free arm around in hammy desperation. "If they don't leave now, they'll miss the bus, and then they won't get to the hospital within the hour, and won't get to say goodbye! How could you do that to them, Hugo!??"

"But-!"

"Can't you hear them crying out here?" Clay waved at his friends, and Apollo quickly jumped towards the speaker, jamming a finger against his nose to close off one nostril and doing his loudest sniff in the direction of the small microphone beside the talkbox button. "They can barely speak, they're so distraught!" Clay cried.

"Alright, alright!" Hugo shouted, and the buzzing of the unlocking gate rang from above them. "Just be quick, okay?"

Clay grinned, giving the talkbox one last parting shot as Apollo opened the gate. "You're a pal, Hugo!"

"This better check out with the principal!" Hugo warned, and the speaker went quiet.

"We are in so much trouble," Luke groaned as Clay released the button on the talkbox.

Dancing in delight, Clay pushed Luke out the gate after Apollo. "Quick, before someone spots you!" he laughed.

"I can't believe that worked," Apollo said with a smile, closing the gate behind Luke. "How long until he remembers we're adopted?"

Luke frowned. "Does Mister Thrume even know we're brothers?"

"Who cares!?" Clay cried, waving his hands at the pair through the bars. "Get out of here!" With that, he spun around and ran off to class.

Laughing, Apollo grabbed Luke's wrist and the pair disappeared in the direction of the bus-stop.

December 12, 3:58PM
Trucy pouted at the desk as she worked on her homework. It had taken several minutes of convincing, but she had managed to persuade Phoenix to leave her alone in the reception area with her schoolwork. She had claimed it was her birthday present to him to be on her best behaviour, when, in actuality, it was only a small part of her plans for the afternoon. It unnerved her that her father had still looked suspicious of her despite letting her get her way, but she was sure it was just her own guilty nerves.

The handle on the front door softly turned, and Trucy looked up to see Apollo's face appearing in the opening door. He gave her a smile, peeking around to check the room was empty before coming in. "Where's Dad?" he whispered.

"The office," Trucy replied, jerking her head towards the closed door as she pushed herself off her chair. "I'll have to distract him so you can get up to my room."

Luke crept in behind Apollo, quietly locking the front door behind him. "I'm pretty sure we almost got caught at the park," he quietly whined. "We are so going to get expelled!"

Apollo shushed his brother, grabbing his arm to guide him somewhere hidden from the office once the door was opened. Trucy waited until she was sure they would be out of their father's sight, then collected her homework from the desk. "I'll distract Daddy in his bedroom," she told them, "but I can only do that for a minute or two. You need to hurry into my room the moment the coast is clear."

"Don't worry," Apollo replied, giving her a thumbs-up. "We'll meet you there in a sec."

Trucy grinned, then hugged her work to her chest and headed into the office, swinging the door wide open as she ran in.

Apollo and Luke held their breath as they listened to the conversation beyond the door.

"Daddy, I need to talk to you!"

"What is this about, Truce?"

"Come with me!"

"What?"

"We need to talk privately!"

"... About your homework? Who'd even listen in on us?"

"Daddyyyyyy!"

"Alright, fine! Where do you insist you have to be to ask for help on this!?!"

Luke silently sighed as he heard Phoenix and Trucy heading into the kitchen. Apollo was grinning widely, and Luke wondered if he was enjoying this. "C'mon!" the older boy whispered excitedly, and, gripping the backpack to his chest, ran through into the office. Luke shook his head and followed.
View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Phoenix had first started worrying about the Psyche-Locks five days ago.

It wasn't uncommon to see one or two pop up on someone in his day-to-day life, but, without a murder investigation in progress, Phoenix usually didn't see the point in invading people's right to privacy. It was helpful on occasion when he suspected one of his children was hiding something that deserved to be properly out in the open, but he was happy to otherwise let them keep their little secrets. A lot of the time, especially in the weeks leading up to Christmas, a Psyche-Lock or two was innocuous thoughts on gifts anyway.

He had first caught his children chatting animatedly in Luke and Apollo's room when the boys were home for Thanksgiving, 'caught' because they suddenly got all quiet and looked up at him innocently when he knocked at the door to check up on them. It was as they insisted they weren't doing anything suspicious Phoenix saw the familiar chains and a single red Psyche-Lock appearing around each of the three's hearts. He had been confused about what the trio could possibly have been discussing until he happened to glance at the calendar and remembered there was not only his birthday but Christmas coming up in the next month. At the time, he had simply laughed and rolled his eyes as he resolved to leave them to it, and smiled to himself when he asked them again later and the single Locks had split into twin pairs.

Another school-week had gone by, and Apollo and Luke came home for another weekend, quickly and quietly pulling Trucy aside to talk with her in their room after dinner. Luke had hung back to get a drink, and when Phoenix had asked him about his week at school, four Psyche-Locks appeared. Such a large number was uncommon enough on its own, but Luke's guilty behaviour as he fled from Phoenix's surprised questioning only made the father's concerns grow.

Luke had spent that weekend avoiding Phoenix, and, to Phoenix's surprise, Apollo and Trucy seemed to be helping him. The pair's own number of Psyche-Locks had increased to three each, and it was only because they were continuing to be incredibly calm about the secret the three were undoubtedly sharing that Phoenix decided to ultimately leave them alone. It hadn't stopped him from worrying, but, with Luke and Apollo both at school until the next Saturday, it had freed him for a while to keep his attention on Trucy's suspicious behaviour. Besides suddenly becoming very protective of the privacy of her room, the little girl had started insisting on doing her homework in reception instead of the little desk next to her bed. Although Phoenix had asked her reasons, he'd only gotten lies and the three Psyche-Locks in return. Nevertheless, he'd gone along with Trucy's odd performance, knowing sooner or later the Locks would shatter and he'd finally get an answer for the whole strange thing.

'I honestly thought that would be happening today though,' Phoenix thought with a sigh. He glanced up at the door to reception opposite him, through which Trucy had stubbornly insisted on doing her homework alone and with the door closed. 'This definitely has something to do with my birthday,' Phoenix decided, 'but nothing at all to do with "giving me a quiet afternoon"!?' He paused. 'On that note, can't believe I'm actually twenty-seven. Only twenty-seven. I have a fifteen-year-old son, after
Suddenly, the door to reception swung open, and Phoenix looked up to see Trucy bouncing in, hugging her homework to her chest and looking proud of herself. "Daddy, I need to talk to you!"

Phoenix frowned. "What is this about, Truce?"

Instead of answering, Trucy skipped around the desk and grabbed his hand, dragging her father in the direction of the kitchen. "Come with me!"

"What?"

Trucy leaned forward, speaking in a mock-whisper. "We need to talk privately!"

Phoenix resisted a sigh as he saw the Psyche-Locks reappearing, and frowned when he noticed the initial three had become four. He gave Trucy a withering look, glancing noticeably at the papers and books in her arms. "About your homework? Who'd even listen in on us?"

"Daddyyyyyy!" Trucy whined, tugging on his arm again.

Rolling his eyes, Phoenix gave in. "Alright, fine!" He stood up. This better result in this secret of yours finally unravelling! "Where do you insist you have to be to ask for help on this!?"

Trucy only grinned, pulling him ever more forcefully through into the kitchen and up the stairs. "Quick, quick!" she cried. "We have to hide in your room!"

Phoenix frowned as his daughter dragged him down the hallway towards the master bedroom. "Why?"

"It's a secret!" Trucy cried, dashing to the bedroom door and hurrying Phoenix inside before closing it behind them.

'You bet it's a secret,' Phoenix thought wryly, but plonked himself down on his bed anyway. "Alright, what is it?" he sighed.

Trucy climbed onto the bed beside her father and rested her books on her lap, flipping through her papers and pulling out one that said "MATH" in big important letters at the top. "I need help with my three times tables!"

Phoenix stared at the paper for a solid second. "And why did you have to ask for help here specifically?"

"Because!" Trucy insisted, then tapped at her paper. "I can never remember three times eight!"

Rubbing at his eyes, Phoenix leaned forward on his knees. "What's three times seven?" he asked her.

Trucy scrunched up her face in thought, and Phoenix found himself wondering how much of it was an act. "Twenty?" she asked.

"Close," Phoenix replied, straightening up. "Little bit m-!" He paused as he heard a creaking from out in the hallway, and his head spun around to the closed door.

"Twenty-two?" Trucy asked, poking her father and fixing him with an innocent smile. "Is it that?"

Phoenix frowned, still watching the door. "Did you hear that?"
"That's just the building settling!" Trucy brightly explained, but Phoenix found her childlike reasoning less reassuring thanks to the four Psyche-Locks making a reappearance. "It creaks all the time, Daddy!"

There was a short silence as Phoenix fixed Trucy with a suspicious glare. "It's twenty-four," he answered, then stood up.

"Wait!" Trucy cried, pulling together her papers and books as Phoenix strode to the door. "Daddy!"

Phoenix threw the door open and jumped out into the... empty hallway, pausing in surprise. 'But... I could have sworn... I definitely heard something!'

Trucy gleefully skipped out past Phoenix down the hall. "Thanks for the help, Daddy!" she called over her shoulder. "I'm going to finish up in my room!" With that, she opened her bedroom door and jumped in before closing it with a thud behind her.

Left alone and very confused, Phoenix scratched his head. 'I could have sworn she'd left her door ajar earlier, too.' Shaking his head, he went back downstairs to his office.

Five minutes later, Phoenix was sitting at his desk, puzzling over the mystery of Trucy's secret. 'Enough is enough,' he told himself. 'I'm confronting her on it today!' He was collating together any and every scrap of evidence he could think of that might hint towards her true intentions, in the hope that he would have enough to break through the four Psyche-Locks and convince her to tell him the truth. 'Firstly, I think bamboozling her with the Psyche-Locks increasing as today approached is enough to convince her I know she's hiding something specifically about my birthday. It worked with Drew Misham, after all. That should break one of them, with any luck, but I'll still have three left.' He rubbed his chin in thought, idly flipping through the Court Record. 'Thinking back on it, she may have been sneaking someone in.' He'd already checked the front door was locked, but, as would have been pointed out in a courtroom, that didn't mean it had been locked the entire time Trucy had been alone in the room. 'Whoever it was must have hidden very quickly after making the floor creak. They would have made even more noise going downstairs, and the bathroom and the boys' room was too far away, so they're likely in Trucy's room right now... if they haven't snuck out the back door already.' He frowned. 'No, Trucy would have come back in here to 'distract' me if they were sneaking out. In which case, if I go up there right now, I can-'

There was a methodical thudding of three pairs of feet rushing down the stairs at top speed.

'Ah, it's just the kids coming down. Now, where was... Wait a second.' Phoenix looked up just in time for the door through to the kitchen to fly open, revealing the three Wright children standing in the doorway with massive smiles on their faces.

"Surprise!" Apollo and Trucy shouted, arms thrown out wide, while Luke opened his mouth only briefly before silently closing it again, looking slightly guilty as he kept his hands behind his back.

Phoenix was too shocked to reply for a few moments, Trucy running in and grabbing his hand to again pull him out of his chair. "C'mon, we have to sit on the sofa!" she demanded.

Apollo giggled. "Happy birthday, Dad!" he cried, quickly elbowing Luke into nodding agreement despite his continued avoidance of eye contact.

"What are you two doing home!?" Phoenix asked, half in surprise and the other half in exasperation that Trucy (who was still slowly pulling him out from behind the desk and towards the lounge) had
gone to such lengths to sneak her own brothers into the apartment under his nose. "And this early in the afternoon?"

Luke winced, hands still hidden, but Apollo grinned, running around to help Trucy push Phoenix down onto the sofa. "We wanted to spend time with you, Dad!" he reasoned, standing back as Phoenix reluctantly sat down and Trucy threw herself into his lap. "It would have been terrible to make you want until evening to get the present we got you!"

Phoenix sighed. "Present. Of course. That accounts for... maybe three of the four Psyche-Locks. I'd bet the fourth is the actual contents of this present."

Luke walked forward and held out his hands, revealing a completely average-looking black backpack, arm-loops pulled tight and stuffed with padding. "We weren't able to wrap it," he apologised.

Phoenix couldn't help a laugh as he felt the tension of his concerns fading away. "You've gone to all that trouble sneaking into your own home at a time you're supposed to still be at school, if not on your way here, and you're worried about not wrapping it?" Luke blushed guiltily as Phoenix took the bag, but smiled anyway. "A backpack, huh? Is this a subtle message that my beloved suitcase is out of fashion?" Phoenix continued with a grin, patting the open space on either side of the lounge to direct the boys to sit down.

Apollo laughed as he jumped to Phoenix's side. "Totally!" he replied.

"That's not the only thing!" Trucy protested, bouncing in Phoenix's lap as Luke gingerly took his place next to them. "Open it, open it!"

Phoenix laughed as he did so, placing the backpack on the floor and quickly pulling out a flat object wrapped in dark blue fabric. "What's this?" he asked as he slowly pulled the woolly fabric out of the knot it had been tied in.

"I was going to give it to you on Christmas," Trucy explained, "but I changed my mind." She grinned. "It's a scarf!"

"Ah, I see!" Phoenix said as he unwrapped the scarf from whatever it was wrapped around, and quickly found that said object it was hiding was in fact three objects: a trio of handmade birthday cards, individually addressed in big letters to 'Daddy', 'Dad' and 'Nick'. "I wonder who made each of these?" he joked as he put the scarf down to read them.

Trucy wriggled around in Phoenix's lap to hug him as he silently read through the cards, and, one by one, Apollo and Luke leaned against his sides, reading the lovingly hand-drawn pictures and messages they had made together the previous weekend over his shoulder. As Phoenix finished the last one, he placed the cards in his lap and reached out with his arms to pull the boys into a hug around Trucy, who giggled gleefully.

"I love you guys," Phoenix quietly told his children.

Smiling, Apollo and Luke seemed happy to return the hug, locking the family of four into a tight circle of love.

"But, just so you know," Phoenix bluntly added, "I can tell when you're keeping secrets from me."

The smiles on Trucy, Luke and Apollo's faces instantly died.
View the Court Record
"Ooh, it's pretty!" Trucy cooed as she carefully poked the magatama, then pulled it from Phoenix's hand as she realised it wouldn't hurt her if she touched it.

"Why is it glowing?" Apollo asked. "How is it glowing?"

Luke crossed his arms, frowning in thought. "I'm certain I've seen something like that before," he said. "I can't remember where, though."

Phoenix grinned, carefully taking the green stone back from Trucy. "It's called a 'magatama'," he explained. "Maya wears hers around her neck, which is where you would have seen one before, Luke."

"Ah, I see," Luke replied with a smile and a nod, uncrossing his arms. "That makes sense!"

Trucy frowned at the mention of Maya, but was cut off before she could complain again about wanting to meet her.

"Actually, this one used to be Maya's as well, but she gave it to me a few years ago," Phoenix continued. "It's glowing because... well, I can't answer 'how', but the 'why' is because Maya's cousin Pearls filled it with spiritual energy so I could use it."

Apollo frowned. "Use it?" he repeated.

"That's its power," Phoenix replied with a grin. "It tells me when someone I'm talking to is hiding something from me."

Trucy looked impressed. "How does it do that?"

Luke looked doubtful. "You're sure it isn't a trick or something?"

"I'm sure," Phoenix told Luke with a wry smile. "You can't fake Psyche-Locks."

Apollo crossed his arms, imitating Luke's disbelieving look. "And what are 'psycho locks'?" he asked.

"Psyche-Locks," Phoenix corrected, gently elbowing Apollo. "They're representations of the locks on a person's heart. The more of them there are, the more desperately they want to keep their secret."

Trucy thought for a moment. "So, you knew the entire time that we were keeping this surprise a secret?"

"I knew you were keeping a secret," Phoenix explained, tapping Trucy on the nose, "and I figured it had to do with either Christmas or my birthday, so I didn't pry. I must admit though," he turned to Luke, "when I saw four Psyche-Locks on you, I started to worry there was something else you were
hiding from me."

Luke squirmed uncomfortably for a moment before suddenly announcing "Apollo and I got out of school early because Clay fooled Mister Thrume into thinking there was a family emergency and Apollo wanted to get home before dark!"

"Luke!" Apollo cried.

"I'm sorry!" Luke added guiltily, hysterical tears beginning to leak from the corners of his eyes. "They're gonna kick us out of school and we'll never finish our education and we don't deserve to live with you!"

Trucy whacked Luke's torso with one hand, giving him her best glare. "Are you stupid!? You're my brother, you're not going anywhere!"

"I don't doubt you'll both be in trouble," Phoenix added, giving the sulking Apollo and still slightly frantic Luke a stern look, "but I don't think they'll expel you simply for skipping one afternoon. You'd have to do a lot worse than that."

Luke rubbed at his eyes with a sleeve. "You don't hate us for sneaking out?"

"Of course not," Phoenix assured him, ruffling Luke's hair. "As a father, I'm disappointed, but since you did it for my birthday, I'll leave any punishments on this occasion for the school to deal out to you." He smiled, poking Apollo's arm. "Just don't do it again, okay?"

Apollo nodded, giving his father a small smile. "Sure."

"We won't, Nick!" Luke cried more exuberantly. "We promise!"

Trucy looked between her brothers. "Well, you know what this means, Luke and Polly: Now we have to think about what to get Daddy for Christmas!"

As the two boys groaned, Phoenix laughed. "Don't bother," he assured them, tapping the cards and scarf in his lap. "What you got me today is more than enough, I can promise you that!"

A few minutes later, Phoenix had arranged the three cards along the top of the short bookcase by his desk, next to the window. Beside them was a short line of birthday cards from Phoenix's friends, even one from his parents. Pride of place, however, was carefully given to the handmade 'thank yous' at the front, addressed individually to 'Daddy', 'Dad' and 'Nick'.

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My dear Luke,

You may notice this letter is slightly fuller than usual. Flora has finally decided to write a letter for you, so we've bundled them together to save on postage. I trust that this has also arrived after the card that we sent Mr. Wright for his birthday; If not, please apologise to him for us on its late arrival.

On that note, your idea for a gift for him does indeed, as I said, pale in comparison to anything I could have suggested. I'm sure he will appreciate the love you put into making cards by hand.
However, I must ask what your plans for the day exactly were? You seem very vague on them, so I can't help but wonder if something worries you.

I would suggest, when you next decide to share a story of our exploits, to ask Mr. Wright what he thinks about talking of Labyrinthia. I'm sure he would want to help in telling that one, especially considering the times we split up for various reasons. If Miss Fey is around, she may also want to contribute, although I seem to remember you mentioning she was not available and thus may have to sit out. Otherwise, you will have to decide between Misthallery and Folsense for the subject of your story.

I'm sure Flora will talk at length about it in her letter, but she found an orphan from Future London the other day. He's only a baby, which seems to have excited her even more, and she's started accumulating good boys names for him. I'm actually quite fond of his existing name, 'Alfendi', and I hope whoever does adopt the boy decides to keep it. He apparently has a reputation for being a bit of a terror to his handlers.

This American holiday of Thanksgiving sounds... unusual. The way you describe it, it sounds as though it began as a genuine day of giving thanks and has devolved into simply an excuse for a feast... and this 'Black Friday' that follows it sounds especially troublesome. I hope what you heard about it is indeed exaggerated.

Everyone here is in full swing for Christmas now. The shops have set up all their displays, and there are Christmas lights going up everywhere you look. I saw Dean Delmona personally setting up the tree in the hall of the university yesterday, so it's clear he hasn't learned from the trouble doing so caused last year. I find you can't argue with Christmas cheer, though.

I will end my letter here, I think. I hope you enjoy the puzzles I sent, and that this letter finds you well.

Your friend,

Professor Hershel Layton

5th December, 2019

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Dear Professor Layton,

Don't worry Professor, your card for Nick's birthday was sitting in his office yesterday, so it must have arrived earlier this week while I was at school! I had a peek inside too, and I don't think Flora had to be quite so forceful asking him to look after me. I'm not sure if you saw that or not before sending it, but I'll thank her for her concern in the letter I write to her after this.

As for our plans for Nick's birthday, well, I'm afraid you'll be awfully disappointed in me to hear them. We wanted to be home that evening so the three of us could give Nick his present in person, but Apollo didn't think it would be fair to make him wait for us to get home, since it's after dark by the time we arrive. He and Clay convinced me the right thing to do would be to sneak out of school at the end of lunch to get home around the same time Trucy does. We somehow managed to do it too, because Clay made up some story about a dying great-uncle who knew us as babies and tricked Mr. Thrume into opening the gate for us. I was so guilty about it, Nick actually noticed and was worrying about me, but he says he's forgiven us now. The school hasn't, though. We've got afternoon
detention for all of next week, me, Apollo, and Clay. We do deserve it, but next time they try to talk me into that, I'm refusing to go along with it.

Asking Nick is a good idea when it comes to story-telling, thank you for suggesting it, Professor. I didn't even think of Maya, though. I don't think she'd like being left out, so I'll wait until she has the free time to come visit us and ask her then. In the meantime, maybe the Spectre of Misthallery would be a good story to tell next! There's no sense in telling them backwards, now I've thought on it a bit, and I think I'll be alright talking about Mum and Dad now.

Alfendi sounds cute, even if he is a terror! Flora said he was really well behaved when you met him, but the nurse said he's usually crying all the time? I don't blame him, I suppose. I'll do my best to talk some sense into Flora, but you have to admit her promise to learn normal cooking sounds tempting.

Admittedly, it was Apollo, Trucy and Clay who explained Thanksgiving and Black Friday to me, so I may be off on what it's about. Nick didn't seem to care about it either way, though that may have been because he says we don't have the money for a traditional feast. Clay and Apollo insist they weren't exaggerating on Black Friday though, and I did see some story in the paper talking about an injury toll and protests against it, so I'm inclined to believe them.

It's kind of snuck up on us, but we're entering our last week of school for this year! Apollo thinks we got distracted with all the worries we were having about Nick's birthday (Trucy is already trying to get us together to talk about a Christmas present! Nick insists we don't need to bother, though.), but it will be nice to have a couple of weeks where we don't have to go all that way to school so early in the morning. I'm curious to see what differences there are between American and English traditions when it comes to Christmas, actually. I discovered by accident the other week that there's an American robin that's much bigger and different-looking to our English one (it's not nearly as cute, too!).

I'm running out of paper, so I'll stop here. My next letter will probably be after New Years, taking into consideration the mail getting clogged with Christmas cards and packages, so I hope you have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, Professor!

Your friend and apprentice,

Luke Triton

13th December, 2019

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View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
'First day of the winter break, and here I am cleaning my room,' Phoenix thought to himself as he brushed a dustcloth across every horizontal surface he could reach. 'Probably would have been smarter to do this while the kids were all out at school. Oh well, too late now. At least they're occupied at the moment.' He shivered a little and regretted his decision to put his hoodie and beanie in the wash today of all days. 'Should have known better than to trust the forecast. It was supposed to be warmer than usual today! Eh, suppose this is why I should have more than one hoodie and beanie. I was not prepared to suddenly be living day-to-day without my suit again.'

The ex-lawyer's musings were interrupted by a buzzing in his pocket, shortly followed by a chirping ringtone. 'Excellent, a distraction!' Smiling to himself, Phoenix gladly abandoned the dustcloth and pulled the blue phone out of his pocket and checked the screen. Smile becoming a grin at the displayed name, he hit the button to pick up the call and pressed the phone to his ear. "Maya!" he cried in delight.

"Hey Nick!" the spirit medium replied cheerily from the other end of the line. "'S been a while, huh? Sorry I haven't been able to get in touch as quickly as I thought..."

Phoenix shook his head, just glad to be talking to his best friend again. "Don't worry about it. You've got a lot of work to do up there."

"Not right now I don't!" Maya giggled, and Phoenix could imagine her victorious grin. "I've managed to get next week off, since all the elders are going off for midwinter to do training!"

"You're not joining them? Isn't that a bad thing for the Master of Kurain to do?"

"Pffft!" Maya scoffed. "I can do whatever I want, I'm the Master! But, yeah, I'm exempt because I already did my training this past week. Planned it nicely, didn't I?"

Phoenix resisted the urge to scoff right back, sitting on his bed as he grinned to himself. "Yeah, I'm sure that was deliberate on your part."

"Shut up," Maya replied, in a tone that suggested she was rolling her eyes. Phoenix couldn't resist a laugh. "How are the kids?" Maya continued. "I think I've got all your texts on what's been going on. They're off school now, right?"

"Yup," Phoenix said with a nod. "Luke and Apollo got in real late last night, since they had to finish up their last detention for skipping school."

Maya sighed. "That was so sweet of them, though! They wanted to give you a birthday present while it was still light out!"

Phoenix chuckled. "Unfortunately, the school was never going to see it that way," he pointed out.
"Well, that's because they're boring!" Maya argued. "Luke's such a little gentleman, he'd never do something like that without a good reason!"

Laughing to himself, Phoenix decided not to explain how distraught Luke had been about it and that it wasn't even his idea in the first place. "Trucy's still complaining about wanting to meet you, by the way," he said instead, his tone becoming serious. "I'm lucky she hasn't been at the Club on the same nights as Kristoph, actually. It feels like it's only a matter of time before she spills something to him."

"Can't you tell her how important it is she not mention me?" Maya asked. "She can keep a secret, right?"

Phoenix shrugged. "If I specifically say to be quiet around Kristoph, that will be enough of a warning that she'll treat him differently, and he'll pick up on that, I'm sure. On the other hand, if I tell her generally to not mention you any more, she'll probably just brush it off as mean old Daddy not wanting her to whine any more and ignore me." He sighed. "I don't know what to do."

Maya was silent for a moment. "Hey, I have an idea!" she suddenly exclaimed. "Have you got any plans for next week?"

"Don't think so, no."

"Well, you do now!" Maya cried. "Come up to Kurain! I'll get to see Luke again, introduce myself to the other two, and they can all meet Pearly!"

Phoenix frowned. "How does this solve the Kristoph problem? I don't want him knowing I'm still friends with you."

"We can discuss that later," Maya insisted. "Bring them to Kurain on Monday! I'll even buy the train tickets for you!"

"Really?" Phoenix sighed. "I'm not totally broke, y'know!" He waited for a reply, but none came. "Hello? Maya?" After several more moments of silence, he pulled the phone away from his ear to curiously look at the screen, only to find it sitting on the normal idle cycle. 'Huh. That's weird. She must have lost signal suddenly.' Shrugging, he decided to head downstairs to see what the kids were doing.

December 21, 10:01AM

Wright Talent Agency

Kitchen

"Covent Garden! Ha!" Apollo was shouting as Phoenix entered the room, and he saw the elder of his sons flipping over a small card with a confident grin as Luke and Trucy groaned from their seats at the kitchen table. Between the trio, sitting in the middle of the table, was the board game Edgeworth had given Luke, decked out with three of the magnetic figures and six red 'closed station' markers dotted throughout the famous train map.

"Now you're winning!" Trucy whined, grabbing the die as it was offered to her and quickly rolling, only to groan again. "One!? This dice is rigged!"
"If there's only one, it's a 'die'," Luke patiently explained as Trucy pushed her purple figure along the yellow line it was sitting on. "More than one are called 'dice'."

Trucy rolled her eyes as she ignored him, handing Luke the die with a glare levelled in Apollo's direction.

Phoenix approached the table as Luke rolled the die and began to move his dark blue figure. "How's it going?" he asked, resting the phone lazily dangling in one hand on the tabletop.

"Good," Luke replied with a grin, then placed his figure on a station and flipped the second of his four cards. "Knightsbridge!" he cried, eliciting yet another groan from Trucy.

"Now you're both winning!" Trucy whined.

"I'm sure your luck will turn around, Truce," Phoenix assured her.

Apollo smiled as he took the die, quickly rolling it from a fist. After a moment, he laughed in surprise. "Woah, I got a six!"

"That's so not fair!" Trucy complained.

Apollo grinned and shook his head. "No no. It's this that's not fair." He carefully counted stations on the blue line his figure was travelling along, then landed it purposefully only two steps along. "Russell Square!" he shouted, flipping the third of his four cards.

Trucy dropped her head to the table with a thud, mumbling muffled groans as Apollo flicked the die in her direction.

"You're getting all the good hazard cards and die rolls today, Apollo!" Luke pointed out in amazement.

Apollo shrugged, grinning. "I did come second last time. I guess I'm just good at this game."

Phoenix's phone began to buzz, singing its chiptune ringtone again. "Oop," Phoenix muttered, grabbing it back up to quickly check the screen and answer the call with a smile. "Hey! You lose signal or something?"

Luke frowned as he watched Phoenix turn and wander off towards his office. "Wait a second," the teen said to his siblings, "I just realised I've heard that tune before!"

Trucy scoffed as she lifted her head off the table and reached for the die. "Steel Samurai," she muttered.

"Yeah, I noticed that the weekend we first met him," Apollo said with a shrug, arms crossed as he leaned back in his chair. "I guess you'd never seen the Steel Samurai before we showed it to you, so you wouldn't have noticed it."

Luke thought to himself as Trucy rolled the die and began to move her figure. "That makes sense," he decided.

Phoenix gently closed the office door behind him, listening to Maya's explanation for how her phone had suddenly disconnected on its own and how upset she was that it had chosen the worst possible moment to do so. "I don't even know when it cut off, because I just thought you'd gone quiet
because of your kids or something, and when I looked at my phone-!

"Hey, calm down," Phoenix interrupted, resisting a smile. "You were insisting I take the kids up to Kurain on Monday, weren't you?"

Maya sighed to herself and hummed a positive. "Y'know, if you're that worried about Trucy saying something to Kristoph, once they're up here I can feed them a scare story to convince her to keep quiet?"

Phoenix shrugged. "She might not go for it. I think, if we're just semi-honest and say bad things could happen if they spill they know the Master of Kurain, that might be enough."

"Oh! I don't remember, did you tell Luke about that yet?" Maya asked. "The Master of Kurain thing, I mean?"

Glancing at the door behind him, Phoenix smiled. "Hmmm," he mumbled, trying not to let any laughter into his tone. "Don't remember." He opened the door and wandered back into the kitchen.

Luke was moving his figure around the middle of the board, and announced to the table, "And, since I'm stopping at Victoria, I'm changing to the Victoria line!" Dropping his magnetic figure to leave it sticking to the map, he grabbed a card from the pile in the far corner of the board.

Trucy was peering at the map key next to the card pile. "Oh!" she cried, looking up to Apollo. "He means the light-blue one!"

"Wait, actually," Maya was saying in Phoenix's ear, "I do remember now! You were saying something about how he was curious about my mother, weren't you? So you did tell him!"

"Mm-hmm," Phoenix mumbled, biting his lip to hide his smile as he slowly approached the kitchen table.

Luke frowned as he read his card. "I'm skipping a turn, too?"

Apollo burst into laughter. "Oh wow, both of you got that!? One right after the other!?"

Trucy crossed her arms. "Why'd you have to be the one to get the open-close stations and we get skip-turns!? You're winning!"

"Nick?" Maya asked suspiciously. "What are you doing?"

Luke shook his head as he passed the die to Apollo. "I guess you get two turns in a row, then," he said.

Apollo fist-pumped in victory.

As Phoenix approached Luke, he placed a hand over his free ear and started talking as loudly as he could without shouting. "Oh no, I'm losing you! Oh wait, I think I can fix the signal if I hand you over to Luke!"

Luke looked up in surprise. "Huh?"

"What?" Maya cried, confused.

"Yup, gotta hand you over to Luke, talktoyoulaterMaya!" With that, Phoenix had shoved his phone into his bewildered son's hands.
Luke scrambled with the phone for a moment before deciding to put it to his ear. "Hello?" he nervously asked.

There was a short silence. "Luke? Is that you?"

"Oh!" Luke gasped. "Maya!" He jumped to his feet, placing his hand over the phone's mic to address his siblings. "I'll be right back!" With that, he had dashed off into Phoenix's office for some privacy.

Phoenix grinned as he lowered himself into his seat at the kitchen table, enjoying the slightly confused looks on Apollo and Trucy's faces. "So, who's winning?"

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"It's been ages since we got to talk!" Luke cried as he carefully closed the office door. "How have you been doing, Maya?"

Maya laughed. "Aw, I've been fine! 'Specially when compared to everything Nick tells me you've been up to!"

Luke blushed. "Uh... what exactly has Nick been telling you?"

"Well, what you did for his birthday was really sweet," Maya replied, but her jovial tone faded as she continued. "Oh, and he told me what happened to your parents back in... September?"

"August."

"Right. Sorry."

Luke smiled. "It's fine," he said. "We... did a little investigating with Detective Gumshoe, back when the adoption went through. And, of course, I've got Apollo and Trucy and Nick now."

"It still hurts, though," Maya pointed out. "I barely knew my mom, but it still hurt to suddenly lose her."

It took Luke a few moments to be able to respond. "Yeah, it still hurts," he admitted. "I'm fine, though. I'm coping." He took a deep breath in and out to steady himself. "Nick tells me you're the head of your family now? That that's why you've been too busy to visit?"

Maya sighed. "Yeah, 'head of the family' works. I've got a proper title, but it's a bit weird using it still." She giggled. "Oh, and as for the 'visiting' thing, you just wait 'til you get off the phone!"


"You'll see!" Maya sang in response. "Oh, and you got the room next to Nick's, right? The one opposite the bathroom?"

"Yes, that bedroom is mine and Apollo's," Luke replied, smiling. "How do you know it?"

Maya laughed. "I know the office like the back of my hand! I used to stay there when I was in the city! Too long a trip to commute, y'know."

Luke was intrigued. "Nick let you stay here?"

"Less 'let me' and more 'had no choice'," Maya explained with a chuckle. "It's complicated, but I'll explain it to you when we next talk! Ooh, how's the Professor and everyone back in Labyrinthia? And after you tell me that, we have to discuss what you guys are planning to do for Nick for Christmas!"
When Luke had finished talking to Maya and returned to the kitchen table, the first thing he noticed was the racket Trucy was making as she ranted loudly at Apollo. Luke could pick up the usual offenders in Trucy's vocabulary when playing his board game, such as 'unfair' and 'rigged', and could guess by Apollo's massive grin as he leaned back in his chair, arms crossed, what might have caused it.

Phoenix looked up as the office door opened, and stood from the table. "Ah, you're done!" he said as he approached Luke, reaching out to retrieve his phone. "Have fun catching up?"

Luke nodded, smiling as he returned the item to its owner. "I did, thank you!" he replied, then headed back to his seat at the table. "What happened while I was busy?" he asked his siblings.

"Apollo won the game!" Trucy declared, pointing angrily at the smug teen sitting beside her.

"What!?" Luke cried, running to the table to address Apollo. "But you still had your fourth destination to get to and returning to your starting point!"

Apollo just nodded, still grinning. "Yup!" he replied. "Only needed two turns!"

"After you left, he rolled a one and got to his fourth stop," Trucy explained, "then on his next turn, he went to change lines, and the card sent him straight to his next destination!" She huffed, falling back in her chair. "So he won just like that!"

"Yup!" Apollo added, still grinning proudly.

Phoenix laughed as he walked up behind Luke, patting him on the shoulder. "Hey, nothing stopping you two continuing the game," he pointed out. "Don't you want to find out who's in second place?"

Trucy and Luke looked at each other for only a moment before Luke jumped into his seat and Trucy grabbed the die from in front of Apollo, tossing it across the table in a hurried roll.

Poking Luke as he walked behind him, Phoenix lazily sat back down in his seat. "So, did Maya mention she made some plans for us for next week?"

Luke frowned, concentrating on the game as Trucy moved her figure on the board. "I think she was hinting at something."

"Green Park!" Trucy cheered, flipping her third card.

"She did say before she hung up to remind you she wants to pay for train tickets," Luke continued, idly reaching for the abandoned die.

"And I'm changing lines!" Trucy announced, grabbing a hazard card. "The dark blue one!"

"Piccadilly!" Luke corrected her, but was ignored.

Trucy read her card with a grin and moved her figure to a station covered with a 'station closed' marker, allowing her to relocate the small red magnet elsewhere across the board. "Ha! Now I'm on the right line and I can get back to King's Cross later!" the eight-year-old gloated in Apollo's direction, only to get a smug smile in return.

"Still didn't win first," Apollo pointed out.
Phoenix shook his head. "Getting this conversation back on track," he said, pausing to look down at the train map on the table, "no pun intended, I suppose I should explain what she was talking about. Maya has next week free, so she's invited us up to Kurain over Christmas."

Luke dropped the die he was rolling earlier than he intended in shock, and Trucy gasped loudly. "Really!?" she cried. "We'll finally get to meet your Maya!?"

Apollo had gone pale. "K-Khu..." He frowned. "Did you say... 'Kurain'?"

"That's it," Phoenix assured him as Luke recovered and began to move his figure. "It's only a couple hours away by train, up in the mountains."

"Jinxie lives up in the mountains!" Trucy added, then frowned in thought. "She doesn't need so long to get to school, though."

Unnoticed by his family, Apollo minutely sighed in relief. 'Stupid... of course he didn't mean...'

Luke finished moving his figure and grabbed a hazard card. "Changing to the Central line," he announced. "I suppose your friend doesn't live as far away as Maya does," he continued, passing the die to Trucy and relocating another of the red markers on the board. "She told me just now that she used to live here at the office when she was in the city, since it was too long a trip home."

"A couple of hours isn't much longer than the trip from here to school," Apollo mused aloud, finger held to his forehead in thought.

"That's by bus," Phoenix pointed out. "By train, two hours is a much longer distance to cover."

Trucy cheered as she flipped her last destination card, having rolled just a large enough number to reach it. "Piccadilly Circus! I'm winning!"

"Actually, you two have Maya's room," Phoenix continued to the boys, a nostalgic smile on his lips. "She used to stay here occasionally when this was still Mia's place."

Apollo was caught off-guard by the question, but recovered enough to quickly return to his 'thinking' pose. "That was the first time you went up against Prosecutor Edgeworth, right?"

"Yes, it was," Phoenix answered with a nod, idly wondering if Apollo had made the connection between the prosecutor and the 'uncle' who'd visited not that long ago. "It was a murder, too; almost all of mine were."

"I remember something about a clock that looked like a statue," Apollo mumbled, then blinked and looked up at his father with wide eyes. "Didn't the charges get transferred to you on that one?"

Phoenix nodded again. "Do you remember the name of the victim? Or the first defendant?"
Apollo was forced to shrug, looking guilty. "I'm terrible with names," he admitted. "Sorry."

"No problem," Phoenix calmly replied, smiling. "The first defendant was Maya. It was how we met."

"Really!?" Luke cried with a frown, and Phoenix noticed the game had quietly continued while he'd been distracted, as Luke was again moving his figure across the board. "What a way to meet your best friend!" He stopped his marker at the very edge of the map and grinned at Trucy as he flipped his last card. "Notting Hill Gate!"

Trucy rolled her eyes, smiling smugly as she took the die.

"Although," Luke continued, tapping his chin in thought, "I suppose the circumstances surrounding how I met the Professor were sort of similar. It was just a mystery though, not a murder."

Phoenix chuckled. "Yeah. Oddly enough, we were always going to meet that evening anyway." He looked over to the office door, seeing in his mind's eye the last conversation he'd had with Mia before her death. "Mia was my mentor, and Maya's older sister. This used to be her office, a long time ago."

Apollo and Luke glanced at each other as they mutually realised who the victim of the case had been.

"I won!" Trucy suddenly cried, slamming her figure down on the board and startling the rest of her family from their conversation. "I beat you this time, Luke!" As she looked up and noticed everyone staring at her with wide eyes, she returned their gazes with one of confusion. "What?"

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Phoenix found himself feeling more and more like a mother hen the closer they got to Kurain. In addition to herding his little family in the right direction, he found himself counting and recounting that the three of them were all nearby and following him, checking and double-checking they all had their little travel bags, and all on top of keeping track of his own bag and the family's train and bus tickets.

"Trucy, we're going this way, please."

"Coming, Daddy!"

"Luke, do you have your bag?"

"Don't worry Nick, I've got it!"

"Apollo, would you watch your siblings while I get our tickets out, please?"

"Sure, Dad."

Finally, they got off the bus in Kurain Village and Phoenix busied himself doing a final check-up while they waited for the bus to do a spin of the nearby open area before heading back down the mountain. "Trucy, Luke, Apollo, you've all got your bags... Where's mine? Oh, you have it, thank you Apollo." Taking his wheeled travel bag from his eldest son, Phoenix sighed in relief, turning to watch the bus disappearing down the road. "Looks like we made it to Kurain in one piece!" he announced.

Trucy and Luke were staring wide-eyed at the little town that lay before them, traditional Japanese houses lining the street and spreading up the sloped ground into the forests surrounding them. The giant boulder to their left also attracted some of their attention, although neither were attempting to approach it just yet. Apollo, although also admiring the view, was focussing more on paying attention to his immediate surroundings, keeping half an eye on his younger siblings while trying to mainly listen to Phoenix.

"So where's Fey Manor?" Luke asked as he surveyed the houses eagerly, hoping to spot a glimpse of Maya's familiar purple outfit between the buildings.

"Ooh, do they live in a tree-house!?" Trucy squealed, holding a hand above her eyes as she peered into the forests.

Phoenix laughed, instinctively glancing up and down the dirt road before slowly walking across, wheeling his bag behind him. "I'm afraid you won't find anyone living in trees here, Truce."

Apollo nudged his younger siblings to ensure they were following Phoenix before trailing at the back of the small group himself. "Is it a long walk?" he called to their father.

"Not long," Phoenix assured him with a knowing smile, reaching the other side of the road and
lifting his bag over the stone steps of the magnificent building opposite the bus stop.

Luke's eyes widened as he looked from Phoenix's bag up to the mansion before them. "Wait, that's Fey Manor!? I thought it was a town hall!"

Trucy's smile widened to a grin and she squealed excitedly, bouncing across the road to the bottom of the steps. "We get to stay in the biggest, most amazingest house in the village!? That's so cool!"

Casting a sideways glare in his sister's direction, Luke muttered, "'Amazingest' isn't a word."

Phoenix couldn't resist a laugh as he approached the wooden door of the manor, leaving his bag at the top of the steps to the porch while the children huddled together on the edge of the road. "I'm sure Maya will love to show you around," he assured them, knocking on the doorframe. "We'll need to find her first, though. And remember, we've got a few days here, so don't go doing everything in the first da-
"

The front door of the Manor was flung wide open, and the voice of a young girl cried "Mister Nick!" before said young girl, dressed in a pale pink outfit not unlike Maya's, jumped out from behind the doorframe and latched onto Phoenix, arms clutched around his middle as she buried her face in his stomach.

"H-hey, Pearls," Phoenix said, smiling as he petted the girl's head with one hand and held her shoulder with the other. "Been a while, huh?"

Aside from her outfit, Luke quickly noticed the girl, somewhere around Trucy's age at his best guess, had bare feet and light brown hair styled up at the back of her head in a large loop that bore an odd resemblance to a pretzel.

"Is that Maya's cousin?" he wondered to himself.

Pearl pulled away from Phoenix, hands balled into fists at her sides. "You haven't come to visit Mystic Maya in forever! How can you be special someones if you don't spend any time together!?"

"Nick?" called a voice from inside, and a moment later a dark-haired young woman in a purple kimono appeared in the doorway. Her eyes almost immediately latched on to Phoenix, who smiled as he spotted her. "Nick!"

"Hey," Phoenix had just enough time to say before Maya jumped forward, just barely avoiding Pearl as the girl leapt to one side. The ex-lawyer and spirit medium stood silently for a while in a tight hug, smiling brightly as they treasured the long-awaited moment of reunion, Maya's head resting comfortably on Phoenix's shoulder while Phoenix buried his face in her hair.

"Hi, Maya!" he called, waving.

Breaking their hug, Maya and Phoenix looked up, and Maya's grin widened as she recognised the teenage boy in blue. "Luke, is that you?" she asked, stepping past Pearl to jump down the porch steps. "Why didn't you tell me you've gotten so much taller?"

Luke frowned. "I'm not taller!" he protested.

Maya bit her lip, failing to hide a smile as she poked Luke's nose. "Yeah, you are. Your head's at my
"Is not," Luke grumbled, pulling the brim of his hat down, though he wasn't sure quite why he was fighting the idea. "Maybe you've shrunk!"

While Maya laughed, Trucy's confused frown slowly turned into a smile. "Are you Maya?" she asked.

"That's me!" Maya replied, giving the girl a grin and holding out her hand. "You must be Trucy!"

Trucy grinned, bouncing as she shook Maya's hand eagerly. "Yay! You're our new mommy, right?"

Maya's face instantly went red as she recoiled in shock. "Huh?"

Pearl gasped, eyes sparkling as she looked up to Phoenix. "She is!?"

"No, no!" Phoenix cried, waving his hands as his face similarly went red. "We're just friends!"

"Mister Nick!" Pearl protested, moving to roll up her sleeves. "That's not a nice thing to say about your special someone!"

Maya shook her head, giving her young cousin a pained look. "Pearly, please..."

Chastened, Pearl slowly backed down, hands clasped together as she sadly stared at the porch floor. Phoenix rubbed at his face in embarrassment as the colour slowly returned to normal. Luke shot Trucy a nervous glance, noticing she still seemed a little in shock at the rapidity of the protest to her question.

"We're just friends," Maya repeated to Trucy. Sighing, she then turned to the last of the trio, forcing a smile. "And you must be Apollo!" She grabbed for his left hand before the teen could react, forgetting to shake as she used the chance to give his bracelet a closer look. "Nick tells me you were in the audience for some of our trials!"

"My trials!" Phoenix corrected.

Apollo nodded, carefully pulling his hand from Maya's grasp and rubbing at his wrist nervously. "Uh, y-yeah, I was," he admitted. "I, um, I didn't recognise you until I saw you, though."

Maya grinned, but then frowned, fist held to her cheek in thought. "You're, like, my height," she pointed out. "How can I baby you when you're so freakishly tall?"

The teen was almost too shocked to respond for a few moments. "Actually, I'm one of the shortest in my classes," he mumbled, posture slumping.

Phoenix patted Pearl on the shoulder and gestured to the group at the bottom of the porch steps. "You want to introduce yourself too, Pearls?"

"Oh!" Pearl quietly cried, and she dashed down to Maya's side, fixing the three visitors with a wide grin. "It's nice to meet you all! Mister Nick and Mystic Maya have told me about you!"

"Yes!" Maya added, giving the girl a quick hug. "This is my cute little cousin, Pearly!" She then gestured to each of the other three in turn, whispering, "If you didn't hear earlier, that's Trucy, Luke and Apollo."

Pearl nodded, whispering back, "Don't worry, Mystic Maya, I heard!"
Trucy grinned, excited to have another girl around her age to befriend, and she grabbed Pearl's hand to shake it gleefully. "Hi! It's really nice to meet you!"

Luke crossed his arms, frowning in thought. "So is it 'Pearls' or 'Pearly'?"

Pearl gave Trucy a polite smile as she withdrew her hand, chewing on the thumbnail nervously. "Well, my name is Pearl, but Mister Nick calls me Pearls and everyone else usually calls me Pearly."

Apollo grinned. "Nice to meet you, Pearly!" he said, deciding not to shake her hand after seeing Trucy do so already.

"Oh, hey!" Maya suddenly cried, noticing the travel bags the three had either on their backs or dropped on the ground in front of them. "We should get you inside! I'll give you a tour while we show you where you'll be sleeping!" Waving for the trio to follow her, she jumped up the steps and ran back inside, Pearl following behind with a big grin.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Excited to be meeting other kids her age for once (despite Trucy being a year younger and Luke five years older), Pearl was quick to invite the trio to her room once the tour of the grand Fey Manor was complete.

"It's not much," the nine-year-old apologised as she led her new friends in, "but this is where I sleep and keep all my toys."

Trucy quickly locked her gaze on the blue ball sat on the low bed, emblazoned proudly with a picture of the Steel Samurai. "Wow, you have a Steel Samurai ball!"

Pearl nodded, picking the object up. "Mystic Maya gave it to me!" She then blushed, embarrassed. "Although I didn't see any of the show until more recently. We don't watch much television up here."

"Really?" Apollo asked in surprise, distracted from his examination of the sparse room that reminded him rather oddly of his school dorm. "What do you do to pass the time?"

"Play with my ball or other toys, study channelling techniques," Pearl began to answer, checking off a mental list, "talk to Mystic Maya, play a board game, draw-"

"At least you keep yourself entertained!" Luke decided to interrupt, not wanting to drag out the question any further.

Trucy bounced over to the window overlooking a garden beyond, and sat down. "So, Pearly," she cried, patting the floor nearby to indicate she wanted the older girl to join her, "what do you think about making Miss Maya our new mommy?"

At that, Pearl immediately perked up, dropping her ball back on the bed as she jumped to join Trucy by the window. "Mister Nick and Mystic Maya are destined for each other!" she declared, hands to her face as she fawned over the mental image of the pair as lovebirds. "It's like a fairy-tale! Mister Nick has saved Mystic Maya so many times, and he would do anything to defend her honour!"

Luke covered his mouth with a hand to prevent a snort escaping, while Apollo crossed his arms, leaning against the wall by the door. "If you two are going to turn this into a match-making session, I'll take my chances with Dad."

Trucy stuck her tongue out at her eldest brother. "If you're going to be boring and not help us get a new mommy!" she cried accusingly.

Apollo rolled his eyes, muttering, "Yeah, whatever." He pushed himself off the wall and turned towards the door. "You guys do what you want, just leave me out of it." With that, he left the room.

"What about you, Luke?" Trucy added, fixing her other brother with a bright smile. "You want a
new mommy, right?"

Luke restrained a smile, thinking for a moment. "Well, I'd never call her 'Mum', but if I'm honest, I actually agree with you, Pearl."

Pearl smiled widely, mouth wide open. "Really?" she asked.

"Yup!" Luke replied with a nod, walking over to sit with the two girls. "When I first met Nick and Maya back in Labyrinthia, I thought for the longest time they actually were a couple."

"Because they are!" Pearl insisted, looking sad. "I don't know why they keep saying they aren't!"

Trucy crossed her arms, pouting. "Well, we have to get them together!"

Pearl nodded emphatically. "I've been trying for years!" she cried. "I got them a honeymoon 'soo-eet' at the Gatewater Hotel, and then I booked them into the Special and the Ultra Course at Hazakura Temple!" She sighed, slumping. "Nothing I do seems to work!"

Luke reached out to pat the girl's shoulder sympathetically.

"Don't worry!" Trucy assured her new friend, tipping her silk top hat. "With the three of us working together, I'm sure we'll think of something that'll work!"

"Um," Luke found himself butting in, uncertainly, "maybe we shouldn't?"

The two girls looked up at him, shocked. "What do you mean!?" Pearl asked, an angry look on her face. "They belong together!"

"And I agree with you on that!" Luke quickly insisted, raising his hands up in surrender. "It's just... don't you think forcing them is more likely to push them apart than together?"

Trucy and Pearl stared blankly in the teen's direction for a few moments.

Luke sighed. "It's a natural human reaction when being forced into something to fight it. Nobody likes losing control of their own choices, after all." He shrugged, hoping his meagre explanation was making sense to the girls. "If we keep pushing Maya and Nick into being a couple, they'll just keep fighting it and insisting they're only friends. What we should do is back off, do nothing for a while, and give them a chance to actually consider the idea on their own terms without anything being forced on them."

Pearl and Trucy stared at the floor, deep in thought. "We should... do nothing?" Trucy repeated.

"Are you sure that will work?" Pearl asked, giving Luke a worried look. "What if they still don't get together?"

Luke thought for a long moment. Pearl's sad look was reminding him of Flora, and how upset she always looked at even the slightest implication that someone didn't like her experiments in cooking. This was going to be just as hard a subject to broach, so Luke decided to deal with it the way he always had before: by ignoring the problem. He gave Pearl a smile. "And why wouldn't they?" he assured her. "They're meant for each other, right?"

Pearl grinned. Trucy gave Luke a suspicious look, but didn't interject.

December 23, 2:04PM
Apollo sighed as he stalked down the hallway and into the entrance hall of the mansion, called the Meditation Room if he remembered correctly from Maya's earlier tour. *I'm sure I heard Dad and Maya going in this direction earlier.* Finally, he heard their voices drifting in from an open door to one side, and rushed to the doorway, a sliding wood door that was open only a crack.

"And what about Apollo?" Maya asked from the nearby garden.

The teen stopped dead in his tracks.

Phoenix softly laughed. "He's doing 'fine', as he and Luke would say! Y'know I caught him in the office with one of Mia's law books the other day?"

Apollo winced as he heard Maya laughing. "Well, it's officially become awkward to interrupt." Nevertheless, he made no move to leave. Instead, he tip-toed to the door and peeked out, seeing his father and spirit medium friend out in the garden by the Winding Way, their backs to him as they leaned against the high wooden walkway. Phoenix had lost his beanie since the end of the tour, and looked far more relaxed than he had on the trip up to Kurain, while Maya looked somehow calmer now she wasn't excitedly showing the kids around her large home. *Besides, that book made my head hurt. Then Dad surprised me, I dropped it, and it made my foot hurt...*

"If he can make any sense of those things, he's welcome to them," Phoenix continued, a smile in his tone. "It's not like they'll be at all relevant by the time he's actually studying to be a lawyer anyway!"

Maya was still laughing. "Aw, but he's gonna try anyway!" She shook her head, letting loose one last giggle before changing the subject. "He's getting on with Trucy?"

"Mm-hm," Phoenix replied, nodding. "They get on just like that." He snapped his fingers to illustrate his point.

"Understandable, considering!" Maya pointed out knowingly.

*And what's that supposed to mean?* Apollo asked himself, confused. *Considering what?*

There was a short pause, and Maya gently rocked her body against Phoenix's in a friendly jab. "You told them yet?"

Apollo frowned. *Told us what!? What are you hiding from us!?*'

"Not yet," Phoenix replied. "I'm thinking I'll wait 'til May, make it a birthday present. Or I might just get impatient and do it earlier, we'll see." He turned his head just enough that Apollo could see a smirk on his face, although the teen quickly hid behind the door to avoid being spotted. "Of course, I'm not gonna make it easy for them."

Maya scoffed. "You? Making things easy?" she joked.

"He wants to be a lawyer, after all!" Phoenix laughed. "I'll make it a little investigation for him. He can ask Luke for help if he needs it."

Apollo rolled his eyes, carefully peeking through the crack in the doorway again.
Maya scratched her cheek in thought. "Speaking of Luke, do you think you could get him to tell that story to me and Pearly? It sounds interesting!"

'She must mean that story about his last adventure with this Professor of his,' Apollo mused.

Phoenix shrugged. "I dunno, Apollo and Trucy would probably rather hear something new." He glanced over to Maya before returning his gaze to the garden in front of them. "I was thinking they might like to hear about Labyrinthia, actually. Luke hasn't told them about it yet."

"That's a good idea!" Maya gasped, hands clasped together eagerly. "After all, we never told Pearly the full story, did we?"

Phoenix opened his mouth to respond, then thought better and closed it again, only to look over to Maya and again change his mind. "Should we maybe tell Luke to leave out...?"

"The night we were separated?" Maya filled in, and Apollo noted how serious the two suddenly were, as though the event were some great tragedy (though he couldn't imagine how simply being away from someone for a single night was that bad).

"Yeah," Phoenix replied, nodding and looking away again to sadly stare at the ground. "That was the worst night of my life, ignoring the Hazakura incident of course. I don't think any of us particularly want to relive it."

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'Before today, you'd been apart for longer than I've known you both combined, for goodness' sake...'

Maya nodded, also staring at the ground. "It was pretty scary," she agreed, then looked up at her friend. "You know what scared me the most, though?"

Phoenix returned her gaze curiously. "What?"

"More than the Shades, more than being lost in the forest," Maya answered, leaning in against Phoenix's side, "I was worried sick about you."

Apollo blinked in surprise. 'Lost in the forest? 'Shades'?' He began to rethink his earlier mental criticisms of their comments as he realised he had no idea what it was they were actually discussing.

There was a short pause before Phoenix moved his arm around to Maya's shoulder, pulling her tighter against him as they rested their heads against each other.

Apollo backed away from the door. 'Whatever they're talking about, he told himself, 'I'll find out about it later.' He shook his head as he turned and headed off back down the hallway. 'I think I'm starting to see why the others think they're a couple, though.'

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
FLASHBACK: Sunflowers

- One Year Earlier -

November 15, 7:15AM
Bakery

Phoenix repressed a yawn as he slid into his seat at the table next to Maya, placing a specially wrapped fresh loaf of bread beside him where it wouldn't be forgotten. 'It is far too early to be suffering jetlag and already neck-deep in a case...' He was the last to come to the table, having deviated to the kitchen to pick up something for Espella when they went to visit her after breakfast. He'd volunteered earlier to help Patty prepare the bread and pastries for both the shop displays and their morning meal in an effort to wake himself up, but, needless to say, it clearly hadn't worked as well as he'd hoped.

"Are the two of you engaging in an eating contest, by any chance?" Professor Layton remarked with a smile.

Phoenix looked up to see Luke and Maya, sitting opposite each other, piling great amounts of Patty's pastries onto their plates, and the two of them both grinned sheepishly up at the Professor before moving to begin eating. The lawyer sighed, running a hand over his face. "How the two of you are so energetic after getting no sleep last night, I'll never know," he sighed.

Maya scoffed, elbowing her friend. "C'mon Nick, we have a case to investigate! There's no time for sleep!"

"That's because you're insane," Phoenix muttered, grabbing a random pastry from the tray. "Besides, Espella's my client. You should probably have a nap or something."

"You're just grumpy because you're jetlagged," Maya replied with a smile. "You fight jetlag by staying awake in the sun and only trying to sleep at night, silly!"

Professor Layton nodded to himself, cutting a loaf of bread into slices. "Ah, yes, you are both American, are you not?"

"Los Angeles, yes," Phoenix replied, smiling. "Born and bred."

"Just arrived-! Well," Maya paused, fist to her cheek in thought. "We landed the evening before defending Espella in London, but who knows exactly how long it's been for us since then."

The Professor nodded sympathetically. "It is difficult to judge any time passed between leaving London and arriving here, I'll agree."

Luke paused in his stuffing of food into his mouth to swallow. "When we get back to London, do you think no time would have passed back home?" he asked. "Like in the Narnia books?"

Phoenix shrugged. Professor Layton frowned in thought. "We have no way of knowing that until we do return," he pointed out, pulling on the brim of his top hat. "And until then, I don't think we should
waste any time worrying about it, Luke."

Luke nodded, smiling as he returned to his food.

"We've got two weeks here at least," Phoenix continued, leaning back in his chair and unconsciously reaching for the small golden pin on his lapel. "Once we get Espella cleared of this ridiculous witch charge, then we can find a way out of here." He frowned to himself. "I still can't believe I'm doing this without any kind of forensic evidence at all..."

The Professor chuckled to himself, giving Phoenix a smile. "I must admit, I am rather ashamed of myself for not noticing your badge when we first met, Mister Wright." Phoenix glanced to the pin he was running his fingers over. "It is a defence attorney's badge, is it not?"

Maya rolled her eyes as she noticed Phoenix begin to grin. "And now you've got him started."

"Yep!" Phoenix brightly replied, ignoring his assistant. "Every defence attorney back home gets one of these when they pass the bar! It's required if you want to stand behind the bench in court!"

Luke abandoned his food for a moment, peering over to the small object. "Can I see?" he asked.

"Don't encourage him!" Maya cried. "He'll show that thing off 'til the cows come home!"

Scoffing in Maya's direction, Phoenix unscrewed the badge from his lapel. "I worked hard for this thing, I'm allowed to be proud of it!" he argued, then passed the tiny object over the table to Luke. "Be careful with it," he instructed the boy.

"I will!" Luke promised, and he examined the badge closely. "It's very shiny!"

Phoenix grinned proudly. "I take good care of it."

"You keep polishing it the way you do," Maya warned, "and it'll lose that shiny coating, you know!"

"Like you'd know," Phoenix pointed out, rolling his eyes. "You've never had one! And don't claim you saw Mia's, because that's just outright lying."

Maya stuck her tongue out at her friend.

Luke frowned as he looked at the round badge in his hand. "Why are there scales in the middle?" he asked.

"Those would be the Scales of Justice," Professor Layton answered with a smile, finger in the air, then he frowned in thought. "Although the symbolism behind the shape baffles me somewhat. I would have thought a shield might be appropriately symbolic, but the pattern doesn't resemble any round shield I have known."

Phoenix rubbed his chin. "I do know what it's supposed to be shaped like," he replied, "just not off the top of my head. I think I looked it up once, or it came up in conversation with Mia or something..."

Maya smirked. "What, there's something about your precious badge you don't know?" she joked. "It's a miracle! Zvarri!" She waved a hand through the air in a grandiose gesture.

Resisting a laugh behind his hand, Phoenix tried and failed to give Maya a stern look. "I'm busy enough memorising law and case details for my clients, I don't need to waste brain space on trivia!"

Luke angled the badge over his head, watching it glint in the light of the rising sun through the
"Is it a sun?" he asked.

"Sunflower!" Phoenix suddenly cried, snapping his fingers.

Professor Layton frowned, confused. "Sunflower?" he repeated.

"That's what it is!" Phoenix added. "It's some kind of thing about how it always faces the sun, so it's a symbol of 'the light of truth' or something." He shrugged.

Maya and Luke glanced at each other before looking at the badge in Luke's hand. "Never would have figured it was a flower," Maya admitted.

Phoenix shrugged. "You know me and flowers," he pointed out to her, gently elbowing the young woman in the side. "I was never going to remember a fact like that."

Luke handed the badge back with a smile. "Thank you for letting me look at it, Mister Wright!" he said.

"No problem, Luke," Phoenix replied, laughing at the boy's unfailing politeness as he attached the beloved item back to its usual home on his lapel.

Casting a glance at the kitchen to ensure Patty was out of sight, Professor Layton pulled a fob watch from a pocket inside his jacket, and checked the time. "We should hurry and get moving," he announced, quickly replacing the item and standing up.

Luke cried out in surprise and hurriedly stuffed the last of his breakfast into his mouth as he jumped off his chair.

"Isn't it a bit early, still?" Maya asked, picking at the crumbs left on her plate.

"You're thinking of the Detention Center back home," Phoenix pointed out, standing from the table and ensuring he grabbed the loaf by his side. "They won't have strict opening times here."

Maya nodded and followed her friends, sneaking as many of the bread crumbs from her plate as she could before her friends got too far ahead.

"As it seems we are all ready to go," Professor Layton said as he exited onto the street, "shall we make our way to the court?" He turned to watch for Luke and Maya tumbling out the front doorway. "So does everyone remember how to get there?"

"Sure," Phoenix nodded. "We just head east from here, and it's on the other side of the forest, isn't it?"

Maya clapped her hands to remove the last of the crumbs from them, crying, "Boy, Espella must be feeling so sad and lonely! Let's get a move on!"

Luke giggled, skipping after as the group headed off. "Let's go!" he agreed.
A field of sunflowers stretched out as far as the eye could see, even from high up above where Luke was currently hovering. They were glowing a deep yellow in the light of the setting sun somewhere behind him, and it took the boy a few moments to recognise with a sudden gasp of fright that the beautiful plants had in fact been turned to gold.

The sun behind him switched off like a light, and Luke found himself falling towards the field below. The sunflowers, however, were still glowing, but this time it was in the light of an all-consuming crimson fire, burning between the golden stems and reaching up with flapping tendrils to catch the boy in blue as gravity took him closer, accelerating through the air, unable to scream...

Luke woke up in bed.

He almost sighed in relief as he found himself facing the wall, cozy under a thick blanket with his cap acting as a pillow for his head, but changed his mind as he woke up fully and remembered the situation. 'Oh yeah, the Professor's been... and Maya...’ He shook his head, then rolled over to look around the room from his spot on the middle bunkbed. Everything seemed much the same as it had been when he went to sleep, with the piles of wooden crates and barrels, empty bottles, half-finished statues, and the empty hammock slung between them. 'Wait, empty!?’

Luke sat up and jumped out of bed as it registered Phoenix was absent from the bed he had chosen. A glance up told him Espella was still fast asleep in the bed above his, her red cape pulled tight around her as a second blanket in the cold night, and the thirteen-year-old panicked for a moment that their older friend had maybe abandoned them while they were sleeping. A closer inspection of the hammock allayed his fears though, as he found Phoenix's jacket (with prized defence attorney's badge attached) and red tie slung over the back of one of the statues, out of the way. By the door, he also spotted their three pairs of shoes, where they had been left as the three got into bed. ‘So where is Mister Wright, then?’ Seeing no sign in the room itself, Luke tiptoed to the door, making sure he wasn't disturbing Espella's sleep as he slowly pulled it open.

The chandelier and candles in the bar itself were all still lit, and Luke blinked for a moment as he slowly adjusted to the light, pushing himself out the door. Behind him, he pulled the door almost to a close, not wanting to wake Espella with the light nor with the noise of any unseen mechanisms clicking into place.

"I'm the only one who can protect Luke and Espella," Phoenix's voice said from somewhere below. "But I'm scared. I'm scared that what happened to Maya will happen again..."

Luke clapped a hand to his face to restrain a gasp. 'Mister Wright!' "Maya, huh?” Rouge replied, and Luke could hear the clinking of glass as she adjusted something at the bar. "I caught wind of what happened today in court. She seemed... very important to you."

There was a short pause. "I'm... all right," Phoenix insisted, but even Luke could tell it was a lie. "I'm just... not sure I can protect those two.” He sighed. "More than that... I just don't want them to think I might fail them."

A part of Luke told him to go back to bed, to stop eavesdropping on what was clearly a private conversation, but his feet refused to move. Since their escape from the courtroom that evening, the boy had been worrying about his lawyer friend. It seemed Phoenix had shut down from the loss of Maya, and Luke couldn't blame him after doing almost the same thing losing the Professor. Against his better judgement, he began to softly creep towards the stairs.

"You want to protect them," Rouge slowly said, a dangerous tone to her voice, "and don't want them to think you'll fail, huh?” She huffed to herself in thought. "That all sounds well and good. But you
want to know what I think? I think you're just telling yourself what you want to hear."

"Huh?" Phoenix replied, sounding more confused than anything else. "What do you mean?"

Luke peered over the top of the stairs and spotted the pair at the bar, Rouge standing behind it while Phoenix sat on a stool opposite her. Between them was a small array of daggers and glasses, which looked to be possibly the remains of a puzzle. Rouge was frowning, and she leaned forward on the bar to hold a gloved fist up as though ready to throw a punch. "I think the words coming out of your mouth right now are downright selfish."

Phoenix was leaning back in shock. "H-hey, what are you-?"

"Have you taken a second to step back from your wallowing and think how worried they must be about you right now?" Rouge continued, and when Phoenix only stared sadly at the floor in reply, she leaned back and crossed her arms. "So it's hopeless, huh? Do you think those kids are hopeless too?" She rolled her eyes. "Pshh, don't make me laugh! You wanna see hopeless? That's easy. Just take a look in the mirror."

"That's no way to talk to Mister Wright!" Luke objected in his head, and instinctively took a step down the stairs before stopping himself.

"How do you expect to protect those two," Rouge continued, gesturing above her to where their room was, "if you can't even manage to get a hold of yourself?"

Finally, Phoenix seemed to respond, looking up and giving the bartender a glare. "I-I...!"

There was a long pause, before finally Rouge softened her gaze and gave Phoenix a smile. "It's okay," she assured him. "I get it. You had some really, really rough stuff happen to you today. Unimaginably sad, emotionally trying stuff."

Phoenix had returned to staring at the floor. Luke slid down to sit on the top step, peering down through the bars holding up the railing.

"That's why the first thing you need to do," Rouge continued, reaching out to rest a hand on the lawyer's shoulder, "is just accept it. Accept it all. The sadness, the remorse... everything. Honestly, I don't blame you for expressing just how hard this whole situation has been on you. Who could?"

Luke leaned against the railing, hugging himself tightly. "I guess there's no hiding... we might be able to save the Professor, but poor Maya..."

"I," Phoenix croaked, and paused before continuing, his whole body tensing up in his seat as he directed his head even further downwards, pulling away from Rouge's touch. "I can never forgive myself for letting this happen. I couldn't do anything, not a single thing! I did nothing to help Maya at all!" He leaned forward, head almost on the bar as he gripped it tightly, thoroughly angry at himself.

"Maya gave her own life to save Espella! If only I'd been quicker, if only I could've done something, Maya would still be..." His anger spent, Phoenix pulled his arms up to form a pillow on the bar, burying his face in it. "She'd still be here by my side," he quietly added, then shook his head as Rouge again reached out to rest a comforting hand on his shoulder. The lawyer began to sob. "It's all my fault..."

'If I'd been quicker following the Professor,' Luke echoed, 'Maya would never have been accused of turning him to gold... He might never have turned to gold in the first place! They'd both be here, helping us save Espella.' He closed his eyes, head slumped. 'And Maya would be here to cheer up Mister Wright... He's so upset... I wish I could do something for him...'
An ever-so-soft creaking in the floor behind him shocked Luke back into action, and he looked up and behind him to see Espella wincing at the noise she'd caused. Seeing Luke staring up at her, she gave him an embarrassed smile. "Luke, what are you doing here?" she whispered.

Luke pulled himself to his feet, returning the embarrassed grin. "Ah, Espella, what are you doing up at this time?"

The teen shrugged, looking sad. "I couldn't sleep," she claimed, tip-toeing to the top of the stairs. "I thought I'd just get a glass of water." Peering down into the bar below, she paused. "Who's that over there? Is that... Miss Rouge and Mister Wright?"

Panicking, Luke grabbed Espella's arm and gently pulled her away from the stairs. "Hey, we should head back to bed, Espella!" he insisted. "We have an early start tomorrow, after all!"

There was a short pause before Espella bit her lip, humming in agreement. "You're right," she agreed, giving the boy a smile before heading back towards their room.

Luke followed Espella a few steps before stopping and staring down to the lower floor through the bars of the railing. He couldn't see the pair downstairs from here, but he knew his friend was probably still breaking down over Maya. 'They are definitely a couple,' he decided. 'Or... were.' He sighed to himself, shaking his head. 'I'll make myself more useful to you, Mister Wright. I promise.'
"It was just as the Storyteller said:" Luke dramatically narrated to the assembled group. "A man from afar falls to a golden curse! But it wasn't Nick who fell, it was the Professor!"

Trucy and Pearl, cuddled up to either side of Phoenix on the edge of Trucy's low bed, gasped.

Apollo rolled his eyes. "C'mon, he's not actually dead," he pointed out. "Luke's been writing letters to him, remember?"

Maya poked him in the side, shushing the teen.

Luke resisted a giggle at Apollo's reaction. He knew he wouldn't have been able to tell this part of the story so gleefully when the pain of initially thinking the deception had been true was still fresh in his mind, but sufficient time had passed that he was able to ham up the drama of Professor Layton's brush with being turned to gold for the sake of a good story. "That's not the end of it, though!" he continued, leaning forward from the floor cushion he was sat on. "The Talea Magica that fell by Maya's feet, and the spell we'd all heard as we ran down the hall? That was enough for Inquisitor Barnham to place the blame on Maya!"

The two girls gasped again, cuddling even closer to Phoenix as he resisted a smirk at Luke's gleeful narration. "Yeah, Maya has a problem with keeping herself out of trouble," he joked. Maya stuck out her tongue at him in response.

Apollo held a finger against his forehead in thought. "So you ended up in Witches' Court again?" he asked, trying not to look excited at hearing a brand new story of one of Phoenix's trials.

"Mm hm!" Luke said with a nod. "Nick defended her, of course!"

"And weren't you one of the prosecution's witnesses?" Maya asked with a knowing smile, poking Luke's arm and pretending to think hard on the question. "I seem to remember there being a certain boy in blue down there!"

Luke blushed, pulling his cap over his eyes. "U-um..."

Taking pity on the teen, Phoenix ruffled the hair of the two girls at his side. "Luke was understandably upset at losing the Professor. After all, we didn't know yet if we could reverse the gold spell on him."

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Will you stop pretending magic is real!?" he objected.

"What was worse," Phoenix continued, ignoring Apollo's outburst, "was that Barnham had managed to convince Luke Maya had to have been the witch responsible, so to get anywhere in that trial, my first task was to try and calm him down and make him see reason."

Luke rubbed an arm, staring at the floor in an attempt to hide his embarrassed blushing.
"You managed it though, right?" Apollo asked with an excited smile. "By pointing out magic wasn't real?"

Pearl frowned, while Trucy rolled her eyes. "Will you drop that already?" the young magician replied, exasperated.

Phoenix chuckled. "I did it by proving there was no possible way Maya could have dropped that staff. When the Professor's statue fell, the arm snapped off and was stolen by one of the witnesses."

Apollo resisted muttering a sarcastic remark. 'Oh yes, "the Professor's statue"; You're definitely not admitting right there that the supposed 'magic' is all totally fake...'

Pearl looked scandalised, arms on her hips. "Who could do such a thing!? That's someone's arm they're taking!"

"Ugh, he was a pretty terrible person all around," Maya admitted, waving a hand. "But hey, Nick got him to return it, and he even told us he'd found it on the floor between me and the staff!"

Luke scrunched up his face in thought. "Yeah, but then Inquisitor Barnham tried to say we'd just misheard whether the staff or the Professor fell first..."

Phoenix grinned. "Hey, Apollo," he called to the teen, "do you remember the trial for the Gourd Lake murder?"

Apollo jumped in surprise at being asked the question out of nowhere. "Huh? Uh, yeah, I remember reading about it." He started to go over his memories of the case file in his head, trying to find a parallel between it and the current case they were discussing. "A man was out on the lake with a prosecutor after midnight on Christmas Eve, and the man was found dead from a bullet wound on the shore the next morning. There were pictures taken by an automatic camera that suggested the prosecutor was the shooter, and two-, er, three witnesses, one of whom was the owner of the camera, another was out on the lake for some other reason, and the last was this old guy suffering from dementia or something that ran the boat shop."

"Wow, impressive," Maya commented, smiling. "I was there, and even I don't remember it that well!"

"And how did we prove the 'old guy' was faking it?" Phoenix asked with a smile.

Apollo frowned. "You... called his pet parrot as a witness?"

"One of the other witnesses was a bard, Mister Birdly!" Luke announced, a finger in the air as he instantly brightened up. "He had a pet parrot that went with him everywhere, called Cracker!"

"Cracker had a trick," Phoenix picked up, "that he could perfectly imitate any sound he'd heard. We were able to get him to repeat what he'd heard when the Professor was turned to gold."

Apollo slapped his hand against his face. "Oh no," he sighed.

"Wow!" Pearl cried. "That's so clever, Mister Nick!"

"So you proved Miss Maya was innocent?" Trucy asked with a grin.

Maya laughed. "Not quite yet!" she said.

"Cracker was supposed to say 'Goldor', the name of the gold spell," Luke explained, "but instead he
said 'Godoor', and at the wrong time, too!"

"He made a mistake?" Apollo thought aloud.

Phoenix shook his head. "We were just misinterpreting what he said," he continued. "There was a spell called 'Godoor', which could make a portal in any wall that was painted green."

"Oh!" Apollo suddenly cried out, remembering an earlier part of the story Phoenix had told. "The bit of green wall behind the painting!"

"Exactly!" Phoenix replied with a proud smile. "It wouldn't have been a big hole, but it was big enough to throw something through."

Maya giggled. "Do you want to try and figure this one out yourself, Apollo?" She gave him a wink. "It's good practise for when you become a lawyer yourself!"

"U-um," Apollo muttered, turning red. "I... wouldn't be very good..."

"No-one is on their first try," Phoenix pointed out, feeling sorry for Maya putting the teen on the spot. He looked down to Trucy and Pearl. "Are you two okay with stopping for a bit to let Apollo figure out what happened?"

Trucy nodded, giving her father a bright smile. "Sure!"

"I'm okay with that, Mister Nick!" Pearl added.

Luke pulled his notebook and pen out of his satchel on the floor beside him, flipping to the back page as he held it out. "You can use this if you want, Nick!"

"Ah, thank you, Luke!" Phoenix said, taking the offered items and immediately sketching a small map on the paper.

For the next ten minutes or so, Phoenix carefully walked Apollo through the case.

"So the butler did it, right?"

"Hmm... You want to call him to the stand? What do you want to ask him? Keep in mind, only girls can be witches."

"Um... if he's actually a girl?"

"Good idea. He won't answer you though, not yet. First, you have to show a logical connection between him and the murder."

To Apollo's credit, Luke thought he did very well, considering he was essentially being asked to guess what Phoenix had done.

"Alright then, Greyerl admits, yes, she's actually a girl."

"I knew it!"

"But, she's been watching the trial and knows you don't have any actual evidence, so she's going to leave."
"What!? But-! How do you solve the case without-!?"

"Exactly. What do you do to keep her on the stand, Apollo?"

Especially since Phoenix was playing it like it was a game rather than a retelling of actual events.

"Greyerl says a neighbour helped her break down the door."

"Wait, a neighbour? Who's this neighbour?"

"... Congratulations, you've just called Emeer Punchenbaug to the stand."

Trucy and Pearl also loved throwing in their own ideas, wanting to join in on the 'game'.

"Ms Mailer says she dropped by to pick up a very important letter she was told would be ready, and once she found it, she left again to deliver it."

"Oh wait, Luke and the Professor had that letter they found in the Storyteller's place, didn't they Daddy?"

"The blank one? Why would Belduke deliver a blank letter?"

"Was it magic disappearing ink, Mister Nick?"

"Hey, I'm supposed to be working this out!"

Eventually though, the fun wound down and the sad truth of Jean Greyerl's story came out.

"Greyerl also saw Belduke's letter, and glimpsed the words 'truth' and 'witch', among other things. She thought he was planning to out her to the Storyteller himself, so she pulled out her Talea Magica and created a portal behind his desk specifically to steal it, swapping the real letter for the blank sheets Luke and the Professor found. When she saw Belduke's head leaned back on his chair, fast asleep, she was overcome with anger at his betrayal, and choked him to death."

"So... she did do it?"

"... Luke, would you like to take over here?"

Luke watched the faces of his siblings and Pearl as he told them of Greyerl's reading of her master's letter, and of how, once Belduke's suicide came out and Maya's name was cleared, Phoenix fought for Greyerl to not be punished, as she hadn't actually done anything as a witch. Trucy and Pearl cried out in shock when Espella gave herself up in her place, and Luke even spotted Maya and Phoenix repeatedly giving each other looks as the story edged closer and closer to the moment of truth.

"And then, still trapped in that terrible cage," the teen narrated, intensity in his tone, "Maya dropped like a stone into the flame pit, burning alive!"

Trucy and Pearl gasped, clinging to Phoenix.

"That's bullsh- er, bull crap!" Apollo cried, hesitating only to keep from swearing in front of his father and young sister. "Maya's sitting right there, she's clearly not dead!"

Maya gave him a cheeky grin. "Who's to say for sure? I could be long dead and just being channelled by another talented spirit medium right now!"

Pearl was holding her hands over her mouth, looking worried. "Mystic Maya, I don't remember you
mentioning this part when you told the story to me before!"

"Don't worry, Pearls," Phoenix assured her, hugging her close. "I promise you there's a happy ending."

"Besides," Apollo angrily continued, having not noticed Pearl's quiet outburst, "the last time Luke told us a story, I pointed out repeatedly that there's no such thing as time travel in real life, and you know what? Future London, future Luke, future Professor... All of it was a hoax!"

"Hey, spoilers!" Maya protested, hands on her hips. Luke looked away awkwardly as he very deliberately continued to not bring up Claire. Trucy crossed her arms, giving her oldest brother a glare. "I just realised... ! You know what you're doing?" she asked. "You're asking to jump to the end!"

Surprised out of his anger, Apollo looked over to his sister. "Huh?"

"You heard me!" Trucy shot back. "You keep demanding answers, and forgetting that the answers are at the end of a story!" She wagged a finger at him. "So shut up and listen! We'll get to the end when Luke says so! Not you!"

Apollo was too shocked to respond. Luke waited a moment before deciding to break the silence and continue the story. As he described Barnham taking pity on them and telling them where to go, he cast the occasional glance over to Phoenix, who was similarly casting glances at Maya (who was herself listening intently to a part of the story she hadn't been present for). The teen carefully skipped over how Espella and Phoenix had been badly grieving Maya's loss, and hoped the missing part of the story wasn't noticed by his small audience. He didn't want to dwell on how terrible the experience had been for them at the time.

"Rouge let us stay the night in a spare room upstairs," Luke narrated, "and we decided that, since Espella's trial was going to be tomorrow evening, we'd have to work all the harder the next day."

Maya frowned in concern. "You didn't have any trouble sleeping that night?"

Luke shrugged. "We were fine," he insisted, dodging eye contact and trying not to look in Phoenix's direction.

Trucy's eyes subtly widened as she picked up the lie and assumed the worst. Apollo, however, frowned. "What, did you have nightmares or something?"

"Leave it, Apollo," Phoenix warned.

"What?" Apollo asked, part confused and part annoyed.

"Just leave it."

Apollo quietened as Luke continued the story. Phoenix only half-listened, distracted by the memory of that terrible night that he had never spoken about to anyone, except only to say it had been the worst experience of his life (until Hazakura Temple beat it out, of course). He could see the telltale Psyche-Locks that indicated Luke was hiding something, and knew they were best left alone. 'They'll be about how he was awake when I got back to the room, I'd say,' he told himself. 'We all needed a little healing time to ourselves that night.'
View the Court Record/Luke’s Notebook
It had been a hectic morning, the younger children all waking up at the crack of dawn and Luke excitedly leading the way as the four children rushed to open their gifts. They only had one each (not counting chocolates from Santa or Trucy’s craft-work), but everyone was happy with what they had and, wrapped up in their new scarves Trucy had made for everyone, the kids headed out into the cold air to see if they could find any Christmas snow.

Pearl chewed a thumbnail nervously as she led the way down the road to the nearby river, pastel pink scarf hung loosely around her neck. "I don't know if we'll find anything," she admitted. "It hasn't been that cold this year."

Trucy huffed, pulling her cape tightly around herself despite the layers she had on beneath it. "Snowy Christmases are funner," she muttered.

"'Funner' isn't a word," Luke pointed out, hands in his trouser pockets and a light blue scarf around his neck.

Trailing at the back of the group, Apollo looked up from the phone in his hands, the present he had received that morning. "Good. You guys would just give yourselves frostbite anyway," he called through the red scarf pulled over the bottom half of his face. "Dad'd kill me."

Trucy looked back at her eldest brother, one eyebrow raised. "Why are you following us if you don't even want to play?"

"I have to watch you, don't I?" Apollo pointed out. "Dad and Maya are busy enough without you guys causing trouble."

"We don't cause trouble!" Trucy protested. "Besides, you're watching your phone, not us!"

Luke and Pearl gave each other a look.

Apollo shot Trucy a smirk, looking up from his phone. "You're not causing trouble yet, are you?"

"You're trouble!" Trucy quickly replied, sticking her tongue out for good measure. "And boring!"

"Thought hard about that one, did we?" Apollo said with a smile, looking back down to his phone. "Besides, I'm not done setting this up yet."

Trucy huffed for a moment. "You're a set-up!" she quietly retorted.

Apollo snorted, but didn't reply.

Suddenly, Pearl stopped, throwing up an arm to keep her friends from passing her. "We have to look somewhere else," she calmly announced.

"Why?" Trucy asked, before looking ahead of them and instantly seeing the answer to her question. "Oh."
The four kids locked their gazes on a large brown bear not far ahead of them, leaning up against a tree and sniffing at the bark. Unseen by the others, Luke's face instantly lit up.

Apollo tensed up, slipping his phone into a pocket. "Great, just our luck to run into a bear that isn't hibernating. If we just turn and leave, will it notice us?"

Pearl shook her head, still focussing on the bear. "They're pretty calm, especially in winter. If we don't disturb it, it will ignore us."

"Woooow!" Trucy sighed, hands clasped together in excitement. "I've never seen a wild bear before! It's so close!"

Luke grinned. "Do you want to meet her?" he asked.

Apollo gave his brother a stern frown. "What are you talking about?"

"I've always dreamed of getting to pet a bear!" Trucy replied, ignoring Apollo, then sighed with longing. "I'll never get to, but I've always wanted to!"

"Luke, what are you planning?" Apollo insisted, crossing his arms and still glaring at his brother.

Luke gave Apollo a shrug, then walked right past Pearl and towards the bear.

"Wait, you shouldn't do that!" Pearl cried, but was kept from following him by Apollo's hand on her shoulder.

"Luke, get back here!" Apollo demanded.

Ignoring the cries of his brother and friend, Luke strode up to within a metre or two of the wild bear, who dropped back down to all fours to watch the approaching teen, softly growling under her breath. Luke tipped his cap. "I don't mean to bother you, Missus Bear," he said. "My name is Luke. I was just wondering if you had some time to spare for a quick favour."

"Luke, what are you doing!?" Apollo cried.

The bear paused for a moment, then stepped closer to Luke, sniffing at his winter coat. The teen smiled calmly as she pushed her nose into his chest, then watched her step back, making snuffling sounds through her nose.

"Oh, thank you!" Luke said. "It's my little sister, you see. She was admiring you and I was wondering if you would let her come and see you up close." He scratched behind an ear, embarrassed. "She was also hoping to get to pet you, but I can tell her not to if you like."

The bear sat on her haunches, and made a few more snuffling sounds in Luke's direction.

"Really?" Luke asked, smiling. "Thank you so much! I'll go and get her!" He turned and casually walked back towards his friends, grinning in self-satisfaction as he registered the three were all giving him distinct variants of a dead stare; Pearl was watching him in confusion, while Apollo was glaring, and Trucy had her mouth open in a massive smile. Luke held out his hand to Trucy. "She's going to let you pat her, Truce!"

Trucy's grin somehow got even wider, and, after only a moment's pause, she bounced to Luke's side, taking his hand. As Apollo and Pearl looked on, too shocked to speak, Luke led Trucy down the path to where the bear sat, watching them approach. Trucy hung behind Luke a little, nervousness overcoming her excitement the closer they got.
Luke stopped in front of the bear, closer than he had been before, and gently pulled Trucy forward to his side. "Missus Bear, this is my sister Trucy. Trucy, this is Missus Bear."

The bear leaned forward, sniffing at Trucy as the young girl giggled. Emboldened by the animal's interest in her, Trucy slowly reached out a hand, and was surprised when the bear moved her head into it in silent permission to let the girl pet her fur.

Luke grinned, leaning in close to his sister. "She says it's nice to meet you," he told her.

Trucy giggled again, gently rubbing her hand back and forth along the top of the bear's head. "It's nice to meet you too, Missus Bear!" she said. After a moment, she bit her lip in thought and withdrew her hand. "Thank you very much!" she told the animal.

The bear nodded once, made some snuffling sounds in Luke's direction, then turned and lumbered off into the forest.


Trucy watched the bear leave in amazement and, the instant it disappeared, squealed loudly, dropping Luke's hand and running back down the path to Pearl and Apollo. "I GOT TO PET A BEAR!"

December 25, 10:52AM

Fey Manor

Guest Room 1

"Quickeest?" Phoenix asked with a grin. "Really?"

Maya laughed as she watched her friend carefully rewrapping the mug she had bought him in the mounds of bubble wrap it had arrived with. "Well, even fathers of triplets usually have to wait nine months!" she pointed out.

Phoenix shook his head. His gift, a joint effort of Maya and Pearl on the behalf of his three children, was a blue mug proudly emblazoned with "World's Best Dad" on one side... only "Best" was crossed out and "Quickeest" written underneath in black marker. "I'm not the only adoptive father in the world, you know," he replied, trying to sound stern despite his smile. "It's usual to have to wait a few weeks for everything to become official."

"And how many adoptive fathers adopt three kids in five months?" Maya said with a giggle, hands on her hips. Over the top of her usual purple kimono was a hot pink sweater, the logo for the Pink Princess plastered across the front, and Maya wore her gift gleefully despite Phoenix's teasing on the bright colours it boasted. Around her neck she had hung the white scarf Trucy made for her, the ends dangling down towards the floor she was currently sitting on.

"Closer to six," Phoenix corrected, carefully packing the wrapped mug into his suitcase, which was lying on the floor between where the two were seated. "I started the process for Trucy in April and Apollo and Luke's adoption wasn't finalised until-"

"DAAAAAAD!"
The pair looked up to the door as they heard the shout. Phoenix frowned. "Apollo?" he called back, mentally debating whether he should get up or not. Apollo's tone didn't sound urgent, but he wasn't sure he wanted to risk being wrong. "What is it?"

There was a pounding on the floor that got closer and closer, and Phoenix and Maya stood up just in time for an upset Apollo to appear in the doorway, hands on the frame as he leaned in. "Did you know Luke can talk to animals!?" the teen cried.

Phoenix couldn't resist a sigh of relief, sharing a glance with Maya as the pair laughed. "That's what this is about?" the spirit medium asked. "You had your father and me worried, there!"

Apollo looked horrified. "You did know!" he accused.

A quicker pair of feet thundered down the hallway, and Trucy dashed into the room under Apollo's arms, surprising the teen into jumping back away from the doorframe. "Daddy!" she cried as she ran to Phoenix's side. "Daddy, I got to pet a bear!"

"Oh?" Phoenix asked, surprised to hear there were any bears out and about in the middle of winter. "Is this Luke's doing, huh?"

"Uh-huh!" Trucy nodded, an ecstatic smile on her face. "He asked her if I could pat her, and she said yes, and then Luke took me over to meet her and I got to pet her!"

Pearl and Luke then appeared in the doorway, bypassing the irritated Apollo and running in after Trucy. Pearl ran straight to Maya's side, crying "Mystic Maya, Luke can talk to animals!"

Maya nodded, giggling as she leaned down closer to Pearl's level. "Yeah, he did it a few times while we were in Labyrinthia together!"

Apollo rolled his eyes and stomped up behind Luke, poking the younger teen's back to attract his attention. "If you were talking to animals in Labyrinthia," he said, "why exactly did you never mention it?"

Luke shrugged, smiling. "I thought it distracted from the story," he explained. "After all, all I left out was that we had a parrot friend in Future London who helped us get into Chinatown, and the secret passages we used in Labyrinthia's courthouse were something I learned about from Eve the cat!"

"And that it was your idea to ask Birdly's parrot for help during the trial," Phoenix added.

"Oh, that's all?" Apollo sarcastically asked.

Luke nodded, giving Apollo a bright grin. "More or less!"

Sighing, Apollo shook his head. "Anything else we should know about before you give me another heart attack?"

At that, Luke blushed. "Oh, sorry Apollo," he said, an apologetic smile on his face. "I didn't mean to scare you before. Can you forgive me?"

Apollo was surprised for a moment, before finally relaxing and returning the smile. "Yeah, I'm fine."
"So Apollo, Nick tells me you were a member of his fanclub!"

Apollo snorted in surprise, fighting to keep from either spitting out his mouthful of curry or forcing it up his nose from shock.

Pearl gasped in surprise from her seat next to Trucy. "You were!?

Around the low table, sitting on traditional Japanese floor cushions, the rest of the Wright family laughed, watching Apollo sputter and swallow his food. The teen shot a glare at Maya. "You couldn't have waited until my mouth was empty!?

Maya shrugged apologetically. "Heh, sorry," she apologised, then reached across the table to pat his shoulder. "I was just going to ask what your username was. We might have talked!"

"Yeah!" Pearl added, eagerly nodding. "What was your name?"

Apollo thought a moment, frowning curiously. "You were members, too?" he asked.

Trucy jumped in her seat as a thought occurred to her. "Miss Maya, you should tell Polly what your name was, too!" she instructed, then tapped Pearl beside her. "You too, Pearly!"

Maya grinned proudly, arms straight as she leaned on her crossed legs. "Oh, you know, Pearly and I were only Precious-Fairy and My-Fairy." She tossed her head, briefly throwing her fringe above her. "You might have heard of us."

Luke frowned. "Wait, weren't those the usernames of...?

Phoenix, sat next to Maya, hid a snicker behind a hand.

"You founded it!?

Phoenix couldn't resist a laugh. "Once you told me about them when we first met," he explained, "I asked Maya about it." He smirked. "It was quite a shock to me, too. For different reasons, though."

"We had to leave though," Pearl sadly explained, "after Mystic Misty died. We didn't have the time."

Apollo nodded. "Uh, yeah, I remember BlackbirdLuck took over near the end." He then frowned as something occurred to him. "Wait, are you talking about that weird case Dad had in February?"

Maya smiled sadly. "What do you think?" she asked.

"Wait," Luke spoke up, hand gingerly raised. "She was your mother, right? That you and Nick were telling me about?"

"BlackbirdLuck..." Phoenix interrupted, musing to himself. "That's Maggey, right?"
Maya gave Phoenix a nod. "She offered to take over, and once we'd recognised who each other was, I left her to it."

Apollo and Luke gave each other a glance as they realised the subject of Misty's murder was off-limits.

Pearl sighed, turning to Trucy and explaining "I don't know if you've heard, but the fanclub doesn't exist anymore."

"Yeah, I heard," Trucy sadly replied, then crossed her arms and frowned. "I don't know why, though! If there were so many fans of Daddy's, why did they just believe everything the papers said?"

"I don't know about anyone else," Apollo spoke up, "but there were a bunch of us who were posting in the forum that didn't believe it." He shrugged. "But, the people who did outnumbered us, and essentially harassed everyone who was left until Blackbird shut the whole thing down. She said she used to be a cop, and even murderers were more decent than the haters that took over."

Luke picked at his food with his fork. "That's a shame," he said. "Couldn't those of you who believed in Nick stay in touch?"

Apollo shrugged. "Some people probably did. But, well, I was a bit scared to try. When people heard how old I was, they always refused and told me not to, so I'd given up."

Maya tapped her cheek in thought. "Maggey might still be in touch with some people," she said, then broke out into a grin. "Oh yeah, you haven't told me what your username was yet!"

Apollo blushed. "Uh..."

"Yeah!" Pearl cried, hands clapped together in an imitation of her cousin. "Tell us your name, Apollo!"

Staring at his plate, Apollo turned beet red. "teelyustisoveh," he mumbled.

"Can't hear you," Phoenix replied, grinning.

"SteelJusticeLover," Apollo repeated, louder this time.


"Yeah, I think I remember you!" Maya cheerfully announced. "You were one of the local kids who'd been to some of Nick's trials!" She then smirked. "Oh, and weren't you one of the Steel Samurai fans, too?"

Apollo didn't reply, still too embarrassed of his old username.

Pearl was still deep in thought. "Were you the person who had to use a school computer all the time, and someone else got into your account once?"

"Clay," Apollo said. "I asked him to watch my computer while I ran to get something, and he decided to prank me by posting something on my account."


"I'll give you Maggey's number later," Maya promised Apollo as she returned to her food. "She might be able to get you back in touch with some people!"
As much as the Wright children had enjoyed getting to spend time in Kurain with Maya and Pearl, all too soon the time to part had come. Trucy and Pearl compared a few last notes on what they hoped to get out of the books they each had received as Christmas presents (Pearl's a fantasy novel and Trucy's a guide book on homemade plush toys), while Luke and Apollo were hurriedly copying Maya's number into their brand new phones, promising to keep in touch via texts. Apollo was also taking the chance to copy down Maggey's number, eager to see if she still knew any of his old online friends.

Phoenix ran his eyes around the room to check his children and all their belongings were present, then glanced at his watch. "Five minutes till the bus comes," he noted aloud, then walked over to Maya, interrupting her from her conversation with the boys. "We'd better head outside so we don't miss it."

Maya sadly nodded, biting her lip to keep from tearing up. "I'm gonna miss you!" she cried, throwing her arms around Phoenix, although it wasn't clear if she was referring to the whole Wright family or Phoenix alone with her statement. "You need to come back sometime soon, okay?"

"As soon as we can!" Phoenix promised, giving her a quick hug. "We need to get moving, though." He pulled his beanie out of his hoodie pocket and pulled it over his head.

"Oh!" Maya cried, and she waved to Trucy to gather the Wright children around her. "Kids! I have something very important to tell you before you all go!"

"I'm not a kid," Apollo grumbled, stuffing his new phone into a pocket while Luke and Trucy gave each other confused glances. Pearl watched curiously from Maya's side.

Maya cleared her throat, then fixed the trio with a stern glare. "It's vitally important you never mention me or Pearly to anyone outside Kurain, okay? Actually, don't mention Kurain itself at all, got it?"


"Being Master of the Kurain Channelling Technique is a very dangerous job to hold," Maya continued, keeping up her stern façade. Luckily for her, this explanation was not technically a lie. "If you let it loose to anyone that you know me, no matter how trustworthy they seem, they may mention it to someone else, and then you would be putting yourselves in danger. Do you understand?"

There was a short pause as the trio digested the dire warning. "We will," Luke and Trucy promised, while Apollo nodded his head vigorously. "Not a word to anyone," Luke added.

Maya kept up her stern glare for a few moments more until she was sure she'd scared the kids enough, then she smiled at them. "Thank you. Now, you have fun on your way home, and be good
for your dad, huh?"

Phoenix, standing by the door as he watched for the bus, gave the group a warning cry: "I think I see the bus coming!"

"We'll be good!" Trucy promised Maya, and the family dashed about to gather their bags, running out the door and into the bus stop just as the vehicle was approaching the Kurain Boulder. Maya and Pearl close behind them.

Maya gave Phoenix one last hug. "Keep in touch," she insisted.

"Why wouldn't I?" Phoenix asked with a smile, returning the hug, then pulling the bus tickets out of his jeans pocket. "I'll text you once we get home."

Maya and Pearl waved as the Wright family got onto the empty bus, which took off again to turn around and putter back in the direction of the train station. Neither of the spirit mediums stopped until the bus was well and truly out of sight.

Pearl gave Maya a hug as the older cousin sighed. "Don't worry, Mystic Maya," she said, "Mister Nick and Apollo and Luke and Trucy will come back."

"You bet they will," Maya replied, giving Pearl a grin before tightly hugging her back, rubbing her forehead against her younger cousin's. "Nick's an honorary Fey, remember? He'll never be too far away from us."

- END OF 2019 -

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Hi, you don't know me, but my name is Apollo Wright. I used to be a member of the Phoenix Wright fan club when it was still online, I was steeljusticelover, and Maya gave me your number because she thinks you might still be in touch with other members of the fan club. If I have the wrong number, please feel free to ignore me.

Hey there SJL! Or should I say Apollo? ;) Maya told me about you! Yeah, I'm still in touch with a whole bunch of people. We actually started up a second, private forum to get away from the haters, since they'd so overrun the old one and we couldn't find a better way for all of us to keep in touch. If you give me your email, I can send you an invite to join up? I'll keep a look out for you and get your account certified. You must be pretty proud to have been adopted by the one and only Phoenix Wright, huh? ;) Detective Gumshoe told me quite a bit about you as well! - Maggey Byrde aka BlackbirdLuck

Yeah, it was a bit of a surprise meeting Dad the way I did. I've kinda gotten used to it tho, since I live with him now and all. My email is ajustice@siriusturner.edu and I look forward to the invite! Thank you Blackbird, I really appreciate this! Wow, you know Gumshoe? Was he in the club or something?

And your invite is sent! I'll look out for you on the forum! Oh, and you're very welcome SJL ;) Detective Gumshoe wasn't in the fan club, he's just a good friend of mine!

The Revived PW Fan-Club Forum!

Home > Other Discussion

Thread: Hey guys

steeljusticelover [CERTIFIED USER], 01/02/2020 10:33:35AM

Hi everyone, steeljusticelover here! I don't know how many of you remember me, but I was on the old forum too. I ran into My-Fairy and Precious-Fairy on a vacation and they got me in touch with Blackbird, so here I am again! How’s everyone been doing since the old forum closed?

CelestialImpacts, 01/02/2020 12:02:26AM

Hello there, stranger! I think I remember you, actually. You're 14, aren't you? You were one of the kids trying to sign up for the IRL meetups that we had to decline?

Oh, and how are the Fairys doing? We haven't heard from them much except for Blackbird saying they've been really busy at their new jobs.
steeljusticelover [CERTIFIED USER], 01/02/2020 12:12:14AM

15 now, actually. And yeah, I lost touch with everyone here because I figured no-one wanted to get to know a minor. I mean, I get why I suppose, it was just disheartening to lose touch with everyone because I'm still young.

The Fairys are doing great, even though they're really busy! They're not nearly as refined irl tho.

Pocky-Hockey, 01/02/2020 03:17:57PM

Yooo SJL! Wasn't expecting one of the literal babies to make it here with us! Hey, why's Blackbird certified you? Did you somehow manage to befriend Mr Wright while you were away? I suppose that's how you ran into the Fairys, huh?

Thunderdome, 01/02/2020 03:58:09PM

Welcome back, SJL! I don't think I remember you, but I'm looking forward to getting to know you now we're such a smaller group! I hope the trolls didn't get to you too bad before the old forum closed down.

What do you mean, "the Fairys are refined"? I remember My-Fairy being the goofiest when it came to Steel Samurai arguments! xD Precious tho, she was a real refined lady, despite her terrible typing skills. I'm glad to hear they're both doing well.

CelestialImpacts, 01/02/2020 04:36:48PM

Pocky, just befriending Mr Wright doesn't necessarily make you certified. Blackbird would be the better person to ask on that. I'm more curious as to why we're still doing the 'certified' thing when Mr Wright isn't a lawyer anymore. We don't have trial announcements, so why do we need to know whose word can be trusted?

SJL, don't worry about it. You managed to find your way back here, after all. We'll be your online friends until you're old enough to come to a meetup... whenever we end up next holding one, of course.

steeljusticelover [CERTIFIED USER], 01/02/2020 05:24:31AM

Sort of, Pocky. I'm actually friends with one of his sons. You guys heard about that, right? But yeah, as Celestial said, I don't know why we're still doing the certified thing. I didn't realise that was what Blackbird was talking about when she sent me the invite.

Thank you, Thunderdome! No, I didn't post much after those guys took over. I think they were happy to ignore me as long as I didn't contribute to any discussions. And thank you to Celestial as well. It'll be great meeting old friends again and making new ones too.

(I guess I forgot My-Fairy was such a Samurai fan. I should have used that opportunity when I had it to finish some of the arguments we had about it... although not in my dad's hearing, because he
would have totally mocked me for it, I just know it.)

BlackbirdLuck [CERTIFIED USER] [ADMIN], 01/02/2020 08:58:13PM

Hey, glad you made it here, SJL! Welcome back!

As SJL said, he's been certified because he actually has a much closer connection to Mr Wright now than I do, rivalling the Fairys' connection to him. I guess it didn't occur to me that we may not need the 'certified' system anymore, but I'm keeping it, for now at least. After all, what if Mr Wright manages to prove he was framed and gets his badge back? We're gonna want to know, right? Besides, Dime is certified for her connection to Global Studios, not Mr Wright, so it's not like that's the only thing we've certified people for.

Don't worry SJL, I passed on that Mr Wright had adopted two boys once My-Fairy told me about it. Do you know why he suddenly did that? We had this massive argument on possible reasons and everything before I had to close it for people crossing lines. You can probably find the thread easily, if you want.

(Your dad would make fun of you for liking Steel Samurai? Really?)

Dime_Quarters [CERTIFIED USER] [MOD], 01/03/2020 06:46:25AM

Wow I thought we had everyone who was gonna make it across already! Welcome back, Steel! Always great to see another of the Samurai fans back in the team!

I would be totally fine if we abolished the 'certified' system btw. I was only ever in this group for the friends I made here, thanks to My-Fairy inviting me in when she started it up. (No offence to Mr Wright, he's a nice guy)

steeljusticelover [CERTIFIED USER], 01/03/2020 07:39:50AM

Hey Dime! Great to see you again!

(Blackbird: My dad would more make fun of me for getting into a heated argument over it. My sister and I found tapes of the show in his office that we watch when we're bored, so he already knows we watch it. Not sure how they got there, tho)

As for why Mr Wright adopted them, I do know that one of them was an existing friend who was suddenly orphaned, so Mr Wright took him in. The other one, I really can't say. My best guess is, he just liked him... or pitied him. Maybe a mix of both.

I'll skip on reading that thread you mentioned. It looks massive.

Pocky-Hockey, 01/03/2020 09:10:43AM

Wooooow that's cool! And I'm not being sarcastic either, I'm genuinely impressed here. What are his kids names btw? You'd know, since you're friends with one of them.
BlackbirdLuck [CERTIFIED USER] [ADMIN], 01/03/2020 11:22:03AM

Pocky, we already discussed that we weren't going to invade Mr Wright's privacy or the privacy of his children. It's in the rules, and one of the reasons we closed the thread discussing them. Consider this your first warning.

SJL, I hope the other son is okay with what you've said. Is that what he told you himself?

(I've started a new thread to discuss the pros and cons of keeping or abolishing the 'certified' system, for anyone who hasn't seen it yet)

ForgotMeKnot, 01/03/2020 02:07:16PM

Is it really a breach of privacy to ask their names? I'd think we should ask SJL on his opinion, if he knows them personally. He'd know what those kids are comfortable sharing.

On that note, hi SJL. Great to see you back.

Pocky-Hockey, 01/03/2020 03:58:39PM

Exactly my point! I'd understand demanding details on their personal lives or for photos, but just asking for their names isn't crossing any kind of line I can see! It's not like we're all storming down to Wright & Co Law Offices to ask them in person.

Dime_Quarters [CERTIFIED USER] [MOD], 01/03/2020 05:47:25AM

Do we have to start another thread to have this discussion? Honestly, arguing borders feels iffy to me, because it feels it would be very easy to decide you deserve their names, then that you deserve photos, and then more and more details on them from there. That's how celebrity gossip chains got started, isn't it? Also, anything we get from Steel is secondhand, and since when do kids honestly know or appreciate an appropriate privacy filter? No offence, Steel.

Also, Steel, it feels really mean to that 'other' son to say he was adopted because Mr Wright pitied him. I certainly hope you're repeating something he told you himself and not jumping to your own conclusions. And if it is something he said himself, give that kid a hug from me and tell him to talk about it with Mr Wright. You can't let that kind of negative thought fester and ruin a relationship.

BlackbirdLuck [CERTIFIED USER] [ADMIN], 01/03/2020 09:36:50PM

I propose we not demand ANY details from SJL and leave it to him to offer any information he has made certain the Wrights are comfortable with. Mr Wright knows you're a member of the fanclub, right SJL? I seem to remember MyF mentioning that.
Alright Blackbird, that sounds good with me.
I hope we haven't scared you off, SJL. You still there?

Not everyone is able to reply immediately, Knot. Isn't SJL the one who could only get on the forum through school computers? I don't think schools are back yet, so he might be having trouble getting online.

Steel! Great to see you again! I thought we'd lost you to the haters there! It's not quite as grand as it once was, but welcome back to the PW fanclub forum!

You may notice I'm not a mod anymore. We had to cut down on the discussion boards since there are so few of us now.

Fine fine, I'll go with the suggestion Blackbird made. Still dying of curiosity over here, tho.

You sure you can't tell us anything, SJL?

Sorry I took so long to reply, been busy.

At this point, I'm not going to say anything more about the Wrights. And Blackbird, Dime, I was repeating something he told me. Don't worry, he's going to go over it with his dad. He appreciates the advice. :)

We have a couple of home computers, but they belong to Dad and they're ancient. My brother and our best friend head out to the library sometimes to book time on the computers there. Usually though, we just use our school laptops, but they're a little old and we have to return 'em over summer.

Hey Liz! Don't worry, I've always been loyal to Mr Wright. :) The forum may not be as crowded as it used to be, but that just means we'll all be closer as friends, right? Also, he only found out about this place through me, so he knows I'm a part of it, don't worry.

That's good to hear, Steel. I hope your friend feels better after talking about it with him.
I don't remember you bringing up your family before, now I think about it. I guess it's easier to talk about personal stuff with a smaller group, huh?

Mr Wright didn't know about this place before!? I always thought he did!

**Thunderdome, 01/04/2020 08:09:59PM**

It's not like he'd know we've reformed, tho. We're deliberately keeping this one a secret.

**ForgotMeKnot, 01/04/2020 08:41:15PM**

I'd always thought it was originally called 'semi-official' precisely because he DIDN'T know. MyF and Precious were close friends of his or something, weren't they? I always assumed MyF started the club because she OBVIOUSLY had a massive crush on him, and kept it a secret because she was embarrassed about it.

Oh, but this is all grown-up talk. Ignore us old fogeys, SJL. You're the baby of the group now, so we're gonna look after you, okay? :)

**steeljusticelover [CERTIFIED USER], 01/04/2020 08:50:59PM**

Just because I'm the youngest, doesn't make me a child. :| I'm the oldest in my family, not counting my dad.

(and Precious would totally agree with you on MyF having a crush)

**Liztropical, 01/04/2020 08:52:34PM**

Hey, no smacktalking about the Fairys! If MyF says there was nothing between them, there was nothing between them!

Steel, don't you have school tomorrow? I'd say that makes you the baby of the forum on its own! ;)

**steeljusticelover [CERTIFIED USER], 01/04/2020 09:04:29PM**

You guys are as bad as my dad and sister. :|

Chapter End Notes

Aside from Apollo and Maggey, there are two other Ace Attorney characters hiding behind the above usernames. Both are from the original trilogy, and they should be easy to spot by looking at the online handles I gave them.
(I hope you guys don’t mind me doing something a little different for this chapter, too)
"Dad... can we talk?"

"Sure, what about?"

"Um... privately?"

Phoenix gestured Apollo into his bedroom and closed the door behind them. Apollo was looking nervous, right hand clutched to his left elbow while his left hand dangled down against his thigh, pulled into a tight fist as he resisted crossing his arms. He stood awkwardly by the door, eyes darting around the room, and it occurred to Phoenix that neither of the boys had really set foot in his room before.

Clearing his throat, Phoenix gestured to the bed, stepping forward as if to demonstrate. "Wanna sit down?"

Apollo nodded, and followed his father to the side of the unmade single bed. They sat on its edge as one, but Apollo kept his gaze focussed on the floor, studying the beige carpet.

There was a short, awkward silence. "So," Phoenix spoke up, hands clasped together in his lap, "what did you want to talk about?"

The teen stayed quiet a few more moments, gathering his thoughts. "Dad," he mumbled, staring at the carpet, "why did you decide to adopt me?"

Phoenix was too shocked to respond for a second. "'Why'?
he repeated.

Apollo only nodded in answer.

"Well..." Phoenix muttered, reaching up with one hand to rub the back of his head uncertainly. "That's a tough question." He then frowned, giving his son a curious stare. "Why'd you wait so long to ask?"

"I was just thinking, is all," Apollo insisted. "You barely knew me... not like you knew Luke."

Phoenix mentally waved away the image of the Psyche-Lock as it popped up around his son, deciding the real answer was 'it's personal'. "I knew enough," he said, resting a hand on Apollo's shoulder. "You got along well with Trucy, and with Luke. You clearly didn't object to me."

Apollo slowly turned his head to look up at Phoenix.

"Luke even said at the time, the two of you and your friend Clay obviously didn't want to be separated," Phoenix continued, "although it looked like you seemed to think that was happening
anyway." He took in a deep breath and sighed, giving his son a smile. "I knew from that first meeting you were an outstanding, dedicated young man, and, if it was at all possible, I was going to be making room for you here... if you wanted to accept it, of course."

Apollo stared at Phoenix for a few quiet moments, seemingly studying him for any hint of a lie. "It wasn't because you pitied me?"

At that, Phoenix almost laughed in surprise, removing his hand from Apollo's shoulder. 'No, no, serious face, serious face!' "What? Of course not!" he cried, incredulously. "Why would you-?" He then frowned as the events of that first Saturday they had spent together ran back through his mind, and he remembered how the two of them had discussed Apollo's bracelet while Luke and Trucy were otherwise occupied. Grimacing, he added, "Oh... actually, I can see why you thought that."

Apollo briefly glanced away, looking uncomfortable.

"I'm so sorry, Apollo," Phoenix said, moving his arm back up to hold Apollo in a sideways hug. "I should really have talked it over with you at some point. I didn't think at all about how you would have seen it."

"Mmm," Apollo mumbled, and Phoenix thought he saw a hint of tears in the corners of Apollo's eyes before the teen threw his face into Phoenix's chest, clinging to him in a tight hug. "Thank you, Dad. For everything."

Phoenix couldn't resist a smile at the brief moment of deja-vu, and returned the hug. "You're very welcome. You know what we need, though?"

"What?" Apollo's muffled voice responded.

Grinning, Phoenix's gaze turned to a deck of cards on his bedside table. "How much do you know about poker?"

January 5, 7:06PM

Borscht Bowl Club

On the one hand, Apollo was glad he'd taken the advice of his online friends and brought up his concerns with Phoenix as to why he'd been adopted. They'd talked, hugged it out and that was that.

"A pro watches their opponent's body language for any 'tells', ticks in their movements that give away if they have a good or a bad hand."

On the other hand, now Apollo was being introduced to his father's real job... the hard way. And the fact that Trucy hadn't been exaggerating when she described how badly Phoenix played piano wasn't helping.

"Trucy's quite good at it, so she's been along and helped me out a few times. Since you share her
ability, I think you'll have no trouble spotting them yourself."

"Isn't that cheating, though?"

"Nope. Besides, I don't think I'll be needing help for any games that happen tonight. This is just for you to practise."

Apollo sat at the table next to the grand piano, forehead on the bare wood and hands over his ears. It didn't do much to block the discordant plinks and plonks of Phoenix's fingers on the white keys (he didn't seem to bother even aiming for the black ones), but Apollo couldn't resist trying anyway.

"You holding up over there, Apollo?" Phoenix asked, a smile on his face. "Sorry to stick you with the worst table in the house."

Apollo looked up. "Worst?"

"It's next to the piano," Phoenix pointed out with a grin.

Apollo rolled his eyes, dropping his head back on the table's surface. "Of course," he mumbled. 'At least Dad's aware he's a terrible pianist...'

Phoenix laughed. "You do remember we discussed things you could do to keep yourself occupied if you're bored?" He gestured to the black backpack on the floor by Apollo's feet. "You've got my old work tablet in there, some books to read..."

"Yeah, yeah," Apollo replied, reluctantly sitting up to stare down at the bag. Running through the mental list of what had been packed as his 'anti-boredom supplies', he had to admit it was the tablet computer that intrigued him the most. Luke had spoken briefly of what was in their father's old 'Court Record' when he had briefly used it, and Apollo remembered hearing that there seemed to still be evidence lists from some of Phoenix's past trials. Mind made up, the teen reached into the backpack and dug through it until he found the thin tablet computer, turning it on as he pulled it into his lap.

"Password's 'x-mas list', no spaces," Phoenix said.

Apollo blinked in surprise as he looked up at his father, who was still tapping away at the piano. "What?"

"X-mas list," Phoenix repeated, shooting a quick grin as his son. "All lowercase except for a capital L, no spaces or punctuation." He chuckled. "Don't worry, I change it up all the time. Force of habit."

It took a moment for the intended message to register in Apollo's brain. "Oh. Thanks." Returning to the computer in his lap, he carefully tapped out the password on the onscreen keyboard.

Phoenix smiled from his seat on the piano stool, clumsily attempting one of the few tunes Maya had tried to teach him in the many quiet weeks they shared between cases. He had very quickly stopped being self-conscious about his total lack of talent when it came to music, especially with his new boss assuring him "The worse you play, the more people wish to play poker, da?" It had certainly already proven to be an asset at times, helping persuade the occasional wary challenger to fortify their nerves and challenge him already just to stop the terrible death throes of once-decent music assaulting their ears.

It was quite a stroke of luck, finding the Borscht Bowl Club. After adopting Trucy, Phoenix knew
his one chance to clear his name lay with finding her birth father, Shadi "Zak Gramarye" Enigmar. Given Enigmar's... unique method of choosing an attorney, the former lawyer figured his best bet to find him was on the poker circuit, and had thus thrown himself into researching the oftentimes underground community of not-quite-gamblers. Bolstered by his win over Enigmar, Phoenix had walked into the Borscht Bowl Club (it was the closest to his home and thus first on his list) and talked himself up to the owner as 'unbeatable', putting his absolute best bluffing face on. By some miracle, he easily won the two games the owner challenged him to, and was immediately hired. He attributed the fact that he still had yet to lose to both his usual dumb luck and Trucy's occasional 'help'. Plus, the longer his winning streak continued, the more agreeable the boss was towards ensuring his best asset was treated well.

The door of the small restaurant opened and closed, and a tall man with blond hair spilling over his shoulder in a twisted ponytail entered the room. He looked around, tugging on the cuffs of his suit jacket, before fixing his gaze on the grand piano in the corner and heading over. Phoenix resisted a smirk as he noticed Apollo was still engrossed in whatever he was reading on the screen of the Court Record, his back to the rapidly-approaching visitor.

Phoenix ended his latest attempt at a song by running his hand up and down the keys and spinning on the piano stool to face the man, throwing his arms out wide. "Kristoph!" he called, making Apollo jump and look around franticly as he noticed they had a visitor. "Been a while, hasn't it?"

"A few weeks, yes," Kristoph replied, giving Phoenix a polite but friendly smile as he reached the table. He turned to Apollo with a curious look. "I see you've brought one of your sons tonight."

"This is my eldest, Apollo," Phoenix said, gesturing to his son, before looking to the teen and gesturing to their visitor. "Apollo, this is a friend of mine, Kristoph Gavin. He's a defence attorney."

Apollo was halfway through acknowledging the man with a nod before Phoenix's words registered and he looked up at Kristoph in shock. "You're a defence attorney!?" he repeated, suddenly noticing the circular golden badge on Kristoph's lapel.

Kristoph nodded, looking down at Apollo. "Indeed I am. Do you have an interest in law?"

Apollo turned bright red, looking away. "Uh, yeah, I do," he admitted, before boldly returning his gaze upwards. "I'm gonna be a defence attorney too one day!"

"Oh?" Kristoph replied, amusement tugging at the corner of his lips. "Intending to bring honour back to the family name, are we?"

The teen was confused for only a moment before again blushing and shrinking into his chair, hugging the computer in his hands close to his chest. "Oh, uh, I guess it does look like that, doesn't it..."

Phoenix laughed. "It's a dream he's had since before we met," he explained, waving for his friend to sit. "But enough small talk, Kristoph! We have some catching up to do!" He winked. "And after that, I'm sure my son will want to grill you on the wonders of life behind the defence bench."

Apollo somehow turned even redder. "Daaaaaaad..."

Kristoph only gave Apollo a serene smile as he sat in the offered chair. "I would be glad to," he insisted.

View the Court Record
"You're not angling them right," Apollo told his sister as they sat by the small lake. "You have to throw it more like this!" He demonstrated with a wave of his arm.

Trucy frowned in thought, picking at the small pile of pebbles between them that the pair had collected together. "This is harder than it looks!" she complained, but still picked out another smooth rock and again knelt as close to the water as she dared.

"Throw it flat," Apollo instructed, rushing to crouch by her side and again imitating a throw with his own arm. "Like you're playing baseball, swinging the bat."

"I haven't played much baseball," Trucy muttered, but threw the pebble anyway. To her surprise, the small stone skipped once off the flat surface of the water before disappearing into the depths. "I did it!" she cried.

"I knew you'd manage it!" Apollo said in congratulations, grinning as he watched his sister rush back to the small pile of rocks to pick out another. "I figured this would be easy for you, since it's a kind of magic trick, in its own way."

Trucy giggled as she dropped back into a crouch at the water's edge, tongue sticking out as she prepared another throw. "And I'm the best there is at magic tricks!" she boasted, tossing her stone only to watch in disappointment as it failed to skip. "Aw..." Undeterred, she ran back for another pebble to try again.

Apollo softly laughed as he carefully leaned back and sat down properly, hugging his knees. He watched his sister in silent thought for a few moments, before softly calling, "Hey, Truce?"

"Mmm?" Trucy replied, carefully aiming her next throw over the water.

"Do..." he started to say, then paused and took a breath before continuing, "do you think Dad will be going to work tonight?"

Trucy threw her pebble, silently cheering as it skipped once before dropping into the still water. "He hasn't said anything, so I don't think so," she replied, staying put for the moment as she turned to face Apollo with a frown. "Are you going to replace me when Daddy needs help now?"

Apollo froze. "Uh..."

"'Cuz that would be awesome!" Trucy continued, grinning. "That old club is so smelly, and Daddy isn't always playing poker, so I have to sit at the table, bored stiff, and listen to Daddy's piano playing!" She rolled her eyes exaggeratedly. "It's so boring!"

Apollo blinked in surprise. "You... don't like helping Dad out?"

"Nope." Trucy shook her head, jumping to her feet and skipping to their small pile of rocks to pick out another suitable candidate for skipping. "Well, I like the actual 'helping' part, it's just the in-
between I hate!"

Laughing, Apollo watched Trucy run back to the water's edge with another pebble. "How'd you end up helping him, anyway?"

"Uncle Larry and Uncle Edgeworth were too busy to babysit me this one time," Trucy explained, sitting at her brother's side. "Daddy had to bring me in to work, and he had this big important game lined up with this guy from another club who was supposed to be unbeatable." She grinned. "Daddy beat him, of course!"

"Of course," Apollo repeated with a smile.

"Anyway," Trucy continued, rubbing her fingers along the smooth edges of the pebble in her hands, "Daddy let me sit next to him, and I knew his game was important, so I thought I'd help him. I whispered to him, I said 'He's got a good hand, I can tell!' And Daddy listened to me, too!" She smiled to herself, looking at her hands. "Daddy was really surprised when we talked about it after! Every time he had a big game after that, or if no-one could babysit me, he'd ask me to come along and help. Since I'm a kid, no-one really pays any attention to what I'm doing there, anyway."

Apollo looked out over the small lake, his mind already looking back to the previous Sunday. Phoenix had had two games that night, one just after Kristoph left and one not long before they packed up to head home. As instructed, he'd focused his time on watching Phoenix's opponent, and surprised himself when he was so easily able to pick up the 'tells' Phoenix had told him about, mostly thanks to his sudden realisation midway through the match that his bracelet tightened around his wrist when said 'tells' were happening.

"That guy sure liked to tap his finger a lot..."

"Yep. Probably thought doing it all the time lessened its likelihood of being picked up."

"Are all tells that easy to notice? Like, a tapping finger slowing down or speeding up?"

"Not all of them. The best players are so difficult to read, only you and Trucy would be able to do it."

"But... how do I know if you've spotted it or not? What if I want to help you, like Trucy does?"

"... You don't."

The second visitor to challenge Phoenix was, as promised, much harder to read. Apollo had pretty quickly noticed he could feel when the guy had a good or a bad hand, but, now he had the help of his bracelet to tell him when to focus, it took him only a little longer to identify why. He remembered deciding there was no way Phoenix could have noticed the tell, then screwing up his courage to reach out and tap his father's elbow, whispering "Good hand." Phoenix had only glanced at him, giving no other visible acknowledgement of the hint, but Apollo was pretty sure he'd listened, as the rest of the game moved from a neck-and-neck tie to the outright wins Phoenix was becoming known for.

"Well done. I figured you must have spotted his tell, the way you were staring at him!"

Apollo winced, sitting back down in his chair by the piano. "Was I that obvious?"

Phoenix laughed, turning around on his stool to face the piano. "Your eyes bugged out, you were staring so hard at him!" He gave his embarrassed son a grin. "How could you tell, by the way?"
"I wasn't sure at first," Apollo admitted with a shrug, rubbing at his bracelet. "I just kept feeling like he was smiling, or frowning... then I realised, he actually was, but he hid it so quick it was barely noticeable. I only picked it up because..." He trailed off, deciding not to talk about his bracelet just yet, and smiled nervously. "I... guess I helped you, then?"

Phoenix simply smiled for a moment before reaching out and ruffling Apollo's hair, to the boy's annoyance.

Apollo frowned at the lake as one of Trucy's stones managed to skip twice before disappearing below the water, idly rubbing at the bracelet on his wrist. "What about Dad?"

"What about him?" Trucy asked, walking back to pick out another rock.

"His tells," Apollo explained, looking up to watch his sister. "We had the guy who tapped his finger and the guy who hid his expressions... but no matter how hard I watched Dad, I could never pick up what was on his mind."

Trucy paused, thoughtfully tapping the stone in her hand against the pile.

Apollo sighed, looking back out over the small lake. "He's such a different person when he plays poker. Totally unreadable. It's almost... scary, in a way."

"Daddy hides a lot more than you think," Trucy quietly said, moving to sit next to her brother and returning his confused look with a sad gaze. "He was really hurt when he couldn't be a lawyer anymore. I could see it in his eyes, all the time. Sometimes, he'd forget I was there and just stare at his office, looking like he was going to cry."

Apollo couldn't imagine their carefree father crying. He'd seen Phoenix angry, and mischievous, and relaxed - even the kind of thoughtful someone gets up to only when they don't realise they're being watched! - but he'd never seen him sad. It struck him suddenly that there was a lot he didn't really know about his father, no matter how many casefiles he'd read.

"I did my best to make him better," Trucy continued, fiddling with the stone in her hands. "Even though he doesn't look it anymore, I think it still hurts him. He's just got better at hiding it."

Apollo found his thoughts turning to Luke, and the few rare nights when he had been woken by his brother's crying, missing his parents and his former home despite months having passed since he unwillingly left them behind. "They don't want us to worry," he pointed out, "Dad and Luke. That's reasonable, I suppose."

Trucy huffed, looking out over the lake. "But we're family now! We're supposed to worry! It's our job!"

Laughing, Apollo tipped Trucy's hat off her head and ruffled her hair, turning her frown into a giggle. "I guess it's up to us to remind them of that then, huh?"

The pair's laughter was interrupted by a soft clearing of the throat behind them, and the duo spun around to see an elderly man watching them, smiling in a friendly way as he leant on a cane. "Excuse me," he asked them, "but would you two know where the exit to Kitaki Avenue is? I'm afraid I've gotten a little lost this afternoon!"

Apollo nodded, and pointed down a path to the man's right. "If you go that way, and turn right, it should lead you straight there."

The man peered down in the direction Apollo pointed, then gave the pair a grin. "My eternal thanks,
young man!" He winked to Trucy. "You have a very intelligent brother there, young missy!"

Trucy shrugged, grinning mischievously. "He's not, usually."

"Hey!" Apollo protested, but Trucy only giggled.

The man laughed. "Ah, I knew when I looked at you that you had to be brother and sister! You've probably heard this a lot, but the two of you have the same face, you know!"

Apollo and Trucy were too confused to respond, glancing at each other. "Uh..." Apollo mumbled.

"Well, I'd better be going!" the man announced, tipping his hat to them as he slowly began to walk off. "Again, my thanks for your help!"

The pair silently watched as the man disappeared down the path, then looked at each other with confused frowns.
Apollo ran his hand over his carefully gelled spikes one last time, opening the door to the bedroom he shared with his brother. They were home from school on spring break, so Apollo and Luke were making the most of their days home, in-between meeting up with Clay to do various things around the city together. For now though, Apollo was simply set on finding his school-issued laptop.

‘I wonder if Pocky's replied to that thread yet?’ the teen wondered as he walked over to his side of the room. His eyes ran over Luke's side, checking on the bronze statuette displayed on his brother's bedside table, before he returned his attention to his own, the black rectangle sitting half-off the table’s surface underneath the re-purposed desk lamp, a cord dangling from a corner down to a power-point near the bottom of the wall. ‘Actually, I'm surprised a bunch of Troupe Gramarye fans have no idea Magnifi had a granddaughter... Now I'm wondering if I should have mentioned that or not.’ He reached for the laptop, intending to unplug it from the charger cable, but his thoughts on his computer and online friends were distracted as he noticed something sitting on his bed.

‘Huh...?’ Leaving the laptop for now, Apollo reached for the paper and plucked it off his pillow, carefully opening it to investigate the strange item.

The first thing that caught his attention was the photo at the very top. It was of a young woman, on the cusp of adulthood, sitting with her elbows resting on a table in a beam of sunlight, a lush forest visible behind her. She was looking off to her left, a finger held against her lips in an odd cross between a frown and a smile. ‘Why is she familiar?’ Apollo asked himself, slowly sitting on his bed as he clutched the paper. ‘She's very beautiful.’ Tearing his eyes away from the picture, he turned his attention to the rest of the paper, and quickly noticed it appeared to be a printout of an old newspaper article. ‘What's the date on this thing...? October, two-thousand-three? That makes this thing older than me. What's it doing here?’ He blinked in surprise as he finally read the headline of the article, and sighed as he realised who the page must belong to. ‘Gramarye. Of course. It's Trucy's. Is that why the lady seems familiar? She's probably a relation. Maybe an aunt?’ Although he didn't want to pry by reading the article in full, he couldn't resist taking another close look at the woman in the photo. She was wearing a white dress, and earrings that sparkled so harshly in the sunlight that the resulting lens flare totally hid them from view. On her wrists were twin bracelets, which Apollo only glanced over at first until the pattern on them registered and he snapped his attention back to them instantly. ‘What the...!? They look just like mine!’ His gaze jumped back and forth from the picture to his own bracelet on his left wrist for a few moments, comparing the two and failing to find any differences between them. ‘But... what's one of the Gramaryes doing with bracelets just like mine...? Are... are they not as unique as I thought...?’ Shaking his head to clear out the creeping uncertainties, Apollo decided to take the plunge and read the article.

GRAMARYE DAUGHTER LEAVES TROUPE?

Lone child of the famous Magnifi Gramarye, Thalassa Gramarye, has quit performing with the world-famous magician's troupe. "It's by no means permanent," she says in a public statement made
yesterday. "I'm not ruling out returning to magic. I simply feel that, at this point in my life, I'm happier away from the stage."

Anonymous sources say the eighteen-year-old has recently wed Borginian performer Hyperion Reylu, and may already be expecting a child herself.

When asked if her father supported her decision, Thalassa responded, "My father has always supported every choice I made for myself, and I will do the same for any children I may have in my future."

*Pictured above, Thalassa Gramarye, showing off her Gramarye heirloom bracelets. Photo credit: Shadi Enigmar.*

"'G-Gramarye heirloom bracelets...? It... it can't be!" Apollo resisted the urge to crumple the paper into a small ball. He thought back to everything Trucy had mentioned over the past five months about her first family, and remembered, aside from her father's famous disappearance and her grandfather's murder, that she had described her mother as 'disappeared' once. *But what exactly did she mean by that? And is this Trucy's mother, or an aunt?* He stared at the article for a few more moments before coming to a decision. *'I guess I only have one option here: interrogate Trucy.'*

Clutching the paper in his hand, Apollo jumped to his feet, abandoning his computer and charging out the door into the hallway. He had last seen his sister ('Oh god no, we might actually be blood-related') watching television with Luke in the office, so he headed downstairs to check there.

March 19, 10:01AM

Wright Talent Agency

Phoenix's Office

"*In international news, a ruling has finally been given today on the investigation into former British Prime Minister, Bill Hawks, and his involvement in underhanded dealings both before and after his election that is alleged to have caused a deadly explosion in central London over ten years ago, and even to have led to his own kidnapping last year.*"

"About time!"

"Not a very gentlemanly comment there, Luke."

Apollo opened the door from the kitchen, pausing as he looked around and was unable to see his sister. "Where's Trucy?" he asked.

Phoenix and Luke looked up from the couch, where they had been watching the television. "In her room," Phoenix answered with an almost gleeful smile.

The teen resisted growling to himself. "Argh, I just came down here!" he cried, waving the paper in his hands as he turned to leave again.

Luke frowned, noting Apollo's agitation. "Are you okay, Apollo?"
"I'm-! I'm fine!" Apollo insisted, resisting the urge to slam the door as he stormed out.

Luke stood to follow his brother, but Phoenix stopped him with a hand to his arm. "If he wants help, he'll ask for it," he told the younger teen.

March 19, 10:04AM
Wright Talent Agency
Trucy's Room

Apollo knocked only once on Trucy's door before opening it, finding the young girl within stood in front of her full-length mirror, her wooden Mister Hat puppet propped up from a hidden mechanism somewhere under her cape. She turned in surprise as her brother entered, swinging so fast she almost toppled over from the carefully-balanced weight of the puppet on her back.

After checking his sister hadn't hurt herself, Apollo cleared his throat and held out the paper in his hands with a stern look. "I think I found something of yours in my room."

Trucy raised an eyebrow at the piece of paper. "But I haven't been in your room," she pointed out.

When Apollo only deepened his frown, she sighed and took the paper anyway, unfolding it to look at the contents printed on the inside. She blinked in surprise as she saw the photo. "That's Mommy!" she cried, then looked up at Apollo with wide eyes. "Where'd you get a picture of my mommy!?"

Now it was Apollo's turn to look confused. "What are you talking about? It isn't yours?" he asked, then shook his head. "Look, I found this on my bed. If that's your mom, maybe you'll know about those." He pointed to the photo, tapping firmly at her wrists.

"Her bracelet?" Trucy asked, then gasped in surprise. "Woah, she has two of them in this! I didn't know Mommy had two!"

Apollo's hand jumped to his left wrist, rubbing at the bracelet there. "Well, this photo is from before even I was born, so-"

"Woah!" Trucy cried again, her eyes jumping from the photo to Apollo's bracelet, and she grabbed the teen's hand, pulling him down a little as she compared his bracelet to the two in the photo. "Yeah, they look exactly like your's!" She giggled, releasing Apollo's hand and watching him gingerly rub it while shooting her an annoyed look. "It's funny, though," she continued, "cuz Mommy only ever had one that I saw." Her smile turned sad. "She used to wear it all the time... she was probably wearing it when she disappeared, too."

Apollo suddenly felt guilty for jumping into his sister's room as though she were being accused of something. "What happened to her?" he asked.

"She was practising a new trick," Trucy explained, staring at the photo, "with Daddy and Uncle Valant. They made her disappear, but something went wrong. She didn't come back."

'A... literal disappearing trick?' Apollo thought to himself. 'Somehow, something seems off about that story...'

One hand on Mister Hat's bowtie to keep him steady, Trucy ran to her bedside table, pulling out the
small drawer and rooting around in the mess of small objects there until she pulled out a golden locket. She flipped it open, smiling at the picture inside, then gestured for Apollo to join her, holding out the locket for him to see. "Look, it's even the same picture!"

Apollo approached, taking the locket and examining the small photo contained inside. Just as Trucy said, it looked to be the original picture from the article, cut down for the locket in a way that hid her bracelets perfectly from view. "Your mom's pretty," he said.

Trucy giggled, holding the article in her hands close to her chest. "Silly! She must be your mommy, too!"

Apollo frowned, holding out the locket to return it and pretending he wasn't blushing. "We can't say that for sure!" he protested.

Trucy took back the locket, still giggling as she returned it to her drawer. After bumping it closed with her hip, she pulled her cape closed in front of her and concentrated hard, trying to hide the movement of her arm underneath. Mister Hat bounced as his mouth flapped open, 'saying' "Hey, you need to look at the facts, kid! Wooden you say it looks pretty certain?"

Apollo rolled his eyes, resisting the urge to punch the puppet in the face.

"Oh!" Trucy cried as a thought occurred to her, and she quickly withdrew Mister Hat back into his resting place, grabbing her hat from his head as the mechanism rapidly obeyed. "We need to tell Daddy and Luke!" she proclaimed, grabbing Apollo's wrist and dragging him away.

"W-wait!" Apollo cried, but Trucy didn't listen, determinedly pulling him out of the room.
The door from the kitchen opened with a bang, making Luke spin around in surprise to see Trucy drag a very red Apollo into the room. Phoenix only smiled at the two and quickly muted the television.

"Guess what!" Trucy announced, holding the article up high. "Apollo's mommy is my mommy!"

"What!?" Luke cried, jumping to his feet to take the article in Trucy's hands. "How do you- oh, actually, she looks just like you two."

Apollo finally pulled his wrist from Trucy's hands. "No, she doesn't," he insisted.

Trucy giggled. "Mommy gave Apollo one of her special bracelets! That's how we know!"

"Oh yeah!" Luke laughed as he noticed the bracelets in the photo. "And I guess that's why you both have the same ability to sense lies, huh?"

Apollo frowned in thought, immediately remembering his bracelet's tendency to tell him when people were lying. "Didn't think of that," he admitted.

Phoenix grinned, watching Trucy bounce in the excitement of their discovery. "Well, I guess that just makes it official for you two, doesn't it?"

While Trucy giggled, Apollo gave their father a suspicious look. "Wait a second, did you know about this!?"

Phoenix shrugged, scratching his face idly. "I may have lost that article there somewhere in the vicinity of your bedroom this morning..."

Apollo sighed and rolled his eyes. "At least we now know the real reason you adopted me..."

"Oh!" Trucy gasped, clapping her hands and turning to Apollo. "You're a Gramarye! I have to teach you some magic tricks!"

"Magic...?" Apollo repeated, warily backing away already.

"It's the family business!" Trucy insisted, jumping forward to grab Apollo's arm again. "C'mon!" With that, she had once again dragged him out of the room.

Luke blinked in surprise, the old article still in his hands. "Well, I certainly wasn't seeing this coming." He moved to sit back down next to his father, looking up at him curiously. "You really knew all this time?"

Phoenix only grinned, moving to unmute the television. "I have to keep some secrets."
Did Luke get on to you about going to the library tmrw?

Yup. He said you had something to tell me? And so soon after my birthday too! Is this a coming out of the closet thing? You're free to tell your best friend anything yknow ;( I wont judge.

Very funny. :\ Actually Trucy wants to come with us. We have some big news she wants to tell you in person

Ah I see. She can come along if she wants.

You don't mind?

Trutru's cool. She can come with.

Don't call her that

I'll see yo guys at the library tmrw ;) right Wright?

Why are we friends

You know you love me.

Space dork :P

March 20, 10:13AM
Public Library

"Are you serious?" Clay asked, astonished.

"Yup!" Trucy chirped, bouncing in her seat opposite Clay at the table in the library. "Cool, huh?"

Apollo grinned, still setting up his school laptop on Clay's left. "Told you you'd want to be sitting down for this," he said.

Clay was, for once, speechless, leaning back in his chair and staring between Trucy and Apollo with a confused frown. "So you two...? How did you find out for sure?"

Giving a world-weary sigh, Apollo couldn't resist rolling his eyes. "Apparently Dad knew the entire time. He must've been researching Trucy's family at some point and found this old newspaper article from before I was born about our mom."

"Mommy gave Apollo one of her special Gramarye bracelets!" Trucy butted in, pointing to Apollo's wrist eagerly. "And there was that old guy in the park a few months ago that thought we looked alike, and Luke thinks we both look like Mommy, and we can both tell when people are lying!"

Clay crossed his arms, tapping his chin in thought. "Huh. Guess wearing that old bracelet
everywhere *did* pay off then."

Apollo shrugged, turning to his computer and trying to hide his smile.

"You said you have the same mom?" Clay continued, turning to Trucy. "What about your dad?"

Trucy shook her head. "Different daddies. My Daddy wasn't married to Mommy until after Apollo was born."

"We don't know for sure yet," Apollo continued, tapping at his laptop keyboard, "but that old article Dad found is in the right time-frame for Mom to have been pregnant with me, and she'd just married someone else at the time, who we can only guess was my birth father." He paused, frowning in thought. "She was only eighteen, too. She was so young..."

Clay hummed curiously, then gave Apollo a smirk as he saw his friend's screen. "You found this out yesterday and you haven't already looked it up?" He pointed at the search engine, currently set to search Thalassa's name. "I thought that was why you wanted to come here today!"

"Not everything can be found on the internet!" Luke announced, arriving at the table with a pile of books in his arms, which he deposited next to Trucy and opposite Apollo. He promptly sat down and began to look through them, one by one.

Apollo scoffed, swiping his finger on his laptop's touchpad. "Well, I was trying to do online research yesterday, but a certain someone insisted on teaching me sleight-of-hand instead!"

Trucy stuck her tongue out at her brother in response.

Clay laughed. "Oh yeah, if you two are actual blood-siblings, that makes you a Gramarye!" Clay realised, slapping Apollo's shoulder. "Are you going to learn magic and perform with her on stage, then?"

Trucy gasped loudly in sudden excitement.

Apollo went pale. "Oh God, no."

"But it would be so fun!" Trucy insisted. "Besides, I've tried teaching sleight-of-hand to Daddy and some of my friends at school, and they took forever to figure it out! You *have* to learn more tricks with me!"

"They what?" Apollo repeated, remembering how much praise Trucy had given him the previous night when he finally perfected the trick. "But it's the easiest trick in the book, isn't it?"

Luke laughed, looking up from his pile of research. "You may as well, Apollo," he pointed out. "If you're as good at it as Trucy thinks, you might find it fun!"

"Yeah!" Trucy agreed.

Apollo groaned, but eventually nodded his agreement. "Fine, I'll give it a try."

"Yay!" Trucy cheered, jumping in her seat as she threw her fists into the air in triumph.

Luke hurriedly shushed Trucy. "This is a library!" he reminded her.

Clay stifled giggles for a few moments, then finally noticed what most of Luke's books appeared to be about. "Luke, are you looking up Greek mythology?" he asked in surprise.
Looking up from his book, Luke grinned sheepishly. "I've been meaning to do more reading on it for a while," he admitted. "I was actually wondering if Apollo was given his name as some kind of family theme, so I'm trying to see if I can find the names of the rest of Troupe Gramarye at the moment."

"Ooh!" Trucy cooed, looking over Luke's shoulder at his books. "Is 'Trucy' the name of a Greek god?" she asked.

Luke shook his head. "'Fraid not," he said.

Apollo snickered, taking a sip from his water bottle. "I doubt Luke's gonna find anything, Truce. 'Magnifi', 'Zak' and 'Valant' aren't exactly Greek-sounding."

"'Thalassa' might be, though," Clay pointed out. "You never know."

Trucy huffed, leaning her forearms on the table as she continued peering at Luke's books. "What about 'Artemis'?"

Apollo spat out his drink.


Clay laughed. "Where'd you get 'Artemis' from?"

"It's my middle name," Trucy explained with a shrug. "Mommy wanted it to be my first name, but Daddy didn't like it."

Lacking any more liquid in his mouth to spit, Apollo only continued to sputter.

Luke pulled a small book from the middle of his pile, and slid it over to Trucy. "Artemis was Apollo's twin sister, and the goddess of the hunt! She's also probably the oldest character in the entire Greek pantheon!"

Trucy excitedly flipped open the offered book, 'The Beginner's Guide to Greek Mythology', cooing in excitement as she skimmed the pages.

"She had a chariot pulled by deer with golden antlers," Luke continued, one finger pointing into the air, "and fourteen hunting dogs! Some say she was also the masculine to Apollo's feminine!"

Apollo, still coughing, rolled his eyes as he checked his computer was okay. "Gee, how flattering."

Clay just laughed. "Luke's done his research!" he pointed out, elbowing Apollo. "Impressive!"

Ignoring his friend, Apollo returned his attention to his computer screen. "If only it was as easy to find information on Mom as it is on our namesakes," he grumbled.

"What do you mean?" Trucy asked, looking up from her book. "Troupe Gramarye was really popular! It should be everywhere!"

Apollo paused before answering, frowning at his screen. "You said she 'disappeared' four years ago now?"

Trucy nodded.

"I can't find anything on it," Apollo admitted, throwing his hands in the air and leaning back in his chair. "She's performing with Troupe Gramarye, then she just stops and everyone says she's left the
Troupe, but there's no trace of what actually happened to her."

"Really?" Luke asked. "Nothing at all?"

Trucy sadly turned another page in her book, but said nothing.

Clay hummed in thought, tapping his chin. "What about your dad?" he asked his friend. "Your real one, I mean?"

Apollo sighed. "I don't know where Dad, our real dad, found that article," he said, unable to resist the jab at Clay's wording as he reached into his bag to remove the mentioned printout, "so I'm not sure I'll find anything else on 'im we can read. This says he was Borginian, and they use a different alphabet to us... Not to mention, when he died, anything that could identify him burned up, and Mom had disappeared in the chaos; There's no information to find there."

Trucy blinked in surprise, watching Apollo carefully.

"Bummer," Clay sympathised.

"There's nothing stopping us from trying!" Luke said, trying to perk up his brother. "I'm positive we'll get something useful out of today's research, even if we have to use an online translator to do it!"


View the Court Record
You’ll be happy to hear I finally told them

Told who? About what?.

OH APOLLO AND TRUCY HOW DID IT GO.

Better than I feared :) Trucy’s ecstatic and Apollo seems happy to have some answers, even if there’s still so much we don’t know. Even Luke seems happy w the news

Trucy’s actually roped Apollo into learning some magic and might be dragging him on stage in future lol

Hang on, I think Apollos texting me the news himself, I need to send him a congrats.

He just might kill me if he learns you already knew, just a warning

Maya, this is Apollo. I thought Id let you know that it turns out Trucy and I have the same birth mother, so we’re actual blood siblings and not just adopted ones

Hey wow, that's amazing! Congrats on that, kiddo!.

Don’t worry, I know you already knew

How do you know that lol I’m just congratulating you kiddo.

I overheard you and Dad over Christmas talking about something concerning me and Trucy that you weren’t telling us yet. It was this, wasn’t it?

Ah I guess you caught us fair and square then ^^; if you knew we had a secret why didn’t you ask?.

It didn’t seem like the right time tbh. Its fine, Dad probly asked you not to say anything huh?

Got it in one :) you say congrats to your sis for me.

Will do :)

Hey.
Hey Nick.

What

Guess what.

What, Maya
Apollo knew I knew and isn't mad so ha.

I repeat, ha.

Don't ha me Nick :P.

That's my line

Oh wait now Lukes texting me.

Great, get out of here :P I need to talk to Law Child

DID APOLLO TELL YOU?

YEAH HE DID ISN'T IT AMAZING.

I KNOW! AND THEY WOULD NEVER HAVE MET IF IT WEREN'T FOR ME AND NICK!

THAT MAKES YOU TWO AMAZING AS WELL IF YOU ASK ME.

Wait, why are we yelling?

You started it :P.

Nick's just come in here telling Apollo off about eavesdropping. Did he already know you knew?

Hey wait why did you both know I was in on the secret!?.

I didn't think Nick would have kept it from you, but I didn't want to assume without evidence. You and Nick are really close, after all.

Well at least you didn't eavesdrop :P And what's this about close, you been listening to Pearly?.

Nevermind Nicks my best friend I don't mind admitting that.

:) I'll talk to you later, Maya. Nick's free now if you want to call him.

Watch it kid :P.
"You can't bring a book to the dinner table, Trucy!" Luke protested, sitting down in his usual seat.

"Why not!" Trucy asked, clutching the Beginner's Guide to Greek Mythology to her chest. "I'm still reading about Apollo and Artemis!"

Phoenix stifled a laugh as he carefully removed the book from his daughter's arms and sat it on the kitchen bench, right behind his seat. "You'll damage it," he pointed out. "I'm not paying for damaged library books."

"Besides," Luke continued, arms crossed, "it's rude to read at the dinner table!"

Trucy pouted, but sat down next to an amused Apollo, who patted her shoulder sympathetically. "You'll have plenty of time to read more about them later," he pointed out.

"But I want to do it noooow," the eight-year-old whined, wriggling unhappily in her seat.

Phoenix laid out the four plates of store-bought, microwaved lasagne for the family, then sat down himself as the three children rapidly began to eat. "Dare I ask if you found anything interesting today?" he asked with a smile.

"Mommy named me 'Artemis' because she's Apollo's twin sister!" Trucy chirped.

"Oh really?" Phoenix replied.

Apollo snorted, quickly swallowing his mouthful of food. "I didn't even know Truce here had a middle name!" he laughed.

"Although," Trucy continued, "Artemis was older than Apollo, and the book says she was something called a 'virgin' goddess." She frowned in thought. "It didn't say what that means, though."

Phoenix and Apollo cast each other terrified glances.

Jumping to the rescue, Luke pointed a finger into the air knowingly, saying "That means she never kissed anyone!"

"Oh!" Trucy replied with a smile, not giving any indication she'd picked up on a lie. "That makes sense!"

Phoenix and Apollo sighed in relief.

"And," Trucy continued, "both Apollo and Artemis could heal people and also make them sick!"

Apollo nodded. "Yeah, I remember reading that. Apollo was the patron god of hospitals because of it, I think."

Luke chuckled, picking at his food with his fork. "I found something pretty interesting while conducting my own research, too!"

"More Greek mythology?" Phoenix asked with a joking grin. "Please, no, it's too much."

Giggling at Phoenix's teasing, Luke gave his siblings an excited grin. "I found where the name 'Thalassa' comes from!"
"You did!?" Apollo cried in surprise.

"She was a primordial sea goddess!" Luke explained. "Her name is also the Greek word for 'sea', so she's essentially the personification of the ocean."

Trucy frowned. "What's 'pry-mord-eel'?"

"It means she was the first one of her kind," Luke added with a smile. "I found Hyperion, too!"

Apollo perked up, unable to deny he was curious to hear the story behind his birth father's namesake. "You did?"

Luke nodded. "He was a titan. He fathered the god of the sun, as well as the goddesses of the moon and the dawn." He paused, and shrugged with an apologetic smile. "With his sister, of course."

Trucy screwed up her nose at Luke's last comment. "The Ancient Greeks were weird," she muttered.

"According to them," Phoenix pointed out, "we're the ones who are weird." He smiled. "By the way, no points for figuring out where my name comes from."

Apollo and Trucy giggled, shooting sidelong glances at each other.

"Actually," Luke continued, "there's a lot of Greek mythology in modern names... or at least, among our family."

Phoenix frowned. "You mean your name has a connection, too? 'Luke's' Biblical, isn't it?"

Luke nodded, looking sheepish. "Well, it's actually originally Greek, but... I meant Triton. He's a Greek sea god. I... never changed my name, after all."

Trucy looked confused. "I thought a 'triton' was that forky-thingy with the three points...?" She held up three fingers to illustrate her thoughts.

"That's a 'trident'," Apollo told her, resisting a laugh.

"Triton had a trident," Luke added, feeling less nervous after the change of subject, "but he's better known for carrying a giant conch shell that he used as a trumpet."

The four ate in silence for a few moments, before Phoenix turned to Apollo. "What about you, Apollo? Did your research today turn up anything?"

Apollo slowly chewed his mouthful of lasagne in thought. The moment he swallowed, he reluctantly shook his head. "Not much. I didn't find that article you gave us, and there was nothing on Trucy's and my mom that wasn't Troupe Gramarye related... but at least we tracked down my father. I know his name now."

Phoenix nodded. "I did most of my research using the courthouse library. It has a database of newspapers you can run a search through."

"Okay," Apollo noted. "I'll remember to try that one next."

"I doubt you'll get any more luck," Phoenix sadly informed him. "I didn't find anything more on either of your parents than that article you have." He shrugged. "What did you find on your father?"

Apollo thought a moment before answering. "Well... nothing I didn't already know," he admitted.
"Polly's dad died in a fire! It's so sad!" Trucy cried. "He burned to death rescuing Polly, and Mommy never found them after!"

Phoenix turned to Apollo in surprise. "What happened?"

Apollo sighed. "According to what I was told as a kid, my dad was a travelling musician," he explained. "I guess he took Mom and me with him. We were in Asia, and he took me to a performance for the country's queen..."

"You said it was arson, didn't you?" Luke added, looking concerned. "The queen died too, and the country was in so much uproar after that he was never identified."

"Mom probably thought I'd died with my dad," Apollo continued, frowning at his food. "After that, she would have gone back to Troupe Gramarye alone."

Phoenix thought over the information for a few moments. "When did all this happen?"

"October, two-thousand-four," Apollo mumbled, picking at his food. "I would have been five months old."

The family was again silent for several moments. Finally, Phoenix nodded. "That makes sense," he said.


"During the adoption process," Phoenix explained, facing Apollo, "Lauren showed me the file registering you into the foster system... Though I'm not sure how to pronounce the name of the country in question. Or where 'Justice' came from."

Apollo forced a smile. "All they knew about my dad was his stage name: 'Jangly Justice'. He told them he was from California, and that my name was Apollo. I guess nothing else ever came up before the attack."

Phoenix didn't miss that Apollo hadn't touched on the country he'd been left behind in. "If I remember correctly, the form did say you were about five months old at the time."

While Apollo stared at his food in silence, Trucy scrunched her face up in thought. "So, why didn't Mommy tell them who you were and bring you back to Grandpa?" she thought aloud. "That doesn't make sense!"

"That country's queen had just been assassinated," Luke pointed out. "I doubt the news Apollo had survived got very far at all, and it's not like your mother would have known where to look for him." He shook his head. "Even so... If she's dead, I guess we'll never know her exact actions."

"She's not dead!" Trucy insisted, perhaps a little too stubbornly, crossing her arms and fixing Luke with a glare. "She got stuck in a disappearing trick!"

Phoenix was halfway through doing the dishes when he happened to glance up at the calendar hung on a cupboard door and realised what the date was. 'April nineteen? Now why is that a familiar da-
Oh...' He was forced to grip the edges of the sink as the realisation caused him to stumble in shock, his previously content mood suddenly turned sour. 'It's... already been a year since I lost my badge...' He glanced at the time and scoffed darkly. This time last year, I was in front of the Bar Association, actively losing it...' He tried to make himself reach for one of the dirty plates in front of him, to move it to the dishwasher, but only got halfway before a memory hit him.

Phoenix hurriedly threw the last of his papers into his suitcase, cursing his latest client's refusal to co-operate and the complete lack of investigation he'd had any time to do. 'If only Maya were here,' he found himself thinking, and shook his head to rid himself of the distracting thought. 'She has enough to do. I'm perfectly capable of defending a client on my own, even one as difficult as this.' Thus, mentally psyching himself up, the blue-suited lawyer ran out the door.

The ex-lawyer felt his breathing begin to accelerate, and was suddenly glad the kids were all out right now. The last thing I need is for them to worry about me.' He hurriedly shook his hands to dry them, abandoning the sink and open dishwasher as he fled the kitchen, running upstairs in the direction of his bedroom.

He was halfway up the stairs when he spotted Detective Gumshoe on the next floor, standing around and mumbling to himself as he read through some kind of file. Grinning, Phoenix waved to his friend, jumping to the top of the stairs and calling, "Hey, Gumshoe!"

The detective looked up in surprise, smiling as he recognised the approaching defence attorney. "Hey, pal!" he replied, closing his file and holding it close to his side as he turned to face his friend. "What're you doing in the courthouse today?"

Phoenix laughed. "What else would I be doing here?" He felt a niggling sense of dread at the back of his mind as he found himself asking the same of Gumshoe, and added, "Um, you wouldn't happen to also be working the Gramarye case, would you?"

"Yep!" Gumshoe proudly replied, before suddenly realising what the question actually meant and looking confused. "Wait, you're Enigmar's lawyer? Last I heard, that other Gavin guy was workin' for 'im!"

Phoenix shrugged. "Apparently he changed his mind. Hired me last night," he explained, then cast a curious look at the file in Gumshoe's hands. "He didn't tell me anything, though. Think you could
give me a run-down before we go in?"

Gumshoe scoffed, "You'll be hearing it anyway in court, pal!"

"Ah, yes," Phoenix replied, giving his friend a cocky smirk, "the moment when I tear apart your testimony in court is always my favourite part of a trial!"

"Hey!" Gumshoe cried, glaring. "We've actually got good evidence this time! There's no way you're winning this case!"

"We'll see," Phoenix calmly replied, happily allowing himself to believe his own boasts for the moment, if only for the boost in self-confidence he desperately needed right now.

Phoenix almost tripped on the top stair, just barely catching himself before he crashed into the carpeted floor. Shaking his head, he ran down the hallway, throwing open his bedroom door and running inside, leaning against the door as it closed again behind him.

Phoenix had been given a choice: provide absolute proof Magnifi beyond a doubt wrote more in his journal, or lose the trial. Failing to protect an innocent life, especially after everything he'd gone through to get where he was, was out of the question, so he'd presented the suspicious-looking page young Trucy Enigmar had passed on to him, and pointed the finger at Valant for the murder. The court erupted into a noisy clamour, forcing the judge to repeatedly call for order so proceedings could continue.

"But, but wait!" Valant protested from the stand. "This is... That's impossible! That old man couldn't have written that..." Klavier Gavin smirked from behind the prosecutor's bench, and threw out his arm dramatically in Phoenix's direction. "Objection!" he called, then relaxed and laughed to himself. "Finally. You just couldn't resist, could you, Herr Wright?"

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, leaning palms-down on the defence bench. "Resist what?" he asked, an almost patronising tone to his voice as he spoke to the teenage rockstar opposite. "Presenting solid evidence?" 'We'll just ignore for now that I wasn't nearly as sure about it five minutes ago...' Klavier smiled cockily at the attorney for a few moments before turning to the tall podium to his left. "Herr Judge?"

"Y-yes, Prosecutor Gavin?" the judge replied.

"Might I request we put the current cross-examination on hold? The prosecution would like to call a new witness."

He could remember the feeling of dread that had built up and settled in his stomach as the audience had been ushered away and the 'forger' shown in. One hand gripping at his chest where his suit lapel used to be, the Phoenix of the present slid down the door until he was sitting on the floor, unable to keep himself from shaking slightly as the memories ran through his head.
"The regional prosecutor's office received a tip-off yesterday," Klavier explained, grinning as he fiddled with his hair. "Illegal evidence has been prepared for the trial of Zak Gramarye."

The judge frowned. "Illegal... evidence?"

"I initiated an investigation," Klavier continued, gesturing to the nervous man at the witness stand, "and found this witness. A painter to the world at large, Drew Misham has another side, you might say. He is skilled in making perfect reproductions of certain things." He paused, smirking at Phoenix. "Forgeries, in other words."

Phoenix blinked, mind still reeling as a part of him realised what was going on. "F-forgeries!" he repeated.

"W-well!" the judge cried, looking rather nervous himself. "So, we are to understand that this page here is..."

"A fake," Klavier answered, smugly resting his hands in his pants pockets. "Prepared by a certain defence attorney."

At the direct accusation, Phoenix finally managed to spring into action, throwing out an arm and shouting "Objection! Hold it! I didn't 'prepare' this evidence!"

"Objection!" came a responding shout from the other side of the courtroom. Klavier clapped his hands together, leaning forward as he grinned at the attorney opposite him. "Ah, the attorney speaks!" he almost sang in delight. "Something about this page, I presume." As he stood tall again, he began to play with his fringe, a patronising tone to his voice. "But what is he saying? It makes no sense! After all," his tone suddenly became dark as he threw out his arm to point at the defence bench, "it was you who presented this evidence to us, Phoenix Wright!"

The sudden memory of the trial of Lana Skye, and how Edgeworth had barely survived his own accusations of forged evidence, was enough to quieten Phoenix again for several minutes.

"I'm such a fool," Phoenix muttered to himself. "What's the point of this stupid investigation? I haven't found anything I can use!" He clutched his head as the hot tears began dripping down his cheeks, his body slipping to one side to lie on the floor. "I'm never getting my badge back... I'm sorry, Mia..."

April 19, 3:01PM

Wright Talent Agency

Kitchen

Trucy was the first of the trio to enter the room, looking around as she skipped to the dining table and deposited her small bag there. "Daddy!" she called. "We're back!"

Luke stretched his arms as he headed straight to the kitchen, intending to get himself a drink, and paused as he noticed the sink full of dirty dishes and the open dishwasher. "That's odd," he said, walking over to the pile and peering into the half-full sink. "Why'd he leave this?"
"Leave what?" Apollo asked, closing the door to the office behind him as he entered. "Where's Dad?" Seeing the abandoned chore, he frowned. "Wait, that's not like him."

As Apollo and Trucy followed Luke into the kitchen, the boy in blue stuck a wary finger into the soapy water. "It's not cold, but not exactly warm anymore either," he told the others, shaking his finger to dry it. "Nick can't have been gone long."

Trucy suddenly gasped. "Wait, what's the date today!?" she demanded, grabbing Apollo's arm.


"Oh no!" Trucy cried, hands covering her mouth as she backed away from her brothers, looking scared. "It's been exactly a year since..."

Apollo's eyes widened. "Since he lost his badge..." he filled in.

"What!?" Luke said, glancing up at the calendar nearby. "But why would he...?"

Apollo shook his head to pull himself together, deciding to take responsibility for his younger siblings. "Luke, do you know how to finish up the dishes?"

Luke thought a moment, then nodded. "Uh, sure, I can do that."

"Good." Apollo rested a hand on Trucy's shoulder. "You help him, huh?"

"But how will that help!?" Trucy cried, still looking worried. "We need to find Daddy!"

"I'll do that," Apollo assured her. "Don't you think it would help Dad to have this done for him when I do?"

Trucy thought a moment, then nodded, agreeing to the request despite her worry for Phoenix.

"Good girl," Apollo said, then dashed off towards the stairs. "I'll be right back!" he promised over his shoulder, glimpsing Luke showing Trucy what to do before they disappeared out of his sight.

View the Court Record
Apollo decided his first destination would be his father's bedroom. Although he highly doubted Phoenix had left the apartment, he had to be sure before he went back downstairs alone and worried his siblings. The sight of the closed door at the end of the hallway bolstered his resolve, and the teen quickly dashed down the hallway, pressing his ear to the small gap between door and door-frame. He couldn't hear anything at first, but after a moment he heard what seemed to be the sound of a bed creaking, and almost sighed in relief. 'He's in there!' Leaning back, Apollo gently knocked on the door. "Dad?" he softly called.

There was no answer.

Starting to worry, Apollo knocked again. "Dad, I know you're in there." When there was still no answer, the teen sighed, leaning against the wall. "Trucy was right, huh? Losing your badge still hurts; You've just got better at hiding it." He frowned. "You probably think hiding away in there isn't going to make us worry, but you're wrong. We're family now, because of you. It's our job to worry about each other, and you locking yourself up only makes us worry more." He pushed himself off the wall, ranting to the closed door. "You're gonna do that to us? Make us worry about you because you won't talk to us when you're not feeling the best, pretending everything is fine like life's just one big game of poker!?!" He paused, crossing his arms as he forced himself to calm down. "I know you'd probably be more comfortable spilling this kind of thing to Maya or Uncle Edgeworth, but... Y'know, I'm almost sixteen now, and that's considered 'adult' in some countries, right? I can listen to you if you want." He shrugged. "Anyway, I promised Luke and Trucy I'd come back with you. They're finishing up the dishes in the kitchen, so you don't have to worry about those." He pressed his forehead to the door, arms dropping to his sides. "Just come out, Dad. Please?"

There was a short pause, then the door opened, surprising Apollo as he jumped away from it. He looked in, only glimpsing Phoenix at the edge of his view as the man walked back to the bed and sat down. Gulpimg, Apollo carefully pushed the door open a little wider and entered, gently pushing it closed behind him. "Dad?" Phoenix was sat on the edge of the bed, slumped forward with his head in his hands, leaning on his elbows and knees and seemingly staring at the carpet. Apollo nervously took a deep breath to steady himself, then walked up to his father's side and sat down next to him, hands clasped in his lap. "You want to talk about it?"

There was a long pause before Phoenix sighed. "I didn't want you three to worry about me," he quietly told Apollo. "This has nothing to do with you."

"What are you talking about?!" Apollo cried, finding himself feeling offended. "You're our dad! If it has to do with you, it has to do with us!" He paused a moment, then added, "I didn't even know you a year ago, personally anyway, and you losing your badge hurt me then, too. And you should have seen Luke when Clay and I told him what happened to you, and I'm positive it hurt Trucy at the time as well, not just because of what happened to her father." He sighed, hoping his impassioned plea had been heard. "Just let us help you, Dad! None of us want you to hurt alone..."
Phoenix took a few seconds to formulate a reply, lifting his face from his hands and turning his red eyes towards Apollo. "Would you be prepared," he whispered in a scratchy voice, "to keep a secret from Luke and Trucy?"

Apollo blinked in surprise. "Huh?" He thought a moment, then reluctantly nodded. "I guess so. Why would I have to?"

Phoenix glanced up at the door, ensuring it was closed before he straightened up a tad in his seat. "As much as I love your sister, she's incapable of keeping a secret that doesn't involve magic. You and Luke I can trust on that, but Trucy would quite rightly demand to know the details if I told you both, and this is a secret that's too dangerous to allow to get out."

"Dangerous?" Apollo repeated, already jumping to various conclusions of his own as he pondered what this secret was and how it related to his father's lost badge. "More dangerous than you being accused of forgery?"

Phoenix nodded. "I was led into a trap, my last day in a courtroom," he continued, a stern tone to his voice. "I foolishly walked into it, but I'm not allowing the same mistake to happen a second time. No one else can do this but me."

Apollo looked down at the carpet for a few moments in thought, then looked back up to meet his father's gaze with a determined stare. "I'll keep the secret," he promised. "Let me help you, Dad."

After a moment's pause, Phoenix's stern glare softened into a smile, and he ruffled Apollo's hair, to the teen's exasperation. "I knew I could count on you," he said, then turned serious again. "That piece of forged evidence was given to me on the morning of the trial via an innocent third party. I don't have any evidence to say who commissioned it, only my own gut feeling and the word of a little girl who won't even talk about it because she's too scared to."

"N-not Trucy, right?" Apollo found himself briefly worrying. "Or Pearly?"

"Not Trucy or Pearls," Phoenix assured him with a smile. "No, this little girl hasn't even left her own home in years. It took me a while to convince her to do anything more than stare at me. He shook his head, getting himself back on topic. "The person who created that forged evidence did so on commission for a client, but said client covered his face when they met in person and never gave his name. All he left behind was a very unusual bottle of nail polish."

Apollo suddenly found himself thinking of when Kristoph had last visited them at the Borscht Bowl Club, and the attorney had paused at one point to do his nails. He remembered because the bottle had caught his attention, being a beautiful glittering blue and with a sculpted hand reaching upwards from the lid.

"I've eliminated the prosecutor and any of the Gramaryes as the client in question," Phoenix continued, "but, the day Zak Gramarye hired me to defend him, he fired his previous attorney, the brother of the prosecutor I faced in court. I've looked, and there's no paperwork proving it, but I'm pretty sure this attorney was the forger's client."

Apollo could feel his heart beating faster in anticipation. "Who was it?" he asked, wondering if it would be a name he recognised.

Phoenix smiled, deciding not to answer just yet. "This attorney was actually already an acquaintance of mine in the year or two beforehand," he continued, staring off into space. "We'd bump into each other in the hallways of the courthouse, congratulate each other on recent wins, commiserate on the occasional loss..." He chuckled. "At the time, I thought that was the reason why he was the only
person on the board of the Bar Association who voted to give me another chance." His expression then darkened. "Then I started connecting the dots. By that point, he'd reached out to me and become one of the few friends I had left. I couldn't- can't afford to let him know I'm on to him."

"Wait," Apollo interrupted, beginning to connect his own dots, "does this have anything to do with why we aren't allowed to talk about Kurain to anyone?"

"Part of it, at least," Phoenix answered. "I'm happy to let him think I'm all alone and have given up on returning to law." He then grinned, ruffling Apollo's hair again as the teen rolled his eyes, deciding not to complain. "I'm sure he thinks the closest I'll ever get is through you, and you won't be a lawyer yourself for a few years yet. By then, why would I still be investigating into a lost cause like the disappearance of Zak Gramarye?"

Apollo thought for a few moments. "Wait... He's a defence attorney... and I've met him?" he realised.

Phoenix nodded, smile fading.

Apollo's eyes widened. "It's Mister Gavin, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid so," Phoenix replied. "Try not to treat him any differently the next time you meet him, huh?"

"Oh, yeah," Apollo agreed, firmly nodding as he processed connecting the idea of forged evidence to the eternally calm attorney he'd met by the piano. "Of course I will."

"That's my boy," Phoenix said, pulling the teen into a reluctant hug.

Unprepared for the sudden display of familial love, Apollo rolled his eyes. "Thanks, Dad," he sarcastically replied. "I needed my hair ruined and my ribcage crushed today."

"Glad I could oblige," Phoenix laughed, releasing the teen and standing up. "Now, I'd better get downstairs and assure your siblings I'm alright. Coming?" With that, Phoenix left the room.

Sighing, Apollo stood up and brushed himself off. 'It wasn't the secret I was expecting,' he thought to himself, 'but I've got a responsibility now to help Dad keep it.' Nodding to himself, he followed his father back downstairs.

View the Court Record
As he entered the door into the kitchen from the laundry, Phoenix was greeted with the loud cries of Apollo and Trucy as they argued over who was making lunch. Luke sat not far away, engrossed in a book at the kitchen table, apparently ignoring the ongoing conversation.

"You are perfectly capable of making a sandwich yourself!"

"But I'm tired!"

"You haven't been doing anything!"

"I've been teaching you magic!"

"Did I ask to have a lesson today?"

"Pfft, you're never getting on stage with that attitude, Polly!"

"Did I ask to go on stage!?"

Hiding a smile, Phoenix walked over, one hand on his hip while the other leaned on the kitchen counter. "Getting along, are we?"

Apollo and Trucy jumped in surprise, looking up at their father and looking like they'd been caught with their hands in the cookie jar. Trucy was the first to recover, giving Phoenix a wide grin. "Oh, hi Daddy!"

Phoenix nodded his acknowledgement of the greeting, then turned to Apollo, who was crossing his arms and pretending not to roll his eyes in his sister's direction. "Actually Apollo, I wanted to talk to you."

"Huh?" Apollo replied, looking up in shock. "About what?"

Turning, Phoenix walked past the table, tapping Luke's head to attract the teen's attention. "You've got a birthday next week, of course," he pointed out, lowering himself into his chair next to Luke's. "Since we can't do anything on the day, I was thinking celebrating next Saturday instead."

Luke blinked in surprise as he felt the tap on his head, looking up at the ongoing conversation and putting his book down as he realised he was being asked to pay attention.

Apollo, following Phoenix around to the table, rubbed the back of his head in thought. "Sounds good," he agreed. "Celebrating how, though?"

"We're a bit old for parties, I think," Luke pointed out.

"But you already have a magician to entertain everyone!" Trucy argued, running around and
bouncing on Apollo's arm, to her brother's annoyance. "I haven't gotten to do a party yet!"

Phoenix laughed at Trucy's enthusiasm. "I was actually thinking we could go out somewhere. You could invite your friend Clay, too."

Apollo opened his mouth to respond, but was beaten to the punch by Trucy, still bouncing at his side. "Oh! Oh! We could go to Gatewater Land!"


"Hey, it's my birthday!" Apollo pointed out, elbowing Trucy to stop her tugging on his arm. "I'm deciding what we do!"

"But it's so cool!" Trucy cried. "I went there last year, when Daddy and Uncle Valant were performing there, but I didn't get to see any of it because we were too busy!"

Phoenix tapped his chin in thought. "Ah yes, I think I remember seeing them advertising that when I was there myself..."

Luke frowned. "Does this 'Gatewater Land' have anything to do with the Gatewater Hotel across the street?"

At that, Phoenix couldn't help a laugh. "Yeah, and after all the help we gave them, getting them their popularity! I think they still advertise it, even!"


Trucy huffed, tapping Apollo's arm. "See, Luke hasn't even heard of Gatewater Land! We should totally go!"

Sighing, Apollo shook his head. "Are you just incapable of letting me make my own decision in peace?"

"What do people normally do at sixteen?" Luke wondered aloud. "We could call Clay and ask what he thinks...?"

Apollo thought in silence for a few moments, looking torn. Eventually, he sighed and rolled his eyes. "Fine, we'll go to Gatewater Land."

"YAY!" Trucy cheered, bouncing around the room in glee.

Phoenix nodded. "Alright then." He stood up and headed back into his office. "I'd better look it up, see if anything's changed there over the past year."


"It's a themepark," Apollo explained, taking pity on his brother and briefly sitting in Trucy's chair opposite him. "It's themed on the cops. They made a lot of noise about it when they opened last year, saying it was a thank you for everything the police had done for them."

"Okay," Luke replied, calmly taking in the information. "It's a bit strange for a hotel chain to open a themepark though, isn't it?"

Apollo grinned, resisting a laugh. "Yeah," he agreed. "Actually, I've always been curious to see it. Never got to go before. It should be fun!"
Luke giggled. "I hope so!"

Apparently I'm taking the kids and a friend of theirs to Gatewater Land next week for Law Child's birthday. Interested? 

No, thank you. I've had quite enough of that place for one lifetime, and I'm sure you can handle your own children. Provided you don't invite Larry, of course.

I would advise you however to stay away from the haunted house. And the costumed badgers. And not for the reasons you're undoubtedly thinking, I assure you.

Lol! I'm not holding Apollo and Clay back from the haunted house if they want to go, but Luke and Trucy will be happily steering clear of it anyway I think .

We'll avoid the kidnappings and murders, dont you worry Uncle Edgeworth ;).

Very funny, Wright. I hope the children have fun on your outing.

You bet they will :) .

May 9, 10:06AM

Gatewater Land
Main Gate

Clay stifled a laugh as he recognised the teen in a red cape walking towards him on the bridge in front of the Gatewater Land theme park. "Nice outfit, Gramarye," he said through his hand, failing to hide his grin.

Apollo frowned, pulling the silk top hat further down on his head. "I'm only borrowing it," he mumbled.

"Yup!" Trucy chimed in, bouncing at his side in her identical (although smaller) hat and cape. "I gave him my spare hat and Mister Hat's cape, just for today!"

"Oh?" Clay replied, hiding snickers. "Looks great on you, dude."

Luke joined the trio with a giggle. "You should see what he got from a friend of Nick's!"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "You mean the thing that gave Dad a laughing fit when we realised what it was?" He held up the front of Trucy's spare cape for a few moments, pointing Clay to a small circle of cardboard pinned to his shirt.

Unnoticed, by the others, Trucy looked back the way they'd come and promptly dashed off.

Clay frowned at the yellow card for several moments. "What is that?" he asked. "A flower? With
scales drawn on it?"

"It's an attorney's badge!" Luke giggled. "Made out of cardboard!"

"Oh!" Clay cried, laughing in surprise. "Man, no wonder you're wearing it, then!"

Apollo turned almost as red as the cape he was throwing back over the fake badge. "Shut up." The moment Apollo had pulled the piece of cardboard from the parcel Maya sent them, the small object had sent Phoenix to the floor in a fit of laughter, although none of his children understood what was quite so funny about it and Phoenix refused to explain, telling Apollo to go ahead and wear it if he wanted to. To Luke, Trucy and Clay, the cardboard badge was only funny in that it was a gift for Apollo the future lawyer, even if said future lawyer didn't see the humour.

"Oh yeah, I have a gift for you, too!" Clay cried, reaching into the bag slung over his shoulder and pulling out a small jar. "Sorry it's just the usual."

Apollo shrugged, accepting the hair gel with a grin. "That's fine. It's all I need, anyway."

"Speaking of fake," Luke spoke up, finger held knowingly in the air, "you might be interested in the book I got for Apollo!"

"He won't," Apollo insisted.

"At least let me hear what it's about!" Clay laughed. "C'mon, what is it?"

Apollo sighed. "It's a look at Greco-Roman myth and astrology."

Clay stared for a second before again having to stifle his laughter. "Oh, right, that fakey-fake fakerson stuff you keep being so interested in?"

"I already know it's fake," Apollo replied, rolling his eyes. "For the last time, I don't take it seriously. It's just interesting."

Luke frowned. "Are we talking about the ancient myths or the astrology here? Because that applies to both."

"Astrology, duh," Clay said, elbowing Luke playfully. "That stuff's, like, an insult to us astronauts! And law-boy here keeps reading it!"

Before Apollo could reply, Trucy returned, Phoenix beside her. "Ah, there you are!" he called as they approached. "You kids should know better than to run off in the middle of a crowd!" He gave Clay a brief nod. "Hello, Clay."

"Hey, Mister Wright!" Clay replied, giving the man a small wave.


"Can we go in now?" Trucy excitedly asked, bouncing to the bridge railing to look down at the rowboats dotted along the canal beneath them. "Ooh, they have boats! Can we ride them?"

"It's Apollo's decision what we do first," Phoenix gently reminded the girl, then turned to look at Apollo. "Any ideas what you want to do?"

Apollo turned to look ahead, where the front gate stood tall just beyond a decorative fountain. "Can we just go in and see what's there first?" he asked.
Phoenix nodded. "We can do that."

"Yay!" Trucy cheered, jumping to Apollo's side and grabbing his arm. "We're going in!"

With that, the group of five headed through into the park.

View the Court Record
"This summer is gonna be so fun!" Trucy cried, bouncing ahead of her brothers and Clay as they approached the front doors to one of their favourite hangouts in the local mall. "I only had Daddy to play with last year! We're gonna do lots of fun stuff together, right?"

"Right, Wrights!" Clay replied, laughing as he shot the girl a thumbs-up.

Apollo rolled his eyes. "You're never gonna stop saying that, are you?"

Luke giggled, skipping ahead to Trucy's side as they led the way into the arcade. "Where do you want to start, Trucy? The classics are over there, and then there's the racers section on that side, and the first person shooters on the far wall..."

Clay's attention was caught by a poster in the window of the opposite shop, and he stopped dead, frowning. Apollo, looking back in concern, paused to stay with his friend as Trucy and Luke ran off ahead. "What is it?" he asked.

"I totally forgot," Clay mumbled, gesturing to the poster. "I still have to get my dad something for Father's Day."

"Father's Day is coming up?" Apollo replied, a smile slowly forming on his face. "Hey, this'll be the first year I actually have a father to celebrate it with!"

Clay laughed, slapping Apollo's arm as he turned back to the arcade, slowly catching up to Luke and Trucy. "Congrats on that, dude!" He then shook his head solemnly. "It's not all that great, though. You just get a card, maybe write a little somethin' in it." He shrugged. "My dad always expects something from me, so I just give him the card in the morning and he leaves me alone."

Apollo frowned in thought, arms crossed. "When is it, exactly?"

"This Sunday," Clay replied.

"What?!" Apollo cried in shock, jumping away from his friend with eyes wide. "So soon?!"

Clay nodded nonchalantly. "It's not a big deal, dude. I can take you to get a card today, if you want."

"That's not the point!" Apollo argued, then looked ahead and noticed Luke and Trucy standing at the intersection of the classic games and the racers, discussing where to go first. Shooting Clay a look, he ran up to his younger siblings, making sure he was close enough to be heard over the loud music above them before he started to speak. "Guys! Father's Day is this Sunday!"

"What?!" Luke cried in surprise as he and Trucy spun to face their brother. "Already?!"

Trucy gasped. "Oh! We have to get Daddy something!"

"You guys have had dads before!" Apollo pointed out. "What do you normally do on Father's Day?"
Clay rolled his eyes, standing just far enough away to listen in on the conversation. "You guys are seriously making a big deal out of nothing, I swear."

Ignoring his friend, Luke crossed his arms, thinking to himself. "Well, for my dad, Mum always got a fancy pen for me to give him, and I made a card." He smiled nostalgically. "Sometimes we got him some other small thing too, if he hadn't used up the ink from the last one just yet. He always loved them."

"Mommy always took care of getting a gift for Daddy, too," Trucy agreed, tapping her chin in thought before sadly looking to the floor. "After she disappeared, I never really knew when Father's Day was anymore, so I was never able to get anything for him. I don't think he minded, but..."

"If you want to get something for Nick," Luke continued to Apollo, wringing his hands worriedly, "maybe just you and Trucy should take care of it. I don't know if I really have any right to, since I don't call him 'Dad'."

Apollo frowned, shaking his head. "Nonsense. He adopted you, he counts as a father."

"What do we get him, then?" Trucy asked. "A fancy pen?"

"What did you do last year?" Luke responded. "You passed the one-year mark a few weeks ago, didn't you?"

Trucy shuffled uncomfortably for a few moments. "I didn't realise when it was," she admitted. "We didn't do anything."

Clay groaned dramatically and stomped forward in determination, placing his hands on Apollo and Trucy's shoulders. "Look, Wrights," he said, "you really are thinking too hard on this." He looked down at Trucy. "You didn't do anything last year?" he confirmed.

Trucy nodded.

"Then," Clay continued, looking Apollo and Luke in the eyes, "this will be Mister Wright's first Father's Day too. He won't be expecting anything." He looked between the three, ensuring they all heard his message. "I think he'd be happy enough just getting cards from you guys, as an acknowledgement of what he means to you. You don't need anything big to do that."

There was a long pause as the Wright children thought on their friend's advice. Finally, Luke looked up with a smile. "You know what?" he said. "Clay's just given me the perfect idea!"

My dear Luke,

Apologies for the longer gap than usual between letters; Alfendi has finally arrived back home after overcoming his illness, and he has proceeded to once again take up almost all of my and Flora's free time. Now he's free and able, he's taking every opportunity to crawl all over the apartment. Multiple times, Flora and I have had to pull him out from underneath desks and tables, specifically in my office. He especially loves grabbing for things in there, although when I have handed him objects that would be safe for an infant to hold, he quickly loses interest.

Now that he is feeling better, Alfendi is very quiet. I'm told most children are saying words by this
age, but Alfendi seems content to point and glower at us until we guess what he wants. He does grunt during mealtimes if he doesn't like the food, but Flora is always able to get him to at least smile with the way she feeds him. I'm not worried about him, I assure you; All children grow at their own rate, after all.

I'm sure at least some of the news concerning Bill Hawks' trial has reached you in America. Inspector Chelmey invited me to watch the trial in-progress (I suspect I was on a list of potential witnesses they wanted on-hand, just in case), but I wasn't able to make it every day due to Alfendi's illness. Dimitri was called multiple times as the primary witness, and even Clive was brought in once. You might have enjoyed watching it yourself, although it wasn't as exciting as a Witch Trial; I'm certain Mr Wright would have loved to see it, and your brother Apollo. The prosecution is having trouble making any charges related to his own kidnapping stick, as I thought they would, but it seems certain he will finally be facing charges for the explosion eleven years ago.

I'm glad to hear your day out to celebrate Apollo's birthday went well. It seems every time you write, you describe your siblings more and more alike! I suppose that is only natural, speaking from experience as someone who discovered a lost sibling they didn't know existed previously. Apollo is clearly enjoying it himself, if he didn't complain about wearing that magician's outfit you described.

You mentioned in your last letter you were planning to find a way to pay respects on this 'Memorial Day' holiday. Is this the American version of Remembrance Day? I thought I recalled you mentioning Remembrance Day was still a public holiday there, but what for if not remembering the millions lost to war?

The usual puzzles are enclosed. I hope you and all your loved ones are well.

Your friend,

Professor Hershel Layton

12th June, 2020

__________________________

Dear Professor Layton,

It's great to hear from you again, Professor! Don't worry about taking so long to reply, I understand if you don't have as much time to anymore.

I'm glad Alfendi is doing well! I admit, I was starting to worry something had happened when I noticed your and Flora's letters were late! It sounds like he likes hiding in the dark. Maybe he feels safer there? I know I do sometimes, especially when I was younger.

I have heard some of what is going on with Mr Hawks' trial. Nick and I usually watch the news together, and it was a great relief when the newswoman finally mentioned it! Even though I've already told Nick all about it, I had to remind him of some things again, because he'd forgotten some details over the past few months. For example, he got Mr Allen and Clive confused! I'll have to look up some of this trial online and see if he's interested in looking at it, and if Apollo is too.

Am I describing Apollo and Trucy as alike? I suppose I must be. They ARE very alike, after all. Apollo may have liked wearing the outfit for a day, but I think he's still wary about being dragged on stage. Trucy seems determined to make it happen, given how often she pulls him into her room to
teach him magic, but he seems to be helping her with tricks as well, since she's getting very good with her ventriloquism now. She's not looking off to the side when Mr Hat talks anymore, and she must have found a new way to make him move, because her arm isn't as noticeable!

Memorial Day is essentially the American Remembrance Day, yes. They specifically honour only the soldiers though, and the custom is to go to graveyards and leave little flags on the graves, instead of any kind of service with the poems and the Last Post and the minute silence. They still have a holiday in November, but they call it Veterans Day, and it's to honour returning soldiers, I think. I don't know why it's so different here, but I have decided I will wear Dad's poppy in both May and November, to honour the dead on both days. It seems only right (or 'Wright', as Clay would say!).

Summer holidays have just started, and Father's Day is coming up for us. I don't remember if it's on the same day as back in England, but I think it is. It's Mothering Sunday that on a different date, isn't it? Anyway, this will be a first for Apollo and Nick, and the first time Trucy and I have had to take care of a Father's Day gift ourselves. Trucy lost her mother a few years before her father disappeared, so she hasn't even noticed when it was since then, she says. I wasn't sure at first about getting Nick a card from me, but Apollo and Clay convinced me I should. We're just going to get him cards this year, but we're going to make them special and write messages in them. And I don't mean 'messages' like a simple "thank you", since we did that for his birthday cards, I mean detailed messages thanking him for taking us all in and making us a family. I've already written mine out, but Apollo and Trucy are taking a little longer to get theirs perfect.

Actually, by the time you get this, Father's Day would have already passed. Did Flora get something for you from Alfendi?

I have a few more puzzles than usual, so I hope you and Flora enjoy them in whatever time you have available!

Your friend and apprentice,

Luke Triton

18th June, 2020

P.S. I really miss Mum and Dad... If it's not too much trouble Professor, could you maybe write about your favourite memories of them in your next letter? Thank you.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Phoenix stretched his arms as he exited the stairs into the apartment's kitchen. In front of him, the children were all huddled around the dining room table, playing a round of Luke's board game, and barely noticed Phoenix as he idly approached.

"No-one's going to Elephant and Castle, are they?" Trucy asked as she moved a red marker to the mentioned station, a hazard card in her hand.

Luke and Apollo shook their heads, then Luke looked up in surprise as he noticed Phoenix. "Oh, hey Nick," he said with a smile.

Phoenix nodded a greeting to the kids as they glanced up at him, still concentrating on their game. "Having fun?" he asked them with a grin. "Who's winning?"

"We only just started, so no-one yet," Apollo explained as the die was passed to Luke. "We actually decided this time to try not to deliberately get in each other's way. See how that strategy turns out."

Chuckling in amusement, Phoenix watched Luke move his piece and pass the die on to Apollo, then moved off towards his office. "Well, have fun then," he called.

"Mmm," Trucy replied, staring at the die in Apollo's hand as he moved to roll it.

Alone in his office, Phoenix shook his head in amusement as he closed the door to the kitchen. ‘Those three always amaze me,’ he mused as he headed to his desk. 'After that first disastrous game, I thought you'd never be able to convince Trucy to play it again, let alone to play non-competitively!' He pulled out his desk chair to sit down, only to pause as he noticed a small pile of envelopes sitting on the seat, face downwards. 'Now that's odd.' He picked the out-of-place objects up and, noticing there happened to be exactly three, flipped through them to see if they were labelled. Sure enough, in three different styles of handwriting, the three envelopes were addressed to 'Dad', 'Nick' and 'Daddy'. 'Why are these...?' Phoenix started to ask himself, then suddenly remembered how he'd only just been reminding himself upstairs to find time to call his father, as today happened to be Father's Day. 'O-oh...'

Phoenix slowly lowered himself into his chair, placing the envelopes gently on the desk in front of him. He supposed it shouldn't surprise him that his three kids would do something on this day in particular, but the fact they did was still a big enough shock to render him speechless for several moments. 'It must be that, even though two of them actually call me 'Dad', it still feels weird to think of myself as their father?' He shook his head, deciding his feelings were too tumultuous to pin down at the moment. 'I should just read these things. Get it over and done with.'

He opened the first letter and pulled out a card within; It was a matte grey, but with a black heart shape in which there was a cut-out message reading "First Father's Day". Phoenix stared at it for a
moment, thinking 'Yep, that's certainly true,' then sighed and opened it up. The inside was blank, but there was a small sheet of paper folded up within, printed off from a computer. Frowning in confusion, Phoenix unfolded the paper to read it.

Dad,

I won't deny, the main thing on my mind when I heard you wanted to adopt me was "OMG the famous lawyer Phoenix Wright wants to be my dad!". My favourite guilty pleasure fantasy when I became a fan of yours was that one of my horrid teachers would be murdered and you would be defending the accused, so that we'd get to meet and become friends... even then, though, I always told myself it was unrealistic to dream you'd want to take me in. I thought it was a dream coming true when Luke arranged for me just to meet you, so you can imagine how out-of-the-blue it was to hear you'd taken that next step.

Talking of surprises though, bringing me to Trucy was another one. I liked her plenty when we were just adopted siblings, but learning we were legitimately half-siblings? In retrospect, I can see why you decided to wait to tell us, since that might have overwhelmed me a bit had you told us at the time we met.

The card applies to both of us. I've never had a dad before, after all. Sure, there were foster parents, but I never really had the chance to connect with any of them, not like I have with you, and you're the best dad I could have asked for, even if you can be really annoying or embarrassing sometimes (but I suppose that's in the job description, isn't it?). When I think of you now, I don't think of the case files or the memories of your trials that I got to see, not anymore. I think of my Dad, who took me in even though I'm almost an adult already, who gave me a sister and a brother, who gave me a place I can call home for the rest of my life (even after I eventually move out). You may not be a lawyer anymore Dad, but I don't care, because you'll always be amazing to me. Thank you for teaching me how to spot tells, and for letting me in on your secret investigation, and just in general for everything you've done for me over the past year. There's too much to list!

Happy first Father's Day, Dad. Thank you for everything.

Love,

Apollo

Phoenix rubbed at one eye with a hand, chastising himself for finding it was wet. 'It's just a letter. Sure, it's heartfelt, and Apollo really put his all into it, but...' He shook his head. 'Next one. Move on to the next one.' He put Apollo's card and letter to one side, reaching for the next envelope in the pile and pulling out another card. This one was a pastel green, with "Happy Father's Day" written in pastel blue and a tie pictured next to it. Phoenix only smirked at it before opening the card, not being surprised this time to find the card was again blank and there was a letter folded up inside to replace the message. 'Well, here we go again.' He unfolded the letter to read it.

Nick,

I'm not sure where to begin with this letter. It's still difficult for me to mentally connect 'Phoenix Wright' with 'father', so I wasn't sure at first if it would be at all correct to get you a card for today.
However, Clay and Apollo pointed out to me that you did adopt me, so even if I don't call you 'Dad' or 'Daddy' like Apollo and Trucy, you still count as a father for me, regardless of if my Dad is alive or not.

I already thought of you as a good friend before my parents died, and I think I can safely say we’ve only gotten closer since the adoption. I don't know how I'd be coping with this move to America without the help of you, Apollo and even Trucy, and it was very brave of you to offer to take me in considering how hard it is for us to get by (and you don't have to try to hide that; We can tell and we’re happy to help any way we can). I'm very grateful for the offer of a home, and a brother and sister, and even for the help in investigating what happened to my parents (even though our investigation has stalled rather badly at the moment).

One thing I know for sure is that, if my dad were to appear on our doorstep tomorrow, he would take one look at everything you've done for me since he disappeared, shake your hand and say "Thanks for looking after Luke for me." I couldn't be happier with how everything’s turned out, despite all the hardship it took to get to this point.

Thank you for everything, Nick.

All my love,

Luke

Phoenix smiled as he refolded the letter. 'Poor Luke. He's caught between missing his dad and being nice to me on Father's Day.' He put the card with Apollo's, then turned to the third envelope. The final card was brightly coloured, with 'Daddy' written in large, mismatched lettering as though drawn by a child. 'Fitting.' He shook the card a bit to loose the letter hidden within, then put the card down to open the folded piece of paper and read the contents.

My Daddy!

When my other daddy told me I could trust you, I didn't know exactly what he meant. I miss him a lot since he left, but since I came to live with you, I've gotten two cool older brothers, and one of them even has the same mommy as me! I'll always miss my other daddy, but you being here for me now he's gone is the best thing ever! I promise to do my hardest to look after you and Apollo and Luke, so don't you worry about a thing Daddy, because we'll always be here for you.

We all love you lots and lots and don't you dare ever think we don't, okay?

Your Trucy

PS Please get us a new mommy soon, okay?

'Short and sweet,' Phoenix mused with a teary laugh at the postscript, 'just like the author.' He rubbed at his eyes again as he collected the three cards, wondering what to do with them for a moment before simply turning around and placing them on display on the bookshelf behind him. The letters he left on his desk for the moment, standing up and heading to the kitchen door. 'I have a little something else to do now.'
Trucy wriggled around in an odd sort of seated dance, singing a nonsense song to herself in her own personal celebration. "I wo-on, I wo-on! I won ov-er you two! I won the ga-ame! I beaaat you! I'm the wiinner!"

Luke sighed as he placed his figure just short of its goal. "Nope, I'm definitely in last."

"You never know," Apollo comforted him as he took the die. "I might roll a one, then you might roll another six!"

Luke shook his head, and his feelings were confirmed when Apollo's roll yielded a five, more than enough to move his figure to his final destination. "Yeah, I was never going to get to Putney Bridge and all the way back to King's Cross before you got back to Paddington," Luke pointed out, resting his chin on the table. "It's not your fault, I just got all the bad cards and spent half the game struggling to get this close."

Apollo looked embarrassed, and started to collect together the cards dotted around the table to clear the game away.

Trucy finally took notice of her brothers' progress and stopped her dancing. "Oh hey, did you come second, Apollo?"

"Yup," Apollo said with a nod, still picking up the dropped cards.

"Yay!" Trucy cheered. "I still beat you!" She returned to dancing.

Luke picked his head off the table, pushing his cards towards Apollo and forcing a smile for Trucy. "Congratulations, Truce."

"See what happens when we work together for a change?" Apollo added, shooting his sister a smile as he shuffled the deck of Souvenir cards.

Trucy giggled. "I still wo-on!" she taunted them.

The door to the office opened, and the three children stopped what they were doing instantly to look up, seeing Phoenix standing in the doorway. None of them had forgotten the letters they'd carefully planted twenty minutes ago before setting up to play their game, and they were unsure what to think as they stared up at a somewhat thoughtful-looking Phoenix not far away.

"Hey Daddy!" Trucy called, forcing her biggest smile despite her worry. "I won our game!"


Luke and Apollo carefully got up from their chairs, standing awkwardly. "Did you find our...?"

Luke began to ask before trailing off, fiddling with his hands.

Phoenix nodded, and began to walk towards the trio by the table. "I love the cards," he said. "The
letters, though?" He chuckled, stopping near the table by Luke and Trucy. "Those were my favourite part."

Trucy grinned, jumping out of her seat to hug Phoenix tightly around the middle. "Love you, Daddy!" she cried.

Apollo smiled, running around Trucy's seat and joining the hug at Phoenix's side. "Love you, Dad," he echoed.

Phoenix held the two tightly with his right arm, then looked to Luke, holding out his left arm expectantly. The younger teen shuffled awkwardly for a moment before his eyes began to water, and he jumped into the family hug without a word.

"I will never stop loving you guys," Phoenix said, hoping he could adequately reply to their letters all at once without losing his composure. "No matter how bad it gets for us, you three will always make me the proudest father in the world."

It was a long while before Phoenix found the time that day to call his father.
FLASHBACK: Spectre

- Four Years Earlier -

April 22, 6:49PM
Triton Estate
Luke's Room

Luke sat at his small desk, reading through his notebook again as he cramped up against the typewriter that took up most of the table-space. 'I wonder if my letter got to London?' he idly wondered. 'If Mister Layton's going to solve this mystery, he'll need to be here for a spectre attack.'

A scratching at the window alerted Luke's attention, and he jumped from his chair to open the thick blue curtains. Just beyond the glass was a small purple rat with a lick of curled fur on the top of its head, and the boy quickly opened the window a crack, letting the rodent in. Holding out one hand for the rat to jump into, Luke then closed the window and the curtains, carrying his animal friend into the dark room. "What is it, Toppy?" he asked. "Has the spectre changed locations? Is it not appearing in Great Ely Street anymore?"

The rat waved its front legs all around, squeaking madly as it gesticulated to its human friend.

Luke gasped. "People? Coming here? What people!? Who were they!?"

Toppy squeaked a little more.

"A man in a top hat?" Luke repeated, looking thoughtful. "And a woman in a yellow coat?" He bit his lip, staring into space. "I wonder if it could be..."

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. Luke started, whispering "Someone's here!" and rushing to his chair, where his satchel hung. "Quick, Toppy! Hide!" He held his hands out to his satchel, and the rat squeaked only once before jumping in. Luke thought a moment before grabbing his notebook and sliding it in beside the rat, then pulled the flap over the opening to hide the illegal visitor.

"Luke?" called a voice, slightly muffled through the door. "My name is Hershel Layton. I'm a friend of your father's. Could we talk for a moment?"

Luke gasped. 'It's really him!?' He cleared his throat, standing tall and taking a few steps towards the door. "Certainly," he announced, trying to sound important and aloof. 'Like Dad,' he thought darkly. "But first, you'll have to solve my door puzzle."

"Your... door puzzle?" the man outside the room repeated. He then gently laughed, and it sounded as though he had turned his head to talk to a companion. "I see. Luke means to test our mettle with a puzzle."

"So we shall," Layton agreed, and it sounded as though he was addressing both his friend and the ten-year-old sequestered away in the bedroom.
Luke took a deep breath, and slowly crossed his room to the wall opposite his door, at the end of his bed. He almost stumbled over the violin propped up against the corner, but quickly moved the black case into place again and carefully stepped past it. "If you truly are the esteemed Hershel Layton, then this puzzle should be no problem," he told them, crouching down so he could see the line of light coming through underneath his door, broken only by the shadows of the two people outside. He explained the rules of his carefully thought out riddle, gave them a minute to look around outside his door, and waited for their signal they were ready to solve it.


"You know what you have to do?" the boy asked, staring hard at the light underneath the door.

"I believe so, yes," Layton replied.

Luke instructed them to stand in front of the door. "Remember," he reminded them, "you can't do anything to solve this puzzle." Hoping they'd picked up on the hint, he held his breath and, lacking a watch, began to count. 'One elephant, two elephant, three elephant, four elephant...' As the seconds passed, he kept his gaze firmly on the four breaks in the line of light under his door. Occasionally, he thought he saw one begin to move, but it would always stop. The pair outside didn't make a sound. '"eleven elephant, twelve elephant, thirteen elephant, fourteen elephant... Fifteen elephant.' Luke let out his breath all at once, gasping excitedly as he sat up. "That was what you had to do!" he cried happily.

"You can't do anything to solve this puzzle!," Layton repeated, sounding amused. "Or, in other words, to solve this puzzle, you can't do anything. 'Nothing' was the 'thing' we had to do to solve this riddle. An interesting puzzle, Luke."

Luke couldn't resist blushing from the praise.

"So, even from inside his room, he could hear us if we did something?" the woman mused to herself.

"Now Luke," Layton continued, "are you convinced that we are who we say we are? Will you open the door now?"

'Oh, right!' Luke jumped to his feet. "As I promised," he said, pushing away his excitement to put on his stern airs again as he ran to the door and unlocked it, tugging once on the handle to signal it was open before turning around and running to the window next to his desk. He stood at the small gap in the curtains, staring out across the back gardens and listening as the door to his room slowly creaked open, two sets of footsteps walking in to his bedroom.

The doubts began to circle in his head again. 'What if he decides not to investigate? What if he sides with Dad and says there's nothing going on? What if Dad's already got to him and he's actually in on the whole thing?!' He screwed his eyes shut. 'Stop it, Luke. That's why we're testing him first.' He slowly turned his head, sending a glare to his visitors as he got his first good look at them.

Just as Toppy had said, the man wore a brownish-black jacket over an orange turtleneck, and had a matching black-and-red top hat on his head. The woman had flowing brown hair and a yellow coat, and Luke could see a notepad sticking out of a pocket near where her hands were idling. Although the man, obviously Layton, had his attention fully on Luke, the woman was taking the chance to look around his dark bedroom first.


Luke stared back, eyes narrowing a little as he grunted a quiet reply.
Layton slowly and deliberately reached into his jacket and pulled out a familiar looking envelope. "Your letter. I thought you might want it back."

Gasping, Luke half spun around to face the pair. 'How'd he...!?'

The woman looked intrigued. "Professor, you think Luke wrote the letter?"

Layton smiled as he held the opened envelope out for her to look at. "Clark was never a fan of typed correspondence." He looked back towards Luke. "He always wrote his letters out in longhand." The letter was replaced in his jacket. "Moreover, only someone very close to Clark would know about our past together. This someone would know I could never ignore a friend in need."

Luke continued to stare at the man, resisting the urge to smile proudly. 'I knew I made the right choice in who to ask.' "Are you really Professor Layton?" he asked, properly turning to finally face his visitors full-on.

"Is this true, Luke?" came a voice from the hallway, and Luke gasped again in surprise before levelling his sternest glare in the direction of the door. In walked a tall man in a blue suit and sporting a full, brown beard, pushing his way through the two visitors to sternly confront his son. "How could you do something like this?" He held out his hands, almost pleadingly, unfazed by the loathing coming from Luke. "What were you thinking? Were you even thinking at all!?"

Without a word, Luke turned around to stare back out his window. He had nothing to say to his father.

"Here, now," Clark said, a warning tone in his voice, "don't you turn your back on me again!"

"Clark, please," Layton interrupted.

Luke heard his father sigh, then turn to face his friend. "Forgive me," he said. "The boy has barely spoken to me in the last six months. He's been so withdrawn since the appearance of the spectre, I don't know what else-"

"Very soon," Luke said, bringing his father's frustrated rambling to an instant halt. He gathered up all the hatred he could muster and directed it into his next sentence. "The world will end." He heard his visitors quietly gasping in surprise, but Clark made no sound.

"The end of the world?" Layton repeated. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean what I just said," Luke mumbled, keeping his gaze levelled out the window. It wasn't pretty, but all likely scenarios he had laid out led to it.

The woman scoffed. "Luke, you can't say something like that and not elaborate," she told him.

Clark sighed. "He just won't open up to anyone," he said, and Luke heard him turn away from the window, seemingly deciding to ignore Luke as Luke was ignoring him. "He wasn't always like this. When he does speak, it's only to say something inscrutable, as you just saw." He scoffed. "Prophecies... absurd."

"Prophecies?" Layton repeated, sounding intrigued.

"It's all my fault," Clark sighed, and for a moment Luke almost felt sorry for him, before hurriedly pushing the thought from his head.

"What are you talking about, Clark?"
There was a short pause. "I'm sorry. I have urgent business I must attend to in my study." Luke felt a wave of relief as he heard his father leaving the room. "We can discuss this later." He paused at the door, and Luke turned his head only a little to see his father watching him from the doorway. "Luke, Mister Layton is a close friend. Please talk with him. Perhaps you could even help him." He didn't seem to expect a reply, as he immediately turned to Layton. "Thank you, Hershel." With that, he was gone.

Luke quietly sighed to himself as he looked back out the window, trying to keep from dwelling on the problem of his father. 'I don't have the time to worry about things like that right now...'

Another set of footsteps entered the room, and Luke heard their butler Doland announce, "I'm afraid that it is time for Master Luke to retire."

'What, now?' Luke objected to himself, turning around to face his room again.

"What, now?" the woman protested, and Luke almost spoke up in annoyance that she had voiced his thoughts. "We're right in the middle of something! It's still light out!"

"Nevertheless, it is bedtime," Doland continued, stepping into the room and beginning to pull back the covers on Luke's bed.

Layton thought a moment. "If I may, Doland," he said, "I'd like to ask Luke just one more thing." Without waiting for a reply, he turned to the ten-year-old. "Luke, though the town has been repeatedly attacked by the spectre, no one has been injured. It seems than an oracle alerts the townspeople about which areas to evacuate from." Luke stole a glance at his satchel, then to Doland. "Luke, I believe that you are this oracle. Am I correct?"

"What!?!" the woman cried.

"Absurd!" Doland scoffed.

Luke fidgeted uncomfortably where he stood.

"Luke," Layton continued, "I must ask you a very important question: Do you know when the spectre will appear next?"

Doland stepped in front of the boy. "Master Luke will not stand for such balderdash," he insisted. "Please leave at once!"

Luke thought only a moment, then looked up, a stern frown of determination on his face. "Tonight," he said.

Doland stepped back, all three adults looking down at the boy in surprise.


"But," the woman breathed, "how could you know that?"

Layton gripped the brim of his hat, thinking to himself. "Tonight..."

"If you want, I can also show you where it will appear next," Luke offered, trying to keep the hopeful tone out of his voice. He didn't want to admit he missed wandering the world outside his bedroom.

"I would very much like that, Luke," Layton replied, smiling as he nodded his thanks to the boy.
Doland laughed uncomfortably. "Master Luke! This joke is in poor taste!"

Luke shuffled nervously. "Please don't tell my father about this, Doland," he begged.

"Master Luke," the butler sighed, "I... Are you certain this is okay?"

Nodding firmly, Luke answered, "Yes. Did you tell the townspeople? About the spectre?"

Doland smiled kindly, nodding back. "I did, just as before. I will make a final tour of the area to ensure everyone has gone."

"But then, where will the spectre appear tonight?" the woman asked.


"Then we must go now," Layton decided, taking a step towards the door. "Even if we can't stop the spectre, we must confirm Luke's prediction." He walked out of the room, the woman close on his heels. Luke quickly grabbed his satchel off his chair, taking care not to jostle Toppy inside as he hurried after his new friend.

"Good luck," Doland quietly called after them, before turning and beginning to re-make Luke's bed.

View Luke's Notebook
Luke couldn't help but feel a bit uncomfortable as he sat on the blanket in the heavily crowded park. In the sky, the sun was setting behind the buildings to the west, and flashes were visible in the streets as people saw the fading light and lit up various fireworks of their own. Trucy was bouncing on her tip-toes to spot the pre-show antics, eager to see as much of the excitement as she could before Phoenix dragged her back home to bed. Not far away, Apollo and Clay were amusing themselves playing rock-paper-scissors, although Apollo seemed to be having more fun as he was winning every round, laughing at Clay's grumbling as he again chose poorly and accused his friend of somehow cheating. Phoenix was seemingly engrossed in a book, but Luke spotted him frequently glancing up to check on the four kids under his care. Despite lacking his favourite hoodie, he still seemed hot in the beanie he refused to remove, more concerned with being recognised than with his own comfort.

It wasn't the heat of the midsummer night that was making Luke uncomfortable (although it didn't help). It also wasn't the crowds, as Luke was used to them from his time in London. No, what was bothering Luke was more the atmosphere of this unique American holiday he was experiencing for the first time. Everywhere he looked, he saw white stars on blue backgrounds, stripes of red and white, painted faces and flags of every size and shape being either worn or simply waved in the air. To be honest, it was seeing that flag plastered over every available surface that he was finding rather creepy.

Desperate for something else to look at, Luke pulled his phone out of his pocket and opened up the texting app, tapping out a short message.

*Hey Maya. Anything happening in Kurain tonight? I need a distraction.*

He sighed as he hit 'send', staring at the screen as the text flew off into the digital void. 'Don't know how long it will take her to respond, but it's worth a try anyway.' He frowned in thought. 'Do they even celebrate this... whatever-it-was-called holiday in Kurain? The village seems so... Japanese-style? Chinese? Some kind of Asian. I should really set aside some time to research and learn how to tell those apart.'

Clay huffed as he lost yet another round of his game, looking over to his other friend. "Hey, Luke, can I play with you for a bit? 'Pollo here has to be cheating!"

"I am not!" Apollo insisted, though the laughter he was struggling to talk through said otherwise. "You're just really bad at this!"


"Yes!" Clay cried, eagerly jumping to his feet and rushing over to sit next to Luke, holding his fist out ready for a game. "Ready?"
Nodding, Luke held out a fist to mirror Clay's, and the pair moved their hands up and down, chanting, "Scissors, paper, rock!" On the final word, Luke spread his hand out flat, while Clay stuck out two fingers. There was a moment's pause before Clay laughed, throwing his arms into the air and crying "I won! I finally won!"

Luke giggled, glancing over to Apollo to see his brother rolling his eyes good-naturedly. Before he could say anything in response, the phone in Luke's pocket buzzed, and the teen quickly pulled it out to read the screen.

Not much. Me and Pearly are watching fireworks on tv. You okay kiddo?

"What is it?" Clay asked, leaning forward curiously as he spotted the device in Luke's hand.

Luke pulled the phone away, shoving it back in his pocket as he remembered Maya's warning. "Nothing," he insisted, but quickly relented enough to add, "Talking to someone."

Clay frowned a moment, then shrugged and dropped the subject. "Another round?" he offered, holding out his fist again.

Sighing, Luke shook his head. "I'm not in the mood. Sorry, Clay."

Apollo and Clay glanced at each other, concerned. "You alright?" Apollo asked.

"I'm fine," Luke replied, looking away and not caring if the lie was seen through or not. "Just tired."

"Ohhh, I get it!" Clay suddenly cried, grinning at Luke. "You're English! You have to be sad on the day England lost her greatest colony, huh?"

Luke frowned as his friend laughed. "Why would I care about that?" he pointed out. "All the colonies got independence sooner or later."

Clay's laughter ended somewhat awkwardly. "Dude, I was joking," he mumbled, wincing.

Apollo moved over to sit by his two closest friends. "Do you want to talk about it?" he asked his brother. "Maybe do a Chords of Steel session?"

There was a short pause before Luke shook his head. "There's nothing you guys can do, anyway. I'll be okay."

Suddenly, a bright light from the distance attracted the trio's attention, and they looked up to the dark sky as three fireworks whistled above them, exploding in a beautiful display of red, white and blue light. Trucy squealed in delight as she ran around to find the best viewpoint on their blanket, watching the sky as more and more lights whizzed by overhead, popping in a rhythm only professional displays ever managed to achieve.

Luke watched the fireworks for a moment before looking over to Phoenix, who had put his book away to peer up at the display thoughtfully. "Nick?" he called.

Phoenix looked over to the teen. "Hmm?"

"Is it alright if I just go home?"
Phoenix thought a moment before frowning in concern. "You okay?"

"I'll be fine," Luke promised, forcing a smile.

Seeming reassured, Phoenix nodded and pulled out a set of keys from his pocket, holding it out for Luke to take. "Be careful of the fireworks on the way, huh?"

Luke stood, taking the keys. "I will," he agreed, then turned to Apollo and Clay, deciding not to interrupt Trucy's enjoyment of the display above them. "I'll see you two later."

Although they looked worried for him, Apollo and Clay gave Luke a nod, watching silently as he turned and walked away.

Was Luke texting you? He seems down, and he's gone home just as the fireworks started

He has? He did send me a message and I thought he sounded kinda down. Any idea what the matter is?.

Thats what I was asking you! No idea?

It IS independence day. Maybe he misses England?.

Thats a possibility I spose. I'd better make a note not to invite him out to celebrations in future

I could offer to let him call the Prof but he'll be asleep atm and Luke seems to think he'll be fine on his own

Yknow what? I think I have an idea.

Oh no

What 'oh no'? I'm inviting you guys up to Kurain again!

You have time off to do that?

I'm making time. Luke needs me!

We can make it over Pearlys birthday okay?

... You can just MAKE time to see us?

Get with the program Nick! This is an emergency!

I'll get back to you tomorrow with dates and times! Enjoy the fireworks!

July 4, 8:21PM
Luke sighed as he entered his bedroom, flicking the last of the long line of light switches he'd passed on his way from the front door. He took only a few steps in the direction of his bed before tripping over the sleeping bag on the floor, remembering too late that Clay was sleeping over for the night to watch the firework display in People Park with them. Shaking his head at his own clumsiness, Luke stepped over the temporary bedding and headed over to his own, sitting on the edge only briefly before deciding to lie down on top of the covers, staring at the ceiling.

He was sitting in his favourite corner of the living room, his nose in a book while his mother dusted the ornaments as she rearranged them on the nearby dresser. The house was quiet, as it normally was, and the young boy was enjoying the chance to read without any interruptions.

From upstairs, there was a loud thudding of someone coming down the stairs, and Luke recognised the rhythm of the footsteps as belonging to his father. He looked up, seeing the sound attracting his mother's attention as she turned away from her chore and moved towards the door.

"Brenda!" came a call from the hallway, and a moment later the door opened, a man in a white shirt and a loose red tie flung himself into the room, looking around for a second before he spotted his wife standing nearby, arms crossed. "Brenda, you will not believe the horrid news I was just listening to over the wireless!"

"Oh?" Brenda replied, arms uncrossing as she began to look worried. "What?"

Clark groaned angrily, throwing his hands into the air. "Yet another group of racist, flag-waving wankers causing a riot somewhere in the world, burning buildings, shooting innocent people by the dozen!" Not noticing his wife's face darkening, he wagged a finger knowingly. "I keep saying this is what happens when people put any kind of foolhardy pride into a bloody strip of fabric, but no-one listens to sense, do they!? They just let these idiots hide behind nationalism to excuse their own behaviour! Bloody bo-!"

"Clark, would you watch your language around our son?" Brenda quietly interrupted, glaring at her husband.

The man paused in surprise, suddenly noticing the six-year-old sat nearby, watching the conversation curiously. "Oh... I didn't see you there, Luke," he told the boy with an embarrassed smile.

Young Luke cocked his head to one side curiously. "What's a 'wanker'?"

"It's a word we don't use," Brenda replied, shooting another dark look at Clark while he winced uncomfortably. "Ever."

Luke thought a moment before nodding. "Okay. Why are they waving flags?"

Clark huffed, crossing his arms. "Never put too much pride into the Union Jack, Luke. People who put pride in flags generally end up attaching the worst of beliefs to it."

"Like what?" the boy asked.
"Like that killing people who are different from them is a good thing," Clark solemnly explained. "You know better than that, don't you?"

Luke nodded fiercely. "That's just mean!" he told his parents with a firm nod and the sternest glare he could manage. "Why do they do that, anyway?"

Brenda shook her head. "Who knows?" she replied. "Besides, the Union Jack is the one flown at sea," she chided Clark, nudging his arm with a smile. "It's the Union Flag on land. I didn't think Luke was at all desperate to be a sailor, last I checked."

Clark chuckled, giving his wife a loving look. "You always choose the best time to make me look like a fool, don't you?"

Luke rubbed at his eyes, pretending he didn't notice his arm came away wet, and rolled over to stare at his bedside table. The bronze statuette he'd been given for his last birthday had pride of place next to the lamp, and at its foot had been left the plastic poppy and goofy-looking phoenix pin. After retrieving the items from his parents' suitcases last year, Luke hadn't had the heart to put them away again, so they now sat in the open where he could look at them. He briefly debated getting up to retrieve the photo album in the bottom drawer, but decided ultimately he didn't want to make the effort to actually move and stayed put.

'It's not just Dad though,' Luke told himself. 'Here, they hang their flag in classrooms, and say a pledge to it every morning... Don't they find that weird? It's like you're not allowed to have a problem with it, or you're alienated and... ' He sighed, unable to finish his thought. 'I miss Guy Fawke's Day. At least then it was fireworks without any flags. And bonfires.'

The phone in his pocket buzzed, and Luke pulled it out to find a text from Phoenix.

Trucy and I are on our way back. Can you make sure the door is open for us?

Making one last rub at his eyes to ensure they were dry, Luke quickly tapped out a reply and got out of bed to head downstairs.

I'll wait for you in reception. See you in a minute, Nick.
The Channelling Chamber

Be sure to bring a photo of your parents with you to Kurain okay?.

Why?

Cuz me and Pearly want to know more about them of course! Didn't Nick say you have a whole album of pictures?.

Yes, I do. Why are you so interested in them?

I need a reason to have an interest in something now? ;) Just make sure you bring it along Luke.

July 15, 7:53AM
Fey Manor
Hallway

Luke had just woken up and was stumbling towards the kitchen with a yawn when he was suddenly accosted by an energetic spirit medium in purple.

"Luke, I've been thinking on it for a while, and I think I've finally hit upon an answer!" Maya explained, grabbing Luke's arms. "I can actually help you! And I think you'll like this, too!"

"Huh?" Luke mumbled, still half-asleep.

"I'll explain later!" Maya promised, patting Luke's shoulders and running off. "Be ready once I'm done with my preparations, okay?"

Luke shook his head, still highly confused. 'Thinking on what? What answer?' They'd arrived in Kurain only the previous day, and he'd thought at the time that Maya was treating him oddly, almost carefully, as though he might break down in tears at any moment. 'I'm not some fragile doll,' he angrily mused to himself, rubbing the sleep from his eyes as he returned to his walk. 'I wonder if this has anything to do with how she was so excited to look at Mum's photo album last night...?'

July 15, 10:40AM
Fey Manor
Meditation Room

"We're ready!" came the cry throughout the mansion, and the four Wrights and two Feys gathered in
the Meditation Room at the front door. The forbidding, thick wooden doors nearby, which had been locked tight until now, were open, revealing a dark, windowless room beyond. Pearl looked excited, Phoenix stern, and Apollo and Trucy simply confused, while Maya was almost as excited as she'd been that morning, running to Luke and grabbing his hands. "I have a little surprise for you," she told the teen. "It may or may not be pleasant, but I think it's exactly what you've been needing the past year."

Releasing her grip from the confused Luke, Maya pulled an important-looking black key from her sleeve and handed it to Phoenix, who held it tightly, as though it might fly away should he not be careful. She gave him no instruction, so Luke presumed this was something they had done before.


Maya didn't reply. With a sad smile, she took Luke by the hand and led him through into the small room, closing the doors behind them.

Luke looked around warily. The room was a lot brighter than he expected, lit by maybe a hundred small candles dotted all around the floor. At the far wall was an old-looking paper screen, behind a small shrine of more small candles. On the floor were paper mats, soft to the teen's bare feet.

Having released Luke's hand, Maya quickly tip-toed to the paper screen, checking the inky blackness between it and the wall, then moved to kneel down on the mats with her back to the candle-shrine, patting the floor in front of her to invite Luke to join her. "This is the Channelling Chamber," she told him. "Don't be scared. We're not doing anything yet."

Luke thought a moment before gingerly kneeling down on the paper mats, as close to Maya as was comfortable. "What is this about?" he warily asked.

Maya sadly smiled. "I've never fully explained to you what it really means when I say I'm a spirit medium, have I?"

Frowning in confusion, Luke paused before he replied, "Spirit mediums supposedly talk to the dead, don't they?"

"'Supposedly'?” Maya repeated, an eyebrow raised.

Luke blushed in embarrassment. "Uh, well, not to offend you, I just-!"

"It's alright," Maya laughed. "We've probably heard worse insults over the years!"

"I'm sorry," Luke mumbled, staring at the floor as he tried to force the red from his face.

"I just said, it's fine," Maya insisted, leaning forward to rub Luke's arm comfortingly. "Here in Kurain though, we do a little more than just talk to the dead."

Luke looked up curiously, unsure if he wanted to believe what Maya, friend or not, was saying right off the bat.

Maya held her hands together in her lap, looking a little unsure of herself. "I-I know you don't know for sure if your parents are alive or dead at this stage, but, y'know, I figure it's a win-win if I-"

"They're probably dead," Luke darkly interrupted, again staring at his lap. "I know."

There was an awkward silence for a few moments before Maya again spoke. "I can try to channel them. They'll take over my body for a little while, give you a chance to talk to them. If you want to."
Luke didn't respond.

"I can only channel one at a time, though," Maya continued, clutching her hands together tightly. "Do you want me to go ahead?"

It was a long time before Luke made a move, raising one arm from his lap to rub at his eyes. "I do. I need to apologise to Dad," he mumbled, trying to hide the hitch in his voice. "I want to talk to Mum, but... Dad's more important first."

Maya nodded, giving Luke a sympathetic smile even though he couldn't see it. "I remember what he looks like," she said. "And his name's Clark, right? Just so I know who I'm looking for."

"Mmm," Luke replied with a small nod, forcing himself to sternly look up to Maya's face despite his damp eyes. "A-and, I'll know if you've faked it, okay?"

Maya couldn't resist a small laugh, assuring her friend, "Oh, don't worry; If it doesn't work, it will be obvious!" She shuffled in her seat a little, holding her hands together in front of her chest and taking a deep breath to calm herself. "Normally," she whispered conspiratorially, giving Luke a wink, "we ask visitors to close their eyes as well, to help convince any shy spirits to drop by, but I don't mind if you want to keep yours open. I don't think your dad will be shy of you, huh?"

Luke forced a nervous smile, gripping his knees as he watched his friend. She closed her eyes and concentrated, fingers interlocking into fists until only her pointer fingers were still extended. Despite the frown in her eyes, her face otherwise looked totally serene. Luke was sure it was just his imagination, but it seemed the hundred individual little flames in the candles around them flared at the same moment, and collectively got brighter.

Despite his intention to watch Maya closely for any trickery, Luke found himself losing his nerve and moving his gaze down to the floor, seeing only her knees opposite his.

'I hate to not trust her completely, but I have to be certain she isn't trying to give me false comfort! What's a question I can ask Dad to ensure it's him if this succeeds?' As he ran through possibilities in his mind, his attention was then called back to the floor he was staring at, as he noticed something was strangely off about Maya's knees.

'Wait, I didn't think Maya's legs were quite that...'

As he watched, her hands lowered into view, untangling themselves from each other, and Luke suddenly realised those were not Maya's hands.

"Luke...?"

Luke's gaze shot up, and the teen found himself staring into his father's beardless face ('Dad looks super weird without his beard.'), looking down on him with wonder from underneath Maya's black fringe. 'H-how...!?'

Clark chuckled, shaking his head. "My goodness, Luke, look at how you've grown! How long has it been?"

A part of Luke's mind jumped to work, figuring out a laundry list of possible explanations for what he was seeing. 'Hallucinogenic gas? Hypnotism? Body-swap with a look-alike and a sound-alike feeding them lines?' The rest of him, however, was overcome with shock, and quietened the doubts the more he stared at the figure kneeling before him. Finally, he tossed any doubts or suspicions of trickery from his head and threw himself into his father's arms, loudly sobbing, "I'm so sorry!"

Clark grunted a bit as he suddenly found a crying fourteen-year-old huddling against his chest, but he was quick to hug Luke tightly and offer comfort. "Luke, you have nothing to apologise for," he assured his son. "I should be apologising for not being there for you!"
Luke shook his head fiercely, almost pulling his hat off as he rubbed it against Clark's chest. "I was mad at you!" he pointed out. "And then you died! You're dead and I was still mad at you!"

"Oh, Luke!" Clark mumbled in comfort, pulling Luke tighter towards him. "I never blamed you for being mad. I was dragging you away from England, from Hershel and Flora, from all our old friends in Misthallery! Of course you would take a while to warm up to the idea!"

Luke sniffed a little before slowly nodding. He had to admit, it was a relief to hear those words being said with his father's voice.

"Aside from what happened to me, how are you?" Clark continued. "How's your mother? Are you doing well?"

At that, Luke frowned, leaning back from his father to look up at his face in confusion. "Isn't... Mum dead too?"

Now it was Clark's turn to look confused. "I haven't seen her," he admitted with a shrug. "I assumed you were both together, after we got pulled from the car."

Luke paused a second, then jumped to his feet, searching his pockets for his notebook. A moment later, he'd pulled out a pen to accompany it, and dropped back to the paper mats as he flipped the worn blue notebook open. "Dad," he instructed as he readied his pen, "tell me everything you remember about the accident! From beginning to end!"

Clark was still confused, but shook his head and decided to acquiesce to Luke's request.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"Well, it makes sense you don't remember it," Clark began, thoughtfully. "You were asleep at the time, if I recall." He crossed his arms. "I was driving. Your mother and I were chatting between ourselves to pass the time." He smiled to himself at the memory, then frowned. "Then... that thing appeared."

"Thing?" Luke repeated, writing down small, hurried notes of his father's words into his notebook. "Like a lorry?"

Clark shook his head, sending Maya's long hair waving about his shoulders. "No, the silhouette was wrong for a lorry," he replied. "It was... tall. Wide enough to take up the whole road. The headlights were in entirely the wrong places; It looked like they were even moving independently."

Luke hummed to himself in thought as he noted down the observations.

"I tried to swerve out of the way, but I don't think I got very far," Clark continued. "It was like it... moved suddenly at the last second, to meet us just before we hit the trees." He sighed. "I'm sorry I can't be of any more help."

"It's okay, Dad," Luke assured him, smiling as he continued to write. "Every little bit helps in an investigation!"

Clark chuckled. "I'm sure," he agreed. "After that is a bit fuzzy, I'm afraid. I don't recall the accident itself. My next memory is of being pulled from the car by the rescuers."

Luke tapped his pen against his chin in thought. "Do you know how long that was after the crash?"

"Not too long," Clark replied. He reached up to rub his chin, only to be surprised when his hand met bare skin instead of hair, and, looking somewhat perturbed, crossed his arms tightly to keep himself from dwelling on it. "It was still dark. Your mother was awake, I remember, talking to me." He frowned. "She'd cut something. She had blood streaming down her arm." He shook his head at the memory. "The men... I think they were men... They were all in leather uniforms. They took us into the forest a little way and left us there for a while, I assumed to go get you. I tried to talk to them, but they just told me to rest."

Luke paused in his writing momentarily as he realised why the bracelet they'd found had been so badly blood-stained. He briefly wondered what had happened to it after Phoenix handed it off to Gumshoe.

"I'm sure I'm misremembering things," Clark continued warily, "but I seem to recall that the men who rescued us all had the same face... but different voices."

"That's odd," Luke agreed, noting the fact down. "They must have been disguising themselves for some reason."
Clark shrugged. "I admit, I found myself a bit suspicious when they came back with syringes." He shivered. "I was too weak to stop them, but they injected us with something." He sighed. "The last thing I saw before I lost consciousness was your mother reaching under a bush. I must have passed on before I had the chance to wake up again."

Luke smiled, realising Brenda had been deliberately leaving them a clue with the loss of her bracelet. The syringes, though, were an equally important clue that needed attention. "They weren't real rescuers," he pointed out.

"I realise that now," Clark sighed. "I was hoping for the best, but if your mother is still missing out there..." He paused, looking down at Luke with a confused frown. "What happened to you? Surely someone's looking after you until your mother is found!"

Luke winced, abandoning his notebook for the moment. "Dad, as far as the authorities are concerned," he explained, "you and Mum were killed in the crash. Nobody ever found your bodies."

Clark blinked in surprise. "Never...?"

"I've been fine, I promise," Luke continued. "They found me in the car the next morning, and took me to the hospital. I've..." He paused, nervously avoiding his father's gaze. "I've been adopted. By a friend of mine. I don't know if you remember me talking about him or not."

After a short pause, Clark chuckled. "You'd have to tell me his name for me to answer that," he pointed out, then looked around the room curiously. "Where are we, by the way? If we were back in England, surely Hershel would be looking after you."

Luke smiled. "Still in California," he answered. "My friend lives here. His..." He paused again. "When the Professor and I were in Labyrinthia, we met them there. Maya's a spirit medium," he gestured to Clark's purple dress, "and Nick's... Mister Wright... he used to be a lawyer."

Clark picked at the kimono as though only just noticing it, then turned his attention back to his son. "Is he looking after you? Are you happy?"

Luke thought a moment, then shyly nodded.

"Then I have nothing to complain about," Clark decided, hands clutched together in his lap.

Luke looked up in surprise. "You don't?"

Clark laughed. "You think I'd be upset someone was looking after you now that I can't anymore?" he asked with a knowing smile. "I remember how you raved about this 'Mister Wright' and how talented he was. Considering the circumstances, it sounds like you couldn't have a better father!"

Biting his lip, Luke looked away. "Fathers Day was last month," he said. "I almost didn't get Nick anything."

"Ah, it's July, is it?" Clark deduced with a smile, crossing his arms. "Can't be more than a year since I last saw you, so it must be twenty-twenty, correct?"

Luke frowned. "Dad, you're getting off-topic!"

Clark laughed in response, reaching out to ruffle Luke's hair. "Ah, I see. I'm still 'Dad', but your new father is only 'Nick'." His smile tightened a bit in concern. "You know I don't mind that you have a new 'Dad', Luke. You don't have to wait for my permission to accept him."
Fiddling with his hands, Luke looked away nervously. "But I already have a 'Dad'," he quietly argued, trying to hold back the tears pricking at the corners of his eyes as he edged closer to his father's side. "I don't want to forget you, Dad..."

Clark gently pulled Luke back into a hug. "And I know you never would," he replied. "If you don't want to, you don't have to call this Nick 'Dad'. I called my own father 'Pop', for example."

Luke sniggered. "'Pop' is what I called him, too!" he pointed out.

"True," Clark said with a laugh. "Maybe not the best suggestion I've ever had, then!" He hugged Luke in silence for a few more moments. "Think about it, though. Discuss it with him. Oh, and," he lifted Luke's chin with a finger to look his son sternly in the eye, "you tell this 'Nick' he better look after you, or I'll be haunting his nightmares."

Luke grinned. "Don't worry, Dad. Even if Nick's busy, Apollo and Trucy are always there!"

Clark frowned and tensed up, confused. "Who?"

"Apollo and Trucy!" Luke repeated, pulling away to give his father a big grin. "They're half-siblings, and Nick adopted them too, so they're my new brother and sister!" He giggled. "Apollo's a little older than me, but Trucy's turning nine in August!"

Clark relaxed with a soft laugh. "Ah, the one thing your mother and I never gave you: Brothers and sisters!" he joked.

Luke giggled for a moment, then quietened and leaned back in to hug Clark again. "I suppose I could call Nick 'Papa'," he mused aloud. "Trucy's hat that she made for him says that, even though she calls him 'Daddy'." He smiled to himself, snuggling his father tightly. "I love my two dads."

"And the both of us love you right back." Clark returned the hug, although his sincere smile soon changed into a concerned frown. "I think my time here is running out," he said.

Luke froze in shock, then looked up at Clark with wide eyes. "So soon!?"

Clark held Luke's face, giving his son a tearful smile. "Never forget I love you, son. You look after your new family. Continue doing your best to find your mother."

Luke nodded, blinking away his own tears. "B-but I want you to help me, Dad!"


Sniffing, Luke clutched his father tightly, unable to restrain his sobs. "I love you too, Dad..."

The hug continued for uncountable moments, the hand on Luke's head patting him comfortingly, and Luke focussed on it so he wouldn't know exactly when Clark's spirit left Maya's body. He didn't want to have to say goodbye to his father again, not so soon after learning he was never going to be finding him alive.

The hand moved from his head to wrap around Luke, and the teen quickly noticed how different this hug felt to Clark's bearhugs, letting out another round of sobs as he knew his father was gone.

"It's okay," Maya murmured from above his head. "You let it out, Luke. No one will judge you."

It was several minutes before Luke calmed down enough to pull himself together. Maya didn't say a word until her young friend was finally sitting in front of her again, his face dry (despite his red eyes) and his arms gleaming in the candlelight with the thin layer of salt water covering them. Her own kimono was a little wet around the chest area, but she didn't seem to mind, smiling sympathetically at Luke.

"If you don't want to just yet," she offered, "I can try for your mother in another few hours. Give you time to calm down."

Luke thought for a moment, busying himself by picking up the abandoned notebook and pen on the floor. "What happens," he slowly asked, "if you try to channel someone who's still alive?"

Maya cocked her head in surprise. "The channelling fails," she answered. "Did I not manage to explain that before I channelled your dad?"

"I might have interrupted you," Luke replied, mind already whirring on his next question.

"Oh, okay," Maya replied, frowning to herself. "You think your mom might be...?"

Luke nodded. "Dad thought she was still alive. He said something about not having seen her."

Maya thought a moment, then slowly smiled. "You want me to check if she's there or not?"

"If you can," Luke replied, blushing a little. "I was going to ask if it was possible to see she was there without channelling her."

"Of course it is!" Maya chirped, then jumped back into her 'channelling' pose, hands together with index fingers pointing to the ceiling. "Her name's Brenda, right? I remember what she looked like."


Maya closed her eyes, concentrating as she went totally still. The only sound in the dark room was the crackling of the candles and the pair's breathing.

Luke waited impatiently, staring at Maya and holding his hands together to keep from making any distracting noises. His notebook in his lap was pressed tight into his legs to keep it from slipping, his pen clutched in one fist. The candlelight played against the features of Maya's face, tricking Luke multiple times into thinking he could see his mother's nose or eyes, before he realised his mistake and saw only Maya's calm face.

It seemed to be forever before Maya gradually relaxed, her hands drifting down towards her lap as her eyes opened. She stared off into the distance for a moment in thought, then looked up to meet Luke's excited gaze, and slowly smiled. "I can't find her," she announced. "I think your mother's still alive!"

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Phoenix had been pacing back and forth in front of the chamber doors for a while now, methodically tapping the key in his hand against his palm. Once he'd helped Pearl explain what was going on to Apollo and Trucy, he'd quickly taken to the nervous pacing, a distracted frown on his face. Pearl still looked excited, fiddling with her hands as she sat on the floor where she'd led her honorary cousins once the doors to the Channelling Chamber had closed. "It's been so long since we used the Channelling Chamber!" the birthday girl squeaked. "Mystic Maya is so busy nowadays, it's always the elders handling clients!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, turning his gaze from Trucy drawing on his left to Pearl on his right. "Are you okay with this happening today?" he asked.

Pearl frowned. "What do you mean by that, Apollo?"

"It's your birthday," Apollo pointed out with a shrug. "I'd've thought you wouldn't want to be overshadowed or something."

"No...?" Pearl replied, looking confused. "I may be turning ten, but today is just a day." She then smiled again. "And we're making Luke happy! That's the important thing!"

Trucy looked up from her paper, covered in pencil scribbles. "But didn't you say that if Miss Maya channels his mom and dad, that means they're actually dead?" she asked. "I thought he said they were still alive!"

"That's the thing, we don't know," Apollo answered, giving his sister a sad shake of the head. "Not knowing if they're alive or dead is probably a worse feeling for Luke than knowing for sure if they're dead or simply missing." He crossed his arms, thinking. "Actually, it's a worse feeling in general, not knowing that kind of thing for sure."

Trucy frowned to herself, then returned to her drawing.

Finally, the forbidding double doors began to open with a conspicuous creak. Everyone in the room paused, looking up expectantly as first Maya then Luke emerged from the room. Maya gave them all a reassuring calm smile, while Luke seemed deep in thought, his eyes red from crying.

Phoenix took a step forward, torn between running to comfort his middle child and giving him space. "Luke? Are you alright?" he asked, the black key Maya had given him clutched tightly in his hands.

Luke looked up in mild surprise as he was pulled from his internal train of thought, but gave Phoenix a smile. "I'm fine," he said. "Really, I am."

Apollo stood up, followed by Trucy and Pearl. "What happened in there?" he asked.

Maya grinned, clapping her hands together. "Well, we have some good news and some bad news!"
she announced, turning towards Luke to pass the topic on to him.

"Good news first!" Trucy cried, gripping her paper she had been drawing on in her hands and staring intensely at Luke. "I wanna hear good news!"

Luke thought a moment. "Well, it's all kind of a mix of both good and bad," he admitted.

"Are they still alive?" Apollo asked, nervously clutching his bracelet. "Your parents?"

To Apollo's surprise, Luke giggled a little. "We think Mum might be!" he replied.

Trucy and Pearl cheered, the younger of the two dropping her picture and jumping on Pearl to swing her around in a brief celebratory dance before Pearl nervously extracted herself, looking a little embarrassed.

Phoenix smiled, looking relieved. "What about your dad?"

"He's..." Luke paused, and his sad look answered the question all on its own. "Dad died just after the accident. But," he turned his face up to meet Phoenix's sympathetic gaze with a determined look, "he told me everything he remembers about that night, so I think we have a few leads now on the investigation!"

Although surprised at Luke's ability to be keeping calm, Phoenix returned a determined smile and nodded. "Sure. We can go over them together later."

Before anyone else could respond, Apollo jumped forward, reaching into the pocket of his shorts. "Maya! Are you able to do another channelling?"

Maya looked confused, glancing over at Phoenix just as he smiled knowingly. "Why?" she asked.

Apollo rushed forward and pulled out a tightly folded piece of paper, which he carefully pulled open and held out to Maya, showing off the image of Thalassa Gramarye that dominated the top half. "Can you find out if she's alive?"


"That's your mom!?!" Maya realised.

Trucy ran up behind Apollo, slapping his back and rushing around to his front as he cried in pain, recoiling from the hit. "Mommy's alive! I told you she is!" she insisted.

Apollo frowned at Trucy, but decided to continue his plea to Maya rather than respond. "Pearly said you need a photo and a name, right? Well, this is the photo, even if it's a bit old, and her name is Thalassa Gramarye. Is it possible to find out if she's still alive or not?"

Trucy growled, stomping her feet before resorting to slapping Apollo again.

"Trucy, stop that!" Phoenix warned her, getting ready to step in and drag her away if he had to.

"You're not listening!" the eight-year-old accused her brother.

"Yes, I am!" Apollo replied. "You need to face it Trucy, no one vanishes in the middle of a disappearing trick, not unless they're trying to run away! You don't think she was running away, right?" Noticing Trucy's slight wince as she glared off to the side, he softened his harsh tone a little. "Something happened, and we don't know what. All I want to do right now is confirm if she's alive or dead. Okay?"
Everyone watched in silence for a few moments, before Trucy sniffed, rubbing at her nose with the back of her wrist. "Okay," she mumbled, still staring at the floor.

"If you two want to come with me," Maya offered, resting her hands comfortably on Trucy's shoulders, "we can find out the answer to that question."

As Maya, Apollo and Trucy disappeared into the Channelling Chamber, Pearl moved to clear up the small mess Trucy had left on the floor from her drawing, including the paper itself and a small pile of coloured pencils. Phoenix and Luke stood next to each other in silence, watching the thick double doors.

"Will Trucy be okay?" Luke quietly asked, looking up at Phoenix worriedly.

Phoenix smiled, looking down at the teen. "Are you?"

Luke blushed a little, and nodded, looking away again. 'Should I...? I probably should.' Steeling his nerve, he turned back to face Phoenix with a smile. "When I was talking to Dad, he wanted me to pass on that you have to look after me, or he'll haunt your nightmares."

"Ah," Phoenix mumbled, looking a bit put-down by the comment. "I'll... do my best."

"You weren't already?" Luke giggled, and, when Phoenix rolled his eyes, added, "Don't worry Nick, you're doing a great job!"

Phoenix laughed, ruffling Luke's hair through his hat. "Good to hear! I don't want to disappoint your father, huh?"

Behind them, Pearl smiled, happy knowing Luke was doing well after the morning he'd gone through.

Luke stared nervously at his feet. "There was another thing Dad and I talked about," he continued. "I... I've not been thinking of you as a father, like I should."

"I understand, Luke," Phoenix replied, peering down at his younger son as he worried what was troubling him. "You still have your dad. I don't want to replace him."

It was a few moments before Luke responded, looking up to meet Phoenix's gaze. "Is it alright if... if I call you 'Papa'?"

Phoenix stared blankly for several seconds, then slowly smiled, moving to ruffle Luke's hair again. "I wouldn't mind that at all."

Pearl grinned, watching through her fingers as Luke giggled and hugged Phoenix. Watching them bond was almost as heart-warming as the best romance in her eyes.

The Channelling Chamber doors swung open, deceptively fast, and Trucy bounced out energetically, running to Phoenix and pulling on his arm as Luke hurried out of her way. "Daddy! Daddy!" she cried. "She's still alive!"

"Oh?" Phoenix asked in surprise, looking up to see a happy Apollo and Maya following after. "You couldn't channel her?"

Maya shook her head. "Guess she must still be out there somewhere!"

"She didn't run away!" Trucy insisted, shooting a glare at Apollo that was met with a rolling of his
eyes. "Mommy would *never* leave me and Grandpa and Daddy!"

"Alright, alright," Apollo mumbled, crossing his arms. "It was just a suggestion of what *might* have happened!"

Luke giggled. "I guess we've *all* got investigations to do!" he said.

"You bet," Maya replied, hands on her hips as she shot a cheeky smile in Phoenix's direction. "I'm starting to worry I've lost the knack for channelling! Maybe I should try for Sis as a test!"

Phoenix went red, holding his hands up as his eyes went wide. "N-no need to do that!" he cried, a little higher-pitched than normal. "Don't want to bother Mia for no reason, after all!"

Maya pouted but relented. "You've got to tell her sometime, Nick," she pointed out, then turned back towards the chamber. "I've got to clean up. I'll talk to you guys later, okay?"

Phoenix sighed in relief, ignoring the curious looks his children were now giving him. "I... need to return this key to Maya," he mumbled, waving the key in his hand as he followed her into the chamber.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
My dear Luke,

This past Saturday was Alfendi's first birthday. Flora and I took him out around London, and I think he quite enjoyed it, although moreso for the people-watching than the change of scenery. Flora was quite happily getting ice-cream and chatting away to him about one thing or another, and Alfendi actually seemed to be intently listening to her. He also seems to be attempting to say her name, as I heard him saying something like 'Fofo' to himself in his pram. Why he prefers to practise his speech on his own, I don't think I'll ever understand. Flora was also encouraging him when he was distracted by a toy and started tossing it out of the pram repeatedly. I suppose at least they were both having fun, but I would prefer not to end up being the one to have to play this 'game' when he decides to play it at home.

As for this 'channelling' of Miss Fey's, I find myself still a bit wary. I understand your point that she is a friend and would not lie, not to mention that we have certainly seen stranger things over the years, but I can think of so many ways what you experienced could be faked. I suppose I shall have to see it for myself to fully believe it. I certainly do not intend to needlessly hurt your feelings talking about it so. In any case, I am glad you got to talk to Clark, and that the experience has helped you move on and accept Mr Wright. It is truly sad to hear Clark is gone, although, as you say, we still have every hope of finding your mother alive at this point. We certainly mustn't waste it.

I have got on to Paul regarding those masks of his, but I'm sorry to say what he told me would be of little help; Paul's masks came from an English company in Sussex, and the ones these 'rescuers' of Clark's had on would be American in origin. I would look for a manufacturer in the Los Angeles area first, if I were you; I don't imagine a group as shady as this would go too far for supplies.

The usual puzzles are enclosed, along with a photo Flora took of myself and Alfendi last week. I assure you, I am not sleeping in that picture, merely resting my eyes a moment. I hope you and your loved ones continue to be well.

Your friend,

Professor Hershel Layton

11th August, 2020

Dear Professor Layton,

Oh, I didn't know Alfendi's birthday was coming up! You should have warned me so I could send him a present! What do babies like as gifts? I'm glad he had fun on the day, though. Flora said in her letter that someone started lecturing her, thinking she was Alfendi's mother? That sounds horrid! It seems like Flora gave them a good talking-to at least.

I'm sorry I rambled a bit in my last letter, talking about the channelling. I know there's still a possibility it was faked, but I don't believe it was. Dad was far too real to not be there, and besides, Papa says Maya used to channel her sister all the time in the city when he was having trouble with his early cases (she was his mentor, you know). Maya told me she would have done that in
Labyrinthia too, but she'd have been accused of being a witch had anyone noticed, so it was too dangerous. She did laugh that it didn't help anyway, but that's beside the point.

It's too bad to hear Don Paolo couldn't help. I thought he would have some kind of insight into this kind of thing, considering how often he was trying to trick us one way or another. I guess I'll have to start looking without a clear starting point then. Thanks for asking him, Professor.

Speaking of Mum and Dad, it's almost been a full year since the accident. Detective Gumshoe has invited us to the police storage warehouse tomorrow, to look through the things they kept from the moving truck. Most of the furniture is gone, apparently, but hopefully there'll be things like my Sherlock Holmes books in there, and the rest of the photo albums. It'll be nice to see those again. I should try and keep some of Mum's stuff for when we find her. I think anything I can't take is getting auctioned off or something, so I have to be thorough.

I've included some of my own puzzles for you and Flora. The photo is adorable! Don't worry Professor, I know you're not sleeping in it, no matter what Flora says! Alfendi's quite a bit bigger than in the last photo you sent. The three of you continue looking after each other, okay?

Your friend and apprentice,

Luke Triton

17th August, 2020

August 18, 12:55PM

Storage Warehouse

Unit 015

"Detective Gumshoe!" Trucy shouted, running away from her family's group walking along the pavement and towards the large man in a coat hanging around outside one of the long line of garage doors in the side of the building.

"Hey there, pal!" Gumshoe laughed in response, returning the girl's hug and shooting a smile to the short-haired woman with glasses standing next to him. "Told ya they wouldn't be long!"

Phoenix pushed along Luke and Apollo at his sides, grinning as he followed his daughter at a more leisurely pace. "Hope we didn't keep you waiting!" he called in greeting. Luke waved to their friend, while Apollo only nodded, remembering the last time they'd met Gumshoe almost an entire year ago.

"Nah, no problem, pal!" Gumshoe replied. "Glad you could make it!"

The woman at the detective's side smiled cheerfully at the Wrights, giving Phoenix a quick salute. "Nice to meet you again, Mister Wright!"

"Hey there, Maggey," Phoenix replied, a little surprised. "Wasn't expecting to see you here! Oh, and I should make some introductions." He moved his hands on top of Luke's and Apollo's heads, to Apollo's annoyance. "Luke, Apollo. Over there is Trucy. Kids, this is Maggey Byrde, a former client of mine."
"Hi!" Trucy chirped.


Maggey turned to Apollo, crossing her arms with an open smile. "Ah, so you're Apollo! Nice to finally meet you in person!"

Apollo blinked, shoving Phoenix's hand off his head with a confused look. "Huh?"

Laughing, Maggey decided to elaborate. "Maya gave you my number, remember? I'm hurt you'd forget about me, Steel!"

Hearing his internet username, Apollo went pale. "Oh, Blackbird! I-I'm sorry, I... forgot, I guess..."

"Hey, you're fine, pal," Maggey giggled, waving a hand. "I don't mean to embarrass you in front of your dad!"

"Too late!" Phoenix cheerily replied, poking Apollo's arm as the teen rolled his eyes. "I forgot, you two know each other from that fanclub, huh? You probably want to catch up!"

"That can wait 'til later, pal!" Gumshoe cried, turning to pull the sliding door behind him up and open. "We've got a job to do!"

Luke gasped, running forward and ducking under the door the moment it was high enough for him to enter. The light spilled into the room beyond, the dark concrete-walled cube full of boxes, most open or half-open, littered all over the floor and into several piles almost as tall as Trucy. Someone flicked a switch behind him, and a single bulb in the roof above flickered on, lighting the dark corners that the sunlight couldn't reach and illuminating a few forgotten chairs and a chest of drawers tucked up the back.

Looking at the boxes, Luke was struck at how well he remembered them from the weeks before they left England, either from packing his own things into them or from watching them be taken away and piled into a moving van to begin their journey to America a week or two ahead of the Tritons themselves. *There's so many... Where do I even start?*

Phoenix came up behind the teen, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. "You okay?"

Luke nodded. "I'm fine, Papa," he replied, then looked up with a smile. "We'd better get started, huh?"

Apollo watched as Gumshoe pulled out a list of the boxes and began to read them out, Trucy running around to locate the ones he named. Very soon, they'd settled into a routine with Phoenix helping Luke go through a box, take out things he was interested in keeping, then Gumshoe ticking off that box as checked and sending Trucy off to find the next one on the list. Standing outside watching the proceedings were Apollo and Maggey, content to stay out of the way.

"Can I ask you something, Steel?" Maggey asked, a serious look on her face.

Startled out of his thoughts, Apollo looked up with a confused look. "What?"

"Back when you first joined the new forum," Maggey explained, a hand shyly reaching up to grip her other arm, "I made the stupid decision to ask if you knew why Mister Wright adopted you and your brother."

"Yeah, I remember that," Apollo mumbled with a blush, scratching the back of his neck. "What
Maggey frowned to herself. "I just wanted to apologise and... ask if you were okay." She gave him a concerned look. "You talked to him about that, right?"

Apollo had to resist laughing. "Yeah, sure I did!" he said, grinning. "Turns out Trucy was my half-sister already!"

"Oh!" Maggey gasped in surprise. "Really!?"

"Dad was keeping it a secret," Apollo continued, giggling behind his grin. "Wanted to surprise us!"

"Well, it surprised me!" Maggey replied, smiling. "Speaking of the forum, I was expecting you to join up and boast about how you got adopted." She frowned, giving him a curious look. "Why the pretence that you're just friends?"

Apollo shrugged, thinking to himself. "I guess I figured no-one would believe me," he explained. "I... didn't want everyone to reject me right off the bat."

Maggey gripped her hands together, concerned for her young friend. "Hey, I'll back you up," she offered. "No-one's gonna argue with the admin."

"Thanks for the offer," Apollo said, giving her a grateful smile, "but it's fine. I'm happier not being the centre of attention." He gave her a half-lidded stare. "Anyway, you know Pocky would ambush me with demands for details every second of the day."

"That's a good point," Maggey relented, arms crossed.

In the garage, Trucy loudly cried, "There's one over here!", attracting Maggey and Apollo's attention. She ran to a wall by the entrance, where a small stepladder was folded against the wall. "I found a ladder!"

"That's a stepladder, Truce," Phoenix replied from one of the piles of boxes, a small frown on his face as he corrected her.

Apollo scoffed. "It has 'ladder' in it, who cares what she calls it?"

Phoenix gave Apollo a somewhat frustrated look. "It unfolds and makes steps, it's a stepladder."

"You can make steps with any ladder," Apollo pointed out, rolled his eyes, "providing you angle it right!"

"Do we have to discuss this now!?!" Luke cried, exasperated.

"Yeah!" Gumshoe chimed in. "It's clearly a ladder, pal!"

Phoenix slapped his face with one hand. 'I give up.'
Luke hummed in thought, sat on one of the benches out the front of the school watching the cars go by on the road outside.

Apollo smirked. "You have to say them out loud y'know, or I can't count 'em."

Luke winced, then sighed. "Okay, um..." He held up a finger, frowning in concentration. "California, Arizona... New York... Mississippi..."

"That's four," Apollo said. "Forty-six to go."

"Texas," Luke continued, then looked over to Apollo warily. "Is there a state called 'Dakota'?"

Apollo snorted, but quickly schooled his face back into a neutral expression. "Sort of," he replied.

Luke frowned. "You're not being very helpful."

"I'm not giving you the answer," Apollo insisted with a grin.

"GUYS!" came a raspy shout from somewhere behind them, and the brothers turned around to see their friend Clay barrelling out of the school doors towards them, a terrified look on his face. "GUYS, IT'S AWFUL!"

Giving each other confused glances, Apollo and Luke jumped to their feet, meeting Clay as he arrived at their bench, doubled over panting. "What's going on?" Luke asked. "Did your detention get extended?"

"The... the rocket!" Clay cried through his laboured breathing. "It's...! Mister... Starbuck...!"

"Okay, calm down," Apollo instructed his friend, patting his back and guiding him to sit down. "Use your big boy words."

Clay was too distressed to react to the mild insult, sitting on the bench and hugging his middle tightly as he slowly regained his ability to speak coherently. He was serving detentions for a half-hour after classes for two weeks after skipping school the previous day to hang out at the Cosmos Space Center, helping out in preparation for the launch of the Center's manned mission into outer space that morning. He'd wanted to be there on the launch, he'd told his friends, but was persuaded by Director Cosmos to drop by a day early instead... not that anyone knew if he was aware Clay was skipping school to do so.

Luke patted his friend's back as he sat beside him. "Are you calm enough to talk now?"

Clay nodded appreciatively, then gave his friends a worried look. "The HAT-1... it's had a series of critical failures. It launched the probe successfully, but... they don't know if Mister Starbuck will make it back to Earth."

Clay only nodded. "They're not going into details, so I don't know any more than that..." He sighed, staring at the asphalt below their feet. "Poor Mister Starbuck... And I was only just talking to him yesterday!"

"He'll be fine, Clay!" Luke insisted, holding his fists up and giving his friend a determined frown. "Mister Starbuck will get back home, just you wait!"

Forcing a small smile, Clay nodded, but it was obvious he didn't actually believe it. "I wonder if they'll give me a copy of the photo..."

"Photo?" Apollo repeated.

Clay nodded. "When I was there yesterday morning, we took a team photo. Me, Mister Starbuck, Director Cosmos... even Ponco and the robot scientists."

"Aw, that's nice of them!" Luke said, trying to cheer up his friend with a smile. "They count you as part of the team!"

"Yeah," Clay laughed, though he still had a sad smile. "Mister Starbuck lent me one of his old jackets, too." He frowned. "Now I wish I'd got to keep it..."

The three friends sat in silence for a few moments, Luke patting Clay's shoulder in an attempt to offer comfort.

Apollo thought for a moment, then looked over to Clay. "Oh, um, I almost forgot... Did you find out why Director Cosmos sent you home early yesterday?"

Clay frowned, staring at his friend. "I get the feeling you know."

Luke looked between them, confused. "Why? Did something happen?"

Clay sighed, turning to Luke. "Apparently someone was murdered. One of the robotics scientists, I think. I only found out about it today, when I was looking up the launch at lunchtime."

"Oh no!" Luke cried. "And you were there, but you didn't know!?"

"No-one told me," Clay replied, shaking his head with a frown. "I was downstairs from there with Mister Starbuck, then Director Cosmos came in, kicked me out and didn't say why." He sighed, reminded of his mentor's current predicament. "I barely got to say goodbye to him..."

"He's not dead," Apollo sternly pointed out, "not yet. Don't lose hope." He held up a fist in determination. "We keep fighting to the bitter end! As long as we believe he'll be okay, Mister Starbuck will pull through!"

"Yeah!" Luke cheered as he joined in. "And the three of us will be there to welcome him home, right?"

Clay slowly smiled at the prospect of his friends returning to the Space Center, then flung his arms around their necks with a grin. "You bet we will!" he cried. "Mister Starbuck's gonna get home safe and be absolutely fine!"

The three teenage boys loudly cheered to themselves as they began to repeat the affirmation to themselves, determined to believe in the best possible outcome at all costs.
Dad, have you heard about the hat1 rocket?

Yeah I saw that on the news. I guess Clay must be upset.

Upset is a bit of an understatement :|

Why?

Hang on, your brother is texting me now.

PAPA, DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE ROCKET?

APOLLO LITERALLY JUST ASKED ME THAT WHY ARE YOU BOTH TEXTING ME AT ONCE?

OH, SORRY, I'LL LET APOLLO TELL YOU THEN!

SEE YOU TOMORROW, PAPA!

See you tomorrow, Luke :) And turn your caps lock off.

Sorry!

Mr Starbuck is Clays mentor, how do you not remember this Dad?

I cant remember every little detail of Clays life, hes not the one I adopted.

But at least now I know why he'd be more than upset, thats very distressing.

Did Luke mention we want to invite him over for another sleepover? Mr Starbuck isn't landing until tomorrow evening and we don't want to leave Clay alone.

Thats reasonable. Tell him he can come over as long as he doesn't camp himself in front of the news 24/7.

We wont let him do that, dont worry.

Thanks btw

Nice to know thanks are an afterthought with you ;).

I'll see you tomorrow.
Luke, Clay and Apollo sat bunched up together in their pyjamas on the black leather couch, staring at the television screen. At their feet, Trucy yawned in her nightie, leaning against Apollo's legs as she watched with them, a continuing view of sunlit open ocean and sky, narrated over by the droning monotone of a tired newscaster.

"Why are we looking at the sea?" Trucy asked, trying not to look as sleepy as she felt. "The guy said he was gonna land!"

Apollo and Luke looked to Clay, but he was staring so intently at the screen, he didn't appear to have heard Trucy's question. "Mister Starbuck has a long way to fall," Luke explained, stepping in for his friend. "He has to land in the sea, so he doesn't get hurt."

"Before you ask," Apollo cut in, giving his sister a dry look, "that's why he's taking so long. We don't know exactly how high he is at the moment."

Clay adjusted his ever-present visor nervously. "They said his heat-shield has malfunctioned!" he spoke up, starting to sound panicky. "What if he burns up in the atmosphere!?"

Luke and Apollo instantly turned to comfort their friend, grabbing his shoulders. "He'll be fine, Clay!" Apollo cried.

"Yeah!" Luke added. "We're going to go meet him when he comes home, remember?"

Clay nodded, trying to keep himself calm with the positive thoughts, but still bit his lip hard as he stared at the live news broadcast.

The office door opened, and Phoenix wandered in, the only one still in his day clothes. "He hasn't landed yet?" he asked.

Luke looked up and shook his head, shooting his father a worried look.

Phoenix grimaced in sympathy, then headed over to the lounge, leaning on the back to watch the television over the trio's heads. "I'm sure he'll appear soon. There's no reason for him not to."

Clay didn't react, leaning forward in his seat, fists clenched tightly as they rested on his knees.

Suddenly, the view on the screen swung upwards towards the cloudy sky, zooming in and just barely keeping focus on a cone-like object hurtling towards the sea, a parachute clinging to the top point. "And we have visual contact!" the newscaster announced. "The HAT-1 command module has made it to Earth!"

"YES!" Clay cheered, leaning back in his seat and throwing his arms into the air, narrowly avoiding Phoenix as the older man jumped back in surprise.

"Careful there!" Phoenix cried.
"But," the newscaster continued as the camera slowly zoomed out on the descending spacecraft, "is our brave astronaut within safe and unharmed?"

Apollo glared at the TV. "Screw you!" he shouted. "Mister Starbuck's gonna be fine!"

"He can't hear you, Polly," Trucy quietly pointed out, hiding a yawn.

"The moment we know for sure he's safe," Phoenix decided, giving Trucy a warning glare, "you're going to bed, young lady."

Trucy looked up in surprise, whining, "But Daddyyyy!"

Clay, sitting almost on the edge of his seat, shot Trucy a grin. "Don't worry, it'll probably take a few minutes still before they get Mister Starbuck out."

"Yeah," Luke chimed in, "and then we're going to bed." He gave his friends a meaningful look. "Aren't we?"

Apollo nodded without hesitation. "Once we see Mister Starbuck back on Earth, I'll drop dead out of pure relief!"

Clay snorted. "Wait 'til we see him again in person to do that!"

Trucy crossed her arms and sulked as she turned back to the television, only to promptly have to hide another yawn. Phoenix smirked to himself at the kids antics, leaning on the lounge again now he wasn't in danger of getting punched in the face by Clay's enthusiasm.

The five watched in silence as Starbuck's spacecraft slowly touched down on the water's surface, and a small boat, followed by a massive ship, sped to meet it. The parachute was carefully pulled out of the way, the newscaster commentating all the while, and, finally, the door was forced open after some difficulty, the workers in the small boat helping pull free a red-haired man in a bright orange spacesuit.

Clay jumped to his feet, screaming "HE'S SAFE!" and causing everyone around him to jump back, wincing and clutching their ears.

"Solomon Starbuck has returned safely to Earth!" the newscaster cried, a tone of excitement evident in his voice. "He has survived the terrible ordeal no-one ever expected would happen!"

As Luke, Apollo and Clay celebrated amongst themselves, Phoenix rounded the sofa and crouched down by Trucy, grinning. "Bed-time." Trucy sighed, but got up without question, clinging to her father's neck as she silently asked to be carried. Phoenix didn't object, picking her up and holding her tightly as he got to his feet. "You three turn everything off before you head up, okay?" he instructed the boys as he started heading towards the door.


As Phoenix and Trucy left the room, Clay dropped back down on the lounge, sighing in relief. "Oh I'm so glad Mister Starbuck is okay...!"

Apollo laughed, crossing his arms as he watched the Starbuck on the TV being helped onto the massive ship, the remains of his rocket being secured to a crane to be lifted out of the ocean. "Just like I said at the beginning of this mess, he's just fine!"

Luke nodded, fighting off a yawn. "And when he gets back home tomorrow, we'll go and meet him,
Clay grinned. "You bet!" He then sat up. "But you guys are right, we really need to head to bed." Jumping to his feet, he bounced over to Luke, throwing an arm over his shoulders. "We need to be full of energy tomorrow!"

Luke mutely nodded, beginning to head off to the door. "It is really late." Clay shot Apollo a grin as he followed Luke, and the two quickly left the room.

Apollo rolled his eyes as he turned off the TV. "Perfect. Leave me to take care of this," he grumbled to himself, and quickly left the room, turning off the light as he went.
Phoenix looked through the newspaper article with a solemn eye, wondering if he should bring it up to Clay or not. It was connected to the same Space Center the HAT-1 was, although the peril of the malfunctioning rocket had quickly blitzed almost any mention of the murder from making the news anymore, and he had no doubt Clay at least knew who the victim was, even if he wasn't as close to her as to his mentor.

The door burst open and Clay, Apollo and Luke raced into the room. "We're going out, Dad!" Apollo cried, and the three ran towards the front door.

"Hey, hey!" Phoenix called, getting up from his chair behind the desk as he attempted to halt the trio for a moment. "At least tell me where you're going!"

Luke grinned, clutching his satchel where it hung over his shoulder. "The Space Center!" he announced. "We're going to meet up with Mister Starbuck!"

Phoenix was surprised, but decided not to question it. "Alright," he said with a shrug as he sat back down. "Let me know when you're heading home."

"We will!" Luke and Apollo replied in unison, charging out the door with a grinning Clay.

'Clay seems happy enough,' Phoenix mused to himself as the front door slammed closed. 'He might not have known this murder victim after all. Or Starbuck surviving his ordeal is distracting him.' He stared down at the article on his desk. 'But another prosecutor convicted of murder? At least this time they caught him immediately instead of fifteen years later.'

As if on cue, the phone in Phoenix's pocket started to buzz, singing a chirping tune as its owner pulled it out to check the screen. Frowning at the name he saw there, Phoenix pressed the button to answer. "Edgeworth? Why are you calling me?"

"'Hello' would have sufficed," Edgeworth replied from the phone speaker, sarcasm dripping from his tone. "I trust by now you've heard of the prosecutor who was convicted yesterday."

"Yeah, I heard of him," Phoenix said, leaning back in his chair. "Simon Blackquill, the supposed 'king of suggestion'." He scoffed. "Is there something in the water over at the prosecutor's office? That's like the fourth convicted murderer since von Karma himself!"

Edgeworth grunted to himself. "Four individual cases in two years does not a pattern make," he insisted. "Besides, three of those were last year, and the general public didn't care about those cases as they are clearly caring about this one."

Phoenix frowned. "What do you mean?"

"You were disbarred last year," Edgeworth immediately pointed out.
A little shocked at the sudden bluntness, Phoenix winced. "Thanks for reminding me of that," he mumbled.

"One of those previously mentioned prosecutors, not to mention the aforesaid Manfred von Karma, were brought down by you," Edgeworth continued. "It was a great shake to the public trust in the law when the heroic Phoenix Wright, who they believed they could trust, appeared to be almost if not just as bad as the men he had brought down."

Phoenix paused in thought. "People really cared that much about me?" he mused aloud. "I mean, I know I had a fan-club, but."

"Fan-club or not," Edgeworth cut in, "hot on the heels of your disbarment, we have another prosecutor convicted of murder. Even with the distraction of this spacecraft disaster, there are a lot of unfriendly eyes pointing our way." He sighed. "I fear for the public perception of lawyers of all kinds now."

"I'm sure you'll get through it," Phoenix said, running his eyes once again down the article discussing the prosecutor's confession and subsequent conviction. "I mean, the law survived a Chief of Police and Chief Prosecutor being put away for murder, accomplice to murder and obstruction of justice on the same day. Why not a single young prosecutor?"

Edgeworth didn't reply immediately, deep in thought. Eventually, he merely muttered a dark "We'll see," and changed the subject.

October 10, 11:47AM
Cosmos Space Center
Entrance

There weren't very many regular workers at Cosmos Space Center, but it still felt like a small crowd gathered just behind the main gate, out of sight of the road. Clay was nervously pacing, and several times an employee at the Center would approach him to chat a little while before leaving again, leaving Apollo and Luke feeling out-of-place in the building they had once visited so regularly. Ponco and Clonco, the resident robots, whirred around through the crowds, apparently ordered to ensure everyone was healthy and safe from heatstroke as they stood out in the hot sun. To Luke's surprise, not only did Ponco still have him and Apollo registered in her (it's?) database, but Clonco did too, despite the pair never having met him (it?) before.

"Your body temperature is point-five degrees higher than average!" Ponco warned Luke during her latest round, her neutral blue face blinking on her screen. "We recommend you sit in the shade to cool down, Luke!"

Luke looked up in surprise from where he was reading Professor Layton's latest letter to pass the time. "Is that Celsius or Fahrenheit?" he reflexively asked, a common question he'd had to pose since his arrival in America.

Apollo, sitting at Luke's side on the grass next to the concrete path and reading over his shoulder, rolled his eyes. "Does it matter?"

"My apologies!" Ponco cried, her face flashing a deeper blue as she briefly miming crying. "I have
been programmed to use Celsius! Would you prefer a translation into Fahrenheit?"

Luke smiled in surprise. "No need, Ponco. I actually prefer Celsius." 'For one thing, I always know what temperatures in Celsius mean...' He got to his feet. "Will you tell Clay where I am, Apollo?"

Apollo sighed, also standing up. "I may as well join you. Clay's busy talking to, um," he looked over to where their friend was standing with a man they didn't know, "someone or other. He won't miss us."

"Thank you, Ponco!" Luke called, waving to the robot as he and Apollo walked over to the shaded area closer to the front gate.

"You're welcome!" Ponco replied, a green grin on her screen, before turning and wheeling off to check on someone else.

Just as the brothers were finding a spot to sit in the grass where it was shaded, a car pulled up on the road outside, a side-door opening to reveal a familiar man in a blue jumpsuit, a dark-blue jacket identical to the ones most of the HAT-1 team were wearing over the top.

Luke gasped.

"It's Mister Starbuck!" Apollo shouted, and his Chords of Steel quickly alerted most of the crowd to Starbuck's arrival.

Luke watched from a distance as Clay led the charge to welcome Starbuck back to the Space Center, Director Cosmos at his side to keep everyone from crowding the man in their joy. It took several minutes for the crowds to begin to clear enough for Luke to even see the astronaut after that, and Apollo waited impatiently at his side, eager to greet Starbuck but not wanting to leave his brother behind.

Finally, Clay came to find his friends, grinning widely. "C'mon, you guys! I told Mister Starbuck you were here to see him!" Grabbing their arms, he pulled Apollo and Luke through the milling crowd to the astronaut's side.

Apollo waved as Clay finally released his arm. "Hey, Mister Starbuck!"

Starbuck turned to the three teens with a smile. "So you two are here! You came back!"

"Yeah, we just had to come by to check that you were alright," Luke giggled, blushing.

"Ah, yeah, I'm alright," Starbuck replied, rubbing the back of his head with a nervous grin. "Just barely."

Director Cosmos, standing atop his motorised scooter nearby, scoffed to himself, pulling on his moustache. "You won't believe the sheer number of requests for interviews I've had to chase off since last night. Our astronaut has become a star!"

As the group erupted into conversation, Luke found his attention drawn to the doors of the Center itself. Clonco was trailing behind a labcoated woman in black gloves and bright pink tights, purple hair styled into twin points above her head. As she headed towards the doors to push them open, she suddenly rounded on the green robot, shouting something Luke couldn't make out over the happy crowd around him, then stormed into the building, leaving Clonco to return to the party alone.

'Very curious,' Luke thought to himself, wondering who the woman was and what had her so upset at the little robot.
"Woah, seriously?" Clay cried, drawing Luke back into the conversation.

"Apparently," Starbuck replied with a nod, looking embarrassed. "Dunno how I feel about it just yet, though. It's bound to take all sorts of liberties..."

Apollo scoffed. "But that would be so cool to have a movie made about you!"

Luke laughed in surprise. 'A movie!? About Mister Starbuck? That would be cool!'

"At any rate, we will see what happens," Director Cosmos insisted rather sternly. "Nothing is set in stone."

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My dear Luke,

I hope I am not irritating you that I start off most every letter nowadays with an update on Alfendi first and foremost. He's beginning to walk now, although only alongside something he can hold onto to keep his balance. Flora is greatly enjoying mothering him, as usual, and I seem to be getting a little more free time than I've been used to over the past year to actually work on my classes again! I don't recall if I mentioned I was having to cancel so many lectures at the last minute due to a lack of preparation. In any case, Dean Delmona reduced the classes I've been covering, so the workload is much easier to handle now.

The Ascots came by for a visit, but I don't think Sherry quite knew what to do with Alfendi. He was rather wary of her, sticking close to Flora and glaring at everyone if they tried to get too close. Randall thought the whole thing was hilarious, which I don't think helped Alfendi's opinion of him.

I'm glad to hear you recovered your Sherlock Holmes books, among all those other items you mentioned. I agree it's a shame you couldn't keep everything you wanted, but it is a bad habit to keep everything one ever owns, and especially hard to escape when grieving for lost loved ones. A good clean-out now and then is a good idea.

I don't recall a 'fan club' being mentioned before. You say Apollo and this friend of the detective's were members of it? I can't imagine a lawyer, even one as brilliant as Mr Wright, managing to acquire 'fans', let alone enough to form an online community.

I'm glad to hear Trucy enjoyed her birthday. I believe she is nine now, correct?

The usual puzzles are enclosed.

Your friend,

Professor Hershel Layton

2nd October, 2020

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Dear Professor Layton,
It's alright Professor, I love hearing what Alfendi's been up to! I'd love to meet him in person too, but I guess we'll have to wait and see if that ever happens. It's nice to hear he's walking! And Alfendi is almost all Flora talks about in her letters, so I guessed she was making the most of him while he's small and cute!

That's nice of the dean to help you out like that. Is someone else picking up the classes you had to drop? If so, would I know them?

Aw, poor Sherry! I'm sure once Alfendi is a little older he'll appreciate strangers visiting him a little more!

I didn't mention Papa's fan-club before? I could have sworn I did! Yes, Apollo was a member of it, but I understand the public forum self-destructed a bit after Papa lost his badge. Some of the core members are still in touch as friends, which is how Apollo knew Ms Byrde (They call each other 'Steel' and 'Blackbird', because of their usernames on the old forum!). Maya and her cousin Pearl actually founded it, apparently! They don't have reliable internet in Kurain, and since Maya is so busy now they had already left the fan-club before everything destroyed itself.

Trucy is nine now, yes! I think she's already looking forward to next year, when she hits double-digits! I also think she's currently planning something for Apollo, possibly to try and convince him to try performing on stage with her. I can't say I envy either of them!

You've heard of the HAT-1 Disaster, right? Or, rather, they're calling it the HAT-1 Miracle now it's over. I don't remember if I mentioned Mr Starbuck before, but he's Clay's mentor, so Clay was very upset when the rocket malfunctioned and we thought he might not make it. Papa let us stay up late to watch Mr Starbuck's landing, and then today we decided to come back to the Space Centre with Clay to greet him when he came back! Apparently there was also a murder there the day before the launch, when Clay skipped school to drop by, but I don't know much about it. Everyone's talking about the 'miracle' over anything else.

I've included my own puzzles. I hope you, Flora and Alfendi are all well!

Your friend and apprentice,

Luke Triton

10th October, 2020

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Year of Magic

October 11, 9:54AM

Wright Talent Agency

Kitchen

The first thing Trucy had done once the excitement of the HAT-1 Miracle died down was gather her family together to discuss what they were doing for the upcoming Halloween holiday... although it was less of a 'discussion' and more of an 'announcement'.

"We're gonna all have Troupe Gramarye outfits!" the nine-year-old cried with a grin.

Apollo frowned. "Wait, you're taking the lazy way out this year and just wearing your normal clothes?"

"Silly Polly!" Trucy replied, sticking her tongue out at him as she crossed her arms. "I'm making myself a new costume!" She tapped at her chin in thought. "I'm thinking I'll try out blue first. See how I like it."

Phoenix and Luke glanced at each other in confusion. "So your plan is to make a Gramarye outfit for all four of us?" Luke asked.

Trucy grinned and nodded. "Yep!" She pointed to Phoenix. "Daddy, you're going to be Grandpa! Luke," she pointed to the younger of her brothers, "you can be Uncle Valant! And Polly," she turned to her older brother, "you're going to get your own proper stage magician's outfit!"

Apollo looked crestfallen. "Oh, I see. This is an excuse to give yourself a new outfit and make me a matching one for when you finally drag me on stage. I get it."

Trucy scoffed. "You don't have to look so down about it!"

"Hey, at least she's not making you dress up as me," Phoenix said with a smirk, making Apollo hide his reddening face behind a hand.

October 24, 5:33PM

Wright Talent Agency

Phoenix's Office

Aside from Trucy now spending all her free time in her room sewing, or dragging various family members out with her to fetch supplies, the rest of the family thought nothing of the approaching holiday until the final week of the month. With Halloween this year falling on a Saturday, plans were easy enough to make.

"Hey, Dad!" Apollo called as he charged through the reception door, Luke at his heels. "They're
Phoenix couldn't resist a smile. "Trucy's going to be upset neither of you are trick-or-treating with her this year."

"As long as you come to her act that night, I'm sure she'll forgive you," Phoenix assured the pair. "That's part of why she decided our theme for us this year."

"Really?" Apollo asked, surprised. "I thought maybe the Wonder Bar would have its own special acts it wanted to do on Halloween."

Luke giggled as a thought occurred to him. "Trucy probably has her own special act set up especially for it!"

Phoenix grinned. "She has something up her sleeve, alright," he agreed. "We'll just have to wait and see what it is."

October 31, 6:42PM

Wright Talent Agency
Reception

On the evening of the thirty-first, Clay arrived at the front door of the agency, clad in blue with a darker blue jacket thrown over the top. He laughed as Luke let him in, running his eyes up and down the younger teen's yellow cape and tight black jumpsuit. "Wow, what's with the banana outfit?" he joked as he entered the reception area.

Luke smiled, spinning around in his costume so his friend could see it all. "I'm Trucy's Uncle Valant!" he announced, tipping his yellow top hat as the felt streamers imitating the man's black locks began to tangle around his shoulders. "That's our theme this year!"

"You guys have a theme?" Clay repeated in disbelief.

The door to the office opened and Phoenix came in, leaning against the doorway and grinning through the fake beard wrapped around his jaw. "Clay! Nice to see you made it!"

"Hey, Mister Wright!" Clay replied, not commenting at all on Phoenix's black suit and matching hat and cape.
Ignoring the interruption, Luke gave Clay a confused frown. "We had a theme last year, too," he pointed out. "We even told you about it and you joked it was 'cute'!"

"Did I?" Clay mused aloud, then shrugged. "Eh. My costume's still better."

From behind Phoenix, Apollo poked his head into the room, edging in around his father as he rolled his eyes at Clay's comment. "Wow, you're dressed as Mister Starbuck, no-one saw that coming," he sarcastically muttered with a grin. "You're missing the red hair, by the way."

Clay stifled a laugh as he saw Apollo's red hat and cape, over a black jumpsuit similar to Luke's except that it was baggy around the knees where it met his white boots. "Oh boy, Luke's a banana and Apollo's a tomato!" he cried.

Apollo frowned, crossing his arms as he pretended not to notice Phoenix and Luke hiding smiles. "You've seen me in the hat and cape before," he pointed out. "Besides, how'd you get your outfit, anyway? Beg Mister Starbuck to borrow an old uniform?"

"Shows what you know!" Clay boasted, hands on his hips. "I was given this jumpsuit specifically for tonight! It's mine now!"

Luke smiled, poking at the jacket. "And this?"

Clay squirmed, crossing his arms and admitting, "Well, yes, the jacket is just an old one that I'm borrowing... B-but that's only because Mister Starbuck isn't allowed to give it away!"

In the middle of Apollo and Luke's laughing at their friend, Trucy bounded into the room, twirling to show off her brand new blue hat and cape. "Clay! Look at my new outfit!"

"Hey, lookin' good!" Clay replied, giving the girl a thumbs-up. "Blue really suits you!"

Trucy giggled. "This is the colour Mommy wore!" she said. "So now we're all dressed up as the members of Troupe Gramarye!" She paused and pouted, glaring at Apollo and Luke. "Not that we had all four members when Daddy took me trick-or-treating earlier."


October 31, 6:57PM

Wonder Bar

With everyone assembled, and Clay's assurances he'd eaten already (although he insisted he meant no offence to Mister Eldoon and his salty noodles), the five made their way to the Wonder Bar. Trucy immediately disappeared backstage, and Phoenix led the trio of teenage boys to a table near the stage, which was once again reserved for them.

"Huh, I'd've thought Ms Vogel would tell Truce to leave these tables open," Phoenix mused aloud. "Put us a little further back."

Clay jumped into a chair, quickly followed by Luke and Apollo. "Man, I wonder what tricks she has planned for tonight?" he asked.

"And 'wonder' you might!" came a cry from behind him, and the family spun around to see a slender
woman in a red dress, dark hair pinned up and make-up carefully applied, making her look something like a movie star. She smiled playfully at Clay as she approached the table. "Little Trucy is our biggest talent here!" She giggled at her own joke, throwing a wink to Phoenix, who looked away awkwardly.

"Boys," Phoenix said, gesturing to the woman with a polite smile, "this is Aderyn Vogel. She owns the Wonder Bar."

"Nice to meetcha!" Aderyn sang, hands on her hips as she grinned at the trio.

Luke's eyes widened as he suddenly picked up on the lilt in Aderyn's voice. "You're Welsh!"

"Luke!" Phoenix cried in a mixture of surprise and stern disapproval at his rudeness.

Aderyn only laughed. "Aye, picked that up, did ya?" she asked. "I'm from Cardiff. You ever been?"

Luke blushed, shaking his head. "Oh, no. I did a lot of travelling back in London, but I don't think I ever made it to Wales."

"Ah, London, 'ey?" Aderyn repeated, giving the teen a sympathetic look. "Could say the same about me, to be honest. Done a lot of travellin' in my day, but I never went to London." She smirked. "I was thinkin' you sounded a little Cockney, mate."

"Anyway," Phoenix interrupted, gesturing to the boys, "Ms Vogel, these are my sons and Trucy's brothers, Luke and Apollo."

Apollo waved. "Hi."

"Nice to meet you, ma'am!" Luke added with a cheery grin.

Aderyn shook Luke's hand, giving the boys a friendly nod.

"The last one is Clay, he's a friend," Phoenix continued.

Clay gave Aderyn a small salute and cocky grin, to her delight.

"Well, I hope you all enjoy the show tonight!" Aderyn chirped. "By the way," she added, tapping Luke's hat, "since you guys are in the front, you might wanna remove these once the show starts. Don't wanna block the view for everyone else."

Luke obediently removed his hat immediately and placed it on the table, carefully arranging the black streamers attached to the inside of the brim so they didn't tangle.

"I was going to ask about that," Phoenix admitted, glancing at the stage almost right next to their seats. "Is it really okay we're sitting here? You don't want paying customers in these seats?"

Aderyn smirked to herself, a hand over her face in an attempt to hide it. "Oh, it's fine," she insisted, glancing at Apollo. "Anythin' for my best little performer!" With that, she threw a final flirting wink to Phoenix and sauntered back towards the bar, laughing to herself. "Wunderbar!"

Apollo frowned in thought. "She's definitely in on whatever Trucy's planning," he decided.

"Yup," Clay agreed with a smile.
View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
As the restaurant finished filling to the brim, Phoenix nervously began to fiddle with his hat, Aderyn's request to remove it for the show playing across his mind opposite his fear of being recognised in public. Only as the lights above them dimmed and the blue curtain on the stage lit up did he finally pull the black top hat and fake beard off his head, resting them on the table in front of him while running a nervous hand through his spikey hair.

There were a few other acts that went on before Trucy's magic show was due, in its regular slot. Aderyn eagerly hosted, cheerily talking up each of her performers and throwing in handfuls of fluent German that contrasted greatly with her Welsh accent as she walked back and forth across the stage, microphone in hand. The wait was long enough that the Wrights almost forgot about Trucy's suspicious plans for the evening, and Phoenix forgot entirely about his recognisably visible hair.

"And now for an act I'm sure you've all been lookin' forward to," Aderyn announced, twirling the microphone cord in her free hand, "a little magician who truly puts the 'wonder' in 'Wonder Bar'!" A small cheer rose up from members of the audience who were clearly regulars. "Ah, I see she needs no introduction, aye?" she joked, grinning as she surveyed the crowd. "Well then, I guess I'll let 'er get right to it! Here she is, little Trucy Gramarye!" As she strode off stage, the curtains beginning to twitch as they opened, Aderyn could be heard calling to someone, "Das ist wirklich wunderbar, nicht?"

Trucy's act proceeded as it usually did, with Trucy focussing more on tricks she could play up a 'horror' aspect of, whether it was the pretend gore of chopping off a hand, or her usual card tricks now being accompanied by a short story of how their 'magic' was the result of a haunting from a tragic death.

"Ooh!" Trucy squeaked into the microphone pinned underneath her blue cape. "For this next bit, I'm gonna need a very brave volunteer to come up on stage to play with these haunted cards!" While idly shuffling her deck, she skipped along the front of the stage, looking out over her audience.

Apollo rolled his eyes, sinking down in his seat slightly as he tried not to call attention to himself. As fun as it was to watch his little sister shining in the spotlight, he had helped her practise every trick and spiel, and had no desire to be dragged up on stage as her 'assistant'... again.

Clay bounced in his seat, waving an arm eagerly. "I'll do it!" he cried. "Me!" There were similar cries coming from behind them, of other similarly impatient potential volunteers.

Trucy paced back and forth, tapping her chin as she critically evaluated the eager crowd. Slowly, a cheeky grin spread across her face. "Aw, do we not have any willing volunteers out there tonight?"

A small laugh bubbled across the crowd, most of the volunteers falling silent.

Trucy gave an exaggerated shrug. "Well, this is Halloween! There's all sorts of spooky, dangerous
spirits hanging around up here!" She held a hand up to her mouth, adding in a stage-whisper, "It's too dangerous to let just anyone come up on stage, y'know! Don't wanna upset the ghosts of long-dead acts!"

Apollo frowned. 'Is... is she doing what I think she's doing...?'

Trucy's pacing stopped right in front of the Wrights' table, and she grinned as she peered down into the darkness. "I guess I have no choice but to call up someone who won't sue if the spirits don't like them!"

"Oh no," Apollo muttered, gripping the brim of the red top hat on the table in front of him.

Holding out her hand to her eldest brother, Trucy called with a grin, "Come on up, Apollo!"

His family shooting amused grins in his direction (Clay was more disappointed over missing out), Apollo stood up from his chair, jamming the red hat back on his head as he stalked around to the stage stairs near the bar. To his surprise, he heard the audience applauding him as he came under the stage lights, and remembered after a second he was wearing a matching outfit to Trucy's, only in red while her's was now blue. They probably think this was planned, ' he thought, then resisted a scowl. Well, it was on her part, anyway.'

Trucy skipped to the small table in the centre of the stage, placing her deck of cards down while she picked up the loose wireless microphone, holding it out for Apollo to take with a grin.

Apollo resisted the urge to glare at his sister, checking the mic was on by tapping the top and being rewarded by the sound of thudding from the speakers. "Okay, that's on." He was mildly surprised when the comment got a small laugh from the audience, but told himself to ignore them and focus on Trucy for now. "This isn't your revenge for me not going trick-or-treating with you tonight, is it?"

Grabbing her cards again and ignoring his comment, Trucy began to idly shuffle them, facing the audience although she was fixing her brother with a cheeky smile. "So, Apollo, you know how to do this phantom card trick, don't you?"

Apollo frowned. "Yeah, but I've only got one hand free at the m-!" He paused, then placed his free hand on his hip with a stern glare. "So that's why you had me practise it one-handed, you sly devil!"

As the audience laughed, Trucy shrugged innocently, holding out the cards with an expectant smile. "You had a grand plan tonight, didn't you?" Apollo continued, taking the cards and carefully shuffling them one-handed on the table. "Make me a Halloween costume, teach me magic for months..." He paused to move the microphone from his face, spreading the deck of cards out in his hand and holding them out to face Trucy. Once she obediently took one, showing it only to the audience, Apollo straightened up the deck on the table, freeing his other hand to again allow him to speak. "All of that was so you could drag me up here like a pet dog to show off what I can do. Put your card on the deck, already."

Trucy giggled, placing her card on the top of the deck and watching as Apollo carefully shuffled the cards again. "Aw, you're not a pet dog to me, Apollo!" she said. "You're not cute enough, for one thing!"

As the audience both laughed and sighed in sympathy, Apollo just rolled his eyes. "Yeah, I'm quite happy not being thought of as 'cute'," he pointed out. Finishing with his reshuffling, he slipped a single card out of the deck and took a stern peek at what it was. "Seven of diamonds?" he asked, holding the card out for the audience to see.
Trucy only grinned as the audience applauded the successful trick. Apollo placed the card back down on the pile, smiling back at her. 'Y'know what? I could actually get used to this.'

As the minutes passed, Apollo found himself more and more at home on the stage, exchanging careless banter with his little sister. In addition to performing some of her simpler card tricks, he helped her accomplish some of the more difficult parts of the act, their constant discussion honed from the months of practising as they kept the audience's attention on them and away from the real clues to the secrets of their craft. To his surprise, he didn't mind the constant audience attention as much as he feared he would, unable to really see far into the crowd thanks to the bright stage lights shining directly on him. His Chords of Steel training also helped, in that he was able to keep his voice at a constant volume and speed instead of trailing off or speaking so fast he fumbled over his words, both scenarios Trucy had warned him of beforehand. In fact, it was quite a while before Apollo even noticed he'd been on stage far longer than Trucy's typical volunteers.

"Isn't this the point you usually send your victims back into the audience?" Apollo asked as their previous conversation ended.

Trucy looked up from where she was putting away the props from their last trick. Without missing a beat, she smiled at her brother and replied, "Aw, but I like talking to you!"

Apollo scoffed playfully. "You talk to me almost every day of the week!" he pointed out, relieved when he heard the audience chuckling in response.

"No, I don't!" Trucy cried, standing up and planting her hands on her hips. "You have school!"

Crossing his one free arm across his front (his other arm still busy holding the microphone to his face), Apollo gave his sister a sarcastic look. "We live in the same house," he replied. "Remind me how long we've been siblings?"

Trucy couldn't respond immediately, as Apollo's comment seemed to particularly amuse their audience for several seconds. She gave her brother a knowing nod. "See, they're only laughing because they have no idea what the answer to that question is," she said.

Apollo grinned. "Yeah, and the answer they're thinking of is technically just as correct!"

Much to apparently everyone's disappointment, Apollo slipped off-stage after that to return to his family's table, sitting between Clay and Luke as they happily applauded him along with the rest of the audience. Trucy's act ended not long after, and she gave the gathered crowd a bow before the curtains closed, cutting her off from view as Aderyn came back out to wrap up and introduce the next act.

"What a show, right?" Aderyn cried emphatically. "Give it up for little Trucy and her big brother Apollo! What a good sport, huh?"

Apollo blushed, sinking in his seat as he felt the stares of the people around him focussed in his direction. The applause that followed helped, though.

October 31, 8:17PM

Wonder Bar
It was several minutes after the show ended that Trucy finally emerged from the backstage door behind the bar, running gleefully to her family's table. "Daddy! Daddy!" she called, immediately jumping up on Phoenix's lap to hug him. "Wasn't my act amazing tonight!?"

Phoenix chuckled, while Apollo rolled his eyes, Clay and Luke exchanging stifled laughs. "Your act was wonderful," Phoenix assured his daughter, hugging her and shooting Apollo a grin. "Both of you did fantastic up there."

Apollo stared at his lap, pretending he wasn't blushing at the praise.

"Ah, you're all together!" came a cry from the direction of the bar, and Aderyn approached the table, clapping her own applause for the young magicians. "You two were brilliant, you were!" She laughed, looking between Trucy and Apollo. "So, what's the word on turnin' that into a more permanent state of affairs, then?"

Apollo's eyes widened in shock. "Huh?"

"That were a test run," Aderyn replied, Trucy grinning from Phoenix's lap as said father raised an eyebrow in impressed surprise. "Trucy proposed we try it out tonight, and, if the audience liked it, I'd consider hirin' you on as a permanent performer!"


Clay laughed, slapping the stunned Apollo's arm. "Dude, do you realise how awesome that is!?"

Apollo raised a hand to silence his friend, staring at Aderyn. "Wait, you're willing to pay double just to have me on stage with Trucy?" When the woman cheerfully nodded, he frowned in confusion. "Why?"

Aderyn sadly smiled and shrugged. "I guess I just like you," she said. "Plus, that were the kind of chance I didn't always get back in my performin' days."

Surprised at the truthful admittance, Apollo stared for a moment before smiling. "Well, I should probably practise some more with Trucy first," he said, "but I'd be happy to accept your offer, Ms Vogel."

Trucy cheered as she bounced in Phoenix's lap, causing the man to wince a bit in pain. Luke and Clay joined in the cheering, while Aderyn only reached out to shake Apollo's hand with a wink. "I look forward to workin' with you, Mister Wright!"

"Me too!" Apollo found himself admitting with a laugh.

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Chapter End Notes

Aderyn's "Das ist wirklich wunderbar, nicht?" is the German equivalent of "This is truly wonderful, no?". Thanks to retconnedtimelord over on Tumblr for correcting my initial
translation!
Luke's music stand was a bit old, and had trouble standing up sometimes, but it had been recovered from the Triton moving van and it was a better option than simply balancing his violin books on whatever surface would take them. In fact, Luke had made sure when he found the music stand and his old violin books to immediately separate them to ensure they were taken home, and even gone through some of them again out of a fear he was drifting off-key with his finger positions. Ideally, he'd have a violin teacher to help him stay on track, but the teen knew the Wright family's finances were permanently on the rocks and had no desire to put a further strain on it, thus he continued regular practise sessions on his own.

He was in the middle of one such practise session when there was a quick rapping on his door, which promptly opened without waiting for an answer. Noticing Trucy bounding in, Luke reluctantly put his violin down, waiting for his sister to announce what she wanted.

Closing the door again behind her, Trucy very quickly skipped to Luke's bed, side-stepping his fragile music stand and sitting on the blankets, giving her brother a grin. "Hey Luke!"

"Hi, Trucy," Luke replied, giving her a polite smile while he awkwardly stood with his violin and bow in hand. "What did you want?"

Trucy stared at him a few moments before deciding to respond. "You know what would be cool?"


"If you signed up to the Agency as one of our talents!" Trucy announced, giving a meaningful glance to the violin.

For a few moments, Luke was too shocked to respond. "You mean... our Agency? The Wright Talent Agency?"

Trucy rolled her eyes. "Duh! You could play your violin and get money for it! Like Polly and I do with magic!"

Luke looked down to the violin in his hand. "Perform my violin...?" He shook his head, looking back up to his sister. "I don't think that's a good idea. I'm not that good at it."

"Nonsense!" Trucy scoffed, crossing her arms with a smile. "I'm sure I can find you someplace to perform where people will agree with me that you're good!"

Giving up on his practise for now, Luke set about putting his carefully kept instrument back in its case. "I'm sorry Trucy, but I'm not planning on taking up music as my job when I grow up." He closed the case, leaving it on the floor at his feet as he then turned to his books.

Trucy pouted, watching as the violin books were put away in a small bookcase at the foot of Luke's
"So?" she asked. "You can still do it as a hobby!" She paused for a moment in thought, then added, "What do you want to be when you grow up, anyway?"

Luke looked up from the bookcase, eyes wide in surprise. "Uh..."

Trucy stared for a moment, then gasped, hands at her mouth. "You don't know?!" she asked.

Blushing, Luke quickly rushed to and collapsed his music stand, leaving it next to his violin case and silently walking over to the bed, where he sat down at Trucy's side without a word.

"I always thought," Trucy eventually continued, looking embarrassed, "since you were really into keeping up with your violin, you'd want to be a music professor or something. Y'know, like Professor Layton."


Trucy shrugged. "You are good at it," she said. "You're good at a lot of things." She grinned. "You tell great stories of your adventures! And you're really smart, too! You could do whatever you wanted to, I bet!"

"That's the problem," Luke admitted. "Out of everything in the world, there's nothing in particular I really want to do when I leave school." He sighed, leaning on his knees. "I love puzzles, but there's no real job you can do revolving around them. I love animals too, but I don't know how I could use that in a grown-up job."

"You could be a vet!" Trucy piped up excitedly. "There's a girl in my class who's always talking about how she's going to be a vet when she grows up!"

Luke looked over to his sister in surprise, slowly sitting up straight in his seat. "Hey... that actually makes perfect sense!" He grinned, beginning to laugh. "I'd be a brilliant vet! I can talk to the animals and find out what's wrong with them directly! Why didn't I ever think of this before!?

Trucy giggled, clapping her hands in celebration. "Yay! We found your dream!"

"Dream?" Luke repeated incredulously, before laughing again. "It's more of a 'goal', I'd say! Becoming a vet isn't going to be easy! 'Of course, I have to develop a passion for it to stand a chance, given how much studying it requires...'"

"It will be for you, I bet!" Trucy said with a grin, leaning across to give her brother a hug. "You're the smartest person I know! 'Cept for Daddy, of course."

Luke smiled as he reflected on the praise.

"Of course," Trucy continued, leaning back and fixing Luke with a bright smile, "in the meantime, you can still join the agency as a violinist!"

After a moment of thought, Luke sighed and nodded. "Sure, why not?"

---

My dear Luke,

I'm relieved to hear you are more than happy to read my updates on Alfendi. Indeed, it would be
wonderful were the two of you able to meet, but the unfortunate reality is that neither of us is in the best situation to be able to just jump across the Atlantic right now.

I would hope Flora continues to love Alfendi even once he ceases to be 'small and cute'. It was one of my biggest worries when she started insisting we look into adopting a baby, that she would grow bored with it once it became a child. I don't recall if I mentioned that or not in a previous letter. Regardless, I don't think it will be a problem at all, as Flora and Alfendi do indeed get along swimmingly.

I'm sorry to say you won't know the person picking up my dropped classes; She has only recently joined the university. She is talented however, so I would hope she stays on as a professor here for a long time.

I shouldn't be surprised to hear this 'fan-club' of Mr Wright's fell apart so quickly, but I find I am. I was almost tempted to look it up myself, actually. At least before all that, it did some good with these friendships you mentioned, such as between Apollo and Ms Byrde. As for Miss Fey being the one to start it all up, I must say that was the least surprising thing to hear. I still recall how you told me our first evening in Labyrinthia that you were convinced they were a couple.

The incredible story of the HAT-1 Miracle did indeed reach us over in England. I must admit, I found Mr Starbuck's name familiar when I heard it on the news, but could not place from where. I hope your friend Clay is alright, since I can imagine it would have hit him hard to see his mentor in such peril. The story seems to have so captured the public imagination, it is only now finally beginning to disappear from the headlines. I've heard rumours they plan on making a movie about the event, although I imagine such news would be easier to verify in Los Angeles than in London, and even easier if you know Mr Starbuck personally. Flora told me she got up early to watch the landing, although I was too busy to do such a thing myself. It was at some time around sunrise for us, which is altogether too early for me.

I had not heard of a murder at the space centre, however. If you find out any more about it, I would be interested to hear it.

The usual puzzles are enclosed, as is your birthday gift for this year. Be sure not to open it until the tenth. Flora, Alfendi and I are doing splendidly, I assure you, and we all wish you a happy birthday.

Your friend,

Professor Hershel Layton

28th October, 2020

Dear Professor Layton,

At the time of writing this, I haven't opened your gift, but Papa tells me he'll let me call you the morning after my birthday (since we'll be at school on the day), so I can thank you then. Or, did thank you then, since you won't be reading this until after!

You aren't jealous that my Papa had a fan-club, are you, Professor? If you searched online, I'm sure you'd find a group of people similarly connected through admiring you! You're just as amazing as Papa, so there's bound to be something! And I'm not the only one who thinks Papa and Maya should
be a couple; You will have to meet Pearl when you finally manage to visit us here!

I think I remember Mr Starbuck mentioning there had been offers made on the day he got back to do a movie, but I don't know if there's anything happening with that still. Clay's been by the Space Centre every day he's had free, and Apollo and I have gone with him a few times, too.

Halloween was a week ago today, and boy was it exciting this year! Trucy dressed us all up in costumes fashioned after her family when they were all Troupe Gramarye, with Papa as her grandfather Magnifi, me as her uncle Valant, Apollo as her father Zak and herself as her mother Thalassa. We didn't find out till later that the reason she decided on the 'theme' on her own was because she was going to have a performance of her act at the Wonder Bar on the day, and she had concocted a grand plan to trial herself and Apollo together on stage! Apollo complained, but he really enjoyed himself, so he's said yes to doing it again in future! Trucy's using the costumes she made for them as the basis for their new permanent stage outfits, and she says she's going to change her stage name to Artemis Gramarye, to match Apollo once he takes on 'Gramarye' as his stage name. They really were amazing on stage as a pair! I wish you could have seen it, Professor! Trucy's even making sure not to call him 'Polly' while on stage, she says to emphasise their names once they're performing together every week. Oh, and Papa's even given the go-ahead to let them perform more often! Trucy and Apollo have to talk about it with Papa and their new boss, but they're really looking forward to it!

I've included a photo of the four of us in costume, and some new puzzles inspired by Halloween! I hope you, Flora and Alfendi are doing well!

Your friend and apprentice,

Luke Triton

7th November, 2020

P.S. Do you think I'd make a good vet?

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"It's the first Monday off from school, and what are you two doing with it?" Apollo asked, hands on his hips.

"Enjoying it?" Trucy replied with a grin, sitting on the lounge next to Luke, the television in front of them paused in the middle of an episode of Pink Princess.

Apollo rolled his eyes, ruffling his red cape as he pulled it tighter around himself. "No, you're wasting time watching TV when there's freakin' snow out there to enjoy for once," he continued. "I'd've thought, out of anyone, you two would be the most excited for this."

Luke shrugged. "It's not cold enough out there," he said.

"Especially not for real snow," Trucy added. "Real snow is more fun."

Apollo sighed, stalking off towards the front door. "Fine then. I'm going to the park to actually experience the snow event that has been carefully set up exactly for ungrateful people like you." With that, he was gone, the door falling closed behind him.

Trucy scoffed to herself as she leaned back in her seat and set the episode to continue playing.

Luke curled up beside his sister, getting comfortable. "Do you think Apollo's jealous he's never got to experience real snow like us?" he asked.

"Yup!" Trucy chirped with a grin. "He obviously didn't have enough of it when it snowed here a few years back!"

"Or when we were in Kurain last year!" Luke added with a laugh.

The pair settled in to watch their show without another thought for their brother. Although the special 'snow event' being set up in People Park looked intriguing, neither were really interested in the fake snow meant to make the warm winter feel more Christmassy. Luke was used to seeing snow at least every couple of years back in London (and never as early as Christmas itself), while Trucy had spent much of the first five years of her life in colder climates, sometimes living in places where it snowed almost year-round. Although there was frequently snow on some of the mountains surrounding the city, Apollo had admitted to never having gone to see it when he was younger. Secretly, Luke didn't blame him for still being excited to see it, even if it was fake like the event in People Park.
to his front door and turned towards People Park, a voice called out, causing him to halt.

"Excuse me, kid! In the Gramarye cape?" Apollo turned, finding to his surprise a young woman wrapped up in a green coat, smiling at him hopefully. She gestured towards the stairs he had just come out of. "Would this happen to be the Wright Talent Agency?"

Apollo was too surprised to respond for a second, before catching himself and giving her a friendly smile. "Yes, actually! Would you like me to help you?" 'How often do we even get customers!?'

The woman laughed, waving a hand dismissively. "Oh no, that's alright! As long as there's someone inside, I think I'll be fine, thank you!"

Apollo watched as the woman headed up the stairs, a gleeful grin on her face. 'I wonder if I should have warned her it's just Luke and Trucy in there right now...?' After a pause, he shook his head and headed off towards the park. 'Nah.'

It was the sound of the front door opening that alerted Trucy someone had entered the office, and she jumped up to pause their show.

"It's probably Apollo," Luke pointed out, uncurling to sit normally in his seat. "He must've forgotten something."

As if in answer to his assertion, an unfamiliar voice called out, "Hello? Is this the Wright Talent Agency?"

Luke's eyes widened, and Trucy jumped to turn off the television, running to the reception door and throwing it open. Luke hurried behind her, and the pair stood in the doorway grinning up at the green-coated young woman beyond. "Welcome!" Trucy cried exuberantly, arms in the air. "We here at the Wright Talent Agency are always here to help!" She strode forward, taking the somewhat surprised woman's arm and gently guiding her towards the office. "What is it you need, ma'am? Magician? Musician? Both? More than one but up to two of either?"

The woman didn't respond as Trucy led her to the lounge in the office, looking around at the former law firm and the two children currently occupying it for several moments before smiling at Trucy, trying to hide her discomfort as she sat down on the black couch. "Actually, I was looking for a musician," she admitted.

Trucy gasped, clapping her hands together. '"That's wonderful! Both of our musicians are in the building currently!' She turned to Luke, who was standing off to the side somewhat awkwardly. "Luke, did you want to get your violin to demonstrate for our client?"

The woman perked up. "Violin?" She grinned, turning to Luke. "That's perfect! A violinist is just what we need!"

Luke forced his biggest smile through his surprise as the woman began to dig through her purse. "Oh, that's good, then!" he said. "I'm glad to be of help!"

"Here!" the woman said, pulling out a folder that she handed off to Luke. "This is the music we'll be performing! Can you play it?"
Taking the folder, Luke opened it and found it to be full of sheet music, set out for a violin with accompanying lyrics listed below. He examined the pages critically, leafing through it for a few moments before giving the woman a smile. "Yep, I can do this with a little practise!"

"Excellent!" The woman cried excitedly, then held out her hand. "My name's Aria Holliday, by the way. I don't think I ever introduced myself!"

Luke took her hand to shake it politely. "Luke." He paused a split-second, then added, "Wright. I'm Luke Wright." Noticing Trucy's strange look, he gestured to her. "This is my little sister Trucy. She's usually in charge around here."

Aria laughed, not seeming to notice Trucy's resulting pout. "Nice to meet you!"

"Trucy, could you go get my violin for me?" Luke asked, holding up the folder of music in his hands. "I'd like to try a run-through."

Trucy nodded, then paused and grinned. "Oh, I'll get Daddy while I'm at it!" She turned her bright gaze to Aria. "He handles all the money around here!" Without waiting for a response, she ran off towards the kitchen door.

Aria bit her lip as she watched Trucy disappear, and Luke could have sworn he heard her quietly squeal. She turned to Luke, standing from the couch and forcing herself back to business. "Now, the performance is on the twenty-fifth, by the lake in People Park. We'll be starting around seven, but we'll have to show up a little earlier to get everything set up."

Luke nodded. "That won't be a problem," he assured her, then frowned curiously, looking down at the music. "Did you have another violinist who had to cancel suddenly?"

Aria sighed, crossing her arms. "Yeah," she admitted. "I mean, I know we're not technically professionals, but he could have told us earlier he'd be going on vacation for this." She huffed to herself, staring out the window at the hotel across the street. "Honestly, it's like the guy was raised in a barn sometimes!"

Luke smiled sympathetically, but, before he could answer, the door to the kitchen opened again, and Phoenix wandered in, beanie on his head and Trucy at his side, a black violin case in her hands. He smiled politely at Aria as he headed behind his desk. "Ms Holliday, I assume?"

Aria nodded eagerly, a massive grin on her face as she ran to the desk. "Yes!" she cried, then seemed to reign in her excitement and stood calmly. "Are these two your children, Mister Wright?"

Trucy shot a look to Luke behind Aria's back and giggled. Luke tried to give her a disapproving frown, but couldn't resist a smile.

Phoenix nodded politely, arranging the papers on his desk to find the barely-used form he had designed for keeping track of one-off clients. "Two of the three, yes," he replied with a proud smile, finally locating the form and pulling out a pen to start filling in details. "So you want to hire Luke, right?"

"Luke Wright, yes," Aria replied. "We need a violinist on the twenty-fifth."

"It's in the park, at seven," Luke added, clutching the folder of music in his hands as he ran up to the side of the desk. "That'll be okay, won't it Papa?"

Phoenix nodded, shooting Luke a grin. "That's perfectly fine. We can drop by and watch you perform!"
"Oh, that'd be wonderful!" Aria cried in a high pitch, clapping her hands together. "We'd love for you all to come by and watch!"

Trucy giggled, running around to hand Luke his violin and looking up at Aria. "Miss Holliday," she asked in her best business-like tone, "may I ask how you came to hear of the Wright Talent Agency?"

Aria thought a moment, tapping a cheek. "Well, to be honest, a friend of mine posted about it in this online forum we go to," she explained, then turned to Luke. "I think he's a friend of yours? I don't know his real name."

Luke frowned in thought, looking to Trucy. "You think it might be Clay?"

Aria snorted. "'Clay'. That would fit the old stick-in-the-mud!" she giggled to herself. "Kinda suits his username, too!"


Aria shrugged. "All I know is he's a teenage boy who is supposed to know you. Besides, a lot of people are very different on the internet than in real life."

Phoenix interrupted the conversation to hold out the form and his pen for Aria to take. "If you would just sign this, Ms Holliday," he said, "then we can get everything confirmed to go for you."

[View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook]
Here We Come A-Carolling

December 25, 7:21PM
People Park

It was a minuscule crowd of people, but there was still applause when the humble performance by the six singers and their violinist huddled under the streetlight finally ended. Luke sighed in relief as he put down his bow, lowering his instrument back into its case sitting at his feet. Aria loudly thanked the crowd for their time, then headed over to the teenage boy with a grin. "Hey, that was great!" she cried, gloved hands clapping together. "You're pretty good at this!"

Luke blushed, busying himself locking up the black case. "Oh, I'm alright, I guess," he answered, then stood up to reach for the music sitting on his stand. "Thank you for the compliment, though!" He held out the folder of sheet music. "You'll want this back, I assume?"

"Oh, yeah, thanks!" Aria chirped, taking the small folder with a laugh. "If we ever have another problem with my idiot friend, I'm definitely coming to you first!"

"Thank you," Luke said with a blush, collapsing his music stand and wincing as it promptly fell sideways onto the pavement below their feet, where bits of fake snow from the previous week still clung in irregular patches. "Oops."

Behind Aria, a familiar voice chuckled. "Need help?" Phoenix asked, approaching Luke with Trucy and Apollo at his sides, both siblings clad in their matching capes although only Trucy wore her hat.

Luke grabbed the folded music stand with a smile. "I'm fine, Papa," he assured his father, standing up with his violin and stand in hand. "How was it?"

"That was great!" Apollo cried with a grin from Phoenix's right, fists held before him.

"I said you were good at this!" Trucy pointed out with an I-told-you-so tone, arms crossed. "And I was right!"

Phoenix laughed at Trucy's comment, saying to Luke, "I thought it was a wonderful performance."

Luke smiled, while Aria squealed as she clapped her hands. "Oh, I'm so glad you enjoyed it, Mister Wright!" She glanced down at Apollo and Trucy "And you two, as well!" While Apollo rolled his eyes, Aria turned her excited gaze back up to Phoenix. "You have very talented children!"

Phoenix laughed again, hands on Apollo and Trucy's shoulders as he proudly grinned. Before he could say anything though, Trucy tipped her hat to Aria. "If you think Luke's good, you should see what me and Polly do!"


Paying Luke's comment no attention, Trucy pulled a flyer out of her hip-bag, handing it to a curious Aria. "Come to the Wonder Bar the Saturday two weeks from now! We're having our first performance as a pair!"

"Ooh!" Aria cooed as she looked over the newly printed flyer advertising the range of talents the
family shared. "I should have guessed you two were magicians, what with the cute Gramarye outfits!" She giggled. "You sure it's legal to perform in those?"

"About that," Apollo butted in with a grin, arms crossed, "Trucy and I are actually both Gramaryes. We're just continuing the family tradition."

Aria was shocked, the Wrights all quietly amused at her reaction. "Really!? I mean, I knew Zak had a daughter, but..." She shook her head, then fixed a bright smile on her face and looked between the caped pair. "I will definitely come by to see your show! I'm looking forward to it already!"

Trucy and Apollo grinned, glancing at each other, only for Trucy to suddenly gasp and lunge at her oldest brother. "Polly, you're not wearing it!"

Apollo jumped out of Trucy’s path, frowning as he circled Phoenix to try and dodge her. "I don't want to wear it!" he complained, only for Trucy to grab his cape and pull him to a halt in threat of choking himself. "Let go!"

Phoenix gave Trucy a glare, convincing her to release her brother, then turned to Apollo as the teen fled to his father's left, opposite from Trucy. "Apollo, you may as well make your sister happy and put it on for a minute."

"But-!" Apollo objected, then sighed. "Fine." Out of the small bag hanging off his belt where Zak would have kept his gun holster, he pulled a hot pink beanie, which his quickly threw on his head, revealing the word 'Bro' stitched in blue along the side. He glared at Trucy, ignoring Luke's badly hidden giggles. "I put way too much effort into my hair this morning to flatten it under this pink monstrosity."

"Now that's not a nice thing to say about your Christmas present," Phoenix chided the teen, grinning. He then turned to Aria, who was watching the siblings with a smile. "We'll let you go now, Ms Holliday. Thank you for hiring Luke tonight."

"Oh no, thank you!" Aria insisted, giggling for a moment to herself before blushing and fidgeting where she stood. "Actually Mister Wright, I should probably admit... when our first violinist cancelled, I didn't just come to you because you were close. She picked at the end of a coat sleeve self-consciously. "I've actually been a fan of yours for a while now. Y'know, back when you were a lawyer."

The Wrights stared in surprise for a moment before Phoenix turned to Apollo with a smirk. "Wow, you guys just keep popping out of the woodwork, don't you?"

Aria raised an eyebrow.

Apollo turned red as he looked away. "Daaaaad..." He briefly glanced back at Aria suspiciously, but otherwise kept his gaze focussed on his feet.

Trucy tapped her chin in thought. "Wait, does that mean you didn't hear about us from Clay?"

"Clay?" Apollo repeated in confusion.

"No, no, I was telling the truth there!" Aria insisted, a serious look on her face. "This friend of yours posted about it on our forum and was all enthusiastic about how you were expanding your range." She paused, crossing her arms in thought. "Actually, if you two are Gramaryes, that probably explains why he knows so much about the Gramarye family too."

Apollo went pale, staring at Aria with wide eyes.
"Anyway, I should probably get going," Aria chuckled, waving a hand. She smiled at the Wrights and began to walk away. "I'll get in touch if I need a replacement violinist again! See you on stage, kids!"

"Bye Miss Holliday!" Trucy replied, waving her arm in reply as the woman disappeared down the path towards Kitaki Avenue.

Phoenix laughed, gesturing for his children to follow him as he headed off towards their home. "C'mon, let's go. It's way too dark to be out and way too late for certain children to be away from home."

"Awww!" Trucy whined, taking Phoenix's hand as she reluctantly followed him. Luke laughed as he joined the group, but Apollo took a little longer, staring in the direction Aria had disappeared for a few moments before shaking his head and rushing to catch up to his family.

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**Blackbird? Are you up?**

*I don't want to disturb you if you're busy or something*  

*Hey steel. Nah I'm free. What's the matter?*.  

*I think our latest client at the agency was someone from the forum*  

*I see. You want me to do anything about it?*.  

*No I'm fine. I'm just panicking a bit that they've figured out who I am and that I lied about it and everything*  

*Well that's not a nice holiday gift. But hey, if anything bad does come of this you can count on me to keep a handle on it*.  

*But I can promise nothing bads gonna happen. No ones gonna judge you, no ones gonna stop being your friend, okay?*.  

*Okay. Thanks Blackbird. That helped*  

*No problem pal :) Feel free to text me anytime if you need someone to talk to*.  

*I will :) thanks again*

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December 25, 8:34PM  
Wright Talent Agency  
Luke and Apollo's Room

Apollo stared at the dark ceiling, listening to Luke's steady breathing from the other side of the room.
In his hand was his phone, the screen turning off as it timed out since Apollo had sent his last text to Blackbird - Maggy - a few moments before. He was still a little uneasy, but his friend's assurances that his online friendships wouldn't change was helping.

'If only I knew who this 'Miss Holliday' was!'

Groaning, Apollo turned on his side, reaching out to carefully drop his phone onto his bedside table before pulling his arms under the warm blankets. From here, he could see Luke, almost entirely hidden under his own blankets, his brown hair sticking out from under the covers as the teen slept facing the wall. Apollo smiled. 'At least one of us is getting some rest. Despite what he thinks, Luke did actually play really well at the park today.' His smile died. 'Except, Luke was only hired in the first place because Holliday had heard about the Agency from me... If I hadn't posted about it, I wouldn't be lying here worrying that my online friends are going to figure out I've been lying to them, but at the same time Luke wouldn't have had this first opportunity to play for a paying audience. Well, sort of 'paying audience'. He mulled over the situation for a few moments before shaking his head and curling up into a ball, the blankets pulled up to his chin. 'No. Posting about it was the right thing. Blackbird's right, no-one's gonna judge me for hiding the truth... even if they do figure it out.' With that, Apollo closed his eyes and finally drifted off to sleep.

View the Court Record
Connecting Dots

The Revived PW Fan-Club Forum!

Home > Phoenix Wright Himself

Thread: People Park on Christmas!

Pocky-Hockey, 12/24/2020 05:37:38PM

Oh wow I totally forgot to post about this here but like

Is anyone free tomorrow evening? My friends and I run an amateur choir, with one of my friend's brothers playing the violin (except he isn't this time because reasons) and we're performing in People Park tomorrow! We'll be by the lake at 7pm! Anyone who can come, let me know and we can have a mini-meet-up!

Oh and if someone complains this has nothing to do with Mr Wright you'd be wrong bucko because guess who I've hired to replace my friend's idiot brother when he dropped out? ONE OF MR WRIGHT'S KIDS, BABy I am beyond pleased I got an excuse to actually meet them it's amazing

Liztropical, 12/24/2020 08:52:34PM

Wow, that sounds cool, Pocky! But be honest, was there actually a problem with your friend's brother, or did you just want an excuse to check out the Talent Agency? I must admit I'm a little wary, especially since it wasn't all that long ago Steel was advertising them here.

Unfortunately, I won't be able to make it to People Park tomorrow. Let us know how it goes, huh?

ForgotMeKnot, 12/25/2020 09:14:51AM

Hey, you've met Mr Wright and his kids? Spill! :D

I can't make it either, but I hope it all goes well for you, Pocky.

Pocky-Hockey, 12/25/2020 10:23:42AM

Nope, I'm not talking. :) We have those privacy rules for a reason and my relationship with Mr Wright and his kids is purely professional!

Dime_Quarters [CERTIFIED USER] [MOD], 12/25/2020 01:35:27PM

Well that's a surprise! It's a shame you gave us so little warning you were performing tonight, Pocky! I'm out of town, but I might have been able to drop by had I known earlier.

And I'm sure the entire purpose of Steel posting about the Talent Agency was to give them business,
so I'm sure no one minds Pocky dropped by. Just continue to be aware of the privacy rules, huh?

ForgotMeKnot, 12/25/2020 08:21:25PM

You're such a buzzkill Dime :/ Don't worry, we'll keep to the rules.

Pocky's performance should be over by now. Where is she? I wanna hear about it went!

Pocky-Hockey, 12/26/2020 09:32:25AM

AAAA So I didn't post last night once the performance was over because it was late, but everything went amazing! Even Mr Wright liked it! :D Were any of you guys able to come?

Oh and someone tell SJL he was bang on about the Wright Talent Agency. The kid with the violin was great! And the other two even invited me to go watch their little magicians act in a couple weeks! Wait actually SJL ARE YOU READING THIS? I found out how you know so much about the Gramaryes, you little nutjob ;D

BlackbirdLuck [CERTIFIED USER] [ADMIN], 12/26/2020 09:36:50AM

I'm glad to hear everything went well Pocky, but could you try not to insult Steel, even playfully?

I can pass on a message for you if you'd like. We have each other's phone numbers.

ForgotMeKnot, 12/26/2020 02:18:24PM

SJL's a big boy, he can handle a joke :/ I know we say he's the baby of the forum but c'mon Blackbird.

So Pocky, you hired one of the Wright kids to play for you and the other two invited you to watch their show!? Are you assimilating yourself into being their friend or something!? Now I'm just dying to know more about these kids. Which one is SJL friends is? If he'd just show up already we could maybe meet up with him at the magic act.

Pocky-Hockey, 12/26/2020 06:45:42PM

Blackbird, is SJL okay? I'm guessing you guys talk outside the forum, so you sound like you'd know better than us.

It's not like that, Knot. xD I think I may or may not know SJL's real name, since I told them I heard about the agency from a friend of theirs (they only gave me one possibility, and IT FIT SO WELL GUYS), but I didn't say it was through the fanclub. Of course, if SJL is friends with the older kid, the one I didn't talk to, then this is all crap anyway.

Also apparently there was another Gramarye child because he's said older kid. Zak's little girl SJL was boasting about was one of the Wrights! I am so looking forward to seeing them perform, you
Thanks Blackbird, I'm fine.

I heard about your performance, Pocky. It sounds like it went well. Yeah, the Gramarye kids are the ones I'm friends with. Their stage names are Apollo and Artemis Gramarye, and they're looking forward to performing too. They were really excited about their brother yesterday. Did you know you were his first client?

I won't be able to do any meet-ups, though. I'm busy the night of their first performance. Actually, I'm busy most weekends.

Pocky-Hockey, 12/27/2020 10:02:24AM

Aw, are you telling me your real name isn't 'Clay'? It's perfect! It matches your username! Well, the 'steel' part, not so much 'justice' or 'lover' xD

No meet-ups? :o But you used to be so eager to do those! And you're not going to go watch your friends on their first performance!? This is the closest we'll ever get to the famous Troupe Gramarye acts, people!

(Also I love their stage-names... although "Apollo's" isn't very imaginative, is it? ;D )
Title: RE: Did I say something wrong?

Recipient: Pocky-Hockey

steeljusticelover [CERTIFIED USER], 12/30/2020 06:27:48PM

It's fine Pocky, really. No, I'm not Clay, though he'd probably agree with you on what you said (if he was a member here, I'd bet you his username would be 'spacedork' :P ). And the thing about Apollo is kinda true, so there's no hard feelings there. He and Artemis fully understand why I can't be in the audience to watch their show and they accept it.

I didn't reply to the thread because I wasn't sure what to say. It had nothing to do with you, don't worry.

I've met Mr Wright a lot over the past year. He makes strange comments all the time. I wouldn't pay him any attention.

Title: A Very Important Question

Recipient: BlackbirdLuck

Pocky-Hockey, 12/30/2020 06:43:20PM

You know SJL's real name, don't you? Could you answer a very important question for me?

Title: RE: A Very Important Question

Recipient: Pocky-Hockey

BlackbirdLuck [CERTIFIED USER] [ADMIN], 12/30/2020 07:52:08PM

Are you seriously asking me to tell you Steel's real name? The rules still apply in PMs too. It's none of your business what his real name is.

Title: RE: A Very Important Question

Recipient: BlackbirdLuck

Pocky-Hockey, 12/30/2020 08:04:29PM

Yes or no: Is he Apollo?

Title: RE: A Very Important Question

Recipient: Pocky-Hockey
And what makes you think he is?

Title: RE: A Very Important Question
Recipient: BlackbirdLuck

Pocky-Hockey, 12/31/2020 06:54:19PM

A lot of little things, really. Mr Wright said something about meeting fans to Apollo in a sort of teasing way, Luke didn't think 'Clay' sounded like my description of SJL, Trucy almost demanded I go see their show but is apparently okay with SJL ALWAYS being too busy to see it despite being a friend (this would make sense if he's on stage with her), SJL’s talked about having a sister and a brother and a father but nothing else (which also fits if he's one of the Wrights), he knew about Trucy being a Gramarye which proves he genuinely knows the Wrights and hasn't been faking anything... Did he figure out I was a member of the forum and might know who he was and that's why he's been so short with me lately?

Look, if he is actually Apollo, I can see why he kept quiet about it. I won't spill, I can promise that.

Title: RE: A Very Important Question
Recipient: Pocky-Hockey

BlackbirdLuck [CERTIFIED USER] [ADMIN], 12/31/2020 07:30:13PM

The rules of the forum say we protect the privacy of the Wrights above all else. I consider that to apply to Apollo, too. He doesn't want who his father is to be a big deal, and this is one place in the world it definitely would be.

You really did scare him, you know. I made him a promise nothing bad would happen and he wouldn't lose any friends, so I'd better not find you've broken that promise I made him, okay?

Title: RE: A Very Important Question
Recipient: BlackbirdLuck

Pocky-Hockey, 12/31/2020 07:42:06PM

Thanks for telling me the truth, Blackbird. You can count on me! I won't let you, or Steel, down! My lips are sealed!

(but seriously, thanks. I won't say a word)

Title: The biggest of apologies!
Recipient: steeljusticelover

Pocky-Hockey, 12/31/2020 10:07:25PM

My New Years Resolution this year is to you, my friend: Not a word of the Wrights leaves my keyboard while online, and we can stay the best of friends! :D Sound good?

Title: RE: The biggest of apologies!

Recipient: Pocky-Hockey

steeljusticelover, 12/31/2020 10:10:14PM

???

Okay...

I hope to hear your thoughts on Apollo and Artemis' act when you go to see them. They've been working hard on it, so you'll post a review afterwards, won't you? Like, a one-off exception to your 'resolution'?

Title: RE: The biggest of apologies!

Recipient: steeljusticelover

Pocky-Hockey, 12/31/2020 10:15:50PM

Of course, I'll make an exception for thoughts on their performances. :) Anything for my little online buddy who's a friend of theirs and can't make it himself! :D

Title: RE: The biggest of apologies!

Recipient: Pocky-Hockey

steeljusticelover, 12/31/2020 10:28:41PM

... Okay. Thanks, Pocky. :)

- END OF 2020 -
FLASHBACK: Assemble

- Three Years Earlier -

September 15, 8:27AM
Wright & Co Law Offices
Phoenix's Office

Pearl sighed as she sat, totally dwarfed, in the chair behind Phoenix's desk. "Mister Nick's name is hard."

"To spell?" Maya sympathised, crouched next to the chair as she typed into the keyboard of the ancient computer that had once belonged to her sister. "Yeah, it took me a while to get it right." She then smirked as she realised what she'd said. "'Wright'. Pfft. That part was easy!" While Pearl watched in confusion, Maya dug through the mess coating Phoenix's desk and pulled out a small holder of business cards, pulling one out to give to Pearl. "I just always kept one of these on hand until I memorised it."

Pearl nodded, studying the small card in her hands as Maya returned to her typing. After a few moments, she looked back up at the CRT monitor, watching her cousin carefully picking out a colour scheme. "Is that part of why we're making a 'four-um' for his 'club of fans'?" she asked. "So they can learn to spell his name?"

"No, Pearly," Maya replied, frowning as she wondered how she could explain it any clearer when she wasn't exactly a technology buff herself. "Nick's... 'club of fans' doesn't exist yet. This forum is going to be a place where all his fans can find each other! We're starting the club!"

Pearl thought a moment, then nodded. "Okay."

Clicking a final button to finish the process, Maya bit her lip in excitement, watching the website load. Finally, it popped up with a message that set-up was complete, and Maya jumped in place, cheering as loudly as she dared. "It's up!" she cried, then grabbed the mouse. "You want to sign up as a fan, Pearly?"

The girl had a think for a while before replying. "On a 'four-um', you have to write messages for each other, don't you, Mystic Maya?"

Maya nodded, only then pausing as she saw Pearl's nervous nail-chewing and realising what the problem was. "Oh, are you upset because you're still learning to spell?"

Pearl looked away, but it was clear the answer was 'yes'.

"I'll type for you, then," Maya offered, clicking buttons to set up the first account on the new forum after hers. "I called myself 'MyFairy', so how about you go with 'PreciousFairy'? I think that suits you!"

"Thank you, Mystic Maya," Pearl muttered, looking up at the monitor uneasily, "but why do we
need new names?"

Maya paused, turning to her young cousin. "That's how the internet works," she explained. "It can be very easy for not-nice people to see everything you do, so you give yourself a new name and you don't tell strangers anything about where you live or what you look like." She gave Pearl a smile. "Understand?"

Pearl nodded. "Yes, I think so."

"Good!" Maya returned to setting up the account. "I'll give you co-founder status, since we're making this together." She winked in Pearl's direction. "Remember we're keeping this a secret from Nick, though!" As Pearl was nodding excitedly, Maya heard a creaking of floorboards from the kitchen, and, panicking, hurriedly closed the internet browser, standing up straight and putting on her best innocent grin just as the door creaked open. In the doorway stood Phoenix, mostly dressed in his usual blue suit except for the jacket slung over his shoulder, badge just visible gleaming from the lapel.

Phoenix frowned suspiciously at the girls as he saw them sat (or stood, in Maya's case) behind his desk. "What are you two doing?"

"Nothing!" Maya sang, grinning widely. "How's your new bedroom, huh?"

After a moment, Phoenix shrugged. He'd only finished moving in to the upstairs apartment the previous day, no longer able to afford renting both the office and his old flat at the same time. "It'll grow on me," he admitted, then swung his jacket off his shoulder to start pulling it on. "What are you two doing on that computer?"

Pearl shook her head, pushing herself off the chair and running around the desk. "We were just looking, Mister Nick!" she insisted. "I've never used a com-pyu-tah before!"

Phoenix turned to Maya with a raised eyebrow, doing up the buttons on his jacket. "And if I had that magatama of yours on me right now, would I be seeing Psyche-Locks?"

Maya shrugged, returning Phoenix's gaze with a mischievous grin. "I guess you'd have to fetch it to find out!" She then nodded towards his spiky hair. "Unless of course you have lingering brain damage from that hit to the head!"

"H-hey, objection!" Phoenix shouted, one hand flying to the back of his head, where he could still feel the bump the fire extinguisher had given him exactly a week ago. "The amnesia wore off, didn't it!?"

Maya just laughed, waving a hand dismissively at her friend as she walked out from behind the desk. Phoenix rolled his eyes, then headed back into the kitchen. "I'll deal with you later!" he promised darkly.

"Sure you will!" Maya replied, crossing her arms with a smile. "Old man!"

September 17, 8:01AM

Penny's Kitchen
Penny Nichols sat slumped at her kitchen table, a bowl of cereal sitting untouched in front of her. She sighed as she stared into the milky meal, trying and failing to psyche herself up to eat. 'It's not like I'm doing anything today,' she told herself. 'Maybe skipping breakfast won't be that bad? Wait, no, if I start saying that now, I'll be saying it on mornings when I do have work and that would be a terrible idea to talk myself into.'

Just as Penny was reaching for her spoon, the mobile phone on the benchtop began to vibrate, loudly singing the Pink Princess theme. Eager for a distraction, the young woman jumped to her feet, abandoning her cereal and leaping for the phone, which she answered in a heartbeat. "Hello?"

"Penny, it's Maya!" cried the voice on the other end of the line. "Do you know anything about online forums?"

Penny frowned, her free hand tapping idly on the countertop. "Why? Are you having trouble with one?"

"Sort of," Maya admitted, sounding embarrassed. "How... do you get people to join them?"

"Join them?" Penny repeated, confused. "Well, it's the job of the forum owner to advertise, but other than that, you can't make someone sign up to something they don't want to."

There was a long pause from the phone's speaker. "So," Maya eventually continued, sounding even more embarrassed, "how does the forum owner... advertise?"

Penny thought a few moments. "You've started up a forum," she deduced.

"Yes!" Maya cried, upset. "And no-one's joined except me and Pearly! I know there are other fans out there, but they haven't found my forum!" She groaned. "Argh, and I spend ages putting it together!"

Penny decided not to vocalise her suspicion Maya the known technophobe had likely followed a short prepackaged tutorial on customisation and spend a maximum of five minutes putting her forum together. "Well, what's the focus of your website?" she asked. "What fans are you trying to attract?"

Maya didn't respond immediately. "Fans of Nick," she admitted. "And I know there are fans, because he had one as a client the other week, so I put together an official fan-club, but no-one's signed up yet!" She huffed. "Where are they!? How do I find them!?"

Sighing, Penny sat back down in her chair. "Well, I guess you'd have to find places where general law fans hang out and advertise there," she thought aloud. "I dunno, I'm not a fan of that kind of stuff. I'd have to do some research before coming up with a better strategy." She was beginning to regret first introducing Maya to online forums back when they first met, showing off the Steel Samurai board she was an avid member of.

There was another pause. "Would you join the fanclub?" Maya asked.

"Me!?" Penny repeated incredulously. "I'm not a fan of Mister Wright!"

"You don't have to be!" Maya begged. "I'll make a little subforum thing for Steel Samurai! You'll like that, right!?"

"You'd have to do better than that to persuade me!" Penny cried, then paused before quietly adding, "You'd make me a moderator, right?"

"Of course!" Maya replied. "And when you join up, you'll help me advertise, right?"
Penny thought for several long moments, her free hand automatically grabbing a spoonful of cereal that she stuffed into her mouth. By the time she had swallowed, she had made her decision. "Alright, I'll do it."

October 25, 5:45PM

Courthouse Library

"There's a what!?" Maggey Byrde cried in disbelief.

"You really didn't know?" the woman opposite her, hair dyed a bright pink, asked in surprise. "I'd've thought if anyone knew, it'd be you!"

Maggey shook her hands in barely restrained excitement. "Elly, why didn't you tell me earlier!?" She looked around, then, spotting a nearby unmanned computer, dashed off immediately to claim it. "I have to look it up!"

Elly Cooper watched her friend of two years run off with an exasperated look. "What, now?" She followed after, adjusting her bailiff uniform as she walked. "You're seriously this big a fan of the guy? You lost your job because of him!"

"Mister Wright is the lone reason I'm not in jail!" Maggey shot back, bringing up the internet browser and the first search engine that came to mind. "My bad luck has nothing to do with him!"

"Alright, alright!" Elly cried, crossing her arms as she watched Maggey quickly locate the website she was looking for. "But seriously, I thought it had been you who started everyone talking about this fan-club. How did you not know about it?" She paused, then blinked in surprise. "Wait, you're signing up now!?"

"Of course I am!" Maggey cried, deleting her latest attempt at a username. "Well, 'LawBird' is taken. 'Blackbird'?" When that attempt also returned an 'already taken' error message, she sighed in defeat.

Elly smiled in sympathy, petting her friend's shoulder. "Bad luck, Mags. Maybe think of something on your way home?"

Maggey thought a moment, then smiled. "Of course!" Typing in 'Luck' at the end of her name, she again tried to create her account and cheered loudly when she was finally successful. "BlackbirdLuck!" she shouted, fists in the air. "I have an account! My luck is turning around!"

Elly sighed and rolled her eyes, but smiled softly. "At least you're having fun," she said, hands on her hips as she watched Maggey celebrate.

December 19, 1:45PM

Sirius Turner Boarding School for Boys

Computer Room 2
"It is the *best* thing I've ever seen, I swear!" Clay insisted, typing in a URL into his internet browser. "There's tonnes of people just like me!"

Thirteen-year-old Apollo rolled his eyes, idly fiddling around with his own computer next to Clay's. "Great, a whole website full of space dorks."

Clay scoffed as the forum loaded on his screen, hurriedly logging in. "Dude, there's forums for every subject under the sun these days." He smirked. "I bet there's even one for your lawyer hero!"

"He's not my hero!" Apollo muttered, blushing a deep red as he crossed his arms. "He's the best defence lawyer in the world, and I'm going to be just like him one day!"

Laughing, Clay elbowed his friend's arm. "Whatever you say, dude! Keep on dreamin' on!"

Apollo's glare went unnoticed as Clay focussed on his computer, browsing the space-themed forum he had been proudly boasting about only a moment before. The boy turned to his own computer, where the browser was open to the school's default search engine. After a moment of thought, he leaned forward in his chair and, casting a furtive glance at Clay to ensure he wasn't watching, typed in 'Phoenix Wright forum' and hit enter. After an agonising few seconds, the search results popped up, and Apollo's eyes widened in surprise as he saw the top result. *The Official Phoenix Wright Fanclub Forum!* Restraining an excited gasp, he quickly clicked on the link, scrolling down eagerly to survey the forum as it loaded. 'Wow, they've got a Steel Samurai sub-forum!' Making a mental note to check that one out later, he navigated into the boards that specifically focused on the lawyer it was named after, amazed to find an avalanche of threads within devoted to discussing his hero. 'Which one do I read first? Oh, I know, the one I got to see in person!' He thought for a moment, then scowled. 'Argh, what was the name of the defendant?! Maybe if I search for 'Chief Prosecutor' I'll find the thread on it.' He grinned as the search found him the intended result, eagerly reading the assembled thoughts of his fellow like-minded fans.

A few minutes later, Apollo's fun was called to a halt: "What are you doing?" Clay said.

Apollo jumped, turning red as he registered his friend leaning across and staring curiously at his screen. "H-how long have you been...!?"

"Wait, 'The Official Phoenix Wright Fanclub Forum'!?!" Clay read aloud, grinning mischievously. "Wow, I was just kidding, I didn't think it actually existed!" He laughed. "And official, too! Think the guy runs it himself? What an ego!"

Glaring, Apollo crossed his arms. "*Obviously* he doesn't run it himself! Mister Wright is way too busy with his cases to run a fan club!"

Clay scoffed. "And how many cases has he had again? Seven?"

"Eight," Apollo corrected. "And he's never lost! Not once!" He sighed in frustration. "Don't you realise how amazing that is for a defence lawyer?!"

"Whatever, law boy." Clay replied with a grin, returning to his own computer. "Have fun with your weirdo law friends. *I'm* hanging with the cool kids!"

Apollo rolled his eyes as he returned to his reading. *He has a point, there. 'Law friends'. Heh.* He smiled. *And I think I already have a good username in mind to use, too!*

[View the Court Record]
Apollo had been a little surprised to find a star on the front of their dressing room door, under the rather intimidating name 'Gramarye' in all-caps, taped above the cardboard star on a piece of A4 paper. Trucy had merely giggled as she dragged her astonished brother inside, closing the door behind them and jumping towards a small dressing table, the mirror resting unsteadily against the wall behind it. It was a small room, but Apollo mused it didn't need to be all that big anyway, as he and Trucy were already in costume as they arrived. Not to mention, Trucy was only nine years old and didn't need as much space as a full-grown adult would.

It hadn't taken long for Trucy to apply her own make-up, then sit her brother down in the chair and do the same to him. It was the first time Apollo had found himself having to wear any kind of cosmetics, and he had to fight the urge for several minutes to wipe the strange substance off his face once it had been carefully applied. A glance in the mirror assured him it wasn't even obvious he was wearing any at all, but he knew it would still be a potentially bad idea to erase his sister's hard work before they went out in front of their audience. In fact, the longer they waited, the more time Apollo had to think, giving his mind the opportunity to come up with a list of things that could go wrong that only got lengthier as they waited to go on.

At the same time, Trucy was unnervingly calm, running around their little dressing room like a whirlwind, checking on every prop multiple times to ensure it was ready to go on-stage. "Magic Panties, our deck of cards, the little guillotine, all five linking rings, water tube," she muttered to herself, then began to run her hands through all the little hideaways and hidden pockets throughout her costume, each filled with a different object and ready for their specific tricks. "Okay. I think everything's all ready to go." She looked up to Apollo with a grin. "You ready?"

Apollo sighed, arms wrapped tightly around his middle as he sat perched on the chair. "I was ready to go out there ages ago!" he complained, looking up at the clock hanging on the wall opposite the door. "We couldn't have come a little later?"

Trucy shook her head, very seriously. "We need the time to make sure everything's perfect, just in case something isn't," she explained, then crossed her arms. "You do not want to be running late when the call comes to get on-stage, believe me."

Groaning, Apollo turned and rested his forehead on the cool surface of the dressing table. "This wait is agonising," he mumbled. His right hand found its way to his left wrist, where his bracelet normally sat, and, although Apollo knew it was sitting safely on his bedside table, he found himself missing the comforting object.

Smiling sympathetically, Trucy walked up to her brother and patted his shoulder, using her other hand to nudge his hat, sitting on the table, a little nearer to its owner. "Cheer up, Polly! Once we get the call to go on, we won't have time to worry about anything!"

Apollo looked up only to shoot his sister a glare. "That's not helping."
Trucy giggled, then gasped. "Oh! I almost forgot!" She pulled her Magic Panties prop out of her hip-bag, dramatically pointing at it a few times before pulling out a small velvet box, which she handed off to Apollo while stuffing the fabric prop back in her pouch. Apollo took the small box warily, raising an eyebrow at Trucy as she finished replacing the oversized underwear and grinned at her brother expectantly. "Well? Open it!"

Sighing, the sixteen-year-old flipped open the box... and stared in surprise.

"You like it?" Trucy asked, one foot tapping at the floor shyly. "They weren't ready for Christmas, and I made 'em myself, so they don't look amazingly pretty, but..."

Apollo smiled, reaching up to knock Trucy's blue hat off her head and ruffle her hair, to the girl's giggles. "They look great," he assured her, placing the box on the table to extract the two identical bits of home-made jewellery it contained, made of clay and painted gold. Glued to the back of each was a small safety pin. "One for each of us, I assume?" He pulled the bare pin out of his cape, where the cardboard club had been on Halloween, and set about attaching one of the new pins in its place.

Trucy nodded, doing the same with her diamond pin. "The two arrows and the two pins!" she elaborated. "When I was doing research on Apollo and Artemis, I found that they were both associated with bows and arrows, so I thought it fit!"

Apollo turned towards the mirror, fixing his top hat on his head. It didn't annoy him as much as it used to that his carefully-constructed hair style was hidden under the hat, he had to admit, although he found himself barely recognisable in the full outfit. Propped up around his head was the tall collar of his cape, the same one that had been passed down to Trucy by her birth father, and underneath was the black jumpsuit Trucy had made for him almost three months previous, although the round buttons it had sported before had now been replaced with diamond-shaped ones to match Trucy's dress, the laces between them carefully removed. The latest addition, painted gold to match the golden buttons of the jumpsuit, was a small pin in the shape of a bow with two arrows pulled back and ready to fire. Although the bow and arrows were made of clay, the taut string was made of wire, and helped to hide the safety pin glued to the back of the arrows.

Having fixed her hair and replaced her hat on her head, Trucy stood next to Apollo, making final adjustments to the placement of her own pin. Her outfit, apart from the colour change to blue, was still otherwise identical to the way it had always been, down to the red neckerchief poking out from behind the curves of her cape as it struggled to stay put around her shoulders. She gave her brother a grin. "Ready now?" she asked. "Got all your hideaways, your microphone pack?"

Apollo stuck a hand inside his collar to check his microphone was in place, then ran through his mental check-list as he patted down every secret compartment dotted throughout his costume. After a few moments, he felt confident returning Trucy's grin. "I'm ready."

As if on cue, there was a knock on the door. "Five minutes!" Aderyn called from the other side of the wall.

"Coming!" Trucy replied, then turned to her brother with a wink. "We're gonna be fantastic!"

Apollo could only laugh in agreement.

January 9, 7:28PM

Wonder Bar
They couldn't see the audience from where they were standing, but the stage, complete with amateur stand-up comedian, was directly in their line of view. Next to them was a sign, reading in large letters "YOU CAN BE HEARD ON STAGE FROM HERE", which Trucy had carefully made sure was in front of them as they watched the act preceding theirs. The trio of stage hands were milling about, impatiently waiting to close the curtains so they could rush out to put Trucy's larger props in place for the duo's upcoming performance.

Trucy gently tugged on Apollo's cape, prompting him to lean down and allow her to whisper in his ear as she pointed at the man on stage. "This guy needs a better joke book!"

Apollo smirked and nodded, whispering back, "Or an instruction video on how modern comedy works!"

As the pair snickered amongst themselves, Aderyn emerged from somewhere behind them, giving the siblings a wink as she rearranged her hair around her shoulders. "You two ready?" she quietly asked.

"Is it too late to back out?" Apollo joked, Trucy hiding her giggles behind a hand.

Aderyn snorted, rolling her eyes and checking her watch. "Well, that was the longest ten minutes of my life," she mumbled, then stalked forward, staring at the man on stage as she mimed tapping at her watch. The amateur comedian glanced in her direction, then quickly and nervously wrapped his act up, the stage hands immediately pulling the curtains closed as Aderyn walked out on stage, her black dress billowing about her ankles.

Apollo and Trucy gave each other only a glance as they dashed out on stage, past the star of the previous act as he sadly headed to the dressing rooms, mumbling to himself. One of the stage hands, a young woman not much older than Apollo, placed Trucy's small table of props in centre stage just as the siblings arrived, and gave them a wink as she mouthed "Good luck!". Apollo mouthed a "Thank you," in return, and the backstage crew disappeared off-stage. Trucy shot Apollo a look, reaching behind her hip bag, and Apollo almost gasped in surprise as he similarly reached behind the pouch hanging from his belt, where the battery pack for his microphone was hidden, and flipped it on. 'Can't believe I almost forgot that!'

"So here they are," came Aderyn's introduction from the other side of the curtains, "Apollo an' Artemis Gramarye!"

Apollo took a deep breath in the pause before the curtains shifted and began to open, the audience beyond applauding the arrival of the Wonder Bar's star act. He planted a grin on his face, glancing at Trucy to see her doing the same, and took her lead in stepping forward to acknowledge the crowd's excitement to see them.

Following their rehearsed script, Trucy took a little bow. "Hello, everyone!" she called, then gestured to Apollo. "This is my brother Apollo..."

"... and this is my sister Artemis!" Apollo picked up, also bowing as he held his hand out towards Trucy.

"And we're here to show you some amazing sights tonight!" Trucy continued, leaning forward in excitement. "Ain't that right, Apollo?"
Apollo pretended to think a moment. "Well, 'amazing' is such a subjective term..."

"Just agree with me!" Trucy cut in, looking annoyed as their rehearsed script demanded. The exchange was met by the audience with a small laugh, and Trucy took the chance to jump back to their little table and pick up five linked rings sitting in one corner. She held the chain out to the audience. "Now, who's seen this trick before? Raise your hands!"

Apollo shook his head, giving the crowd a pleading look. "Please don't. Then we'd have to come up with something to replace it."

Ignoring the crowd's amused reaction, Trucy held one end of the chain out for Apollo to take. "Here, stretch it out so the audience can see it properly!"

As prompted, Apollo took the offered ring and the pair held it out, loosely letting the chain hang. "Huh, these make a funny sound when they hit each other!" he pointed out, referring to the ringing noise the chain made as it moved.

"Yeah, but you have to be careful!" Trucy replied, turning to the audience in an almost exaggerated way. "These are special, magic rings!" Next to her, Apollo looked thoughtful and began to shake his end of the chain up and down. "If you're not careful, they might just go right through each-!" With a gasp from the audience, the ring in Apollo's hand suddenly separated from its neighbour, sending the chain falling down limply on Trucy's side. The pair stared with their best shocked look at the loose ring in Apollo's hand, giving the audience a few moments to laugh at the 'trick gone wrong'.

Trucy held her free hand on her hips, giving Apollo a glare just as the audience began to quieten. "What did I just say?"

Putting on an embarrassed smile, Apollo shrugged. "Er, sorry, Artemis." He quickly leaned down and nabbed the chain from Trucy's hand. "I can fix it, though!" he insisted, and began to whack the loose ring against the other end of the chain, being very careful not to activate the gimmick that allowed them to 'link' together. Although trying his best to appear to be concentrating fully on the chain, he kept half-an-eye on Trucy, waiting for a cue from her that they had perhaps teased the audience enough.

'Trucy was right,' Apollo told himself as he hid a smile. 'We will be fantastic.'

View the Court Record
Apollo and Trucy's act had ended with a round of applause, and Apollo even spotted through the stage lights a few people giving them a standing ovation, obviously having greatly enjoyed the pair's debut performance together. Once the curtains closed, Apollo didn't have the time to pause and process the past ten minutes, as Trucy pulled him off-stage and the pair collected their props from the stage-hands before heading back to their dressing room, ensuring they'd turned off their microphones as they left the backstage area.

Trucy sighed loudly as she placed their props on the dressing table, making herself busy checking they were all there before she started putting them all away again. Apollo placed the few he'd picked up on the table where she could see them, then leaned heavily against the wall. His mind was racing as he thought back over everything that had happened since the curtains opened, his thoughts moving too fast to be able to focus on any one thing for too long.

Nodding to herself, Trucy pushed their props into a round pile, content they were all accounted for. She thought a moment, then looked up at Apollo. "Our first joke was a bit of a dud. We should think of something to replace it."

Apollo stared in confusion for a moment before he was able to recall what she was referring to. "Oh, yeah, it was a bit, wasn't it?"

"And," Trucy continued, one hand pointing into the air in thought, "we need to practise the 'cup and balls' routine. I don't think we pulled it off as well as we should've."

"Sure," Apollo agreed, staring into space as he nodded.

Trucy paused a moment, then slowly smiled at her brother. "Yeah, it's a real rush when you first get off stage, isn't it?"

Apollo blinked in confusion, then gave his sister a glare. "I've been on stage before, remember?" he pointed out.

Giggling, Trucy sat down on the chair by the dressing table. "But after that, you had other acts to watch," she replied. "It's different sitting back here after a good performance."

After thinking over her words for a moment or two, Apollo found he had to agree. It was so quiet and relatively dark in the dressing rooms during the show, but out on stage it was loud and bright. Even in the audience, there was still the noise to distract from the dark. A part of him wondered how the comedian who had preceded them had coped upon his return to his dressing room.

"Don't worry," Trucy assured her brother, jumping to her feet and patting his arm. "You get used to it."

"I sure hope so," Apollo instinctively replied with a raised eyebrow. "If I mentally shut down after
every performance, there's no way we're doing this more than once a week."

Trucy laughed.

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January 9, 8:02PM

Wonder Bar

Restaurant

Once the show had ended, and all their props were safely locked away in their dressing room, Trucy showed Apollo the way to the backstage door behind the bar, leading out into the restaurant area of the building. After carefully snaking their way through the two bartenders already working in the narrow space, they exited the employees-only area and paused as they looked out over the tables that still housed a majority of the audience from the show.

"I didn't see them sitting next to the stage," Apollo muttered to his sister, removing the top hat from his head. "Where'd you reserve their table?"

Trucy shrugged. "I asked Aderyn to do it," she admitted. "I told her Daddy wanted to be a little back from the stage this time."

Apollo sighed, then took Trucy's hand. "C'mon, let's go find them." As he led her towards the tables, slipping his hat back on his head, he hoped they wouldn't find their path blocked by too many people wanting to stop and congratulate them; He'd had enough of that with the people backstage.

As the siblings snaked their way through the tables, Apollo was relieved to find that most people were content to leave them alone, some shouting cheers their way as they passed, waving to the caped duo as they continued their search. Trucy always returned their acknowledgements with loud 'thank you's, while Apollo gave them a polite smile and wave, quickly returning to his search.

"Apollo! Trucy!" came a call from Apollo's right, and he turned just as Trucy pulled her hand out of his, running to where Luke was walking towards them with a smile on his face.

"Luuuuke!" Trucy cried, pulling her brother into a hug. "Did you like it!? Was it good!?"

Luke laughed as Apollo joined them, hugging his little sister back. "You were brilliant!" he assured her. "Both of you!"

"Thank you," Apollo replied with a grin, again taking off his hat to carry it in one arm. "Where were you guys, anyway? We didn't see you."

"We're over here," Luke gestured behind him as Trucy finally pulled out of the hug. As he led his siblings through the crowd, he continued, "Papa said it was like you'd grown up doing that your whole lives! You really work well together up there!"

Apollo and Trucy shared proud grins. "It kinda felt like that for us, too!" Apollo said.

A few moments later, the Wright siblings arrived at their destination, a small table around which were sat Phoenix, idly playing with his phone, and Clay, who jumped to his feet the moment the pair arrived. "There you are!" he cried in exasperation, throwing up his hands. "Do you realise how long
we've been waiting for you two!"

"Two minutes?" Apollo replied with a cocky grin. "Oh no, you poor boy."

Phoenix put away his phone as Clay scoffed, then stood, being ambushed by a hug from his daughter. "Did you two have fun?"

Trucy nodded. "Yup!" she replied. "We were great, weren't we, Daddy?"

Laughing, Phoenix nodded his agreement. "As if you could be anything less!"

Clay poked at Apollo's cape as he noticed the golden bow holding it together. "Hey, where'd this thing come from? You weren't wearing that before you got on stage!"

Apollo adjusted it proudly. "Trucy made them. They fit our theme-naming."

Clay scoffed and rolled his eyes.

Luke's attention was drawn away from the table, and he smiled and waved at a figure lingering not far away. "Hello, Miss Holliday!"

Everyone looked around as the woman waved nervously, approaching the table. "Hey, thought I'd drop by after you invited me and everything!" she called.

"Thank you for coming!" Trucy said, bouncing in place as she gave Aria a grin. "Did you enjoy the show?"

"Yes, I did," Aria replied, tucking some hair behind an ear. "Very much, actually!"

Apollo grinned. "That's great to hear!" he assured her. "We're glad you had fun!" 'So, this is Pocky, huh? A little more shy now, but otherwise exactly how I'd have expected her to be,'

Luke turned to Clay. "Miss Holliday hired me to play on Christmas," he explained.

"Ohhh!" Clay replied, shooting the woman a thumbs-up. "Gotcha!"

Phoenix chuckled, placing his hands on Trucy's shoulders from behind her. "We at the agency are very proud of all three of them," he said, smiling at each of his kids in turn. "They're tremendous talents."

Apollo blushed, looking away. "Daaaad," he mumbled. Luke fiddled with the sleeves of his jumper, looking like he wanted to protest, but kept quiet. Trucy only grinned wider, looking up at Phoenix happily.

Aria giggled, beginning to look more comfortable again. "I can certainly agree with that!" she assured them, then turned to Apollo. "I'm actually writing up a review of your show when I get home!"

Apollo perked up, but didn't seem too surprised. "Really?"

Trucy gasped. "Wow, cool! I don't get to read many reviews of the show!" She bounced forward, out of Phoenix's grip. "Where will you post it!?"

"D-don't worry about that," Apollo cut in, holding up his free hand to signal to his sister. "I'll find it. It shouldn't be hard."
Clay frowned. "How?"

Apollo gave his friend a dry look. "Ever heard of a search engine?"

Aria giggled. "Yeah, there won't be that many websites talking about 'Apollo and Artemis Gramarye', huh?" she agreed, then clapped her hands together. "If all goes well, I'll post it up tonight!"

"I'll keep an eye out for it!" Apollo promised with a grin.

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The Revived PW Fan-Club Forum!

Home > Phoenix Wright Himself

Thread: Apollo and Artemis Gramarye's Debut

Pocky-Hockey, 01/09/2021 10:27:38PM

As I have promised certain people, here is my review of Apollo and Artemis Gramarye's new magic act!

(Talk about the kids goes in this forum, doesn't it? ALSO I HAVE PERMISSION TO POST THIS BEFORE YOU ASK)

If you haven't heard already, two of the Wright children are magicians, the grandchildren of Magnifi Gramarye himself, and they've just started performing together in a cute little place called the Wonder Bar! It's the kind of restaurant where you sit at tables (which are all semi-circular!) facing a stage, and every night (and afternoons on weekends I think) they have a show. It's like six different 10min acts, and the Gramaryes are right in the middle, but they really deserve to be the finale because they were WAY better than anyone else up there tonight. I mean, if you're a big fan of magic, I'm sure it's all stuff you've seen before, but these kids have chemistry and they make it interesting no matter how many times you've seen someone else doing this trick! And did I mention Artemis is like maybe 10 at the oldest? Apollo's a teenager, but he comes across as the less experienced of the two (which only makes it more interesting to watch), and leaves a lot of stuff for Artemis to do. They also talked between themselves a LOT, and man does Artemis's chipper attitude bounce off Apollo's dry sarcasm! They had a running gag where Artemis would call a volunteer on stage and Apollo would refer to them as her 'victims', even apologising to them as they came up! I was sitting too far away to be called up myself, unfortunately!

Anyway, I had a lot of fun tonight, but I'm exhausted! I'm off to bed now, but I might think of more to gush about tomorrow xD

CelestialImpacts, 01/09/2021 10:36:48PM

Permission? From who?

Wow, sounds like a lot of fun! I guess I have to make it a goal to drop by this place one weekend and see them. Do they perform every week, and how often every week are they working?
Never been a big fan of magic, but these kids sound like talented performers, if not magicians. And one of them is 10 years old?

**ForgotMeKnot, 01/10/2021 09:41:21AM**

Hey, cool! Did you see if Mr Wright was in the audience? Surely he'd be there to watch his kids! Tell me you talked to him, dude.

**Dime_Quarters [CERTIFIED USER] [MOD], 01/10/2021 09:52:17AM**

Knot. Rules. Don't make me give you a warning.

Pocky, sounds like a lot of fun! I see no problem with these kinds of posts about performances the Wright kids are doing, since that's something they're putting out in public themselves. I guess I should think about dropping by to see them, since I also work in the entertainment industry and all. They'd probably be a lot easier to work with than some actors (or crewmembers actually, most of the time) I've met over the years.

**steeljusticelover [CERTIFIED USER], 01/10/2021 10:04:29AM**

C'mon Knot, we have rules here for a reason ;) And the Wrights told her themselves they wanted to see it, didn't they Pocky?

I'm glad you had a lot of fun! They've told me it was a lot of hard work, but hearing the audience enjoy it really made the whole thing worth it a million times over.

I've sent your review to them, too! Apollo says your praise means a great deal to him, and Artemis just squealed and ran all over the house boasting about how nice you were (she's actually 9, by the way). Anyway, they're both happy, and they hope to see you again sometime down the line!

Celestial, at the moment they're performing every Saturday evening, but they're considering expanding to Sunday evening and afternoon, too. I'm sure they'd love for anyone to stop by and see!

**Pocky-Hockey, 01/10/2021 11:32:25AM**

Aw, I'm glad they liked it, SJL! :D Yeah, even if the rules didn't allow this, I put it up at their request, so ha :P

Okay, so Artemis is 9. I wasn't far off! She's real talented for a 9yo.

Also, tell Apollo I loved the thing how he was always 'ruining' Artemis's tricks, like at the beginning with the rings that could link and unlink? Don't overdo it tho, because that's the kind of gimmick that
can get old fast.

steeljusticelover [CERTIFIED USER], 01/10/2021 01:25:57PM

I'll pass it on, Pocky! Thanks again! :D

View the Court Record
Luke stormed into his junior year dorm room with a frustrated sigh, running straight to the tidy desk in the corner. Behind him, looking a little concerned, were Apollo and Clay, who filed in and closed the door behind them before standing by the bed awkwardly, watching their friend open his school-issued laptop and begin clicking through it as he leaned on the desk instead of sitting down.

"So..." Apollo spoke up. "What did you need help with, then...?"

Luke dropped into his chair, waving his friends over. "I've been researching for almost a year now!" he explained, trying to calm himself down as Apollo and Clay slowly walked up behind him. "I just... I've hit a wall, and I don't know what to do next!"

Clay shared a glance with Apollo, crossing his arms. "What are you researching?" he asked.

Luke opened a text document, then leaned back in his chair as he gestured to it. "Local companies that manufacture rubber face-masks. There are a lot of them around here."

"Yeah," Apollo laughed, "they would get a lot of money from the film industry making those!"

Clay frowned. "Why?" he asked, confused. "Are you trying to buy one yourself, or...?"

Luke froze as he remembered that he had very deliberately kept the story of Maya channelling Clark from Clay, as a part of the 'keep Kurain a secret' promise they'd made their first Christmas together. "Uh..." He hurriedly tried to think of a convincing excuse.

"We found one," Apollo jumped in. "On Forest Road."

Luke sighed in relief, sending a silent thankful glance to his brother.

"Really!?" Clay replied, surprised. "Why didn't you tell me before!??"

"I guess we forgot!" Luke answered with an embarrassed shrug. "I've been doing research on it too, so I think I wanted to wait until I had something to share!"

Clay scoffed, but seemed to accept the explanation. "So you're trying to track down who bought it?" he reasoned.

"Yup," Apollo replied, leaning in to read the list Luke had left on his laptop screen. "Wow, there really are a lot around."

"The problem is," Luke said, "these companies I've listed won't give some random fifteen-year-old information on their previous clients!"

Clay adjusted his visor, staring off into space. "Not even if you tell 'em it's for a murder investigation?"
"Why would they believe us?" Apollo pointed out. "They'd only give that kind of stuff to detectives."

"Aha!" Clay replied, snapping his fingers with a grin. "You guys have a detective friend, don't you? Ask him to help you!"


Clay nodded. "Yeah, him! He'll help you, right?"

The brothers thought for a moment. "He has his own cases to work on, doesn't he?" Apollo mused aloud. "Would he even have the time to help...?"

"Never know until you ask!" Clay pointed out, gently slapping Apollo's arm.

Luke winced to himself. "He's not working on the Forest Road case anymore, remember?"

Clay and Apollo looked confused. "He's not?" Apollo asked.

"Y-yeah, he said when we last saw him," Luke explained with a shrug. "There was another accident there last June, so his boss replaced him with another detective, a 'rookie' by the name of 'Fulbright' apparently." He paused, staring at the desk. "Detective Gumshoe said the same thing happened to the last detective on that case, when my parents disappeared there."

Clay crossed his arms. "Well, you can still ask him to help, can't you?" He shrugged. "So he has to lie a little! He'd want to find the truth as much as you!"

Luke looked back to his list. "I'd have to ask Papa to call him, anyway. We don't have his number."

Apollo suddenly gasped, attracting his friends' attention. "Wait!" He pulled his phone out of his pocket and scrolled through his contacts. "I have Blackbird's number!"

Biting his lip to keep in a laugh, Clay repeated, "Blackbird?"

"Oh, Miss Byrde!" Luke realised, turning to Clay to explain, "She's Detective Gumshoe's girlfriend!"

Clay raised an eyebrow. "And how do you have her number?" he asked his friend with an amused look.

"None of your business," Apollo shot back, then paused. "Should I call...? Maybe I should text. She might be busy."

Rolling his eyes, Clay pushed Apollo's arm. "Just call her!" he cried.

Twisting in his chair to look up at his brother, Luke shrugged. "Maybe text her to check she's okay with being called?" he suggested. "You could ask if she's with Detective Gumshoe at the moment, and if he'll talk to us."

Apollo thought a moment, then nodded. "I'll try that first." He began tapping out a message to his online friend.
Are you busy right now?

Not right now. What's the matter?

Nothing serious, I was just wondering if you were with Detective Gumshoe atm?

Yeah, we just met up. You got a message for him?

Luke has a potential lead on finding his parents but we can't progress on our own. Would Detective Gumshoe be able to help us out?

I'm afraid that's out of the question. I'm sorry about your brother but investigations are really better left to the police. If you take your lead to them, they can look into it for you.

Again I'm really sorry we can't help.

It's fine. Thanks anyway Blackbird.

Papa, what did you do when your investigations hit a snag?

Issues with your research into those facemasks huh? Sorry to say that at that point I was always forced to give up and find my answers in court, which isn't exactly an option for you.

Is there anything I can do? Pep talk? Take a second look at what you have?

We were trying to ask Detective Gumshoe to help us, but Ms Byrde said we should leave the investigation to the police.

Yeah that's a thing the police will do. If I could convince em for you I would, but they won't listen to me either.

Don't lose hope. We'll find something.

Even if it takes years?

Even then.

Apollo sighed, dropping backwards onto his brother's bed, his phone in one hand. "Well, there goes that lead," he grumbled.

Clay, sat next to Apollo, nodded in agreement, resting his head on a hand dejectedly.

Luke stared at the list on his screen, the encouraging message from Phoenix still displayed on the screen of the phone in his hands. Slowly, he put the phone down on his desk, then covered his face with his hands.

"We can't give up here," Clay said, frowning into the distance.
Apollo looked up. "What else can we do?" he pointed out. "Detective Gumshoe won't help us."

"Then we'll just have to help ourselves!" Clay insisted, standing up with his fists held up determinedly. "We can research those companies Luke found! See if that helps us narrow down the possibilities!"

Luke looked, slowly turning around in his chair. "Research the...? How would that help?"

Clay shrugged. "Well, if we can find out everything about them, they're probably upstanding companies," he reasoned, "so they'd be less likely to be involved with a criminal organisation!"

"An organisation!?" Apollo repeated, sitting up in shock.

"Duh!" Clay replied, rolling his eyes. "There's been a tonne of accidents on that road. A single person couldn't do all that!"

Luke nodded, frowning in thought. "That makes sense," he decided. "And if any of the companies on my list seem at all suspicious, that makes them likely candidates, right?"

Clay gave his friend a thumbs-up. "Right, Wright!"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "All of this only raises the question of what they hope to accomplish from kidnapping people even more," he pointed out, then held out a hand to begin counting off. "They're somehow crashing these cars without killing the people inside or leaving a trace on the road, they specifically kidnap only some of the people inside, leave false evidence that these people died, then take them who-knows-where to do who-knows-what!"

Clay rested his hands on his hips, chewing his lip. "Yeah, but we don't exactly have clues to any of that, yet."

Luke was still lost in thought. "What if we don't find anything because they've been manufacturing the masks themselves...?" he wondered aloud, turning to look at his list again. "They might disguise themselves as one of the companies making them!"

"Woah, clever!" Clay laughed. "That way the police would have loads of trouble finding 'em even with that 'mask' lead!"

Apollo smirked, sarcastically adding, "Yeah, then the three teenagers uncover them and get themselves killed!"

Clay shot his friend a glare. "We're not confronting them, geeze!"

Luke looked up with a smile. "We could always visit them physically with some of the masks from my collection!" he joked.

"Ugh, I call dibs on not being the girl or the old men," Apollo immediately replied, hands in the air.

"Wait, what?" Clay said, turning to Luke with a surprised look on his face. "You have a mask collection?"

Luke blushed, shrugging. "It's a long story," he said, then began to count on his fingers. "I have one each of the Professor and Flora, and one of Inspector Chelmey, Doctor Schrader, Dean Delmona..."

Clay's laugh interrupted the list. "I have no idea who any of those people are," he pointed out, "but you'll have to tell me the story when you show this 'collection' of yours to me!"
"Oh, yes," Luke agreed, embarrassed. "We can do that on Saturday, can't we?"

Apollo shook his head. "It would take us all day for you to tell him those stories," he lamented. "Although I bet Trucy would love that."

Luke nodded in agreement. "She does like my stories, doesn't she?"

"It's a deal, then!" Clay cried, giving Luke a thumbs-up. "Stories and a mask collection, Saturday sharp!"

Luke laughed. "Deal!"

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
There was only one person at the stop as the bus pulled up alongside, bouncing in place in her school uniform as she watched the doors creaking open before her. The first person to emerge was a seventeen-year-old who paused on the final step with confusion as he noticed the nine-year-old girl waiting, and he stepped out on the pavement frowning at her. Behind him, his younger brother paused to throw a smile and a wave to the bus driver. "Thank you, sir!"

"What are you doing here?" Apollo asked Trucy, arms crossed, as Luke jumped out beside him.

Trucy only chirped a bright "Hi!" and jumped on her brothers, pulling them into a hug. Luke chuckled as he hugged her back, although Apollo only rolled his eyes, sending a glance back at the bus as it pulled back out into the afternoon traffic. Trucy jumped back with a grin. "Uncle Edgeworth came over, so Daddy asked me to come and find you!"

"Mister Edgeworth is visiting?" Luke repeated, surprised.

"Why?" Apollo added, confused.

Trucy shrugged. "It must be something important," she decided, turning and skipping off in the direction of home. "They wouldn't talk about it in front of me."

Luke and Apollo shared a glance as they began to follow their sister. "But usually Dad talks with Uncle Edgeworth on the phone, doesn't he?" Apollo thought aloud. "Why did they need to talk in person?"

"Maybe he wanted to ask Papa's help on a case?" Luke reasoned. "That could be why they're keeping it such a secret."

Trucy shook her head. "Uncle Edgeworth didn't have any papers that I saw," she said, then looked up at Apollo with a questioning look. "You need papers to talk about a case, right?"

Apollo shrugged.

Luke tapped his chin in thought. "Well, whatever it is," he eventually decided, "I guess we'll have to wait until we get home to find out..."

Apollo was in the lead as the trio stepped into their home, pausing as he entered the kitchen and saw
Edgeworth and Phoenix sat across from each other at the table, a pair of mugs sat between them. Phoenix looked up with a smile as Luke and Trucy filtered in, stopping to either side of their brother as their conversation suddenly halted. "Ah, there you are!" Phoenix waved the children closer. "We've been waiting for you to get back!"

The kids shared a wary glance before stepping forward. Luke decided to give Edgeworth a polite smile and wave. "Hello, Mister Edgeworth!"

Edgeworth nodded, taking a quick sip from his cup before returning the smile. "Greetings," he replied, then looked to Trucy. "My apologies for sending you away, but your father and I wished to discuss logistics privately before revealing the surprise too soon."

Trucy immediately perked up. "Surprise?" she repeated, jumping to Phoenix's side with a grin. "What's the surprise, Daddy? You can tell us now, right!?"

Phoenix laughed. "Sure!" he said, to Trucy's cheering. "You remember how summer vacation is starting in a couple weeks, don't you?"

"Of course we do," Apollo loudly sighed, crossing his arms. "Luke and I've been suffering through exams, haven't we?"

"I haven't!" Trucy chirped.

Apollo narrowed his eyes at her. "Well, lucky you then."

Trucy stuck out her tongue at him.

Phoenix laughed. "Well, we've spoken to Maya and it looks like you two," he pointed to Apollo and Trucy, "will be spending your first two weeks of summer break up in Kurain!"

Apollo looked confused. "Really!?"

"Really!?" Trucy gasped, a wide smile on her face. "We get to spend more time with Miss Maya and Pearly!?" She jumped in place, cheering.


Phoenix grinned, glancing at Edgeworth, who was absenting himself from the conversation by busily sipping from his mug. "Well, we've been invited," Phoenix simply said.


Slowly, Edgeworth put his mug down on the table and turned to specifically face Luke. "I've invited yourself and Wright to join me on my upcoming research trip to London, England." He smiled. "Would you be interested in coming?"

The Wright children stared for a few moments as the words sunk in, then, finally, Trucy shouted, "WHAT?"

Luke's shocked gaze quickly turned into a broad grin. "R-really!? You'll let me come along?"

"What does he get to go!?" Trucy continued. "I wanna go to London!"

"Thank you so much, Mister Edgeworth!" Luke cried, clasping his hands together while his eyes shone with unshed tears of joy. "It feels like forever since I was last in Blighty!"
Trucy crossed her arms, pouting. "It's not fair! I wanted to see the university and Misthallery and Future London!"

Phoenix sighed, holding a hand up in the hope of silencing Trucy before she descended into a full-on tantrum. "Truce, it was very generous of Uncle Edgeworth to invite just me and Luke," he told her in the most serious tone he could muster. "It's a bit rude to try and demand he extend that to you too, don't you think?"

Apollo nodded as Trucy only glared at the ground. "Yeah, and I think Luke deserves to go more than us," he added, giving her a stern look.

Trucy didn't reply.

Luke took a step towards Edgeworth, unable to tone down his delighted grin. "Thank you so much for inviting me, Mister Edgeworth!" he repeated. "This really means a lot to me!"

Edgeworth nodded, giving Luke a polite, though warm, smile. "I'm glad to hear it."

Apollo poked Luke's shoulder, grinning. "Hey, congrats!"

Luke giggled. "Thanks, Apollo!"

"Oh, that reminds me!" Phoenix said, reaching for an envelope sitting on the table nearby and holding it up towards Luke. "You'll probably want to tell the Professor, won't you?"

Gasping in excitement, Luke made a grab for the letter. "Oh yes!" he cried, then turned around and dashed towards the office. "The Professor and Flora have to know as soon as possible!"

My dear Luke,

I'm afraid I must begin this letter by lamenting that I will be glad when Alfendi's baby teeth finish coming in.

Unrelatedly, Alfendi gave us a scare yesterday when he ran straight into a door frame while playing with Flora. He may be able to run, but he clearly has yet to master anything other than speed. Nothing was broken thankfully, but he is wandering around the apartment a lot more carefully than he was before.

It would have been Apollo's birthday last Friday, would it not? I imagine that makes him seventeen now. Another year and he will officially be an adult! I wonder, did their performance that weekend reference it at all, or was it business as usual?

We had the May Day bank holiday last week, and Flora decided it was the perfect time to take Alfendi out on a picnic. She made quite a stockpile of supplies for it, more than we'll ever need, and I'm quite surprised at myself that what I'm about to write is true, but the food was simply delicious! She has come a long way since she started following recipes and learning how cooking normally works... I believe she's even learning how experimenting with food actually functions; When we next get the chance to meet in person, I'm sure she'd love to demonstrate such for you. In fact, I may have complimented her so much she's beginning to realise her previous attempts were not perfect. Do please be gentle on her if she inquires as to your true opinion of her past cooking ability.
Things have been very quiet around here the past month, so I find I do not have very much to write about. I hope things have been more exciting for you. How is your investigation going? Have you found any more leads?

The usual puzzles are enclosed.

Your friend,

Professor Hershel Layton

15th May, 2021

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Dear Professor Layton,

I have some wonderful news! Mr Edgeworth is going to London from the 7th to the 18th of June, and he's invited Papa and me to come along! I'm going back to England! I can't wait to see you and Flora again, and to meet Alfendi! He's almost two, isn't he? I can hardly believe it's been so long since I left!

Apollo and Trucy are going to stay with Maya while we're in London, and Trucy's really upset about it, but I'm sure they'll have a great time anyway! Apollo is seventeen now, like you said, but I guess Papa prefers there be someone else to look after them rather than leaving him to look after Trucy alone. Actually, I should ask if they're still planning to do their show while we're away. I don't think they made any reference to Apollo's birthday in their show, now you mention it.

No new leads on my investigation, but we can talk about that more in person! I can't wait to see London again! And to see how good a cook Flora is now, of course! And then I also have to write a letter to Arianna if I want to see her while I'm town, too. I have a lot to plan before we go!

Mr Edgeworth says we'll be arriving in Gatwick Airport, around 2pm your time (Papa thinks he might adjust to the jetlag better by arriving in the middle of the day). Will you be able to meet us there? I suppose you can call us to answer that, since there won't be time for a return letter!

I included some puzzles for you all. I can't wait to see you next month!

Your friend and apprentice,

Luke Triton

21st May, 2021
Their flight was scheduled to leave at seven in the evening on the Sunday. As Los Angeles was eight hours behind London, and the flight itself took eleven hours in total, it would be six in the morning by their internal body clocks when they landed at two in the afternoon in Gatwick on Monday. Phoenix argued, as last time it was the middle of the day for him although he was landing in the evening, this would be easier to adjust to, although Edgeworth claimed exactly the opposite, saying they would be flying into the rising sun and years of experience told him this was harder to adjust to. Nevertheless, their day of departure had arrived, and Edgeworth had appeared at the Wrights' door to take Phoenix and Luke away with him to the airport.

Phoenix fussed over Apollo and Trucy as Edgeworth and Luke carried their bags down to the car. "You'll sure you'll be okay tonight?" Phoenix asked the siblings, one hand on Apollo's shoulder while the other held Trucy's cheek. "You can handle dinner alone, and breakfast tomorrow?"

"We'll be fine, Dad," Apollo sighed, resisting the urge to roll his eyes. "And you're sure you can get to the train station on time tomorrow?" Phoenix continued, looking between the two with concern. "You'll make your train, and you know what bus to get at the other end?"

Trucy giggled. "Stop worrying, Daddy!" she told him with a smile. "Polly knows what to do, don't you, Polly?"

Apollo nodded, and began to count off on his fingers. "We have leftovers for dinner, we've gotten breakfasts for ourselves a million times already so that's not at all hard to do, the train and bus timetables are pinned to the fridge, and the bus will have 'Kurain' on its sign so we can't exactly miss it." He crossed his arms. "Not to mention, if we have any problems I can just call Maya. She's promised to be available if we need her."

Phoenix was still unsure. "You won't forget to lock everything up when you leave?"

"I won't," Apollo promised, exasperated. "All the openable windows, the back door and the front door, and I won't forget to leave up the sign saying the office is closed and everything."

"You'll remember to take your keys with you?" Phoenix prompted.

"Yes!"

Edgeworth sighed from behind Phoenix as he and Luke arrived back in the apartment. "Stop mothering them, Wright," he said. "Apollo is more than capable of looking after himself and Trucy for one day."

"Exactly!" Apollo agreed.
Phoenix stuck his hands into the pockets of his hoodie, still looking worried. "What about when you come back down on Saturday? Will you be okay getting to and from the Wonder Bar?"

"Dad!" Apollo shouted, throwing his hands in the air in frustration. "Trucy and I will be fine!"

"Yeah, Miss Maya and Pearly are coming with us that night!" Trucy pointed out, crossing her arms.

Phoenix gestured with his shoulders as though he was holding up his hands in defeat, although they didn't leave his pockets. "Alright, alright," he muttered as he stepped back, though he didn't look convinced.

Luke stepped forward, and was about to speak when Trucy raced forward and threw herself onto him in a tight hug. She rubbed her face into his shoulder, saying, "You'll have lots of fun in London, won't you? And you'll come back with more stories about you and the Professor?"

Smiling, Luke hugged his sister back. "You bet I will," he promised her. "I'll be thinking of you the whole time!"

"Don't waste your time doing that!" Apollo joked, stepping forward to gently punch his brother on the arm. More seriously, he added, "Have fun. We'll be waiting to hear about it when you get back."

Trucy pulled away from Luke and jumped on Phoenix, hugging his middle. "We'll miss you, Daddy!" she cried.

Phoenix smiled, kneeling down to hug his daughter. "I'll see you in two weeks," he said, then stood up and pulled Apollo into a sideways hug. "You'll look after each other, won't you?"

Apollo nodded, pulling away and awkwardly rubbing the back of his neck. "I'll, um... I'll text you when we get to Kurain, Dad."

Phoenix nodded gratefully. "Thank you."

Edgeworth looked at his watch. "As heartwarming as this is," he announced, "we need to get going." He turned and walked out the door.

Pulling all three of his children into one last hug, Phoenix planted a kiss on Apollo and Trucy's foreheads. "You two be good," he said, releasing them. As Trucy nodded eagerly, Phoenix and Luke ran for the front door.

Luke paused at the door to give his siblings one last wave. "Bye, guys!"

"Bye!" Apollo and Trucy called, then the front door closed and the two were alone. After a pause, Trucy looked up at Apollo with a grin. "So, how much trouble would we be in if we burned the apartment down?"

Apollo gave his sister a glare, then silently turned and headed inside.

You guys are heading off soon right?.

Yup. You'll look after Apollo and Trucy won't you?
Lol stop worrying Nick! They'll be fine! Apollos like 17, he could probably look after himself.

I mean at that age Sis moved to the city to be a lawyer, and I met you.

You’re different tho, you’ve always been independent

So’s Apollo, and Trucy too to some degree.

Stop worrying, they’ll be fine. I’ll make sure of it.

Thanks Maya. See you when we get back?

We’ll see, but I hope so :) Have fun in jolly old England!

We will :) Seeya

__________________________

Hey, thought I'd wish you luck before you left!

Hi Maya! We're in the airport now, waiting to board the plane, so I can't chat for long.

Lol that's okay, I just wanted to tell you to have fun! I'll keep an eye on your brother and sister huh?

Haha, I know Apollo and Trucy will be fine! Did you want me to pass on a message to the Professor when we meet him at the airport?

Sure, tell him I said hi! Oh and if you happen to meet up with anyone from Labyrinthia you'll let me know won't you?

Of course! And I'll tell you all about London when we get back!

I'm looking forward to it already! :D Seeya in a few weeks, hopefully!

Talk to you later, Maya!

__________________________

June 7, 2:06PM

Gatwick Airport

Arrivals Area

It was a very tired trio of travellers that dragged themselves out into the arrivals area after collecting their bags, but Luke was refusing to let his lack of sleep get to him, looking all around the open hall eagerly. "The Professor said he'd be here with Flora and Alfendi!" he cried, somewhat disappointed at his inability to see them.

"He probably is," Phoenix pointed out, also joining the search as Edgeworth filed along behind them. He rubbed one hand along the top of his head, contemplating whether or not to remove the beanie to make himself more recognisable for their friend. "It'll take us a while to find him in this
crowd, though."

Edgeworth nodded in agreement. "It's perhaps best we find somewhere with a good vantage point and wait for them to come to-"

"Professor!" Luke suddenly cried, dashing off into the crowd with his bag swinging behind him. "Flora!"

"Wait, Luke!" Phoenix called after him, following his son in a mild panic while also trying to see where the English professor was hiding in the crowd. Edgeworth rushed behind him at a brisker pace, but seemed to be refusing to actually run just yet himself.

When Phoenix caught up to Luke, he found the teen locked in a tight embrace with a young woman in an orange dress, reddish-brown hair pulled up into a ponytail with a ribbon. Despite their close proximity, they were seemingly already deep in conversation, loudly squealing to each other about how long it had been since they last met and whether or not Luke had grown taller. Nearby stood an older man in an orange turtleneck, who looked up as Phoenix and Edgeworth approached with a welcoming smile, his hands resting on the handle of a pram currently locked into place between him and Luke. Inside was a toddler with stringy red hair, staring sternly up at the strangers.

Layton tipped his hat. "Mister Wright, a pleasure to see you again!"

Phoenix grinned, nodding his head as he approached the small group. "Professor! It's been a while!" He held out his hand, and the old friends shook warmly. "We were worried you hadn't come for a moment there!"

Layton laughed. "Oh no, we wouldn't have missed meeting Luke here for the world!"

At that moment, Luke and Flora suddenly ended their excited conversation, and Luke jumped to Phoenix's side. "Oh, I should make sure everyone is introduced!" he cried, then gestured to Phoenix and Edgeworth, looking at Flora. "Flora, this is my Papa, Phoenix Wright, and his friend Mister Edgeworth. Papa, Mister Edgeworth, this is Flora Reinhold!"

Flora gave the two men a wave. "Hello!"

Phoenix waved back, while Edgeworth gave her a small bow. "A pleasure," he said.

Luke stepped forward, gesturing between Layton and Edgeworth. "Mister Edgeworth, this is Professor Hershel Layton. Professor, this is-!"

"Miles Edgeworth," Edgeworth cut in, bowing to Layton before turning to Luke. "My apologies, but if we're doing full introductions, I feel it's only fair to mention."

Luke smiled, unoffended, while Layton tipped his hat. "Then it is to you I must offer my thanks for allowing Luke this chance to visit," he said.

"Please, think nothing of it," Edgeworth replied.


Layton stepped over to the pram, reaching in for the toddler inside. "That leaves one last person for the introductions," he said, picking the quiet young boy up and holding him in his arms, where the baby promptly clung to his father's neck, peering over his arm curiously at the newcomers. "This is Alfendi Layton. As of tomorrow, he is twenty-two months old."
Luke jumped forward eagerly to greet the toddler. "Hello, Alfendi!" he cried. "I've heard a lot about you!"

Alfendi buried his face in his father's shoulder.

Phoenix laughed. "Shy, is he?"

"He's wary of strangers," Flora explained with a shrug. "We think it might have to do with what happened to his parents."

"We can explain another time," Layton added, prising the toddler from his neck to place him back in the pram. Flora moved to help strap the boy in, and Layton looked up to the three visitors with a smile. "Now, where was it the three of you were staying while you're here?"

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Meanwhile, Thousands of Miles Away

June 7, 1:26PM
Kurain Village

Apollo and Trucy waited impatiently as the bus they had just gotten off slowly turned itself around and headed back down the mountain, freeing up the road for them to dash across towards Fey Manor. Waiting on the porch, grinning in excitement, was Pearl, waiting for her unofficial cousins to arrive.

"Pearly!" Trucy shouted, bounding up the stone steps and launching into a hug with her friend. "It's great to see you!"

"Hi, Trucy!" Pearl replied, politely hugging the younger girl back. "It's been a while!"

Apollo settled for a wave as the girls parted. "Is Maya around?"

Pearl shook her head. "She's in a meeting right now," she explained, looking apologetic. "She asked me to make sure you were settled in."

"Oh, that's alright, Pearly!" Trucy chirped, gripping the handles of her backpack as she bounced in place. "We know where to go and everything!"

Apollo laughed in agreement. "Yeah, this place is like a second home!"

Pearl pressed her palms to her cheeks as she blushed. "Oh, I hope Mister Nick thinks so as well!" she cried.

Trucy squealed, clapping her hands. "Me too!"

Sighing, Apollo rolled his eyes, then headed into the mansion.

________________________

Just thought I’d let you know, Trucy and I are in Kurain. Before you ask, I locked up all the windows and doors, the sign was still there when we left, and I have my keys on me.

Thank you, Apollo. I knew I could trust you, it was just difficult to convince myself. :) It's almost 10pm here and Lukes already knocked out from all the excitement. Hows Maya and Pearls?

The usual as far as I can tell. Mayas in a meeting so we haven't seen her yet. Trucys catching up with Pearly right now.

That's good :) I'll call you around 9am tmrw your time so be prepared. Love you

Love you, Dad.
Apollo pressed 'send' on his latest message to Phoenix, pretending his face wasn't bright red as he then quickly locked his phone screen and shoved the device deep into a pocket. Sitting in the Winding Way outside the side room, he could hear Trucy and Pearl loudly talking amongst themselves nearby, and wondered what they were so excited about. *Probably our show on Saturday,* he decided. *Given how easy it seems to be to impress the Feys with magic, anyway.*

The door from the Meditation Room slid open, and Apollo looked up in surprise to see Maya's head poking out, searching the small garden curiously before spotting Apollo and rushing towards him with a smile. "Apollo!" she cried, crouching at his side and petting his head. "Great to see you again, kiddo!"

The teenager waved the hand off his hair with an annoyed look. "Pearly said you were in a meeting."

Maya nodded, biting her lip to hide a smile. "Snuck out," she said with a shrug. "Had to check you guys made it okay!" She laughed, elbowing Apollo playfully. "Your dad woulda killed me if you hadn't!"

Apollo smiled, knowing he couldn't argue with that. "We made it fine," he assured her. "Trucy's talking to Pearly, if you hadn't noticed," he added, gesturing in the rough direction of the open window that the pair's conversation was drifting out of.

"Yeah, I noticed," Maya laughed, standing up. "I figure there's no reason to disturb them." She then waved for Apollo to stand next to her. "Now come here, I want to see how much you've grown!"

"Seriously?" Apollo sighed, rolling his eyes. "You know I'm taller than you n-"

Maya tapped a finger on Apollo's head. "Uh-uh! Get up here, I want to see." Apollo contemplated pointing out that Maya wasn't his mother, but decided it was easier to just do as she said and not make a fuss about it. Maya was fond of comparing their height whenever they met in person, after having noted with disappointment when they first met that he just about matched her in how tall he was. In fact, he was unsurprised to see, as he stood straight next to his impatient unofficial mother figure, that he had a good few additional centimetres on her since the last time she insisted on measuring him against herself.

Maya spent a few moments trying to stretch herself up to Apollo without going on tip-toes, but was eventually forced to give up. "You have Nick's height, I bet!" she complained, arms held straight at her sides as her hands curled into fists. "Just my luck that you're not taking after me in that regard!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "I'm not biologically related to either of you," he pointed out.

Waving a hand, Maya turned and headed back towards the door. "Well, I'd better get back to work!" she cried, back to her usual cheerful self. "Talk to you later, Apollo!" With that, she was gone.

Sighing, Apollo sat back down, dangling his feet off the wooden balcony. *Why are all of my family weird?*
What's the time over there right now?

Just gone midday.

Oh, yes, it's just after 8 in the evening here! I should have remembered it's an 8 hour difference!

Lol! Dad was telling me how you went out today with your friends Ariana and Tony?

Arianna and Tony, yes. We went back to Misthallery, so I met pretty much everyone I used to know there! It did get a bit frustrating after a while how almost everyone would greet me by immediately offering condolences for what happened to my mum and dad, but I had fun seeing everyone again. I even found Toppy, though he's getting old now!

Wow, did everyone seriously know about your parents? :/ And Toppy was the rat that helped you out when you met the Professor, right?

Misthallery isn't all that big, and Dad was the mayor here. I guess news of the crash spread really quickly. Yes, Toppy was my rat friend. He was probably the only old friend who didn't know what had happened, actually. All the people around my age didn't mention it, I think because they knew all the adults would be separately apologising. I should have thanked them before I left.

Well you had a good time at least. Tired yet? ;).

A little! It was worse this morning, but I'm really trying to power through the jetlag. I might find something boring to do for a while until I feel I can sleep! Maybe I could ask Papa about his day with Mr Edgeworth again, it sounded like even they thought it was boring!

Lol! Good luck with that!.

Thanks! By the way, did you know Papa brought his old suit with us? He's wearing it instead of his usual jumper and hat.

Jumper=sweater, did you forget already? Lol! Yeah it must be weird seeing him in the suit again. Does it even still fit him? He hasn't been a lawyer for a couple years now.

It is weird, yes! But I should get going now. Talk to you tomorrow, Apollo!

Seeya then :).

June 12, 8:25PM

Train Station

"But how did you even do half of those!?" Maya gasped as their small group of four made their way onto the platform to catch the last train back to Kurain. "That has to be actual magic!"

Pearl nodded in agreement. "How did you not cut off your hand in that 'gill-o-teen'?" she asked
Apollo, looking worried. "That looked like it might have really hurt!"

Apollo laughed, sharing an amused glance with Trucy. "Aw, a magician never reveals their tricks!" he said.

"Magician's code!" Trucy chimed in with a grin.

Maya pouted, balling her hands into fists as the group came to a halt on the platform. "Stupid code," she muttered darkly to herself. "Max said that about his magic, too!"

"Max?" Trucy repeated, confused.

"He's a magician too," Pearl explained. "He works at the Berry Big Circus, here in town."

Apollo's eyes widened. "Wait, you mean Max Galactica!?" he asked. "The guy Dad defended for murder!?"

"Oh!" Trucy cried. "I know who he is! He used to compete against Daddy and Uncle Valant in the Magician's Grand Prix!"

Maya laughed. "Ah, I see you know who he is!" she said, holding her hands behind her boastfully. "Yeah, I met him when Nick was defending him for murder. Boy, what a case that one was!"

"He had a wonderful act!" Pearl cut in. "He flew through the air, then he disappeared!" She pressed her hands to her face, smiling in glee at the memory. "It was the first magic act I ever saw, and the first time Mister Nick and Mystic Maya took me out somewhere!"

"Huh, really?" Apollo replied. "That case was the first full trial of Dad's I got to see!" He laughed to himself. "I actually dragged Clay along to watch some of it with me! Man, he hated it, even after all the excitement of how Dad took down that acrobat guy!"

"You mean Acro?" Maya asked, hand held to her face as she solemnly remembered the trial. "Yeah, that was an eventful trial, wasn't it?" The train pulled into the station, halting the conversation as Maya gestured the three kids towards the nearest door. "Okay, everyone in!" she cried as she began to herd them. "We gotta make the last bus, or we're walking home in the dark!"

---

_How was your day?_

_Actually pretty eventful. How much did Papa tell you when he called earlier?_

_Eh he didn't say much, just that you'd had a busy morning and it would take too long to explain it all :/ What happened?_

_It's a bit of a long story. Actually, tell Trucy we have her 'adventure' over and done with to tell her about when we get back on Friday._

_We're not even seeing you until Saturday xD But yeah I'll tell her. Short version?_

_I'll leave that to Papa. He was more involved than me._

_Aw! Lol._
I'll just say we went to Gressenheller University and something went a bit wrong. You can hear the full story on Saturday.

Alright I'll look forward to it then. Of course Trucy and I are gonna invent our own versions in the meantime tho xD.

Haha! Feel free, although it might make the truth a little less exciting!

I'll talk to you tomorrow, Apollo.

Seeya then :) .

June 16, 2:05PM
Fey Manor
Pearl's Room

The first thing Apollo saw as he walked through the doorway was the hula hoop falling clumsily from around his sister's waist. Coming to a halt in confusion, he frowned, watching as Pearl ran to grab the fallen ring of plastic from around Trucy's feet. To his surprise, Trucy was, for once, lacking her hat and cape, wearing only the black dress and white boots of her usual magician outfit. He decided to lean against the door frame as he watched.

"You're supposed to start swinging before you let go," Pearl instructed, helping Trucy hold the hoop around her middle.

Trucy nodded, holding the object tightly as Pearl let go and stepped back. Frowning in concentration, she began to swing her hips around in a circular motion, then let go of the hoop, which swung meagrely around her waist only once before again falling to the floor at her feet. Crying in frustration, Trucy threw her fists against her legs. "This is so hard!"

Pearl nervously fiddled with one of the bands wrapped around her wrists. "I'm sorry," she mumbled.

"Don't be sorry, Pearly. You just need practise," Apollo said, startling the two girls as they noticed he was there. He pushed himself off the door frame. "The more you do it, the easier it is to do."

Trucy glared at her brother, then grabbed the hoop off the floor, flipping it over her head and holding it out towards him. "You try it, then!" she challenged him.

Apollo shrugged, smiling. "Sure. It's been a while, though." Taking pleasure in Trucy and Pearl's surprised looks, he took the offered hoop and, with his free hand, promptly took Trucy's lead in removing the hat, cape and belt of his costume, putting them to one side where they were out of the way. Noting he was too close to the walls for comfort, he shooed the girls back a little until he had a reasonable free space, then flipped the hoop over his head to hold it around his waist. 'Okay, Apollo. It's been a few years... or, more than a few, really, since you last did this... Do not screw up.' With a practised, though rusty, motion, Apollo swung his hips side to side, throwing the hoop around his waist to spin there.

Trucy and Pearl gasped. "Wow!" Trucy cried.
Grinning, Apollo said, "Let's see if I can pull off a trick or two, huh?" Without waiting for a reply from the girls, he jumped a little and shifted the hoop to spinning around his upper legs, then down close to his ankles, before kicking it back up to his waist. Smiling proudly at the successful trick as the girls gasped in awe, Apollo moved to try and gets his arms inside the spinning object, but misjudged his movements and hit the hoop instead. Although he tried to catch it, the plastic ring fell to the floor with a clatter, leaving Apollo wincing at his mistake. "Oops."

To Apollo's surprise, Trucy and Pearl erupted into applause, bouncing in place and grinning widely as they cheered his effort. "That was amazing!" Pearl cried.

"Yeah, that was so cool!" Trucy added, running to her brother and tugging on his arm. "Why didn't you ever say you were good with a hula hoop!?!"

Apollo shrugged, blushing. "Well, I guess it never came up," he said, "and, really, I'm not that good anymore. It's been ages since I last played with one."

Pearl peered down at the fallen hoop curiously. "What happened to your hoop that you don't have one anymore?" she wondered aloud.

Once again shrugging, Apollo looked away, frowning. "It wasn't mine, really. It belonged to this foster family I was staying with." A hand reached up to rub the back of his neck. "I played with it so much, they even sent me to hoop dance classes for a while." He frowned. "Then they couldn't look after me any more, so I had to go."

Pearl held a hand to her mouth, eyes wide in sympathy.

Trucy knelt down and grabbed the hoop off the floor, swinging it over Apollo's head as he pulled his hand down to avoid getting whacked with the moving hula hoop. "But that sounds really cool!" she cried, pausing to look over the smallish hoop. "Y'know what? We need to get ourselves our own hoop like Pearly's!" She looked up at her brother with a grin. "Then we can figure out a way to work it into our act!"

Apollo blinked in surprise. "Really?"

"Sure!" Trucy chirped, pushing the hoop towards Apollo again. "C'mon, let's find a better place to practise so you can teach me and Pearly how to do it!" With that, she raced outside.

Pearl and Apollo shared a confused glance before shrugging and following after, smiles on their faces.

View the Court Record
Although they had met up almost every day since their arrival the previous Monday, Luke was still highly excited to greet the Layton family as they found each other in the front hall of Gressenheller University. Luke and Flora ran to each other to tightly hug, although Luke quickly pulled away to then run to Layton and young Alfendi, who managed to give the teen a small smile as he recognised the visitors. Luke gave the toddler a small wave, which was returned, although Alfendi followed it up by again hiding his face in his father's shoulder.

Edgeworth looked around the entrance hall with an inscrutable expression. "You're sure we aren't disturbing you, coming here?" he asked.

"Please, it's no trouble at all," Layton insisted, tipping his hat as Alfendi looked up curiously. "I am here on research today, so we shouldn't have anyone interrupting."

"Oh!" Luke cried, turning towards his father. "Should I maybe show you around before we go to the Professor's office?" He scratched at the side of his head, grinning in embarrassment. "It's quite easy to get lost here if you don't know the campus very well..."

Flora giggled. "He's speaking from experience, of course!"

Luke blushed, rounding on his friend. "Well, you got lost here a lot, too!"

Phoenix laughed, crossing his arms to keep from fiddling with the old suit he'd dug out from his closet to wear on the trip. "I'm sure we'll work it out!" he assured his son, then gestured to Edgeworth. "We're meeting with that professor of law here first, remember?"

Edgeworth nodded. "Indeed. I have her office number, so she shouldn't be hard to locate."

"In that case," Layton said, "Luke can return to my office with us while you go to your meeting. We can meet up there when you are done."

Phoenix grinned. "Sounds like a plan."

Luke dashed to Phoenix to give him a hug, saying only, "See you later, Papa!" before running off again with Flora.

Layton adjusted Alfendi in his arms and gestured down the nearest hallway. "My office has the top hat on the door. It's not far down this way," he told them.

"Understood," Edgeworth replied.

"We'll see you later, Professor," Phoenix added with a small laugh.

Alfendi wriggled, asking to be put down, and ran off the moment his feet touched the wooden floor. Layton followed closely behind, ensuring the toddler was not likely to hurt himself as they headed
Edgeworth pulled his organiser out of a pocket, flipping it open to the current day. He looked over his own notes for a moment before looking up at the nearby stairs and heading towards them, snapping the organiser closed. "This way, Wright. She's on the first floor."

Phoenix paused. "Then why are we going upstairs...?"

"'First floor' meaning the first floor off the ground," Edgeworth explained, stopping at the first step to wait for his friend to catch up. "This floor is called the 'Ground Floor' here, not the 'First'."

"Oh, okay." Phoenix mumbled, rolling his eyes at the unexpected difference in terms as he hurried towards the stairs.

June 15, 10:49AM

Gressenheller University

First Floor Hallway

"The stairs are back this way, aren't they?" Phoenix mumbled to himself as he and Edgeworth wandered back down the hallways towards the lobby. "Man, Luke was right when he said it was easy to get lost!"

Edgeworth crossed his arms, fingers tapping as he thought to himself. "I think we need to turn down this next hallway coming up," he said, gesturing to an upcoming intersection.

Phoenix sighed, digging his hands into the pockets of his suit pants. "I hope you're right. I don't want to have to dig out my phone and call Luke to come find us." 'And it was so nice to pretend at being a lawyer again, learning about the English law system properly... y'know, not by being thrown into the deep end in a deliberate effort to get someone wrongfully declared guilty! ... The good mood is promptly ruined by getting lost.'

One thing that had been glossed over about this trip to Phoenix's kids was the true purpose of the original invitation to Phoenix himself; Much to Edgeworth's disappointment, public opinion on the state of the courts in California had rapidly declined after the conviction of Simon Blackquill. Although Phoenix didn't see what they could possibly do about it, Edgeworth was determined that the deterioration of trust could be halted and possibly even restored if they first cleared Phoenix's name, and, for that, he had come up with the idea of a new system of judging criminals.

"If the public do not trust the judges alone," Edgeworth had explained, "then what better way to change their minds than by bringing them into the judging process itself?"

"Like a jury?" Phoenix had asked, scratching his chin. "Didn't that old system get scrapped precisely because people hated doing it?"

Edgeworth had sighed in response. "Obviously they didn't know what they had until they lost it," he almost snapped. "I understand, contrary to your experience, the United Kingdom still uses jury trials for the majority of its cases. The one you participated in would have been subject to this 'pulling of strings' that got you defending in it." Phoenix hadn't been convinced, so Edgeworth would later add, "And how exactly are you planning to prove Gavin framed you in the 'forged evidence' scandal...?"
without any evidence, then? At least with a jury you can ask for a conscience vote."

Phoenix hadn't been able to argue with that.

As they turned down the new hallway of the university, Phoenix noted an open, sunlit space at the other end and grinned hopefully. "Look, the lobby!"

Edgeworth shook his head. "It can't be. He gestured to the hallway behind them, extending beyond where they had turned off it. "We're not at the front of the building."

Phoenix sighed, throwing his hands in the air dejectedly. "So we're still lost."

"Not exactly," Edgeworth replied, a small smile at the corners of his mouth as he continued walking. "There may be stairs there. If we can return to the ground floor, it will be easier to find our way to the lobby from there."

"I hope you're right," Phoenix mumbled, keeping pace with his friend as he rested his hands back in his pockets.

The silence was interrupted by a scream suddenly sounding from a doorway to their right.

Phoenix and Edgeworth only glanced at each other before racing to the door the sound had come from. Phoenix reached it first, throwing the door open and racing into the dark room. It was a classroom, built for smaller tutorial classes or practical assignments, with a chalkboard on the wall by the door and an array of desks lined up down the room. Against the far wall was a large cupboard, its door hanging open, and standing in front of it was a pre-teen girl with long orange hair done up in a ponytail on the side of her head, a school uniform her only clothes. She was staring, hands over her ears, at the floor in front of her, where, hanging out of the opened cupboard, was the body of an older woman, bright hair stained with blood and tucked underneath the collar of a green coat. She rested face-down on the laminated floor, her legs awkwardly folded at the bottom of the cupboard that she had clearly fallen out of.

The two men moved forward as one, Edgeworth towards the woman on the floor and Phoenix to the girl, gently holding her shoulders and pulling her away from the grisly scene. She was reluctant to move, seemingly still in shock, until Phoenix knelt down next to her. "Hey, c'mon, let's get out of the way now," he whispered, and directly addressing her finally alerted the girl to the men's presence, making her look up in surprise at Phoenix. He gave her his best friendly smile, saying, "We'll just get in the way hanging out in here, okay?" The girl thought a moment, then mutely nodded, so Phoenix stood back up and took her hand.

Edgeworth was kneeling by the body, his hand pulling away from her neck. "Dead, but not long," he announced, looking up to see his friend leading the girl back out into the hallway. "If you'll call the police Wright, I'll begin an investigation here."

Phoenix nodded, pulling his phone out of his pocket.

"The number here is triple-nine by the way," Edgeworth added as a reminder.

"Got it," Phoenix replied, exiting into the hallway and closing the door as the girl followed him.

After discovering the scene inside, it felt almost eerie to find himself back out in the quiet hallway, although the sun shone through the windows at the distant ends of the large corridor. Nearby, against the wall by the door they had just come out of, was a convenient bench, so Phoenix led the girl over to sit down. "I've gotta call the police, okay?" he told her, and, when she nodded her acknowledgement, he turned his attention to his phone.
"Nine Nine Nine, what is your emergency?"

View the Court Record
Phoenix dropped onto the bench next to the girl as he hung up the phone. 'Man, I almost forgot how long it can take to inform the police of a murder.' He frowned. 'Actually, I should probably find a way to inform the university, too. Wait, that'd be easy, I could just call Luke and get him to pass the message on to the Professor. As much as I'd hate to ruin their day, it's kind of necessary given the circumstances.'

He felt a soft tugging on his sleeve, and looked down to the girl sat at his side, gazing up at him worriedly. "Um, excuse me," she mumbled, "sir?"

Phoenix smiled. "My name's Phoenix," he said, "but you can call me Nick if you want. What's your name?"

The girl only continued to look nervous. "Uh, it's, um..." She hugged her arms close to her tummy, rubbing her hands comfortingly by her elbows. "A-Athena."

"Nice to meet you, Athena," Phoenix replied, holding out his hand to shake.

Although she was still too shy to face Phoenix directly, he spotted a small smile as Athena shook his hand, slowly becoming more comfortable with him.

"Did you want to ask me something?" Phoenix continued.

Athena nodded, her hands slowing their nervous petting. "My teacher might be worried about me. I was supposed to come right back once I found my..." She paused, then gasped, hands flying to her mouth. "Oh no, my notebook!"

The girl jumped to her feet and looked ready to run straight back into the classroom, so Phoenix threw himself forward to grab her arm and prevent her from leaving. "Bad idea!" he cried. "That's a crime scene now! You can't just run in!"

Athena chewed her lip nervously. "But my notebook is still in there!" she cried, only to sigh and reluctantly sit back down, arms flopping at her sides. "Missus Hawkins let me come and get it, and she told me to be right back! I can't go back to class without it!"

Phoenix glanced up and down the hallway. "You're here on a school trip?" he asked her, hands clutched together in his lap.

"Mm-hmm," Athena said with a nod. "All of Year Seven came out here today to talk to some of the professors about what they teach in university."

After a moment of thought, Phoenix smiled and pulled his phone out of his pocket. "Well, I know of a way to get a message to your teacher for you," he offered, "seeing as the police will probably want to talk to you before you can go back to class."
Athena looked up, eyes wide in fear. "Th-they will?"

Phoenix patted her shoulder. "It's okay, they'll just want to know what you saw." He thought a moment, then added in a more serious tone, "You were the first to find the body, so anything you might have seen could be vital to finding who did it."

The girl didn't seem convinced, but gave Phoenix a nod to show she understood.

On his phone, Phoenix hit one of his contacts and held the phone to his ear. After a few moments of ringing, the other end of the line picked up.

"Papa?" Luke asked from the phone speaker. "Did you get lost?"

"Er, not quite," Phoenix replied, wincing a bit as he remembered his last conversation before discovering the body. "I'm sorry to have to ruin your good time with the Professor, but there's been an... incident."

There was a pause from the other end of the line. "Incident?"

"I'm afraid Uncle Edgeworth and I found a body," Phoenix bluntly explained. "I'm going to have to ask you to ask the Professor to pass on to the dean that the police are on their way."

"O-oh," Luke mumbled in surprise. "I'll do that, sure. Where is it?"

Phoenix glanced over to the classroom door again, where the room number was displayed under a picture of a blooming flower he couldn't identify. "Room zero-thirty-six," he said. "The door has a flower on it."

"What kind of flower?"

"I-I don't know," Phoenix admitted, trying not to sound frustrated. "It's on the second floor you'd say here."

Luke took a moment to reply, and Phoenix wondered if he was writing this down. "Okay, I'll make sure Dean Delmona knows about it," he promised. "Is there anything else?"

Phoenix nodded, forgetting for a moment that Luke couldn't see him. "Yeah, one other thing, actually."

"It's a rose," Athena suddenly chimed in, startling Phoenix from his conversation.

Covering the microphone, Phoenix turned to the girl with a confused look. "Sorry?"

"The flower on the door," she explained, pointing to the picture nearby. "It's a rose."

Phoenix paused a moment, then gave Athena a smile. "Ah, thank you," he told her, then returned to his phone. "Apparently the flower on the door is a rose, but that wasn't what I was going to say."

Luke giggled. "Okay, Papa! What else were you going to say then?"

"There's a school trip somewhere in the building right now," Phoenix explained. "If you could find out where they are, and explain the situation to the teacher, I'd greatly appreciate it."

"There is?" Luke wondered aloud, starting to sound worried. "Why? Is the body a kid!?"

Phoenix shook his head, surprised to hear Luke's conclusion. "N-no, of course not!" he cried. "I
think the body belongs to one of the professors here, actually... No, it was discovered first by one of
the kids from the school trip. Her name's Athena, and I think her teacher might be getting worried
about her by now."

"Missus Hawkins," Athena reminded Phoenix. "And that was Professor Rains inside."

Phoenix had opened his mouth to pass the information on to Luke when he suddenly realised what
Athena had said and turned to her with a surprised look. "You knew who it was...?"

"What was that, Papa?" Luke asked.

Athena looked embarrassed, running her hands through her ponytail. "Y-yeah," she admitted. "She
was talking to us about biology in plants."

Phoenix stared at the girl for another moment or so before returning his attention to his phone.
"Apparently the victim is a Professor Rains, and she teaches biology in plants," he said.

"Oh, Professor Rosa Rains, the botanist!" Luke cried. "I met her once, before I left!" He paused a
moment, then added, "Professor Layton is leaving now to go find Dean Delmona and that school
trip. Shall we catch up to you when we're done?"

"That's a good idea," Phoenix agreed, certain now that Luke had been writing everything down to
immediately pass along to Layton. "I'll see you in a bit. Love you."

"Love you, Papa," Luke replied, then hung up.

Sighing, Phoenix returned his phone to his pocket. "This is why I didn't become a detective," he
mused aloud to himself.

The background noise of the university had slowly become an increasingly loud babble over the past
few minutes, and Phoenix looked around to see various classrooms both in and out of this particular
hallway opening up to empty of students, turning the babble into a full-on crowd, everyone talking at
the top of their voices to be heard by their neighbour. At his side, he noticed Athena gripping her
ears tightly, and reasoned it might actually be easier to return inside the classroom, at least until
everyone had gone. *I hope no-one's expecting a class with Professor Rains, though.* Resting a hand
on Athena's shoulder, he leaned in close and said to her, "Why don't we wait inside where it's
quieter, huh?" Athena nodded, looking grateful, and followed Phoenix as he stood and escorted her
back into the classroom.

June 15, 11:00AM

Gressenheller University

First Floor, Classroom 036

Edgeworth looked up as the door opened and closed. "Have the authorities been informed?" he
asked, standing from where he was examining the body.

Phoenix nodded, guiding Athena towards the nearest desk. "Luke and Professor Layton are finding
the dean, and then they're going to track down Athena's class so they don't worry about her." He
paused to silently instruct Athena to sit down. "Oh, and apparently our victim is one Rosa Rains.
She's a professor of biology here. A botanist, specifically."

Edgeworth raised an eyebrow. "A little more information than I was expecting you to return with," he admitted. "Although it does make sense, given the high quantity of dirt under her fingernails."

Athena again tugged on Phoenix's sleeve. "Um, would it be alright if I found my notebook while we're in here?"

Phoenix leaned down to the girl's level. "Where'd you leave it?" he asked.

The girl stood, looking around the room before pointing at a desk on the other side of the classroom, near where the body had fallen. "Over there," she said. "I was looking when I heard something in the cupboard..." Rubbing an arm nervously with her other hand, she sat back down, shooting glances in the direction of said item of furniture.

Edgeworth took a cursory glance over the desks nearest to him, then reached under one and plucked an A5-sized exercise book off the chair, holding up for Athena to see. "Would this be it?"

Athena nodded, grinning. "Yes, that's it!" she said. "Thank you, sir!"

Phoenix chuckled. "I guess my friend here is good for something, huh?" he joked.

Ignoring the comment, Edgeworth strolled towards them, reading the front of the booklet. "Athena Cykes is your name?" he said, holding it out for the girl to take. "I can tell you are not from around here by your accent."

Athena winced, taking the notebook and hugging it tight to her chest.

Phoenix shot Edgeworth a glare, though he was surprised to realise that she did indeed talk with an accent more reminiscent of California than London. "I don't see how that's relevant," he pointed out, protectively resting a hand on the girl's shoulder. "She did just discover a body, Edgeworth."

"I'm aware, Wright," the burgundy-suited prosecutor replied, arms crossed, before turning to Athena. "Maybe you could tell us more about what happened before we found you. You were here looking for your notebook, correct?"

Athena nodded, staring at the desk in front of her as a hand reached up to cling to the collar of her school uniform, where the golden chain of a necklace was just visible. "I heard something," she repeated. "I thought maybe there was someone, or something, trapped in there, so I went to open the door." She hugged herself tighter, looking distressed. "I... I..."

"It's okay, you don't have to talk about it," Phoenix assured her, kneeling to be closer to her level while shooting murderous glares at Edgeworth in a silent warning to back off.

Edgeworth rolled his eyes, then turned and walked back over to the body without another word.
"So we meet them as they arrive," Luke asked as they walked briskly from the dean's office to the lobby, "and show them where the room is?"

Layton nodded, a hand resting protectively on the brim of his hat. "It shouldn't take them long," he explained. "Scotland Yard isn't far away."

Flora hugged Alfendi tighter as she tagged along at the back of the group. "Do you think it will be a detective we know?" she wondered. Although Layton had initially wanted to leave the pair in his office, both Flora and Alfendi had kicked up such a fuss at being left behind that he had reluctantly agreed to let them come along, provided Flora kept herself and her baby brother out of the way of the investigation. "It would be nice to see Inspector Chelmey again!"

Luke giggled, looking back at the young woman. "Yeah, I haven't seen him in a few years! Has he changed at all?"

Flora shook her head, grinning. "Nope!"

The group arrived in the lobby, standing near the entrance doors. The halls had quietened again now the switch-over between classes had ended, with any remaining stragglers either heading to the inner courtyard or to an office somewhere in the building. Luke adjusted his hat as he peered out the glass doors. "I hope they come soon," he said, "whoever's coming."

Alfendi began to fuss in Flora's arms, asking to be let down, so she gently placed the boy on the ground. "What is it, 'Fendi?" she asked him, but the baby only toddled over to Layton, gripping his trouser legs tightly in his fists.

Layton crouched down to Alfendi's level, giving him a reassuring smile. "What is it, Alfendi?" he asked. "Are you worried about something?"

The baby rubbed his face against Layton's knee, making soft whining noises as he refused to talk.

Luke looked over to Flora questioningly, but she just shrugged with an apologetic smile.

"Are you worried I'm leaving you?" Layton asked, one hand petting the toddler's red hair. When the baby looked up at him with sad eyes, the Professor chuckled, taking Alfendi into his arms and standing up, holding his son close. "Well, you don't have to worry about that. I can promise I will never leave you."

Flora sighed wistfully. "Aw, little baby!" she cooed.

Luke restrained a giggle, looking out at the road outside, and jumped when he recognised a car parking by the bus stop. "Professor!" he cried, pointing at the blue police car. "They're here!"

Everyone looked up, watching in anticipation as two men got out, one solemnly stalking towards the
university doors while the other scrambled close behind on his much shorter legs.


"You were right, they haven't changed!" Luke added.

Layton nodded, shifting Alfendi to his other arm. "Indeed," he said with an amused smile.

One banging of the doors later, Chelmey and Barton strode into the university lobby. Chelmey instantly spotting the small group and quickly approaching them, hands behind his back. "Layton. Should have guessed it was you," he growled, not seeing Barton cheerfully give the group a wave behind him. "So where are they then?"

Layton tipped his hat. "Good day to you, Inspector, Constable," he greeted the officers. "Professor Rains' body was discovered in her classroom on the first floor. We can show you there promptly." He nodded to Flora and Luke to follow him, then turned towards the stairs.

Chelmey pulled out a notebook, waving at Barton to tag along as he stuck to Layton's side. "Rains, huh? When did you find her?"

"We didn't!" Luke objected, crossing his arms. "My Papa and Mister Edgeworth did!"

Chelmey stopped, bringing the party to a halt as he looked back in surprise, staring at the teen for a moment. "Hang on, you're that Triton boy!" he cried as he recognised Luke. "I thought you left?"

Luke nodded. "Oh, I did! I'm visiting!" he explained, then giggled. "It's good to see you again, Inspector!"

"Hmm," Chelmey mumbled, then turned and continued to follow Layton, sending the group once more into motion. "I thought it was you lot that discovered the body."

"I'm afraid not," Layton replied. "As Luke explained, it was his father - adoptive father, not Clark Triton - and a friend of his that stumbled upon it. We offered to show you there so they could guard the scene."

Chelmey grunted to himself, tapping his notepad with his pencil as they emerged onto the upper floor. "Right," he said. "Let's get to it, then."

June 15, 11:11AM

Gressenheller University

First Floor, Classroom 036

"Wow, you're twelve?" Phoenix proclaimed, with a hammed up tone of wonder.

Athena giggled, running her hands through her ponytail.

"My daughter's only nine!" Phoenix laughed, leaning against the desk next to Athena's that he had sat in as Edgeworth continued to stand around the body. "Of course, then I have a son who's fifteen, so you're about inbetween the both of them!"
"Oh, I didn't know you had kids, mister!" Athena replied in surprise. "Do they go to school near here?"

Phoenix laughed again. "Ah, no, they go to school back home in California."

Athena momentarily froze in shock. "California?"

"We live there," Phoenix explained, not noticing her reaction. "I'm here on a business trip actually, although my younger son did come with us to visit some old friends. He used to live here."

After a moment's pause, Athena smiled and nodded, although she looked a little confused. "O-okay."

A knock at the door interrupted the conversation, and Phoenix looked up just as the door was opened by a stern looking man in a tan trenchcoat, a brown moustache hanging over his top lip. He scowled around the room as he sauntered in, taking in every detail. Behind him, to Phoenix's relief, was Professor Layton, Alfendi in his arms.

Edgeworth looked the man up and down, then waved a finger in his direction. "You must be the police, I assume?"

Behind Layton, Flora and Luke sidled into the room, Luke giving Phoenix a small wave that was quickly returned. A short policeman in uniform sidled in after them, slowly closing the door at his back.

"Detective Inspector Chelmey," the coated man introduced himself, looking down his nose at Edgeworth with a hint of suspicion. "And you would be the people who discovered the body, I take it?"

Edgeworth nodded, stepping away from the scene and holding out his tablet computer. "I took the liberty of documenting the scene as we found it once we established Professor Rains was deceased," he explained. "I'd guess cause of death was the wound on her head."

Chelmey snatched the small computer out of Edgeworth's hands and looked at the screen critically for a few moments. "Hmph. Well done," he begrudgingly admitted, handing the tablet off to Barton as the constable scurried to Chelmey's side to take it. "We will need to take witness statements from the three of you," he pointed out, pulling his notepad from a pocket.

"Naturally," Edgeworth replied, giving a little bow. "My name is Miles Edgeworth. I'm a prosecutor."

"Oh ho ho, you are, are you?" Chelmey scoffed, giving Edgeworth a warning glare. "That why you're trying to take over my crime scene? Feh! High-and-mighty prosecutors trying to take over our jobs, like they did in America!"

Phoenix shot Edgeworth a questioning look, which the other man only ignored, concentrating on stifling his glower in the detective's direction.

"Your misunderstanding of the system of law in the United States aside," Edgeworth continued, arms crossed, "Wright and I were walking past in the hallway outside when we heard a scream and came in here immediately. The body was on the floor, and I attempted to check her pulse and breathing only to find there was none of either. The body was also rapidly cooling down, indicating it could not have been dead long."

Chelmey rapidly scribbled the story down on his notepad. "And who's 'Wright'?" he asked.
"That's me," Phoenix spoke up, standing from his seat by Athena and resisting the urge to crack a joke at the perfect set-up line he'd inadvertently been given. "Phoenix Wright. I was the one who actually called you guys in."

The detective narrowed his eyes at Phoenix, scribbling in his notepad. "And the 'scream'?"

"Athena," Phoenix explained, gesturing to the girl sitting next to him as she shrank away from the attention. He patted her shoulder comfortingly, leaning down to her level. "Do you want to tell the detective what you told us a little while ago?"

Athena rubbed her arms nervously, standing from her chair. "Um..."

"Speak up, girl!" Chelmey cried, waving his pencil at her and not seeing her wince in response. "Can't hear you if you mumble like that!"

Phoenix shot the detective a glare. "Ignore him," he told Athena. "Take your time."

Chelmey was about to respond, when Layton cut him off. "Please, Inspector," he said, lowering Alfendi to the floor to rest his tiring arms, "the girl has just discovered a body. A little patience is in order, is it not?" Chelmey grumbled, but kept quiet.

Athena stared at the desk in front of her a while before feeling brave enough to speak up again. "I left my notebook behind," she said, as loudly as she dared. "Missus Hawkins said I could fetch it if I was quick, so I ran back to get it." She paused, gripping her arm tightly. "I heard something move in the cupboard, so I thought I'd open it to see what it was, and..." Her right hand moved from her arm to her mouth, the knuckles pressing into her lips.

"Understandably," Phoenix picked up, staring at Chelmey as though daring him to upset Athena further, "she screamed and Edgeworth and I found her. Any objections?"

Chelmey narrowed his eyes, returning the stare for a few moments before writing Athena's story in his notebook. "So she screamed just as you two happened to be passing by in the hallway?" he confirmed.

Edgeworth nodded, tapping a finger against his arm. "Quite fortuitous timing. The hall was quite empty otherwise, and no-one else ever came to investigate."

"And did the pair of you even see this girl before she came into the room?" Chelmey asked.

Phoenix's eyes narrowed suspiciously as Athena shook under his hand, her hands moving to her ears. "You aren't seriously trying to suggest she caused this, are you?" he asked, a dark tone to his voice.

"Please, Inspector," Layton chimed in, looking equally worried, "at least wait to make your conclusions until after your investigation has finished! We aren't going anywhere, after all!"

Chelmey growled, waving his pencil around angrily. "Now look here, this is my crime scene and I'm in charge! Not you," he pointed to Edgeworth, who rolled his eyes, "not you," he pointed to Layton, who crossed his arms, "and most definitely not you!" He gestured to Phoenix, who didn't react at all to the outburst, used to hearing the cry from detectives. "I don't even know what you are!" he added to Phoenix, face red as he worked himself up.

Teeth clenched in anger, Luke stormed forward, hands balled into fists. "He's my Papa!" he cried. "And he's a brilliant investigator, as good as the Professor!"
"Luke," Layton interjected, pulling the teenager back with a hand on his shoulder, "a gentleman never causes a scene."


Phoenix only rested his hands on his hips, returning Chelmey's glare. "Consider me Athena's defence. I'm not letting her be accused of something she didn't do."

Chelmey scoffed. "Ha! And what kind of authority do you have to do that!?"

Phoenix suddenly froze as Chelmey's words registered, his confidence draining away in an instant. Luke gasped, hands to his mouth.

"None, I tell you!" Chelmey continued, not noticing the reaction.

Edgeworth stepped forward, levelling his best glare at the detective as he stepped between him and Phoenix. "He's with me," he sternly said. "That's all the 'authority' he needs."

Before Chelmey could bite back, Layton raised his hands, planting himself between the detective and prosecutor. "Please, gentlemen, we can discuss this calmly and rationally," he said, somehow managing to calm Chelmey down with his plea. "This is being treated as a murder investigation, after all. We must all keep clear heads if we hope to find the true culprit."

A sudden, childish cry echoed through the resulting silence. "Wake up!" Everyone turned towards the body, where the sound had come from, and were shocked to see young Alfendi crouched at the corpse's side, poking Professor Rains in the cheek. "Not nap!" he added, frowning.

"Alfendi!" Layton cried as he and Flora raced across the room, the Professor reaching the baby first and plucking him rapidly off the floor and away from the body. He turned to Flora, eyes wide in worry. "Flora, I thought you were watching him!"

"I thought he was standing by your legs still!" Flora replied, looking equally terrified.

Alfendi pointed accusingly at the body. "Sleeping!" he cried.

"No, she's not sleeping, Alfendi," Layton told the boy, carrying him back to the other side of the room. "I'm afraid Professor Rains is dead."

"De...?" Alfendi repeated in a confused tone, propping himself up on his father's shoulder to look him in the eyes.

Layton winced to himself, wondering how he was supposed to explain death to a child too young to talk. "I'm afraid it's very complicated," he said.

Chelmey huffed, walking past the small family and towards the corpse. "Keep the baby under control, will you Layton?" he cried, waving for Barton to follow him. "C'mon Barton, we have an investigation to get underway!"
The first thing Luke had done once everything calmed down was run to Phoenix as he slowly sat down next to Athena. "Papa, are you okay!?” he quietly cried, eyes shining with concern.

Phoenix forced a smile through the residual shock, patting Luke's shoulder comfortably. "I'm alright," he insisted. "Why don't you help the Professor and Flora watch Alfendi?"

Luke glanced between the Layton family and his father for a few moments, then sighed. "Okay," he reluctantly agreed.

"Good boy," Phoenix said, giving Luke one last pat before the teenager wandered off. He watched his son go for a few moments, approaching the Laytons to admire Alfendi babbling away in Flora's arms, the most talkative the baby had been since they first met him in the airport. In the corner where the body of Professor Rains lay, Chelmey was walking around, staring hard at every inch of the area. Occasionally, he barked something at Barton to write down. Nearby, Edgeworth stood watching them, fiddling around with his tablet computer. Phoenix had no doubt he had already investigated the area thoroughly and would not hesitate to speak up if Chelmey's conclusions differed from his.

Phoenix felt a gentle tap on his arm, and looked around to see Athena still sat at his side, looking up at him with the same worry Luke had been showing only a few moments before. "Mister Wright...?"

Forcing a smile on his face, Phoenix turned in his chair to face the girl. "What is it, Athena?"

Athena didn't reply for a few moments, seemingly arguing with herself internally on what to say. Eventually, she opened her mouth and forced out, "A-are you a prosecutor like Si... Mister Edgeworth?"

Phoenix was surprised. "A prosecutor?" he repeated, smiling a little at the thought. "Ah, no, but I am a lawyer." Too late, he remembered his gut reaction wasn't exactly true anymore and kicked himself for letting it out. 'I guess it's understandable. I've been pretending otherwise since we arrived here.'

"You are?" Athena replied, confused. "What kind?"

'Well, too late to back out and admit I'm not now,' Phoenix decided. "A defence attorney, actually," he explained, allowing himself to happily pretend a little longer. "My job is to stand opposite prosecutors in court and make sure they give the defendants a fair trial."

Athena thought on this a moment, and Phoenix wondered if she was going to come out with the next question he usually heard, the veiled accusation that he got criminals off scot-free. To his surprise, when Athena finally spoke, she instead asked, "So you don't let them send someone to jail if they haven't done anything?"

"Y-yeah," Phoenix answered, surprised and relieved. "I believe my client didn't do it, and I fight in court to find the truth of what happened and send the real guilty party to jail." He chuckled. "I'm
pretty lucky to have only had one of my clients found guilty, but he was more or less the actual murderer, so justice won out in the end."

Athena looked impressed, then frowned as a new thought occurred to her. "So, um, if you had a client who was already in prison," she asked, "could you get them out?"

A part of Phoenix suspected she had a specific person in mind, and he immediately empathised with the girl. "Of course I could," he said. "It's never too late to overturn a wrong verdict. In fact, I've done that very thing in the past." *Though I'll never understand how the initial trial happened with that fake behind the defence's bench...'*

Athena pulled at the necklace hidden under her uniform collar, deep in thought.

Chelmey loudly coughed, walking back to the assembled group on the other side of the room. Once he had everyone's attention, he snatched his notepad back off Barton. "Alright, now we just need to establish when the victim was last seen alive. Does anyone know if she had any classes today?"

After a short pause, Athena stood up, looking determined. "She was talking to my class about biology," she explained, only for her determination to immediately falter. "It, um... was maybe... five minutes before I realised I left my notebook behind?"

"So in that five minute-or-so gap," Edgeworth mused aloud, fingers tapping against his arms, "Professor Rains was either murdered or died in an accident, in which case someone tried to cover her death up."

"I'll make the deductions here!" Chelmey protested, writing in his notepad while sending a glare in Edgeworth's direction.

Edgeworth shrugged, giving the detective a smug grin. "Of course," he replied. "I was only stating the obvious, given Ms Cykes is clearly not able to have moved Rains' body without getting herself covered in blood, and lacked any time to clean herself up."

"The lack of blood," Chelmey shot back, waving his pencil at the prosecutor, "is precisely my earlier point! How do you kill someone and not leave a trace of blood on yourself or the environment!? In fact, how do you open a cupboard and have a body fall out on top of you without it touching you and leaving blood behind!?"

Athena gripped her elbows, arms held tightly against her middle. "I-it didn't fall out immediately," she said. "It... sort of hung there for a second, then started tipping over towards me, so I jumped back."

"Hung?" Chelmey repeated, then made a note in his notepad.

Edgeworth looked back towards the cupboard, then strode over and plucked a plastic-coated hook from a hole in the back wall. It was white, aside from the bloodstains, and had a screw sticking out of the bottom. Regarding the screw for a moment, Edgeworth wasted no time in crouching at the side of the body, sticking his hand down the back of her green coat.

"Hey!" Chelmey cried, running to Edgeworth's side. "No fiddling with the crime scene!"

A moment later, Edgeworth pulled out a wooden rod, slightly curved, with a tiny hole in the centre of the convex edge. Standing up, he pushed the hook's screw into the hole, revealing the completed object to be a coat-hanger. "I believe that solves your mystery, Detective. Ms Cykes is obviously incapable of having literally hung the body in the back of the cupboard," he pointed out, rather smugly.
Chelmey snatched the coat-hanger off Edgeworth with a scowl, then handed it off to Barton.

Athena leaned over to Phoenix with a grin, whispering, "The sound I heard must have been the coat-hanger breaking!"

Phoenix quietly laughed. "Wow, you must have really good hearing to have heard that!" he remarked.

Embarrassed, Athena ran her hands through her ponytail. "Y-yeah, I do," she admitted.

Phoenix was too surprised to respond for a moment. "Wait, really?"

"Should we maybe start asking around?" Luke suggested. "See if anyone else saw her, or anyone in the hallway outside?"

"An excellent idea, Luke," Layton said. "We would need to be quick about it if we wish to catch them before they leave the university."

"I saw someone!" Athena piped up, only to shrink back again when the room's attention focussed on her. "W-well, sort of..."

"That could be just the clue we need," Phoenix pointed out, giving her a friendly smile. "What did they look like?"

Athena thought for a moment, one hand rubbing the opposite arm nervously. "It was a man," she said. "He was wearing black... His hands were really dirty."

"Dirty how?" Edgeworth asked, arms crossed. "What were they covered with?"

"Um, dirt, I think," Athena replied, her hand reaching for her collar again as she thought. "He was very tall. I saw him go into another classroom, on the other side of the hallway."

Chelmey remained silent as he wrote the information down on his notepad. Waving at Barton, he strode towards the classroom door. "We'll see if we can find this witness before he goes too far," he announced, rounding on the assembled group one last time as he opened the door. "And I want to see nothing changed in here when I get back!" After shooing Barton out in front of him, Chelmey slammed the door shut and was gone.

Alfendi's babbling quickly broke the resulting silence, and Luke, Flora and Layton quickly resumed conversation as they kept the baby entertained. Edgeworth strode to the classroom's windows, looking out to an inner courtyard of the old building. He quickly flicked opened the latch at the bottom and opened the window fully, sticking his head out to peer directly down.

Phoenix patted Athena's shoulder as she lowered herself back into her chair. "That was very brave of you to stand up and tell us all that," he complimented her. "You've really helped out in this investigation."

Athena ran her hands through her ponytail, blushing with pride. "Really?" she said. "Am I... good enough to be an investigator when I'm older?"

"Definitely!" Phoenix laughed.

"Wright," came a call from the other side of the room, and Phoenix and Athena looked up to see Edgeworth standing at the open window, gesturing for his friend to join him. "I believe you'll want to see this."
Phoenix shot Athena an apologetic smile as he stood up. "I'll be right back," he promised her, unable to deny he was excited to see whatever Edgeworth had found.

"That's okay," Athena said, smiling back. "I'll be here."
Outside the classroom's windows was a small courtyard, surrounded by the walls of the old university building. The ground was mostly covered in grass, except for the paved pathway straight down the middle that connected the two doors back inside. Around the walls, dotted around in carefully planned patches, were small gardens, populated with beautiful flowers, small bushes and the occasional young tree. As instructed, Phoenix only took in the view for a moment before looking directly down into one such small garden, and smiled as he saw what his friend had spotted. Hidden behind a bush were two overturned pots, one large and round while the other was small and rectangular, piles of loose dirt surrounding them on top of the lovingly spread pebbles that carpeted the garden. Sticking out of the loose dirt were a handful of plants of varying sizes, roots sticking up into the air while their green leaves struggled to catch light from the dark corner of the courtyard. The largest of the plant remains mildly reminded Phoenix, to his discomfort, of Charley back home.

"Wow," Phoenix muttered, leaning back into the classroom to give Edgeworth a grin. "Guess we found our possible murder weapon-slash-place of death?"

"Possibly," Edgeworth agreed, smiling smugly. "They're a bit far away to tell for sure, but I'd say one of those pots had blood on it."

Phoenix snorted, throwing another glance at the garden below. "I'd say there's something red on both of them, and it can't be anything other than blood," he said, then threw his friend a teasing smirk. "What, is your eyesight failing in your old age, Edgeworth?"

Edgeworth shot Phoenix a glare. "We are the same age, Wright," he pointed out.

Chuckling a little, Phoenix turned to where the Layton family was gathered. "Hey, Professor?" he called, attracting Layton and Luke's attention while Flora busied herself keeping Alfendi occupied. "You wouldn't happen to know if Rains had a couple of potted plants in here, do you?"

"Pot plants?" Layton repeated, not noticing Phoenix suddenly bite back a smirk at the expression. He scratched his chin in thought. "She always had a few around, yes. I did think it rather odd that I couldn't see any when we first came in."

Luke nodded, a finger pointed into the air knowingly. "She always kept them under the windows, so they'd get the morning sun!" he explained. "She was always talking about them! Loved them like they were her children, Dad said!"

Athena perked up from her seat by the door. "Yeah, she had some when my class were in here earlier!" She pointed towards Phoenix and Edgeworth. "Right under that window!"

Phoenix and Edgeworth shared a glance. "Can you remember what they looked like?" Phoenix asked the girl.

"Yeah!" Athena cried with a grin. "One was big, and the other was a little boxy one... Um, they
were both black, and the big one had one big plant in it, and the small one had three little plants!"

"I'd say that's them, then," Phoenix decided, turning to Edgeworth as he gestured to the window.

"Indeed," Edgeworth agreed, smiling as he crossed his arms. "Of course, we'll have to inform the detective when he returns, so a proper forensic examination can occur."

Layton smiled. "Ah, the culprit tossed them into the courtyard, did they?" he realised. "Yes, those pots were small enough to do that."

Alfendi began to fuss, clinging to Flora's dress.

"Aw, what is it, 'Fendi?" Flora asked the baby, bouncing him in her arms. "Are you tired?"

"No!" Alfendi firmly replied, rubbing his face sleepily into her shoulder.

Flora and Layton shared a knowing look. "I'm sure Inspector Chelmey won't complain if you leave to put him down for a nap," Layton assured her. "It has been a very exciting morning."

"I'll see you later, Flora!" Luke said with a wave.

"Bye, Luke!" Flora replied, holding the whining Alfendi close as she carefully carried him out of the room. "I'll see you later, Mister Wright! Mister Edgeworth!"

The two men nodded in response, and, as the door closed behind Flora, Edgeworth frowned in concern. "The detective is taking a long time to return," he mused. "Perhaps we should go and find him?"

"This witness must be difficult to locate," Layton pointed out, a hand tugging on his hat. "They have had plenty of time to move about. They may have even gone home."

The room was silent for a few moments as everyone mused to themselves. Phoenix looked over to Athena. "Actually, when were you supposed to be leaving the university, Athena?"

Athena thought for a moment. "Before lunch, I think," she said, legs swinging under her chair. "We were just going to have a bunch of the professors talk to us about things we might want to do when we grow up."

"That could mean any time between now and one o'clock," Layton quietly pointed out. "Perhaps we should also relocate Missus Hawkins to confirm how long you can stay here."

"I could do that," Luke offered. "I remember where she said she'd be."

Phoenix shook his head, one hand resting on his hip. "Better not," he said. "If too many people disappear from this room, we could really upset the detective."

Athena suddenly turned her head towards the door. "I think he's coming back now," she said.

As if on cue, the door swung open and Chelmey stomped in. "Alright, the forensics have arrived, so you lot need to move." He gestured behind him with a thumb. "You can sit in on our interview with the other witness."

"How very kind of you, Inspector!" Layton remarked with a smile.

"Yeah, yeah," Chelmey waved him off, leaving the room.
The room directly opposite Rains’ was dark, the windows covered by blinds and the artificial bulbs above the only source of light. The walls were covered in anatomy posters of frogs and salamanders, with the cupboards along the back wall all very visibly locked tightly shut with warning signs taped to their fronts. Scribbling away on something at the teacher’s desk was a tall man in a black suit, pointedly ignoring the newcomers to his classroom as his forehead shone with sweat.

Layton tipped his hat as the rest of the small group filed in behind him. "Good morning, Professor Keil," he greeted the man at the desk. "I understand you met with Professor Rains earlier today?"

The man at the desk, Keil, jumped in surprise as he looked up. "Er," he mumbled, "y-yes, I suppose I did, yes. How’d you know, Professor Layton?"


Phoenix guided Athena to a desk about halfway down the classroom, where she happily sat with her school book. Luke sat in the desk next to hers, shooting Phoenix a grin as he silently declared to help watch over the girl. Edgeworth stayed near the front of the room with Layton and Chelmey, Constable Barton standing to one side with notepad in hand.

"I hope this all wraps up today," Phoenix muttered to Luke. "Don't want to make your siblings worry if I don't call them this afternoon."

"I'm sure they'll be fine, Papa," Luke assured him in a whisper. "Sure, Apollo might worry, but they'll understand when we tell them we were too busy to call today." Noticing Athena watching them, he gave her a smile. "Oh, I don't believe we've been properly introduced!" He held out a hand to the surprised girl. "My name's Luke! You're Athena, right?"

Athena shyly nodded, shaking Luke's hand. "Hi." She studied his face carefully, as though recognising him from somewhere, but didn't say anything about it.

"Not Athena Wright, Athena Cykes," Phoenix joked, ruffling Luke's hair. "Geeze, stop attaching our name to everything!"

"You can talk, Papa!" Luke retorted with a giggle.

At the other side of the room, Layton was filling Edgeworth in on Chelmey's new witness. "This is Professor Keil. He teaches biology and zoology here." He turned to Keil. "Amphibians are your speciality, I believe?"

Keil nodded. "I'm a batrachologist," he answered, rather proudly. "Used t'work in a lab, y'know."

"I see," Edgeworth replied, arms crossed.

Turning to Chelmey, Keil insistently continued, "An' I've already told you all I know! She wasn't there when I dropped by! I didn't even know she was dead until you told me!"
Athena looked up from her desk in surprise.

"And may I ask why you were going to see her?" Chelmey pushed, hands clenched together behind his back.

Keil shrugged. "I was goin' t' congratulate her on her project gettin' funded," he said.

Athena bolted upright from her chair. "No, you weren't!" she objected.

Everyone turned to look at Athena with surprise. "And who are you t'say I wasn't, little girl?" Keil shot back with a glare, also standing from his chair.

Athena seemed to lose her nerve at the retort, pausing and looking up at Phoenix uncertainly. Seeing his reassuring smile, she turned back to Keil with a determined frown. "I have really good hearing, better than most everyone else in the world," she explained. "I can hear what you're really saying, what your heart is saying, and your heart is saying you hated Professor Rains! You couldn't have been going to thank her!"

Edgeworth and Layton looked intrigued at this statement, although Chelmey looked sceptical. Keil simply rolled his eyes. "Right, because that wasn't a total load of gibberish," he scoffed.

Athena looked down, disheartened. Beside her, although still curious about her outburst, Phoenix and Luke both sent Keil a stern glare.

"I think what the girl says has merit," Layton argued, turning to his colleague. "After all, your rivalry with Professor Rains was widely known. Your own project was turned down in favour of hers, was it not?"

Keil went pale.

"Oh really?" Chelmey butted in with a smug grin, gesturing to Barton to have the information noted down. "Not quite the 'good friends' angle you were giving us earlier then, Mister Keil?"

Avoiding eye contact, Keil ran a nervous hand through his hair. "W-well, it's not right t' speak ill of the dead, y'know..."

"Maybe you'd like to tell us again what happened after the school kids left," Chelmey offered with false kindness only to drop the act as he continued. "The real story this time, or I will have you nicked for obstructing justice!"

Keil gulped, fiddling with his tie. "O-of course, Inspector," he agreed.

View the Court Record
"I wanted t'ave a chat with Rains," Keil admitted, sinking back into his chair, "about why her project got funded and mine didn't, but when she came in, she was constantly busy, and I couldn't pin her down t' talk." He thought a moment, then sighed. "After the din from that school group had passed, I waited a few minutes before I went t' confront her. She... she wasn't in her room, so I came back here."

"Are you sure about that?" Edgeworth asked, fingers tapping on his arm.

"Hey!" Chelmey butted in, shaking a fist at the prosecutor, "my witness! I ask the questions!" He looked at Keil for a moment before grudgingly nodding in Edgeworth's direction. "What he said."

Keil nodded. "Of course I'm sure. The room was dark, and she was gone."

Layton tugged on his hat brim. "You didn't, say, look around the back of the room, where her cupboards are?" he suggested.

"Of course not!" Keil insisted, looking upset. "I don't go diggin' around in people's cupboards when they're not there!"

As the group argued, Luke snuck a sidelong glance at Athena, who was concentrating on the conversation, then carefully leaned across and tapped her arm. She looked over to him curiously, and Luke noticed the movement had also attracted Phoenix's attention. "Athena, if you can hear what people are really thinking," he said, "is there anything else you've picked up from listening to Professor Keil?"

Athena thought for a moment. "He doesn't like kids," she whispered. "He sounds really upset about his project too. Most of all, though... he sounds really scared. Especially when he talks about Professor Rains."

Phoenix rubbed his chin in thought. "So when you say you can hear someone's 'heart'," he mused aloud, "what you mean is you can hear their true emotions?"

After a moment or two of reflection, Athena nodded. "I... guess so," she said. "Yeah, that sounds right, actually."

A part of Phoenix wondered how many of his own white lies she'd noticed since they met.

"Do you think he did it, Papa?" Luke asked, looking worried. "That Professor Keil is scared because he knows he'll be found out?"

Phoenix didn't reply, staring hard at the group around Keil's desk. They were still arguing, and it didn't look like Edgeworth, Layton or Chelmey had managed to weasel any more information out of Keil, who was still insisting he never saw Rains and also that he didn't see anyone in the hallway.
"Go question him, Papa," Luke said, a knowing smile on his face.

Phoenix shot Luke a horrified look and shook his head. "N-no, there's too many people questioning him already. I'll just get in the way." The last thing this investigation needs is a has-been lawyer butting his head in...

"When are you next going to get a chance to do this?" Luke pointed out. "Surely you have some secret technique you used in court to get people to give you more information!"

Athena looked between the two, confused, but kept silent.

Phoenix thought on Luke's words for a few moments before slowly smiling. "Well, there is one thing I was very well-known for," he said, giving his relieved son a grin before ruffling his hair through his hat. "I'll be right back." With that, he left the pair and headed towards the group at the front of the room, hands in his pockets.

"This murderer didn't teleport into her room!" Chelmey was angrily pointing out, fist waving in the air. "You must have seen someone coming or going! You yourself said you were watching the hallway the entire time!"

Phoenix cleared his throat, slotting himself into an open space in the rough semicircle of people in front of the desk. "Excuse me, Professor Keil, may I ask a question?"

Everyone looked over at the man in the blue suit, baffled. "I... suppose so?" Keil agreed.

"Do you mind!?" Chelmey cried. "This is a murder investigation here!"

"You know anything about plants?" Phoenix casually asked the zoologist, ignoring Chelmey. "It's just, I noticed Professor Rains had a few in her classroom! Beautiful little things! Do you know what kind they were?"

Keil wrinkled his nose in disgust. "Plants!? I'm a batrachologist! I don't know anythin' about some ruddy plants!" he protested. "Besides, there aren't any in Rains' room right now, so what kind o' weed have you been smokin'!?"

Edgeworth narrowed his eyes at Phoenix. "Wright..." he muttered in a warning tone.

Phoenix scratched his chin in false confusion. "Oh? Wasn't Professor Rains a botanist, that is, she specialised in plants? Why would she not have plants in her classroom?"

Layton smiled, picking up on Phoenix's game. "A good point," he said, turning to Keil. "It's widely known around the university that Professor Rains loved her pet plants, and her classroom has never been without one. Yet, you already seem to know her plants are conspicuously missing, so not only have you been in the room since the school children left but the plants were gone already when you dropped by." He crossed his arms. "Why, then, did you not find this fact odd enough to mention before?"

Keil was sweating buckets, nervously wiping his brow. "W-what do I care about her ruddy plants?" he cried, but his attempted tone of anger fell into more childish whining.

"This is the first I've heard of them," Chelmey pointed out to his fellow questioners with an annoyed tone, waving at Barton to ensure he was writing the information down. "Do we know anything else
about them right now?"

Edgeworth sighed, ignoring Chelmey's comment. "I hate to play devil's advocate, Wright," he told his friend, "but that little stunt of yours hasn't proven anything. He was not fond of Rains or her plants, so he had no reason to bring them up should he be telling the truth about not seeing her."

Phoenix scoffed, rolling his eyes. "Objection! He knows he's the most likely suspect right now! Why would he hide a clue that could catch the real culprit if it wasn't him?"

"Objection!" Edgeworth shot back. "The fact he did not get on with Rains is enough of a reason that he might have genuinely forgotten about her missing plants!"

"Objection! What kind of ill-thought out excuse is that!?" Phoenix cried.

"It's better than your ill-thought out excuses, Wright!" Edgeworth replied.

"Gentlemen!" Layton firmly announced, stepping between the two with his hands held up to quieten them. "May I remind you we are not in a courtroom!"

As the two men sheepishly backed down, Chelmey rolled his eyes, muttering, "Should've known, they're both lawyers..." Turning back to the very confused Keil sat behind his desk, the detective continued, "So what is the story behind these pots, then? Why didn't you mention 'em before?"

Keil thought for a long moment, then determinedly shoved his hands under his armpits. "I-I have a right to remain silent!" he announced, more like he was reminding himself than using it as a defence. "I don't have t' say anythin!'"

His four questioners sighed in frustration, individually pondering the best next step to take. Eventually, Phoenix ran a hand through his spiky hair, frowning in thought. 'Surely there has to be a way to convince him to talk!' He thought back over his past week in London, and all the meetings and research trips he and Edgeworth had taken together in their efforts to learn the intricacies of the English law system, desperate for some kind of clue as to how to proceed. 'Wait a minute... Athena said he sounded scared when he mentioned Rains?' Luke's question ringing in his mind, Phoenix chose his avenue of questioning. "Professor Keil," he said, "I don't doubt you wanted to talk to Rains about her project getting funded over yours." Keil looked away, glaring at a wall, but Phoenix wasn't disheartened. "My only question now is, was her death an accident?" There was a short pause. Keil continued to not respond, while the rest of the group watched Phoenix, curious to hear what he had to say. "I don't think you understand, but right now you're facing murder charges, and there's more than enough evidence to convict you. You may not have the death penalty here in England, but murder will still get you a lifetime of jail. If you didn't mean to kill her, and admit it was an accident, that's a manslaughter charge. Manslaughter will still get you jail time, but ultimately you'll get the chance to live your own life again afterwards." He thought a moment, then added, "Of course, that's if the courts agree with you on what happened."

Edgeworth smiled. "I'm impressed, Wright, You have been paying attention."

Phoenix shot his friend a smirk, turning back to Keil. "If you tell the truth now, and co-operate with the police, you're much more likely to get a shorter conviction. I may not be your attorney, but I think I can trust you'll make the right choice here."

Keil sat in silence for a minute or two, then finally sighed, hands dropping to his lap as he leaned forward in his chair. "Alright," he admitted, "I... I did talk to her."

Chelmey raised an eyebrow, impressed that someone had finally got Keil talking.
"I went across the hallway the moment I heard those kids were gone," Keil continued, staring at his lap. "I just wanted t' talk to her, I-I didn't mean..."

"Take your time, Severin," Layton gently assured Keil, a soft smile on his face.

Keil nodded, taking a deep breath. "I... lost my temper, we got into an argument, and..." He frowned. "I saw those ruddy pot plants of hers under the window. They were the basis of her research project, y'know. I... decided I was gonna throw 'em out into the courtyard, get rid of 'em so she had nothin' t' research, but she tried t' stop me." He sighed, eyes squinting shut. "One moment, we were fightin' over that pot plant, the next, the plant was out th'window and Rains... Rosa... was face down in th'other one, blood all over..." He paused, taking another deep breath. "I panicked. She had her coat hangin' in the cupboard, so I put it on her and shoved her in there until I could work out what to do... and that pot plant had blood all over it, so I dropped it out th'window like th'other one." One hand rubbed at his eyes, and he started to sniff loudly. "I-I didn't mean... I didn't mean to kill her..."

The room was silent for a few moments as Keil resisted tears. Finally, Barton looked up at his superior. "Does this mean our investigation is over, sir?"

Chelmey sighed, reaching into his coat for a pair of handcuffs. "I suppose so," he agreed, then pointed the constable to the door. "Go tell the team about those pot plants in the courtyard, will you?"

Barton nodded, pocketing the notepad and pencil as he dashed out of the room.

"Protocol says I have to handcuff you while I take you down to the station," Chelmey explained, rounding the desk to approach Keil. "Just co-operate and this will be over with quickly."

"You did the right thing confessing, Severin," Layton assured the other man.

Keil nodded, mutely standing to offer up his hands to Chelmey to be cuffed. He gave his colleague a sad smile. "Thank you, Hershel. You'll tell the dean I didn't mean to rob him of any employees, won't you?"

"Of course," Layton agreed, a hand on his hat.

Edgeworth smiled in thought as Chelmey escorted Keil out into the hallway. "When will criminals learn the truth always comes out eventually?" he said to himself.

Phoenix looked back to where Luke and Athena were sitting, both looking sad from the bittersweet conclusion to the case. Unable to resist an amused smile, Phoenix approached the pair, hands in his pockets. "So, have fun?"

Athena's hands slowly lowered from around her mouth, eyes shining with unshed tears. "No wonder he sounded so sad!" she whispered.

Luke reached over to pat her shoulder comfortingly. "It's alright, Athena," he assured her. "Everything turned out okay in the end!"

Phoenix chuckled, gesturing for the two to get up. "C'mon," he said, "it's time we got out of here."

View the Court Record
As the group emerged into the hallway, still dotted with busy policemen and women, a voice cried out, "Athena!"

Athena looked up in surprise. "Missus Hawkins!?" she dashed forward, almost running into a middle-aged woman with short brown hair, who, although careful not to unnecessarily touch the girl, was undoubtedly beyond relieved to have found her.

"Are the nice police done with you yet, Athena?" Hawkins asked, visually checking over the smiling girl as though counting every part of her body to ensure it was there. "It's time for us to leave! I'm sorry you had to miss out on all the lectures."

Athena nodded, hugging her lost notebook to her chest. "It's alright, Missus Hawkins," she replied. "I discovered what I want to do when I grow up anyway!"

Hawkins looked surprised. "You did?"

Nodding enthusiastically, Athena turned to look back at where Phoenix, Edgeworth, Layton and Luke were, only to see the quartet slowly heading away down the corridor. "Oh, wait a sec!" the girl told her teacher, then raced after her new friends. "Mister Wright!"

Phoenix stopped, looking behind him as Edgeworth, Layton and Luke also came to a halt just in front of him. "Athena?" he asked curiously, kneeling down to the girl's level as she ran up to him. "What is it?"

"I wanted to tell you!" she excitedly said, breathing hard more from excitement than from the short sprint. "I decided what I want to be when I grow up! I'm gonna be a defence lawyer like you!"

Phoenix blinked, surprised. "A defence attorney?" he repeated.

Athena nodded, then began to play shyly with her ponytail with one hand. "I... used to live in California," she admitted, "and I have this friend back home who got put in jail for something he didn't do." She looked back up into Phoenix's face with a determined stare. "But I'm gonna save him. I'm going to become a defence attorney like you and get him out of jail!"

Phoenix couldn't resist a smile at the familiar-sounding plea. "I could name a couple of lawyers who became defence attorneys to save someone close to them," he said.

Behind him, unseen by Phoenix, Edgeworth rolled his eyes.

"But don't think it will be easy," the ex-lawyer warned Athena. "Getting into law is a lot of hard work. You've got to be prepared for that."

Athena nodded. "I will, I promise!" she assured him. "And, when I do become a lawyer..." She paused, smiling sheepishly. "Do you think I could maybe come work for you?"
Edgeworth just barely held in a snort of amusement. Luke bit his lip to keep his growing smile from showing.

Phoenix took a moment to process the unexpected request, then smiled. "Well, I don't see why not," he decided, reaching into an inner pocket of his suit jacket for one of his old business cards he was still getting rid of, although he'd stopped apologising for their out-of-date business name as part of the ploy that he hadn't been disbarred. "When you pass the bar in... hmm, I'd say about ten years or so," he held out the card to the girl, "give me a call. I'll always be available to help."

Athena grinned, reading the old 'Wright & Co.'-emblazoned card with glee. "Thank you, Mister Wright!" she cried.

"And when you're looking for a law degree to take," Professor Layton suddenly spoke up, one hand pointing into the air and a smile on his face, "may I recommend one of the courses we offer here at Gressenheller? Our law department is always delighted to see an eager student such as yourself."

Athena giggled, giving the Professor a grateful nod. "I will, sir!" she said.

Hawkins, having approached the group, laughed as she heard the tail-end of the conversation. "Athena, it's time to go," she reminded the girl.

"Coming!" Athena called, running to join her teacher and giving one last wave to her new friends. "Thank you again, Mister Wright!"

Phoenix waved back, laughing as Hawkins took the girl's hand and led her around the far corner into another hallway. "It's nice to have a dream, huh?"

Luke giggled. "She'd get along great with Apollo, wouldn't she?" he joked. "They were both inspired by you!"

Phoenix scoffed in brief embarrassment, but then smiled proudly, turning to his son. "And who wouldn't be?" he replied. "I'm amazing!"

Luke laughed, but Edgeworth rolled his eyes. "In your dreams, Wright," he replied, shaking his head and starting the group walking back down the hallway towards Layton's office. "You always have relied too heavily on your capacity to bluff. I'd say your luck would run out one day, but I'm inclined to think it already has."

Phoenix winced. "Don't need to rub it in," he muttered, one hand rubbing at his lapel where his badge used to sit.

"In my opinion," Layton interrupted with a smile, "it's very charming that Mister Wright is still able to work some good in the world despite the sudden career change." He crossed his arms, turning to Phoenix. "Should young Athena decide to study here, I will be happy to keep half an eye on her progress for you."

Although surprised at the offer, Phoenix nodded gratefully. "That'd be great, thank you, Professor."

"It's not a problem," Layton replied, chuckling to himself. "I am only returning a favour."


"In any case," Layton continued, "we had best return to Flora. I'm sure she is eagerly waiting to hear what happened after she left."
"Hey, Dad!"

"Good morning to you, Apollo! How was your day yesterday?"

"Eh, nothing really exciting. Trucy was teaching Pearly how to knit. I practised some magic in the side room. Maya was really busy, so we didn't see her much. What about you?"

"A very busy morning. Uncle Edgeworth and I stumbled on something after the meeting we had planned today with a professor of law here."

"Wow, really? Stumbled on what?"

"... It's a long story. I'll have to explain it when we get back."

"What? Aw, come on, Dad!"

"Haha! Sorry, it would just take too long to tell the whole story now. You can always ask Luke if you're desperate. I know the two of you have been texting each other."

"Yeah, but Luke doesn't text me until the middle of the day!"

"That's only in a few hours, it's not exactly a long time."

"It's shorter than waiting for you to get back."

"Haha! Well, that is true, but I really think this story is better heard in person. Is Trucy around?"

"Yeah, I'll go get her. Love you, Dad."

"Love you, Apollo."

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June 15, 7:19PM

Grace Hill Hotel

The two Wrights were sat happily on the beds in their hotel room, full from dinner and happy to relax as they watched the news on the television. Luke lay flat on his belly, head propped up on his hands, while Phoenix propped himself up against the wall, pillow pushed up as a cushion while one leg dangled off the side of the bed in front of him. Nearby, Edgeworth sat on the chair at the desk, reading something on his tablet computer.

Edgeworth looked up at his travel companions. "Wright, about that Cykes girl we met today..."

Phoenix blinked, turning to his friend with a confused look. "What about her?"

Luke also looked up curiously. "Do you know who her friend was she's trying to save?"

"I... believe so," Edgeworth admitted, glancing at the tablet in his hand. "Let's just say, I think it
would be wise to keep in touch with her. She could be of great help in future."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "'Keep' in touch? She can contact me, but I can't contact her," he pointed out, then smirked. "Besides, isn't it a bit creepy for a twenty-eight-year-old man like me to befriend a twelve-year-old girl?"

Luke propped himself up on his elbows, looking behind him at his father. "But she's older than Trucy. Doesn't that make it different?"

Phoenix shook his head. "I'm literally a stranger she met this morning," he explained. "It's very different to my relationship with you three."

"But..." Luke protested, then thought better of it and quietened, still looking confused.

"And the fact that I have three kids doesn't effect it either," Phoenix added, smiling fondly as he recognised Luke's concern. "Criminals are perfectly capable of having kids of their own."


"Whether it's 'creepy' or not," Edgeworth continued, "the case Ms Cykes was involved with is an important one. If she holds true to her promise and returns to California with a badge, it would be ideal were she to work closely with you." He placed the tablet on the desk. "Of course, how a lawyer can take up a job at a talent agency, I don't know."

Phoenix shrugged. "By then, Apollo will have his badge too," he pointed out. "If I can't get her a job working with me, we might be able to pull some strings to have her work with Apollo, depending on where he ends up getting a job. Like Luke said, those two would probably get on like a house on fire."

Luke frowned. "Without all the property damage and trauma, hopefully..."

Edgeworth thought a moment, then nodded. "That could indeed work," he agreed, ignoring Luke's comment as he turned back to his computer. "In any case, we can't make any concrete plans until she acquires said badge. We have no choice but to wait until then."

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"I'm sorry, Professor," Luke cried, tears pouring down his cheeks, "but I'm not a gentleman yet!" Blubbery loudly, the thirteen-year-old threw himself at his beloved mentor, rubbing his face into his jacket.

Layton stood surprised for a moment, then smiled, gently returning the hug. "There there," he whispered to his young apprentice. He reached up with one hand to adjust his hat, trying to hide the tears threatening in his own eyes. It had been a rough couple of weeks for all of them, and he would be the first to admit it.

"Oh, Luke!" came a cry from nearby, and Layton looked up to see Brenda charging towards them, eyes filled with concern for her son as she dropped a medium-sized suitcase by Luke's. "Are you alright, baby!?"

Luke reluctantly pulled away from the Professor, rubbing at his eyes as he attempted to stop his blubbering, and was quickly ambushed by a hug from his mother, which he gladly returned, slowly getting himself back under control. "I-I'm alright, M-Mum," he tried to insist through his tears, mumbling into his mother's shirt.

Brenda frowned in concern, hugging Luke tighter. She gave Layton a questioning look, but the man only pulled his hat down over his eyes, unsure what he could even say in return.

"Well, that's everything set for the hold," Clark announced as he approached, also placing a medium-sized suitcase down by Luke's and Brenda's. "Now all that's left is- oh, is Luke alright?" He walked over to his wife, watching his son with concern as Brenda only shrugged in response. "Luke?"

Luke rather childishly turned his head firmly away from his father.

Clark sighed, disappointed but unsurprised by his son's reaction. Instead, he then turned to Layton. "Well, we're all about ready to board. I guess this is goodbye, Hershel."

Layton smiled sadly. "Only a 'so long'," he insisted, "until we meet again."

"Ah, yes, of course," Clark replied, forcing a laugh through the sad tone in his own voice. He held out his hand, and Layton in return grabbed it to firmly shake. "Until we meet again, old friend. May it be sooner rather than later." Layton nodded in silent agreement, then Clark turned and, after shooting Luke a worried glance, moved to pick up both his and Brenda's suitcases, one in each hand. "I'll go ahead and get these situated in our cabin," he quietly told Brenda. She nodded her understanding, and Clark left.

Luke had managed to calm down, but still clung to his mother, desperate for comfort. "I don't want to go," he mumbled into her shirt.
"I know," Brenda replied, sadly petting Luke's hair where it stuck out on the back of his head. "You'll love America once we settle in, I promise."

"Your mother's right, you know," Layton chimed in, not wanting to see his young friend leave in tears. "You can write to Flora and myself once you arrive."

Brenda suddenly gasped. "Oh, that's right, we never gave you our new address!" She pulled away from Luke towards where she had left her suitcase, only to remember too late that Clark had already taken it away. After a frustrated pause, she muttered, "Oh, well, let's see if I can remember it..." She tapped her chin for a few moments, slowly turning back to face Luke and Layton. "United States of America, obviously, and the state we're moving to is California, so you have to put a big 'CA' in there somewhere... Postcode is some ridiculously long string of numbers, but I've not the slightest idea what any of them are. I... think we're going to be in Los Angeles itself? We might be just outside it." She sighed, giving Layton a defeated look. "I'm not being much help, am I?"

Layton looked intrigued at the mention of Los Angeles, but gave his friend a smile when she couldn't produce a precise location. "That's alright. You can send me your new address once you get there."

"Oh!" Luke cried, suddenly perking up again. "I can mail it to you once we arrive in America!"

"A splendid idea," Layton replied. "I shall look forward to it."

Brenda giggled, a hand to her mouth. "That would work!" she agreed, then patted Luke on the head. "And, if I find any cute souvenirs you might like, I can send them to you then!"

"Souvenirs?" Layton repeated, feeling a twinge of dread.

Luke playfully scoffed at his mother. "Mum's planning to find every tourist shop she can between here and our new home. Packed an extra suitcase just for souvenirs."

"And knick-knacks!" Brenda added insistently, winking as she poked Luke with a finger. "I'm hoping to have a sub-collection of American paraphernalia to set up once we get there!"


The massive steam-powered horn of the mighty ship nearby blew two loud notes, billowing steam from its massive smoke-stacks. The three stood below looked up at it for a moment before returning their gazes to each other with a sad look.

"I guess it's time we joined Clark," Brenda said, patting Luke on the head before holding her hand out to Layton. "Until we meet again, Hershel?"

"Until we meet again," Layton agreed, shaking the offered hand as he forced a small smile. "I wish you luck on your move, Brenda."


Luke didn't reply immediately, frowning in thought for a moment before slowly stepping forward. "U-until we meet again, Professor," he said, staring at his friend's shoes rather than his face.

After a short pause, Luke looked up into Layton's face with a smile. "I'll write soon," he promised, then took a step backwards. "So long."

"So long," Layton replied.

Luke forcefully turned himself around, running to his massive suitcase and only just managing to hold it off the ground. Brenda quickly ran to his side to help, and the two headed off towards the nearest ramp onto the ship.

Before disappearing into the crowd, Brenda looked back at Layton to wave. "See you again, Hershel!" she called, then the pair were gone.

August 18, 1:51PM
Prince Atlantis
Upper Deck

As they handed Luke's suitcase off to a friendly crew-member, Luke paused, looking back out at the docks over the ship's railing. Brenda, noticing his distraction, gave the crew-member their cabin number before resting a hand on her son's shoulder. As Luke looked up at her in surprise, pulled out of his thoughts, she gave him a knowing smile. "Do you want to stay up here for a bit?"

Luke thought for a moment, then silently nodded.

"Our cabin's ten-oh-five," Brenda told him. "Just ask a crew-member if you can't find it."


Brenda kissed her son on the forehead, her hand automatically moving to keep her hair out of the way as she leaned forward. "I'll see you in a bit, honey." With that, she left.

Luke slowly walked over to the railing, resting his hands on the smooth iron, warm from the sun's rays beating down overhead. The ship below his feet was unmoving, held still in giant underwater clamps as its larger cargo was transported onboard. Laid out before him was the expanse of the docks, warehouses and smaller boats laid out in a grid around the canals of water. There were people everywhere he looked, although nowhere was busier than the concrete dock directly below him.

'I wonder if the Professor's still there?'

Luke felt a wave of guilt wash over him for bursting into tears earlier. Yes, he was leaving his whole life behind, but the Professor needed friends after what had happened the previous week, and losing Luke and both his parents was undoubtedly going to be hard on him, too. 'He must feel absolutely awful! And I didn't help at all!' He ran his eyes frantically around the crowds below, looking for the distinctive top hat he had never - 'Well, ALMOST never,' - seen Layton without.

That night the previous week, at the end of their adventure in Future London, Luke remembered watching in surprised silence as his mentor removed his hat, staring up into the clouded sky as the pollution from Clive's giant mechanical beast generated a summer snowfall that had lasted only a little way into the night before melting away again. He wondered if, after all of Layton's insistence that he never removed his hat, it would be happening a lot more often now. He hadn't seen the hat
apart from its owner since that dark night that Claire had disappeared, but what happened to it when the Professor was alone, he couldn't say.

Unable to find Layton in the crowd, Luke instead turned his eyes to the Laytonmobile, parked on the edge of the dock facing out to sea. Luke had insisted on spending every moment he could with Layton and Flora the past few days, so it had been the Professor who took him to the docks that morning. 'I couldn't stay at home... not with Dad organising the move.' He frowned at the thought of his father, still angry at the whole idea of moving so far away, but was distracted as he finally spotted a top hat heading through the crowd towards the red car parked there. "Professor!" he called, waving, but the man was simply too far away to hear him over the bustling crowds, standing next to the Laytonmobile as he looked up at the ship before him. Luke sighed, giving up on trying to catch his attention just yet.

When the ship finally pulled away from the dock and headed out to sea, Luke firmly stayed out on deck, waving madly, until Dover was out of sight.
Return Home

June 18, 5:09PM
Gatwick Airport
Departures Area

"Don't wander off, Alfendi!" Flora warned, lowering her baby brother to the tiled floor as she rested her arms.

Luke crouched down by the toddler, holding out his hand to shake. "I don't think we'll be seeing each other again for a while," he said with a smile. "Goodbye until then?"

Alfendi looked up at Luke for a few moments, then firmly gripped one of Luke's fingers, gently attempting to wave it up and down. Luke giggled as he repeated the action himself, watching the boy then let go and give the teenager a serious look. "Bye bye," Alfendi said.

Luke nodded. "Bye bye," he repeated, then stood up and turned to Flora. "Until we see each other again?"

Flora smiled sadly and nodded. "I hope it's soon," she said, hands held tightly together in front of her chest. "I really missed you when you were gone."

"Me too," Luke replied, then, after a pause, pulled Flora into a hug. "I'll write to you again soon, okay?"

Although surprised at the unusual body contact, Flora smiled and returned the hug. "Okay. I promise I'll reply, too."

Luke giggled, letting her go and watching as the young woman quickly busied herself chasing after Alfendi as he attempted to disappear into the crowds around them. He looked over to where Alfendi's pram sat, next to the Professor. Layton was saying his own goodbyes to Phoenix and Edgeworth, shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries about how nice it had been to have them in the country and that they hoped to be meeting one another again soon.

"Maybe next time you should come to us!" Phoenix suggested with a smile. "I think that's the only way Maya will get to see you again, and she was really annoyed she had to miss this!"

Layton chuckled, arms crossed. "And I shall be delighted to see Miss Fey again. You and your family would be able to give us the grand tour, I presume?"


Luke paused a moment, then smiled, approaching the small group. "It's 'Luke Wright', Papa! You're saying my name wrong!"

Phoenix laughed. "Ah, yes, I have a problem with that!" The moment Luke came within range, he immediately ruffled his son's hair through his everpresent blue cap. "You finished your goodbyes to Flora and Alfendi?" he asked, more seriously.

Luke nodded. "Flora's making sure Alfendi doesn't get lost," he explained, gesturing behind him to
where he'd last seen the pair.

Edgeworth nodded, looking at his watch. "I think it's time we checked in," he said, then turned to Luke. "Wright and I can save a spot in the line for you until you've said your goodbyes." With one final nod in Layton's direction, the prosecutor had turned and was walking off, pulling his travel bag behind him.

Phoenix sighed. "Until next time, Professor," he said.

"Until next time," Layton agreed, tipping his hat.

Patting his son's shoulder, Phoenix pulled his beanie out of the pocket of his hoodie, which he had donned to replace his suit before they left the hotel that afternoon. "You catch up to us when you're done. Don't take too long, though."


Pulling his beanie over his spiky hair, Phoenix gave the pair a smile, then turned and followed Edgeworth, his black backpack hefted on his shoulders.

Luke and Layton turned to face each other, sad smiles on their faces. "I guess this is another goodbye," Luke said.

"Indeed," Layton agreed, then held out a hand. "Until next time?"

"U-until next time," Luke agreed, shaking the offered hand then, after a pause of thought, jumping forward to hug the Professor. After a moment, he felt Layton return the hug, and the pair stood silently for several moments before Luke pulled away, eyes glistening with unshed tears. "I'll write soon," he promised, grabbing his travel bag off the floor nearby.

"I look forward to it," Layton replied, and Luke was sure he could see tears threatening the older man's calm demeanour.

They stood in silence for a few more seconds, then Luke turned and went to find his father in the queue for the check-in.

It only occurred to Luke after he left that he was no longer able to hide his face in the Professor's shoulder when they hugged anymore.

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*If you're awake, Papa and I just landed back in LA.*

*Hey congrats. Trucy and Pearly have gone to sleep, but me and Maya are still up. We'll see you tmrw? Have a safe trip back home.*

*We will. See you tomorrow.*

*Also it's 'Maya and I'.*

*Got it xD You got your story of that adventure you had prepared? Trucy's gonna demand it the moment we see you.*
Yes, I've been writing notes to practise telling it for her. Actually I'm really struggling to stay awake at the moment. We went to sleep on the plane and it's 5am back in London.

Oops lol. Will you be able to get back to sleep at all? How's Dad?.

I think Papa was attempting to stay up so he'd be able to sleep when we arrived, but he took a nap towards the end. He seems more awake than me. I'll just have to see if I manage to sleep through the night though.

Good luck. I'll see if I can talk Trucy into delaying the story until you've settled back in.

Luke?

Goodnight, Luke :).

June 19, 11:35AM
Wright Talent Agency
Kitchen

"HELLO?" Apollo called as he and Trucy let themselves into their home and ventured through to the office in search of their father and brother, who were supposed to have returned the previous evening. "Dad? Luke?"

Trucy pushed past her brother, bouncing towards the kitchen door. "Daddy! Luke!" she called. "We're home!" Just as she was about to reach out for the door, it swung open, forcing Trucy to jump back to avoid getting hit.

"Oh no, sorry!" Luke cried as he noticed his sister moving away. "I didn't realise you were so close to the door!"

Trucy only grinned. "Luuuuke!" she shouted, jumping on her brother and hugging him tightly. "I missed you!"

Luke laughed, hugging his sister back while waving to Apollo. "I missed you too!" he assured her, then gently pulled her through into the kitchen. "I wish you could have come! I could have shown you all around London!"

Apollo laughed, pulling the hat off his head that he'd been wearing only out of a lack of somewhere else to keep it. "At least you had a good time!"

"Yeah!" Trucy cried, bouncing eagerly at Luke's side. "Where's Daddy? I want to hear about the adventure you had!"

Luke laughed. "Oh yeah, we promised you we'd have an adventure, didn't we?"

The stairs nearby creaked as Phoenix came down, and he'd barely had the time to greet his children with a wave before Trucy had launched herself at him, clinging to his middle. "Daddy!" she cried. "I missed you sooo much!"

Phoenix laughed as he plucked Trucy off the floor and carried her back into the kitchen, waving for
Apollo to join in. "Did you two have fun with Maya and Pearls while we were gone?"

Apollo nodded, running to his father to briefly join the hug before sheepishly pulling back again. "Yeah, we were fine," he said, looking between Phoenix and Luke. "What about you two? Was London fun?"

Luke grinned, nodding enthusiastically. "I got to see the Professor and Flora again, and got to meet Alfendi!" he boasted, more to Trucy than to Apollo. "And I spent a day back in Misthallery with all my old friends there, too!"

"Apart from the Professor," Phoenix picked up, lowering Trucy back to the ground, "there wasn't anyone Maya and I met the last time we were there." He shrugged. "That's alright though, since I was busy enough helping out your Uncle Edgeworth with his business trip."

"Your adventure!" Trucy cried, bouncing at Phoenix's side as she pulled on his hoodie sleeve. "Tell us about your adventure!"

Phoenix laughed, sharing a glance with Luke. "Aw, you sure want to hear it now?" he teased. "It's a terrible story; It could ruin your entire day!"

Trucy crossed her arms, pouting up at Phoenix. "I want to hear the story!" she insisted.

"Well, if you insist," Phoenix said with a laugh, gesturing to the kitchen table as he walked around to his usual seat.

Trucy grinned, rushing to grab Apollo's arm and drag him to the table despite the teen's protests that he could walk on his own. Luke just giggled as he sat in his chair, next to Phoenix.

Finally pulling free of his sister, Apollo slid into his chair, watching his father and brother with concern. "Aren't you jetlagged at all?" he asked. "We can do this when you're more awake."

"We're fine," Luke insisted with a smile.

"A little tired, maybe," Phoenix admitted, casting an amused glance at Luke as the teen rubbed at his eyes, "but we'll be back to normal in a day or two."

"I've been practising this one!" Luke boasted, changing the subject back to the story of their 'adventure'. "You ready to hear it, Trucy?"

Trucy nodded eagerly, a big grin on her face. "Yes! Yes! Tell it already!" Apollo rolled his eyes, but smiled as he settled in to listen.

Luke giggled. "Okay, well, this all happened on Tuesday. Mister Edgeworth, Papa and I were going to spend the day at Gressenheller with the Professor, Flora and Alfendi..."
"Cor!" Luke cried as the trio approached the front gate of the Space Center. "They really did rebuild it!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Turnstiles? Really?"

Since Apollo and Luke's last visit to Cosmos Space Center, the entire front section of the entrance outbuilding had been rebuilt. Gone were the sliding metal gates and thick walls, replaced with pillars holding up the roof and small twin ticket offices surrounding a pair of turnstiles, the function of which wasn't clear as there was so much open space to easily walk around them. Above the green sign of the Center's name, and the round GYAXA logo, was a circular sculpture resembling a space station. Although it looked like it was built to spin, it was currently stationary. Beyond the building itself, the paved path to the Center's front door had been widened and a traffic light set up in front of the tracks that the launch pads used to encircle the main building.

Clay grinned. "What, you didn't believe me?" he laughed. "Y'see, this is what you guys miss out on when you don't come by more often!"

"It wasn't even covered in scaffolding last time!" Luke cried, running around the outbuilding to examine its new structure. "How'd it go up so fast!?"

Apollo gave Clay a look. "You're not counting the beginning of summer when Luke was in England, are you?"

"Oh yeah, and you were with distant family or something?" Clay mused, rubbing his chin. "I actually forgot about that, but yeah."

"You forgot?" Apollo replied, arms crossed. "You were bugging me every day to find a way back to visit the Space Center with you, then, once Luke and Dad got back, you suddenly lost interest in asking us to come by!"

Clay shrugged, giving his friend a cocky grin. "Well, I wanted to make sure you didn't get bored!" He giggled. "Give you an excuse to escape family members?"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Thanks, but I don't hate my family." He thought a moment. "Boredom was a legitimate issue, though."

Before Clay could do more than laugh, Luke ran back to the pair, looking panicked. "Wait, guys, when does this ceremony start!?"

"We've got a while yet," Clay assured him, "but I don't see why we can't head in now." He began to saunter towards the Center's front doors, cockily waving for his friends to follow. "C'mon, I'll take you up!"
Apollo and Luke shared a glance, Apollo irritated and Luke hopeful, then the brothers ran after their friend.

**August 2, 10:30PM**  
**Cosmos Space Center**  
**Space Museum**

"This used to be Launch Pad Two?" Luke said in awe as the trio exited the long corridor and emerged into a massively tall room, so tall that its ceiling was invisible in the inky blackness above.

Apollo rubbed the back of his neck as he looked up at the replica rocket where it disappeared into the darkness. "Wow. It almost makes my neck hurt just thinking about how high that rocket is..."

Apart from the dimensions of the room, and the large rocket by the far wall, it was almost unrecognisable as the functional launch pad it had previously been... not that any of the three boys had seen it before its refurbishment. To one side was a display, proudly showing off photos, articles and even a space suit and spare HAT-1 team jacket. Various people were dotted around in the circle of light from the few lamps set up in the rafters, and a temporary stage had been set up near the rocket, a ramp on one side giving away who it was intended for.

Clay grinned as he noticed the display, grabbing his friends' arms as he dragged them over to it. "Hey, Mister Starbuck was telling me about this!" he cried, ignoring Luke and Apollo's startled cries as they were suddenly pulled out of their thoughts. "They put the photo we took on display! The one with me in it!"

Apollo and Luke glanced at each other as Clay released them from his grip, watching their friend running along the brightly lit display case and stopping at the end, under the team jacket. They followed him to near the end of the display, where Clay was excitedly pointing at the lone photo in the section second from the end. "Wow," Apollo said, leaning in to see it more clearly. "You look almost as happy there as you do now," he added with a smirk.


Luke giggled, admiring the photo. Wearing a spare team jacket over his school uniform, just as he'd boasted at the time, was the image of sixteen-year-old Clay, standing proudly next to a slightly younger Starbuck, their arms slung over each other's shoulders although Starbuck had to kneel down slightly to match Clay's height. In front of them, right in the centre of the photo, was Director Cosmos, giving a stern thumbs-up from atop his everpresent motorised scooter. At his side was Ponco, cheerfully grinning for the camera through a multitude of bandages that covered her head and one of her arms. Behind the small robot were two women that Luke found vaguely familiar, although he couldn't quite place why for either of them. He assumed he'd probably seen them around the Center during one of the trio's visits over the past two years. "Everyone must have been so proud!" he said. "This was the day of the launch, wasn't it?"

"Day before," Clay corrected, giving his friend a grin. "I had detention on the day itself, remember?"

Apollo was admiring the jacket hanging nearby when he paused, frowning. "That jacket's ripped on the side," he pointed out, gesturing to the clean tear on the left of the buttons.
Luke and Clay looked up to see what Apollo was referring to, confused. "I wonder what happened to it?" Luke wondered.

"And why they didn't fix it," Clay added, then, after a short pause, shook his head and turned away from the display. "Well, enough of that! Let's find Mister Starbuck!"

Luke and Apollo laughed as they followed their friend.

As it turned out, Starbuck wasn't hard to find, standing at the edges of the small crowd and peeling himself away the moment he spotted the three boys. "There you are!" he cried as he approached, waving to the trio. "I was waiting for you guys to show up!"

"Hey, Mister Starbuck!" Apollo replied with a grin.

"There was no way we were gonna miss this!" Clay added, waving to his mentor. "No way was I gonna let my two best friends in the world miss it, either!"

Luke giggled. "You must be excited, Mister Starbuck!" he said to the astronaut. "I heard they announced that movie finally!"

Starbuck laughed in embarrassment, rubbing an arm with the opposite hand. "Y-yeah, but this one's a documentary, not really a movie, you know?" He shoved his hands into the pockets of his jacket. "I think the script-writer decided he had to do both, but one at a time, and somehow managed to strike a deal with his higher-ups? I don't really know all the details."

Apollo shrugged. "Who ever does with the movie business?" he pointed out, one eyebrow raised.

"Didn't they cast the guy to play you, though?" Clay asked, confused. "That famous movie actor?"

Starbuck nodded. "Hank Thomson. He was hanging around last week, actually." He smiled. "I could've introduced you guys to him if you'd dropped by!"

Clay looked excited at the idea, while Apollo mentally scoffed, shaking his head. Luke only looked confused. "I've... never heard of him?" he admitted.

"To be fair," Apollo pointed out, "you also don't watch many movies."


Starbuck quietly laughed. "Yeah, apparently they're still doing 'reconstructions' for the documentary, so he's still involved! He's really excited about it, too!"

Apollo crossed his arms. "Wait, does this script-writer guy know about Clay?" He gestured in his friend's direction. "They're not including him in this, are they?"

Clay gasped, smiling. "Whoa, you mean they might!?" he cried.

"That never occurred to you?" Luke asked. "You were the one boasting that you were an unofficial part of the team!"

Starbuck laughed. "I really don't know, I'm afraid!" he told them. "You'd have to ask this guy yourself!"

Clay looked disappointed, but Apollo laughed. "Hey, if he does include you," he told his black-haired friend, "you'd just be the 'mascot', anyway."
"Would not!" Clay argued.

"Alright alright," Starbuck interrupted, holding up his hands to calm the pair down, "enough of that! Hey, you know what?" He pointed to the rocket above them with a thumb. "I'd show you guys the rocket replica, but it's just a shell right now. They don't even have the lights for the top installed yet."

"Aw!" Clay sighed, disappointed. "But I wanted to check it out!"

"Of course you do!" Luke giggled.

"S-sorry," Starbuck mumbled, running a hand through the mop of red hair on the top of his head. "Maybe once it's done."

Apollo wasn't sure if his promise was a lie or not.

"Everyone!" came a call from the direction of the small stage, and the quartet looked around to see Director Cosmos rolling up the ramp, his scooter giving him additional height over the crowd than what the stage alone gave him. "First off, thank you all for coming to our little ceremony!"

The small crowd, gathering a little tighter around the stage, cheered in response. Starbuck waved at the three teenagers and led them a little further in himself.

"It is a great honour that so many of us could make it this morning!" Cosmos continued. "As you all probably know, the official opening will be in October, on the anniversary of HAT-1’s launch. By then, we should have the rest of our lighting up, and a few more space props furnishing the path here!" A handful of people in the crowd, evidently the people in charge of said props, whooped. "Ms Blackquill has also assured me," Cosmos continued, "that the robots are ready and willing to direct visitors, once we have them. But, as of today, I think it's prudent that we now refer to Launch Pad 2 by its new name: the Space Museum!" As the audience cheered, Cosmos pulled a plastic bottle of water from a pocket, then turned towards the rocket behind him.

"This is what we did to the original HAT-1 rocket," Starbuck whispered to the boys in explanation. "Didn't want to damage it with glass or wine."

Once the cap had been unscrewed, Cosmos held the waterbottle high, then, to raucous cheering from the crowd, tossed its contents over the replica rocket. "I christen thee, 'HAT-1 Replica Metis' of the Space Museum!" he announced.

Luke and Apollo glanced at each other in confusion, but quickly shrugged as they mutually decided not to question the rocket's unusual name.
The small room was nearly pitch black, barely large enough to spread out your arms and not be touching both sides. Aging wallpaper was barely visible on the walls, ripped and tattered as the hanging fragments waved in an invisible breeze. Screams and shouts echoed slightly from other rooms within the temporary structure, while a recording played from overhead speakers of phonograph music accompanied by the white noise of screeching wind.

The door at the darker end of the room creaked open, and three teenage boys in a variety of costumes sidled in, standing as close to one another as they dared without actually touching. Their eyes darted fearfully around the room, and they stuck firmly to the open areas furthest from the walls as they edged their way carefully to the door in front of them.

Suddenly, the wall on the trio's left snapped open, and an ominous figure leapt out of the darkness with a screech. Two of the boys screamed, clinging to each other as they jumped back. The third, however, only flinched in surprise before smiling widely at the figure's intricate make-up in the dim light, a hand on the brim of the top hat on his head. "Wow, that's an amazing costume you have there!"

The other two boys groaned as they quickly got over their momentary fear. "Luke!"

Luke looked back at his friends with an innocent smile. "I'm just congratulating the actors on a job well done!" he insisted, then turned back to the confused-looking actor as they slowly slunk backwards into their hole. "You're doing great!" he assured them.

Apollo rolled his eyes, grabbing Luke's arm as the trio headed towards the exit door with a huff. "This is the last time I invite you to a haunted house," he grumbled. "You take all the fun out of it!"

Clay shrugged as he followed the two brothers, pulling his borrowed HAT-1 team jacket tight around his neck to protect it from the cold breeze. "I guess Luke has a point about them being almost nothing but jump-scares, though," he reasoned. "Especially that one."

Once outside under the night sky, stars obscured by the bright lights of the Halloween fair, the trio made their way back to their assigned meeting place by the lake. "I wonder if Trucy and her friend have finished with what they were doing?" Luke wondered aloud.

Apollo shook his head, spotting the lake ahead and failing to see their little sister nearby. "Doesn't look like it," he said, rubbing the centre of his forehead. "Honestly, they can take their time. I've had enough 'warding charms' slapped on my face today."

Clay snorted in amusement. "Man, I wish I was there to see that!" he said.

Luke giggled, but Apollo shook his head. "Don't remind me," he mumbled.
The first thing Jinxie Tenma had done once Trucy took her into the office was shriek "DEMON!" and slap a small piece of paper on Apollo's forehead. "You won't get me, blue demon! My mama is still outside if you try!"

Apollo stood, blinking in shock, as he registered the girl's words. "Demon...?" 'I understand blue, given my costume, but...' Phoenix held a hand over his mouth to hide a smile, while Luke was as shocked as Apollo, lacking the words to speak. Trucy ran to stand between her friend and her brother. "No, Jinxie, this is my brother, Polly! I told you about him!"

"You said he wore red!" Jinxie argued as she half-hid behind Trucy, gesturing to the blue suit Apollo was wearing as his costume that night. "And you didn't tell me he had horns!"

Apollo grimaced, a hand flying to his carefully-styled hair that he had refused to hide under a wig. "It's hair!"

"Apollo's wearing a costume tonight!" Luke explained to the girl, rushing forward. "We all are! He's dressed as our papa!"

Phoenix smirked at the reminder, Apollo quietly blushing. "Yeah, well," the teenager shot back at his brother, "you're dressed as your Professor Layton, aren't you?"

Luke tipped his top hat proudly. "Yup!"

Jinxie cast several suspicious glances between Apollo and Phoenix, the latter in a Steel Samurai costume as he watched the kids interacting from the doorway. Apollo gingerly pulled the paper from his forehead, examining the Japanese script and paw-print with a raised eyebrow. With a wordless scream, Jinxie promptly pulled out another identical paper and slapped it where the previous one had been, standing almost in an action pose as she fixed Apollo with a fierce look. "My warding charms are not to be under-estimated!"

Apollo gave Jinxie a level stare.

Luke looked between the two in concern. "Maybe you should wear a hat?" he suggested to his brother.

Trucy patted her friend's dark hair with a smile. "It's okay Jinxie, Polly is a good demon!" she told her. "He's going to be a lawyer like Daddy when he grows up!"

"A... good demon?" Jinxie carefully repeated.

Apollo sighed. "Can't I just be a person?"

Ignoring Apollo, Trucy gave her friend a bright smile. "Yep! He was supposed to be wearing a wig tonight," she tugged on her own wig of dark brown curls, "but if his hair bothers you, we can get him to wear a hat!"

"Jinxie thought for a moment, casting nervous glances at Apollo's hair, then carefully gave her friend a nod.

Apollo looked to Luke for help, but only got an apologetic shrug. Sighing again, he turned and stalked off further into their home. "I'll go get a hat," he groaned.
Phoenix patted Apollo's shoulder as the teenager passed him. "Why not get that beanie Trucy made for you?" he suggested with a smile. "It's the most like mine, after all!"

Rolling his eyes, Apollo headed off towards the stairs.

Apollo ran a hand along the pink beanie covering his hair, wishing he could pull it off without having to worry about a ten-year-old slapping his face, 'warding charm' or not. "Where did those two go while we were in the haunted house, anyway?"

Clay shrugged. "Trucy's friend said something about the stalls, maybe?" He then scratched a cheek in thought. "Speaking of, what is that girl's costume? I can't figure it out."

"Apparently, she's not in a costume," Luke explained, peering off in the direction of the fair's market stalls. "Jinxie's family is very big on demons and the like, so she's covered herself in those warding charms to protect herself." Although the girl only had two charms on her forehead when they first met her, she had slowly acquired more on various parts of her clothes and arms as the night wore on, and refused to take them off for any reason. The Wrights had decided to simply leave her to her own devices.

Apollo gave Clay a glare. "Speaking of costumes, mind explaining why you just repeated last year's instead of getting a new one?"

Clay scoffed. "Naw, last year I dressed as Mister Starbuck! This year, I'm just an astronaut!"

"Mister Starbuck is an astronaut!" Apollo pointed out, waving his arms in frustration. "They're the same thing! You didn't even change anything about the costume!"

"And what about you?" Clay laughed in response. "You're dressed as your dad! Did you just borrow his suit!?"

Before the pair could descend into an argument, Luke held up a hand. "Wait, I see Trucy!"

Sure enough, in the direction of the stalls was a worried-looking ten-year-old girl, racing down the path towards them. One hand was on her wig to keep it from flying off, and her black robes and gold-and-red scarf flapped in the breeze behind her. As she spotted her brothers, she waved frantically with her free hand, running straight towards them. "Polly! Luke! Help!"

Apollo and Luke glanced at each other in concern before racing to meet Trucy halfway, Clay hurrying close behind. Apollo was the first to reach her, leaning down as he gripped his sister's shoulders. "What is it? Did something happen to Jinxie?"

Trucy panted for a moment as she recovered from her sprint. "I was... playing one of the games... where you have to throw a ball," she haltingly explained through her gasps for air. "When I... looked around... Jinxie was gone!" She shook her head rapidly, knocking her wig slightly askew. "I can't find her! She doesn't... know her way around the park like we do!"

Luke gasped, a hand on his hat as he looked around frantically. "Oh no! If only Papa was here!"

"You're telling me!" Trucy interjected. "I went to all that trouble... making a costume for him... and no-one's gonna see it!"
"'Make'?” Apollo repeated under his breath. ‘More like bought...’

Clay looked between Apollo and Trucy. "We can find her, can't we?"

Apollo nodded, looking to his sister. "Why don't you take us to where you last saw her?" he asked. "We don't need Dad's help. Not yet, anyway."

Trucy thought for a moment, then nodded. Once Apollo released his grip on her, she then turned and more calmly led her brothers and friend towards the fair.
In the end, it didn't take very long to find where Jinxie had disappeared to.

Once they arrived at the stall where Trucy had last seen her friend, Apollo instructed everyone to split up, but for Trucy to stick with one of the three older boys; As they had phones, he wanted them to be able to contact each other the moment they found any sign of Jinxie. After some whining that she wanted a phone of her own, Trucy grabbed Luke's hand, and the three teams headed off in opposite directions to begin their search.

Clay headed towards the haunted house, slowly sauntering along as he studied the faces of anyone shorter than his shoulders.

Ok I've reached the haunted house and no sign of her

    Thx but maybe you could not text me until you actually find something? :

    I'm keeping you updated on my progress! :P

    Every time my phone beeps I think maybe someones found her :

    So don't think that! Problem solved :D

    This is serious, Clay :|

Luke and Trucy headed to the darker, less crowded sections of the market behind the stalls, where technically they were not supposed to be at all. Trucy had insisted, pointing out that Jinxie may have gotten scared enough to try and hide there, and her impassioned plea was enough to let any adults trying to chase the pair out agree to leave them be. Although Luke hoped to also use the quieter environment to ask the help of nearby animals, it seemed there weren't any brave enough even to frequent where they currently were.

Any luck? :

No, sorry. Trucy's convinced a few adults to keep an eye out for her, but we haven't seen her yet.

Trucy says to try looking underneath tables, by the way. I'll pass that on to Clay, too.

    Alright I will. Let me know the moment you find anything :

We will, don't worry.
Apollo stuck to the brighter sections of the market, the opposite end from the haunted house. Following Trucy's hurried suggestions, he made sure to take a peek under the tables wherever he could, and even asked the occasional stall owner or passer-by if they'd seen anyone matching Jinxie's description (the best he could do was "this high, very pale skin, black ponytail, has covered herself in paper?"). By some stroke of luck, one woman smiled in recognition and was able to point Apollo to a nearby stall selling handmade ornaments all shaped like rabbits.

As Apollo ran to the self-proclaimed 'Bunny Beloveds' stall, he almost cried in relief to see a familiar dark-haired girl sitting just behind the table, petting an extremely fluffy toy rabbit. "Jinxie!" he shouted, almost throwing himself at the table and giving the girl a grin. "We finally found you!"

Jinxie looked up in surprise, but, seeing Apollo leaning over the table above her, she shrieked and slapped a warding charm on his forehead, jumping to her feet and clinging the toy bunny tightly. "Don't eat me!"

Apollo stood frozen in shock, moving only when he heard the owner of the stall approaching, obviously alerted by Jinxie's shout. "Oh, I'm sorry, she's been doing that to a lot of people!", the woman said, gently pushing Apollo away slightly as she pulled the charm off his face. "Usually it's people in scarier costumes though..."

"Eh, yeah, she's got it in her head that I'm a demon," Apollo explained, rubbing his forehead with a sigh. He gave the stall owner a glance and was surprised to see she wasn't in a costume herself, perhaps the only reason Jinxie seemed happy to stay in her care. "We've been looking for her, actually. Thanks for taking care of her."

The woman nodded, giving Apollo a friendly smile. "Ah, so you're in charge of her, are you?" She turned to Jinxie. "Did you hear that, sweetie? Your friend's here to take you home!"

Jinxie only widened her eyes, looking around Apollo frantically. "Where's Trucy! ?" she cried. "You gobbled her up, didn't you!?"

"No, I didn't!" Apollo replied, sighing in frustration. "Why would I even do that!?"

The stall-owner seemed worried, giving Apollo a concerned look. "I'm sorry, if she doesn't want to go with you-"

"Yeah, I know," Apollo muttered, realising he should have known this would happen. It was a basic safety tip that lost children were never to be 'returned' to someone they didn't trust, and it seemed there was no-one Jinxie didn't trust more right now than Apollo. The teen pulled his phone out of his pocket. "Jinxie, I'm gonna call Trucy and get her over here, and prove I didn't eat her, okay?"

Turning away from the stall, he stood off to one side and called Luke's phone. When Luke picked up, it was with a slightly panicked tone he immediately shouted "Have you found her!?"

Apollo blinked in surprise, giving his phone a frown. "Hi," he replied pointedly. "Yeah, I found her. There's a 'bunny' stall, past the play equipment from where we split up. She won't go with me, though."

"Bunny stall, got it!" Luke replied, then paused before thoughtfully adding, "Are there any actual bunnies there?"

Apollo sighed. "No, Luke, there are no real rabbits," he told his brother. "Do you think you'll be able
to find us?"

"Mm-hmm," Luke said, almost audibly nodding although he was starting to sound slightly out-of-breath. Apollo suspected the pair were running full-tilt to meet him. "Trucy and I are already on our way! Does Clay know yet?"

"I'll call him," Apollo promised. "Seeya when you get here."

Luke chirped "Bye!" before promptly hanging up.

Apollo looked back at the stall as he lowered his phone, and was frustratedly unsurprised to see Jinxie sat on her stool, glaring at him. "Trucy's on her way," he told the girl, though was met with no response. Sighing, he returned to his phone to call Clay.

"Yo bro," Clay sang as he picked up. "Any news?"

"We've found Jinxie," Apollo explained. "If you come back to where we split up, there's a stall selling rabbit-themed stuff just past the food stalls. Luke and Trucy are already on their way."

"Ah, you found her!" Clay replied with a laugh. "Past the food court? Shouldn't be hard to find."

Apollo closed his eyes to resist rolling them. "Just get here, will you? After all this excitement, I'm thinking we should at least get the girls back home before we lose one of them again. I'm not explaining to my dad why we couldn't keep an eye on them like we promised."

"Dude, I'm pretty sure your dad'll understand," Clay assured him. "I'll find where you are, and we can play babysitter getting them back to your place."

"Thanks," Apollo muttered gratefully. "I'll see you in a bit." Clay hung up without another word, and Apollo sighed as he put his phone away.

Suddenly, there was a shout to Apollo's right, and he turned to see Trucy flashing past him in a streak of black, running to Jinxie's side. "Jinxie!" Jinxie jumped from her stool, mouth open in surprise, and Trucy quickly launched herself at her friend to give the other girl a hug. "Jinxie, where'd you go!? I was so worried when I couldn't find you!"

"I saw a group of demons headed our way!" Jinxie cried, clinging to her friend as the plush rabbit fell forgotten to the grass. "I was so scared! I thought you got eaten by a demon!"

Quickly catching up, Luke tipped his top hat to the woman manning the stall. "Thank you for looking after her, ma'am," he told her, panting from his brief sprint. "We've been very worried about her!"

The woman smiled. "Oh, it's no problem!" she assured him, and turned to Apollo with an apologetic look. "I'm sorry I couldn't let her go with you before, it's just."

"I know, I know," Apollo sighed. "She doesn't like me. No-one would have let her go with me." He smiled to show there were no hard feelings. "I don't blame you."

October 31, 7:15PM
Wright Talent Agency
Kitchen
Once they'd met up with Clay, the five kids all headed back to the Wrights' home. Although Clay would then bid his friends goodbye before heading to his own home, Jinxie was staying the night and returning home after school the next day. "I'll see you two tomorrow, Wrights," Clay told Apollo and Luke as he bid them goodbye on the street outside their home. "Another time, Truce!"

"Bye, Clay!" Trucy called, waving as Clay walked off with a laugh. "Seeya later!"

The Wright kids and Jinxie met Phoenix, now out of his costume, sitting in the kitchen with a glass of grape juice, and he fixed the quartet with a smile as they entered. "Have fun at the fair?" he asked.

Trucy nodded, although Apollo and Luke gave each other nervous glances. Jinxie kept quiet, hands clasped together as she looked to Trucy. "We played lots of games!" Trucy cried, nudging her friend. "Didn't we, Jinxie?"

Although Jinxie nodded, Phoenix's eyes narrowed as he watched the four. After a moment, he bluntly said to them, "Tell me what happened."

Apollo and Luke winced, remembering how Phoenix was always able to tell if they tried to hide anything.

"Nothing!" Trucy insisted, still smiling brightly as she bounced on her heels. "We may have gotten a bit lost, but we found our way home in the end!"

Apollo sighed, stepping forward. "Trucy and Jinxie wanted to do different things from me, Luke and Clay, so we thought we should split up, but then Jinxie got lost. We found her though, then we came straight back here. It was my responsibility, I shouldn't have let it happen."

"I-it was my fault, too!" Luke insisted, jumping to Apollo's side. "We should have realised it was a bad idea to leave the girls on their own!"

"Hey, we can look after ourselves!" Trucy protested, arms crossed.

Phoenix sat silently in thought for a moment or two, then slowly smiled. "I'm glad you could tell me the truth," he said. "Since you already know what it was you did wrong, I'm not going to harp on about it. You've learned your lesson, and everything's turned out okay in the end."

Apollo and Luke glanced at each other with surprised smiles.

Phoenix stood up. "Trucy, Jinxie, why don't the pair of you get ready for bed? It's getting late."

"Okay, Daddy!" Trucy chirped, grabbing the silent Jinxie's arm and pulling her to the stairs. "C'mon, Jinxie, I'll show you my room!"

Luke ran to Phoenix and gave him a hug. "We really are sorry, Papa," he said. "Thank you for not getting mad."

Phoenix chuckled as he hugged Luke back, giving Apollo a smile as the elder teen hung back, looking embarrassed. "As long as you never make the same mistake again, I don't see any reason to be upset. You seem to have handled it well, after all."

Apollo suddenly ran to join the hug, just as Luke had been pulling away. "Thanks, Dad," he quickly said, then just as quickly dashed off upstairs.

Luke nodded, running after his brother with a giggle.
"Warren Street Animal Shelter, can I help you?"

"Um, hello, I was wondering if you were welcoming volunteers at the moment?"

"We're always open to anyone wishing to volunteer. If you want to drop by and pick up an application, all you need to do is fill it in and our manager will arrange an orientation. I can fill part of it out for you over the phone, but you'll need to sign it yourself and check we've got everything correct."

"Oh, thank you! I won't be able to drop by until the weekend, though. Will you be open?"

"Haha, we're open eight to seven, seven days a week! If you're coming in on Saturday, just tell the guy at reception that you spoke to Duck. I'll leave a note so he'll expect you. May I ask how old you are?"

"I, um, just turned sixteen yesterday."

"Then we're gonna need parental permission, I'm afraid. Your mom or dad there?"

"My papa is, yes. I'll get him. Thank you again, sir!"

"No problem, kid. What's your name, by the way?"


"I look forward to working with you, Luke."

November 13, 11:43AM

Warren Street Animal Shelter
Reception

Luke looked around as he pushed through the glass doors of the animal shelter. It had been a long road of research and both internal and external deliberating, but here he was, newly sixteen years old and applying for his first job, only a half-hour's bus ride from home. 'Well, if a volunteering position could be called a 'job', I suppose.' The room, to Luke's disappointment, was empty. Directly in front of the doors was a table, a small bell set out on the counter, and to either side of it were double doors into the inner corridors of the shelter. 'I wonder where the receptionist is?' He walked up to the desk and hit the bell, telling himself it wasn't nearly as fun to do as he thought it was and resisting hitting it more than once.

There was a commotion behind the door to Luke's right, and he looked up just as one of the double doors swung open, a young man with a black mohawk jumping out. He paused for a moment as he looked Luke up and down, then gave him a patented 'customer service' smile and walked over behind the desk. "Welcome to Warren Street Animal Shelter! May I help you, sir?"

Luke grinned. "Hello! I'm picking up my application to volunteer here!" He paused, nervous. "I, um,
spoke to Duck over the phone on Thursday?"

The man (Luke noticed his name-tag read 'Cailen') thought for a moment, then gasped. "Oh yeah, you're that kid! Forgot about you!" He slipped into the chair behind reception and leaned sideways to open various drawers Luke couldn't see, before finally seeming to find what he was looking for and standing back up again, placing a paper and pen on the counter in front of Luke. "Just finish filling it in, let me know if anything Duck put in is wrong."

Luke nodded, looking over the form.

"Oh, yeah," Cailen continued, holding out his hand, "I'm Crow. Nice to meet ya."


"England, huh?" Crow mused, tapping his chin. "What, online, or you met on holiday...?"

"I used to live there," Luke admitted with a giggle. "Usually people notice my accent and figure it out."

Crow looked shocked for a moment, then sighed. "Aw, I knew you were talking funny," he groaned. "I'm terrible with accents."

Luke giggled, filling in the final details of the form. "That's okay. It's not as obvious as it used to be, anyway."

After a moment or two, the doors on the right again opened, this time ejecting a middle-aged woman with orange hair. Unlike Crow, she lacked a name-tag. She gave Luke a smile as she approached. "Ah, you're our new volunteer, are you?"

Luke nodded. "I'm Luke! Nice to meet you!"

Crow gave the woman a frustrated look. "How did you remember the note Duck left and I didn't?" he sighed.

"Little thing called memory," the woman joked to Crow, then leaned on the counter, reading over Luke's shoulder as he signed the form. "Luke Wright, huh?" she said, then held out her hand. "Kitty. I think 'Northpaw' would work for you."

Luke was already moving to shake her hand when her comment registered, and he paused, confused. "Huh?"

"You think Northpaw?" Crow repeated thoughtfully. "I was thinking more along the lines of some kind of bird."

"His name's 'Wright' and he's right-handed," Kitty replied with a shrug, then laughed as she saw Luke's bemused expression. "It's a tradition. Everyone who works here, except the boss of course, gets a nickname. It's usually animal-themed, but we've had exceptions."

"Oh, I see," Luke replied, looking to Crow. "So that's why your name-tag says 'Cailen', not 'Crow'?"

Crow nodded. "Cailen Rog. Kitty here's real name is..." He looked over to her, frowning in thought. "Tiger, isn't it?"

"Tiger Vadas," Kitty replied with a smile. "To be honest, 'Kitty' sounds more like my real name than
"Tiger'. Barely *anyone* calls me that!"

"Hell, Duck's real name is 'Drake'!" Crow laughed. "We coulda gone with some cool dragon theme, and we went with *Duck*!"


"Excellent!" Crow cried, taking the application and giving it a quick once-over. "I'll get this to the boss, and he'll probably give you or your dad a ring on Monday to organise an orientation."

"I don't see why he won't accept you," Kitty continued. "We're pretty short-staffed at the moment, and you seem like a perfectly reasonable young man." She shrugged, smirking. "We accepted Crow here, after all!"

Crow frowned, filing the application into a drawer. "Hey!"

Ignoring the receptionist, Kitty waved Luke towards the doors she and Crow had come out of. "You want a quick tour, Northpaw? It's just the three of us here at the moment, so I can show you around before you head back home."

"I'd love that!" Luke replied, rushing to Kitty's side. "Thank you, Kitty!"

"No problem!" Kitty sang, leading Luke through the swinging double doors.

Beyond the reception was a long, white corridor, lined on either side with enclosures separated from the main hall with clear plastic doors. Inside each one, Luke could see a different variety of dog, sometimes alone, sometimes paired up. "Wow," he breathed, grinning widely as he saw the collection of canines stretching before him.

Kitty giggled. "This is just the dogs!" she said. "We have the cats on the other side, but I'm feeding the dogs at the moment."

Luke paused by one of the enclosures to kneel down and wave at the interested dog inside. "Are they all happy here?"

Kitty opened her mouth to answer, then paused. "Well, I hope so," she eventually answered. "We're only a small shelter, and a no-kill one, so our biggest problem is overcrowding."

"Overcrowding?" Luke repeated, looking up in surprise.

"People have a tendency to not neuter their pets," Kitty explained, "so when they have kittens or puppies they can't sell off themselves, they just dump them on us." She sighed, crossing her arms. "Not to mention the idiots who decide after a day they don't want a pet anymore, or, even worse, wait until it's stopped 'being cute'."

Luke gasped, scandalised. "Dogs and cats are always cute!" he cried.

Kitty laughed, cheered by the fervent belief of the teen. "We may think so, but unfortunately not everyone agrees with us." She frowned. "Not as many people adopt animals as drop them off. We can tell people we're full and not accepting anything, and just get animals dumped on our door as a result. It's a lose-lose situation." Shaking her head, Kitty waved Luke to the doors directly in front of them, where the corridor extended off to the side, housing more dogs beyond. "But enough of my pessimistic nonsense. C'mon, I'll show you the dog run!"
Beyond the door and through a short corridor, Kitty and Luke emerged back into the sunlight of midday. In front of them was a large, fenced-off enclosure, inside of which were a small pack of about ten or so dogs, running around madly as they played together. One of them barked as it spotted the two humans approaching, and in moments the whole group was bouncing at the fence, howling for attention.

Kitty sighed, waving at the dogs as she feebly commanded, "Quiet! No barking!" When the animals proceeded to ignore her, she sighed and rubbed her face with one hand. "What am I even doing."

Luke gave her a sympathetic grimace, then turned to the barking mass himself. "Guys, we can't understand you when you all talk at once! One at a time, please!"

"It's pointless," Kitty told the teen. "At this point they're just fuelling... each... other...?" To her utter bafflement, at Luke's plea the entire pack had almost instantly quietened, and was now sitting silently at the fence, tails wagging. One of the dogs, a golden retriever-cross, was pushing itself against the wire mesh, making soft whining noises at Luke, who was leaning down towards it and listening intently, occasionally even nodding. Kitty shook her head, but the image before her didn't change, so she was forced to accept it as reality. "Northpaw...?" she quietly asked. "How'd you do that?"

It took Luke a moment to register he was being addressed, and he looked up at Kitty with an innocent smile and a shrug. "I'm just good with animals, I guess," he explained, then gestured to the enclosure. "Is it okay for me to spend some time with these guys? I won't be a problem, I promise."

Kitty thought a moment, then slowly nodded, still getting over the shock of the suddenly quiet dogs. "Um, sure, I'll go let you in."

"Thank you so much, Kitty!" Luke cried, skipping after her towards the gate.

"I'll let you out once I'm done feeding the other dogs," Kitty added, opening the gate to allow the teen to mingle with the eerily obedient dogs currently in the enclosure. "Just shout if you need anything."

Luke nodded, surrounded with the crowd of canines the moment he entered the dog run. "We'll be good, won't we?" he asked the dogs, who all wagged their tails, a couple of them barking once in apparent agreement.

"Right," Kitty replied, then slowly turned and walked away. 'I think I'm gonna need a stiff drink tonight...'

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Phelan Pound, the owner of the shelter, was a short man not much taller than Luke, his most distinctive feature being the black circle beard around his permanently smiling mouth. He was waiting in reception when Luke arrived on the day after Thanksgiving for his orientation, and cheerfully greeted the teen with an energetic handshake. "I'll give you a tour and show you how everything works!" he told Luke, throwing an arm over the teen's shoulders as he led him through into the dog kennels.

Feeding the dogs as they arrived was a very tall man with thick eyebrows, who looked down at Luke somewhat sternly.

"Gagnon, this is our new recruit!" Pound happily announced, waving at the teen. "His name's Wright!"

The man blinked in surprise, then smiled, the action making him instantly look a lot friendlier. "Oh, Crow left a note about you! 'Northpaw', is it?"

Luke giggled in relief, nodding. "Yeah, that's me!"

"Duck!" the man replied, reaching out to shake Luke's hand with a grin. "We spoke on the phone!"

"Oh!" Luke cried in recognition. "Nice to meet you in person, sir!"

Duck laughed, waving the comment off. "Please, the whole reason we have the nicknames is to use 'em! 'Duck' is fine. Pleasure to be working with you, Northpaw!"

Pound sighed good-naturedly, pulling a small notepad out of a pocket and making a note with an equally small stub of a pencil tied to the wire binding. "Another nickname to remember," he said, then gave Luke a side-long glance. "You gonna be sticking around, Wright? I only graduate to these nicknames with people who actually hang around."

"Two years isn't a long enough time?" Duck muttered with a smirk.

Luke shrugged. "I hope to stay here as long as possible," he admitted. "This is the closest animal shelter to home, and I want to help the local animal population any way I can."

"Spoken like a true animal lover!" Duck laughed, then he turned to Pound. "Boss, Reindeer and Fox are in the recuperation room when you're ready for him to learn how the surgery works."

"Good point," Pound replied, then gestured for Luke to follow as he walked off. "Come along, Wright, we still have the rest of the tour to finish before we get down to the nitty-gritty!"

Luke waved to Duck as he left. "I'll see you later, Duck!"
After being shown the cat enclosures and all of the procedures for feeding and providing basic care for the animals, Pound led Luke into a room hidden away behind his office, inbetween the two corridors that housed the cats and dogs. This room contained a mixture of the different cage sizes Luke had seen, although overall they were smaller than the largest of the dog enclosures. About half of them housed an animal inside, and Luke could hear some of them quietly talking to their neighbours, although they were in various states of pain or sleepiness. Sat on the floor, laid out on a blanket, was a large black Labrador, a white spot on its chest. Around it were crouched two people in lab-coats, the younger woman petting the canine to keep it calm while the elderly man listened to its heartbeat with his stethoscope. Luke noticed the woman had a name-tag on her coat reading 'Vixen', although whether or not the man had one he couldn't tell, as his back was to the door. He took Pound's lead in hanging back until the grey-haired man removed his stethoscope, at which point the woman waved to the pair of newcomers as they approached. "Hey, Mister Pound! We're just finishing up with Bonnie here!"

"Let's get her back in her cage," the man cut in, ignoring Pound and Luke behind him as he stood up. "She'll be fine tomorrow."

"Reindeer!" Pound called, waving to the man as the young woman gently led the dog to an open cage nearby. "You got time to show the new recruit around the surgery?"

The man looked around, fixing his gaze on Luke with a dismissive sniff. "Said I'd have time, didn't I?" he replied. He looked the nervous teen up and down, turning around enough for Luke to notice the name-tag on his coat that read 'Rudolf'. "What was your name, kid?"


"Nice to meet you, Northpaw!" the woman replied, bouncing back to the group as she finished with her patient. "I'm Vixen, but everyone calls me Fox!"

Luke nodded, grinning. "Hello Fox!"

"Bagley and Reindeer here are our resident vets," Pound explained to the teen, gesturing to the sick animals surrounding them. "Bagley's interning at the moment, but she's due to start working full-time here any year now." He looked to the young woman, grinning at his own joke.

Fox bit her lip, moving a clump of hair behind an ear. "I've just got this final year of study before I get my veterinary medicine degree," she explained to Luke. "Until then, I'm just Reindeer's assistant."

Luke tapped his chin. "That's a thought. Volunteering here would be hard if you're away at university."

"You're sixteen, aren't you?" Pound asked. "You've got a while before you have to think about college."

"Um, not really," Luke explained. "I skipped a year or two when I moved here, so I'll be starting
university next September. Or August."

Pound rubbed his chin. "Well, just let me know what your plans are closer to the date and we can sort it out then," he decided.

"I've got a deal with my lecturers at the moment," Fox added with a grin. "I'm interning here and studying online instead of going all the way up to Davis to attend my classes this term!"

"Oh, Davis!" Luke cried in excited recognition. "Ivy University! That's one I'm thinking of going to! Could I ask you about it later?"

Reindeer narrowed his eyes at the teen. "Planning to be a vet, are you?" he spoke up.

Luke turned to the old man in surprise, having forgotten he was there. "Y-yes, sir," he replied. "It's part of why I wanted to volunteer at a shelter."

The man scoffed. "Plenty of kids like animals, say they want to be vets. What none of 'em realise is how much work you gotta do to be good enough to be trusted with the health of an animal." He wagged a finger at the teen. "It can be ten times the work of a human doctor! You may think, just because you're smart and skipped some years of school, that it will be easy for you, but you don't even know the meaning of hard. Are you listening to me, boy?"

Luke stared up at Reindeer, equally sternly. "I know it's going to be a lot of hard work, sir. I'm doing all my research now so that I can be ready to start my studies the moment I arrive at the university I chose. I'm still looking at options, but I fully intend to put my all into whichever course I end up taking." He glanced over to the dog the pair had been previously looking at. "And I don't mean any disrespect by this, sir, but you have no idea what I've been through to get to this point. You have no business telling me I don't know what hard work is."

Reindeer stared back for a few moments, then a corner of his mouth twitched upwards. "I like you," he decided. "You got spunk. Northpaw, was it?"

Pound nodded. "Yup."

"Northpaw," Reindeer repeated, chuckling at the confused Luke. "I'll see you around, kid." With that, he turned and headed off to a door behind him.

Laughing, Pound elbowed Luke. "Don't mind Reindeer, he has to scare every kid we get in here."

Fox shrugged, looking embarrassed. "He can be scary, but he's really skilled. I'm pretty honoured he's mentoring me." She ran her hands through the red ponytail draped over her shoulder. "Come talk to me once we're done here and we can talk about college."

"I will, thank you!" Luke replied with a nod.

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My dear Luke,

I'm glad to hear your birthday was an enjoyable one! That was indeed good timing that the parcel arrived the day before; I was worried I had left sending it too late. And your Halloween celebration does indeed sound like it was a harrowing experience. It is fortunate the girl was found so quickly.
Please do discuss your university options with Mr Wright thoroughly before making a decision. To be honest, I had expected you to consider Gressenheller as an option before I sent the reference materials with your gift, and was wondering why you hadn't asked for anything. Regardless, if the American system is anything like ours, you'll be needing to send out applications soon, so a decision as to where to prioritise must be made quickly. I'm always willing to act as a reference for your application here if you want to apply, and I'm sure Flora and Alfendi would appreciate seeing you on a more regular basis, although it would come at the expense of your family having the pleasure of your company. I can't imagine Trucy would like that at all, if I remember rightly her past reactions to being separated from you for any length of time.

Alfendi has taken to parking himself in my study and drawing while I work. I've had to watch him to ensure he doesn't try to draw on anything other than the paper we give him, but it's nice to know he's not far away. Flora tells me he likes to play cooking or mealtimes with her, and he very deliberately follows us if we leave him alone in a room. It's amazing the little things you notice that make you realise a baby is growing up. Now I understand why Clark and Brenda were always so excited to talk about you non-stop before you all moved to Misthallery!

Don't be afraid to call me if you need to discuss your university options in person. Differing time zones permitting, I will try to be available for you if you have any questions.

The usual puzzles are enclosed.

Your friend,

Professor Hershel Layton

27th November, 2021

Dear Professor Layton,

I've been doing a lot of research into universities and veterinary medicine degrees over the past few weeks. It looks like I'd have to spend time away from home anyway, since the nearest accredited university may be in California, but it's half the state away, and I haven't measured it but I'm almost sure that's at least the entire length of Britain from top to bottom. The other problem though is how to transfer my schooling here back to England and I guess the other way once I'm done? I haven't checked yet if a vet degree from overseas would be recognised in America, it only just now occurred to me it might be necessary. I did look at the requirement paths and I noticed it takes almost twice as long to become a vet here as it does in England! You have to take two separate courses, a 'pre-med' degree and then the veterinary medicine degree itself, while the information from Gressenheller you sent me says it's just the one course over there! This is so confusing. I think I need to pin Papa down and discuss it with him more to work out what to do. His advice last time was just to research my options first, but I feel like that's only made it harder.

One thing I have done since my birthday is finally look into local animal shelters. I found one about thirty minutes from home, and they've signed me up as a volunteer there, so I'm now dropping in every weekend and any weekdays I have off from school! Papa had to give his permission for me to work, and I'm obviously not getting paid, but it's a lot of fun and I've made some good friends there already! In addition to the animals and other volunteers, there are the receptionists and the boss, and the two vets. One of them is currently studying at that university I mentioned, so I was asking
her about it to see if it helped me decide what to do. They also have a tradition at the shelter that everyone who works there has an animal-themed nickname, so everyone has dubbed me 'Northpaw' because I'm right-handed and I told them my name was 'Wright'. I thought it would make the whole thing easier if I didn't have to explain why Papa's name was different from mine.

Mum and Dad were always talking about me when I was a baby? I suppose I shouldn't be surprised, but I didn't know they did that. Was any of it written down? Do you remember anything they were particularly happy about? Or upset?

I've been too busy to think about puzzles, so I haven't got any to send this time. Sorry about that, Professor. Thank you for offering to let me call you though. I might take you up on it, maybe when I talk to Papa about what I'm doing with my education.

Your friend and apprentice,

Luke Triton

5th December, 2021

- END OF 2021 -

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
A Surprise Trip

Time is running out Pearly. If we can’t get miss Maya here, can we get Daddy to Kurain again?

But if all of you come here, Mr Nick and Mystic Maya won’t get alone time! We have to get him to come alone, and I will stay out of their way!

You can come here!!! I can get out the sleeping bag and you can stay in my room and Polly can babysit us except we’ll have to do it over a weekend so he won’t be at school instead.

And give Mystic Maya and Mr Nick a romantic weekend alone! It sounds so perfect! ^o^

THEN ITS SETTLED~! Lets do it this weekend! Will miss Maya be free?

Oh yes, I can ask the elders to keep her skedyuel open, like she does when you come up to visit!

Excellent! I can get the train tickets with my pocket money and surprise Daddy with them :D.

I think I will wait to tell Mystic Maya until I leave, so she can be surprised when Mr Nick gets here!

Oh and we must try not to look excited. I think I may have just made Mystic Maya suspishus already. :;

Hmmm :/h Keeping secrets from Daddy is hard, but I think I can do it! Operation Get A New Mommy is go!

*o* I forgot Mr Nick had Mystic Maya’s magatama! Good luck, Trucy!

Don’t worry about me, soldier C: I can handle Daddy, you look after miss Maya!

January 15, 11:09AM

Wright Talent Agency

Kitchen

Phoenix was beginning to regret getting Trucy her own phone.

Sure, it had seemed like a good idea at the time, after she had managed to lose her friend in the park last Halloween. He and Maya had laughed at the realisation that Pearl was similarly getting her own phone for different reasons, and wouldn’t it be the cutest thing to see their faces light up as they were given each other’s numbers?

Then Trucy had shoved a backpack she had packed herself into Phoenix’s hands and showed him a ticket for the next train to Kurain.

Phoenix frowned, looking sceptically at the bag in his hands. "Truce, did Pearls set you up to
Trucy scoffed, crossing her arms. "Nobody 'set me up'!" she protested. "Pearly and I agreed that you and Miss Maya need some time together! You aren't making any effort to find us a new Mommy anyway!"

Apollo and Luke, stood not far away, glanced at each other in confusion. "That's what this is about?" Apollo cried, equal parts surprised and exasperated. "You want to hook Dad up with Maya!"

Phoenix sighed, rubbing his forehead. "Truce, I thought you were already over this..."

"Exactly," Luke added, raising an eyebrow as he gave his sister a look. "Why are you doing this now?"

Trucy grinned innocently. "Well, we can't have Polly babysit me and Pearly if he's at school!" she explained.

Apollo shook his head fiercely, almost laughing in disbelief. "Oh no you don't! Leave me out of this!" Waving his hands, he promptly turned around and headed upstairs, cape flapping behind him.

Phoenix again sighed, wishing it was as easy for him to deny any involvement in his daughter's plot. "Trucy, please tell me you haven't arranged for Pearls to stay here while you've got me up in Kurain..."

"Yup!" Trucy chirped, then pushed her train ticket into his hands and pulled her father towards the door. "Now come on, Daddy! You need to get to the train station before your train leaves!"

To Phoenix's surprise, Luke ran up to the pair, helping Trucy hurry their father out the door. "May as well go, Papa," he said, a smile on his face. "No use wasting Trucy and Pearl's effort to set it all up!"

Phoenix shot Luke a glare, standing very deliberately still. "You didn't help them with this, did you?"

"Of course not!" Luke replied, offended, although he quickly smiled. "But you'll say hi to Maya for us while you're there, won't you?"

Groaning in exasperation, Phoenix gave up fighting his children and headed out the door. "You two are so grounded when I get back!" he threatened over his shoulder, but the pair only giggled as they waved goodbye.

January 15, 11:38AM

Wright Talent Agency
Reception

Pearl looked around in awe as she was shown through the front door of the Agency, taking in how much the room had changed since her last visit almost three years previous. Various magic paraphernalia still dotted the walls and shelves, as did photos and drawings of Trucy and Apollo in their stage outfits, usually in the middle of a trick. In a corner was the piano Maya had brought in long ago, a portrait on top while a violin case rested on the stool, a brand new music stand stood
nearby with a host of music books resting open to their owner's favourite pieces. The desk that had once held an array of scribbled ideas from Trucy now housed a much tidier array of Apollo's papers and books, the teen having claimed the reception as his place to work. On the reception desk was a stack of fliers, which Phoenix had recently redesigned, featuring a colourful lineless pattern of two top hats and a ribbon of music notes encircling them, coming from a violin on one side and a piano keyboard on the other. Underneath, a new text-box proudly proclaimed the magician pair were now doing matinee performances at the Wonder Bar.

Pearl tore her eyes away from the fliers on the desk, walking over to where Charley stood next to the door and running a hand along his leaves. "I was expecting things to have changed here," she said, "but I wasn't expecting things to have changed quite so much."

Luke and Trucy glanced at each other, each feeling guilty for their own parts in the transformation of their family home since they moved in. "It sort of looked like a boring office when Daddy adopted me, though," Trucy explained, shrugging. "A talent agency has to look fun and inviting!"

Luke rubbed at the back of his head. "Actually, now I have the two of you here," he said, pausing to sternly cross his arms, looking between the two girls. "I thought we agreed trying to push Papa and Maya together would just push them further away! Why are you two forcing them to be romantic!?"

The girls winced. "We got impatient," Trucy admitted, wringing her hands.

"We're sorry, Luke," Pearl added, staring at the floor.

Luke sighed, but gave the girls a smile. "I suppose I can't blame you for being impatient. Papa and Maya haven't really had much of an opportunity to just be friends, have they?" He laughed. "If nothing else, I suppose they can have fun spending time together!"

"And get a chance to finally confess their feelings!" Pearl added, hands clasped together while her eyes sparkled hopefully.

Trucy squealed, running to Pearl's side. "Yeah! We can make a ring for Daddy to propose with!"

Luke frowned as the girls giggled together. "Um, they're not even a couple yet," he pointed out, but the girls weren't listening, already running off further into the house. Shaking his head, he locked the front door and moved to follow them.

In the kitchen, Luke found Apollo had ventured downstairs and was now standing forlornly in the middle of the room, Trucy and Pearl standing either side of him as Trucy asked her brother an endless series of questions about how he planned to be watching over them until Phoenix's return the next day. "Are you going to force us to go to bed? Maybe Pearly and I want to have a sleepover and stay up all night! You're not going to make me do homework, are you? That would be rude while we have a guest over! Are we allowed to go out to the park?"

"Better question," Apollo interrupted, pushing through the girls and walking over to Luke as he spotted him coming in. "We have a performance tonight and two tomorrow. What's Pearly planning to do while we're working?" He spun around and glared at the pair, arms crossed. "Did you even think of that?"

The girls looked at each other blankly. "N-no, I guess we didn't," Pearl admitted.
"Yeah," Trucy muttered in agreement, crossing her arms and tapping a foot in thought. "I suppose you could come watch us? Except Polly can't look after you from backstage..."

Luke giggled. "I can do it while you two are busy," he pointed out.

"Oh, that's a good idea!" Pearl cried, hands pressed together. "And could we go watch one of your performances?" she asked Apollo.

Apollo and Luke shared an amused glance. "Don't see why not," Apollo said, shrugging. "You okay to sit through yet another of our boring old acts, Luke?"

"Sure," Luke laughed. "You promise not to try and call me up as a volunteer?"

"I make no promises," Apollo replied with a smirk.

"Yay!" Trucy cheered, bouncing in place before turning to Pearl. "C'mon Pearly, let's get my room set up for our sleepover!"

Pearl nodded, replying "Okay!" before following Trucy up the stairs. "You're in my old room, aren't you?"

Apollo watched the two disappear before sighing in relief. "Man, I'm glad we got that sorted out," he said, turning to Luke with a suspicious glare. "Did you have anything to do with this?"

"Of course not!" Luke immediately replied, offended. "Why does everyone think I did!?"

"Maybe because you've told me before that you thought Dad and Maya were a couple when you first met them?" Apollo pointed out, one eyebrow raised.

Luke blushed, shrugging. "Well, yeah, but..." He frowned. "Wait, Papa doesn't know that, so why did he think I was involved in this!?"

"Probably because you're terrible at keeping secrets even without Dad's precious maggy-tama thing," Apollo replied, smiling. "It's beyond obvious you agree with them." He paused before giving his brother a smug smirk. "You're not jealous because Trucy and Pearly didn't involve you in their 'brilliant' plan, are you?"

"Very funny," Luke muttered, looking away to hide that he actually was, though only a little bit. He turned and headed back out towards reception. "I'm going to practise my violin for a bit."

"Don't let me catch you sending 'romance' tips to Dad and Maya, huh?" Apollo laughed.

"Stop it!"

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Phoenix was somewhat surprised to find Maya waiting for him at the bus-stop as he arrived, nervously pressing her palms together as she gave him an embarrassed smile. "Hi," Phoenix greeted her, waving.

"Hey," Maya replied, giving him a small bow and pausing only momentarily before exploding with, "I'm so sorry about Pearly, I had no idea she was going to do this, I only just found her letter!"

Phoenix laughed, equally embarrassed. "Hey, I had no idea what Trucy was doing, too. And I've got the magatama!"

Maya sighed. "Yeah, I guess so," she admitted, watching the bus driving back down to the train station. "I s'pose I'd better show you in then? At least it was just a visit they arranged this time."

Nodding, Phoenix smiled in agreement, pulling his beanie off his head. "Sure. I should probably take a look at what Trucy decided I would need while I was here." He gestured to his backpack with a thumb.

Maya led Phoenix across the road and into Fey Manor, where the two paused for a moment as Phoenix dropped his backpack and sat down to remove his shoes. "Any idea what might have prompted them to do this?" Phoenix asked.

"Probably just both of them talking over the phone," Maya pointed out, referencing how both girls had received their own phones the previous Christmas. She sighed. "And we thought it was so funny when we arranged to give them each other's number..."

Phoenix kicked off his second shoe. "You think Luke's involved? He seemed awfully supportive of them kicking me up here."


Phoenix paused a moment in thought before standing up. "Why would Trucy care?" he pointed out, deciding to change the subject rather than discuss his suspicions concerning Luke. "Pearls has probably been talking to them." He rested his hands on his hips. "Apollo certainly seemed to already know what they want us to do."

"Oh yeah, Pearly," Maya sighed, leading Phoenix further into the house towards the guest room that was usually reserved for him when the Wrights visited. "I'm sorry about that..."

Phoenix followed his friend in silence, and, when they reached his room, was quick to dump his backpack on the bed, gesturing for Maya to sit down with him. "That's my other question," he said. "How exactly did Pearls get it in her head that we were 'special someones'? She was already going on about it the day I met her!"

Maya scratched at an ear, nervously entering the room. "Well," she mumbled, "I suppose I should finally admit..." She sighed, then sat down next to a curious Phoenix. "I... sort of accidentally implied..."
Phoenix nodded, remembering those few months well. He'd fought as hard as he could to keep Edgeworth from wrongly going to jail, and Maya had been fighting equally hard the whole time to try and channel Mia to help, but was simply unable to do it through lack of practise. After an emotional conversation at the train station, she'd promised to come back once she'd finished her training, but that still left Phoenix in the empty office day after day, all alone and directionless for a full six months. If it hadn't been for a timely interruption by the Skye sisters, Phoenix was sure he'd have moped back and forth between the office and his old flat until the day he reunited with Maya. "What, was it the story of how I defended you for murder?" he asked. "I suppose she could have seen Mia asking us to look after each other as some 'destined love' thing."

Maya looked away, blushing. "A-actually," she replied, unsure of her words, "it was... less what I said and more... how I said it..."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"I..." Maya took a deep breath, staring at the floor. "I sort of... used to have a big crush on you."

While Maya turned even redder, Phoenix's eyes widened. "You had a crush on me?"

"Well, can you blame me!?" Maya shot back, finally looking up to meet her shocked friend's eyes as her skin colour slowly returned to normal. "Sis told me all about her talented junior partner, then suddenly she's dead, and I thought everything was hopeless and I was going to die too, but you insisted on defending me despite us being total strangers and won, not only saving my life but being the first person to beat Edgeworth in court, and to top it all off you were a really great guy too!" She groaned in frustration. "I think I even told you you'd made me a fan!"

At that, Phoenix couldn't resist a snort of laughter, the shock wearing off. "Well, you did start up that fan club," he pointed out, gently teasing her. "Doesn't that technically make you still a fan?"

Maya crossed her arms, looking away again. "I just did that out of pity," she insisted. "Because you were always under-appreciated by everyone."

Phoenix found it amusing how she was apparently unable to quickly construct an excuse that actually mocked her closest friend. He was about to open his mouth to respond when he saw five Psyche-Locks materialising around her, and instead scoffed. "Yeah, don't know why you're trying to hide that you're a fan," he pointed out, reaching into his jeans pocket to pull out the glowing green magatama, which he examined closely. "I actually forgot I still had this on me. I would've left it with Pearls if I'd remembered."

Maya only blushed, tensing up as the Psyche-Locks didn't even shake.

The lack of response instantly killed Phoenix's teasing mood. "Maya?"

"It's fine," Maya quietly insisted, then turned to Phoenix with a forced smile. "That's what Apollo and Luke say all the time, right? It's fine! Let's talk about something else."

Phoenix frowned. "Maya, please tell me what's wrong," he replied, twisting on the bed to give his friend his heartfelt request, the magatama clutched tightly in his hand. "If something's worrying you, I want to help."

"Ugh!" Maya cried, turning away with a pout. "It's nothing! Just because I'm keeping a secret, it doesn't mean anything bad is going on!" When Phoenix only crossed his arms in response, she shot him a glare over her shoulder. "You care that much, try breaking them. I can guarantee you'll be
disappointed."

Phoenix stared at Maya for a few moments before sighing in defeat. 'She's right, I'll have to try breaking these to figure out what's going on. It's almost hard to focus through all the 'what ifs' though. And where am I going to find the evidence to back up my guesses?' Rubbing at his chin in thought, he mused aloud, "Well, my first guess was that you were hiding being a fan of mine, but I suppose I should have known better than to think such an innocent secret was behind five Psyche-Locks." When Maya didn't react to the comment, he reflected on their conversation a little longer, wondering where to start. "I suppose, going backwards in order of what we've been talking about... Does it have anything to do with that crush you mentioned?"

The five Psyche-Locks shook as though they were about to break, Maya's posture tightening up as she firmly kept her back to Phoenix. After a moment, the Locks again stilled, remaining attached to the illusionary chains surrounding Maya in her seat.

"I'll take that as a yes, I guess," Phoenix muttered as he went pale, trying not to sound as suddenly overwhelmed as he felt.

"You could say that," Maya whispered, head bowed as one of the Psyche-Locks, to Phoenix's surprise, simply faded away instead of shattering. He wondered if the unusual disappearance was Maya consciously deciding to put less effort into keeping her secret, rather than having the detail dragged out of her. "You're on the right track, anyway."

Phoenix sat for a while in thought. After a long pause, he stood up. "I think I can guess the answer," he quietly said, dropping the magatama onto the bed. "I'll leave you alone."

Maya looked around just in time to see Phoenix walk past her, heading straight out the door and into the hallway outside, out of sight. "Nick...?" Her arms moved up to hug herself tightly as it registered Phoenix had actually walked off and left her alone. "Oh no... He... He knows..." Biting her lip to keep from suddenly bursting into tears, Maya pushed herself to her feet, feeling a sudden urge to run far away and hide, although she would settle for locking herself in her room. 'Why did I tell him!? What was I thinking!?" As she lamented not having any work to do this weekend thanks to Pearl's meddling, the Master of Kurain took wobbly steps out of the guest room and burst into a sprint towards the master bedroom, hoping she wouldn't pass Phoenix on the way. It wasn't merely that she didn't want him to see her crying, but she didn't want him to see her at all. 'He's guessed my crush never really went away, I know it! He's walked off because it's shameful that I couldn't change how I feel even after all this time! How can we be friends with this hanging over us!?'

When Maya reached her bedroom, she slammed the door closed and threw herself onto her bed, hugging her pillow as she let out her tears, muffling them into the soft fabric. It was going to be a long time before she felt up to making human contact again.

View the Court Record
Fey Manor was unusually quiet that day, its only two inhabitants carefully avoiding each other as they sat silently in their individual bedrooms. It was only once the sun had set that their alone time was finally up; Maya ventured out into the kitchen to make dinner, and, upon finishing, rang the customary dinner bell to alert the household of the evening meal. When Phoenix arrived, he found her already eating, avoiding eye contact and conversation, so he silently sat down on the floor cushion opposite her and reached for his fork. Instead of eating however, he ignored the hunger eating at his stomach (he had missed lunch, after all) and looked across the table at his friend. "Luke wanted me to say 'hi', by the way."

Maya's eyes screwed shut, and she slammed her chopsticks to the table, staring red-faced at Phoenix. "Do you hate me!?"

Phoenix blinked, confused. "H-huh?"

"You asked me about my secret, and it wasn't a yes-or-no answer, but you figured it out anyway, didn't you!?" Maya continued, looking more and more visibly stressed with every word she said. "You hate me, I know you do! Because I can't control how I feel and I've tried to stop but I can't help it even though I know it can never happen and I don't deserve to be your friend!"

Phoenix, still a little nonplussed over the sudden emotional outburst, rushed to his feet and around the table, offering his friend a calming hug. "Maya, it's okay, calm down!" She clung to his chest the moment he sat on the floor beside her, crying ugly tears into his hoodie. "I could never hate you! Why did you think I would?"

Maya sniffed, hiding her face in shame. "You walked off in disgust, didn't you?"

"What!? Of course not!" Phoenix cried in surprise. "I..." He paused, blushing as he pondered how best to put his complicated thoughts on the matter. He settled on the nearest believable excuse, one with a convenient amount of truth in it. "I realised your secret was a personal one and I had no right to pry. I walked off because..." He paused again. "I... needed some time. To figure out what I thought about it." He shook his head. "I'd never hate you, Maya. You mean too much to me."

There was a short pause before Maya nodded, hugging her friend tightly as she occasionally sniffed to herself. "When Pearly gets back," she whispered, words muffled as she spoke into Phoenix's chest, "I'll talk to her. Tell her why we could never be... what she thinks we are."

Phoenix smiled. "And why would you do that?"

Maya paused, confused, and pulled out of the hug to direct her tear-stained face at Phoenix. "Huh?"

Shrugging, Phoenix tried not to grin. "Well, the kids see you as a mother anyway, don't they? Apollo and Trucy, I mean. May as well let them have a mom while their other one is missing. Luke too, possibly." He cleared his throat, looking away from Maya's thoughtful face. "Plus I kinda feel the
same way about you so I can't blame you," he muttered under his breath, pretending he'd said nothing as he immediately followed it up with, "And Pearls would stop bugging us if we let her believe she'd succeeded anyway, so-"

"What was that?" Maya asked, smirking as she interrupted his speech. "Did you just say what I think you said?"

Phoenix feigned ignorance, trying not to blush. "What, about Pearls not bugging us, or asking Luke if he'd take you on as a second mom?" He shrugged, forcing a mischievous smile. "I know it's shocking, but he accepted me as a dad, so anything's possible."

Maya laughed, shaking her head as she whacked Phoenix's chest with the back of a hand. "Inbetween that! You know full well what I'm talking about!"

"Nope, 'fraid not," Phoenix insisted, half-jokingly, rubbing at the back of his neck as his face turned pink. "Pretty sure you just imagined it."

"I did not!" Maya replied, laughing. "You said you felt the same way, you dork!" She laughed a moment more, watching Phoenix blush as he avoided eye contact, then clasped her hands together, grinning at her friend. "Just so we're on the same page," she said, gathering up all of her courage. "I love you, Nick."

Phoenix paused only a moment before meeting her eyes, arm lowered back down to rest in his lap. He leaned towards her a little, a part of him still nervous about being overheard despite being totally alone with her. "I love you too, Maya," he whispered.

To Phoenix's surprise, Maya squealed loudly, wriggling in glee as she gave Phoenix a quick hug, feeling it was wrong to do much more just yet. "Wow, it's such a relief to get that out finally!" she cried. "Like, I was thinking we'd legitimately never discuss this, and here we are!"

Chuckling, Phoenix nodded in agreement. "It is a bit of a relief, isn't it? What have we been doing all these years when we should have been having this conversation?" he joked. 'Including putting it off by saying we took too long to get to this point?'

Maya shifted in her seat, grinning as she turned her back to Phoenix and leaned on him like a chair, his arms automatically moving to support her. "I took ages even figuring it out myself," she admitted. "I mean, I always knew I had a crush on you, but after a few years I noticed how long we'd known each other and it was like 'at what point has it stopped being a crush, Maya?'." She huffed, twisting her head to look up at Phoenix. "Y'know?"

"I can guess," Phoenix replied, laughing to himself. "I was in denial about it until... well, today, I suppose."

"Today?" Maya repeated, surprised. "Really?"

"In retrospect, it's a bit obvious," he reasoned, more to himself than Maya. "I mean, the way I reacted all those times I thought I'd lost you forever... I think I knew, but I was pretending I didn't, because it hurt to think it would never happen." He winced. "Also... it kinda felt like it would be betraying Mia to think of you that way. I figure I've disappointed her enough by now, so what's one more thing?"

At his confession, Maya frowned, then pushed herself back up and spun to face Phoenix. "Is this the real reason you've been refusing to just admit to her what happened with your badge?"

"What? No!" Phoenix cried, crossing his arms defensively. "I'm just not ready to tell her yet!"
"It's been almost three years, Nick," Maya pointed out. "I talk to Sis once a year on my birthday, when Pearly channels her for me and we spend some quality time together like we used to." She paused a moment, fiddling with her hands in her lap. "She always asks after you, y'know."

Phoenix looked away guiltily.

Maya thought for a moment, then reached out to rub Phoenix's arm in comfort. "In the interest of not keeping any more secrets," she admitted, "I couldn't lie to her face. I've already told her basically what happened."

Phoenix sighed, now feeling doubly terrible. "Sorry to make you have to be the one to do that," he mumbled. "I should have been the one to break it to her."

"She doesn't hate you, if you're wondering," Maya continued, a small smile on her face. "She does want to hear it from you, but I think she's also dying to hear about the kids." She giggled. "Dying literally!"

It took a moment for the joke to register through Phoenix's moping, and he shot an amused glare at Maya. "That was terrible."

"Made ya smile, though!" Maya pointed out, moments before a loud gurgling cut through their conversation and the pair looked down at Phoenix's stomach in surprise.

Phoenix grinned in embarrassment, looking over at the abandoned table holding their half-finished and untouched dinners respectively. "I think that's a sign we should eat our food before it gets cold."

Maya shrugged, grinning in amusement. "Yeah, probably," she agreed. She watched Phoenix walking back over to his seat on the opposite side of the table, quickly tucking into his noodles, and smiled as she picked up her chopsticks to follow his lead. "We should probably also talk about... well, us," she pointed out. "Are we actually 'special someones' now, like Pearly's always said?"

Phoenix mused on the question as he swallowed his mouthful. "Isn't it still shameful for the Master of Kurain to be involved with the Forgin' Attorney?" he replied, somewhat bitterly.

Maya scoffed. "Who cares!? You're my best friend in the whole world... or, well, boyfriend now? And I don't care who knows it or what they think!"

"Even Kristoph Gavin?" Phoenix pointed out, eyebrow raised.

"Even him!" Maya huffed, cheeks puffing out. "Seriously, what can that guy do to me that I haven't already lived through? And how would it impact your investigation, anyway!?"

Phoenix rolled his eyes. "One, he might still hurt you, and two..." He paused, having to recall if he had any reasons from years before. "I'm sure I had a reason for two. I'll get back to two."

Maya scoffed. "Why would he possibly hurt me? He's, what, forged some evidence and framed you for it? Doesn't sound like a violent person to me!"

Although annoyed, Phoenix was forced to concede that point. "Even so, I'd never met the guy before and he very likely arranged to take me down simply because Enigmar changed attorneys at the last minute. Isn't Kurain in a bad enough position that he could easily do the same to you should Trucy mention how close you two are?"

Maya picked at her noodles. "Hmm. I guess that is a thing," she agreed, then scowled. "Stupid Kurain. Wasn't enough to take my mom, my dad, my aunt, my uncle, my sister and my cousins, was
it? Has to take *Nick* too!"

Phoenix gave her a sympathetic smile. "I'm not going anywhere, I promise," he told her. "Let's just finish eating and we can discuss this properly then."

[View the Court Record]
After dinner, and a long talk, Maya took Phoenix's hand and led him to her bedroom. Cushions were placed opposite each other on the floor, and the pair sat down, Maya carefully adjusting her robes to cause the least discomfort for her sister's larger frame. "You ready?" she asked.

Phoenix nervously scratched his neck as he made himself comfortable on the cushion. "We're not doing this in the Channelling Chamber?"

"Pfft, you think Mia's the kind of spirit to cause trouble?" Maya replied, laughing. "We've done this a ton of times before, remember?"

"Yeah," Phoenix mumbled, embarrassed, "I just thought you'd told me it was some rule that every channelling in Kurain had to..."

Maya shook her head. "Mia's a Fey. She doesn't count," she insisted, then took a deep breath, preparing herself. "Ready?"

Phoenix thought a moment, then slowly nodded, staring at the floor as he pushed his hands into his hoodie pockets. He was still nervous about confronting Mia after all this time, knowing she would be disappointed in him, but Maya's assurances that everything would be okay had given him the confidence to agree to see her tonight... not that the conversation he'd just finished with Maya about their complicated relationship was making it easier to bear.

"Phoenix?"

Phoenix just barely resisted a wince at the sound of his mentor's voice, and slowly looked up to meet Mia's eyes. "H-hi."

Mia briefly paused, pushing Maya's fringe to one side as she furrowed her brow in Phoenix's direction. "Is something the matter?"

'Ooh yeah, Maya probably told her to act surprised when I finally got around to confronting her on this.' Sighing, Phoenix looked back to the floor. "I know you know. Maya said she already told you."

There was a short pause before Mia replied, "I would have preferred to hear it from you."

"I know." Phoenix wasn't sure if it was possible to feel more guilty than he did right now.

"You could always elaborate on what Maya told me," Mia continued. "She said something about forged evidence and that you'd been stripped of your badge, but not much more." She paused, then quietly added, "You really worried her."

Phoenix nodded, then forced himself to meet his mentor's concerned gaze. "Long story short, someone slipped me forged evidence and told the prosecution I was going to present it. I'd run out of
options, so I... I didn't think, I just threw it out as a last-ditch attempt to get my client acquitted." He shook his head, looking away again. "The prosecution jumped on me, brought out the guy who'd even made the damn thing. Then, to top it all off, my client vanished from the courtroom before he could be declared guilty. I'm pretty sure people were thinking I helped him, too." He sighed. "They took my badge that afternoon. Only one guy on the board wanted to give me a second chance, and he offered his help later, but..." He looked up again, seeing Mia's hand resting on her chin as she paid him her full attention, the neutral expression on her face marred only by the slight furrowing of her brow. "Edgeworth helped me out investigating what happened, and we don't have any evidence to prove it, but it's looking like this guy was the one to betray me in the first place. His name's Kristoph Gavin, but I don't think he was practising yet when you died."

Mia shook her head. "No, I've not heard of him," she confirmed. "Although working to convict someone with not much evidence? That's a struggle I can certainly relate to."

Phoenix softly smiled at the memory of how they'd taken down Redd White in the courtroom, only a matter of days after Mia's murder, although the smile quickly died. "He's not as bad as White," he explained. "Not a murderer, I mean. The guards at the detention center apparently saw him talking with my client before he hired me, and he's the brother of the prosecutor who cornered me in court. Edgeworth says the prosecutor checks out, and the guy left the country after anyway, so there's really no-one else we could say is responsible."

"But not enough evidence to convince a court," Mia concluded, frowning in thought, "you're right. What's your strategy then?"

"Pretend I know nothing," Phoenix replied. "Kristoph drops by my new place of work every so often, and we've invited each other to dinner a few times, so I think I can say he considers me a friend." He shrugged. "Basically, I'm biding my time until I can either find the evidence to clear my name... or he finally slips up big time."

Mia thought to herself in silence, nodding absently in agreement.

"Edgeworth also has a big plan for what we could do," Phoenix continued. "We're working together on a new system of court that might allow us to convict Kristoph even with what we have."

Mia looked intrigued, though stern. "That sounds like a potentially dangerous thing to be able to do," she pointed out.

Phoenix shrugged sheepishly. "We are still working on it. In the meantime, I'm also trying to track down my former client. If I could just get him to tell me the truth, I might be able to clear his name... as well as some other things." He returned to staring at the ground, leaving a long pause before he resumed talking. "You're disappointed in me, right?"

Mia didn't reply immediately. "I don't think anyone could beat you up about this more than you already have," she said. "I am sad circumstances have left you in this position, but it's very heartening that you have a plan, and friends to help you." She gave Phoenix a smile as he carefully lifted his head back up. "But, of course, that isn't the only thing you have yet to tell me about, is it?"

After a short, confused pause, Phoenix broke into a grin. "Oh, right, the kids!" He reached into a pocket in his jeans and pulled out a small photo, which he handed over to an interested Mia. "That's them! Apollo's the oldest, on the right, then that's Luke on the left and Trucy in the middle! She's the youngest," he explained, almost giddy at the rare chance to gush about the trio. "This was them the first weekend after Apollo and Luke's adoption, so they're quite a bit older now. I should arrange a new photo actually. Oh, and Trucy and Apollo are talented magicians! They have a show every weekend, in this bar not far from the office, and they always draw in a crowd! Luke's very smart too,
he sometimes performs with his violin to help out with bringing money in, and he's going to study to become a vet once he finishes school in July. He's already skipped a few years, so I like to think of him as a prodigy in his own right-

Mia laughed, surprising Phoenix into halting his impassioned spiel. "And to think, you're the same man who couldn't connect with a seven-year-old boy back in... how long ago was that? Five, six years ago? And here you are now, a proud father of three!"

Phoenix blushed. "W-well... They're my kids. They may not be biologically, but they're mine all the same. I can't help but be proud of 'em."

"Every father should," Mia replied, smiling fondly at her former student. She handed him back the photo. "Maybe one day I could meet them in person."

"Yeah," Phoenix agreed, casting a fond look at the photo before putting it away again. "A-actually, Mia... there is one more thing."

Mia raised an eyebrow, arms crossed under her ample bosom. "Something else?"

"The only reason I'm up here this weekend," Phoenix explained, "is because of Pearls. She's been talking to Trucy you see, and apparently Luke too..."

"Ah," Mia sighed. "Yes, I can imagine." She smiled, amused. "So now you have two little girls and a teenage boy trying to set you up romantically with my little sister?"

Phoenix nervously rubbed at the back of his head, looking away as his face started turning red. "Mmm," he mumbled, biting his lip as he failed to find an adequate reply. "Yeah, about that... Maya and I were talking today and..."

"And they've succeeded?"

Phoenix winced, looking up at Mia's knowing smile. "Y-you're not disappointed...?"

Mia laughed. "Why would I be?" she replied. "Maya's almost twenty-three, she can make her own decisions," She looked off into the distance thoughtfully. "She's nearly as old as I was when I met Diego." Smiling mischievously, Mia gave Phoenix a wink. "She's certainly older than you were when you last had a girlfriend."

Groaning at the thought of the red-head she was referring to, Phoenix hid his face behind a hand. "D-don't remind me," he muttered.

"Not to mention," Mia continued, "if there's anyone I can trust to look after Maya, it's you, Phoenix. You've always given it your all protecting her, and I don't expect that to change if you decide to 'upgrade' your relationship, in a sense. And, in return, there's no-one I can trust to look after you more than her. You're good for each other. Far more than I expected when I first asked you to look after each other."

Phoenix thought for a moment, hands clutched together in his lap.

"Of course, there is the problem of your and Kurain's reputations," Mia pointed out with a concerned frown, hand brushing against her cheek. "You two thought about that, didn't you?"

Phoenix scoffed. "Of course we did," he replied. "Maya wants to go ahead no matter what anyone thinks, but I've convinced her we can still do this while keeping everything quiet." He smiled. "She's actually coming down into the city with me tomorrow, to break it to the kids. She's going to offer to
be their mother, I think."

Mia slowly smiled, marveling at how much her sister's life was about to change. After a pause, she looked around. "Is there any paper around? I'd like to leave a message for her myself."

"Uh, yeah, over here," Phoenix said, getting to his feet and leading the former spirit medium to Maya's desk against the wall. He gestured to a piece of paper and pen set out ready to be used, explaining, "Maya figured you might want to, so she left that out for you."

Mia nodded, pulling the seat out from the desk but pausing before sitting down, turning to Phoenix. "You two will look after each other as well as those kids of yours, won't you?"

Phoenix gave her an offended look. "Of course I will! Maya, too! What do you take us for?"

"Good," she replied, giving her former student a loving smile. "Maybe I'll talk to you again soon."

"Until then," Phoenix said, nodding his goodbye with a grateful smile before turning to leave. "Tell Maya I'll be in my room if she wants me again tonight," he asked.

Mia sat at the desk, laughing to herself. "I will," she promised. "Until next time, Phoenix."

View the Court Record
"Phoenix?"

"Oh, hey Chief. Do we have a case?"

"Afraid not. Are you free tonight?"

"... Why?"

"My sister's coming into town, so I thought maybe we could all go out to dinner and introduce you to each other. If you're busy, we can-"

"Oh, no, I'm not doing anything. Was just planning on lazing around my apartment, really."

"Ah, that's good! So it's settled, then."

"... You're really going to introduce me to this fabled sister of yours?"

"'Fabled'? Haha! She's said the same thing about you, y'know."

"Really? What's so 'fabled' about me?"

"You'll have to ask her that. Come back to the office around nine? We can go out together from here."

"Sure, I'll be back here at nine."

"Then it's a date."

September 5, 9:08PM

Fey & Co. Law Offices
Reception

The office was unusually dark when Phoenix arrived, out of breath from the sprint as he'd raced to regain lost time. He glanced at his watch as he leaned against the door, closing it behind him, and groaned. 'Still late!' Chastising himself, he looked around the empty room, registering the quiet darkness. 'Guess they left without me.' Sighing, he moved to round his desk, intending to leave an apology note for when Mia returned, but something halted him in his tracks. 'What's that smell...?' He sniffed for a moment, then froze, eyes going wide. 'Blood...? Mia!' Barely pausing for thought, the twenty-three-year-old ran to the office door in front of him, pushing at the wood panelling and throwing it open.

Underneath the window, sat against the wall where the glow from the streetlights outside didn't quite
reach her, was Mia Fey, slumped and lifeless with an ominous red stain in her long brown hair. At her side was crouched a teenage girl in strange purple robes, fearfully reaching out towards the woman's face as her eyes filled with tears. "Sis..."

Phoenix didn't give the girl a second thought. "Chief!" he shouted, racing into the room towards the unfortunate scene.

The girl was up like a shot, staring at Phoenix with wide eyes as she jumped back, towards the spray of broken glass on the carpet behind her. "W-who...?"

Torn between checking on his mentor and curiosity towards the strange girl, Phoenix paused, looking her up and down. "Who are you?" he replied to her unspoken question.

The girl was breathing hard, and Phoenix worried she would faint. "I... I didn't..." After a short pause, her eyes rolled up into her head and she collapsed.

"Whoa, whoa!" Phoenix reacted quickly, just managing to catch the teen before she fell onto the broken glass below. 'Just my luck. She's out cold.' He looked between the girl and Mia for a few moments before sighing and hoisting the girl into his arms, carrying her back into reception. Opposite his desk, next to the front door, was a black leather sofa, and he carefully laid her down on the soft surface. 'I have a feeling she's not going to try and run,' Phoenix decided, looking at the girl's strange outfit once more. 'I should probably get back to the chief, though.' Wincing to himself, he ran back into the office, stepping over the mess littered across the floor as he made his way to Mia's side, crouching much like the girl had been.

"Ch-Chief?" Phoenix rested a hand on Mia's shoulder, able to feel the residual warmth of life through her black suit. Biting his lip, he carefully shook her, hoping her stillness was just a trick of the dim light. "Chief?" There was no response, and Phoenix realised he could already feel the warmth fading away. Ignoring the pricking at his eyes, he shook her again, a little more forcefully. "Chief? M... Mia?" He felt his throat closing up, and, as the cold began to set in against his fingers, he lowered his head. "Ch-Chief..." Resting his forehead against her shoulder, Phoenix screwed his eyes shut. He allowed himself only a minute or two to mourn, then pulled himself to his feet, wiping at his eyes with a sleeve. 'It's hard seeing her like this, but if there are any clues here... I'm gonna need my camera.' Turning towards the door, he strode back out into reception.

The first thing Phoenix noticed as he rounded the corner was that the strange girl had disappeared. 'Where'd she go!? Uh oh, I hope she didn't run on me.' Running a hand through his black, spiky locks, he stepped over towards his desk, only to suddenly come face to face with the girl, stood by the bookshelves next to the door, where she had been just out of sight. "Yipes!" Phoenix yelped as he jumped in shock, the girl gasping as she similarly stepped back. The pair stared at each other with wide eyes for a very long moment before Phoenix took a deep breath, calming himself down. "Um, excuse me but," he asked, "who are you?"

The girl didn't respond, looking away nervously as she fiddled with her sleeves.

Phoenix took another deep breath. "It's okay," he assured her. "I work here."

This seemed to perk the girl up, as she looked back to Phoenix, apparently studying him intensely with her eyes. It didn't take long for her gaze to lock on to the brand new badge sitting on Phoenix's lapel. "Maya," she eventually replied. "Maya Fey."

Phoenix blinked in surprise. "Maya... Fey?"

The girl, Maya, nodded.
"So, you're the chief's...?"

"Sister," Maya confirmed. "I'm her younger sister."

Phoenix nodded. *The chief did say her sister was visiting... Didn't think I'd be meeting her under quite these circumstances, though."

"She said she wanted me to keep some evidence for her," Maya continued, returning to fiddling with a sleeve.

"Evidence?" Phoenix repeated, confused. *But we don't have a case right now...?*

Maya only nodded, looking distressed. "I-it was that clock," she whispered. "It was 'The Thinker'."

Phoenix's eyes widened in surprise, and he resisted the urge to slap his own face out of frustration. *Should have known. Everything Larry touches is cursed.* He looked around, spotting his suitcase where he'd left it under his own desk, and moved to retrieve it. While he busied his hands with the job of pulling the suitcase onto the desk and opening it, he watched Maya out of the corner of his eye. *She seems to be in shock... To be honest, I probably am too. Regardless, I have to know what happened, and I don't want to disturb her, but...* Pulling his almost brand new tablet computer from its home, he closed the suitcase and turned to the girl. "Um, Maya, was it?" When the girl nodded, looking up at him curiously, he continued, "Can you tell me what happened?"

Maya thought for a moment, looking like she was fighting back tears. "I came in," she whispered. "The room was dark." She sniffed, rubbing at her nose with an arm. "And Sis... Sis..."

Phoenix winced as he watched the girl start to quietly cry. With no idea how to offer comfort to a stranger, he opted instead to leave the room. *The chief was already dead. That was all I needed to know.*

In the office, Phoenix couldn't help but feel choked up looking down at his mentor's body. *Chief... You helped push me to become a defence attorney, took me in as your junior partner, helped me so much even before I passed the bar... and now you're...* He shook his head. *Moping later. Police. Gotta call the police.* Shoving the tablet under an arm, Phoenix looked around for the office phone and quickly located it on the low table, still intact by the upset lounge chair. Carefully stepping over the rubble, he leaned down and picked up the receiver, only for it to mysteriously open right down the middle in his hand, only one or two badly connected screws holding the casing together. *W-what the...!?!*

A scream shattered the quiet atmosphere, and Phoenix spun around, feeling his heart stop. Across the street, looking out of a window from the luxurious hotel opposite, was a woman with pink hair, a phone in her hand as she stared right at Phoenix. "Police!?" she shouted. "Please, come quick!"

Phoenix felt the phone drop from his hand in surprise, watching as the woman spun around to run back into her room. *The hell was that!?* he asked himself, then shook his head, breathing deeply to force himself to calm down. *Police. Police are taken care of. Now for clues.* He cast a suspicious glance at the phone, mentally promising to make a note of the oddity, then stepped over towards Mia's body. Turning the tablet computer on, he first took a photo of Mia as she sat, then moved in to take a close up of the wound on her head. *Struck on the head with a blunt object, I'd say. She probably died instantly.* He heard the click of the camera and sighed as he stepped back once again.
'I hope she did, anyway.' He looked down on the floor and instantly spotted a familiar statue lying by his feet, a red stain coating the side of its base. 'Murder weapon. Of course.' He quickly snapped a picture of it, then turned to the glass shards littering the carpet nearby. 'Must be that glass light stand. That thing was brand new, wasn't it?' He made sure to take a picture, hoping the detail would come in handy.

Sighing, Phoenix took a moment to look around the room. 'Anything else that looks like a clue?' He found his gaze repeatedly settling on Mia, and was about to drag himself back out of the room in defeat when he noticed something white sitting on the floor by her hand. 'Huh?' Running over and crouching by Mia's side, Phoenix lifted his computer to first take a photo. The object looked to be a piece of paper, specifically a receipt, which he reasoned must have fallen out of Mia's hand when he was shaking her earlier. Through the ominous red stains, he noticed it was dated for the previous day, from a nearby department store. 'Should I turn it over...?' he asked himself, knowing it could be a vital clue. 'I almost don't want to, but...' Taking a deep breath, he quickly flipped the paper to the blank side of the receipt, and recognised instantly that the blood had been carefully applied, writing out a single word that he took a photo of in disbelief.

'Maya'.

Phoenix gulped. 'Did Mia write this? Was she trying to tell us something about that girl?' He glanced back at the door through into reception, hoping the girl hadn't actually run off while he'd been busy. Staring at the photo of the bloody word on his tablet's screen, he sighed. 'I think I'd better show her this.'

Back in reception, Phoenix found Maya sitting at his desk, peering at the many sticky-notes surrounding his computer screen, each one covered in its own boredom doodle he'd done when business was slow. Blushing, he rushed to her side and reached over to start pulling them off, piling them on the desk. "D-don't! Ignore those!" he cried.

Maya frowned, leaning out of his way. "Don't ignore them...?" she repeated.

"Y-you know what I mean!" Phoenix cried, giving up on the task as he pulled his tablet out from under his arm. Sighing, he turned to Maya as she got out of his chair, watching him nervously. "Look, before Mia died," he explained, "she wrote a message with her own blood, on the back of this receipt."

Maya frowned in confusion as Phoenix held out the tablet, which she reached out to as she studied the image on its screen. After a moment, her eyes went wide and she jumped back in fright. "Th-th-that's my name!" she cried, her voice slowly increasing in pitch. "W-why!? Why would she write my name!?"

'Uh oh. Now I've done it.' Recognising panic when he saw it, Phoenix quickly killed the image and tossed the tablet onto the desk, holding his hands out to the teenager. "Please, just calm down!"

"W-why would Sis write my name!?" Maya cried, pressing herself against a bookcase and looking like she was going to faint again.

Before Phoenix could formulate an answer, loud sirens cut through the quiet night, and Phoenix ran to the window. He barely had time to register the red and blue lights spinning from atop the police...
cars below before a loud thumping up the stairs attracted the pair's attention to the front door, which exploded open as a trench-coated detective and two officers jumped into the room, guns up.

"Freeze! Police!" the detective shouted as the officers followed him into the room, glaring between the terrified teenage girl by the desk and the surprised man at the window as they both raised their hands into the air. While one each of the officers kept their guns on the two witnesses, the detective was quick to lower his, shoving it back in his holster as he instead pulled out his police badge.

"Alright, I'm Detective Gumshoe, pal," he announced, gesturing to the officers to lower their guns, which they quickly did. "We received a report from the building across the way." Phoenix glanced back at the hotel across the street, remembering the woman he'd seen. "Got a person saying they saw a murder. Anyway, I don't want either of you moving one inch, 'kay?" Phoenix and Maya slowly nodded, lowering their hands, and the detective waved to an officer as they ventured into the office, the second staying behind to watch over the two witnesses.

'Great. Just great,' Phoenix mused to himself, and he cast a concerned look over to Maya, who was still leaning against the wall, staring wide-eyed at the floor. 'She wouldn't have...? No, of course she didn't.'

"Whoa!" came a shout from the other room, and Gumshoe burst back through the door, waving a small piece of bloodstained paper in his hands. "Scuze me!" Maya yelped in surprise as the paper was shoved into her face, Gumshoe making sure both of them saw it. "This word 'Maya' here mean anything to you?"

Phoenix paled, glancing at Maya as she began to shake. "Um... that," she muttered, "that's my name-"

"WHAT!?” Gumshoe shouted, and he immediately waved at his two subordinates, showing them the receipt. "The victim drew this here note in her own blood, pal! With her dying breath, she wrote down the killer's name!"

Maya shook her head, beginning to panic again. "K-killer? I'm not-!

Unfortunately, Gumshoe wasn't listening. "Case closed! You're coming down to the precinct, ma'am!"

"W-what!?" Maya cried, but the two officers grabbed her arms, quickly cuffing her before dragging her around the desk and towards the front door. "No, wait, I didn't kill her! I swear I didn't! I didn't kill her!"

Phoenix couldn't help but wince at the frantic shouts as the teenage girl was taken away. 'I wish there was something I could do...'

"Hey, you!" Gumshoe called, pulling Phoenix out of his thoughts. "We're gonna want to take you down for questioning, pal. Don't go anywhere."

"I won't." Phoenix promised, sighing. 'I have to find out what happened to Mia... and to do that, I'm going to have to talk to this 'Maya' girl myself. As soon as I possibly can.'
Phoenix looked up as he heard soft footsteps outside his door, and smiled as he recognised Maya, 'Holy crap, this is my girlfriend,' standing there with a shy smile. "Hey," he said, waving from his seat on the bed, pushed up tight against the wall as he wasted time playing with the Court Record, which he'd found in his backpack. 'That's one thing Trucy got right, anyway. Wright. Pfft.'

Maya giggled to herself, bouncing into the room and making short work of climbing across the bed to Phoenix's side, curling up against him. When he reached an arm around her to pull her tighter, planting a quick kiss on her forehead, she blushed, playfully pushing him away. "Tell me how everything went with Mia!" she demanded. "It went well, didn't it? I told you it would go well!"

Phoenix rolled his eyes. "Congratulations, you've had more opportunity to gauge Mia's reactions to the tragedies of my life recently." When Maya laughed in response, he tossed the tablet computer in his hand to one side, cuddling up closer to her. "What did she say in her letter?"

Maya thought for a moment before responding, resting her head on Phoenix's shoulder. "That it was about time we finally talked about us. She's been telling me for a few years now that I needed to tell you how I felt." She fiddled with her sleeves, her face turning red. "I guess it was kinda obvious to everyone but us, huh?"

Phoenix chuckled, resting his head on Maya's in the comfortable way they often did when they thought no-one was watching. "To be honest, I'm pretty sure Luke already knew about us long before meeting Pearls. I... didn't really take thinking you'd died in Labyrinthia well."

Maya grinned. "The Professor probably twigged too, from how I was reacting to it," she assured him. "I... never really mentioned that I worked myself up pretty bad, worrying if you were okay."

"You weren't the only one," Phoenix sighed, hugging Maya tighter as his free hand gripped one of hers. "I was inconsolable when you were kidnapped. When I thought you'd die, I just... shut down. The bartender at the place we stayed in overnight, she had to... figuratively slap some sense into me, once Luke and Espella were in bed. Then when I thought you were trapped on the other side of Dusky Bridge with a murderer..." He shivered. "I'm still not sure how I managed to hold myself together long enough to ensure you were safe. Iris, or what we thought was Iris, was accusing you of the murder and I just snapped." He smiled nostalgically, despite all the rage attached to that particular memory. "I guess that's the point when I stop believing in my clients to the very end: If they try and accuse you of murder."

Laughing, Maya turned in her seat and hugged Phoenix tightly around the chest, resting her head comfortably under his chin. "You're such a dork," she whispered. "That's what I love about you, though."
Apollo had looked up in surprise from his work desk when he heard the front door unlocking. "Dad?" he called, only to very quickly add in surprise "Maya!?" as the two adults entered the home. "What are you both doing here so early!?"

"Go get Pearls and your siblings, please," Phoenix sternly ordered, arms crossed. As Apollo wilted in anticipation of trouble, Maya imitated Phoenix's pose at his side. "We need to have a talk."

It took a few minutes, but before long the four kids were all sat scrunched together on the couch in the office, Phoenix and Maya standing nearby. Phoenix noticed Pearl had taken the opportunity while back in the office to drag Charley out of the reception, although he had gotten no further than just inside the office door. He supposed that was as good a place as any for the plant to live.

"Are we in trouble?" Trucy quietly asked from her spot between Apollo and Pearl, hat in her hands.

Phoenix and Maya, keeping their stern expressions on their faces, shot each other a look. "What exactly were you hoping to accomplish this weekend with this little prank?" Phoenix asked.

"Hey, I didn't have anything to do with it!" Apollo cried. "Why am I getting punished!?"

"I didn't, either!" Luke added, sitting next to Pearl. "I promise!"

Pearl stared up at the two adults with wide eyes. "We just wanted to give you some time alone together!" she insisted, eyes shining with unshed tears. "You never get to anymore!"

"And it had nothing to do with making us 'admit' to being special someones?" Maya asked, hands on her hips.

Trucy and Pearl glanced at each other, then gave the adults their cutest looks, nodding insistently.

Phoenix stared at the two for a few moments before suddenly giving them a bright smile. "Well, that's too bad!" he said. "You would have been able to chalk it up as a success!"

The four kids stared in shocked silence as Phoenix and Maya shot each other cheeky grins. "Huh?" Apollo muttered.

"We had a talk," Maya explained, hands pressed together. "One we probably should have had a while ago." She shrugged nonchalantly. "We've decided, although Kurain's reputation is better than it used to be, it's still not in a good enough place for its Master to openly be friends with Nick here, let alone admit to being his girlfriend!" Giggleing to herself at the still-new term, she rolled her eyes. "So, it looks like that's another secret you guys have to be keeping to yourselves!"

As one, Trucy and Pearl suddenly squealed, jumping out of their seats as they individually ran to Phoenix and Maya. While Trucy launched herself at her father's chest (her hat was tossed unceremoniously onto Apollo's lap), Pearl simply bounced in glee at Maya's side. "I always knew it was an amazing fairy-tale!" Pearl cried, hands pressed to her cheeks. "A forbidden romance against all the odds...! I knew you were destined to be together, Mystic Maya!"

Trucy also bounced, clinging to an almost equally excited Phoenix. "Does this mean Miss Maya is our Mommy now!?" she demanded. "Even if she's a secret?"
"Ask her!" Phoenix laughed, looking to Maya.

Maya shrugged with an embarrassed smile, waiting for the girls to calm down before she answered the question.

Dropping his sister's hat on the abandoned lounge, Apollo got to his feet, looking very confused. "Wait, did I hear everything right? Dad and Maya are dating now, but we can't talk about it to anybody just like we can't talk about Kurain?"

"That's it, more or less," Phoenix replied, gently pushing Trucy to loosen her stranglehold on his chest. "Did you have any objections?"

Apollo thought a moment, then sighed and shook his head. "I guess not," he admitted, crossing his arms. "You two were always acting like a couple anyway."

Phoenix and Maya blushed as they shot each other amused looks, then Phoenix turned to his other son. "What about you, Luke?"

Luke was still sitting on the edge of the lounge, deep in thought until Phoenix's question dragged his attention back to the conversation. "Oh, um," he muttered, "I don't have any problems with it."

Apollo raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Luke?"

"But something's the matter?" Phoenix pointed out, concerned.

"Hey, you always said you agreed with us!" Trucy protested, arms crossed as she confronted her brother. "Did you change your mind!?"

"Of course not!" Luke replied. "I tried to help you, didn't I?"

"Yeah, but," Pearl quietly butted in, "and I don't mean any offence by this, your plan didn't work..."

Luke only sighed, staring at the floor. Maya patted Pearl's shoulder to instruct the pre-teen to stay put, then walked across the room and sat down at Luke's side, giving him a sympathetic smile. "Your mom's still out there, isn't she? You're worried about her."

"Trucy and Apollo's mum is out there somewhere, too," Luke pointed out defensively, not moving except for a lonely sigh. "I... really worry about Mum, but I'm not sure if I'm overreacting, or..." He wiped at his eyes with a sleeve.

Immediately, Phoenix rushed to Luke's other side, sitting on the sofa's arm. "I know, our investigation hasn't been moving very fast, has it?" he said in comfort, rubbing Luke's shoulder. "Whoever these kidnappers are, they're very good at covering their tracks."

"You're definitely not overreacting, I can promise you that. And I don't want to replace your mom, especially if it makes you unhappy," Maya assured Luke, taking hold of one of his hands to offer comfort as the teen looked up to meet her gaze. "I'm happy for you to just call me 'Maya' like always. You can think of me as... a big sister! Or a cool aunt!"

Apollo scoffed. "Yeah, one who's dating Dad."

"Hush, you," Phoenix told Apollo with a smirk.

Luke smiled. "I'd appreciate that, Maya. Thank you." In return, Maya grinned and pulled the teen into a hug, which he gratefully returned.
Trucy giggled, happy to see her brother cheered up, and bounced towards the sofa. "So, Miss Maya, does that mean you're okay with me calling you Mommy?" she asked, barely restraining her excitement. "I can call you Mommy, can't I?"

Giving the girl a grin as she pulled out of the hug with Luke, Maya laughed softly to herself. "Of course you can!"

Cheering, Trucy ran to Pearl, and the girls grabbed each others hands as they twirled in joy. Apollo shook his head, then gave Maya an apologetic smile. "Um, I'm just gonna stick with 'Maya' myself. Is that okay? It would be weird to call you 'Mom'."

"Why wouldn't it be okay?" Maya asked with a giggle as she stood up, pausing to straighten her robes. "I'm certainly not going to dictate your lives like an evil stepmother!"

"You're certainly dressed for it," Phoenix joked.

In response, Maya simply crossed her arms and pointed her tongue in Phoenix's direction.

Trucy stopped her spinning with Pearl, gasping. "Oh, wait! We're a family now!" She turned to Maya and Phoenix, who was standing up from the edge of the lounge. "Mommy, Daddy, we should get a new family photo while we're all together!"

Phoenix rubbed his chin in thought. "Hmm. I was just thinking yesterday I needed to update the one I already have." He shot Trucy a grin. "Why not? Everyone huddle together somewhere, and I'll get my computer!"
View the Court Record
It had been a quiet evening at the club. Aside from one opportunist who had wandered in off the street, Phoenix hadn't even had any need to go down to the Hydeout to play poker. Not that he minded all that much; The night was still young, and he wasn't bored of his paid piano practise yet, alone with his thoughts as he stabbed at the keys.

It had been Maya who taught him how to play piano. She and Mia used to play together when she was young, she once explained, and she'd kept up learning in Mia's absence. At some point between Mia's death and Phoenix moving in to the apartment above the office, Maya had somehow acquired an old piano from somewhere that now lived in reception, and occasionally, when the office was especially quiet and Pearl was away in Kurain, she would drag Phoenix out to try and teach him. Phoenix himself, when Maya had left to become the Master of Kurain, hadn't made any effort to keep up what little skills he'd learned, which had come back to bite him after his disbarment. Even now, if Phoenix was up in Kurain (or, as was the case two weeks ago, Maya was at the office), she would find time to pull him to the closest piano to make him practise with her, insisting all the while it was even more important now he was supposed to be playing professionally. Although he had initially hated being dragged from his important lawyering work to waste time at a piano, he no longer minded all that much being made to sit down with Maya for a while. The children inevitably scattered at the sound of his playing (part of him liked to joke he'd trained them well), so it was just the two of them for however long Maya decided her 'lesson' was.

Phoenix couldn't resist a smile at the thought of Maya. It was strange to think of her as his girlfriend after all this time, and he was still trying to work out at what point he had actually fallen in love with her, through the strong denial he'd been living with for so many years. His best guess was that the progression from 'friend' to 'best friend' to anything stronger had been such a gradual one, there was no concrete beginning or end point to find. All he could say for certain was that they'd been friends at her second time in the defendant's chair, and she was the most important person in his world by the time of their trip to England.

"Good evening, Wright."

Phoenix almost jumped in his chair, spinning to see the familiar face of Kristoph Gavin looking down at him from a metre or two away. "Oh, Kristoph!" he cried, smiling at his 'friend'. "I didn't expect to see you today!"

"Indeed," Kristoph chuckled, sitting down at the nearby table as Phoenix turned around on his stool. "Apparently you were suddenly called away when I came by last."

Phoenix thought a moment. "Was that two weeks ago?"

Kristoph nodded. "I can't imagine what it might have been," he continued, looking genuinely curious. "I was at the Wonder Bar meeting someone for a case. I half expected to see you there as well."

Laughing, Phoenix leaning back against the piano keyboard, being careful not to press down on the
keys. He crossed his arms as he raised a teasing eyebrow in Kristoph's direction. "Seeing Apollo and Trucy's act? I thought you said you didn't like magic, Kristoph!"

"I... can appreciate it," Kristoph insisted, pushing his glasses up as they threatened to slip down his nose. "I must admit those two seemed to be the most talented performers on that stage."

"Pfft, 'course they are!" Phoenix scoffed, shrugging in feigned obliviousness. "Not even legal adults, and Apollo and Trucy could out-act anyone! They're the best magicians in the world!" He laughed at Kristoph's tight smile. "Then again, as their father, I am a bit biased," he admitted.

"Indeed," Kristoph sighed. "My question was related to your other son, however."


"Yes, I believe it was him," Kristoph continued. "I noticed him in the audience while I was looking for you. There was a girl with him, maybe Trucy's age. She was wearing what looked like traditional Japanese garb."

It was only thanks to Phoenix's trained poker face that he didn't react outwardly to the description of Pearl as he recognised it. "Oh?"

"I recall you said you had a falling out with your former assistant," Kristoph asked, looking somewhere between concerned and curious. "Assuming of course that the girl I saw was indeed related to the Feys of Kurain."

Phoenix slowly smiled and chuckled to himself. "Aw, guess I've gotta come clean," he joked. 'Sooner than I would have liked, but at least Maya and I did go over this possibility, so I'm not totally unprepared.' 'I got back in touch with Miss Master of Kurain a couple weeks ago. Can't really be open about it, what with Kurain's reputation on the line and all, but we're... rebuilding our friendship.' 'After all, that is mostly true. '

Kristoph looked even more confused now. "I was not under the impression a village of spirit mediums was in any particular danger of their reputation being slandered," he said.

Phoenix shrugged. "Then call it them being wary thanks to past experience," he replied, deciding to skip over how it was mostly him that was worrying, rather than Maya. "The kids have gotten attached to Pearls, who was the girl you saw at the Wonder Bar. Maya, though, we're trying to take slow before telling everyone we're back in touch." He thought a moment. "Actually, we haven't even told Edgeworth yet. I should remember to do that." 'Not that he'll probably care in the slightest that we're dating now, but we should at least try and announce it to someone outside the family.'

Although still confused, Kristoph seemed to accept this explanation. "I see. I shall keep this a secret between us for now, then."

"Please do," Phoenix said with a small laugh. "I'd appreciate it."

It was difficult to explain Phoenix's complicated relationship with Kristoph. It was very easy to slip and become the mask, allowing himself to think of the other man as a genuine friend, especially when he found himself dwelling on how he truly was in for the long-haul on this investigation and might never complete it. At times like that, it was only the thought of his three children that cheered him up, and of how Apollo was even in on the situation to help him if he needed it... not that he was planning to go crying to young Apollo when he felt down, but the thought of his eldest son's support was usually enough to boost his mood.

As far as Kristoph went, however, Phoenix was never quite sure what to believe. On one hand,
despite his often cold demeanour, he was very friendly and appeared to genuinely care for Phoenix and, by extension, his children. On the other hand, sometimes, on the very rare occasions something seemed to personally offend him and coax Kristoph to anger, Phoenix caught glimpses of something dangerous lurking beneath the surface. It was nothing concrete, and he usually convinced himself later he'd imagined it, but the brief scare was enough to remind him to always be on his guard.

The two men's conversation was interrupted as two more visitors arrived in the restaurant, heading straight over to the piano as they waved to the waitress.

Phoenix smiled. "Trucy, Apollo! We were just talking about you!" he called.

Trucy grinned as she skipped to the table. "Hi Daddy! Hi Mister Kristoph!"

Apollo gave Phoenix a more sedate wave, turning almost immediately to Kristoph with a friendly smile. "Hi, Mister Gavin! We didn't expect to see you tonight!"

"I was in the area," Kristoph replied with a nod of greeting.

Trucy bounced to Phoenix's piano, trying to climb into his lap until Phoenix quite firmly sat her on the stool at his side, as she was getting too big for him to see over. Apollo, meanwhile, lowered himself into a chair next to Kristoph, looking up to the man hopefully. "Actually, there was something I've been wanting to talk to you about, sir," the teen said.

"Oh?" Kristoph asked, turning to face Apollo with an eyebrow raised. "Please continue."

"I've... been wanting to ask your advice on something," Apollo admitted. "I'll be going to college at the end of this school year, and I was wondering if you had any suggestions for the best law course to take."

Trucy snapped her head around from where she had been cuddling against Phoenix. "What!?!" she cried, then jumped to her feet to stare furiously at her brother. "But we're professional magicians! Why are you leaving me to be a lawyer!"

"I'm not leaving you!" Apollo shot back with his own determined stare. "I'll still perform and practise with you, but I've dreamed of being a lawyer for years and our magic career isn't going to change that!"

Trucy wilted a little, looking upset. "But..."

Kristoph pressed the bridge of his glasses in thought. "You're still going ahead with becoming a defence attorney?" he asked Apollo.

Apollo turned to Kristoph, giving him a firm nod. "I've been studying for the LSAT, next month," he said. "If I get a good score, I... I want to help people. I want to protect them from false charges and keep the innocent from paying the ultimate price for crimes they didn't commit! I want to be the one person on their side when no-one else will be!"

Trucy mutely sat back down at Phoenix's side, hands clutching the pin on her cape as she stared at the floor.

"A noble pursuit indeed," Kristoph chuckled, then turned slightly towards Phoenix. "I would have expected you to ask your father for advice, however."

Apollo blushed, shooting Phoenix a glance. "I, um... already did, actually."
Phoenix shrugged, looking sheepish as he comforted Trucy with one arm, rubbing her back gently. "What can I say? I haven't been a lawyer in years!" He scratched a cheek in thought. "Actually, I don't know if Ivy University is even still doing law courses nowadays..."

"They are, I looked into it," Apollo said, then sighed. "Not that we'd be able to afford me going there, though. And I'm not likely to win a scholarship like Luke probably would."

"I'm sure we can convince your grandparents to donate a little to your cause," Phoenix said, although he winced as he admitted, "although, yeah, Ivy's pretty expensive."

Kristoph sat still in thought. "A career in both entertainment and law," he mused to himself. "If my brother could do it, I suppose you could, too."

Apollo blinked in surprise. "You have a brother?"

Nodding, Kristoph gave the teen a rare warm smile. "He calls himself Klavier. He studied at Themis Legal Academy, actually."

"I've heard of Themis!" Apollo piped up in excitement, then calmed down again almost immediately in annoyance. "I wasn't allowed to go there, though. My old social worker said I was too young to make that kind of choice."

"I myself went to Cardea Institute of Technology," Kristoph continued. "Compared to some of your other options, I think you'll find it relatively cheap, and I can't imagine the quality of its courses will have declined since I left."

Apollo nodded. "Cardea Institute of Technology," he repeated, "got it!" He then turned to Phoenix. "Have you got a piece of paper, Dad? So I can write that down?"

While Phoenix nodded and reached into his bag to find a notebook, Trucy finally lifted her head to glare at her brother. "If you stop performing," she warned him, "I'll never forgive you."

Apollo watched his fuming sister for a moment before getting up and walking around the table, standing at her side. "I won't miss a single performance," he said, "I promise. As hard as it will be to study law on top of keeping my magic skills aligned with yours, I vow I won't ever let you down. Okay?"

Trucy stared at him a moment before sniffing, jumping to her feet to throw a hug around her brother's middle. "You better not," she warned him through her tears, but smiled at the reassurance regardless.
My dear Luke,

It appears old Bruno, of St Mystere, has fallen ill. Flora has left to look after him and the town, leaving myself looking after Alfendi alone. He seems to understand Flora has a friend who isn't well, but clearly wants Flora to return. I fear I may have to try explaining death to him again when she does. We haven't heard from her in a few days now, but I trust she will call soon.

I understand it was Miss Fey's birthday last Monday. With this new relationship between her and Mr Wright, did you all meet up again to celebrate?

I apologise for the somewhat abrupt nature of this month's letter. Alfendi has not been taking Flora's absence well, as a two-year-old would, so this week has been a difficult one. I imagine we shall talk again soon regardless, what with the sorting out of your application to Gressenheller.

The usual puzzles are enclosed.

Your friend,

Professor Hershel Layton

5th March, 2022

March 12, 9:57AM

Wright Talent Agency

Kitchen

"So since my grades have always been really good, despite me being so young," Luke announced to his siblings, "it looks like I'll be going to Gressenheller University back in England!"

Apollo and Trucy stared at him blankly. "Huh. I was wondering why you pulled us away from practise," Apollo muttered.

"Y-you..." Trucy muttered, beginning to look upset, "w-w-what...!?"

"I'm going to university in England," Luke repeated, fiddling with his hands as he shot Phoenix, standing at his side, a nervous look. "They have an accredited veterinary medicine course there, which is actually shorter than the ones here, and since I used to spend a lot of time at Gressenheller, I know the area really well and it won't be too hard to adjust to it."

"Professor Layton's been helping us sort everything out," Phoenix added, hands in the pocket on the front of his hoodie. "We just got off the phone with him. Luke's application has been approved, pending good grades."
Trucy gave Luke a stare that was somewhere between furious and hysterical. "B-but why!? Why are you going to England!?!"

Luke looked away in thought, then shrugged. "Why wouldn't I?" he replied, quietly. "I miss England a lot. The Professor works at Gressenheller, and its where my mum and dad studied, too. Where they met, and fell in love. Mum was always using the library they had... I spent a lot of time there when I was the Professor's apprentice." He looked up to Trucy, only to notice her rapidly tearing up and immediately held up his hands somewhat frantically. "B-but I know I'll miss you guys when I'm there! A-and it's certainly not a permanent thing, because I'll be coming back home over holidays!"

"Backpedal harder," Apollo muttered, eyelids lowered.

"B-but you're leaving us!" Trucy cried, hands clutched together as tears rolled down her cheeks. "D-don't you love us anymore...?"

Panicking slightly, Luke ran to Trucy, waving his hands as he leaned down to her height. "Of course I still love you! I'll only be in England during term to attend classes! I'm coming back!" He bounced on his feet a little. "I-I'll even talk to you on the phone every day if you want me to!"

"But b-both you and Apollo are l-leaving me!" Trucy sobbed.

"We are both graduating from school and going to college," Apollo pointed out, one eyebrow raised. "Pretty sure doing that doesn't annul you being our sister."

To Trucy and Luke's surprise (as they had forgotten his presence in the midst of their conversation), Phoenix then appeared at their side, holding out a box of tissues for Trucy, which she gratefully took a few of to blow her nose. He kept silent, rubbing Trucy's back in comfort while staying out of the conversation himself, although he shot Luke a meaningful look.

"Trucy, I promise you I'm not leaving!" Luke said, managing to calm himself down a little. "It'll be like now, when Apollo and I go away for school, except that I won't be able to come home over weekends... Terms are shorter though, so I'll be home more often than you think!"

Trucy took a fresh tissue to wipe at her eyes. "You'll call me every day?" she quietly asked.

"If you want me to," Luke agreed, glad to see Trucy calming down. "Is that alright?"

The girl thought a long time before responding, looking up with a serious expression on her face to meet Luke's eyes. "You're not allowed to come to our show anymore."

Surprised, Luke leaned back, blinking. "Uh...?"

Apollo sighed. "Don't I get a say in that?" he pointed out, arms tightly crossed. "It's my show too!"


Apollo nervously avoided her gaze before reluctantly nodding. "Turns out Clay's applying to Cardea, too," he said. "We're gonna dorm together."
Trucy gave him a glare. "And you're not going to miss practise or performance like you promised?"

"I won't miss a single one," Apollo repeated, one hand held up as though making a solemn vow, which he sort of was. "If it conflicts with study for my law degree, so be it."

After a long, stern stare, Trucy nodded, giving both of her brothers a grin. "Good!" Dropping her tissues to the floor, she pulled them into a hug, all three of them grinning.

Phoenix laughed. "I hope you're planning on cleaning that up, Truce!" he cried, moving to return the box of tissues to its usual home on the kitchen counter.

"I will, Daddy!" Trucy replied, letting go of her brothers and racing to retrieve the dropped tissues and take them to the nearest bin.

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Dear Professor Layton,

Since Flora didn't send a letter with your last one, you'll offer her my apologies again for what happened to Bruno and St Mystere? I forgot to mention this when we were on the phone, but if she wants to see living robots again, there is always Ponco and Clonco at the Space Centre here. Could you mention that to her, please? I'm sure she'd love to meet them.

We did meet up for Maya's birthday, actually! Her birthday fell on a public holiday this year (I think it was Presidents Day? I can't remember for sure), so we didn't have school and Papa took us up to Kurain. We could only be there for a few hours, but it was nice seeing them again. I hope seeing them more often is permanent!

After we got off the phone with you, Papa called down Apollo and Trucy from their rehearsals, and I told them about how I might be going to Gressenheller. Apollo was happy for me, but Trucy got upset because we're both going to be away from home for much longer periods of time, and she seemed to think it had something to do with her. I've had to promise to call her every day, although it looks like the only time I could do that would be the middle of the day in Britain and early morning here, but she's calmed down about it now. Apollo and Clay will (hopefully) be going to the same university here in the city, so they're planning to room together. Apollo's similarly had to promise Trucy to meet her regularly for rehearsals and their shows, even if his studies suffer because of it.

Speaking of Clay, it's his birthday next week. He keeps boasting about how he's now allowed to drive us around in his car (Apparently there's a rule that you can't drive around non-family members under twenty years old before you're eighteen?), and has promised to take us out to the Space Centre. I'm hoping to get my license and a car eventually too, but since Papa doesn't drive and Apollo isn't interested in it either, we don't have a car. I am old enough to get a learner's permit, but without a car to practise in there's little point chasing it up yet. Apparently the usual thing here is for people to sit in a classroom and take a lesson on road rules before they can get their permit. I don't understand it. Isn't that what on-road practise with an instructor is for? If it wasn't for Clay, I'd be under the impression that they learn everything in a classroom and don't even sit in a car until taking their test! Oh, and then there's the difficulty of finding someone who'll teach me manual instead of automatic.

Wow, I didn't mean to prattle on for so long about cars! I guess it's just still confusing for me and I'm trying to sort out my thoughts by explaining it to someone. The different terminology is still
something I'm getting used to.

I pulled together a few puzzles I made over the last few weeks, including one for Alfendi. I hope it's not too hard for him, and of course it's too late to help with how much trouble he was causing you in Flora's absence. I hope to be seeing you all soon, anyway!

Your friend and apprentice,

Luke Triton

12th March, 2022

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
This is supposed to be a surprise but I should warn you that Trucy and me are on our way to Kurain atm

You're what!? Thanks for warning me! I'll make sure I'm free. Why are you two coming up here? .

It's just for a short visit. You'll see when we get there :)

May 8, 1:25PM
Kurain Village

"It'll be the perfect surprise!" Trucy had said as she begged Apollo to take her on the long trip to visit Kurain that morning. "And you're eighteen now, so nobody can say we went without an adult!"

Although Apollo dearly wanted to pass her off to Luke (who was studying hard for their finals coming up), when he heard her intended mission, he found he couldn't say no to his kid sister. Thus, he bought them tickets up the mountain and found himself two hours later escorting her off the bus in Kurain Village.

Apollo sighed as they waited for the bus to pass them on its way back down to the train station. "This is so embarrassing," he muttered.

Trucy stuck her tongue out at him. "You're just being silly," she said, dismissing him as she promptly began to skip across the road. "Mommy will love this!"

Following close behind, Apollo tightly crossed his arms. 'I will never get used to her referring to Maya as "Mommy". It's both way too accurate, and way too weird; She's only five years older than me! At least Dad's eleven years older!" He thought a moment. 'Although, for Trucy... that becomes twelve and eighteen. Eh, still weird.'

Jumping up the stone steps in one bound, Trucy made for the front door of Fey Manor, standing on her tip-toes and reaching up high with a gloved hand to knock on the yellow wood. She giggled in the ensuing silence, shooting Apollo a wide grin as he joined her, and, eventually, the door was opened by a pre-teen girl with brown hair, who smiled as she recognised the visitors. "Hi, Pearly!"

Trucy called.

"Trucy! Apollo!" Pearl replied, clapping her hands in delight before hurriedly waving the pair inside. "What are you two doing here?"

"Surprise," Apollo explained in the dullest tone of voice possible, waggling his fingers in the air to indicate a false sense of excitement.

Trucy skipped inside, grinning at Pearl. "We came to visit Mommy!" she cried. "Do you know where she is?"

Pearl smiled, closing the door behind Apollo as he followed Trucy in. "Mystic Maya's working in her room! I'll go get her!"

"Great!" Trucy chirped in reply, watching Pearl hurry off. "Thank you, Pearly!"
Apollo sighed as he sat down on the nearby low shelves, pulling off his boots. "Y'know, there's one thing I've been meaning to ask you..."

Trucy cocked her head to one side, balancing on one leg to remove her own boots. "What?"

"Our mom is still out there somewhere, even if we don't know where to start looking," Apollo pointed out, shoving his shoes into one of the shelves underneath him. "What if we actually pull off a miracle and find her again? Or she finds us?"

Trucy paused thoughtfully, working her second boot around her ankle. "I guess the same thing I'll do if my other daddy comes back," she decided, finally working the shoe free and pulling it off in one swift motion. She walked over to the shelves Apollo was sitting on, carefully placing her boots inside. "I'll have two Mommys or two Daddys. Mommy Maya, Mommy Thalassa, Daddy Nick, and Daddy Zak."

Apollo frowned, looking away as he felt a twinge of guilt at the memory of how he'd reacted when he first learned who Trucy's biological father was. "Why did your other dad leave you behind?" he wondered aloud. "He honestly thought you'd be better off in foster care than with him?"

'Did... he know about me? Did Mom ever mention me to anyone after she thought I'd died? If it weren't for Dad taking me in, what would I even be doing right now?'

Trucy looked at her brother for a moment, then sat at his side, giving him a hug. "We can ask him when he gets back," she brightly assured him, although Apollo could hear a twinge of sadness in her voice as she spoke about her distant father. "He'll come back. I know he will."

From the nearby hallway, Maya finally emerged, Pearl close behind. "Trucy! Apollo! What are you two doing here?" Maya laughed.

Apollo and Trucy got to their feet, Apollo relieved that Maya hadn't mentioned their arrival was anything but a surprise. "Hi, Mommy!" Trucy called, running across the room to grab Maya in a hug. "Surprise!"

"That's my line," Apollo muttered with a smile.

Maya laughed, patting the top of Trucy's hat as the girl pulled out of the hug. "I hope this is a short visit," she said. "I don't want your dad panicking if you're not home tonight!"

"We'll be on the next train back to the city," Apollo promised. "Trucy had something to give you, though."

Trucy quickly shushed her brother. "Don't spoil the surprise!"

"A gift for Mystic Maya?" Pearl asked, biting a fingernail in confusion. "But her birthday was in February!"

Trucy shook her head, giving the equally confused Maya a wide grin. "Today's special!" she announced, then reached into the heart-shaped bag at her hip and pulled out a greeting card, which she pushed into Maya's hands. "I know you're not technically our mommy," she explained with a nervous shrug, "but I wanted to give you a card anyway."

Maya looked at the card with wide eyes. Proudly emblazoned across the front were the words 'Happy Mother's Day', surrounded by cute heart-shaped balloons. "It's Mother's Day today...?" she realised, opening the card to see inside.

Pearl quietly gasped as she realised what the card was, hands over her mouth.
Inside the card, above a few printed lines about the virtues of having a mother, Maya saw Trucy had scrawled the line 'To Mommy Maya'. Underneath, also in her distinctive scrawl, were the words 'From Trucy and Apollo and Luke', as well as the hurriedly written addition 'but they were too busy to sign this themselves'. Maya suspected otherwise, but couldn't resist a smile as she bit her lip to keep her emotions in check.

Trucy held her hands behind her back, rubbing a toe into the floor. "D'you like it?"

Maya closed the card, leaning down to show Trucy her smile directly. She surprised herself that she was having to force the words out through threatening tears tightening her throat. "I love it."

Grinning, Trucy jumped forward to give Maya another hug, which the woman returned with a laugh.

Apollo scratched at the back of his head, still embarrassed by the whole thing and unsure if he should interrupt. "If you're wondering, Luke doesn't know about the card," he explained. "I didn't even know about it until Trucy asked me to help her deliver it."

Maya giggled, patting the top of Trucy's hat as the pair ended their hug. "I guessed it was something like that," she said.

Trucy pouted in Apollo's direction. "You're ruining it!" she complained, face blushing a soft pink.

Pearl quietly squealed to herself, palms pressed to her cheeks. "I didn't even realise it was Mother's Day today!" she admitted, then calmed down and nervously chewed a fingernail. "It's been a long time since I last celebrated it..."

"Even longer for me," Maya added with a sigh, giving Pearl a sympathetic glance before leaning towards Trucy to give her a soft smile, the card hugged to her chest. "Thank you, Trucy. Your card really means a lot to me."

"I'm glad," she replied, a proudly matter-of-fact 'of course it does' tone to her voice.

"Of course, Dad doesn't know about it either," Apollo continued, finger pressed to his forehead in thought. "We kinda snuck out. When we get home, he's gonna wonder where we disappeared to."

Loudly groaning in exasperation, Trucy threw up her hands at her brother. "Alright, alright! We'll get going back home then!"

Placing the card securely in a pocket inside her robes, Maya laughed as she watched Trucy stomp back over to where she'd stashed her shoes to put them back on. She looked over to Pearl, who seemed a little uncomfortable at Trucy's anger but was otherwise happy to see her extended family. "You know what?" Maya suggested, clapping her hands together as she walked over to the Wright children. "Pearly and I will walk with you down to the train station!"

"Really!?" Pearl cried with an excited smile.

Trucy, sat on the floor midway through pulling on a boot, looked up in surprise. "Wow, you will!?"

Apollo smiled gratefully, sat on the shelves as he retrieved his boots from where they'd been stashed. "Thanks, Maya. It'd be great to have some company."

"I know, it's quite a walk if you're not used to it," Maya replied, waving a hand as she went to get her sandals, Pearl running alongside as she did the same. "You guys have only done it... what, once, twice before?"
"On your birthday!" Trucy pointed out, jumping to her feet as she finished putting on her shoes. "We came up then, too!"

Pearl dropped her sandals to the floor and stepped into them, running off excitedly to the front door, Trucy at her heels. "Come on, let's go!" she cried, waving to Maya and Apollo.

A few minutes later, the quartet was on their way to the station, walking together down the road at an even pace, although Apollo had to frequently slow himself down as his long legs threatened to leave the two much shorter girls behind.

"So, Trucy," Maya spoke up as they left Kurain behind, "you're turning eleven this year, aren't you?"

Trucy nodded. "Mm-hm! Daddy says I'm getting to be a big girl!"

Maya laughed. "I don't disagree!" she said. "It did just occur to me though: If I'm your mother now, it looks like I need to give you the puberty talk. And you're the right age to start thinking about it, too."

"Puberty?" Trucy replied, confused.

Pearl grinned. "Mystic Maya gave me that talk when I was ten!" she said.

Apollo tightly crossed his arms, looking uncomfortable. "Um, isn't she going to get that from school?"

Maya frowned. "You honestly trust a school to give a decent talk on puberty and sex that answers all a kid's questions?" she pointed out. "Besides, she's clearly not going to get any kind of useful advice from you guys. No offence."

Apollo, bright red, looked away. "None taken."

"But what is 'puberty'? Or 'sex'?" Trucy asked, still confused. "I think I've heard the words before, but I don't know what they mean!"

Maya thought a moment before answering. "Well, to explain it in full would be to have the talk here and now," she explained, "but in short puberty is a period of growth every teenager goes through to become an adult. With some exceptions, it's different between girls and boys, so your dad and brothers would have gone through a different kind of growth than I did, or you and Pearly will." She frowned in thought. "Sex is a lot longer to go into. You'll have to wait for that one."

"It's very fascinating!" Pearl chimed in.

Apollo hid his face behind a hand, still bright red. "Please don't talk about it here," he begged.

Trucy frowned in thought, looking between Maya and Apollo. "Alright," she eventually said. "When are we going to have this talk, then?"

Maya rested a lightly curled fist against her cheek. "I'll talk to your dad about it," she said. "We'll arrange something."
"Thank you," Apollo sighed in relief.
The hall buzzed with activity as the ceremony came to an end, and seats were quickly vacated as students, and occasionally their families too, bid each other fond goodbyes and promises to keep in touch throughout their wildly varying futures.

"I'm gonna be a police detective!" Ernest Holmes boasted, a fist to his chest. "Gotta give the gift of my amazing intellect back to the people, I always say!"

Apollo gave him a level stare, eyelids lowered. "You never say that," he pointed out.

Luke bit back a laugh, remembering how Ernest had very nearly not graduated at all thanks to his consistently lower-than-average grades. "Good luck, Ernest!" he told their friend. "I'm sure you'll make a great detective!"

"Just like my ancestor!" Ernest only continued to boast, moving to push back his fringe with one hand, only for the errant hair to immediately flop right back over his eyes. "The great Sherlock himself!"

Clay rolled his eyes. "That'll be the day," he laughed, draping himself over his friends' shoulders, to Apollo's annoyance. "Me, I'm going to be the most amazing astronaut you ever saw! One day, Ernest, you can boast to your kids that you went to school with the great Clay Terran!"

"What, there's an astronaut course in college?" Ernest asked, confused.

"He's doing engineering," Luke explained, a hand moving to grab Clay's elbow and support his weight.

"Mister Starbuck recommended it!" Clay boasted.

Ernest wasn't impressed, his own ego deflated by the reminder of someone else's. "Yeah, whatever," he mumbled, looking between Apollo and Luke. "What about you two?"

Luke shrugged. "I'm going back to London to study as a vet!" he cried, then hurriedly added, "Veterinarian, I mean. Not 'veteran'. 'I've already had one awkward misunderstanding today...'"

Apollo shoved Clay off his back, to the other teen's disappointed laughter. "Lawyer," he said. "You never know, we might work together one day, Ernest."

"Pfft!" Ernest laughed, his ego back in full force. "I'll blow you away with my deductive skills! Just make sure you don't work against me, and we'll do great!"

Apollo nervously laughed, knowing in his heart that would never happen. "Uh, yeah, I'll do that..."

An older woman not far away called for Ernest's attention, and the young man gave her a wave before shooting his classmates a grin. "Well, I'll see you guys around maybe! It's been fun!"
"Bye!" Luke called as the trio waved, and their friend left to join his family.

"Who was that?" asked a voice behind them, and the three teens spun around to see Phoenix and Trucy stood behind them, dressed unusually proper with Phoenix in his old blue suit (which was starting to look rather threadbare) and Trucy in the black dress she normally hid under her magician’s cape.

"Mister Wright!" Clay called in greeting. "Trucy! Great to see you again!"

Trucy giggled as she gave Clay a wave.

"That was Ernest," Apollo explained, jerking a thumb in the direction of the Holmes family.

Luke nodded. "He's the one who's always boasting about being descended from Sherlock Holmes?" he added.

"Ah, yes," Phoenix said in recognition, then smiled knowingly, rubbing at his chin. "Well, there's something you share with him."

The four kids shared glances, confused. "What do you mean, Daddy?" Trucy asked.

"My great-grandfather," Phoenix explained. "He was Japanese, and, apparently, spent some time in London working with Sherlock Holmes."

The four were too surprised at first to react to the out-of-left-field news. "Really?" Luke added.

"According to family legend, anyway," Phoenix added with a laugh. "My father loves telling the story. Kinda surprised he never took the opportunity to impart it to you!"

"That's so cool!" Luke cried, excited to have some kind of connection, however tenuous, to one of his idols. "If I'd known that before... oh wow, I can't believe all this time I've had an ancestor who worked with Sherlock Holmes!"

Clay laughed. "Yeah, but that doesn't sound nearly as impressive as being descended from him, does it?" he pointed out, gesturing to the Holmes family. "Whether or not it's even true!"

Apollo smiled. "We're descended from the great Phoenix Wright," he said. "That's good enough for me."

"Aw, shucks," Phoenix said, hiding a threatening blush by immediately ruffling Apollo's hair, to the teen's annoyance.

Trucy was about to respond when she was distracted by a figure moving towards them through the crowds. "So who's that?" she asked, pointing towards the woman approaching them.

The three boys turned to look, only to immediately be ambushed as the short woman jumped on the nearest of the trio, which happened to be Luke. Sobbing at the top of her lungs, she hugged Luke's chest and cried "Oh my poor dorm dears! All off to lead amazing lives and change the world... and I'll miss every last one of you!"

Luke wasn't quite sure how to react to the interruption, looking around at the rest of the equally confused group. "Um, Nancy...?"

"Why, I remember taking you here from the hospital after that terrible accident!" Nancy continued, reaching into a pocket for a handkerchief as she, seemingly accidentally, released Luke from her
grip. "A poor lost little boy with his teddy bear, coming to a dreary old school like this! Just look at how grown up you are now!"

Apollo sighed. "You do this every year, Nanny K..." he pointed out, looking around the room. "How many people have you cried on so far?"

"You'll be fine, Nanny K!" Clay cut in, stepping forward to grip the woman's shoulder firmly. "You've been like a real mother to us! We'll never forget you!"

"Oh, that's so sweet of you to say, dear!" Nancy sighed, patting the tears from her eyes with her handkerchief. "I remember when the two of you first became friends, always sneaking out of your rooms at night! 'To watch the stars', you always said!"

Apollo looked embarrassed. "Well, we were," he mumbled.

Phoenix couldn't help an amused chuckle, though he tried to hide it behind a hand. "You and Clay did what?"

Clay shrugged, giving Trucy a grin as she giggled. "We only stopped 'cause we kept getting caught!" he explained, interlocking his hands behind his head cockily.

Luke shook his head at the unsurprising news, then turned back to Nancy with a smile. "Thank you for looking after us, Nancy. We won't ever forget your kindness."

Nancy sniffed a moment before nodding, hands wringing the handkerchief in her hands. "You go off and change the world, dears," she said, then turned to Phoenix. "You'll look after your boys, won't you Mister Wright?"

Phoenix grinned. "Does that include Clay?"

"Yeah, you'll look after me, won't you?" Clay joked. "I'm one of 'your boys', right Wrights?" He elbowed Apollo, who just rolled his eyes.

Nancy laughed. "Oh, I know you three will be just fine!" she assured them, already waving. "After all, that's what you were always saying so loudly in your rooms! Now you go off and have amazing lives!"

As Nancy turned and began to walk back off into the crowd, the three teens waved after her. "Goodbye, Nancy!" Luke called. "Thank you!" She waved back over her shoulder before disappearing.

Phoenix looked at his watch. "Was there anyone else you three wanted to say goodbye to before you go?" he asked.

Luke, Apollo and Clay all glanced at each other before shaking their heads. "Can't think of anyone in particular," Apollo said.

"Yeah, that was Nanny K," Clay began, counting off on his fingers, "and we were chatting to all our classmates both before and after the ceremony... Teachers generally gave us their goodbyes in our last classes with them."

"I think the big speech Mister Turner gave was his goodbye," Luke chimed in.

Trucy groaned. "That guy made me fall asleep!" she complained. "He was so boring!"
"Count yourself lucky you never had to sit through his assemblies every week," Apollo replied, poking Trucy's nose with a smile.

"Plus, it is getting late," Luke pointed out, peering through a nearby window to the darkening sky outside.

"Then let's get going," Phoenix suggested, stepping towards the door as he waved for the four to follow. "Say goodbye to this old school!"

Luke grinned as everyone fell into step around Phoenix. "Goodbye, school!" he loudly called, to Trucy's amusement.

Clay made sure to walk alongside Phoenix, giving him a somewhat sheepish smile. "By the way Mister Wright, thanks for offering to be my 'parent' today. It was kinda... disheartening when my old man didn't want to come."

"No problem," Phoenix assured him. "You three boys are close enough, I'm happy to consider you one of the extended family."

"You're just saying that because he's giving us a ride home," Apollo joked to his father, elbowing Clay.

Clay just laughed.

As the group approached the door, they were stopped by a man in his mid-twenties with a brown ponytail, who held out a hand to Clay, Luke and Apollo expectantly. "Hey, you three need to turn in your student cards. No exceptions."

Apollo and Clay sighed as they reached into their uniform pockets to retrieve the items, but Luke was distracted, staring at the man thoughtfully. "Mister Thrume...?" he eventually asked.

The man took a deep breath as Apollo and Clay looked up in surprise. "Yeah, it's me," he admitted with another sigh. "Honestly, not many people recognise my voice without the scratchy speakers..."

Clay laughed as he and Apollo handed over their cards. "Wow, you're not at all what I imagined, Hugo!" he cried.

Hugo waved the comment off, only to stare at Clay's card as he received it, quickly looking up to give Clay a glare. "Hey, you're that tricksy kid!" he cried. "You got me in trouble so many times with your sneaking out in the middle of school!"

Clay shrugged, grinning somewhat cockily. "Hey, not my fault you always believed what I was telling you!"

Hugo gave Clay another glare as he took Luke's card, then put Clay's away as he turned his attention to the remaining two. After a moment, he looked confused, glancing up at the brothers and at Phoenix nearby. "I... thought your name was 'Justice'," he told Apollo.

"Uh... it used to be?" Apollo said, a little surprised to be reminded of his former name. "I changed mine when Luke and I got adopted, though Luke here didn't." He gestured to Luke, who gave Hugo a wave.

"Come on, Hugo," Clay said with a laugh, "you seriously didn't know about our resident Wright brothers?"
Apollo gave Clay a glare.

Hugo looked down at Luke's card, surprised. "Woah, you mean you two are brothers!? I thought that was a joke!"

At that, Clay burst into laughter. Even Trucy started giggling.

Turning red, Hugo waved the group towards the door. "Just get going," he told them, but directed a glare and a pointed finger at Clay as the quintet began to leave. "But take note, I'm glad to see you gone, Terran!"

"I love you too, Hugo!" Clay replied, throwing a kiss as he followed the Wrights out of the building.
It had been a very usual Independence Day for the Wright family this year. While Phoenix took Trucy out to watch the fireworks in the park, Apollo and Clay had gone to join the celebrations at the Cosmos Space Center, Clay boasting non-stop about his still-new ability to drive unrestricted as they went to the quiet, isolated valley to see the local variant of the traditional pretty explosions. In the meantime, Luke stayed at home, listening to the cacophony outside as it was only vaguely muffled by the walls and closed windows.

His first year home alone on this day, Luke had quickly discovered it was quietest in his bedroom; Not only was it on the opposite side of the building to the street, but the small window overlooking the alleyway below meant there was more wall to soften any sound echoing across the bricks. Although he was in the apartment, he had locked the doors and windows anyway, as he was, by design, as far from them as possible.

'I wonder if the Professor will be writing back this week?' he mused to himself, looking over to the statuette on his bedside table. 'It usually takes him a week or two to reply, especially when classes are on.' Shaking his head, he returned his attention to his book, the next in line in Luke's re-read of his Sherlock Holmes collection. If questioned, he would have to admit he was re-reading them (this time, anyway) purely because of the comment Phoenix had said during their school graduation. His collection was far from complete (quite a few of his books had been lost in the shuffle of the move and the car accident), and the extended biography of the famous detective was notoriously incomplete itself, but even so Luke was hoping to catch a glimpse in one of his books of a Japanese man who might have conceivably been Phoenix’s ancestor... not that he had any idea what the man's name might have been, but he was sure he could ask Phoenix if a name was brought up.

The distant shouts seemed to die down for a moment. Luke took the opportunity to focus more on his book, as it was difficult to do so with the noise from outside. However, his silence was interrupted by a crashing of glass, causing Luke to jump. No sooner had he laid his book down and got to his feet than the crash was followed by a loud, fizzing bang. Gasping in shock, and hoping dearly that the unnervingly close sound was merely from the street outside, he ran out of his room and into the hallway, making a break for the stairs.

It was as Luke reached the top step that the smoke alarms went off.

Ever since he was a boy, it had been hammered into Luke's head that, on the sounding of a fire alarm of any kind, he was to leave the building and call for help. However, on this occasion, Luke didn't think anyone would argue if he dallied a bit first. Spinning on his heel, he sprinted back into his room, lunging at his bedside table to grab his phone from its usual resting place, tugging it off its charger as he again changed direction for Apollo's bedside table on the other side of the window. Resting there was his brother's silk hat, and, underneath, his gloves, items Apollo only wore on-stage and stored here otherwise. 'If this isn't a false alarm, he'll need these.' Throwing the gloves and phone into the hat, Luke hugged it tightly to his chest and again left the room, the smoke alarms' high-pitched beeping ringing in his ears.
Once in the kitchen area, Luke again paused to look around for the source of the smoke that had set off the alarms. There were two in the apartment, linked to both go off if one detected smoke; One was in the hallway above the stairs, placed to wake up anyone sleeping should it go off overnight, while the other was in the main office next to the kitchen, so cooking or burning food wouldn’t cause false alarms. As Luke had yet to smell anything suspicious, he didn’t think it was the upstairs alarm that had been set off, and, to his confusion, the kitchen seemed to be totally clear too. He cast a glance at the laundry behind him, the closest path to outside. ’It’s a little early to abandon ship without even finding out what’s causing the problem, isn’t it?’ Making his decision, he placed the hat and its contents on the dining table and ran to grab the small fire extinguisher and fire blanket from where they had been carefully hung near the fridge. Thus armed, he dashed into Phoenix’s office.

Luke heard the crackling of the fire before he spotted it. As he stood by the desk, he looked in the direction of the sound and noticed the door into reception had been left wide open, the room beyond lit by a flickering orange light. Gathering up his nerve, Luke shoved the fire extinguisher under an arm and readied the blanket, running to the door and nervously looking beyond into reception.

The room was a mess - moreso than usual. A brick rested by the shattered window, shards of broken glass surrounding it. On the carpet, right in the middle of the blaze, Luke could make out the blackened remains of what he could only guess was a firework casing, quickly burning up as the fire spread through the room. For a few moments, the teen was too shocked to move, staring at the blaze in disbelief. ’Why would someone...? HOW would-!? N-no, I can ask questions later; I have to put out the fire!’ Forcing himself back into motion, he ran through the thickening smoke to the rapidly growing small fire and tossed the blanket as best as he could. It didn’t cover the whole fire, and his aim wasn’t very good with the fire extinguisher under his arm, but the burning section of carpet between him and the original source of the fire seemed to have been successfully smothered, sending a wave of thick smoke up into Luke’s face as it settled. He coughed through the smoke, waving it away as he stepped back into slightly clearer air, only to groan as he looked up and saw the rest of the fire, which the blanket had failed to cover. ’Can I retrieve the blanket, or would that just cause more problems...? I think I’d better leave it.’ Luke readied the fire extinguisher, pulling it out from under his arm and turning it to read the instructions on the side. He had previously read them purely out of curiosity when he was bored, but any memory of what they said had gone out the window when faced with an actual problem. This time, Luke found himself struggling to concentrate on the bright, clear pictures through the adrenaline and noise, but managed to get his bearings to pull the pin from the top and, pointing the nozzle at the rest of the fire, sprayed the white foam wildly.

With a great hissing, the mass of red flame overtaking reception seemed to die down. Luke couldn’t see much of anything through the white foam covering the area immediately around the front desk and door, and there was still a faint sound of crackling, but he assured himself it must be the foam working its magic. Sighing in relief, he placed the extinguisher on a corner of the reception desk that hadn’t gotten itself encased in white, then turned and wandered back into the office, where the air was clearer and he could begin to breathe. The adrenaline from the emergency was beginning to die down, but the loud beeping of the smoke alarm above him reminded Luke he couldn’t stop to relax just yet. ’I’ll need to tell Papa what’s happened... Oh, and would the perpetrators still be hanging around!?’ He ran to the window, only to see out in the street the usual small groups with their fountain fireworks, spraying sparks of light in the middle of the road as onlookers watched from the pavement. ’...Did any of those people even notice what happened up here!?’ Growling in frustration, he turned his attention back inside the apartment. ’Argh, and those alarms are killing my ears! Maybe first I should try and turn them off. I can’t call anyone with those things blaring right above me, anyway. Where’s Papa keep the instructions?’

Assuming his quarry was somewhere in a bookshelf, Luke ran his eyes along the rows of books against the walls around him. To his annoyance, he could only see the usual mixture of Phoenix’s old law books and Trucy and Apollo’s much newer magic books, which had started to migrate into
wherever they would fit in the small apartment. Luke frowned in thought, wondering where the booklet might be. 'Actually, I wouldn't be surprised if it was in reception, knowing my luck tonight.' As he slipped a hand under his hat to run it through his hair, he sighed and made his way back into the fire-damaged room. 'I'll be lucky to see it through all the foam, but there's no harm trying.'

The odd crackling sound, to Luke's surprise, only seemed to have gotten louder in his absence, and, as he looked around in an attempt to read the titles of the books in the nearby bookcases, he quickly noticed an unusual orange glow on the furniture on the other side of the wall of foam. Gasping in sudden realisation, Luke grabbed the fire extinguisher and jumped as close to the foamy mess as he dared, pointing the nozzle through towards where he could see the glow. 'How did I manage to miss that it was still burning!? And how am I so terrible at aiming that I've blocked my own view of where the fire is!!?' He searched for the location of the crackling fire in vain, finally being forced to give up as he dropped the extinguisher back on the reception desk. 'I could have handled this so much better,' Luke told himself with a defeated sigh, running back out to the kitchen to retrieve his small hatful of supplies. He paused only to ensure every door he passed on his way out was closed behind him.

"Luke? Why are you calling me?"

"Papa! It's all my fault! Well, not fully my fault, but I only made it worse and I'm so sorry!"

"Whoa, whoa, calm down! Luke, what's going on?"

"I... well... Okay, before you ask, I've already called the fire brigade. They're on their way."

"... What happened."

View the Court Record
"You're kidding," Apollo breathed into his phone, standing at the edge of the artificial light set up in the grass not far from the Space Center's main building.

Clay raised an eyebrow. When Apollo had suddenly and mysteriously gotten a call from his father, he had decided to answer it purely because it was unusual, and thus the pair had run as far from the noisy fireworks and explosion-loving crowd as they could. Clay was as curious as to the purpose of the call as his friend, and tapped his fingers impatiently against a leg as he waited for the news.

"Alright, I will," Apollo promised, looking unsettled. "Don't worry about me, Dad. Just keep me updated, and I'll be fine. You're sure you don't want me back right now?" He bit his lip as he listened to his father's reply, then sighed. "Okay. I'll text you when I'm on my way, then. Bye."

Clay watched eagerly as Apollo hung up, the black-haired teen promptly bouncing to his friend's side. "Well!?" he cried, grabbing Apollo's arm. "What's going on?"

Apollo pulled his arm from Clay's grip, rolling his eyes. "If you must know," he said, "some vandal threw a firework into our apartment. They've put out the fire, but they don't think it's safe for us to stay in there tonight."

"Whoa," Clay laughed, impressed, then shook his head and put on a more serious expression. "I mean, uh, sorry about your house. Do you know what the damage is? Where are you going to stay?"

"Dad didn't say much," Apollo said with a shrug. "I don't think we know what's damaged, anyway. Apparently Dad's spoken to our insurance, and they can put us up in the nearest hotel for a few nights." He paused and thought a moment. "Or, I think he said 'nearest'."

Clay crossed his arms. "Nearest sounds about right."

Apollo shrugged again. "Maybe," he agreed, "except that the nearest hotel to home is the Gatewater across the street."

It took a moment for the statement to sink in, and Clay stared at Apollo as he recognised the name of the famous building, probably the most luxurious hotel in town. "Oh."

"'Oh' is right," Apollo muttered, then sighed and headed back towards the crowds, tugging his cape back from his shoulders. "Let's get back to Mister Starbuck. I'll explain what's going on."

July 4, 8:52PM

Gatewater Hotel

Lobby
"Everything seems to be in order, sir!" the woman behind the counter chirped, pulling out four cards from somewhere underneath her desk. "I'll have your keys ready momentarily!"

Phoenix breathed a sigh of relief that, for once, something had finally come through for him... especially considering his past history with this hotel and its staff. "Thank you," he said, casting a wary eye at the woman's manager as he gave them a friendly smile and again disappeared into a back room. 'And thank your manager for not recognising me... that guy's creepy enough even when there isn't a murder I'm trying to investigate...' He self-consciously tugged his beanie down tighter on his head.

Trucy watched intently as the woman ran the four cards one by one through a small machine on her desk, the ten-year-old almost hanging off the edge of the counter as she peered over the top, standing on her tiptoes. The woman noticed the girl's gaze and gave her a smile, which Trucy responded to with a giggle.

Luke had been amusing himself during the long wait (it had taken a while for the hotel manager to contact their insurance company) by reading some of the tourist brochures lined up near the check-in counter. It was half a game of 'which of these places have I been' and half 'which of these places have I never heard of before that sound interesting'. The Gatewater Land leaflets were the most prominent, and Luke had been overlooking them until he eventually ran out of anything else interesting to look at, and cast his eye over them out of curiosity if they'd changed since the Wrights went there a few years previous. In his hands, he still held Apollo's hat and gloves that he'd 'rescued' in his escape from the fire, although he now regretted it as it looked like they'd be back in the house long before Apollo would be needing the items next.

"If you're at all interested," the woman spoke up, noticing Luke's perusal as she ran the last of the card keys through her machine, "we have a remarkable tourist attraction right here in this building!"

"You do?" Luke asked, looking over to the woman in surprise.

Trucy frowned. "I've never heard of something in this hotel!"

Phoenix closed his eyes for a moment to quash his frustration. "It's nothing special," he told the kids.

"Now that's not true, sir!" the woman chirped, finishing with the cards and slotting them into pre-prepared cardboard sleeves. "The 'Room with a View to Kill' is very popular! Everyone loves the tours we run!"

"I beg to differ," Phoenix muttered.

Luke wandered over to the desk, tapping his chin in thought. "What is this 'Room with a View to Kill'?" he asked. "Did something happen once in one of these rooms?"

"Indeed it did!" the woman replied, cheerfully explaining, "We had a very high-profile murder happen within view of the hotel, and the murderer planned it all out from one of our third-floor rooms!"

Trucy cooed in delight. "That sounds cool!"

"It's not," Phoenix interrupted, starting to get irritated as he turned to the woman behind the counter. "May we please have our keys?"

"Oh, of course, sir." The young woman handed Phoenix the four cards she had been holding in her hands. "Rooms fourteen-fourteen and fourteen-sixteen, right next door to each other. Enjoy your stay!"
"Thank you," Phoenix muttered, trying to restrain himself from angrily snatching the keys. He immediately headed off towards the lifts, waving for Trucy and Luke to join him. "C'mon, you two."

Luke and Trucy cast concerned looks at each other, then moved to follow their father.

July 4, 9:58PM
Gatewater Hotel
Room 1414

When Apollo met up with his family, he found them already settled in to their rooms. It hadn't been difficult, considering they'd not yet been allowed back into the apartment and thus had only what they'd brought with them when they first left earlier that evening.

Trucy was yawning as she lay on one of the twin beds in the room, already stripped of her shoes, hat, cape, and even her red scarf. Cuddled up against the pillows, she looked ready to fall asleep where she was, though she was forcing herself to stay awake and gave Apollo a tired grin as Luke let him in. "Hey, Polly," she quietly called.

Phoenix, sat on the other bed, visibly sighed in relief to see the last of his children had made it to their temporary 'home'. He tapped at the upside down red hat sitting next to him, the pair of white gloves poking out the top. "Luke rescued these for you."

Apollo paused in surprise, blinking once before turning to Luke standing next to him. "You... shouldn't have?"

Luke blushed, hands clasped behind his back. "I-I was worried the whole building might be going down!" he explained. "Those were the first things I thought of to take with me when I left..."

Apollo thought a moment, then nodded. "Okay. That's fine, I don't mind." He walked over to Phoenix to take the missing parts of his magician's outfit, a part of him glad he took Trucy's lead in wearing most of it as his regular garb. "It shouldn't take more than five days for us to be back home, right?" he asked his father. "It's Monday today, and Truce and I don't have another performance til Saturday..."

Phoenix shrugged. "We won't know until the investigators have finished inspecting the place," he admitted. "The fire didn't spread outside reception, but it apparently got to the ceiling, and they said there's a possibility it damaged structure or something." He sighed, shaking his head. "We'll hear back from them tomorrow."

Apollo nodded, then looked over to Trucy to find she appeared to have dropped off to sleep already, curled up in her black dress on the hotel pillows. He smiled, a part of him wondering if she had been too tired when he came in to even remember by tomorrow that they'd spoken. "I guess we'd better turn in," he whispered, gesturing to his sleeping sister to point her out to Phoenix and Luke.

Luke smiled, a hand to his mouth to keep from giggling. "Good idea," he agreed. "Shall we see you tomorrow, Papa?"

Phoenix nodded, patting Apollo's arm. "I'll see you tomorrow. Luke has your room keys, by the way."
"Sure," Apollo quietly replied, grinning as he moved to follow Luke out of the room. "Seeya tomorrow, Dad."

The two teens kept quiet until they'd closed the room door behind them, and Luke led Apollo to the room next door, opening it with a card key in his pocket. "Did you and Clay have fun?" he asked, opening the door and shoving the key immediately into a small socket on the inside wall.

Apollo laughed a little at the reminder, following Luke in as the lights overhead flickered on, revealing the small room to be a mirror image of its neighbour. "It was dampened a bit after Dad told me what was going on at home," he admitted. "What even happened?"

Luke sighed, pulling the other card key from his pocket and laying it out on a table. "I don't really know," he admitted. "I heard a crash, then a bang, and the smoke alarms went off... I went to investigate, found someone had thrown a brick and a firework through the reception window. Somehow." He paused, pulling his hat off his head and gripping it tightly in guilt. "I... couldn't put out the fire, so I had to get out the back door and call the fire brigade."

Apollo paused a moment from his inspection of the nearest bed, putting down his hat and gloves and walking to Luke's side to rest a comforting hand on his shoulder. "You're fine, Luke," he reminded his brother. "You did the right thing."

Luke thought a moment before nodding, giving Apollo a small smile. "Thanks, Apollo," he said. "I'll try to remember that."

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
When the Wrights met up the next morning to go down to breakfast together, Trucy enthusiastically greeted Apollo with a loud hug. True to Apollo's prediction, she couldn't remember seeing him the night before.

All of the four members of the family felt various degrees of dishevelled as they travelled the fourteen floors down to eat. Even if all of them regularly wore clothes several days in a row, only Luke and Phoenix had ever been forced to sleep in them before, and neither had resorted to it in a very long time. Even Apollo, after growing out of all his other clothes while alone at Turner School, had stripped to his underwear to sleep... not that he'd felt comfortable doing so while sharing a room with Luke.

Once sat at a table, the family set about getting food and chatting as they ate. Trucy was very quick to launch into a rapid description of the night before for Apollo, telling him about the fireworks she and Phoenix had managed to see before the fire in their home broke out and they'd been forced to return. "And then Daddy was talking to the fire people for ages," she explained, "and it took even longer to get the insurance people on the phone!"

"It was the Fourth of July," Apollo pointed out. "We won't have been the only people whose home was vandalised by idiots."

Luke scowled, stabbing at a sausage on his plate with his fork. "Tossers," he muttered darkly under his breath. "Literally, too."

"But then we came here," Trucy continued, "and there was this kinda weird manager guy who talked to the insurance people, and a nice lady who got us our rooms!"

Phoenix hid a smirk behind his food at Trucy's description of the manager.

"And the nice lady mentioned they have a touristy thing in this building," Trucy added in a vaguely confused tone, picking at her food. "Something to do with a murderer."

Apollo was intrigued, but quickly noticed Phoenix, sitting opposite him, scowl at Trucy's words, intently looking away. "What was it?" Apollo asked his sister, a little wary.

"She called it 'Room with a View to Kill'," Luke explained, noticing Apollo's thoughtful expression. "Have you heard of it?"

Apollo took a moment to reply, glancing at Phoenix. "Maybe," he admitted. "I'm not sure."

Trucy crossed her arms, thinking. "Well, she said a famous murder happened here once, and they let people tour the room."

Luke shook his head. "No, the murder happened somewhere else! The murderer planned it from a
room in the hotel."

"And people line up to tour this room?" Apollo questioned, confused. "Why?"

"Exactly," Phoenix agreed, returning his attention to the conversation. "Nobody except those close to it remember the murder itself, and they are the people least likely to tour the place the murderer planned it." He frowned, staring at his plate. "Besides, it's just a normal hotel room. There isn't even anything special about it."

Luke and Trucy shared another glance as they recognised the repeated odd behaviour from the previous night. "How long ago did this murder happen, anyway?" Luke warily asked.

Phoenix thought a moment. "Six years, come September," he said, still staring at his plate, although more thoughtfully now than in anger.

"Only six years?" Trucy cried, offended. "I thought this was some old-timey murder from aaaaaaages ago!" Huffing, she leaned back in her seat, arms crossed. "Why was it such a famous murder, anyway?!"

Phoenix smiled. "The murderer had done a lot more than just kill someone," he explained. "This guy had an entire empire built around collecting and using blackmail material on every person in this city with some modicum of fame or power."

Luke was surprised. "Wow, really?" he asked, then laughed. "I guess it's a good thing he got caught!"

Apollo frowned, silently eating. 'So I was right, then...'

"But if he could blackmail so many people, how'd he get caught?" Trucy asked, leaning forward eagerly in her seat as she questioned her father. "What happened to his 'empire'?"

Phoenix thought a moment, then sadly smiled. "If you have so many questions," he said, "why not go on this tour yourself? I have to meet with the inspector today anyway, and it's probably best you all wait here in the hotel until we're done."

"I'll take you," Apollo offered to Trucy. "On the tour, I mean."

Trucy grinned. "Wow, you will!?" she cried, glancing at Luke to see him also looking excited at the idea. "They'll have, like, a tour guide who knows all about it, right?"

"Can't imagine why they wouldn't," Phoenix said.

"It sounds interesting!" Luke laughed. "That should definitely keep us occupied while you're talking to the inspector, Papa!"

Phoenix smiled. "I'm glad."

"We can organise a tour once Dad's left," Apollo said to Trucy, who squealed excitedly. "I'm sure they'll be happy to show off the thing that made them so famous."

July 5, 9:43AM

Gatewater Hotel
"And here it is, exactly as our fair murderers left it!" the manager of the hotel boasted as he opened the otherwise ordinary hotel room door and showed the three Wright children in. "The Room with a View to Kill!" He chuckled a little, one hand held across his abdomen in a small bow while the other gestured around the room. "I came up with the name myself!"

Trucy jumped in to the room, excited at first, but quickly deflated when she realised, exactly as Phoenix had said, it was merely an ordinary hotel room, not all that different from their own cheaper rooms upstairs. This one was larger, had a single queen-sized bed against the far wall instead of two singles, and the door opened with an ordinary metal key, but it otherwise had the same beige wallpaper, orange carpet and blue chairs. "Oh," she muttered.

Luke adjusted his hat, gaze sweeping the room and noticing the little details that seemed to prove it had remained untouched, true to the man's word. On a small table by the window were two wine glasses, accompanied by an open wine bottle, and the bed had been made, but not as professionally as he'd seen the hotel staff do so. "This is...?" He cleared his throat, casting a glance to their nearby guide. "Very exciting," he insisted, although his tone gave away his disappointment.

Apollo hung at the back of their group, closing the door behind them. He only took notice of the fake flowers sitting in a pot to the side, nearby a blue screwdriver sticking awkwardly out of a drawer. 'Just like Dad described in his case-files... Surely the police would have taken it in to prosecute the wiretapper, though? Maybe it's just a replica.' He looked over to the manager, standing nearby watching them expectantly, and asked, "So, can you tell us the story behind this murder that happened?"

The manager laughed cheerfully as Luke and Trucy looked over to him, Trucy impatiently awaiting the tale. "Of course, sir! Oh, it was many years ago now!" he began. "I was but a mere bellboy then!"

"It was six years ago!" Trucy pointed out, arms crossed.

Thrown off a little by the interruption, the manager scratched his cheek. "Y-yes, well, six years can be a long time, miss," he insisted, quickly returning to his well-practised tale. "The esteemed Redd White of Bluecorp checked in here with his secretary." He sighed, nostalgically. "Ah, what a beautiful woman Miss May was! I personally checked them in myself, you know."

"Really?" Luke asked in surprise, now understanding why, when they'd arranged to do this tour, it had been the manager who stepped forward to take them up instead of one of the 'lesser' employees.

"It was an ingenious plan," the man continued. "They specifically asked for this room, because it has a wonderful view of their victim's office!" With that, he gestured to the window, leading the group to the scene laid out before it. Luke and Trucy smiled as they hurried after him, peering over the table and out the window, although they were surprised to recognise the street outside their home. "She no longer works there of course, but you can see it still!" the manager continued, pointing to a second floor window across the street. "That dark window with the blinds half-shuttered!"

Luke and Trucy, when they realised what the man was pointing at, gasped, Trucy clapping her hands over her mouth in shock. Apollo rested a hand on Trucy's shoulder, looking across the street much more calmly. The dark office the hotel manager was referring to, right next to the broken, boarded-up windows of their front room, was their father's.
"I hear the place is a talent agency now," the manager continued, interpreting the younger pair's surprise as awe of the view. "Regardless, at the time I believe it was a law office!" He chuckled again.

Trucy would have spoken up to boast about her family's talent agency, but was still too shocked to speak.

"The poor woman was investigating into Mister White's, and Bluecorp's, illegal affairs," the man explained. "They realised she was on to them, and came here to off her!"

"What did they do?" Luke asked, staring in awe at their guide. "Why was this room so important?"

The man laughed to himself. "Why, to create an alibi, sir! They tapped her phone, found a time to pin the blame on another, and crafted their perfect frame-up!" He turned and hurried over to the bathroom door, reaching in and pulling out a medium-sized cork board, on which were pinned all sorts of newspaper articles. His trio of guests slowly followed to read them, quickly noticing every article on the board seemed to be about the murder and how it was uncovered in court. "Well, not ab-so-lutely perfect!" the guide continued. "Miss May ensured I would be her alibi, but she was arrested for the tapping of their victim's phone! And then Mister White, he tried to get away with his crime by confessing to the tapping, only to change his mind and confess to the whole thing!"

Trucy and Luke both looked over at Apollo, standing behind them. "You knew all about this, didn't you?" Trucy accused him.

Apollo only shrugged.

Taking no notice of the sibling disagreement, the hotel manager leant the board against a wall and hurried to the drawer, where the screwdriver was sticking out. "And now for the best part, the drawer in which they kept the wiretap...!"

View the Court Record
It was a quiet and rather awkward trip back down to the lobby, and the trio quickly sat in a row on one of the comfortable sofas dotted around the massive room at the entry doors.

"Stay here and look out for Dad?" Apollo asked, looking to Trucy at his side and Luke next to her.

Luke nodded, but Trucy instead looked up at her oldest brother with a glare. "If you knew someone was killed in Daddy's office," she loudly accused him, "why didn't you ever mention it before!?"

Apollo quickly shushed the girl, looking around as her words echoed in the open space. After shooting apologetic smiles to the few who turned their heads in confusion towards the trio, he returned Trucy's determined glare with one of his own. "Because you wanted to see it," he explained. "Plus, Dad knew the victim, and I didn't want to accidentally upset him by bringing it up."

Trucy blinked in surprise. "He did?"

Luke thought a moment, running a finger across his chin. "His mentor, right?" he asked. "I'd forgotten Papa mentioned she was murdered. He never said it was in the office, though."

"Huh?" Now Trucy looked between both her brothers in confusion. "What are you guys talking about!?" she cried.

"You don't remember?" Apollo asked, one eyebrow raised.

"It was a while ago," Luke pointed out. "If I remember correctly, I don't think Trucy was even paying attention at the time."

Trucy huffed, crossing her arms.

"I'll explain then," Apollo offered, resisting the urge to smile at his sister's threatening anger as he rested a hand on her caped shoulder. "I've read Dad's case-file and notes on it several times, so I think I probably know more about it than that tour guide."

Trucy only pouted at her oldest brother's smug grin.

"Her name was Mia Fey," Apollo began. "She was Maya's older sister."

At that, Trucy again blinked in surprise. "She was!?"

Luke smiled. "You remember her now?" he asked.

"Mommy's mentioned her!" Trucy cried, glancing back and forth between her brothers. "Her 'Sis'! That means she's our aunt!" She thought only a moment, not noticing Luke and Apollo's confused looks, then grinned. "That makes her Auntie Mia! We should ask Mommy and Pearly if it would be alright to meet her one day!"
Apollo stared at Trucy in disbelief, crossing his arms. "That's what you're focussing on here...?"

"So, um," Luke spoke up, getting the conversation back on track, "she was investigating this Bluecorp company and they tried to kill her for it?"

Nodding, Apollo continued, "Yeah, and frame Maya. Dad stood up for her, though. He proved the wiretapping had happened, he got himself accused in Maya's place, and then Maya channelled Mia and helped him get the murderer to confess."

"Auntie Mia sounds so smart!" Trucy gleefully told Luke, her legs swinging as they dangled over the edge of her seat.

Apollo snorted in laughter. "You should see her case-files!" he cried, grinning excitedly. "Dad's kept 'em all, and she was an amazing attorney!"

Luke giggled. "You've been studying them?" he realised.

Apollo shrugged, looking embarrassed. "Well, I haven't gone through all of 'em yet..."

The entrance doors swung open, and the trio looked around as a familiar man in a white shirt and blue beanie came in to the lobby. Trucy jumped to her feet, waving as she ran to him. "Daddy!" she cried, attracting Phoenix's attention just as she reached his side, grabbing his middle in a tight hug.

Phoenix laughed as Apollo and Luke slowly joined them. "Ah, you're all here!" he said, then gently pried Trucy off his abdomen. "I have some good news!"


Smiling, Phoenix nodded, and his three children erupted into cheers.

July 5, 10:47AM

Wright Talent Agency

Reception

After a brief trip back to their hotel rooms to ensure they had everything they'd arrived with, Phoenix led the Wrights back to their front door, carefully unlocking it and pushing it open to enter the damaged front room, stepping gingerly on a line of rags leading to the office beyond. Apollo, Trucy and Luke filed in behind him, looking around in shock.

The green carpet that had stretched into the neighbouring office was completely gone, cut off at the doorway, leaving a dirty grey subfloor. Great swathes of the beige walls were similarly missing, revealing the wooden framing and electrical wiring usually hidden behind the drywall, while the parts that remained suffered black stains from the smoke. The broken window pane was covered by wooden boards, which appeared to be nailed into the frame, while the other two panes of glass around it were blocked from letting in much sunlight thanks to a thin layer of smoke still covering their inside surface. Every bit of furniture that used to sit in the room had vanished, leaving it empty, echoing back the trio's quiet gasps as they took in the reality of the situation.

"Almost everything in here was damaged beyond repair, if not destroyed completely," Phoenix
explained, watching the trio. "Anything left stinks of smoke, but I think we can clean them up with a little elbow grease. We might have to invest in a few air fresheners or aromatic candles or something, just until we get the faint smell out of the rest of the rooms." He winced as he looked to Apollo specifically. "Oh, by the way... Your desk was completely gone, Apollo. Nothing in that corner survived. Sorry."

"It's fine," Apollo replied, still looking around the room in vague shock, "I'm fine. I just had my old school stuff there... and some things for college. I can always print those out again." He turned his gaze to Phoenix, forcing a small smile. "At least we're alive, right? And it was just this room that got hit. We've only been out one night."

"My violin was in here," Luke quietly realised aloud. "And all... well, most of my music." He sadly stared at the floor, gripping his other arm in self-comfort. "Mum gave me that violin... It was a Christmas present..."

Trucy suddenly squeaked. "The piano!" she shouted, and almost dashed out into the room before Apollo and Luke instinctively grabbed her. "My portrait of Daddy was on there!" she meekly added, gripping her brothers' arms as she hung off them, almost dropping to the rag-covered floor if not for Apollo and Luke holding her up. She sniffed, tears gathering in her eyes. "How can I remember what he looks like for when he comes back...?"

Luke pulled Trucy towards him into a hug, letting the girl cry. "It's okay, Truce. You can let it out if you want."

Phoenix quietly stepped backwards and hurriedly walked into the office, unnoticed.

Apollo dropped to his knees, placing his hat on the floor and rubbing Trucy's back. "Don't you worry. We can make another one."

"No need," Phoenix interrupted, re-entering the room as the trio looked up in surprise, seeing him standing with a small smile and his hands behind his back. "It smells of smoke, and the piano itself was beyond repair, but the fire did spare this at least." He swung his arms around, revealing in his hands the missing portrait of Zak Gramarye, a little blackened near the bottom but otherwise totally intact.

"Daddy's portrait!" Trucy cried, running forward and grabbing the frame from Phoenix to hug before jumping back, holding it at arm's length with a disgusted cry. "Blegh! Wow, it does stink of smoke."

Luke and Apollo giggled, shooting each other relieved looks as Apollo got back up off the floor, retrieving his hat.

"Don't worry, Daddy," Trucy said to the portrait, smiling widely. "we'll get you cleaned up in no time!" With that, she happily skipped into the office. Apollo and Luke moved to follow after her.

Phoenix stood by the door, but held out a hand to stop Luke before he followed his siblings further into the home. "I'm sorry about your violin," he said giving Luke a sympathetic look. "There really wasn't much left of it."

Luke sadly nodded, rubbing an arm in self-comfort as he looked away. "I'm fine," he insisted. "It's just a violin. I have other things from Mum and Dad." He sighed. "Besides, if I'd been able to put out the fire-"

"And you can stop that right there," Phoenix interrupted, giving his son a stern look as Luke met his gaze in surprise. "This wasn't your fault. You did everything you could." He smiled. "If it weren't for
what you *did* do, that fire would have done more damage for sure. Probably would have spread into the office." He paused briefly, more for effect than anything else. "You should be proud."


Phoenix softly laughed, reaching up to ruffle Luke's hair through his hat, to the teen's giggles. "Let's join your siblings," he said, and the pair headed through into the office.

View the Court Record
As Trucy entered the room, her portrait of Shadi Enigmar's stage persona held gingerly in her arms, she paused, her attention grabbed by the window overlooking the street outside. The Gatewater Hotel was as visible here as her home had been from there, and she rushed to the small sofa to place the sooty portrait of her biological father down. "You sit here for a moment, Daddy," she told it, ensuring the frame would not fall from its perch.

Apollo, having been examining the old coat-rack rescued from the neighbouring room, raised an eyebrow as he watched his sister's antics. "What are you doing?" he asked, a part of him wondering if he even wanted to know the answer to his question.

"It was in here, wasn't it?" Trucy replied, a 'well duh' tone to her voice as she stepped towards the window, looking across at the row of windows on the hotel's third floor. "I wonder where that room we were in is?"

Apollo opened his mouth to respond, but thought better of it and changed his mind, shaking his head as he wandered towards the kitchen door, his hat still held securely in his hands.

Phoenix and Luke finally entered, Phoenix closing the door behind them so as to keep any lingering smell of smoke from needlessly spreading to the rest of the apartment. "What are you two talking about?" he asked idly, crossing the room towards his desk.

"Auntie Mia," Trucy casually replied, then turned and held her hands on her hips with a scowl, seemingly not noticing all three members of her family freeze and stare in her direction. "How come you never told us about her, Daddy!?""}

Phoenix blinked, a blank look on his face that slowly gave way to a confused frown. "'Auntie' Mia...?"

Apollo and Luke shot each other horrified glances, wondering if they should speak up.

"Yeah!?" Trucy cried, running to the window and standing in its centre as she looked out at the hotel across the street. "The tour guide said someone watched her die in here from that room we went to in the hotel!" She fixed Phoenix with another glare. "Why didn't you ever say someone died in here!?!"

To Apollo and Luke's surprise, Phoenix then laughed, pulling his beanie off his head and tossing the item onto his desk. "Oh, it just never came up," he airily explained, walking over to join Trucy at the window. "We found her body right there where you're standing, underneath the window."

At that, Trucy squealed and jumped away, staring at the spot of carpet under the centre pane. "Right there!?" she repeated.

Phoenix laughed again. "Aw, don't tell me you're afraid of Mia's ghost, Truce?" he teased, leaning down towards her.
"No!" Trucy insisted, brushing back her cape as though wiping off dust. "I just... thought I saw a bug. Besides!" She crossed her arms, putting on a know-it-all tone. "Mommy or Pearly could channel her if they wanted to, so she's probably hanging out with them!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Really," he sighed.

"Exactly," Phoenix chuckled, poking at Trucy's nose with a grin. "Why would she want to scare you? That would be a terrible first impression for when you all finally meet each other!"

Luke frowned. "Wait, does she know about us?" he asked.

"Course she does," Phoenix replied, standing straight as he turned towards Luke. "I actually spoke to her in January, and Maya spends some time with Mia every year on her birthday."

"Maya's birthday?" Apollo clarified.

"But we visited Mommy on her birthday this year!" Trucy pointed out. "Why didn't we see Auntie Mia then!?"

Apollo sighed, and would have crossed his arms had he not been holding his hat. "We were only there for an hour or two," he replied. "I presume it's Pearly who channels Mia, and she obviously wanted to spend that time with us instead of channelling someone else."

Trucy tapped her foot, but had no objections, so she silently accepted the argument.

Luke thought a moment, looking to Phoenix. "Papa, if you knew what this 'Room with a View to Kill' was about, why didn't you tell us before we went there? We might not have gone if we'd known it was about the murder of Maya's sister... and in this office, too." He gestured to the window, where Phoenix had said her body was.

Phoenix shrugged. "Who am I to tell you how to spend your own time and money?" he said, then smiled as he looked to Apollo. "Besides, Apollo seems to have told you more about it than that creepy ex-bellboy did."

Apollo blushed, looking away. "Well, I've read your notes on the case a few times," he quietly admitted, "a-and they were asking questions, so..."

Shaking his head, Phoenix quietly laughed to himself. "Right now, I'm curious to see what the chief thinks of 'Auntie Mia'," Phoenix continued, winking at Trucy, who simply grinned. He then turned to look out the window, directing a stern stare into the room he still distinctly remembered seeing April May standing in on the night of Mia's death. "That room, though... It's been almost six years, and they're still flogging it out as a tourist attraction to every passer-by?" He frowned, turning his expression into a glare. "I don't think I'll ever understand what goes on in the heads of the staff over there..."

Apollo and Luke shot glances at each other, unsure how to break the suddenly serious mood. Trucy simply followed Phoenix's eyes, still trying to locate the window to Room 303.

Phoenix sighed, turning away from the window and heading behind his desk, offering his kids a reassuring smile. "But, we have work to do, don't we?" he pointed out, searching the loose paper littering the area to find a blank piece.

"We do?" Trucy asked, running to grab her dropped portrait of her birth father.

Phoenix finally located a blank piece of paper, grabbed a pen, and walked around his desk towards
the door further into the home. "Making a list of the stuff we lost in the fire, of course," Phoenix explained, patting Apollo's shoulder as he passed. "Have to furnish that room again once it's been rebuilt. This talent agency won't get any customers with a reception room like that!" He opened the door and headed through into the kitchen.

Trucy giggled, skipping after Phoenix. Apollo and Luke smiled as they followed. "So we'll get a new piano and violin?" Luke suggested. "Oh, and I don't suppose that old computer on the desk survived, did it?"

Phoenix shook his head, sitting at the dining table as he started writing a list on the blank piece of paper. "Whole thing melted from the heat," he said, then began to mutter to himself. "Lessee, piano, violin, desk... Those are all stuff for the agency, so those have priority."

In a few moments, Luke, Trucy and Apollo had also sat in their regular seats at the table. "We kept our fliers in there, too," Trucy pointed out with a sigh. "We'll have to order to have them reprinted!"

"You might want to redesign them again first, Papa," Luke giggled.

Phoenix scoffed good-naturedly, returning his attention to the list. "Quite honestly, it'd be nice to have a brand new piano. That old thing was something Maya brought in, and it was really starting to look shabby."

"Couldn't hold a tune, either," Luke replied with a grin.

"Nah, that's just Dad's playing," Apollo added, shooting Phoenix a mischievous look.

"Hush," Phoenix said, pretending he couldn't hear the three kids giggling madly.

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"So last night was a bit hair raising

Hm? 

Someone threw a firework through our window

WHAT!?!?!?!? .

WE'RE ALL OKAY I PROMISE

YOU BETTER BE OR I'LL KILL YOU THEN CHANNEL YOU THEN KILL YOU AGAIN!!!!! .

I'M THE MASTER OF KURAIN I CAN DO THAT!!!!! .

Luke was home, he managed to keep it restricted to reception

The police apparently got a profile on the guy from onlookers, they say they know who he is

The building has been inspected and declared safe so we were only out a night

Where did you go overnight? .

The Gatewater. I wasn't sure how long my phone battery would have to last, so I waited to tell you
what was happening

If you scare me like that again Nick I swear you will be meeting Sis in the afterlife.

I'm sure I would be. Btw apparently the kids are all eager to meet their 'auntie Mia', guess who called her that

Aw, I can't be mad with the kids! I guess we'll have to arrange something when we have the time. ;).

__________________________________________________________

So are you three okay? Your dad told me what happened :(.

APOLLO: We're fine. Luke was the only one home at the time, and Dad says he stopped the fire getting too bad

That's good. It was reception that got hit right?.

APOLLO: Yep. We lost almost everything in there. I think the only thing that survived was Trucy's portrait of her dad

APOLLO: The carpet's totally gone, and a lot of the wall is missing at the moment too

Wow... .

LUKE: Hey, Maya! What Apollo said. It's weird how much a room changes when it's all stripped down, but Papa says some builders will be coming sometime to replace the window and rebuild the floor and walls.

APOLLO: Yeah, they're going to try and match the carpet and walls to their original color, so it still goes with the office

TRUCY: WE HAVE TO CLOSE THE AGENCY UNTIL RECEPTION IS BACK TO NORMAL, IT'S A DISASTER!

APOLLO: It's not that bad, Truce :/

TRUCY: YES IT IS

I hope you get everything running again soon :( you still have the wonder bar don't you?.

APOLLO: Exactly. And Dad has the bowl club too. It's just any walk-in one off jobs we're missing atm

LUKE: My violin's gone. So's Papa's piano. We have to replace those before I can help out again.

The piano's gone!? I got such a good deal on that! D: .

But the important thing is all four of you are safe and alive. I'm glad for that at least.

TRUCY: You'll come visit us soon, won't you Mommy? :3 And bring Pearly?

We'll see Trucy ;).
View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"Actually, you two have Maya's room," Phoenix continued to the boys, smiling nostalgically. "She used to stay here occasionally when this was still Mia's place."

Luke thought curiously as he rolled the die and moved his figure. "I think Maya's mentioned Mia. Who was she?"

"Does this have to do with Charley?" Apollo asked. "You said something about him having seen a lot for an average plant."

Phoenix thought in silence for a long moment. "Apollo," he eventually said, turning to his eldest, "you've read all my case-files from the courthouse library. What do you remember about my second ever case?"

December 22, 11:30AM

Wright Talent Agency
Phoenix's Office

Fifteen-year-old Apollo cast a furtive glance around the room as he poked his head through the crack in the door. Seeing no-one inside, he checked there was nobody in the kitchen behind him and dashed into the office, carefully closing the door once inside.

A part of Apollo told him he was being stupid; Why sneak around in his own home? Phoenix was his father - had been for almost three months now - and there was no reason he couldn't ask if there were files or even notes of any of the ex-lawyer's cases lying around, or if Apollo could maybe look at them. The rest of Apollo said this was the only time he could do this; Phoenix was busy organising their trip tomorrow, going to meet a friend of his and Luke's up in the mountains, and Luke and Trucy were trying to help, putting together things they would need for the four days they'd be away. Apollo had thrown together some of his clothes and a few books Luke had leant him, and his packing was done. Asking to poke around in Phoenix's office would only bother his father, and, if he said no, what was Apollo's plan then? 'Better to ask forgiveness, I think the phrase goes? Besides, with us leaving tomorrow, I'm pretty sure Dad would say no.'

The conversation they'd had the previous day over Luke's board game had bothered Apollo all night.

"I remember something about a clock that looked like a statue," Apollo mumbled, then blinked and looked up at his father with wide eyes. "Didn't the charges get transferred to you on that one?"

Phoenix nodded again. "Do you remember the name of the victim? Or the first defendant?"

Apollo was forced to shrug, looking guilty. "I'm terrible with names," he admitted. "Sorry."
"No problem," Phoenix calmly replied, smiling. "The first defendant was Maya. It was how we met."

Back before the fan club had fizzled out in the wake of Phoenix's disbarment, Apollo had prided himself on knowing all the small details about every case. He'd spend the whole afternoon sitting in the courthouse library, reading the official case-files and courtroom transcripts until he'd memorized every argument and every piece of evidence used to support it. Now, though? 'I haven't read a case-file in months... how'd I forget all of that so quickly? I mean, I always knew I'd never manage the names, but forgetting so much about Dad's first big trial?' Apollo sighed to himself, leaning against the door. It was because he'd forgotten so much about his idol-turned-parent that Apollo was convinced he had to return to his former hobby. How could he call himself a fan, let alone a fan who wanted to become a lawyer himself one day, if he could no longer recall any of that information he'd once so prided himself on knowing?

Phoenix looked over to the office door with a thoughtful, far-off look in his eyes, and Apollo wondered what was on the ex-lawyer's mind. "Mia was my mentor, and Maya's older sister. This used to be her office, a long time ago."

Apollo and Luke glanced at each other as they mutually realised who the victim of the case had been.

A part of Apollo was angry at himself for deciding to leave out Luke. Much of the previous evening had been spent telling his little brother everything he had managed to remember about the case: that there had been a conspiracy with a big businessman, that Phoenix had almost lost until he'd resorted to threatening to release a list of people to the press, and that said list had been full of famous important people who had committed suicide, a fact discovered by one of Apollo's old friends in the fan-club. It had led to a lot of speculation that the businessman, who Apollo couldn't remember the name of for the life of him, had overseen more than one murder before finally being executed the previous year. Luke had wanted to question Phoenix about it immediately, but Apollo had convinced him to leave it alone, wanting to re-read the case-file first. For Luke, this had translated to "after our trip" - another reason Apollo was leaving him out of his little 'mission' this morning.

'But I should get going before I lose my chance.' Pushing off from the door, Apollo tip-toed behind Phoenix's desk and crouched down, looking over the drawers kept within reach of the big, comfortable chair currently tucked under the desk, its wheels having long left marks in the carpet from years of use. He held out a hand towards the drawers, wondering which to try, but paused as he noticed keyholes by the handles. 'Uh-oh. What if they're locked?' Closing his eyes, Apollo decided to take a chance, and reached out for one randomly. The plastic handle firmly in his grasp, he gave a firm tug... and was surprised when he felt the drawer slide out easily at his touch. Eyes blinking open in shock, he smiled as he saw the drawer, conveniently the one furthest to the left, indeed open in front of him. He pulled it open a little wider, and grinned as he saw a sea of carefully organised files within. Every one was marked with an unfamiliar handwriting, a code of two letters followed by a dash and a single number. Underneath each was scribbled a month and year, and a quick scan told Apollo that the earliest, the ones hidden at the back of the drawer, were from as far back as February, 2013. The most recent, the file at the very front, was labelled "AUG '16". Apollo frowned. 'Huh. That's weird. Dad didn't take his first case until that August, didn't he?' He ran a hand through the files, seeing glimpses of the official documentations, transcripts, and even loose notes and copies of written evidence. These can't be Dad's. What are they doing here? Whose are they?"
At that moment, Apollo heard the door to the kitchen opening, and immediately reacted, slamming the drawer closed and jumping back, almost falling over onto the green carpet and hitting his head on the desk behind him. Eyes wide, he looked up around the chair and computer monitor to the kitchen door, only to see Phoenix stood in the doorway, one hand on the doorknob and an equally surprised look on his face as he stared back at the teen.

"You are in for it now, Apollo..." the fifteen-year-old told himself, meekly standing up, although he couldn't make his eyes meet his father's. He opened his mouth to speak, but couldn't think of an excuse that wasn't babbling. It was plainly obvious what he'd been doing; Talking would just make it worse. He gripped his bracelet tightly, waiting for the retribution that was sure to come.

After a long pause, Phoenix laughed. "Were you looking at my case-files?"

Apollo winced, although he was a little surprised at the reaction. "Um... yeah," he admitted, carefully looking up at Phoenix's amused face. "You're not mad?" he asked.

"Why would I be?" Phoenix replied, still laughing as he entered the room, pushing the door to a mostly closed position behind him. "If I didn't want you in there, I'd've locked them up!"

"Oh," Apollo mumbled, now beginning to feel embarrassed for worrying in the first place.

Grinning, Phoenix walked around the desk to stand next to Apollo, arms crossed as he leaned against the back of his chair. "Feel free to go through them. I don't mind, I promise."

'The grin says you're looking for another opportunity to tease me,' Apollo thought with a sigh, but he obediently knelt down by the drawers anyway. He had automatically re-opened the one he'd been looking in already before he remembered what he'd been doing immediately before the interruption, and looked back up at his father. "Actually Dad, I was wondering..." He gestured to the drawer. "Whose cases are these? They can't be yours, right?"

Phoenix's grin downgraded to a smile. "You're correct on that point," he agreed. "Those weren't my cases, though do feel free to read them anyway. Those were Mia's."

"Mia's?" Apollo repeated as Phoenix crouched down at his side, sitting comfortably on the carpet. "Your mentor's?"

Phoenix nodded. "She was an amazing lawyer. Everything I know I learned from her, so I'm sure you'd pick up something studying her cases too." Smiling, he reached to the drawer next to Apollo's and pulled it open, revealing another stack of files and folders within. "These were mine," he explained. "Not as organised as Mia kept hers, but it's in order, so that's good enough for me." He chuckled to himself. "Organisation was one thing she never was able to teach me before she left."

Apollo looked over the files in Phoenix's drawer, and found he had to agree. They were labelled and ordered identically to Mia's, by two different sets of handwriting (one he recognised as Phoenix's, but the other was different to even the writing on Mia's files), although bits of the documentation, the notes and other bits of paper stuck out everywhere, making it harder to even locate the labels or where the separate files began or ended. Looking at the dates, he noticed the file at the back was labelled "AUG '16", while the one at the front was "FEB '19", only ten months previous. Something in the back of Apollo's head told him there was something off about that most recent date, that maybe there was a file missing, but he decided to ignore it for now, running a hand through the case-files as he caught glimpses of familiar official records, transcripts he'd once studied, copies of evidence he'd only read about, and even messy, handwritten notes he'd previously only dreamed of being so close to.
"I'd offer to let you take some to Kurain with us to read," Phoenix said, interrupting Apollo's train of thought, "but honestly I'd rather these not leave the office."

"Alright," Apollo replied, nodding as he gave his father a grin. It seemed like a reasonable request, especially in return for unrestricted access to the personal files of the Phoenix Wright. 'How did I end up getting adopted by my hero again?' He was so amazed at the opportunity, he almost forgot that his original intention had been to look up a very specific case, so it was with a small cry of discovery that he reached into the back of Phoenix's drawer, grabbing the file second from the back. It was labelled "NS-2 SEP '16", and the haphazardly organised paper inside fell into place as the file was removed from its home, making it already look much tidier. "This was the one I was looking for," he explained, giving Phoenix an apologetic look. "That's... okay, right?"

Phoenix was surprised, but slowly smiled. "Of course it is," he insisted, then pushed himself to his feet, hands shoved into the pocket in the front of his hoodie. "By the way," he added, "let me know if you have trouble reading my handwriting in those things. I was only ever writing my notes for me, so I didn't try to be tidy with them."

Apollo nodded, watching as Phoenix then turned and left the room, closing the door again as he went. He hoped he hadn't accidentally upset his father, but any thought he might have had to follow and check up on him was overtaken by the excitement of the treasure trove before him, and he simply had to examine his chosen file immediately. Leaving the drawers open, Apollo stood up, clutching the file firmly in his hands, and moved for the desk. He pulled out the chair and sat down, plopping the file on the (for once) clean surface (which he suspected Luke had cleared recently, as tidy as he was). After opening the file, Apollo very quickly pulled out the official documents and the court transcript, putting the familiar papers to one side as he focussed on the small pile of handwritten notes. On top was a crumpled scrap of paper with a message in the unfamiliar handwriting: "When my sister couldn't find any contradictions in a witness's testimony she would bluff it and press the witness on every detail! The witness always slips up and says something wrong... It worked lots of times!" Frowning at the strange item, he put it aside, as he also quickly did to the small stack of newspaper clippings that were underneath it. After that, to his surprise, was a list of handwritten names... a very familiar list of names, one he had read so many times in the court transcript he had once managed to even recite the first three. 'This... It's the suicides! The ones Dad threatened to release to the press to get the murderer to admit to it!' It looked like Phoenix had never even finished reading the whole list to the court, as it was much longer than Apollo remembered it being, and none of the names in the latter half were familiar at all. The handwriting, to his confusion, wasn't Phoenix's, but it also wasn't the mystery writer of the strange note he'd already put to one side. He glanced back at the still-open drawer of Mia's case-files, studying the careful script of the labels that poked up periodically from the folders. 'Was it...? Did she write this before she died?'

After a long pause for thought, Apollo shook his head, moving the list aside. 'I'll work it out another time.'
A Precious Return

The Revived PW Fan-Club Forum!

Home > Other Discussion

Thread: EMERGENCY! Help me convince PreciousFairy...

steeljusticelover, 09/02/2022 04:07:38PM

... to return to the forum! READY SET GO!

Pocky-Hockey, 09/02/2022 06:45:42PM

Wait, what!?

Precious, are you reading this? We miss you, friend! You were always so wise, but at the same time really innocent and naive... I also really miss your little romance posts you used to do now and then!

BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN], 09/03/2022 09:36:50AM

Precious might be coming back!? 

Tell her (and MyF) to contact me if she wants her old account set up again. You can give her my number, can't you Steel?

Drewby, 09/03/2022 09:50:34AM

Precious-Fairy? As in one of the co-founders?

... can she promise not to be so infuriating?

Liztropical, 09/03/2022 10:44:08AM

Drewby, please don't bring your beef with Precious into this thread. If you don't like her, what are you doing in here to begin with?

Precious, I really miss you! You brought such a sense of refinement to every thread you commented in!

Drewby, 09/03/2022 10:50:53AM

Your not a mod anymore, I don't have to listen to you
Dime_Quarters [MOD], 09/03/2022 01:35:27PM

It's called 'common courtesy', Drewby. I don't want to have to suspend you again.

It would be great to see you back, Precious. Though, I thought you left because you'd be somewhere with terrible internet? Does that mean your situation improved?

ForgotMeKnot, 09/03/2022 03:21:25PM

AUGH SJL, you scared me when I saw that 'EMERGENCY' in the title of a PINNED THREAD, do you want me to die of a heart attack!? I thought another firework had gone thrown thru the Wright's window or something!

Why is Precious potentially coming back and not MyF? Or are we convincing Precious TO convince MyF? Uh-oh, looks like you're gonna be out a job, Blackbird ;D

steeljusticelover, 09/03/2022 04:26:27PM

Thanks for the comments, guys! I gave your arguments to Precious, and here's what she has to say in response:

"Thank you for all the kind words, everyone! I also miss being able to spend so much time with you all. Drewby, I'm sorry you got so upset about my stories, but if you'd been nice and said something much sooner, I could have done much more to fix them than I was able to. I had some amazing ideas planned before I had to leave! :o

"I've been practising my spelling a lot since I left, so I no longer need My-Fairy to type for me. It looks like I let a lot of you think I was a grown-up, but actually I'm younger than SteelJusticeLover. I'm sorry for lying, and I feel really bad about it. :( \n
"SteelJusticeLover told me how the forum is much smaller and private now, so, since I know only our friends will see it, we took a photo together! I've asked him to include it when he posts this. Thank you again, everyone!"

I was trying to convince her to come back because she's going to school here in the city now, so she has internet access. Since she's always over here playing with my sister (they're about the same age), I figured it was worth a try. :)

FILE ATTACHED: IMG2973.JPG - [ERROR: THIS FILE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE USER]

BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN], 09/03/2022 04:34:52PM

Very funny, Knot. ;) Besides, MyF made it quite clear when she passed the forum down to me that she would most definitely never have the time to be running it herself again, so if she came back, it would only be as a normal user.
Oh, you two took a selfie!?! I... guess I wasn't expecting that. I have to say though, you've grown a lot since we met in person, Precious! Let me know if you change your mind about coming back!

Liztropical, 09/03/2022 06:35:30PM

Wait, Precious, you're... 10? 11!? I always thought you were, like, MyF's older sister or something! That means you were... what, 6 or 7 when we met? And you're sure all those intelligent sounding words were all you, if MyF was doing your typing?

This... is a shock.

Dime_Quarters [MOD], 09/03/2022 07:35:27PM

... I guess now is a bad time to admit I'm one of the few who was in on Precious's secret already? We only met the once, but I agree you've grown a lot. You were 8 at the time, weren't you? That'd make you about 11 or 12 now.

And Steel: that's you? Really? You're sure you want to insist that?

steeljusticelover, 09/04/2022 09:17:36AM

Precious just turned 12. She says she was 7 when she and My-Fairy started up the original forum. But yeah, I was surprised to find that out when I first met her too!

And yeah, that's me, Dime. Why wouldn't it be? That's just my normal clothes if that's your question. There's nothing weird about it.

Pocky-Hockey, 09/04/2022 11:35:23AM

AAAAA PRECIOUS!!! You're so cute~! I had no idea you were such a little kid! :DDD Actually I bet that's the real reason Steel wants you back, so he isn't the baby of the forum anymore! Haha!

ForgotMeKnot, 09/04/2022 01:30:16PM

I agree with Dime. I was at the Wonder Bar in July, when the Gramaryes were doing their show every night for a week or two. You said they were raising funds to rebuild their agency, right? I was even trying to talk to 'em after the show, but they disappeared quick...

Actually, haven't a lot of us been to see the Gramaryes by now?

BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN], 09/04/2022 04:43:01PM

Dime, Knot: Check your PMs!
steeljustice lover, 09/04/2022 06:08:27PM

I'll take down the stupid picture then... get Precious to take another one without me in it or something.

CelestialImpacts, 09/04/2022 07:02:26PM

It's your choice to take down the photo SJL, but I don't think it was stupid. You turned 18 this year, didn't you? I thought you looked like a very strapping young man.

It looks like there are more of us than I thought who had met the Fairys IRL. There are 9 of us here, and I'm counting 4 of us who already knew Precious was so young.

Dime_Quarters [MOD], 09/05/2022 09:26:18AM

Steel, I'm sorry for confronting you like that. I didn't intend to upset you, and I should have politely questioned you through PM before... doing what I did.

Hey, I didn't know you'd met the Fairys IRL, Celestial! We gotta compare stories over PM sometime ;)

Speaking of this forum having 9 members... I hear that's about to become 10. :D

Liztropical, 09/05/2022 11:44:49AM

Is Precious actually coming back!?

Excuse me a moment, I have to go run around the block to let out my excitement.

Precious-Fairy, 09/05/2022 02:07:12PM

Hello everyone! Thank you again for all your kind words! :)

I am truly very sorry to have allowed you all to believe I was a grown-up for so long. My-Fairy thought it would be better that way, especially when there were hundreds of users back on the old forum. It's very sad to see how few of us are still around after all this time. ;(

When I took that picture with SteelJusticeLover, I had no idea it would cause so many problems! Anyone else who has a problem with him will have to go through me in future! >(

LizTropical, I think it was in the forum's second year we became friends, wasn't it? So I would have been seven or eight then. It's great to see you again! And My-Fairy always wrote down what I told her to, but I've never been very good at spelling, so she got all the words right when I couldn't.

DimeQuarters, hi! I'm afraid I don't really remember meeting you. I'll ask My-Fairy though. If it was just once, that's probably why I've forgotten. I'm sorry. :)
Pocky-Hockey, thank you! My-Fairy is also always saying I'm cute! SteelJusticeLover says he just wanted me back because my old friends here would love to see me again. I didn't know everyone called him the baby of the forum though. He's a grown-up now. He's going to start studying to be a defens aterny in a few weeks.

CelestialImpacts, I remember you! I hope things are going much better for you now!

ForgotMeKnot, 09/05/2022 04:21:07PM

I'm just gonna say this, totally unrelated to anything: Apollo Gramarye is a sly dog.

Great to see you back, Precious! If you're not good at spelling, you should get a spell-check app for your browser or something. As far as I can tell, all you got wrong was 'defence attorney'.

Wait, SJL is studying to be a defence attorney!? 

Precious-Fairy, 09/05/2022 05:58:03PM

YOU TAKE THAT BACK ABOUT APOLLO. >(

steeljusticelover, 09/05/2022 05:59:18PM

Calm down, Precious. He didn't mean anything by it.

Dime, thanks for the apology. I'm fine. And I'll be thinking twice about posting any more photos.

Knot, I've never really hidden that's what I was planning to do? It's been my dream since I was a kid. And I don't know why you think that about Apollo, but isn't being sly a necessity for being a magician?

Pocky-Hockey, 09/05/2022 06:36:33PM

*looks at time-stamps* Yep, you two are posting in the same room, aren't you? ;D

Welcome back, Precious!

steeljusticelover, 09/05/2022 06:40:09PM

... Like I said, Precious is always over here to play with my sister. So, yeah, we're kinda in the same room with our computers atm.

ForgotMeKnot, 09/05/2022 10:03:58PM

Wait, Precious, I was kidding! I'm sorry!
You make a good point, Steel. *strokes beard* I shall let you live... for now.

**Drewby, 09/06/2022 10:41:44AM**

Looking at the info in this thread, it looks like it's time for a fresh start between us, Precious. Maybe if YOU'D been open about your age, I wouldn't have got so angry at your childish story-telling in the first place.

Could you repost that picture, SJL? I missed getting to see what you looked like.

**steeljusticelover, 09/06/2022 11:31:50AM**

Sorry, I'd rather not.

**Precious-Fairy, 09/06/2022 03:49:54PM**

SteelJusticeLover explained it to me ForgotMeKnot, so I will forgive you.

Drewby, I can be nice. If you would be nice too, we could be friends.

**Dime_Quarters [MOD], 09/06/2022 04:17:09AM**

Well I'm glad you two are settling your disagreements. Although it would help if everyone kept the /hostile tone/ out of it.
My dear Luke,

I imagine this will be the last letter I send to you before you make the trip here to begin your studies at university. As I write this, we have only three weeks left before classes start. I have been busy preparing materials, and Alfendi has been doing his best to help, although anything more than a single sheet of paper he has a tendency to either drop or chew on. I hope your own preparations are going much more smoothly.

Flora has also been busying herself lately. I don't recall if I mentioned she was looking for another job in my last letter, but her quest to be self-sufficient has taken another odd turn. In short, Flora has decided that, despite it only being a matter of weeks until we will see you again, it is high time all three of us went to California to visit your home there. What's more, she has decided to pay for it with some of the Reinhold Inheritance, and is refusing to let me even look at how much it will cost. She also appears to have looked up the hotel you mentioned, the one across the street from your home. I'm sure she will be telling you all about it in her letter, but I will go over everything just in case.

At the moment, it seems that we will be returning here on the same flight as you, arriving on the morning of the 18th. We will be leaving here on the evening of the 15th, although arriving in California far too late for a reunion at the airport. It looks as though we will only have the one day to look around while we are there, unless you feel there is time to do something before leaving on the 17th.

Given the flight is said to be eleven hours disregarding stops, I do not know how Alfendi will handle it. Since we are leaving in the evening, it should be dark enough that he will sleep the whole way, but it is difficult to predict how he'll react. I'm already trying to explain to him what this trip will entail so he is prepared, but it is difficult to describe what it is like to fly.

I shall be in touch if our plans change at all. The usual puzzles are enclosed.

Your friend,

Professor Hershel Layton

28th August, 2022

Dear Professor Layton,

You're coming up here? I must say Professor, I wasn't expecting to be reading that!

I'll be happy to show you around while you're here. I don't think we'll have the time to do both the things that immediately come to mind though: Showing Flora the Cosmos Space Centre or taking you up to Kurain to see Maya? And it looks like the 16th is a Friday, so both Trucy and Pearl will be in school. I'm sure both of them will be sad to not meet you properly, although I can try and make sure we do something together before we leave on Saturday.
(I'm thinking visiting Maya would be the better thing to do now I think about it - She'd be terribly disappointed to miss seeing you again, and if Flora wants to come back sometime, I can show her the Space Centre then.)

The Gatewater is well known as the most luxurious hotel chain in town (or at least they advertise themselves as such), so if Flora wants to shell out the money to stay there, it would be nice to have you close by. They do have some cheaper rooms though, like the ones we stayed in, so don't worry about it too much. Speaking of the fire, our reception room is almost back to normal now! It still looks a little empty without all the stuff we used to keep in there, but we've got some new bookcases and a few desks, so it looks a lot more professional than it used to! Papa's decided to keep the new piano in his office, and Trucy's already started decorating it with some of her and Apollo's old props.

My preparations for university are going well. I have everything I think I'll need packed except my clothes, because I'm still wearing them. Apollo and Clay are starting to prepare too, although they have another week until they start their first semester.

I'll be glad to see you all when you arrive! Give me a call or a text when you want to meet up!

Your friend and apprentice,

Luke Triton-Wright

3rd September, 2022

________________________________________

September 16, 8:57AM

Wright Talent Agency

Reception

The sound of a violin sang around the room, spilling out through the closed doors and nearby window, its notes faintly heard even on the busy street below. Stopping and starting only occasionally to correct wrong notes, the violinist played from memory, imagining, as he often did, that somewhere in the world his mother could hear the tune, and maybe follow it home.

Since the destruction by fire two months previous, the Agency's reception room had undergone a series of changes: Although the carpet and walls were rebuilt good as new, back to how the room had looked before the tragedy, its contents could not have been more different. Unable to find a desk to match the one in the office, Phoenix had thrown his arms up and instead ordered three that matched each other, one for each of the Agency's 'subordinates'. One, quickly designated as Apollo's, sat by the front door where the original main reception desk had been, blocking off most of the room from the entrance and outlining a 'corridor' through to the office. The other two sat opposite each other either side of the window; Luke's now sported a miniature music stand and a small pile of books both new and old, while Trucy's was a mess of fabric samples and scribbled ideas on scraps of paper. In contrast, Apollo's desk was almost untouched, sitting empty in preparation for his upcoming years of study. The wall space inbetween was filled with some new (still mostly empty) bookcases, in which Luke had made a valiant effort to rehouse all the books on magic spread throughout the home, only to give up once Trucy attempted to 'help' by relocating a few of Phoenix's
old law books to join them. The wall opposite Apollo's desk was blank, lacking any of the photos or posters it once displayed, and the old sofa that had once sat underneath was, despite being mostly undamaged, now gone, thrown out with everything else as part of the 'refreshing' of the room in general. The coat-rack, cleaned up of the soot that had coated it on one side, was back in place by the door, mirroring Charley's new home in the office next door.

The handle on the entrance door slowly turned, opening silently as two figures crept into the room. They smiled as they saw the tall teen in blue standing at the other end of the room, his back to them as he played his violin to the window. The figure in front, a young woman with brownish-red hair done up in a ponytail with a red ribbon, grinned as she tip-toed inside, a hand over her mouth as she held back giggles. Behind her, a man in a top hat, a three-year-old boy in his arms, crept in, allowing the door to close behind him. The thud and click of the latch startled the violinist, who jumped as he spun around to finally face the visitors.

Luke grinned. "Flora! Professor! And Alfendi too!" Laughing, he hurried to place his violin and bow down on his desk.

Laughing, Flora ran around Apollo's desk to greet her old friend, the pair meeting halfway in a gleeful hug. "Wow, and I thought you were tall when we saw you last year!" she cried, looking up at Luke as they parted. "You've grown again, Luke!"

Blushing, Luke adjusted his hat, noting with some embarrassment that he was now taller even than the Professor (not counting the hat). "W-well," he muttered, "Papa says I might end up the tallest of the family once I'm done growing. I match Apollo now, y'know."

Layton laughed as he followed Flora around to greet Luke, Alfendi in his arms paying more attention to the room. "It's a pleasure to see you again, Luke," he said, reaching out a hand to shake. "And it's nice to have the opportunity to see your home!"

Luke giggled as he shook the Professor's hand, giving Alfendi a smile as the toddler briefly looked his way. "Papa's taken Trucy to school," he explained, "but Apollo's home at the moment. I'll show you around!" He stepped around his friends, heading to the door inside.

Flora clasped her hands together, looking around. "Is this the room that was destroyed?" she asked. "By the fire?"

Pausing, Luke turned back around. "Oh, yes, it was this room," he answered, giving an apologetic smile. "It's a bit empty still. Sorry."

"Nonsense," Layton replied, smiling as he lowered Alfendi to the floor. "If you hadn't told us, I doubt we'd have known there was a fire here only a few months ago." He chuckled as he adjusted his hat. "It looks quite clean and new, in my opinion."

Luke blushed, rubbing the back of his head. "I... suppose I just notice it more because I knew what it used to look like really well," he admitted, then gestured to the door through to the office. "If you'll come through, I'll show you Papa's office!"

Alfendi, apparently excited at the invitation to explore, squealed and charged past Luke into the next room, closely followed by Luke and Flora, eager to ensure the toddler didn't hurt himself on anything. Layton followed them with a soft laugh, one hand on the brim of his top hat.
The first thing to catch Flora's attention in the office was the shiny black piano sitting against the wall, directly in view as they walked in. She cooed as she spotted it, her watch over her baby brother forgotten as she ran to inspect the instrument. "It's so shiny!" she cried, running a hand along the closed lid covering the keys.

Luke giggled, noticing Flora's excitement attracting the attention of Alfendi. "That's Papa's piano," he explained, walking to Flora's side. "It was brought in here because reception was still in pieces when we got it, and Papa decided he liked it in here."

Alfendi stared for a few moments, sucking on his fingers and casting occasional glances at his father, watching from the door. After a short pause, he toddled to Luke's side, tugging on the teen's pants. Surprised, Luke looked down to the boy, crouching a little to more closely match the three-year-old's height. "What is it, Alfendi?"

"What's a piano?" Alfendi asked.

Luke was a little taken-aback by the question, but recovered quickly enough to give the boy a smile. "It's a musical instrument," he explained, standing up straight and opening the lid to reveal the clean white-and-black keys within. "You press these, and they make a sound!"

Alfendi strained to see what Luke was referring to, and Flora picked him up off the floor to sit him on the piano stool, where he was able to marvel at the shiny keyboard. "These?" he asked, pointing to the piano keys.

"Yup!" Luke giggled, pressing one randomly with an index finger to demonstrate. "My papa practises on this one. His job is to play piano!" 'Well, technically.'

Although unsure at first, Alfendi reached out to the keyboard with both hands, lightly resting them on the keys at first before imitating Luke and holding a pointer finger onto a single key directly in front of him. He slowly put more pressure on it until the key depressed under his touch, a soft note emanating from the piano. He frowned in confusion, then lifted his finger and pressed again, slightly harder this time, eliciting a louder note that made him jump in surprise. Grinning, the boy quickly began to experiment with the instrument, eager to hear the variety of sounds he could produce with it.

Layton chuckled as he joined the group. "And this is why we didn't get him a toy xylophone," he quietly said to Flora.

Flora huffed, though she still smiled at her adoptive father. "He's having fun," she pointed out.

The door to the kitchen suddenly opened, and in stormed a cape-less and somewhat drowsy Apollo. "Luke, what the hell are-!" His angry frown vanished as he spotted the visitors staring back at him,
his face rapidly paling. "Oh." He ran a hand through his hair awkwardly. "I forgot you guys were coming today."

Layton tipped his hat to the young man. "Good morning," he said. "I hope Alfendi wasn't disturbing you."

Luke giggled, walking over to his brother. "Eaten breakfast yet?" he asked.

"Was in the middle of it," Apollo muttered in reply.

Giggling, Luke turned to his friends, gesturing to Apollo. "This is my brother, Apollo. Apollo," he turned to his brother and gestured to his visitors one at a time, "this is Alfendi, Flora and Professor Layton!"

Apollo gave them a small wave, which Alfendi returned. "Luke's told me a lot about you all," he said.

"All good, I hope!" Flora replied, giving him a wink. She petted Alfendi's hair with one hand, keeping her eyes in Apollo's direction. "Luke's told us a lot about you as well!"

As Apollo sighed, Layton stepped away from the now-silent piano, towards the brothers. "Maybe you could show us the rest of your home, Luke," he suggested. "I assume we are waiting for Mister Wright to return before we go to see Miss Fey."

"That'll be another twenty minutes or so," Apollo replied, arms crossed. "Until Dad gets back, I mean."

Luke nodded in agreement. "He told me before he left to not go out of our way to wait for him. If we're ready to go, he wants us to leave and he'll catch up to us."

"That seems a bit mean," Flora replied, picking Alfendi up off the piano stool as he complained and reached wildly for the keyboard. "It's a long journey, isn't it? Shouldn't we take it together?"

Now placed back on the floor, Alfendi tried his hardest to climb on the tall stool he had previously been sat on, although he wasn't having any luck. "I wanna play more!" he cried.

"Maybe later, Alfendi," Layton promised.

"It's not that long," Apollo assured Flora. "Long enough that you have to make a day-trip of it to be worth it, but..."

Giving up on the piano stool, Alfendi ran to Layton's side, pulling on his trouser legs. "Papa!" he cried. "Wanna play with the piano!"

Giggling at the toddler's insistence, Luke leant down on his knees. "Tell you what, Alfendi," he proposed, "why don't I show you around the rest of my home, then you can come back and play the piano. Alright?"


Apollo sighed. "I'd better finish my breakfast," he told Luke as his brother straightened up from talking to the three-year-old. "Lemme know when you're going to leave."

"Sure," Luke replied, and Apollo returned to the kitchen.
The first thing Phoenix heard as he arrived home was the irregular plinking of the piano echoing from his office. They haven't left yet? he realised with some confusion, heading through from the reception. As he opened the door, he quickly noticed both his sons, Professor Layton, and Flora stood around the office (although Apollo appeared to be perched on the edge of the desk), their discussion halted as they turned to the newcomer. Phoenix grinned, idly noting the piano also went silent as he entered the room. "Professor! Flora! Welcome to America!"

Layton smiled, tipping his hat. "A pleasure to see you again, Mister Wright," he replied, stepping forward to shake Phoenix's hand. "Luke has been showing us around your lovely home."

Phoenix snorted. "'Lovely' is a bit of an exaggeration," he pointed out, then looked over to the piano, seeing Alfendi sitting on the stool and staring in his direction. "Ah, so that's who was playing on the piano!" He shot the toddler a thumbs-up. "Don't worry Alfendi, you're playing better than I do!"

Alfendi put a hand in his mouth and looked away.

Flora giggled, waving from where she was standing by the piano. "Hello, Mister Wright!" he called. "We thought we'd wait for you before we left!"

"I told them they didn't have to," Luke interrupted, shrugging, "but they insisted."

Phoenix laughed. "Aw, that's alright!" He glanced at a clock hanging on the wall by the television. "There's a train every five minutes, though we're not gonna be able to catch a bus at the other end." He looked around at their visitors. "You're ready for a fifteen, twenty minute walk?"

Layton thought a moment, rubbing his chin. "That's a good point," he muttered, then turned to Flora. "I shall have to fetch Alfendi's pram before we go. Will you wait here a moment, Flora?"

"Of course," Flora replied with a nod.

"I shall be right back," Layton announced, petting a confused Alfendi on the head before heading out.

Apollo, still sitting on the edge of Phoenix's desk, called to his father, "So does that mean we're leaving now?"

"Get off that," Phoenix ordered, then, once Apollo had slid off the desk, answered, "I guess so, if everyone else has what they'll need."

"I'm ready, Papa!" Luke said, patting his satchel hanging on his shoulder.

Apollo shrugged. "We don't really need much; We're just visiting Maya."

Alfendi, getting bored of watching the conversation, returned to hitting random keys on the piano.

Flora thought a moment, looking at Phoenix's hoodie and beanie. "Mister Wright, are you sure you don't want to take off your jumper and hat before we go? It's a bit warm for so many layers, isn't it?"
Luke jumped forward to explain, "By 'jumper', she means your sweater. That's what we call them in Britain."

Phoenix nodded, giving Luke a smile before returning his attention to Flora. "I'll be fine, thank you. It's a surprisingly thin material."

"It probably feels warmer to you than it does to us, anyway," Apollo added, looking to Luke. "Didn't you say yesterday it was like twenty degrees colder in England right now?"

Luke thought a moment. "In Fahrenheit," he agreed, turning to Flora to explain, "That's a ten degree difference in Celsius, so it would seem much warmer here to you."

Flora giggled as she nodded in agreement. "It's difficult working it out exactly, since everyone seems to use Fahrenheit over here."

"Tell me about it," Luke agreed as he rolled his eyes only with a hint of bitterness. "I still get confused by all the different measurement scales they use here!"

Phoenix hid a laugh behind a hand. "We are standing right here, y'know," he pointed out.

Luke blushed, fidgeting with a sleeve. "Y-yeah, I... I wasn't directing it at you, Papa..."

"Well, it won't matter so much once you're back in England with us," Flora pointed out with a smile. "But I guess we can talk about it more once the Professor gets back!"

[View the Court Record]
The two families quickly settled in to a group of four seats on the train, with Alfendi sitting (or rather, standing) in his father's lap as he stared out the window and Luke squeezing his lanky frame into the seat he was sharing with Flora, although he still stuck out into the aisle a little.

"So what's this 'Space Centre' like?" Flora asked Apollo, hands clasped together eagerly. "Luke's told me the people built robots with emotions there!"

Apollo nervously laughed, rubbing the back of his head. "Well, I don't know too much about it; Clay's the space nerd."

"He's our friend," Luke filled in with a giggle, elbowing Flora. "You'll get to meet him tomorrow!"

"Ooh, I can't wait!" Flora replied, adding with a sigh, "We won't have time to visit it on this trip, after all."

"If you ever decide to come back here on your own, Flora," Layton pointed out, hands supporting Alfendi as the toddler leaned against the window, "you could go visit it then."

Alfendi bounced in Layton's lap, pointing out at the intermittent buildings beyond. "Papa, look!"

"I'm looking, Alfendi," Layton assured him.

"I guess I'll have to," Flora agreed, giving Luke a smile. "Sometime next year?"

Luke nodded. "Maybe during the summer! Trucy and Pearl will be off school then, so they could join us!"

"Would they even be interested in going to the Space Center?" Phoenix laughed.

"Then they could come to one of our shows!" Apollo suggested, grinning as he tapped at the red cape hanging over his shoulders. He looked over to the Layton family. "You guys are gonna be gone tomorrow morning, so you'll miss it this time!"

Flora thought a moment, curled fingers resting against her chin. "Your magic act?" she confirmed. "When is it on?"

"Every Saturday and Sunday, seven PM," Apollo answered, crossing his arms as he proudly stuck out his chest. "We also do a matinee on Sundays, around three, and over the summer holidays we're going to be performing every night." He giggled. "Trucy has to concentrate on her school work."


"What about you?" Apollo continued, resting his hands on his knees as he curiously watched Flora. "Luke's told us his stories of the adventures you guys got up to loads of times. How much of 'em is true?"
Luke scoffed, failing to hide a mischievous smirk. "You don't believe I tell you guys the whole truth?" he asked. "You're a living lie detector, aren't you?"

Apollo rolled his eyes, giving his brother a smile. "Everyone knows any storyteller worth their salt exaggerates the truth to make stuff more exciting!" He looked over to the Professor, who was still balancing Alfendi in his lap. "Like, there wasn't seriously an entire second London built in a cavern, was there?" He turned to Flora. "Or a village entirely populated by robots?"

Flora stared wide-eyed at Apollo for a few moments before getting to her feet, frowning. "Excuse me, I think I might wander along the train a little," she said.

Luke frowned in worry as he shifted to allow her past. "Flora? Are you okay?"

"I'm alright," Flora insisted, ignoring the confused looks Apollo and Phoenix were giving her. "I'll be back in a few moments." With that, she had wandered off down the train carriage.

Apollo thought a moment, then frowned at Luke, who was still watching Flora leave worriedly. "You did exaggerate about the village of robots," he decided.

"Quite the opposite," Layton replied, surprising Apollo with his serious stare. "Had you been in London last year, we could have taken you there ourselves to prove it. As it happens however, Saint Mystere is no longer functioning."

Phoenix rubbed his chin in thought. "It shut down?"

"Flora tried her best to keep it running," Layton continued, "but I'm afraid her efforts were in vain." He sighed. "As much as she would have liked otherwise, she simply isn't mechanically minded. Her skills are in cooking. She couldn't repair the robots faster than they were breaking down."

Phoenix frowned sympathetically, noticing Luke fidgeting with his sleeves and guessing he had already known. "The poor girl. They were her family growing up, weren't they?"


Apollo glanced in the direction Flora had gone, looking chastened. "I... didn't upset her too bad by bringing it up, did I?" he asked.

"I'm sure she will be fine, in time," Layton assured him. "She is still grieving, however."

Alfendi bounced in Layton's lap, pointing out the window again. "Papa!" he cried. "Papa, look!"

"I'm looking, Alfendi," Layton insisted, indeed turning to look out the window. To Apollo, he continued, "Regardless, I would suggest apologising to Flora when she returns. If nothing else, she will greatly appreciate it."

September 16, 11:20AM

Kurain Village

After a lengthy walk from the station to the village, Phoenix led the group straight to Fey Manor. "Here we are!" he announced, climbing the steps to the small porch. "Maya's expecting us, so we
can just go in."

Layton paused in his pushing of Alfendi's pram, looking at the stone steps with some concern. "We will need a few moments to follow you," he said.

"You need help getting the stroller up?" Apollo asked, watching as Flora plucked Alfendi from his seat and let him walk.

"We can handle it, thank you," Layton replied, giving Apollo a grateful smile as he moved to carry the pram up the short distance to the porch.

With Phoenix already inside, Flora held Alfendi's hand and helped the three-year-old navigate the steps, directing him inside. Luke followed her, Apollo hanging back to stay with Layton in case he needed help with the unwieldy pram.

Flora was surprised as she looked around at the bare room, pausing just beyond the door. "Wow... I wasn't expecting such a grand manor to be so... plain," she admitted.

Phoenix, shoving his sandals into the shelves nearby, laughed, looking up as Luke entered behind the young woman, pulling his shoes off as he walked in. "If there's one thing you can say about the Feys, it's that they aren't a very extravagant family," he said, pulling off his beanie to toss it in with his shoes. "Especially not what they call the 'main family'," he added, waving his fingers in the air to simulate quotation marks.

Flora thought to herself as she led Alfendi further into the room and away from the door, unwilling to let her little brother run off on his own just yet. Phoenix, seeing she had no more questions, shoved his hands into his hoodie pocket and wandered out to the middle of the room, watching the door that led further into the mansion.

Luke gently poked Flora's shoulder, his socks still in his hand. "Flora, we need to take off our shoes," he told her.

"Oh!" Flora realised she should have noticed both Phoenix and Luke doing so before, and hurried Alfendi over to the low shelves, clearly intended to hold the footwear of visitors. Once released from her grip, Alfendi lowered himself to the floor and pulled at his shoes, pausing only to let Flora unlace them for him before eagerly tearing off his shoes and socks. Flora herself removed hers in a more dignified manner.

As Layton and Apollo finally entered the manor, the door further inside finally rolled open, and Maya emerged, grinning as she spotted her visitors. "Hi!" she called, running first to Phoenix, who was closest. They greeted each other with a quick kiss, holding each other's arms before Maya moved ahead to the Laytons. "Professor! It's so good to see you again!"

Flora blinked in surprise as she watched Maya enter. She hadn't known what to expect of this 'Maya' she'd heard so much about, but it definitely wasn't a short, cheerful woman in long, traditional robes. She hung back, unsure just yet how to act around the extremely casual and extremely important woman in front of her.

Layton laughed as he held out his hand to shake Maya's, saying, "It's been too long, Miss Fey!" before Maya surprised him by pulling the man into a brief hug. He quickly recovered, directing his hand to gesture to where Flora was standing, Alfendi sitting at her feet as he explored the shelves nearby. "May I introduce Flora Reinhold and Alfendi Layton, the other members of my family."

Maya quietly squealed as she moved towards the pair. "Hello! Luke and Nick have told me about
you!"

To Flora's relief, the older woman held out a hand to shake instead of going for a hug, and she gladly returned it. "I've heard about you from the Professor," she said. "It's nice to finally meet you, Miss Fey."

"Please, call me Maya," Maya insisted, leaning down to briefly coo at Alfendi, who was totally ignoring her as he tried to see if he could fit himself into one of the spaces in the shelves. "Aw, aren't you such a cutie-pie!" Unoffended by the lack of attention from the toddler, she then stood and walked over to where Luke and Apollo had ended up, standing next to each other at the door. "And how are my two boys?" she asked, pulling them into a hug as Luke laughed.

"You're barely six years older than me!" Apollo cried, rolling his eyes.

"We're fine, Maya!" Luke told her, both of them ignoring Apollo's comment.

Maya gave the pair a grin as she again moved on. As she walked back over to somewhere she could address her visitors as a group, she waved a hand in Alfendi's direction. "I think Pearly left her ball out in the garden by the Winding Way? He can play with it if he's interested."

"I'll go check!" Luke offered, jumping to where Alfendi was hanging out of one of the shelves and carefully extricating the toddler from the confined space. "C'mon Alfendi, I'll take you outside and we can play together!"

Flora fidgeted nervously. "You don't want me or the Professor to go with you?" she asked.

"We'll be fine," Luke assured her, taking Alfendi's hand as he stood up. "Won't we, Alfendi?"

"Um," Alfendi muttered, a hand in his mouth.

"I'm sure they will be alright, Flora," Layton assured her, both of them watching as Luke led Alfendi out to the Winding Way. "We won't be far away if he needs us, after all."

Maya smiled. "In the meantime, I'd love to show you around the manor! Oh," she gestured to Layton's feet, "but could you please take off your shoes first, Professor? Don't want to track dirt into the house."

"Of course," Layton agreed, and moved to obey her request.

View the Court Record
"So what even brings you guys here to America?" Maya asked as her tour finished in the dining room, everyone sitting around the table on the floor-cushions as she wandered into the neighbouring kitchen to prepare tea. "Wanted to make sure Luke wasn't travelling alone or something?"

Layton looked to Flora to answer, and she paused to think for a moment. "Something like that," she answered. "I had a... relative die suddenly, several months ago now, and they left me a lot of money. I thought it was about time I started using some of it."

Maya paused, teapot in hand, and looked over to the girl sympathetically. "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that," she said, well-versed in dealing with grieving clients. "It's never pleasant to have to say goodbye to someone, especially when it's without warning."

Layton and Phoenix privately agreed, although only Phoenix knew Maya was speaking from personal experience.

"I'll be alright," Flora insisted, staring at the table as she moved a strand of unruly hair behind an ear. "It's probably high time I started becoming independent anyway. Most girls are living on their own by twenty-one."

Maya thought for a moment, then placed the teapot down and walked back into the dining room, sitting at Flora's side and taking her hands to attract the young woman's full attention. "Look, I'll be the first to admit I'm exactly the opposite of 'most girls'," she pointed out, "but if you're not ready to be out on your own in the world, don't feel pressured to do it... especially not if you're still grieving a lost loved one. Believe me," she laughed bitterly, "that is not the kind of situation you want to willingly put yourself in."

Flora didn't answer, quietly thinking to herself. On the other side of the table, Phoenix raised an eyebrow in Maya's direction.

"I take it you speak from experience, Miss Fey," Layton realised, surprised.

Maya shrugged nonchalantly. "It's okay," she replied. "Losing my mother, my sister... it helps me connect to my clients. I know what it's like and how to help them."

Flora, although shocked to hear about Maya's family, became confused at the mention of 'clients'. "What is your job, Maya? If you don't mind me asking, of course," she said. "I don't think Luke's mentioned it."

Maya grinned, hands held together. "I'm a spirit medium!"

"A... spirit medium?" Flora repeated, even more confused.

"Queen of the spirit mediums," Phoenix quipped with a smirk, only for Maya to stick her tongue out
at him with a smile.

Layton gripped the brim of his hat, deep in thought.

"I'm the Master of the Fey Channelling Technique," Maya explained to Flora. "We can channel the dead, and we get clients who pay us to do it." She rested her hands in her lap, thinking a moment. "It's actually easiest to channel people who died suddenly. Most of our clients tend to be relatives wanting to say a last goodbye, because they didn't get the chance to when their loved one was still alive."

"And then there are the nut-jobs who hate the person they're asking you to channel..." Phoenix added, still smirking.

"Shush!" Maya ordered him, hiding an amused smile.

Apollo rolled his eyes, leaning forward and resting his elbows on the table. "Flora, if you think she's making it up, just talk to Luke. She channelled his dad for him a couple years back."

"And what about me?" Phoenix cut in with a laugh. "Maya and Pearls have channelled Mia dozens of times in front of me!"

"You don't count as a reliable source, Dad," Apollo argued, "you're dating her!"

Flora giggled, deciding to ignore the Wrights' interruptions. "Thank you, Maya," she told the older woman with a grateful smile, "but I did get the chance to say my goodbyes." She looked away, smiling sadly. "Besides, most of my friends... I don't think you'd have much luck channelling them."

Maya looked sceptical, but accepted Flora's decision not to request her services. "It's up to you," she said, then got to her feet. "All we'd need is a photo and a name."

Layton watched as Maya returned to the kitchen, setting up the water to warm in the teapot and busying herself readying the tea leaves and cups for her visitors. Eventually, he decided to break the silence and said, "Luke told me quite extensively of when you channelled Clark."

"Oh?" Maya asked, leaving the water to warm up as she returned to the dining room. "I don't think he talked about it to us, much."

"No, he didn't," Phoenix added, shaking his head. "He told us what he'd learned about the car accident, but not much else." He was unsurprised that Luke had opened up to Layton instead of his new family though, as Clark had been a friend of the Professor's and, especially back then, Luke had been closer to his former mentor than his siblings or new father.

Layton thought to himself a few moments more, arms crossed and eyes closed. "I must admit, I am still hesitant to believe any of it," he admitted.

Maya laughed. "Aw, that's okay, Professor! We get a lot of sceptics up here, too!" She sat down, her smile fading. "I've seen more people than I'd care to admit calling us 'scams' and 'con artists' and..." she paused to sigh, "other stuff like that."

Layton looked up, eyes wide. "Goodness, I... don't mean to imply such harsh words myself!" he insisted.

"It's fine, Professor," Maya repeated, giving her friend a reassuring smile. "Were you wanting a demonstration? I'm sure my sis would be happy to talk to you about it."
Apollo gasped in excitement. "We could finally meet Mia!"

Phoenix laughed, patting Apollo's shoulder. "Calm down there, rookie. You'll meet the chief eventually."

Embarrassed, Apollo crossed his arms and looked away with a glare.

Layton gave the teen a small smile. "I hate to disappoint you, but I actually had someone else in mind." He reached into a pocket of his trousers and pulled out a small photo, which he stared at for a moment before sliding it face-down along the table in Maya's direction. "Luke tells me he's not mentioned her to you, so I don't expect you'll recognise her at all."

Maya retrieved the photo, studying it in silence. Phoenix and Apollo were mildly confused, but Flora watched Layton in worry. "Professor, you don't mean...?"

"Her name is Claire Foley," Layton continued. "Depending on how you count it, she died either three or thirteen years ago, in an explosion." He paused, pulling at the brim of his hat. "I trust that's enough information."

Maya stared at the photo a moment more, then nodded with a determined expression and returned the photo to Layton the way it had been given to her. "It won't be a problem, Professor. I'll take you in to the Channelling Chamber once we're done with the tea." At that, she stood and returned to the kitchen.

Apollo scratched at the back of his head. "So, um... can we ask who she is? Or... was? If Luke wasn't allowed to tell us..."

"Not 'wasn't allowed'," Layton corrected. "Luke merely elected not to mention her on his own. I believe he might have felt it wasn't necessary to his story." He closed his eyes. "In any case, I would rather not discuss her now. Once the channelling is over..." He paused, sighing a little as he thought. "I may talk about her then."

September 16, 12:03PM

Fey Manor

Meditation Room

Once Maya had distributed the tea, Flora had taken a while to adjust to it not being the more familiar black variety, Maya and Phoenix had laughed over the memory of Maya's own freak-out reaction to black tea on their trip to London, and everyone had eventually finished drinking, the group headed out to the Meditation Room, ready for Maya to channel Claire for Professor Layton.

"It shouldn't take long to prepare the chamber," Maya assured him as she pushed open the doors, readying a lighter to get started lighting the hundred-or-so candles littering the room's walls. "I'll be ready in a few moments!"

"Take your time, Miss Fey," Layton replied, smiling as he watched her get to work.

The door leading to the Winding Way slid open, and Luke poked his head in with an embarrassed smile. "Oh, what's everyone doing down this end of the house?" he asked, nervously entering the
"Maya's gonna do a channelling," Apollo answered in a bored tone, arms crossed as he leant against the wall.

"She's channelling Claire," Flora added, fiddling with the end of her ponytail.

Luke looked over at Layton in surprise. "Y-you actually asked her, Professor?"

Layton didn't reply, only continuing to watch Maya lighting her candles with a stern look on his face.

"She was gonna channel Mia," Apollo said, shrugging, "but the Professor had this other person you've never told us about in mind."

Luke winced a little at the accusation he hadn't told the entire truth in his stories. "W-well," he mumbled, changing the subject and attempting to look nonchalant, "you know Trucy would have killed us if we got to meet Mia before she did."

Phoenix looked around a little, frowning in thought. "Wait, where's Alfendi?"

Flora gasped, looking around the room with her hands over her mouth, and even Layton was distracted from watching Maya to turn to Luke, eyes wide.

"Oh, he's fine," Luke insisted, pausing to shrug, embarrassed. "We were playing, but he started getting upset and angry, and I thought he was trying to throw a tantrum, so I took him into the side room, and he kinda..." Luke paused to tap his fingers together, "curled up on the floor and went to sleep."

Layton laughed, immediately easing the tension in the room. "I'm not surprised!" he explained. "It's well past his usual bed time back home."

Luke sighed in relief that he wasn't in trouble, rubbing at an arm. "I, um, guess you're not trying to adjust to our timezone, since you're only here for today," he realised aloud.

Maya finally re-emerged into the room, the black key of the Channelling Chamber in hand. "I'm ready," she announced, looking to Layton. "Professor?"

As everyone watched, Layton paused a moment, then nodded. He followed Maya into the small, dark room, and the thick wooden doors closed behind him. A few moments later, Phoenix, Apollo, Luke and Flora heard the clicking of the lock.


Luke frowned in thought. "It really depends," he eventually answered, giving Flora an apologetic smile. "We'll have to wait and see if the Professor and Claire have a lot to say to each other or not."
Professor Layton watched Maya lock the doors, then stuff the key into her sleeve as she tiptoed to the screen at the back of the room, peeking behind it before settling down in front of the 'altar' nearby. She gave him a wide grin and patted the mat on the floor, a clear signal for him to join her.

"Are you ready?" Maya asked as Layton sat in front of her, legs crossed.

The professor had to think a moment before answering. "As ready as I can be, I suppose," he quietly replied, struggling to keep his tone even as his throat threatened to close on him. He reached up with both hands to gently remove the hat from his head, placing it on the floor beside him. "I'm certainly more ready than I was the last time I had the chance to say goodbye."

Although surprised to see Layton without his hat for once, Maya decided not to ask any questions, recognising it was a bad time to chat. "Since you're a friend, I can make the same allowances for you as I did for Luke," she explained. "There's a whole lot of tradition about how these meetings are supposed to go, like everyone closing their eyes and stuff, but..." She shrugged, giving her friend a small smile. "It's just traditions; They don't actually affect how a channelling goes. You can watch me if you want."

Layton chuckled. "I would hate to step on any sacred traditions, Miss Fey."

Maya giggled. "I wouldn't call 'em 'sacred'!" she replied, more calmly adding, "Seriously, I used to channel my sis for Nick all the time, without any of these 'traditions' dictating how or where. The only reason I never did it in England was..." She paused for thought, holding a hand to her cheek. "Well, the times when we might have needed her help, I was kinda more worried about getting accused of being a witch. Again."

"Understandable," Layton replied, nodding.

Maya nodded with a grin, glad to have said what she wanted to. She shifted a bit until she was comfortable, then pressed her hands together in a praying motion. Giving one last small smile to Layton, she closed her eyes and frowned in concentration, her fingers curling around until only her index fingers were pointing to the ceiling, resting against her bottom lip.

Although Layton knew, and had personally experienced, many different ways in which one could trick the eye into seeing whatever they wanted, he was inclined to simply believe in Maya's ability upfront. Despite his years of breaking down illusions and tricks, he'd seen his fair share of the unexplained and supernatural, and he was reluctant to believe a friend like Maya would intentionally trick people into seeing their loved ones again... especially given how this 'illusion' was apparently highly portable. He watched her as she concentrated, intending to make full use of her given permission to bypass tradition. At first, it didn't look like anything was happening, but before long Layton noticed a small glow, which seemed to be emanating from the yellow magatama hanging around her neck. No sooner had he registered the sight than the glow intensified in a brilliant flash of light that forced Layton to close his eyes, shielding his face with an arm. Thus protected, he tried to
open his eyes again, only to discover he had been temporarily blinded by the flash, large spots of purple and red dancing in the centre of his vision and blocking all but the candle flames flickering at his sides. Letting out a small groan of annoyance, Layton attempted to return his vision to normal, rubbing at his eyes with his arm and blinking rapidly.

"Hershel...?" a familiar voice asked, sounding wary.

Layton paused, then lowered his arm to look in Maya's direction, only to note with frustration he could only catch glimpses of her hair and robes. "Claire?" he asked, squinting. "If that's you, I'm afraid to say I appear to have temporarily blinded myself."

There was a moment of silence before Layton heard a response. "Pffft-!" Claire exploded in laughter, and Layton could just catch glimpses of Maya (or was that Claire...?) doubling over on the mat in front of him.

Layton frowned. "I don't find this as hilarious as you do," he pointed out. At the back of his mind, he recognised this reunion would have been a lot more emotional had he not made the mistake of staring at Maya's magatama during the channelling process and 'ruining' the mood.

Claire momentarily calmed down, still panting from her laughing fit. "Wh... when I saw you rubbing at your eyes," she explained, "I thou... thought you were crying or something!" With that, she dissolved into more laughter.

Layton crossed his arms, waiting for his former girlfriend to stop laughing at him. To his relief, the spots in his vision were beginning to clear, giving him a slightly better view of the woman sitting opposite. "When you're quite ready."

"Gi... gimme a minute!" Claire panted, leaning with one arm on the mat as she pulled herself together. "Oh, my sides hurt now! Or, actually, they're not mine." Layton could just see her patting around her ribs with one hand. "Looks like I need to apologise to this poor girl whose body I'm borrowing. I'll have to ask you to do that for me, Hershel."

"I'll pass it on to Miss Fey," he promised.

"But still," Claire continued, "how did you manage to blind yourself??" She restrained a giggle. "And what are you even doing getting someone to drag me back from the dead? I'd've thought you wouldn't believe in that kind of thing... although..." She paused for thought, a finger held to her chin. "I suppose given what Clark's told me, I should've been expecting this sooner or later."

Layton blinked in surprised. "You've spoken to Clark?"

"Sadly, yes," Claire continued with a shrug, then giggled again. "He still boasts all about Luke like he was the be-all and end-all!"

At that, Layton found he had to laugh. "Ah, yes... it's been so long, I forgot he always did that!"

As the pair shared their amusement, Layton had a moment to finally register that the spots had cleared from his eyes, and his vision was back to normal. Although he'd been looking her in the face for a while, it was only now (with the spots obstructing his vision cleared) that he actually noticed the strange sight of Claire's face underneath Maya's straight, black hair. Although it was a bit off-putting to see Claire without her wavy, orange locks (and in a purple kimono to boot), it was something he could deal with for the opportunity to have a final talk with his loved one... again.

A thought seemed to strike Claire, and she gave Layton a worried look. "How is Luke, by the way? He's getting on with his new family? Oh, and Flora! I hope she's doing alright!"
Layton smiled. "You needn't worry about either of them. Luke is very happy with how his life is going, and Flora..." He winced a bit at the thought of the turmoil the young woman had put herself through after the demise of Saint Mystere. "Flora is doing as well as can be expected, but I will continue looking out for her, in the absence of her parents."

Claire softly smiled. "That's good to hear," she said, then clutched her hands together tightly as she thought to herself for a few moments, staring at her lap. When she looked back up, she gave Layton a cheeky smile. "Oh, and I hear through the grapevine there's another new addition to your little family?"

Layton was at first confused, but then laughed, reaching a hand up to fiddle with his hat before remembering he had taken it off and running his hand through his hair instead, pretending that had been his intention from the start. "I suppose Luke told Clark who told you?" he asked, getting a giggle from Claire in answer. "Alfendi was orphaned in the destruction Clive wreaked on London, and when Flora heard about him, she begged we take him in." He smiled, thinking back on the young boy currently sleeping not far away. "He's quite a handful, but he's my son. I wouldn't give him up for the world."

Claire pressed her hands to her chest, biting back happy tears. "Oh, if only I could meet him," she sighed, but shook her head. "But no. I have no business being in this world anymore." She gave Layton a smile. "I know you'll look after him Hershel, and Flora too. The three of you can look after each other, like a family does."

Layton couldn't speak for a moment, only mutely nodding. When he was able to talk again, he said, "When you next talk to Clark, tell him Luke's attending Gressenheller. He should be happy about that."

"Really!?!" Claire cried, then laughed. "Wow, I thought Clark was exaggerating how far ahead that boy was academically! Luke's going to university now?" She marvelled at the thought for a moment. "What's he studying? Geology? Archeology?"

"Veterinary medicine," Layton replied, unable to hide a somewhat proud smile. "He was concerned at first about leaving his family to obtain his degree in London, but I think he's happy for the opportunity to live in his former home city again, if only temporarily."

Claire seemed surprised. "Huh. I'd've thought he'd go for the same degree as Clark or Brenda." She shrugged. "Ah well, I guess him having Brenda's face and Clark's hair doesn't necessarily mean he'll have the same interests."

Layton nodded in agreement. "He comes back with us tomorrow morning, local time. First semester starts Monday."

"That soon?" Claire asked, although she seemed unsurprised. "How's the rest of his family taking it? I assume poor Brenda is still missing."

"She is, regrettably," Layton replied. "Mister Wright is proud of him, as he should be. I hear his younger sister Trucy didn't take it well, but has slowly warmed up to the idea. His brother Apollo I can only assume, but he seems to be happy for Luke." He then frowned in confusion, giving Claire a look. "What exactly do you mean by 'rest of'? Clark doesn't know about this, yet."

Claire grinned innocently. "Do you, Flora and Alfendi not count as extended family?" she asked, then paused to giggle. "I saw the way you looked after Flora and Luke when we were in 'Future London'," she added in a conspiratorial tone. "I bet even then you were a father figure to him!"
Layton didn't smile in response, frowning sadly as he thought back on Luke's last few weeks in London before the grand move that ultimately cost the young boy both his parents. "I had to be," he quietly admitted. "Clark was about to move him across the world. Luke wasn't taking kindly to it."

Claire's smile quickly died. After a brief, uncomfortable silence, she leaned forward to rest a hand on Layton's shoulder. "Hershel," she said, and his gaze lifted to meet hers. "Clark and Brenda made us his godparents for a reason. I don't think Luke would have been with you at all if they didn't think of you as a second father for him."

"Mister Wright is his father now," Layton pointed out.

"And?" Claire replied before Layton could continue. She lifted both her hands to his face, holding Layton's cheeks in her palms. "If this Mister Wright loves Luke like a real father, he'd agree with me, and you know it."

After a few moments, Layton smiled. "Thank you, Claire."
"I'm thinking of going with a theme for their names, but it's difficult to decide," Luke explained with a sigh, sat on one of the floor cushions he and Apollo had retrieved as they waited for Layton and Maya's return. "Some of them I have the perfect title for, but all the others have too many fitting options!"

Flora, sat on another cushion nearby, thought for a moment. "Well, what are you calling them right now?"

"Whatever Trucy calls 'em, usually," Apollo remarked with a grin, arms crossed as he sat by the nearby wall.

Luke shot his brother an unamused look, turning back to Flora to reply, "Well, for most of them I like to have the title be 'The Adventure of' something. So, for example, the story of we met," he gestured between himself and Flora, "is called 'The Adventure of the Curious Village'."

"Not 'Saint Mystere'?" Flora asked, head slightly cocked to one side in confusion.

Luke bit his lip. "Er, no," he admitted. "I thought it would be best to keep real names out of the titles."

Phoenix, standing near the thick doors to the Channelling Chamber, laughed, interrupting the conversation. "Yes, you're planning on maybe eventually publishing them, aren't you?" he asked with a grin.

Luke blushed. "Um..."

"Really!?" Flora cried, surprised. "But what about the names still being in the story itself!?"

"I-I'm still thinking about it!" Luke hurriedly assured Flora, hands held up. "Once, or if, I start properly writing them, I'm going to change real people's names, I promise!"

Flora seemed suspicious but accepted Luke's explanation. "Okay then," she continued, "what about the other stories you tell your sister?"

Luke took a moment to sigh in relief, then thought to himself, counting off on his fingers. "Let's see, the other titles I'm sure about... There's when the Professor, Emmy and I went to Monte D'Or, which I'm calling 'The Adventure of the Miracle Mask' -"

"Even though it was called the 'Mask of Chaos'," Apollo interrupted, an eyebrow raised above his smirk.

Luke shushed his brother. "'Miracle Mask' is alliterative!" he cried, then turned back to Flora. "And when we travelled around the world with Professor Sycamore and Aurora; That one's called 'The Adventure of the Azran Legacy'." He thought a moment, silently counting off his 'adventures' on a
hand. "Oh, and I forgot about when the Professor and I went to Ambrosia. I decided to call that one 'The Adventure of the Eternal Diva'."

Apollo looked up with a frown. "'Diva'!?" he repeated in indignation.

"Janice was an opera singer, and the queen in the legend sang too," Luke explained with a shrug. "It might not fit perfectly, but I can't think of any better word to fit 'singer' than 'diva'."

After a moment, Apollo decided he had to agree and shrugged.

Flora thought to herself a moment. "So... the first time the three of us went on the Molentary Express, and everything that happened in Future London... you don't know what to call those stories?"

Luke nodded. "I was thinking either 'Diabolical' or 'Pandora's Box' for the Folsense adventure," he explained. "The Future London one, I'm torn between 'Lost' and 'Unwound Future'."

"I still think you should go with 'Diabolical Box' and 'Lost Future'," Apollo chimed in. "They make more sense."

"But 'Pandora's Box' and 'Unwound Future' are so poetically perfect!" Luke argued, then threw up his hands as he growled in frustration. "I don't know what I'll end up deciding on."

Flora giggled a little at her friend's predicament, and reached out to pat his shoulder sympathetically.

Apollo smirked a little at Flora's predicament, and reached out to pat his shoulder sympathetically. Apollo smirked, looking to Flora. "He has the same problem deciding between 'Last Specter' and 'Spectre's Call'. One's 'poetic' and the other's practical."


The thick doors to the Channelling Chamber swung open, Phoenix jumping back as Apollo, Luke and Flora perked up in their seats, quickly moving to stand as they saw Maya emerge. Not far behind her was Professor Layton, his hat in his hands and a small smile on his face as he thought to himself.

"Professor!" Flora cried, running to Layton's side with a worried frown. "Are you okay?"

Layton looked up in mild surprise before giving Flora a reassuring smile. "I'm quite alright, Flora. Don't you worry about me."

Flora stared for a moment more, then smiled back, relieved.

Maya grinned as she walked to Phoenix's side, giving him a wink. "Another satisfied client!"

"It's a pity the girls are in school today," Maya continued, crossing her arms idly. "Me or Pearly could have channelled Mia while all of us were together!"

Phoenix just laughed.

Apollo scratched at the back of his head as he stepped forward. "You... could do that anyway, Maya," he suggested. "I mean, we don't have to tell Truce or Pearly..."

"You'd betray Trucy just like that?" Luke cried in an outraged tone, fists on his hips, though his smile gave away his true intention.
Wincing, Apollo looked away.

"Knock it off, you two," Phoenix said, waving his hand at the pair and pretending he wasn't grinning. "Besides, I want to see Mia's face when Trucy greets her with a hug and a loud 'Auntie Mia'!" He briefly imitated Trucy, only to quickly descend into giggles along with Maya.

"You two are a pair of children," Apollo muttered in the pair's direction, only to have to immediately shoot a glare at Luke when said brother started giggling along with them. Noticing Apollo's look, Luke was quick to stop, giving Apollo an innocent smile.

Flora looked away from the goings-on with a smile, turning back to Layton. "By the way, I checked on Alfendi while you were busy."

"Oh?" Layton asked. "How is he?"

"Fast asleep, just like Luke said," Flora replied with a sigh of relief that her small family was content. "We'll probably have to wake him up to eat, though."

Layton thought a moment. "That's a good point," he said, then reached into a pocket and pulled out a fob-watch, checking the time. "It's half past eight in the evening back home. It will have to be a late supper."

Maya looked over in surprise. "Oh right, it's time we ate!" She clapped her hands together, giving everyone a grin. "When everyone is ready, join me in the dining room and I will prepare our meal!"

Flora watched Maya walk off. "I'll go wake up Alfendi," she told Layton, heading towards the Winding Way.

"Be careful," Layton warned her. "He won't be happy about that."

"I will, don't worry," Flora replied, shooting him a reassuring grin before she ran off.

September 16, 12:43PM

Fey Manor

Dining Room

Alfendi had been grumpy upon being woken up, but once placed at the table (in Layton's lap so he wouldn't try to run off) he calmed down, sleepily allowing his father to force him to eat. Layton, to everyone's surprise, did not put his hat back on immediately, leaving it to sit on the table as the group chatted together.

As their previous conversation lapsed into silence, Maya took the chance to clear away everyone's empty plates. Phoenix was quick to turn to Layton. "So, um, I'm curious. This Claire you wanted to talk to... an old friend?"

Layton thought a moment, then nodded, smiling. "You could say that," he replied, slightly distracted as Alfendi played with one of his hands. "She was a physicist. Along with Clark and Brenda, she was one of our group of friends at university."

Apollo looked over to Luke in surprise. "Wait, aren't those your parents' names?"
"Mm-hm." Luke nodded, smiling in mild embarrassment. "They didn't tell me that much about her, though. She died when I was... well, Alfendi's age." He jerked his head in the young boy's direction. "By then, we were in Misthellery already."

Maya giggled, arriving back at the table to start picking up cutlery she'd missed. "Aw, I can just imagine you as a cute baby, Luke!"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "You clearly haven't seen Luke's family photo albums yet then," he pointed out.

Phoenix chuckled, helping Maya from his seat. "I guess we'll have to get them out the next time you come down to the Agency," he told her.

"Ooh!" Maya cried, excited. "Sounds fun!" She then winked at a giggling Luke. "I only saw the one of them last time, after all."

Apollo frowned in confusion, then sighed, hitting his forehead with one hand. "Right, Luke brought one up here when you channelled his dad... I forgot."

Phoenix shrugged, giving Apollo a sympathetic smile. "Eh, I did too. It's not that big a deal."

"It didn't have any cute baby pictures in it, though," Maya pointed out with a grin.

Flora giggled, leaning over to play with Alfendi from next to Layton. "I forgot to bring my camera," she lamented. "Alfendi looked so cute when he was sleeping in the spare room!"

"When we head back to the city," Phoenix asked, rubbing at his chin in thought, "is Alfendi going to sleep the whole way?"

"He seemed fine sleeping on the plane," Layton replied. "I don't think the train ride will bother him once he's settled."

While everyone else was distracted, Flora grabbed Layton's hat from the table and rested it on Alfendi's head, where it promptly fell to rest on his nose, completely covering the boy's eyes. He seemed startled, looking around a moment as if wondering where the world had gone. "Look, it fits already!" Flora said, grinning. "You look just like your papa in that, 'Fendi!"

Alfendi smiled from under the hat.

View the Court Record
Honorary Uncles

September 16, 3:52PM
Wright Talent Agency
Phoenix's Office

After a fond farewell to Maya and Kurain, the Wrights and the Laytons took the bus and the train back into the city. As predicted, Alfendi fussed in his pram between bus and train, but once settled in his father's lap he was quick to fall asleep again. Once they arrived back in the agency, Alfendi was left to sleep in Phoenix's room while Phoenix himself left to collect Trucy from school. In the meantime, Luke and the Professor amused themselves in the kitchen swapping puzzles, while Apollo and Flora sat in the office watching TV.

Apollo heard the front door opening a single moment before it was following by the banging of the office door, giving him enough time only to turn in his seat towards the noise. There was a loud squeal, attracting Flora's attention, and Apollo made for the remote with a sigh.

"HI YOU MUST BE FLORA MY NAME IS TRUCY!" Trucy shouted as she jumped at Flora where she sat on the sofa, clinging to the young woman's neck.

Flora was too shocked for a moment to respond. "Um... hello there." She gently pushed the girl off her lap and away from her neck. "It's... nice to meet you."

Trucy just grinned.

Phoenix entered the room much less noisily, closing the door behind him. "Remember to be quiet, Truce," he reminded her. "We've got a baby sleeping upstairs. Don't want to wake him."

Apollo sighed as he stood up, placing the remote by the now-off television. "If he wakes up and starts crying, I'm blaming you," he added.

Trucy stepped back from the sofa, glancing worriedly at the door to the kitchen. "So I'm not going to get to meet Alfendi?" she cried.

"You can tomorrow," Flora offered, sitting forward in her seat as she gave the girl a smile. "It's very late right now back home, but tomorrow morning he'll be awake!"

"Hmph," Trucy mumbled, sticking out her bottom lip. "I guess I havta wait." She then fixed Flora with a grin. "But I can meet you and the Professor, though! Luke's told us all about you, Flora!"

"He's told me about you, too!" Flora replied, laughing. "You're Trucy, aren't you?"

Trucy nodded, bouncing in place.

"Well, I'll introduce you to the Professor, then!" Flora continued, getting to her feet and gingerly brushing off her dress.

"Yay!" Trucy cheered.

Apollo shushed his sister. "Baby!" he reminded her.
Trucy shrugged apologetically, then followed Flora to the kitchen door, whispering, "Yay!"

September 16, 3:54PM
Wright Talent Agency
Kitchen

Luke thought hard as he sat at the dining table, one hand curled around his chin as he frowned in concentration. After a long moment of silence, he suddenly smiled, looking up at the Professor opposite. "I've got it! The answer's three, isn't it?"


Luke quietly cheered to himself, watching as Layton marked on the tiny scoreboard in the corner of the paper that the teen had won another point. "So now it's my turn!" he cried, and he returned to thinking as he brainstormed his next puzzle to try on his mentor. 'I better make it a good one...' At that moment, the door to the office swung open, and Flora entered the room, closely followed by a very excited Trucy. "Mister Wright is back!" Flora announced with a smile.

Luke looked up, grinning as he spotted his sister. "Trucy! You're home!"

Trucy gave her brother only a cursory wave before skipping forward towards Layton, who stood from his chair. "Hi!" Behind her, Apollo entered the room, leaning against a nearby wall with his arms crossed.

Layton tipped his hat to the girl. "Hello," he replied.

Flora giggled, and Luke also got up from his seat, gesturing between the pair. "Professor, this is my little sister Trucy! Truce, this is-!"

"The Professor from your stories!" Trucy filled in, bouncing excitedly as she stared up at the man in the top hat. "I've been looking forward to meeting you!" she told him.

Layton laughed. "Ah, well, thank you! Luke's told us a lot about you in his letters!"

"Is it okay if I call you 'Uncle Professor'?" Trucy continued, still grinning.

Layton was taken aback, a quick glance to Luke confirming that the question was unexpected by all involved. "Er..."

Apollo sighed, slapping his face with one hand. "Seriously?" he asked, levelling a glare at Trucy. "You don't have to make every close friend into a member of the family, y'know."

Trucy quickly stuck her tongue out at Apollo. "You call Uncle Edgeworth and Uncle Larry 'uncles' too, Polly," she pointed out.

Apollo sputtered, turning red. "B-but... That's different! For one thing, Uncle Larry demanded we call him that!"
Layton laughed, attracting Trucy's attention back to him. "That's quite alright," he assured her. "I already have one honorary niece. I don't mind having another."

Luke frowned in concern. "You're sure you want to do that, Professor? Sherry at least calls you 'Uncle Hersh'..."

Trucy squealed in glee, giving Layton a quick hug, surprising the older man. "Thank you, Uncle Professor!" she cried.

Phoenix laughed as he belatedly entered the room, tucking his beanie into the front pocket of his hoodie. "That's what you're calling the Professor, Truce? Really?"

"I tried telling her how stupid it sounds," Apollo said, sulking by the wall. "Big surprise, she didn't listen."

"I think it's cute," Flora cut in with a smile.

Trucy shot Flora a grin, then tugged on Layton's arm. "Uncle Professor! Did you really swordfight a vampire to convince him Miss Katia wasn't his fiancée?"

"He wasn't a vampire!" Apollo reminded her.

Layton and Luke laughed at the memory of the swordfight she mentioned. "No, he wasn't a vampire in the end," Layton explained to Trucy, "but I did have to fight him off when he attacked me with a sword. He simply wasn't listening to reason, otherwise."

Trucy giggled in delight. "And does your car really turn into a plane!?"

"The one Paul made for me does," Layton replied with a good-natured smile, sitting back down.

"And there really was a magic mask that could turn people into stone?" Trucy continued, bouncing in excitement. "Or into horses?"

Phoenix laughed, walking up behind Trucy to ruffle her hair. "What, you want the Professor to re-tell all of Luke's stories for you?"

Trucy shrugged, looking sheepish.

Layton pulled at the brim of his hat, smiling to himself in thought. "I can think of one you might like to hear again," he said, looking up in Luke's direction. "Although I think Luke might prefer to tell it himself."

Luke frowned in confusion. "Which one?"

Flora gasped, her hands to her mouth. "Oh, you don't mean...?"


"Future London, of course," Layton replied, as calm as ever.

"Wait," Apollo cried as he started to connect the dots, taking a few steps towards where Layton sat at the table. "You don't mean this 'Claire Foley' was connected to the 'Lost Future' story...?"

Trucy blinked in confusion. "Who was what?"

"You want me to tell them, Professor?" Luke asked, dropping back into the seat opposite Layton at
the table mostly out of shock. "You don't want to tell them about Claire yourself?"

Phoenix ran a hand through his hair as he watched the chaos unfolding. "I agree with Trucy. What's going on?"

There was a short pause as everyone waited to see who would speak up first. "Claire Foley," Layton eventually said, looking up to Phoenix and then down to Trucy. "Luke told me he left her out of the story he told you about our adventure in 'Future London'."

"He did!?!" Trucy cried in surprise, looking over to an embarrassed Luke.

"Yeah, I remember that," Apollo said, a finger pressed to his forehead as he thought. "I noticed he was leaving something out, and he just said it was personal."

Phoenix also thought a moment. "'Depending on how you count it'," he repeated. "She's tied in somehow to the time travel charade."

Layton closed his eyes in answer.

"How long does it take to tell that story, Luke?" Flora asked, walking around the table to take the seat next to Layton. "I'm actually interested to hear it myself."

Luke thought a moment. "The full, un-edited version takes at least an hour," he explained, "but having to mentally re-edit it as I go to include everything about Claire will extend it a bit." He looked around their small kitchen. "Plus, I don't know if there's room for everyone to sit down as I tell it..."

"I'll go get some of our office chairs, then," Phoenix said with a smile, then turned and headed off into the office. "We'll only need two."

Trucy was looking excited again. "Ooh! Ooh! Is the story very different!?" she cried, dashing around Luke to clamber into her usual seat at the table, the only currently-empty chair. "Can I still help!?"

Luke laughed. "Sure you can!"

"Yay!"

Apollo sighed, shaking his head. "I have a feeling I'm not gonna like this story very much..."

View the Court Record
"And with that, Inspector Chelmey walked off with the Prime Minister," Luke narrated to his family, spread around the small dining table. "The Professor, Celeste behind him, walked over to the bench Dimitri was still sitting on." At first, he'd been nervous about telling a story partly about Layton and Flora to Layton and Flora themselves (especially for the parts where Trucy gleefully parroted recreated dialogue in an imitation of Luke's imitations of his friends), but as neither objected and quietly gave him encouraging smiles, Luke slowly forgot his awkwardness and was able to properly focus on his tale. "Meanwhile, I was with Flora. As it was starting to get late, and half of London seemed to be flattened, we decided together that it was best we returned home." He closed his eyes in thought. "Flora decided to go on ahead, but I was going to tell the Professor what we were doing before I left."

Apollo, sat in a chair from reception, sighed as he rested his crossed arms and chin on the edge of the table between Trucy and Flora. "So that's basically it?" he interrupted. "The grand secret behind this 'Claire Foley' was that she looked a lot like her younger sister, died in a failed science experiment, and happened to be the Professor's girlfriend?" He paused to throw an apologetic look to Layton. "No offence."

"None taken," Layton assured him, leaning back in his chair with closed eyes and a sad smile.

Luke scratched the back of his neck uncomfortably. "W-well..."

Trucy scoffed. "He hasn't even finished the story yet, Polly!" she pointed out fiercely, only to lean back on her elbows as she gave Luke an excited grin. "Go on, Luke!"

Luke thought a moment, fiddling with a sleeve. "When I found the Professor and Celeste again... They were still standing by the bench, but Inspector Chelmey had come back and was taking away Dimitri. I... wasn't sure what to make of it, because they both - the Professor and Celeste, I mean - looked upset. They were just staring at each other."

Apollo frowned, sitting up a little straighter as he recognised a new part of the story. Flora silently gasped, her hands over her mouth as she remembered hearing this part before.

"I asked what was wrong... startled them a bit, but they just said everything was fine. Celeste..." Luke frowned, contemplating for a moment how best to unravel the upcoming bombshell for his siblings and father. "She told me I'd grown into a fine young man. She'd been appointed my godmother when I was a baby."

Trucy blinked in surprise. "Wait, really? I thought you'd just met Celeste."

"Yeah," Apollo said, surprised to find himself agreeing with Trucy for once. "That was one of the new parts of the story, that the Professor hadn't even heard of her before... when, y'know, he should have heard from Claire about her sister at some point, estranged or not."
Phoenix raised an eyebrow at the odd sight of Trucy being the one to point out a 'contradiction', but said nothing.

Luke paused for a moment, then decided to just come out and say it, sitting up straight and looking Apollo and Trucy dead in the eyes. "It was then she told me that 'Celeste Foley' didn't exist. She never had." He watched as the pair looked even more confused, then sighed. "Her real name was Claire. She was Claire Foley."

Apollo and Trucy were too surprised to speak. Phoenix, however, smiled, rubbing his chin in thought. "Depending on how you count it," he repeated. "The time travel experiment worked."

"But only for a moment," Layton picked up, smiling sadly as he sat back in his chair, arms crossed. "Her body wasn't stable. She was destined to eventually return back in time, to the moment of the explosion." His smile faded, and he stared at the table in front of him. "And her time was running out."

Trucy squeaked a tiny gasp, hands to her mouth. "Oh no!" she cried, eyes shining with sympathetic tears. "Poor Uncle Professor!"

Layton was surprised by the girl's concern for him, but gave her a smile. "I'm quite alright, Trucy," he assured her. "After all, can I not now talk to her whenever I wish?"

"Oh yes!" Flora cried in sudden recognition. "Maya channelled her for you today!"

Trucy gasped, grinning widely. "You went to see Mommy!?"

"By that she means Maya," Phoenix quickly explained for Layton and Flora with a smile.

Layton opened his mouth to respond, only to be interrupted by a loud sigh from Apollo, which attracted the attention of everyone in the room. He gave Luke a suspicious look. "You're seriously telling me that time travel is an actual thing?"

Luke frowned. "You didn't believe spirit channelling was a thing either until Maya channelled my dad."

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Oh, right. Spirit channelling is real, therefore every single other myth and fairy tale must also be real," he sarcastically replied.

"Because I'm usually right!" Apollo argued, waving a hand that he quickly moved to start counting off on. "The 'future' London was faked, the 'spectre' was a robot, there was no such thing as real magic or witches, the weird guy in the old mansion wasn't a vampire, and Maya never died!"

"And what about the things you were wrong about?" Trucy argued in return, hands on her hips. "Somebody actually time travelled once, Loosha was one of those 'spectres', hypnotism and hallucinations..." She paused, her rant interrupted by the difficult word that she quickly decided to skip. "That weird gas stuff! You never saw either that or the hypnotism thing coming, and all the old Azran artefacts and machinery! And-and!" She pointed at Flora. "What about the village of robots!?"

"Which I'm still doubtful about, by the way," Apollo shot back, not noticing Flora draw back from the conversation, looking uncomfortable.

"I don't see why," Luke spoke up, giving his brother a stern look that he hoped was a good enough
signal for Apollo to drop the conversation. "You're all praise about Ponco and Clonco."

Apollo scoffed, crossing his arms. "Ponco and Clonco were built by a professional roboticist and programmed by a master programmer," he said, "and actually look like robots, not real people. You're telling me a single person, an amateur at that, built thirty unique, life-like robots, with programmed personalities good enough to pass as people? Of course I'm going to doubt that."

"Bruno was a qualified technician," Flora cut in, surprising Apollo as he spun to see her glare. "A very skilled one. Maybe he should have been doing something more with his life than helping my father after my mother died, but he chose to make robots for us and look after me, and he kept looking after those robots until his death."

Apollo shrunk back, chastened. "I, uh... I'm sorry, Flora."

"It's... fine," Flora sighed, looking away sadly. "Besides, he told me he outsourced most of the programming. He had an online friend he was always talking to."

"Bruno's dead?" Trucy asked, looking both shocked and upset.

Flora just nodded.

Phoenix smiled to himself. "You probably need to tell Maya that story about the robot village, Luke," he said. "She's never heard it, has she?"

Luke shrugged, smiling in embarrassment. "I've only managed to tell her three or four," he admitted. "And no, 'Curious Village' isn't one of them."

"It strikes me we have gotten very off-topic," Layton pointed out, looking around the table. "You never finished your story, Luke."

"Oh, right!" Luke realised with a gasp. "We got distracted talking about Claire!"

"It's so amazing Celeste was Claire the whole time!" Trucy cried, settling back down to listen to the younger of her brothers. She looked over to Layton and Flora and explained, "In the old version of the story, Celeste was just someone who had a sister die in the accident! Luke never even mentioned the stuff about Claire!"

"I can see why," Flora agreed, giving the girl a smile.

Phoenix watched Apollo carefully, giving him a stern look. "You're going to not interrupt the rest of this?" he asked.

Apollo sighed. "Sure," he agreed.

Luke paused a moment to ensure no-one else had anything to say, then cleared his throat. "Well, um... Claire and the Professor told me what was going on. She'd been friends with my mum and dad in university, along with the Professor, so she said she was glad they were doing well." He frowned a bit at the thought that they weren't anymore, but decided not to bring that up. "By then, everything was getting busy again with all the onlookers and rescue services still trying to get everything back to normal, so we found a quiet alleyway to go to..."
FLASHBACK: The Lost Future

- Three Years Earlier -

August 12, 6:49PM
Avoncombe Park

"I'll see you later then," Flora said with a smile.


The pair parted with a wave, Flora disappearing off down the street while Luke turned back towards the park, looking around the grassy area that the modified Laytonmobile had landed in. To one side was the bench he had seen Dimitri resting on earlier, and he noticed with surprise that Inspector Chelmey had returned, and was escorting Dimitri away, casting glances behind him as he left. Standing alone, not far from where Luke had last seen them, were Layton and Celeste, staring at each other with wide, tearful eyes.

Luke frowned. What had happened while he'd been talking with Flora? 'I haven't seen the Professor like that since... well...'. He ran across the pavement and onto the grass, stepping gingerly towards the two adults. "Professor?"


Luke glanced worriedly between the two, distrusting of their false assuring smiles. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Celeste laughed to herself, then stepped forward towards Luke. "You've probably heard this a lot, Luke," she said, "but you really do look a lot like your mother." She gave him a warm smile. "You've really grown into a fine young man."

"Huh?" Luke asked, confused. He looked to Layton for answers, but found the Professor looking away, hiding his face behind the brim of his hat. "How do you know my mum?" he asked Celeste.

Celeste giggled to herself, a hand held to her mouth. "Both Brenda and Clark were friends of mine for a long time. They made me your godmother, you know."

Luke was only even more confused. "But I didn't even know I had godparents!" he cried. "What are you talking about, Celeste?"

The redhead paused for a moment before giving Luke a sad smile. "I'm sorry, Luke," she said. "I'm afraid I had to lie to you, down in that 'Future London'. My name isn't Celeste."

Luke was shocked. "What!?"

"There is no Celeste Foley, and there never has been," the woman continued, a hand fiddling with the scarf around her neck. "My real name... is Claire."
Blinking in surprise, Luke stared up at her. "Claire?" he repeated. "B-but... how can you...?"

"That experiment ten years ago," Claire explained, in an almost matter-of-fact way. "It worked, but only for a moment. I only have so much time left here before I have to go back to the moment of the blast."

Luke looked back over to Layton, who was still hiding his face behind his hat, and suddenly understood why the normally composed Professor was so upset. "Sh-should I... leave you both alone?"

"Nonsense," Layton suddenly spoke up, giving Luke a stern look. "You shouldn't be out alone this late, especially given what's happened this evening." He then looked around, vaguely confused. "Where's Flora?"

"She went home already," Luke explained. "She wanted me to tell you she'd see you there."

Layton thought a moment, then sighed, pulling at the brim of his hat again. "At least we know she can look after herself for the short trip. She'll be safe at home."

Claire took a moment to survey the park and nearby road, which was slowly filling up with onlookers now the police had gone and the mayhem of Clive's machine had died down. "It's getting busy." She turned to Layton with a smile. "I think we should find somewhere more private to talk, Hershel."

After a pause to look around, Layton agreed.

It hadn't been a long walk to find their 'private place to talk'; As Layton still refused to let Luke head home alone, the boy was tagging behind the reunited couple as they walked hand-in-hand down the street. They spoke quietly as they walked, and Luke did his best not to listen, feeling very much like a third wheel but not wanting to make his mentor angry by sneaking off while Layton's back was turned. Not to mention, although he wanted to assure his parents he was alive and safe, he didn't mind all that much waiting a little before returning home.

Eventually, Claire and Layton ducked into a quiet alleyway, away from the busy roads full of people. Luke looked back warily, but followed them in. He was surprised when Claire seemed to come to a stop, looking around the alley before smiling at a confused Layton. "Here seems as good a place as any," she said.

Layton paused, then looked up ahead where a single lamp shone before the path ended at a brick wall, splitting off to either side and out of sight. "I suppose so," he quietly agreed.

The couple walked forward a little more, towards the pool of light from the overhead lamp. Luke looked around a bit before stepping forward and dashing to the nearby wall, leaning against it somewhere out of the way, where a part of the building jutted out. He didn't want to lose sight of the adults, so, although he was staring at his feet in a show of not eavesdropping, he frequently cast glances towards them from the corners of his eyes.

Claire let go of Layton's hand, looking up at the lamp above with a smile. "They had so much artificial light down there," she said. "It's a pity that it had gotten so dark by the time we finally got out."
Layton thought a moment, then nodded. "Their artificial sun," he mused aloud, although there was a hitch to his voice that betrayed his false calm. "It had to look real, for the trapped scientists..."

Looking over to Layton for a moment, Claire's smile faded. "I know you don't like to talk about it," she said, "but you don't still have those nightmares, do you? I hate to think of you suffering through them alone still, after all this time."

Layton didn't reply immediately, pulling at his hat. "They've... not gone away," he quietly admitted, "but they aren't as bad as they used to be." He forced a small smile as he returned her gaze. "I know they're just a fantasy now."

Claire briefly smiled back, then turned her head to the concrete path they walked on. After a long pause, she sighed. "I know there's still so much we should talk about, but I don't think any amount of time would be enough." She looked up to him again, a sad smile on her face. "I suppose this is it, Hershel." She turned her body to face him fully. "I have to go back to my own time. Back to that day when... we parted."

"No, Claire," Layton muttered, just barely managing to hold himself together.

Claire bit back a laugh, worried it would open the floodgates, and stepped forward, resting her hands on Layton's chest as he reached to hold her shoulders. "I'm sorry I can't stay," she told him, lowering her head against his shoulder as they embraced.

Luke decided to look away. This was far too private for him to be there for, and he was wishing more than ever that he'd been allowed to go home back at the park. 'Why is the Professor so insistent I had to stay with them, anyway? I'm thirteen! I'm old enough to walk home alone! A-and, even if he thinks I'm not, we could always ask a policeman to go with me!' He then frowned in thought. 'Oh, but the police might all be busy with the refugees from Future London, and all the damage Clive caused... I hope Flora was right that he missed her and the Professor's place.'

"Claire, wait!" Layton cried, and Luke looked up to see Claire in the middle of walking away, having halted at the Professor's desperate cry. There was a long pause, then Claire began to turn around.

Luke quickly returned his gaze to the pavement at his feet. 'Don't notice I was looking, don't notice I was looking... has that lamp suddenly got brighter, or is it just me?'

"We had so many... plans for the future," Claire said. "You won't forget, will you? Our shared past... and our... lost future?"

There was another pause, and Luke wondered if they were hugging again.

"You can't go!" Layton suddenly shouted.

Luke almost winced, turning his head away from where the pair stood. 'They're not hugging, then...' 'I don't want to say goodbye again!' Layton continued. "I can't, I won't!"

There was another pause. "I know you," Claire replied, in a calm, quiet almost-whisper. "And I know you'll stay strong. After all..." She almost laughed, but it sounded more like a sob with her sad tone. "That's what a gentleman does."

Luke almost looked around at the familiar refrain, but stopped himself as his eyes met his feet. A part of him wondered if Claire was simply repeating Layton's phrase or he had picked it up from her.
"I must go now, Hershel," Claire continued. "Thank you for everything. Goodbye."

'Wait... 'goodbye'!? ' Luke could hear a single pair of footsteps walking off down the path, and looked up in worry to see something glowing disappearing around the corner to the left. He pushed himself off the wall and ran to catch up with it, past the unmoving Layton and to the corner he'd seen the light from. Beyond, in the darkness away from the lamp above them, he saw the glowing figure of Claire Foley, firmly walking away from him. As he gasped in shock, she faded away into nothingness, a few remaining motes of light falling to the ground as they too disappeared. 'Oh... So she's...? ' He blinked once, turning back to where Layton still stood. "She's gone!"

The best word Luke could find to describe Layton's expression was 'broken'. At Luke's call, he tensed up, then slowly turned around. Just as Luke was thinking of going to comfort his friend, he saw the man's shoulders start to shake, and, with a deep breath to calm himself down a little, the Professor turned his face to the sky. A hand reached up to remove his top hat, which Layton hugged close to his chest as small white flecks resembling snow (though they could also have been dust from the smoke emitted by Clive's machine) began to fall from the sky.

Luke was unsure what to do, shocked at the sight of his mentor without his trademark hat. 'Wh... What are you supposed to do when it's the adult who's sad?' He watched a few moments more, then gently walked over to join Layton. Without a word, he stood at the elder's side, and rested a hand on his arm in an offer of comfort.

Although he still stared at the sky, Layton smiled. Blinking away tears that rolled down the existing tracks on his face, he looked down to the worried teen. "Thank you, my boy. I'm glad to have had a friend by my side for this."

Although surprised, Luke tried to smile through his concern. "Anything I can do to help, Professor."

Layton quietly chuckled, giving a fond smile to the hat in his arms. "We should get you home now, Luke," he said. "I'm sure your parents will be worrying about you." With that, he slowly walked back out to the street.

Luke stared after his mentor for a moment. 'I hope he'll be okay... ' He cast a single glance back at the corner he'd seen Claire disappear behind, then sighed and rushed to catch up with Layton.
"The elders only agreed to it because Mystic Maya said it would help teach us how to be independent, for our training, so they set it up a few years ago," Pearl was explaining to Layton as she and Trucy played with Alfendi on the floor. "I didn't think I'd ever want to use it, but I changed my mind when I realised I could spend more time with my friends here over the week!"

"As good a reason as any," Layton agreed, watching the girls and Alfendi with a smile as he sat on the nearby sofa. "It was nice of you to come to meet us today regardless, Pearl."

As, like Trucy, Pearl had missed seeing the Laytons in Kurain, she had arrived that morning to meet them (and say goodbye to Luke) before they left. Shortly after coming through the door and being introduced to Layton and Flora, Trucy had dragged her away to show off young Alfendi, who was enjoying the attention of people closer to his age. As the three of them played together with some of Trucy's old toys, Pearl was answering Layton's question about her current arrangements going to school in the city.

"It wasn't a problem, Mister Professor," Pearl replied with a grin. "Mystic Maya wanted me to come and give her goodbyes to everyone, anyway."

Layton chuckled. He'd tried to correct Pearl already on his name, but the girl seemed to have forgotten again, so he decided to leave it be.

From the direction of the neighbouring room, the small group heard a door open and shut, and a voice called out, "Yo, Wrights! Where are you guys?"

Layton frowned, looking to Trucy as she gasped. "Where you expecting anyone else today?"

Trucy jumped up, grimacing. "Um..." She cast a worried glance at Pearl, then took a deep breath and put on a wide grin, running to the door to reception. "Hi, Clay!" she shouted, rushing to throw the door open.

Layton stood, turning to look as the door revealed a laughing young man with messy black hair, a shiny visor sticking out over his grinning face. "Trucy! Where's 'Pollo and Luke, huh?"

"I'll go get them in a sec!" Trucy promised, waving her brothers' friend in.

Clay stepped into the room, only to pause as he locked eyes with Layton. Although surprised at first, he quickly grinned. "Oh, hi there!" he called, waving. As Layton smiled back, Clay then noticed Pearl sat with Alfendi on the floor. "Hey!" he added to them, seeming slightly confused. "Apparently the Agency is really crowded today?" he remarked to Trucy, giving her an amused grin.

Trucy just shrugged, keeping the smile plastered on her face. She skipped over to Layton, gesturing between him and her newest guest. "Uncle Professor, this is Clay! He's Luke and Polly's friend!"

"Ah, so you're Clay?" Layton asked, tipping his hat to the young man. "My name is Professor Hershel Layton; It's a pleasure to meet you."
"Whoa, cool, you are the Professor!" Clay cried, balling his hands into fists in excitement as he bounced forward. "I thought it might be you from the hat!" He stuck out a hand. "Clay Terran! Luke's told me tons about you!"

Layton shook Clay's offered hand, chuckling at his enthusiasm. "I've heard a lot about you from Luke, too," the Professor said. "He says you're studying to become an astronaut."

Clay laughed, adjusting his hat. "What can I say? It's true!"

"And of course, I should introduce my son too," Layton continued, gesturing to the toddler on the floor (currently poking at the button eyes of one of Trucy's handmade dolls). "This is Alfendi Layton."

Alfendi looked up at the sound of his name, peering curiously up at his father and the newcomer nearby.

"Hey, kid!" Clay called, giving the toddler a wave.

Alfendi stared at Clay for a moment, then waved back.

Pearl gently got to her feet, giving Clay an embarrassed smile. "Um, should I introduce myself too...?" she asked Trucy, biting at a thumbnail.

Clay frowned, confused. "Why... wouldn't you...?" he asked.

Trucy's smile faltered a little as she looked between the two, thinking over the question. "I'll let Polly and Luke do that!" she eventually announced, then sprinted for the kitchen, disappearing behind the door.

Clay raised an eyebrow. "Okay," he muttered to himself, still confused.

"I'm sorry, Mister Clay," Pearl replied, looking away.

Layton looked between the pair, finding himself as confused as Clay. "I must admit, why and how the two of you do not already know each other puzzles me as well."

"Don't worry, Mister Professor," Pearl said, one hand fiddling with a bracelet, "there is a good reason Mister Clay doesn't know me."

Clay crossed his arms, scoffing. "Can't wait to hear this," he mumbled.

The door to the kitchen opened again, and into the room burst Apollo and Luke, frantically rushing to greet their friend. Apollo, much like Trucy, had an almost-convincing grin, but Luke was visibly nervous and smiled in more of a grimace than anything remotely genuine. "Clay!" Luke cried. "We weren't expecting to see you until we got to the airport!"

Clay pouted at the pair. "What, I'm not allowed to show up early and spend more time with my best friends before one of them goes to England for three months!?"

Luke winced, rubbing at an arm as he stepped back and looked away. "I'm sorry, Clay; I didn't mean it like that..."

Apollo sighed, then rested a hand on Clay's shoulder. "Trucy said she hadn't introduced you to Pearly, so..." He gestured to Pearl, still biting her thumbnail as she watched them. "This is Pearly. She's a friend of the family."
"Hey," Clay called to Pearl with a defeated sigh.

Pearl quickly bowed a greeting in return. "Hello," she said, giving Clay a friendly smile. "I've heard a lot about you, Mister Clay."

Clay stared at Pearl for a moment, then turned back to Apollo with a frown. "So how come she knows me but I've never heard of her?"

Luke nervously started pulling at his sleeves. "I-it's a long story," he said.

"There's a short version, though," Apollo continued, looking Clay dead in the eyes with a serious stare. "You can't keep a secret."


"Hey!" Clay replied, hands on his hips as he glared at Apollo. "I can too keep a-!" He paused, thinking for a moment. "No, you're right, I can't." He ran a hand through his hair, giving his friends a relaxed grin. "Man, what's so secretive about her, though?"

Luke sighed in relief, glad to see his friend's anger gone.

Apollo smirked. "What, you think we're going to tell you and let that secret out?"

Clay scoffed, shrugging. "Worth a try, isn't it?"

Pearl giggled to herself.

Layton chuckled, crossing his arms. "As much as I'm also curious to hear this 'secret', I'm glad this has been happily sorted out for everyone," he said. "In fact, Luke, you should introduce your friend to Flora." He turned to Clay. "She was most disappointed when she realised we wouldn't have the time on this trip to visit this 'space centre' we've heard so much about."

Clay's face lit up with a bright smile. "Oh man, next time you come, I'll definitely give you a tour!" he cried. "It's an amazing place to visit! I can even get you behind the scenes a little, and show you the stuff normal tourists don't get to see!"

Luke laughed. "Come and tell Flora that! She's the one who's really interested!"

"Sure!" Clay replied, adjusting his visor with a smug grin. "Anything for a lady interested in space!"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Please don't tell me you're going to try and flirt with her."

Instead of answering, Luke and Clay laughed and rushed through to the kitchen door. Apollo gave a long-suffering sigh, glanced at Layton with a raised eyebrow, then followed them, closing the door behind him.

With the boys gone, Pearl lowered herself back down to the floor, tidying some of the unused toys littered around Alfendi into a pile. Layton moved to sit back down on the sofa, watching with a smile as Alfendi took the tidying as a challenge to make another mess, slamming his hands into the pile with a giggle to send the toys scattering in all directions.

While Pearl smiled serenely and moved to re-tidy the floor, Alfendi giggling madly, Layton leaned forward. "If I may ask, Pearl," he said, a curious frown on his face, "what exactly was the reason Clay was not aware of you before today?"

Pearl paused in her tidying, not even reacting to Alfendi impatiently scattering the pile with an
almighty cackle. "It's a long story, Mister Professor," she explained, brow furrowed nervously. "A lot of it was before I was even born."

Layton's eyes widened in surprise. "Oh?"

"It started a long time ago," Pearl said, her hands moving automatically to rebuild the small pile of toys for Alfendi. "Kurain Village was famous then, Mother said. We were well-respected, and the Master had a great sway on all sorts of things." She frowned. "I... can't remember if she said exactly what."

Layton thought a moment, resting a curled hand on his chin. "I don't suppose it really matters," he assured her. "What happened, then? Given what Miss Fey... er, Maya, told us about your village's... detractors, I don't imagine that is quite true anymore?"

Pearl shook her head, watching as Alfendi grew bored of scattering the toys and instead began to mime a conversation between a misshapen hippo and a squirrel. "There was a murder," Pearl continued. "A very famous one. The police couldn't figure it out, so they decided to call in the Master of Kurain to secretly channel the victim for them." She shook her head. "But the man the victim accused was proven innocent, then word got out of why the police had accused him in the first place."

"Oh dear," Layton mumbled, recognising immediately how the village's reputation must have nose-dived overnight. "And it's taken this long to rebuild your village's good reputation?"

Pearl opened her mouth to reply, then paused. "Sort of," she eventually said. "It wasn't until after Mystic Mia died, and Mystic Maya and Mister Nick met, that that old murder was finally solved. Kurain Village could finally overcome the past."

Layton noted to himself that he would have to ask Phoenix or Maya for the full story at another time. "And what does all this have to do with keeping you a secret from Clay? Surely Maya doesn't consider him to be a potentially violent detractor of your village's... 'talent'?"

Pearl shook her head. "Oh no, that's not the reason at all!" she explained, surprised. "It was Mister Nick who told us to keep everything a secret!"

"Mister... Wright?" Layton repeated, confused. "Why did he...?"

"It was after he lost his badge," Pearl sighed, hugging herself at the thought of the terrible memory. "You should have seen how much everyone hated him. He said, after everything Mystic Maya had done to help Kurain recover, the last thing we needed was for him to be associated with us." She closed her eyes a moment or two. "I was so angry at him. I thought he was abandoning us." She returned her gaze to Layton, a small smile on her face. "But Mystic Maya didn't let him. No matter how busy she was, she always made time to call him until he agreed to keep in touch with us, even if we were all too busy to see each other in person anymore." She giggled. "But then Mister Nick adopted Trucy and Apollo and Luke, and they started coming to visit us in Kurain, instead of us coming into the city!"

Layton smiled. "I see," he said, laughing a little at the almost deceptively simple answer that he should have seen coming. "I'm glad to hear there's a happy ending, regardless."

Pearl giggled, then returned to playing with Alfendi.
"Looks like this is as far as we can go," Phoenix announced as the group entered a massive room, and he directed everyone to the side of the crowd to keep out of the way.

"It's so busy here," Pearl said as she looked around, sticking close to Flora, who was walking alongside the sleeping Alfendi's pram as Layton pushed it.

Clay scoffed as they came to a stop near a wall. "It's LAX; Of course it's busy."

Trucy sniffed, then jumped at Luke and hugged his middle tightly, burying her face in his chest and knocking her hat askew. "I don't want you to go!" she cried. "Can't you stay at home? With me?"

Luke watched his sister with concern, hugging her back. "I'm sorry, Truce," he told her. "I have to go. It's too late now to change my plans."

"Don't you worry, your brother will be back before you know it," Layton added, giving the girl a reassuring smile although she couldn't see it.

Trucy just shook her head, clinging tighter to Luke. "Both of you are leaving me and Daddy!" she stubbornly accused her brothers, muffled by Luke's jumper. "Why can't you stay!?"

Apollo sighed, a hand to his face as he realised she was addressing him as well. "We've gone over this, Trucy..."

"I'll be back for Christmas," Luke promised. "It's only a couple of months. It'll be over before you know it!"

Trucy looked up at Luke with wide tearful eyes, her hat almost falling off were it not for one of Luke's hands at the back of Trucy's head. "You're not even going to be back for your birthday!? Or Daddy's birthday!? Or Halloween!?"

"I'll... have classes," Luke pointed out with a wince. "I won't have the time to come home."

"Flying between here and London is eleven hours or so in the air," Phoenix explained, shrugging. "That's not the kind of journey you can take lightly."

"I promise to text you every day," Luke added, giving Trucy a smile. "You'll never go more than twenty-four hours without hearing from me!"

Trucy thought a moment, letting go of Luke with one hand to wipe at her eyes. "You really promise?" she asked in a small voice.


After a pause, Trucy smiled, burying her face back in Luke's chest as she hugged him again.

Pearl ran to Luke and briefly joined the hug. "We'll miss you, Luke!"
Luke laughed, wrapping an arm around Pearl before she pulled away with a smile. "I'll miss you too, Pearl!" Trucy shifted at his side, hiding under Luke's arm as she rubbed at her eyes and nose, her other hand wrapped around her brother's back as she still clung tightly to him. "Say goodbye to Maya again for me?" Luke asked Pearl.

The young spirit medium nodded. "Sure," she agreed.

As Pearl stepped back, Clay stepped forward, grabbing Luke's free hand to shake with a super serious expression on his face. "We'll see ya, dude. Keep in touch, okay?"

Luke giggled, but nodded. "Of course I will! I have to keep you in line so you and Apollo don't kill each other!"

Clay grinned. "Yeah, like Apollo would ever be able to beat me in a fight!" he boasted.

"Hey!" Apollo cried, running to Clay's side and poking his friend's arm. "I'm not the one whose room is so disorganised he stepped on his hat and broke it!"

"Still fits, doesn't it?" Clay replied, adjusting his cracked visor with a wink before pointedly stepping away, leaving Apollo standing alone opposite Luke.

Luke shrugged as Apollo sent him a look, then giggled. "Have fun at your 'college'," he said with a grin.

Apollo scoffed, crossing his arms as he returned the grin. "Have fun at your 'uni'," he replied. "Don't let too many animals die, will you?"

"You know I won't actually be looking after any for a few years yet!" Luke laughed.

Phoenix then swept forward, pulling the two brothers (Apollo reluctantly, although he secretly enjoyed it) into a family hug that Trucy giggled as she joined. "Don't have so much fun over there you forget about us," he warned with a smile. "We'll miss having you around."


Phoenix leaned over to plant a quick kiss on Luke's forehead (both of them being exactly the right height to do so) while he ruffled Luke's hair through his hat. "Love you, Luke."

"Love you too, Papa."

The Wrights held their hug for a few moments more before Phoenix pulled back, Apollo blushing and hiding a smile as he was released from Phoenix and Trucy's grip. Even Trucy finally let go of Luke, though she grabbed his hand to keep contact with the younger of her brothers a while longer.

Layton tipped his hat, giving the Wrights, Clay, and Pearl a smile. "I suppose this is 'so long'," he said. "Until we can next visit."

"Oh, yes!" Flora cried excitedly. "I'm definitely coming back next year! I have to see that space centre after all!"

Clay grinned. "And I will be delighted to show it to you, my lady!" he announced with a grand tone, giving Flora an exaggerated bow.

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Knock it off, Clay."

Flora giggled, blushing.
"Goodbye Mister Professor, Ms Flora!" Pearl called, waving. "And say goodbye to Alfendi too, when he wakes up!"

"We will," Flora promised.

"We'll see you another time then, Mister Wright," Layton continued to Phoenix.

Phoenix smiled. "I look forward to it, Professor."

With a bit of effort, Layton moved the pram containing the sleeping Alfendi around to point towards the check-in counters, looking up for the nearest screen to tell them where to go for their flight. "It's time we got moving then. The plane will leave without us if we take too long here."

Luke looked down to Trucy, still tightly clinging to his hand. "I'll text you tomorrow morning," he told her. "Promise."

Trucy bit back tears, nodding sadly.

Phoenix wheeled Luke's old suitcase to his side, leaving it for the teen to take. "We'll see you at Christmas."

Luke nodded, taking his trunk and carefully pulling his hand from Trucy's grip. After a moment, he set off towards the check-in counters with Layton and Flora, Layton pushing Alfendi's pram while Flora pulled along their travel suitcase.

Clay waved madly as the small group left. "Have fun, dude!"

"Keep in touch!" Pearl added.

"Don't be too awesome without us!" Apollo joined in with a grin.

Luke laughed as he waved over his shoulder. "Thanks!" he shouted back. "I'll see you when I get back!"

Trucy watched sadly as Luke and the Layton family disappeared into the crowd, then turned and leapt on Phoenix without a word, clinging to his middle much as she had Luke's.

Phoenix gently hugged his daughter, patting her back comfortingly. "Don't worry," he quietly told her. "He might not be home all the time, but Luke will never stop being your brother."

Trucy sniffed into his hoodie, but didn't reply.

Clay sighed as he watched the crowds. "Man... It's gonna be like old times again, then?" he asked Apollo. "Before Luke moved here?"

Apollo shrugged. "Not really," he pointed out. "We're not at school anymore, I've got a dad, brother and sister that I didn't back then..."

"Luke's still going to talk to us, though," Pearl pointed out to the pair. "We all have phones. It's just the time differences that will make it difficult."

"Yeah, I guess that's true," Clay agreed, then gave Pearl and Apollo a grin. "We'll just have to work hard to be awesome without him, huh? Make him jealous he decided to go!"

Apollo laughed, though he shook his head. "You're such a jerk, Clay."
Luke stared out the window as Los Angeles disappeared far below him. Somewhere in the seats ahead of his, the Layton family had settled in with Alfendi, who was once again drifting off to sleep for the long journey home. He was glad to have a window seat, even if it meant he couldn't sit closer to his friends. *The last time I did this, I was with Papa and Mister Edgeworth, and we were only going to be gone a fortnight...*’ He sighed, hugging himself as he rested his forehead against the window. *I'm on my own this time, and I'll be gone much longer... Why does it feel like I'm moving away? I'll be back home for Christmas!*

The images of his parents crossed Luke's mind, and he remembered the disastrous journey that was the Tritons' move to California. *Maybe I should have asked Maya if I could talk to Dad before I left... We could have checked Mum was still alive while we were at it.*’ He closed his eyes. *I hope Mum's doing okay... I'll find you when I get back, Mum. I promise.*’

There was a 'dong' sound above Luke's head, and he looked up to see the seatbelt lights had been turned off. Over the speakers came an announcement from the pilot: "Ladies and gentlemen, we have reached cruising altitude and you are now free to roam about the cabin, however please note that if you are sitting in your seats, for your safety, please keep your seatbelts on and secured. Thank you." Another 'dong' signalled the end of the announcement, and Luke heard the general chatter of the crowded plane slowly start up again.

The teen turned his head back to the window, looking out on the landscape below. *I miss Mum and Dad everyday already; I guess Papa, Apollo and Trucy are just going to add to the list. Until I'm back home again, I'll just have to talk to them, and Maya and Pearl, and Clay, and all my friends at the animal shelter, as much as I can to make up for it.*’ He found himself smiling at the thought of his family and friends being happy again upon his return. *I have a promise to keep, after all.*

*View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook*
Good morning! ;)

Good midday! ;D It's almost Halloween and your not here :/

I'm sorry Trucy, I can't make the time to come home, especially for a Monday evening. I was thinking of going to one of the costume parties people are throwing here though; It won't be the same without one of your amazing outfits of course! :

Polly said the same thing :/ not about the outfits tho, I'm still making some for him and Clay

Oh and I'm almost done with Polly's surprise too! ;D I'm thinking of giving it to him tonight, since I won't see him tmrw

Oooo, sounds interesting! You'll have to get a picture of it for me! :

You'll see it when you get back, silly! xD

Haha, that's true! I'll have to ask Apollo or Papa to get that picture for me, then! :

NO I AM TELLING POLLY AND DADDY YOU HAVE TO WAIT BECAUSE YOU WENT TO ENGLAND :P

Aw, if you insist! I have studying to get back to now; Break a leg on your performances today! :

Thanks Luke! ;D I'll talk to you tmrw!

How's England?

It goes. Clocks have gone back. Met some more old friends today, but Alfendi tried to kill them with a teddy bear. :

He what!? I have to hear THIS story! Was it anyone you've told us about before?

The Ascots, actually! It isn't really all that exciting a story: Angela was holding him and he starting hitting away at them with his bear! :

Oh man, I wish I coulda seen that xD

I should get back to work; Break a leg today! :

Thanks! Altho I think Truce has something in store. She's been sending me really weird texts this week. I hope she hasn't pranked my costume or something, since she's giving it to me after the matinee today

Ah, I'm not allowed to comment on that, I'm afraid! Haha, don't worry though, I know you'll love it!
Over the weeks since Luke and then Apollo had left home for their respective tertiary studies, Trucy had been rather distant to Apollo when they met up every weekend for their regular parts in the Wonder Bar's stage shows. She hadn't ever let it show on-stage, like a true professional, but in person she had a tendency to either text him or talk 'through' a handy stagehand or their boss Aderyn. She had tried doing so with Phoenix the second week of Apollo's semester, but he had pulled her aside to talk, out of Apollo's hearing, and she never did so in front of their father again. Apollo could only guess what Phoenix's exact words to her had been.

As he entered the Wonder Bar through the back door, Apollo dusted off his dull red top hat and planted it on his head, covering his carefully gelled hair spikes. Inside, standing by some steps in the corridor, he spotted Aderyn and one of the stagehands talking, and waved as he planned to dash past.

"Oh, Apollo!" Aderyn cried as she registered the young man, briefly breaking off from her discussion with the stage-hand. "Your sister wanted me to tell you: She's working on summat, so she wants you to knock before going in to your dressing room today."

Apollo stared at his boss for a few moments, surprised. "Wait, she had an actual message for me?" he replied. "Not something she wanted to say to me from two feet away?"

"I know; Surprised me, too!" Aderyn laughed in response. "Dunno what she's got for ya, though. Break a leg tonight!"

"You too!" Apollo said, giving the Welsh woman a grin as he returned to dashing down the corridor. His smile quickly turned to a worried frown once alone. 'I already picked up my and Clay's costumes from her... what else has she got in store?'

The siblings had already seen each other that day for their matinee performance, and were looking forward to doing something possibly a little grander for their Halloween Eve evening act when they next reunited that night. They had been chatting like everything was back to normal between them, and Apollo had been hoping it would stick... but not if it brought more odd behaviour like this along with it. 'I just want to be able to talk with my sister again like we used to... No surprises, no ignoring me. I just want my sister back.'

As he reached their dressing room door, Apollo almost automatically reached for the handle before remembering Trucy's 'message' and instead knocked on the doorframe. "Truce?" he called. "It's me. Can I come in?"

"Wait a sec!" Trucy called, muffled by the door between them. After a long pause, during which Apollo contemplated ignoring her instructions and just going in anyway, the doorhandle turned and was pulled open, revealing Trucy standing just inside and grinning excitedly up at Apollo. "Polly!
Come on, I have a surprise for you!"

Apollo opened his mouth to question what this 'surprise' was, but Trucy had already turned and dashed inside, towards a hook on the wall over which she appeared to have flung a blanket to hide something hanging underneath. Apollo groaned as he stepped into the room, closing the door behind him. "Trucy, what is this?"

Trucy pressed the toe of a boot into the floor, blushing in embarrassment. "Um, I was kinda thinking," she admitted hesitantly. "About your stage outfit..."

"My... stage outfit?" Apollo repeated in surprise, one hand picking at his cape. "What do you mean?"

Trucy sighed dramatically. "I mean, I made it for you years ago! It needed replacing anyway!"

Apollo sputtered. "Wait, 'replacing'?!" He gestured angrily to the covered object under the blanket. "You mean you've made me a new outfit and not even consulted me on it?!?"

"I consulted Daddy and Luke!" Trucy argued. "Daddy even made sure it was 'court-appropriate'! I wanted to surprise you!"

Apollo glared at Trucy for several seconds, before stepping back with a sigh. "Well, I guess it's stupid to pass judgement before I've even seen it." He raised an eyebrow in her direction. "You're sure this isn't some highly elaborate prank because I'm at college now?"

Trucy shook her head, a serious look on her face. "I miss you and Luke being home, but I wouldn't let that get in the way of our show," she promised, pausing to glance up at the covering beside her. "I thought you deserved something that was more uniquely yours than just an old Halloween costume of my daddy's outfit. Luke suggested the colour, and Daddy helped me with the design."

Apollo frowned, casting a glance over Trucy's well-worn cape and hat. "What about you? Your's is just Mom's, isn't it?"

Running a hand along the edge of her cape, Trucy nodded, looking to the floor. "I did think about making myself a new one too, but..." She shook her head. "I like it. I like the colour, I like the design... I like kinda looking like Mommy when I wear it."

Apollo stepped up to rest a hand on her shoulder in silent comfort.

"Plus Daddy said I wasn't allowed to pierce my ears or take the straps off my dress," she added with a small smile, looking up at her brother. "Luke thought maybe I should try out changing my colour to purple, 'cause Mommy wore blue and Daddy wore red."

Apollo snorted in laughter, looking over to the nearby wall where an old Gramarye poster had been hung; Trucy had found it a few years back, introducing both her and Apollo to a forgotten fifth member of the Troupe, outfitted in green and purple with a mask covering the right side of his face. It was kinda funny that this Mister Reus was so forgettable it had slipped Luke's mind that he'd ever seen the image that now lived in this dressing room, alongside Magnifi, Thalassa, Zak, and Valant. Grinning, Apollo turned back to Trucy. "You could look good in purple."

Trucy giggled. "But I like blue too much," she said. "Besides, purple wouldn't go with your outfit very well!" Before Apollo could react, she stepped out of his reach and pulled the blanket down off the hook, revealing her surprise underneath while accidentally entangling herself in the blanket as it fell over her head.
Apollo frowned, staring at the revealed costume while one hand helped disentangle his sister. At first glance, it looked much like his current costume, except that the dull pinkish-red of Zak Gramarye had been replaced with a much brighter crimson more befitting Apollo's tastes. As he looked closer at the cape hung limply over the coathanger that also held the rest of the new outfit, he also noticed that the purple and blue card suits that decorated the edges had gone, leaving the plain white diamonds with gold beads on the corners. The black jumpsuit underneath also seemed to have been swapped out for a more formal-looking waistcoat and tight pants, with a heart-shaped bag modelled after Trucy's in the same crimson colour of the new cape. The waistcoat was held together by the same two rows of round buttons as his current outfit, while the shirt underneath looked to be a regular dress shirt. Tucked under the collar, unknotted in any way, was a necktie the same shade of blue as Trucy's cape and hat. Trucy herself was now pulling the blanket off from over her head, so Apollo left her to it and stepped forward, lifting up the edge of the cape to peek underneath and noticing that the dress shirt had carefully had its sleeves removed, causing Apollo to smile. 'Man, if she'd talked to me about this, I could have asked her to give me sleeves so I didn't have to shave my armpits anymore!'

Folding up the blanket and dumping it on the floor, Trucy looked up at her brother with a nervous smile. "So... do you like it?"

Apollo turned to her with a grin. "It's perfect."

After a pause, Trucy squealed and jumped on Apollo to give him a hug. "I'm so glad you like it!" she cried, bouncing on the spot as she stepped back again. "I'm gonna make myself a new cape like yours over the week! Then we can match!"

Laughing, Apollo watched his sister celebrate to herself for a moment. "You're not expecting me to change into it tonight, are you?" he asked. "I don't think we have the time to swap all my props over, and it might take me a while to adjust to it."

Trucy scoffed. "Of course not! You can take it home tonight and practise in it over the week!" She grinned. "Then we can debut our new look next Saturday!"

"Yeah, I'll need to learn how to tie a tie, too," Apollo thought aloud, looking at the new costume with a smile. "It looks way better than this old thing," he added to Trucy, patting the cape pinned around his neck. "You're the best, Truce."

Trucy blushed, grinning. "Only coz I got Daddy and my two big brothers looking out for me," she said, then frowned. "Except for Daddy not letting me get earrings. Or cut the straps off my dress."

She shot another grin at Apollo. "But we can convince him sometime, can't we? You'd tell Daddy I'd look great with earrings, right?"

Apollo laughed at his sister's audacity in demanding his support. "Maybe if you stop only ever talking to me through someone else?" he suggested. "I like talking to you like this, just us two." He shrugged, watching Trucy's smile falter. "Kinda feels sometimes like my sister's love is dependant on only ever doing what she wants, and not getting to control my own life."

Trucy looked guilty, hands behind her back, and she avoided Apollo's eyes. "I'm sorry," she mumbled. "I just... I miss having you and Luke around. You're not even home for weekends anymore."

After a pause, Apollo reached out and pulled Trucy into a hug. "I miss Luke too," he said, "and I miss seeing you and Dad as often as I used to... but that's just a part of growing up. Eventually, me and Luke are going to move out into our own places, and so will you. We'll still be a family, and we'll still make time to see each other as often as we can." He smiled. "After all, Luke still texts you..."
Trucy sadly smiled, clinging to Apollo. "Every morning," she whispered. "Sometimes he does it when he's in class. It's the middle of the day for him, y'know."

Apollo laughed. "Well, there you go!" he said. "You're never getting rid of us, Trucy Artemis Wright, no matter how hard you try!"

After a moment, Trucy giggled, hugging Apollo tighter in silent thanks.

"Now let's get everything ready for our show," Apollo said. "We've got an audience to please!"

View the Court Record
Together Again

Good morning! :

Are you coming home yet? >(

You're not even saying hello anymore? :

You said you turned in all your stuff so why aren't you coming home!?!?

Assignments, and I AM coming home, just not today. I have to finish packing by tonight, and I'm leaving tomorrow morning for my flight.

You ARE coming home!?!?!? FINALLY! So I'll see you tomorrow? :D

Looks like it. :) I'll be on a plane this time tomorrow, so don't expect to hear from me again until you get home from school. You haven't finished term yet, have you?

Nope, still got another week. I can't wait to see you!!!! :DDD Do you think Daddy would let me skip tomorrow?

Don't skip school, Trucy. I'll see you when you get home, I promise. :)

Aw ok :(

Lemme guess, you told Truce you were coming home tomorrow

Why, what's she doing?

Bouncing all over the apartment shrieking about how she can't wait

Oh... she must be excited, I guess!

Dad's planning how we're going to meet you at the airport. Trucy won't stop begging to skip school. Should I invite Clay?

I've told Trucy to be patient and go to school instead of meeting me! Go ahead and tell Clay to come if he's available. You guys finished a week ago, right?

Yeah we've been done a while now. We actually got really used to being roommates too. Clay never does anything by halves

I can believe that! I'll see you at the airport!

Seeya then :)
Luke took a sip of the cool glass of water in his hands, hoping the cold would keep him awake for a few more hours. He stood in the kitchen, leaning against the counter by the fridge, assuming that staying upright would also help him keep from nodding off.

"You must be glad to be back where it's warmer!" Apollo joked, standing nearby as he idly spun his new hat in his hands. "I mean, it's winter and all, but it's way warmer here than in England!"

Luke giggled. "I grew up with England's temperatures; I prefer the cold!"

Apollo scoffed. "Preferring the cold? Crazy talk!" He laughed. "I mean, I love the snow and all, but it's way too cold to actually enjoy when it comes around, y'know?"

Luke resisted a smile, shaking his head. "No, I don't know."

Apollo opened his mouth to give a confused reply, then noticed his brother was joking and shook his head with an amused sigh, Luke giggling to himself. "I still think warmer weather is better," the elder brother argued. "You don't have to hide under several uncomfortable layers of clothing, your fingers and face don't freeze off because you can't cover them... Not to mention, you could wear ten layers on cold days and still feel cold."

"I see your point," Luke replied, deciding not to point out that they had had this discussion multiple times over the years and it was clear neither would ever be swayed from their opinion. "I disagree with your thoughts on layers being uncomfortable and not working, but I see why you prefer warmth."

Apollo opened his mouth to reply, only to again pause as he heard their home's front door banging open. "Heads up," he muttered, turning to the office door. "Trucy's home."

Luke grinned, pushing off the counter as he turned to carefully place down his glass of water. He had a feeling there was a tackle-hug in his near future.

The pair heard another door's banging through the wall before the nearby door from the office violently swung open, an eleven-year-old girl eagerly looking around the room from the doorway before her eyes locked on Luke and Apollo in the kitchen. Her face broke into a wide, excited grin, and she ran towards Luke at full speed, latching around his middle in a tight hug.

"LUUUUUUUUUUKE!" she shouted. "I MISSED YOU I MISSED YOU I MISSED YOU I MISSED YOU!"

Luke laughed as he hugged Trucy back. "I missed you too!" He petted the top of her bare head, buried into his jumper. "But you were fine while I was away, weren't you? Just like we said you'd be!"

Trucy didn't reply, rubbing her face into Luke's chest a few more moments before looking up at him with wide eyes. "But you weren't here!" she cried. "And you'll be going away again after New Years!"

Apollo sighed, slapping his face with a hand as he walked off.

"I just got home a few hours ago, and you're already thinking of when I next leave?" Luke pointed
out with a smile. "We've got three weeks together to look forward to!"

Trucy looked unconvinced, biting her lip as she hugged Luke tighter.

Phoenix panted as he finally made his way into the kitchen, pulling off his beanie with one hand. "Geeze Truce, did you have to run all the way home from the bus-stop!?" he cried with exasperation. "Luke wasn't going anywhere!"

Trucy didn't reply, clinging to Luke as Phoenix trudged across the kitchen to get himself a drink of water. Apollo watched with a smirk, but decided not to comment.

"Oh, I just remembered!" Luke said, breaking the silence and giving Trucy a wide grin. "You did a great job with Apollo's new look! The brighter colour works really well on him!"

"I know, right!?" Trucy enthusiastically replied, finally pulling away from Luke to run to Apollo's side and pulling him over closer to their brother. "See, he's got this waistcoat and tie underneath that looks all lawyerly, so he can wear it in court," she explained, pulling aside Apollo's cape and ignoring his annoyed looks, "and I made him a new bag that looks like mine, and I updated our capes so we don't have the card suits on the ends anymore!"

Apollo shoved his hat on his head, deciding to let Trucy do what she wanted. "I just already showed it to him," he muttered.

Luke laughed. "I know you worked really hard on it, but it looks like it was a breeze for you to do!" he complimented her. "Like I was telling Apollo, I've got to drop in on your next show to see it in action!"

Trucy giggled, bouncing on her heels with a proud grin. "He's got new gloves, too!" she added.

"Oh yeah, so I can wear my bracelet on stage now," Apollo agreed with a grin, tapping at his left wrist where it sat. "Best part about the new outfit by far!"

As the kids laughed, Phoenix downed his glass of water and turned to them with an exhausted smile. "You'll be heading up to Kurain tomorrow, right?" he asked Luke. "Maya will be excited to see you back."

"Yeah!" Trucy cried. "And Pearly's coming by this afternoon, too!"

Luke nodded. "Yup, I'm planning to visit everyone while I'm here," he assured them, then began to count off on his fingers. "Clay met me at the airport, Pearl's dropping by today, I'll go and see Maya tomorrow... Then I also want to visit the animal shelter I was working at, ask Mister Edgeworth or Uncle Larry if they want to see me while I'm in the country, and Clay might drag me to the Space Centre at some point before I have to go back to London again."

Trucy's face fell at the mention of London. "You can't stay here? They'd let you do classes online, wouldn't they?"

Luke gave her a sympathetic frown. "I'm sorry, Trucy. They probably would, but practical classes aren't the same if you're not physically there."

Trucy just looked away.

"Not to mention, London is where I grew up," Luke continued. "I like going back there and seeing old friends. Even though I miss you guys an awful lot, but..." He shrugged, looking around at his family. "I've accepted you guys will never want to live there, and I think, even once I am old enough
to live alone, I'd hate to move back there on my own."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "Really?" he asked. "Not even for a year or two?"


Apollo reached under his hat to scratch at his head. "You really think you won't change your mind? You're, like, seventeen. That's still pretty young."

"I could say the same about eighteen," Phoenix pointed out with a grin.

Apollo gave his father a glare.

"I'm sure," Luke said in answer to the question, giggling. "Why, are you thinking of changing your mind about staying in LA, Apollo?"

Apollo rolled his eyes, then was forced to recoil as Trucy whacked him with the back of a hand. "Ow, hey!"

"Don't you dare move away!" the girl accused him, then ran to Luke, staring at him with big eyes. "You really promise not to stay in London forever?"

"I'll always come back," Luke promised, and was immediately greeted by another hug from his sister. After a pause, Luke looked up at Phoenix with a grin. "Hey, while I'm visiting Maya, do you think she'd mind channelling my dad for me again? He'd love to hear what's been going on at Gressenheller since we left!"

Phoenix chuckled, a hand on his hip. "I'm sure she'd love to," he assured his son.

Apollo sighed at Trucy. "Geeze, you didn't overreact this much when I came home at the end of term," he mumbled, then gave Luke a smile. "I am glad you're back, though."

Before Luke could reply, Trucy had jumped back with a gasp, turning to Phoenix. "Wait, Daddy, I forgot it's your birthday today!"

"Oh yeah, the big three-oh!" Apollo added with a grin. "How do you feel about being so old, Dad?"

Phoenix gave Apollo a half-lidded stare. "Very funny," he deadpanned, then looked over to Trucy with a smile. "Honestly, just Luke coming home was a good enough gift for me."

Trucy shook her head stubbornly. "Nuh-uh!" she cried, then grabbed Phoenix's hand and began to drag him into the office. "We can't let something like Daddy's thirtieth birthday go past without doing something to celebrate!"

Apollo and Luke shared amused looks as Phoenix reluctantly let himself be pulled away into the next room. "You weren't hoping distracting her with you coming home was going to make us forget, were you?" Apollo asked.

Luke shrugged. "It's was Papa's idea," he replied, then headed into the office with a laugh. "I knew it wasn't going to work! "I am glad to be home, though. Even if it is only for a little while!"

- END OF 2022 -
View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Phoenix hated doing finances. It was a necessary evil, but he hated it all the same. It didn't help that, with Luke away in England for most of the year and both Phoenix's sons now attending their respective universities, there was less money than usual going in (although not much of a difference in how much they were spending, considering it was only Phoenix and Trucy at home most of the time). Luke had returned to London early the previous Sunday, to Trucy's mild annoyance, but Apollo still had another week before he was again out of the apartment. With Trucy at school, he was apparently using today to read through the rest of Mia's old case-files, having grabbed a bunch from the very back of her drawer and wandered off to his desk in reception to read them.

Phoenix sighed as he leaned forward on his desk, rubbing his temples as he took a brief break from his work. 'I wouldn't even mind this so much if it didn't give me such a headache! I studied art, not math!' Huffing in irritation, he forced himself to return to his computer. 'But, I gotta get this done. Complaining won't do the work for me.'

The door to reception opened and Phoenix looked up to see Apollo stood in the doorway, looking vaguely confused. One hand still rested on the door where he had pushed it open while the other held a folder full of paper and related files, which Apollo kept glancing at as he contemplated stepping into the office.

Phoenix smiled. "Got a question about an old case?" he asked, leaning back in his chair and crossing his arms smugly. "I hope you read all the files you took in there with you, first."

Apollo looked up at his father with a frown, then finally stepped forward into the room, heading to Phoenix's desk. "You knew exactly which case I was gonna get to today, didn't you?" he asked accusingly. "Seriously, if I'd known I'd find this, I'd've got around to finishing Mia's files years ago."

Phoenix just smirked. "What, and spoil the surprise of you finding it yourself?"

Glaring at his father, Apollo reached the desk and slammed the folder on a section that was, for once, clear of anything else. "You met your mentor because she defended you when you were accused of murder," he said. "How was that not important enough to mention!?"

"Because that was years before she died?" Phoenix replied with a shrug, his grin fading. "It's not like it was the only time I've been accused of murder."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "What, is it not the first time you had a girlfriend dump you through killing someone?"

Phoenix frowned, and Apollo seemed to recognise he'd stepped over a line and looked away guiltily. "Think less of me if you want," Phoenix said, "but 'Dollie' was my first serious girlfriend. For eight months, she was the sweetest, kindest person I'd ever met." He stared at the abandoned case-file on his desk, eyebrows furrowed. "And it took five years for the full truth of that trial to even begin to come out, anyway."
Apollo looked curiously at the folder. "What do you mean?" he asked. "I've read the other file, and it looked like Mia took you on specifically to save you from this Hawthorne person."

"I didn't mean that," Phoenix replied with a smile, looking up at Apollo. "I know it's not the same as being there, but you surely picked up from the transcripts that Dahlia was a less-than-sweet, not-at-all-kind kind of person, right?"

Reluctant to admit he hadn't wanted to judge, Apollo just shrugged.

"That's because I was right when I said the Dahlia who attended the trial wasn't my 'Dollie'," Phoenix explained, a nostalgic smile on his face. "I never really knew Dahlia at all. Only met her twice before she died!"

"Huh?" Apollo muttered, confused. "What do you...?"

"I guess it's been a while since you read that file," Phoenix added with a grin, spinning his chair towards the drawers behind him to pull out the one containing all his old case-files, grabbing the one right at the front. He held it out for Apollo. "Maybe you should refresh your memory. This was one of the ones you saw in person, wasn't it?"

Apollo nodded, recognising the date and police code on the label (February 2019, Phoenix's second-last trial) as he took the offered folder. "It's connected to the other case?" he asked, frowning. "Is... is that why I could never understand what was going on towards the end...?"

Phoenix laughed, irritating Apollo, and leaned back in his seat, arms crossed. "Well, since you first watched it happen, you've met Edgeworth, Maya, and Pearls, learned all about spirit channelling, Mia, and now Dahlia and something about Diego Armando if you were paying attention... I don't see why you wouldn't understand it better on a second glance!"

Apollo sighed, deciding not to point out he'd read it last only a year or two ago, long after being introduced to the Feys, Edgeworth or spirit channelling. As he thought back on the case-file in his hands, he remembered specifically the parts he had always found confusing. "Wait, if Hawthorne was executed... was she the one Maya was channelling? Pearly's... cousin?"

"Half-sister," Phoenix corrected with a smile. "And don't expect me to tell you anything else; Re-read the file first!" He waved at the folder in Apollo's hands, restraining a laugh.

"Yeah, yeah, I will," Apollo muttered, rolling his eyes. He shoved the file under an arm, deciding to put his questions about it aside for later. "I did have a serious question though: How'd you go from an art student, albeit one studying law, to Mia's junior partner?"

Phoenix didn't reply immediately, looking off to the windows at his side as he thought.

Apollo flipped open the case-file still sitting on the desk, running his eyes down a random page of the trial transcript. "Reading this, it's hard to imagine most of these words being said by you... And how did you manage to eat a necklace!?!"

At that, Phoenix couldn't resist giving his son a smirk. "With a lot of difficulty," he remarked. "It was very crunchy, as I recall."

"Wasn't it made of glass?" Apollo asked, an eyebrow raised.

"Plastic," Phoenix assured him with a grin. "Didn't make it easier to swallow. Didn't make it easier on the way out, either."
Apollo grimaced, shaking his head. "Gross..."

"You asked," Phoenix pointed out with an amused shrug. Leaning forward in his chair, he rested his elbows on the desk and stared at the open case-file Apollo was still leafing through, hands at his mouth. "As for your other questions... it was a long time ago. People can change a lot in... how long has it been? Almost nine years now?" He shook his head in astonishment. "Wow, it has been a long time..."

As the ensuing silence stretched on, Apollo mused to himself, looking through Mia's physical records of the old case. 'Given what happened, I shouldn't be surprised Dad has a lot of painful memories of this trial...’ Out loud, he decided to change the subject. "I've never really thought about it before, but I guess you didn't always want to be a lawyer, huh? Why'd you make the switch from art?"

Phoenix didn't reply immediately, slowly smiling as he continued to stare into the distance. "That's a long story," he said. "Let's just say... your uncle Edgeworth convinced me initially, but it was my experience in court with Mia that gave me the push to really put my heart into pursuing it." He closed his eyes, chuckling to himself. "I still would have eventually become a lawyer without Mia, but who knows if I would have accomplished my goal that way."

Apollo frowned, giving his father a curious look. "Goal?" he asked. "What goal?"

Phoenix only continued to sit and smile, events of years long past running through his mind. "It's a long story," he repeated, then opened his eyes to glance meaningfully at the folder under Apollo's arm. "Now run along. You have a case-file to read."

Shooting Phoenix a glare, Apollo decided to ask again later. Sighing, he turned and walked back to his desk in the next room. As he reached the doorway, he paused, one hand on the frame, and turned back to his father. "By the way, once I'm done with these case-files... Maybe you could finally let me look at the one for the Gramarye case? The one you've hidden away somewhere?"

Phoenix blinked in surprise. "Uh..."

Ignoring his father's blank response, Apollo left the room without another word.

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So I think I've just discovered why its always Dad doing the design for our pamphlets and advertising.

Because he's the oldest of the four of us and has the most practise drawing?

Nope, because he studied art in college.

Wait, what? When did Papa study ART? He graduated as a lawyer, didn't he!? 

It was a surprise for me too. I finally finished reading Mia's old casefiles, and it turns out she only met Dad because she defended him when he was an art student.

But why was Papa studying ART!? He's always been so passionate about being a defence attorney! Even WITHOUT his badge!

Search me. I asked him but he didn’t tell me.
Well I sort of asked him.

Actually it was more a question about why he switched to being a lawyer. He just said it was a long story.

Now I think about it, wasn't Grandma a comic artist before she retired? Maybe Papa was following in her footsteps before discovering his passion?

That's a good point. I'll ask him once I've finished rereading this other casefile he dumped on me.

Oh yeah isn't it the middle of the night for you rn?

Just gone one in the morning. I couldn't sleep though - still adjusting to the timezone.

Well you won't get any sleep talking to me! Go to bed you dingbat! :P.

Alright, alright, I'm going! Talk to you tomorrow! :)

GO TO BED.
April 6, 8:33PM  
Wright Talent Agency  
Bathroom

The room was echoey, and rather loud when the shower was running, and opening your mouth under the stream of water was likely to get you a mouthful of soap if you weren't careful, but none of that stopped Trucy from singing as she cleaned herself up every night.

"Throw your doubt away and come fly with me!" the eleven-year-old chirped to herself, dancing a little as she rubbed the soap all over her body. "For a day, believe you live in a dream! Let magic take your breath away, let me show you anything's possible!"

Tonight, Trucy was feeling especially cheery, as both her brothers were currently home from their respective places of study. Apollo would be leaving again at the end of the week, but Luke would be sticking around a little longer before ultimately leaving again, and, although Trucy was still in school herself, she was making the most of having them both around.

"Breathe in, close your eyes and you'll see what you've been missing," she sang into the soap bottle, bouncing only a little so she didn't slip and fall in the enclosed space. "Make a wish and maybe you'll be lucky! Make a wish and maybe you'll-!"

Suddenly the bathroom was plunged into darkness.

Shrieking in shock, Trucy dropped her soap bottle and jumped out of the shower, having only enough foresight to grab her towel and wrap it around her wet, soapy body before throwing open the door. Still screaming, she ran into the hallway and promptly collided with her eldest brother's arm, clinging too tightly to her towel to grab onto him as she would have preferred.

"Geeze, quiet down, Truce!" Apollo cried as he grabbed his sister before she could run off down the darkened corridor. "It's just a blackout!"

"I was in the shower!" Trucy loudly complained, pulling her towel tighter and gesturing to the shower cap covering her hair. "It's really dark in there!"

Apollo looked past Trucy into the room beyond, and, although he couldn't see much in the deep shadows, he noticed he could still hear the running water within. "Wait, you haven't turned off the shower!?

"It's dark in there!" Trucy angrily cried in response.

A light shone from the direction of the stairs, and the siblings looked over to listen to the footsteps of Phoenix and Luke as they came up from the kitchen below. "Are you two alright?" Phoenix asked, pointing the torch in his hands at the floor so the family of four could all see each other in the dark.

"We heard a scream!" Luke added with a concerned frown.
Apollo sighed, gesturing to the bathroom. "Trucy was in the shower," he said.

"The lights suddenly turned off!" Trucy almost shouted in explanation. "It's really dark in the bathroom!"

Phoenix suddenly noticed that Trucy was clad in nothing more than her towel. "Truce, did you run straight out here?"

"And left the shower on," Apollo muttered, crossing his arms as he shot his sister a glare.

"Of course I did!" Trucy cried in a vaguely hysterical tone, hugging herself under her towel. "It suddenly went dark! What was I supposed to do!?"

"Turn everything off first?" Apollo muttered.

Luke shot Apollo a disapproving frown. "Leave her alone, Apollo!"

Phoenix gave Trucy a sympathetic smile as he realised how freaked out she had been by the unexpected darkness. "It's alright, Trucy," he promised her, resting a hand on her wet shoulder. "It's just a blackout. We can give you a flashlight if you want to finish your shower."

Trucy firmly shook her head. "Not until the lights come back!" she insisted.

"Are you sure?" Luke asked. "We can get my torch for you; It turns into a lantern!"

"No!" Trucy cried, shaking her head again. "I'm not going back in there until we have lights back!"

Phoenix sighed, pinching at the bridge of his nose. Given how long the power had been gone, they were unlikely to see it back for a while, and Trucy couldn't stand around as she was for that long. He looked over to Apollo. "Apollo, could you go turn off the shower and fetch your sister's school uniform from the bathroom, please?"

Apollo rolled his eyes, but nodded in agreement, stepping into the darkened bathroom without a second thought, confident he could find his way around without a source of light.

"Truce," Phoenix continued to his daughter, "why don't we take you to your room, and you can dry off and get dressed, huh?"

Trucy thought a moment, listening to the squeaking sounds of the shower tap being spun and the water slowing to a trickle. Although still uncertain about letting herself be alone in the dark, she gave her father a small nod.

As Phoenix gently walked Trucy down the hallway, he called to Luke over his shoulder, "Would you get your flashlight for her, Luke?"

"Of course!" Luke replied, and he dashed off to dig around in his room for his torch.

A few minutes later, Phoenix had gathered the small family in the office, sat on the open carpet around Luke's torch. Luke had suggested they turn the dark night into a 'camp out' of sorts, so his torch was acting as a campfire while some spare blankets were pretending to be sleeping bags. Although Phoenix had hoped the location of the office would provide Trucy some comfort from
outside streetlights, they also appeared to be dead, so he suspected their wait for the power to return was going to be a long one.

The presence of her family and the view of the stars through the large windows of the office helped Trucy settle down after her earlier scare, although she still stuck close to whichever member of her family was in nearest reach. At the moment, it was Luke, and she sat at his side, clinging to his arm, as Apollo and Phoenix returned from ensuring all the lights elsewhere in the apartment were off should the power suddenly return. "What are we going to do?" she asked, quietly. "Until the lights come back?"

Apollo grinned, pointing his torch up at his face as he crouched down on one of the blankets. "Tell ghost stories!" he cried.

When Trucy hid her face in Luke's arm in response, Phoenix shot Apollo a glare. "We're not doing that," he said, ignoring Apollo's subsequent sigh of disappointment. He also lowered himself to the carpet, giving Luke a smile. "Stories are a good idea, though. Maybe we could give Luke a break from the same seven stories he's always telling you, Trucy?"

Luke blushed in embarrassment, although Trucy managed to giggle. "What story, then?" she asked, eyes wide with curiosity.

"How about a story about Mia?" Apollo asked, turning to Phoenix with a grin. "You must have something about her!"

"Yeah, Auntie Mia!" Trucy agreed.

Phoenix laughed, rubbing at the back of his head. "I, uh... don't think I have any stories about Mia, actually..."

Apollo smirked. "Are you kidding, Dad? I've read the case-files; You had some interesting stuff before she died!" He snorted, hiding a grin behind a hand. "Not to mention the story of how you met!"

Phoenix shot Apollo a death glare.

Luke frowned in thought. "There's a story behind that?"

"Not a very interesting one," Phoenix insisted, sighing. "Honestly, I'd suggest the time Mia died and Maya and I met, but I expect you've already heard all about that one from Living Lie Detector over here." He jerked his head in Apollo's direction with a raised eyebrow, the teen rolling his eyes with a scoff in response.

Trucy thought a moment. "What about after that? Like, Luke went on loads of adventures with Uncle Professor. Didn't you have adventures with Mommy?"

Phoenix laughed. "None as impressive as Luke's, but I suppose a lot of my cases could count as 'adventures' in a certain light."

Apollo grinned, nodding enthusiastically. "How about the Steel Samurai one?" he suggested. "I could get the case-file for you to help!"

Although surprised, Phoenix nodded, watching as Apollo immediately jumped to his feet, torch in hand, and dashed off eagerly to the hidden drawers behind Phoenix's desk.

"The 'Steel Samurai one'?" Luke repeated, confused. "What's that one about?"

Luke was taken aback by the accusation, unused to not being the storyteller for once. "Um, sorry."

Phoenix laughed. "It was my third case, the first trial conducted by Wright & Co Law Offices and the first one I investigated with Maya’s help."

Trucy's eyes lit up, but before she could talk, Apollo returned with a case-file in hand, which he handed to Phoenix with a grin as he sat back down in the rough circle. "Found it!" he announced.

"Ah, yes, thank you," Phoenix said, taking the folder with a smile and leafing through it. "Now I'll have some props to jog my memory."

Trucy squealed, throwing herself to the floor to eagerly look up at Phoenix, her head propped up against the floor by her elbows. "Where does it start, Daddy!?"

"You'll have to bear with me; I'm not as good at this as Luke," Phoenix said, throwing a grin to Luke, who shrugged good-naturedly in return. "I guess you could say... the story started here, in this room. It had been a few months since Mia died, and, despite the publicity, we weren't getting any calls for cases..."

View the Court Record

Chapter End Notes

Trucy's song taken from the lyrics written for her theme, 'Child of Magic', by Adriana "adrisaurus" Figueroa.

Also, I've finished Azran Legacy now, so potential spoilers for that from this point on.
"It's always so bright and sunny here!" Flora said as she left the airport with the Wrights and Clay, pulling her travel suitcase behind her. "No wonder you never want to leave, Luke!"


"There's other reasons I want to stay besides the weather," Luke pointed out, sending a brief smile to Trucy clinging happily to his side.

Phoenix quietly chuckled to himself, then looked to Flora. "Where are you staying this time? Back at the Gatewater?"

Flora shook her head. "I thought I'd try somewhere different!" she explained cheerfully. "There's a little bed-and-breakfast a few streets down from you that I thought looked cute."

"Ooh, I can take you there!" Clay chimed in with a grin. "The Wrights were planning to take public transport home anyway, so-"

"No way," Apollo interrupted, shooting his friend a glare. "Give you several minutes alone to outrageously flirt with our guest? Why should we do that!?"

Flora blushed. "I don't mind," she insisted.

"I thought you came to take their luggage for them, anyway," Phoenix chimed in, scratching the back of his head. "We only agreed to take the bus home because there isn't room for all of us in your car."

"We can compromise!" Luke suggested. "Clay can take Flora to check in and drop off her luggage before they meet us back home, and Apollo can go with them!" He looked to Trucy at his side. "I suppose you would want to stay with me and Papa, huh?"

Trucy grinned, nodding firmly.

Clay shot Apollo a smirk, and Apollo sighed. "Sure," he agreed.

"Fine with me!" Clay added, turning to Flora and gripping his visor as he leaned forward in a small bow. "Shall I take your bag on the way to the car, milady?"

Flora giggled. "Oh no, I'm fine taking it myself kind sir, thank you!" she insisted.

Apollo groaned as he rested his face in the palm of one hand.

Luke laughed, sharing a smile with Trucy. "I'm glad to be home," he said. "One year down, two to go!"

"Oh right, that's your first year of study over!" Phoenix realised. "How's it feel?"
"Pretty good, I guess!" Luke replied with a shrug and a grin. "I'm actually interested to see how much smaller my classes get as we go on. We've already lost quite a few people as we have more to learn."

"Huh, really?" Apollo asked, crossing his arms. "I haven't noticed anyone dropping out of my law course yet."

Clay nodded. "Same with my engineering classes," he added. "Although it is hard to tell, since we still share a bunch with other degrees."

"Oh!" Trucy suddenly cried, bouncing away from a surprised Luke to run to Flora's side. "Flora! Didn't you say last time you were here that you were gonna get a job as a cook?"

Although astonished at the reminder of how long ago her last visit was, Flora smiled and nodded. "Yes, and I managed to find one, too!"

"Ooo, congratulations!" Trucy chirped.

Flora giggled. "Thank you. It was a lucky break too; My manager agreed to take me in and train me even though I don't have any kind of formal education or training."

"The Professor vouched for her," Luke filled in. "We actually went there one night, too!" He winced. "It's just too bad Alfendi threw a tantrum and we couldn't enjoy it much."

"You'll just have to come another time, then!" Flora insisted with a smile.

Trucy grinned. "And can we go if we're ever in London?"

"Of course!" Flora replied.

Phoenix laughed. "In the meantime," he said, "why don't we look forward to your performance tonight, huh?"

"Right, almost forgot about that," Apollo muttered.

"It's gonna be so cool!" Trucy cried to Flora, then ran back to Luke and grabbed his hand. "You're coming too, aren't you?"

"Of course I am!" Luke laughed. "I always miss seeing your show when I'm away!"

"Yay!" Trucy cheered.

July 10, 7:54PM
Wonder Bar
Restaurant

Up on stage, Trucy exaggeratedly frowned as she looked around their small 'set', peering under the nearest table and a chair before glaring at Apollo, fists on her hips. "Apollo, where did you hide the magic hat?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Me? Are you sure you didn't make it invisible and misplace it again, Artemis?"
Trucy huffed, giving him a haughty look. "Well, we can't do our next trick without it!"

"What, summoning doves again?" Apollo asked with a small smile. "You have to stop doing that, anyway. We're out of space to keep them."

A ripple of laughter spread through the audience. At a table in the front row, Luke glanced over to Flora, sat on his right, happy to see she was enjoying the show as much as he'd hoped she would. On his left was Phoenix, watching the stage proudly, while Clay was on Flora's other side, rolling his eyes at the antics on stage although he was smiling at the chance to watch.

Trucy grinned as she 'spotted' the missing hat behind a box, lifting it up into the audience's view. It was similar in design to her's and Apollo's, but this top hat was black with a red band: the same hat Luke had used for his Halloween costume a few years previous, and that Phoenix had used the year before that (when it had a white band instead of crimson). "Ha!" Trucy cried, waving it smugly in Apollo's direction. "Your attempts to hide the magic hat have failed once again!"

Apollo scoffed as Trucy placed the hat upside-down on the table. "Let's not summon any more animals. Our rabbit hutch is full to bursting after you insisted on pulling just the two from that hat."

"Fluffy needed a friend!" Trucy cried. "How was I to know he was a she!?"

Raising a hand to quiet his sister's arguments as the audience tittered in amusement, Apollo stepped forward and looked out over the crowd with a smile. "Looks like we're gonna need a victim for this trick anyway."

"Volunteer!" Trucy corrected in a stage-whisper, running to his side.

"Yes, 'volunteer', I meant 'volunteer'," Apollo continued, his smile unchanging as the audience laughed at the reappearance of the running gag. He peered out over the crowd for a few moments before grinning. "Ah, and I think I see someone in the front row!"

Luke resisted a smile, casting a glance to the unsuspecting Flora on his right. He noticed Clay similarly shooting her a glance, hiding snickers of amusement.

While Trucy waited on stage with a massive grin, Apollo jumped down into the audience, pulling a microphone from seemingly thin air as he bounded across to the Wrights' table, promptly holding the microphone out towards a surprised Flora with a smile. "Hello there, young lady! May I ask your name?"

Flora looked around at Clay, Luke and Phoenix for a moment, then, seeing them only smiling encouragingly, turned to Apollo with a tentative smile of her own, leaning slightly towards the microphone. "Um, Flora," she mumbled.

"Good evening, Flora!" Apollo chirped in response, and waved for her to get up. "Come on up on stage!"

Flora hesitated for a moment, but, seeing Luke and Clay also waving for her to go, slowly got to her feet. As she walked around Clay, Apollo offered her his free hand, which she gingerly took as she allowed herself to be led to the stairs and up on stage. The audience clapped as she entered the stage lights, nervously following Apollo as he brought her to centre stage, where Trucy stood waiting with a great deal of unfamiliar eyes staring directly at her from the dark open space beyond.

Just as Flora was beginning to think of running, Trucy reached out and grabbed Flora's hand to
shake enthusiastically. "Hello there, Flora!" she cried, giving the young woman a wink with the eye hidden from the audience. "What brings you here tonight? Visiting a friend?"

Flora thought a moment before nodding.

"Ah, I see, I see!" Trucy continued. "My prediction was correct!" She then paused to think, imitating Apollo as she pressed a gloved finger to her forehead. "I sense you've come a great distance to be here tonight! London, England, I believe?" She opened an eye to look up at Flora with a smile, and, once Flora had given her a small nod in response, tipped her hat pridefully. "Ah, of course! You must be a big fan to have come all this way just to see Apollo and Artemis Gramarye perform!"

Flora had almost opened her mouth to speak when she heard Apollo scoff, and turned to see him giving Trucy a smirk. "Now now, we both know you only know that because we picked her up from the airport today personally."

Trucy didn't react for a few moments, waiting for the resulting peal of laughter from the audience to die down. Flora suspected they had called on her specifically for that joke. "Well, ruin a good trick if you insist!" the girl continued with a shrug, still brightly smiling. "Let's get on with the other one, then!" Subject appropriately changed, she whirled around with a flash of her cape to continue the show.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Flora looked around the tall room with a gasp, a wide smile of amazement on her face. "I've never seen a real space rocket this close up before!"

Clay grinned, crossing his arms smugly. "Cool, huh?"

That morning, Clay had met the Wrights at their apartment with his car, and he, Luke and Apollo had picked up Flora together before heading on to the Cosmos Space Center. At Luke's suggestion, once they arrived, Clay first took Flora to the previously-named Launch Pad Two, now better known as the Space Museum. A few other tourists were milling about the room, admiring one of the many displays set up to either decorate the large vertical space or to inform readers of space-travel and the history of the Space Center's ill-fated attempt to send a human to the moon.

"Technically, that's not a real one, though," Apollo chimed in with a wave of his hand. "It's just a replica."

Clay scoffed. "Replica inside and out!" he shot back. "If they wanted to, it could go into space today!"

Luke smiled brightly. "Oh, they finished it?"

"Yep!" Clay replied, shooting Luke a thumbs-up. "Mister Starbuck even said it gave 'im flashbacks to the original HAT-1 rocket! It's completely identical!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Flashbacks...?" he quietly repeated.

"We were here at the opening, a few years back!" Luke boasted to Flora. "A lot of this was still in-progress then."

Flora giggled. "I remember you writing to me about it!" she said, looking around at the displays. "Are these about the HAT-1 Miracle?" she asked. "I watched the astronaut landing safely from that!"

"So did we!" Clay replied, bounding over to show Flora the display specifically focussed on the infamous accident. "See, here's a photo from the day before lift-off!"

As Flora followed him to see, he tapped his finger firmly at the side of the photo featuring him. "I got to come 'round that day, so they let me be in it with Mister Starbuck!"

Flora gasped as she looked over the picture, and excitedly pointed at the other side of the photo, where Ponco stood, covered in bandages. "Is that one of the robots!?"

Luke laughed as he nodded, catching up to the pair. "Yeah, that's Ponco!" he explained. "Clonco looks mostly the same, but green!"

Clay frowned as his presence in the photo was brushed off, but carried on regardless through his pouting. "Oh, yeah, one of 'em should be around here somewhere. There's always one not far from
the museum." He turned around, saying, "Isn't that right, Apollo?" but only to pause as he realised Apollo had disappeared. "Huh? Where'd he go?"


"He's your brother," Clay cried, stepping away from the display as he looked around. "You should keep an eye on him!"

Luke raised an eyebrow, watching Clay search for the missing Wright. "You're his roommate," he replied. "Besides, Apollo's nineteen; He can take care of himself."

Clay huffed, and Flora wrung her hands in concern, watching Clay stalk off towards the entrance to the converted hangar. "Will he be okay?" she asked Luke.


July 11, 10:52AM
Cosmos Space Center
Boarding Lounge 2

Beyond the corridor back into the main building, Luke and Flora were surprised to find the boarding lounge much less empty than they were expecting. Sat on one of the chairs by the tables was Apollo, watching the nearby green robot as it sat dormant, the back of its head open to expose its innards. Kneeling at the short robot's side, hands deep in its inner workings, was a woman around Clay's height, dressed in bright pink tights under a short lab-coat and large black gloves. Clay himself, standing behind her as he watched the woman's work over her shoulder, looked up with a smile and waved as he spotted Luke and Flora's entrance. "Hey guys! We found Clonco!"

"So I can see," Luke commented, nudging Flora out of her excited staring at the robot to lead her over to their friends. "Is something wrong with him?"

"What do you think?" the woman in the coat spat, adjusting her wrap-around safety glasses with a quick glare in Luke's direction. "This pile of scrap metal shuts down for no reason and everything's hunky-dory? Of course something's wrong with him!"

Flora blinked in surprise at the woman's harsh tone, then frowned. Before she could speak up, Apollo was talking.

"I came out here earlier and found Clonco deactivated," Apollo explained, "so I called for someone to take care of him."

"Oh, yeah, I should do introductions or something," Clay laughed, bounding over between Luke and Flora to slap his hands on their shoulders with a grin. "Guys, this is Ms Blackquill! She's the resident robotics expert around here!"

Luke thought a moment. "I thought there was more than one...? Robotics experts, I mean."

"Your information's out of date," Blackquill replied, seeming to finish her adjustments as she got to her feet, slapping the panel on the back of Clonco's head closed. She looked Luke over with an intense stare. "I know you. Luke, right?"
Although surprised, Luke nodded.

"I've seen you three boys around a lot," Blackquill explained, casting glances between Luke, Clay and Apollo. "Practically members of staff, in a way." As Clay grinned proudly, she then raised an arm and karate chopped the top of Clonco's head, which bounced around as though the robot's neck was a spring before coming to rest, the black screen that acted as the robot's face flickering as it came to life.

Flora gasped, a hand flying to her mouth. "Careful!" she cried.

Blackquill raised an eyebrow, almost smirking in Flora's direction. "And who's this?" she asked. "One of you boys' girlfriends?"

Clonco's face lit up with a green smile. "H-h-hello. M-my naaaame is Clonco."

Disregarding Flora for now, Blackquill gave Clonco a glare and karate chopped the robot a second time, its screen turning yellow with shock. "Pipe down, Hunk of Junk! I got more work to do on you first!"

Apollo and Luke shared frightened looks, unsure quite how to act around the scientist, although Clay stood calm, his hands firmly gripping Luke and Flora's shoulders. Flora, however, was fuming. "You should be treating him better!" she cried. "Hitting him like that isn't nice!"

"'Nice'?" Blackquill replied with a disbelieving laugh, taking the chance to whack Clonco on the head a few more times with an open palm. "He's my robot to do with as I please. It's not like he can feel pain."

"But the robots here have emotions, don't they!?" Flora shot back, pulling away from Clay's warning grip on her shoulder. "Pain is more than just physical feelings, it's emotional too!"

At that, Blackquill's smirk dropped into a glare, and she stared at Flora for a long moment before responding. "Listen to you, all high and mighty like you know anything about this at all."

Luke watched Flora fuming warily. He agreed with her on principle, but recognised losing his temper and getting angry at Blackquill wasn't going to change anything. Not to mention, Blackquill scared him a little. "Um, perhaps we should all calm down for a moment... Discuss this rationally?"

Blackquill scoffed to herself, grabbing Clonco's head with both hands and physically dragging the robot along as she stalked off towards the elevator. "I don't have time for a philosophical argument. If you'll excuse me, I have a robot to repair." As she reached the door, she bumped into someone coming the other way, who stood to the side and watched with wide eyes as she pushed past him and disappeared.

Flora relaxed her hands from the balled fists they had formed as she forced herself to calm down from the stern discussion. Suddenly she wasn't as eager to learn about the resident robots as she had been.


Starbuck looked over in surprise as he saw the three boys and their friend, then cast a wary glance in the direction Blackquill had disappeared to. "Geeze, what is it with you guys and pissing off the robotics lab?"

"It's not like we try to annoy people," Apollo mumbled, arms crossed.
Stepping into the lounge, Starbuck noticed Flora and gave her a grin. "Hello, there!" he said in greeting, holding out a hand. "You a friend of these three?"

Flora nodded, shaking the offered hand with a smile. "Flora Reinhold," she introduced herself, then looked up at him curiously. "Are you... Solomon Starbuck? The astronaut?"

"Oh, uh," Starbuck stammered, fiddling with his hands in embarrassment although he still gave Flora a smile. "Just 'Sol' is fine, but, yeah. That's me!" He shot her a thumbs-up, forcing a confident grin. "At your service, ma'am!"

Luke and Clay glanced at each other and laughed. "We told you about Flora, didn't we Mister Starbuck?" Clay explained. "She's a friend of Luke's, visiting from England!"

"I was watching your landing from the HAT-1 Miracle!" Flora added with a bright smile, only to then frown in sympathy. "That must have been terrifying to go through!"

"Uh, y-yeah, it was," Starbuck nervously admitted, fiddling with his jacket. "B-but hey, who wants to talk about that?" Forcing another grin, he headed back over to the door, waving for the four to follow him. "We can show you around! Right, Clay?"

Clay grinned. "You bet!" he cried, rushing to catch up.

Apollo rolled his eyes, getting to his feet as he gave the worried Flora a reassuring smile. "They're always like this. It's best to just humour them."

Luke laughed in agreement, waving for Flora to follow as he hurried to run after Clay and Starbuck. "C'mon, we'll lose them!"

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"Here it is!" Luke announced as he pushed open the front doors of the animal shelter where he occasionally worked. "Come on in!" He held the door open, and, not far behind him, Trucy and Flora entered, looking around the small room in wonder.

"Cool!" Trucy cried.

"It's very... cozy," Flora added, casting a wary eye over to a young blonde woman sat behind the reception desk, levelling a stern glare over the top of her pointed glasses.

Luke noticed the woman and gave her a wave, approaching the desk. "Hello there! You must be the new receptionist Crow mentioned!" He held out his hand to shake. "I'm Northpaw! It's nice to meet you!"

The woman didn't move, continuing to stare at Luke and ignoring his offered hand. "Can I help you?"

Luke was a bit taken aback by the woman's tone, withdrawing his hand, but pressed on regardless. "My name's Luke Wright, but everyone here calls me Northpaw. I volunteer here when I'm not at university. Is anyone else around at the moment?"

The woman stared at him a few moments more, then reached for a walkie talkie sitting on her desk. Holding it up to her face (and still staring at Luke), she pressed the button. "Mister Pound, someone wants to see you in reception."

"On my way," a voice replied through the crackling speaker.

The woman smirked at Luke as she replaced the small device on her desk. "Manager's on his way."

Luke frowned in confusion. 'Does... Does she think I'm lying?' "Alright," he said, then turned to smile at the equally confused Flora and Trucy. "My boss is on his way," he told them. "I'm sure he won't object to me showing you around."

Trucy grinned, bouncing on her heels. "Yay! I can't wait!"

The woman rolled her eyes and turned her attention to her computer.

A minute later, one of the two pairs of doors leading further inside swung open, and a short man with a goatee stumbled through, balancing on a pair of crutches while one foot dangled below him, wrapped in a thick cast. He smiled as he spotted Luke. "Ah, Wright! So you're Gatti's 'someone', huh?"

Luke was about to wave in greeting when he spotted Pound's injured foot. "Mister Pound! What happened to your leg?"

Pound shrugged. "Eh, broke my foot. Believe me, it's not an exciting story." He smiled, waving to
Flora and Trucy. "These two lovely ladies friends of yours?"

Luke nodded, gesturing to the pair. "This is Trucy, my little sister, and Flora, a friend who's visiting from England."

"It's nice to meet you," Flora said with a smile.

Trucy bounced, waving vigorously in Pound's direction. "Hi Mister Pound!"

Pound laughed, adjusting his crutches to carefully turn around. "Oh, Wright, I suppose you've met Gatti here? Our new receptionist?"

Luke nodded awkwardly in the woman's direction, noticing she was looking somewhat chastened now and deliberately avoiding eye contact. "Yes, sort of," he said. 'She definitely thought I was fibbing earlier...'

"What's the nickname they gave you again?" Pound asked, stepping towards the desk as he gave Gatti a curious look. "I remember it was explained to me as 'lion' in another language."

Gatti sighed, looking up. "My name's Leo, so Kitty decided the obvious answer was 'Simba'." She rolled her eyes. "Apparently it's from some African language. Don't ask me which."

'Swahili, actually,' Luke mentally replied, though he decided not to say it out loud and potentially incur the woman's wrath again. "Well, it's nice to meet you, Simba!" he brightly told her, tipping his cap.

"Wright here's studying to be a vet, aren't you?" Pound continued, giving the teen a grin. "Thinking of helping out Fox and Reindeer when you're done?"

Luke shrugged, blushing. "If you'll have me!" he giggled.

Simba huffed to herself, turning back to her computer with a frown.

"Oh, is it alright if I show Trucy and Flora around while they're here?" Luke asked.

"Of course!" Pound replied, shooting the excited teens a smile before turning back to the nearest door into the shelter. "Have fun while you're here, girls!"

"Thank you, sir!" Flora called after him, waving.

Trucy giggled, running to Luke's side. "We will!" she promised Pound as he disappeared through the door, then turned to her brother. "So, where are we going first?"

Luke laughed, then headed towards the other door, waving for his friends to follow him. "C'mon, this way!"

July 12, 3:39PM
Warren Street Animal Shelter
Recuperation Room

"Northpaw!" Fox cried in delight as she spotted Luke entering the room, abandoning the cat she was cuddling to run and greet her friend with a hug. "You're back!"
"Hello, Fox!" Luke laughed in response, hugging her back. "Having fun without me?"

"Eh, you know. It goes." Fox shrugged, pulling back and looking around to spot the disgruntled cat now staring at them. "Oops, I think I upset her," she whispered, then noticed the two visitors fawning over the cat from behind Luke. "Oh, you have friends!"

Trucy looked up in surprise, then burst into laughter.

Luke blushed, noticing Flora's equally amused look. "Poor choice of words, Fox..."

Noticing her mistake, Fox turned red. "Oh, er, I didn't mean I was surprised you have friends, I just meant..." Deciding to leave it, she spun around, carefully approaching the cat watching them. "C'mere, Sandy," she called, but the cat only walked around her, out of reach, her tail sticking straight up into the air.


Sandy stared at Luke for a few moments, then stepped forward to sniff his hand, quietly meowing.

"I promise I won't hurt you," Luke told the cat, and she responded by jumping into his arms, purring contentedly. Luke giggled as he slowly stood up, petting Sandy's orange fur.

Trucy gasped in delight, poking Luke's side. "Will she let me hold her?" she asked hopefully.

Luke gave the cat a smile. "Will you be alright with my sister taking over, Sandy?" When the cat meowed in response, Luke adjusted Trucy's arms into a holding position with one hand, then carefully handed her the orange furball. As Trucy giggled, running a hand through Sandy's long fur, the cat returned to purring.

Fox huffed to herself as she watched the exchange. "I will never understand your strange affinity for animals, Northpaw," she muttered.

Flora cooed over Sandy, restraining herself from reaching out to pet the cat in case said cat objected to the unwanted contact. "She's so sweet!"

"You should've seen her when she arrived!" Fox laughed. "Oh, by the way, I'm Vixen," she added, waving to Flora and Trucy. "You can call me Fox if you want, though."

Before anyone could reply, the door to the next-door surgery opened and an elderly man walked in, drying his hands with a towel. "I'm hearing voices in here," he announced, then looked over to the visitors and smiled as he spotted Luke. "Ah, Northpaw, you're back from England."

Luke tipped his cap with a grin. "Hello, sir!" He gestured to Trucy and Flora. "By the way, this is my little sister Trucy, -"

"Hi!" Trucy chirped, her hands busy with Sandy.

"- and this is a friend of mine, Flora!" Luke continued. "She's visiting from England!"

Flora waved. "Hello!"

Fox gave the pair a smile, while Reindeer scratched his chin, watching Trucy.

Luke turned to Trucy and Flora. "Since Fox has already introduced herself, this is Reindeer," he said, gesturing to the older man. "He's the 'top dog' of the surgery here!"
"Hey, only I'm allowed to tell that joke," Reindeer replied with a smile. He then turned to Trucy. "So you're Northpaw's little sister, huh? Does that make you 'Southpaw'?

Trucy thought a moment, then grinned. "Oooh! So Daddy and Polly would be Eastpaw and Westpaw!"

Fox snorted in barely restrained laughter, and Reindeer blinked in shock before smiling. "Why not? A 'Paw for every point on the compass."


"Then I'll be Eastpaw!" Trucy decided.

Flora frowned in thought. "Apollo's left-handed...?"

Trucy nodded. "You didn't notice?" she asked.


"I'm not calling you 'Eastpaw'," Fox told Luke with a laugh.

Reindeer chuckled to himself, stepping forward towards Trucy and scratching Sandy behind an ear. "Did you three see Pound on your way in?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Oh, yes," Flora replied with a worried frown. "He broke his foot!"

"Said it wasn't an interesting story, too," Luke added, confused. "Do you know what happened?"

Fox slapped a hand to her face, failing to hide a laugh. "Do we!" she giggled to herself.

"He broke his foot in a way only he could," Reindeer explained with a smile. "He literally stepped wrong in his own backyard."

Trucy frowned. "He tripped?"

Fox shook her head, still giggling. "Nope! Literally put his foot down to take a step, broke it instead!"

Luke also began to laugh. "Wow, you're right! Only Mister Pound could break his foot taking a step!"

Reindeer gently picked up Sandy from Trucy's arms, carrying the cat back to an open cage nearby. "Let's just let Sandy here rest, and we can show you girls how our little surgery here works...

July 13, 12:55PM
LA International Airport
Departures Area

"I had so much fun while I was here!" Flora said as she gave each of the Wrights a hug goodbye. "I'll have to make plans to visit again sometime!"
"Make it soon!" Trucy told her, hugging the young woman tightly. "And take Uncle Professor and Alfendi back with you! They have to see my and Polly's show!"

Apollo laughed, poking Trucy's back as she pulled away from Flora. "What, you wanna pull the same routine on them, or something?"

Trucy shrugged. "Alfendi might be a bit young," she said, then grinned and winked at Apollo. "I have something else I want to show Uncle Professor anyway!"

Apollo thought a moment, then returned her grin. "Oh yeah, that! Forgot about that!" He then winked back at his sister.

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, but decided not to pry on the pair's inside joke. Turning to Flora, he shoved his hands in his pants pockets. "We'll see you when you next decide to visit, then," he told her.

"Yes, of course," Flora replied with a smile. "I have to see if I have time next year, or maybe the year after, but I'll definitely try to come back sometime!"

Luke adjusted his cap, looking at Flora's travel case. "You'd better get going, I guess," he said, then looked up to give his friend a smile. "I'll see you in September, then?"

Flora nodded. "The Professor and I will see you at... Gatwick, Heathrow... whichever airport you arrive in!" she promised. "And Alfendi, too!" She looked around at the other three. "Goodbye, everyone!"

As Flora picked up her bag and headed off to the check-in counters, the four Wrights waved back. "Bye, Flora!" Trucy called. "See you later!"


Before disappearing into the crowd, Flora turned to give the family one last smile before heading off home.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"I have no idea what you're even worrying about," Clay said, lounging on Apollo's bed with his hands behind his head. "I mean, you barely live here anyway, so what can she complain about?"

Apollo sighed, picking through a box of old magic props as he sat on the floor nearby. "You clearly do not know Trucy as well as you think you do."

Clay scoffed. "If anything, she should celebrate losing you from the house!" he claimed. "It's not like she doesn't see you all the time. Certainly more than you guys see Luke right now..."

"Shut up, Clay," Apollo groaned, pushing the box to one side and burying his face in his hands. "She very nearly disowned me when we started college. This time, she's gonna kill me, I just know it."

After a short pause, Clay pushed himself up on his elbows, looking down at his friend. "Dude, you gotta move out sometime. You can't stay here forever, sharing a room with your brother and all." He grimaced. "I mean, I love Luke, but you're nineteen and he's almost eighteen. You should have had your own spaces ages ago."

Apollo sighed, hands dropping to his lap. "Yeah, I know... This is the right thing to do, I just..." He shook his head. "There's just no way I can break this gently to Trucy. She might not forgive me this time."

The door swung open, and Luke wandered in, closing the door behind him. He smiled wearily as he spotted his friends, pulling his old satchel off his shoulder. "Hey guys," he greeted them, placing the worn bag on top of the small bookcase at the foot of his bed and sitting down on the arranged covers with a sigh. It was only then he noticed Apollo's morose state and gave his brother a concerned look. "Everything okay?"

"We're moving out," Clay said with a shrug. Luke blinked in surprise. "Huh!?"

"Clay!" Apollo cried, shooting his friend a glare.

"Oops," Clay mumbled with a shrug, lying back down to hide the grin on his face. Apollo rolled his eyes, throwing up his hands with frustration. "This is exactly why we didn't tell you about the Feys..."

Luke thought a moment, hand tapping against his mouth. "I suppose that makes sense," he conceded. "Most people begin to move away from home once they're at university..."

"I figured you'd be okay with it," Apollo sighed, leaning against the bed-frame behind him. "Dad will be, too. It's Trucy that's the problem."
Luke winced in sympathy, remembering Trucy's reaction when he revealed he would be attending Gressenheller in London. "So, have you been putting this off, or is it deliberate that you're planning to tell her this on her first day back at school?"

Apollo rubbed at one arm uncomfortably. "A bit of both," he admitted. "Since we've gone back to the school-time schedule for the show, she won't have to share the stage with me until Saturday, so she has time to calm down if she reacts badly... although I don't want to put it off too long, since we've actually starting looking for a small apartment to rent."

Clay nodded, shooting Luke a grin. "Think you'll still be around to help us move, or are you planning to be back in London by then?"

Luke chuckled at the joke. "I guess we'll see when you move! I'll definitely help if I can."

Apollo sighed, checking the time on the alarm clock on his bedside table. "Trucy and Dad'll be home soon. Pearly might be dropping by, too. I kinda want to get this over with, but..."

"Trucy's going to be excited about seeing all her friends again," Luke filled in with a smile, and shrugged. "Maybe give her ten minutes to run off some steam before telling her?"

Sighing again, Apollo looked away to stare at his hands, gripping his bracelet tightly. "I... just hope she doesn't hate me for this," he whispered.

August 21, 3:58PM
Wright Talent Agency
Kitchen

"And Alex was telling us all about her trip to Canada!" Trucy excitedly told her father, brothers, Pearl and Clay as she bounded around the room. Phoenix and Pearl had sat at the table with a drink each, cooling down from the hot walk home from the bus, while the other three were stood dotted around the room, almost serving as bases for Trucy to hit as she ran in circles around them.

"That sounds fun!" Luke said with a smile, humouring his sister as she dashed past him. "What were they doing while they were up there?"

"Sightseeing, mostly," Trucy explained with a shrug, pausing for a moment to bounce on her heels. "They went to Niagara Falls, and she was talking all about this boat they went on, and a bridge where you could see the water falling and stuff."

Apollo tapped his fingers nervously against his bracelet, glancing uneasily at the clock on the microwave. 'A few more minutes, then I have to kill her good mood...' As the seconds passed, he was finding it harder to concentrate on Trucy's excited rambling about what all her classmates had been getting up to over the summer, the terrible news he was about to break to her looming in his mind. 'Yep. Prepare to be disowned here, Wright. Gonna have to leave show business. Probably be forced to work under my old name. I always used to say 'Justice' was the best name a lawyer could have.'

A tapping on his arm pulled Apollo out of his thoughts, and he looked down in surprise to find Trucy standing in front of him, staring suspiciously at her brother. "What's the matter, Polly?"

"Uh..." Apollo immediately went pale, glancing up to Clay and Luke to silently beg for help. Clay
only grinned at his friend's discomfort, while Luke gave him a sympathetic look, making a 'go on' gesture with his hands.

"Well?" Trucy pushed, hands on her hips as she gave Apollo a stern glare.

"N-nothing," Apollo insisted, firmly looking away from his sister. *'I'm trying to be kind to you! Ramble for a few more minutes!'*

Trucy only continued to glare. "Tell me."

Clay stifled a giggle behind a hand. "Go on," he taunted Apollo, ignoring his friend's frustrated sigh. "She's given you an invitation and everything!"

"May as well get it over with," Luke agreed, with a sympathetic frown.

Trucy looked around, noticing only Pearl and Phoenix seemed to be as confused as she was. "What's going on...?"

"Do you three boys have something to tell us?" Phoenix added, getting up from his chair and casting a wary look between the trio.

Pearl bit a fingernail worriedly. "Is it bad?"

Clay and Luke looked to Apollo, Clay grinning while Luke nervously fiddled with a sleeve. Apollo clutched at the homemade pin holding his cape around his shoulders. *'Luke's right. Better get this over with.'* He looked between Trucy, Pearl and Phoenix, but focussed more on his sister, worried for her reaction. "Clay and I have been thinking about it over the past few months, and we've decided it's time for us to move out. We're thinking of renting a small apartment together near our college, at least until we finish there."

Phoenix was surprised, and seemed torn on how to react. "Oh. That... wasn't what I was expecting to hear." Equally surprised, Pearl simply thought to herself in silence.

Trucy seemed to be frozen, staring up at Apollo with wide eyes. Slowly, the shocked gaze shifted, the corners of her mouth curling downwards while tears accumulated in her eyes. "Y-you're... leaving?"

"I'm moving out," Apollo repeated. "I'll still hang around here, and see you every weekend; I just won't be sleeping here anymore."

Trucy only continued to stare, eyes shining.

Phoenix rubbed at the back of his neck, frowning in thought. "Geeze... I, uh... I'll definitely support your decision, Apollo, but..." He shook his head, trying to pull himself together. "When are you planning on going?"

"Have you told Mystic Maya yet?" Pearl added, concerned for her cousin. "She'd want to know, too."

"I'll text her in a bit, Pearly," Apollo promised, then turned to Phoenix with a vaguely amused smile. "And we're still looking for a place, Dad. You'll have to put up with me for a while yet."

"We might have some trouble, since places will be going fast as semester starts," Clay pointed out, rubbing at his nose. "but I'm sure we'll find something and be settled in before we have any classes to get in the way." He paused. "Well, hopefully."
"Meaning we might be moving out near the end of September," Apollo clarified.

Pearl frowned. "In about a month? I thought moving took longer than that..."

Clay scoffed. "You can do anything if you're dedicated enough!" he insisted.

Trucy sniffed loudly, drawing Apollo's attention back to her. "B-but why are you leaving?"

"I..." Apollo sighed, then leaned down a little to match his sister's height. "I can't share a room with Luke forever. I need my own space." He gave her a smile. "You think that'd keep me from hanging around and bugging you all the time, though? You couldn't fight me off with a shovel."

Trucy stared back at Apollo for a long moment, then slowly smiled and grabbed her oldest brother in a tight hug. "I wouldn't want to," she whispered in reply.

View the Court Record
"It was a lot of work, though. They really should have given themselves more time to organise everything," Luke told the long-haired cat lying in his lap as he ran a hand along her back. "I think my sister's actually planning on going over there after school. Papa seems to be okay with it, anyway."

Sandy meowed curiously, briefly interrupting her purring for only a moment.

Luke laughed. "It's actually quite a nice place, considering it's so small! I don't know what the policy on pets is, but I'm sure Trucy will be finding out soon." He smiled fondly at the thought of his sister. "She's always wanted the chance to include animals in their act. It's never been possible because they don't allow pets in our home."

The orange tabby seemed to sniff disapprovingly, curling up tighter in Luke's lap.

"That may be your view on it," Luke said in amusement, "but I think you'll find most humans disagree!" When Sandy didn't reply, he mused in thought for a moment. "It's going to be weird at home, now Apollo's out in his own place... well, his and Clay's. Not counting dorm rooms, I haven't had a bedroom to myself since..." He frowned, thinking back to the house he had lived in with his parents, before the move from London. *That was such a long time ago... and I still don't know what happened to Mum.* He winced, guiltily. 'Maybe putting off the search wasn't a good idea...? But it's not like I really had a choice. I hit a dead end! What else was I supposed to do!?' A part of Luke started to berate himself for not trying harder to find his missing mother. It couldn't have been that hard after all, not if he'd just thought harder and found the right clue he'd surely missed in his initial investigation. *But not even the Professor had any ideas for where to go next! If a mystery has even the great Professor Layton stamped... what hope do I have!?'

A plaintive meow dragged Luke out of his thoughts, and he noticed Sandy in his lap staring at him, somewhat annoyed his petting of her had stopped. "Ah, s-sorry, Sandy," Luke said, rubbing at his eyes as he noticed there had been tears threatening at the corners of his vision. "I was just... thinking." He returned to running his hand over the cat's long fur, smiling as she settled down happily. "You're going to find it a lot harder to have conversations like this once I go back to uni on Saturday. I expect you'll have a new family by the time I come back. A sweet cat like you should go in a flash, now you're up for adoption."

The pair were sitting in one of the smaller cat enclosures, near the back of the building. Luke had left the door half-open as he entered, trusting his relationship with Sandy would keep the feline firmly in her small 'room'... a place she only had to herself thanks to the fact she wasn't getting along with the other cats, which had inspired a hasty reshuffle as the staff found a place for the abused cat to stay.

Sandy mewed quietly, rubbing her head against Luke.

"Of course they'll love you," Luke promised her. "And they'll be good people, too. Mister Pound wouldn't let them take you if they weren't."
Before Sandy could reply, Luke heard a distinct cough behind him and spun around, eyes wide. Standing in the doorway of the enclosure, a smirk on his face, was Reindeer, watching the teen. "Not interrupting anything, I hope?"

Luke shook his head. "Er, n-no, of course not," he insisted. 'How long have you been standing there!?' "Um... did you want something, sir?"

Reindeer smiled, stepping inside and crouching down near where Luke sat, Sandy in his lap. "Don't worry, you're not the only person in the world who talks to the animals as though they can understand you."

Luke tried not to look uncomfortable as he smiled back. 'If only you knew... not that you'd believe me, probably.'

"I'm always overhearing someone spilling their troubles to one of the dogs, or trying to tell a cat to sit still for a photo or something," Reindeer continued, although Luke thought he seemed more amused than trying to actually reassure him. "Nobody has any idea how sound can travel down these corridors... especially if you leave all the doors open."

At that, Luke winced. Not only had he left Sandy's gate ajar, but he remembered leaving the door at the end of the hallway open too, having come from the storage room as he fed the cats. "I... guess it's kind of a habit around here to leave as many doors open as possible to make things easier, huh?"

Reindeer chuckled to himself, watching Sandy as she purred in Luke's lap. "Well, I won't complain. I've learned all sorts of interesting things from what I overhear."

Luke frowned, shooting the old man an accusing look. "It's not very polite to eavesdrop."

Laughing, Reindeer shook his head. "That it isn't!" he agreed. "But hey, I'm a nosy old man. I get what fun I can out of life."

"Acknowledging it doesn't make it better," Luke pointed out, pouting a little. "Why don't you tell people when you can hear them so they know to close the doors?"

"Told you, haven't I?" Reindeer replied with a smirk. When Luke blushed as he realised the elder man was right, Reindeer chuckled quietly to himself, adding, "Besides, I thought you sounded troubled, talking about your brother moving out."

Luke looked away. 'Ah... so that's how long he was listening to me...’ "I'm fine," he insisted. "I'll just take some getting used to." He forced a smile for his concerned co-worker. "This time next week, I'll be back in London annoying everyone around me by shouting "I'm fine" at them."

Reindeer quietly laughed, and Luke didn't doubt he was remembering the few times over the years Luke had been nervous enough to accidentally shout the phrase in someone's face... usually to Reindeer himself. "Well, we all miss you while you're gone," he said, smiling down at the contented cat in Luke's lap. "Especially the animals, I think."

"I'm sure they're fine," Luke said, petting Sandy with a now-genuine smile. "Everyone else is here for them. And then they get adopted, and have families to love them."

Reindeer nodded in agreement, then scratched his chin in thought. After a pause, he shook his head, as though dismissing an idea, and gave Luke a smile. "Speaking of families, how young was your sister when you moved here? I couldn't hear a hint of an accent when I met her in... how many months ago was it?"
Luke shrugged. "That was July," he replied, then frowned in confusion. "What do you mean by 'accent'...?"

"Your family moved here from Britain, right?" Reindeer asked. "That's why you're going to England and getting that doctorate to lord over us when you finish." He grinned.

Blushing, Luke shook his head. "Oh, I won't use the title if I end up working here," he insisted. "I don't want to wrongly imply I'm more skilled than you or Fox." As Reindeer laughed, the teen thought more on the rest of the elder man's question. As he recognised the source of confusion, he tapped a finger against his mouth, pondering how best to answer. "Mum, Dad and I did move here from England," he agreed. "But... well, my family now isn't the same family I... moved... with? If that makes sense?"

Reindeer stared at the teen, nonplussed. "Huh?"

Before Luke could reply, Sandy leapt out of his lap and jumped up onto one of her climbing platforms, where she hissed briefly at the pair before settling down to sleep where she was. Luke smiled, getting to his feet. "Guess she's sick of us already," he said, and left the enclosure. "Can't blame her."

Reindeer nodded in agreement, following Luke out and closing the gate behind them. "I'll take your word for it," he replied, and the pair began to walk together down the hallway, idly checking on the other cats in their pens. "Back to my question though," he continued, "you moved here with your mom and dad? Where do your brother and sister come in?"

Luke shrugged. "It's... complicated," he said as explanation.

"I've got the time," Reindeer replied.

Sighing, Luke decided it wouldn't do any harm to tell his friend the story. Looking up at Reindeer's face, the old man certainly seemed genuinely interested. "I was an only child," Luke said. "Dad got a job here, so we moved, but then there was a car accident and Mum and Dad..."

Reindeer looked surprised. "Ah, so your mom...?"

"They both died," Luke said, deciding to give the simple version and not try to explain the truth as he knew it. Predictably, Reindeer looked confused, so he continued, "Once I was orphaned and in foster care, there I met Apollo and Trucy, whose parents were also dead or just missing. I already knew Papa as a friend, but that's a long story in itself, and he found us and decided to adopt all three of us." He smiled. "That's the simplified version, anyway. This was all back in twenty-nineteen. We've been a family ever since."

Reindeer seemed surprised, and thought over the information for a moment or two. "Geeze, kid, I had no idea..."

"That's alright," Luke assured him with a nostalgic smile, staring into the distance. "I haven't had much reason to talk about Mum and Dad here, though I do miss them a lot. And you only just met Trucy; You still haven't met Papa or Apollo."

Nodding in agreement, Reindeer shoved his hands in his pockets. "Well... in that case, Northpaw," he said, "I think it's time this old man stopped bothering you."

"Oh, you weren't bothering me!" Luke insisted, giving his friend a bright grin. "I don't mind talking about my family!"
"That may be," Reindeer chuckled in reply, pulling up a sleeve to check his watch, "but you're usually heading home around this time, aren't you?"

Luke thought a moment, then laughed. "I'd better get going then!" He ran back to the storage room, where he had left his satchel and belongings, waving back to Reindeer as he went. "See you later, sir!"

Reindeer waved back as he watched the teen disappear around the corner, then stared into the nearest enclosure, watching a trio of kittens within playing together. "What I wouldn't give to understand you guys the way he can," he mumbled, then smiled. "Ah well. Youth is for the young." Shoving his hands back in his pockets, he ambled off in the opposite direction.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
FLASHBACK: Sudden Departure

- Six Years Earlier -

August 21, 4:29PM
Gressenheller University
Courtyard

Luke giggled, pausing in his watering of the plants as the puppy at his side yipped in excitement. "You have a lot of questions, don't you?" he asked, laughing at the pup stopped instantly, seeming somewhat embarrassed. "It's okay! I have plenty of time today, helping the gardener with the watering, so I can answer them for you!"

The elder dog behind him, the pup's mother, nudged at the boy, making a soft grunting sound in her throat.

"That's alright," Luke assured her. "You're not being a bother, I promise." He looked back to the puppy, whose mouth was open in a wide grin. "And of course we get cold in winter! In fact, I just came back from a place so cold, it snows year-round!" The puppy yipped excitedly, causing Luke to laugh as he pulled at his open cardigan. "It wasn't that fun for me, since my cardy is very thin. Mum's actually insisted on taking me out clothes-shopping soon to see about getting something warmer!"

Luke heard a door open nearby, and turned around, gripping the watering can tightly. Standing in an open doorway, several metres away, was a young woman in a yellow coat, brown hair falling in waves over her shoulders. Forgetting immediately about the pair of dogs behind him, Luke carefully placed his watering can down on the brick edge of the flowerbed, and ran around the paved path to meet his friend. "Emmy!" he called, running to greet her with a smile. "Did the Professor want to-?"

His question was cut off as he spotted a suitcase sat on the ground near Emmy's feet, propping open the door behind her. As he paused his run, he looked up at his friend quizzically, but she avoided his gaze. "Emmy?"

"Has the Professor told you?" Emmy asked, still looking away sadly.

Luke suddenly wished he still had the watering can in hand, so he had something to grip as he felt the sudden anxiety creeping up his back. "T-told me what?"

Emmy paused for a moment before sighing. "Of course he didn't," she muttered, then turned to finally face Luke. "I'm... I'm resigning. As the Professor's assistant."

It took the young boy a moment to react to the surprising news. "You're...?" He shook his head. "But, why!? How will we solve all our future investigations without you!?"

"I'm sure you'll be just fine," Emmy insisted, finally managing a small smile for her eleven-year-old friend. "The famous Professor Layton and his assistant... one and only assistant now, not just number two."


"That sound better?"

"Much better," Luke replied with a smug nod, only to pause in thought before giving Emmy a worried frown, eyes wide. "But the Professor still needs an assistant! You can't go, Emmy!"

"I don't really have a choice," Emmy sighed, her smile replaced by a sad stare. "I took this job in the first place to... spy on the Professor for Uncle Leon." She looked away, guiltily. "With Targent gone, my mission's over. There's no reason to stay."

"Yes, there is!" Luke cried, jumping towards his friend with a determined look, fists in the air. "You're our friend! We need you!"

Emmy shook her head, giving Luke a sad smile. "No, you don't," she said. "The last thing either of you need is a traitorous friend."

Luke felt the memory of the brief betrayal hit him like a punch to the gut. "You're not a traitor," he insisted, tears involuntarily coming to his eyes at the memory of how he'd endlessly cried as he'd been dragged down the tunnel of the Azran Sanctuary, the sharp icicle in Emmy's hand inches from his throat. "W-we don't blame you for that."

Emmy looked away. "Maybe you don't," she agreed. Without another word, she turned around and picked up the suitcase holding the door back inside open.

"Wait!" Luke cried, and Emmy paused, her back to him. "Don't go! Please, Emmy!" He struggled to think of another way to beg his friend to stay, but his mind only came up blank. "P-please... don't go..." He clutched his hands together, blinking away tears as he stared at Emmy's back. "You're one of my best friends."

There was a long pause before Emmy finally spoke. "I'm sorry," she quietly replied. "I guess I'm not a very good one."

Luke felt his hopes drop, and turned his gaze to the paved path below his feet.

Emmy didn't move for a moment, but then slowly placed her suitcase back down, and half-turned to look at Luke. He carefully looked up to meet her sad eyes, and she gave him a soft smile, walking over to the boy. Before he could react, she had pulled him into a hug, resting her chin on the top of his head. "Maybe I'll come back one day," she assured him. "If you're still around, we'll meet again then."

Luke bit his lip, hugging Emmy's waist tightly. "Of course I will be!" he replied almost indignantly, struggling to keep his voice from breaking. "I wouldn't be the Professor's apprentice if I left!"

Emmy laughed. "No, you wouldn't be!" she agreed, then pulled back, giving Luke a wide, if sad, smile. "Until then," she quietly said, then stepped back over to her suitcase.

Luke watched silently. He didn't move or make a sound until Emmy had walked back inside with her suitcase, disappearing with the click of the door mechanism. With the finality of the ensuing silence, he rushed to press his back against the bricks of the nearby building wall, gripping his tummy tightly as he slid down into a sitting position on the paving. 'First Professor Sycamore is Descole... then Aurora dies... and now Emmy...' Failing to fight back any more tears, he buried his face in his hands, curling up into a ball as he mourned the end of an era.

October 25, 8:15AM
Luke skipped merrily as he got off the bus outside the university. He'd been feeling over the moon since that morning, when his parents passed on the message to him that Layton had requested Luke join him for an investigation. 'I wonder what we're going to do? Rescue another town from mechanical spectres? Find another ancient historical artefact? Reunite lost loved ones after years of separation? Or maybe it'll be something totally different and unexpected, like... like something so amazing and spectacular I can't even imagine it!' He giggled, adjusting his new jumper. 'I can't wait to find out!'

As he turned the corner to the small parking lot serving the university, Luke quickly spotted the familiar red shape of the Laytonmobile and, standing next to the open driver door, Layton himself. Gasping in excitement, he broke out into a run, waving madly to attract his mentor's attention. "Professor! Professor!"

Layton had been perusing a letter in his hands, brow furrowed in concentration, but as he heard Luke's call, he turned and looked up, smiling at the sight of the approaching boy. "Luke! Glad you could make it, my boy."

Luke giggled as he ran to join his friend. "Another investigation, Professor? What are we doing this time? Who are we going to help?"

Instead of replying immediately, Layton cast a thoughtful look at the letter still in his hands, then shook his head and began to fold it up. "I'll explain once we're out of the city. It's a couple hours journey to our destination." He replaced the letter in its envelope and put it away in an inner pocket of his jacket. "Why don't you get in the car and we can be on our way?" he instructed with a smile.

Luke nodded, grinning, and made for the nearby door into the back seat.

To Luke's surprise, Layton laughed, causing the boy to halt in his tracks. "Oh, no need to sit in the back! You can sit up the front with me, Luke."

"But that's Emmy's seat!" a part of Luke instinctively replied, and Luke had to pause for a moment to pull himself together at the reminder of their missing friend. 'N-no... Emmy's gone now. There's no reason I can't sit there.' He walked around the back of the car to get in the passenger side, unsure of what he was doing at every step. He could remember all the times he and Emmy had fought (or, more accurately, he had fought Emmy) over the right to sit in the front, even though Emmy, as an AdultTM, had won every time, a knowing smirk on her face as Luke was grumpily relegated to the back. Sitting there now, at Layton's side, felt like a hollow victory, and Luke was struggling to fight off the wrong-ness as he strapped himself in.

Layton, already seated behind the wheel, cast a worried glance at Luke as he also clicked his seatbelt into place. "Is everything alright, Luke?"


Layton, midway reaching to turn the key in the ignition, paused. "It does," he quietly agreed, then moved to start the car.
"Do you know what happens to am-in-als when they die?"


Alfendi grinned, hugging his worn teddy (a gift from Luke) tightly around the neck. "They get eated."

"Eaten," Luke corrected, sighing as he shook his head. "And no, they don't get eaten when they die."

"Do too!" Alfendi insisted, pouting and sticking his nose in the air. "Papa told me that's what meat is! Dead am-in-als!"

"An-im-! Never mind," Luke muttered, running a hand over his face. "Your papa's right, but we don't eat all animals when they die." He tried to give the boy an understanding smile, although a part of him knew his explanation would be ignored in favour of Alfendi's fixation on the 'dead animals' part. "We don't eat pets, after all. Pets get buried when they die, like people!"

Alfendi's frown deepened. "We do too eat them!" he argued. "Flora said! Dogs get eated in some places, and guinea pigs, and we're always eating fish!"

Luke mentally cursed Flora for telling Alfendi those particular factoids, and wondered if Layton had also attempted to explain this issue to the young boy. "Yes, but that's usually animals we've never met, like pigs, cows or sheep who've lived their whole lives on farms we've never been to. For individual animals we're friends with, we don't want to kill or eat them. When they die, we just bury them, as our friends."

Alfendi looked sceptical. "How do you know?"

At that, Luke had to smile. "What, you don't believe me?" he asked. "I am a vet, remember." 'Almost one, anyway!' "You're sure you want to ignore a vet?"

Alfendi nodded firmly.

"You're a hundred percent sure you want to do that?" Luke added, crossing his arms as he gave the boy a playful smirk.

Tilting his head to one side, Alfendi looked up at Luke in confusion. "What's... hunnerd percent?"

Luke laughed, realising something as complicated as percentages (not to mention a number as high as one hundred) would be something totally foreign to the boy for several years yet. "Why don't we go ask your papa? He should be done with his class by now!"

Alfendi grinned brightly, nodding his head as Luke got to his feet. "Papa's office!" he announced,
and ran off to the nearest door leading inside.

"Alfendi, wait!" Luke called, but the boy was off like a shot, and Luke hurried to catch up.

The door opened as Alfendi reached it, and, not stopping for whoever was coming out, the boy charged straight through into the opening, tripping up a woman in yellow, who fell to the ground with a cry as her sunglasses went flying from under her cap. Alfendi was knocked to the ground by her side, grunting as he hit the bricks below, his fall cushioned by his large teddy bear.

Luke gasped in surprise and ran to meet the pair as they picked themselves up off the pavement. "I'm so sorry!" he cried on Alfendi's behalf, pulling the boy to his feet with one hand as he offered the other to the woman. "Can I help-?" At that moment, he caught sight of the woman's face as she brushed her brown braid over her shoulder, and cut himself off with a gasp.

Midway through brushing the dirt off her yellow blouse, the woman looked up and also gasped as she noticed Luke staring at her, the retrieved sunglasses in her hand falling back to the ground. "U- um..."

The pair stared at each other in silence for a long moment. Alfendi looked between the two in confusion, one arm still held loosely in Luke's grasp. Finally, Luke seemed to regain the ability to speak, and stammered, "E... Emmy...?"

Emmy blinked, then slowly smiled apologetically, relaxing slightly out of her tense stance. "H-hello, Luke."

Before either could say anything more, Alfendi ripped himself out of Luke's grip and kicked Emmy in the shin, dashing off inside.

"Alfendi, get back here!" Luke shouted, abandoning Emmy for the moment as he ran after the young boy, his voice echoing in the halls as he spotted his wayward charge not far ahead. It didn't take him long to catch up, grabbing the mischievous boy's hand and immediately dragging him back in the direction of the courtyard. "That was a very naughty thing to do!" he told Alfendi, who only pouted as he attempted to claw Luke's hand off his. "You are going to apologise to Emmy for kicking her!"

"Are not!" Alfendi cried. "She walked into me!"

Luke didn't reply, internally fuming at the boy as he escorted him back to the door. He pushed it open, looking around for Emmy with a friendly smile, but, to his astonishment, she was nowhere to be found. "Emmy?" At first, Luke was confused, wondering where his old friend could have disappeared to, but it was quickly overcome with disappointment as he realised that, once again, she didn't want to be found. 'I... I missed my chance for a last talk with her? Again!?'

Alfendi grunted to himself, attempting to cross his arms with one hand still held firmly in Luke's and the other still gripping his teddy. "She still walked into me," he muttered to himself.

Luke shot the boy a glare but said nothing, recognising he was mostly angry at himself for letting Emmy slip away so easily. Instead, he simply turned around and headed back inside.

November 16, 4:32PM
Gressenheller University
Professor Layton's Office
Luke sighed as he closed the office door behind him, Alfendi beginning to again struggle to pull himself from the eighteen-year-old's grip. Not far away, he quickly spotted Layton standing by his desk, looking through some papers strewn across an open book, his hat resting not far away. Hearing the door close, the Professor looked around to greet the pair with a smile. "Luke, Alfendi. Have fun?"

Alfendi looked away guiltily as Luke immediately shot another glare at the boy. "Alfendi tripped someone up and then kicked her," Luke explained. "Just now as we were heading up."

Layton was surprised at first, then crossed his arms and fixed Alfendi with a stern stare of disapproval. "Is this true, Alfendi?"

The four-year-old avoided his father's gaze, fidgeting with his jumper. After a moment, he nodded. "You know full well that's not a polite thing to do," Layton continued, crossing the room to approach his son. Luke released the boy's hand, but Alfendi didn't take the opportunity to run, using both arms to hug his teddy tightly. "I hope you apologised to this woman."

"We didn't get the chance," Luke admitted, staring off into the distance as he wondered where Emmy had disappeared to. "Alfendi ran off, and she'd disappeared by the time I caught up."

Layton gave Luke a curious look, but quickly returned his attention to Alfendi. "Then you had better remember what she looked like, Alfendi. The next time you see her, you are going to apologise. Do you understand?"

Alfendi thought a moment, then nodded. "Good," Layton replied, relaxing back into a small smile. "You can run off and play now."

Still guiltily avoiding his father's gaze, Alfendi wasted no time running off to a corner of the office next to Layton's desk, where a small box of toys, pencils and colouring books rested. Dumping his bear on the floor nearby, he dropped to the floor and pulled out a handful of coloured pencils and a book from the box, flipping open the book to a random page to find something to colour.

Alfendi now occupied, Layton turned his attention to Luke. "Did something else happen?" he asked quietly, the concerned look back on his face.

Luke thought a moment. "Not really," he said. "It's... The woman Alfendi ran into."

"Hmm?" Layton replied, curious. "What about her?"

"She..." Luke sighed again, still puzzling to himself as to why their old friend had reappeared only to run off again. Looking Layton in the eyes, he admitted, "It was Emmy."

Layton seemed surprised for only a moment, then smiled. "Ah, she's been forced to reveal herself then."

"Hmm?" Layton replied, curious. "What about her?"

"She..." Luke sighed again, still puzzling to himself as to why their old friend had reappeared only to run off again. Looking Layton in the eyes, he admitted, "It was Emmy."

Layton seemed surprised for only a moment, then smiled. "Ah, she's been forced to reveal herself then."

Now it was Luke's turn to be surprised, although it brought with it more confusion. "Huh?"

"I noticed she's been hanging around again over the past fortnight," Layton added with a smile, and headed back to his desk, sitting in his chair. "I imagine she's back in London for her job, but still hasn't had the courage to visit us."

Luke watched Layton in shock. "Y-you... you've known she was here all along!?" He ran to the spare chair by Layton's desk, sitting down as he watched the Professor organise his papers with a
smile. "B-but you said you had no idea where she'd gone! That she didn't want to be found and we had to respect a lady's wishes!"

"And I was telling the truth, at the time," Layton replied with a laugh. "It wasn't until a year or two later I happened to discover what Emmy was doing with her life. Not long after, I started noticing her sneaking around the university in disguise."

Luke suddenly connected dots in his head. "The sunglasses," he realised aloud. "And the cap, instead of her old coat. She's wearing her hair differently, too."

Layton nodded. "She appears for a few weeks every year, around this time. I haven't approached her, but I've noticed her sneaking into the back of my classes several times, and she likes to conceal herself in the courtyard and discreetly watch us from a distance." He chuckled. "Although she hasn't spoken to us, she seems to be checking up on how we're doing, in her own way."

Leaning back in his chair, Luke scratched at the back of his head. "And now she knows without a doubt I've recognised her, do you think she might come forward?"

"Maybe," Layton agreed, looking out the window with a soft smile. "I suppose we shall have to wait and see."

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
It had been a very usual Friday morning for Hershel Layton. After dragging Alfendi out of bed and into some clothes, he had passed the boy off to his sister to eat breakfast, leaving Layton to collect his material for the day's classes and office work before leaving. After a short lecture for a group of first-year archaeology students, he was now settled in his office, engrossed in marking assignments for another of his classes.

Behind him, Layton heard a knock on his door. This was far from unusual, so he only made a mental note of where he was up to on the paper before him. "Come in," he called, placing down his red pen. The door creaked open slowly, and Layton turned his chair to one side to greet them, only to pause as he saw the nervous figure poking their head through the doorway, gripping the edge of the door. "Ah, this is a pleasant surprise," he said, giving the figure in yellow an encouraging smile as he gestured to the spare chair nearby. "Why don't you come in? It's been a long time since we had a chat, Emmy."

Emmy drummed her fingers against the door for a moment, then gently stepped into the room, leaning against the door to close it behind her. "You don't seem so surprised," she pointed out, walking slowly across the room. "I suppose Luke told you what happened yesterday."

Layton continued to smile, watching Emmy politely sit in the offered chair. "He did, yes," he agreed, adjusting his hat. "I understand a certain little boy will owe you an apology when next you meet."

Emmy had to think a moment before laughing. "Oh, yes, the little redhead. Is he yours?"

Chuckling, Layton crossed his arms. "I can't imagine you don't already know the answer to that. You've seen him with us since he was a year old, haven't you?"

Eyes wide, Emmy stared at Layton for several seconds. "Uh..." A blush spread across her face, and she looked down guiltily. "You knew I was there the whole time," she realised.

"Indeed I did," Layton replied. "At least, I'm sure it didn't take me long to notice you, hiding at the back of my lecture hall the year Luke left."

Emmy continued to stare at her lap, palms pressed into her knees as she winced. "In retrospect, sneaking into your classes was a bad idea. I just had to make sure you were okay," she explained, looking up to meet Layton's eyes. "I mean, of course I knew you'd all be fine without me, but I had to check."

Layton nodded. "I thought that might be the case." He cast a glance to an abandoned newspaper on the edge of his desk. "I understand you're working for the World Times now?"

"Oh, yes," Emmy admitted, smiling as she pulled a few strands of hair over her shoulder, fiddling with them nervously. "I was wondering if you'd happened to notice that. It's a great excuse to travel the world, see exciting things. Plus, I'm back in London every November to review my contract, so I can visit Uncle Leon." She looked away again, forcefully brushing her hair back over her shoulder.
"I... was never quite sure if I was ready to talk to you or Luke yet. Couldn't bring myself to confront you." She sighed, then turned back to Layton with a sad frown, folding her hands neatly in her lap. "I've been keeping an eye out for both of you in the news, since I left. I heard what happened to the Tritons in America."

Layton frowned in thought, remembering his missing friends. After a moment, he remembered something and gave Emmy a curious look. "And how did you learn of what happened to Clark and Brenda? I seem to recall it wasn't widely publicised."

Emmy shrugged. "I worried about Luke when I didn't see him around Gressenheller that year. I ran a search for 'Luke Triton', but that got me nothing, so I thought I'd try his parents' names on a whim." She sighed. "I got a retrospective article on that road they died on, listing the dead in memoriam. After that, I was so scared for Luke, but I had no idea where to even start looking for him. Did they take him back to Britain, or was he still in America? And England on its own would be hard enough to search, assuming he wasn't in Wales or Scotland or something, but the entire United States?" She ran a hand through her hair, huffing in frustration. "You have no idea how relieved I was when I recognised him last year. I was beginning to think he'd dropped off the face of the earth."

Layton laughed, adjusting his hat. "Luke's been quite safe, I can assure you. Of course, he can tell you all about that himself."

Emmy nodded, beginning to look guilty again. "He wasn't too mad I ran off like that yesterday, was he?"

"I can't imagine why he would be," Layton assured her. "He seemed to be looking forward to seeing you again properly."

Emmy smiled, leaning back in her chair. "That's good," she said.

The pair sat in comfortable silence for several moments, relaxing as they enjoyed each other's company after so long apart.

"Oh, that reminds me," Emmy spoke up again, nonchalantly tapping a finger against the side of her mouth, "have you been in touch with... former-Professor Sycamore? Descole?"

"My brother?" Layton filled in with a smile, crossing his arms. "He's sent me the occasional letter, though I cannot reply to them with no return address. Did you have something to do with that, Emmy?"

Emmy blushed, shrugging. "Yeah," she admitted. "I... ran into the Bostonius in South America, and Raymond suggested I join them... helped me persuade Desmond to let me." She grinned. "We travel the world, exploring, solving puzzles, helping people... I write reports, take pictures, and send 'em off to my boss to be edited and published." The grin faded a little. "It's a lot like what I used to do when I was your assistant, only without all the secrecy and betrayal."

"Which we've long since forgiven you for," Layton reminded her, giving Emmy a concerned look. "We'd already forgiven you when you left."

Emmy nodded in acknowledgement, but kept her guilty stare at her lap, staying silent.

The quiet moment was interrupted by a short, confident knock on the door, which was promptly opened to reveal a young woman in a peach-coloured dress, red-brown hair done up in a neat ponytail with a red ribbon. At her side was a young boy with messy crimson hair, clinging tightly to her arm with one hand as he stuck the other in his mouth. "Professor," the woman called, "I hope we
aren't interrup- Oh!" She paused as she spotted Emmy in the extra chair by the desk. "I suppose we'd
better come back la-"
"Emmy!" cried a voice behind her, and a tall young man wearing a blue cap pushed his way into the
room, dashing towards Emmy with an excited grin. "You came back!"
Emmy stood up in surprise as she recognised Luke, just in time for him to grab her in a tight hug, his
chin scratching against the side of her forehead with the tiniest hints of unshaven stubble. She
laughed, then pushed her friend away, looking him up and down as he continued to grin widely at
her. "Wow, Luke, when did you get so tall?" she asked.
Luke, by now long used to hearing the question from his friends in England, giggled as he shoved
his hands in his pockets. "American mandate," he joked, giving her a wink. "They feed you growth
hormones in your sleep."
Layton got out of his chair and waved Flora in, approaching the pair with a smile. "Flora, Alfendi,
may I introduce Emmy Altava, an old friend of ours."
Alfendi frowned as he watched Emmy, who gave the pair a wave in greeting. Flora gasped, smiling
in recognition of the name. "Oh! You're that Emmy! I've heard a lot about you from the Professor
and Luke!"
"I wish I could say the same," Emmy replied, clasping her hands behind her back in mild
nervousness. "It's nice to meet you, Miss...?"
Layton smiled, looking at Emmy as he gestured to Flora and Alfendi. "Emmy, I'd like to properly
introduce you to my adoptive children; Flora Reinhold and Alfendi Layton."
Emmy blinked in surprise. "Oh, you're...?" she replied, looking at Flora. "I always thought you were
his new assistant."
Flora giggled, deciding to let go of Alfendi's hand. "Well, before I started finding my own path in
life, I did help the Professor out when I could," she explained. "Luke was usually better at it than me,
before he moved away."
"I don't think so," Luke replied, shrugging. "I just had more experience!"
Before anyone else could speak up, Emmy suddenly jumped back with a cry of "Ha!", dodging a
feeble punch from a very surprised Alfendi standing at her side. Grinning, she dropped into a crouch
and grabbed the boy's outstretched hand. "Thought you could sneak up on a master of martial arts,
eh?"
"Woah," Alfendi muttered under his breath, staring at Emmy with wide eyes.
"Which reminds me," Layton said, crossing his arms and giving Alfendi a stern glare. "You have
something to say to Emmy about yesterday, don't you, Alfendi?"
Alfendi looked back at his father, then to Emmy, thinking to himself for a moment before pointing
his eyes at the floor. "Sorry," he muttered.
"It's alright," Emmy replied, smiling at the boy as she released his hand. "Next time, I'll just throw
you into a headlock." Giving the awestruck boy a wink, she got to her feet and turned to Luke as
though nothing had happened. "Oh yes, I was going to ask you what you've been getting up to since
I left, Luke! You've been in America, I take it?"


Luke nodded, grinning. "Yep! That was a couple years after you left!" As Flora shooed Alfendi into his play-corner and settled herself on the sofa, Luke began to explain...

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Alfendi seemed nervous as he clung to his father's hand, almost hiding behind it as he peered out at the passers-by as they walked down the street. "Can we go home yet?" he meekly asked, hands curling around the Professor's fingers.

"Not yet, I'm afraid," Layton replied with a reassuring tone. "Look, we're almost at the cafe now."

Flora gasped in excitement as she spotted a small sea of tables under a large awning, and a familiar brown-haired woman standing within, facing away from them. "I can see Emmy!" she cried, and dashed ahead, waving in their friend's direction. "Emmy, over here!" It didn't take long for Emmy to hear Flora's calls, and the two were quickly happily greeting each other as Flora made her way through the sea of tables.

Luke giggled. "At least we found her quickly!" he pointed out, walking alongside the Professor as he sent him a grin.

Layton smiled, adjusting his hat as he watched the two women happily chatting away as they sat down. "And it appears she brought a friend along."

"Huh?" Luke turned back to inspect the selected table, and noticed a third figure, wearing a black-and-grey cloak, sitting next to Emmy. As Luke recognised the brown hair curled around where he was used to seeing a white boa, he almost stopped in his tracks, just barely keeping pace with Layton and Alfendi as his shocked expression deepened into a frown. "What's he doing here?"

"Now now," Layton whispered, giving Luke a stern look. "He's a different person now."

"How can you know that?" Luke hurriedly hissed back, casting nervous glances at the rapidly approaching table as they entered under the awning of the cafe. "We haven't seen or heard from him in years!"

Layton didn't answer for a moment. "Give him a chance, then," he replied, then turned to the visiting pair with a wide smile, tipping his hat. "Emmy! A delight to see you again!"

Emmy, who had sat with her back to them, looked around with a grin. "Professor! Luke! Glad you could make it!" She then threw a wink to Alfendi, who was still clinging to Layton's hand as he stared up at her. "Oh, and you too, Alfendi. Come sit down! You two remember Desmond here, don't you? We've been travelling together the past few years!"

The caped man turned to give the pair a nod, somewhat nervously adjusting the red glasses perched on his nose. "Layton."

"Of course," Layton said in answer to Emmy, tipping his hat to Sycamore with a smile before leading Alfendi around the table to sit next to Flora, himself taking the empty seat between Alfendi and Emmy. "Always a pleasure to meet old friends again," he added.

seat open if you want to sit down."

At that, Luke gave the man a frown. "I don't need to be told what to do, Descole."

"Luke," Layton called in warning as the teen moved to take the remaining empty seat, between Flora and Sycamore.

"There's no need for such hostility," Sycamore calmly replied, almost seeming more comfortable being greeted with anger than kindness as he crossed his arms underneath his cape. "We parted as friends, did we not?"

Luke only glared at the man as he sat at Flora's side, edging his chair closer to her. "You may have saved my life once, but that doesn't make up for everything else you did," he replied. Sycamore only calmly returned Luke's stare, and a part of the teen wondered if he privately agreed before Luke quietened that part of him and continued, "If you've really changed, you have a lot to prove first."

Sycamore didn't reply, staring back at Luke in the resulting silence.

Luke and Sycamore's end of the table remained fairly icy as the minutes passed. Emmy, Flora and Layton, doing their best to brush past the situation, continued to happily chat as they drank the tea the group had ordered, occasionally casting nervous glances in Luke's or Sycamore's direction. Alfendi mostly ignored the table at large, eating a small plate of biscuits Flora bought for him or colouring an activity sheet one of the cafe's workers gave him. Although Sycamore was happy to politely respond to any questions Flora and Layton had for him about the years since he'd left, Luke kept quiet, avoiding eye contact and giving short answers when Emmy or Flora tried to entice him to join the conversation.

Eventually, Alfendi began to tug on his father's sleeve. "Papa! Papa!"

When Layton obediently leaned down, Alfendi held up a hand and whispered something into the Professor's ear. Layton smiled at the boy. "In that case, we'd better ask where the men's room is, hmm?" Standing from his chair, he gave the rest of the table an apologetic tip of his hat. "We'll be right back," he assured them, helping Alfendi climb off his chair and leading the boy into the cafe.

The resulting silence as Layton temporarily left the conversation would have been a comfortable one, and was for several moments, before Sycamore again turned to Luke, a look on his face somewhere between sympathetic and his usual stern neutral. "We heard what happened to your parents," he said. "My condolences."

Flora and Emmy sent each other worried looks.

Luke took a moment to respond, having been staring at the table. When he did react, he started by looking up at Sycamore with a glare. "When did you ever care about my mum and dad?" he asked, strangely quiet despite the anger in his tone. "You locked Mum in the cellar for six months. You told Dad you'd kill her if he didn't do what you wanted. You let me believe they'd had a fight and everything strange that was happening was because of my dad. So, I re-iterate: When did you ever care about me or my family?"

There was a long silence after Luke's calm outburst. Flora and Emmy glanced at each other, wondering if they should speak up or not, but Sycamore beat them to it, pressing his glasses to his
face with a sigh. "I suppose it's true. I was never friends with Mister and Missus Triton; I couldn't afford to be, since it would endanger my mission. I did know I would never be required to actually end their lives, since it was clear they cared about each other and you too much to endanger anyone." He paused, looking away. "I... did think, perhaps, those few weeks we spent together on the Bostonius had made the two of us at least friendly acquaintances, despite what happened. I did once try to kill you in Ambrosia, but I saved your life in the Azran Sanctuary, so I believed that particular sin was paid for. And..." He met Luke's angry gaze, his brown eyes a mixture of sadness and a fury that was dulled by time. "I do know what it's like to lose your entire family in one fell swoop. If nothing else, I can empathise with what that feels like."

Luke stared back, feeling his anger fade away and be replaced with guilt. "I... I still can't forgive you," he replied, keeping his stare stern. "Not yet."

"I have no expectation I will be forgiven for my actions," Sycamore replied, crossing his arms and closing his eyes. "To be perfectly honest, I only came here today because Emmy begged me to."

"I didn't beg," Emmy protested, one hand on her hip. "I requested you join me because I thought it would be good for you!"

Sycamore opened his eyes and turned to Emmy with an amused smile. "With you, there is precious little difference."

At that moment, the group heard the unmistakable sound of a giggling child from very close by. Flora looked around in confusion. "Alfendi?"

Sycamore cried in shock and jumped to his feet, knocking his chair back with a screech of metal on concrete. He gripped the edges of his cloak, looking down with wide eyes at a small redhead boy peeking out from under the table, looking back up at him with a mischievous grin. "Uh..." Before anyone could say anything more, Alfendi had run at Sycamore, pulling himself inside the cape and giggling as he proceeded to hide within.

"Alfendi!" Luke cried, unsure how to best extricate the boy from the cape. "Leave Professor Sycamore alone!"

Sycamore sighed as he looked over to Luke. "Just 'Mister' Sycamore, I'm afraid," he explained, sounding a touch exasperated. "I haven't been a professor for a number of years now."


Layton came running up to the group, looking worried. "Has Alfendi...?"

"He's here," Flora quickly assured him with a smile, gesturing to Sycamore. "Playing with his uncle."

Layton sighed in relief, looking over to where Alfendi was still giggling as he hid in Sycamore's cape. "Alfendi, you must stop running off like that."

Sycamore lifted a section of his cape and watched the happy boy within with a smile. "That's right, I am your uncle, aren't I?" He chuckled, looking up at Layton with a smirk. "Are you sure he isn't biologically yours, Layton? He's got the Bronev nose..."

Layton lowered his eyelids in an almost uncharacteristic sarcastic stare. "I'm sure." He pulled a watch from a pocket and inspected the time. "In any case, I think it's time we got going. The two of you are leaving London tonight, are you not?"
Emmy nodded, also standing from her chair. Sycamore was still busy with the giggling boy running around under his cape, watching Alfendi with a smile. "And to think, I only wore this today because I thought it was cold out," he commented to himself.

Flora laughed as she ran to try and coax her brother out of hiding. "Come on, Alfendi, it's time to say goodbye to Emmy and Uncle!" She then paused, looking up at Sycamore apologetically. "Oh, um, you don't mind if we call you that, do you? Given you're the Professor's brother? If you're uncomfortable with it-

"I don't mind," Sycamore assured her, the smile on his face a mix of sadness and pride. "You are my niece and nephew, after all."

While Flora giggled and turned her attention to persuading Alfendi out from underneath Sycamore's cloak, Emmy turned to Luke. "Hey Luke, you said you're living in California now, right?"

Luke nodded, becoming the last to stand from his chair at the table as the group began to leave the cafe's seating area. "Mm hmm. L.A., specifically."

"Well, if we ever happen to be in the area," Emmy continued with a smile, throwing an arm around Luke's shoulders, "how would we find you? You've got an address, right?"

Giggling, Luke returned her smile. "That's easy! Just look up the Wright Talent Agency!" He gave her a proud grin, hands on his hips in his best imitation of Apollo and Trucy's stage personas. "There's only one place to go if you want it done Wright!"

Sycamore smiled in amusement, pulling his cape tight around his shoulders. "I see, 'Wright' as in the name. Very clever."


Emmy only smirked at Sycamore. "No wonder you like it, with your terrible sense of humour!"

Sycamore only glared at her in return.
The Family You Make

*ring ring* *ring ring* *click*

"Dad?"

"Hey Apollo. Are you free right now?"

"I'm not doing anything important. What is it? Why'd you call me?"

"Aw, am I not allowed to simply wish to hear your voice? Haha!"

"... Well, this is me talking. What is it, Dad?"

"Surely you've noticed what tomorrow is."

"Tomor?- Oh, yeah, duh. I was planning to spend the day with you guys, as usual. Will you be at home, or...?"

"Up in Kurain again, actually. That seems to be a tradition, now."

"... Huh, you're right. Every second year. So I'll meet you guys at the train station then?"

"If you want. We were planning to torture poor Luke and get the ten-past-eight train so we can catch the first bus into Kurain."

"Hasn't he usually got over the jetlag by now?"

"You can meet us for the same train, or catch a later one. It's up to you."

"No, I'm fine getting up that early. I had a class at that time this term. I'll meet you guys at the station."

"Alright. We'll see you tomorrow morning, then. Love you."

"Love you, Dad."

*click*

December 24, 4:45PM
Apollo and Clay's Apartment
Living Room

Apollo ran a hand over his hair as he entered the main room of the small apartment he shared with his best friend. "Clay?"

"Down here, dude," Clay called, and Apollo noticed the black-haired young man stretched across the sofa, waving in his friend's direction. "You want something?"

"Sort of," Apollo replied, walking around and gingerly sitting next to Clay's feet. He gestured with the phone in his hand. "My dad just called. I'm gonna be gone all day tomorrow and the morning of
the day after to spend Christmas with my family."

Clay thought for a moment. "Huh." He then smiled at Apollo. "Can I come?"

Apollo frowned. "Your dad hasn't asked to spend it with you?"


Sighing, Apollo shook his head. "We're not staying at the Agency," he explained. "We're staying with Dad's girlfriend again."

Clay paused, then looked up at Apollo in shock. "Your dad has a *girlfriend*!?

Apollo remembered too late that he and Luke had been keeping that particular factoid to themselves for a reason, and slapped a palm over his face. "Shouldn't've mentioned that."

"Now I *have* to come!" Clay cried, sitting up and giving Apollo a wide grin. "I didn't know Mister Wright had a *girlfriend*!"

"It's not that exciting," Apollo pointed out, glaring at Clay as he stood up. "It's Maya, Pearly's cousin. I've told you about her before, remember? Trucy calls her 'Mom'?

Clay scoffed, watching Apollo walk off. "But you didn't mention she was *doing it* with your dad!"

Apollo shouted in disgust, stopping in his tracks to shoot Clay a horrified look. "Ergh! Don't put that mental image in my head! That's the last thing in the world I want to be thinking about!" As Clay only laughed, he shook his head, trying to clear his mind of the thought of his father's sex life. "Dad and Maya are supposed to be a secret, anyway!" he argued.

Clay stopped laughing and thought for a moment. "Oh they are, are they?" he asked, grinning mischievously.

Apollo crossed his arms and shot his friend a glare, recognising what he was doing. "Don't you dare."

"Tell you what," Clay said, pushing himself off the sofa with a smug smile and nonchalantly ambling to Apollo's side. "You let me come along, and it stays a secret!" He propped an elbow on Apollo's shoulder, resting his weight on his friend as he leaned his grinning face close to Apollo's half-lidded stare. "We got a deal, dude?"

Apollo stared at Clay for several moments before sighing and pushing his friend off his shoulder. "I'm not the one to be asking permission from, anyway," he pointed out. "I'd have to ask Maya, and I don't think she'd be happy with some random stranger joining us at the last minute."

Clay only continued to grin, hands on his hips. "Aw, too bad," he said. "I guess if your answer is no, I'll just have to resort to desperate measures!" He reached into a pocket with one hand.

As he realised what Clay was doing *now*, Apollo's eyes widened in surprise. "Don't you dare!" he repeated, hands curling into fists.

Pulling his phone out of his pocket, Clay studied it idly, still grinning. "Hmm, I've been meaning to call that cute girl Sandra from my architecture class!"

"*No!*"
"I'm sure she'd love to hear all about your dad's secret girlfriend!" Clay continued to tease, ignoring Apollo's protest.

Apollo groaned loudly, rolling his eyes and throwing his hands in the air. "Fine! I'll ask Maya if it's okay for you to come!"

"Aw, thanks, dude!" Clay said with a grin as Apollo stomped off into the hallway. "You're the best!"

Apollo brushed Clay off with a sigh, pausing in the door to give his friend one final warning. "I'll ask her, but I'm telling you she's gonna say 'no'!"

December 25, 9:58AM
Fey Manor
Winding Way

"I can't believe you said yes to this."

Maya laughed as she watched Pearl and Trucy drag Clay off to show him the rest of the Manor. "I don't know why you're so surprised!" she pointed out, elbowing her unofficial son with a grin. "You and Luke are always talking about your 'best friend Clay'! You made me curious!"

Apollo huffed, brushing her off. "He's only interested in you because I accidentally mentioned the thing between you and Dad."

"You make it sound like they have some fearsome, tentacled creature sitting between them," Luke remarked with a smile.

Phoenix laughed, gesturing to Luke as he pointed out the eighteen-year-old was currently standing exactly between him and Maya. "Would that make it you, then?"

Luke giggled. "I guess so!" he replied, then, ignoring Apollo's eye-rolling, headed off in the direction of the house. "I'd better check the girls aren't mistreating Clay."

Maya waved at Luke as he went. "While you're there, better tell the girls about this creature of Apollo's!" she called with a wink.

Apollo sighed, covering his face with one hand. Once the still giggling Luke had disappeared back inside, the elder Wright brother turned to Maya and Phoenix with a curious frown. "By the way, do you have any plans for how we're spending today? I know we're leaving early tomorrow morning."

Maya and Phoenix gave each other a knowing smile before turning to Apollo with innocent shrugs. "Maybe," Phoenix answered.

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Meaning yes," he pointed out.

"Maybe," Maya repeated, identical mischievous grins on her and Phoenix's faces.

Apollo sighed and followed Luke back into the house.

Phoenix wrapped an arm around Maya, watching Apollo disappear inside. "So do you think he'll explode with anger or excitement when he finds out? Or maybe just freeze in shock?"
Maya giggled. "I think his poor little fanboy mind is going to implode. Then maybe he'll dig out a list of questions for her and spend the whole time dogpiling her with them!" Phoenix laughed, and Maya planted a quick kiss on his cheek, only to draw back with an amused frown. "Ugh, you need to shave! Almost cut my lips to ribbons with that old man stubble!"

"'Old man'!?" Phoenix shot back, rubbing his chin with a smile. "I'll have you know I'm only thirty-one! That's a respectable age for a father of three!"

Maya scoffed, rolling her eyes. "Whatever you say, old man!"

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "You do realise you're the same age right now that I was when you first started calling me that?"

Maya just grinned. "Yeah, but I'm one of those forever-young types. You were born old!"

Phoenix shook his head with a laugh, as the two tightened their grip on each other. After a pause, he looked to Maya with a concerned frown. "Are you and Pearls all set up for tonight? You've talked it over with her?"

"Of course I have," Maya assured him. "Pearly's decided she's going to do the honours."

"Not you?"

Maya shook her head. "I was all ready to; I got pretty insistent with Pearly that she should get to celebrate today with everyone here, but she was more insistent that I get to do that instead." She shrugged, blushing a little. "I guess she wants me to be conscious for all of my break from work. I don't often get time off."

"Nope," Phoenix agreed, resting his head on Maya's. "Won't this be the first time we get to see Mia together? Since... you know."

"Since you stopped being a dork and admitted you liked me back?" Maya filled in with a grin.

Phoenix lifted his head to shoot Maya a quick glare. "I wasn't going to put it quite like that..."

Maya giggled. "Nah. You came up for my birthday this year, remember?"

"Oh yeah, while Trucy was at school," Phoenix realised. "Forgot about that."

From somewhere inside the house, the pair heard the distant shouts of Apollo arguing with Trucy. Clay's voice soon joined them, seemingly trying to escalate the argument for his own amusement, while Luke's pleading tone entered the fray in a valiant-though-fruitless attempt to calm everything down.

Phoenix smiled. "Ten bucks Apollo loses it tonight."

"You're on, old man."

(View the Court Record)
After dinner, Pearl had quickly taken charge of the extended family's movements and dragged everyone into the living room, where there was a traditional Japanese table called a kotatsu set up - a low table with a blanket spread out underneath, and a heater to keep the underside warm. Clay had instantly fallen in love with the invention, and sat underneath it with a massive grin on his face as Pearl promptly set out a pile of her board games for the five 'kids' to play while Phoenix and Maya watched from the sidelines.

As a heated game of Mouse Trap came to an end, Trucy eagerly grabbed Monopoly to set up as Pearl packed the previous game away in its box. "This one is rather fragile," the young spirit medium explained, getting to her feet with box in hand. "I'd better put it back right away, just in case."

"We're not going to throw it across the room or anything," Apollo pointed out, one eyebrow raised. "I know," Pearl replied with a smile. "You guys keep on playing without me. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Clay scoffed. "Uh, you're just worried you'll lose at Monopoly!" he laughed. "Go ahead, I don't blame ya, dude! No-one beats the Clayster!"


"Ha!" Trucy cried, poking Clay in the arm with a smirk. "You're not gonna beat me! I'm gonna be the doggy!"

"Hey, I wanted to be the dog!" Luke protested.

"You can be the top hat!" Trucy replied with a smile, sliding the small metal piece across the table to her brother. "And Polly can be the shoe!"

Apollo sent his sister a glare. "No way, you can be the shoe."

Pearl smiled as she stepped away from the table, packed-up board game in hand. As she passed Phoenix and Maya, she sent them a gleeful grin and a wink, which Maya returned as the girl slipped out of the room.

"Step one..." Phoenix whispered to Maya with a smile.

After some more arguing over the pieces they would claim as their own, the Wright kids and Clay started their game. It wasn't more than a couple of minutes before a figure appeared in the doorway, unnoticed by the four at the table. Maya looked up with a grin, elbowing Phoenix to alert him to the new arrival.

"Grunting in pain at the assault to his ribs, Phoenix looked over to the door, smiling as he recognised the figure standing there, fitting Pearl's clothes much better than she had in years long past. Getting to his feet, he walked over to the table and rested a hand on Apollo's head, ruffling the young man's
hair and causing him to groan in exasperation. "Okay kids, better put your game on hold for a while."


"What's going on, Mister Wright?" Clay added, confused.

Trucy pouted. "But I'm winning!" she cried.

Apollo raised an eyebrow at his sister, pulling Phoenix's hand off his head. "We only just started the game. No-one is winning."

Phoenix grinned, jerking his head in the direction of the door. "We have a visitor," he said.

The four stared at him in confusion for a moment, before turning to look at the entranceway. Stood at the edge of the light, arms crossed in front of her large bust, was a woman wearing Pearl's pink robes (reshuffled a little to better fit her larger frame), with Pearl's hazel bangs framing her face. She smiled at the group, though she stayed stood where she was and made no attempt to approach them.

"May I introduce," Phoenix continued, delighting in seeing Luke's and Apollo's shocked expressions (the pair having quickly twigged as to who she was) and Clay's and Trucy's more confused ones, "my former mentor and Maya's older sister, Mia Fey." As Trucy gasped in shock, Phoenix leaned down towards Apollo, who was still staring wide-eyed in Mia's direction. "Surprise."

Before anyone else could react, Trucy was on her feet, racing around the table towards the woman. "AUNTIE MIA!" she shouted, latching her arms around Mia's waist and sending her hat flying.

Mia looked surprised at the title, but quickly warmed to the girl and patted her head. "It's nice to meet you," she said.

Luke was the next to stand, retrieving Trucy's hat from the floor. "It's a pleasure to finally meet you, Mia!" he told her, tipping his cap with a grin. "Papa and Maya have told us a lot about you!"

Mia seemed amused. "And they've told me a lot about you in return," she said, watching the grinning Trucy release her from the hug. "You're a perfect young gentlemen in blue, which makes you Luke, correct? And you, the little magician girl, must be Trucy."

Trucy nodded, not reacting as Luke replaced her hat on her head. "That's us!" she cried.

His eyes fixed on Mia, Clay leaned over towards where Apollo was still frozen in his seat. "Dude," he whispered, "why's she wearing the same clothes as Pearly? And the same hair, even?"

Phoenix grinned at Clay. "Have Luke and Apollo not explained the 'spirit-channelling' thing to you yet?"

"Wait, this has to do with that!?!" Clay replied, somehow looking even more confused than before.

Chuckling at Clay's confusion, Phoenix poked Apollo in the shoulder. "Go and say hello," he prompted him. "She's not gonna bite."

Knocked out of his frozen stare, Apollo gave Phoenix a terrified look. "Get up and talk to her!??" he hissed at his father. "Just like that!?!"

Mia looked up from where she had been talking to Luke and Trucy, fingers brushing against her cheek. "You're Apollo, aren't you? Are you going to join us?"
As Apollo looked back up at Mia in terror, Trucy grinned and waved at him. "C'mon, Polly! Come and talk to Auntie Mia!"

Maya restrained a giggle, giving the young man a cheeky smile. "You're not scared, are you?" she asked.

"N-no," Apollo muttered, turning red. Reluctantly, he got to his feet. "Why would I be?"

"Exactly!" Luke added, trying to reassure his brother. "After all, everything worked out fine the first time you met Papa, right?"

Apollo temporarily recovered enough from his fear enough to scoff. "Yeah, but Dad's a huge dork."

Phoenix frowned. "Hey..."

Mia smiled to herself, amused. "Well, we all have our moments," she cryptically agreed. "You're the one who's studying to be a defence attorney, right?"

Although still blushing in nervousness, Apollo nodded. "I-I've read all your case-files that Dad kept," he explained, beginning to smile. "You were really talented."

"Thank you," Mia replied with a grateful chuckle, "but that's only because I had a lot of practise. I'm sure Phoenix would agree."

Phoenix laughed, ruffling Apollo's hair to the latter's annoyed disapproval. "With Apollo, maybe!" he said, ignoring said son's glare as he shoved Phoenix's hand off his head. "I might have gotten up there with another year or two under my belt, though!"

Luke tapped his chin in thought, then turned to Mia. "That reminds me, did you ever have a fanclub, Mia? I'm sure you must have had fans."

Mia seemed confused for a moment, then shot an embarrassed Maya a knowing smile. "I'm afraid not," she replied with a neutral tone. "At least, not to my knowledge. I know Maya started one for Phoenix, though."

Clay raised an eyebrow in Maya's direction, then rolled his eyes and stood. "Okay, um, I'm really confused here, so I think I'll go and find where Pearly disappeared to, 'kay?"

Trucy and Maya simultaneously snorted in amusement, while Mia and Luke hid smiles (Phoenix, while he also smiled, made no attempt to hide his grin). Apollo simply rolled his eyes at his friend. "Yeah, good luck with that," he muttered.

Clay frowned. "Huh?"

"You're not gonna find her!" Trucy explained with a giggle.

"Clay, I know we've explained spirit channelling to you," Luke tried to add with a sympathetic smile. "Pearl's not here. She's channelling Mia." When Clay only continued to look confused, Luke's smile morphed into a worried frown. "Apollo explained who Mia was, didn't he?"

"Wait, why is it my job to explain that to him!?" Apollo objected.

Luke shrugged. "I thought you had!" he said. "I mean, you two live together at the moment, and... You're a fan of her like you were of Papa, right?"

"N-no!" Apollo insisted, turning red again.
Clay smirked. "Oh ho, really?"

"Shut up, Clay," Apollo muttered at his friend with a glare. "You weren't even supposed to be here today!"

"Aw, what kind of thing is that to say to your best friend on Christmas?" Clay replied with a mischievous grin.

Apollo only rolled his eyes.

Phoenix moved to sit back down at Maya's side, watching Mia direct the kids to sit down again so she could talk with them more comfortably. Trucy quickly erupted into questions, pulling Mia to sit at her side of the kotatsu, which Mia attempted to answer through Apollo trying to quieten his sister with the claim she was being annoying. Phoenix grinned at Maya. "I think they all like each other," he whispered.

Maya grinned, giving Phoenix a wink. "You owe me ten bucks, Nick."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "According to who?"

"Apollo didn't 'lose it', did he?" Maya pointed out with a smug grin. "I win the bet!"

"Pfft, yeah right!" Phoenix quietly scoffed. "He totally lost his mind in awe. Were you even paying attention?"

Maya shook her head at Phoenix's joking smile. "Nuh-uh, don't you use that lawyer-speak on me! I won, fair and square!"

Phoenix restrained a laugh, shooting a quick glance at the table, where Apollo was now eagerly asking Mia various questions about some of her cases while Trucy stared at him in confusion, Clay and Luke smiling with varying levels of amusement. Assured he wasn't disturbing them, Phoenix leaned in close to Maya with a grin. "Aw, I'm afraid I don't have any cash on me," he said. "You wouldn't happen to accept kisses as payment, would you?"

Maya hummed in thought, biting her lip to hide a smile. "I think I can accept them just this once," she whispered, and giggled as she and Phoenix began to exchange swift smooches.

"Mommy, Daddy!" Trucy suddenly cried angrily from the table. "Stop that! We're trying to talk to Auntie Mia and you're being gross!"

"Really, Truce? 'Gross'?" Phoenix repeated with a laugh, looking up to see that Trucy's protests had attracted the attention of the whole table, Mia looking apologetic while Clay and Luke just seemed confused.

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Yeah, maybe you two could get a room if you're gonna do that," he agreed.

Phoenix laughed as he stood up. "I'm being ganged up on by my own children!"

Maya only crossed her arms, fixing Apollo with a mischievous smile. "Are you sure you want me and your dad off on our own?" she asked. "We might get into all sort of 'trouble'... if you know what I mean."

After a moment of confusion, Apollo and Luke suddenly recoiled with cries of disgust, while Trucy wrinkled up her nose and stuck out her tongue. "Don't even imply that!" Apollo cried.
"Whatever you two do alone, I don't want to know about it!" Luke agreed.

Maya cackled in glee as she stood up, gesturing for Phoenix to follow her as she left the room.
"C'mon, Nick! Let's give the kids some room, shall we?"

As the couple disappeared into the hallway, Apollo levelled a glare at Trucy. "I hope you're proud of yourself for that," he mumbled.


- END OF 2023 -

View the Court Record
The door into their small dressing room opened with a bang, causing Apollo to jump as he looked up from going over the Gramarye siblings' magic props. "Geeze Truce, where've you been!?” he cried, turning to face his sister as she closed the door behind her. "I know we leave a lot of leeway, but-!” He paused, noticing Trucy glaring into the distance and rubbing at her eyes, trying to hide a sniff. "You okay, Trucy?"

The twelve-year-old girl rubbed at her eyes once more. "Mm hmm," she insisted, jerking her head up and down in a brief nod.

Apollo stared at her for a moment more before walking to her side, leaning closer to his sister's height and resting a hand on her shoulder in concern. "Truce, what's the matter?” he quietly asked.

Trucy sniffed, then looked up to meet her brother's eyes with an unmistakably tear-stained face. "I had a fight with Daddy,” she admitted.

Apollo was surprised to hear that, as it wasn't very often their father truly got mad. Whatever it had been about, it was clearly something dear to Trucy, so he gave his sister a sympathetic smile and guided her to the chairs by their makeshift vanity. "Here, come sit down and tell me all about it."

Trucy sniffed again, then looked up to meet her brother's eyes with an unmistakably tear-stained face. "I had a fight with Daddy,” she admitted.

Apollo watched his sister with concern. "He did say he'd think about it, though. Next year."

"Of course," Apollo sighed, rolling his eyes.

"So I thought,” Trucy continued, "since he agreed to do that, I might ask him about getting my ears pierced."

Apollo watched his sister with concern. "He turned that down too?"
Trucy paused a moment, then nodded again. She reached a hand into the bag at her hip. "I bought these this week," she said, pulling something out that was hidden in her fist, "and I thought Daddy might agree once he saw what I wanted to wear." She held out her hand, uncurling her fingers to show Apollo a pair of shiny, gold-coloured earrings, shaped like diamonds. Although the front was pointed, the back was flat, and Apollo could easily see the studs that marked where they would hang from an earlobe. He held out a hand to look at the diamonds, and was surprised when Trucy grabbed his hand and dropped the earrings into it. "They match my buttons," she pointed out, "and the white diamonds on our capes, and the gold goes with the beads and our pins."

"Yeah, they'd fit our general design scheme really well," Apollo agreed, rolling the earrings around in his hand for a moment before looking back up at his sister in concern. "Dad still didn't listen?"

Trucy nodded with a morose look. "He got upset that I was 'wasting my money' on a pair of earrings, and said I'm never going to wear them while I'm under his roof," she quietly explained, beginning to tear up again as she recalled the argument. "So I... I said my other Daddy would have let me wear them, then Daddy got angry and said I was welcome to go find him if I could, then I noticed it was getting late, so I came here."

Apollo blinked for a moment in shock, having not realised such harsh words had been exchanged. He doubted Trucy's departure from home had been as calm that night as she'd unintentionally implied. "Oh man, Truce..."

"And before I left, I..." Trucy continued, her voice breaking as the tears began to fall. "I told Daddy I wasn't coming back!" With a wail, she leapt across the small space onto her brother's chair, her hat sent flying as she wrapped her arms around Apollo's neck and cried into his shoulder, knocking his own hat askew.

Apollo was surprised for only a moment before he wrapped his arms around his sister in comfort, removing one arm only briefly to move the diamond earrings and his hat to the small table where they were out of the way. "Aw, Truce, it'll be okay," he mumbled into her ear, helping her move into the more comfortable (for her; he was willing to sacrifice personal comfort for his sister's well-being) position of sitting in his lap instead of awkwardly leaning over him. 'I'd suggest you try out the Chords of Steel routine to help you cheer up, but backstage isn't exactly the place for it... There has to be something I can do for you, Trucy...'

Trucy hiccuped, tightening her grip on Apollo. "N-now Daddy thi-thinks I... I hate him!" she sobbed.

"I can promise you he doesn't," Apollo assured her, patting her back. "I'm sure Dad didn't mean what he said and knows you didn't mean what you said either."

Trucy sniffed a few moments more, still shaking a little in distress. Outside their door, Apollo could hear hushed voices and hurried footsteps, and realised with a glance at the clock that the show had started. They now had a fifty-minute countdown to the appearance of Apollo and Artemis Gramarye on stage, all bright and bushy-tailed as they always were in the spotlight, but it was looking increasingly likely it wouldn't be happening tonight. 'I hope Aderyn doesn't mind asking everyone to run a little long... or does she have a back-up act tonight to take our spot?'

The siblings sat in a long silence broken only by the occasional sob from Trucy. Apollo occupied his mind over the passing minutes by outlining an idea in his head, which quickly became more and more solid as he constructed a plan of action to help his little sister. 'It's kinda crazy, and I'll need to do a bit of research first,' he reasoned, 'but it's guaranteed to work. I think."

Eventually, Trucy moved her arms away from Apollo's neck, leaning back and rubbing at her eyes.
Apollo kept a hand at her back to help support her, a sympathetic frown on his face. "Are you up to going on-stage tonight?" he quietly asked. When Trucy didn't react, he added, "We need to make that decision now. Aderyn has to have time to organise filling the gap we'd leave."

Trucy thought for a long moment, staring at her hands folded in her lap. "I'll go on."

"Are you sure?"

Nodding firmly, Trucy stood and moved back to the other chair, attempting to dry her face with her already-wet gloves. "I just need to get my make-up on," she insisted, her voice hoarse. "I'll be fine."

Apollo watched her for a few moments to ensure she was certain about going ahead with the show, then sighed. Leaning forward and giving his sister a smile, he moved her hands away from her face. "I'll put your make-up on," he offered, grabbing a box of tissues from the table and handing it to Trucy. "I think you'll find these will dry your face better."

Trucy sniffed and nodded, feebly returning the smile as she took the box.

"You know what?" Apollo continued, moving his chair closer to hers. "There's that public holiday next Thursday. Since neither of us will have classes, want to come spend the day with me and Clay?"

Trucy looked up at her brother in surprise. "Really?" she asked.

Apollo nodded, pulling out their meagre make-up supplies ready to put on himself and his sister. "Apart from the times Dad drags me back home to have dinner with you, we don't really see each other outside of this place." He gestured to the building around them with a grin. "Dad won't mind letting us have some quality time together, would he?"

It took a few moments for Trucy to react, her confused frown slowly morphing into a grateful grin. "Yeah," she quietly agreed, more enthusiastically adding, "We'll have loads of fun with just the two of us!"

"That's more like it!" Apollo cheered. "Now hold still; We don't want to get foundation on your costume."

February 10, 8:07PM
Wonder Bar
Backstage

If anyone noticed Artemis Gramarye was less cheerful than usual on stage that evening, they didn't bring it up to the little girl herself. Hiding her hoarse voice behind an ad-libbed 'disappearing voice trick gone wrong', Trucy did little more than smile at the audience, doing any of her talking through her puppet Mister Hat instead of as Artemis. Apollo, to her relief, had been quick to offer to take over for what he called 'the harder stuff', and bounced around the stage that night without a single hint to the audience that there was anything going on for the pair behind the scenes. Trucy's morose mood only seemed to be noticed by Aderyn and the other regular backstage staff, but, busy keeping everything running, none of them did anything more than send the pair concerned looks as they raced past.

Neither Apollo nor Trucy seemed to want to spend much time back in their dressing room as they
came off-stage. Well-practised with their end-of-show routine, they didn't say a word to each other as they cleaned their faces and packed up their props for another night, ready to unpack them again the next day. While tidying their small vanity, Apollo quickly noticed Trucy's beloved diamond earrings still sitting by the mirror, where she seemed to be pointedly ignoring them. Deciding the sight of the items were only making her relive her earlier argument with Phoenix, Apollo took the earrings and slipped them into his bag, deciding he would keep them safe until Trucy next needed them.

Trucy was the first to finish, but, unwilling to leave on her own, she waited for Apollo. As he wrapped up with his preparations, he rested a hand on Trucy's shoulder and the pair left without a word, Trucy sticking close to Apollo's side as they made their way through to the back door.

Aderyn spotted the pair as they passed, running up to them with a cry of "Apollo! Trucy!" As the pair turned to look at her, she stopped in front of them with an embarrassed laugh, then turned to Trucy. "Hey, are you alright, kiddo? Did somethin' happen today?"

Trucy bit her lip, staring at the floor as she leaned on Apollo, who patted her shoulder comfortingly. "Sort of," he admitted. "We can handle it."

Aderyn still seemed concerned but, lacking the time to push, decided to leave it. "Oh, there was one thing I needed to tell you," she said, jerking a thumb in the direction of the back door. "Your dad was lookin' for ya. He's waiting outside."

Apollo wasn't sure whether to be annoyed or relieved Phoenix had come to meet them. "Thanks," he told their boss. "We'll see you tomorrow."

"Sure," Aderyn agreed, then, sending them one last concerned look, she hurried off back down the hallway.

View the Court Record
The first thing Apollo noticed as he opened the back door of the restaurant was the thirty-one-year-old man in a hoodie and cyan beanie pacing not far away. Said man paused as he heard the door open, turning to look up at the pair with wide eyes, and Trucy, still hiding at Apollo's side, gasped, hands flying to her mouth. The trio stared at each other for a moment or two before Trucy tore herself away from her brother and ran to Phoenix, shouting, "I'M SO SORRY, DADDY!"

Phoenix grunted as the twelve-year-old collided with his chest, wrapping her arms around his waist. "No, Truce, I'm sorry," he told her, a pained expression on his face. "Um, maybe you could not hold me so tight, though...?"

"Oh," Trucy mumbled, releasing her father and sniffing as the tears returned to her eyes. "Sorry, Daddy."

"S'okay," Phoenix mumbled in response. Apollo noted with some pride that he looked equally as miserable as Trucy. "Truce, I promise I didn't mean what I said about kicking you out," Phoenix continued, crouching down to sit on his heels and looking up at his daughter, taking one of her hands in his. "I'd never leave my little girl out on the streets alone."

Trucy stared back at him, her free hand fiddling with the pin holding her cape on. "And I'm sorry I said that stuff about my other daddy," she quietly replied, blinking as the tears began to roll down her cheeks. "A-and that I wouldn't come home... I-I didn't mean it!" She jumped forward to again pull Phoenix into a hug, and he returned it with a sad smile. "I don't hate you, Daddy."

Phoenix softly chuckled, holding Trucy tighter. "No amount of disagreements could make me stop loving you."

Watching the pair from near the back door, Apollo found he couldn't help but feel a little bitter. 'None of this would have happened if you weren't so freakin' over-protective, DAD.' Not wanting to ruin the moment, or start a fight with Phoenix, he stayed silent and made sure to keep a neutral expression on his face. 'If all goes well, this whole issue will be resolved by this time next week anyway. As long as Dad doesn't actually lose it once I pull this off.'

Phoenix and Trucy finally broke their hug with relieved smiles, Phoenix getting back to his feet. "Aderyn told me you went ahead with your act," he said, looking between Trucy and Apollo as the latter slowly approached. "How'd it go?"

"Okay," Trucy replied with a shrug, then grinned at Apollo. "Polly and Mister Hat did all the talking for me."

Apollo half-smiled. "It was Trucy's call to go on-stage," he explained, then shrugged. "It wasn't our best show, but we entertained the audience and that's all we ever really aim to do."

Phoenix nodded. "I'm glad everything turned out," he said, and looked to Apollo with a tired smile. "I guess we'll see you tomorrow then, Apollo."
"Yeah," Apollo agreed, avoiding Phoenix's gaze by looking to his sister. "Hey Truce, we still on for Thursday?"

Trucy had to think a moment before she remembered what Apollo was talking about, and grinned widely. "Yeah! Definitely!"

Phoenix looked confused, looking between the pair. "Thursday...?"

"The public holiday?" Apollo explained, trying not to look nervous or possibly trigger one of his father's 'psyche-locks'. "Trucy's coming over to my place for the day."

Not seeming to see anything suspicious, Phoenix smiled. "Ah, okay. Sounds fun." He patted the top of Trucy's hat. "You're probably looking forward to some quality time with your brother outside of your job, huh?"

Trucy giggled, nodding.

Apollo hid a sigh of relief. 'Step one complete...'

_________________________

You're thinking of doing WHAT!? 

You promised you wouldn't tell! .

I'm not going to BREAK that promise! But... seriously!? Behind Papa's back like that!? Is it even LEGAL!? 

YES ITS LEGAL. I looked it up. There's restrictions on minors for everything BUT the ears. She could do it herself if she wanted .

See? I've thought this whole thing out. By the time Dad notices there'll be nothing he can do about it .

Sorry Apollo, but I think you're underestimating Papa's powers of observation. He was a good lawyer for a very good reason.

And he loves to point out he isn't one anymore. Besides it took me pointing it out for him to even notice Trucy wore makeup onstage so I don't think he'll notice this .

Yes, but he IS an unbeaten poker player now, remember?

Fine, go ahead. Just be careful. If I'm right, and Papa notices, it's going to be Trucy who bears the punishment.

Trust me. Dad will never suspect a thing .

February 15, 10:20AM
Apollo and Clay's Apartment
Living Room
Apollo grunted in annoyance as he shuffled the bits and pieces of a spacecraft model kit around the small coffee table, trying to make the small apartment look somewhat tidy. "Seriously Clay, I thought you grew out of these years ago...."

Clay huffed, only barely helping Apollo by moving some of the smaller pieces into a nearby box. "Excuse me, model kits are a very adult hobby," he argued, only to follow it up by childishly sticking his tongue out at his friend.

Apollo rolled his eyes, and decided not to respond.

At that moment, a knock echoed from the front door, and Apollo grinned, dropping what he was doing to race over to the front of the room, where the entrance to their apartment was. Throwing open the door, he greeted the pre-teen beyond with a wide smile. "Trucy!"

"Hi Polly!" Trucy chirped, bouncing into the apartment as Apollo closed the door behind her. Noticing Clay, she gave him a wave. "Hi Clay!"

"Yo," Clay replied, giving the girl a quick salute.

Trucy turned back to Apollo, giving him a wide grin. "So, what are we gonna do today?" she asked. "Did you have something in mind?"

Apollo had to keep himself from snorting in amusement. "You could say that," he said, winking.

Trucy frowned. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Biting his lip to hide a smile, Apollo pulled out his phone to check the time. "If I tell you, it'd ruin the surprise!" he claimed.

Trucy crossed her arms, looking unimpressed. "What are we doing?"

"You'll see," Apollo said, replacing his phone in his bag and quickly checking he had everything he needed. "I promise you'll love it. We probably need to leave about now to get there in time for our appointment, actually." Although Trucy looked sceptical, Apollo opened the front door again, waving in Clay's direction. "We'll see you when we get back, Clay!"

Clay briefly held up a hand in goodbye. "Later," he replied, smiling at Trucy as she sent him a suspicious glare before reluctantly following her brother out the door.

Even though it was a short walk to their destination, Apollo still had to bring up a map on his phone to ensure he was leading his sister in the right direction. Trucy remained wary, watching her brother carefully as he finally put his phone away with a smile, pointing to a shop-front across the road, a large sign above indicating its name was 'Frizz 'N Curlz Hair Salon'. "There it is!" he announced, taking his sister's hand to led her across the quiet road.

Trucy glared, looking between the shop front and Apollo. "That's a hairdresser," she pointed out.

Apollo only grinned, leading her to the door. "We're not here to cut hair, though," he said, pointing to a sign hanging nearby.

Confused, Trucy looked over the indicated sign. As she read the words ('Piercings available,
Apollo grinned proudly, escorting his sister into the small shop. "I thought you might like this surprise!" he joked.

"I'm getting my ears pierced!" Trucy squealed happily, then stopped dead just inside the door, looking worried. "Wow, I'm getting my ears pierced..."

After informing the receptionist they were there for an appointment, Apollo took Trucy to sit down on a nearby sofa. "Are you alright?" he asked.

Trucy nodded, though she still looked worried. "Daddy's gonna notice," she pointed out, then frowned. "Will they even let me get earrings without him here?"

"Course they will," Apollo promised. "I'm a law student, remember? I looked it all up. 'And then had to explain what I found to both Clay and Luke, but that's neither here nor there.' He gave her a reassuring smile. "And don't worry about Dad noticing. I figure, if you get something small, we can cover it with tape and make-up and he won't see a thing." When Trucy only continued to look worried, he gave her a concerned frown. "If you want to back out now, you can. I did kinda spring this on you."

For a moment, Trucy seemed likely to agree, only to then frown and give Apollo a determined stare. "I'm gonna do it," she told him. "I don't care if Daddy doesn't like it. I'm getting earrings."

Apollo smiled. "Then let's do it."

A woman with a ring in one nostril came out and smiled at the pair. "So, which one of you am I mutilating today?"

Trucy looked confused, but Apollo grinned, pointing to his sister. "That'll be Trucy here."

"Trucy, huh?" the woman asked, giving the girl a friendly smile. "We going through your earlobes today?"

Although a little intimidated by the prospect of what was about to happen, Trucy forced a smile and nodded.

"Excellent!" the woman cried, clapping her hands together. "Come through to the back with me, and we'll have this all over with in a jiffy!"

View the Court Record
As she led Trucy and Apollo into the back room, the woman introduced herself as Jade. "Honestly, there was never any other job I was going to go into," she joked as she pulled up a display of small, simple stud earrings, all paired off in their identical colours. "Not with the last name 'Pierce'!"

Trucy picked out a pair she thought was the least obtrusive, and Jade sat her down at what looked like a spare hairdressing table from the front room. After rubbing some kind of liquid on Trucy's ears (she didn't know what it was, but the strong smell reminded her of the Wonder Bar's kitchen, the few times she'd ended up in there), Jade marked with pen where on Trucy's ears the holes would be going. Once placement had been approved, a clamp-like contraption was affixed to Trucy's right earlobe and Jade sat in her rolling stool at the girl's side, her cart of tools right next to her.

"Stay perfectly still," Jade warned Trucy. "Don't move your head until I tell you, okay?"

Trucy almost nodded before remembering the instruction. "Okay," she replied, her voice shaking as she fought to stay calm.

Jade smiled, and Trucy swore she spotted a glimpse of a long, silver object in her hand. "Don't you worry, this won't hurt; You'll just feel a pinching. Stay calm and think about something else for a bit."

"Mmm," Trucy hummed in forced agreement, closing her eyes and trying to think of something, anything, other than her current situation.

"Hey Truce," Trucy heard Apollo say from somewhere to her left, "you'll never guess what happened before my lecture yesterday!"

Trucy frowned, a part of her wondering how he could sound so cheerful at a time like this... but she had to admit she was curious. "What?"

"There was this group of girls sitting in the row in front of me," Apollo began to explain. "They were really excited about this band they were fans of, called 'the Gaviners'."

"That's a weird name," Trucy replied with a frown.

Apollo laughed. "Yeah, that's what I thought! But, you remember Mister Gavin, right? One of Dad's friends?"

Trucy had to think for a moment, and restrained herself from nodding. "Yeah, I remember him. Don't see him so much since we stopped meeting Daddy at his work."

Anything Apollo might have said in reply was cut off as Trucy felt the pressure of the clamp on her right ear fade, although there was a distinct pinching feeling left behind that she definitely didn't want to focus on. "Okay, one ear down!" Jade announced, and Trucy, unwilling to move or open her eyes just yet, heard the woman roll her stool around to Trucy's left, where the girl soon felt the clamp taking hold of her other ear. "You're doing great so far, sweetie," Jade assured her.
"Yeah, like I was saying," Apollo continued, now from Trucy's right, and she wondered if Jade had signalled for him to keep talking. "I thought it was weird this band had a similar name to him, and I remembered he mentioned his brother was a performer, so I thought I'd ask the girls." He paused, sounding amused as he shortly added, "They pretty much confirmed my suspicions! Turns out the Gavinners are the band Mister Gavin's little brother runs!"

Trucy was surprised. "Wow, really?"

"Yup!" Apollo replied with a laugh. "But Mister Gavin also said his brother was a prosecutor, so I asked them about that, and they said something kinda weird."

"Weird how?"

"Turns out Klavier Gavin only ever prosecuted one case," Apollo explained. "They said he quit after to focus on the band."

Trucy thought for a moment. "Didn't Mister Gavin say he was still... being a lawyer?" she asked. "As well as doing his performing stuff?"

There was a pause before Apollo responded. "That's what confused me," he replied, and Trucy realised he must have nodded in the pause. "I've actually read the case-file of the one trial he ran, too. The weirdest thing, though, is-"

"And we're done!" Jade announced, interrupting Apollo's train of thought. "You can open your eyes now, sweetie."

Feeling a wave of mixed trepidation and excitement, Trucy gingerly peeked out of one eye first, then opened the other to join it. At first, she didn't see much out of the ordinary, but quickly noticed the small blue gems of the studs she had chosen winking at her from the centre of her earlobes, which seemed redder than usual but not enough to alarm her. Although she could feel the unusual pinching pressure of the studs inside her ear, she decided it wasn't painful. After a moment of careful observation, she grinned, and looked up at a proud Jade. "It looks great!"

Jade laughed. "It'll look better once they settle in, I promise!" she said, then started putting her equipment away.

Trucy turned to face Apollo, who mirrored her grin as he looked over her new additions. "They look awesome!" he assured her, and Trucy giggled.

"Some things you should know:" Jade interrupted, approaching the pair with a careful frown. "First of all, leave those studs in for six to eight weeks to let the wound heal. Under no circumstances take them out before three weeks; That's just asking for infection."

Trucy nodded, giving Jade a determined frown. "Don't touch 'em for eight weeks, got it!"

"I'd also recommend you keep something regularly in there for six months to a year," Jade added, smiling a little at the girl's serious reply. "Those holes will probably close up otherwise."

"Don't leave 'em empty!" Trucy replied, smiling. "Got it!"

Jade grinned. "Then we're done here," she said, looking to Apollo. "I'll take you up to reception to pay, and you can go enjoy the rest of your day!"

Apollo laughed, watching Trucy admiring her reflection in the mirror. "Oh, we'll definitely do that," he assured her.
Once at reception, Trucy bounded around admiring herself in every reflection she could catch, while Apollo went through the process of paying Jade for her services. She sent Apollo a wink as she clicked away on her computer. "So, you really know Klavier Gavin?"

Apollo shook his head. "Never met him. Our dad's an... acquaintance of his older brother."

Jade looked disappointed. "Aw. That's a shame. It'd be brilliant to meet the Klavier Gavin." She grinned. "Ah well. I'll always enjoy their music!"

Apollo sighed. 'I've really got to look this guy up.'

[IMAGE "IMG2938" SENT]
Guess who's proud of her new jewellery? :D

Awesome! Tell Trucy it looks great!
You're sure Papa won't notice that?

NO HE WONT, STOP ASKING THAT
Trucy bounced around the room a million times and said thx btw

Well, I guess Papa can't complain now they're in. Good luck hiding them.

No prob. As long as we watch what we say, Dad won't suspect a thing

I hope you're right, Apollo. For Trucy's sake, at the very least.

February 15, 3:47PM
Apollo and Clay's Apartment
Bathroom

"Wow, are you guys sure you know what you're doing?" Clay asked, arms crossed as he leaned against the bathroom doorway, watching Apollo and Trucy as they stood by the sink, where the room's mirror hung. "It looks terrible."

Apollo sent his friend a glare, trying to apply make-up to Trucy's left ear so it didn't look quite so red (although it had calmed down since the piercing that morning). "If you've got several years worth of experience with this that we somehow don't know about," he said, a clear sarcastic tone to his voice, "then please feel free to speak up."

"We're doing our best!" Trucy added, fiddling with the tape covering the stud on her other ear. "We don't want Daddy to notice them!"

"Careful with that!" Apollo cried, motioning for Trucy to put both her hands down. "You'll pull it off!"

Clay grinned. "Y'know, before today, you Wrights never came across as the 'rebel' types. I'm impressed!"
Trucy pouted, clutching her hands tightly to keep from fiddling with Apollo's work. "Well, if Daddy had let me get earrings, Polly wouldn't have had to help me!"

Apollo snorted. "C'mon Truce, you would've done this on your own eventually anyway."

"I guess," Trucy agreed, shrugging. "I mean, I wouldn't have thought of it so quick on my own. I didn't even know I could just walk into a store and get my ears pierced without Daddy there!"

"I'm sure some places would've wanted your dad there," Clay assured her, still smiling in amusement. "Besides, you couldn't try and hide it from him without Apollo here!"


Apollo blushed, and pretended he hadn't heard her. "Okay, I think I've done all I can for that ear," he said, moving around to Trucy's other side, where he quickly moved her hair aside to get to work on her right.

Trucy stared into the mirror, studying the disguise on her left ear. After a moment, she smiled. "It looks good! I don't think you can tell at all there's an earring there!"

Clay looked more sceptical, rubbing his chin. "I dunno, it looks really lumpy. I don't think that's gonna slip by Mister Wright, especially if he sees her from the back."

"There's nothing I can do for the size of the studs," Apollo pointed out, shooting Clay a quick glare. "Dad doesn't have any reason to look at her ears anyway; He won't notice."

"You're sure about that?" Clay pushed.

"Yes," Apollo insisted with a frustrated sigh. "Honestly, you're as bad as Luke. Trust me, Dad won't see a thing."

View the Court Record
Being well-trained in the art of spotting lies, it wasn't in Apollo or Trucy's nature to themselves distort the truth... off-stage, anyway. Being consummate actors, they didn't think it would be too hard a task, even if it was their father they were lying to. As long as they made sure not to *directly* lie or leave a question unanswered, Apollo insisted, Phoenix wouldn't see a single Psyche-Lock and would never have any reason to suspect there was anything going on.

That didn't stop them being nervous as they walked in the Agency's front door.

"Is that you, Trucy?" Phoenix called from the next room as the door closed behind them. "Is Apollo with you?"

The siblings gave each other a determined nod, then planted wide smiles on their faces as they strode through into the office, Trucy gleefully leading the way. "We're both here!" she announced, staying by the door as she noticed Phoenix sat behind the desk, giving him a wave. "We had lots of fun with Clay!" she boasted.

Apollo nodded in agreement, grinning at their father. "It's nice to spend some time together outside the Wonder Bar for once!"

Phoenix frowned as he looked between the two, only to quickly focus on Trucy. "Is there something wrong with your ears, Trucy?"

It took the pair a few moments to react, their smiling expressions unchanged. "Why would there be?" Trucy asked.

Apollo forced a laugh that he hoped sounded carefree. "I didn't let Trucy out of my sight all day; She didn't get into any trouble, Dad!"

Phoenix's frown deepened, and he stood from his chair. "I'd ask what the two of you are hiding, but from the available evidence, I think I can guess."

'Dammit, Luke!' Apollo mentally cried, keeping the calm smile on his face. 'Of all the times you couldn't be wrong!'

Trucy's smile started to falter, and she drew closer to Apollo, reaching for his hand. "G-guess what, Daddy?" As her hand found Apollo's, they gripped each other tightly, seeking and offering comfort as Apollo's plan fell apart around them.

Phoenix stepped out from behind his desk, gesturing to Trucy. "I suppose you two have been planning this all week, then?"

Apollo felt his sister's grip on his hand tighten, and he dropped any pretence of a smile, stepping in front of the twelve-year-old protectively. "Trucy didn't know anything about it. I surprised her."

"And how did you do it, huh?" Phoenix continued, stepping towards the pair with a glare. "Isn't
there a law against body piercings without the presence of a parent?"

Apollo almost rolled his eyes. "It's friggin' legal to do the ears!" he almost shouted in frustration. "I'm a law student, I looked it up!" He looked back to Trucy with a sigh. "Why is that always the first question anyone asks!?" Without waiting for a reply, he turned back to Phoenix, who seemed vaguely surprised by the information. "If Trucy had the money on hand, she could have done this on her own, entirely legally. I just sped the process up."

Phoenix stared back at Apollo for several moments, then looked to Trucy with a stern frown. "Trucy, you're grounded."

"What!?" Trucy cried. "Why!?"

"Why do you think?" Phoenix replied, crossing his arms. "I told you 'no', and you just ignored me and went ahead anyway." He pointed at her ears with a glare. "You can remove those right now."

Trucy blinked, surprised, and her free hand flew to one of her ears. "But I can't!"

"You are perfectly capable of-

"No," Apollo interrupted, "she really can't." As Phoenix's questioning glare turned to him, he explained, "The woman who did it said taking out the studs in the first three weeks was inviting infection. Ideally, she shouldn't touch them for eight weeks, to let the wound heal."

Phoenix stared for a few moments, then sighed and returned his stern stare to Trucy. "In that case, you are grounded for as long as those studs stay in," he decided.

"What!?" Trucy cried.

"Once these eight weeks are up," Phoenix continued, "you are removing them."

"No!" Trucy shouted, her face turning red as she started to mirror Phoenix's anger but none of his calm. "I've wanted earrings for years! I'm not taking them out!"

"Too bad," Phoenix replied. "They are coming out, young lady."

"No, they're not!" Trucy shot back, letting go of Apollo's hand as she screamed at their father. "And if you make me take them out, I'll... I'll just get them re-done!"

"No, you will not."

"Yes, I will!"

Phoenix glared at Trucy for a few moments before sighing, seeming to realise she was determined to stand her ground on that point no matter the punishment. "Fine," he agreed.

Apollo blinked in surprise, daring to hope. 'Did we... finally convince him?'

"You can keep one."

Apollo's face fell. 'No, of course we didn't."

"One!?" Trucy cried in disbelief. "You can't have one earring!"

"Yes, you can," Phoenix replied, looking remarkably calm. "As I understand it, having only one can be somewhat fashionable."
"But they sell earrings in pairs!" Trucy pointed out. "Every time I found something pretty to wear, I'd be wasting money on an extra one I can't use!"

"You should have thought of that before you pierced your ears without permission," Phoenix insisted, although Apollo thought it was ludicrous to genuinely expect her to have foreseen the direction of this conversation. "I'm already being very generous allowing you to keep the one, anyway. You either agree to that, or they both come out." He stared at Trucy expectantly. "Which will you go for?"

Apollo watched Trucy as she continued glaring at Phoenix, thinking his ultimatum over. Finally, she stood on her tiptoes, trying to look more aggressive to their father. "Fine!" she cried, and pointed to her right ear, mostly hidden behind her hair. "I'll take out this one! You can barely see it anyway!"

With that, she pushed past Phoenix and stormed out towards the kitchen. A moment later, her angry footsteps could be heard thumping up the stairs towards her room.

Phoenix's eyes were closed in the aftermath of the argument. Apollo, recognising this was the ideal time for him to leave, stepped back towards the door to reception, only to be halted by a word from Phoenix: "Apollo."

The nineteen-year-old paused, turning back towards his father. "Dad."

Opening his eyes, Phoenix looked up at Apollo with a stern, though tired, stare. "I recognise you aren't living under my roof anymore and there's nothing I can do to punish you... but I'm very upset and disappointed that you deliberately disobeyed me on your sister's behalf."

Apollo returned the even stare. "I know. To be perfectly honest, I thought you forbidding her from things as small as going to sleepovers, wearing make-up, and getting her ears pierced was..." he paused to find a word that wouldn't offend his father, "well, ridiculous. Getting earrings, wearing bare shoulders under her freaking cape? She just wants to be grown-up. Fighting her on little steps like that won't stop her, it'll just make her fight harder."

Phoenix sighed and shook his head. "No. You don't even understand what-"

"Yes, I do," Apollo interrupted, forcing himself to stay calm as he crossed his arms. "If you let her do these things, she's not going to get kidnapped, or starved for days, or frozen half to death. No-one's going to try and kill her, let alone succeed."

Phoenix stared at Apollo in surprise. "W-why would she be in danger of...?"

"That's why you're so overprotective of her, isn't it?" Apollo asked. "All those things happened to Maya, before you lost your badge. Trucy's the most like her, so you think the same things might happen, but they won't."

"O-of course they won't," Phoenix insisted, but his sudden avoidance of Apollo's eyes revealed the teen's point was hitting too close for comfort. "I don't even know how you got to that conclusion..."

"You were never like this with me or Luke," Apollo pointed out, relaxing a little as he realised Phoenix's anger was long gone. "We never got picked up from school every day, or forbidden from staying away from home overnight. We never had to regularly check in with you if we were out with Clay. You were all supportive of Luke going to college in London, and we don't see him much now, outside summer. You... didn't object to me moving out, either." He paused. "You can say it's because she's the youngest, but she's already almost Luke's age when we all met, and I'm not seeing you giving her the same kind of freedoms he had then."
Phoenix didn't reply, staring off to the side and frowning in worry.

His piece said, Apollo decided now was the time to go. "Just... think about it, okay? I'll see you later, Dad." Without another word, he turned and left.

[View the Court Record]
Two of Diamonds

Am I overprotective?
Please don’t be busy right now Maya I need to talk to you

    No no I’m here, tho I might be slow replying .
    What’s that question supposed to mean anyway? .

Exactly what I said. Do you think I’m overprotective with Trucy?

    With Trucy, I guess so?? You don’t exactly let her do anything without permission .
    Even when they were still at school, the boys were pretty much constantly unsupervised as I recall .

I was afraid of that

    Ok what’s going on? What happened? .

Trucy got her ears pierced, Apollo says they went behind my back because I’m overprotective of her

    Huh. Ykno Sis had earrings? I wanted to get some too when I was younger but I always chickened out. Maybe I should try again! .

I think you’re missing the point

    Hmm .

Alright grumpy gills, I think you need a vacation. I expect to see you on my doorstep tmrw morning .

Maya no

    Nick yes! I’ll take the day off, you come up here while Trucys at school :) .

Do I have to?

    You bet you do old man ;) .

:\
Alright fine, I’ll be there tomorrow
Right now I gotta apologize to Trucy tho

    I’ll see you then then! :) .

February 15, 4:26PM
Wright Talent Agency
Trucy’s Room

It had been ten minutes since Trucy slammed the door to her bedroom as she came in. Nine minutes since she had thrown her hat at her desk, kicked off her boots, and pulled open the pin on her cape to let the blue garment fall to the floor. About six since she had finished peeling off the tape on her new earrings, and done her best to start removing the make-up before the discomfort around the studs got to be too much to handle. Four minutes since she had thrown herself on her bed and started hugging
her pillow, using its fluffy bulk to hide her tears.

It had also been about ten seconds since Phoenix started knocking on her door.

"Trucy?" Phoenix gently called from the hallway outside Trucy's door. "I know you're in there. I just want to talk, okay?"

Trucy frowned, looking up from her pillow only to shout "GO AWAY," at the door.

There was a short pause, during which Trucy hoped her father had given up, before the hinges of her door creaked as it was slowly pushed open.

"I said GO AWAY," Trucy shouted again, burying her face back in the pillow the moment her words were out of her mouth. "I don't want to talk to you!" she added, though the message was muffled through her pillow.

A few seconds pause, then the dull thuds of footsteps approached across her carpet, and she felt the heavy weight of her father settling on the edge of her bed, near her feet. "I wanted to apologise. For earlier."

Trucy glared into her pillow. She decided not to reply, and just wait for Phoenix to leave.

"I'm not going to change my mind on anything," Phoenix continued, giving her a warning. "I marked eight weeks from now on the calendar, and I'll expect you to remove one of those permanently then."

Hugging her pillow tighter, Trucy looked up only to direct her glare at her father. "Then you aren't really sorry! Not if you're still grounding me and making me lose one!"

Phoenix, who had been watching her in concern, sighed, giving her a stern look. "You went against my word and will be punished for that," he said. "Maybe if you'd waited a few more years, I would have let you keep both, but I'm not backing down on the compromise we made."

Trucy glared at Phoenix a moment before burying her face back in her pillow.

Phoenix sighed, and Trucy felt him adjusting his position on the bed. "I didn't mean to come off so harsh, okay? I had a talk with Apollo before he left, and... and I realise I've been restricting you a lot more than I probably should be."

Confused, Trucy slowly lifted her head, watching her father out of the corner of her eyes. He seemed to be leaning forward, elbows on his knees and staring at the floor. It didn't look like he'd noticed her moving.

"I'm not ungrounding you, or letting you keep both earrings, but I can promise, from now on, to try and be more open with what you want to do," Phoenix said, looking almost painstaking about the words coming out of his mouth. "Things like... going to sleepovers, wearing make-up off-stage... Little things like that."

At first, Trucy couldn't believe her ears. He was... relaxing some of his rules? Slowly, she pushed herself into a sitting position, watching Phoenix as he looked up to meet her eyes. They stared at each other in silence for a few moments before Trucy shuffled across to Phoenix's side, dangling her socked feet over the edge of the bed and hugging her father tightly. "I forgive you, Daddy," she said. "I'm sorry for disobeying you." She paused a second or two, then added, "But I don't regret it."

Phoenix chuckled, wrapping his arms around her to return the hug. "That's okay," he assured her. "I
I repeat: Uh-oh.

Calm down, its nothing as bad as... what happened yesterday. I've got what you could call another surprise for Trucy, and theres no way Dad can complain about this one.

I repeat: Uh-oh.

... I'm beginning to wonder why I miss you when you're away.

:(
Trucy was applying make-up when the door to their dressing room opened, admitting her somewhat frazzled-looking older brother. She turned to face him with a glare, eyeliner only half-applied. "What took you so long!?” she demanded.

Apollo shrugged, giving his sister a smile as he moved to their props arranged nearby.

"We're supposed to arrive early!” Trucy reminded him. "To make sure we-!” She cut herself off as she watched Apollo going over their props, noticing something off with the right side of his face. Her anger quickly faded as she gasped in surprise. "P-Polly... did you...?”

Grinning, Apollo looked up at his sister. "Yep," he confirmed, and pointed to the small red stud in his right earlobe. "Just this ear, though."

Trucy stared in confusion. "Why'd you do that?” she asked.

Apollo shrugged, walking over to sit in the chair opposite his sister. "Well, we're supposed to be a pair, aren't we? It would look weird if you had a single earring and I didn't." He chuckled. "Since you're keeping your left ear, I thought I'd do the right, so we mirror. Oh, and it means your 'pairs' of earrings never go to waste, since I can always take the extra."

Trucy held a gloved hand to her mouth, eyes wide and shining in amazement. "Polly...

"And, before I forget," Apollo added, reaching into his bag with one gloved hand, "there was something I needed to return to you." He held out his hand, showing Trucy the same pair of diamond-shaped earrings she had shown off the previous week. With his other hand, he picked one of the two up and held it out to her with a grin. "One for you, one for me. We can start wearing them once it's safe to remove our studs."

Trucy slowly smiled, her eyes tearing up. Without a word, she leapt across the small space between them and hugged Apollo tightly around the neck. "Thank you," she whispered.

Apollo grinned, hugging his sister back. "No problem," he assured her.

After a long moment, Trucy sniffed and moved back from her brother, reaching for the tissues to dab at her face. "Oh great, now I have to redo my make-up!” she cried, still smiling widely.

Laughing, Apollo nodded in agreement. "Let's get ready for our show!"
The conversation had fallen into silence as the minutes ticked ever closer to the required ringing of the ten o'clock bell. Despite Iris' frequent insistences she had to leave, and Phoenix's own need to attend to, neither had yet to move.

"Um, Mister Wright?"

Phoenix looked up from his musings, arms still wrapped tightly around himself in an effort to keep warm in the cold night. "Yes?"

Iris' hands flew up to the purple orb attached to the ties on her hood. "If it's alright with you," she said, "I would like you to have this." In one smooth motion, she had undone the pink straps and pulled the hood off her head, revealing a crown of long hair that Phoenix was surprised to see was black and not red. A concerned frown on her face, Iris pushed the white fabric into Phoenix's hands. Phoenix shook his head, pushing the hood away. "But this is yours!" he insisted. 

'It isn't this some sacred part of your outfit!? Surely it at least helps keep you warm in the snow!'

"It has the power to protect you from evil spirits," Iris explained, still pushing the hood on Phoenix with a worried look. "I pray for your safety on this dark, cold night!" He stared back at her for a moment, then reluctantly accepted it, and Iris smiled, despite her concerned eyes. Clutching her hands to her chest, she slowly backed away, towards where Phoenix supposed the temple bell was. "I'm sorry, but I must bid you goodnight." She turned with one swift motion, attempting to disappear into the dark.

Phoenix blinked, then looked up at Iris' retreating back with wide eyes. "Wait a minute, Sister Iris!"

The nun paused in her rush, slowly turning her head to show Phoenix only the side of her face. "Y-yes?"

The lawyer took a moment to gather his thoughts. "Just now... you called me 'Mister Wright'," he pointed out, eyebrow raised in thought. "How'd you know my name? I never introduced myself to you."

Iris' eyes widened, and she turned to face Phoenix fully, looking more scared than ever. "Th-that's..."

"Sister Iris," Phoenix sighed, "please, tell me the truth." He took a step towards the scared woman, gesturing between them. "You and I... have we ever met before?"

Iris stared back at him for a moment, then looked away. The instant she did, Phoenix heard the rattling of chains as the images of Psyche-Locks sprung into existence before his eyes, the five crimson illusions bouncing as they clung to the woman's spiritual cage.
Phoenix was almost too shocked to respond for a moment, a part of him wondering if, as a Kurain nun, she even knew about the locks. "I-Iris..."

"O-oh!" Iris seemed to jump, pulling a small watch out of her robes, although she barely glanced at it. "I-it's almost ten!" As the Psyche-Locks faded away around her, she gave Phoenix a look somewhere between apologetic and relieved. "Perhaps we can speak again," she offered, "tomorrow." Before Phoenix could even begin to reply, she had spun around and dashed off into the darkness.

Phoenix stared after her for only a moment before shaking his head, pulling his white coat tighter around his suit, and wandering off to find the bathroom.

'At least there's one thing I learned for sure,' he comforted himself, running his fingers through the soft fabric of the hood one last time before secreting it away in a pocket of his suit jacket. 'She does know me. I'll have to take her up on her offer to talk... tomorrow.'

February 7, 11:06PM
Hazakura Temple
Courtyard

Phoenix had been in his room when he heard the terrified scream from the courtyard. Too hurried to throw on his jacket or coat, he endured the cold biting through his thin shirt as he raced down the hallways and out into the sheltered square. The first thing to catch his attention was a dark-robed figure lying on the ground below the statue of the throned Ami Fey, a sharply-spiked sword in the statue's hand sticking in the woman's back, her long hair spilling out over the snow. "M-Ms Deauxnim!" he shouted, running towards the body, only to trip a second later as his foot collided with something soft lying on the ground, throwing Phoenix to the cold snow.

"Hey!" came an indignant shout from somewhere in the vicinity of Phoenix's shoes. "Don't step on my tummy like that!"

Dragging himself to his feet, Phoenix looked back with surprise to see Sister Bikini sitting up in the dirt, brushing snow off her nun's robes as she also struggled to stand. "Wh-what are you doing lying there in the snow!?!" he demanded.

"I was passed out!" Bikini shouted back with a frown. "What do you think!?"

Phoenix blinked as he connected dots in his head. "So that blood-curdling scream was you...?"

"F-forget about that!" Bikini snapped, waving her hands at Phoenix as though to shoo him out of the courtyard. "Hurry up and call the police!"

Looking around in confusion, Phoenix stepped back a little, away from her furious waving. "Is there even a phone in the Main Hall?"

The nun rolled her eyes. "No, but we still get reception up here in the mountains! You must have a cell phone on you, right?!"

Phoenix froze (almost literally, considering how cold he was). "I, um," he mumbled, turning red as much with embarrassment as from frostbite. "I didn't bring it with me-"

"Oh, you're useless!" Bikini cried, throwing up her hands and turning away in disbelief. "I mean,
even *Iris* has a cell phone..." She shook her head, looking determined as she spun back to face him. "We've got no choice! You'll have to use the public phone by Dusky Bridge! Hurry, hurry, hurry!" She resumed her waving, chasing Phoenix out of the courtyard. "Run as fast as you can!"

"Y-yes, ma'am!" Phoenix replied, and ran from the courtyard as fast as his legs could carry him. Bikini shouted something after him, but he was already too far away to make out the words.

February 7, 11:18PM
Dusky Bridge

Phoenix felt like his legs were killing him by the time he finally neared the end of the road. His breath froze into clouds around his face, the snow crunching under his feet as he pushed through to his destination. 'At least I'm not cold anymore,' he reasoned, rounding the last copse of trees. 'Once I tell the police what happened to Ms Deauxnim, I should go tell Maya too. She's just across the... bridge!?'

Phoenix's run came to a sudden halt. Up ahead, he could see the old bridge suspended over Eagle River, right next to the public phone he had been aiming for. The snow piled all around was glowing red in the light, and the heat of the crackling fire could be felt even from the other side of the makeshift parking lot. The other side of the ravine, where the Inner Temple lay, was cloaked in an inscrutable darkness.

Dusky Bridge was alight.

*The nearby firepit burned hot on his face, even from a fair distance away. Above, he could hear the ominous clanking of the cage, beginning to close around its captive.*

"Maya!"

Although he struggled, he couldn't pull more than an arm free from the pile of heavily armoured knights on top of him, pinning him to the ground.

"Help me, Nick!"

With a snap, the final gates closed around Maya's face, and the cage began to fall with a clanking of chains.

"Stop! You've got to stop!"

*The cage dropped like a stone into the fire pit, which seemed to explode on impact, sending a shower of bright sparks all over.*

"Mayaaaaa!"

*When the cage rose back out of the flames, the gates had opened, and Maya was gone.*

Phoenix wasn't sure if his heavy breathing was from exhaustion or panic, his weak legs from the long run or the reminder of Maya's last brush with death. He thought he felt dizzy, so he shook his
head firmly to ground himself in the present. 'Maya... gotta check she's alright! A-and call the police!'

He had taken only a few wobbly steps forward before a voice suddenly rang out of the shadows to his right: "What are you doing here?"

"ARGH!" Phoenix couldn't resist a brief shout of panicked surprise, almost falling over as he spun around to see Larry sitting on a tree log, a sketchbook sitting in his lap.

Larry stood, leaving the book on the log and watching his friend with confusion. "Huh? What is it? Is it me?"

Phoenix shook his head, struggling to control his breathing. "D-don't scare me like that, Larry!" he snapped at his friend. "I almost had a heart attack!" 'In addition to the one I had when I saw the bridge...'

Larry pouted, crossing his arms. "My name isn't Larry!" he protested. "It's Laurice!"

Resisting the urge to roll his eyes, Phoenix waved his friend off, hurrying towards the bridge. "Larry, hurry up and call the police!" he ordered. "I'm going to the Inner Temple!"

"D-don't be stupid!" Larry shot back, running after Phoenix and grabbing his arm to keep him from walking straight out over the ravine. "The bridge is nothing but a burning wreck right now!"

Phoenix glared at Larry, shaking his arm free. "Listen to me!" he cried, perhaps more harshly than he should have. "There's been a murder! Here! At Hazakura Temple!"

Larry gasped, almost jumping back in disbelief. "Wha-what!?"

"The murderer might have fled across the bridge!" Phoenix continued, turning to continue his trek despite the building pain in his legs. "I have to make sure Maya is safe!" 'I already failed her once... I'm not doing that again!'

Larry made another grab for Phoenix's arm, terrified eyes pleading silently with his friend. "B-but...!"

"Please, call the police!" Phoenix repeated, shaking Larry off his arm for a second time. "I've got to go!" He started to run for the bridge, only for Larry to follow, throwing himself in front of Phoenix with arms held wide. Before Larry could muscle up the words to speak, Phoenix had tightened his hands into fists, glaring at the would-be artist for daring to stand in his path. "Get outta my way, Larry!"

"I-it's too dangerous!" Larry pleaded, but Phoenix ignored him, shoving his friend to one side and making a break for the bridge. "Nick, w-wait!"

'The last time there was a fire between me and Maya, I didn't, couldn't, do anything to save her...'

'I'll die before I let that happen a second time.'

View the Court Record
"Is Polly here yet?"

Phoenix looked up from his desk with a smile as Trucy appeared in the doorway from the kitchen, still dressed in her school uniform. One hand was fiddling with her right ear, hidden under her hair. "Not yet," he told her.

Trucy gave a dramatic sigh and plodded into the room, throwing herself facedown on the nearest of the twin red sofas. "I wish he'd hurry up!" she cried, her voice muffled by the leather seat. "I wanna try out our new earrings already!"

Phoenix grinned in restrained laughter, placing a hand against his mouth as he returned to his work.

Luke, sitting on the other sofa with his notebook and a pen in hand, smiled at his sister. "Well, your grounding ends today, doesn't it?" he asked. "You could always go meet him."

Trucy sighed, then lifted her head to stare across at Luke. "Yeah, but what if he's still on the bus?" she complained. "I'd just be waiting at the bus-stop then! And that could be for hours!"

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "I don't think he'll take quite that long, Truce."

Luke gave her a sympathetic look as Trucy flopped back down on the sofa. "I'm sure he'll be here any minute now," he assured her.

"He better," Trucy mumbled darkly into the red leather.

Today marked exactly eight weeks since Trucy had disobeyed Phoenix's orders and had her ears pierced, and she had arranged for Apollo to come over after school to help remove her right stud and try out various earrings she had bought for them while out grocery shopping with their father (Although she had still been grounded, he had allowed her to leave the apartment for things other than school or work if he was accompanying her). It seemed she was trying to make a big ceremony of the end of her grounding, considering how dramatic she had been about it since waking up that morning, demanding that Phoenix give her an exact time the grounding was lifted (he decided on the moment her school day ended), and telling Luke he had to be there to see when she and Apollo first wore the newest updates to their magician's outfits... even though Trucy had yet to change into hers.

As if on cue, there was a knock at the front door, which promptly creaked open, almost hesitantly. Trucy shot Luke a grin, then rolled off the sofa, jumped to her feet and bounded across into reception, shouting, "Polly! What took you so-? Huh?" Her run into reception paused just inside the door, as she caught sight of someone who was definitely not Apollo carefully closing their front door; A woman with long dark hair, wearing purple-pink robes very similar to Maya's and Pearl's, stood with her hands on the edge of the door, staring at Trucy with wide eyes. At first, Trucy was thrown off by their visitor being someone other than Apollo, but she quickly recovered as she realised the woman must instead be a client. Grinning widely, she ran to the woman's side, taking one of her hands and shaking it enthusiastically. "Hi there! Welcome to the Wright Talent Agency! Come in, come in!"
The woman was reluctant to follow Trucy, but seemed to lack the nerve to pull her hand out of the girl's grip. "I-I'm sorry, I think I have the wrong-"

"Who is it, Trucy?" Phoenix called from the office.

The woman froze at the sound of Phoenix's voice, even resisting Trucy pulling at her arm for a moment.

"It's a client, Daddy!" Trucy called back, dragging the reluctant woman through into the office. "See?"

As Phoenix caught sight of said 'client', his eyes widened and he shot out of his seat into a standing position. As she similarly spotted him, the woman blushed and looked away, one hand flying to the purple magatama around her neck.

Not seeming to notice the silent exchange, Luke tipped his hat to the newcomer as he got to his feet. "Hello there!" he called in greeting, giving her a friendly smile. "And how are you this afternoon, ma'am?"

"What were you needing today?" Trucy continued, bouncing on her heels as she looked up at the short woman, only half a head taller than the twelve-year-old. "Musician? Magician? We have our violinist in town until the end of next week!"

Luke giggled, waving. "That's me!"


"You know her, Papa?" Luke realised.

Phoenix stared at the woman for a moment more, the newcomer still避免ing his gaze by staring at the floor, her hand still fiddling with the magatama. "I do, yes," he answered, looking between his children as he continued, "Actually, could the two of you leave us alone for a few minutes, please?"


Trucy looked between Phoenix and the woman for a few moments, then sighed and dashed off after her brother without a word.

Luke closed the door gently behind him, leaving Phoenix and his guest alone in the office. They stared at each other awkwardly for several moments before Phoenix again cleared his throat. "So, Iris," he said, "what brings you here?"

Iris took a few moments to answer, pulling a few stray strands of hair behind her ear. "Mystic Maya suggested I should visit," she admitted. "She and Pearl have been telling me to since I got out of jail, to be honest."

Phoenix nodded in thought, recalling the too-few times he had visited Iris between her conviction and his disbarment. Her location in jail had made her the easiest of his friends to completely cut himself off from. "That was a few years ago, wasn't it?"

"Mm-hm," Iris agreed, staring at the floor with a sad look. "They told me you weren't a lawyer
anymore. That must have been awful.”

Phoenix idly reached up to rub at the back of his head, and, encountering the fabric of his cyan beanie, decided to pull it off, holding the coarse material tightly in his hands. "I got through okay," he said. "I've got more to live for than just my badge."

Iris turned her gaze to the door leading to the kitchen. "The little one called you 'Daddy'," she pointed out, looking up at Phoenix. "That young man, he was also calling you 'Papa'."

Smiling proudly, Phoenix nodded. "My kids," he explained. "Two of them, anyway." He thought a moment, realising something as he saw Iris' confused face. "Maya and Pearls didn't tell you about them?"

Iris shook her head, still confused. "They... look a bit old to be yours," she admitted. "And I don't remember you having a family when last we met."

"Unless you count Maya and Pearls, I didn't, really," Phoenix replied with a shrug, shoving his beanie in his hoodie pocket. "No, I... adopted my kids, some time after I lost my badge." He frowned in thought, staring off to one side. "Come to think of it, it's almost exactly half a decade since that happened. How time flies."

The pair stood in silence for a few more moments. "Fee-, um, Phoenix?" Iris eventually spoke up.

Phoenix looked up. "Hm?"

"The reason I came today," Iris nervously explained, staring at the floor as her hand continued to play with her magatama, "was because I-"

The front door swung open with a loud creak, cutting Iris off. "Dad! Truce! Luke!" a voice called from reception. "I finally made it!"

Apollo laughed as he entered the office, spinning his hat in his hands. "Traffic, mainly!" he explained, only to pause as he noticed Iris stood by the desk, Phoenix's hand still gripping her upper arm. "You have a visitor?" he asked in surprise.

Phoenix half-smiled, glancing between the equally confused Iris and Apollo. Looking at Iris, he gestured to his son. "This is my eldest, Apollo," he explained, then looked to Apollo, dropping his hand from Iris' arm. "Apollo... this is Iris."

"Nice to meet-," Apollo began to say, only for the name to suddenly click in his head as he gave Iris a shocked look. "Wait, you're that Iris!? Dad's ex-girlfriend Iris!?"

Iris blushed, looking away again.

"Apollo here's an avid law student," Phoenix explained. "He was in the audience for your trial."

Apollo shrugged, scoffing as he crossed his arms (being careful with the hat in his hand). "Not that I understood any of it at the time," he pointed out. "The first day I was just disappointed the famous Phoenix Wright wasn't there, the second... Well, I gave up trying to work out what was going on around the time the exorcism happened." He rolled his eyes.

At that, Iris smiled and let out a small giggle. "Yes, my sister was always very dramatic," she said,
seeming to finally relax. "She probably could have been a brilliant actress, if she hadn't wanted to study literature instead."

Phoenix chuckled, and turned to Apollo. "Your siblings are probably upstairs. Trucy was waiting for you."

Apollo nodded with a fond roll of his eyes. "Yeah, she's been texting me madly all week to make sure I'd be here," he said, uncrossing his arms and holding his hat tight. "I'd better go put her out of her misery." He gave Iris a nod. "It was nice to meet you, Iris." As Iris smiled in response, Apollo left the room, closing the door again behind him.

"He's a pleasant young man," Iris told Phoenix. "He must set a good example for the younger ones."

Phoenix snorted in laughter. "Hmm, some of the time," he said, trying to hide his grin as he remembered what today was the eight-week anniversary of. "Mostly the example-setting one is Luke, though." He watched Iris for a moment as she looked vaguely confused. "You'd probably understand what I mean if you got to know them," he suggested.

"Oh, no," Iris insisted, shaking her head. "I don't want to intrude... especially not if the younger ones don't yet know about me, and my sister."

Phoenix grinned. "Well, Pearls is your half-sister. Does she count?"

Iris shook her head, looking concerned. "You know what I mean, Feenie. Explaining Dahlia to them... is not something I was expecting to do. I'm not prepared for it." She paused, then looked up at him with a hopeful smile. "Maybe another time?"

Chuckling, Phoenix nodded. "Sounds good. Apollo and I can explain the whole 'Dahlia' thing to them in the meantime, if you want."

Iris nodded, taking a few steps towards the door. "I'd like that," she replied, then paused and looked back at Phoenix. "By the way, Pearl told me about your relationship with Mystic Maya."

Phoenix blushed, looking away as he rubbed at the back of his head. "Ah... she did, did she?"

Iris giggled. "I'm glad to hear you're both happy," she said. "You certainly deserve to be. And..." She paused again, her hand flying once more to her magatama. "I'm... glad we can be friends."

Phoenix was too surprised for a moment to respond, then he smiled at Iris. "So am I."
THE ADVENTURE OF THE CURIOUS VILLAGE 4/June/24

We were a long way from London when the Professor finally handed me the letter that had led us on our latest investigation. It was simple enough; A rich baron had recently died, and his inheritance was left to the first that could find it... a contest, if you will. The baron's wife, a Lady Dahlia, wrote to the Professor's assistance, and thus we found ourselves speeding down the quiet, country road to the tiny village listed on a map included with the letter. Little did we know that the things we saw that day in the village became a secret we would have to keep from everyone for the rest of our lives...

I looked up from the letter in my hands. "But Professor, why are we going to solve an inheritance dispute?"

At my side, in the driver's seat of his beloved car, my mentor the Professor smiled. "Now now, do you really think I'd take on a request as ordinary as that? No, this is an altogether unique situation, and it has piqued my intellectual curiosity! But I suppose I should explain the case before we arrive at our destination: Two months ago, Baron Augustus Reinhold passed away. Shortly after his death, his will was disclosed; The contents of it were fascinating, to say the least. 'The Reinhold family treasure, the Golden Apple, is hidden somewhere within this village. To whomever successfully locates this treasure, I offer the whole of my estate.' Naturally, those who attended the reading of the will immediately set out in search of the treasure, but in the end, everybody came back empty-handed. It turns out that no-one had even heard of this Golden Apple until its mention in the will."

I was impressed. "Wow... that's some puzzle, alright."

"Quite. Augustus Reinhold was such a perplexing individual. I wish I could have met him before he died."

I smiled as I folded up the letter. "By the way, just what is this Golden Apple? Do we know?"

"In short, no: It's as much a part of the mystery as where it's hidden." He shook his head. "I can't shake the feeling that this is linked to some larger mystery... something huge."

At that, I began to get excited. "Is that your famous intuition again, Professor?"

The Professor didn't reply, smiling to himself. "Our first step is getting to this town. It's called St Mystere; We should be nearing it by now."

And thus, we arrived in St Mystere.
"Luke?"

The eighteen-year-old almost jumped from his staring at the paper in front of him, looking over to the small boy watching him from not far away. "W-what is it, Alfendi?"

Alfendi hugged the plush rabbit in his arms tighter, looking at the pen and paper in Luke's hands. "What are you doing?"

Luke cast a glance to the heavily-scribbled-on piece of paper. "Um... writing, actually."

The four-year-old frowned. "No you weren't," he insisted. "I was watching!"

"W-well," Luke explained with a nervous smile, "you may not have seen me actively writing... I was... re-reading this prologue, o-or first chapter I've written, to work out how to rewrite it and make it better." He turned his attention to the words with a frown. "It's just written down almost exactly how I tell the story aloud at the moment. I had no idea I'd have to do so much rewriting once I started adapting it for a potential book..."

Alfendi screwed up his nose dismissively of Luke's excuse.

Luke sighed, placing the paper down on the Laytons' coffee table in front of him. "Forget about me," he said, turning to the boy with a forced smile. "What are you doing, Alfendi?"

Grinning, Alfendi held up the plush rabbit in his arms to show to Luke. "I'm playing fireman!" he announced.

"That sounds fun!" Luke replied. "You're saving your toys from a fire, huh?"

Alfendi shook his head, hugging his rabbit tightly around the neck as he continued to brightly grin. "They've already died from the smoke. I'm getting their bodies!"

Luke froze, unsure how to respond at first. "That's... very realistic of you, I suppose."

"I'm gonna be a fireman when I grow up!" Alfendi boasted. "Papa says you have to practise something a lot to be good enough to get money for it!" He then turned and dashed back out of the room, dragging his toy rabbit by the paw as he went.

Sighing, Luke leaned back on the sofa. 'At least I should be thankful that's the worst he throws at me?' Not that he would ever regret offering to babysit Alfendi in the gaps left by Flora and the Professor's busy schedules, provided he didn't have his own classes to attend in the meantime. Luckily, with Alfendi in school most of the day, said gaps and Luke's classes didn't often collide. 'It's better for someone he knows to watch him, anyway.' Even with school every day, Alfendi still didn't talk much around strangers, unless they happened to discover his interests and engaged his talkative side... at which point they usually freaked out at his enthusiasm and ran to the boy's father with their 'serious concerns'. Luke reasoned it was much less of a hassle to just let Alfendi play alone, and allow him to be himself, without dragging panicky strangers into it.

Just as Luke was reaching for his written story and a fresh piece of paper, his mobile phone, sitting on the table next to them, began to buzz. "Oops, never took you off silent, did I?" he muttered to himself with a smile, grabbing the device to read the screen. Giving the phone a surprised look, he hit
the button to answer and pressed it to his ear. "Trucy?"

"Hi!" Trucy chirped through the phone speakers. "It isn't, like, a bad time for you, is it?"

"No," Luke assured her, glancing at a nearby clock. "I don't usually have classes in the afternoon; It's only just gone five." He frowned in confusion. "Why are you calling? I'm usually expecting your texts around this time."

There was a short pause. "I thought it was midday for you when we talked?"

"I usually send you a 'good morning' text around the middle of the day for me, yes," Luke explained with a smile. "That's early morning for you. I wake up around your midnight, if I have a morning class."

Trucy hummed in thought. "I guess I misremembered the time difference..." she mumbled, then changed the subject to more confidently add, "So! What are you doing today? Uh, did today?"

Luke laughed, relaxing back into the chair. "Well, I had two classes today, one a lecture and the other a tutorial. Right now, I'm babysitting Alfendi until the Professor's last class finishes."

"Oooh!" Trucy cooed. "How's baby Alfendi?"

"Not a baby anymore," Luke pointed out with a smile. "He's going to school now, remember?"

"He's still a baby to me!" Trucy argued.

Luke decided that was a good point, shrugging. "He's fine," he said. "Actually, he's playing in the other room at the moment, while I try to see if I'm capable of being an author."

There was a short pause before Trucy responded. "You're writing your stories down!?" she squealed excitedly. "Tell me, tell me!"

Looking down at the battered paper containing his first draft of a prologue, Luke winced. "It's... not going very well so far," he admitted.

"What!?" Trucy cried. "Nonsense! Your stories are amazing!"

"I'm glad you think so," Luke replied, always happy to hear his sister's praise, "but I don't think the way I tell them to you translates well to paper."

Trucy thought a moment. "Yeah, I guess you can't do all the acting and funny voices in writing," she agreed. "You were still thinking of what to rename everyone, right?"

"Mm-hmm," Luke said, nodding. "At the moment I'm thinking of not giving my character a name at all; If I'm telling the story in first person, I don't think I'll ever have to even describe him! Or her, actually!"

"You're making your character a girl?" Trucy asked, confused.

"I'm leaving it up to interpretation," Luke explained with a grin. "At least, I'd like to. Have you seen how much fewer stories there are out there with girls as the main characters? I'd hate to accidentally contribute by making my 'apprentice' character too much like me."

Trucy hummed as she mused on Luke's reasoning. "Okay!" she chirped in reply. "What about Uncle Professor?"
"He's just 'The Professor'," Luke giggled. "I couldn't think of anything that fit him better than his actual name, so I figured, well, most people just call him 'Professor' anyway! I don't have to name him!" Trucy giggled in agreement, and Luke continued, "But I still haven't put much thought into anything else yet. Flora suggested I could keep the original names of the robots of Saint Mystere, so I decided I'd try that story first, since it would be the easiest. The fewest things to re-name, and all."

"Oooh!" Trucy cooed in interest. "Sounds cool! I can't wait to read it!"

Luke giggled, until a thought occurred to him and he frowned. "Wait, you didn't answer me earlier," he realised. "Why are you calling me today, Trucy?"

There was a long pause before Trucy sighed. "I'm bored!" she whined. "Polly still has classes and Daddy's busy and I already went up to visit Mommy and Pearly yesterday and it's only the first week of summer and I have nothing to do!"

Luke was surprised. "It's only Tuesday morning and you're already out of ideas to occupy yourself?"

"Mm-hmm," Trucy mumbled, then dramatically sighed.

Luke restrained a smile as he imagined his sister dramatically throwing herself onto her bed. "Well, what about your school friends? Can't you hang out with them?"

Trucy grumbled for a moment. "I guess..."

"You don't want to?"

Sighing, Trucy admitted, "I just saw them on Sunday! They came to see my show with Polly and then we went out together!"

Luke wondered why two days was too short a time to see them again, but decided not to question it. Not far away, he heard the sound of a key in a lock, followed by the front door creaking open. "Oh, sounds like the Professor is back," he told Trucy. "I have to hang up now."

"Aw!" Trucy cried. "But I'm still bored!"

"Papa!" Alfendi squealed, and Luke saw the four-year-old dash past the open doorway as he ran to greet his father at the entrance.


There was a long pause before Trucy responded, during which Luke listened to Alfendi excitedly telling Layton about his day at school. "Alright," Trucy eventually agreed with a sigh. "I'll just lie here waiting for you to call back."


"Love you," Trucy replied in a tired tone.

With that, Luke hung up the phone, giving it a fond smile as he imagined what his sister might be doing at that exact moment as she impatiently waited for her brother to entertain her. 'I'll call her once I've said hello to the Professor,' he told himself, then placed his phone in his pocket and stood to go greet his mentor.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"Alright everyone, please calm down!" Dean Delmona called as he strode into the bustling room, taking his place at the head of the table. As the assortment of assembled professors began to quieten from their chatter, the dean clasped his hands together. "Apologies for the late start; I was held up outside."

Hershel Layton looked around the room as the general hubbub finally died down. He had been puzzling all morning as to the meaning of this meeting, but upon arrival, it seemed everyone else was just as confused as him. The general assumption would have been that it was a departmental issue with the Psychology and Law groups, given everyone else was a teacher of one of the two, but the addition of Layton spawned confusion; Why one archaeology professor in a room of psychologists and lawyers?

Finally, Delmona judged the room quiet enough to continue. "I'm sure you're all curious as to why I called you here... in fact, it's to do with a very unusual submission we received for the upcoming year." He cast glances at two of the professors seated nearby. "I'm sure you two know what I'm talking about."

The respective heads of the two departments, Professor Erkens and Professor Cattell, looked at each other in surprise. Cattell gave the dean a confused look. "You don't mean that fifteen-year-old who applied to take an analytical psychology degree, do you?" she asked.

"Wait," Erkens cut in, holding up his hands with wide eyes. "You've got to be kidding! You mean we've got the exact same fifteen-year-old applying to be a defence attorney as well!?"

This only seemed to spark more confused conversation between the assembled teachers. Hershel took the opportunity to raise a hand, looking to the dean. "Dean Delmona, that still doesn't explain why I am here," he pointed out. "I'm not connected to either of these departments."

Delmona scratched his head with an embarrassed smile. "Ah, Hershel, she told me it was you who recommended she apply here, so I thought your input would be most helpful." He coughed awkwardly when the professor only gave him a puzzled look, adding, "I hope you remember her on sight, because she seemed quite certain you knew her."

"It is the Cykes girl, right?" Erkens cried over the hubbub of the room. "I thought we were breaking university records just admitting her for one course! What the hell's she doing applying for two!?"

"Calm down, Ewald," Delmona replied, hands held up in a calming motion. "That's exactly what I called everyone here to discuss! The girl herself is even in the building if you want to ask her any questions." Erkens opened his mouth to respond, but Delmona cut him off, clarifying, "Any polite questions, Ewald."

"She sounds like an intriguing student," Cattell explained, the room quietening as she spoke. "She spoke in her application about how she has sensitive hearing, and can understand people's emotions through the tone of their voice."
"Then what's she doing wanting to become a lawyer?" Erkens pointed out with a frustrated sigh. "This Cykes girl sounds like a fine psychologist!"

Hershel frowned, the discussion sparking something in his memory. "Did this girl mention in her application any role models leading her to law?" he asked.

Erkens had to think for a moment, scratching at his chin. "Uh, yeah, that one American guy. The attorney who got busted for forging evidence?"

"That isn't exactly very specific, is it?" one of the other law professors pointed out, rolling her eyes.

Another of the law teachers, a Professor Lamont, frowned in thought, tapping her cheek. "I suspect you are referring to Phoenix Wright, are you not?"

"Yeah, that guy!" Erkens cried, looking proud to have found the answer. "He kick-started that 'dark age of the law' they've got going on in California right now!"

Hershel blinked in surprise to hear his friend referred to so callously.

Lamont frowned. "No offence Ewald, but once again you prove you know very little about anything outside our own system of law." She crossed her arms, tapping her fingers sternly. "I met Mister Wright a few years ago, when he came to visit me with a colleague of his; I'm sure you've heard of Prosecutor Miles Edgeworth, have you not?"

Erkens paled, leaving no doubt that he recognised the name. "W-well," he mumbled, "it's not that simple, Noriko..."

"Yes, I recall their visit clearly," Hershel picked up with a smile, only to frown. "Not for all the right reasons, unfortunately."

Lamont nodded. "That was the day of Rosa's death," she added. "I understand they got caught up in it as they left."

Cattell gave Hershel a curious look. "How do you know a pair of American lawyers, Hershel?" she asked.

"Mister Edgeworth I have only met in passing, when he was here a few years ago." Hershel replied with a smile, one hand to his hat. "Mister Wright is a dear friend of mine. I met him on an... expedition many years ago now, before he lost his badge."

Half the table gave each other knowing looks as they translated what 'expedition' meant when used by the famous Hershel Layton.

"Nevertheless," Hershel continued, crossing his arms, "I believe I do know why young Athena Cykes wishes to be a lawyer; Mister Wright left quite an impression on her as he helped us solve the mystery of Rosa's death. I told her our law department would be happy to take in such an eager candidate," he scratched his chin in thought, "though I do not know where the psychology degree comes into it."

"We can ask her that later," Delmona assured everyone. "One thing we do need to discuss however is whether it would be appropriate to accept her into two full-time courses at once, especially considering her age."

"No way!" Erkens cut in, slamming his hand on the table with a glare. "She's way too young! Make her take one at a time, or none at all!"
Lamont adjusted her glasses, giving Erkens a pointed glare. "Calm down, Ewald. This isn't court."

"She obviously believes she is capable of doing both at once," Hershel pointed out. "She may have a more realistic view of her abilities than we give her credit for."

Delmona thought over the conflicting views in the resulting silence. "I suppose I had better fetch this girl then," he decided. "She can tell us why she wants to take on both at once, for starters."

"W-wait!" Cattell interrupted, almost jumping to her feet as she held up a hand to call the dean's attention. "I'm sorry for keeping this to myself, but I actually do know why Miss Cykes wants to study psychology."

"You do?" one of the other psychology professors asked in surprise.

"Why did you keep it to yourself, Margaret?" Hershel added.

Cattell ran a hand through her hair nervously. "I wasn't sure if it was appropriate for me to bring up," she admitted. "But if you're going to ask her anyway..." She shook her head. "You see, her mother was a psychologist too, and Miss Cykes said she found the subject interesting and studying it made her feel closer to her mother."

"Now that is a good reason," Hershel muttered to himself, a hand to his mouth in thought.

Delmona nodded. "Well then, I shall fetch our young applicant, shall I?"

The teenager who entered the room trailed behind Dean Delmona, nervously playing with her hair. She was dressed in casual yellow, a blue ribbon tied around her orange ponytail that matched the sad-looking blue face on her odd necklace. From one ear dangled a golden crescent-shaped earring. As the girl spotted Hershel, she grinned and gave him a wave, her necklace turning green as the face switched to a happy one. Hershel smiled at her in reply.

"Here we are, young Miss Cykes herself," Delmona announced, a hand briefly patting Athena's shoulder. "Professor Cattell, maybe you'd like to go first?"

Cattell thought a moment, then stood, Athena's retrieved application in hand. "Miss Cykes, I'm sure you know why you're here today."

The teen nodded, looking stern. "You're gonna say I can't handle two courses at the same time." She looked away, a hand covering her necklace as it flashed blue. "You think I'm crazy, just like everyone else."

"Oh, no, dear," Cattell insisted, looking worried for the girl, "of course not! For one thing, I'm a psychologist; Nobody is 'crazy' to us!"

Athena met Cattell's gaze again, but still looked unconvinced.

"I'm merely concerned that two full-time courses at once is too much work even for an adult," Cattell continued. "Why not do one at a time? There's no hurry."

"Yes there is!" Athena argued, clutching her necklace tight as she gave Cattell a determined look. "I need to become a lawyer as fast as I can! And I need the kind of practise with my abilities that this
psychology degree will give me!"

Erkens raised an eyebrow. "Why? What's the rush?"

Athena bit her lip, unsure how to respond. "I... have a friend back home I need to help," she admitted. "I don't know how long he has left."

"He's been sentenced to death, I presume," Lamont cut in, smirking to herself as she adjusted her glasses. "And you can't trust any attorneys working in this 'homeland' of yours to defend him properly."

Avoiding their gaze, Athena shook her head. "I thought I might be able to ask Mister Wright to, before..."

Erkens scoffed, crossing his arms. "Yeah, 'til he got done in for forgery!"

Hershel sent the law professor a glare. "Ewald, may I remind you that Mister Wright is a friend of mine? One of his sons attends this very university."

"Er, sorry, Hershel," Erkens mumbled, rubbing at the back of his head before blinking in surprise as the last statement registered. "Wait, really?"

Hershel turned his gaze to Athena with an understanding smile. "I seem to recall you mentioned when we last met that you came from California, where Mister Wright lives, correct?"

Athena blushed and nodded.

"In that case," Cattell said, watching Athena with a concerned look, "why not just focus on this law degree? You can pursue psychology at a later time."

"Because I want to," Athena replied, looking up again with a deadly serious expression on her face. "I'll attend every lecture, finish every assignment... I-I'll even take classes over the summer!" She finally removed her hand from her necklace, revealing its happy green face as she gave the entire room in general a determined look, holding a fist tightly near her chest. "I'll do it to prove I can, just as much as to learn everything I'll need to to be the first ever psychologist-lawyer, and I'm going to revolutionise the court system!"

The room stared back at Athena in silence for several long moments. Finally, Lamont chuckled, adjusting her glasses. "Well. I'm convinced."

Looking around the room, Hershel saw most of the other assembled teachers nodding in reluctant agreement, and gave the teen a warm smile. "May I be the first to welcome you to Gressenheller, Miss Cykes. I'm sure you'll enjoy your time here."

Athena could only grin in response.

View Layton's Notebook
On the first day of Autumn Semester, it was usual for new and returning students to drop by Hershel Layton's office in a constant stream, asking for help on their first day or simply greeting their teacher at the beginning of a new academic year. It was why he always made sure to have something simple to be working on, so he could drop it at a moment's notice to greet the latest knock at his door... as he was doing at that moment, placing his cup of tea down in its saucer as he marked his place in the book lying open on his desk. "Come in."

The door opened with a soft creak, and Hershel turned in his chair to see his latest visitor was an orange-haired teenager, looking slightly nervous as she edged into the room. He gave her a smile. "Miss Cykes, a pleasure to see you again," he said in greeting, tipping his hat as he got to his feet. "Was there something else you wanted while you were here?"

Athena grinned, bouncing more confidently into the room as the door closed itself behind her. "Hi, Professor Layton!" She paused, rubbing the back of her neck nervously. "I, uh, just wanted to drop by and say thanks for helping me out..."

Hershel chuckled, gesturing for the teen to come closer as he rounded the orange sofa. "It was no trouble at all, I assure you!" He sat down on the couch with a smile, patting for his visitor to join him. "Athena, did you want to ask something about Mister Wright?"

Nodding, Athena stared at the floor, twirling a finger around the lock of hair dangling in front of an ear. "I know now he'd already lost his badge when I met him," she explained. "I even asked to work with him... and the card he left me said he still worked at a law office." She looked up at Hershel, frowning in worry as her necklace glowed blue. "Why did he lie? Is he okay?"

Hershel chuckled, giving her a reassuring smile. "I can assure you, he is quite happy." When Athena still seemed unconvinced, he added, "I even asked to work with him... and the card he left me said he still worked at a law office." She looked up at Hershel, frowning in worry as her necklace glowed blue. "Why did he lie? Is he okay?"

Hershel chuckled, giving her a reassuring smile. "I can assure you, he is quite happy." When Athena still seemed unconvinced, he added, "I even asked to work with him... and the card he left me said he still worked at a law office." She looked up at Hershel, frowning in worry as her necklace glowed blue. "Why did he lie? Is he okay?"

"Oh!" Athena cried, her necklace flashing yellow as she jumped in shock. "O-of course I believe you, Professor!" she insisted.

"I'm not offended if you don't," Hershel insisted, continuing to serenely smile, hands folded in his lap. "After all, I see him in person very rarely; We stay in contact through the occasional letter and my friendship with Luke."

Athena shrugged, blushing as her necklace again turned green. Before she could reply, there was another knock at the door, attracting the pair's attention just as the newcomer opened the door anyway.
"Professor!" Luke called as he entered the room, a wide grin on his face. "I thought I'd-! Oh!" He stopped dead as he noticed Athena on the couch, still standing in the doorway.

"Speak of the devil," Hershel muttered with a smile, getting to his feet.

"I-I'm so sorry, Professor," Luke insisted, slowly backing out of the room and blushing in embarrassment. "I didn't know you had a guest..."

"No no," Hershel quickly replied, holding up a hand to signal for Luke to stay. "Luke, surely you remember Athena Cykes?" he asked, gesturing to the teen. "From the incident with Professor Rains?"

Luke blinked in surprise, looking over at Athena to meet an equally shocked gaze. The two stared at each other for a moment before breaking into identical wide grins. "Athena!" Luke cried, running into the room and towards the teen with a hand outstretched to shake. "It's so great to see you again!"

"Hi Luke!" Athena cried, jumping to her feet to eagerly shake the young man's hand. "I should've guessed it was you Professor Layton mentioned was coming here!"

Luke laughed. "What are you doing here?" he asked. "It can't be another school trip!"

Athena shook her head, grinning proudly with her hands on her hips. "Nope! I just started studying here!"

Impressed, Luke blinked in surprise. "Wow," he muttered, then grinned. "We should start a club for under-age applicants!"

At that, Athena looked confused. "Why? How old are you?"

"Oh, um," Luke muttered, blushing. "W-well, I'm eighteen now," he admitted, "but I was sixteen when I started here." He grinned. "I'm studying to be a vet!"

Athena smiled. "I'm fifteen," she said, winking proudly. "I'm studying to be a psychologist-lawyer!"

Luke laughed. "Wow, that sounds impressive!" he said. "You decided to go ahead and be a defence attorney?"

"Yup!" Athena replied, nodding. "Even if Mister Wright isn't one anymore, there's no reason I can't be!"

Luke stared at her for a moment, then winced in embarrassment. "Ah, you found out about that," he realised, looking away. "J-just so you know, Papa didn't-"

"It's okay," Athena insisted, shrugging as she gave Luke an understanding smile. "I heard how happy he was talking about being a lawyer. He must have enjoyed pretending."

Hershel raised an eyebrow as he watched the pair, standing by his desk and sipping from his teacup.

"Y-yeah, I think he did," Luke agreed, forcing a nervous grin. "S-so, what's this 'psychologist' part about, then?" he asked, walking around to sit on the orange couch where Layton had previously been.

Athena sat back down, grinning. "You remember I can hear people's emotions, right?" she reminded him. "Court's a scary place. I figure, if I can hone my abilities and become a psychologist as well, I can use them to help keep witnesses calm so they can tell their stories clearly and accurately!"
Luke thought a moment, then winced a little at a particular set of memories that ran across his mind. "Yeah, that... actually sounds like a really good idea," he said, not noticing Athena's confused look as he turned his gaze downwards.

Athena frowned. "Are you alright?"

"Hmm?" Luke looked up. "Of course I am."

"Oh," Athena mumbled, looking thoughtful as one hand began to fiddle with her necklace. "I-I wasn't sure; There were a lot of emotions in what you just said, so..."

"I'm fine," Luke insisted, only for the almost instinctual phrase to make him laugh as it reminded him of something. "Oh yeah, you have to meet Apollo! Papa even said you'd get on like a house on fire!"

Athena frowned in confusion. "A... pollo?"

"My brother!" Luke explained with a bright smile. "He's also studying to be a lawyer, back in California!" He paused, a thoughtful look coming across his face. "Huh. Athena and Apollo. That's an odd co-incidence."

"What is?"

"The Greek mythology connection, of course," Luke explained, smiling. "It seems everyone in my family has one! Artemis, Triton, Phoenix..." He shook his head, pulling himself back on topic. "Anyway, do you know the story about the first ever trial?"

Athena thought a moment, one hand straying to her right ear to tap the crescent earring hanging there. "I... don't think so?" she replied.

Luke giggled. "Apollo first told me this story," he said, "with our best friend Clay, of course, though I had to look it up myself later to get all the details! It being an Ancient Greek story, it predictably involves violence and murder."

Athena seemed surprised, but then smiled. "I suppose it would, if it's about the first ever trial!"

Luke laughed. "Yeah, I guess so!" he agreed. "Anyway, this family in Troy were essentially killing each other one-by-one, each new death out of revenge for the previous murder. The god Apollo and a group of beings called the Furies argued over whether the last in the series of deaths was justified, so Apollo took everyone to the goddess Athena, and they argued their cases to her, with the Furies saying the latest murder wasn't justified and Apollo saying it was." He giggled. "Athena sided with Apollo! That made him the first ever defence attorney, and Athena the first ever judge!"

Athena seemed amused, but something was troubling her, and she again began to poke at her earring, deep in thought. "That... sounds vaguely familiar," she admitted. "Did you tell me that story last time?"

Luke frowned, confused. "Nnnno? I remember telling it to Trucy once, but... I don't think we even had the time when we last met."

"Weird," Athena muttered, still thinking as she tapped at her earring. "Then why do I...?" Suddenly, she gasped, paling as her tapping instantly halted. "Oh..."

"What?" Luke asked, concerned for his new friend. "What's the matter?"

"N-nothing!" Athena insisted, jumping to her feet. "Um, I should probably get going, I have a lecture
this morning." She hurried to the door. "I'll talk to you later, Luke!"

"Wait-!" Luke cried, standing up. Hershel looked up from his seat at his desk, watching with a bewildered look.

Athena threw open the office door. "Thanks again, Professor!" she called, then ran out into the hallway, leaving the door to close itself behind her.

Luke stared after the teen for several moments before sighing and turning to his former mentor. "What was that about?"

Hershel had to shake his head. "I'm afraid I have no idea," he admitted. "Something would appear to have spooked her."

"But what?" Luke wondered, sitting back down and tapping a finger against his chin in thought. "I told her that story... she seemed to think she heard it from me before..."

"Athena sided with Apollo, of course!" Apollo boasted. "Although, it's been a while since we looked all this up. We might be wrong on some points."

Clay gave Apollo a cheeky grin. "Yeah, Apollo probably lost."

As the two old friends descended into a light-hearted slap fight, Luke's attention was distracted by movement on the floor above. He turned his gaze up the stairs, and found himself locking eyes with a young girl, maybe a little older than Trucy, peering around the wall. Her bright orange hair was pulled into a ponytail on the left side of her head, and she was wearing a set of massive pink headphones with odd antenna sticking out of them. Luke and the girl stared at each other for a moment before the girl gasped and disappeared.

"Wait!" Luke cried, attracting Apollo and Clay's attention as he dashed past them and directly up the stairs.


Starbuck frowned. "Oh geeze, you guys wouldn't have something to do with why Metis is so upset, would you?"

Apollo looked up. "Metis?" he repeated, quietly.

"Doctor Cykes. Y'know, labcoat, yellow kimono?" Starbuck explained, placing his plastic container on the table and giving the three a serious look. "What happened?"

Clay and Apollo exchanged nervous glances. Luke adjusted his cap. "Mister Starbuck," the young gentleman asked, "do you know anything about the girl on the fourth floor?"

Hershel frowned in concern. "Luke?"
"She lives here, but she has ear problems or something," Starbuck explained. "Doesn't get on with strangers well, so she mostly stays up around the lab."

Clay frowned. "What do ear problems have to do with strangers?"

"She was wearing strange headphones," Luke pondered aloud, tapping his chin in thought. "If she has ill-health, I suppose Doctor Cykes was very worried about her, and that's why she threatened to kick us out."

Luke shook his head, turning to look up at his friend with a shocked expression. "I-I... I think I might have met Athena before."

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Luke sat in the grass, as he did many days, underneath the tree at the back of the courtyard. It being autumn, most trees were avoided by the other students due to their tendency to drop leaves at the worst possible times and on the worst possible places, but Luke didn't mind, parking himself on this particular tree's roots and nonchalantly brushing off any leaves that landed on him. Having finished his lunch, the eighteen-year-old was packing away his rubbish in his satchel to dispose of later, and extricating a textbook to read, a homemade bookmark constructed by his little sister sticking out the top. *May as well get to work on memorising these drug effects,* he mused to himself. *Still got a few minutes. Better to use them constructively.*

It had struck Luke the previous day that this would be his final year studying at Gressenheller. A part of him missed his first year, when he had, what seemed in retrospect at least, less work to do and more free time to spend with friends. Alfendi had yet to start school then, so he was usually somewhere around the campus, being watched by either his father or sister; Luke had always enjoyed helping to look after the toddler around his classes, although nowadays the young boy rarely came to the university anymore.

"Luke?"

Interrupted from his train of thought, Luke looked up from his book. To his surprise, a teenager in yellow was standing not far away, watching him with a nervous smile as she adjusted the backpack hanging over her shoulders. "Athena!" he cried, and gave her a polite smile. "Hello!"

Athena grinned, relaxing as she was recognised, and skipped over to join Luke under the tree. "What are you doing, Luke?" she asked.

Luke laughed, showing her his book. "Getting started on exam study, I suppose!" He moved his bookmark to his current page, closing the book and watching Athena. "I was kinda thinking I'd scared you off, given how fast you left the other day."

"O-oh, yeah," Athena mumbled, blushing as she ran her hands through her ponytail. "S-sorry about that."

Glancing at his book, Luke recalled for a moment the conversation he'd had with his former mentor, just after he'd last seen the teenager standing beside him.

*Hershel frowned, placing his teacup back in its saucer as he stood from his desk. "You've met her before?" he repeated, rounding the sofa and sitting in the seat Athena had just vacated, all the while watching Luke curiously. "When was this?"

"J-just after the adoption," Luke explained, eyes still wide in shock as he processed the revelation he had just made. "Clay and Apollo and I were at the Space Centre, a-and that story I just told Athena... that's where Clay and Apollo first told it to me!" He took off his cap, running a hand through his hair as he forced himself to stay calm, staring off into space. "I-I saw a girl on one of the
floors above, and tried to chase her, but we, or I, lost her, and I ran into this scientist!"


Luke nodded, pausing as he realised he had been starting to panic for a moment there. "I think the scientist I literally ran into that day was Athena's mother," he said, managing to keep himself more level-headed with the aid of his former mentor at his side. "Mister Starbuck said the girl we saw... 'belonged' to the robotics scientists, and had ear problems, so she was kept away from strangers."

Hershel frowned. "Hmm. I remember now; You wrote to me about that incident," he recalled. "Didn't you and your brother decide not to return until this scientist had calmed down?"

"We didn't go back to the Space Centre until after the HAT-1 Miracle," Luke explained, "and I never saw that scientist again." He frowned. "But, we did run into Ms Blackquill when Flora was last visiting... she said she was the only scientist working in the robotics lab now." Again, he tapped a finger against his chin, thinking. "I wonder what happened to move Athena and her mother to London?"

Hershel softly grunted to himself, tugging at the brim of his hat to cover his eyes.

"Do you suppose I should ask her?" Luke continued. "She must have recognised me when Papa introduced us. Why didn't she say anything?"

"Whatever the reason," Hershel interrupted, giving the young man a stern stare, "she doesn't seem to want to discuss it."

Luke blinked in surprise before he realised what the professor was hinting at, his hands twisting at his cap. "O-oh, yeah," he mumbled, feeling chastened. "'A gentleman always follows a lady's wishes', right?"

Hershel nodded, giving Luke a small, but proud, smile. "Miss Cykes most likely has a very good reason for not wanting you to recognise her from this chance meeting of yours. If she wishes to discuss it, I don't doubt she'll bring it up herself... in her own time."

Although it had taken him a while, Luke had eventually managed to put aside his burning curiosity and agree with his former mentor not to confront the teenage girl with the list of questions brewing in his mind since the moment he had recognised her for the headphoned little girl in the Space Centre. He looked up at the worried Athena with a smile. "It's fine," he told her, knowing he truly meant it.

Athena smiled in relief, and sat down at Luke's side, taking the time to find a comfortable spot among the tree roots. "I just finished a lecture," she explained with a grin, pulling her bag off her back. "It ran a little late today. What about you?"

"Heading off to a tutorial in about five minutes," Luke replied, taking the chance to check his watch. "I've had this teacher before, though; She's always late, so I can take my time."

Nodding, Athena looked around the quiet area of courtyard. "You don't have anyone to wait with?" she asked, concerned.

Luke took a few moments to respond, tapping a finger against his book in thought. "No. For much the same reason you didn't leave class with anyone else, probably."
Athena spun around to look at him in surprise. "Huh?"

"The age difference," Luke pointed out with a sad smile, busying himself by putting his book back in his satchel. "The first semester or two I made a few friends, but they couldn't ever take me out anywhere... I was too young, and uninterested, in getting drunk or breaking the law, so they stopped asking." He closed his eyes, the smile becoming a frown. "Everyone else, they were focused on doing the work, like I was, but they just saw me as a kid. Then one person found out I used to be Professor Layton's apprentice, and no-one tried to be my friend after that." He sighed. "The Professor says they were just intimidated, but I doubt anything I could do would make them care about me at this point."

Luke was surprised by a pair of arms throwing themselves around him, and he opened his eyes to see Athena, seemingly on the verge of tears, hugging him tightly. "That's so sad...!" she squeaked. "No-one should have to go through that!"

Resisting the urge to laugh at her sympathetic tears, Luke patted the teen on the back. "Really, I'm fine," he assured her. "I have the Professor, Flora and Alfendi to talk to, and my family is only a text away, most of the time." He giggled. "And, I would hope to count you as a friend now, too."

Athena looked up in surprise, releasing the young man from the hug. After a moment, she grinned widely. "Of course you can!" she cried. "I'd love to be your friend!"

Luke laughed, leaning back against the tree behind him. "I'm glad to hear it!"

Still grinning, Athena moved to sit against the tree next to him. "Oh yeah, I'd heard about Professor Layton's accomplishments!" she explained. "You'll have to tell me about this 'apprentice' thing sometime!"

At that, Luke had to laugh again, giving the teen a knowing look. "Well, I have been writing it down. Maybe I could let you look over it. For mistakes and such."

Athena looked up, and, seeing his amused smile, giggled. "That sounds awesome!" she replied, excited. "I'd love to!"

"Great!" Luke replied, then looked at his watch, his smile turning into a frown. "Hmm. I'd better get going to class."

"Aw," Athena sighed, watching with disappointment as Luke hung his satchel over his shoulder and got to his feet. "We can talk again later, right?"

Luke nodded. "Of course!" he assured her. "Where will you be in an hour's time?"

"Either still here or at home," Athena replied, a hand fiddling with her necklace. "I have another class this afternoon."

Luke grinned. "Then, if you're sticking around, I'll meet you back here under the tree!" he promised. "We can compare our schedules and arrange to meet up more often!"

Athena nodded, returning the grin. "That sounds awesome!" she agreed, and she gave her new friend a wave. "I'll see you then, Luke!"

"Bye!" Luke called back, turning with a laugh as he ran off towards his classroom. "See you later, Athena!"
View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"You don't have to come, you know," Luke quietly told Athena as they stood between the flower beds underneath the window of Professor Layton's office. "I know the American traditions about Remembrance Day are very different to ours."

Athena giggled, sitting on the brick walls of one of the gardens. "You forget I've been living in Europe for four years now. I already know all about it."

Luke contemplated sitting opposite the fifteen-year-old, but worried about accidentally crushing some of the flowers, so decided to stay standing. "In 'Europe'? Are you saying you haven't just been living in London?" he asked.

Shaking her head, Athena smiled. "My aunt loves travelling," she said. "Her favourites to visit are Germany and France. They don't speak much English there, so I know a bit of Deutsch and Francais thanks to her putting me in local schools."

Luke giggled. "I suppose other languages are always useful to know!" he agreed, then paused in thought. "So, you've been skipping entire years of school while you've been here... and still had the time to learn two other languages and repeatedly move home around the mainland?" He shook his head in amazement. "No wonder you knew you could handle two major degrees at once!"

Athena grinned proudly. "Danke schon, merci beaucoup! You should see the number of hobbies I keep up, too!"

"Oh really?" Luke laughed. "Such as?"

"I'm a pretty good artist!" Athena boasted, arms crossed. "And I always make sure to keep track of my diet and exercise, so I stay fit and healthy!"

Luke giggled. "Wow, you don't ever rest, do you?"

"Of course I do!" Athena shot back with an indignant look. "Rest is an important part of staying fit and healthy!"

Before the nineteen-year-old could reply, he heard a cry behind him. "Luke!" Quickly turning around, he saw Flora entering the courtyard from the nearby door, leading young Alfendi by the hand.

Luke smiled, giving his friend a wave. "Flora! Alfendi!" He cast a quick glance at Athena next to him, watching the newcomers curiously. "Come over here so I can introduce you to Athena!"

Flora waved at the teenager, approaching with a friendly grin as she dragged along the reluctant young boy at her side. "It's nice to meet you properly, Athena!" she said. "I don't think we ever got the chance to talk the last time we met!"

Athena's curious look turned to a smile as she recognised the young woman. "Oh! No, we didn't!"
she agreed, shaking Flora's hand. "It's nice to meet you... Flora?"

"That's me," Flora replied with a smile, then indicated the boy at her side, who was giving Athena a stern glare. "This is my little brother, Alfendi," she continued.

Gasping, Athena clapped her hands together, giving Alfendi a wide grin. "Aww, you're the baby who got all excited about the body!" she cried in recognition, then held out a hand to shake. "It's nice to meet you again, Alfendi!"

Alfendi continued to stare.

"Fendi," Flora warned the five-year-old with a falsely-sweet tone, nudging her brother with the hand gripping his.

Biting his lip, Alfendi begrudgingly shook Athena's hand, sending a glare somewhere off to his side.

"Thank you, sweetie," Flora told her brother with a smile.

Luke peered behind the siblings, a confused look on his face. "Where's the Professor?"

"He said he had something quick to take care of in his office," Flora explained, gesturing to the windows above them. "He promised he'd be right out."

"We still have enough time to get to this graveyard, right?" Athena asked with a worried frown.

"Of course we do," Luke assured her, quickly checking his watch. "The Professor especially always leaves plenty of time to spare."

Flora held a hand to her chin, seeming concerned. "I think he's expecting someone to join us."

Athena frowned. "Aside from me?"

"He's invited someone else?" Luke asked. "Who?"

Flora shrugged, looking frustrated. "I really don't know anything else. He said something vague about 'visitors' and just gives me that infuriating smile when I ask... you know, the one he always has when he knows what's going on and you don't."

Luke nodded sympathetically. "Yeah, I know that smile." He then turned to Athena. "Oh yeah, speaking of, have I given you the latest couple chapters of Curious Village yet, Athena?"

Athena shook her head. "Don't think so. I've read up to the point where the Professor and the apprentice just got to the top of the tower?"

Flora grinned. "Ah, you're about to get to the best part, then!" she told the fifteen-year-old with a wink. "Any ideas on the mystery yet?"

Before Athena could answer, there was a cry of "Surprise!" from behind Flora, causing her to jump with a shriek as she pulled Alfendi into her arms protectively. She and Luke turned to look at the cause of the shout as one, and Luke was the first to react, grinning widely.

"Emmy!" Luke cried, rushing forward to greet his friend and just barely restraining himself from pulling her into a hug. "What are you doing here!?"

Emmy laughed, reaching up to rustle Luke's hair through his cap despite the young man's height. "I promised I'd come back and visit, didn't I?" she pointed out.
Flora sighed in relief, letting go of Alfendi as she gave Emmy a wave in greeting. "It's nice to see you again! Could you... not give me a heart attack next time?"

"Oh, sorry about that," Emmy muttered, running a hand through her hair with an apologetic smile.

"Uncle!" Alfendi suddenly squealed, running away from the group and towards Desmond Sycamore, who was standing a short distance away looking vaguely uncomfortable, and almost downright terrified when he spotted the small boy racing towards him. Luckily for him, Alfendi stopped a little away from the man, looking him up and down critically. "Where's your cape!?" he demanded.

Sycamore pushed his glasses tightly against his nose, almost seeming to sweat from the disapproval the five-year-old was giving him. "I-I apologise," he said, deceptively calmly. "I didn't think it was cold enough today to require it." When Alfendi only continued to glare at him, he nervously added, "I'll... be sure to bring it next time."

Alfendi grinned. "Good!"

Flora rushed over to her brother's side, giving Sycamore a smile as she gestured for him to join them. "It's great to see you again, Uncle! I suppose it was you and Emmy the Professor invited to join us today?"

Sycamore nodded, adjusting his glasses again. "He... made a compelling argument," he admitted. Emmy then seemed to notice the fifteen-year-old sitting on the bricks, watching the goings-on curiously. "Oh, hello there!" she said in greeting, holding out a hand. "You must be Luke's friend the Professor mentioned!"

Luke jumped in surprise. "Oh, Athena, I'm so sorry, I-!"

"It's alright," Athena quietly insisted with a smile, although her necklace flashed blue. She stood and shook Emmy's offered hand, giving the woman a warm grin. "I'm Athena Cykes! Nice to meet you!"

"Emmy Altava!" Emmy responded, then smirked and jerked a thumb behind her to Sycamore, who Alfendi was leading back to the group with a determined look. "The loser back there's my travelling companion, Doctor Desmond Sycamore."

Sycamore looked up with wide, angry eyes. "Excuse me...?!"

"You're a 'doctor', Uncle?" Flora asked in surprise.

"Well, y-yes," Sycamore admitted, trying to ignore Alfendi tugging on his arm as the boy played with his frilly sleeve, "in that I have a doctorate in archaeology... But I prefer to forget about that, hence why I ask to be called 'Mister' and not 'Doctor'."

Luke couldn't resist a somewhat proud smile. "I'll have a doctorate myself at the end of this school year."

"Goody for you," Sycamore shot back with a glare.

Athena looked between the two nervously, then turned to Sycamore. "So, you're Flora and Alfendi's uncle, Mister Sycamore?"

Sycamore sighed and gave the teen a nod. "We're what you might call 'estranged'," he explained, "but I am Layton's brother. We're," he paused to adjust his glasses, frowning in thought, "attempting
to form a relationship."

"One other than 'mortal enemy'?” Luke muttered to himself, not noticing the curious look Athena gave him in response.

Having not heard Luke's aside, Emmy looked up to the window above them that she remembered as belonging to Layton's office. "Does the Professor know about Uncle Leon...?” she wondered aloud.

"Know what?” Flora asked, seeming confused.

Sycamore scoffed, attempting to cross his arms before deciding not to deprive Alfendi of his fascination with the frilly sleeve under his suit. "Please, spare him the misery of knowing that man might be out and about again. It's the least you can do."

Luke's eyes widened. "They've released him!?”

"No, no!” Emmy cried, shaking her head and looking somewhat frustrated. "They've just given him permission to go on supervised outings to universities, to give talks about the Azran!” She smiled, proud of her 'uncle'. "One of the Oxbridges asked him to guest lecture, apparently! He is the world's foremost expert on the Azran civilisation, after all!"

Luke gave her a doubtful look.

"And you,” Emmy continued, shooting Sycamore a look, "might stand to be a bit nicer to him! He's your birth father, after all!"

"That man is no father of mine,” Sycamore hissed, shooting wary glances down at Alfendi, who was ignoring the conversation. "I'm not nearly as forgiving as my little brother, so kindly stop asking!”

Emmy and Sycamore continued to glare at each other until a clearing throat behind them attracted everyone's attention to Hershel, standing not far away watching the group with a concerned look. "Is something the matter?"

"Papa!” Alfendi cried with a grin, running to meet him. "Papa, it's Uncle!"

Hershel gave the boy a smile. "Yes, I know," he told him with a laugh. "I invited him, after all."

Emmy and Sycamore both stepped back, avoiding each other's gazes. Flora, wringing her hands nervously, planted a smile on her face and approached Hershel. "You should have warned us, Professor!"

"And ruin the surprise?” Hershel pointed out, amused. "Now why would I ever do that?”

Athena watched as the subject was quickly changed, the emotionally-charged conversation relaxing into a more friendly one. A part of her, however, still pondered on the anger and sadness she had heard, not only between Emmy and Sycamore shortly before Layton's arrival, but between Luke and Sycamore too. What had happened that had these 'friends' so upset? 'I wish I could help them... but I'm not a psychologist yet.’ She frowned, gripping Widget around her neck tightly. 'One day I will be, though. I'll help them all out... and make Mom proud!'
Once the group had split up and Luke had offered to walk Athena home, the conversation had died between them.

It wasn't that the silence was uncomfortable; in fact, Athena quite liked not having to concentrate on a conversation over the background hubbub of the busy city, even on an important public holiday such as today. Not to mention, the morning had been a bit of a roller-coaster in her opinion: Before the two-hour memorial service Luke had invited her to, there had been the emotionally-charged meeting with Emmy and Sycamore, which everyone else had ignored as they all headed off. After the memorial, tragedy had struck when the fraying poppy Luke had pinned to his jumper with a safety pin suddenly fell apart in his hands.

"Oh no!"

Luke's cry attracted the attention of the entire group, who turned to look almost as one. Athena, hearing the despair in his voice, ran to his side, only registering as she got there that Luke had dropped into a crouch, scrabbling on the gravel below their feet for green and red pieces of what looked like fabric. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"I-I was just adjusting it!" Luke cried, gathering the pieces of fabric and a small black circle of plastic into his hands and holding them close to his chest. "I didn't want it to...!"

"I see..." Hershel said from behind Athena, and she looked up to see him watching with a sympathetic gaze, one hand on the brim of his hat. "That poppy was never built to last, Luke."

It was only then Athena noticed the piece of lonely green plastic pinned to Luke's jumper. Above it, Luke was still staring at the remnants in his hands. With a sigh, he hid them in his fists, standing back up as his gaze hardened. "I know," he replied, still staring at his hands. Athena wondered if any of the others could still hear the sadness in his harsh tone like she could. "It was just plastic and fabric. It was always going to fall apart eventually."

Glancing around at the others, Athena noticed Emmy and Sycamore shooting each other confused looks, while Flora seemed to be busy keeping young Alfendi from running off. Luke himself was shoving the remains of his poppy into his pockets, unpinning the lonely stem from where it still sat on his chest. Athena took a moment to prepare herself mentally, then asked her friend, "Why was it important?"

Luke looked up in surprise at her question, then sighed again, shoving the stem and safety pin into his pocket and continuing to walk out of the parking area the group were still standing in. "It was my dad's," he admitted as he walked, barely seeming to notice Athena keeping pace at his side or the rest of their group more reluctantly following behind. "He used to wear it every year, and I picked up the tradition... I just hoped I'd be able to keep it in one piece longer than this."

Athena frowned in thought as they walked. 'Mister Wright wore it?' she wondered. 'I didn't think he was the type...' Out loud, she asked Luke, "Do you want to talk about it?"
For a long moment, Luke didn't reply, and Athena was beginning to contemplate retracting her question when finally the teen turned to her with a small smile. "Alright."

Although much of what Luke had told her for the next few blocks only confused Athena further as she tried to connect the stories to what she knew of Phoenix Wright, the rising tone of happiness in Luke's voice compared to sadness had convinced her to keep quiet, watching her friend with an encouraging smile.

"Dad had really strict rules regarding poppies," Luke began. "October was way too early to wear them in his opinion; He liked to get angry at newscasters for putting them on 'too quickly', but Mum would always shut him down by telling him to write an angry letter if it bothered him so much." He chuckled to himself at the happy memory. "When we were living in Misthallery, we were one of the few families there to not have direct family on the memorial at the edge of town. Sometimes someone tried to tell us we couldn't go there, but Mum had this really great speech, and she and Dad used to tag-team it if someone bothered us!" Giggling, he gave Athena the brightest smile she'd seen from him since he introduced her to Flora first thing that morning. "It was great! If I remembered it clearly, I'd recite it for you!"

"Sounds like it would have been fun!" Athena replied, grinning.

Luke giggled, then looked away as his smile faded. "Once we got home, the poppies always had to go off immediately. Mum said once it was to 'symbolise the short life spans of the actual flower' or something, but she was just joking." He paused a moment, thinking deeply to himself. "Dad's favourite thing to do to lighten the mood after a memorial was to pull off his poppy once we got home, shout that we'd spent enough time living in the past, then proudly announce he was going to go continue his latest archaeological study in his office."

From behind them, Athena heard Hershel chuckling to himself. "Yes, he did love that joke."

'Now I'm even more confused, though,' Athena thought. 'Mister Wright studying archaeology? And why does everyone sound so sad about it?'

"He did it every year," Luke continued, then frowned as a note of anger entered his voice. "Well, except for the year Mum was 'away'." He shot a quick glance behind him, and Athena looked around to notice everyone else, except for Alfendi and Sycamore, firmly looking away. While Alfendi was distracted watching passers-by, Sycamore was staring evenly at Luke's back, adjusting his glasses with one hand. "That year, I don't think Dad even noticed the date. He was working too hard," Luke darkly continued. After a pause, he sighed, the anger dissipating from his voice. "It's at times like this I ask myself why it was ever so necessary for us to have to leave London... but I won't ever get an answer. Besides, there's nothing anyone can do to change the past, is there? It's no use dwelling on it."

The conversation, along with the one from when they all met up at Gressenheller hours earlier, continued to circulate in Athena's head. There were still two major thoughts she had taken from the day's events that confused her, and, as she kept telling herself, now was probably the best chance she'd get to ask about them. The first she dismissed as being unimportant, deciding her confusion over tying Luke's stories about his father to what she knew of Phoenix Wright was just because she didn't know the man all that well, and she would certainly look stupid if she asked. The other,
though, had been on her mind longer, and a part of her was convinced it was a rather urgent
problem.

Athena took a deep breath, then looked up at Luke by her side. "Luke, why are you and Mister
Sycamore friends if you don't like each other?"

Luke seemed surprised at the question, looking back at the teen with wide eyes. "Huh?"

"I heard you talking to Emmy," Athena pointed out. "You were all happy just talking about her
visiting, but if she brought up Mister Sycamore you were upset. You pretended to be happy about it,
but I could tell you were faking."


"She seems to think you're friends with him like you are with her," Athena continued, "but I can hear
it in your and Mister Sycamore's voices whenever you talk to or about each other: You're both
angry." She cocked her head slightly to one side, fixing Luke with a curious stare. "Why?"

Luke looked away uncomfortably, shoulders held tense. "I-it's a long story."

Athena frowned. "Then tell a short version."

As Athena watched, Luke seemed to carefully weigh over his options, then eventually make his
decision with a sigh, turning back to look at her with a sad stare. "When I was nine, my mum, my
dad and I lived in Misthallery. Out of the blue, Sycamore came to my dad, under a disguise. He
kidnapped my mum and our butler and locked them away in the cellar, and made my dad work to
find something for him. Sycamore himself hid by pretending to be our butler, keeping a constant
close eye on Dad. The worst part was that he was busy searching on his own anyway, destroying
Misthallery with mechas while we slept."

Athena could only stare in surprise. Out of everything she was expecting to hear, that was not on her
list.

"Months passed like that. It only ended when I finally found a way to call for help, and the Professor
and Emmy answered. They rescued my mum and Doland, but Sycamore escaped, without even
telling us who he was." Luke shook his head, looking away again. "We met him again a few more
times in his disguise. One time, he tried to impale me on a drill, or at least drop me thirty stories to a
sticky end. The other time, he sat back and let another guy try to drop me thirty stories, and almost
drown a whole city in sand."

'Wow, this really would be a long story in full,' Athena realised. 'I should ask Luke to retell it
another time.'

"The last time we met him, it was without his disguise, so we didn't know we'd met him before,"
Luke sighed. "He told us he was fighting to stop an evil organisation, helped us rescue a girl, and
then took us all over the world while we solved problems and tried to stop this organisation he was
fighting against." He paused, frowning. "He was right about the organisation, since it turned out
they'd killed his wife and daughter, but it still hurt when he revealed who he really was. He stayed
with us as long as he had to, then he put on his disguise and flew away, laughing."

Athena reached up and rested a hand on Luke's arm in offered comfort as she heard the rising
distress and anger in her friend's voice.

"We were able to chase after him, but... all sorts of things went wrong, and the Professor, Sycamore
and I were forced to work together for a while," Luke forced himself to continue, stopping for a
moment before admitting, "He saved me then. I almost got zapped by lasers, but he pushed me out of the way and got himself hurt in my place."

Sadness, now? Athena made a mental note to definitely ask for the full story later.

"He helped us save the world, then left us, making it look like he was letting himself die in the collapsing ruins." Luke paused to frown. "I actually believed it for an hour or two, then I noticed the Bostonius was gone and realised he must have survived. The Professor probably figured it out immediately." He sighed, then looked over to Athena. "I know he's reformed and everything, but... I can't just forget everything he did! Especially to my parents." His face tightened, and he looked away again, tears beginning to prick at the corners of his eyes. "Does... that make me a bad person? Hating him like that?"

"Of course not!" Athena insisted, wrapping an arm behind Luke in a half-hug as their walk slowed. "And... I can't say anything professionally for a few years yet, but, from what you've told me... An awful lot happened between you two, huh?"

"Not just me," Luke pointed out. "He tried to kill the Professor a few times, even as the only one who knew at the time that they were brothers. I expect the Professor could forgive anyone though, if you gave him even a tiny reason. And Emmy... she probably felt guilty enough for what she did that forgiving Sycamore was easy."

Athena thought for a few moments. "Just because you want to forgive him, doesn't mean it'll be easy," she told him. "It also doesn't mean you have to forget what happened. I read that in a book once."

Luke couldn't help but smile at Athena's honesty on the source of her advice. "You're probably right," he admitted. "I... I need to think about it, though."


Laughing, Luke adjusted his cap with one hand. "A noble pursuit if I ever heard one!" he proclaimed, then gave her a relaxed smile. "But thank you. I really mean it."

"No problem!" Beaming, Athena skipped the rest of her way home.

*View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook*
To my dear friend,

It all happened when I was young - still a child, by most accounts, though I preferred to think of myself as a teenager to seem older. I was his apprentice, and lone assistant, back then, and the stories of our adventures were already widely known thanks to the papers... But the things we saw that day in the village became a secret we would have to keep from everyone for the rest of our lives, because, you see...

It was a bright and sunny day out in rural England. Our car bumped along the dirt road, winding its way through the trees to a destination only the Professor knew. I, the ever-loyal apprentice, was sitting at his side in the passenger seat, never too far away from my mentor.

I looked up from the letter in my hands. "We're going to solve an inheritance dispute?" I asked, confused. "That doesn't sound exciting at all!"

The Professor laughed. "Ah, but I think you'll find this is a rather unique case," he told me. "As it says in the letter, Baron Cornelius Avalon passed away two months ago. His will, once it was disclosed, indicated a heretofore unknown family treasure by the name of The Golden Petal was hidden somewhere in the village he called home."

"The Golden Petal?" I asked. The name intrigued me, and I simply had to know what such a treasure might be. The letter the Professor had handed me seemed to indicate we'd been hired to find something, after all. "Is that what we're looking for? What is it?"

"Not so many questions at once!" The Professor requested with an amused smile. "In short, nobody knows what this 'Golden Petal' is, only that whoever found it would inherit the entirety of Baron Avalon's estate."

I folded up the letter in my hands, putting it away in its envelope. "So it's still missing?" I realised. "And this Lady Hyacinth who wrote the letter, the Baron's widow, has hired the greatest puzzle-solver in the world to come and find it?"

The Professor laughed again, always humble about his fame. "It is indeed a puzzle as to where and what it is," he agreed, frowning in thought. "Baron Avalon staked his life on this mystery. My intuition tells me there's a lot more to this story than meets the eye."

Over the horizon, a great tower loomed, followed by the wall of a small village by a river, a drawbridge the only way in or out.

We had arrived in Gardens Dell.
Trucy giggled as she finished reading. "It's so awesome!" she cried, handing the paper back to her blushing brother. "Do you have more than just the prologue done? I want to read more!"

Luke laughed, re-folding the paper. "You've just read the entirety of Chapter One!" he told his sister. "I'm glad you like it, though! Athena's been loads of help stream-lining it with me... she's even done illustrations, though I don't have any with me at the moment."

"So is there more or not!?" Trucy demanded, ignoring most of Luke's reply. "I want to see what you've done with the story!"

"But you already know it back to front," Luke pointed out.

"I wanna know what you've changed!" Trucy argued. "Like, I thought you weren't changing the robots' names, and you changed Lady Dahlia!"

At that, Luke rubbed nervously at the back of his neck. "Well, after that story Papa and Apollo told us about the twins Iris and Dahlia..."

The apartment's front door swung open, quickly closing again with a thud. "Anyone home?"

Immediately forgetting her conversation with Luke, Trucy jumped off the couch with a grin, running to the reception door just as Apollo opened it from the other side. "Polly!" she shouted in greeting, giving the young man a brief hug before jumping back and indicating Luke. "Luke was showing me the first chapter of his book!"

"I-it's still a draft!" Luke added with a nervous smile, hugging the paper to his chest as he got to his feet.

"Sounds cool!" Apollo laughed, giving Trucy a grin as he entered the room properly, his sister bouncing at his side. "I'll have to read it later!"

Luke frowned in confusion. "You can read it now, if you like," he offered, holding out the paper. Apollo shook his head. "Nah. I actually had something I wanted to discuss with Dad, that I should get to as soon as possible." He looked around the room. "He's at home, right?"

"Yeah, he's here," Trucy assured him, gesturing to the kitchen door with a bored look on her face. "I think he's wrapping presents in his room."

"You might want to knock before you disturb him," Luke added with a smile. Apollo grinned in agreement, nodding at his siblings before leaving the room. "I'll be right back," he promised as he left.

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December 24, 10:57AM
Wright Talent Agency
Phoenix's Bedroom
At the knock on his door, Phoenix hurriedly shoved the small pile of books, DVDs and wrapping supplies under the covers of his bed. "Yes?" he called.

"It's me," came the voice of Apollo from the other side of the door. "Can I talk to you, Dad?"

Phoenix lifted the covers to assess what he had and hadn't wrapped. "Just a moment," he replied to his son, gathering together the pile to move to somewhere safer: into his closet. Once he had shoved everything into the nearest box, he carefully closed the doors and turned to face the entrance to his bedroom, casually sticking his hands in his hoodie pockets. "Come on in, Apollo."

The door gingerly opened, and Apollo stuck his head in, looking around a bit before coming in to the room. "Huh," he muttered to himself. "The others thought you were wrapping stuff for tomorrow."

Phoenix grinned, shrugging nonchalantly as he sat down on his bed. "You wanted to talk?" he asked.

Apollo nodded, closing the door behind him as he frowned in thought. "I wasn't sure how best to tell you this," he began as he crossed his arms, slowly walking over to join Phoenix, "so I've been putting it off. I figured maybe it would be best if I just said it straight out."

Raising an eyebrow, Phoenix watched his eldest son sit at his side on the bed. "What is it?"

Apollo took a deep breath, folded his hands in his lap, then looked up to meet Phoenix's eyes. "I've applied for my internship at Gavin Law Offices."

Phoenix stared blankly at Apollo for a very long moment that only seemed to stretch longer and longer. "I've applied to Mister Gavin to intern at his law office," Apollo repeated.

"What were you thinking!?" Phoenix suddenly hissed, casting glances at the door as he worried about Apollo's siblings potentially listening in. "He's not going to hesitate to accept you! You know what I've found out about him!"

Apollo nodded, giving his father a serious stare. "Yeah, I do," he replied. "Once you finally gave them to me, I read that case-file and all your investigation notes until I almost had them memorised."

"Then why did you apply to him!?" Phoenix asked, staring at Apollo with a look between anger and bewilderment.

"Because your current strategy is to wait until he slips up, isn't it?" Apollo pointed out, arms crossed. "You don't have any hard evidence to prove anything, just your gut instinct."

After a pause, Phoenix sighed, hiding his face in one hand. "And you think you might have better luck as his subordinate," he realised.

Apollo shrugged, embarrassed. "In short, yes," he admitted. "I want to help you, Dad."

Phoenix moved his hand to his chin, deep in thought and eyes closed.

When it didn't look likely he'd get an immediate response, Apollo tapped a finger nervously against
his bracelet. "I'm not going to do anything stupid," he promised. "I won't try playing detective, at least not yet. I'll just be an intern. Do whatever busywork he gives me." He gave his father the smallest of smiles. "I'll be getting my badge next summer, anyway. Maybe by then we'll have that evidence we need."

Phoenix didn't react, thinking to himself for a long moment before, finally, opening his eyes to meet Apollo's. "I... suppose it's too late to stop this trainwreck you've set us on," he admitted.

"Not a trainwreck, Dad," Apollo objected with a frustrated frown. "I'll be careful! I know who I'm dealing with! And I have the experience to not let him pick up on anything, too!"

Sighing, Phoenix nodded. "Sure. I can't exactly stop you."

Apollo blinked in surprise for a moment, having expected a bit more of a fight, then relaxed into a smile. "Thanks, Dad," he said. "I won't let you down, I promise!"

Phoenix laughed. "I know you won't," he assured his son, resting a hand on Apollo's shoulder. "You'll make me proud like you always do. And hey, maybe he's got some good lawyering tips tucked away in that evil brain of his!"

Apollo snorted in restrained laughter. "I guess we'll have to see!"

- END OF 2024 -

View the Court Record
"Did you sleep at all last night?"

Clay blearily looked up at his friend from where he was stretched out on the sofa, a laptop sitting on his chest. "Why? What's the time?"

Apollo frowned, hands on his hips as he cast a pointed glance at the small computer. "You have a clock right in front of you. You tell me." When Clay only stared blankly at the screen in front of him, Apollo rolled his eyes. "You didn't sleep last night."

"I have an assignment, dude!" Clay argued, picking up the laptop and carefully sitting up, placing his feet firmly on the floor. "I have to get it done!"

"Well you're not getting anything done by doing it on no sleep," Apollo argued, taking the computer from his friend's hands.

"Hey!" Clay protested, making a grab for the laptop before it seemingly disappeared into thin air behind Apollo's back. Glaring, he jumped to his feet and ran in circles around his magician friend, looking for any trace of where it had gone. "Gimme back my computer, dude!"

"In a second," Apollo promised, turning to face Clay with crossed arms. "I need two things from you, first."

Clay sighed, sitting back down on the couch. "Sure," he muttered in defeat. "I'll promise to go eat and take a nap before I do any more work."

Apollo smiled. "That's great of you to say, though I was going to ask something else first." When Clay looked confused, Apollo shrugged nervously and gestured to his outfit. "What do you think?"

Clay frowned, looking his friend up and down. Apollo was wearing the black suit he always had on, though it was usually hidden on weekends by his red cape. His usual heart-shaped bag was missing too, and his diamond earring had been replaced with the simple red stud Apollo usually wore to classes. From his knees down, he had his stage boots on, their black soles barely visible on the thick, dirty carpet of the pair's home. His hands sported their usual gloves, Apollo's ever-present bracelet glistening from his left wrist. "Your outfit?" Clay asked.

Apollo sighed, irritated. "Yes! Do you think I look professional?"

Clay raised an eyebrow at Apollo's worried expression. "Dude, that's what you've always worn to your classes. Why are you asking now?"

Apollo glared at Clay, then reached behind him and pulled out from nowhere the missing laptop, placing it on the coffee table behind him. "I'm heading off for my first day of internship," he replied. "I'll see you this afternoon."

"Oh," Clay muttered, watching Apollo storm off to the front door. "Um, I'll get right on breakfast
Apollo didn't reply, throwing open the front door.

"Good luck, dude!" Clay called, just as the door slammed closed behind his friend.

Apollo nervously adjusted his tie as he exited the elevator. 'I hope I'm not late...' His father's dire warnings echoed in his head as he checked his watch.

"Let him believe you've let your guard down, but always keep an eye out. He may be a simple law-breaker, but I have my suspicions he's capable of far worse, so watch yourself. Oh, and, above all... try to relax, okay?"

"Easier said than done, Dad," Apollo muttered to himself, finding the door not far away with a small sign on the nearby wall reading 'Gavin Law Offices'. "That must be the place." He then frowned and shook his head. "Stop talking to yourself, Wright. You got this. You're fine." Resisting the urge to shout, he firmly walked over to the door and pushed it open.

Perhaps it was because he was so used to his family's own messy office space that the neat and clean room he was greeted with surprised Apollo so much, making him pause in the doorway as he looked around in shock. Comfortable-looking chairs lined one wall, near an almost empty reception desk that appeared to be unused despite being free of any sign of dust or disrepair. There was a door in the far wall, held open with a small, simple wedge door-stopper on the carpet. 'Is... is this what a professional office looks like!?'

Apollo heard movement in the next room, and jumped inside, letting the door swing closed behind him with a thud. He winced a bit at the noise, hoping he hadn't caused too much of a ruckus, and rubbed at his bracelet nervously, shooting the door a quick glare.

"Is that you, Wright?"

"U-uh..." Looking around, Apollo realised Kristoph Gavin was standing in the office doorway, adjusting his glasses as he calmly watched the young man in black. "Y-yes, sir!" Apollo almost shouted, straightening up and swallowing his nervousness. In a quieter, almost meek tone, he added, "I... hope I'm not late?"

Kristoph's brow furrowed in the smallest frown, rubbing at an ear with one finger. "There's no need to shout," he said. "And you are actually a few minutes early, if anything."

Apollo tried not to wilt at his mistake. "Sorry, sir."

"Mister Gavin' is fine," Kristoph continued, stepping forward towards the young man as he looked him up and down. "I presume that is what you plan to wear in court?"

Shooting a glance down at his black suit and white boots, Apollo nodded. "It's part of my stage outfit. My sister designed it... with Dad's help." He struggled not to again reach for his bracelet, wondering if wearing the gloves today had been a bad move. 'At least I remembered not to wear the
Kristoph thought for a moment. "It's adequate," he eventually decided, pushing his glasses further up his nose. "Certainly an improvement on your father's simple suit, with less eye-catching colours. The missing sleeves and those blindingly white boots are a bold choice, but I can't say I've not seen stranger sights from certain prosecutors. At least the boots will be invisible behind the bench."

Apollo sighed in relief. 'Remind me to treat Trucy later for making this work without the cape! Also, kill Clay for not pointing out the boots.' "I'll remember to wear normal shoes in future, Mister Gavin," he promised.

"That would be preferable," Kristoph continued with a hint of a smile. "To be perfectly honest, I was half-expecting to have to take you out shopping for suitable court dress myself. Students are notoriously low on funds, and I'm well aware of your family's situation in particular."

'Geeze, a shopping trip with my boss? What would that have been like?' Apollo wondered. Aloud, he felt some of his stage confidence returning to him as he smirked and asked, "Should I be insulted, Mister Gavin?"

Kristoph quietly chuckled to himself. "Why don't you come through to my office?" he asked, gesturing to the room behind him. "We can start putting you to work right away."

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Wanna meet up for dinner tmrw nite? :

Oooo ok! Why tho?

Cuz I want to tell you all about my first day as an intern in person before we have to work :) .

:DDDD

I'll take that as a yes xD .
Eldoons at the usual time? .

Yeah! :D
Oh is it ok if Daddy comes too?

Sure :) .

Yay! We'll see you there! :D

January 18, 6:28PM
Mort Street

The breeze of the cold evening blew at Apollo's cape, exposing his bare arms to the winter air. 'Should've worn a sweater to work today,' the young man chided himself, tugging the edges of the red fabric tight around his torso, hoping the wind wouldn't grow strong enough to blow his hat off his head. 'Where the hell is Mister Eldoon? He's normally around here at this time!'
Finally, Apollo spotted a familiar cart winding its way around the corner ahead. Grinning, he raced forward, a hand on his hat to keep it from flying away as he used the other to wave. "Mister Eldoon!" he cried. "Mister Eldoon, I've been-!" It was then the man pulling the cart looked up, and Apollo finally saw his face, grinding to a halt as he recognised it was not the face of the person he was expecting. Instead of thin grey hair, there was nothing natural visible under this man's identical noodle-like wig of hair, and the lack of Dude Eldoon's blue glasses revealed similar thick eyebrows, although this man's were a deep black instead of grey. Other than that though, Apollo couldn't see any more similarities outside the man's wardrobe.

The two stared at each other in surprise and confusion for a long moment. "Who are you?" Apollo asked.

The unknown man scoffed to himself, climbing out from the pull-bar of the cart. "You're one of the regulars," he said, more as an observation than a question. "Sorry I won't know your usual. That kind of thing weren't exactly written down." With that, he began to open up the mobile stand for business, pushing open the shades and disappearing into the back.

Apollo shook his head, still confused. "Uh, just a normal bowl," he muttered, walking up to the window and pulling a small handful of notes from his bag. "Not too much salt, though. It disagrees with me, and I kinda have to be on stage in an hour or so." He watched the man silently working behind the low-hanging 'Eldoon' banner, and, shivering, pulled at his cape for protection from the cold. "So, where's Mister Eldoon?" he asked. "What's happened to him?"

The man sighed, pausing in his work only briefly before placing a bowl of noodles in front of the magician waiting outside. "By that, I'll assume you're asking about my pops and not me," he said.

Passing over his money, Apollo's eyes widened in surprise. "You're his son?" he asked, grabbing a pair of chopsticks. "The one he wasn't getting along with?"

"Told you 'bout that, did he?" the younger Eldoon muttered, then sighed. "I suppose I was just fighting destiny, trying to avoid this old stand. Who am I to break a tradition of fifteen fathers?" He shook his head, pressing a hand against the bowl and yellow wig perched on his head. "No, salty broth runs through my family's veins!" He looked to Apollo. "Name's Guy. What about you?"

It took Apollo a moment to realise he was being asked his name, and he quickly swallowed his mouthful of noodles. "Uh, Apollo."

"Nice to meet you, Pollo," Eldoon replied with a nod.

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Looking the young man up and down, Guy Eldoon crossed his arms and leaned against a counter top behind him. "What are you then, eh? An actor?"

"Magician," Apollo explained, smiling as he gestured to his outfit with his chopsticks. "Although I'm also studying to be a lawyer. My sister and I stop by here before our show all the time." He paused to look up and down the street, wondering where said sister was.


Apollo shot the man a glare. "Considering what happened to my dad six years ago, I wouldn't be surprised if they did more than just joke about it. Especially to my face."

Although confused, Eldoon decided to accept that and shrugged. "Speaking of fathers, I suppose I should break the bad news," he said, changing the subject. "My pops won't be coming back to this stand, I'm afraid."

"What do you mean?" Apollo asked, frowning. "I promised him just two weeks ago I'd tell him all about my first day of internship. My brother was going to tell him about London when he gets back in a few months."

Eldoon shook his head. "Sorry, sonny. I'm afraid he suffered a fatal heart attack over the week. Nobody's gonna be telling him anything anymore."

Apollo almost dropped his chopsticks and bowl in shock. "He's... dead?"

"That's generally what happens with a fatal heart attack, yes," Eldoon replied with another heavy sigh, staring off to the side. "If he'd only told me he..."

Apollo placed his chopsticks down on the small counter of the cart for a few moments, still trying to process the news. Although Dude Eldoon had never been a close friend, the old man had been a constant presence in Apollo's life for as long as he'd been a Wright. Many a night had been spent out looking for the old noodle cart when the family found themselves unable to scrape together the money for groceries, and Phoenix would ask for their meal to go on his tab... a tab that Apollo had heavily suspected for many years now the elder Eldoon would quietly discount as time went on. Before Apollo had moved out, he and Trucy (occasionally joined by Luke and/or Phoenix) would stop by the cart for dinner before going to work, and after moving out, sometimes, as he did tonight, he would plan to meet Trucy there instead of at the Wonder Bar. He'd never been the biggest fan of the salty noodles Eldoon made, but the old man had been such a friendly presence Apollo had never argued chatting with him. As the years passed, he even got less salty noodles out of the deal, so he was never going to be the one to complain about it.

"Polly!"

Pulled out of his thoughts, Apollo looked up to see Trucy running down the footpath towards him,
Phoenix trailing not far behind with a smile. He forced a small smile of his own, waving to his approaching sister. "Hey, Truce. Dad."

Trucy bounded to Apollo's side, gripping the counter sticking out from the window to the cart. "Mister Eldoon, I! Huh?" She looked the man within up and down, confused. "You're not Mister Eldoon!"

The younger Eldoon frowned, offended. "Yes, I am!" He turned his glare to Apollo, jerking his head towards the girl as he noted her identical cape and hat (except in blue instead of red). "This your sister, Pollo?"

Phoenix caught up as Apollo was nodding, peering into the cart with a confused gaze that quickly turned to recognition. "Hey, I know you!"

Guy Eldoon looked terrified for a moment, looking Phoenix up and down before seeming simply confused. "Eh?"

"It's Guy, right?" Phoenix asked, glancing nervously up and down the street before carefully pulling off his beanie. "You remember an old customer, don't you?"

Upon seeing Phoenix's unique hair, Eldoon broke into a grin. "Hey, ol' Phoenix! You still a regular after all this time, eh?"

Phoenix laughed, slipping the beanie back on as Trucy watched him in confusion. "You bet! What are you doing back here selling noodles? You seemed so excited about following your dream when you left!"

Eldoon sighed, losing his cheer almost instantly. "I guess sometimes dreams just don't work out. Yours didn't either, if I remember rightly."

Phoenix didn't reply, looking off to the side with an unreadable expression on his face.

Apollo looked to Trucy, deciding to put her out of her confused misery. "Truce, this is Guy Eldoon, Mister Eldoon's son."

Nodding, Trucy gave the man a grin. "Hi!" she chirped.

"Pleasure to meet ya," Eldoon replied.

"Mister Eldoon, my little sister Trucy," Apollo continued.

Eldoon laughed. "And what a fitting name it is, too!" he told the girl. "So, what can I get ya, Trucy-doll?"

Trucy opened her mouth to respond before realising she couldn't remember what her usual order actually was, as it had been so long since she had had to say it. She looked up to Phoenix for help. "Daddy, what is it I usually get again?"

"'Daddy'?" Eldoon repeated in surprise, looking to Phoenix. "They both your kids?"

Phoenix nodded, placing one hand on Trucy's shoulder and the other on Apollo's, a proud smile on his face. "A pair of successful magicians like these? I'd be crazy to say they weren't!"

Apollo blushed, brushing his father's hand off his shoulder. "Dad," he muttered.

Eldoon laughed. "Well, I won't question it, then!" he decided. "Now what can I do you kind folk
Apollo watched as Phoenix placed his and Trucy's usual orders, the other bit of news concerning the Eldoons weighing on his mind. "Um, Mister Eldoon?"

Busy putting together the two bowls, Eldoon shot a glance at Apollo over his shoulder. "What is it, sonny?"

Apollo opened his mouth to speak, then lost his nerve and closed it again before reconsidering with a different train of thought. "How... how do you know our dad?"

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, but Eldoon laughed. "Aw, I used to help my pops out for a time, selling these! Ol' Phoenix would drop by with his assistant all the time."

"It was the cheaper option to burgers," Phoenix picked up, smiling at the thought of Maya. "Luckily, Maya has a fondness for pasta, or I'd never have been able to convince her to eat it."

Trucy giggled, although Apollo hadn't been listening, frowning in thought as he wondered if it would be appropriate to pass on Maya's ability to channel the dead to someone who was mourning. Eldoon, unaware of Apollo's thought process, laughed again, turning back to the family and handing out Phoenix and Trucy's bowls of food. "He used to whip out his badge," Eldoon continued, gesturing to Phoenix with a grin, "and say to us, 'Put it on my tab, you know I'm good for it!'"

Phoenix rubbed at the back of his neck with an embarrassed smile. "Yeah, I probably need to check up on the status of said tab..." he admitted. "I hope your dad has that thing written down somewhere, or we'll have to ask him when he gets back."

Aside from the sound of Trucy happily eating, the cheerful atmosphere around the noodle cart quickly died. Eldoon paused just long enough for Phoenix to register something was wrong before leaning underneath his counter and fiddling around out of sight for several moments, the sounds of clinking bowls echoing from within the wooden cart.

Apollo bit his lip in thought. 'On the one hand, it's this Mister Eldoon's father who died and he might want to be the one to tell everyone... on the other hand, he's probably had to break the news to every regular who asks where the other Mister Eldoon is, and might not want to have to go over it anymore...' Sighing, he made his decision and looked up at Phoenix. "The other Mister Eldoon apparently died of a heart attack this week."

Trucy paused in the middle of shovelling another ball of noodles into her mouth, chopsticks sticking out between her lips as she looked up at Apollo in shock. "Mmwpht!?"

Phoenix stared for a moment before looking into the cart, where the younger Eldoon was emerging with a piece of paper in hand. "I'm sorry to hear that," he said.

Eldoon just sighed. "I've made peace with it," he admitted. "To be honest, the timing couldn't have been better. After all the troubles I've had, I finally reached out to him at New Year's. Was gonna start taking over this old thing again anyway. Would've liked a little more time with him before he passed, but what can you do." Changing the subject, he tapped the paper in his hands. "Looks like he wrote down what you owe us, Phoenix. At least he had the foresight to keep track of that."

Phoenix nodded. "That's good."

Trucy finished swallowing her massive mouthful of pasta, looking sadly into her bowl. "Poor Mister Eldoon..."
The younger Eldoon gave the girl a fond smile. "Don't you worry about either of us, Trucy-doll," he assured her. "My pops is in a better place, and I can look after myself."

Have your siblings told you about Mr Eldoon?

No? What happened?

Apparently he died of a heart attack over the week. His son's running the cart now

What!?

I know, it came out of nowhere. I think you'll like Guy though. He has his father's friendly attitude

This is the son he wasn't getting along with, isn't it?

Yep. Apparently they'd just made up

I think I need some time to process this.

I don't blame you. Feel free to call me if you need to talk, alright? I'm available any time you need me

Alright. Thanks, Papa.

Papa says Mr Eldoon died?

Yeah, he did
Still not sure what to think about it

Me too.

Oh yeah, I was going to tell you about my first day of internship
I got distracted by assignments... and the whole Eldoon thing

How'd it go?

Mr Gavin's a cool boss. He seems to really like me
Plus he approved of the suit Trucy made ;)

Haha! That's always a good sign! I bet Trucy loved that, too!

She mostly just boasted that it was all her, even though Dad was right there pointing out he'd helped her design it xD
Apparently he had to guide her through a few iterations before they got what I have now ;)

Yeah, I think I remember her complaining to me about that, haha!
I should get back to my own assignments though. Talk to you tomorrow?
Sure, seeya then

Bye!

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"Luke!"

The nineteen-year-old looked up from his book and smiled as he saw his friend approaching. "Hello, Athena!"

Athena grinned as she jogged to the pair's usual tree, looking up to the new leaves budding on the branches above them. Spinning on her heel, the sixteen-year-old plopped down on the ground and fixed Luke with a curious smile. "Hey, I've been meaning to ask for a while; Why this tree?"

Luke stared for a moment, then frowned in thought, moving to close his book. "What about this tree?"

Athena gave Luke a look. "I've heard how you feel when you talk about it," she pointed out, then gave him an understanding smile. "It's not just a random tree in the courtyard, is it?"

Luke slowly smiled and nodded, looking up at the branches above with a nostalgic gaze. "It's less the tree itself," he explained. "More the location."

Grinning in excitement, Athena hugged her knees. "Tell me about it?" she asked.

Laughing, Luke decided to comply, replacing his book in his satchel. "My parents both studied here at Gressenheller," he explained. "They were classmates with Professor Layton."

"Really!?" Athena asked in surprise.

Luke nodded, giggling at her reaction. "Dad studied archaeology; He even roomed with the Professor in their later years. Mum studied geology. Her best friend was a co-worker at a nearby restaurant; They were waitresses there."

He paused, looking up at the tree again. "This was just some random tree to Mum at first; It was near the geology department, and it was quiet here, so she liked to sit under it if she could to eat, or study, or socialise between classes."

Athena followed Luke's gaze, her expression somewhere between sad, confused and curious.

"It was here my mum and dad met," Luke continued, still staring at the branches. "Mum said Dad and the Professor were late to a class, so they were running, and Dad decided to take a shortcut past this tree... but he didn't see Mum sat on the other side until he'd already tripped over her." He smiled, remembering the laughter in his mother's eyes whenever she'd told her son the story. "He was still late, so he just apologised and ran off, but Mum said he sought her out the next day. He was worried he'd destroyed her books or something, and wanted to pay for them if he had!" He giggled, finally looking down from the tree and catching a glimpse of Athena smiling as she intently listened to his story. "After that, they became friends. Dad introduced Mum to the Professor, and Mum introduced them both to her friend Claire. Mum said the four of them were inseparable, right up until they had me and we moved to Misthallery."

His smile died a little, knowing how far apart the four friends were now. "When we moved back to London and Dad was working here, Mum pointed this tree out to me," he looked back up at the branches, "and told me the story. She always said this was her tree,
because she and Dad and the Professor and Claire were always underneath it." He paused, then looked over to Athena with an apologetic smile. "It probably sounds a little stupid, but... I guess I'm continuing her tradition."

Athena smiled understandingly. "It's not stupid," she assured him. "It makes you feel closer to her, right?"

Luke nodded, giggling as he leaned back against the tree's trunk. "Yeah, I guess it does."

The two friends stared up at the branches above them for a while in silence. "That's why I'm studying psychology," Athena eventually said.

"Hmm?" Luke asked, looking over to her in surprise.

"My mom was a psychologist," Athena explained, looking nervous as she stared at her lap. "I find the subject pretty easy, and studying it makes me feel closer to her."

Luke watched her for a moment. "Was?" he repeated.

Athena sadly returned his gaze. "Both our moms are dead, right?" she pointed out, then looked away again. "Your dad must miss her a lot too."

It took Luke a moment to realise Athena was referring not to the deceased Clark Triton, but to the very alive Phoenix Wright, and he had to restrain a laugh, leaning forward a little. "I, uh, think I need to explain something about my Dad and my Papa..."

Athena looked back up into Luke's eyes, confused. "Huh?"

"My Papa is Phoenix Wright," Luke explained with a smile. "You've met him, when we solved Professor Rains' death. My Dad was Clark Triton." He grinned with restrained laughter. "Him, you've never met, and I'm sorry to say you probably never will, either."

Athena somehow seemed even more confused. "You... have two dads?"

Luke nodded. "A Dad and a Papa," he specified. "Dad was an archaeologist, and even Mayor of Misthallery at one point, and only lived in America for a few days. Papa was a lawyer until he got disbarred, and he's never lived outside California. Do you understand now?"

Athena thought for a long moment, face screwed up in concentration. "You're... adopted?" she slowly realised, her expression turning to shock as she belatedly connected the dots and looked up at Luke in surprise. "What happened to your mom and dad!?"

Luke raised an eyebrow. "You're actually asking that?"

Athena gasped as she realised what she had just said. "Uh, n-no, I was just... surprised," she quickly cried, pressing her hands to her reddening face. "Y-you don't have to answer that!"

Luke laughed, watching Athena as she sighed in relief that he wasn't mad at her probing question. "Honestly, I've told this story to a lot of my old friends when I've met them again on visits, so I don't mind telling it again. Do you want to hear it?"

Although she still looked guilty for her spur-of-the-moment question, Athena nodded, watching Luke intently.

"Alright then," Luke said, leaning back against the tree and smiling up at the branches. "Dad was
offered a job in California. We were all set up to move there. This was..." He frowned in thought. "Wow, six years ago now. More accurately, five and a half." He shook his head, looking to Athena as he brought himself back on topic. "We sent off our shipping container of furniture and things, then we took our time getting to America, so we wouldn't be too far ahead of it. We took a ship to New York, then a plane to Arizona, and then we rented a car and spent a few days driving to Los Angeles." He paused, looking away and trying not to look sad. "We were almost there when it happened. Something hit the car. Dad was killed in the crash, but Mum disappeared. The police say she's dead, but I know she's still out there somewhere." He closed his eyes, taking a moment of silence before he managed to continue. "I'd already met Papa before, when he was in England once. He came looking for me after he heard what happened, and offered to adopt me on the spot." He couldn't resist a smile at the memory, eyes opening just enough to stare at his lap. "I still call myself Luke Triton officially, so Mum can find me when she eventually reappears, but otherwise I consider myself a Wright. I have my Papa and my brother and sister, and they're all I need." There was a very long moment of silence before Luke heard a sniff and looked up in surprise to see Athena staring at him, eyes shining with tears and a smile on her face. "Are... you alright, Athena?"

Athena nodded. "Mm-hmm," she insisted. "It's just... hearing how much you miss your mom and dad and how much you love your new family...!" She paused to sniff, rubbing at her eyes with one hand. "It's so sweet!"

Luke smiled at the girl, pulling a handkerchief out of a pocket to offer it to her. "Well, I'm sure you miss your mum just as much," he said, then paused in thought as he watched her dry her eyes. "Did you ever have a dad?" he asked. "You don't have to answer."

Athena thought a moment, then shook her head. "Never even knew who he was," she explained matter-of-factly. "Or is, even. After Mom died, I got sent to live with my aunt."

"That makes sense," Luke decided, remembering how Athena's aunt was the most common mention the teenager made to her home-life. "Were your mum and aunt not very close? With you and your mum living in California, I mean."

"Probably," Athena said with a shrug, giving her eyes one last wipe before attempting to re-fold the hankie to return to its owner. "Aunt Eury doesn't really talk about my mom." With a thoughtful frown, she left it at that and handed the handkerchief back to Luke. "Thanks."

Luke smiled, laying the damp cloth on top of his satchel to dry. "And she was a psychologist, right? Your mum, I mean?" When Athena nodded confirmation, he tapped his chin in thought, staring off into the distance. "Huh, of course! I should've known with all the fuss over Ponco and Clonco they'd need a psychologist in the robotics lab..." A moment later, he realised what he'd said and whipped around to look at Athena, eyes wide as he stuttered, "I-I mean... I wasn't going to mention that!"


Slowly, Athena seemed to wilt in place, giving the grass a sad stare. "So you did recognise me."

Luke wasn't sure how to respond at first, but looked up again at the sixteen-year-old, giving her a nod. "I worked it out the first day of last semester. I wasn't going to say anything though, not unless you brought it up."

Athena grunted something that almost sounded like an attempt at a laugh. "That story you told me? When I first heard it, I just heard my name. I thought you were talking about me, so I screwed up my
courage to investigate."

Giving her an understanding smile, Luke rested a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"My mom didn't just die," Athena continued, a hand reaching for her blue-faced necklace. "Someone killed her. Everyone thought it was my friend Simon, but I could hear in his voice that he was lying. He never would have killed her, not in a million years." She closed her eyes, clutching her necklace tighter as she fought tears. "I tried to tell them, but no-one listened to me! They locked him away and sentenced him to death, and I got sent halfway across the world to live with my aunt!"

As the teen began to sob, Luke shifted himself over to sit next to her, pulling Athena close in a one-armed hug.

"I didn't even know my mom!" Athena continued, leaning on Luke and moving her hands to press against her eyes in an attempt to stop the flow of tears. "She barely talked to me... made me wear those headphones I hated so much... did she even love me at all, or was I just another of her experiments?"

"Of course she would have loved you," Luke instantly replied, more instinctively at first before quickly wracking his brain for evidence to back up his claim. "Those headphones... I remember seeing them on you when we first met. I'd bet anything they were supposed to help with your sensitive hearing."

Athena sniffed, beginning to calm down, but didn't reply.

"And the first thing, or one of the first things Clay and Apollo told me when they first took me to the Space Centre," Luke continued, "was that the robotics scientists had us banned from going anywhere near them. Your mum especially seemed furious when she caught me chasing you up there. Why would she have been so upset if she didn't love you and want to keep you safe?"

Although still sniffing, Athena stayed silent, rubbing at her eyes.

"I was so scared of her, Apollo and I didn't go back until after the HAT-1 Miracle!" Luke continued, then frowned in thought. "Actually, that must have been around the time she died, right? I remember something about a murder while Clay was there the day before. Wasn't that one of the robotics scientists?"

There was a moment's pause before Athena nodded. "That was her," she admitted, then sighed, pushing herself away from Luke and rubbing at her eyes. "I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about," Luke insisted, giving her one last pat on the back before withdrawing his arm. "We're friends, aren't we? I'll always listen to your problems, and try to be there to support you." He looked around the quiet courtyard, then gave her a smile, whispering, "I promise to keep your secrets, too. You can trust me with anything."

Apollo grinned as he made his way through the crowd of graduating students (graduated, now!), heading for the much larger crowds of friends and family, all trying to reunite with their loved ones now the big ceremony was over. Occasionally, he passed a classmate from his last three years of study and they would stop to give each other their final goodbyes before moving on again.

"Good luck out in the real world, guys!"

"Hey, you'll remember to e-mail me, won't you?"

"Careful with that shout of yours, Apollo!"

"I am totally sending you all a million pics of my badge when it arrives!"

Finally extricating himself from the crowd of students, Apollo clutched the generic certificate he'd been handed on stage that morning and picked a random direction to head off to in his search for his family. It didn't take long before Apollo found it was them who happened upon him.

"YO, 'POLLO!"

Before Apollo could turn in the direction of the shout, he was ambushed from behind by a hug from his best friend, Clay keeping Apollo's arms pinned to his sides as Trucy quickly joined them, running around to Apollo's front to hug him from that direction, neatly slotting her head under her brother's chin.

Clay whooped in victory. "Gotcha!"

"Surprise!" Trucy chirped.

"Guys, get off me!" Apollo cried, shooting Trucy a glare as he attempted to wriggle free of their grasp.

"Aw, but we're so proud of you, dude!" Clay laughed from above and behind Apollo's left ear. "We're not allowed to show our love for you through group hugs?"

Apollo rolled his eyes, wishing he could look his friend in the face from this angle. "Are you sure you're not just jealous you've got another year to go until you graduate?" he asked, smirking. "Just like I always said, it looks like I'm becoming a lawyer way before you could ever hope to go to space!"

Clay didn't reply for a very long moment. "Screw you," he eventually muttered.

Apollo grinned in triumph as Clay then Trucy released him from their grasp, only to promptly find himself encased in the grip of a woman in a purple robe. "M-Maya!" he cried in surprise.

"Aw, my widdle Polly is all grown up and becoming a lawyer like his daddy!" Maya squealed, hugging Apollo tightly before releasing him and fixing the young man with a proud grin. "Just got your badge to go, then you're all set to start defending the innocent, huh?"
"Ha!" Clay cried, poking Apollo defiantly in the ribs.

"Ow," Apollo muttered, shooting his friend a glare.

"The bet's not settled until you've actually defended someone in court!" Clay continued, crossing his arms.

Apollo sighed, rubbing at his eyes with one hand. "You seriously care that much about our stupid bet?"

"Hey, I agreed on my end that I had to actually get into space!" Clay argued, hands on his hips. "Make it fair on your end too, dude!"

"Fine, fine," Apollo agreed, waving his friend off. Looking around, he noticed Phoenix and Pearl had caught up to their small group and gave them a wave. "So we're all here now?" he asked with a smile.

"All of us except Luke," Trucy sighed, crossing her arms. "It's not fair that he couldn't come..."

"He's got his own final exams to deal with at the moment," Phoenix pointed out, ruffling Trucy's hair. "We all know he would've come if he could."

"I'm just glad I could get the time off to come myself!" Maya giggled. "I'd hate to miss seeing my boys graduating from college!"

Apollo was blushing too hard to protest that he wasn't 'her boy'.


Maya shrugged, giving Clay a smile. "I'm sure I'll work something out."

Clay seemed surprised, then sighed in defeat. "Lucky," he mumbled.

Apollo laughed, and patted his friend on the back sympathetically. "Don't worry, Clay. Both Luke and I will come to yours next year, okay?"

After a pause, Clay gave Apollo a grateful smile. "Sure," he replied.

Pearl pressed her thumb to her lips in thought. "So, when will you start lawyer-ing, Apollo? Will you be working at the Agency?"

Apollo shook his head. "Nah. A lawyer doesn't belong at a talent agency," he explained, quickly shooting an apologetic glance to his father with a hurried, "Sorry, Dad."

Phoenix smiled. "No offence taken," he assured his son.

"I've been interning at Gavin Law Offices, remember?" Apollo continued to Pearl. "Mister Gavin said he'd hire me on as a junior partner once I get my badge."

"Oh," Pearl mumbled in reply, then gave Apollo a smile. "Okay."

Trucy frowned at Phoenix, picking at his old blue suit. "You really should have let me make you a new one of those, Daddy. You look awful."

Phoenix pouted, looking offended. "Hey, this suit has been through a lot! There's a lot of important memories associated with this thing!"
"It looks older than me!" Trucy cried, arms crossed.

Maya smirked, a hand to her face. "Hmm. She has a point. I mean, you were wearing that when you jumped through a circle of flames into Eagle River, weren't you?"

Clay's eyes widened in surprise as he looked to Phoenix in awe. "Whoa, did you seriously do that, Mister Wright!?"

"I didn't jump," Phoenix objected, hands on his hips. "And the fire was less a 'circle' and more the reason I fell in the first place."

"Ooooh," Maya continued, ignoring him with a look of glee on her face, "and I think you were wearing that when we both got tased too! And that one time you broke down the door of the Channelling Chamber, and then jumping down into that sooty firepit in Labyrinthia!"

"Wait, tased!?" Apollo interrupted, confused. "When did that happen!?"

Clay snickered to himself. "Man, the lawyering life must be more exciting than I thought!"

"I have no idea about what any of those things Mommy just said are," Trucy complained, crossing her arms. "Except the Labyrinthia one."

Phoenix grinned, rustling her hair. "That's 'cause you haven't obsessively read all my old case-files like Apollo here. Maybe I'll tell you the stories sometime."

"Really!?" Trucy cried excitedly. At Phoenix's resulting nod, she happily jumped in the air and cheered, "Yay!"

Apollo frowned. "Yeah, am I never gonna get an explanation on this 'tased' thing?"

Pearl giggled, pressing her hands to her cheeks as she bounced between Maya and Phoenix. "And all of those things you did were for Mystic Maya!" she squealed in Phoenix's direction. "It was so romantic of you, Mister Nick!"

Phoenix and Maya giggled at each other for a few moments. "Except that time we got tased though," Maya pointed out to Pearl, patting the teenager's shoulder fondly before looking back up at Phoenix. "That was for Edgeworth, wasn't it, Nick?"

"Ungrateful jerk," Phoenix joked, then turned to the frustrated Apollo with a smile. "That was when we were trying to investigate the DL-6 incident. Maya and I ran into Manfred von Karma, and he hit us with a taser to steal our most valuable piece of evidence and make off with anything we might have been able to use in the files."

Clay laughed. "Wow, that sounds awesome!"

Apollo frowned. "Seriously?"

Phoenix nodded, his smile gone. "Deadly serious. Keep that in mind for yourself: Never confront the bad guy with your evidence." He gestured towards Apollo with a finger. "You take them to court and put them on the spot there. I had to learn that the hard way."

Apollo nodded, eyes wide in surprise but mentally making note of the advice anyway.

"Had to learn it twice, too," Maya added with a wink, lightening the mood after Phoenix's dire instruction to Apollo. "Not that we had much of a choice with Redd White though, huh?"
"What do you mean 'we'?” Phoenix asked, giving her a smirk.

Maya grinned innocently. "Well, we all know I would have been right there with you if I wasn't locked up at the time!"

"If you'd been right there with me,” Phoenix replied, holding back a laugh, "you'd've accused White of being Mister Grossberg's lover or something!"

"Well,” Maya replied with a dismissive shrug, "it could very well have been true, y'know!"

Trucy tugged a little on Apollo's black robes, examining them. "Do you have to return this, or do you get to keep it?"

"I have to return it," Apollo told her with a smile. "It's rented, I think."

Trucy pouted in disappointment. "Aw..."

Pearl looked around at the crowd that was finally beginning to dissipate around them. "Are we supposed to be leaving now?"

"Probably," Phoenix agreed, shoving his hands in his pockets as he looked around. "Apollo just needs to return his robes, then we can go."

Apollo snorted in laughter, grinning. "I'll get right on that, since I'm apparently holding everyone up."

"Yeah, why are you so slow, dude?” Clay joked, elbowing his friend.

As Apollo turned to leave, Clay and Trucy following close behind, Maya poked Phoenix in the arm with a finger. "Hey Nick, you'll let me know when they send out those e-mails for the graduation photos, right?"

Phoenix shook his head, remembering how earlier that day, at the prompting by the photographer for a 'family photo', Maya had promptly inserted herself into the proceedings alongside Phoenix and Trucy. Pearl, although told to join in by her cousin, had stayed at the side with Clay, watching with a gleeful smile. "They'll be e-mailing Apollo, not me," Phoenix told Maya with a smile, "but I'll make sure we get one for you."

"Good!” Maya cried with a grin. "It doesn't matter that much, though; We can get a better one at Luke's graduation!"

Phoenix rolled his eyes. Then why did you ASK?’

"I'd just like a photo of Apollo's special day," Maya continued. "You're supposed to have one for each of your kids, right? As a parent?"

After a moment of confusion, Phoenix smiled and shrugged. "Probably,” he agreed. "It'll be somewhere in the Parents' Rulebook."

Pearl looked up at them, seeming puzzled. "There's a rulebook?"
As their boat passed out of the dark tunnel into the candlelight of the stone room, the trio gasped in wonder.

"W-wow," Phoenix breathed, pausing in his punting momentarily before remembering to continue pushing their tiny boat forward. "Who'd have thought there'd be some ancient underground ruins here..."

"This place is amazing, isn't it?" Espella added, face lit up with a wide smile as she looked all around, drinking in every detail she could see. "Look at those large pillars! And that stream of water!" She pointed between the pillars holding the roof above the high walkway on their right, a statue on the opposite wall spilling a fountain from its mouth just visible beyond. "Everything here looks so old! I've never seen anything quite like it!" She then paused, looking to Phoenix in confusion. "And you say this kind of place is called a... 'roo-in', is it?"

Phoenix and Luke shot each other amused glances. "Oh yeah, I guess you don't really have any ancient ruins like this within Labyrinthia, huh?" he asked.

Luke opened his mouth to add to Phoenix's comment, only to stop and sadly frown, slumping in his seat as he stared up at the high stone ceiling, making only a soft noise somewhere between a sigh and a grunt.

The boat came to a stop with a jolt as it bumped against a low platform, next to a pair of other small boats identical to theirs. After mentally kicking himself for getting distracted by his young friend, Phoenix turned to Luke with a worried frown. "Something wrong, Luke?"

"It's just..." Luke sighed, looking down as he waved his hand through the water below them. "Looking up at the columns was making him think of the Azran Sanctuary. "This reminds me of the Professor," he admitted. "If he were here, he could tell us anything we wanted to know about these ruins."

"Oh, that's right," Phoenix mumbled, looking away as he lay the long stick he'd been using to direct their boat down along the side of the hull. "The Professor was an archaeologist, huh?"

Espella ran her fingers through the tuft of hair at the end of one of her plaits, feeling guilty for
admiring the view.

"Sometimes," Luke quietly continued, "I can almost hear the Professor's kind words calling out... Even now, I can almost hear his voice..." He sniffed, rubbing a hand against his nose. "Professor..."

Phoenix thought about moving across to offer the boy comfort, but Espella, already sitting next to Luke, beat him to it, shifting slightly closer to the boy with only a small rock of the boat as she patted his shoulder. Instead, Phoenix closed his eyes, listening to the soft thudding of the boats against the ancient pier and the flowing of the water all around them. In a certain way... it did sound like voices. "Me too," he said. "And Maya's voice along with him."

Espella seemed to pause a moment in her patting of Luke's shoulder. "I-I think I can hear them as well," she admitted, sounding vaguely confused.

The young woman's comment seemed to finally break the melancholy of her companions, who both looked up in surprise, staring at each other and at Espella. "Um, come to think of it," Luke said.

"It really is like," Phoenix continued.

"We can actually hear them..." Espella finished.

The three stared at each other for a moment before crying "What!?" in unison.

"Now then," echoed a faint voice through the ruin, "let's head to the entrance..."

"Professor, wait up!" echoed a reply.

Luke shot to his feet, rocking the boat and almost tipping his companions into the water. "That's...! It has to be...!" he cried, then, before anyone could object, he charged out of the boat onto the stone pier.

Phoenix restrained a roll of his eyes, trying to hold the boat steady against one of its neighbours. "Yeah," he quietly agreed, trying not to sound sarcastic in his irritation. "There's no mistaking that."

Espella only smiled fondly, climbing out of the boat after Luke, but more gently so as to not jostle Phoenix behind her.

Not waiting for his friends to join him, Luke ran up the nearby stairs to the high walkway. At the far end of the room, he could see a massive door, closed and hiding whatever lay beyond it. About halfway between it and him, a man in an orange turtleneck and distinctive top hat emerged from a hidden pathway to the side, almost invisible behind the massive pillars lining the main path. "Professor!" Luke shouted, and broke into a run. "PROFESSOR!"

Hershel paused, then looked up in the direction of the shout. "Luke!" he had just enough time to say before the thirteen-year-old arrived at the man's side, throwing himself at his mentor and latching on to him with a tight hug. Although somewhat awkward about the physical affection, Hershel smiled at the boy as he patted his head. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"P-Professor!" Luke sobbed into Hershel's jacket. "It... it's really you! I-I... I thought... you'd never come back!" He rubbed his face against his mentor's chest, struggling to control his breathing as his tears spilled down his cheeks. "Even though deep down I believed the spell could be broken somehow... there were times I just wasn't sure if it was possible!" He wailed again, clutching the man even tighter.

Hershel chuckled to himself as he rested his hands on Luke's shoulders, waiting for the teen to regain
control of his emotions. "I'm so sorry, my boy," he quietly replied. "I've caused you quite a bit of worry."

"Professor!" came a cry from the direction Luke had appeared in, and Hershel looked up to see Phoenix and Espella emerging onto the walkway from the pier. "You're all right!" Phoenix called, relieved smiles on both of the pair's faces.

Luke slowly brought himself back under control as their friends caught up, sniffing to himself as he let go of Hershel and stepped back. Hershel gave him a reassuring smile before stepping aside to the centre of the path, Luke following him.

Phoenix noticeably looked up and down the path as he approached. "Um, Professor, where's Maya?" he sheepishly asked, scratching a cheek. "I, uh, thought I heard her voice, too."

Hershel smiled, noticing Luke and Espella sending amused grins at each other. "Not to worry, Mister Wright," he assured the lawyer. "Rest assured Miss Fey is just-

"YOOOOOO, NIlllllllick!"

Phoenix had just enough time to turn to his right with a startled look before a flash of purple came running from the side room and launched herself at him with arms wide, knocking them both to the paved ground.

"Hey Nick!" Maya kept shouting, refusing to stop clinging tightly to her friend as he attempted to sit up around the restrictions of her arms pinning his to his sides. "Nick! Nick!"

"M-Maya!" Phoenix cried in surprise, finally managing to sit up despite the spirit medium sitting sprawled on his legs. He pushed her off him, arms firmly on her shoulders as he stared at her grinning face, still processing what his eyes were telling him. "Am I dreaming?" he quietly asked, a small smile finally tugging at the corners of his mouth. "Is it really you?"

Maya just giggled. "Yup yup!" she replied. "The Professor and I are as real as real can be!"

Phoenix sighed, visibly relaxing as he let his hands fall from their grip on her shoulders. A part of him felt vaguely reminded of the first time Maya had channelled Mia in front of him (he reasoned it was the combination of overwhelmed disbelief and light-headedness). "You have no idea how relieved I am," he said with a soft laugh, shaking his head as he kept watching Maya with a fond smile. "Really. I've never been so happy to see you."

Maya looked away, suddenly seeming guilty. "I, uh... I'm really sorry, Nick," she said. "You must have been worried sick. It's just... Well, I wanted to do something to help Espella, y'know?"

"No, no!" Phoenix cried, extricating his legs out from underneath her as he rushed to comfort his friend. "It's not your fault Maya, it's mine." He shook his head. "If only I'd helped you sooner, then none of this would've happened, and you wouldn't," he had to pause as the mental image ran through his head again, "have been dropped into that pit of fire!"

"I..." Maya paused to sniff, then lunged at Phoenix, throwing her arms around his neck in another hug. "I thought I'd never see you again, Nick," she whispered. "I'm really sorry."

Phoenix just hugged Maya back, unable to put together the words to respond.

"Come now," came Hershel's voice from behind Phoenix, and the pair almost jumped apart in surprise, having both forgotten the others were there. They looked up at the trio standing in a group nearby, watching them with smiles on their faces, although Luke was still drying any remnant tears
with a handkerchief. "Everyone here did the best that they could," Hershel continued. "That is what enabled us to power through the hardship and reunite." He crossed his arms. "Or, at least, that's what I believe."

Phoenix and Maya shared a smile. "Yeah," Phoenix replied, his gaze unmoving from Maya's. "You're right, Professor."

"Of course he's right!" Luke boasted, shoving his hanky into his satchel. "The Professor's always right!"

Maya laughed as she and Phoenix got to their feet. "Good old Professor Layton logic! Logic so good, it'll leave you good as gold, right Professor?" She winked, giggling mischievously as Phoenix promptly groaned and rolled his eyes.

Layton gripped the brim of his hat, laughing at the pun. "Indeed, Miss Fey!"

Espella looked to the floor, her smile fading a little from guilt as she played with the ends of her plaits. "I'm so glad you're all okay," she said, then screwed up her courage and fixed Maya with a scared stare. "Um, Maya, are you hurt!? Are you suffering from any burns?" She then turned to Hershel. "And Professor! Has your arm been properly re-attached to your body!?"

Hershel chuckled, amused. "We're quite all right, Espella, I assure you. You may rest easy."

"Yeah!" Maya added, running to the young woman's side with a reassuring smile and holding out her arms for her friend to inspect. "Look! We're perfectly fine!"

Espella bit her lip for a moment, then rubbed a hand almost frantically at her eyes, fighting back threatening tears of relief. "Oh, thank goodness..."

"Aw, Espella!" Maya said in a comforting tone, pulling the teen into a hug.

"We're entirely unharmed, Espella," Hershel added, patting Luke's shoulder with one hand to convey the message to the worried boy at the same time. "Please, dry your tears."

Espella nodded, rubbing at her face as Maya pulled out of the hug, only for the spirit medium to turn on Phoenix with a glare. "Look what you started, Nick!" she accused him. "Everyone got all sappy and now you made Espella cry!"

Phoenix gave her an incredulous look.

"Mister Wright!" Luke joined in, arms crossed. "A gentleman must never, ever make a lady cry!"

Phoenix rolled his eyes. "Why is it my fault!?" he asked with an irritated sigh. 'Besides, if anyone started the crying, it was you, Luke!'

Espella giggled, wiping the last of the dampness from her eyes. "Thank you, everyone."

Hershel turned to Phoenix. "Mister Wright, you kept these two safe and out of harm's way," he said, gesturing to Luke and Espella. "For that, you have my utmost gratitude."

Although surprised, Phoenix pulled himself together quickly enough to give Hershel a sheepish grin, rubbing at the back of his neck. "N-no problem, Professor! I, honestly, couldn't have done it on my own." He looked to Luke with a grateful smile, the teen grinning in response. "Luke and Espella really helped me when I needed it the most." He then glanced at Maya before returning his gaze to Hershel, adding, "Likewise, I should be thanking you for keeping Maya safe. Thank you so much."
Despite having said it, Phoenix still felt he hadn't properly conveyed how thankful he was, and could only look back to Maya with a smile, the pair staring at each other almost as though one of them might disappear again at any moment.

"Not at all, Mister Wright," Hershel replied with an almost proud smile. "After all, it is a gentleman's duty to help a lady in need."

Maya looked thoughtful at the professor's words, then grinned cheekily and elbowed a confused Phoenix. "Nick, you should really learn to be a proper gentleman, like the Professor here!"

Phoenix laughed, running a hand through his spiky hair. "I'm not too sure I'd be able to pull off the whole top hat look for one," he replied, throwing his friend a wink in return.

"Mister Wright," the professor continued, "it is an honour to once again team up with you. No matter what challenges may lie in our way, with your help I am certain we can overcome them." He waved a hand to the large door at the end of the room. "Let us go forth and solve the mystery that is Labyrinthia, shall we?"

Phoenix nodded, a determined look on his face. "Absolutely. We'll fight for Espella until the very end." He cast a glance to the mentioned teen, who sheepishly petted her braids in response. Mind made up, Phoenix stuck out his hand towards Hershel. "Professor, I'm looking forward to working with you and putting an end to this mystery once and for all."

Hershel nodded, taking Phoenix's hand and shaking it firmly. "It will be my pleasure, Mister Wright."

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Luke paced nervously as he waited for his family to arrive, unused to being the one waiting. "Their plane's already landed!" he fretted to himself. "Where are they?"

"Be patient, Luke," Hershel advised the young man. "They will be collecting their bags. You'd know better than all of us how long that can take."

"Yeah," Luke sighed, pulling himself to a stop and staring at his shoes. "I guess I'm just... nervous."

Athena looked up at her friend with concern, one hand playing with her necklace. "Why? It's just your family, right?"

Luke nodded, but didn't say anything in response to her question. He wasn't sure he could even formulate an answer for himself.

"I suppose, given this wait," Hershel spoke up, "it is a good thing Flora offered to stay behind with Alfendi. He would not have taken this inactivity very well."

"Nope," Athena agreed, grinning at the thought of the active young boy. "Kinda a shame he couldn't come by to see friends arriving on his birthday, though."

Luke giggled, looking up to his friends. "I've never been in the country on Alfendi's birthday before!" he pointed out, then turned to Hershel. "Just think, Professor: six years ago! That was the last time we had an adventure together; Only a week or two after Alfendi was born!"

For a moment, Hershel smiled, then his expression turned sombre as he tugged at his hat. "He had only a handful of days with his birth parents before they were taken from him," he mused. "It might be considered a blessing he can't remember any of it."

Luke's good mood vanished instantly at the reminder. Athena seemed surprised, her necklace flashing yellow as she tapped at her earring with one hand. "I didn't know Alfendi was adopted," she said. "Mister Sycamore was making all those comments about how much he resembled your family, Professor."

"He likes to do that," Hershel admitted, crossing his arms at the thought of his brother. "I don't think he can accept that any similarities are just co-incidence."

Through the noise of the arrivals hall, a shout echoed from somewhere in the crowd. "YOOOO, LUUUUUUKE!"

Luke barely had time to turn around before a flash of purple was upon him, throwing her arms around the young man in a tight hug. "Maya!" he laughed in surprise, recognising his friend and hugging her back. "It's great to see you!"

"Aw, my widdle Luke's all grown up and graduating!" Maya squealed, tightening her grip on Luke as she shook him back and forth a little, then stepped back to look up at him with a wide grin. "Look at you!" she added, eyes locking on to a small patch of hair growing on the young man's chin. "You
look more grown up than ever! Older than Apollo, even!" She winked, cheekily. "Not that that's much of a feat, to be honest."

Luke laughed. "Maya!" he attempted to scold her, only to shake his head as he gave up and gave her a smile. "Thank you for coming, though."

"Are you kidding?" Maya giggled, hands on her hips. "There's no way I'd miss one of my boy's graduations! Besides, we're doing the whole 'Labyrinthia reunion' while we're all here!" As Luke laughed, she then turned to Hershel with a smile. "Speaking of! How've you been, Professor?" She walked over, pulling the man into a brief hug.

Hershel chuckled, tipping his hat to his friend. "I have been perfectly alright, Miss Fey," he assured her. "It is a pleasure to see you again!"

"Luke!" came a call from the crowd, and Pearl soon emerged, pulling a large travel bag behind her. Luke waved, rushing to Pearl's side to greet her. "Hello, Pearl!" As the two exchanged smiles and a handshake, Luke took Pearl's bag and walked with her to join Maya, Hershel and Athena. "Thank you for coming!" he told her.

"I've never been so far away from home before!" Pearl said with a nervous smile, looking around at the airport. "So far, it... looks a lot like Los Angeles."

Maya laughed. "It's different once you get outside, believe me!" She then turned to Athena with a smile. "Hi there! You must be Luke's friend!"

Athena nodded sheepishly, and Luke (leaving Pearl's bag at her side) moved around to place a hand on her shoulder. "Maya, Pearl, this is Athena Cykes! Athena, this is my friend Maya Fey, and her cousin Pearl!"

"Hello, Ms Fey, Pearl," Athena said, giving the women a wave.

Maya laughed. "Please, just Maya is fine!"

"And you can call me 'Pearly' if you want, Athena," Pearl added, giving the teen a brief bow in greeting. "That's what my friends and Mystic Maya call me!"

Athena nodded, her nervousness seeming to fade. "Alright!" she agreed with a grin. "Maya and Pearly! Pleased to meet you!"


Luke laughed, hugging Trucy tightly and moving her away from Athena so as to not accidentally hit the older teen with his sister's flailing limbs. "Hey, Trucy! I wasn't gone that long, y'know!"

"Yes, you were!" Trucy protested, pulling away and shoving her fists on her hips with an angry glare. "You finished your exams weeks ago, and-!" Her tirade came to a sudden end as she noticed something new about Luke's face, and she stared at him in confusion. "Why do you have a beard?"

Luke blushed, but, just as he opened his mouth to speak, was interrupted by another approaching voice.

"Truce, stop running off!" Apollo cried as he arrived, sending a thankful glance to Pearl as he
noticed the fifteen-year-old taking care of Trucy's abandoned bag. He placed his own down not far away and approached his siblings with his arms crossed. "It's a miracle we ended up on the right plane, having to stop all the time to chase you down again!" As Trucy rolled her eyes exaggeratedly, Apollo looked up to Luke with a smile. "Hey, L-", he said, only to also pause as he got a good luck at Luke's face. "Um, what's with the," he fought to restrain a laugh, gesturing to his own chin as he stared at Luke's face, "caterpillar on your chin there, Luke?"

Luke frowned, crossing his arms as his siblings broke into giggles. "It's just a goatee," he pointed out. "I thought I'd try it out... See what it looks like."

"It looks silly!" Trucy giggled, sending Apollo into snorts of restrained laughter.

"It does not!" Luke shot back before reining himself in from childish irritation. "Besides, I could have gone for the full beard, like my dad had!"

"Zak Gramarye had weird facial hair too," Apollo replied with a grin, hand to his face as he failed to hide his amusement. "Doesn't mean I should try it for myself."

"A beard isn't 'weird'!" Luke protested, rolling his eyes at the teasing.

Trucy paused, pressing her hands to her face. "Ooh, 'weird beard'!" she cooed to herself in amazement. "It rhymes!"

To Luke's relief, it was at that moment Trucy and Apollo were pushed aside by Phoenix, who rested his hands on their shoulders as he shot quietly amused glances back and forth between them. "Now now, you two aren't making fun of your brother's rather dashing new goatee, are you?"

Luke sighed, giving Phoenix a smile. "Thank you, Papa."

Phoenix threw Luke a reassuring wink.

"You can't talk, Dad," Apollo said with a frown. "You've got permanent stubble."

"Yeah, Nick!" Maya called to the family group with a grin. "Shave once in a while, will you?"

Phoenix pretended he hadn't heard Maya and smiled in his elder son's direction. "You're just jealous, Apollo; Now Luke really does look older than you!"

"What!?" Apollo cried in surprise.

Ignoring Apollo's outburst, Phoenix grinned as he turned away from the trio, heading towards where Maya stood with Hershel as he gave the man a wave. "We meet again, Professor!"

"Mister Wright," Hershel replied, tipping his hat with a warm smile. "Always a pleasure."

Phoenix then turned to the last member of the group, the young redhead staring up at him in wonder. "My my, and is this young Athena you have here?"

Athena blinked in surprise at being recognised, then bounced up to Phoenix with a wide grin, shaking his hand energetically. "Hello again, Mister Wright!" she cried. "It's been a long time, huh?"

Laughing, Phoenix nodded in agreement. "I was a bit astonished to hear you'd gotten into college so quickly! Or 'university', they say here."

Giggling in embarrassment, Athena shrugged nonchalantly, running her hands through her ponytail. "I got impatient," she offered as explanation.
Luke stepped towards the teen, pointing his siblings to her. "Guys, this is Athena. Athena, these are my siblings, Apollo and Trucy!"

Athena grinned, bouncing forward and meeting the equally excited Trucy halfway, the pair shaking each other's hands with glee. "Luke's told me a lot about you!" she said.

"Same here!" Trucy replied, then noticed the small gadget around Athena's neck, currently glowing a bright green. "Oooh, I like your necklace!"

"Thank you!" Athena chirped, patting the object proudly. "His name's Widget!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, but elected not to say anything, giving the teen a wave and a friendly smile. "Nice to meet you, Athena. You're studying to be a defence attorney, right?"

Athena nodded. "Yup! You are too, aren't you?"

"Pfft," Apollo scoffed, grinning proudly as he crossed his arms. "Graduated a couple months back!" He then shifted uncomfortably, admitting, "I'm still waiting on my badge to arrive, though. I was hoping I'd have it before we left."

"Oh, that reminds me!" Luke suddenly cried, opening his satchel and digging through the items within. "I had something I wanted to give you and Trucy!"

"A present!?!" Trucy cried, bounding to Luke's side as she excitedly watched him searching in his bag. "What is it, what is it?"

Luke laughed, pulling out a small plastic bag. "I was going to mail them to you as a graduation gift, since I couldn't be there myself."

"You had exams," Apollo pointed out with a shrug and an understanding smile. "It's fine."

"You didn't miss anything, anyway," Trucy whispered, rolling her eyes. "It was really boring."

Apollo raised an eyebrow in his sister's direction, while Athena stifled giggles.

Luke gave Trucy a smile. "They weren't ready in time to send through the post, so I thought I'd wait to give you these in person." With their attention fully on him, Luke unwrapped the plastic bag, pulling out two small objects. Smiling at his siblings, he reached out and showed the hidden items off. "I hope you like them."

Resting in Luke's outstretched hand was a pair of flat, metal objects, polished and shining a golden yellow. They were bent into a rounded triangle shape, which, on closer examination, proved to more specifically be a taut bow, the same symbol Trucy's handmade clay-and-wire pins on their capes displayed. The two arrows were even there, sticking out as simplified rounded shapes from the curved metal and pointing at the front of the bow, eternally ready to fly loose.

"One of Athena's classmates used to do metal-working," Luke explained. "I thought I'd commission him to make something a little more professional-looking for your capes... No offence, Trucy."

Trucy slowly gasped, carefully taking one of the moulded pieces of metal and examining the back, finding a thick metal pin welded there, the same golden colour as the main badge. Apollo similarly picked up the other badge to inspect it, and quickly found it to his liking, giving Luke a smile. "Wow, these look amazing!"

"Are you kidding!??" Trucy squealed, grinning widely and bouncing in glee. "These are fantastic!"
"I'm glad you like them!" Luke said, only to be ambushed by a sudden hug from his sister as he finished talking, sending him into surprised laughter.

Apollo looked up and noticed Phoenix, Maya and Pearl had joined the group, seeming curious about Luke's gift, so he showed them the new pin in his hands with a grin. "Looks great, huh?"

"Wow!" Maya cooed, glancing up at an impressed Phoenix beside her. "You guys are gonna look awesome wearing these on stage!"

Trucy pulled back from Luke, showing her new badge to Pearl. "You bet, Mommy!" she said to Maya, then promptly yawned, rubbing at her eyes.

Luke looked sheepish, hurriedly shoving the plastic bag still in his hands into his satchel. "Oh, I forgot, it's about three in the morning for you guys!"

"In that case," Hershel suggested, "since everyone is here and has their bags, it is high time we moved on."

"Good idea, Professor," Phoenix agreed, rubbing at his eyes himself as he was reminded how tired the travellers all were. Pulling the sleepy Trucy under his arm, he waved for everyone to follow the professor. "C'mon everyone; Hotel first, then we can rest for a bit..."
After a few hours of rest (during which Pearl and Trucy almost dropped off to sleep several times), Luke led the Wrights and Feys to the Layton household, where the small family was quietly celebrating Alfendi's sixth birthday. Luke, Flora and Pearl were sitting on the couch chatting, while Apollo and Trucy sat on the floor with Alfendi as he told them about school, his toys and various interests. In the doorway, Hershel, Phoenix and Maya stood, alternating between watching over the younger ones and quietly talking amongst themselves.

"Do you have stupid teachers in America, too?" Alfendi was asking Trucy with a sigh.

Trucy nodded, commiserating with her young 'cousin'. "Yeah. I'm pretty sure that's a worldwide thing. Sometimes I wonder why people go into teaching at all if they seem to hate it so-!" Her small tirade was cut off as she suddenly yawned, although she was quick to cover it with a gloved hand.

Alfendi watched, thinking to himself. "Are you tired?"

"All of us are, a little," Apollo admitted with a smile. "We just got here from America, after all."

"Oh, you mean like jetlag?" Alfendi replied, perking up. "Luke always has that at the beginning of term! Do you know why it happens?" Apollo and Trucy opened their mouths to respond, but the six-year-old wasn't waiting for an answer. "I can show you on Papa's globe!" Grinning, he got to his feet and looked up towards his father. "Papa! Can I use your globe, please?"

Hershel, watching the trio with Phoenix and Maya, smiled sheepishly. "Now Alfendi, I believe Apollo and Trucy don't require an explanation of what 'jetlag' is," he explained.

Alfendi paused, then seemed to wilt in place, staring sadly at the floor. "Oh..."

"But I don't mind if you wish to explain it to me," Hershel hurriedly continued, changing his tune at the sight of his son's sadness.

"Yeah!" Trucy added, giving Alfendi a grin. "We'd love to hear you explain it! Wouldn't we, Polly?"

Apollo seemed frustrated at his sister, but shrugged and forced a small smile for the boy. "S-sure, of course."

Alfendi smiled, brushing some of his long and wild hair from his face.

"Why don't you help me fetch it from my study?" Hershel offered, a hand outstretched to the boy, and father and son soon headed off down the corridor together.

"I guess he really was too young to remember visiting us," Apollo muttered to himself once the boy was gone.

Trucy giggled. "Aw, don't kill his excitement!" she told him. "It's so cute when little kids are
passionate about something!"

"Like how people can die in their sleep from smoke inhalation?" Apollo replied, raising an eyebrow.

"He does want to be a firefighter when he grows up," Trucy pointed out with a grin.

In the doorway, Maya poked Phoenix to get his attention and stood close. "When the Professor gets back, I think I'm gonna offer to channel someone for him and Alfendi!" she quietly told him.

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "You honestly think a six-year-old you've known of almost his entire life has had anyone dear to him die that you haven't heard about?" he pointed out.

Maya scoffed. "It doesn't hurt to ask!"

Hershel soon returned, carrying a globe of the Earth in his hands that was about the size of his head. Alfendi was 'helping', gripping the side of the base with one hand, and walked alongside his father as Hershel took it over to Apollo and Trucy, where it was placed on the carpet. Alfendi grinned up at the man. "Thank you, Papa!"

"It was no trouble at all, Alfendi," Hershel replied, tapping his hair with his hand in the absence of his top hat.

Alfendi looked between Apollo and Trucy with a stern stare, his hands resting on top of the globe. "You have to be careful with this!" he told them. "It's one of Papa's things from his study!"

"Don't worry, we will!" Trucy assured him with a determined look. "Won't we, Polly?"

Apollo sighed. "I'll, uh, let you two handle it," he said, shifting slightly away from the pair.

Hershel returned to stand with Phoenix and Maya, giving them a smile. "Apologies for that," he quietly said.

"No problem," Maya replied, smiling. "Actually, I was wanting to ask... Is there anyone missing here Alfendi might like to see? Someone who's passed on?"

Hershel frowned, confused. "You're offering to channel a spirit for him?"

"It is his birthday," Maya pointed out with a grin.

"Oh, wait, I just figured it out," Phoenix interrupted, crossing his arms and giving Maya a look. "You want an excuse to have a nap, don't you?"

"No," Maya insisted, scoffing. "You know full well I'm not sleeping while I'm channelling someone!"

"You may not be dreaming, but you are unconscious," Phoenix pointed out.

Hershel's quiet chuckles stopped the argument in its tracks. "My first thought would be Alfendi's birth parents, except that I have no knowledge of their names, let alone any pictures of them," he explained. "Besides, Alfendi was only a handful of days old when they passed."

Maya and Phoenix were surprised. "That young?" Phoenix asked.

"Yes, unfortunately," Hershel replied with a small nod. He held a hand to his mouth as he continued, "My next thought would be more beneficial for the one you are channelling than Alfendi... Do you happen to remember Claire Foley, Miss Fey?"
Maya thought a moment. "I think I'll need to refresh my memory on her face," she said, smiling, "but channelling her again should be a cinch."

"I keep my photos of her in my study," Hershel said, and directed Maya down the hall. Maya shot Phoenix a grin before following the Englishman away through the corridor.

Professor Layton's study in his home was very much like his office at Gressenheller, with tables, chairs, shelves and even significant parts of the floor piled up high with paper and ancient historical artefacts. The walls, around the shelves, had various newspaper articles tacked up all around them, which Maya noticed on closer inspection seemed to feature the archaeologist's accomplishments over the years... except for the far wall, which was clear of articles. Instead, it featured a small array of framed photographs, each one a different shape and size.

"My apologies for the mess," Hershel said to Maya, treading a clear path across the floor to the desk under the window. He offered no further explanation however, instead reaching underneath for an old blue hatbox.

Maya thought a moment, then carefully closed the study door behind her, making her way across the messy floor to the far wall, her eyes on the photos as they came into her view. The largest had only two people in it she recognised, Hershel himself and a young Luke in a blue waistcoat; Luke was clutching a drink tightly, holding it just out of reach of a curiously sniffing Doberman at his side, while one of the four other people, all looking around Hershel's age, was trying to remove the professor's top hat. Maya couldn't help but giggle at Hershel's surprised expression as he clung to the beloved object in distress.

"Oh!" Hershel cried in surprise, and Maya looked around to see the professor noticing the object of her attention, abandoning his rifling through the contents of the old hatbox. "I see you've noticed those," he awkwardly pointed out, forcing a smile as he rushed to Maya's side.

Maya shrugged, feeling a bit guilty for examining them so eagerly. "Sorry, Professor..."

"No, no apologies necessary," Hershel insisted, sighing a little and giving her a more genuine, and relieved, smile. He gestured to the wall. "I actually forget these are here, since I see them every day. That one," he gestured to a small photo of himself with an elderly couple, "is of my parents."

"Aw, you all look so happy!" Maya chirped as she looked over the picture. "Is Claire on this wall?"

Hershel nodded, and wordlessly pointed to a slightly larger photo, off to one side and underneath a recent school photo of Alfendi. As Maya turned to look, she saw the photo featured four people, all young adults, wearing graduation robes and with their arms thrown over each other's shoulders in a sort of group hug, each one smiling or grinning widely for the camera. To her surprise, she recognised all four, two of them from Luke's old family photo albums (being his parents, Clark and Brenda), the third being Hershel himself, while the fourth was a redhead woman with glasses she remembered from the photo she had been shown three years ago. Maya pointed to the redhead.

"That's her, right?"

Hershel nodded. "I have a copy I had made for Luke," he quietly replied. "I felt a photo of his parents on their graduation day would be the most appropriate gift to give him on his own graduation."
Maya laughed. "My gift to him is just being here!" she joked, then turned away from the wall, headed to the centre of the room. "I'd better get to channelling her, then," she explained as Hershel followed her. "You'll have to explain to her what's going on, though. Sorry."

"It's no trouble," Hershel assured her, heading over to his desk. "I think I won't watch this time, however. I trust you aren't trying to trick anyone."

Maya giggled, watching as her friend returned to his hatbox, replacing items inside it to tidy away back under his desk. "I'll see you later, then!" With that, she closed her eyes and began the channelling process.
"Where's Mystic Maya gone?"

"She has decided, for whatever reason... she's going to channel a Ms Claire Foley."

At Phoenix's words, Luke and Flora had sent each other stunned looks, then shot to their feet and rushed out to the hallway, stopping dead as they spotted the closed door to the Professor's study. Behind them, Phoenix and Pearl followed more slowly, slightly confused at the pair's hurry.

"They must be in there," Flora pointed out to Luke, clutching her hands together in worry as she stared at the closed door ahead of them.

Pearl looked up at Phoenix. "Um... who is Mystic Maya channelling, Mister Nick? And why is everyone so worried about it?"

"Oh, n-no, we're not worried, just... surprised," Luke insisted, turning towards Pearl with a smile that failed to hide his concern. "Maya's channelled Claire before, remember? I think I last told you the story about her a year or two back."

Pearl had to think a moment before she recalled Luke's story. "The time-travel one?" she realised. "In that case, why are you so worried? Shouldn't it be a happy occasion for Mister Professor to see his special someone again?"

Luke and Flora gave each other worried looks, now feeling guilt on top of their concern. Phoenix rested a hand on Pearl's shoulder, giving her a smile. "You're half-right, Pearls," he assured her. "I think Luke and Flora are worried because Claire died a long time ago, and the Professor might be sad about that."

After a moment or two of thought, Pearl nodded. "Okay."

Before she could say anything else, a voice from behind her asked, "Why's everyone out here all of a sudden?", and the four looked around to see Apollo standing near the doorway to the living room, watching them with a confused frown.

"Mystic Maya's channelling Claire," Pearl explained with a smile before anyone else could formulate a reply.

"Claire?" Apollo repeated in confusion, then connected the dots with a gasp, eyes widening. "Oh! Claire!" He paused in thought, then his expression returned to confusion. "Why?"

Phoenix shrugged. "She offered to channel someone for Alfendi's birthday, and the Professor suggested Claire. I've no idea why for either of them."

With nothing else to add, the five stood in silence for a second or two before the door to the study began to creak open. As they all turned to watch, Hershel emerged, noticing them all gathered in the corridor with surprise. Instead of saying anything, he simply smiled reassuringly at Luke and Flora,
then stepped forward, holding open the door as Claire, sporting Maya's hair and robes, followed him with an excited grin. She also noticed the small gathered crowd with surprise, but quickly flashed them a warm smile. "Hello there!"

Flora and Luke almost seemed to sigh in relief at the pair's happy faces, sending glances at each other before Flora took a step forward. "It's great to see you again, -!" she began, only to suddenly pause, looking nervous.

"'Claire' is fine," the woman assured her with a smile. "If you don't call Hershel here any variant of 'Father', you don't need to call me anything special!"

Flora blushed, occupying herself by playing with the strand of hair hanging in front of her right ear. Claire then turned to Luke. "And Hershel tells me you are graduating, Luke! I must admit, it's hard to imagine Clark and Brenda's baby doing that already!"

Luke giggled, tugging proudly at his hat. "Well, I am a few years younger than most of my classmates," he admitted.

"So was your mother!" Claire laughed, then sighed nostalgically, a hand resting on her cheek. "That goatee of yours reminds me of our graduation. Clark was first experimenting with growing a beard, and Brenda kept threatening to dye it bright pink if he didn't get rid of it!"

"She warmed up to it eventually." Hershel added with a smile, arms crossed. "I distinctly remember her mentioning once in a letter that she couldn't imagine Clark without his beard anymore."

Apollo smirked, looking to Luke. "Maybe I should try that," he suggested. "Just dye that overgrown soul patch of yours a hideous colour so you have to shave it off."

Luke shot his brother a glare.

"Now now, Apollo," Phoenix butted in with a knowing smile. "Jealousy doesn't look good on you."

"Huh...?" It took a moment for Apollo to catch what Phoenix was referring to. "I'm not jealous!" he objected.

Luke giggled, deciding to join in on the teasing. "Then why don't you try growing something?" he asked with an innocent grin, trying to hide his amusement. "Isn't it a Gramarye tradition, after all?"


Turning back to Claire, Luke noticed she seemed to be watching them with vaguely confused amusement, and felt his heart fall as he realised how much he might have to explain before he could introduce her to his family. "Um, Claire, has the Professor told you anything about my life since we last met?"

Claire smiled, almost cheekily. "Hmm, a little," she replied. "Mostly I've heard about it from Clark."

Everyone except Hershel and Pearl was surprised at that comment. After a moment, Luke grinned widely. "You've spoken to my dad!?"

Claire nodded, giggling, "You should hear him boast about you!"

Now it was Luke's turn to blush, pulling at the brim of his cap.

"Ah, there's no shortage of things to boast about with Luke!" Phoenix added, winking at his younger
"You say that about all three of us, Papa!" Luke replied, still blushing.

Apollo smirked again. "Yeah, isn't it a contractual obligation as our father or something?"

"Well, I was a lawyer," Phoenix pointed out, still sporting his joking smile. "I'd never turn down following the fine print of a contract!"

Giggling, Luke turned back to Claire. "I should get the introductions out of the way, then." He pointed behind him, gesturing to each person as he named them. "This is my papa Phoenix Wright, my brother Apollo, and a good friend of ours, Pearl Fey."

Phoenix tapped a hand against his head in an informal salute. "Ma'am." Apollo gave her a nod, while Pearl waved with a polite smile.

Claire waved back. "It's nice to meet you all!" she said, then turned to Hershel with a hopeful grin. "So, not to sound impatient, but where's little Alfendi?"

"He's in the living room with Luke's sister," Flora explained, gesturing to the doorway behind Apollo. "Did the Professor tell you-?"

"That Alfendi's six today?" Claire interrupted, not seeming to notice she'd cut Flora off in her excitement. "He did, yes! I'm looking forward to meeting the birthday boy!"

Luke looked to Hershel, gesturing to his family. "We'll wait in the dining room then. Is that okay, Professor?"

Hershel nodded. "We'll let you know when we're ready for you again," he promised.

"Hats don't belong there!" Alfendi protested, pouting at his lone remaining playmate.

Trucy scoffed. "Are you sure?" she asked jokingly, tapping the top of her blue hat she had left to rest on the globe from Hershel's study. "It looks like it belongs there to me!"

Alfendi continued to pout, crossing his arms. "I'm hundred percent sure!" he argued.

"Wow, a full hundred percent?" Trucy replied, trying not to laugh as she continued to mess with the boy. "That's awfully large for someone who's wrong!"

"I'm not wrong!" Alfendi cried, though he was starting to look unsure. "Hats only go on heads!"

"Oh, well, if it will make you feel better!" Trucy giggled, winking at Alfendi as she swept the hat off the globe and jammed it on the boy's head. Their heads being about the same size, it quickly and firmly came to rest halfway down his forehead, his wild hair sticking out every which way. "There we go! All good!"

Alfendi seemed stunned for a moment, but then slowly smiled and began to laugh.

Hurried steps towards them across the carpet attracted the pair's attention upwards, where, to their surprise, they came face-to-face with an unfamiliar woman wearing purple robes, straight black hair
framing her face as she smiled eagerly at Alfendi, eyes brimming with awe. "Hello!" she whispered.

While Alfendi stared back at the woman with confusion, Trucy gasped in surprise, looking to Hershel and Flora standing a little behind her. "Uncle Professor! You asked Mommy to channel someone?"

"She offered," Hershel replied with a soft smile. "And I believe your family is in the dining room, if you wish to join them."

"Nah, I'm fine here," Trucy said, waving her hand as she dismissed the offer, not recognising it was actually a request. She looked to Claire with a smile, holding out her hand to shake. "Hi! I'm Trucy! What's your name?"

Claire tore her attention away from Alfendi, giving Trucy a smile. "Claire," she giggled, shaking the offered hand. "It's nice to meet you, Trucy!"

Flora cleared her throat, distracting Trucy from greeting the visitor further. "Your brothers, Mister Wright, and Pearly are expecting you in the dining room, Trucy. I can show you the way if you don't know where it is."

Trucy simply stared back at Flora, confused. "They're expecting me to what?"

Flora's polite smile hardened into a stern look. "Trucy, we appreciate your willingness to play with my baby brother."

"I'm not a baby!" Alfendi protested.

"- but your family is waiting for you in the other room," Flora continued, ignoring her brother. Trucy stared blankly at Flora for several moments before suddenly gasping, turning to look at Claire. "Oh, you're that Claire!" she cried, jumping to her feet with a guilty grimace. "Sorry!" She grabbed her hat off Alfendi's head, surprising the boy. "We'll have to play again later, Alfendi!" With that, she dashed off out of the room.

Flora sighed in relief. "As much as I like Trucy," she said, "she can be very dim sometimes..."

Claire giggled, sitting cross-legged on the floor as she returned her attention to the still-annoyed and somewhat baffled Alfendi. "A little birdy tells me you're six years old today," she said, giving him a wide smile. "So grown up!"

"I know!" Alfendi agreed, looking frustrated as he turned to Flora with a glare. "Stop calling me a baby already!"

Flora looked sheepish as she sat down at his side. "Well, you'll always be my baby brother, though!"

Hershel chuckled, also lowering himself to the floor on Claire and Alfendi's other side. "I'm afraid I have to agree with Alfendi on this one, Flora. He's long outgrown that label."

Alfendi gave Flora a triumphant smirk, and she shook her head with a fond smile.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"Woooow!" Trucy gasped in amazement, looking up at the medieval-styled buildings around them, the shadowy cranes towering above. "This is Labyrinthia?"

"In the flesh, so to speak," Phoenix replied with a grin as the group stepped through under the giant gate in the town's wall. At the familiar sight of the bustling market around them, he and Maya cast glances at each other, holding hands as they walked.

Pearl, unlike Trucy, looked around at the people, crowding around the stalls and chatting as they went about their chores. "They're all dressed so funny!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow at the teen, clad as always in her spirit medium robes. "You can talk..."

"Now now, no making fun of the local fashion!" Maya chided her cousin, only to look around herself and realise that Pearl wasn't referring to the medieval clothing the town had sported on her last visit: In the seven years since she had last been there, the local populace had moved on slightly from purely medieval to something that was a mix between modern and old, wearing handmade shawls or hats with factory-line shoes and logo t-shirts. "Huh," she mumbled. "They really are dressed funny."

Luke cast his gaze across the clouded sky, studying the horizon. "They've finally finished with the last of the old dome!" he exclaimed with surprise. "I was beginning to think they'd never be done taking it down!"

Hershel smiled, crossing his arms. "Indeed. I'm still surprised no-one ever fought to keep it, what with its ability to manipulate the local weather."

The group of seven continued in silence down the street, admiring the town as they passed through. The town in return slowly began to notice them, several of the townspeople giving the newcomers odd looks, or even excited stares as they recognised one or more of their 'returning heroes'. Luke and Hershel, used to the stares, took no notice, while Pearl, Trucy, Phoenix and Maya were too focussed on admiring the town to register the odd looks. Apollo, however, inched closer to Luke, feeling uncomfortable as he saw and heard some of the whispers through the crowds at the sight of the visitors.

Luke shot his brother a smile, leaning in slightly to his ear. "Don't worry," he whispered, "they've likely recognised the Professor and Maya."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "I can understand not recognising Dad without his suit, but haven't you been here enough they'd recognise you too?"

"Maybe," Luke admitted with a shrug. "I try not to assume that, though. Besides, who wouldn't recognise the Professor's top hat or Maya's outfit?"

"Touché," Apollo replied with a grin.
Trucy gasped loudly, then charged ahead of the group to an upcoming fork in the road, splitting off left and right to circle the centre of town. At the point where the three roads met, there was a large fountain, nestled between the surrounding buildings with a large arched wall at its back. On either side of the lower pool were copper statues of armoured knights, green with age, while the pedestal at the top of the tiered fountain featured two gleaming gold figures, standing back-to-back and pointing dramatically down towards the town gate. Squealing at the top of her voice, Trucy climbed up on the low wall of the pool's edge and bounced in place, staring gleefully at the lifelike statues above her. "Daddy! Uncle Professor!"

Pearl cried out in surprise as she also spotted the statues, running to Trucy's side to join her. "Mister Nick! Mister Professor! Why didn't you tell us about that!?" she asked, a massive grin on her face.

The rest of the group stopped in their tracks, Phoenix, Maya and Apollo staring at the fountain in shock while Luke hid a grin as he watched his father. Hershel simply gripped the brim of his hat with a smile.

After a pause, Apollo burst into loud laughter, doubling over to lean on his knees. Luke and Maya bit back giggles, and Phoenix was quick to direct a glare at the woman standing at his side. "It's not that funny, Maya."

"It so is!" Maya argued through her giggles. "I guess Ms Belduke wasn't kidding when she said they should erect a monument to you and the Professor, huh?"

Phoenix continued to glare, and Maya ran to join Pearl and Trucy, cooing over the statues with amazement. Derived of his partner to glare at, Phoenix instead turned to his sons, arms crossed around his battered hoodie as he stared at the young men leaning on each other for support through their peals of laughter. "Care to explain why you never mentioned that thing, Luke?"

Luke tore himself away from Apollo and forced himself back under control, wiping tears from his eyes as he failed to hide his grin from his father. "I wanted to surprise you, Papa!" he explained through his giggles. "I thought you'd like it!"

Phoenix continued to glare.

"I think it's a very good likeness, Mister Wright," Hershel added, still smiling serenely. "Especially considering we were all back in London at the time they made it."

Apollo's giggles began to subside, though he was still hiding a grin behind a hand. "Yeah, that reminds me, isn't that the statue of you they used in the 'Goldor' illusion, Professor?"

"It is, yes," Hershel replied, still smiling.

"It's a little morbid when you think about it that way," Luke admitted, finally bringing himself under control at the reminder of the harrowing experience. "We thought of it as the Professor's dead body until we found him again outside the town walls! Now it's up on display for the world to see."

Phoenix sighed, deciding to drop the subject, and was turning to give the fountain another look when he caught sight of some passers-by glancing between him and the statues with hurried whispers. As they noticed they'd been spotted, the passers-by quickly looked away and hurried on. Phoenix self-consciously ran a hand through his hair as he looked up to the unique hairstyle depicted on the statue of him above, the young, determined face staring off into the distance a stark contrast to the tired elder watching from below. "I should have brought my hat," the ex-lawyer mumbled.

Luke stepped forward to Phoenix's side, patting his arm sympathetically. "Why don't we move on,
"Papa?" he suggested. "Espella said she'd be in the old courthouse when we were ready."

"Oooh!" Maya chirped, bounding back into the conversation with a happy Pearl and Trucy at her sides. "Let's drop in on Ms Eclaire on the way! She's on my list of people to visit while we're here!" She looked to Hershel. "She still runs that bakery, doesn't she?"

Hershel nodded. "She does, I believe."

"Then let's go!" Maya cried, waving for everyone to follow as she headed off down the road to the right. "Better hurry if we want to see everyone today!"

Maya was still in the lead as the group reached the Eastern Shopping Area, and charged through the open doors of the bakery without hesitation. "Ms Eclaire!" she cried as she entered the building, blinking a little as her eyes adjusted to the sudden lack of bright sunlight. "Hello?"

As Trucy and Pearl filed in behind her, a teenage boy looked up at them from behind the kneading table, his hands white with flour from the dough he was working with. His eyes widened from underneath his mop of blonde hair as his gaze focussed on Maya. "Y-you're..."

"Hi there!" Maya chirped, giving the teen a wave. "Is Ms Eclaire in?"

After a moment of silent staring, the boy turned and ran through into the back of the shop.

Maya frowned, looking to the equally confused teen girls at her side. "We must have scared him."

Phoenix sighed in relief as he entered the bakery, running a hand nervously through his hair. "Geeze, it feels like running the gauntlet out there," he mumbled to himself, casting a glance at Luke coming in behind him. "Apollo decided not to come?"

Luke shook his head. "The Professor's waiting outside with him. They thought it might be too crowded in here if everybody came in at once."

"It is pretty small in here," Pearl agreed.

A muffled voice from the next room cried out in something sounding like frustration, the words indistinct at first but quickly becoming clearer as the source approached them. "... talk about it, Cecil! You're not like this with anyone!" Around the open door to the back room came a short, round woman with red curly hair, frowning as she turned to the visitors. "Can I-?" She stopped in her tracks as she saw the unusual group, watching them with wide eyes, her young assistant peering out from behind her with an identical expression.

Maya waved, grinning. "Hello again, Ms Eclaire!" she called. "It's been a while!"

"Maya!" Patty Eclaire cried, smiling widely as she ran across the room and pulled the younger woman into a hug. "Oh my dear, you've grown over the past seven years! I almost didn't recognise you!"

Softly laughing, Maya hugged Patty back as the baker sniffed away tears.

Phoenix failed to hide a snort of laughter, gesturing to Luke. "Really, out of anyone, it should be Luke here you say that to, Ms Eclaire!"
Luke blushed. "Oh, I, uh, hear it enough from everyone else, Papa..."

Patty looked up from hugging Maya to look Phoenix up and down with a curious look, only to smile again a moment later. "Phoenix!"

"Hello again, 'Boss!'," Phoenix replied with a smile and a wave, but was cut off from adding anything else as the shorter woman proceeded to latch on to him in another tight hug.

"You two kept your promise to come back!" Patty exclaimed, voice high-pitched as she fought off her rising emotional tears. "When you weren't here on the first anniversary, we all said you'd just had more important things to do, but by the fifth I was thinking you'd both just forgotten!"

"Aw, we'd never forget about you, Ms Eclaire!" Maya comforted her, patting her back as Phoenix awkwardly held her, unsure what to do. "We... were planning to come back sooner, but... things happened and... Well, we're here now!"

Luke looked concerned. "Missus Eclaire, didn't Espella pass on to you what I told her?" he asked. "I asked her to when she mentioned you'd been concerned about them..."

Patty sniffed, finally pulling away from Phoenix and looking up to Luke. She seemed confused for a second, then smiled at him in recognition, patting his arm. "Don't you worry, Luke. My head knew things were difficult, but it's not always so easy to convince the heart!" She then laughed, giving the young man a quick hug of his own. "Why is it you seem to be taller every time I see you?"

"I'm pretty sure I'm the same height I was last time I was here," Luke replied, a confused smile on his face.

"It must be the beard, then!" Patty laughed, poking at the goatee. "Makes you look so much older!" She then turned to the final two visitors with a welcoming smile. "Now, are you three going to introduce me to these two beautiful girls?"

Trucy and Pearl giggled as Maya grinned, pulling them close to her, one on each side. "Oh, these two?" the oldest of the three jokingly asked. She nodded her head in Pearl's direction. "This is my little cousin, Pearly," she then nodded towards Trucy, "and this is Trucy! She's..." Maya paused, looking to Phoenix inquisitively. "Wait, how much do we need to explain here?"

Phoenix only had the time to frown in thought before Trucy scoffed. "What's there to explain?" the teen said, pulling herself out from under Maya's arm. She stepped towards Patty, grinning widely as she curtsied politely. "My name is Trucy Wright! My mommy and daddy and brother have told me a lot about you, Ms Eclaire!"

Patty stared blankly at Trucy for a moment or two, then cast quick glances between Phoenix and Maya, who both looked away, blushing in embarrassment as the woman began to smile knowingly. "Ah, so this is the 'trouble' Espella said was keeping you away, is it?" she asked, then laughed and turned to Luke. "Now why didn't you tell us the full truth, young Luke? It would have been delightful to know sooner that these two finally admitted their feelings and started a family!"

As everyone's attention turned to Luke, the young man winced guiltily and looked away, tugging on his cap with one hand. Phoenix, guessing the source of his distress, placed a comforting hand on his shoulder, looking to Patty. "The full truth is actually a bit more complicated than that, Ms Eclaire," he explained. "That would be why Luke's left it simple."

Patty seemed confused, but decided to accept that explanation. "I won't keep you, then," she said, giving Luke a motherly smile. Turning to the others, she added, "Now, I'm sure you all have a lot of
people to visit and, I understand, only today to do it, so you should all get moving!" Before anyone could protest, she was chasing them out of the shop, crying, "Chop chop! Come see me again later if you have the time!"

From the doorway into the back, her young apprentice sighed and returned to his work.

View the Court Record
Once they left the town centre and headed down the wooded path to the courthouse, Luke explained to his family what he had not been explaining to their friends sequestered away in Labyrinthia: "The thing is, when I first came back here after I started at Gressenheller," he began, "I'd been visiting so many old friends, and I'd had to tell the story of what happened to my mum and dad so many times... not to mention, here in Labyrinthia they were all asking after you, Papa, and Maya too!" He sighed, hugging himself as he stared at the dirt road beneath his feet. "I... didn't mean to lie to them, but... it was just easier to answer 'how's everything going' with 'it's going fine, thank you'... Just say I was living in America, oh don't worry about Miss Fey and Mister Wright, they're very busy and can't find the time to visit, they'll come to England again as soon as they can..." He whimpered, squeezing his eyes shut as he hugged himself tighter. "I'm sorry... I meant to explain it to them eventually, I promise!"

Luke then found himself sandwiched in a two-way hug between Maya and Trucy, surprising him enough to pull him to a halt. "Now don't you apologise!" Maya ordered him. "It's totally understandable! We don't blame you in the slightest!"

Luke stared back at her, feeling the eyes of his entire family on them. "Are you sure?" he asked, voice wavering. "I mean, I haven't told them anything..."

Maya scoffed as she pulled away from Luke, hands on her hips. "Would I be telling you not to apologise if I wasn't sure?" she pointed out with a stern look. "Besides, it's not like you've outright lied, just," she shrugged, "been a bit vague on explanations. Which is totally understandable!"

"We forgive you, Luke!" Pearl added, clasping her hands together and bouncing at Maya's side. "Even though, like Mystic Maya said, there's nothing to really forgive..."

"Maybe Trucy and I should avoid mentioning who we are, then?" Apollo suggested as the group resumed their walking. "Make it easier?"

"No way!" Trucy cried, glaring at Apollo as she clung to Luke. "That would be abandoning family and I'm not doing that!"

"There's no need for such drastic measures," Hershel assured them from the back of the group. "I'm sure our friends would be satisfied to simply hear you are family; A lengthy explanation shouldn't be necessary."

Luke shook his head. "Except Papa wasn't my papa when we were first here! They'll all want to know how that happened, and that involves talking about my mum and dad." He sighed in defeat, now dreading the upcoming reunion in the courthouse.

Phoenix hummed in thought as he rubbed a finger against his chin. "They don't have internet here yet, do they?"

"They do not," Hershel replied. "I believe they are happy with their lifestyles as they are, though they are still introducing plumbing."
"I think they're hoping to have some electricity here eventually too," Luke added, looking to his father with a curious expression. "Why?"

"They won't know about my disbarment then," Phoenix pointed out, eyebrows furrowed. "Unless either of you has mentioned it, of course."

Luke shook his head. Hershel simply pulled at the brim of his top hat. "It wasn't my story to tell," the professor explained.

The group walked in silence for a few moments as Phoenix thought.

"So," Apollo spoke up, "what do we do, Dad?"

"What else is there to do?" Phoenix replied with a shrug. "We explain."

Trucy squealed in excitement as they left the tree line and came into view of the old Labyrinthian courthouse. "We're here!" she cried in a high-pitched voice, running from Luke's side to the steps leading under the massive arches of the red brick building's entrance.

"Wait, Truce!" Apollo called, running after his sister. Not far behind him came Pearl and Luke, excited grins on their faces.

Phoenix, Maya and Hershel exchanged amused glances as they watched the children charge ahead, and Hershel moved forward to join them. As the four young ones laughed amongst themselves, Luke pulled open the double doors leading inside, and they all hurried in, Hershel at their back. Maya looked to Phoenix. "Going to join them?" she asked.

Phoenix thought to himself, grimacing. "Oh... they had to meet up in the courthouse?" he asked, staring up at the high dome in the roof of the building in front of them, likely situated right over the fire pit in the courtroom itself.

"They don't use it as one anymore, though," Maya pointed out, gripping Phoenix's arm as she gave him a worried look. "Are you nervous about telling them how you lost your badge?"

"That I lost it in the first place," Phoenix corrected with a sigh, looking to his partner. "I really don't want to go into my own carelessness as to the 'how'."

Maya patted his arm, leaning her head on his shoulder sympathetically. "They're our friends, Nick, even if we haven't seen them in a while. They'll understand."

Phoenix thought a moment more, then smiled and nodded, planting a kiss on the top of Maya's head. "Well, it's been six years since I've set foot in a courthouse," Phoenix said, "but who's counting that kind of thing, anyway?" Laughing, the pair headed inside.

The first thing Phoenix and Maya saw as they entered through the doors was the happy circle at the other end of the room, near the entrance to the Inquisitors' Hall; Hershel was standing to one side as Luke finished eagerly introducing Espella, Eve and Barnham (the latter two a married couple for over a year now) to his siblings and Pearl, all six greeting each other with excited or simply welcoming smiles. As they heard the thud of the door closing, the group of seven looked around to
Maya waved, leading Phoenix into the room towards their friends. "Hiya!"

"Maya, P-!" Luke cried, stopping himself mid-word and awkwardly continuing, "Um, you made it!"

Espella squeaked loudly, then charged forward with a grin, meeting Maya first and enveloping her in a hug. "Maya! Mister Wright!" Finishing her hug with Maya, she then ran to Phoenix, causing him to grunt with surprise as she grabbed him in an equally tight embrace. "I'm so glad to see you both again!"

Phoenix and Maya laughed, Phoenix somewhat awkwardly as he patted the young woman's back. "It's great to see you again too, Espella," he said.

Giggling, Espella broke away from him to grin at the pair. "We've been waiting for you!" she said, waving for them to follow as she crossed the room again to where everyone else waited.

Maya grabbed Phoenix's arm, pulling him after Espella, which he accepted without protest. "You had to meet us in the courthouse?" Phoenix asked. "Out of everywhere in Labyrinthia?"

Eve gave him an apologetic look, nodding her head in greeting. "It's away from the town and marketplace, and empty except for us," she explained. "We felt it was the best option to avoid unwanted attention."

"We get it anyway just walking through the town!" Maya pointed out with a smile, pausing as they joined the main group to give Pearl a quick hug. "I've got a little list of people to visit while we're here!"

"Oh!" Espella cried, eyes wide. "Have you seen Aunt Patty yet?"

"We dropped in on the bakery on our way here!" Luke assured her.

Maya tapped a finger against a cheek in thought. "Who's her new apprentice? He looked familiar."

Espella and Eve fought giggles, while Barnham simply smirked. "He hasn't re-introduced himself to you?" he asked. "That's Cecil Thomas; He's always talking about the time you two apparently helped him find his sister when he was lost."

Phoenix and Maya looked at each other in surprise. "Huh," Phoenix muttered. "Totally forgot about those kids we helped out that one time." He looked up at Eve and Barnham. "Congratulations on your marriage by the way, you two."

Eve looked away with a shy look, but Barnham smiled proudly. "Thank you very much, Mister Wright."

"So," Eve continued, brushing aside the compliment and gesturing to Apollo and Trucy, "Luke's introduced us to his brother and sister that he's told us about occasionally. How have you two been over the last seven years?"

Pearl nervously chewed a thumbnail as she and the Wright children all turned worried looks to the pair, Luke especially seeming likely to blurt something out if the silence extended too long. Phoenix and Maya looked at each other for a moment, holding hands as Phoenix gave their friends a shrug. "Eh, you know, b-busy and stuff," he said, avoiding their gazes as he ran a hand through his hair.

Espella raised a hand to her face, watching him with concern. "Is everything okay, Mister Wright?"
"Yeah, fine," Phoenix replied all too quickly, rubbing at the back of his head and putting on an innocent look.

Espella and Eve cast glances at each other, their expressions somewhere between worried and frustrated.

"For goodness' sake," Apollo sighed, rolling his eyes as he gave Phoenix an annoyed look. "Just say it! It's not that hard!"

Despite Apollo's pained cry, silence reigned for several more seconds as everyone awkwardly looked at each other. Finally, Luke couldn't handle it anymore, shrieking, "I'm so sorry, this is all my fault!" As he flailed his arms wildly, everyone staring at him in shock, he rapidly continued, "I was going to explain eventually but it was so easy to just keep lying and not mentioning what had really happened and I mean I couldn't imagine having to break it to friends that Papa lost his badge and wasn't a lawyer anymore and then talking about my parents dying or disappearing or however I was going to explain it and the whole adoption thing and how much I was even allowed to say about Maya and *I'm so sorry I didn't tell you the truth!*" His tirade over, Luke groaned in defeat and buried his face in his hands.

Trucy wordlessly ran to her brother's side and hugged him tight, and Maya did much the same thing, walking over and pulling the young man into a hug with a gentle coo of comfort. "Aw, Luke! There's no need for you to apologise!"

While Luke's family and close friends watched him with worried, sympathetic looks, Eve and Espella shared another glance. Barnham, noticing them, quietly sighed to himself and poked Eve's arm, the two giving each other looks for a second or two before Eve finally shook her head in defeat and crossed her arms, turning to the visitors. "I suppose now would be the time to admit this isn't entirely news to us."

As the visitors gave her a mixture of surprised and curious looks, Espella hurriedly added, "N-not that we were spying on you or anything! We swear!"

"We may not have much in the way of modern technology here," Eve continued, "but we do have a phone line and a computer in the Tower at least. It's a rather stable connection to the internet, even if we rarely use it."

Phoenix sighed loudly, running a hand through his hair. "Should've guessed," he said with a defeated tone. "Of course news of the 'Forgin' Attorney' would've reached even *here*..."

"Geeze, all the way back then?" Apollo asked with a wince, remembering the dark and forbidding
website that had originally promoted Trucy and Phoenix's tiny agency. Luckily, it had been long replaced with something much more bright and professional, listing all four Wrights along with their talents and expertise. "That was before Dad let Luke and me rebuild it! It looked awful!"

"It didn't look that bad," Phoenix mumbled with a pout.

"It looked pretty terrible, Daddy," Trucy agreed, still pressing up against Luke as she gave Phoenix a knowledgeable look.

Phoenix pouted for a moment more before turning a frustrated look to Luke. "W-well, you agree with me, don't you Luke? You said it looked good!"

Luke shrugged, seeming uncomfortable. "Papa, I was just being polite," he quietly admitted. "Why did you think I insisted on helping to rebuild it?"

As Maya giggled, Phoenix threw his hands in the air, looking and sounding annoyed although there was a small smile on his lips. "My own children!"

Luke then turned to Eve and Espella with a confused look. "Wait, if you knew all along about Papa losing his badge and adopting me, why didn't you say anything?"

The two women looked guilty, but Barnham chuckled, shaking his head. "They said it felt like they were spying," he answered on their behalf. "I told them not to worry so much about it, but they were rather insistent."

"We didn't tell anyone else!" Espella added, hands clasped together. "Just me, Eve, Zach and my dad know! We promised to keep it to ourselves!"

"Don't concern yourself over the matter," Hershel assured her with a smile, a hand raised to signal for her to stop. "What's past is past. So," he crossed his arms, looking around at everyone, "now that you are caught up with us, I'm sure the Wrights and Feys would like to hear how you three have been doing..."
"Are you sure?" Phoenix asked with a smirk. "Disbarred lawyer, remember. Pretty sure there's a rule that I'm not allowed back in a courtroom."

"But I've always been curious about what a 'witches court' looked like!" Pearl said with an excited smile, then turned to Espella. "I'd love to look around! Thank you so much for offering!"

Espella giggled, pulling open the double doors leading through into the court. "I think you'll find it's changed a little over the years!" she told the group. "It's still the same courtroom, though!"

"Oh, Dad!" Apollo cried with an excited grin, fists held up. "Remember when you and Luke and Maya were first telling us about Labyrinthia, and you role-played the court sessions to let me figure out what the answers to the mysteries were? That was so cool!"

Phoenix laughed. "I'm glad you enjoyed it! Pity we could only do it twice!"

"You did what?" Barnham asked, laughter in his tone as he raised an eyebrow.

"Race you to the fire pit!" Trucy suddenly cried, dashing from Luke's side into the now-open courtroom beyond the doors.

"Hey, not fair!" Apollo shouted, racing after his sister. A giggling Pearl was quick to follow them.

Luke tugged on his cap with a determined frown. "Don't worry, Papa! I'll keep an eye on them!" With that, he had run off into the courtroom after his siblings.

"But-!" Phoenix objected, only to sigh as he realised Luke was long gone.

"If you're worried about the fire pit," Eve spoke up, a small smile on her face, "we've installed a lot of safety features around it since we started doing demonstrations. They're not going to be in any danger of falling down there."

Maya released Phoenix's arm and elbowed him with a wink. "See? They'll be fine! And didn't you say you were going to stop being so overprotective, anyway?"

"I'm not being overprotective!" Phoenix insisted, looking away with a pout. "I'm... rightfully concerned for their safety!"

Laughing, Maya grabbed Phoenix's arm and dragged him through into the courtroom.

The massive hall of the old courthouse hadn't, at first glance, changed much over the past seven years: There was the judge's podium by the entrance, and ahead the two desks for the Inquisitor and opposing Defender on either side, massive two-storied audience space closed off behind them. At the other end of the room from the entrance was the unusually wide witness stand, built for groups of
people to testify at once, and behind that, the blackened fire pit, a grey metal cage hanging precariously above. The rolling staircase was pushed up to its side, and Apollo, Trucy, Pearl and Luke were visible on top. The open edge that Maya had once used to jump off was now secured with a railing, and, Phoenix noticed, the low, spiky fence that once encircled the fire pit had been entirely replaced, tall and imposing enough to keep anyone from attempting to climb in. The open torches on either side were as unlit as the fire pit itself, the room kept bright enough to see in by the addition of electric lights on the roof and along the wooden panels separating the audience from the court itself.

Maya cooed in amazement as she looked around the room, running to the defence bench and running a hand over the top. "This is almost exactly how I remember it! And I see what you mean about the safety features, Ms Belduke!" She gestured towards the fire pit with a giggle, smiling at the three locals as they followed her.

Phoenix cast a curious glance over the new lighting system, pointing to it with a thumb. "So, uh, I thought you guys were against using electricity?"

"Here is different," Barnham explained. "Very few of the locals come to this building anymore; For most, I understand it's because of too many bad memories associated with it."

At that, Phoenix couldn't help but give the fire pit an uncomfortable look.

"This is, however, our primary tourist attraction," Barnham continued. "We hold fake witch trials here when occasion demands, all under the guise of being a very dedicated historical re-enactment town of course."

"I love doing the trial re-enactments!" Espella added with a grin. "With all the changes we've made to that cage, it's actually quite comfortable to ride in, now!"

Maya gasped. "You play the witch, Espella?"

"Indeed she does!" Hershel replied with a proud smile, resting a hand on the brim of his hat. "I have seen their show on a number of occasions, and even Luke found the time around his classes to see it once. Espella is quite the talented actress."

Espella blushed. "Thank you, Mister Layton!"

"Huh," Maya muttered, tapping a finger against a cheek. "I don't remember Luke ever mentioning that."

Phoenix just shivered. "I'll do without, thanks," he said, shooting a glare to the fire pit before turning to his local friends with a confused look. "I don't know how you guys are the only people in town who don't mind being here, though."

"It did take a bit of practise," Espella admitted, playing with her hair.

"And we aren't here all that often," Eve explained. "Zach and I are busy with the town's affairs, Mister Cantabella has Labrelum to run-"

"That's why he isn't here this weekend," Espella cut in.

"- and Espella here does most of her work elsewhere in town," Eve finished. "We're only here for the mock trials and general upkeep of the building."

Before anyone else could add to the conversation, they were interrupted by the rushing of feet, and
Trucy flung herself at the Defender's Bench Maya was still standing next to, looking at it in awe. "Is this the defence bench?" she asked excitedly.

Pearl, arriving quickly behind Trucy, seemed disappointed as she looked the bench over. "It... looks like a normal court bench," she said, looking up to Maya and Phoenix with a confused frown.

"That's because it is, Pearls," Phoenix replied, managing to give her a smile.

Apollo and Luke finally caught up to the girls, Apollo looking between the two benches curiously. "Coming in by the judge's podium threw me off a bit," he said, then pointed to the Defender's Bench, "but the defence is still on this side, right?" He moved his finger to point to the bench opposite. "And the prosecution's over there?"

Maya and Luke thought a moment, but it was Maya who responded: "I think so. They're on the same sides here as back home, aren't they, Nick?"

Phoenix shrugged and nodded, wondering why it mattered. "Sure."

Luke, who had been looking around between the bench and the fire pit, suddenly grinned and pointed to a seemingly-insignificant spot on the wall, down near the floor. "Oh, Espella, there's the tunnel where I rescued you, remember?"

Espella grinned and nodded. "Yep! Since you'd shown me those tunnels were there, I decided to map them out once we started renovating this place for the re-enactments!"

Apollo frowned. "Wait, surely your dad had the original blueprints for this building? It couldn't have been more than ten years old when it was last used."

"They were incorrectly filed," Eve explained. "We didn't find them until a few years later, and only then by chance."

Trucy rolled her eyes, giving her brother an annoyed look. "Polly, don't ruin this with your stupid questions."

"They're not stupid!" Apollo shot back. "They're legitimate lapses in logic that Luke never explains!"

Luke frowned, offended. "Just because I don't know the answer, doesn't mean there isn't one," he pointed out.

Eve smirked. "Alright then." She pointed to Apollo with a lazily smug wave. "You have questions about the events here in Labyrinthia seven years ago, young Mister Wright? Fire away."

Apollo seemed surprised to be asked, but accepted the chance to get some answers, taking a few moments to recall some of his questions specific to Labyrinthia as everyone watched him expectantly. "Okay, first of all, everyone was hypnotised not to see pure black, right? And that big bell tower was covered with it to hide it before it got hit by lightning. Why the hell did no-one ever literally run into that thing in the ten years it was there!?!" He sighed in frustration. "And those cranes on the roofs! Did no-one ever need to go up there for building work and run into those!? Why didn't birds landing on them ever tip anyone off!?!"

Eve shook her head, still looking smug. "Simple. It's all in how hypnotism itself works."

At that, most of her audience was confused. "Huh?" Apollo mumbled.

"It was only the conscious mind that couldn't see pure black," Eve continued. "The unconscious
mind is fully aware of what the eyes are actually seeing, and it's that part of the brain that dictates what a person thinks. That bell tower? Everyone simply walked around it. They didn't wonder why, because their own mind was telling them not to." Apollo was already looking chastened, but she carried on. "And the cranes? We generally had the Shades take care of any building work around those, but the same principle applies. Any birds landing on them, again, would just be unconsciously ignored by anyone who saw such an event. To question it would break the 'spell', and that was the last thing anyone in this town wanted to happen before it was meant to."

Apollo shifted uncomfortably for a moment. "W-well... what about Dad and Maya? And Luke and the Professor? None of them wanted to be under your 'spell'!"

At that, Eve seemed a touch guilty, looking away. The four people Apollo mentioned also looked uncomfortable, although they were clearly curious to hear Eve's answer. "There are ways to make even an initially unwilling mind agree to what you want it to," Eve explained. "The ink we manufactured in the Eldwitch Woods helped a great deal, of course."

"Alright," Apollo agreed, moving on, "so what about the whole stupid idea of building this town in the first place? What was wrong with just getting a therapist?"

Espella fiddled with her hair, looking uncomfortable. "You'd have to ask my dad about that."

"A whole town, including our mothers, perished because of us," Eve pointed out with a glare. "Do you think our fathers were prepared to let that out?" She sighed, looking away. "I admit, things may have turned out better for all of us if they had simply pointed out to us back then that it had been me who rang that bell... but, given this happened twenty years ago now, there's not exactly anything we can do about it anymore."

An uncomfortable silence ruled the room, and Apollo took a step back, looking away. He decided not to ask any more questions.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Luke practically skipped as he left the ceremony for this year’s graduates of Gressenheller University, his sister at his side. "Not as bad as you thought it'd be, huh, Trucy?" he asked with a giggle, allowing himself to feel a little pride for his home country.

Trucy shrugged. "I guess there was less pointless talking," she admitted, "but it was still pretty boring."

Luke stopped and turned to look at her with surprise before sighing. "Yeah, I probably wouldn't have gone if I didn't have to be here," he quietly agreed.

Phoenix and Maya came up behind them, hand in hand. "So, which is it going to be?" Phoenix asked his son with a grin. "Doctor Triton, Doctor Wright? Maybe Triton-Wright?"

Giggling, Luke shrugged. "I don't really care about the title," he said. "The name though, I'll probably just go with 'Wright'; My dad was Doctor Triton."

"Aw, that's so sweet!" Maya cooed, while Phoenix tried not to look too proud as he grinned.

Apollo and Pearl caught up to the group, talking between themselves. "But it didn't take as long as yours," Pearl was saying. "That makes it shorter!"

"Yeah, but mine was a bunch of small ceremonies all split up!" Apollo argued. "Put together, they'd be shorter than Luke's!"

Phoenix raised an eyebrow as he looked back at the pair. "What are you two talking about?"

Before either could reply, Maya had gasped excitedly and pointed off into the distance. "There they are!" she cried, and dashed off, dragging Phoenix along with her as she dodged passing people (most of whom were also exiting the stadium after the graduation ceremony), making her way towards a trio of friends stood on the pavement.

Flora smiled and waved as she spotted the Wrights and Feys approaching through the thin crowds. At her side, Athena was playing patty-cake with Alfendi, but their game stopped when Maya got close enough for Flora to call, "Have you seen the Professor yet?", distracting the two as they turned to see their friends.

"Not yet!" Maya replied, coming to a halt by the trio and either not noticing or ignoring Phoenix’s relieved sigh as they stopped running, her iron grip on his hand unyielding. "I'm guessing it takes a while for the teachers to emerge though, huh?"

Alfendi shrugged. "We don't usually come to meet him," he explained.

As Pearl and the Wright children caught up, Athena grinned at Luke, giving him a wave. "Congrats, Luke! Your degree's finally over!"
Luke blushed, tugging at his cap (which had spent most of the ceremony itself tucked in his back pocket). "Thank you, Athena."

"My big brother's a vet now!" Trucy cheered, jumping on Luke to give him a hug. "He can come home and help all the animals and stuff!"

"It will be nice to be working at the animal shelter for more than just the summer," Luke added, giving his sister a smile. "And getting to do more than just feed, bathe, and socialise with them... plus all the other chores, of course."

Apollo smirked. "Trucy's only excited because she thinks you'll sneak out a fully trained rabbit for our act, or something."

"Am not!" Trucy insisted, though she glanced away shiftily.

Luke giggled. "We don't even have any rabbits at the shelter!" he pointed out. "It's dogs and cats only!"

"And I thought you weren't allowed animals at home?" Pearl added, brushing a hand against her mouth.

"They're not," Maya replied with a smile. "Except for Charley, of course!"

Alfendi frowned. "Why are you allowed a pet if you can't have animals?"

"Charley's a plant," Apollo told the boy. "He doesn't count."

"Ohhh!" Alfendi gasped, already deep in thought as he contemplated Apollo's answer.

Flora looked back at the thinning crowds still leaving the large building beside them, and smiled. "I see the Professor!" she announced.

Athena grinned and waved. "Professor Layton! Over here!" she called.

The top-hatted gentleman in the distance spotted the group, smiling as he recognised them, and made his way over.

"Finally!" Alfendi cried, throwing his hands in the air as he dashed off into the crowd. "Papa! Papa!"

Flora sighed, then looked around the group. "Fendi's been impatient for all of you to come out," she explained, then shot a quick glare in her brother's direction. "Very impatient."

"Aw, has he been looking forward to seeing his dad again?" Maya asked with a cheeky smile.

Luke frowned, confused. "Don't tell me he's looking forward to dinner!" he said. "That's unlike him, isn't it?"

Athena shrugged, equally confused, but Flora just gave them a secretive smile. "He has his reasons," she assured them.

Trucy waved as Hershel approached them, Alfendi gripping his hand and prattling away excitedly to his father. "Hi, Uncle Professor!" she called.

Hershel tipped his hat to the teen, Alfendi quietening at his side. "Alfendi tells me plants qualify as pets," the professor said, an amused look on his face.
Phoenix looked sheepish. "Depending on the plant," he admitted.

"Enough talking!" Alfendi ordered, tugging on his father's arm. "Let's go already!" He glanced around quickly, then looked back up at Hershel with an embarrassed look. "Which way are we going, Papa?"

Hershel smiled. "Well, there's no time like the present, I suppose," he said, and gestured the group down the street. "Shall we?"

The restaurant where the group was celebrating post-graduation wasn't too far from the nearest Tube station, and a short journey from the stadium where the graduation had been held; Hershel had told the Wrights he chose it specifically in the hope it would be free of any other families from the ceremony doing the same thing as them. Luke also noted to himself that it wasn't far from the London Aerodrome, though he doubted the random fact was anything more than a coincidence.

Alfendi was almost shaking with excitement as they walked through the grand double doors of the restaurant's entrance, Hershel quickly moving to the host stood nearby to inform him of their reservation. "It should be under 'Hershel Layton'," he said, removing his hat with one hand while he gripped Alfendi's arm tight with the other, keeping the boy from running off.

"You're seated right over there, sir," the host told them, pointing to the tables visible at the back of the room. "The other members of your party have already arrived."

"Excellent!" Hershel replied with a smile. "We can find it ourselves, then. Thank you very much, sir!"

Luke frowned, as confused as his family to hear what the host had told them. "'Other members'...?"

Flora grinned, giving her friend a wink. "Surprise!" she chirped.

Hershel led the group down a winding path through the tables, Alfendi tugging on his arm as the boy tried to race ahead to their destination. Luke warily cast his gaze around the corner of the room the host had gestured to, and quickly spotted a large table that currently boasted only two people: a woman with dark, wavy hair and a man with brown hair curled around his shoulders, the distinctive hairstyle only slightly less recognisable than the black-and-grey cape hung over the back of his chair.

Behind Luke, Athena gasped as she also spotted the table ahead. Grinning widely, she dashed past Luke and to the pair waiting for them, greeting them eagerly by grabbing the woman's hand to shake. "Emmy! Mister Sycamore! What are you two doing here?"

Trucy and Pearl stared at each other in amazement as they heard and recognised the names Athena was calling, eyes wide.

Emmy laughed, flipping her long hair over her shoulders. "The Professor invited us!"

"A pleasure to see you again, Miss Cykes," Sycamore added, giving her a polite smile.

As they reached the table itself, Hershel finally released Alfendi, and the boy was off like a shot to Sycamore's side, tugging on his arm with an excited grin. "Uncle! Uncle!"
"Hello, Alfendi," Sycamore said with a warm smile, shifting in his seat to give the boy his full attention. "Your father tells me you've just turned six!"

"Yup!" Alfendi replied, nodding eagerly. "I'm grown up now!"

As Sycamore laughed, Hershel pointed the Wrights and Feys to their two visitors with a smile. "Everyone, this is our friend Emmy Altava and my brother, Desmond Sycamore. I believe Luke has told you about them."

Tugging at his cap in embarrassment, Luke hid behind Phoenix.

Sycamore looked up from talking to Alfendi with surprise, his warm attitude quickly giving way to a sterner one as he stood from his seat, nodding towards the group as he awkwardly fiddled with his red glasses. "Good afternoon."

Emmy waved eagerly. "Hello! Luke's told us a lot about you!"

Maya was the first to recover from the shock of the unexpected introduction, giving the pair a grin and wave. "Maya Fey! Nice to meet you!" She then promptly elbowed Phoenix, who grunted a little at the shove to his ribs, but quickly gave them a polite smile and nod of acknowledgement.

"Hi," Phoenix awkwardly said, rubbing his side where Maya had poked him.

Trucy jumped forward, briefly tugging Pearl to signal for her friend to take her lead as they ran to Emmy, Trucy grabbing the woman's hand to enthusiastically shake while Pearl stood at Trucy's side, smiling. "Hi there!" the younger of the pair cried. "It's great to finally meet you, Emmy! I'm Trucy, and this is Pearl!"

Emmy laughed, looking at Trucy. "Ah, yes, Luke's little sister! I was looking forward to meeting you!" She then looked up to Phoenix. "And you're his new dad," she turned to Apollo, who was watching with wide eyes, "and you must be his brother Apollo, right?"

Phoenix grinned. "Apollo Wright, that's correct!" he said with a wink.

The terrible pun brought Apollo out of his shocked stare instantly, causing him to roll his eyes and groan. "Oh come on Dad, that was terrible!"

Phoenix just laughed, unnoticing of Sycamore hiding a smile. The introductions over, everyone moved to sit down around the table, Flora pausing only to warmly greet their two latest visitors. Trucy, however, took her chance the moment Flora moved on to run to Sycamore, who had been helping Alfendi into the chair at his side. "Hi!" she cried, giving him a bright grin, then whispered, "You used to be Mister Descole, didn't you?"

Luke, sitting between Athena and Pearl, spun to face his sister with a horrified expression. "Trucy, no!" he hissed.

Trucy shot Luke a glare. "What?"

Sycamore's eyes widened in shock, then he pressed his glasses to his face, avoiding eye contact. "You... could say that," he quietly admitted.

"Okay!" Trucy chirped in reply, then skipped around to the lone remaining empty seat at the table, between Apollo and Hershel.
View the Court Record
Once the group had ordered their meals, Emmy turned to Luke, on the other side of her from Athena. "Hey Luke, surprised you didn't we?" she asked with a cheeky wink.

Luke laughed, trying not to look as uncomfortable as he felt. "Y-yeah, you did! What are you doing in London in August?"

"We already told you; The Professor invited us!" Emmy replied with a grin. "Couldn't pass up the opportunity to congratulate you on graduating, could we?"

"I guess not," Luke replied with a polite smile, though privately he knew Sycamore had never come for him; A glance to the man proved he was already fully focussed again on Alfendi, an almost fatherly smile on his face as the young boy endlessly prattled to his uncle about something or other that Luke couldn't quite hear. A small tap on his arm distracted Luke from his thoughts however, and he noticed Athena giving him a worried look. He didn't doubt she could hear in his voice that he was slowly feeling more and more panicked since their arrival at the restaurant, and she was the only person he had confided in regarding his conflicted feelings on Sycamore. He tried to give her a reassuring smile, and coped with his problem the way he knew best: changing the subject. "Are you sure you're okay, Athena? It's quite loud in here."

Athena scoffed, though she still looked worried for her friend. "I've told you a hundred times, I'll be fine!" she said. "I've got earplugs in my bag if it gets to be too much, and I know the way home if I have to leave early. Don't worry about me!"

"It's nice to finally meet you in person, Ms Emmy!" Pearl piped up, leaning forward and talking past Luke and Athena to the woman in the yellow coat. "I was glad to hear when you got back in touch with him a few years ago!"

Emmy laughed, waving a hand dismissively. "Just 'Emmy' is fine," she insisted. "And honestly, I'm regretting now how much I dragged my feet confronting the Professor again. You always regret it if you put off meeting up with old friends again for silly reasons."

Luke frowned, wondering if the odd comment was a co-incidence or a sly dig at him.

Pearl tapped a thumb against her chin in thought. "So, um... have you and Mister Sycamore...?"

"They're not special someones, Pearl," Luke jumped in, hoping to cut off any embarrassing questions. "Emmy and Mister Sycamore just travel together."

The young spirit medium thought for a moment. "So the airship you said she uses; Is that the Bostonius from your story?"

Luke nodded. "Raymond travels with them, too. He usually stays with the ship now, though."

Emmy gave Luke a knowing look. "Ah, I see. You told them all about me, but haven't mentioned Desmond at all, have you?"
Luke looked away guiltily, but Athena turned to Emmy, confused. "You're not surprised?" she asked.

Snorting in dark laughter, Emmy shook her head. "Disappointed, but not surprised. Those two aren't exactly subtle about it," she explained, then crossed her arms. "That explains why everyone seemed so shocked when the Professor introduced us, anyway."

"I'm sorry, Emmy," Luke said, just loud enough for her to hear him over the hubbub of the restaurant.

"Hey, it's not my problem," Emmy pointed out, sighing in an attempt to seem carefree despite the bitterness in her voice, one hand flipping at her hair. Forcing a smile, she looked across the table, to where Apollo and Trucy were quietly arguing between themselves. "So, you two are magicians, aren't you?"

Luke's siblings looked up at her with surprise, and Trucy was quick to give the woman a wide grin. "Yup! You should come see our show if you're ever in the area!"

"I already plan on it!" Emmy replied, winking at the teen.

Phoenix laughed, looking at the pair sat next to him. "I'm impressed! You two aren't piling them both with questions yet!"

"C'mon Dad," Apollo shot back with a smirk, "we do have some manners!"

Trucy narrowed her eyes in her brother's direction. "You don't."

Apollo glared at her in return. "Really? Now?" he hissed under his breath.

"You thought Mister Sycamore wasn't real!" Trucy loudly pointed out, attracting even the attention of the distracted Sycamore and Alfendi. "You didn't even know he was Uncle Professor's brother because you always walk out on that story!"

Sycamore raised an eyebrow.

Luke blinked in surprise. "Wait, you seriously thought I'd made him up!?"

Emmy burst into badly hidden giggles. Sycamore gave her an unimpressed look.

"W-well, yeah," Apollo admitted with an embarrassed shrug, "but-!"

"Ah, so it wasn't just Saint Mystere you doubted the existence of?" Flora asked with a teasing smile. "Let me guess, you don't think Folsense or Future London were real, either!"

Apollo was by now blushing madly in embarrassment, grimacing guiltily at Flora's comment. "I-I said I was sorry about the Saint Mystere thing!"

Maya, sat between Phoenix and Pearl, hid a smile as she reached across Phoenix to pat in the direction of Apollo's hand, just out of her reach. "Aw, don't you worry, Grumpy Gus! It's not like," she bit back a snort of laughter, "Luke doesn't have any reason to lie to you in the first place!"

Apollo levelled a glare at her. "You're not helping."

Phoenix, who had been sat back watching the conversation with a small smile, raised his hands. "Alright, that's enough," he announced, with a tone of voice that indicated loud and clear he was not to be argued with. As Apollo relaxed at the end of the teasing, Phoenix turned to him with a curious
look. "Although I could have sworn you'd agreed to hear the end of that story by now. The ending's the best part, after all."

Apollo sighed, looking irritated. "I guess I just can't get past the magic floaty transforming ancient artefacts," he admitted, wiggling his fingers to illustrate how seriously he took the idea.

Hershel frowned. "You stopped listening at the formation of the Azran Key?" he asked.

Sycamore chuckled to himself, pushing his glasses up his nose with a smirk. "Ah, then you truly did stop listening at the worst possible time," he said, watching a now-rather-nervous Apollo. "Not that it's my proudest moment, but a minute longer and there would have been no doubt I was not an invention of Luke's."

"Yeah, no offence, but," Apollo began to reply as he shifted uncomfortably, only to pause and think over his words. "Actually, no, a lot of offence." He turned to Luke with a glare, gesturing to Sycamore. "If he's been hanging around as long as Ms Altava, why the hell didn't you mention it, Luke!? I'd've believed you, then!"

Luke was a little guilty at the accusation, but mostly just annoyed. "Why do I have to constantly prove I'm telling the truth!?" he shot back. "You'd've got all your answers about 'Azran Legacy' if you'd not walked out before I'd finished it!"

Athena had her hands clapped over her ears, watching the pair with wide, worried eyes. "Could you please stop fighting?"

"I thought I said that was enough," Phoenix said, sternly looking between his sons with arms crossed, his tone enough to make the two look away from each other guiltily. "Both of you are adults, and you should be capable of settling this like ones."

There was a long, awkward pause before Apollo sighed, looking across the table at his brother. "I... guess I'll listen to the end of that story, then," he agreed. "Like... when we get home."

Trucy perked up. "Can I help tell it?" she asked with a subdued grin. "I wanna be Aurora!"

Luke smiled. "Sure you can, Trucy," he agreed, watching his sister happily cheer at his response. He then turned to his brother. "Don't worry, Apollo; It'll answer a lot more questions than you'd think it would, I promise."

Apollo just mutely nodded, fiddling with his tie.

"And... I'm sorry for getting upset about it," Luke added. "I guess I'm just frustrated you've never given that story a chance before today."

Athena quietly sighed in relief, lowering her hands from her ears.

Emmy smiled. "It's almost a shame we don't have more time together!" she said to Luke. "I'd love to hear your version of our adventures on the Bostonius!"

"It would be entertaining," Sycamore agreed, fiddling with his glasses to hide a smile. "From what I remember, even then you were quite a gifted young storyteller."

Luke blushed, biting back a proud grin. He could easily recall the days and nights of their long journeys that he had passed by entertaining the crew of the small airship with tales of his, Emmy's and the Professor's adventures so far. He could only imagine how much Sycamore and Raymond had had to fight to present neutral reactions to his descriptions of the former's alter ego as 'the evil
Jean Descole', let alone all his 'evil plans'; The word 'evil' had featured a lot in his vocabulary back then, especially when it came to his mentor's nemesis. Eight years on, he had to admit he would have been more than glad to demonstrate how much more kindly he depicted the 'villains' of his stories now.

View the Court Record
Gifts and Forgiveness

August 10, 6:59PM
Flightfeathers Restaurant

Once Luke and Apollo had cleared the air after their brief argument and everyone's dinner had arrived, it seemed the discussion around the table was quick to settle into something much more friendly than it had been before. Trucy all but demanded Emmy and Sycamore come visit them in Los Angeles after Apollo had heard the end of their story so she could ask them questions about it, not wanting to spoil anything for her brother, and, while Emmy had laughed, Sycamore had promised he'd see what they could do. Athena had shown off the capabilities of her constant computer companion Widget to Phoenix and Apollo, boasting of how she would be able to use it in court once she passed the bar. Maya spent several minutes teasing Luke by grilling Hershel and Flora on how many changes Luke had made to their story in his nearly-complete book, and Flora had happily joined in to jokingly complain about the various name changes and how she was never going to achieve the fame and fortune her friend's debut work would surely bring them. Even Pearl had overcome her shyness and had fun, leaving her seat to entertain Alfendi with an Agatha Christie book she'd brought in case of boredom, the pair discussing the mystery as it unfolded on the page and making theories on who would be pinned for the murder at the end.

All too soon, the celebrations had to come to an end, as their waiter took away their empty plates and Phoenix half-heartedly argued with Hershel on how much of the bill he should cover. While Pearl was moving her chair from behind Alfendi back to between Maya and Luke where it belonged, Emmy turned to her blue-capped friend with a grin. "I almost forgot!" she cried. "Desmond and I brought you something as congratulations for graduating!"

Luke blinked, staring at her in surprise. "You did?"

Emmy nodded, reaching under her chair and removing a backpack that she pulled into her lap. "I hadn't had the heart to go through my photos of our final adventure before I left," she explained as she pulled open the bag and dug around inside, "then I'd forgotten about them by the time I worked up the courage to face you and the Professor again. I decided now was as good a time as any to finally give you this."

As Luke watched, Emmy pulled out a medium-sized photo album, thick with photos and held together with a plain yellow binding. She looked over it for a moment before passing the album past Athena and over to her friend with a grin, ensuring the side facing Luke as it was pushed into his hands showed the small pale pink flower design that had been pasted there. He stared at it for a moment, unsure how to respond.

"You'll have seen a lot of them already," Emmy continued, flipping her hair with one hand. "It's copies of almost every photo I took of our time together, from Misthallery to London to the Bostonius."

After a moment more of staring, Luke placed a hand on the cover of the photo album and cracked it open, the thick pages following the binding to come to rest with the middle of the book lying open on Luke's lap, to a spread of photos detailing the icy landscape of Froenborg, as it had looked on their first time arriving there. Luke couldn't resist a smile looking at the pristine white snow, glimpses of his younger self dotted around as the eleven-year-old frolicked with unrestricted child-like glee on the chilly playground nature had provided him with. Despite mostly remembering Froenborg for how
cold it was, it seemed the reality said Luke had enjoyed himself a lot more than he'd thought he had on their brief trip to Russia. "It's hard to think it's been eight years, huh?" he said.

Emmy nodded, smiling nostalgically. "Nine since we first met," she pointed out. "And I certainly never would have expected our lives to turn out the way they have back then!"


Pearl peered over Luke's shoulder at the photos, smiling curiously. "Wow, that snow is so clean!" she said.

Athena grinned, pointing to a shot of the younger Luke crouching at the edge of the road, clumping the nearby snow into what looked like a large snowball with an excited smile. "You were kinda cute when you were little!"

Maya leaned towards them from her seat nearby, straining to see any of the album's contents from where she was without getting up. "You'll have to show us that later, Luke!" she added with a wink.

"Of course!" Luke agreed. "We can go through it together sometime!" Closing the album, he turned his attention back to Emmy, noticing Sycamore, Alfendi and Flora also watching from behind her. "Thank you, Emmy. And you too, Mister Sycamore."

Sycamore hurriedly glanced away. "I-I had very little to do with that," he admitted. "It was all Emmy."

Emmy laughed, gently nudging the man. "Hey, that's not all we have to give today, is it?" she pointed out, glancing down at Alfendi as she passed her bag over to her travelling companion.

While Alfendi looked confused, Sycamore nearly jumped in surprise. "Oh, of course!" he cried, taking the bag and reaching inside with a growing smile. He turned to his young nephew in the seat next to him. "I couldn't pass up giving you something once I realised we'd be here so close to your birthday, Alfendi."

Alfendi's eyes widened as he began to grin excitedly. "You got me a present!"

Sycamore laughed, then pulled out of Emmy's bag a small bundle of blue cloth. Taking a corner of it with his other hand, he held it up for Alfendi to see, the bundle quickly unfolding itself to reveal that it was a smaller version of the cape currently hanging over the back of Sycamore's chair, with dark blue where his was black and light blue where his was grey. The ribbon that tied it together, unlike Sycamore's worn blue one, was a bright white. Smiling, Sycamore held the smaller cape closer to the amazed little boy. "Since you're so in love with mine, I thought it only fitting to make you a cloak of your own. Happy birthday."

Alfendi's open smile seemed to be threatening to overtake his face as he stared at the cloak, slowly reaching out to take it from his uncle before regaining his ability to speak, his voice squeaking as he bounced in his chair. "This is the most amazing-est, coolest thing EVER!" he shrieked, jumping off his seat to pull the cape around his shoulders.

Flora frowned as she noticed the new cloak dragging on the ground behind her brother's feet. "It's a bit big for him, isn't it?" she asked.

As Emmy retrieved her bag from his lap, Sycamore got out of his own chair to kneel by Alfendi, tying the cape's ribbons around his nephew's neck. "I intentionally made it a little long," he explained. "This way, he can grow into it."
Flora nodded, accepting the explanation as she watched Alfendi wriggling in excitement, watching his uncle's fingers securing the cape around his shoulders. "Don't forget to thank Uncle, Alfendi," she reminded him.

"Thank you, Uncle!" Alfendi obediently cried with a grin.

"You're very welcome," Sycamore replied with a smile, finishing with the ribbon and leaving it in a neat bow below the six-year-old's chin.

The moment his uncle's hands left the white ribbon around his collar, Alfendi was off like a shot, racing around the table and giggling madly with glee as his new cape fluttered behind him.

"Be careful, Alfendi!" Hershel cried, distracted from his discussion with Phoenix as the boy sped past them. "No running indoors, please!"

Eventually, Hershel and Phoenix came to an agreement on how to split the bill, with Hershel paying for the actual meal and Phoenix leaving a large tip; Somehow, Phoenix still managed to leave the restaurant feeling guilty, both for paying only the tip and, simultaneously, for paying anything at all. Given part of Hershel's argument had included the fact that the Wrights were out-of-pocket enough simply spending a few days in England, Phoenix supposed he shouldn't be surprised.

Lagging behind everyone else, Luke noticed Sycamore trailing somewhere behind Emmy, who was talking animatedly to Flora while Alfendi ran circles around everyone, showing off his new cape. As there was no-one else close to the man, and the group was imminently splitting up for their visitors to return to the Bostonius, Luke thought no more than a moment before putting on a determined expression and rushing to his former enemy's side. "Mister Sycamore?"

Sycamore looked up in surprise as he registered who it was approaching him. "Luke?" he asked, a confused frown on his face. "What is it you want?"

Luke felt his resolve faltering, but pushed on. "I... I wanted to apologise," he forced out, an apologetic smile directed at Sycamore. "For not giving you a second chance when I should have, and... generally not being very gentlemanly."

After a short, confused pause, Sycamore smiled, softly chuckling. "Honestly, you don't need to apologise for that," he said. "Thank you for doing so anyway, but having someone here who knew as well as I did that I didn't deserve forgiveness was... very reassuring."

Now it was Luke's turn to be confused. "Huh?"

"I must admit, I didn't care much for you when we first met," Sycamore continued. "The privileged young son of the mayor, living in a mansion with both his parents, a butler and a maid? I rather callously told myself you deserved to have a little hardship in your life." He fiddled with his glasses, thinking to himself as his smile faded. "After that, you were mostly just a nuisance; Layton's little apprentice, constantly getting in my way and foiling my plans. It wasn't until I invited you all on the Bostonius I actually got to know you." He returned his gaze to Luke, who was watching him with a solemn expression. "I've grown rather fond of you since. You're intelligent, you know your way around a good puzzle... Although you will forever have my greatest sympathies for what happened
to your parents, I'm very glad you've been able to find happiness with your new family." He gave Luke a small smile. "I will miss seeing you in London every year, young Doctor Triton."

At that, Luke couldn't resist a small laugh. "I was actually thinking of going with 'Doctor Wright'," he admitted. "Dad was Doctor Triton, after all."

"My apologies," Sycamore corrected himself with a slightly larger smile. "Doctor Wright, then." He held out a hand. "Hopefully we shall meet again sometime, sooner rather than later."

Luke nodded in agreement, taking Sycamore's hand to shake. "I hope so too, Doctor Sycamore." Sycamore sighed at the reminder of his title, though his smile betrayed that he wasn't as bothered as he pretended to be, and Luke giggled.

As the two released each other from their handshake, Luke caught sight of Athena watching them, and realised she must have heard their conversation. She gave her friend a proud grin, and, after a moment, Luke gave her a happy smile back.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"You're not coming back!?" Alfendi cried in surprised disbelief, clutching at the edges of his new cloak as he stared at the young man kneeling in front of him.

Luke nodded solemnly. "I'm afraid not," he admitted. "My studies are over. I'm going home with my family and starting a new job back in America."

"But," Alfendi whined, face scrunched up in sadness, "that's not fair! I don't want you to go!"

"I'm sorry, Alfendi," Luke said, giving the boy a sympathetic look as he patted his shoulder with one hand. "I'll miss you too."

As Alfendi began to sniff, eyes shining with tears, Trucy jumped to the boy's side, pulling him into a hug (unlike Luke, she was short enough that she didn't have to kneel to reach Alfendi's height). "Aw, it's okay!" she told him with a comforting tone, petting at his unruly red hair. "You and Flora and Uncle Professor can come visit us sometime! Wouldn't that be fun?"

Alfendi just sniffed some more, leaning in to hide his face in Trucy's chest.

"That's right!" Pearl added, patting Alfendi's back. "You were so little when you were last in America! I'd love to show you around Kurain!"

As the girls comforted the young boy, Luke sighed and stood up, only to be immediately ambushed by a hug from Flora. "You won't forget to write to us, won't you?" she asked.

"Of course I won't," Luke assured her, hugging his friend back. "And you can call or text me whenever you want, too."

Phoenix and Hershel shook hands, not far away from their children. "It was a pleasure to have you all here," Hershel said, tipping his hat. "If timing and circumstance permit, it would be lovely to do this again someday."

"In LA, hopefully!" Maya added, shaking Hershel's hand after Phoenix. "You three can come to us again! Maybe we can all hang out, somewhere where people won't recognise me or Nick!"

Phoenix laughed. "Yeah, good luck finding that," he pointed out.

Apollo, noticing Athena standing back from the group, moved towards her with a small smile, giving her a wave. "So, uh, how long 'til you pass the bar?"

Athena seemed surprised to be addressed by Luke's brother, but smiled back as she shrugged. "Another year, maybe two," she replied. "Once I get my badge here, then I have to go through a process to apply for one in California, so who knows how long that will take."

Apollo nodded in thought. "Well, when you do, you'll get in touch with us, right?"

"Of course," Athena agreed, though she frowned a little in confusion. "Um, why?"
"Why?" Apollo repeated, snorting with laughter as he gave her a proud grin. "So maybe I could pull some strings to get you a job working with me!" He shrugged. "Y'know, depending on how much sway I can get at my office by then."

Athena stared for a moment, then grinned excitedly, Widget at her neck glowing a bright green. "That'd be great!" she cried. "You really want to help me!?"

Apollo nodded. "Why wouldn't I? You're obviously working on a really unique way of conducting a trial; Even Dad said last night that you're gonna revolutionise the courtroom when they finally unleash you on it!"

The sixteen-year-old couldn't help but blush at the praise. "Mister Wright really said that?"

"Yup!" Apollo laughed. "And he's right, too." He paused, noticing the accidental pun in his words with a smile. "In more ways than one. You can't always say that about Dad."

Not far away, Flora, having finished her goodbyes to Luke, was gently pulling Alfendi away from Trucy and Pearl, holding the boy tight as he hid his face behind fists balled around the edges of his cloak. "It's alright, Alfendi. I know life won't be exactly the same without Luke around, but... We'll go to America one day and visit him! We'll see him again!"

Luke nodded, giving the boy a smile. "That's right, Alfendi. This isn't goodbye, just 'so long'!"

Alfendi briefly looked up to give Luke a glare. "Papa always says that when you go away," he mumbled.

Taken aback, Luke adjusted his cap with an awkward smile. "O-oh, he does?" He decided not to mention where he had got the phrase from himself.

Apollo and Athena joined the group, and Flora looked between Luke's siblings and Pearl with a smile. "It was nice seeing you three again," she said. "Hopefully it won't be too long until we next meet!"

Pearl nodded in agreement. "Maybe you could come visit us next summer?" she suggested.

"Yeah, you have to do that!" Trucy cried. "Alfendi, Pearly and I won't have school, Uncle Professor won't have classes... you could come see our show again!"

"Oh, yeah!" Apollo cried with a grin. "You guys still need to come see it again! We have a whole routine prepared for you guys!"

Trucy shushed him with a smile. "Don't spoil it, Polly!" The pair proceeded to giggle at each other as everyone else gave them puzzled looks.

Athena moved over to Luke's side. "So, it's finally the day you've been moping about for two months," she said.

Luke frowned. "I haven't been 'moping'!" he insisted.

"Yeah, you have," Athena quietly replied, giving him an understanding smile. "It's not 'goodbye', but it certainly feels like it, huh?"

After a moment of thought, Luke sighed and nodded in agreement. "London was my home for so long," he said. "I'm really gonna miss it, and all the friends I made here. I don't even know if I'll get to come back."
Athena grinned. "I'll be joining you in California soon enough!" she pointed out, only for her smile to quickly fade again. "But I will really miss having you around to talk to between classes."

"You can always text or call me," Luke offered. "I'll be about half a day behind, but I'd hate to lose touch with you, Athena."

"Me too," Athena admitted, then forced another smile. "I guess I could always make it a regular thing, like you always had to text your sister every day!"

"I'm right here!" Trucy reminded them with a pout.

"She didn't mean anything by it," Luke reassured his sister with a smile, then turned back to Athena. "That'd be great! If nothing else, at least I'll know you aren't working yourself too hard if you're taking time out to talk to me!"

Athena laughed.

The three parents of the group approached, and Hershel tipped his hat to Apollo, Trucy and Pearl. "It was a pleasure having you all here," he said. "Hopefully it won't be too long until we can all meet again."

"Yeah!" Trucy loudly agreed. "You have to come see our show sometime, Uncle Professor!"

"We've had a special routine prepared for a few years now," Apollo admitted with an apologetic smile. "Plus, we're always changing our show anyway, so it's different from when you were last in LA."

Pearl gave Hershel a formal bow, her hands clasped together. "It would be our pleasure to again welcome you to Kurain Village sometime, Mister Professor," she added.

"You bet it would!" Maya said, walking over to give her cousin an impromptu hug. "You guys'll always be welcome up on our little mountain!"

"I'm glad to hear it!" Hershel laughed, and Flora giggled in agreement. Even Alfendi managed to look up curiously from where he was hiding against his sister's side.

Phoenix turned to Athena with a friendly smile. "And you'll let us know when you get your badge, won't you?" he asked. "I'm looking forward to seeing you in action in a courtroom."

Athena gave him a massive grin, only barely hiding just how excited she was. "I will, Mister Wright!" she promised. "I'll get my badge here, then I'll apply for my American one, and then I'll go join you all in California! I won't let you down!"

Phoenix laughed. "As long as you aren't killing yourself trying to reach unreasonable expectations, I don't think you could!"

With all other goodbyes said, Luke and Hershel looked to each other, each forcing a small smile. "I, uh..." Luke stuttered, "I guess this is 'so long', Professor."

Hershel nodded, tugging on the brim of his hat. "I wish you luck in your new profession," he said. "Don't forget to write to us."

"I won't," Luke promised, starting to find it harder to force a smile. "You'll come visit sometime, won't you?"
"Of course," Hershel agreed.

There was a very long silence as the two failed to add anything else to their conversation, avoiding each other's gaze. The rest of the group exchanged glances, ranging from knowing looks to confused frowns.

Maya raised an eyebrow at Phoenix, and he nodded as he got her intended message. "Alright, then!" he announced, breaking the silence with a clap of his hands. "I think it's time we started boarding this plane!" He grabbed his backpack off the floor by his feet, while Maya began to herd Pearl, Trucy and Apollo towards the security gate. Phoenix looked to Luke with a smile. "We'll start lining up; Catch up to us when you're done, but don't take too long, okay?"

Luke paused a moment in thought, then nodded.

"Bye!" Trucy called, waving to Athena and the Laytons as she and her family walked off into the distance, and were quickly out of earshot.

Flora gave Luke a smile. "Until next time," she said, and the two nodded at each other as she gently escorted Alfendi back outside; The young boy, hand held tightly in his sister's, kept his eyes glued on Luke, sadly waving until they were out of sight.

Athena looked between Luke and Hershel with a smile, then began to walk backwards towards the door outside, watching Luke. "I'll text you tomorrow afternoon!" she promised, waving.


Giving her friend one last grin, Athena turned and skipped away.

Luke and Hershel stood in awkward silence for a few moments, before Luke finally stepped forward and pulled the shorter man into a hug. "I'll miss you, Professor."

Hershel chuckled, gingerly patting Luke's back. "Nonsense. We'll be seeing one another again before too long. After all, I promised to help you find your mother, and I can't very well do that from London, can I?"

Giggling, Luke nodded. "I guess not!" He pulled back, giving his mentor a vaguely teary smile. "Once Apollo and I are settled in to our new jobs, I'll finally be able to get back on the search."

Spotting the tears in Luke's eyes, Hershel gave him a sad smile, patting the young man's shoulder. "Now now, no tears. This is only a 'so long', not a 'goodbye'."

Luke hurriedly nodded, wiping at his eyes as he tried to hide a sniff. "At least I'm not making a scene this time," he pointed out, quietly laughing to himself. Hershel only smiled, and, after a few moments, Luke was able to pull himself back together again. "Until we meet again, Professor."

Hershel nodded, stepping away from his former apprentice. "Until then."

After a moment's pause, Luke picked up his well-worn travel suitcase and walked off to join his family, waving to Hershel as he went.

'So long, Professor.

'Goodbye, London.'
View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
It Starts

August 11, 2:06PM
Apollo and Clay's Apartment
Living Room

The first thing Apollo heard as he pushed open the front door of his home was the sound of electronica music and the vague wailings of a monster roar, which quickly stopped as the nearby TV was paused and a familiar face poked up from the front of the couch, smiling as he registered Apollo's arrival. "Welcome back, dude!"

Apollo gave his friend a smile, pushing the door closed behind him. "Thanks. Anything come for me?"

Clay laughed, remembering how impatiently Apollo had been waiting for the arrival of his badge before he left. "A buncha stuff, actually." He gestured down the hall, towards their bedrooms. "Left it all on your bed."

Smiling, Apollo nodded. "Right. Thanks." He gripped the handle of his travel bag tighter and started to wander towards his room.

"By the way," Clay continued, pointing a thumb at the paused TV, "I found a marathon of classic Doctor Who episodes, if you're interested."

Apollo paused, thinking for a moment. "It would help me stay awake," he admitted, "and it sounds interesting. I'll be right back."

"Great!" Clay cried. "I'll see how far back I can rewind live TV on this thing!" With that, he was reaching for his laptop on the floor beside him.

Chuckling to himself, Apollo moved on down the hall and into the nearest bedroom, shoving open the door with an elbow.

The first impression Apollo's bedroom gave off was usually "surprisingly neat"; Unlike Phoenix and Trucy, who kept their spaces messy and seemed to like it that way, Apollo preferred keeping things clean and organised. Part of it was because he had a learned ability to emotionally disconnect from objects, keeping his belongings light at all times, but mostly he liked to blame the years he shared a bedroom with Luke, witnessing and even helping his younger brother neaten and organise his books and various belongings. Sure, there would be places in the neatness where Apollo would allow a mess to develop, but mostly he liked to keep everything in a certain order: Bed against the wall, a small table next to it, desk on the opposite wall, floor kept clear at all times. Next to the desk was even a special closet specifically for his magicians' gear, which was kept padlocked if its owner was away from it for any reason or length of time. The cupboard for his regular clothes was across the room, by the foot of the bed.

Dumping his bag by his cupboard to unpack later, Apollo unpinned his cape and draped the garment over his desk chair, his eyes glued to his bed. Sure enough, Clay had left a small pile of mail on Apollo's pillow; Most of it was plain regular letters, but one in particular caught Apollo's attention: a padded envelope. Gasping in surprise, Apollo almost jumped at his bed, grabbing the yellow piece of mail and running to his desk for a pair of scissors. A minute later, he had opened the troublesome
envelope, and was excitedly emptying it onto a clear space on his desk (where his laptop normally sat). After a few shakes, a small round object fell onto the wood with a _plink_, its golden sheen glinting in the light as it came to rest on the smooth surface of the desk: A tiny sunflower, the scales of justice proudly displayed between its circle of petrified petals.

Apollo stared in disbelief, frozen for several moments. 'Th... That's my badge... My defence attorney's badge...’ A slow smile spread across his face, and he reached out to pick up the small object, letting the envelope in his hand fall to the floor. _This is mine! My badge! What I've worked so hard to earn since I graduated from school!_ He found himself laughing semi-hysterically, still unable to believe the round badge clutched in his fingers was real. How long had he been waiting to hold his very own attorney's badge in his hand? As he spun it around, staring at it from every angle, he quickly noticed a number etched into the back, above the screw and fitting. _Two-nine-zero-zero-three, huh? Guess that's me!_

"Hey, dude, you planning on coming back this century?" Clay called from the front room. "The bad guy's fallen in love with the fake American girl, and I think this might be the last episode of this story!"

Apollo restrained his excited giggles, clutching his new badge tightly in his fist. "Y-yeah, coming!" he called, then looked down at his waistcoat. _Now, where did Trucy and I decide it would go?_ After a moment, he tapped at the top button on his right. _I wonder if...?_ Still grinning to himself, Apollo slipped off the garment, grabbed the spare sewing kit Trucy had given him a few years ago, and headed back out into the living room.

Still stretched out on the sofa, Clay sighed in relief as he saw his friend appear, Apollo easily sitting on the floor by the coffee table. "Finally!" he said, setting the episode to play again, only to then notice the massive grin on Apollo's face and the waistcoat and sewing kit being laid out on the table before them. "Dude?" he asked, the TV forgotten as he watched his friend in confusion. "What are you doing?"

Apollo laughed, grabbing a small pair of scissors from the kit and beginning to pick at almost-invisible threads around the top left button of his suit. "I guess you could say I'm redecorating my costume!" he said, unable to turn down his excited grin.

Clay stared at his friend for several seconds, then noticed a small, golden-coloured object sitting by the sewing kit, similar in design to Apollo's round buttons but much smaller in size. He frowned at it, examining the 'button' from a distance before giving his friend an unamused look. "Your badge came while you were away," he realised.

Apollo nodded, his grin finally beginning to fade. "It's kinda annoying," he said. "I wanted to show it off to everyone in London, but it arrived too late for that. And now I've just come back, and I'm all jet-lagged, and so's my family, so everyone's gonna be too tired to really appreciate that it's finally here."

Clay gave his friend a cheeky smile. "Including you?"

Although he was still smiling, Apollo shot Clay a glare. "Ha ha," he deadpanned, quickly returning to his work as he carefully freed the button from his waistcoat. "I'm thinking I'll get this attached to my costume, then take it home tomorrow to show Dad and Trucy and Luke. We'll all be awake enough then to actually appreciate it." He grinned as a thought occurred to him. "Hey, I should just not mention it and see how long it takes for them to notice!"

Clay laughed. "You think you'd be able to?" he pointed out.
"Shut up," Apollo replied, though he still smiled, knowing his friend was right.

August 12, 11:31AM
Wright Talent Agency
Phoenix's Office

Apollo could barely keep his hand away from the new addition to his waistcoat, still unable to dial down his excited grin at the reminder it was there. It had taken him a while but, finally, he had managed to replace the round button with the smaller attorney's badge the previous evening. He doubted he would have got any sleep at all that night if it weren't for the fact that he was so jet-lagged from the trip to England. Even then, he had snapped awake come morning, and had had to slowly pull on his complete magician's outfit (sans hat) because the prospect of finally wearing his eagerly-awaited license to defend was making him giddy.

After tearing his hand away from his new badge, Apollo shakily unlocked the front door of his former home and slipped into the reception. Instinctively locking the door again behind him, he peered through into the neighbouring office. "Anyone home?"

"Come on in, Apollo," came Phoenix's voice from the office.

Catching the vague shadow of a waving hand through the open door, Apollo took a deep breath to calm himself and walked through as casually as he could, though he couldn't hide the excited grin on his face. "Hey, Dad!"

Phoenix looked up with a smile from his desk, where he was looking through some papers. "Couldn't wait to-?" he started to joke, only to pause and frown in confusion as he recognised Apollo's immense restraint in not bouncing off the walls. "Something happen?"

Apollo shrugged, forcing himself to stay silent as he stood in the centre of the room, continuing to fail in hiding his grin.

There was a long silence as Phoenix stared at Apollo, then, finally, he smiled knowingly, abandoning his papers and leaning on his desk. "So where is it, then?"

Giggling in excitement, Apollo practically leapt forward to his father's desk, throwing one side of his cape over his shoulder to show off the right side of his chest, where his waistcoat buttoned up. "I spent all of yesterday afternoon working out how to attach it!" he boasted, tapping at the small badge once to show where it was before gently pulling it out of a special mechanism he'd constructed to make it easily removable, holding out the badge for Phoenix to see. "It was waiting for me when I got home!"

Phoenix slowly reached out for the golden object, frowning in thought. He didn't seem to react at all as Apollo eagerly pushed the badge into his hand, staring at the tiny sunflower as it rolled around his fingers. After a long moment, he smiled. "Looks familiar," he joked, though Apollo could hear a strain in his voice of barely-hidden emotion. "Can't imagine why."

Apollo chuckled, guessing it must be very nostalgic for Phoenix to have an actual attorney's badge in his hands again, six long years after his disbarment. "With any luck," he quietly said, "I'll be maybe half as good a lawyer as you were, Dad."

At that, Phoenix broke into a laugh, tears beginning to appear in his eyes. "Apollo, really, why
would you want luck to bring you down *that* far?"

Apollo blushed, running a hand through his hair.

Clutching the badge in his fist, Phoenix got up from his chair and circled his desk, pulling Apollo into a tight hug. "I'm so proud of you, son," he said, feeling the tears ("*Liquid pride!*") falling down his cheeks and finding he didn't care at all. "You're going to be amazing, I know you will."

"*Man, you're making me want to cry!*" Blinking rapidly, Apollo hugged his father back, putting aside his usual awkwardness as the least sappy member of his family. "Thanks, Dad," he whispered.
Apollo left the right side of his cape flipped up over his shoulder as he climbed the stairs to locate his siblings, unable to resist making his badge more visible in the hope they'd notice it quicker. "Luke? Trucy?" he called as he reached the landing, heading to the open door to Trucy's room as he checked his sister wasn't inside.

A moment later, he heard a happy shout, and looked down the hallway at exactly the right moment to catch sight of a blue blur dashing out of Luke's room. He had just enough time to brace himself before his little sister slammed into him in a hug of greeting, her cape flapping behind her. "Polly!" she shouted, then jumped back to grin up at him. "You came to hear the end of the story!"

Apollo had been opening his mouth to greet his sister when her words registered, and he paused to stare at her in confusion. "Huh?"

"She means 'Azran Legacy'," Luke explained as he appeared in the hall with a smile, approaching his siblings at a much more relaxed pace. "You promised to hear the end of it when we got home."

"O-oh," Apollo muttered, sighing as he remembered the argument in the restaurant after Luke's graduation. "Yeah, I did promise that, didn't I?"

Trucy looked up at him with a frown. "If you didn't come to hear the story, then why are you...?" Her words trailed off, the oddness of his cape's positioning leading her eyes down to his waistcoat, where she stared as she noticed the much smaller 'button' not far below her eye line. "Wait, is that...?"

Apollo grinned, realising she'd noticed it. "Oh, this?" he casually asked, tapping proudly at his new badge. "It arrived while we were away! Added it on last night!"

Luke hurried closer to curiously look over Trucy's shoulder at what Apollo was indicating, and broke into a smile. "Oh, your attorney's badge!" he cried. "Congratulations, Apollo!"

Before Apollo could reply, Trucy squealed, bouncing up and down. "Polly's a lawyer!" she shrieked, giving her oldest brother another hug before excitedly spinning to give Luke one too. "Just like Daddy was, too!" She turned back to Apollo with a grin. "Can I look at it?"

"Sure!" Apollo replied, grinning back as he easily pulled the badge from its new home on his waistcoat and handed it to his sister. "Be careful with it, though."

"I will!" Trucy promised, taking the small badge with an awed look as she examined it. "It's so shiny!"

Luke hid a smile, suddenly remembering an almost identical exchange he'd had with Phoenix seven years previous.

"It's brand new!" Apollo pointed out with a laugh. "Of course it's shiny!"
"Do they tell you what the symbols stand for?" Luke asked.

Apollo frowned in thought, while Trucy was preoccupied still looking over every millimetre of the golden object in her hand. "Of the badge?" he asked. "Well, the scales are the obvious 'justice' symbol... is there something else about it?"

Luke smiled. "Papa told me when we first met that they're modelled after a sunflower. Sunflowers symbolise freedom and justice, because they're always facing the sun."

Trucy looked up at the younger of her brothers with a surprised look. "Oh yeah, you actually got to see Daddy's badge before he lost it!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow at her. "So did you," he pointed out.

"No, I didn't!" Trucy shot back with a frown. "I barely talked to Daddy before my other Daddy's trial, and then he didn't have it anymore!"

Luke watched the badge in her hands, still smiling nostalgically. "It looks pretty much the same as I remember Papa's being like," he assured his sister. "They probably still use the same moulds to make them as they did when Papa got his."

Trucy nodded, looking at the badge's back. "Why is there a number here?" she asked.

"It's an ID number," Apollo explained. "I think it's to identify the owner if it gets lost or something."

"Security, actually," came a voice from nearby, and the trio looked up in surprise to see Phoenix standing at the top of the stairs, watching them with a faint smile as he rested an arm on the handrail. "They're supposed to be unique so the bailiffs can ensure only the proper people are using them in court... not that that stopped a couple of notable exceptions of course."

"What do you mean, Papa?" Luke asked, confused.

Apollo frowned in thought. "Wait, didn't Uncle Edgeworth defend Iris on the first day of her trial?" he cut in. "You mean like that?"

Phoenix nodded. "He borrowed my badge while I was in the hospital," he explained. "A few months before that, someone successfully pretended to be me with a cardboard replica." He shrugged, his smile fading. "I hope they've improved their methods since then."

Trucy looked back to the badge in thought. "What was your number, Daddy?" she asked curiously.

Phoenix had to shake his head. "I'm afraid I don't remember," he admitted, a vaguely sad expression flitting across his brow. "It was a long time ago, Truce."

"Aw," Trucy sighed with disappointment, then handed the badge back to Apollo.

As Apollo re-attached his badge to his waistcoat, Luke tapped his goatee in thought. "How long did you have your badge, Papa?" he asked. "It was at least a couple of years, wasn't it?"

"Three, actually," Phoenix replied with a smile, then turned and headed back down the stairs, continuing, "Not that long at all in the grand scheme of things."

The Wright kids looked at each other in concern before following their father down into the kitchen.

"That would have been nine years ago now," Phoenix mused to himself, coming to a thoughtful halt near the middle of the room. "Almost a whole decade since my own badge arrived in the mail. Huh."
Luke frowned in thought as he tried to remember what he had been doing in the summer nine years ago (nothing much - he'd been moving from Misthallery to London with his parents, having appointed himself the brand new apprentice of Professor Hershel Layton). Apollo, however, was doing some quick maths in his head, and approached his father with a concerned look. "You were... twenty-three?" he asked.

Phoenix seemed surprised that the three had followed him, or was simply shocked out of his train of thought, and turned to face them. After a short pause, he nodded. "A little older than you," he confirmed, then smiled. "I wasted some time on that art degree I never finished."

Apollo laughed. "You must've been pretty excited!"

Phoenix shrugged, though his nostalgic smile gave away that Apollo was right. "I only had the one person to show it off to, though."

Trucy grinned. "You mean Auntie Mia?"

Laughing, Phoenix nodded. "Yep, Auntie Mia!" he confirmed. "She had to put it on my lapel for me, I was shaking too hard with excitement!"

Everyone laughed for a few moments at the mental image of a young Phoenix jittering with glee as Mia calmly attached his badge to his suit for him.

"Speaking of," Phoenix continued, waving a finger at his eldest son, "you'll need to tell Maya and Pearls if you haven't already."

"Yeah, of course," Apollo agreed with a grin. "I'll go up on the weekend, if Maya's free!"

Trucy jumped to Apollo's side, tugging on his arm. "Okay, now you've shown us your badge," she demanded, "it's time to finish the story!"

Apollo sighed, his excitement draining. "Do we have to?"

"Yup!" Trucy insisted, pulling her brother towards the stairs.

Phoenix watched with a raised eyebrow. "I thought you were busy making something for Luke?" he asked.

Luke nodded, smiling. "She's making me a vest, or waistcoat, to wear for my new job!" he explained, glancing to Apollo. "I think we were done measuring though."

"Uh-huh!" Trucy agreed with a bright grin and a nod. "I can start work on it while you tell the story!"

Apollo sighed, resigning himself to his fate as he obediently followed Trucy back up the stairs, Luke behind him. "Great, wonderful. I've been looking forward to this."

"Don't sound so excited!" Phoenix joked, calling after them with a grin. "I'll be down here when you're done!" With that, he headed back into his office.

Luke's room was, as always, in tip-top condition, with everything neat, orderly and exactly where it
was supposed to be. The side that had been Luke's from the start was almost entirely unchanged from how it had been since the moment the brothers moved in, but the side that had been Apollo's until he moved out had changed quite a bit: The small desk that had once sat on the landing by the stairs (intended for homework until they'd all gotten individual desks in reception) had been moved into the corner the elder brother's bed had once occupied. The wall around it had also been covered with things taped all over, ranging from temporary notes and to-do lists to seemingly random lists and diagrams to photos both old and new. Apollo even noticed a copy of the Agency's current, now-outdated, flyer at the edges. The desk itself, normally kept almost entirely clear, currently carried the framed graduation photo of Luke's parents and the album he had received from Emmy, neither having found their proper places yet.

Letting go of Apollo's arm, Trucy dashed to Luke's bed, where she quickly scooped up a notebook, pen and measuring tape she'd been using before Apollo arrived. "I'll be right back!" she cried, then ran back out of the room and down the hall.

Luke gave Apollo a shrug, then headed over to his desk and pulled out the chair. "You can sit wherever you want, Apollo," he offered, gesturing to the chair and the bed. "I was thinking, since you've only heard 'Azran Legacy' just the once, I'd start from the beginning again to refresh your memory."

"Sure," Apollo agreed with a non-committal shrug, then headed over to the bed. He was going to need a comfortable seat to get through this.

Luke lowered himself into his chair, watching Apollo with concern. "I know you think I exaggerate most of my stories, but-"

"I know, I know," Apollo interrupted, waving a gloved hand, "you promise you aren't lying."

At that, Luke frowned. "You should know full well I'm not," he pointed out, glancing at Apollo's bracelet as his face fell. "That's... why it hurts so much when you don't believe me."

Apollo felt his other hand going to his left wrist. "Y-yeah," he mumbled, staring at the carpeted floor. After a long pause, he added. "I guess it's just in my nature to doubt things. S'why I became a lawyer, right?"

Luke thought a moment. "Papa would say it the other way around," he pointed out, but gave his brother a smile. "I'm glad you're hearing me out, at least. You can claim I'm lying all you like, just as long as you've heard the whole thing."

Apollo resisted a guilty wince. "Y-yeah," he mumbled again.

With an excited giggle, Trucy burst back into the room, her arms full of fabric, paper and various other sewing supplies. "I'm ready!" she announced, then dropped everything on the floor and plopped herself down in the middle of it all, sorting through her pile of things to pull out the notebook, where she began immediately sketching and making various notes. "Go ahead, Luke!" she ordered, her eyes glued to her writing.

Apollo rolled his eyes with a smile, and Luke chuckled to himself, then the younger brother took a deep breath and began the story: "It all happened back when I was eleven years old. The Professor, Emmy and I had been through a number of adventures together already, but this one was the grandest of them all..."
View the Court Record
Apollo adjusted his blue tie as he entered his workplace, smiling at the thought of the new badge sitting on his chest. 'I don't think I'll ever get over that!' Like most everyone else Apollo knew, Kristoph was well aware of the young man's impatience for the arrival of his badge, although Apollo had been careful to tone down his excitement in front of his boss... not that he was going to find it any easier to do now said badge had finally arrived.

Resisting the urge to skip, Apollo headed over to the closed door into his mentor's office, knocking twice and announcing, "I'm here, Mister Gavin! Good morning!"

A moment later, the door opened, and Kristoph Gavin stood in the doorway, smiling down at his employee. "Good morning, Wright. On time as usual." As Apollo grinned proudly, Kristoph continued, "How was your trip to London?"

"Good," Apollo automatically responded. "We didn't have much time to look around, just being there for Luke's graduation and all."

Kristoph nodded and, noticing Apollo didn't appear to be heading to his desk, raised an eyebrow. "Was there something else you wanted?"

Apollo paused a moment, then smiled, pointing to the badge on his waistcoat. "My badge arrived, sir!"

"So it has," Kristoph replied, looking over the new addition with what Apollo hoped was pride. "It appears you are now legally capable of defending in court."

Although he was widely grinning with glee, Apollo found himself glancing at Kristoph's badge on his lapel, and wondered if his boss had felt excited when his own badge had arrived. 'Nah,' he decided. 'Mister Gavin's the 'Coolest Defence in the West' - he probably just put it on and got to work!'

"I suppose," Kristoph continued with the same calm smile, "that means it's time I promoted you." With that, he turned and headed to the desk in his office.

Apollo blinked in surprise. "Huh?" He carefully followed his boss inside, watching Kristoph sit down and pull open a nearby drawer to remove a single piece of paper. "What do you mean, sir?"

Kristoph chuckled, shaking his head. "It's time you were hired on as a junior partner, rather than just an office assistant," he said.

Apollo stared for several moments in shock. "J-jun...?"

"If you're willing to, of course," Kristoph added.

His face breaking into a wide grin, Apollo nodded emphatically. "Y-yes, sir! I'd love to be your junior partner, sir!"
Kristoph continued to smile. "I'm glad to hear it," he said, then his expression turned stern. "Keep in mind however, a badge doesn't suddenly make you ready to lead a case. I will be expecting you to act as my assistant in court for at least a year or two before you can begin to take cases of your own."

Apollo nodded, his hands balling into determined fists to match his mirrored frown. "I understand, sir," he said. "I'll work hard so I don't disappoint you!"

"I'd expect nothing less," Kristoph replied, his smile returning. "You will likely turn out to be a, as you put it, 'fine' young defence attorney, Wright."

Apollo blushed. "Y-yes, sir," he said. 'As long as you don't ever say that in front of Dad or Trucy... I think I might be.'

August 13, 10:30AM
Warren Street Animal Shelter
Reception

Luke adjusted the brand new vest over his shirt, still getting used to the fit. 'I wish Trucy hadn't suddenly decided to do this at the last minute... I can't help but feel she rushed it.' Shaking his head and assuring himself he looked perfectly fine, the young man pushed open the door and entered into the animal shelter's reception, calling, "Hello!" to whoever might be inside.

Behind the desk were two familiar faces, who looked up as Luke entered and smiled, instantly recognising him. "Northpaw!" the woman with an orange mane of hair called, waving to her friend. "Long time, no see!"

Luke grinned, approaching the pair. "Hi Kitty, Duck!"

Duck nodded from his seat behind the desk, idly clicking something on the computer. "I'm afraid the boss isn't in today - got himself injured again."

Luke paused in surprise. "What happened this time?"

"Clocked himself on the back of the head," Kitty explained, crossing her arms and failing to hide a small smile of amusement. "Apparently he was reaching for something on the back of the shelf in the supermarket and stood up too fast."

"I heard he dropped something under his trolley," Duck interrupted with a confused frown.

"Whatever happened, he bumped the back of his head, knocked himself out and got himself in the hospital," Kitty continued with a shrug. "He says he'll be out soon, but we can't say anything for sure until the doctors release him."

Luke thought for a moment, concerned for his friend. 'Poor Mister Pound. He can't go more than a few months without another injury for his collection...'

"Speaking of," Duck continued with a smile, "I understand you've got a doctorate now, haven't you?"

Blushing, Luke nodded. "Vets become doctors in the UK," he explained. "I've read we're allowed the keep the title in the US if we want to."
"Well then, Doctor Northpaw," Kitty said with a cheeky wink, "fancy coming to work for our little shelter here?"

Luke giggled. "If you'll have me!" he said, then gave Duck a worried look. "Um, does Mister Pound want me...?"

Duck laughed. "There've been lots of discussions about it over the past year," he replied. "Reindeer... should probably tell you himself, but everyone wants you to come in as one of the paid employees."

Despite Duck's reassuring words, Luke's worry only heightened. "What about Reindeer!!?" he asked, eyes widening.

Before Duck or Kitty could reply, the door from the dog enclosures slammed open, and a young woman around Luke's age stormed out, raven hair sticking straight up and falling over her face, barely hiding her angry glare. "WHERE IS HE!?" she shouted.

Luke jumped back in fright, although the other two were merely surprised. "M-me!!" he cried.

The teen looked up, her one visible eye locking on to Luke with shock. "Northpaw!?" she replied, straightening up. "What are you...?" She shook her head, returning to her more angry glare as she turned to Duck and Kitty. "Did Bee come by here!? I can't find him!"

Luke sighed in relief. The teen girl, only a year younger than him, had been volunteering at the shelter almost as long as Luke, and the pair had worked together on many a shift over the years. Her nickname around the shelter was Poe, and she certainly seemed to embody some of the famous poet's darker nature... especially when she got angry.

Kitty smiled knowingly, seeming unconcerned. "Slacking off again?"

"What do you think!?" Poe cried, groaning in frustration as she pressed the palm of a fingerless glove to the side of her head, brushing past the ring in her one visible eyebrow. "Why is the boss even letting him stay!? He never does the work he's assigned to do!"

"Who's Bee?" Luke asked.

"New guy, signed on last week," Poe explained, waving a hand dismissively. "You haven't met him yet."

Duck smiled. "We call him 'Busybee' because he hides rather than actually work."

Luke frowned in confusion. "If he doesn't want to work, why is he volunteering here?"

"Who can say!?" Kitty answered with a laugh, then turned to Poe. "I'd help ya look, girl, but I'll have to man reception while Duck here deals with Northpaw."

Poe seemed confused for a moment, then smiled in understanding, giving Luke an excited look. "Aw, they're gonna pay you now, Paw!" she realised. "Congrats!"

"That's Doctor Paw!" Kitty cut in with a wink.


Duck chuckled to himself as he got up from the reception desk's chair, waving for Luke to follow him. "As usual, I'm standing in for Mister Pound until he gets back," he explained, heading past Poe
to the dog side of the building. "We'll have to wait for him to get back to sign anything, but we can work everything else out for now."

Luke nodded, giving Kitty and Poe a wave as he headed after Duck, the tall man taking his usual slow pace down the hallways. Once he was sure the door behind them had closed, and it was clear Poe wasn't following them, Luke gave Duck a curious look. "So, why is Bee allowed to stay if he doesn't work?"

"I can't say for sure," Duck replied, "but my suspicion is because there's one thing he can always be relied on to do, and Pound obviously thinks it's important enough to keep the kid on."

Luke frowned in thought, but couldn't think of any one possible chore that stood out as requiring less work than the other chores. "What?"

Duck looked down at Luke with a grin. "Socialising the animals, of course."

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"You really didn't need to do this," Phoenix insisted as he waved his friends in. "There are better things you could have done with your weekend than help me."

"Nonsense," Edgeworth shot back, shooting a quick glare at Kay to leave the pile of Samurai tapes by the TV alone. "Something clearly went wrong with the handling of this case, and I intend to keep my promise to help you see it through."

Phoenix sighed, crossing his arms as he leaned on his desk, half-feeling like he wanted to just lie down on its top and forget the world outside his small apartment existed.

Gumshoe nervously fidgeted from near the window, where he seemed to have taken up an unneeded post as 'look-out' (though for what, Phoenix had no idea). "So, uh, pal," he quietly asked, one hand rubbing at the back of his head, "how've you been doing since... um..."

"Since I lost my badge?" Phoenix bitterly spat, glaring at the nearest wall. "Just fine, thanks."

Gumshoe winced, sadly looking out the window.

"Hey!" Kay cried, crossing her arms as she gave Phoenix an angry look. "He was just asking if you were alright!"

"Kay," Edgeworth growled in warning, and the girl sighed as she dropped onto the single sofa, giving up on hounding Phoenix any further.

It had been only three days since Zak Gramarye had vanished from the courtroom and Phoenix Wright, Ace Attorney had subsequently been disbarred. To Phoenix, the passing days still felt like a nightmare that might end any minute... that he hoped would end any minute. Despite the moments of hope his friends kept giving him, he was struggling every second not to retreat into his bed, curl up into a tight ball and just... stay there until the outside world sorted itself out. It felt like the world had been out to get him since February, when he not only nearly lost his best friend through fire, freezing and murder, but began the slow descent into the much more torturous losing her to her home village's culture. Most of it had been self-inflicted, but the thought of dragging Maya, Pearl and Kurain down with him had Phoenix firmly convinced they were better off now with him as far away as possible.

Edgeworth, on the other hand...

The red-suited prosecutor stepped towards his friend, arms at his sides. "What about your investigation?" he asked. "You said you would look up this forger; Have you made any progress?"

Phoenix sighed, though he was secretly grateful to be distracted from his wallowing in self-pity. "Not really," he admitted. "I... haven't found him yet."
Edgeworth hummed to himself in thought, crossing his arms and tapping distractedly on his arm. "We haven't gotten far either," he replied. "Prosecutor Gavin was very possessive of what secrets he did have."

As Phoenix gave his friend a confused look, Kay nodded knowingly from the sofa. "We're pretty sure he didn't have anything to do with it, though."

"I highly doubt that," Phoenix darkly mumbled, glaring at the wall. "It seems to be the case, however," Edgeworth calmly insisted, having expected Phoenix's response. "He didn't want to talk about it. The whole thing made him uncomfortable, and he was forceful about his information coming from an anonymous source." He closed his eyes in thought. "I suspect he also knows that trial was not entirely just, but something is keeping him from admitting it."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, watching his friend curiously. "What do you mean?"

Edgeworth had to think for a few moments to formulate a reply. "He was very evasive," he explained. "Given how insistent he was when we pressed him on it, I doubt he was lying when he said he knew as much about that forged page as we do. Someone definitely tipped him off, but he seems prepared to go to the grave with the secret of who exactly it was."

Shaking his head, Phoenix rounded his desk and fell more than sat in the chair behind it. "So we know even less now than we did before," he sighed. "Perfect."

Gumshoe looked even more miserable. "I-if I'd known what he was plannin' to do in court, pal, I swear I'd've told you!"

"That's probably exactly why he didn't let you know," Edgeworth pointed out, waving a finger at the detective. "Gavin is a prodigy for a reason. He would certainly have done his research and known you have worked on many cases with Wright, thus he could not trust you not to inform Wright of his plans."

"Yeah, it's really weird," Kay piped up, crossing her arms and legs as she frowned at the ceiling in thought, leaning back in her seat. "Most of the bad guys we corner are real jerks, but Prosecutor Gavin seems like a really nice guy." She grinned. "He kept calling me 'Fraulein!'"

Phoenix rolled his eyes. "Doesn't surprise me."

Edgeworth just glared off into the distance. "To be honest, I would find it easier to trust him if he weren't pretending so hard to be what he clearly isn't."

"What do you mean, sir?" Gumshoe asked, scratching his face with a curious look. "He's a German rock-star prosecutor, what's he pretending to be?"

"German," Edgeworth bluntly replied.

Everyone else looked up at the prosecutor in surprise. "He's... pretending to be German?" Phoenix asked in disbelief.

"No native German speaker uses the word 'Fraulein' anymore," Edgeworth explained, "especially not one his age. And it is more natural to end a sentence in German with 'nicht', not 'ja.'" He tapped a finger against his arm, looking annoyed. "I understand it is part of his stage persona along with the ridiculous name, but I wish it would stay his stage persona, and not become his entire life."

While Kay and Gumshoe looked surprised, Phoenix burst into laughter. "You mean the kid that cost
me my badge... that *prodigy prosecutor*... is *PRETENDING TO BE GERMAN!*?" he cried, almost falling off his chair with sudden delight.

Kay sat up on the sofa, watching the former lawyer with concern. "Are... you okay, Mister Wright?"

With a loud sigh as his laughter slowly died, Phoenix planted his head face-first on his desk, on top of some old papers cluttering it. "Nope!" he announced in a cheerful tone. "I am not okay *at all!*

Edgeworth sighed, approaching the desk. He uncrossed his arms and seemed about to reach out to pat his friend's back to offer comfort, but paused mid-movement and awkwardly crossed his arms again. "You said you hadn't located this forger yet," he said, changing the subject. "Maybe we can assist you in locating him."

"Nah, I'm pretty sure I can do it on my own," Phoenix insisted, gently pushing himself back up into a sitting position, his face returning to a morose look as he brushed off a piece of paper that had attached itself to his forehead. "I've just... been distracted by something else."

Edgeworth raised an eyebrow. "And what is this 'something else'?

Phoenix didn't answer immediately, thinking to himself for a moment before turning to Gumshoe, still stood by the window. "You remember that little girl, don't you?" he asked. "Trucy Enigmar?"

Gumshoe blinked. "You mean Zak Gramarye's daughter?"

Kay gasped in surprise. "Zak Gramarye had a daughter!?"

"The state will be taking care of her," Edgeworth pointed out, one eyebrow raised as he suspiciously stared at Phoenix. "What is so important about the girl, Wright?"

Phoenix shrugged, trying not to look uncomfortable at his friend's question. "I... feel responsible for her, I guess," he admitted. "If I'd done my job properly, her father wouldn't have vanished, and-"

"Nonsense," Edgeworth interrupted, shaking his head. "Enigmar would have known full well he would be leaving his daughter behind. If he was any kind of loving father, he would have made plans for her."

"That's just it," Phoenix sighed, resting his elbows on the desk and interlocking his fingers thoughtfully, resting his hands against the lower half of his face. "He was... probably the least helpful client I've ever had." He paused, frowning. "Well, excepting Ron DeLite, anyway." He shook his head. "I-it was like... he *wanted* me to do a terrible job. It didn't matter, because he was planning on leaving anyway, without answering a single question about what actually happened."

"And?" Edgeworth asked, wondering what Phoenix's ramblings had to do with Trucy.

"He hired me after I beat him in a game of poker," Phoenix continued, frowning in thought. "Said only his former mentor had beaten him before."

Kay looked confused. "Poker? Like, the thing you poke fires with?"

"'Poker' as in the game of cards," Edgeworth explained, then turned back to Phoenix with a thoughtful look. "I seem to recall the three of us taught ourselves poker as children. You always won then, too."

Phoenix smiled proudly and shrugged. "Eh, you and Larry are both terrible at poker."
"So, uh, what's this got to do with the kid?" Gumshoe asked.

"I've been researching her family," Phoenix finally explained. "Shadi Enigmar, Zak Gramarye, was an orphan, with no family to speak of. Her mother, as far as I can tell, was raised by only a father, and was an only child too." He shook his head. "Also, said mother vanished a few years ago... and the grandfather on that side was our unfortunate victim, Magnifi Gramarye."

"Wow," Kay mumbled, crossing her arms. "She's got an awesome pedigree!"

"So you're saying she has no living relatives?" Edgeworth realised.

Phoenix nodded. "She's in foster care, yes, but she shouldn't be. Nothing's been prepared, there's no one to take care of her... I..." He looked away, a little embarrassed to be admitting this to his friends. "I want to help her. I want to look after her until her father gets back. I... have to."

"You want to adopt her, pal?" Gumshoe asked, seeming confused at first before smiling. "Well hey, I always thought you were pretty much already a dad to little Pearl!"

Phoenix seemed a little surprised at the unexpected support, but pressed on. "Yeah, except I don't have a job anymore to support her," he pointed out with a sigh, running a hand through his spiky hair. "I'd hate for her to spend longer alone than she has to, but I have no idea what to do with myself so I can give her a decent living..."

Edgeworth thought for a long moment, fingers tapping on his arms. "I'll help you," he said.

Everyone looked up at the prosecutor in surprise. "You'll what?" Phoenix asked.

"I'll help you," Edgeworth repeated. "I know you, Wright; You need someone to protect. Without your badge, you're even more vulnerable. Someone to look after could be just what you need, and I intend to ensure you have a decent life together."

Phoenix continued to stare for a long moment before giving his friend a grateful smile. "You're the best, Edgeworth. Though I don't know what you could do to help..."

"Trust me," Edgeworth replied, giving Phoenix a rare, confident smile. "We will ensure young Trucy's safety, then put all our focus into this investigation. It shouldn't be too hard at all."

View the Court Record
The ominous thumping suddenly assaulting the tower had made poor Flora shriek in surprise and fear, and Luke couldn't blame her at all. Out the window, Don Paolo was hovering in a copter-like contraption of his own, three spiked metal balls swinging every which way as the copter careened towards the little house on the tower. The next strike threw Luke and Flora to the floor, and the Professor shouted "Follow me!" as he dashed to the door, stopping only to help Flora back to her feet. Outside, the trio could see the plumes of smoke and brick dust from the damaged building below as they raced to the path downstairs, but more worrying was that Don Paolo's machine seemed to have disappeared, and the ground was rhythmically shaking under their feet.

"What now!?" Luke cried, with a frustration that belied his inner panic. He didn't receive or expect an answer, as they were already on the stairs back inside, running as fast as they could without falling. It seemed only a moment later that the roof above them began to break apart, and before Luke had the time to react, the stairs in front of him were gone, crushed by a falling block of concrete.

The shaking that had brought the Sanctuary out from under the mountain by Froenborg was nothing compared to the shaking that was bringing it back down. Most of Luke was still physically and emotionally numb from the lingering pain of stopping the golems, not to mention the subsequent loss of Aurora, but he still managed to make himself move through the unstable structure, wiping away the tears still streaming down his cheeks. Following at the Professor's side, he was vaguely aware of Descole, Emmy and Bronev waiting for them, before the five all ran out together into the sub-arctic sunlight. The ground again shifted beneath their feet, knocking Luke down to his knees, but there wasn't any time to waste, and he forced himself to concentrate on one thing and one thing only: follow the Professor to safety.

He was still too numb to muster a reaction when, a few moments later, Descole disappeared in the falling rubble.

With a clinking of snapping chains, the massive chandelier hanging in the manor's expansive front hall came free of its moorings, crashing down into the floor below and bringing much of the roof with it. Luke looked up and could see the rapidly growing cracks in the walls all around them, parts of the building coming loose every direction he turned his eyes. Katia ran to her grandfather, and Luke thought for a moment both she and the Professor had been crushed as the top-hatted man pushed her out of the way of some falling rubble. Luke was finding it hard to breathe as he ran around where the floor was still stable, finding Katia, the Professor and Anton safe on the other side. "We have to go!" he shouted, trying to quell the rising fear that, this time, they wouldn't be so lucky to get out alive. "Hurry up!"
Luke awoke with a scream and no idea where he was. Folsense? The Azran Sanctuary? Saint Mystere? His hands automatically clung to whatever was nearest, and he quickly realised the shaking wracking his body was not his own; He was lying on a carpeted floor, one hand clinging to the soft beige while the other clutched an old and battered teddy bear already in his arms. The whole building around him was vibrating, and Luke's eyes widened, knowing from experience this meant it must be falling down. He pushed himself to his feet, only vaguely registering the bed he had been lying next to, peacefully napping before the almost audible rumbling knocked him to the ground.

Just as Luke made a lunge for the door, the movement stopped, throwing the young man to the floor as he again lost his balance. 'What's going on!?' Still half-asleep, Luke was finding it hard to concentrate on his surroundings, not even noticing as he shakily pushed himself back to his feet that he'd managed to drop his beloved teddy despite the vice-like grip he'd had on it. Although the rumbling had stopped and there was no sign of falling rubble, he didn't stop to think, the residual panic from his waking nightmare forcing the young man out his bedroom door, running down the hallway and into the kitchen below.

Trucy was grinning from beside the kitchen counter, looking around before noticing her approaching brother. "Did you feel that!?!" she excitedly cried.

"W-we have to get out!" Luke shouted, rushing to grab his sister's arm and dragging her towards the office door.

They had only gotten a few steps before Trucy ripped her arm out of Luke's grip, giving him a confused glare. "Why?!" she asked.

"Because!" Luke hurriedly replied, too terrified for their safety to formulate a longer answer, and he made another attempt to grab Trucy's arm, only for the teen to dodge him, ducking under his flailing hand and running around into the open room behind him. Luke, deciding she must be heading for the back exit, let her go and ran for the door to the office, only to find himself colliding with a taller figure in a black hoodie.

"Luke?" Phoenix asked, his frown somewhere between confused and worried.

"Papa!" Luke shouted, grabbing the fabric at his father's chest in his panic. "We have to get out of here! Quickly!"

As Luke tried to push past to make a run for the front door, Phoenix grabbed his shoulders, keeping Luke stock still. "Luke!" he cried with a stern gaze, commanding the young man's attention. "We're perfectly safe where we are. It was just an earthquake."

At that, Luke's panic finally began to subside. "A-an... earthquake?"

Phoenix's gaze softened a little, visibly concerned for his son. "And only a little one, too. This building's made to withstand worse than that."

Luke could only stand in shock for several moments as the truth of the situation sank in. Nothing was collapsing. There was never any danger of being trapped underneath a pile of rubble. All that Luke had accomplished was scaring his family and making a scene, neither of which was an appropriate, gentlemanly reaction to a simple earthquake. Full of shame, he buried his face in his hands with a squeak of repressed tears, and soon found himself gently pulled into Phoenix's comforting embrace.

"It's okay," Phoenix whispered into Luke's ear, one hand patting the back of Luke's head where it
rested against his shoulder. "You're alright."

Luke felt shaking again, but this time it was only his own body, the relief that was replacing his fear only making the tears in his eyes stronger. Despite that, he managed to repress any sobs, keeping his distress silent. A hand to his back made him jump, but, after whipping his head around in shock, he saw it was only Trucy, watching him in concern although his reaction to her touch had made her retreat back a few steps. Luke sighed, feeling even worse, but Phoenix patted his back reassuringly.

"Come sit down in the office," Phoenix told Luke, gently guiding him in with the firm hand resting on his back.

Lacking the energy to protest, Luke allowed his father to lead him through into the next room. He kept his gaze strictly on the floor, watching the carpet below his feet as Phoenix guided him to one of the two red sofas near the piano, where he sat down, hugging himself tightly and screwing his eyes shut.

"Are you alright, Luke?" came a weary voice from not far away.

Luke almost jumped in surprise again, looking up to see his unofficial uncle sitting on the other sofa, leaning heavily on one side as though he had been lying down and was just getting up. "Oh, Mister Edgeworth, you're still here!" Luke said, trying to force a smile. "I thought you would have gone home by now..."

Edgeworth shook his head, giving Luke his own small smile (Did he look paler than usual, or was Luke imagining it?). "I thought I'd stay and catch up with your father for a while. Maybe I should have gone home, however; Pess might have warned me of the earthquake before it struck."

Luke nodded at the attempt to lighten the mood, then returned to staring at the floor. It was hard to think now that he had had such a good morning, having been graciously allowed to borrow Edgeworth's car (the only manual, or as they called them here 'stick-shift', any of the Wright family's friends owned) to practise his results from, so far, only two weeks of driving lessons. It had been made even better when Edgeworth took Luke to his home for a break and the young man had once again been allowed to visit the prosecutor's golden retriever, Pess, which was a chance four times as rare as Edgeworth's own visits. It had been such a busy morning, Luke had elected to go straight to his room to have a nap when they got home, which, to his great displeasure, had led to this whole mess.

"We should be asking how you are, Edgeworth," Phoenix asked, still standing by Luke's side and watching his friend with a concerned look.

"I am perfectly fine," Edgeworth insisted, shifting slightly in his seat to be more upright. "Given a few minutes to recover, I think I shall be alright to drive home... given there are no aftershocks on the way, of course."

Trucy leaned over the back of the sofa beside Luke (an impressive feat considering the pile of magic props she and Apollo had accumulated behind it) and looked between her brother and Edgeworth with a small smile. "You want some hot chocolate?" she asked, then shrugged apologetically. "I don't know how to make tea on my own, so..."

"That would be most agreeable," Edgeworth replied, giving her a grateful smile. "Thank you, Trucy."

Luke, still feeling guilty and not trusting himself to talk, gave her only a smile and a silent nod.
Trucy grinned. "Two hot chocolates, coming right up!" she cried, then bounced off the back of the sofa and rushed off to the kitchen.

Phoenix sat at Luke's side, rubbing his son's back comfortingly with one hand. "I suppose, given your reaction, you should count yourself lucky it took this long for an earthquake to strike while you were here," he told the young man. "You've never mentioned being in one before."

"Because I haven't," Luke replied, still staring morosely at the floor. "I had no idea that was an earthquake until you told me. It woke me up and I thought the building was falling down."

There was a short pause as the other two men thought to themselves. "That can happen," Edgeworth admitted, "but most if not all buildings here are specially designed not to."

Phoenix frowned, not seeming to have heard Edgeworth. "Of course, your stories," he muttered, more to himself than to his friend or Luke. "You know first-hand what it's like inside a collapsing building, don't you?"

Luke nodded, still avoiding eye contact. "The Herzen Manor, the tower in Saint Mystere, the Azran Sanctuary... somehow, we always managed to run fast enough to get out before anyone got hurt, but every time I honestly thought we wouldn't all make it... probably because, one time, we didn't..."

Edgeworth crossed his arms, reflecting on Luke's words. "Flight is a natural reaction to fear," he assured the young man, then smiled to himself. "Certainly a more useful one than simply fainting."

Phoenix couldn't resist a short laugh, while Luke looked up in confusion. "I guess that's another similarity you two have: " he said, looking between the pair, "A fear of earthquakes!"

Edgeworth seemed amused, although Luke took a moment to connect the dots and realise what they were talking about. Although surprised to learn the random fact about his unofficial uncle, he forced a smile and looked up at his father. "I'm sure if I'd been awake I would have realised what was going on much sooner," he insisted. "I wouldn't have... tried to evacuate everyone. I kind of woke up in the middle of it after all."

"There's no need to explain," Edgeworth replied. "We react how we react, and there's nothing more to it."

"You can count on us always being there to help you, too," Phoenix added, pulling Luke close in a one-armed hug and giving his son a comforting smile. "We're family, after all."

Finally, Luke was able to give a genuine smile and leaned against his father. "I know, Papa," he quietly replied. "That's what family's all about."

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View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Aunt Eury and I still have Thanksgiving, but it's not the same when we're the only people in the continent doing it.

Plus we're kinda celebrating some questionable things, which every single person I mention it to here will point out :/

I don't much see the point of it myself, especially since we don't particularly have the money to buy a feast.

Papa always tries, but this year especially is a bit small because everyone came to visit me in England.

You've been over here for Thanksgiving the last few years, though! I should have invited you last year, actually. Aunt Eury would LOVE you!

Haha! Like I said, I'm kinda neutral on the whole thing. November was always busy enough, with my birthday, Remembrance Day, Emmy and Mr Sycamore visiting, the Labyrinthian Anniversary...

Oh yeah, I always forget that's a thing. :/ I was so sheltered in the space center, I've only heard stories of what happens.

It's not pretty. We're doing something for it at the shelter though: Black Fur Friday! Costs for adopting pets are reduced! Mr Pound says it's been a rising trend across shelters all over the country, and it helps all sorts of animals find homes.

Sounds fun! :) I hope it's nothing like the sales everywhere else. Will you be there?

All three of us vets will be, yes. Mr Pound didn't want to put the burden of dealing with a crowd purely on volunteers.

Well, good luck! :D

Thanks! I'd better get to work now. Talk to you tomorrow, Athena! :

Seeya, Luke! :D

November 28, 6:00PM
Warren Street Animal Shelter
Reception

"Next year, let's not do 'Black Fur Friday'," Fox sighed, stretching her arms and back as she led the trio down the hallway to reception. "Or at least only do it in the morning."

Luke nodded in agreement. "No-one showed up after lunch," he agreed. "I think it's a great idea to get more animals out to loving homes, though."

Reindeer playfully scoffed. "Screw the animals! All that matters is our own comfort, right?"

Fox shot her mentor a glare. "You know that's not what I meant."
Finally, they reached the reception door, and Fox pushed it open, Luke and Reindeer right behind her. Sat behind reception was Simba, speaking in hushed, angry tones with Pound, standing at her side. As the pair registered the three vets' arrival, Pound stepped away from Simba, rubbing his hands together nervously. "We'll discuss this later, Gatti," he quietly told the upset receptionist, then turned to the trio with a forced grin. "Ah, leaving, are you? I think it's safe to say today was a success!"

"Of course!" Luke immediately agreed. "We actually have empty enclosures now! How long has it been since we had that?"

"I do think we properly need all hands on deck if we do it again," Fox added, giving her boss a concerned look. "The three of us were run off our feet all morning."

"I didn't mind," Reindeer insisted with a grin. "Got my old-man nap in once everyone vanished in the afternoon!"

Luke giggled. "We all know you weren't napping," he said. "We could hear you talking to the animals!"

"Better than hearing you talking to them!" Reindeer shot back with a wink.

While everyone else was giving the older man confused looks, Pound rolled his eyes, giving the three a grateful smile. "Well, thank you all for sticking around anyway. See you all Monday?"

"I'll be staying in for a while, actually," Luke replied, pointing a finger into the air.

Fox gave him a frown. "Seriously?" she asked. "We actually had a longer workday today, the sun set over an hour ago, and you still want to stay after-hours?"

"No-one can say Northpaw don't love those critters," Reindeer said with a grin, shooting Luke another wink as the young man giggled again.

"Well, as usual, let me know when you leave so I can shut everything down," Pound told Luke, then looked to the other two. "I'll see you two Monday!"

"Monday!" Fox repeated, giving Pound a grin and a wave as she headed on to the front door.

Reindeer scoffed to himself as he followed the young woman. "Yeah, if I haven't died before then!"

Pound shook his head at the old vet's joke, watching Fox and Reindeer walking off down the dark road through the glass doors. Chuckling, he then patted Luke on the shoulder as the two headed back into the hallway behind reception. "The day that old coot finally meets Death, Death is getting a stern talking-to, I'm telling you."

Luke giggled in agreement. Behind them, Simba rolled her eyes as she moved to lock the doors.

November 28, 6:45PM
Warren Street Animal Shelter
Hallway

"I'll see you another time!" Luke called to the dog he had been cuddling in the recuperation room,
carefully closing the door behind him. It was a ritual he cherished, spending time with the dogs and cats that especially needed care when everyone else had gone home for the day, and even a day as busy (and infamous) as Black Friday was no exception. *I'd better go drop in on Mister Pound, then I can head home,* Luke reminded himself, and headed off to the end of the building opposite reception, where there was a room exactly between the dog and cat enclosures, only steps away from the exits to the yard out the back. Like a number of the more important rooms, the otherwise nondescript door was fitted with a large lock, which required a key-card to open, and a small sign that simply read 'OFFICE'.

As he arrived at the room's often looked-over entrance, Luke reached out his hand to knock before catching himself with a giggle. *Of course, I keep forgetting I have a key card now!* He easily pulled the small plastic card from a pocket, then pushed it into the slot on the lock under the doorhandle. A small green light flashed, and Luke heard the lock clicking open, grabbing the handle to open the door. "Mister Pound!" he called, walking in. "I'm done for the-" He stopped in his tracks, staring at the scene before him.

Phelan Pound was dead.

Luke stared for several moments, unable to breathe with the sheer shock of the scene before him. Finally, his lungs forced a shuddering inhale, and Luke's legs hurriedly back-pedalled, pulling him out of the room and against the wall of the corridor outside. 'M-Mister Pound...! I... What do I...?' he asked himself, breathing heavily as he pressed against the smooth brick at his back, slowly sliding down to sit on the cold, concrete floor. 'C-call the police! Of course!' Reaching back into his pocket, Luke grabbed his mobile phone, and was already dialling triple-nine before catching himself and restarting with nine-one-one. *The perils of moving so frequently between two different systems recently... I'm pretty sure they wouldn't redirect that number here.* Oddly enough, the familiar musings on cultural differences helped to calm Luke down, so when he heard a voice from his tinny phone speaker say, "Emergency. What do you need?", he was able to concentrate on what he needed to do.

"I need the police," Luke calmly told the operator. "Someone's been murdered."

"Luke?"

"Hi, Papa."

"Hey. You on your way home?"
"Not yet, I'm afraid. There's... been a murder."

"A what!? Are you alright?"

"Y-yeah, I'm fine. Mister Pound's... I-I've already called the police, so they're on their way."

"Okay, good... In that case, you'd better make sure you're prepared for the detective and prosecutor when they arrive. You'll have to show them where the scene is, and be ready to tell them everything you know."

"Alright... I don't know much, but I can tell them a little..."

"You'll know more than they do. Is anyone else there?"

"N-no, just me."

"... In that case... Your phone has a camera, right?"

"Yeah, of course it does. Why?"

"Once you've finished talking to me, fire up that camera and take pictures of everything, no matter how insignificant it seems. Don't get too close to the murder scene itself, just stand back and take some photos."

"Wh... why am I taking photos?"

"... Whichever detective and prosecutor you end up with is going to be a lottery. Should you end up with a bad pair..."

"Papa... this doesn't have anything to do with this 'Dark Age of the Law' Mister Edgeworth mentioned... does it?"

"..."

"Papa?"

"I don't want you getting caught up in something you didn't do. I want you to be safe."

"... I will be, Papa."

"Good. Keep me updated on what you're doing, okay?"

"Y-yeah. I promise."

"We'll save you some dinner for when you get home. I love you."

"Love you, Papa."

View the Court Record
As much as he'd tried, Luke couldn't bring himself to take more than a handful of photos of the inside of the office. The adventures he'd had in his youth as Professor Layton's apprentice had, thankfully, never exposed him to any (truly) dead bodies; His lone point of reference was Professor Rains, who he had not unexpectedly discovered and whose accidental death had reunited him with Athena for the first time. Even then, he'd had his family and friends all around to distract him from the body, which had been remarkably clean except for the trail of blood in her red hair... entirely unlike the mess left by Phelan Pound in the shelter's manager's office four years later. To distract himself, Luke wandered throughout the shelter, taking a photo with his phone every ten steps, carefully counting as he walked the halls, taking stops in various side rooms and taking pictures of the animal food, the surgery tools and even of the toilet. It was almost spooky, wandering the halls in the dark of night, the only living human sharing a building with the bloody corpse of his boss... and the numerous cats and dogs, of course. Luke shook his head to remove the memory of the body before it appeared in front of his eyes again, trying to ignore the occasional curious meows or worried whines from the animals he walked past. He wasn't in the mood for talking yet.

Eventually, Luke heard knocking from the direction of the front door, and ran to reception. On the other side of the locked glass doors was a tall man in a white suit, blonde hair sweeping down the back of his head, curling at the ends to form a triangle-like silhouette. Behind him, Luke noticed a small swarm of police officers, all in their uniforms and hanging around nervously behind what was clearly the detective Luke had been waiting for.

As the detective spotted Luke coming into reception, he grinned widely and gave the young man a salute with a gloved hand. "Good evening!" he boomed. "Justice has arrived!" With a swift movement of his arm, he pulled out a small black wallet, which he held close to the glass as it flipped open to show off his police badge and ID card. "And it requests you let us in!"

Although Luke wasn't sure what to make of the man, especially after what Phoenix had told him, he knew better than to disobey, so he ran forward to pull open the door. "Thank you for finally coming!" he said as the detective and most of the police began to file in. "I-it's this way..." Before anyone could reply, he waved for them to follow him and led the small crowd down the nearest hallway, past the evermore curious pets to the very back of the building.

As they arrived in the tiny corridor by the back exits, the detective looked around sternly, pushing his sunglasses (Why was he wearing sunglasses at night!?) up his nose. "Quite a distance from the nearest helpful ear," he mused aloud.

Luke nodded, pulling out his employee keycard again to open the office door. "I last saw him alive at six o'clock. The animals have been especially noisy today, so I didn't hear a thing." As the tiny light next to the handle flashed, he pushed the door open and, firmly looking away from the room beyond, held it open, silently watching as the detective approached, holding the door himself as he peered at the situation beyond. Luke, deciding he wasn't needed, slipped out under the taller man's arm and leaned against the wall next to the door, replacing his keycard in his pocket and watching the detective's eyes behind his sunglasses darting all around the office, taking everything in with a note of horror that Luke was almost relieved to see.
After a moment, the detective waved to the group of police officers, who jumped at his signal and filed in to the room. The detective himself turned to Luke, giving him a grin. "Our many thanks for reporting this heinous crime, citizen!" he cried, then his smile faded into a sympathetic look. "It is always distressing when a criminal such as this commits the unthinkable. But not to worry!" He brightly grinned again, giving Luke another salute. "In justice we trust! Justice will always prevail!"

Luke smiled at the detective's enthusiasm. It looked like, despite Phoenix's worries, he'd ended up with one of the good detectives. "I hope so," he said, holding out a hand. "My name's Luke Wright. I work here."

"A pleasure!" the detective boomed in reply, grabbing Luke's hand and shaking it wildly. The moment he let go, Luke found himself nursing his hand, wishing the other man hadn't gripped it quite so hard, while the detective again reached into what Luke could now see looked like a gun holster under his left arm. Instead of a gun however, he pulled out the small black wallet from before, which he held out before him with a grin as it flipped open. "Bobby Fulbright!" he announced. "Heroic detective and champion of justice! In justice we trust!"

Luke simply stared at the man for several moments, unsure how to respond.

Fulbright didn't seem to notice how intimidated Luke was, pulling his ID back in the sling under his arm and resting his fists on his hips. "So! You reported the crime, Mister Wright?"

Luke nodded, silently thanking his father for warning him to be prepared for this conversation. "Yes, I did."

"You know the victim?" Fulbright continued.

Again, Luke nodded. "Phelan Pound. He's my boss, the owner and manager of this shelter." He mentally kicked himself for stuttering, the prepared explanations leaving his lips only reminding him that his friend was lying dead in the neighbouring room. "Like I said, I last saw him alive at six; We were closing up, so the other vets and I think the receptionist were leaving at the time."

Fulbright thought to himself, pushing on his sunglasses with a frown. "You stayed behind?"

"I always do," Luke explained. "I like to spend some extra time with the animals before I go home."

"And it was just you and him in here until you called us?"

Luke thought a moment, then shrugged. "I thought so at the time. I guess not though, considering..." He glanced to the door at his side, hearing the hubbub of the working officers within as they documented every inch of the small office.

Fulbright thought to himself for a very long moment, then, still frowning, pointed to the door. "That door. You need a card to open it?"

"Yes," Luke quickly replied, pulling out his keycard again to show the taller man. "The volunteers don't get one, only paid employees. We have locks like that on the surgery, the front door... various places." He thought a moment, then added, "Well, most paid employees. The receptionists don't need them, so most of them don't have one."

There was another very long pause as Fulbright mused over the information. Finally, he turned to the door, a hand to his mouth as he called, "Cooper!" When a middle-aged woman with hair dyed bright pink emerged, watching the detective obediently, Fulbright gestured to Luke. "Take him in."

Luke's eyes widened in disbelief as the woman, Cooper, pulled a pair of hand-cuffs from her belt and
approached him, grabbing his hands with an almost business-like roughness as she attached the cuffs around his wrists. "B-but wait!" Luke cried. "I didn't kill him!"

"You were the only one here and you had the perfect opportunity to corner him in his office," Fulbright explained, barely even looking at Luke as he fixed his gaze on the office nearby. "I think we're done here."

Before Luke could further protest, Cooper had finished cuffing him and grabbed his arm, dragging the young man back towards reception. "B-but I didn't kill him!" Luke protested, only to be ignored as he was pulled around the corner and out of sight. "It wasn't me!"

November 28, 8:26PM
Wright Talent Agency
Phoenix's Office

Phoenix couldn't help but pace nervously, hands locked behind his back and eyes staring at the carpet below his feet. 'It shouldn't take this long for them to question Luke and let him go,' he told himself. 'He should have called back by now!'

"It's almost been two hours," Trucy pointed out, sitting on one of the sofas nearby and wringing her hands with worry. "Has something happened to his phone?"

Phoenix almost jumped as Trucy spoke up, and forced his best comforting smile for her. "Y-yeah, I'm almost certain that's what's happened. It's probably run flat from all the photos I told him to take! He'll be on the bus headed home right now."

Trucy stared back at him for a moment or two before slowly smiling, grateful for his attempt to reassure her although she knew it was a lie.

The silence was broken by the sudden unmistakable sound of the Steel Samurai theme, and Phoenix and Trucy spun around towards his desk, where the old blue phone was happily singing from atop a pile of paper. Phoenix didn't hesitate, lunging across the room and snapping up the phone, answering it with a loud "Luke!" that he hoped didn't sound too panicked.

"P-Papa?" came Luke's meek voice from the speaker.

"I'm so relieved you finally called, we were starting to-!" Phoenix cried, before cutting himself off with a frown as he realised he could hear Luke trying to hide sniffs... and he hadn't exactly greeted them with the kind of tone Phoenix had expected. "Is everything alright?"

Trucy's eyes widened from the sofa as she watched Phoenix's half of the conversation.

Luke seemed to stop hiding, and began to more obviously sob. "Papa... they think I did it!"

"What?!" Phoenix had to restrain himself from shouting. "Why do they...?" His question trailed off. He should have expected this. Since when did the police ever get the culprit right the first time round?

"I was... the only other person in the building," Luke began to explain, having to pause occasionally to take a deep breath in an effort to quell his audible tears, "and Mister Pound was in a room you... need a keycard like mine to get into..."
Phoenix shook his head, rubbing the bridge of his nose as he held back a sigh. "No no, you don't have to explain. I... I can get this sorted out." He looked up, finding himself standing by the window and looking out at the street beyond. He levelled a glare at the hotel opposite, as though it had personally accused his son of murder and had him locked away in the cold, heartless detention centre. "I promise you, we're going to get you out of there. We're going to find that killer and we're going to prove your innocence."

Luke was silent for a few moments, listening to his father's passionate announcement. "H-how?" he asked. "You don't-"

"I may not be legally able to do so myself anymore," Phoenix said with a smug smirk, "but I do happen to know the best defence attorney in the region... and you and I both are very well acquainted with his apprentice."

At that, Luke gasped. "O-oh! Will he...?"

"Don't you worry about a thing," Phoenix continued, assuring his son with a smile. "Besides... at least no-one's accusing you of being a witch!"

Phoenix was glad to hear Luke give a tearful laugh at the other end of the phone line. "I guess so," he agreed. "Thank you, Papa."

"We'll come visit you tomorrow," Phoenix promised. "Love you, Luke."

"Love you, Papa."

With that, the phone hung up, and Phoenix lowered his hand to stare at the device in his grip, concern overtaking his confident demeanour all over again.

"Daddy?" came a meek voice from the sofa, and Phoenix looked around to see Trucy still watching him, her hands pulling nervously at the neck of her nightie. "Is Luke going to be okay?"

Phoenix smiled, walking over to sit at Trucy's side and pulling his daughter into a hug. "Of course he will be," he promised her, feeling confident nonetheless that the upcoming battle would be one he had faced and won many times before, though never quite like this. "He's just going to stay in the detention center for a few days, then he'll be back home with us, you'll see."

Trucy didn't reply immediately, hugging her father tightly and burying her face in his chest. "I hope you're right, Daddy," she whispered.

Phoenix held his daughter tightly so she couldn't see his worried expression. 'So am I.'
*ring ring*
*click*

"Mister Gavin?"

"Wright, I'm glad you're still awake... although I suppose I shouldn't expect otherwise, given the situation."

"What's the matter, sir? Why are you calling me so late at night?"

"... You aren't aware?"

"Aware of what?"

"Hm... No matter. You'll be finding out soon enough."

"....?"

"We have a case. Meet me at the detention center tomorrow morning, ten o'clock."

"O-oh, a case! Yes sir, I'll see you at ten, sir!"

"Don't be late, Wright."

*click*

November 29, 10:01AM
Detention Center
Visitor's Room

Kristoph had said nothing more than "Good morning, Wright," as Apollo came racing up to him outside the detention centre. Despite his burning curiosity as to the brand new case he had taken (he'd barely been able to restrain his excitement to boast to anyone other than Clay, not wanting to disturb his family in the middle of the night), Apollo managed to keep himself silent, bouncing on his heels as he followed Kristoph inside.

At the front desk, while Kristoph was talking to the guard on duty, Apollo was distracted looking around. It was very plainly decorated, all for function over any kind of pleasing form; The walls were a smooth purplish-grey, and lined with various posters, most advertising Gatewater Land and it's latest Blue Badger-related attraction. After a minute or so, Kristoph and the guard walked across to a door on the other side of the room, which the guard opened as he waved the two defence attorneys in. Kristoph walked on ahead, and Apollo rushed to catch up as he realised his boss wasn't going to wait for him.

The room beyond was a medium size, though it seemed smaller, thanks to the low wall and large glass window splitting it in two. The door on their side, which the guard had closed behind them, was in the middle of the wall, with the corners on either side occupied by small desks, one of which
had a chair. At the centre of the brick-and-glass partition was a second chair, which Kristoph headed to. "Pull up the other chair, Wright," he ordered as he sat down.

Apollo nodded, pulling the green, fold-up chair across the laminated floor and sitting at his mentor's side. He took a moment to look around the other side of the room, finding it bare of anything more than a barred window, a security camera, and a green door. "Where's our client?" he asked.

"On his way," Kristoph assured him with a small smile of amusement. "The guards will be fetching him from his holding cell."

As if on cue, the door to the other half of the room opened and, to Apollo's amazement and sheer disbelief, Luke walked in, followed by another guard, who closed the door behind them and stood at attention in front of it. Luke's hopeful look turned into a wide grin as he saw who his visitors were, and he nearly flung himself at the chair on the other side of the glass, shouting, "Apollo! Mister Gavin!"

"Luke!" Apollo shouted back in return, barely noticing he was cutting off his mentor's own greeting. "What the hell are you doing here!?"

Kristoph gave Apollo a smile, while Luke just looked puzzled. "He's our client," the elder attorney explained. "Your father gave me a call last night asking us to take him on, and, naturally, I accepted."

Apollo spluttered for a moment, looking between Luke and Kristoph. "B-b-but... I...!"

"Papa didn't tell you?" Luke asked, seeming a little down at Apollo's confusion.

"Obviously not!" Apollo pointed out, frustrated. "Why did Dad think my brother being in jail wasn't a big enough issue to tell me about!?"

Kristoph shook his head. "Although this building contains a jail, Luke is only in the detention center," he explained. "Should we fail in properly defending him, then he will be in jail."

"I guess Papa just didn't want you to worry about me," Luke said, giving his brother a reassuring smile, though it seemed he was trying to reassure himself at the same time. "I'll bet he and Trucy got about as much sleep as I did last night."

Apollo tried to not look too guilty at the thought he was getting a peaceful, though excited, eight hour's sleep while the rest of his family was tossing and turning with worry all night.

"Back to business," Kristoph continued, pushing at his glasses, "you should tell us exactly what happened, Luke, from shortly before the murder to discovering the body."

"You're accused of murder?" Apollo cried to his brother in astonishment.

Luke nodded, looked morose. "My boss, Mister Pound," he explained. "You know we were all-hands-on-deck for Black Friday, right?"

Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead in thought. "Um... yeah, I think I remember you talking about it on Thursday."

"We were pretty busy that morning," Luke explained with a smile, "though everything calmed down in the afternoon. We were closing at six, and Reindeer, Fox and I all headed out to reception together."
Kristoph frowned. "'Reindeer' and 'Fox'?" he asked.

"Mm-hmm," Luke replied with a nod. "They're the other two vets; We use nicknames around the shelter. Hang on..." He reached into a pocket inside his vest and pulled out his notebook, flipping through until he landed on a specific page, grinning in triumph. "Here we go! Real names that I've picked up over the years!"

Kristoph did no more than nod at Apollo, but the young man had been working at his boss's side for long enough to know he was being asked to take notes. Pulling his Court Record from one of the many hiding places in his suit, he readied himself to oblige.

"Reindeer's real name is Rudolf Wildgrube," Luke began, "and Fox is Vixen Bagley." He paused, noticing Apollo frantically typing everything onto the touch-screen keyboard of his tablet, and smiled sympathetically. "Maybe I should just show you the list and you can copy it?" he offered.

Apollo grinned guiltily. "Uh, yeah, thanks," he replied.

Luke pressed the page he'd been reading to the glass with a smile, and Apollo gratefully began to copy it to his Court Record. Kristoph gave the list a glance, then returned his gaze to Luke. "You and the other vets left together?"

Nodding, Luke continued, "Reindeer - um, Mister Wildgrube and Miss Bagley went home together, but I always stay a little longer to spend some time with the animals."

Apollo, still copying the list, couldn't resist a quiet scoff of amusement, knowing that, by 'spend some time', Luke really meant 'chat'.

"The receptionist that day was Simba-," Luke explained, cutting himself off as he attempted to correct himself with Simba's real name. "Um, something Gatti..."

"Leo Gatti," Apollo filled in, looking over the notes on his Court Record. "I'm done with the list now, by the way."

Luke nodded with a smile, taking back his notebook. "She was... actually, I think she was arguing with Mister Pound about something, but they stopped when we came in." He shrugged. "Then Reindeer, Mister Wildgrube and Miss Bagley left, Mister Pound and I went back inside, and Miss Gatti started locking up. She would have left once she was done."

"Would have' left?" Kristoph repeated. "You don't know when exactly she went home?"

Luke shook his head. "I saw her locking up, and there wasn't really any reason for her to stay after that," he explained. "She would have gone home almost immediately."

Kristoph seemed to accept that answer, continuing with, "And what did you and Mister Pound do once you were alone?"

"Mister Pound went back to his office," Luke replied, seeming down again. "I went to the recuperation room next to the surgery. When I came out... it was around six-forty-five. Mister Pound always asks me to let him know when I'm leaving, so I went to find him..."

Apollo gave his brother a sympathetic look. "And you didn't even hear a thing?"

Luke couldn't resist a short, almost bitter, laugh. "We're an animal shelter," he pointed out. "There's a lot of background noise when the animals are riled up, even with the thick walls, and the doors are pretty good noise-blockers when they're closed." That said, he sighed, staring at the laminated
Kristoph frowned, still thinking. "Surely they didn't accuse you merely because you were the only other person in the building," he said. "Any passer-by could have forced their way in, could they not?"

"No," Luke replied with a sigh, shaking his head. "Mister Pound's office, and a couple other rooms around the shelter, have a keycard lock. Only Mister Pound, us vets and Duck -" he paused to look at his list, "Drake Gagnon, the assistant manager - have them. Mister Pound was in his office, and, since I have a keycard, they decided I did it."

Apollo opened up his notes again. "Might the specific rooms be important to know, sir?" he asked Kristoph.

Kristoph took a moment to reply. "Potentially," he admitted. "To clarify, this Mister Pound is the owner and manager of your animal shelter, correct?"

Luke nodded. "He's always the first to arrive and the last to leave," he explained. "The front door and two back doors have keycard locks, which he turns off when he comes in, and the surgery and recuperation room have them too." He paused to think. "I think the inner storage room is keycarded as well... the one that has the valuable stuff in it, not just food for the animals."

Apollo noted down what Luke said, while Kristoph remained silent, deep in thought. Once Apollo was done, he looked back up at his brother curiously. "How do those keycard locks work?" Apollo asked.

"Simple:" Luke replied with a smile, "They have a slot on the outside, you push in the card, and it unlocks just long enough for you to open the door!"

"The 'outside'?' Kristoph mused. "Outside of the casing?"

"Outside of the room," Luke clarified. "They're one-sided. If you want to get in, you have to have a keycard, but to get out you can just open the door and leave."

Kristoph smiled to himself. "Take a note of that, Wright; It's almost certainly important."

Apollo nodded as he did so.

"Oh, and if you see the detective," Luke spoke up, looking sheepish, "could you ask if he's done yet with my phone? They took it away to copy all the pictures I took..."

Apollo gave his brother a frown. "Why were you taking pictures?"


"Clearly it was," Kristoph pointed out with a smirk, then assured the young man, "We shall ask after your phone once we visit the crime scene. I'm sure we'll run into the detective there."

"Oh, that reminds me!" Luke cried, and he reached into his pocket, pulling out a small green card. "If you want to look around the shelter, you'll probably need one of these!" He slid the card into a small opening at the bottom of the glass, just large enough to stick a hand through, and Apollo reached to grab it. "I can't use it while I'm in here anyway," Luke continued with a sheepish smile.

Apollo looked at the card, realising from the printed label (which read only 'Wright, L.') what it was,
and gasped. "You're giving us your employee keycard!"

"If the police are an obstruction, I'm sure it will be useful," Kristoph pointed out, giving Luke a grateful smile as he stood. "We will return if we have any more questions for you."

Luke nodded, seeming nervous as he watched Apollo jump to his feet after his mentor, secreting his Court Record and Luke's keycard somewhere on his person with his usual expert magician's handling. "Thank you, Mister Gavin," the younger brother said, looking between the elder attorney and Apollo. "Good luck."

Apollo gave Luke a confident grin as he slowly followed Kristoph out of the room. "Don't you worry!" he called, flashing two thumbs-up in an imitation of Clay. "We'll have you out of there before you know it!"

Luke watched them disappear, waiting until they had gone to drop his smile and sigh. "I hope so," he mumbled.

[View the Court Record]
Turnabout Shelter, Day 1: Part 2

Why the hell did you not tell me!? .

About Luke?

No, about Maya. YES ABOUT LUKE .

I understand you're upset, but I didn't want to worry you. You're going to need all the sleep you can get to focus on this case. Call it being cruel to be kind

That strategy has never worked ever .

Probably. I'm sorry for not telling you, by the way
I was half expecting Kristoph to pass it on. Can never really tell with him
Last night was pretty busy for me. After Luke told me what was going on, I had to call your boss, force Trucy into bed, then I made a couple calls to some old friends in high places. I have yet to hear back from them

You'll let me know what they say? .

If its important
Trucy and I are going in to see Luke. I assume his questioning is over for now?

We just left. He should be free .

Then I'll let you go and focus on your case. I'll be in touch if I find anything useful

Alright. Thanks Dad .

No problem. Now go be a lawyer and make me proud, huh? :)

November 29, 10:57AM
Warren Street

As Kristoph's car pulled up to the curb on the street Luke's shelter was on, the elder attorney looked to his assistant in the passenger seat. "Would you happen to have ever visited your brother's workplace before today?"

Apollo sighed, shaking his head. "No, actually," he admitted. He paused as the two exited the car, Kristoph locking it as he joined Apollo on the pavement and they began walking down the road. "Trucy came here a few years ago," Apollo continued, "but I decided at the time I wasn't interested."

"Fair enough," Kristoph agreed. "You couldn't have predicted this unfortunate turn of events, after all." He frowned in thought, pushing at the bridge of his glasses. "It would have been an advantage had you any prior knowledge of the crime scene, but we work with what we have."

It was hard to miss the animal shelter when the pair arrived, firstly because of the large sign of a cartoony dog and cat pointing the way in, and secondly because the road outside the building was swarming with police officers and their cars, all exchanging information and ferrying notes,
professional cameras and bits of what seemed to be evidence back and forth. The large, friendly sign advertising the building had also had a piece of paper hastily taped to it, assuring any potential customers that the shelter would be open for business as usual on Monday.

Apollo frowned. "Isn't the trial on Monday?" he asked.

Kristoph nodded. "It is," he confirmed. "Although the crime scene itself will still be out-of-bounds to staff, the police investigation is generally finished by the time a trial starts."

"O-oh," Apollo mumbled, blushing as he saw his mentor's small smirk of amusement. "That makes sense..."

Although the police at first tried to turn the pair away, once Kristoph showed them his badge, they allowed the two attorneys through. Kristoph pushed open the glass front door and led Apollo through into reception, where the two were forced to pause as they noticed, either side of the empty reception desk, two sets of double doors leading in different directions - one labelled 'CATS' and the other 'DOGS' - and both with streams of police coming in and out.

Out of one door came a policewoman with bright pink hair, carrying a box of what looked like files, and at her back was a tall man in more casual dress, black hair swept up into a point at the side of his head that vaguely reminded Apollo of a duck's tail. "Please, you can't take those!" the man was pleading. "Those are our finances, we need them to keep the shelter running!"

"Not my problem," the policewoman shot back. "Detective Fulbright ordered us to take these as potentially significant - go talk to him if you need them that badly!"

Apollo jumped out of the way as the pair walked past, only to feel a scraping of something under his shoe.

"But-! Wait, please!" the tall man was calling, only to be left bereft in reception as the policewoman strode outside.

Leaning down, Apollo moved his foot and found underneath what appeared to be a clean disc of metal - a coin with no face or markings. He looked around, but the single coin appeared to be alone.

'That's odd...' Picking it up, he spun the coin between his fingers, noticing that, not only was it blank on both sides, it had a small hole stamped near the edge. 'Was this a part of someone's jewellery? What's it doing here?'

Kristoph, not seeming to notice his assistant's distraction, waved to the tall man with a smile. "Excuse me, do you work here?"

The man turned to the pair of attorneys with surprise, eyes wide. After a short pause, during which he noticed neither was in a police uniform, he sighed and shook his head. "I'm sorry - I don't know how you got in here, but we're closed for the weekend. Come back on Monday."

As Apollo stood back up, slipping the coin into a pocket, Kristoph chuckled good-naturedly. "Ah, we're aware," he replied. "We are actually defence attorneys. The defendant in this case, Luke Wright, is our client."

The man's eyes widened again. "Oh, you're Northpaw's lawyers!?" he cried, then seemed to relax, giving them a smile as he stepped forward, holding out his hand to shake Kristoph's. "I'm Gagnon, Drake Gagnon... Assistant manager, I guess would be my title. They call me Duck around here." He briefly shook hands with Apollo, then stepped out of the way of another stream of police officers, hands shoved under his armpits as he glanced at them uncomfortably.
"Gavin," Kristoph introduced himself, then gestured to Apollo. "This is my assistant, Apollo Wright."

"Pleasure," Duck replied with a nod, giving them a forced smile. "What do you need?" he asked the attorneys.

Kristoph thought a moment. "First of all," he began, "do you happen to have any maps of this place?"

Duck frowned, then shook his head. "No, sorry," he said. "The layout's pretty simple, especially if you're only here to adopt someone." He gestured to the right door, labelled 'DOGS'. "Behind the dog enclosures are the storerooms, bathroom, grooming area." He then pointed to the left door, labelled 'CATS'. "Behind the cat cages is the veterinary surgery and recuperation room." He crossed his arms. "The central hallways are entirely dedicated to the animal enclosures, except for the office at the very back. Beyond that is just the outside enclosure and the shed."

Kristoph looked at the police going to and fro through both doors. "So the crime scene, this office, is accessible from either door?"

Duck nodded. "Mister Pound liked being central to the entire 'operation', you could say."

"That reminds me," Apollo spoke up with a frown, arms crossed, "Luke - Northpaw - gave us a list of everyone who works here and their nicknames... Mister Pound didn't have one?"

At that, Duck laughed. "Oh, no," he replied. "He said he thought the whole 'nickname' thing was dumb, but he always warmed up to them eventually." He sighed, looking off into the distance with a faraway smile. "It took him a few years, but once you earned his trust, you earned your right to be called by your nickname by the boss himself." The tall man shook his head, dragging himself out of his own memories. "We mostly called him either 'Boss' or just 'Mister Pound'. That was the way he liked it."

Kristoph thought a moment. "I believe Wright said you were not working here yesterday?"

Duck opened his mouth to respond, then closed it again, frowning in thought. "Actually, I was," he eventually answered. "Only in the morning, though; Once the crowds died down, I decided there wasn't any point in hanging around and went back home to my family." He shrugged. "I told the boss to call me if we got a late resurgence, but he never did. I guess it was just quiet the rest of the day."

After another long moment of thought, Kristoph nodded. "I don't believe we have any more questions for now. Wright?"

"Um, just one," Apollo answered as his boss looked to him expectantly. "Is there anyone else working today, Mister Gagnon?"

Duck smiled. "Just me, Fox and Crow," he replied. "We've told volunteers not to come in until the police are gone, so it's just us receptionists and poor Fox."

Apollo and Kristoph glanced at each other. "'Fox' being one of the veterinarians on duty before the murder?" Kristoph asked.

Duck nodded, looking uncomfortable again. "The detective was questioning her earlier, so I think she's holed herself up in the recuperation room. Crow's handling all the chores single-handedly, and I'm trying to make sure this police investigation doesn't make off with all our valuable paperwork." He shot a glare at the police cars outside.
"And this 'recuperation room' is beyond the cat enclosures?" Kristoph clarified, looking to the doors again.

"Yep," Duck said with a nod. "Just head straight through that door, take an immediate left, and it'll be the door hidden away in the corner. If you knock, she'll probably open it for you."

"Thank you," Kristoph replied with another of his serene smiles. "We'll come find you if we have any more questions."

Duck shrugged, looking sheepish. "Well, anything to try and get the real killer found." He watched as Kristoph waved to Apollo, and the pair headed off towards the left set of doors leading further inside. "Hey, um," Duck called, stopping the pair in their tracks, and the tall man gave Apollo a thoughtful look. "Did you say your name was Wright?"


Duck stared at Apollo for a moment. "Huh." He then gave the young man a smile. "Should've guessed. He did say you were a lawyer."

Apollo smiled back at the man for a moment or two, before Kristoph turned and headed through the doors to the cat enclosures. Eager not to be left behind, Apollo hurried after him.

View the Court Record
Just as Duck had promised, hidden to the left upon entry to the cat enclosures was a blue door, labelled ‘STAFF ONLY’ in large letters. A black contraption was bolted around its handle, signifying it needed a keycard to pass and preventing access to anyone but the vets and other key-holders who worked at the animal shelter. Kristoph gave Apollo a glance, then headed straight for the almost imposing door, knocking gently with the back of his hand. "Ms Bagley?" he called.

"Go away!" came an immediate cry from within.

Kristoph’s surprise at the response, to Apollo's amusement, actually managed to break through his calm demeanour, and he stood shocked for a second before frowning and knocking again. "Ms Bagley, we just want to ask you a few questions."

"If you idiots have something else to bring up to make my day worse,” the voice shot back angrily, "you can get the bloody detective or that moron prosecutor to do it!" There was a pause, then she added accusingly, "And now you've gone and upset Patsey! I hope you're very proud of yourself!"

Kristoph's glare looked like it might have been able to set fire to the door with the frustration evident across his face. Apollo, despite being a little scared of his mentor's wrath, was equally angry at the woman, and shouted back, "If making 'Patsey' upset will prove my brother didn't murder anyone, then so be it! I'll upset Patsey a million times if it means getting Luke out of jail! Now will you frigging talk to us or not!?"

Kristoph, having regained his composure, gave Apollo a disapproving look as the young man panted heavily at the end of his speech. "No need be so loud, Wright."

Apollo rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. "Sorry, sir..." 'He's probably right. Better tone down the Chords of Steel...'

To the pair's surprise, the thick handle shifted with a click, and the door moved inward, revealing a pale face looking out at them warily in the small opening. Blue eyes locked onto Apollo from behind an unruly mop of red hair. "You're Northpaw's brother?" she asked.

Apollo nodded, giving her a small smile.

"We're Luke Wright's defence attorneys," Kristoph explained, again sporting his serene smile. "May we please ask you a few questions about last night, Ms Bagley?"

Fox thought only a moment before stepping back, opening the door to let the pair in.

The Recuperation Room was longer than it was wide, the walls lined with cages, almost all of which contained a solitary dog or cat, although Apollo could see a few that appeared to have a handful of puppies or kittens, and occasionally their mother with them. At the far end was another door, lacking a handle and appearing to be capable of opening both ways. Apollo supposed it led to the surgery itself.
Fox walked about halfway down the room, hugging herself tightly, before turning and staring sadly at the attorneys who had followed her. "Northpaw didn't do it, did he?" she quietly asked.

"Of course he didn't!" Apollo cried, offended. "He's spent his whole friggin' life helping people, he wouldn't hurt a fly!"

"Wright," Kristoph interrupted, shooting the young man a warning glare that made Apollo wince apologetically.

Surprisingly, Fox giggled. "I was hoping he hadn't," she said, staring at the floor as her smile faded. "With the way the detective and prosecutor were carrying on, though..." She looked back up to Apollo, giving him a grin that seemed happy despite her depressed demeanour. "You're exactly the way Northpaw's always described you, Apollo. Or should I call you 'Southpaw'?"

Apollo blushed. "Uh, just 'Apollo' is fine," he mumbled, rubbing the back of his head with a grin.

Kristoph pushed at the bridge of his glasses. "Since you two are acquainted, my name is Gavin," he said as introduction. "We're sorry to have to disturb you, Ms Bagley, but there are a few things we need to know to help our client."

Fox nodded, a serious look on her face although one hand was nervously playing with the loose ponytail hanging over her shoulder. "You want to know what happened last night?"

"If it's not too much trouble," Kristoph replied, putting on his serene smile again. "Wright said you were working with him until around six, correct?"

Staring at the floor, Fox thought for a moment in silence. "Yeah, I think that was the time we left," she agreed. "We packed up, then Reindeer and I went home together and Northpaw stayed behind... the usual routine, though a little later than normal."

"The receptionist, 'Simba' was it?" Apollo spoke up. "Did you see her go home?"

Fox shook her head. "She would have locked up as we left, but I didn't see anything," she explained. "Reindeer might have seen her go, though."

Kristoph and Apollo glanced at each other, surprised. "He would?" Kristoph prompted.

"He forgot his keys," Fox continued with a shrug. "We were only a couple minutes from here, so he went back to find them, and I went on home."

The two attorneys stared at her for a moment, then Kristoph hurriedly regained his composure, frowning in thought. "Have you seen him since?"

Again, Fox shook her head. "Sorry, I can't tell you how to find him," she said. "I think the prosecutor or detective has questioned him by now, though. You could ask them?"

Apollo looked up to his mentor curiously. "Would they tell us?" he asked.

Kristoph closed his eyes, thinking. "They are unlikely to," he replied. "No doubt Mister Wildgrube will be a witness in court, and prosecutors are very protective of their witnesses."

Fox sighed, looking away. "I'm sorry I can't be of any more help..."

"It is through no fault of yours, Ms Bagley," Kristoph assured her. "If we have any more questions, we'll-"
"Actually," Apollo interrupted, turning to Fox and pulling the small coin out of his pocket, "Ms Fox, is this yours?"

Fox looked at the coin curiously, and frowned as she shook her head. "No," she hesitantly said, still staring at it. "It can't have come off anything of mine; That kind of thing gets in the way, working with dogs and cats."

Kristoph raised an eyebrow, examining the odd disc of metal in his junior partner's hand. "Where did you find that?" he asked.

"It was on the floor," Apollo explained, "in reception."

"Then a customer likely dropped it," Kristoph pointed out. "It won't have anything to do with our case."

Fox was still staring at the coin, frowning in thought. "Actually, I think it might be Simba's," she said. "She has a necklace with coins like that on it, and she was working in reception yesterday."

"In which case it definitely doesn't have anything to do with our case," Kristoph added, waving to Apollo as he turned and began to leave the room. "It's time we examined the crime scene, Wright."

Apollo sighed, slipping the coin back into a pocket. "I'll return it to her later, then," he told Fox, then hurried after his mentor.

November 29, 11:22AM
Warren Street Animal Shelter
Hallway

Beyond the cat enclosures, Kristoph and Apollo exited into a hallway, at the back of the building as they had been told. To their right, it didn't take long to spot a tall man in a white suit arguing with the equally tall Duck, both standing by an open doorway that had a strip of yellow police tape across it at chest level. As Kristoph led Apollo towards the pair, Duck noticed them approaching and gave them a wave. "Guys!" he called, looking somewhat frustrated, "would you please tell him," he gestured to the white-suited man, "that we're happy for copies to be made, but not if it means we lose all our vital files of information!"

The other man scoffed, pushing his sunglasses up his nose. "You'll have them all back soon enough! Besides, what kind of vital information could an animal shelter have that it can't do without for a few days?"

"Oh, I don't know," Duck sarcastically shot back, "how about medical records of our in-house cats!? I just caught one of your goons making off with them! And!" He pointed at the open office door. "I asked you hours ago to ensure our storeroom, funding and employee files were retrieved and safe so I could make sure the money and resources were still flowing to keep this place afloat, and I have not seen a lick of evidence that you actually listened to me! In fact, I caught another of your goons very specifically taking our financial records, so I have every reason to believe you're deliberately spiting me at this point!"

The other man thought for a moment, starting to look uncomfortable. "Well... I suppose I didn't realise how important those were," he admitted, his hand moving down from his glasses to rub at his other arm. After another moment of thought, he seemed to come to a decision and gave Duck a
confident grin. "In justice we trust! We will make this right for you, Mister Gagnon!" He turned to look into the office, calling, "Cooper!"

A policewoman with pink hair, the same one they had seen in reception before, ducked under the tape and out into the hallway with a sigh. "Detective Fulbright, sir?"

"Escort Mister Gagnon to the store of files," the detective ordered, "and allow him to retrieve anything he believes this shelter cannot do without!"

The policewoman looked to Duck with wide eyes, seeming scared of the triumphant smirk he was giving her. "Y-yes, sir," she replied, then walked off towards the dog enclosures.

Following his escort, Duck waved to the attorneys, still watching in silence. "Thanks, guys!" he called, then disappeared around the corner.

Kristoph and Apollo gave each other equally puzzled looks. "We didn't even do anything," Apollo quietly pointed out.

"Best to leave it," Kristoph sighed.

View the Court Record
"You two more employees?" the detective asked, turning to the pair of attorneys with a wide grin. "Here to give us your alibis?"

"Not so, I'm afraid," Kristoph replied, smirking serenely. "We are defence attorneys - specifically, Luke Wright's."

The tall man seemed surprised. "Ah," he said, then gave them a salute. "Of course, then I, Detective Bobby Fulbright, shall be happy to assist and ensure justice is done!" He laughed. "Although I doubt you'll get too far with this one!"

"Spare us your commentary, detective," Kristoph interrupted, pressing his glasses tight to his face. "Has an autopsy report been completed yet?"

"Yes, sir!" Fulbright saluted once more, then reached down to a large satchel leaning against the wall and pulled out a file, which he handed over with a grin. "Phelan Pound, aged thirty-three. Died from blunt force trauma to the head and neck, though there were bruises all over his upper body. Estimated time of death is six-o-five PM last night."

Apollo looked over Kristoph's shoulder as the elder attorney pulled out the report to study himself, finding the detective's summary matched it quite closely, except that the time of death was a lot more vague. "My thanks," he said, slipping the file into an inner pocket of his suit jacket. "Is there a reason you can be so exact with the time of death?"

"Naturally!" Fulbright boasted, pointing to the office behind him. "As long as you don't touch anything, you can go see for yourself!"

Before Kristoph could take the detective up on his offer, Apollo jumped in with a pleading look. "Oh, but one other thing: Have you finished with the defendant's cell phone? He'd kinda like it back."

Fulbright laughed. "Yep, we're done with that!" he assured Apollo, pulling the blue phone out of a pocket and handing it off to the young man. "Quite a lot of pictures he's got there. Almost didn't need to take any of our own!"

Apollo just smiled, quickly secreting his brother's phone away in his pocket.

"We've also checked it for any kind of call records," Fulbright continued. "Nothing suspicious, but he doesn't have any recording software, so we've no idea on the specific content of them."

Kristoph nodded. "Then we would like the opportunity to examine the crime scene, if you please."

"Of course!" Fulbright brightly replied, stepping aside to wave them into the small room. "Look all you like!"

Not waiting for the detective to change his mind, Kristoph ducked under the tape to enter the office,
Apollo followed close at his heels. The first thing the young attorney noticed was the doorstop jammed under the door to keep it from closing ('I guess because none of them have an employee keycard,' Apollo reasoned), and his eyes followed the hideous green carpet to a large brown stain in the centre of the room, still half-covered with a small pile of books, over which Kristoph stood, looking at the scene critically. Against the wall nearby was an empty bookcase, positioned carefully between a pair of filing cabinets, and at the back a small desk was pushed against the wall, its chair barely visible from where it was trapped in between the two. Like the bookcase, there was nothing atop the desk except for a small analogue clock, whose cracked face showed it had been damaged and was no longer running.

Kristoph smiled, pointing to the clock. "That would be why time of death is so accurate," he said, and Apollo realised upon closer inspection that it displayed about five minutes past six, exactly the time Fulbright had given them. "This clock must have been on the bookcase when it fell."

Apollo nodded, taking out his Court Record to take a photo and trying not to think about the prominent blood stain on the carpet below his feet.

Kristoph crouched down, running a hand through the air just above the carpet, tracing the outline of the stain. "It looks like the killer was trying to cover their tracks; The blood here is smeared."

Finished with his photo, Apollo steeled himself to look down at what his mentor was pointing to. "Smeared?" He kneeled at Kristoph's side to examine the area more closely.

"See? Right here." Kristoph waved a finger around some uneven marks, outlining circles around each of them with a finger. "No doubt the forensic team has already noted this down themselves, but it looks as though something small and circular was resting here. The killer took it away with them, but tried to mask its existence by covering where it protected the carpet."

'Several small and circular somethings,' Apollo thought, quickly taking photos of each scuffed patch of carpet he could see: five in total. "Coins, maybe?" he asked.

"Or keys," Kristoph suggested. "A contact lens, shot glasses... even a watch could fit the profile." He stood back up, crossing his arms as he surveyed the room. "But it does us no good to guess. What else is there to find here, Wright?"

As Apollo stood up, his eyes landed on the broken clock on the desk. "If they have time of death matched with when the bookcase fell over," he said, "does that mean they think the falling books killed him?"

"A good thought," Kristoph complimented him with a smile. "Were it not for his injuries not being consistent with purely that, they may have written this death off as an accident."

'I do remember Luke saying his boss was tremendously clumsy...’ "What doesn't match with the books falling?" he asked.

Kristoph pulled the autopsy report out again, opening it to read the file within. "His bruising was primarily on the front of his body, and Pound was discovered lying on his front under the pile of books, none of which were underneath him. If he wasn't dead when they fell, he didn't survive long enough to move afterwards."

Apollo winced, wondering at how horrified Luke must have been to walk in on that with no warning.

"We didn't find any fingerprints, before you ask," Fulbright suddenly chimed in from the doorway,
watching them with a smile. "The killer knew enough to wipe the place down. Didn't leave a trace behind."

"Really?" Apollo asked, frowning. "You didn't find anything?"

Fulbright shrugged, fiddling with his sunglasses again to badly hide a smug grin. "Well, we found the defendant's prints on the door handle, but we were expecting that."

"Speaking of," Kristoph said, gesturing to the door, "are there any records of who opened these doors and when? If anything would be damning of our client's innocence, it would be that."

At that, Fulbright's smugness disappeared, and he avoided their gazes. "I was hoping you wouldn't ask about that," he mumbled.

Kristoph smiled, arms crossed. "Ah, so there are records. And they support our side of the case?"

Fulbright sighed, then gave the pair of attorneys a glare. "Keep in mind, it's only because Prosecutor Debeste ordered I help you that I'm even letting you know about this!" he said, then reached back into the satchel on the floor.

"Debeste?" Kristoph repeated, frowning in thought. "So he's our opponent, then."

Apollo couldn't resist a smirk. "Ah, he may be 'the best'," he said, crossing his arms with a proud grin, "but is he always Wright?"

Kristoph gave Apollo a disapproving glare. "No puns, Wright," he ordered.

Fulbright laughed as he straightened up, a piece of paper in his hand. "I wouldn't call him that to his face, though," he warned the younger attorney. "I've heard Prosecutor Debeste doesn't like it too much." He held the paper out to Kristoph, surprising the elder attorney out of a train of thought. "Your copy of the keycard records," he explained.

Kristoph smiled as he took it. "My thanks, Detective." He quickly scanned the document, locking on to the very bottom of the chart within. "Ah, very interesting."

"What's it say?" Apollo asked, bouncing to his mentor's side.

Handing the paper to Apollo to read, Kristoph explained, "As I thought it might, it only records when a keycard is used, not every time a door is opened. Have a look here, around the time of the murder."

Apollo ran his eyes over where Kristoph indicated, right at the end of the day. A 'Wright L' was labelled as entering 'Recup. Room' around six, then 'Office' forty-five minutes later, just as Luke had described. Also, just as Fox had told them, a 'Wildgrube R' was shown to have used the 'Entrance' door, only a couple of minutes after six. Aside from Luke, a 'Pound P' was the only person to have entered the office, at around six, the same time Luke had gone into the Recuperation Room. Apollo frowned. "There was time for Mister Wildgrube to have committed the murder," he realised. "I bet Luke wouldn't believe it was his beloved Reindeer, though."

"There's something else interesting this document tells us, however," Kristoph pointed out with a smile. "Have you spotted it, Wright?"

Initially confused, Apollo studied the chart a little longer, then spotted the problem. "The murderer didn't use a keycard to get into the office!" he realised with a gasp.
"Which widens the possibilities of who committed this murder quite a bit," Kristoph added. "Pound would have opened the door for them from inside."

"But it still has to have been someone with a keycard!" Fulbright argued, childishly pouting at having to share the biggest weakness in their case against Luke. "After all, the outside doors were all locked! The building was empty!"

"That still means Mister Wildgrube could have done it as easily as Luke!" Apollo shot back with a glare.

"Enough," Kristoph ordered, looking between the two like an annoyed parent (despite being slightly shorter than Fulbright). "Let's save the arguing for court, shall we? That is what it's for, after all."

Fulbright and Apollo looked away sheepishly. "Sorry, sir," Apollo muttered.
Having failed to find anything else at the crime scene, and unable to tease any more information out of Detective Fulbright, Kristoph and Apollo decided to thoroughly examine the other rooms at the back of the shelter building. When a cursory examination of the first storeroom and the toilet within came up blank, Apollo pushed Luke’s keycard into the door on the side wall, and led his mentor into the second storeroom. Much like the first storeroom, it was a reasonably sized space, with large bags of dog food, cat food and cat litter piled high all around, interspersed with various boxes full of large amounts of the various other things needed for the regular care of so many animals at once. Unlike the first storeroom, there was a corner that appeared to be dedicated to some computer towers and a large safe.

While Kristoph moved to examine the safe, Apollo ran to a small window high on the wall, jumping up and clinging to the sill to study the window. After a few moments of hanging by his fingers, he dropped back down, wiping any dust from the wall off the front of his suit. "This window doesn't open, and it's a bit high and too small for someone to climb in," he decided. He paused as he thought he'd heard a jingling sound behind him, but saw when he turned around only Kristoph, standing with his back to Apollo by the safe as he examined the computer towers.

"I didn't think someone would," Kristoph replied, slowly turning to give Apollo a smile as he tore his gaze away from his search. "I doubt the police have been in here; Those keycard records show this room hadn't been opened since mid-afternoon, up until your brother came in here after the murder."

Apollo nodded. Luke really had gone everywhere in the main building while waiting for the police to arrive, as the keycard records showed him visiting and re-visiting rooms in-between his two visits to the crime scene that night. "Mightn't the police think he dumped something in here, then?"

"I don't think so," Kristoph explained, frowning in thought. "All those pictures on his phone are perhaps proof enough that, whatever they think he did, he had long finished with it by the time he called the police."

Sighing, Apollo decided to accept that explanation, though he wasn't happy about it. "So, what next? Go back to Ms Bagley and look around the vet area?"

Kristoph shook his head. "Let's head through the dog enclosures and find this grooming area Gagnon mentioned," he suggested.

As they emerged back into the hallway, the two attorneys noticed that the police presence seemed to be finally dying down; Even Duck looked a lot more relaxed when they glimpsed him rushing past
them on his way to the sheds outside, a box of files in his arms. Fulbright was still hanging around outside the office, but was preoccupied with something and didn't notice Kristoph and Apollo as they left the hallway and turned into the central corridor they had missed on their way down, lined with enclosures that housed dogs of all shapes and sizes. To their surprise, it was not empty, as a short man with black hair in a mohawk-like style was crouching in an open gate, apparently fussing over the happy dog within. As he spotted the two men entering from the hallway door, he hurriedly gave the canine a pat goodbye and backed out of the enclosure, closing the gate and directing a sheepish smile at the attorneys. "You must be Northpaw's lawyers!" he called.

"Indeed we are," Kristoph replied, smiling in the direction of the somewhat baffled looking retriever in the enclosure. "Did you have some information for us?"

The man grimaced and shook his head. "Sorry," he said. "I wasn't in yesterday. Don't have a keycard, anyway."

Apollo frowned in thought, then gave the man a smile. "Are you Crow?" he asked.

"That's me!" Crow replied, grinning at Apollo. "And you must be Northpaw's brother?"

"Yep!" The young attorney crossed his arms proudly. "I guess Mister Duck told you who we were?"

Crow shrugged, still grinning. "Well, he told me Northpaw's lawyers were around. As for the brother thing," he paused to giggle, "I actually heard you shouting at Fox earlier."

At that, Apollo's pride instantly vanished, and he looked away as his face flushed red. "Oh..."

"Good luck, though," Crow continued, giving the pair a serious look. "I don't think any of us believed for a second Northpaw killed Mister Pound. None of us could do that."

"I'm sorry to point out the obvious," Kristoph replied, "but one of you must have. There's nowhere for a customer to have hidden away, and it must have been someone he knew for Pound to have opened the door to them." Crow seemed unconvinced, but before he could object, Kristoph had continued down the corridor to an alcove identical to the one in the neighbouring corridor. "Come along, Wright."

Apollo looked between Crow and Kristoph for a few moments, then made a decision. "I'll catch up in a minute," he called to his mentor.

Kristoph paused in surprise, looking back at the young man. "Are you sure?" Apollo nodded with a determined look, so Kristoph shrugged in acceptance. "When you're ready, then." A moment later, he had left the room.

Crow stared at Apollo with a confused look. "What is it?"

"I just wanted to check something," Apollo explained, pressing a finger to his forehead in thought. "My dad's always saying to think outside the norm on this kind of thing, so... is it possible a customer hid away somewhere? There were a lot of people here that day."

"Sorry, not really," Crow replied, seeming slightly disappointed. "It's evening routine: Lock the front door, dim all the lights, check the grooming area, the open storeroom, and the bathroom for 'stowaways', then knock on Mister Pound's door and let him know you're leaving." He shrugged. "Then, y'know, leave."

Apollo thought for a few more moments. "Just those rooms?"
"They're the only ones you can access without a keycard," Crow pointed out with a smile. "Oh, and you have to make sure to peek in the dog and cat enclosures to check they're empty, too. Of people, I mean."

'And only select employees have a keycard, bringing us back to Luke,' Apollo thought with a frown. "So, Ms Simba would have done that on the night of the murder?"

Crow nodded. "It only takes about five minutes," he said.

Apollo blinked, then stared at Crow with wide eyes, the image of the broken clock sticking in his mind. "Exactly five minutes?"

The other man seemed surprised at Apollo's sudden intensity, though he shrugged, looking back at the young man with a confused frown. "Probably less. Depends on the day, I s'pose."

'And our receptionist Ms Gatti was starting that process at six, putting her on the list of potential culprits!' Apollo almost cheered in triumph, but restrained himself in front of the wary Crow. More calmly, he continued, "So, just to check, there's no way someone with a keycard could have hidden someone else away in a locked room, either?"

Crow had to think for a few moments. "I... think that's possible, actually," he admitted. "Like, if they were in the storeroom, and no-one else came in. Even on the weekends, there's too much activity in the vet area for someone to hide for long."

Restraining another triumphant cheer, Apollo pulled out his Court Record and checked the digital copy he had made of the keycard records... only to pause as he found the name attached to the mid-morning visit to the storeroom, the last person to go in before the murder: 'Pound P'. "Oh. I think Mister Pound is unlikely to have planned his own violent, painful death... and there's nowhere to hide in that storeroom, so..." "I guess there's no way at all it was anyone but an employee," he quietly admitted.

Crow sighed, looking away with a sad frown. After a pause, he began to mutter, "I've always thought of us as a family. We have special names for each other, we bicker and fight, but through it all we were always united by our love and care for the dogs and cats here." He looked around at the dogs surrounding them. "How could someone... anyone... break that? Just... come in and murder our father figure, then slip back into the crowd like nothing happened! We're just supposed to point fingers at our brothers and sisters until, if, the real culprit is found?"

Apollo wasn't sure how to react to Crow's rant, standing in silence for several seconds and staring uncomfortably at the tablet computer in his hands. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

"S'not your fault," Crow sighed, crossing his arms and still avoiding Apollo's gaze. After another pause, he added, "Say hi to Northpaw for me." With that, he pushed past Apollo and left the hallway.

Making any progress?

Some. Two other possible suspects but they aren't around to talk to. I still say everything they have on Luke is circumstantial.
That sounds pretty usual for a murder investigation unfortunately

I got back Luke’s phone at least.

I’ll let him know

Did you find anything interesting?

Your Uncle Edgeworth thinks the prosecutor is a trustworthy guy. Both he and Gumshoe also say the detective has his heart in the right place

We’ve met the detective. He wasn’t too keen on helping out. Don’t think we’ll see the prosecutor until court tho.

Thanks anyway Dad.

Np. Good luck :)

View the Court Record
When Apollo caught up to his mentor, he elected to quietly join the casual examination of the large room, set up with baths, various high tables and a handful of cages all ready to keep the resident animals clean. Kristoph eyed the young attorney curiously, then cleared his throat to attract Apollo's attention. "Is something the matter, Wright?"

Apollo sighed. "I thought I had a lead, but..." He shook his head. "It doesn't matter. I wasn't expecting it to go anywhere, not until we can question the other people who were here last night."

"That is true," Kristoph agreed, solemnly pushing at his glasses. "Although we still have the veterinarians' rooms to investigate, I doubt we will be finding anything more useful here today. Wildgrube and Gatti are the keys, and the prosecution will have likely sent them home."

An idea popping into his head, Apollo tapped his forehead, thinking it over before bringing it up. "So, maybe we could find them, then? Look up their addresses?"

Kristoph smiled, the closest to a laugh Apollo had ever seen him get. "You are certainly welcome to try," he agreed.

Apollo grinned, beginning to regain his confidence. "Yeah!" he cried. "Once we get back to the office, I'll look up where they live and we can go pay 'em a visit!" He slammed a fist into his other hand. "And once we've talked to 'em a little, we'll know who did it and nail 'em in court! This'll be easy!"

Kristoph's smile faded. "I wouldn't get your hopes up, Wright. Proving your brother innocent is still going to be a monumental task, even if we do manage to talk to our missing witnesses."

"What do you mean, sir?" Apollo asked, frowning in confusion.

"It's all about evidence," Kristoph explained, arms crossed. "What the prosecution has, or at least what we know they have, is mostly circumstantial, true, but the judge will still side with them unless we have the evidence to prove it wasn't Luke who killed Pound. Evidence is everything in court."

Apollo stared for a moment, frowning. "But... that's not fair!" he objected. "It wasn't Luke!"

"Court isn't fair," Kristoph replied, frowning in disapproval of the younger attorney's childish outburst, "and I'm sorry to burst your bubble if you honestly believed it was. Surely you've heard the general public's opinion on the state of the law around here in recent years?"

"Y-yeah," Apollo mumbled, looking away as he tightly crossed his arms. "Everyone says we're in a 'Dark Age of the Law'."

Kristoph sighed. "As much as I detest the over-dramatic term," he continued, his gaze softening, "it has an element of truth to it. Over the past five years, there has been a substantial increase in dirty tricks and underhand deals throughout the entire system." He shook his head. "Nothing provable of course, but the general air in court seems to be that the prosecution will do anything to win, and,
sadly, so will a fair number of attorneys."

Apollo thought a moment, piecing together his mentor's view with the bits and pieces he'd heard from his father and Uncle Edgeworth over the years. "So... what can we do?" he asked.

"Our best," Kristoph replied. "As I said, evidence is everything in court. We need to evaluate what we have and piece together the proof that will absolve your brother of suspicion." He gave Apollo a stern stare. "The judge will accept nothing less than definitive proof from incontrovertible evidence."

"O-okay," Apollo said, a little dazed from the sudden harsh lesson on how court had changed for the worse since his father's day. "The testimonies don't matter?"

"They will be swayed to the prosecution's side," Kristoph explained. "They only call witnesses who agree with them, after all." He frowned darkly. "It's also not unusual for them to make deals. We cannot rely on witnesses, Wright."

Apollo didn't reply, starting to feel drained. They really did have a slog of work to get through before they were ready for court, and it was looking less likely now than ever that they'd be able to free Luke on Monday.

Kristoph paused a moment, then briefly patted a hand on Apollo's shoulder and walked off to the door. "Come along, Wright. Let's examine the veterinarians' rooms and we can return to the office."

November 29, 6:12PM
Apollo and Clay's Apartment
Living Room

Apollo hung his head as he carefully closed the front door of his apartment behind him. 'And new to the list of 'days I never want to have to think about again ever'...' He sighed as he automatically locked the door behind him, shoving his hands in his pockets as he moped towards his room.

A head appeared out of another of the doorways nearby, grinning. "You're back! How'd it go?"

"Not now, Clay," Apollo mumbled, turning towards his bedroom.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Clay called in reply, but Apollo was ignoring him, falling back-first onto his bed and staring at the ceiling. "Dude?" After a moment, Clay appeared in Apollo's doorway, watching his friend with concern. "What happened?" he quietly asked. "You were so excited this morning."

Apollo sighed, running a hand along his face. "A lot happened today," he explained. "Our case is hopeless, the entire police department and prosecutor's office is apparently out to get us, and, worst of all, my brother is going to jail."

Clay's eyes widened as he shouted, "What!?" He shook his head, laughing uncomfortably. "I think I misheard you there! Did you say something about Luke going to jail!?"

Apollo only nodded, his blank gaze still locked to the ceiling.

"You can't just leave it at that!" Clay protested, stomping into Apollo's room and standing over his bed, hands on his hips as he gave his friend a stern glare. "What's going on!? Why is Luke in jail!?"
"He's not in jail," Apollo quietly explained, turning his head away to stare at the wall. "Not yet. He's been accused of murder, but it doesn't look like Mister Gavin will be able to help him."

Clay stared at Apollo in disbelief for a moment before his gaze turned fierce, and he grabbed his friend's arm, pulling him off the bed. "Hey!" Apollo objected as he was dragged to his feet. "What's the big deal!?"

"Come on!" Clay ordered, tightly gripping Apollo's right wrist as he pulled his friend out into the living room. "You are in desperate need of an emergency training session, buddy!"

Apollo groaned as he realised what his friend was doing. "Clay, I don't need-"

"No excuses!" Clay insisted, throwing his friend somewhere in the vicinity of their small TV and standing so he blocked any kind of escape into the hall or kitchen. Feet held apart, he clenched his fists and gave Apollo a stern stare. "Position, dude!" he ordered.

Rolling his eyes, Apollo lazily separated his feet a little, then shrugged at Clay with a raised eyebrow, as if to say 'good enough for you?'.

Clay seemed annoyed, but decided to let it go. "Me first!" he said, then pointed his head upwards and shouted at the top of his lungs, "I'M CLAY TERRAN AND I'M FINE!"

Apollo sighed, staring at the floor. "I'm..." he muttered.

"C'mon!" Clay ordered, giving his friend a confident grin. "Top of your lungs, Apollo!"

"I'm," Apollo started again, a little louder, then screwed up his face, clenched his fists, and shouted, "I'M APOLLO WRIGHT AND I'M FINE!"

"YOU'RE FINE!" Clay added, throwing his fists into the air in triumph.

"I'M FINE!" Apollo repeated, beginning to smile as his confidence and energy slowly returned.

There was a rapid knocking from the ceiling above, and a muffled voice screeched, "COULD APOLLO WRIGHT AND CLAY TERRAN BE FINE IN SILENCE!?"

The two young men grinned sheepishly at each other, then fell about laughing, dropping onto the sofa at each other's side. Once their laughter died down, Clay looked to Apollo with a bright, though solemn, smile. "So, what happened today?"

Apollo sighed, though, this time, he found he had the energy to answer Clay's question.

It took a long time, and Apollo frequently had to pause to gather his thoughts, but slowly he explained to Clay how he had met Kristoph and Luke at the detention centre, of how he and Kristoph had ventured to the animal shelter and met all the colourful characters there, of what little and vague evidence they had found, and of Kristoph's harsh but true speech on the realities of the trial ahead.

"When we got back to the office," Apollo told his friend, "I thought I'd be able to find this receptionist and vet easy, but apparently not! I spent all afternoon looking, and Mister Gavin had to send me home because I couldn't find hide nor hair of 'em!" He groaned in frustration, burying his face in his hands.

Clay hid a smirk, patting Apollo's shoulder sympathetically. "Well, think about it, dude: Not many
people nowadays like any old random person being able to look up their address just like that."

"But 'Gatti' and 'Wildgrube' are such uncommon names!" Apollo cried, only to sigh as he let the subject go, falling against the back of the couch. "At least Mister Gavin said he's making progress on the argument we're gonna use in court."

"That's good," Clay pointed out with a smile. "So rescuing Luke's not so hopeless after all, huh?"

Apollo just shrugged. "I dunno... Mister Gavin told me not to go in tomorrow. Just take the day off and prepare for Monday."

Clay thought for a few moments, nodding absently. "So, if you're not doing anything tomorrow, and I'm not doing anything tomorrow, and Luke's not doing anything tomorrow-

"Luke's busy being stuck in the detention center," Apollo interrupted, shooting his friend a glare.

"I know, I know!" Clay hurriedly replied, rolling his eyes. "I was gonna suggest we go visit him, you dweeb!"

Apollo blinked in surprise. "Oh." After a pause, he smiled and agreed, "Why not? Let's do that."

View the Court Record
Hey! How was Black Fur Friday? :P

Luke? You there?

Ok guess you slept in. Reply when you see this huh? :)

What's going on over there? You don't usually take an entire day to reply. :(  

You there yet Luke?

Hi Athena, this is Apollo. Luke's gonna be away from his phone for a few days but I'll let him know you've been texting him.

Apollo! Hello! :D What happened? Why do you have Luke's phone?

It's complicated. Short version is they frown on detention center inmates having their cells with them.

Wait what!?

He's fine I promise. Mr Gavin and I are defending him in court tomorrow.

Phew! He must be pretty relieved to know a talented defence attorney huh? :)

Flattery will get you everywhere Ms Cykes ;) We're doing our best but Mr Gavin is doing the bulk of the work.

Good luck anyway Apollo! I know you can do it! What's he been accused of?

Thanks Athena :) Murder unfortunately, but I think we have just enough evidence to clear him.

:O Sounds nasty! Tell Luke good luck and I'll talk to him once he's out!

Will do.

November 30, 9:19AM
Detention Center
Visitor's Room

"Did you tell her I'm okay?" Luke asked from behind the glass, a worried tone to his voice as his clutched at the edges of his work labcoat.

"Of course I did," Apollo assured his brother with a smile, sitting in one of the two chairs on the visiting side of the room. "Like I said, she wished you good luck and said she'll talk to you once you're out."

As Luke sighed in relief, Clay laughed, relaxing in the chair next to Apollo. "See? Even a girl who barely knows Apollo knows he'll get you out of here, dude!"
Luke giggled, though his brow remained creased with worry. "And she's training to be a lawyer herself!" he added. "You might get to meet her in a year or two!"

"Dad and Trucy came by yesterday, right?" Apollo asked, noting the new addition of Luke's hat since the previous morning.

Nodding, Luke tapped the brim of his cap with a smile. "Yep!" he said. "Brought me my hat, a deck of cards to entertain myself back in my cell... Tried to sit with me all day, but the guards always kicked them out after an hour or two."

Clay laughed, while Apollo just grinned, saying, "I'll bet that didn't put them off, though!"

Luke shook his head, giggling. "They came back later, of course," he agreed. "The guards kicked them out again another hour or two later!"

The three friends laughed together for a few moments as, behind Luke, the door softly opened and the guard on duty switched with his replacement, waiting outside.

"How's the investigation going?" Luke asked, giving Apollo a bright smile, his spirits lifted by the assurances of his friends. "Were you able to find much back at the shelter?"

Apollo's smile quickly faded, though he tried to force a cheerful attitude. "Oh, yeah, sure. The detective let us look at the crime scene, so there was a lot of useful information there, and we spoke to Duck, Fox and Crow too."

"Are they okay?" Luke asked, looking worried again.

"They're fine," Apollo promised, managing a small smile, "though naturally they're upset by Mister Pound's death. I'm sure they'll be okay, though."

Luke nodded in agreement.

"I bet they'll feel much better once you and Mister Gavin find the culprit, huh?" Clay pointed out, elbowing Apollo with a grin.

"If we find the culprit," Apollo shot back with a glare. "I'll settle just for proving it wasn't Luke. Maybe then the police will do their job and arrest someone on more than circumstantial evidence."

Apollo hadn't meant his impassioned statement as a dig at the guard on duty, so was surprised and ashamed when the man suddenly spoke up in response: "It's more than circumstantial already, actually."

The three looked up to the young man, Luke spinning in his seat, and quickly registered a familiar face below the police cap, hidden by a wave of black hair. Clay was the first to gasp in recognition.

"Ernest Holmes, is that you!?"

Ernest gave the trio a nervous smile and a small wave. "Hi," he quietly replied. "I guess you remember me?"

Luke gave him a friendly smile. "How could we not?" he said. "We were classmates for-!" He paused, frowning in thought. "Three years?"

"More like five or six for us!" Apollo added, shooting a smile to Clay. "You're on your way to becoming a detective, Ernest!"
Ernest blushed, scratching at an ear sheepishly. "A bit, yeah," he admitted. "Just a regular officer at the mo'."

"Hey, that's great!" Luke replied, giving their old friend an encouraging smile. "You can practise your deductive skills, and you'll be going up the ranks in no time at all!"

The young policeman gave Luke a strange look. "You're about to be given a death sentence!" he cried. "How are you being so cheerful?"


"Yeah!" Apollo cried, crossing his arms and shooting a glare at Ernest. "All your evidence is circumstantial at best, and we're gonna clear Luke's name in court tomorrow!"

Ernest winced a little, looking incredibly guilty as he shot wary glances at the doors on either end of the room. "I really shouldn't be talking to you guys at all," he admitted, stepping forward to Luke's side and addressing the Wright brothers, specifically Luke, with a solemn glare, "but I was assigned to help Prosecutor Debeste yesterday and there's more than just evidence implicating you."

Luke's eyes widened for a moment, then narrowed suspiciously, and Apollo instantly recognised the signs of his brother beginning to lose his temper. "You're lying."

"I'm not!" Ernest insisted with an angry frown.

As Luke opened his mouth to respond, looking likely to jump out of his seat and shout in the young policeman's face, Apollo slammed his fists into the counter in front of him, shooting to his feet and staring his younger brother down. "Luke, calm down! At least hear him out!"

"There's nothing to hear!" Luke protested, waving a hand at Ernest with a frustrated air. "If they don't have evidence, that means they have testimony, and that means he's claiming someone at the shelter is lying to say I did it!" He stood up, glaring right back at Apollo and managing to look fierce with his superior height. "None of us would ever do that, just like none of us would have killed Mister Pound!"

"Well, I hate to have to break it to you, Luke," Apollo shot back, "but someone did! Either Simba or Reindeer murdered him and is blaming it on you, and you have to face reality on this!"

Luke's face was starting to turn red as he leaned on the counter opposite his brother. "But neither of them has any reason to kill him!"

"And how do you know that!?" Apollo pointed out. "You can't read minds! You aren't privy to the private relationships your boss had with either of them!"

"I-!" Luke started to protest, only to halt as his glare turned into a grimace, his face down-turned as he fought tears. "But... they wouldn't!"

Clay also got to his feet, placing a hand on the glass as he worried for his friend. "Luke, everything's going to be okay," he said.

"No it's not!" Luke replied, quiet tears starting to drip down his cheeks. "I might be locked up and killed for a crime I didn't commit, and even if I'm not, Simba or Reindeer will! It's bad enough losing Mister Pound... I can't accept that it was one of us!"

Clay pressed his hand tighter to the glass. "Don't you worry, dude," he assured his friend. "Apollo
and Mister Gavin'll find out what really happened." Apollo stayed silent, knowing that trying to reiterate Simba or Reindeer's guilt would only upset his brother further.

Ernest, who had taken a few uncomfortable steps back when the brothers started shouting at each other, sighed, one hand rubbing his other arm nervously. "I... I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said anything..."

"No, you shouldn't," Apollo agreed, raising an unamused eyebrow in the young policeman's direction. "You've always been pretty terrible at keeping your mouth shut though, so I'm not surprised."

The statement seemed to surprise Ernest, who looked between the trio with his mouth hanging open. "W-what do you mean?"

Luke sank back down into his seat, and Clay, still concerned for his friend, mirrored him. "You don't remember?" the young vet asked, still staring downwards as he clutched his hands together in his lap. "I'd just lost my parents in a car crash when we first met. You jumped me and made some proud speech about how it was 'so obvious' I'd injured myself in some grand falling out with them and was sent to Turner's as a punishment."

Ernest looked horrified. "I-I said that...?"

"But hey!" Clay interjected, trying to look cheerful. "If 'Pollo and I hadn't had to save you from Ernest, we might never have become friends, huh? And you two," he waved a hand between Luke and Apollo, the latter of which was standing by his chair with his arms tightly crossed, "wouldn't have been adopted together and become brothers! Everything turned out okay in the end!"

Neither of the brothers visibly reacted to Clay's short speech, Luke still staring at his lap and Apollo at the wall, both seemingly deep in thought. Ernest simply looked guilty, and, after a very long moment of silence, sighed again, shaking his head. "Look, I really really shouldn't be doing this," he said, "but I wanna help you guys. You... probably deserve it for putting up with me when I was being an idiot kid."

"Everyone's an idiot kid at some point," Apollo quietly replied, waiting until he had finished talking to turn to Ernest and give their old classmate a small smile. "Any help would be appreciated, though. Thank you."

Ernest momentarily blushed, then put on a determined expression and stood by the glass, close to Apollo. "Okay, first of all, right at the end of the day we had a new piece of evidence handed in: A passer-by found a labcoat with massive bloodstains on it just flying around in the wind not far from the crime scene, and we matched it as from the shelter with the victim's blood."

Apollo frowned, tapping his forehead in thought. "A blood-stained labcoat...?" he repeated. "Was there anything else forensics picked up?"

Ernest shook his head. "It had been washed, apparently," he explained. "Whoever it was hadn't got all the blood off it, so they just dumped it. Got everything incriminating, though."

Apollo nodded. "Anything else?"

"No more evidence," Ernest replied. "Though if either of the witnesses was lying, I'd put my money on the old man, with the way he had us running around in circles all day."

"What do you mean?" Clay asked Ernest curiously.

The policeman sighed, looking frustrated already. "What didn't he do?" he said. "It was like some terrible comedy sketch! First he was claiming to not be him, then he insisted he hadn't been working the day of the crime, then he claimed he'd gone straight home... We had to keep proving he was lying to get him to finally admit he'd been there at the time of murder! The bastard never stopped smiling at us!" He groaned, shaking his head. "Even Prosecutor Debeste looked about ready to hang the guy by the end of the day!"

Luke giggled, and it felt like his amusement despite his situation was giving his friends permission to also smile at the humour of the story. "Reindeer loves being difficult," he explained. "Especially with people he doesn't know."

"What about the other one?" Apollo asked Ernest. "The receptionist, Ms Gatti?"

The dark-haired young man had to think for a moment. "She was very co-operative," he eventually said, "though she did seem very uninterested in the whole thing. You'd almost think she had no idea it was a murder investigation."

"That's Simba," Luke explained, finally looking up at his friends with a smile on his tear-stained face. "She acts all distant and aloof, but you should see her with the animals; She has a heart of gold."

Clay frowned in thought. "So, are both of them being called as witnesses in court tomorrow?"

"As far as I know," Ernest admitted with a shrug.

"Cool!" Clay replied, grinning. "I'll finally get to meet some of Luke's work friends!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow at his friend, smirking in amusement. "You mean you're actually coming to watch the trial?" he asked. "I thought you hated court!"

Clay playfully scoffed, crossing his arms. "C'mon dude, I'm not gonna miss seeing you prove Luke didn't do it!"

"I'm not proving it, Mister Gavin is!" Apollo corrected his friend with a smile. "I'm just helping!" He turned to Ernest. "What about Prosecutor Debeste? I've been told he's 'trustworthy', but that's all I know about him."

"Aw, Prosecutor Debeste is a great guy!" Ernest immediately boasted. "He asked a few of us newer guys to go around with him, and was always asking us our opinions and thoughts!" He paused to laugh. "He said finding the truth is a group effort, so he wanted everyone to pull their weight and not be afraid to contradict him if we disagreed! He's the best!" Ernest suddenly paused, looking embarrassed. "Oh, but, don't say that to his face. I think I really upset him doing that."

Clay seemed amused. "Man, he must've been teased about his name a lot growing up!"

"I've only met him the twice, but he does seem like a good-hearted prosecutor," Luke agreed, ignoring Clay as he gave Ernest a smile. "It's all I can ask for that he be more interested in finding the truth than just convicting me."

Ernest grinned proudly.

"That is a rarity nowadays!" Clay laughed. "If you believe the media, of course!"
"And there's no reason to," Apollo insisted with a glare, noting out the corner of his eyes that Ernest also looked annoyed at the implication on his profession. "We'll have a fair trial tomorrow, find the true culprit, and Luke can go back home. I won't let it happen any other way."

View the Court Record
Kristoph looked up from his quiet re-reading of the case-file with a small smile. "I'm impressed," he told the young man sitting at his side.

Apollo almost jumped in fright, looking up at his mentor. "Sir?"

"Before a trial, most attorneys are busy relieving tension," Kristoph explained, "especially so early in their careers."

Apollo laughed, rubbing the back of his head sheepishly. "Eh, I can handle stage fright," he explained, looking away as his smile faded. "It's disappointing Luke that's worrying me more. Plus, I didn't want to distract you by doing the Chords of Steel routine right here and now... Clay and I did enough of that before I left home this morning."

Kristoph chuckled to himself. "You needn't worry," he assured the young man. "I have everything in hand." When Apollo only nodded in response, the elder attorney thought a moment, then closed his case-file. "Would you like me to prove it to you?"

"N-no, that's okay, sir," Apollo insisted, giving Kristoph a sheepish smile. "Just... we don't know what to expect from the witness testimonies, so..."

"We will need to think on our feet, I admit," Kristoph said, "but this won't be the first time I've had to do so. I've faced unscrupulous prosecutors before."

Apollo wasn't sure if that description applied to the supposedly 'trustworthy' Debeste, but wasn't about to passionately defend someone he'd never met to his mentor.

The doors of the lobby opened, and in walked two bailiffs, escorting between them a tired-looking Luke, still wearing his labcoat from the night he'd been arrested. As Apollo got to his feet to greet his brother, the bailiffs closed the doors behind them, released Luke, then stood guard either side of the lone exit.

Apollo barely restrained himself from running to check his younger brother was okay, instead merely stepping towards him with a worried look on his face. "You alright, Luke?" he asked.

Taking a few steps forward to meet his brother halfway, Luke nodded, forcing a reassuring smile. "I'm fine," he insisted. "It's... been a while since I was last in a trial, but I'll be alright once it's started. I know what to expect... sort of."

Replacing his case-file in his satchel, Kristoph got to his feet, approaching the brothers with a smile. "Good morning, Luke," he greeted the taller of the pair, hands clasped behind his back. "I assure you, there's no need to worry. Your brother and I have this case well in hand."

"Y-yeah!" Apollo added, forcing a cheerful grin and rushing to stand at Luke's side, a hand gripping his shoulder tightly. "Remember what Ernest said yesterday? We got this in the bag!"
Luke relaxed a little, nodding at Apollo with a grateful smile.

There was a knock at the door, and one of the bailiffs opened it, letting in Phoenix, Trucy and Clay. Trucy ran straight to Luke, clinging tightly to his side as Apollo stepped out of her way with an unsurprised smile. "You're gonna be okay!" the teenage girl cried, face screwed up tightly as she pressed it to his shoulder, and it was obvious she was trying to convince herself more than Luke. "I know you will be!"

Luke nodded, moving to hug his little sister. "Of course I will," he replied, seeming a lot calmer now there was someone more upset than him to comfort.

"Right!" Clay added with a confident grin, slapping Apollo's shoulder and almost knocking the lawyer aside, to Apollo's annoyance. "'Pollo here is gonna wipe the floor with this case!"

"For the last time, I am not!" Apollo objected, pushing his friend off with a glare. "I'm just assisting Mister Gavin!"

Phoenix laughed as he joined his children, and Kristoph seemed equally amused. "Maybe a less colourful metaphor would be a more accurate description," Kristoph said, crossing his arms and giving Clay a friendly smile. "I assume you are a friend of Apollo's?"

"This is Clay Terran, Apollo and Luke's friend," Phoenix explained, gesturing to the young man, who waved happily at Kristoph. "Clay, I believe Apollo has told you all about Kristoph here?"

"Yep!" Clay replied, nodding eagerly as he draped an arm over Apollo's shoulder, to his friend's annoyance. "Nice to meet you, Mister Gavin!"

"A pleasure," Kristoph replied, pushing at his glasses.

"The three of us just dropped by to wish you three luck before the trial," Phoenix explained, looking solemnly between the two lawyers and Luke. "We're going to be in the gallery cheering for you."

Apollo's eyes widened in fear as an idea occurred to him. "I hope you don't mean literally."

Phoenix laughed. "No, don't worry," he promised with a grin. "We'll be quiet."

Although his father's grin did nothing to diminish Apollo's worry, he decided to accept that answer, crossing his arms with a frown.

"We'll be here to bring you home once they let you off, Luke!" Clay added, giving his friend a thumbs-up.


Luke giggled, hugging his sister tighter in appreciation. "Don't you worry, I'll be back home tonight. Apollo and Mister Gavin will make sure of it," he looked up at them with an expectant smile, "won't you?"

"Of course!" Apollo cried, clenching his fists with determination. "We'll be doing our best out there, right Mister Gavin?"

Kristoph nodded. "Naturally," he calmly replied.

"Then we'd better head to the courtroom if we want good seats," Phoenix announced, waving
towards the door and giving significant looks to Clay and Trucy.

Clay obediently nodded, finally leaving Apollo alone and heading to the door, waving to his friends. "See you guys later!" he called.

Trucy gave Luke one last hug, then let go and wordlessly ran to join Clay, staying silent and avoiding her brothers' gazes. The door creaked as it closed behind them, one of the bailiffs ensuring it latched behind the pair.

Before joining them, Phoenix gave Luke a worried look. "You'll be okay?" he asked. "Keep in mind, the courtroom here is, in theory, much nicer than Labyrinthia's, but it's always a lot worse for the defendant than a witness."

"I'll be fine, Papa," Luke promised, managing to show him a small smile. "After all, Maya's survived both just fine. If she can do it, I can do it."

Phoenix seemed unconvinced for a moment, then fixed Luke with a sad smile, pulling him into a hug. "You bet," he replied, letting his younger son go with a fond look. "We'll be waiting once it's all over," he assured both his sons, glancing between them before turning to leave.

Apollo and Luke only quietly watched as the door closed behind Phoenix, then turned to each other with encouraging, though worried, looks. Kristoph closed his eyes, pushing at his glasses with an unreadable expression on his face.

December 1, 10:00AM
District Court
Courtroom No. 7

As he walked to the defence bench behind his mentor, Apollo looked around at the slowly filling stands in which the crowds had gathered to watch today's trial. It was a little disconcerting being able to see every individual so clearly, Apollo being more used to having his audience obscured behind a row of stage lights, but he was sure that, once the trial got started, he'd be able to focus and entertain the gallery with his performance. 'Perhaps 'entertain' is the wrong word, though. And 'performance'. Just... gotta focus on saving Luke. That's the important thing.'

Kristoph idly laid out his case-file and physical evidence on the desk before them, then pulled out his Court Record tablet computer. After a few moments of digging, he located a cord hidden underneath a small panel, and plugged in the device, giving Apollo a wry look as he explained, "I will have to replace this before long. They prefer us to go wireless these days."

Apollo nodded. "We could have used mine," he suggested. "It's configured for that."

"It doesn't matter," Kristoph replied, laying the tablet down where he could see an overview of their digital list of evidence.

A loud rapping of a gavel silenced the hubbub of the courtroom, and Apollo looked up to his right, where the tall podium at the head of the room stood, at its top a bald man with a magnificent white beard, black robes adorning what little of his body was visible underneath. "This court is now in session," the old man announced to the now-quiet room.

"The prosecution is ready, Your Honour," came a voice from the other side of the room, and Apollo
almost jumped as he noticed the young man, only a few years older than him, standing at the prosecutor's bench.

The prosecutor's hair, a caramel brown, seemed to wave out around his head like a mushroom, except for one strand that stuck up in a curve almost like a question mark. His clothes Apollo found vaguely reminiscent of Edgeworth in style, with a blue-black, frilly dress shirt, over which was draped a crimson blazer. Matching the shirt was a long scarf, wrapped around the man's neck and pinned together at the front with what Apollo quickly recognised was a prosecutor's badge. 'Don't see those on display often.' The final additions to the man's outfit were a pair of simple white gloves, and he idly tapped an extendible baton against the palm of one hand.

"The defence is ready, Your Honour," Kristoph announced, pulling Apollo out of his thoughts.

The judge nodded. "Your opening statement, Prosecutor Debeste?"

Debeste slammed his hand against the end of the baton, closing it. "Of course, Your Honour."
Placing the baton down, he waved to the courtroom doors, where a pair of bailiffs were escorting in Luke, leading him to the witness stand. Apollo met his brother's eyes only briefly, before Luke solemnly turned his attention to the prosecutor. "Our victim was one Phelan Pound, aged thirty-three," Debeste explained, "the owner and manager of a small animal shelter on Warren Street."

"Ah, I do so love animals!" the judge mused to himself with a smile.

Apollo raised an eyebrow.

"He was found dead on the floor of his office late Friday night," Debeste continued, brushing off the judge's comment. "The only other worker in the building at the time, which we will prove today, was our defendant, Doctor Luke Wright, the only possible culprit of this crime." He gestured to the witness stand, and Luke almost flinched away from the attention.

"A doctor?" the judge replied with surprise, and turned to Luke. "What is a doctor doing in an animal shelter? Don't you have patients to see?"

At that, Apollo noticed Debeste seemed to give the smallest sigh. "Not that kind of doctor, Your Honour," he replied, eyes closed.

"I-I'm not a doctor of medicine," Luke began to explain, holding up a finger before catching himself and adding, "w-well, I am a doctor of medicine, but of animal medicine, specifically cats and dogs, not of human medicine." He coughed awkwardly, staring at the floor.

"Ah, a veterinarian!" the judge asked, smiling as he understood. "I didn't think those became doctors!"

"Generally they don't." Debeste admitted, looking mildly frustrated. "The defendant, however, trained in Europe, and they do become doctors there."

"I see, I see!" the judge cheerfully replied, nodding.

Apollo found himself sympathising with Debeste as the other man hid a brief facepalm behind the motion of brushing hair out of his eyes. "Cause of death was blunt-force trauma," he continued, "but I'll leave it to the detective to fully explain."

The judge nodded thoughtfully, looking solemn as they returned to business. "Then you wish to call your first witness?"
"I do," Debeste replied, snatching his baton and extending it again, pointing it with a snap of his arm to the courtroom doors. "The prosecution calls Detective Fulbright to the stand!"

View the Court Record
Fulbright saluted the judge proudly as he arrived at the witness stand, Luke having been escorted to a side room on the defence's side by the bailiffs. "In justice we trust!” he cried.

"Name and occupation please, witness,” Debeste requested, having returned to idly tapping his baton against his other hand.

Fulbright laughed. "Naturally, I'm the detective assigned to this case!” he announced, pulling out his ID from the holster under his arm with a grin. "Bobby Fulbright, at your service, sirs! Champion of justice and defender of the peace!"

"Thank you, detective," the judge said with a nod. "Would you give the court your testimony, please?"

Slipping his ID back into the holster, Fulbright grinned proudly. "I would be honoured to, Your Honour!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, wondering if the pun was deliberate. He heard Kristoph softly sighing at his side and guessed his mentor was thinking the same.

"The victim was last seen alive by a small group of his employees at six PM on Friday evening," Fulbright explained. "Two of them left the building at that time, while another left a few minutes later, leaving only the victim and defendant in the building. The defendant himself reported the murder at six forty-five, probably hoping to divert suspicion from him!” He laughed.

"Objection,” Kristoph calmly called, hands clasped behind his back. "Would the prosecution please refrain from putting words in the defendant's mouth? It's just as, if not more, likely he called out of a duty to report the murder, not to divert suspicion."

Fulbright seemed like he was about to shoot back a response, but Debeste nodded in agreement. "Of course; This testimony should be bare facts only, Detective Fulbright.” He waved his baton at the witness stand with a piercing look. "Or would you like me to reflect your error of judgement in the next review of your salary?"

The detective pushed at his sunglasses, apparently choosing to bite his lip rather than reply. After a moment, he cleared his throat and continued, "The victim suffered multiple blows to his head and upper body, as reviewed in the autopsy report." He held up a small document identical to the copy he had given the defence team on Saturday, which a bailiff grabbed to rush up to the judge. "The primary murder weapon was found in the grass outside the shelter building, below the bathroom window. It had been cleaned of fingerprints and all but a few traces of blood, but it did still have hair fragments of a colour that matched the victim's."

"Specifically," Debeste spoke up reaching under his desk, "this baseball bat.” He held up a plain wooden bat for the court to see, and Apollo held back a gasp as he noticed one side of the business end looked rather battered, splintering a little from the aftermath of a powerful hit.
The judge seemed a little horrified himself, eyes widening at the sight of the newly-submitted evidence. "Goodness! The victim must have had a hard head!"

"I don't think that damage was from the murder, Your Honour," Kristoph spoke up, thoughtfully pushing on his glasses.

"It wasn't," Debeste confirmed, giving the attorney opposite a relieved smile. "We believe this damage to be pre-existing; Employees confirmed this was one of the victim's possessions that he kept on display in his office, which I will remind the court was our crime scene." Placing the bat down on his bench, he flicked at a tablet resting nearby.

The holograms of the courtroom sprung to life, four blue-tinted screens around the central aisle of the court: One in front of the judge, a small window especially for him; Twin medium-sized screens flickered into being in front of the opposing prosecutor and defence benches, large enough for the sections of the gallery behind them to see; And, lastly, one massive screen high in the air above the witness stand, where the largest part of the gallery either side of the entrance doors could see. Apollo couldn't help a grin as he turned his attention to the defence team's window, excited to finally be seeing the technology that had amazed him as a child so close. 'Huh, is that a map of the shelter?'

Fulbright pointed to the massive map above him, not so different from Apollo's own. "As you can see," he explained, "this office at the back was the crime scene. The bathroom is just down the hall, where the murderer cleaned and disposed of the weapon."

"And what are these tiny key symbols?" the judge asked, peering at his small screen as he ran his fingers through his beard curiously. "Did the victim drop his keys there?"

"No, Your Honour," Fulbright replied, giving the old man a grin. "Those doors are special! They automatically lock when they are closed, and require an employee keycard to open!"
"Ah!" the judge cried, smiling to himself. "Of course!"

"But only on one side," Debeste picked up. "You need a card to go in, but the doors will always remain open for you going the other way." He tapped at his screen, and the front door and two back doors were all circled by flashing red rings. "These doors are unlocked for customers during the day, but are locked at night. They had been specifically locked shortly before the murder, so no-one without a keycard could have entered the building."

Fulbright laughed. "And every time those doors are opened, it's logged into the computer!" he boasted, producing a sheet of paper that he held out for the bailiff to take, watching the young officer scurry the important item off to the judge. Apollo noticed Debeste hide an eye-roll, then the prosecutor flicked at his tablet and brought the keycard log up on the hologram monitors. "Every keycard and the door it was used in!" Fulbright pointed out, not skipping a beat as he gestured to the three-columned table above him. "Only the relevant portion, of course!"

<table>
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<th>6:00</th>
<th>Recup. Room</th>
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Debeste took down the logs from the holograms, causing them to flicker as they closed down their display. The judge, busy perusing his physical copy, didn't seem to notice. "And the condition of the crime scene?" Debeste prompted his witness. "Would you report on that, detective?"

"Naturally!" Fulbright boasted, giving the prosecutor a salute. "The victim and murderer engaged in a scuffle which almost destroyed the room!" As if on cue, Debeste activated the holograms again, bringing up a photo that immediately made the gallery, and judge, gasp loudly. "Audience members with weak stomachs may want to look away," the detective added, almost cheekily, to the crowds behind him.

Apollo's eyes widened as he recognised the subject of the photo: Phelan Pound, lying face-down on the hideous green carpet of his office floor, a puddle of blood leaking through his dark hair down into the rug below. Above him, propped against the oddly-angled desk (presumably shoved backwards in the fight), was the empty bookcase, its contents dumped in a pile on the body below. Apollo could even see the small, white clock between a box of files and a few large books. 'Geeze, no wonder Luke couldn't make himself take photos of it...'

"As you can see in this photo of the scene as we discovered it," Fulbright brightly continued, "the fight ended with the victim underneath the contents of his bookcase! Analysis indicates he was most likely killed by the avalanche of books," Debeste took this moment to switch the photo to one of the broken clock on its own, "and this clock that fell with them tells us time of death was almost certainly six-oh-five!"

Debeste then produced the clock itself, resting it next to the baseball bat on his bench. "The defendant had a keycard, thus access to the crime scene, and was the only other person in the building at the time," he announced to the court at large, "but one more piece of evidence also ties
him to this crime."

Fulbright laughed. "You may have noticed earlier Your Honour, a certain piece of clothing the defendant is wearing today?"

The judge thought for a moment, then ventured, "I did think he had a rather nice hat..."

"His labcoat, Your Honour," Debeste pointed out, then flicked at his tablet and brought up on the holograms a picture of a labcoat laid out on what Apollo could only guess was the floor of the police station where the item had been handed in. He was briefly glad they'd been warned of its existence through Ernest. "This coat is identical to the one the defendant was wearing when he was arrested," the prosecutor continued. "It matches the labcoats kept at the shelter, and in fact their stores are one short; This one was dumped on the streets and handed in by a passer-by. As you can see, there are prominent bloodstains all over it. It appears the murderer attempted to wash it, but failed to clean off the blood completely."

The judge thought to himself for a long moment. "I see, I see," he muttered. "This does seem like some very compelling evidence."

"Not as compelling as it might appear, Your Honour," Kristoph finally spoke up, and tapped at his Court Record to bring up the keycard records on the holographic screens. "For one thing, the defendant owning a keycard is irrelevant, as the logs do not tell us on their own who committed this crime."

Soft discussion rippled through the gallery as they studied the logs themselves and realised Kristoph was right: The only people to have entered the office that night were the victim himself and Luke, the latter of which was clearly shown to be in a totally different room shortly before the murder, not entering the office himself until forty minutes afterwards. Between the two, the only other door logged was the entrance, by a third person yet to be introduced to the court. "So it does!" the judge realised. "There's even a third person listed here! What does it mean?"

"The records themselves are still highly relevant to solving this murder," Debeste spoke up, seeming to decide to let Kristoph's point stand mostly unopposed, "although I can promise the third person you mention will be addressed in a moment. As previously mentioned, the building was locked. Only employees had access to the crime scene, whether or not they opened the door themselves." He gestured with his baton, pointing to the judge. "My next witness can answer all your related questions, I assure you."

"Ah, then you'd better call them," the judge agreed.

Fulbright saluted. "We will fetch them immediately, Your Honour!" he boasted, then rushed off towards a side-room near the prosecutor's bench.
"Name and occupation please, witness," Debeste announced as the bailiffs finished escorting the young woman to the stand.

Apollo's first impression of the blonde woman busy adjusting her pointy glasses was 'nervousness', although he supposed he couldn't blame her. She seemed to be trying to hide, pushing her blue-tinted glasses close to her eyes, the shawl tightly wrapped over her shoulders and around her neck brushing against her bottom lip, which she seemed to be anxiously chewing. "Leo," she quietly said. "Leo Gatti. I'm a receptionist at the Warren Street Animal Shelter."

'So this is the heart-of-gold, unconcerned-about-the-murder Simba, huh?' Apollo asked himself. 'Not how I imagined her, I have to admit.'

"And you were working on the night of the murder, were you not?" Debeste continued.

Simba nodded. "I went home just before it happened," she elaborated. "Locked everything up myself."

"There's no need to worry, Ms Gatti," the judge told the young woman, a paternal smile on his face. "I can promise the defence won't bite!" After a short laugh, during which Apollo noticed a disapproving frown flit across Kristoph's face, the judge continued, "Could you testify in more detail?"

After a pause, Simba nodded, taking a few moments to breathe deeply and calm herself down a little. "I was the last to leave," she began. "It was the end of the day, so I had to lock the front door and the two back doors, and check there wasn't anyone still hanging around looking at the animals." She paused, twirling a finger through a lock of her hair. "I knocked on the boss's door maybe a minute after he went back to his office... Y'know, around the time the vets all left. Then I went home."

The courtroom was quiet for a moment as everyone slowly realised the young woman had stopped talking. "You... were the last to leave?" the judge repeated, sounding confused. "What about the victim and defendant?"

"Not counting those two, Your Honour," Debeste pointed out, and Apollo noticed one of his eyebrows twitching in annoyance.

"I didn't see either of them," Simba explained, staring off to the side. "They were behind locked doors, anyway. I couldn't get to them even if I wanted to."

The judge frowned to himself. "But aren't you an employee?" he asked. "Don't you have a keycard?"

"Not every employee does," Simba sighed, vaguely annoyed. "I just man reception and feed the animals. I don't need a keycard to do that, so I don't have one."

"Although Ms Gatti was tasked with locking the outside doors," Debeste picked up, "it was Mister
Pound himself who opened everything in the morning. In fact, it's because of this we can safely eliminate Ms Gatti from any suspicion."

"I wouldn't say that just yet," Kristoph spoke up, a small smile on his lips. "The defence hasn't cross-examined her, after all."

The judge nodded. "Then go ahead, Mister Gavin. But be mindful of the young lady, is that understood?"

"Of course, Your Honour." Kristoph tapped on his Court Record for a moment to access the updating transcript, then turned to Simba with his serene smile. "Ms Gatti, you say you knocked on the victim's door before you left. Did he not reply to you at all?"

Simba didn't react for a moment, then moved a hand to press her glasses closer to her face. "I don't remember," she said.

Apollo's hand flew to his bracelet as he felt it tighten around his wrist. "Mister Gavin!" he hissed. "She's lying!"

Kristoph's eyes glanced briefly to his assistant, only to return their focus to Simba. "Are you sure?" he asked her. "It would have been the last time he spoke to you if he did. I was under the impression the staff of the shelter think of each other as family. Wouldn't you remember your last interaction with him?"

Again, Simba didn't react for several moments. Eventually, she responded, "I guess he didn't, then."

Apollo noticed Kristoph looking to him, and was forced to give his mentor a shrug; It was impossible to discern the truth from such a vague statement. Kristoph seemed to get the message and returned his gaze to the witness stand. "You still don't sound certain, Ms Gatti," he pointed out.

"I think it's obvious the witness doesn't remember, Mister Gavin," Debeste interjected, tapping his baton a little harder into the palm of his other hand. "Is it really all that relevant if he replied or not?"

"Naturally it is," Kristoph said, smiling with an almost smug air. "If he did reply, we would know without a doubt that Ms Gatti left before the murder. As it stands, she cannot prove the time she left."

"He wasn't dead when I left!" Simba suddenly cried, her nervousness giving way to anger as she glared at Kristoph, her glasses slipping down her nose to reveal her eyes beneath. "I knocked on his door and I went home!"

Apollo almost jumped back with the ferocity of Simba's proclamation, his bracelet almost painful on his wrist. "Sir...!"

Kristoph minutely nodded, and Apollo realised he had picked up on his own that Simba's reaction was off. "And how can you be so certain of that, Ms Gatti, if he didn't reply?"

Simba seemed caught off guard for a second or two, then returned to being withdrawn, pushing at her glasses to again hide her eyes while shoving her chin behind her shawl. "I... I think he did reply," she quietly admitted. "He called out to me when I knocked. He was still alive when I left."

'Convenient for her to remember that NOW,' Apollo was in the middle of thinking when his bracelet once again tightened on his wrist. 'Wait, which part of that was the lie!?’ In his brief moment of panic and not wanting the moment to slip past him, he forgot about his mentor at his side and called, "Ms Gatti, could you repeat that, please?"
Kristoph shot Apollo a stern stare of disapproval, while Simba simply sighed loudly. "I said he replied when I knocked!" she cried.

"I don't think we need to have it repeated," Kristoph interrupted, then turned to Apollo and whispered, "If you didn't hear her, we have the transcript for a reason."

"Sir, she was lying!" Apollo hissed back. "I just needed to work out exactly what the lie was!"

Kristoph opened his mouth to reply, then closed it, frowning in thought.

"Has the defence finished its cross-examination?" the judge asked.

"We still need to ask her about her argument with the victim!" Apollo whispered in reminder to his boss. "The one Luke mentioned!"

Kristoph nodded, then looked up to the judge. "Not yet, Your Honour." He returned his attention to Simba. "I had something I wanted to question, if the court would allow it."


The judge shrugged to himself. "Well, if Prosecutor Debeste doesn't mind, the court will allow it. Mister Gavin?"

"Thank you, Your Honour," Kristoph replied with a small bow, and turned to Simba. "If I may, Ms Gatti... we understand you had a rather... let's say 'rocky', relationship with the victim."

Apollo glimpsed Simba's eyes narrowing behind her glasses.

"She did?" Debeste asked, curious. "Why do you say that, Mister Gavin?"

"On the night of the murder," Kristoph continued, "she was seen arguing with Mister Pound before her co-workers left the building."

"She was!?!" the judge cried, eyes wide in shock. "That does sound suspicious!"

Simba didn't immediately reply, but then laughed with an airy tone, shaking her head. "Wow, you guys love to blow things out of proportion, don't you?"

Debeste looked unimpressed. "You're saying it's true, then?" he asked, fists tightening around his baton, though he was careful not to bend it. "Something as suspicious as that should have been passed on to me! Why didn't you tell me about it!?"

Simba shrugged. "You didn't ask," she said, still sounding amused.

"Well, we're asking now," the judge pointed out with a stern stare. "Testify to the court about this argument you had with the victim!"

Although she scoffed, Simba seemed willing to co-operate. "Honestly, it's nothing," she insisted. "We have high standards of care for the animals at our shelter, although it can be hard to keep up with so many heartless people dumping their cats and dogs on our doorstep and overcrowding us." She shot a glare into the gallery. "I was merely campaigning for our standards to be raised even higher; Larger enclosures for the animals, phasing out the use of the outdoor kennels and such." She gave Kristoph a smug smile, a hand lingering near her face. "See? Nothing to do with the murder."

Apollo frowned as he rubbed at his bracelet, then leaned towards his mentor. "She's lying again," he whispered. "On that last part. That argument was definitely related to the murder."
Not noticing the discussion at the defence bench, the judge nodded thoughtfully, stroking his beard. "Ah, I see," he said. "Indeed, it sounds like it was unrelated." He gave the witness a smile. "You should be commended for fighting so passionately for animal rights in your workplace, Ms Gatti!"

Kristoph hid his mouth behind a hand, standing closer to Apollo. "And how can you tell?" he asked.

"Her hand," Apollo explained, minutely gesturing to where Simba was again pushing at her glasses. "She keeps tugging at that shawl whenever she talks about the murder."

Simba smirked up at the judge. "Thank you," she chirped, one arm crossed across her torso while the other tugged at the coil around her neck with her ring finger and pinkie. "I would never have let a disagreement like that get in the way of my work."

"See?" Apollo quickly hissed to Kristoph. "She did it again!"

Kristoph seemed reluctant to act on Apollo's insistences for a moment, but finally clasped his hands behind his back and turned to her with an unreadable expression. "Ms Gatti, the defence believes you are lying to the court."

While everyone else looked to Kristoph in silent astonishment, Simba only laughed at the attorney. "Why would you say that?" she asked, and Apollo almost had to commend her for sounding so unconcerned in the face of a murder accusation. "Sure, I didn't mention the argument, but that was only so you guys didn't have to waste your time on it. You have 'bad guys' to find, don't you? No time for silly stories about petty disagreements, right?"

"A-and a very thoughtful action it was!" the judge cried as he regained his ability to speak. "After all, this is a court of law! We must focus on finding and punishing criminals above all else!"

Debeste shot a glare in the vague direction of the podium, clutching his baton.

"Your shawl," Kristoph pointed out, remaining calm. "Would you mind removing it for a moment?"

"No way!" Simba cried with a glare, both hands clutching at the item as though she feared Kristoph would remove it himself. "It's friggin' cold in here!"

"We will only need a moment," Kristoph assured her with a smile. "I am sure your neck will not freeze in that time."

Debeste raised an eyebrow at the defence team across from him. "And why is this so important?" he asked.

Apollo was dying to explain what he had discovered himself, but forced his mouth to stay closed.

Kristoph paused a moment, then seemed to softly sigh to himself. "When Ms Gatti mentions the murder," he reluctantly explained, "she pulls at her shawl. I was curious if the two were related somehow."

"But they are!" Apollo resisted shouting, looking up at his mentor with disappointment. 'She definitely knows more than she claims!'

Simba scoffed, waving a hand dismissively at the defence bench as she restrained laughter. "Really? You see me fiddling with my shawl and decide that means I did it? Get real! I'm fiddling with it because I don't usually wear a shawl, moron!"

Apollo bit his lip to keep from shouting at the woman, then noticed to his horror that Kristoph at his
side was pushing at his glasses, eyes closed and a chastened look on his face. "M-Mister Gavin...?" the young attorney whispered.

Debeste, however, looked thoughtful, tapping his baton against his head. "Actually, that sounds like a good idea," he said, only to blink in shock at his own words and look up with an embarrassed smile, hurriedly correcting himself with, "I-I mean, removing the shawl, of course!"

Simba's laughter died as she gave him an incredulous look.

"You agree with the defence's request, Prosecutor Debeste?" the judge asked.

Debeste nodded, looking thoughtful again. "That's a poker trick, isn't it? Watching your opponents for 'tells' that give away their hand?"

"Ah, poker!" the judge said to himself with a nostalgic smile. "I played that game in my youth! They used to call me the 'Poker Head of Courtroom 3', you know!"

Apollo looked up at the judge in confusion. 'Don't you mean 'poker face', Your Honour?'

Ignoring the judge, Debeste turned to Simba. "This will only take a moment, Ms Gatti. Please remove your shawl for the court."

"You're serious?" Simba muttered, still giving the prosecutor an incredulous stare as mutterings began to spread through the gallery. "You really wanna go along with that nonsense?"

"When murder is involved, I'm always serious," Debeste replied with an even stare, then he slammed his baton down on his desk with a loud THWACK that instantly silenced the courtroom. "Now remove your shawl, Ms Gatti!"

Although she huffed to herself in disagreement, Simba reluctantly unlooped her shawl from around her neck and pulled it off with a final tug. Her neck, now laid bare for the entire room to see, was covered in red scratches, standing out against her pale skin as the lines stretched across her collarbone and up towards her chin. Her hand hovered not far away, wanting to continue covering up the injuries even as the gallery gasped and muttered amongst themselves at the unexpected sight. "There," she muttered. "Happy now?"

View the Court Record
The gallery continued to mutter amongst themselves as all attention was locked to Simba's scratched neck, the injuries plain to see even from a distance.

Kristoph smiled to himself. "Ah, looks like your hunch was right after all," he quietly told Apollo, who grinned with pride in response.

The judge rapped his gavel a few times, calling, "Order! Order!" as the discussion in the gallery slowly quietened back down. Sighing, he sternly looked down at Simba. "And how exactly did you come by such injuries, Ms Gatti?"

"Exactly!" Debeste cried in agreement, angry tears threatening in his eyes as he clung to his baton so hard Apollo worried it might snap in half. "Why didn't you mention that, witness!?"

After a moment, Simba's small smile returned to her face, and she shrugged. "There you go again, making a mountain out of a molehill," she said. "You're really gonna kick yourselves when you hear the truth this time."

Debeste seemed furious, but Apollo thought he was doing an admirable job holding it in, taking a deep breath to calm himself down and, just for good measure, slamming his baton against the desk again. "Testify, Ms Gatti!" the prosecutor ordered. "Why did you keep those injuries a secret!?"

Simba scoffed, idly waving a hand disinterestedly. "I have a cat," she said. "Her name's Servalan; Haughty little white fluffball, like her namesake. She doesn't like baths, and, y'know, she kinda needed one the other night." She shot a smirk at the defence bench. "Do I need to say any more?"

The courtroom stared at her in shocked silence for several moments. Apollo was lost for words, unable to see any sign she was lying, but unwilling to believe every nervous twitch he had been chasing to this point had been simply because of an upset cat.

Kristoph's eyes narrowed. "And you say this happened the night of the murder?"

"Mm-hmm," Simba replied, smiling like the cat who got the cream. "Tore my favourite necklace to pieces while she was at it. And now I can't go out without looking like someone tried to strangle me!"

"That's quite the co-incidence," Kristoph pointed out.

Simba rolled her eyes. "Y'see why I didn't bother mentioning it? Some asshole like you would insist I'm lying."

Apollo shook his head, his hand resting on his bracelet. "She has to be lying!" he hissed. "I know she was covering up something to do with the murder!"

Kristoph shot Apollo a glare. "I think you've said enough, Wright."
Shocked at his mentor's angry stare, Apollo jumped back a step. "B-but...!" he protested, only for Kristoph's continued disapproving look to quieten the younger attorney.

Debeste sighed, looking just as unhappy with the situation as Apollo. "It would be impossible to prove whether or not Ms Gatti gave her cat a bath on the night of the murder," he pointed out to the court. "I suppose, if the defence has no objections, we have no choice but to end her testimony here."

"I should hope the defence has no more objections!" the judge proclaimed, more on the 'angry' side of the 'upset' scale. "We wasted all that time establishing nothing more than that Ms Gatti loves animals and owns a cat!" Kristoph seemed slightly shaken at the disapproval, pushing at his glasses to avoid meeting anyone's gazes. "Prosecutor Debeste, do you have another witness to call?"

Debeste nodded. "I do, Your Honour."

"Then prepare your next witness!" the judge ordered. "In the meantime, this court will take a recess!" With that, he slammed down his gavel with a decisive whack.

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"I'm glad you pointed out that shawl, at least," Luke told Apollo as they sat together on the sofa in the lobby. "Simba doesn't normally wear that. She has a necklace, a blue one with coins on it, that she's always had on, before today anyway."

Apollo nodded. "Ms Fox mentioned it, I think," he said, though he couldn't recall in the moment why or exactly what the other woman had said. "But she honestly didn't seem suspicious at all to you? You know her better than us!"

Luke meekly smiled. "She doesn't look it, but Simba's really shy. She always gives a bad first impression because she deals with it by acting... well, like she did on the stand."

"Seriously!?!" Apollo cried, then ran a hand over his face in frustration, leaning forward on his knees. "She has to be hiding something about the murder!"

"I'm pretty sure she isn't," Luke assured his brother, patting his shoulder. "Simba's not the best at social stuff. She's argumentative and haughty," he paused to giggle, "like her cat Servalan, actually! She has a heart of gold, though. It's just... not very many people get to see it. I don't think she has many friends outside us at the shelter."

'I can see why,' Apollo darkly thought, but decided not to upset his brother by saying so out loud. Instead, he just sighed. "I hope you're right," he quietly replied.

Not far away, Kristoph was standing alone, rereading through his case-file. "I imagine the next witness will be Mister Wildgrube," he said, casting a glance at Luke. "Anything you could share about him?"

Luke thought for a moment, his hand still resting on Apollo's shoulder. "He'll... probably be doing his best to give you all a hard time," he reluctantly admitted with a wince.

Apollo looked up at his brother, raising an eyebrow. "Why? Does he want you to be found guilty?!"
Suddenly seeming disheartened, Luke looked away, clutching his hands together. "I hope not..." he muttered.

"The prosecution wouldn't be calling him as a witness unless he was beneficial to their case," Kristoph pointed out, giving Apollo a hard look. "We already know he was in the building at the time of the murder. He could have all manner of things to say that would harm our case, very little of which I have confidence we can disprove."

"But if Reindeer does lie," Luke said, turning to Apollo with a hopeful smile, "you'll point it out, won't you?"

"Of course!" Apollo instantly replied with a determined look. "I'm not letting what he has to say convict you of murder!"

Kristoph shook his head with a disapproving gaze. "I'd rather you didn't," he told the younger attorney. "Not after that debacle with Ms Gatti. Keep your 'poker tricks' to your father's games in future, Wright."

Apollo and Luke were both too shocked to respond for a moment. "But, sir-!" Apollo cried.

"No 'buts'," Kristoph interrupted with a stern frown. "Unless you have the evidence to prove you have a lead, something as vague as 'the witness's eye twitched' is no more than simply bluffing." He briefly paused to push at his glasses, then turned back to Apollo with a softened gaze. "I do understand bluffing was your father's strategy in the courtroom, but it was that same unplanned conducting of his cases that resulted in his disbarment. I won't have you falling into the same pitfalls, Apollo."

Apollo found he couldn't object, and meekly looked away. 'I... guess he has a point, there...'

Luke thought to himself for a moment. "What about the prosecutor?" he asked. "Couldn't we ask him to help us?"

"He's supposed to be trustworthy," Apollo explained, reasoning Luke had likely been told the same thing by Phoenix while in the detention centre, not to mention also having heard Ernest's glowing praise the previous day. "Focused on finding the truth, rather than just convicting the first person the police arrest."

Kristoph scoffed, pressing at his glasses. "Sebastian Debeste, trustworthy?" He shook his head. "I'm sure you heard that from certain contacts of your father's in the prosecutor's office, did you not?"

"Debeste' is possibly the least trustworthy name to have ever entered that office," Kristoph continued, smiling. "His father, Blaise Debeste, was the Chief Prosecutor in his day, not to mention the Chairman of the P.I.C.; Today, he's more well-known as a convicted murderer and forger, amongst other things."


"Prosecutorial Investigation Committee," Apollo explained. "It's the prosecution's version of the Bar Association." As Luke nodded in understanding, Apollo turned to Kristoph with a puzzled look.
"But what does his father have to do with anything? This Debeste seems pretty focussed on the right things to me."

Kristoph shook his head dismissively. "A prosecutor can appear to be many things, but by their very nature they can never be focussed on the 'right' thing."

Luke frowned, looking somewhat offended. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"The prosecutor's job is to find the defendant, in this case you, guilty," Kristoph pointed out. "The defence attorney's is to find you not guilty. Being in such total opposition, it would be... unnatural were one to join the other's side." As Luke tapped his chin thoughtfully, Kristoph brushed at his fringe, continuing, "Besides, if there is one thing this Debeste is known for other than his father, it would be his rather disastrous first year in the field." He smiled. "He graduated from Themis Legal Academy in the same year as my brother, the top of their class. He was called a prodigy... until it came out that his 'top marks' were all falsified."

Luke gasped, while Apollo's eyes widened in surprise. "What!?" the younger attorney cried. "He... cheated!?!"

"You didn't know?" Kristoph replied, clearly enjoying being the one to tell the brothers the story. "It was only because of his father's influence he didn't have his badge stripped from him immediately." He shrugged nonchalantly, though his amused smile remained. "It's like I said before, Wright; You can never trust a prosecutor, no matter their first impression."

With that, Kristoph turned and left the brothers to mull over his words, Luke looking almost as scared as he had been before the trial while Apollo was simply confused. 'Who do I trust?' he asked himself. 'Mister Gavin, or Uncle Edgeworth?' He sighed, putting a comforting arm over his brother at his side. 'For now, I guess I have no choice but to trust Mister Gavin. I'll... have to ask Uncle Edgeworth for the full story another day...'

[View the Court Record]
The gavel banging from the podium instantly quietened the crowds in the gallery, and the judge, seeming calmer than he had been before he left, announced, "Court is now back in session!"

Apollo, stood next to his mentor behind the defence bench, cast a wary glance to the prosecutor opposite them. Although Sebastian Debeste didn't look any different than he had before, the young attorney couldn't help seeing him in a different light; Phoenix had passed on from Edgeworth that the man in the dark scarf was someone they could trust to ensure a correct verdict, but, despite Ernest's high praise, Debeste was still here in court pushing for Luke's conviction. Apollo was starting to suspect Kristoph might be correct to not put any faith in their opponent... but, on the other hand, wasn't putting faith in their opponent what had allowed Phoenix and Edgeworth to become such good friends?

The judge turned to the prosecutor. "Your witness is prepared, Prosecutor Debeste?"

Debeste nodded. "Yes, Your Honour."

"Then go ahead and call them to the stand," the judge requested.

A minute later, the bailiffs escorted to the stand a grey-haired man in a labcoat, face wrinkled with age and long hair dangling over his shoulder in a loose ponytail. As he arrived at their destination, he somewhat impatiently waved away the guards on either side, lounging on the stand almost cockily as he looked around the courtroom. "Man, what a dump!" he cried.

Apollo noticed Debeste immediately sigh and bury his face in his hands.

"E-excuse me?" the judge muttered, eyes wide with shock before they quickly narrowed. "My courtroom is not a... dump!"

"That so?" the man at the witness stand replied, shooting a smirk at the top of the podium. "Could've fooled me."

Kristoph frowned at the witness, whispering to Apollo, "I see what your brother means about him giving us a hard time." Apollo simply nodded in agreement.

"Ignore his taunts, Your Honour," Debeste advised, already looking tired of the elderly man's antics. He pointed his baton at the witness stand. "Witness, please state your name and occupation for the court. Quickly."

The witness scoffed, idly brushing a long lock of loose hair from his face. "Doctor Dolittle," he said with a grin. "Veterinarian."

Instantly there was a loud THWACK as Debeste slammed his baton against his desk, glaring at the witness. "Your real name!" he ordered. "Do not waste the court's time!"

"What, you don't believe me?" the grey-haired man replied with a teasing look, jerking a thumb
behind him. "Got a pushmi-pullyu in the back I can show off if you like!"

Debeste ran a hand over his face, barely restraining a frustrated groan.

Apollo found himself feeling sympathetic for the prosecutor. 'Luke really wasn't kidding... Poor guy. ' "I refuse to play these games with you a second time!" Debeste cried, angrily pointing his baton at the veterinarian. "Introduce yourself to this court, Mister Wildgrube!"

Reindeer shrugged, the smug grin on his face. "Sounds to me like you just did," he pointed out, then paused to laugh as Debeste groaned again. "Wow, you're really wound up, law-boy. You oughta learn to take a joke."

Apollo could have sworn he saw Debeste's eye twitching in barely contained rage.

Reindeer laughed, then waved dismissively in the direction of the judge. "Rudolf Wildgrube," he announced, apparently deciding to finally take pity on the prosecutor. "I'm a pretty good veterinarian, if I do say so myself. And I do." He chuckled at his own joke. "They call me 'Reindeer' 'round the shelter, 'cause I got a nose for trouble."

The judge gave the witness a disapproving look. "Mister Wildgrube, surely even you have better things to do than make puns and cause trouble in this court."

"Maybe," Reindeer admitted with a shrug, his smirk unchanging, "but what do you expect from an old man? I gotta get my kicks somewhere!"

Still disapproving of the witness's antics, the judge turned to the prosecutor's bench. "Prosecutor Debeste, why exactly is this witness here?"

With great effort, Debeste managed to calm himself down. "If you'll recall those keycard records we submitted at the beginning of this trial," he explained, "there was a name on them other than the victim and defendant." He flicked at his tablet, and the holograms activated to display the mentioned logs.

The judge peered at his screen, quickly finding the extra name between Pound's and Luke's. "Wildgrube?" he read. "I thought you said only the victim and defendant were in the shelter at the time of the murder."

"And that is why Mister Wildgrube is on the stand," Debeste explained with a sigh, apparently not wanting to bring up they'd discussed Reindeer's presence at the beginning of the trial. "To explain that he was already gone by the time of the murder."

The judge thought for a moment, then turned to Reindeer with a stern look. "Alright then, Mister Wildgrube: Testify to this court about the night of the murder."

Reindeer looked thoughtful for a moment, one hand rubbing at his nose, and Apollo almost believed he was about to answer seriously until he noticed the hint of a smile on the old man's face. "The what now?"

The entire courtroom seemed to sigh in frustration. Debeste pressed his hand to his face for a moment before running it through his hair, and stared Reindeer down. "Mister Wildgrube," he ordered, "just tell the court what you told me on Saturday night."

"Hmm, Saturday?" Reindeer repeated, again hiding a small smile behind a thoughtful frown. "Nope, I've plum forgotten Saturday." He smirked at Debeste as the prosecutor's face fell. "'Fraid you'll have
to remind me, bright spark."

Lost for words, Debeste leaned forward onto his desk, hiding his face in his arms in silent despair.

The judge gave Reindeer a stern glare. "Mister Wildgrube, if you do not co-operate, I will be forced to find you in contempt of court," he explained.

"I do not think that would help, Your Honour," Kristoph spoke up, hands calmly clasped behind his back. "Mister Wildgrube seems content to cause chaos regardless of the outcome." He paused to push at his glasses, hiding a smile that Apollo only saw due to his position at his mentor's side. "After all, if he was truly as close to the defendant as we had been told, he would be fighting to have him exonerated, not convicted."

Reindeer's joking façade finally seemed to fall as he fixed Kristoph with a glare. "I'm not fighting for Northpaw to be convicted," he said, deceptively calmly given the anger in his expression. "Why should I trust you lot to find the right person, anyway? You're all corrupt as hell."

Murmurs spread throughout the gallery, and the judge looked shocked for a moment before frowning at the accusation. "I will choose to ignore your wild allegations for the moment, witness," he growled, only to then look confused. "Who is 'Northpaw'?"

"Your ruddy 'defendant'!" Reindeer shot back. "Luke Wright! You got wool in your ears, Santa!?"

"I do not!" the judge replied offended. "And kindly refrain from that kind of reference when there might be children in the gallery!"

"For a murder trial?" Reindeer pointed out, eyebrow raised.

"Mister Wildgrube!" Debeste interrupted, having returned to his feet. "Will you now testify properly for this court or not?"

Reindeer was silent for several moments, then finally sighed, staring off to the side. "Sure, whatever."

"Then go ahead, witness," the judge ordered, looking relieved. "The night of the murder, if you please."

"Alright, alright," Reindeer muttered, rolling his eyes. "Keep your beard on." He shifted behind the stand for a few moments, running a hand through the hair hanging at the side of his face, then looked up. "We packed everything up around six. Fox and me, Fox being our other vet, we were heading home, but Northpaw and the boss were hanging around a while longer." He paused in thought. "Simba, the receptionist, she were about to go, but I couldn't say exactly when. I'd left my keys behind, actually. I didn't see her when I went back for 'em."

The judge's eyebrows shot up. "Ah! So you were back in the building looking for your keys!" he proclaimed, then smiled. "I've lost my keys more times than I can count, myself! Always in the last place you look, you know!"

"And you found your keys, correct?" Debeste interrupted, watching Reindeer sternly.

"Of course I did," Reindeer snapped. "Couldn't get back into my house without 'em, could I!?"

Apollo felt his bracelet tighten, and shot a wary glance up at the unsuspecting Kristoph at his side. 'Mister Gavin would kill me if I spoke up now... But what can I do?'
"So Ms Gatti had gone when you came back for your keys?" the judge asked. "Where were they, by the way?"

"Sitting on the front desk," Reindeer replied, and Apollo had to bite his lip to keep from calling out the lie. "I guess Simba found them on her rounds." He paused, rubbing at the back of his neck. "I guess she must have left if her rounds were completed, but she might have still been finishing up somewhere."

The judge nodded. "I see nothing to argue with there."

"That may be so," Kristoph spoke up with a smile, "but the defence is still entitled to a cross-examination, Your Honour. May I proceed?"

"I-I guess so," the judge agreed, seeming surprised, then gave Kristoph a stern stare. "Be warned, Mister Gavin; I see little reason to drag this trial out much further when the defendant's guilt is this clear."

Kristoph nodded in understanding, then turned to Reindeer, who watched with a wary frown. "Mister Wildgrube," he began, "am I to understand you have only your own word as evidence you were not even aware of the murder until the next day?"

"Of course I wasn't!" Reindeer shot back, almost offended. "Didn't see no-one, didn't hear nothing! I found my keys and I got out of there!"

'Argh, we're getting nowhere with this!' In a fit of righteous anger on his brother's behalf at the man's lies, Apollo slammed his fists into the bench in front of him, giving the old witness a furious glare. "Tell the truth, Mister Reindeer!" he shouted. "Don't you realise what will happen to Luke if you keep lying like that!?"

Reindeer looked surprised, as did most of the court, staring at Apollo with wide eyes as though only just noticing him. "Huh?" he cried.

"You didn't find your keys, did you!?" Apollo continued. "You saw or heard something in the shelter that night, something important!"

Kristoph stared down at his assistant in anger. "Wright! Enough!"

As Apollo fixed a glare on the bench in front of him, fists shaking at his sides, the judge rapped his gavel to call the suddenly-noisy court back to order. "Is the defence making the claim that Mister Wildgrube did not, in fact, recover his keys and return home that night?" he asked, frowning at the pair on his left. "I hope you have evidence of this if you are."

Debeste waved his baton with an almost smug smile. "I should warn the defence, we have proof he returned home that night," he said. "How could he have done so without his keys?"

Being so ridiculed by the court had visibly upset Kristoph, who couldn't keep his frown off his face as he glared wide-eyed at the judge and prosecutor. "The defence... guarantees there will be no more unruly outbursts," he announced through gritted teeth, firmly avoiding even acknowledging the equally upset young man at his side.

The judge nodded. "Good," he said, then held up his gavel, ready to bang on his desk at a moment's notice. "Is your cross-examination over?" His stern look made it painfully clear he was asking a rhetorical question.

Kristoph almost jumped in visible horror. "N-no, Your Honour, we're not done yet!"
"Wait, no!" Apollo cried, forgetting his fear of his mentor in the face of his brother's terrifyingly close conviction.

"I am ready to call my verdict," the judge announced, eyes closed. "I find the defendant, Luke Wright-"

"STOP!"
As the shout rang through the silent courtroom, everyone turned in shock to stare in the direction of the witness stand, where Reindeer stood tall, a hand reaching out towards the judge's podium and a fearful look on his face. "You can't find him guilty, not yet!" he called. "I'm not done talking!"

Debeste narrowed his eyes at the old man, gripping his baton tightly. "Don't tell me there was something else significant you've been hiding... unless this is just another one of your ridiculous time-wasting tricks!"

"It's not!" Reindeer promised, looking more serious than Apollo had ever seen him. "I...!" He sighed, and Apollo thought he glimpsed the man glancing in the direction of the defence bench. "I guess I was wrong not to trust the courts... or Northpaw, enough to tell the whole truth." He looked up, meeting a surprised Apollo's eyes. "Sorry about that, Southpaw."

Apollo could only stare back at the man, lost for words. At his side, he heard Kristoph softly sighing in relief at the momentary reprieve from Luke's sentencing.

Debeste gritted his teeth, bending his baton for a several long moments before seeming to regain control of himself with a sigh, apparently too tired to keep up his anger at the troublesome witness. "Alright then, Mister Wildgrube," he agreed, pointing the metal stick at the man. "Your full testimony, if you please. Nothing left out this time."

Reindeer nodded, arms hanging at his sides as he thought. "I... didn't find my keys," he admitted. "I had to borrow the spare from the landlord to get into my apartment." He closed his eyes, crossing his arms and frowning to himself. "I didn't see anyone while I was in the building. I guessed Northpaw was in the recuperation room, as always, the boss would've been in his office, and Simba was either on her rounds or had gone home... probably gone home, because I didn't run into her. I looked around the reception, then the dog enclosures, and the grooming area." He paused, then shook his head. "After that, I went home. Thought I'd come back the next day to try again in the sunlight."

Apollo rubbed at his bracelet, a part of him pleased it hadn't reacted at all, but most of him simply sad to see the man his brother had often spoken so highly of over the years so melancholy.

Debeste glared at his witness, but ultimately decided not to ask why it was only now the old vet had finally stopped messing around. Sighing, he toyed with the baton in his hands. "Alright then. Defence, your cross-examination?"

The judge blinked in surprise. "That's my job!" he pointed out. Debeste simply whacked his baton on his desk, causing the old man to jump. "Um, go ahead," he continued.

Kristoph calmly nodded, pushing at his glasses before giving the witness a neutral stare. "Mister Wildgrube, you say you halted your search after already looking through a number of rooms," he pointed out. "Why exactly did you decide to stop then, instead of continuing your search?"

Reindeer looked vaguely uncomfortable, shrugging in response. "It was dark," he eventually explained. "The building felt totally empty of other people, though I knew Northpaw and the boss
were there at the very least. I..." He paused, glaring into the distance. "I can't believe I'm about to admit this, but..." Sighing, he shook his head. "I got scared. I ran out of there with my tail between my legs."

Apollo wasn't quite sure how to take the old man's admission, turning to his mentor to whisper, "He's not lying." Kristoph didn't reply, concentrating on his own thoughts.

"And was it something in particular that unnerved you?" Debeste asked, seeming curious at the new information. "A scream, a howling dog...?"

Reindeer barked a short laugh at the prosecutor's suggestion. "There ain't nothing unnerving about a regular ol' dog howl," he answered with a grin. "Especially after such a busy day! Nuh-uh, this were more than that." His smile faded back into a serious frown. "I heard something crashing. It sounded like... I dunno, a slamming door and a small avalanche of hard objects. Could've been from inside the building, or just outside on the street somewhere." He shrugged. "I'm an old man, so I'd be pretty terrible in a fight. Didn't help that it was dark. I got paranoid there was a gang waiting for me outside or something, so I left."

"Goodness, a gang!?" the judge cried.

"Yep," Reindeer replied, smiling. "Never had anything to do with one in reality, and it's not like the shelter's in a bad neighbourhood or anything, but you can't exactly reason with irrational paranoia."

The judge thought for a moment, then nodded in understanding. "Very true," he agreed.

Kristoph simply smiled to himself. "And this testimony alone debunks the prosecution's claim that the defendant was the only other person in the building at the time of the murder," he pointed out.

Debeste frowned. "How?" he asked.

"The sound Mister Wildgrube described," Kristoph pointed out. "That would easily match a falling bookcase, would it not?"

The courtroom seemed to gasp in surprise at the new fact, but the judge seemed confused. "Yes, but it doesn't effect anything else regarding this case, does it?" he reasoned. "The evidence still overwhelmingly points to Mister Wright."

Apollo glared up at the bearded man, hands curling into fists. *Then we'll have to persuade him to get Ms Simba back out here! This time we'll break her for sure!* Kristoph shook his head, his smile almost smug. "In that case, it appears the defence finally has some evidence for the court that will change its mind," he announced.

Everyone turned to look at Kristoph in surprise, including Apollo. *Wait, we do?* he wondered.

The elder attorney reached into his suitcase under the bench, retrieving a small plastic bag that Apollo could hear jingling. "I believe," he continued, looking to Reindeer as he held the bag high for all to see, "we recovered your keys, Mister Wildgrube."

The gallery murmured in confusion, and, out of the corner of his eye, Apollo noticed Debeste frowning at the defence team, the prosecutor's baton idly tapping against his other hand. Reindeer, however, peered across the courtroom to the clear plastic bag, a handful of loose keys inside. After a moment, his eyes widened in vague surprise. "Huh," he muttered. "Those do look like mine."

Kristoph continued to smile. "Then you confirm they are indeed yours, Mister Wildgrube?"
Reindeer thought a moment more before nodding, giving Kristoph a smile. "Yep. Guess I should thank you, then. Where'd you find 'em?"

The judge gave Kristoph a disapproving frown. "And how exactly is this relevant to the murder, Mister Gavin?" he asked. "If you wished to return the witness's missing keys-!"

"Ah, the location is the most important part," Kristoph continued, apparently choosing to ignore the judge as his attention remained on Reindeer. "As you might have noticed, there are five keys here." Lowering the bag in his grip, he used his other hand to tap at the screen of his Court Record, bringing up on the holograms the picture he and Apollo had taken of the smudged bloodstain on the floor of the office. "This is a series of unusual markings the culprit left in the blood of his victim, five in total. As you can see, he tried to hide them, but the original outlines left in the pooling blood are still very clear."

"Goodness!" the judge cried, leaning towards his screen as he took in the image. "This was left on the floor of the crime scene? This looks like important evidence!" He turned to his right with a stern frown. "Why did the prosecution not bring it up earlier?"

Debeste looked sheepish. "I-it was a loose end," he admitted. "We found no trace of what had been there, nor what the defendant might have done with them afterwards."

"Allow me to fill in the dots, then," Kristoph almost cheerfully replied, again holding up his bag of Reindeer's keys. "As you might have noticed, Mister Wildgrube's keys are all loose. They lack a keyring of any kind to tie them together."

Reindeer nodded, flicking at the long hair in his face with an embarrassed look. "Yeah, I was keepin' 'em on a string. I can't deal with regular keyrings; They're just impossible to get things on or off..." He frowned. "Actually, what happened to the string?"

"I imagine it broke in the struggle," Kristoph suggested, still smiling as he held the bag high for all to see. "After all, if you'll look, these keys still bear the markings of blood on them."

"What!?" Reindeer cried as he realised what Kristoph was suggesting, and the rest of the courtroom seemed to gasp with him, including Apollo. "What are you...!?" The gallery quickly erupted into discussion, giving Reindeer suspicious looks as the old man slowly began to glare at the elder attorney. "You can't be serious!"

Although looking shocked himself, the judge slammed his gavel a few times to bring the court to order. "Bailiff!!" he ordered. "Fetch me those keys!" As one of the court officials quickly complied, the judge turned his attention to the prosecutor's bench, where Debeste had gone pale, gripping his baton so hard it looked like it was about to either snap or fly into his face. "Prosecutor Debeste, I'm sure you can arrange for these items to be tested to ensure this is the victim's blood." The prosecutor meekly nodded, and the judge was again distracted as the bailiff arrived at his side with Kristoph's bag of keys. Taking it, the bearded official studied the evidence and, after a long moment, nodded. "This does indeed look like blood." He handed it back to the bailiff, who quickly rushed the bag out of the room, presumably to forensics.

"I don't believe this!" Reindeer shouted, by now giving Kristoph a full-on angry glare, leaning heavily on the witness stand in front of him. "You cannot be claiming-!"

"It appears you did indeed find your keys," Kristoph interrupted, cool as a cucumber in contrast to Reindeer's barely contained rage, "if they'd ever been lost in the first place. Regardless, you did drop them in the struggle with your employer, leaving those marks in his blood. But you were too smart to leave them where they were, where they could tie the murder back to you." He paused, pushing on
his glasses with a triumphant look. "You collected them up and tried to hide where they had been, only to finally lose them all in the process of cleaning up the rest of your mess." The attorney flicked at his tablet, changing the holograms back to the map of the shelter, on which he quickly highlighted the first storeroom and the toilet within, just down the hall from the office. "You cleaned the murder weapon in the bathroom, and threw it out the window there. I found three on the floor of that room: one behind the toilet, one underneath the sink and another behind the door. The other two were dropped out in the storeroom, lodged under some of the boxes there." Switching off the holograms, Kristoph smiled serenely at the witness stand. "It's not hard to imagine you kicked them under those stores in your rush to clean up. By the time you noticed you'd left them behind, it was too late; The murder had been discovered, and there was no way for you to safely retrieve them."

Apollo stared wide-eyed between his mentor and the man at the witness stand, too overwhelmed by the sudden rising situation to even form coherent thoughts. His bracelet clung tighter to his wrist with every word Kristoph said.

"You bastard!" Reindeer shouted, shaking a fist in the defence's direction. "I trusted you to get Northpaw off, and this is how you repay me!"

"Is the defence formally accusing Mister Wildgrube of the crime in question?" the judge asked, gavel in hand.

Kristoph nodded. "We are."

"NO!" came a shout from somewhere behind the gallery, and Luke came dashing, panicked, out of the small side-room he'd been placed in when not on the stand. "YOU CAN'T!" Before the young man got very far, a pair of bailiffs sprinted into his path, colliding with Luke and just barely avoiding knocking him to the ground as the labcoated vet struggled in their tight grip. "REINDEER DIDN'T DO IT!"

The courtroom seemed to erupt into chaotic noise, the judge fruitlessly banging his gavel as he called for order. Apollo, concerned for his brother, slid past his mentor to run for him, only for a hissed warning from Kristoph, "Wright!", to call him to a halt. On second thought, Apollo wasn't even sure what he planned to do once he reached Luke; Calm him down, or free him from the bailiffs to help him object to the clear violation of justice going on with Kristoph's accusation?

"Say I did it!" Luke continued to shout, starting to tire in his fight against the bailiffs. "I'll be guilty! Just don't say it was Reindeer!"

Reindeer watched the whole thing with a stunned expression, above all else listening to Luke's cries. Above the chaos rose a single shout: "I did it! I murdered him!"

View the Court Record
Finally, the commotion in the courtroom began to die down as, one by one, everyone heard the passionate declarations from the centre of the room: "I did it! It was me, okay? I admit I killed him!"

Luke was frozen in shock, staring wide-eyed at his friend at the witness stand. "Reindeer...!"

"Everything that idiot," Reindeer gestured to a smug Kristoph, "said about my keys was true! I'm a damn dirty murderer and I tried to pin it on Northpaw!"

"Mister Wildgrube!" the judge cried in shock. "Are you... confessing?"

Apollo couldn't believe his eyes, his hand gripping his bracelet as it tightened on his wrist at the old vet's words. 'Mister Reindeer, no!'

Reindeer scoffed. "Of course I am!" he insisted. "You think I was happy about those two young things taking my job?"

Debeste looked uncertain, his baton shaking in his hand. "W-wait, Mister Wildgrube-!"

"So I killed the boss to get back at him!" Reindeer continued, arms crossed as he glared up at the judge, daring someone to contradict him. "He cut my wages to chase me into retirement in favour of them, so it was never going to work out anyway!"

"Reindeer, no!" Luke shouted, seeming to regain some energy in his struggle with the bailiffs. "The wage cut was your suggestion, don't lie for my sake!"

"And who told you it was my suggestion, huh?" Reindeer snapped, only half turning towards Luke as he glared at nothing in particular, avoiding meeting the young man's gaze. "Face it, kid; You were an idiot if you ever looked up to me. Aren't you supposed to be the smart one with that fancy doctorate of yours? You should've guessed this was coming a long time ago."

Luke couldn't speak for a moment, shaking his head as he stared at his friend, no longer struggling against the bailiffs. "N-no..." His legs seemed to give out suddenly, and the bailiffs, instead of holding him back, were now struggling to hold the young man up.

Debeste frowned in thought, minimising his baton. "I guess that makes sense," he agreed, then placed his baton on his desk as he tapped at his tablet, bringing up the image of the bloodstained coat. "After all, this labcoat here could just as easily be the witness's as the defendant's."

"Exactly!" Reindeer cried, then turned his glare to the judge. "Hurry up and name me guilty already!"

The judge sighed. "I'm afraid that would have to wait for another trial," he pointed out. "This one specifically pertains only to Mister Wright." Looking to Debeste, he continued, "Is the prosecution lifting the charges against the defendant to agree with the defence's claim?"
"Of course it is!" Reindeer cut in. "It's the truth, isn't it?"

Debeste looked uncertain for a moment, then strengthened his resolve and gave the judge a firm nod. "It is, Your Honour."

"About time!" Reindeer cried.

Ignoring the witness, Debeste gestured to the side room near the prosecutor's desk, and Fulbright, followed by a policeman, emerged. They approached the man at the stand, who waved off their attempts to grab him as he proudly strode off in the direction they had come from. Although slightly confused, the pair rushed after him.

With the witness stand now free, the two bailiffs supporting Luke dragged him back to his feet and escorted him to the stand, where the young vet meekly stood, leaning heavily on the object as he stared at the floor in shock. Apollo longed to run to his brother and comfort him, but, knowing that was impossible just yet, instead quietly slunk back behind the defence bench, Kristoph giving his assistant no more than a glance as he reappeared at his side.

"I suppose that leaves us with only the verdict," the judge announced to the all-too-quiet courtroom. He took up his gavel. "This court finds the defendant, Luke Wright, not guilty." With that, he banged his gavel, and hidden cannons throughout the room exploded, sending confetti everywhere as the gallery cheered.

Kristoph smiled as he looked up at the falling pieces of brightly coloured paper. "All in all, a successful trial, was it not?"

Apollo couldn't make himself reply.

December 1, 11:07AM
District Court
Defendant Lobby No. 6

Luke hadn't said a word since Reindeer's arrest, mutely following his brother back to the defendant lobby and sinking into the sofa, staring straight ahead. Apollo sat at his side, patting his brother's back comfortingly.

"I'll admit, most of that trial could have gone a lot better," Kristoph mused aloud as he went over the case file one last time. "Although it wasn't an ideal situation, we did manage to achieve our goal of proving Luke's innocence."

Apollo idly nodded in agreement, keeping his attention primarily on his brother. He wanted to comfort him, but was stuck on how. Saying 'it's okay' just rang false, neither of them truly believing it, and 'you're fine' sounded plain selfish, focussing on Luke's acquittal over Reindeer's potential death sentence for a crime he didn't commit. Not to mention, the one thing Apollo couldn't allow himself to do was display distrust of his mentor, not if he wanted to help Phoenix's long term plans, and now more than ever those plans were clashing with his loyalty to his siblings. In the end, the young lawyer was forced to sit silently at his brother's side, patting his back in an imitation of their father.

The door of the lobby opened, and the trio inside looked up to see, to their surprise, Sebastian Debeste entering the room, hands in his pockets. Apollo jumped to his feet, protectively standing in
front of his brother, but Kristoph held up a hand to signal for his assistant to stay calm. Debeste seemed unsurprised by their reactions, looking between Apollo and Luke with a sympathetic gaze. "I promise I don't mean any harm. I just want to apologise."

Apollo blinked in surprise, unsure how to react. Luke, watching the prosecutor from behind his brother's protective stance, quickly came to his own decision, standing up and gently pushing Apollo aside to approach the taller man. "Reindeer didn't do it," he told Debeste with a stern gaze.

Debeste nodded. "You've made your thoughts quite clear on that," he agreed, "but the evidence does seem to say otherwise."

"The evidence is wrong, then," Luke calmly insisted. "None of us would have killed Mister Pound for any reason. It had to have been someone else trying to frame us!"

"Luke!" Apollo hissed, nudging his brother's back as he ran around to his side, where Luke sent him a glare. "We discussed this, it had to have been an employee!"

Gently clearing his throat, Debeste called the brothers' attention back to him, looking between the two with a surprisingly understanding gaze. "Mister Wildgrube's guilt will be determined later," he pointed out. "I came here because I wanted to apologise for the false arrest."

Apollo blinked in surprise, but Luke frowned suspiciously. "For me or for Reindeer?" the younger of the pair asked.

Debeste smiled a little. "The verdict is still out on Mister Wildgrube, I'm afraid," he replied, before his smile faded. "I am sorry about him, by the way. Was he your mentor?"

Now it was Luke's turn to be surprised, and he had to think for several long moments. "I... guess so," he admitted. "One of... a few, actually. I... never really thought about it like that before."

"Even so," Debeste continued, still watching Luke with a sympathetic stare, "I know what it feels like... when you find out someone you've idolised for so long, never really deserved it. It's... hard to accept, and it feels absolutely awful to even consider it, but... in the end, no amount of denial can change the truth."

As Luke stared at the floor in thought, Apollo found himself watching the prosecutor curiously. 'Wait... this is the guy who used his father to get his badge...? A-and managed to keep it even after everyone found out he hadn't earned it?'

"I'll look over all the evidence a few extra times before taking Mister Wildgrube to court," Debeste promised. "This time, I'll make sure we have the right person before taking them before a judge."

Luke mutely nodded, still staring at the floor, and Apollo noticed the tell-tale signs of his brother beginning to tear up. 'Not surprising, I was waiting for that.' He rested a hand on Luke's shoulder, squeezing to offer comfort, and Luke lifted his other hand to rest on Apollo's in silent appreciation.

"Again, I am sorry about what happened," Debeste elected to continue in the face of Luke's silence, looking somewhat embarrassed. "I'll... be the first to admit I'm not exactly the brightest spark, but I always do my best to make sure I have the right person when I take a case to court."

Luke's shoulders began to visibly shake, a single tear spilling down his cheek. "Everyone who's ever betrayed me in the past... they've never really meant it, not if they were really my friend!"

"Then I suppose Mister Wildgrube wasn't," Debeste gently pointed out.
Apollo watched his brother cry for only a moment more before gently pulling him away from the prosecutor. "Thank you for your concern, Mister Debeste," he told the taller man. "It means a lot to us."

Debeste nodded once, giving the crying Luke a sympathetic glance before turning and leaving the room.

View the Court Record
It was a disparate group that wafted around aimlessly in the hallway outside the defendant lobby. Although most of them stood against the wall, several had taken to pacing the corridor, none venturing too far from the door marked '6'. Finally, the doors they watched opened, and two young men exited into the hallway; The taller of the two stared at his feet, hiding his eyes behind the brim of his blue cap, his white labcoat finally removed and draped over an arm, while the shorter of the pair, still in his black vest and odd-looking sleeveless shirt, guided his brother away from the doors, a hand firmly gripping the younger's shoulder.

One of the watching groups from the wall instantly reacted to the sight, a teenage girl in matching blue top hat and cape tearing herself away from a middle-aged man in a dark hoodie and cyan beanie, racing across the hallway to launch herself at the younger of her brothers. Although surprised at first, Luke smiled appreciatively as he realised who it was burying her face in his chest, and hugged her back, Apollo hiding a sad smile as he finally released his grip on his brother. It took only another moment for Phoenix to catch up, and he exchanged a concerned look with Luke before pulling both his sons into a family hug, Trucy in the centre as her taller brothers and father encircled her. As far as the Wrights were concerned, no words needed to be said.

The last to leave the defendant lobby was Kristoph, gently closing the door behind him as the guards slowly disbanded, their job over. He gave a cursory nod to Clay, standing not far away after following Phoenix and Trucy, then turned to the Wrights as the family finished their hug, Phoenix looking to the attorney with a grateful smile. "Kristoph, thank you," he called as the other man approached, the three younger Wrights noticing his presence though Trucy refused to pull away from Luke, an arm tightly wrapped around his back as she clung to his side. Although he wouldn't admit it, Luke returned her gesture, draping his arm over her sister in a less-noticeable grip on her shoulder, keeping her close by.

Kristoph smiled, arms crossed. "It was my pleasure, Wright," he replied. "I won't argue with you on that," Kristoph agreed, giving his assistant a nod. "Although the net result of your... meddlings seemed to level out: You helped us get the full story out of Ms Gatti, though it turned out irrelevant to the murder, and your outburst to Mister Wildgrube gave us more information, even if it did nearly cost us the whole case first."

"Y-yeah," Apollo mumbled, now feeling even worse as he rubbed an arm with one hand. "Sorry, sir."

Kristoph only continued to smile. "No matter," he assured the young man. "This was a highly emotional case for you already; Handling trials in general will become easier with experience." His piece said, he returned his gaze to Phoenix. "We can discuss payment another time. Maybe you could come by my office sometime this week."
Phoenix laughed, his hands in the pocket at the front of his hoodie. "Of course, I can drop in on Apollo while I'm at it!" He gave his elder son a grin, getting only a sigh in return.

Kristoph nodded once. "Until then," he agreed with a smile, then turned to Apollo. "I don't expect you to return to the office now, Apollo," he pointed out. "I'll see you at the usual time tomorrow."

"Yes, sir," Apollo agreed.

Their conversation over, Kristoph walked off down the hallway, quickly disappearing from sight.

With the older man gone, Clay took the chance to jump at the Wrights, grinning enthusiastically as he gave Luke's shoulder a friendly shove. "Luke, congrats, dude!" He gave Trucy a knowing wink. "See? I told you 'Pollo would get him off!"

As Trucy giggled, Apollo rolled his eyes. "Clay, for the last time-!"

Luke raised an eyebrow at their friend. "Out of context, that sounds really suggestive," he pointed out, causing Phoenix to also burst into laughter as Clay paused, embarrassed. "We know what you mean though," he added, assuring his friend with a smile. "Thank you for coming, by the way."

Clay scoffed, waving off Luke's comment. "How could I not?" he replied. "One of my best friends is helping with a case in court, and the other is the guy accused of the murder? It's a no-brainer, c'mon."

Phoenix glanced behind Clay at the slowly forming group nearby, and gave his younger son a smile. "Luke, I think there are some other people here who want to talk to you."

"Hm?" Luke asked, and, as Clay jumped to the side, he finally looked out at the hallway and saw the group of six gathered nearby, most patiently waiting for their friend to finish greeting his family. "Oh!" he cried, gently pushing Trucy away as he stepped forward, walking towards the group before pausing, frowning uncertainly as his free hand played with the labcoat draped over his other arm. "H-have... you guys seen...?"

Duck sighed, shoving his hands in his pockets. "Seen Reindeer?" he filled in. "Not since they dragged him out of court." He jerked his head behind him, where Luke noticed Simba was standing, holding her shawl tight around her neck as she stared blankly off to one side. "Simba found out where you were, so we thought we'd check in with you first."

"You're okay, aren't you!?!" Poe burst in, jumping towards Luke with her visible eye wide in concern. "They didn't hurt you in jail, did they!?!"

Luke blinked at his friend in surprise. "I wasn't in jail," he explained. "That's what the trial was for!"

At the back of the group, Fox gasped, her hands flying to her face as she already looked close to tears. "You mean they're taking Reindeer to jail!?!"

"Of course not!" Kitty assured the younger woman, patting her shoulder comfortingly. "They'll have another trial for Reindeer. Maybe we could go watch that one, too!"

The tall woman's words reminded Luke of something, and he quickly cast his eyes over the assembled group, counting who was there. "Wait, the only missing person here is Bee," he pointed out, eyes wide. "Who's manning the shelter!?!"

Crow waved a hand, giving Luke an assuring look. "Don't worry about it; We fed everyone early, then locked up." He shrugged. "None of us wanted to miss out on this trial, not even Bee."
"He had school though," Duck explained, crossing his arms. "I told him under no circumstances was he to come. Haven't seen him today, so I think he listened to me."

Fox was tightly hugging herself as Kitty continued to comfort the younger woman. "W-what are we going to do?" she asked. "Mister Pound's dead, Reindeer's..." She pressed a hand to her mouth, muffling a sob.

"What else can we do?" Duck replied, turning to face the vet with a sad frown. "We carry on. It's what both of them would want, isn't it?"

"Without the boss?" Kitty asked, waving her free arm with eyes wide in disbelief. "He was the soul of our entire operation! How can we go on without him? Even grumpy old Reindeer's an indispensable member of the family!"

Luke turned his face to the floor. "You saw him in there," he quietly pointed out. "He was determined to make his confession. No-one could have stopped him."

Duck nodded, hands on his hips. "Reindeer was planning to retire soon, anyway. Fox and Northpaw can handle the veterinary business on their own. As for replacing the boss, well..." He shrugged, moving one hand to rub at the back of his neck in thought. "I was always standing in for him anyway, so I guess that job falls to me. What with me still being Winona's primary caretaker, I can't be in every day, not until she's old enough for preschool or something... I'd have to quit any front desk duties, too." Pausing, he looked around to Simba, who was still staring blankly off to the side. "Simba, you've been wanting to go full-time for a while. I know it's short notice, but you don't mind doing that immediately, do you?"

Surprised to be addressed, Simba stared up at Duck for a moment before shyly looking away again. Instead of speaking up, she stayed silent, only nodding in response.

Fox shook her head, still suppressing sobs. "If only I'd stopped him from going back!" she cried. "I should've made sure all three of us left together! Mister Pound might still be alive!"

Luke was the first to react, running to his co-worker with a determined frown, fists at his side and feet apart in the stance normally reserved for Chords of Steel sessions with his brother and best friend. "Don't say that!" he ordered, surprising Fox into staring back at him with wide eyes, her sobs halted. "Don't you dare dwell on what-ifs, not when there's work to be done! We want Mister Pound and Reindeer to be proud of us, don't we!?"

Although still in shock at his aggressive, unexpected pep-talk, Fox meekly nodded.

"Then there's no time to waste thinking about what-ifs!" Luke loudly continued, almost on the verge of shouting. "No matter how terrible the situation, how dark the circumstances, good things will always come! We've just got to keep our heads up until they do! Right, Fox?"

After a short pause, Fox nodded again, a small smile on her face. "R-right," she agreed. "Of course we do."

"Don't you worry!" Luke told her, a wide grin on his face as he added with a loud shout, "WE'RE FINE!"

Apollo smiled proudly, elbowing Clay at his side. "I taught him that," he said, only to get a playful glare and a punch in the arm in return.
View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
The Revived PW Fan-Club Forum!

Home > Other Discussion

Thread: My brother's trial

steeljusticelover, 12/01/2025 05:08:39PM
I know you guys have been waiting for an update, and I just got away from my family so
Good news, we got my brother the 'not guilty' verdict.

Thunderdome, 12/01/2025 05:44:43PM
Congratulations, Steel! Is it just me, or do you not sound all that happy about it?

BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN], 12/01/2025 05:46:30PM
I'm so sorry I could get there to support you in person, Steel! :( Is he okay!? How were the detective and prosecutor? I've never met them, but I've heard they're supposed to be pretty good...

steeljusticelover, 12/01/2025 05:51:24PM
You mean "couldn't", Blackbird? ;) He's fine. Detective Fulbright and Prosecutor Debeste do seem like nice people, though it was hard to see that when they were convinced they had the right person on trial.
It's more how the trial ended that has me bummed. My brother was especially upset because the actual culprit was a co-worker he admired an awful lot, and his workplace is such a small family thing that all of them were kinda in shock. Any kind of celebrating feels bittersweet.

Liztropical, 12/01/2025 06:14:04PM
That sounds absolutely awful! I'm so sorry, Steel! Do you want to talk about it with someone in private?

BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN], 12/01/2025 06:15:22PM
Oh, yes, "couldn't", sorry :( You knew what I meant at least. I guess my brain's all screwy with the excitement of the move and the engagement and everything!

Precious-Fairy, 12/01/2025 06:50:53PM
SteelJusticeLover isn't even telling the whole truth! He thinks he made mistakes in the trial that almost got his brother convicted, but everything turned out okay in the end, so they obviously weren't that bad! He was probably as amazing in the courtroom as Mr Nick always was!

steeljusticelover, 12/01/2025 06:55:27PM
This was my first time actually trying to help instead of just assisting my boss, and I sucked at it. My first attempt was probably always going to suck. And don't you dare compare me to Mr Wright when you weren't even in court to see me screw up, because you were supposed to be in school!

Precious-Fairy, 12/01/2025 07:01:25PM, EDITED 12/01/2025 07:08:35PM
You-know-who wasn't in school, either! Why was she allowed to go to the trial and I wasn't?
Edit: Oops, sorry SteelJusticeLover...

steeljusticelover, 12/01/2025 07:06:27PM
You know that full well and I thought we already discussed NO REAL NAMES PRECIOUS

Drewby, 12/01/2025 07:08:22PM

QUOTE: Precious-Fairy, 12/01/2025 07:01:25PM
Trucy wasn't in school, either! Why was she allowed to go to Luke's trial and I wasn't?

Ooh, who's Trucy? ;D You got a girlfriend, Precious? Or is she attached to this 'Luke'?
Also, I've always meant to ask, why do you keep calling Mr Wright "Mr Nick"? That's kinda weird.

Liztropical, 12/01/2025 07:15:30PM
I think it's safe to assume they're not in a relationship, Drewby. Even if they were, it's not really any of our business.
As for the "Mr Nick" thing... I think Precious said once that it was a nickname she's just always called him since she was young.

Precious-Fairy, 12/01/2025 07:35:27PM
Please forget you saw that, Drewby. I didn't mean to post it, I'd just forgotten about the 'no real names' agreement I made with SteelJusticeLover. All I'll say is that 'you-know-who' is a friend, like a sister to me, and that's all she is to the other person you mention too.
Um, yes, I call Mr Wright that sometimes because it's what I've always called him. It feels wrong to call him anything else, even here.

steeljusticelover, 12/01/2025 07:47:36PM
Well then, cat's out of the bag. */ Trucy and Luke are my siblings. Happy?

Drewby, 12/01/2025 08:35:23PM
Too late, I'm looking up these names! >D
(I'm VERY happy, thank you ;D)
Wow, I looked up this trial myself by the prosecutor name, and it does look like it was rough. By the by, we're your friends here, Steel. If you have anything you want to tell us about, we won't judge you for it.

Do I have to shut this thread down? No prying into personal lives, Drewby!

Sigh... Why not, today was hard enough with that trial. And I should be going to bed now to be ready for work tomorrow morning...

Don't worry, I'm not sharing anything I find ;)
This is some interesting stuff I've uncovered! I'm almost tempted to blackmail you with it, Steel ;)

You have no idea how not-funny that is, Drewby.
Or, really, you should have every idea how not-funny that is.

Steel is a defense attorney, Drewby, remember? That kind of thing is serious business for them.

Pfft, okay. Your getting off lightly, Mr JusticeLover. ;)

Okay I think we need to start holding interventions for people who keep prying into personal lives. ;)
First Dime, now Steel? When will the madness end!
Sorry to hear about your brother, Steel. I hope everything going better now that ordeal is over, at least?

Everything's going much better now, thank you Pocky. ;)
I actually have an uncle in the prosecutor's office that I spoke to on my lunch break today. He's promised to keep an eye on what's going on too.
*BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN], 12/02/2025 06:14:55PM*
Ooh, I know who you mean by that! You can definitely trust what that particular uncle of yours says, pal. ;)

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*Drewby, 12/02/2025 07:46:12PM*
Wait now I'm confused...
Unrelated, does Mr Wright have any siblings?

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*BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN], 12/02/2025 08:00:41PM*
This is a public warning, Drewby. I've sent you a PM. Please reply to it.

---

*steeljusticelover, 12/02/2025 08:12:06PM*
I think this particular question is okay to answer, though: He's an only child, but he has a few close friends that his kids refer to as 'Aunt' or 'Uncle'. ;) It's totally unrelated to this thread of course, but I think it's an interesting fact on the subject of uncles.

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**Should we be worried about Drewby? :(**

I don't think so. I highly doubt she's figured out who you are, and I think most of the forum already knows who I am by now anyway. The secrecy's just tradition at this point. You'd think, being a member of the forum and knowing who my dad is, she'd remember the Engarde trial and the one reason Dad was involved with it to begin with.

It's my fault she found out if she has. I'm so sorry I forgot about the no-names thing! D:

Don't blame yourself, Pearl. We all make mistakes. I made plenty in court the other day :) .

Stop saying that, I'm sure you were great!

You weren't there, so you can't insist I was. Everyone except you seems to have accepted I did some stupid things I regret and am resolving never to do them again.

:(

Oh fine, just for you: I was really amazing in that courtroom, just like Dad used to be :/ .

:)

By the way, if Drewby ever does try anything, you still have Blackbirds number don't you? .

Yes, I still have that. I should contact her then?

Yep. If you can't by phone, just PM her on the forum. She's pretty good at responding.
Okay, I will. Talk to you later, Apollo!

You're getting pretty careless with that secret of yours, Steel ;)
How'd your meeting with Mr Edgeworth go?

C'mon, we all know by now it's practically open knowledge... not that I'd feel comfortable discussing it openly just yet.

It wasn't really much of a meeting. I just had some questions for him that he answered, and I didn't have much time away from work to waste.

You couldn't tell your boss it was work-related? Given it was about Luke's case I assume

Not really. It's a long story, but I didn't want my boss to know about it. Uncle Edgeworth isn't someone he thinks highly of, let's just say.

Oh geeze, better not introduce him to Dick then. ;) You let me know if you need anything too, okay?

Haha, sure, Blackbird :).
An Uncle's Advice

Uncle Edgeworth, I know you're busy, but will you be free to talk over lunch? I need to talk to you about something and I'd rather do it in person.

I can make time for you, Apollo. I assume this is about the trial yesterday?

Yes, sort of. I... need advice, and I don't think I can talk my dad about it.

I understand. My office is on the 12th floor of the prosecutors building, room 1202. It shouldn't be too hard to find me.

December 2, 12:45PM
High Prosecutors' Offices
Room 1202

The reaction to the timid knocking on the door was a prompt call of "Enter," and it took only a moment longer for said door to creak open, the person behind hesitantly peeking in.

Miles Edgeworth smiled as he saw the familiar face, standing from his desk. "Ah, Apollo, I thought it might be you. Come in, then."

Apollo Wright nervously grinned as he entered the office, pausing to close the door behind him. "Thank you for agreeing to see me, Uncle Edgeworth. I-I know you're busy and everything..."

"Nonsense," the prosecutor insisted, walking to the sofa against the wall and gesturing for the younger man to join him. "Something is clearly troubling you, and it's something you cannot talk to either Gavin or your father about." He smiled as he sat down, Apollo blushing as he rushed to join him. "I would assume in that case that it is regarding your father's suspicions of your current employer?"

Apollo rubbed at the back of his neck, making himself comfortable on the red sofa beside his uncle. "I thought Dad had probably told you about that," he replied. "I told Mister Gavin I was meeting with my friend Clay for lunch, so I don't have a lot of time, but I did have a couple of questions I wanted to ask you..." He paused, shrugging as he looked away, and admitted, "ones I don't think I could ask Dad about."

Edgeworth thought a moment, then nodded, arms crossed as he faced his nephew. "Go ahead."

Apollo paused, frowning to himself. "Um, this is probably a dumb question," he quietly admitted, "but... Mister Gavin was telling us about Prosecutor Debeste, and..."

"What did he tell you?" Edgeworth asked, no kind of judgement on the question in his expression.

"That his father was a Chief Prosecutor," Apollo answered, beginning to finally relax a little, "and the Chairman of the P.I.C., and got convicted for, um, murder and forgery." He held up a hand, mentally counting off the information he'd been given. "Prosecutor Debeste used his father's influence to cheat the system, getting high grades he didn't earn and even his badge, and when the truth came out, it was because of his father they didn't take away any of that, letting him keep
prosecuting like nothing had happened." He sheepishly looked up at Edgeworth. "Mister Gavin seemed to think it was true, but..."

As Apollo trailed off, Edgeworth smiled. "And you had to ask me this because it was me who told your father Sebastian was trustworthy," he realised. When Apollo blushed and nodded, Edgeworth leaned back in his seat, thinking to himself. "As you likely suspected, Gavin only told you half the story, and the facts have become a little twisted in the retelling. Blaise Debeste did indeed use his influence as Chief Prosecutor and Chairman of the P.I.C. to get away with a lot of illegal doings, including the inflating of his son's grades, and the P.I.C. likely used their knowledge of him in their decision to not take Sebastian's badge once the whole terrible truth came out... but poor Sebastian wasn't aware of any of it."

Apollo's eyebrows shot up. "What?"

Edgeworth directed a gentle smile at his surprised nephew, continuing, "If you'd ever seen the two of them interacting back then, you'd know how much the elder Debeste walked all over his son, endlessly mocking his intelligence and only driving Sebastian to try ever harder to earn his father's respect." He shook his head, frowning at the memory. "He was heartbroken when he learned his father had instructed his teachers to inflate his grades behind his back. Not even Sebastian thought he should keep his badge once Blaise Debeste was finally put away."

"So," Apollo asked, frowning in confusion, "why'd they let him keep it?"

"Most of the P.I.C.'s members had known Sebastian since he was young, and were well aware of his relationship with his father," Edgeworth replied with a smile. "I believe they pitied him, in part. Perhaps they thought any raw knowledge he hadn't truly picked up from his schooling was adequately made up for with experience." He chuckled. "Regardless of their decision, Sebastian did not prosecute any more cases for a number of years."

Apollo crossed his arms, thinking. "He... took a study break?" he realised.

"Correct," Edgeworth said, resting a hand on the sofa cushions beneath them. "He returned to Themis and retook his classes and exams, so he felt he had truly earned the badge he so proudly wears. That red blazer of his, I believe that came from his original years of study; A gift given to the top scorer of each class."

"And he still wears it?" Apollo asked, finding himself impressed. "Even though those marks were faked? What, is it a self-reminder or something?"

Edgeworth shrugged. "You'd have to ask him," he admitted. "When he returned to the Prosecutor's Office, he was reluctant to take on any cases alone for a long time. Franziska and myself mentored him when we were able, but eventually he weaned himself off our support."

Apollo couldn't resist a smile at the thought of his 'Auntie Franziska' as a teacher, complete with whip, though did muse to himself that many of Sebastian's gestures with his baton had been reminiscent of her use of said weapon. He could still remember the echoing crack around the courtroom from the few of Franziska's trials against Phoenix he'd witnessed as a teenager. "Mister Debeste came by to see Luke after the trial," Apollo admitted, the smile fading as he recalled the conversation. "Said he knew what it was like to... how did he put it? Find out someone you idolised for a long time didn't deserve it."

Edgeworth nodded. "He would have been referring to his father, I imagine," he agreed.

"He also said he'd look over the evidence again to make sure he had the right person," Apollo
continued, staring at the floor in thought, "just for Luke." His frown deepened. 'If only there was something I could do...'

In the long pause that followed, Edgeworth studied his nephew's face carefully. "You don't think he does," he stated more than asked.

Apollo almost jumped at being read so easily, and meekly nodded. "That was my other question," he admitted. "The... evidence that Mister Gavin presented, that incriminated Mister Rei-, um, Mister Wildgrube." He frowned for a moment, pondering how best to present his concerns. "I'm pretty sure Dad suspects this too, but he would almost definitely say to hang on to my proof and wait. I guess I find it harder to see Luke so distraught over this than he does."

Edgeworth closed his eyes, a serious expression on his face as he picked up on the young man's choice of words. "You can prove he forged that evidence."

Apollo nodded. "Mister Gavin said he found those keys in the bathroom. This morning he told me he went back the day after we investigated together, which was why I didn't know about it." He paused a moment. "After Luke found the body, he rang Dad to ask what to do, and Dad told him to take photos... so, he kinda took a tonne of them, all over the shelter." As Edgeworth looked up curiously, Apollo pulled out his phone, flicking at the screen to bring up the one in particular he was thinking of. "I spent a few hours copying them the day before the trial, but I didn't have the time to look at them closely until last night." He held up the phone, showing his uncle one photo in particular of the shelter's small toilet. "Mister Gavin said there was a key behind the toilet, and one under the sink, but this photo Luke took shows there was nothing there on the night of the murder!"

The prosecutor shook his head. "That's not proof on its own," he pointed out.

"I know," Apollo agreed, flicking through to another photo, this one of the second storeroom, hidden behind a locked door. "Then I found this photo. See that safe in the far corner?" Edgeworth was beginning to nod when he registered that the large, black safe in the photo had something small and silver sitting on top, and frowned. Apollo grinned as he saw his uncle had noticed. "It's the keys!" he explained. "Mister Gavin must have noticed and grabbed them when we went in there the day after the murder!"

"Have the police seen these photos of Luke's?" Edgeworth asked, still frowning in thought.

"Supposedly," Apollo replied, putting his phone away again. "Luke handed his phone over to them before he was arrested, then I had to get it back for him the next day. Detective Fulbright said something about not needing to take many pictures themselves, though Luke didn't take a single one of the crime scene. I don't think he could bear to look at it."

Edgeworth didn't reply for a long moment, deep in thought. "You are correct that your father would say to hold on to this," he eventually said. "Although this is very convincing proof, it's not enough that we could say any kind of definite result... other than you being fired and Gavin cutting himself off from your family entirely."

"If not worse, the way Dad sees it," Apollo added, gesturing with one arm. "But on the other hand, bringing it forward would prove it wasn't Mister Wildgrube who killed Mister Pound!"

"And put the suspicion back on Luke," Edgeworth pointed out, an eyebrow raised at his nephew. "Proof of forged evidence would be enough to declare a mistrial and put him back in front of that judge. Your family would have little choice but to rely on a third party to defend him, given your lack of experience, and I doubt things would go any better for you a second time around."
Although shocked at the frank statement, Apollo had to admit Edgeworth was telling the truth. "But I know we could work it out if we were able to question Ms Gatti!" he insisted, hands tightening into fists. "She was lying through her teeth on the stand, but we couldn't prove anything, so she just got away with it!" He frowned in thought, looking away. "Actually, I bet it was her. It wasn't Luke and it wasn't Mister Wildgrube, so it had to be her."

Edgeworth crossed his arms, thinking carefully. "I would advise you have more evidence than that before confronting anyone," he said, then gave Apollo a serious look. "Regardless, what you do next is your decision. Either hide this evidence and leave Gatti be at the cost of Wildgrube's freedom, or release it to the courts and lose Gavin's trust, as well as, should things go wrong, Luke's freedom and any hope of justice for your father." He closed his eyes. "Either path will be a hard one to take; Unfortunately, life has a tendency to not be so easy."

Apollo wasn't sure how to react, staring back at his uncle in a long moment of silence. With his options, and the potential consequences, laid out so frankly, it felt like he was stuck between a rock and a hard place... nowhere to turn, and no happy ending in sight. "There's... no third option?" he quietly asked.

Edgeworth shook his head, giving Apollo a sympathetic look. "Not unless the police happen to discover this on their own," he told his nephew. "Even then, all they would do is declare a mistrial and put Luke back under suspicion. They wouldn't permit Gavin to defend him a second time in that case."

Apollo sighed, his eyes falling to the floor. The more he heard, the more bleak his, and Luke's, future was looking.

"My door will always be open for you if you wish to talk again," Edgeworth softly continued. "I hope what we've discussed today has been of help."

"Y-yeah," Apollo quickly replied, giving his uncle a nod and a forced smile of gratitude. "It has. Thanks, Uncle Edgeworth."

At that moment, there was a rapid knock on the office door, which was promptly opened by a familiar young man with brown hair, his attention on a handful of papers in his hands. "Mister Edgeworth, I was hoping to-" As he looked up, his movement stopped dead, and he stared wide-eyed at the pair standing up from the sofa, looking back at him. "O-oh, I didn't realise you had company..."

Edgeworth chuckled, stepping forward and seeming not to notice Apollo's shocked staring at the visitor. "It's no trouble, Sebastian. I believe the two of you are acquainted already?"

The two stared at each other for a moment before Apollo looked away, rubbing the back of his neck. "I-it's okay, I was about to go anyway." He looked up at his uncle. "Thanks again, Uncle Edgeworth."

"It was no problem, Apollo," Edgeworth insisted with a smile. "Pass my congratulations on to Luke, would you? And my regards to your father and sister, as well."

Grinning, Apollo nodded. "Sure," he agreed. With that, he headed towards the door, pausing only as Debeste stepped aside to let him pass.

"It was 'Wright', wasn't it?" Debeste asked as Apollo was moving to the door.

"Yeah," the young attorney replied with a nod, pausing. "Apollo Wright." He looked away, again
rubbing at the back of his neck. "Um, thank you, for what you said to my brother after the trial yesterday. It really meant a lot to him."

Debeste also looked away, clutching at his papers awkwardly. "N-no problem," he insisted, nevertheless hiding a smile. "Anything to make up for wrongfully arresting him like that."

Apollo nodded, staring at the floor, but made no move to leave just yet. After a moment, he bit his lip to hide a grin, looking up at the young prosecutor. "Y'know, I guess even Debeste turns out to not always be Wright, huh?"

Edgeworth scoffed in disapproval, rolling his eyes, but Debeste, after a second or two of shocked staring, slowly smiled and laughed. "Yeah," he agreed with a grateful grin. "I guess so!"

View the Court Record
Debeste waved to the three junior police officers he'd personally picked out, silently instructing they stick close as the small group approached the apartment. "Thirty-nine," the prosecutor read aloud, gesturing to the number on the door. "This is the address on file." With that, he reached out with his gloved hand and rapped his knuckles on the wooden surface. After a moment or two, one of the police officers pointed out the doorbell on the neighbouring wall, and Debeste sheepishly pressed the button, listening to the distant buzzing as it rang somewhere inside.

"Awright, awright, I'm comin'!" came a muffled call from within, and the thudding of approaching feet echoed through the floor. After a short moment of silence, they could hear clinking of small chains, then the door was abruptly pulled open, revealing a surly old man beyond, who glared out at the prosecutor and the three police officers fanned behind him. "Whaddaya want?" he grunted.

Although a little taken aback by the man's attitude, Debeste steeled himself and asked, "Mister Wildgrube?"

"No," the old man snapped, and slammed the door in their faces.

The group of four stood in shocked silence for a very long moment. Eventually, one of the three police officers nervously raised a hand. "Uh, Prosecutor Debeste...?" he asked. "What do we do now?"

Debeste frowned, unsure how to answer. After a second of thought, he knocked again on the door, hoping the rude occupant of the apartment hadn't ventured too far. "Do you at least know where Mister Wildgrube lives?" he called.

"No!" the old man repeated, shouting from somewhere inside. "Go away!"

As Debeste stared blankly at the door, the three police officers behind him exchanged confused glances. One of them, a young man with black hair sweeping down over his face, nervously raised a hand. "Maybe the shelter had the wrong address on file...?" he suggested.

The prosecutor looked back at the uniformed man behind him, taking a moment to recall his name. "A good point, Holmes," he admitted. "If the occupant of this house won't help us, I suppose we'll have to call Detective Fulbright and ask him to check with Gagnon for us." With that, he turned and walked back towards the elevator, his red jacket sweeping dramatically behind him as it hung over his shoulders. "In the meantime, we can move on to the other person on our list..."
Debeste glared at the door number as he approached, his three uniformed lackeys (for lack of a better word) behind him. "Mister Wildgrube!" he cried, pressing his finger firmly to the doorbell as he listened to it ring. "We know it's you in there!"

A stomping echoed from within, followed by the clinking of tiny chains, and the old man again opened the door, looking out at the prosecutor and three police officers with an unsurprised glare. "How many times do I have to tell you people to leave me alone!?"

"I know we have the right place!" Debeste continued, ignoring the man's protests. "Don't deny that you know what the name 'Rudolf Wildgrube' means!"

The old man paused, glancing away as he bit back a laugh, failing to hide a smirk. "Well, I know 'Rudolf' means 'famous wolf'. 'Wildgrube' means somethin' like 'lives by an animal den', but I'd have to look it up to be sure."

Debeste tried not to glare at the man. "Lying to police is a punishable offence!" he loudly announced. He wasn't entirely sure how true his claim was, but no-one was about to contradict him. "Now are you Rudolf Wildgrube or not!?"

The man scoffed as he leaned against the door-frame. "Good thing I wasn't lying to police then, just to you," he pointed out with a grin. Before Debeste could do more than tense up in anger, the old man continued, "Yeah, that's me. They call me 'Reindeer' 'round the shelter, though. Did you want somethin', kid?"

Sighing in relief to finally have the man's co-operation, Debeste decided to let the old vet's remarks slide. "Mister Wildgrube," he continued, "I'm sure by now you've heard of this murder we're investigating."

Reindeer frowned, the suddenly serious look almost unnerving Debeste more than the joking one, though he wasn't sure why. "Yeah, I got that call. They found the boss bludgeoned to death in his office, right?"

Debeste nodded. "We understand you were at the shelter yesterday," he said. "Could you tell us about it?"

"Nope," the old man immediately replied.

Debeste wasn't sure how to react to the total opposite of what he'd been expecting to hear. "Uh...!?"

"Wasn't working yesterday," Reindeer clarified, the corners of his lips beginning to twitch upwards in a smile. "Can't help ya, sorry."

"B-but!" Debeste tried to object.

With a totally unapologetic smile, Reindeer brightly cried, "Come again!" and closed his front door with a bang.

The prosecutor and police officers all stood in shock for several seconds, before one of the officers, a blonde woman, scoffed to herself. "But we have two testimonies saying he was! What does he think he's doing!?"
"E-exactly!" Debeste agreed, glancing back at the officer as he briefly struggled to remember her name. "Th-that's true, Truman!" Spinning back to the door, he banged his fist on the wood with a glare, reasoning the man inside couldn't have gone far. "We have testimonies saying you were at work yesterday, Mister Wildgrube!" he shouted. "Come out and talk to us!"

He could hear Reindeer scoffing inside, not far from the door. "And who said that, huh?" he asked. "How d'you know they weren't mistaken?"

"Because three separate people agreeing on something generally means it's the truth!" Debeste shot back. "And it was exactly three other people, not including the victim, who were with you yesterday evening! Now come out and talk!"

"My other question?" Reindeer only cockily replied, prompting for more information. "Who says I was at the shelter yesterday?"

Debeste shot a disbelieving glance at the officers behind him. One of them, apparently taking the look as a call for help, pulled out his notebook. "Wright, Bagley and Gatti all agreed you were," he explained. "Also, I believe Gagnon added he had seen you at the shelter that morning."

"Never heard of 'em!" Reindeer called back, much too quickly for Debeste's liking.

"Thank you, Gunnar," the prosecutor muttered in the young officer's direction, then returned his glare to the vet's door. "How can you not recognise the names of your colleagues!?" he cried. "You've worked alongside them for... who knows how long!" He hadn't actually asked, the information having not come to mind before now, but he made a mental note to check later.

Reindeer laughed. "Wow, you really are an idiot!" he cried.

Debeste froze, his hands clutching his baton. A familiar voice echoed in his thoughts, "Honestly, you really are a useless idiot." He shook his head to clear the voice from his mind, but the pain of the memory lingered.

"They won't recognise my name either!" Reindeer continued, unnoticing of the prosecutor's reaction on the other side of the door. "We use nicknames!" He paused to laugh again. "Come back with something more... provable. Then we can talk."

Debeste stared at the door for several long moments, but didn't see it. Behind him, the three police officers exchanged worried looks. "Prosecutor Debeste, sir?" Ernest Holmes meekly spoke up. "Are you alright?"

The prosecutor nodded, avoiding the trio's gazes as he struggled to blink back tears, only the knowledge that the vet behind the door had no connection to Blaise Debeste keeping him calm. "I suppose we'll need written proof to present to him before he'll agree to talk to us again..." Sebastian quietly announced, then turned and walked away.

November 29, 3:32PM
Mauve Street Apartments
Door 39

Debeste felt much calmer as he approached his witness's door, even though it was now for the third time in one day with still no new information from the man. In fact, he was even able to calmly smile
as he pressed the doorbell, waiting for Reindeer to appear with a curious look before brandishing the piece of paper in his hands. "A written statement from one Vixen Bagley," he announced. "We have similar statements from Drake Gagnon and Luke Wright too, if you wish to inspect them." He decided not to mention that they had not gotten one from their other witness, as they had been unable to contact Simba since her questioning earlier that day. With the three officers he had grabbed at random standing close behind him, he felt a lot more confident in his case now than he had only a few hours before.

Reindeer frowned. "So?"

Debeste smirked. "So, three pieces of proof that you were indeed working the night of the crime." He held out Fox's statement, which Reindeer snatched out of his hands to read. "Will you answer our questions now?"

It took a moment for the old man to respond, sternly reading over the statement before sighing in defeat, clutching to the paper in his hands. "Guess so. Sure, I was working last night. What about it?"

Not allowing himself to feel relieved just yet, Debeste instructed, "Please tell us everything you saw and heard that night in the shelter, from about six o'clock onwards." He had prepared his request to be very specific, knowing the old man was likely to twist his words and further inhibit their fight for justice. He could only hope it was enough.

Reindeer thought a moment, looking away, then reluctantly nodded, solemnly looking Debeste in the eye. "I'm sure Northpaw, Fox and Simba already told you about how we all met up in reception around that time." Debeste quickly nodded, hoping the three nicknames were indeed the three witnesses he was thinking of, though he couldn't attach the names to specific individuals. "Northpaw always stays a little late, though we weren't sure if he would yesterday. Way too big a heart for those critters, I tell you," Reindeer continued, arms crossed and eyes closed as he mused on the previous night. "The boss has to leave last, since he locks up. Simba, she weren't far from leaving herself, since she was closin' up reception and turning off the lights." He paused, seeming to ponder on his next words, then opened his eyes again, looking up to the ceiling. "Fox and I both head to the bus stop after work, so we usually walk together, for safety."

Debeste nodded, waiting to hear the follow-up he had been most desperate to question the vet about. "And then?"

"Went home," Reindeer said, once again giving the young prosecutor that same infuriating smile.

The three officers and lone prosecutor stared at Reindeer in shock. "N-no, you didn't!" Gunnar sputtered.

Reindeer laughed. "Course I did!" he replied, gesturing to the domicile behind him. "I'm home right now, ain't I?"

Debeste's shocked expression hardened into a glare. "But you went back to the shelter first!" he explained, pointing angrily at the paper still in Reindeer's hand. "Bagley said so right there in her statement!"

"What statement?" Reindeer asked with a grin, staring Debeste dead in the eye as he tossed the paper over his shoulder, the breeze blowing it slowly down the hall at the vet's back and well out of the prosecutor's reach. "I don't see a statement! Guess she must've been mistaken!"

Debeste could feel his eye starting to twitch.
"Welp!" Reindeer cried with a cheerful grin and wave. "See you nuts later!" With that, he closed his door.

The three officers watched their superior shake in rage for a long awkward moment. "S-sir?" Ernest spoke up. "What now, sir?"

Debeste said nothing as he spun on his heel and stalked away. "I'll show you," he growled. "Right as soon as I work it out."

November 29, 5:43PM
Mauve Street Apartments
Door 39

It had taken longer than Debeste would have liked to find the piece of definitive evidence that Reindeer couldn't argue away, but, paper in hand and moon rising in the dark sky, he led Ernest, Gunnar and Truman right back to the old vet's door, banging on it with a fist and a triumphant grin. "Wildgrube!" he called. "Come out and tell us the truth, under pain of the law!"

"Geeze!" came a cry from inside, and the door was opened by a rather frazzled-looking Reindeer, who glared out at the four in surprise. "There's no need to shout! You could wake the dead with that racket!" "Tell us the truth, Wildgrube!" Debeste repeated, waving the paper in his hand at the man. "Do you know what this is?"

For a moment, Reindeer appeared to be contemplating the smart answer of 'a piece of paper', but seemed to reconsider once he gingerly took it from the young prosecutor, his eyes widening in surprise.

"The records show you used your keycard to return to the shelter after closing," Debeste explained, gloating his hard-won win over the troublesome witness. "Anything you saw or heard would be extremely vital to this case, so I suggest you tell us the whole truth, right now."

Reindeer stared at the keycard records for a long moment before sighing, only looking sad as he handed the paper back to Debeste, although the prosecutor found it hard to feel sorry for the man after spending all day chasing this moment up. "Sure," the vet admitted. "I... left my keys behind, somewhere in the shelter." He rubbed at the back of his neck, staring at the floor. "I realised once Fox and I left, so I went back for 'em. Didn't see anyone, though; Northpaw would've been with the animals still, and the boss in his office, and Simba... probably had gone home already, since I didn't see her."

Debeste nodded, briefly glancing behind him to check Gunnar was taking notes as asked. "What else did you see?" he prompted the vet.

Reindeer didn't answer immediately. "Nothing, actually," he admitted, then looked up with a smile. "'Cept my keys, of course. They were in reception, so I picked 'em up and headed off again." He shrugged. "Fox's bus had come while I was grabbin' 'em, so I missed seeing her before I got home."

Behind Debeste, Truman gave Reindeer a suspicious glare. "Are you sure you found them there?" she asked.
Reindeer just laughed. "Course I found them!" he replied, gesturing to his home. "How could I open my front door without my keys?"

Truman crossed her arms. "Could've had a spare, or asked the landlord," she pointed out.

"Well, I didn't need to," Reindeer insisted, frowning at the young woman. "Besides, I went back specifically looking for my keys. Why would I have left without them?"

"He has a point," Debeste said, folding up the keycard records still in his grip, then turning around and handing them to Ernest for safe-keeping, Truman looking away guiltily. "Although it's a shame to not have anything more definitive, there's nothing we can do if Mister Wildgrube didn't see anything." He turned to the old man with a grateful smile. "Thank you for finally telling us the truth."

Reindeer shrugged, carefully avoiding eye contact. "Whatever," he mumbled.

It would be another two days before Reindeer finally regretted not admitting the entire truth that evening.
Apollo gingerly opened the door to his brother's room, unsure exactly what he'd find within but driven regardless by the concern that had only heightened when Phoenix and Trucy told him where the middle child of the family was upon his arrival that night. "Luke?" he whispered, and quickly spotted the tall young man sprawled across his bed against the wall, his back to the door and his head buried under his pillow. Softly sighing, Apollo stepped into the room and gently closed the door, tip-toeing to the bed. "Are you okay?" he asked, a little louder.

Luke suddenly jerked up with a cry, sending his pillow and a teddy bear Apollo hadn't previously noticed flying as the young man sat up, looking around with wide eyes before spotting his older brother and, after a moment to register what had happened, relaxing. "Oh, it's just you," he said, reaching down for the pillow that had landed on the floor. "You surprised me."

Apollo smiled, walking over to sit at Luke's side as his younger brother moved into a comfortable sitting position, busying himself rearranging his pillow. "How've you been doing?" he asked.

Luke sighed, still facing away from his brother. "I'm fine," he quietly insisted. "I'm not in jail. The shelter is still in business. I have my job to go back to tomorrow."

Frowning in concern, Apollo rested a hand on Luke's shoulder. "It's okay," he said. "You're allowed to still be upset about Mister Reindeer."

Luke suddenly choked, and Apollo briefly worried the twenty-year-old would burst into sobs. "I-it's not just that," he whispered, and slowly turned to look at his older brother with eyes shining with barely restrained tears. "I... I went to the detention centre this morning."

"You did?" Apollo asked, surprised. "To visit Mister Reindeer?"

Luke nodded, turning his head towards the floor as he squeezed his eyes shut, beginning to restrain sobs. "He... he didn't want to see me! The guards said he didn't want to talk to me... I wasn't let into the visitor's room, or anything!"

Apollo watched Luke in surprise for a moment, then moved a little closer to pat his crying brother's back. "I'm sure he just didn't want you to worry about him," he told the younger man.

"But it's not fair!" Luke cried, turning to his brother with eyes red from tears. "You know he's innocent, don't you?" he asked, a desperate plea for reassurance. "Reindeer would never kill anyone, not for any reason! The evidence is wrong!"
Apollo sadly stared back at his brother's tear-stained face. Knowing how much pain his brother was in, he couldn't bring himself to lie and say Reindeer was the murderer, but he also knew to even imply Luke's offhand claim was correct right now would only make the situation worse for all of them: Luke would demand the entire truth, then shout it from the rooftops, shoving it in everyone's faces with no regards for his own safety until Reindeer was exonerated. The young vet would go to jail, and cut the Wright family off from Kristoph with his proof the attorney had forged the evidence that had incriminated Luke's friend.

Apollo was suddenly glad he had deleted those photos off Luke's phone in the process of copying them for his files.

In the face of his brother's long silence, Luke's resolve faltered, and he looked away with a sigh, drying his tears on the teddy bear in his arms. "S-sorry," he muttered. "I know, he..." He shook his head, turning away from Apollo. "I just want to be alone right now," he quietly told his brother. "I'm sorry."

Unable to make himself speak, Apollo only mutely nodded. He got to his feet and slowly walked across to the door, leaving as quietly as he had entered. Once out in the hallway, he leaned against the bedroom door, staring across at the wall opposite. All he could see in his mind's eye was his little brother hiding his tears in that battered teddy bear, and he had to fight the urge to turn around and comfort the heartbroken young man in the room behind him with the truth that his beloved mentor was indeed as innocent as he thought... It was only the contrasting image of Luke back in the detention centre that kept him where he was.

Apollo heard the thudding of slow, heavy footsteps coming up the stairs, and quickly recognised the rhythm as belonging to Phoenix. He waited until the footsteps had entered the hallway, then looked up into his father's concerned face.

"Is he okay?" Phoenix asked, his eyes flicking to the door behind his eldest son.

Apollo nodded, hugging himself as he took a few steps towards his father. "A-are... W-we're doing the right thing, aren't we?" he quietly asked, almost feeling like he might take Luke's lead and cry himself.

Phoenix watched him for a moment or two, worry for both of his sons evident in his face. "We are," he whispered in reply, stepping forward and resting a hand on Apollo's shoulder. "It may not feel like it, but we are."

After a moment or two, Apollo nodded, then stepped forward and wrapped his arms around Phoenix in a meek request for a hug. Phoenix didn't waste any time in returning it.

A minute later, Apollo found himself sitting on the bed in his father's room, Phoenix checking one last time that Trucy was still downstairs before closing the door and sitting at Apollo's side. "Edgeworth filled me in on this proof of forged evidence you have," he quietly told the young man, arms crossed nonchalantly.

Apollo resisted a wince, looking away guiltily. "O-oh," he mumbled.

"To be honest, I suspected those keys were faked somehow," Phoenix continued. "It was too perfect... and the look on your face in court, that pretty much said it all."
Apollo nodded. After a pause, he looked up to give his father an apologetic look. "I-I was planning on telling you-

"Of course you were," Phoenix interrupted, giving Apollo an understanding smile. "A young attorney needing advice, it's only logical to go to someone who still has a badge." When Apollo still looked guilty, Phoenix chuckled. "Believe me, I know first-hand you don't always feel comfortable talking to your parents about certain things. I'm just glad you made sure to go to someone who was already in on the secret."

After some effort, Apollo managed a half-smile. "I looked over my evidence some more on the way over," he said, pulling his tablet computer out of his vest. "If the police work out on their own that Mister Gavin forged those keys, I think we could still get Luke off."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, watching the tablet's screen as his son began to flick through it. "Luke's photos prove the keys were faked, right?" he asked.

Apollo nodded, grinning as he realised Edgeworth had apparently filled Phoenix in on the details, saving Apollo the trouble of explaining it all again twice in one day. "Yep," he replied, then landed on the photo he had taken of the smudged bloodstain on the office floor. "You remember this?" he asked his father, and, upon receiving a nod in answer, reached into his pocket and pulled out the small coin he had found on the reception floor, having totally forgotten about the object in the stress of the then-upcoming trial. "Ms Fox told me that receptionist, Simba, had several coins just like these on her necklace, then, when she appears in court, she claims her cat destroyed that necklace, scratching up her neck in the process. And on the same night as the murder, too!"

Phoenix rubbed his chin, deep in thought. "That could still just be a co-incidence," he pointed out. "An unlikely one, but still. Where did that one you have come from, anyway?"

"I stepped on it," Apollo replied with a smile. "It was on the shelter floor."

"Hmm," Phoenix hummed to himself in thought. "So you think it was Mister Pound who scratched up her neck, destroyed the necklace, and scattered coins like this on the floor?"

Apollo nodded, glad his train of thought wasn't an unreasonable one to follow. "She collected them up, tried to hide they'd been there, probably cleaned them in the bathroom at the same time as the bat, but she was smart enough then to try and take them home with her." He grinned, holding up the lone coin he had discovered. "This one she probably dropped accidentally on her way out. Plus, I went through Luke's photos again, and I'm pretty sure I can see it still on the floor in reception!"

Phoenix stared at the coin for a moment, then smiled. "Alright then, let's check for blood, shall we?"

Before Apollo could ask what he meant, his father had stood up and gone to a small cupboard in the corner of the room, which he searched for a moment or two before emerging with a white spray-bottle and two pairs of red-tinted glasses.

Apollo gasped as he recognised the items, placing the coin and Court Record down on the bed as he eagerly got to his feet, taking one of the glasses with glee. "The blood-testing stuff!" he cried with an excited grin. "I totally forgot you had that!"

Chuckling, Phoenix slipped the extra pair of glasses on his face. "It's called 'Luminol'," he reminded his son. "Go get that coin ready, huh? And don't forget we'll need to take a picture of what we find."

Not wanting to spray the chemical in his bottle needlessly around his room, Phoenix led Apollo through his side door into the bathroom, which they locked to keep Luke or Trucy from barging in on their secret experiment. Apollo put on the red-tinted glasses his father had given him, and, after a
moment of thought, laid the coin down on the floor, not wanting to risk losing it down the sink or shower drain. Their target readied, the pair knelt down on the floor and Phoenix aimed the spray-bottle, gently pulling the blue lever to evenly spread the luminol across the small disc of metal.

Apollo stared wide-eyed at the tiny coin as the substance landed, readying his tablet computer. After a very long moment of concentration... absolutely nothing happened. He blinked, leaning back in shock. "H-huh!?" He pressed at the glasses on his face, checking he was indeed wearing them. "B-but... if there's no blood on this... My theory was wrong...?"

Phoenix rubbed his chin in thought, staring at the coin. "Maybe... or maybe we're looking at this from the wrong angle."

Apollo frowned at his father. "What do you mean?"

"It's very good advice," Phoenix continued, looking up to give his elder son a grin. "Mia was always telling me that, and it saved more cases than I could count." He glanced back down at the coin, then gestured to it with his free hand. "Before we call this a lost cause, there's one more thing we can try. Following Mia's advice, thinking outside the box... what would you suggest?"

The young lawyer wasn't sure how to answer, turning his gaze back down to the coin on the floor. 'I have to "think outside the box"...? But what does that even mean, what 'box' is there here to think outside-' His train of thought came to a halt as he recalled his father's exact wording. 'Wait... "maybe we're looking at this from the wrong angle"?' Frowning in thought, he hesitantly reached forward and, after only a short pause, flipped the coin over to the other side. "Maybe it's... the wrong way round?" he sheepishly suggested.

Phoenix only smiled, readying the Luminol bottle and again spraying the coin. This time, after only a second or two, the upwards-pointing face of the blank coin began to glow a brilliant blue, the clear sign that it still carried traces of blood.

Apollo gasped, a grin spreading across his face. "I was right!" he cried.

"Picture!" Phoenix interrupted, pointing to his son's forgotten tablet computer. "Quick, before the glow fades!"

"O-oh, right!" Unable to wipe away his grin, Apollo pointed his Court Record at the coin and snapped a photo, staring at the image as it appeared on his screen. "My theory was right!" he continued. "It was her, and I can prove it without a doubt!"

"Ssshhhh!" Phoenix hissed, glaring at Apollo and glancing noticeably at the locked door to the hallway behind him. "Do you want your siblings to hear!?!" Apollo snapped his mouth closed, giving his father an apologetic look, and Phoenix sighed in relief. "Let's get this stuff away," he said, getting to his feet and pulling the glasses off his face. "This doesn't change our immediate plans, but it is a relief to know we have some good evidence to protect Luke should the worst happen."

Apollo nodded, pulling out a small plastic evidence bag to put the coin in. "So we're still not doing anything about Mister Reindeer?" he asked.

Phoenix shook his head, interrupting Apollo only briefly as he retrieved the glasses his son was still wearing. "There's nothing we can do," he insisted. "You put that coin away somewhere safe, securely file all your evidence from Luke's trial... and then we wait."
View the Court Record
Luke's decision to move out had come surprisingly quickly to Phoenix.

After Rudolf Wildgrube's conviction in early December last year, things had been very quiet at Warren Street Animal Shelter, the middle Wright child told his family. His lone remaining co-worker in the veterinarian department, known as Fox, had found her relationship with her boyfriend turning sour, and, a few short months later, the pair had split up. Having been renting out a room in his apartment, she had little choice but to move out, and quickly, finding another apartment to call home not too much further from work. However, her salary alone wasn't enough to pay rent, so she was seeking a room-mate. Luke, to his family's surprise, had elected to take her up on her offer; After all, he pointed out, Apollo and Clay had been nineteen when they left home, so, in a sense, twenty-year-old Luke was already late on making the next big step in his life.

Apollo had immediately supported his brother, offering to help him move and even drag Clay into helping too.

Trucy had been disappointed, but plastered a smile on her face that didn't fool anyone and agreed to do her best to help as well… as long as Luke promised to come home and see her regularly.

Phoenix, a lot more adept at hiding his feelings than his children, gave Luke an assuring smile and suggested they arrange the big move for the following weekend, when everyone would be available to help.

After a Saturday spent in Kurain, visiting Maya on her birthday, Luke, Apollo and Trucy headed off early Sunday morning to pick up Clay; As Fox had been unable to secure the place without Luke, she was also moving in today, and the assembled team had decided hers was the more important job to complete first. Phoenix, deciding he would just be in the way, was staying at the Agency, though he had promised to join them if they desperately needed his help. Thus, Phoenix found himself that morning sitting at his desk, idly doodling design ideas on a spare piece of paper. He sighed. *That's two gone now... how long 'til Trucy follows their lead?*

A bang echoed from the front room, causing Phoenix to jerk his head up in surprise. "MISTER WRIGHT!" came a feminine shout.

Dropping his pencil, Phoenix shot to his feet, rounding his desk as he rushed to the office door. 'What the hell is going on!?' Before he could reach it, however, the door into the front room slammed open, knocking Charley behind it and slapping the plant against the wall it lived by. In the doorway stood a young woman around Apollo's height, brown hair sitting on the top of her head in a curled ponytail above a pair of white-rimmed glasses with red lenses. The rest of her hair spilled down over her shoulders, where the straps of a very full shoulder-bag hung over a long, white labcoat. Quickly spotting Phoenix not far in front of her, the woman gave the taller man a glare. "*There you are!" she cried, throwing up her hands as she stomped into the office. "Finally!"

Phoenix took a few steps backward, watching the woman with concern.
"What on earth were you thinking!?!" the woman continued, surprisingly gently closing the door behind her and mildly jumping in shock as she seemed to register the appearance of the office around her. "And you've gone and redecorated everything in here too!? How long has it been!? Did you even manage three years!?!"

Phoenix gave her a quick glance up and down, trying to work out if he was supposed to know her or not... although he only learned she was wearing high-heels, probably making her truly closer to Maya in height. "Um, who are you?" he asked, now the woman had finally quietened down.

Again, the woman seemed surprised, looking Phoenix up and down as though also trying to recognise a stranger. "Wait, you... you are the famous defence attorney Phoenix Wright, aren't you?"

Phoenix wasn't quite sure how to react to that, the pair staring at each other in a long silence. 'How long has it been since I heard those words in sequence?' he wondered.

The woman sighed sadly, seeming to deflate. "Please tell me that's you, Mister Wright," she quietly asked.

"W-well," Phoenix hesitantly replied, "I'm... not a defence attorney anymore, but-"

"So it is you!" the woman cried, looking up with a smile and pouncing on Phoenix to give him a quick hug before the man had a chance to react. She bounced back, giving him an excited grin. "Don't you recognise me, Mister Wright? It's been nine years to the day since we first met, but I haven't changed that much!"

Phoenix blinked, looking over the woman again before his eyes finally locked on to the glasses sitting on her head, then the labcoat, then a large badge with a surprised face pinned to her bag. He sighed, shaking his head with a smile as he wondered how he'd overlooked the clues before, especially given how familiar their conversation had turned out so far. "It's nice to see you again, Ema."

Ema Skye giggled. "Man, it's such a relief I had the right place after all!" she cried, strolling over to the twin red sofas and picking one at random to sit on, carefully arranging her bag at her side so as to keep it as close to her as possible. "I was worried when you didn't recognise me!"

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, moving to sit opposite his old friend. "You weren't even sure it was me, but you were going to chew me out anyway?" he asked.

Ema shrugged sheepishly. "W-well, to be fair, you look like a totally different person with your hair covered up." She paused, looking him up and down critically. "And with that hobo stubble. And that ratty old sweater."

"It's not ratty!" Phoenix complained, picking at the old hoodie defensively, and decided to change the subject before she started mocking his sandals too. "What are you doing back in America? Last we met, you were off to Europe to stay with a relative, weren't you?"

Crossing her arms, Ema scoffed, giving Phoenix a smile. "I'm twenty-five, Mister Wright," she pointed out. "I've done all the studying I can; Now it's time to return to Los Angeles and fulfil all the promises I made as a teenager!" She then frowned, giving him another glare. "Or I could, if I hadn't got here and suddenly found out you weren't a defence attorney anymore!"

Phoenix winced a little, both unreasonably guilty at the accusation and, he had to admit, still stinging a little from the now-distant loss. "That was six years ago," he pointed out in return. "I've... long moved on from that part of my life."
Ema didn't lighten her glare, narrowing her eyes as she studied the man. "Mister Edgeworth told me," she explained, though Phoenix hadn't asked. "Lana was still in prison at the time, so she didn't hear anything about it. When I got back, Mister Edgeworth was first on my list to see... after Lana, of course."

Phoenix tried not to roll his eyes, wondering if the crush Ema had on her prosecutor idol had anything to do with that.

"He said, even though you didn't have your badge anymore," Ema continued, her glare beginning to soften, "I might still be able to help. Even..." She looked away guiltily. "Even though I wasn't good enough to be a forensic scientist."

At that, Phoenix blinked in surprise, staring at the young woman. "You... what?" he asked. "Did you just say...?"

Ema sighed, crossed arms tightening in a self-comforting hug. "I applied, don't get me wrong. I did everything right... everything except pass the test, apparently."

Phoenix could do little more than stare at the woman with a sympathetic gaze. "Oh, Ema..."

The young woman closed her eyes, frowning bitterly. "It's not a total loss," she insisted. "They've hired me as a detective. I get to investigate, just..." She shrugged, then looked up at Phoenix with a small smile. "But hey, at least I got a little bit of first-hand experience in forensic investigation, right? Investigating with you, nine years ago?"

Phoenix was only able to give her a confused shrug in return. "But being a forensic scientist was your dream, Ema!"

"Just like being a defence attorney was yours, right?" Ema shot back, a stern frown on her face. "I've told my story; I'm not where I wanted to be, but I can still help you, or at least Mister Edgeworth said I could." She glanced around the room critically. "Just what are you doing now, anyway?"

Phoenix stared at Ema for a long while, remembering the sixteen-year-old who'd burst into his office one day begging for his help to save her sister. She was right; Ema had grown up since then, and deserved to hear the truth. If nothing else, he told himself, she was older than Apollo, and Phoenix's eldest was still the youngest to be in on the secret. Solemnly, he got up from the sofa opposite Ema, looking around just to double-check none of his children (or, heaven forbid, a stray customer) had wandered in before moving to sit at Ema's side. As she gave him a confused look, he lowered his voice, staying close to her. "If Edgeworth thinks you can help," he explained, "then you deserve the full story... but be warned, everything I'm about to tell you stays between us."

Ema's eyebrows shot up, surprised. "Oh?"

Phoenix nodded. "How much has Edgeworth told you about how I lost my badge?"

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*View the Court Record*
Ema leaned back in her seat, arms crossed, as she absorbed the information Phoenix had given her: Klavier Gavin, the frontman of the Gavinners rock band that so many of her classmates were fans of, used to be a prosecutor, and had been the one to accuse Phoenix of forgery, thus kick-starting the loss of his badge? She had been a little surprised but, given she wasn't fond of the Gavinners' music in the first place, easily agreed it seemed plausible; What was more surprising was the revelation that Gavin had an older brother, a defence attorney, who was supposed to be the real mastermind that Phoenix was still attempting to pin down despite the years that had passed since the incident. "So you've just been collecting evidence for six years?" she asked. "Continuing your investigation?"

"Edgeworth's been helping me, since he point-blank refused not to," Phoenix replied with a shrug. "My only other direct helper is Apollo, though you haven't met him yet."

Ema turned to the man with a curious frown. "Who's Apollo? Another friend?"

Chuckling, Phoenix looked away, a hand reaching into a pocket. "Ah, that's something else that's happened while you've been in Europe," he said, being cryptic if only for the amusement of seeing Ema's bemused look. "I suppose 'friend' works. He's a little younger than you. Qualified as a defence attorney last year, though he hasn't taken any cases alone yet. Works under Kristoph Gavin, actually."

Ema's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "And he's in on your plan?" she asked, a little awed.

"He's a brave kid," Phoenix replied, closing his eyes as a proud smile flitted across his face. "He's got a rough journey ahead of him, but he wouldn't turn away from it for the world."

"He obviously means a lot to you," Ema pointed out, idly looking around the room as her thoughts drifted elsewhere. "So, uh, how is your search for evidence going, anyway?"

Phoenix shrugged, rubbing his face as he returned his attention to his guest. "Only bits and pieces, unfortunately," he admitted. "We have a back-up plan, but Edgeworth can only do so much alone; The current court system is highly flawed anyway, so he thinks we might achieve justice by finding a way to hold a fairer trial."

Ema thought for a moment. "Spy cameras can count as good evidence in a pinch, can't they?" she asked.

Phoenix was thrown for a second, having not expected that concern to ever cross his mind. "Uh..." He shook his head to organise his thoughts, hoping maybe to shake loose the long-hidden details of his law studies a full decade earlier. "If it's relevant to the case... I don't see why not," he hesitantly decided.

"Good!" Ema cried, then pulled her bag into her lap and firmly gripped the badge pinned to the front, unclipping it with a triumphant grin. "This thing'll finally be useful!"

"What thing?" Phoenix asked, watching her warily as she removed the badge, sticking one hand into
her bag as she searched for something inside. "Ema, what are you doing?"

With a cry of "Aha!", Ema pulled out a short cable from her bag, getting to her feet and inspecting Phoenix carefully, a finger tapping her mouth. "I think we should put it... here!" With a grin, she grabbed the beanie on Phoenix's head, ignoring the ex-lawyer's objections as she pinned the badge to the brim, right above his left eye. "Now it can see everything you see!" she announced as she stepped back, proudly surveying her work.

Phoenix frowned at the young woman, wondering if he was going to have to get used to the feeling of the surprisingly-heavy badge on his beanie and hoping it wouldn't tear apart the knitting of the well-loved garment. "I should warn you, there's a girl out there who'll be very upset if you've ruined this hat just for a badge..."

Ema giggled, sitting down again as she grinned at her friend. "It's a spy camera!" she explained. "Lana gave it to me when I was just a kid, but I've never really had a use for it. It still works, though!" She pushed the cable into Phoenix's hands as he gave her a confused look. "You'll need this, too! I find it best to leave it connected to the computer every night, to free up the disk space of everything it captured and let it charge for the next day!"

Phoenix looked over the black cable, recognising the USB port on one end, though he couldn't name the metal connection on the other. "S... spy camera...?" he muttered, still stuck on processing what he had just been given.

"Yep!" Ema cried, then frowned in thought as she stared at the yellow badge on Phoenix's beanie. "I never worked out how to turn it on and off, though. Don't think it even has that kind of switch. Kinda ruins the 'secret' if you're seen fiddling with it, I guess. Oh!" She pointed at it, giving her friend a grin. "I should warn you, the footage it gets isn't exactly in HD, and the framerate is pretty low, and the sound can be a little grainy. Trade-off for such a small, busy device being on twenty-four-seven!"

"E-Ema," Phoenix stuttered, shaking his head emphatically as he tried to hand back the short cable, "I can't accept this!"

"Yes, you can!" Ema insisted with a grin, shoving Phoenix's hands back towards him. "Besides, it goes with your cute hat! I bet you can't say that about this 'Apollo's' outfit, can you?"

Phoenix had to agree she had a point there; He couldn't shake the image of Apollo with a very obvious childish badge on his vest and Kristoph ordering him to take it off immediately. He quickly banished the picture from his mind to return his attention to Ema, saying, "Ema, you already gave me that luminol and fingerprint powder the last-"

"You still have them!?" Ema interrupted, looking excited.

"Y-yes," Phoenix struggled to quickly reply, thrown off by the sudden change of subject, "I-"

"That's so cool!" the young woman cried, dancing in her seat before fixing her friend with a sheepish smile. "I was kinda worried you'd thrown them out or something. They're neat little mementos of our time together, right?"

Phoenix sighed, giving her a reluctant nod, to Ema's glee. He couldn't argue they were reminders of the hectic few days of Lana's trial, though only the luminol had proven to ever be useful; In fact, he distinctly remembered, a week or two after adopting Trucy, the young girl finding the fingerprint powder and trying to eat it, apparently believing it to be sugar. He'd had to hide the small jar after that, warily keeping it well out of sight for all three of his children as they came into, and, for two of
them, eventually moved out of, his household. "I have to admit," he told her, "the luminol has come in handy. The fingerprint powder, however..."

Ema scoffed, waving a hand dismissively. "Give to this 'Apollo' of yours! He's a defence attorney, right? I'm sure he'll find a use for it. Oh!" She grinned. "If he's ever working on a case with me, I can show him how it works!"

Phoenix chuckled at the offer. "I'm sure he'd like that, actually," he agreed. "And..." He pointed to the badge on his beanie. "I suppose I should thank you for this."

"No problem!" Ema replied, crossing her arms proudly. After a moment, she then reached into her purse and pulled out a plastic food bag, which she popped open and offered to Phoenix. "Snackoo?" As Phoenix looked at the bag with confusion, she added, "They're delicious! Can't get 'em here, though. Have to import them from Europe!"

Shrugging, Phoenix reached into the bag and grabbed one of the chocolate sticks within, examining it for a moment before tossing it into his mouth. After a few moments spent chewing, he nodded, giving Ema a smile. "It's good," he agreed.

Ema grinned. "Awesome!" she replied. "I can get you a bag of your own the next time I have a spare!"

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Moving in Fox's stuff is taking longer than we thought. It looks like we'll have to move my stuff tomorrow.

Alright. I'm sure Trucy's disappointed to miss out on that ;) .

Haha! Actually, Fox has just pointed out we both work on Mondays, so we'll probably end up having to do it all slowly over the week. Trucy wants to help out, but Apollo's had to tell her it would conflict with their show and now the subject has changed and I've totally lost the conversation thread.

That happens when you're talking to me instead of paying attention ;) So you'll be coming home tonight with Trucy? .

Yes, until we get my new bed set up. I think the others have decided we're going to hang out here, then go to the Wonder Bar, so you'll be seeing Trucy soon. I'll go home with her afterwards.

Okay. Let me know if your plan changes .

Will do, Papa!

February 22, 5:45PM
Wright Talent Agency
Phoenix's Office

That afternoon, Trucy sighed in exhaustion as she trudged through her front door. "Daddy, I'm
"Hey, kiddo," Phoenix called, giving his daughter a smile as she crossed the room to meet him, though a part of him was still melancholy at the thought he would have to get used to seeing her come home alone like this. "Getting set for your show tonight?"

Trucy nodded, smiling as she remembered the restriction of 'no shows on school nights' finally being lifted almost a full month ago, allowing her and Apollo to turn their three weekly shows into a daily performance... at the trade-off of quitting the matinee they'd been doing on Sundays. Even though today was a weekend, she was still excited at the thought of getting to perform so much more regularly. "We're all gonna meet up at Eldoon's before we get to the Wonder Bar," she explained. "Luke's friend Ms Fox said she'd come to see the show tonight!"

Phoenix chuckled, nodding. "I guess I'd better come along and meet her properly, then," he said, standing up. "This move was so rushed, I haven't had the chance yet."

Trucy was about to agree when she suddenly noticed the yellow badge gleaming from Phoenix's beanie, a pinkish-red outline forming the image of a shocked face. She frowned, pointing at it. "Daddy, when'd you get that badge?"

Phoenix grinned cheekily. "What badge?"

"That one!" Trucy cried with a pout, pointing more firmly at his beanie. "On the hat I made you!"

"Oh, this one?" Phoenix asked, still grinning as he gestured to the disguised spy camera, then gave her a dismissive wave as he walked into the next room. "That's not a badge!"

Trucy crossed her arms, glaring at her father as she followed him. "Daddy, it's clearly a badge! Where'd it come from?"

Phoenix almost had to fight not to laugh as he continued to mess with his daughter, turning to give her a wink as he tapped the side of his nose. "Secret," he said.

"That's not fair!" Trucy complained, grumpily following him into the kitchen as he got himself a glass of grape juice. "Why won't you tell me!?"

"Secret!" Phoenix repeated, almost singing the word as he ignored Trucy's cloying for details.

"Argh!" Throwing up her hands in frustrated defeat, Trucy rushed off up the stairs. "I don't have time for this, I have to get ready!" she shouted as she went, pausing halfway up the stairs to turn back and call accusingly, "You're being really unfair, Daddy!"

Phoenix just laughed as he ignored her.
The strange man smiled. "You still do not know who I am?"

Sat at his piano, Phoenix took a swig from the bottle of grape juice in his hand, and placed it back on the ground, giving the man a frown the entire time. "Have we... met?" It was then the penny suddenly dropped.

"Today, in this courtroom... you cannot declare me guilty."
"What are you talking about?"
"I am talking... about this!"
"M-Mister Enigmar!"
"The defendant's escaped! Find him! Quick!"
"Bailiff! Close all exits from the building! On the double! He must not be allowed to escape!"

Phoenix stared, wide-eyed, at the person in front of him, the echoes of the long-ago trial still ringing in his head. "Z... Zak Gramarye!?" he whispered in awe.

"Yes," the man replied with a nod, looking quite proud of himself as he was finally recognised. "The reincarnation act of the century. Pity I have only an audience of one."

'Just me?' Phoenix shot a quick glance at the odd-looking newsman scribbling away on a notepad at the other side of the table, paying the pair little attention as Zak studiously ignored him.

Looking around, Zak noticed a nearby waitress (a new hire Phoenix didn't know very well) and ordered her to prepare the Hydeout. Wrapped up in her warm furs, she meekly agreed and scurried off without another word, and Phoenix supposed he couldn't blame her; Zak Gramarye was quite a fearsome presence, even when he was 'dead'.

"It's really you?" Phoenix asked the moment the waitress was out of sight. "Shadi Enigmar?"

Zak held up a single finger, correcting Phoenix, "Now I am Shadi Smith. Remember this."

Phoenix stared at him a few seconds more, then sighed, leaning on his knees. "How many years has it been now?" he asked, mostly to himself. "Six?" Wow, when was it I stopped keeping track of the anniversary of that trial?"

"In exactly three days from now, it will be seven," Zak replied, one hand brushing idly at the front of his white suit as he put on a vaguely sorrowful look, avoiding Phoenix's gaze. "I have caused you much inconvenience, I fear."

At that, Phoenix could barely keep a glare off his face. "Yeah," he muttered darkly. "You could say
that.

Zak seemed not to notice, still staring off into the distance. He looked almost... vulnerable. "Is... she well? Trucy, I mean."

Phoenix didn't want to give the man an answer out of spite, but the thought that Trucy would have wanted him to answer persuaded him otherwise. "She's fine," he curtly replied, deciding that, if Zak wanted more than the bare minimum, he could talk to his daughter himself. "I've got her working already. Hope you don't mind."

Zak gave Phoenix a faraway smile, apparently unsurprised. "I hardly need express my gratitude, but you have it." He nodded to himself as the smile faded. "This is why I have come." The smile turned into a fearsome look, one Phoenix had seen many times in the eyes of potential challengers... people who believed themselves the best, and who could not bear to be the losing party. "That, and to settle a matter of cards."

"By which you mean poker," Phoenix replied, keeping his voice and expression calm; He was more practised than he'd like to admit with how to handle the kind of competitors who came to him with a look like that in their eyes.

"I despise losing above all else," Zak continued. "And so, I have decided that I will win tonight, no matter what it takes."

Phoenix narrowed his eyes as he noticed a small smile flickering at the corners of Zak's mouth. That was a kind of confidence that said 'I have a plan that can't fail', that shouted 'danger' from the rooftops and did not care what would happen to Phoenix in the fallout it would create.

Suddenly Phoenix wondered if Zak had anything to do with the mysterious Five of Hearts he'd found in his pocket earlier.

Finally, Zak's expression softened, and he gave Phoenix an almost friendly smile. "Perhaps we should take this time to talk, before we play. I know you have much to ask me... and I, you."

'An opportunity to finally get the answers to questions I've held for seven years? Who could resist that?' Phoenix closed his eyes for a moment, pondering which of his questions was most important. "Why not start from our first meeting?" he eventually asked, looking up at Zak. "We competed that day seven years ago, too."

"Ah, yes," Zak replied, smiling in thought at the memory. "You must have been surprised! Called to the detention centre out of the blue."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "You choose your defence attorneys by playing poker."

Zak shrugged, admitting as much without saying so. "Some are hired, others fired," he said. "When you compete, you see a man's true nature." Before Phoenix could get distracted thinking about how unnerved Zak had made him in their long-ago poker bout, the man was giving him a secretive smile. "You know what I speak of. I know that you do."

At first, Phoenix had no idea what he was referring to, until he recalled how he had unwittingly discovered Trucy's ability to detect lies... whether in speech, or implied as in poker. "Trucy's 'power'?"

"Trucy?" Zak chuckled. "She is in a class of her own."

'Her's and Apollo's,' Phoenix corrected, but kept the thought to himself. "Can you tell me what her
"power is?"

Zak nodded. "Judging a person's thoughts by reading their reactions is a staple of performance magic," he explained, "but those of Trucy's line possess far greater skill."

'So it is genetic. Not that it could have been a co-incidence she and Apollo had the same unique ability.' Phoenix resisted a smile, deciding to feign ignorance for now. "Her 'line'?"

"Recall," Zak said, looking away with a harsh expression, "you were the second man to whom I've lost."

Nothing needed to be said: Phoenix only nodded as he remembered Zak telling him seven years ago that the other person he shared that honour with was Trucy and Apollo's grandfather, Magnifi Gramarye. 'I suppose it was him they ultimately inherited it from, then... via their mother, obviously.'

"That was the first time I learned of this 'power', as you call it," Zak continued.

"It's genetic?" Phoenix asked, his best confused look on his face. "Just 'in' the Gramarye blood or something?"

Zak seemed thoughtful... distracted by the past. After a moment, his expression hardened, but Phoenix almost missed it as he suddenly became very aware of the magatama sitting in his pocket; Three Psyche-Locks shimmered into being before his eyes, hanging from the spiritual chains the former magician had wound so tightly around himself. It was only Phoenix's practised poker face that kept him from crying out in shock before Zak finally answered, "I am sorry, but it is not something told lightly to outsiders. And it is nothing you need to know at this time."

'Need to know!? I became a father to two of them seven years ago, thanks to you! How could I be any more 'need to know' than I already am!?' Despite his inner rage, Phoenix managed to stay outwardly calm and cool, very aware of the need to not lose his temper during so critical a meeting. He'd leave that to Apollo and Luke if the ex-magician ever deigned to show his face to his daughter.

Zak, however, didn't seem to notice Phoenix's reaction, distracted again by his past as the Psyche-Locks faded. "She's... fifteen this year?"

Phoenix nodded, deciding not to point out Trucy's next birthday wasn't until the end of September. "She's still trying her best to follow in your footsteps, you know," he instead said, half-hoping the statement would pain the man across from him in some obvious way.

"I... see," Zak carefully replied, and Phoenix couldn't help but feel happiness to see the guilt settle in the man's expression. "When I planned my disappearing act, it was the thought of her alone that gave me pause."

"Wait," Phoenix suddenly realised, distracted from his own dark musings on whether or not Zak deserved better, "you were planning on vanishing from the get-go? Even if I'd managed to clear your name!?"

Zak nodded. "Yes, and for that, I must apologise." He sighed, reaching into a pocket. "However, I could not be found guilty that day... because of this." He pulled out a small piece of paper, which he held out to Phoenix. The ex-lawyer took it gingerly, reading a short, hand-written message neatly crossing the page. "A transferral of rights," Zak explained, seeing Phoenix's confused expression. "You see the signature?"

Sure enough, Zak seemed to be correct; The handwritten contract officially passed on the "secrets, staging and performance" of Magnifi Gramarye's magic to "the recipient named below". Right
beneath that, all in what Phoenix presumed was Magnifi himself's handwriting, was Zak's name, followed by Magnifi's signature. What caught Phoenix's attention most, however, was the fact that the left edge of the paper was torn all the way down... like the page had been pulled out of a book. "This... is torn," Phoenix muttered, running a finger along the rough edge with a thoughtful frown.

"You recall the diary, yes?" Zak replied, a vaguely sad smile on his face.

Phoenix glared at the page as his suspicions were being confirmed. "How could I forget?" He handed it back to Zak, the memory of the falsified paper flashing in front of his eyes. "That scrap of paper lost me my attorney's badge."

"This is the real page that was torn from the book," Zak explained, though even he realised Phoenix had already guessed that. "Magnifi gave it to me that night."

The ex-lawyer could not meet Zak's eyes for a long moment, trying to calm himself down from the newly ignited rage on the indignity of his lost badge. Eventually, he snapped his glare towards Zak. "You could have told me this earlier. Like, seven years earlier."

Zak nodded in calm agreement. "Once again, I must apologize. It was all I could do to prepare for my escape from that courtroom." When Phoenix only looked away, continuing to quietly huff to himself, Zak changed the subject: "The greatest of Magnifi Gramarye's illusions are true art. As such, they are well protected... by this document." He gestured with the handwritten contract in his hand. "Only its bearer may perform his illusions on stage."

Phoenix forced himself to calm down, helped with the distraction of Zak discussing the Gramarye contract. If it was likely to involve Trucy, he wasn't going to allow himself to lose control.

"As the rightful heir to his art," Zak continued, "I, too, wanted a rightful heir." He smiled. "I'm sure you know who I chose as my successor."

"Your daughter," Phoenix said. 'Poor Apollo... if this... man had done any kind of looking in to how Trucy was doing, he'd know you'd found each other.'

Zak nodded. "That is why I have risked all to come here tonight." He turned to the forgotten newsman still lingering on the other side of the table. "Brushel."

Brushel jerked his head up in surprise. "Sir!" he cried, then jumped to his feet and scurried around the table, pulling out a piece of paper from a bag and laying it between Zak and Phoenix, pulling the pen from behind his ear and holding it out to Phoenix. "Here you go!"

Phoenix looked between the man and the paper in confusion, carefully taking the pen. "What's this?" he asked the ex-magician.

"A letter passing the rights I have inherited to Trucy," Zak explained, leaning forward to tap the bottom of the paper, where lines had been drawn out for three signatures. "I would have you sign here, as a witness."

"B-but," Phoenix cried, "I'm not a lawyer anymore! And you need a public notary, besides!"

"Ah," Brushel interrupted with a proud smile, "I may not look it, but I'm a certified notary!"

Phoenix stared at him in surprise. "You are...?"

"By day, I wear a notary's glasses and hunt for news!" Brushel went on, an apparently rehearsed speech of pride. "Also by day, I wear a reporter's glasses and notarise! When I take off the glasses,"
he paused, fiddling with his thick eyewear, "I can't see very well."

"Your signature, please," Zak interrupted to Phoenix, shooting a glare at Brushel. "This is the first reason I have come here tonight."

View the Court Record
It took only a minute for all three men to sign the document, officially passing Magnifi’s tricks down to his granddaughter. Although Phoenix hoped Trucy would immediately share them with her brother once she received them, he continued to keep Apollo's existence to himself for now, unwilling to give more information to Zak than he was getting.

Zak folded up the paper, solemnly passing it to Phoenix. "Pass this on to Trucy," he asked, "when the time is right." Once Phoenix had taken the document, the ex-magician then turned to the third man of their group. "Brushel," he called, waving away the newsman. "You may leave."

"Ah, but it's your last game!" Brushel argued, clinging eagerly to his pen and notepad. "I mean, what a scoop-!"

Without pausing to even think, Zak stood and punched Brushel below the chin, knocking the spindly reporter to the floor, where he quickly scrambled to right himself. Zak himself calmly sat back down, returning his gaze to a shocked Phoenix. "I punch and I punch," he explained with a shrug, "but still, it is not enough."

Brushel finally regained his footing, adjusting his glasses with a nervous smile as he got back up. "Er, I just remembered a future, er, prior engagement!" he muttered. "Toodles, gentlemen!" He quickly gathered up his things, giving Phoenix a nod. "Oh, and nice meeting you, piano man!" With that, he spun around and rushed out of the restaurant as fast as his legs could carry him.

Zak seemed proud to finally be alone to talk, though Phoenix was still unnerved by the casual act of violence. 'I'm glad Trucy didn't inherit that...' To distract himself, Phoenix changed the subject, turning to Zak with a curious look as he examined the document in his hands. "It's... been seven years, you said?"

The former magician smiled, probably guessing what Phoenix was thinking about. "Precisely."

'Seven years... the time limit on missing persons. When 'missing' becomes outright 'deceased', legally...’ After a moment to carefully place the paper in his bag, Phoenix continued, "Three days from now, Sunday, is when you become 'deceased' in the eyes of the law. Everything you own would pass to Trucy."

"Exactly," Zak replied. "I risk showing my face in public for the sake of that document." He gestured to Phoenix's bag, then smiled. "You might say, I am securing my daughter's inheritance."

"But do you really need it?" Phoenix asked, also gesturing to the document hidden in his bag. "Wouldn't Trucy inherit your estate automatically?"

Zak frowned, thinking a moment. "Not in this case, I'm afraid." At Phoenix's confused look, he continued, "I received the performance rights from Magnifi Gramarye, however, this was done in secret, without witnesses." He pointed a finger into the air. "Before Magnifi died, only two potential successors to his repertoire were named: Myself, Zak Gramarye... and Valant Gramarye." He lowered his hand, a solemn frown on his face. "Not Trucy."
'And not Apollo either,' Phoenix silently added, grimacing to himself. 'I suppose Thalassa was thought to be dead, which explains why they weren't passed on to her.' "So you do need the document."

Zak glanced in the direction Brushel had disappeared. "I have known Brushel since before I vanished," he said, finally explaining the man's presence with a smile. "Now, only three know of my 'rebirth'."

Phoenix mentally counted himself and Brushel, wondering who the 'third' was. 'I suppose it doesn't really matter. Perhaps... it's time I pressed him for a little more information.' "I... took the liberty of looking into Trucy's background," he told the ex-magician. "You have no other close kin?"

It took a few moments for Zak to reply, sternly returning Phoenix's curious gaze. "It is as you say." A very long pause followed.

Phoenix resisted the urge to sigh in frustration. 'Okay, I know I've been withholding some stuff, but...' As the awkward silence continued, the ex-lawyer decided he had no choice but to be direct; He reached into his bag for his old computer tablet, still kept on him at all times purely by force of habit, and flicked through to find where he had copied the picture of Thalassa. "This, I believe," he said, showing the photo to Zak, "is Trucy's mother?"

Zak's posture stiffened, though Phoenix wasn't sure if he was scared or simply angry... possibly both. "How did you come by this!?"

"Well, Trucy showed me her locket," Phoenix explained with a shrug. "It took a lot of digging to find this, though." He smirked. "I just said I was looking into Trucy's background, didn't I?" When Zak only looked away, still not offering information, Phoenix added, "Trucy said her mother was 'gone'?"

"Then it is so," Zak curtly replied, still looking away.

Phoenix frowned in frustration. "Um...?"

"She is gone," Zak insisted. "What more is there to say?"

"How about lots?" Phoenix shot back. "For one thing, she's Magnifi's only child, correct?"

Zak's expression darkened. "This discussion is over, Mister Wright."

Phoenix bit back a sharp reply, deciding it wasn't worth it. 'Clearly, I have to give a little to get any more info here.' He reached a hand into his pocket, clutching at the green magatama within. 'Now, what was it that set them off earlier? Trucy and Apollo's 'power', I think.' "Then let's change the subject a bit," he suggested. "Trucy's 'power' allows her to almost see right into other people's minds." He smiled, almost laughing at the memory of the first time he'd brought her in to 'work'. "Certainly she blew mine when I first saw her do it."

Zak raised an eyebrow, unaware of the three Psyche-Locks shimmering into existence around him. "And after you were done having your mind blown, you took her to play cards with you."

Phoenix blushed, wondering how Zak knew about that... or had it been a guess? "Er... gotta use the resources at hand, I always say," he muttered as an excuse. "A-anyway... You haven't admitted to sharing this power, so... she got it from her mother, then?"

The other man's expression again darkened, and he glared at Phoenix. "I will not speak of that," he said in a warning tone.
"Why not?" Phoenix asked, waving a hand. "Because you were a team once?" While Zak seemed to struggle not to sputter in anger, Phoenix returned his attention to his Court Record, flicking through to an old photo from his early investigation into the Gramarye trial. It only took a moment to locate the picture he'd taken of young Vera's stamp, showing two young men and a younger woman in their full magician gear, and he turned the old computer around to 'present his evidence' to Zak. "You, Valant and Thalassa were a trio. No-one in the entire country hadn't heard of Troupe Gramarye at its peak. But then tragedy struck, didn't it?" Zak firmly looked away, which Phoenix took as permission to continue. "Not many people know this, of course, 'and even less seem to know it isn't true, judging by the rumour mill I found it on,' "but Thalassa lost her life during a rehearsal... to you and Valant's bullets."

With the shattering of one of his Psyche-Locks, Zak seemed to break, pressing a hand to his mouth as he doubled over. "It was an accident!" he cried. "How could I shoot my dear Thalassa!"

"I'm sure Valant would say the same thing," Phoenix pointed out, unable to resist rubbing a little salt in the wound as he added, "Why, it's just like another murder I might mention."

Zak shot Phoenix a glare. "Damn you!" He took a moment to compose himself, lost in the memory of his wife. "Her eyes... I love Thalassa's eyes. To think they could read my mind was frightening, yet there was a warmth in them that... felt like an embrace." He silently sighed, shaking his head. "She is dead, and Magnifi Gramarye has joined her."

Phoenix closed his eyes. As much as he'd liked the dark joy in torturing Zak with his wife's 'death', perhaps it was time he let the man in on the truth... If nothing else, Trucy would want it that way. "I'm afraid," he sighed, opening his eyes to meet the ex-magician's gaze, "that's not quite the entire story." Zak frowned, confused. "What are you talking about, Mister Wright?"

Phoenix lost his nerve for a moment, looking away before he could steel himself to look Zak in the eye again. "I already know you were Thalassa Gramarye's second husband." Zak's eyes subtly widened in surprise. "Trucy isn't the only one she passed her ability on to. Isn't that right?"

After a half-second of silence, Zak laughed, though he couldn't keep away a nervous tone. "Hah! You're gonna be difficult about this, huh?" Without a word, Phoenix returned to his Court Record, flipping through to a photo he'd taken of Apollo over a year ago now, during Christmas celebrations at Edgeworth's place. He'd snapped it while Apollo was distracted showing off to Franziska and Adrian, catching the young man off-guard mid-trick; As a result, it wasn't the most flattering picture of his eldest son, but, being both recent and including his everpresent bracelet, he picked it now, displaying the photo on the tablet screen and again presenting it to Zak. "Just a wild guess, but I'd say he fits the bill."

Zak raised an eyebrow, taking the tablet computer and staring at the photo in disbelief. "This... boy?"

"That's 'young man' to you!" "His name is Apollo," Phoenix explained, keeping his gaze on Zak stern. "Seven years ago, he carried the surname 'Justice', just as Trucy carried 'Enigmar'. They've both changed that now, for mostly the same reasons."

Perhaps beginning to suspect Phoenix's meaning, Zak gave the other man a glare, returning the Court Record to its owner. "And who could he be?"

Phoenix couldn't resist a smile at the somewhat vague wording of Zak's question. "He could be any
number of things," he replied. "Although most of the world would probably first think of him as..." 'best not bring up the 'magician' thing just yet,' "well, I suppose 'an attorney'."

"A-attorney!" Zak repeated, angry surprise in his eyes, before he narrowed his glare. "So what are we to make of this, O Great Ex-Attorney?" When Phoenix only frowned in response, the former magician continued, "You can show me pictures of strange boys all you like, but you could at least say something like 'I'm this boy!' I could use a laugh!"

"Perhaps you wouldn't laugh if you knew the facts," Phoenix shot back, pleased to see Zak looking unnerved at the confident and immediate reply. "This might not be a hundred percent proof, but it's certainly close... and as good as 'true' to all else involved. There's a link between Apollo and Thalassa." He paused, looking down at the picture still displayed on the computer screen, and smiled. "Actually, it's more of a 'ring'."

Again, Zak seemed confused. "A ring?"

Phoenix smiled, showing the Court Record to Zak. "On his wrist. You didn't notice?" As Zak leaned forward to look, Phoenix added, "Surely I don't need to bring up the picture of Thalassa again to refresh your memory."

Although Zak remained silent, Phoenix noticed a barely hidden gasp, and the second of the Psyche-Locks shattered.

"Thalassa's first husband died a year after they were wed, yes?" Phoenix quietly asked. "About... twenty-one, twenty-two years ago?"

Zak took a moment to reply, continuing to stare at the picture of Apollo. "He was a performer." he admitted, tearing his gaze away to stare off into the distance at his side. "They met when he joined us Gramaryes as a guest in our show. After Thalassa wed him, she left the Troupe for a while." He closed his eyes, again pausing. "And you say she had a child then?"

Phoenix paused a moment before replying. "It was a miracle I ever ran into Apollo," he said, smiling at the memory of the starstruck fifteen-year-old he'd been introduced to outside Turner School. "I recognised his bracelet instantly, from that photo of Thalassa I found. They... really stand out, those things."

"They are a Gramarye family heirloom," Zak explained, opening his eyes only to sadly gaze at Apollo's picture. "I always suspected something more had happened, but..." He sighed, passing the Court Record back to Phoenix and turning his head as though he couldn't stand to look at it anymore. "That photo you have of Thalassa; I took it, before she left us. When she returned... she wore only one bracelet."

Phoenix was so distracted looking at the image of his eldest son in his hands that he almost missed seeing Zak's final Psyche-Lock shatter, the spiritual chains around him fading away into nothingness.

"She gave it to this boy," Zak continued in a whisper, voice laden with emotion. "Her son."

Nodding, Phoenix powered down his computer, returning it to his backpack. He suspected it was seeing so much of Zak's vulnerable side that was finally turning his opinion on the man, that he no longer wanted to torture him the way he had been. "You should also know, although I have no evidence that you would believe, Thalassa isn't dead," he told him. "Trucy and Apollo have been keeping half-an-eye out in the hope she might reappear, like you have."

Zak shook his head. "You are all mistaken, then," he quietly replied. "Thalassa is dead. There is little
point keeping hope otherwise." He slowly looked up to meet Phoenix's eyes. "And I am afraid I will not be able to reappear to Trucy. It is... simply too risky, even for her." Before Phoenix could do anything more than frown in disapproval, Zak continued, "They know they are brother and sister?"

Sighing, Phoenix decided not to push why Zak wasn't seeing Trucy. "I told them... probably six years ago now," he said in answer. "Didn't think they deserved being left in the dark."

Zak nodded, looking more relaxed. "I... am in your debt. Once again."

"No kidding," Phoenix replied, only half-joking. "The madness of the Wright family is nothing compared to you Gramaryes... Quite an accomplishment considering two of us are both."

Chuckling in reply, Zak paused a moment, then gave Phoenix a determined look. "I have made a decision," he announced. "I will tell you all I know. Consider it a gift."

View the Court Record
Luke snorted into his pillow as he reluctantly regained consciousness, still half-asleep. He could hear something buzzing insistently on his bedside table, where a bright light was shining straight into his eyes. 'Is... that my phone? Oh yeah, it's set to silent overnight... Who's calling me at, um, whatever time it is right now?' Pushing himself up with a groan, the young man reached out a hand and blindly patted along the surface of his bedside table until he landed on the mobile phone, which he grabbed and brought to his face, answering it with eyes still squeezed shut against the bright light of the screen. "Mmm... 'ello?"

There was a relieved sigh from the other end of the line. "Luke, it's Papa. Sorry to wake you up, but I'm glad you answered."

Luke frowned in confusion, blearily rubbing at his eyes to keep himself awake as he lay back in bed. "Papa? Why are you calling in the middle of the night?" He glanced around his room, wishing he had some kind of luminescent clock handy.

Slowly, the gears turned in Luke's head, and he shot awake as he realised what had happened, throwing off his covers as he pressed his feet to the carpet below, his free hand clutching at his pillow as he sat up. "Papa! They think...!? What happened!?"

"I'll explain later," Phoenix promised. "I've already got Kristoph and Apollo on my case, so I shouldn't be away from home for more than a few days. I'm calling you because I need to ask you to do something for me."

Luke paused a moment, wondering what his father could need other than a defence attorney. "What is it?"

Phoenix sighed, sounding suddenly sad. "Look after Trucy. I'm sure she can handle herself for a few days, but I'd feel more comfortable if there was someone at home keeping an eye on her."


"Still there," Phoenix replied, a smile evident in his voice, "though I would've thought you'd want to use your old bed over that old thing!" As Luke blushed at the forgotten fact, the older man continued, "I doubt Trucy will want to go to school today, by the way. Sorry to have to ask you to take time off work."

"It's fine," Luke promised, grinning as he stood up and started to circle his room, making a mental list of essentials to grab. "Duck will understand, and Fox can handle herself on the job alone. I can call Trucy's school later too, if you want."
Phoenix chuckled. "I'd appreciate it," he said. "The both of you come to the detention centre later today and I'll explain everything... Or, at least as much as I can."


"Love you," Phoenix repeated, and the phone disconnected.

Luke paused a moment before trying to put his phone in his pocket, belatedly realising as his attempt failed that he was still in his pajamas. 'Okay then. First port of call: Get dressed.' He stepped towards where he knew his dresser was, only to hit something at hip-level that he quickly registered must have been his desk. 'Ow... Scratch that: Lights first.'

*ring ring*
*click*

"Mister Gavin?"

"Good morning, Wright. Have you heard from your father?"

"Um... not since our show last night, no. Did something happen?"

"Hmm... Once again, he leaves it to me to pass on the unpleasant news."

"...?"

"There was a murder at the Borscht Bowl Club early this morning, in the Hydeout. Your father has been arrested as the suspect."

"What!?"

"Not to worry, he has already hired us as his defence. Come straight to the crime scene and we can get to work."

"Y-yes, sir! I'll see you there!"

*click*

April 17, 10:02AM
Borscht Bowl Club
Outside

Apollo paced nervously across the pavement in front of the Russian restaurant. After getting the call from his mentor as he was getting ready that morning, he'd been finding it hard to focus. 'It's Luke's arrest all over again!' He'd been able to shoot off a quick text to Luke asking what his younger brother knew about the situation, but had yet to receive a reply. He was unwilling just yet to contact Trucy, as she was supposed to be at school and he didn't want to accidentally break the news to her if she was still unaware. More than anything, he wanted to run to the detention centre to check on his
father, but after the disaster of what had happened the last time a member of his family was arrested, he didn't want to argue with his mentor on anything work-related. He could only hope this case would run smoother than Luke's did.

"Wright," came a call from nearby, and Apollo looked up to see Kristoph approaching, his everpresent calm smile on his face. "I hope you didn't rush here," he said.

Apollo shrugged, trying not to blush. 'I knew I should have at least waited to explain what was happening to Clay... I kinda left him in the dark a bit.’ In fact, all he had told Clay as he rushed to leave the apartment that morning was that he had a case, phone already in hand texting Luke.

"No matter," Kristoph continued, looking around. "The police appear to have finished their examination here. Do you think they'll let us in?" Without waiting for an answer, he walked over to the front door and pushed it open.

Almost immediately there was a thud as the door's movement was halted, and a face appeared in the doorway, hidden behind a wave of black hair. "Restaurant's closed!" he shouted, irritation evident in his voice.

Kristoph sighed. "We are defence attorneys," he explained, pointing to the badge on his lapel. "Our client is the one accused of the murder here."

Apollo, meanwhile, was smiling in recognition at the officer just inside the door. "Ernest Holmes?"

The officer paused in confusion, looking over to Apollo before grinning. "Whoa, hey Apollo! What are the chances we'd be on the same case again, huh?"

"Yeah!" Apollo agreed with a laugh. "So, uh, can we have a look around?"

Ernest paused, biting his lip as he glanced around the room behind him. "Uh..." He hesitated, then sighed loudly, stepping back to open the door. "The detective'll kill me if he finds out," he said, "so be quick."

Kristoph smiled as he walked in, giving Ernest a grateful nod. "Our thanks, officer," he said.

Apollo grinned as he slipped in behind his mentor, helping Ernest close the door. "Thank you so much!" he said, hoping he sounded more sincere than the words alone felt. Despite his old friend's kindness, he couldn't resist adding, "Who's the detective and prosecutor? Do you know?"

Sighing again, Ernest crossed his arms and leaned against the door, watching Kristoph cast his gaze around the unchanged main room of the restaurant. "I gotta say, we both had it good with Fulbright and Debeste," he admitted. "Detective Slingsby really doesn't seem to care, and the prosecutor... well, I hate to make the obvious joke, but he's a real pain."

Apollo raised an eyebrow, but Kristoph gave a rare laugh, turning to the pair. "Ah, but which one? There are two 'pains' in the prosecutor's office."

Ernest gave a weak smile. "I don't know his first name, sorry."

"No matter," Kristoph assured him. "Our client will know when we talk to him later today."

Although he was still confused over what the pair were talking about, Apollo most wanted to ask that they not refer to Phoenix as their 'client'. It felt... wrong. Impersonal. Exactly the opposite of taking the defendant's side in a case when no-one else would.
Kristoph turned and headed towards the door down into the Hydeout, Apollo rushing to stay on his heel and Ernest hurriedly locking the front door before following them. "I imagine the police investigation has concluded already?" the elder attorney asked.

"Y-yeah, it has," Ernest replied. "It was a very open-and-shut case..." He paused as Apollo halted and shot a glare up the stairs at his former classmate. "S-sorry," the young officer muttered.

Entering the room below, Kristoph crossed his arms, looking around the room with a stern expression. "Indeed it has," he muttered to himself.

Curious at the odd statement, Apollo hurried down into the basement, coming to a halt in shock as he looked around the familiar room. "What the-!?"

The tiny basement was unusually clean: The three swivel chairs were neatly tucked under the poker table, anything that might have sat atop it removed to leave the wooden surface bare. On the floor, it was clear cards had been strewn everywhere, as the impressions they left were surrounded by innumerable bootprints of passing officers from their investigation of the crime scene. Apollo found himself wondering if the cards were okay; The last time a deck of poker cards had been destroyed (a handful ended up down a drain in circumstances he couldn't even guess at), the remainder had gone to him and Trucy, on the excuse that "cards are your trade, after all". Trucy kept the incomplete deck as a back-up for some of their magic tricks, though they rarely used it. 'I guess someone was playing fifty-two-card-pick-up the night of the murder? I wonder if they were using red or blue that night...'

Kristoph grunted to himself, turning to face Ernest behind them in the doorway to the room. "They took everything."

Ernest nodded sheepishly. "Y-yeah..."

"Do you know what was here?" Apollo asked, spinning to face his friend with a desperate look. "Did you see the crime scene!?!"

"S-sorry, no," Ernest mumbled in reply, staring at his boots. "I only know the real basics because I overheard the prosecutor talking to the detective before they gave me guard-duty."

Kristoph shook his head with a sigh, one hand brushing at his hair. "The bare bones of the prosecution's argument will be better than nothing," he pointed out.

After a short pause, Ernest nodded in agreement, looking up to meet Kristoph's gaze. "Apparently there's a witness," he said. "Also it happened during a poker game. The victim was a customer."

Apollo nodded. "No offence, but I could've worked out the last bit on my own." Gesturing to the room behind him, he explained, "This room is reserved only for poker, and people come here to challenge my dad. At most, it was probably just him, the customer and the dealer in here last night."

Ernest crossed his arms, sighing. "I figured it was your dad," he muttered. "Your family must be cursed or something."

"So the dealer would be the witness then," Kristoph continued, looking back at the poker table. "A waitress at the restaurant, I assume?"

Apollo nodded. "Usually," he agreed. "Occasionally the owner will deal, but he hasn't done that in ages."

Kristoph stared at the poker table in silence for several moments.
"I'm really sorry I couldn't help more," Ernest muttered, hugging himself as he returned to staring at his boots. "I mean, after what happened with Luke..."

Apollo gave his friend a reassuring smile, wondering if it was only because Phoenix was the father of two of Ernest's former classmates that the young officer had bent the rules and let them in at all... although Luke's near-conviction six months previous probably had a lot to do with it too. "You're fine, Ernest. We'll go talk to my dad and work out a battle plan. There's nothing to worry about."

'Okay, there is, but I'm not telling Ernest that."

Ernest nodded, giving Apollo a smile. "Thanks," he said. "Good luck."

View the Court Record
Turnabout Trump, Day 1: Part 2

Have you heard about my dad?.

No? Something wrong?

He got arrested early this morning. Murder apparently.

Oh no! D: What happened!? I'm trying to work that out, with my boss obviously. We're just waiting to see him now.

Did you want me to mention it on the forum, or keep this quiet?

... Actually, the guys on the forum probably deserve to hear about it. Don't mention me, just say Phoenix Wright has been arrested.

Will do, pal. :) You let me know once the court date's announced, k?

Alright. Thanks Blackbird :).

April 17, 12:38PM
Detention Center
Visitor's Room

Apollo fidgeted in his chair as they waited for the guards to escort Phoenix in. He was feeling more nervous than ever since their brief investigation had yielded nothing of use. 'At this point in Luke's investigation, at least we had a shortlist of possible suspects! We don't have anything for Dad! How can we possibly find the real culprit!?'

"Calm down, Wright," ordered Kristoph from the chair next to him. "Our client will be out momentarily."

Nodding, Apollo forced himself to stop fidgeting, tightly clutching his hands together and pressing his feet to the floor. It still felt wrong to refer to his father as 'our client', but he wasn't going to fight Kristoph on terminology, especially when their case was this hopeless.

Finally, the door on the other side of the glass opened, and in came a middle-aged man in a grey hoodie and cyan beanie. He smiled as he spotted his visitors, casually pulling out the chair and sitting down with a grin. "Hey."

Apollo could bite his lip no longer, leaning forward and crying, "Are you okay, Dad!? They're not mistreating you, are they!?"

Phoenix laughed, looking as relaxed as he would be on any usual day at home. "Don't you worry, this isn't the first time I've been falsely accused of murder." He gave his eldest son a wink. "I'm very used to this by now."

Groaning in frustration, Apollo lowered his head to the small desk under the glass window.

"I wouldn't look so relaxed about that if I were you," Kristoph warned Phoenix, giving him a stern
look. "Multiple arrests for violent crimes, even if proven false, don't look good in the public eye... and can be used against you in court if the prosecutor finds a way to."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, still smiling. "Now is that really the kind of attitude you want to show your clients, Kristoph?"

"I don't believe in giving false hope," Kristoph pointedly replied.

As Phoenix simply shrugged, still smiling, Apollo lifted his head off the table, giving his father a curious look. "What exactly happened?" he asked. "All we got from the crime scene was that it was during a poker game."

"You don't have the autopsy report?" Phoenix asked, looking a little surprised.

"Surely as a witness and an ex-attorney," Kristoph interrupted, "you would have some idea of how he died." He closed his eyes, looking thoughtful. "You said someone hit him, if I recall correctly."

Phoenix just gave them a non-committal shrug.

It was then Apollo noticed something gleaming at his father's collar, and found a very familiar-looking locket hanging around Phoenix's neck. Frowning in confusion, he glanced between the locket and Phoenix's eyes. "Dad... why are you wearing Trucy's locket?"

After a moment of surprised confusion, Phoenix grinned, tapping at the pendant. "Good luck charm," he said. "Trucy and Luke were in here this morning."

Apollo raised an eyebrow at the thought of Trucy handing over her prized locket as a 'good luck charm', then realised it was probably exactly what she would do and decided to let it go with a sigh. "At least they both know, I s'pose. Trucy isn't in school?"

Phoenix shook his head. "Luke called her in sick. He's looking after her while I'm in here, and you, he grinned proudly, "are getting me out."

"Trying to," Apollo corrected, looking away with a glare.

"If you weren't listening earlier," Kristoph cut in, "we didn't get much information from the crime scene. As a result, you should know very well how vital your testimony is going to be to our case."

"Aw, I know you can do it!" Phoenix replied with a bright smile. "You're the best attorney in town, aren't you?"

Kristoph was starting to look annoyed. "Even the best attorney can only work with what he has," he pointed out. "You might at least tell us who the victim was!"

Phoenix put on a thoughtful look, staring blankly off into space, and Apollo recognised it as being the kind of expression his father would wear while joking around with his children... minus the smile. "A traveller, I think," he muttered. "New customer, never seen 'im before."

Alarm bells started going off in Apollo's head.

Kristoph gave a long-suffering sigh, pushing on his glasses. "What about the prosecutor? I presume you've met him by now."

"Old Winston?" Phoenix laughed. "That's why I'm so confident you'll win this thing!" He gave Apollo a wink. "That guy's a pushover, believe me."
Before Apollo could do more than smile bemusedly, Kristoph had crossed his arms, giving Phoenix a glare. "If you refuse to help us, we will be forced to work a miracle in that trial." He shook his head. "And I regret to inform you, that will be nearly impossible, regardless of who the prosecutor is."

"'Nearly'?" Phoenix repeated with a bright smile. "Ah, so you can do it!"

Kristoph simply glared at Phoenix, then got up without a word and stalked out of the room.

For a moment, Apollo was torn over following his mentor and talking to his father privately now he had the chance... then Phoenix made the choice for him, turning to his son with a serious look. "Apollo, I'd get started on your case plan if I were you."

"Case plan?" Apollo muttered in surprise. "What do you mean? Mister Gavin's heading the-!"

"Do it for practice if nothing else," Phoenix interrupted with a warm smile. "Don't you worry about Luke and Trucy, or about me. Just focus on your job, okay?"

Apollo felt his face fall. "But Dad, you are my j-!"

"Forget that," Phoenix told him, face somewhere between stern and sad. "Right now, I'm just your client. Focus on your trial, and I know you can win it."

At that, Apollo frowned, giving his father a suspicious look. "Dad, you're talking like I'm defending you instead of Mister Gavin. Are..." He paled as a terrifying thought came to mind of what was going on. "Are you planning something?"

Phoenix didn't reply for a long moment, staring back at Apollo. "You'd better catch up to Kristoph," he advised. "You've both got a lot of work to do." Before Apollo could reply, the ex-lawyer had stood from his chair and approached the guard, who escorted the man out of the room without a word.

Apollo sighed as he stood up, moving to go find his mentor. 'Whatever Dad's planning... it better not backfire.'

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Have you heard what's going on with Dad? .

DAMMIT LUKE WHERE ARE YOU!? .

Oops, sorry, Apollo! I was asleep! Papa woke me up in the early hours of the morning, so I didn't get much sleep last night... also I left my phone at home.

There you are. :/ Yeah, Dad mentioned you're looking after Trucy atm? .

Yes, I am. Trucy sort of locked herself away once I told her what had happened, and I called her in sick... I sort of fell asleep after that, then Trucy woke me up to go visit Papa. Once we got back, she locked herself away in her room again.
I'm really sorry, Apollo, but I should stop there; Papa said we shouldn't talk to you at all so you can
concentrate on the case. I've already broken that promise.

Yeah, he said something similar to me :/ I understand, don't worry. Talk to you after the trial? .

Sure. :) We'll both see you then, me and Trucy.

See you then...

April 17, 5:52PM
Apollo and Clay's Apartment
Front Room

Apollo sighed as he closed his front door behind him, wondering just what was going on and what he was supposed to do about it. *If Dad were even trying to be helpful, it would be a different story... but to even forbid Luke and Trucy from talking to me? It's not like I was planning to screw this trial up like I did Luke's!* Nevertheless, he had quietly prepared his own case plan as Phoenix had instructed... purely for practise, of course. He wasn't nearly experienced enough, or confident enough, to lead a case yet, and Phoenix knew that... right?

There was a thud from somewhere inside, and Clay poked his head out of his bedroom doorway down the hall, smiling at he spotted his friend. "Yo, 'Pollo!" he called, waving. "How'd your case go?"

Apollo half-heartedly waved back, trying not to look as down as he felt. "Uh, alright, I guess. It's... going."

Clay raised an eyebrow, stepping out into the hallway. "Wow, that bad, huh?"

Unable to formulate a reply, Apollo simply stepped through into the kitchen, deciding to leave the conversation at that.

Clay wasn't so willing to let the subject go, frowning in concern as he followed his friend. "You don't want to talk about it?" he asked.

Apollo tried to ignore his friend, grabbing a glass and heading to the sink. "Don't you have studying to do?" he asked, perhaps more harshly than he intended.

"I need a break anyway," Clay replied with a shrug, watching Apollo with a grin. "What happened, dude? Gimme the details!"

Sighing, Apollo finished filling his glass with water, then turned around, leaning against the counter as he took a sip. "It's... Our client. And... I guess the police and prosecutor, too... Nothing concrete, and... y'know."

"You're not making any sense there, dude," Clay pointed out with a sympathetic smile. "Rough day, then?"

Apollo nodded, taking another quick sip of water to buy time as he wondered how to begin. "Ernest's on this case, too," he eventually explained.

"Oh, cool!" Clay replied, grinning. "How is he? Any help?"
"Not really," Apollo admitted. "He didn’t see the crime scene, and though he let us look at it, the detective's already cleared it of anything useful."

"Bummer," Clay sympathised, crossing his arms and leaning sideways against the fridge. "What about the prosecutor?"

Apollo sighed again, staring at his glass. "Dad says he's a pushover, which is good I suppose," he explained. "We'll need all we can get on a murder case."

Clay nodded. "And your client? What's their story?"

Apollo would have laughed then, had he not so strongly wanted to punch his father. Instead, he merely frowned bitterly. "Well, for starters, he's an ex-lawyer turned pianist-slash-poker-champion with three adopted kids, and this is apparently the third time he's been accused of murder."

Clay stared back at Apollo blankly.

Sighing, Apollo rolled his eyes. "It's my dad, moron."

"O-oh," Clay mumbled, looking a little shocked. "I knew that."

(View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook)
It was a full day later and still the image of Trucy's face as she held back tears lingered in Luke's mind. He'd been sitting at his old desk, staring at his latest draft of "The Adventure of the Curious Village" and attempting to edit it, but his eyes were only travelling across the page without actually taking any of it in. A part of him wished he'd thought to grab his violin when he dropped by his apartment after their visit to the detention centre the previous day, but he knew he wasn't much in the mood for music, and would likely just get the same result from trying to practise it now. Phoenix's words echoed in his head, disrupting any attempt by Luke to distract himself.

Trucy had been keeping a brave face despite her worry... right up until Phoenix opened the locket hanging around his neck to show her the picture inside. She stared at it in shock for a moment before seeming to break, hands pressed to her face as she crumpled in her chair. Luke wasted no time in shuffling his seat to her side to hug his sister, offering comfort as he gave their father a confused look.

Phoenix sighed, closing the locket and draping it back over his neck to hang neatly just above the zipper of his hoodie. "I can't say very much here," he sadly told them. "Full explanations will have to wait until later, I'm afraid."

Trucy sniffed loudly to herself, looking up from behind her hands long enough to ask, "What happened," she paused to hiccup, although Luke could have sworn she'd said 'to' in the gap, "Daddy?"

Phoenix closed his eyes, frowning. "Both of you have to remember, nothing we say here is to be passed on to Apollo until after the trial." He opened his eyes, looking at the both of them sternly. "Do you promise?"

Trucy nodded, but Luke was unsure. "Why?" he asked. "Isn't this all stuff you'll have told him anyway? To help him and Mister Gavin with the case?"

Another sigh, and Phoenix shook his head. "It wasn't part of my initial plan, but this trial has inadvertently turned into one of my 'secret missions'. Apollo will play his part in this better if he doesn't know the full story just yet."

Luke's reminiscings were interrupted by the sound of footsteps up the stairs outside their front door. He quickly rubbed at his eyes to brush away threatening tears and jumped to his feet, registering the thudding steps were familiar, but not enough to recognise the owners. He was halfway to the door before he saw the door handle rattle, quickly followed by a knocking on the opaque glass window.

"Trucy?" came a call from a voice Luke knew very well. "Are you in there?"

"Maya!" Blinking in surprise, Luke rushed to unlock the door, throwing it open with a relieved grin
to see Maya and Pearl stood on their doorstep, travel bags in hand. "Pearl! What are you doing here?"

Maya scoffed, throwing her arms around the young man in a tight hug. "Whaddaya think?" she asked, before prompting Luke step back to allow the pair in. "We heard Nick had been arrested, so I cancelled all my appointments and took some time off to drop in on you." As she and Pearl placed their bags down, Luke closing and re-locking the door behind them, Maya turned to Luke with a curious frown, hands on her hips. "Actually, what are you doing here? Didn't you move out in February?"

Luke nodded. "Papa asked me to look after Trucy while he's in the detention centre," he explained, then rubbed at an arm nervously. "He's... not going to be happy about you two being here."

Maya again scoffed, Pearl nodding in agreement with a knowledgeable smile. "We can look after ourselves," the elder Fey simply said, then grabbed her bag and continued through to the office.

Taking Maya's lead, Pearl also picked up her bag, waiting for Luke to join her before they followed Maya. "Where's Trucy?" she asked, a worried frown on her face.

"In her room," Luke sighed, taking Pearl's bag to no complaint from the young spirit medium. "She's been locked up in there ever since I told her what happened. She's only come out to visit Papa and use the bathroom." A part of him wished he'd thought to time how long Trucy's shower had been the previous night, although he knew that particular fact would probably only make him worry for her more.

The trio made their way into the kitchen, and Maya placed her bag on the small dining table, looking around critically. "Man, I remember this place being a lot cleaner before you left, Luke."

Luke frowned, though he tried not to look as worried as he felt. "Well, Trucy's actually been keeping everything mostly in order," he mumbled, then looked between Pearl's bag in his hands and Maya's on the table. "Um, may I ask why you both appear to have travel bags with you?"

Pearl grinned. "It was Mystic Maya's idea!" she chirped.

Maya winked, giving the teen girl a proud smile. "Though Pearly helped me pull it off!" she boasted. To Luke, she explained, "We couldn't just leave you kids to fend for yourselves with Nick in the detention centre and all!" She stepped forward to pull the young man into another hug, patting his back and apparently firmly ignoring that her head only came up to Luke's eyeline at best. "Mommy will be here to look after you while Daddy's away, okay?"

Luke smiled, hugging Maya back appreciatively. He knew, if Apollo were here, his brother would be quick to point out that the two brothers were, quite literally, looking after themselves now, but Luke was raised better than to spit in the face of kindness... even though Apollo's complaints were only ever met with teasing smiles anyway. "Thank you, Maya," he whispered in reply.

As the pair parted from their hug, Pearl took her bag back from Luke with a smile. "I was thinking I might stay in Trucy's room," she announced. "Where are you staying, Luke?"

"In my old room," Luke replied. "I bought myself a new bed when I moved out, so my old one's still there."

"And I'll be staying in Nick's!" Maya added with a cheeky grin and a wink. "He's not using it right now after all!" Before either of the younger pair could reply, she had swept her own bag back into her arms and was marching off upstairs. "Let's go tell Trucy we're here, huh?"
At the top of the stairs, Maya dropped her bag on the floor, and Pearl was quick to copy her as she and Luke caught up. The elder spirit medium was already heading for Trucy's door, where she solemnly stood, gently rapping the wood with the knuckles of one hand. "Trucy?" she softly called. "You wanna come out, honey?"

Luke and Pearl hung back for a few moments, then the bedroom door opened and the pajama'd teenager within latched on to Maya in a tight hug, burying her face in the elder's shoulder. Trucy said nothing, silently shaking as she clung to her unofficial mother. Maya returned the favour, staying quiet and just hugging the teen back.

Hating to see his sister in distress (and cursing himself for not pushing harder to be there for her), Luke dashed forward, hugging Trucy from behind and resting his face on the top of her head. Pearl was quick to join in, running to hug her 'first cousin once removed' (she and Trucy had once spent an afternoon figuring out the exact term of their familial relationship, as unofficial as it technically was). The quartet stood for a long while, unmoving, before finally Trucy shifted in the centre and everyone else stepped back to give her space, watching the teen rub at her face and give her assembled family a small smile. "Thank you," she whispered.

Maya smiled warmly. "Pearly and I are going to be staying here a few days," she explained. "Why don't we all take a few minutes to settle in, get changed into something less conspicuous," she gestured to her and Pearl's robes, then to Trucy's pajamas with a wink, "and we can all go visit your dad together. Sound good?"

Trucy thought a moment, then nodded, still rubbing at one eye with a hand.

"It's okay if I stay in your room, right?" Pearl quietly added, biting a thumb nervously.

Giggling, Trucy nodded. "Of course you can, Pearly!" she replied, starting to look more like her usual chipper self. "We can have a sleepover!" As Pearl was grinning at the permission to stay, Trucy paused, frowning in worry as she then turned to Luke. "You're... gonna stay too, aren't you?"

Luke blinked in surprise. "Why wouldn't I?" he asked. "Papa asked me to look after you until he got back, and he's not back yet." He gave her a grin as she slowly began to smile again. "I'm not going to break a promise that important for so silly a reason!"

Trucy simply giggled in response.

"Alright then," Maya said, looking between Trucy and Pearl, "why don't you two get settled and changed, huh?"

"Yes, Mystic Maya!" Pearl cried, dashing to grab her bag and slip into Trucy's room.

Trucy hung back, stepping out of Pearl's way and giving Maya another hug. "Thank you for coming, Mommy," she said, then turned and followed Pearl, closing the door behind them.

The girls taken care of, Maya and Luke gave each other understanding looks before heading to their own rooms.
Hey Steel! I told everybody on the forum. How are things today?

Been better. It would help if Dad actually co-operated with us 😞. He's even asked Luke and Trucy not to talk to me, to 'let me focus on the case'. I swear I could punch him right now.

Aw, I'm sorry pal :( If it helps, I think I can get some time off to come see the trial in person. It's on Monday, right?

Yep, Monday. Luke and Trucy will probably be there too if you wanna find them.

Excellent! I'll keep an eye out, and see you on Monday then!

See ya Blackbird.

April 19, 3:26PM
Detention Center
Visitor's Room

Phoenix's poker smile was firmly glued to his face as he sat down in his chair that afternoon, looking his lone visitor dead in the eyes. "Kristoph, glad you could make it!" he cheerfully announced.

Kristoph closed his eyes in a quiet sigh, looking more tired than anything. "I hopefully needn't remind you your trial is tomorrow," he said. "At this late stage, are you finally agreeing to co-operate with your own defence team?" His tone indicated he already had a suspicion of what the answer was going to be, despite his hopeful look.

Phoenix hummed to himself thoughtfully, somewhat enjoying what he thought might be his last chance to mess with the attorney. "Actually, I had more of a request," he admitted.

"Request," Kristoph bitterly repeated, a flash of darkness in his expression as he pressed at his glasses. "And what 'request' would this be, then?"

"It won't take long," Phoenix promised, keeping up his innocent grin as he lounged in the uncomfortable detention centre chair.

Kristoph still wasn't impressed. "And you couldn't ask your son to do this because...?"

Phoenix grinned. "Because he's not currently leading the case, is he?" he pointed out, as though his request was plainly obvious.

Kristoph paused, raising an eyebrow.

Resisting the urge to laugh, Phoenix shook his head, his smile never fading despite his serious tone. "Kristoph, I want Apollo to lead the defence in this trial."

At first, Phoenix thought maybe Kristoph hadn't heard as the attorney failed to react at all to the statement, but, after a few seconds, the man's eyes slowly widened. "You must be joking," he
On the contrary," Phoenix replied, sticking his hands in his pockets as he continued to grin at Kristoph, "I would never joke about something as solemn as a trial. This is my own life at stake."

"Exactly," Kristoph snapped, arms tightly crossed as his face tightened into a frown. "You know as well as I do that Apollo has no experience! With what little information we have, he has no hope of acquitting you!"

Phoenix's smile finally began to fade. "I'm afraid I'll have to disagree with you there: Apollo has sat in on a number of your trials since you took him as a junior partner, which is certainly more experience than I had in my first trial. He'll need to take that next step of an actual case eventually, so why not now?"

Kristoph only continued to scowl. "You would gamble your life like this merely to give him court experience?" he asked, then scoffed. "I'm sure you remember how he let his emotions get the better of him in his brother's trial last December. We can't rely on another miracle to save you."

Phoenix almost laughed, closing his eyes in thought. 'Meaning you haven't prepared any kind of forgery to pin it on someone else. All the better for Apollo's prospects, I'd say."

"Besides," Kristoph continued, a knowledgeable look on his face as he waved a hand dismissively, "the pre-trial meeting has been and gone. I am already registered as your attorney."

"And it's perfectly possible to switch that to Apollo," Phoenix pointed out, giving Kristoph a grin and a wink. "I haven't forgotten how trials work, Kristoph. Isn't it your job as my attorney to follow my request?"

Kristoph took a moment to respond. "Maybe," he admitted, "but as both your attorney and friend, it is my job to talk you out of a bad idea. I implore you to reconsider, Wright. I'm not considered the best attorney in California for nothing, and, considering your past and the difficulty of this trial in particular, Apollo would do better with a later case." He shrugged. "I could even grant him the next one that comes along if you are so desperate for him to begin taking charge on his own; I must agree, it would be a benefit to the firm to have us both working on separate cases at once."

Phoenix thought a moment, a small smile on his face. "Frankly, I think you're underestimating Apollo's ability," he said.

The other man scoffed, waving away Phoenix's concerns. "You may have been an attorney yourself once upon a time, but tell me again which of us has been working alongside that young man the past year?" He shook his head. "I've taught Apollo everything he knows, and he does not yet know enough to handle leading a case."

Phoenix shot Kristoph a glare. "And remind me which of us raised him as a son? If anyone knows what Apollo is capable of, it's his father."

"Then let's ask him, shall we?" Kristoph shot back with a dark look. At Phoenix's surprised confusion, he elaborated, "You may have adopted Apollo, but even then he was already almost grown. You by no means 'raised' him, Wright."

Phoenix stared, wide-eyed, at Kristoph for a long moment, torn between incandescent rage and the simple shock that Kristoph had the nerve to hang something as inconsequential as that over Phoenix's head. Slowly, his gaze turned into a glare. "He's still my son. Whether he lived under my roof for four or fourteen years doesn't matter." As Kristoph didn't seem to have a reply, still returning
Phoenix's gaze with a stern stare of his own, Phoenix closed his eyes, looking away as he forced himself to calm down. 'One more day. One more day, and this will all be over.' "As your client, I'm asking you to put Apollo in charge of this case," he quietly insisted. "I know he can do this, especially if his teacher is there with him in court to guide him."

There was a very long pause, long enough that Phoenix began to worry Kristoph had simply given up and left, but, eventually, the other man sighed. "I suppose, as your attorney, I have little choice," he admitted. Phoenix looked up to see the man adjusting his glasses with a resigned expression. "I shall put through the paperwork tonight, and Apollo will be acting as your attorney in court tomorrow morning."

Phoenix nodded, finally allowing himself to smile again, this time genuinely. "Thank you, Kristoph."

Kristoph just sighed again, getting to his feet. "Of course, I shall also have to call him in to the office to hand over all the paperwork and give him warning. It seems to be a worrying trend that he is learning so much troubling news from me rather than you."

"It's not deliberate, I promise!" Phoenix laughed. "I'd call him myself, but they've taken my phone as evidence."

"Understandable," Kristoph replied, managing a small smile of his own before he turned and left the room. "Until tomorrow, Wright."

"Until then," Phoenix agreed, watching the other man disappear through the other door. The moment he was out of sight, the ex-lawyer's friendly smile faded into a stern frown. 'Tomorrow... tomorrow, you finally face punishment for one of your crimes, Gavin. And this revenge is going to taste so sweet.'

BLACKBIRD HELP IM DEFENDING MY DAD TOMORROW.

Um, yeah? Are you having last minute nerves, steel?

NO I MEAN MR GAVIN STEPPED DOWN AND IM DOING THE ACTUAL DEFENDING IN COURT HELP.

!?!?!? Are you serious!? Why'd your boss step down!?

Apparently Dad called him to the detention center today and asked to switch! I said I wasn't ready and Mr Gavin just said anything I had to say he'd already presented to dad and dad wasn't having any of it!!

Why does Dad want me to defend him!? I'm not ready for this!!!

Apollo, calm down. Where are you rn?

On the bus, heading home from the office.

Hm. It's not ideal, but... Hang tight and I'll give you a call

Ok.
When the phone in Apollo's hand rang, he instantly hit the button to pick up, pressing the small device to his ear as he huddled in a back corner of the half-empty public bus. "I really don't want to bother you, Blackbird..."

"Nonsense!" came Maggey's immediate reply from the tiny speaker. "You're my pal, and you clearly need to talk to someone!" She huffed. "Your dad won't talk to you, your brother and sister can't talk to you... Looks like it's left to me to talk to you!"

Apollo briefly smiled through his pained expression, mentally noting all the other members of his unofficial extended family that Maggey had overlooked in her brief list: Maya and Pearl he had left alone, reasoning Phoenix had probably also forbidden them from helping him, and Clay he had been expecting to see when he got home, though he wasn't sure whether or not his friend would actually try to help. His various aunts and uncles had very important jobs of their own he didn't want to interrupt, especially the few he had the number of, and he would feel uncomfortable demanding they spend time comforting him for something as silly as panicking about his first ever trial... on the contrary, they'd probably want to congratulate him. At the very end of the list was his employer and senior partner, and Kristoph was a totally different matter; There was no way Apollo was going to insist to his boss that he wasn't ready to lead a case... even if it was painfully true right now.

"So," Maggey continued, "Mister Wright's been arrested, and the night before the trial, he suddenly switches attorneys to use a newbie who he happens to be related to. Any ideas why?"

Apollo sighed. "Not really," he admitted. "I... think he was already planning the switch, though. Told me when we went to see him to have my own case file prepared... 'for practise'."

"Huh." Maggey thought for a moment. "Why'd he wait, then? Who makes their attorney's job harder by switching at the last possible minute!?"

That question suddenly seemed a very familiar one to Apollo... hadn't Phoenix himself once said that in relation to a case...?

"You'd think he'd know better as a former attorney himself!" Maggey pointed out, unimpressed. "At least he warned you a little, I guess. How's your boss taking it?"

"Okay, I s'pose," Apollo muttered, shrugging. "He said he'll be behind the bench with me in court. I think he's pretty mad at my dad, though."

"Can't blame him," she replied. "But hey, you'll have help in the actual trial! It's not like you'll be alone in there!"

Apollo shook his head. "N-no, but... Mister Gavin's the best attorney in the district! I've been trying to learn from him for over a year now, and..." He paused, his breathing quickening as he felt his throat tighten. "I-I've never been able to keep up with him in court, a-and when we were defending Luke, I-!"

"Whoa whoa, Steel, Apollo, stay calm!" Maggey interrupted as she heard her friend's distress.

"I'm not ready for this!" Apollo insisted, curling up against his quiet corner and pressing his free hand to his eyes. "I'm going to screw this up like I did Luke's trial, and Dad's going to end up in jail, because of me!"
"No, you are not!" Maggey shot back in a stern snap. "I might not know your father as well as you do, but I know for a fact that he wouldn't push you into something you weren't ready for! You can do this, Apollo!"

Apollo said nothing for a long moment, slowly bringing his breathing back under control. 'You're fine,' he repeated to himself. 'You're fine, you can do this. Even Blackbird thinks you can do this, so you can do this.'

"If I said I was planning to be in the gallery tomorrow," Maggey quietly spoke up when her friend didn't reply, "would that help, or just make you freak out more?"

A snort of laughter was Apollo's immediate reply, finally making the young man smile. "It wouldn't hurt," he admitted, grateful for another friendly voice of support in the terrifying crowds of the courtroom.

Maggey giggled in reply. "Well then, looks like my trip into the city tomorrow is a go!" she chirped. "Are you feeling better?"

Apollo was nodding before he remembered she couldn't see him. "Yeah, I think so. Thanks, um, Ms Byrde."

"Please, 'Maggey' is fine!" Maggey laughed in reply. "Besides, I've been 'Ms Gumshoe' for four months now... unless you meant 'Ms Bird' as in my username?"

As his friend continued to laugh, Apollo frowned in confusion, then smiled. "Oh yeah, I forgot about your 'ceremony-free wedding',' he giggled. "If you ever actually decide to hold a ceremony, I expect to be there, don't forget!"

"Of course!" Maggey replied. "I'd better let you go now, though. See ya tomorrow, pal!"

View the Court Record
It wasn't often the Wright family had the opportunity to see their extended family on Edgeworth's side, so the sudden invitation to his apartment to close out 2024 with a 'Christmas get-together' was quickly accepted. Phoenix had hesitated when he learned this event was mostly because Edgeworth and his sister Franziska had not been in the same country at that time of year for a long while, but Trucy, Luke, and Apollo's excitement for the 'party' convinced him to agree to go regardless.

As it turned out, Edgeworth's invitations had not only been extended to the Wrights, but to Maya and Pearl too... as well as Maggey and Gumshoe, though they only learned of the latter pair when Phoenix and his two younger kids arrived at Edgeworth's home, being escorted through to the open living area by their host once the family appeared at his door.

Upon spotting their friends, Trucy raced ahead to give them hugs. "Hi Maggey! Hi Detective Gumshoe!" she cried, then noticed a pair of women standing nearby. Grinning as she recognised one of them, the teen bounced over to also pass on a greeting hug. "Hi Auntie Franziska!"

Phoenix resisted a nervous wince as he hurried after his daughter. "Um, Truce, maybe you shouldn't-!"

Franziska von Karma only smiled at the teenage girl, one hand idly resting near the looped whip on her belt. "It is a pleasure to see you again, young Trucy Wright. You've certainly grown since last we met."

Not noticing her father quietly sighing in relief behind her, Trucy nodded to her honorary aunt. "We've updated our act a lot, too! You should come and see it again!"

"I shall have to make time for it," Franziska agreed, then turned her attention to Luke, who was quietly greeting Maggey and Gumshoe through a much more sedate handshake. "I only count one of your brothers. Where is the other one?"

"That would be Apollo," Phoenix filled in, standing behind Trucy and placing a firm hand on her shoulder to keep her from trying to hug her 'aunt' again. "He had to drop by his apartment first. Shouldn't be too long." He then turned to the blonde woman beside Franziska with a friendly smile, nodding in greeting. "Hello again, Ms Andrews."

Adrian nodded to Phoenix in return. "It's been a long time, Mister Wright," she said, giving him a grin. "A lot has changed in five years."

"I don't believe you've been introduced to Adrian, Trucy," Franziska interrupted, changing the subject and giving Phoenix a smirk. "Perhaps it would be wise to do so for your children, Phoenix Wright."

Phoenix gulped, then hurriedly called Luke over.
The 'party', as quiet as it was, continued mostly uneventfully. The next to arrive had been, to Phoenix's surprise, not Apollo but Kay Faraday, who had raced in with a grin and leapt on Gumshoe with a loud cry of "Gummy!" After asking her father who the strange girl was and getting only a smile and "Why don't you ask her?" in reply, Trucy had rushed to introduce herself to Kay, and the two quickly became embroiled in a friendly argument over whether ninjas were magical or not, dragging everyone around them into one side or the other. Only Luke missed out on the hullabaloo of the young woman's entrance, having been occupied spending time with Pess in the next room.

After Kay, it was Maya and Pearl who arrived next, though only Phoenix seemed to notice Edgeworth showing them in, approaching them with a smile. "You took your time," he joked.

Maya scoffed, though she smiled back. "We've got a longer journey than you!" The pair quickly clasped hands, unwilling to be too affectionate in a more 'public' setting.

Pearl ran forward with a grin towards Trucy, distracting the girl from her discussion as she greeted her 'cousin' with a squeal of "Pearly!"

"Hello, Trucy!" Pearl replied as the two hugged, the conversation called to a halt as everyone quietened to acknowledge the new arrivals.

"Oh, Pearly, this is Kay!" Trucy quickly told her cousin, gesturing to the young woman nearby, then adding in a tone of mock outrage, "She doesn't think ninjas are magical!"

Kay playfully scoffed, rolling her eyes. "Yeah, 'cause ninjas are cooler than that! They don't need magic!"

Once Pearl had said her hellos to everyone ("Hello Mister Scruffy Detective and Ms Byrde! Hello Ms von Karma and Ms Andrews!"), Trucy ran to engulf Maya in a tight hug, loudly squealing, "Hi Mommy!"

Maya laughed as she hugged the girl back, pointing out, "It hasn't been that long since we last saw each other!"

Gumshoe waved to the older spirit medium. "Hey, Ms Fey!"

Kay crossed her arms, frowning in confusion. "'Mommy'? Isn't Trucy too old to be hers?"

"I must admit, that is a new development to me," Franziska replied, lightly brushing at a sleeve with a gloved hand, "although I can't say I'm surprised." She looked to Adrian with a smirk, and the other woman bit her lip to hide a laugh.

"Come now, Kay," Edgeworth cut in, surprising the girl as she twirled around to see him standing behind her with a smile, Luke standing at his side and Pess between them. "You've met Ms Fey before," Edgeworth continued. "It shouldn't be too much of a stretch to assume Trucy had adopted her as Wright adopted Trucy, Luke and Apollo."

Kay had to think a moment or two before she recalled her indirect introduction to Maya, the day after Phoenix lost his badge. "Oh yeah!" she cried. Brushing the subject aside, she then turned to Luke with a grin. "By the way, who's this, Mister Edgeworth? Did he sneak in the back?"

Luke only looked away uncomfortably as Kay winked at him. "I'm Luke," he said, then held out a hand as he forced a friendly smile. "Luke Triton, or, um, Wright. I-I must have missed you arriving; I was in the other room with Pess."

Kay giggled. "Wow, such a gentleman!" She shook his hand, grinning at his resulting proud smile.
"So that's where you went!" Maggey said, looking between Luke and the happy retriever at his feet with a smile. "I'd've thought you'd see so many animals at college, you wouldn't be sequestering yourself away with one on your time off!"

"Ah yes, you are taking veterinary medicine at an English university, are you not?" Franziska asked, gesturing with a hand. "How go your studies, Luke Triton?"

Luke nodded. "Just another six months to go," he replied. "I'm... hoping the animal shelter I volunteer at might be able to hire me once I graduate."

"That sounds great!" Adrian said, giving the young man a smile as she took the chance to be friendly. "Enjoying being back home for the holidays?"

Luke didn't immediately reply, frowning for a long moment in thought before finally returning his gaze to Adrian with an apologetic look. "Um... I-I'm originally English, so... Y-you'll have to be more specific on what you mean by 'home', Ms Andrews."

Blushing in embarrassment, Adrian decided to leave talking with Luke to everyone else.

When Apollo finally arrived, Phoenix offered to let him in to save Edgeworth the trip, and greeted his son at the door with a raised eyebrow. "What took you so long?"

Apollo sighed as he entered the house, removing his coat as his father closed the door. "Clay waylaid me with guilt-trips about how I was 'abandoning him' and 'oh it's so cold and lonely here all by myself!'" He scoffed, brushing off his cape as it was freed from under his winter coat, which Phoenix took to hang in the nearby closet. "He even managed to drag me into helping him look for something before I realised he was making it up just to waste my time!"

As they entered the main room, Trucy was distracted from showing off to Kay and Pearl to enthusiastically greet her brother with a loud cry of "Polly! What took you so long!?"

"Blame Clay!" Apollo shot back.

Not far away, Adrian and Maggey were sat together, chatting about how they met their respective partners. As Apollo approached to greet them, at Trucy's behest, Maggey waved to the twenty-year-old, calling, "Hey there, Steel!" with a wide grin.

Apollo smiled in reply, also giving his friend a wave. "Hey, Blackbird!"

Adrian blinked in surprise, looking between the two with wide eyes. "B... Blackbird...?" she breathed.

"Oh, um, our online handles," Maggey hurriedly explained, blushing in embarrassment. "We're friends online, so that's what we call each other."

"Yeah," Apollo agreed with a laugh, "I'm Steel and she's Blackbird!" He paused, rubbing at the back of his head. "More seriously though, I'm Apollo Wright. I think you've already met my dad and siblings...?"

Quickly pulling herself together, Adrian nodded, still casting a surprised glance or two at Maggey. "I-I'm Ce... Adrian," she said, forcing a cheerful smile for the young man. "Adrian Andrews. Your sister was telling me all about you earlier!"

Apollo gave her a grin, despite being a little embarrassed at the thought of what Trucy might have been telling people behind his back. "Heh... I should warn you though, Trucy likes to exaggerate..."
"Ooh, that reminds me!" Maggey cried, perking up as she gave Apollo a cheeky grin. "Ms Andrews here met your father on one of his cases!"

While Adrian hid a blush at the reminder of the story she had just finished telling her new friend, Apollo crossed his arms, thinking deeply for several moments. "Andrews... Oh, Adrian Andrews!" He looked back to Adrian with a grin. "You were in that case where Maya got kidnapped and the assassin saw your name and thought you were a guy and Dad called him out on it even though it might hurt Maya but then he and Uncle Edgeworth managed to save her and get the bad guy convicted!"

Adrian and Maggey both stared at Apollo in surprise, though Adrian also seemed a little horrified, repeating, "K-kidnapped!?"

"Geeze, I can't believe I didn't recognise the details of that one!" Maggey muttered to herself with a sigh. "Dick was telling me all about that kidnapping for weeks!"

It didn't take long for the conversation to turn to Apollo, touching on his in-progress law degree before the young man began to boast of his skill as a magician, which, he insisted, was at least equal to his sister's. Adrian, perhaps wanting to tease him, told Apollo to prove it, which he was more than happy to do: "A professional can perform anywhere, any time!" Before long, Adrian had pulled Franziska away from her friendly bickering with Edgeworth and the pair were being treated to a special 'show' by Apollo Gramarye... complete with Trucy standing nearby catcalling him.

"You're a hack!"

"Could I have some quiet in the audience, please?"

"I'm not in your audience!"

"Then you're a terrible stage-hand and you're fired."

It wasn't until Phoenix decided to add to the pranking by surprising Apollo with a photo that the impromptu show ended, with Phoenix, Trucy, Maya and Kay playing keep-away with Phoenix's Court Record as Apollo did his best to erase the photo. By the time the tablet computer ended up in Luke's hands (Kay had tossed it to him only for the young man to hand it over to Apollo with a smile and a "Here you go!"; The rest of the Wrights and Feys groaned at Kay for misjudging Luke and ending their game pre-maturely), the screen had locked, and Apollo, without the password to get into it, was forced to admit defeat and return the item to his father.

At the end of the evening, the assembled group slowly all packed up to leave, bidding their goodbyes to each other. Adrian, to Maggey's surprise, pulled the other woman aside with a nervous smile. "It was great to get to meet you tonight, Ms Byrde," the blonde woman said. "It... already feels like we're old friends!"

"Aw, that's so nice of you to say, Ms Andrews!" Maggey replied, though she wasn't sure what had happened to make the other woman think so. "We all had a wonderful time tonight; You'd have to thank Mister Edgeworth for that!"

Adrian gave a short laugh, nodding in agreement. "I... just wanted to thank you before we said goodbye."
"But surely we'll meet again, right?" Maggey pointed out with a friendly smile. "Dick and I are friends of Mister Edgeworth, and you're with Ms von Karma... It shouldn't be that hard to get in touch!"

"Y-yes," Adrian mumbled in reply. She paused a moment, then opened her mouth to speak, only to reconsider and close it again. After another long moment's pause, Maggey watching her curiously, Adrian simply sighed, giving her new friend a smile. "Until we meet again, BlackbirdLuck." Before Maggey could reply, Adrian had left.
Apollo resisted the urge to hug his bag for comfort as he walked through the massive double doors that led into the city courthouse. *I'll be fine, I'll be fine, I'll be fine... I better be fine, or Dad gets... Well, best not to think about that.* He had awoken early with Clay, and they had done some Chords of Steel training together, but Apollo had experienced enough stage fright in his life to recognise when he was doing more harm than good, and called their practise to a halt before long; He doubted he could drum up much respect in court with a voice hoarse from shouting.

Speaking of Clay...

"So where's it at?" Apollo's dark-haired roommate asked, looking around at the various staircases and corridors leading all over the maze of a building, newly in the midst of renovations. "Which number are we looking for?"

"You can go straight to Courtroom Number Two," Apollo told his friend with a raised eyebrow. "*I'm* meeting Mister Gavin and Dad in a Defendant's Lobby before the trial."

Clay nodded. "Right, right." He turned to Apollo with a grin. "Hey, d'ya think you'd be making all kinds of 'justice' puns right now if you hadn't changed your name back when you got adopted?"

Apollo blinked in surprise, then smiled. "Ha, probably!" he admitted. "It's too perfect not to... Besides, hasn't *Justice* always been on the side of *Wright*?"

Clay's grin widened. Shooting his friend a wink, he held up his hands, pointing 'finger-guns' at his friend.

"I'd say," Apollo continued with a chuckle, "by becoming a lawyer, I'm using *Justice* to do the *Wright* thing for my clients!"

Laughing, Clay stepped off towards one of the staircases, waving at his friend. "Yo, good luck, huh 'Pollo? I'll say 'hi' to Luke and Truce for you when I find 'em!"

"Later!" Apollo replied.

It took a few minutes for Apollo to find Defendant Lobby Three, and, cheered by his discussion with Clay, he was able to smile as he found his boss and father there already.

Kristoph looked up as Apollo came in, giving him a friendly smile. "Ah, good morning."

"Good morning, sir!" the young lawyer called, then turned to the relaxed figure slumped lazily on the lobby's couch. Raising an eyebrow, he incredulously asked, "Dad, are you *asleep*?"

Despite looking for all the world like he was napping, Phoenix smiled enigmatically and turned his face upwards to meet his son's gaze. "Now now, I know from experience how bad an idea it is to sleep just before a trial. What do you take me for, a common criminal?"
Apollo frowned. "Dad, you about to be tried for murder!" he pointed out, then huffed and moved over to sit at his father's side, noticing in the corner of his vision Kristoph moving away with the case-file to give the pair some privacy. "Are you... are you sure about this?" He gestured between himself and his father, explaining, "Having me defend you instead of Mister Gavin?"

Phoenix's jovial expression tightened a little. "As sure as I was when I adopted you," he quietly replied.

"But Mister Gavin's-!"

"You can do this, Apollo," Phoenix insisted, sitting up to give his son a more authoritative look. "I wouldn't ask you to do something so important if I couldn't trust you to pull it off."

Apollo looked away, thinking to himself, but didn't reply.

With a fatherly smile, Phoenix pulled a hand out of his hoodie pocket to rest on his son's shoulder. "I think you'll find once you're up there that it's just like standing up on stage with your sister, arguing over every minute detail."

Apollo failed to bite back a laugh at that.

"You'll see," Phoenix promised, buoyed by the sight of his son's half-hidden grin. "Just be confident."

"Y-yeah," Apollo quietly replied, looking up to meet Phoenix's face with a smile. "I won't let you down, Dad."

April 20, 10:00AM
District Court
Courtroom No. 2

"This court is now in session," the judge announced as he banged his gavel from up on his podium.

The old man in the yellow suit behind the bench opposite smugly smiled, flipping at his long hair flowing to his shoulders from around his prominent bald spot. "The prosecution is ready, Your Honour."

Apollo, fists pressed into the bench he stood by, jumped at his cue. "The defence is f-, uh, ready, Your Honour!" he called. "Dammit, almost said the defence was 'fine!' Don't lose your nerve now, Wright!"

The judge paused, frowning at a piece of paper and casting glances down at the defence bench. "Your name was... Mister Wright?" he asked, giving the young man a critical look. "And this is your first trial?"

"Yes, Your Honour!" Apollo replied, nodding and trying to not look as frantic as he felt. "I'm fine!"

The judge seemed impressed. "You seem remarkably confident for a first-timer! If a little tense, of course!" While Apollo tried not to blush in embarrassment of his inability to relax (and his better-than-expected ability to fake confidence), the old man turned to Kristoph, who was standing at Apollo's side. "Mister Gavin, I was under the impression that you would be heading up this case. No
offence meant to the current attorney, naturally." He cast a small smile to Apollo, who forced one in return, not wanting to admit aloud he agreed with the judge's unsaid misgivings on the arrangement.

Kristoph sighed. "That was my intention, yes," he admitted. "However, a defence attorney must always cede to his client's wishes... and my client specifically requested Mister Wright."

"Odd," the judge murmured to himself, looking over his papers one more time before suddenly noticing something, looking surprised. "Ah! 'Wright'!" He turned to Apollo with a curious look. "You wouldn't happen to be related to the defendant, Mister Wright?" He frowned to himself. "Things could get very confusing with two Mister Wright's in this courtroom. One was quite enough."

Apollo thought for a moment, unsure how he could fix the judge's plight. "U-um, I used to be called 'Justice' a long time ago," he offered. He didn't think it would be a good idea to bring up the name 'Gramarye' in court, even if it was a more 'current' alternate name.

The prosecutor (Apollo's case documents called him 'Winston Payne') scoffed. "Well, a defence attorney would want to be called that, wouldn't he?" He patted at the small patch of hair in the centre of his forehead, giving the young attorney a condescending smile. "Gives off all the right impressions, doesn't it?"

'You bet it gives off all the 'Wright' impressions!' Apollo dearly wanted to shoot back.

"Ah, I know!" the judge again spoke up with a cheerful grin, apparently having not noticed Payne's interjection. "I'll call you 'Defence Wright' and 'Defendant Wright! That will keep it clear who I'm talking to!" Seeming very proud of himself and not waiting for a response, he then turned to look around at the court in general. "Let's begin!" he announced. "The defendant may enter the courtroom!"

Apollo bit his lip to keep from pointing out how much a mouthful 'Defence and Defendant Wright' were, standing still and watching as the bailiffs escorted in Phoenix from the side-room on the defence's side of the court. Just as in the lobby, Apollo's father was oddly relaxed, agreeably following the bailiffs to the witness stand, hands shoved deep into the pocket in the front of his hoodie. His head was pointed down, almost hiding his eyes above the calm smile on his face.

The judge sighed as he looked down at his defendant. "This is truly an unfortunate turn of events," he said, giving Phoenix, to Apollo's surprise, a genuinely sorrowful look. "I'm sorry we had to meet again under these circumstances. Long time no see, Defendant Wright."

Phoenix looked up, giving the old judge a shrug and a grin. "Let's put the past behind us, shall we? These days, I'm merely Phoenix Wright, piano player."

Apollo tried not to roll his eyes. 'Of all the times to play the fool, Dad... The 'poker' thing is kind of vital right now.'

"I won't speak of it further then," the judge agreed with a nod, then turned to the prosecutor. "If the prosecution would be so kind as to explain the charges. Mister Payne?"

Payne seemed to be giving Phoenix an almost gleeful smile. "To think, I saw you enter this room a fresh attorney, and now I'll see you leave in chains."

This time, Apollo did roll his eyes. 'Okay, we get it, you all know my Dad!'

Apart from a small frown, Payne seemed to brush Phoenix's jibe off, finally getting to business. He turned to his notes, clearing his throat. "The crime occurred at the Borscht Bowl Club, a Russian restaurant. The defendant, Phoenix Wright, took the victim, a customer..." He paused, seeming almost gleeful as he animatedly continued, "And he hit him! Wham! On the head! Smack!" He whacked a fist into his other hand a few times to demonstrate, then brushed off his suit and stood still, smugly brushing back his hair. "Killed him cold."

Apollo resisted the urge to demand the prosecutor shut his mouth immediately.

"Hmm," the judge hummed to himself in thought. "A customer at the restaurant, you say? And the defendant, you say he was...?"

"The pianist for the club, it seems," Payne replied, looking slightly confused at the notion.

The judge's eyes widened in shock. "Phoenix Wright... a pianist?"

For a moment, Apollo wondered why the both of them seemed so surprised, then remembered how, once it had sunk in what his new father's job was, he hadn't understood it at first either. 'Should I speak up and explain it, or...?'

Unfortunately, Payne interrupted Apollo's chance, reaching under his desk and pulling out a green glass bottle. "This is the weapon that took the victim's life: A bottle of grape juice, complete with the defendant's fingerprints," he announced, brandishing the item for all to see before leaving it to rest on his bench. "Grape juice is apparently our defendant's drink of choice."

Apollo sighed, burying his face in one hand. 'You and your damn grape juice, Dad.'

The judge nodded solemnly. "The court accepts the deadly bottle as evidence." He briefly paused, looking over the documents on his podium. "So, the victim was a customer at this restaurant... but just who was this, erm, 'Shadi Smith' fellow?"

Payne hid an uncomfortable wince, and Apollo couldn't help but wryly smile as he realised the prosecution knew as little about the victim as the defence did. "We believe he was a traveller, Your Honour."

"A... traveller?" the judge repeated, confused.

"According to his passport," Payne continued, referring to his notes, "he had been out of the country for a number of years. He had only returned recently, though his place of residence is unclear."

As they discussed the victim, Apollo turned his attention to the autopsy report sitting on the bench before him. It had been handed to Kristoph in the pre-trial meeting the previous day, then passed on to Apollo after Phoenix requested the change of attorney, and it had been bugging the young man ever since. The name of the victim he didn't recognise (which wasn't a surprise, given Apollo's awful track record with recalling names), but the small photo taken from the dead man's passport was naggingly familiar. 'I'm certain I know this guy... but from where? And if I know him... Dad must know him too.' He cast a glance to the witness stand, but Phoenix had his head down-turned, still smiling and looking for all the world like he was totally in control of his awful situation.

"And he had some sort of connection with the defendant?" the judge asked.

Payne paused. "That, too, is unclear at present, Your Honour," he admitted. "We believe they first met at the Borscht Bowl Club on the night of the crime."

The judge frowned, looking as confused as Apollo felt. "If they had only just met, then why
murder?" he asked. "Perhaps the victim slighted the defendant's piano playing?"

Apollo again resisted the urge to roll his eyes. *'Given the way Dad mocks himself, making fun of his questionable piano skills would only result in him agreeing with you.'*

"That doesn't appear to have been the case," Payne replied, beginning to look smug again. "No, the motive had nothing to do with the defendant's lack of playing skill... at least, not piano playing." He smirked, tapping at his tablet computer, and Apollo felt his hands tightening into fists as he began to guess what the man was implying. "I'll let this photo explain what I mean," Payne added, and, a moment later, the holographic screens around the room flickered into life.

The audience in the gallery murmured amongst themselves, as Apollo had now learned they often did on first sight of the victim, and, indeed, the black and white picture on the monitors showed a man lying limp in one of the chairs of the Hydeout, his hat draped over his eyes as though he were only sleeping. Around him, Apollo quickly noted the remains of the poker game on the table, along with what looked like the murder weapon. Cards littered the carpet below, barely visible in the picture, and light flickered in through the small window on the wall in the background, illuminating the cupboard that hid the secret tunnel.

Still Apollo couldn't keep his eyes off the murder victim. Just who was he?

"As we can see," Payne continued, still smugly smirking, "a game of poker was in progress at the scene of the crime."

The judge almost jumped in surprise. "Wait a second!" he cried. "Isn't poker gambling? That's a crime in and of itself!"

Apollo blinked in surprise, momentarily frozen. "Wait, what!? N-no it isn't!"

"Indeed," Payne chuckled, shutting down the holograms with a prideful swipe of his fingers. "It appears our defendant has fallen to become the basest sort of criminal!"

Apollo barely registered the growing hubbub of the gallery around them before blurting out "OBJECTION!" his face turning red from barely concealed rage. "N-no he hasn't! Poker isn't a crime!" He saw Payne only smirking knowingly at him, and was about to shout some more at the man before he heard a gentle cough at his side, and turned to see his mentor calmly smiling nearby.

"Let me handle this one, Wright," Kristoph quietly instructed, then turned to address the court. "It is true that the defendant was engaged in a game of poker with the victim," he announced, "yet it was only that: a game, in the purest sense. A competition, Your Honour."

That seemed to surprise Payne. "A... competition?"

"Yes," Kristoph replied, "a test of wits, a silent clash of passions." He closed his eyes, flicking at his hair. "Only the cards, their backs wreathed in blue flame, know its final outcome."

Apollo, having managed to calm himself down, frowned in thought. "Wait, when did we learn they were using the blue deck...?"

The judge was confused for a different reason: "Er, come again?"

Payne crossed his arms, unimpressed. "The cards on the table had blue backs, Your Honour," he explained. "I believe the defence was waxing poetic in an attempt to mystify those present..." He paused, scowling. "And impress women."
Although still confused, Apollo reasoned he must have missed the detail of the card backs being mentioned in the pre-trial meeting. *I wonder how it even came up?*

The judge shrugged in acceptance of Payne’s answer, then moved on. "That will be our first order of business here then: To find out more about this fatal game of cards." He looked to Phoenix, who finally seemed to react to the goings-on of the court by returning the old man’s silent gaze. "Defendant, you will testify to the court about the poker competition held the night of the crime," the judge instructed, and Apollo was certain he saw a soft, pitying look in the man’s eyes.

Phoenix simply smiled. "My pleasure."

*View the Court Record*
"I am a pianist by trade," Phoenix explained, almost leaning on the witness stand as he gave the court a relaxed smile, "yet I can hardly play at all. My real job is to take on interested customers over at the poker table. The room where we play and the competition in there are," he shrugged, seeming almost bashfully proud, "the club's main attractions. The rules are simple: we play a game of poker using two decks of cards." He gave a pointed look to Payne, who looked away with a scowl. "That's all it is: a game. And our customers are happy."

The judge seemed thoughtful. "A pianist who can't play piano?"

Payne smirked, taking the opportunity for another biting remark: "Better than a defence attorney who can't defend!"

Apollo bit his lip, hands tightening into fists. 'What I wouldn't give to get that guy a knuckle sandwich right now...' Phoenix, unsurprisingly, was unfazed.

The judge frowned at the prosecution's comment, but didn't speak up. "Very well. The defence may begin the cross-examination."

After a moment, Apollo jumped. 'Oh right, that's me!' "Yes, Your Honour!"

Kristoph's eyes subtly narrowed as he watched his student. "Will you be alright?" he quietly asked.

"Of course, sir!" Apollo insisted, nodding. "No need for help here! I think I've got this one covered!"

Kristoph raised an eyebrow. "I think you'd better do more than 'think'," he replied, but said no more, deciding to leave the young attorney be.

Apollo turned his attention to the updating transcript, belatedly wondering just what his goal was supposed to be when cross-examining the defendant. Finding lies and inconsistencies was what you did with witnesses, not your own client! A part of him wanted to add that his father knew better than to lie on the stand, but, upon giving the overly-calm Phoenix another glance, he had to admit he knew his 'witness' better than that. Feeling the expectant gaze of the entire court on him, Apollo randomly picked a question from thin air, one he already knew the answer to, looking up at the witness stand. "U-uh... Y-you say you're a pianist... but you can only play one song...?"

The judge was surprised. "Only one?" he repeated. "Is that true?"

Phoenix grinned. "'One' is usually all anyone wants, on the rare occasion they demand it," he boasted, and Apollo resisted the urge to groan. "The title of 'pianist' is just a mask; A respectable face I wear for the world at large."

Payne scoffed. "Then they pay you just to play poker?" he asked, condescension dripping from his tone.

"That would seem to be the case," Phoenix replied with a smile, apparently ignoring Payne's
patronising for what Apollo could only assume was personal enjoyment. "I am a professional, after all."

"Bah!" Payne cried, frowning almost bitterly. "Do I detect pride in that statement?" He smirked, tapping at his head. "It's just hard for an honest, hard-working member of society like me to imagine-!"

Phoenix looked away, but failed to hide his own amused smirk. "Yes, your imagination was always a bit limited, Winston."

That made the prosecutor pause, looking shocked. "Wh-What...?"

"I've played poker for seven years in that little room," Phoenix continued, turning a stern face to the court at large. "And I've never. Lost. Once."

Apollo couldn't help but be impressed by his father's boast, despite being well aware of it already. The silence in the court, and the look on Payne's face, helped, though he made himself bite back a proud grin.

"You see why the customers come now?" Phoenix asked, beginning to smile again, a fierce determination in his eyes. "Defeat the undefeated poker champion! It's quite a draw. That is, I'm quite a draw."

'Okay, that's enough boasting, Dad.' Hiding a smirk, Apollo crossed his arms. "The Hydeout too," he reminded his father. "Don't forget that."

"Ah, yes!" Phoenix cried, shooting his son a grateful smile. "The Borscht Bowl Club has quite a history! It used to be a gathering spot for black market types back in the day." He shrugged. "All in the past now, of course, but suffice it to say there were a lot of deals being made under the table, right there in that room."

The judge tugged at his beard thoughtfully, tapping at his own screens to reactivate the holograms with the photo of the Hydeout. "A smoky room, gambling hoods... You know, just looking at this picture makes me feel 'bad!'"

Although Apollo raised an eyebrow, Phoenix seemed to be expecting such a response from the old man on the podium. "The bosses gather around the table, cutting deals, safe from the eyes of the law," he continued, playing along with the judge's mental image. "Meanwhile, a goon keeps watch through the small window." He nodded again to the photo on the hologram. "I can practically picture it now!" He laughed a moment, then switched gears to continue, "The room has a few other tricks to it; Common knowledge to our regulars." He cast a glance at the defence bench. "At any rate, they come to play poker in a room steeped in history. Despite the dark past, it's all just good, clean fun."

Apollo nodded. "That's also why there are two decks of cards," he added. "To prevent cheating."

"Exactly," Phoenix agreed, shooting his son a smile. "No one can slip in cards if you alternate decks."

"There's something else I noticed," the judge said, still staring at the photo and gesturing to it. "In addition to the cards on the table, there are some lying scattered on the floor.""

"Precisely," Kristoph cut in, eyes closed as he continued to wax lyrical. "Cards on the table, cards upon the floor... Each one forming a complete deck. A crime scene painted blue by a sad sweep of cards." He smiled, brushing at his fringe. "It's poetic, really."
'Could we do without the poetry?' Apollo asked himself.

"Incidentally," Phoenix picked up with a smile, "the two types of cards we use? One deck is red, and the other blue."

The judge hummed in thought. "As I recall," he said, "in poker you make five-card 'hands'. I can see how it would be easy to cheat."

Apollo noticed a flash of a smirk on Phoenix's face. "Yes," the man quietly agreed, "a game of 'hands'..."

The young attorney stared at his father with a frown. 'Just what are you playing at, Dad?'

Apparently satisfied, the judge nodded. "I believe the court understands the nature of this competition of yours sufficiently," he announced.

"Well, of course!" Apollo cried, arms crossed as he hid a sigh of relief. "It was just a simple game, like we said!"

The judge gave the young attorney a stern stare. "Are you sure?"

Apollo was too startled by the question to respond beyond a confused "Huh?"

"People are not murdered over 'simple games', Defence Wright," the judge pointed out, with a wisdom Apollo hadn't been expecting from the dotty old man. He turned to Phoenix. "Defendant, you were in the room the very moment that the crime occurred... yet you claim no connection to the crime?"

Apollo saw Phoenix look at him, and recognised with a jerk he was being prompted to react on his father's behalf. "O-objection!" he cried, but once the word had left his mouth, he discovered to his horror that he hadn't the slightest idea what to follow it up with. "U-uh... he, uh... Um..." Turning red, he stepped back from the bench, turning wide eyes to his father in a silent plea for help.

Although Phoenix seemed sympathetic (though amused) at Apollo's tied tongue, it was Kristoph who came to his rescue: "The defendant has not yet testified anything about the crime, Your Honour," he explained with his constant calm smile. "As of now, he has only spoken of the game of poker played in his place of work."

Apollo sighed in relief, but still kicked himself mentally at the blunder. 'More proof I'm just not cut out for this yet...'

The judge seemed surprised. "Ah, of course!" he agreed with the elder attorney.

"In which case," Kristoph continued, turning to Phoenix, "there is one thing I'd like made clear, Wright; Namely, your connection to the case at hand..." He gave a pointed look to Payne who was watching somewhat nervously from the opposing bench, warning the prosecutor to stay quiet. To Phoenix, he added, "And I'd like to hear it from you."

Phoenix seemed to think a moment, then smiled. "Sure, why not?" he agreed.

The judge nodded. "Very well. The defendant will amend his testimony."

With the entire court's eyes on him, Phoenix scratched his chin in thought for several moments, then looked up with a lazy smile. "I plead silence regarding the murder. But I will say I never touched the murder weapon."
Apollo blinked in surprise, then frowned and cried out, "W-wait, hold it!" He stared at his father, fists pressed into the bench in front of him. "Silence!? Are you freaking kidding me!?!"

"The defendant has the right to refuse to testify," Phoenix explained, giving Apollo an infuriatingly calm smile before looking away with a smirk. "I haven't forgotten everything about the law."

'Clearly!' Apollo wanted to shout, but held himself back, restraining himself to simply glaring at his father. "And just what am I supposed to do with 'silence'!?!"

"Your job," Phoenix replied with a raised eyebrow, almost laughing. "Turn it around in our favour."

Apollo could almost feel steam coming out of his ears. 'I COULD KILL YOU RIGHT NOW, DAD. THE DEATH SENTENCE WOULD BE SO WORTH IT.'

The young attorney's glaring was interrupted movement at his side, and Kristoph muttered in Apollo's ear, "Wright, didn't you detect anything odd about that testimony?"

Apollo gave his mentor a curious look for a moment before blinking in surprise. "Oh, yeah!" He turned back to the witness stand. "And another thing! What do you mean 'never touched the murder weapon'!? Have you not been paying attention!?!"

Phoenix just smiled knowingly, scratching at his face. "I guess not," he said. "Does the evidence contradict my testimony?"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Yes!" he cried in exasperation. 'You know full well what I'm getting at! Stop pretending and take your own friggin' trial seriously!'

The judge looked between defence and defendant with a confused look. "Something the matter, Defence Wright?"

Payne giggled to himself, looking smug again. "Too bad our new defence attorney never learned how to play dumb!"

Apollo blinked in surprise, snapping out of his anger instantly. 'O-oh, right... pointing out that lie helps the prosecution's case...'. He frowned. Thanks for leading me into THAT trap, DAD.'

"What's this, Mister Payne?" the judge asked.

"The bottle in question," Payne explained, tapping at the piece of evidence still prominently displayed on his bench beside him. "As I mentioned earlier... it was covered in the defendant's fingerprints!"

It took barely an instant for Apollo to react, slamming his fists on the bench before him and shouting "OBJECTION!" as loud as he dared, considering what his experience on stage had taught him about reigning in the 'Chords of Steel'. "What's so strange about fingerprints on a bottle in a restaurant!? That alone doesn't prove anything! There'd have to be something special about them to be-"

A giggle crossed the room from the prosecution, and Payne grinned triumphantly. "Oh, you are right on track, aren't you? It's true, I must admit: These aren't normal fingerprints!" He gestured to the bottle. "These are upside-down!"

Apollo restrained a sigh as the judge and gallery all gasped in surprise. 'Good job, Dad... just make yourself look more guilty, why don't you...'

"He was holding the bottle inverted!" Payne further gleefully explained, even demonstrating by
picking up the bottle himself by the neck. "And the one reason to hold a bottle like this is to brain someone with it!"

'Somehow, I'm not convinced.' Apollo's attention was taken by the bottle in Payne's hand. In his head, he was remembering a night long ago in Kurain, huddled with his family as they spoke of a surprise date in a London court, with a girl accused of similarly braining someone with a pipe that bore her fingerprints. He didn't doubt the memory that came to mind was no co-incidence.

"Defendant!" the judge called to Phoenix accusingly. "Can you explain your fingerprints on this bottle to the court?"

Phoenix glanced once at Apollo, then smiled as he closed his eyes. "I stand by my plea of silence regarding the murder," he announced. "For now."

The judge stared at him a moment, humming in thought. "This could hurt your case, Defendant Wright," he pointed out.

Payne scoffed, brushing at his hair. "I'm sure he's uncooperative because he's hiding something," he spat with a bitter tone.

"Objection," came a calm call from Apollo's right, and everyone turned their attention to Kristoph, hands clasped behind his back. "Your Honour," he said, though his eyes were on Payne, "you seem to have forgotten something."

"And what might that be, Mister Gavin?" the judge asked, confused.

Kristoph smiled. "On the night of the crime, who was it who reported the murder to the police?"

Payne jumped a little in surprise. "W-well, that was the defendant, Mister Wright," he admitted, rapidly adding, "but still, that-!"

"Really!?!" the judge interrupted, as shocked as the gallery gasping around him.

"Erm, yes," Payne meekly replied, his fire seemingly gone for now as he turned his full attention to his papers. "According to the case file, the murder was reported from near the scene, by a call from the defendant's cell phone." He reached under his bench, pulling out a familiar, battered mobile phone, its battery held in by a small, glue-streaked mat of tape.

Apollo thought a moment, pressing a finger to his forehead. "Where exactly was the call from?" he asked, running through a list of possibilities in his head. "The restaurant? The street outside?"

Payne bit his lip, then turned to tap away at his tablet computer. "Let's... take a look at a diagram of the murder scene, shall we?" he instead replied, and the holograms flickered back to life with a diagram of the familiar basement, Smith's body outlined in its chair by the poker table. "The victim was murdered in a small room in a basement two floors down from ground level. Of course, cell phones can't get reception so far down." He tapped on the stairs, which briefly flashed white. "The defendant used the stairs in this hallway to go above ground. The call came from the first floor of the restaurant."

The judge regarded the old phone on the prosecutor's bench thoughtfully as Payne again shut down the holograms. "I see... and this is the phone that made the call?"

"The defendant could have just fled the scene of the crime if he so chose," Kristoph pointed out. "Yet, he fulfilled his duty as a citizen and reported it to the authorities." He looked at Payne, the smallest smirk on his face. "And you claim he is being 'uncooperative'...?"
Payne gulped nervously, and Apollo tried to hide a smile at his mentor's clear victory, as minor as it was.

"I think the prosecution has toyed with our client enough for the time being," Kristoph continued, turning his gaze to the judge.

"T-toyed!?!" Payne cried, trying and failing to look confident through his nervous sweating. "I assure you, no-one is more serious about-!"

"What was it you said?" Kristoph interrupted, looking back to Payne. "The defendant was 'in the room the very moment that the crime occurred'? How can you possibly know this?"

The judge seemed surprised. "That's a good question! How indeed!"

"Simple!" Apollo spoke up, noticing Kristoph frowning in the corner of his eyes as the young attorney took over for his mentor with a wide smile. "He has a witness, of course!"

Payne looked between the two with a confused look, then sighed, crossing his arms. "You're more perceptive than you look," he muttered, then looked to Kristoph, "and you're certainly as good as they say you are."

Kristoph didn't respond. Apollo was too gleeful over the tiny victory against the smug prosecutor to explain they'd been expecting said witness from the start.

The judge nodded. "Very well. The prosecution may call its first witness to the stand."

*View the Court Record*
Once Phoenix was escorted from the witness stand, it took only a minute for the bailiffs to bring in a short young woman, about Apollo's age, all bundled up under layers of heavy furs, an apron almost comically added on top. Wavy blonde hair spilled out from under her woollen cap, and she seemed to be carrying a tray in one mittened hand. As Apollo watched, she looked around the court frantically, then seemed to glance in his direction and immediately dive behind the witness stand, shivering.

Payne sighed, apparently deciding to pretend he hadn't seen what his witness was doing. "The witness will state her name and profession."

"H-hold on just a moment!" the judge interrupted, looking around the courtroom as he seemed to have missed the woman's arrival. "Where's the witness?"

Payne gave Apollo a wry stare. "I surmise that she has been frightened by the defence's demonic-looking horns."

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'Yeah, make fun of the hair... real original...'

"Have no fear!" the judge told the witness, a fatherly look in his eyes. "If any horns point in your direction, this court will cut them off!"

The young woman seemed to believe the old man's assurances, peeking above the witness stand to peer up at him. "You... are sure?" Apollo was a little surprised to hear what seemed to be a thick Russian accent in her voice, though he supposed it made sense for her to be working in a Russian restaurant.

"I swear it on my gavel!" the judge replied, waving the small hammer with a friendly smile. "Please, come out."

The woman thought about it a moment more, casting a glance to Apollo that only made the attorney roll his eyes again. "Well, if you are sure it is okay," she said, and slowly began to extract herself from behind the stand.

The judge cleared his throat. "Now, the prosecution-" He promptly cut himself off as he saw the witness arranging her covered plate of food as she stood at the stand. "W-wait a minute!" The old man shot a glare down at Payne. "Would the prosecution care to explain the witness's, erm, paraphernalia!?"

"Er, yes," Payne muttered to himself, fiddling nervously with his glasses. "She is a professional, Your Honour. Those are... merely the tools of her trade."

The judge blinked at him for a moment. "And that would be...?"

The woman smiled sweetly. "My name... is Olga Orly," she spoke up. "I am employed as waitress in Borscht Bowl Club restaurant."
"Then... why the camera?" the judge asked, casting glances at the yellow object hanging around her neck. Apollo was surprised to notice it himself; Cameras weren't usual gear for the restaurant's waitresses.

"Of course," Olga replied, patting her camera, "it is my pride to serve borscht that is naming restaurant! But I also perform," she paused, mitten to mouth in thought, "how it is said? Other service."

The judge tugged at his beard for a moment. "I take it one of these other services is taking the customers' pictures?"

Olga nodded eagerly. "Da, da! Like, for example," she looked to Payne, a hand on her camera, "this one." Payne seemed to silently sigh to himself, tapping at his computer and displaying on the hologram screens a colour photo of the upper room of the restaurant, covered in its usual piles of fake snow. On one side, sitting with his back to his piano, was Phoenix, in his usual hoodie and with Trucy's beanie on his head. Opposite him, at the table, was a dark man in a white suit: unmistakably the victim.

The courtroom gasped, along with the judge. "Th-that's... the defendant?"

"Indeed," Payne sighed, a certain amount of disinterest in his tone. "On the night of the murder."

Olga gestured to the victim, a small smile on her face as she sweetly explained, "Man in white hat, is one who has gone kaput."

The judge nodded. "Indeed, that is the victim." The gallery's mutterings began to rise in volume, forcing the judge to bang his gavel. "Order! Order!" Once quiet had returned to the air, he huffed to himself. "This is quite a piece of evidence to casually drop into our laps!"

"It is same way as I drop cold bowls of borscht on laps of customers," Olga replied. "Casually."

The judge considered her words, humming in thought. "Then the court will casually accept this new evidence."

As the holograms powered down, Apollo brought up the photo again on his Court Record, frowning at the image of his father with the victim. 'It's still bugging me who this guy is... Where have I seen him before?'

"Now, witness," Payne spoke up, attracting Apollo's attention back to the proceedings. "Where were you at the time of the murder?"

"I was in room," Olga readily explained. "The Hydeout, we call it."

The judge thought a moment. "I believe we've heard that term before."

"Is room where famous gangster 'Badgai' was arrested," Olga explained cheerfully, only to turn more morose as she added, "Is room where murder took place." As the court gasped in surprise, she instantly switched her frown to a grin and grabbed her camera, pointing it at the defence bench before pausing and looking disappointed at the two attorneys' lack of a reaction. By then, the moment had passed for surprising people with photos, so she simply dropped it to again hang from her neck.

Instinctively, Apollo didn't trust this woman. Along with being the only other person present at the time of the murder, something rang as false to him about her entire demeanour. She didn't seem to exactly be lying, but something about her was a falsehood... he just hadn't figured out what yet.
"Very well, witness!" the judge announced. "You will testify to the court about that night's events!"

Olga nodded, thinking to herself a moment before she seemed ready to begin. "That night, customer asked me to deal cards for game," she explained. "It was cold... Both players played with hats on, da. The victim, he plays whole time with hand on locket at his neck." She patted her camera, as though imitating the victim's actions. "Then, last hand is done! But something terrible has happened, da!" She paused to shiver, looking scared. "That man flew at victim, and is strangling him to death!"

Apollo restrained a growl, fists tightening at his sides.

The gallery murmured to itself, but the judge was deep in thought. "Incidentally," he asked, "who won the game?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Payne scoffed, regaining some of his lost self-confidence as he smirked. "The winner was the victim, Mister Smith!"

"Objection!" Apollo instantly shot back, fists slamming his bench as he glared at the prosecutor. "That's ridiculous! My dad would never lose!"

Kristoph gently cleared his throat, and Apollo looked up to see his mentor watching the young attorney disapprovingly. "Wright, maybe you can come up with a more legitimate objection?"

"But that is legitimate!" Apollo argued. "He hasn't lost in seven years!"

Payne chuckled darkly. "I know it's hard to admit such a thing about your dear Daddy, but take it from me, it happens." He paused to flip his hair. "I didn't lose a case my first seven years as prosecutor, either."

Meanwhile, the judge was watching Apollo, confused. "I'm sorry, but what does your father have to do with this, Defence Wright?"

Apollo shuffled uncomfortably, having forgotten he'd already dodged the bullet of explaining that at the beginning of the trial.

"You spotted it yourself only this morning, Your Honour," Payne spoke up, giving Apollo an odd look between a smirk and a frown, like he couldn't decide if he liked this or not. "Why else would the great ex-attorney appoint a nobody to defend him? He's our young defence attorney's dear old daddy."

Despite the distraction of his embarrassment at being 'outed' and his anger at Payne for the prosecutor's choice of words, Apollo noticed Olga gasping in surprise, shooting the young attorney a wide-eyed glance.

"Ah, yes!" the judge cried with a proud smile. "I did notice that!" He paused, then frowned again, turning to Apollo. "But... You're Phoenix Wright's son? I wasn't aware he had children."

Apollo thought about answering, but decided there was too much to say. 'If he's a friend of Dad's, he can ask Dad. Later.' "Does it really matter, Your Honour?" he asked with a sigh.

Oddly enough, Payne seemed to agree. "Incidentally," he announced, tapping at his computer with a smug smile, "I have some evidence here that the defendant did indeed lose." Before anyone could interrupt him, the holograms flickered back to life, this time displaying another police photo: a colour image of the poker table, before it was cleared. The victim's white suit was even visible in the far chair. "These are the poker chips as they lay the very moment of the crime," Payne explained. "The hand and chips on this side," the near side of the table was highlighted, "belong to the defendant,
Phoenix Wright. Those on the far side," the highlighting moved to the stated side, "belonged to the victim, Mister Smith."

Apollo could feel himself going pale. Just as Payne had said, it appeared the final hand was won by the victim; Although both men miraculously had a full house with two aces each, Smith had three kings, and Phoenix three sevens. The chips, however, confused him: At a glance, he could see Phoenix had been winning up 'til then, as he had four of the more valuable red chips while Smith had only two. Was it possible the inevitable had finally happened? Had Phoenix... finally misread an opponent? 'Oh, if only I'd been there with you that night, Dad... I could've stopped all this!'

Apollo's attention was suddenly dragged back to the trial by the judge's announcement of "The defence may cross-examine the witness!" Jumping in surprise, he quickly turned his attention down to his Court Record, seeing the hologram displays shutting down in the corners of his eyes as he brought up the updating transcript. Quickly re-reading Olga's testimony, he thought a moment. 'She was the dealer... The owner had the AC on full again... The victim had a... Wait a second. I don't remember seeing that.' Apollo frowned, then looked up to the waitress. "The victim had a locket?"

Olga nodded. "I believe it was good luck charm, da? He gripped it many times as he played that night."

"Yes, he must have felt as though it might carry him to the moon and the stars!" the judge cried, musing to himself with a smile. "Though if it were small enough to fit around his neck, it wouldn't have much lift..."

Apollo was distracted from his own thoughts by the judge's odd comment. "Um... This is a locket we talking about, isn't it?" he asked. "I mean, a pendant with a picture in it? Not a 'rocket'?"

The judge seemed surprised, then frowned, avoiding Apollo's gaze. "Of course! I knew that!" he insisted, and Apollo didn't need his bracelet to know the old man was lying. "It was probably a pendant shaped like a rocket. That's why she called it that."

Apollo simply stared back at the judge in disbelief. "No, a locket's a locket!" he pointed out, the ridiculous argument strongly reminding him of his sister. "It doesn't matter what shape it-!"

"It's considered bad form to poke fun at the hard-of-hearing," Kristoph quietly interrupted, calling Apollo's rant to a quick halt.

The younger attorney gave his mentor an incredulous look, but decided to let it go, returning his attention to the transcript on his computer. Although looking at the waitress's final statement still enraged him, "The absolute last thing Dad would do if he lost would be 'strangle someone!'", it was only now he was calmer that he noticed the contradiction in the testimony. "Ms Orly... You say the victim was 'strangled'? That's odd."

Olga nodded in surprising agreement. "Da, normal customers only choke on borscht."

The statement threw Apollo for only a moment before he decided to ignore it, activating the holograms to throw up the autopsy report, highlighting the cause of death. "N-no, I mean that isn't how the victim died! He was killed by a blow to the head!"

"Aack!" the waitress cried, eyes wide in shock, and she almost dropped her tray before scrambling to right it.

It was beyond obvious the exact circumstances of the murder were news to the shady waitress. "Ms Orly!" Apollo demanded. "Tell the truth: Did you witness the crime?"
Olga only shrieked, hiding behind the witness stand as the gallery loudly murmured.

The judge hummed to himself in thought, replacing the autopsy report on the holograms with the crime scene photo. "Looking at this picture, it doesn't seem like he was hit," he mused. "He's still wearing his hat and everything."

"Yet, it is a fact that he was hit, Your Honour," Payne sighed, tapping at his tablet computer and again replacing the image on the holograms, this time with a picture brand new to the trial. "Here's a photo we took of the victim with his hat off during our investigation." It was a close-up of Smith, and, although Apollo's attention was still primarily drawn to the man's vaguely familiar, pained face, he couldn't help but notice the prominent dark spot in the middle of Smith's forehead. From the wound, a line of blood traced its way back along his hairless crown, disappearing out of sight.

While the gallery burst into a small hubbub of discussion, the judge stared at the photo with wide eyes. "Well, that's quite shocking, isn't it? This head certainly was hit."

"B-but...!" Olga protested, looking somewhat panicked. "I have seen it happen! The defendant, he lunge at victim, his neck...!"

The woman's insistence gave Apollo pause. 'She's... not lying. But...' Frowning, he turned back to the photo looming over the court from the holographic screens, though this time his eyes were drawn to the victim's neck. It lay exposed in the lower third of the frame, the wide collar of his shirt fanning out around his head like a grey flower, colours stolen away by the black-and-white camera. As he was expecting, there were no signs of bruising. 'W-wait... he's supposed to have a locket, isn't he? Where is it?'

On his own Court Record, he quickly flicked back through all the previous photos supplied by Olga and Payne. Payne's was, of course, of the dead body, also with no sign of a locket, but Olga's snap of Phoenix and Smith before the murder surprised him: There, shining from the gap of the man's red collar, was a golden pendant... the missing locket.

Apollo felt his breathing quicken. What did this mean? It wasn't very clear from the long shot, but as far as he could tell Smith's locket was extremely similar to Trucy's, the locket Phoenix was currently wearing... or, at least, that was what he'd told Apollo about the golden pendant on his neck. A closer look at the photo confirmed Phoenix's entire chest was hidden from view, his body turned at an angle that hid where a locket would rest, but Apollo wasn't expecting to see anything there anyway; Trucy was supposed to have handed her's over later that day, in the detention centre... Apollo knew for a fact Phoenix certainly hadn't had it that night as he went off to work after their usual show.

Meanwhile, the victim's had disappeared between the poker game and the police investigation, a locket that looked remarkably similar to Trucy's, which was itself a gift from her father in years long gone. On top of it all, Apollo hadn't spoken to his sister since their show the evening before the murder (Aderyn had called him the next day to confirm Trucy putting their usual act on hold until after the trial, and Apollo had only spoken to Luke briefly over text, just the once; He had had no contact with Trucy herself). Olga was sure she'd seen Phoenix at Smith's neck. And just who was Shadi Smith, anyway?!

It all added up to something... but Apollo was starting to think he didn't want to know the answer.
A small nudge to his arm brought Apollo back to reality, and he looked up to see Kristoph watching him with concern. "Are you quite alright, Apollo?" he quietly asked. "You've been staring into space for a while now."

The young attorney hesitated only a moment before pulling himself together with every scrap of acting ability he could salvage from his brief panicked breakdown. "Of course I am, sir," he insisted, a calm smile to rival Kristoph’s best plastered on his face. "I'm always fine."

Although Kristoph seemed unconvinced, he didn't wait long before accepting the answer, turning towards the judge. "The defence will continue its cross-examination," he announced.

"Ah, good," the judge replied, and Apollo noticed him shooting the younger attorney worried glances. Had he been so focussed on his thoughts that he had missed them trying to talk to him? It did seem a lot quieter now than he remembered it being, and the holograms had been deactivated since he last looked. "What was your next question for the witness, Defence Wright?"

'Well... how do I put this?' Apollo turned to his tablet computer, again reviewing Olga's testimony. "If you recall, Your Honour... the witness said the victim played with 'his hand on locket at his neck'."

Payne scoffed. "I hope you aren't about to raise an objection to the witness's grammar!"

"No," Apollo shot back, wishing the man would just shut up about his obvious grudge already, "but look at this photograph!" With a swipe of his hand, he reactivated the holograms to display Payne's second photo again, of the hatless Smith as he lay back in his chair, stone dead. "Do you see a locket on the victim's neck?"

Sure enough, at Apollo's prompting, the court seemed to notice the inconsistency as one with a gasp. Kristoph smiled as he turned to the younger attorney, quietly saying, "Well done, Wright. I'm impressed. I admit, I should have known you had the ability to handle this... despite the odd hiccup now and then."

Apollo shrugged and grinned in response.

"If we are to believe this witness's testimony as is," the judge pointed out, "then the locket 'disappeared' following the victim's death!"

A part of Apollo wanted to joke it had been magicked away in a disappearing trick, but, for some reason, he found himself terrified to voice that thought.

"It's quite simple when you think about it," Kristoph said, a hand pushing at his glasses. "If the locket is gone, someone must have taken it off, no? Ms Orly didn't see the defendant strangling the victim; He was taking off his locket!" He looked around the stunned courtroom with a smile. "Wouldn't that explain it?"
While the rest of the court was erupting into a hubbub of shocked noise, Apollo looked away, trying to keep himself calm. 'N-no, I'm just jumping to conclusions. Of course I don't know Smith. Dad doesn't, either. Even the prosecution knows he's never met any of my family before.' It was then he spotted grey to his left, and looked over to see Phoenix stood not far away, watching the commotion with a neutral stare. 'Whoa. How long's he been standing there...?' A bailiff carefully lingered at a respectable distance, and a part of Apollo laughed at the thought they were intimidated by the 'hero attorney' despite the infamous disbarment.

Phoenix, perhaps sensing his son's eyes on him, turned his gaze to meet Apollo's. His eyebrows subtly raised, a silent question of 'How are you going?'.

Apollo gave a small shrug and a tight smile in return: 'I'm not perfect, but I can handle it'.

In reply, Phoenix flashed a grateful smile of his own: 'I'm proud of you'.

"D-defendant!" the judge cried, interrupting their 'conversation' (Apollo wondered if the old man had also just noticed Phoenix standing there). "What do you have to say to this?" He gestured with a stern frown to the displayed photo of the victim and his bare neck.

Phoenix just smiled enigmatically, looking away as he mused on what to say.

The judge frowned, leaning forward in his chair as he stared at the ex-attorney. "Say..."

"Yes?" Phoenix replied, meeting the judge's suspicious gaze with an innocent look.

"I just noticed this, but... you have something hanging around your neck, don't you."

At the judge's question, it seemed suddenly the entire courtroom had noticed the golden pendant sitting above Phoenix's hoodie zipper, muttering to themselves as every eye turned to the middle-aged ex-attorney. Unfazed by the attention, Phoenix himself only grinned, tapping at the locket with one finger. "Oh, you mean this?" he asked. "Yes, it's a locket... with a photograph inside." He barely glanced at Apollo before looking down at the locket itself (though it was too high on his collar to see without taking it off), the grin fading into a smile. "A photo of my daughter."

Apollo felt himself going numb. Even if he wanted to speak, he didn't think he'd be able to make his voice work.

"D-defendant Wright!" the judge cried in shock. "You have a daughter, too!?" He then turned to Apollo, looking more embarrassed. "Erm, your... sister, I suppose?"

Apollo just nodded.

"We confirmed it at the time of the arrest," Payne spoke up with a sigh. "The picture in the locket is indeed Mister Wright's daughter." He briefly paused. "And... the other Mister Wright's sister."

Although he felt he should be shocked, Apollo wasn't surprised to hear something so contradictory to what he'd been previously told. Turning back to Phoenix, he noticed his father watching him with a carefully controlled expression, and, as their eyes met, he saw Phoenix's eyes subtly frowning; A warning look. He could only guess it was a request to keep quiet, and Apollo was only too happy to follow it.

The judge huffed to himself. "Well now, if the results of this poker game led to the murder... perhaps we should hear a bit more about the outcome of the game?" he suggested.

Payne smirked, tapping at his head. "Further testimony won't really be necessary. It's clear the
defendant lost. Badly." As if to prove his point, he flicked at his computer, changing the image on the holograms to the photo of the poker table, chips and all.

Apollo frowned, confused. 'Lost 'badly'?'

Olga herself looked at the photo only a moment before looking away, nervously playing with her collar.

The judge, perhaps noticing her hesitation, faced the witness stand with a solemn frown. "Ms Orly!" he ordered. "You will testify to the court about the game played between the victim and the defendant!"

"D-da," Olga stuttered, taking a moment to compose herself before standing steadfast behind the witness stand, staring at a spot on the floor somewhere in front of the judge's podium. "The game began with three five hundred point in chips for each man. House chips come in two size: small and large. The one who was winning... da, it was victim!"

Apollo's eyes widened, but a glance at the photo still displayed on the holograms confirmed his initial impression. Th-that...! How dare she...!"

"For last hand," Olga continued, "defendant play with all chips on table and lose. The moment loss was decided, defendant grabs bottle from table and..." She winced at the memory, looking away and ending her speech with a squeak, hand clenched at her neck.

Apollo was still too angry to allow himself to react.

"Indeed," the judge agreed. "Looking at this picture, it does seem to be a one-sided game."

"As the court knows," Payne added, giving Apollo a particularly condescending smirk, "poker was the defendant's life! Failure must have been a bitter pill to swallow!"

Finally, Apollo could bite his lip no longer. Shouting "Objection!" as loudly as he dared, he slammed his fists into the bench, then dramatically pointed at Olga. "That testimony was a load of bull!"

While Olga nervously avoided his furious glare, the rest of the court seemed mostly confused. "Whatever do you mean, Defence Wright?" the judge asked.

Apollo sputtered for a moment as he forced himself to calm down enough to process how to explain. "The chips!" he cried. "It's blatantly obvious that it was the victim who was losing before the last hand!"

The court stared back at Apollo in silence. After a long moment, Payne chuckled, smugly smiling at the young man. "It seems our new attorney is in denial over his dear old daddy's dreadful deeds!" He gestured to the photo. "A glance at the picture is enough to tell you who won!" He brushed at his hair, snidely adding, "If you're not in kindergarten."

Apollo bit his lip to keep from hurling abuse at the old man. "Then maybe you should go back there," he spat. "Add them up! Most of the points are on my dad's side!"

The gallery murmured to itself. The judge just looked confused, looking between the two opposing attorneys as they stared daggers at each other. "Um... just for safety's sake," he turned to Kristoph, his expression begging for help, "could the defence explain the problem to the court?"

Apollo couldn't believe it. 'What's everyone's problem!? Why is everyone suddenly incapable of counting four and two!?'
Luckily for both Apollo and the judge, Kristoph again came to the rescue, with his everpresent calm smile. "I think I can identify the communication issues here," he assured everyone. "It is a simple matter of the assumptions we make when we look at this photo."

"Assumptions?" Apollo repeated, confused.

"Indeed," Kristoph replied, seeming slightly amused as he turned to Apollo. "You have been to the Hydeout many times over the years, Wright, watching your father play. You are as aware of the games played there as the defendant and witness... a familiarity the rest of us here cannot boast." He turned back to the photo above them, though still addressing his junior partner. "But that familiarity has blinded you to what a stranger to the game might see upon looking at those piles of chips. You simply assume we see what you see - that your conclusion is the same anyone else here would make."

Apollo remained silent, musing on his mentor's advice.

"So then," the judge spoke up, a curious look on his face, "what is it that Defence Wright knows that we do not?"


Payne frowned, unconvinced. "Calculation?"

"As Wright so eloquently told us, 'add them up'," Kristoph continued, then turned to Olga, still nervously fidgeting behind the witness stand. "Were the usual rules in effect for the game that night?"


"Then we must ask what the usual rules say about the worth of the chips," Kristoph concluded, returning his attention to the photo. "We have small, red chips and large, black chips, altogether worth... seven thousand points, I believe."

Apollo nodded. "Exactly. Six worth a thousand each, and ten worth a hundred." He pointed to the photo. "At a glance, you can ignore the hundred-point chips and just look at the thousand-point ones to see who's in the lead."

Payne was starting to look nervous. "May I ask... which ones are worth a thousand points?"

"The smaller red ones," Apollo replied. "Look at the photo; The victim has two thousand, nine hundred points, but the defendant has four thousand, one hundred!"

As the courtroom erupted into commotion, Payne jumped back with a terrified expression, arms held up around his head. "That's... impossible!" he cried.

Apollo couldn't resist a smug smile, crossing his arms as he watched the prosecutor. "Well, well! That gives our defendant even less reason to kill the victim! After all, he was winning!"

Payne shrieked as he continued to hide behind his arms.

His jibe against the prosecutor delivered, Apollo then turned to the waitress at the stand. "Now, Ms Orly... You must have known the true value of the chips... You were at the scene of the crime, weren't you?"

Olga just stared wide-eyed at Apollo before crying out in fear and hiding behind the witness stand.
The crowds in the gallery were only getting noisier, so the judge was finally forced to start banging his gavel. "Order! Order!" As the courtroom finally began to quieten, he sighed, turning to Payne. "It appears our defendant has lost his motive," he pointed out. "And Defendant Wright's supposed defeat... never happened."

Payne just stood, tensed, behind his prosecutor's bench, sweating nervously. "We must now ask ourselves," the judge continued to the court at large, "whether we can trust the witness's testimony at-"

"Hold it!"
The entire courtroom turned to look at the witness stand. "E-excuse me?" the judge asked. "What is it, Ms Orly?"

Olga herself seemed to have overcome her fright, determinedly standing behind the stand with her free hand clenched tightly in a fist at her neck. "I... I did not want to be saying this but," she began, only to seemingly lose her nerve, fidgeting as she looked down. "Actually, you see... erm..."

"See what, Ms Orly!?" Payne pressed, apparently seeing an opportunity to regain the upper hand. "What do we see!?"

Olga closed her eyes a moment, then looked up at the judge with a confident gaze. "In the last hand, there was cheat!"

A gasp rang round the courtroom.

"A c-ch-chaet!?!" Payne cried, somewhere between shocked and delighted. "You... you don't mean... a trick!?!"

"Wait," the judge added, surprised, "or do you mean... a scam!?"

Apollo resisted a glare at the prosecutor. 'Jerk. Tricks' are a totally different thing to 'cheats' and 'scams'!'

"Yes, there was cheat in last hand!" Olga determinedly repeated. "That is why game ends with chips as they are!"

Apollo sighed, burying his face in a hand. 'And she's not lying. Great.'

Kristoph seemed amused. "Well, this case certainly has taken a turn... for the interesting!"

The young attorney shot his mentor a glare. 'You're not helping!'

"Witness!" the judge commanded. "You will please testify to the court! Tell us about this 'cheating' in the final hand!"

Olga nodded. "The last hand, both men had 'full house'!" she explained, gesturing to the photo on the hologram above her. "There is four of each card in deck, from ace to king... If you look at both men's hands, cheat is more obvious!"

Apollo wondered who wouldn't know about the layout of a deck of cards, then reasoned that the earlier confusion over the chips had convinced her to explain everything, just in case. 'I guess, as a magician, I do have more reason than most to know that kind of thing.'

"The next moment," the waitress continued, "game becomes argument, da! The defendant's trick was exposed!"
Apollo's eyes widened. 'Wait, what?'

"He took bottle in hand..." Olga shook her head as she trailed off, looking sad. " Poor Mister Smith!"

Shooting the waitress a glare, Apollo banged his fists on the defence bench. "Ms Orly!" he ordered. "Why did you not tell the court about this from the very beginning!?"

Olga looked away, fiddling with her camera.

'Just as I thought!' Apollo told himself. 'A cover-up! And all to frame Dad for this murder, I bet!'

The judge hummed in thought. "A full house is a very high-scoring hand," he pointed out. "Not easy to make in my experience."

Payne scoffed. "That alone is enough to suspect less-than-scrupulous tactics," he replied, the smug smirk returning to his face. "There's a very easy way to make a full house and go undefeated for seven years: You cheat!"

Apollo dearly wanted to shout at Payne to take the comment back, but restrained himself to merely quietly fuming and clenching his fists tight enough to leave bruises from his fingernails.

The judge cleared his throat, looking to Apollo. "The defence may cross-examine the witness."

Forcing himself to calm down, Apollo again studied the photo of the poker table, giving the cards themselves another look. 'Both full houses, all four aces on display... The victim won the hand, though; Three kings beats three sevens.' He frowned. 'Where's the cheat? And Dad lost the hand, so he'd be a lousy cheater anyway.' "Ms Orly..." He looked to the waitress, still confused. "Where is this 'cheat'?"

Olga seemed as confused as Apollo. "It is obvious!" she insisted, gesturing to the screen. "The defendant... well, he played a fifth ace!" When everyone gasped in surprise, she nodded, looking all over the room. "Da, da! I still remember both hands very well! Mister Smith's hand has three aces, and Mister Wright's two!"

Apollo frowned, looking up at the photo above them. From the muttering in the gallery, he was sure some of the audience had noticed the problem, too.

"Obviously, cheating was afoot!" Payne boasted. "Or perhaps I should say... a-hand!" He chuckled at his own joke, ignoring Apollo rolling his eyes. "Adding cards to a deck is no less serious a taboo than... than forging evidence in a court of law!"

At that, Apollo very nearly stormed out from behind his bench, only being stopped from the potential rampage by Kristoph's firm hand on his upper arm.

"That was when argument started, da," Olga continued. "The victim, he shouts, 'you are cheater!', and then the defendant shouts something like, 'I have objection!'... To the gallery's amusement, she even mimed pointing her finger in an imitation of Phoenix as she 'recreated' the fight.

"Shouting objection, eh?" Payne laughed. "Old habits are hard to break! First he bluffed his way through the courtroom, now he bluffs his way through life!"

Apollo didn't think it was possible to hate someone more than he hated Payne already, so much so that he didn't question his father's odd return to a habit the young man had never had the opportunity to witness. "Objection!" he cried. "The defendant lost the hand! Doesn't that cast the shadow of doubt on Mister Smith!?!"
Unfortunately, Olga had a prepared explanation ready: "Humiliation from losing even when cheating... That is what set fire to defendant's heart!"

The judge nodded sagely to himself. "Ah, yes... I've always suspected the defendant was fire-proof!"

While Apollo was quietly fuming to himself, Kristoph gently called his attention with a quiet clearing of his throat. "Wright... Have you noticed her testimony keeps changing?"

"Y-yes, of course," Apollo hurriedly replied. "The strangling changed to the bottle, the serious competition changed to cheating..."

Kristoph nodded. "Perhaps it's time for you to say something, then?" he pointed out. "You have evidence that contradicts her, do you not?"

Apollo thought a moment, looking up at the photo still displayed above them. 'Why didn't I object with this earlier...? Oh, yeah, Payne.' After a pause, he gave Kristoph a determined look. "Leave it to me!" he said. Although the court was rather noisy with the hubbub of conversation, it took no more than slamming his bench to again quieten the room, and he stared at Olga. "It appears, once again," he announced, "that the witness is mistaken."

Olga cocked her head to one side. "Miss... Taken?" she innocently asked. "But my name-"

"The photo on the holograms, Ms Orly," Apollo prompted, gesturing to it with one hand. "We spent so much time staring at it counting those chips, and you never once even glanced at the cards?"

The judge frowned, confused. "What is the issue, Defence Wright?"

Apollo thought a moment, debating how to respond before keeping his attention on the stand. "Ms Orly," he said, "you said the victim had three aces and the defendant two, correct?"

Olga nodded. "Da," she replied, "that is cheat in final hand."

"Then I must ask you to explain yet another inconsistency," Apollo continued, reaching for his Court Record and setting up a highlight on the victim's hand. "Why, in this photo, does the victim have three kings and two aces?"

"Eek!" Olga squeaked as she saw what Apollo was pointing out.

"Objection!" came an immediate cry from the prosecution, though Payne seemed very unsure of himself. "Well... well, maybe the witness was simply confused!" he insisted. "Perhaps it was the defendant's hand that held the third ace in question!"

"Objection!" Apollo shouted in response, and switched the highlighting to Phoenix's hand. "Take another look!" he ordered. "The defendant also has two aces! Where's this fifth ace?" He narrowed his eyes at the prosecutor. "I see cheating alright, and it's going on right here in this courtroom!"

The hubbub of the gallery and Payne's offended look were all the response Apollo needed.

The judge tugged on his beard. "Two aces in each player's hand does make four aces total," he mused. "Hardly proof of cheating."

"Wait, please!" Olga cried, looking almost frantic as she clung to the stand, turning wide eyes up at the judge's podium. "It is true, I have seen it! The fifth ace! There was cheating, I swear to you!"

Apollo watched her. 'Again, she's not lying...' He closed his eyes for a moment. 'But was the cheater
"Dad? Nah, I doubt it. As shady as he can make himself seem, he'd never stoop to that kind of trickery. The worst he got was bringing me along to give him 'hints'. Trucy too, sometimes."

"You're right to trust your instincts."

Apollo's eyes snapped open in surprise, turning to look up at Kristoph. "Mister Gavin?"

"Who knows what lies in store for us in the trial ahead?" Kristoph enigmatically said, turning his gaze to the judge before Apollo could reply. "Your Honour, if I may, I have a suggestion."

The judge was already intrigued. "What might that be, Mister Gavin?"

"If you don't mind," Kristoph continued, "perhaps we might examine the actual cards?"

"The... cards?" the judge repeated, confused.

Kristoph had already turned his attention now to the prosecution. "Mister Payne."

Payne almost jumped at the sound of his name. "Yes?"

"The players' hands that night were set aside as evidence, were they not?" Kristoph asked. "The defence would like to request that the cards be shown to the court."

"Very well," the judge agreed, nodding. "The prosecution will submit this evidence!"

Payne sighed, then shuffled off to the nearest bailiff, quietly giving the officer orders before the young bailiff then scurried away out of the room.

Apollo thought to himself. 'I can't see what looking at the actual cards will teach us... but I suppose Mister Gavin knows what he's doing.'

Kristoph seemed proud of himself. "When the evidence arrives," he quietly asked his junior partner, "which will you examine first: The defendant's or the victim's hand?"

'Geeze, does it matter?' Apollo was tempted to reply. "I dunno," he admitted with a shrug. "I guess... since Ms Orly was convinced it was the victim's hand that was so different... that one first?"

"Always a good idea to quickly identify the most suspicious piece of evidence," Kristoph replied, seeming happy with Apollo's answer. "If these cards don't prove there was cheating, nothing probably will."
Eventually, the bailiffs returned with two clear evidence bags, each containing five cards in a small pile. Reluctantly, Payne took the bags, examined them, and handed one back to the bailiff, who ferried the small bag across the room to the defence team. Apollo gave the harried officer a grateful nod as he took the wrapped cards, laying them on the bench. In their pile, all he could see of them now was the king of hearts on top. 'Gonna have to take them out of the bag to look at them properly. Good thing I always bring my gloves.'

With one hand, he reached into a small pocket in his pants to retrieve his white gloves, while the other flipped the evidence bag over, where a label confirmed this was, indeed, Shadi Smith's last hand of poker. Something else gave Apollo pause as he unfolded his gloves, still staring at the cards in their clear bag. "Mister Gavin?" he asked. "Didn't we establish earlier they were using the blue cards in that final hand?"

Kristoph seemed more surprised than Apollo, dropping his carefully controlled demeanour as his eyes widened upon sight of the undoubtedly red cards before them. "Huh?" He quickly brought himself back under control, looking away as he hummed in thought, though it was clear he was still a little shaken. "Hmm, which was it now?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, but decided to let his mentor be. After all, maybe they had gotten it wrong earlier. He quickly threw on his left glove, then popped open the bag and gently shook out the five cards, being careful to only use his left hand to flip them face-up and spread them out. Just as in the photo: Three kings, two aces. 'Gotta admit, that doesn't really help.' Frowning, he pulled the cards together into a fan-shape and, still only using his gloved hand, pulled them to the edge of the bench and picked them up, flipping them around to give the backs a cursory glance. Immediately, he froze. 'W-what...?'

One of the five cards was blue.

"Your Honour!" Apollo almost yelped, quickly holding up the cards to display their mismatched backs to the judge's podium. "One of the victim's cards... the back is a different colour!"

The courtroom burst into instant commotion, Payne shrieking as he jumped back in shock. Olga was frozen in shock for a moment, but then shook her head frantically. "Th-that's impossible!" she cried, her thick accent mysteriously vanishing. "But I put that card in Wright's hand!" The words were out of her mouth before she suddenly realised what she'd voiced, and she gasped loudly, clapping her free hand over her mouth while the other struggled not to drop her covered plate of food.

The hubbub was calming down already, but it hadn't stopped the three attorneys and judge from hearing the witness's slip. Kristoph gave Olga an almost smug smile. "What was that, Ms Orly?" he innocently asked.

"No!" Olga cried, then winced at herself. "N-nyet! I merely said, eh..." She shook her head, staring at the stand in front of her with wide-eyed panic. "Da, I have...!"

Kristoph turned to the judge. "Your Honour, tell me, what is the easiest way to cheat at poker?"
The judge seemed confused. "To... cheat?"

"I'll tell you," Kristoph continued, turning his triumphant smile back to the witness stand. "One simply needs a friend, a 'comrade', shall we say: The dealer!"

The judge cried out in surprise as he made the connection, and Apollo, though equally surprised, found himself watching the frightened woman with respect, gently placing the cards in his hand on top of their evidence bag. "Wow... I can say from experience, Ms Orly, it is not easy to play with the order of a deck of cards without being noticed! I'm impressed! Are you a professional?"

Olga wasn't expecting that response, looking up at Apollo curiously.

"As impressive at her 'trick' might seem," Kristoph continued, his attention back on the judge, "Ms Orly is undoubtedly the cheater. A professional, as Wright put it."

"Nyeeaarh!" Olga cried, recoiling from the accusation.

The courtroom again exploded into loud chaos, forcing the judge to bang his gavel, calling for order.

While the crowds calmed down, Apollo dragged himself back to business. He could professionally admire another card-artist's skill later; Right now, he had an act to do. "Your Honour! Ms Orly just gave us a very important piece of testimony! She 'put that card in Wright's hand'! He couldn't resist a grin, pointing dramatically at the witness stand. "Ergo! Ms Olga Orly conspired to cheat, not with the defendant, but with the victim, Mister Shadi Smith!" He paused to let the crowd react with shock, Olga herself starting to shiver in fear as he lowered his hands to his side, where one rested on the bench. "And not only did she cheat, she cheated poorly!" He crossed his arms. "It's not hard to imagine an altercation between her and the victim."

"What!?" Payne cried, recoiling as though his every worst fear were being relived at once. Apollo supposed, given the man's grudge against Phoenix, it very possibly was.

The judge blinked in surprise. "Wait, you don't mean..." He frowned. "The defence isn't accusing the witness, Ms Olga Orly... are you?"

Apollo nodded. "I am!" he replied, again throwing out his arm to dramatically point at the witness stand with a triumphant smile. "The defence accuses the witness, Ms Olga Orly, of murder!"

Olga shrieked at the top of her lungs, then fainted dead away, her bowl of covered food clattering to the floor beside her.

'Don't feel bad. It's the only logical conclusion, after all. She was the only other person in the room besides Dad and... the victim. It had to be her.' Apollo's triumphant joy at landing the accusation had quickly given way to guilt as the young woman lost consciousness. The bailiffs had taken her away to the first aid office to recover, accompanied by Payne, but it had been several minutes since then.

Finally, Payne returned to the courtroom, scurrying back behind his bench.

"Mister Payne," the judge said in greeting, giving the prosecutor a nod as the gallery quickly quietened. "Where is your witness, Ms Olga Orly?"
"Erm," the man muttered, brushing nervously at his hair. "Still unconscious in the first aid office, Your Honour. I'm told she will fully recover in time."

The judge nodded thoughtfully, then turned to Apollo. "Defence Wright?"

Apollo quickly stood to attention at his bench. "Your Honour!"

"It seems you've presented a new possibility to the court," the judge announced. "One suggesting a connection between the witness and the victim, Mister Smith."

Smiling hopefully, Apollo asked, "And that means...?"

The judge shook his head. "The court cannot pronounce a verdict for the defendant at this time!"

Payne snorted as he jumped in surprise. "What!?"

Apollo just grinned. 'I did it! I held out!' He sighed in relief. 'Maybe now Dad will finally tell us what happened!'

"I see no point in prolonging the trial this day," the judge continued. "The prosecution will need to make further inquiries."

"OBJECTION!"

Everyone spun to face the open space on Apollo's left, where, between the two sections of the gallery, a middle-aged man in a cyan beanie was striding out of the side-room with a stern look on his face, a nervous bailiff trailing behind him.

Apollo stared in surprise. "Dad, what are you doing!?" he hissed.

"You can't end the trial here, Your Honour," Phoenix announced, walking to the witness stand and proudly standing tall behind it. "Not yet."

Payne shot the eldest Wright a glare. "What nonsense is the defendant spewing now!?

"Think," Phoenix continued, ignoring the prosecutor. "One of the cards had a different coloured back. Don't you wonder what it means?"

"Objection!" came Payne's shriek in response, and the prosecutor sputtered in Phoenix's direction. "W-what are you doing, Mister Wright!? Raising objections when you're about to get off the hook!?"

He scoffed, crossing his arms with a frown. "Ridiculous!"

The judge simply chuckled to himself. "Mister Payne, you of all people should know, Defendant Wright has a talent for the ridiculous!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow in his father's direction, though Phoenix himself, predictably, just seemed proud of the judge's proclamation.

"Perhaps we should get to the bottom of things," the judge agreed, apparently swayed purely by his familiarity with the defendant. "Let's clear up the facts about the game that fateful night."

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"As was said before, we alternated between two decks of cards that night," Phoenix explained from the witness stand.

"That was said before!" Payne bitterly hissed to himself.

"The two decks at the club have different coloured backs," Phoenix continued, unfazed. "Blue and red. One colour per deck."

Apollo nodded. "And the reason for two different decks is to keep them from getting mixed up... though that apparently happened anyway."

"We used the red deck for the last game," Phoenix added.

The judge hummed in thought. "I see. But... that's odd." He gave Phoenix a confused look. "For some reason... I have this impression that you were using the blue cards!"

'Yeah, me too,' Apollo silently agreed, keeping his eyes firmly on the bench in front of him. 'It... it was just a simple assumption of Mister Gavin's.'

"Whatever," Payne scoffed, looking beyond done with the entire trial. "In the end, one card of the wrong colour got into the mix, which means there was cheating."

"Yes, a card slipped into the deck would seem to indicate cheating," Phoenix agreed, though his expression said otherwise. "Yet..." He shook his head. "This card raises two serious questions. Apollo?"

The young attorney almost jumped as he noticed his father's attention on him. "Huh?"

"Let's consider the first question, shall we?" Phoenix smiled as he always did when presenting Apollo with one of his 'trial games': a law-related problem, or 'puzzle' as Luke always called them, that Phoenix would always talk Apollo through while playing the role of prosecution, judge and witnesses. "Think," Phoenix instructed his son. "In the last game, when was the card swapped?"

Apollo blinked in surprise. "When?"

"There are three broad possibilities here," Phoenix explained, turning behind the stand to be properly facing Apollo alone, and counting off on his fingers. "It could have been swapped before the murder, during the murder, or after the murder."

Payne once again scoffed, arms tightly crossed. "Well, yeah! Thanks for the news bulletin, Mister Wright! Of course it was swapp-"

"Oh?" Phoenix interrupted with a knowing smile. "It might be as simple as you think, Mister Payne. Or... it might not be."

Payne snorted in displeasure, firmly looking away.
With that, Phoenix turned back to his son. "What do you think, Apollo? When were the cards swapped?"

The courtroom was quiet with anticipation as Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead in thought. 'Well, we can immediately discount 'during', because what does that even mean? The same moment as the victim was whacked on the head with that bottle? Our assumption was 'before', but... Exactly as designed, that would be noticed as she was dealing the cards, and she was definitely telling the truth about the cheat not being called out until later. That just leaves...' Slowly, he lowered his hand and looked up at his father. "Perhaps it happened... after the murder?"

"Objection!" came an immediate cry from the prosecution. "Ridiculous! What's the point of cheating after the hands have been shown?" Payne shouted furiously. "That's silly!"

"Objection!" Apollo shouted back. "Yes, it is! But tell me, how do you swap cards during the game!?" He crossed his arms. "I'll take 'silly' over 'impossible'!" That's all I ever get from my family, after all.'

"Objection!" Payne repeated. "Take it from me, sonny boy, there's a lot of silly in this world, but very little impossible!"

Apollo scoffed. "Even when the backs of the cards are a different colour?" he pointed out. "If you pulled that during a game, you'd be caught in no time!"

"Quite true," Phoenix agreed with a proud smile. "That would mean the blue card in question was swapped after the hands were shown, after the murder!"

Payne wasn't done yet though, crying another "Objection!" with a tight glare. "Okay, this is going past silly and straight on to crazy!" He sighed. "I ask again: What's the point of cheating after the game's over!? Who would do that!?"

"Who indeed," Phoenix agreed, looking away with his enigmatic smile. "That's one of the mysteries before us."

The judge, who had been watching the argument with intrigue, was surprised. "There's another?"

Phoenix nodded. "Yes. A simple, yet decisive, question must be asked: Who swapped the red card... for a blue card?"

Apollo frowned in thought. "Who...?"

Kristoph closed his eyes. "The game, and murder, is done," he outlined. "The victim is dead. Only two remain in the room, alive, that is: The defendant, Phoenix Wright, and our witness, Olga Orly." He then turned to Apollo, his eyes opening with a curious look.

Apollo paused, thinking. 'Maybe... no, but... Huh?' After a moment, he looked up to meet his father's eyes. "Obviously, it can't have been you, Dad, since you have no reason to have touched it," he pointed out, eyebrows furrowed in concern. "But... well, it doesn't seem like it could have been Olga Orly, either..."

"W-what are you suggesting?" the judge asked.

Kristoph frowned. "That's hardly a logical conclusion, I'll admit," he quietly told the younger attorney. "As the defence, I think it only makes sense for you to name Ms Orly at this point."

"Yes, I know," Apollo almost sputtered as he assured his mentor, "but...!" He sighed. "But she was
the one who dealt the cards, right? I... I just can't believe she would make the mistake of swapping the wrong colour card!"

"And if the card was swapped during the game, it'd be obvious," the judge repeated, tugging at his beard.

Apollo noticed Phoenix grinning, and wondered if his little 'trial game' was even more fun than usual when played in an actual courtroom.

Payne gave a world-weary sigh. "If the one who swapped the card wasn't the defendant, and it wasn't Ms Orly... then who was it!?" he asked.

"Well, that's the question, isn't it?" Apollo shot back. "Someone else swapped those cards!"

"Precisely," Phoenix picked up, and he smiled proudly as he stood tall behind the stand. "I believe we're about to see this case take a new direction. We'll find that, indeed, after the murder, someone swapped one of the cards in the victim's hand... and that someone made two critical mistakes."

"I'm sure you're going to tell us that the first was swapping the wrong colour card," Kristoph replied, seeming oddly tense.

"Because the one who did the swap," Phoenix explained, "didn't know two colours of cards were being used. The other mistake..." He paused, grinning to himself. "Was the number on the card."

Apollo nodded. "Right, they replaced the fifth ace with a king."

"I'm sure whoever swapped it wasn't expecting there to be a fifth ace, after all," Phoenix continued. "All they knew was that the game had been won with a full house, so they picked up a king from the table, and swapped it in."

"Objection!" Payne cried, leaning heavily on his desk as he glared at Phoenix. "But! There's one problem!" He pushed off his desk, tapping firmly on his papers sat next to his tablet computer. "According to our case record, this person doesn't exist!"

"True," Phoenix readily agreed, "not until now. But you have to admit the possibility of a fourth person." He looked away again, smiling enigmatically. "Though, it's more than a possibility. There was someone else there that night at the scene of the crime."

"W-what!?" Payne shouted in shock.

Apollo watched his father cautiously. 'If you knew this... why didn't you say anything earlier, Dad? What is all this really about?'

"I believe the judge spoke truthfully earlier," Kristoph sighed. "You do make trials... ridiculous, Mister Wright."

Phoenix just gave Kristoph a proud grin.

"This trial has proceeded on one central assumption," the judge announced, "namely, that at the time of the incident, there were only three people in that room."

"I believe this new evidence, shall we say... overturns that assumption?" Phoenix added, still grinning.

The judge just gave Phoenix a stern look. "The problem is that you chose to conceal this information
Phoenix's grin faded. "I... suppose that is a problem, yes," he solemnly agreed.

Shaking his head, the judge banged his gavel. "Court is adjourned for a brief recess!" he announced, then turned to the defence bench. "Mister Gavin, I'll see you in my chambers during this recess."

Kristoph seemed a little surprised, but readily nodded his head in agreement. "Certainly, Your Honour."

"Very well!" The judge returned his attention to the entire room. "The trial will resume in twenty minutes!" With that, he banged his gavel once more before getting up and rapidly leaving the room.

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"That was quite... unexpected, Wright," Kristoph admitted as he led the two Wrights into the lobby. "To suddenly claim there was another person at the scene of the crime like that... I must ask." He spun on his heel to face the other man, his face carefully schooled into its usual neutral expression. "Is it the truth?"

Phoenix just smiled. "Well, now... I'd think you would know the answer to that?"

"Ah, being mysterious, are we?" Kristoph sighed, pushing at his glasses. "Sadly, I've no time for mysteries. I'd only ask that you leave the defending to your defence in future." He gave a pointed look at Apollo before returning his gaze to their client. "After all, was this trial not meant to be your son's first experience in court? You're being remarkably... underestimating of his ability."

Apollo frowned in confusion, wishing the 'adults' would acknowledge he was right there.

Phoenix snorted in laughter. "Throwing my words back in my face, are we? I see you haven't mellowed out one bit, Kristoph."

Kristoph didn't respond, pausing a moment before turning to his junior partner. "Apollo."

"Yes, sir?" Apollo replied, almost wanting to stand at attention.

"The judge has summoned me to his chambers, so carry on without me." With that, Kristoph left the room.

Phoenix chuckled in the ensuing silence, moving over towards the sofa. "You're doing well, Apollo," he called over his shoulder. "If you insist," Apollo replied, though he smiled at the praise. He followed his father to the sofa, sitting at his side. "I... did have a few questions, though."

"Hm?" Phoenix leaned back in his seat, giving Apollo a curious look. "Be warned, I'm still keeping quiet on some things."

Apollo sighed. 'Of course you are.' "First... the locket." He eyed the golden pendant hanging off his father's neck. "That's... not Trucy's, is it?"

Phoenix closed his eyes, looking away with a saddened expression. "No," he admitted. "It's not."

Apollo found himself letting out a breath of relief, turning his body away from his father. "Then we do know the victim." He felt his chest tightening again, as it had during his brief panic in the courtroom when the victim's disappearing locket had first come up, and he screwed his eyes shut. "That's why the photo is just of Trucy, not all three of us... and why you had it when you were arrested." His hands were pressed into the seat cushion, either side of his legs, and he leaned forward as he tried to keep his breathing under control, a part of him already knowing the conclusions he would reach if he kept talking. "W... why did you...?"
A hand rested on Apollo's back, and the young man felt Phoenix sitting close at his side, offering comfort. "I knew it would be easier for you to go ahead believing it to be Trucy's as you'd assumed when you first saw it," the ex-lawyer quietly assured his son. "I was... hoping you wouldn't figure it out until after the trial."

"Why'd you lie?" Apollo asked, looking up with glistening eyes to accusingly meet his father's gaze. "You could have just said... I-I dunno, that it wasn't important! O-or even, that it was the victim's and...!"

Phoenix sighed, looking pained. "Technically, I didn't lie, except by omission: I strung some unrelated sentences together to leave the impression your assumption was right." He closed his eyes. "It hurt to do, believe me, but I couldn't say any more without ruining the plan."

Apollo blinked in surprise. "The plan!?" he repeated. "You have a plan!?"

Phoenix smirked in amusement, giving Apollo a look. "What, I told Luke and Trucy not to talk to you, refused to talk about the crime, appointed you my lawyer... and you didn't think I had a plan?"

Apollo stared at his father in a long silence before sighing resignedly. 'Right. Of course.'

"We'll have a lot of talking to do once this is over anyway; I'll answer all your questions then," Phoenix promised with a smile. "The real trial begins now, Apollo. I need you to be ready. I need your 'power'."

His hand jumping to his bracelet, Apollo gave his father a look somewhere between confused and concerned. "B-but..."

Phoenix just smiled. "I know you've been picking up on Ms Orly's tells. Now you just need to apply it. Figure out what they mean, then confront her to see if you're right."

Apollo nervously rubbed around his left wrist. "B-but... we tried already, in Luke's trial, and I-!"

"It didn't work that time because you lacked the evidence to put the witness on the spot," Phoenix replied with a stern gaze, his hand gripping Apollo's shoulder. "You forget; Although I'm not talking about it, I was there, just like her. I know you can use the evidence you have to prove she's lying."

Apollo wasn't convinced, meeting his father's eye for only a moment before staring at the floor.

"Do your best," Phoenix said. "I know you'll pull through in the end."

April 20, 12:14PM
District Court
Courtroom No. 2

"Court will now reconvene," the judge announced, banging his gavel as he sat down atop his podium. "Has our witness, Ms Olga Orly, recovered?"

"Y-yes, Your Honour," Payne replied, nodding nervously before clarifying, "Er, well, she's regained consciousness."

Kristoph, who had been waiting at the bench already upon Apollo's arrival, finally seemed to relax
from his tense death-glare into space, clasping his hands behind his back as he directed his ever-present calm smile to the courtroom. "Perhaps we can hear her version of the events again?" he asked.

Payne ran a hand across his forehead, wiping away anxious sweat. "That's the thing... You see, she's quite fatigued..."

"You're looking a bit fatigued yourself, Mister Payne," the judge replied, seeming concerned for his colleague.

"Sadly, fatigue is insufficient grounds for refusing to testify," Kristoph pointed out with a smile, "or prosecute. The defence would like to request that Ms Orly take the stand."

The judge nodded in agreement. "Very well. The witness will take the stand!"

It didn't take long for a bailiff to escort Olga back into the courtroom, now free of the plate of food she'd spent so long balancing in the first half of the trial. Her pink mittens fiddled with each other nervously as she approached the witness stand, casting fearful looks around the room as she shivered in place.

"Perhaps you could repeat your name and profession?" Kristoph asked.

Olga didn't reply.

"Or perhaps you'd rather admit that you're a poor liar, and a poorer loser," Kristoph added.

That seemed to spark a reaction, Olga blinking in surprise as she looked to the defence. "Ny-ny-nye-l!" Suddenly, her fearful shivering stopped, and she stood tall, glaring at Kristoph. "Not." Before anyone had time to register that her thick Russian accent had disappeared, the diminutive waitress was throwing off her thick layers of furs, standing taller than before on a pair of high heels that had somehow come out from within her snow boots (Apollo suspected she'd been crouching in the coat to deliberately seem smaller). Underneath her woollen cap was a bright red bandanna, the image of a six-sided die printed across it in white, and her coat had been covering a suit, black vest over a white shirt and topped with a red bow-tie. Aside from her face and hair, the only thing about her that hadn't changed was the yellow camera dangling from her neck. "Name's Olga Orly," she barked, a finger twirling in her hair. "That's the truth! I'm a pro dealer. People call me Olga 'Quick-Fingers' Orly!"

"Oh..." the judge muttered, staring at the young woman with wide eyes. "Oh really?"

"Want to know something else?" Olga continued, the hand in her hair clenching into a fist. "I'm not really Russian! And my last name sounds like 'oh really!'" She slammed her hand on the witness stand with a growl. "There, that's the truth! I hope you're satisfied!"

Despite his best intentions, Apollo was only admiring Olga more: A pro card-trickster, who was a pretty good actress too? It was a pity she used her skills for petty crime; She'd be a decent magician if she put her mind to it. "Ms Orly," he called, giving her a respectful nod, "please tell the court what you were actually doing the night of the crime."

Olga sighed, seeming to return a grudging respect for the young attorney. "Fine, I'll talk." Her finger continued to twirl in her hair. "We had a plan, see."

"Let me remind you," the judge spoke up with a stern look, "that you are currently under oath. Any further fabrications will have serious consequences."
Although she winced guiltily, Olga seemed to accept the suspicion. "Fine," she repeated. "Like I said, I'm a pro. That guy, Smith, hired me to do what I do best." She pulled her finger out of her hair, brushing at her golden locks proudly. "I was planted at the Borscht Bowl Club several days prior to the night of the game, as a waitress."

"So you were working with the victim," Apollo pointed out, glad to hear his earlier theory confirmed.

"Not that he needed my help," Olga scoffed. "Smith is a well-known poker player in some circles. But winning wasn't the main purpose of this game." She smirked. "It was about destroying a legend: the unbeatable Phoenix Wright!"

Apollo scowled at the pride in her statement. No wonder she'd been insisting so heavily Phoenix had cheated.

"The plan was simple," Olga continued. "Elegant, really. You see, we set up a trap of sorts: I was to plant a card in Wright's pocket beforehand, and then deal five aces during one of their games." Still smirking, she brushed an errant lock of hair from her face. "When their hands were revealed, Smith would call him out and search Wright. He would then pull out the planted card, and the trap would snap shut!" She snapped her fingers to illustrate the metaphor. "Exposed as a cheater and losing on top of it! It would have made a great double play! Just like that, the legend would be dashed to pieces!"

"Indeed," the judge mused, tugging on his beard. "Getting caught red-handed at cheating would cast doubt on all his prior wins..."

"Sounds oddly familiar," Apollo bitterly chimed in, arms crossed. "This isn't the first time someone's pulled that trick on him."

Olga scoffed, rolling her eyes. "I'm not surprised; If you play poker, especially if you never lose, you're a part of a seedy underbelly whether you like it or not." She grinned. "Last guy must've been a real amateur to fail so badly that I'd never even heard of 'im, though."

Apollo just gave the woman a glare. "'Poker' wasn't quite what I was referring to."

Kristoph smiled to himself, pushing at his glasses. "Nevertheless, it appears you made quite the mistake yourself, Ms Orly." As Olga gave him a confused glare, he continued, "I agree, the trap was elegant. Yet, what happened to that planted card?"

Apollo gave the witness a triumphant smirk. "Like I said, this isn't the first time someone's pulled that trick on my dad."

Olga scowled, avoiding looking anywhere near the defence. "He's lucky, I'll give him that," she admitted. "You'd have to be to slip free from a trap laid by Olga 'Quick-Fingers' Orly!"

"Oh really?" the judge asked, frowning at the stand. "The witness would be much cuter if she dispensed with the 'evil mastermind' shtick."

"Cute!?" Olga cried, offended. "Who wants to be cute!? I'm not cute! I'm bad!" Giving the judge a furious glare, she pounded the witness stand with her fists. "You hear me?! Bad!"

The judge wasn't impressed. "When you're through being bad, perhaps you could testify to the court?" He gestured to the small podium she stood behind. "Tell us about this 'trap', and how it was sprung."
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"That night, I planted the card like I was supposed to, and Wright lost the last hand, just like he was supposed to," Olga explained, standing tall behind the witness stand, her left hand playing with her hair. "Then Smith searched him... but the planted card was gone! The trap failed!" She sighed, her hand moving to her neck. "The next moment, Wright picked up a bottle and swung it! It wasn't me who hit Smith!" She shot a pointed glare at Apollo, who was staring at her intently. "It was that no-good, cheating defendant!"

The judge hummed in thought. "A surprisingly frank testimony," he admitted, "that still leaves us mostly in the dark."

"The trap was perfect I tell you, perfect!" Olga insisted, her hands curling into fists. "If that rotten cheater hadn't messed it up...!"

Apollo was almost too distracted by his own mental processing of Olga's testimony to scoff at her words. "Look who's talking."

The judge sighed. "Well, the testimony, for what it's worth, is all yours, Defence Wright."

Apollo closed his eyes a moment, running through everything he'd seen in his mind as he pressed a finger to his forehead. 'She wasn't lying about the plan, or that she isn't the murderer, which is surprising enough on its own,' he mused. 'Actually, Dad picking up the bottle is the only thing she's consciously falsifying. She does seem to think he committed the murder, though... and that he's a cheat.' At that thought, Apollo couldn't resist a small smile. 'Well, sometimes, but never in poker.'

"Are you planning to ask her a question," Kristoph quietly asked, "or just stand there and think all day?"

At his mentor's prompt, Apollo quickly dropped his hands to his sides. 'He's right: Enough thinking! Time to act!' "Ms Orly, I'm curious... Could you tell us about this planted card?" he asked. "What was it? When did you plant it?"

Olga fumed to herself. "My trump card, the Five of Hearts," she explained. "I slid it into Wright's pocket, while he was eating."

The judge wasn't impressed. "Let me guess: Defendant Wright was to have switched the Five with the Ace to make a full house," he said. "At least, that's what you were going to accuse him of doing, thereby ruining his legend."

Olga just smirked. "At the Borscht Bowl Club, we serve borscht... and suckers."

"Remind me never to go there," the judge replied with a stern look. If he wasn't so closely connected with the restaurant already, Apollo admitted he'd easily agree.

"Of course, the card was to make its grand debut during the game," Olga continued. "Like a good borscht, a good plot must be cooked up early and allowed to thicken."
Apollo crossed his arms, thinking. "But what happened to it?"

"Hell if I know," Olga spat. "It disappeared without a trace! Poof! Zippo!" She twirled her finger in her hair. "We searched every nook and cranny... even inside his cute little hat!"

'I wouldn't call that neon monstrosity of Trucy's 'cute',:' Apollo mused, then shook his head to rid himself of the distracting thought. "You never found it?"

Olga didn't seem to have heard him, muttering darkly to herself. "Never in my long, storied career... never has 'Quick-Fingers' Orly been so readily duped!"

"Oh really," the judge said, again looking unimpressed. "So what did happen to that Five of Hearts?"

"Don't look at me," Olga snapped. "Why don't you ask that cheating, lying, two-faced defendant?"

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'Man, and I thought Payne had a grudge against Dad... Him foiling her plans really ticked her off.' Deciding to put the matter of the missing card aside, he decided to move on. 
"So the card disappeared. Your trap failed. Without a doubt, he didn't cheat, and all three of you knew it." He narrowed his eyes at the witness, arms crossed. "Why, then, would the defendant feel the need to pick up that bottle and strike the victim?"

At that, Olga almost flinched, rubbing at the back of her neck. "W-well..."

Apollo's bracelet subtly tightened on his wrist, and he couldn't resist a small smirk. 'Gotcha.' "Ms Orly, once again, you're hiding something."

"Wh-what are you talking about!?" Olga snapped, her hand gripping the back of her neck nervously as she glared at the young attorney. "Y-y-you! M-m-m-me? 'Quick-Fingers' Orly, h-h-hide something?"

"Objection!" Payne yelped from the prosecutor's bench, startling Apollo as he remembered the man was there. "The defence will refrain from baseless accusations!"

Apollo tensed up slightly - that was the issue that had so screwed them over in Luke's trial, after all - but pushed on anyway. "I have one question for the witness then," he announced, turning back to face her. "You say you saw the moment the defendant hit the victim. Is this true?"

By now, Olga was visibly sweating, avoiding Apollo's gaze... not as good an actress as he'd previously thought. "O-of course it's true!" she insisted, her hand again rubbing at the back of her neck. "I d-did see it, honest! I saw it when Wright hit him. With my own eyes, I saw it!"

'Yep, definitely her neck.' He smiled, putting up a confident air though he still doubted his ability to use his 'power' to any kind of court advantage. "Ms Orly... I doubt you are aware of this..."

Olga froze. "A-aware of what?"

"Every single time you bring up that one certain event," Apollo explained, "you touch the back of your neck with your left hand."

"My... my neck?" Olga repeated, more confused than anything else. "So... so what!?"

Kristoph closed his eyes, the smallest of frowns in the corners of his lips. "Be careful, Wright," he muttered. "Remember what happened last time."

Apollo gave his mentor a quick nod to acknowledge the warning. "You're reacting to a memory,
"subconsciously," he continued to the witness. "A memory that unfailingly comes to mind every time you talk about the moment of the murder."

"A memory?" Payne scoffed, looking around the courtroom. "Would someone care to explain what he'd babbling about?"

The judge thought a moment. "This is highly unusual," he eventually admitted, then turned to Apollo. "Defence Wright, you claim the witness is remembering something. Maybe you have evidence of this 'memory' to show us?"

'Just like Dad said: Use the evidence I have to prove she's lying.' He closed his eyes a moment in thought, then opened them again, his eyes locking on to a green bottle still perched upon the prosecutor's bench. He smiled, turning to his witness. "Ms Orly, whenever you recall the crime that night, you scratch your neck... specifically, when you think about the exact moment of the crime. There must be some reason behind this 'habit' of yours, and I believe the weapon that left an inerasable 'impression' on your neck..." Grinning, Apollo pointed dramatically across the room at the deadly bottle. "... is that!" As planned, the gallery muttered amongst itself at his small display. "What reminds us more of the moment of the crime than the murder weapon itself?" he asked, a rhetorical question to cap off his presentation.

Olga had frozen, looking nervous.

"But something doesn't fit about that," Apollo continued, turning to face the con artist again. "If you were only the witness to the crime, why would that make you touch your neck like you're in pain?"

"What's he talking about now!?” Payne hissed.

"After all, it was the victim Mister Smith that was hit," Apollo was still saying, determined to push on as long as he could, "not you.”

Olga was fidgeting with her hair, her hand now deliberately moved away from her neck. "Uh... um..."

Payne had apparently had enough. "Objection! This is a cross-examination, not a cross-wild-conjecture!” he cried, steaming with anger. "Th-the witness's habits!? They're completely irrelevant!"

Apollo could almost feel Kristoph's disapproving stare on the back of his head, but he wasn't going to stop now. "Ms Orly! Please testify, in detail, about the moment of the crime! The very moment!"

Olga stood frozen for a moment, then ducked under the stand and emerged a few moments later in her fur coat and hat. "Ny-nyet, I am knowing nothing!” she cried, her voice dripping with the forced Russian accent.

The moment of absurdity instantly silenced the chaotic courtroom as everyone stared at Olga in disbelief, all tension gone without a trace. Apollo frowned. "We already know you're not Russian, Ms Orly,” he pointed out.

The judge nodded, giving her a stern stare. "The witness will testify, please," he agreed, almost surprising Apollo by appearing to agree with his conclusion. "Now."

Olga sighed, rolling her eyes. "Bah. Fine!” She threw off her coat and hat with a pointed glare at Apollo, making sure to very firmly grip a lock of hair with her left hand to keep from rubbing at her neck. "Like I said, it was Wright who did it! I didn't let him out of my sight until the cops got there!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, watching her hand twitch. "You seem very uncertain about that."
"You try sitting up here!" Olga snapped in response.

Apollo could see her nervousness in her eyes, darting all over the courtroom as though looking for an escape. 'Didn't let him out of your sight, huh?' "Tell me, after the crime, what was the defendant like?"

Olga's eyes subtly widened - she hadn't been expecting that question. "Uh. Well. He must have been stunned by the weight of his crime!" she cried, stiff as a board. "He sat in a daze at that table until the cops came!"

"Intriguing," Kristoph muttered with a smile. "I believe this is all the testimony we'll be getting out of this witness." He turned to Apollo. "What did you think, Wright?"

"I'll tell you what I think," Apollo replied, arms crossed and with enough volume to announce his opinion to the court at large. "Her testimony is basically bogus. It contradicts the evidence!"

Payne jumped. "W-what's that!?"

"Well, show us this contradictory evidence, Defence Wright!" the judge cried.

Once again, Apollo turned his attention to the prosecutor's bench, pointing to where the ancient mobile phone belonging to his father lay. "Why, it's right over there, Your Honour! Sitting next to the murder weapon!" As everyone turned to look, he smirked triumphantly, crossing his arms. "The court record states the police were only alerted to the murder by a report from the defendant from that very phone."

Olga twitched. "Eh..."

"And we know that the defendant left the room, climbed the stairs and made that phone call from the first floor of the Borscht Bowl Club!" Apollo explained with the flourish of a professional performer.

"Ack!" Olga cried, jumping a little as she realised the young attorney's point.

"Please, explain, Ms Orly," Apollo continued, watching her carefully with a confident smile. "I've performed many magic tricks in my time, but never have I been able to see through two storeys of stone walls!"

Olga shrieked in shock, hiding under the witness stand as the gallery burst into commotion. Apollo worried for a moment that she'd fainted again, but, a few moments later, she carefully stood up, supporting herself on the witness stand with a pained look on her face. Without the judge even having to warn them, the gallery quietened to listen to what she had to say. "The man who picked up a bottle and swung it that night," she slowly admitted, her gaze locked on her feet, "wasn't the defendant."

Apollo was surprised. 'Are we... finally getting the truth?'

"Our plan went off without a hitch, until we couldn't find my trump card," Olga continued, still staring at the floor. "'You lose', he said. Just then, Smith grabbed the bottle from next to Wright..." Her breath hitched in her throat. "And he hit me!" She pressed a hand to her face, though Apollo could see it twitching towards her neck; He wondered if that was where she had been struck. "When I came to..."

The judge seemed sympathetic when Olga's final testimony trailed off. "The victim was already dead. Is that it?"
Olga nodded, managing to turn her gaze slightly upwards in the direction of the tall podium. "That's why I couldn't reveal who I really was. If it came out that I was in league with Smith..." Her hands on the stand tightened into fists, and she seemed to be slowly regaining control of herself. "I'd be a suspect for sure!"

There was a very long silence in the courtroom as Olga's words sank in. Finally, the judge leaned back in his chair and sighed. "Well. Where does this leave us?"

Payne was shaking his head, stepping back from his bench with a hand pressed tightly to his cheek. "M-madness. Th-this is madness! I'm dreaming! It must have been me who was hit with a bottle and I'm imagining all of this!"

The judge raised his eyebrows. "It appears our prosecution is at his wit's end, and frankly, I can't blame him." He turned to the defence. "Mister Gavin, what do you think about this turn of events?"

Kristoph was silent for a long moment, thinking to himself.

"Mister Gavin?" Apollo whispered, wondering if his mentor knew he'd been called upon. "Sir?"

Finally, Kristoph looked up at the judge. "I believe that, as the defence in this case... we are compelled to call Ms Orly a 'big fat liar'."

"W-what!?" Olga cried in disbelief, and Apollo couldn't blame her, adding his own, "B-but, sir-!"

"Three were in that room the night of the murder: the defendant, the victim and her," Kristoph was continuing. "And she has a motive."

Suddenly Apollo was having terrible flashbacks to Luke's trial.

"Her plot foiled, the witness got into an argument with her client, Mister Smith," Kristoph calmly explained. "The denouement of that argument... was murder."

"I didn't!" Olga desperately cried. "I'm no killer! It's a trap! Someone's trying to frame me...!"

View the Court Record
Apollo heard chuckling on his left, and turned to once again see Phoenix had wandered out of the side-room to stand in the court. "Dad!" he cried in relief, alerting the entire room to the man's presence.

Phoenix didn't respond, apparently ignoring his son. "What tangled webs we weave when we practise to deceive," he said. "So tangled, we catch ourselves in the process."

The judge frowned, confused. "Defendant Wright?"

"Such a hasty conclusion," Phoenix continued, looking up at Kristoph with a lopsided grin. "It's not like you, Kristoph Gavin."

Kristoph stared back with a neutral expression. "What are you saying?"

"Why not consider the other possibility?" Phoenix asked, shrugging. "That there was another person in the room at the time of the murder?"

As quiet discussion rippled through the gallery, Apollo crossed his arms in thought. 'Right, Dad's theory... but is it even possible to prove?'

"A single card was swapped into the victim's hand after the murder," Phoenix explained. "And the one who swapped the card didn't know two colours of cards were being used... a fourth person."

"Objection!" came a surprising cry from the prosecution, and Payne scoffed at the ex-attorney. "Ha, this theory again!" He smugly brushed at his hair, and Apollo wondered if it was merely the sight of his 'rival' Phoenix that had stopped his earlier mutterings of madness. "Your 'fourth person' doesn't exist!"

Phoenix only smiled. "Indeed. That's why I decided to bring this case to court."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. 'You 'decided'? Really, Dad?'

"Here, where there's no escape, and no chance for deception," Phoenix was continuing, the enigmatic smile on his face as he looked away. "The perfect place to catch the real criminal."

"The r-real criminal?" the judge repeated.

"And we're in luck!" Phoenix brightly continued. "A clue to the real criminal's identity was kindly provided for us, and right at the beginning of the trial, no less!"

"W-what!?" Payne stuttered, jumping back in shock.

It was then Phoenix finally met his son's eyes, giving him that same playful smile he always wore when 'playing court'. "Apollo... Perhaps you know what I'm talking about?"

Apollo opened his mouth to say he didn't, but then changed his mind and closed it again. Although
he longed to say otherwise, he had a funny feeling he did know what his father was referring to.

Phoenix didn't seem to mind Apollo's silence. "Remember what I said," he prompted. "The fourth person who swapped the cards made one critical error."

"Y-yeah," Apollo agreed. "They grabbed a card from the wrong deck."

Phoenix nodded, giving him a proud smile. "Right." He looked around the court, addressing his words to all to hear. "But how could such an obvious mistake occur? The cards used for the last game were red! Yet..." He returned his gaze to Apollo. "There is one person, here, in our court... who thought those cards were blue."

Apollo felt his face go pale. 'N... no...'

"Well, Apollo?" Phoenix asked, watching the young attorney with a kind smile. "You know who it was?"

Payne seemed to be shivering in fear. "I-it's not me, I swear!"

"Who is this fourth person!?" the judge demanded, looking between the two Wrights impatiently.

Seeing Apollo's slightly panicked look, Phoenix chuckled. "Let's hear what the defence has to say," he told the judge, before turning back to Apollo. "Who was it?" he prompted. "Who thought the cards used in the final game were blue?"

Apollo stared back at his father, the courtroom around them cloaked in a thick veil of silence. He didn't want to admit it, but that little fact had been niggling at the back of his mind for a while, the mistake that hadn't made any sense, that he'd brushed off as a mere assumption... something incredibly out-of-character for the man who had done it. Slowly, eyes wide in shock, Apollo turned his gaze to the floor... then turned around to stare at the tall man standing on his right.

Behind him, Phoenix smiled. "Kristoph Gavin," he announced. "You were the fourth person that night."

Kristoph, having been giving Apollo a mildly confused look, stiffened, eyes wide as he stared back at Phoenix.

"B-but," Apollo cried, spinning back around to his father, "of course Mister Gavin knows the colour of the cards!" he argued, unwilling to admit just yet his mentor had gone as far as committing murder - Forging evidence, yes, even possibly causing Phoenix's disbarment... but murder?

"Oh?" Phoenix replied, walking over to the witness stand. He gave Olga a respectful nod as he arrived, gesturing to the stand. "If I may, Ms Orly." Still nervous, she stepped back, and Phoenix dug around on the old, wooden structure until he had pulled out a cord. A few moments later, he pulled from his pockets an aging tablet computer, which he powered on and plugged in to the cord. Behind him, a bailiff approached Olga, quietly escorting her out of the courtroom to the side-room behind the prosecution, unnoticed by Phoenix, who was busy watching his computer boot up. He tapped away at its screen as he quickly prepared it for court, accessing the public Court Record through the cable on its side. "How would Kristoph know the colour of the cards?" he asked, finally flicking at his screen and activating the holograms, which displayed the initial crime scene photo of the Hydeout. "As you can see, this photo is black and white. You can't tell which of the cards are blue: the ones on the floor, or the table."

Apollo shook his head, flicking at his own computer to switch the display to the photo of the table itself, displaying the chips and the final hands. Off on one side, clearly visible, was the abandoned
blue deck. "B-but look!" he cried. "You can see the colours in this photo!"

"Yes," Phoenix admitted, still smiling, "but when he said the cards were blue, it was well before this evidence came to light."

After a moment of staring, not wanting to admit his mentor was a murderer, Apollo frantically turned to his computer, switching to the transcript and rapidly scrolling back to the beginning of the trial, the words flying past on his screen at a breakneck pace. Above him, the holograms shut themselves off.

Meanwhile, Phoenix turned to the elder attorney. "Well, Kristoph?"

Kristoph didn't respond, still staring into space, stiff as a board. Next to him, Apollo was finally coming across the moment Kristoph had first claimed the cards were blue, finding that the only piece of photographic evidence at that point was indeed the black-and-white photo Phoenix had brought up. To his surprise, Apollo felt no shock and no further disbelief... only quiet acceptance, staring at the words on the screen almost numbly.

"Mister Gavin!" the judge cried, concerned at the elder attorney's continued silence. "I-is something the matter?"

Kristoph finally reacted, looking up at the judge. "Hmm? N-no, nothing." He shook his head, relaxing only a little. "Excuse me, it was just so... sudden." A carefully crafted neutral expression on his face, he turned to Phoenix. "Wright. You aren't seriously accusing me... are you?"

"Oh, Kristoph?" Phoenix asked, one eyebrow raised under his beanie. "You know even I'd never take a joke this far."

The gallery began to mutter, though it was quickly silenced by a cry of "Objection!" from the sweating prosecutor. "This has gone beyond ridiculous, beyond dumb... This is insanity!" Payne shouted. "The defendant accusing his own defence attorney of murder!?"

Apollo frowned. 'Hey, I'm his defence attorney, not Mister Gavin! Even though it doesn't seem like I'm doing much to help...'

"I assure you," Phoenix replied with an amused smile, "I'm quite sane."

"But what possible connection could Mister Gavin have to the victim!?" Payne sputtered.

Phoenix raised his eyebrows, giving Payne a surprised look despite the small smile on his lips. "I wasn't aware I had a connection to Mister Smith, either."

Payne paused a fraction of a second. "Yes," he admitted, "but Mister Gavin and the victim have never even met!"

"Well," Phoenix replied with an innocent shrug, "what if they have?"

Payne stared at him, confused. "Huh...?"

"There is a possibility, after all," Phoenix continued. "They may have met that night, before the game started."

The judge frowned. "What are you suggesting?"

Apollo perked up. 'Wait, of course!" Your Honour!" he announced. "The defence would like to request the defendant testify to the court!"
"Objection," came an immediate call from Apollo's right, surprising the young man into jumping back from the bench. "The defence would like to request no such thing!" To Apollo's shock, Kristoph was outright glaring now, a hand resting on the bench as he shot quick glances at Phoenix. "Testimonies must relate to the case. How could anything happening before that game of poker be related?"

The judge thought a moment. "I'm not sure I follow, Mister Gavin."

Kristoph minutely relaxed, straightening his pose and brushing at his fringe. "As I explained before, the defence believes that Ms Orly-"

"Am I to assume you speak for young Mister Wright in this?" the judge interrupted, giving the elder attorney a stern look. "He is the defence, not you."

Kristoph froze, eyes wide. It seemed he'd forgotten that.

The judge looked to Apollo. "Well, then... Defence Attorney Apollo Wright. The matter of the defendant's testimony is up to you."

Apollo felt most of the court's attention on him... and he wasn't sure what to say in response. "Oh."

"Does the court, in your opinion," the judge continued, "need to hear the defendant's testimony?"

Despite the fact that it had been his own suggestion, Apollo suddenly found himself unsure. On his right, Kristoph was firmly avoiding his gaze, glaring off into the distance, his posture tense from a barely contained rage. On his left, Phoenix stood calmly at the stand, watching his son with a neutral expression; It was clear he wasn't going to interfere with Apollo's decision, as much as the young attorney might have wanted to pass off the responsibility. He turned his gaze to the bench before him, deep in thought as he stepped forward to rest a hand on the smooth surface of the polished wood. 'Dad's been waiting for this for seven years; It seems Mister Gavin finally slipped up, even if this won't clear Dad's name... I...’ He sighed, steeling himself. 'This is my decision to make... and I'm going to see it through.' Apollo looked back up to the judge with a determined stare. "The defence would like to request that the defendant testify to the court!"

Kristoph didn't outwardly react except to close his eyes. "Et tu, Apollo? You would betray your teacher for your father?"

"I'm sorry, Mister Gavin," Apollo replied, hoping the elder attorney could see that it was genuine. "This isn't about loyalty. This is about the truth."

Saying nothing, Kristoph turned away.

The judge nodded. "Very well. The defendant..." He paused, perhaps noticing Phoenix was already at the witness stand. "Er... Will take the stand." Pretending he hadn't just made a fool of himself, he gestured for Phoenix to continue.

Phoenix rubbed at his chin in thought for a few moments. "That evening, Kristoph and I had dinner," he explained, then flicked at his computer to bring up Olga’s photo of himself and the victim. "We sat at the table in this photograph. Shadi Smith walked in five minutes after Kristoph left." Another swipe at his touchscreen, and the holograms shut down again. "When the 'trap' failed, Smith hit the waitress. The girl was knocked out cold, and Smith was uncontrollable. I left to call the police. When I returned, he was dead, blood streaming from a cut on his forehead." He closed his eyes at the unpleasant memory, grimacing slightly. "That's when I made another phone call... to Defence Attorney Gavin."
Apollo was almost surprised to realise his father was finally testifying about the murder... nothing held back any more.

The judge was turning to Kristoph in surprise. "Mister Gavin! You were at the Borscht Bowl Club the night of the murder!"

Kristoph didn't respond.

Phoenix smiled. "I dine with him rather frequently," he explained.

"A-and he talked to the defendant on the phone directly after the murder!" Payne added to the judge's outburst.

"Quite against my will, I had become involved in a murder," Phoenix pointed out with an amused look. "I thought I might be in need of a lawyer, so I called him."

Finally Kristoph reacted, pushing at his glasses as he kept his gaze firmly on nothing and nobody in particular. "You were planning this all along, weren't you, Wright? Just because you wanted to drag me into your little murder trial."

Phoenix's humour instantly gave way to stern determination. "The only thing I want is the truth," he insisted. "As I did back then, and now."

Kristoph snapped his head around to glare at the other man. "I thought I was doing you a favour when I took on your defence," he snapped. "When I passed it on, against my better judgement, to your son. It appears I was wrong." With that, he returned to staring straight ahead, his growing rage evident in his expression.

The judge seemed a little startled by the elder attorney's fury, but carried on with only a wary look at the man. "Very well. The defence may cross-examine the witness."

Apollo was already nodding and mentally preparing himself when he was startled by an icy whisper from Kristoph: "Apollo, he's lying and you're going to expose him."

"H-huh?" the young attorney muttered in surprise. "B-but-!

"As you said, this is about the truth," Kristoph continued, still staring dead ahead and pushing at his glasses to hide his whispered orders. "He's just a witness and you're going to take him down."

Apollo stared back at his teacher for a long moment. *This can't end well.*
Apollo ran a hand through his hair, steeling himself up for what was sure to be the most difficult cross-examination of his young career: The icy rage of the Coolest Defence in the West at his right, and his own father, the legendary Ace Attorney himself, the witness he was to question. With the transcript of Phoenix's testimony in front of him, he took a deep breath and began. "So, um... You had dinner with Mister Gavin that night?"

Phoenix smiled, knowing it was a question Apollo knew the answer to. "Yes, he dines with me at the Borscht Bowl Club rather frequently," he replied, for the court's benefit rather than Apollo's. "We were enjoying a usual dinner at our usual spot... as usual." When Apollo only nervously nodded in response, Phoenix hid a smirk. "'Usual' meaning the table closest to the piano, of course."

"I see," the judge muttered to himself, tugging on his beard. "Where Mister Smith was sitting in the photo!"

Payne frowned, looking confused, and he brought said photo up on the holograms. "So, the plates and such on the table were from your dinner?" he asked.

Phoenix nodded. "Indeed. The remnants of my meal with Kristoph." As Payne took the photo back down, Phoenix continued, "We dined for two hours, then Kristoph left."

"And Mister Smith walked in five minutes later," Apollo picked up, tapped his forehead in thought. "So, the two of them could have passed in the restaurant during that time?"

"That would have been a fateful encounter to be sure," Phoenix said, shooting a smile at Kristoph, but the elder attorney simply continued to ignore him.

"Objection!" Payne cried, then giggled with a gleeful smile, tapping his head. "Oh, Mister Wright... What was it you said? Kristoph Gavin and Shadi Smith may have met...?"

Phoenix nodded. "I believe I did say that," he conceded.

Payne scoffed. "Here I was all nervous about this 'meeting'... and now we hear they just passed in the hall!"

The judge hummed in thought. "That does seem a little weak as a pretence for murder," he agreed.

"Oh, it would be," Phoenix readily admitted with a smile, "if that was all that really happened."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Don't tell me you are still hiding something at this late stage, Dad!"

Deciding to leave it until Phoenix was ready to talk about it, he moved on to the next part of the testimony. "The failed 'trap' you mentioned... That's the same 'trap' Ms Orly was telling us about, right?"

"Yes," Phoenix replied, nodding. "A harmless prank, in essence. It was by a quirk of fate that I happened to discover it."
Payne frowned. "A 'quirk'?

"I happened to put my hand in my pocket," Phoenix explained, grinning, "and found a card."

Apollo blinked in surprise. "The planted card!"

"I snuck a peek at it," Phoenix continued. "It was the Five of Hearts. I had a feeling something might happen, so I disposed of the thing... before the game."

"Disposed?" the judge repeated, leaning forward eagerly. "Where!?!"

"There was an empty bottle of grape juice I had been drinking beside me," Phoenix explained. "I rolled the card up and shoved it in there. The coloured glass makes it hard to see."

Apollo frowned. "An empty..." His eyes widened in surprise. "You don't mean the murder weapon, do you?"

Phoenix nodded, grinning.

The judge tugged on his beard with a smile. "A battle of wits between the deceiver and the would-be-deceived! That sounds like terrific drama!" He nodded. "Defendant Wright, the 'Poker Head of Courtroom Number Three' approves of this battle of wits!"

Apollo, meanwhile, was staring at the bottle on the prosecutor's bench. 'Did the police really miss that in their investigation? Surely the murder weapon would be something they'd look at from every angle!'

Payne seemed confused. "Why in an empty bottle!?!"

Phoenix smirked. "I perceived my opponent's intent immediately. I'm used to entrapment, you see." He looked away, smiling enigmatically. "I knew what was coming."

"Ho ho, so you struck first!" the judge laughed. "I like that!"

"I know every trick in the book," Phoenix idly boasted. "They don't work on me."

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'You got lucky, Dad. Or unlucky. Any way you look at it, it was the Wright luck.' "So, um... When you discovered the dead body..."

Phoenix bitterly laughed. "I'll admit, I was a little startled when I walked in on that. He was bleeding from his forehead, after all."

'Can't blame you for that,' Apollo agreed, but, with his mind so focussed on the memories of his own initial impressions (it had proven to be useful a number of times in this trial, after all), he was already flipping through the photographic evidence. "You could see the blood on his forehead?" he asked.

Phoenix nodded. "Yep."

Apollo paused a moment as he found his photo, then swiped his finger to put it up on the holograms: the initial black-and-white crime scene photo. "You shouldn't have been able to see that, though," he pointed out. "The victim was wearing his hat."

After a few seconds of thought, Phoenix smiled, again nodding at his son, almost proudly. "Good point."
Kristoph huffed at Apollo's side, almost startling the young attorney as he remembered the man was there. "Next time you point out an inconsistency, put a little more oomph into it," he muttered.

"Defendant Wright!" the judge was calling. "Can you explain this to the court?"

"Ah, I forgot to mention something," Phoenix admitted, almost guiltily were it not for the gleeful grin. "I was the one who put that hat on his head."

The courtroom gasped at the revelation. While Apollo simply blinked in surprise, Payne actually jumped in shock. The judge slammed his gavel once, giving Phoenix a disapproving look as he asked, "You put the hat on the dead man's head?"

Phoenix didn't seem fazed by the reaction. "He wore it through our entire poker game," he explained. "After calling the police, when I returned to the scene, his head was in full view, shining bright..." He tapped at his computer, bringing up the photo of the victim without his hat. "Just like... in this photograph."

"And?" the judge asked.

"I picked his hat up off the floor and put it on his head," Phoenix said, still smiling.

Payne still seemed in shock. "W-w-why'd you do a thing like that!?"

Phoenix grinned. "All I can say is... I'm sorry." He capped his 'apology' off with a tiny bow of the head to the prosecutor. "But that's the only thing I touched at the crime scene."

Now that Apollo found intriguing. "So... Ms Orly didn't see it?" he asked, arms crossed as he frowned in thought. "His head, I mean?"

"I'd think not," Phoenix agreed, smiling enigmatically again. "She was out cold. I believe I was the only one who witnessed his head."

Kristoph sighed. "Ah, here we go again..."

Apollo blinked in surprise as he turned to his right, confused. "Mister Gavin?"

Clearing his throat, Kristoph put on a smile, speaking loud enough for the whole court to hear. "Pardon. It just seems our client is determined to lie his way through this case."

Apollo was too intimidated to say anything after that.

The judge hummed in thought, frowning at the attorney for a moment before turning to Apollo. "In any case, please continue the cross-examination. I'm afraid decisive contradictions call for decisive evidence."

Apollo barely had time to nod before Kristoph was looking at him with a stern frown, whispering, "Push him harder, Wright. Break him! It's just you and the witness in the ring. Go for the K.O.!"

"R-right," the young man nodded. 'Even discounting that we should never treat a client like that... does he not comprehend this is my father he's telling me to do this to?" Gingerly, he stepped away from his boss, out behind the bench. "M-Mister Payne," he called, ducking under the red ropes stretching past the defence bench, "I was wondering if I might take a closer look at the murder weapon?"

Payne seemed confused, but apparently had stopped caring, waving at the green bottle on his bench.
with a sigh. "Very well."

"Thank you," Apollo replied, giving the man a grateful nod as he quickly dashed across the room, getting out his gloves and pulling them on as he moved. It took him no more than a moment to sweep up the glass evidence into his hands, immediately pointing it to look down the neck through the top. 'Hmm... It might be more visible from the other end.' Spinning the bottle around on his silk glove (and eliciting a spattering of amazed cooing from the gallery), he turned his eye to the thick bottom, peering through the green glass from another angle. 'Huh. Dad seemed pretty sure it was this bottle... I hope that wasn't another of his 'plays'...' He turned to his father with a curious expression. "You're sure it was this bottle that trump card ended up in?"

Phoenix seemed surprised, which didn't do much for Apollo's confidence. "It's... not in there?"

Apollo shook his head, indicating the bottle still in his hands. "It's empty."

Phoenix frowned, looking away as he hummed in thought.

The judge sighed. "Surely that isn't all you have to say for yourself, Defendant Wright!" he cried. "I can't say I know what happened to that card," Phoenix explained. "I did put it in that bottle, however."

Apollo watched his father closely, his hands automatically placing the bottle back down on Payne's bench. 'You better not be lying, Dad. You've always known we could never tell with you.'

"Perhaps a fifth person came and took it out?" Kristoph bitterly asked, glaring in a random direction. "Oh, and a sixth person could've helped!"

The judge watched Kristoph in shock. "Mister Gavin...! Mister Wright is your client!"

Kristoph paused a moment, calming down before smiling up at the judge's podium. "My apologies, Your Honour."

Apollo suddenly found himself very unwilling to return to the defence's bench... however, as the leading defence attorney on the case, it would just be silly to remain lingering on the prosecution's side, so he forced himself to wander back across to his post.

Payne shot a glare at the two attorneys opposite. "I won't have you disparaging our investigation, either!" he snapped. "We looked inside that bottle, too! There was nothing!"

Apollo couldn't meet anyone's eyes as he ducked back under the red rope, pulling off his gloves to put away in a pocket.

Kristoph shook his head. "$I believe that's enough of that," he announced. "$This witness's 'testimony' is more like a 'travesty'. It's riddled with lies." He glared across at Phoenix. "$I'm beginning to see how you came to lose your attorney's badge seven years ago."

Apollo barely restrained a shocked gasp, although he was certain he heard a somewhat similar reaction from a small section of the gallery.

Phoenix only glared right back, putting on all appearances of being unfazed by such a low blow. "$Well. You certainly have a unique way of treating your clients, Kristoph. I never knew."

"I believe it was you who threw the first stone?" Kristoph darkly replied.
Apollo felt torn between his mentor and his father. "D-dad," he called, "if you are still hiding something..."

Phoenix's glare softened to a smile as he turned to his son. "Don't be misled," he said. "I haven't told a single lie here."

To his relief, Apollo felt he could believe that.

"When I noticed the 'trap'," Phoenix continued, gesturing to the bottle, "I put the card in that bottle to dispose of it." He paused, hiding a small smile that Apollo only just caught a glimpse of. "And, when I put the hat on the victim's head... Let's just say I had a reason for doing that as well."

"A... reason?" the judge asked, confused.

Phoenix paused a moment, then stepped out from behind the witness stand with a smile, heading towards a somewhat nervous Payne. "That reason," he announced, "is right here." With that, he grabbed his ancient blue phone from the bench, lazily taking it back with him. Everyone in the court exchanged confused looks, so Phoenix began his explanation as he arrived at the stand again, holding it up high. "That night, recall that I spoke with Defence Attorney Gavin after calling the police." He paused, grinning. "Just in case, I recorded our conversation."

Kristoph's eyes widened. "What's this...?"

"Now that we're all here," Phoenix continued, already with his eyes on his tiny phone screen as he navigated menus with the clunky keypad, "I see no reason why I shouldn't play it back for the court."

A few moments later, the phone began to play back the recording at full volume...
"Kristoph. I seem to be in a bit of trouble."

"What's this? Game not going well?"

"Something like that."

"That gentleman who challenged you... He turn out to be good?"

"He turned out to be dead. Someone hit him. Hard."

"You mean someone cracked that flawless bone china pate?"

"..."

"It... wasn't you, was it?"

"Me? Please. ... The cops should be here any minute. I'm in your hands... Should it come to that."

April 20, 2:19PM
District Court
Courtroom No. 2

There was a short beep as the phone's recording ended, and Phoenix placed it down on the stand.

Apollo frowned. "Bone china plate...?" he repeated.

"A kind of porcelain, very smooth and shiny," Phoenix explained with a joking grin, taking delight in Apollo's resulting frown that that hadn't been what he was confused about. "And not 'plate', but 'pate'. I believe," he paused to again bring up the photo of the victim without his hat on the holograms, "he was referring to a certain gentleman's balding forehead."

The judge nodded approvingly. "The court appreciates the defendant's discretion in not indicating my forehead," he said.

Apollo was busy staring at the photo again. "But... hadn't Mister Gavin left the Borscht Bowl Club after dinner?" he asked.

Phoenix smiled proudly. "Most certainly."

"Then... how'd he know?" Apollo continued, looking over at his father (partly out of a strong desire to not see Gavin's own reaction to the question). "When did he see this 'bone china pate'?"

The judge jumped a little in surprise. "Oh! That's right!"

Phoenix sadly nodded. "Yes... That was when I began to see my good friend in a different light."

Apollo chanced a look at the man on his other side, but Kristoph had his eyes closed, standing perfectly still and calm as though he was not even aware of the court around him. '... 'Good friend'.

...
"Troubled, I returned to the crime scene," Phoenix continued, "and when I spotted Mister Smith's head again, I realised exactly what was wrong." He turned his gaze, ever so solemnly, to Kristoph. "Well, Mister Gavin. The stage has been set. Perhaps you would like to explain this to the court?" Phoenix's eyes ever-so-subtly narrowed. "Exactly how did you come by your privileged knowledge of the victim's head?"

There was a very long pause, in which Kristoph remained totally still. Finally, his eyes opened, and he looked up at Phoenix. "So, this is your 'reason'," he said. "Why you put the victim's hat back on. Why you insisted I step down in favour of your son."

Phoenix's gaze did not waver. "Your point, Mister Gavin?"

Kristoph stared back for another long moment, then closed his eyes again, turning away. "It's come down to this, has it, Phoenix Wright?"

Suddenly, the gallery erupted into chatter, and the judge was forced to slam his gavel a few times as he called for order.

Apollo was almost too stunned to process what was going on. 'Get a hold of yourself, Wright. The whole reason you took up a job with Mister Gavin was to help Dad once this day came... Argh, I just wish I'd been given some warning at least!'

As the courtroom calmed down, the judge turned to the prosecution. "Mister Payne!"

Payne jumped. "Y-yes, Your Honour!"

"I believe this court has been left with no other choice," the judge continued. "Are you prepared to hear Defence Attorney Gavin's testimony?"

"Eh?" Payne muttered in shocked reply, stuttering to himself for several moments before clearing his throat. "Well, as the prosecutor, I-"

"Very well!" the judge interrupted. "We'll break for ten minutes, after which Mister Gavin will take the stand for a cross-examination!" He looked around the room sternly. "Are we all clear on that?"

Kristoph, despite his closed eyes, was glaring again. "Crystal clear, Your Honour."

The judge nodded. "Very well! This will be the final recess for the day." With one final bang of his gavel, he was up and out of the courtroom.

April 20, 2:32PM
District Court
Defendant Lobby No. 3

The bailiffs had very quickly whisked both Phoenix and Kristoph away to speak with the judge, so it was Apollo alone who arrived in the lobby. He was still a little stunned from the dramatic last few hours in court, pacing back and forth across the room. 'I work way better with a performance if I know the bloody script! Sigh... Who'd've thought today would turn out like this...'
The door creaked open, and Apollo looked up in surprise to see the familiar face of a teenage girl peeking in at him with a grin, her hands hidden under her cape behind her back. "Hi, Polly!"

"Truce!" Apollo cried, rushing to meet his sister as she came in to the room. "What are you doing here!? You're supposed to be with Luke in the gallery!"

Trucy just grinned. "I have something for you!" she announced, then swept her hands into view to reveal a small bundle of red cloth, neatly folded on top of a much thicker red-and-white heart-shaped bag, its strap dangling out of the teen's grip.

Apollo blinked in surprise. "Wait... is that...?"

"Yep!" Trucy chirped. "Well, technically it's your spare. I was gonna ask Clay to bring your actual outfit, but he can't pick the lock on your closet."

Apollo just stared, dumbstruck, at the magician's cape and bag in his sister's arms, too shocked to even react to the fact Trucy had asked Clay to break in to his closet. "Why is it even here?" he asked. "I'm in court, not on stage!"

Trucy scoffed. "Daddy helped me design it so you could wear it in court, too!" she boasted. "You cut it down for Mister Gavin, but he's not telling you what to do anymore!" She forcefully pushed the bundle into Apollo's arms, forcing him to take it. "Now you can be wearing it when you take down your first criminal and save Daddy!"

Sighing, Apollo reluctantly held the red bundle of fabric. "Is it really so important I have to wear it?"

"Yes!" Trucy insisted, pushing further at the bundle. "Put it on!"

Rolling his eyes, the young attorney moved the remnants of his costume away from Trucy's reach. "Alright, alright, fine!"

Cheering, Trucy bounced up and down a moment before stopping with a gasp. "Oh yeah! Since Clay couldn't get into your closet, you don't have the fancy pin Luke made for you!" With one hand, she gripped the overlapping corners of her cape on her chest, while the other pulled out her own golden badge, which she held out to her eldest brother with a smile. "You can borrow mine!" She glanced down at his black court shoes with a frown. "Though I can't do much about your boots. We'll have to hope nobody notices that."

Apollo was staring at the bow-shaped pin in his sister's hand. "Are you sure?" he asked, gingerly taking it. "What about...?"

"Don't worry about me!" Trucy cried, reaching into the bag at her hip to pull out a safety pin, which she quickly stuck through the blue fabric at her chest to hold up her cape in the missing badge's place. "I came prepared!"

"You sure did," Apollo couldn't resist saying with a fond laugh.

Trucy shot him a grin, then turned and bounced out of the room. "Good luck, Polly!" she called.

Apollo was only briefly able to wave at his sister until she disappeared out of the room, the door closing shut with a decisive thud. 'How is it Trucy still fails to be predictable after all this time?'

Shaking his head, he slipped the pin into a pocket for a moment, then firmly held the bag and cape with one hand each, pulling them away from each other to prepare to put on. As the cape unfolded in his grip, billowing out in a crimson wave, Apollo heard the tiny flutter of falling paper. 'Huh...? What was that?' Lying by his feet was a playing card, face-down on the carpet, the red design on its back
displayed for all the world to see. "What the...?" the young man muttered to himself, draping his cape over his other arm and kneeling down to get a better look at the errant card. 'It... it does **look like one from the Hydeout! Or, um, one of the incomplete deck we 'inherited', anyway.' With his free hand, he reached out and grabbed the card, flipping it in his fingers as he held it up for a closer look.

The pristine white around the large, black symbol of the Ace of Spades was broken only by an ominous red splotch on its right: a single drop of blood.

Hiding a gasp, Apollo's gaze snapped up to the door of the lobby, as though he might find Trucy there to question her... but she was long gone, and he knew it. 'Where did she get this!? Why'd she have to hide it in my cape and not just give it to me directly!? Why is it...!?' He shook his head, slowly standing up. 'No, I'm sure she had her reasons. I... I just hope this isn't what I think it is.'
'Gloves, bag, cape... only things missing are my boots and hat, not that I'd want to cover up my hair in court.' Apollo smiled to himself as he adjusted his cape around his shoulders, finding himself feeling grateful that Trucy snuck the outfit to him... even if it felt a little weird wearing it in court after so long without most of it. The bow-shaped pin Luke had made for Trucy was securely fastened under his chin, the blue tie that matched his sister's costume peeking out from the shadows of the crimson cape's high collar. 'It hides my attorney's badge a little, but I knew that when I first got it. I hope Trucy isn't wanting me to try and advertise our show during the trial.'

As he approached the defence bench, Apollo's walk halted with a start. Waiting for him, in the spot Kristoph had been standing in up 'til now, was Phoenix, watching his son with an amused look. "You brought your stage outfit?" he asked. "What are you doing here?" he asked. "Defendants are supposed to be off in the side room."

Phoenix grinned. "Hey, defendants are allowed to stand at the bench with their attorneys if they want to," he said. "Besides, don't you want my help now Mister Gavin is 'away'?"

At that, Apollo couldn't resist a smirk. "Oh, you're planning to actually help me now, are you?" he asked.

"Very funny," Phoenix chuckled in response, moving to try and ruffle his son's hair before Apollo ducked out of the way with a laugh.

The bang of the gavel instantly quietened the room, attracting everyone's attention to the judge's podium. "Court will now reconvene," the judge announced as he sat down. He looked out across the room, and Apollo turned to see a bailiff standing with Kristoph, not far from the entrance doors. "Defence Attorney Kristoph Gavin," the judge called, "will you please take the stand?" Sighing, Kristoph obeyed, leaving the timid bailiff behind as he stepped up to the small podium, now free of all the paraphernalia Phoenix had left there before the recess. The judge nodded. "Now then, if you would, Mister Payne."

Payne was shivering with fear behind his bench opposite the two Wrights. "Y-y-yes, Your Honour!" he yelped, then looked to the stand. "Erm, will Mister... er, the witness state his name and occupation?"

Kristoph's arms were tightly crossed, and he gave a long-suffering sigh. "Is this farce necessary, Your Honour?" he asked.

The judge seemed to chuckle to himself. "Believe me, far stranger things have gone on in this courtroom."

'No kidding,' Apollo thought. 'Any one of Dad's trials had weirder things going on than this.' Kristoph didn't seem to like that answer, but accepted it anyway. "Fine. I'll play along."
The judge nodded. "First, there's one thing we need to have made clear: How did you know about the 'secret' beneath the victim's hat?"

There was a short pause before Kristoph responded with a tight frown. "Forgive my curiosity, but what is it about this fellow's head? Your Honour seems to have an inordinate interest in it."

Apollo almost jumped as he heard an open-palmed slam on the defence bench, and turned to see Phoenix throwing out a pointer finger with a loud shout of "Objection!" The older Wright smiled. "I wouldn't call it inordinate, Mister Gavin."

Suddenly Apollo was reminded of the first time he got to see one of the famous Phoenix Wright's trials in person, huddled up in a back corner of the gallery and staring down with glee at the distant figure in blue as he won his case with ease (or, at least, that's how he remembered it going). Never could he have imagined he'd one day be witnessing that famous shout from Phoenix's side.

Kristoph glared. "What do you think you're doing, Wright?"

Phoenix grinned confidently, and Apollo didn't doubt he was enjoying the fleeting chance to 'play lawyer' again in an actual courtroom. "Consider something for a second," he explained. "The victim wore that hat all night, never once taking it off... except for one time."

"That one time," Apollo picked up with a grin, "being the instant he was hit!"

The judge jumped in surprise. "Oh...!"

"When Dad, I mean, the defendant returned from reporting the crime," Apollo explained to the court, "the hat was lying on the floor. The defendant picked it up, and placed it on the victim's head. In other words, in order to have seen Mister Smith's bald head, you have had to be at the scene of the crime," he banged a fist on the bench, taking his father's lead, "at the time of the crime!"

Kristoph idly pressed at his glasses. "In other words, you'd have to be the real killer, is what you're trying to say."

Apollo felt a brief tap on his back, and turned to see his father giving him a proud smile. He grinned in return.

At the witness stand, Kristoph began to chuckle, brushing at his hair. "I'm afraid that I haven't been entirely honest with the court," he announced.

"W-what!" Payne yelped.

"Oh, I assure you, I had the noblest of intentions," Kristoph continued, giving the room the same serene smile he'd been wearing when the trial began. "I did it all... to protect my client, Mister Phoenix Wright." As murmurs rippled through the gallery, the attorney sighed to himself with a smile. "Yet, I'm afraid in the current situation I see little reason to hide anything." He paused a moment. "Very well. Allow me to tell you the truth of what happened that night."

"Finally!" the judge cried, and Apollo thought he glimpsed the old man rolling his eyes. "You may begin your testimony. Tell us, how were you involved in the events of that fateful night?"

Kristoph nodded. "The rage I sensed in that man that night troubled me, so I returned to the club. I went down to the basement and peeked in through the little window to the Hydeout." He paused, brushing at his hair. "It must have been right after the murder took place. The victim was dead, as he appears in the photo. A bald head, an unconscious girl... and Wright, holding a bottle in his hand." He smiled as his words seemed to cause more ripples amongst the gallery. "I sensed that was not the
best place for me to be at the time and so I left. That's when the call came from Wright."

Apollo was almost disappointed in his boss. 'Geeze, a pack of lies from start to finish... well, except the various minor details that we already knew were true, of course.'

Payne stared at Kristoph in disbelief. "So... you witnessed the murder!?"

Kristoph shrugged. "For better or worse, I missed the actual moment of the deed."

The bracelet on Apollo's wrist twinged.

"Mister Gavin," the judge said, sounding concerned, "may I remind you that you are on Defendant Wright's defence team? Your testimony is clearly disadvantageous to your client!"

"What else could I say?" Kristoph replied, as calm as he usually was. "I'm standing on the witness stand, after all."

'You could start with the truth,' Apollo thought, knowing he didn't have the courage to voice it.

Phoenix just smiled. "So you are, Mister Gavin." When Kristoph gave him a confused frown, he continued, "And you had to testify as you just did. You had to tell them you saw the scene of the crime through that little window." He turned his face downwards, eyes closed as he continued to smile to himself. "You had to say that... because that was the only probable window of opportunity."

Apollo was almost surprised. 'Actually, that makes sense. He is trying to save his own skin here, after all, as most murderers would.'

The judge gave Phoenix a disapproving look. "Defendant Wright, the defence should do the cross-examination, not the defendant!" Sighing, he turned to Apollo. "Defence Wright, are you prepared?"

Apollo nodded. "Yes, Your Honour." He looked down at his computer, returning his attention to the transcript. 'Can't pull my punches here. That's what you've always taught me to do after all, Mister Gavin.' "When you returned to the Hydeout," he began, looking up at the stand, "why did you go through the trouble of peeking in through the window? Wouldn't it have been easier to just open the door and go into the room?"

Kristoph thought a moment. "I didn't want to upset Wright, you see."

"Upset...?" Apollo repeated, confused.

"Yes. What if my fears had been unfounded?" Kristoph replied. "I'd be walking in on their match! Bad form, to say the least."

Apollo returned his attention to the transcript, embarrassed. 'Well, that was a dud.'

Phoenix chuckled to himself. "Ah, there's that 'Coolest Defence in the West' we know and love!" he said. "Even when you're standing up there on the witness stand, some things never change."

Kristoph raised an eyebrow. "I was afraid you'd changed, too, Wright, but you haven't." He closed his eyes, looking away. "You and that overbearing personality of yours."

Leaning confidently on the defence bench with one hand, Phoenix was unfazed at the veiled insult, simply shrugging it off.

Apollo rolled his eyes, focusing on his next question. "So, at the scene of the crime, you saw only the victim, the defendant and Ms Orly?"
Kristoph nodded. "Yes... As far as I saw, at least."

Payne smirked, tapping at his head. "Then we're back where we started. The killer was the defendant, Phoenix Wright! Who else could it have been!" His confidence quickly drained again as he gave Kristoph a curious look. "But... why didn't you talk to the police?"

"Two reasons:" Kristoph replied, "First, I didn't actually witness the very moment of the crime. Second, my office was asked to defend Wright. Even after seeing what I had seen," he paused to shrug, his smile almost seeming cocky, "I couldn't abandon my friend."

The judge was humming in thought, tugging at his beard.

'Uh-oh, the judge is turning to Mister Gavin's side!' Thinking quickly, Apollo grabbed at the first idea that came to mind and shouted "Objection!", slamming the bench with his fists. "There must have been someone else there at the moment of the crime!"

Kristoph gave Apollo a stern stare. "Apollo, I just said I saw no one. Not a soul."

'And that's only the truth because the fourth person was you,' Apollo lamented. "B-but," he insisted, "that goes against the evidence! It doesn't make sense without a fourth person on the scene!"

"Ah yes," Kristoph almost laughed, "it would be very convenient for your father were there a mysterious 'fourth person' to be the 'real killer', wouldn't it?" He raised a single, disapproving eyebrow. "I thought I taught you to value the truth above personal relationships, Apollo."

Phoenix snorted to himself. "Glad to see there's one thing we agree on, Mister Gavin."

"Let me pose a question, then," Kristoph continued, ignoring Phoenix. "Tell me, what possible reason did this 'real killer' have to swap cards in the victim's hand?"

Apollo froze. He didn't know the answer to that.

"Hmm?" Kristoph pushed. "Perhaps you can show us a reason why such a thing would be necessary?"

'How can I show something I don't know myself?!' Apollo thought, trying not to visibly panic as he stepped back from the bench.

"Keep calm, Apollo," came a comforting whisper from Apollo's right, and he looked over to see Phoenix watching him with a solemn expression. "You know this, even if you don't realise it yet. It was the fifth ace, remember?"

"Y-yeah, the fifth ace," Apollo repeated with a rapid nod.

The judge seemed impatient. "Well, Defence Wright?" he asked. "The question of why the killer would swap out a card has been raised. Can you point to a reason?"

Kristoph just smiled, looking somewhat smug. "I'm willing to wait for as long at it takes, Wright."

Apollo wondered which 'Wright' he was referring to.

"Take a few moments to think it over," Phoenix prompted, remaining calm and quiet at Apollo's side. "Turn the question around: Why did the killer have no choice but to swap that card out of Smith's hand?"

Squeezing his eyes shut, Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead and tried to shut the sounds of the
courtroom around him out. 'Right, turn it around, like Mia always used to say. No choice but to swap the card. Why would you HAVE to swap that card? I guess... because it could be used as evidence against you? Maybe if... Wait, the fifth ace! Of course!'

That was it. The solution. Apollo jumped to the bench, looking up at the judge with a confident smile. "The defence would like to present evidence to the court, showing the reason why a card was swapped out!"

Kristoph watched in neutral silence. Phoenix was frowning slightly.

The judge nodded. "Then go ahead and point out your reason, Defence Wright," he ordered. "Why did the killer take the fifth ace?"

With a flourish, Apollo raised his left hand into the air, twirling his fingers and seemingly materialising a single playing card from thin air, which he held high for all the court to see. "My reason," he announced, "is this!"

*View the Court Record*
The entire courtroom stared in shock at the tiny playing card between Apollo's index and middle fingers, Kristoph more than anyone. The young magician was too focussed on staying perfectly still, his confident smile directed out at the court, to turn and see his father's reaction, but he expected Phoenix must have been waiting for this; After all, how else could Trucy have this card to pass on to her brother?

"Is that... an ace?" Payne asked.

The judge was leaning in for a closer look when he suddenly gasped, jumping back. "Why, it's got blood on it! Right next to the spade!"

"W-what!?" Kristoph cried, somewhere between shocked and furious.

"This is insane!" Payne was shouting. "Why wasn't I told about this!? Why!?"

"Could... this be the missing fifth ace!?" the judge was asking.

Kristoph was forcing a half-smile on the stand, though his face kept visibly twitching. "I-inconceivable! How could you... What are you doing with that card!?"

Apollo just smirked. 'What, put out that your plan was foiled? You shouldn't have left it behind, then!'

"Oh, that card?" Phoenix picked up from Apollo's side, and Apollo finally lowered the card, turning to see Phoenix shrugging with a lazy smile. "It's mine. That is, I picked it up at the Borscht Bowl Club that night after the murder had occurred," he explained. "I gave it to my daughter. Cards are her, and Apollo's, stock and trade, after all."

'Yeah, that would be why Trucy had it!' Apollo agreed, still smiling ecstaticly. 'Dad knew it was important and gave it to her for safe-keeping!'

"Objection!" Kristoph quickly cut in, starting to look slightly panicked. "N-no! Impossible! Unacceptable! The court can't accept this evidence! It's a fraud!"

"A fraud?" Phoenix repeated, smirking. "How can you be so sure?"

Kristoph paused. "W-what...?"

"I would think the only person who could claim it was a fraud," Phoenix explained, "would be the one who took the 'real' card from the crime scene... the real killer!"

Kristoph was too surprised to respond to that.

"Allow me to elaborate," Phoenix said, reaching over and plucking the card from Apollo's hand. "What if this trace of blood was the reason?"
Payne frowned. "The reason for...?"

"For the killer to take the card from the scene of the crime," Phoenix replied, as though it were obvious.

The judge seemed confused. "Where are you going with this?"

Phoenix turned to Apollo, gesturing to his computer. Understanding the unspoken question, Apollo nodded and handed the small device to his father, who smiled gratefully and tapped at the screen for a few moments. "Take another look at the photo," Phoenix said, bringing up on the holograms the close-up of the hatless victim, "and at the victim's head. At the moment of the crime, his hat fell to the floor, and a trickle of blood ran from his forehead down the back of his head." He gestured with the card still in his hand. "Couldn't a drop of that blood have fallen on one of the cards?"

Apollo crossed his arms, thinking to himself.

"The killer then took the card," Phoenix continued, "to hide the blood."

"Objection!" came another cry from Kristoph. "R-regardless! That evidence is non-permissible!"

Phoenix looked to the stand with a raised eyebrow, a smile on the corners of his mouth. "Oh?"

Kristoph took a deep breath to steady himself, then stared sternly at Phoenix. "Wright! Regardless of how you've wasted the last seven years, you used to be a lawyer! You know what a serious crime it is to conceal evidence!"

To Apollo's surprise, Phoenix only smiled, as though they were discussing the weather. "Oh, we can discuss the finer points of our legal system later. What's important now is that I've answered your question."

"W-what are you talking about?" Kristoph asked, confused.

"You wanted to know why the killer would have taken a card from the crime scene," Phoenix replied, "and, now, I've told you." Placing Apollo's computer out of the way on the bench, he held up the bloodstained ace, examining it. "That one drop of blood would have been decisive evidence, you see."

Kristoph slammed the witness stand. "Objection! Th-this is... baseless conjecture! Baseless!"

Immediately, Phoenix was slamming the defence bench, pointing at Kristoph. "Objection!" he shot back, silencing the court in a moment. Slowly, Phoenix smiled, then bitterly laughed, lowering his hand as he shook his head. "Oh, I assure you, it's quite based."

"W-what?" Kristoph muttered in response, frowning in confusion and fury.

Phoenix was again admiring the single card, musing aloud. "It's amazing, really... how a single drop of blood on a single card can lead us to the truth. It's quite simple." He turned to his son. "Apollo?"

Apollo was almost surprised to be brought back into the proceedings, with Kristoph and Phoenix dominating it for so long. "Hmm?"

"You're familiar enough with the Hydeout," Phoenix continued, clutching the single card in his hand. "Picture the scene of the crime in your head: The body of the luckless victim was found at the poker table, and, before the killer swapped a card out, there was a single card," he gestured with the ace, "with a drop of blood on it in the victim's hand. Given this, there is one decisive problem with
Again, the judge was impatient. "Well, what is it!?" he asked.

"Let's keep it simple, shall we?" Phoenix replied, turning his attention to Apollo's computer again. "Given that there was a drop of blood on a card..." With a swipe of a finger, he brought to the holograms a diagram of the scene that Payne had used much earlier that morning. The simple floor-map of the Hydeout had the usual markers of the victim in his chair, a 'W' in the dealer chair, a '2' outside the marked window, and the killer standing by Phoenix's usual chair, opposite the victim. "Whose position in this diagram doesn't fit?" Phoenix asked. "The victim's? The killer's? The witness's? The second witness's?" He turned to Apollo, focussing on him as though this were only a simple 'trial game'. "Whose position doesn't fit with the bloody card?"

Apollo turned to the displayed diagram with a thoughtful frown, the photos of the crime scene and his own memories of the Hydeout lingering in his mind. 'Well, Ms Orly was unconscious and out of the way, so really her location is totally inconsequential,' he reasoned. 'Not sure if I can discount Mister Gavin's claims yet, but...' His thoughts turned to the killer and victim, and the photo of the trail of blood behind the victim's head flashed before his eyes. Hesitantly, he pointed to the diagram. "Well... isn't it the victim's position that's the problem?" he asked.

The judge frowned. "I don't follow your logic here, Defence Wright."

Apollo struggled a moment on how to explain. "Well, look," he said, briefly replacing the displayed image with the photo of Smith, "the victim was struck on the head, sending him back in his chair. You'd think any blood would fall behind the body, not onto the table in front of him."

"Ah...!" the judge cried as he understood the young man's point.

"So, if he bled in this position," Apollo continued, switching back to the diagram, "the blood would fall on the floor, not on the cards."

"Why, that's right!" the judge agreed. "So... what does this mean?"

"Incidentally," Phoenix interjected with a smile, "those are swivel chairs we use down in the Hydeout."

Apollo grinned. "So, at the time of the murder, we have to assume the victim's chair was facing the other way!" With a few taps on his computer, the image of the chair under the victim counter flipped, facing the wall. "Away from the table!"

Mutterings spread through the gallery.

"When Defendant Wright returned from informing the police," the judge asked, looking to Phoenix, "which way was the chair facing?"

Phoenix briefly took over Apollo's computer, pulling up the first crime scene photo. "When I came back to the room, the body was facing as seen in this photo."

"Which would mean the killer turned the chair back around," Apollo concluded as Phoenix returned the diagram to the screens.

Kristoph remained silent and unresponsive.

"Let's take the next step," Phoenix said. "Look at the diagram once more. We know now the victim was facing away from the table at the time of the murder. But... this creates another significant
contradiction."

Payne groaned to himself. "A-again!?"

Phoenix turned to Apollo with a smile. "Apollo, whose location on this diagram contradicts our new understanding of the crime?"

Apollo grinned. *This* one was easy. "The victim was struck from the front, correct?"

"Indeed," Phoenix replied, smiling as he saw his son knew the answer.

"Well, wouldn't it be hard for the killer to hit him from the front, sitting where his indicator currently is?" Apollo asked, gesturing to the 'K' now placed closest to the victim's back, on the other side of the table.

Like Apollo, Phoenix was holding back a laugh. "I would think it'd be quite hard, yes."

"Objection!" Payne cried, frustrated. "Yes, but what you're saying makes no sense! Why would the victim suddenly turn to face the wall in the *middle of a game*!?"

Phoenix just smiled. "I believe a sufficient reason will soon come to light."

Payne was too confused to respond coherently.

"There's something on this diagram that makes far less sense, actually," Phoenix continued, turning to his son. "Apollo, could you update the killer's location for me?"

Nodding, Apollo looked down to his computer, editing the diagram to move the 'K' icon... only to pause, looking back up at his father. "I can't," he said. "The cupboard is in the way."

"Ha!" Payne laughed, suddenly looking cocky again as he crossed his arms. "You get points for flair, but that's about *all* you get! I hardly need to point out that standing there would be impossible. The victim is facing a solid cupboard!" He chuckled, patting his head. "Or are you claiming the killer climbed the cupboard and hit him from above?"

The Wrights both stared at Payne, though Phoenix smiled in amusement. "$t^r$'s simple logic, really," he told the prosecutor. "$f this is the only place the killer could have been standing, then that means, at the very moment of the crime..."

Apollo also grinned. "... the cupboard wasn't there!" he picked up. "Even if you *don't* know, that's an easy enough conclusion to reach!"

The judge blinked in confusion. "What's this now? Don't know what?"

"I mean, that's the only explanation," Phoenix continued, ignoring the judge as he turned his attention to the witness stand. "Right, Mister Gavin?"

Kristoph pushed at his glasses, staring evenly back at Phoenix.

Unfazed, Phoenix turned his gaze to the judge. "Your Honour! I have a suggestion for the defence: We should arrange to examine the cupboard in the Hydeout immediately!"

The judge nodded, already calling for a bailiff.

Apollo poked at Phoenix's arm to attract his attention, giving his father a confused look. "We can't just tell them?"
Phoenix smiled. "Let them find out on their own," he said, winking. "It's more... exciting that way." Grabbing a random loose sheet of paper from the bench, he ripped off a blank corner, turning towards the judge. "Ah, Your Honour!" he called, stopping the orders currently being delivered to the bailiff.

The judge looked over in surprise. "What?"

"There's one more thing your men should look for," he called, pulling a pen from his pocket. He quickly scrawled something on the scrap of paper, which he then folded and handed to the bailiff, who scurried off around the back of the judge's podium.

Within a few moments, the scrap had reached the judge, who read Phoenix's message with a thoughtful hum. "Yes, I see." He folded the paper back up, giving Phoenix a warm smile. "You do belong in the courtroom after all, Phoenix Wright."

Phoenix gave the judge a small bow of gratitude. "I do my best."

The judge turned to the bailiff with a quiet order, and the court official hurried off out of sight, quickly disappearing.

"But, let's forge ahead here while we wait," Phoenix suggested, already back to business. "Look at the diagram once again: It's been changed. If the killer was standing here at the time of the crime, then this cupboard wasn't here." He gave his son a nod. "Apollo." The young attorney nodded back, tapping at the screen of his computer as he moved the killer's location and then, after a moment of thought, slid the troublesome cupboard aside, where it now pressed against the wall. "Thank you," Phoenix said, then turned back to the court. "As you can see, the cupboard was the problem. At the time of the murder, it has to have been as shown here. Now everything is in place to reconstruct the moment of the crime." To Apollo's horror, Phoenix then gave an exaggerated gasp. "Oh my! What's this?"

"D-Dad... no," Apollo mumbled, wincing in embarrassment. 'Leave the acting to me and Truce...'

"W-what is it now!?" the judge cried.

Phoenix pointed to the diagram. "Look; It appears we've found yet another contradiction... what I believe to be the final contradiction, in fact." He turned to his son. "Notice something, Apollo? Our line of deduction is rapidly approaching its logical conclusion."

Apollo ripped himself out of the second-hand embarrassment of his father's overacting to look at the diagram. '... Huh. So there is.'

"Which is it, defence?" the judge asked. "What's this final contradiction?"

Smiling, Apollo pointed to the cupboard, where it pressed against the tiny window. "With the cupboard where it is now... It covers up the little window to the stairs."

The judge cried out in shock.

"There's no way someone could see into the room from outside," Apollo continued. "Not even Mister Gavin."

Kristoph's eyes were wide with barely contained fury. "What... what did you say?"

Phoenix smirked. "Oh? Is the 'Coolest Defence in the West' losing his cool?"
Kristoph snorted, apparently just barely keeping himself under control. "Don't expect me to play along with your little game, Wright."

"It's only a game until someone gets killed, Mister Gavin," Phoenix replied, the humour gone from his expression. "And someone was... while the window to that room was blocked by a cupboard."

The attorney at the witness stand stared wordlessly.

"So, Mister Gavin," Phoenix continued. "Perhaps you'd like to explain to the court." He threw out an arm, pointing dramatically right at the twitching witness. "Exactly where did you witness the crime scene from?"

View the Court Record
Kristoph sputtered wordlessly at the stand, apparently unable to answer Phoenix's question. The sounds of the gallery muttering gradually increased as his silence lengthened, and Apollo wondered if the judge was going to have to force another recess to calm the growing commotion.

Suddenly, the wide entrance doors of the court slammed open and a bailiff charged in, waving a piece of paper over her head. "Excuse me, Your Honour!" she shouted over the noise.

The judge blinked in surprise at the new arrival, then shot a glare around the room as he repeatedly banged his gavel. "Order! This is a court of law and I will have order!" Finally, the gallery calmed down, and the judge turned his attention to the bailiff.

Making her way towards the podium, the court official nervously called, "We... We just now received word from our investigative team at the Borscht Bowl Club! They've examined the cupboard in the Hydeout, Your Honour!"

Apollo wondered if that meant Ernest... Although it was possible some other poor policeman was guarding the scene today.

"And what did they find?" the judge asked.

The bailiff shuffled in place awkwardly. "Well, Your Honour... It turns out there is a secret passage behind it!"

The judge jumped as the gallery loudly muttered to itself again. "What!?"

Phoenix shot Apollo a grin. "See? It's much more rewarding for them to find it on their own." As Apollo was rolling his eyes, Phoenix turned to the tall podium with a grin. "Ah yes, I believe I mentioned something of the sort before," he casually announced. "This is one of the 'tricks' to the room many of our regulars know about. A secret passage is a handy thing to have when you're engaged in illegal goings-on; Never know when you might need to duck away from the eyes of the law!"

Apollo noticed the bailiff scurrying away, back the way she'd come. 'Yeah, better get out of here before you get dragged into Dad's drama.' To the rest of the court, he added, "And it connects to the restaurant above. The underworld bosses used it to get away from the cops."

"And enjoy a cold bowl of borscht, no doubt," Phoenix picked up with a smile. "Just like our killer."

Payne scoffed. "And I suppose you already knew about this, Wright..."

"Well, naturally I did!" Phoenix replied, giving the man a grin. "I work there, after all!"

"N-no, not you, the other-!" Payne cried, then sighed and turned away. "Never mind!"

Apollo couldn't resist a pitying smile for the prosecutor, whose entire case had been taken over by
the Wrights. 'Well, it's almost all over now.' He turned to Kristoph, standing stock still at the stand, eyes closed and head pointed downward. "At the time of the murder, the window was blocked, and the victim's hat was only off his head for the few minutes between Mister Smith's murder and the defendant's return from calling the cops," he announced to the court, who quietened to listen to his speech. "In other words, the only place anyone could've seen the victim's bald head was from inside the Hydeout!"

Kristoph didn't respond.

"Well, Mister Gavin?" Apollo prompted.

Kristoph moved his head away, but still didn't open his eyes nor speak.

The judge frowned. "Hmm... Dare I ask what really happened that night?"

With a minute sigh, Apollo crossed his arms, deciding his employer was never going to answer. "Actually, we can probably figure it out ourselves at this point," he admitted. "That night, for whatever reason, our killer had a date with Mister Smith... a date with destiny." He put on his best acting face, well-trained after six years of practise with his sister. "There he crouched, hidden in the secret passageway behind the cupboard, holding his breath, waiting for just the right moment... Then the chance came, and he took it! Ms Olga Orly was out cold, struck by Mister Smith, and the defendant had gone upstairs to call the cops, leaving Mister Smith alone in the Hydeout with the unconscious dealer. Then, and only then, our killer stepped out from the secret passage and into the Hydeout. No doubt, Mister Smith heard the cupboard sliding open on that carpet, and spun around to look... then, whack!" He slammed a fist into his other palm, and was pleased to see a number of his audience jump, engrossed in his story. "The moment had passed; Mister Smith lay dead in his chair, his hat fallen to the floor."

"The criminal must have seen the blood on the card," Phoenix picked up in Apollo's resulting dramatic pause, breaking the spell of the magician's tale. "He would have, of course, realised the need to destroy the evidence. That single spot of blood told the whole story of the crime."

Apollo smirked. "It's just too bad for him he didn't linger long enough to see the cards on the floor... and the fact that they were all red!"

Kristoph winced slightly, turning away and fruitlessly brushing his hair away from his furious glare.

The crowds were beginning to murmur, and the judge whacked his gavel a few times to silence them. "Well, it seems this trial has taken yet another turn." He turned to Kristoph with a sorrowful look. "I'm truly, truly sorry I had to see this day come, Mister Gavin."

Once again, Kristoph seemed frozen in place at the stand. Apollo wanted to call out to him, tell him it was nothing personal... but it was. As much as he'd always known there was a dark side to his boss, he'd never wanted to be the one to finally confront it.

"Mister Payne!" the judge cried with a stern stare.

The prosecutor jumped with a loud yelp, then, realising who was calling him, cleared his throat as though nothing had happened, despite being covered in sweat from the long trial. "Yes, Your Honour?"

"The prosecution will continue its investigation!" the judge ordered, then turned to address the court at large. "As for Mister Phoenix Wright, the defendant, he is hereby cleared of all suspicion."

Payne yelped again in surprise and disbelief.
"Believe me when I say that I don't believe this is happening, Mister Gavin," the judge continued to Kristoph, looking more disappointed now than sad, "but, I'm afraid circumstances call for me to issue a warrant for your arrest. Immediately."

Kristoph stood frozen for only a moment before his furious glare suddenly faded, back into his ever-present calm smile. "Oh, no need to apologise. I rather enjoyed myself," he said, determinedly looking away from the defence bench. "It's not every day you get to witness a legendary attorney's dirty tactics first hand..."

Phoenix just stared at the man behind the witness stand. "Your point, Mister Gavin?"

"Frankly, Your Honour, I'm shocked," Kristoph continued, ignoring Phoenix as he looked up at the judge. "That a person of your calibre would be taken in by such a low-grade parlour trick..."

Apollo couldn't help but be offended; It wasn't just Phoenix's reputation being attacked, but the magic acts two of his children practised as well. He was about to shout something, anything, in response, until he felt a hand on his shoulder and looked over to see his father giving him a stern look, subtly shaking his head.

"The defendant is 'cleared of all suspicion'?' Kristoph was saying, a clear rage lingering behind his half-grin. "This is hardly the time for jokes, Your Honour: Mister Phoenix Wright hasn't proven anyone's guilt or innocence here. What he has done is use his own children (which, might I add, are not his) to help him present illegal evidence and put the blame on someone else! And not just anyone else, but me, his own defence attorney!"

It was only thanks to Phoenix's hand on his shoulder that Apollo did nothing more than twitch in outrage... though he could feel his father's grip tightening a little.

The judge suddenly seemed nervous. "I-illegal evidence?" he repeated.

"Objection!" Phoenix shouted, his hand slipping off his son's shoulder as he glared at Kristoph. "Let me ask you, Mister Gavin: Is there still any reason, at present, to suspect me of wrongdoing?"

Kristoph paused only a moment before gesturing to the prosecutor's bench with a smile. "Of course. That bottle, for instance: How do you intend to explain away the fingerprints on the murder weapon? And not just any fingerprints," he turned to face the man behind the bench he had been gesturing to, "am I right, Mister Payne?"

Payne jumped a little at being addressed, clearly just wanting the nightmare trial to end already. "Er, a-actually, yes," he meekly replied, rifling through his notes. "The fingerprints on the bottle were, erm, upside-down."

Apollo thought a moment before recalling the mentioned fact. 'Oh yeah, that came up earlier, didn't it? Never really got the chance to address it.'

"The court, and this case, demand an explanation," Kristoph continued, starting to look as smug as Payne had at the beginning of the trial. "I can think of only one reason why one would hold a bottle upside-down, and that is hit someone with the bottom of the bottle." He turned to the judge's podium. "Well, Your Honour?"

As the judge hummed in thought, considering the notion, Phoenix chuckled in amusement. "Ah, see how the caught fish squirms to the last," he said, then turned to his son with a smile. "Well, Apollo, your boss seems awfully concerned about that bottle still."

Apollo nodded, beginning to smile himself.
"I'm sure you have a reasonable explanation in mind for him, of course," Phoenix added, winking. "His explanation isn't the only one."

The judge sighed from up on his podium. "It... would be hasty to deliver a verdict with unanswered questions, indeed," he agreed, then turned to the defence bench. "Perhaps the defence would care to enlighten the court?"

Nodding, Apollo replied, "Naturally, Your Honour!" He opened his mouth to explain, then paused, closing it again. "It's much more rewarding for them to find it on their own, huh?" "Actually, it would be easier to show you rather than explain." He held out a hand to point to the prosecutor's bench. "Mister Payne, would it be alright if that bottle was given to the judge for a few moments?"

Payne glanced between Apollo and the judge a few times, then shrugged. "I-I suppose so," he agreed. A bailiff immediately dashed out of nowhere to collect the piece of evidence, delivering it to the top of the tall podium.

Once Apollo saw the bottle being gingerly handed over to the judge, he smiled and nodded. "Place that bottle on the floor, Your Honour," he instructed, "next to your chair."

"Excuse me?" the judge asked, leaning forward to hear the defence more clearly. "On the floor?"

"Yes," Apollo replied, nodding. He watched as the old man ducked out of sight a few moments. "Now," he continued, "reach down and pick it up, without getting out of your chair."

As everyone intently watched, the judge leaned sideways, almost out of sight. A second or two later, he emerged again, looking surprised. Holding up his hand, he displayed the green glass bottle... upside-down in his grip.

Payne jumped again with a yelp.

Grinning triumphantly, Apollo continued, "See? You naturally go to pick up the bottle by its neck, with your fingers upside-down!" He briefly turned his attention to the Court Record, bringing up on the holograms the photo of Phoenix and Smith that Olga had taken. "Look at this photograph taken on the night of the murder. The defendant sat here, playing piano, bottles of grape juice on the floor to the side of his piano bench. He would have naturally picked up the bottles upside-down several times."

The judge seemed impressed, staring at the bottle as he placed it on his small desk with a chuckle. "Wow! I can't believe it was that simple!"

Phoenix was busy watching Kristoph, still standing silent at the stand. "Recall our dinner that evening, Kristoph. I was drinking my usual juice then, too."

"Basically, you used the bottle on the table to do the deed," Apollo picked up, "but then you must have remembered! So you went and picked up one of the bottles from under the piano, and switched them!" He crossed his arms, though was unable to smile, considering who he was addressing. "You took one of the defendant's bottles and made it look like the murder weapon."

Kristoph evenly stared back at Apollo as the court erupted into chaos around them.

View the Court Record
"Order!" the judge shouted as he banged his gavel, glaring at the gallery. "Order! Order!" Finally, the courtroom began to calm, and the judge turned his glare on Kristoph. "What do you have to say to these charges, Mister Gavin?"

Kristoph idly brushed at his hair with a calm smile, shaking his head. "Fascinating... So this is the legendary attorney's famed tactic of misdirection..."

Apollo blinked in surprise. "What...!?"

"You claim that I switched the bottle?" Kristoph asked. "Where is your proof?"

Unable to answer, Apollo looked to Phoenix for help, but his father was busy giving Kristoph his own carefully blank stare.

Taking the young man's silence as an answer, Kristoph scoffed. "As I thought. More baseless conjecture." He pushed at his glasses with an unmistakably superior air. "I'm afraid your 'bottle' of proof is quite empty."

Apollo saw the flash of a smirk on Phoenix's face before his father threw out an arm to point at the stand, shouting, "Objection! I wouldn't be so sure about that."

Kristoph seemed too surprised to answer, frozen mid-movement as he stared at Phoenix with wide eyes.

"Your Honour," Phoenix called, turning to the judge. "When you initiated the investigation of the Hydeout earlier, do you recall I requested an additional investigation?"

"Ah, yes," the judge replied with a nod. "I have your memo about that here." He held up the small scrap of paper, which he opened and read aloud, "Retrieve the bottles from under the piano at the Borscht Bowl Club." He looked up to the court entrance with a smile. "Ah, and here's one of the bottles in question."

Apollo turned in surprise to see the nervous bailiff from earlier scurrying back into the courtroom, holding a single bottle in her hands. Apparently unsure what to do next, she stood awkwardly at the back of the room, behind the witness stand.

Kristoph scoffed, raising an eyebrow at the judge. "What, are you going to dust that for fingerprints, too? I would be surprised if any were on that but his."

'He has a point,' Apollo had to admit, arms crossed as he thought. 'He'll have known better than to leave his own fingerprints on anything.'

Phoenix grinned, gently elbowing his son to get his attention. "You wanna examine our new evidence, Apollo?"
Apollo stared back at his father in confusion. "Why?" he bluntly asked.

"Just humour me," Phoenix replied, seeming amused. "I think you'll find that bottle will finally solve this case once and for all."

Relieved to have something to do, the nervous bailiff hurried over to the defence bench, where she handed the bottle of grape juice to Apollo before rushing away again. As he had done for the other bottle held in evidence, Apollo took a cursory look at its label, 'Yep, that's Dad's grape juice alright,' before pointing it to peer into the neck. 'Geeze, I hope we don't end up having to ask for ALL the bottles under that piano to be brought in here and examined. Why'd they only bring in just the one, anyhow?' Seeing nothing in the narrow opening of the neck, Apollo again spun the bottle around on the smooth fabric of his glove to look through the bottom. 'I hope they didn't leave all the others back at the... Hang on.' Surprised, he spun the bottle back around, crying, "There's something in there!"

As the court sat up and took notice, Apollo began to gently tap the upside-down bottle on the defence bench until, finally, a piece of white card stuck out of the narrow neck. Carefully, Apollo gripped the slightly damp corner, and pulled out a single, very crumpled playing card: A red-backed Five of Hearts.

Kristoph's eyes widened. "Th-that card...! It can't be...!"

Phoenix smiled. "Recall that unpleasant woman's testimony for a moment," he instructed the court.

"You mean Ms Olga Orly?" Apollo cut in with a frown.

"Yes, our little swindling devotchka," Phoenix replied, ignoring his son's disapproval. "She spoke of a 'trap' she prepared, that ultimately failed when Smith was unable to find her planted 'trump card'."

Apollo looked at the card in his hand. "Huh. You mean this is the card? The one you found in your pocket and 'disposed of'?"

"The Five of Hearts?" Phoenix said, looking over to the crumpled playing card. "Yep, that's it!"

A gasp rumbled through the gallery.

"The bottles were swapped," Phoenix announced, erasing his smile for a stern glare, "and the only one who could have done that was the fourth person in the club that night." He turned to the witness stand with a pointed finger. "You, Mister Kristoph Gavin."

Kristoph winced slightly, then, shaking in silent anger, he raised a single fist and slammed it down on the witness stand, meeting no-one's eyes.

There was a very long silence as everyone stared at the two, the attorney at the stand and the ex-attorney at the bench.

Finally, Phoenix closed his eyes. "That is all."

Kristoph was still frozen, shaking as he pressed his fist into the stand. "Is... this your idea of revenge, Phoenix Wright? For the events that took away your attorney's badge seven years ago!?"

Phoenix opened his eyes only to give Kristoph a long, solemn stare. "My past is like my logic: straight and true," he insisted. "Nothing's changed. All I did was point the finger of justice in the proper direction."

It was a very long moment before Kristoph reacted, seeming to relax as he straightened his pose and almost leisurely crossed his arms as he always did at rest. He even managed to plaster back on his
everpresent calm smile. "Fine. I'm glad we could have this little tête-à-tête, Wright."

Phoenix only continued to stare.

Next, Kristoph turned to Apollo. "I suppose there were some things I was never going to get through your head, Apollo; You're just far too stubborn. Like him. The two of you were made for each other after all, it seems."

Apollo couldn't help but be a little hurt at being so easily brushed aside. "The same thing would have happened today anyway," he replied. "You've always said the truth was more important than personal relationships... a-and..." He looked down, unable to meet Kristoph's eyes. "I was following that to the letter today."

Kristoph watched Apollo a moment more before also turning away, physically leaving the witness stand. A bailiff ran to meet him, escorting the man to a pair of waiting police officers at the courtroom doors.

"This... this is insane!" Payne cried, the gallery around him slowly gaining volume in their discussion. "What about me!? Don't I get to prosecute anyone!?"

A few minutes passed before the hubbub of Kristoph's arrest had died down, mostly at the sight of a bailiff dashing into court to talk to Payne. Phoenix himself, without a word to Apollo, had returned to the witness stand, awaiting his final verdict.

The judge sighed. "I believe this time we've finally come to the end of our trial," he sadly announced. "Mister Payne, do you have a report for us on Kristoph Gavin?"

Payne briefly fiddled with his thick glasses. "He's admitted everything," he replied. "We're processing his arrest now."

"I see," the judge sighed, disappointed. "Still, one had to wonder why he would do such a thing... He didn't even have a connection to the victim, did he?"

"Er... None that we know of," Payne agreed.

The judge looked to Phoenix. "Defendant Wright, have you anything to add?"

Phoenix didn't immediately reply, staring off into the distance with an unreadable expression. "I'm afraid I can't shed any more light on the matter," he quietly said.

Accepting that, the judge tugged at his beard thoughtfully, looking over his notes. "About this victim, Mister Shadi Smith... His occupation was listed as 'traveller'," he pointed out. "An odd profession to be sure, and that's all we know about him!"

Payne hurriedly nodded. "I'll arrange a follow-up investigation, Your Honour."

"Good," the judge replied, then returned his gaze to Phoenix. "Defendant Wright?"

Phoenix looked up. "Yes?"

The judge slowly smiled, then chuckled. "Seven years... and you still haven't lost your touch."
Phoenix flashed a smile, only to then look away. "Kristoph Gavin... was a man with much significance for me. Both as a friend... and a lawyer."

"He was extremely talented, to be sure," the judge agreed.

"I needed two things before I could confront him," Phoenix continued. "The first was a place where no injustice would be tolerated: This courtroom. The second was a person who would tolerate no injustice... in other words, a defence attorney." He looked up to Apollo with a warm smile. "And, by some stroke of luck, I found I'd had the perfect candidate all along."

After a moment of surprised confusion, Apollo blushed, giving his father a sheepish smile in return.

The judge nodded approvingly. "Well, this seems like a good time to announce a verdict," he called, holding his gavel high. "This court finds the defendant, Mister Phoenix Wright, not guilty." As he banged his gavel, the courtroom erupted into cheers, and confetti rained down from hidden cannons that exploded as the verdict echoed through the court.

Grinning madly, Apollo dashed out from behind the defence bench and jumped on his father with a tight hug. He felt more than heard Phoenix laughing as he returned it.

Over the din, the judge was barely audible announcing, "Court is adjourned!"

View the Court Record
FLASHBACK: Third Time's the Charm

- Three Days Earlier -

April 17, 2:01AM
Borscht Bowl Club
The Hydeout

Just like seven years ago, it all came down to an all-in final hand. And, just like seven years ago, Phoenix was winning.

"Showdown time."

However, unlike seven years ago, Phoenix was taking this game seriously. Although he still thought of his previous win as total luck, he was much more evenly matched as a pianist against a traveller than he was as an attorney versus a magician.

With well-practised poker smiles, the two opposing hands were thrown down on the table. The small dealer had barely had a chance to look at them properly before she gasped. "Two full houses!" she cried: One had two aces... and the other, three.

Phoenix could only stare, frowning in disappointment. Somehow, he wasn't surprised.

Zak jumped to his feet with an oddly triumphant snarl. "You dirty cheat!" he shouted, storming around the table towards Phoenix. "Check his pockets, now!" he ordered, waving at the dealer.

Unwilling to cause a scene, Phoenix simply got to his feet, allowing Zak to roughly grab his wrist and hold the pianist's hands high from behind as the dealer jumped in to begin the search. She stuck her hand in the almost hidden side pockets of Phoenix's black track-pants, then paused, looking confused. A moment later, she checked the other side, then began to frantically search his hoodie, too.

Phoenix smiled.

Zak watched the woman. "What are you doing?"

"I-it's gone!" she admitted, jumping away from Phoenix with wide eyes. "The card's gone!"

"What...!?" Zak shouted in disbelief, then turned to the search himself, sticking his hands in every pocket and, eventually, pulling off the ex-attorney's beanie to check underneath. Noticing Phoenix's smile, he gave the other man a glare, tugging at his wrist to drag Phoenix's face to his. "What did you do!?"

Phoenix didn't immediately reply, staring Zak right in the face. "You lose."

Zak was frozen for only a few moments before his face curled into a furious scowl, and, finally dropping his grip on Phoenix's wrist, he spun with a roar to face the young dealer, stood by her chair at the table. "Y-you-!" he barked. "Some master of cheating you turned out to be!" With that he grabbed the closest thing at hand, the glass of grape juice sitting by Phoenix's cards on the table; His
sudden motion even knocked the red deck of cards, sending them flying throughout the room.

As the ex-magician began to wave the bottle through the air, attempting to hit her, the dealer shrieked, backing up instinctively until she hit her chair, falling backwards to sit in it. She didn't have the time to scramble out of Zak's way before the glass bottle in his hand connected with her, knocking the young woman out.

Phoenix was almost too shocked to react. "What... Why did you do that!?" he demanded, watching Zak heavily leaning on the table as he caught his breath from the outburst. Worried, he looked over to the dealer. *'She's not bleeding, but she's unconscious, so she definitely needs medical attention.'* He cast a glance at Zak; The other man still worried him, and it wasn't just the sudden attack on the dealer. The ex-magician had also been punching that reporter earlier, after all. "Wait here," Phoenix instructed, kneeling down just long enough to grab his beanie. "I'll get help."

Zak nodded, moving in the vague direction of his chair, but Phoenix didn't stay long enough to confirm his destination, already out of the room and rushing up the stairs towards the restaurant, tugging on his beanie as he went. *'Suddenly I'm glad he doesn't want to see Trucy.'*

Phoenix knew he could not call for an ambulance; It wouldn't be fair to the paramedics to send them in while Zak and the bottle he wielded (the one with that card he and his accomplice had undoubtedly expected to find in his pocket) were still in there. So, the police it was, and Phoenix urged them to hurry, though he did not tell them what was happening; A poor decision in hindsight, but, in the rush of the moment, he didn't think he had the time to spare for details.

As the pianist dashed back down the stairs, stuffing his phone back in his pocket, he hoped he could calm Zak down and keep him that way until the cops arrived. *'Shouldn't be hard. Maybe I could regale him with stories of Trucy and Apollo's magic act tonight.'* Once at the bottom, he pushed open the door, registering the dealer was still slumped sideways in her chair, and, strangely enough, so was Zak, his bald head shining from the other side of the room and the abandoned bottle lying on the table beside him. "Okay," he called, entering the room, "the police are-"

It was then Phoenix noticed the blood. For a moment, he couldn't move, a part of him idly counting the years since he had last walked in on a dead body. A glance at the dealer assured him she was still alive, though unconscious, but he could see no movement from Zak, and dashed forward to the man's side, hand flying to his neck. *'Nope. No pulse.'* He kept his hand there for a few more seconds, mind whirring. *The police are coming. They're gonna see Zak, or 'Shadi Smith', dead, our little scheming waitress unconscious, and me... well, they're gonna blame me.'* His eyes landed on the locket, shining from Zak's collar. *'And if they find out who 'Shadi Smith' really is...'* Phoenix didn't wait much longer, hurriedly moving to unlatch the locket and pull it from Zak's neck. He was moving to shove it in a pocket before he had a better idea: Pausing only to glance at the picture within, the ex-attorney attached the locket around his own neck. *'They can't prove this isn't mine. It's got Trucy's picture in it, after all.'*

After that, next on Phoenix's agenda was to arrange for his own defence. It only made sense to call Kristoph, knowing how nervous Apollo was about taking charge of a case after the trouble with Luke's trial the previous year, and besides, Kristoph's skill and experience would ensure the best job possible got done... provided there was no more forgery going on under the Wrights' noses, of course. He contemplated calling his kids to warn them of what was going on, but, given it was the early hours of the morning, he decided to give them a few more hours of much-needed sleep... He'd pick one of them to call when the police got him to the detention centre.

"You mean someone cracked that flawless bone china pate?"
He hadn't worked out what bugged him about the question until, phone once again resting in his pocket, Phoenix wandered back down to the Hydeout... and the first thing he saw was Zak, his hat on the floor and his bleeding, bald head visible for the world to see. Thinking fast, the ex-attorney scooped up the white hat on the floor and placed it carefully right on top of Zak's forehead, as though the man was only sleeping. 'Okay... better look around for clues before the police come and arrest me. If nothing else, I can bring it up in court... though I'll have to sort out how I can get my own defence attorney on the witness stand later.'

Shaking his head to clear his mind, Phoenix turned his attention to the poker table. Apart from the red deck of cards now splattered across the floor and the abandoned bottle lying nearby, it didn't seem unchanged at first glance. *The chips are all in place, there's my full house, and there's... W-wait a sec!* He leaned in slightly to study Zak's final hand of cards: Somehow, while Phoenix had been out of the room, the second Ace of Spades in his opponent's hand - the source of Zak's obvious ploy to once again ruin Phoenix's reputation with allegations of cheating - had been replaced with a third King.

It puzzled Phoenix why someone would have swapped out those cards. It would have suited Zak and the young dealer very well to leave all five aces on the table and try to imply to the world Phoenix was the cheat they already thought he was; The only logical conclusion that came to mind was that this anonymous card-switcher was a fourth person... probably the same person who had killed Zak while Phoenix was out of the room and the dealer unconscious. *But why would someone uninvolved with our game swap those cards? Or, maybe... Why did they have no choice?*

The answers came to Phoenix in a rush: The card was crime scene evidence. Zak had probably bled on it when he was killed. That meant Zak had his back to the table when he died. Which meant the killer was in the secret passage. From the secret passage, the dealer would have been audible announcing the two full houses, thus the unmentioned fifth ace being changed for a king.

The only people to have seen Zak's bald head tonight were Phoenix himself... and the ex-magician's killer.

A quick glance at the new card gave Phoenix a further surprise: This third king was from the blue deck, which was still neatly stacked by the dealer's chair. *Now why did the killer search the blue deck for a card rather than the floor? Did...* He looked around the small room. *Did he not see the floor...?* Sure enough, looking at the table alone gave the impression the blue deck had been in use; Had that been what happened?

The dealer began to stir in her chair, and Phoenix rushed around to sit in his own chair, closer to the young woman. "Are you okay?" he asked.

She didn't reply, apparently forcing herself to sit up as she pressed one of her bright pink mittens to her jaw line, near her neck. "W... why..." she muttered, then turned to look at Zak, staring at him almost uncomprehendingly.

Phoenix noted she seemed scared, and he supposed he couldn't blame her after a surprise attack like that... Now he was looking at her properly, she only seemed around Luke's or Apollo's age. "I've called the police," he told her. "They don't know Mister Smith is dead yet, but they'll find out when they get here."

The young woman's eyes subtly widened as she registered the white-suited man was dead. "H-he...!" She curled up in a half-ball in her seat, spinning suddenly to stare at Phoenix as she shrunk away from him. "W-what happened...?"

Phoenix closed his eyes, already tired of those words. "Now that is the question, isn't it?"
'Thrice now I've been accused of murder. I just hope third time's the charm.'

View the Court Record
Apollo and Phoenix walked side-by-side back to the lobby, arms slung over each other's shoulders proudly. "I almost can't believe it!" Apollo laughed as the doors closed behind them. "We won! My first trial ever and I managed to win!"

Phoenix's smile tightened a little, and he patted Apollo's shoulder before pulling away, turning his back on his son. One hand rubbed at the locket hanging from his neck. "That... was certainly a miracle, alright." He looked back at Apollo. "A magic trick worthy of a Gramarye... though not necessarily in all the right ways."

Suddenly it felt like all the joy was draining from the room, and Apollo's exuberant grin faded as he stared at his father in confusion. "Wh... What do you mean?"

"Apollo." Phoenix turned to face the young man with a stern look. "Where did you get that Ace of Spades?"

Apollo blinked. "Uhh..."

"No, I already guessed," Phoenix continued, looking away with a glare. "There's only one way you could have obtained that card with no idea of what it really was."

Suddenly it felt to Apollo like the floor was dropping out from underneath him. "Y-you mean...?"

Before Apollo could finish his question, the lobby doors flew open, and in ran a teenage girl in a blue cape, making a beeline for Phoenix. "Daddy!" she shouted, latching on to him in a tight hug. Phoenix barely had the time to look up in surprise before a second figure barrelled into the room, crying, "Papa!" as he also ran to their father and joined in the hug.

Phoenix couldn't resist a smile at his first opportunity at physical contact with his younger children in three days... a very harrowing three days. "Hey Luke, Trucy," he almost casually replied, hugging them back. "You two been looking after each other like I asked?"

Luke nodded. "Of course we have!" He half-giggled, though his breath seemed to catch in his throat. "Why wouldn't we?"

"I'm glad that's all over with!" Luke sighed in relief, adjusting his cap. "I couldn't bear to make a contingency plan in case Papa got convicted!"

Apollo frowned, offended. "You didn't think I'd manage it!?"

"W-well..." Luke shuffled his feet a little, embarrassed. "To be fair Apollo, you didn't think you could do it, either."
Apollo was almost nodding in agreement before he realised he had never said so to Luke, and gave his brother a confused frown. "Wait, I never-"

"You didn't have to say," Luke explained with a fond smile. "You're our brother. We knew."

The young lawyer couldn't find the words to reply to that.

"I always knew Polly would get Daddy free!" Trucy boasted. "And get Mister Gavin convicted!"

Apollo blinked in surprise as he turned to his sister. "Wait, did you two know?"

"We can discuss that later," Phoenix cut in, bringing the trio's discussion to a halt. He looked between the three with a stern glare. "What's more important is, where did that card come from?"

Luke noticed their father's gaze specifically focus on Trucy, who was looking tremendously guilty as she stared at the floor. "S-so... that bloodied card Apollo presented..." he said. "It wasn't genuine evidence, after all."

Although feeling guilty himself, Apollo gave his brother a curious look. "You knew?"

"I suspected," Luke admitted with a shrug. "After everything else Mister Gavin did to hide his trail, why would he have left something like that at the scene? The fact that it was swapped with a blue card to fill out the hand was a primary piece of evidence against him in the first place. Not to mention, why would Papa have ever taken such an important clue and just casually given it away, even if it was to one of us?"

Once again, Apollo couldn't reply to that.

Phoenix was still staring at Trucy. "In other words, you didn't involve either of your brothers in your little plan," he said. "Let me guess: You slipped it to Apollo when you gave him his cape in that final recess."

Trucy didn't immediately reply, then, eventually, nodded a quick 'yes'.

"What were you thinking!?" Phoenix hissed, just barely containing a furious shout. "I didn't tell you what happened for you to forge evidence like that! You could cost your brother his badge, Trucy, and in exactly the same way I lost mine! Did you ever stop to consider what would happen if he got caught!?"

Trucy did not remove her gaze from the floor, hiding her tense expression under the brim of her top hat.

"B-but he wasn't, right?" Luke nervously pointed out, hands clutched together. "Everyone seemed to just believe it was real..."

"And Gavin can turn that all around whenever he wants," Phoenix pointed out. "He took the real card, after all; Most likely he burned it, but, having confessed he was the murderer, he has nothing to lose in telling the police that card was forged." He sighed, frowning to himself. "I was half-expecting Payne to start shouting about forgery when he said Gavin confessed; He's not the type to leave something like that for later."

There was a very long pause as the family contemplated Phoenix's musings. "No-one's gonna know," Trucy quietly said. "I made sure."

Everyone turned to Trucy curiously. "And how exactly did you 'make sure'?" Phoenix asked.
"I'm pretty sure Daddy was the same blood-type as me," Trucy replied, still quiet and hiding a sniff. "And it's been too long to test for DNA. I looked it up."

To his shock, it took Apollo a moment to realise which 'Daddy' his sister was talking about... and that his siblings had known 'Shadi Smith's' true identity all along. "Truce..." He stepped towards the girl, pulling her into a hug.

Trucy was quick to react, clinging to the back of Apollo's suit under his cape and visibly shaking as she held back sobs. "Everyone is always leaving me!" she cried, slightly muffled by Apollo's shoulder. "Mommy left me, then Grandpa, and Uncle Valant, and Daddy... Then you moved out, Polly! And L-Luke moved out, too!"

"But we still see you all the time, Trucy!" Luke cried, looking heartbroken at his sister's distress. "We're never far away!"

Trucy sniffed. "You visit for a while, but you always leave in the end," she bitterly replied.

As much as he might have wanted to, Luke couldn't reply to that.

"I always hoped I'd get to see Daddy Zak again," Trucy continued. "He'd come back, and do magic with us... he could live in Luke's room, and the police wouldn't ever have to know about him." She sighed, shaking her head as she pressed it harder into Apollo's shoulder. He patted her back comfortingy, and Trucy gave him a grateful squeeze in response before reluctantly pulling away to face Phoenix, looking up at him with a tear-stained face. "I didn't want to lose both my Daddies in one fell swoop," she announced. "I didn't want to be all alone."

Phoenix sadly stared back at Trucy for only a moment before stepping forward to hug her. "You were never going to be alone," he said, and, without any kind of signalling between the three of them, Apollo and Luke stepped forward to join the hug too. "As far away as we might feel sometimes... there will always be at least one of us here to run to your side when you most need it."

"I'm really sorry, Truce," Luke said. "I thought... I thought you'd be okay if I gave you a little space to be alone. I-I was wrong to do that... I'm really sorry." He squeezed his eyes shut to keep from crying himself.

Trucy, who had been standing almost limply as she was surrounded by her father and brothers, raised an arm around Luke's back in a half-hug. "It's okay," she assured him, giving the younger of her brothers a small smile.


The four Wrights stood in their arrangement for a very long time, both seeking and giving comfort to one another as they recovered from the previous week.

"Oh yeah, I almost forgot," Apollo said with a frown. "I'm... kind of out of a job now."

Phoenix, Luke and Trucy looked at Apollo for only a second before bursting into laughter, all stepping back out of the family hug. Trucy grinned as she tugged on Apollo's cape, telling him, "Aw, don't worry, Polly! We're the best undiscovered talents in all of California!"

Apollo gave his sister an unimpressed frown. "I didn't mean magic. I haven't been working so hard for so long to just stop practising law after my first trial."

Phoenix shook his head with a grin. "I'm sure we'll sort something out. We can discuss it at home, after we meet up with Maya and Pearls."

Trucy bit her lip to hide a smile, while Luke looked away uncomfortably. Apollo just frowned in confusion. "Maya and Pearly came down to visit?" he asked. "Why didn't anyone mention it?"


Phoenix had been already heading to the door when Luke spoke, and turned to face him with a raised eyebrow. "What about them?"

Trucy giggled, bouncing and throwing up her arms as she proudly announced, "They came to see the trial!"

"What!?" Phoenix cried in horror, then, without waiting for an explanation, he spun around and hurried out of the room, his three children at his heels.

*View the Court Record*
The Long Awaited Meet-Up

April 20, 4:41PM
District Court
2nd Floor Lobby

It didn't take long for Phoenix to spot Maya, stood next to Pearl at the edge of a group of people. Even out of her traditional spirit medium's robes, he instantly recognised her in her Pink Princess backwards baseball cap and an over-large hoodie taken from his own closet. "Maya!" he hissed across the room, not wanting to call her name too loudly in the lingering crowds from the recently-ended trial in the next room.

Somehow, Maya managed to hear Phoenix over the low-level hubbub, and turned, spotting him striding towards her. "Nick!" she replied with a smile, waving as she rushed over to meet him halfway. "Congratulations, old man!" She gave him a cheeky wink. "I knew you'd get out scot-free and indict the real killer while you were at it!"

Phoenix sighed, frowning in disappointment. "Maya, I told you not to come!" he forcefully whispered. "You and Pearls were both supposed to be waiting at home!"

Maya raised an eyebrow, still smiling. "Just like we were supposed to sit up in Kurain, ignoring that you'd been arrested and Luke and Trucy were all alone, and not come visit you in the detention centre?" She shook her head. "Nope, not happening! We just care about you too much to stay away!"

"I'm flattered, really," Phoenix insisted through gritted teeth, "but I'm not telling you to stay in Kurain for no reason! This is your own safety at stake!"

"Nonsense," Maya scoffed, arms crossed. "You're just being overprotective." Before Phoenix could protest, she jumped up on her tip-toes and planted a brief kiss on his lips, giving him a grin. "Don't worry; That's one of the things I like about you."

Finally, Phoenix relaxed, unable to resist Maya's unwavering skill in making him smile. "Really?" he asked. "Usually I just hear complaining about that."

Maya was about to respond when she spotted Apollo, Luke and Trucy quietly catching up to their father, and gave the trio a wide grin. "Ah, there you are!" She winked at Apollo. "Congrats on your win, Apollo! You really do take after Nick!"

Apollo rolled his eyes, having long given up objecting when Maya made those kinds of comments. "Eh, I barely did anything," he said, crossing his arms. "Dad pretty much ran the whole trial."

Phoenix laughed. "Aw, we wouldn't have gotten anywhere if you weren't at the bench to help, though!" he said.

Apollo opened his mouth to respond, but was cut off by the loud arrival of his dark-haired roommate, who leapt on his friend with a loud "Whoop!" of joy, pulling Apollo and the nearby Trucy in to a sideways-hug, his arms hanging lazily over their shoulders. "Dude, that was AWESOME!" Clay shouted, and Apollo didn't doubt the whole room, if not the entire courthouse, could hear him. "You got your OWN BOSS put away for murder!? Talk about Chords of Steel; You must have BALLS of Steel!"
Sighing, Apollo pushed Clay's arm off his shoulder, stepping back for some personal space. "Well, I didn't exactly have a choice. If Mister Gavin hadn't committed murder-"

Clay laughed, "Now now, 'Pollo, you're selling yourself short!", leaving the giggling Trucy to instead throw his arm around Luke, pulling the young vet over towards his brother. "C'mon Luke, tell 'Pollo he's selling himself short!"

Luke shrugged, giving his irritated brother a smile. "I certainly think you did more out there than you think you did," he agreed.

"It was almost like the old days again!" Pearl said, surprising almost everyone as they noticed her standing next to Maya, having followed the much louder Clay to join the group. Like Maya, she was similarly 'in disguise' with a pale pink t-shirt and jeans, with her twin loops of hair pointed downwards from underneath a sun hat. "Just when all hope seemed lost, Mister Nick would come in with a wild scheme to turn everything around in a flash!"

Phoenix looked offended. "Hey, my schemes were never 'wild'!"

As everyone else giggled, Apollo gave his father a smirk. "See, even Pearly knows that was your trial more than mine, Dad," he pointed out.

Phoenix just scoffed.

Luke then turned to the Fey pair. "That reminds me," he said, a twinkle in his eye, "we have another surprise for Papa and Apollo, don't we?"

"Oh yeah!" Trucy cried with a wide grin, and jumped on Apollo, gripping his arm under his cape. "We found your people, Polly!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, noticing Clay hiding snorts of laughter while Maya and Pearl grinned almost as widely as Trucy. Phoenix, at least, seemed just as confused as him. "'My people'?

the young attorney repeated.

"They've all been looking forward to meeting you, Apollo!" Maya said with a wink, turning to Phoenix with a cheeky grin to add, "Although they aren't going to turn down meeting you either, old man!" Phoenix opened his mouth to respond, but was cut off as Maya hooked his arm in hers with a giggle. "C'mon, then!" She promptly spun on her heel and began to drag Phoenix back the way she'd come, towards the small group of people gathered near the courtroom doors.

Apollo sighed, looking around at his siblings and friends all watching him expectantly, grins on their faces. "Fine," he muttered, moving to follow his 'parents' as Trucy bounced happily at his side.

It wasn't a long distance to the awaiting small crowd, and Phoenix was the first to get a good look at them, frowning in recognition as he spotted a familiar face or two smiling in greeting. "Maggey? Ms Andrews!?" He looked around in fright for a moment. "Von Karma isn't here, is she!?"

Adrian, standing mostly in the middle of the group, hid a smile. "No, sadly. Franziska's out of the country at the moment, though I'm sure she'd want to be here if she could."

Phoenix instantly relaxed, though hid it behind a neutral nod, brushing off his question. "Uh, yeah, of course... good to hear." He firmly ignored Maya's giggling at his side.

Maggey, who had been sitting at the edge of the group on a bench, pushed herself to her feet, a hand on her visibly swollen belly. "Sorry to surprise you like this, Mister Wright," she said with an apologetic grin. "This all kinda happened last minute."
"I see," Phoenix replied, raising an eyebrow as he noticed Maggey's hand on her middle. "I also see why you and Gumshoe were in such a hurry to get married all of a sudden."

The woman just shrugged, looking proud of herself as she patted her baby bump. "Should've done it years ago, anyway."

"Blackbird!" Apollo called, catching up to the group with Trucy, Luke, Pearl and Clay lagging behind him. He gave his friend a grin. "I was so busy with everything, I almost forgot you'd promised to be here!"

Maggey laughed. "I also promised you'd do okay in court! And you did better than okay if I do say so myself!"

Apollo scoffed at the praise, hiding a smile behind a roll of his eyes. It was then he seemed to notice the seven other people in the small group, looking around with surprise. "Wait... Adrian? And..." He pointed at one woman with two-tone brown and blonde hair, who gave him a small wave. "Weren't you a client at the Agency?"

"Apollo!" Luke cried, offended, crossing his arms as he gave his brother a stern glare. "That's Miss Holliday; She was the first person to ever hire me, remember?"

"Well... that was years ago," Apollo muttered. "At least I remembered she was a client!"

Aria smiled. "I was a regular customer until Luke left for college," she pointed out, "but I guess Luke does have more reason to remember me than you do, Apollo!"

Meanwhile, Phoenix had noticed a woman about Maya's age, wearing round glasses and with neutral brown hair done up in a ponytail, her entire demeanour seeming to direct attention away from herself. "You're familiar," he told her, scratching his chin. "Weren't you involved with one of my cases back in the day?"

The young woman seemed relieved to hear his question, giving Phoenix a relaxed grin. "The Jack Hammer murder case, Global Studios," she replied. "I was just the on-set assistant back then."

"C'mon Nick," Maya cut in, elbowing Phoenix with a wink, "Penny and I stayed in touch to trade Steel Samurai cards, remember?"

Apollo was looking around at the small group, examining the remaining four. "All of you seem familiar," he said, then frowned. "Aren't... Aren't you all regulars at the Wonder Bar?"

"I wouldn't say 'regular'," a short, androgynous youth with an impressively muscular build scoffed, looking at their pink-painted nails. "I only go when I can afford to."

One of the only two males of the group, pale with platinum blond hair, giggled at Apollo, apparently ignoring his friend. "Well, how could we not?" he said. "We heard so many good things about the Gramarye show!"

"They're all fans!" Trucy squealed in delight, pulling on her brother's arm as she bounced excitedly at his side. "Of us!"

Apollo gave her a frown. "I gathered that," he pointed out.

"I should probably explain," Maggey said, giving Apollo and Phoenix, though Apollo in particular, an apologetic smile. "Like I said, all of us meeting up was kind of last minute, and mostly unplanned..." She then specifically turned to Apollo. "I wanted to warn you earlier, Steel... but I
figured you'd probably panic and you had enough stress with the trial and all."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, wondering what Maggey was talking about, while Apollo gave her a suspicious frown, warily asking, "Warn me of what?"

Maggey took a deep breath, then gestured to the assembled group. "We're... Well, essentially, this is the first meeting of the entire semi-official Phoenix Wright Fan Club."

Apollo went pale, feeling everyone's eyes on him. "Oh."

View the Court Record
Phoenix immediately broke into uproarious laughter. "So that's what Trucy meant by 'Apollo's people'!" he cried.

Apollo spun around to glare at his father, turning red with embarrassment. "Dad!"

Ignoring his son, Phoenix was already turning to Maya with an amused look. "So this is your 'official fan club', is it?"

"Semi-official," Maya corrected with a wink. "And I'd be careful about letting that pride go to your head if I were you, old man."

"It used to be a lot bigger before you lost your badge, Mister Nick," Pearl pointed out somewhat nervously.

Meanwhile, Clay was running around Trucy to throw an arm over Apollo's shoulders, giving his friend a smirk. "And what's this I hear about your username being 'Steel Justice Lover'?" he laughed. "Is it even possible to think up a name lamer than that?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "What are you talking about, Starbuck Fan Three-thousand?" he shot back. "You helped me come up with it, moron."

Clay paused, surprised. "I did?"

The androgynous youth huffed to themself. "Why didn't you ever tell us who you really were?" they demanded of Apollo, still managing to seem intimidating despite their height. "What kind of jerk lies like that for... well, however long you were planning to wait to tell us!"

Apollo resisted the urge to give his father a pointed look.

Pearl looked unimpressed. "We already explained that, Drewby," she said, slightly pointing her nose into the air.

"I thought it was pretty obvious why," Aria pointed out. "We're a fanclub all about Mister Wright, so what reason does his kid have to admit who he is?"

The young adult backed down at that, and Apollo found he wasn't surprised to learn the confrontational youth was the argumentative Drewby.

"Well, thank you all for being fans!" Phoenix said with a proud grin, ignoring Maya rolling her eyes at him. "I'm astonished you still exist as a group this long after the mess seven years ago!"

"That was all thanks to Blackbird, really!" a motherly-looking woman insisted, giving Maggey a warm smile. "She warned some of us the first forum was going to shut down, so we had time to exchange contact information and keep in touch!"

"Some of us," Apollo quietly repeated, crossing his arms.
"Now now, don't gripe," Maya gently scolded him with a smile. "We got you in touch with Maggey, didn't we?"

"After roundly mocking me for being a part of the fanclub you started," Apollo replied, raising an eyebrow.

Luke shook his head. "No, that was Papa doing the mocking," he corrected, "not Maya."

After a short pause, Apollo rolled his eyes and sighed. "Y'know, I'm not surprised."

Phoenix scoffed, giving his sons an innocent grin. "Now come on, you two act like I don't respect you or something!"

"Oh, you do?" Apollo asked with a smile. "Could've fooled us."

Adrian adjusted her glasses nervously. "We don't want to keep you if you're busy, Mister Wright," she told Phoenix. "I imagine you'll be looking forward to home after spending so long in the detention centre."

Phoenix waved her concern off. "Don't worry about me, Ms Andrews; It was only a few days. Besides," he shot a smirk at Apollo, "how could I keep little Apollo from his friends?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Ah, yes, more of that fatherly respect we're all so used to hearing from you," he deadpanned, though a small smile tugged at the corners of his mouth.

"Speaking of," Maggey spoke up with an apologetic wince, "I hope you're not mad about this, Steel. I mean, I promised to keep your secret, and that's all blown out of the water now..."

"It's fine," Apollo sighed, looking a little tired. "Besides, after Pearly's slip up..."

"I said I was sorry!" Pearl cried, hands clutched together as she gave Apollo a sad look. "I tried to take out real names before anyone else saw them!" Maya smiled sympathetically as she reached out to rub the teen's arm comfortingly.

Apollo shook his head. "No, no, I already forgave you for that. It was an honest mistake." He returned his attention to the rest of the club members. "I mean, it was kind of an open secret by now anyway, right? You all knew who I was."

Aria grinned. "Since Trucy invited me to your debut performance!" she boasted.

"You forgotten you posted a picture of yourself a grand total of once?" the blond man laughed, crossing his arms. "Man, Blackbird told me off when she realised I'd figured it out!"

Apollo blushed, looking away as he remembered the photo he and Pearl had taken, as part of his attempt to re-introduce her to the fan-club. It had been up barely a day before he took it down, scared of the awkward questions it had attracted.

"Yeah, that was when I realised, too," Penny said with an embarrassed shrug. "I even got all 'angry mod' on you before Blackbird told me what was going on."

"Me three," Adrian added, holding up her hand. "I was going to tell you who I was at Mister Edgeworth's party a couple years back, but..." She brushed at her fringe, glancing at Maggey. "Well, I guess I lost my nerve."

Maggey leaned towards Apollo with a wink. "Miss 'CelestialImpacts' here figured out who I was
thanks to you!” she giggled. Adrian blushed as Apollo hid a smile himself.

The motherly-looking woman gave Luke a fond smile. "I must admit, I was concerned when you were posting about your brother being on trial," she explained. "When I saw those real names Precious accidentally posted, I... looked them up."

"Me too," Drewby muttered, looking away as they rubbed an arm guiltily. "The only surname that fit what you'd told us was 'Wright'. It wasn't hard to figure out." Biting their lip, the young adult glanced between Apollo and Pearl. "You guys know I was kidding about the 'blackmail' thing, right?"

The last of the group, a tall stick of a man who had been quiet up until now, ran a hand through his hair with a wince. "Uh... I guess I'm just thick, 'cause I honestly had no idea before today."

The group chuckled at that, the motherly woman giving him a hug and saying. "Aw, don't beat yourself up, Thunder! Everyone misses little things like that!"

Maya giggled, poking Phoenix in the side. "Y'know Nick, this calls for a celebration! Whaddaya say we do the traditional thing?"

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "This isn't exactly a small group, Maya. I doubt he'd appreciate that."

Trucy watched them with a surprised look. "You had a tradition, Mommy?"

"You bet we did!" Maya replied with a wink. "Didn't we, Pearly?"

Pearl nodded enthusiastically. "After every trial, Mister Nick took Mystic Maya and I to get noodles and burgers!" she explained, then paused and added, "Almost every trial, I mean."

"Oh yeah!" Apollo cried with a smile, looking to Clay and Luke as he said, "That's why Mister Eldoon knows Maya!"

"As long as I'm not paying for it," Phoenix sighed, crossing his arms. "And I don't think anyone else but you could eat full servings of both noodles and burgers."

"We don't want to impose," Penny insisted. "If it's a problem, we can just go to a park or something."

Maya scoffed. "Of course it's not a problem!" she cried. "There's only! Hang on." She paused, visibly counting the number of people in their group. "Fourteen of us! Mister Eldoon won't mind!" Before Phoenix could object, she was turning to her online friends with a grin. "Oh, everyone here likes noodles, right?"

During the walk to Guy Eldoon's noodle cart, the Wrights, Feys and Fan Club all split into smaller groups to talk. Maggey finally explained to Apollo that, once she'd mentioned Phoenix's arrest online, all the other forum-goers had sprung into action, looking up his trial dates and making arrangements to be there in person... and the excitement had only doubled once Precious announced she would be there with My-Fairy and the Wright children. With everyone except the absent Steel confirming they would go, Maggey felt she had no choice but to admit he was defending, especially after his brief panic to her the previous day over taking the reins of the case from his boss. Maya had
moaned to Phoenix about how none of the Wrights had contacted her or Pearl directly over the arrest, with Pearl only discovering by chance through the forum, though Phoenix had just rolled his eyes and ignored her, muttering that she knew his reasons for keeping quiet better than anyone and they had already discussed this only two days ago Maya.

Clay was very enthusiastic about meeting Apollo's online friends, saying it was a bit of a shock to find Luke and Trucy in the middle of a group when he caught up to them, not to mention the surprise of learning who exactly they were. Luke and Aria, the latter of whom Apollo was still confused over calling 'Ms Holliday' or 'Pocky', were very eager to catch up, as she had been a relatively regular client for him in the years before he left for university (apparently there had been too much fuss over the trial for them to chat earlier). Trucy seemed content to cling to Apollo's arm, although he noticed her frequently sending pleased grins at Phoenix and Maya, arm-in-arm ahead of them. Pearl, behind them, was engrossed in conversation with the motherly-looking woman, who had introduced herself to Apollo as "Liztropical, but just 'Liz' is fine - It's my name, after all!".

Of the other members of the fanclub, they individually re-introduced themselves to their friend once the group had arrived at Eldoon's, the small cart's owner happily preparing bowls for everyone in his tiny 'kitchen'. The tall, quiet man was Thunderdome, though he insisted it was awkward to call him that offline and preferred to go by 'Max' instead. The blond, somewhat forward man was ForgetMeKnot, though he had laughed that 'Knot' wasn't all that different from his given name 'Knox', so he didn't mind what people called him. The young woman who Maya had called 'Penny' introduced herself as Dime_Quarters, who had been outed only the previous year as an accomplished director at Global Studios - That she had met Phoenix and Maya there on their first investigation together was both surprising and not surprising. Adrian had only given Apollo a wink before confirming she was CelestialImpacts online, though she objected to being nicknamed 'Celeste' by the others and Apollo thought it would be awkward to call her anything other than her name anyway.

To Apollo's relief, after the initial meeting in the courthouse, most of his online friends were happy to leave alone the subject of his long-held 'secret identity'; Only Drewby, who seemed frustrated about it, and Max, who was just confused, brought it up before the night was over, and, once Apollo had given them apologies and explained how he'd been a teenager terrified of being abandoned, they eventually accepted that the past was past and moved on. Drewby themself, who Apollo learned preferred being gender-neutral even in their daily life, seemed especially surprised to hear his reasoning, giving Apollo an odd look before hurriedly exiting the conversation. Apollo had been too distracted to chase his friend up by Clay loudly proclaiming he was prepared to spill all of Apollo's most embarrassing moments to whoever would listen, forcing the young lawyer to tackle him. Their brief brawl had to be called to a halt by Luke, who dragged the two of them to their feet by their ears and glared at them until they both apologised.

It was Penny who first asked Trucy and Apollo about their magic act, concerned they might miss a performance. "Oh, don't worry!" Trucy assured her. "We arranged to take a break from performing until after the trial!"

"Specifically, tomorrow," Apollo elaborated. "That gave us time to extend it if something went badly today." He then paused, reaching for the pin holding his cape around his shoulders. "Actually, that reminds me," he said, gripping the fabric firmly with one hand as he unclipped the pin, holding it out to his sister. "You can have that back."

Trucy just nodded, taking the pin and swapping it with the safety pin holding her own cape together. "You want my safety pin?"

"I'll just take it off," Apollo replied, pulling off his cape carefully to avoid accidentally whacking it against somebody.
A moment later, Luke was at Apollo's side, holding out his satchel. "I'll look after it," he offered.

Apollo nodded, giving his brother a grateful smile as he quickly folded up the crimson fabric and deposited it in Luke's bag.

Liz sighed as she watched the siblings, standing with Maya and Phoenix as she caught up with her old friend My-Fairy. "Seeing that makes me wish I had such a good relationship with my sister," she said, giving the pair a smile. "You must be such proud parents!"

Phoenix blushed, rubbing at the back of his head. "Well, who wouldn't be?" he muttered.

Maya just looked away uncomfortably. "Trucy calls me 'Mommy', but I'm not their mom," she quietly explained. "Don't get me wrong, I'm proud of 'em, but..." As Phoenix pulled her close to his side, watching her with concern, she forced a smile and shook her head. "It's complicated."

"Doesn't look like it to me," Liz said, giving Maya a warm smile, followed by a joking wink. "But I guess you've tended to downplay your relationship with Mister Wright, too."

Phoenix snorted as he failed to hide a laugh, while Maya just blushed.

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One by one, the assembled group around Eldoon's Noodles had separated, leaving for their own homes. The Wrights and Feys, sticking closer together as their friends new and old gradually left, waved their goodbyes and finally moved on, headed back to the tiny office and the equally small apartment attached to it, parting ways with Clay as Apollo elected to stay with his family a little longer. They filed in to the office in a line, Luke at the head as he unlocked everything that had been carefully closed up that morning. While Phoenix had headed to his computer, pulling off his beanie with a relieved sigh, Maya had made herself busy instructing Apollo, Luke, Trucy and Pearl to move the various pieces of furniture and piles of magic props littering the room, clearing a space in the middle of the floor that she quickly filled with every spare blanket and pillow from the linen cupboard.

When Phoenix next looked up, he was almost surprised to see everyone sat in a pile on the cushioned floor, all centred around Trucy. Luke's satchel and Apollo and Trucy's hip-bags were tossed onto the sofa nearby with Trucy's hat and cape, while Maya and Pearl had cast off their oversized sunglasses and hats. While Maya's bun was already back in place, Pearl was taking a little longer to move her hair-loops to once again point upwards.

Apollo sighed as he cast a glance over to the silver-framed portrait of Zak Gramarye, looking down on them from the top of the piano. "Y'know, of all the things I thought might happen today... he was at the very bottom of the list."

Trucy sadly nodded, mutely staring at the floor in front of her.

"Did you work it out during the trial?" Luke asked his brother.

Apollo thought a moment, then nodded. "I didn't want to know at first," he admitted. "The moment part of me worked it out... I just refused to think about it until I got out of the courtroom."

"It was an awful shock," Pearl agreed, finishing her fiddling with her hair. "He finally came back, only for Mister Gavin to kill him like that?"

Maya, sitting slightly behind Trucy, wrapped her arms around the teen in a comforting hug, pulling her head to rest on Maya's shoulder. "My mom did the same thing: Disappeared for seventeen years, only to get murdered when she finally tried to come back... and I didn't even find out until after."

"I just wonder why it took him so long," Luke bitterly added, crossing his arms. "How could he abandon Trucy the way he did and not even try to track her down for so long?"

Pearl noticed Apollo give Luke an odd look, and explained, "Mister Nick told us where his file for that case was; Luke was reading it all of yesterday."

"Who deliberately leaves their child alone like that!?" Luke demanded, turning to Apollo. "He even got Trucy to help him abandon her, and just left her without any kind of friend or guardian! If it wasn't for Papa, she'd still be alone out there!"
"I know; I've read that file, too," Apollo pointed out, raising an eyebrow. He then paused, tapping at his bracelet in thought. "Wait... it's been seven years, hasn't it? Like, exactly seven years?"

"Yesterday was the anniversary of his disappearance," Luke replied, still pouting to himself. "Today's exactly seven years and one day since his trial."

Pearl gave Apollo a curious look. "Why? Is there something significant about that?"

Apollo nodded. "It's a legal thing," he explained. "Missing persons are declared legally dead once seven years has passed."

Maya frowned. "So he was still legally alive for two days after his murder." She clutched Trucy tighter, the teen still unresponsive to the conversation. "I'd ask why that didn't apply to my mother, but I suppose she was just in hiding, not missing."

Luke's pout faded, his arms moving into a self-hug. "If mine weren't already both legally dead..." he quietly mused.

"Do you think he knew about that law?" Apollo wondered aloud, not hearing his brother. "Was he trying to establish he was still around to extend the deadline?"

"'Dead'-line?" Luke repeated with a grimace. "Bad choice of words there."

The five sat on the floor suddenly heard a clearing throat, and looked up towards the desk, where Phoenix was getting up from his chair. "And that sounds like a cue for me to come in," he said, rounding the desk to approach the group. "I did make a lot of promises that I'd explain everything once the trial was over."

The moment Phoenix had lowered himself to the nest of blankets and pillows, Trucy tore herself away from Maya, jumping to Phoenix's side and clinging to his hoodie. "Was he going to come back?! He was going to see me, right?! Did he come to one of our shows?! He wasn't going to take me away, was he?!"

After a moment of surprise at Trucy's demands for knowledge, Phoenix held up his hands, giving his daughter a stern stare as he interrupted her avalanche of questions. "Truce, calm down. I have a lot of explanations to give as it is, so let me lay them out in an ordered fashion and everyone's happy."

Trucy stared for a moment before her grip on Phoenix's jumper loosened, eyes shining with tears. Maya crawled along the cushioned floor, picking a spot that would sandwich Trucy between her and Phoenix, and guided the teen to once again lean on her shoulder. Trucy didn't protest, sniffling to herself as her tears spilled on Maya's borrowed hoodie.

Phoenix sighed, wondering if he'd been a bit harsh trying to calm his daughter down. "Truce, I didn't mean to sound so angry there. I'll explain everything now, okay? I promise."

Although she didn't look up, Trucy bit her lip to hide a small smile, and reached out behind her with a free hand, which Phoenix took to hold with a grateful look, his thumb running back and forth along her fingers.

Apollo couldn't help but find the picture in front of him odd, with Maya still in one of Phoenix's hoodies, identical to the one Phoenix himself was wearing.

"I guess there's no better place to start than the beginning," Phoenix began, looking around at the small group; Pearl, Luke and Apollo glanced at each other before edging closer, forming a tighter circle. "Thursday night, just as usual, I left the Wonder Bar and headed off to work. It was pretty
quiet, poker-wise... wasn't expecting anything major to happen. Kristoph showed up around midnight, and we were sat together about an hour eating dinner."

Apollo nodded, eager to hear something new; So far, Phoenix was just repeating what they'd heard in court.

"It would have been around one in the morning that Kristoph left," Phoenix continued, staring off into the distance with a frown. "Five minutes later, a pair of strange men appeared at my table... wanting to talk."


Phoenix nodded. "Though I didn't recognise him at first, one was a Mister Shadi Enigmar, as you might have guessed," he explained. "The other was some kind of reporter; A friend of his who was a public notary. Long gone by the time of the murder, of course."

"That's odd," Apollo pointed out, pressing a finger to his forehead in thought. "If he wanted to publicly reveal himself with a news report, why hasn't that story broken yet? And why'd he bring the guy to see you?"

"I'll get to that," Phoenix said, a half-smile on his lips. "Mister Enigmar, or Smith as he insisted on being called, told me he was there for two reasons. One... was to 'settle a score', if I correctly recall his exact wording."

"The poker game?" Pearl asked.

Apollo frowned. "You mean he was still upset you beat him seven years ago!?" he cried in disbelief. "That's why he went to so much trouble trying to ruin your reputation!? Again!?"

Phoenix just bitterly chuckled. "Apparently, I share that honour with only one other person." He looked between Apollo and Trucy. "You two's grandfather."

After a pause, Trucy twisted her head around to give Phoenix a curious look. "Grandpa Magnifi...?"

"I suppose it bugged him that I had managed to win despite lacking the 'Gramarye power'," Phoenix continued. "He'd decided he was going to win this time, at any cost."

Maya frowned disapprovingly, but said nothing, firmly stroking Trucy's hair.

Apollo opened his mouth to question the phrase 'Gramarye power', but reasoned it wasn't that big a logical leap that his and Trucy's unusual skill ran in their family, so he shut up.

"But, before all that," Phoenix said, "Mister Smith had one other thing he wanted me to do... and, in return, he was willing to talk for a while, and answer a few questions."

"One of them was about Trucy, right?" Luke asked, glancing worriedly at his sister. "He was planning to visit her, wasn't he?"

Phoenix didn't reply immediately, glaring at nothing in particular. "No," he admitted. "He wasn't."

Trucy almost jumped, snapping her head around to face Phoenix with enough force to pull her off Maya's shoulder, her eyes wide in shock.

"He what!?" Apollo cried in outrage, fists clenched as he longed to punch the man who had put his family through so much. "How can he finally show himself in public and not visit Trucy!??"
"Exactly my thoughts on the subject," Phoenix calmly replied, his words calming his son down all on their own. "He only said it was too risky, even for her." He closed his eyes. "Considering what happened, he may have had a point."

Trucy said nothing, turning back to rest her head on Maya's shoulder.

Apollo and Luke exchanged glances. "You seemed unsure in your notes," Luke spoke up, "whether or not Mister Gavin really had been Zak Gramarye's first attorney."

"Because there aren't any records," Apollo pointed out. "But, like, nothing pointed to anyone else, either."

"It was Kristoph," Phoenix insisted, his gaze flicking between his sons. "We still can't prove it, but... Zak recognised him after they crossed paths. Knew his name."

Pearl gasped, a hand flying to her mouth.

"So your comment in court about them 'passing in the hall' was more than just speculation," Apollo realised.

Phoenix nodded. "I should have questioned him at the time, but we'd just finished a long discussion and were heading down the Hydeout by then," he explained. "I'd run out of time, and didn't even know it."

[View the Court Record]
"What did you spend so long talking about?" Luke asked.

Phoenix smiled. "Trucy, mostly," he chuckled. "Although we touched on Apollo a little, too."

Apollo blinked in surprise. "You told him about me?"

"Only a little," Phoenix assured him. "Just enough to get him to tell me what he knew."

Pearl and Trucy shared a confused glance. "About what?" Pearl asked.

Phoenix grinned a moment in amusement, then stared off into the distance as his smile faded. Instead of answering the question, he turned to Apollo. "Zak didn't know him very well," he said, "but your father was performing with the Gramaryes, as a guest in their show. That's how he met your mother."

Apollo froze, staring back at Phoenix with wide eyes. 'M-my... father?'

"As we already knew, they got married and Thalassa left the Troupe for a while," Phoenix continued. "Zak never knew about you before he died, but he did say that Thalassa was missing one of those bracelets of hers when she returned."

Apollo felt everyone's eyes on him, but couldn't tear his own from Phoenix, one hand reaching to his bracelet.

Phoenix paused, looking between Apollo and Trucy. "He also explained a little more to me about this 'power' of you two's... The Gramarye ability to see through lies."

"Mommy had it too?" Trucy asked, perking up a little from Maya's side.

"Yep," Phoenix replied with a nod. "Zak said he was just repeating to me how Thalassa had once explained it to him: It's... reacting to 'tension', basically."

Luke frowned. "Tension?" he repeated. "You mean, body tension?"

"Exactly," Phoenix replied. "Most everyone tenses up somewhere at least a little when they lie. Without even knowing it, someone of the Gramarye line will mirror that tension when they see it."

Apollo thought a moment, clutching his bracelet tightly. "That makes sense," he said. "We just... felt it when something was wrong."

Trucy nodded in agreement, sitting up properly next to Maya as she eagerly waited for more news with a grin. "What else did Daddy say, Daddy!?"

Phoenix laughed at the sight of his daughter's excited face. "Ah, just a little something I suspect our dear Polly already knew all about," he said, looking to Apollo with a grin. "Something to do with a certain bracelet."
Blushing madly, Apollo clung to the golden 'ring' on his wrist. "Eh heh... I probably know a lot less about it than you think..."

"What does the bracelet have to do with anything?" Pearl asked, hands neatly folded in her lap.

Luke looked thoughtful, tapping his chin.

"Apparently, those bracelets are made of a special alloy," Phoenix explained. "They expand and shrink, just a little, in reaction to body warmth."

Apollo stared down at the object on his arm, frowning in thought. "That's why it's so difficult to get off and on," he realised.

"They make an exact fit to your wrist," Phoenix continued, looking to Apollo. "Then, when you tense up in reaction to someone else... the bracelet feels tighter."

Luke smiled. "I suspected there was something to do with the bracelet," he said. "You always grab it when you say someone's lying, Apollo!"

"I do...?" Apollo muttered in reply.

Trucy pouted at her older brother, crossing her arms. "That's why you were always better at spotting lies than me!" she cried. "Cause Mommy gave you one of her bracelets and not me!?"

Maya's eyebrows furrowed, her hands clinging together firmly. "I'm sure she had a reason for not leaving you the other one, Trucy," she calmly pointed out.

"And that's not all there is to it," Phoenix picked up, giving Trucy a warning look to calm down and listen. "The bracelet only tells Apollo when to focus; Actually spotting the lie is something you both do."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "You mean there's more to it than that?"

"Actually, I'm surprised I didn't put the pieces together sooner," Phoenix continued with a smile. "I don't suppose any of you have heard of 'kinetic vision', have you?"

"I have!" Luke piped up with a grin. "Athletes have that, right? If they focus, they can see a moving ball like it was stopped!"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "We're not athletes," he pointed out.

"Not all athletes have it," Phoenix corrected, trying to hide an amused laugh. "And it's certainly not just athletes, either. It's primarily the ability to focus... to see even the faintest twitch in the face, Zak said, as well as the meaning behind it."

Trucy opened her mouth to say something, then paused, frowning in thought.

"But it's difficult to hold that kind of focus," Phoenix continued. "Thus, the bracelets, to tell you when to do it."

There was a short pause as everyone mused on the new information. Apollo had a finger pressed to his forehead in thought. "So... that's the real reason Trucy thought I was better at it?" he asked. "Because I had the bracelet to tell me when to 'focus', and she had to work it out on her own?"

Phoenix nodded, then looked to the quiet teen at his side. "That's probably why I didn't know about your 'power' until the first night I took you to the Borscht Bowl Club," he explained. "Working out
Still frowning into the distance, Trucy absently nodded.

There was another short pause. Maya ran her hands through her hair. "So... was that all he told you?"

Phoenix sighed. "There was more," he admitted. "We spoke for a long time before finally heading to the Hydeout." He closed his eyes. "I'm... going to have to admit I'm not prepared to tell you all of it right now."

"We did have a very busy day today," Pearl pointed out.


Phoenix thought a moment. "I did ask him about Magnifi's murder," he admitted.

Trucy seemed a little startled to hear that. "Daddy didn't do it, did he!?"

"Of course not," Phoenix assured her, shaking his head with a small smile. "He... belatedly answered all the questions he should have answered seven years ago."

Apollo and Luke shared another look, both mentally pinning the true culprit. 'It couldn't have been anyone else but Valant,' Apollo mused.

Trucy shifted closer to Phoenix, giving him a hug. Her expression was looking sad again, thinking of her birth father without the distraction of another subject to talk about.

"Maybe, when the pain isn't so fresh," Maya offered, rubbing Trucy's back with a comforting smile, "you can come visit me and Pearly, and I'll channel him for you. How's that sound?"

Trucy didn't immediately react, thinking for a moment before looking back at Maya with a grateful look. "I'd like that, Mommy." Although she kept one arm clinging to Phoenix, she reached out with the other to grab Maya, pulling her adoptive parents together in a small group hug.

Maya giggled, then gestured to Pearl, Apollo and Luke, beckoning them closer. Pearl and Luke grinned as they leapt forward to join the hug, though Apollo was a little more hesitant, rolling his eyes and hiding a smile before crawling over to join the laughing pile in the middle of the blankets and pillows.

"So, uh, what do we do now?"

The rest of the family, lying about on the blankets, variously twisted to look in Apollo's direction. "What do you mean?" Luke asked.

Apollo shrugged. "Well, um, I guess I mean 'what do I do now'," he mumbled, staring at the ceiling. "I still want to be a defence attorney, and I just lost my job. Who would even hire me once they find out I put my own boss away for murder?"

"Someone who knew you were doing the right thing," Phoenix replied, watching Apollo with concern. "There are still people out there who care about that over 'winning' in court."
"Maybe," Apollo sighed, unconvinced.

Trucy frowned, sharing a look with Pearl.

Maya grinned. "Well, why not work here?" she asked, gesturing to the office around them.

Apollo finally tore his eyes away from the ceiling, glaring at his adoptive mother. "I already work here," he pointed out. "As a magician."

"Well, why can't you work here as a lawyer too?" Maya asked with a cheeky wink. "My sis and Nick here never had a problem with that!"

"To be fair, this was a law office at the time," Phoenix laughed in reply. "We closed it down when we ran out of lawyers!"

Luke nodded, frowning worriedly. "And it's not called the Wright Talent Agency for nothing," he agreed. "I can't work here as a vet either, only as a violinist."

Trucy began to smile excitedly as she picked up on Maya's train of thought. "Then we'll change the name!" she declared. "That way, we can all work here, with everything we can do!"

"We can't change the name!" Apollo cried, scandalised. "We'd lose our existing customer base, and no matter what we chose as a new name, who in their right mind would look for a lawyer or vet in a talent agency, or a musician or magician in an office?"

Trucy scoffed at her brother's concerns, shaking her head.

"Apollo has a point," Luke agreed. "Besides, I couldn't work here as a vet anyway; I would need a practise room and a full stock of equipment for that."

"Then we just add Apollo's law career," Phoenix suggested with a shrug. "Any ideas for a good middle-ground between Wright Talent Agency and Wright Law Offices?"

There was a very long pause as everyone thought hard.

"You... could run them both?" Pearl suggested. "In the same office?"

Maya shook her head. "I think that would just be more confusing than anything. Better to stick with one."

"I don't think we can mix office and agency," Trucy decided, then grinned cheekily. "Let's stick with Agency! It's just Polly being difficult about it, after all!"

"I am not!" Apollo protested, pouting at his sister.

"And we should definitely keep Wright at the beginning," Luke picked up. He smiled to himself, looking almost sheepish. "We... could go with Wright Family Agency. That covers all of us for everything, doesn't it?"

Phoenix smiled for a moment before something seemed to occur to him and he frowned. "Yes, but only the four of us," he pointed out. "Should we ever want to hire anyone else, we'd just run into the same problem."

Pearl seemed surprised. "Hire someone?" she repeated. "Who?"

Phoenix chuckled. "Well, one particular young psychologist-lawyer-in-training comes to mind..."
Luke immediately perked up. "Oh! Athena!" he cried, and giggled. "Yeah, it would be great to bring her here!"

"Huh," Apollo mumbled, smiling despite himself. "I can't believe I forgot... I promised Athena I'd work with her someday! Here would be perfect!"

"Glad to see you're warming up to the idea!" Maya pointed out with a cheeky grin.

Apollo immediately plastered a forced frown on his face and looked away.

"Ooh! Ooh!" Trucy cried, bouncing into a sitting position to look down on her assembled family with glee. "I just got the best idea!"

"What?" Pearl asked, already smiling with anticipation. "What is it?"

"The Wright Anything Agency!" she announced. "We could expand our business to do any odd jobs people have for us, not just music or magic or law! And the name's similar enough to the old one that we won't lose regular customers!" She looked to her father and brothers expectantly. "Well?"

Luke thought a moment, then nodded his approval. "That's a great idea, Trucy!"

Phoenix grinned. "Sounds good to me," he agreed.

Everyone turned to Apollo, waiting for his thoughts, and he sighed loudly as though it were a great effort to do so. "I suppose it's okay," he admitted.

Trucy and Pearl cheered with glee, while Maya gave everyone a grin. "Well then, I guess we've got a grand re-opening to celebrate!"

Phoenix jokingly held up a hand as though it were holding a wine glass. "To the Wright Anything Agency!" he called. Everyone else, even the reluctantly smiling Apollo, cheered in reply.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
The Real Names Club

The Revived PW Fan-Club Forum!
Home > Phoenix Wright Himself
Thread: After that trial yesterday...

BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN], 04/21/2026 10:27:38AM
It was all very exciting to finally get to meet each other IRL, but that does cause a significant problem: NAMES. All of us exchanged at least our first names with each other yesterday, so it seems wrong to just switch back to usernames. SO. Why not just use our real names? We all know each other here, and this is a private forum anyway, so who's gonna bug us about it? So, yes, feel free to just call me Maggey here (and don't spell it wrong, please!)
While I'm at it, it seems a few of us had met the Wrights before today, and it's not something we've spoken about here, or had time to explain yesterday... so, why not talk about it here? :) I'll start: As some of you probably remember, I used to be a police officer. I went through training (met my husband there, but that's another story!), earned my police badge, and started a regular shift. At the time, I also had a boyfriend, Dustin, another new police officer I met in training. To make a long story short... Dustin got murdered, and I was blamed. I'd been a fan of Mr Wright for a while (and this was BEFORE the fanclub!), so I put through my request to him. To my surprise, he accepted! He was so nice about it, listening to my story, asking questions... then he gave me a confident smile and said he'd get me out of there in no time! I still have a business card he gave me with his cell number, to call if I remembered anything else! The trial was a bit of a fiasco thanks to the actual murderer hitting poor Mr Wright over the head with a fire extinguisher, but he managed to keep his promise in the end!
(Needless to say, I also met Maya/My-Fairy at the same time, when she was Mr Wright's assistant!) I didn't become friends with Mr Wright or Maya for another full year after that, though. I'd been fired from the force despite being proven innocent, so I took up a job as a waitress and, just my luck, got myself caught up in another murder... I didn't even realise the guy defending me wasn't even the real Mr Wright! Well, after a month or two in jail, the REAL Mr Wright found out what happened and got me out again. Since then, we've been casual friends, although I don't meet up with him or Maya all that often.
So, how about you guys? Join the Real Name Club, and lay down your story if you have one!

ForgetMeKnot, 04/21/2026 10:48:03AM
Gee, I was gonna tell people not to worry about it and just call me Knot, but if you're so eger to switch 'Maggey'... sure, you guys can call me Knox if you wanna!
I hadn't really met the Wrights before yesterday. I mean, I went to Apollo and Artemis' show out of curiosity, liked it enough to come back when I could, approached them a couple times after to tell em they were great... never met Mr Wright, though I saw the brother in passing. He was Luke, wans't he? Lemme know if I'm wrong, Steel.

Dime_Quarters [MOD], 04/21/2026 11:52:14AM
My story's not all that exciting. I mean, a certain few of you were determined enough to work out my job that it wouldn't have been hard to figure out my real name from that. I mean, sure, we're friends... so Penny it is.
I've never been friends with Mr Wright, though I did help him and Maya on a case. It was their first working together, I think. Maya was a fan of Steel Samurai (I think she talked Mr Wright into
defending WP when he asked them), and so was I, so we stayed in touch after to trade cards. I was only an assistant then, so all I did was tell them what I knew, but apparently it was enough to help. In fact, as I'm sure I've mentioned before, I'm only a mod here because Maya needed help setting this place up and promised me my own sub-forum in return. It may not exist anymore, but I like this community enough that I don't mind. :)

Pocky-Hockey, 04/21/2026 12:04:16PM
So are we getting banned if we don't joint he Real Name Club? Is it a new clique or something? j/k, you guys can call me Aria!
You guys already all know how I met the Wrights: I hired Luke to play the violin when a friend bailed on us, then Trucy invited me to her and Apollo's first performance together! :D

Thunderdome, 04/21/2026 01:14:30PM
I'm happy to join the Real Names Club. Call me Max.
I've been to the Wonder Bar a couple times, but I've never met the Wrights. I didn't want to bother them by chasing them after their show, either.
Also, I just want you guys to know... I don't post often, but I really appreciate your friendship. It was just amazing to get to meet you all in person, and to feel so accepted! :') I think that's a happy memory that won't ever fade.

Drewby, 04/21/2026 02:02:41PM
NOPE, NO WAY AM I JOINING YOUR 'CLIQUE'. CALL ME DREWBY OR DIE!
(please be obvious that i'm joking)
Same story with me. Haven't met 'em before yesterday. Been to the show a couple times. Actually, I think I got called up on stage once. Tried to steal Apollo's hat.

CelestialImpacts, 04/21/2026 03:30:01PM
Adrian here. My story is a bit of a complicated one... I was involved in a case or two of Mr Wright's back in the day. The first one was, I believe, the first case he 'lost', and it was explained to me years later that he was only defending that man in the first place because he was essentially being blackmailed. Relatedly, I didn't meet Maya until a year later, when she and Pearl entrusted something to me that got stolen by Mask DeMasque.

Liztropical, 04/21/2026 04:06:10PM
Ah, I think I remember seeing a volunteer who tried to steal Apollo's hat. That was you, Drew?
You guys already call me Liz, so I guess I'm the first to join this 'Real Names Club'? Haha!
I didn't know that about you, Adrian! That's actually very interesting!
Aw, Max, if only we were speaking in person so I could hug you!
I find it interesting Maggey, that yours is actually the -longest- story so far!

Precious-Fairy, 04/21/2026 5:26:48PM
I don't mind if you all want to call me Pearly. :) It will be nice to consider all of you real life friends
instead of just online ones!
I'm not sure how to talk about meeting Mr Nick. My-Fairy is my cousin, Mystic Maya, but she used to have a sister, who was Mr Nick's mentor. I met him the first day Mystic Maya took him to our home to visit. We helped him on all of his cases, until we had to leave the fan club because Mystic Maya was too busy. Then he lost his badge. We didn't see him for a long time after that, until he came to see us with Apollo, Luke and Trucy at Christmas. Trucy's my best friend, like a sister, even though we're first-cousins-once-removed! Luke's the smartest, and he's always very polite! Apollo always looks out for all four of us, and he likes to pretend we annoy him, but we know he's just playing. :) And ever since Mr Nick and Mystic Maya finally admitted they were special someones, we've seen a lot more of each other!

steeljusticelover, 04/21/2026 6:31:25PM
Geeze, you sure know how to compliment someone, don't you Pearly? ;)
Apollo here. It's kinda weird finally admitting that openly, but I guess it was just a matter of time. As for how I met Phoenix Wright... well, I was 15 at the time. Stuck in boarding school, all alone except for my friend Clay and the fanclub, until it imploded after the disbarment incident. That was a very lonely summer for me. Then, the second week of the school year, we got a surprise new student, named Luke. The three of us, me Clay and Luke, become best friends, spending all our time together... and then we found out that Luke was friends with the famous Phoenix Wright, who had sought him out after Luke's parents died. Luke took me along to meet him, and, to my surprise, a week later I had an offer of adoption in the mail. Once I found out who it was... well, I HAD to accept! Who wouldn't? For the first time in my life, I had a family... and one of them even turned out to be a blood relation, too!
We went to meet Maya and Pearly that first Christmas, and Maya told me the fanclub still existed, even if as a fraction of its former self. She gave me Maggey's number, but so much had changed in my life that I didn't think I'd be believed if I outright explained it all when I got my account back... then, I worried I'd be a target for constant questions about Dad, and what was going on with me, Luke and Trucy. So I kept quiet, and made up a story about being a friend of myself. But, you know, lies are hard to keep, and I slipped up a few times, talking about Trucy, or our show, or Pearly, Luke... or even Dad. I'm sorry for lying, there's no real excuse, but nobody lynched me yesterday, so I guess I'm forgiven?

The Revived PW Fan-Club Forum!
Home > Phoenix Wright Himself
Thread: ANNOUNCEMENT: Wright Anything Agency!
steeljusticelover "Apollo", 04/21/2026 06:34:23PM
Yes, you read that title right: The Wright Talent Agency is no more. In its place stands the WRIGHT ANYTHING AGENCY! Where you've always come to the WRIGHT place!
What's the Wright Anything Agency, I hear you ask? We're the number one destination for ANYTHING you need doing!
Need a magician? We're home to the famous duo Apollo and Artemis Gramarye!
Need a pianist or violin player? Phoenix and Luke will be more than happy to oblige!
Need someone to defend you in court? The fearless Apollo Wright will stand on your side!
Need anything else? Don't you worry! One of our agents will always be more than happy to help, no matter the task, any time of the day or night! Big or small, it doesn't matter; We only care that YOU
get the help you need!
So come on down to the Wright Anything Agency! You've always come to the WRIGHT place!
(co-written by Luke and Trucy Wright, art and logos by Phoenix Wright)
(And before anyone asks... no, we don't offer discounts to friends of the family ;) -Apollo)

BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN] "Maggey", 04/21/2026 07:17:14PM
Y'know, that does answer my question of what you planned to do now your old boss is in jail. That's quite a novel idea, actually. Who came up with it?

steeljusticelover "Apollo", 04/21/2026 07:26:16PM
Trucy, actually. I would have liked somewhere a bit more 'law office'y for my law career, but everyone else talked over me.

Precious-Fairy "Pearly", 04/21/2026 07:35:32PM
We did not! >[ You agreed to it!

Pocky-Hockey "Aria", 04/21/2026 07:54:43PM
I have been meaning to hire Luke for my choir's next performance. Looks like I have to find an excuse to hire you guys for something different some day! ;)


The Anything Agency's First Steps

Can you meet me at the office tomorrow morning?

Um I guess. Why?

I have a mission I've been neglecting, and I need an attorney's badge to investigate.

Mission? What mission?

I'm not lending you my badge, if that's what you're asking.

Don't worry, I'll explain tomorrow. See you at nine.

???

May 10, 9:04AM
Wright Anything Agency
Phoenix's Office

It had been nearly three weeks since Phoenix's trial, and Apollo was almost amazed at how quickly everything had returned to normal... or, at least, the new 'normal': Instead of spending his weekdays at Gavin Law Offices, then in the afternoon dropping by his apartment to change before meeting Trucy for their nightly show, he was now spending almost his entire day at his 'childhood home', leaving only to head off to the Wonder Bar with Trucy in the evening. The long-closed drawers of Phoenix's and Mia's casefiles were now opened, and Apollo's (so far) lone casefile added to the line... a small drop in an impressive history the young lawyer was determined to match one day. On his birthday the previous Thursday, the family had made the rare decision to close the office and spent the day 'on the town' - Trucy had ensured the day off was viable for their business by bringing along a stack of their brand new fliers to hand out to any and all passing strangers, practising their new pitch on her unsuspecting audiences. It had been hard at first to get used to the Agency's new title, and there had been a rash of calls and random people off the street coming in purely to ask what an 'Anything Agency' was, but it was easier to handle than the occasional visitor who'd wandered in over the past seven years looking for 'Wright & Co Law Offices'. 'Naturally,' Apollo thought, 'those confused people suddenly stop appearing now we ARE doing law again.'

Pushing open the door with its new sign (Trucy had taped the word 'anything' over 'talent', as a temporary measure until they got a new one), Apollo didn't pause as he strolled right through reception and into the office, finding his brother sat on the red couches, staring at a document on his laptop screen. "Hey, Luke."

Luke jumped, looking up at Apollo in surprise before recognising his brother and smiling widely. "You came!" he called, shutting his laptop and leaving it on the table. "I was getting worried you'd forgotten!"

"Course not," Apollo replied with a half-smile, watching Luke jump to his feet. "I am curious why you've called me to 'work' on a Sunday, though."

Shrugging in embarrassment, Luke grinned sheepishly. "Well, I needed to be off work at the shelter, and I didn't want to take you away from Papa and Trucy while the office was open..." He scratched
at a cheek. "I guess this investigation would be easier during the week, but we can always try again if today turns out to be a failure."

Apollo frowned, crossing his arms as he walked around the twin couches, closer to his brother. "That reminds me, what exactly are we doing today?"

Luke stared at him blankly for a moment. "You haven't guessed?"

"Obviously not," Apollo pointed out with a half-lidded glare. "What the hell is this 'mission' of yours that you're dragging me on?"

To Apollo's surprise, Luke seemed a little hurt by the question, and looked away as his expression turned carefully guarded. "You've forgotten," he said.

"F-forgotten what?" Apollo asked, eyes wide as he wondered what he'd done wrong. 'Has Luke mentioned it before? Why is he so upset I don't know!?!'

"I can't blame you, I suppose," Luke continued, not seeming to hear his brother as he wandered off towards Phoenix's desk. "It was seven years ago, after all."

Apollo was only feeling more and more lost, following his brother worriedly. "What? What is it? Luke?"

Luke sighed, leaning on the desk with his back to Apollo. "It's my mother, Apollo: Brenda Triton."

With a gasp, Apollo remembered: Although Luke's birth father had been confirmed dead for years (and they'd met him quite a few times now through Maya or Pearl channelling Clark for special occasions), Luke's mother was only legally deceased, as they knew her to be still alive but missing. Luke himself had searched for her for over a year before being forced to admit he'd hit a dead end, and his investigation was called to an abrupt halt. Apollo realised that, with the recent death of Zak Gramarye, Luke must have realised he finally had the tools to continue his long-dormant search (namely, Apollo's badge), and was hurrying into action before his own longed-for reunion met a similar fate to Trucy's. "Luke, I'm... I'm so sorry," Apollo whispered, approaching his brother and gently reaching out a hand to rest on Luke's shoulder. "I can't believe I forgot about that..."

"It's not your fault," Luke insisted, though he kept his gaze firmly on the desk he was leaning on. "We all forgot about her."

Before Apollo could say anything, Luke was spinning around, facing Apollo with a business-like stare. "We can pick up where I left off," he announced, the previous conversation seemingly forgotten. "I have a list of companies that made face-masks like the ones my dad saw, ordered by how suspicious I thought they were. "He pushed past his mutely stunned brother, to where his satchel rested on the couches. "I've been looking through it and crossing off any that have shut down since then, but there's still quite a lot left to investigate in person."

Meanwhile, Apollo had finally found his voice. "A-and what exactly will we be doing?" he asked. "What are we looking for?"

"I have some questions to ask them," Luke replied, hanging his satchel off his shoulder and turning back to Apollo with a determined look. "If they say no, we can tell them you're a lawyer and we're investigating a murder. It's technically true, after all."

Apollo wondered if Luke had picked up that particular trick of 'bending the truth' from Phoenix... or
maybe it was something anyone in regular contact with Trucy and Apollo naturally picked up eventually.

Luke pulled out a map from his satchel. "I've planned out three companies to visit today; With any luck, they'll all be open and readily answer our questions."

"Just out of curiosity," Apollo interrupted, a hand to his chin, "are you following this list from most to least suspicious, or...?"

At that, Luke finally smiled. "Least to most," he replied. "I think they'll be most open to answering questions, and we can more readily cross them off the list."

Apollo frowned. "You aren't going most to least?" he confirmed. "I'd've thought that would pin down the place you're looking for quicker."

Luke looked away for a few moments, apparently thinking. "I was going to," he admitted, "but I've had five long years to think about this, and I reconsidered." He looked up again, meeting Apollo's eyes with that same determined stare. "A company with something to hide will just turn us away outright; If we go most to least, we'll take longer to start ticking suspects off the list. I don't want to start this final stage of the investigation on such a low note."

After a few seconds of thought, Apollo nodded in agreement. "That sounds fair."

Before the two could even begin to head out, the door through to the kitchen slammed open, and a teenager in a blue cape jumped into the room, waving at her brothers. "Polly! Luke! Wait a minute!"


Apollo rolled his eyes. "Don't worry, we'll hand out fliers if you're that desperate for us to," he assured her with a sigh.

Trucy stared at him for a moment before giggling. "Okay! I wasn't going to ask that, though!"

Apollo blinked in surprise. "Uh-!?"

"If you guys are going out," she brightly continued, "can we go somewhere else first?"

"You want to come with us?" Apollo asked, confused.

Luke frowned, staring at his map. "Well, I suppose that's okay," he decided. "Where did you want to go?"

Trucy scoffed. "To visit Mommy, of course!"

Apollo was about to ask why before the reason hit him, and he gasped, "Oh!"

Luke was just confused, looking between his siblings. "Why?" he asked. "Has something happened with her recently?"

Apollo felt his face fall, sharing a glance with his puzzled sister. 'Oh dear lord, he doesn't know.' Blushing, he rubbed at the back of his neck. 'How on earth do I break THIS to him?!' "Uh, Luke... did... did you not realise what day you were starting this search for your mother on...?"

Trucy's eyebrows shot up. Apparently she hadn't known why her brothers were meeting at the office that morning.
"No...?" Luke replied, only looking even more lost than before. "I thought today was just a normal Sunday."

"Luke..." Trucy spoke up, giving him a worried look. "It's Mothers Day today. I thought that was what you and Polly were meeting about."

At first, there was no reaction from their brother, but then Luke frowned, looking away with a hard stare. "Oh."

Apollo looked to Trucy. "But didn't Maya say she was busy this weekend?" he quietly asked. "I thought you'd be waiting 'til next weekend to do anything."

Trucy only looked more worried, shaking her head. "I don't think she is," she said. "Remember after Daddy's trial, when we all had the sleepover in the office and talked about Daddy Zak and Mommy Thalassa?"

Apollo nodded. "Of course I do," he said, thinking back on that nearly-disastrous Monday three weeks ago. "Then Dad insisted Maya and Pearly had to go back to Kurain the next morning."

"But we haven't seen Mommy since then!" Trucy pointed out. "And she always says she's too busy to talk to us!"

"It's not exactly unusual for her to drop off the face of the earth for a few weeks," Apollo replied with a raised eyebrow. "She has a village and a channelling school to run, as well as all those highbrow social events she has to attend every so often... not to mention those ridiculous training sessions she's always doing to keep her skills up."

Trucy sighed, her hands clung together. "This is different," she insisted. "Mommy's avoiding us, I know she is! She must be upset because we were all talking about how much we miss our other mommies after Daddy's trial!"

Apollo didn't know how to respond for a moment. "Why would she be?" he asked. "We could all see how much you missed your other dad, and Dad isn't upset."

"With Daddy, it's official!" Trucy replied. "He adopted us and everything! Mommy can't, because Daddy won't let her ruin her reputation!"

"Kurain's reputation," Apollo corrected; Although it had never been outright explained to them, the Wright children had one-by-one worked out the truth behind the secrecy around the Feys on their own over the years... whether from research into Phoenix's past cases, a casual mention by Pearl, or just overhearing Phoenix and Maya arguing about it. "Besides, Luke and I are adults now, she can't legally adopt us! I'm not sure she could even adopt you without marrying Dad first!"

"And for them to do that, we'd have to clear Papa's name." Apollo and Trucy looked up in surprise to see Luke watching them, the map in his hands now folded up and in the middle of being returned to Luke's satchel. He looked up at them with a smile. "But in the meantime, a simple visit will suffice, won't it?"

View the Court Record
The mansion was quiet as the three Wright children let themselves in through the front door, looking around warily for any sign of activity; Although they had dropped in on Maya without warning before, it was never at a time she claimed to be busy... and, although they had glimpsed other inhabitants of the village at a distance, they had never met any, and none of the trio fancied meeting a Kurain elder for the first time in the halls of Fey Manor in the midst of something important.

"Coast seems clear," Apollo hissed, waving at his siblings as he peeked down the nearby hallway. Luke and Trucy nodded once before all three rushed to pull off their shoes.

Both Apollo and Trucy still found it a little awkward that they had dragged Luke away from the search for his birth mother to visit Maya, who Luke had been very clear over the years could never be his adoptive mother as she was to Trucy. Apollo had especially felt guilty that said search had already been delayed by five years, but Luke would have none of it when they tried to insist he stay behind, especially since he had never joined them to visit Maya on Mother's Day before: "Mum's survived this long, so she'll be able to wait a few more days," he had said. "Maya needs us right now, and I don't think my mum would complain if we saw to her first." Thus, he had tugged his siblings out the door and in the direction of the tiny village in the mountains.

Trucy pulled together her and Apollo's boots with Luke's work shoes, looking for a spot to hide them in the open room. "Do you think we can get away with just putting them in a corner?" she asked.

"If it's somewhere out of the way," Luke replied. "As long as they doesn't draw attention, I think we can safely assume they'll be overlooked."

As Trucy was nodding, already moving to shove the shoes in a hidden corner, the sound of sliding wood interrupted their conversation, and they all turned to see the previously-ignored door to the Winding Way opening, revealing behind it a short woman in purple robes, who watched the shocked trio with a mischievous grin. After a few seconds of staring, Maya gave them a wink. "Busted."

It became blatantly clear as Maya took the trio through into the dining room that her claim she was too busy to see them that day had been anything but true, as the house was silent as the grave save for Maya herself, who seemed almost gleeful that the three Wright children had shown up in her front room; Pearl, she explained, was out with school friends in the city that day, thus her absence from the manor. Apollo, Luke and Trucy had been too surprised, confused and guilty for being there to complain as Maya sat them down with the usual drinks she always prepared for them on their rare visits.

With the young trio supplied with glasses of juice and water in their line on one side of the table (Apollo in the middle with Luke on his right and Trucy his left), Maya plopped down opposite them.
with a grin. "So," she asked, hands held together, "what are you three doing here on a day you aren't supposed to be?"

There was a brief pause as the trio exchanged glances. "It was a mutual decision," Luke eventually said with a guarded tone. Apollo was almost surprised he hadn't immediately pinned the blame on Trucy, as it had been her idea originally. "We couldn't not come, no matter the risk."

"Today's important," Trucy added with a determined look. "Especially after Daddy's trial!"

Maya's smile faded a little as she nodded thoughtfully, avoiding their gazes suddenly.

"You've never been busy on Mother's Day before," Apollo continued, watching Maya carefully. "And it seems pretty clear you weren't busy this year either; You've always made time for us, no matter what else you had on."

Maya didn't immediately reply, her hands gripping her own glass of water. "Well, luckily for you, all my appointments today cancelled. I'm all yours."

Apollo felt Luke and Trucy immediately turn their gazes to him, and he couldn't blame them; They all knew from evidence more than any special skill that Maya was lying, even if Apollo was the only one to see her eyes flicker down to the magatama around her neck, whether at the thought of 'family' or possibly the memory of the locket that Phoenix had given to Trucy after the trial three weeks ago... That didn't mean any of them wanted to accept it, though. Unwilling to point the lie out himself, Apollo tapped a finger on his bracelet to signal Luke (under the table, the movement wouldn't be very clear to Maya) and gave Trucy a quick frown of disappointment, subtly shaking his head.

Luke sighed, looking away as he understood Apollo's unspoken message, but Trucy turned to Maya with sad eyes. "Mommy... you know you're our mommy, right? No matter what happens?"

Maya seemed a little surprised to hear that question, staring at Trucy for a moment before giving the trio a smile. "Of course!" she said, though Apollo knew from the way her fingers suddenly interlocked around her glass that she didn't believe it. "What's brought all this on suddenly?"

"Stop pretending, Maya," Luke said, somewhere between frustrated and worried for his friend. "Apollo's even already mentioned it's Mother's Day today."

Maya just playfully scoffed. "Aw, it can't be Mother's Day! Apollo just had a birthday on Thursday!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Mother's Day has always been the Sunday after my birthday," he pointed out. "Not that it ever meant anything to me before we started celebrating it with you."

Maya didn't reply, seemingly frozen with a confused smile as she stared at Apollo.

"Mommy, we know you've been avoiding us, ever since Daddy's trial!" Trucy picked up, leaning forward on the table with a pleading look that slowly gave way to tears. "Do... you not want to be our mommy anymore?"

Immediately, Maya had gotten to her feet, rushing around the table to sit at Trucy's side, pulling the teen into a hug. "Of course I want to be your mom!" she insisted, and Apollo was relieved to find no trace of a lie this time. "Three wonderful kids like you? Anyone would be lucky to call themselves your mother!"

While Trucy hugged Maya back, drying her tears, Apollo and Luke gave each other a worried look,
shifting on their seat cushions to better face Maya's changed position. "And you don't count yourself in that?" Luke asked.

Maya didn't reply, focused on hugging Trucy. Trucy, her head resting on Maya's shoulder, turned just enough to give her brothers a glance, concerned.

Apollo sighed. 'As the oldest, I guess I'd better start.' "I know I complain a lot," he said. "Whenever you, or anyone, goes on as though we're a biological family, I always point out we're not... I mean, Dad would've been eleven when I was born, and you five. It's physically impossible when it comes to me and Luke."

Maya looked away, though Trucy gave Apollo a glare.

"But, well..." Apollo continued, shrugging. "I mean, it would just be weird to call you 'Mom'... but it's not like I don't think of you as our mother."

At that, Maya looked up in surprise.

"I've never had a mother before," Apollo explained, continuing without pause, "not since I was less than a year old. I..." He paused, wondering how best to put his thoughts into words. "I guess, I've got Dad and you as parents, a brother and a sister... even Pearly as a cousin. That's kinda the closest to a normal family any of us are ever gonna get." He gave Maya a smile. "I've never really said 'thanks' for that. You seem like a pretty great mom to me."

"Who needs a normal mom, anyway?" Trucy agreed with a grin, hugging Maya tighter.

Apollo laughed. "Thalassa Gramarye has a lot to live up to when she finally appears!"

Maya herself didn't reply, giving Apollo a slightly teary warm smile. "Thank you, Apollo," she said. "I... can't say how much it means to hear you say that." She held out a hand to the young man, and he moved over to sit on the floor at her side, being pulled into the hug. Maya even planted a kiss on his forehead, quite a feat considering how much shorter she was.

Luke fidgeted nervously from his seat, seeming slightly awkward. "I... should probably admit upfront, I still could never think of you as my mum, Maya," he said.

"I understand," Maya told him with a smile. "You were very close to your mom. I don't want to get in the way of that."

"I don't think you could, though," Luke replied. "Get in the way, I mean. Before you first channelled my dad, I was convinced he'd be upset about Papa, but he wasn't, and I'm starting to think my mum will tell me the same about you when we finally find her." He looked away, thinking for a moment. "You're... my big sister," he said. "We have fun together, and have ever since we met in Labyrinthia."

At that, Maya giggled, seeing in her mind memories of the nineteen-year-old and the thirteen-year-old who connected so fast they spent their first night after meeting each other wandering the town in search of a missing cat, against the wishes of their respective elders. "You weren't nearly as freakishly tall back then," she joked.

Luke couldn't resist a laugh, partly at Maya's quip and partly at the raised eyebrow Apollo gave her as he heard it (whether he was resisting the urge to point out Phoenix was still taller than both of them or just irritated at the reminder his 'little' brother had outgrown him, Luke couldn't say). "Even so," he continued, "you've been the mother figure in our life ever since the adoption. It's not official, not like Papa... but it's real. It always will be. And that's all that really matters in my opinion."
Maya smiled appreciatively, then waved at Luke with the arm that was slung over Apollo's shoulder. "C'mere," she ordered, and Luke obediently crawled over to the group to allow Maya to pull her arms out from around his siblings to give the young man a tight hug. "I'm more than happy to be your big sis, Luke," she assured him. "I learned from the best how to be one of those!"

Trucy giggled as she joined the hug, and Apollo just smiled as he did the same.
"Oh, I almost forgot!" Trucy cried as the small group pulled out of their hug. "I have a present for you, Mommy!" She shoved a hand into the bag at her hip, then pulled out a golden necklace with a matching pendant, holding it out proudly for Maya to take. "Here!"

The other three all gasped, recognising the distinctive locket in Trucy's hand, the locket that Phoenix had taken from Zak's dead body and passed on to Trucy the night after Kristoph was arrested. "T-Trucy," Maya stuttered, shaking her head, "I can't-!"

"Course you can!" Trucy insisted, grabbing one of Maya's hands and depositing the locket firmly into the palm. "It's mine to give away, and I'm giving it to you. We even already got a photo for it!"

Apollo and Luke shared confused glances. 'We did?'

Although she was still apprehensive of accepting the gift, Maya couldn't help but be intrigued. Holding the locket for all to see, she clicked open the tiny door in the pendant, revealing a small picture inside: Phoenix, Luke, Apollo and Trucy, laughing and being silly in the celebration of the Agency's rebranding. Maya remembered this photo well: She had taken it herself, the night after the trial, on Phoenix's suggestion that they try to get a few family photos of the four Wrights to potentially use in the Anything Agency's advertising. This one in particular was one she snapped without warning, when everyone was hit by the giggles in the middle of their attempts to be serious for the photos. She couldn't remember what had set them all off, but the mere sight of her loved ones being so happy together was enough to make her smile.

Luke looked at the photo in surprise before leaning close to Trucy and whispering, "Pearl isn't in that picture!"

Trucy's eyes widened, a hand clapped to her mouth. "Oh no!" she cried, looking to Maya. "Do we have to take a new one?" she asked. "Pearly isn't in it!"

Maya laughed, unthinkingly holding the locket close to her chest. "Aw, Trucy, I see Pearly all the time!" she assured her. "Besides, I don't think this locket can fit more than four people in that tiny photo!"

Trucy blushed, sharing a relieved glance with Luke (Apollo just rolled his eyes). "I guess it was just made for one person," she admitted, then frowned in thought. "We should have just put Daddy in it, then."

"And who says I don't want you three in it too?" Maya replied, reaching up to pinch Trucy's cheek with a grin, making the teen giggle. "This is a perfect gift!" She paused, looking at the locket in her hands as her smile gradually faded. "But... I really shouldn't have it. This belonged to your father, Trucy." She held it out for the girl to take. "He used it as a memento of you. You should really keep it for yourself, as a memento of him."

Trucy just smiled, shaking her head. "Nope. This one wasn't the one Daddy had," she explained. "This is the one he gave me when I was really little; The one that had Mommy Thalassa's picture in
Everyone else froze, staring at Trucy with wide eyes. "It's what!?" Apollo cried.

"We have a bigger photo of Mommy Thalassa," Trucy continued, "and Polly's bracelet, so we don't need the locket! I wasn't wearing it, anyway!"

Apollo tapped at his bracelet for a moment in thought. "That's true, actually," he admitted.

"But still," Maya insisted with a worried frown, "I shouldn't have this. Nick at least deserves it more than me!"

Trucy grinned. "You gotta keep this a secret," she said in a stage-whisper, "but I'm giving Daddy the other locket! We gotta remember to all take a picture together before we go!"

Maya stared for a long moment before giving Trucy a warm smile, her hands closing around the pendant in her palm. "Thank you, Trucy," she said, looking around at the boys to add, "all three of you. This is the absolute best gift anyone's ever given me." Gripping the locket in one hand, she threw her arms around Apollo and Trucy at her sides, leaning forward to try and include Luke despite the shortness of her arms.

Luke, although he was still shooting smiles at his sister, giggled as he pressed his forehead to Maya's, throwing his arms similarly around his siblings. "It's kinda funny," he said. "Apollo and Trucy gave up the locket with their mother's picture in it today... and I gave up a day's search for mine."

Maya was surprised, sitting up to look Luke in the face. "Oh, Luke, you didn't have to come today!"

"No, I did," Luke insisted with a smile. "Finding Mum's going to take a long time anyway; A day off to make sure you're alright won't change anything."

"We tried to talk him out of it too," Apollo cut in to Maya with a grin. "Luke's just too stubborn."

Maya laughed.

Maya wasn't sure if she could wear her new locket around her neck without it getting in the way of her existing magatama and beads, but she had promised her three children she would find a way to wear the pendant somehow. Once the four had pressed their faces together and made big grins for Trucy's phone to take a photo for Phoenix's corresponding locket, Apollo suggested it was time they returned home, telling Luke, "Maybe we could get at least one of the names on that list confirmed today?"

Trucy clung to Maya's arm as they walked back to the meditation room at the front door. "Mommy?" she asked. "Are you and Daddy ever going to have kids together?"

Had Apollo been drinking anything, he was sure he would have spat it out at that.

Maya frowned. "What do you mean? We have you three, don't we?"

"I mean, like, babies!" Trucy explained with a grin. "I wanna be a big sister too someday!"

After a moment of thought, Maya laughed. "Aw, I think that decision's up to your dad, sweetie! I'm
all for it, but he's just dragging his legs... and other things!"

Luke and Apollo shared a worried glance as they sensed where this conversation might be going. "Um, can we excuse ourselves from this discussion...?" Luke meekly asked.

"He's got that big thing about 'ruining Kurain's reputation' and all," Maya continued, ignoring the boys' discomfort. "I'm kinda required to give birth to an heir eventually as Master of Kurain, but Nick won't let me have one with him until his reputation gets cleared." She paused to giggle. "You can probably tell I've had this conversation with him quite a few times!"

"Objection! The last thing I wanted to think about today was you and Dad in bed!" Apollo cried, face red.

Trucy giggled, also ignoring her brothers. "Luke was saying earlier we'd have to clear Daddy's name to get him to marry you!"

Maya cooed at the thought, intrigued. "I'm looking forward to that!" she said. "Although, to be honest, we'll probably end up doing what Maggey and Gumshoe did, and having a shotgun wedding once I'm pregnant!" She giggled, giving the amused Trucy a wink. "That'll really annoy the elders, but they can't do anything about it once they've got an heir on the way!"

Apollo sighed, pressing a palm to his face, but Luke was frowning in thought, a finger tapping his chin. "If you two did get married, how would it work?" he asked. "Would Papa have to move up here, or would you be free to stay in the city?"

Maya's smile faded as she thought on the question. "I'm not sure," she was forced to admit. "We'll just have to cross that bridge when we come to it." After a pause, she smiled to herself. "And make sure it hasn't been set on fire by then. I'm not losing Nick in another freezing river!"

My dear Luke,

You are correct that the broad strokes of your father's trial got through to us via Athena. She was particularly worried about you (as was Flora, in fact), almost as much as when you yourself were wrongly imprisoned. I was glad to hear when everything turned out alright thanks to Apollo, although many of those details you gave us sound particularly troubling, especially the ones you would not divulge. I would suspect they relate to this former employer of Apollo's, and how he knew the poor traveller he murdered... but I will not pry. I merely hope you are keeping those secrets for the right reasons, Luke.

As for this re-branding of your agency, I suppose that gives us even more reason to visit you in America some day soon! I was hoping to make it this year, but one of my fellow teachers in the archaeology department had unexpectedly left us; This wouldn't be too much of a problem, except that she was handling the summer courses, and the rest of us are scrambling to organise how we can fill in before finding a more permanent replacement. In any case, I may or may not be available during the summer months to see you in person, although Flora may decide to take Alfendi herself to drop in on you. We shall have to wait and see.

I'm pleased to hear you've started work on your next piece of writing! Are you planning to publish the first? That was your plan from the start, I thought, given all the name changes you were making to distance it from the actual events. As for this next one, I'm sure I can track down some of our
friends from the Folsense adventure to get their thoughts on the subject; I heard enough of your conversations with Flora that I think I can guess what kind of details you would want from them, proposed name changes, memories of the events, and the like. I won't do so unless you give the go-ahead, of course.

Flora enjoyed the gift you sent, though I'm sure she has thanked you for it herself in her letter. This letter will surely arrive after Apollo's birthday; Although we do not know him well enough to send a gift, give him our best wishes. I hope it was an enjoyable day for all of you!

I wish you luck if you do indeed restart your search for your mother. I know you only halted it in the first place because you ran out of leads.

The usual puzzles are enclosed.

Your friend,

Hershel Layton

6th May, 2026

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Dear Professor Layton,

I'm glad Athena passed on what I told her! She told me she had, anyway. I was more concerned for her when it was me in the detention centre, because I didn't have my phone and it was Apollo who ended up telling her what was happening. With Papa, I kept telling her Apollo would work it out, but I guess she could tell I didn't fully believe it myself, which is almost shameful to admit considering he's my brother.

The details I left out were for a very good reason. The long and short of it is that I'm just paranoid a third party will read these, and I don't want certain things getting out so easily. When we see each other in person, I can explain in full if you remind me.

I'm sorry to hear about the hassle going on at Gressenheller. I was looking forward to your visit, but if you can't make it this year, I understand. We can see each other next year, can't we?

I'm still a little torn on what to do with Curious Village now it's finished. Self-publishing would be easy enough digitally, but printing physical books would be a hassle, and I'd have to advertise it myself, which I'm not sure how to do. Going to a publisher would mean at least three more drafts before they accept it, and they might make me change all sorts of things I don't want to lose. I suppose, now I have the next one to work on (I've decided to title it The Adventure of the Pandora's Box), I can do research into publishers or something and shop around to find out what would work best.

As for talking to our old friends from Dropstone, it doesn't look likely that I'd be able to visit them myself, no. I'm a bit busy at the moment, but the next time I'm working on Box, I'll compile a list of questions and send them in the next letter, so you have something prepared to ask them. Thank you so much for offering to help, Professor!

I'm glad Flora liked it! Twenty-five is a big number to hit, after all! She did thank me in her own letter, but it's always nice to get confirmation on these things! And Apollo said to thank you for
thinking of him. He did enjoy his birthday; We all closed the office for the afternoon and went out to explore the city! It was a lot of fun!

It was also Mother's Day this Sunday, so Apollo, Trucy and I went up to Kurain to visit Maya. Coincidentally, it was also the day I thought I'd take Apollo out to start narrowing the search for Mum. We've made some progress, thanks to Apollo's badge and a little persuasion talking about investigating a murder, but I know not everyone is going to be so open with us as the search progresses. Right now, I'm just happy it's going well.

Puzzles are enclosed.

Your friend,

Luke Triton-Wright

15th May, 2026

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
A lone figure wandered out of People Park's front entrance, hands deep in the pockets of his baggy hoodie. The night was especially dark on this dim street, quiet save the distant swooshes of vehicles down the major streets of the sprawling city, so the figure didn't hesitate walking straight out into the middle of the road as he headed to his right. The avenue was rarely used by larger traffic, and had a very low speed limit, as it was shared by pedestrians and vehicles; It wasn't particularly dangerous for the average walker to drop their guard this way. Opposite the park, a large mansion stood, hidden behind tall stone walls, a brilliant jade dragon weaving in and out of fading patterns of yellow, red and black across its imposing surface. In front of its high wooden gates were several cans of bright paint, though they were well out of the way of any passing pedestrians, so the lone passer-by paid them no mind as he continued towards his destination.

An engine roared somewhere ahead, and the man paused, looking up curiously. That can't be something on this street, he told himself... but why did it sound so close?

Suddenly, a pair of lights appeared around the corner ahead. The man raised a hand to his face in an instinctive reaction to the brightness, but didn't have the time to do much more before there was a squeal of tires, the lights weaved away for a moment, and his vision went dark, pain exploding all down his right side as he was thrown against something, a momentary spike of pain in his gut, then tumbling to the ground, loud clangs echoing in his ears. The concrete path splashed as he hit it, feeling cold and sticky on his cheek, and the rattling of metal faded around him as the all-consuming roar of the engine squealed behind... then was gone. Left, stunned, in the silence, the man lacked the energy to move, or to even ponder on what it was, struggling to process what he had just narrowly lived through.

'Phoenix Wright, what have you gotten yourself into this time?' he asked himself.

Somewhere in the distance, loud voices approached, attracted by the explosion of noise outside the park. "Look at this mess!" a husky voice bellowed. "It's gone all over the street!"

'So have I, apparently,' a part of Phoenix, free of the numbness of shock, couldn't resist joking.

Footsteps splashed through the sticky substance on the concrete, and Phoenix felt more than saw the shadow of a large mass crouching at his side. The shadow asked, "Are you alright?" and oversized hands gripped his shoulders; Phoenix feebly tried to push himself up, helped by the firm grip of the deep-voiced man at his side.

"My goodness!" cried the husky voice, and Phoenix managed to turn his gaze up to see a round figure, kimono swishing around her ankles, hurriedly approaching. "Did that car hit you!? Into that pole!??"

Guided by the much bigger man at his side, Phoenix finally stood, heavily favouring his left as his right foot twinged in pain, resisting any weight being placed on it. 'And these two came out of Kitaki Mansion...? Oddly friendly for a pair of gangsters.' He took a quick look around, evaluating where he'd ended up after the chaos of the crash. With a weak smile, he laughed, "Man, the guy must've tossed me thirty feet!'"
Glancing behind her, the woman's eyebrows shot up, either surprised or impressed (Phoenix couldn't tell). "You should come inside," she insisted regardless, indicating the mansion's gate behind her. "A car accident isn't something you should brush off so easily."

Phoenix shook his head, limping out from the taller man's shadow and struggling not to stumble back to the ground, though he tried his hardest not to be too obvious he was cradling his aching right side. "No, I don't want to be a bother," he said. "I'll be alright. I have a job to get to. That Indochine place, on the other side of the river." He gestured down the road, in the direction he had been heading. "I kinda need the paycheck."

A second pair of figures, taller than the woman but nowhere near the height or wide build of the man, had emerged from the gate, and, spotting them, the taller man waved them away. "Back inside!" he ordered. With the duo scurrying away, he turned his shadowed gaze back to the shorter man in the hoodie. "With all due respect, I don't think you're going anywhere in your condition," he said. "There's a hospital not far from here: Hickfield Clinic."

"I've... heard of it," Phoenix replied with a frown. "The former 'Hotti' Clinic, right?" 'Huh, I thought the Kitakis used that Meraktis place around the corner from us. Isn't it closer?'

The taller man nodded. "If you won't come inside, I suggest you go there," he continued. "If nothing else, they can help clean that paint off you."

With a surprised blink, Phoenix reached up to pat the side of his face that had hit the ground, feeling the cold, sticky substance transferring to his fingers. A glance in the light from the streetlamp at his back (not that Phoenix remembered hitting it - the mild pain at the back of his head said otherwise) revealed what was clearly crimson paint on his fingers. 'Geeze, I hope I haven't cut myself and gotten something toxic in my bloodstream... Guess I'm not going to Alden Tae's, after all.'

"I can give them a call," the taller man offered, "so they are expecting you."

After a moment of thought, the injured man nodded. "Thank you. That's very kind of you." Taking great care not to aggravate his throbbing ankle, he slowly turned, pausing only momentarily to lean against the streetlight before limping down the road. At the back of his mind, he noted it was the opposite direction he had been walking before the crash... the same direction he had heard the car disappear. 'Hope this guy doesn't come back to finish the job, then.'

"Ah, but I will need a name to give them," the taller man called, almost an afterthought.

The man in the hoodie halted his irregular stride, then looked back with a small smile. "It's Wright," he replied. "Phoenix Wright." Hoping they didn't recognise the once-famous name, he quickly turned and stumbled away around the corner.

June 14, 9:21PM
Apollo and Clay's Apartment
Apollo's Bedroom

It had been about an hour since Apollo arrived home after his and Trucy's nightly show, and he had yet to settle down for the night. That wasn't unusual, as he had always been more of a night-owl than early-bird Luke, and it was a trait he shared with Trucy and Phoenix. It was a usual busy Sunday night in the Wonder Bar, the end of the first week of summer holidays for school kids, so there were
a lot of younger fans that the next generation of Gramaryes were entertaining by pretending to cut each other into pieces (their split box for the Zig-Zag illusion was just small enough for Apollo, though Trucy hoped one day to be inside it herself) or by playing around with the stuffed animals that stood in for the real ones neither of them could afford to keep to Luke's satisfaction (Trucy's current favourite was a stuffed cat called Bullets, which they shot from a specially-made gun). Once the show was over, the pair left together through the back door, meeting the small crowd that usually gathered there on weekends this busy, and going through the motions of greeting their fans. They had even said hello to Apollo's online friend Knox, who had been in the audience that evening and waited patiently to see his friends before heading home himself. Finally, as they always did, Apollo walked Trucy part of the way home before letting her return to the Agency alone and taking himself back to his apartment, where he promptly locked himself in his room to put away his smaller equipment and his costume as he prepared for bed... not that he had done more than taking off his hat and boots just yet, lounging as he was at his desk with his computer in front of him.

No, what was unusual about that night... was that Apollo's phone was ringing.

The young magician stared at the mobile phone on his desk for several long moments in confusion before hesitantly reaching for it with the nearest hand. 'Who's calling me at THIS hour...?' To his surprise, it was Phoenix's name on the screen, and he was half-tempted to simply hang up ('Isn't Dad supposed to be at a job right now? This HAS to be a pocket-dial.'), but the possibility his father was calling for a very important reason changed his mind. Tapping the button to answer, he held the phone to his ear. "Dad? What are you calling me for?"

"Hello?" an unfamiliar voice replied. "Is this Apollo Wright?"

Apollo momentarily froze. "Y-yes, it is," he forced himself to say, wondering why someone other than his father could be using Phoenix's phone to call him and already finding himself jumping to horrible conclusions. "Has... something happened to my dad?"

"I don't know if you're aware that you're listed as an emergency contact for Phoenix Wright," the voice continued, apparently ignoring his question with a distracted sigh. "He's been admitted into Hickfield Clinic."

'... Oh no.'

"He was hit by a car."

'OH NO."

"His injuries aren't too severe, by some miracle, but he is actively attempting to resist aid and walk out; I highly suggest you talk some sense into him. We're prepared to make an exception to regular visiting hours if you wish to come in tonight-"

"I do!" Apollo loudly interrupted, jumping to his feet and almost tipping over his chair. "I'm coming in tonight!" He paused a second, then hesitantly added, "Um, where's Hickfield Clinic?"

A minute later, Apollo was pulling on his boots as he stumbled out of his bedroom, his phone carefully held between his teeth as he tripped his way towards the front door. "Lay! Uh'm ghoin' ou!" he shouted, hoping his meaning was decipherable (there was a reason he didn't have a Mister Hat of his own, after all).

Behind him, Clay poked his head out of his room with a confused look. "What?"

His boots on, Apollo paused, removing the phone from his mouth and shoving it in his bag. "I'm
going out!" he repeated. "My dad's in the hospital!"

Clay's eyes widened in surprise. "What!?" he shouted, dashing out after his friend. "What happened!?"

Apollo turned to face his friend. "Apparently he's fine," he explained. "Call it another example of the Wright Luck, but he got hit by a car and is actively trying to walk it off."

"Geeze!" Clay muttered, wincing sympathetically in spite of his relief that Phoenix was apparently okay. "Well, you'd better check on 'im, then. Lemme know how he is."

"Sure," Apollo agreed with a distracted nod, and quickly left the apartment.

View the Court Record
Casual Near-Death Experience

June 14, 9:46PM
Hickfield Clinic
Phoenix's Room

After a few wrong turns and a brief stop to ask directions, Apollo finally located the hospital that held his father. He tried to stay calm as he searched for a rack to lock up his bicycle on outside, then headed in to the reception. It took a bit of arguing before the receptionist on duty would even listen to what he was saying (she kept repeating "Visiting hours are over, come back tomorrow," the moment she heard Apollo say "I'm here to see-!"), but eventually a passing nurse recognised Apollo’s name and specifically allowed the young lawyer to check on Phoenix, if only briefly, giving him a room number that Apollo didn't hesitate to race off and find.

Phoenix looked up from his bed as the door opened, smiling as he recognised the caped young man rushing towards him. "Apollo!" he laughed. "So they did call you!"

"Of course they did!" Apollo cried with no small amount of frustration, running to Phoenix's bedside in the plain-looking room and looking over his father for any visible signs of injury. "They said you were hit by a car!"

Phoenix continued to laugh. "They weren't lying!" he admitted.

Apollo took the chance to take in his father's condition: His well-worn clothes were scruffier than usual down his left side, with his hoodie even sporting brand new patches of black and yellow, Phoenix's hands well hidden in the jumper's front pockets. His shoes had been removed, Phoenix's right foot and lower leg in some kind of hard plastic boot-like contraption that appeared to be keeping it still (Apollo half-wondered if it had been put on to keep Phoenix from walking out). On his head, the cyan beanie seemed to be faring well, but underneath the entire left side of Phoenix's face was stained red, right around a rather large band-aid across his cheek, and Apollo couldn't help but immediately imagine the worst. "Are you okay, Dad?" he quietly asked.

"I'm perfectly fine," Phoenix insisted with a smile. "Honestly, if it weren't for the paint," he gestured to the red stain on his face, then to the black and yellow patches on his hoodie, "I probably would've kept heading to Alden Tae's."

"Paint?" Apollo repeated, blinking in surprise.

"Whoever owns that mansion out the front of People Park," Phoenix explained, "they had some paint tins sitting out along their wall. I think they were repainting the design. When the guy hit me, he threw me into the mess he made knockin' 'em all over." He shook his head with a sad frown. "What a waste of paint."

Apollo stared a moment more before sighing in relief, lowering himself into a chair nearby. "I thought that was a bloodstain on your face," he said. "It's just paint?"

Laughing, Phoenix nodded again. "Sorry to worry you," he said with a sincere smile. "They're pretty insistent about not letting me leave though, so I'm going to be stuck here another couple of days at least." He then raised an eyebrow. "Did you know they don't allow grape juice in here? They allow all the other juices, but not grape! It's ridiculous!"
Apollo just rolled his eyes. 'Don't drink it, then. It's not that hard. If we weren't so careful about checking on it all the time, it'd go alcoholic and you'd be a freakin’ drunkard, anyway.' He refrained from voicing his internal monologue however, his eyes again drawn to the plastic boot, which was far more important than idly mocking his father's drink of choice. "Did you break your ankle?" he asked.

"I don't think so," Phoenix assured him. "It hurts to walk on, so they've x-rayed that, and a few other places, to double-check. Haven't heard back yet, though. Doubt it's more than just a sprain; I managed to get all the way here on it, after all."

Picking up on the brushed-over detail (and deciding to ignore that Phoenix had walked to the hospital on a sprained ankle), Apollo narrowed his eyes at his father. "What 'other places'? What else did they x-ray?"

"What, you're going to ask for the entire grisly list?" Phoenix asked with a grin, ignoring Apollo's frustrated glare in return. Rolling his eyes, he held up his hands (Apollo noticed a few band-aids spread out across those too) and began to count off: "Minor abrasions to face and hands, varied bruising, minor neck pain, injured ankle..." He sighed. "They're testing for blood poisoning or any trace of broken bones, and I wasn't sure if I lost consciousness or not so they're keeping me to make sure I didn't hit my head against that pole too hard, but I honestly feel fine now they've given me painkillers."

Apollo stared, wondering which of his father's ailments on the list was more worrying. "Why might you have blood poisoning!?" he eventually sputtered.

Phoenix grinned, pointing at the band-aid on his cheek, surrounded by the faint crimson stain. "Paint, remember? They're checking nothing got into the cuts."

Apollo warily nodded. "And what's this about hitting your head on a pole?"

"Streetlight," Phoenix explained, rubbing at the back of his head with a small wince. "Think I got knocked into it as I hit the ground."

With a sigh, Apollo lowered his head into his hands. "Do you have to be so casual about nearly getting killed?"

Phoenix just shrugged, watching Apollo. "If it makes you feel better, I could talk about some other time I should have died," he offered, grinning mischievously. "Maybe the time I fell into freezing river rapids from a burning bridge? Or swallowed a tiny bottle of poison? It wasn't even my fault this time!"

Apollo shot his father a glare. "I swear, there's some higher power up there in a love-hate relationship with you," he said. "And for a very good reason."

Phoenix laughed in reply, then calmed down with a thoughtful look. "Listen, Luke and Trucy don't need to know every little thing about why I'm in here tonight," he said, staring off into the distance. "Just tell them... Tell them I just sprained my ankle. He gestured to his cheek. "This stain should be gone by visiting hours tomorrow, and the smaller cuts will be healing up. They don't need to know about anything else."

After a long moment of silence, Apollo nodded in agreement. It struck him that, maybe, Phoenix's casualness and downplaying of his true injuries was just as much a coping mechanism for himself as for his loved ones.
Phoenix smiled, seeing the movement in the corners of his eyes. "Thanks, Apollo."

Apollo hid a smile. "Speaking of telling Luke and Trucy," he said, "I guess you want me to do that?"

"If you could," Phoenix replied, looking up. "They haven't given me back my phone yet. I think I'm being punished for misbehaving." He grinned, giving Apollo a wink.

Rolling his eyes, Apollo decided to ignore the comment. "Luke will be asleep by now," he mused aloud. "If I wake him, he'll probably panic and want to see you immediately, so I'll just text him to call me when he can. As for Trucy," he crossed his arms with a frown, "she should be in bed by now, but probably won't be. I'd better head to the Agency and look after her until they let you out of here."

"Yes, I think it is your turn to do that," Phoenix said with a grin. "Luke babysat her when I was in the detention centre two months back!"

Apollo shot Phoenix a glare, deciding to ignore that too. "And I promised Clay I'd update him once I saw you, so I'll let him know I won't be back tonight while I'm at it," he continued. "As for Maya... she'll probably be asleep, so I guess I should text her to call me, too. Pearly will be with her, so she'll hear from Maya once they've called me." He paused, pressing a finger to his forehead in thought. "Anyone else you want me to call?"

Phoenix rubbed at his chin. "No, I think that's enough family-wise," he decided. "But, once you get back to the office, call Alden Tae's for me. Let them know why I didn't arrive tonight."

"Sure," Apollo agreed, then pushed himself off the chair to his feet. "Actually, I should get going now. The nurse didn't want me in here for long, since visiting hours are over and all."

Phoenix nodded, watching as Apollo gave him a small wave and slowly strolled towards the door. "Oh, Apollo?" he called.

Apollo paused, looking back with a confused look. "Hm?"

"If you see a man introducing himself as either 'Doctor' or 'Director Hickfield'," Phoenix said, a serious stare in his eyes, "with a patch of pink hair and missing teeth... keep him away from Trucy."

Although confused, Apollo nodded, committing the description to memory. "Okay," he said. "See you tomorrow, Dad."

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Maya, I need you or Pearly to call me as soon as you get this. Dad's gotten himself hurt again.

Barely a minute after sending off the small message, Apollo was giving up on walking his bike to the Agency and preparing to ride it when he felt a buzzing from the bag on his hip, and quickly halted to retrieve it. "Luke?" he wondered aloud, only to blink in surprise and smile when a glance at his phone screen told him he was wrong. Accepting the call, he held the phone to his ear, continuing his walk with his bike. "Hey, Mommy Maya," he joked.

Maya scoffed from the other end of the line. "What's Nick getting up to now!?" she demanded,
skipping any greetings. "Piano and poker aren't dangerous! Has he been arrested for murder again!"

Apollo bit back a laugh. "Nah, nothing quite as special as that," he said. "He only got hit by a car."

"What!?" Maya cried.

"He's fine though," Apollo assured her. "I was just with him; The worst he's got is a sprained ankle."

There was a short pause as Maya mulled over this information. "I guess that's only to be expected with him," she sighed. "Where is he?"

"Hickfield Clinic," Apollo explained. "Visiting hours are nine to six. Will you be able to make it down?"

Maya sighed again. "I'm not sure," she admitted. "We're right in the middle of a very important training session for the acolytes..." She paused again, and Apollo could swear he could hear her biting her lip. "I'll see if I can drop in early tomorrow morning," she eventually suggested. "I'll send Pearly down to help you guys out while he's away."

Apollo didn't think they needed help with anything, but knew Pearl would want to be there if she could, so he didn't object. "Okay. I'm sure Dad will appreciate seeing you anyway."

Maya laughed a little, sounding relieved. "I'm glad he's okay," she said, then hummed thoughtfully. "Y'know, if he's stuck in the hospital, he's gonna need stuff to keep himself busy, isn't he?"

"Um, I guess so," Apollo agreed. "He had a TV in his room, but nothing else that I saw."

"Oooh!" Maya cooed. "Did you see if it had a DVD player attached?"

Apollo had to think - he hadn't exactly been paying that much attention to the old television. "I... think so?"

"Perfect!" Maya chirped. "Okay then, if you're there at the same time as me, I'll see you tomorrow! If not... well, I'll see you when I'm next free!"

Rolling his eyes, Apollo decided to leave whatever Maya had planned alone. "Alright," he replied. "Seeya then."

"Buh-bye!" Maya called, then the phone beeped in Apollo's ear as she hung up.

View the Court Record
June 14, 10:04PM
Wright Anything Agency
Kitchen

As Apollo locked the front door behind him, he noted he could see lights on further inside the house and realised Trucy was, as he'd feared, still awake. 'Well. Now I have to try and explain what happened without making her panic and demand to go see Dad right now.' Running through various words and phrases in his head, he made his way through to the office, wondering if the sound of the front door opening and closing had attracted his sister's attention...

And he found out a moment later, when the door ahead of Apollo burst open, and Trucy charged in wearing little more than her strapless dress, wielding one of their prop guns (the comically-large barrel gave it away) and shouting, "You came back, huh!? Well I'd better get a-!" Suddenly, she stopped, staring at her surprised brother in shock. "Polly!!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "What was that about?" he asked, but didn't wait for an answer, continuing through to the kitchen and gesturing for his sister to follow. "You ought to be in bed right now, anyway."

Trucy pouted, crossing her arms as she trailed behind Apollo. "It's summer vacation! I can sleep in all I want!" she argued. "Besides, what are you doing here!? Our show's over, and Daddy's at a job!"

Apollo almost stopped dead at that, causing Trucy to bump into his back before he regained his composure and stepped forward, turning to face her. "Actually, Dad is exactly why I'm here. He's not coming home tonight."

At that, Trucy cocked her head to one side, frowning. "Huh? Why not?"

"It's..." Apollo sighed, mentally kicking himself to just get it out. "First of all, he's fine, I was just with him in the hospital-"

"The hospital!?" Trucy repeated, eyes wide as her hands flew to her mouth in surprise.

"Y-yeah," Apollo admitted, holding up his hands to implore his sister to keep calm. "He kinda got hit by a car, so-"

"Hit by a car!?"

"He's fine!" Apollo repeated, starting to sweat at the thought of how badly he was handling this. "I guess the car just grazed him or something, 'cuz he was actively trying to walk out before they put his foot in... whatever that boot thing was!"

Hearing that seemed to bring Trucy back from the brink of panic, her hands lowering as she frowned in confusion. "Daddy went to the hospital... then tried to leave?"
Apollo nodded. "And after all the trouble of walking there himself, too," he added. "On a sprained ankle!"

Trucy stared for a moment, then rolled her eyes. "That's just like Daddy," she said. "So, we can go see him, right?"

"Not tonight," Apollo replied, relieved that the panic had passed. "We can all go tomorrow, during visiting hours."

"Okay," Trucy said, then paused, thinking to herself. "Have you told Mommy and Luke?"

"I was on the phone with Maya just a few minutes ago," Apollo assured her, beginning to smile. "I've sent Luke a text asking him to call me. He'll be asleep right now. There's no point waking him up just to worry him, and I'm not telling him Dad got hit by a car over text."

Trucy grinned. "Yeah, he's such a worrywart. Like you!"

"Hey, objection!" Apollo cried, giving his giggling sister a glare before letting the jibe go with a sigh. "You should get to bed. I have to call the place Dad was supposed to be working at tonight, explain what happened."

Trucy nodded, and was already heading off towards the stairs by the laundry room before she stopped with a gasp. "Oh yeah! I almost forgot!" She spun around to face the confused Apollo behind her. "I was staying up late because I was doing laundry!"

Apollo glanced at the room behind her, noting the light inside appeared to be on. "Have you not finished?"

"Everything's hanging up to dry," Trucy assured him, jerking a thumb towards the room. "I had to move it all inside." She crossed her arms with a frown. "I don't think we should use the lines out in the alleyway anymore. There's a thief about."

"What!?" Apollo cried in surprise, then sighed, pressing a hand to his face in defeat. "What'd we lose?"

Trucy shuffled awkwardly for a moment or two. "Just the one thing," she replied. "It's..." The rest of her sentence came out as a barely-audible garbled mess, the teen heavily avoiding her brother's gaze.

Apollo raised an eyebrow, taking a step towards his sister. "Truce... what did the thief take?"

"My..." Trucy mumbled, then was silent a moment more before quietly admitting, "My magic panties."

Apollo was too shocked to reply for a moment. "But we only just replaced those!" he cried, remembering her older pair that had finally fallen apart just a month previously. "We need them for the show tomorrow!"

"I know!" Trucy shot back indignantly. "I didn't know they were going to be stolen! They were getting a bit dirty and needed a wash, and they've never been stolen before!"

Sighing, Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead. "Alright, alright," he muttered. "I guess we'll just have to rework the show around them until we can get another pair." He frowned in thought, then looked up at his sister curiously. "Did you know when the theft happened?"

Trucy nodded. "I was still hanging stuff up," she explained, gesturing to the wall on her right, "so I
was going up and down the stairs out the back with the basket. Then I heard some of the clips snapping like something was pulled off the line!" She pointed dramatically. "Then I saw him, making off with my panties! So I chased him!"

"You chased him!?!" Apollo repeated in disbelief. "Truce, what if he was some kind of murderer!?!"

"He took my panties!" Trucy cried in protest. "I had to stop him! I was shouting, 'Give those back! Wait!', but he just sped up!" She gestured behind Apollo, to the currently-out-of-sight road perpendicular to the street their office was on, which led directly to the eastern entrance of People Park; Fittingly named Park Street, it was also the road that the alleyway out the back of their home led to. "He ran that way, and crossed the road," Trucy explained, "then ducked into a half-open garage!" She sighed in defeat. "I waited a while, but he'd disappeared... I lost him!"

Apollo sighed, pressing his whole hand to his face. A part of him wondered if the thief knew the blue-and-pink pair of underwear was a prop, but it was probably more likely the guy was an average, though bold, pervert. It made him sick to the stomach to even consider what the criminal might be doing now with their ill-won prize, so he tried to not think about it. "At least you tried, I guess," he admitted, crossing his arms. "We can tell Dad what happened tomorrow, decide if it's worth doing a search or reporting it or something."

Trucy nodded, sticking out her bottom lip. "I'm sorry, Polly..."

"It's fine," Apollo insisted. "There's nothing you could have done, anyway. We'll just have to deal." He rested a hand on her shoulder with a small smile. "For now though, you should get to bed. We wanna be up bright and early tomorrow to go visit Dad in the hospital, don't we?"

Trucy gave her brother a grin. "Yeah," she agreed, then laughed. "Y'know, if Daddy was more badly hurt, I'd be thinking about giving him his Fathers Day gift early."

Apollo laughed, remembering how much trouble they'd gone to preparing Zak's old locket behind Phoenix's back; It was pure luck their father apparently never noticed its twin entwined in Maya's robes, glittering at her hip where she could admire the picture inside any time she pleased. "That's coming up, isn't it? Fathers Day?"

Trucy nodded. "Next Sunday," she said. "We gotta organise sometime this week how we're giving it to him." When Apollo only nodded in return, she stepped back out of his reach and headed for the stairs. "Night, Polly. I'll see you tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow," Apollo replied, giving her a wave. Once she was out of sight, he sighed, his face falling as he turned to the office. 'And now... to call Alden Tae.'

---

Hey, Clay. Turns out my dads fine. They're just keeping him for observation.

Awesome! :D Man he's lucky to be so unhurt by a car crash!

Tell me about it >.>.

I'm at the office now to look after Trucy, so I won't be back tonight. Just a heads up.

Sure dude. Lemme know if you need anything :D
Will do :) .

Good news! They gave me back my phone!

Cool :) I've already called Maya, but Luke's still asleep. I told Trucy when I got home, and I've called Alden Taes about what happened. Maya said she's busy atm but she'll try and visit you tmrw.

You've been busy then ;) Thanks a bunch

Shouldn't you be trying to sleep Mr Walking Wounded? ;).

Speak for yourself! I had another favor to ask you actually. I forgot while you were here to ask if you could put together some kind of overnight bag with a change of clothes.

You realise that if Trucy sees me actively leaving she's going to demand she come with to see you.

Then don't let her know ;)

Thanks, that's helpful >.>

You could also mention you won't actually be seeing me. The nurses will likely deliver it to my room.

Alright, I'll find a bag and grab you a change of clothes.

And maybe put in a bottle of grape juice while you're at it?

I'm not sneaking in grape juice for you.

Aw and I thought you loved your dear old dad ;)

Not enough to disobey doctors orders.

Fine, fine. I'll see you and your siblings tomorrow then, Maya too. That reminds me, does Pearls know?

She'll be in Kurain with Maya, so she's probably heard by now. Maya said she'd bring Pearly down with her.

Good, as long as everyone in the family knows. Maybe tomorrow I'll tell the extended family too! Tell your sister good night for me btw.

Condemning myself to a terrible night without my father's love, sure ;).

Sneak me in a bottle of grape juice and maybe I'd feel like wishing YOU a good night as well ;)

Love you too, Dad :).
"Phoenix! You gotta help me!"

"... Guy?"

"My castle's been stormed! My keep's been kept! My noodle stand's been stolen!"

"H-huh!? What!?"

"You had that whole rebrandin' about doin' anything needs doin', right? You gotta find my noodle stand! I'm finished without it!"

"W-wait, calm down... Who'd steal a noodle stand!?"

"Who cares!? It's gone! My livelihood! My keep! My castle! Oh, and it was my pops' pride and joy...!"

"Alright, alright! *sigh* Don't worry Guy, I'll put the kids on the case. Can you come by our office sometime after nine?"

"Eh? Why can't you get on the case right now!? This is my livelihood we're talking about!"

"Because the sun is barely over the horizon, from what I can see. You not only woke me up with your call, but I can guarantee Apollo, Luke and Trucy are still asleep too. They'll be better able to search with a good night's rest... and once they've seen me and aren't worrying about my health."

"Why? What happened? ... Somethin' wrong, Phoenix?"

"I'm... in the hospital at the moment. It's nothing too serious."

"Ah... Well then, I'll wait 'til around nine, nine thirty, then get to your office. Get well soon."

"I will, thank you."

June 15, 9:00AM
Hickfield Clinic
Phoenix's Room

After being rudely awoken by Guy Eldoon's panicked call sometime around sunrise three hours ago (it was a miracle there was no-one currently in the other bed of his room to annoy), Phoenix had found it hard to get back to sleep. He'd tried turning on the TV at his bedside, but it turned out it wasn't connected to anything, so, unless he was reduced to staring at the static, off it went. The overnight bag Apollo had packed for him had nothing more than a change of clothes and a bottle of water with a sticky note on one side, on which Apollo had scrawled 'Special Grape Juice for big baby Phoenix Wright' and drawn a rough representation of a bunch of grapes; As amusing as Apollo's reluctance to sneak in anything against the doctor's orders had been, it wasn't doing much to alleviate Phoenix's boredom. 'At least if I had a pencil I could use the note to draw on...' In the end, Phoenix found himself passing the time by peeling off the band-aids on his cheek and hands (the cuts on his hands had nicely healed, though there was still a small mark on his cheek where he'd grazed
against the pavement), stealing some hand-soap from the bathroom to scrub the last remnants of the red paint from his face, sending occasional texts to Maya begging she sneak in some grape juice when she dropped by, idly flipping through every old file and photo in his Court Record until he was sick of the small computer, and changing into the spare clothes Apollo had grabbed for him... once a nurse had come in and taken his foot out of the boot-like restraint, instead tightly wrapping the ankle with bandages and ordering Phoenix to stay in his room and alert them immediately if he felt any further pain. He had to admit, it had been a relief when he'd heard back from the doctors on the multiple tests they'd done, confirming he was pretty much as uninjured as he'd assured Apollo he was... though they were still reluctant to release him until they'd confirmed no symptoms of whiplash in his neck, and "to give that sprain a chance to heal before you go right back to walking everywhere and anywhere, Mister Wright".

Just as Phoenix was starting to consider counting the seconds on the clock, the door opened, admitting two short women in formal robes, their arms piled high with bulging bags. "Morning, Nick!" the taller of the pair chirped with a grin as she strode to his bedside.

Phoenix grinned, pushing himself into a sitting position. "Maya! Pearls! Thank goodness!" he cried, deliberately being a touch over-dramatic. "A distraction from the crushing boredom of this hospital room!"

Pearl giggled as she placed her burdens on the floor at the foot of the bed. "We brought some things to help you with that too, Mister Nick!"

"I figured you'd mope without someone around to keep you company," Maya picked up with a knowing smile, giving Phoenix a quick peck on the cheek before dumping most of her bags and shoving a hand into one, "so I grabbed you a few things to keep you occupied!" With that, she pulled out her hand to reveal a DVD case tightly clutched in her palm: The Pink Princess, Season 2, Part 4.

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, looking over the 'supplies' the Feys had brought him with concern. "Are all of those bags full of nothing but Steel Samurai DVDs...?"

Maya shrugged. "Almost all of them," she admitted with a grin, laying the case in her hands on Phoenix's lap.

"Oh joy," Phoenix muttered, resisting a sigh. "You sure know how to spoil me, Maya."

"Here it is, Mystic Maya!" Pearl cried, pulling a bag up onto the bed, on a small table surface above Phoenix's legs.

Quietly squealing to herself in glee, Maya leapt on the bag, pulling it open and peering inside. "Here we are! The special stuff! First off..." Reaching both hands into the bag, she soon pulled out a toddler-sized grand piano, painted bright pink and with little more than a couple octaves' worth of keys. She proudly deposited the toy on Phoenix's lap, next to the DVD already there.

Phoenix stared at the tiny piano in disbelief. "You got me... a baby piano."

"To keep your skills up!" Maya insisted with a grin. "Don't want those old man fingers getting stiff, do we?"

After a moment of shocked staring, Phoenix couldn't resist a laugh. "Yeah, guess I gotta keep up my illustrious career pretending to play the piano somehow!"

Pearl smiled, biting at her thumbnail. "I chose the colour. I'm glad you like it, Mister Nick!"
"It's beautiful, Pearls," Phoenix assured the teen with a grateful smile.

Maya wasn't done however, again shoving both her hands into the bag. "And last up...!" She shot Phoenix a wink, then pulled out two green glass bottles, one in each hand, which she held out towards her partner.

Phoenix was amazed for all of a second before he registered the strange white labels on the bottles and frowned. "'Deep Sea Mineral Water'...?" he asked.

Giggling, Maya shoved the bottles into Phoenix's arms, leaning in close and whispering, "Switched the labels. Don't tell anyone, okay?"

Slowly, Phoenix smiled as he realised the true contents of the gift, and he looked up at Maya with a sincere smile. "I love you."

"I know," Maya replied with a cocky grin.

Pearl snuck delighted glances at the pair through her fingers, hiding a smile.

Phoenix chuckled, sharing multiple chaste kisses with his girlfriend as she giggled. "Humble as ever, I see."

"You know it!" Maya boasted, then jokingly pushed Phoenix away, tapping his chest. "Now, I have a little assignment for you, to keep you busy while I'm teaching the acolytes!"

"Assignment?" Phoenix repeated, raising an amused eyebrow. "And exactly what is it you're ordering me to do this time?"

Maya had returned her attention to the bag, this time pulling out an A4 spiral notebook and a pen, which she gleefully held out for Phoenix to take. "I'm getting you to write about the episodes as you watch them!" she explained. "Y'know, thoughts on the acting, the costumes, the plot...! It'll be fun!"

Phoenix hesitantly took the offered stationary. "You... want me to write reports?"

"You bet!" Maya chirped, planting a kiss on Phoenix's cheek. "Better get started, mister! I expect to see that notebook full when I get back!"

Phoenix sighed, though he had trouble hiding a small smile. "This is an elaborate form of punishment for getting myself hit by a car, isn't it?"

Maya just ignored him, signalling to Pearl before the pair began to pull piles of DVDs out of their bags. "We'll get these all organised for you before I go," she told him, "so you can watch them in order!" She briefly paused, looking up to examine the television on the table beside the bed before smiling. "Ah, good, Apollo was right about that thing playing DVDs!" She laughed as she returned to her work. "I'd hate to have to put my classes on hold even longer to go get you something that would work with these!"

Phoenix shook his head, deciding to leave the excited pair to it as he leaned back against his pillow. It didn't seem to take long at all before Maya and Pearl were constructing elaborate piles of the DVDs at Phoenix's bedside.

"Mystic Maya?" Pearl spoke up as she was arranging cases of The Nickel Samurai in the proper order. "When you go back to Kurain, should I wait here with Mister Nick, or head to the agency?"

"You're staying in the city, Pearls?" Phoenix asked in surprise.
Pearl nodded, while Maya explained, "Yeah, I thought she could help the other kids out while you're stuck in here." She shot Phoenix a grin as Pearl giggled, the pair quickly returning to their tasks. "You may as well wait here, Pearly. The others should be here soon, after all."

View the Court Record
Luke was happily humming to himself as he emerged into the small kitchen of the apartment he shared with his co-worker, making a bee-line for the fridge. "Morning, Fox!" he cried, giving the bleary-eyed redhead sat at the nearby table a wave.

Fox didn't seem to notice, quite a contrast to her friend in her pyjamas next to his more formal shirt and vest, all ready for work while she was fresh out of bed. "Hey, 'Paw," she mumbled distractedly as a greeting, tightly clutching a mug of coffee in her hands. Not far from her was an abandoned mobile phone, which she was staring at with a frown. "I think your brother's texting you," she said. "He seems... kinda mad."

Luke, his head already in the fridge, looked up with surprise, his prepared lunch already in hand. "He is?" he asked, shoving the cling-wrapped sandwich in his satchel and closing the fridge door. "What about?"

"No idea," Fox admitted with a shrug, turning her worried gaze to Luke as he approached. "I think he's been trying to contact you for a while. Did you mean to leave your cell out here?"

"I never do," Luke regretfully pointed out, sliding into the other seat at their small table and reaching for his forgotten phone. As he unlocked it and navigated to his messages, he mused aloud, "I should probably change up my evening routine so it actually follows me into my room more often."

Fox smirked. "That would be a good idea," she agreed.

Luke gave her a quick smile before turning his attention to Apollo's texts, noting that the first was from the previous night. "'Call me when you get this',' he read aloud. "'It's urgent but not an emergency'." He frowned, his reading turning to mumbles as he looked over the trio of messages, then paused, looking at his screen with an offended scowl. "Well, that's just uncalled for."

Fox was watching Luke with a worried look. "You gonna call him?"

Sighing, Luke looked over to the clock on their microwave. "I guess I should," he reluctantly admitted. "If I'm quick, I can still get to the shelter on time." Fox nodded in agreement, and Luke tapped at his phone screen only a moment more before raising it to his ear, staring off into the distance as he wondered what exactly Apollo was so upset about.

The phone on the other end rang barely once before cutting off, being replaced by the somewhat frantic yell of Apollo's Chords of Steel: "LUKE, YOU BASTARD, YOU BETTER NOT BE HEADING TO WORK ALREADY!"
Luke instinctively pulled the phone away from his ear with a frown. "There's no need to shout," he firmly informed his brother. "And I'm leaving shortly, so make this quick, please."

Apollo sighed heavily. "Fine. You want the short version of the story?" he snapped. "Dad got hit by a car last night."

At first, Luke thought his brother was joking, but it quickly sunk in that Apollo's brief 'explanation' perfectly fit the increasingly frantic text messages, as well as Apollo's reaction when Luke finally called him as requested. "W-what!?" the younger brother breathed in shock, eyes wide. "What happened!?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," Apollo snippily replied, "I thought you were in a hurry."

"You can't just leave it at that!" Luke pointed out, getting out his chair as he felt the sudden urge to pace. "He got hit by a car!?" Already, he was fighting off terrifying images in his head, of Phoenix lying in pieces in a hospital bed... or worse, a coffin. He pressed a hand to his forehead as his breathing sped up; It was becoming a struggle to keep his eyes dry. "Is he okay!?"

Fox looked up in shock, having been listening to the ongoing half-conversation before her with interest. "Someone got run over!?"

Apollo sighed again. "He's fine," he assured his brother, finally sounding more calm and reasonable... and possibly a little guilty too. "If it was serious, I would've called you last night, once I'd been to see him. I wasn't expecting you to take so long to call me back..."

Luke was busy trying to calm his rapid breathing. "You can't just say Papa got hit by a car and follow it up with 'but he's okay'!?" he weakly argued. "Who's okay after getting hit by a car!?"

"Apparently, Phoenix Wright," Apollo replied. "I wanted to get on to you before you left for work in case you wanted to come with me and Trucy to see him this morning. Visiting hours start at nine."

Concerned for her friend, Fox carefully pushed back her chair and stood up, half-extending a hand towards Luke, but she didn't dare to move any further.

At the option presented before him, Luke finally managed to begin to calm down, stood stock still as he considered. "I... don't know if I can right now," he replied, "not during work hours! I-I've already taken time off from the shelter when Papa got arrested, and Duck's relying on me today to be the lone-"

Luke's litany of excuses was cut short when Fox snatched the phone from his hand, putting it to her ear while her friend was still processing what had happened. "Southpaw?" she asked in a business-like tone, but didn't wait for an answer from the equally surprised Apollo on the other end of the line. "He'll be there in twenty minutes." With that, she hung up, pressing the phone back into Luke's hands and holding his fingers tightly with a smile. "I'll take over today, and don't worry about Duck; You know that guy couldn't be mad at you to save his life!"


Fox grinned, releasing her grip on his hands. "I'll tell him what happened. You go ahead and visit your dad."

June 15, 9:15AM
Hickfield Clinic
Once the three Wright kids met up, they didn't waste any time heading to the hospital... though they did waste several minutes pointlessly arguing whether it would be faster to take Luke's car (Luke's suggestion) or just walk (Apollo's idea), before Trucy pointed out they'd be there by now if it weren't for the prolonged fight and dragged her brothers into walking. Once at the clinic, Apollo led them through to Phoenix's room, where they were surprised to find, not Phoenix, but Pearl, sitting on the end of the abandoned hospital bed while the TV behind her blared an episode from one of the numerous spin-offs of the Steel Samurai. Pearl's attention, however, was taken by the other person in the room with her, a short man who looked even shorter thanks to the way he was almost crouching, with a single tuft of bright pink hair on his forehead. He was squinting in Pearl's direction, giving her a grin that showed off all the gaps in his teeth.

"Very important to have regular... examinations, y'know," the strange man was saying, constantly fidgeting as though completely unaware of how odd he was coming across.

Pearl was biting her thumb, humming in thought, when she spotted the trio in the corner of her eye and looked over with a relieved smile. "Apollo, Luke, Trucy!" She slipped off the bed, sidling past the strange man to run and meet them. "I was hoping you'd arrive soon!"

"Sorry we took so long," Luke told her, blushing as he rubbed at his neck in embarrassment. "That was my fault..."

Trucy looked around the otherwise empty room with a frown. "Where's Daddy?"

"He had to go for a morning check-up," Pearl explained. "He should be back any minute!"

As Trucy was nodding in understanding, suddenly the strange man had appeared behind Pearl, surprising the teen and making her jump into her cousin's arms. "Hiya there, kiddo!" he said, one hand wiping at his bottom lip as he fixed his gaze firmly on the two girls, barely sparing the boys a glance. "Cute as a button, you are! Eh he he."

Apollo frowned as he looked the man over, Phoenix's warning from the previous night playing in his head. "Are you the... doctor?" he warily asked.

"Ayup," the man replied. "Doctor Hickfield's the name. Eh he he."

Trucy gave him a wide grin. "Good morning, Doctor!" she cried.

Listening to the alarm bells in his head, Apollo firmly stepped in front of Trucy and Pearl before 'Hickfield' could open his mouth again, making the strange man jump back in surprise as Apollo made full use of the rare height advantage. "Thank you, but we'd rather wait alone for your 'patient' to get back," he firmly told the labcoated man. "Maybe another time, 'Doctor'."

'Hickfield' stared up at Apollo for a very long moment, apparently unused to being so firmly brushed off. "Hrm. Hrmh." Finally, he grinned widely, the single golden tooth in his mouth glinting in the light. "Guess I'll be off then. Eh he?" He shuffled around Apollo awkwardly, Luke stepping out of his way as the strange man made for the door behind them.

'Hickfield' stared up at Apollo for a very long moment, apparently unused to being so firmly brushed off. "Hrm. Hrmh." Finally, he grinned widely, the single golden tooth in his mouth glinting in the light. "Guess I'll be off then. Eh he?" He shuffled around Apollo awkwardly, Luke stepping out of his way as the strange man made for the door behind them.

Just as 'Hickfield' was taking a step into the corridor beyond, he collided with Phoenix, who was on his way in. Phoenix seemed as surprised as the fake doctor, looking up and taking in Apollo standing in front of Trucy and Pearl before returning his gaze firmly to the man in the labcoat in front of him. "Ah, you. I believe the nurse was looking for you," Phoenix coldly informed 'Hickfield', then limped
to one side.

The short man looked around with an almost frightened grin. "Later, Pearl," he said to the young medium, then scurried away.

View the Court Record
Phoenix sighed in relief, only to be immediately set upon by Luke and Trucy, who hugged him tightly as they cried "Papa!" and "Daddy!" respectively. He laughed as he hugged them back. "Good to see you, too!"

Apollo smiled at his siblings, taking the chance himself to visually check up on his father's injuries: The worrying red stain on his face was gone, as were the band-aids he had sported the previous night, with only faint marks of where his injuries had been underneath them. The boot was gone from his right foot, replaced by a bandage tightly wound around his ankle. He also noticed that Phoenix had changed into the clothes from the overnight bag Apollo had prepared for him, as there was no longer paint on his hoodie. All in all, he was already looking much better than he had the night before.

"How are you three holding up without me?" Phoenix asked with a laugh, limping over to his bed as Trucy and Luke stayed at his sides. Luke attempted to help him move, but Phoenix only politely held him back. "I can walk, Luke."

"Sorry," Luke mumbled in embarrassment, stepping back to allow Phoenix to reach his bed, which their father immediately moved to sit on, swinging his legs up off the floor. "Are you sure you're okay, Papa?"

"Course I'm sure," Phoenix replied, giving all three of his kids a grin as they gathered around his bed. "Absolutely nothing wrong with me, except for that," he pointed at his bandaged foot, "and that's just a sprain. It'll be back to normal in a week or two."

"I'm glad you're alright, Daddy!" Trucy chirped, then seemed to noticed the swaying, spiralling stacks of DVD cases all along the side of the bed by the TV. "Did Mommy bring these?"

Pearl nodded with a grin. "Mystic Maya thought Mister Nick might get lonely, so we brought him a few things to keep him busy!"

Luke bit back a smile as he pointed to the small piano on the floor nearby. "Is that one of them?" he asked.

"Gotta keep my skills up," Phoenix replied with a wink. "A pro always keeps his weapon close at hand."

Apollo rolled his eyes.

Trucy's attention was already focussed on the TV, and she gasped as she recognised the images on screen. "That's the Sniffling Samurai, isn't it?" she asked, turning excitedly to Pearl. "I didn't know Mommy was collecting that series!"

"As long as she didn't cave in to your childish demands for grape juice," Apollo sighed, "I'm happy."

Phoenix kept his expression carefully neutral, glad he'd had the foresight to hide the two bottles...
Maya had given him. Pearl, to her credit, hid her guilty look behind a sudden interest in the TV.

Luke was frowning in thought, arms crossed. "Papa... what exactly happened?" he asked. "Apollo said you got hit by a car?"

Grinning, Phoenix leaned back against the headboard of his bed. "Ah yes, who could have imagined I'd be the victim of a hit and run...!"


"Oh, he tried to swerve, I'll give him that," Phoenix gleefully continued. "Picture me tossed thirty feet through the air... only stopping when my head hit that telephone pole."

Apollo's siblings only continued to look horrified. "You hit a pole with your head!?" Luke repeated. "Are you okay!?"

Phoenix laughed. "What'd I tell you? Just a sprained ankle." He gestured again to the bandaged foot with a grin. "Every other test they've run has come back negative. I'm fine."

As Luke and Trucy sighed in relief, Apollo fought the urge to slap his father for deliberately teasing them about something they were so genuinely worried about (and for good reason, too), although he was glad to hear about all the tests he remembered being mentioned the previous night. He turned to Phoenix with a thoughtful look. "So, you never got a look at the culprit?"

"Nope," Phoenix admitted, shaking his head. "It'll make insurance difficult, but I'm not sure how we could track him down, otherwise I'd put you three on the case."

"If you won't, we will!" Luke announced, proudly resting his hands on his hips and looking between his siblings. "We'll find that irresponsible driver and make him pay for his crimes!"

"Yeah!" Trucy cheered in agreement. "The Wright Anything Agency never leaves a case unsolved!"

Apollo sighed. "Well, I guess we don't have any clients today anyway," he admitted, then looked to Phoenix with a reluctant smile. "Is there anything you can tell us?"

Phoenix looked thoughtful for a moment, then smiled. "A little." He reached down to the brown bag sitting on the floor nearby, pulling out his old tablet computer. With a few taps of the screen, he had turned it on and brought up a map of the general area, which he showed off to the four. "As you can see, this is the People Park area," he explained, then pointed to a red circle at the south entrance of People Park, standing out against the green of the park, the blue of the river that ran through it, and the dull grey tones of everything else. Next to it was a hand-written note of 'Car'. "I was about here, heading to Alden Tae's, when he came roaring around the corner, sent me flying, nicked a telephone pole... and zoomed away, about that direction," he pointed at the corner to the right of the circle, where the road turned south, indicated by a red arrow. "That was around nine or so. Good luck finding him from that, I say."

Apollo pulled his own Court Record from the bag at his hip, immediately getting the image file copied across.

Luke was examining the remainder of the map, and gestured curiously to two other red circles Phoenix had placed, one labelled 'Home' while the other had a small drawing of some kind of cart. "So what about these?" he asked.

"The middle one, obviously, is the Agency," Phoenix explained. "I marked it so you'd know where
The four teens and young adults exchanged surprised glances. "We do?" Trucy asked.

Apollo couldn't resist a hopeful smile. "Is it a legal thing!?!"

Phoenix laughed. "Unfortunately, no," he replied, trying not to look too amused as Apollo's face fell. "If he wasn't at the office when you left, he'll probably be there by now. You can go and get the details from him."

"You can't tell us what it is?" Luke asked.

"Missing item hunt, basically," Phoenix replied, deciding to go easy on them. "The item itself is... rather unusual, though."

Trucy turned to Pearl with a grin. "Are you going to join us, Pearly?"

Pearl thought a moment, then shook her head with an apologetic smile. "I'll stay at the office," she explained. "I could keep it clean while Mister Nick is here and you're all out searching!"

"Holding down the fort: An excellent idea!" Luke decreed, to Pearl's pleasure.

Apollo, meanwhile, had finally finished copying Phoenix's map (complete with signature 'PW' and a small fire bird in the corner) onto his own Court Record, carefully looking over the three red circles. "That makes three tasks for today," he announced. "First, the car that hit Dad... Second, the client waiting for us at the office..." Finishing his task, he locked the small computer and shoved it in a pocket. "And third, Trucy's panties."

Trucy nodded sagely, but everyone else gave the pair confused looks. "What about her panties...!?" Phoenix asked.

Apollo gave Trucy a look, and she sighed morosely. "They got stolen last night," she admitted.

Phoenix stared a moment more before slapping a hand against his face. "Oh no, that's awful!" Pearl gasped, giving Trucy a sympathetic look.

Luke still looked confused. "W-why... How did someone steal a pair of your underwear!?"

Apollo shook his head. "No, the Magic Panties," he explained. "One of the props in our show?"

Luke thought for a moment. "Oh! That makes sense," he said, then looked to Trucy with a frown. "What happened?"

"I put them through the wash last night with all our other laundry," Trucy meekly explained, fidgeting with her fingers, "but somebody grabbed them off the line when I had my back turned."

"Didn't we just replace that!?" Phoenix asked, looking up with an exasperated frown. "Trucy, those panties cost a lot of money!"

Trucy just continued to fidget, biting her lip as she looked away.

"That's why we're hoping to find them today," Apollo pointed out. "If worst comes to worst, we'll just rearrange the show without it, but since Trucy was able to chase the guy-"

"You chased them?" Pearl repeated in awed surprise, watching her younger cousin. "That was so
brave of you, Trucy!"

Trucy smiled at the praise, gaining the confidence to look up at her family again. "Yeah, I heard him pull my panties off the line as I was on my way up the stairs!" she boasted. "I turned around, saw him running off, and ran right after him!" She held out an arm in an imitation of her side of the chase. "'Wait!' I shouted! 'Give those back! I need them!' But he didn't listen, just kept on running!" Her hands curled into fists, held close to her chest as she gave her family a fierce look. "Eventually, he ducked into a garage... and disappeared! I'd lost him!"

"In other words," Apollo cut in, hoping to end his sister's overly dramatic retelling there, "the moment we have any spare time, we'll find this garage and, hopefully, a lead on the thief."

"And my panties!" Trucy firmly added.

"And the magic panties," Apollo agreed.

Phoenix took a deep breath, thinking for a moment. "Sounds like a plan," he agreed, then smiled. "For now though, the four of you had better get back to the office. Don't want to keep our client waiting."

"You can count on us, Papa!" Luke cried with a grin, spinning around and charging out of the room. Trucy squealed in glee as she followed.

Pearl gave Phoenix a small bow. "Let us know if you need us, Mister Nick!" she said, then rushed to follow.

Apollo was moving to join his siblings and cousin, but paused at the door, looking back as his father settled in to watching the TV. "Dad?"

Phoenix looked back in surprise. "Hm?"

"All those tests definitely came back negative?"

Phoenix paused, then smiled. "Definitely," he said. "No trace of blood-poisoning, no bones broken, I haven't shown any sign of brain-damage or whiplash... I'm fine. Just a sprained ankle."

Apollo stared at Phoenix for a few moments before allowing himself to sigh in relief, returning the smile. "Okay. See you later, Dad."

"Check in on me if you need help," Phoenix called in reply.
As the four approached the stairwell leading up to their home and work space (or home-away-from-home, in Pearl's case), they quickly caught sight of a tall man in white leaning against the nearby wall, a crimson bowl sitting upside-down on his head and noodle-like hair spilling out all around his long face. When he spotted the approaching group, he straightened up with a frown, shaking a fist at the youths. "Hey, hey, hey! How long you planning on making me wait, eh!?"

Apollo shared a surprised look with Luke before breaking into a run towards their family friend. "Mister Eldoon!" he cried, making sure to give the man a smile as his siblings and cousin hurried to follow. "Good morning!"

Eldoon's stern look faded as the kids caught up. "Hey there, Pollo, Trucy-doll... and you two, Luke and Pearly, right?" He gave Apollo a wry smile. "Sounds like your pops had a bit of a rough spot, eh?"

Trucy sighed. "All's well that ends well, I guess."

Luke thought a moment. "Are you our client, Mister Eldoon?" he asked. "The one Papa told us to meet?"

"That'd be me," Eldoon replied with a nod. "The boss told you what I need, right? Don't let me down now, Pollo!"

Apollo opened his mouth to respond, then paused in thought. "Let's talk about it inside, shall we?" he decided, then turned to Trucy. "Truce?"

"I'm on it!" Trucy cried, giving Apollo a salute before charging up the stairs.

Once the small group was inside, Pearl was the first to charge off, announcing "I'll prepare some tea!" as she disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. Luke did a circuit of the office, making a valiant effort to tidy up a little despite the seemingly-by-design messy nature of the room. It didn't help that his efforts were hampered by Apollo, Trucy and Eldoon coming in right behind him, watching him run around for a moment or two in vague confusion.

Trucy shrugged, then gestured to the red couches as she invited their visitor to sit down with a wide grin. "Could you tell us what the problem is, Mister Eldoon?" she asked.

Eldoon chuckled as he lowered himself onto the seat. "Anything for you, Trucy-doll!"

Apollo noticed Trucy bouncing into place on the couch opposite Eldoon, and moved to join her. Luke, apparently noticing that business was happening, abandoned any further efforts to neaten up
and ran around to copy his siblings, sitting on the other side of Trucy from Apollo.

"I'm afraid to say..." Eldoon explained with a frown, crossing his arms. "My noodle stand was stolen last night."

"What!?" Trucy cried.

"Stolen...!?" Apollo repeated, shocked.

Eldoon nodded morosely. "My stand! Gone!"

Luke had been frozen in surprise, but now frowned determinedly and pulled his notebook out of his satchel, preparing a pen. "What exactly happened, Mister Eldoon?" he asked. "Tell us everything you know!"

The older man sighed, then began to recount his tragic lament. "It was last night. I was doing my rounds, blowin' my whistle." He tapped the harmonica hanging around his neck somewhat proudly. "I closed up my stand for the night and parked by the house... then, this morning, dark 'n' early..." He shook his head. "It was gone! My keep! My castle!" He wailed rather dramatically.

Apollo frowned, a finger pressed to his forehead. "Do you know who might have taken it?"

"I don't care!" Eldoon practically barked in reply. "Without that stand, I'm finished!" He groaned, all the anger fading away as he seemed to almost deflate. "All my noodle bowls were in there, too..."

Trucy's hands were still pressed to her mouth, wide eyes shining. "That's the saddest thing I've heard all day!" she declared.

"You know it," Eldoon muttered.

Luke finished scribbling the last of his notes in his book, tapping the end of the pen against his chin. "You just want us to find the stand?" he clarified. "Not who took it?"

Eldoon nodded, giving the trio a stern stare. "Yep! And the day you bring my baby back is the day you feast on as many noodles as you want!"

Apollo tried not to visibly wince; He had yet to warm up to Guy Eldoon's particular brand of especially salty noodles, and he was beginning to doubt he ever would. "You can count on us, Mister Eldoon," he said.

Luke was still frowning in thought. "If you do have a thought about who might have taken it, though," he explained, "that would be a good lead in finding the stand. Do you really have no idea?"

Eldoon shook his head. "Gonna have to leave that part to you three," he replied, then pushed himself to his feet. "I live right 'round the corner, on Park Street," he told them as they also stood up. "Can't miss my little shack; You drop by if you need any more info, 'kay?"

"We will, sir!" Luke promised.

"Get it back today if you can," Eldoon continued with a stern look. "I got noodles to make!"

Apollo nodded. "Yours isn't our only search with a deadline today..."

"Don't you worry about a thing, Mister Eldoon!" Trucy promised, giving the man a cheerful salute. "The Wright Anything Agency is on the case!"
Eldoon was smiling at her and about to say something when the door to the kitchen opened, and Pearl stepped in, a single cup in her free hand (the other was on the door handle). "Tea's ready!" she announced. "How many people want it?"

"Not me, Pearly-girl," Eldoon replied, hand held up as he moved away from the couch. "I'll be headin' home now." As he headed for the door, he pointed at the Wrights with a warning look. "Remember, find my stand or there's an empty bowl in yer future!"

"Er, right," Apollo mumbled.

Luke and Trucy shared confused glances as their client left the room. Not long after, they could hear the click of the front door as it closed behind him.

Pearl clutched the cup in her hands, looking worried. "So, um... does anyone want tea...?"

Luke stepped away from the couch, moving towards Pearl with a smile. "If you've gone to all the trouble of preparing it, I'll definitely have some," he assured her.

Apollo nodded with a sigh, following his brother. "Yeah, we may as well work out our battle plan of what to do first."

"Alright!" Pearl said with a relieved smile, turning back to the kitchen. Luke and Apollo followed her.

Trucy giggled, bouncing after her brothers. "Things have certainly picked up, haven't they?" she marvelled. "We had no work yesterday, and now we have three cases!"

"Yeah, and two of them are us," Apollo pointed out with a frown.

"I heard what happened to Mister Eldoon's noodle stand," Pearl said with a sad frown as she poured out her green tea into four cups, each wildly different in appearance and scrounged from the Wrights' pieced-together kitchen supplies. "It doesn't sound like you have very much to go on."

Luke sat at the kitchen table, his notebook held out in front of him as he studied his notes. "We have enough for a start, at least," he pointed out. "For Papa's accident, there's the scene of the crime: The southern entrance to People Park."

"I don't think we're going to find anything there, though," Apollo sighed, sitting near Luke at the table. "We're looking for the car that hit him, and it sped away."

"You never know, it might have left something at the scene of the crime!" Trucy pointed out, bouncing into her chair next to Apollo as Pearl came out from the kitchen with two of her cups, leaving them with Luke and Trucy. "Thanks, Pearly!"

Apollo sighed as Pearl went back into the kitchen for the last two cups. "So what about the stand theft?" he asked Luke. "What possible leads do we have on that?"

"Well, the crime scene," Luke admitted, looking a bit sheepish. "Again, we'll have to see if the thief left anything telling behind."

"If only you had eyewitnesses," Pearl sympathised, emerging from the kitchen with a cup she left in front of Apollo. "At least then you'd have some idea who the thief was," she continued as she slid into the last empty seat, next to Luke.

"The Magic Panties too," Luke added. "Our only lead there is this garage where Trucy lost the thief
when she chased after him."

Trucy nodded. "I can show you where that is, too!" she said. "It's on Park Street, same as Mister Eldoon's house!"

Apollo sighed. "I suppose there at least we could kill two birds with one stone," he admitted. "Check out the garage and the scene of the stand theft at the same time."

Luke was frowning in thought, again staring at his notes. "It kinda bothers me though," he said. "All three of our cases happened in such a small area, and all on the same night. Might they be connected?"

As Apollo and Pearl mused over the thought, Trucy giggled. "This is so exciting! We're like real detectives! Ooh!" She bounced in her chair, giving her brothers an excited grin. "We should add, like, 'private investigators' to our fliers!"

Apollo frowned, arms crossed. "I'd prefer as little of these jobs as possible, thanks."

"It is a bit like all the cases I helped the Professor on when I was a kid," Luke admitted with a smile. "On a much smaller scale, of course."

"Then why don't you head the investigation, then?" Apollo replied as he looked away, barely hiding the bitter tone that crept into his voice. "Since you have experience in this kind of thing and all."

Everyone stared at Apollo for a few tense seconds. "I wasn't aware anyone was heading this investigation," Luke calmly told his brother. "Besides, all of us present except for Trucy have valuable experience in this kind of thing; I'm not special in that regard."

After another lengthy pause, Apollo sighed, forcing himself to calm down. "Yeah, sorry. I just... I guess everything's just getting to me today."

Luke gave him a smile, nodding in understanding. "That's alright. Why don't we take a break here with our tea before we head off?"

Apollo gave a half-smile back, uncrossing his arms to grab his cup. "Sure. We can start on Park Street, since it's closer and everything."

Trucy hid a sigh of relief, turning to Pearl sitting across from her. "Hey Pearly, are you sure you're not coming with us?"

Pearl shook her head, looking apologetic. "I'd better not," she said. "You all seem to have this in hand. Plus," she smiled, "someone needs to look after the office and Charley while everyone's out."

"Aww," Trucy mumbled in disappointment.

Apollo gave Pearl a smile. "We'll try not to take too long," he promised her.

Pearl smiled back.
Apollo was in the lead as he, Luke and Trucy crossed the road onto the far side of the street Eldoon lived on. This was something new to all of them, as they usually ventured onto Park Street only to head to People Park itself, the eastern entrance the road lead directly to being the closest to their home at the Agency. They stayed on the pavement to avoid the passing traffic, crossing a side-street to where a very sparkly building sat on the corner, its entrance hidden under a loud archway that shone gold in the mid-morning sun. Between them and the entrance of the building was a half-open garage door, almost hidden behind a police car parked in front of it.

Trucy gasped, pointing at the garage. "That's it!" she cried, tugging on the nearest sleeve (which was Luke's) and bouncing in excitement. "Polly, Luke, that's where the thief went!"

"Behind the police car?" Luke asked, confused.

"Well, obviously the police car wasn't there last night!" Trucy pointed out. "It must be here to find my panties!"

Luke raised an eyebrow. "But you haven't reported the theft to the police," he replied. "Why would they be looking for them?"

Apollo frowned, examining the building. Unnoticed by his bickering siblings, he crept forward, getting a better look at the sparkling entrance. Up a red carpet, below the golden archway above the tiny porch, a sign proudly boasted 'Meraktis Clinic'. 'Looks more like a casino parlour than a hospital...' Beneath, a wide set of glass double doors hung, some kind of metal stand set up to the side. Apollo stepped forward into the shadow of the archway to get a closer look, only for the doors to suddenly open, a pink-haired police officer poking her head out.

"Sorry sir, no going into the clinic today," the officer warned.

Apollo blinked in surprise, stepping back automatically. "Why?" he asked. "Did something happen?"

"Huh?" the officer replied, then hurriedly shook her head. "Oh, no. Nothing to see here. Move along." She waved at Apollo, chasing him away off the stairs. "You'll have to find someplace else to play doctor." With that, she closed the door and disappeared back inside.

Apollo stared dumbfounded at the place the officer had been. 'Do I look the right age to be 'playing doctor'!?' He was startled out of his thoughts by a tap on his arm, and looked over to see that his conversation with the officer had attracted Luke and Trucy, the latter grinning up at him as she turned her tapping of his arm into a cheerful wave.

"A clinic, huh?" Luke mused with a frown, reading the sign. "I'd understand an ambulance outside a clinic, but a police car?"

"Maybe they're tax evaders!" Trucy gleefully suggested.

Apollo sighed. "We need a little more info on this place," he said. "Trucy's thief might still be in
there, after all."

"Yes!" Trucy agreed. "We need to check out that garage!"

Luke was frowning in thought, then seemed to notice something behind Apollo and smiled. "We could ask Mister Eldoon," he suggested. "He's their neighbour, after all."

'Neighbour?' Apollo turned around and, to his surprise, saw a shack of a house sandwiched between the flashy clinic and the building on the other side. Out the front, sat in a chair next to a sleepy-looking dog lying in its doghouse, was Guy Eldoon, apparently dozing off in what little sunlight reached his property past the bulk of his suspicious neighbour. "That's Mister Eldoon's house...?"

"You didn't know?" Luke laughed. "He lives around the corner from us and you two eat his noodles almost every single night!"

Apollo shot Luke a glare.

Trucy skipped past her brothers to the sleeping Eldoon, stopping in front of him with a wide grin. "Hi, Mister Eldoon!"

With a snort, Eldoon woke up, looking around in confusion before registering Trucy in front of him, Luke and Apollo approaching behind her. "Ah, there you three are!" he cried, pushing himself to his feet. "Well, you find anything yet?"

Apollo tried not to look guilty. "Well, um, no. Not yet."

Eldoon scoffed, unimpressed. "The longer you loaf around here the saltier your victory bowl gets, just remember that!"

Apollo resolved to quietly dump his 'reward' in a bush once Eldoon wasn't looking.

Luke almost seemed to squeal with glee as he noticed the dog sleepily watching them from its doghouse. "Mister Eldoon, I didn't know you had a dog!" he cried, rushing around to kneel at the animal's side.

Eldoon laughed. "Ah yes, you're the vet, aren't you? 'Er name's Spoon."

"Hello there, Spoon," Luke said to the dog with a grin, and she quietly grunted in reply as she smiled up at him. Luke giggled, and slowly began to pet her on the head.

Trucy frowned. "Spoon doesn't seem so lively," she pointed out.

"She didn't get her bowl of salty broth this mornin', that's why," Eldoon explained with a morose sigh. "Poor lil' thing."

Luke looked up in shock, but apparently elected not to wail on their client for not feeding his dog correctly. Instead he caught Apollo's eye, glancing repeatedly behind the lawyer.

Apollo frowned for a moment as he wondered what Luke was asking, turning to look behind him. His eye was caught by a large tarp, the bright blue contrasting with the brown of the house and its generally worn down surroundings, and he stepped over to pick it up, noticing it didn't appear to be covering anything.

"That's the place! Right there!" Eldoon crowed, following Apollo and gesturing to the area in front of an outside kitchen unit, where the tarp had been discarded. "That's where I kept my stand.
Covered all nice 'n' purty with that blue tarp there!

Apollo thought a moment, then carefully placed the sheet of plastic back on the ground. "I see."

"You see?" Trucy repeated, almost surprising Apollo as he noticed her behind him again. "What? Did you figure out why it was stolen!?"

"Well, no," Apollo admitted, "but it does suggest that the thief knew what they were looking for. They clearly knew what was under that sheet."

Eldoon scratched his chin thoughtfully. "So it wasn't one of those casual drive-by stand snatchers, you mean?" he asked, then gave Apollo a smile. "Not bad, sonny-boy. Not bad at all!"

Apollo couldn't resist a proud grin.

Trucy's attention was caught by something crimson lying on the ground, and she jumped over to grab it, spinning the item in her hands. "Mister Eldoon, this is one of your bowls, isn't it?" she asked.

Eldoon looked over to see what she was holding and gasped, jumping over the tarp to her side. "Hey! It is!" he cried, taking the bowl as Trucy offered it to him and sniffing the inside, following it up with a satisfied sigh. "Smells like noodles... Pretty soon it's gonna taste just like noodles!" He turned to Apollo, holding the bowl out. "All my other bowls got taken away with my stand! Get it back for me sonny-boy, I'm beggin' ya!"

Apollo nodded, taking the bowl. "We will, Mister Eldoon, don't you worry." He leaned down and placed it carefully on the tarp. "Actually, I was curious... You've told us when you discovered the cart was missing, but when did you last see it before that?"

Eldoon hummed as his face scrunched up in thought. "Ooh, I reckon it was right before ten PM," he said. "I came home, washed my bowls and gave the wheels a squirt of grease... then I went inside."

"So it disappeared this morning?" Trucy wondered, tapping her mouth.

"Early this morning," Eldoon replied. "Before the sun rose."

'Hence the "dark 'n' early" comment earlier,' Apollo thought.

"I'm washed up on the salty shores of ruination!" Eldoon lamented, turning his face to the sky. "That stand had my whole life in it... nay, my whole being!" He sighed, looking down to the single bowl on the tarp. "If you don't find that stand today... then I'll be forced to walk the streets peddling that bowl... my last bowl."

Apollo wasn't sure how he could reply to that, sharing a glance with Trucy. "Well, we'll do our very best to find it," he promised. "We did have one more question though." As Eldoon gave him a curious look, Apollo gestured to the neighbouring clinic. "Do you know what happened next door? There's a police car out front..."

Instantly, Eldoon's demeanour changed, his self-pitying sorrow turning to anger in the blink of an eye. "Feh! Probably gave someone food poisoning, I'll bet!" he scoffed, crossing his arms. "That police car got here this mornin', actually. I asked what they were up to, but they wouldn't even tell me, the neighbour! Feh!"

Trucy was humming in thought, but Apollo resisted the urge to roll his eyes. It was clear, whoever the 'Meraktis' of the neighbouring clinic was, he didn't get on with Eldoon.
"Not that I was surprised much," the noodle seller was continuing. "That doctor works for the wrong crowd. It was just a matter of time 'fore he got what was coming to him. Feh!"

Apollo frowned. Now there was an interesting tidbit. "The 'wrong crowd'...?" he repeated.

Eldoon paused, apparently surprised he'd let the phrase slip, then waved dismissively at Apollo, his anger fading. "Never you mind about that," he insisted.
It was a grand room. It reminded me the most of a library, every visible wall covered by a bookcase bulging with books. The roof above us was made of glass, the ominous dark clouds blocking any view of the sky, and the skeleton of some kind of pterosaur was hanging off it.

At the end of the room, we saw him: Leon Bronev. He was sitting behind a large desk, full of artefacts and papers, but he stood up as he saw us come in. "Well, well! At long last, here you are. How do you like this Nest of ours?"

The sight of Bronev was too much for Professor Sycamore, because he finally snapped, jumping forward with that fierce look in his eyes: "Bronev! You soulless monster! I'll make you pay for what you've done!"

Bronev just laughed. "Hahaha! Ah, brought some extra baggage with you, I see."

Professor Sycamore visibly bristled, but kept himself under control.

"But I have no interest in the brayings of fools. No, Professor Layton, you are the one I have been waiting for." He held out a hand, and we were all too shocked to reply as we realised what he was about to ask: "I would like to extend an invitation to you... to join Targent."

"I beg your pardon?"

Professor Sycamore scoffed. "This is an absolute joke! Don't listen to him!"

Bronev was still ignoring him, though. "Don't feign surprise, Layton," he said. "You're an archaeologist after all; One who has seen the Azran ruins, and knows their significance. Power and wisdom beyond anything that mankind possesses today! You cannot tell me you are not tempted!"

The Professor stood for a long moment. "The advancement of man's knowledge is a worthy goal," he admitted, "but not one that should come at the cost of the basic human right of freedom."

"Such a noble sentiment," Bronev replied, though he was scoffing at the idea. "However, you are also here today because you seek the Azran eggs. What difference is there, really, between you and me?"

Professor Sycamore snapped again: "We are nothing like you! We understand the importance of free will! Why would we ever want to be your slaves!?"

"Free will? Pah! Are you so attached to your independence you'd forgo the benefits of working together for a greater goal?" He shook his head. "No matter. Let us not dwell on our disagreements. How about... a little game?" He pulled a small box from a drawer in his desk. "This one is a favourite of mine, a simple coin game."

"Wait, a game!? Can we play? Huh? Can we? Pleeeeaaaase?"

Oh, um, I guess so... It's more of a puzzle actually, but it is fun! How many coins do we have?

"Ergh, do we have to? It's holding up the story! And we know the Professor would have won it,
anyway!"

"But I wanna play! Luke will tell us the answer if we don't do it now!"

"Just say the Professor won and move on! It's not that hard!"

"But-!"

He... does have a point, Trucy.

"Awww..."

I won't say anything about the coin game itself, so you can figure it out on your own... But remind me later and we'll play it together, okay?

"Okay!"

"THANK you."

Now, where was I...? Oh, yeah, the Professor won the game, naturally, leaving Bronev staring in shock! "I believe I have won. Now, the Azran egg was the prize we agreed on, was it not?"

Bronev wasn't happy, but he calmly packed up his game. "I suppose I have no choice, do I? You can have the egg."

I couldn't resist a small cheer at that, but Aurora looked like she was too scared to really react, and Emmy was still glaring off to one side; I don't think she'd even noticed.

"But before you start to feel smug, I have something I'd like to show you." Bronev smiled confidently, left his box of coins on his desk, then picked up a small remote that he pointed at the window. A shade rolled down automatically, and a hidden projector somewhere in the room switched on to point at it: It was Mister and Missus Layton, the Professor's parents!

"Oh no!"

They were sitting at a table in a garden, enjoying a cup of tea and totally unaware they were being filmed. Their discussion echoed from speakers somewhere in the room: "Don't you know what day it is today? It's the day we brought little Hershel home! More than thirty years ago now!"

"So, his birthday?"

"Shhhh! You're ruining it, Polly!"

"... What's that look about, Luke?"

*Oh, uh, nothing!*

The Professor was frozen in shock and fear, unable to make himself speak.

"What a charming old couple they are," Bronev was saying. "You must be very fond of them, Layton."

It was beyond obvious this was one of Targent's threats. "What do you intend to do to them?" the Professor asked.

"Nothing, if you accept my invitation."
Professor Sycamore had been watching sternly. "Don't pay any attention, Professor," he called. "It's a trick."

Bronev laughed. "Hahaha! How tiresome you are! Listen to any more of his drivel, Layton, and I'll have no more mercy for you than I had for him. The choice is yours: What will you do?"

The Professor suddenly seemed a lot calmer, thinking for a moment. "No," he replied. "I will never join Targent."

Professor Sycamore was surprised, but Bronev just laughed again. "So you don't really care for your parents after all! And I thought you were such a soft-hearted man! So you won't accept my invitation. Suit yourself. I won't coerce you; It's much more fun to just unleash you on the world and see what you'll do." From his pocket, he took out a small blue object-

"The Azran Egg!"

"Oh goodie."

Yep, the egg! He tossed it at us, and I caught it, but I quickly handed it over to Aurora.

"Be warned," Bronev continued. "Everywhere you go, I'll be one step ahead of you. So long, boys!" With that, he turned and left through a back door.

The Professor was still shaken; I ran to his side. "Professor? What's going to happen now? Are you sure that was...?"

"I don't know, Luke," he admitted. "But that footage wasn't live... thank goodness."

"It wasn't?"

"That party took place last week. I was sorry to miss it. In fact, I spoke to my mother on the telephone just yesterday. Ma and Pa are perfectly fine... for the moment, at least."

"What a happy coincidence you called them so recently," Professor Sycamore said.

"I must hope that Bronev is too focussed on the Azran to follow through with his threats," the Professor continued. "The thought of him hurting my parents... He had me so shaken I was fooled at first, you know. If Professor Sycamore hadn't interjected, I fear I would have given in." He turned to Professor Sycamore and tipped his hat. "Thank you, Professor. I am extremely grateful."

"It was nothing. I am familiar with Targent's trickery. Speaking of which," he gave the egg in Aurora's hands a suspicious look, "I wonder if this egg is just another trick?"

Aurora shook her head, finally giving us a smile. "It's real," she said. "The last aura stone." She thought for a moment, then looked sad. "Professor, once I release the power of the aura stones... I may not by myself any more."

"You have got to be kidding me."

"Shhhh!"

We were all surprised. "Are you sure?" the Professor asked.

Aurora nodded. "Ever since we entered this tower, I have had a very strong... feeling."

"The feeling of bullcrap?"
"Polly!"

"Not happiness or sorrow or fear... but a compulsion. To follow my mission to its completion, to remember my duty as the Azran emissary. I feel... a great gulf between myself and all of you."

Professor Sycamore gave her a kindly look, resting a hand on her shoulder. "Do not worry, Aurora; You are more than just the Azran emissary, but also our trusted companion and friend. Whatever anxiety grips us, we face it together, as one."

"Do you really mean that, Professor Sycamore? Professor Layton?"

"Of course," the Professor insisted. "No matter what happens, we all believe in you, Aurora."

Aurora seemed relieved, all of us giving her encouraging smiles. "Thank you," she said. "Your words have given me strength. I'm ready to activate the aura stones now."

We had to go outside to do it, since Aurora said there wasn't room in Bronev's office, and we didn't want to wait until we could get out of the Nest. She walked out into the open space of the courtyard on the top of the tower, raised the five eggs into the air, and said, "O five stones of aura, hear the call of the emissary! Reveal unto the world your true form!" Her eyes, like the five eggs, all glowed a brilliant blue, her hair flowing like she was underwater. The eggs, they began to float, spinning in a circle as they-

"Okay, that's it!"

April 18, 10:45AM
Wright Talent Agency
Luke and Apollo's Room

Luke looked up in surprise as his brother got to his feet. "Apollo?"

Trucy, sat at Luke's side on his bed, pouted at Apollo. "What are you doing, Polly?" she demanded.

Apollo rolled his eyes. "These dumb little ancient artefacts have the ability to float now?" he asked.

"They're not 'dumb'!" Luke protested, trying not to be offended. "And they weren't just floating; They were transforming themselves into a-!"

"Transforming?" Apollo scoffed. "Okay, now I really have heard it all."

Luke was too shocked to reply.


Apollo crossed his arms, raising a sceptical eyebrow at his sister. "I think it was pretty ruined already."

Luke stared with wide eyes, trying not to cry.

Trucy gritted her teeth, barely holding in the fury emanating from her tiny frame. "Why can't you just sit and listen to Luke's stories for once!?" she cried. "You always have to butt in and... and be a
"If Luke wasn't claiming this all actually happened, I'd be a lot more receptive, believe me," Apollo calmly replied, waving away Trucy's childish argument. "This one in particular is clearly nothing more than a wild exaggeration."

"No it's not," Luke quietly insisted, but was too hurt to meet Apollo's eyes, looking at the floor as he blinked back tears.

Apollo didn't seem to hear his brother. "Maybe another time," he continued, then turned and walked out, closing the door behind him.

Trucy glared at the door for a very long moment before letting out her anger in one long shriek. "APOLLO WRIGHT IS A BUTT!" With that, she stomped back to Luke's side, sitting on the bed and turning to look at her brother. At the sight of his distress, she instantly calmed, throwing herself on Luke with a tight embrace. "Ignore Polly," she said. "He's a big idiot, anyway."

Luke couldn't resist a small giggle at that. After a moment to push the sadness to one side, he turned to his sister, forcing a smile. "He can be," he agreed.

Trucy grinned.

"What do you say," Luke continued with a more genuine smile, "we continue the story anyway, just the two of us?"

Gasping in delight, Trucy nodded eagerly. "Yeah! Finish the story! Finish it!"

Luke giggled, pushing his sister off his shoulder to put some space between them. "Okay, then! Let's see, we were at the formation of the Azran Key..."

It would be a very long time before Apollo heard the end to the story.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
With Eldoon back in his chair, idly petting his dog, the Wright kids huddled together out of his hearing range to catch each other up on what they'd learned: Apollo and Trucy told Luke about when the cart was last seen and the solitary remaining bowl, which Luke dutifully wrote down in his notebook, then Luke explained to his siblings what he'd learned from his short talk with Spoon.

"She sleeps inside, so she didn't see anything," Luke said, "but she did say she heard something strange going on outside last night."

Trucy bounced excitedly. "She heard the theft!?"

Apollo sighed. "So nothing useful from the dog," he pointed out. "I doubt she heard anything that could help us."

Trucy paused, thinking to herself. "But if she heard something, why didn't she tell Mister Eldoon? Or his wife?"

Luke shrugged. "She seems a very quiet dog... and I don't think she puts much of an effort into protecting that cart anyway; She doesn't like it too much."

"That makes sense!" Trucy giggled.

"But I do think what she heard could help us," Luke continued, turning to Apollo. "She said, after she heard the tarp being pulled off, she only heard the cart moving for a very short distance. After that, she heard a lot of, what she called, 'before-water washing up sounds'."

Apollo and Trucy gave each other confused looks. "What's that meant to mean?"

Luke smiled. "I think she was hearing the bowls clinking together!" he replied. "You said Mister Eldoon washes them every evening, doesn't he? She knows he calls that 'washing up', and she recognised the sound the dry bowls make when they tap each other, but didn't know what made it!"

"Ooh!" Trucy cooed. "I never would've guessed that!"

Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead. "But why would she hear that?" he asked. "It doesn't make sense. The bowls have to still be in the cart, because they're not here! And why would the thief stay so close just to mess around with the bowls!?"

Luke shrugged. "Search me," he admitted, "but I'm sure a little more investigation will give us some kind of explanation! Oh, and," he turned to Trucy with a smile, "she said she'd heard you chasing your thief earlier that evening!"

"Does she know where the thief went?" Trucy asked hopefully.

"Sorry, no," Luke admitted, shaking his head. "She heard him walking away, but couldn't remember if she could tell where at the time." Trucy sighed in disappointment. "Same with the cart, actually!"
Luke continued. "She heard it moving away, but couldn't tell where."

Apollo crossed his arms with a frustrated grunt, half-ready to dismiss the dog's testimony entirely. "So, what next?" he asked.

At that, Trucy perked up. "The garage!" she cried, pointing to the nearby door, still hanging half-open behind the police car. "Maybe my thief left a clue in there!"

Apollo gave Luke a harried look, but Luke just giggled. "Why not?" he said. "We'll be quick and quiet, and won't touch anything we don't have to!"

"But we're trespassing," Apollo pointed out, raising an eyebrow. "Why are you okay with that!?"

"We'll be quick, Polly!" Trucy laughed, skipping away to squeeze behind the police car. Luke followed her, and the pair quickly disappeared underneath the half-open rolling door.

Sighing, Apollo pressed a hand to his face. "We are so going to get caught," he mumbled.

Suddenly, a scream rang from inside.

"Trucy!" Apollo cried, throwing himself over the front of the car and ducking under the door into the garage, where he paused, looking around frantically as his eyes adjusted to the low light filtering in from behind. "Trucy!?"

Luke laughed, and Apollo's gaze latched on to the two figures directly in front of him, at the other end of the room. "It's okay!" Luke called, and, a moment later, a yellow-orange light on the wall to Apollo's left flickered on, better illuminating the room. "We found a skeleton!" the younger brother added, standing next to the light switch he had just flicked on.

Trucy was giggling as she played with the macabre model. "It's gold-plated!" she pointed out, then looked to a box sitting next to it. "Ooh, look, there's bits of a mannequin in there!" She knelt down, poking gleefully at a tan foot sticking straight up into the air. "This place just screams 'hospital storage', don't you think?"

Apollo sighed in relief that the momentary scare turned out to not be anything serious. "It screams something, that's for sure," he mumbled.

Luke gasped, a wide smile on his face as he suddenly rushed past Trucy, manoeuvring around a pair of tires on the floor to where a folded step-ladder rested. "Hello there!" he cried, his eyes locked on the top of a towering pile of boxes on Apollo's right. "My name's Luke! What's yours?"

Apollo looked up in surprise to see a black-tuxedo-patterned cat perched above them, peering down warily with bright yellow eyes. It mewed at them, tail waving back and forth.

"Hello, Gabriel!" Luke replied, a hat moving to tip his cap as Trucy ran to join her brothers. "We won't be here long; We're investigating a pair of thefts that happened near here last night. One of the thieves came in here before we lost track of them, actually. Would you happen to know anything about it?"

Gabriel seemed to relax a little at that, its tail slowing to a standstill and hanging limply over the edge of the cardboard tower. It meowed again, a little louder this time than before.

"Oh, that's a shame," Luke said, with a sad look. "Well, if you do ever find out anything, we'd greatly appreciate if you could pass it on!"
The cat meowed again, then firmly turned its head away.

Luke shrugged as he turned to Apollo. "Sorry, he says he was at his home last night. Doesn't know anything about our investigation."

Apollo just nodded; He wasn't sure how much he could believe an animal's testimony anyway. "While we're here, we may as well look for any clues the thief might have left," he pointed out, moving around Luke to head past the lime-green car parked at their side.

"Yeah!" Trucy cheered. "Clues... to a panty-snatching!" she dramatically whispered. "Clues... like a pair of panties!"

Apollo was midway through rolling his eyes when an anomaly on the side of the car caught his eye (and, luckily, before he brushed into it): The side mirror on the driver's door was missing, roughly broken off with presumably-live wires sticking out of the hole. He frowned, reaching for his Court Record to take a picture. "Now that's odd," he pointed out.

Luke and Trucy ran to Apollo's side, examining the damage to the car. "Do you think it's relevant?" Luke asked. "For all we know, the owner of this car has nothing to do with the thefts."

"They clearly don't know about the damage," Apollo pointed out, snapping a picture. "In any case, I feel better having a record of this. You never know." He slipped the thin tablet back into his hip bag, pausing to carefully rearrange the wires so they pointed back into the hole of the missing wing-mirror.


Apollo moved on, running a hand along the side of the car as he slowly moved towards its back, smiling. "Hey, you know what this car reminds me of?"

"What?" Trucy asked, trailing behind her brother.

"One of Dad's cases!" Apollo replied. "A murder happened in the back of a car, and Dad spotted a cloth in the tailpipe that turned out to be a vital clue to solving the case!"

"Wow," Trucy said, faking some enthusiasm for her brother. Luke just smiled in amusement, staying where he was.

Not seeming to notice his siblings humouring him, Apollo made his way to the back of the car, crouching down by the car's exhaust. "Wouldn't it be funny if-?" He paused, staring at the tailpipe in disbelief. "Hey! There's something in here!"


Apollo was already carefully shoving his hand into the exhaust, and, a moment later, pulled out a bundle of blue-and-pink fabric with a grin. "Truce! Is this...?"

Trucy gasped, grabbing the bundle from her brother and shaking it out a bit to reveal her, slightly dirty, blue Magic Panties, decorated with reddish-pink hearts. She squealed in delight, throwing her arms around Apollo as he got to his feet. "My panties!" she cried. "Thank you so much, Polly!"

Apollo laughed, hugging his sister back. "That was quick!" he pointed out. "I'm glad we didn't have to rearrange the show!"
"You bet!" Trucy replied, bouncing away from her brother to admire the reclaimed prop. "It would have been terrible to lose our best-loved act!"

"Excuse me?" Apollo asked, laughing as he crossed his arms. "I'd say my Zig-Zag illusion is our best-loved act, Artemis."

Trucy stuck her tongue out at Apollo, and was about to shoot back a reply when a clearing throat from their brother nearby drew their attention.

Luke was watching his siblings, a hand held close to his mouth from his efforts to alert them. "I don't think you've noticed," he said, gesturing down with his hand as he stared pointedly at Apollo, "but there's another potential clue here." As Apollo and Trucy watched blankly, Luke quickly knelt down, reaching under the back tire of the car. As he stood up, he brandished a small, hot pink mobile phone in his hand.

"A cell phone!" Apollo cried in surprise.

Trucy jumped forward, looking down where Luke had found it. "Right beneath the tire!" she pointed out, then looked up at Apollo. "If the car moved, it would have been crushed for sure!"

"Which means the car hasn't moved since it was dropped," Apollo mused aloud, pressing a finger to his forehead. "Think it belongs to the doctor here?"

"We should bring it to him later!" Trucy suggested.

Luke nodded in agreement. "We shouldn't leave it here, where anyone could take it," he said, apparently not noticing that they were doing exactly that. "We want to talk to him anyway, to rule him out as the thief."

Apollo thought a moment more. "Luke?" he asked, a hand reaching into the bag at his hip. "Think you could put it back where you found it for a moment? I want to take a picture."

After a drop by the Agency to check Pearl was doing alright alone, the Wright children headed onwards to the south entrance of their local park; Luke had noted their usual eastern entrance was closed off, and Apollo was loath to sit around Eldoon's looking for more clues, which he doubted existed, so on to their second crime scene it was.

They didn't usually venture around this end of the park, and Apollo couldn't help but notice the massive mansion as they approached, running his eyes along the elaborate dragon design painted along the stone wall that protected the distinctly Asian-styled house behind it. 'Feels like Chinatown,' he thought. 'Or Kurain.'

Luke had ended up at the lead as they turned the final corner, and paused in surprise, causing Trucy immediately behind him to bump into his back. "Apollo!" he cried. "Look!"

Apollo rushed to Luke's side, dodging Trucy as she also hurried to look. "What?" he asked, but got no answer, catching sight of the street outside the park entrance with a gasp.

Kitaki Avenue was more of a wide path than a road, but even so a significant section of it was blocked off by a series of orange traffic cones, police tape tied around them and across the fancy archway over the park entrance nearby. A white van was parked behind the line of tape, a stretcher at its back, although it currently held nothing more than an abandoned purse of groceries as a nearby officer fought to keep an old lady from climbing the fence. A second officer stood under the arch, next to the public bin, engaged in a curt discussion with a young brunette in a yellow dress anxiously looking past him into the park.

Trucy cooed, pointing the woman out to her brothers. "She's pretty!" she said. "I bet she has a story, you know?"

"Everyone has a story," Luke pointed out with a smile. "It's not exactly polite to accost someone on the street and demand they tell it, though."

As Apollo watched, the woman finished her talk with the officer, looking furtively around before rushing off past them, apparently in a bit of a hurry. Although he agreed she was acting suspiciously, there was little reason to run after her. "Personally, I'm more interested in the park," he said, gesturing to it as he strode forward, his siblings behind him. "Why's it suddenly all closed off?"

"There's a lot more activity at this entrance than the other one," Luke added. "Something must have happened."

"I bet they're filming a movie!" Trucy excitedly chirped. "Let's go look! We might see someone famous!" Before her brothers could stop her, she had raced past them to the archway.

The officer on duty held up a hand, moving to stand in front of Trucy as she approached. "Hey, Miss! Stay out of the park!" he ordered.

A little shocked by the stern dismissal, Trucy jumped back, then turned to her brothers with a sad
look. "He got mad at me..."

While Luke moved to comfort Trucy with a pat on the shoulder, Apollo more casually approached the policeman on duty. "Did something happen here, officer?"

"Huh?" the officer mumbled in reply, then seemed to catch himself and firmly shook his head. "Uh, no, move along, nothing to see." He waved the young man away dismissively. "Why don't you kids go play someplace else with your older brother there?"

At that, Apollo gave the man a scowl. "We're not kids and we're not playing!" he cried, hearing the footsteps of his siblings approaching from behind. 'Why are so many people calling me a kid today!? And since when was Luke older than me!? I'm a magician! I-I mean, an attorney!"

"Something wrong?" a voice asked, and the three Wrights looked up in surprise to see a young woman, about Apollo's height, approaching from within the park, dark eyes taking in the situation with a stern glare.

The officer spun around, saluting the woman. "Detective Skye!" he cried. "We're fine ma'am, nothing to report!"

Apollo gave the woman a curious look. 'She's a detective...?' His eyes were drawn to a pair of white-rimmed glasses with pink lenses resting on top of her head. 'Wait... aren't those...?'

Trucy pulled on Luke's arm, whispering, "Why's she wearing a lab coat?"

Luke could only shrug.

"And these kids are?" the detective continued to the officer, waving at Apollo.

"Curiosity seekers, ma'am," the officer replied, then hid a smirk. "They claim to be... 'magic lawyers'."

Apollo turned red, both in rage at being dismissed and embarrassment that he'd let the wrong occupation slip out first.

The detective seemed to hide a smile at that, turning to Apollo. "Why don't you kids run along and play someplace else?"

"Look," Apollo cried, trying not to get frustrated and make himself seem childish, "we're not-!"

"Or I spill something on that pretty face of yours," the detective continued, looking stern again. "Want a dose of experimental Hydroxyacelunodosetrase?"

The Wrights were shocked into momentary silence. "Come again?" Trucy asked.

Luke frowned, stepping around from where he was partially hidden from the detective behind his brother. "I'm sorry, you're threatening to throw an enzyme at us?" he asked. "Firstly, what are you doing carrying that kind of thing around, and secondly, I'm pretty sure that counts as chemical warfare and will certainly get you fired, Detective."

The detective definitely hadn't been expecting a retaliatory threat in return, staring at Luke in shock for a moment before sheepishly looking away, forcing the stern frown back onto her face. "Well. You should be keeping a closer eye on your little brother and sister," she insisted. "Keep them away from us hard-working grown-ups."
Apollo was about to object before he saw the dangerous look in Luke's eyes, the taller brother crossing his arms. "We were simply asking what was happening in the park," Luke calmly pointed out. "I don't see how that question deserved such an impolite response, regardless of the age you thought my older brother here actually was."

Luke's snide jibes regarding Apollo's age seemed to hit home, both the detective and officer looking slightly uncomfortable. "Well," the detective replied, "we don't answer those questions." With that, she turned to the officer. "Try to keep out the riff-raff, if you would."

"Yes ma'am!" the officer said, saluting again as the detective stalked off back into the park.


"It's fine," Apollo assured him, patting Luke's shoulder with a smile and guiding his siblings away from the park entrance. "Besides, it has nothing to do with us. We came here to look into Dad's accident, remember?"

Trucy nodded, staring up at the younger of her brothers in awe. "That was so brave of you to stand up to that detective, Luke!" she cried. "Even though she was threatening to throw her experimental Hydroxy-whatever in Polly's face!" She briefly frowned in thought. "What was it you said it was again?"

Luke smiled. "An 'enzyme'," he explained. "I had to study several as part of my veterinary degree. And I don't think there was anything to worry about with her. I've never heard of an enzyme, experimental or not, that had such a long name! I'm pretty sure she just made it up to scare us."

"She clearly didn't bet on you, then," Apollo pointed out with a grin of pride in his brother.

Trucy giggled, then gasped, looking over at the mansion opposite. "Oh, and if we're looking into Daddy's accident," she said, pointing her brothers to the gate, "there's a nice-looking lady over there! Let's question her!"

Luke and Apollo looked over to see a short woman in a dark, embroidered kimono, a yellow fox with multiple tails prominently displayed on one side. In her hands was a straw broom, and she was brushing menacingly at the dried pools of paint littering the cobblestones under the heavy wooden gate of her mansion home, the massive bow on the back of her elaborately styled dark hair feeling to Apollo like a red flag of doom. "Uh... Let's not and say we did," the elder brother said.

Luke raised an amused eyebrow at Apollo. "What kind of answer is that?" he asked. "Papa mentioned that mansion! If anyone was a witness to his accident, it would be them!"

Before Apollo could reply or try to stop them, Luke and Trucy had left him behind, approaching the woman at the mansion gate. Sighing, Apollo reluctantly followed, more out of wanting to protect his siblings than any desire for information.

"Excuse me!" Trucy called, waving at the woman to catch her attention. "Um, can we have a few words with you?"

The woman looked up, apparently surprised at being addressed. "You want something?" she asked, her husky voice instantly making Apollo sweat.

"We don't want to bother you," Luke picked up with a polite smile. "My name's Luke Wright, and these are my siblings, Trucy and Apollo." He gestured to them as he spoke. "Our father was hit by a car here last night, and-"
Suddenly the woman laughed, all the sternness melting away from her expression in an instant. "That man was your father?" she asked. "The guy who flew thirty feet and just walked away?"

"That's him!" Trucy chirped, bouncing excitedly.

Apollo sighed. "I don't think it was quite that dramatic an incident," he mumbled to himself.

"I should've known!" the woman laughed. "One of our Capos thought he'd make a great point man!" Before Trucy could do more than look confused at the unfamiliar terms, the woman set her broom to one side, putting her chore on hold. "I'm Plum," she said. "Plum Kitaki. Wife of the fourth head of the Kitaki Family business. Friends call me Little Plum."

Luke tipped his cap. "It's lovely to meet you, Missus Kitaki!"

Trucy giggled to herself. "Little Plum! That's a really cute name for someone so-"

"Trucy!" Apollo cried, diving to his sister's side and slapping a hand over her mouth. Ignoring her confused glare, he whispered in her ear, "H-how about you go through me when talking to her, okay?"

Rolling her eyes, Trucy pulled her brother's hand from her face. "That seems like a bit of a needless procedure," she pointed out.

"I'm a lawyer," Apollo replied with a deadpan stare. "I live for needless procedures."

Luke and Plum only seemed to be amused by the pair's antics. "Oh little girl," Plum laughed, "you should know... We're gangsters."

"Originally Yakuza from Japan, right?" Luke asked.

Plum nodded, impressed. "You've done your research!"

"Oh!" Trucy cried. "Gangsters! That means you're the bad guys!"

"Trucy!" Apollo warned, feeling like he'd faint if she kept on the way she was. "Through me!"

Plum just laughed. "The bad guys... I like the sound of that!" she said, giving the girl a wink.

Apollo sighed, pressing a hand to his face. 'I'm gonna need some of Pearly's warm tea after this...' "It takes a lot of hard work to protect a family fortune," Plum continued, her good humour fading. "Things aren't as easy as they used to be for us 'bad guys'."

Luke gave her a concerned look. "I'm sorry to hear it," he said. "I hope things turn around for you soon."

Apollo resisted the sudden urge to strangle his brother. 'Can we not wish their dubious 'business' well, please!?'

"Ah, they will be," Plum assured Luke with a smile that failed to hide her sad eyes. "Even if we have to lose the house to get it."

Luke and Apollo shared a confused glance, wondering what she meant.

Trucy looked up at the mansion beyond the gate in awe. "Your house is really big!" she cried. "And the gate, too!" She pointed to a small, yellow symbol on the wooden doors, resembling a fox head
not unlike the one on Plum's kimono. "I like the fox! It's so cute!"

"Ah, that," Plum said with a smile, looking back at the symbol. "That's our family crest, from the old country." She gave Trucy a well-practised sharp grin. "We're clever as the fox... and our teeth are sharp."

Trucy was delighted. "Ooh, like a motto!" she cried, then turned to her brothers. "We need a crest, too! For the Agency!"

"We already have a motto," Apollo pointed out with a frown. "'Where you've always come to the Wright place', remember? How do you propose we make that into a crest?"

"Maybe you should ask Papa later, Trucy," Luke suggested. "He might have an idea."

"Oooh, yeah!" Trucy cried with a grin. "Daddy will know!"

Apollo sighed. "Speaking of Dad..." He reluctantly returned his attention to Plum. "The, um, car accident last night?"

"Oh yes, that," Plum replied, looking as annoyed at the subject as Apollo. "It's been nothing but trouble. I've been cleaning up this mess since morning!" She gestured to the spilled paint across the ground. "Bah!"

Apollo was reminded of how Phoenix had been covered in paint following his accident. It made sense that paint would litter the crime scene too.

Luke craned his head around the gate to look at the decorated stone walls on either side. "Were you repainting?"

Plum nodded. "That's right. I called in an artist to do the job right." She paused, frowning. "He's the third so far."

"The... third?" Apollo repeated, surprised.

"The first spilled paint all over the entrance here," Plum explained, her hands tightening on her broom, "the second on my kimono, so I..." With a glare, she pulled her hands apart just enough to reveal the hidden blade in the handle of her 'broom'.

"N-no, don't mention it," Apollo insisted, forcing himself not to run away as he resumed sweating in fear. "It's better we don't know!"

View the Court Record
"This paint was spilled at the time of the accident, right?" Luke asked.

Plum nodded. "It was around nine last night," she said, pushing the handle of her broom back into place. "I heard a crashing noise... and found your father drowning in a sea of paint."

"So you came to his rescue?" Trucy asked.

"You've my husband, the Boss, to thank for that," Plum told them with a smile. "The car that hit your father knocked over this paint," she gestured to the ground, "then turned the corner," she pointed to the road behind them, "and sped away."

Trucy frowned in thought. "But why are you out here cleaning it up?"

"What do you mean?" Plum asked, as confused as Trucy's brothers.

"I mean, aren't you a gangster?" the teen continued. "Don't you have any 'goons' to do your dirty work for you?"

Apollo paled, fighting not to panic. "Truce!" he cried.

Plum just laughed. "Don't be such a stiff, kiddo! I suppose we gangsters do have a certain image."

Luke rubbed at the back of his head, recalling his own run-ins with gangsters back in Future London... even if they had turned out to be merely actors in the end.

"But we're community-oriented gangsters, you see," Plum continued. "The Boss likes to give back to the people."

"Huh," Luke muttered, stroking his goatee in thought. "That's why there are plaques on the park entrances that say 'Donated by Big Wins Kitaki', right?"

"Yep, that's my husband," Plum said with a proud smile.

'How noble of him,' Apollo thought, resisting the urge to roll his eyes.

"I availed myself of the public facilities to get rid of all the garbage," Plum continued, gesturing across the road. "Now there's just the paint on the street to deal with."

Apollo looked behind him, his gaze locking on to the public bin sitting at the entrance to the park, where it had apparently been dragged from further inside. 'Which reminds me...' "Can I ask you a question?"

"What?" Plum asked back.

Apollo jerked his head to the park, giving Plum a curious look. "What happened in the park across the street?"
"Oh, yes, quite the commotion," Plum explained, sadly shaking her head. "Chicago Lightning, as the Boss would say."


"Gunfire," Plum elaborated. "Someone was killed. Strange circumstances, too."

The trio were surprised. "You're kidding!" Apollo cried.

"And this was last night?" Luke asked.

Plum nodded. "What a morning! Trouble everywhere," she said. "The park, the gate, even our house..."

"Did something happen at your house, too?" Trucy asked, looking sympathetic.

"A crime without honour! Without remorse!" Plum proclaimed. "It's a private matter." She paused, then gave the trio a stern stare. "Wanna hear about it?"

Apollo noticed poor Luke freeze at the question, battling internally over how to respond. A glance at Trucy confirmed that the Gramarye siblings both suspected 'no' wasn't an acceptable answer, so he turned to the woman with a restrained sigh. "So... what happened at your house?"

"Bloomers," Plum simply said, still staring. "Last night." When she got only confused stares in response, she added, "Me, Little Plum Kitaki, the victim of a panty-snatcher!"

Trucy gasped. "What!? So it wasn't just my panties that were stolen!?"

"Got you too, did they? Poor thing," Plum replied, giving Trucy a sympathetic look before returning her stern gaze to the two boys. "Like I said, whoever did this is a hardened criminal." She pulled open the handle to her broom again, letting the blade within shine in the sunlight. "It wasn't one of you, was it?"

"N-no, of course not!" Apollo cried, jumping back in fear.

Even Luke finally seemed to be a little frightened by Plum, taking a step back. "Why would we steal our own sister's underwear!?" he pointed out.

Plum just sniffed in response, but did put away the hidden blade. "I've heard word that panties have been disappearing lately," she continued as though nothing had happened. "And the missing panties all have something in common."

Apollo had already started wondering what that was before he realised he was imagining Plum's underwear and shook his head to rid himself of the image.

"I know!" Trucy cried with a smile. "We'll find your bloomers, too!"

"Great!" Plum immediately replied, giving Trucy an encouraging grin. "Show me what you're made of!"

Luke seemed to have finally recovered, again tipping his cap to Plum. "We'll do our absolute best, Missus Kitaki!" he promised. "The Wright Anything Agency will get the job done!"

"Wait, what!?!" Apollo cried, wondering what exactly it was his siblings had just gotten him into.

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a fifth person, a young woman who gently by-
passed the Wrights with a nod as she headed to the gate of the Kitaki Mansion. Plum jumped as she noticed her. "Oh! Welcome home, sweetie."

The woman nodded, somewhat nervously. "Ah, uh... hello, m-mother."

Apollo hid a gasp. This was the same young woman in the yellow dress they'd seen watching the park earlier; She was a Kitaki?

"Um, Miss!" Trucy suddenly cried, jumping forward with a hand digging around in her bag. "Miss!" The woman turned, giving Trucy a curious look, and was promptly handed a small sheet of decorated paper. "Here, our flyer!" Trucy announced with a grin.

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'Really, Trucy!?'

The woman frowned as she read it over. "The... Wright Anything Agency?"

"That's us!" Luke chimed in, stepping forward and tipping his cap to the woman as he picked up on Trucy's unspoken hints. "We'll do anything, anywhere! Though we do specialise in illusions, violin and piano performance, and legal defence!"

"Defence...?" the woman repeated, her eyes flicking between Luke and Apollo.

"Drop by our office!" Trucy offered, giving the woman a curtsy. "We'll be waiting!"

The woman stared for a moment, then gave Trucy a vaguely uncomfortable nod. "Ah... goodbye." A moment later, she turned and disappeared into the house, and Plum shortly followed her.

The moment they were alone, Apollo shot glares at his siblings, whacking Trucy on the back of the shoulder to make her face him. "What was that about!? Why'd you give her our flyer?"

Trucy thought a moment, then shrugged. "I dunno," she admitted. "She seemed like she could use some help."

"She's the heiress to a gangster dynasty!" Apollo hissed. "She doesn't need our help!"


Apollo sighed, pressing a hand to his face. "Fine, fine," he mumbled. "Let's just hope she doesn't." With that he turned and headed back towards the park, Luke sticking close by. "Anyway, at least that little diversion did give us some lead."

"What do you mean?" Trucy asked, skipping after her brothers.

"Missus Kitaki said she threw the trash from the accident in the 'public facilities', right?" Apollo replied, shooting his sister a smile as he headed straight for the bin at the park entrance. He gave the officer a nod before the pair promptly ignored each other, the young attorney turning his attention to the large wire basket on the paving stones. "There might be clues!"

"That's a good point!" Luke agreed with a grin, rushing to Apollo's side. "If that car dropped anything when it hit Papa, it would have ended up in here!"

Trucy giggled, bouncing to Apollo's other side as he dug down to the bottom of the mostly-empty public bin. "A detective's life sure is a hard one!"

"Not detectives, Trucy," Luke corrected, barely hiding his excitement, "investigators!"
Apollo smiled at his siblings' antics above him, his head almost at the bottom of the bin as he looked through its contents. Mostly it was the remains of paint tins, emptied from the crash and a few even heavily dented from a direct hit by the car that knocked them over. It was only as he pushed them aside to see what had slipped past them to the very bottom that he found something new... a pair of objects that were very interesting indeed. "Aha."


Grinning, Apollo grabbed the most interesting object first, and pulled himself back up out of the bin, brandishing a green wing-mirror, covered in black, yellow and red paint. At the end where it used to attach to a car, several long wires splayed out, their bare ends frayed as the result of a violent separation between mirror and vehicle.

Luke and Trucy both gasped in unison as they recognised the object. "It's even the same shade of green!" Trucy whispered in awe.

"This proves without a doubt that the clinic car was the one to hit Papa!" Luke gushed, almost jumping for joy. "We solved another case!"

"There's more," Apollo said, holding out the mirror for Luke to take before 'diving' back into the bin, emerging a moment later with a pair of green, similarly paint-covered, slippers in his hand. "Look at these," he said, pointing to a short line of text across the top. "'Meraktis Clinic'. These are probably lent out to patients or something."

Luke frowned as he examined the footwear. "What are they doing so far from the hospital?" he mused aloud. "Do you think they fell out of the car?"

"It seems unlikely," Apollo admitted, shrugging. "I mean, look at the paint stains on them. Only on the soles? It looks more like someone was walking in them than they flew out an open window or something."

"Plus, I doubt it's a high likelihood that both rather than only one would have fallen out, and landed on their soles rather than upside-down," Luke added, conceding to Apollo's reasoning.

Trucy took one of the slippers from Apollo's hand, turning it over as she examined it. "Oh, look, there's a weird shape here!" She showed it off to her brothers, and they quickly spotted the outline of a leaf on the slippers' sole. "The person walking in it must have stepped on a leaf before the paint!"

"Leaving the outline when the leaf came off!" Apollo realised, taking the slipper back to more closely examine the outline. "That's a great find, Trucy!"

Trucy grinned with pride.

"That's certainly suspicious," Luke agreed, frowning, "but do you really think the slippers are related to any of our cases?"

Apollo thought a moment. "The fact that they come from the same place as the car that hit Dad is enough of a co-incidence," he replied. "I think we'd better take both." Passing the slippers to Trucy, he reached into his bag to fetch his stash of plastic evidence baggies, which he always kept handy just in case. "Since we know for sure who ran Dad over, we'd better go check on him. Let him know what we've found out."

Trucy giggled, grabbing an offered baggie to stuff the slippers in. "Yeah, he'll just mope if we leave him alone for too long!"
With the slippers in Trucy's bag and the mirror in Apollo's, the Wright kids made their way back to Hickfield Clinic.
Check Up

We're going to check on Papa if you want to join us.

No, that's okay. I'll stay here and look after the office
But tell me how he is once you're done, okay?

Of course, Pearl! Apollo says we'll head back to the office anyway once we're done.

Thank you, Luke! See you then! :)

June 15, 11:03AM
Hickfield Clinic

Phoenix was running his pen along the pages of the notebook Maya had left him, alternating between idle doodles and actual notes on the Nickel Samurai episode whose credits were blaring from the TV on his sidetable. He frowned to himself, distractedly kicking his uninjured leg over the edge of the bed where he was turned to face the television. 'Note to self: Check my 'random selection' before putting it in. Don't want more 'kidnapping' flashbacks from Engarde.' He had no idea how Maya could still love that particular sub-series, or even the series as a whole, after their debacle with Matt Engarde and Shelly De Killer. Maybe she was just that forgiving, or able to separate the show from its cast and crew the way Phoenix couldn't. Either way, he had to admit Maya wouldn't be the same without her Samurai 'addiction', and Phoenix loved her for it all the same.

A knock at his door distracted Phoenix from his musings, and he looked up from his doodle of his girlfriend to see his three kids standing in the doorway, grinning and waving. Turning in his seat to face them, Phoenix put his notebook aside, waving the trio in. "Yo!" he called with a teasing grin. "How goes it?"

Trucy raced to his bedside. "Daddy! How do you feel?" she demanded.

Phoenix laughed. "Not bad, Trucy, not bad. It's good to have you young'uns on the case!"

Apollo rolled his eyes.

Luke giggled as he took up a position on the other side of the bed from his sister. "We solved two cases and picked up a fourth, Papa!" he announced.

"Oh?" Phoenix replied, surprised. "Wow, you three have been busy."

"You'll be pleased to hear," Apollo explained, unable to resist a proud smile, "we found the car that tried to run you over last night."

While Phoenix was staring in shock, Luke nodded eagerly, adding, "Yep! It was in the garage of the Meraktis Clinic, next door to Mister Eldoon's place!"

"And we found my panties there, too!" Trucy picked up with a grin. "Do you think this Doctor Meraktis guy was the one who stole them?"
"I highly doubt that, Truce," Apollo sighed. "We discussed this already, didn't we?"

Phoenix was frowning in thought, a hand rubbing at his chin. "Meraktis... I've heard of him. Nothing good, mind you."

"There was a police car outside his clinic," Luke admitted, arms crossed. "We thought maybe something had happened."

"What do you know about him?" Apollo asked their father, leaning on the bars at the end of the bed. "What's this 'Meraktis' guy done?"

Phoenix sighed, shaking his head. "All I've heard are the rumours," he said. "That clinic's been making good money... in a bad way."

"'Bad' how?" Luke asked.

"Ties to organised crime," Phoenix explained. "In particular, the Kitaki family."

Apollo, Luke and Trucy gasped, sharing surprised glances. "The Kitaki's!?" Apollo repeated. "What's he been doing with them!?"

"Some injuries you can't take to a public hospital," Phoenix explained. "They use the Meraktis Clinic for their patch-up jobs. He'd get a lot of money for keeping their business with him quiet."

"Interesting," Apollo mumbled, running the information over in his head.

"Oh, that reminds me!" Trucy chimed in, "something happened in People Park! It's all closed off!"

Phoenix couldn't resist a short laugh. "Ah, yes, I've heard about that, too: Apparently someone found a body there, in unusual circumstances."

"Something more unusual than being dead?" Apollo quipped, an eyebrow raised.

Luke nodded. "They were shot, weren't they?" he asked. "Plum said something about gunfire."

"It's not our concern in any case," Phoenix pointed out. "I suggest you focus on the cases you have left. The noodle stand, right?"

"Yep!" Trucy agreed. "And finding my thief!"

"We'll get right back to it," Apollo promised, speaking up before either of his siblings could mention Plum's bloomers were also on their list. "It's kinda hard to know where to start, since there aren't any witnesses, nor clues about which way either thief went."

Phoenix thought a moment. "Well, you managed to find the car that tossed me thirty feet," he pointed out.

"Only because we found clues we weren't expecting," Luke pointed out. "For Mister Eldoon's cart, we were expecting clues, and didn't find anything useful."

Apollo nodded, and was about to add to his brother's explanation when he was interrupted by a buzzing in his bag.

"Is that your phone, Polly?" Trucy asked.

"Yeah, hang on," Apollo replied, turning away from his family as he pulled the device out of his
To his surprise, the screen proudly displayed 'Pearly', and he cast a worried glance back at his father and siblings before answering it. "What is it?" he asked. "You okay?"

"Oh, I'm fine!" Pearl's bright voice replied over the tiny speaker. "Although, you should return to the office as soon as you can; You have a client!"

Apollo blinked in surprise. "A client? At the office?" he repeated, casting another glance back at his equally confused family. "This... isn't another missing-item hunt, is it?"

At that, Pearl giggled. "She specifically wants you for a reason, Apollo! You're the only defence attorney here, aren't you?"

Apollo froze, almost dropping his phone in surprise. "Y-you mean..." His mouth, hanging open from the shock, moved into an ecstatic grin, and he had to restrain himself from jumping for joy. "SOMEONE WANTS ME TO DEFEND THEM!?"


"Mm-hm!" Pearl cheerfully replied. "She's willing to wait, but don't take too long, okay?"

"Y-you bet!" Apollo cried, finding it hard to keep still, jittering in excitement. "Tell her I'll be right there, ten minutes at the max!" With that, he ended the call, hurriedly shoving the phone back in his bag as he spun to face his family. "Dad! I have a client!"

"So I heard!" Phoenix laughed, clapping his hands together. "Congratulations!"

Turning his gaze to his siblings on either side of the bed, Apollo waved for them to follow him. "Guys, come on, we have to get back to the office!" Without waiting for a reply, he had already dashed out of the room at full speed, his crimson magician's cape fluttering behind him.

Luke and Trucy gave each other surprised looks, then Trucy ran to follow her brother, shouting, "Polly, wait for us!"

Sighing, Luke nodded to their father. "We'll check in on you later then, Papa," he promised.

"I'll look forward to it," Phoenix replied.

Clutching his satchel tightly, Luke gave Phoenix a smile and raced off to join his siblings.

June 15, 11:21AM
Wright Anything Agency
Phoenix's Office

Although Apollo's journey back to the Agency had started out as a race, it quickly slowed to a brisk pace, then a casual walk. His legs were burning from the exertion, but he refused to stop and rest, not even to let Trucy or Luke catch up to him; They'd fallen behind not long after leaving the hospital.

Finally, the stairs to the Agency's front door came into view, and the thought of being so close to his destination gave Apollo the energy to push past his aching legs and sprint up the steps, through the open door and past the empty reception. As he burst into the office, he grinned widely and called, "Hello!? I'm back!"
Sitting on the twin red couches in front of him were two young women: One was Pearl, smiling up at Apollo as she paused, midway through removing two empty mugs from the table; The other was the same young woman in the yellow dress that the Wrights had seen on Kitaki Avenue, her tawny brown hair pulled into a bun on the back of her head and a green scarf tied around her neck. She fiddled nervously with blue ribbons tied around her wrists in bows, which matched the fancy heeled sandals on her feet. Although surprised to see her again, Apollo forced the smile back on his face and walked around to Pearl's side.

Pearl placed the two mugs back down, getting up. "Hello, Apollo!" she replied, gesturing to the woman. "This is Ms Alita Tiala, your client!" She turned her friendly smile to said client. "Ms Tiala, this is Apollo Wright, the defence attorney!"

Apollo gave the nervous woman a friendly smile, bowing to her as he normally did on stage. "A pleasure to meet you, Ms Tiala!" he said.

Alita watched him, still seeming nervous as she slowly stood. "You... You're the defence attorney...?"

"Um, yeah," Apollo replied, trying not to lose confidence at the thought that she had mistaken Luke for the attorney of the family. He flipped one side of his cape over his shoulder, pointing out to her where on his vest he kept the proof of his profession. "My badge is right here, if you want me to prove it."

"Oh, no, I believe you," Alita shyly insisted, avoiding eye contact as she backed down into her chair again. "I... I need your help."

'So Trucy was right after all.' Apollo lowered himself into the seat opposite her, keeping the polite smile on his face. "Well, you've come to the Wright place!" he said. "Maybe you could tell me what happened?"

Alita thought as she played with the bow on her wrist, watching Pearl again pick up the two mugs and sidle over towards the kitchen. "Well, actually, I'm... I'm not the client," she admitted. "The client would be my... well, my fiancé, I suppose you'd call him."

Apollo nodded. "What happened to him, then?"

"He was arrested this morning," Alita explained. "The charge... was murder." When Apollo only nodded in understanding, she added, "Have you heard about what happened at the park?"

"A bit," Apollo replied, frowning. "That's the murder they've accused him of?" 'It explains how Missus Kitaki knew more about it than Dad, anyway...'

"I haven't been told all the details," Alita said, "but I do know a body was found in the park, near the Kitaki Mansion. Apparently, the victim was shot with a pistol... but I hear the circumstances of the shooting were... rather unusual."

Apollo nodded, pulling out his Court Record to take notes. "So they arrested your fiancé?"

Behind him, Pearl re-entered the room, now free of the mugs. "Ms Tiala was telling me about him earlier," she told Apollo. "Apparently he's the son of the Kitaki boss!"

Had Apollo been drinking anything, he was sure he would have spat it out at that. 'Does Pearly even know what she's saying!?'

"We're to be married next month," Alita explained, finally starting to look more comfortable. "But
you needn't worry about the Kitakis'... 'reputation'. They're *locally responsible* gangsters." She smiled, looking off into the distance. "I thought it'd be nice for a change... Quit my boring job, live the good, gangster life."

'So her fiancé's the Kitaki, but she isn't yet?' Apollo realised. "Is he... their only son?"

Alita nodded, returning her gaze to Apollo. "His name's Wocky. Wocky Kitaki." She reached into a blue purse at her side and pulled out a small piece of paper she held out for Apollo to take. "I brought a photo."

Apollo stared at the picture as he took it: A male teen, his hair in some ridiculous style that vaguely resembled horns with a massive curl inbetween (and Apollo could call it ridiculous because he had personal experience with ridiculous hair). He was standing in what looked like People Park, near the river, and wore a Bad Badger t-shirt under a brightly coloured pink and yellow jacket, which had twin patches on the chest of snarling fox heads that were undoubtedly added as a variant of the 'Kitaki crest'. But, perhaps most unnerving of all, was the ridiculous smile the teen was directing at the camera, one hand in the curl of hair at his forehead. "Well. That's... quite the photo," Apollo said.

"I know!" Alita giggled, her hands at her mouth. "Oh, he can be powerful and menacing, but so cute!"

Suddenly Apollo wasn't so sure about this case. "But, if he's the boss's only son..."

"Yes, I'm sure he'll take his father's place some day," Alita said with a smile.

Apollo felt his bracelet twinge.

"Please help my Wocky!" Alita was already continuing, giving Apollo a pleading look. "Please!"

Although a great part of him wanted to turn Alita down and run as far away as he possibly could... Apollo could not make himself turn away the first actual defence case he'd gotten since the formation of the Anything Agency. Giving her a smile, he nodded firmly. "I'll do everything I can to prove him innocent, Ms Tiala! You can count on me!"

Alita smiled, then pulled an envelope from her purse. "I... prepared a letter of request," she explained as she handed it over. "I know you need those."

Apollo took the envelope gingerly, unable to ignore the giant 'Hit Request' painted across the front. "Ah... thank you."

"I hope that's okay?" Alita asked, looking concerned as she noticed Apollo's discomfort. "I've never written a letter of request before."

"Oh, it's fine," Apollo insisted, forcing the smile back on his face as he put the envelope, along with the photo of Wocky, in his bag. 'And I should hope you've never written a letter of request before...!' "Don't you worry about a thing, Ms Tiala! We'll take care of everything!"

*View the Court Record*
Once Alita had left, Apollo had promptly leaned back against the couch cushions and stared at the ceiling. "What have I gotten myself into, Pearly?"

"It sounded like a decent job to me," Pearl replied with a smile, sitting at Apollo's side and offering him a mug of tea. "I thought you were excited about getting to defend someone?"

Apollo sighed, sitting up to take the mug with a grateful nod. "I was," he agreed. "But, hearing my client is the son of a gangster boss..."

Pearl frowned, biting at a thumbnail in confusion. "I thought... gangsters were just a fairy tale...!" she said.

Biting back a frustrated groan, Apollo shook his head. "N-no, they're..." He decided not to bother, just be as astonished as he usually was whenever Pearl's ignorance of the wider world outside her home village came up. "Anyway... Something Ms Tiala said near the end there... I'm not sure she's all she appears to be."

Pearl's head cocked to one side, the teen staring at Apollo nonplussed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean..." Apollo began to explain, before having to pause as he wondered just what he did mean. "She said something... about Wocky taking over from his father." He paused again, shaking his head. "She... I felt my bracelet tightening! She was lying about something!"

Pearl thought a moment, seeming troubled. "But... why would she be lying about that?" she asked.

Apollo sighed, sipping at his tea. "No idea," he quietly admitted. "And she moved on too quickly for me to ask about it."

The pair heard the sound of the front door opening and closing, and looked up to see Trucy, followed by Luke, appearing in the office doorway, both slightly sweaty and panting from their failed attempts to keep up with Apollo. Trucy looked around in disappointment as she registered no-one was there save her brother and cousin, and wandered over to sit on the free sofa, pouting at Apollo. "Where's your client?"

"She's gone already," Apollo explained, hiding an amused smile. "If you'd kept up with me, you might have got to meet her."

Trucy just glared at him in reply.

Luke weakly laughed, sitting at Trucy's side. "To be fair, if you'd waited for us, we would have got to meet her then, too."

"Are you kidding!?" Apollo replied, giving his brother a smirk. "Since when do we leave our clients hanging!?"
Pearl gave the exhausted pair a smile. "Do you two want some tea? I still have some in the kitchen!"

"That would be lovely, Pearl; Thank you," Luke told her with a grateful smile. Trucy just nodded, too tired to speak up.

As Pearl scurried off with a grin, excited to be useful, Apollo placed his own half-empty mug on the low table in front of them. "You two might be surprised to hear... Remember that lady we saw on Kitaki Avenue? In the yellow dress?"

"The one Trucy gave our flier to?" Luke asked.

Apollo nodded. "She's my client! Or, well, technically, her fiancé is my client."

Trucy gasped, then gave her eldest brother a smug look. "I told you she looked like she needed help!"

"Yeah, yeah," Apollo mumbled, waving her off with a grin. "Her name's Alita Tiala. Her fiancé, Wocky... he's the only son of the Kitaki Family's boss."


"Plus," Apollo continued, "he's been accused of the murder in People Park, the one that grumpy detective is investigating."

Trucy grinned mischievously. "Oooh, we can really rub it in her face when we go to investigate the park!" she cackled. "No-one turns us away from a crime scene without explanation!"

Luke frowned at his sister. "That's a bit of an over-reaction, isn't it?"

Pearl returned, two mugs of tea in her hands, and made her way over to offer them to Luke and Trucy. "I don't know if you three want to start investigating immediately," she said, "or maybe have lunch first. It's almost midday."

The trio thought, Luke and Trucy taking their mugs with grateful smiles. "It's only just gone eleven-thirty," Apollo pointed out, turning to Luke. "Weren't you saying on our way to see Dad that we should match the mirror we found against that car?"

Luke nodded, sipping from his cup. "That shouldn't take more than five minutes," he pointed out. "It's only around the corner."

"We should go investigate the crime scene!" Trucy cried. "People Park's not far either, and they'll let us in now!"

Apollo shook his head, arms crossed. "No. The first thing we should do is head to the detention center, and talk to my client. That's the first thing a defence attorney should always do, if they can."

"How long will that take?" Pearl asked curiously.

"We can use my car," Luke offered. "It'll be quicker than waiting for buses."

"Sure," Apollo agreed with a thankful smile. "And, maybe, since it won't take us long, we can drop by the Meraktis Clinic before we go to get a photo of the mirror against the car. I see no reason why it won't fit perfectly."

Trucy giggled as she sipped from her mug. "Sounds like a plan!" she chirped.
"We can go as soon as we've finished our tea," Luke added, giving Pearl a smile.

"And let me know when you're coming back," Pearl requested, looking to Apollo. "If the timing's right, we could have lunch together before you start your investigation!"

Apollo nodded, softly laughing. "Of course," he agreed, and picked up his half-empty mug from the table.

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**Sorry for running out on you Dad. Turns out my clients the guy accused of the murder in the park, and the only son of the Kitaki boss too.**

Wow, you really did inherit the Wright Luck huh? ;') I understand, you were excited about finally getting a case and I can't blame you for that

Don't forget you've still got the noodle stand to find, and come talk to me if you ever need help

We haven't forgotten about the stand! And don't worry, we won't let you mope alone for too long, Dad ;).

Haha! You'd better! ;)

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June 15, 12:17PM  
Detention Center  
Visitor's Room

Once they had finished their tea, courtesy of Pearl, the Wrights bid her farewell for the time being and walked to the Merakits Clinic around the corner. Sure enough, the broken wing-mirror had been a perfect fit against the broken hole on the side of the green car. Apollo had worried sneaking into the open garage a second time would alert the officer on guard within the small hospital, but the trio had avoided detection easily. To Luke's disappointment, Gabriel the cat had moved on, and was no longer anywhere in the vicinity.

Their errand complete, Luke led his siblings to his small, second-hand car, parked outside the Agency. It was a soft, pastel blue, similar to the vest Trucy had made him, acquired only from what little savings Luke had put together over the years from pocket money and spare wages; Trucy had dubbed it the 'Lukemobile'.

As they pulled in outside the detention center, Trucy giggled at Apollo, who was sitting shotgun next to Luke. "You look as happy as a clam in its shell, Polly!"

Apollo just continued to grin, ignoring her teasing from the back seat. "For a lawyer, this is it," he explained, "the place where the battle begins!"

Luke laughed, switching off the car. "Better hope your prosecutor doesn't take that seriously!"

Apollo led the charge inside, heading straight to the reception desk. "Hi there!" he announced to the officer sat behind it, staring sceptically at the young man in the crimson cape. "We're attorneys; I was
hoping we could see Mister Wocky Kitaki?"

The officer thought a moment, then shook her head. "Sorry, he's in questioning right now," she replied. "Could take a while."

While Apollo was staring at the officer in shock, Trucy sighed. "Drat. Oh well, guess we'll have to come back later then." With that, she turned and began to leave.

Luke patted Apollo's back sympathetically. "I guess your battle's been postponed?"

"Yeah," Apollo sighed in disappointment, turning to follow Trucy back to the car, Luke at his side. "But what now? You always talk to the client first!"

Luke pushed open the door as they headed outside. "Well, what else can we do right now? Investigate the crime scene!"

Apollo stopped dead in his tracks. "Oh. Yeah, that... that would be a good idea." He resumed movement, heading over to where Trucy was waiting by Luke's car with a smile. "But first," he announced, "why don't we head back home and have lunch with Pearly?"

Trucy grinned, bouncing in excitement. "Yeah! It'll be well and truly lunchtime by the time we get back!"

Unlocking the car, Luke laughed. "And, if we've learned anything from this outing, it's to call ahead before wasting a half-hour car trip!"

Apollo blushed. "Y-yeah, we'll call ahead next time."

View the Court Record
Despite the setback of trying to visit their client, Apollo was feeling optimistic as they approached the cordoned-off entrance to People Park on Kitaki Avenue. He had Luke with him to fend off any further threats from the grumpy detective, and Trucy for emotional support and an extra pair of eyes, so he was confident they would be leaving with some solid information on this mysterious murder.

His chest puffed out in pride, Apollo strode up to the officer under the entrance archway.

The officer sighed as he saw the three Wrights approach, speaking loudly over the roar of a passing motorbike. "You kids again? Look, can't you find some other-"

"We aren't children," Luke interrupted, giving the man a stern look. "Maybe you could give us even a modicum of respect and hear us out before brushing us off?"

Trucy firmly nodded in agreement, crossing her arms.

While the officer was looking away sheepishly, Apollo pulled Alita's letter of request from his bag. "Sir, I have a letter of request here," he announced, staying calm.

"Letter of...?" The officer took the envelope, frowning at the large words elegantly painted across the front. "Huh? Why does it say 'Hit Request' on it?"

Apollo inwardly groaned, having been hoping no-one else would notice that. He suspected it was simply the first available envelope when Alita was writing it... or possibly a threat to not screw this case up.

"Excuse me, coming through," came a heavily accented voice from behind them, and the Wrights turned as one to see a tall blond man approaching them, a purple jacket over a flamboyant popped collar and a matching violet motorcycle helmet under his arm. What stuck out most to Apollo, however, was the stylised pointy 'G' the man was wearing on a chain around his neck, underneath a face and hairstyle that was almost identical to Kristoph Gavin, save for the friendly smile.

It couldn't be anyone other than Klavier Gavin himself... and Apollo instantly hated him.

"Ah, Mister Gavin!" the officer cried, suddenly nervous as he stepped aside, waving the man past.

Klavier took a couple of steps towards the archway before seeming to notice the stares of the nearby trio, and pausing to flash them a smile. To Apollo's annoyance, it was him the famous 'rockstar prosecutor' decided to focus on, leaning forward with his hands resting leisurely on his hips. "I must say, I'm used to being inspected by the ladies, but this is the first time I've felt this way with a man!"

Apollo was too angry to react to the jibe, used to such teases from his family. "Mister Gavin," he said through gritted teeth, not letting up his glare at the man opposite.

Klavier turned his attention to the very confused Luke and Trucy behind, specifically focussing on Trucy. "Ah, Fraulein, what is a sweet morsel like you doing in such a dismal place? Can I help?"
Trucy had smiled and opened her mouth to respond before Apollo cut in, stepping protectively in front of his sister. "We don't need any help from you," he insisted.

"Apollo!" Luke hissed, horrified at his brother's blatant rudeness.

Klavier's posture straightened a little, emphasising his height over the shorter Apollo, whose gaze he met evenly with only a faint fading of his friendly smile. "But I don't believe I was addressing you, Herr Wright," he pointed out. "I was speaking to the Fraulein."

Luke cast suspicious glances between the two. "Have... you two met?"

"And as her guardian right now," Apollo said, ignoring his brother, "I'm refusing contact with you. The answer is 'no'."

Biting her lip nervously, Trucy tugged on the back of Apollo's cape as her brother and the handsome stranger stared each other down. "But, Polly, the officer man won't let us in!"

"Of course he will," Luke insisted, and stepped around his surprised brother to approach the officer directly. "I think you'll find, despite the envelope its in, that's a perfectly serviceable letter of request."

He crossed his arms, giving the now-nervous man a stern glare. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but wouldn't it be against the law to refuse an attorney, and his assistants, entrance to the crime scenes connected to his client? You're already on thin ice after the threat of chemical assault earlier."

The officer gulped, sweating already as he handed the envelope back to Luke. "O-of course you can go through," he insisted, grabbing at the tape to hold it high enough for them all to duck under it. "Why would I s-stop you?"

"Thank you very much!" Luke replied with a large grin, looking back at Apollo triumphantly.

As Apollo stared in astonishment at his brother, Klavier laughed. "Ah, so we are going to the same place then!" he said, gesturing into the park. "I will take you to the scene of the crime myself!" With that, he ducked under the tape and headed down the path.

Trucy grinned, dashing after Klavier with a loud, "Whee!"

Apollo tried to grab his sister's cape as it passed, but narrowly missed. Instead, he gave Luke a frustrated glare. "You couldn't have waited for him to leave?"

Luke blinked in surprise. "Wh... I was just trying to help, Apollo!"

Rolling his eyes, Apollo ducked under the tape and ran after their sister with a groan. A baffled Luke was close at his heels.

June 15, 1:32PM

People Park

When Apollo caught up to Trucy, he found her skipping at Klavier's side, happily chatting away with him. "Really?" she was saying in response to her new friend, whose comment Apollo hadn't been close enough to hear. "That's weird! You seem really friendly to me!"

Apollo frowned, deciding to hang back a little. 'The hell are they talking about...?' He had to admit,
he was a little curious about the mysterious younger Gavin.

Klavier chuckled. "You are very different from usual girls, Fraulein... but 'different' is a good thing, ja? It would be awful to be exactly the same as everyone else."

"That's what I've always thought," Trucy agreed. "We're both magicians, you know, me and Polly... Well, Polly's a lawyer too, but he doesn't get cases very often. We gotta stand out on stage, or who's gonna watch our show?"

Apollo almost stopped dead in shock. 'Wait, was she telling him about me!?'

Luke caught up to the group, walking alongside his brother and shooting him confused looks. For one reason or another, he decided to stay quiet.

Klavier stared at Trucy for a moment. "You truly do not know who I am, Fraulein?"

Trucy frowned back at him, confused. "Am I supposed to?"

"Ah, it does not matter," Klavier replied, softly laughing.

'Aaaaand I think that's enough of that.' Steeleing his nerve, Apollo quickened his pace behind his sister, hissing, "Trucy!" When she looked back at him with a surprised expression, he gave her a stern frown, gesturing with his head for her to drop back behind him.

Trucy only glared, pretending she hadn't seen the gesture. "What? I'm just talking!"

"With a complete stranger," Apollo pointed out. "I'm not going to be the one telling Dad when you get yourself hurt! Or killed!"

"Since when have we not talked to strangers!?” Trucy shot back. "All our clients are strangers!"

"G-guys, we can discuss this rationally," Luke meekly tried to interrupt, clutching his satchel strap as he looked between his siblings. "P-please stay calm!"

A clearing throat snapped the bickering pair from their argument, and the three Wrights looked up at Klavier in shock, having forgotten he was there. "I'm afraid we have reached your destination," he said, still smiling as he gestured down the path ahead of them, where it met the river and turned off to the right. At a glance, Apollo saw a field of blue plastic and what looked like a wooden construction of some sort. "I am heading on elsewhere," Klavier continued, "so I will leave you be. Enjoy your investigation!" With a wave, he turned and headed back the way they had come.

Trucy blinked in shock, then jumped after Klavier with a grin, waving at him. "Thank you!" she called. "Will we see you again?"

Klavier laughed, briefly turning to walk backwards. "Ask the wind, Fraulein. I'll be riding on it!"

With that, he was gone.

Apollo instantly returned to glaring at his siblings. "What is you two's problem!?” he cried. "Why didn't you listen to me when I said not to talk to him!?”

"But you didn't say not to talk to him!" Luke pointed out with a worried frown. "You told him not to talk to Trucy!"

"It's the same thing!" Apollo shot back.

Trucy crossed her arms, pouting at Apollo. "What's your problem?” she demanded. "He's nice! Why
don't you like him when you don't even know him!"

Apollo groaned, rolling his eyes. "Truce... you seriously didn't recognise him?"

Although her anger seemed to fade at the question, Trucy shook her head.

Luke, however, only looked more worried. "I... thought he looked familiar," he admitted.

Sighing, Apollo finally calmed down. "That... That was Klavier Gavin," he explained. "Kristoph Gavin's younger brother."


"Doesn't he play in a band or something?" Trucy asked, confused. "What's he doing at a crime scene?"

"No idea," Apollo sighed, shaking his head. "Look, let's... discuss it later, okay? We should try and focus on the case for now."

"Y-yeah," Luke agreed, "we'll talk about it later."

Trucy only morosely nodded, moping in the direction of the river.

As he and Luke followed their sister, Apollo turned his attention to the wooden structure he had spotted earlier. He was sure he didn't remember seeing such a thing along the river before, and he seemed to be proven right as he got a closer look at it, seeing that it was actually some kind of wagon, and a very familiar one at that. Red bandannas with white letters printed on them hung over the edge of the aging black roof, which, despite the table, box and oil drum tied to it with rope, Apollo had seen too many times over the years to not instantly recognise. "Wait, that's-!"

Ahead of him, Trucy screamed, running back and jumping on Apollo, frantically grabbing at him. "Polly!" She pointed fearfully to the front of the cart. "A corpse!"

"What!?!" Apollo cried, grabbing back at his sister protectively.

Luke immediately dashed past his siblings, looking around to the front of the cart... but his determined glare quickly melted into a relieved laugh, and he looked back at Apollo and Trucy with a smile. "It's okay," he announced, gesturing with a wave of his hand. "It's just a mannequin!"

The caped duo stared at their brother for a moment, then Trucy pulled away from Apollo and dashed back to Luke's side, laughing as she came back into view of her 'corpse'. "Wow, it sure got me!"

Apollo followed her, staring in confusion at a strange lightweight statue of a policeman mid-salute, leaning forward against the pull-bar of the cart, which it was tied to with yellow police tape. "Huh. Weird."

A clearing throat behind them startled the trio, and they spun around to see the grumpy detective, a hand on her hips as she glared at the Wright children. "Might I ask exactly what it is you're doing here?" Before they could reply, she blinked in surprise, apparently recognising their faces as they spun around. "Oh, it's you." She frowned again. "How did you get in here?"

Luke's hands curled into fists, returning her glare; Apollo suspected he was taking the detective's (and the officer at the archway's) beef with them personally. "We have a letter of request from our client," he informed her, reaching into his satchel to retrieve the item. "My older brother here is the
defence attorney on the case."

The detective glared at them for a moment in silence, then snatched the letter from Luke's hands, opening it without a second glance. From her purse, she pulled out a large magnifying glass, using it to study the paper, squinting through her large lens at the handwritten note.

Apollo, Luke and Trucy shared confused glances; Did a simple letter of request really deserve that intense a scrutiny...?

View the Court Record
Finally, what felt like an eternity later, the detective seemed to finish studying the paper, passing it back to Luke with a sniff. "I'd recognise that handwriting anywhere. Scientific analysis says this was written by Alita Tiala."

While his siblings mostly looked confused, Apollo defaulted to a glare. "Thanks," he grumbled. "Took you thirty minutes to read her signature!?"

Luke shrugged, putting the letter away. "So, why is there a mannequin pulling the noodle stand there?"

"It's taking the place of the body," the detective explained, a hand resting idly on her hip in what Apollo figured was her neutral posture... the same as the slight frown on her lips. "Preserving the scene of the crime as it was found."

Apollo looked back curiously. "So our victim... was Mister Eldoon's thief?"

"So," the detective continued, and Apollo turned around to see her looking at him, casting her eyes suspiciously up and down his magician's outfit. "You're a defence attorney, are you?"

Nodding, Apollo threw back the right side of his cape, tapping at his badge with a small smile. The detective thought a moment as she stared at it, then grunted to herself, meeting Apollo's eyes. "Detective Ema Skye," she said, and it took the young attorney a moment to realise she was introducing herself. "I'm in charge of this crime scene."

Trucy leaned towards Luke, whispering, "She doesn't seem that happy about it..."

Apollo didn't think she seemed that happy about a lot of things.

"I trust you know how to stay out of the way," Ema continued. "I always carry two pairs of handcuffs... just in case."

Trucy frowned, looking at her brothers. "Um, but there are three of us...?"

Ema's eyes narrowed. "I could make it work," she darkly replied. With that, she stepped backwards and sat on a fold-out chair sitting on the path at the back of the benches looking out over the river, glaring at the trio as she pulled out a small plastic baggie with some kind of foreign text on it. Before the trio could ask what it was, she'd popped open the bag and was tossing the chocolate sticks inside into her mouth a handful at a time, munching on the treats loudly enough to signal she wasn't open for further conversation.

The Wrights stood in confusion for several long moments, then looked at each other and mutually shrugged. Luke was the first to talk, pointing a thumb at the nearby wooden cart. "So, um... we all noticed that's Mister Eldoon's noodle stand, didn't we?"

Apollo nodded. "The circumstances could stand to be better," he said. "We can't exactly return it to
"That's a shame," Trucy sighed. "He's out of work until the police investigation's over!"

"Well then," Luke said, smiling, "that makes it our job to get this all sorted out as soon as possible! Once the true murderer is convicted, Mister Eldoon can get his stand back!"

"True," Apollo agreed with a determined smirk. "Let's get started then, shall we?"

As the trio turned to approach the stand, a cry from behind halted them: "Hey!" They looked back in surprise to see Ema, half-out of her seat as she glared at the Wrights, one hand still in her bag of food. "No messing with the crime scene!"

Apollo stared at her in disbelief. "B-but we need to investigate!" he argued.

"Investigations are to be carried out by professionals," Ema snapped, "scientifically!"

Luke frowned. "But that's not exactly fair," he calmly pointed out. "You're already watching us like a hawk, and you weren't doing anything anyway when we arrived! Isn't that a clear enough signal that your investigation is over!?!"

Ema just ignored him. "Quiet, please. It's snack time." Firmly looking away, she resumed shoving sticks of chocolate in her mouth.

"We're not making much progress here," Trucy pointed out.

Apollo shook his head, a hand resting on Trucy's shoulder. "I don't think there's any arguing with her," he told his siblings under his breath.

Luke was forced to reluctantly agree. "Let's just go," he sighed.

June 15, 2:10PM
Hickfield Clinic
Phoenix's Room

Phoenix had been dozing off to the sound of the Pink Princess when a gentle knocking on his door startled him back into wakefulness, looking up with surprise to see his children smiling cheekily at him from the ward door. "Ah, you're back!" he called, putting aside his half-forgotten notebook and sitting up against his pillow.

Luke and Trucy giggled as they came in, each taking up their usual posts either side of Phoenix's bed. "Were you sleeping, Papa?" Luke asked.

"Just resting my eyes," Phoenix replied, shoving his hands in the front pocket of his hoodie with a lazy smile.

"Yeah, old men need their rest," Apollo joked.

Phoenix waved off the trio's laughter, deciding to get to business. "Run into some problems already? You only just got that defence request."

"Oh! Yeah!" Trucy cried, gasping as she remembered why they were there and facing her father
with an angry glare. "That funny detective lady won't let us on the scene! What kind of detective wears a lab coat, anyway!?"

Phoenix's surprised look went unnoticed.

"A detective who thinks she's a scientist, apparently," Luke added, himself frowning at the memory of the woman as he turned to explain to Phoenix. "She threatened to throw what she called 'experimental Hydroxyacelunodosetrase' at us, but I'm sure she was just making it up because the 'ase' at the end means it was an enzyme, and of all the enzymes I've studied over the years, I've never heard of one with such a long na-

"Okay, Luke," Apollo interrupted, "we don't need to know!" As Luke sheepishly quietened, the elder brother sighed and turned to Phoenix. "Her name was really familiar for some reason... 'Skye'?"

Smiling, Phoenix nodded. "She was involved in a case of mine, about ten years ago," he explained. "She was still a high school student at the time."

Trucy and Luke exchanged surprised looks. "Doesn't that make her about our age?" Luke asked, gesturing to himself and Apollo.

"A little older than Apollo, actually," Phoenix admitted.

"Of course you'd know who she was!" Trucy cried, grinning. "You'd know all the police types, wouldn't you, Daddy?" Before Phoenix could do more than laugh in response, Trucy's good mood faded, and she fiddled nervously with the pin on her cape. "Oh, yeah... you'd know who the guy who let us in to the crime scene was, too..."

Phoenix paused, watching the trio suddenly all look away uncomfortably. "I get the feeling you three have been up to a lot since you got that request," he said. "Mind catching me up?"

Apollo thought a moment, then nodded, determinedly meeting Phoenix's gaze. "First of all, it turns out my case is the murder at People Park," he said.

"Huh."

"Yeah!" Trucy added with a grin. "And we found Mister Eldoon's noodle stand at the scene of the crime!"

"Did you now," Phoenix replied, rubbing his chin thoughtfully and keeping his expression carefully blank. "That's unusual indeed. Never heard of a noodle stand being used as a murder weapon."

Trucy burst into giggles, while Apollo rolled his eyes. Luke just smiled, telling their father, "Papa, the murder weapon was something else!"

"Was it?" Phoenix replied, unable to hide his smile through his innocent expression. "What was it then?"

Apollo sighed. "We don't know," he admitted. "Detective Skye won't let us investigate."

Phoenix frowned in thought, nodding. "So she clearly didn't let you in." He looked up, meeting Apollo's eyes. "Who did?"

The eldest of the Wright children was reluctant to answer, looking away for a moment before regaining his determination to meet Phoenix's eyes. "Klavier Gavin."
Phoenix stared for a very long moment before finally reacting, closing his eyes as his frown subtly deepened. "Ah."

"What's he doing here?" Trucy asked, fiddling with her pin again. "He's a musician, isn't he? Mister Gavin's brother?"

"But he's a prosecutor," Luke picked up, confused. "Doesn't it make sense for him to be at a crime scene?"

Apollo sighed. "He quit prosecuting seven years ago, to focus on his music. Hasn't stepped foot in the prosecutor's office since."

Phoenix kept silent and still.

"Maybe he came back?" Luke hesitantly offered in the ensuing silence. "There's no other reason for him to have been at People Park today, after all."

"But why would he?" Apollo argued. "He only ever prosecuted one case, then ran off with his tail between his legs! Why would he-?" He paused, stopping mid-sentence as his eyes widened in sudden realisation. "His brother went to jail," he breathed.


"His brother went to jail!" Apollo repeated, louder as he started to panic. "I got him convicted! He's gone back to the prosecutor's office to bring me down like he brought down Dad!"

"Apollo." The young man stopped, snapping out of his panic as he looked over to his father, who was giving him a firm stare. "Klavier has been back at that office for a few weeks now. If he was actively planning something against you, he would have done something before ending up on the same case by pure luck."

While Apollo was forcing himself to stay calm, Luke gave Phoenix a suspicious look. "You already knew he was back at the prosecutor's office?"

Phoenix gave a quick nod. "Edgeworth told me. He's been keeping an eye on him." He looked back to Apollo. "You don't need to worry about Klavier. He might be difficult, but he follows the rules. Edgeworth says his heart's in the right place, at least."

Luke seemed unconvinced.

"Well... that's good, right?" Trucy said, forcing a smile for her brothers. "Uncle Edgeworth won't let anything happen to us!"

Apollo thought a moment, then sighed, nodding. "Sure, I'll try not to worry about him," he reluctantly agreed. "But that still leaves the problem of Detective Skye. We can't investigate with her around!"

At that, Phoenix smiled. "Trucy," he said, looking to the girl, "you remember that trophy you got in that talent show several years back?"

Trucy grinned proudly. "You bet!"

"The one in the office with the spare hats on top of it?" Luke asked, eyelids lowered.

"There's a little something I've hidden in there," Phoenix continued. "Take it to the detective. It
should convince her to work with you a little."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "And what is this mysterious 'item' of yours?" he asked.

Phoenix just grinned. "You'll see," he almost sang, winking mischievously. "Oh, and tell her I said 'hi', would you?"

View the Court Record
It was Trucy who led the charge into the office, making a beeline for the staircase drawers sat between Charley and the piano. The drawers themselves were full of old and spare props and extra costume pieces, but a handful of larger items were carefully arranged on top: On the bottommost 'step' was a large green file, too big for the drawers, and a small box of assorted items; The middle 'step' was currently empty except for the extra red scarf and blue tie draped across it, while the top step proudly displayed a golden trophy, almost level with the top of the neighbouring piano. The plaque on the trophy's base proclaimed Trucy Wright as the winner of an annual talent contest held at Prime Mall a few years back, and on top of it was carefully balanced two silk top hats, one blue, one red.

The two hats on the trophy had been a source of almost constant consternation for Apollo and Trucy for several months now. When the drawers were in place, and Trucy had proudly set up her new display the way she wanted it, she had placed Apollo’s spare hat and tie on the middle step, putting her trophy atop her scarf and under her hat on the top step. The moment Apollo saw how much more prominently Trucy’s part of the display was, he had quietly moved her scarf to the middle step and balanced his own hat on top of hers... and thus begun a silent war. Although Luke and Phoenix had started out trying to compromise with the pair, the Gramarye siblings’ own rearrangings of the ‘tower’ kept winning out, always moving their own hat to be on top, and their brother and father simply gave up.

As Trucy turned to the trophy today, she discovered with a pout that Apollo had been the last to ‘fix’ it, with his own crimson hat balanced rather precariously atop hers. Slapping the offending red object aside (and sending it tumbling to the floor), she grabbed at the trophy beneath, her own hat staying stable atop it.

Apollo entered the room just in time to see his hat falling to the pale green carpet, and sent a glare at his sister as he snatched it up. "Hey, I should be getting this thing of Dad's!" he objected, making a grab for the trophy.

"Nuh-uh!" Trucy replied, sticking her tongue out at her brother as she manoeuvred out of his reach. "It's my trophy! I'm opening it!"

"Give it here!" Apollo cried, managing to grab one of the handles and turning their fight into a tug-of-war that sent Trucy's spare hat to the floor. "Dad told me to get it, anyway!"

Attracted by the noise, Pearl ran in from the kitchen, staring with wide eyes at the scene before her. "Apollo? Trucy?"

"Apollo's being a butt!" Trucy only shouted, managing to drag Apollo around to the glass-topped table between the twin sofas, which they stood at the end of as they continued their tug-of-war.

"And you're being a pest!" Apollo snapped in return, stepping up his efforts to keep his sister from moving them from where they now stood.
Luke rolled his eyes as he came in behind his siblings. "Do you two have to bicker about this like a pair of five-year-olds?" Briefly leaning down to grab Trucy's spare hat from the floor, he stepped forward between them, pulling Apollo's hat from his hands (unwittingly allowing his brother to tighten his grip on the trophy). "You're an adult, Apollo, and Trucy, you are perfectly capable of acting like one!" he firmly reminded them. With a small smile, he held up the hats in his hands. "Now, why don't we put our serious business hats on," he plopped Apollo's hat on his head and went to do the same to Trucy before realising she was already wearing her usual stage hat. After a short pause, he simply placed the spare on top of the hat already on her head in a small tower that made everyone else stare in stunned confusion, finishing off with a grin and a, "And discuss this like grown-ups! How's that sound?"

Apollo and Trucy stared at each other for a moment, and it seemed like they might listen to their brother before they both scowled, resuming their tug-of-war with even more ferocity than before, shouting indistinctly at the top of their lungs. Pearl was running around to try and stop them when the pair suddenly tipped over, falling either side of the glass-topped table to the floor in front of the red sofas, the trophy itself landing on the glass with a terrifying crash, sending all four cowering; Apollo and Trucy, already on the carpet, hid their faces under their arms, while Luke jumped back to the drawers and piano behind him, arms flying to his face. Pearl, mid-step in her run to aid her cousins, changed direction to jump at Luke's side, pressing her face to the back of his shoulder and clinging to his forearm.

The silence stretched out for several long seconds. Slowly, Luke lowered his arms, Pearl peeking out from behind him. Despite their fears, the table had survived the force of the trophy being thrown at its fragile glass surface, and the pair sighed loudly in relief. "Thank goodness," Luke muttered. Though Pearl still clung to his arm, he didn't make any move to push her away.

Either side of the table, Apollo and Trucy came out of hiding, pushing themselves up to peek over the tabletop. They locked eyes for a moment, Trucy having lost both her hats in the fall while Apollo was pulling the brim of his down more firmly on his temple. Between them, spread across the table top, were the fallen trophy on its side, the lid to the golden cup nearby, what looked like a cotton ball on a stick, and a small brown jar with a white lid, which rolled gently a little way before coming to a stop.

Trucy gasped, jumping up and grabbing at the jar with an open smile. "I remember this!" she cried, holding the object high and looking between her brothers excitedly. "I found it in Daddy's dresser when I was little, before you guys got adopted! I thought it was sugar, so I licked it!" She paused, staring off into the distance with an expression more befitting a traumatised soldier looking upon the field of war. "It wasn't sugar."

Apollo raised an eyebrow, pushing himself up and reaching forward to take the jar from his sister's outstretched hand.

"I got in a lot of trouble with Daddy," Trucy added, as a coda to her dramatic story.

Frowning, Apollo studied the jar, turning it over in his hands as he immediately went for the white sticker along the side. "What even is this? I think the label's... in Spanish, maybe?"

Luke stepped around to Apollo's side, taking the jar as his brother handed it over. He frowned as he also studied the object. "French, I think," he decided.

"Can you read it?" Pearl asked, stepping around to Trucy's side and helping the younger teen up, the young magician's hands full with the pair of cyan top hats she had gathered into her arms.

"Sorry, no," Luke had to admit, shaking his head. "All I can pick up is that most of these words seem
Sighing, Apollo grabbed the odd cotton ball on the table and got to his feet, spinning the fluffy 'brush' between his fingers. "So we've got a mysterious jar of white powder and a strange ball-shaped brush... and Dad isn't telling us what they're for?"

Pearl blinked in surprise. "Why are you getting them if you don't know what they're for?" she asked.

"Daddy told us to!" Trucy brightly explained, putting one of her hats back on her head with a grin. "We've got to show them to the detective! She'll know what they are!"

Pearl was still confused. "Why?" she hesitantly asked.

"Because apparently Dad knows her, and it should convince her to let us investigate," Apollo explained, sighing as he took back the jar from Luke. "Speaking of, we should really get moving again. We need as much information as we can get about this case if we want to have any hope of winning in court." He shoved the jar and brush in his bag, gesturing for Luke to attend to the fallen trophy.

Once Luke had righted the golden trophy, placing its lid back in place, he returned the object to its home on the top of the staircase drawers. Trucy, clutching her spare hat in her hands, kept close at his back, intently watching both the trophy and Apollo.

"Sorry to fly through like this, Pearly," the eldest of the Wright children was telling their cousin. "We're kind of all over the place with this investigation."

"It's alright," Pearl replied with a smile. "Mister Nick always had the same problem!"

Laughing, Apollo then waved a farewell and turned to the door, preparing to head out.

Trucy snickered behind a hand, badly hiding her giggles. "Oh, we're ready to go, Polly?" she innocently asked.

Apollo turned to face her with a confused frown. He opened his mouth to speak, only to see Luke, stood behind their sister, give Apollo a look, a hand playing with the brim of his cap. With a gasp, he suddenly remembered the crimson top hat on his head, and grabbed it, stepping over to Trucy with a frown. He made a grab for the hat in her hands, then, when she moved it behind her back, for the one on her head, the two engaging in another war of who was going to put theirs on the trophy first.

Pearl and Luke glanced at each other worriedly, then Luke sighed, stepping towards his siblings and pulling the spare hats from them with a glare. "That's enough fighting for one day!" he ordered, turning to put them away himself. To Trucy's loud disappointment, it was hers that ended up in the middle of the 'tower'. Before she could do much more than whine wordlessly and reach up to try and 'fix' it herself, Luke had spun around, placing his hands firmly on her shoulders, and was pushing her out of the office. "We're going back to People Park!" he forcefully told her as they left the room.

Apollo grinned at seeing the tower in the 'right' order. "Seeya later, Pearly," he called as one last goodbye to their cousin, getting a smile in return as he turned to follow his siblings.
When the Wrights returned to the crime scene, they found Ema standing on the path, arms crossed and one foot rapidly tapping as she sent a furious glare at the noodle stand in front of her. She perked up a little at the sound of their approaching footsteps, turning to face her scowl on her visitors as she recognised them. "You three again!" she cried, waving at them to go away. "Didn't I tell you to leave my crime scene alone!"

Apollo bit back a retort, instead just pulling the strange jar and its accompanying brush from his bag. "Look, does this ring any bells for you?" he asked, holding them up for her to see.

Ema blinked in surprise, taking a step back as she stared at the items, one hand pressed to her cheek. "I-is that-? It couldn't-!" She looked up at Apollo, eyes narrowed, and demanded, "Where'd you get that?"

The three Wrights glanced at each other, wondering how to explain. "Well, it... was our Papa's," Luke hesitantly explained. "He told us to get it from the office to show you."

Ema stared at them for a long moment, her suspicious frown softening into a more thoughtful look. "You... work at the Wright & Co Law Offices, yes?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, wondering how long it had been since he'd heard that phrase. "Sort of."

Trucy stomped a foot, glaring at Ema. "Detective Skye! How do you know our daddy!?" she demanded.

Ema almost jumped backwards, staring wide-eyed at Trucy and Luke. "Wait, you weren't joking!?" she cried. "Don't tell me you two are actually-!"

"Phoenix Wright's children, yes," Apollo interrupted, giving her a stern stare. "All three of us." He gestured to his siblings, saying, "This is my sister Trucy, my brother Luke," he pointed to himself, "and I'm Apollo. I'm the lawyer."

For a very long moment, Ema continued to stare, then her gaze narrowed again on Apollo. "You're Apollo?" she said.

Apollo nodded, frowning. "Has Dad not told you about us? You're a friend of his, right? From one of his cases?"

Ema crossed her arms, biting her lip for a moment. "He mentioned you," she admitted. "Didn't say anything about kids though. But..." She straightened up, giving the trio a grin as one hand adjusted the familiar pair of white-rimmed glasses on her head. "If you three are Mister Wright's kids, then I'm available to help you in any way I can!"

The trio exchanged confused glances, then Luke gave her a bright smile. "Thank you very much!" he replied.

"This powder," Ema continued, tapping at the jar in Apollo's hand, "is used for detecting
fingerprints. I guess you might call it a memento, from the time I spent with Mister Wright." She paused to smile nostalgically, then gasped. "Oh! Actually, I have the perfect piece of evidence to teach you how to dust for prints yourself! C'mon!" Waving for the trio to follow her, she spun around and excitedly ran to the corner of the path, near where the mannequin was slumped over the front of the cart.

Trucy skipped after Ema with a giggle, and Apollo was moving to follow her when he felt a tap on his arm, and turned to see Luke hanging back. "What is it?" he asked his younger brother.

"I'll be right back," Luke said, gesturing behind them to an open grassy area of the park. "There are some crows over there, so I thought I'd just check to see if they saw anything."

Apollo nodded, watching his brother promptly dash off towards the grass. Sighing, the elder sibling then turned and hurried to catch up to Ema and Trucy, who were crouched on the path. Nearby, sticking handle-up out of the muddy ground, was a thin knife. Ema watched the eldest Wright's approach with a raised eyebrow. "Oi! We can't start this without- Hey, where's your brother going?"

"He'll be back," Apollo said as explanation, crouching at Trucy's side and holding out the powder and brush for Ema to take. "Here."

Ema scoffed, pushing the items back towards Apollo. "Nuh-uh, how can I teach you unless you do it yourself?" She gestured to the knife. "This here is a 'shiv'."

"Ooh, lingo!" Trucy cooed excitedly.

"Given the defendant is the son of known gangsters, the police are assuming this belongs to him," Ema continued with a cocky grin. "Wanna see if they're right?"

_Talking as though you aren't one of them,_ Apollo thought, but kept it to himself, looking at the knife with a raised eyebrow. "So you want us to..." He trailed off, noticing black marks on the beige handle. "Wait, is that a hand print?"

"Well spotted!" Ema grinned, and Trucy giggled at her side. "And where there's a hand print, there might be a fingerprint! Let's investigate!"

It took several minutes to dust the 'shiv' for prints, and Apollo had to admit, he actually enjoyed it a little, reminded of the times Phoenix had supervised their use of the luminol. In fact, the memory of the blood-detecting substance had brought his answers on why Ema, and the glasses atop her head, were so familiar; It was her name scrawled along the side of Phoenix's spray-bottle, and the red-tinted glasses had gone with it... Not that this new knowledge had improved his opinion of her all that much.

Under Ema's supervision, Apollo had coated the knife's handle with the white powder (which they learned was aluminium-based) from the jar, and Trucy had helped him blow the excess away. Ema prompted Apollo to pick a finger of the resulting print, then picked the powder there up with tape and pressed it onto a clear plastic card. Her print prepared, she entered it into a device she got out of her bag.

"So," Ema asked, her machine buzzing in her hand, "whose prints do you want to check this against? The police office has samples we can compare to."
"That doesn't sound like as much fun as actually finding the print," Apollo mused, but kept the thought to himself. "Well... I guess Wocky Kitaki, if you think it's his."

Ema grinned, jabbing a few buttons on her machine. It buzzed for a few more moments before going quiet with a triumphant beep, a tiny speaker squawking "MATCH FOUND."

Apollo sighed. "So this knife is the defendant's," he mumbled. 'What a waste of time...'

"Yes! Isn't it amazing?" Ema replied, not noticing Apollo's disappointment as she practically shone in glee. "Ah, the power of science. It's my life!"

Trucy giggled, elbowing her brother and whispering, "Polly, she's sparkling!"

"And I'm dimming," Apollo muttered in reply.

"Look sharp, spirits up," Ema ordered with a smile, getting to her feet as she put her fingerprint machine back in her bag. "The real fight is yet to come!"

"Yeah!" Trucy agreed, bouncing into a standing position alongside her morose brother. "Chin up, Polly!"

Apollo just sighed. The trial hasn't even started and I'm already losing...' "The defendant's prints on the knife mean he was here the night of the crime," he pointed out to Trucy.

"That's what I call irrefutable scientific evidence!" Trucy replied. "Neat!"

"Not so neat when it happens to be evidence against our client," Apollo pointed out, arms crossed. He looked to Ema. "What else do you know about the case?"

Ema's smile faded as she got back to business. "The body was found much as you see it now..." She paused, gesturing to the mannequin at the front of the cart. "Except it was a real body."

Apollo frowned. "But... why?"

"Why was a body pulling a noodle stand?" Ema elaborated, frowning herself. "If I knew the answer to that, I wouldn't still be here."

Sheepishly running a hand through his hair, Apollo decided to move on. "Well, what was the cause of death?"

"A bullet wound, to the temple," Ema explained. "He was shot by a pistol. Not the easiest thing to come by in this day and age."

'Unless you're a cop,' Apollo mentally replied. 'Or a gangster.' He pulled out his Court Record, thinking it was probably a good idea to start getting photos of the scene.

"Incidentally, the victim's name was Pal Meraktis," Ema continued, digging around in her bag. "I just received the autopsy report, in fact."

"Meraktis!?" Trucy repeated in shock.

Apollo had to agree, almost dropping his tablet computer as he jumped up from his photo-taking of the knife at their feet. Ema held out a manilla envelope and the young lawyer wasted no time in taking it, opening the file to examine. Trucy pressed herself to his side, reading over his shoulder.
The photo of Meraktis' square face didn't look familiar, the man himself staring grumpily into the camera with thick eyebrows, greying hair streaked with black sweeping across the top of his head and hanging above his left eye. The file described him as being forty-six, the same age as his neighbour Eldoon, and having died from a bullet wound to the brain in the half-hour around ten-thirty the previous night. 'And he hit Dad around nine... and the magic panties were stolen sometime before ten... And somewhere in there, he stole Mister Eldoon's noodle stand, too. Man, he must've had a busy night.'

"I mean, really!" Ema scoffed to herself, throwing a hand in the air. "What's up with this case!? It's enough to make me want to run off, pulling a mysterious noodle stand behind me...!"

Trucy smiled. "Not so mysterious, actually!" she proudly announced, then elbowed her brother. "Tell her, Polly!"

Ema raised an eyebrow. "You know where that thing came from?" she realised, jerking a thumb in the direction of the stand. "A likely story! I didn't come here to play games, you know!"

Apollo resisted the urge to laugh. "Actually, we do know where the noodle stand came from. It's written all over the cart!" He busied himself putting the autopsy report back together, and tried to hand it back to Ema before she just shook her head, briefly indicating a second copy in her bag. Putting his report in the bag at his hip, Apollo gave Ema a grin. "That's the Eldoon's Noodles cart," he said. "The proprietor, Guy Eldoon himself, hired us this morning to find it after it was stolen!"

"He's famous in this part of town!" Trucy boasted.

Ema stared at the pair for a long moment, then leaned to the side with a smile, her hand on her hip. "Not bad. I guess Mister Wright picked the right kids for the job." She gestured to the stand. "That saved me a lot of work. Thanks."

Apollo and Trucy shared a grin, then Trucy looked to Ema, bouncing on her heels. "What sort of person was the victim, anyway?"

"You mean what did he do?" Ema replied. "He was a doctor."

Apollo frowned. 'Yep, definitely the same Meraktis of the clinic. Hence the police car there.'

"As for why he died like this, search me!" Ema continued with a frustrated huff. "Inconceivable! I just don't get it! Some people just can't die normally!"

"It is strange," Trucy agreed, tapping a finger against her chin in thought.

'He's dead, give him a break,' Apollo thought. "Is there anything else you can tell us about the victim?"

Ema sighed, looking off in a random direction as she thought. "Well, let's see... Apparently he's the physician at a clinic in the area. Quite well off too, from the sound of it."

"You mean the Meraktis Clinic?" Trucy cut in, standing solemnly at her brother's side. "That's why the cop car's parked there, right?"

"What?" Ema replied, raising an eyebrow. "You've been to the clinic?"

Apollo nodded. "Yeah. On a... related issue, actually. Like I said, Mister Eldoon hired us to find his stand after it went missing."
"He lives right next door to the Meraktis Clinic!" Trucy added with a grin, bouncing on her heels. "We were there looking for clues!"

Ema thought for a moment. "I see." She fiddled with a strip of hair hanging over her shoulder. "So that means, Doctor Meraktis stole the stand and pulled it all the way here?"

"That would seem to be the case," Apollo agreed. "As for why, we've got as much of an idea as you do." 'I get the feeling Mister Eldoon might know, though...'

"What about the defendant?" Trucy asked, looking to Ema. "Do you know anything about him?"

"The only son of the Kitaki family?" Apollo pointed out with a frown at his sister. "What else is there to know?"

Ema smirked at little. "Well, I don't know if he is the boss's son, but he's certainly throwing his weight around." She frowned. "Violently. In the detention center."

Trucy's idle bouncing halted as she stared at the detective in surprise. "I see."

"Why was he arrested in the first place?" Apollo asked. "Surely that knife isn't your only reason?"

Ema thought a moment. "You're Wocky Kitaki's defence attorney, am I right?"

Apollo nodded. "Y-yes, actually."

Sighing, Ema looked away. "Well... we have a witness to the moment of the crime."

Trucy squeaked in surprise, but Apollo could only stare in disbelief.

"The witness called the police," Ema continued. "They'll be testifying during the trial tomorrow."

View the Court Record
Apollo and Trucy were still in shock over Ema's bombshell when a shout from behind attracted the trio's attention. "Apollo!" They turned to see Luke racing down the path towards them, a massive grin on his face as he waved for their attention. "There was someone in the stand!"

"What!?!" Apollo cried, stepping forward to meet his brother as he rejoined them, doubling over to pant in exhaustion from his sprint. "What do you mean 'someone was in the stand'!?!"

"It... matches... what Spoon heard!" Luke insisted, pushing himself off his knees to stand straight, though it seemed nothing could dim his triumphant grin. "You couldn't fit a person and all those bowls in there at the same time!"

Trucy squealed. "You mean she wasn't just imagining things? We're a step closer to solving the mystery!"

Apollo was about to open his mouth to demand more information when a voice from behind interrupted him: "And how do you know that?" Luke's face instantly paled, and the three Wrights turned to see Ema watching them suspiciously. "You weren't here looking for proof, so you must have a witness. Who was it?"

Luke nervously smiled. "Uh... m-me?"

"Uh huh." Ema wasn't convinced, still staring at Luke with narrowed eyes. "If you were here in the park last night, where exactly were you at the time of the murder? Why didn't you come forward to police?"

Apollo saw Luke look to him for help, but could only shake his head and step back. 'Sorry, I got nothing. You got yourself into this mess, animal-whisperer.'

"I, uh..." Luke mumbled, kicking a shoe into the pavement beneath them. "I was... in a tree?"

Ema just continued to stare.

"And, obviously," Trucy cut in, gripping Luke's arm tightly as she glared protectively at the detective, "he was really embarrassed about it and that's why he didn't come forward!" She looked up at Luke, winking at him with the eye furthest from Ema. "That's right, isn't it? You don't like admitting to your weird bird-watching hobby!"

"Y-yeah, that's it!" Luke jumped in, pulling nervously at his collar. "I, uh, was watching the ducks! In the river!" He briefly pointed to the nearby water, then to the tree behind the noodle stand. "You get a good view of the river from up in the trees!"

After another moment of silence, Ema pulled a notepad out of her bag, readying a pen. "So then, as a witness with his big 'secret bird-watching hobby' exposed, I don't suppose you'd mind testifying to what you saw then?"

"I-I guess not," Luke agreed, sending Apollo a nervous glance before stepping forward to meet Ema.
"Where did you want me to start?"

"Your full name first," Ema replied. "Then you can tell me everything you know about last night."


Ema rolled her eyes. "I'm just asking your name. Why is that such a difficult question?"

Apollo stepped forward, resting a hand on his brother's shoulder. "Luke didn't change his name when we were adopted," he explained, and didn't miss Ema's eyes suddenly widening in understanding, as though more than one question had just been answered for her.

Luke nodded. "I usually go by 'Luke Wright'," he added, "but, officially, my name is still 'Luke Triton'. I... guess, as a witness, you'd... want my official name, right?"

Ema thought a moment, then nodded, jotting down on her notepad and saying aloud, "Luke Triton." With that, she gave him a small smile before returning to her business-like frown. "Your testimony, please?"

Hesitantly, Luke began to explain what he knew... a testimony Apollo and Trucy knew he was only passing on from the local bird population, hence the claim he had seen everything from the trees. "I don't know what the time was," he said, "only that it was late. It was too dark to see very much, but... I heard the stand passing before I saw it." He gestured up and down the path, as though lining the trail the cart would have made to its current location. Ema was rapidly taking notes, glancing up and down between her notepad and Luke. "The person pulling it, he stopped, and there was someone else there. The second person had something shiny in their hand."

Apollo frowned. 'That must've been Wocky Kitaki and his knife.'

"Then a third person appeared," Luke continued. "There was a bang, and the person pulling the noodle stand fell, but the other two ran away. The one with the shiny thing, they dropped it."

Ema paused in her notes, looking confused. A moment later, she resumed writing. Apollo was more intrigued by the thought that Wocky had still been holding his knife at the time of the gunshot.

"Once they were gone, a fourth person climbed out of the stand," Luke said, smiling, "and also ran away."


Apollo shot his sister an annoyed glare. "He already told us that literally three minutes ago."

Ema was looking suspicious again, staring at her own notes. "And these three other people... what about them could you see?"

Luke smile faded as he returned to clutching at his satchel strap. "Uh, n-not much, really," he replied. "It was too dark."

'Because, naturally,' Apollo darkly thought to himself, 'a bunch of birds aren't going to be able to tell people apart. Why couldn't you keep your mouth shut for three more minutes, Luke!?'

Ema just frowned, pointing behind her to the brightly coloured lampposts lining the river, their red trunks highly visible. "Even with everyone under the streetlights?"
Again, Luke paled, shooting nervous glances to his siblings for help. "U-uh..."

"Well, obviously," Trucy again cut in, hanging off her brother's arm, "that's because he wears sunglasses while he's bird-watching! So he sees what the birds see!"

At that, Ema pressed her hands into her hips, narrowing her eyes at the pair. "I thought birds had better eyesight than humans."

Luke's nervousness immediately vanished as he smiled knowingly, pointing into the air. "Actually, that's only during the day!" he proudly explained. "Most birds have absolutely terrible night vision! They'll even run into street-lights sometimes!"

Apollo was surprised at the random fact (though not at all surprised it was the subject of animals that brought out Luke's confidence), but what surprised him more was the brief wide-eyed look Trucy gave her brother, followed by a smug grin at Ema; It appeared she had as little idea as Apollo that her pulled-from-thin-air excuse had any element of truth to it.

Ema didn't react, quietly humming to herself in thought as she continued to give the middle Wright a suspicious glare. "Alright," she eventually agreed, seeming to accept the story. "But surely there has to be something else you can tell me? So far, you haven't given me any reason to believe you."

Apollo frowned curiously. 'Is Luke contradicting her witness, I wonder...?'

Luke hummed in thought, stroking his goatee. His gaze wandered around the scene, then came to rest on the noodle stand itself, and he smiled. "Ah!" He pointed to the blue tarps laid out on the grass. "Those are to preserve the scene, right?"

Trucy cocked her head to one side, crossing her arms with a frown. "I thought maybe the victim was going to have a picnic here..."


"I think the perfect piece of evidence to support my story might be under them," Luke explained, still smiling brightly. "May I?"

Ema thought for a very long moment, glancing between Luke and the tarps as an indecisive frown flickered across her face. Finally, she sighed. "Fine, alright." She pushed ahead to the back of the noodle stand ahead of the Wrights, and peeled back the sheets of blue plastic, exposing the dried, formerly muddy ground underneath, the tracks left by the stand clearly visible between clumps of green and yellow grass. "But don't touch anything!"

Luke nodded, crouching at the edge of the path as he looked over the muddy ground, followed by Trucy, the pair closely watched over by Ema at their side. After a few moments of searching, Luke grinned, pointing to a clear indentation in the yellow turf, not far from the large metal wheels of the noodle stand. "Aha! A footprint!"

"Wow!" Trucy cried, looking up from the print to the wooden cart beside it. "They must have climbed out of the window!"

Ema just stared in disbelief, then almost pushed Luke aside as she dropped to her knees to get a closer look at the clue, right in the middle of a small trail of leaves from the tree above. "A print!" she whispered almost reverently. "So I was right about there being clues here!" She grinned widely, barely restraining a delighted squeal, only to then suddenly calm, frowning at the new piece of evidence. "But I don't have my new kit on me," she grumbled, and reached for the tarps, pulling them back over the dirt.
Luke and Trucy, sending confused glances to each other, jumped back to their feet and retreated to Apollo's side, where he had hung back from the search. The eldest of the Wright children crossed his arms, watching Ema suspiciously. "So what exactly are you doing with that clue Luke gave you?" he asked. "Not to mention his testimony."

Ema sighed, then slowly stood up and turned towards the Wrights, a sad frown on her face. "Look, I'm sorry for not believing you," she said. "As for this footprint... Argh, I have just the thing to analyse it, but it's at home! I didn't bring it with me today!" She groaned again, frustrated with herself, then gave the trio a determined look. "I promise though, I'm gonna go get it as soon as I possibly can. I'll analyse that print and see if there's any information we can possibly get out of it!"

Luke smiled, giving her a nod. "That's all we can ask of you," he said. "How soon might you have the chance to analyse the print?"

Ema sighed, looking more morose than ever. "Who knows?" she admitted. "What with the glimmerous fop coming in and out as he pleases and the guards letting in all sorts of riff-raff, I really have to babysit this place to keep it from being tampered with." She gave the trio a sidelong glance, looking away guiltily. "N-no offence or anything."

Apollo shrugged. "S'okay," he replied. Privately, he wondered who exactly she meant by 'glimmerous fop'.

Trucy looked around the crime scene curiously, then tugged on Apollo's cape to get his attention. "So, we've looked around the noodle stand, and we've asked the detective about the case..." she pointed out. "Does that mean we're done here?"

'Good question.' Apollo looked around the area himself, taking a few steps closer to the water and studying carefully everything he could see to ensure he left no corner ignored, his Court Record raised to take pictures from every angle as he went. Down the path, where it followed the river, he quickly spotted another public rubbish bin, the same bright red as the lampposts, resting in the grass opposite the water. Over its edge, he could see some kind of off-white fabric draped, slightly fluttering in the breeze.

Trucy giggled, exaggeratedly rolling her eyes when Apollo looked back at her in confusion. "You and your trash cans!" she said, waving a hand as Luke beside her bit back snickers of amusement. "Go ahead, knock yourself out, Polly."

Apollo glared at his sister. "Hey, I'm looking for clues! That other one had important stuff in it too, didn't it!?"

Although he was fighting laughter himself, Luke shook his head, patting Trucy's shoulder. "Ignore us," he said. "Go ahead and look, Apollo."

His siblings' barely restrained giggles didn't give Apollo much confidence, but he decided he'd put up with their mocking if it meant he found a new clue. Sighing, hiding his reddening face, he dashed quickly to the red mesh bin. It looked pretty empty, but the smell turned the young lawyer off examining its contents as closely as he had the previous bin. The fabric draped over the edge was what had caught his attention, so he carefully took hold of a corner and lifted the item into the air, quickly locating a waistband that he held between his index fingers and thumbs. As the true nature of the piece of clothing became clear, his face paled. "A-another pair of underwear!?"

"What!?" Luke called, he and Trucy running to catch up to their brother, staring at the linen garment in astonishment.
"Wow, Polly!" Trucy cried, grinning. "You're a genius at finding panties! I never knew!"

"That was one time!" Apollo argued, pouting.

Luke was studying the bloomers, stroking his goatee in thought. "Whose are they?" he asked. "Do you think they were stolen, like Trucy's and Missus Kitaki's?"

Apollo frowned, spotting a glimpse of red through the thin fabric and spinning the item around to find a massive red flower with five round petals; Embroidered on top in black, a single character of what looked like Japanese writing. "Speaking of Missus Kitaki..." He held out the bloomers to show his siblings. "What do you guys want to bet that says 'plum', and the flower's a plum blossom?"

Luke and Trucy leaned over to look at the pattern, and Trucy cooed in amazement. "Genius!" she cried. "That way, she doesn't have to write her name on them!"

"I would think writing your name would be easier than drawing a flower," Apollo pointed out with a frown. "Writing your name in English, I mean."

Luke chuckled. "Not to mention, asking whoever found them to either read Japanese and know what the flower meant!" He then paused, thinking. "Although, I doubt she ever expected anyone outside her immediate family to actually see them like this..."

Apollo grimaced, trying not to think about the fact that he was essentially manhandling the underwear of the very scary gangster queen not far away. "Let's pack this up and return it to her," he said, hurrying to grab one of his evidence baggies from his bag.

Trucy giggled, looking back to the red mesh bin. "I'll always remember this trash can," she announced, "as the place where Polly found those bloomers!"

While Luke fought laughter, Apollo glared at her, shoving the underwear into a plastic baggie. "Don't you have more important things to remember?" he asked.

"Nope!" Trucy replied, and skipped off back towards the noodle stand.

View the Court Record
As the Wrights left the noodle stand, Apollo gave Ema a wave. "Thanks for your help, Detective Skye," he called.

"No problem!" she called in response, then jumped at the trio with a worried look. "Oh, um... Have you met the defendant yet?"


Ema frowned, looking thoughtfully at the pink watch on her wrist. "Visiting hours are almost over at the detention center," she said. "You might think about wrapping up here and heading over."

"That's a good idea," Luke agreed, turning to his brother. "They're sure to have finished questioning him by now, right?"

Apollo sighed again, nodding. Privately, he wasn't sure what good it would do, given the witness and the prints on the knife, but he didn't suppose his job could possibly get any harder than it currently was.

Ema smiled, chuckling a little at Apollo's expression. "Don't worry, it's like a Wright tradition," she assured him.

"Of all the things to pick up from Dad," Apollo replied with a glare, "I do not want his bad luck."

Ema laughed, then waved the trio away. "You kids just get going. I might see you in court tomorrow, if the Great Glimmerous Fop rules it."

"Bye, Detective Skye!" Trucy replied, waving to the detective as she and her brothers headed down the path towards Kitaki Avenue.

Much like during their previous passages through the street south of the park since being hired by Alita, there was no sign of Plum Kitaki outside the mansion as the Wrights left the park. There had clearly been progress made on the dried paint stains covering the asphalt, but the colourful patches still lingered all around the cobble-stoned entrance of the traditional house.

"I guess she's gone to get a paint scraper," Apollo mused aloud, heading to the gate and intending to wait for her return.

Luke nodded, looking around the thick wooden doors of the gate. "I don't see a doorbell. We'd have to knock to call her out."

"I'll do it!" Trucy offered, jumped forward to do so, but was called to a halt by Apollo grabbing hold of her forearm with a firm grip.
"No thanks," Apollo insisted with a stern look. "I'm sure she'll be right out."

"We can't exactly dally, Apollo," Luke pointed out. "We have to get going to the detention center, remember?"

At that moment, a shrill shriek echoed from beyond the high walls of Kitaki Mansion, from a voice that the trio instantly recognised: "Okay, who's the wise guy who spit gum out on the street!?"

Although he knew himself to be innocent, Apollo paled. He did not want to face an angry Kitaki, and Luke's concerned face seemed to indicate he felt the same way.

Trucy giggled. "She's a neat freak!" she said. "How cute!"

"You there!" Plum's voice continued. "It was you wasn't it!? 'Fess up! I hope you've said your prayers; You're gonna need them!"


"Agreed," Luke replied with a nod, turning without a second thought to speed-walk down the path. Apollo grabbed his sister's upper arm and dragged her after Luke, ignoring her protests.

"But we were going to return her panties!" Trucy insisted.

"And we will," Apollo promised as they hurried around the corner. "Later."

June 15, 3:57PM
Detention Center
Reception

Apollo's pleas for Luke to hurry didn't make their drive go any faster, the middle Wright refusing to break any laws no matter the emergency. The moment the little blue car parked outside the old detention center, Apollo leapt out and ran into the nearby building, almost falling on the reception desk as he failed to pull himself to a halt in time. "I need to see-!"

The guard behind the desk looked up with a jerk, his long black fringe hiding all but his surprised frown. "I'm sorry, meeting hours for-" He paused. "Apollo?"

"Ernest?" Apollo slowly smiled as he recognised his old school friend, and turned to wave over Luke and Trucy as they entered the double doors behind him. "Luke, it's Ernest!" Before his brother could do more than grin and wave, Apollo had returned his attention to the officer with a determined frown. "We need to see Wocky Kitaki. We only have three minutes!"

Ernest bit his lip, looking away. "I'll... put in your request, but don't expect anything," he reluctantly agreed, standing up. "The father's talking in the private room with him."

"The father?" Trucy repeated, looking confused. "You mean like a priest?"

"I mean the suspect's father," Ernest replied, walking around the desk and adjusting his uniform sleeves as he went. "Mister Winfred 'Big Wins' Kitaki himself."

Apollo watched Ernest heading to the visitor's room door, trying not to look as anxious as he
suddenly felt. 'Just the one gangster on their own was bad enough... Did we have to meet the entire Kitaki Family before the trial!?' Nevertheless, he forced his feet to move, following his former schoolfriend. Behind him, he waved at his siblings to stay back, unwilling to make them face any more gangsters.

The moment Ernest pulled open the door, angry shouts bellowed from the new opening, talking over each other with a fury that Apollo had never heard before.

"Die you-!"

"You're the one on your way out old-!"

Apollo looked back to his siblings, and was relieved to find they appeared to have backed up from the fright, almost pressed against the wall. Trucy was clinging to Luke's arm, half-hiding behind him as they both stared at the open door with wide eyes.

"Ah, they're here," Ernest muttered, almost casually, and waved Apollo in.

The first thing Apollo saw when he returned his gaze to the doorway was the very large man inside, taller than Phoenix and twice as wide, sunken eyes hidden below a thick brow and a thin moustache on his upper lip. Dressed in tight black robes, he stood tall in the dim light of the detention center's visitor's room... proudly displaying a lemon yellow apron with a cutesy fox head on the chest, right underneath a strip of green that read 'SALE!'. He turned his hooded gaze on the young magician. "You Wocky's lawyer?"

Apollo rapidly nodded. "Y-yes, sir!"

The man grunted to himself, then stepped towards him, holding out a hand to shake. Not wanting to irritate him, Apollo rushed forward to take it. "Well, I'm Big Wins Kitaki," the man introduced himself, "fourth head of the Kitaki family... capice?"

The moment their 'friendly' handshake finished, Apollo's hand fell back to his side. "Er... Actually, I came to speak to your son," he admitted.

Wins stared at Apollo for another long moment (or Apollo assumed he did - the man's eyes were totally invisible in the darkness under his eyebrows). "Mister Wright."

"Yes?" 'He already knows my name?'

"My son's innocent," Wins calmly insisted. "He killed no one. If he were found guilty... it wouldn't be good." He pointed a finger casually at Apollo, unnervingly like a gun. "Capice?"

Apollo rapidly nodded again. "Y-yes! I'm all about capicing! Capice'd loud and clear!"

"You gotta do more than just understand to make it," Wins continued. "You'll learn, though. Even if the lesson comes at the end of your short life."

'Way to make me feel confident about this trial...' Apollo thought, feeling a nervous sweat developing on his brow.

"What's the big idea, old man!?!" came an indignant shout from behind, and Wins stepped aside as he turned to face it, giving Apollo a good view of the other side of the glass, where a familiar-looking teenager stood, bouncing back and forth in his pink-and-yellow jacket as though preparing for a boxing match. "You can't treat me like a kid no more, not now!" he cried, then stilled, his scowl twitching nervously at the corners. "You know I... I... I wanted to go to the clink!" he insisted. "I like
Apollo resisted the urge to sigh. He could see the origins of Ema's comment about the young man throwing his weight around... but he could also see a scared teenager, terrified of going to jail despite his insistent denials. Apollo stepped towards the glass, closer to his client. "You must be Wockey."

"A G's not a G 'til he does hard time!" Wocky continued, bouncing back and forth again. "Bizzoooy!" He threw a false punch towards the glass, giving Wins a glare as he ignored the lawyer. "You'll see. When I get out of here, things'll change!"

Wins suddenly lurched forward, slamming a hand on the desk and making both Apollo and Wocky jump in fright. "Silence!" he ordered, then stood straight as thought nothing had happened, his hands hidden in pockets behind his apron as he calmly turned towards Apollo. "My apologies, Mister Wright. He's usually such a nice boy."

Somehow, Apollo found that hard to believe.

"Ha!" Wocky barked, regaining his confidence remarkably quick. "You can't take me under your wing this time, old man! You heard me!" He jabbed a finger firmly against the glass, pointing at his father. "I don't need no trial! I did it!"

'Please don't say that...'

Wins sniffed, then turned away, placing a firm hand on Apollo's shoulder. "I think that's enough for today, Mister Wright," he said, guiding the young lawyer back out the still-open door into the reception. Apollo, unwilling to see more of the gangster's anger, went along without a fight. As they passed Ernest, who closed the door behind them, Wins stopped and gave Apollo a long stare. "Don't let me down tomorrow." With that, he left the lawyer behind and walked out of the building.

A lengthy silence followed the exit of the intimidating gangster boss, and it took some time before Apollo felt comfortable enough to sigh, the noise seeming to signal relief in everyone else too. "So much for talking to our client," he grumbled.

"Sorry, them's the rules," Ernest replied, returning to his desk. "And don't ask me to bend them, not for the Kitakis."

"That's understandable, Ernest," Luke said, giving the young officer a smile before heading over to Apollo, patting his back sympathetically. "Don't worry, Apollo; We made a lot of progress today! We solved the missing noodle stand, and the hit-and-run..."

"And we found lots of panties, too!" Trucy cheerfully added, jumping over to grab Apollo's other arm with a grin. "Maybe we should advertise your new skill for the customers!"

Apollo turned red, scowling at his sister. At his side, Luke was already stifling giggles. "Are you never going to let me live that down!?" He could even see Ernest pause, watching the trio, and no doubt he had a raised eyebrow under his mane of hair.

Trucy giggled. "We had fun, at least!"

"You have a strange idea of 'fun'," Apollo muttered, then sighed, deciding to move on. "I don't think there's really anything else investigation-wise we can do now. I've got paperwork to do for the trial tomorrow, but other than that..."

"Let's go visit Papa," Luke suggested. "We can see if he has any ideas on the case before you two have to go off for your show."
Trucy gasped, a hand to her mouth. "Oh! Yeah! And I need to give the Magic Panties a quick wash from that tailpipe!"

Apollo nodded. "Right then. Back to the office, Trucy washes the panties, I'll grab my paperwork, then we can take Pearly and go visit Dad."

"Sounds like a plan!" Luke laughed, and the trio headed off outside. Apollo and Luke gave their friend at the reception desk one last wave as they went, Luke calling, "Thanks for your help, Ernest!"

The young officer gave them a small smile and a wave in return.

View the Court Record
The moment the Wrights and Pearl were all together again, the first thing Apollo made sure to do was catch Phoenix and Pearl up on everything they’d been doing since the investigation in People Park had begun, telling the pair about their angry young client, the family he belonged to, the evidence that stood against him, and the science-loving detective who had helped them. Once he’d finished, Luke stepped up to talk about the testimonies he had heard from Spoon the dog, and his crow friends in the park, specifically one called Corbin, who had been a friend of Luke's for two years now.

"He's promised to ask around for information," Luke explained, sitting in one of the chairs the group had dragged around Phoenix's bed, "and get back to me if he learns anything. Unfortunately, it was just too dark for him to see much on the night itself; If Detective Skye hadn't been watching us so closely, I might have been able to find some squirrels or someone else with better night vision that was by the river last night."

"Won't the gunshot have scared them off?" Pearl asked, on the other side of the bed with Trucy.

"Maybe," Luke admitted, "but these are animals living in an urban environment; They're mostly used to loud, unexplained sounds. Corbin and his family certainly are."

Phoenix, leaning back against the pillows of his bed, rubbed his chin in thought. "So... we should probably start out by outlining the series of events." He turned to his eldest with a small smile. "Apollo?"

Apollo looked up from the paperwork in his lap, momentarily surprised at being called on. "Uh..." Shuffling his paperwork to try and locate his notes, he sat up straight, pausing to run the details over in his head. "Well, as far as I can tell, it all started with that car accident." Finally, he found the relevant page, leaving it on top of the pile as he neatened it up. "Yeah, around nine. Doctor Meraktis hit you, then raced right back to his clinic, leaving his car there. Sometime after, the Magic Panties were stolen, and the thief, whoever they were, left behind both the panties and their phone."

"It had to be that doctor!" Trucy proclaimed, scowling as she held up her fists. "He stole my panties and went and hid in his home!"

"Except I don't think it was, Trucy," Luke cut in, stroking his goatee. "Spoon heard your thief leave; If it were Meraktis, where was he going? And why didn't Spoon hear him coming back before the stand was stolen?"

"Whichever it is," Apollo cut in, frowning at his notes, "the theft of the noodle stand was next. For some reason, Meraktis specifically went after Mister Eldoon's stand, and we're assuming he took the time to remove all the bowls from it before going to the park."

"To make room for the fourth person at the crime scene, maybe?" Luke suggested. "They were inside it, after all."
"But why?" Pearl asked. "If they were going somewhere, why'd they have to steal the stand and empty it for the other person to hide in?"

Luke opened his mouth to reply, then paused, deep in thought.

Trucy sighed, flopping back in her chair. "Nothing about the stand theft or this other person makes sense!" she cried in frustration. "What on earth were they doing!?"

"I'd say the answer to that will solve the entire mystery," Phoenix mused aloud. After a pause, he turned back to Apollo. "And once they stole the stand, what happened then?"

"Meraktis pulled it to People Park," Apollo replied, returning to his notes. "His friend was hidden inside. They... then came across someone."

"The defendant," Phoenix filled in. "And his knife."

Apollo nodded. "At this point, all we really have is the crow's testimony: Someone, the witness we'll be seeing in court tomorrow, interrupted them, a gun went off, and everyone fled. Wocky also dropped his knife."

Pearl was biting her thumbnail in thought. "So... where was the gun?" she asked. "And... why did Mister Wocky bring a knife if he was going to shoot Doctor Meraktis?"

"A good point to bring up in court tomorrow," Phoenix pointed out. "With Wocky's prints all over it, they can't deny he clearly had it on the night."

"I bet it was the witness who shot him!" Trucy decided, grinning at Apollo with a furrowed brow. "They ran in, shot the doctor, then planted the gun and ran off!"

Apollo sighed, crossing his arms. "We'll just have to see," he said. "If Detective Skye had been able to analyse that footprint we found, we might have had enough information to at least find this fourth person who was in the stand. We could've asked them."

Phoenix then noticed Luke still staring into the distance with a thoughtful frown. "You've been quiet for a while now, Luke," he pointed out, startling the young man was he was dragged back into the conversation. "Did you figure something out?"

Luke grimaced. "Well... I did come up with a hypothesis," he admitted.

Pearl looked confused, biting her thumbnail again. "High-pot-amus?" she asked.

"He means a theory," Apollo explained, a growing hopeful smile on his face as he turned to his brother. "What is it?"

Luke didn't respond for several seconds, pulling at his goatee. "I'd... rather not say," he said. "We don't have enough information to either support or disprove it, and," he turned his worried gaze to Apollo, "I don't want to give you, as Wocky's lawyer, a false idea of what happened should I turn out to be wrong. It could hurt your arguments."

Apollo shot his brother a glare. "Just tell me, for crying out loud!" he insisted. "I'm not going to confuse a theory for what actually happened!"

"Oh, you're not, are you?" Luke asked, returning the glare with a stern frown. "That's your biggest weakness when it comes to puzzles; You always bring in your pre-conceived notions and rarely think outside the box."
"What do puzzles have to do with a court case!?” Apollo asked, more confused now than angry.

"Everything," Luke replied. "Finding out what happened is one big puzzle that the defence and prosecution have to solve together! You have to be prepared to go somewhere that seems illogical to find the answer!"

"And turn everything on its head," Phoenix added with a nostalgic smile, watching his younger son. "There's a reason Luke and the Professor were invaluable to me in Labyrinthia."

Luke looked over to Phoenix in surprise, then smiled back with a bashful blush.

Phoenix returned his gaze to Apollo, who was staring thoughtfully at the floor. "As annoying as it may be at the time, sometimes you really just have to work it out yourself. In fact, on that note..." He looked between his sons with a grin. "Why don't you assist him in court tomorrow, Luke? You have experience, after all."


"What!?" Trucy cried with a pout. "Why does Luke get to help Polly in court!? Why can't I do it?"

"W-well, he did help Mister Nick a few times," Pearl said.

"So have you!" Trucy pointed out.

Pearl shook her head. "Not really," she replied. "All I ever did to help was channel Mystic Mia."

Apollo was suddenly tempted to ask Pearl to do exactly that.

"I was just making a suggestion," Phoenix assured Trucy with a smile. "I think it would be most beneficial to Apollo's case if Luke assisted him, but the final decision is Apollo's."

Immediately, Apollo felt the entire room's attention turn on him, Trucy's restless glare standing out against everyone else's patient looks. "U-uh..." Resting his paperwork securely in his lap, he pressed a finger into his forehead, taking a moment to think.

Truthfully, Apollo had had an idea of who would ideally assist him in his second trial ever since the formation of the Anything Agency: Phoenix himself. Despite the circumstances, it had been the realisation of a childhood dream to stand behind the bench with his father and former idol at his side, leading the defence with the support and help of Phoenix's experience on call... but, unfortunately, Phoenix was not an option. Apollo didn't even dare to bring the secret hope up, knowing his father was desperate to 'escape' the hospital and not wanting to give Phoenix an excuse with which to defy his doctors and skip out on his much needed healing time.

After Phoenix, Mia was the next best thing, with just as much experience and wisdom as Phoenix... although it had been seven long years since she had last assisted Phoenix, and Apollo had picked up the impression that she had been carefully weaning her former subordinate off her help before then; It didn't seem likely she, or the other Feys, would be open to aiding Apollo the way they'd aided his father. In fact, Apollo was certain they'd agree to help if asked, and promptly resent him ever after for being unable to work with what he already had in the world of the living.

That left only Luke and Trucy, and, Apollo had to admit, Luke was the better option. Not only did Luke have prior experience acting as a court assistant (even if it was eight years ago in a radically different court system), he seemed to have a tight enough grasp on the wild mysteries of this case to actually have some idea of the truth behind it all... both of which Trucy, as dear as she was to her brothers, lacked.
Sighing, Apollo made his decision, looking up to meet his sister's eyes. "Truce... you and I perform together every night," he pointed out. "We will be performing together in a couple of hours. Don't you think it's Luke's turn?"

At that, Trucy's angry gaze instantly softened, shooting her other brother apologetic looks. "I... guess so," she admitted.

His sister taken care of, Apollo then turned to Luke, watching him worriedly. "Although... will you be okay standing in court?"

Luke frowned, confused. "Of course I will," he said, then paused as it seemed to register exactly what Apollo had been referring to. He gave his brother a reassuring smile. "Don't worry about me, Apollo; I'll be fine. You have a case to concentrate on."

Apollo smiled in return.
The Wrights and Pearl had sat and chatted for as long as they could, right up until a nurse came to chase the young group out at the end of visiting hours. As they reluctantly left, Phoenix grabbed Apollo's hand and gave his eldest a grin - "You'll do just fine in the trial tomorrow; I know you will." - and let them go with a wave. After so much talking in the hospital room, Apollo, Luke, Trucy and Pearl settled into a comfortable silence as they wandered down the now-familiar route back to the Wright Anything Agency, the path around them busy with passing people. Every so often, Apollo would glance at a watch he kept under his right glove, keeping an eye on how long he and Trucy had until they had to leave for their show.

Finally, the quartet reached the last intersection to their destination, which required them to cross the road. Apollo held his hand out to signal his siblings and cousin, and paused at the gutter, looking both ways along the road (still busy despite not being rush hour). They barely noticed the roar of a passing motorbike as they dashed across the asphalt through a gap in the traffic to the pavement on the opposite side, the final stretch to home.

"Today's actually been really busy if you think about it," Trucy pointed out, breaking the silence as they fell back into their comfortable walk. "Running all over the place, looking for things, checking on Daddy..."

Luke gave her a smile. "If you want, I could give you a lift to the Wonder Bar tonight," he offered. "After all the walking we've done today, you two might appreciate the chance to rest your feet."

Apollo chuckled; He had to agree. "As long as you take us by my apartment first, that'd be nice," he admitted. "Performing is enough of a work-out. You two gonna come and watch tonight while you're at it?"

"I'd love to!" Pearl cried. "It's been a while since I last saw you two on stage!"

Luke was similarly opening his mouth to respond when he was interrupted by the roar of another motorbike (or perhaps, he later realised, the same one). He paused to wait for it to pass, but the loud engine slowed and came to a stop, sputtering at the edge of the road right next to them and quickly attracting the small group's attention, calling them to a halt.

Apollo noticed the shiny metal surface of the bike first; It was alternately silver and a reddish-purple, obviously well-loved and likely costing its owner a bundle in maintenance. On the front, near the hooded headlight and under the chest of the rider as he straightened up from his grip on the handlebars, was the familiar sigil of the pointy G: The logo of the Gavinners. The glare was already on Apollo's face as he turned his gaze to the rider himself, a tall man in black with a matching reddish-purple jacket on top, the silver chains of his belt and necklace standing out below the anonymous hood of his helmet. Idly flipping an unreasonably perfect coil of blond hair over his shoulder, he nodded in greeting to the quartet. "What a co-incidence; I just came from your office, Herr Wright."

Apollo wasted no time in stepping forward, protectively keeping his siblings and cousin behind him. "What do you want?"
Klavier laughed, his voice slightly muffled by the helmet. "Believe it or not, I did not stop by to antagonise you." He flipped up his visor, grinning casually out from the tiny window his face was squeezed into. "I believe you have a Herr Triton working for you, ja?"

Before Apollo could do more than blink in surprise, Luke had stepped forward, watching the bike rider carefully. "You want to talk to me about my testimony?"

Klavier nodded, his smile fading into a more serious frown. "I am loathe to go into a trial without all available information," he said, then looked up to the slowly darkening sky, the shadows of the buildings extending across the street. "However, it is a bit late to be questioning someone, ja?"

Smiling again, he returned his gaze to Luke. "Since we will both be at the courthouse tomorrow morning, maybe we could meet before the trial, Herr Triton. Have a little talk."


"Then it is settled!" Klavier replied with a grin. He flipped his visor back down, hiding his face. "I will see you both in court!" With a friendly wave, he revved his motorbike and peeled back out into the traffic, disappearing into the stream of cars behind them.

Apollo immediately turned on Luke. "You should have said no."

"And kept from him something that could make your job easier?" Luke asked, one eyebrow raised. "I've been a witness before; I know how this works."

Instead of replying, Apollo simply turned around, hands curled into fists as he stalked back towards home. Reluctantly, Luke and Pearl moved to follow him; Trucy, however, skipped up to Apollo's side, fixing her eldest brother with a grin. "So," she asked, "if Luke's gonna be a witness tomorrow, does that mean I can help you in court?"

"Not now, Truce."

June 15, 6:40PM
Apollo and Clay's Apartment
Living Room

With Luke and Trucy waiting in the car outside, Apollo and Trucy dashed through his apartment's front door, making for Apollo's bedroom at the back.

Clay, stretched out across the nearby lounge, jumped up in surprise, looking up at the pair as they ran past. "Wha- 'Pollo? Trucy?"

"No time to talk!" Apollo replied as he disappeared into his room, his sister at his heels. "We're just getting my magic stuff and some spare clothes!"

"We'll be out in a minute!" Trucy added.

Frowning, Clay muted the television and got to his feet, scratching his head through his messy bedhead of black hair. "Where've you guys been all day? All I've heard is that your dad was fine!"

"Long story!" Apollo shouted, amongst the thuds of thrown open drawers and closet doors. "We got
a lot of cases - Not that one, Truce, that one's falling apart - so we were really busy!"

Clay stared for a moment before sighing, crossing his arms. "So... what's the hurry now, then?"

"We gotta be at the Wonder Bar in ten minutes!" Trucy cried. A moment later, she had dashed out of
the room, arms full of random mid-sized props. She paused only to grin at Clay. "Luke's giving us a
lift, and Pearly's coming to watch too!" With that, she had run off back outside.

"Huh, really?" Clay asked, turning to smile at his roommate as Apollo exited his room, hat on his
head and struggling to pull closed a zipper on the old school backpack in his hands. "Maybe I should
come, too!"

Apollo shot his friend a quick smile, adjusting his bag into a firmer grip in his arms. "If you're
coming with us, you gotta come now; We don't have the time to wait for you."

Clay grinned, pointing a pair of finger-guns at his friend with a click of his tongue. "Gotcha, dude."
He grabbed a jacket from the floor, then jumped into a pair of beige sandals that clashed strangely
with his mint green socks. "Liftoff!" he announced, throwing his arms into the air, then raced out the
door into the fading evening light.

Apollo chuckled, rolling his eyes as he headed out after.

\[Man, have I got a story to tell you when you wake up in a few hours. I know I said this morning that
nothing was happening, but that all got turned on its head only a few minutes after we talked.
Actually, strike 'when you wake up'. I'll put it all out there when we're both awake tomorrow
morning.\]

\[Naw thats okay, I can hear it now :D\]

\[Athena, why are you awake!? Isn't it 5am over there? .\]

\[Almost 6! I get up early for my morning jog remember? ;) And aren't you normally in bed by this
time Luke?\]

\[I was giving Apollo and Trucy a lift to and from their show... But that doesn't matter. Today's been a
bit of a whirlwind.\]

\[Papa was grazed by a car (he's fine though), one of Apollo and Trucy's props was stolen, a family
friend's mobile business disappeared... and someone got murdered. To top it all off, all four became
our cases and they're linked together in the strangest ways.\]

\[Wow, that DOES sound like whirlwind :/ Sorry to hear about Mr Wright. Tell him to get better from
me?\]

\[Sure. Also, the prosecutor Apollo's facing in court tomorrow... I don't know if you've heard of him.
Klavier Gavin? .\]

\[KLAVIER!? LOL ARE YOU SERIOUS!?\]

\[Have you heard of him? .\]

\[NOPE BUT HE HAS THE SILLIEST NAME I'VE EVER HEARD!\]
WHO CALLS THEMSELVES 'PIANO'!?  

I’m afraid you’ve lost me...

GIMME A MINUTE TO STOP LAUGHING THIS IS GOLD  
Okay I think I’ve calmed down now. OH WOW THO  
Klavier is the German word for piano. Who does this guy think he is!? There’s that law against naming kids after objects in Germany!

Huh. Really? He’s supposed to be German...

Yeah, no way. :) Looking him up, is he the same Gavin in the Gavinners band?

That’s him. Apollo really hates him because he was involved in the whole forgery scandal back in 2019.

Just read that bit on him in Wikipedia. Says he left the prosecutors office to focus on his music.

And now he’s back prosecuting. We’re facing him in court tomorrow, and he’s talking to me about what I ‘witnessed’ of this murder (long story).

We HAVE to have an actual phone conversation ASAP! I gotta hear these details!

Haha, yeah, once this trial is over. :) Now I’m kinda torn on telling Apollo about this ‘piano’ thing: He’d find it hilarious, but I just know he’ll turn it into some childish insult in court and I don’t want him to be resorting to that when I’m struggling to get him to give Mr Gavin the time of day.

I hear you ;) Talk to ya later Luke!

Until then, Athena.

View the Court Record/Luke’s Notebook
Hey everyone, it's late and I want to get to bed, but I figured you'd all want to hear this so I'll make it quick.

My dad's in the hospital right now. He got hit by a car, though he's okay... just laughing and joking about it like usual, trying to walk out of the hospital despite his ankle. I've had to drop in back home to look after my sister, which is kinda annoying on such short notice, but I'll live.
Anyway. I'm going to bed now. It was great to see you after the show today, Knox.

Dime_Quarters [MOD] "Penny", 06/14/2026 11:31:14PM
Oh no! Sorry to hear about your dad, Apollo! Is his ankle broken?

Pocky-Hockey "Aria", 06/15/2026 08:04:16AM
I broke my ankle once, when I was a kid. Quite a story too. I whacked it falling off a swing! xD Never been hit by a car though, so its kinda amazing Mr Wright is well enough to try and walk out. I may not know him as well as you do, but that does sound just like him actually.

ForgetMeKnot "Knox", 06/15/2026 09:48:03AM
Wait what!? Hit by a car!? I almost didn't read this thread because 'general update' is so vague, why don't you mention that in the title!?
And it was great seeing you last night man, we should catch up irl more often.

Precious-Fairy "Pearly", 06/15/2026 10:26:48AM
Hi everyone, Apollo's really busy with a few cases the agency got this morning, so I thought I'd answer your questions!
Mr Nick's ankle is just sprained, though the hospital doesn't want to let him out yet. Mystic Maya and I came down to see him this morning, though Mystic Maya had to leave again because she's very busy. I'm staying with Trucy until he's better, to keep the office clean! Nobody seems to be very good at that since Luke moved out. :/
I think Apollo just said 'general update' in the title because he didn't want to worry anyone. Luke told me he almost didn't get the messege of what happened and yelled at Apollo when he was trying to ring him because he was busy getting ready for work.

ForgetMeKnot "Knox", 06/15/2026 10:48:03AM
Eh I guess that makes sense. Tell Mr Wright to get better from us, okay?
Precious-Fairy "Pearly", 06/15/2026 10:52:20AM
I will! :)

Dime_Quarters [MOD] "Penny", 06/15/2026 11:52:41AM
Slow day, Pearly? ;) You're replying fast!

Precious-Fairy "Pearly", 06/15/2026 12:02:12PM
Yes, a bit. :) I don't have much to do today, in between cleaning.

The Revived PW Fan-Club Forum!
Home > The Wright Anything Agency
Thread: Apollo has a new case!
Precious-Fairy "Pearly", 06/15/2026 01:29:38PM
He's given me the okay already to announce it here, too! :) Though I'm not allowed to talk about the
details, so all I can say is that he's been hired to take on another defence case!
I'm probably not going to go to the trial, because I'm busy looking after the office, and Mr Nick is
still in the hospital, so I have to keep him company too. Trucy says he'll mope if we leave him alone
too long!

BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN] "Maggey", 06/15/2026 02:01:14PM
Congrats, Apollo! I won't be able to make this trial either, assuming it's tomorrow or the day after...
Good luck tho, huh? :) And Pearly, you'll give our well wishes to Mr Wright for me and Dick, won't
you? I only just saw the other thread, so I thought I'd ask here.

Precious-Fairy "Pearly", 06/15/2026 02:16:48PM
I will, Maggey! :) And I'll tell Apollo when he next drops in that you wished him luck!

CelestialImpacts "Adrian", 06/15/2026 02:30:01PM
It's a pity trials are always on such short notice. If I hadn't just left, I'd definitely be trying to be there
to cheer you on, Apollo. :) Good luck from me and Auntie Franziska! (she didn't say outright that
she wished you luck, but I know she meant to :) )

Precious-Fairy "Pearly", 06/15/2026 02:47:35PM
Oh no! Apollo was just home and I forgot to tell him anything because they came in to get something
for their investigation and he and Trucy were arguing about something and it totally slipped my
mind! D:
Dime_Quarters [MOD] "Penny", 06/15/2026 03:05:44PM
Haha, you keep an eye on those two in Mr Wright's absence, ok Pearly? ;) And tell Apollo to get back on here so we can wish him luck 'in person' as it were. I mean, I know he's busy, but you could have this thread open on your computer and point him to look at it when he's next around or something.
Oh, and is that trial tomorrow or the day after? I might have the time off to see at least part of it, depending.

Precious-Fairy "Pearly", 06/15/2026 03:12:14PM
That's a good idea, Penny! I'll try that when he next comes back!
I'm not very good at keeping Apollo and Trucy from fighting... Luke seemed to be able to stop them, though. I think they were fighting about which way their hats sit on display in the office? And there was something in a trophy Mr Nick wanted them to get for something.
The trial's tomorrow. That's why Apollo is so busy investigating it, and Luke and Trucy are helping him.

Pocky-Hockey "Aria", 06/15/2026 04:12:16PM
Ooo, perfect timing! I'm already taking tomorrow off, so I'll come cheer you on, Apollo! Maybe we could meet up again like last time? Obviously there won't be nearly as many of us there, but...

Dime_Quarters [MOD] "Penny", 06/15/2026 04:27:24PM
I have a shoot that evening, but if the trial doesn't go too long, I can be there tomorrow. :) Shall we meet up outside the courtroom again, Aria?

Drewby "Drew", 06/15/2026 04:32:43PM
Aw man, all the cool stuff happens while I'm busy! How are you two free on a weekday!? (oh yeah, good luck Apollo, and I hope your dad gets better)

Pocky-Hockey "Aria", 06/15/2026 04:54:15PM
Keep your hair on, Drew. ;) I have a bunch of vacation days I have to use up, and I was taking them this week to spend some time with my girlfriend while she's off from her teaching job. She's not that interested in law, but I think she does have some lesson plans or something to do, so I'll just owe her a night out or something to make up for it. :D
And outside the courtroom sounds good! I'll see you there, Penny!

ForgetMeKnot "Knox", 06/15/2026 05:08:39PM
Sorry, I won't be able to be there myself. Good luck Apollo, and Penny and Aria, you two cheer him on for all of us, k?
(Woah, Pearly, where'd you go? You were replying to us almost instantly earlier!)
BlackbirdL.uck [ADMIN] "Maggey", 06/15/2026 05:19:18PM
So Aria and Penny, you two know how to recognise each other? It looks like it'll be just you two and whoever else will be with Apollo on the day (not counting Pearly, since she's said she can't make it). Keep in mind, we haven't heard from him yet if he'll have the time for a meet-up, and there's every possibility the trial will extend to a second or third day too, depending on what this exact case even is.

Dime_Quarters [MOD] "Penny", 06/15/2026 05:36:34PM
I won't be able to make a second or third day, if that happens. Even if this first one takes too long, I'll have to sneak out to prepare for my evening shoot. And Aria and I were just confirming each other's phone numbers, so we're okay on that front.

Pocky-Hockey "Aria", 06/15/2026 05:42:56PM
I'll cheer Apollo on alone all three days if I have to! >D Also, if it's okay with you Pearly, I could drop by the office in the afternoon to say hi? I don't know how busy you'll be, or if Apollo will manage to wrap this thing up in a single day.

Precious-Fairy "Pearly", 06/15/2026 08:46:37PM
Sorry, we were all out together discussing Apollo's case! I can't say how it will go tomorrow, but Mr Nick is very confident, so I think Apollo will definitely win! He can give you a better answer once he's done putting all his and Trucy's things from their show tonight away. :)
I don't mind you saying hello tomorrow, Aria! It will be nice to see a friend, and I'm sure Apollo and Luke and Trucy would like to see you too!

steeljusticelover "Apollo", 06/15/2026 08:53:25PM
Hey everyone, sorry it took so long for me to get back to you all! Pearly passed all your well-wishes on to Dad, and he said to thank you all for thinking of him. He's still fine, laughing and joking about it, and still trying to escape despite doctor's orders to stay put. I was actually hoping to ask him to assist me in court, but I'm not giving him a reason to sneak out before they've agreed to release him, so I'm not letting him know that. Going through my paperwork, it looks like we'll be in Courtroom 4 tomorrow. Aria and Penny, keep an eye out just in case for State vs Wocky Kitaki, the murder trial. I'm not going to be able to meet you beforehand, but my friend Clay has said he'll come, so if you remember him or he remembers you, you could meet up with him. Dad might think I can pull this off in a day, but I'm doubtful. The prosecutor worries me, and I honestly think he'll have some nasty tricks up his sleeve for us in court. I don't even know if Luke will be able to assist me, or if I'll have to let Trucy do it instead. Will you guys even WANT to say hi if I lose this? I might just run and hide, unless he manages to twist things around to get me arrested or something.
Oh, yeah, and thanks for wishing me luck in the trial, everyone. :) I'll try not to disappoint you.
You're not going to need it, but I thought I'd wish you luck in your trial today :)

Thanks Dad :) Pretty sure I will need it tho.

Nonsense. You have your unique 'power' after all, and Luke's puzzle solving skills if you get stuck. Tell yourself you're fine like you always do and you'll do great! ;)

Ha ha >.> We'll come see you after the trial, however it turns out.

See you after your win then. :) We all believe in you, Apollo

... Thanks Dad :) .

June 16, 9:30AM
District Court
Entrance Hall

"So, where exactly is this dude you gotta see?"

Luke frowned, arms crossed as he entered the courthouse with his siblings and friend. "I'm not entirely sure, Clay," he admitted. "I assumed he'd be in the lobby assigned to the prosecution for this trial." He looked to Apollo. "That'd be the one next to yours, right?"

Apollo thought a moment, then nodded. "Yeah, we're up on the fourth floor; Courtroom number four itself. I'm supposed to meet the Kitakis in Lobby Two, so I guess Gavin will be waiting for you in One."

"So we can all go with you to meet Wocky, right?" Trucy asked, a hopeful grin directed straight at her eldest brother. "And if Luke doesn't come back from talking to Mister Gavin, I can go with you into court, right?"

Apollo shot his sister a glare, but decided to resign himself to accepting her help; It would be awful to lose Luke to the witness stand, but even worse not to have a source of back-up, and Trucy was better than nothing. "Fine, fine, you can come," he sighed.

Trucy immediately whooped, jumping into the air with her hands held high.

"But the moment Luke comes back," Apollo added, pointing a threatening finger at his sister, "you're sitting in the gallery with Clay!"

"Aw!" Trucy whined in reply, her exuberant mood quickly dropping.

Clay snickered to himself, patting Trucy on the back as the group made their way to the stairs. "Don't worry, I'll keep you out of trouble, little missy!" He shot her a wink as Apollo smiled and Luke hid giggles.

Trucy rolled her eyes. "I can look after myself!" she insisted.
Although Luke had offered to practise their Chords of Steel with Apollo before the trial, it turned out that they didn't have time for it. While Clay had headed off to the courtroom gallery to wait (promising to keep an eye out for Apollo's online friends if he recognised them), the Wrights went down the nearby corridor to the defendant lobbies. They passed Lobby One first, and Apollo and Trucy gave Luke a small wave as he stopped to knock on the door. Although Apollo kept moving, gripping Trucy's hand tight to hold her close, he watched over his shoulder as they continued to their lobby, until Luke's door opened and he was waved in by a purple-sleeved arm. With Luke out of sight, the eldest Wright had hurried Trucy into Lobby Two, already mentally preparing to settle in for a long wait.

As he sat down on the distressingly dull brown sofa, Apollo wondered what exactly was going on on the other side of the wall at his back. Was Klavier grilling Luke on his 'hobby', why 'he' was in the tree, why he was 'wearing sunglasses' at night? Was Luke managing to keep his cool and, as much as he was terrible at it, lie convincingly with the story Trucy had come up with for him? Was Klavier showing as little mercy for Luke as he'd shown for Phoenix seven years ago, as cold-hearted as his brother behind that amicably jovial exterior? Apollo struggled not to let his hands curl into fists around the court papers he was pretending to review; Now more than ever, he wanted to be at his brother's side, protecting him from the Gavins and the cruel outside world that would throw Luke in the loony bin before even beginning to entertain the thought that the young vet could truly understand what his animal friends were saying to him as though it were true British English as perfect as Luke's own.

A hand on his arm startled Apollo from his thoughts, and he looked up in surprise to see Trucy sat as his side, giving him a worried look. "Don't worry," she told him. "Luke'll be okay. He's a Wright: Wrights always pull through in adversity."

Apollo gave his sister a smile. "Yeah," he agreed. "Yeah, we do."

It was ten minutes before a knock at the door startled the Gramarye siblings into action, both jumping to their feet as Apollo dropped his papers on the nearby table. "Luke!" they both cried as they ran towards the door, only for it to open before they'd taken more than a few steps.

"Look at me, I'm fine, I'm great!" shouted a familiar voice as a young man stumbled into the room, waving off a tall figure behind him. "You know what I'm saying!?"

Apollo and Trucy exchanged confused looks. "Uh, not really," Apollo admitted.

"Wocky!" came a warning bark from the doorway as Big Wins Kitaki followed his son into the room. "Don't be running your mouth like that in here!"

The teen turned on his father with a scoff. "See, that's the difference between me and you, old man,"
he said. "I ain't afraid of no cops. Real G's can't keep it real till they spend some hard time in the pen."

Wins seemed to be glaring at Wocky from under his dark brow. "You have absolutely no idea what you're talking about."

Seeing his client was still too busy arguing to talk, Apollo risked a glance at his watch. 'Nine fifty... Trial's about to start, I haven't had a real talk with my client... and Luke's still missing in action.'

Sighing, he glanced at the wall separating the lobby from its twin next door. 'I hope he's okay...'

Luke gripped the strap of his satchel tightly to keep from fidgeting. It wouldn't do to let his brother's case down now by letting suspicion be cast on him... and the thought that it might be if it came out he was lying was terrifying the young vet more than it should have been. "I guess Apollo was right to ask if I was okay about this after..." He shook his head, not wanting to dwell on the events of the previous November. 'I'll be fine. I am fine. There's nothing to worry about.'

Klavier turned around from the table his papers were spread across, giving Luke a patient smile as he casually leaned backwards on the wooden surface. "So... Herr Triton. The Fraulein detective tells me you witnessed the murder, ja?"

Luke warily nodded, his fingers tightening around his satchel strap. The pause stretched out for a minute or two before Klavier laughed. "Would you mind explaining it for me, Herr Triton?"

"O-oh, of course," Luke hurriedly replied, plastering a smile on his face and trying to stay calm.

It took only a few minutes to run through the list of events, and Luke was suddenly glad Trucy had prompted him to practise it in the car on their way over. Klavier had kept quiet, watching Luke as he patiently waited for the tale to end, dark eyes never leaving his. At first, Luke found it terribly embarrassing, having to pretend he had been in a random tree in the park, wearing sunglasses in the middle of the night (that particular detail he hoped was never going to be addressed - Trucy had instructed him to pretend he hadn't known if someone else did notice), but, as he stuttered out Corbin's story of the interrupted confrontation, the gunshot, and the flight of the three witnesses, he slowly managed to regain his confidence.

"And then a fourth person climbed out the window of the noodle cart," he said, finishing his tale, "and ran away. Once they were all gone, I left myself."

Klavier stood in silence for a moment, until it was clear Luke had finished talking, then smiled, pushing off the table. "I see," he said, hands resting idly in his pants pockets. "And, may I ask... would you be able to describe any of the people you saw?"

Luke shook his head, having expected that question. "S-sorry, it was too dark."

"Because of your sunglasses," Klavier added, his smile suddenly seeming more amused, to Luke's embarrassment. "Did it not occur to you to remove them?"

Pretending he wasn't turning as red as Apollo's cape, Luke shook his head again. "N-no, I... I wasn't
expecting someone to get shot."

Klavier paused again, then reached behind him and grabbed a sheet of paper, which Luke saw as it was held out to him was a diagram of the crime scene, complete with river, path, noodle stand and even the nearby tree that Corbin had been in. "Could you mark everyone's positions on this map then, Herr Triton?"

Luke froze. He hadn't been expecting that; Corbin had said nothing to describe where the people he saw were, other than (who they assumed to be) Wocky being 'in front of' Meraktis and the witness being 'by the river'. "Uh..."

"It shouldn't be too hard," Klavier continued, grabbing some small paper labels from the table behind him with his other hand. "We know the victim was here," he placed a label with 'V' in front of the stand, "and you were around here, ja?" A label with 'W2' was placed over the tree. "Plus, your little stowaway in the cart." Grinning, he placed a third label of 'W3' over the stand, then held the map and his two final labels, 'K' and 'W1', out for Luke. "Even in the dark, you should have seen enough to know where everyone was."

There really wasn't any way for Luke to refute that logically, and he knew it. Slowly, he took the labels and map, thinking carefully on how best to bluff through this particular question - If seven years being a Wright hadn't taught him how to bluff, he didn't think anything could. The 'K' label he assumed was for Wocky, although he objected on principle to its clear meaning of 'killer'; At least with Wocky it was easy enough to guess where he would be - right in front of Meraktis - so he placed it down and gave Klavier a glare. "Although I do not believe Mister Kitaki was the killer, since you clearly want me to label him with this one, I have done so," he coldly informed the prosecutor.

Klavier laughed. "Ah, fine, fine," he agreed. "You have spark, Herr Triton!"

Luke just continued his firm stare for a moment, then returned his gaze to the map, his current 'puzzle'. 'Corbin said the witness was by the river... presumably, they were on the path, putting them to the north, but there's nothing to say they weren't on the grass to the south. We don't know anything about this witness, after all.' He frowned. 'And I'm not going to get any hints on this one, either.'

After a long pause, the prosecutor opposite flicked at his hair, his grin fading to a small smile as he took a step towards Luke. "You can just admit it if you don't know, Herr Triton."

Luke was very careful not to react: It would be awful to get himself accused of the crime (he trusted Apollo to protect him if that happened), but for a stranger, let alone one he didn't trust in the slightest, to touch on his special ability to talk to and understand animals? He knew from experience he would just be laughed at and ridiculed, and attracting that kind of attention to the defence in court was the last thing he ever wanted to do; Only Maya had ever believed him outright with no evidence to prove it, and Luke didn't see any animals in the small defendants lobby that could help him not look like a madman in Klavier's eyes.

Finally, Klavier took the map and unused label from Luke, giving the surprised young man a smile. "I think that's all I wanted to know, Herr Triton. You may leave now if you wish."

"R-really?" Luke asked, watching the prosecutor return his map to the table of paperwork. "You don't want me as a witness in the trial?"

Klavier chuckled, turning to face the young vet. "If I do, you will not be far away, ja?" Returning his attention back to his paperwork, he waved Luke away. "I shall see you in court with Herr Wright. The trial will begin soon, after all."
Luke stared for a moment, then nodded and hurried out of the room.
Turnabout Corner, Day 2: Trial, Part 2

June 16, 10:00AM
District Court
Courtroom No. 4

Luke had run into Apollo and Trucy almost the moment he left the prosecution's lobby, and Apollo had been beyond relieved to see him, already en route to the courtroom. Trucy had given them both a quick hug and wished them luck before dashing off to find Clay in the gallery, and the Wright brothers had continued ahead together, escorting their client (still fuming from a lengthy argument with his father) into the courtroom ahead.

It was only a few minutes later that Klavier arrived opposite them, and, not long after, the courtroom was called to silence for the arrival of the judge, who settled himself into the chair at the top of the podium and began court with a few firm taps of his gavel.

"Court is now in session for the trial of Wocky Kitaki," the judge announced.

Apollo nodded, standing tall behind his bench. "The defence is ready, Your Honour."

Klavier smirked, brushing at his fringe. "Ready to rock 'n roll, Herr Judge."

The judge turned to Klavier, examining the younger Gavin. "Long time no see, Prosecutor Gavin," he said. "Were you taking a leave of absence?"

The prosecutor almost seemed to scoff, preening at the attention. "You know that little band I started in my free time?" he replied to the elderly man above them. "Thing is, we got real popular. Hard to say 'nein' to your fans when three of your singles go platinum, ja?"

Resisting the urge to roll his eyes, Apollo only tightened his glare at his opposition. 'Destroyed my father's life and got rewarded with a successful music career... no wonder you thought you'd come back to finish the job with me.'

The judge only nodded, seeming deep in thought. "I see," he mumbled, then gave Klavier a worried look. "To be honest, I was a little concerned," he admitted. "I feared that you might still be distraught over that one trial..."

'Obviously he's using his brother's conviction as fuel for the fire of revenge,' Apollo bitterly mused to himself.

Klavier's face twitched for a moment, too fast for the average eye, and he brushed at his hair nonchalantly. "Not to worry, Herr Judge," he insisted. "I wouldn't miss this day in court for the world. It's worth even more than VIP passes to one of my concerts, ja? How could I pass up a chance to see the true strength," he turned to lock eyes with Apollo, his smile suddenly seeming very false, "of the little boy who bested my brother?"

Apollo refused to reply, returning Klavier's gaze with a stern glare. It was beyond clear to him now that neither of the Gavins were interested in finding the truth of a case, only winning against their opponent; Why else would the prosecutor be using such personal insults as calling Apollo a 'little boy'?
Seeing he was getting no reply, Klavier humphed, flicking at his hair as he looked away with a smile. "It was worth cancelling a show or two," he casually added.

The judge nodded. "Understood." He leaned back in his chair, getting to business with a wave of his hand. "You may give your opening statements to the court."

Klavier hid a laugh. "Before that," he said, looking up at the judge, "I was thinking... Is the air in this courtroom not a bit... serious?"

"It is a court of law," the judge pointed out, raising an eyebrow.

This time, Klavier did laugh. "That's no way to get the crowd jumping, Herr Judge!"

"They're not supposed to jump!" the old man replied, starting to look annoyed. "This is a courtroom!"

Ignoring the judge, Klavier threw out an arm to point dramatically, eliciting a cheer from the gallery. "Achtung, baby!" he cried. "Today, we play it my way!" With that, he immediately turned to miming what looked like a guitar solo.

Apollo glanced at Luke, only to see his brother was as confused as he was. He almost could have sworn, in the roar of the gallery, he could actually hear an electric guitar playing.

With a flourish, Klavier finished his air guitar solo, grinning for the crowd. "Sometimes you have to get on up in order to get down," he paused to point dramatically in the defence's direction, "to prosecuting!"

Behind his glare, Apollo was developing the desire to demand Klavier get on with it already. Luckily, it seemed the prosecutor opposite agreed with him.

"The victim: Pal Meraktis, director of the Meraktis Clinic," Klavier announced. "The scene: People Park." With a flick against the tablet resting on the bench in front of him, Klavier brought up a photo on the holograms, of the aged man slumped over the pull-bar of the noodle stand in the park, Wocky's knife sticking out of the ground in front of him. "He was found pulling a noodle stand."

The judge blinked in surprise. "What in the world was a doctor doing pulling a noodle stand?" he asked.

Klavier grinned cockily, brushing at his hair as the holograms shut off again. "Yes, I believe you will only find that out by asking the defendant, right here, right now... because it's an undeniable truth that he shot the victim!"

Instantly, Apollo slammed at his bench with his fists, his glare focussed tightly on the prosecutor opposite. "What do you mean, 'undeniable'!?" he demanded.

Klavier only scoffed, smiling at the attorney as he gestured to the witness stand, where Wocky was lounging idly, not paying attention to his surroundings. "If you are to glare at anyone, Herr Wright, glare at the punk in the defendant's chair. His crime was witnessed quite clearly, you see."

Apollo refused even to glance in his client's direction, still staring firmly at Klavier. "Try harder, Gavin. It takes more than an unreliable witness to shake a Wright's belief in his client."

The judge nodded. "Very well. Please admit this witness to the court."

Klavier snapped his fingers, shaking his head. "Nein, not yet! First, there is a little matter to be
cleaned up." With that, he began rocking on his air guitar again.

Luke bit back a snort, leaning towards his brother. "A bit in love with his music, isn't he?"

The judge sighed. "What is it, Prosecutor Gavin?"

Finishing his silent solo with a flourish, Klavier pointed up at the judge's podium. "The motive, Herr Judge," he explained. "Why did the little punk do it? Why did he kill the director of the Meraktis Clinic?"

"Objection!" Apollo shouted, banging on his bench again and almost smiling as he caught his opponent out. "Not so fast! The defendant doesn't have to explain that!"

Klavier just continued to smile. "Oh?" he asked. "But what if the defendant specifically requests to do so, as he did this morning?" He brushed at his hair, grinning cockily. "I want to give a shout out to all my homeys', I believe he said."

"What!?” the judge cried.

"'What' is right!" It was only thanks to his training on stage, and the cold hard focus of his anger at Klavier, that Apollo barely reacted to that news. It was just as one of his and Trucy's books said: Always hit your crowd with speed and ferocity. A part of him wondered if Klavier had read that book, too.

Luke was gripping at his satchel strap. "This isn't good," he whispered. "I hope you got to talk with Wocky while I was busy?"

Apollo minutely shook his head, turning his more neutral gaze to the defendant studying his fingernails on the stand. "No," he quietly replied. "I guess he really means it when he says he wants to go to jail; It must be a bonus for him that he didn't actually commit a crime."

"Well, this is highly unusual, but..." the judge mused aloud, then sighed. "The court will now hear from the defendant concerning his motive in the crime!" He banged his gavel to warn the rising noise in the gallery, then turned to the teen at the stand, who jumped to his feet as he realised he was being addressed. "So... you, son, are the defendant," he paused, glancing at his papers, "Wocky, are you?"

Wocky screwed up his nose as though he'd been hit with a particularly nasty stench. "I ain't your son, old man!" he shouted, shaking a fist at the podium. "You step to a Kitaki, you best be prepared to step strong!"

The judge seemed unfazed, staring sternly back at the boy. "You 'step' to a public official, you best be prepared to step into jail," he replied.

"I think that's only going to encourage him," Luke muttered with a wince. Apollo nodded in agreement.

With another bang of his gavel, the judge continued, "Well then, the court will now hear testimony on the defendant's motive, from the defendant himself!" With a nod, he gave the teen at the stand another stern stare.

Wocky rubbed at his nose with a sniff, seeming to ignore the old man entirely as he looked away in the vague direction of the ceiling. "I'll tell you one thing, that doctor was a quacker!" he cried. "Someone had to show him what's what! I was in his clinic 'bout half a year ago. He messed up my op something bad." He waved a hand, scowling as he returned his gaze to the attorneys and judge. "And then he just lets me go, without a word! See ya later, bye!" He paused, growling. "So I gotta
go in, get another doc to patch me up again! That was the day I done figured it out." He pointed a finger threateningly. "No O.G.'s gonna let that pass! That's why I went to his pad that night, know what I'm saying?"

Apollo closed his eyes as he held back a sigh. There was no sign of a lie in Wocky's words... but at least he wasn't yet claiming to be the one who shot the unfortunate victim.

"You're saying you were one of the victim's patients...!?" the judge cried.

Wocky nodded. "Lotta stuff does down when you're keeping it real on the street," he replied. "True dat. I'll tell you one thing, that doc was wack!"

"That's a lot of 'one things' he's telling us," Luke muttered.

"Shame he couldn't spill them to us earlier," Apollo quietly agreed with a frown.

The judge hummed in thought for a moment, then nodded. "Very well, the defence may begin the cross-examination."

[View the Court Record]
Apollo crossed his arms as he mentally prepared himself for the cross-examination. More than anything, he wished he'd had the time to question Wocky before the trial, but there was little point in idle wishes now he had his client actively fighting him in court. 'I know this happened to Dad once... but I doubt Wocky's trying to avoid a worse charge than his current one. He just wants the 'reputation' of being imprisoned for murder.' He looked up, watching Wocky. "So you were a patient at the Meraktis Clinic half a year ago?" he asked. "For what reason?"

Wocky smiled proudly, crossing his arms. "I had what you might call a 'mark of honour'," he boasted.

"Can you explain precisely what was wrong?" Klavier prompted, standing relaxed behind the prosecutor's bench.

"We had a little run-in with the Rivales Family," Wocky explained with a sniff, smirking. "That's when I pulled a jack move, and ran into an ambush. G busted a cap right in me."

Klavier smiled, amused, looking at his tablet computer. "According to my sources, you 'couldn't stand the stress of waiting and ran in fifteen minutes before the appointed time'..." He looked up at the teen, raising an eyebrow. "By yourself."

Wocky growled. "Hey, I was more than a match for those guys!" he cried.

"So you were carried to the Meraktis Clinic from there?" the judge asked, stroking his beard curiously.

"Apparently, he was shot in the heart," Klavier filled in, still smiling in amusement.

Luke's eyebrows shot up. "And he's still alive!?"

'And I thought catching bullets with my teeth was dangerous enough,' Apollo mused.

"The bullet stopped just short of my thumper, you know what I'm saying?" Wocky continued. "I woulda been golden if it weren't for that wack doc! Can't even take out a stupid bullet!"

"So, as you say, the surgery was failure," Klavier picked up, playing with his hair again. "And, saying nothing about it as he did, it sounds as though Herr Doktor wished to hide his mistake."

Scowling, Wocky nodded. "He's a liar, straight up! He's a badder G than me!"

"I'm not surprised," Luke muttered to his brother. "That sounds like a difficult procedure."

Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead in thought. "So, this bullet is still...?"

"You know it!" Wocky cried, jabbing at his chest. "I can still feel it, right there in my chest, pressin' up against my heart!"
"Likely only through the power of suggestion," Luke was muttering again with a frown. "If he could actually feel it, he wouldn't have needed a second check-up to know it was still there."

Klavier was standing, relaxed, behind his bench with his eyes closed, snapping his fingers rhythmically. "'Your words are like a bullet shot straight into my heart', or something to that effect?" Chuckling, he stopped, looking up into the gallery to wink. "Incidentally, that's from one of our hit singles."

Apollo rolled his eyes as he heard a squeal or two of delight from the crowd.

To his credit, the judge appeared to be ignoring the off-topic preening of the prosecutor. "Well, that sounds like a straightforward case of malpractice!" he told Wocky in astonishment. "Word, J-man," Wocky agreed with a nod. "Weren't no accident, that's fo' shizzle."

Apollo thought a moment, then went to his Court Record to consult with the transcript. "You... 'went to his pad'?" he asked Wocky, confused. "How did you end up in the park, then?"

"What, you blind!!" Wocky shot back. "Shortest way to the clinic from my place is through that park!" The teen leaned forward on the witness stand, apparently trying to be dramatic with his story. "There I was, cold walking to that clinic of his... when he comes popping up out of nowhere, right before my eyes!" He smirked, standing up with arms crossed. "I figured someone up on high was looking out for me, know what I'm saying?"

The judge just nodded sagely, humming in thought. "It seems that there were issues with this doctor," he decided.

"Man, putting him down was like doing the world a favour!" Wocky added in agreement.

Apollo sighed, pressing a hand to his face. 'Wocky, you're getting dangerously close to outright 'confessing', and that's the last thing we need!'

"But why did this mistake only come to light that day?" the judge asked.

"It was found during the Family health check-up," Klavier casually explained.

Luke frowned, confused. "The... what?"

"That was the wackest thing of all!!" Wocky cried, shaking a fist. "All us G's lining up, taking eye exams n' all that. Better to die young than fade away, bizzoy!" He bounced back and forth, holding out his arms as though ready to start a fight right then and there.

Klavier quietly chuckled, brushing aside a lock of hair. "A relief to hear."

Wocky paused, looking over at the prosecutor with wide eyes. "W-what's a relief!?" he demanded.

"Oh? Did your father not tell you?" Klavier continued, his amused smile slowly fading as he met Wocky's eyes. "That bullet you carry so close to your heart... If not attended to immediately..." he paused, shaking his head. "It could kill you."

The courtroom rang out with surprised gasps, Wocky himself frozen, staring at Klavier with wide eyes. Luke, however, only frowned, rubbing his chin in thought. "Right... That does make sense."

Apollo turned to his brother, a single eyebrow raised, but had no time to question him before the prosecutor was speaking again.
"Yes, Herr Doktor Meraktis had knowledge concerning this 'ticking time bomb' in you," Klavier told Wocky, playing with his fringe again and almost looking boastful. "Knowledge that could have saved your life."

"No way!" Wocky managed to shout, breaking out of his shocked stare. "Th-that's wacked!"

"There is proof," Klavier replied, reaching under his bench and pulling out a medical file, which he held up by his face. "Your check-up report." With that, he laid it down on the bench, tapping at his tablet computer next to it; A moment later, Apollo saw the report (dated the day of the murder) pop up in his Court Record, and tapped it to examine, although it was Luke who seemed to be giving it the most careful attention. "How ironic that you would kill the one man capable of helping you," Klavier continued, now outright giving the teen at the witness stand a grin. "You're almost as careless as he was!" With that, he laughed, shaking his head.

Poor Wocky could only stare, stood behind the stand, and looking far less confident now than he had been when the trial began. Apollo couldn't blame him, he and Luke also lost for words at the clear mocking of their (admittedly very juvenile) client.

Still grinning, Klavier clapped his hands. "Well, now that the place is hopping," he cheerfully announced, "let's get this gig started!"

"S-started?" the judge asked, as lost in the silence as the rest of the courtroom had been.

"We've had enough of a warm-up act, ja?" Klavier replied, as though his answer were obvious. "Time to hear from a witness!" He gestured to the bailiffs, who rushed to escort the sullen Wocky off the stand.

Luke turned to Apollo, a worried frown on his face as he leaned in to whisper, "Suddenly I don't think this trial is going very well..."

Apollo only nodded, glaring at the prosecutor opposite. "That'd be his strategy, I bet," he quietly replied. "Unnerve us right at the start so we don't give our best when the going really gets tough later on."

"O-oh," Luke muttered. He stepped back a little, looking Apollo up and down with his eyebrows pressed together in concern.

Noticing his brother's reaction, Apollo tried not to roll his eyes, turning to face him. "What is it?" he barely restrained from snapping.


Apollo raised an eyebrow. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Luke lost any chance to reply, as the bailiffs re-entered the courtroom, cutting off the vibrant conversations of the crowd flying back and forth above them. Between the two guards, a thin man with a drawn face, dressed in a graduation gown complete with hat. In his hands, he held a thick, leather-bound book, which he was flipping through as he walked, his eyes scanning back and forth across the pages.

For reasons that were completely escaping him, Apollo found this new witness very familiar.

Klavier snapped his fingers, drawing the court's, and the new witness's, attention. "So." He smiled at the man at the witness stand. "You will tell us your name and occupation."
The witness, lips permanently pursed, stared at Klavier for a moment, gently closing his book. "My name... is Wesley Stickler," he said, then let his book fall open in his hand as he returned to perusing it. "By 'occupation' I take it you refer to some labour that 'profits' society at large, and supports a livelihood under which definition I must confess to being 'unemployed' however we must acknowledge the meaning-"

While the witness continued to prattle on at a mile a minute, Luke and Apollo gave each other confused looks. Whoever this 'Stickler' was, he certainly liked the sound of his own pompous voice.

Finally, Klavier interrupted the witness, frowning a little in irritation. "By which he means to say that he is a student," he explained. "A junior at Ivy University if I'm not mistaken?"

"Yes, in the Department of Science and Engineering," Stickler replied, giving a small nod as he again looked up from his book, holding his arms wide with a smile. "Filled with curiosity for all things, I spend my days in pursuit of truth, honing my-!"

"Herr Stickler," Klavier again interrupted, "please direct said curiosity to the case at hand today."

The judge nodded. "Very well, Mister Stickler. Please testify to the court about what you saw on the night of the crime."

Stickler sniffed. "You ask, quite simplistically, 'what I saw'. However, we must understand that homo sapiens possess two eyes, each of these designed to receive and interpret data..."

As Klavier hurried to try and distract Stickler from his rambling, Luke elbowed Apollo with a smile, whispering, "Now I'm even more glad I decided not to go to Ivy myself!"

Apollo nodded distractedly. "Uh, yeah..."

Luke frowned, surprised not to get at least a smile for his joke. "What is it?"

"I-I just..." Apollo shook his head, staring at the witness with a worried frown. "Does that guy look familiar to you?"

"No?" Luke replied.

Apollo sighed. "I could swear I've seen him before..."

Finally, Stickler's ramblings were halted, and his cleared his throat in preparation for his testimony. "That night, I passed through the park on my way home from shopping... when I saw them!" He held up his hands dramatically, his book snapping shut in his hand. "One man, pulling a stand. Another man, facing him. I saw them quite clearly. The man facing the victim was the defendant. In his hand he held..." As if just noticing the book in his hand, he returned it to his chest, gently opening it to leaf through its pages. "Yes, a pistol!" His book again snapped shut. "It was pointed at the man pulling the stand. A shot!" Once again, he returned to his book; Apollo wondered why he bothered closing it at all. "The bullet hit the man pulling the stand from the front, square in the forehead!"

The judge pulled at his beard, humming in thought. "Was there anyone else in the park at that time?"

"I can say with a hundred percent accuracy that there was not," Stickler decisively insisted.

"Depending on your definition of 'anyone else'," Luke muttered.

Klavier was digging around under his bench again. "The pistol our witness refers to..." He stood up, brandishing a small plastic bag containing a silver gun. "Is this."
The judge nodded. "The court accepts this into evidence."

Nodding, Klavier placed the gun down and tapped at his tablet. A moment later, Apollo saw the information on the weapon popping up on his Court Record screen: Two rounds fired, fingerprints wiped - An unfortunate dead end in determining for sure who had held it to deliver the fatal blow.

"Very well," the judge was already continuing, turning to Apollo. "Mister Wright, you may cross-examine the witness."

Apollo gave the old man a firm nod, turning to the witness stand. "Yes, Your Honour."

View the Court Record
During Stickler's testimony, Apollo had quickly determined his very particular nervous habit, one so obvious he wondered how no-one else could see it... Then again, nervous habits on their own don't make or break a testimony; He would have to cross-reference them with his evidence to make any kind of headway. *He was unsure about the pistol, and there was a brief hesitation about the result of the shooting... Neither's really helpful right now.* He pressed a finger firmly to his forehead in thought, then looked up to meet Stickler's eyes, only to find them glued to the man's book; Deciding to ignore that, he pressed on regardless. "These two men you came across... were they talking, by any chance?"

"Ah, now that you mention it," Stickler replied, snapping his book shut, "they were, though I cannot claim I heard them clearly." He looked up at the ceiling, clearly thinking back to the night at hand. "Only fragments, such as 'You lied to me!' Oh, and 'I'm gonna give you a taste of your own medicine, pal'."

Apollo almost winced at the professed student's terrible acting ability in recreating the tone of voice behind what little he remembered of the conversation he'd walked into.

Klavier laughed. "It's just as our defendant claims!" he pointed out with no small amount of delight. "I believe he wished to 'teach' the victim what it felt like to take a bullet in the heart."

"But he was shot in the head...!" Luke muttered.

"If that's true, then this is a vital piece of testimony!" the judge realised with surprise.

Apollo simply sighed; He had to admit, everything seemed to be nicely fitting together so far.

"Ah, hold a moment!" Stickler suddenly cried, holding up a hand. "Might I be allowed to amend my testimony?" Without waiting for an answer, he cleared his throat and explained, "To be precise, he did not say 'pal' but 'man'. Yes, that was the way of it. I swear it on my diploma!"

Luke frowned. "If he's a student, surely he doesn't have one of those yet...?" he quietly wondered.

Apollo restrained another sigh. "Not that his amendment mattered to anyone, anyway," he replied. With a louder voice, he continued to Stickler, "How can you even be sure it was the defendant you saw? The crime took place at night! It would have been too dark!"

Across the courtroom, Klavier hid a smile; At Apollo's side, Luke nervously gripped his satchel strap, looking away. Stickler, however, sniffed with his usual pompous tone, snapping his book closed as he met Apollo's eyes. "Perhaps I was remiss in not mentioning this earlier."

The young lawyer blinked. "Huh?"

"You see, in class, I always sit in the very backmost seat," Stickler continued. "Do you know why?"

Apollo just barely bit back a reply of 'Who cares?"
"Because I do not wish anyone to copy my perfect notes!" Stickler cried, clutching his book with an almost-offended glare.

The judge looked as confused as Apollo felt. "And this relates to your testimony how?"

Stickler huffed at the podium. "I mention this to illustrate my predisposition to that which is 'perfect'." He turned to Apollo. "It was dark, you say? Yet there are lights in the park. If I say the defendant was in the park that night, then he was in the park that night. It is a hard, immutable fact."

Apollo was starting to feel sorry he asked; Not only was Stickler not lying, his confidence in his statement was overwhelmingly clear.

Klavier chuckled. "Herr Wright, if you wish to contradict him with another's testimony," he said, giving Apollo a grin, "then you must first summon this other person to take the stand themselves, ja?"

Noticing the prosecutor's eyes flick to Luke, Apollo shot him a glare, leaning forward on his bench as though to protectively step in front of his brother as he had for both his siblings the previous day. "I didn't ask you, Gavin," he spat venomously in reply.

The court suddenly erupted into conversation, forcing the judge to bang his gavel with a glare directed at the gallery. "Order!" he cried, managing to quickly regain control of the unruly audience.

Klavier was staring back at Apollo, his smile looking suddenly forced after the earlier jibe. However, he said nothing, turning away as he busied himself with studying the wood of his bench.

Luke nudged his brother's arm, attracting his attention to the young vet's worried look. "Apollo, please be careful not to lose your temper," he warned, "not in court!"

Apollo almost huffed, arguing, "I'm not-!"

"Mister Wright!" called the judge, distracting the pair from their conversation. "Are you done with your cross-examination?"

"Er, no, Your Honour," Apollo hurriedly replied, and turned his attention back to the witness stand, where Stickler was idly examining his book, ignoring the court at large. Time to ask about that other thing he was unsure about. 'Mister Stickler, as you sure the 'pistol' you saw is the same as the one just submitted as evidence?"

Stickler, to Apollo's surprise, bit back a smile, again snapping his book shut as he met the young lawyer's eyes. "Am I 'sure'? Surely, you jest!" he said, then turned away, looking smug. "Or so a common witness would be tempted to say."

Apollo and Luke gave each other confused looks.

"Yet I am no common witness," Stickler proudly continued. "I see not only events as they are, but the logical structure governing these events! First, we must consider the fact that it was night in the park, which indeed..."

Already Apollo found himself tuning out against his will; Stickler was starting to remind him of some of his former lecturers from college. This guy really gets a kick out of long, incomprehensible monologues, doesn't he? Argh, pay attention, Wright!

"... it becomes difficult to say with certainty that Object A was indeed Object A," Stickler finished with a flourish.
Luke crossed his arms, giving Stickler a disapproving stare. "You could've just said 'It was too dark to see clearly'. You're not helping anyone by being so deliberately obtuse."

Apollo shot his brother a grateful smile; At least one of them was paying attention.

Stickler huffed, ignoring Luke with a scowl. "Yet the fact that a pistol was fired before my eyes is indisputable," he insisted. "I heard that single shot, clear as day!"

"Single shot...?" Apollo repeated, pressing a finger to his forehead in thought. "You're absolutely certain it was only one?"

"Yes," Stickler snidely replied, waving his book dismissively. "Of course it was one shot. Why do you ask?"

Apollo held back a smile at finally finding a fault in the overly verbose student's testimony, meeting Stickler's eyes. "I ask because, according to the Court Record, that pistol was fired twice. A clear contradiction."

"Objection!" came a cry from the prosecution, and everyone looked to Klavier as he grinned at Apollo, giving the surprised attorney a wink. "Good eyes, Herr Wright. You're cool. Real cool."

Apollo was too surprised at the sudden compliment to react, only staring at the prosecutor blankly.

"Yet, there is no reason why this other shot had to have been fired that night," Klavier continued.

"Meaning...?" the judge asked.

Klavier chuckled, picking up the gun in its evidence baggie to show once again to the court. "This pistol came from the Kitaki Family mansion, ja?" he pointed out with a smug smile. "I think it's not unreasonable to assume the pistol had been fired once before that night. During, perhaps... another altercation?"

Apollo sighed as he pressed a hand to his face. Klavier had a point there, and, what's worse, he'd likely been waiting for Apollo to point out that problem specifically to shoot it down.

"Don't give up, Apollo," Luke reassured his brother with a smile. "There's one more contradiction in the testimony!"

"And, whatever it is, Gavin's likely already spotted it," Apollo darkly muttered in reply.

Luke shrugged, unable to refute that. "Even so, you should still point it out anyway," he insisted, flicking at the Court Record to bring up Stickler's testimony. "Papa says to believe in your client until the very end, right? It's not the end, yet!"

Apollo sighed, but he agreed with his brother; What kind of Wright would he be to give up now? As he turned his attention to the testimony to find this last contradiction of Luke's, he noticed said brother dig through Apollo's papers and pull out the autopsy report (which Apollo had copied digitally into his Court Record the previous night). 'Yeah, don't try to be subtle with your hints at all, Luke.' But, sure enough, a quick comparison of the two gave Apollo his answer and, despite his dreading of what reaction the prosecutor might give this time, he swiped at the digital copy of the autopsy report to display it on the screens. "What about this, then?" he asked the court, though he primarily focussed on Klavier. "The witness says the victim was shot 'square in the forehead'? Why then does the autopsy report say the entry wound was the 'right temple'?"

Stickler looked surprised. "T-temple...?"
The growing mutterings of the gallery around them were silenced by a cry of "Objection!" as Klavier seemingly rose to Apollo's challenge. He shook his head, hiding a laugh. "Herr Wright... Oh, Herr Wright..."

Apollo's eyes narrowed as he stared at the prosecutor. "Yes?"

Klavier shot Apollo a grin. "Your tactics are outdated. Trying to shake the witness by objecting to trifles?" Chuckling, he brushed at his hair. "Surely you haven't forgotten the fatal wound your father suffered seven years ago? Phoenix Wright, was it?"

Apollo felt himself turning red with rage, his hands curling into fists tight enough to leave fingernail marks in his palms through the fabric of his gloves. However, before he could pull together a reply, someone else spoke for him:

"Objection!"

View the Court Record
Blinking in surprise as he was shocked out of his anger, Apollo turned to his right, where Luke stood, eyes shooting daggers at the prosecution. "Luke...?" he asked.

"How dare you! What does the disbarment of Phoenix Wright have to do with anything!?!" Luke was shouting. "You're bringing it up purely to demean the defence, totally unrelated to the case at hand!"

Klavier, instead of sputtering out a reply like Apollo was expecting, only stared, apparently shocked that it was Luke ripping him a new one and not Apollo; Apollo himself had to admit it was shocking that it had been the ever calm and polite Luke who had been the first to lose his temper today.

"And how is 'objecting to trifles', as you put it, 'outdated'!?!" Luke added, pointing across the room at the bench opposite. "It's impossible to find the truth of what happened unless we put in every effort to make the entire story match up, which includes nitpicking at details, however minor!"

"N-nein," Klavier managed to stutter, shaking his head, "I was saying-!"

"And you claim our tactic was to 'shake the witness'!?!" Luke cut across the prosecutor's protests, by now well into the flow of his impromptu speech. "All we are trying to do is get him to tell us the full truth of everything he knows, so we can determine the full truth of what actually happened! And, if you were doing your job, that's what you'd want him to do, too!" He slammed a fist on the bench.

"When did finding the truth become simply an 'outdated tactic', Klavier Gavin!? When!?"

The silence echoed in the courtroom for what felt like forever. Apollo stood still behind the defence bench, Luke at his side panting slightly in the exertion of his outburst, and couldn't help but feel oh-so-very proud of his not-quite-little-anymore brother. Opposite them, Klavier seemed to be half cowering behind his own bench, half still shaken from the accusation Luke had just levelled at him; He stared back at the pair, eyes wide, and said nothing. Above, on his podium, the judge was equally frozen in shock, casting confused glances back and forth, and the gallery (and Stickler, who clutched his book for dear life) seemed to be mirroring him, too scared to speak up and break the deafening silence.

Apollo grinned, deciding to take on the task of returning life to the room himself. Softly laughing, he nudged his brother to attract his attention. "So, uh, what was it you were telling me earlier about not losing my temper?"

Luke blushed, embarrassed. "O-oh, uh..." He turned to the podium on their right. "M-my apologies, Your Honour. I guess I just needed to get that out."

"Er, n-no, that's quite alright," the judge insisted, managing to relax with a (still slightly tense) smile directed at the defence team. "It was a very passionate speech about the purpose of the court." He then frowned in confusion, looking over to Klavier. "Er, what were we talking about before that, again...?"

Klavier sprung back to life with a hurried clearing of his throat, avoiding meeting anyone's eyes as he nervously fiddled with his hair. He still didn't speak up.
"It was a contradiction in the testimony," Apollo filled in in the prosecutor's stead. "The autopsy report puts the entry wound of the bullet in the victim's right temple, and the witness had said the shot landed 'square in the forehead'."

"Ah, yes!" the judge cried with a smile, then turned a stern frown to the still-terrified Stickler. "And how do you explain this discrepancy, witness?"

Stickler made a gurgling noise in his throat.

Finally, Klavier seemed to regain his ability to function, forcing a broad grin and again clearing his throat. "Ah, that is rather simple," he replied, then looked towards the defence bench. "Herr Forehead."

Apollo raised an eyebrow in confusion. 'Is... he talking to me?'

"Let us imagine you are walking through the park," Klavier continued, though the façade of his usual airs was broken by the audible shakiness in his voice. "You see two men facing each other, one with a pistol trained on the other. What would you do, Herr Forehead?"

Apollo resisted the urge to roll his eyes as he realised, yes, the prosecutor was talking to him. "I... guess I'd try to stop them," he reluctantly replied. "Shout for them to stop or something."


Luke sadly frowned, looking away. "I'd be too scared to do anything," he admitted. "I'd just freeze." He then looked up to meet Klavier's gaze with a stern frown. "And what about you, Piano Gavin?"

Klavier was quick to avoid Luke's eyes, nervously stuttering for a moment before just looking to Stickler. "S-so, Herr Stickler, what did you shout, I wonder?"

Apollo slapped a hand to his face as he realised what the 'simple' explanation was - He'd have to ask Luke about the 'piano' comment later.

Stickler's lingering fear instantly vanished. "Ah yes. Thank you for jogging my memory," he said. The judge nodded. "It sounds like an addendum to the testimony is required," he ordered, waving his hand at the witness.

As all eyes turned to Stickler, Apollo noticed Klavier turning his back to the courtroom, a hand to his face as he leant against the prosecutor's bench. The young lawyer almost felt sorry for him - Luke's passionate speeches could be awfully hard-hitting like that - but quickly reminded himself this was the man who had gloated about 'catching out' the famous Phoenix Wright using forged evidence, and quashed any remaining sympathies. They couldn't afford to drop their guard when a Gavin was involved.

"As soon as the killer raised his pistol," Stickler was explaining at the witness stand, "I took action. 'Cease this at once, you two!' I cried," he held out a hand the same way he probably had on the night, then paused and sniffed, adding, "with composure." His hand returned to his book. "The victim turned in the direction of my voice, and a shot rang out, whereupon our cowardly killer, the defendant, appeared to have become frightened. Tossing the pistol aside, he fled the scene."

'Of course, he mentions Wocky running away at the sound of the shot,' Apollo mused, 'but not himself running away as well? I wouldn't be surprised if it was the shout that set off the gunman in the first place.'
"I see," the judge said with a nod. "So you attempted to stop the crime."

"Indeed," Stickler replied, pausing for a moment before quickly adding, "With composure."

Klavier spun back around, seemingly now back to his former self, minus a bit of his usual humour. "Let us consider this new testimony, shall we?" he asked, and swiped at his tablet computer to bring up on the holograms a grey and black map of the crime scene, complete with river, path, noodle stand and even the nearby tree. In front of the stand was a marker, 'V', with an arrow pointing in 'front' of them to a second marker, 'K', with an identical arrow pointing right back at V; It didn't take a genius to figure out what they represented. "Observe the diagram, if you would. The witness - Mister Stickler, was it? - stood here." As he spoke, Klavier tapped at his computer and a third marker appeared to the south, 'W1'. "He shouted, 'Oh stop! Please!', or something of this nature, and the victim responded by looking in the witness's direction!" Another tap at his computer, and the arrows of V and K both turned towards W1, eliciting murmurs from the gallery as they realised what Klavier was saying. "If the killer were to have fired at just that moment..." He paused, giving a small chuckle that seemed to be lightening his mood back to normal, and a dotted line appeared between K and V. "As we can see, the bullet would have struck the right temple, as in the report."

The judge stared at his small holographic screen, running a hand through his beard. "That does seem to be the case," he agreed.

Stickler raised his hands with a proud smile, announcing, "Witness the power of a Junior in Ivy University's Department of Science!"

Luke quietly sighed, muttering to Apollo, "The more he boasts about that, the less it becomes something anyone else would boast about..."

The judge gave the witness a nod, then turned to the defence. "Very well, Mister Wright, you may cross-examine the witness."

Apollo nodded, bring up the transcript on his Court Record before turning to face Stickler. "So you saw a raised pistol... Weren't you frightened?"

Stickler almost huffed with pride. "It can be said we students of Ivy University know no fear," he insisted. "The moment I saw that pistol, my inner sense of justice compelled me to take action!"

"That was certainly brave of you," the judge pointed out with a sympathetic look. "You might have gotten shot!"

At that, Stickler blinked in surprise. "Er...?"

"You certainly were lucky," Klavier agreed, smiling. "If I were in the killer's shoes, I certainly wouldn't have left a witness behind."

Stickler was now frozen, eyes wide, and didn't reply.

Apollo almost laughed; Apparently, he realised, Stickler had had no idea until now that he'd actually been in danger by interrupting the scene he'd wandered into. "Did you hear the gunshot at the same time as the victim turned?" he asked, hiding his smile.

Breaking out of his shock, Stickler hurriedly nodded. "Indeed," he replied. "I would say 'about' the same time, to be precise."

'As vague as always...' Apollo mused. 'No time for Meraktis to even ask for help, just instantly shot.' "And the killer's actions? Can you describe them more clearly?"
Stickler smiled, amused. "He seemed quite surprised, especially considering that it was he who did the deed!" He held up his hands. "As we can see, human psychology is a tangled web, indeed."

"He simply couldn't believe what he had done," Klavier explained with a knowing smile and a shrug. "He shot, he panicked. A common tale, but true."

"Except that it doesn't line up with Wocky's supposed 'confession' earlier," Luke whispered, frowning.

"I think that depends on personal interpretation," Apollo whispered back with a smile, then returned his attention to Stickler, clearing his throat as he wiped the amusement from his face. "So the criminal ran. You didn't try to apprehend him?"

"It all happened so fast, I'm afraid I hadn't the time," Stickler insisted, pressing a hand to his chest.
Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead as he wondered what to ask next. They appeared to have run out of fuel in the testimony, and Apollo hadn't spotted any contradictions... Was it time to ask Stickler about his own exit from the crime scene? Technically, as Klavier had pointed out earlier, they couldn't use Luke's testimony as evidence until it was presented in court, and Apollo was loathe to resort to putting Luke behind that witness stand again unless they had no other choice. Despite that though, with Stickler having not yet said anything about leaving the crime scene, it wouldn't hurt to sort of angle towards that direction... right?

A nudge at his arm interrupted Apollo's train of thought, attracting his attention to Luke at his side. The young vet was giving him a small smile, and asked, "Need help?"

Apollo sighed. "Yeah, guess so," he reluctantly admitted under his breath.

Luke nodded, his smile unchanging. "Now's the perfect time to ask Stickler about a certain piece of evidence Gavin gave us. You didn't notice anything odd about the actions of the killer?"

"No?" Apollo replied, shaking his head with a raised eyebrow. "According to Stickler, he fired, dropped the gun, and booked it."

"Exactly," Luke said, still smiling. "So, there's something missing that should be there if the witness is telling the truth."

Apollo had opened his mouth to ask what, when Luke pushed the Court Record towards him across the surface of the defence bench. On the screen, the evidence notes on the murder weapon, the Kitaki pistol: 'Weapon left at the crime scene. Two rounds were fired. Fingerprints were wiped.'

"See it now?" Luke asked with a grin.

It took Apollo a moment or two more to realise what his brother was referring to, and he grinned triumphantly as he slammed his fists on the bench, turning his gaze to the witness stand. "Wait a second, Mister Stickler!"

Stickler just waved a hand at the defence dismissively. "Tsk tsk, another misleading request. Yet you're so beholden to your own mode of 'discourse' you can't see how it affects you!"

Apollo blinked in surprise, unsure how to react to the unexpected response. "Come again...?"

"Wait a 'second', you say?" Stickler was already continuing. "A 'second'? Are we intended to wait just that, a single second, one sixtieth of a minute? That's hardly enough time to draw a breath, let alone make a statement in court! Now, had you-"

Apollo turned to see Luke already rolling his eyes at the witness again. "Now he's just being pedantic to the point of insult," the younger brother muttered.

Stickler's speech was interrupted by the judge, who looked down at Apollo disapprovingly. "Mister
"Yes, Your Honour?" Apollo asked, rubbing the back of his head.

"Am I to understand you are objecting to the length of a second?"

Apollo frowned in confusion for a moment, then hurriedly shook his head. "N-no, I...!" He paused, groaning in frustration, and pointed at the pistol sitting on the prosecutor's bench. "Look at the pistol! The court's own notes say it doesn't have a single fingerprint on it!"

"Ah, a common ploy, made all the more common, I fear, by the prevalence of television," Stickler moaned dramatically, not seeming to notice the fact's relation to his own words. "Criminals these days are loathe to leave fingerprints."

"You said yourself the killer tossed the gun and ran!" Apollo shot back. "He didn't have time to wipe the gun for prints!"

Stickler paused, surprised.

Before the witness could attempt to explain, Klavier was chuckling, attracting the court's attention to his easy-going grin. "And tell me, Herr Wright... what is it you wear on your hands?"

Apollo glanced at the white gloves Trucy had made for him before shooting a glare at the prosecutor. "The notes on the murder weapon are very clear about one thing: The fingerprints were wiped, which means some trace of prints remained!" He turned his attention to Stickler, pointing at him dramatically. "Which contradicts your testimony! If everything happened as you say it did, he wouldn't have had time to wipe the pistol!"

Stickler thought a moment, then sniffed self-importantly. "That may be, but it does not change what I saw," he insisted. "The killer, the defendant... He threw down the murderous weapon from his hand and fled."

The judge was humming in thought, tugging at his beard. Luke was similarly stroking his goatee, muttering, "Murderous weapon...?"

"And this pistol was found at the scene of the crime," Stickler continued, gesturing to the gun on Klavier's bench, "strongly suggesting that this was the weapon he disposed of!"

Apollo couldn't resist a grin. 'Meaning, just as I thought from the beginning, you had no idea if it was really that pistol in Wocky's hand!'

Klavier brushed at his hair with a smile. "That sounds solid to me," he said, looking across the room to the defence. "Well, Herr Forehead? Any of your precious objections?"


Instead of replying, Klavier just snorted in amusement.

Leaving the prosecutor to his brother, Apollo turned to Stickler, arms crossed and a knowing smile on his face. "Mister Stickler, what if I told you there was something else on that crime scene... Another 'murderous weapon', as you put it."

Stickler's eyes widened. "Oh?"

"Yep," Apollo replied. "And, given the circumstances... I'd say it's much more likely to be the thing
you actually saw falling from the 'killer's' hands."

"Perhaps you can inform the court as to the nature of this 'other weapon'?” the judge cut in, looking concerned.

With a grin, Apollo tapped at his Court Record, bringing up on the holograms his own photo of Wocky's knife, sticking handle up out of the muddy ground of the crime scene. "Take that!” he announced.

The judge frowned, leaning forward as he examined the photo on his screen. "Is that... a sword?” he asked. "I saw one of those on the late night movie last night!"

Apollo was momentarily thrown by the judge’s apparent claim of being sleep-deprived, but pushed himself to ignore it and move on. "This knife was found at the scene of the crime,” he re-iterated, "with the defendant's prints on it."

The judge almost jumped out of his chair. "His prints!" he repeated.

"This single piece of evidence proves two important things:" Apollo was already explaining, holding a finger up to count with his other arm tucked behind his back. "One, that what the defendant threw down wasn't a pistol." He held up a second finger. "Two, that the defendant wasn't wearing gloves!"

The judge hummed in thought, then nodded with a smile. "Indeed!"

Klavier chuckled, apparently impressed. "Oh, Herr Forehead? You're forgetting two other things you've just proven."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. 'Really? 'Herr Forehead' is a thing now?'

In imitation of the young magician, Klavier raised a finger. "One, that the man the witness saw was the defendant, Mister Wocky Kitaki." He held up a second to join it. "Two, that the defendant was holding a knife, with the intent of harming the victim!"

Apollo almost surprised himself as he instinctively raised a hand to firmly grab Luke's upper arm before his younger brother made a remark he'd regret. As for Wocky being on the scene, he'd already resigned himself to admitting it wasn't something he could argue, as he'd seen the truth of Wocky's own story of revenge even if he doubted the teen had committed the crime at hand.

The judge again hummed in thought, then nodded. "Indeed!” He gave Stickler a disapproving look. "This court is of the opinion that our witness is fond of making assumptions. In that light, I believe it would behoove us to hear what really occurred,” He banged his gavel to punctuate his order, "with less assuming, please!"

Stickler huffed. "It is always the same with you people,” he muttered. "'Mark left the house on foot and five minutes later his brother left after him. How long would it take for Mark's brother to catch up to him, assuming that Mark never had to stop for a traffic light'! Assuming...” He scoffed. "Yes, that's what I said, assuming! As if that were a probable situation at all! Yet here you are 'assuming' that my 'assumption' is no better!"

The judge rapped his gavel again, giving Stickler a stern frown. "Ahem. What this court 'assumes' is that the witness will testify as to what happened after the shot was fired!"

Although Stickler clearly didn't like the order, he seemed to decide there was little point fighting it further. Though still ruffled, he explained, "I could not prevent the killer from leaving the scene, nor could I simply leave the scene in good conscience." With that, he flipped open his book again,
Immediately, Apollo was giving Stickler a suspicious frown. From Luke's testimony alone, he already knew Stickler had left the scene, so his nervous habit as he claimed to have stayed was just a confirmation of Corbin's tale... except that the words themselves raised an interesting point: If Stickler did have a phone, and did intend to call the police, why'd he leave to do so? Unless, maybe... "You didn't try to chase the killer?"

"He was, as you say, a killer," Stickler pointed out, as self-important as always. "Of course, I could have run him down, yet what would he have done when cornered? Sadly, it takes more than an aptitude for solving quadratic equations to know that."

The judge was humming in thought. Apollo was similarly staring the witness down; Stickler wasn't lying, but he hadn't answered Apollo's question as to why he had left the scene... In fact, why was he lying about it in the first place?

"Did the testimony earlier not prove the defendant's presence at the scene?" Klavier asked with a grin. "And do we not also now know that there was no one else there? It seems clear that we have our killer, does it not?"

"Does it not, Mister Wright?" the judge repeated with a questioning frown at the defence.

Apollo just glared at the prosecution. "It doesn't, and you know that full well," he darkly replied, then quickly turned his attention to Stickler. "So, which way did the killer run?"

"By that time, it was clear the killer had noticed me," Stickler replied, waving a hand as though giving a lecture. "Naturally, he ran in the opposite direction."

"Away from the Kitaki Mansion?" Luke whispered in surprise.

Before Apollo could reply to his brother, Klavier had shouted, "Achtung!" and thrown a pointed finger in their direction with a grin. "Don't even think about pointing out that he was going away from his home," he warned. "All he had to do was loop back once he was out of sight."

Luke winced. "Ugh... He has a point there. And good hearing, apparently."

Apollo just gave his brother a sympathetic smile before turning back to the witness stand with a stern look. "You say you stayed at the scene until the police arrived? You were certainly composed for someone who had just witnessed a killing."

"If one is to devote one's life to the pursuit of science," Stickler explained, nose in the air, "one must never flinch at the sight of a little blood. Nor be so moved by a chemical discovery that one drops one's flask upon the lab room floor."

Luke snorted before managing to hold in his amusement, hiding his grin behind a hand. "What do you wanna bet that happened to him once?" he asked through muffled giggles.

"Oooh, cool answer," Klavier was complimenting Stickler with a smile that seemed to suggest the opposite. "Very cool."

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Can you tell us in detail about the ten minutes before the arrival of the police?"

Stickler held up his hands dramatically. "I stood in a state of heightened awareness. Anything could..."
happen at any moment. Anyone could appear from any direction!"


To Apollo's surprise, Stickler appeared to have finished talking, hands still held up as the student stared at the ceiling. "Is... that all?" the young lawyer asked.

Stickler nodded, lowering his hands. "No one came," he said. "Nothing happened at all. I saw it all, which is to say, I saw nothing."

'You sly devil,' Apollo mentally growled. Stickler showed no signs of a lie, which proved he was telling the truth, but he was also conveniently bypassing that he had left the scene, despite his noble desire to report the crime and guard the victim.

"It was late at night," the judge pointed out. "It's not odd to think there would be few people around in the park."

Apollo barely noticed the comment, pressing a finger to his forehead and frowning in thought. 'That seems to suggest he returned to the scene after running away, missing the person in the noodle stand leaving. But if he left, why'd he go back? Did he leave to call the police? Why would he need to do that? Didn't he have his...?'

Suddenly, everything clicked.

View the Court Record
Apollo stared at Stickler with wide eyes somewhere between astonishment and pure rage. "That's why you're familiar!"

While everyone else gave the young attorney confused looks, Stickler's eyes suddenly widened, and he quickly turned his attention to his book, nervously fidgeting with the pages. "I don't know what you claim to be talking about," he insisted.

"You think I wouldn't recognise a face I see almost every day⁉️" Apollo cried, scowling as his hands tightened into fists. "That was you outside the Agency that night, wasn't it⁉️ What, did you slink off to People Park to sulk after losing your precious 'prize'⁉️"

"Objection!" cried Klavier, slamming a fist into the wall behind him. "Would you mind only asking the witness about the case at hand, Herr Forehead?"

"Yes," the judge agreed with a nod. "How is this relevant, Mister Wright?"

Despite the warnings, it was only Luke's gentle tug at his cape that gave Apollo cause to calm, turning around to see his brother's concerned face, eyes wide in surprise. "Apollo?" Luke asked. "Are you saying that...?"

Forcing himself back from the brink of rage, Apollo gave Luke a small nod, watching his younger brother gasp in shock, shooting looks at the witness stand. "You have the phone we found," Apollo whispered. "Could you get it ready? Keep it hidden for now, though." Luke nodded, turning away from the rest of the courtroom to search through his satchel, and Apollo returned his attention to Stickler with a stern frown. "Mister Stickler," he called, "you used your cell phone to call the police immediately after witnessing the murder?"

Although still nervous, Stickler put on a casual air, still perusing his book. "The police undoubtedly have a record of the call," he replied. "Why not check with them?"

"Oh really?" Apollo asked, arms crossed. "Do you mind if I ask... May we see this cell phone of yours?"

Stickler's head jerked up with wide eyes. "Wh-why?" he asked. "Whatever for?"

"Show me and you'll find out," Apollo replied with a clear warning tone, glare locked firmly on his target.

"W-well I can't!" Stickler snapped, beginning to panic as he nearly ripped the pages in his book with his shaking hands. "I don't have it, you see."

The judge blinked in surprise. "You don't have it...?"

Apollo glared at Stickler a moment more in silence, then held a hand out behind him towards Luke. "Mister Stickler." A moment later, a chunk of hard plastic came to rest in his hand, and he gripped it
tightly, thrusting the object upwards for the entire court to see. "Is this your cell phone?"

Stickler yelped in shock, gripping his book tightly to his chest as the gallery gasped around them. "Wh-where did you get that!?" he cried, his eyes locked on the bright pink phone, complete with watch-strap, in Apollo's grip.

Apollo didn't reply to the question, slowly lowering the phone with his stern gaze never leaving the witness. "How strange, Mister Stickler. Can you explain why your cell phone is sitting here in my hand at this very moment?"

"Wait a minute!" the judge interrupted, shocked. "What is the meaning of this!"

"This cell phone was found yesterday," Apollo coldly explained, pausing for effect before adding, "in the Meraktis Clinic garage!"

The judge gasped. "The Meraktis... Why, that's where the victim lived!"

Stickler seemed most shocked of all, stepping back in surprise with a look of horror on his face. "Th-that's impossible!"

Apollo brandished the lost phone at the witness stand. "Mister Stickler, you lied to this court!" he shouted, just barely reigning in the full force of his Chords of Steel. "If your cell phone is here, how could you have called the police from the scene of the crime!?

Stickler gave a high-pitched shriek, clutching his book tightly as he cowered from Apollo's yelling. He whimpered, then gingerly forced himself to step forward, to the witness stand he had unwittingly also fled from. "It... it's true," he admitted. "I didn't have my cell phone that night. That is why it can be said that I called the police from a public pay phone."

"A pay phone!" the judge repeated in surprise, muttering to himself.

"Just where was this pay phone located, Mister Stickler!?!" Apollo demanded, almost scrambling with his Court Record as he found a map of the area, the same one Phoenix had prepared for them the previous morning, and threw it up on the holograms; He realised too late that Phoenix's proud handiwork of the red labels noting the Agency, Kitaki Avenue and Eldoon's house were now accompanied by his own notes in cobalt blue regarding the murder investigation, labelling the clinic and murder scene complete with rough time stamps, and even signed with 'AW' and a simple diamond. Similarly to the arrow denoting the direction of the car after it hit Phoenix, a second in blue outlined the flight of the panty thief to the clinic, and a third the rough path of the noodle stand to the murder scene, while a dotted fourth suggested the most probable path of the car from the accident site to the clinic. "Point it out for the court!" he shouted, pretending the map wasn't nearly as messy as it looked.

Stickler studied the giant screen above him for a moment, making no move to comment on the red-and-blue notes littering the map it displayed. "Well, to indicate it with a startlingly high degree of accuracy..." He reached up and pointed to the location of the Gatewater Hotel, where Apollo suddenly remembered there was indeed still a public pay phone out on the street opposite the Agency. "It was right around here."

Apollo found himself wondering just what he'd been doing at the time Stickler had ventured so close to their home; Had he narrowly missed this witness on his way to and from Hickfield Clinic with his father's overnight bag? How different the night might have progressed if they'd run into each other then, though Apollo hoped he would have recognised him had that happened.
"That's... quite a ways from the park," the judge pointed out. "But... but why did you lie?"

Scowling, Apollo shut down the holograms displaying the map covered in his and Phoenix's doodles. "Why else?" he asked, bitterly. "He didn't want the court to know he had lost his cell phone, because it was found in the victim's garage!"

Stickler gave a startled cry. "Wh-wh-what are you saying!?!"

"Mister Stickler!" Apollo continued, pointing his finger accusingly at the student, "you broke into the Meraktis Clinic garage on the night of the murder!" Lowering his finger, he again waved the phone at the witness stand. "This cell phone tells all!"

"B-but that's ridiculous!" Stickler protested, sweating nervously. "That makes it sound like... like I snuck into this fellow's garage to commit some crime! As though I were trying to kill him!"

"Well, Doctor Meraktis was killed that night," the judge pointed out, eyebrows raised.

Stickler sputtered for a moment. "W-well y-yes, but no! This line of reasoning has to be against the rules!" He shook his head emphatically. "Yes, it's true! I lost my cell phone! But you can't prove that I lost it that night!"

The judge thought a moment, then turned to Apollo. "Well, Mister Wright? If that cell phone was dropped the night of the murder, it does raise considerable suspicions as to a connection with the crime."

Luke again tugged on Apollo's cape, and, as his brother turned to face him, whispered, "Are you sure he's really Trucy's thief? It could still be a co-incidence."

"It's no co-incidence," Apollo insisted with a frown. "He's a regular at the Wonder Bar, so he's well aware of that particular prop, and it gives him the perfect motive; Besides, we know his phone couldn't have been lost until after Dad's accident, remember? The theft was between then and ten o'clock, the perfect window of time to put Stickler in the area."

After a moment of careful thought, Luke nodded, giving his brother a smile. "Alright. You'd better go prove it, then." He raised his fists with a confident, determined look. "Take him down!"

Apollo grinned, then turned to face the court at large, arms crossed over his puffed out chest. "Naturally, of course, I can prove that the phone could only have been lost on the night of the murder."

"Ooh, I like your swagger, Herr Forehead," Klavier replied with a chuckle, and snapped his fingers with a smile. "Hit it!"

The judge nodded. "The court will see this evidence. Mister Wright, 'hit it', as they say!"

With a deft movement of his hands, Apollo whisked the paint-stained mirror from the doctor's car out of his bag, holding it up high to the court. "Take that!"

There was a pause as the court studied the object in confusion. "That's... a side-view mirror?" the judge asked.

"As it so happens," Apollo explained with a grin, "Doctor Meraktis' car was in an accident on the night of the murder."

"An accident!?" Stickler repeated in surprise.
"An accident," Apollo echoed confidently, and brought up on the holograms his map from earlier, no longer embarrassed of the useful notes covering it as he highlighted Kitaki Avenue. "It happened a little after nine PM, just outside People Park, our murder scene. Doctor Meraktis’ car hit a pedestrian!"

Although still nervous, Stickler mostly looked confused. "Wh-what are you trying to say?"

Apollo switched out the map for the photo he had taken of the damaged car. "From the absence of a mirror," he explained, his voice beginning to gradually increase in volume, "it's clear that the car was parked after the accident, which means it was parked there after nine PM on the night of the murder. If your cell phone had been dropped before the car was parked in that garage, then it would have been crushed." Glaring once again at his witness, he swapped out the photo on the holograms for another, one he had taken of the phone sitting under the rear wheel. "After all, it was lying on the ground, right under the wheel!"

Stickler made a strangled-sounding gasp, stepping back from the stand in shock.

"Ergo, Mister Stickler!" Apollo was almost shouting, slamming his fists on the bench. "The only time you could have dropped this in that garage was after nine PM, the night of the murder in the park!"

This time, Stickler outright jumped with a squeal, clutching his book for dear life.

"Meaning," Apollo shouted, glaring right in his eyes, "you did break into the victim's garage that night, after the accident and before the murder!"

The judge seemed to laugh to himself in shock. "This is most unexpected!" He looked to Apollo. "Mister Wright, are you naming the witness as a suspect in the murder of Pal Meraktis!?"

Apollo's rage drained out of him in an instant, replaced with shock and confusion. 'W-wait, what...?'

Stickler madly shook his head, face white as a sheet. "N-no, stop!" he cried. "This is too much! This can't be happening!" He turned towards the prosecutor's bench, where Klavier stood watching the goings-on with a neutral look. "P-p-p-prosecutor!" the panicking student begged. "Say something!"

Klavier closed his eyes, expression still carefully blank. "I suppose it is worth saying this: No connection has been found between Wesley Stickler and Pal Meraktis." Opening his eyes again, he gestured to the hot pink phone resting on the defence bench, adding, "That is, other than this."

Apollo felt a tug at his cape and turned to face Luke, who was watching him in concern. "Do we think he's the murderer?" the younger brother asked.

The older brother opened his mouth, but found himself unable to respond beyond a stuttered, "I-I..."

"I believe our next testimony will be most... revelatory," the judge said, giving Stickler a stern look. "Is the witness prepared?"

Stickler hurriedly nodded, clinging so tightly to his book Apollo was starting to think it might rip apart, cover and all. "Y-y-yes, Your Honour!" And he began to speak.

View the Court Record
"That night..." Stickler muttered to himself at the witness stand, as though struggling to remember... or struggling to think up a believable lie. "Yes! I went to the supermarket. I must have dropped my cell phone on my way back."

Apollo rolled his eyes, but, unfortunately, couldn't tell for sure if Stickler was lying or not, as his nervousness was simply off the charts. Given his suspicions though, he highly doubted it was anything more than a lie.

"And when I was walking through the park," Stickler continued, slowly regaining confidence, "I happened to witness the crime! I saw the killer, the victim, the stand... all as clear as day! It was him! I saw the defendant at the scene!"

The judge continued to give the witness a stern stare. "Yes, but your cell phone was lying in a garage."

"Ah, yes, well," Stickler hurried to explain, "as you can see my model of cell phone has a defect: It is given to rolling!" He forced a small smile. "It's quite a pain when I drop it alongside the road, you know."

Everyone's eyes, including Apollo's, turned to the hot pink phone resting on the defence bench. "Looks like a normal cell phone to me," the judge said, but decided to leave the subject be and turned his gaze to Apollo. "In any case, Mister Wright, the cross-examination, please."

Nodding, Apollo brought up the transcript on his Court Record. To be honest, he was still a little thrown at the thought that Stickler might be their killer as well as their panty thief, but he wasn't sure yet what to think about it; They simply had too little evidence either way. 'Well... the only way to work it out is if I ask him a few questions.' "You... went shopping," he repeated. "So... you were holding a grocery bag when you witnessed the murder taking place?"

Stickler's surprise gave Apollo his answer on how accurate the whole story was. "Er... W-well, yes, of course..."

Klavier was still relaxing behind his bench, for all appearances paying no attention to the ongoing case. "Incidentally, the prosecution has received no report of this domestic detail," he spoke up.

The judge turned to Stickler with a frown. "Mister Stickler? Can you explain yourself?"

"No!" Stickler cried. "I mean, yes! I did go shopping, really! I walked around the supermarket, trying out the free samples..." He sniffed, giving Apollo the impression, maybe, he actually was telling the truth here. "It's... a deeply spiritual time for me."

The judge raised an eyebrow. "I'm sure the store clerks would disagree."

"And I don't think 'spiritual' is the right word for it," Luke muttered, looking thoughtful.
Apollo was already deep in thought again: As far as he could tell, Stickler's route home from the supermarket took him down Park Street, past both Meraktis Clinic and the alleyway where the Magic Panties were stolen, and then through the park itself. Stickler could easily claim he'd dropped his phone and it 'rolled' to where Luke had found it the next day. "Alright then, let's go back to the scene in the park," he decided. 'I doubt there's anything more he can tell us about Wicky or Meraks, so let's go for the one new thread he's brought up.' "Do you happen to remember the noodle stand?"

"Quite well, yes!" Stickler boasted. "For a student of the sciences, keen observation and healthy curiosity are vital! I remember everything! I could even read the sign! I believe it said..." He trailed off. "Er..." He stood in thought for a very long moment.

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'Ugh... Don't shout it out, Wright. If he doesn't remember, he doesn't deserve to be told...'

Finally, Stickler smiled and announced, "Noodle. Yes, that was it."

That got Apollo's attention. 'W-wait... 'Noodle'?!'

The judge frowned. "For remembering something 'quite well', it sure took you a while to tell us. And thank you for telling us that a noodle stand sells noodles. Very enlightening."

"I didn't realise the judge was capable of sarcasm," Luke muttered to Apollo in astonishment, misinterpreting his confused look as agreement. "Stickler must be really irritating him!"

"Well, Mister Wright?" the judge sighed, turning his attention to Apollo.

Snapping out of his confused stare at the witness stand, Apollo smirked. "So the sign on the noodle stand said 'noodle'?" he asked. "That's a vital new detail. And you're sure the sign definitely said that? Absolutely sure?"

Stickler stuck his nose in the air, offended. "Let me be frank: Yes," he replied. "Why, just last week, my professor offered me this praise: 'At least you have good eyesight, Stickler. I'll give you that.'" He nodded firmly. "It read, without a doubt, 'noodle'."

"I see," Apollo said, crossing his arms as he continued to smile confidently.

"What?" Stickler protested, seeing Apollo's look. "Why are you looking at me like that? Is that... pity I see in your eyes!?"

'Of a sort,' Apollo mentally replied, still smiling.

"Wait, you figured something out?" Luke asked, giving his brother a confused look. "From what?"

Apollo chuckled. "Call it my experience as a magician," he said, then turned back to the court at large. "Let's take a look at our map, shall we?" He quickly searched through his Court Record for Klavier's diagram of the scene, complete with the three markers of V, K and W1. "So, you're claiming that when you saw the sign, you were standing... Here, was it?" He highlighted W1. "Although, it would've been a bit hard to read the sign from this spot."

"Y-you think so?" Stickler asked, his prior confidence again quickly giving way to nervousness.

Apollo was suddenly very proud of himself for all the photos of the scene he'd taken the previous day, finding one of the noodle stand that he'd taken from near where the witness claimed to have stood. "Mister Stickler, I'd like you to please take another look at the stand," he swiped it up onto the holograms, "and to carefully read what the sign says." Already he was hearing gasps from sharp-
eyed members of the audience, and even one from Luke at his side. "See? That sign actually states the name of the stand's owner: 'Eldoon's'."

"E-el-eld...?" Stickler sputtered in disbelief. "Inconceivable! I'm certain it was definitely 'noodle' for sure! Positive!"

The judge held a hand to his mouth, and Apollo got the impression he was hiding a chuckle. "I'm afraid your professor was wrong about that eyesight."

"I wouldn't be so quick to jump to that conclusion," Apollo replied, pointing a finger into the air to keep the court's attention on him. "What would you say if I told you that there is one spot from which the sign would be read the way Mister Stickler claims?"

Stickler stared at Apollo, his eyes slowly widening. "What...?"

"Mister Wright!" the judge commanded. "Show us this spot!"

'With pleasure!' Grinning, Apollo tapped at the screen of his tablet computer. "The witness was standing..." In moments, he had moved the W1 marker from the south of the stand... to the north. "Here! On the opposite side!"

Stickler was now totally frozen, staring at Apollo in terror.

"H-how do you know that?" the judge asked.

"My question exactly," Luke added. "How'd you come to that conclusion?"

Apollo gave his brother a grin. "Well, one, I'm a lot more familiar with that stand than you are," he idly teased Luke, "and two, I took a lot of pictures yesterday." With that, he proceeded to swap out the map on the holographic screens for the photo of the stand. "When viewed from the south, the sign on the stand reads 'Eldoon's', as we know," he explained to the court. "However! Observe the other side of the stand!" With a dramatic slide of his hand across the Court Record screen, the picture was swapped for another, one Apollo had taken from next to the mesh bin he'd found the bloomers in; The stand, and its sign, were clearly visible from under the branches of the nearby tree, exactly as they'd been on the night of the murder. "Oh!" the judge cried, almost in unison with the gasps throughout the court. "This side says 'noodle'!" he pointed out.

"Exactly!" Apollo replied, snapping his fingers as though he'd just pulled off one of his and Trucy's magic tricks back in the Wonder Bar. "The name of the stand is split between the front and back signs!" He slammed his fists into the bench, his smirk fading into a glare. "Mister Stickler, you lied to the court! You witnessed the crime from the northern side of the park, not the south!"

The slam startled Stickler back into motion, yelping as he jumped back and almost tossed his book straight up into the air. "Y-you got me!"

Any further whimpers from the witness were cut off by a loud cry of "Objection!" from the prosecution, and Apollo surprised himself with the fact that he'd forgotten Klavier was still there after all his focus on pinning a panty thief. Klavier shrugged to himself, looking as casual as can be as he gave the defence a smile. "So what?"

Apollo blinked. "S-so what!?" he repeated, equal parts confused and shocked.

"What does it matter if he saw the killing from the north or the south side?" Klavier elaborated with a
"It makes no difference at all!"

"H-he's right!" Stickler insisted, jumping at the witness stand and leaning on it heavily. "Travel far enough to the south, and you will end up going north! Viewed on a global scale, directions are utterly without meaning!"

Apollo frowned. 'Argh, don't tell me I went to all that effort for nothing!'

"That's utter nonsense," Luke spoke up from Apollo's side, arms crossed as he gave Klavier and Stickler disapproving glares. "The witness's true location changes everything! Have you all forgotten the spat we had earlier over the location of Doctor Meraktis' bullet wound?" Before anyone could reply, he'd grabbed Apollo's Court Record and brought back up the diagram of the crime scene. "If the killer and the victim turned to look at Mister Stickler when he was standing to the north," he rotated the arrows of V and K to point to W1's changed location, "then which side of the victim's temple does that bullet end up now?"

"Th-th-the left!" the judge cried in answer.

"Precisely!" Luke replied. "It's impossible for someone to shoot the victim's right temple in this scenario when standing at point K!"

Apollo could only stare at his younger brother in awe.

Klavier chuckled, apparently unmoved by the revelation. "Indeed. You are absolutely correct, Herr Triton."

"There is more," Luke continued, starting to look worried and casting nervous glances at Apollo. "Considering the placement of the wound, the location of the true killer would have to be..." He paused, looking uncomfortable, then screwed up his courage and finally blurted out, "to the north! Where Mister Stickler was standing!"

As Stickler shrieked in terror, the gallery erupted into a furor, forcing the judge to begin banging his gavel as he shouted over the rabble, "Order! Order!"

Before Apollo could congratulate Luke on his eye for detail, the younger man had turned to his brother with a nervous look. "Is it okay I accused Stickler?" he asked, and Apollo could see he was almost on the verge of panicking. "I-I don't actually think he did it, but since he was away when the other person left, I-!"

"It's fine," Apollo assured him, grabbing his brother's shoulders to help ground him and calm him down. "You're fine, Luke. You've given us a lead and time to work on it, and that's more than I could have asked for at this point."

Luke sighed in relief, managing to relax and give his older brother a small smile. "That's good... I'm glad to help."

"Objection!" came a cry from across the courtroom, which instantly quietened as all eyes turned to Klavier, who was giving the Wright brothers a stern stare from behind the prosecutor's bench, more serious than they'd ever seen him before. "Clarify one point for me if you would, Herr Forehead," he asked.

Releasing Luke and turning to face Klavier, Apollo raised an eyebrow. "What?" he bluntly replied.

"Are you truly accusing this college student," the prosecutor sternly requested, "of murder?"
Stickler squeaked, clutching his book for dear life. "No, please!" he cried, begging the defence. "Looks aside, I'm really a nice guy! All my friends say so!"

The judge frowned. "Let's hear what the defence has to say," he suggested.

Apollo felt the eyes of the court focussing on him, waiting for an answer.

View the Court Record
Apollo was used to the focus of a crowd, so, deciding they could wait, he crossed his arms as he pondered his options. Truth be told, he agreed with Luke that it was doubtful Stickler was the murderer: Luke's accusation was based by necessity on the assumption no-one else was in the area, which they knew wasn't completely true - it also assumed Stickler had to have been lying when he claimed to have shouted upon happening on the confrontation, which Apollo knew from the initial testimonies had been true. All put together, Meraktis' right temple, when the doctor turned towards Stickler, should have been facing the stand behind him (the location of the missing witness) and the nearby tree (where Luke was pretending to have been to cover for Corbin). As much as he hated to give Klavier the fuel to point suspicion on his brother, Apollo knew he had no choice but to admit the truth... Besides, hadn't he been waiting for the perfect chance to bring up Stickler's real crime?

"I do accuse Mister Stickler of a crime," Apollo announced, "but not of murder." He glimpsed Klavier minutely relaxing before he turned his attention to Stickler, watching the man sweat as he hugged his beloved book close to his chest. "Mister Stickler," he called, giving him a stern frown, "you seem unusually quiet. Tell us why, now."

Stickler's eyes darted around the courtroom before returning to Apollo, and he opened his book to rapidly flip through the pages. "Th-the word 'confession' isn't in my dictionary!" he cried.

"Tsk tsk tsk, Herr Forehead," Klavier said, a smile on his lips. "I'm afraid it falls to you to elucidate Herr Stickler's silence."

The judge stroked his beard, looking thoughtful. "Mister Wright, you did say you were accusing the witness just now for a crime other than murder." He looked down at the young attorney. "Your reason? The court's all ears."

Internally sighing, Apollo closed his eyes. "It seems the area around People Park had quite a rash of crime on the night of the murder," he explained. "Doctor Meraktis' car hit a pedestrian. Guy Eldoon's noodle stand was stolen by his neighbour, said Doctor Meraktis. A mysterious assailant shot Doctor Meraktis in the head." He paused, then opened his eyes to give Stickler a stern glare. "And a teenage girl had a pair of her panties stolen right before her eyes." Resisting the urge to slam his hand on his computer and accidentally break it, he brought up on the holograms a photo he had taken back in the garage, of Trucy posing gleefully with her reclaimed panties next to the tailpipe they had been found in. "Specifically," Apollo added, his voice increasing in volume, "this pair!"

Stickler visibly winced as the court's attention turned to him, the gallery loudly muttering. "D-don't look at me like thataaaat!" he shrieked.

The judge banged his gavel, calling, "Order! Order!" Once the crowds finally died down, he sighed and turned to Stickler. "Mister Stickler, while I can't say this comes as a shock-"

"I-it's not what it seems!" Stickler insisted, wiping the sweat from his brow with a sleeve. "By Pythagorilla's Theorem, I swear it!"
"And that would mean something if 'Pythagorilla' was an actual person," Luke muttered, arms crossed as he gave Stickler an offended look.

Apollo shook his head. "On the night of the murder," he said, dramatically telling the story to the court, "sometime between nine and ten PM, a young girl catches a panty-snatcher red-handed! Bravely, she gives chase, but the snatcher flees, and hides himself in no other place than the Meraktis Clinic garage!" He paused to let the gallery mutter to themselves, then pointed to the photo on the holograms. "Incidentally, these panties were found in the exhaust pipe of the car there; Presumably, he was trying to hide the evidence of his crime." He gave Stickler a glare that sent the student whimpering behind the stand. "But there's more: You see, this particular pair of panties is more than just a pretty pair of underwear... It's a magic prop. A very popular magic prop, one that he," Apollo pointed at Stickler with a scowl, "is very familiar with indeed!" He slammed his fists on the bench in front of him. "Don't try to deny it, Mister Stickler! I see you in the Wonder Bar almost every night! You knew full well what you were taking, and from who! It's bad enough you had to take my little sister's underwear, but to try and steal a magician's secrets is a crime I can't forgive!"

Stickler was by now cowering behind the witness stand, hiding from the full force of Apollo's fury. "Please! Hear me out!" he begged. "It's not what it looks like!"

The pleas of the cornered witness were very quickly drowned out by the buzz of conversation in the gallery, forcing the judge to bang his gavel, calling for order.

Apollo felt a tug at his cape, and he turned to Luke with a confused look, seeing his younger brother sporting a worried frown. "What?" he barely kept from snapping.

"I know what he did is vile," Luke whispered, shooting a glare of his own at the witness stand, "but try and stay calm. He's not worth losing your temper."

After a pause, Apollo nodded. "Don't worry, I can control myself."

The judge had finally calmed the room down, and gave Stickler an angry look of his own. "Mister Stickler. You should be ashamed!"

Stickler poked his head out from behind the stand, gasping for breath as he cried, "It's... not... what... it... seeeeeeeeeeeee-!" His shriek continued until his lungs were out of air, sending him back behind the stand as he sputtered for air.

"So," the judge continued, unfazed, "are we to understand that you were silent not because you were guilty of murder, but because you lacked the courage to admit your theft of this girl's undergarments?"

Coughing, Stickler pulled himself back up into a standing position. As ruffled as his previously-immaculate gown now was, he put on a calm air as he carefully paged through his book once again. "Perhaps you are not aware that my school's name was originally written 'IV'! 'I' stands for 'intelligent', 'V' stands for 'valiant'! See!?"

The judge's frown deepened. "Your point?"

"I'm not done!" Stickler yelped before regaining control of his panic and returning to his book. "Now, I'm a major in the Science Department, and what does science teach if not curiosity!" He closed his book and held up his hands, gazing at the ceiling. "Yes, we of the Ivy U. Science Department are valiantly curious! No challenge is too daunting, and what greater challenge to science than a mystery!?"
Instantly, Apollo was at the brink of rage again, slamming his fists into the bench with a scowl.

"OBJECTION! It's magic! The whole point is that it's a mystery to the audience, and the audience doesn't follow the magician home and rob them to uncover it!"

"That's easy for you to say!" Stickler cried, hugging his book to his chest. "You know the mystery behind that lacy fabric! To a scientist like me, a mystery is the unknown, and the unknown is unacceptable!" Lowering his book, he pressed a hand to his chest, staring up at the ceiling with watering eyes. "And, my friends, when it comes to mysteries, those panties are the promised land! From the moment I first laid eyes on them, I was compelled to investigate, for science! A full-sized car tire was only the first mystery those panties revealed!"

Apollo was only held back from snapping at the student a second time by Luke's hand at his arm.

"A car tire!?" the judge repeated, impressed.

"Yes! I saw them both do it, her and him!" Stickler cried, a look of awe on his face that Apollo knew well from the glimpses he caught in the Wonder Bar's audience. "They pulled a tire out of those panties! But that's not all! First, there was the tire, then a stew pot, and a frozen chicken! One mystery after another! It was..." He paused, both hands pressing his book to his chest. "It was magic!"

"That's the point!" Apollo hissed, just barely resisting shaking a fist at the student. "It's a magic act!"

"I just don't understand," Stickler mused aloud. "A broom, from a pair of panties? It mocks the very laws of physics..."

Apollo very nearly ran at the witness stand to throttle the student, held back only by Luke's firm grip on his arm.

The judge was giving Stickler a very stern look. "Mister Stickler... Am I to understand you stole this girl's panties to understand a magic trick?"

Stickler scoffed. "You say 'panties' but they are so much more than that! For me, they are an object for serious study!"

"Stop talking about my sister's panties that way!" Apollo demanded.

Klavier was looking thoughtful, despite the amused smile on his face as he watched Apollo's fury. "I wonder... There has been a recent rash of panty-snatchings in the area." He raised an eyebrow at Stickler. "Were they all you?"

Stickler clung to his book, looking uncomfortable. "I... I am sorry," he admitted. "But I did it for science! Each time I spied a pair of panties flapping in the breeze, I thought maybe! Maybe this would be the pair that would elucidate the mystery..." He smiled, despite the glittering tears in his eyes. "Even that night as she chased me through the streets, I wept tears of joy! Perhaps this is the night that I will seize the truth that lies within those panties!"

Apollo stopped listening with a scowl. He felt he'd be sick if he heard another word about the Magic Panties from Stickler's lips.

"Still, that leaves one thing unexplained," the judge pointed out, tugging his beard thoughtfully.

Klavier grinned. "Ah, you refer to our witness's other lie, yes?" he asked. "The witness claimed he saw the crime from the south, but was, in fact, in the north."

The judge nodded. "Indeed. Would anyone care to explain why he lied about that?"
Stickler fell silent, sweating nervously as he paged through his book.

Klavier gestured to the man, giving Apollo a cheery wink. "Be my guest, Herr Forehead."

Apollo's surprise helped snap him out of his boiling rage. "Me!?"

"Did I not hear you correctly?" Klavier asked, grinning. "Did you not say you 'do not accuse the witness of murder'? Why, then, did the witness lie about his location at the time of the shooting?" He chuckled. "Or have you no idea?"

"Give us a moment, Mister Keyboard!" Luke snapped back, then turned to Apollo with a determined frown, pointing to the diagram of the crime scene he'd pulled up on the Court Record. "Apollo, look at where you placed him here! Remember what else was around there?"

The judge interrupted their 'moment' with a cough. "Well, Mister Wright? What say you?"

Apollo half-wanted to scream at everyone to be quiet and give him a second of peace to think, but forced himself instead to cross his arms and press a finger to his forehead, eyes screwed shut. After a moment to collect his thoughts after the rush and emotions of pinning the Magic Panties thief, he returned his attention to the question at hand. Luke's advice he quickly realised was referencing the location of the mesh bin, unmarked on the diagram, though he wasn't sure at first why the fact was so important. When it did hit him, his eyes snapped open, in both surprise... and fear. '... Oh no.'


Sighing, Apollo took another moment or two to prepare himself, then reached into his hip-bag for the one piece of evidence he'd totally forgotten he had, and that he'd hoped to never have to bring up in this kind of situation. "The evidence that shows why he lied," he reluctantly announced, "is this." With that, he pulled out the small evidence baggie, and, from that, unfurled the large pair of beige bloomers, still reeking of garbage.

"What!?" the judge cried. "More panties!?"

Klavier seemed to giggle to himself, but, luckily, said nothing.

"These were found in a trash can at the park," Apollo explained, and brought up the diagram on the holographic screens. "Looking at the diagram," he quickly added a red square to indicate the location of the bin in the grass at Stickler's side, "we can see that the trash can was right next to where the witness stood."

The judge gasped. "Mister Stickler... You didn't...!"

"Alas!" Stickler loudly cried, falling forward on the witness stand dramatically, "I'm a failure as a scientist! I can't unravel the mysteries of the universe! I can't even unravel a pair of panties!"

"So," the judge continued, giving Stickler a stern look, "these panties are your handiwork as well?"

Stickler sniffed to hold back tears, then slowly nodded. "Th-that night, I had been chased, hounded into the Meraktis Clinic garage," he explained. "Weeping in frustration, I was forced to abandon my prize! Don't you see how I felt!?"

Apollo's hands tightened into fists. "Believe me, I'd rather not," he darkly reminded the student with a warning glare.

Stickler winced a little at Apollo's tone, but he was quickly back at his tale: "I hid in the garage for a
short while, then, abandoning the panties, I made for home. To avoid the office where the girl works, 

Luke's grip snapped tight on Apollo's arm, keeping the young magician from launching himself at
the witness the moment the implication he had followed them home was brought up.

"- I went towards the south entrance," Stickler continued, not noticing the minor altercation of the
Wright brothers nearby, "when I saw them hanging there on a clothesline by a great mansion: A

Apollo rolled his eyes, wondering if knowing the mansion was the home of the mob would have
stopped the self-proclaimed 'scientist' from his spontaneous theft.

Stickler was smiling at the memory of his triumph. "I had them, safe in my pocket, ready to take
home," his smile faded, "when I stumbled upon a murder! I reported what I had seen, but as I waited
for the police to arrive, I got scared!" He visibly shivered, again hugging his book to his chest. "What
if they searched me?"

"So you disposed of the bloomers?" Apollo asked with a glare.

"Yes," Stickler sighed morosely. "It was a severe blow to the progress of science, but one that had to
be born."

View the Court Record
The judge thought to himself for a moment or two. "A fascinating, if disturbing, tale," he decided. "I believe this brings today's proceedings to a close? And I'm more than pleased to dismiss this witness for the remainder of the trial."

Stickler whimpered from behind the witness stand, and a pair of bailiffs approached to escort him from the court.

Klavier snapped his fingers as Stickler disappeared from the room. "One or two last things, if I might."

The judge raised an eyebrow. "Yes, Prosecutor Gavin?"

"Regardless of where this witness led us," Klavier explained, "some vital points were made: Namely, that the defendant, Wocky Kitaki, was at the scene of the crime; And, he was pointing a weapon at the victim." With a grin, he lifted a single finger. "One more thing. Wocky Kitaki has a clear motive."

"Indeed," the judge agreed with a nod, "the defendant Wocky Kitaki is still the prime suspect in this case. The only suspect, in fact, assuming there was no one else on the scene at the time."

Klavier chuckled, brushing at his fringe. "And, on that note..." He leaned forward, giving Apollo and Luke a wide grin. "I believe the defence, with their strong focus on determining the full truth, has a witness of their own to call, do they not?"

It took barely a moment for Apollo to realise what Klavier was implying, and his eyes widened as he bit back a gasp.

"Oh?" the judge asked. "I should hope this witness is a lot more... agreeable than the last!"

Apollo's eyes turned to his brother, seeing Luke staring into space with a determined frown. "N-no!" he shouted to the judge, trying not to look as panicked as he felt. "There's no witness!"

Klavier raised a curious eyebrow, while the judge and Luke gave Apollo shocked looks. "What are you talking about!?" Luke cried. "Of course we have a witness!"

"No, we don't!" Apollo loudly insisted, turning towards his brother. Quieter, he hissed, "I'm not letting you do this, Luke! Not now!"

"And why ever not!?" Luke equally quietly demanded with a glare. "I can help our case!"

"Because it's a trap!" Apollo explained. "Gavin gets you up there, he makes me cross-examine you and pick apart your testimony!"

Luke rolled his eyes. "Then don't!" he snapped. "He can't 'make' you do anything! If he has an objection to what I say, he can make it himself!"
"B-but I don't want to have to question you!" Apollo replied, not wanting to admit Luke had a point.

"Well, too bad, I want to get up there and help you any way I can!" Luke shot back.

Apollo repressed an annoyed sigh. "Luke, we don't need your testimony; We have that footprint at the scene, remember? Detective Skye will have analysed it by now! We can use that to prove the other person was there!"

The judge frowned at the defence bench. "Is the defence planning to give us an answer sometime today?"

Both Wrights winced at the accusation, avoiding the judge's gaze. After a moment of shared embarrassment, Luke stared his brother in the face, determination in his eyes. "Like it or not, Gavin knows I'm a witness. You have to call me to the stand."

Apollo shook his head. "Luke, I-!"

"Let me do this," Luke insisted, then gave his brother a smile. "I'll be fine, Apollo."

The judge cleared his throat, looking annoyed. "Well, Mister Wright?"

Apollo stared at his brother a moment more, then sighed, turning to face the judge's podium. "The defence wishes to call Luke Triton to the stand."

The judge thought a second or two, then nodded. "If the prosecution has no objections?"

Klavier grinned, shaking his head. "Nein, no objections."

"Then it's settled," the judge decided, banging his gavel. "Can your witness be here in twenty minutes, Mister Wright?"

Apollo almost wanted to laugh as he glanced at his brother, who was pressing a hand to his mouth to hide a smile. "He's in the building right now, actually," he admitted.

The judge grunted in surprise. "Even so, this trial has gone on all morning without a break," he said. "Twenty minute recess, then we shall question our final witness of the day. With that, he banged his gavel and dismissed the courtroom.

June 16, 12:09PM
District Court
Defendant Lobby No. 2

Despite being the defence's witness, Luke was pulled aside as they left the courtroom by a bailiff, who escorted him away to speak with Klavier. Apollo continued alone to his assigned lobby, where he proceeded to nervously pace. Of the Kitakis, there was no sign, and Apollo could only assume either Wacky refused to leave the side-room he'd been placed in after his testimony, or Big Wins had managed to procure a separate lobby specifically for them. Truthfully, the young attorney was glad to not have to deal with the stubborn teen right now, or his shouting matches with his father; It was nice, after the emotional roller-coaster of the trial so far, to have a little peace and quiet to pull himself together and prepare for the last push to the end of the day's proceedings. Then once that's done, we've got more investigation to do to find this missing witness and..." He sighed, shaking his head.
'Better not let myself dwell on that. Just thinking about it is making me want to curl up in a corner somewhere and cry. Maybe Luke's got a point in testifying now, to get the prosecution looking for this person, too.'

At that moment, there was a knock on the door, interrupting Apollo's pacing as he looked up in surprise to see the lobby's door opening, and a teenage girl in a cyan top hat and matching cape dash in, giving him a bright smile. "Hi, Polly!" she chirped.

"Truce!" Apollo replied, laughing in relief at seeing one of his siblings safe as she bounded at her brother to pull him into a hug. "What are you doing here?" he asked her.

Trucy looked up at him with a cheeky grin. "Well, Luke got called as a witness!" she pointed out. "So I get to go with you into court!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, stepping back out of their hug. "What?"

"You agreed!" Trucy said, giving him an innocent smile as she bounced on her heels, hands clutched behind her back. "You said, if Luke got called as a witness, I could help you in court!"

At that, Apollo could only stare for a long moment, before sighing and pressing a hand to his face. "Truce, that was if he didn't come back before the trial started!" he groaned.

"Nuh-uh!" Trucy insisted, shaking her head. "You said, if Luke got called as a witness and couldn't help you in court!"

"No, I-!" Apollo began to argue, only to cut himself off with another sigh as he decided not to bother. He was almost certain Trucy was deliberately misremembering the agreement, but, at this point, he lacked the energy to order his siblings not to help him. Besides, he had to admit he wouldn't have gotten very far at all today without a second pair of eyes to spot what he missed, and a calm watch to keep the elder brother's temper in check; Neither Apollo nor Trucy could match up to Luke in smarts, but, hopefully, they might come close as a team. Reluctantly, Apollo gave his sister a nod. "Fine, you can come."

Trucy immediately gave a loud cheer, jumping into the air with triumphant fists held high. "Whoo! I get to go into court!" Bouncing excitedly, she grabbed her brother's hand to shake wildly. "Don't you worry, Polly, I'll be the best assistant you ever had!"

As he watched his sister continue to bound happily around the room, Apollo had to smile; He knew her ability to be helpful would be far outclassed by Luke, Phoenix, or even any one of the Feys, but her enthusiasm was infectious, and, maybe, it was her enthusiasm he would most need when court resumed. 'Besides, Luke's not going to stop helping just because he's on the witness stand. It might be nice for all three of us to work together in the courtroom, even if it's only this once. I almost wish Dad was here to see it!'

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To Luke's surprise, he found Defendant Lobby One empty when he entered it. He looked around, confused, but it was beyond obvious as he searched that there was no Klavier, and neither was there any of the notes that had littered the nearby row of tables earlier. For a moment, he thought maybe the bailiffs had taken him to the wrong room, but a brief knock on the door later to ask them informed him that the prosecutor would be 'right with him', so Luke was forced to wait.
For the first minute or two, Luke sat patiently on the sofa, twiddling his thumbs as he awaited the arrival of his questioner.

In the third minute, Luke started to worry. What was taking him so long?

By the fifth minute, the worry had turned to pacing. *This must be some kind of technique to shake me up so I'm easier to discredit in court. Well, it's not going to work on me, Gavin! I'm too determined to fail!*

A full ten minutes after entering the room, Luke found himself back on the sofa, head in his hands. *Who am I kidding!? This is like waiting for an execution!* He struggled not to dwell on his previous experiences behind the witness stand in a courtroom... either the first time, when he was so full of the anger and sorrow of grief and loss, trying to take it all out on new friends he thought had betrayed him, or the second time, when he was forced to watch in hysterical tears as a beloved mentor admitted to murdering a shared loved one, refusing to look Luke in the eyes as he walked willingly to jail. Luke had told Apollo his past experiences didn't bother him, and he had been telling the truth, but it was different now he was actually staring that prospect in the face, waiting for it to happen like a shot in the arm. It was only his determination to help his brother that had kept his fears locked up so tightly in the back of his mind, and determination was a difficult thing to keep a firm hold of.

It was becoming increasingly hard not to panic.

Finally, the door opened, and in came a surprisingly morose Klavier, who jerked in surprise as he noticed Luke staring at him expectantly from the nearby sofa. "Ah, *Herr* Triton...! I forgot you would be here," he admitted with a nervous smile.

Luke stood up, forcing a friendly smile; It helped that his abnormally long wait was a genuine mistake and not, in the end, some twisted tactic to psych him out. "That's okay," he said. "Both you and Apollo are already fully aware of what my testimony will be, anyway."

Klavier looked thoughtful, rubbing idly at the underside of his chin with a thumb. "Yes, your testimony... Are you sure that is what you are going with?"

Crossing his arms, Luke raised an eyebrow at the prosecutor. "And why exactly would I be changing it?"

"Because you are an awful liar, *Herr* Triton," Klavier replied with a cheeky grin.

Luke stared with wide eyes for only a moment before frowning. "That doesn't change the truth of what I say I saw. We even have the evidence to back it up."

Klavier looked intrigued. "Hm." With a grin he wandered off to the nearby tables. "In that case then, we shall sort this matter out when the trial resumes, *ja*?"

Luke only nodded. *'Just gotta stay focussed on my goal... I'll be fine.'*

[View the Court Record]
"You weren't alive at the time of those bombings, were you?"

Luke paused, raising an amused eyebrow at his friend, walking at his side on the dark pavement. "Considering it was exactly twenty years ago today, and I'm nineteen..."

Athena blinked, then blushed in embarrassment, shaking her head. "O-oh, yeah, stupid question. Forget I asked."

Laughing, Luke just smiled. "It's okay," he told her. "I mean, technically, Mum would've been pregnant with me at the time, and she and Dad were living in London then."

Humming in thought, Athena idly nodded, then stopped her walk and wandered over to the low brick wall, overlooking the brown water of the river below. "It's kinda weird how quiet it is today. Comparatively, I mean."

Luke mentally agreed, looking around as he joined his friend. Although the city was still chock full of passing pedestrians from any and every walk of life, the crowds were noticeably thin, even as close to the major landmarks of the London Eye and the general Westminster Bridge area as they were. He suspected, with the major event of the twentieth anniversary of the bombings on the Underground and one of the city's famous double-decker buses, most of the people who would usually be walking the streets were at various memorial services or the like.

It wasn't as though he and Athena had planned to be wandering London's tourist traps on this day of all days; Entering their final week of exams for the academic year, the pair had decided to take a break, and happened to pick the Monday as neither had an exam that day. Luke, keenly aware that this was his final semester before returning to California, had suggested they look around London's landmarks, and Athena readily agreed, saying it had been a long time since she'd gotten to be a tourist in her current home city. He'd taken her to the London Museum first, his favourite haunt of his youth, then they'd decided to head to the Thames to hit all the famous buildings there... and been surprised to learn as they'd set out on their 'day off' just how significant the date had been to the city's recent past.

"Oh hey, Big Ben!" Athena chirped, looking up and pointing past the nearby bridge to the clock-tower beyond, the Palace of Westminster standing proud behind it. "For some reason I always forget it's so close to the London Eye."

Luke laughed. "We should have done this months ago!" he told her with a gentle elbow to the arm. "How do you know so little about the amazing city you live in, Athena?"

Athena rolled her eyes at the friendly dig, hiding a smile despite the green glow of Widget at her neck. Spinning around, she sat on the wall with her back to the water, looking up at her friend with a serious frown. "Actually, that reminds me... When are you heading back home?"
At that, Luke's smile died, and he lowered himself down to sit at her side on the low wall. "I'm... not sure yet," he admitted. "I'm sort of taking it as I go right now." He forced a smile. "For one thing, I have to make sure I passed all my exams first, don't I?"

"Guess so, yeah," Athena agreed with a forced smile of her own, which quickly faded. "It's just, before you go... I was wondering if you'd come with me to... y'know..." She shrugged, looking away nervously. "Check out the Old Bailey? Or the Law Courts? Y-you don't have to, but-"

"Of course I will," Luke assured her, interrupting her nervous question with a reassuring smile. "Although I am a little surprised you haven't gone already. Has no-one else had the time to help?"

Athena smiled sheepishly, running her hands through her ponytail. "O-oh, well... I haven't exactly asked anyone else," she admitted. "They... don't exactly know I'm... having trouble..."

Luke patted his friend's shoulder. Athena had made vague implications to him since they opened up to each other about their parents back in March, that the incident of her mother's murder made it difficult to face a courtroom. With his own bad memories of testifying in court, he could certainly sympathise, though neither had gone into details. "Once exams are over, we can pick a date and make a day of it," he suggested. "I know a good chippie or two around there; We can drop in for as long as you want, then head out and just take it easy for a while. No pressure."

"Thanks," Athena replied, sighing in relief as she gave him a smile. "I know this is silly, with me wanting to be an attorney and all... I guess I just need to suck it up and face my fears."

Luke frowned in concern, then suddenly grinned, holding his fists tight by his chest and loudly crying, "You're fine, Athena! C'mon, say it with me!"

Although a little shocked by Luke's outburst, Athena laughed as she recognised the almost trademark cry of her friend, which she only ever heard in open public spaces such as this (Luke said he didn't want to disturb people by being too loud around the university, their usual haunt). "Say 'you're fine, Athena'?!" she asked.

"If you want," Luke replied with a grin, following it up with another shout of, "I'm Luke Wright and I'm fine!"

Though madly giggling at her friend's boldness shouting in public, Athena managed to reply with a shout of her own: "I'm Athena Cykes and I'm fine!"

"That's it!" Luke encouraged her with a joyful laugh. "Feel better?"

Athena nodded, trying and failing to stifle her giggles.

Luke watched his friend for a moment, then his smile turned sympathetic. "I may not be terrified of court itself as such, but I know I'd be hesitant to go into one without a friend... and I'd certainly resist having to testify in one," he admitted. "I... had a bad experience when I was younger."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Athena replied, her giggles gone at the thought of a friend in pain. She was vaguely aware of hearing something in Luke's voice when he had once approved of her mission to aid emotionally overwhelmed witnesses in court, and realised this was probably the reason behind it. "M-me too," she assured him with a sigh, her gaze turning to her lap. "I-I've told you before, right? After my mom was killed, and Simon was deliberately taking the blame... They called me as a witness in court, but they didn't listen to a word I said." She shook her head, trying to ignore the tightness inside at the terrible memory. "And, every time I think about going into a courtroom, I just remember how terrifying that was, and I chicken out."
Luke gave her a reassuring smile, resting a hand on her shoulder. "You've been brave enough to tell me about it, and here I am, having not said a word about my own experience!" he softly joked. "Mine's not nearly as bad as yours, of course."

"If they still affect you, they were bad enough," Athena insisted, looking up at her friend with a frown. "That's just stupid to compare your pain to others!"

"Alright, alright!" Luke cried, leaning back with a laugh, hands held up in surrender. "I'll admit you obviously know more about it than me!"

Athena nodded proudly. "You bet!" she cried, crossing her arms, then gave her friend a smile. "Do you wanna talk about it?"

Luke thought a moment, rubbing at the slowly growing patch of hair on his chin. "Normally I just brush over it in the middle of the big Labyrinthia story," he explained, "but that one only gets told with Papa and maybe Maya around to help... Obviously that's not going to be possible for a while."

After a pause, he came to a decision, smiling at Athena. "I guess I could give you an overview, if you don't mind some details being spoiled."

Athena scoffed. "I'm more concerned with my friend's welfare over being spoiled about a fictional adaptation of his life story!" she insisted.

Laughing, Luke decided she had a point. "Alright, then!" He paused again, pondering how best to talk about the particular situation surrounding the Witches' Court of Labyrinthia. "It's... a bit complicated," he settled for saying. "It's how the Professor and I met Papa and Maya, actually: The four of us were trapped together in a place that believed strongly in magic and witches, and had a system for putting witches on trial and, if found guilty, dropping them into a pit of fire right there in the courtroom."

"What!?!" Athena cried in surprise, staring at Luke in disbelief. "But... How old were you!? No wonder you don't like courts if you had to watch people be executed...! That's positively medieval!"

At that, Luke had to laugh. "I was thirteen, actually!" he replied. "And, like I said, the whole thing is kinda complicated to explain!" He cleared his throat to hide his amusement, noticing the lingering look of horror in Athena's eyes. "Honestly though, I didn't actually see anyone get dropped into the fire: They were in a cage, which closed up so you couldn't see them."

"Even so!" Athena said, looking offended on her friend's behalf and horrified at how blasé he was acting about the whole thing. "It might be out of sight, but it's still someone getting dropped to a burning death!"

Luke had opened his mouth to respond, but decided to concede Athena's point; He'd explain the whole 'illusion' thing another time. "It almost happened to Maya, too," he said, sidestepping the complicated explanations for an easy half-truth. "She got put on trial for turning someone to gold."

Athena was mid-scoff before she paused, giving Luke a worried look. "Turning... someone to gold?" she repeated, confused. "Was it someone you knew?"

Nodding, Luke forced a smile, trying to cover for the lingering regret of the situation that he was sure his friend had picked up. "The Professor, actually," he admitted. "We all thought he was dead for a day or two there."

Athena's hands flew to her mouth in shock, eyes wide as she stared at her friend. "Oh no!" she cried. "It gets worse," Luke added, sighing as he looked away. "I was so angry... even though Maya was a
friend, I decided the Inquisitor must have been right, that she had killed him with magic, so I agreed to testify... against her, and against Papa. N-not that he was my Papa then, of course."

"That is worse!" Athena cried, her voice muffled through the hands over her mouth and her eyes shining with tears of empathy for Luke. "M-mister Wright knew you didn't mean it though, right?"

Luke smiled, nodding. "Yeah. He talked me around, made me realise accusing Maya on no basis was the exact opposite of what the Professor would want, and I ended up helping him win the case." Finally, he looked up at Athena with an encouraging smile. "As wary as I am of going into another courtroom, I know that entire situation could never happen again; That was Witches Court, worlds away from the courts of England or America."

Athena's hands slowly lowered from her mouth, though she still looked worried for her friend.

"Even if I did ever have to testify in a trial again," Luke continued, "I know I'd have my friends and family at my back, and I know better now than to give in to anger before accusing someone like that. It would be a piece of cake compared to Maya's trial."

His younger friend had to think a moment before she finally smiled and nodded. "Yeah. It could only go uphill from that, right?"

Luke giggled. "Yep!" With that, he pushed himself to his feet. "We should probably get moving now, or there's no way we'll be able to cover all of the Tower of London." He turned to Athena with a grin as she stood up at his side. "Next time we do this, I'll take you to Labyrinthia! Maybe the Professor could help me tell you the story of our adventure there!"

"Sounds fun!" Athena agreed, then grabbed at Luke's sleeve as she headed off towards the nearby Westminster Bridge. "C'mon, slowpoke! We've got tourist crap to do!"

Laughing, Luke hurried after her.

Little did either of them know that Luke's conviction would be tested to breaking point before the year was out.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
The gavel banged from up on the judge's podium, calling the room to order. "Court is now back in session!" the judge announced. "Is the witness ready?"

Klavier only nodded, snapping his fingers in the direction of the bailiffs.

Apollo took a deep breath to steady himself, watching as his brother was escorted to the witness stand: Luke was standing tall, hands held in tight fists at his sides and a determined frown on his face, although he avoided meeting his siblings' eyes at the defence bench or in fact anyone's eyes in general, staring dead ahead at the bottom half of the judge's podium opposite the witness stand.

Klavier grinned, playing with his hair. "Could the witness give the court his name and occupation?"

Luke was silent for a moment, glancing at Klavier. "Luke Triton," he said. "I'm a veterinarian."

The judge frowned as he watched Luke. "That's odd... Standing there, you look familiar, but I don't recognise your name. Have you stood in court before?"

At that, Luke smiled, turning his face up to the old man. "Yes, actually," he admitted. "I'm amazed you recognise me, Your Honour! That was seven months ago!"

"Ho ho!" the judge laughed, looking proud of the praise. "Yes, I am known for my fantastic memory!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, but elected to say nothing.

"That's also why my name might not be familiar," Luke continued. "In that trial, I went by my full title and work name: Doctor 'Northpaw' Wright."

"Ah, of course!" the judge crowed. "The doctor veterinarian from Europe!" He frowned. "That was a murder in an animal shelter, wasn't it? Nasty business."

Luke nodded, though Apollo saw his smile become noticeably forced.

Klavier was looking thoroughly confused, glancing between Luke and the judge. "Ah... I was not aware you had a second name, Herr Triton," he said, frowning in annoyance. "How did you come by it? And why did you not inform me?"

Luke raised an eyebrow at the prosecutor. "You didn't ask about my name," he pointed out. "And, quite frankly, why I have two surnames is irrelevant and none of your business."

Klavier gave Luke an intense stare. "You're a Wright at the Wright's office," he said, apparently only realising the implications of such as the words left his mouth.

"Mm-hmm," Luke replied, smiling. "You're surprised? I thought it was obvious, with Apollo going so strongly into big-brother-mode to protect us from you."
"Objection!" Apollo cried, giving his brother a glare. "I'm not *that* bad!"

Trucy giggled at Apollo's side. "Yeah you are!"

"Well, maybe if you two weren't constantly trying to get into trouble all the time...!"

Klavier looked between the trio blankly for a few moments, then sighed, rubbing his eyes in a way that suddenly reminded Apollo of Kristoph.

The judge tapped his gavel, giving the Wright kids a raised eyebrow. "Are we planning to question this witness, or simply discuss the defence's family life all afternoon?"

"Sorry, Your Honour," Apollo replied with a sheepish look, pressing on Trucy's shoulder to keep her from shouting out something he'd regret. "We'll stay on topic from here on."

Appeased, the judge nodded, turning to Luke. "So... you witnessed the murder, Doctor Wright?"

Although he looked uncomfortable about saying so, Luke nodded. "I do have information about the murder that Mister Stickler didn't," he explained. "Had I been called to testify earlier, I could have told you then he didn't stay at the scene as he claimed."

"Indeed?" the judge muttered, intrigued. "In that case, why *weren't* you mentioned earlier as having witnessed the scene?"

Luke shot a glance at Apollo, but was speaking before his brother could interrupt: "After the previous trial I was involved with, the defence was reluctant to use my testimony if it didn't have to."

He smiled. "As I'm sure has been demonstrated, my older brother is very protective of our family."

Apollo turned red, trying to hide his face behind a hand. "Stop saying that like it's a bad thing..."

The judge chuckled. "Oh, that brings me back to my childhood with my own little brother!" He then cleared his throat, putting on a businesslike frown. "Well then, Doctor Wright. Tell us everything you know."

"Of course," Luke replied. He took a moment to collect himself, then slowly began to talk: "That night, I was in People Park... up a tree. Naturally, no-one could see me up there."

He closed his eyes. "I saw Doctor Meraktis pulling his noodle stand, and someone else, the defendant I suppose, stop him with something shiny in his hand. After a few moments, Mister Stickler interrupted them; The gunshot followed after."

He opened his eyes again. "Doctor Meraktis collapsed, and the other two ran, the defendant dropping the object in his hand. Once they had gone..." He paused. "That's when the fourth person climbed out of the noodle stand and made a run for it."

The gallery gasped, muttering amongst themselves loudly. The judge, though similarly flabbergasted, pulled himself together quickly enough to bang his gavel. "Order! Order!"

Once the crowd had calmed, he turned to Luke with wide eyes. "Are you telling me that not only were you also on the scene on the night of the crime, but another person was, too!?"

Luke nodded. "As I said, I was in a tree, so no-one else saw me," he explained again. "The person in the noodle stand seemed to be waiting for everyone else to leave themselves."

Smirking to himself, Klavier brought up the diagram of the crime scene on the holograms. "So, with the testimony of Herr Doktor here," he said, "we have two more people to place on the scene."

With a tap of his finger, a label of 'W2' appeared on top of the noodle stand. "Here, our mysterious figure hidden away," then a second label, 'W3', in the nearby grey blob denoting the tree, "and here, Doktor Wright himself." He looked up at Luke with a grin. "I would say this is correct, is it not?"

The judge thought a moment, tugging his beard. "In that case, the defence may begin their cross-
examination." He waved a hand in Apollo's direction, almost dismissively.

"Good luck, Luke!" Trucy called to the witness stand with a grin.

Klavier smirked at the bench opposite him. "I'm looking forward to this," he said. "Don't forget, Herr Forehead... Your job here is to 'determine the truth', regardless of who your witness is."

Apollo was on the verge of barking a reply when a retort came instead from Luke, who crossed his arms as he gave the prosecutor a disapproving frown: "The defence is well aware of its purpose, Mister Keyboard. You don't need to remind him."

Raising an eyebrow, Apollo gave his brother a look. "The defence can speak for itself, witness."

Luke sheepishly looked away, and Trucy stifled giggles at Apollo's side.

Sighing, Apollo decided to get on with it. Looking back over the transcript, it looked like Luke had been careful to, unlike his previous retellings of the story, be remarkably vague and not give every detail unprompted as he usually strived to do (or would nervously blurt out with when he was trying too hard to lie). He supposed his brother was attempting to leave leads for Apollo to ask about... Hopefully, doing so would distract from the real problem behind the testimony. "So, you couldn't see anything about this person in the noodle stand?"

Luke shook his head. "It was the middle of night. Although there are streetlights along the river, there aren't any near that corner, and the person I saw was hidden in the shadow of the stand."

Apollo simply nodded as though this were the first he had heard of the information, ignoring the faint smirk on Klavier's face opposite him. "And the object in the defendant's hand?"

"All I saw was it glinting in the light," Luke admitted, deciding to stick to the minimal testimony he had been given, "but, considering the evidence, I'm of the opinion it could only be the knife that was found at the scene."

The judge nodded. "This all makes sense so far," he agreed, then frowned in confusion. "But the defence believes neither the defendant nor Mister Stickler fired the gun, correct?"

Apollo and Luke shared a confused glance, wondering how the question was relevant to Luke's testimony. "Yes, Your Honour," Apollo replied.

Klavier chuckled, playing with his fringe again. "Ah, Herr Judge has spotted it too," he said. "Yes, Herr Doktor's testimony presents us, or at least the defence, with a very intriguing problem..."

Trucy was tapping her chin, pondering Klavier's words. "What problem?" she asked. "The person Luke saw in the noodle stand must have fired it, right?"

At that, Klavier only laughed. "Ah, Fraulein, your deductions are as childlike as your face!"

Immediately, Apollo slammed his bench, glaring at the prosecutor. "You take that back!" he demanded.

"Herr Forehead, I was merely offering your sister a compliment," Klavier replied with an amused smile.
"Oh! Thank you!" Trucy replied with a big grin, though Apollo at her side was still doubtful, not letting up his glare.

Klavier chuckled again. "No, Fraulein... If Herr Stickler did not fire the gun, and the defendant did not fire the gun, it had to be someone standing on his right as he turned his head, ja?"

Apollo's eyes suddenly widened as he realised what Klavier was angling at. "No..."

"Therefore," Klavier continued, snapping his fingers with a grin, "according to your own logic, Herr Doktor here becomes the most prominent suspect of the murder."

View the Court Record
The gallery buzzed as Klavier's accusation hung in the air. Was this actually happening? Was the defence accusing someone on their own team of the murder? At the witness stand, Luke was frozen, hands clasped together as he stared at Klavier, his eyes wide in a blatant fear that the young man so rarely allowed anyone else to see. Behind the defence bench, Trucy was similarly shocked to a standstill, hands held to her mouth as she slowly looked more and more guilty for 'leading' the prosecution to its terrifying conclusion, the prospect of the legal system taking a member of her family away from her again hanging menacingly over their heads.

Apollo refused to stand for it. Whacking his fists on the bench in front of him, he threw out a hand to point directly at Klavier opposite with a furious glare. "Objection!" he cried, with the full force of his Chords of Steel bringing the room to a sudden quiet. "Luke would never be a murderer! Not in a million years!"

"What would your reasoning be?" Klavier continued, looking remarkably smug. "Maybe, for example... Herr Doktor here was not at the scene that night at all?"

Luke winced, looking away guiltily as his hands fiddled nervously with his collar. The gallery above them once again began to murmur.

Behind the defence bench, Apollo and Trucy kept their expressions carefully still, their resolve to protect the lie in Luke's testimony keeping them focussed despite the shock. Trucy slightly leaned towards her brother at her side, whispering, "I think he's on to us."

The judge banged his gavel to quieten the gallery, then directed a stern frown at the defence. "This is a very serious accusation against your witness, Mister Wright," he pointed out. "If it turns out to be true, you will have wasted quite a lot of this court's time... among other infractions." His frown deepened. "I shouldn't have to impress on you how much trouble you would be in."

Apollo quickly nodded; Calling a false witness was as bad as falsifying evidence, and he was intimately familiar with the kind of penalties he'd face should either be proven. "I understand, Your Honour," he assured the judge, determination in his gaze. "I can promise you the accusation is false."

Klavier chuckled again. "Oooh, very tough, very cool," he said with a wink, snapping his fingers. "I'm afraid the court requires more than just a promise, ja?"

"We can prove it!" Apollo insisted. "There's incontrovertible proof someone was hiding in the noodle stand, as Luke saw! And Luke has even less of a connection to the victim than Stickler did; What exactly does the prosecution propose his motive was!?"
As Klavier brushed off the retort with a chuckle, the judge pulled at his beard thoughtfully. "Evidence, you say?" the old man repeated. "I would very much like to see this 'evidence'."

Apollo nodded firmly, already scrolling through the photos in his Court Record. "The proof that someone was hiding in that noodle stand... was this!" With that, he swiped at the screen and brought up on the holograms the final photo of the crime scene he'd taken the previous day.

The gallery gasped, even Klavier seeming a little surprised. "And what is that?" the prosecutor asked.

"A footprint," Apollo replied with a smug smile, "or, more accurately, a shoeprint. This final witness left it in the mud right under the noodle stand's window as they left!"

"Ho ho!" the judge said with an impressed look. "That is indeed incontrovertible!"

Klavier looked extremely unhappy (cheering Apollo up immensely) for all of five seconds before he scowled and slammed a fist against the wall behind him. "Fine. This extra person in the noodle stand does indeed appear to exist," he agreed. "Where are they, then?"

"An excellent question," Luke cut in, a finger pointed into the air with no small amount of pride. "Unfortunately, as I could not see any details in the dark, all we have to go on is a connection with Doctor Meraktis and that shoeprint." He then smiled at Klavier, lowering his finger. "Surely, if anyone is going to locate them now, it would be the police and their superior analysing equipment, correct?"

"A connection with the victim?" the judge asked, confused. "What kind of connection?"

Luke shook his head. "Unfortunately, I cannot say for sure," he admitted. "I only have theories. Nevertheless, it seems likely this other person assisted the victim in stealing the noodle stand they were hiding in... As to why, I cannot claim to know that either."

The judge nodded. "In that case, it looks like this case cannot be decided until this final witness is found and questioned. Their testimony would appear to be vital."

Klavier was unimpressed. "I will have a search started immediately," he agreed. "However, the prosecution does not believe this extra witness's testimony will change the fact that our defendant was the one to fire the gun at the victim." He snapped his fingers, then brought up on the holograms the diagram of the crime scene. "The defendant had the motive and the murder weapon, and his presence at the crime scene was proven by the defence themselves."

"And yet he is physically incapable of having fired the shot!" Apollo shot back. "The gunshot wound was on the opposite side of the victim's head, and the defendant was holding a knife! Who'd bring a knife to a gunfight!?"

"Then who did fire that pistol, Herr Forehead?" Klavier asked, throwing out an arm to point across the room at the young attorney. "If your witness was at the scene, what's to say it wasn't him?"

Apollo froze. What could he say that wouldn't unintentionally direct the bulk of the suspicion back on Wocky and sabotage their case? 'I think I'm regretting not asking Dad or Mia to assist me now...'

Trucy was glaring across the room at Klavier, her fists on her hips. "Well, I can think of something!" she announced. "Why would Luke ever want to shoot this guy!? And how could he have that gun, anyway!? It belonged to the Kitakis!"

Luke sighed as he pressed a hand to his face.
"Truce!" Apollo hissed at his sister in wide-eyed panic.

Trucy looked up at him in innocent confusion. "What?"

Klavier's chuckling from the other side of the room attracted the Wrights' attention, and the prosecutor grinned at Trucy with a wink. "All excellent points, Fraulein," he said. "In fact... does not the defendant have the motive you are looking for? And this access to the pistol, is that not also something the defendant possesses?"

Trucy went pale, looking up to her brother only to see Apollo's disapproving glare, which sent her shrinking away in shame.

"And what about the missing witness?" Luke asked Klavier with a stern look. "They may also have a motive, and some kind of access to the murder weapon. How can you say they don't unless you find them and ask?"

"That is assuming they do," Klavier pointed out. "A connection to both the victim and the defendant? A very narrow criteria for this last witness to be a suspect, ja?"

Luke just smiled. "Every argument in a courtroom starts with an assumption, Mister Gavin," he replied. "You must always assume the defendant is guilty and the defence must always assume the defendant is not guilty, until all other possible scenarios have been ruled out. That's how a trial works, isn't it?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow at his brother. 'When did Luke become so intellectual on how trials work, anyway?'

After a moment of thought, Klavier smiled back at the young vet. "An excellent point, Herr Doktor." He snapped his fingers. "And what about my scenario that you were not on the scene, ja? Can you rule that out?"

"I believe they already did, Prosecutor Gavin," the judge replied, giving Klavier a stern frown. "This final witness Doctor Wright saw left a shoeprint in the mud."

Klavier grimaced, clearly unconvinced. "And... what proof is there that it was you in that tree, Herr Doktor?" he continued, his attention back to Luke. "I am finding myself unconvinced after you failed to describe anything about the other people you saw that night!"

"Objection!" Apollo shouted, throwing out an arm to point at Klavier. "You demand proof Luke was there!? What proof is there that Mister Stickler was truly there!? You cannot insist a witness is lying without some kind of concrete proof of your own, Gavin!"

As Klavier winced at the accusation, the gallery around them burst into activity, forcing the judge to start banging his gavel to calm them down.

"Ooh, that was cool!" Trucy whispered to her brother, impressed.

Apollo raised an eyebrow at her. "This would have been a lot easier if you hadn't helped him earlier."

Trucy shrunk away at that, ashamed. "I-I'm sorry, Polly..."

"That is true," Klavier admitted, annoyed, "but which of us was making such a big deal about 'determining the full truth' earlier? I may not be able to prove anything, but I can see you are hiding something!"
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Apollo had opened his mouth to snap a reply at the prosecutor opposite, but was interrupted by the quiet sigh of his brother from the witness stand, who everyone promptly turned their attention to. The young man in blue had crossed his arms, a tired look on his face as he looked up at Klavier. "And what exactly is it you want to hear me say, Mister Gavin?" he asked.

Klavier stared at Luke with a blank look. "Er...?"

"You want me to say you're right, that I wasn't in the park that night?" Luke continued. "Where, then, has my testimony come from? Long before it came out in court, I was already telling your investigation that Mister Stickler did not stay at that crime scene, even if I couldn't say where he'd been standing. It was me who found that shoeprint that proves someone else was hiding in the noodle stand at the time. I don't see how you could argue someone didn't see these things from the tree that night."

"I-I was only asking-!" Klavier stuttered, looking away.

"Are you wanting me to say I'm simply repeating someone else's testimony?" Luke interrupted, unwilling to stop before he'd made his point. "Why would I be doing that? Is this 'someone else' perhaps incapable of testifying in court? Maybe they speak a language no-one else except me does. Is that why they couldn't come forward themselves?"

Apollo's eyes widened. Was Luke... admitting where his testimony originated?

"Maybe it was more than just a language barrier," Luke suggested, the poor prosecutor he was lecturing looking slowly more confused as the young vet's tired voice kept coming. "Maybe this witness would be laughed out of the building if they even tried. Is that it, maybe? Why else would I be telling another's testimony as my own, unless the truth of who this other person was was simply too unbelievable for the court to accept the truth... like, maybe... this other 'person' wasn't human. Might that be what you're accusing me of doing?" He then paused and smiled at Klavier. Once the prosecutor had met his eyes with a confused look, finally Luke asked, "Are you saying I can talk to animals, Mister Gavin?"

The gallery murmured to itself in a vague state of confusion somewhat equal to the puzzlement settling on Klavier's face. It seemed no-one watching was sure whether or not to laugh at Luke's 'outlandish' suggestion, including the judge.

"Oooh, clever!" Trucy whispered to Apollo. "Telling the truth as a hypothetical scenario! I didn't think of that!"

"And, by the way," Luke added to Klavier, a finger pointed into the air, "the person making 'a big deal' about determining the full truth? That was me." He gave the prosecutor a warm grin. "I'm glad to hear you're taking that to heart, Mister Gavin."

Klavier's eyebrows pressed together, but overall he still seemed puzzled. Apollo wondered what was going through his mind.
The judge cleared his throat. "So, ahem... Does the prosecution still have any objections to this witness's testimony?"

There was a pause before Klavier finally broke his intense staring at Luke, shaking his head and fiddling with his hair with a slight frown on his face. "Nein, Herr Judge. No objections."

"And the defence has finished their cross-examination?" the judge added, turning to Apollo.

Apollo nodded. "Yes, Your Honour," he replied.

The judge seemed a little relieved. "In that case, it seems high time we ended this trial for today." He banged his gavel. "Despite all the progress made here, several mysteries remain: First, this extra missing witness who was on the crime scene that night. Second, the location of the wound in the victim's right temple." He gave both Klavier and Apollo a stern look. "The court requests further investigation from both the defence and prosecution."

Klavier almost scoffed, avoiding the old man's gaze as he played with his fringe. "Ja, baby."

Apollo just nodded. "No problem!" he cried.

"Very well." With that, the judge banged his gavel again. "This brings the trial for the day to a close. Court adjourned!"

June 16, 1:02PM
District Court
4th Floor Lobby

Apollo couldn't resist a sigh of relief as he pulled his siblings into a hug the moment they left the courtroom. "In the name of all that is good in this world, don't you two ever do that to me again!" he cried.

Trucy laughed as she patted her eldest brother's back. "Aw, don't cry, Polly! Everything's turning out great so far!"

"I'm not crying!" Apollo objected, although he rubbed at his eyes with a hand just in case.

Luke gave him a sympathetic smile. "Trucy's right though," he said. "Look at all the progress we made! We uncovered the panty thief, and the evidence is really beginning to stack up that Wocky couldn't have fired that shot! You'll have this case in the bag tomorrow for sure!"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "That's if we can find this last witness!" he pointed out. "Even if Detective Skye has their shoeprint analysed, that's not going to be enough information to lead us to them! And this gap is giving Gavin plenty of time to think up some excuse to explain away the discrepancy of the wound! And!" He jabbed Luke in the chest with a finger. "What if he goes and talks to Fox or something and proves you weren't actually in the park!? We're practically inviting him to disbar me at this point!"

Luke glanced around them nervously, gripping his satchel strap. "C-could you not say that quite so loud...?"

Trucy crossed her arms, sticking out her bottom lip at her eldest brother. "Don't tell me you're giving
"Of course I'm not giving up!" Apollo replied with a frustrated sigh. "I'm being realistic! We've got a lot of work to do if we want any chance of still pulling this off!"

Luke smiled. "In that case, what are we doing standing around moping about it?" he asked. "Let's get back to investigating and prove the prosecution wrong!"

Apollo rolled his eyes and was about to respond when he was interrupted by a loud "WHOOP!" and a tall figure with an explosion of black hair launched himself at the young lawyer, knocking Apollo back several steps as he struggled to fend off the tight grip of the arm around his neck. "That was great, 'Pollo!" Clay shouted with an enthusiastic grin, rubbing a fist into the top of his magician friend's hair. "What a first day in court, huh?"

Finally, Apollo threw his room-mate off his neck with a wordless groan. "Can't you say 'hello' like a normal person, Clay!?" he demanded.

Clay just laughed. "What, and not have a bit of fun with my best friends?" He then moved over to the giggling Luke and Trucy, who he high-fived with a grin. "You two were great too, by the way!"

Apollo rolled his eyes and crossed his arms.

"That was very well-handled, actually," came a voice from nearby, and Apollo looked up in surprise to see his two online friends, Penny and Aria, joining the group with a wave and a smile. Penny, who had spoken, had her hands on her hips as she gave Apollo a proud grin. "Especially considering that was Klavier Gavin you were facing in there. I'm not surprised you were so worried about this yesterday night!"

Apollo blushed, rubbing at the back of his head. "Y-yeah, I... didn't want to worry you guys bringing that up..."

Luke smiled at the pair. "Hello again, Miss Holliday! And it's Miss Penny, right?"

"Just 'Penny' is fine," Penny replied.

Aria gave Luke an excited wave, then looked to Apollo. "Hey, even though you got all angry and upset at that guy who stole Trucy's Magic Panties, I thought you stayed pretty calm, Apollo!" she assured him.

"That guy didn't know what hit him!" Trucy added with a mischievous grin. "You never take something from one of us and get away with it, you know!" She then added a delighted cackle, waggling her fingers in the air.

Clay laughed, elbowing Luke with a grin. "Yeah, and you were giving that Gavin guy a hard time, weren't ya Luke?"

Luke blushed, nodding. "W-well, I did get a bit carried away, yeah..."

"He deserves anything he gets," Apollo growled. "Mocking us, mocking Dad, continually leading us into traps..."

Penny nodded in agreement. "Bringing up your dad was a bit of a dick move, true."

Trucy sighed, staring at the floor sadly. "And he was so nice yesterday..."
Luke also shuffled uncomfortably. "Actually, I think Papa and Uncle Edgeworth had a point when they said his heart's in the right place. 'He's difficult, but he follows the rules', I think Papa put it?"

"Yeah, follows the rules to screw us over," Apollo shot back. "He nearly got you accused of murder in there, Luke! Again!"

"He's doing what he thinks is the right thing to do," Luke replied, staying calm in the face of his brother's temper. "He truly believes Wacky is the culprit, and he insisted on calling me to the stand because he knew I was lying, and he wanted to know the truth."

Aria blinked in surprise. "Wait, you were lying?" she asked.

Luke almost jumped, having forgotten Apollo's friends were there, and blushed in embarrassment as he looked away. "U-uh... It's a long story."

Clay grinned, waving a hand dismissively. "Luke can talk to animals. No biggie." As the three Wrights stared at him in disbelief, moments from madly telling him off and making excuses for his claim to the very confused Penny and Aria, Clay rested an arm each around Apollo's and Luke's shoulders, looking between them. "So, you guys have a plan of action for taking this guy down tomorrow, right Wrights?"

Apollo sighed, deciding to let the comment go. "I guess. We have to go talk to the detective anyway, and we should probably give the crime scene another look."

"We should go home first, though!" Trucy insisted. "We have to tell Pearly how it went!"

"And Papa will want to know, too," Luke added. "He might have some ideas for us."

Penny gave Apollo a smile. "Good luck, then," she said. "I won't be able to make it to tomorrow's trial, unfortunately."

"I'll just cheer for the both of us!" Aria giggled, then turned to the Wrights. "I'm planning to visit Pearly myself later, but if I don't see you then, I'll see you right back here tomorrow! I know you'll do great, Apollo!"

Apollo gave her a half-smile, shoving Clay's arm off his shoulders. "Thanks," he told his online friends, "to both of you, for coming today at all."

"No problem," Penny insisted.

Clay grinned, and gave the two an exaggerated bow. "Then, until we see you lovely ladies again!"

Apollo rolled his eyes, whacking his friend with the back of the closest hand. "Stop it, Clay."

[View the Court Record]
"Sounds like quite a trial," Phoenix's crackling voice laughed from the phone sitting in the middle of the table. "I'm sorry I missed it!"

Apollo sighed. "It was a complete train wreck," he replied, slumping forward in his seat. "I'm not even sure we made it out alive..."

While Luke, Trucy and the speaker phone'd Phoenix laughed, Pearl gave Apollo a sympathetic smile. "Would you have felt better if I came to court with you?"

"Not unless you were planning to channel Mia or something," Apollo admitted, looking away in guilt.

Pearl blinked in surprise. "Oh... Did you want me to ask her?"

Apollo shook his head, still firmly looking away. "Nah, it's fine. I managed on my own. That's probably what she would have wanted, anyway."

After leaving the courthouse, and their friends, the Wright siblings had headed back to the office for lunch, putting Phoenix on speaker-phone to tell him and Pearl about the trial so far. Apollo had started the story, although Luke and Trucy frequently interrupted to talk over him, and it became almost a battle for the three of them to get everything out. It was pure luck that, despite the Wright children constantly verbally tripping over each other, the details managed to clearly cross over to Pearl and Phoenix, even with their limited interruptions.

"The important thing is, we had fun today!" Trucy insisted. "And Wocky made it through the day, too!"

'No thanks to you,' Apollo resisted saying out loud, settling for shooting a glare at his sister instead.

"And we made a lot of progress on the case!" Luke added with a smile. "We really surprised Mister Gavin with that extra person, and, with the police looking for them now, I'm sure they'll be in court tomorrow for us to question!"

"That's if we can get them to talk," Apollo pointed out. "What if they're genuinely no help? What are we supposed to do then?"

"Pray," came Phoenix's voice from the phone.

The four sat around the table looked at each other for half a second before bursting into assorted laughter, even Apollo managing to loosen up enough to enjoy the joke.

"On a more serious note, though," Phoenix continued, a smile in his voice, "you can't always predict what's going to happen with a case; All you can do is take it as it comes and aim for the best possible outcome, whether it results in a 'not guilty' verdict or not." He paused, chuckling to himself.

"Although, considering what you accomplished today, I think you're more than capable of clearing
young Wocky's name here."

Although Apollo was still doubtful, Luke gave him a wide grin. "See?" the younger brother said. "Even Papa thinks you can do this, Apollo!"

Apollo just grunted, dismissively waving a hand as he looked away.

"We got good publicity for our act today, too!" Trucy cut in. "All that talk about my Magic Panties should attract a good crowd tonight!"

"Are you serious!?!" Apollo snapped, locking a stern gaze on his sister. "The way that no-good thief was going on about the 'mystery of your panties', and you're thinking about flaunting that as advertising?!"

Trucy shrugged, smiling. "Why not?" she asked. "It's our best-loved act, after all!"

Not in the mood for playful bickering, Apollo just looked away with a sigh.

"Wow, you really are feeling down," Trucy noted with surprise.

"I know how hopeless it can seem sometimes," Phoenix picked up. "Honestly, Apollo, if you feel you need a break, feel free to stop and recharge for a while. You've got all afternoon for work, and all of you have been running around almost non-stop since yesterday morning."

Luke nodded. "That's a good point. The rest of us can pick up the investigation if you need us to."

Slowly, Apollo looked up at his family with a smile, even sparing a glance for the phone even though he knew Phoenix couldn't see him. "Thanks for the pep talk," he said. "I probably do need a break; I've got a lot of paperwork still to do, and I'm going to collapse tonight mid-show if I keep going on like this." With a smirk, he pointed at Luke. "And don't you guys dare run off and investigate without me."

Luke laughed. "We wouldn't dream of it!" he promised.

Trucy nodded, giving her eldest brother a determined look. "Yeah, we need you happy and energised for the show! There's bound to be a big crowd tonight, after all!"

"Sure, sure," Apollo muttered with a smile.

It was decided to take an hour off for the Wright kids to rest up and prepare for the second half of their investigation. Apollo decided to spend it in reception at his desk, working on some of his paperwork for the case, though he wasn't sure exactly what his siblings, or Pearl, were up to elsewhere in the apartment; Occasionally, he would hear the creaking of the floor above, or a closing door, but as long as the three were keeping to themselves and not bothering him, he wasn't planning to bother them in return.

About half-an-hour after their quick lunch and chat with Phoenix, Apollo had tuned out the world around him, absorbed in one of his and Trucy's magic books during a break from his paperwork. Thus, it was incredibly startling when the front door suddenly creaked open, surprising Apollo enough that he jumped in his chair, tossing the book into the air as he slipped to the carpet below.
"Oh! I'm sorry!" came a voice from above, and Apollo saw as he clawed his way back to his feet that it was Alita Tiala, watching him worryingly as she carefully closed the door behind her. "Are you alright?" she asked.

"I'm fine!" Apollo insisted, quickly brushing off and straightening his costume from the brief tumble as he gave their visitor a wide grin. "Was there something you wanted, Ms Tiala?"

Alita seemed relieved at the young lawyer's reply, though continued to fiddle nervously with the bow on her wrist. "I just wanted to thank you for today," she said. "The trial went... well."

Apollo almost winced at the hesitation in her statement; it was clear for all to see that the morning's session in court was a disaster. He kept the grin plastered on his face regardless. "O-oh, right! It was no problem!"

"Do you think Wockey will be okay?" Alita continued, looking away with a worried frown.

'Well, he's not guilty... Apollo kept himself from replying, biting his lip.

Unfortunately, Apollo's silence betrayed his thoughts, and Alita met his eyes with a tearful, yet determined, gaze. "Please, you have to help him!" she begged, her hands pressed to her chest. "We're supposed to get married next month..."

Apollo blinked in surprise. "Oh, congratulations!" he said, though he was inwardly wilting at the thought of even more pressure to secure his 'not guilty' verdict.

Alita smiled, giving him a grateful nod. "Please let me know if there's anything I can do to help!"

At that, Apollo paused; Considering they had yet to properly question Wockey, and he seemed so determined to be found guilty anyway, maybe they could get some of their 'background context' (a very important thing to have for every client, he was taught, and that he'd never needed before now) from the teen's fiancée instead. "Actually, I did have a few questions," Apollo admitted, and he gestured to the office further in. "If you don't mind, maybe we could sit down and chat for a bit?"

"I don't mind," Alita insisted, though Apollo noticed her grip on the bow at her wrist suddenly tighten. Nevertheless, she walked ahead into the office, making her way back to the red sofas with Apollo at her heels. "What did you want to know?" she asked as she made herself comfortable.

The young lawyer was deep in thought as he sat opposite Alita, his back to his father's desk on the other side of the room. "Well, for one thing... are you sure about marrying into the Kitaki Family?"

Alita just smiled. "I'm fine with it," she said. "And I love Wockey with all my heart."

Apollo felt his bracelet twinge. 'Uh oh. What's she lying about?" So, uh... it doesn't bother you that you'll be, erm... married to the mob?"

To his surprise, Alita minutely frowned, looking away. "I don't think so," she said. "My parents are against it, of course."

'Can't blame them,' Apollo thought. 'She must have to lie all the time to hide her true fears about it. I guess I should ask a happier question to cheer her up.' "Actually, how did you and Wockey meet? You don't look the type to have gangster connections."

"Oh..." Alita paused, slightly nervous as she stubbornly kept her gaze on the nearby wall. "We met at my old job, actually."
Apollo was opening his mouth to answer when a bright young voice chirped from behind him: "Aw, office romance! How sweet!" He spun around in surprise to the door through to the kitchen behind him, and noticed it had been opened at some point during the conversation, his younger sister now using it as a barrier from which to discreetly watch the unfolding conversation. "Oh, you can keep going!" she insisted to her brother, waving at him to continue. "Don't mind me!"

Apollo shot her a glare, then looked back to the slightly confused Alita with an apologetic smile. "Ah, I'm sorry about this, Ms Tiala..."

"It's okay," Alita replied, staring at her lap with a faintly relieved expression.

'I guess that was all she wanted to say anyway,' Apollo realised with a frown, then stood up and turned his attention back to his sister with a glare. "Trucy, I'm very busy right now!"

"Yeah, I can tell!" Trucy chirped, bouncing into the room; Apollo couldn't tell if her comment was sarcastic or genuine. "What are you asking her about? Can I help?"

Apollo crossed his arms. "Truce, I don't-"

"Hi there!" Trucy cried to Alita, ignoring her brother as she ran around to shake the woman's hand. "My name's Trucy! You must be Ms Tiala!"

Alita seemed a bit baffled by the teen's attentions, but nodded anyway. "Y-yes, that's me..."

"It's nice to meet you!" Trucy continued, then sat down next to Apollo, grabbing his arm to pull him back down next to her, her bright grin never turning away from their 'client' sat opposite. "You were telling us about Wocky, weren't you? Your fiancé?"

Apollo rolled his eyes and decided to just let Trucy sit in; It would be too much of a hassle to chase her off now she'd dug her claws into the conversation. "Actually, I was about to ask her about the Kitaki Family in general, but okay..."

Alita slowly smiled, then giggled, her hands steepled at her mouth. "Did you know that the boss is trying to get out of the 'business'?"

Apollo and Trucy both blinked in surprise. "R-really?" Apollo asked.

"He's trying to transfer his assets into a normal company," Alita explained. "He only announced it recently, out of the blue. I hear there's quite a lot of confusion in the ranks."

Trucy was tapping her chin in thought; Apollo was remembering the oddly cheerful apron Big Wins Kitaki had been wearing both times they briefly met him, and wondered if this was the reason behind it. "I can't imagine Wocky going along with that," he said.

Alita giggled. "He's highly motivated, isn't he?"

Trucy stifled giggles of her own, nodding in agreement.

"Um, that's not the word I would have used," Apollo admitted, rubbing at the back of his head.

Alita didn't seem to have heard him: "He said, 'I'll be the next Big Boss, and keep the Family alive!'" she proudly told them. "I think he's at that age when boys want to make a mark on the world."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. 'Not the way I would have put it...' "His father moves in a lot of circles," Alita continued. "He's really focussed on profits. The Kitaki..."
Family's been making a killing recently!"

'Again, not the way I would have put it...'

Alita paused, looking away as her smile turned distant. "But Wocky says it's not about the money; They have the gangster tradition to uphold."

"Oooh, a generation gap!" Trucy cooed in excitement, elbowing her brother as she shot him a grin. "They've even got the ever classic 'what about the family business' thing going!"

Apollo gave her an unamused look, deciding not to bait his sister by pointing out it was usually the father and not the son upholding the traditions of a family business. Instead, he turned to Alita. "Can I ask you a question about Wocky? I understand he was operated on by the victim, Doctor Meraktis."

"Apparently, yes," Alita sighed, nodding with a sad frown. "It sounded horrible. Wocky has always been fond of fighting, I'm afraid."

Apollo decided not to ask if 'fighting' was the appropriate term when guns got involved.

"Mister Gavin was saying his life might be in danger, wasn't he?" Trucy asked, her excited grin for once replaced by a sympathetic frown for the young woman opposite.

Alita shook her head. "N-no, that can't be right!" she insisted, only shooting the siblings a glance before returning her firm gaze to the wall. "I'm sure he was just trying to scare us."

Again, Apollo felt his bracelet twinge, and couldn't help but feel sorry for the woman. 'Considering she only just learned her fiancé may die any day now, I can understand if she's still in denial.'

"It's scary to think that a surgeon might make a mistake," Trucy admitted, a hand fiddling with the pin on her cape, "but it's even scarier when he tries to hide it!"

Apollo gave his sister a smile, patting her shoulder. "We'd never let that happen to you, Truce," he assured her. 'It's high time we got more information about this clinic, I think.'

Alita then stood up, her hand fiddling with the bow on her left wrist. "I should be getting home now," she told the pair. "Wocky's in your hands, Mister Wright."

Nodding, Apollo stood up and gave Alita a final handshake. "Don't you worry, Ms Tiala! Just leave it to me!"

"Polly will get it all sorted out in no time!" Trucy added with a grin, bouncing to her feet at his side.

"Thank you," Alita replied, despite her remaining nervous demeanour. With that, she turned and left the office.

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As the door closed behind her, Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead, deep in thought. "If it's okay with you Truce, I'd like to cut our 'break' short and get going. Could you chase up Luke and Pearly?"

Trucy failed to bite back a grin. "Why?" she asked. "What's the plan?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow at her, wondering what his sister's game was, but decided to answer the question regardless. "We need to look into the Meraktis Clinic," he told her. "Since it's tied in to our case, the officer watching it should at least talk to us." He closed his eyes. "And we should catch up with Detective Skye too; She should have finished looking into that shoeprint, and she's obviously happy to work with us thanks to Dad. After that, as much as he seems happy to go to jail, we really need to talk to Wocky; Maybe out of court he'll be more honest about telling us what really happened that night."

"A very good idea," a feminine voice, clearly neither Trucy's nor Pearl's, replied, surprising Apollo and causing him to spin around to face the back of the room. To his shock, standing by the kitchen door and in front of Phoenix's desk, was an amused Luke and a woman in Pearl's pink robes, the young medium's distinctive hair loops on the back of her head. "You seem to have this case very much in hand from what I've seen."

"Mia!" Apollo cried, jumping around the sofa before remembering to restrain his excitement over a rare meeting with his 'aunt' and forcing himself to stop in embarrassment. "W-what are you doing here?"

Mia smiled, glancing between Apollo's grinning siblings. "Luke and Trucy wanted to ask me on your behalf for my assistance," she explained. "They've been explaining the case to me."

"We were just coming down to talk to you," Luke picked up, "but we heard you talking to Ms Tiala, so we decided to wait until you were done!"

"I didn't!" Trucy pointed out with a proud grin, puffing out her chest.

Apollo rolled his eyes, knocking Trucy's hat off her head to ruffle her hair. "That's 'cause you're a pest," he joked. As Trucy giggled, bending down to retrieve her hat, Apollo turned his attention back to Mia. "I, uh, thought you'd want me to do this on my own," he admitted. "I mean, everyone else seems to think I can finish this case without help, but..."

Mia frowned in concern. "Your career is, unfortunately, turning out very similar to Phoenix's... and to mine. The major difference being that you lost your mentor during your first case rather than after."

Apollo shrugged. "We were expecting that to happen eventually anyway," he insisted. "And Dad's a better mentor than Mister Gavin was... He just can't help much right now, what with being in the hospital from the car accident."
"Yes, your siblings were telling me," Mia replied, still looking concerned. "My point is, I still had someone to teach me until I felt confident enough to strike out on my own... and I was still able to mentor Phoenix when he needed help in something I'd lost the time to teach him." Her concerned frown turned into a smile. "Despite not having a 'mentor' to help you, you do seem to be progressing well on this case of yours. That's very commendable."

Apollo tried to brush off the compliment, but couldn't stop a wide grin spreading across his reddening face, a hand rubbing at the back of his head. He barely even noticed Luke and Trucy giggling in response, too focussed on the thought of being praised for his attorney skills by the Mia Fey.

"If you still feel you need help," Mia continued, "I'm happy to talk things over with you. On the subject of trials however, I don't think you'll need my help, even when Phoenix isn't tied up elsewhere."

"Y-yeah, I figured," Apollo admitted, rubbing at an arm as he stared at the floor, trying to tone down his blushing cheeks and delighted grin. "Th-that's why I didn't mention anything yesterday..."

Mia nodded in understanding. "There's no shame in asking for help if you need it," she said. "Although, in this case, it doesn't look like you did need it. Was there anything in particular you wanted to discuss before you head off?"

"You may as well use this, Apollo," Luke pointed out to his brother. "It was actually Pearl's idea; She wanted to help the only way she thought she could."

"Yeah, and how often do we get to talk to Auntie Mia!?!" Trucy added with a grin.

Mia laughed. "Apparently too often," she said with a wink. "I am dead, you know."

The three Wrights giggled, and Apollo paused to ponder what exactly he would need Mia's advice on... and what exactly she would be able to help them with, having been dead for almost an entire decade. "W-well," he asked, "if Luke and Trucy were telling you about the case... Is there anything you could immediately suggest?"

Mia shook her head. "Only that you investigate to find more information, and you appear to be already doing that." She thought a moment. "I'd focus on talking to your client first; Luke tells me you haven't been able to yet."

Apollo shook his head. "May as well do that first, then," he agreed, looking between his siblings to check they were ready to go; While Trucy returned his glance with a grin, Luke had his attention elsewhere, deep in thought. "Luke?"

The young vet jumped as he was startled from his train of thought, looking up at his brother with a surprised cry. "Huh? S-sorry, did you ask me something?"

"Are you ready to go?" Apollo asked, repressing a laugh.

"O-oh, yes, of course," Luke replied, blushing and tugging at his cap brim with an embarrassed smile. "What are we doing first?"

Trucy giggled. "Wow, you really zoned out there!" she pointed out.

"We're going to try questioning Wocky again," Apollo told his brother. "Mia suggested it."

"Unless that theory you were telling me about needs some other, more important information," Mia
added, raising a curious eyebrow at the young man in blue.

Apollo's eyes widened as he turned to stare at his brother. "You'll tell Mia your theory but not me?"

Luke looked away guiltily. "I-I honestly haven't," he insisted. "Just... implied it."

"He's telling the truth," Mia added to Apollo. "We had a few moments alone while Trucy was with you and that Tiala woman; Nothing more than a passing comment."

Apollo paused; Did Luke suspect Alita of something too?

"A-anyway, we should get going," Luke insisted, pushing past his siblings to the front door. "We've got a lot to do today."

"To the Lukemobile!" Trucy cheered, rushing after her brother and pausing only to wave back at Mia. "See you later, Auntie Mia!"

Mia waved as the younger Wrights disappeared out the door, then looked to Apollo. "Remember if you're ever stuck: Turn your thinking around. You'll always find your solutions there."

Apollo nodded, rubbing sheepishly at the back of his head. "Y-yeah, and a lawyer doesn't cry until it's all over, right?"

"More or less," Mia replied with a smile. "You'd better get going."

"Yeah," Apollo said, backing up towards the door, avoiding the sofas only through muscle memory of where they sat in the room. "Um, hopefully I won't need you again on this case... sorry for bothering you."

Mia laughed. "It's no bother," she insisted. "Now get going. And good luck."

Apollo grinned, then dashed off after his siblings.

June 16, 2:58PM
Detention Center
Reception

As Apollo entered the building, Luke and Trucy at his back, the first thing he noticed was the sight of his friend Ernest back at the reception desk. "Hey, Ernest!" he called with a grin and a wave.

"Hey," Ernest replied with a friendly nod. "You wanting to speak to one of the suspects?"

Apollo paused, sharing a confused look with Luke. "Uh, Wocky, yes. We really need to talk to him."

Ernest shook his head. "Kitaki's in questioning."

While Apollo stared at Ernest in disbelief, Luke gave their old friend a thoughtful frown. "What about this 'other suspect'?"

Trucy gasped, hands to her mouth. "You mean the panty-snatcher!?" she asked.
Ernest only nodded.

"They arrested him?" Apollo realised with surprise, and couldn't stop a wave of pride washing over him that his sister would be safe from the strange man's advances. He smirked. "Alright. Let's have a little chat with Mister Stickler."

Luke shrugged, watching Ernest get up and head to the visitor's room. "May as well," he agreed. "We're here, after all."

"And he's a valuable witness!" Trucy added.

Apollo snickered. "He is a bit 'precious', I'll give him that."

A minute or so later, the three were stood by the chairs on their side of the glass, none of them willing to sit down before they had their witness in sight. Trucy, refusing to leave, remained behind her brothers at Apollo's insistence, where she would be mostly out of Stickler's view. Finally, the door on the other side opened, and a tall young man in black robes sauntered in, his guard behind him, and his nose buried in a book.

"Please, keep this brief, if you would," Stickler said, walking automatically towards the chair. "I'm quite busy. I need to finish this paper-" The student's eyes glanced up to see his visitors, looking down again at his book before quickly widening, his sentence cutting off as he jumped in surprise. "Nyurk!" He almost tossed his book into the air in shock before fumbling to grab it more tightly, hugging it to his chest as he stared at Apollo and Luke in fear. "I-it's you!"

The Wright brothers stood with crossed arms, giving the man a joint stern stare. "Mister Stickler," Apollo said. "We'd like to have a few words with you."

Stickler returned their stare for a very long moment before finally sighing in defeat. "Very well," he agreed, lowering himself into the lone chair on his side of the glass. "As long as they're few." He promptly popped open his book and returned his focus to its pages.

"Nothing would make me happier,' Apollo resisted the urge to reply. He and Luke shared a glance, and they slowly moved to sit down on the two chairs. Behind them, Trucy leaned on the back of Apollo's chair, lacking anywhere to sit herself.

"So then," Luke spoke up, hands folded neatly in his lap, "where do we start? The murder? Your serial thefts? Or maybe your obscene obsession with a minor's underwear?"

"Wait!" Stickler cried, snapping up to meet Luke's gaze in the same way a teacher might pause a disruptive class. "I can't help but feel that I'm being misunderstood."

Apollo's gaze narrowed, his crossed arms tensing as he resisted the desire to punch the man's lights out through the glass. "How, exactly?"

Stickler sighed as though asked to explain the intricacies of quantum physics. "Yes, that night, I obtained a pair of panties, it's true," he admitted. "However! It was my burning curiosity that drove me to do it! Nothing more!"

At that moment, Trucy giggled, attracting the prisoner's attention. "You wanted to know the trick to my panties, right?"

Stickler almost jumped out of his seat. "Y-you're here, too!?"

Luke raised an eyebrow. "That would explain stealing the Magic Panties alone, but what about
Missus Kitaki's? What about all the other women's underwear you've stolen?"

The student didn't seem to have even registered Luke's words, jumping to his feet and leaving his book to fall to the small surface in front of him, his hands clasped together as he stared intently at Trucy. "Oh, Great Artemis! Teach me!"

Trucy was too shocked to reply, stepping back with wide eyes. "U-uh...!?"

Immediately, Apollo had slammed the tiny desk, shooting to his feet to stand protectively in front of his sister. "Don't you dare talk to her EVER again," he growled. "You lost that right when you followed us home!"

"But I must know the secret of those panties!" Stickler begged, pressing against the glass as he gave Apollo a pleading look. "My very existence hangs in the balance! Please, make me your apprentice, Gramaryes! Teach me the mystery!"

"We wouldn't take you on as an apprentice if you were the last possible option on the entire planet!" Apollo snapped. "We'd rather let the Gramarye name die than let a pervert like you anywhere near our tricks!"

Stickler shook his head. "But I'm not a-!"

"You can say that all you like," Luke cut in from his chair, eyes closed, "but those words alone won't convince anyone." His calm, authoritative tone silenced the room instantly, attracting everyone's attention to the young vet, arms crossed as he leaned back in his chair thoughtfully. "You said you stole all those panties, or bloomers, or whatever you want to call them, in search for the Magic Panties themselves. On the night of the murder, you'd found them, even if you had to leave them behind." He opened his eyes, staring up at Stickler. "Why, then, did you steal those bloomers right after? You'd found the Magic Panties, you couldn't have not realised there was no chance those bloomers were them."


Luke just sighed, looking away again. "Not that it matters. We only called you here to talk about the murder."

At that, Stickler huffed, sitting back down. "I already told you all I know!" he insisted, reaching for his book. "The defendant was there in the park, of this I'm quite certain."

Apollo also slowly sat back down, but Trucy behind him hung back, not wanting to draw Stickler's attention by moving closer.

"He was pointing a pistol, or something like that, at the victim!" Stickler continued to Luke. "That's when I shouted, 'Stop, you two! Let's resolve this like gentlemen!' And, the next moment, a shot was fired." He shrugged. "You see? It hardly differs from the testimony I gave in court."

"And this is all true?" Apollo asked, giving the man a stern stare and not trusting his or Trucy's abilities in his anger. "Really?"

"My panties are gone," Stickler sighed, clinging to his book morosely. "My innermost heart revealed. What further reason could I possibly have to lie?"

Apollo stared at Stickler for a long moment before deciding he couldn't disagree. With a nod, he stood up. "Thank you. That's all we wanted to know."
View the Court Record
The moment they were out of the visitor's room, Trucy jumped at her eldest brother, clinging to his chest as she pushed her face into his shoulder. "Can we not talk to him again?" she quietly asked.

Apollo didn't hesitate to give his sister a sympathetic hug, and Luke rested a supportive hand on her shoulder. "Don't you worry," the lawyer told her. "When we press charges, Dad and I will handle everything."

"And it would be easy to have him banned from the Wonder Bar," Luke added. "You'll never have to see him again, Trucy."

Trucy sniffed once, then pulled back from Apollo, giving both her brothers a smile. "Thank you," she whispered. "I've got the best brothers in the world."

Luke giggled, tapping his sister's nose, while Apollo just smiled, then moved on to the reception desk. "Hey Ernest, is Wocky done now?"

Ernest shook his head. "Sorry, buddy. From what I've heard, he's not co-operating at all, so his sessions take a long time."

Apollo sighed, leaning on the desk. He moved to pull out his phone, hearing his siblings approaching behind him. "Is there any way you could, like, text me or something when he's done? I've been here three freaking times in the past two days, and I still haven't got to talk to my own freaking client! I've only got..." He paused to look at a nearby clock. "Fifty-five minutes left before the centre closes!"

The officer held back a laugh at that, to Apollo's irritation. "Aren't we on opposite sides here?" he pointed out. "Why should I help you?"

"But you've helped us before, Ernest," Luke replied, standing at his brother's side with a confused frown. "What's so different this time?"

"Last time, it was either you or your dad in here; I helped because I felt sorry for you guys, as your friend," Ernest told Luke with an air of 'isn't it obvious'. "This time, your client is a dangerous gangster."

"Who's still been falsely accused!" Apollo argued, though he could see Ernest's point. "I mean, it's not like I'm asking you to share evidence, or the prosecution's argument, or even to let us in to a locked off crime scene!" He paused. "Although, if you could help us get into the Meraktis Clinic, that would help a lot."

Ernest's mouth bent downwards into a frown. "I'm not helping you get anywhere," he insisted.

"Awww!" Trucy whined, giving him her best sad look. "But we need to investigate the victim!"

"No," Ernest repeated, then sighed. "But... I suppose... there's probably a by-law somewhere extending visiting hours for attorneys. I could look it up and... text you once Kitaki is done in
questioning."

Trucy cheered in excitement, her brothers sharing a grin. "Thanks, Ernest," Apollo told him, unlocking his phone to share his number with his friend. "You're the best! Better than 'Debeste'!"

Ernest snorted at that. "Yeah, right!"

June 16, 3:39PM
Park Street

The first thing Apollo noticed as they approached the Meraktis Clinic was the garage door. Apparently, after how important it had been in that morning's trial, the police had decided to close it, preventing any further 'invasions', and the police car was more firmly blocking it, parked ever so slightly closer to the walls than it had been the previous day.

"Think they'll let us in?" Luke asked, examining the building sceptically.

"I hope so," Apollo replied, though he privately doubted they'd get anywhere without some inside help. "The guard wasn't very co-operative yesterday..."

Trucy scoffed at her brothers' negativity. "No harm in asking!" she chided them, and skipped up the steps to the glass door, tapping it with her knuckles. As Apollo and Luke warily followed to stand at her back, the door was carefully pulled open by a police officer on the other side, who Trucy cheerfully waved at. "Excuse me!" she called.

The officer's eyes widened as he took in the trio waiting on the clinic's doorstep. "Hey, it's you three from yesterday!" he cried.

Apollo suddenly recognised the face of the unhelpful officer who had been at the park the previous day. 'Oh great, how'd we get saddled with trying to get past him two days in a row!?'

"Your business is over in the park isn't it?" the officer continued with a frown. "The clinic's off limits. It's not involved."

Trucy was wearing her best puppy-dog face, eyes wide as she gave the man a pleading look. "B-but-!"

"What part of 'off limits' do you not understand?" the officer snapped, unaffected by Trucy's moping. "Show me proof that the clinic is connected to the incident in the park, or beat it." With that, he slammed the door closed and disappeared back inside.

Trucy spun around to face her brothers with a frown. "But Doctor Meraktis died! Of course the clinic is connected!"

"He means the events of the murder itself," Luke explained. "He wasn't killed here, so there's no connection between the clinic and the murder."

Huffing in defeat, Trucy stomped back down the steps. "S'not fair," she grumbled.

Apollo shrugged, patting his sister's back sympathetically as she passed him. "No harm in asking," he reminded her. 'No gain either.'
Trucy looked up, and her gaze locked onto the house beyond the clinic, behind Apollo. She broke into a grin. "Hey, it's Mister Eldoon!" she cried, hitting her brothers with a hand as she rushed off. "Oh Mister Eldooooon!"

"That was quick," Luke muttered in amusement to Apollo, moving past him to join her.

As Apollo turned to follow his siblings, he saw a sight very similar to what the trio had seen yesterday, when they'd come to Eldoon's ramshackle house looking for clues: Guy Eldoon himself was lounging in a chair next to Spoon's doghouse, idly scratching behind the lazy pooch's ears as he dozed in the afternoon sun. Nearby, the abandoned tarp still lay on the ground, the lone remaining Eldoon's Noodles bowl lying on its surface by the makeshift kitchen at the house's front wall. As Trucy called, the man slowly raised his head, abandoning his dog as he pushed the bowl and noodle-like wig underneath back on his head, revealing his eyes. He blinked once or twice as he looked between the approaching trio of Wrights, then crossed his arms and looked away with a "Hrmph."

Trucy stopped in front of the noodle vendor, watching him curiously. "What's wrong?"

Eldoon was silent for a long moment. "So, you found my stand," he said. "That's why I'm here. To thank you."

Apollo noticed Luke shoot him a confused look, and had to agree. 'You're waiting at your own house to thank us...?'

"Ah," Trucy said somewhat guiltily, shrinking back from their old friend a little.

"But now it's a crime scene and they won't let me have it back!" Eldoon snapped, waving an arm and sending the Wrights all back a step, Trucy jumping to Apollo's side to cling to his arm. To his credit, the man seemed to notice he was scaring the trio, and calmed down with a sigh. "That's also why I'm here. I got no other place to go."

Apollo was regretting his decision now of not trying harder to track their friend down the previous day; Although they'd come back to the clinic after their initial search, Eldoon was no longer lingering outside his house next door, and Apollo hadn't wanted to upset him by having to admit they were as-of-yet unable to return the noodle stand they'd been hired to find. "I'm sorry, Mister Eldoon."

"Not your fault," Eldoon replied with a shrug, returning his gaze to the trio. "How can a noodle stand be a crime scene, that's what I don't get, Pollo!" He gestured angrily at his bawdy neighbour. "Even in death he's after my neck I tell ya! Bah! Can't even cook an honest noodle..." Arms crossed, he returned to glaring in the opposite direction of the clinic, muttering under his breath.

The three Wrights all shot glances at each other. "You mean Doctor Meraktis?" Luke asked, voicing their thoughts.

Eldoon didn't seem to have heard them, shaking his head and muttering to himself. "I tell ya. It's enough to drive a man to make his soup even saltier."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. 'I really hope this is just all talk in the heat of the moment and you'll be back to normal once we get this whole murder trial squared away...'

"That stand," Eldoon mused aloud. "For generations, it's served up the very best noodles us Eldoons could make. A tradition of noodles and salty broth."

"Yes, I think you or your father have mentioned that," Luke sympathised. "Fourteen generations, right?"
"Fifteen," Eldoon idly corrected. "It's more than a stand; It's history, I tell you."

Apollo bit his lip. *Watch what you say or it might become true...'*

"I'm sorry," Luke told him with a sad frown. "But, I suppose you'd never planned to be running it anyway, right? Maybe you could go back to what you did before?"

"Too late for that, kiddo," Eldoon sighed, giving the clinic next door a wistful look. "Aye, I was a go-getter back in the days I rebelled against my pops... until my friend next door butted in." His gaze turned to a glare, and he stood from his chair, kicking at the abandoned tarp on the ground. "In the end, I was left with nothing but that dusty old stand to earn my fortune."

Trucy sighed to herself. "Poor Mister Eldoon..."

Apollo rubbed at the back of his neck. "Um, Mister Eldoon, I don't mean to pry," he nervously asked, "but what exactly did you do before you took on the noodle stand? You've never mentioned it."

"Bah!" Eldoon replied, waving the question off and turning away from the Wrights. "Let old noodles lie, that's what I say."

Luke gave Apollo a look, and Apollo could tell his brother had also guessed what it was their friend had been doing in the years he'd been feuding with his father.

"He stole my dreams and left me with nothin' but noodles," Eldoon grumbled. "And now I don't even have that!"

"If I might ask, Mister Eldoon," Luke picked up, "what exactly did Doctor Meraktis do to you?"


"Enmity?" Eldoon repeated, taking a step towards the trio. "I hate 'im!" He paused awkwardly. "Er. Hated." Shaking his head, he turned away again. "Him actin' like he smells like roses when he's rollin' in mud!"


"He's the only doctor at that clinic, you know," Eldoon continued, apparently not hearing them. "Pretty impressive, eh?" He turned to face the Wrights, leaning in close with a hand to his mouth. Despite his apparent care to be secretive, he spoke only in a mock whisper: "I'll tell you the secret to his success: The mob!"

The siblings shuffled awkwardly, not wanting to embarrass their friend by telling him they'd already known that particular factoid. "The Kitaki Family, right?" Luke replied.

Eldoon nodded, crossing his arms disapprovingly. "They're always having one of them 'turf wars' or whatnot. Always an injury or two that needs fixing. Meraktis saw a chance for some business, so he started giving the Kitaki Family a good deal."

Luke frowned, equal parts horrified and surprised. "A deal?"

"Every fifth operation for free!" Eldoon snapped, pausing to spit in the direction of the clinic. "He stole the idea from my pops!"
Apollo closed his eyes. He could remember well old Dude Eldoon's attempts to drum up more business with the proclamation that every customer got one free bowl of noodles a week, even if the Wrights had so often refused it out of fairness, being such frequent customers - it was part of why Apollo suspected the old man had been discounting their tab, retroactively giving them the free meals they denied.

"Can a doctor just decide to do that?" Trucy asked, confused. "What about the insurance companies?"

Eldoon gave a bitter laugh. "Oh, no doubt it's illegal," he replied. "But, it got him in good with the Family. Pretty soon he was getting all the business in town." His scowl deepened, the man grinding his teeth at the overshadowing hospital next door. "Leavin' me here, in the dark! Up t'my neck in soupy noodles!"

'Whatever happened to 'let old noodles lie'? Apollo wondered, raising an eyebrow.
Luke cleared his throat, stepping towards their friend. "Well, if we may, Doctor Eldoon, would it be correct to say Doctor Meraktis was a rival of yours?"

Eldoon paused, looking at Luke in silence for a moment before sighing, his anger evaporating instantly. "Figured it out, did ya?" He nodded, ambling back to his chair to sit down, returning to idly scratching Spoon behind the ears. "That's right, I was a doctor. A surgeon, actually... until Onion-boy butted in."

"Onion-boy?" Trucy repeated.

Eldoon thought for a moment, looking up at the trio. "You like those onions they put in the soup broth?"

Apollo blinked in confusion. "Um, yeah, kind of," he admitted with a shrug.

Luke shook his head. "Not really, no."

"You take a spoon, you drink some broth," Eldoon explained, miming the action as he turned in his chair, his hand leaving Spoon to her nap. "Those onions will find their way in there. For people who like 'em," he gestured to Apollo, "why, that's just fine. For people who hate 'em..." He gestured to Luke, then paused, crossing his arms as his scowl returned. "I hate onions. Hate 'em!" he proclaimed. "Always sneaking in from the side, gettin' in the way of a good tastin' spoonful. Well, that's what he was!" He waved angrily at the clinic next door. "An onion!"

"Oh!" Trucy cried with a grin. "Onion-boy! That's such a clever nickname!"

"Ever since pre-school we were getting in each other's face," Eldoon continued, glaring at his gaudy neighbour. "No matter what I did, sure enough, he'd come followin' along. Then he'd do it better than me. Just blow right past without so much as a 'howdy'."

Apollo frowned in thought, crossing his arms. "I see."

"Thanks to Pal Meraktis, I was forced to trade in my scalpel for a ladle!" Eldoon sighed, then shook his head, pushing himself back to his feet as he gave the trio an apologetic look. "Sorry, kiddo. Didn't mean to weigh you down with an old man's ramblings."

"No, it's fine," Apollo insisted, smiling at their friend.

Eldoon didn't seem to want to accept that as an answer, pointing at the young lawyer. "By way of apology... You ever get yourself in a spot of trouble, you drop by."


"You're investigating Meraktis, aren't ya?" Eldoon asked with a smile, crossing his arms. "Well, you want to know about a doctor, you ask a doctor. That's all I'm sayin'."
Luke thought a moment, then giggled. "Makes sense to me!"

Eldoon grinned, looking to Apollo. "You just think of me if you need something, Pollo."

After a second or two of confusion, Apollo smiled and gave their friend a nod. "Right. Thanks, Mister Eldoon."

June 16, 3:56PM
Kitaki Avenue
People Park Entrance

As the Wrights turned the corner onto Kitaki Avenue, they were immediately accosted by a shout from the entrance of the nearby mansion: "Hey, you three! Over here!"

Apollo jumped, recognising Plum Kitaki waving, broom in hand, underneath the elaborate gate. "U-uh, us?" he replied.


Trucy eagerly waved, running to meet the woman. "Yo, Little Plum! Wassup!?"

Luke was at his sister's heels, giving Plum a wave. "Hello, Missus Kitaki!"

Apollo sighed, forcing his feet to follow his siblings. 'Note to self: Keep Trucy away from gangsters better in future.'

"I heard you retrieved my bloomers!" Plum called as the trio approached.

Luke nodded. "Yes, we did!" He then gave her an apologetic smile. "We tried to return them to you yesterday, but-"

Plum interrupted him with a hearty laugh. "You caught the thief, didn't you? A man takes credit where it's due!"

"In that case," Luke giggled, turning to Apollo, "you should be talking to Apollo!"

Trucy nodded. "Uh-huh! It was Polly who found them, and Polly who nailed the panty-snatcher in court!"

Apollo blushed, rubbing the back of his head. "Er... y-yeah, I guess I did that..." After a half-second's pause, he then reached into his bag and pulled out the evidence baggy he'd stored Plum's bloomers in, holding it out for the woman to take. "And, um, while we're on the subject..."

"Hey, my bloomers!" Plum cried, smiling as she recognised the clump of beige fabric. "Thanks for that. I owe you one."

"N-no problem," Apollo muttered, feeling more awkward as he continued to hold the item out for its owner to take. "I thought you might like them back, so..."

Plum blinked, looking surprised. "Oh, no, no," she insisted, shaking her head as her surprised look melted into an amused smile (or was that a smirk?). "Why don't you keep 'em as a souvenir?"
Apollo felt himself paling, and didn't need to look at his siblings to know they were watching him with highly amused grins. "Oh no, I couldn't, really!" he argued, silently begging the woman to take the underwear from his hand. "Thanks for the offer, bu-"

"We could use those in our Magic Panties act!" Trucy interrupted with an excited gasp, bouncing in place. "They could be Polly's pair!"

"What!?" Apollo cried, turning on his sister in shock as Luke outright erupted into laughter. "Why would I have Magic Panties!?"

Trucy just pulled at her brother's arm with a wide grin, still bouncing in place. "You could pull shivs and godfathers out of them!" she continued, ignoring his protests. "Ooh, and you could use them in court to pull out evidence and surprise the prosecution!"

Apollo shook his head, scrambling to pull together an argument his sister might understand. "Truce, when you have Magic Panties, it's funny; When I have Magic Panties, it's creepy!"

Plum's laughter interrupted the conversation, drawing the siblings' attention back to her. "Ah, I'm sure you two can discuss the details later!" she said, before her gaze turned serious. "But enough about bloomers. What about my son, Wocky?"

Sighing, Apollo reluctantly put Plum's old bloomers back in the bag at his hip. 'Where do I even begin...?'

"He's really everything you'd expect in a Boss's son!" Trucy chirped, then bounced on her heels, adopting a pose that imitated Wocky's 'boxing stance'. "I'm going to be a gangster, dude!" she added, her voice deep in an attempt to copy the elder teen's voice as well.


Apollo raised an eyebrow.


"Huh?" Luke muttered, then shook his head. "N-no, Wocky's nineteen! I'm twenty!"

"Only a year off though," Apollo pointed out with a teasing grin. "Thinking of quitting the respectable life already?"

Luke blushed in embarrassment. "Stop it!" he whined. Ignoring his siblings' giggles, he then turned to Plum, who was watching in amusement. "Actually, I'm amazed getting shot didn't stop him. Wocky almost died, at such a young age, and he still wants to be a gangster?"

Plum nodded, a sad smile on her lips. "He didn't tell you the whole story, though," she explained. "You know, even if had a pistol then, he couldn't have shot anyone."

"What...?"

"He acts like he's 'hard', but he couldn't shoot someone to save his life," Plum continued. "I should know... I'm his mom."

Apollo simply nodded understandingly at her words. The emotional weight behind them was almost palpable, to the point that Luke was affected by it and had to look away, and Trucy quietly took Apollo's hand in hers, hiding her true feelings behind a small smile; Apollo suspected they had just
been reminded of their own, far too short, times with their mothers, and tightened his grip on Trucy's hand to silently offer some comfort the only way he could.

"Hopefully, when this is all taken care of," Plum sighed, "he and the Boss can sort out their differences."

Apollo frowned in thought. *They certainly aren't on the best terms, are they?* he agreed.

"The Boss may act tough, but that boy means the world to him," Plum added.

"But Wocky seems, well," Apollo spoke up, shrugging as his first attempt trailed off. "It seems like he's against his father's position."

Plum smiled. "Ah, it's to be expected. We're in a bit of a transition now; Trying to cut our ties to the shadier side of the street and do more on the up-and-up. Wocky isn't too enthusiastic about the change, it's true."

"But why the change?" Trucy asked, confused. "Is the gangster thing just not paying the bills?"

Before Apollo could think to quieten his sister, Plum was laughing heartily. "It *pays,"* she agreed, her laughter fading back into a stern look, "but we need a lot of money right now. Clean money, that is."

Luke hummed in thought, stroking his goatee, and Apollo wondered if the younger brother had guessed the reasoning behind Plum's words.

"He'll see things the way the Boss sees 'em," Plum continued with a sad smile. "Some day."

After a moment of thoughtful silence all around, Apollo prised his hand from Trucy's grip and dug around in his bag for his Court Record, turning it on and flipping to his evidence list. "Can you... tell me..." Arriving on the photo of the knife buried in the muddy turf, he flipped the tablet computer around to show Plum. "Does this knife belong to Wocky?"

Plum leaned forward, examining the photo for a moment before straightening up with a nod. "Oh, that's his knife alright," she replied. "Bought it for him for his birthday." She smiled. "I remember him falling asleep with it clutched in his arms."

"Ooh, I know the feeling!" Trucy cried, grinning.

"Isn't that dangerous!?" Luke asked, horrified.

Apollo was already flipping to a different piece of evidence to show Plum. "And this pistol belongs to the Kitaki Family, correct?"

Plum nodded again. "It's one of the pieces we keep around. That is, we *used* to keep around." She frowned. "They're all gone now."

"Oh?"

"Police came yesterday and took everything," the woman explained, then glared menacingly into the distance as she tightened her hands on her broom, partly exposing the hidden blade within. "Everything but my 'broom'."

Apollo tried not to look too nervous at the reminder he was less than a metre from a dangerous woman and her sword.

Trucy hummed thoughtfully, arms crossed. "Don't you think you should have given them that, too?"
she innocently asked.

Plum's glare vanished instantly, the blade disappearing behind its camouflaging sheath as she laughed heartily. "You kidding? Can't clean up very well without a broom!"

It was only then Apollo thought to look down at the cobblestones, noting that the paint stains were significantly smaller than yesterday; It seemed Plum was simply sweeping when she'd stopped them, taking a break from wiping the last traces of the car accident from the street.

"It's true," Plum continued, surprising Apollo with how quickly she'd returned to a business-like tone. "One of our pistols is missing."

Luke rested a hand against his chin, arms crossed. "As unfortunate as that is for our case, we couldn't think of an alternative for where it came from," he admitted.

Plum scoffed. "It gets worse: None of the rank and file have access. Only the Boss, myself, and..." she took a deep breath, steadying herself, "and Wocky could have taken it."

"I see," Apollo muttered, staring at the pistol on his Court Record screen with a frown.

"I'm sure the cops will continue tromping all over the mansion because of this case," Plum added, already looking more cheerful. "Maybe this is a sign it's time for a change!" With that, she laughed.

Luke smiled, giggling himself. "At least you're not worrying about that, Missus Kitaki!"

"True!" Plum agreed.

Apollo thought a moment more, then shoved his computer back into his bag. "I just have one more question:" he said. "Is there anything you can tell us about Alita Tiala?"

Plum's good humour instantly vanished, and she stared sternly into the distance. "Yeah," she mumbled, blowing a loose strand of hair from her face. "Wocky's fiancée."

"They're getting married next month, correct?" Apollo added.

"I suppose," Plum continued with a distracted shrug. "She's been staying over lately."


Plum looked up with wide eyes. "How'd you guess?"

Apollo resisted the urge to point out how obvious she'd been about it. "Could you tell us more about her?"

The woman stood in thought for several seconds. "Wocky brought her home one day," she said. "Says he wants to tie the knot."

"I can see why!" Trucy chirped. "She's so pretty!"

Plum frowned. "Oh, she's pretty enough," she darkly muttered, "but, you know..."

Trucy just looked confused. Apollo and Luke shared a knowing glance; It seemed there was more weight to their suspicions than they'd previously thought.

"Nah, it's probably just me being suspicious," Plum insisted with a shake of the head, but Apollo saw
her fingers fidgeting on her broom handle, betraying her own denial. "Stay in this business too long and you start to only see darkness in people." She frowned sternly. "You get a nose for it. A nose for people. A nose for trouble."

Before anyone could reply, Apollo felt his phone buzz from his bag, and moved to pull the device out and examine it.

"What is it?" Luke asked.

Apollo smiled as he examined the phone screen, almost laughing in relief. "It's Ernest," he explained. "Looks like they're finally done questioning Wocky!"

"Finally!" Trucy cheered.

"Then we'd better get going before they pull him aside again," Luke pointed out with a smile, then turned to Plum and tipped his cap. "Thank you for all your help, Missus Kitaki!"

Plum laughed. "You can repay me by helping my son!" she replied, and watched as the trio dashed off back towards home.

View the Court Record
When the trio arrived at the detention center, Ernest had proudly informed them he'd found a loophole enabling them access to Apollo's client until seven, prompting Trucy to insist she give him a massive hug in thanks. After only a moment of basking in the Wrights' gratitude, the young officer let them in to the visitor's room, then disappeared to fetch Wocky on the other side.

Apollo was quick to settle into one of the fold-up chairs by the glass, but Luke and Trucy hung back.

"Do you want to sit down this time?" Luke asked his sister.

Trucy shook her head. "You can sit down if you want," she insisted.

Apollo tried not to roll his eyes and sarcastically suggest they share the seat. Knowing them, the pair would probably go ahead and do just that.

The green door leading to the holding cells opened, and a guard escorted in the male teen in his brightly coloured jacket, said teen grinning widely with eyes closed as he sauntered cockily to the lone chair on the other side of the glass, waving at Trucy. "Yo, 'sup, my little impostor!"

Trucy jumped with a squeal, caught off guard by his sudden appearance. "Wh-what did you call me?"

Wocky blinked in surprise. "Dizzam! It's you!?" he said, then lowered himself into the chair with a huff. "Sorry, G, thought you were Alita."

"'My little impostor' sure is a strange nickname," Trucy pointed out, crossing her arms and looking unimpressed.

"It's a clink thang, you wouldn't understand," Wocky scoffed, before his eyes widened and he crossed his arms, trying to look casual. "D-did I say 'impostor'? I meant 'poster'," he claimed, "like 'poster girl', 'aight?"

Trucy just stared. "If you're going to drop part of that, why not drop 'poster' and just call her 'girl'?"

"'Cause she's so much more than that, G," Wocky explained, looking a little wistful as he spoke of his fiancée. "She's like... She's like an angel. A fallen angel."

Apollo noticed Luke frowning as he stared intensely at the floor, and wondered what his younger brother was thinking.

"So," Wocky continued, looking to his lawyer, "what can I do you for?"

Trucy studied Wocky's subdued demeanour for a few moments. "You don't look so chipper today, Wocky."

Apollo couldn't blame him. "Worried about your, um," *How to put this delicately?* "heart condition, maybe?"
Wocky tensed up, avoiding their gazes. "M-man... I ain't trying to hear that!" he cried, a faint warbling in his voice that he seemed to be doing his best to disguise. "A man fights to protect what's valuable to him, you know what I'm saying?" He paused, letting out a long sigh. After a short silence, he declared, "I miss my fallen angel!" and pointed at Apollo. "Hey, you go get Alita for me. You're my lawyer, aren't you?"

Apollo just glared at him in response. 'Lawyer, not gofer,' he mentally replied, but decided to otherwise ignore the request and get to business. "So, I hear you're to be married next month?"

"Straight up!" Wocky replied, instantly cheered by the thought of his fiancée. "We poured the nuptial forty out on the stoop!" He sighed wistfully, a silly grin much like the one in the photo Alita herself had shown them on his face. "Alita! Oh, snapplecakes! She sooooo foine!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow.

"If we might ask," Luke spoke up, stepping towards the glass but not sitting down, "how did you and Miss Tiala meet?"

"Ooh, yeah, we asked her that earlier!" Trucy added with a grin, then frowned. "She was... very vague."

Wocky seemed surprised to hear that. "Well, man, if she wouldn't tell you, I'd best hold my tongue, you feel me?"

Luke stared. "But-"

"Man, what's past is past, she knows that," Wocky continued, waving a hand dismissively. "When I'm with Alita, I feel like there's things worth protecting out there, you feel me? And my Alita, she's down with that all the way."

Apollo and Luke shared a frustrated look. The younger brother sighed, deciding to change track by asking, "What about Pal Meraktis? Could you go over your relationship with him?"

The teen scoffed at the word 'relationship', but agreed to answer regardless: "There's something you should know. We Kitakis are having what you might call a feud with the Rivales Family." He sniffed, rubbing at his nose. "So, 'bout six months back, I go into Rivales turf, packing a knife, right?"

"And you were shot?" Trucy filled in, slowly sitting down in the free chair.

"Coldest thing I ever seen," Wocky sighed, shaking his head. "One shot, to the heart, but my homies weren't too late. It's a miracle that I lived." He grinned proudly. "It's already considered one of the seven wonders of the Kitaki Family, you know that?"

Apollo decided not to comment. "So you were taken to the Meraktis Clinic then?"

Wocky snorted in laughter. "You shoulda seen their faces when they wheeled me in," he said. "You can't just let the Boss's son die, you know?"

"I can imagine," Luke sympathised. "Even so, he should have admitted if he couldn't remove that bullet."

"That doctor... He did it on purpose!" Wocky growled, arms crossed. "The Rivales paid him off, I'm sure of it!"
Luke frowned. "I highly doubt that," he replied. "Any surgery involving going into the ribcage would be difficult; It's more likely it was just beyond his skill range and he was too scared to admit it."

Wocky ignored him, staring off to the side. "Life in the Family is a G thang," he said, changing the subject. "It's about being a man. You know what I'm saying?"

Trucy shook her head. "Sorry, I'm not up on my G things," she replied. "I'm not even sure what a G thing is..."

"Please don't use that phrase ever again, Truce," Apollo muttered, pressing a hand to his face as he tried to unhear what he'd almost misheard in Trucy's words.

"But my old man, he's gone soft," Wocky continued with a glare. "He says the old rival gang days are over. He just wants to make money!"

"Isn't that a good thing?" Trucy asked.

Wocky shook his head. "Man, there ain't no soul in making money!" he proclaimed. "Better to live fast and die young. Fo'shizzle!"

Luke was giving the teen an intense stare. "You seem a lot more confident about that now than you were in court this morning."

The teenager didn't reply, awkwardly looking away and pretending he hadn't heard the young vet.

Apollo hid a smile, distracting himself by pulling out his Court Record and once again flipping to the photos of the pistol and knife. "About these weapons," he began, flipping the computer around to show Wocky the screen. "The pistol and the knife."

Wocky sniffed as he gave the tablet computer a nod. "They belong to the Family," he confirmed. "I snuck 'em out that night."

Luke quietly grunted to himself in thought, rubbing his chin distractedly.

"So the 'killer' Mister Stickler says he saw that night was you?" Apollo asked, reluctant to fully believe it despite their ordeal in court that morning.

Wocky shrugged, looking unsure. "Guess so," he admitted. "I was there, after all."

Apollo was surprised; After all his bluster that morning, it seemed that truthfully Wocky was as confused about who fired the fatal shot as the court was. It was looking less and less likely that it had been the teenager at all.

Trucy thought a moment, then waved her arms in an imitation of some of Wocky's mannerisms. "Yo, Wocky!" Her act was promptly ruined by the big grin she gave the elder teen. "Do you think you could tell us exactly what happened that night?"

Instead of being offended, Wocky seemed amused at the girl (A lot like his mother in that respect, Apollo mused). "Heh... You don't beat around the bush do you?" he asked with a small smile. "I like your style, shorty."

Trucy shot a proud grin at her brother, Apollo smiling in return.

"Thing is... I dunno if I was the one who shot 'im or not," Wocky explained, arms crossed. "The day
of that check-up, when I found out about the bullet by my heart..." He paused, frowning uneasily. "I... borrowed a gun from the Family's stash. Figured I'd give that doctor a taste of his own bad medicine."

Apollo frowned. It was disheartening to hear Wocky had been the one to take the gun after all.

"But you were carrying a knife, weren't you?" Trucy asked, confused.

"Oh, that?" Wocky asked, smirking a little at the reminder. "Yeah, well, never can be too careful, I say." He paused, his smile dying as he returned his train of thought to the murder. "So I'm on my way to the clinic, right, when I run into him in the park... and he's dragging this noodle stand behind him!"

"Wait, you didn't put him up to that?" Trucy again interrupted. "Like, you know, in the movies?" She put on a deep voice, holding her hand to her face like a phone. "If you value your life, you'll bring the stand...!"

Wocky gave the girl a strange look. "Shorty, you're more wacked than I am," he said. "And that's saying something."

Trucy seemed disappointed. "But I was serious!" She didn't notice her two brothers hiding smiles at their sister's antics.

"The thing is," Wocky sighed, "I don't remember what happened next all too well."

"You don't?" Apollo repeated, surprised.

"I mean, I don't know what's going on with all the extra witnesses and everything," Wocky continued, "but it looks like it was probably me, you know what I'm saying?"

Apollo frowned. 'Man, even with all the evidence against it, the prosecution's argument has a firm grip on everyone it touches, doesn't it?'

Luke shook his head. "Wocky, if I might ask... do you remember for sure if you brought that gun with you or not when you went to find Meraktis?" He gave the teen a stern look. "Don't give me a guess or an assumption, just tell me what you know for sure."

Wocky thought hard for a few moments. "Man, I... I don't remember," he eventually replied. "But, the way I see it, I got that gun from the stash, and it shot the doc, so... Who else could it be, you know?"

Luke pondered the answer a second or two before giving Wocky a smile and a nod. "Thank you, Wocky," he told the teen. "You've been a lot of help."

View the Court Record
The Wrights heard the screaming long before they found where it was coming from. Since their talk with Plum, the section of street around the Kitaki Mansion's gate and the park entrance opposite had been surrounded by a small crowd of mostly teenage girls, a pair of harried police officers doing their best to hold the hysterically screaming onlookers back from the park entrance as they jumped up at the nearby fence. Fortunately, it appeared the young women were relatively well-behaved, respecting the far-too-short line they were given and their obsession with the fence keeping them out of the way of any potential passing traffic... not that their apparent good-will for passers-by could repay for the incredible noise they were generating.

Luke pressed his hands to his ears with a frown. "That screaming was coming from here!?!"

"What are they even screaming about?!" Trucy added, clearly uncomfortable with the noise but trying to hide it, restraining herself from copying Luke.

Apollo could only shrug, noticing with a glance at the mansion that Plum appeared to have fled from the racket of the street... not that he could imagine her having much luck inside the house, either. "They're trying to get a glimpse of the crime scene, probably," he guessed.

"Why?!" Luke cried over the din, exasperated. "What is there possibly worth screaming about in there?!"

As Apollo's eyes wandered across the scene, he then noticed a brightly shining motorcycle, resting partially in front of the archway over the park entrance; Its red-purple colouring was broken only by the stylised G on its side. 'Gavin!' His expression hardened to a glare, and he grabbed Trucy's shoulder, keeping her close with a firm grip. "I think I know why." Before allowing either of his siblings to speak, he carefully led them around the shrieking crowd and towards the unguarded park entrance.

"Omigod, it's him!!" a high-pitched shout came from the onlookers, and their screams instantly doubled in volume, the throng shifting dangerously close to the archway, despite the valiant efforts of the two officers to hold them back. The source of their heightened activity wasn't far away, as, a moment later, a tall blond figure appeared from the park, grinning in delight as he ducked under the police tape.

Apollo heard Luke gasp as he recognised Klavier, his hands even finally managing to leave his ears. Trucy, however, was quiet, staring between Klavier and the clump of teenagers clamouring after him with a strange look on her face - It struck Apollo that the girls in the throng all appeared to be awfully close to his sister's age.

Klavier looked up, spotting the trio only a meter or two away. "Ah! If it isn't Herr Forehead," he called, waving the Wrights closer.

Apollo felt his siblings' gazes on him, looking for assurance on how to respond. After a quick squeeze of Trucy's shoulder to offer comfort, he slid his hand off, stepping in front of her protectively...
as he approached the man between them and their destination inside the park. "Prosecutor Gavin," he replied, his siblings close behind.

Klavier chuckled, either ignoring or not noticing the continued guarded expressions the Wrights sported around him. He gestured to the screaming throng next to them, slowly being pushed further back by the harried officers. "Some fans found me on my way out," he explained. "Just my luck."

"Thus the screams," Apollo muttered disapprovingly, arms crossed.

"New album just came out, you know," Klavier added, still grinning in amusement. After a pause, he nodded his head towards the small crowd. "Try waving to them. They love it."

Apollo raised an eyebrow, but made no move to do anything - He'd had plenty of experience with excited fans before (though none to this extent of hysterics), and had no desire to interact with someone else's. At his side, he saw Luke hesitantly watching the babble of teens, then slowly lifting a hand and meekly waving. Immediately, the screams of the crowd shot up in pitch and volume, some of the girls looking almost ready to faint in sheer excitement.

Klavier laughed. "They're so excited, it doesn't matter who waves to them, see?" he pointed out.

Luke grimaced. "I don't know how you can stand that kind of constant attention, Mister Gavin."

"Ah, it's not for everyone, I'll give you that!" Klavier agreed.

Feeling someone clinging to his cape, Apollo spared his sister at his side a glance; Trucy was watching the squealing rabble of music-lovers with that same strange look she'd had earlier, her hand tightly gripping her brother's cape around where his arm would have been had he not crossed them. His brow wrinkled in concern, and he reached out a hand to take Trucy's grip, her eyes looking up to meet his in surprise. Seeing Apollo's worried look, she gave him a smile, taking his hand.

Apollo wanted to ask his sister what was on her mind, but there was the more pressing concern of Klavier Gavin to deal with first, so he quickly returned Trucy's smile, making a mental note to check up on her later. Turning a stern gaze on the prosecutor in front of him, he asked, "You're here investigating, I take it?"

Klavier nodded, still as friendly as could be. "And I was on my way home... when my hog gave up the ghost."

Luke frowned, confused. "Your 'hog'...?"

"My motorcycle won't start," Klavier explained with a sigh, gesturing to the nearby bike. "A clogged exhaust pipe."

"Oh, that's awful!" Luke gasped, looking far more sympathetic than Apollo was comfortable with. "How did that happen?"

"Ach, I think I was using the wrong oil," Klavier admitted, shaking his head. "My own fault, really. Cars, motorbikes, they're all the same: Clog the exhaust, and they won't run."


Klavier turned to the young lawyer with a smile. "Ah, tell me you share our angst, Herr Forehead," he said.

Apollo's frown deepened. "I ride a bicycle, actually."
The prosecutor shrugged off the comment with a chuckle. "In any event, I'm waiting to get her off to the shop to be fixed. The detective in charge of the scene isn't fond of me, anyway."

"Detective Skye, you mean?" Luke asked, apparently as surprised as Apollo.

"Ja," Klavier replied, nodding. "She's in a foul mood, too. Be gentle."

Before any more words could be exchanged, there was a fluttering of wings, and a large crow landed heavily on Luke's head, chattering over the din of the thronging fans nearby. Klavier, Apollo and Trucy jumped back in surprise, but Luke, looking up at his cawing visitor, grinned widely, holding up an arm that the bird was quick to jump to. "Corbin!" he quietly cried. "Sorry, what was that?"

As the crow made more chattering noises at Luke, Apollo turned his attention to Klavier: The prosecutor was still staring at the black bird on Luke's arm with wide eyes, but, as he watched Luke nod along to the crow's chattering, his expression turned more curious. A moment later, he seemed to notice Apollo's glare, his eyes flicking over to meet the unapologetic young magician's, and he shot his fellow lawyer a grin.

"Agreed," Luke said with a bashful smile as the crow's cries stopped, casting a glance at the crowd. "I'll see you in a moment."

The crow bobbed its head in a nod, then took flight in the direction of the park.

Trucy, pulling out of Apollo's grip on her hand, jumped to Luke's side with an excited smile. "Was that Corbin?" she asked. "What'd he say? Has he found out something!?"

Luke laughed. "I don't know yet!" he replied. "We have to talk somewhere... quieter." He gestured to the crowd, a wry smile on his face.

"Ohhhh!" Trucy said in realisation, then tapped the side of her nose knowingly. "Gotcha."

Giggling at his sister's antics, Luke looked up to meet Apollo's expectant gaze. "We should go investigate the crime scene, Apollo," he instructed. "Maybe question a witness." He grinned, giving his brother a wink.

Apollo smiled, rolling his eyes good-naturedly. "Maybe you could keep from advertising it this time?" he replied, earning chuckles from his siblings. "I'd like not to have a heart-attack before I'm thirty."

"Tell that to Daddy!" Trucy joked. "He's the one throwing himself under cars!"

Luke shook his head, deciding to ignore their sister's remark. "I'll... keep that in mind," he agreed, sheepishly shrugging.

"Shall I escort you in again, then?" Klavier asked.

Apollo almost jumped at the interruption, having forgotten the prosecutor was there. He gave Klavier a stern look. "We know where the crime scene is," he pointed out. "We don't need help finding it."

Klavier wasn't discouraged, still giving the Wrights a friendly smile. "In that case," he continued, "I would like to accompany Herr Triton in order to question him again... as a witness."

"Oh really?" Apollo growled, glaring at the man. "What a co-incidence."

"It's alright, Apollo," Luke insisted, giving his brother a smile. "We're all trying to find out what
really happened, aren't we?"

Apollo sent his brother a raised eyebrow. "Are you serious?" he hissed. "We can't trust a Gavin to seriously care about the truth!"


After a very long stare, Apollo sighed, backing down. "Fine," he agreed.

"Thank you," Luke sincerely replied, smiling. Without another word, he took Trucy's hand and the pair headed off into the park.

Klavier looked to Apollo with a grin. "Shall we go?"

Apollo glared in return. "Just so you know, I don't trust you," he spat. "You try anything else on my family, I'll make sure to take you down like you took down our dad."

The prosecutor stared evenly for several long moments. "Your wariness is reasonable, Herr Wright," he replied in a neutral tone, nodding in acknowledgement as he stepped back, apparently backing down. "I won't argue you on that." His piece said, he turned and followed Luke and Trucy under the police tape, his fans squealing louder as he disappeared from their sight.

Apollo caught up to his siblings just around the first corner of the path, hidden from the entrance behind a row of hedges that also significantly dampened the din of Klavier's fans. Corbin had once more found Luke, sitting on his arm and chattering away while its wings twitched repeatedly in irritation; Luke's muttered apologies and bashful look said it all. Trucy was standing nearby, intently watching as though she shared Luke's ability, and Klavier moved to join her, looking curious about the whole thing. Apollo made sure to keep a watchful eye on the prosecutor as he stood at his brother's side.

"I've said how sorry I am, Corbin," Luke pointed out to the large bird. "I can't apologise enough for taking so long to get back to you, but we do have a time limit for solving this puzzle; Could I possibly ask you to tell me what more you know?"

The crow paused, studying the young vet for a few moments. It then much more calmly took up its chatter again, head bobbing animatedly.

"I see," Luke muttered thoughtfully, stroking his goatee. "That's a shame... Thank you for trying, though. You've been a lot of help."

The crow cawed once, then took off once again into the trees.

Luke looked around at the assembled group with a smile. "Corbin's been trying to find anyone else who witnessed the murder, but anyone he found couldn't tell us anything new."

Apollo sighed, rolling his eyes. "Seriously? This is why we don't use animal testimonies, Luke!"

"I'm not done," Luke calmly continued. "He was able to clarify a few things about what he'd already told me in his own testimony; Namely, our mystery person."

"What'd he say?" Trucy demanded, excited to be closer to solving the case. "Did he find who it is!?"
Luke laughed. "Unfortunately not," he admitted, "but not from a lack of trying. Like I said yesterday, birds have awful night vision, so he couldn't pick anything out about their appearance. He did say they ran in the same direction as Wocky did, though."

"Which doesn't tell us anything," Apollo grumbled.

"On the contrary, it tells us more than you might think. Herr Forehead," Klavier spoke up, shooting the attorney a smirk.

Apollo resisted the urge to tell the other man to shut up.

"He also elaborated on the version of events as he saw it," Luke continued. "He wasn't paying attention to Meraktis and Wocky's conversation, but he said Stickler stuck around slightly longer than Wocky did after the shot. He also said the person who came out of the noodle stand stayed nearby for a little while; They walked around to Meraktis' body before leaving the scene."

"Checking on the corpse?" Apollo asked.

"Or perhaps planting evidence, ja?" Klavier pointed out.

Luke shrugged, giving Klavier a small smile. "I'm sorry you can't make much use of this officially... Mister Keyboard."

Klavier chuckled, not offended by the nickname. "I will keep it in mind as the investigation goes forward," he promised. "We can consider it an anonymous tip." With that, he gave the Wrights a brief salute and began to amble back out of the park. "Auf Wiedersehen, baby! Until tomorrow!"

Apollo growled quietly to himself until the tall man was out-of-sight, then turned his stern gaze on his siblings. "Let's not include him in our investigation from now on, okay?"

Trucy nodded obediently, but Luke just looked slightly frustrated. "I can't make any promises, Apollo," he sighed.

The elder brother stared back for several moments in silence before nodding. "Fine. Let's go talk to the detective."

View the Court Record
The first thing the Wrights noticed about the crime scene as they approached was the blinding blue of the tarps now restricted to a small pile on the side, exposing the previously covered ground. Nothing else about the area seemed to have changed... except that their new detective friend and her labcoat were nowhere to be seen.

" Didn't Mister Gavin say she was still here?" Luke mused aloud.

Trucy looked around curiously, wandering down the path ahead until she had rounded the noodle stand, her face lighting up as she looked down towards the location of the mesh bin. "There she is!" she informed her brothers, pointing ahead as Luke and Apollo moved to catch up. "She seems to be apologising reverently," she continued, confused, "to the trash can."

Apollo's eyebrows shot up as he came into view of the odd sight, seeing Ema leaning forward towards the red bin as though sharing a secret with it. "She's... under a lot of stress," he told his sister. "The investigation's probably not going so well."

Ema suddenly shot up, spinning around to shoot the trio a glare. "Hey, you!" she called. "If you're going to talk about someone behind their back, do it more quietly, please!"

Apollo jumped in surprise, turning red in shame. "Oh, Detective Skye," he replied, as his sister proceeded to whistle innocently. "Hello."

"Is something the matter?" Luke added, hiding an amused smile at his siblings being caught out.

Ema threw her hands up in the air as she stalked towards the Wrights. "This is miserable!" she declared. "Miserable! My new kit doesn't work when it's supposed to, and everyone's all smiles for that glimmerous fop!"

"Glimmerous...?" Trucy repeated, then her confused frown morphed to a smile of realisation. "Oh, do you mean Prosecutor Gavin?"

"And 'glamorous'?" Apollo added with a raised eyebrow.

Ema scoffed. "When he walks, his shiny chains catch the sun and glimmer in my eyes!" she explained. "It's distracting." With that, she pulled her bag of food from her purse and loudly began to munch on it.

Apollo restrained himself from pointing out the hypocrisy of her irritating chewing.

"I guess I just have to accept the fact that I lack talent," Ema sighed to herself, her gaze on the darkening sky above.

Luke seemed to have zoned out of the conversation, looking around at the newly-exposed ground thoughtfully. "Detective Skye, did you say you'd been able to analyse that shoeprint we found?"

Ema nodded, putting away her food with a smile. "To a degree," she replied, waving for the trio to
follow her as she made her way back towards the bin. "I've been testing out my footprint analysis kit! It was raining the night of the murder, so I've found footprints from everyone who was on the scene!" She paused, looking back at Luke. "Except for you, apparently. We'd need to get a shoeprint from you, anyway."

Luke blushed, rubbing the back of his head. "Uhh, if you insist, of course. It's no problem..."

The detective didn't seem to notice his sudden nervousness, crouching back down beside the bin to a small box full of equipment sitting on the stone path; Apollo could make out a measuring cup, several bags of powder and a rolling pin. "Here it is!" she proudly announced as Luke and Trucy crouched at her sides, Apollo deciding to just lean over them from behind. "Ever wanted to know exactly where someone was standing? Like your panty-snatching student witness, for instance?"

Trucy gasped in amazement. "You found his footprints!?"

"Yep!" Ema replied, grinning. She dug around in her box, then pulled out a small stack of papers, the top one Apollo quickly recognised as a rough representation of the crime scene, littered with sketchy footprints, each one individually labelled. Ema flipped through the stack, briefly showing off the numbered sheets beneath and the inky blackness of a life-size shoeprint each one sported. "I've been busy, in what little time I had this place to myself today! Every single dent in the mud, scientifically catalogued and numbered!"

Apollo couldn't help but be impressed; Ema had clearly been working hard since they'd spoken to her last.

"See this one here?" Ema continued, pointing to a barely-visible print in the grass nearby. "That's your Mister Stickler's right foot! He was standing exactly here at the time of the murder."

Luke giggled. "That's amazing, Detective Skye!" he congratulated her. "It's a pity you couldn't get these put together earlier, to confirm Stickler was lying about where he was!"

Ema scoffed, but still looked proud of her work. "Oh, pshaw! I'd still be putting all this together if you guys hadn't given me a heads-up!" Hugging her stack of paper to her chest, she stood up and headed back towards the noodle stand, the Wrights at her heels. "And over here is where we found Wocky Kitaki's footprints!" A moment later, she was pointing the trio to a second dent in the ground, opposite the location of the body on the other side of the paved path. "More proof he was in the park on the night of the crime!"

"Wow!" Trucy cried. "I can almost see the science at work!"

"Don't you love it!?" Ema excitedly replied, almost bouncing in delight. "Ah, nothing feels better!"

Apollo hid a smile; As fun as using forensics to investigate a scene was, he was never going to be as into it as their detective friend.

Luke frowned, turning back towards the noodle stand. "And the other person on the scene?" he asked. "Or is that what you meant by your kit 'not working'?"

Ema's enthusiasm faded. "Oh, yeah, that one..." She sighed, pulling the very back paper from her stack. "I got a print, but this is unlike any kind of shoe I've ever seen before. It's too smooth." She then held the sheet out for the Wrights to take.

Apollo and Luke shot each other a glance as they briefly and silently debated who would take the paper, and eventually it was the older brother who reached out to examine the offered shoeprint, his siblings watching over his shoulders. Just as Ema had promised, the print from their missing witness
looked too smooth to be a regular shoe sole, though its shape proved it was definitely a form of footwear. The most distinctive thing about it was the large imprint of a leaf under the ball of the foot, likely fallen from the tree above.

"I don't even need to look to know I can't match this to anything on file," Ema added. "It's... certainly unique. Not from a regular shoe, at least."

Luke hummed in thought, stroking his chin. "Actually, it looks like we could help you with this one," he admitted, shooting his siblings a smile.

"Oh?" Ema replied, an eyebrow raised as she placed her stack of shoeprints gently in her purse.

Trucy frowned in confusion as she looked to Luke. "We can?"

Apollo slowly smiled as he realised what his brother was referring to. "Of course we can," he told Trucy. "You remember those shoes we found yesterday? Not far from here?"

The youngest Wright stared at Apollo for a moment before her face lit up in realisation. "Oh!" She immediately shoved her hands into the bag at her hip, digging around with an excited grin for several moments before emerging with one of Apollo's evidence bags, a pair of green slippers visible within. "Here's our culprit!" she announced, proudly holding out the item for Ema to take.

"Slippers...?" Ema muttered, almost snatching the bag from Trucy's hands and popping it open with a frown, staring at the footwear within. "What would slippers be doing out here?"

"Have a look at the soles, Detective," Luke instructed, hiding a grin. "Specifically, the one on the left."

Ema raised an eyebrow at the young man, then obediently pulled the left slipper from the bag, flipping it around to examine the sole. "It's covered in paint." A moment later, her eyes widened in surprise. "Hey, that spot is shaped like a leaf!"

Apollo grinned. "What if a leaf was stuck on the bottom, and came off when the slipper stepped in paint?" he pointed out. "Makes sense, doesn't it?"

The detective didn't reply, flipping the shoe in her hand around again to examine the other side. "Hang on, something's written on this," she mumbled, then gasped again. '"The Meraktis Clinic!'"

Trucy gasped along with her. "I forgot about that!" she cried, then looked up to her brothers. "Wait, that means... that someone from the clinic was involved?"

Luke nodded, a serious look on his face. "Like I said before, this missing witness has some kind of connection to the victim. They would have come here together from the clinic that night."

Ema was peering intently inside the slipper in her hand. "Hey, I think I see a toe mark," she commented.

Apollo was surprised, having not thought to look inside, and couldn't help but feel excited at the thought of lifting a print. "You think we can get a print off that?" he asked.

"Sure!" Ema replied, grinning widely. "Toes have prints just like fingers do, you know." Before Apollo had much of a chance to get his hopes up though, she was frowning again. "Oh, but there's one problem: The police station doesn't keep a record of toe prints, so we won't know whose it is."

"Oh," Apollo muttered in disappointment. He didn't miss his siblings hiding giggles. "So, even if we
lifted a print, we'd just be wasting our time?"

Ema stared at the slipper in her hand for several moments before putting it in the bag with its twin and handing the item back to Trucy. "Not necessarily," she said. "If you find another toe print somewhere, I can compare them for you to see if they match. That's probably your only hope for finding this guy." That said, the detective had pulled out her bag of food, throwing the chocolate sticks into her mouth as she glared into the distance.

The trio stood in silence, each deep in thought. After a moment, Trucy replaced the slippers in her bag and stepped forward towards Ema. "Um, Detective Skye? We have a favour to ask!"

The detective jumped in surprise, looking down to the teen. "What?"

"Can you get us access to the Meraktis Clinic?" Apollo asked, still holding the shoeprint in his hands.

"The police won't let us in!" Trucy added. "They say the murder and the clinic aren't connected, and it's off limits until we prove they are!"

Ema continued munching on her treats for a few moments before slowly smiling, looking somewhat smug. "I should be able to do something for you, yes," she said the moment her mouth was clear.

"Thank you so much, Detective!" Luke replied, giving her a grin. "That would be so much help!"

"Well, you did my work for me here with the slippers and all," Ema reasoned, shrugging. "Seems like I should return the favour." She shoved her bag of food back in her purse, grabbing the shoeprint from Apollo to return to her stockpile, then pulled out a blank paper and a pen. A few minutes later, once she'd found a hard surface to write on, Ema folded up the handwritten letter with a grin, handing it proudly to Apollo. "Here," she instructed. "Show this to the police officer on duty."

"Thank you again, Detective," Apollo replied, taking the paper and giving it a brief glance (he noted she had drawn a small heart by her name, in much the same way he and Trucy had taken to drawing diamonds in theirs).

"Don't mention it," Ema insisted with a grin, waving the trio off. "Now go find that witness!"

View the Court Record
Apollo grumbled as he checked his watch. 'Just over an hour until showtime. We're really pushing it today.'

Trucy was in the lead as the trio arrived outside the clinic, and skipped to the door with Ema's letter clutched tightly in hand. Just as before, she jumped up the steps and knocked on the glass door, giving the officer within a wide grin as he reluctantly pulled it open.

"Ah, you three again," the officer sighed, shooting Trucy in particular a stern look. "When oh when will you learn. Look at me however you want, you're not getting in today."

"I wouldn't be so sure if I were you!" Trucy giggled, then held up the letter for him to take. "Look what we have!"

The officer raised an eyebrow, warily eyeing the rather smug Luke and Apollo standing nearby before taking the folded piece of paper. "What's this?" he asked, opening it up to read. A few moments later, he was sputtering in surprise. "Detective Skye!?!" He then gave the trio a suspicious glare. "Yesterday it was Prosecutor Gavin, today it's Detective Skye. Who are you three? Really?"

Luke scoffed, arms crossed. "Excuse me, but yesterday Prosecutor Gavin just happened to be nearby when you agreed to let us in. He's not related to this at all."

Apollo resisted the urge to giggle at the reminder of how Luke had essentially blackmailed the man before them into letting them into the park, and, to the officer's credit, he was beginning to look appropriately embarrassed.

"W-well, you got the orders," the officer mumbled, pulling the door wide open. "I gotta let you in. Have fun." With that, he stepped out, waving the trio into the room beyond.

"Thanks, Mister Officer!" Trucy chirped as she skipped inside, her brothers at her heels.

The first thing Apollo noticed as they entered the Meraktis Clinic's reception was just how homely the place looked. The walls around the entrance were wallpapered with a pattern almost Victorian in style, and there were a few paintings hung up to cover them. A fake pot of white hibiscus sat on one side by a reasonably sized aquarium complete with fish (Apollo half-wondered if the officer was feeding them), and underneath a low set of shelves held an array of identical green slippers, the two long rows broken only by the conspicuous gap at one end of the upper level. The slippers we found at the park, covered in the paint from the hit and run...' Below, sitting on the black tiles of the doorway area, were a pair of women's sandals, high-heeled with blue strapping.

Luke immediately made for the abandoned footwear, crouching down to examine them without yet touching them himself. "Hmm... That makes sense..."
Trucy jumped up onto the step leading inside, crouching opposite Luke with a grin. "Does Doctor Meraktis have a visitor?"

"Truce!" Apollo barked, waving at his sister to get down off the white tiles of the clinic interior. "Take your boots off!"

"Can't tell me not to!" Trucy sang in response, running off into reception and giggling madly.

While Apollo rolled his eyes, Luke chuckled in amusement. "With Meraktis dead, no-one's going to mind if we don't, just this once," the younger brother pointed out.

"Fine, fine," Apollo sighed, crouching at his brother's side and deciding to let his teenage sister run off some steam. "Obviously these shoes can't be from a current visitor, given this place is vacant," he continued, changing the subject. "Besides, a friendly visitor would have used his house entrance instead of the clinic entrance, right?"

Luke nodded, a stern frown on his face. "Exactly. We need to get these to Detective Skye."

Apollo was able to connect enough dots in his head to realise why, but halted halfway to pulling an evidence bag from his stash. "Those are too big for one of the baggies," he pointed out.

"Just get out the biggest one, then," Luke replied, picking up the left sandal. "The toe of this shoe is the important part to protect."

A moment later, the left sandal had been shoved toe-first into the largest of Apollo's evidence bags, the massive heel causing it to stick out considerably. Luke was putting away both shoes in his satchel when finally Trucy reappeared, bouncing on her heels. "Hey, Polly, guess what I just figured out!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, standing up. "Am I going to regret answering that?"

Trucy giggled. "Mister Eldoon must do take-out!" she replied, and pointed around the corner of the nearby reception desk behind her. "I guess he was still friends with Doctor Meraktis after all!"

"What do you-?" Apollo's question was halfway out of his mouth before he realised what his sister was really saying behind the gleefully ignorant jokes. Eyes widening in surprise, he dashed up onto the white tiles, circling Trucy and coming face-to-face with a small pile of distinctive red and white bowls, each one with the hand-painted logo of the Eldoon's Noodles mascot on the inside. "The bowls!" he cried, dropping to his knees to examine them more closely.

"They've been washed clean," Trucy added, following him with a smile. "I already looked."

Apollo almost laughed in relief, looking up to see Luke catching up behind their sister, unsurprised by the pile of crockery. He shot his younger brother a smirk. "You were probably expecting this, weren't you?"

Luke innocently smiled and gave his brother a shrug.

A loud thump echoed from down the corridor.

Instantly, the trio's eyes all locked on a door at the end of the dark passageway to Apollo's left, underneath a glowing green emergency exit sign. Although the door had a glass window, it was covered by flattened blinds on the other side, blocking any view either in or out. A placard nearby labelled the room beyond as "Doctor's Office".
"I th-think someone's in there!" Trucy whispered, jumping to Luke's side and clinging to his arm, both of them staring wide-eyed at the distant door as Luke hugged his sister protectively.

The sight of his siblings' fear prompted Apollo to gather his courage, slowly standing up with a determined frown. "Let's check it out, then," he announced, and strode forward, boots thudding methodically along the square tiles beneath. Without even pausing to consider what he might find, he grabbed the door handle (surprisingly, it wasn't locked), and threw the door open, jumping through into the room beyond.

The office was a mess. It was also empty. Apollo's gaze locked on instantly to a tall window by the important-looking desk at the other side of the room, open just enough to allow someone to slip out into the green garden beyond. "$They went that way!" he cried, and was moving to run after them before he felt a hand grab his arm, and turned to see his siblings had caught up, Trucy's gloved hands pulling her eldest brother to a stop.

"We're too late to catch them now," Trucy pointed out, shaking her head morosely. "$They must have heard us coming."

Apollo sighed, deciding to heed his sister's advice. "We should at least tell the police," he replied.

"Not yet," Luke insisted, pushing past his brother to look around the office. "$Look at this, Apollo." He turned, giving his siblings a smile. "$I think this is exactly the break we've been looking for."

"Huh?" At his brother's insistence, Apollo gave the room a more careful sweep: It was even more fancy than the reception had been, a darker wallpaper and wood panelling encircling a deep purple carpet covering the floor. Twin lounge chairs sat either side of the entrance, their matching cushions thrown asunder, and all the furniture - the heavy brick of a desk, a nearby table along the wall, room-height shelves along the back full of jars containing a variety of fish - was made of the same dark wood, built to match the elegant stylings of the existing room. What was most strange about it however was the pattern of mess the burglar had left behind: Upturned books on the floor, a spilled glass and accompanying bottle, a potted plant that had been tipped on its side, leaning heavily against the nearby table. On a hunch, Apollo stepped forward and knelt down to look at the dropped bottle (he almost laughed that he could instantly recognise it as grape juice, the same brand their father always bought), finding the dark stain its contents had left in the carpet was long dry. "$This was knocked over a while ago."

Luke nodded, glad to have convinced Apollo to stay, and headed around the desk to examine the plant in its pot. "$Very unusual for a burglar to be looking under a plant, too," he pointed out, righting the object.

"This mess is even worse than Daddy's room," Trucy huffed to herself, arms crossed. "$What was the burglar looking for? The key to the safe?"

Apollo looked up, belatedly noticing the large safe nestled amongst the jars of fish in the shelves behind the desk. "$I've heard of house keys under plants, but the key to a safe?" he asked as he got to his feet.

"Then maybe they were looking for the house keys!" Trucy replied with a grin.

"Unlikely," Luke told their sister, shaking his head. "$Remember, there's an officer standing guard outside, and a patrol car very visibly out the front. A run-of-the-mill burglar would be avoiding this place."

Trucy rested her hands on her hips, face scrunched up in thought. "$Then who was it breaking in?"
"Whoever it was, they obviously needed to do it today," Apollo realised, sharing a look with his brother that told him Luke had a very good idea of who it was already.

"Ooh, look at this!" Trucy suddenly cooed, rushing past Apollo and crouching by a small table lamp sat on the carpet, its cord stretching up over the desk to an out-of-sight power point elsewhere. "Kind of an expensive-looking lamp, isn’t it?" Before Apollo could tell her to leave the object alone, she was peering into the bright blue shade covering the bulb, frowning in disappointment. "Hey, the bulb's broken!"

"Broken?" Apollo repeated, suddenly intrigued as he moved to his sister's side. "Don't you mean burned out?"

Trucy shook her head, looking up at her brother. "No. Our cat burglar must have dropped it." She promptly stood up, waving for Luke to come and see himself.

Apollo frowned as he also peeked inside the shade, seeing the smashed bulb as Trucy had said. "But why is it standing up on the floor like that then?" he still pointed out.

"Hey, look at the cord!" Trucy instead cried, and Apollo looked up to see his siblings leaning over where the black cord stretched across the top of the desk.

"There's some kind of red mark on it," Luke added as their brother stood to join them, pointing out a soft red splotch on the black plastic covering the fragile wire. "See?"

It was easy for Apollo's mind to jump to the worst conclusion first. "You think that's blood?" he quietly asked.


Apollo sighed in relief, but Luke's intense staring at the mark gave him pause. 'Wait. That burglar didn't cause most of this mess. It must be connected to the murder! That's why we came here, after all!' He pulled out his Court Record, preparing to snap some pictures of the lamp. "Something's definitely odd about this, that's for sure," he said as explanation.

"Once you're done with that, we need to look at this safe," Luke replied, gesturing to the nearby object. "It looks like the burglar was halfway into it."

"Halfway?" Trucy asked, confused, and walked around Apollo to approach the safe herself.

Luke smiled, rounding the chair behind the desk and pointing his sister to a tiny keypad in the centre of the reinforced door. "It looks like this opens with a four-digit combination, and two of them have already been entered in!"

As Trucy cooed in amazement, Apollo quickly finished his photos of the lamp and ran to join his siblings behind the desk, shoving his computer back in his bag. Sure enough, next to the circular handle on the far left of the safe door was a tiny keypad and a screen large enough for four numbers, slowly blinking '79'. "I wonder what's inside this thing...?"

"How do we find out the last two numbers?" Trucy asked. "Do you think Doctor Meraktis would have written the combination down somewhere?"

Luke smiled. "Actually, I think there's a far quicker way to find out the combination," he replied, a finger pointed into the air. "Tell me Trucy, how would the doctor have opened this safe?"
Trucy crossed her arms, face scrunched up in thought. "He'd've entered the number?" she asked, confused, then her face lit up. "Oh! This is a puzzle!"

Apollo rolled his eyes, but decided to let his siblings have their fun.

"And how would he have done that?" Luke continued, always delighted to be engaging in his favourite pastime in the course of everyday life.

"Pressing the buttons," Trucy replied, gesturing to the tiny keypad and looking confused again. "Why? What am I solving?"

"How to find the next two numbers," Apollo pointed out, realising the answer himself and digging through his bag. "We have just the thing, actually."

Trucy blinked in surprise. "We do? What?"

Apollo smiled as his fingers closed around the tiny jar at the bottom of his bag. "You press those buttons with your finger, don't you?" he pointed out, then pulled out the jar and brush to show his sister. "Wouldn't that leave residue behind?"

"Oh!" Trucy gasped, grinning. "He'd leave prints!" She then paused, her face falling. "But, if the burglar was trying to get in, how do we know they knew the right numbers? What if seven and nine are wrong?"

Although Apollo hesitated, unable to refute Trucy's point, Luke frowned determinedly. "They knew the number," he insisted. "It doesn't make any sense otherwise."

Apollo and Trucy stole a glance at each other; It was clear their brother had a very specific person in mind. Deciding Luke would tell them when he was ready, Apollo opened the jar of fingerprint powder and got to work.

View the Court Record
Over the next minute or two, Apollo dabbed at the keypad with the brush, coating the plastic moulding in white powder that Trucy eagerly volunteered to blow away, spraying the powder back into her and Apollo's faces and sending Luke into a badly hidden fit of giggles. Despite that, Trucy's grin never faded as she and Apollo struggled to wipe the powder off, although it was eagerly sticking to the oils on their skin as it was designed to, Luke offering them no help in his delight at their misfortune. Once the whole ordeal was over, the three Wrights admired their handiwork, finding the powder had stuck to four different buttons: On the seven and nine, there was a notable absence of powder in the centre, revealing the numbers behind. "The burglar must have been wearing gloves," Apollo realised. "They were the one who entered the code..."

"Two and five," Luke said, paying attention more to the other two buttons coated in powder. "So the combination ends in either five-two or two-five."

"Let me try!" Trucy cried, and excitedly reached up to hit the buttons top to bottom, finishing the half-done combination on the screen. "Two five!" To the trio's surprise, first try appeared to be correct, as the safe beeped, made a 'clunk' sound, and the door subtly popped open.

Apollo had to hold back a grin. "It opened!" He grabbed at the handle, pulling the safe open as far as it would go, the door banging against a shelf wall on its left as it swung around.

The inside of the safe was deceptively small, given the compartment's thick walls. A large money box sat on the floor, almost the entire width of the safe, a stack of papers shoved at its side. On top, another, messier, stack of papers and a single manilla folder, as well as a small lucky cat figurine, golden with a stack of notes in its moulded paw.

Trucy gasped, grabbing at the manilla folder, which she was quick to open, pulling out a piece of paper and a thin sheet of black-and-white plastic. "This looks like... a medical chart," she said, handing the paper to Apollo as she turned her attention to the plastic. "There's an X-ray in here with it."

Apollo decided to ignore the chart for now, peeking over Trucy's shoulder at the X-ray as Luke attempted to do the same from across Apollo. It was, to him, a mess of grey, the only recognisable shape being a ribcage that took up most of the picture. "I can't make heads or tails of it," he admitted, looking back to the paper in his hands. "And I can't read the chart either; It's all in medical-speak."

Before the final word was even out of Apollo's mouth, Luke had grabbed the paper from him, studying the chart intently. "Hmm... That's interesting." He looked up. "Can I see the X-ray, Trucy?" Their sister nodded, handing over the remainder of the lone hidden file, and Luke turned to take a few steps toward the window, holding the sheet up to examine against the dimming light outside.

Apollo followed his brother, biting his lip. "I know you don't specialise in humans," he said, "but is there anything you can see that could help?"

Luke nodded, still frowning at the X-ray. "This is Wocky's chart," he explained. "From the failed
operation to remove the bullet."

"What!?” Trucy cried, bouncing at her brothers' backs as she tried to see for herself. "Why is Wocky's chart the only one in there!?"

"Why else?" Apollo replied, placing a hand on Trucy's shoulder to stop her jumping. "If that got into the wrong hands, the Kitakis would have their vengeance on Meraktis for sure... Not that it helped, in the end."

Luke sighed, placing the X-ray back in the folder and turning towards his siblings. "That's not all,” he said, turning his attention back to the chart with a worried look. "You don't need any kind of medical knowledge to read a name. Take a look at the nurse who filed this." He held out the paper, a finger pointing to a box on the top right, underneath Meraktis' name as the physician on duty.

Trucy gasped, hands to her mouth. "Nurse Alita Tiala!?” she read aloud. "But she's Wocky's fiancée!"

"What's her name doing here!?" Apollo added, glaring at the chart as though it might be able to tell him. "Why didn't she ever mention she was on staff at this clinic!?"

"A very good question,” Luke replied with a stern frown, putting the chart back in the folder with the X-ray. "She's been actively denying any prior knowledge of this operation; I doubt her reasoning behind that is benevolent."

Apollo nodded in agreement, turning back to the safe to give it another look. Mentally, he was kicking himself for writing off Alita's lies earlier that day as denial; There was no way she was as concerned about Wocky as she claimed. "I'd be very interested if there's anything else that chart can tell us," he called over his shoulder.

"You'd need a human doctor for that, I'm afraid," Luke said with a smile. "All I can make out is stuff we already knew: The bullet near the heart, the aborted oper-"

"Hey!" Apollo suddenly cried, interrupting his brother as he pulled his tablet computer from his bag, staring into the safe with wide eyes. "This looks like a bullet hole!"

Trucy gasped, and Apollo felt her grabbing at his arm long before he was expecting her to appear at his side, bouncing to get a look around the Court Record as her brother took a photo. "Look, you can still see the bullet sticking out of it!” she pointed out.

As Luke wandered over to look, Apollo drummed his fingers against the back of his computer in thought. "The question in, why's it in the middle of a safe?" he asked.

Trucy was already reaching up to scrape at the hole, and dislodged the metal pellet inside. "It came out!” she announced, plucking the bullet from where it had fallen to examine more carefully in the palm of her hand. "The tip is all squished."

"Not surprising, given it was fired into a metal safe," Luke pointed out, watching from Apollo's other side as the elder brother resumed taking pictures of the flattened bullet. "If it was so easy to remove, it must be a recent addition in there; Doctor Meraktis would have surely taken it out himself otherwise."

"There's a story behind it, that's for sure," Apollo agreed, finishing with his photos and shoving his computer in his bag, swapping it out for a small evidence baggy. "For now, let's gather this all up and get out of here."
"Thank you again, Mister Officer!" Trucy chirped as she led her brothers back out onto Park Street, where the sullen policeman was waiting for them. "It was really useful to get to look around!"

"Yeah yeah," the man muttered, shooing the Wrights away from the door as he made his way back in. "Leave already."

Apollo gave the man a glare, changing his mind about informing him of the half-complete theft within.

"Before you go, sir," Luke spoke up, apparently more willing to stick to his guns despite the man's rudeness, "it looks like we interrupted a burglary in progress. The office window is open, and we heard someone moving in there."

The man was surprised. "O-oh," he muttered sheepishly. "Thanks, then." With that, he hurried back into the clinic, closing the door behind him.

Luke shrugged as he turned to Apollo. "That's that, then."

"What now?" Trucy asked, bouncing on her heels as her brothers joined her on the pavement. "We need to talk to Wocky about his operation, and tell Mister Eldoon we found his bowls too." She looked over to their friend's house next door, but there appeared to be no sign of him.

"And ask the detective to compare the toe prints on the sandals and slippers," Luke added, stroking his goatee in thought. "It might also be worth asking Doctor Eldoon to take a look at that chart, too."

Apollo sighed, checking the watch under his glove. "We've got just about fifteen minutes," he said. "We're not going to make a visit to Wocky."

Trucy gasped, then sadly looked to the ground, fiddling with the brooch on her cape. "Oh yeah... I forgot about the Wonder Bar."

Luke was still deep in thought. "If I give you a lift, that cuts your travel time a little," he pointed out, "although you two still need to fit in dinner before you go."

"Forget it," Apollo sighed again, crossing his arms. "Ernest can't get us in to see Wocky after seven, and five extra minutes won't help us much... The investigation's over for today." With that, he turned and began to walk back down the street towards home.

Trucy gave Luke a guilty look, then turned and rushed to catch up to their elder brother.

Luke rolled his eyes, then ran to Apollo, grabbing his shoulder to bring him to a halt and spin him around to face his younger brother. "Apollo, if I leave now, I can still make it to the detention centre in time to question Wocky." Luke gave his brother a look that he hoped was both pleading and sternly sincere. "I know I promised before that I wouldn't dream of investigating without you, but... If it's okay with you, I'd like to do that. I can finish the investigation today in your stead."

Apollo stared back at Luke with a blank expression, but Trucy's face split into a wide grin. "That's a great idea!" she cried. "We don't have to call off a show, and Polly's investigation is all complete for the trial tomorrow! It's perfect!"
"I-I guess it is," Apollo admitted, his stunned look slowly fading to a half-smile. "And this is an emergency we weren't expecting." 'Even though it was my idea to wait so long to get going after the trial...’ "You're really okay with doing all of that for me?"

Luke laughed. "Of course I am!" he replied. "I wouldn't offer otherwise!"

Apollo bit back a chuckle, finally allowing himself to relax. "Alright, then. Anything to get these final few questions answered, right?" After a short pause, he then pulled his brother into a hug, only partially because of the grateful tears pricking at his eyes. "Thank you. You helping out like this... It really means a lot to me, Luke."

Smiling, Luke returned his brother's hug. "We're brothers, aren't we? What are family for?"

View the Court Record
Luke smiled triumphantly as he pushed through the entrance doors to the detention centre. *Ten minutes to spare! Apollo and Trucy will be at the Wonder Bar right now, preparing for their show. I can't let them down!* A part of him wondered if Pearl had decided to join them or stay behind at the Agency: The moment he and his siblings reached the Agency door, he'd jumped straight into his car, leaving Apollo and Trucy to go inside and explain the situation to their cousin; He hadn't the time to waste doing so himself, talking only very briefly to Apollo then making a mad dash for the detention centre before it closed for the night.

"Luke?" Ernest asked as he looked up from the desk, confused. "Where's Apollo?"

"He has a prior commitment," Luke explained, making his way to the desk with a smile. "I'm here to talk to Wocky."

Ernest frowned. "Buddy, only attorneys are permitted to meet clients this late in the day. I can't let you in."

Luke only continued to grin, pulling a small object from his pocket that his brother had solemnly handed him as they parted ways only half-an-hour previous. "And who's to say I'm not an attorney?" He held the tiny badge in his fingers, presenting it to his former classmate with pride. "This is all I need."

The young officer's surprised look turned into a frown. "I know that's not yours. You're a vet, not a lawyer."

"And how do you know that?" Luke brightly asked, refusing to be deterred. "For all you know, I also did a law degree while I was in London. How can you say for sure I didn't?"

Ernest stared at Luke for a long moment, then sighed, getting to his feet. "Alright, fine. I'll look the other way just this once!"

Luke resisted the urge to cheer, watching his former classmate call for Wocky to be brought to the visitor's room. "Thank you so much, Ernest!"

"Don't mention it," the officer insisted. "Really. Don't."

When Wocky sauntered into the room on the other side of the glass, it was once again with eyes closed and a wide grin on his face. "Don't cry angel, Daddy's back and Daddy's-" His eyes opened to see only Luke sat in a chair opposite, and the teen's face fell. "Oh. You again." With that, he slumped into the chair at his side, arms crossed.
"Me again," Luke confirmed with a sympathetic smile. "I just have a couple of questions for you this time, then I'll let you get back to your cell."

Wocky huffed. "Whatever, man."

Deciding not to irritate the teen, Luke peeked into his satchel: All he had with him evidence-wise was the medical chart and the sandals, both from the clinic, as he and Apollo had determined it would be all Luke needed to question Wocky; It was pure luck both had ended up with Luke somewhat naturally during their search. 'Well, first things first... and biggest things first, too.' He pulled out the sandals, the left one still toe-first in a clear plastic evidence bag to preserve the print within; Asking Wocky about the shoes had been his idea, anyway. "Do you happen to recognise these at all, Wocky?"

Wocky's expression brightened immediately. "Hey! Sure I do!" He smirked proudly. "I was the one who bought 'em for her."

Resisting the urge to smile at the confirmed hunch, Luke asked, "For Miss Tiala?"


Luke only smiled. "Thank you," he replied, putting the shoes back in his bag. Although Wocky gave him a suspicious look, Luke didn't give him time to question anything, pulling out the medical chart. "And this... this is a medical chart." He opened the folder, slipping out enough of the X-ray to show Wocky it was there. "To be specific, Doctor Meraktis' chart from your failed operation."

Wocky was surprised, even turning a little pale. "H-hey, I already know what that's gonna say-!"

"But not what I'm going to ask about," Luke firmly interrupted, pulling out the form. "This tells us there was a nurse assigned to you during your stay: One Miss Alita Tiala."

The teen almost sighed in relief, apparently more fearful of his impending death than how he met his fiancée. "You lawyers do your homework," he muttered, slumping in his chair. "Yeah, I met her at the clinic. So?"

"So," Luke replied, replacing the file in its folder, "could you tell me more about the exact circumstances of your meeting?"

"Fine, fine!" Wocky cried, waving dismissively. "I'll tell you how we met if you want to know that bad." He pushed himself upright again, taking a moment to ponder his answer. "Bout half a year ago, I was shot during a little turf war with another family. I was ready to die, sure, but they came in and got me, hauled me off to the doc's."


Wocky nodded, smiling nostalgically. "That's where I met her," he said. "My fallen angel..." He paused to giggle at the thought of his fiancée. "She was scared of me at first, turns out, but you know what they say: The bad guy always gets the ladies!"

Luke resisted the urge to outright laugh at the assertion. "Go on," he settled for saying, distracting himself by replacing the folder in his satchel.

"She was done with that clinic anyhow," Wocky continued, "so I was like, I'll take you on, woman! Straight gangster style." He grinned in pride. "Guess what she said?"

Wocky looked a little disappointed with that answer, but seemed to decide to let it go, smiling again at the memory. "Eh, yeah, kinda. She said it real quiet-like, on the down low, know what I'm saying?" He leaned in close to the glass, where the opening at the bottom was. "I'll leave, if you'll marry me."

Luke was both surprised and not surprised to hear that. "And that's how you became engaged?"

"You know it!" Wocky boasted. "An oath of love, right there in the hospital room. Just like that, the op was done, and we were outta there. See ya later, bye!"

At that, Luke felt a fresh wave of pity for the teen. 'And yet he hasn't realised the implications of everything he's just explained... Blinded by his affection for Tiala.'

The vet's silence deflated Wocky's ego, and he sniffed awkwardly. "Yeah, didn't go so well after all, did it? Bullet still in me an' all."

Luke decided to change the subject a little. "So, this health check-up that brought the error to your attention... Whose idea was it? Your father's?"

"Yeah," Wocky sighed. "Can you imagine? What's the point of living healthy when you're a G, you know what I'm saying?"

"You say this despite the fact that this check-up has potentially saved your life?" Luke pointed out, raising an eyebrow.

Wocky scoffed, looking away. "Well, I figured I could get that cap pulled after I got my revenge on that wack doc," he said, apparently ignoring Luke's point. "And hey, I'm still living large now, aren't I?" He shook his head. "Guess my old man must be getting old. Older, I mean."


At that moment, the door behind Luke opened, and Ernest poked his head in. "Time's up, buddy," he called. "You gotta wrap up and get out of here now."

"Alright," Luke replied, standing and giving the teen on the other side of the glass a smile. "That was all I wanted to know. Thank you for talking to me, Wocky."

Wocky feigned disinterest, but gave Luke a return nod. "Whatever floats your boat, man."

Neither moved for a long moment, Luke staring at the teen slumped in the chair on the other side of the glass, his polite smile fading to a concerned frown. "I feel I should apologise in advance for what's going to happen tomorrow," he said.

"Eh?" Wocky mumbled, meeting Luke's eyes with a confused look.

"It's not going to be pleasant for you," Luke continued. "I should know; I've been in your position, about to live through what you'll have to face in trial tomorrow. This is worse than a guilty verdict, this is going to break your heart, and..." He paused, struggling to keep himself from tearing up. "And there's nothing I can say to make this easier for you."

Wocky stared at Luke with wide eyes. "Wh... What's with the sudden weird vibe, man?" He weakly laughed, forcing a smile. "Like, no reason to get into a funk, right?"
Luke didn't respond. After several seconds of silence, he turned and left the room.

As Luke slipped into the driver's seat of the Lukemobile, slamming the car door behind him, he was unable to get Wocky's frightened face out of his mind. History was repeating itself, and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

"If they don't have evidence, that means they have testimony, and that means he's claiming someone at the shelter is lying to say I did it! None of us would ever do that, just like none of us would have killed Mister Pound!"

"Well, I hate to have to break it to you Luke, but someone did! Either Simba or Reindeer murdered him and is blaming it on you, and you have to face reality on this!"

"But neither of them has any reason to kill him!"

His hands tightly gripped the steering wheel as the voices of the past echoed in his head. He squeezed his eyes shut to block any errant tears. 'And I thought the prospect of being a witness again was awful... Now I have to watch one of the worst moments of my life happening to someone else?' He could still feel the tight grip of the bailiffs as they held him back, his feet slipping against the floor as he struggled to break free and run to his mentor... and the terrible look on Reindeer's face as he refused to meet Luke's eyes.

"You think I was happy about those two young things taking my job?"

"W-wait, Mister Wildgrube-!"

"So I killed the boss to get back at him! He cut my wages to chase me into retirement in favour of them, so it was never going to work out anyway!"

"Reindeer, no! The wage cut was your suggestion, don't lie for my sake!"

"And who told you it was my suggestion, huh?"

The scene was playing out in Luke's head, but suddenly all the faces and voices were changed; Debeste to Klavier, Kristoph to Apollo, Reindeer to Alita and Luke to Wocky.

"Face it, kid; You were an idiot if you ever looked up to me. Aren't you supposed to be the smart one with that fancy doctorate of yours? You should've guessed this was coming a long time ago."

'But where will you be when Wocky lives this?' a voice in Luke's head piped up. 'Will you hang back like Apollo did, hiding at Kristoph Gavin's side?'

"Where did that come from?" he wondered aloud, blinking in surprise. "Apollo did the best he could! What good would he have done running to help me?"
'You know full well what it would have meant to you,' the voice replied. 'You felt so alone in that moment, it was like the Professor being turned to gold all over again. To feel that again was so shameful, you never even showed anyone those bruises the bailiffs left on your arms.'

Luke couldn't reply to that.

'So, where will you be when Wocky lives this?' the voice repeated... then fell silent.

[View the Court Record]
On Friday, Luke had walked in on his friend and colleague's bloody corpse.

Saturday and Sunday were spent locked in a tiny cell, accused of a murder he didn't commit.

Monday's trial successfully cleared his name... by condemning someone else's.

On Tuesday, Luke dragged himself back to the detention centre, but was shown the door without even glimpsing his goal in going there.

Today was Wednesday, and the absolute last place Luke wanted to be was where he was standing right now.

Simba had gasped when the young vet meekly pushed his way in through the front door of the shelter's reception, her hand clutched tightly to the shawl still wrapped tightly around her neck. "N-Northpaw!" she cried. "I... forgot you were coming in today!"

"I can't exactly stay away, can I?" Luke quietly pointed out, not meeting her eyes as he stood by the door. "We have animals to look after and re-home."

"U-uh... yeah, guess so," Simba replied, fiddling nervously with her shawl.

Luke didn't respond, and the pair stood in awkward silence for several seconds.

Finally, Simba cleared her throat, standing behind her desk. "I'll, uh... I'll go find Duck for you."

With that, she scurried off, leaving her walkie-talkie behind on the desk.

When Duck arrived, he made an immediate beeline for the young man, giving him an encouraging smile. "Northpaw, you're back already?"

Luke nodded. "I said I'd be in today," he pointed out. "Why wouldn't I be here?"

Duck frowned in concern. "I told you if you needed more time to recover from the trial-"

"Why should I need more time?" Luke interrupted, his voice emotionless. "The shelter needs to keep running, especially after all we've lost. We can't afford anyone being absent right now."

The resulting sigh from his friend only made Luke feel guilty for lacking the energy to fake cheer. "We can handle one person's absence for another day or two," he insisted. "If you need it, Northpaw."

"I'm fine," Luke again interrupted. "I've lived through worse."

Duck stopped arguing with him after that.
In the recuperation room, Luke found Fox sitting on the floor, her back to him as she examined a small terrier. He decided not to greet her, busy ing himself with grabbing his labcoat and hanging up his satchel, the whole time avidly avoiding the third, empty hook between his and Fox's. When he turned around, he found the noises of his preparation for work had finally attracted his friend's attention.

"Northpaw?"

Luke only nodded, making final adjustments to his coat. Although he remembered his co-worker's tears on the day of the fateful trial, he couldn't summon the energy now as he did then to bring her out of her lingering melancholy; His own was hard enough to handle.

"I'm about halfway through the check-ups," Fox continued, gesturing to the nearby wall of cages. "We got a surprising amount of adoptions yesterday, so a lot of the healthier ones can go out into the bigger cages now."

Once again, Luke nodded, and got to work. Neither said a word to each other for several hours, focussed entirely on the animals they were examining and whether or not they were ready to fill empty cages in the main section of the shelter. They worked almost mechanically, Luke barely seeing his charges as he evaluated their health... which was only made harder as the cats pushed their purring heads into his hands and the dogs whined softly as they licked fervently at his cheeks, forcing him to pause as he waited for them to stop. Although all of them asked Luke what the problem was, wanting to help and with no idea of what had happened over the past week, Luke could not bring himself to answer them (especially not with Fox still in the room) and forced himself to tune their pleas out. In the end, every last one failed to receive an answer and backed down.

Eventually, Luke and Fox's paths brought them together, their jobs done. Fox gave her friend a forced smile. "That's everyone. Let's starting re-homing them, huh?"

Luke just nodded.

"Alright. I'll do the cats, you can do the dogs."

It was as he was locking away the last dog in its new cage that suddenly a blond teenage boy appeared at Luke's shoulder, giving him an intense stare. It was Bee. "Are you free now?"

Luke slowly nodded.

Bee smiled. "We were going to start bathing the dogs now, but Kitty has to start food rounds," he explained. "Did you want to help me?"

After a moment of silence, Luke returned a small smile of his own. "I'd love to."

Perhaps it was because Bee was the youngest volunteer of the shelter, or maybe because he'd been absent from the trial itself, but being alone with the teenage boy, their attention completely focussed on the dogs they were currently giving a thorough wash, seemed to calm him much easier than anything else had that day. Predictably, lazy Bee left most of the work to Luke, doing a bare minimum himself, but Luke didn't mind; He was content to keep his hands busy, struggling with the dogs who disliked baths and calming down the dogs who were overjoyed to play in the warm water. Luke even found himself laughing at their antics.

But it wasn't to last: Duck asked Luke to come to the office when he was finished. Luke had nodded and agreed to be there, then reluctantly bid Bee goodbye.

In the hallway at the back of the building, Luke stood outside the door that led to the Manager's
Office. Only five days ago, it had been the sure-fire place to find Phelan Pound. Five days ago, Luke had found Pound, lying on the floor under the contents of the nearby bookcase, bleeding out into the carpet... and all that had changed. Now, every time he tried to reach for that door handle, the image of Pound bleeding on the carpet flashed in front of his eyes, and he flinched away, pressing his back to the opposite wall much like he had on the day of the murder. He could remember the shock and humiliation he felt when the detective's whole attitude switched from compassionate to cold, and Luke was dragged away in cuffs. His hands curled into fists, pressing tight to the wall at his back. *What is wrong with me!? Everything turned out alright, and I've literally survived worse, why is this hurting so much!?’*

"Northpaw?"

Luke paused in surprise, then slowly looked up. To his left, coming out of the storeroom, was Simba, giving him a worried look as she clutched a bag of animal feed in one hand. He stared at her, unable to make himself reply.

Simba glanced away, then shrugged, giving Luke a small smirk. "Having trouble with the door?"


There was a short pause, then Luke heard the clops of Simba's shoes against the concrete floor, and saw said sandals entering his field of view to stand at his side. "I get that," she quietly told him. "I've been having the same problem... I-it being where Mister Pound died, and all. It's... freaky, I guess you could say."

A spike of anger shot through Luke's mind, and he firmly looked away from his friend. "You didn't see him, Simba," he coldly replied, keeping his voice low. "The way the murderer just *left* him... Stunned, bleeding to death under his books? They didn't *care.*" He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to slow his rapid breathing. "He didn't even get a *quick* death... Slow and painful, and they *left him there to die*, Simba! Lying in a pool of his own blood! He..." His vocal chords suddenly stopped working, and Luke pressed a hand to his face as he sank to the floor. With great effort, Luke managed to quell his threatening sobs long enough to choke out, "He didn't deserve that..."

Simba didn't reply for a very long moment, and Luke half-wondered if she had gone before he felt her hand patting his shoulder, and heard the bag of food she had been holding crumple as it was placed gently on the floor; Simba must have crouched down at his side. "I'm sorry," she simply said, a clear sincerity in her quiet voice that wasn't often heard from the sarcastic receptionist.

"Reindeer didn't do it," Luke added, slowly bringing himself back under control.

There was a slightly longer pause this time. "He didn't," she agreed.

They sat there, unmoving, for what felt like an eternity. Luke's strangled sobs calmed relatively quickly, leaving him with the quick task of wiping the tears off his face with a sleeve of his labcoat.

Eventually, Duck came out of the office, and was surprised to find the pair so close. "Northpaw! I was... just wondering where you were."

Luke nodded and pulled himself to his feet, lacking the energy to even feel sheepish about his brief breakdown. "Sorry. I was..." He trailed off, ending his sentence with a shrug.

"It's the office," Simba picked up, standing at his side and with her emotionless demeanour back on in full force. "Considering what Northpaw found last time he was in there, it's hard not to be wary."

Duck's eyes widened in surprise. "O-oh! Uh, geeze, I'm sorry about that, Northpaw!" He scratched a
cheek, giving Luke an apologetic smile. Luke couldn't summon the energy to return it. "Uh, I just wanted to discuss you and Fox's schedule... y'know, since there's, um, just the two of you now. I thought, since the office is technically mine now, and it's private-"


In the end, Duck relocated his meeting with the two remaining vets to the surgery, as it was private and away from the animals, like the office. Luke couldn't bring himself to argue, still fighting his fears of the manager's office, no matter how many times he told himself he would only get over his sudden phobia by going back into the room and confronting it. He continued to barely say a word during the meeting, going along with Fox and Duck's suggestions with the insistence that whatever they worked out would be fine with him. Given Fox was being particularly quiet herself, this left Duck rather frustrated with the both of them.

As the meeting came to a close, Fox stood from their makeshift meeting table and gave Duck a thoughtful look. "Have... you visited Reindeer?"

Luke and Duck looked up at her. "After his arrest the other day?" Duck replied. "Sure, I tried."

Fox blinked in surprise. "Oh..." She then sighed. "He turned you away too, did he?"

Duck nodded, standing as he gathered his papers. "I think pretty much everyone's tried to visit him by now, but he's point blank refused to take any visitors. Stubborn as ever, the old bastard."

Luke's gaze turned to the examination table he was still sat by.

"Guess so," Fox mumbled, then sighed. "I just wanted to ask him... why? What really happened that night? Why'd he do it?"

"We all want answers," Duck assured her. "Unfortunately, the law doesn't really care about 'why', just 'who' and 'what'. If Reindeer won't tell us himself..." He trailed off, standing for a long moment in silence before shaking his head. He didn't need to say it for Fox and Luke to know what he meant.

"Reindeer didn't do it," Luke mumbled. "He's just saying he did to keep me from going to jail."

Fox and Duck both looked down at Luke in surprise. After a moment, Duck sighed. "And I'd love nothing more than to be able to believe that, Northpaw," the man softly replied. "But if you didn't do it, and Reindeer didn't do it... Who did?"

Luke couldn't reply to that, his eyes locked on the table.

"All we can do is trust in the system," Duck continued, "and that it found Mister Pound's murderer. I know it's hard, but would you rather live in fear that the killer is still out there? That they could come after you?"

When Luke still didn't reply, Duck took his papers and left without a word.

To his shame, Luke stayed in the surgery for the rest of the day, sitting on the floor in a dark corner. He kept telling himself to get up, go outside and help his friends and co-workers with the chores, but for some reason the order never quite reached his legs, and he remained on the floor, making no move to get up. It was so easy to just sit in the silence, to not have to think, escaping from the doubts and the fears of the previous Friday and the terrifying weekend in the detention centre and the simply awful trial that had followed.

Five o'clock arrived faster than expected. It was the end of the work day, and, usually, Luke would
be looking forward to it, as the shelter emptied and he could spend some quality time with his animal friends without the fear of being discovered. Right now though, the young man wasn't sure if he even had the energy to do that.

The swinging door to the recuperation room opened, and Luke heard paws padding across the floor only moments before a wet black nose pushed itself into his face, a large Labrador-cross trying her best to climb into his lap as she licked at Luke's eyes and nose. "H-hey!" he cried, gently trying to push the dog off. "Stop that!"

As the dog reluctantly backed off, Luke wiped the saliva from his eyes, and looked up to see Fox standing nearby, giggling softly. "Sorry," she said, not looking at all apologetic. "I guess Patsey got away from me while I was feeding her."

Luke sighed, watching the black dog lie down at his side with her head in his lap. He settled for patting her neck.

"She's such a loving dog, huh?" Fox continued. "She'll get to make a family out there very happy one day."

Luke still didn't respond.

Fox held up a wrist to look at her watch, but had already begun speaking before her eyes had a chance to read it. "Oh, hey, it's home time! Are you coming, Northpaw?"

After a pause, Luke decided not to argue, and carefully moved the dog's head off his lap before getting to his feet. Still smiling, Fox led the errant canine back to her temporary home in the Recuperation Room, then grabbed Luke's satchel for him as he took off his labcoat. Not making any move to remove her own, she guided her silent friend out into the hallway and then to reception, where a figure stood silhouetted in the evening light.

"Hey, Luke."

Luke looked up in surprise to see Phoenix, giving his son a warm smile.

"Thought you could use some company on the way home today," Phoenix explained.

Although a part of Luke was bursting with questions - primarily WHY - the rest of him simply didn't care. He ran from Fox's side to latch on to his father with a tight hug.

Phoenix returned the gesture without comment. "Let's go home, huh?"

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"I'll leave my Court Record inside, along with all the evidence Trucy and I have, if you don't need any of it for Wocky. Oh yeah, and a note on what the password is so you can get into the system. You spot anything else suspicious, don't forget to take a picture of it. And! Before I forget, you're going to need an attorney's badge to get in to see Wocky. Take care of it, okay? Don't do anything stupid. I'll text you once the show's over."

Luke was feeling a lot better after the drive back to the agency. From here, it was just a short walk to the crime scene to talk to Ema, then back to Park Street to see if he could find Eldoon. As he locked up his car and headed up the stairs into his childhood home, he ran through what he would need in his head. The fingerprint powder, slippers and sandals for the detective to analyse and compare the toe prints, and then the medical report and probably the Court Record too for Mister Eldoon, to tell him where his bowls ended up and ask his opinion on that report. Well, to see if there's anything else new we can learn from it, anyway.' He felt his stomach gurgle, but intently ignored it; He would have time to eat after finishing this investigation... hopefully before the sun fully set in another half hour.

As he entered the office, Luke's attention was caught by the array of items scattered across the glass-topped table between the two sofas. That must be everything for the case.' On top of a small pile of paperwork in the centre of it all was a small tablet computer, which Luke quickly recognised as being Apollo's beloved Court Record. He made a beeline for the object, sitting on the sofa with his back to the desk as he made to sort out what he could carry in his satchel.

"Is that you, Luke?" came a call from the kitchen, and Luke heard the door open behind him as Pearl entered.

"Yep, it's me," Luke replied with a smile, examining a small post-it Apollo had stuck to his computer, the password scribbled across it. "I'm just picking up some stuff, then heading off to talk to the detective." He paused a moment, removing the note and placing the Court Record in his lap as he reached for the slippers. "Apollo explained what we were doing, didn't he?"

"You don't want dinner?" Pearl hesitantly asked. "You have to eat, Luke!"

"I will," Luke promised, carefully arranging the slippers in his satchel alongside the sandals, "but I have to hurry to catch Detective Skye before she leaves the crime scene, and I might miss Mister Eldoon entirely if it's dark before I get around to him."

A third person then chuckled from somewhere in Pearl's direction, a person Luke had not been expecting to hear at all. "Now, that won't do. Need some help?"

Luke spun around, abandoning his bag for the moment as he looked up into the grinning face of Phoenix Wright, standing next to Pearl by the office's desk. "Papa!" he cried, jumping to his feet and just barely grabbing the Court Record before it fell to the floor. "What are you doing here?"
Phoenix scoffed. "I live here," he pointed out with a mischievous grin. "Why does everyone keep asking me that?"

As Luke shook his head at the joke, Pearl gave him a smile and explained, "Mister Nick decided to sign himself out this afternoon. He asked me to help him move Mystic Maya's DVDs back here!" She pointed to a literal pile of the Steel Samurai collection dumped by the TV, seemingly awaiting a willing hand to sort it again.

"I was going out of my mind with boredom," Phoenix added, and gave Luke a mock hurt look. "You three haven't been to see me all day! What kind of ungrateful children have I raised here?"

Luke laughed. "We were busy," he pointed out, then remembered his purpose in entering the office to begin with and quickly sat back down, placing the Court Record at his side and reaching for the fingerprint powder. "In fact, I'm still busy. I need to see Detective Skye right away."

"I'll come with you," Phoenix offered, walking around the sofa to Luke's side; Luke couldn't miss the slight limp in Phoenix's gait, or the tightly-bandaged ankle that was the cause. "I've been wanting to see Ema again anyway."

Luke gave his father a wary look, the jar of powder still in his hand. "Are you sure, Papa? That's quite a distance to walk on your ankle."

Phoenix scoffed. "Hey, I can walk just fine," he insisted with a smirk.

"He walked with me back here from the clinic," Pearl added.

"Exactly," Phoenix said, shooting the teen a grin. "I can handle a trip or two around the block."

Luke wasn't convinced, but didn't see the point in arguing. "You're not going to listen if I tell you not to, are you?"

"Nope!" Phoenix cheerfully agreed, taking the fingerprint powder from Luke. "C'mon, it'll be just like old times, investigating a case together!"

"We only investigated together once, Papa!" Luke pointed out with a laugh, handing Phoenix the Court Record to look after. With everything they needed now sorted out, he once again stood and turned to his cousin behind him. "Did you want to join us, Pearl? If Papa's home now, your 'job' cleaning up the office will be over."

Pearl blinked in surprise, a hand to her mouth. "You want me to come?"

"Sure, if you want to," Phoenix replied, giving her a smile as he secreted the fingerprint powder and Apollo's computer in his hoodie. "You'll probably get along with Ema."

Breaking into giggles, Pearl bounced around to join Phoenix and Luke, looking between the two of them. "Oh, I'd love to! It really will be like old times, Mister Nick!"

Phoenix laughed, then turned to Luke. "So, Apollo left you in charge, I believe. Where to first?"

June 16, 7:42PM
People Park
Although Luke had offered to pass over Apollo's badge to Phoenix, the ex-lawyer had refused, insisting Apollo gave it to Luke to look after and he didn't want to interfere with that; Luke suspected the larger, unspoken reason was probably one of pride, that Phoenix didn't want to carry a badge that wasn't his, so he didn't argue. Once at the park, Luke put on the airs of a professional to persuade the officer at the entrance to let their trio through. It had been easier than he thought, as apparently the officer recognised Luke from his earlier visit with his siblings and was now under the assumption Luke had been the attorney on the case all along, which none of them were going to argue with.

As Luke approached the crime scene, his father and cousin at his back, he quickly spotted their detective friend in the midst of packing up her fold-up chair, her footprint kit packed away at her side. He gave her a wave. "Detective Skye! I'm glad we caught you!"

"In a minute!" Ema grunted in reply, struggling with her chair before it finally gave way to her efforts and folded up properly. "There! You took your time getting back here! I was about to-!" As she looked up to properly tell off her visitors, her words stopped dead, and she gazed in silence for a moment. "Mister Wright!" Dropping her folded chair, she turned to the man standing slightly behind Luke with a massive grin on her face. "I wasn't expecting to see you today! I was going to go visit you in the hospital tomorrow morning before the trial! What are you doing out already? Are you alright?"

Phoenix laughed, waving off her concerns. "I checked myself out earlier this afternoon. Honestly, I'm perfectly healthy."

"He sprained his ankle," Luke filled in, giving his father a wry look. "I told him he didn't have to walk here on it, but he wanted to come."

While Phoenix scoffed at the idea, Ema gave Luke a thoughtful look. "So, uh, what happened to your brother and sister? Isn't Apollo the lawyer in your family?"

Luke nodded. "He is."

"If you hadn't guessed from their outfits, Apollo and Trucy are magicians," Phoenix filled in with a proud grin. "They had a show to do, so Luke offered to finish up a few lingering questions in their investigation before the trial tomorrow."

"And we came along to help!" Pearl brightly added, giving Ema a small bow. "My name is Pearl Fey! It's a pleasure to meet you, Detective Skye!"

Ema gave Pearl a friendly wave, apparently only now noticing her hiding behind Phoenix and Luke. "Hey there. You a friend?"

Pearl nodded. "Mm-hmm!"

"You could call her a cousin," Phoenix added, poking Pearl's cheek and making the teen giggle.

The introductions over with, Luke flipped open his satchel. "By the way Detective, I had something to ask you about."

"Ah, a discovery!" Ema replied, grinning with pride as she adjusted the glasses on top of her head. "I thought I recognised that look on your face!"

Luke giggled, and pulled out the slippers in one hand and the sandals in the other. "We found these sandals-"

Before Luke could finish his explanation, Ema had grabbed the left sandal, still half sticking out of its
Luke nodded. "Could you possibly analyse them for us?"

"Of course!" Ema cheerfully chirped, taking the slippers as Luke offered them to her. "Do have the fingerprint powder still on you? I don't think I showed you how to do this!"

"O-oh, no," Luke nervously agreed, forcing a polite smile. "I was... looking around at the time." He then paused, confused. "Why? Don’t you have your own forensics kit to use?"

Phoenix chuckled, pulling from his pocket the small jar of fingerprint powder and its accompanying brush. "If there's one thing Ema here loves to do, it's teach people the scientific method."

"Pshaw," Ema mumbled, blushing as she waved off Phoenix's comment.

Pearl was biting at her thumbnail, looking slightly worried. "Um... what's 'forensicks'?"

Ema gasped, giving the spirit medium a shocked look. "You don't know!?" Before Pearl could do more than slightly shake her head, Ema was excitedly grinning again, shoving the shoes into her purse, grabbing the powder then Pearl's arm and dragging her away from Phoenix and Luke. "Oh man, have I got a whole new amazing world of science to show you! I'll teach you how to dust for prints! We are gonna have so much fun!"

Luke watched in bemusement as the two young women settled down on the concrete path under a streetlight and began to dab at the toe prints on the two left shoes. "What just happened?" he asked.

Phoenix hid a soft laugh. "Ema happened."

It took a minute or two for Pearl to finish dusting the two toe prints, and Ema collected them both on slides to enter into her machine. Once the second print had gone in, she fiddled with it for a moment, it whirred, then beeped. "MATCH FOUND."

"Bingo! Gosh, I'm good." Ema grinned, looking up at Luke watching from nearby. "A perfect match!" she repeated, then put away her device and began to collect up the shoes. "The same person wore these sandals and slippers!"

Luke nodded, giving her a grateful smile. "Thank you, Detective! That was a lot of help!"

"That was fun!" Pearl giggled as she helped put the slippers back in their evidence bag. "I like forensicking!"

"I'm sure Apollo will let you do as much 'forensicking' as you want in his next case," Phoenix said with a grin. "If you're around again, of course."

Pearl squealed in delight as she got to her feet, handing the slippers to Luke. "Oh, I hope I am!" she declared.

Ema looked more thoughtful as she also stood, giving Luke the lone sandal she had taken and watching him put the shoes back in his satchel. "'All you have to do now is find out who these sandals belong to!' she pointed out, then paused, turning more serious. "Or... do you already know?"

Luke hesitated. Should he tell her? Would Apollo be happy to let that get out, even though the
detective was a friend? He doubted it. "I'm sorry," he eventually muttered, avoiding Ema's eyes. "I don't think Apollo would want me to tell you before I've even managed to tell him."

Ema stared a moment more, then nodded, holding out the fingerprint powder. "No hard feelings. With any luck, it'll be the person the glimmerous fop is calling as a witness tomorrow. They vaguely match your requirement of 'motive to murder', at least."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, stepping forward to take the powder himself. "You know who the witness will be tomorrow?"

Ema bit her lip in thought. "Well... Since it's you asking, Mister Wright..." She nodded, making a decision and giving them a confident look. "Her name's Alita Tiala. I believe she's the defendant's fiancée."

Luke said nothing, closing his eyes as he crossed his arms.

Pearl gasped in surprise, a hand to her mouth. "Ms Tiala!?! But why would she be testifying against her special someone!?"

Phoenix watched Luke's reaction, frowning. "You have to wonder what Gavin's up to... And I get the feeling there's a lot more to this 'Tiala' woman than there appears to be," he said. "Am I correct, Luke?"

Luke felt everyone's eyes turning on him, but didn't move. "Apollo's had suspicions," he admitted. "I'd rather not say anything more."

Ema nodded once. "Then I hope you two know what you're doing," she said. "Good luck tomorrow."

*View the Court Record*
As they approached the ramshackle house hidden in its dark corner next to the Meraktis Clinic, Luke spotted with relief their family friend out the front, seemingly in the midst of persuading his pet dog to go inside. "Mister Eldoon!" Luke called, waving to the man.

Eldoon looked up in surprise, standing up straight and crossing his arms with a smile as he waited for the trio to reach him. "Now this is a surprise," he said, and gave them a brief nod in greeting. "Luke, Pearly-girl. You doin' better, Phoenix?"

"Sure, I'm fine," Phoenix replied. "Nothing serious, like I said."

"I told him he didn't have to walk here on his sprained ankle," Luke explained, a heavy tone of disapproval in his voice, "but he insisted."

Phoenix sputtered a little in shock, but Eldoon laughed. "Phoenix, you're a stubborn one! I don't envy your doctor!"


"So," Eldoon continued, turning to Luke, "what's the matter, then?"

Luke paused a moment, then began to dig through his satchel for the medical chart. "We found something during our investigation," he explained. "I've looked over it, but I'm not a human doctor, and I'd prefer to have an expert take a second look." He managed to extract the folder from the bag and looked up in surprise to see Eldoon pressing his upside-down bowl hat over his eyes, mouth wibbling as he held back a sniff.

"Mister Eldoon!" Pearl cried in shock. "Are you okay!?"

"I'm just," Eldoon replied, sniffing again, "so happy! I thought my doctor days were gone for good."

Phoenix smiled sympathetically. "Always happy to relive the glory days, huh?"

"Yep," Eldoon sniffed again, looking to the ex-lawyer with a small smile. "You understand the feelin', don't you Phoenix?"

Luke hid a smile of his own behind opening the folder and pulling out the chart and x-ray ready for view. Once Eldoon seemed ready, he held out the small stack for the ex-doctor to take. "Here it is," he said. "All I've been able to make out is the basi-"

"A medical chart!?" Eldoon interrupted, recognising the layout of the page as he grabbed it to take a closer look. "You shouldn't go around taking these from clini-!" He then cut off his own protests, frowning deeply at the paper in his hands, a moment later switching it with the x-ray to stare intensely at that too.
Pearl was biting a thumbnail worriedly. "Mister Eldoon...?"

"What... What's going on here?" Eldoon muttered, his glare deepening as he switched back to the chart.

Phoenix hid a wry smile. "That's what we're asking you..."

"That chart belongs to Apollo's client," Luke explained. "He's in the detention centre right now, on trial for murder."

"On trial!?!" Eldoon cried, finally breaking his stare at the files to give Luke a horrified look. "That's crazy! You can't put him on trial! He's A.B.D.!!"

"A.B.D.?" Pearl repeated, confused.

"All but dead," Eldoon explained with a stern frown. "He's knocking on the Pearly Gates, and someone's about to answer."

Luke could only stare in surprise.

"It's that serious?" Phoenix asked, equally as surprised as his son. "That's for this bullet that was never removed, isn't it?"

Eldoon stared at the chart for another long moment, then reached up with one hand and pulled off his hat and its attached noodle-like wig, revealing cropped black hair underneath. "Well, permit me to speak as a surgeon," he said, pressing the bowl-hat to his chest momentarily before placing it on the nearby chair and turning to Luke. "You listen up good now, son."


"According to this chart," Eldoon continued, tapping at the paper as he read over it, "this 'Wocky Kitaki' feller's not doing so well. He's got a bullet right up side his heart!"

"Yes," Luke agreed with another nod. "It's his entire motive for attempting to murder Doctor Meraktis."

"But," Eldoon added, waving the chart and x-ray, "this chart talks about the post-op. In other words, the operation is already finished! But you can still see the bullet stuck in there!"

Phoenix was rubbing his chin in thought. "But why would it still be there after an operation to remove it?"

Eldoon stared at the chart for another long moment, then reached up with one hand and pulled off his hat and its attached noodle-like wig, revealing cropped black hair underneath. "Well, permit me to speak as a surgeon," he said, pressing the bowl-hat to his chest momentarily before placing it on the nearby chair and turning to Luke. "You listen up good now, son."


"Does the chart say that x-ray is post-op?" Luke asked, trying to get a second look at the x-ray. "I assumed it was pre-op."

"No, it's post-op alright; Whole thing's about his post-op care," Eldoon assured Luke, then turned to Phoenix. "'Bout the only reason I can think for it still bein' there is it was too tricky to operate on."

Pearl was watching the ongoing conversation with a worried look, getting more and more confused. "Why was it so hard to get out?" she asked. "Couldn't you just pull it out of the hole?"

Eldoon chuckled, shaking his head. "If only, Pearly-girl. Unfortunately, reality's much more complicated than that." He waved the x-ray, gesturing to the white spot of the bullet just off-centre. "That bullet's snug as a bug there next to the aorta, which is connected to the heart. Heck, that scrap of metal's just surrounded by blood vessels. Kind of a miracle." He sighed, shoving the plastic sheet
back into the folder. "Two millimetres to either side and there'd be some serious bleeding going on in there. Not something yer average doc'd be eager to fiddle with."

"You mean...?" Pearl mumbled, still looking both worried and confused.

"It took a miracle to get that bullet stuck where it is," Eldoon explained. "It'd take more than a miracle to take it out. It'd take a magician."

Phoenix frowned in thought, fingers rubbing his chin.

Luke almost winced at the word Eldoon had chosen. "Both our magicians are... otherwise occupied," he muttered.

"Course, with the heart pumping and lungs working," Eldoon continued, "that bullet's on the move. I'd give him another half a year, tops."

"But his operation was already a half-year ago!" Pearl pointed out, glancing between Phoenix and Luke for confirmation. "That was how long it was, wasn't it?"

Eldoon sighed. "That's why I'm saying you're outta time! This kid shouldn't be on trial! He should be on an operating table!"

In the ensuing silence, Luke tried to assure himself not to worry - Although they'd known about Wocky's potential death from the errant bullet, they hadn't known it was quite so serious a threat. 'Mister Eldoon sure can be scary when he wants to be...'"

"But how could the doctor do such an awful thing?" Pearl asked, distressed. "He didn't tell anyone he left it behind?"

Eldoon shook his head, putting the chart back in its folder with the x-ray and handing the whole thing back to Luke. "I got a pretty good idea of how he felt," he said. "An emergency operation. He's got the kid's chest open on the table... then he finds that bullet." With another sigh, he reached for his bowl-hat, flipping it back onto his head so the noodle-like wig fell evenly either side of his face. "That's despair right there, Pearly-girl. Cold despair."

Pearl didn't reply, staring at the ground with her hands tightly clasped together in front of her.

"'Bout the only thing he could do is sew the boy back up," Eldoon continued. "He wasn't exactly in the situation to go admitting he couldn't take it out."

Phoenix nodded understandingly. "You don't say 'no' to a Kitaki."

"You bet," Eldoon agreed. "This kid's their only son, I hear." He didn't leave any kind of pause for a confirmation, already speaking again with, "So, he skips the operation, and Wocky's back on the street living his life. Course, it's only a matter of time before his heart haemorrhages and he drops cold."

Luke frowned, staring at the folder in his hands. "And they take him to Meraktis for answers."

Eldoon nodded. "He's got enough ties to them, he could probably cover up the truth of what happened."

"That's just terrible!" Pearl meekly cried. "He was going to let Mister Wocky die?"

Phoenix patted Pearl's back, giving her a sympathetic look. "There are a lot of terrible people in this
world, Pearls. That's why Apollo's a defence attorney, and why I used to be one; We gotta protect the innocent from the evil out there."

Eldoon pressed his hat to his head, hiding his eyes. "When you're up against real evil, Pearly-girl... Well, it don't matter if you're weak or strong. It'll take you all the same."

Luke closed his eyes, thinking a moment before putting the chart away in his satchel. "What about you, Mister Eldoon? Could you operate on Wocky?"

Eldoon scoffed. "I wish. I'm afraid there ain't nobody in the country that could. Maybe not even in the world..."

Pearl sniffed. "So... Wocky...?"

"He's real lucky to be alive even now," Eldoon replied.

Phoenix patted Pearl's back as she wiped at her eyes; It seemed Eldoon's efforts to impress how dire Wocky's situation was had hit her especially hard. "Thanks for your help, Guy," Phoenix said. "Apollo should have this entire case sorted by tomorrow, and the police will finally release your noodle stand."

Eldoon sighed, looking away. "With any luck."

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"He was very firm about that, actually. It would be so difficult to get that bullet out that he doesn't think any surgeon in the country would be brave enough to try."

Apollo pressed a finger against his forehead, deep in thought. At his side on the sofa, Luke was putting away the medical chart and x-ray, finished with his explanations of all he had found while Apollo and Trucy were performing (a busy night as Trucy had predicted; In hindsight, he was glad he decided not to skip it). The pair had returned home only a few minutes ago to find Luke waiting for them in the office, and while Trucy ran off to find Phoenix and Pearl, Apollo sat down with his brother to put his badge back on his costume and learn Luke's findings. "And the whole time, Alita Tiala knew all about it," he muttered.

Luke nodded, his expression as stern as his brother's. "Exactly," he agreed.

"Why didn't she ever tell him?" Apollo wondered aloud. "If she knew he was in serious danger, you'd think she'd want to get that second operation before getting engaged! What was she thinking!?"

"She knew full well what she was doing," Luke pointed out with a glare into the distance. "Look at it from her point of view: The only son of the Kitaki Boss, a timer on his life no-one but you or the doctor know about... and he starts flirting with you? What would you do?"

Apollo looked over to his brother with a confused look. "If she was going to insist he propose, why not tell him the moment they got out of the clinic? It doesn't make sense!"
Luke closed his eyes, suddenly rather melancholy. "How did she end up in the noodle stand, Apollo?" he asked instead, changing the subject slightly. "There's only one way I can think of that all of this makes sense, and not one bit of it is pretty."

Apollo stared at his brother for a moment before looking away again, frowning in thought. 'So... Tiala somehow got the gun, took it to Meraktis... Then, leaving her sandals behind, they stole the noodle stand, went to the park... and while Meraktis was distracted by Wocky and Stickler, she shot him? Why!? And, despite being engaged to Wocky, she refused to talk about her old job or the ticking time-bomb near Wocky's heart?' He sighed, shaking his head. "Nothing about this makes sense."

"Ah, I know that feeling."

Apollo and Luke looked up in surprise to see their father (without his beanie now he was home for the night) had entered the room, giving them both a warm smile. "Dad?"

Phoenix chuckled, walking around to sit on the couch opposite his sons. "The investigation isn't going as well as you hoped, I take it?"

Sighing, Apollo nodded. "You could say that."

Luke stared at Phoenix a moment. "Papa, were you wanting to take over assisting Apollo in court?"

Apollo blinked in surprise, looking between his father and brother, trying not to look too hopeful. "You do!?"

Phoenix laughed. "Now why would I want to do that?" he insisted. "You two seem to have this case well in hand. I can't break up a dream team like you, can I?"

"O-oh," Apollo replied, turning red and rubbing at the back of his neck sheepishly as he hid his disappointment behind a grin. "Yeah. Of course."

Luke gave Phoenix a small smile. "If you insist, Papa."

"You'll do just fine," Phoenix assured them. "Tomorrow's trial is the final stretch. You have everything you need... You just need to use it."

**View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook**
There had been no sign of Wocky or his father in the lobby; Apollo had assured Luke the pair likely had their own lobby to argue in, but Luke had only grown slowly more worried as the time of the trial's start approached. Whatever was concerning him, Apollo couldn't say, but Luke had managed to hide it quite well before they separated from their family and friends - Phoenix, Trucy, Pearl, Clay, and Aria - who had headed to the gallery to cheer them on. When Apollo outright asked Luke what the matter was, the younger brother had simply insisted he was fine, and changed the subject by asking to do a quick Chords of Steel session before they left for court.

After the agonising wait in the lobby, finally the pair now found themselves stood behind the defence bench back in the top floor courtroom. Opposite them was Klavier, settling in behind the prosecutor's bench and idly organising his files. Above them, the judge sat down in his chair behind the podium, and rapped his gavel loudly to call the noisy room to order.

"Court is now in session for the trial of Wocky Kitaki."

Apollo nodded. "The defence is ready, Your Honour."

Klavier shrugged, playing with his fringe and looking every inch the smug rock-star. "Prosecution is warmed up, and it's a sold-out house."

The judge softly humphed to himself. "Very well, to recap: While yesterday's witnesses seemed more guilty than any other party-"

Apollo noticed Luke flinching a little at that. He reasoned that, to be fair, Stickler had been a dirty panty-snatcher.

"- we did find out one thing for certain," the judge continued. "There were no less than five people in the park at the time of the murder: The victim, the defendant, yesterday's two witnesses... and a mystery person." He looked between the two benches below. "Has either the prosecution or defence had any luck in tracking this mystery witness down?"

Apollo and Luke glanced at each other, unsure how to answer.

"No luck from either side, I take it," Klavier replied on their behalf, grinning proudly. "In which case, I'd like to do something a little new age: I'd like to look at this horrible crime... from the outside."

"The 'outside'?" Apollo repeated, confused.

Luke's frown slowly turned into a smile. "Ah, I see!"

"The acquisition of the murder weapon, the preparation for the act," Klavier continued, apparently ignoring the pair at the opposite bench. "Our poor defendant told all, you see... to his betrothed."

The judge looked as confused as Apollo felt. "His... bee trove?"
Klavier was nonplussed for a moment or two, then brushed at his fringe, hiding a small sigh. "His fiancée, Herr Judge," he replied. "His partner for life, with no chance for parole."

Luke hid a snort of laughter, only seeming more amused by the raised eyebrow Apollo was giving him. "That's one way of putting it!" he whispered.

"Very well," the judge agreed, "you may show the, erm, 'lucky' lady to the stand."

In the pause as Alita was summoned, Apollo turned on his brother. "Okay, what exactly is so funny?"

"Don't you see?" Luke asked, a wide grin on his face. "I think Gavin's figured out who was in the noodle stand, too! He's pretending he hasn't to not tip her off!"

Apollo shook his head. "I highly doubt that. He'll be working with Tiala to 'explain away' all the inconsistencies with his story, to get Wocky declared guilty!"

"That's kind of his job to argue Wocky's guilt," Luke pointed out. "Remember what I outlined in yesterday's trial? I said the person in the stand had to have a connection to both the victim and defendant, and Tiala fits that to a tee!"

"We may know that, but Gavin sure doesn't!" Apollo argued, then sighed, crossing his arms. "He's planning something, I'm sure of it..."

Luke just smiled and shook his head. "Believe what you want, Apollo."

The crowds in the gallery quietened as the bailiffs escorted a young woman in yellow to the stand, where she stood solemnly, her gaze straight ahead.

"Your name and occupation, Fraulein," Klavier requested.

"Alita Tiala," the young woman replied, then smiled. "My occupation... is future wife."

The judge sighed nostalgically. "Ah, traditional values! I respect that." He huffed disapprovingly. "Too many brides these days can't even weave baskets blindfolded underwater!" Before anyone could react aloud to his comment, he was giving Alita a confused look. "Yet you're here today as a witness for the prosecution?"

"To be honest, I didn't want to testify at first," Alita explained with a sheepish shrug. "But... I couldn't hide the truth."

The judge hummed in thought, then nodded approvingly. "Honesty!" he declared. "Another admirable trait."

Apollo noticed Luke muttering darkly to himself, but decided not to ask; As far as he could tell, Alita had yet to actually lie in trial.

Klavier gave Alita a long, hard look. "Fraulein, is it true that, on the day of the crime, the defendant Wocky Kitaki confessed his plans? His plans... for murder?"

Alita returned Klavier's stare, then nodded. "Yes."

Apollo wasn't surprised this appeared to be true: They all knew Wocky's very real desire for revenge, even if the defence believed it had never worked out. It was arguing it hadn't that was the problem.

"The witness will please give her testimony to the court!" the judge demanded.
Alita gave a quick smile, but looked too worried to hold it long. "It was the day that the family health check-up results came back," she explained. "When Wocky found out that Doctor Meraktis had lied, he flew into a rage. 'I'll teach him!' he said. He took one of the Family's pistols, and... And, you already know what happened that night." She shook her head. "I... just don't see how anyone but Wocky could have done it."

Again, Apollo was almost surprised by how closely Alita was sticking to the truth. The only thing he'd picked up as a lie was her final sentence.

"So the pistol did belong to the Kitaki Family, then..." the judge mused aloud.

"Yes," Klavier replied, as serious as could be. "With regards to this, an investigation is underway at the Kitaki mansion, on charges of the possession of illegal firearms."

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'Maybe, this time, they could pick up Missus Kitaki's broom while they're at it?'

The judge nodded. "And the bullet that took the victim's life? Was it...?"

"Fired from the pistol the defendant procured?" Klavier picked up, finishing the judge's unspoken question. "Yes, this has been proven."

"Rifling marks, I assume?" Luke asked, scratching his goatee.

Klavier nodded. "What else?"

Apollo turned his attention to Alita. "And when did you first hear about Wocky's plan?"

"It was the day of the murder," Alita replied, fiddling with the bow on her wrist and looking every inch the nervous fiancée. "I... I should have stopped him! I just didn't think he would actually do it!"

The judge was clearly taken in by the act, and Apollo couldn't blame him. "Very well," the old man said, giving her a sympathetic look, then he waved to the defence bench. "The defence may begin the cross-examination."

Apollo gave the judge a nod, even if, technically, he'd already asked a question. His next was another clear one: "Ms Tiala... Is it easy to take a pistol out from the house?"

Alita paused in thought. "Not really, I think," she replied. "There's a system in place to limit access." She then smiled sweetly. "But Wocky's a special case, being the next-in-line."

Apollo raised an eyebrow, and could hear Luke's muffled giggles on his right. He was almost tempted to laugh himself. 'A wannabe gangster like him with a taste for... sweets?'

"The point here," the judge pointed out, "being that Wocky had access to a pistol." He waved at Apollo to continue.

Rolling his eyes, Apollo returned his full attention to Alita. "And how can you say that for certain?" he asked. "That only Wocky could have committed this murder?"
Alita's smile faded, and she was opening her mouth to speak before being interrupted by a shout of "Objection!" from the prosecution. "Herr Forehead, you will refrain from badgering the Fraulein," Klavier ordered with a stern look. "It was the defendant," he paused, "erm, Wocky, was it, who took the pistol from his home. We know this for a fact now."

The judge looked thoughtful. "I suppose we do."

Klavier's frown turned slightly upwards. "So, how could anyone else have used this pistol to shoot the victim? They could not." The small smile turned into a full-out grin. "Simple logic, ja?"

"That does seem to be the case," the judge agreed. "Does the defence have anything to say regarding this point?"

Apollo resisted the urge to sigh. "Yes, it does!" He turned to Alita with a frown. "Based on your testimony, there was clearly another; One other person had access to that pistol!"

Klavier's grin didn't change, snapping his fingers rhythmically. "What's this?"

The judge's eyebrows shot up as he grunted, impressed. "Interesting! Tell the court who this other person with access was, defence!"

Apollo couldn't resist a slightly smug smile, turning to the witness stand with arms crossed. "Well, of course, I mean you, Ms Tiala."

Alita's eyes widened as she stared at Apollo. It took her a moment to formulate a reply. "M-me...? But why-"

"You were quite clear when you told the court," Apollo interrupted, not in the mood for an excuse and too proud of the angle he had found to hesitate at opening up the field to the questions he really wanted to ask. "You heard about the pistol from the defendant on the day of the murder. In other words, you knew what he was planning."

"Objection!" came another cry from Klavier, who closed his eyes in thought, snapping his fingers. "Let me get this straight: You intend to tell us that this lady stole the pistol from her fiancé and killed a man in cold blood on his behalf?" He paused to laugh, the gallery even deciding to join in in his amusement. "I've heard of people doing strange things for love, but this?"

The judge raised an eyebrow in agreement. "It does seem a bit... unfathomable, to be sure. I'm all for romance, and for supporting your partner in life, but I think I would hesitate at murder!"

Apollo closed his eyes and held back a sigh. "I'd hope you'd do more than hesitate!" "But what if a different connection could be proven?" he argued. "A connection between the witness and the victim? We might find that she had a personal motive beyond wanting to help her fiancé."

Klavier smiled. "Hmm, that would put things in a slightly different light." He flipped his hair, looking genuinely curious. "What possible connection are you suggesting here?"

"Just as I thought," Luke muttered with a smile to his brother. "The police didn't even think to look in that safe."

Apollo shot his brother a smile, then turned to the court with arms crossed in pride. "I have evidence showing a connection between the witness Ms Tiala and the victim!" he announced, then threw out a hand, "Take that!" The crowd gasped as, out of seemingly nowhere, the medical chart appeared in the magician's grasp, and Apollo held it high as Luke quickly tapped at the Court Record to bring up the pictures they'd taken of the chart on the room's holograms.
The judge leaned forward as he examined the images. "That looks like... a medical chart?"

A triumphant grin on his face as he watched Alita's frozen expression, Apollo lowered the chart in his hand to the bench. "Found inside a safe at the Meraktis Clinic," he explained, then tapped at the screen to zoom in and highlight the 'doctor' and 'nurse' fields at the top. "I'd like to draw the court's attention to the names written on the chart."

A gasp rang through the room. "What!?" the judge cried, and turned his attention to the witness stand with a frown. "Ms Tiala! Whatever... Why is your name on this chart!?"

There was a pause as Alita failed to react, sweating nervously.

"Well? Care to explain the meaning of this, Ms Tiala?" Apollo asked.

Alita stood frozen at the stand, the court's attention on her as everyone awaited her words...

View the Court Record
Alita pulled herself out of her shock, a sneer on her face as she crossed her arms. "I'm not sure what you mean by 'meaning', Mister Wright!"

Apollo's triumphant smile faded to a stern frown. 'Doesn't take much to freeze up the warm little fiancée act, does it?'

"I was on staff at that clinic until half a year ago," Alita snapped as explanation. "It was boring. So I quit. That's all. Is there a problem with that?"

The judge, to Apollo's surprise, looked furious. "Ms Tiala! You testified that you had no connection to the victim!"

"And I don't," Alita replied with a shrug, shooting the old man a glare. "Now."

Apollo raised an eyebrow, shutting down the holograms. "Now?" he repeated.

"I quit half a year ago, didn't I?" Alita explained, rolling her eyes. "So there's no connection!" She sighed, turning her glare back to the judge. "Let me guess, you're the kind of guy who can't rest until he knows every last detail of his girlfriend's past, am I right!?"

The judge's anger faded in a heartbeat, and he looked genuinely hurt by the accusation. "Th-that's not true at all! Why, I... I embrace the ones I love, past flaws and all, no matte-"

"Objection!" Apollo shouted, slamming his fists on the bench to bring the judge's ramblings to a halt and glaring at the woman on the stand. "'There's no connection now' doesn't fly in a court of law."

"Doesn't... fly?" Alita repeated, her frown intensifying at the young lawyer.

Apollo turned to his brother, who gave him a quick nod and wordlessly turned his attention to his satchel. They both knew what was coming. "You left your job at the Meraktis Clinic, true," Apollo told Alita, "but you remained connected somehow!"

"Very well, Mister Wright," the judge spoke up, looking intrigued. "Show us evidence that proves the witness is still connected to the Meraktis Clinic!"

Apollo looked to Luke just as his brother was pulling the shoes out of his satchel. After a quick pause to tug the protective plastic off the left one, the vet placed the high-heeled sandals on the bench, in full view of the curious court. Apollo simply smiled, gesturing to the footwear with one hand. "These sandals were found in the Meraktis Clinic lobby," he explained to Alita. "They're yours, aren't they?"

Alita's smugness had vanished. "W-well, who knows?" she insisted, playing with the ribbon on her wrist. "I'm sure there are lots of people with those sandals..."

A chuckle from the prosecutor's bench attracted everyone's attention to Klavier, who was shaking his
head with an amused grin. "So sorry, Fraulein," he said, not looking at all apologetic, "but your act isn't working. Your moment of hesitation just now cost you."

Alita stared at him for a moment in shock, then glared. "Wh-what's with you? I thought you were on my side!"

Klavier raised an eyebrow, but didn't respond to her accusing remarks. "Perhaps you are unaware that toes leave 'toe prints'?" he asked, gesturing to the sandals. "A simple analysis of these sandals will reveal all."

There was a long silence, then Alita scoffed, crossing her arms again. "Well, now we see your true colours," she darkly muttered. "I was wrong to cooperate with you from the beginning! I just wanted..." Her anger faded back into the 'scared fiancée' act, her fingers resting on her cheeks. "I just wanted you to help get Wocky back on the straight and narrow."

The judge hummed in thought, giving her a stern look. "This court thinks you need to worry less about Wocky and more about yourself," he said. "It sounds as though we need to hear a bit more about your story."

"Your sandals were found in the entrance to the clinic," Apollo sternly reminded Alita, "which means you went there on the day of the murder!"

Alita sighed. "Well, there's little point in denying it."

"Very well," the judge said with a nod. "The witness will tell us about this visit. Why did you go to the Meraktis Clinic that day?"

The young woman looked away for a moment. "I did go to the clinic that day," she admitted, her hands held together close to her chest. "My first time in half a year, since I quit in January. I went to warn him. After all, I knew Wocky had the pistol."

Apollo felt his bracelet suddenly tighten on his wrist.

"The doctor always was a timid man," Alita continued, looking somewhat disdainful but also a little mournful for her former employer. "Too timid to admit to his own mistake."

The judge paused a moment. "By 'mistake', you mean the mistake we heard about from the defendant? The botched operation?"

Alita nodded, looking calmer. "He was a timid, small man," she repeated, "but I never wished him harm. I just thought I should let him know, you know?"

The judge hummed in thought, then nodded. "That does make sense."

Klavier had his eyes closed, silently musing to himself, then snapped his fingers to attract attention, giving Alita a neutral stare. "Yes, but there is still one thing which does not."

"You mean her sandals, Mister Gavin?" Luke asked, a smile on his face. "I imagine you have a reason of your own for why she didn't wear them home from the clinic."
Apollo shot his brother an annoyed look. 'Don't encourage him!'

Klavier smirked, irritatingly proud of himself. "Ah, I see you are getting to know me, Herr Doktor!"

The judge looked surprised. "That's a good point!" he said, apparently only just noticing the problem. "If it were me, I would have worn those sandals home!"

"As would anyone." Klavier agreed. "So, why were the sandals left behind?" He looked to Alita, who was again frozen behind the stand, carefully watching the discussion before her. "There's probably a good explanation for this, right, Ms Tiala?" he suggested when she remained silent. "Say, for instance... there happened to be a similar pair of sandals there which you wore home by mistake?"

Alita stared for a moment more, then smugly smiled again, resting a hand on her hip. "Actually, that's right," she replied. "I'm impressed, Mister Gavin."

Klavier chuckled, shaking his head. "Oh, it is nothing." He then shot a grin at Apollo. "There is, after all, no other possible explanation. Ja, Forehead?"

Apollo resisted the sudden urge to punch his pretty-boy opponent in the face.

"Stay calm, Apollo," came Luke's reassuring voice from Apollo's right. "He's just challenging us to present the real reason why."

"Can he not do it by blocking us from doing exactly that!?" Apollo hissed at his brother in return.

"The defence may begin the cross-examination," the judge announced.

Apollo sighed, deciding to just get to work; He had a few clarifying questions to ask before tackling the big one. "Around what time did you go to the clinic?"

"I don't remember exactly," Alita replied with a shrug, "but it was after nine thirty, I think."

'No sign of a lie yet...'. Apollo nodded. "And that was the first time you had contacted Doctor Meraktis in half a year?"

"Of course it was," Alita sighed, badly hiding a roll of her eyes. "He wasn't the kind of boss you made 'friends' with."

"Did you want him to run away?"

Alita paused a moment, shrugging again. "Well, after I failed to stop Wocky, I thought that was the only other way to avoid the problem," she admitted.

"Couldn't you have called?" Apollo pressed on. "Why go in person?"

"I called several times that evening, but no one was in," Alita explained, looking, to Apollo's surprise, genuinely sorrowful. He mused she must have felt more affection for her former employer than she'd realised.

"The victim was busy driving home until after nine PM that night, remember?" Klavier chimed in. "This was proven by the mirror yesterday, ja?"

Alita wasn't paying attention, staring into the distance. "I thought if I warned him, he would run away for sure."
Apollo closed his eyes. As mournful as she was about the doctor's death, he wasn't going to let himself forget she'd most likely been the cause. It was time to pin her on her 'dark secret'. He looked up with a glare. "Ms Tiala," he said, tapping at his Court Record to bring up the chart again on the holograms. "This chart was found inside a safe in the doctor's office."

Alita glared back at the young lawyer, a single eyebrow raised. "Yes?"

"Why would this one chart be in that safe?" Apollo pointed out. "Ms Tiala, you know why it was, don't you?"

The young woman didn't reply, beginning to sweat.

The judge frowned at his screen, confused. "Mind filling me in?"

Apollo nodded. "Doctor Meraktis didn't have the leisure of making 'mistakes','" he pointed out, withdrawing the chart again from the screens. "That's why he wrote up a false report, and kept the truth locked away."

Klavier smiled absently to himself. "Bad Herr Doktor."

"And this is where you come in, Ms Tiala," Apollo continued, turning to the woman on the stand. "The nurse who filed this chart was you, which means you knew about Wocky's failed operation!"

The judge's eyebrows shot up, impressed. "Interesting..."

"You were in the same position as Doctor Meraktis!" Apollo added, pointing accusingly at Alita. "Kind of makes it hard to claim 'no connection', doesn't it?"

Despite her earlier fear, Alita seemed confident, giving the young lawyer a smug smile as she crossed her arms. "You're bold for a novice, I'll give you that." Before Apollo could reply, she was scoffing at him. "Mister Wright, you must know I was only a nurse. The doctor is responsible for the chart's contents."

The judge hummed in thought. "This chart business seems to be quite important," he decided. "Please amend your testimony accordingly."

Alita gave Apollo a smirk. "Too bad, little attorney."

Apollo just glared at her in return, one hand on his bracelet. He wasn't going to waste time wondering why, but something told him he needed absolute focus for whatever the former nurse was about to say. He barely registered the courtroom around him disappearing into blackness as the young woman's every movement filled his vision.

"Honestly," Alita was continuing, innocently clasping her hands together at her chest with a sweet smile, "why would I go to the clinic now for a half-year-old chart?"

There it was. Apollo couldn't resist a smirk of his own as he turned his attention up to meet the woman's gaze. "Why go now, you ask? But you know why you would go 'now', don't you."

Alita stared evenly back at him. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"It was quite clear, Ms Tiala," Apollo continued. "You have a nervous habit: The moment you said the word 'now', you used your right thumb to fiddle with your ring."

"Wh-what?" Alita asked, both surprised and confused.
Apollo was too proud of himself for using his own ability to bypass the need to ask Luke for help to stop now. "The chart wasn't a part of your past, it was a clear and present threat!"

"That's ridiculous!" Alita scoffed. "Why, if that were the case, I would have had six months to do something about it!"

"Indeed," Apollo agreed, surprising the young woman into silence. "Which means something happened quite recently... Something to make that chart a problem for you now."

Alita didn't reply, sweating behind the stand.

"Ms Tiala, there's no use trying to hide it," Apollo continued, reaching for his Court Record resting on the defence bench. "The chart became a threat to you now... because of this."

View the Court Record
On the holograms, the doctor's report that Klavier had submitted back at the beginning of the trial came into view, and Apollo was careful to highlight its date, the same day as the murder. "A health check-up report, belonging to the defendant," Apollo explained with a confident smile. "The Kitakis are trying to get out of the business. The health check-up this month was their first ever." The smile turned into a smirk, his eyes having never left Alita's. "What did you think when you heard about this?"

Alita was still sweating, avoiding eye contact. "Oh, n-nothing," she insisted. "Why should I think anything?"

"Oh?" Apollo replied, his voice slowly getting louder as his argument gained traction. "I would think you were positively beside yourself. Because you were afraid. You knew what Wocky's chest x-ray would reveal!"

The young woman made a gurgling noise as she failed to construct a reply.

"A full half year had passed since the operation," Apollo still continued, staring her down as he refused to stop until he'd made his point. "You thought you were home free... when the chart," he grabbed the file, waving it at the witness stand, "came back to haunt you!"

Finally, Alita screamed, clutching her head as she leaned back, before her own cry was strangled as she twisted around, refusing to look in Apollo's direction.

Apollo felt a sudden swell of light-headedness as the courtroom came back into focus around him, and pressed a hand to the bench to keep from visibly swaying, the chart falling from his grasp. "That's all, Your Honour," he managed to add with the same strength as his previous speech. 'Note to self: No matter how excited you are, remember to stop focussing once you have what you need...'

A hand rested on Apollo's arm, and he turned his head to see Luke giving him a proud smile. "That was brilliant," the young vet whispered. "You really are better at this than you think, Apollo!"

Apollo could only sheepishly smile in return.

The judge seemed confused. "Wh-what just happened?" he asked. "Did... the witness just admit to lying?"

Klavier was watching the defence team with, to Apollo's surprise, an impressed smile. "I sensed it. There was a great 'aura' emanating from Herr Forehead." He gave them a nod. "Very cool." Before Apollo could even think to formulate a reply through the shock, Klavier had turned to Alita, who was leaning on the stand with a nervous grimace. "So, the lady was lying, it seems," he continued, seeming unsurprised.

Apollo quickly nodded, shoving his confusion over the enigmatic prosecutor to the side. "That's correct. She said she had no connection to the Meraktis Clinic, but her connection was deep indeed... a bit too deep." He forced himself to stand up straight to at least fake his earlier energy, which was
thankfully slowly returning after his accidental over-exertion. Grabbing the chart, he again waved it at Alita. "If the Kitakis got a hold of this chart with her name, she'd be finished. Isn't that right, Ms Tiala?"

Alita paused, then sighed, standing up straight herself and brushing off her dress with a glare. "You guessed it," she darkly muttered in admittance.

The gallery broke into excited chatter, forcing the judge to bang his gavel to call for order. Apollo barely noticed, shooting Luke a happy grin as he placed the chart back on the bench. 'I-I did it! I broke her testimony!'

"Wait!"

Apollo almost jumped in surprise at the interruption.

"Ms Tiala?" the judge asked, peering down at the one who had spoken.

Alita was once again standing confidently behind the stand, her hand, which had been held out as she called for attention, coming to rest at her side. "It's true, that chart was bad news for me," she announced. "That's why I went to meet the doctor that day! But that's all! I told him about Wocky and went home! Nothing happened!"

Apollo felt his bracelet twinging again and resisted the urge to sigh.

Klavier grinned as he watched Alita. "It appears this cross-examination is far from over." He turned to Apollo and Luke. "She hid the truth from us, this is clear; Yet it is not clear that this truth has anything to do with the case at hand!"

'And I bet if she hadn't said something, you would have...' Apollo darkly mused, glaring at the prosecutor.

The judge nodded. "Very well. The witness will add this to her testimony... and we'll have a bit more cross-examination." He gestured to Apollo to continue.

Luke patted Apollo's arm. "Don't panic. This is what we've been waiting for, after all."

"Waiting for?" Apollo repeated, raising an eyebrow at his brother. "Waiting for what?"

"To ask her about the confrontation with Doctor Meraktis," Luke replied, smiling. "Remember the mess in that office? Something certainly happened while she was there."

Apollo paused a moment to think, finger pressed to his forehead. 'Told him about Wocky and went home, huh? True, I shouldn't have needed my bracelet to tell me that was a lie.' He looked up to where Alita was standing, arms crossed as she gave him a wary glare. "You say 'nothing happened' in the doctor's office," he said. "I disagree." With another magician's flourish, he produced from thin air the small baggy containing the squashed bullet from the safe, eliciting gasps from the gallery as he held it high. "Take a look at this."

Alita wrinkled up her nose as she leaned forward to examine the tiny lump of metal. "What's that? It looks like a squished-up ball of clay." She smirked, looking to Apollo. "Kind of like you, actually."

Apollo ignored her comment, still holding the tiny bag where all could see it. "This bullet was found in the Meraktis Clinic office," he explained. "Something did 'happen' in that office, Ms Tiala!"

"Objection!" came a cry from Klavier, who gave Apollo a stern look as he threw out a pointer finger.
"Enough of this joking around. The police investigated that clinic."

"Objection!" Apollo shot back, tossing the bullet to his right hand to point with his left in return. "Ah, but this was stuck inside the doctor's safe."

Klavier blinked in surprise. "Inside the safe...?" He then shook his head, banging a fist against the wall behind him. "Objection! But there is a problem. How can you say that bullet was fired on that day?"

"Objection!" Apollo again shouted, smiling to himself. "Were't you the one who brought up rifling marks earlier?" Before Klavier could do more than wince in shock, Apollo was continuing: "The pistol was taken from the Kitaki Mansion that day. If the marks on this bullet," he waved it at the court again, "match the murder weapon, then that proves a firearm was discharged in that office on the day of the murder!"


The judge banged his gavel. "Bailiff! Have this bullet analysed immediately!" A bailiff ran to the defence bench, where Apollo handed over the tiny lump of metal. As the official scurried away out of the room, the judge nodded decisively. "It will certainly take a while for us to hear any results, and I don't see anything worth questioning the witness about until then. Indeterminate recess!" Another bang of the gavel, and the trial was temporarily suspended.

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The Wright brothers sat side by side on the dull brown sofa in the lobby. Again, there was no sign of Wocky or his father, but Apollo was no longer surprised by that. His lack of sleep from the previous night (he hadn't fallen asleep until one in the morning, and woke up around five from a nightmare) was combining with the over-exertion from using his unique ability for too long in court, so he slumped back in his seat and closed his eyes. If he did manage to doze off, he trusted Luke to wake him in time for the trial to resume.

Next to Apollo, Luke sat with his hands neatly folded in his lap, gaze locked on his knees. He sighed, frowning deeply in worry. "This is it," he muttered. "The final stretch."

Apollo pulled one eye open to check on his brother. "Yeah," he agreed, closing it again as he deemed the problem to be simple nerves. "Just need to prove she was at the clinic, then we can jump to putting her in the noodle stand."

Luke didn't respond for a long moment. "Wocky's gonna hate us."

"Yep," Apollo sighed, keeping his eyes closed this time. "He wants us to declare him guilty; Of course he's going to get mad."

There was another pause. "I didn't mean about that."

Apollo frowned, then reluctantly lifted his head from the back of the lounge, watching his brother carefully. "About what, then?"
Luke stared solemnly into the distance, slowly leaning forward in his seat. "You haven't noticed?"

Resisting the urge to strangle his brother for being so evasive, Apollo sat up straight, giving Luke a stern look. "Luke, tell me what the problem is," he ordered. "What's wrong?"

"All the similarities are piling up and there's nothing we can do to help him," Luke muttered, squeezing his eyes shut in an attempt to prevent tears. "We're about to ruin his life, Apollo..."

Apollo was about to ask his brother in frustration to just say what the problem was when it finally hit him, and he gasped. "L-Luke, no, of course not!" He jumped to comfort his brother, putting an arm around his shoulders. "We're about to save his life! He can't have that operation in jail, can he!? And we're protecting him from Tiala this way!" When Luke didn't immediately respond, he pulled his brother closer. "Luke... we didn't ruin your life. Why would this be ruining Wocky's?"

Luke was silent a moment more, but did lean into his brother's embrace. "It felt like it at the time," he admitted. "And the way Mister Eldoon was talking, it didn't sound like Wocky would even survive an operation... He could drop dead right now-!"

"But he won't!" Apollo insisted. "C'mon Luke, he'll be fine! He'll survive this, just like you did, and he'll be grateful in the long run!"

"But what if there's not-!"

"And what if there is?" Apollo interrupted. He sighed, wondering what best to say that would cheer up his brother. "This... This is what being an attorney's about. It's helping people, being on their side when no-one else is, when even they aren't. We're fighting for the truth here. We can't back down from that."

There was a very long pause. Luke didn't react.

Slowly, Apollo gave his brother a grin... then sucked as much air into his lungs as he could to shout, "You're Luke Wright and you're fine!"

Luke jumped a little, looking up at Apollo with wide eyes, then, a moment later, softly giggled at the gleeeful expression on his brother's face. "Haven't we already done Chords of Steel today?"

"Hey, since when is there a rule saying you can't do it more than once a day?" Apollo pointed out, crossing his arms. "Which one of us made this thing up again? Just gotta be careful not to blow your voice out, that's all."

After a short pause, Luke giggled again. "Alright. I suppose another session won't hurt." He got to his feet, giving Apollo a genuine smile. "We gotta be in top spirits to protect Wocky, after all!"

"That's the spirit!" Apollo laughed, and he jumped to his feet to join his brother.
The moment the report returned to the courthouse, summons were sent out for the trial to resume, and the crowds once more gathered in the gallery. As Apollo and Luke found their places back behind the bench, they both mused it felt like no time at all had passed since they left, with Klavier patiently waiting opposite them and Alita huffing nervously at the witness stand.

Above everyone, the judge lowered himself into his seat at the judge's podium, a small piece of paper in his hand. He banged his gavel to quieten the crowds, "Court is now back in session!" then turned his full attention back to the paper. "Now, I'm sure everyone remembers where we left off," he said. "The report has returned from the analysis of the bullet found in the safe." He cleared his throat, then read out, "The rifling marks on both bullets are identical." He nodded decisively, placing the paper down on his desk. "Well. It seems as though the bullet in the safe was fired from the murder weapon."

Klavier stood with his eyes closed, deep in thought.

"Perhaps the defence would like to state their position?" the judge offered.

Apollo nodded, taking a moment to formulate his thoughts. "The bullet in that safe proves one fact: A pistol was fired in that office on that day, and, at the time of the firing, the safe was open... the safe which contained the top secret chart."

"Do you think someone was threatening Doctor Meraktis?" the judge asked. "In order to open the safe?"

"Only one person was in a position to do such a thing," Apollo replied, then threw out a finger to point at the witness stand. "Our witness, Alita Tiala!"

The gallery erupted into loud discussion, forcing the judge to bang his gavel repeatedly. "Order! Order! Order!" When the crowds finally quietened, he turned to the defence bench. "Mister Wright! Where are you going with this? Are you accusing the witness!?"

Apollo took a deep breath. 'Here we go.' "Alita Tiala knew about Wocky Kitaki's botched operation! She got engaged to him without telling him about it!" He banged his fists on the bench to punctuate his point. "As long as that bullet remained in his chest, his days were numbered. What if she married him, and then the bullet finally reached its destination?"

The gallery gasped. "Wh-what!?" the judge agreed.

"That reminds me," Klavier cut in, snapping his fingers. "Apparently, the Kitakis have been asserting themselves in lawful business practises. They're making quite a great deal of money." He turned to Alita with a smile. "A fortune, if you will."

Alita looked away, frowning uncomfortably.

"Nefarious!" the judge commented. "So she planned to marry him just to get her hands on this
fortune?"

There was a sudden slam from the defence side of the courtroom, and nineteen-year-old Wocky Kitaki charged in the direction of the defence bench, shouting "Objection!" just as a pair of bailiffs jumped in his way, grabbing the teen and just barely managing to hold him as he struggled in their grip, shaking an angry fist at Apollo and Luke. "You keep talking trash about my Alita and... and I'll sue you, lawyer-man!"

Apollo could only stare at the teen with a mix of shock and fear of what would happen should Wocky slip out of the bailiffs' grip. "Huh? Me?"

"Yeah!" Wocky shouted back, face red. "You said... You said you'd... you'd..." He shook his head, his anger impeding his ability to speak. "You'd abuse my Alita!"

"N-no, accuse!" Apollo corrected. "We're accusing her!"

Wocky didn't seem to be listening. "Same difference!"

Luke slipped past Apollo, moving towards Wocky with a sympathetic look. "Wocky, please, I know this is-"

"Is this what you were talking about yesterday!?" the teen demanded, turning his attention to Luke and starting to sound frantic. "Well I don't want it! You keep your hands off my Alita, or I'll-!" Abruptly, he stopped talking, and, in the silence, everyone could hear the muffled giggles that had given the teen pause. As Wocky slowly turned his head to the witness stand, so too did the attention of the court change its focus to the laughing young woman in the centre of the room, a hand pressed to her face as she doubled over, failing to hide her grin.

The judge frowned, confused. "Ms... Tiala?"

Alita stopped bothering to hide her amusement, waving a hand. "I-I'm sorry," she said, not looking at all apologetic as she dabbed tears from her eyes. "I just... It's been so long since I've laughed so hard."


Alita didn't seem to hear him, waving her hand dismissively as she turned to Wocky with a smirk, speaking to him as though to a particularly dim-witted child. "Wocky. Wake up and smell reality!"

Wocky seemed frozen, staring at his fiancée almost uncomprehendingly. "A... Alita-baby?" At his side, Luke was waving away the bailiffs, giving the teen some room.

"The signature on the chart, the engagement," Alita pointed out with a snort of laughter. "I mean, come on! It's so obvious!" She raised a mocking eyebrow, giving Wocky a sneer. "Even for a brainless, spoiled brat such as yourself."


Klavier was fiddling with his hair, giving Alita a stern look. "Your honesty is like a breath of foul air, Fraulein."

Alita waved a hand dismissively, turning away from Wocky to face the room at large. "Hey, I wasn't getting out of this clean, anyway."
"So," Apollo spoke up, refocussing on the case to let Luke take care of their client, "the Family fortune is what you're really after."

"That's right," Alita readily admitted. "I wanted the money."

"No way!" Wocky cried with a trembling voice, almost jumping towards Alita before Luke held him back, but, this time, the teen made no effort to struggle, staring at his fiancée with wide eyes. "That's wack! I ain't trying to hear that!"

Alita didn't even dignify the teen with her attention, pointedly facing away from him as she muttered, "Should have done the wedding earlier. Oh well."

Luke was guiding Wocky back to the side-room, muttering something to the teen that Apollo couldn't make out - He assumed some kind of comforting words. A part of him wanted to be upset his 'help' was 'abandoning' him at such a critical stage of the case, but he supposed no-one was better suited to help their client right now than Luke.

"By the way," Alita continued, turning to Apollo with arms crossed, "can I ask you a question?"

Apollo blinked in surprise. "Who, me?"

Alita smirked. "I believe you said you were going to abuse me?"

At that, Apollo gave her an unamused stare. "Accuse."

"Of what crime, might I ask?" Alita shot back, still smirking. At Apollo's sudden confused look, she continued, "Oh, I'm a bad girl, sure. I got close to that brat because I wanted his money. But he was the one with the pistol. He could've fired it into the safe after I'd already left the clinic."

Apollo was almost too surprised at the claim to respond, a hand on his bracelet as he felt it subtly tighten on his wrist. "What...?"

"I would never do a thing like that," Alita insisted. "It was definitely that silly brat."

More twinges from his bracelet, but Apollo wasn't sure where to even begin with a counter-argument. "Wait, but..."

"Your lies end here, Miss Tiala."

Everyone turned in surprise to see Luke emerging from the side-room again, a cold glare fixed on the woman at the witness stand. "L-Luke?" Apollo muttered.

"Wocky didn't know that chart existed," Luke was continuing, standing firm by the defence bench. "None of the Kitakis did. Only you and Doctor Meraktis knew where it was hidden, and no-one had more to lose than you if it was uncovered."

Alita stared at him a moment before huffing, faking a confident sneer. "But I didn't have a pistol now, did I?"

"You may not own a pistol," Luke conceded, his glare never failing, "but the Kitakis certainly did. Your fiancé had one that very night." He crossed his arms. "To live as one of them for so long was quite the con, Miss Tiala. I wouldn't think you'd be above some idle thievery."

Alita's false confidence was starting to fade. "Well, you'd think he'd have mentioned if he'd lost that pistol, no? All I've heard him do is boast about how guilty he is!"
Apollo half-wanted to object that that was only because Wocky put so much value into his 'gangster' reputation, but he decided not to.

"Actually, Wocky couldn't recall if he had the pistol on him when he was in the park," Luke coldly replied. "He can't recall the murder at all. It was too traumatising even for him."

Alita rolled her eyes. "Oh how convenient for him..."

"Sorry to intrude in this lovely conversation," Klavier interrupted, drawing everyone's attention with a concerned look at Luke, "but you are forgetting one critical point, Herr Doktor."

"And what point is that?" Apollo asked.

Klavier brushed his hair from his eyes. "Certainly, the Fraulein wanted that chart," he explained. "You assume she threatened the doctor into opening that safe. But then, wouldn't she have taken the chart?"

Luke just gave Klavier a smile. "Ah yes, thank you for bringing that up, Mister Gavin," he said, and began to stroke his goatee. "I was struggling over that particular logical paradox myself for a while: If someone wanted so badly to retrieve that chart that they had a gun with them, what happened that their objective was never completed?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow at his brother. "I hope you have an answer to that question," he muttered, not wanting to admit that the issue hadn't occurred to him at all.

Luke giggled as he turned to Apollo. "Oh, of course I do! Although it is just a theory."

The judge turned to Alita with a grunt. "Ms Tiala."

"Yes?" Alita sighed, a hand on her hip.

"It is clear to this court that you are not a very good fiancée," the judge announced, giving her a disapproving frown.

Alita just smiled. "Oh, I'm flattered."

"Perhaps it's time you told us the truth?" the judge suggested, in a tone that said 'no' was not an answer. "Tell us about yourself, including your actions and whereabouts on that day."

Seeing a chance, Apollo butted in with, "Don't forget! We've proven that you were at the Meraktis Clinic on the day of the crime!" At his side, Luke was moving to rejoin him behind the bench.

Alita gave Apollo a long stare, then began to speak.
"Yes, I went to the clinic that day to speak to the doctor," Alita reluctantly agreed, pointedly looking at Apollo before turning her attention to the court at large. "I wanted that chart, but I failed to get it, so I went back to the clinic later." She crossed her arms, shooting a glare at Apollo. "In any case, I didn't shoot him. You don't even have proof I stole that pistol, do you."

Apollo bit his lip to keep from shouting something about how he could see the nervous twitches of her hand as she claimed to not have shot Meraktis.

"And that brat was spotted in the park at the moment of the crime!" Alita continued, scoffing. "Frankly, I don't think it matters who else was there. Only one had the murder weapon, if you see what I mean."

The judge thought a moment. "You went back 'later'...?"

"That chart was dangerous, you understand," Alita explained with a sigh. "I needed to get rid of it, that's why I went that day."

"But you couldn't get the chart then, could you?" Klavier pointed out, giving Alita a neutral stare.

Alita looked away for a moment, not responding to his question. "And later that night, Doctor Meraktis was shot." She shook her head. "I heard about the shooting, waited a day, but then I had to go back..." She glared to one side. "No easy feat with the cops all over the place."

Apollo blinked in surprise. "Th-that was you!?" he cried. "That thump we heard in the office!? You were the burglar?"

Alita raised an eyebrow, looking between the pair behind the defence bench. "That was you two?" she asked in return, then scowled. "If only I had one more minute, then I could have opened that safe and gotten the chart!"

"At least we were there legally, Ms Tiala," Luke pointed out.

"Witness, that's trespassing!" the judge exclaimed in shock. "And brazen, at that!"

Alita rolled her eyes. "Oh, is this a trial for trespassing now? Besides, you can't blame a girl for wanting to protect herself." She smirked at the judge. "They are gangsters, you know."

The judge shook his head, deciding to leave it. "In any case, Mister Wright, your cross-examination!"

Apollo sighed to himself, studying Alita's confident smirk as she awaited his questions. 'Admitting the little crime to avoid the big one, eh? Well you must really be dreaming if you think it's that easy to escape the truth! Though there is one small thing that's been bugging me about that burglary...'

"Why did you wait to go back to the clinic?"
Alita shrugged. "When I heard what happened, well, I was too scared to do anything that day," she admitted. "So I waited until the day after... The sixteenth, was it?" She shot a glare at the defence team. "Of course, you and your meddling 'assistant' had to get in my way."

The judge tugged on his beard in thought. "But why did Doctor Meraktis keep that chart around?" he asked. "It was clearly dangerous for him. He could have burned it."

"Because he's a coward," Alita spat in disgust. "The chart was his insurance."

"Insurance?" the judge repeated, confused.

"My signature was on that chart, to be more specific," Alita explained with a scowl. "That made sure I couldn't betray him."

'That... makes more sense than I thought it would,' Apollo admitted to himself, pressing a finger to his temple. 'I guess now we move on to the big guns.' He stood up straight, a hand resting on the bench, and tried to look important. "Ms Tiala, you say it 'doesn't matter' who else was on the scene of the murder that night?"

"Obviously," Alita replied, rolling her eyes at the question. "Only the brat had the gun, after all."

"But it's impossible for Wocky to have killed him!" Apollo pointed out with a frustrated glare. "The wound was on the other side of his head!"

A snapping of fingers from the prosecutor's bench cut the argument short, Klavier thinking to himself as he waited for the room to fall silent. "Let's review the facts again, shall we?" he offered, then activated the holograms to bring up the diagram of the map, though only with markers of Wocky and Meraktis' locations. "If the killer shot from this location," he indicated the 'K' marker, "the bullet would've struck our victim square in the forehead." To illustrate his point, a small red arrow flashed to point at the 'front' of the victim's marker. "However! The entry wound was in the right temple."

The arrow moved to point at the 'right' of the victim.

The judge nodded. "Yes, we heard testimony on this yesterday." He pointed at his own screen, generating the 'W1' marker to the south of the existing ones. "At the time of the shooting, the witness standing here shouted. The victim turned his head to look, and was shot."

"Objection!" Apollo exclaimed, slamming the bench with his fists. "But that testimony was proven to be a lie! Our egregious panty-snatcher Mister Stickler did witness the crime, but he was standing to the north, next to the trash can where he tossed those panties!" He tapped at his Court Record to correct the location of the W1 marker. "If Mister Stickler shouted from this location, the bullet couldn't hit his right temple, not when fired from where Wocky was standing!"

Alita laughed to herself. "Silly, silly attorney..."

Apollo looked to the witness in surprise. "What?"

"Do you remember what you had for breakfast that morning?" Alita asked, almost mockingly. Confused by the strange request, Apollo shrugged. "Um, a glass of milk, usually..."

"What matters is one thing," Alita continued, arms crossed. "The doctor was shot in his right temple. If that's the case, there can only be one explanation: The panties guy was mistaken."

With a growl, Apollo slammed his fists into the bench again. "Objection! But his location was proven! You can't write that off as him being 'mistaken'? And what about the other two witnesses on
"Objection!" came a cry from Klavier, who smiled knowingly at Apollo. "Ah, but need I remind you that, of those two, one is still missing and the other most certainly did not give a clear picture of events on his own." He gave the defence, especially the sheepish Luke, a grin. "Why don't you show us, Herr Forehead... Where was the shooter standing?"

Apollo blinked in surprise; He hadn't been expecting to be outright asked who actually shot Meraktis, not after his arguments were so continually brushed aside the previous day.

"Don't hesitate, Apollo," Luke said from his right, giving his brother an encouraging smile. "I know you know the answer to this."

Giving his younger brother a firm nod, Apollo moved a hand to his Court Record... then paused, and looked up at Alita with a confident smile. "I believe we all owe a debt of gratitude to Ms Alita Tiala."

Alita suddenly looked scared. "Wh-what do you mean?"

"Thanks to you, we had a chance to review the crime," Apollo replied. "We already knew it couldn't be the first witness, Wesley Stickler, nor the second... but the third? They've been a total mystery in this trial so far."

The judge gasped. "Oh no..."

"Oh yes!" Apollo cried. "Who's left that was on the victim's right as he turned to face Mister Stickler!?" He tapped on his computer to highlight the 'W3' marker in the noodle stand. "The mystery witness! Any other answer is simply impossible!"

The gallery broke into excited murmurs, forcing the judge to bang his gavel for order.

Alita hid her nervousness with a scoff. "This is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard!" she declared. "I'd think you'd notice if you were pulling someone along!"

"Oh, we don't doubt he knew full well that person was there, Ms Tiala," Luke replied, giving her a stern glare. "Besides, their existence was proven yesterday, by both footprint and testimony."

"And you want to know the most interesting part, Ms Tiala?" Apollo added with a smug smile. "We found the shoe that left the print... and it had your toe prints inside." The gallery was already in uproar before Apollo had raised his hand, displaying the slippers he had again dramatically magicked into his grip. He considered shouting over the crowd to highlight that this proved she was said mystery witness, but, from the reaction of the audience, it looked like he didn't need to after all.

Alita made a gurgling noise, staring at the pair with wide eyes. Above, the judge was madly banging his gavel, shouting, "Order! Order!"

"Objection!" came a shout from Klavier, finally silencing the gallery as he pointed dramatically at Apollo. "Yet, upon second viewing of this evidence... Can this be called a footprint, in good faith?"

"Objection!" Apollo shouted back, dropping the slippers on the bench to return the point. "Observe the diagram! A park pathway runs right next to the slipper mark! A slipper wouldn't leave a trace on a cobblestone path!"

"Objection!" Klavier curled his outstretched hand into a fist and banged it against the wall behind him. "Yet you still cannot say this is a 'footprint', ja?"
"Why not!?" Apollo demanded, banging his own fists on the bench.

Klavier shook his head. "You have an impression left by a single slipper," he explained. "What if it was on the stand and simply fell to the ground?"

"I'm afraid that simply doesn't fit with the evidence, Mister Gavin," Luke interrupted with a smile, picking up the slippers to show off the paint-covered soles. "For one thing, they were clearly worn by someone that night, as they stepped in the paint from the hit-and-run on Kitaki Avenue, quite a distance from the scene of the murder." He placed them back on the bench. "For another, this is a working noodle stand. Normally, it would be full of the various tools of its trade; In Mister Eldoon's case, it is mostly filled with his bowls. And where did we eventually find those bowls?" He tapped at Apollo's Court Record, replacing the crime scene diagram on the holographic screens with the photo Apollo had taken in the clinic reception. "Neatly piled up just inside the front doors of the Meraktis Clinic. Space was being very specifically made in that noodle stand to fit a person inside."

"And," Apollo picked up, shooting a triumphant grin at the nervous Alita, hands pressed to her ears, "right around the time that you were there, Ms Alita Tiala!"

Alita shook her head as the murmurs began again from the gallery, then shrieked, "Stoooop!" Her cry silenced the gallery in an instant, and the young woman shot frantic glares at the defence bench. "I won't listen to any more of these wild fantasies! No, not fantasies..." She growled at the pair. "They're worse lies than that spoiled brat's pick-up lines!"

"I would like to remind the witness of her current status," the judge interrupted, giving her a stern look. "This court does not consider you entirely innocent."

Alita scoffed, lowering her hands from her ears to cross her arms. "Show me an innocent, I'll show you a fairy tale."

Apollo frowned. 'Man, were you a prosecutor in a past life, too?'

The judge sighed, shaking his head. "In any case. The defence has, somehow, made its point. The witness had both a motive and an opportunity to kill Doctor Meraktis."

"More fairy tales!" Alita barked. "This whole trial is a fairy tale!"

"Then please," the judge replied, raising a pointed eyebrow in her direction, "pull us back down to reality, Ms Tiala. I'm giving you one last chance to explain yourself."

Alita scoffed, but seemed agreeable to talk as requested.

View the Court Record
Apollo rested a hand on his bracelet as he stared Alita down; He didn't want to miss a single thing when it came to this final testimony - They couldn't afford for him to miss even the smallest detail that might lead them to the full truth.

"That night, I went to ask Doctor Meraktis for the chart," Alita reluctantly admitted. "I had no intention of ever letting that chart fall into the Kitaki Family's hands." She paused to sigh. "But Doctor Meraktis didn't understand... For some reason, he thought the Kitakis had sent me!" She shook her head, looking away as a hand rested at her neck. "So I gave up and went home... All I did was talk to him!"

Apollo frowned as he evaluated the young woman's minute movements. Was it just him, or was there another similarity to Luke's trial that was about to rear its ugly head...? "All you did was talk?" he repeated.

Alita nodded, but didn't meet Apollo's gaze.

Shaking his head, Apollo crossed his arms, his mind working a mile a minute to fully decode Alita's intentions. This time, he would do it right. "No. All you did was lie."

"Wh-what?" Alita snapped in shock, glaring at Apollo with wide eyes. "Show me proof!"

"The proof," Apollo replied, "is you, Ms Tiala. 'All I did was talk to him', you claim." He threw out a hand to point dramatically at her. "Yet you can't hide your own nervous twitch when you say those words!"

Her hand was playing idly with her scarf, almost certainly unconsciously, as she stared Apollo down. "My 'twitch'? What are you talking about!?"

"You have a habit," Apollo proudly explained, "of scratching the area of your neck around the edge of your scarf."

"Wha-!" Alita stuttered, then consciously pulled her hand away from her neck, clutching it tightly with her other hand in the vicinity of the clover shape at the front of her dress. She pressed her teeth together, torn between shock and rage as she glared at Apollo with wide eyes. When he only smirked knowingly at her, she added, "D-don't look at me like that! I t-told you the tr-truth..."

Apollo shook his head as she nervously trailed off. "It seems that when you recall what really happened in that office, you can't keep your hands off your neck, can you?" Alita didn't respond, sweating heavily as she stared back at him, and Apollo's smirk turned into a stern look. "You can't hide behind your scarf, Ms Tiala! Something happened between you and the victim in the Meraktis Clinic office! And I've got proof that shows exactly what happened!" With a firm tap on his Court Record, he brought up on the holograms one of the photos he had taken the previous day, of the table lamp with the broken bulb Trucy had been admiring.

"Wh-what's that?" Alita hesitantly asked, her hand back at her neck as she obviously avoided
looking at the picture.

Apollo smirked. "You're touching your scarf again."

With a tiny squeak, Alita again withdrew her hand, her nervous face turned away from Apollo as she continued to sweat.

Standing tall, Apollo turned his attention to the court. "There's something unusual about this lamp," he explained. "The bulb is broken," he paused to switch the photo out for one of the cord, "and there's a red splotch on the cord." He looked to Alita. "Seeing how you hide your neck... I think I can come up with a plausible explanation for the lamp's state."

Frustration seemed to overcome Alita's fear, as she shot the defence team a glare and demanded, "Well spit it out! This talking in circles nonsense is killing me!"

Apollo nodded. "Very well. The answer is very simple. Ms Alita Tiala..." He paused, again pointing dramatically at the witness stand. "Please remove your scarf!"

Alita once again shrieked, clasping her hands to her ears and madly shaking her head.

The gallery muttered to itself, and Apollo finally took his attention off the witness to briefly check in with his surroundings: Opposite them, behind the prosecutor's bench, Klavier was standing with eyes closed, deep in thought. Above, on his podium, the judge was frowning sternly at Alita, his hand readying his gavel in case the gallery got too enthusiastic. On Apollo's right, Luke stood with arms crossed, eyebrows pressed together in concern as he stared intensely at a spot on the defence bench directly in front of him. Worried for his brother (and with no idea how long Luke had been in that state), Apollo gently tapped his arm, whispering, "Hey, you okay?"

Luke didn't seem to react at first, then quietly insisted, "I'm fine. I was expecting something like this, after all."

Apollo wanted to press his brother harder, but it seemed Alita had recovered enough to resume her protests: "I... I won't do it! This is insane! I'm a... an unrelated third party!" She clutched her scarf tightly, sending death glares at the defence team. "You can't order me to remove my clothing!"

The judge shook his head, Alita's shrieks enough to quieten the gallery on their own. "Ms Tiala, I'm afraid you've forgotten what's already been proven."

Alita blinked in surprise, then shook her head at the judge. "Y-you haven't proven that was me in that ridiculous noodle st-"

"Objection!" came Klavier's voice, and he looked up at the witness with an even stare. "Maybe so, but you are hardly 'unrelated', Fraulein."

The judge nodded in agreement. "Please remove your scarf," he instructed.

Alita stared in disbelief for a moment, then slowly shook her head at the judge. "No," she muttered, then pressed her hands to her face, shouting, "Noooooo!"

There was a long silence, the court frozen as it expectantly watched and waited for Alita to follow the judge's orders. She remained unmoving for several seconds, until a bailiff nervously began to take a few steps in her direction, and she finally broke from her spell to wave them away. "I can do it!" she snapped, then, once the bailiff had scurried back to their post, she paused again. With a sigh, slowly she reached up to the long green scarf knotted firmly around her neck, and pulled it away.
Apollo couldn't resist a smirk as he stared. "I knew it. So I was right, wasn't I, Ms Alita Tiala!"

An angry red mark was snaked visibly around Alita's neck, standing out against her pale skin. As far as Apollo could see, there wasn't a single break in the line, looping perfectly all the way around. Alita herself had her head turned away, biting her lip in clear worry, her hands tightly clutching the scarf to her chest.

"Your neck," the judge muttered, a look of awe on his face. He shook his head in shocked disbelief. "That isn't what I think it is!"

"Something did happen that night at the Meraktis Clinic!" Apollo continued, pointing accusingly at Alita. "You needed to get that chart back, no matter what it took. Even if you had to steal your fiancé's pistol to do it!"

"B-but wait!" the judge interrupted, studying the photos of the lamp on his personal screen. "Looking at this lamp, and the witness's neck... It looks like the very opposite happened!"

Apollo nodded. "Exactly. The victim in the clinic that night was this witness! Specifically," he crossed his arms, sternly staring at Alita, "you tried to threaten Doctor Meraktis and he attacked you! That's what happened that night at the Meraktis Clinic!"

Alita stared back for a moment, then shrieked once more, burying her face in the scarf still clutched in her hands. It seemed to echo around the room for a full minute before she finally fell silent, slumped on the witness stand.

The gallery erupted into conversation again, forcing the judge to call for order, banging his gavel. "Order! Order! Order!" Once the crowds had began to quieten, he turned on the lawyers below him and demanded, "Will someone please tell me what really happened!?"

"I told you the truth already!" Alita cried with a sob, her hands moving to drape the scarf back around her neck and hide her injury. "I went to the clinic that night to warn Doctor Meraktis!" She sniffed, rubbing at her nose with the back of a hand, her gaze on the stand before her. "I told him the Kitakis knew, that they were coming for him, and I asked him to hand over the chart... He said..."

She shook her head, sniffing again. "He said I was just saving my own skin, wanting in with the Family... Then he said, if he was going down... he wanted some company."

The courtroom watched her in total silence for several seconds. Seeing her distress, Apollo felt a stab of guilt for being so harsh in dragging out the truth... but he couldn't let himself go easy on a murderer. "And what happened next!?" he sternly asked.

"He jumped at me, and knocked me to the floor!" Alita continued, still staring downwards with a hand on her neck. "Then, he took that cord..." She shook her head again, finally looking up at the court with a pained expression. "Pal Meraktis was serious. Deadly serious. He really tried to strangle me. I..." She looked down again, biting her lip. "I must have blacked out."

The judge watched her sympathetically, eyes wide in shock. "So... you were the victim!"

"And the red splotch on the cord," Klavier added, eyes closed in thought, "was your lipstick."

"I... I didn't want to remember that night," Alita whispered. "That's why I didn't bring it up." With a glare, she turned her tearful gaze up to Apollo. "There. Are you happy now?"

Apollo was too taken aback to respond.

"I was out cold, almost killed!" Alita added accusingly. "And you claim I then snuck into that noodle
Before Apollo could even begin to register his shock, Luke was calmly crossing his arms, meeting Alita's gaze evenly as he responded, "And when did we say you snuck in, Miss Tiala?"

It was now Alita's turn to be surprised. "What?"

"We only said it was you in the noodle stand," Luke pointed out, a small smile forming on his lips. "In fact, we proved it. Whether you were conscious of going in there or not is irrelevant."

Alita could only stare in surprise.

Apollo shot his brother a proud smile. As always, Luke was right: Alita was in that noodle stand, and they couldn't allow her to wring the sympathy of the court to let her get away with it.

The judge was deep in thought. "Well, one thing is clear," he announced. "We now know what really happened at the Meraktis Clinic. And it would seem that our victim was not entirely without blame himself!"

"With all due respect, Your Honour," Luke interrupted, a finger pointed into the air, "we don't yet know the full story. The witness was rendered unconscious, true, but what happened after that? There are too many questions still unanswered."

Klavier nodded in agreement, snapping his fingers. "This party's just getting started, Herr Judge!" he said with a grin. "Now, we rock!"

The judge looked over to the man in surprise. "Prosecutor Gavin...?"

Apollo decided to add his own voice to the fray, turning to Alita with a smirk. "Ms Alita Tiala, as you can see, we're not through with you just yet."

Alita shot the young lawyer a glare. "You really want to blame me for this murder, don't you?" she asked, then looking to Klavier with an equally accusing frown. "You too, 'Prosecutor' Gavin."

"Me?" Klavier replied with an amused smile. "Fraulein, I only wish to know the truth."

Luke nodded. "In fact, I believe we have enough gathered knowledge to piece together the events that led to the murder that night," he announced, looking to the judge.

After a moment of thought, the old man nodded. "Very well, defence. Why don't you tell us exactly what happened on the night in question?"
Luke stood for a moment in silence, eyes closed and fingers stroking his goatee in thought. Apollo got the feeling he was fighting the urge to pace, perhaps to circle the witness stand and truly put Alita on the spot as he'd so passionately described Professor Layton doing in all his stories. In any case, Luke stayed put, snapping his eyes open to survey the court. "This is what the defence believes truly occurred on the night of the fourteenth of June," he began. "After learning of the bullet still in his chest, the defendant was, understandably, furious. He wanted revenge on the victim, taking a gun from the Family stash for exactly that purpose, but, crucially, did not immediately act. His fiancée, the witness, knew all this full well, and had no choice but to act to keep her involvement in the failed surgery six months ago from being uncovered." He closed his eyes again. "I have no doubt she stole Wocky's pistol before she left. Her reasoning was likely twofold: Firstly, to keep Wocky himself from using it; Secondly... She described the victim as being a 'coward', using the chart as blackmail against her, and there's no faster way to make a coward act than by fear."

"You mean she intended to threaten him with the gun?" the judge clarified.

Luke nodded, looking up to the podium. "Exactly, although I doubt she ever wanted to have to use it."

Alita was looking away, fiddling with her nails and biting her lip. Apollo had no doubt his brother's words were hitting very close to home.

"When she reached the clinic," Luke was continuing, "Miss Tiala politely removed her sandals and put on the slippers, as was the routine there. It was only a small distance from there to the office, where she attempted to both warn Doctor Meraktis of what was going on and obtain the chart. Her plan was that the doctor would hand it over for her to destroy and he would then flee, saving both their lives... but, tragically, Doctor Meraktis believed otherwise." He shook his head sadly. "I believe he pretended to go along with her, opening the safe in his office where the chart was kept... but, likely while Miss Tiala was distracted retrieving the chart, attacked her from behind with the closest weapon at hand: the cord of the table lamp. In shock, Miss Tiala fired the pistol, hitting the back wall of the safe, but was unable to fight back."

Luke paused a moment, eyes closed, and Apollo wondered if talking about the details of the attack in such calm tones was harder than it looked. "Strangled by the cord, the witness passed out," Luke sighed, forcing himself to keep talking. "Doctor Meraktis was probably in a panic by this point; He believed he had killed her."

"What?" Alita interrupted, surprised. "But I was still alive!"

"Ah, but panic can blind us to the most obvious things, Fraulein," Klavier pointed out with a small smile. "Hence why it is called 'blind panic'."

Luke had opened his eyes again, looking around the court again with a serious look. "Doctor Meraktis' next move was clear: He had to dispose of the 'body'. Thus, with Miss Tiala still wearing the slippers, he dragged her to the clinic's doorway and grabbed the nearest available object to carry
"The noodle stand!" Apollo cried out with a grin. "That's why he stole it!"

Luke nodded, giving his brother a smile. "Taking out the bowls to make room for Miss Tiala!"

"And then taking her to the park to dump her in the river!" Apollo replied again, feeling oddly energised by the pieces they'd collected finally all falling into place in front of him. "Except it was then he ran into Wocky and Stickler."

"And it was then Miss Tiala woke up," Luke added, his smile turning into a serious look as he turned to address the court at large. "For whatever reason, Doctor Meraktis put the gun in the noodle stand with her. His last words may have been attempts to tell Wocky the full story, or maybe Miss Tiala simply wanted revenge and took her chance when she had it, but, no matter the reason, as the doctor turned his head towards Mister Stickler, she fired that pistol into his right temple, killing him instantly." He closed his eyes as the gallery quietly murmured to itself. "Wocky fled, and Stickler left not long after. Thinking herself alone, the witness left the noodle stand, wiped her prints off the gun before planting it on the scene, then left for home. As far as she could tell, no-one ever knew she was even there."

Alita was staring at the pair behind the defence bench with wide eyes. It seemed she wanted to protest, but had so much to say she didn't know where to begin.

Klavier smiled, a hand brushing at his hair. "Impressive, Herr Doktor. Very impressive."

The judge frowned in thought, nodding to himself. "Hmm. Yes, the evidence certainly supports your theory." He looked up, fixing Alita with a stern gaze. "Well, Ms Tiala?"

Alita continued her staring for a very long moment before, finally, pulling herself together, shooting the brothers livid glares as she crossed her arms. "Hmph. Nice work."

Apollo blinked in surprise, sharing a grin with Luke. She was admitting to the truth already? 'That was easier than I thought!'

"You've done a fine job," Alita continued, "dreaming up a story to get that spoiled brat off the hook!"

Although surprised at her continued resistance, Luke was clearly crestfallen they still had more to prove, and Apollo's protective-older-brother mode kicked in instantly, slamming the bench with his fists as he returned the witness's glare. "You're the one who's dreaming!" he shot back. "We can back up everything Luke's said with facts! If you're so sure he's making it up, give us some other explanation for what happened after you were attacked!"

Alita simply scoffed, looking down her nose at Apollo. "Who knows?" she replied. "But there's one gaping hole in your logic. I think Mister Gavin knows whereof I speak!"

"Whereof what!?" Apollo demanded, glaring between Alita and Klavier, unsure who to focus on. Luke frowned, confused. "A... hole in my logic?" he repeated. "Where?"

"Is this true, Prosecutor Gavin?" the judge cut in, raising an eyebrow in Klavier's direction.

Klavier chuckled, closing his eyes as a hand ran through his blond locks. "Must I always be the one to point out the defence's errors?" he asked, amused, then opened his eyes to give the Wright brothers a grin. "I believe the Fraulein speaks of Herr Doktor's car."
Apollo had to think a moment to clarify which 'Herr Doktor' the prosecutor was referring to.

"That's right!" Alita smugly agreed, smirking at Apollo and Luke. "The Meraktis Clinic has that big garage!"

The judge tugged at his beard in thought. "In which sat... a green sports car, was it?"

"Why would he steal that stand in the first place?" Alita continued, apparently not even noticing the judge's comment. "If he wanted to carry a body, he would have used the car!"

Apollo paled, and it was only because of his years of stage experience he was able to keep from sputtering wildly in shock.

"And so we find our victim without probable cause to steal that stand," Klavier added, eyes closed again and grin fading to a small smile, "and our defence without a case."

"Not so fast, Mister Gavin!" Luke called out, pointing across the room with a confident smile. "The reason Doctor Meraktis had to use the stand is simple! His-!"

"Objection!" came a responding shout, stopping Luke in his tracks as Klavier pointed right back at him with a grin. "Ah ah ah, I believe we've heard quite enough from you today, Doktor Wright." As Luke watched in confused surprise, the prosecutor turned his amused gaze to Apollo. "I want to hear from Herr Forehead. Why does he think our victim stole that noodle stand?"

The young lawyer had opened his mouth to reply before realising he didn't have anything to say and closed it again. Instead, he turned to shoot a confused look at Luke, but his younger brother only shrugged off being ordered to stay quiet and gave Apollo an encouraging smile. 'Go on,' he seemed to be saying. 'You can do this easy.'

Apollo wished he shared his brother's confidence. Sighing, he pressed a finger to his forehead, throwing himself into the problem at hand. The obvious suggestion to make was that the car wasn't working, but they already knew that same car had hit Phoenix earlier the same night, and was clearly not damaged enough to affect its ability to run. *But what other reason is there for him to take the stand!?* I don't think there are any barriers in the park that would have blocked car access... Argh, this is as confusing a situation as the whole noodle stand theft was!'

His frustrated sighs must have slipped out of Apollo's internal monologue, as Klavier chuckled at the young man across from him. "Is that a groan of surrender I hear?" he asked, his smile only growing when Apollo responded with a silent glare. The prosecutor snapped his fingers at Apollo, calling his full attention. "Some advice: Now's a good time to review all you know... Everything you've learned over the last two days."

'Everything I've learned...?' Apollo stared at Klavier in surprise for only a moment before something unexpected came to mind: The conversation outside the park the previous afternoon, the shrieks of teenage girls threatening to drown them out as Klavier and Luke commiserated over engine failures. *That* had been new information to him after all.

"Mister Wright, this contradiction casts doubt on your entire case," the judge announced in the lengthy silence. "This is truly your last chance. The defence will explain to us what happened that night!"

Apollo closed his eyes for only a moment before looking back up to the judge with a determined nod. "That night, Doctor Meraktis *couldn't* use his car."

Alita let out a bark of laughter from the witness stand, smirking at the young lawyer. "Now you're
"Not according to my information, Ms Tiala," Apollo replied, hoping his doubts that he was even on the right track weren't obvious. "Put one and one together, and the explanation is simple."

The judge raised a doubtful eyebrow. "If it's so simple, perhaps you can show us some evidence?" he asked. "Show us proof why the car wouldn't run that night!"

Apollo nodded and quickly turned his attention to his Court Record. It took him only a few moments to find the same photo he'd presented to the court the previous day, of Trucy proudly showing off her recovered panties in the yellow light of the Meraktis Clinic garage. "Take that!" he cried as he pulled it up on the screens.

It seemed to take a moment for the judge to register the picture, squinting as he leaned in to his personal holographic screen. "Let's see now..." He then jerked back, eyes wide. "Panties!? Again!?"

Apollo couldn't help a small smirk, his magician persona coming forth and puffing out his chest proudly. "All sorts of things come out of Artemis' Magic Panties," he boasted. "Even the truth!"

Before anyone could reply, he spun towards the slightly confused Alita on the stand. "Another crime was committed the night of the murder: The theft of these panties! The latest in a string of similar thefts, actually." He pointed at her dramatically. "But that night, the snatcher was caught in the act! A brave young girl chased the thief until they hid... in the Meraktis Clinic garage."

Alita blinked, her eyes widening in surprise. "Wh-what!?" Apparently she hadn't been paying attention to that part of yesterday's trial.

"The snatcher hid the panties there before running," Apollo continued without pause. "Perhaps someone in this court remembers where he hid them?"

The judge's eyebrows shot up. "Why... weren't they found in the car's exhaust pipe?"

Apollo nodded, crossing his arms with a smug smirk. "Exactly." He looked to the prosecutor's bench. "And by the way, I should thank you, Prosecutor Gavin. You gave me a very important piece of information yesterday."

Klavier just grinned, glancing at Luke.

"While Ms Tiala and the doctor were struggling," Apollo continued to the court, "the panty-snatcher snuck into the Meraktis garage. From then, until those panties were recovered the following morning, that car wouldn't start."

At that, Alita's disinterested look immediately faded, the young woman staring at Apollo in shock. "Wh... What!?"

"That's why Doctor Meraktis had to use the noodle stand!" Apollo proudly finished off, pointing dramatically at the stand once again. "It was the next closest thing he could think of!"
As the gallery murmured to itself, Apollo crossed his arms with a proud smile, watching Alita stare back at him with wide eyes. "Well, Ms Tiala? This wraps your doubts up quite nicely, I think!"

Alita continued to silently watch him for a very long moment, then sighed, looking away with a distant frown. "So it does." She closed her eyes, a hand to her neck as a pained look flashed across her face. "Funny. This isn't the way it was supposed to turn out." There was another pause, then she shook her head. "Oh well. Too bad."

The judge looked down on her sympathetically. It seemed he couldn't think of anything to say in response.

"Your biggest mistake," Apollo continued, letting his smile slip off his face in the sombre atmosphere, "was throwing out those slippers where you did, still covered in the paint from the hit and run. If we hadn't come across those, we would never have found the evidence to uncover the truth."

Alita scoffed, looking up to meet Apollo's eyes with a glare. "No. My 'biggest mistake' was coming to you for help, Mister Wright!" Apollo and Luke glanced at each other in confusion, but Alita didn't give them any chance to respond, snapping, "I believed in you! You and your 'Anything Agency'! If anyone would get Wocky declared guilty it was you!"

Luke was looking ready to snap an angry comment in response, so Apollo grabbed his arm and gave his brother a raised eyebrow. 'Seriously. It's not worth it.'

At an unspoken signal from Klavier, a pair of bailiffs escorted Alita away, out of the courtroom. Klavier followed them, but was quick to return only a minute later, waiting behind his bench with a calm smile as the judge calmed the gallery back into silence.

"I believe we've reached a conclusion of sorts," the judge finally announced, shuffling some paperwork from atop his podium. He looked to Klavier. "Prosecutor Gavin, how is Ms Alita Tiala doing?"

Klavier nodded. "She's confessed to everything," he said. "We're processing her arrest now."

Apollo was staring across the room, studying the man who had served as their opponent over the last few days. 'He's awfully calm for someone who just 'lost'... but, then again... He probably figured out she was the killer a while ago, same as us. Was Luke right after all? Can we really trust him, even after what he did to Dad?'

The prosecutor noticed the young attorney's stare with surprise. "Something the matter, Herr Forehead?"

Apollo quickly shook his head, then looked away.

"Looks like it's time to announce a verdict," the judge proclaimed, clutching his gavel solemnly.
"This court finds the defendant, Mister Wocky Kitaki, not guilty." With that, he struck the hammer down once, then nodded. "Court is adjourned!"

June 17, 2:12PM
District Court
Defendant Lobby No. 2

"Well, that turned out as well as it could, didn’t it?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow at his brother as they entered their lobby, studying his calm smile. It didn't take much searching to see the tension stretching across Luke's face, the carefully controlled serene expression that Luke always employed when he was trying his hardest to be gentlemanly... and hiding his true hurt. Apollo frowned in concern. "Luke..."

Immediately Luke turned away, a flash of a frown crossing his lips before the controlled smile returned. "Prosecutor Gavin helped us find the true culprit and uncover her crimes in court. Seeing justice be served makes all our effort worth it, doesn't it?"

Apollo watched as his brother stepped forward towards the depressingly brown sofa. As admirable as it was that Luke was holding together through his hurt, it was killing him to see. He made to follow, intending to question his brother further, but had barely taken a step before the doors behind him burst open with a bang.

"Hey! Attorney-man!"

Apollo spun around with wide eyes, finding himself suddenly face to face with a very angry nineteen-year-old.

"You're gonna pay for what you did to my Alita, homes!" Wocky shouted, spit flying on Apollo's face. "You give my Alita back!"

"What happened to being grateful!?" Apollo was shouting in return before it occurred to him that perhaps it would be a bad idea to bait the young man. Regardless, he was already jumping back to keep Wocky out of his personal space, hoping there were bailiffs nearby to keep an eye on the situation.

Wocky's face turned even redder and he moved to jump at Apollo again, but the moment the space had opened up between them, Luke had stepped into it, his back to his brother as he held up his hands in an effort to calm the aggressive teen. "Wocky, please, I know you're upset-!

"Enough, Wocky!" The deep boom of Big Wins Kitaki brought the argument to a halt, everyone looking up to the tall man entering the room, giving his son a stern look. "It's high time you opened your eyes."

Wocky's pleas were ignored, Wocky's attention switching gears with a growl. "You stupid attorneys have a death wish!?" he shouted. "I didn't ask for this! You think you-!"

"Enough, Wocky!" The deep boom of Big Wins Kitaki brought the argument to a halt, everyone looking up to the tall man entering the room, giving his son a stern look. "It's high time you opened your eyes."

Wocky's shocked look turned back into a scowl. "What do you know, old man!? I think it's 'bout time you opened yours!" He jabbed a finger at his father accusingly. "Givin' up the life, trying to become some kinda businessman!??"
Wins shook his head, eyebrows furrowed at his son as he ordered, "Don't talk about what you don't understand, Wocky!"

Apollo cast a concerned glance to the doorway as the pair resumed their endless arguing. Given Wocky's emotional state, he wouldn't be surprised if the bailiffs outright gave up and threw the pair in jail to calm them down... though he wasn't sure what else they could do to help.

Standing in front of his brother, Luke also watched the Kitakis in concern for a long moment... then, before Apollo had even realised what he was thinking, he had stepped forward again, putting himself once more between Wocky and his target. "Wocky, have you not realised why your father is working so hard to make money all of a sudden?"

Wocky paused, surprised at both being interrupted and the question he'd been posed without warning. "Uh... what is there to understand?" He then shot the vet a glare, hands curling into fists. "Haven't you done enough!? I don't need your pity!"

Luke's frown turned dark. "It's not pity; It's empathy," he said. "Would you rather have had no warning, and been dragged kicking and screaming from the courtroom? I can say from experience that's not exactly pleasant."

Wocky stared in silence for a moment, then looked away.

"But clearly you won't listen to me," Luke continued with a sigh, and looked to Apollo. "Could you tell him, Apollo? Why Mister Kitaki is leaving the life of a gangster?"

Both Kitakis looked as surprised at that as Apollo felt. 'Way to put me on the spot, Luke...'" "Whazzat?" Wocky muttered, raising a confused eyebrow.

Apollo put aside the strong urge to curse out his brother; It wasn't productive, not when he had the full attention of two notorious (though former) gangsters. Just as in court, the answer to Luke's question wasn't immediately coming to mind, though he was sure he probably did know it. Luke himself wasn't giving Apollo any hints, simply staring at him with an expectant smile. Wocky was similarly staring, his eyes flashing in warning should Apollo not say the right thing. All in all, neither were any help. Wins, though... His gaze was not on Apollo, but on Wocky, brow twisted slightly over his hooded eyes. The show of concern was enough on its own to jog Apollo's memory. He frowned, turning to the teenager before him. "Think about it, Wocky. Think about your condition."

Wocky blinked, surprised.

"We spoke to your mother, Little Plum, yesterday," Apollo continued. "She told us your family needs a lot of money right now. Clean money. Why do you think that is, Wocky?"

The teen stared for a very long moment, realisation spreading across his face. "She doesn't mean..." He turned around towards his father. "You aren't really... are you?"

Wins didn't immediately reply, looking back at his son. "I searched the globe. And I found one," he explained. "A doctor who can take that bullet out of you, Wocky. But it's an expensive procedure."

Wocky was starting to look distressed again. "M-man! B--but you got plenty of money already, don't you?"

"I won't use it," Wins insisted, shaking his head. "It was the gangster life that did this to you, Wocky. I want to help you, and I want to do it clean." He stared a moment, then his brows moved up on his face, revealing small eyes that blinked open to stare longingly at his son. "Please understand,
"D-Dad..." Wocky muttered, eyes shining with unshed tears; Apollo could almost admire his willpower in keeping his composure. A second later, Wocky shook his head, forcing a glare onto his face as he held a threatening fist up to his father. "M-man, I see how it is, old man! Always you looking out for... out for..." His voice faltered, and he shook his head again to put himself back on track. "Listen good, old man! One day... One day... I'm gonna take you out! Then we'll see who's the O.G.!!" He shoved at Wins' apron, but the older man did not respond. "You try to hide in your business suit, I'll find you!" Wocky cried. "Stupid ol' geezer!" With that, he pushed past Wins and out of the room.

Luke sighed, watching the teen go with a sad look. "He's had a lot to take in today. He just needs time."

Wins nodded in agreement. "It's as it should be," he said, then turned his puppy dog eyes on Apollo. "I'm glad... to have met you. I'm not so good with words... but I know a professional job when I see one." He looked between the brothers. "Thank you. Both of you."

Luke seemed to take the gratitude in stride, but Apollo blushed, rubbing at the back of his neck. "Us? I don't think-"

"Someday," Wins continued, "I'll bake you one of our latest: The Kitaki Lime Pie."

Apollo blinked in surprise. *They're opening a pie shop?*

Luke softly giggled. "It was no problem at all, Mister Kitaki. We're just happy to help."

Wins grunted, a small smile at the edges of his lips. "So long." With that, he was gone.

*View the Court Record*
They had lingered only a moment more in the defendant's lobby before Luke was following the Kitakis out into the hallway, and Apollo rushed to follow. However, instead of turning left towards the courtroom like Apollo had been expecting, his younger brother instead turned to the right, heading to a bench sat under a window overlooking a courtyard. With Luke intently staring out at the sky, Apollo glanced left, seeing the door to the fourth floor lobby closing behind Wins. 'Well, that's the last we're seeing of the Kitakis I guess,' he mused, then turned back towards his brother. "Luke?"

Luke didn't immediately react, standing still and quiet. Finally, after a long moment's pause, he turned, opening his mouth to respond...

... but he was interrupted before anything came out: The door at the end of the hallway was thrown open with a bang, attracting the brothers' attention as it startled them from their conversation. A caped blue blur was speeding across the vinyl floor, her arms waving gleefully as she cried, "Great job, Polly! You did it!"

"Tru-!?” Apollo had just enough time to gasp before his sister was upon him, slamming against his chest in a tight hug and emptying his lungs of air.

"Wocky's off the hook!” Trucy continued. "Free to become the gangster he's always wanted to be!” Releasing Apollo, she turned her grin on Luke, who was smiling back at her. "And he has you two to thank!"

Apollo rolled his eyes, tapping his chest with a fist to hide his gasps for air. "More like blame..."

Luke giggled. "Now that we've sorted out what happened, Wocky will be alright," he assured Trucy. Patting her shoulder, he then headed down the hall, to where Apollo now noticed the rest of their family and friends were slowly coming to meet them.

"Weren't they great, Daddy?” Trucy chirped as she skipped alongside Luke, grinning at Phoenix. "Wasn't expecting them not to be," Phoenix replied, coming to a stop near the door into Defendant Lobby 1.

Pearl nodded in agreement, bouncing up to meet Trucy and giving Luke and Apollo a wide grin. "You were amazing in there!"

Apollo couldn't resist a blush, rubbing at his neck. "Oh, uh... thanks, Pearly. Dad."

Behind Phoenix, Aria scoffed, waving a hand with a joking smile. "Honestly Apollo, were you expecting us to come in here and tell you you were awful or something?"

The Wright children all giggled at that, Trucy giving her eldest brother another tight hug.

Clay, the last of the group, did an exaggerated stretch as he walked around between the Wright brothers, draping his arms over their shoulders and looking between them almost conspiratorially.
"No, but, like, for serious... that was really boring."

Luke blinked in surprise, while Apollo rolled his eyes. "Clay! For goodness' sake, you were the one who insisted on coming to support us!"

"Yeah, but," Clay replied with a shrug, "apart from the dude running back in and shouting at everyone, it was actually really boring."

Groaning in disgust, Apollo shoved his friend's arm off his shoulders, everyone else in the group laughing at the exchange.

Phoenix's good mood suddenly vanished, the man casting quick glances to one side. "It's time for us to go, anyway. Don't want to clog up the courthouse more than we have to, huh?" He plastered on a fake smile and gently began to wave the small group back out of the hallway. The jovial atmosphere quickly faded as, one by one, everyone noticed what had attracted Phoenix's attention: A rather sheepish Klavier Gavin, standing in the open doorway to Defendant Lobby 1. Although Klavier seemed to be, rather uncomfortably, watching Phoenix in particular, Phoenix himself was avoiding his gaze, gesturing for the assembled group to leave.

Aria was the first to move, hastily and wordlessly turning to all but outright bolt to the door. Trucy was quick to take her lead, pulling on Apollo's arm as she forced a big grin, dragging her brother away with a cheerful, "C'mon Polly, we have to give Mister Eldoon the good news and collect our reward!"

"Has he even got his noodle stand back yet!?" Apollo asked in exasperation as he was pulled through the doors. Pearl and Clay weren't far behind him.

Last was Luke, calmly surveying the situation: Phoenix was standing with his right shoulder to Klavier, his gaze firmly on the floor in front of him; Klavier himself was staring somewhere in the vicinity of Phoenix's right ear, his eyebrows downturned almost longingly. It was clear to Luke that the prosecutor had something to say, and he wasn't sure Phoenix was willing to hear it. Making a decision, Luke smiled and stepped towards Klavier. "Thank you for all your help in there, Mister Gavin. We wouldn't have been able to find the truth of that night without you."

Klavier blinked in surprise, then, a moment later, suddenly regained his confidence, flipping his hair with the smug airs of his rockstar persona. "Ah, Herr Doktor, it is you I should be thanking." His grin turned a little sheepish. "I must admit, I nearly forgot of my own personal creed for the truth when I realised I was up against a Wright again. Would you pass my apologies on to your brother?"

"Of course I will," Luke agreed with a nod. "In fact... I wouldn't mind working with you again one day."

Klavier's eyebrows shot up only momentarily before the prosecutor made the appearance of taking the compliment in his stride. "And I would not mind working with you in return," he replied. "I look forward to such an opportunity that I might have need of your... unique skill."

Luke giggled, then turned and headed to the door. As he reached out for the handle, he paused, looking back towards Phoenix. "Shall I tell the others you'll be along in a moment, Papa?"

Phoenix didn't visibly react, apparently deep in thought. Just as Luke was considering asking again, finally the ex-lawyer replied, "Thank you, Luke. I won't be a minute."

With a small nod, Luke gave his father a smile and left the hallway.

The moment the pair were alone, Klavier's confidence was quick to once again melt away, revealing
his nervous uncertainty. "M-mister Wright, about that case-"

"A very good friend of mine assures me you had nothing to do with it," Phoenix interrupted, his expression carefully guarded. After a short pause, he finally turned his gaze up to meet Klavier's eyes. "I'd like to think I can continue trusting him on that."

Klavier winced guiltily. "I... I don't know," he mumbled. "Zak may have done the deed, Valant may have done it... And then that page..." He shook his head, looking away. "All I know is that justice wasn't served that day, in more ways than one, and it's a black mark I will forever carry with me. I... cannot imagine how I might even begin to apologise for what happened."

In the long pause that followed, Phoenix studied Klavier thoughtfully. "I see," he eventually said, then turned and took a few slow steps to the door, feeling the prosecutor's gaze on his back. "In that case, I'll have a word or two with my friend. When we're finally ready to uncover the truth once and for all... we'll let you know."

Klavier's eyes widened. "Mister Wright...?"

"Until then," Phoenix said, then left.

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Phoenix seemed back to his cheerful self when he caught up to the group on the steps outside the courthouse, even if he turned down any requests to discuss his 'confrontation' with Klavier. Instead, he wrapped his arms around Trucy and Pearl and escorted the two away with a smile, Aria at their heels. Apollo made to follow them with Clay, but was distracted by Luke, who was again standing stock still, staring at the sky with a frown.

After a quick glance assured him no-one else had noticed Luke's behaviour, Apollo headed back up the stairs to his brother, giving him a worried look. "Luke?" he softly called. "You okay?"

Luke didn't immediately reply, his eyes still focussed on the clouds above. "I'm fine," he insisted. "Wocky will be alright, too. He just needs time to heal."

Apollo looked away guiltily. 'It's been long enough. He needs to know.' Fearfully glancing back to see how far away Phoenix was, Apollo forced himself to do his best to meet his brother's gaze. "L-look, Luke, there's something I never told you about that trial..."

"I don't want to hear it," Luke interrupted, shooting his brother a quick glare before making his way down the stairs after their family and friends.

"B-but-!"

"Not now, Apollo."

Apollo could only watch, dumbfounded, as his brother stalked off. After a moment's confusion, he sighed. 'Dad didn't want him to know anyway...' Pushing the overhanging guilt from his mind, he hurried to follow.

View the Court Record
*pulls party popper* Happy first anniversary, you strange little AU-fic that wouldn't stop growing and expanding! Who'd've thought it'd take a full year to get into canon territory, huh? And that I'd be using you as my project in a Masters course of Creative Writing? It's just all too weird for words... especially that last bit, pffft. Anyway, back to your regularly scheduled Wright family nonsense. :)

June 21, 11:36AM
Wright Anything Agency
Phoenix's Office

"We could pull them out of my panties! It could be part of the joke!"

"That won't change the fact that it's creepy, Truce!"

"Of course it will! The audience will accept anything ridiculous if it makes them laugh!"

"Those things being 'ridiculous' isn't the problem here!"

Luke rolled his eyes as he turned the page of his book, trying his best to block out his siblings' argument. He had arrived in the midst of it five minutes ago, and his attempts to shut them up for long enough to even greet him had all failed, so he had simply given up and sat down with a book to wait for the disagreement to run its course. Unfortunately, it wasn't looking like either Apollo or Trucy would be running out of steam any time soon.

"What are you so scared of, Polly?"

"Wha-!? I'm not scared of anything!"

"You think they'll call you a girl, don't you?"

"Um, no, I think they'll call me a pervert."

"No they won't! 'Cuz you're not!"

"Oh yes, what perfect evidence to the contrary, why didn't I think of that."

From what he'd been able to glean from their conversation, the old pair of used bloomers gifted to them by Plum Kitaki had somehow come up when Apollo arrived not long before Luke, with Trucy eager to put them to good use as she'd promised and Apollo equally eager to not have anything further to do with them after the embarrassment of presenting them in court. 'Funny how presenting the Magic Panties twice hasn't stopped him from being a part of that trick...' Although he had to admit that the Magic Panties being an obvious prop, and Plum's bloomers clearly not, were probably a large part of the problem. He shook his head. 'This wasn't how I planned spending our Father's Day get-together...'"
Finally, the front door in the next room swung open, and Luke put his book down with a sigh of relief. "Maya and Pearl are here!" he loudly announced as he stood.

Apollo and Trucy's argument finally came to a halt as they turned in surprise, just in time for the door to reception to open, revealing a grinning Maya and Pearl. "Mommy! Pearly!" Trucy cried in delight, her frustration with Apollo forgotten as she ran to greet the pair.

"Hi there Trucy!" Maya replied, pulling Trucy into a hug before letting her go to greet her cousin. The elder Fey then dashed into the room to Luke, who was closer to the door. "And how are my boys?"

Luke giggled as he also gave their mother figure a quick hug. "We're fine, Maya!"

Apollo just gave an exaggerated sigh as Maya moved on from Luke towards the eldest of the trio. "We had a week from hell, but it turned out okay, I guess."

Maya laughed, pulling the young man into a hug and patting his back sympathetically. "Aw, Nick's all recovered from his injury, your client got acquitted... What's there to complain about, huh?"

Instead of replying, Apollo sighed again, though he hid a smile as his morose act made Maya laugh again.

"Where is Nick, anyway?" Maya asked, looking around the office as though she might spot him hiding behind an abandoned magic prop. "You three haven't given him his present already, have you?"

Luke shook his head. "I haven't seen him yet."

Apollo rubbed the back of his head guiltily. "He was here when I arrived, but I think he wandered off..."

Trucy giggled, bouncing to Maya's side. "You want me to go find him, Mommy? I can fetch his present while I'm at it!"

"Oh, good idea, Trucy!" Maya replied, giving the girl a bright smile. "We'll wait here."

"It's not much of a party without the guest of honour," Pearl sagely pointed out.

With another twinkling laugh, Trucy skipped off out of the room.

It took a few minutes for Phoenix to finally arrive, being pushed into the office by an overly eager Trucy. He didn't seem to mind, a lazy smile on his face as he surveyed his sons and the Fey women sat on the twin couches around the glass coffee table, watching with no small amount of amusement. "Ah, I see we have some visitors!" he announced as he made his way over. As he ruffled Luke's hair through his hat in greeting, he jokingly added, "What's the occasion?"

Nobody replied, either laughing or rolling their eyes at the question. Trucy bounced around to sit between her brothers on the nearest couch, a hand resting on the bag at her hip. "Sit down, Daddy!" she demanded.

Chuckling, Phoenix decided to obey the request, and sat himself on the only remaining free space at the end of the other couch, next to Maya and opposite Apollo. "In a hurry, are we?" Once he was comfortable, he turned to Maya, the pair sharing a few quick kisses.
Apollo rolled his eyes. "Dad, you can kiss Mom later."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow wordlessly. He'd never heard Apollo call Maya that before... and so casually, too.

"Sure, he can kiss me later," Maya replied with a cheeky grin, "but we can't let 'now' go to waste either!"

When the three Wright children promptly responded to that with impatient complaints, Phoenix laughed, raising up his hands in surrender as he backed off from Maya. "Alright, alright! You obviously called me down here for a reason; What is it?"

"We have your gift!" Trucy cheerfully announced, pulling out a small, colourfully wrapped, object from her bag. "I would have given this to you in the hospital if you'd been hurt badly."

"Yeah, that was the worst possible time to run under a car, Dad," Apollo added with a smirk.

Phoenix scoffed playfully as he leaned forward, reaching for the gift. "I'll keep that in mind next time someone tries to kill me," he joked, then, once Trucy had handed over the present, sat back in his seat, turning the box over a few times as he examined it. "What is it?"

Luke snorted, pressing a hand to his mouth to repress laughter.

"That's why you open it, dummy," Maya pointed out, elbowing her boyfriend and childishly demanding, "Hurry up!"

Phoenix complied, picking at the tape to carefully unravel the bright paper. "I take it you and Pearls already know what I'm getting, then?"

"We've been waiting for this for ages!" Pearl squealed, hands covering her face so she was catching glances of Phoenix through her fingers. "It's so perfect!"

Trucy hurriedly shushed her cousin. "Don't ruin the surprise!"

Barely a moment later, Phoenix pulled away the last of the wrapping paper, revealing a small black box, about the size of his palm. "Ah, excellent, a cardboard box," he remarked. He didn't wait to wriggle the uncooperative top open, then stared down in surprise at what he found within: A golden locket, the egg-shaped top-heavy pendant resting neatly on top of the looped chain. He didn't believe it.

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His shock seemed to have turned the ambient excitement into subdued and bittersweet acceptance. Trucy nodded, giving off a sad air despite her smile. "Yep. It was Daddy Zak's. But it's yours now."

"Why don't you open it, Papa?" Luke quietly asked, a hand moving to rest on his sister's back.

Phoenix wanted to object - just as he'd always loved to do in court - but the atmosphere felt it was too fragile to withstand that kind of blow... and what kind of ungrateful person would he be to argue about a gift of this magnitude before even giving it a second glance? Although, to be fair, he had worn it nonstop for a number of days after recovering it post-Zak's death. But that's irrelevant right now. Just open the damn thing, Phoenix.' Holding his breath in anticipation, he carefully pulled the necklace from the box, then pried open the pendant. Inside, replacing the picture of seven-year-old Trucy in her brand new magician's costume, was a small photo of Maya, Apollo, Luke and Trucy, clearly taken relatively recently: In the middle was Maya, winking and sticking out her tongue as she threw her arms around Apollo and Luke's necks, dragging them down to her height. On the left was Apollo, also sticking out his tongue as he pulled down an eyelid with one finger.
Luke, on the right, was laughing at their antics, not bothering with a silly face himself... although that hadn't stopped him from giving Maya bunny ears beside her bun. Trucy was at the bottom of the picture, the top of her head tickling Maya's chin as she bit back laughter, concentrating her attention on the camera; Her arms appeared to be, from what little of them could be seen, holding said camera, apparently taking the photo.

"Took that last month," Apollo explained, the corner of his mouth twitching upwards into a half-smile. "Pearly wasn't available, but we got most of us in there."

"There wasn't room for me anyway," Pearl pointed out with a smile; Phoenix was surprised to note the lack of any Psyche-Locks, meaning she genuinely wasn't bothered about being excluded from the picture. "And it matches Mystic Maya's!" She giggled, her hands clasped together excitedly.

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, turning to the sheepish Maya at his side. "Matches what?"

Maya's embarrassment quickly turned to amusement. "You can be so unobservant, Nick," she gently chided him, then reached for the side of her obi opposite the bow. After a moment's fiddling, she extracted a locket of her own, the pendant identical to the one in Phoenix's hands although the chain had been swapped out for one more appropriate to its new home in her sash. With a flick of her thumb, she opened the locket, showing Phoenix the photo inside, one he recognised from the night of the Agency's rebranding: Himself and his three children laughing together as they failed to take a serious photo. "Seriously, I've been wearing this since Mother's Day, and you never noticed it!"

"Mother's Day, huh?" Phoenix repeated, a smile creeping across his face. He turned to the trio on the opposite couch. "Hence why you three were so secretive about telling me anything you were up to that day."

Luke scoffed playfully. "Nonsense, Papa. We told you we'd gone to Kurain, and about my search for my mum, didn't we?"

Phoenix could only laugh at that.

"Honestly, this whole thing was Trucy's idea," Apollo explained, patting his sister's shoulder as he gave her an affectionate look. "They were her lockets to give, and we couldn't exactly say no to her."

Trucy nodded. "I don't need them. We have other things to remember Mommy Thalassa by, and what would I need a locket with a picture of myself in it for?" She bit back giggles as she looked to their father. "And besides, I thought it really suited you, Daddy."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow as his children and their cousin giggled to themselves, then shrugged. Snapping the locket closed, he grabbed the clasps at either end of the chain and reached up to attach it around his neck, the pendant resting neatly above the zipper of his hoodie, just below the neckline of his shirt. After staring at it for a moment, he smiled. "Y'know, I have to agree with you there."

Maya smacked his arm playfully as the kids laughed.

"By the way Maya," Phoenix continued, getting to his feet and collecting the packaging of his gift, "I hope you're planning on taking those DVDs back with you today."

"Hmm?" Maya looked around the office, confused, before her gaze landed beyond Pearl, where the small mountain of Steel Samurai episodes had been left. A smirk formed on her face as she turned back to Phoenix. "You got all those reports I asked for?"

Phoenix paused, giving her an incredulous look. "You can't be serious."
"Nuh-uh," Maya replied, shaking her head and holding out her hand in a beckoning gesture. "No buts. I told you to have reports done when I got back, and now I'm back. Where's that notebook I gave you?"

Trucy's giggles were first to break the silence, quickly followed by Pearl and Luke. Phoenix shot them unamused glares, but it only made the problem worse... even Apollo was hiding his mouth behind a hand. "You heard her, Dad," the young lawyer said, muffled a little by restrained laughter.

Sighing, Phoenix threw up his hands in defeat. "I guess I should know by now not to even try fighting you," he muttered in Maya's direction, trying to sound angry around the fond smile threatening the corners of his mouth.

"You bet you should," Maya said with a knowing wink.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Apollo and Luke were pretty sure it was by design that they'd never interacted with Clay's father before today, beyond the occasional distant glimpse back in their school years. Clay had never been shy about the ups and downs (mostly downs) of his paternal relationship, and even when he'd finally talked Apollo into moving into an apartment together he'd organised his own moving day to be at a time his father was away. All in all, Clay liked to keep his friends separate from his family... which made it all the more surprising when the Wright brothers found themselves sitting in an uncomfortable silence with Mason Terran for three hours.

Although there had been no introductions, there was no mistaking that the man rapidly approaching them in the audience for the graduation ceremony was Clay's father. He and Clay were remarkably similar in appearance, although Mason's hair lacked the same wildness as Clay's; The two were similar heights and builds, and shared the same piercing stare, though Mason's face was more lined and less exuberant than his son's. The moustache helped differentiate them even further.

Apollo and Luke's surprised gazes didn't go unnoticed by the stranger as he moved past them, sitting down quickly at Luke's side. He shot the duo a quick glare, then pointedly turned his attention to the distant stage somewhere ahead of them. Apollo, embarrassed, had looked away, but Luke was never one to back down from fixing an awkward situation and gave the man a polite smile, attempting to engage him in conversation: "Hello there, sir! If I might ask, you wouldn't happen to be Clay's father, would you?"

The man didn't immediately react, pausing a few moments before turning his attention back to Luke, his expression unchanging.

"Clay Terran, I mean," Luke continued, unfazed. "My name's Luke, and this is my brother Apollo; We're friends of Clay's!"

There was another long pause before the man nodded, returning his uninterested gaze to the stage. "That's me."

Apollo tried not to let his displeasure show in his expression as he watched the awkward atmosphere get worse by the minute. Their new 'friend' obviously wasn't much of a talker.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you!" Luke happily replied. "We've heard a lot about you, Mister Terran!"

'And very little of it good,' Apollo kept himself from saying aloud.

"Mason," the man muttered in reply.

Luke nodded, still smiling. "Mason, then. It's a ple-!"

"I didn't say you could call me that," Mason interrupted, shooting another quick glare at Luke as the young man was shocked into silence. "I just want you to be clear on my full name. I doubt my son has mentioned it." With that, he firmly stared out at the stage, no longer paying attention to his immediate neighbours.
Chastened, Luke winced and looked away, hands tightly gripping his knees. He didn't dare speak up again after that.

And thus the hours passed. As much as they would have wanted otherwise, not even the various speeches on the stage were an adequate distraction from the awkward vibes between the Wrights and Mason. When Clay was briefly on-stage to receive his diploma, Mason sat stock still and silent as Apollo and Luke madly waved their arms and shouted Chords of Steel cheers for their friend. As they calmed afterward, the elder man shot them dark looks for so blatantly defying the request to keep their cheers for the entirety of Clay's class.

Once the ceremony was finally over, the Wrights wasted no time in fleeing the audience seating, making their way for where the graduating students in their dark robes were all congregated near the stage. In the end, it was Clay who found them first, charging at them with a wordless shout of joy and throwing his arms around their necks in a strangling hug.


"Uh, yeah," Apollo agreed, a smile on his face although he was struggling to escape his friend's grip.

"Aw, dudes, I should be thanking you for coming!" Clay replied, throwing his arm off Apollo to enthusiastically noogie Luke through his hat. "Those cheers were epic!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow curiously, crossing his arms. "What would an 'epic cheer' actually sound like, I wonder...? Exaggeration aside."

Clay's laughter suddenly stopped, his hands falling from around Luke as his dark eyes locked on to something behind the Wrights on their path to meet him. Apollo and Luke, noticing their friend's odd behaviour, turned to look. Standing a few short metres away from them was Mason Terran, arms hanging at his sides like a soldier at attention as he gave the trio a stern stare.

Clearing his throat, Clay straightened, giving his father a nod. "Thanks for coming, Dad. It means a lot."

Mason didn't immediately react, and the trio thought for a moment or two that he hadn't heard Clay. Finally, he returned his son's nod. "Congratulations."

Clay gave him a strained smile. "T-thanks."

With that, Mason spun on his heel and walked away.


Clay sighed, tearing his gaze from the direction Mason had disappeared in. "I'm fine. He's always like that. Don't worry about it." Forcing a smile, he clapped his hands on his friends' shoulders. "But hey, you guys probably deserve a medal for putting up with him today!" He laughed, almost sheepishly. "The only way to make him come was to buy him a ticket myself, and I guess they misunderstood when I said I wanted you two together!"

Although Luke still looked worried for their friend, Apollo gave him a reassuring smile, slapping his back in return. "Hey, anything for our best friend, huh?"

It took about an hour to finally extricate Clay from his classmates, get him out of his graduation
robes, and head back to their cars. After Mason's abrupt exit, it had taken a while for Clay to stop looking like he was faking his usual enthusiasm, but eventually he'd regained his characteristic energy, thoughts of his father long gone from his mind.

"Oh hey, I almost forgot!" Clay cried, grabbing his friends' wrists and dragging them towards his car with a grin. "I have something I want to show you!"

Apollo sighed as he fought to keep up with Clay's longer strides. "And what exactly are you showing us?"

"No idea!" Clay gleefully replied.

Luke and Apollo shot each other confused looks, but had no time to question their friend before he came to a sudden stop, releasing his friends and almost sending them running straight into his little black hatchback.

"Watch it!" Apollo barked, catching himself against a window.

"Sorry," Clay muttered with a giggle, then ran to unlock and fling open the passenger side door.

While Apollo sighed, leaning against the car with a roll of his eyes, Luke watched their friend curiously. "You have something to show us, but don't know what it is?" As Clay continued to giggle, his entire top half buried in his car, Luke suddenly gasped in realisation, a grin spreading across his face. "It's a gift!"

"A what?" Apollo asked.

Clay jumped back out of his car, proudly waving a wrapped present in his hands, soft in his hands and no larger than his head. "Got it in one!" Laughing, he slammed shut the door. "Mister Starbuck gave me this the other day and told me to open it once I graduated!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "So you brought it to the ceremony? You couldn't wait until you were back home?"

"Nope!" Clay cheerfully replied. With that, he was ripping off the paper, letting it fall to the grass below them.

"Whoa, careful!" Luke shouted as he lunged for the paper, eyes wide.

Clay wasn't paying much attention, losing the last of the wrapping and holding up the blue garment within with no small amount of glee. "Oh. My. God."

Apollo found himself unsurprised, chuckling as he crossed his arms. "I take it this is a 'welcome to the Cosmos Space Center' thing? Now you've graduated, you're an official staff member?"

Clutched in Clay's hands was a blue jacket, a high collar folded back above the shoulders, white stripes across the chest and at the ends of the sleeves. Luke gasped as he paused from his clean-up to look up at the gift. "A HAT-1 jacket?!"

Clay's mouth, hanging open in shock, slowly turned into a wide grin, and he wordlessly shouted in delight as he bounced around his friends, waving the jacket over his head. "I'm an official astronaut!" he gleefully announced, pausing to point at Apollo with a smirk. "Take that for our little bet!"

Apollo bit back laughter. "Our little bet? You mean the one I won last week, when I successfully
defended a case in court?"

Clay's smirk died. "Yeah, well... Do it without any help, then it'll count!"

"I highly doubt you'll get into space before then," Apollo teased.

"You're just jealous," Clay said, slipping the jacket on over his casual t-shirt. "You two decided to become a boring lawyer and a vet, instead of something cool like me."

Luke giggled as he stood, the scraps of the wrapping paper cradled securely in his arms. "Magicians don't count as something cool anymore?" he asked, giving Apollo a pointed glance.

"He's only half a magician," Clay immediately claimed with a grin. "Those aren't cool."

Apollo just gave his friend a glare. "Let's just head home, shall we?"

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
The pudgy red plane was instantly recognisable long before it slammed onto the tarmac of the runway, its boat-like belly almost brushing against the asphalt as the landing gear bounced on its suspension. The propeller at its tail slowed, and the plane turned off the runway to an open space to the side, near a small arrangement of hangers, where it came to rest. A pair of officials with a stairway rushed to meet it, locking the moving stairs on a door in the fuselage, by the wings. As the two climbed up, the door opened for them, revealing a suited man waiting inside, who waved them in. After several anxious minutes' wait, the two men again left, escorted by the suited man to the bottom of the stairwell before heading off past a group of four youths to the airport terminal building.

Luke turned to his siblings as the men passed with an excited grin. "It looks like they're done!"

Clay sighed as he tugged at his blue jacket, taking note of the distance from where the quartet waited to the round plane ahead. "Did they have to use such a tiny airport? It's way too hot to stand around in the sun like this..."

Apollo scoffed, elbowing his friend. "Well, maybe if you didn't wear that ridiculous jacket twenty-four-seven..."

"It's not ridiculous!" Clay protested.

"Fine then," Apollo replied with a grin, "but we won't mourn you when you die of heat exhaustion."

Luke and Trucy gave each other a look and giggled, then rushed off ahead. "C'mon slowpokes, let's go say hello!" Trucy cried, waving at them to follow.

Although the pair didn't acknowledge Apollo's siblings, they moved to walk after them, still focussed on their conversation: "Oh, you wound me, 'Pollo!" Clay cried dramatically, his hands to his heart. "Right through the heart! I'm bleeding out, here! I didn't deserve such a fatal cutting remark!"

Apollo shook his head, but didn't bother to hide his smile. "Nimrod."

Below the plane, the suited man looked up with a smile at the small group as they approached. "Ah, there you are. I was wondering if you'd managed to make it... or noticed we'd landed already."

"Of course we wouldn't miss coming to meet you, Mister Sycamore," Luke replied, stepping forward to shake Sycamore's hand. "And the Bostonius is instantly recognisable; We couldn't not notice it touching down!"

"It's certainly unique," Clay said in agreement, getting an elbow to the chest from Apollo in reply.

"Will you be staying here while you're visiting?" Trucy asked, peering up the stairs through the open door in the side of the plane above them.

Sycamore chuckled. "That is our plan. We're paying to keep the Bostonius here, and it is our home." He looked knowingly between the girl and the open door. "I assume you're wanting a tour?"
Trucy gasped, her smile forming into a massive grin as she held her hands to her cheeks. "You'll let us look around!? That would be so cool, Mister Sycamore!"

Apollo nodded in agreement, unable to resist a smile himself. "Luke's told us quite a bit about the Bostonius over the years. It would be interesting to see how much of it is true." He shot his brother a mischievous grin, a signal of truce after their disagreement the last time they had met the man before them.

Luke was surprised, but smiled as he saw his brother's smirk. "I might embellish," he replied knowingly, "but I never lie. Excepting the times I do, of course."

Sycamore watched the pair in amusement before turning to the black-haired boy between them, who was staring up at the Bostonius with a critical look. "And your friend?"

"Oh, this is Clay," Luke announced with a smile, waving between the two as he belatedly performed introductions. "Clay, this is Mister Sycamore."

Clay gave the man a nod, but his attention was still drawn to the plane. "So, um... how high does that thing go?"

Sycamore raised an eyebrow.

Apollo rolled his eyes. "It's beyond obvious it doesn't get into space," he pointed out.

"N-no, I know that," Clay hurriedly replied, blushing a little as he fiddled with his visor, looking away. "I was... just curious."

Sycamore laughed, but before he could reply, Trucy gasped, pointing up the stairs in amazement. Two figures in flowing, brightly coloured dresses had appeared in the doorway above, one in peach pink and the other lemon yellow, drawing the group's astonished attention. They both draped scarves around their necks, fanciful hats pressed to their crowns above matching sunglasses on their faces. The taller of the pair, in yellow, grinned down at the watchers below, giving them a wave with her fingers. "Hey there, boys."

"Wow!" Trucy breathed, admiring the pair. "Emmy! Flora! You look so pretty!"

Clay snickered, tapping Luke's arm and leaning in to whisper, "You're gonna introduce me to her too, right?"

Luke only sighed.

Apollo hid laughter as he watched the two women sweep their way majestically down the stairs. "Why the fancy outfits?"

"Because this is Los Angeles," Emmy replied as though it were obvious, waving a hand to gesture around the barren tarmac. "The land where talent and beauty combine!"

Flora nodded excitedly. "Uh-huh! You gotta dress up in Los Angeles!"

"And, what, you think a talent scout is gonna pick you up in the streets and make you a movie star overnight?" Apollo asked with a teasing grin. "You're only going to pick up con artists that way."

Emmy smirked right back at him. "Says the kid who wears a magician's outfit every waking moment of the day."
Apollo turned red as Trucy giggled at his side. "Objection! Th-that's different!"

"And no matter what you wear, you still look positively radiant, my lady," Clay insisted, giving Flora a charming grin as he took her hand and kissed her gloved fingers, prompting Flora to giggle, her cheeks flushing.

Apollo rolled his eyes, nudging Clay back from the young woman. "Okay, that's enough."

"You're just jealous I have charm," Clay shot back with a scoff and a teasing grin.

"I have plenty of charm," Apollo replied, a small smile forming on his face. "I just save it for the stage."

Luke giggled, then quickly waved between Emmy and Clay. "Emmy, this is my friend Clay Terran. Clay, this is Emmy Altava."

"Ah, a pleasure to meet you!" Emmy replied, giving the grinning Clay a wink over the top of her sunnies. "Luke and Flora have told us about you!"

"The latter more than the former," Sycamore added with a sly smile at Flora.

The young woman blushed as she looked away shyly. "Uncle, please..."

Clay just gave Flora another wide grin, one hand behind his back in a short bow while the other was at his ever-present visor.

"Flo-ra has a cru-ush!" came a sing-song voice from the stairs, and the group barely had time to register the arrival of six-year-old Alfendi Layton before Flora had again turned red, this time for a very different reason.

"You take that back right now, 'Fendi!" Flora ordered, storming up the stairs towards the boy, who only ducked under her grasp to race back down the stairs.

Alfendi laughed loudly as he jumped off the last step and made a run for it between Emmy and Sycamore, only for the latter to grab the boy's collar as he passed, pulling him to a halt. "Let me go!"

"Apologise to your sister," Sycamore ordered, his free hand on his hip.

"Uncle!" Alfendi pleaded, pulling at the man's grip and failing to wriggle out of it.

"Now."

With a long-suffering sigh, Alfendi stopped his wriggling to mutter a reluctant, "Sorry," glaring all the while at the tarmac below his feet.

Flora stuck her nose in the air, adjusting the scarf at her neck. "Apology accepted," she airily replied, lightly stepping back down the stairs.

As Sycamore released Alfendi from his grip, Luke knelt down to give the boy a smile. "Hello, Alfendi! Adjusting to our time zone well?"

Alfendi shrugged, cheering up a little now he wasn't being punished for teasing his sister. "Guess so," he replied.

"Ooh, yeah, it's late at night for you guys!" Trucy remembered, then gave Alfendi a big grin. "You get to stay up late without getting in trouble! Better make the most of it, huh?" She gave him a
knowing wink for good measure.

Alfendi giggled in reply. "And I got time off school, too!"

"Whoa whoa, wait a sec, you're the baby who was here with the Professor and Flora way back when!?!" Clay cried, hunching down to examine the six-year-old with a gleeful grin. "How'd you get so big all of a sudden, huh?"

Alfendi raised an eyebrow, giving Clay a look that clearly indicated he thought the young man was missing more than a few brain cells. "I... grew up?"

While everyone else laughed at the boy's clueless response, Sycamore snapped his fingers in thought, turning to Luke. "That reminds me. Speaking of my brother, he wished for me to pass on his apologies he couldn't make it himself. Exam period and all."

"It's understandable," Luke replied with a smile. "He already explained in his last letter, so we weren't expecting him. And Athena couldn't come for the same reasons."

"Oh, right, Athena!" Emmy cried, eyes wide as she looked between the Wright brothers with a grin. "She had something she wanted us to give you!"

Apollo and Luke shot each other confused looks. "She did?" Apollo asked.

Emmy beckoned for the group to follow as she turned and climbed up the stairs. "C'mon, I'll show you around while I dig it out!"

"Yay, a tour!" Trucy squealed in delight and hurried to follow.

Sycamore stepped to one side as the procession headed up the stairs in single file, Alfendi sticking to his side with a frown.

"Do we have to go back in, Uncle?" the boy asked. "We only just got here!"

"No, you don't have to," Sycamore assured him with a smile. "You can wait out here with me if you like."

Apollo, at the back of the line to head into the Bostonius, paused as he overheard the pair, and hung back a while on the bottom step. "Oh, um, Mister Sycamore, I should warn you, Trucy will be wanting to pull you aside at some point to question you."

Sycamore frowned, confused. "Question me?" he repeated.

"Did you forget?" Apollo replied with a smile. "Trucy begged you last time to come visit us once I'd heard the end of Luke's story, so she could ask you questions without spoiling anything for me."

"O-oh," the elder man muttered, pressing his glasses against his nose self-consciously. "Yes, I do recall her saying that now."

Apollo gave a short laugh. "I'd be interested in hearing more about the "miracles of Monte d'Or" myself. I'm sure most of her questions will be about those."

Eyes closed in an internal sigh, Sycamore nodded. "Understood."

Alfendi cocked his head to one side, squinting up at the young man on the stair. "Why about Monte d'Or?"
"Because we're both magicians," Apollo explained to the boy with a proud grin. "Miracles are our trade."

[View the Court Record]
The interior of the Bostonius hadn't changed much in the nine years since Luke had briefly lived in it as a child; The same wallpaper decorated the walls, the purple sofas spread across the area below the flight deck... even the same old map was framed on one wall, if a bit more faded than it used to be. What had changed, Luke could almost count on one hand, as long as he made sure to group the multiple minor differences together according to cause: Keats' various toys and living necessities were dotted about (all well-loved and more numerous than they had been before), sending Luke idly wondering whatever had happened to the cat's original owner that he never returned to them; The Descole outfit was openly on display now, though only in parts, with the cape hanging on a coat-rack and the hat, boa and mask on a mannequin head set up on a nearby table; An old camera of Emmy's appeared to be in pieces on the coffee table, and Luke strongly suspected the various decorative souvenirs from various places all over the world were her doing too.

Luke's contemplation of the main room was broken by the squeal of his sister as she dashed to the purple couches, where he noticed Keats the cat was perched, leaning against an armrest. "A kitty!" she cried, dropping to the floor in front of the feline and gazing at him longingly, her hands cupping her face. "What's its name?"

"That is Master Keats, young lady," came a familiar Scottish brogue, and Luke noticed Raymond watching them from the flight deck, making his way slowly down the stairs. "He is resting right now."

"Oh, I won't disturb him then," Trucy replied, backing up only a little but continuing to admire Keats as he gave a wide yawn.

Luke smiled as he stepped forward to meet the old man at the bottom of the stairs. "Hello again, Raymond."

"Master Luke, you have certainly grown since last we met," Raymond replied with a chuckle, though he seemed totally unsurprised (as he always did, Luke recalled). As the pair shook hands, he added, "Are you and your family staying long?"

"Not too long," Emmy answered, walking past where Apollo appeared to be holding Clay back from charging at the flight deck, no matter what stood in his way. "I'm just planning to fetch something, and we thought we'd show the kids around!"

Luke frowned. "We're not kids anymore, Emmy."

"Yeah!" Trucy agreed from the floor, her hands on her hips as she turned rather awkwardly to face the woman in yellow. "I'm a teenager!"

"Well, Trucy's a kid," Apollo replied with a smirk, earning a glare from his sister.

It didn't hit Luke how much smaller the Bostonius seemed when compared to his memories until Emmy and Flora led the Wrights and Clay into the downstairs hall, where the sleeping quarters were.
Raymond's room, at the back, was still as off-limits as it had been when Luke was young, and so technically was Sycamore's, but Emmy was happy to throw open his door to give them a brief glimpse of the study inside, all neat and tidy except for the mess on the floor that was Alfendi's temporary bed. Next to that was Emmy's room, the former guest room where Luke remembered sleeping with Emmy and Aurora in his youth. There was even still a sleeping bag on the floor, though it was now Flora's rather than his or Emmy's.

"I remember this room being a lot bigger," he muttered as he peered inside over his sister's head. "Not much, but... bigger."

Emmy laughed as she dug through her closet, at the head of her bed. "Yeah, you were small enough to just sleep on the floor back then," she pointed out, gesturing to the carpet behind her where Flora stood. "And sharing that space with me, as well!"

"Oh wow, remembering you being so young," Flora added with a nostalgic smile at Luke. "That was such a long time ago!"

Apollo snickered, elbowing his brother. "Yup, that would be back when you were actually *smaller* than me!"

Clay leaned down a little to rest his chin on Apollo's shoulder, flattening the collar of his cape to give the magician a teasing grin. "Aw, is 'Pollo upset he's short?"

Instead of dignifying the jibe with an answer, Apollo shot his friend a glare and shoved him away.

Luke giggled, and decided not to point out he was only taller than his brother by a couple of centimetres.

"Aha!" Emmy cried, and finally emerged from her wardrobe with a bulging plastic bag. "Found it!"

"Found what?" Trucy asked, her hat in her hands.

Emmy manoeuvred around her bed (Luke fought not to mentally refer to it as Aurora's anymore) and approached the Wrights in the doorway with a grin, holding out the plastic bag. "Here it is! Your thing from Athena!"

Apollo frowned, gingerly taking the offered bag. "What even is it?" he asked, and immediately peered into the opening of the opaque white plastic. With a start, he looked back up at Emmy with wide eyes. "She's sent us CDs!?"

Trucy gasped, jumping to try and look in the bag herself. "CDs!?" she excitedly repeated.

"Sent you CDs," Emmy corrected, giving Apollo a smirk. "She specifically told me 'Give these to Apollo the moment you meet him; They're very important'."

Apollo's nose wrinkled in disgust as he looked back into the bag. "But they're... Gavinners CDs..."

Trucy's eager jumping paused in shock.

Luke suddenly burst into laughter. "Oh, I remember now!" he cried, leaning against the wall. "Athena and I were doing research together on Klavier Gavin after your case against him! She even told me she'd send her half of the research to you!"

Apollo glared at his brother. "Her 'research' consists of the entire physical catalogue of his band!?"
"I guess so!" Luke replied, trying and failing to stifle his giggles. "I can text her to make sure, but as Gavin writes all their lyrics, I think she was looking into his work to get a better idea of who he is."

"That's such a good idea!" Trucy decided, once more bouncing to try and look into the bag. "I mean, I've been listening to some of their songs on YouTube, but I didn't think we could call that 'research'!"

Apollo's suspicious gaze snapped to his sister. "You've been what!?"

"I haven't paid for anything," Trucy assured him, rolling her eyes exaggeratedly. "That would just be weird, asking Daddy for money to buy Mister Gavin's music."

Emmy was looking thoughtful, arms crossed as she tapped a finger against her cheek. "I could have sworn Athena had some papers she was planning to put in there as well... Did she forget to include them?"

"She must have," Luke agreed, giving his brother a reassuring smile. "Actually, I could ask her right now if you like. It's almost ten PM over there, so I think she'll still be awake."

"That would be great, thanks," Apollo sighed, trying not to sound ungrateful as he held the unwanted bag of CDs gingerly in his grip, away from Trucy's clawing hands.

There was a chuckle from behind him, and Clay suddenly reached around to also try and sneak into the bag, grinning cheekily. "Well, if you don't want it...!"

Apollo pulled the bag away from his roommate with a glare. "Drop it, Terran."

Back up in the main cabin, Luke stretched his arms, enjoying the open space when compared to the tiny living quarters in the back. He could hear Raymond pottering about in the kitchen, likely making note of the Bostonius' supplies for a restocking run later. Keats lay expectantly in the half-open doorway, his tail flicking slowly back and forth as he stared into the room with great interest. Luke couldn't resist a smile as he moved to sit down on the large purple sofa, pulling his phone from his satchel.

'I hope Athena hasn't already gone to bed. I'd hate to wake her."

Nevertheless, Luke didn't dare pause as he set his phone to dial her number. He knew deliberating over it would only make the time even later, and Athena usually set her phone to silent once she'd gone to bed; If she didn't pick up, he'd know it was too late and could leave her a text for when she awoke in another seven or eight hours. To his surprise, he didn't end up having to wait long.

"Hey Luke! What's with the late call?"

Luke almost laughed at the surprise of hearing Athena's voice interrupting the dull ring-tone. "Ah, I'm glad you're awake! I wanted to let you know that the Bostonius has arrived, and Apollo got your package." 

Athena gasped. "Oh, good! Has he had a chance to look at it? I know there was a lot in there..."

"Well..." Luke shrugged, forgetting for a moment she couldn't see him. "He did have a quick look. I
don’t think he’s very fussed about Gavinners music though, so I’ll probably end up looking them over with Trucy."

Athena snorted. "Oh, yeah, I figured he wouldn't be impressed with the music! What about the rest of it?"

At that, Luke paused. "Rest of it?"

"Yeah, there should be a wad of paper in there," Athena continued. "I printed out my psychologically-lyrical analyses for him to look at, and some other stuff I wanted to ask him that was, y’know, more law-related. Has he looked at that?"

Luke wasn’t quite sure how to break the news to her, so he decided to be blunt. "Athena... there was just the CDs in there. No paper."

There was a long pause, then Luke heard the distant wooden thuds of drawers being rapidly opened and closed.

"Athena?"

The distant scraping of wood-on-wood continued, until finally Luke heard the noises abruptly stop, and Athena sighed defeatedly. "I left them all in my desk," she admitted. "They must've got caught up in my study notes..."

Luke tried not to laugh; Athena was feeling bad enough about it. "That’s okay. Just email me the files and I'll pass them on to Apollo myself. You said they were print-outs, didn't you?"

"Y-yeah, okay, I'll do that," Athena agreed, then sighed in relief. "You'll tell Apollo I'm sorry for forgetting, right?"

"Sure I will." Luke paused, hearing the voices of his siblings and friends echo from the hallway below, and smiled. "I'll let you go now though. Oh, and I should thank you for sharing your research with us."

Athena giggled. "No problem! I was just studying anyway. Talk to you later, Luke!" With that, she had hung up.

Luke stared at his silent phone in bemusement for a moment before shaking his head with a fond smile and putting the phone back in his pocket. He'd make sure to call her again when he next had time.

**View the Court Record**
The group took their time heading to the Agency, Clay and the Bostonius crew getting to know each other and everyone generally just clowning around in the airship before piling into Luke's and Clay's cars to head off. Once at the family home, Apollo was quick to chase Clay off alone, as the young astronaut had a busy week ahead of him at the Space Center and had homework to do anyway.

"Your home doesn't seem so different since I was last here," Flora pointed out as they passed through reception.

"To be fair, you're the only one of us who has been here before," Sycamore replied.

Alfendi nodded, arms crossed knowingly. "Yeah, and I don't count cuz I was just a baby."

"You never know, maybe you'll see something you recognise, Alfendi," Luke said with a smile, and led the visitors through to the office, his siblings trailing at the back.

The moment Luke opened the door, they heard Phoenix's harried voice trailing through from within: 
"-wouldn't be asking you if I didn't have something genuinely important going on. Just answer the question."

Confused, Luke took only two steps into the room, staring across to the desk on the other side of the room, where he could see his father bent over in his chair, a hand on his face and his phone pressed to his ear. Luke cast a glance behind him, and glimpsed Emmy and Flora at his back, Alfendi trying to run in before a grown-up's hand (probably Sycamore's) held him back.

Phoenix gave a great sigh. "Fine, fine. If we don't have any choice, of course I'll be there. You know this whole thing would just crumble to pieces without me, anyway." He smirked, then lowered his hand from his face and looked up, jolting in surprise as he saw the small crowd gathering in the doorway. "Hang on," he said to the phone, then stood, his free hand covering the microphone as he gave everyone an apologetic smile. "Um, sorry, it's a very important call. I can't exactly put this off. Maybe if you guys go to the kitchen, I can catch up to you once it's done."

Luke nodded, leading his friends around the red sofas. "I didn't know you were expecting an important call," he said.

Phoenix's smile turned into an annoyed frown as he lowered himself back into his chair. "Neither did I," he replied. "This got sprung on me."

Apollo slipped past the visitors, dashing to his father's desk and leaning over the computer monitor with an eager look. "What's it about?" he asked. "Can I help?"

"Not with this," Phoenix chuckled in reply. "And I'll tell you later. Promise."

Although disappointed, Apollo accepted that and waved everyone through into the kitchen.

"Oh, Apollo!" Phoenix cried, holding his phone awkwardly with the hand over the mic as his other
grabbed an envelope on the desktop in front of him. "I almost forgot this thing came earlier. It seems to be addressed to you three."

Apollo raised an eyebrow as he took the offered item. "Alright. Talk to you later, Dad."

Phoenix gave him a grateful smile and returned to his phone. "Sorry about that, the kids got back. What were we talking about?"

Apollo was still examining the envelope as Trucy closed the office door behind her, the last of the group to enter the kitchen. "What is it, what is it!?" she demanded, jumping at her eldest brother excitedly. "Who's writing a letter to all three of us!?"

"I certainly don't know!" Apollo pointed out to her.

Emmy was looking around the room curiously, even stealing a peek into the laundry. "This is a cosy little place you've got here," she said.

Alfendi gave her a confused look. "Isn't that just another way of calling it 'small'?"

Flora was quick to shush him.

"Well, until your father has finished his call, we certainly can't get a full tour," Sycamore told the Wrights, and gestured to the letter in Apollo's hand. "You may as well open it now and see if it's important."

Luke shrugged, approaching his brother. "He's right. May as well find out who's writing to all three of us."

Apollo rolled his eyes and sighed, then made his way to the dining table, ripping open the envelope flap with his finger. With his siblings still sticking close to his sides, he took a quick peek into the letter and frowned, then carefully held it out as he pulled at the contents, spilling three identical yellow slips of paper onto the table below.

Trucy was quick to snap the slips of paper up, examining them carefully. "What are these?" she asked.

Apollo and Luke didn't seem to have heard, Apollo pulling out the paper between his fingers and almost dropping a second, which Luke grabbed. The empty envelope left forgotten on the table, the brothers each studied their papers with confused frowns.

Sycamore, Emmy and the Layton children joined the Wrights, all gathered around the table as they watched and waited for explanations. "So?" Emmy asked, smiling eagerly for news. "What is it?"

Apollo glanced up at her, still looking confused, then shook his head and began to read aloud: "Herr Apollo, Doktor Luke and Fraulein Trucy Wright: You are hereby invited to the July seventh evening performance of the 'Guilty As Charged' tour, featuring world-famous rock band The Gavinners and special guest Lamiroir."

Everyone gasped, Trucy almost dropping the papers in her hands. Alfendi, the only one not to be shocked, looked around the table in confusion.

"Please find enclosed," Apollo continued, "three VIP tickets in your names - These will allow you access backstage during the show."
Everyone looked to the slips of paper in Trucy's hands, and her grin magnified as she regarded the precious items in a new, awed, light.

"Also enclosed is..." Apollo paused to sigh, looking at the letter in his hands with a mixture of disbelief and resigned acceptance. "An invoice for them... Don't fear, I have given you, as my friends, twenty percent off what the regular price would have been. I'm sure you understand I can't just give these away for free, not even for you."

Luke gave his brother a half-smile as he held up the paper in his own hands, signalling somewhat sheepishly what it was.

Apollo sighed again, resisting the urge to mutter darkly at the letter and instead continue reading. "I can't wait to see the three of you there. This is a unique opportunity after all, and I am eager to get to know you all better." Apollo paused to glare at the paper, again resisting the urge to mutter some choice words. "We've played together on one stage, now I show you how I play on mine. With kindest regards, Klavier Gavin." With that, his hands lowered, the letter done.

There was silence for a long moment as everyone contemplated the contents of the unusual letter... a silence broken by a very loud squeal from Trucy, who jumped at her eldest brother's arm as she waved the three tickets in his face. "Polly, we got invited to a Gavinners concert! Mister Gavin called us his friends!"

Apollo scoffed, dropping the paper on the table with disgust. "Right, 'friends'. That's why he's making us pay for the wretched things."

Luke was unsure, studying the invoice in his hands. "Not quite. Those tickets have already been paid for."

"What do you mean?" Flora asked, confused.

"They obviously must have been," Sycamore pointed out, gesturing to the slips of paper in Trucy's tight grip. "Tickets are printed at the time they are bought and paid for, not before. This Klavier Gavin must clearly trust you to pay him back for the expense."

Luke nodded, showing the invoice to his unconvinced brother. "Mister Gavin's paid for these himself. He's expecting us to pay him back. See? Those are his details there for where to send the money." When Apollo still wrinkled his nose in disgust, Luke added, "And at a discount too, don't forget that."

"He's still expecting us to pay for this 'gift' of his, discount or not," Apollo pointed out, arms crossed. "And did you even look at how much he's expecting us to fork over? There's no way we can justify throwing away money like that."

"You mean we can't go!?" Trucy cried, face falling. "B-but... that's not fair! I've never got to go to a concert before!" She pulled on Apollo's arm, almost toppling him over with her sudden weight. "And we already have the tickets, Polly! Why can't we go!?"

Apollo almost growled, grabbing the invoice from Luke's hand to show to Trucy. "Then you're happy to take out a loan on the next thirty-years-worth of your pocket money to pay for it!?"

Luke grimaced, gesturing to their friends. "To be fair Apollo, we make our friends pay to go to your show."

"But it's different for us!" Apollo shot back, slamming the invoice on the table as he turned back to his brother. "We barely get by! Gavin is a rich and famous celebrity!"
"But that's why I wanna go!" Trucy whined, clinging tighter to Apollo's arm.

Sycamore sighed, holding up his hands in a peace-making gesture. "Perhaps it would behove all of us to calm down and discuss this rationally? If you've forgotten, your father is in the next room on an important phone call." He raised an eyebrow pointedly, arms crossed. "You don't want to disturb him, do you?"

The Wright kids shuffled guiltily, Trucy releasing Apollo's arm as the trio carefully separated from each other.

"Honestly?" Emmy spoke up in the silence, holding a finger in the air. "I think you should go. That letter's right, this is a unique opportunity. You can't just turn it down."

Apollo sighed, leaning forward on the table. "That's another reason why we can't go. You guys aren't leaving until Friday. We all had plans to spend that time together."

"Oh, it's just one evening. We don't mind if you cancel," Flora chipped in with a cheerful smile. "You get to go behind-the-scenes of a concert! That sounds so exciting!"

"Right!?" Trucy cried, gesturing to Flora and looking at Apollo pointedly. He just glared at her in return.

"We have plenty of time to do things together as a group," Emmy added with a smirk. "We can handle ourselves alone for a single evening."

Sycamore chuckled in agreement, a hand resting on his chin. "Indeed. Getting up to mischief on our own is almost a hobby of ours."

Luke thought a moment, then nodded and gave his friends a smile. "Well, if you're okay with it then I'm happy to go." He looked to Apollo, almost apologetically. "Um, as for paying for it... I'm sure you're just exaggerating the kind of dent it would cause, Apollo. We can handle it."

Apollo rolled his eyes. "I can't believe you're all happy to go along with this." He tapped at the letter on the table in front of him, shifting his stern gaze back and forth between his brother and sister. "Have you two completely forgotten? After what he did to Dad, after what I had to do to his brother, and he's acting all buddy-buddy? Don't you think he's up to something?"

Trucy looked away, crest-fallen, but Luke shook his head, staring his brother right back. "What I think is that Mister Gavin is better than that," he said. "He's proven already he's not out for revenge. He was seeking Papa's forgiveness. There's no ulterior motive here, Apollo."

"Um, excuse me?" Flora butted in, raising a hand and looking confused. "But... what are you talking about? Mister Gavin did something to Mister Wright?"

Apollo sighed, glaring into the distance. "Klavier Gavin is the reason Dad's not a lawyer anymore."

Flora gasped, her hands flying to her mouth. Emmy and Sycamore cast surprised glances at each other.

"Again, that's a bit of an exaggeration," Luke firmly cut in, arms crossed. "All he did was call out forged evidence when he saw it. How was he to know what the defendant was going to do after that? Or what was going to happen to Papa?"

"He still kicked all that off," Apollo shot back. "Dad would never have lost his badge if it weren't for him."
Emmy tapped her cheek in thought. "So, any reason why you've never told us this before, Luke? That sounds awfully important."

Luke shrugged. "I didn't know the details myself until this past April."

Flora was now looking conflicted. "Well, if you're so adamant about not going, Apollo..." She gave him a hopeful smile. "I'll take your ticket instead!"

Apollo sputtered a moment in shock. "No!" he cried, hands pressed to the table. "No-one's going! We're sending these right back to him with a 'no thank you!'"

"What!?" Trucy cried, then whacked her brother's arm with a hurt look. "No! We can't do that! I want to go!"

Emmy scoffed, giving Flora a smile. "Well, even if you three don't, I don't see why we can't join in on the fun. What do you say we buy our own tickets, Flora? Regular ones, of course."

Flora grinned. "Oh, that sounds wonderful!"

"Great," Apollo muttered, rolling his eyes.

Sycamore sighed, pressing his glasses to his face. "Well, you two go have fun wasting your money on resold tickets from scalpers. I'll be staying behind at the Bostonius with Alfendi."

"See?" Trucy hissed at Apollo. "Now they're going too! Why can't we!? We ne-!"

"Wait, stop everything!" Flora cried, her suddenly panicked look calling Trucy's tirade to a halt as everyone turned to the young woman. Flora was looking around the room frantically, her hands pressed to her chest and eyes wide. "Where's Alfendi gone!?"

View the Court Record
No matter how focussed he was on his very important call, there was no way Phoenix could have missed the kitchen door slowly and silently opening. Keeping an ear on the voice of his friend on the other end of the line, he watched as a red-headed boy slipped into the room, closing the door behind him as carefully as he'd opened it. Noticing Phoenix's eyes on him, he flashed a small smile and pressed a finger to his lips, indicating he would stay quiet. Phoenix nodded in return, then returned his attention to his phone, keeping half an eye on the boy just in case.

Alfendi proved to be remarkably well behaved. He stayed in Phoenix's sight at all times, busying himself by silently looking around the room at the various magic props, bookshelves and other random items dotted about. Phoenix had no idea why the boy had come back into the room, and alone, but he supposed the scenario of an important call was probably something familiar to Alfendi from his home; Hershel Layton was certainly an important enough man that he might get very important calls at home occasionally, and he would have been sure to impress on his son the correct manners when someone was on the phone. It was a relief they seemed to have taken.

"Then I'll see you tomorrow, Wright," said the voice on Phoenix's phone.

"Yeah yeah, bright and early," Phoenix replied with a grin. "Until then." With that, he (finally) hung up, placing his phone down on the desk with a sigh.

Alfendi looked over from where he was examining the piano. "Who were you talking to?"

"A friend," Phoenix explained with a smile, then got up from his chair and rounded the desk. "So, why are you in here, may I ask?"

"They were all arguing in there," Alfendi replied, shrugging.

"A concert?" Phoenix repeated to himself, casting a confused glance at the kitchen door. "Is that what the letter was about?"

"Mm hmm," Alfendi mumbled, then pointed to the piano, abruptly changing the subject. "I remember this. From last time."

Phoenix couldn't resist a smile, walking forward to crouch at the boy's side. "Ah yes, I'm not surprised. You quite enjoyed playing it, if I remember rightly."

Alfendi grinned. "It made a lot of noise. I don't get to do that much without being told off."

"You've never tried to learn an instrument?" Phoenix laughed in surprise. "I thought your father could play the piano, or the organ, or something like that."
"Yeah," Alfendi muttered, his smile fading. "I'm not very good at playing music. Just making noise." He frowned. "And I don't like practising."

'Well, that would put an effective damper on any prospective musical skills,' Phoenix mused. "Me too," he agreed, patting the boy on the back.

At that moment, the door to the kitchen swung open, admitting a wide-eyed Flora. "Mister Wright, have you-!?" She paused, noticing the desk she had been aiming for was empty, and turned around to see Phoenix and Alfendi standing by the piano behind her. "Alfendi!" she shouted, and jumped on her younger brother to give him a tight hug. "Don't ever run off like that again! I was worried sick!"

Sycamore poked his head in the door, then looked back into the kitchen to call "We found him!" before coming into the office himself.

"I don't know why it took you so long," Alfendi replied with a shrug, wriggling out of his sister's grip with a frown. "I've been in here for ages."

Flora stepped back from her brother, hands on her hips. "You know full well you're supposed to tell me before you go running off! The Professor made it a rule!"

"I know," Alfendi groaned, visibly struggling not to roll his eyes. "Papa gave me, like, a million rules though! Do I have to follow all of them!?"

Eventually, the Layton siblings were calmed down from their bickering and the Wright children were recalled from their search (Apollo and Trucy had been scouring upstairs, while Luke checked the laundry and the alleyway behind their building), and everyone settled down in the office around the red couches with some of the green tea the Feys always kept stocked for their visits (plus some juice for the visiting six-year-old). Trucy and Alfendi, being the youngest, sat directly on the carpet, while the six adults took up all the available sofa space.

Phoenix leaned back in his seat, leaning on the armrest at his side. "So, what was that letter all about?" he asked, directing a grin at Luke opposite him and Apollo at his side. "Something to do with a concert, I hear?"

Apollo sighed, crossing his arms, and Luke looked away, his hands fiddling nervously in his lap.

Trucy huffed from the floor next to her father. "Mister Gavin's invited us backstage to his concert on Tuesday! And Polly doesn't want to go!"

"What!?!" Phoenix cried in surprise, jerking up in his seat. He noticed Sycamore, Emmy and Flora carefully avoiding eye contact, busying themselves with sipping their tea. Alfendi just rolled his eyes, playing with his glass of juice.

Recognising another argument threatening on the near horizon, Luke leaned forward in his seat, resting a hand on his sister's shoulder and cutting any fight off at the pass. "Could you fetch the letter for us, Trucy?"

The teen sighed. "Alright," she mumbled, then got to her feet and dashed off into the kitchen.

The middle Wright child returned his attention to his father. "The letter was from Klavier Gavin. He's sent us three backstage tickets, for his concert at Sunshine Coliseum."

"But he still expects us to pay for them," Apollo added bitterly, raising an eyebrow.
"Oh?" Phoenix asked, surprised.

Luke winced, nodding. "Y-yes, it would cost quite a lot. B-but he has given us a discount, and technically they're already paid for anyway; He's just expecting us to pay him back."

Phoenix didn't reply, frowning slightly as he stared off into the distance.

"Here it is!" Trucy called as she re-entered the room, waving the opened envelope over her head. As she got to the table, she quickly emptied its contents back out, snatching up the three tickets to show Phoenix. "See, Daddy? We already have the tickets, so we should go, right?"

"No we are not!" Apollo snapped, grabbing at the invoice to also show Phoenix. "Dad, look at what he's expecting us to pay for these!"

Sighing, Phoenix held up his hands, silencing the pair. "I am perfectly capable of looking at things myself," he pointed out, giving Apollo and Trucy stern stares until they sheepishly placed their items back on the table, Trucy lowering herself back down to sit on the carpet. Free of his children's hounding, Phoenix finally turned his attention to the letter.

It took a few minutes for him to peruse the contents of the envelope, his gaze carefully expressionless in his best poker face. He could feel the stares of his children on him, and the occasional curious gaze of their silent guests, but he didn't acknowledge them, quietly reading Klavier's letter before turning to the invoice.

Finally, Apollo couldn't take the quiet anymore. "You agree we can't go, don't you?" he asked. "I mean, Gavin's clearly up to something. And I doubt we could afford to go, anyway."

"No, we could just about manage that," Phoenix muttered distractedly, returning his attention to the letter. "If you boys chip in for your own tickets, that'd help too."

Trucy's face erupted into a grin, while Apollo's paled. "You can't be serious...!" he said.

"We get to go!?" Trucy cried. "Really really truly!?"


"But Gavin's clearly planning something!" Apollo argued, giving his father a pleading look. "You know we can't trust him, Dad!"

Phoenix finally looked up to meet Apollo's gaze with an innocent grin. "Oh, I'm sure he's planning something," he replied. "He's planning to give you three a solid night of entertainment."

As Apollo stared in disbelief, Luke giggled. "I'm glad we got all that sorted out," the younger Wright brother said.

"And I was looking up tickets too," Emmy spoke up, a finger in the air as she grinned proudly. "Flora and I were thinking of going ourselves. We've been hearing a lot about these 'Gavinners' recently!"

Flora looked to her little brother. "What about you, Alfendi? Are you interested?"

Alfendi shifted, uncertain. "Um, what exactly is going to happen there?"

"Very loud music," Sycamore filled in with a dry look. "And equally dense crowds."

"And that's half the fun of it!" Emmy replied with a grin.
Alfendi wrinkled his nose. "No thank you," he muttered.

Apollo sighed, lying back in his seat with his head resting on top of the cushion behind him. "Great. Somehow this has turned into a group excursion."

Phoenix chuckled, but his smile was quick to fade. "That reminds me, I have some bad news to break."

Everyone looked up to watch him with surprise. "What is it?" Luke asked.

"Nothing serious," Phoenix assured him, looking to their visitors. "It's just that I'll be very busy over the next few days; I don't think I'll have the time to show you guys around myself like we planned."

"Was that what your call was about?" Alfendi asked.

Sycamore shook his head. "Unfortunate, but understandable," he said. "I imagine this is too important to put off?"

Phoenix nodded. "I tried to, believe me, but this is something that has to be done now. I don't exactly have a choice."

"What will you be doing?" Trucy asked, watching her father with confusion.

"Yeah," Apollo agreed, suspicious. "This has never happened before, Dad. What's going on?"

Phoenix just grinned. "Secret mission."

Trucy groaned, rolling her eyes, while Apollo looked thoughtful. "Wait, really? You'll tell me later, right?"

"Of course," Phoenix promised, still grinning as he relaxed in his seat. "Later later."

Apollo's eyes narrowed. "What does that mean?"

"I'll tell you later," Phoenix simply said.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Honoured (Paying) Guests

July 6, 1:25PM
Kurain Village

The bus was quick to empty when it pulled up to Kurain Village that afternoon. Its handful of passengers hid under the small shelter, waiting until the bus they had just exited had turned and disappeared back down the road to the train station. As it passed, the door of the mansion opposite them flew open, and a teenage girl in pink robes dashed out, grinning excitedly as she paused at the top of the stairs, pressing her hands together and bowing deeply in greeting. "Welcome to Kurain Village, honoured guests," she called. "We're glad to see you have made it safely."

Trucy giggled, breaking off from the group huddled under the shelter to race across the road and greet her cousin with a hug, standing on her tiptoes on the second step from the top. "Hi Pearly!" Given Trucy's slightly taller frame, this wasn't difficult for either of them to accomplish. "Where's Mommy?"

Still grinning, Pearl pulled away from Trucy as her brothers crossed the road to join them, Luke waving along their visitors behind him. Pearl gave the visitors another quick bow. "Mystic Maya will be coming to greet you shortly," she announced, in a 'proper' manner that the Wrights weren't used to hearing from her. "Please, come inside." With that, she turned and went inside.

Luke, Apollo and Trucy gave each other confused looks, before the latter pair followed her in. Luke shrugged before waving in his friends.

In the Meditation Room, Pearl was automatically directing everyone to remove their shoes, though she halted awkwardly as she noticed that the sight of the Wrights doing so was enough of a prompt for the Bostonius crew to follow suit. Apollo was the first to finish, and he approached the girl with crossed arms. "You can drop the act now, Pearly. You've met these guys before."

"Oh, thank goodness!" Emmy suddenly cried with a laugh, waving apologetically at Pearl. "I was beginning to think you were a sister or some other very similar-looking relative!"

Pearl bit a thumbnail. "I'm sorry," she mumbled, glancing back at Emmy before looking away. "I thought you'd want a traditional welcome. You're honoured guests, after all."

Luke snorted, biting back a giggle as he shoved his shoes in one of the provided cubby holes. "Aren't we honoured guests? You've never greeted us that way."

"Oh, well," Pearl muttered, hiding a small smile, "I've always thought of you as 'family', not 'guests'."

Luke froze, surprised, and Trucy giggled as she pulled at his arm. "Well, duh, how'd you forget that, Luke?"

Chuckling, Luke adjusted his hat, looking down at his sister. "Yes, that was a silly question, wasn't it?"

Apollo just shook his head, amused. "Nice to know family doesn't deserve a special welcome," he joked, giving Pearl a grin. She giggled in return.
Sycamore straightened his tie as he stood from stowing away his shoes, then approached Pearl with a hand outstretched. "It's a pleasure to be here, Miss Fey. Flora was telling us of her last visit here during our trip."

"Oh, really?" Pearl replied, politely shaking the man's hand, then looked to Flora with a smile. "I was at school then, wasn't I?"

Flora nodded, looking up from where she was hovering over Alfendi, the last of the group to be putting his shoes away. "Oh yes, you and Trucy were both indisposed that day. And then I was visiting alone the next summer, and I didn't have the time to come all the way up-"

At that moment, the hallway door flew open, interrupting Flora as everyone turned their attention to the incoming woman in purple robes, floating in almost serenely were it not for the massive grin on her face. "Yo!" she called, giving their guests a wave. "How's it going?"

"Mommy!" Trucy cried, running to give Maya a hug.

Maya laughed as she hugged the teen back. "And how's my little girl, huh?" She beckoned to Trucy's brothers, adding, "And my boys, how are you two?"

Luke giggled and waved, while Apollo crossed his arms, hiding a smile. "We're fine, Mom," he assured her.

"Pffft, fine, don't get a hug then," Maya scoffed, releasing Trucy as the girl snickered in amusement.

"Hello Maya!" Flora called, stepping forward towards the woman. "It's a pleasure to see you again!"

"Flora!" Maya replied, pulling the young woman into a quick hug. "Welcome back to Fey Manor!" Releasing her, she then looked around for Alfendi, spotting him sitting on the low shelves and looking bored. "And you too, Alfendi! You probably don't remember your last visit, do you?"

Alfendi shook his head.

"Of course he doesn't; He was asleep," Apollo pointed out with a smile.

Everyone promptly hid a smile or laugh, and Alfendi was offended. "No I wasn't!"

"Actually, Alfendi's right," Luke reflected, rubbing his goatee in thought. "I took him out to the Winding Way to play with Pearl's ball, remember?" He paused, giving the boy a smile. "Then he fell asleep."

A fresh wave of giggles spread across the group, and Alfendi huffed to himself in embarrassment, arms tightly crossed.

"Don't worry, we're just teasing," Flora assured her brother, stepping towards him. "You were just a baby, after all; The jetlag got to you."

While Alfendi dodged comforting pats from his sister, Emmy moved towards Maya, her hand held out to shake. "I don't believe we spoke much last time we met, Miss Fey. Did you get my letter?"

Maya nodded, looking suddenly very business-like as she shook the offered hand. "Of course, Ms Altava. I was very honoured to read your intriguing offer."

Sycamore blinked in surprise, then groaned, pinching his nose with a frown. "Emmy, don't tell me..."

Emmy shot a smirk at the man, then turned back to Maya. "Is there anything you wish to discuss
before we go ahead?"

Maya pretended to think, hiding a smile. "No, it was quite agreeable." Her smile turned into a grin as she dropped her prim demeanour. "Besides, no-one here's going to turn down some free, and **positive**, publicity in the World Times!"

Sycamore sighed. "Of course you did."

Pearl gasped. "Oh! We're going to be in a newspaper?"

Luke looked to Flora, confused. "Did you know about this?"

Flora shook her head, her expression somewhere between scandalised and puzzled, and turned to Emmy. "I thought we were just here for a visit, not for work!"

"Oh, we *are* here for a visit," Emmy insisted, flipping her hair with a proud smile. "But I can't very well afford to waste time in Los Angeles and *not* have an article ready for publishing at the end of it, can I?"

"And it's not like we're going to complain," Maya added, patting the grinning Pearl's shoulder. "We could always do with more customers!" She then turned back to Emmy, her mood more serious. "I don't know if you have a passed loved one you want us to channel, but I did take the liberty of consulting with a spirit who could help explain how our customs work, if you're at all interested."

Trucy grinned. "You mean Auntie Mia, right?" she asked. Maya gave her a quick smile and a nod.

Emmy frowned, a finger on her cheek. "No, I didn't have anyone in mind," she admitted. "Honestly, even if I did, I don't think I'd have a photo of them anyway. Ironic, I know." She patted the camera pouch on her belt.

Not seeming to have heard the woman's wry words, Trucy gave Emmy a bright grin, bouncing at her side. "Emmy, Emmy! When you come to see my and Apollo's show tonight, would you be able to write about that too?!"

"Hmm, maybe," Emmy conceded with a sly smile. "If you two give me a particularly spectacular show, of course."

Apollo scoffed, arms crossed as he puffed out his chest with no small amount of pride. "What are you talking about, Ms Altava? Our shows are *always* spectacular."

Sycamore sighed, then stepped forward to also shake Maya's hand. "In any case, thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet us, Miss Fey... despite my *friend* here's," he shot a glare at Emmy, "unreasonable requests."

Emmy scoffed, waving off his disapproval.

"They're not unreasonable at all," Maya insisted with a smile. After a short pause, she turned and waved the pair to the door behind her. "In fact, why don't I give you two a tour of the Manor? You could get started on your article, Emmy."

"A wonderful idea, Maya," Emmy replied with a grin, pulling her camera out of its pouch. "Shall we go?"

With that, the two women linked arms and strolled out into the hallway. Sycamore sighed heavily before following them.
Trucy turned to Pearl with a grin. "So, any plans for us? Or are we just killing time for Mommy to
finish with them?"

Pearl thought a moment, then turned to Alfendi still sat on the low shelves. "Actually, I should
check... Did you want a tour too, Alfendi? You didn't get one last time, after all."

Alfendi screwed his nose up in thought. "Is there anything interesting in it?"

Apollo bit back a snort of laughter at the boy's audacity, while Pearl simply looked shocked.

Flora was watching her brother disapprovingly. "Alfendi, that was rather rude, wasn't it?"

"But I don't want to go if it's going to be boring!" Alfendi protested.

Luke gave him a sympathetic look. "I don't think a tour would interest you, no," he admitted, then
turned to Pearl. "Why don't we get out a board game? Something not too complicated, just to fill the
time until the others are done."

"That's a good idea!" Trucy announced, turning to Flora and Alfendi with a grin. "Have you guys
ever played Castle Panic?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Castle Panic isn't complicated?"

"It should be easy enough," Pearl decided, turning to the Laytons with a smile. "It's co-operative. We
can show you how it works as we play."

Flora nodded. "That sounds fun," she said, looking to her brother. "What do you think, Alfendi?"

Alfendi shoved his hands in his pockets, face screwed up in thought. After a moment, he jumped to
his feet and gave Pearl a smile. "Okay."
It didn't take too long for Pearl to set up the game, and she and the Wrights gave the Laytons a quick overview of the game mechanics before starting a round. It took a little longer for Flora and Alfendi to get a handle on it (especially Alfendi, who, in addition to being under the game's age suggestions, kept trying to hide his cards), but, being a co-operative game, they were thoroughly guided and helped by their friends. Eventually, even they were happily joining in strategy discussions, trading cards and helping to destroy the hordes of monsters slowly descending on the group's tiny castle in the centre of the board.

During a lull where Pearl was generating new monsters from the diminishing pile, Flora turned to Luke. "Speaking of castles, how is your story about the Folsense adventure going? The Professor's notes from our visit to Dropstone arrived, right?"

Luke was surprised at the question, looking up at Flora before frowning in thought, his gaze on the cardboard walls of the game's stone fortress. "Yes, those arrived this past week." He shot her a smile. "I should thank you for that, too. You asked them things I'd forgotten to include in my list! They're proving to be very helpful!"

Flora blushed. "Oh, it was no problem, Luke. I'm just glad my additions are useful."

With the new monsters set up on the board, Trucy began to draw cards, eyeing a goblin only a space away from one of their castle walls. She examined her new draw, then huffed. "No one has a green swordsman? Or a barbarian? Or a hero?"

Apollo shook his head. "Draw a new card. Maybe you'll get one," he pointed out.

While Trucy was busy choosing which of her cards to discard and replace, Luke continued to Flora, "I've got the version I tell people all written down. Right now, I'm just planning out new names, and basic ideas for the necessary medium changes." He smiled. "What do you think about 'Stonefall' for Dropstone?"

Apollo snorted, hiding a smirk. "Bit on the nose, isn't it?"

Flora giggled. "I like it! What about Folsense?"

"That one was a lot harder," Luke admitted, stroking his goatee. "I was thinking about 'Goldknell'. Or... 'Goldenknell', maybe?"

Alfendi screwed up his nose. "Those both sound awful."

Luke shrugged. "Katia suggested I could always keep 'Folsense', since it is a ghost town. And the air is meant to be all clear in the area by now anyway."

"Well, I hope we won't need a red archer!" Trucy suddenly cried, slapping one of her four cards on the discard pile and grabbing another from the draw pile; She hadn't even noticed she was interrupting anything, her focus being so strongly on her own issue at hand. After a moment, her
glare at the new card turned into a defeated sigh, and she held it out to Pearl. "I've got a fortify. We can kill it that way at least."

Pearl gave her a sympathetic nod, taking the card to discard it and then turning to the game box at her side. A moment later, she had pulled out a tiny piece of cardboard resembling a wooden wall, which was hung on the wall in front of the offending monster. "Are you done playing cards?"

Trucy sadly nodded, picking up the goblin token and the 'fortification' on the wall in front of it. "What a waste of a fortify." Tossing them back in the box at Pearl's side, she made a grab for the bag of monster tokens, looking at Luke curiously. "Were you talking about something?"

"It's unrelated to the game," Flora informed her with a smile. "I was just asking Luke how his latest novel is going."

Luke blushed, rubbing the back of his head. "I wouldn't call it a 'novel'..."

"Cool!" Trucy chirped, pulling out a pair of monster tokens from the bag, which she was turning her attention to already. "That's the one with the train, right?"

"Yep," Luke replied, nodding. "I'm still thinking about what to rename the Molentary Express to, though."

There was silence for several moments as Trucy placed one of the monster tokens, an orc, on the board where the die assigned it, then tossed the other one back into the game box. "We've got an archer plague," she informed everyone.

Alfendi frowned. "What does that mean?"

"If you have an archer card in your hand," Pearl told him, "you have to discard it."

Nodding, the boy turned his attention to the three cards sitting in front of him on the table. After a moment, he added, "Do they have to be actually in my hand to count?"

Apollo grinned, biting back a laugh. "In your hand of cards, yes," he said. "Not necessarily in your actual hand."

Without a word, Alfendi handed over one of his cards to be discarded.

As she moved the monsters that were already on the board closer to the castle, Trucy grinned at Luke. "That reminds me, didn't Emmy and Mister Sycamore want to hear some of your stories last time we saw them? Maybe we could do that when they get back!"

Apollo chuckled, drawing some cards to fill out his hand as the turn of play moved to him. "I think Ms Altava will be too busy talking to Mom about that article. It'll have to wait."

Trucy frowned in disappointment, but a moment later her face once again lit up. "Then we can talk to Mister Sycamore! Do you think he'll mind if we ask him about your stories, Luke?"

Luke had to think for a long moment, then finally shook his head and shrugged. "I'm afraid I have no idea. We haven't talked about it much ourselves."

"It probably depends on what exactly you want to ask him," Flora replied in his stead. "He talks to us about those days from time to time." She gestured between herself and Alfendi, the young boy grinning proudly at the mention of his beloved uncle.
"Oh, I just wanted to ask about Monte d'Or," Trucy airily explained, waving a hand. "Not, like, about Descole or anything." She paused, then gave Luke a hopeful grin. "Unless he doesn't mind me asking about that, of course."

Luke shrugged again. "Don't look at me."

Flora just looked confused. "Monte d'Or? I'm pretty sure Uncle only ever went there the once..."

"They want to ask about illusions or something," Alfendi explained, watching Apollo use one of his cards to attack a troll nearing the castle.

Trucy nodded eagerly. "He helped plan the Masked Gentleman's illusions, right? I wanted to talk to him about his techniques!"

"He's not exactly a magician, after all," Apollo added, smiling. "He won't have sworn himself to secrecy on it."

"But you guys are against using audience plants," Luke pointed out, a little confused. "Not to mention, all the Masked Gentleman's miracles were on such a grand scale... I don't mean to be rude, but you two could never pull those off in the Wonder Bar."

Apollo and Trucy shot each other identical grins. "Yeah, we knew that," Trucy replied.

"Just because we work in different styles of illusions," Apollo continued, "doesn't mean he won't have anything interesting to tell us." Their eyes locked on Luke, the pair promptly slapped their hands together in a proud high five.

Although still bemused, Luke decided to drop the question, shaking his head with a fond smile.

Not that the group in the living room seemed to notice, their attention fully focussed on defending their tiny cardboard castle from marauding monsters, but Maya's tour ended up taking a surprisingly long time. Sycamore's long-suffering sighs, initially unnoticed by the two women, had slowly increased in volume as the group of three stopped every five steps for Emmy to ask a question and Maya to give a long-winded explanation as an answer, Emmy taking copious notes in her little book with an intense frown of concentration. Once Emmy had noticed her friend's frustration, she began to shoot him amused smirks, goading him into taking action if he was so upset, but Sycamore refused to rise to her bait, pushing his glasses up his nose with a glare and waiting patiently for Maya's latest thorough explanation to finish and the trio to once again move on.

Finally, Maya's tour came to an end, and she led her visitors back down the corridors with a smile. "Well, I hope I answered all your questions adequately, Ms Altava."

"Oh, of course," Emmy replied, grinning as she put away her notepad and pen. "Your little village here is so fascinating, Miss Fey. Who wouldn't want to hear as much as they can about it?"

Behind her, Sycamore rolled his eyes.

Coming to the living room door, Maya giggled as she heard the raucous laughter of the group within. "You almost don't want to spoil their fun, huh?" she whispered to Emmy, then knocked and promptly opened the door. "Hey kids, I hope you weren't too bored by us abandoning you like that!"

The group within, circled around the low table on the floor, looked up in surprise, their previous conversation abruptly halted as Maya swept her way towards them. Trucy grinned, giving the
woman a wave. "Hi, Mommy!"

Pearl smiled, gesturing to the board game on the table. "It's alright, Mystic Maya; We were just playing a game to pass the time."

Luke turned his attention to Emmy and Sycamore, trailing into the room behind Maya. "Was your tour fun?"

"Of course it was," Emmy insisted with a sly grin at Sycamore. "Why wouldn't it be?"

Sycamore withheld another sigh, pushing at his glasses. "I suppose you could call it that," he admitted.

"I think our game is almost done," Flora said, indicating the nearly empty bag of monster tokens sitting in front of Alfendi. "It's quite fun, actually!"

"I like the castle," Alfendi added, grinning as he pointed to the cardboard castle, currently missing three of its walls and one of its towers to the game's wrath. "It's got my age of walls!"

Apollo smirked. "Well, when it's complete it does."

"Oh!" Trucy cried, jumping to her feet. "I almost forgot!" She ran around the table to where Emmy and Sycamore stood, her hands clasped together as she gave Sycamore a wide grin. "Mister Sycamore, Polly and I wanted to ask you about something!"

Sycamore glanced at Apollo, withholding another sigh. "Monte d'Or, I take it?"

Trucy nodded eagerly. "You helped plan all the Masked Gentleman's illusions, right?"

Emmy was surprised, looking between the two magicians. "But surely Luke's told you how those were done, hasn't he? The Professor worked it all out pretty quickly."

"And it wasn't me who pulled them off, either," Sycamore added. "Ascot did that all on his own."

Apollo scoffed, getting up to join his sister. "Yeah, but he was just following instructions. You were the one who planned it." He stood at Trucy's back with his hands on his hips, the pair giving the man before them identical grins. "Quite impressive for an amateur."

Sycamore's eyes widened as he sputtered, giving the siblings an offended look. "Excuse me?"

Emmy snorted, but quickly hid her laughter behind a hand, steadfastly avoiding anyone's gaze as she suddenly pretended to be very interested in the ceiling. Everyone else was exchanging shocked looks, not quite sure how to respond.

Trucy just nodded knowingly. "For instance," Apollo picked up, "you must have had plans for 'miracles' that you never sent, right? We'd be very interested in hearing about them!"

For a very long moment, Sycamore simply stared at the pair, but, eventually, his anger faded away with a sigh of quiet acceptance. "Alright, alright," he agreed. "Let's sit down and I'll answer all your questions."
View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"This is infinitely more exciting than a dumb little magic show, am I right?" Clay boasted, gesturing widely to indicate the massively tall room around them. "Or a roomful of sick animals that would just make everyone sad?"

Luke rolled his eyes. "You don't need to bring the shelter into this, Clay." Nearby, Apollo and Trucy crossed their arms in unison, sending identical unamused glares at their astronaut friend.

"It's certainly impressive," Sycamore agreed, looking up at the rocket towering above them with a smile. "A great feat of engineering." He then turned his attention to the models of aliens hung nearby, firing on a helpless satellite and its gun-toting astronaut from their UFOs. "Although it would help its integrity to be a little less sensationalist in the decor..."

Emmy snapped a few photos of the rocket, then turned her attention back to Clay. "This is an exact replica you said?"

Clay nodded, gesturing proudly to towering spacecraft. "Yep! Identical in every way to the rocket that brought Mister Starbuck into space six years ago! They could fill it up with fuel and fly it into space today if they wanted to!"

"Seems a bit of a waste of resources to me," Emmy muttered, hiding her comment behind her camera as she took another photo, this time of an information board by the railing around the rocket.

Alfendi tugged on Clay's sleeve to attract his attention, then pointed at the display nearby. "What's that one about?"

"Ah, that one?" Clay replied with a grin, walking across the glass floor to the closed case. "This happens to be the most exciting exhibit in the whole museum!"

Noticing her brother looking warily through the transparent floor at the distant ground, Flora took Alfendi's hand, guiding him along beside her as they followed Clay. "This is the one on the HAT-1 Miracle, right?"

"Indeed it is, my lady!" Clay crowed with no small amount of pride. He bent down closer to Alfendi's height, giving him a grin. "You've heard of the HAT-1 Miracle, right kiddo?"

Alfendi thought a moment, sticking close to his sister and still shooting the occasional wary glance at the floor. "No..."

Clay's grin somehow got even bigger. "Ah, fantastic! I get to introduce you, then!"

As Clay launched into a blow-by-blow retelling of the satellite's failure and its lone passenger's safe return to Earth, the rest of the group slowly dispersed around the room. Trucy and Luke gravitated to a holographic model of the solar system, playing with the buttons to see what it would do. Sycamore lingered by the HAT-1 display, examining the items in the case and listening in on Clay's story with interest. By the rocket stood Apollo and Emmy, their hands on the white railing separating them from
the sheer drop to the rocket's base far below.

"It's actually very pretty, what they've done in here," Emmy told Apollo, gesturing to the walls, which were painted a blue so dark it appeared black, with spots of white-yellow that seemed to glow in the dim light indicating stars. Far above them, the ceiling was similarly painted, but a slightly paler blue, wisps of clouds circling around the dome where a dedicated spotlight lit the area. Near one of the supports for the rocket, a model of Jupiter hung, opposite from the space-battle more befitting a children's cartoon than a scientific diorama. Emmy shrugged as she similarly turned a bemused look to the latter. "I mean, I agree the aliens are a bit much, but..."

Apollo chuckled. "Yeah, I'd bet anything that was Director Cosmos' idea. He's... a bit obsessed with the idea of alien attack."

Emmy raised an eyebrow. "And he runs a serious space research centre?"

"Yep," Apollo replied, smiling. "You gotta be a little kooky to work here, I've found."

After a moment of thought, Emmy accepted the comment with a shrug. "I guess it's always a good idea to be wary when it comes to space research. There's a lot of people out there who'd love to shut these people down and claim all their work for themselves."

Apollo frowned. "Huh? What do you mean?"

"You don't know?" Emmy asked, surprised. "Your friend is such a talker, I thought..." She shook her head. "Never mind. You didn't know about all the underground interest in space research?"

"No?" Apollo replied, still confused. "Why would people be taking something like that 'underground'?"

Emmy shrugged. "All I know is, there are a lot of strange people out there. Some of it is just other countries wanting to keep all the research to themselves, some of it is lone companies wanting all the 'market' power..." She frowned. "Some of it... well. There are a lot of strange people out there."

Apollo stared up at the rocket before them, shining in the spotlights trained on its pristine white skin. As much as he liked to think the best of humanity as a whole, he had to admit he could understand where Emmy's worries were coming from; As a world-travelling reporter, she'd certainly be more informed on the subject than he was. "What about the people that aren't countries or companies?" he asked, looking back to the woman in yellow. "You're saying there are lone wolves that just want to hoard the knowledge themselves?" When she didn't immediately reply, he added, "But that doesn't exactly make sense... what can one person do on their own to get into space?"

Emmy didn't say anything for a long time, staring a hole in the GYAXA logo on the rocket's side. "Like I said: There are a lot of strange people out there."

Apollo watched her go in confusion, headed to the HAT-1 display. "Strange..."

Nearby, he noticed his siblings still playing with the solar system hologram, zooming in and out of various planets and playing with the scale to compare their sizes to each other and to the truly massive sun. Smiling at their antics, he walked over to join them, arms crossed. "I hope you two aren't getting into trouble."

"Of course not!" Trucy protested, jabbing at a button to reset the picture. "We never get into trouble!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow at her claim.

Luke giggled, but evidently decided not to comment. "Did you want to have a go?"
The elder brother shook his head, his worried frown etching itself back on his face. "Actually, I... I was just talking to Ms Altava..."

At that, Luke's expression mirrored his brother's. "What happened?"

"Nothing too serious," Apollo insisted, forcing a quick smile. "She was... just telling me about how there are people out there who'd prefer to hoard all the space research for themselves..."

Trucy blinked, shocked. "Why would they want to do that!?!"

"That's what I said," Apollo replied, and sighed. "Y'know, other countries might do illegal things in an effort to be better than us. And then unscrupulous companies might want to dominate the 'market' and put competitors out of business. All sorts of reasons."

Luke frowned, studying his brother intently. "But that's not what has you so worried, is it?"

Apollo thought a moment, then reluctantly nodded. "She didn't say it outright, but she seems to think there are people unconnected to governments or research companies just as willing to take action against a place like this. But that doesn't make any sense, right?"

"Of course it doesn't!" Trucy agreed, crossing her arms. "It costs a lot of money to go into space, doesn't it? You'd never hide something as big as that rocket without someone else seeing it!"

Luke wasn't so sure, a hand at his chin in thought. "I don't know, Emmy has a point. The places I've seen... it's not unheard of to hide something bigger than this from the outside world."

"But why would you even want to take space travel underground?" Apollo asked. "There's no point. One person can't get far on their own, and getting too many people involved is just asking to be uncovered and shut down."

Much like Emmy, Luke didn't reply for a long moment. "What would be the point in taking archaeology underground?" he instead asked, meeting Apollo's eyes with a stern frown. "They'd claim to be acting purely for the benefit of mankind, I'm sure... but it's all about greed in the end."

Apollo and Trucy shot each other surprised glances. "You mean there's another Targent out there?" Trucy asked. "One for going into space instead of finding the Azran?"

"Or even another Descole?" Apollo added, shooting a glance to the suited man standing by the HAT-1 display.

Luke stared across the room at where Emmy and Sycamore stood, smiling and laughing along with Flora as Clay and Alfendi continued their animated discussion. Finally, he sighed, looking away. "If Emmy didn't say anything for sure, she probably has as much of an idea as us," he decided, then gave his siblings a reassuring smile. "I wouldn't worry about it. If there was something going on, you know Clay would be telling us all about it the first chance he got."

As worried as Apollo was, he had to admit Luke had a point. "Yeah, true," he sighed, relaxing with a smile. "Clay couldn't keep a secret to save his life."

Trucy giggled in agreement.
Eleven-year-old Luke Triton was becoming increasingly bored with travelling the globe.

Oh sure, it had all started as incredibly exciting, with a glamorous airship to admire, a short trip across Europe, a high-speed plane battle and a mid-air rescue... but, with Aurora safe and the group started on their quest to recover all the Azran Eggs before Targent did... Luke had very quickly run out of things to do. He'd explored every inch of the small plane they now lived in (barring the engine room and Sycamore and Raymond's private quarters), read every one of his Sherlock Holmes books he'd brought with him to pass the time (even the new ones he'd picked up when they dropped by London again after Torrido), and had told all three of his stories about his and the Professor's adventures to everyone else... multiple times. Out of desperation, he'd also tried introducing his beloved books to Aurora, but discussing even fictional murders proved to be distressing for her and Luke wisely decided not to bring them up in her hearing ever again.

Thus, the pre-teen found himself stretched out on one of the purple sofas, lying on his back and staring out one of the high portholes at the blue sky beyond, an intense feeling of boredom permeating his skull.

"Don't tell me you're out of things to do already?"

Luke jumped with a cry, falling off the sofa to the floor. Above him, he heard the chuckling of Professor Sycamore, and felt a blush spreading across his cheeks as he scrambled to his feet. "P-Professor, I didn't see you there!"

Sycamore's laughter faded as he crossed his arms across his chest, watching Luke with no small amount of amusement from behind the sofa. "I was expecting you to be up on the outer deck with the others. Professor Layton is giving Aurora a lecture on ancient mythology, believe it or not."

Luke looked up to the door in the corner of the room, accessed by a nearby stairwell. "Why mythology?" he asked.

"I believe she was curious about the legend of the phoenix we heard in Mosinnia," Sycamore explained, still watching Luke. "We only left this morning. Are you so bored you won't even seek out something to do?"

Luke shuffled guiltily, then turned around and sat back down on the sofa without a word, his eyes locked on his knees.

"Ah, so this is a serious case indeed," Sycamore said knowingly. A moment later, Luke noticed out of the corner of his eye that the man was rounding the purple lounge, and he sat down at the boy's side. "We're not scheduled to reach our next destination for another day or so. We'll fetch the final egg and after that... well." The man paused, suddenly seeming uncomfortable. "I suppose we'll see what the Azran have in store for us next."

Luke wasn't sure what to say to that. The uncertainty of what a race of people were thinking oh so
long ago when they set up this strangest of Easter egg hunts was... well, scary. He tore his gaze from his lap to look up at the man at his side. "As long as we get it before Targent does, right?"

Sycamore didn't reply, and Luke wasn't sure if he'd even heard the question, frowning off into the distance with a hand on his chin.

"Professor?"

Suddenly Sycamore sprang back to life, pushing at his glasses as he shot glances all over the room. "Y-yes, as long as we secure this 'legacy' before Targent does," he hastily muttered, refusing to meet Luke's eyes. "You have nothing to worry about, Luke."

Luke watched the man carefully. It seemed reasonable, and even a little reassuring, that the adults of the group were as concerned about the uncertainty facing them as Luke was. With this thought in mind, he looked away, deciding it was time to change the subject.

... But what to?

Luke's mind drifted back to the previous day, spent running all over the ancient town of Mosinnia. They'd found good friends in Umid and all the other children that lived there, and outsmarted the two Targent agents skulking around and irritating poor Adler the eagle. However, although they'd been too busy at the time to question it, one small exchange he'd overheard stuck in his mind.

"You know, my dad died when I was young, so I never got to know him, but I heard he was a quick thinker, like you."

"Sounds like he would have been a wonderful father. Hmm... If my daughter were still alive, she'd be about your age, too."

"Oh, I..."

"You... had a daughter, Professor?"

"Ah, forgive me. This isn't the time."

"I'm so sorry..."

"All that is in the past. What matters now is waking up the people of Mosinnia."

Of course, now the adults of Mosinnia were all awake, the danger past and the Azran Egg in Aurora's care where it belonged. They had all the time in the world to talk... but would Sycamore want to talk about it? Luke shot him a wary glance. He didn't think so. After all, they'd not heard even an inkling about a family from the man, not in the two weeks they'd been travelling with him and certainly not in the article Emmy had found about his achievements, before they'd left for Froenborg. Given the way the subject had been brushed off as 'not the time', Luke doubted there would ever be a 'good time' to talk about it for Desmond Sycamore.

That didn't stop Luke being curious, though.

As bad as he was at guessing ages, Luke was fairly confident Umid was older than him; A teenager at the least. And Sycamore, if he remembered Emmy's article correctly, was in his late thirties, not
much older than Luke's father; He'd probably been around the same age at his daughter's birth as Clark had been at Luke's. So how long had it been then since said daughter had died? And what of? Was she a lot like her father, or more like her mother? In fact, what had happened to her mother? Sycamore had made no mention of a wife, so had they separated, or was she dead too? Were they ever even married?

"Were you wanting to ask me something?"

Luke jumped, looking up at the man beside him with wide eyes. "P-pardon?"

Sycamore gave the boy a fond smile. "You keep glancing at me. Something on your mind?"

Blushing at having been caught out, Luke looked away. "U-um..."

Sycamore's smile slowly faded, turning into a more concerned look, the man's eyes wide. "Luke, what is it?"

"I-I..." Luke mumbled, his hands wringing the corner of his cardigan. "Are you sure you won't mind me asking, Professor?"

"Of course not," Sycamore insisted, laughing nervously and forcing a smile. "Tell me what the matter is."

Luke shifted uncomfortably for a moment; Sycamore's sudden 'demand' to know was rather unnerving. "W-well... it's just, you were telling Umid back in Mosinnia that you... used to have a daughter?"

Sycamore stared for a long moment, then laughed, relaxing back into his seat. "That was what you wanted to ask me about? My daughter?"


At that, Sycamore calmed, pressing his glasses against his face with a smile. "Ah, it doesn't matter," he insisted, looking off into the distance. Now his laughter had faded, his expression had turned... nostalgic. "No, it's only natural you'd be curious about her. I may not talk about my family, but... I do think of them. All the time." His eyes glanced to the stairs leading to the upper deck.

Luke frowned. Sycamore's mysterious relief at the question, and his near-panic beforehand, almost had him insisting to know what the man had thought he was going to be asked... especially when the subject of Luke's true question was brought into it. He decided not to push his luck, though. "I'm sorry."

"No need to apologise," Sycamore replied, giving the boy a reassuring smile. "My wife and daughter died a long time ago now... My parents even further back. I'm sure you would have gotten along well with them."

Despite his earlier concerns, Luke couldn't help a small smile in return. "What were their names?"

"My wife and daughter? Jean and Chloe," Sycamore replied, his gaze turning distant. "Jean was such a fighter, right to the end..." His smile died. "Chloe was only five years old. So much like her mother, but... there was only so much any of us could do." He looked up to the window, almost frowning. "My parents died when I was eight. I barely remember them now. And my little brother Teddy..."
Luke wasn't sure what else he could do but apologise again, so he neatly folded his hands in his lap and kept quiet as Sycamore's sad tale trailed off. It sounded like he'd lost everyone he ever called 'family'... and what could Luke possibly say to that?

After a pause, Sycamore seemed to return to the present, looking at Luke with amusement. "You aren't going to ask what happened? Everyone else always does."

"I-I don't want to bother you," Luke insisted, trying not to fiddle with a loose thread on the end of his shorts. "I mean, it's none of my business, right?"

Sycamore chuckled. "Funnily enough, the mere fact that you're here helping me means it is your business," he replied. "Sort of, anyway."

Luke met the man's gaze, frowning. "It does? How?"

"Targent," Sycamore replied, his expression darkening.

"Targent?" Luke repeated, shocked. He would have been scared by the dark look in the man's eyes, but he'd long ago noticed the almost involuntary deepening of Sycamore's voice and dead-eyed glare that came to the surface whenever the topic of the underground organisation came up; He was used to the deep-rooted anger the archaeologist harboured, and, given what they'd all seen Targent attempt to do to Aurora, he couldn't blame him.

Sycamore nodded, glaring back out the window. "My father was an archaeologist too. They wanted him to join them. When he refused, they gave him no choice." His eyes closed. "Two decades later, they set their sights on me. Naturally, I gave them the same answer my father did, and..." He trailed off, and didn't say anything for a long time. Finally, he quietly added, "Every family I've made, they've torn apart."

Luke looked around the room. He could just about see Professor Layton's waving arms on the upper deck as he continued his personalised lecture for Aurora and Emmy. The flight deck was empty, the plane currently on autopilot and under Sycamore's care while Raymond was busy arranging their evening meal. Keats' usual spot on the couch cushions was empty, the cat almost certainly sitting in the kitchen hoping to see a dropped treat or two. The boy thought a moment, then turned back to Sycamore. "We're not going to let them do that to this family though, right?"

Sycamore frowned, then his eyes opened, looking curiously to the boy at his side. "I'm sorry? What do you mean?"

Luke shrugged, smiling. "Well, we're a family, aren't we? We're Aurora's family. None of us are related, but... we all came together to look after her. So... that makes us family. In my book, anyway."

The man's frown faded as he mulled over Luke's words. After a long pause for thought, he gave the boy a sad smile. "Yes... yes, I suppose that does make us a family, of sorts." He looked away, but somehow seemed even more distressed than he had earlier. "We'll take down Targent together. Of course we will."

"Mm-hmm," Luke agreed, forcing a smile though he was watching Sycamore carefully.

After another short pause, Sycamore stood, giving Luke a fond look. "That was a good talk, Luke. Now why don't you run along and check on Professor Layton?"

Luke glanced to the upper deck, then back to Sycamore. "Um, okay, Professor." Shooting the man a concerned glance, he jumped off his seat and ran to find his mentor.
Sycamore didn't move an inch until the boy was out of sight.
The fading glow of twilight was bathing the park surrounding the Sunshine Coliseum all shades of orange and pink, glittering as it hit the windows of the large concert hall above them. The sweeping roof cast a long shadow down into the courtyard below, where a fountain-like installation held an array of blooming flowers, their colours all tinged red in the fading light. Above, balloons of multiple colours floated, dangling banners advertising the night's concert; Below them, a massive billboard did the same, featuring what looked like Klavier in a birdcage, surrounded by wings of fire. At his feet was emblazoned the words "Guilty as Charged".

Apollo had to wonder if there was any symbolic significance to that image.

Trucy looked up from where she had been admiring the flowers with Flora, and pointed to where the sweeping roofs met above the entrance. "Hey look, they labelled the coliseum with a sun! So you know it's the 'Sun'-shine Coliseum!"

Flora giggled. "Almost ironic it's being used for this concert as the sun is setting, isn't it?"

Emmy was eyeing the crowds gathered around the massive columns surrounding the stadium's entrance. "I don't know about you three, but I think Flora and I had better get in line if we want to be able to see this thing."

Luke crossed his arms, frowning in thought. "How exactly are we getting in? Through some kind of back door, or just through the front with everyone else?" He looked to Trucy. "Does it say on the tickets?"

Trucy reached into the bag at her hip, pulling out the three slips of yellow paper. Squinting, she held them up in the dim light in an attempt to examine them for small print. "Um..."

Apollo rolled his eyes, then pulled out his phone and moved to stand behind his sister. With a press of a button, he lit up his phone screen and held the device up to shine its light on the tickets.

"Oh!" Trucy cried, shooting a grateful grin at her brother. "Thanks, Polly!" When her brother only shrugged in response, hiding a smile, she returned her attention to the tickets. "I think it says we have to show them to a staff member, and they'll direct us to a side door."

Flora studied the crowd for a moment, then pointed eagerly to a section on the right, where there appeared to be some marquees set up by the giant billboard. "I think there's some people in there. Would they count?"

"Aren't they selling merch?" Apollo asked, putting his phone away.

"Even if they can't show us where to go," Luke reasoned, "they would still be able to help us find someone who can. There's no harm in asking them."

Apollo sighed, seeing Trucy giving him an expectant grin. "I guess we'd better go talk to them then."

"Yay!" Trucy cheered, jumping once before running off up the stairs.
"Wait, Truce!" Apollo shouted, running after his sister. "We have to stick together!"

Luke chuckled, and tipped his hat to Emmy and Flora, who were watching in amusement. "Have fun! We'll see you after the concert!"

"You too!" Flora replied, waving.

"We'll see you later!" Emmy added, already walking off towards the crowds at the coliseum entrance.

After some running around, eventually a security guard (in a suspiciously police uniform-like outfit) was able to pull herself away from crowd control to check the three Wrights' tickets and escort them around the side of the massive Coliseum, blocked off by temporary wire fencing. Below a set of five multi-coloured flags was a massive purple truck emblazoned with the Gavinners logo (Apollo presumed it probably carried their equipment), a similarly decorated bus (for the band themselves) and multiple smaller cars and vans. The guard didn't comment on anything in the makeshift parking lot, leading the three through a door into the Coliseum's backstage area. Once inside, Luke and Trucy found themselves shrinking away from the enclosed walls and open ceilings of the maze-like corridors, each clinging to one of Apollo's hands; Apollo hid a smirk at their wary avoiding of the walls, simply leading his younger siblings after the guard ahead of them.

Finally, the guard stopped to knock on an open side-door, leaning into the hidden room beyond. "Ma'am? The three backstagers have arrived." The woman promptly disappeared into the room, muffled conversation erupting from within.

The Wrights all glanced at each other nervously, unsure what to do. Luke seemed to finally notice his grip on his brother's hand, blushing madly as he retracted it. "Do we wait for the security guard to come back out?" he whispered.

"Probably," Apollo replied, frowning. "Is it just me, or do they seem a bit unprepared for us...?"

Finally, the guard returned, sighing to herself. "Alright, looks like you three are my responsibility for right now." In her hands were three lanyards, each with what looked like some kind of ID card attached; She held them out in a bunch for the trio to take. "These are yours for the night. Don't take 'em off until you leave, and make sure you return them when you do, alright?"

"We will," Apollo promised, taking the lanyards as his siblings nodded in agreement. Separating the items gave him a closer look at the cards attached, and he realised they were temporary backstage passes, each with one of the Wrights' names on it. He made sure to pass the correct ones to his siblings, and they all slipped the lanyards over their necks obediently.

The guard led the trio back the way they had come, past the door outside and through an open doorway to a single corridor leading to the back of the building. "Down here are the dressing rooms," she explained, waving to the red doors, "but they are off-limits until the show has started. Mister Gavin has asked you have free reign, so he obviously trusts you not to get in the way." Before they could express surprise at that, she was pointing down to the far end, where the corridor went through another doorway and into an open room, where a set of stairs protruded up and out of sight. "Down there's the way to backstage. It's off-limits for you three."

"Understood," Apollo told her, shooting Trucy a warning look. She just gave him a frown in return.

The guard was quick to herd them back the other way, to a steel door they quickly realised was a lift.
Mashing a button on the wall nearby to open it, she waved them in. "Here's where you guys go to watch the show," she explained, setting the small box in motion the moment all four of them were inside. "Regular fans can get pretty rowdy, so you don't get the best seats in the house, but it's relatively private and you won't get mobbed by people wanting your backstage passes."


"Yeah," Trucy chipped in with arms crossed, "do you know how hard it is to get VIP tickets to a Gavinners show!? Of course they'd be mad!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow; He suspected this was information his sister had known for a while.

The guard laughed. "Well, as long as you enjoy the show, I guess!"

At the top of the elevator shaft was another corridor, this one slightly more open than the one below. The guard, after a moment of looking around in vague confusion, finally spotted a door she found familiar, and pulled it open. "Here we are!"

Luke and Trucy's first reaction to the view inside the small room was an awed gasp, and Apollo couldn't blame them; The view was indeed incredible. The top half of the wall opposite the door was missing, open to the growing audience of Gavinners fans in the concert hall below. To their left was the stage, decorated with red metal beams (apparently supporting a raised section of stage for the drum kit) and three large purple flags with the band's logo emblazoned across them. Another, smaller, metal railing separated it from the first row of the audience, already clumped up against it like a mob, aimlessly milling about as they awaited the objects of their affections. The crowd thinned as it got further from the stage, to a raised diamond-shaped platform at the back of the room. Below it, twin doors were allowing the steady stream of fans to fill the massive expanse of the hall.

"Try not to stray into any of the other rooms up here," the guard continued, attracting the trio's attention back to her. "We've got some security lookouts and, of course, the lighting guys, so don't disturb them if you can help it."

"Of course," Apollo agreed, giving her a reassuring smile. "We're actually performers ourselves, so we'll keep out of the way."

"You don't need to worry about us, ma'am!" Luke added, tipping his hat.

The guard nodded, smiling back at them. "Alright then. Enjoy the show, huh?"

 waren you two in the concert hall yet? .

Yep, we just came in. Where are you three?

We have a room near the light box. Apparently we're in danger of being mobbed for our passes if we go down into the crowds.

Ha! Yeah, don't make me write a sad article about three kids getting stampeded at a concert. The Professor would kill me.

Anyway, you better stop talking to me and enjoy your posh VIP seats. ;) Talk to you later, Luke
Of course! You enjoy the show too, Emmy!
"Thank you for coming to the Gavinners: 'Guilty as Charged' Tour! This ends the first part of tonight's show. There will now be a twenty-minute intermission."

It hadn't taken Apollo long to decide he wasn't much of a fan of the Gavinners' music. Sure, he could see why they were popular, being loud and having a variety of catchy beats and riffs that Trucy, and the crowd below, eagerly sang along to at the top of their lungs. Even Luke seemed to like it, standing at the window next to Trucy with a smile on his face, alternately watching the stage and his gleefully dancing little sister. Looking at the audience, crammed into the concert hall like sardines in a can, Apollo found a range of emotions sweeping through his head - appreciation, guilt, jealousy, shame - and not one of them he was happy about. No, he decided. His mind was firm: This band could not be something he liked.

They hadn't looked around their little room much when they'd first entered it, but, sick of the rock music emanating from the stage, Apollo turned to looking around to occupy himself. As per his suspicions, the abandoned chairs and tables, paired with frequently placed power-points and the railing on the ceiling by the window, told him that the room was usually used as a light box, but had been cleared out on this occasion specifically for the Wrights to use. On one table, he found a few fliers for the concert, and they proved an adequate distraction from the bass and percussion beating through his feet. A short blurb on the band heading the tour told him that they had only risen in success after their founding in 2019 (a part of Apollo wanted to find the exact date to compare to Klavier's first, and Phoenix's last, trial), and their first single had gone platinum overnight. Two of the three acts of the concert were dedicated to the band alone, with the first act a mix of their earlier hits and the third their newest favourites; The second was purely the realm of their guest performers, the major reason Apollo had finally resigned himself to accompanying his siblings tonight.

Of Lamiroir, Apollo was already aware: Her songs were always somewhere on the charts when they came stateside, and he and Trucy were happy to call themselves fans. In fact, Apollo had found himself quite a few times having to convince Trucy not to use Lamiroir's music in their act for fear of getting them both sued, instead talking Luke into doing some tasteful violin covers for them to use instead (although a piano would have been closer to the originals, he refused to bring the offer to Phoenix for obvious reasons). He'd always thought it was a miracle the enigmatic singer managed to gain fame despite not singing in English, though he'd never found a reliable source before to tell him anything more about her: To his surprise, the flier told him she was Borginian. Her everpresent piano accompaniment was also the work of a teenage boy, blind from birth, who she had all-but-adopted as her own, and the two reportedly went everywhere together.

Apollo couldn't help but smile at that; His wasn't the only tale of an orphan adopted by their hero.

Finally, blessedly, the music stopped, and the Gavinners left the stage. Once Klavier had (rather smugly in Apollo's opinion) announced the upcoming performance of their "special guest", an announcer came on over the speakers to formally close out the first act. It would be another twenty minutes before anyone returned to the stage.
Trucy squealed as she bounced back from the window to where Apollo sat in one of the abandoned chairs. "Isn't this so cool, Polly!? Our first live concert, and it's for the Gaviners!"

Apollo screwed up his nose in disgust, making a show of sticking a pinky finger in one ear as though cleaning it out. "I'm sorry, did you say something? My ears are still ringing."

Luke's smile faded a little. "You didn't enjoy it, Apollo?"

The elder brother sighed. "Let's just say the Gaviners put the 'sick' back in 'music',' he said, then held up the flyer in his hand. "I was reading this instead. Quite interesting stuff, actually."

"Oh?" Luke asked. "What about?"

Trucy scoffed, arms crossed. "Who cares? It can't have stuff we don't already know in there!" She then fixed her brothers with an excited grin. "Let's go to Mister Gavin's dressing room! You know, like we're VIPs! I've always dreamed of being a VIP at a Gaviners show!"

Apollo's eyes narrowed. "Truce, you didn't even know who Gavin was two weeks ago."

Trucy shrugged, suddenly looking uncomfortable as she ambled around her brothers and towards the door to the hallway. "Yeah, but I'm a girl. I'm supposed to swoon over gods of rock." "God-awful, maybe," Apollo darkly muttered, rolling his eyes.

Luke meanwhile was giving their sister a concerned look. "Who told you that, Trucy? That you're 'supposed' to do that just because you're a girl?"

Trucy lingered at the door, shifting slightly on her heels and avoiding eye contact. "No-one had to tell me," she insisted, then, before Luke could push the issue, she threw open the door with a bright grin. "Now come on, let's go find Mister Gavin before the intermission's over!"

The Gaviners' dressing room was surprisingly easy to locate, what with the small printed sign on the wall next to the door with their name on it. Apollo had sent a longing glance to the neighbouring room, labelled "Lamiroir", but as Trucy was already charging her way into the Gaviners' space, he wisely decided to follow her, Luke at his heels.

"Hi, Mister Gavin!" Trucy cried, waving as she jumped into the room.

"Ah, you made it," came Klavier's voice in response. As Apollo entered behind his sister, he saw the man putting down a guitar, giving his visitors a grin as he approached to welcome them, ducking under the chains hanging across the ceiling. Behind him, the other four members of his band stayed where they were, engrossed in their conversation and paying the trio no mind.

"Thank you for the tickets," Luke added to Trucy's greeting, closing the door behind him. "That was very kind of you to send them."

Apollo couldn't resist crossing his arms and darkly muttering, "And the invoice that was with them."

"You were incredible up on stage, Mister Gavin!" Trucy continued, apparently deciding to ignore her eldest brother's comments.
Klavier chuckled, brushing at his fringe. "Nothing like music to brighten the mood after a trial, ja? And we're almost ready for our next act. I'm looking forward to it myself."

"Lamiroir's singing, right!?" Trucy excitedly asked. "The 'Siren of the Ballad'?"

At the mention of their shared idol, Apollo's frown faded. "Oh yeah, the flier said she flew all the way over for this show."

Klavier nodded. "That's right. I happened to catch her show while overseas. Her voice..." He paused, visibly searching for the right words to fit his meaning. "Is divine. I knew I had to invite her to perform with us."

A soft laugh echoed from their right, and the trio turned to see a woman in a white frilled dress sitting in a stool, her back to the mirror of the dressing table. A veil covered most of her face, and a blue, star-patterned cloak covered the rest of her. A diamond brooch was pinned on her chest, the exact centre of her collar. At her side was a teenage boy, also in white, wearing sunglasses and apparently staring at his lap. The woman, her arms neatly crossed, spoke, but none of the Wrights could understand her words. Apollo couldn't help feeling that both woman and boy were incredibly familiar... and he could guess why.

"Lamiroir says, 'You praise me too highly'," a deep voice said, and it was only then the Wrights noticed the tall, sturdy-looking man standing nearby, a nondescript suit on his body and a thick brown beard on his face.

Klavier chuckled at the Wrights' stunned reactions to the trio of strangers. "Ah, allow me to introduce Mister Romein LeTouse, Lamiroir's manager," he said, waving to the man. "And her interpreter, incidentally."

LeTouse nodded. "It is a great honour for us to be here. And a great honour for Lamiroir to be heard in this country."

The woman, Lamiroir, pressed a hand to her chest, giving the Wrights a small bow of her head as she again spoke in the language they couldn't understand.

Trucy squealed again, jumping at Apollo and clinging to his arm. "It's Lamiroir!" she stage-whispered to her brother. "We're actually meeting Lamiroir!"

Apollo couldn't resist a smile, though he kept his excitement better in check. "I noticed."

"Lamiroir says," LeTouse continued, "'We have long looked forward to this joint performance'."

"It's a pleasure to meet you all," Luke said, giving all three a polite smile and nod.

Klavier waved his hand in the air as though smelling something particularly sweet, his eyes closed. "Ah, Lamiroir, your voice... It is art."

Lamiroir seemed amused by his continued praise, speaking once more as she rested a hand on the shoulder of the boy at her side, who looked up at the visitors. A moment later, his eyebrows shot up; Apollo assumed he had been so wrapped up in his own world, he hadn't noticed the Wrights were there.

"Yet without his piano to guide me'," LeTouse translated, "'it is but a voice'."

The boy did not speak, staring open-mouthed in their direction for a moment before suddenly looking away again. Was it just Apollo, or were the boy's cheeks turning red?
Trucy again squealed, much quieter this time, still hanging on her brother's arm. "It's Lamiroir's pianist!" she pointed out. "He's so much cuter in person!"

Apollo couldn't resist a smirk, whispering to his sister, "I hear good pianists such as him are a dying breed."

"Allow me to introduce Machi Tobaye," LeTouse informed the Wrights, gesturing to the boy. "He is blind. This is why he never strays far from Lamiroir. They are always together."

It was only then Apollo noticed Luke's reaction to this whole affair; After shooting LeTouse a surprised look, he stared intently at young Machi, a hand stroking his goatee in thought. Apollo wondered what was on his mind.

"Lamiroir's so, um, what's that word?" Trucy continued to babble in excitement, still tightly clinging to Apollo's arm. "Like, exotic, but, not in the bad way. And mysterious!"

"Why are you telling me this?" Apollo asked her, grinning in amusement. "You know I agree with you."

"Her eyes are certainly intriguing." Luke quietly added, and Apollo looked up in surprise to see his brother's odd suspicion from earlier had vanished, and he was giving his siblings a smile.

Klavier chuckled. "Hers is a kind of 'sight-seeing musique'," he informed Luke. "She travels the globe, putting the sights she sees into song. Even though her appearance and voice are 'exotic', as the Fraulein put it, her songs remind us of something close, and warm."

"Sights into song," Trucy repeated with a dreamy sigh, leaning heavily on Apollo. "That's so poetic!"

Luke was looking suspicious again, glancing between Lamiroir and Machi... but, a moment later, he smiled. "I see."

"She was gracious enough to put music to my lyrics tonight," Klavier continued. "'The Guitar's Serenade'..." He shot the Wrights a grin, hands on his hips. "I hope you enjoy it."

"I can't wait!" Trucy chirped.

Klavier laughed, then looked up to a clock on the nearby wall. "And now it is time," he said. "For the next part, we're giving the Gaviners' hard rock a little rest." Grinning, he gestured to the woman seated nearby, bowing to her. "Lamiroir, the stage is yours."

Lamiroir's attention turned to Machi, saying something in their native language. A moment later, they reached out to grasp hands and got to their feet as one.

"The band members will not play during Lamiroir's ballad," LeTouse explained to Klavier and the Wrights. "Only Machi's tender tones, and Lamiroir's dulcet voice."

"And my guitar, of course," Klavier added with a laugh, reaching for a guitar case under the nearby table.

Finally, Trucy released Apollo's arm, but only to jump up and down on the spot, cheering excitedly. "Nights like this make it all worthwhile, you know!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Make what worthwhile?"
Luke giggled, grabbing his sister's arm to call her bouncing to a halt. "C'mon Truce, let's get out of their way."

"Oh, right!" Trucy cried, then grinned at Klavier. "Good luck, Mister Gavin!"

Klavier gave her a quick bow, still grinning widely. "Take care your hearts aren't stolen away, ja?"
He turned to Lamiroir and Machi, gesturing to the door. "Shall we hit the stage, then?"

Keenly aware they were in the way, Apollo hurried after his siblings as Luke herded Trucy back out into the hallway. From there, Trucy wasted no time in racing back to the lift, waving for her brothers to follow. "C'mon, let's get back to the concert hall!"

View the Court Record
To tell the truth, Apollo was as excited to hear Lamiroir's song as Trucy, despite all his moaning about going to a Gavinners concert. Comforted by the knowledge that only Klavier was accompanying her, he eagerly stood at their window in their converted light box, looking down on the stage and the audience below.

The lights came up slowly, hushing the crowds. Walking out onto the stage, as he'd seen so many times before, came Lamiroir, hand-in-hand with Machi. She led the blind boy to the grand piano at the side of the stage, then Klavier followed her out, a simple acoustic guitar hanging on his front from its strap over his shoulder. Grinning under his sunglasses, he gave Lamiroir a bow, and she curtsied, then he took her hand and held it high, escorting her to the centre of the stage, to the middle of a diamond-shaped marking on the floor. Mild applause rang from the crowd as they prepared to begin.

Machi's piano was the sound to cut the crowd back into silence, softly playing a few chords in a simple melody that nonetheless attracted attention. Then Lamiroir began to sing.

"Sugar, sugar,
"O that night, in your embrace.
"When you stole away the keys,
"My heart held on to so tight."

Lamiroir held out her arms, and the section of stage she and Klavier stood on suddenly rose up, a tall platform that completely hid the drum kit behind them from view. As they moved, Klavier finally brought his hands to the guitar strings, beginning to play along.

"Pleasure,
"But a fleeting melody."

The platform reached its full height, a good five metres in total, and Lamiroir gestured along with her song, running a hand down her face and then pointing to the sky.

"It wraps itself around me,
"And now through the air I fly."

She held her arms out again, and Klavier abandoned his guitar playing, stepping around in front of Lamiroir with his back to the audience.

"Woh, woh...

As Lamiroir pressed her hands together in a praying motion, Klavier raised his hand up to the top of her head and, in one swift motion, grabbed her cloak and pulled it down over her face, throwing it out over the audience. Behind him, Lamiroir had disappeared.

"What!?" Luke cried in shock, and was promptly elbowed by his siblings on either side of him.
Spotlights followed the cloak as it floated through the air above the gasping crowds. On stage, Klavier had resumed his guitar playing, and Lamiroir's voice continued to echo through the speakers unabated.

"Burning on in my heart. Fire.  
"Burn my love away. All away."

Suddenly there was a flash of light from the top of the platform, and Klavier jumped as his guitar suddenly burst into flames. Flailing in shock, he fell backwards, scrambling to untangle himself from its strap.

"Like a bullet of love. Fire.  
"Take my life away. All away."

Meanwhile, the cloak had reached the other side of the room, where the other diamond-shaped platform had been all night. Now, however, Lamiroir stood atop it, raising her arms as her cloak neatly landed perfectly on top of her, exactly as it had been on stage. The crowd burst into cheers as they recognised her.

"Guitar, guitar,   
"Up together to the sky."

On stage, Klavier was crouched on the opposing platform, engrossed in putting out the flames of his guitar. The lingering final notes of Machi's piano disappeared into the roar of the cheering audience.

Up in their little box, Trucy didn't hesitate to cheer along, bouncing up and down and leaning out the window. Luke, worried she would fall out, grabbed at her waist to keep her inside. "Be careful!" he cried.

Apollo couldn't resist the massive grin on his face after the spectacle he and his siblings had just witnessed. Leaving their sister's care in Luke's hands for now, he looked back out over the concert hall as the lights began to fade out for the second intermission. Lamiroir was being guided down off the high platform at the back by an employee as the spotlight on her shut off, disappearing into the dark. On stage, the tower was lowering back down, Klavier pulling himself to his feet as a stage-hand ran to meet him with a portable fire extinguisher, finally putting out the orange flames for good. A separate stage-hand was escorting Machi offstage.

Trucy took her celebrating away from the window, bouncing around the room in glee. "Wasn't Lamiroir amazing!?" she cried, then paused, her fists pressed to her cheeks as she sniffed. "I even cried a little."

Luke finally relaxed now their sister wasn't attempting to hurl herself out into the crowd below. "I was surprised Mister Gavin actually burned his guitar," he said. "I mean, I know it's a thing to destroy guitars in a rock concert, but-"

"Yeah!" Trucy interrupted, bouncing again. "That even surprised me, and I'm a magician! What a production!"

"What a destruction," Apollo remarked with a smirk, crossing his arms. He turned to Luke, his smile fading. "I dunno; As a magician myself, I think Gavin was expecting that to happen about as much as we were. At least whoever set it off timed it well."

Luke seemed surprised for a moment, then frowned and nodded. "I should have guessed. The perfect timing to the lyrics threw me off."
Trucy didn't seem to have been paying attention to her brothers' conversation, tapping at her chin in thought. "Is that what they call 'risking life and limb for art'? That was so brave of him!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "I'm not sure I'd call that 'art'."

But his sister wasn't listening, already running to the door back to the hallway, waving for her brothers to follow. "Well, what are we doing here? Let's get going to Mister Gavin's dressing room! There's twenty minutes 'til the last part of the show!"

As Trucy disappeared outside, Luke shrugged, shooting Apollo a smile. "Might as well," he pointed out, and hurried to follow her.

Apollo sighed. "How many breaks does this band need?" he muttered to himself, and reluctantly ran after them.

Downstairs, Trucy led the way back to the dressing rooms, but abruptly stopped as she turned the corner into the hallway, causing her brothers to run into her back as they were unceremoniously alerted to her change of momentum. Ahead of them, Klavier Gavin was clutching his sunglasses tightly in one hand, standing tall over a cowering staff member as they gathered together dropped pieces of burned wood from the floor.

"What the heck was that!??" Klavier shouted, waving his hand. "I was never consulted about it!"

"S-sorry, Mister Gavin, sir!" the staff member apologised, hugging the pieces of ruined guitar to his chest. "I've asked the man in charge-"

"I play new rock, not Great Balls of Fire!" Klavier interrupted, apparently too into his rant to even hear the man's words. "Speaking of fire, I have a good mind to fire whoever's responsible!"

Trucy turned to her brothers. "He seems upset."

Her comment seemed to have been heard, as Klavier promptly wheeled around, and, noticing the trio, pointed at them with a scowl. "Apollo Wright! Were you the one who tried to torch me!?"

Behind him, the harried staff member took the opportunity to flee, disappearing into the backstage area.

Apollo held up his hands, wondering why it was him the prosecutor had decided to hone in on. "Hey, I didn't do it!"

Klavier huffed, looking away, but he seemed to accept Apollo's innocence, pressing a hand to his face.


"'The Guitar's Serenade' is ruined!" Klavier cried. "Ruined!" With that, he turned and stormed into his dressing room, the door slamming closed behind him.

The Wrights stared at the empty hallway for several long seconds.

"Well," Trucy finally spoke up, "let's try to talk to him at least." She began to step forward, only to be grabbed by Luke.
"I don't think that's a good idea right now, Truce," Luke said, looking worried. "We should give him his space, until he calms down."

Apollo nodded in agreement. "He seemed pretty mad."

Trucy scoffed. "C'mon, don't you two have any taste for adventure?" Before they could protest further, she had pulled herself from Luke's grip and skipped after Klavier into the Gavinners' dressing room. Her brothers could only exchange worried glances before hurrying after her.

Klavier was alone in his dressing room, his bandmates likely avoiding him after catching wind of his rage. He was slumped in a chair in front of a mirror, his head in his hands, and didn't react at all to the three Wrights slowly filing into the room.

Trucy carefully tiptoed across to the man, her hands linked behind her back. "So... the guitar... That wasn't part of the act?"

"Part of the act!?!" Klavier repeated, coming to life and lifting his head to give Trucy an incredulous look. "Who'd burn up a guitar on purpose!??"

Luke shrugged. "Well, it fit perfectly with the lyrics."

Trucy nodded in agreement. "Yeah, you know." She promptly attempted to half-sing the lyrics of the song: "'Burning on in my heart, fire, burn my love away, all away'?"

Klavier stared, wide-eyed, for a very long moment. "Wait, you think the audience thought it was...?"


Frowning in thought, Klavier looked off to the side, apparently contemplating his luck in timing. After another long pause, he shook his head, getting to his feet. "A-anything, that guitar was the Ferrari of guitars!" he cried, launching into a speech. "All the speed, all the sound... and all the price. If I burned one of those at every show I'd go broke!"


"Achtung!" Klavier shouted, throwing his hands in the air and moving past Trucy to the back of the room. "Today's been one disaster after another... My hog won't run, my guitar case's broken..."

Looking worried, Trucy went to follow Klavier, but paused as she passed the table in the middle of the room, examining a pile of purple cards spread out between the other random items that had accumulated there. Cooing to herself, she was quickly absorbed in poring over them, Klavier forgotten.

Shaking his head, Luke picked up where Trucy had left off, walking around to Klavier's side. "That song was incredible, though. You wrote the lyrics, didn't you?"

Klavier nodded, turning to Luke and putting on a polite smile. "Ah, yes, thanks. It was a collaboration: I wrote the lyrics and she wrote the melody."

Luke smiled. "I'm surprised she could sing in English."

"I'm sure she practised a long time for this day," Klavier chuckled, then snapped his fingers as
something came to mind. He reached into an inner pocket of his jacket, pulling out a small sheet of paper. "Ah, here."

"Thank you," Luke automatically said, looking over the paper curiously.

Apollo frowned, taking a few steps forward. "What is it?" he asked.

"A lyrics sheet," Klavier explained, giving the suspicious elder brother a grin. "It's yours. Signed by myself and Lamiroir."

Apollo's eyebrows shot up in surprise.

"That's very kind of you, Mister Gavin," Luke said, looking over the paper with a wide smile. "Thank you so much!"

Trying his hardest not to be jealous of Klavier's success as a performer, Apollo crossed his arms and decided to change the subject, gesturing to the table. "What are those postcards there, by the way?"

Immediately, Trucy jumped away from the table, where she'd been ignoring the greater conversation for some time now. Her fake smile screamed 'guilt'.

"Lamiroir's, you mean?" Klavier replied, looking a little confused. "It's part of her PR campaign. I received a stack. You can have one if you'd like."

"Ah, that's good to hear," Apollo replied, and gave his sister a stern stare. "Trucy already swiped one, is why."

Trucy was visibly trying not to sweat, her hands clasped tightly behind her back. "B-but that... But I..." Giving up on feigning innocence, she crossed her arms and gave her eldest brother a glare. "What's the big idea, making me look like a criminal!? It was... a collaboration! I've always wanted to do a collaboration!"

Klavier chuckled. "Usually, a collaboration is for creating, not stealing."

"You don't even know what that word means, do you?" Luke pitched in with a fond smile.

"Of course I do!" Trucy insisted. "It, um... It means... I don't have to tell you what it means! It's obvious!" When her brothers only rolled their eyes, she pointed angrily at them and cried, "I'm telling Daddy you two were picking on me!"

As the two elder Wrights laughed at their sister, Klavier's attention was again distracted by the clock above the door. "Almost time for the third act of the night," he announced.

Trucy immediately calmed at the thought of more concert to watch. "Oh! There's more?"

"Yes!" Klavier laughed. "Lamiroir's part is done. Now it's time for us to drop our groove again, ja?" He winked, looking between Trucy and Luke. "Hope you're ready to catch it."

Cheering, Trucy ran to Apollo's side, grabbing his arm. "Ready, Polly?"

Apollo tried not to visibly wince. "I think I'll pass."

Luke gave him a sympathetic smile. "You're not enjoying yourself?"

"I liked the bit with Lamiroir," Apollo replied, shrugging. "The rest could use a volume knob. Turned way down."
Trucy giggled. "You're just getting old, Polly!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow at her. "I'm twenty-two."

"Well, I'm going," Trucy told him, releasing his arm, then looked to her other brother. "What about you, Luke?"

Luke shrugged. "I'll go. There's no reason not to."


Apollo rolled his eyes.

Klavier chuckled. "Let the old folks rest backstage, ja?" he said, waving for the younger Wrights to follow as he left the room. "Time to rock!"

'You're older than me!' Apollo resisted from spitting at the man's head as he passed.

Luke paused at the door, giving his brother a sympathetic smile. "I'll keep an eye on Trucy. We'll be right back once the show's over."

Apollo nodded, forcing a smile back. "Sure."

View the Court Record
Thinking it would be rude to linger in the Gavinners' dressing room, and already having decided not to follow his siblings back up to their box, Apollo quickly found he had nowhere else to really go. He stood out in the hallway for a little while, quietly examining the vending machine, a battered-looking Blue Badger doll, and a nearby bench stacked with random items such as a trunk, a guitar case and a small pile of hoops... But even the apparently-forgotten earpiece on the floor failed to keep his attention for long, and he found himself wandering off back towards the elevator. If nothing else, it was further from the stage and thus echoed less of the Gavinners' music into his long-suffering ears. 'At least I don't have to worry about Luke and Trucy,' he assured himself. *They can look after each other. I hope Ms Altava and Flora are enjoying themselves too.*

It was as he turned the final corner of the bend in the corridor that led to the elevator that Apollo heard footsteps ahead, and looked up with mild curiosity to see who it was... only for the approaching figure to stop dead in her tracks, apparently as surprised as Apollo to see who she was meeting. "Hey, it's you!" she called, resuming a speedy walk in his direction. "One of the Wright kids!"

Apollo forced a polite smile as he waved in greeting, hoping this meeting would go better than their last. "Detective Skye!"

Ema reached Apollo's section of the hallway and gave him a grin. "Call me Ema," she insisted. "There's no need for titles once you've shared a bottle of fingerprinting powder." She winked.

"That's a new one," Apollo chuckled. "So, um, Ema, what are you doing here?"

Sighing to herself, Ema slowly continued her plodding walk down the hallway, and Apollo fell into step at her side. "Isn't it obvious?" she asked, holding up the plastic bag in her hand. "I'm snacking. You think I want to be here!? Me, in charge of security in this pit!?"

Apollo blinked in surprise, wondering if she was the person who'd passed the Wrights off on that random security guard earlier... and suddenly realising why said guard was dressed, and acted, more like a police officer than mere security personnel. "Security...? Did something happen?"

"There's no knowing with that glimmerous fop," Ema muttered, scowling into a handful of Snackoos as she shoved them into her mouth. "Apparently, he's all upset because something was stolen. He wanted security back here during the concert." She huffed. "Where does he get off acting like he's some big rock star?"

Apollo bit his lip to keep from pointing out the obvious.

"Hey!" Ema cried, tossing a piece of chocolate that pinged off Apollo's forehead. "You listening to me?"

Rubbing at his forehead, Apollo nodded. "Yes, yes! Geeze!"

The pair rounded a corner and found themselves back in the section of corridor where the dressing
rooms were. Apollo cast his eyes over the near door, where he had just come out of the Gavinner's
dressing room, and then the far door, the one labelled as Lamiroir's. He could only presume she was
in there right now with her pianist and manager, probably idly waiting for the concert to end.

Ema paused, noticing the blue vending machine opposite the Gavinner's door. "Oh hey, look at that.
You thirsty, Apollo?"

"Come to think of it," Apollo admitted, turning his attention back to the machine, "I am a little."

The detective nodded, a hand on her hip. "I'll have some tea."

Apollo stared for a long moment as Ema failed to move, belatedly realising she seemed to be
expecting him to buy her drink. Rolling his eyes, he turned to the machine, putting his back to Ema.
"I think I'll get a water," he decided.

"I'll have tea!" she ordered.

Apollo looked around only long enough to shoot her a glare. Where was Luke when you needed
him? "If you want tea so bad, go buy it yourself!" The moment he'd turned back to look at the
machine, he felt something small pinging off the back of his head, and looked around again to see
Ema staring at him with narrowed eyes, her free hand in her snack-bag.

"I'll take a tea."

The two stared each other down for a long moment, neither budging to give the other ground.

\textbf{BANG}

Apollo jumped, looking down the hall. In front of him, Ema was also looking around, both trying to
locate the source of the sound. "What was that?" Apollo asked.

\textbf{BANG}

"Was that..." Apollo whispered, hoping to goodness he was wrong, "a gunshot?"

A crash echoed down the hall. It was unmistakably coming from Lamiroir's dressing room.

"You, out of my way!" Ema ordered, shoving Apollo against the vending machine as she charged
the short distance to the far door. "Lamiroir! Lamiroir!" she called, and her hand instinctively moved
to the doorknob, which unlatched in her grip and gave her pause, looking down in surprise. She
and Apollo locked eyes for only a moment, then she announced "I'm going in!" and threw open the
door.

The first thing to hit Apollo was the sudden loud shrieking of guitars in his ears, which he took a
moment to recognise as the sounds of the concert coming from a speaker directly above them. Ema
stopped just inside the door, and he was forced to stay behind her, frantically looking around the
surprisingly messy room for the source of the bangs. It didn't take long to see the large man sprawled
on the floor at the back, blood pooling on the carpet underneath him and a noticeable dark stain
covering his left shoulder. "Th-that's-!"

"LeTouse!" Ema interrupted, spotting the man at the same moment Apollo did. She practically leapt
over the couch in front of them, making for the other side of the room, and Apollo wasn't far behind
her. "Oh no," she groaned to herself, stepping over a massive revolver and standing briefly at
LeTouse's side to examine him, then she rounded on Apollo with a fierce look. "Hey, you!"
"M-me?"

"Watch this room for me," she ordered, and pushed past Apollo again to run back to the door. "I have to call for backup!"

Apollo nodded, still in shock. "R-right, understood. You want me to make sure no one comes in, right?"

Pausing in the doorway, Ema nodded. "And don't touch anything! I'll be right back!" With that, she was gone.

Despite the ear-splitting rock music still ringing in his ears, the room felt unbearably silent all of a sudden. Apollo stared at the door, left slightly ajar in Ema's hurry to leave. What now? Just... stand there until something happened? The adrenaline was pumping in his veins; He had to do something...

A groan interrupted Apollo's rising panic, and he noticed with a start that the man lying at his feet was still alive. "Mister LeTouse!" Springing into action, he leapt to the man's side and dropped to his knees. "Can you hear me?" If he's alive, and he's hurt... *I should get him into the recovery position!*

Automatically, he started moving to push the man's shoulder off the carpet, but paused. 'No, wait, he's got a bullet wound in that shoulder... bad idea.'

"Sh... shot," LeTouse mumbled with great effort. "I was... shot."

Apollo shook his head, refocusing himself on helping LeTouse. Primary goal: Keep him talking and awake. Secondary goal: Stop the blood-flow. He pressed a palm to a barely-noticeable rip in the middle of the bloodstain. "Who? Who shot you?"

LeTouse's face twitched, but whether in pain or deep thought Apollo wasn't sure. "I don't know," he admitted. "Ask..."

"Ask?" Apollo repeated, terrified of what would happen should LeTouse trail off permanently. "Ask what?"

"Ask... wi... witness..."

Apollo gasped. "Witness... There was a witness!?" He gripped LeTouse's shoulder tightly with his other hand, desperate to get as much information from him as he could. "Who!?"

LeTouse paused, coughing. "Cold... so cold... Witness..."

"You're cold?" Apollo's hand flew to the brooch on his cape, unclipping it and tossing the crimson fabric over the man's back. "D-don't worry, you're going to be fine! Help is on the way!"

"Can't s... see..."

Apollo noticed with a start that LeTouse's eyes were drifting closed. "Hang in there, Mister LeTouse!" he cried, clinging to the man's shoulder through the red cloth of the cape, barely feeling the points of his brooch digging into his left palm through his glove. He was leaning so far down, the ID card on the lanyard at his neck was brushing against the floor. "Tell me, who was the witness?"

LeTouse didn't immediately reply, struggling to breathe. "The wi... witness... is... si... si... ren..."

'Siren? As in the mythological...?" Apollo shook his head, dismissing his confusion for later; LeTouse's eyes had closed, and the tension was leaving his face. "Mister LeTouse!" he cried, shaking the man's shoulder to try and keep him awake.
A closing door, far too close for comfort, snapped Apollo out of his focus on the dying man, and he looked up. "Ema!?" He jumped out of his crouch over LeTouse, the brooch in his hand falling to the floor, and peered around the half-closed separator wall to the hallway door, which appeared to be closed tight. "Wh-who's there!?!"

The door swung open, making Apollo jump before he recognised Ema finally returning, and he pressed a hand to his chest, sighing in relief as he dropped back down by LeTouse's side.

Ema was almost at the young lawyer's side before she noticed his unease and gave him a worried look. "What's wrong?"

Apollo shook his head, gesturing to the hallway. "Ema, did you see anyone just now?"

"Huh?" After a moment of thought, she shook her head. "No..."

The young lawyer continued to stare at the door, frowning intensely as his breathing refused to slow. 'Didn't Ema leave that ajar?'

"The concert's been cancelled," Ema continued, and Apollo suddenly noticed the music echoing through the room had stopped. "Backup's on its way. Is Mister LeTouse...?" She frowned, looking down at the man on the floor, Apollo's cape draped over his back. After a moment, her stare turned sad. "He's dead, isn't he? That's terrible."

Apollo had followed her gaze to also stare at the man he'd been comforting only moments before, but it still took a moment for Ema's words to register. Face paling, he jumped to his feet, scrambling away from the body on the floor.

LeTouse was dead.

And only Apollo had heard his last words.

View the Court Record
After LeTouse's death, Ema sat Apollo down on the nearby red couches and instructed him to recount everything that had happened while she was away. Once he was done, she retrieved his cape and dropped brooch from the corpse; The cape had acquired a large bloodstain in the back of the left shoulder, no thanks to Apollo gripping that area so tightly as he attempted to hear LeTouse's last words, and the blood had transferred through to his formerly-pristine white gloves, mixing with Apollo's own blood where he had punctured the skin on the sharp points of his brooch - Ema sternly told him to go find the first aid kit later as she pulled the gloves off his hands. Only the brooch itself was undamaged, any blood easily wiped off the metal surface, and Ema pressed it gently back into Apollo's undamaged palm the moment she had wiped away any residue of blood with a box of tissues in the room. "Sorry about your cape and gloves," she said, piling the items together and tossing the soiled tissues. "I... could get them cleaned for you. If that's okay?"

Apollo just nodded, unable to meet her eyes. "Thank you."

It was then Klavier arrived in the room, accompanied by one of his bandmates. Noticing the pair shooting him glances as they called over Ema to get to work, Apollo decided it was time to leave. Out in the hallway, Apollo cleared some space on the bench on the opposite wall, then sat and waited. LeTouse was the first and only death he had ever witnessed, let alone the one and only dead body he had ever seen, and the thought of that, the responsibility of having been the one at LeTouse's side to hear his last words, to comfort him as he passed, to literally have LeTouse's blood on his hands... He could only sit, clinging to the golden brooch in his palm as it glinted in the artificial light. At least he could be grateful the shock was slowly wearing off.

Footsteps echoed from down the hall, and Apollo looked up to see his siblings rounding the corner, looking around worriedly. They were quick to catch sight of him, and Apollo gave them a re-assuring smile as they raced to his side.

"Polly!" Trucy cried, clutching her hands together with concern as she noticed the missing parts of his costume. "What happened!? The announcer guy said the concert was cancelled, and everyone had to give the security staff their names and addresses!"

"I told Emmy and Flora to give them the agency as their temporary address," Luke added. "They said they'd wait outside for us to catch up."

Apollo nodded, clutching the brooch tighter. He stared at his lap, unsure of what to say.


There was a moment of silence, and Apollo assumed his siblings had nodded. "What about him?" Luke asked.
"He's dead," Apollo quietly replied. "Someone's shot him."

His siblings remained silent and unmoving for several seconds. Slowly, Luke moved to sit at Apollo's side, where the bench had been cleared of clutter. He rested a hand on his brother's shoulder, but Apollo didn't look up, keeping his eyes on his lap. "You did the best you could," Luke assured him.

At that, Apollo looked up to meet his brother's gaze, surprised. "How'd you...?"

Luke just smiled. "I'm a vet. I've had plenty of patients pass away under my care. Let's just say I know that look."

Sighing, Apollo leaned back against the wall behind them. "What about you two? Have they talked to you yet?"

Trucy nodded. "One of the security guys met us in our box."

"He told us not to leave just yet," Luke added, "so we decided to come find you."

Apollo thought a moment, staring off into the distance.

Seeing her brothers had nothing more to add to the conversation, Trucy moved between them. "Shove over," she ordered, pushing the two to either side and squeezing herself onto the bench between them. Apollo and Luke moved over to indulge her, even though Apollo was now pushed up against the large trunk at his side and Luke was at the very edge of the bench, in danger of falling off if he wasn't careful.

Just as the three Wrights were getting comfortable, the door to Lamiroir's dressing room opened, and Klavier Gavin came out into the hallway, his bandmate behind him. "- venue's locked down," the other man was saying. "We took names and addresses before letting the crowd go."

Klavier nodded, pausing in the hallway as his friend followed him out, Ema standing expectantly in the doorway behind them. "Good work, Daryan."

"I'll let you know if I find out anything about the victim," the other man, Daryan, continued, giving Klavier a cocky grin and running his hands along his extravagant pompadour. "Later." With that, he turned and wandered off down the hall, out of sight.

Klavier turned to Ema with a smile. "It's investigation time then, ja, Fraulein Detective?"

Ema glared. "I don't need some rock 'n' rolling prosecutor to tell me that."

Said prosecutor was unphased by her proclamation, chuckling as he turned his attention to the Wrights on the nearby bench. "One request I must make," he added, apparently addressing all four of them as his smile died. "Tell no one, on staff or otherwise, anything of this."

"Ooh, a gag order!" Trucy cooed, looking between her brothers with a grin.

"No word gets out, other than that Mister LeTouse is dead," Klavier continued. "No word of the cause of death, or of the murder."

Apollo realised he must have guessed the eldest Wright had already told his siblings the full story, and nodded sheepishly. "Tell no one... Not even Lamiroir?"

"Not even her," Klavier replied, shaking his head. "We must keep everything under wraps. Oh, one
other thing." He held his hand out to Ema, who sighed dramatically and pulled a piece of paper from her purse, handing it over to him. He gave her a grateful nod, then passed the paper on to Apollo. "I'll need your signature on this, Herr Forehead. Yours too, Fraulein, Doktor."

Clutching his brooch in one hand, Apollo pulled himself out from between Trucy and the trunk, getting to his feet. "On that?" He took the paper, examining its contents thoughtfully. "An 'investigation request'?"

"Why just us?" Trucy asked.

"You three are civilians," Klavier pointed out, his smile slowly returning. "It's standard procedure."

Apollo looked to Luke, who gave him a smile and a nod. 'It should be okay to sign, I think...' Luke retrieved his pen from his satchel, and the three Wrights took turns signing the paper, using the nearby trunk on the bench as a flat surface. To Apollo, the hallway felt very crowded with his siblings, Klavier and Ema all there; Once he had passed the pen back to Luke, he moved down the hallway a little to calm down, pressing the brooch in his hand to his chest. Despite his best efforts, he still couldn't make himself put it in a pocket. He just felt naked, vulnerable, without his cape and gloves... and the glint of the bow-and-arrows distracted him from the glimpses of red he kept seeing on his palms.

With the contract signed and handed back to Klavier, the prosecutor turned to Ema with a grin, handing the paper back to her. "Right, well, get started with the investigation!"

"I'm on it already!" Ema cried indignantly, spinning around dramatically and disappearing back into the dressing room, the door slamming shut behind her.

Klavier chuckled, unphased by her theatrics, and turned to Apollo, one finger in the air. "Ah, and one tip for you."

Apollo briefly looked behind him to check no-one was there. "Me?"

"Try not to get in the Fraulein detective's way," Klavier continued, pushing his fingers into his pants pockets. "She's in a foul mood today." Apollo rolled his eyes, but Klavier just turned and walked off out of sight.

Luke sighed, pulling his phone out of his satchel. "Well, if the Coliseum's on lockdown, I guess we're not leaving any time soon."

Apollo shook his head. "I'm technically a witness, so I probably can't go anyway until they've arrested someone." He then frowned, noticing Luke's intense fiddling with his phone. "What are you doing?"

"Telling Emmy and Flora to go ahead back to the Bostonius and that we'll see them tomorrow."

Luke replied, shooting his brother a smile. "Don't worry, I'll keep to the contract and not tell them what's happened."

Trucy meanwhile was gazing intently at the door to Lamiroir's dressing room. "Y'know, Detective Skye is a friend of Daddy's... do you think she'd let us look around the crime scene?"

"I don't know, Truce," Luke replied, finishing up his text message to his friends. "She might not want us getting in her way."

Apollo sighed, crossing his arms. "I still can't believe I was there when it happened," he quietly
admitted.

Luke gave his brother a sympathetic look as he put away his phone. "What exactly did happen?" he asked. "You heard Mister LeTouse getting shot?"

Trucy scoffed. "This is no time for navel-gazing!" she proclaimed, and was stepping forward to open the dressing room door, "Let's crack this-!", when she paused, looking down and lifting her boot. "Huh? What's that?" Distracted from her train of thought, she crouched down by the abandoned earpiece on the floor that Apollo had noticed earlier, pressing the lanyard around her neck to her chest to keep it from getting in the way. "It looks like some kind of future-phone!"

'What would Dad do in this situation?' Apollo found himself wondering, hearing but no longer listening to his siblings' conversation. He held out his brooch, staring at it in his palm between the angry red cuts it had caused not ten minutes before.

Luke crouched at Trucy's side, similarly pressing the loosely hanging ID card to his chest. "Oh, that's not a phone. It looks like a transceiver... I think they call those specifically 'headsets'."

'Obviously, Dad would insist on investigating himself, regardless of whether he had a client... He did that when he first met Mom, didn't he? And again for Uncle Edgeworth... but he sorta knew Mom from Mia, and Uncle Edgeworth was his friend since they were kids. I didn't know Mister LeTouse at all, so I don't exactly have a personal stake in this. Maybe Dad would be leaving it to the police after all...'

"What's it doing on the floor?" Trucy was asking Luke, frowning in confusion, then she gasped. "Wait! Do you think Mister LeTouse might have been wearing it? Like one of those bodyguards?"

'Except I witnessed the murder... I literally had Mister LeTouse's blood on my hands! Doesn't that make it personal? Argh, why am I even trying to emulate Dad in this situation!?! I should just do what I want! But... what do I want?"

"I don't think he was wearing one of these, actually," Luke was telling Trucy. "And it looks like it's on. See that LED?" He pointed to a tiny green light near the small speaker.

"So... can we take it?"

Apollo's grip tightened on his brooch. 'I want... I want to know who killed Mister LeTouse. I want to know what his last words meant. He wanted me to know. I'm involved in this. It's my duty to see it through.'

"Better not. Whoever owns it will come looking for it eventually."

Trucy sighed in disappointment, pushing herself back to her feet. She looked around a moment, confused. "What were we doing? Oh yeah!" She grinned, turning to Apollo. "We have to go ask Detective Skye if we can investigate! Right, Polly?"

Apollo nodded a determined frown on his face. "The witness is siren," he said, then securely fastened the brooch in his hand to his tie, roughly where it would sit had he been wearing his cape along with it. "Let's investigate."
Ema looked up as the door opened, but seemed unsurprised as she saw the three Wrights crowded in the doorway. "Oh, it's you," she said, a hand on her hip as she stood from beside the body. "I figured you'd come."

Apollo took a deep breath, stepping forward into the room. "You have to let us investigate the scene, please!"

Looking the three over, Ema raised an eyebrow. "You're attorneys, no? Shouldn't you wait until you have a client?"

The young lawyer's determined look just deepened into a glare.

Behind Apollo, Luke adjusted his cap, adding to his brother's firm stare. "If nothing else, at least let us assist in your investigation," he said. "We all want to find who shot Mister LeTouse, don't we?"

"Please!" Trucy picked up, her hands clasped together as she pleaded with the detective. "Think of poor Lamiroir!"

Ema looked uncomfortable under the gazes of all three Wrights, shifting a little where she stood before sighing. "Oh well, I suppose," she reluctantly agreed. "You did find the body with me."

Apollo sighed in relief, giving Ema a smile. "Great!" He glanced back at his siblings to spot Luke narrowing his eyes at Ema while Trucy was giving Apollo an excited grin. "Let's get to it!"

"Right!" Trucy replied, a hand at her hat. Luke seemed to dismiss whatever was on his mind with a shake of his head.

"Just try not to touch anything!" Ema ordered, sitting back down on a stool by LeTouse's body.

Apollo noticed with a sense of elation that Ema had not pulled out her bag of Snackoos, evidently making herself available to talk. *This bodes well! Better get started then.* He stepped forward into the room, and, although it was his second time inside, he suddenly realised he hadn't really looked around the last time he was there: Hanging from the roof in much the same way as the chains in the neighbouring room were a series of brightly-coloured streamers, but only in the half of the room at the entrance door, the ceiling being clear around the dressing table itself at the back. Along with the red sofa and lounge chair was a figure-eight-shaped table and a large TV, as well as hearty piles of fruit, flowers and presents for the visiting singer.

"Ooh, what a pretty brooch!" Trucy suddenly cooed, and Apollo turned to see her dropping to the floor by a small fridge, next to the entrance. "Um, Detective Skye...?" She peered over the top of the sofa with a hopeful look.

Ema rolled her eyes. "First, you can call me Ema, second, you're not going to say 'can I have it please', are you?"
As Trucy's expression fell, Apollo walked over to see what she was looking at; Luke, who had moved over to the other side of the lounge area, joined him. It didn't take long for them to notice the green diamond-shaped brooch, outlined in gold, lying on the grey tiles.

"Look, you may be a cute little girl of fourteen," Ema continued, "but that doesn't get you any special treatment with me!"

Trucy shrank away even further.

Apollo couldn't resist a smirk at the detective, sitting grumpily on her stool at the dressing table. "It's not healthy to envy the young, Ema."

"It's not about envy!" Ema shot back. "It's about tampering with evidence!" When Apollo rolled his eyes, she added, "You need to learn to respect your elders a little!"

Luke was stroking his goatee as he examined the brooch. "That seems familiar..." He then looked up at Trucy. "Actually, did you used to have one like that, Trucy? Before you replaced it to match Apollo?"

Trucy blinked in surprise, a hand flying to the bow-and-arrows pinned to her cape. "Oh, yeah, I did!" she realised, then frowned. "But mine had a white outline. And it stuck out on the corners. And the diamond was all pointy, not round." She turned her frown back to the abandoned brooch. "Though... I don't think that's why it's familiar."

Apollo internally sighed, knowing the allure of the pretty pin wasn't going to leave his sister's mind for a while. To appease her, he pulled out his Court Record from his hip-bag (truthfully, he'd almost forgotten he had it), and unlocked the screen. "Want to take a picture of it?" he asked her.

"Yes please!" Trucy eagerly replied, taking the offered computer tablet to snap a photo of the floor at her feet.

Luke's attention had meanwhile turned to the wall at his left, above the fridge they were stood near. "Those are bullet holes, right?"

Apollo looked up and nodded. "Looks like it. Two shots. Matches the bangs we heard."

"From the look of it," Ema picked up, looking through her own notes on a notepad, "the victim was shot once in the shoulder. The first shot must have missed."

Trucy finished her photo-taking, turning her attention to the conversation at hand. "But there are two holes," she pointed out. "Wouldn't that mean two misses?"

Ema stood, gesturing to something on the floor out of their view. "The murder weapon is a forty-five-calibre revolver. It's very powerful." She stepped over the body and towards the trio, pointing to the bullet holes. "I believe what we're seeing here is the mark left by the second bullet after it passed through his shoulder."

Trucy winced. "Ouch... Sounds painful."

Apollo could only frown as he stared at the damaged wall, seeing LeTouse's pained face in his mind's eye.

Luke had turned to Ema. "If I may ask... I gather you and Apollo witnessed the crime?"

Ema sighed, a hand on her hip. "In a way. We certainly know more about it than anyone else."
"Y-you do?" Trucy cried, surprised.

Apollo nodded, still staring at the bullet holes. "It was us who found the body," he repeated.

"What!?!" Her shock apparently spent, Trucy huffed, crossing her arms. "I guess that's what we miss for watching the concert, huh, Luke?"

"Hey, I wish I was watching the concert," Apollo replied, shooting her a glare before again looking away. "Anything would be better than this..."

Luke nodded, giving Trucy a sympathetic look. "He's right, Trucy. It's not as pleasant as you think to walk in on a murder."

Trucy opened her mouth to protest before remembering both her brothers were speaking from experience, and wisely shut up.

"Well, we know the crime took place during the concert," Ema continued, deciding to ignore Trucy's interruptions.

"And when we heard the shots and entered the room," Apollo picked up, "the killer was already gone."

Trucy frowned. "What? But that doesn't make sense! You came in when you heard the shot and no one was here?" She looked around almost indignantly. "How did they leave the room?"

Luke was stroking his goatee again, giving an intense frown of his own to the ceiling behind Apollo. "It's not as nonsensical as you might think, Trucy."

"What does that mean?" Trucy asked, crossing her arms.

Meanwhile, Apollo turned to find the object of Luke's attention. Indeed, there on the ceiling behind him, right above where a pink streamer was attached to the wall, was an air vent. Below, leaning against the wall, was a stepladder tall enough to reach it.

"You've noticed," Ema pointed out, arms crossed as she glared at the vent herself. "The killer must have had a way out other than the door... and that air vent is one possibility."

Trucy peered around Apollo, finally spotting what everyone was talking about. "But... that's much too small!" she argued.


The teenager turned to the younger of her brothers with a raised eyebrow. "You're not saying it was me, are you?"

Luke gave her an offended look. "Of course not!" he cried. "You were with me up in our box! Why would I accuse you!?"

Trucy shrugged, turning away with an innocent air. "As long as we understand each other."

Luke just rolled his eyes.

"What about the other possibilities?" Trucy asked, turning to Ema. "Like... that little window over there!" She bounced around Luke, pointing to a small window in the wall behind Ema. "Maybe they escaped through that!"
Apollo leaned over, peering suspiciously at the mentioned window around the half-closed separator wall. "It's barely big enough for me to get my head through," he pointed out, stepping across the room to examine it closer.

"Not to mention it only opens a crack," Ema added.

Trucy paused, then leaned against the side of the sofa, disappointed. "I was just saying it's possible..."

Luke patted her back sympathetically. "We understand."

Ema shrugged, looking back at the window. "You could peek into the room through it, though."

Finding himself on the other side of the separator wall, Apollo stopped in his tracks; He'd caught sight of LeTouse, still lying on the floor where Apollo had last seen him. 'I... forgot he would still be here...’ Nearby, bundled on the floor, was the magician's soiled cape and gloves... the proof of Apollo's failure to help.

At his side, Ema gave Apollo a concerned look. "Did you want to examine the body?"

Apollo didn't immediately answer, still staring at LeTouse, but finally he tore his eyes away to focus on something, anything, else, and happened to land on the large gun lying on the floor nearby. He remembered seeing it when he and Ema first entered the room, but hadn't paid it much attention before now. Taking a deep breath, he gestured to it. "This is the murder weapon, isn't it? This revolver...?"

Ema paused for a fraction of a second before nodding. "That's right. A big forty-five-calibre revolver."

Trucy hesitantly stepped forward, apparently as put off by the body as her brother. "Wow. I wonder who brought this in here? I thought only police were allowed to have one of those." She raised the computer tablet still in her hands, taking photos of the scene.

Apollo looked up at Ema, silently waiting for her explanation, but Ema, noticing his gaze, just glared in return. "Why are you giving me that look!? I didn't do it!"

The lawyer blinked in surprise, then shook his head. "I didn't-!

"Listen," Ema forcefully continued, "I was out in the hall eating Snackoos when it happened!"

"I know, I know!" Apollo insisted, holding his hands up in surrender and backing off from the detective. "No one here thinks you did it, Ema!"

Ema's eyes narrowed. "It's hard to tell with you sometimes, Apollo."

Apollo resisted the urge to roll his eyes. 'What did I do!?'

Luke wandered around behind Trucy, stroking his goatee. "But why would someone bring a gun to a concert? Does that mean this was pre-meditated?"

Ema just frowned, glaring at the gun. "Something's certainly odd about it, that's for sure. Even the police don't carry guns this big."

"Really?" Apollo asked.

The detective nodded, crossing her arms. "You don't need so much power to kill at such close range.
It's overkill."

Trucy looked up from her photo-taking, confused. "I'm not sure I see the problem."

"Of course you don't," Apollo replied with a teasing smile. "You always order curry 'extra spicy', can't eat more than a couple bites, and mooch off Luke's food."

Luke stifled giggles, while Trucy pouted, spinning around to take photos of the other side of the room.

"There's another thing about a gun this big and heavy," Ema continued. "It puts a lot of strain on the shooter."

"Strain?" Apollo repeated.

"Yeah," Ema replied, nodding, and gestured to the young magician. "Say, if you were to fire this revolver, the recoil would probably dislocate your shoulder."

Apollo instinctively grabbed his left shoulder with a wince. "Er, I'll stick to our prop guns, thanks..."

Luke was frowning in thought. "So you're saying the shooter is a victim too?" he asked. "They'll be either big and strong, or small with a dislocated shoulder."

"I'm not that small," Apollo muttered, crossing his arms.

Ema sighed, shrugging. "Yet, they used this revolver," she pointed out, "and quite well. I'm guessing whoever did it was used to shooting."

Trucy seemed to finish with whatever she was doing on the other side of the room and dashed up behind Luke, tapping his back to attract his attention.

Luke turned, giving his sister a confused look. "What is it, Trucy?"

"I was wondering," she asked, frowning, "with all this talk about the revolver... what's a calibre? And what does the 'forty-five' mean?"

Ema snorted, interrupting whatever Luke might have said in response. "You want me to tell you?" she said, smirking. "It's the size of the barrel. Simply put, the larger the calibre, the bigger the round. The bullet, in other words." She crossed her arms. "Bigger bullets do more damage."

Apollo half-smiled, impressed. "Wow, chalk one point up for forensic science."

"You know it!" Ema chirped proudly.

Trucy still looked confused. "But it's not forty-five inches, right? That'd be too big."

"Actually, in a way, you're right there," Luke replied, smiling at his sister. "It isn't forty-five inches, it's point forty-five inches. About the diameter of one of your fingers, probably. " He held out one of his own for comparison, and Trucy imitated the movement with a giggle. "Off the top of my head, it'd be somewhere around a centimetre in metric units."

Apollo noticed Ema quietly frown to herself, then pull out her notebook to scribble something down on one of the pages. When she noticed him looking, she shot the young magician a glare, turning away. Apollo hid a giggle behind a hand. 'Yep, that was news to Ema too.'
"Mister Romein LeTouse... Lamiroir's manager, and interpreter apparently," Ema explained, stepping towards the body and sitting back down on the stool between it and the dressing table. "This was his first time in the country."

Luke and Trucy looked up from their conversation in surprise; Apollo couldn't blame them, as it had been a rather sudden change of topic. He could only assume Ema had decided it was high time they get to talking about the elephant in the room of their investigation.

"It doesn't seem likely he knew many people here," Ema continued. "Nor can I think of anyone with a motive to murder him... except for one person, of course."

"One person?" Trucy asked. "Who?"

Luke frowned. "Who else?" He crossed his arms with a sigh. "The only adult in this building who's known him for more than a day: Lamiroir."

Trucy instantly bristled, offended on her idol's behalf. "What are you talking about!?" she demanded, slapping her brother's arm. "Lamiroir didn't do it!"

"And I believe that too," Luke assured her, though he winced a little at the assault on his upper arm. "Unfortunately, she and her pianist are the only people who might conceivably have a motive with the information we currently possess."

"Well, it wasn't him either!" Trucy argued, crossed her arms and pouting as she calmed down. "Mister LeTouse is a big man. Or... was. I don't think even Polly would win in a fight with him."

Apollo wanted to be offended, but he had to agree with that assessment. "Which is why whoever it was used a revolver, I'm guessing."

"We've sent a request to the Borginian Embassy for more info on him," Ema explained, then gestured to the body on the floor in front of her. "Were you three planning to take a closer look at the victim?"


"Me!?" Apollo cried, backing away himself. "Why me!?"

Luke sighed, then stepped forward, away from his sister's terrified grip. "You two don't have to if you don't want to. I'll look at him."

Apollo felt a flood of relief at not having to confront the corpse of the man he had tried so hard to save... but also guilty for having to leave the job to his younger brother. As Luke knelt down at LeTouse's side, in the same spot Apollo had sat earlier, the elder brother turned his attention to Trucy, who was hanging back by the lounge chair, hands fiddling with the lanyard around her neck.
as she debated joining Luke or running away; Apollo would bet money she was having the same internal argument as him. After another glance at Luke (he was leaning over the body now, stroking his chin and frowning intently as he studied the area closely), Apollo walked over to his little sister and rested a hand on her shoulder. "Stay here," he told her, making the request an order partly out of worry for letting her near a dead body and partly to keep her from forcing herself to approach it out of a misguided need to prove herself. "Luke and I will look at Mister LeTouse." He waited only to see Trucy give him a nod, staring up at her brother with wide eyes, then he turned to join his brother.

Apollo noticed Luke hiding a smile as the elder Wright crouched at his side. Ignoring it, he asked, "Noticed anything yet?"

"Sort of," Luke replied, his smile fading as he got to work, pointing at LeTouse's right hand. "Did you see that bloodstain there?"

"Yeah, I saw that," Apollo said, running his eyes along the blood smeared across the carpet and leaving out how he'd dismissed it at the time to concentrate on LeTouse. "It's a strange stain, isn't it?"

Luke nodded. "It looks like something was written there, then wiped away. If we had Papa's luminol, we'd probably be able to find out what it was."

Ema gasped, interrupting their conversation. "Did you just say 'luminol'!?"

The Wright brothers looked up, confused, at her growing grin. "Yes?" Luke hesitantly replied. The detective squealed. "Oh he did keep it!" After a short moment wriggling in her chair, she turned her attention back to the two Wrights. "I don't have any on me right now, but I'll be sure to get some in here and test that stain to see what it said!" She promptly pulled out her notebook, turning to a fresh page and jotting something down with a massive grin.

Luke and Apollo shared a look, then shrugged, and returned their attention to the body. "There was one other thing," Luke continued, and pointed to LeTouse's left hand, curled into a loose fist in front of Apollo. "Did either of you look closely at this?"

Apollo leaned in a little closer, then jumped back a little in surprise. "He's holding something!" He instinctively reached out a hand to investigate.

"Hey!" Ema snapped, calling Apollo's attempted search to a halt. "No touching!" Leaving her notes, she shoved a hand into her purse and promptly tossed a small handful of Snackoos at him, three of them pinging off his forehead.

Apollo glared at her, shooting a wry look at the chocolate sticks now dotted around and on top of the body. "You can throw all the snacks at me you'd like, Ema," he argued, "but sooner or later, you're going to run out of them."

Ema frowned, pausing halfway back into her purse for more ammunition. "Hmm. You raise a good point." She withdrew her attack, putting her notebook and pen away. "I'm a bit intrigued by this scene," she admitted. "Let's take a look."

Apollo and Luke got up and backed away as Ema stood from the stool, walking around to kneel where Apollo had been sitting. Gently, she worked the fingers of both her hands into the curl of LeTouse's fist, then worked his grip open, pulling out whatever he was clinging to with a jangling of metal. "Huh." As she stood, she held up the small object for the Wrights to see, and they quickly recognised a small keychain, a purple strap attached to a golden heart that was the ring itself. Attached were three keys, hanging together at the point.
"A key ring?" Apollo muttered, frowning in confusion.

Trucy squealed from the lounge chair, bouncing in place. "You think it might belong to the killer!?!"

"Definitely a possibility," Ema replied, turning the keys over in her hand to examine them from every angle. "It's certainly unusual... both the key ring and the keys themselves."

"What do you mean?" Luke asked, stepping forward to get a better look.

Ema looked between Luke and the key ring, then sighed and handed them over to him. "I'm sure you can figure it out." Ignoring Luke's surprised look as he clung to his new possession, she turned away, pulling her notebook back out of her bag. "Well, that's about it. I think we've looked at just about everything there is."

Apollo looked around the room and sighed. "I guess you're right."

The detective almost laughed, turning back to Apollo with a smirk. "I know how you're feeling; It is hard to know when to stop. But," she turned away again, waving a hand, "anything more involved has to wait until the squad gets here."

Trucy crossed her arms and pouted, but reluctantly accepted the prognosis. "I suppose..."

"I'll go report the evidence," Ema continued, reviewing her notes. "Sorry, but could you wait here till I get back?"

The three Wrights glanced at each other in surprise. Luke was the first to gather his wits, calling, "Well, actually, we-"

"Great!" Ema interrupted, shooting the three a grin as she strode to the door. "Thanks!" She threw it open, then paused, looking back at Apollo with a frown. "Oh, yeah, your clothes: Don't worry about that, I am going to get 'em cleaned, promise." With that, she closed the door behind her.

Apollo glanced back at the stained cape and gloves lying on the floor with a grimace.

Trucy turned to her brothers with an uncertain look. "So... what do we do now?"

Luke was examining the key ring in his hand, frowning. "We can't exactly investigate while keeping watch on the crime scene."

"True," Apollo sighed, crossing his arms. "I guess we'll have to wait for Ema to get back... again."

At that, Luke looked up, giving his brother a curious look.

Trucy scoffed, waving a hand dismissively. "Screw that!" she decided, skipping to the door. "Time's a-wasting! We've got a lot of ground to cover!"

"Wait, Truce, where are you going?!" Apollo demanded, running after his sister.

"Where do you think?" Trucy replied, pausing to shoot her brothers a grin over her shoulder. "We have to finish the investigation, don't we?"

Apollo paused. He couldn't deny that he did want to keep looking for LeTouse's killer, and he certainly didn't like the idea of once again being trapped in the small dressing room waiting for Ema to return - Just once that night had been more than enough.

"Why don't you two go?" Luke suggested, approaching his siblings with a smile. "I'll stay and watch
the scene for Detective Skye, while you follow up on some of our leads."

"We have leads?" Apollo asked, confused.

Trucy gasped, her grin getting even wider as she pressed her hands to her face. "Ooh, yes, that's a
great idea!" she cried. "What are we doing first?"

Luke held out the key ring in his hands, fanning out the three individual keys for his siblings to see.
"First of all, you can probably guess who these belong to, can't you?"

Apollo's eyes widened as he focussed on the item in his brother's hand, hearing Trucy gasp at his
side: Although the two keys on either side were common and innocuous, the middle key on the
heart-shaped loop was highly unusual, a golden hue in the metal and the key itself in the
unmistakable shape of an acoustic guitar. "Is that...?"

"It must be the key to a guitar case!" Trucy decided, bouncing in glee at having solved the mystery.

Luke giggled, handing their sister the small item. "And once you've questioned its owner, there's one
other person you need to talk to," he continued, a serious look on his face as he turned to Apollo.
"You know who I mean, right?"

Apollo frowned, looking away.

"Who?" Trucy asked, glancing between the two. "Who do we talk to next?"

"I know you're reluctant to talk about it," Luke told Apollo, "but if I'm piecing together what
happened correctly, you were alone in this room as Mister LeTouse was dying, correct? He gave you
his last words; 'The witness is the siren', if I remember correctly?"

Apollo didn't immediately reply, then reluctantly nodded. "The Siren of the Ballad," he filled in,
arms crossed. "It's unnerving how much is pointing at her right now."

"Wait, Lamiroir!?" Trucy squeaked in horror, clutching the keys in her hand tightly. "Lamiroir didn't
do it!"

"We're not saying she did, Truce," Luke assured her. "Mister LeTouse himself named her as only a
witness, after all."

Trucy still looked unhappy, but seemed to accept his argument.

"That's the other problem," Luke continued, turning back to Apollo. "I'm sorry to have to insist,
but... What else did he tell you? Was he trying to say anything else? About the witness, or even the
shooter?"

Apollo's first instinct was to refuse to answer, shut his brother down and make a run for the
hallway... but Luke's final question had triggered something in his memory he'd almost completely
forgotten, and he felt a rush of guilt for very nearly taking his pain out on his younger siblings.
"Actually, the first thing I did was ask about the shooter," he admitted, staring at the floor. "He just
said he 'didn't know', and told me to ask the witness."

Luke nodded, a hand cupped around his chin in thought. "What else did he say? Even if it seemed
unimportant, it could turn out to be a vital clue."

Apollo sighed, arms tightening in their grip across his torso. "It was hard to hear him over the blaring
rock music, but... He said he was cold," he quietly said. "That he couldn't see."
At that, Luke's eyebrows shot up. "Do you remember his exact words?"

Sighing again, Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead, just as much to avoid meeting his brother's gaze as to think; Although it had been a while now since the event itself, he could still hear LeTouse's pained gasping echoing in his ears. "Cold, so cold," he repeated in a monotone, trying not to dwell too much on the words coming out of his mouth. "Witness, can't see... The witness is siren."

Luke's frown slowly morphed into a smile. "I see," he said, then dropped his arms to his sides, giving his siblings a bright smile. "In that case, you two go ahead and question our leads. I'll stay here and wait for Detective Skye."

Apollo stared at his brother in confusion, baffled by the change of topic. Luke didn't have anything to say about LeTouse's last words after pushing so hard to hear them? Nothing at all?

"Yay!" Trucy cheered, then pulled out of the bag at her hip a familiar-looking computer tablet - Apollo's Court Record. "And if you find any more evidence, you can take pictures of it!" she instructed him.

"Should we get one of those keys?" Luke asked with a smile.

"Oh yeah!" Trucy chirped, pushing the keys into Luke's hands again only long enough to snap a picture, before taking them back and replacing them in Luke's grip with the small computer. "Seeya later, Luke!" She spun around and ran for the door. "Let's go, Polly!"

Apollo gave his brother a worried look. "You'll be okay? With the body and all?"

"I'll be fine," Luke promised. "What's going to happen, Apollo?"

[View the Court Record]
Trucy bounced on her heels as she waited for her eldest brother to join her in the hall. "Where to first?" she asked.

Apollo thought as he closed the door behind him. *Where are we going to find our errant prosecutor?* He looked down the corridor to his left. "Let's check the stage first; He was headed that way when we last saw him."

"Okay!" Trucy chirped, and skipped off towards the stage, her brother at her heels.

As the pair rounded the corner of the doorway at the end of the hall, they were confronted by a flash of yellow, causing Trucy to scream as she jumped back to cling to her brother. In the brief confusion, Apollo focussing on his sister's safety and Trucy with her back to whatever had startled her, the swish of bright fabric disappeared in an upwards direction, vanishing in the darkness.

"W-who was that!?" Apollo cried, clinging to Trucy as hard as she was clinging to him.

"We... didn't just imagine that, did we?" Trucy asked, looking around the short stretch of hallway fearfully.

Apollo thought hard, looking up into the darkness above them and trying to recall exactly what it was they had glimpsed. "He was wearing a silk hat," he realised. "And... he had a cape, didn't he?"

Trucy scoffed, pulling herself away from her brother and brushing off her costume. "Well, he won't get anywhere copying our outfits! These are Gramarye-tried-and-tested!"

As his sister promptly continued towards the stage as though nothing had happened, Apollo lingered a moment longer, staring up at the spot where the strange man had disappeared. *Was that...? N-no, of course not. Trucy's right, it's just some suspicious-looking faker imitating our family's success.* As he reluctantly rushed to catch up, he tried to shake the feeling that their exit was being closely watched.

It was easy to find the stage, as it was surrounded with clear signage warning passers-by to keep absolutely silent during showtime. As they climbed the stairs to enter the wings, loud voices began to drift towards them, both familiar, though one more than the other.

"What is it with today!? Problem after problem! Achtung!"

"You ain't kidding."

Trucy gasped, looking back at Apollo with a grin. "Polly, look! It's the two leading members of the Gaviners!" She pressed her fists to her mouth, muffling a squeal.

Apollo rolled his eyes, watching at his sister's side. Indeed, he did recognise the two from what little
he saw of the first act of the concert... one of them being Klavier himself, the lead guitarist and primary vocalist. The other was one of the other guitarists (Apollo couldn't tell if he'd had a bass guitar or not on stage), and the same elaborately-haired man who'd been accompanying Klavier on his visit to the crime scene earlier. 'His name's... Darren? I wasn't exactly paying attention.' Either way, the pair were stood at the edge of the stage, glaring in turn at each other and some machine behind them, rocking on their heels as they kept from pacing in an overflow of nervous energy.

"What are they arguing about?" Trucy whispered.

Apollo shrugged. "Probably the case, I'd bet," he quietly replied, arms crossed.

"My hog won't start," Klavier listed off on one hand, "my guitar case is busted, my guitar's been burnt to a crisp, and to top it all off, someone's dead!" He dramatically pointed out at the stage. "And then there was that performance just now! What was that all about!?"

"Hey, man, don't blame me!" his bandmate cried, looking defensive. "You were the one who missed the cue."

"Me? Miss a cue!?" The remark had clearly offended Klavier deeply, judging by the tightening of his fists and the glare he directed at the other man. "How could I conceivably get the most important part of that song wrong? How!?!" He waved a hand, pausing as he worked to articulate his feelings further. "And what was all that tinny playing of yours?"

The other man snorted, snarling right back. "Who you calling 'tinny'?"

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'Or not.'

"Sounds like one of those 'differences in musical direction' bands are always splitting over," Trucy whispered, looking worried.

"This is hardly the time," Apollo quietly pointed out, resisting the urge to scoff.

Klavier's head suddenly snapped towards the pair, his eyes wide. "What are you two doing here?" he called. His bandmate spun around, his purple boots squeaking on the floor as he also gazed at the pair in surprise.

Apollo and Trucy both grinned widely, embarrassed as being 'caught'. "Ah, um, hiya," Apollo replied, waving.

The two bandmates glanced at each other, then simultaneously cleared their throats, looking casual. "We were just discussing the investigation, if you don't mind."

"Sorry," Apollo was replying instinctively, before Klavier's words actually registered. "Wait... you were what?"

Klavier ignored him, turning to his bandmate with a serious look. "Listen, you need to confirm that with the Republic of Borginia, Detective Crescend."

The other man nodded, as suddenly business-like as his friend. "Right. Anything else?"

Apollo blinked in surprise, leaning towards his sister to whisper, "Did he just call him 'Detective'?"

Trucy giggled, but any reply she might have given was interrupted by a bark of laughter from said man, running his hands cockily along his enormous pompadour as he directed a grin at Apollo. "Ah,
greetings. Daryan Crescend. Criminal Affairs, Division Three."

Apollo jumped, blushing at having been overheard. "Uh... H-hello."

Trucy rolled her eyes, giving her brother a good-natured sigh of disbelief. "Wow Polly, how can you go to a concert and not know anything about the band playing?"

"Easy," Apollo hissed as she skipped across the room to join Klavier and Daryan. He reluctantly followed her. "I didn't want to be here in the first place!"

Klavier chuckled. "Oh, Herr Forehead, you wound me!"

Apollo just glared at him, arms crossed.

"The Gavinners aren't just an average rock band, Polly," Trucy explained, her fists on her hips. "Each member is connected to the police somehow!"

"Okay, so they have a gimmick," Apollo replied, rolling his eyes. "Very unique."

Daryan scoffed. "Bit more than a mere 'gimmick'."

Apollo narrowed his eyes, muttering, "Well, something kept you together for seven years..."

Klavier either didn't hear or ignored the young attorney's comment, and gestured to his friend. "Daryan here is my right-hand man," he explained. "I make the melodies, and he attacks them with his guitar." He gave his friend a grin. "He's a bit of a rogue, really."

"Heh," Daryan laughed, grinning back. "And this guy's a bit of a perfectionist," he shot back. "When a performance goes the least bit wrong, he goes into this funk... Just like today."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. 'I'd hope murder would be a bit more off-putting than a 'ruined' concert...'

Meanwhile, Klavier's face had screwed up in disgust at Daryan's reminder of their earlier argument. "The concert today? A disaster!" he proclaimed. "I'll get to the bottom of this, and then we'll see who missed a cue!" He turned on the two Wrights. "You heard it, didn't you? From the audience?"

"Not if it was in Act Three, no," Apollo muttered with a glare.

Trucy shook her head. "I didn't notice anything, but Luke might have."

Daryan scoffed, giving Klavier a look. "See? No amateur is going to pick up on that!"


Klavier turned from glaring at Daryan to give Apollo a surprised look. "Herr Doktor plays an instrument?"

Trucy nodded, she and Apollo slipping into identical boastful grins. "Yep, the violin! He's been playing since he was eight, so he's very good."

"A classical guy, is he?" Daryan commented, chuckling.

Klavier just seemed impressed. "Well, that just proves we most certainly didn't have an entire audience of amateurs," he pointed out. "But, in the absence of Doktor Wright, you shall have to do instead." He beckoned to the surprised Apollo and Trucy, turning to the machine behind him. "Take a listen to this."
Intrigued, Trucy immediately bounced to Klavier's side. "What's that?"

"A mixing board," Klavier explained, waving a hand over the large device. "We used it to record our concert tonight."

Apollo noticed Daryan rolling his eyes in disgust, arms crossed. He had to admit, he agreed with the sentiment. 'Is this 'missed cue' thing seriously taking priority over a murder investigation?'

Trucy glanced back at her brother. "Well, we've come this far," she decided, "might as well go all the way! I've always wanted to learn about the recording industry!"

Klavier chuckled. "This is but one of the devices used in recordings," he told her. "We're a five-part band; This lets us record each member's performance separately." He pointed to the array of sliders, specifically to five at Trucy's end of the board. "You use these to adjust the volume for each part. Check it out!" He fiddled with the laptop attached to the device, then hit a button, and a loud rock song began to play on the computer's speakers. Klavier then placed a hand across the five sliders in front of Trucy, moving them all down and reducing the volume of the playback.

"Wow, neat!" Trucy cried, bouncing in glee. "So, could you, say, hear only the drum part?"

"Of course," Klavier laughed, pushing up only the far right slider, making the steady beat and elaborate flourishes of the drum kit stand out against the faint echoes of the other four instruments. "That's how we'll find the criminal guilty of missing his cue tonight!"

Apollo sighed. "I'm more concerned with the other criminal," he pointed out. "The one who kills people."

Klavier met Apollo's eyes with a glare. "You want help on the case?" he asked. "Then help me with mine."

At that kind of ultimatum, Apollo didn't feel he had a choice. Restraining a groan, he joined his sister at the mixing board.

"Let's begin!" Klavier announced, back to his cheerful self as he brought up all the sliders again to a volume just loud enough to still talk over. "First, we bring up the part of the performance in question," he said, his attention back on the laptop as he began to slowly skip ahead through the song. "Like so!" With a flourish of key presses, he left the track running, turning back to Apollo and Trucy with a grin. "There it is. Now, listen!"

Apollo screwed up his nose and reluctantly turned his ears to the music, while Trucy frowned determinedly. The song sounded to Apollo to be in its closing chords, every instrument in the band going all out in one final blast before going quiet, the speakers falling into silence. Trucy looked confused, looking up at Klavier. "Was something wrong?" she asked.

"You couldn't hear it?" Klavier replied, resetting the track back to the beginning of the final section. "Listen again, closely."

The music blared again in the speakers, and Apollo gave up, crossing his arms and looking away. Trucy however only concentrated even harder, and, as the final chords fell into silence, grinned widely. "The timing's a little off, isn't it?"

"You see!?" Klavier cried, as excited as Trucy that the problem had been found. "There! Right at the most important part!" He turned to Daryan pointedly. "And even an amateur can hear it!"

Daryan rolled his eyes. "An amateur with a mixing board, maybe."
"You're missing the point!" Klavier argued, waving a hand. "We'll never stamp out crime until we're perfect. Perfect!"

"Here he goes again," Daryan sighed, looking away.

Klavier returned his attention to the mixing board. "Right. Fraulein Amateur, you will prove my point."

"Me!?” Trucy asked, bouncing in glee. "What do you want me to do?"

"You will find the missed cue!" Klavier instructed, setting the song playing again. "You will tell us which instrument, which part, is the guilty party!" After a moment's more fiddling at the laptop, he pointed to the sliders. "Adjust the volume for each instrument track, so we may find which one hopelessly bungles the cue, with your untrained amateur ears!"

Trucy squealed in glee, turning to the sliders. After a moment of thought, she turned them all down, starting to experiment with them and listening carefully to each of the five instruments. It soon became apparent that Klavier had set the final bars of the song to loop, making it easier for her to narrow down the flaw.

Apollo sighed as he turned away, waiting for his sister to finish. He had to admit, he was a little jealous (it looked fun to mess around with equipment as sophisticated as that), but he wasn't interested in hearing the same riff of already-objectionable music over and over again. Even so, he had no choice but to wait it out.

View the Court Record
"Here it is!" Trucy cried excitedly, turning down all but one of the sliders to isolate a single guitar as it looped through the final bars of the song. "This is the part that's off!"

Apollo and Klavier both looked over to see which one she was pointing at, a slider labelled 'Track 2'. "Which is that?" Klaver muttered in thought. "Second Guitar." A frown slowly settling on his face, he turned to stare behind him, Apollo and Trucy following his gaze as it settled on one very embarrassed Daryan Crescend, trying visibly not to sweat. "It was you, Daryan!"

Daryan shrugged, avoiding his friend's eyes. "Ah well," he said, waving off the accusation as casually as could be. "Looks like the cat's out of the bag."

"'Ah well'!?" Klavier repeated, stepping towards Daryan with a glare. "That's all you have to say!? That kind of attitude lets killers walk free, Daryan!"

Trucy leaned towards her brother and whispered, "Here they go again."

Apollo nodded. "We should have brought up the case sooner. It's starting to feel like we're just wasting time."

"It's all experience under our belts!" Trucy assured him with a smile. "That can't be bad! And I got to play around with 'Guilty Love'!"

At that, Apollo raised an eyebrow. "'Guilty Love'? That's the name of that song?"

Meanwhile, Klavier and Daryan's argument once again had fizzled out, both men now sulking in the outcome. Klavier turned back to the Wrights, brushing at his fringe as he visibly tried to calm down. "Now, I believe you had something you wished to talk to me about, Herr Wright?"

Straightening from his conversation with his sister, Apollo nodded. "I wanted to talk about the crime, actually."

Klavier paused, frowning in thought. "Which crime do you mean?"

Apollo's face screwed up in indignation. "The murder, what else!?"

"Oh, that," Klavier sighed, running his hand through his hair again. "For me, today has been a hit parade of crimes, you see."

Trucy frowned, tapping her chin in thought. "Oh yeah, wasn't he talking about that earlier?" she whispered to her brother. "Something about his hog, and his guitar case?"

Apollo shrugged. He hadn't been paying much attention to Klavier's diva-like outbursts.

"Anyway," Klavier continued, resting his hands in his pants pockets. "I'm afraid you know more about the killing of Mister LeTouse than I do. For now, at least."
"Huh?" For a moment, Apollo felt panic at the thought that Klavier knew they'd pushed their way into the crime scene; Was he mad?

Klavier only smiled. "You were the one who found the body, ja?" he pointed out. "While we were in the middle of a performance, no less."

"Oh," Apollo muttered, relaxing. That made more sense.

"Aren't you going to examine the crime scene, Prosecutor Gavin?" Trucy asked.

Klavier chuckled. "I'll leave that to Fraulein Detective," he said. " Wouldn't want to step on her toes."

Apollo nodded; Given Ema's earlier rage at the man, and her general dislike for him on top of that, he could understand Klavier wanting to keep his distance. It did feel strange to be the one more informed on something for once, though.

"Oh!" Trucy suddenly cried, reaching into her bag. "Guitar case, of course!" With a jingling of metal, she pulled out the heart-shaped keyring, holding it up to Klavier with a grin. "Do you know anything about this, Prosecutor Gavin?"

Klavier gasped. "Th-that...!"

Apollo smirked; He felt he didn't need to ask, but did anyway: "Does it look familiar?"

"Familiar!?!" Klavier repeated. "It's mine!" He took the key ring from Trucy's hand, checking it over with an excited grin. "That's my key ring! I've been looking all over for it!"

"It is yours?" Trucy realised, sharing a wary look with Apollo.

Klavier sighed, attaching the clasp on the strap to something inside his jacket. "Thanks, anyway," he told them, still smiling. "So, where did you find it?"

Apollo winced. "Actually... the victim was holding it," he admitted, watching Klavier's gaze snap up to meet his, the prosecutor's face rapidly paling. "Like he was trying to keep it from the killer. Even if it meant his life."

Klavier could only stare, frozen, for a very long moment. Apollo could even see Daryan's large pompadour out of the corner of his eye, looking between the two of them as though waiting to see who would break the silence first. Finally, Klavier seemed to break out of his shock, frowning in confusion and shaking his head. "Wh-what!?!" he managed to stutter. "The victim... You mean, Mister LeTouse had my keys?"

Apollo nodded. "Indeed."

Sighing, Klavier turned and wandered away, deep in thought. "When will my trials be over?" he muttered to himself. Daryan similarly took a few steps backwards, frowning as he mused to himself.

Trucy leaned towards her brother, watching Klavier. "Speaking of trials," she whispered, "I've never heard Mister Gavin whine in court like he has been today."

Apollo nodded. "Ema was right about the fop, I'll give her that," he quietly replied.

"Polly!" Trucy hissed, lightly slapping her brother with the back of a hand. As he rolled his eyes and ignored her chastisement, she took a few steps towards Klavier. "Mister Gavin, maybe we can help.
Tell us about your troubles today."

Klavier turned, raising an eyebrow at the teen. "I really don't think that's-"

"Tell us," Trucy interrupted, grinning, "and we'll keep mum about the key ring for now."

Daryan barked in laughter, turning away as he hid his amusement. Klavier only stared at Trucy in amazement for a long moment, then slowly smiled. "Are... you blackmailing me, Fraulein?"

Apollo couldn't resist a proud smile, walking over to stand at his sister's side; Given the location they'd found Klavier's keys, anything the man could tell them about the item would certainly be relevant to the case. "You were saying something about your motorcycle not starting?" he prompted.

"And something about your guitar case being busted?" Trucy added.

Klavier's eyes narrowed, looking between the pair. "You're well informed."

Trucy scoffed, crossing her arms. "You mentioned it a few times," she pointed out.

The prosecutor winced, brushing at his hair. "Ach!" He shook his head, then reluctantly explained. "It all happened this morning. It's all this key ring's fault. He patted at his jacket, where the item had been returned earlier. "It's got all my keys on it, ja? My bike key, my car key... and the key to my guitar case."

Trucy frowned. "Wait, so the key ring..."

Klavier shrugged. "It disappeared," he admitted. "I thought I'd put it in my jacket pocket..." He shook his head, sighing. "I had to come to the concert by taxi. How embarrassing! And in order to get my guitar out, I had to break the lock."

Apollo looked out at the stage, another recent incident with a guitar coming to mind. "Wait, this guitar wasn't the one that...?"

"The very one," Klavier replied with a nod. "Up in flames, and right on stage, too." He sighed, clearly still mourning the loss of the wooden instrument. "Crazy. And to top it off, Mister LeTouse's life was taken. Nobody told me 'bout days like these."

"Strange days, indeed," Apollo agreed, frowning in thought. He decided not to mention that, unlike Klavier, strange days such as this were a frequent topic of discussion in the Wright household.

"You think?" Klavier replied, distracted.

Trucy was frowning in thought, tapping her chin. She said nothing, and it was her silence that attracted Apollo's attention more than anything else.

Watching his sister with worry, Apollo asked, "Something wrong, Truce?"

Everyone's attention turned to the teen, still deep in thought. "I'm just trying to make sense of everything," she explained. "First that heart-shaped key ring gets stolen. Then a very expensive guitar flares up on stage. Then Mister LeTouse dies."

Klavier frowned, likely already fearing whatever conclusion she was about to reach. "Yes, and...?"

"Could it all really be just a co-incidence?" Trucy asked, finally looking up to meet Klavier's eyes. The prosecutor looked confused. "Co-incidence? Meaning...?" He sighed, turning to his friend.
"Daryan, can you make any sense of all this?"

Daryan shrugged, even backing up a little. "Hey, don't look at me."

"You know what I mean, don't you Polly?" Trucy asked, turning to her brother. "Either Mister Gavin's having a really bad day... or all this was planned."

Apollo frowned, his mind working overtime to run over what she was implying. *You're saying... someone deliberately set out to steal the keys and set the guitar on fire...? Well, naturally, if they wanted to set the guitar on fire, they'd need the keys to its case, though that doesn't change it being a mean prank to play. You can't seriously mean that's all connected to the murder though, right? LeTouse didn't seem the type to do that kind of thing...*

Meanwhile, Klavier was staring intently at Trucy, one hand pulling out his keys again to examine them. "You... aren't thinking what I think you're thinking... are you, *Fraulein*?"

Trucy gave him a firm nod. "I am!"

"What? What!?!" Daryan cried, looking between the two with wide eyes. "Hey, don't leave me in the dark with Spike, here!"

Apollo shot the man a glare. "It's Apollo."

"You noticed it too, right Polly?" Trucy asked, shooting her brother a glance as she dug around in her bag.

"Between the key ring and the guitar, yes," Apollo admitted, shrugging, "but not with the murder, if that's what you're implying."

Trucy stared at him a moment before groaning, then pulled out a sheet of paper from her bag. "It's *this!* she cried, shoving the paper into her brother's hands. "The Guitar's Serenade! They're all connected!"

Apollo looked over the paper in his hands, recognising the signed lyrics sheet Klavier had given Luke earlier. Obviously Trucy had taken the chance to study it while they were separated earlier, but Apollo himself hadn't exactly had the time. *Well, no wonder I didn't notice a connection. What is the connection, anyway?*

Daryan took a few steps towards Apollo, leaning to check the paper over his shoulder. "A lyrics sheet?" he asked, then turned to Klavier with a frown. "What's that got to do with anything?"

"It has everything to do with everything," Klavier replied, studying the key ring in his hand. "Though I wouldn't have believed it if the *Fraulein* hadn't pointed it out."

"What are you talking about, man?" Daryan sighed, crossing his arms in frustration. "Enough with the riddles!"

Klavier shook his head, meeting Trucy's eyes. "Maybe it is a coincidence, or perhaps it means something. Don't you think, *Fraulein*?"

Trucy nodded. "I do." She looked up to Apollo and Daryan. "Everything that's happened to Mister Gavin today is predicted in the lyrics to this song."

Daryan jumped back, eyes wide. "Wh-what!? No way!"
Apollo looked to his sister in surprise, then turned his attention back to the lyrics sheet. "Wait, you're right!" he cried. "There in the first verse: 'When you stole away the keys my heart held on to so tight'..."

"The key ring was stolen!" Trucy filled in. "And not just any key ring, a heart-shaped key ring!"

"And after that," Apollo continued, "'Burning on in my heart, fire, burn my love away'..."

"The guitar bursting into flame!"

"'Like a bullet of love, fire, take my life away'..."

"Mister LeTouse was killed!"

Apollo shook his head, still staring at the lyrics in disbelief. "And it's all in order, too! That's crazy..."

Trucy nodded, crossing her arms. "Yeah, no kidding."

Daryan was looking thoughtful, staring intently at the floor. "So everything that happened today, here... This song predicted it all?"

"Or perhaps it was the other way around," Klavier pointed out with a stern frown, replacing his keys inside his jacket. "The criminal could have based his crime on the lyrics."

Apollo looked up from the lyrics sheet. "But who would go through all that trouble?"

Klavier sighed. "Someone who moves in mysterious ways, no doubt." He turned to Trucy. "I believe you've stumbled upon something quite vital... and quite annoying, Fraulein."

Trucy grinned, blushing a little as she giggled with pride.
"The lyrics predicting the crime," Daryan muttered to himself in thought, then turned to his friend. "Klavier?"

"Seems a bit more than just a co-incidence to me," Klavier decided, glaring at nothing in particular. Daryan nodded. "I have to agree. The key ring, the guitar, and the murder..."

Apollo folded up the paper in his hands, still sceptical. "The key ring might have been dropped by accident," he pointed out.

"Yet the victim was holding it," Klavier replied. "Hard to think that it was unconnected."

"That's true," Apollo sighed, and handed the lyrics sheet back to his sister.

Trucy took the paper, quickly putting it away in her bag. "So the criminal matched their actions to the lyrics?"

"That sounds likely," Daryan replied, nodding.

Apollo crossed his arms, frowning. "Why would anyone do that?" he asked. 'It doesn't make sense! Then again, neither did a lot of Dad's cases until the full story came out...'

Daryan scoffed, stepping back from the conversation. "While we think about that, I'm going to get cracking on the biggest crime here and talk to the Borginian Embassy about this Mister LeTouse."

Klavier nodded. "Ah, right. Thanks, Daryan."

"I'll leave the pondering of mysteries to you," Daryan continued, shooting his friend a grin as he turned and ambled away, waving goodbye. "I'm outta here." With that, he jogged down the stairs and disappeared into backstage.

Meanwhile, Klavier was still deep in thought, hands in his pockets. "A foreign national, Mister LeTouse, was killed... It seems like that would have to be the 'point' of all this," he reasoned aloud. "But they did more than that. They left us with not only a murder, but a mystery!"

Apollo and Trucy shared a wary look; It occurred to both of them that Klavier was awfully irritable tonight, much more so than he'd been throughout the entirety of their previous encounter with him. 'This must be the real Klavier Gavin,' Apollo mused. 'The one we don't get to see in the courtroom.'

Klavier threw up his hands. "I've had enough, frankly," he announced, and turned to the Wrights. "If you find any more mysteries, do me a favour and keep them to yourselves, ja?"

"Ja," Apollo repeated, nodding. 'That pretty much concludes our questioning of him, I'd say. And next up is...' "Mister Gavin, do you know where Lamiroir is now?"

"Ah, I had her go to my dressing room," Klavier replied, running a hand through his hair and
looking thoroughly flustered in the aftermath of all that had gone on that night. "With that pianist, Machi Tobaye, of course. She seemed rather shocked by Mister LeTouse's sudden passing."

"Right, thanks," Apollo said, and took Trucy's hand. "C'mon, Truce."

As she was led away by her eldest brother, Trucy eagerly waved back at Klavier. "Seeya later, Mister Gavin!"

A small smile on his face, Klavier waved back.

July 7, 11:15PM
Sunshine Coliseum
Lamiroir's Dressing Room

Luke would have never admitted it to Apollo, but a part of him was still repulsed by the idea of being alone in a room with a dead body. Quite frankly, he didn't want to be a hundred-percent okay with it, either; He had simply decided, as the one with the most direct experience with death (mostly animals, but a fair amount of human death too: Phelan Pound, Rosa Rains... even Doctor Schrader sort of counted, as they'd all thought he was dead when Luke first met him, and the same went for the convicted 'witches' of Labyrinthia and Professor Layton himself if you wanted to be technical), it made more sense for him to stay behind while Apollo and Trucy got on with the investigation. Plus, after seeing the look on Apollo's face when they caught up to him after the murder... there was no way in hell Luke was allowing Apollo to be the one to wait for Ema's return.

As he paced the room, idly looking around with Apollo's Court Record in hand, Luke mused that this was by far a cleaner crime scene than Phelan Pound's had been. That's probably to be expected, though... Mister Pound was beaten to death with a bat, while Mister LeTouse was just shot. And at least he didn't die alone. Even if he didn't know his killer, he was able to give Apollo enough information to help us track them down.' Trucy's photos only heightened the comparison, all being, with no exception, of everything around the room but the crime scene itself... well, if you didn't include dark corners like underneath the larger furniture, or the small gaps between said larger furniture and the walls. In the aftermath of discovering Pound's death, that dark night in the shelter alone, Luke could remember kicking himself for lacking the courage to face his dead friend, open up the blood-covered office and contribute more to finding the man's killer through cataloguing the scene as he'd found it. I'm not letting Mister LeTouse down like I did Mister Pound. He trusted Apollo with his last words, and Apollo's dead-set on solving this murder; Anything Apollo does, there's no question I'm going to help him in every way I can. There is no corner I will overlook!' With that in mind, he opened up the camera app of the computer tablet in his hands, aiming to exhaustively catalogue the corpse's half of the room as Trucy had done for the 'living area' on the other half.

It hadn't taken nearly as long as Luke had hoped.

Sitting on the floor near LeTouse's body, the young vet placed the Court Record down with a sigh. 'Well, that's that. Now what? It feels like Detective Skye's taking forever...' His gaze soon turned to the blood-stained cape and gloves lying nearby. 'Oh, Apollo...' He knew it was likely LeTouse's blood, but it still hurt to look at, so he turned away again, and found his gaze landing on the sofa and lounge chair on the other side of the room.
"Huh... Now, what was it I was thinking earlier, about Trucy's photos being exhaustive except for the
dark corners underneath and behind the furniture...?"

And that was how Luke found himself lying on his front and taking photos of the floor underneath
the sofa.

When the door slammed open without warning, Luke jumped, his thumb tapping the screen
involuntarily to snap an extra photo of the darkness under the red lounge. The click of the camera
seemed to go unnoticed by the visitor, who had slammed the door again behind him and was striding
purposefully towards the other side of the room. From his position on the floor, Luke had a very
good view of the strange man's heeled blue-purple boots, the long tongue pointed and sticking
straight up as large 'wings' flared out on either side. Above them were black leather pants, leading up
to a purple-and-white hooded jacket, the pattern and sharp teeth of its zipper heavily reminiscent of a
shark, especially when paired with the white-tipped pompadour on top. This strange newcomer was
unmistakably the second guitarist of the Gavinners, a man Luke had been watching on stage for most
of that evening. What was he doing here?

"Can I help-?"

The man shrieked, jumping backwards and flailing around until he spotted Luke on the floor, the
tablet computer in his arms. "Wh-!? Y-!? Don't scare me like that, man!"

"I'm sorry about that," Luke said, pushing himself up onto his knees, then to a stand. He watched the
man carefully, frowning. "Were you not expecting someone to be here?"

The man didn't reply for several moments, still looking a little scared. "Um..." He then shook his
head, pulling himself together with a glare at the young vet. "The hell are you to be asking me that?
You're not a member of security!"

he calmly informed the man. "Detective Skye left me in charge of the crime scene until she gets
back. And who are you, may I ask?"

The man's eyes narrowed. "Detective Daryan Crescend," he replied in a low tone.

"A pleasure to meet you, Detective Crescend," Luke said, giving the man a polite smile despite his
clear displeasure with Luke's presence; Luke didn't have the same encyclopaedic knowledge of the
band Trucy seemed to have picked up, but he had remembered the trivia that all five Gavinners were
connected somehow to law enforcement. It still didn't explain exactly why a detective not in charge
of the scene had stormed in the way he had, though. "If you're looking for Detective Skye, I believe
she said she was reporting the evidence. She shouldn't be far away."

"Yeah yeah," Daryan muttered, crossing his arms. Was he... sulking? "I... spoke to her already.
Crime scene's mine now."

At that, Luke frowned. "And she didn't tell you she'd left someone watching it?"

"Obviously not," Daryan snapped impatiently. "Must've slipped her mind. She was real busy, not
paying attention. You getting out of here or what?"

Luke thought a moment. "May I ask where she is? I had something I wished to talk to Detective
Skye about myself."

Daryan scoffed, shrugging. "What do I care?" He pointed angrily at the door. "Civilians shouldn't be
in here anyway! Can't you take a hint?"
Putting the tablet computer in his satchel, Luke decided not to push his luck any further. "Then I'll leave Mister LeTouse in your care, Detective. Farewell."

"Yeah, sayonara," Daryan muttered, glaring at the young vet slowly making his way across the room to the exit.

As Luke closed the door behind him, he was very glad he decided not to mention what he'd found under the sofa to Detective Crescend.

[View the Court Record]
Trucy skipped merrily at Apollo's side as they left the stage, headed to the dressing rooms. "And now we get to talk to Lamiroir!" she gleefully pointed out. "This is so cool!" She giggled, poking her brother playfully in the chest. "And you didn't want to come to this concert! We'd've missed out on meeting one of our idols!"

Apollo chuckled; As much as he hated the idea of a handout from Klavier, and that he'd walked head first into a murder only an hour ago... he did have to agree that meeting Lamiroir was worth the trouble.

Suddenly, Trucy stopped, pulling them both to a halt. "Wait... but... She can't speak English," she pointed out, frowning. "How are we going to talk to her?"

Apollo smiled. "Didn't you notice earlier?"

Trucy blinked, confused. "Notice what?"

Laughing, Apollo poked his sister's nose. "When we spoke to her before. You don't remember hearing Mister LeTouse speaking in Borginian?"

Although irritated by her brother's teasing, rubbing her nose with a glare, Trucy stopped to think. "Um... wait..." Now she only looked more confused. "I... don't remember hearing him talk in Borginian."

"Exactly," Apollo replied with a grin. "She may not be able to speak English, but Lamiroir can obviously understand it well enough." He laughed as Trucy pouted at him, then resumed their walk, dragging his sister along at his side. "Somehow we'll muddle through some questions with her. If she can understand what we're asking, she'll find a way to make sure we understand her answers."

The pair rounded the corner to the stretch of hall with the dressing rooms, only to again stop in their tracks, Trucy shrieking as she threw herself at Apollo, her arms wrapping tightly around his chest. The man in yellow was there one moment, then disappeared with a flash of his cape up on top of the vending machine and into the darkness above the lights.

Apollo and Trucy stood in a long silence, clinging to each other and staring at the black ceiling above the vending machine. Finally, slowly, they extricated themselves from each other, and Apollo dashed forward to the spot where the man had disappeared, his eyes on the ceiling. Despite the glare of the overhead lights, he could just make out the metal grate of a sizeable air vent, snuggled into the corner the nearby pillar made against the wall. 'So that's how he's getting around.' Even though they had just come from the stage, a part of Apollo wanted to run straight back and ask Klavier about the suspicious man in yellow.

As he turned to check on his sister, Apollo saw Trucy frozen in place, staring at the floor with an expression somewhere between sad and confused. "Truce?" He walked back to join her, resting a hand on her shoulder.
Trucy jumped at her brother's touch, but quickly recovered, taking his hand in her grip. "He... looked familiar," she admitted.

Apollo frowned. He was afraid of that. "More than just a faker?"

His sister didn't immediately reply, staring at the vending machine where the man had disappeared. Finally, she shook her head. "I don't know," she admitted. "I'm sorry."

"It's alright," Apollo assured her, giving her hand a squeeze. "C'mon, let's go talk to Lamiroir, huh?"

The Gavinners' dressing room was much the same as it had been since they were last there, although this time it was Lamiroir and Machi sat in the nearby stools by the mirrors rather than Klavier. Both looked clearly distressed, Machi's face tight with worry while Lamiroir's hands were clutched together, looking up with wide eyes as the door opened to admit the two Wrights.

Apollo gave the pair a respectful nod, but Trucy plastered a large grin on her face, greeting them with a wave. "Lamiroir!" she called.

The singer wasn't in the mood for small talk. "What... what has happened?" she asked, almost haltingly despite her clear desire for information. "I heard that Mister LeTouse has died!"

The Wrights glanced at each other in disbelief, shocked to a halt. "L-Lamiroir!" Apollo cried. "You speak!? I mean," he shook his head forcing himself to calm down, "you speak English?"

Although still upset, Lamiroir sighed, nodding. "Ah, yes. I was invited here from the Republic of Borginia... but I am not Borginian by birth."

It was then Apollo noticed her accent. It sounded distinctly different to LeTouse's, which he supposed made sense given this new information, but he still couldn't place where exactly it was likely to have originated.

"But wasn't Mister LeTouse your interpreter?" Trucy asked, confused.

"Ah, that..." Lamiroir seemed uncomfortable, her gaze on her lap. "Yes, well... It was Mister LeTouse's idea. He thought it would add to the mystery, you see."

Apollo's gaze flitted to the teenage boy sitting at her side, tense in his seat as he stared at the floor. "Then, your pianist is also...?"

Lamiroir shook her head. "No, Machi Tobaye is Borginian. He does not speak English." She looked back up at Apollo, her gaze stern. "Now, please tell me! What has happened to Mister LeTouse? Why did he...?"

"Actually," Trucy carefully explained, "Mister LeTouse was."

"Truce!" Apollo cried, slapping a hand over his sister's mouth with a glare. "We're not allowed to talk about it, remember? We signed the agreement!"

Trucy frowned, pulling her brother's hand from her face. "B-but Mister LeTouse is Lamiroir's manager! That's not fair to her! I mean, isn't she a related party?"

Apollo looked away. He didn't want to say in Lamiroir's hearing that Trucy's point was exactly the reason why they weren't allowed to tell her anything... Although, he had to admit, there was no
chance that she could seriously be a suspect. He wouldn't mind sticking it to Klavier if it meant
soothing the woman's worries.

"All we have been told is to wait here in this room," Lamiroir explained. "It is very unsettling."

Apollo shook his head, dismissing his train of thought as the opportunity passed. "I'm sorry," he told
her, "we're trying to figure it out ourselves." He paused, then stepped closer to the woman. "Do...
you think I could ask you some questions?"

Lamiroir nodded, as graceful as ever despite her concern. "Of course. I am always willing to help."

Apollo moved to pull over a stool, Trucy running up behind him, but Lamiroir's attention was
grabbed by Machi, who had reached up to grip her sleeve, speaking in Borginian. The Wrights
paused, watching Lamiroir frown in concern as she replied, then look shocked as Machi spoke again.
She said some urging words to him, but he shook his head as he spoke in return, apparently
unmoved.

As the two paused, Apollo reluctantly asked, "Um, what seems to be the problem?"

"Machi," Lamiroir sighed, then turned to the Wrights. "He is not good around strangers. He wishes
to go out for a breath of fresh air. Would that be alright?"

Apollo thought a moment, then nodded. "Uh, sure, of course." 'He's blind, so he won't have seen
anything anyway. There's no reason to keep him cooped up with us if he's uncomfortable.'

Machi didn't speak, getting to his feet and holding a hand straight out in front of him, walking
straight to the door. He paused as his outstretched hand touched the wall, then felt for the handle,
pulling the door open and heading out to the hallway. The door closed behind him with a sharp click
of the latch.

Hesitantly, Apollo sat down on the stool he'd pulled over, while Trucy, grinning widely, skipped
over to the one Machi had abandoned, pulling it a little way from Lamiroir out of politeness before
perching on it herself, giving the singer an excited grin.

"What is it you wished to ask me about?" Lamiroir asked, her gaze on Apollo's lap.

Apollo looked the woman up and down. She seemed so... fragile. He couldn't make himself ask
about the murder just yet. He quickly scrambled for another topic of conversation. "The Rupublic of
Borginia... that's in Northern Europe, right?"

Lamiroir smiled, turning her head upwards to Apollo's face. "I started out singing in a restaurant,"
she explained. "Then a producer called me. Before I knew it... here I am."

"You don't say!" Trucy chirped. "You know, our daddy plays piano in a restaurant!"

Apollo snorted in restrained laughter. "Producers tend to look for talent, Trucy." As his sister
giggled, he turned back to the singer. "Lamiroir, you're not from Borginia originally? Were you born
here?"

Lamiroir frowned. "Well..."

"Oh, is that supposed to be a secret?" Apollo interrupted, suddenly panicking he'd crossed a line.
"Part of the image and everything? I'm sorry, you don't have to answer..."

"We know quite a bit about 'image' ourselves," Trucy filled in with a knowing nod.
Lamiroir smiled. "Ah, yes, it is something like this," she replied. "A contract, you might say. I'm also not to speak anything but Borginian in public."

Apollo nodded. That made sense. He of all people knew how important image was when you were a performer.

"We love your music though," Trucy cut in. "All that poetic 'landscape painter in sound' stuff... Travelling the world, putting everything you see to music...!" She sighed longingly. "I wanted to use your songs in our act, but Polly wouldn't let me."

"You want to pay the royalties out of your pocket money?" Apollo asked her with a smirk.

Lamiroir softly laughed. "You're very perceptive," she told Trucy. "But this 'landscape painter in sound', too, is an image." She looked away, her smile fading. "Yet without it, my songs would not be so widely heard."

Apollo paused, frowning in thought. "The 'Siren of the Ballad', right?"

"Yes," Lamiroir said, nodding. "In Borginia, 'Lamiroir' means 'the siren'." She stared sadly at her lap. "I fear that, perhaps, already I am not the siren I once was."

View the Court Record
Revealing

July 7, 11:42PM
Sunshine Coliseum
Gavinner's Dressing Room

Trucy seemed as upset as Lamiroir to see the woman's self-doubt. "Um, your pianist," she spoke up. "Machi, was it? He's cute!" She grinned. "Like a porcelain doll."

Apollo raised an eyebrow at her. "He's probably around your age," he pointed out. "Is this a 'crush' situation?"

Blushing, Trucy shot her brother a glare. "N-no, of course not! Can't I just call someone 'cute'!?"

Lamiroir seemed amused by their antics, smiling behind her veil. "I met him while singing in restaurants in Borginia," she explained. "He is an orphan... His playing is exquisite. Soon he came to live with me."

Apollo smiled. "That's very similar to us, actually. How we ended up with our dad, I mean." He shot his sister a grin, and she smiled back. "Minus the exquisite piano playing of course." He turned back to the singer. "I've, um, noticed Machi hardly leaves your side."

"Yes, well," Lamiroir quickly replied, her hands fidgeting in her lap, "he is blind. At first, I hesitated at dragging him across the world."

Apollo found himself frowning, watching her hands. Did... did Lamiroir just lie?

"He doesn't speak English either, does he?" Trucy asked, not noticing her brother's sudden distraction.

"He had never left Borginia before we met," Lamiroir explained, nodding. Her hands were still. "I made his presence part of my contract. Machi and I together are 'Lamiroir'." She stared at her knees, thoughtful. "Together, always."

Apollo dragged his gaze back to Lamiroir's face, a part of him surprised she didn't seem to have noticed his actions; Trucy certainly had by now, shooting her brother a curious look, but he decided to ride his good luck and move on; He'd find what she'd been lying about later. "So... Mister LeTouse was translating more for Machi than you?"

Lamiroir thought a moment in silence, then turned her face up to Apollo's. "Mister LeTouse was my new manager."

"New?"

"Yes, from three months ago," she explained. "Around when I received Mister Gavin's invitation to come. I met Mister LeTouse at my office. He was to be my manager and bodyguard." She paused, a hand reaching for her hair under her cloak. "And, as it turned out, my interpreter."

Apollo nodded. "Even though you speak English."

"Yes, but we were to visit more places than just here," she continued. "We had a concert in Japan.
scheduled after this one." She paused, frowning. "Though I fear that may have to be cancelled now..."

Trucy had her arms crossed, frowning in thought. "Mister LeTouse was from the Republic of Borginia too, right?"

Lamiroir looked uncertain, her hands clasping together. "He was only with me for three months," she repeated. "He was such a talented man... That phrase, 'Siren of the Ballad', that was his idea, you know." She shook her head. "But I'm afraid there is much I do not know about him... and now, I shall never know." She stared down into her lap, blinking back tears. "No one will even tell me why he has died."

Apollo stared at her, then looked down himself, eyes closed in a fierce frown. Suddenly, this woman he had never met before was reminding him rather heavily of Trucy... the night Phoenix was acquitted of Shadi 'Smith's' murder... the reunion with Luke after his disaster of a trial... that time she and Phoenix had a blow-up over getting her ears pierced, twice... all the times she tripped and scraped a knee or an elbow, or fell off the play equipment in the park... when she got sick and was especially miserable about having to cancel her shows... This wasn't right. Apollo turned his fierce gaze up to Lamiroir's face. "Mister LeTouse was murdered."

Lamiroir looked up to meet Apollo's gaze in surprise.

"P-Polly!" Trucy gasped, watching her brother with a mixture of shock and worry. "We promised Mister Gavin we wouldn't-!"

"Well, I never liked Gavin anyway," Apollo replied. "Besides, you were right earlier: This isn't fair. She deserves to know."

Lamiroir frowned, looking down at her lap again. She said nothing, apparently deep in thought.

"The thing is, Lamiroir," Apollo continued to the singer, "I was the one who found him... and he was still alive."

"What...?" she muttered, looking confused, though she didn't meet Apollo's eyes.

Apollo nodded gravely. "I was the only one around to hear his last words. He didn't know who, well," he paused, deciding to be careful with his words, "delivered the killing blow, but he did tell me there was a witness. He wanted me to find them, to ask them what had happened."

Lamiroir's frown seemed to deepen. Apollo didn't doubt she knew by now what he was getting at.

"I... couldn't help him," Apollo admitted, his injured left hand reaching for the brooch pinned to his tie. "I tried to stop the bleeding, but... he died right in front of me. I... failed, really."

Trucy was watching her brother with sad eyes. "Polly..."

"So I have to find who killed him," Apollo continued, keeping his eyes on Lamiroir and trying not to tear up. "Please, Lamiroir. You're the 'siren'. You must have seen something."

Lamiroir didn't reply, her hands tightly clasped and her gaze intense as she stared at the floor. Finally, her mouth opened behind her veil. "I..."

The door flew open with a creak of its hinges, making all three jump as they turned their attention to it. "Apollo? Trucy?" called a familiar voice, and a young man in blue peeked into the room, eyes quickly locking on the trio. "There you are!" he cried, a grin growing on his face.
"Luke!" Trucy shouted, jumping off her stool and racing across the room to greet her brother with a hug. A moment later, she jumped back, giving him a glare. "Hey, you're supposed to be watching the crime scene!"

Luke chuckled, closing the door behind him. "Don't worry, I was relieved of my post. Mister Gavin thought I might find you here." He looked over to Apollo, his grin turning quickly to a frown. "Apollo, are you alright?"

Apollo got to his feet, nodding his head firmly. "I-I'm fine," he insisted, rubbing at his eyes with the back of a hand. Snot was building up mutinously in his nostrils, forcing him to clear them with a loud sniff.

Although he clearly didn't believe his brother, Luke decided to move on, smiling at Lamiroir as she stood behind Apollo. "My apologies, Lamiroir, for barging in so suddenly. I hope I wasn't disturbing something important."

"It's no trouble," Lamiroir insisted.

Luke looked a little surprised by her reply, but quickly covered it with another smile.

"We were asking her about the murder," Trucy explained. "If she saw anything."

At that, Luke's face fell, and he turned back to his brother. "I hope you weren't using that exact wording, Apollo," he said.

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"Because," Luke reluctantly explained, "Lamiroir didn't 'see' anything."

Behind him, Apollo heard Lamiroir gasp, but his attention was fully on his brother. "What are you talking about?" he asked, frowning as he stepped forward. "You agreed Mister LeTouse named her as a witness. She even told us just now that 'Lamiroir' means 'the siren' in Borginian!"

"And that's all still true," Luke agreed, his expression sad, as though he didn't want to be discussing the topic. "You two are supposed to be more perceptive of people than I am; I'm a little surprised you didn't notice yourselves. Mister LeTouse was even trying to warn you."

Apollo bristled at the mention of his and Trucy's perception, glaring at his brother as he took another step forward. "Just say what you mean, Luke," he growled. "Stop dancing around the subject."

Luke sighed, shooting the woman behind Apollo a glance. "I apologise for this, Lamiroir." He then met his brother's eyes with a stern look. "Apollo... she's blind."

Trucy gasped, her hands to her mouth as she rapidly turned back and forth between Luke and Lamiroir.

Apollo shot a glance behind him, seeing the singer downcast, her hands tightly clasped at her chest. Scoffing, he turned back to his brother. "Don't be stupid, Luke. Her pianist is the one who's blind. 'Landscape painter in sound', remember?"

"Oh, no," Trucy sighed, eyes watering as she started making connections in her head, her fingers idly playing with the lanyard around her neck. "That's the 'image', Polly..."

"Machi Tobaye isn't blind," Luke explained, resting a hand on Trucy's shoulder for comfort. "I caught him staring at me earlier, but he looked away the moment we locked eyes. He can see..."
perfectly well."

Apollo stared for a long moment. "What on earth-?"

A thump behind him stopped Apollo in his tracks, and he spun around to see Lamiroir slumped on her stool, looking suddenly very unsteady, one hand to her face. Without even stopping to think about it, he dashed back to her side to hold the woman firm (left arm across her back, right hand on her upper arm), ensuring she wouldn't fall off with her backside only barely on the green seat. "Lamiroir, are you alright?"

Lamiroir gently nodded, regaining enough control of herself to sit down properly on the stool, allowing Apollo to release his grip. "I'm... I'm alright."

It was then Apollo noticed Luke appearing at her left, opposite from his brother, hands held out in case the woman collapsed again and eyes wide in concern. "I-I'm so sorry, Lamiroir, I didn't mean to upset you! Did you want me to keep it to myself?!"

"No, it... it was going to be explained anyway," Lamiroir sighed, her hand lowering from her face. Apollo noticed her hand moving vaguely towards him and instinctively went to take it in his grip... but, as he clasped her right hand in his, he caught a glimpse of something gold under her cloak... something gold that came into full view as her cloak fell away, her arm twisting to accommodate her tight grasp on the young man, seeking his support.

A bracelet.

A bracelet Apollo was all too familiar with.

Trucy gasped somewhere to Apollo's right, but he wasn't paying attention, his wide eyes locked on the object on the woman's wrist. "L-Lamiroir... your bracelet..." He looked up to her face, finally making himself acknowledge the unfocused, unseeing gaze of those icy grey eyes. "May I... ask where you came by it?" 'Oh no those are Trucy's eyes that's why she was reminding me of Trucy earlier...'

Lamiroir subtly frowned. "I... I'm afraid to say I do not know," she admitted. "I do not know the English word for it, but... 'Lamiroir' is not my true name. I remember nothing of the time before I was given it... before I started singing on stage." Her eyes closed. "This bracelet comes from that time, before everything. I hold on to it because it gives me comfort... even if I do not remember why."

As Apollo stared at Lamiroir's face, he was vaguely aware of Luke watching his siblings carefully. "I think that's called 'amnesia'," the younger brother told Lamiroir. "Your condition, I mean. Have you been unsuccessful regaining your memory?"

Lamiroir shook her head. "I... That is difficult to talk about."

"Then we won't press you," Apollo assured her, moving his left hand to grip hers tighter; He didn't miss that it brought their matching bracelets so close together. "We're sorry for bringing it up."

A rapid padding of boots echoed through the room, and Apollo looked up just in time to catch a flash of Trucy's cape as she fled into the hallway. "Truce?" he called.

"Is your sister alright?" Lamiroir asked.

Apollo met Luke's eyes, seeing his brother's worried look. The vet glanced to the door, and Apollo nodded. "I'm sorry, Lamiroir," he told the woman. "I need to check on her."
Lamiroir nodded as the young man placed her hand back in her lap. "I understand."

Apollo stepped back, keeping his gaze on Lamiroir just long enough to see Luke pull over a stool to sit at her side, picking up his brother's watch... then the elder Wright ran for the door.

View the Court Record
As he pulled the door to the dressing room closed behind him, Apollo instantly located his sister, standing a few metres away in the direction of the stage, her back to her brother and her head drooped. "Trucy?" he softly called, running up behind her and standing warily just within arm's reach of her back, not wanting to scare her even further away by touching her if it wasn't welcome. "Truce?"

Trucy was shaking, ever so subtly, and sniffed loudly. "She doesn't recognise us..."

Apollo felt his heart breaking, seeing his sister in distress. After a moment, he rested a hand on her shoulder. "No," he quietly agreed. "She doesn't. And we can't make her."

With another loud sniff, Trucy turned to look up at Apollo, tears streaming down her face. "Why!? Why can't we tell her!?"

"You know why," Apollo sighed, keeping his voice low. "She's blind. She has amnesia. How do you think she'd react if we told her who we are? Who she is?"

Trucy's anger faded as her gaze fell to the floor. With a single step forward, she pressed herself against her brother's chest, where she was immediately enveloped in a hug (though Apollo moved just as much to get her top hat out of his face as to rest a hand on the back of her head). "It's not fair," she mumbled into his vest.

"No," Apollo whispered in reply. "No, it's not."

The siblings stood like that for a while, neither paying any attention to the time passing. Apollo was minutely aware of every movement his sister made as her sobs slowly died down, listening to her irregular breathing slow and again become uniform. As for himself, as much as he might have liked to just pour his heart out as Trucy did, Apollo found he was too numb to really react to the shocking revelation. They had been hoping for six years to find their mother, to work out what had truly happened to her, why she left Trucy the way she did... and now they'd indeed found her, happened upon her thinking they were merely meeting an idol on the invitation of a certain frenemy of the family. And they weren't going to get any of the answers they wanted.

No. It was not fair.

Apollo's musings were broken by a clatter from behind him, and he half-spun on the spot, clinging tighter to Trucy, twisting to see what was going on. In his arms, he felt Trucy pushing to also look around, rubbing at her face with one hand.

"We meet again!"

The caped man in yellow, the one who'd been hiding in the vents, stood proudly by the vending machine, spinning a pink cane in one gloved hand. Apollo's eyes narrowed as he wondered if the already-suspicious figure had been spying on their conversation; His smirk was far too... egotistical for Apollo's liking.
Trucy gasped, pushing herself out of her brother's grasp as she madly wiped the last of the tears from around her eyes, a massive grin on her face. "Uncle Valant! It's you!"

"Yes, it is!" the man replied, bowing ostentatiously to the pair. "The Great Valant Gramarye! As seen on television."

Apollo felt his free hand (the one not still holding Trucy's hat) curl into a fist. 'I knew it.' The smirk on the man's face was still getting on his nerves, too.

"It's been a while, Miss Trucy," Valant continued, walking closer to the pair and focussing on the younger of them. "Seven years to be exact! My, how you've grown!"

"Good to see you again, Uncle Valant!" Trucy replied, curtsying then bouncing forward a few steps to meet him. "You... look exactly the same!"

Apollo thought he looked visibly older, but he wasn't going to say anything; Aside from the new moustache and faint wrinkles, he swore he could see some grey in Valant's hair. He forcefully relaxed his fist, adjusting the brooch pinned to his tie. There was no use in being rude, as Luke would say. "It's a pleasure to meet you, sir." He smiled as he stepped forward, almost surprising himself at how genuine he felt.

"He is an actual professional magician, I suppose. No shortage of things to admire about that."

Valant laughed, brushing off Apollo's greeting. "Ah, and who is your friend here, young Trucy?"

Trucy giggled. "That's Polly!"

"Apollo," her brother quickly corrected, holding out a hand to shake. "I'm Trucy's brother."

Valant froze, his confident smirk vanishing in an instant. After a moment, he looked Apollo up and down, then shook his head, the smile coming back to his expression. "Yes you are," he quietly said, and shook the young man's hand.

Apollo felt his suspicions rising again.

"What are you doing here, Uncle Valant?" Trucy asked, bouncing on her heels.

Valant laughed, already back to his old self. "Ah, my presence was petitioned by the purple prosecutor," he admitted. "But when I saw you here Miss Trucy, the first time in seven years..." He rested a hand on his forehead, palm outwards, an overly sad expression on his face. "I could fain contain my emotions! I wept oceans!"

"Aww!" Trucy sighed, her hands pressed to her cheeks as her eyes shone. It was clear she was happy to go along with the man's over-dramatic version of events.

Apollo raised an eyebrow, but decided to leave it. "So that teleportation illusion during the Guitar's Serenade... That was your work?"

"Yes!" Valant cried, snapping back to normal and again twirling his cane. "I am here to watch my trick take to the air."

At that, Apollo couldn't help a slow smile; That was indeed impressive.

"A simple sleight-of-hand, a petit prestidigitation," Valant continued, chest puffed out in pride. "A modicum of magic from me," he paused only long enough to bow to the pair, tipping his hat to them, "to you."
"It was wonderful, Uncle Valant!" Trucy cried.

Apollo nodded in agreement, and cast a glance up to the air vent above the vending machine. "I was thinking about how you did it... The air vents, right?"

Valant looked suddenly uncomfortable.

"Oh, it's okay Uncle Valant," Trucy hurried to assure him. "Polly is a magician too."

"Ah, I see!" Valant cried, relaxing. "Of course you are."

Apollo gave him an apologetic smile, holding up his hands. "Sorry, yeah, I'm not asking you outright to explain it. It's just habit to dissect any tricks I see... see if Trucy and I can make use of them in our show." He pointed to the ceiling. "The air vents are how you kept disappearing earlier, aren't they?"

Valant smiled knowingly, holding his cane to the brim of his hat. "I am like a deity, with the stage as my domain!" he proclaimed. "I suffer no mystery upon those floodlit boards not grasped tightly 'twixt my fingers. It is a potent, primeval power I possess."

"So that's a yes then?" Apollo replied, grinning.

"My illusions are mine alone," Valant only said, though he gave Apollo a smile. He turned to Trucy and performed another elaborate bow. "And now, I, Valant Gramarye, must make my leave, Miss Trucy, Sir Apollo."

Trucy blinked in surprise. "Oh, there's no need to rush, Uncle Valant!"

"I am afraid I must not linger," Valant replied, his smile as he gazed at Trucy now seeming more soft. "Perhaps I will see the two of you tomorrow at your home. I was planning to visit."

"Really?" Apollo asked, surprised. Surely Valant knew Phoenix lived there too, and had suspected the magician of murder since they first met in court?

Although she was sad to see him go, Trucy reluctantly nodded. "Okay. We'll see you there?"

Valant grinned, slowly walking backwards and away from the siblings. "Correct! In a while, alligator!" With a twirl of his cape and a wink of his eye, he spun around... and walked away, disappearing around the corner.

Apollo rolled his eyes. As much as he resented Valant for the murder of Magnifi... he had to admit he was really warming up to the over-dramatic magician.

Trucy suddenly yawned, the glee at reuniting with her magician uncle fading rapidly from her face. "That was nice," she whispered, drooping in place as her eyes remained closed. "Getting to catch up with Uncle Valant again..."

Apollo watched his sister warily, seeing how drained she was, and he couldn't blame her. 'Ideally, I'd get her home, but that's out of the question still... and she can't continue the investigation like this.' Looking around, he quickly took note of the nearby bench, where the three Wrights had waited together after the murder. 'That'll do.' He moved over to where Trucy stood, placing his hands on her shoulders. "Why don't we sit down for a bit, huh?"

Trucy didn't protest as she was guided over to the bench, watching blearily as Apollo put her hat down on the trunk, then unpinned her cape. "Polly...?"
Apollo gestured to the bench, waiting for his sister to reluctantly sit down. He promptly sat at her side, slipping her brooch into a pocket before throwing the cape over Trucy like a blanket. As she registered what he was doing, she leaned into her brother's side, resting her head on his shoulder, and Apollo wrapped his arms around her in a tight hug. "Comfy?" he whispered.

Trucy nodded.

"Good." Apollo rested his head on top of Trucy's, and they fell into a relaxed silence.

No matter what life may throw at them... the Gramarye-Wright siblings would always have each other.

View the Court Record
"Again, I'm very sorry about all that, Lamiroir," Luke said, fidgeting in his stool at the singer's side. "I-if I'd known about your amnesia, I would've..."

"Please, I am alright now," Lamiroir insisted, smiling from her seat. "As you said, you did not know. I can trust it's not a mistake you would make twice."

Luke hurriedly nodded, before remembering she couldn't see him. "Y-yes, of course." He still couldn't quite believe it; Lamiroir was...? Even now, her hands were idly replacing her cloak back over the telltale bracelet, hiding it once again from sight. The worry for his siblings was rising in the back of Luke's throat, and he hoped beyond hope Apollo and Trucy were okay in the aftermath of their unexpected discovery.

"I should apologise on Machi's behalf," Lamiroir said, "and explain."

Luke blinked in shock at being dragged from his train of thought, his gaze snapping back to the woman's face. "Explain?"

"Why he was staring at you earlier," the singer continued, a small smile visible under her veil. "He said he recognised you, from some old articles he used to read to me."

"Arti?- Oh!" One of Luke's hands clapped over his mouth as he suddenly recalled why his face might have been in a newspaper. "You mean, you've been reading about Professor Layton?"

Lamiroir nodded. "Yes. He is supposed to be able to solve any problem."

Luke grinned eagerly. "Oh yes, he can! Any puzzle, big or small, Professor Layton can solve them all!" He giggled at the rhyme, something Emmy had come up with when he was young - The pair of them would cheer it occasionally between cases, mostly for the odd looks said Professor would give them in return. It was something he'd never realised he'd missed once Emmy left.

"I'm glad to hear it," Lamiroir replied, looking thoughtful. "I once thought... I considered asking him to solve the 'puzzle' of my past. It was Machi's idea, truthfully." Her eyes closed. "He still tries to convince me, now and then."

Luke frowned, head cocked to one side in confusion. "Why didn't you? He'd be glad to help. The Professor helps anyone who comes to him with a worthy cause... and you're not the first singer to do so, either."

Lamiroir sighed. "I... am afraid," she admitted. "I do not fear the darkness I live in, but I do fear the darkness in my heart." She pressed a hand to her chest. "I tried, for many years, to clear the fog of my memories, but they would not come... only the feeling of great pain. Whatever is in my past... I think I am better off not knowing."

Again, Luke's gaze drifted to the door, and he wondered how his siblings were doing. He couldn't pass by this chance to reunite them with their mother. "Lamiroir, I understand you don't want to
know... but..." He sighed. "Actually, the Professor's son and daughter are in town visiting me right now, with their uncle and a friend of theirs, the Professor's former assistant. Let me introduce you to them, once this investigation is over. If you ever change your mind, at least then getting in touch with Professor Layton will be easy."

Lamiroir thought a long moment, her head turned in Luke's direction. "That's very generous of you."

"It's the least I can do," Luke insisted. "It's a gentleman's job to help a lady in need; I wasn't the Professor's apprentice for nothing."

Under her veil, Lamiroir smiled, her eyes twinkling. "I suppose not. You saw through my and Machi's act, after all."

Luke blushed, giggling in embarrassment as he scratched the back of his head. After a moment of silence however, his smile faded. "That reminds me..." He shook his head, his hands resting in his lap. "Lamiroir, I should state this outright: With the evidence they have now, the police are going to arrest Machi for the murder."

Lamiroir gasped. "Wh-what!? But Machi didn't shoot him!"

Luke nodded, briefly forgetting the woman couldn't see him... though he did pick up her word choice, filing it away for later. "Apollo and a detective heard the shots from the hall outside. When they came in, only Mister LeTouse was in the room. The only other exit is the air vent, up a ladder by the door." He sighed. "There are only two people backstage small enough to fit through that vent, and one of them has a rock-solid alibi... The other is Machi. No matter the evidence against it, they're going to arrest him."

"But he did not-!" Lamiroir began to argue, only to stop, apparently recognising that Luke was only stating facts. She clasped her hands together, frowning in distress.

"I know it couldn't have been Machi," Luke continued, "but I also know there is no way anyone larger than him was in the room when Apollo and the detective heard those shots. Somehow, you witnessed what happened in that room, and Mister LeTouse knew you did. Anything you know, however small, could be what we need to prove Machi's innocence."

Lamiroir closed her eyes, deep in thought. "This... is difficult," she sighed. "I still do not understand how what you are saying can be possible... but there is not much I can say to explain myself." She screwed her eyes shut. "I am sorry, my English is not perfect."

"No, I understand," Luke assured her, then crossed his arms, a hand resting on his chin. "Let me think..." He hummed in thought, running over all the information in his head. Knowing Lamiroir was a witness, and how Apollo and Ema had come across the body... he had to admit, he found it confusing too. There was only one other place the singer could be to have heard what was going on in the dressing room, but placing her there completely blocked all possible exits for the shooter.

There was much more to LeTouse's death than he'd initially suspected.

Luke shook his head, then returned his attention to Lamiroir, who was waiting patiently. "If I'm correct... May I ask when exactly you heard the shots?"

"When?" Lamiroir repeated, a little surprised. "Well... It was during my performance, of course," she said. "I was in a hurry, just passing by, so I didn't have the time to report it."

Luke's eyes widened. "During your performance?"
"Yes," Lamiroir continued. "There is something like a little window... I heard everything through it as I passed."

"Of course!" Luke quietly exclaimed to himself, a grin growing on his face. "The teleportation illusion!" He laughed. "I suspect you've been sworn to silence on the details, if the magician that planned it is worth their salt!"

Sighing in relief, Lamiroir nodded. "Yes, I am. I'm afraid I cannot speak in detail about why I was... well, where I was."

"No, don't worry, I understand," Luke assured her. "My brother and sister are magicians, so I know what's it like." He leaned back on the stool, thinking. "This explains those fragments... It was all a set-up for when Apollo and Detective Skye were in the hall..."

"I heard more than just the two shots," Lamiroir offered. "Mister LeTouse was talking to someone... a grown man."

Luke perked up at that. "Did you recognise their voice?"

"Unfortunately, no," the singer admitted. "But, should I ever hear them again, I am sure I would. When I hear a voice, I do not forget it."

"They were undoubtedly the shooter," Luke muttered to himself, rubbing his chin. "And Mister LeTouse must have seen his face if they were talking, so it means something that he didn't know who this shooter was..." He nodded firmly, giving Lamiroir a determined look. "Lamiroir, I must ask, as unpleasant as it is, please reflect on everything you remember of what you heard. Any small detail you can recall could help us find this man."

Lamiroir nodded, her face mirroring Luke's even though she couldn't see him - She must have heard his steely resolve in his voice. "I will," she promised.

Luke smiled. "Thank you, ma'am. You've been a great deal of help."

The woman's expression softened, almost amused. After a short pause, she asked, "Is this what it's like when the famous Professor Layton takes on a case?"

At first, Luke was confused, but then it registered she was comparing him to his former mentor, and he blushed. "Oh, uh..." He giggled, rubbing the back of his head. "I-I don't know how I'd compare to the Professor, but I do my best to live up to him!" His laughter faded as his hands clasped together in his lap, a frown settling on his face. "But... even when the Professor was in charge... it did always seem to get worse before it got better." His frown deepened, staring off into space. "I don't have the same reputation amongst the local police that he does with Scotland Yard, either."

Lamiroir, looked away, saddened. "Will you be able to protect Machi?"

It broke Luke's heart to admit it, but he couldn't lie to the mother of his siblings... especially not about her adoptive child. "I'm... sorry. I can only promise I'll do my absolute best."

The singer simply nodded, accepting his response. "That is all I can ask."

"But be sure to tell the police everything you've told me," Luke continued. "Even on its own, it may convince them Machi is innocent."

Lamiroir frowned, concerned. "There are some things we have discussed I am under contract to not mention," she said, again looking determined, "but I will tell them everything I can if it will save
Machi.

Luke smiled triumphantly, straightening in his seat. "That is all I can ask, ma'am."
He couldn't see her face, but Apollo suspected Trucy's stillness, except for her slow, regular breathing, was because she had fallen asleep. He wished he could join her, after their roller-coaster of a night, but sleeping for him was out of the question; He had to watch out for her, keep her company and keep her safe until she was back home in her bed, and he would gladly stay up all night (or morning, considering it was past midnight now) in that empty hallway (if Klavier's ridiculous lockdown lasted that long) for his little sister's sake. The boredom of the wait was only kept from being mind-numbing by the fact that Apollo's mind was already numb. After the murder, and then happening upon Lamiroir's true self purely by chance... He didn't want to even think about it anymore. He kept his focus on Trucy. All he cared about at that moment was her.

Occasionally a member of the concert staff would walk past, though they paid the Wright siblings little more than a glance; Apollo didn't know any of them anyway, so he was happy to ignore them back. He had no idea how many were ordinary backstage crew or members of the police, given they were all dressed very similarly... although he did spot the other three Gavinners running past in a rush, and idly found himself wondering what kind of jobs they boasted as being connected to law enforcement.

Finally, the door to Lamiroir's dressing room opened, and Klavier emerged, Ema at his back. He noticed the two Wrights nearby with surprise, but gave Apollo a small nod and smile before turning his attention back to Ema. "The important thing now is to find that boy, I suppose. And get those items we discussed analysed by the experts."

Ema huffed at his choice of words, but reluctantly nodded. "Sure."

As if on cue, the door to the Gavinners' dressing room then also opened, Luke quickly slipping out and closing it again behind him. He noticed the four other people gathered around in surprise before turning to Klavier. "Mister Gavin, you can't arrest Machi!"

Klavier's eyebrows shot up momentarily before deepening into a frown. "And why can I not, Herr Doktor?"

"Because he's being framed!" Luke cried emphatically, hands curled into fists. "The real murderer has falsified the time of the shooting and is pointing the blame at an innocent child! They can't be allowed to get away with this!"

Klavier sighed, eyes closed. "I will arrest whomever the evidence tells me to arrest," he replied, then gave Luke a stern glare. "Tell me Herr Doktor, is your little claim backed by any evidence?"

"I have testimony," Luke proudly proclaimed, then looked to Ema. "And, Detective Skye, did you take a look at those fragments I told you about?"

Ema nodded, her face flashing a sad look. "They'll have to be analysed before we can say if they're related to the murder."

Luke shrugged. "As long as the analysis comes back before an arrest is carried out, I'm fine with
Klavier sighed and shook his head. "And you would be happy staying here all night, Doktor Wright?" He gestured behind him, to where Trucy was slumped unresponsive against Apollo's shoulder. "I am not sure your sister would agree with you."

Luke only gave the teen a pained look, sharing a quick glance with Apollo to check both his siblings were alright. He then turned back to Klavier, his resolve stronger than before. "Trucy is the same age as Machi," he pointed out. "They're children. A night in this concert hall they can survive, but it would be reprehensible to allow one of them to be jailed for something they didn't do."

Klavier frowned, eyes screwed shut. He stood in deep thought for a long moment, then stepped past and around Luke, heading to the dressing room the vet had just exited. "I apologise, Herr Doktor, but sometimes it is the person we least suspect who is the true culprit."

"In which case," Luke shot back, spinning around to still face the prosecutor, "the person you do suspect is being wrongfully accused!"

Klavier did not reply, disappearing into the dressing room.

Luke sighed, looking frustrated at his own failure to talk Klavier around, then turned back to Ema. "Detective Skye, surely you agree that Machi...?"

Ema's face was downcast. "It's Ema. And I'm sorry, but I can't pick sides. Not even between you and the fop."

"I-I understand," Luke haltingly agreed, though he was clearly upset to lose an ally. "But there's still more evidence for my theory than his."

"I suppose we'll have to see," Ema said. After a pause, she added, "I'll let you know if the analyses agree with you," then disappeared back into the crime scene.

As Ema left, Luke's gaze turned to the floor, a range of emotions mixing across his face. Apollo was about to call out, check his brother was okay, when suddenly Trucy shifted against his shoulder, lifting her head up towards the middle Wright. "Luke?"

Luke blinked in surprise, then turned to the pair with a smile, heading over to where they sat on the bench. "I'm sorry, Trucy. I didn't mean to wake you." He glanced to Apollo. "Are you both okay?"

Apollo nodded, giving his brother a reassuring smile. "We're fine. It's just been a long night."

"Alright," Luke replied, though it was clear his mind was already wandering, his gaze turned towards the crime scene. After a pause, he frowned. "That earpiece... How long has it been there?"

The other two looked over to the abandoned headset on the floor. "I remember seeing it there in the break after Act Two," Apollo said.

Luke gasped. "Of course!" He then turned to his brother with a grin. "If you see anyone picking it up and claiming it, take note of them, okay?"

"Um, okay," Apollo agreed, confused. "Why?"

"It's a part of the frame-up against Machi!" Luke continued. "They must have been specifically waiting until there were people in the hall as witnesses to set off the fake gunshots!"
At that, Trucy shot up out of Apollo's grip, her cape slipping from her shoulders. "What!? You mean Polly and Ema...!?"

Apollo frowned, thinking back to the loud bangs he'd heard as his gaze turned to the vending machine. "We were arguing at the time..."

Luke had apparently stopped listening, pulling Apollo's Court Record out of his satchel to take a photo of the abandoned earpiece. "Surely the sheer amount of supposedly 'circumstantial' evidence helping my case will convince Mister Gavin," he muttered to himself, and sighed as he put the computer away again, still glaring at the device on the floor. "If Lamiroir can't convince him, then..."

Suddenly Apollo remembered why they'd been talking to Lamiroir before their rather rude discovery. "She told you what she witnessed?"

"After some convincing," Luke replied, turning to his siblings with a smile. "I'll give you the full story later."

"Sounds good," Trucy sighed, leaning back against Apollo. As her brother smiled and began to drape her 'blanket' back up over her shoulders, she added, "Will they be letting us go home soon?"

Luke shrugged, and was about to reply when footsteps echoed from towards the stage, and he looked over to see the source. A moment later, Daryan Crescend rounded the corner, striding purposefully towards the Wrights. Luke stepped to the side, giving the man a friendly nod and a "Detective," in acknowledgement, but the man only grunted in reply, passing the trio and disappearing into the Gavinners' dressing room.

Trucy hummed to herself as she watched the door close. "He must have a lot on his mind."

Apollo nodded in agreement. "It probably bugs all of them that a murder happened right under their noses," he pointed out. "And during a performance, too."

Luke was frowning in thought, staring after the man. "The band members..."

"What about them?" Apollo asked.

"Oh, that reminds me!" Trucy cried, her head lifting from Apollo's shoulder as she fixed her other brother with a grin. "Luke, I haven't told you what I found out about the lyrics!"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Here we go..."

Luke seemed intrigued. "Lyrics?"

"To the Guitar's Serenade!" Trucy explained. "Mister Gavin was telling us earlier how those keys of his we found, they were stolen this morning! Then I realised they matched a line in the song about taking keys that 'my heart held on to so tight'!"

"And after that," Apollo picked up, "there's the 'burning' line, about his guitar, then lines about a bullet and taking 'my life away', about the murder."

"It's all in order, too!" Trucy finished, her chest puffing out with pride. "And I spotted it!"

Luke didn't immediately reply, arms crossed against his chest as he stroked his goatee. "Interesting..."

"Unless they've been spreading it around, only Gavin and that detective friend of his know about it," Apollo added, smiling. "They were arguing because Detective Crescend missed a cue on stage."
"Did you notice that, Luke?" Trucy asked. "Mister Gavin was really upset about it."

It took a moment for Luke to respond. "N-no, I didn't notice a missed cue," he insisted, then uncrossed his arms, giving his siblings an intense stare. "But on the subject of the Guitar's Serenade, I trust you two have an idea of how that teleportation illusion was carried out?"

Apollo and Trucy would have shared a confused look had their current position allowed them to. "Why?" Apollo asked, wary.

"As long as you do," Luke replied, smiling. "It's related to the murder, I promise."

View the Court Record
Before Apollo could ask what Luke meant, the door to the Gavinners' dressing room opened again, admitting into the hallway two full-grown men in the midst of another argument.

"I know I left it in there, man! This is a serious offence!"

"Not as serious as our missing pianist. Your guitar isn't going to go anywhere; Someone will hand it in before long."

"Aw, come on, Geeter's more like a missing person, not lost 'n' found..."

Luke again stepped to the side, out of the pair's way. "Mister Gavin, did you-?"

"If any of you three see a guitar," Klavier interrupted, waving to the trio and ignoring Daryan's protests behind him, "return it to our dressing room, ja? And," he stepped towards them, specifically focussing on Apollo and Trucy, "should you see young Machi Tobaye, let me know. He's run off somewhere."

Luke's eyes narrowed. "Only because you want to question him, right?"

"All entrances and exits are sealed," Klavier continued, ignoring the vet, "so he'll be somewhere in the building." He then turned back to Daryan, giving them (Luke especially) no opening to reply. "If you're so worried about your guitar Daryan, go check the stage. Maybe you left it there." With that, he turned and disappeared into the crime scene.

Daryan huffed, crossing his arms. "Check the stage... Ha! As if I'd forget where I left it..."

Apollo found his grip on Trucy tightening.

Luke sighed. "Why don't I check the stage?" he suggested. "If you have somewhere you think is more likely to look, Detective."

Daryan, paused, looking Luke up and down, then grinned. "If you insist." His grin died. "Geeter's a Gibson SG, red. Vintage too, so be careful if you find it."

Although none of Daryan's description meant anything to Luke, he nodded and turned to face the stage. "I'll be careful," he promised.

"Oh, actually," Daryan continued, rushing to catch up to him, "I'd better go with you, Paperboy. Can't let you be alone if the killer walks by, huh?" He laughed loudly.

Luke gave the man an odd look, pausing his walk. "'Paperboy'?" A hand hesitantly drifted to his cap.

"C'mon, let's find my Geeter!" Daryan cried, waving for Luke to follow as he continued to stride towards the stage.

Trucy gave Luke a small wave as he left, then settled back down against Apollo's shoulder. "Wake
me when they're letting us go home..."

"Sure," Apollo promised, hugging her tighter. He was grateful her position meant she couldn't see
the worried look Apollo was giving Luke as he disappeared around the corner with Daryan.

The walk to the stage was mostly quiet, to Luke's relief. Right now, Daryan and his three bandmates
were the obvious candidates for the 'grown man' with the alibi for Act Three and not Act Two; Why
else would they have set up the situation Apollo and Ema walked in on if not to give themselves an
alibi? What's worse, with all of them being Klavier's friends and connected to law enforcement,
Klavier himself wasn't going to suspect them the way anyone else would. It made Luke sick to think
that, given the chance, Klavier would choose to send an innocent teenage boy to his death to let a
friend walk free.

Strange how he was suddenly agreeing with Apollo when it came to the subject of Klavier Gavin.

The stage was awash in red floodlights as it came into view at the top of the stairs. To one side was a
stand with two guitars resting inside, but, with one a bright sparkly pink and the other a dull wood
beige, it was clear neither was Daryan's beloved Geeter.

Daryan sighed as he checked inside a nearby contrabass case. "I told him I didn't leave it on stage,
but does the diva ever listen to reason?" he darkly muttered, throwing up his hands.

Luke stepped forward to the edge of the stage, looking out over the audience. It was strange, seeing
all those empty red chairs that had been filled with people for most of the night... plus, although he'd
been on stages before, it had been a very long time since he'd been on one with a potential audience
of that size.

"You're the violin player, right?"

Luke turned in surprise, giving Daryan a nod. "Yes, I play the violin."

Daryan smirked, walking past Luke to the grand piano, and tapped out a few notes on the keys.
"Classical guy, huh? Hope our show today taught you a little about modern music."

At that, Luke raised an eyebrow. "Just because I play the violin, it doesn't mean-" He then stopped,
his gaze caught on the high platform raised above the stage. "Wait, why is the tower up? That was
lowered when the concert finished, wasn't it?" He jogged towards it, examining around the base to
find some way of climbing it. "How do we retract it?"

There was a loud sigh from behind him, and a clatter; A moment later, Daryan appeared at his side
with an extendible ladder, securing it against the side of the tower. "No idea," he replied. "Quicker to
see if there's anything up there before running for help." He promptly began to climb.

Luke cast a wary glance back at the wings. "Why can't we just...?" He cut himself off with a groan,
deciding to leave it; Clearly Daryan just wanted to climb the tower. He folded his arms and leaned
against the red grate covering the lift mechanisms within.

The regular thudding of Daryan's footsteps up the ladder came to a halt. "Whoa!" Luke looked up
just in time to see the man disappearing on top of the tower. "Looks like Geeter found our missing
person!"

"What!?" Luke cried, then grabbed at the ladder himself, dashing up it as fast as humanly possible.
Sure enough, when he crested the top of the five-metre tower, there was Machi, lying curled up
Daryan was towered over the boy, pulling his guitar from Machi's grip with a stern look. He noticed Luke pulling himself up on the platform with surprise, waving the vet away. "Hey hey hey! It's dangerous up here, you get back down and run for help!"

"Why don't you?" Luke shot back, running to Machi's side. "It's just as dangerous for you as for me." He turned his attention to the teenager, quickly noting the boy appeared to be unconscious. "Machi?" he called, turning him on his back and carefully removing his sunglasses. "Machi, can you hear me?"

"And it's even more dangerous to be messing around with the kid!" Daryan hissed, stepping back with his guitar firmly in hand. "What if he wakes up and tries to push you off, huh?"

At that, Luke gave the man a glare. "That's utter nonsense," he calmly replied. "Tell me, why else would he be up here and unconscious unless he was attacked and put here deliberately?"

Daryan almost seemed to pale under Luke's accusing gaze, but blew it off with a snort. "I dunno, maybe he's narcoleptic!" he cried, crossing his arms and rolling his eyes. "Or maybe he's scared of heights! Why'd he steal my Geeter, that's what I want to know!"

Luke frowned, but decided to let it go, returning his attention to his 'patient'; He wasn't a human doctor, but he at least knew basic first aid. Pressing a finger to Machi's neck, he quickly established the boy had a pulse, and a hand held above his mouth and nose indicated the boy was breathing.

Daryan sighed, then threw his guitar's strap over his shoulder, slinging it over his back. "Whatever. Don't come crying to me if the kid breaks your neck." With that, he began to climb back down the ladder.

Luke just ignored him, busy rolling Machi onto his side again and moving the teen's head to face up and away from his body: The classic recovery position. While the boy was still, arms and legs locked together to keep him from rolling, Luke ran a hand gently through Machi's hair, looking for any signs of bleeding. "How'd they hurt you, huh?" he quietly asked. "Why'd they drag you up here with...?"

He paused, then looked back in the direction Daryan had disappeared. Over the edge of the tower, he could see the white tip of the man's pompadour as he ran through the wings, likely heading for Klavier.

Suddenly Luke's shortlist was even shorter.

Machi shivered, eyes still screwed shut. He muttered something quietly in Borginian.

"Machi?" Luke whispered, and stopped to check Daryan was gone before sitting back from the boy, giving him space. "It's okay, Detective Crescend is gone."

Slowly, Machi's eyes blinked open, revealing bright blue eyes that locked on to Luke's with a fearful gaze.

"Are you alright?" Luke asked, grabbing the teen's sunglasses to offer them back to him. 'What am I doing? I know he doesn't speak English...'

Machi didn't reply, carefully retrieving his sunnies to put them back on. He pushed himself up into a sitting position, hugging his knees. This time, he spoke a bit more confidently, a string of words Luke couldn't pick out followed by two he knew very well: "- Hershel Layton?"

Luke blinked in surprise, then smiled. "Ah, apprentice," he said, only to then mentally kick himself
for using a word Machi *definitely* wouldn't know. He pointed at himself. "Luke Triton."

Machi nodded, and Luke could only hope that indicated he understood what Luke meant, if not his words. That would have to be enough.

"I promise I'm going to help you," Luke said, slowly in case Machi could pick out occasional words, and with as much feeling as he could muster. "I know you're not the killer. Lamiroir knows it too. We've just got to prove it to Prosecutor Gavin." He cast a dark glare in the direction of the wings. "Admittedly, that's going to be hard if Crescend is the culprit... but I'm not going to let that stop me." He looked back to Machi, who was still quietly watching him, expressionless. "Would you be able to trust me?"

There was a short pause, then Machi nodded, giving Luke a small smile.

Despite his relief, Luke hoped the boy wasn't just being polite in answering a question he hadn't understood a word of.

[View the Court Record]
Suddenly the tower shuddered under Luke and Machi, the pair stabilising themselves on the floor with their hands as the platform began to lower. Luke looked around for the ladder Daryan had set up, but saw no sign of it; He could only assume the guitarist had put it away again as he left. In the wings, it wasn't hard to spot Klavier, Daryan at his back, walking towards the lowering tower with a frown. Instinctively, Luke scuttled closer to Machi, holding an arm around the boy's back protectively. "It's okay," he muttered, as much for himself as for Machi. "It's going to be alright." He spotted a flash of blue in the darkness, and was surprised to see his siblings, Apollo holding Trucy's hat with her cape slung over his arm and Trucy clinging to her brother's elbow, dragging him forward to the stage.

Machi seemed to shrink into himself, pressing his face into his knees and hugging his legs tight. Luke pressed tighter against his back, shooting a glare at Klavier as the platform reached two metres high, then one, then folded back into the stage with a thud.

Klavier and Luke stared each other down for a very long moment, Luke daring Klavier to make a move and Klavier silently ordering Luke to move. When it became clear the young vet wasn't going to budge, Klavier gestured to Machi. "Go ahead, Daryan."

"No!" Luke cried, jumping to his feet, though he knew better than to try and physically stop Daryan as he grabbed Machi's upper arm and roughly dragged the teen to his feet. "You're making a mistake! Machi is innocent!"

"I have yet to see any evidence saying so," Klavier coldly replied as Daryan dragged Machi away, the teen's head held low as he meekly followed the taller man.

Luke's hands curled into fists. "Have you even looked?" he shot back. "Did you listen to Lamiroir at all!?"

"I'm tempted to ask you that," Klavier said. "You cannot call yourself an investigator and blindly trust people, Doktor Wright." He turned and began to walk away.

"How dare you!" Luke shouted, seething with rage as he stomped after the taller man. "Do you even realise how hypocritical that statement is!? You've just decided the murderer was an innocent fourteen-year-old, and you're not even entertaining the possibility that you're wrong!"

Klavier sighed as he neared the wings, where Apollo and Trucy were watching nervously. "Herr Doktor."

"Don't 'Herr Doktor' me, you fake German!" Luke spat back. "Or are you just that upset that your name is literally 'Piano', that you're willing to send a pianist to his death for no reason!?"

The prosecutor spun back to face Luke, bristling.

"Luke!" Apollo cried, interrupting anything Klavier might have said as he ran around to his brother's side, grabbing a shoulder with his free hand. "L-Luke, c'mon, there's nothing we can do now they've
carried out an arrest, okay? Let's stop before you say something you'll regret."

Luke didn't even glance at his brother, still visibly panting with rage as he glared at the prosecutor across from him.

Klavier sighed, calming down. "You three are free to go. I'd head home if I were you."

Apollo and Trucy gazed at Klavier in surprise, but Luke was still unphased. Finally, without a word, Luke shook off his brother's grip and stomped away, roughly pulling off his ID card and tossing it on the floor. As he passed her, Trucy watched Luke with a worried look, then turned back to Klavier, approaching him nervously. "Mister Gavin?"

Klavier avoided meeting the girl's eyes, a stern frown still on his face. "What is it, Fraulein?"

"Um..." She looked down, too scared to answer, but screw up her courage to again look up at Klavier's face. "You'll... make sure there's someone to look after Lamiroir now, won't you?"

The man blinked, surprised, and turned his head to look down at the worried teen.

"It's just," Trucy continued, "her manager's dead, and now Machi's been taken away, and she's so far from home... she needs someone to help her. Please?"

"Uh, ja," Klavier replied, still watching the girl with vague confusion, "yes, of course."

Trucy nodded, relieved, and Apollo chose that moment to approach her, a hand on his sister's back as he gently guided her away from the stage. "C'mon Truce, let's go home."

July 8, 1:39AM
Wright Anything Agency
Phoenix's Office

Luke had said very little as he drove them back to the Agency, still fuming over his argument with Klavier. To his credit, he didn't take any of it out on his siblings, apologising to them and checking they were okay. Trucy was quick to fall asleep in the back, her head resting against the window, and Apollo had insisted, instead of dropping by his and Clay's apartment (which was closer), that Luke take them straight to the Agency, and he would get Trucy settled in before walking home himself. Luke was reluctant, but eventually agreed, admitting he was too tired to disagree anymore.

The movement of the car parking was enough to cause Trucy to stir, though she looked confused when she saw where they were. "Polly...?"

"Apollo's going to walk you in," Luke told her with a smile.

Apollo nodded as he opened her door. "Let's get you to bed, shall we? It's past one in the morning!"

Luke's car didn't move until both of them were safely inside.

Trucy said nothing as Apollo guided her through the apartment and up to her room, allowing him to partially strip her of her costume before he left her to change into her nightie herself. Once she was done, she mutely followed his instructions to brush her teeth, then crawled into bed. Apollo insisted on tucking her in, giving her one last hug and a kiss on the forehead.
"Thank you, Polly," she whispered with a smile.

Apollo pulled the bow-and-arrows brooch from his tie as he made his way down the stairs, leaving only the hall light on as he went (in case Trucy needed the security of the light under her door). He contemplated digging out his spare cape, the one he had last worn for Phoenix's trial back in April, but wasn't sure it would be worth it; After all, he didn't have a spare pair of gloves, and it felt a little wrong to be missing them while wearing his cape... He had regularly gone without both back when he was working for Kristoph, after all. As he pushed open the door from the kitchen into the office, he noticed the sound of books being shuffled on a shelf, and the occasional fluttering of paper, and paused. "Dad?" He ventured into the room, looking around the door.

Phoenix was stood at one of the bookshelves, his backpack sitting open on the sofa and his hands on the books of the bookcase by the door, opposite where Charley sat. He was looking back at Apollo in surprise, abandoning his search to turn and face his son. "Apollo? What are you doing here?"

Apollo shrugged, stepping a little closer through the piles of magic props. "We got... held up... at the concert. I was just getting Trucy home." He gave his father a curious look. "Aren't you usually back from work later than this?"

Now it was Phoenix's turn to shrug, the man looking a little sheepish as he ran a hand over the beanie on his head. " Eh, I left a little early. Got that secret mission to attend to, so I gotta be up early tomorrow."

"Right," Apollo muttered, nodding absent-mindedly. He forced a small smile. "You ever gonna tell me what it's all about? You said you would."

Phoenix grinned. "I said 'later'," he pointed out, but the teasing expression faded as he watched his son. "What happened? You okay?"

"Yeah, sure," Apollo replied, quickly enough that Phoenix's concerned frown only deepened. "I'm fine, Dad."

After a short pause, Phoenix sighed. "If you say so." He gestured upwards with one hand, pointing to the ceiling. "In case you've forgotten, your old room is always open if you need to stay the night."

At that, Apollo's forced smile became genuine. "Yeah. I might have to take you up on that." He tried to laugh, but it came out as more of a tired sigh. "Thanks, Dad."

Phoenix smiled, shoving his hands in his pockets. "I'd say 'see you tomorrow', but I'll probably be gone by the time you and Trucy emerge in the morning, so I'll just say 'good night'."

Apollo nodded, turning to head back upstairs, but then paused. "Um, Dad?" he asked as he turned back. "Can I ask you something... about your secret mission? Promise not to lie?"

After a surprised moment of silence, Phoenix's frown deepened. "That... will depend on what you're asking, but..." He sighed, shaking his head. "I can promise I'll give an honest answer, even if it's not the one you want."

"Good enough," Apollo decided, fingering the brooch in his hand. "I just wanted to know, if... in your investigation... you'd ever looked into Lamiroir?"

Phoenix blinked, clearly thrown by the question. "L... Lamiroir? The singer?" He shook his head, confused. "Uh, no, I can't say I have... Should I?"

At that, Apollo found himself laughing in relief, though he wasn't entirely sure why in his current
state of exhaustion. "N-no, it doesn’t matter... Forget it." He turned and headed for the door. "Night, Dad."

"Goodnight Apollo," Phoenix replied. He watched his son go with a concerned look... and made a mental note to investigate this 'Lamiroir' immediately.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
"I told you Mommy was still alive!" eight-year-old Trucy Wright crowed as she sat on the edge of the walkway through the garden, kicking her feet back and forth where they dangled.

Sixteen-year-old Apollo rolled his eyes, sat in the middle between his siblings, their backs to the spare room's paper door. "For the last time, I never said she wasn't!"

On Apollo's left, fourteen-year-old Luke shot the pair a glance, then returned his attention to the photo album lying open in his lap, silently studying the pictures within.

It had been no more than ten minutes since Maya had, one after the other, failed to channel either Brenda Triton or Thalassa Gramarye; The double failures, paired with the successful channelling of Clark Triton, had been a shock to everyone residing in Fey Manor that hot summer day. While Maya and Pearl busied themselves cleaning up in the aftermath of a successful channelling, the three Wright children had wandered off into the Winding Way, the events of that morning heavy on their minds. Of Phoenix's location, they had no idea, as he had ventured off further into the mansion shortly before they left the Meditation Room.

"Miss Maya sure showed you!" Trucy continued, proudly grinning and steadfastly ignoring Apollo's protest.

Sighing, Apollo turned his face to the sky. "Fine, think what you want."

"Now we just gotta find where she went," Trucy said, arms crossed. After a pause, she shot Apollo a glare. "And she didn't run away!"

"I told you, that was just a scena-!" Apollo began to object, only to cut himself off and throw his hands in the air. "Okay, you wanna find her? Where was the Troupe living when she disappeared? You were with them, right?"

Trucy paused, suddenly looking nervous. "Um..."

Apollo stared at her a moment in surprise. "You weren't with them!?"

"I was!" Trucy shot back indignantly. "I just..." She shrugged, staring out at the garden. "I don't remember."

"You don't remember," Apollo repeated, giving his sister a disbelieving glare.

"It was a long time ago, okay!?" Trucy pointed out, arms tightly crossed.

Apollo scoffed. "It was four years ago," he replied.

"And that's a really long time!" Trucy cried, promptly sticking out her tongue as a follow-up.
Rolling his eyes, Apollo decided to turn his attention to his other sibling, who was still paging idly through his currently-lone surviving family photo album. "Speaking of investigations, didn't you say you had a few leads for yours now?"

Luke didn't respond, his eyes on a page of photos dedicated to city views, and people in front of buildings.

Trucy leaned forward, watching the younger of her brothers worriedly. "Luke?"

Luke jolted in his seat, meeting Trucy's gaze with wide eyes. "Huh? S-sorry, where you talking to me?"

Apollo and Trucy shared a look before returning their worried eyes to their brother. "Are you okay?" Apollo asked.

"I'm fine," Luke automatically insisted, looking back down at his photos. "I guess I'm just... still processing..."

Suddenly Apollo noticed the photo Luke was specifically looking at: Clark standing proudly with a large, complicated-looking machine at his back, gesturing to it with a grin. "Your dad's dead."

Luke nodded. "Maya said she'd channel him again any time I wanted to talk to him, but... he's still dead. Nothing can change that."

Apollo rested a hand on his brother's shoulder, offering his silent support.

"To make it even worse," Luke continued, closing the album so it stood on its spine in his lap, "Mum's been kidnapped and taken away somewhere, and I have no idea where she is or how she's doing... only that she's still alive." He took a deep breath, and Apollo thought for a moment he was about to cry, but instead Luke simply released all his pent-up tension with a sigh, resting his forehead on top of the photo album; Perhaps he'd done enough crying that day already. "Papa's promised to help, at least. I'd have no idea where to even start otherwise."

Apollo blinked in surprise. "'Papa'?"

Trucy gasped, a massive grin spreading across her face. "Luke! You're calling Daddy...?"

Luke looked up, giving his siblings a small smile. "Yeah, I decided to stop calling him 'Nick'. It was stupid of me to do that in the first place." He turned away again, the smile fading as he lay the photo album down on his legs. "I kept saying I already had a dad, but... I just didn't want to admit I needed another parent. I shouldn't have waited for Dad's permission to let Papa be that for me."

Trucy leaned across Apollo's legs, reaching for Luke's hand in his lap and coming just short without slipping off the deck herself. "It's okay, Luke. Maybe, while Daddy's helping look for your mom, he could help look for our mom too!"

"With what information?" Apollo pointed out, crossing his arms.

Luke giggled, and reached out a hand to grasp Trucy's, resting on their brother's knee between them. "Thank you, Trucy. I'm sure if all four of us join forces, we can find both our mums in no time."

"Yeah!" the girl cried, and fixed Apollo with a grin. "Isn't that right, Polly? You'll help, won't you?"

Apollo sighed, staring up at the sky as his siblings watched with hopeful looks. "They won't be together," he pointed out. "Luke's mom was kidnapped, and ours is just missing."
"You never know," Luke replied, shrugging. "We'll never know, not unless we try. And there's no harm in that, right?" He giggled. "We'll get farther trying than not."

There was a short pause. "Thalassa Gramarye and Brenda Triton... two needles in an Earth-sized haystack." Apollo looked between his siblings with a joking grin. "They shouldn't be that hard to find, right?" As Luke and Trucy laughed, Apollo rested his left hand on theirs, his bracelet glittering in the sunlight. "Let's give it a go."

Finally, Maya and Pearl finished putting out the candles in the Channelling Chamber, then removing the ones that had dripped wax and cleaning the spilt remains from underneath them (dry wax was especially annoying to remove if it was allowed to build up, a lesson Morgan had been very intent on ensuring Maya remembered by allowing one of the shelves in the small room to be filled with dripping candles until they were all caked together, short strings of wicks drowning in the white mass; It had taken the young Maya two entire days to finally clean the shelf, and the floor below it, to her aunt's satisfaction). Maya sent Pearl to go replace the candles they'd removed, an easy job for the girl, then headed off herself to find Phoenix.

The spirit medium found her friend in the guest room that was always his when he came by, sitting on his bed and holding his beanie in his hands, staring at the pink 'PaPa' boldly sprawled across the side. Smiling, Maya cleared her throat, catching Phoenix's attention. "Tired already, old man?"

Phoenix smirked, placing his beanie down on the bed as he stood. "Finished raising the dead?" he replied, his hands shoved in his pants pockets in the absence of his usual hoodie.

Maya laughed and headed into the room, dropping down on the bed at Phoenix's side. "Well, I'd say our mission was a success, huh?"

"'Our' mission?" Phoenix repeated with a chuckle as he rejoined her. "This was entirely your idea."

"And it was a complete success!" Maya boasted. "Maya the Magnificent does it again!"

Phoenix snorted, crossing his arms. "You never fail to be humble, do you?"

The pair laughed, then fell into a comfortable silence. Maya was the first to break it, her smile falling: "You'll keep an eye on Luke, won't you? He claimed to believe they were both dead, but I still think it was a shock for him when I got through to his father. He'll be in mourning now."

"Of course I'll keep an eye on him," Phoenix insisted, then smiled. "He's my son, isn't he?" When Maya glared at him, he just laughed, holding up his hands in surrender. "Hey, c'mon, I'm not going to let my kids be miserable. You know that."

At that, Maya relented with a sigh. "Yeah. You're a pretty amazing dad, Nick."

Phoenix blinked in surprise, resting his hands in his lap. "Uh. Thank you."

Maya blushed, looking away. "Y-y'know, when you want to be," she hurriedly added, blushing harder as she realised her words weren't as insulting as she'd intended.

"Sure," Phoenix replied, hiding a smile. He decided to just take the rare compliment instead of teasing his friend for being unable to turn it into a back-handed one. "Not sure if all of this would
have cured Luke's homesickness for England, but knowing what's happened to his parents probably helped a lot. In unexpected ways, too."

The redness in Maya's face slowly faded, and she nodded in agreement. "Oh yeah, it was 'cause he was homesick we kicked all this off, huh? Don't suppose there's really anything more we can do to help, anyway..." She frowned, then looked up at Phoenix curiously. "Did he mention to you what he and his dad talked about? Surely it wasn't all questions for his investigation."

Phoenix couldn't resist a smirk. "Apparently if I don't look after Luke, Mister Triton is going to haunt my nightmares."

Maya snorted in amusement.

"And Luke's going to call me 'Papa' now instead of 'Nick'," Phoenix continued, "so yeah, I gather they talked about quite a lot. You were in there a long time."

"Yeah, it was like an hour or something in the end, wasn't it?" Maya mused, then, after a moment of thought, looked up at Phoenix with a grin. "And Luke's named you after your beanie. Congratulations, old man."

Phoenix shot her a glare, but couldn't hide his smile. "Shut up, Maya."

View the Court Record
True to Phoenix's word, he was already gone by the time Apollo and Trucy woke up the next day, having admittedly slept in after their late night the previous evening. Trucy was a little surprised to see her brother making breakfast as she came down the stairs, but otherwise seemed back to her cheerful, although quieter than normal, self, bugging Apollo to make some of the 'special occasion' bacon for her too (ignoring Apollo saying he had already been doing so) and generally annoying him as though he had never moved out.

The Bostonius crew arrived just as the pair had finished breakfast and were cleaning up in the kitchen. Apollo invited them in to sit around the table while he finished up, and wait for Luke's eventual arrival. In the meantime, he chased his sister upstairs to get dressed for their visitors.

"So, what happened last night?" Flora asked, watching Apollo from her chair at the table. "We gave them the address Luke sent us, like you told us to."

"Ooh, yeah!" Emmy cried, a massive grin on her face as she leaned forward on her elbows eagerly. "You three didn't get wrapped up in that murder, did you?"

Apollo dropped his scrubbing brush, and had to scramble to recover it from the soapy water of the sink. "U-uh...!?"

"It was in the news this morning," Sycamore explained, raising an eyebrow. "Rather a big story, I understand. Hadn't you noticed?"

Sighing, Apollo shook his head, returning to cleaning the fry pan. "No, we... we just got up. Didn't get home until one in the morning."

"Goodness!" Flora cried in shock, a hand to her mouth. "It's a good thing we didn't wait for you after all, then."

Alfendi was sitting backwards on his chair next to his sister, arms dangling over the back of the seat as he watched Apollo. "Did you see the dead guy?" he asked, smiling hopefully.

Apollo paused only momentarily in his scrubbing, his focus firmly on the sink in front of him. He could feel his throat tightening, and forced himself to reply despite the strained higher pitch that came out. "Does it matter if I did?"

"What's that supposed to mean?" Alfendi scoffed, arms crossed in disapproval.

Sycamore cleared his throat to attract the boy's attention. "Let's leave that question for another time, shall we?" he said.

"But I want to know!"

Ignoring her brother, Flora gave Apollo a smile. "Did you enjoy the concert, Apollo?"
Apollo was sure to shoot her a thankful look, pulling the frying pan out of the sink to dry it with a dishcloth. "I'm glad I went," he admitted, "for Lamiroir, if nothing else. Could have done without the Gavinners, though."

Loud thudding echoed from the stairs, and Trucy came bouncing down them two steps at a time, her cape flapping behind her. "Polly!" she called, with an audible whine. "You can't say that about the best band in the world!"

"According to who?" Apollo shot back, moving to put the dried frying pan back in its drawer.

As Trucy passed the table, Alfendi held his hand out to grab her cape, stopping the teen in her tracks. "Did you see the dead guy?"

"Alfendi!" Flora hissed, grabbing the boy's shoulder and surprising him into dropping the blue fabric in his hand. "Don't be rude!"

"I'm not!"

At Alfendi's question, Trucy had stopped to stare at him with wide eyes, but she quickly recovered, fixing him with a wide grin. "Of course we saw him! We met everyone backstage!" She leaned forward, her hands folded behind her back. "His name was Mister LeTouse! He was super tall, and he had a cool-looking beard, and his voice was all gravelly and low like a lion!"

Alfendi frowned, disappointed. "Wait, you only saw him before he died?"

Sycamore gave the boy a warning glare. "Alfendi, that's enough about the victim for now."

"Lamiroir's song was really good, though," Trucy continued, bouncing into the kitchen to help Apollo dry the plates. "She's the best, isn't she?"

"Way better than the Gavinners," Apollo agreed with a smile, the two magicians sharing a look.

"I didn't know she could sing in English," Emmy said. "She must have practised a long time for that concert."

Flora tapped her cheek thoughtfully. "If you three were backstage, you got to meet her, right?" She grinned, her hands clasped together. "Is she as nice in person as she seems?"

Apollo chuckled, emptying the sink. "What did we just say? She's the best."

"Uh huh!" Trucy agreed, carrying the plates to a cupboard to put away. "We got to sit down and talk to her in the dressing rooms."

Flora sighed wistfully, leaning on the back of her chair. "Aw, you guys are so lucky!"

As Apollo was drying his hands, he heard a distant door closing, and smiled. "Hold up, Luke's here." He turned and headed to the door, Trucy bouncing at his side, opening it to direct a grin at his brother through the office. "Yo."

Luke laughed, giving his siblings a wave. "Hey." They stepped aside to let him through, but he took his time entering the kitchen, giving them both a worried look. "Are you two okay?"

"Sure we are," Trucy assured him.

"We should be asking you that," Apollo replied. He noticed both he and Trucy were still smiling, and reasoned they weren't both actors for nothing. "You were really upset."
Luke sighed, nodding. "I've had time to calm down. It just hurts that we couldn't stop the inevitable..."

A chair squealed against the floor as Flora stood, watching the Wrights with worry. "Um, I don't want to be rude, but... what exactly happened last night? Why were you three held up at the concert hall for so long?"

Apollo, Luke and Trucy shared a look. "I gather you heard about the murder," Luke said, passing his siblings to approach his friends at the table. Apollo stepped towards Trucy, the pair hanging back at the door, and Trucy took her brother's hand without a word.

"It was all over the news," Emmy admitted with a sheepish smile, standing from her chair. "I had to throw together something at the last minute to send my editor, since I'm the closest she has to the incident; She was calling me all excited the minute the news broke."

"Wow, that fast?" Trucy asked.

Emmy smirked. "I don't think she sleeps."

"Emmy's dubious career aside," Sycamore interrupted, waving off Emmy as she crossed her arms and sent him a dark look, "it does worry me that the three of you were kept around all night. I hope none of you came under suspicion."

Luke shook his head. "We counted more as witnesses than anything," he explained. "With the concert hall locked down, we were even trying to help investigate."

"Not that it helped," Apollo sighed, his free hand on his hip. "Gavin made his arrest and we got kicked out, so that's that."

Emmy frowned, tapping her cheek. After a moment, she smiled knowingly and circled the table towards Luke. "You *sure* you won't tell us what happened? Just between friends?"

Luke shot her a glare, crossing his arms. "We're not going to be your sources, Emmy."

"Aw, who said anything about sources?" Emmy asked, leaning on Luke's shoulder with a big grin. "I'm just curious, is all!"

"We can't talk about it anyway," Apollo sighed. "We signed a gag order."

Emmy looked over to Apollo in surprise, then pushed away from Luke with a disappointed look. "Well that's no fun."

"Um, Luke?" Trucy spoke up, breaking away from Apollo to bounce towards her other brother, who turned to face her. "Did you notice, last night? Where they found Machi?"

Luke nodded, a stern look on his face. "The lyrics, right?"

"Yeah!" Trucy cried, pulling the lyrics sheet from her bag and holding it up for Luke to see. "'Guitar, guitar, up together to the sky', just like in the song!"

"What's a song got to do with anything?" Alfendi asked, leaning back so far in his seat he was almost lying down, his chin resting on his chest.

Flora glared as she stood behind her brother's chair, and grabbed his shoulders to pull him up into a proper sitting position.
"It's my theory!" Trucy boasted. "All the events of the murder followed the lyrics of the Guitar's Serenade!"

Emmy gasped. "Lamiroir's ballad?"

"But I thought last night was its debut," Flora added, confused. "How'd they know the lyrics?"

"And why follow them in the first place?" Luke pointed out, arms crossed. "There's no reason to do that."

Sycamore shook his head, standing from his chair, and rested a hand on Luke's shoulder with a sympathetic look. "There's little use worrying about it now. As your brother mentioned, you aren't exactly on the investigative team."


"But Lamiroir's song was amazing, wasn't it?" Trucy gushed, hugging the lyrics sheet to her chest. She then giggled, showing it to Emmy nearby. "Mister Gavin and Lamiroir even gave us a copy of the lyrics with their signatures on it!"

"Wow, that's lucky!" Emmy laughed, admiring the paper.

"Really!?" Flora cried, running around excitedly to also get a look at the sheet in Trucy's grip. She sighed wistfully as she gazed at it, hands clasped together. "Oh, I'm so jealous you got to meet her!"

At that, Luke smiled. "Oh, that reminds me," he paused to giggle, "I got talking to Lamiroir last night-"

Emmy scoffed, waving a hand with a smirk. "Don't boast, Luke."

"I'm not!" Luke protested. "Anyway, it turns out she has," he paused, frowning, "um, this personal problem, and she's also been following Professor Layton in Borginia's papers."

Apollo and Trucy shot each other surprised looks, then turned their astonished gazes on Luke.

Sycamore smiled. "So you've put her in touch with him, I take it?"

"Not... quite," Luke admitted, shrugging. "She's only been considering asking for his help, and actually wasn't going to. She didn't want to bother him or something, I suppose." He smiled sheepishly. "I... well, I convinced her to at least meet you four, while you and her are all in the same place. In case she changes her mind."

Flora and Emmy turned to each other, slow grins growing on their faces. Sycamore looked merely surprised. Alfendi cocked his head to one side, confused, and asked, "Wait, who are we meeting?"

"You're going to introduce us to Lamiroir!?" Flora squealed. "Oh, Luke, you're the best!" She pounced on her friend as he broke into laughter, giving him a tight hug.

"She wouldn't be up for an interview, would she?" Emmy asked, smirking.

Apollo and Trucy shot identical glares at her. "No interviews!" Apollo ordered.

"She has enough going on!" Trucy added indignantly.

Emmy jumped, taken aback by the pair's complaints. "Uh, s-sorry, of course not, I was only joking!"
A voice then echoed through the open doorway of the office, accompanied by the gentle closing of the front door: "Hello? Are you there, Herr Wright?"
Everyone shot confused glances at each other as the softly-accented voice drifted through the air, the Wrights’ eyes all wide in shock. Flora was the first to react, running past her friends with a grin as she dashed through into the office; Alfendi was hot on her heels. "Hello!" she replied, and everyone heard her gasp as she came face-to-face with the visitor. "Oh! Mister Gavin! This is an unexpected surprise!"

Apollo felt his heart drop as he watched Luke's gaze snap to the open door, a hardened glare forming on his face.

"Ah, good morning, Fraulein," Klavier cheerily replied, and there was a short pause as they heard him kiss her hand. "I do not believe we've had the pleasure of meeting before."

"Luke-" Apollo started to say in warning, but his brother wasn't listening, pushing past Apollo and out into the office. After shooting each other worried glances, Apollo and Trucy hurried to follow.

"Flora, get away from him!" Luke demanded, and Apollo rounded the door just in time to see Flora jumping back from the prosecutor in surprise, her space by his side swiftly being claimed by Luke, standing protectively in front of her with a furious glare. "How dare you show your face here after what you did last night! You know as well as I do that Machi is innocent!"

Klavier's surprised look hardened. "I believe you made your thoughts on the subject quite clear already, Doktor Wright. Arresting him was tough for me, too."

"Well you didn't exactly show it!" Luke shot back. "How heartless can you be to arrest a child because you can't be bothered to investigate properly!?"

"Luke!" Apollo shouted, finally catching up to his brother and grabbing his arm to pull him back. Behind them, he noticed Flora guiding Alfendi away from the confrontation, back to the relative safety of the area around Phoenix's desk, where Trucy, Emmy and Sycamore had gathered. "Luke, calm down!"

Luke was still seething, his eyes locked on Klavier, but he listened enough to his brother to quieten down. "I can't believe I stood up for you," he spat in the prosecutor's direction, then shook his arm from Apollo's grip and stalked out of the room.

Sycamore sighed. "I'll check on him," he offered, and quickly followed the young vet, closing the door behind him.

Klavier shook his head, the stern look on his face turning to a tired smile. "Your brother would have made a fearsome attorney, Herr Wright," he said, "had he chosen a different path."

Apollo was a little surprised to hear that, but found he had to agree. "Yeah, probably." He doubted it had ever occurred to Luke, though; A career in law had always been Apollo's dream, and he knew his younger brother would never have wanted to step on the elder Wright's toes by doing the same thing. "Why are you here, Prosecutor Gavin?"
Klavier played with his hair, giving Apollo his usual easy-going grin. "I was going to apologise for being so upset last night, but I don't believe Herr Doktor wants to hear it." He shook his head. "No matter. The powers that be have determined their culprit; It is vital that this case be wrapped up swiftly, especially since Lamiroir was invited to this country as an ambassador of goodwill."

Apollo sighed, crossing his arms as he looked away. "I'll pass your apologies on to Luke."

"I am here for more than just that, Herr Forehead," Klavier gently chided him, and held up his other hand to show off a plastic shopping bag Apollo hadn't noticed the man was holding. "The Fraulein Detective wanted to return this to you; She was too busy to make the trip herself."

Warily, Apollo reached out, Klavier moving the bag closer for him to examine, and the young lawyer pulled it open to look inside. "My cape!" he gasped, quickly pulling the mass of red and white fabric from the restrictive plastic. "And my gloves!"

Trucy squealed, racing to Apollo's side to pull at the recovered pieces of his costume, examining them as carefully as her brother was. "You got all the blood out!" she cried in delight, pulling at the red cape in her brother's grip. "And there isn't even any bleaching! How'd you do that!?"

Klavier chuckled, wrapping up the now-empty bag in his hands to shove in a pocket. "You'd have to ask Fraulein Detective, I'm afraid. I had nothing to do with it."

"Thank you so much!" Apollo almost laughed, ecstatic to finally have his costume once again complete. "I don't know how we could have cleaned them ourselves!"

Trucy giggled as she pulled her brother's gloves from his grip, watching him throw his beloved cape around his shoulders and dig around in his pockets for the brooch to pin it on. A cursory glance at the items in her hand turned to a frown, and she promptly brandished the left glove, the one missing the large cuff to accommodate Apollo's bracelet, at Klavier. "Hey, you've damaged this one!"

Klavier looked confused, peering at the glove's displayed palm dotted with tiny rips, then shook his head. "Nein, Fraulein, those cuts were already there."

"What?" Trucy cried. "But how-?" She then noticed Apollo's sudden stillness at her side, his bare hands on the brooch holding his cape on his shoulders. Without a word, she forcefully grabbed his left hand (ignoring Apollo's weak protest of "Hey..."), giving his palm a thorough examination. Five small red marks, in exactly the same pattern and position as the glove... matching the five sharp points of the brooch at his neck. "Polly..."

After a pause, Apollo pulled his hand away, avoiding her eyes. "They're only small cuts," he said, though even he wasn't sure if he meant the glove or his hand. "I'll repair the glove by show-time tonight, don't worry."

"No," Trucy replied, matter-of-factly. "I'll do it." Shooting her brother a quick smile, she headed off to their staircase-drawers by the door, where they kept their smaller stage supplies.

Apollo watched her go with a fond look, then turned to Klavier. "Thanks again. But..." He grimaced. "You're sure Luke's arguments don't have merit? You two haven't exactly gone into detail with each other."

Klavier chuckled, giving Apollo a teasing grin. "Herr Forehead, you of all people should know: The prosecution isn't at liberty to discuss their case... especially with the defence."

Apollo froze. "What... did you just say?"
"This is the final reason I am here today," Klavier continued, reaching into a pocket of his jacket. "You Wrights must have impressed our Borginian pianist last night." He pulled out a form Apollo recognised as a request for defence, which the magician took with shaking hands. "He wants to request your services."

No matter how long Apollo stared at the paper in his hands, immaculately filled out in a hand he suspected wasn't Machi's (the usage of English was a dead giveaway), he still could barely believe the stroke of luck. "Machi wants us...?"

"That's so cool!" Trucy was shrieking, and Apollo suddenly noticed his sister had reappeared by his side, the damaged glove forgotten. "Polly, this is just what we've been waiting for! To find who really did it!"

Before Apollo could reply, Klavier was laughing. "I will wish you luck then," he said, flashing them a grin. "You're going to need it."

Apollo shot the man an unamused glare. "Thanks," he growled, "that means a lot coming from you."

Klavier just laughed off the sarcastic jibe, taking a few steps backwards towards the door. "I hope you got all you wanted out of Lamiroir last night, because I'll be questioning her today," he continued. "I shall see you in court tomorrow, Herr Wright." He paused at the door to shoot a quick wave at Emmy, Alfendi, and Flora, the last of whom was still gazing at him longingly. "Maybe next time, Frauleins. Knabe." With that, he was gone.

Flora sighed wistfully. "Klavier Gavin spoke to me! And he kissed my hand!"

Alfendi mimed throwing up.

"He does that to everyone," Trucy explained with a shrug, and skipped off to resume her mending of Apollo's glove, sitting on the open drawers where she'd been retrieving her sewing kit.

Emmy seemed mildly concerned, approaching Apollo as he folded up Machi's request form to put away in his bag. "Well, congratulations on getting a case," she said, though she sounded unsure.

"Thanks," Apollo replied, watching her curiously. "Is... something the matter, Ms Altava?"

It took Emmy a few moments to reply. "I'm sorry to be blunt, but... How did you get blood on your clothes?" she asked. "There must have been a lot if you couldn't clean it yourself."

Apollo shuffled uncomfortably. Around the room, he noticed Flora snap out of her fawning over Klavier, both her and Alfendi suddenly looking very interested in the conversation (though Alfendi's was more out of excitement than worry). Trucy, although she appeared to be hard at work laying out her supplies to repair the torn glove, had notably slowed in her work, clearly keeping an ear on the conversation herself; After everything that had happened last night, he couldn't blame her for worrying about him. "I..." Apollo hesitantly tried to explain, only to stop and close his eyes in shame. "I found the body." He heard Emmy and Flora gasping, and could only guess at how big the smile on Alfendi's face was. "Only, he wasn't dead yet, he was still alive." He turned his head away so he couldn't see anyone's faces, staring at the floor. "He was bleeding to death. I was just trying to help him."

There was a long pause, the only sounds in the room being Alfendi's quickly muffled attempts to speak up, always cut off by a 'hush' from Flora. "I'm sorry," Emmy eventually said.

"I'm fine," Apollo insisted, then, still avoiding their gazes, headed towards his father's desk. "I'd better get started on the paperwork for the case."
View the Court Record
When Sycamore caught up to Luke, he found him in the second bedroom, sitting on the lone, unmade, bed within with his head in his hands and his elbows on his knees. He entered slowly, closing the door behind him and carefully approaching the young man. "Luke?"

There was no response.

Sycamore sighed, then lowered himself onto the bed at Luke's side. "You don't take betrayal of trust very well, do you?"

Luke moved his head, pointing more firmly away from the older man.

"Yes, I know," Sycamore continued, "you're thinking 'who are you to be telling me this, Jean Descole?' You're right, too." He chuckled. "Just look how long it took you to forgive me for that. Eight years, was it?"

Luke didn't reply.

Sycamore was unphased. "Of course, what you don't know is that Jean Descole himself only existed because of a betrayal of trust." He hummed to himself in thought. "As hard as it might be to believe, I too made the mistake of thinking someone I trusted was incorruptible... but that mistake was a lot more tragic for me than for you."

Finally, Luke reacted, raising his head just enough to look Sycamore in the eyes. "What are you talking about?"

"I've told you before about Jean and Chloe, haven't I?" Sycamore replied with a sad smile. "I remember you asking about them after we left Mosinnia."

Luke nodded, slowly sitting up as his hands rested in his lap. "Your wife and daughter."

"Yes, that's them," Sycamore sighed, pushing at his glasses. "I never told you exactly what happened. It was my own fault, really."

"I'm sure it wasn't," Luke said.

Sycamore smiled. "I haven't even told you the story yet." As Luke sheepishly looked away, the man chuckled and crossed his arms. "For the longest time, in addition to my long-term goals of researching the Azran and taking down Targent... I had a rescue mission in mind."

Luke looked up, surprised. "A rescue mission?"

"Targent kidnapped my mother and father right in front of me," Sycamore pointed out. "In addition to avenging the forces that had taken them from me and my brother, I wanted to get them back, if I could. I knew it would take a long time, but I was prepared to wait." He sighed, pushing at his glasses. "Little did I know he wasn't..."
Luke said nothing, waiting for Sycamore to continue.

"I was never planning on romance," Sycamore eventually said. "Inbetween classes, I was meeting with contacts and carrying out small raids on whatever Targent outposts I could locate... always in disguise of course. Even back then I was rather good at those." He paused, the nostalgic smile returning to his face. "Then I met Jean. She rather... forced herself into my life. Helped me in all my goals. Taught me to be bolder with what I wanted." He chuckled. "Always such a fighter. Once my studies finished, the two of us set off together, travelling the country to prevent Targent from keeping track of us. Chloe coming along was a surprise, but not an unwelcome one; We simply found an old farmhouse in the middle of nowhere, a place we hoped could not easily be found." The smile died. "We were so careful... Every time we thought we saw anything out of place, we threw a few belongings and Chloe into the car and set off for a few weeks, until we felt brave enough to scout out the area again, make sure the coast was clear."

Luke frowned in thought. "So... did all those false alarms...?"

"Oh, we were very wary to not let ourselves become complacent," Sycamore assured him. "We even had an agreement: Should one of us return home and find signs of a break-in, we would leave immediately, and wait at an assigned meeting point we'd set up." He sighed, closing his eyes. "I should have followed it. I shouldn't have let..." He shook his head, looking sadly off into the distance. "I'd been out on a grocery run. It was getting dark when I returned, but... I couldn't see any lights on inside. And the front door had been left open."

Luke gasped. "Targent...!?"

"I broke my promise," Sycamore continued. "I couldn't bear the thought of leaving without Jean and Chloe. Even though I knew full well what I might find, I disregarded the danger and went in anyway." When he looked up, it was only to glare at the opposite wall, as though he could still see the scene from his memories in reality. "It was the first time I'd seen him in twenty years... lounging by the fire as though he owned the place."

"Leon Bronev," Luke breathed, eyes wide. "That was how you found out he'd...?"

Sycamore didn't respond for a long moment. "Jean was dead on the floor. She wouldn't stop fighting back, they said, so they shot her until she did. And Chloe..." His glare softened into a sorrowful look. "She was terrified... sitting in front of the fire, tears streaming down her face." He closed his eyes, head bowed. "I didn't know what to think at first... but then he explained what had happened to my mother, made it clear that he had chosen his side... and gave me my choice."

Luke didn't need to guess at what the man's answer had been.

"They weren't very happy to hear my response," Sycamore joked, the smallest smile flickering at the corners of his mouth. "I grabbed Chloe and made a run for it, bullets ricocheting all around us. There was a forest near our cottage, so I ran in there, and kept running until I couldn't run anymore. Thankfully, they didn't follow me." He paused, then sighed again, slipping a hand under his glasses to press against his eyes. "I didn't realise until I'd collapsed that several of those bullets had met their mark: I'd been hit in the shoulder and the leg... and Chloe..." He took a deep breath. "They got Chloe in the head."

Luke gasped. "I'm so sorry..."

"It was a long time ago," Sycamore said, almost emotionless, and took his hand away from his eyes; Even so, Luke could recognise the mask the man had put on in that moment as he stared into space. "I didn't come up with the name or the costume until later, but that was the night Jean Descole was
born... a culmination of Jean, Desmond and Chloe, the three lives that had been taken so suddenly, and before their time." He sighed, a slight frown settling in his mouth as he looked to the floor. "To lose Jean and Chloe, and to the one man I still naively trusted as inherently 'good'... it was too large a betrayal to bear."

The room fell into silence, both men deep in thought. Luke fiddled nervously with the end of his shirt sleeve, wondering what, if anything, he could say in response to the sad tale.

Finally, Sycamore turned to Luke with a serious look. "You might think the lesson to learn here is 'never trust anyone and you won't get hurt again', and that's certainly what I took from it at the time. With the exception of Raymond, I never again trusted anyone to do what I wanted them to, what I expected them to do. I let my anger consume me, and you know better than most the destruction that decision caused." He turned away, a thoughtful expression on his face. "But that's a terrible way to live, and it took me so long to learn to trust people again... to leave myself open to that kind of hurt." He smiled. "But, on the rare occasions it does happen... I know how to move past it now. I know it's only because I have friends, and family, that I care for, and that care for me in return. And I know there will always be an apology and a return to normal at the end of it; If there wasn't, they wouldn't be worth caring for in the first place."

Luke looked away, deep in thought. He didn't say anything.

"I'm not saying this 'Klavier Gavin' does or does not deserve forgiveness," Sycamore continued, watching the younger man. "I'm just asking that you be mindful of your emotions. Don't fall into the same traps I did."

Luke didn't reply.

After a short pause, Sycamore stood from the bed. "We'll be waiting for you downstairs when you're ready." With that, he walked to the door, pulling it open again to leave the room.

"Wait!"

Sycamore paused, then turned, noticing Luke had jumped to his feet, staring after the older man with an unreadable expression on his face. "Yes?"

Luke bit his lip a moment, considering his actions, then gathered his confidence and met Sycamore's eyes. "Can I ask... when we were on the Bostonius together... were you planning the whole time to abandon us like that? Once we got the Azran Key?"

It took a few seconds for Sycamore to respond, looking away sadly. "I kept my plan malleable, but I was always intending to go the final stretch alone," he admitted. "My reasons changed, is all."

"Reasons?" Luke repeated, watching curiously.

Sycamore chuckled, smirking at the young vet. "You love asking questions, don't you?" As Luke looked away sheepishly, the man adjusted his glasses with a smile. "I didn't know if I would need Aurora or not, so I never set in stone if I was going to take her, but I didn't want you three trying to stop me while I was busy taking down both Targent and the Azran once and for all. As the days wore on, I got more and more attached to you all... I 'became the mask', you could say, after all the faking of friendship and kindness." He smirked again as Luke raised an eyebrow at that, but quickly reverted to a more neutral expression. "Once we'd reached Targent Headquarters, and Aurora translated those dire warnings on the spire, I knew whatever was coming was going to be very dangerous; I couldn't allow you all to put yourselves in harm's way trying to help me, and I certainly
couldn't allow Aurora anywhere near Froenborg... so I took the Key and ran. I hoped revealing myself would convince you not to follow."

Luke nodded, frowning in thought. After a moment, he grinned cheekily, hiding a giggle. "You shouldn't have left us the Bostonius then."

"That was for you all to return to London," Sycamore replied with a smirk. "Besides, given the way you landed it, I was right to think you couldn't fly it very well in the first place."

At that, Luke had to laugh. "I guess so!" he agreed.
When Luke and Sycamore returned to the office, they found the twin sofas had become a hive of activity in their absence, everyone busy with something and a lively conversation going on between the three women, with only occasional interjections by Apollo or Alfendi.

Emmy was the first to notice the new arrivals, in the middle of giving each other confused glances, and she waved to them with a bright smile, pausing all other movement around her as everyone else's attention turned to the pair. "Luke, Desmond! You'll never guess what you two missed!"

Sycamore scoffed, smirking at his friend. "You finally learned the meaning of 'subtlety'?"

Emmy just glared in response. "Ha ha."


"In a moment, Trucy," Luke replied, approaching the group with his eyes on his brother. "Apollo, did you stay in our old room overnight?"

Apollo blinked in surprise, then nodded. "Yeah, it was easier than making the trip back to my place. Why?"

Luke frowned, standing at the end of the sofa with his arms crossed. "You haven't made the bed yet."

Sighing, Apollo rolled his eyes, and turned back to his paperwork spread out on the glass coffee table, pretending he couldn't hear the snickering coming from Flora and Emmy. "I'm sorry, I didn't realise you'd turned into Dad," he snidely replied. "I'll do it later."

It was then Luke's turn to blink in surprise, as he suddenly noticed the cape pinned around Apollo's shoulders, and the two gloves sitting in Trucy's lap with a spool of white thread. "Wait, did you get your cape and gloves back?"

"Yep!" Trucy chirped, giggling. "Mister Gavin was returning them, because Detective Skye was busy!"

"And that's not all he was doing," Apollo picked up, shooting a triumphant smile at his astonished brother, Sycamore watching curiously from behind him. "Guess who Machi's requested to defend him?"

Luke's jaw dropped. "He's hired us!?" He practically leapt into the empty space on the lounge next to his brother, a grin spreading across his face. "We can finish our investigation and find the real murderer!?"

"Yep!" Apollo laughed, gesturing to the paper on the table. "I was just getting a head start on my paperwork before we get going!" He then smirked, turning his arm more towards the young boy curled up in a ball against the armrest of the opposite sofa. "Alfendi's admiring all those photos of the..."
body you got, by the way."

Luke blushed, looking to the boy. "Ah, yes, I forgot about that..."

Alfendi peeked over the top of the tablet in his hands to shoot Luke an excited grin, then returned to idly scrolling through the digital gallery.

Sycamore chuckled as he moved to sit in the space left between his nephew and niece, easy enough to do given the pair's smaller sizes. "Maybe now you'll tell us everything that happened last night? We might be able to help."

"Yeah, I figured we may as well," Apollo admitted with a shrug, then turned back to Luke. "We never got a chance to share what we found when we were separated, anyway."

"Oh, of course!" Luke cried. "I forgot about that!"

Flora leaned forward on her knees, watching the pair expectantly. "So? What happened? Did you guys know about the murder when they cancelled the concert?"

"Polly did!" Trucy chirped, returning to her work of patching up the small rips in Apollo's left glove. "Luke and I were watching the concert. Oh!" She grinned excitedly. "Did we tell you they put us up in a lighting box to watch the concert from way high up!?!"

What started as Trucy happily boasting about their adventures backstage during the concert (and gushing with Flora about the performances themselves) eventually turned into a re-telling of the events of the night, the three Wrights passing the story between themselves to answer questions from their friends or just interrupting each other with forgotten details. Apollo, after enduring some teasing by Trucy for not wanting to endure the third act, paused only momentarily before moving on to how he and Ema had heard the gunshots, and finding the dying LeTouse in the dressing room. He brushed over most of his harrowing few minutes alone with the man before his death, then skipped to meeting Luke and Trucy out in the hallway, and the trio deciding to investigate. Trucy eagerly talked about their examination of the crime scene with Ema, though trailed off when it came to the corpse, leaving Luke to pick it up and describe the smeared writing on the carpet and the key ring found in LeTouse's hand. At the point where the trio separated, the story suddenly became a lot calmer, Apollo and Trucy first talking about their conversation with Klavier and Daryan (Trucy happily boasting about the connection she found between the Guitar's Serenade and the murder), then turning over to Luke for his description of passing the crime scene on to the suspicious detective, and then tracking down Ema to pass on a few additional details he'd come across while alone (although he refused to go into detail until he knew for sure if they were related to the crime or not). When it came to Lamiroir, Apollo and Trucy left the story to Luke, who carefully bypassed everything from his conversation with her but her surprising proficiency with English and the testimony she had given him.

"She told me she'd heard the gunshots," Luke explained, more to Apollo than to everyone else. "She was passing by and heard Mister LeTouse talking to someone she didn't recognise, a young man; She did promise she would recognise the shooter if she heard him again, though."

Apollo was silent, a finger pressed to his forehead in thought.

"But, if she heard those shots," Emmy asked, confused, "why didn't she report it?"

"She was in a bit of a hurry," Luke explained with a smile. "I believe she was also distracted enough that she had been hoping she imagined it."
Trucy frowned. "In a hurry?"

Luke chuckled, and turned back to his brother. "Have you noticed the contradiction yet?"

Apollo didn't answer immediately, deep in thought. "Where was she?" he eventually asked, almost quietly enough that no-one could hear him.

"An excellent question!" Luke laughed. "But the more important one here is... when did she hear them?"

"When?" Sycamore repeated. "Surely that was at the same time as Apollo and this detective, wasn't it?"

Luke shook his head, seeming to take delight in all the confused expressions pointed his way. "That didn't make sense to me," he explained. "She wasn't in the hall with them, and that small window to outside looked very thick; I don't think the sound of voices would have got through it easily, especially not with the speaker in there blaring the music from the concert. The only other place she could have been-"

"The air vent!" Trucy interrupted with a scandalised gasp, then shot her brother a glare. "But you said she's too big to fit through the grate!"


Apollo scoffed, looking up at Trucy with a smirk. "Have you already forgotten all those times we saw a grown man jumping in and out of the air vents in the hallway?"

At that, Trucy dropped into silent thought, returning to her work on Apollo's gloves.

Apollo turned back to Luke, confused. "But if she was in the air vent, that just raises more questions," he pointed out. "Like, how'd a grown man get out of a room with no exits?"

"Exactly," Luke agreed, smiling. "Hence why I decided to ask her when she heard the shots." He paused, grinning excitedly. "Apollo, the murder was during the second act!"

Everyone gasped, looking at Luke with wide eyes. Apollo was the first to recover, muttering "What?" under his breath before jamming a finger against his forehead in thought. "During the Guitar's Serenade... You mean, during her 'teleportation'?"

"Oh!" Trucy cried, dropping the damaged glove as her hands flew to her mouth. "That's why she was...!"

"You can't be serious!" Emmy said, arms crossed. "She was on-stage, singing! How could she have been backstage?"

Flora grinned excitedly. "But she wasn't on-stage for all of her song!" she pointed out gleefully. "She disappeared, and then she was behind us! That's why she was 'in a hurry'!"

"Precisely!" Luke proudly agreed, and turned to his siblings. "She was under contract with the magician behind the illusion not to discuss it, so I told her you two were magicians and might already know anything else we might need relating to it."

Now it was Apollo and Trucy's turn to grin with pride, shooting each other a look. "Naturally," Apollo replied. "We even met said magician while you were talking to her."
"Really?" Flora asked in surprise.

Sycamore smirked. "The 'grown man' you saw dropping in and out of air vents, I assume."

"That's him!" Trucy boasted, puffing out her chest. "My Uncle Valant, from before Daddy adopted us!"


Flora and Sycamore looked confused, but Emmy grinned knowingly. "Ah, Valant Gramarye. I was reading about him while doing research for this review I'm writing about you two."

"Oh, how's it going?" Apollo asked, a hopeful look on his face.

"Wait 'til I've finished it," Emmy reminded him with a smirk, which quickly turned into a thoughtful frown. "Regardless, it's interesting to hear that 'teleportation' trick was his; He seems like such a boastful character to me, and I've not heard a peep of any kind of announcement regarding that trick."


"Huh, that's a good point," Apollo agreed, arms crossed. "Why wouldn't he be boasting about that illusion?"

Trucy shrugged. "We can ask him when he comes to visit today."

"If he comes by today," Apollo corrected her. "He's probably avoiding the public eye after the murder... and they might want him at the Coliseum, or for questioning."

"He was planning to visit?" Luke repeated, still a little shocked and confused. "That guy you made me dress up as one Halloween?"

"Ooh, yeah, I forgot about that!" Trucy chirped, grinning. "You'll definitely like him, Luke! Uncle Valant uses a lot of animals in his acts!"

Luke very carefully stayed silent, looking away uncomfortably.

"Actually, that raises another question," Apollo interrupted, looking confused. "If Lamiroir gave Gavin the same testimony she gave you, Luke..."

"Exactly," Luke replied, crossing his arms with a glare. "Machi was on that stage during the murder, playing piano in front of hundreds of people... not to mention, Mister LeTouse said himself he 'didn't know' who had shot him. It's impossible for Machi to be the murderer, yet Gavin still arrested him."

Apollo grimaced. "Well, at least now I know why you went off on him so badly last night... and just now."

Luke turned his glare off to the side, still clearly fuming internally over the injustice.

"Now that's a betrayal indeed," Sycamore muttered sympathetically, watching the young vet.

View the Court Record
Finally, Trucy finished her repair work of Apollo's glove, and Apollo himself finished his paperwork. With their stories of the previous night all told, there was only one thing left to do:

"Investigate!" Trucy proudly announced.

Flora gasped in excitement. "Oh, can we help? It's been so long since I last got to investigate a case!"

"I don't see why not," Apollo agreed, pulling on his gloves and giving Emmy and Sycamore a smile. "Did you two want to join us too?"

"Of course!" Emmy immediately replied, sharing an eager grin with Flora. "It'd actually be really cool to see how you guys carry out an investigation!"

Sycamore smiled. "It certainly sounds interesting," he agreed, then turned to the young boy at his side, squeezed into the space between the armrest and his uncle. "What about you, Alfendi?"

The boy looked up from the tablet computer in his hands, already deep in thought - It appeared he'd been listening to the ongoing conversation as much as everyone else. "I dunno," he said. "What are we doing?"

Apollo shrugged. "Well, we pretty much exhausted any actual looking around last night, and I don't think there's anyone left to question... except Machi, of course."

"But Machi doesn't speak English," Luke pointed out. "Unless someone here speaks Borginian, we can't exactly communicate with him."

"Ooh, we might be able to help there!" Emmy replied, elbowing Sycamore as she turned to him with a smile. "We went to Borginia once, remember?"

Sycamore sighed. "How could I forget? They wouldn't let us leave until they'd searched the Bostonius up and down to ensure we weren't carrying undeclared goods..."

"I don't think I remember enough of it myself, but we still have the phrasebook we got somewhere!" Emmy continued, brushing off her friend’s complaints. "It could help you talk to Machi!"


"That sounds great!" Apollo cried with a laugh of relief. "Thanks, Ms Altava!"

"No problem!" Emmy replied, getting to her feet. "Let's go, huh?"

Flora and the Wrights took her movement as a cue to also stand; Sycamore and Alfendi, however, stayed seated, Alfendi watching everyone intently. Apollo was quick to scoop up his papers to put away in his bag, and approached the boy with an apologetic smile. "Sorry, but I'm going to need my computer back to investigate."
Although Alfendi groaned in resistance, he reluctantly gave up the device, watching it disappear into Apollo's bag. He then frowned to himself, and looked up at the young lawyer with a grin. "Are you going to look at the body again?"

Apollo chuckled. "Sorry, no. Even if we were, the police wouldn't let you guys on the scene, I'm sure."

"Wait, that reminds me!" Luke spoke up from behind his brother, attracting everyone's attention in the rush of their preparations to leave. "When we were looking around the crime scene last night, Detective Skye - Ema - had a few things she needed time to look into. We should try and find her to follow up on those."

"That's a good point," Apollo agreed.

"So we're going back to the Coliseum?" Trucy asked.

Apollo shrugged. "Guess so, if she's there."

"I wanna go to the crime scene!" Alfendi demanded, jumping to his feet with a determined look.

"But we need to go back to the Bostonius first, Alfendi," Sycamore pointed out.

Emmy thought a moment. "Well, there's no reason for all of us to go. We'd be better off splitting up."

"I'll go with Apollo and Luke!" Flora immediately called, giving the two young men a hopeful grin. Luke promptly broke into laughter.

Apollo crossed his arms, frowning in thought. "So that's me, Luke, Flora and Alfendi heading to the Coliseum?"

"I'll go with Emmy, if you don't mind, Flora," Sycamore decided, getting to his feet. "I'm almost certain that phrasebook we're after is in my study. I'd rather search for it myself."

"Excellent!" Emmy cried, grinning. "I knew you'd agree to help, Desmond." She gave him a teasing wink, which he scoffed at, hiding his smile.

Trucy looked thoughtful for a few moments, but eventually turned to her brothers with a smile. "So, how are we getting to Sunshine Coliseum, then?"

July 8, 11:15AM
Sunshine Coliseum

It was a bit of a squeeze, but the three Wrights and two Laytons all managed to fit neatly into Luke's car, and drove the half hour to the concert hall that had served as the previous night's crime scene, waving goodbye to Emmy and Sycamore as the pair headed off to the train station to return to the Bostonius. Before they'd left, Trucy had insisted on writing a small note, just in case Valant came by while they were away, asking he return later, and she taped it to the door with a grin before running after her brothers to jump in the car.

"It looks so different in the daylight," Flora remarked as they came into sight of the massive building. She paused and sniffed, looking confused. "Is that the sea I can smell?"
"Sunshine Harbor's not far from here," Apollo told her, and pointed behind them, across the nearby road. "And Rising Sun Park is over there; They're all named after each other."

Luke giggled. "When this is all over, maybe I could take you guys up Grand Tower, to see it all from above!"

"That sounds nice!" Flora agreed.

Despite the cancellation of any events, and even of the tour itself, all the billboards and posters were still hanging around the area, proudly boasting of the Gavinners' presence and of the concert hall itself. A small blimp, the same brilliant purple as Klavier's jacket, circled above, the giant silver 'G' of the band's logo reflecting the sun's light onto the grass below. A series of balloons, attached to ads for the nearby Prime Mall, floated above the entrance doors where they were tethered, leaving brightly-coloured shadows on the crowds gathered below.

"Crowds...?" Apollo muttered to himself in surprise. "Why are there crowds here!?"

"Maybe they're lining up early for the next performance!" Trucy suggested.

"The next performance has been cancelled," Luke pointed out. "I think it's more likely they're angry customers wanting refunds, or just wanting to know what's going on."

Flora gestured to the nearby merch tables, still set up under their purple marquees. "They look a bit overwhelmed there, too."

Alfendi's attention, meanwhile, was taken by a figure in a blue costume, strolling around the flower display nearby with a bunch of balloons in their grip. "Why is PC Badger here?"

"PC what?" Apollo asked, shooting the boy a confused look.

"That's the Blue Badger, Alfendi," Trucy explained with a knowing grin. "He's the police mascot!"

"No, that's PC Badger!" Alfendi protested with a glare. "Why's he in a different costume?"

Flora held up a hand to keep the two elder Wrights from again trying to correct the boy. "No, Alfendi's right; Back in London, that's PC Badger, the mascot of the Metropolitan Police. He normally has a truncheon and a police helmet, though."

Luke nodded. "I was sure I'd mentioned PC Badger in the past. Didn't Papa say he originated here?"

Trucy thought a moment. "Oh yeah, you did say that."

Apollo just sighed, shaking his head. "Who cares about the badger anyway? We need to find a way around those crowds to see if Ema's here."

"But why is he here!?" Alfendi whined, tugging on Flora's arm where she had his hand in a determined grip.

"He's selling balloons!" Trucy explained, pointing to the mascot as Apollo groaned in exasperation. "Probably raising money for the police. Your PC Badger - he'll be the Blue Badger's cousin, I'll bet - does that over in London, doesn't he?"

Alfendi frowned in thought. "He came to my school once. I have a toy of him at home."

"Well there you go!" Trucy chirped as though Alfendi's remark had answered her question.
Flora gave her brother a smile. "Were you wanting a balloon?"

Apollo bit back another sigh. "If you're getting one, be quick," he told the young woman. "If you guys don't mind, I'm going to try and find someone in this crowd who can help us today." With that, he sped up towards the Coliseum.

Alfendi shifted back and forth a moment, then looked up at his sister with a sheepish smile. "Can I have a balloon, please?"

"Can I have one too?" Trucy immediately asked Luke with a wide grin. "It's been a long time since I last got a balloon!"

Luke laughed. "You can buy one yourself, can't you?" he pointed out, glancing after Apollo to keep an eye on his location.

"Oh yeah," Trucy realised, then beckoned for the Laytons to follow her. "C'mon, let's get some balloons!"

"Catch up to Apollo and me when you're done, okay?" Luke called after her, jogging to follow his brother. "Text us if you can't see us!"

"We will!" Trucy promised, waving at her brother before turning back to their visitors. "Now where were we?"

Alfendi giggled, pulling out of Flora's grip and grabbing Trucy's hand instead, dragging her towards the Blue Badger. "Balloons!"

View the Court Record
Apollo and Luke took long enough finding an officer on guard who would listen to them that Flora, Trucy and Alfendi had long caught up to them, the latter two proudly carrying their helium-filled balloons in hand (although Flora had tied Alfendi's around his wrist, just to be sure he couldn't lose it). Just as they had the night before, the officer guided them through the nearby fencing and around to the back door, where they were instructed to wait while their guide ran to fetch Ema.

"Will the detective let us see the body?" Alfendi asked hopefully, shaking his arm up and down to make his balloon dance in the air above him.

"I don't think so," Luke told him. "They've probably moved Mister LeTouse out by now to do the autopsy."

Flora turned to Trucy. "What's your detective friend like?" she asked. "All the inspectors I've met back home tend to be either grumpy or... not exactly the smartest, to put it nicely."

"Don't worry, Ema's very smart," Trucy assured her. "She was gonna be a forensic investigator, so she's always using science to find leads and stuff. And she's friends with Daddy, too!"

"Oh, that sounds nice," Flora replied, smiling. "It must be wonderful to be able to work with friends!"

Trucy snorted. "And Polly likes her because she doesn't like Mister Gavin!" she whispered conspiratorially.

As the pair descended into giggles, Apollo raised an eyebrow at them. "Did I just hear my name back there?"

Any kind of reply the two might have given was interrupted by the door the group was waiting by finally opening, a young woman in a labcoat emerging with a blink as she stumbled in the bright sunlight. "Argh, who turned on the lights out here!?" she complained, holding up a hand to shade her eyes.

"That's the sun," Alfendi pointed out, arms crossed. "I thought you were s'posed to be smart!"

"She was joking, Alfendi," Luke assured him.

Ema huffed, deciding to ignore the boy as she turned her attention to Apollo and Luke. "So, whaddaya need?"

"I take it you heard Machi hired me, right?" Apollo asked.

"The fop mentioned it," Ema admitted, then pointed to the magician's cape with a smile. "He gave you your clothes like I asked him to?"

"Yes, thank you!" Apollo gushed, brushing at the left side of the cape, where the worst of the staining had been. "We never would have been able to get them looking this great again; I can't
thank you enough!"

Ema waved off his thanks, though couldn't hide her proud grin. "Aw, it was nothing. Those cleaners owed me one anyway."

"How'd you manage to get the blood out?" Trucy asked. "I always end up bleaching stuff removing stains."

"It's a very fascinating process actually!" Ema began to explain. "As I understand it-

"I'm very sorry to interrupt," Luke cut in with an apologetic look, "but we really do need to hear about those leads we couldn't chase up last night. You remember, the writing on the floor and the fragments under the sofa?"

Ema and Trucy were clearly annoyed to break off their conversation (even Flora looked upset at the detective being cut off), but Ema dragged her attention back to Luke anyway. "Oh, yeah, those." She rested a hand on her hip, back into her idle frown. "That writing turned out to be some kind of ID number once we got it under the luminol. One of the other detectives is following it up."

"An ID number?" Apollo repeated. "Like, belonging to the murderer?"

Ema paused, avoiding eye contact. "We can't say anything for sure until we've identified it," she said.

Apollo decided to take that as a 'yes'... a 'yes' that the prosecution was never going to admit. He made a mental note to follow it up again in court.

The detective then waved a hand at Luke. "Those fragments of yours, though? There's not a scrap of evidence they were connected to the murder, I'm sorry to say."

Luke glared at her in response. "They are," he said. "They must be, or nothing else about the true events of this murder makes sense! Just tell me if you've identified them."

Ema sighed. "They had traces of explosives, so they were probably firecrackers of some kind," she admitted. "That device we found with them is still being identified, but it's all on the backburner unless we get proof it was connected to the murder."

Apollo saw his brother biting his lip, hands curled into fists; Luke was visibly restraining himself from giving Ema a similar talking-to to the one he'd given Klavier earlier that day.

"Excuse me?" came a quiet voice from around Apollo's waist level, and everyone looked down to see Alfendi approaching Ema with a hopeful smile, his purple balloon held tight in his hands. "Do you still have the body in there?"

To everyone's surprise, Ema seemed to take the question in her stride, shaking her head as she gave the six-year-old an apologetic look. "Sorry, kiddo. The victim's body was removed early this morning."

Flora nodded, hoping her brother would pick up on her unspoken request to leave his questioning there. "That's right Alfendi, just like Luke said. Now why don't you co-"

"But why'd you do that?" Alfendi continued, tilting his head curiously as he watched Ema.

"For a lot of reasons," Ema seemed happy to explain. "We have to do an autopsy, and it's kinda disrespectful to let a dead body just lie around for longer than it needs to. We also need to finish up
with it as soon as we can so we can release it back to his family, and in this case they're all the way over in Europe, so it's more important than usual we be quick."

Alfendi thought a moment, then nodded. "Okay."

Grinning, Ema leaned forward a little, closer to Alfendi's level. "You planning on being a coroner when you grow up?"

"A korr-nor?" the boy asked, frowning in confusion.

"A coroner," Ema repeated. "They work with dead bodies, prepare autopsies, that sort of thing."

Alfendi didn't reply, deep in thought. A moment later, his balloon slipped out of his grip, bumping against the boy's head and sending him jumping back in surprise as the purple ball of air floated back up to the full length of its string, anchored securely to Alfendi's wrist.

Everyone hid laughter at the sight, though only Ema spoke: "Ah, I'm sure you'll figure it out," she assured the boy, straightening back up. "You've got a long time to think about it, after all."

Alfendi blushed in embarrassment, rubbing at his nose where the balloon had brushed against it and rushing to his sister's side, gripping her hand tightly.


Luke looked away. He didn't respond.

"Thank you anyway," Apollo spoke up, "even if it's just for letting us on the crime scene last night. You've been a lot of help."

Ema made a show of blowing off his praise, but was clearly touched. "P'shaw. Anything for a friend."

Apollo gave her a smile and was moving to leave when Trucy jumped forward, giving Ema a hopeful look and she chirped, "Oh, before we go, what was it you were saying earlier about removing bloodstains?"

Flora also broke into a grin, stepping forward to join Trucy. "Oh yes, that sounded very interesting!"

Sighing, Apollo crossed his arms. "Seriously? How often are any of us going to be in a position where knowing how to remove bloodstains would be useful?"

The three women rounded on Apollo with unamused glares. None of them said a word.

Apollo looked between the three in growing confusion. "What?"

Luke wordlessly dropped his face into a hand. "Oh, Apollo..." He moved to his brother's side, gently guiding him away from the door. "Why don't we just let them talk alone."

"What!?" Apollo objected, though not as strongly in his growing confusion. "Why!??"

"Alfendi, why don't you come with us for a while?" Luke continued, gesturing to the boy.

After some prompting from Flora, Alfendi finally released his sister's hand and ran to Luke, gripping his instead.
"Call us when you're done, Trucy," Luke added over his shoulder as the three men got slowly further away, Apollo still demanding answers behind him.

"We will!" Trucy promised, waving her brothers off with a grin.

"Honestly Apollo, I'm ashamed of you," Luke gently teased as he led his brother and Alfendi back across the arena out of the front of the Coliseum. "One day you're more than likely going to end up sharing a home with a woman, and you're going to scare her away with your complete ignorance."

Apollo ignored his brother, his face almost as bright a red as his cape; It hadn't taken long as they strode away from the girls for the sheer embarrassment to hit him as he slowly realised what everyone else had been talking about. He kept his gaze straight ahead, a stern glare indicating he didn't want to talk right now.

"Remember that girl who used to hang around the arcade when we were kids? The blonde in glasses you had a crush on?" Luke continued, pretending to think harder than he actually was. "You spoke to her once and then she avoided us for months. Is that what happened with her?"

"I didn't have a crush on her," Apollo quietly insisted, crossing his arms. "You and Clay decided I did. And she wouldn't have started avoiding us if you hadn't pushed me into talking to her."

Luke just smiled. "You never would have spoken to her at all if we hadn't intervened," he pointed out.

"That would have been a preferable outcome," Apollo snapped.

"And if you'd spoken to her again instead of just moping and hiding," Luke continued, ignoring his brother's embarrassed anger, "you might have gotten to know her."

Apollo looked away. *Tell me, does it ever get tiring being so damn right all the time?* he snidely wondered.

Alfendi watched the conversation curiously from Luke's side, his purple balloon bouncing along above his head. "Um, Luke? I have a question."

To Apollo's relief, Luke finally turned his attention away from his brother, to the boy still clinging to his hand. "What is it, Alfendi?"

Alfendi screwed up his face for a moment or two. "What... were they talking about?" he asked. "It was just getting out bloodstains, right? Why'd we have to leave? Why's it such a big deal?"

Apollo sighed, pressing a hand to his face. "Just make this even more awkward, why don't you."

"It's only awkward for you," Luke said in a matter-of-fact tone, then turned back to Alfendi with a friendly smile. "I'm afraid it's an extremely complicated explanation in full, so are you alright with a simplified version, Alfendi?"

Alfendi thought a moment, then nodded.

"Okay then," Luke replied, and paused to think for a few moments. "It's something that happens to girls when they grow up," he eventually explained. "Girls have an organ boys don't, that sits in their belly and has an opening between their legs. When they get older, it stops about once a month and bleeds for a few days."
"Wow, cool!" Alfendi cried, looking excited. "Does that really happen!?!"

"Is this seriously happening?" Apollo muttered darkly into his hand.

Luke chuckled, giving Alfendi a nod. "Yep. Naturally, it's very easy to get bloodstains in things, so Flora and Trucy wanted to hear how Ema's friends cleaned them up so well."

Alfendi thought over Luke's words for a few moments. "So, only girls get to do the cool bleeding thing?" he asked. "That's not fair..."

At that, Luke hid a snort of laughter. "Depending on the girl, they might disagree with you there..."

"If I was a girl, I'd take off my trousers and pants and run all over the place!" the boy continued boastfully. "I'd leave blood everywhere, like... like a serial killer! O-or a caveman dragging a dead animal behind him!"

Apollo rolled his eyes, shooting his brother a look. "Now look what you've done. He's not going to shut up about this for days."

Luke just laughed. "Let him have his fun, Apollo. This is a fact of life he'd have to learn sooner or later."

"Speaking of," Apollo replied, eyes narrowed, "how come you know so much about this?"

"Have you forgotten I happen to share an apartment with the owner of a uterus?" Luke pointed out, a mischievous grin on his face. When Apollo only sighed in response, he laughed and added, "Not to mention, you'd moved out before Trucy's first period. I was the only other person home at the time when it hit, so I had to go and get her some pads and help clean up."

Apollo shook his head, crossing his arms as he tried not to feel grateful for that. "Forget I asked."

"I very quickly realised that day that there's no point in being awkward about it," Luke continued insistently, giving his brother a serious look. "It's a fact of life that fifty percent of the population has to live with. Just accept it, Apollo."

As Apollo quietly stewed to himself, Alfendi happily skipped at Luke's side, still happily fantasising aloud about trails of blood.

View the Court Record
Turnabout Serenade, Day 1: Part 4

We finally found the phrasebook! Turned out it WASN'T in Desmonds study, he just forgot it had ended up with me, so we had to pull a few things apart to find where I put it after we left. And of course Desmond complained the whole time about why we still had it because our trip to Borginia was such a nightmare in the end so we were never planning on going back, but it's obviously proven useful so I told him to shut it.

I'm glad you found it! Tho to be honest I'm not sure if it WILL turn out to be useful - it is a 'tourist' phrasebook, yes? .

Yeah? Why?

So it won't exactly have any way for us to ask him "what happened during the murder", or to translate whatever he says in return.

... Crap.

Why didn't you say anything before, Luke!?

Everyone seemed to think it could help, and you looked eager to dig it out. It might still be useful, just not for questioning Machi.

I still can't believe you didn't say anything! What happened to being a gentleman huh?

I WAS being a gentlemen. Like I said, the phrasebook could still be useful. Anyway, we'll probably be heading back from the Coliseum soon. We'll see you at the office, Emmy.

Yeah yeah, whatever :P

Seeya then

July 8, 12:13PM
Wright Anything Agency
Phoenix's Office

Apollo paced nervously around the room as he flipped through the phrasebook Emmy had handed him the moment he stepped out of Luke's car downstairs. "Greetings, shops, restaurants..." He shook his head. "No, there's not much it looks like we could use..."

Emmy sighed, sinking into the sofa and resting her head in her hands.

"At least we can say 'hello' to him now!" Trucy pointed out, giving everyone a bright smile. "That would cheer Machi up, wouldn't it?"

"That's true," Flora agreed. "He's separated from anyone else who speaks Borginian... even a 'hello' would probably mean the world to him."

Sycamore pressed a hand to his chin in thought. "Are... we sure he doesn't understand English?"

"Of course he doesn't," Apollo replied, still flipping through the book. "Lamiroir said so."
The man opened his mouth to reply, but evidently decided it wasn't worth it, closing his mouth again with a shake of the head.

Emmy looked up to shoot Sycamore a glare. "Go ahead Desmond, tell me how I wasted everyone's time getting that book and how we should have thrown it out anyway. I know you're dying to."

"No I'm not, as a matter of fact," Sycamore sternly replied. "I was actually thinking that there remained the possibility this boy had learned to read English on the internet or something, until a moment ago when I remembered he is blind, so it's entirely impossible. Regardless, although Flora and Trucy have a point that he may appreciate someone taking the trouble to at least greet him in his native tongue, that might be overshadowed if we are unable to communicate anything else at the same time."

At Sycamore's mention of Machi's 'blindness', Apollo and Luke shot each other a look, while Trucy casually turned to face the ceiling. Without ever discussing it, they had mutually decided to keep Lamiroir's blindness to themselves, which necessitated Machi's ability to see also being kept secret; None of them were willing to break Lamiroir's or Machi's trust by spreading the truth of the pair's arrangement around needlessly.

Emmy just sighed, returning to a slump in her seat. "I hope you guys got something useful from your detective friend at least..."

Apollo turned to Luke. "I'm not sure we did, actually..."

Luke reluctantly nodded, arms crossed. "I don't think she's been told all the details of this case... but at least she's agreeing to continue the investigation."

"She wouldn't let us look at the body!" Alfendi complained, throwing himself dramatically across the back of a sofa from behind it. "She said it had been moved!"

"We told you before we left we wouldn't be seeing it," Apollo pointed out with an amused smile.

Alfendi just huffed and ignored him.

There was a very long pause as everyone mused over the conversation so far. Finally, Trucy broke the silence, sitting on the arm of the sofa nearest Emmy and looking up at Apollo with a frown. "So, what do we do now?"

Apollo sighed. "I don't think there's anything we can do," he admitted. "We'll just have to wait until the trial tomorrow."

"That sucks," Alfendi muttered.

"You don't have to go if you don't want to," Sycamore pointed out to the boy with a smirk. "If sitting through all the talking isn't worth the possibility of seeing more photos of the murder-"

Alfendi interrupted his uncle with a gasp, his head snapping to attention. "They might show the body!?"

"It is a murder trial," Flora reasoned. "They'll be talking about how he died."

"I wanna go!" Alfendi decided, grinning widely.

Sycamore chuckled. "If you insist."
Emmy finally sat up from her moping, looking between the three Wrights. "So I guess our plans for tomorrow are set in stone then; We'll come and cheer you on."

Apollo started as he suddenly remembered something, shooting a glance to the computer on his father's desk. "That reminds me, I have friends who'll be interested in hearing I have a case..."

"Did you tell them about the concert?" Trucy asked. "Or we had friends visiting?"

"None of your business," Apollo joked, and, with his sister giggling in reply, he then turned to his brother. "By the way, I know this kinda goes without saying, but... With Dad busy again, you'll assist me in court, won't you, Luke?"

Luke gave his brother a smile and a nod. "Of course I will. You can always count on me to help, Apollo."

"Thanks," Apollo replied with a grateful smile, trying not to sound as relieved as he felt; He didn't want Luke to concern himself over Apollo's brief, paranoid worry that he'd get a 'no' as an answer.

"So, are we not going to visit Machi?" Flora asked, a worried frown on her face. "I thought we'd agreed..."

Apollo sighed, shaking his head. "There's not much of a point," he explained. "'Hello' isn't a conversation, and it's all we can say to him. I think we're better off leaving him be."

No-one could think of a good reply to his argument.

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**The Revived PW Fan-Club Forum!**

**Home > The Wright Anything Agency**

**Thread: A New Case**

**steeljusticelover "Apollo", 07/08/2026 01:12:32PM**

So remember how I said I had friends visiting? And most of us were going to that Gavinners concert? And now there’s been a murder there? Yeah. I'm defending that case.

(PS Oh yeah, there isn't anyone here who's available and speaks Borginian, is there? I know it's a long shot, but...)

**Precious-Fairy "Pearly", 07/08/2026 02:32:48PM**

APOLLO WHY DID YOU NOT TELL ME OR MYSTIC MAYA WE WERE VERY WORRIED ABOUT YOU!!!!!!

**steeljusticelover "Apollo", 07/08/2026 02:47:64PM**

I'M SORRY OKAY I'LL TEXT HER NOW
I didn't know you guys had heard about the murder, okay? And why didn't you call me if you were so worried!??
BlackbirdLuck "Maggey", 07/08/2026 03:10:41PM
Congrats on another case... and you've got a high-profile one this time, too. How'd you nab that? :) (sorry, never even heard of Borginia before today)

Thunderdome "Max", 07/08/2026 03:21:34PM
Wow, I was just reading about that case... and I have tomorrow off, so I might drop by and watch it after all. Good luck, Apollo. I hadn't heard of Borginia before today either. Sorry.

Precious-Fairy "Pearly", 07/08/2026 03:43:64PM
YOU KNOW FULL WELL WE HEARD ABOUT THAT MURDER!!! AND OF COURSE WE DIDN'T CALL YOU, YOU WERE ASLEEP!!!

steeljusticelover "Apollo", 07/08/2026 03:54:28PM
ACTUALLY Pearly, I had no idea you knew about it because Luke texted you last night. He only just told me he did that while I was trying to appease your demands for irl contact. *SIGH* ...
Thanks for worrying about us though. We're all fine. Thanks Maggey and Max. I guess it's time I admit, what I failed to mention about those tickets Gavin sent us... they were backstage passes. We met the defendant (and the victim...) before the murder, and did some investigation while we were stuck there. It's a good thing Machi did decide to go for me as his attorney, considering. And it's fine, I know it was a long shot anyone would know Borginian...

CelestialImpacts "Adrian", 07/08/2026 04:40:11PM
Congratulations on the case and good luck, Apollo. I have to say, this one looks difficult. You're gonna have the eyes of an international community on you for this. That shouldn't be a problem for a performer like you though, right? :) No Borginian here, but I think Franziska is rather decent with it... and if she wasn't currently back in Germany, that would be helpful. Sorry. :(

BlackbirdLuck "Maggey", 07/08/2026 04:59:82PM
Wow, backstage passes? I guess Gavin's taken a liking to you for some reason. You're a very lucky kid, Apollo. :)

steeljusticelover "Apollo", 07/08/2026 05:27:56PM
Maggey: Ha ha. I'm so flattered this enemy of my family is wanting to make friends and got me involved in a murder. :/
Adrian: Thanks... I think. I could do without the added pressure. And don't worry about the Borginian thing, I'm sure we'll get by.
Aw, I know you'll do just fine. :) Take it from your Auntie Adrian.

You know full well only Trucy calls you that. Thanks, though.
"Did you see Dad last night?"

Trucy nodded, following her brothers into the empty lobby. "I told him about your case. He said he was sorry he couldn't stick around to talk to you about it."

Apollo sighed, tightly crossing his arms and resisting the urge to pace. "Yeah, I am too, honestly..." He'd felt like a bundle of nerves since they'd been forced to put their investigation on hold the previous day, and, although they had enjoyed themselves taking the planned quiet day for Luke to tell some of his stories, the shadow of the stalled case had hung over all of them. In the evening, their visitors had returned to the Bostonius, having agreed to be in court to watch Apollo's trial. Apollo and Luke had stuck around longer to keep Trucy company, but eventually bid her goodnight and returned to their own homes; With Phoenix busy on his own investigation, Apollo had decided not to bother him with a message over the phone, leaving it to Trucy to pass on the news if their father happened to drop by before heading off to the Borscht Bowl Club for work. Now it was the next morning, and Luke had given Trucy a lift in his car to the courthouse, where they met up with Apollo at the front doors, the three of them walking in together without a word.

"Will you be okay, Apollo?" Luke asked, watching his brother in concern. "Did you want to do some Chords of Steel?"

Apollo shook his head. "Better not. I already did a session with Clay this morning, before he left for the Space Center."

Luke smiled at the mention of their friend. "How'd he take your news?"

"The usual," Apollo replied with a shrug. "Congratulated me, wished me luck... was unreasonably glad he couldn't get off work to support me in person."


Trucy was looking thoughtful, taking a small step towards her elder brother. "Polly? Did you tell Daddy about... about Mommy?"

Apollo frowned in confusion, noticing out of the corner of his eye that Luke was rapidly looking between his siblings with a surprised look. "No... But..." He sighed, shrugging apologetically. "I did ask him if he'd ever looked into Lamiroir on one of his secret investigations. He seemed genuinely thrown, so I think we can trust that he had as much of an idea of who she was as we did."

Trucy looked down, mutely reaching for her eldest brother's hand.

Apollo gave his sister a comforting squeeze. "Why do you ask?"

After a moment, Trucy explained, "He asked me last night... about the concert, and the murder, and then... about Lamiroir." She pressed a gloved hand to her nose, hiding a sniff. "I didn't tell him anything. I just said I was tired and went to bed."
Luke nodded knowingly. "He probably suspects something's going on after Apollo mentioned her," he pointed out, then stepped forward to rest a hand on his sister's shoulder. "Don't worry, Trucy. We'll wrap this case up in no time, then you and Apollo can decide if you want to tell him... And, if Papa works it out on his own, you can trust him not to push you about it; He's just worried because he can tell you two are upset, and he doesn't know why."

Apollo winced; He hadn't realised before now that Phoenix would surely have seen those 'Psyche-Locks' of his indicating both Apollo and Trucy were hiding something from him. "Should I have told him?" he quietly wondered aloud.

"The night of the concert?" Luke replied. "Apollo, I saw how much that shocked you both. You needed some time to process it." He then turned to Trucy. "And it's understandable you didn't want to tell him without Apollo with you, Trucy. This is a matter that means everything to you both, so, if you tell Papa, you should be doing it together. I'll even help if you want me to."

Trucy nodded, but didn't reply.

Apollo thought for a long moment, clutching his sister's hand tightly in his. "Gavin should have brought her here to testify," he said. "I wonder where he's put her?" He left unsaid his worry that Klavier still did not know about Lamiroir's blindness.

At that, Trucy finally seemed to perk back up, a determined look on her face. "She'll be in the lobby next to us, won't she?"

Luke nodded. "Should be," he agreed. "He may move her to the smaller one neighbouring the courtroom itself for the trial, if he's intending to call her."

Trucy thought over Luke's words for several seconds in silence. "Right then." Dropping her grip on Apollo's hand, she dashed away from her brothers and back out into the hallway.

"Truce?" Apollo called. He and Luke shot confused glances at each other before running after their sister, out of the lobby.

They found Trucy standing in front of the doors to Lobby One, hands bunched into fists at her chest and sending a determined glare at the doorknobs. She didn't react to her brothers approaching her, standing guard with perfect stillness as she watched for movement.

"Truce?" Apollo asked again. "What are you doing?"

Trucy didn't reply. After a few moments, just as Apollo was considering asking again, the door she was staring at suddenly moved, sending the brothers scuttling back while Trucy only moved her gaze upwards, where she could meet the eyes of the man currently leaving the room.

Klavier jolted as he registered the girl in his path, stopping in the doorway and staring down at Trucy in surprise. "Fraulein...?"

"Have you been looking after her?" Trucy demanded.

The man only frowned in confusion for several moments, before he finally remembered. "Lamiroir, you mean?"

Trucy nodded, her stern glare refusing to fade.

Klavier relaxed, chuckling as he ran a hand through his hair. "Fraulein, you insult me. Naturally I made sure she was taken care of."
"Okay Truce, you've asked your question," Apollo interrupted, waving for his sister to move out of Klavier's way. "Shouldn't you be heading to the gallery now?"

Trucy just ignored her brother. "And she's in the courthouse, right?" she asked.

Klavier laughed again, then stepped to one side. "Maybe you'd like to ask her yourself, Fraulein?" Behind him, stepping forward somewhat gingerly, was Lamiroir, still dressed in her white dress and blue cloak from the night of the concert.

Trucy's face erupted into a bright grin, and she jumped forward to grab the woman's hand. "Hi, Lamiroir! Are you doing okay on your own?"

Lamiroir smiled behind her veil, looking in the direction of Trucy's voice. "I am surviving," she replied. "Were you worried about me?"

Apollo tried not to visibly wince. 'Oh, if only you knew...'

"Of course we were worried," Trucy quickly replied, her grin frozen on her face. "Do you have someone to show you around the courthouse? It's real easy to get lost around here if you don't know the way."

As he realised what his sister was truly angling at, Apollo sent a fearful glance to Klavier. He found the prosecutor watching Trucy with a vaguely suspicious look.

Lamiroir thought for a moment, then nodded, her smile warm. "That would be lovely." She looked up towards the door. "If Mister Gavin does not mind, of course."

Klavier's suspicious look vanished in an instant, waving to the woman with a confident grin. "Ah, I do not mind. Just be sure to not wander off with your witness, ja Fraulein?"

Trucy scoffed, giving the prosecutor an offended glare. "Obviously not." She turned back to Lamiroir with a wide grin, gently beginning to lead her out into the hallway. "The courtroom's this way, Lamiroir; Just follow me!"

Lamiroir only nodded with a grateful smile, walking where Trucy's hand pulled her with the kind of confidence only a blind woman who was used to faking sight could show. As they left the hallway, Trucy could be heard already happily chatting away with the older woman about the weather.

Klavier chuckled as the door clicked shut behind the pair. "People will begin to wonder if Lamiroir is incapable of walking without a teenager at her side..."

Apollo rolled his eyes but kept silent; He still didn't know after all if Klavier was aware of the woman's blindness or not.

"Don't think we didn't notice your choice of words just now," Luke instead picked up, having stood so silently behind his brother before now that Apollo almost jumped at the reminder he was there, spinning around to see the younger Wright glaring daggers at Klavier. "'Our' witness? You're so dead-set on keeping the truth quiet that you're going to discredit the only person who could identify the murderer."

Klavier's easy-going smile vanished. "Don't be so quick to assume my version of events isn't the truth, Doktor Wright."

"Considering who the most likely candidates are," Luke shot back, "I have every reason to assume you're covering for them."
Apollo recognised the flash of hot anger in Klavier's eyes, and stepped between the two, one hand on Luke's shoulder and the other held up towards the prosecutor in a silent signal to stop. "Okay, that's enough about the case," he ordered. "Let's save it for court, huh?" Klavier huffed and looked away, but didn't argue, so Apollo then turned his attention fully to Luke, who was still glaring intensely at the other man. "Luke, if you won't be able to control yourself during the trial, maybe you'd be better off in the gallery with the others," he quietly pointed out. "I can handle a trial alone."

Luke gaze snapped to his brother, and he didn't bother being quiet as he replied, pushing Apollo's hand off his shoulder. "I am perfectly capable of keeping calm. There is no way you can talk me out of supporting you; Isn't it you who's always talking about what happened the last time Gavin faced one of us alone?"

Klavier grunted from behind Apollo. "Low blow, Doktor..."

"You were right all along," Luke continued, apparently ignoring that the other man was even there. "That's what you wanted to hear, isn't it? You were right not to trust him and I was a fool to give him a chance." His voice slightly wavered, enough to make the vet stop talking for a moment, looking down. "Let's just get to the courtroom." With that, he pushed past his brother and left the hallway.

Apollo turned to watch Luke leave, unable to keep a worried frown off his face.

"Yes, I did want to be right about Gavin... but not like this. Not because he stabbed you in the back."

After a long pause, Klavier cleared his throat, surprising Apollo as he was reminded the man was there; The prosecutor looked around awkwardly, shuffling towards the door out of the hallway. "Your brother isn't wrong about one thing, Herr Wright... We should be getting to the courtroom."

Apollo sighed and nodded. "Sure."

July 9, 9:57AM
District Court
Courtroom No. 3

Apollo found Luke standing stock-still behind the defence bench, arms crossed and eyes glaring at a barely-visible knot in the wood. Not wanting to upset his brother further, Apollo busied himself pulling out his Court Record, connecting the computer to the wireless network of the courtroom... but, as he watched the spinning circle of the loading screen, his worry won out, and he looked over to Luke. "Will you be okay?"

Luke blinked, his angry look fading as he met Apollo's eyes. After a moment, he smiled. "I'll be alright," he assured him. "I have to be. After all, we're doing this for Machi... and, if you think about it a certain way, he's a member of your family, right?"

Apollo paused, frowning in thought: Machi was Lamiroir's adopted son, wasn't he? "Huh. I guess so." He shot Luke a smirk. "I wonder if he'll be as much of a pain as my other younger brother?"

Luke snorted, pressing a hand to his face to stifle his laughter, though he couldn't hide his grin.

Opposite them, Klavier was also settling into his post behind the prosecutor's bench, patiently waiting for the trial to start. A bailiff wandered in with Machi at his side, leading the supposedly-blind boy through into the small waiting room on the defence's side; Apollo was reminded that Trucy had probably done the same thing for Lamiroir earlier, and hoped they were doing okay together in
the prosecution's mirroring room.

The usual bustle of the gallery calmed, and Apollo looked up to see the judge taking his seat on top of the podium at the head of the room. Gripping his gavel in hand, he slammed it on his desk until silence fell. "Court is now in session for..." He paused, squinting at some papers in front of him. "How do I say that?"


The judge nodded, getting back to business. "Right, his trial. Court is in session!"

Apollo stood firm behind his bench. "The defence is ready, Your Honour."

"The prosecution is A-okay, Herr Judge," Klavier added, hands in his pockets.

The trial had begun.

View the Court Record
The judge hummed in thought, then turned to Klavier. "Prosecutor Gavin."

Klavier looked up. "Ah, my opening statement, ja?"

"No, no, actually," the judge replied, drawing surprised looks from everyone in the room. "There was something else I wanted to ask you about."

The prosecutor looked a little lost at that, and Apollo couldn't blame him. "Yes?"

"Say you're going to visit someone in the hospital with an incurable disease," the judge continued, fingers drumming on his desk nervously. "What do you say to them?"

"Eh?" Klavier muttered, eyes wide in confusion.

The judge apparently hadn't noticed how uncomfortable the prosecutor was with the subject. "I mean, you wouldn't say 'get well soon', right? You'd only be kicking them when they're down..."

Apollo decided to try and 'rescue' the increasingly-lost Klavier, turning to the judge with a sheepish smile. "Um, what are you talking about?"

Snapping out of his train of thought, the judge cleared his throat. "Actually, I'm going to visit someone who is terminally ill," he explained, "right after this trial. The Chief Justice's son."

Luke considered for a moment, then gave the judge a serious look. "Your Honour, in my experience, people always appreciate honesty," he said. "Especially those who are dying... and very especially children. I would suggest, rather than something 'moving' and ultimately distant, to just be frank and say what's on your mind." He paused, then quickly added, "Without making it about yourself, of course."

The judge thought Luke's words over. "Just be frank... Hm. Solid advice, young man." He shot Luke a quick smile, then turned to Klavier. "In any case, I'm a bit busy today, so let's wrap this up quickly. Prosecutor Gavin, your opening statement, briefly!"

Klavier grinned. "You're in luck, Herr Judge. I believe you'll be going on your hospital visit sooner than you think." He directed his last comment more at the Wrights than the judge, almost teasing them.

Apollo instinctively grabbed Luke's arm to keep his brother from shouting something he'd regret.

"First, to review the victim in this case," Klavier continued, turning to his own Court Record to
activate the holograms around the courtroom, which soon displayed a passport photo of a familiar looking man with a brown beard and receding hair. "Romein LeTouse, age thirty-five. The global manager for diva songstress Lamiroir." With a swipe of his hand, the passport photo was swapped out for what looked like an autopsy report. "The cause of death: blood loss due to being shot by a large calibre revolver." He waved a manilla folder that had been resting on his bench. "This report has all the details."

The judge nodded. "The court accepts this into evidence."

Luke immediately went to Apollo's Court Record, bringing up the autopsy report as it downloaded. Apollo gave it a quick enough glance to assure himself it didn't have anything drastically different to what they expected it to say.

Up on his podium, the judge was similarly poring over the document. "Forty-five calibre... That's quite large, isn't it?" he mused aloud. "A direct hit from that could knock a man off his feet."

"However, the bullet struck him in his shoulder," Klavier explained, bringing up on the holograms a photo of LeTouse, lying dead on the carpet. "The damage to his body was slight... death was not immediate. Sadly, his blood loss was such that he could not be saved."

Apollo felt a wave of guilt wash over him, LeTouse's final moments flashing in front of his eyes as he stared at the photo on the holograms.

The judge hummed in thought. "I suppose the victim's condition could have been much worse, considering."

Klavier nodded. "Two shots were fired," he continued. "One shot missed, the other penetrated and passed through the victim's shoulder. Both bullets were found in the wall at the scene." He flicked his hand against his tablet computer, and the photo was replaced with a diagram, which Apollo quickly recognised as a birds-eye view of the dressing room, complete with a white outline marking LeTouse's body where it had fallen. "Observe the diagram: This is where the bullets hit." Two red crosses flashed on the screen, on the wall next to the door where the bullet holes had been.

"I see," the judge said. "The court accepts this evidence."

Apollo noticed the photo and diagram downloading on his Court Record, but didn't bother looking at them; He'd seen enough of LeTouse's corpse.

"If we're talking about a forty-five calibre revolver," the judge mused, "we must assume that the killer was adept at the weapon's use."

"That makes sense," Luke quietly muttered at Apollo's side, his hand on his chin. "Ema said it would have broken the arm of someone who wasn't."

Klavier snapped his fingers to attract attention, and carried on with his explanation: "The victim was shot backstage, in a dressing room. This dressing room has only one entrance: this door." The triangle shape of the door on the diagram flashed red briefly.

"That does seem to be the case, yes," the judge agreed.

"However," Klavier continued, "there were witnesses who heard the gunshots." Apollo noticed him briefly gesture across the room, towards the defence bench. "Yet when the witnesses entered the room, it was empty, save for the victim's body of course."

The judge's eyes widened in surprise. "B-but that's... That's impossible!"
"Exactly," Klavier replied, nodding, and shut down the holograms. "This murder was impossible... for all but one person."

Apollo could hear Luke starting to growl under his breath, and grabbed his brother's shoulder, shooting him a warning look. The shock of the touch was enough to silence Luke, but his glare at Klavier didn't let up.

"That is, of course, the defendant," Klavier continued. "Machi Tobaye."

The judge pulled at his beard thoughtfully. "Only this defendant could have committed the crime?" he asked. "But how?"

"It's quite simple," Klavier assured him with a confident smirk. "The circumstances of the crime scene make it clear."

"Very well," the judge replied with a nod. "I assume you have testimony to back up this claim. Let the witness please take the stand!"

Klavier snapped his fingers at the bailiffs, one of whom quickly darted out of the room.

Apollo took his chance as the gallery muttered to themselves to turn to his brother, releasing his grip on Luke's arm. "I know, I know, he's already swaying the judge to his side with his lies, but getting upset now isn't going to help," he hissed. "We have to wait for the cross-examination before we can prove his arguments are wrong."

Luke sighed, giving his brother a hurried nod. "I know that... It just makes my blood boil, looking at him so confidently brushing off Lamiroir's testimony to declare Machi guilty."

He shot another glare at the prosecutor opposite, then returned his attention to Apollo with an earnest look. "But don't worry about me; I'm fine."

Apollo stared back for a few moments, before giving his brother a small smile.

The gallery quietened, and the Wright brothers looked up to see Ema arriving at the witness stand, her usual stern frown on her face.

Klavier shot her one of his usual charming smiles. "Your name and profession, please."

Ema didn't even glance at him. "Ema Skye, I'm a detective for the police department. I was on security detail at the concert forum that night."

'She seems... tired, somehow,' Apollo noticed, frowning in concern for his friend.

"Security at the concert, you day?" the judge repeated, surprised.

"Some security I was," Ema sighed, her eyes on the floor. "Couldn't even stop a murder..."

Apollo winced in empathy; It hadn't ever occurred to him until now that she was likely harbouring the same guilt as he was over LeTouse's death.

"Now, don't blame yourself!" the judge insisted in concern, waving a hand as if to pat her shoulder. "Things like this happen! I've made even bigger mistakes in my career, you know!"


Klavier shook his head. "In any case, because you were on security detail, the crime was quickly discovered, and we were able to identify the killer."
Ema didn't respond, deep in thought.

"You may give the court your testimony, if you would," Klavier continued, waving a hand. "Describe the circumstances of that day, and your discovery of the crime, please."

After a short pause, Ema sighed, looking up. "Alright." She took a moment to pull herself together, then stood confidently behind the stand, back to business. "The night of the murder, I was on security backstage, at Prosecutor Gavin's request," she explained. "Only people involved with the concert in some way were allowed backstage. At the beginning of the third set... I heard shots. I went into the room, filled with blaring rock music, and found the body. I examined the scene and determined that only the defendant could have done it."

Apollo heard Luke darkly muttering to himself, arms crossed.

The judge hummed in thought. "It was lucky that a detective was the first on the scene," he muttered. After another moment's consideration, he then nodded to Apollo. "Very well, the defence may begin the cross-examination."

Apollo nodded back, then turned to Ema. 'May as well get the one burning question I never really got to ask out now...' "The night of the murder was the night of the concert, yes?"

"That's right," Ema replied.

"What was a detective doing on security detail, might I ask?" he added. "If it was only a concert?"

Ema huffed, rolling her eyes. "My thoughts exactly. But, orders are orders. Even when they come from rock gods." She shot a glare at the prosecutor's bench.

Apollo also turned to the man opposite, raising an eyebrow inquisitively. "Prosecutor Gavin?"

Klavier grinned. "Yes, allow me to explain." He leaned on his bench, looking far more serious than the situation really called for. "I smelled something that day, you might say. The stench... of conspiracy. That day, at the concert hall."

Apollo resisted the urge to sigh. "Conspiracy," he muttered in a deadpan, crossing his arms.

"Isn't it obvious!?!" Klavier cried. "My keys! That whole morning, no, the whole day was ruined! And it's all because someone stole my keys!" He began to count off on his fingers. "I couldn't ride my hog to the show, I couldn't open my guitar case-!

'There he goes again.' "I still think it's possible you simply misplaced them," Apollo interrupted.

"Misplaced them!?!" Klavier repeated, sounding horrified. "Misplaced items don't just wander into a murder victim's hand on their own!"

"What's this?!" the judge cried in shock, staring at Klavier. "Prosecutor Gavin, if your keys were in the victim's hand... that makes you a prime suspect!"

Klavier only chuckled, calming from his earlier theatrics in the blink of an eye as he closed his eyes, snapping his fingers rhythmically. "Love, slow-acting and new. Atroquinine... is waiting for you," he softly sang.

Apollo resisted the urge to sigh, muttering to his brother, "Does everything with this guy have to be so over-the-top?"
"The killing happened in the middle of my concert," Klavier explained to the judge. "I was... like a sailor, adrift on a sea of sound. Anyway," he shook his head, "I didn't want anything else stolen, so I put the detective with the most time on their hands on the task."

The judge thought a moment, the nodded. "I see. I can accept that."

"Well, I can't!" Ema cried, glaring at the prosecutor. "What do you mean 'time on their hands'!?!"

"Please," the judge interrupted, waving a hand at the detective. "The cross-examination."

View the Court Record
Apollo ran his eyes over Ema's testimony on the screen of his Court Record. What to ask her about next? He could think of two things, and the first had only come to mind because of Luke's comments on the night, a detail he wouldn't have thought important otherwise. "At the time we heard the shots," he said, "I believe we were chatting, weren't we?"

Ema scoffed. "*You* were chatting," she insisted. "*I* was eating Snackoos." She pulled out a bag of said food from her purse, popping it open to toss a handful in her mouth.

"Hey!" the judge cried, offended. "No snacking in court!"

Ema ignored him, looking away as she continued to munch on the chocolate sticks.

Klavier looked across at Apollo with a lazy grin. "And you're sure the shots came from Lamiroir's room?"

Apollo narrowed his eyes. "Obviously." It would be ludicrous to claim otherwise, after all.

"Hey, *I'm* the one being cross-examined here!" Ema protested, then reached into her purse and pulled out a second bag, which she tossed at the defence bench. "Here, this'll keep you quiet!"

Luke caught the bag with surprise, fumbling not to accidentally drop it over the front of the wooden desk. He shot his brother a confused look, but Apollo just grinned, taking the bag. "Thanks!" the elder brother called to Ema, popping the bag open to grab one for himself; He had to admit, he'd been curious as to their appeal for a while now. At first bite, they just seemed like normal chocolate over a biscuit stick, but chewing them proved to be tastier and more enjoyable than he expected... not that he'd go to the same extremes as Ema for something as seemingly generic as this. Shrugging, he tossed another Snackoo in his mouth and offered the bag to Luke, turning back to the witness stand. "So," he asked around his food, "how about it, Ema?"

Ema had resumed her own snacking, nodding in agreement. "We were right there," she said, slightly muffled with the Snackoos in her mouth. "Hard to be mistaken about that."

The judge shot them both a glare, gripping his gavel. "Please, either talk, or eat. Not both at the same time!"

Luke, having been meekly trying one of the chocolate treats himself, sheepishly took the bag from his brother, carefully closing the plastic zipper and hiding the rolled-up package away in his satchel.

Ema scoffed, but finished her chewing and put her own bag away again, looking oddly triumphant. "Right, so," she continued the moment her mouth was clear, "after that, me and Mister Lawyer there opened the dressing room door to the blaring rock music."

"Er, when you say 'rock'," the judge interrupted, looking confused, "are you referring perhaps to this 'rock 'n' roll' music that's so popular these days?"
Apollo raised an eyebrow. 'Where've you been for the past fifty years?'

Ema apparently decided to ignore the question, rolling her eyes. "They pipe sound from the stage into the backstage through speakers," she explained. "That way, people in the back can hear when they're supposed to be on stage."

'Huh, that's clever,' Apollo mused. 'We don't have anything that fancy in the Wonder Bar. But...' He shot a glare at Klavier. "Did it have to be so loud?"

Klavier brushed at his fringe, grinning. "You don't listen to the Gavinners with your ears," he said. "You feel it with your entire body and soul! I always have the backstage monitors at full volume."

'And my damaged hearing sure is grateful for that,' Apollo resisted the urge to snap in response. 'It's a miracle I heard Mister LeTouse's last words at all with that racket overhead...'

"When we walked in the room," Ema picked up, "the band was playing 'Guilty Love' I believe, making it easy to determine the time of the crime."

The judge hummed in thought. "If you could hear that music playing..."

"Then everyone on stage for that song has an alibi," Klavier pointed out. "Including myself."

Apollo heard Luke darkly muttering to himself again.

"Anyway," Ema continued, "I closed off the scene and started my investigation. It's beyond obvious there's only one person who could have done it."

"Objection!" came a sudden shout from Apollo's right, where Luke was angrily pounding a fist against the desk. "How! How could Machi have possibly committed this murder, Detective!? Why don't you outline your clearly flawed logic to the court!?"

"Objection!" Klavier shot back, throwing out a hand to point at the young vet. "Before you call someone else's logic flawed, maybe you should take a look at your own, Doktor Wright!"

"Hey!" Ema cried, pulling out her bag of Snackos again to furiously toss some of the sticks at the prosecutor. "Stay out of this! I can fight my own battles!"

Klavier softly scoffed, playing with his fringe as he stepped back from the conversation without a word. With his free hand, he activated the holograms again, displaying the diagram of the crime scene.

Her protests said, Ema shoved the bag of food back into her purse, rounding on Luke. "Listen," she said, pointing at the holograms, "we know there was only one exit from the room: that door. The small window only opened a tiny crack. And I was standing right in front of that door! So, how could the killer have fled the scene?" She crossed her arms. "There's only one possibility: the air vent."

The judge blinked in surprise. "Ah..."

"Objection!" Luke shouted again. "So just because Machi was the only person backstage small enough to fit through that vent, that automatically makes him capable of firing that revolver without breaking his arm!?" He slammed his fist on the desk again. "You yourself said whoever fired it must have been experienced with guns! How can you not see the flaws in your own argument!?"

"And who says the defendant isn't experienced with guns?" Ema replied, leaning forward on the
stand. "Besides, the fact that he missed at such close range is enough of a signature that the shooter was blind!"

"Blind!?" Luke repeated, indignant. "You think he's blind!? A better argument would have been that he missed because he was too small to fight the kickback of the gun; at least then you would be making sense!"

Ema stared nonplussed at Luke for a moment or two. "Are you implying he's not blind?" she realised. "What are you saying? Of course he's blind!"

Luke stood stiffly for a moment before throwing his hands in the air with a wordless cry of rage, turning away from the courtroom. "You talk to her!" he snapped at Apollo.

Apollo bit his lip to keep calm in the face of his brother's righteous anger; Luke could be scary when he got mad. A second later, he turned to Ema. "So you say he missed because he was blind. Is that all the evidence you have?"

Ema shrugged, looking a lot calmer now she wasn't dealing with Luke anymore. "There is one other vital piece of evidence," she explained. "Marks were found on the air vent grill. Traces that it had been recently opened."

Apollo blinked in surprise. 'Wait, really?'

"And on top of that, the defendant's fingerprints," Ema continued. "They were very clear."

The gallery began to murmur amongst themselves.

Apollo sighed. On its own, that certainly sounded like decisive evidence... and it didn't help that apparently Machi had been using that air vent as the prosecution claimed. Taking a deep breath, he banged his fists on the bench to silence the crowd, then gave the woman at the witness stand an even stare. "Is that it?"

Ema raised an eyebrow. "Excuse me?"

"Is that all your evidence incriminating Machi?"

The detective crossed her arms, giving Apollo a withering look. "If you're going to ask how he knew about the vents, everyone backstage that day knew they were scheduled for maintenance; You remember that stepladder below the air vent on the scene, don't you?"

Apollo shook his head. "I wasn't going to ask about that, but thanks for clarifying." He turned to his Court Record, flipping through his photos of the scene. "If your main point is that the shooter was blind, you appear to have looked over some very vital evidence that proves you wrong without a doubt."

Ema blinked, surprised. "What?"

With a flick of his wrist, Apollo decided to bring up the same photo Klavier had submitted earlier, just to rub the detail in further. "I distinctly remember us talking about it on the night actually. Do you not remember?"

The judge leaned forward, studying the holograms. "The photograph of the crime scene...?"

"Yes, Your Honour, the crime scene," Apollo agreed. With a swipe of his finger, he highlighted the smeared carpet at LeTouse's right hand. "Specifically, this."
Ema frowned, confused. "The smeared blood stains? We got a match for that ID number, if you-"

"As interested as I am to hear you have a match," Apollo interrupted, "that's not specifically what I was referring to." He pointed up at the holograms above them. "These stains were smeared, Ema. What does that tell you?"

Ema paused, deep in thought.

The judge suddenly broke the silence with a gasp. "Ah, I thought it was just my blurry vision! But it really is blurry!"

Apollo sighed, then decided to spell out the problem. "When Mister LeTouse was shot, he wrote an ID number with his own blood. We agree on this, right?" It struck him only as he said it how strange it was that the man had supposedly had the time to do so between the bangs he'd heard and his and Ema's arrival at the scene, but he stowed that thought away for later.

Ema nodded, watching Apollo curiously. "It's certainly a logical conclusion."

"Then how did it get smeared?" Apollo pointed out. "Mister LeTouse had no reason to, and it certainly wasn't you or me. Who does that leave? Who was trying to rub out what he was writing?"

"Oh!" the judge cried, looking proud of himself. "It was the killer! Ha, naturally, if I were a killer, I certainly wouldn't want to leave something so incriminating behind!"

Klavier nodded, smiling lazily as he continued to watch the proceedings. "Neither would I."

Ema shrugged. "I guess that makes sense. With it being an ID number, the killer wouldn't have recognised its true purpose when he saw it. Of course he'd try to-" She cut herself off, her eyes slowly widening. "Wait..."

The judge's eyes also widened. "When he 'saw' it?" he repeated.

Apollo nodded. "Exactly. You claim it could only have been Machi because of his blindness," he pointed dramatically at the holograms, "but the crime scene itself contradicts you! If there is one claim you cannot make about this case, it is that the killer was blind!"

"Ack!" Ema cried, jumping back in shock as the gallery erupted into chaos. "I-impossible!"

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View the Court Record
"Order! Order!" the judge shouted, banging his gavel. "Order!" As the audience quietened, he turned to Klavier with a surprised look. "P-Prosecutor Gavin! Please explain to me what all this means!"

Klavier didn't respond, standing still behind his bench with his eyes closed.

"I mean," the judge continued, gesturing to the holograms, "looking at this photo, it seems quite clear that the shooter could see! Yet, up until now..."

Finally Klavier reacted, grinning and opening his eyes. "It seems I owe the court an apology." He brushed at his fringe. "The Gavinners are a band with law enforcement ties, yet a murder occurred during our concert! Apparently, this caused some confusion over jurisdiction. As a result, some reports were not filed in an entirely timely manner."

Apollo noticed Ema's shocked look slowly fade into a glare as she stared at the man. He couldn't blame her. At his side, he noticed Luke finally rejoining him, not saying a word as he also shot daggers across the room.

Klavier chuckled. "I've got an idea." He dramatically pointed to the sky. "Let's rock!" After a short pause, he then held up a file on his bench with a teasing grin. "With these documents. But before that." He dropped the file back down (making Apollo wonder what the whole point of his little display was), and turned to Ema, hands in his pockets. "I have a question for the Fraulein Detective. If I may?"

"Wh-what?" Ema asked, understandably nervous.

"Tell me," Klavier continued, still grinning almost cheekily. "Why do you think that Machi Tobaye is blind?"

Ema blinked in surprise, casting glances over at Luke; Apollo suspected she was finally putting two and two together. "H-he's... the blind pianist, right?" she asked, actually beginning to look scared. "So... So he's... Doesn't Lamiroir lead him around by the hand all the time?"

Klavier held up the file he'd been teasing them with before. "I have a report here on the defendant, Machi Tobaye," he explained. "According to this, Machi Tobaye... can see perfectly well. His blindness was merely a publicity ploy by those clever Borginians."

Ema stared at him for a long moment, then nervously flicked her gaze over to the Wrights opposite. "Y-you two... You knew he wasn't blind!" she pointed out. "Why didn't you say anything!?"

Apollo looked away, not wanting to admit in front of their audience he'd been trying for a while now; He knew for sure saying so would just embarrass their friend further.

Luke shrugged, giving her an apologetic look. "We should apologise," he said. "We thought you already knew."
"Regardless," Apollo spoke up, directing a glare at Klavier, "the prosecution’s entire argument hinged on Machi being blind, did it not? I’d say this new fact—"

Klavier’s chuckling interrupted Apollo’s pronouncement. "Herr Forehead, not once in the course of this trial have I claimed the defendant was blind," he said. "The only one who did was Fraulein Detective."

Luke shot the prosecutor a scowl. "And you threw her under the bus for what, entertainment?" He gestured towards the witness stand. "A gentleman would apologise."

Klavier laughed, giving Ema a small wave. "Oh, sorry," he called, ignoring Ema's glares as he turned back to the court at large. "Consider however: Machi Tobaye sees. And he was the only one who could have fled through the air vent. I see no problems with this."

"But what about the bullet holes in the wall?" Ema asked, gesturing angrily to the holograms, apparently forgetting they no longer displayed the diagram she was thinking of.

"Yes, the bullet holes," Klavier repeated with a nod. "I believe Herr Doktor neatly explained those for us: He didn't miss because he couldn't see; it was the kickback from the forty-five calibre revolver. A simple accident, in other words."

"You... you jerk!" Ema sputtered, slapping her hands on the witness stand. "Luke's right, did you just have me in here for comic relief!?"

The judge cleared his throat, giving Ema a stern look. "If we can please end the bickering. Now."

Ema gritted her teeth, looking ready to shout right back at him, but the judge was already tapping his gavel on its stand. "The prosecution has a rather convincing case: The only way in and out of the crime scene was watched, making the defendant the only one who could possibly leave the scene, regardless of whether or not he was truly blind. Simple and decisive."

Apollo groaned. At his side, he could see Luke making great efforts to bite his lip and not shout something out-of-turn.

"I believe we've heard enough to determine our verdict," the judge continued. "Even if I wasn't in a hurry to make a hospital visit."

"Wait!" Ema cried, gripping the top of the witness stand tightly enough that her knuckles had turned white. "I'm not leaving! I can't leave like this! I'll come up with some clue to solving this case if it kills me!"

The judge looked down at her in surprise, almost dropping his gavel. "But your testimony has already given us enough to convict the defendant," he pointed out.

Ema thought a moment. "Ah! Ah ha!" With a grin, she pointed up at the photo on the holograms. "This blood stain... I never got around to telling you what it said!"

"Oh, right!" Apollo cried with a smile. "It was an ID number, wasn't it?"

"You bet!" Ema proudly replied, a hand at the glasses on top of her head. "And we got it matched up yesterday! Turns out... it belonged to an agent of Interpol."

"Interpol!?" the judge repeated, shocked. "Are you saying the murderer was an agent of the international police!?"

Ema shook her head, her grin fading. "Well, we thought it might be... We sent the ID number over,
and they told us the name of the agent it belonged to." Her gaze turned up to the holograms, still displaying the photo of the body at the scene. "It was Romein LeTouse."

As the judge sputtered in shock, Klavier nodded. "Turns out he was undercover, in the middle of a secret operation," he explained. "He was trying to tell us his own identity, and a cautious killer tried to stop him."

"And that revolver he was shot with," Ema continued, "the murder weapon; that was also Mister LeTouse's. He had a permit to carry firearms, and the registration number on the gun matched."

Luke hummed in thought, stroking his goatee. "It wasn't what I was expecting to hear, but that does all make sense. Now we know where the murder weapon came from."

'Surely this is relevant to the case,' Apollo mused. 'But how?'

The judge shook his head. "As interesting as all this is, I fail to see how exactly it's relevant."

"As far as we can tell, it isn't," Klavier replied. "We have yet to hear back from Interpol on what our victim's mission was that brought him undercover as Lamiroir's manager." He then grinned, playing with his hair again. "Hence why I did not feel the need to bring it up... although we can certainly dig the defence's grave deeper with more evidence incriminating the defendant."

Luke slammed his fist on the desk. "If you are referring to that nonsense theory regarding the lyrics!"

"A theory your own sister came up with, if I remember correctly?" Klavier interrupted with a teasing grin. "She won't be pleased to hear you say that."

Crossing his arms, Luke sighed. "Trucy is perfectly capable of letting go of theories once they've been proven wrong, and this one has."

Klavier smirked as he stared at Luke. "Well, I would be most interested in hearing how you've worked that out."

Apollo rolled his eyes. A part of him hoped Klavier genuinely didn't know, and didn't have some kind of plan prepared for what they hoped to prove.

"Theory?" the judge asked, looking between the two. "What theory?"

"I'm sure you noticed," Klavier said, looking up to the podium, "the unusual circumstances of the defendant's arrest?"

The judge thought a moment, then nodded. "That did catch my eye in the report, yes."

Klavier grinned, looking proud of himself, and turned to Ema. "Perhaps you can tie it all together for us with another testimony, Fraulein Detective. How all the strange events of that day lead us to the killer."

Ema rolled her eyes, but didn't protest, sighing as she straightened behind the witness stand. "No one in this country had a motive to kill the victim," she explained. "We believe Machi co-ordinated the thefts, the arson, and the murder to match Lamiroir's song."

"Lamiroir's... song?" the judge repeated, confused.

"Yes, the Guitar's Serenade," Klavier replied, grinning. "It contained a certain 'code' our murderer
decided to follow." He snapped his fingers, then reached into his pocket to pull out his key ring. "First, the keys my 'heart' held on to so tightly were stolen."

"Then his guitar burst into flames on stage," Apollo picked up. "Mister LeTouse's life was taken by a bullet."

Klavier put his keys away, a smug smile on his face. "The rest hardly needs explanation. 'Guitar, guitar, up together to the sky'. He probably would have stolen the body itself if it weren't under constant surveillance, so instead he made do with his own."

"Leading to his unusual arrest," the judge finished, tugging his beard in thought. "But that's... mad! It's like a story out of some fairy tale! I've heard of jumping rope to songs, and counting to songs... but killing?"

Luke shivered, talking so quietly only Apollo could hear him: "Please don't compare this to a 'fairy tale', Your Honour..."

Klavier just shrugged, still looking smug. "It's a wild world out there, Herr Judge."

The judge seemed to accept that with a nod. "Very well. We've heard one song and dance; Let's get on to the next: the cross-examination!"

Apollo sighed, and turned towards Ema. 'If I have to... Court's not much of an appropriate stage for singing and dancing, though.' "We've just learned Mister LeTouse was an agent of Interpol, right?" he pointed out. "How can you just rule out no-one in this country having a motive? He spoke English! Surely he's been to an English-speaking country before!"

"We did look into that," Ema replied. "He'd never been to America at least before coming here as Lamiroir's manager; He may have learned English on his own."

"As for his status as an agent," Klavier picked up, "we still do not know what he was investigating. It certainly doesn't seem relevant, in any case."

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'Great...'

"You see?" Klavier continued with a grin at the Wrights. "No one here had a motive to kill him, and certainly not in such an elaborate fashion."

The judge hummed in thought. "It does seem difficult to imagine."

Ema smirked, looking away from the prosecutor's bench. "Unless our famous prosecutor did it as a publicity stunt."

Klavier's eyes widened in indignant shock. "Wh-what did you say!?"

"Prosecutor Gavin!" the judge cried, surprised. "You did this to promote your song!?"

Luke pressed a hand to his face, hiding giggles. Apollo did the same.

Klavier shot the Wrights and Ema a glare. "Of course not," he told the judge, "and I am quite dismayed by the ludicrous nature of her claim." He waved a hand in the air, grinning proudly. "Why would I need promotion? Everyone already listens to my music."

Ema snorted, still smiling. "I was just kidding! Don't get all worked up, glimmer-boy."

Apollo suspected that was only the first step in Ema's payback for Klavier's earlier misstep.
View the Court Record
The judge thought a moment, frowning. "Perhaps we should go more in-depth on these lyrics. I do not believe it's entirely clear how the crimes of that day are tied to them."

Klavier nodded. "Let us begin with the first verse." He brought up on the holograms a text file, the lyrics to the Guitar's Serenade, then shot Ema a grin. "If you would, Fraulein Detective."

"What?" Ema asked, shocked. "You want me to sing it!?"

"You are the witness, ja?" Klavier replied, teasingly. "Or did you want me to sing? I warn you, my fee as vocalist is not trivial."

Ema bit her lip, shooting him a glare; It was a clear retaliation for her joking accusation. She cleared her throat, turning her attention to the lyrics on the hologram. "Let's look at the first part of the lyrics, shall we?" She paused a moment, then haltingly sang in an approximation of the tune: "When you stole away the keys my heart held on to so tight..."

Klavier nodded. "Indeed, my favourite heart-shaped key ring was stolen that morning."

"A few verses later," Ema continued, "we find 'Burning on in my heart, fire, burn my love away, all away'." She slightly winced at her own nervous attempts to sing the words. "As we know, Prosecutor Gavin's guitar burst into flame. And, right after that, 'Like a bullet of love, fire, take my life away, all away'. Mister LeTouse's life was taken by a bullet."

Klavier clapped his hands, giving Ema a grin that still didn't look at all sincere. "Bravo, Fraulein Detective. Your singing... it's not bad." As Ema glared at him, he snapped his fingers. "Now, for the finale!" Eyes closed, he promptly sang, "Guitar, guitar, up together to the sky..." He grinned, looking up at the gallery as multiple women giggled and swooned; Apollo wondered if the man had simply wanted to show Ema up or was jealous that she had a better singing voice than he'd expected... and was craving to show off again as a result. "As it says in the lyrics," the prosecutor continued, turning to the judge, "our defendant was found with a guitar, high in the 'sky' over the stage. No series of coincidences could be so well-conceived!"

Ema was avoiding the Wrights' gazes. "He's right," she admitted. "Scientifically speaking."

'We would Wocky have said? Apollo wondered to himself. Probably 'that concert was wack'...'

Luke was frowning intensely, looking between Ema and Klavier. "And does the prosecution have any idea why he'd do all this?"

"You want my scientific opinion?" Ema asked. "No clue. But he clearly had a reason to go through all that trouble."

"Not only did he steal my keys," Klavier picked up with a glare, holding a fist in the air, "he torched my guitar! Unforgivable acts even if he had a reason... and worse if he had none!"
"The diva's complaints aside, I can't imagine someone doing this on 'just a whim',' Ema pointed out.

Klavier blinked in surprise, turning to Ema before frowning. "Fraulein Detective! I take offence at that description!"

"I figured," Ema shot back with a smile.

Before Klavier could object, the judge was speaking again: "Indeed, it does seem too... well rehearsed, shall we say."

Ema nodded. "Yes. This crime was planned for sure."

Luke shook his head, arms folded across his chest and a hand on his chin. "I'm afraid I have to disagree with you," he said. "Yes, clearly these crimes are connected... but the lyrics are not the reason why."

"How can you say that?" Ema asked, seeming genuinely curious despite her disbelief. "It matches up too well to be a coincidence."

"Yes, it does," Luke agreed. "Because it was advantageous for the killer to let you believe they were. That was their motive. In fact, I believe it is only because they were privy to the 'lyrics' theory that Machi was found on the platform with the guitar, for no other reason than to 'prove' the connection in the minds of the investigators." He lowered his hand from his chin, giving Klavier a stern look. "Everything else I think truly was a coincidence... which only raises the question of why the murderer would need to go to so much extra trouble to entrench the 'lyrics' theory once they heard it. I don't know about you, but there's only one reason that comes to my mind."

Klavier raised an eyebrow. "An interesting counter-theory. I hope you have more than just words to support it, Herr Doktor."

Apollo nodded, finally spotting their chance. "Of course we do," he announced, then threw out a hand to point dramatically across the room. "We have a direct witness to the murder!"

The gallery immediately burst into murmurs, forcing the judge to quickly pull himself back from his shock to bang his gavel, glaring at the audience. "Order! Order!" With his courtroom quiet once more, he then rounded on Klavier. "Prosecutor Gavin, I thought you said the detective was the only witness!"

'I was a witness, too!' Apollo kept himself from shouting out. 'T-technically...'

Klavier shrugged, unConcerned. "Because she is... Unless another defence attorney wants to take Herr Forehead's place so he can testify." He shot the Wrights a teasing grin.

Apollo shook his head. "Ema and I found the victim, yes," he agreed, "but we were not witnesses to the murder, and certainly not direct witnesses."

"What are you talking about!?" Ema asked, wrinkling her nose in disgust. "We heard the gunshots! How can you say we weren't-!"

"We heard bangs, Ema," Apollo interrupted. "Because the victim was shot, it's easy to assume those bangs were gunshots... but we can't prove they were. We can't say with complete confidence we were witnesses to the murder." While Ema looked away uncomfortably, Apollo returned his attention to Klavier with a stern glare, the prosecutor meeting his gaze with an even look that betrayed no fear of the younger attorney's words. "The victim himself, however, named a direct witness with his dying words. The prosecution knows this, because I told them all about it."
"What!?” the judge cried, shocked. "The victim... named a witness!?”

Klavier shook his head. "Perhaps he did, and perhaps he did not. I'm afraid the detective was not present at that time; All we know is what Herr Forehead says he said." He picked at his fringe. "It's no testimony, especially since it comes from the defence attorney himself."

"Objection!" Apollo shouted, banging his fists on the bench before him. "But it's the truth! 'The witness is siren', he said it with his last breath! It had literally just happened at the time I gave you my witness statement! Why would I have lied about it!?"

Klavier scoffed. "It's my policy to fully investigate everything I deem relevant. Clearly this rookie lawyer thinks he can tell me how to do my job."

Apollo was about to growl a reply when he felt a hand on his arm, and turned to see Luke giving him a concerned look. It was enough of a reminder for the young attorney to pull himself back under control.

The judge shook his head. "Mister Wright, this witness of yours, unknown to the prosecution... I hope you're right." He leaned forward, giving Apollo a stern look. "May the court have their name so they may be summoned?"

Apollo nodded, keeping his eyes fixed on the judge's. "The defence wishes to call Lamiroir to testify."

The judge jolted in shock. "Lamiroir!?"

"The 'Siren of the Ballad',” Apollo explained. "Mister LeTouse said 'the witness is siren'; He could only have meant her."

"Ah, I see," the judge said, though he still looked shocked. He turned to Klavier. "Well, Prosecutor Gavin?"

Klavier was unphased, as Apollo had expected. "My claim still stands," he calmly replied. "There were no direct witnesses to this crime."

The judge thought a few moments. "Very well," he announced. "Let's hear it from the horse's mouth then, shall we? Please show Lamiroir to the witness stand."

Klavier scoffed, but waved to Ema, looking away with the smallest of smiles. Ema shot him another glare before heading off to the side-room on the prosecution's side.

Apollo watched carefully, waiting for his first glimpse of Lamiroir around the raised stands of the gallery. He was finding himself nervous about making her testify in court. At first he thought it was to do with who she was - There was, after all, the smallest of possibilities that her time with Trucy may have triggered some resurfacing memories - but then he realised it was more to do with her being in court. He couldn't forget how, on the night of the murder, Luke revealing she was blind and the resulting argument had caused enough stress to the woman that she had very nearly collapsed; If that happened again on the witness stand, Apollo wasn't sure he'd be able to forgive himself... and, to make it worse, Klavier was sure to push for a verdict while Lamiroir was recovering, destroying their last remaining chance to save Machi (essentially a member of their family, even though he didn't know it yet). Apollo couldn't bear to let either his young client-turned-brother or amnesiac mother down by failing to see justice done in this trial... not to mention how much a loss would hurt him, Trucy, Luke... and even Phoenix. How could a son of the Phoenix Wright, the famous ace attorney whose only loss in court had been with a truly-guilty client, fail to sway the court's opinion on an
innocent teenager?

A hand on his arm startled Apollo out of his thoughts, and he turned to his right to see Luke giving him a smile. "We're in this together," the younger brother reminded him.

After a moment of surprise, Apollo smiled back and gave Luke a nod. No matter what lay ahead, the Wrights were a team; There was no giving up until the day was won.

View the Court Record
"It is my distinct honour," Klavier announced with a bow, quieting the crowds instantly, "to welcome the Siren of the Ballad to our courtroom."

Apollo and Luke looked up in surprise to see two figures heading towards the witness stand, already nearly at their destination. The taller one was who they expected to see: Lamiroir, stepping gingerly forward with a hand on the collar of her white dress. At her side, holding Lamiroir's hand tightly, was a grinning teenage girl in a blue magician's outfit... a girl they knew all too well.

"What's Trucy doing!?!" Luke hissed under his breath. "Is she allowed to so obviously escort Lamiroir to the stand?"

Apollo shrugged. "Guess so."

As the two women reached the witness stand, Trucy stopped and laid Lamiroir's hand down on the wooden podium, whispering something to the singer with a smile. Lamiroir nodded, whispering something back, then Trucy skipped over to the defence bench, taking her place at Apollo's side with a grin. "Hi!" she quietly chirped.

Luke didn't have the time to question their sister, as Lamiroir had turned her attention towards Klavier, giving him a respectful nod. "You are too kind," she said.

The judge jumped in surprise. "Y-you can speak English?"

"Yes," Lamiroir replied. "Yes, I can... though I am not very good. There is much I do not know."

"You speak so well!" the judge gushed. "Have you spent time here before?"

Lamiroir shook her head. "Actually, I do not know how I came by my knowledge of your language... nor where I studied it."

Apollo felt a twinge of sadness. So her time alone with Trucy hadn't triggered any resurfacing memories...

"I too thought to call her as a witness," Klavier announced, giving the Wrights a stern look, "but I did not. I had a reason, of course: Lamiroir suffers from amnesia."

The judge was surprised. "Amnesia?"

"Lamiroir is not my true name," the woman on the witness stand explained. "Yet I remember nothing of the time before I was given it... nothing of the time before I started singing on stage."

"As lauded singer Lamiroir," Klavier picked up, "she lives a good life. There are little difficulties for her, thanks to her success... Yet, I did not wish to subject her to unnecessary stress."

Apollo noticed Klavier's stern gaze flicker back to the Wrights, and shot the prosecutor a glare in return. 'I think I'm more aware of her condition than you, Gavin. You think I would be doing this if I
had any other choice?"

The judge hummed in thought. "I see." He gave Lamiroir a warm smile. "I care surprisingly little about people's pasts. You have nothing to fear in this court, Lamiroir."

Lamiroir nodded. "Thank you, but please do not be concerned on my behalf. I do not believe Machi is Mister LeTouse's killer; If there is anything I know that may help his case, I will tell it gladly."

Her resolve seemed to be unexpected to the judge, but he went ahead with his courtroom procedure. "Well, now that you're here, please give us your testimony... If nothing else, the sound of your voice is welcome. Tell us what you saw the night of the crime!"

Apollo winced. 'Saw? Really? We already know the answer to that...'

Lamiroir gave a tight smile that was barely visible through her veil. "What I saw?" she repeated, thoughtfully. "Unfortunately, I 'saw' nothing. That night, I was invited to sing on stage, and this I did. At the time of the murder, I was on my way from the stage to the backstage exit. There was something like a little window there. I heard two shots... I couldn't do anything to stop it." Her eyes closed, pained, then she looked up towards the judge with a determined look. "But it wasn't Machi! It was a grown person! I know it was!"

Klavier had his eyes closed, fiddling with his hair as he stood relaxed behind his bench. "There you have it. She saw nothing that night. Not as 'direct' a witness as the defence claimed."

"But she heard a lot," Luke calmly replied, suddenly seeming subdued as he stared across the courtroom. "And... you haven't even realised how her testimony is important, have you?"

The prosecutor's eyes snapped open, giving Luke a curious look.

The judge didn't appear to have heard anything of their conversation, smiling at Lamiroir. "I must say, you sound wonderful just testifying," he gushed, then turned to Apollo. "The cross-examination, Mister Wright."

Apollo nodded. 'It would have been nice if you'd been listening to her words, Your Honour...'

Turning back to Lamiroir, he ran over in his head how Luke had explained this same testimony the previous day, and realised she was doing her best to be informative without breaking her contract with Valant (had he recognised her too?) or giving away her own blindness... though Machi's deception being uncovered and Trucy's personal escort to the witness stand certainly hadn't helped that last part. He wasn't sure if it was possible to use her words effectively without giving away either of those, but he was going to do his best to allow her to keep her secrets. "Lamiroir, you say you heard the murder through a 'little window'?"

"Yes, well," Lamiroir sheepishly replied, "'window' is the best word I know in English. I think this is how it is said, yes."

Klavier chuckled, playing with his hair. "You need not worry, Lamiroir. Your choice of words is impeccable. There is a small window in the dressing room in question." He eyed the Wrights teasingly, bringing up the crime scene diagram to highlight the window on the back wall. "Perhaps the defence remembers this detail?"

Trucy minutely gasped, elbowing Apollo excitedly. "That's the one the killer could have escaped through!" she whispered.

Apollo shot her a frown. "No, they couldn't. And it's not relevant to Lamiroir's testimony anyway, remember?"
"Oh, yeah," Trucy muttered, arms crossed in thought.

Luke sighed, shaking his head. "Prosecutor Gavin... Lamiroir... It seems I owe you both an apology."

The entire court seemed to focus on Luke with surprise. "What do you mean?" Lamiroir asked.

"When you told me 'small window'," Luke continued to the woman, "I knew instantly what it was you were referring to... and, naively, I thought the police and prosecution would know too. I didn't think it would be necessary to give you a more specific word for what you meant."

Klavier raised an eyebrow. "What else could she have meant?" He pointed to the diagram on the holograms. "There are no other windows, small or otherwise, on the scene."

Luke shook his head. "The word 'window' has other meanings than just a pane of glass, Mister Gavin. There was another 'window' in that dressing room... one that's come up several times in this trial already."

Klavier frowned. "Now you are just being ridiculous, Herr Doktor. What 'other window'?"

Luke gave Apollo a smile, a silent passing over of the honours, and Apollo grinned at the opportunity to put their prosecutor rival in his place. "Simple," he said, tapping at his Court Record to display on the holograms a photo from the crime scene, one Trucy had taken on the night of the concert. "She was talking about the air vent."

"The air vent!?" the judge cried in shock. "B-but that's no 'small window'!"

"May I remind you, Your Honour, that Lamiroir is Borginian?" Apollo replied. "She is unfamiliar with English; It's not a stretch to imagine the best word she could think of to describe the air vent opening was as a 'small window'!"

"Objection!" came a shout from across the room, and Klavier whacked a fist against the wall at his back, shooting the Wrights an unhappy pout. "Now you've done it. You've gone beyond ridiculous and into ludicrous." He gestured to the diagram. "So Lamiroir was up in the ventilation system listening to this murder going down?"

Apollo nodded, remembering his discussion with Luke the previous day. "The glass window on the scene looked rather thick, and it was closed too; It didn't look possible to overhear anything through that."

"Indeed it was not," Klavier agreed, still looking annoyed. "We ran a simulation and determined the scenario impossible."

"Hence why you threw away Lamiroir's testimony so readily," Luke added with a proud grin. "You didn't think to question her further and determine your interpretation of her words was correct."

Klavier glared. "And who's to say yours is?" he asked. "Why would Lamiroir be in the ventilation system, hiding like a rat!?" He glanced to the woman at the stand. "No offence intended to her, of course."

The three Wrights all shot each other grins, and Apollo crossed his arms over his puffed-out chest as he faced Klavier. "The explanation for that is simple, Prosecutor Gavin." He turned towards the witness stand. "Lamiroir, just to clarify: The 'small window' you heard the murder from... Was it up high, on the ceiling of the room? Not low on a wall?"
Lamiroir thought a moment, then nodded. "Yes, it was up on the ceiling."

"What!?!" Klavier cried, jumping back in shock as the gallery erupted into noise.

The judge began to bang his gavel. "Order! Order! I will have order!"

Trucy giggled as she elbowed her eldest brother. "That was amazing, Polly!"

"Thanks," Apollo whispered back, unable to turn down his grin.

"And now," Luke added, "we just have to overturn the assumption of when the shooting happened!"

Apollo's grin faded at that. "Easier said than done."

Finally, the gallery calmed, and the judge put his gavel back down with a sigh. Annoyed, he turned to face Lamiroir. "Witness! You will clarify this statement to the court! Are you, in fact, saying that you were up above the ceiling of the room? And that's where you heard the moment of the crime?"

Lamiroir nodded again. "Yes, in fact, I was." She bowed her head apologetically. "I am sorry. I did not imagine it would become such an important point..."

"Don't blame yourself, Lamiroir," Apollo insisted. "After all, you are under contract not to discuss why you were in the air vents; It's understandable you'd be hesitant to explain all the errors of assumption the prosecution has made with your testimony."

"Excuse me!?" Klavier cried, tightening a fist as he shot the Wrights a glare. "What exactly are you talking about now, Herr Forehead?"

Apollo grinned, deciding to tease Klavier as Klavier had teased them. "Needless to say, with myself and Ema at the dressing room door, and Lamiroir here in the air vents, there should have been nowhere for the killer to run, correct?"

The judge thought a moment, then nodded. "That's true. There's no other exits."

Klavier scoffed. "That is easy enough to explain," he pointed out. "It is clear Lamiroir is lying to cover for Machi."

"It was not Machi!" Lamiroir insisted, more firmly than Apollo had been expecting to ever see. "I do not forget a voice when I hear it, and I heard the killer speak! It was a grown man!"

"And this voice you heard," Klavier retorted, "could it not have been the victim, Mister LeTouse?"

"Absolutely not," Lamiroir sternly replied. "Did I not just say that I do not forget a voice? If it was Mister LeTouse who spoke, I would have known."

The judge frowned in thought. "But, Lamiroir... you were in the air vents, and you heard this murder happen? Why, then, did you not look to see who the killer was?"

Lamiroir's eyes closed. "I am a singer. I rely more on my ears than my eyes."

"Th-the dressing room was very cluttered," Apollo added off the top of his head, eager not to have to explain her blindness. "It's understandable she couldn't have seen anything through the vent."

"And yet," Klavier said, frown deepening, "I have still not heard a reason our 'Siren of the Ballad' was in those air vents at all, let alone any proof to corroborate her story. How do we know she is not simply covering for the defendant?"
Apollo paused.

"That is a good point, Prosecutor Gavin," the judge agreed. "Testimony alone is not enough as an argument, not in this case." He gave Apollo a stern look. "Does the defence have any evidence to support their claims?"

In the silence, Apollo heard Luke hissing "Bollocks," at his side.
'But I haven't gotten to the best part yet!' Apollo mentally objected, regretting his decision to not bring up the timing of the murder sooner; He highly doubted the judge would accept it as evidence.

Still swearing under his breath, Luke grabbed the Court Record, madly scrolling through their collected notes. Trucy slipped around behind Apollo to join him, peering over Luke's arm at the photos as they flew past on the small screen. Noticing her there, Luke was quick to halt his muttering, simply glaring intensely at the tablet computer in his hands.

Klavier smiled, eyeing Luke's mad search. "Of course the defence doesn't have evidence," he said. "Their theory is complete nonsense."

"Wait!" Trucy suddenly cried, holding out a hand. "Give us a minute!" Without waiting for a reply, she turned to her eldest brother. "Polly, remember that brooch on the floor of the dressing room? I think I've remembered why it was familiar!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, leaning in closer to his sister to hear her better. "Why is that?"

"Lamiroir was wearing it that night!" she explained with a hopeful grin. "Then she wasn't when we spoke to her after! Maybe she dropped it when she heard the gunshots!"

At that, Apollo winced. "Truce, we can't prove when she dropped it," he pointed out. "It could easily have been lying there all night."

Trucy's face fell. "But..."

"Apollo's right," Luke added behind her, still paging rapidly through the Court Record. "Even then, how could we ask Lamiroir if it was hers without the actual brooch on hand for her to touch? She can't exactly look at a photo, remember."

Apollo growled to himself. "Why couldn't Gavin have let us finish explaining before demanding evidence!?"

Klavier chuckled, playing with his hair. "We heard your claim," he said. "We even entertained the possibility... and it brought us to this. Herr Judge!"

The judge nodded, watching the Wrights sternly. "The defence has failed to provide any evidence supporting their theory," he announced, then banged his gavel. "This cross-examination is over."

"Objection!" Apollo cried, banging on his bench with his fists. "Wait! Let me finish explaining-!"

"The cross-examination is over, Mister Wright," the judge repeated with a glare. "Until such a time as a need arises, this witness may leave the stand."

Lamiroir bowed her head, looking as sorrowful as the trio at the defence bench. "I'm sorry I could not be of more assistance." She turned, beginning to walk away from the stand, and Trucy jumped at
her brothers' side, racing to catch up to the woman. She quickly slid her hand into Lamiroir's, then began to escort her back to the waiting room.

Apollo sighed, leaning heavily on the bench as his head rolled forward. *That's it... I've failed...'*

"Your Honour!"

The room seemed to stop as everyone looked up at a young man in uniform racing into the courtroom, ducking past Trucy and Lamiroir as he headed for the judge.

"What is it, bailiff?" the judge asked, annoyed. "Can't you see we're in session here!?"

"We have some results back from the investigation!" the bailiff announced.

Jogging in behind the young officer came Daryan, grinning smugly and giving Klavier a quick wave. He barely paid Trucy and Lamiroir a glance as he skirted around them.

"Ah, the information from Interpol!" Klavier realised with a smile, watching his bandmate expectantly. "Quick work as always, Daryan."

The judge gave Klavier a surprised look, then also turned his attention to the detective. "Well, let's hear your report, Detective Crescend."

Daryan nodded, the bailiff at his side scuttling away back out of the room. "I asked Interpol about LeTouse," the detective explained. "I'm sure you'll find their answer intriguing: Apparently, he was on a search for something."

"'Something'?" Klavier repeated, confused.

"They wouldn't tell us what," Daryan admitted with a scowl. "But, they did say he was given a 'replica' for identification purposes, so we took a look through his belongings and found *this*." With a proud smile, he reached into a pocket and pulled out a tiny white lump, oval-shaped and only about four centimetres long. "It's just plastic, but I figure enough asking around will get us an answer of what it's meant to be." He handed the lump off to Klavier, who carefully turned it over in his grip as he examined it.

The judge nodded. "Thank you for informing us of the investigation's findings, Detective Crescend. This certainly seems likely to tie in to the case somehow."

Daryan smirked smugly. "Oh, no problem at all, Your Honour," he insisted, then spun on his heel and began to casually amble back out of the room. "I'll be heading out."

"Hold it!" came a sudden cry, stopping everyone in their tracks. Still halfway between the witness stand and the waiting room, one hand in Trucy's and the other held out towards the judge, stood Lamiroir, eyes wide. "Wait!"

"La-Lamiroir?" the judge asked, surprised. "Is something the matter?"

She frowned, deep in thought. "That voice just now..."

Klavier glanced over to the detective, stood near the door with an equally confused look. "Daryan?"

"Mister Daryan, is it?" Lamiroir quietly replied. She thought to herself for a very long moment, then nodded, a determined frown on her face. "It was him. I'm sure of it."

"It was 'him'?" the judge repeated, still looking lost.
Klavier meanwhile was watching the woman with wide eyes. "Y-you aren't saying-!?"

"That voice I heard," Lamiroir continued, "talking to Mister LeTouse, when I heard the gunshots fired. It was him! It was Mister Daryan!"

"Is this some kind of a joke!?" Klavier shouted, slamming a fist against the wall at his back as the gallery erupted into chaos.

Apollo was too surprised to say anything more than a strangled "What!??", looking between the steely resolve of his blind mother and the wide-eyed stare of the detective at the courtroom doors. He couldn't read Daryan's expression, only that it was somewhere between shock and fear... and possibly rage, too.

"No way," the detective muttered, almost unheard over the growing volume of the gallery.

The judge banged fruitlessly with his gavel, calling for order, but none came. Eventually, he seemed to give up, shouting over the chaos "This trial is suspended until tomorrow!" and promptly fleeing his podium. His exit served as enough of a signal that everyone else followed his lead, Trucy leading Lamiroir back to the waiting room while Klavier ran to Daryan, the pair rushing out together through the main doors.

Apollo turned to his brother, and was surprised to find him totally calm, a stern look on his face. "Luke?"

Luke looked over, giving his brother a smile. "It looks like the worst part is over," he simply said. "We can't give up now, Apollo."

Although he didn't understand Luke's confidence, Apollo nodded, returning the smile. "No, we can't," we agreed.

The Wright brothers emerged into the third floor lobby, still mostly quiet as the chaotic crowds in the courtroom took their time to leave. It didn't take long to spot Trucy, standing with Lamiroir in an out-of-the-way corner and idly chatting. As they approached, their sister spotted them and waved. "Polly! Luke! We found who shot Mister LeTouse!"

Apollo scoffed, rolling his eyes as he reached his sister's side. "Now we just gotta prove it."

"I'll be honest," Luke added, smiling, "I already suspected Detective Crescend of the murder."

"You did?" Trucy asked, surprised.

"Of course you did," Apollo sighed.

Lamiroir turned towards Luke with a hopeful look. "So there is more than just my word to save Machi?"

Luke paused, uncomfortable. "Unfortunately, 'he was acting strangely all night' isn't going to be strong enough evidence in court."

"Strangely?" Apollo repeated, giving his brother a curious look. "How can you tell? That night was the first time any of us met him."

"I told you this yesterday," Luke reminded them, "that it was Detective Crescend who relieved me.
from guarding the crime scene? He wasn't expecting to see me, and claimed Ema sent him... but Ema hadn't spoken to him since just after the murder, so he was clearly lying. I suspect he came straight to me after you two spoke to him about the 'lyrics' theory."

"Actually, that reminds me," Apollo muttered, a finger pressed to his forehead, "he and Gavin were arguing about that missed cue of Crescend's. Might he have missed it because he injured himself using Mister LeTouse's gun?"

"It's certainly a possibility," Luke agreed. "He was manipulating the hunt for Machi too, complaining about his missing guitar and then 'leading' me to the stage and up on the platform."

"And Gavin mentioned today the killer might have stolen the body itself had it not been watched," Apollo added. "I bet Crescend was planning to do just that until he realised you were guarding it, Luke."

Trucy squealed. "Ooh, this is so exciting! Everything's coming together!"

Apollo sighed. "And the only problem is, we can't prove any of it. We didn't even get a chance to bring up most of our argument, since Gavin cut us off."

Lamiroir clasped her hands together, frowning sadly. "I'm sorry I couldn't help more."

"Please, it's not your fault, Lamiroir," Apollo insisted. "We should have searched harder for evidence yesterday, when we had the chance."

"Oh, but, we can do that now, can't we?" Trucy pointed out. "The judge said the trial was resuming tomorrow, right?"

Luke nodded. "He did. We were very lucky. We can focus this afternoon on finding as much information as we can on our case... and Mister LeTouse's secret mission."

Lamiroir sighed. "I am still finding that hard to believe," she admitted. "What was he seeking? And what connection did it have to me?"

"Luke!"

The Wrights turned to see Flora running towards them, an eager smile on her face. Trailing behind her were Emmy, Sycamore, and Alfendi, the young boy having to be dragged along by his uncle as they tried to keep up with his older sister.


"You and Apollo were both amazing in there!" Flora gushed, reaching their corner of the lobby. Her face then fell. "Mister Gavin was being such a jerk... and you really stood up to him! That alone deserves congratulations!"

"Uh, thanks, Flora," Apollo muttered, running a hand through his hair in embarrassment.

Luke cast a concerned glance between his friend and Lamiroir, the latter listening quietly to their conversation. "This is probably a bad time to be doing introductions, given what we're all in the middle of."

"There's no need for them on our end," Emmy offered, joining the group with a smile. "Flora and I were in the audience of the concert the other day; We loved your song, Lamiroir."
Lamiroir smiled, bowing her head. "Thank you."

Apollo looked behind them, noticing Sycamore now dragging a protesting Alfendi off towards the stairs. "Where's Mister Sycamore taking Alfendi?"

"The kiddo's throwing a tantrum," Emmy explained with a wry look. "Apparently the trial wasn't exciting enough."

"Uncle's taking him somewhere quiet to calm down," Flora assured them. "He'll be alright in a little while."

"Aw, poor Alfendi," Trucy sighed in sympathy.

In the resulting lull of the conversation, Luke turned his attention back to the singer. "Lamiroir, Flora here is Professor Layton's daughter, and this is Emmy Altava; She was the Professor's assistant."

"A very long time ago," Emmy interrupted with a grimace, but turned to the older woman with a curious look. "Luke mentioned you had some kind of problem you were considering bringing to Professor Layton for help? I assume it's to do with the amnesia Prosecutor Gavin mentioned."

Lamiroir nodded, though her face was downturned, hands tightly clutched together. "I may or may not," she said. "I have... other concerns to attend to at the moment."

"That's understandable, ma'am," Flora commiserated, then gave Luke and Apollo a bright smile. "Though I'm sure you two will clear little Machi's name in no time!"

"Especially if you let us help out," Emmy added, gently punching Apollo's arm with a grin. "Getting to go on an investigation is much more exciting than just a boring old regular trip to LA!"

Trucy huffed. "It's not boring!" she insisted. "You came to see our show!"

"And your show was wonderful," Flora insisted, shooting Emmy a disappointed look. "I always love seeing you two evolving your magic tricks!"

Lamiroir smiled, almost laughing under her breath. "Thank you all for your help assisting Machi," she said. "I will be needed elsewhere this afternoon, so I must leave, but I wish you all the best of luck."

"Do you need help?" Apollo asked, giving Lamiroir a concerned frown identical to his sister's. "We don't mind."

"You are already helping by finding Mister LeTouse's killer," Lamiroir assured them. "I will be fine alone. If you need me, I will be at the Coliseum."

Although he still worried for her, Apollo nodded, deciding not to push his luck. "We'll come find you if we need anything more," he promised.

Trucy sidled closer to her eldest brother, grabbing his hand. Her eyes never left Lamiroir. "We'll definitely see you later!" she added in a cheerful tone, betrayed only by the tightness of her expression.

Lamiroir gave them all a grateful smile. "Until then." With that, she turned and slowly made her way out of the lobby.
View the Court Record
"I must say, this case is much more intriguing than I thought," Sycamore said as he lowered himself onto one of the red sofas, pinning down the sulking Alfendi at his side. "Your victim is a secret agent, your suspect a police detective, and your blind client isn't actually blind." He smiled, pushing at his glasses. "Not to mention the secrecy surrounding your chosen witness..."

Luke blushed, shrinking down in his seat opposite the man. "It never got said, but... you must have figured it out pretty quickly once the truth about Machi came out."

Sycamore chuckled, nodding. "It isn't that hard if you give it more than a moment's thought."

"We're sorry for not telling you," Trucy meekly said, sitting at Luke's side, her hands in her lap. "It was really important to keep it quiet, so..."

"It took me a while, I'll admit," Emmy added, standing by the window and looking out over the road below. "I didn't stop to wonder why the deception existed in the first place until the trial was almost over."

Flora frowned in confusion, sitting next to Sycamore. "What are you all talking about?"

Apollo sighed from where he stood, moving over to sit with his siblings. For Flora, he explained, "Lamiroir is known as the 'Landscape Painter in Sound'; For her image, it was important that she be known as sighted... but, in reality, she's blind."

Flora gasped, her hands to her mouth. "Oh! I... didn't even realise!"

"Machi pretended to be blind to cover for her," Apollo continued. "I'm sure you've heard they hold hands at all times... but it's not for Lamiroir to lead Machi; it's for Machi to lead Lamiroir."

As Flora mused over this new knowledge, Luke turned towards the window, watching his friend standing there with a concerned frown. "Emmy?"

Emmy looked around. "Hmm?"

"I know what your answer's going to be, but I really have to double-check," Luke said, carefully considering his words with an embarrassed frown. "You... aren't going to spread around the details of our investigation in your articles, are you?"

For barely a moment, Apollo caught a glimpse of hurt on Emmy's face, but she had covered it so quickly with a smile that he doubted anyone else had seen it. "Of course I won't," Emmy assured Luke, her sincerity clear. "All my information is coming from the trial at this point; Before that, I just passed on what all the other news reports were saying. You don't have to worry about anything private getting out from me."

Luke was visibly relieved. "Thank you, Emmy. I just needed to hear it."
Emmy's smile widened. "No problem."

Apollo decided to keep to himself the sight of her right hand twitching into a fist as she said those last words.

Trucy sighed, leaning back against the couch cushions and staring up at the ceiling. "If only Daddy were here... He'd probably know what to do."

"He would," Apollo agreed, "and, honestly, we wouldn't have needed his help figuring it out anyway."

"We wouldn't?" Trucy repeated, giving her brother a confused look.

Apollo laughed. "We're going back to the Coliseum. We need hard evidence for our case, right?"

"I'll go with you," Emmy insisted, grinning. "I missed out on seeing you three in action yesterday, after all!"

Alfendi loudly groaned, finally inserting himself into a conversation he'd been largely ignoring until now. "Do we have to go?" he asked in a whine. "I don't wanna!"

"Of course you don't have to, 'Fendi," Flora assured her young brother, leaning forward to see him on Sycamore's other side. "Did you want to go back to the Bostonius? Take the rest of the day off?"

The boy paused, thinking the offer over.

"It's entirely up to you, Alfendi," Sycamore added, then paused and turned to Flora. "And what about you, Flora? Were you also wanting to join the investigation?"

Flora looked away, her hands fiddling with the edges of her dress. "I... I don't know," she admitted. "You've spent so much of this holiday watching over 'Fendi, Uncle..."

Sycamore chuckled, shaking his head. "You needn't worry about me, Flora. If you want to join the investigation, go ahead. I'm happy to take care of the boy."

His assurances only seemed to make poor Flora even more uncertain.

Over the ensuing silence, a loud, pompous laugh echoed through the room, stopping everyone in their tracks as they exchanged confused glances.

"Desmond...?" Emmy hesitantly asked, stepping away from the window.

"That most certainly wasn't me," Sycamore replied, eyes wide as he got to his feet.

Trucy's face slowly erupted into a grin, her eyes on the almost-closed reception door behind Sycamore. "Oh! It's...!"

"Wherever the mundane gives way to miracles," the mysterious voice continued, "a word is whispered... Gramarye!"

Apollo wasn't sure whether to roll his eyes or join Trucy in her excitement. "We left the front door open, didn't we?" he asked, but it was more of a statement than a question; He didn't want to consider that the front door had indeed been locked and their visitor simply picked it open.

With a flourish, the door to reception was shoved open, and a man in yellow wielding a long cane stood in the entrance, giving everyone within a wide grin. "We meet once again!"
"Uncle Valant!" Trucy gleefully cried, dashing to her uncle's side.

"Ah, my dear Trucy!" Valant replied, holding his arms out wide to welcome the teen. "You are looking much more cheerful on this fine day than on our last rendezvous!"

Apollo couldn't resist a grin as he saw everyone else watching Valant with a mixture of shock and confusion. "Hello again, sir!" he called, walking around to meet the man.

"And the attorney Apollo!" Valant cried, tapping the brim of his top hat with his cane in greeting to the young man. "I must say, learning it was you on that horrid courtroom stage defending that poor pianist..." He shivered, his confident smirk fading. "Twas a hot topic of talk amongst the staff, you know."

Apollo blushed, running a hand through his hair. "Oh, uh... Thank you. I'm doing my best for him."

"I hate to intrude," Sycamore interrupted, giving Valant a suspicious look, "but I don't believe we've met, Mister...?" At his sides, Flora and Alfendi were curiously watching the new arrival from where they sat on the sofa, Alfendi peering over the back with narrowed eyes.

Trucy gasped, scandalised. "Mister Sycamore!" she cried accusingly. "Don't you remember? This is the Great Gramarye, Valant Gramarye!" She gestured to her uncle, the pair grinning proudly. "The Grand Magician!"

"Yes, it is I," Valant pompously agreed, twirling his cane, "the Great Valant Gramarye. As seen on television."

Sycamore wasn't impressed, pushing at his glasses. "I don't watch much television, I'm afraid."

"Desmond!" Emmy hissed from across the room in warning. At the man's side, Flora stifled a giggle.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you, Mister Gramarye," Luke spoke up, rushing to join his siblings with a polite smile. "Trucy's told us a lot about you over the years."

"Ah, indeed?" Valant replied, fixing said girl with his usual smirk.

Trucy nodded, then gestured to the younger of her brothers. "Uncle Valant, this is Luke, my other brother! Our second-ever Halloween together, I made him-!"

"L-let's not bother him with that story, Trucy," Luke hurriedly interrupted, cheeks red as he laughed nervously.

Valant seemed a little surprised to hear his honorary niece's explanation, but accepted it with a shrug, giving them a boastful smirk. "You have made quite the family since last we met, Trucy; I should apologise that I lack the time to greet your new guardian."

"Papa's very busy this week," Luke insisted; Apollo was starting to see the cracks in the vet's expression as his smile became more and more forced. "I'm afraid he's also short on time to meet people."

"Ah, well, in that case, fate has decided 'twas not meant to be," Valant declared. Regardless, Apollo could see how relieved he'd been to hear Luke's words. The man twirled his cane, dramatically gesturing to call attention to himself. "Now, I believe you wished to see me? So, be quick with your questions, and do not quail, quake or quiver; I am quite tame. Though my stardom may sear the sight, you'll find me down to earth when need calls." He gave a deep bow.
Trucy squealed, taken with her uncle's alliterative display.

In less than a moment, Emmy had pushed past Apollo, notebook open in her hand, and was giving Valant an eager smile. "Don't you worry, Mister Gramarye; I am very practised with firing off quick questions!" she said, pulling a pen from her sleeve and holding it to the top page of her notebook. "I'm curious, the illusion during Lamiroir's performance at the Gavinners' concert was your work, wasn't it? Why haven't you made any kind of announcement about it? You've been working alone for seven years now; Is it very different to when you worked with a partner? I understand you've not been keeping in touch with Trucy, but have you managed to catch her and Apollo's show while you've been back in town?"

"E-Emmy!" Luke cried, face paling as he tried to signal for her to stop. "Is this really the right time for an interview!?"

Emmy just grinned. "He asked for questions," she pointed out.

Valant laughed. "Indeed I did!" he agreed, turning to the woman. "You must be a reporter."

"Emmy Altava, World Times," she replied, pen still held at the ready above her notebook. "I'm working on an article about the next generation of Gramaryes here," she pointed her pen alternately between Apollo and Trucy, "and my boss has got me on the murder at the concert while I'm in the area. Any comments, Mister Gramarye?"

The magician held his cane to his face, eyes closed in thought. After a moment, he looked up again with his usual smirk. "My master-work at the concert... I've been remiss in remembering the reasons for my visit."

"Reasons?" Apollo repeated.

"The first being, of course," Valant continued, turning to Trucy, "to see you, Miss Trucy."

Trucy bounced up and down in glee. "You don't know how happy I am to see you again, Uncle Valant!"

"I'm sure you are," Valant replied, smirking smugly.

Apollo rolled his eyes.

Valant then turned to Apollo holding out a hand. "My other reason for coming here today," he twirled his fingers, and a silver CD appeared from nowhere in his grip, "was this."

The young lawyer took the item, turning it over in his hands. He quickly noticed, scribbled on the top with a black marker, was the handwritten label 'Guitars Serenade'. "Is this...?"

"A recording of the concert," Valant proudly explained. "I've brought it for you, Apollo and Trucy, on behalf of Troupe Gramarye." He gave a quick bow, giving the moment far more importance than it perhaps deserved. "Will you watch it?"

"Of course we will!" Trucy cried, dashing across to snatch the CD from her brother's hands and running to the television, where she didn't hesitate to start fiddling with the aging DVD player.

Luke rushed to follow his sister, "Um, Truce, let me...", and reached for the tray of remotes, gently guiding the teen away from jabbing at the buttons on the front of the machine.
View the Court Record
It hadn't taken long for everyone in the room to assemble around the television, which, moments after the CD was inserted into the tray, flickered to life. It showed the unmistakable image of Lamiroir, standing in a spotlight. The speakers, once Luke had hurriedly turned them up, emitted the gentle piano melody of the song's opening, and were followed half-a-second later by Lamiroir's soaring voice.

The Guitar's Serenade played out much as Apollo remembered it, though now through an edited sequence of close-ups and long shots that highlighted the illusion of the teleportation trick: Klavier's incident with his guitar was entirely in the background (Apollo stifled laughter at the sight of the prosecutor's flailing as he fell offscreen, the camera quickly whipping away), and Machi appeared only in extreme long shots and a single close-up at the very beginning of the piece; The focus of the video was entirely on Lamiroir and, when she wasn't onstage, her cloak. The song itself was as beautiful as he remembered... though a part of him had to blink back tears as the realisation hit him all over again that the woman onscreen, who the camera was paying the utmost attention to, was his lost mother.

The song came to an end, Lamiroir standing on the platform at the back of the audience while Klavier beat out the flames of his guitar in the distant background. The faint cheers of the audience faded out, quickly followed by the image turning to black, and the video was over.

Trucy sighed, her eyes shining as she gazed at the screen with a faraway smile. "Wow... It's almost as good as it was live." Luke, standing at her side, rested a hand on her shoulder, watching his sister with concern.

In the shuffle of everyone arranging themselves around the television, Alfendi had ended up at the front, closest to the screen, and turned to face Valant with a frown. "How did the lady do that?"

Valant laughed. "Are you asking me how my trick took to the air, little boy?"

Apollo shook his head, giving Alfendi a look that was half-stern and half-amused. "Now now Alfendi, it's against the rules to ask a magician how his illusions work."

Alfendi shot Apollo a glare. "Why?"

"Because it's the rules," Trucy added, imitating her brother right down to the crossed arms.

"Don't even ask," Valant picked up, shaking his head with a small smile. "I won't answer."

Alfendi pouted, crossing his arms and glaring at the three magicians.

Valant laughed again, then gestured to the television with his cane, looking at Apollo. "Put that CD in a computer and you should find the individual audio files from the mixing board. As mystical as I am, I could not figure out how to combine them."

Luke snorted, but quickly hid his giggles. "Don't worry Mister Gramarye, I can handle that."
Trucy clapped her hands together, bouncing on the spot. "Oh, thank you so much Uncle Valant! This was the best gift ever!"

"I don't doubt it!" Valant said, then bowed to the girl. "But now, I must make my leave, Miss Trucy."

"What!?" Trucy gasped, running to her honorary uncle. "Th-there's no need to rush... You should stay a while!"

Valant shook his head. "I am afraid I cannot. I may not. I shall not." He held his cane high with a serious frown. "I have been asked to assist with an analysis and so I shall slink back to the scene."

Emmy tapped her cheek in thought. "So you'll be at the concert venue today?"

"Correct," Valant replied, then returned his attention to Apollo and Trucy. "If you would call on me, come to the Coliseum," he told them, then spun around with a twirl of his cape, waving over his shoulder. "See you later, crocodile."

Apollo watched as the man left the room. 'I wonder if... Should I?'

"Wow, we really picked the right time to visit, didn't we?" Flora giggled somewhere behind him. "We got to go to a concert, almost witnessed a murder... We've met Klavier Gavin, and Lamiroir, and Valant Gramarye..."

"Yeah, you guys got some connections, didn't you?" Emmy added in a teasing tone.

Luke sighed, likely the focus of Emmy's attentions. "Please don't, Emmy."

"But how did the trick work!?" Alfendi interrupted, sounding annoyed.

"Alfendi-" Sycamore tried to scold the boy.

Trucy giggled. "Nuh-uh, a magician never reveals their secrets! It's the rules!"

"The rules are stupid!" Alfendi proclaimed.

With everyone else distracted, Apollo decided to make a run out the door.

Apollo caught up to Valant on the stairs leading from their front doorstep to the street below, flying out the reception door and taking care not to trap his cape as he closed it behind him. "Wait, Mister Valant!"

At the sound of his name, the man turned, looking back up the stairway in surprise. "Hmm? Young Apollo?"

"I had something else I wanted to ask you," Apollo explained, jumping down the steps, his hands on either wall of the narrow passage. "In private."

Valant considered the request for a second or two, then nodded, turning to face him. His cane was, for once, lowered to rest upon the step next up from the man's feet. "What did you want to know?"

Apollo thought a moment. "How come... Why..." He stopped, shaking his head. How best to put this? Eventually, he fixed his gaze on Valant's. "When I introduced myself to you as 'Trucy's brother', you knew exactly what I meant," he explained. "How come you knew Thalassa Gramarye
had a son... had me," he paused only to take a deep breath, his chest feeling tight, "and Zak didn't?"

Confirming Apollo's suspicions, Valant returned the serious stare, remaining completely unsurprised... until Apollo mentioned the man's former performing partner. "You've... spoken to Zak?"

"I haven't," Apollo explained, shaking his head. "He... We've had distant contact with him," he settled for saying, not wanting to explain to a man he still suspected of murder what was truly going on with his sister's biological father.

Valant nodded, deciding to accept this explanation, though he was still frowning in worry as he stared off at a point in space somewhere beyond Apollo's shoulder. "I... can't say for sure, but wilful ignorance may have been a factor on Zak's part," he said. "Thalassa never spoke of the year she was away... but even a member of Troupe Gramarye as disregarded as myself could put together the story with a little thought."

Apollo didn't reply, watching Valant carefully. 'Disregarded?'

"There were all the rumours when she left," Valant continued, meeting Apollo's eyes. "Onlookers insisted she must have been pregnant against the wishes of Magnifi to just up and marry and leave the Troupe the way she did. Neither allowed their private lives to be known even to us, his apprentices, so it was always a mystery." He looked away again. "It's a small world, the performing arts. We heard what happened to Hyperion. And then she reappeared in her father's caravan like nothing had happened... except she was missing one of her bracelets."

At that, Apollo instinctively moved to grip the bracelet on his left wrist. Naturally, as he'd been missing his gloves and cape after the murder, the golden ring would have been even more visible upon his meeting with Valant.

"I didn't see the resemblance until you mentioned your relation to Trucy," Valant explained, meeting Apollo's eyes again. "I recognise even a partial magician's costume such as yours that night, and you looked about the right age... When I noticed your bracelet, then I knew for sure. Thalassa had had a child while she was away... and, by some Gramarye miracle, you and Trucy found each other."

Apollo smiled. "That was a miracle," he quietly agreed. "We didn't have anything to do with it, though."

With nothing he could say in reply, Valant simply nodded. "If you are going to ask me about your father, I'm not sure I will be very useful," he admitted. "Understand, it was a very long time ago that I performed with him, and we did not socialise with each other outside of work."

Apollo shook his head. "I've tried looking him up already. Hyperion... Reylu, right?"

Valant thought a moment. "Yes, I believe that was his stage name."

At that, Apollo blinked in surprise. "Stage name?"

"With the exception of his own daughter, everyone who worked under Magnifi had one, even myself," Valant explained. "I don't recall Hyperion's true name - we did not use them, after all - but I believe it was... something Justice."

Apollo felt his stomach drop. "Justice?"

Valant nodded. "Yes, I think so. 'Reylu' is the Borginian word for 'justice', if memory serves. He thought it was clever."
Suddenly Apollo was glad they'd never found a photo of his deceased father; He could only imagine what kind of false hopes might have been conjured had he asked Maya to channel 'Hyperion Reylu' and she had failed with the incorrect name. Who'd've thought that all along it had been 'Reylu' that was the stage name, not 'Justice'? Was 'Hyperion' his name at all, or another fake? And, for that matter... was he actually from California as he'd claimed before his death, not Borginian as the one article they'd found said?

"As for what happened to Thalassa, that is a memory that weighs heavy on my heart even today," Valant was continuing. "It was, truly, an accident... but we still do not know which of us was to blame, and the thought we were murderers was not a happy one. Magnifi was true to his word: Not a whiff of it escaped to the public. Not even a funeral."

Apollo stared at Valant in surprise. "What... happened to her?"

Valant gave a humourless smirk. "Zak and Valant's Quick-Draw Shoot'em, we called it. The worst of all possible tricks to go wrong in rehearsal."

"O-oh," Apollo muttered, his face paling. He decided immediately this would not be information he passed on to Trucy. "I've... heard of that one..."

With a sad sigh, Valant nodded. "You would have; It was our most famous for a reason. Now I perform alone, I wield only prop guns... and even then, I rarely use them."

Apollo looked away, deep in thought. His mind was abuzz with all the new information he'd been given; He hadn't been expecting so much...

"Two last things, young Apollo."

The shorter magician looked up to meet Valant's stern eyes. "Huh?"

"While we are being frank," the elder magician explained, "because of who you are, I will turn a blind eye to 'Apollo and Artemis Gramarye'; It is your name after all. But." He paused, shaking his head. "The rights to 'Troupe Gramarye' the group... have passed to me. If you two attempt to form a troupe of your own with those names, I warn you I will have no choice but to act."

Apollo nodded. "I understand," he said. "I'm not a lawyer for nothing."

A small smile twitched at the corner of Valant's mouth, but he kept going. "Secondly, because I know you will be aware of the rumours..." He paused again, sorrow leaking through his serious expression, and firmly met Apollo's eyes. "Magnifi's death was not of my causing."

At that, Apollo could only stare in surprise. "It... what?"

"I did not kill him," Valant repeated.

Apollo stared a few moments more, unsure how to take the assertion; He couldn't see any sign of a lie. "Zak said that too."

Valant nodded, a smile on his lips. "I'm sure he did," he agreed. Before Apollo could ask for clarification, Valant turned and took a step or two down the stairs before again pausing, turning back to the younger magician. "Oh, and... good luck."

Somehow Apollo got the feeling from Valant's secretive smirk that he wasn't talking about the trial. "For what?"
"For returning to lovely Lamiroir her precious memories, of course." Valant chuckled, watching the young man with a soft gaze. "If anyone could do it, it would be you two." With that, he spun on his heel and stepped out onto the street, leaving Apollo stunned and alone on the stairs.

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"There you are!"

Apollo gave his brother a smile as he re-entered the office, pulling the door to reception closed behind him. After his conversation with Valant, he'd needed some time alone to recover, but was wary of taking too long to return; He didn't want his siblings worrying about him on top of everything else that was going on. "Hey."

"We were about to send out a search party," Sycamore joked. He and Luke seemed to be standing apart from the rest of the group, who were still gathered around the television, replaying the Guitar's Serenade and talking between themselves as they occasionally pointed at the screen. "If we're to investigate this murder, we need our defence attorney."

Apollo shrugged. "Sorry. I... needed to ask Valant something."

Luke watched his brother with a concerned frown.

"No harm done," Sycamore replied with a smile. "Actually, Alfendi's so taken with that stage illusion, he's probably eager to go question Lamiroir herself on how it was done... and I get the feeling Flora will want to go wherever he does."

"Oh?" Apollo asked, surprised. "I thought they were leaning towards staying out of the investigation?"

Luke nodded, seemingly deciding to put his worry for Apollo to the side for now. "That was before Valant Gramarye came in and turned everything on its head... which I'm sure he'd be very proud of."

At that, Apollo snorted, holding back a laugh. "Yeah, he would be."

"The only problem," Sycamore continued, pushing at his glasses, "is that I doubt our entire assembled group would be permitted to run around the crime scene; I understand that dressing room is small enough as it is."

"The corridors in there are very cramped too," Apollo muttered, crossing his arms. "Seven would be very crowded for an investigation team..."

Luke pressed a finger to his chin. "We could split up? Surely we can think of something we need to look into away from the Coliseum."

Sycamore shook his head. "Unless you can think of something, I doubt that's an option. I'll be happy to sit out, but I'm not sure six is all that much smaller."

Apollo thought a moment, then shrugged. "Eh, let's discuss it on the way. Whoever volunteers to sit this bit out can wait outside."
The Lukemobile was a bit crowded as they made their way to the concert venue near the harbour, making Luke very nervous as he fruitlessly tried to convince everyone else it really was safer to just take the train than to sit Alfendi on Flora's lap and Trucy on Apollo's. Emmy eventually talked him down with some gentle teasing once she heard Trucy's nickname for the small blue car, and they were on their way.

Apollo's badge had opened the way for the group of seven to bypass the crowds and enter the car park at the back of the building, heading to the backstage door the Wrights were by now very familiar with. "So, who's volunteering to wait out here?" Apollo asked. "Aside from Mister Sycamore, of course."

Emmy sighed. "I'll sit out," she announced, then gave the surprised Flora a smile. "I'm always on investigations of my own, anyway. Why not let you young people have some fun?"

"Oh, Emmy..." Flora sighed, somewhere between concern and appreciation.

"Don't you worry about me," Emmy insisted, patting Flora's shoulder. "Desmond and I will be out here when you guys get back."

Thus the Wrights and the Laytons headed into the small backstage corridors of the Coliseum.

Alfendi was the most eager to explore, being only barely reined in by the tight grip of his sister on his hand; Even so, Flora found herself dragged to the front of the group alongside Apollo, with Luke and Trucy trailing behind. The young boy refused to remain silent, firing off question after question about everything he could see.

"Where does that way go? Why is the man on that poster in a cage? Isn't he that guy who came to visit the other day that Luke yelled at? Why's his cage on fire? Are these boxes all for the concert? Why is that PC Badger doll there? Did someone forget him?"

At first, Flora attempted to answer him, but eventually Alfendi's ceaseless queries silenced even her, and the group was forced to endure the constant source of noise. Apollo was only just starting to manage to tune the boy out when they turned the final corner to the dressing rooms, and Alfendi asked something that attracted everyone's attention.

"Isn't that the lady who disappeared in the video?"

Sure enough, Lamiroir was lingering in the hallway, her face turned towards the sound of Alfendi's voice. As Apollo spotted her, he rushed forward to greet her, Trucy at his heels. "Lamiroir!"

The woman smiled. "Ah, the attorney. Apollo, was it?"

Apollo realised with a start that, in all the confusion, they'd somehow managed to never actually introduce themselves to the singer. "Uh, yeah, sorry. It's Apollo."

"And Trucy!" Trucy added, grabbing the woman's hand to shake. "Are you okay here on your own?"

Lamiroir smiled. "Humans are blessed with five senses. Even robbed of one, we get by... though it does make being a witness rather difficult."
Even though he knew she was making light of her situation, Apollo still felt a twinge of guilt.

"I thought I could hear your footsteps," Lamiroir continued, turning towards where Luke, Flora and Alfendi were joining them. "That is... Luke, is it not? And Flora Layton?"

Luke blushed as he came to a halt, laughing nervously. "Y-yes, I'm here too, ma'am."

Flora similarly stopped in her tracks, looking a little surprised. "Oh, you remember me?" She didn't seem to mind the wrong surname, and Apollo wondered if it was a common occurrence for her.

"Naturally," Lamiroir replied with a smile. "I heard your footsteps only earlier today."

"You must have great ears!" Trucy remarked.

Lamiroir softly laughed in response.

"Oh, I should introduce my little brother," Flora said, placing her hands on said boy's shoulders as he sent a suspicious stare up at the woman before them. "Lamiroir, this is Alfendi Layton; 'Fendi, Lamiroir here is the woman from that video Mister Gramarye gave us."

"The one who disappeared?" Alfendi clarified.

Flora nodded. "Mm-hmm. Why don't you say hello?"

Lamiroir leaned down a little, looking in the direction of the boy's voice, smiling behind her veil. "Hello there, Alfendi."

Alfendi narrowed his eyes at her, his head turning to one side. "Will you tell me how you did it?"

Trucy huffed, her fists on her hips. "Alfendi! How many times do we have to tell you!?"

"But I want to know!" Alfendi retorted.

Lamiroir only laughed as she straightened up. "I'm afraid I cannot say, young one," she replied. "Mister Gramarye made me swear to never tell a soul."

Alfendi whined in disappointment, crossing his arms. "S'not fair..."

"Hard to be a magician if you can't keep a secret," Apollo pointed out, shooting the boy a smirk. "You'll just have to figure it out yourself."

"Mister Gramarye actually gave us a visit earlier," Luke picked up, talking to Lamiroir. "He gifted us a recording of your performance."

"Oh, yes!" Trucy cried, grinning in glee. "It was even better the second time! And the third!"

Apollo hid a smile. 'Calm down there, Truce...'

Lamiroir pressed a hand to her chest, bowing her head slightly. "Thank you."

"And that reminds me," Trucy continued, "you were wearing a brooch that night, weren't you? A diamond-shaped one?"

The woman frowned in thought, a hand going to the collar of her dress. "I was, yes," she replied. "I noticed after the murder that I had dropped it. I'm not sure where it went."
"Then it might be the one we found on the crime scene," Luke said, a hand to his chin.

"The crime scene?" Lamiroir repeated in surprise, then again frowned in thought. "I... did almost go back in to my dressing room after my performance. I must have dropped it then."

Apollo's eyes went wide. "Y-you did? That was you?"

Luke, Trucy and Flora gave Apollo confused stares, but Lamiroir clutched her hands together, looking pained. "I apologise. By the sound of your voice, I must have given you quite a fright."

"Y-yeah, you did a bit..."

Luke glanced between the two suspiciously. "What are you talking about...?"

Apollo sighed, shaking his head. "When Mister LeTouse was dying... or dead... just before Ema got back... I heard the door suddenly close. Nearly jumped out of my skin... but there wasn't anyone there when I got up to look."

"I was about to go in," Lamiroir picked up. "The door was ajar, so I pushed it open. Then I heard a voice, and I realised I should not be there... so I fled. I am sorry for frightening you."

"N-no, it's fine," Apollo insisted, forcing a smile. "I'm just... glad to have that mystery solved."

Trucy frowned in thought, arms crossed. For once, she kept quiet.

Apollo noticed Luke giving him a concerned look, and tried to subtly wave him off without attracting anyone else's attention, but it seemed he didn't have to worry as Flora abruptly spoke up to change the subject with a bright smile: "So, have you known Machi long, Lamiroir?"

Lamiroir nodded. "Since before I was Lamiroir," she replied, "when I was singing in a restaurant in Borginia." She paused, looking sad. "He was very kind to me when he learned I could not see."

"Is that when you started playing 'opposites'?" Apollo asked.

"Ah, no, it wasn't then," the singer answered, shaking her head. "That began after our major debut... After I became known as the 'landscape painter in sound'..."

"How did that lie even start?" Flora asked, looking confused. "Wouldn't it have been easier to choose a different title for yourself and admit you were blind?"

A smile flickered in the corners of Lamiroir's mouth. "My producer came up with that line after hearing my music," she explained. "He thought I had a global quality, that made the listener picture the country closest to their heart. It's how my music has reached so many."

Trucy sighed dreamily. "Aw, what a lovely story!"

"It was only later he learned I was blind," Lamiroir continued. "I do not mind so much myself; I simply remember that the real 'landscape painters' are the listeners, and my songs a blank canvas."

"That must have been hard for you and Machi," Luke sympathised. "You had to pretend to see and 'guide' him, and he had to pretend to be blind while guiding you."

Lamiroir nodded. "We held hands always. He would write with his finger on my palm to signal to me things I should know." She sighed sadly. "He is a smart, gentle boy."

"Don't you worry, ma'am," Flora said with an encouraging smile, "Apollo and Luke will prove him
innocent for sure!"

At that, Lamiroir gave a gentle laugh. "Thank you all. Machi and I are depending on you."

Trucy watched her with a concerned frown. "Are you still worried about Mister LeTouse?"

Lamiroir's face fell. She didn't need to reply for them to know her answer.

"So no-one knew he was a secret agent?" Flora asked.

"A secret agent?" Alfendi repeated. "Like the movies?"

"He was undercover," Luke explained for the boy. "So, not much like the movies."

Alfendi huffed. "That's boring."

"Someone knew who he was, though," Apollo pointed out. "They went after him that night."

"Or he was after them," Luke replied. "Remember, he was looking for whatever it was he was carrying a replica of."

"Some kind of smuggler, then?" Flora asked, looking around the corridor. "Why would anyone working here need to be dealing in the black market?"

Lamiroir was still frowning deeply. "Why did he pose as my manager?" she quietly added. "I can only assume that he was investigating me... but why?"

Apollo and Trucy shared a concerned glance at their mother's words. "What makes you think that?" Apollo gently asked.

"Perhaps it is not so," Lamiroir admitted, shaking her head, "but I cannot deny the possibility. As my present is veiled in darkness, so, too, is my past clouded from my memory."

At that, Apollo felt Trucy's hand slipping into his and gave her a reassuring squeeze.

"I do not know my past," Lamiroir continued. "Perhaps I committed some terrible crime. Everything before becoming Lamiroir is lost to me."

Trucy shook her head madly. "B-but I don't think you-!"

"I can think of no other explanation," Lamiroir interrupted, frustrated. "Why else would an agent of Interpol approach me?"

Apollo quickly recognised the woman's anger was more directed at herself than any of them, and it only made him more worried for her. "Lamiroir, I honestly don't think your past is related to this case. You're not the kind of person who could commit the level of crime that would attract Interpol's attention... or any crime for that matter."

"Yeah!" Trucy jumped to agree. "I mean, you're such an amazing person! You're so sweet, and kind..."

Lamiroir sighed, but she gave the pair a smile. "I thank you. Machi, too, tells me this often when I fear who I might have been."

Flora watched the woman with a frown. "And... that's why you're not sure if you'll ask the Professor for help?"
"Whoa!" Alfendi cried, looking up at Lamiroir with a grin. "You're one of Papa's clients!? What are you doing in America!?!"

"She isn't yet, 'Fendi." Flora corrected him.

Lamiroir chuckled. "I am considering it," she told the boy, but her smile died as she turned her face up towards Flora. "And, to tell the truth... yes, that is why I have not yet contacted Professor Layton. After this..." She smiled again, but it was quick to fade. "Maybe running into his apprentice and his children is a sign... if I can overcome my fears... once Machi is safe."

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"Ah, but I am reminded I wished to speak to you about something," Lamiroir continued, changing the subject before anyone had a chance to reply. She reached under her cloak, to a small pocket hidden in the folds of her dress. "When I was walking this hallway before, I stumbled upon this lying on the floor." She held out her hand, revealing an earpiece with attached microphone.

The three Wrights gasped. "That's been lying around since the day before yesterday!" Trucy pointed out.

"What is it?" Alfendi asked, standing on his tiptoes to see the device in the singer's hand.

"This is one of our headsets," Lamiroir explained, lowering her hand; Somehow, she must have realised Alfendi was struggling to see it. "Everyone on staff wears one during a concert."

Flora tapped a finger to her lips, frowning in thought. "I wonder whose it is..."

Apollo and Luke shared a look; They could make an educated guess. In fact, it was then Apollo noticed the once-shining green LED by the earbud had gone dark, likely having finally ran its battery down since the night of the concert.

"Why do you need them?" Alfendi asked, poking at the device.

"We use them for communication," Lamiroir replied. "You need something like this to communicate across such a large stage. Everyone on staff had one, of course... and all of the band members too, I should think. It would be quite inconvenient should it go missing."

Luke was stroking at his goatee. "Would you... happen to know their range, Lamiroir?"

"About thirty feet or so, I understand," the singer said. "A stronger signal would interfere with the sound system."

Apollo saw Luke give him a subtle nod, and the elder brother replied in kind. "We'll hold on to it for you then," he offered, taking the headset. "Prosecutor Gavin might know whose it was."

"Yes, that's best," Lamiroir agreed. "Thank you."

Trucy bounced excitedly. "Ooh, ooh, can I put it on?" she cried, and before Apollo could answer, she had grabbed at his hands and pulled the earpiece from his grasp, putting it to her ear. "Ten-four that, little buddy, this is Trucy reporting in, over!"

"I wanna play with it!" Alfendi added, reaching for the device himself. "Let me have a go!"

"No-one is playing with it!" Apollo scolded them, snatching the headset away from his sister with a frown. "This is sensitive equipment that we're returning to Gavin before one of you breaks it!"

Alfendi and Trucy both groaned in disappointment, but didn't protest as Apollo slipped the small object into his bag.
Lamiroir hid a smile behind a hand held over her veil. "If you have anything else to ask me, I will try to stay in this area," she promised. "Good luck with your search."

"Thank you," Apollo replied, a smile almost involuntarily coming to his lips as the now-familiar rush of emotions came to him at the thought of having to leave her again. "We'll see you again soon, Lamiroir. Don't worry about a thing."

"Yeah!" Trucy agreed, her pouting over the headset forgotten as she similarly gave Lamiroir a wide grin. "We'll have Machi out of there before you know it!"

Lamiroir softly laughed. "At this point, I begin to wonder if you are worrying more over me than your case," she pointed out. As the pair blushed in embarrassment, she continued, "I will be fine. And I trust you all to take care of Machi."

Apollo noticed Flora giving them an odd look and blushed harder. "Uh, yeah," he quietly agreed.

Alfendi rolled his eyes.

"Let's head to the stage next, shall we?" Luke suggested, gently guiding his siblings away from the woman. "Maybe there's someone else useful to talk to."

Flora jumped to follow, grabbing her brother's hand. As they left, she waved back at the blind woman. "See you later, Lamiroir!"

The sound of singing was the first thing the Wrights and Laytons noticed as they approached the stage, closely followed by the piano and guitar that were backing it.

Trucy briefly paused, confused. "Is that...?"

"... The Guitar's Serenade?" Apollo picked up, equally confused.

Flora gasped. "Oh! It must be Mister Gramarye!"

That was all it took for Alfendi to cry "It is!?!" and race off ahead of the group.

When the Wrights and Flora caught up to the boy, they found him standing at the edge of the stage, tugging on Valant's cape as the man silenced the music playing from the nearby mixing board. "But why can't you tell me?"

"It is against all that is sacred to inquire as to how a trick is performed," Valant replied. Apollo was pretty sure he could see a muscle twitching in his eye; Likely Alfendi was finally getting on his nerves.

Flora rushed to her brother's side, hurriedly pulling him away with an apologetic smile. "I'm so sorry, Mister Gramarye!" She then turned on Alfendi with a stern frown. "Will you stop running off!? You promised Papa you wouldn't!"

"But you knew where I was going!" Alfendi retorted. "It's only against the rules if you don't know!"

"That's beside the point!" Flora argued back.

Valant was quick to ignore the bickering siblings, waving to the approaching Wrights with a grin. "Ah ha! If it isn't Miss Trucy and Sir Apollo! And indeed it is!"
"Uncle Valant!" Trucy cried in greeting, skipping to the man's side eagerly.

Apollo gave the man a wave and a small smile, feeling a little awkward after their conversation outside the Agency. "Hello."

Luke was looking around the backstage space around them, seeming confused. "I thought you were doing some kind of run-through with the prosecution's investigation, Mister Gramarye."

"Indeed I was," Valant agreed. "But that task is done! Now, I am inspecting my equipment of illusion to make sure naught is amiss, Miss."

Trucy cooed with amazement, playing along with his wordplay.

"I take real responsibility in tasks undertaken," Valant continued, holding his cane high with pride. "Should anything go wrong, it would reflect poorly upon me and my troupe. As I went about my exacting examination, I happened to notice that suspicious piano," he pointed to said grand piano sitting on the stage with his cane, "and I remembered that fair lady's melancholy melody."

Apollo almost winced at that description of the song; It fit in more ways than one.

Trucy, meanwhile, had turned her attention to the piano, staring intensely at the instrument. "Hmmm..."

"I'm sure designing that illusion must have been a challenge," Luke said, looking up at the raised platform on the stage, likely a leftover from the run-through Valant had completed. "There was so little time between Lamiroir's disappearance and re-appearance... I can't imagine how she made it clear across the concert hall in time."

Valant laughed boastfully. "At the climax of the song, I was told to make her disappear, like a dream. But what can I work with on a stage meant for musical endeavours? There are none of the conveniences of a stage built for sorcerous acts." He frowned, shaking his head. "It was a challenging task..." He then smirked, twirling his cane in hand. "And so I accepted."

Luke giggled. "I can't argue with that, I suppose!"

Apollo found his attention wandering as he watched the conversation, barely hearing it as his mind mused on other topics, jumping from thought to thought until he landed somewhere he hadn't expected. As he ran the new realisation over in his head, his eyes turned to Luke, considering his younger brother carefully.

Valant just continued to smirk. "People come to me because I am a professional among professionals," he continued, tapping his forehead with the top of his cane. "My illusions are custom-made for a time and place. Not a bad thing, as far as the fortunes of Troupe Gramarye are concerned."

Trucy's attention was finally torn from the piano on stage. "What do you mean, Uncle Valant?"

"In Magnifi Gramarye's prime, not a day passed that he did not play upon the screens of every TV there was," Valant dramatically explained. "But, as you know, his troupe, my troupe, pulled a vanishing act. Cries for magic no longer heard, the TV screen a barren waste, stripped of illusion."

"Th-that's not true!" Trucy cried. "I still went to all your shows! Like that one in the parking lot down at the supermarket!"

Valant shook his head. "We hone our skill at these small venues, always awaiting our time..." He
sighed, then pressed his cane to his chest, puffing it out with pride. "Yes, one day we will rise, up from obscurity, onto fame's shining stage once more! I do this not only for the magic that is Gramarye, but for my partner."

Luke cast a quick worried glance at Trucy, whose eyes had turned to the floor. "You mean Zak," the middle Wright said.

Valant nodded. "Yes, Zak Gramarye. Before he disappeared seven years ago, there was no name higher than Gramarye in show business circles. None." He held his cane up to the ceiling with a determined look. "I will see us returned to glory!" he proclaimed. "I, Valant Gramarye!"

"I'm rooting for you, Uncle Valant!" Trucy cried, giving him a determined look.

"Miss Trucy, you cannot grow up quick enough!" Valant replied, giving her a smile. "I need the skills of Apollo and Artemis by my side!"

"Two skills coming up!" Trucy proclaimed.

"Whoa whoa whoa!" Apollo laughed, holding up his hands to calm his sister and giving Valant a look somewhere between surprised, confused, and amazed. "Are you... offering us a job?"

Valant nodded, smirking proudly. "Once you are both old enough, of course," he clarified. "I could not break up a pair such as you."

Apollo was almost too busy grinning gratefully to notice Luke giving Valant a suspicious look.

It was at this point Flora and Alfendi rejoined the conversation, Alfendi pushing his way between Apollo and Luke while Flora stuck close behind him, still looking a little miffed from their arguing. "Lamiroir must have had a secret tunnel, right?" Alfendi asked, pointing to the raised platform. "So, when she disappeared, she could run all the way over to the other place?"

Valant laughed, brushing off the boy's question. "Maybe so, maybe no. I'm afraid I cannot say."

As Alfendi once more began to argue his point and persuade Valant to tell him how the teleportation illusion worked (his tactics seemed to have switched to guesses and working it out himself, which was at least an improvement), Apollo's attention was once more grabbed by Luke, who took a step back from the conversation and began to quietly walk around towards the stage. Valant, Flora, and Alfendi, engrossed in their discussion, didn't seem to have noticed, so Apollo carefully stepped backwards himself and quickly moved to follow his brother.

Luke had emerged onto the stage once Apollo caught up to him, standing at the piano and running a hand along the keys, too softly to sound any of them. He was staring intensely at the large instrument, as though at any moment it might shed its wooden exterior and reveal itself to be some kind of giant mecha from Luke's stories of England... or maybe that was just Apollo. Regardless, Apollo approached his brother with arms crossed, giving him a curious look. "What are you doing?"

"I know Trucy noticed, so how you didn't I can't imagine," Luke replied, moving on from the keyboard to check the music stand. "Mister Gramarye described this piano as 'suspicious' earlier. Something about it must have changed since the concert."

Apollo nodded; He remembered the comment, though his attention had been on Valant's other words at the time. "You think it's worth looking into? It might be unrelated."

"We don't exactly have a choice," Luke pointed out, finally meeting his brother's eyes with an apologetic gaze. "We don't have any evidence, remember? We need anything we can get."
"That's true," Apollo muttered, wincing at the reminder. He looked over the large instrument, unsure where to even start. Although they saw a piano every day in the office, it was a small upright model, and rarely ever was touched except for cleaning and adjusting the 'decorations' that dotted it; After growing up hearing how Phoenix played it (and its aging predecessor, before it had been destroyed in the fire), none of the Wright children were ever especially eager to go near one in the event they might encourage him, Luke even finding other methods for keeping his violin in tune. In contrast, this instrument in front of them was a massive grand piano, which had only seemed all the larger when it was Machi at its keys, all set up to play to an entire concert hall of people. It was the same black as theirs, but the paint somehow seemed glossier, more professional. If you wanted, you could peek in the top and look at its strings, which wasn't possible with the uprights Apollo was more familiar with... In fact, Apollo had half a mind to take a look while he had the chance to, just to see the inside of a piano in person.

"Are you considering it?"

Apollo met his brother's concerned eyes in confusion. "The piano?"

Luke glanced away for a moment. "Gramarye's offer," he clarified, looking uncomfortable. "Once Trucy leaves school... Do you really want to go travelling the world with him?"

At that, Apollo was stunned into silence for a moment or two. "Oh." That was a good point: Did Apollo want to put his law career on hold to pursue magic full-time? It was Trucy's ultimate goal for sure, and she would love nothing more than to do so with the very Troupe she had spent the first seven years of her life with - to tell the truth, Apollo quite liked the sound of that, too - but... under Valant Gramarye? As much as he'd suspected the man for years to be Magnifi's murderer, and had 'known' as much for three months now, Valant had seemed open as a book when he said he wasn't, and Apollo couldn't help but believe him; After all, Valant had shared so much with them, with Apollo especially, and was in the same boat as the Wrights with knowing who they (and Lamiroir, for that matter) were while not being in the position to really talk about it. Even the man's infuriating smirk had stopped being so irritating, even endearing, as Apollo got used to Valant's persona. The bottom line simply was that Valant was a magician with an incredible pedigree, having trained under Magnifi himself, and was a part of the Gramarye 'family'... It would be ludicrous to turn an opportunity like that down.

But...

Apollo sighed, shaking his head, then met his brother's eyes. "Trucy doesn't finish school for a few years yet. We'll think about it then."

Luke gave Apollo a long hard stare... then nodded and moved on.

View the Court Record
As Luke continued to look around the keyboard end of the grand piano, Apollo decided to indulge his curiosity and take a peek at the strings. As he'd suspected, it wasn't all that exciting, though it was still interesting to see how something so large was put together, the long strings ranging ever-so-slightly in thickness from one side of the piano to the other, tied securely around what looked like bolts on either end, bits of wood holding them tight; They overlapped significantly, three quarters of the shorter end dipping underneath the last quarter of the long end and creating that distinct shape of the outside frame. He could even see the hammers near the keyboard, shifting slightly as Luke's hands glided across the keys on the other side. Above and nearby were another set of hammers with soft, felt-like edges, just resting against the strings, though Apollo had absolutely no idea what they were for.

'Wait... That's not meant to be there.'

Jammed between two strings at the shorter end of the range was a small black object; On its side, Apollo could just glimpse a splash of red, and something long and thin was sticking straight up. "Luke, look at this!" As Luke's head jerked up in surprise, the young vet rushing around the piano, Apollo pulled out his Court Record, snapping a picture of the strange object. "It's stuck between the strings."

Luke appeared at Apollo's side, then, once he was sure the photo had been taken, leaned inside the large instrument to grab at the object. With a sharp tug, it came free, the piano emitting a short jab of sounds as though someone had briefly slammed a hand down on its high notes. As Luke pulled himself back upright, he adjusted the mystery item in his hand, looking it over. "It's some kind of... remote activator or switch," he said, then held it out for Apollo to see. "Just an antenna and a button."

Sure enough, Luke was right: The splash of red Apollo had seen was a button, right next to a short antenna. Despite the single function it seemed to serve, the handle of the switch was rather bulky, maybe about the size of a smallish mobile phone... and far less useful. "Huh," Apollo muttered, looking between the object and the strings of the piano. "How'd it end up in the piano...?"

"And what does it do?" Luke added, sighing as he shot the object a glare, perhaps demanding it speak up and answer for itself on its own. "The earliest it could have gone in is after the Guitar's Serenade. I'd say someone was trying to dispose of it."

Apollo nodded, frowning in thought. "In which case it's likely connected to the murder. We just gotta find out how."

"What are you doing?"

Both Apollo and Luke jumped with a shriek, spinning around to see Trucy standing behind them, hands on her hips as she pouted at them, watching their every movement with narrowed eyes. Behind her, still stood near the mixing board at the edge of the stage, Valant, Flora, and Alfendi also watched the goings-on curiously; Apollo realised they must have been attracted by the sound of the
piano strings as the switch was pulled out of them.

"Trucy!" Luke cried, giving her a relieved smile as he relaxed after the shock she had given them. "Don't surprise us like that..."

Trucy blinked, noticing the device in Luke's hands. "What's that?"

Noticing his brother looking blankly at the switch, still recovering from his shock, Apollo bit back a smile, pointing at the object. "Some kind of remote switch," he explained. "We found it in the piano."

"Oooh, really?" Trucy asked, grinning. "What does it do?"

As Trucy reached for the device, Apollo was quick to react, taking it from the surprised Luke's hands. "Don't touch it!" the elder brother warned his sister. "You might blow up the whole coliseum!"

Trucy scoffed, crossing her arms. "As if it would do something that old-fashioned! Not every strange button triggers a bomb!"

"It's still a bad idea to just press it when we don't know what it does," Luke pointed out.

Apollo crossed his arms right back at his sister. "Alright then, what do you think it does, Trucy P.I.?"

Trucy thought a moment, then grinned. "Maybe it turns on the electric razor in Mister Gavin's dressing room?"

Rolling his eyes, Apollo replied, "A switch as big as a razor to turn on a razor. Because that makes sense."

Luke sighed, shaking his head at his siblings. "We're just wasting time speculating." He reached over and gently retrieved the switch from Apollo's hand. "There's only one way to find out what this is." He strode away from his siblings, back to where Valant and the Laytons were still watching, and held the switch high in the air for them to see as he approached. "Mister Gramarye, would you happen to know what this is or who it belongs to?"

Valant shook his head, barely having to even think about it. "I have not set mine eyes upon such a thing before this day," he said. "I'm afraid I cannot help you further."

Although he couldn't see his brother's face, Apollo could tell Valant was now getting a suspicious stare, so he hurriedly stepped forward to Luke's side. "Then we'll just have to find someone else to ask. Thanks for your help, sir."

Luke shot Apollo an odd look, but Apollo ignored it.

Valant gave the brothers a deep bow. "It was my pleasure," he replied with his usual smirk.

Trucy appeared with a bounce at Luke's other side. "You'll come see the trial tomorrow, right Uncle Valant?"

Flora gasped, a hand to her mouth. "Oh, yes, will they call you to the stand to testify?"

At that, Valant gave a loud laugh. "A preposterous proposition," he proclaimed. "How could I stand to stand upon the stand? Why, my secrets would be free for the plucking!" He gave Alfendi a pointed look, and the boy pouted in reply, crossing his arms. Still chuckling, Valant shook his head.
"I might even have to sign autographs! No, I intend to remain hidden for the entire day."

Luke resumed his suspicious stare on Valant, but said nothing.

Trucy cooed in amazement. "With vanishing magic?"

"Indeed!" Valant replied, holding his cane out towards the stage as though pointing at a distant object. "I will jump upon an express train, and express myself to the next town over!"

Apollo realised the 'distant object' Valant was attempting to point to was probably the nearest train station, a short walk from the Coliseum's front doors. "You don't have to worry about being called as a witness," he assured the older man. "I'm pretty sure I've worked the illusion out... I'll tell the court what it needs to know, when it needs to know it."

"You are very kind," Valant replied, with another small bow, "but I would rather not risk it, Sir Apollo. My apologies. It pains me to part with you so."

Apollo nodded, giving him a smile. "I understand."

Alfendi was thinking to himself, frowning up at Valant and Apollo. "So... if we go to the trial tomorrow... we'll find out how Lamiroir disappeared?"

Valant laughed again, while Flora rolled her eyes. Trucy shook a finger at the boy, winking cheekily as she told him, "You can't always count on a murder during a magic trick, Alfendi. You'll have to work it out yourself next time!"

"So, that's a yes?" Alfendi asked, confused.

As everyone else laughed at the boy's question, Luke began to wave Trucy and Flora back towards the stairs. "We should be going," he pointed out, slipping the switch into his satchel. "We have a case to prove, after all."

Trucy sighed in disappointment, but gave her uncle a wave as she turned and trudged away. "Goodbye, Uncle Valant."

"Until next time, Miss Trucy!" Valant replied, waving back.

Flora also waved a goodbye, gently guiding Alfendi away, and Luke moved to follow them. Before the young vet got too far however, he was pulled to a halt by a hand on his arm, and turned around in surprise to see who it was. "Apollo?"

Apollo gestured to the girls, calling to them, "You guys go on ahead, we'll catch up." Although confused, they nodded and continued heading off down the stairs, Apollo returning his attention to Valant. "I was going to wait until after this case was over, but if you're leaving tomorrow I'll have to ask this now," the young lawyer explained.

Valant raised an eyebrow. "Another question for me?"

Luke cast another glance at the hand still gripping his arm. "Apollo, why...?"

"I'll try to be quick," Apollo promised the elder magician, casting a look towards the stairs to ensure the girls and Alfendi had disappeared down into the hallways below. "Listen, did you use a face mask when you were on stage with Gavin for the Guitar's Serenade?"

"What!?" Luke gasped, staring at his brother.
Valant thought a moment, then nodded. "Yes indeed. Why do you ask?"

"Did you happen to get it locally?" Apollo continued. "Or, really, know the local business very well?"

The elder magician raised an eyebrow. "May I ask why I am being interrogated on this strange subject, Sir Apollo?"

Apollo sighed, gently removing his hand from Luke's arm and trying not to meet his brother's wide eyes boring into the side of his head. "It's... an investigation," he explained. "One we've been on for several years now. It involves a large group of people wearing identical face masks, and we haven't been having any luck tracking them down. I was hoping you might be able to... give us some hints or something."

Valant stared at Apollo for a moment, then his gaze shifted slightly over to Luke. "Correct me if I'm wrong," he said, his eyes flicking back to Apollo, "but it is illegal to make large numbers of identical face masks here, is it not?"

"What?!" Luke cried, finally turning his attention to Valant in shock.

"It is!?!" Apollo added, equally surprised.

Luke then turned back to Apollo. "You don't know?! You're the lawyer!"

"I never looked it up!" Apollo shot back. "This is your investigation, why didn't you!??"

With a frustrated sigh, Luke dropped the subject, scrambling for his satchel to find his notebook and pen. "The moment we get some free time, we need to confirm it!" he announced, flipping his book open to a blank page and scribbling something down. "If it is indeed illegal, we've been going about this entirely the wrong way! No wonder all those companies were so polarised on whether or not they'd talk to us... Do you realise what this means, Apollo?!!"

Apollo thought a moment, then shrugged. "Maybe they ordered small batches from individual companies?"

Luke shook his head, grinning. "Unlikely. I looked into the process years ago, and it's by design prohibitively expensive to pay for a new mould; They need two for each mask: One for the outward face, and one for the inward. If they were covering their tracks that way, they'd need an additional small fortune for every new company they ordered from. No, I think it's certain they've ordered all their masks from the same place."

Apollo crossed his arms, frowning in thought. "But how does that change anything? It just means the company that sold to them is breaking the law too."

"Which means," Luke explained, a tight ball of excited determination, "that they are in on it! The kidnappers have their own mask-making technologies, and are most likely selling their skills to fund their activities! We're doing more than just finding someone to help us locate them, we're directly locating them! We're so much closer to finding her than we thought!" His voice squeaked a little, and he wiped at his eyes, still smiling. "Mum... we're almost there..."

At the sight of his brother's happy tears, Apollo wasn't quite sure what to do... so he reacted as he would to normal tears, and stepped towards Luke, putting an arm around him in a half-hug.

"I glean that my words have helped."
Apollo and Luke both jumped as they looked up at Valant, who was giving them a knowing look; they'd forgotten he was there. "Um, yes," Apollo replied, giving him a grateful nod. "Thank you. It really means a lot to us."

"Thank you so much," Luke added, an earnest, though tear-filled, smile on his face. "I honestly don't know how I didn't think to look into the laws and regulations before."

Valant gave them a small bow, the tiniest of smiles on his lips. "I would help more if I could, but unfortunately all my supplies have come from elsewhere. Good luck to the pair of you on your search."

Apollo nodded. "Thank you again, sir." With that, he placed his hands on his brother's shoulders, and gently guided the sniffing Luke towards the stairs. "C'mon, let's meet back up with the others."

View the Court Record
As they walked down the stairs, Luke wiped away the last of his tears with a sniff. "Thank you for asking him about that," he quietly said.

Apollo grinned, resting his hands on his belt. "Once I figured out he'd used a face mask in the illusion, there was no way I wasn't going to ask," he replied. "Besides, we never thought we'd find Trucy's and my mom, right? It's only fair we redouble our efforts on yours."

Luke giggled, clutching the strap of his satchel. "Yeah... Once we've proven Machi innocent, and our visitors have all left... We'll get right on finding my mum, won't we?"

"Definitely," Apollo agreed with a nod.

They found Trucy, Flora, Alfendi and Lamiroir in the hallway by the dressing rooms. Lamiroir had sat herself down on the bench cleared by the Wrights on the night of the concert, and appeared to be telling Alfendi a story, attracting the boy's rapt attention as he perched on the bench at her side. Flora and Trucy were not far away, watching the pair while occasionally whispering comments and giggling between themselves. Trucy was the first to notice her approaching brothers, dashing towards them with a grin and a shout of "You're back!", only to stop as she got close, frowning in concern. "Luke, are you okay?"

Luke gave her a big smile. "I'm fine," he insisted. "Really, I am. I hope you weren't waiting long."

"We just had one last question for Valant," Apollo explained. "All we've left to do now is talk to Ema."

Trucy was still giving Luke a worried look, but decided not to push it.

"The detective is in the dressing room," Flora added as she caught up, gesturing to the nearest door. "We saw her going in just now."

Apollo frowned in thought, watching Alfendi and Lamiroir. "Flora, is Alfendi distracted enough that the rest of us could duck in to the crime scene without him noticing?"

Flora shot the door she'd gestured to a surprised look, apparently having not realised it was the crime scene itself. "Actually, we probably could," she decided. "Lamiroir just started telling him some stories from Borginia to keep him from asking more about the magic trick, and he seems pretty taken by them."

Apollo nodded. "Good. Let's try and be quick then." Waving for his siblings and Flora to follow, he quietly ducked into Lamiroir's dressing room.

The first thing to greet the four within was the loud sound of crunching food from behind the separator wall. Apollo almost stopped in his tracks, shooting a wince to his siblings. "Uh oh. There's
only one person I know who can munch with such... venom," he whispered.

The crunching sounds stopped, and a familiar face promptly appeared around the separator wall, glaring at the intruders. The moment her mouth was clear of food, she stepped around to give them a proper withering look. "What are you doing here?"

Apollo fixed a grin on his face, leading his siblings and Flora forward. "Hello, Ema. You're looking as grumpy as ever."

Ema wasn't impressed, a hand on her hip. "Oh, am I supposed to be happy? You give me the second degree in court, and Prosecutor Gavin makes me look like a fool!" She threw her hands in the air, revealing that one was tightly clutching her latest bag of Snackoos. "My department chief had a field day with that one. 'Even a blind person could see the shooter wasn't blind!'" She rolled her eyes, turning around to head back to her stool by the dressing table. "Funny guy, huh?"

Now they had reached the other side of the room, Apollo noticed it had changed a little since the night of the concert; For one thing, LeTouse was gone, the outline of his body marked with white tape and a few small numbered signs leftover from the investigation. The square of carpet where he had written his dying message had been cut out and removed, revealing the grey concrete beneath. The revolver, however, still lay where it had fallen, marked by one of the numbered signs.

"On the bright side," Luke pointed out, "we wouldn't have known what was written there if you hadn't analysed it for us."

"Yeah!" Trucy added with a nod. "We wouldn't know Mister LeTouse was with Interpol if it wasn't for you, Ema!"

Ema screwed up her face in thought, then sighed. "I suppose. Maybe that's why the chief gave me these," she held up her food bag, "after he was finished chewing me out. Said it was my reward."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Are chocolate Snackoos popular down at the precinct or something?"

Instead of replying, Ema just threw a handful of the sticks into her mouth.

The Wrights and Flora shared a look. Trucy gingerly stepped forward. "Um, we were hoping we could check out the crime scene again."

Ema shrugged as she swallowed her mouthful. "Be my guest. You're not going to find any clues in here." She sighed morosely. "I met my embarrassment quota for the year, that's for sure."

"I'm sure nobody blames you, Miss Skye," Flora finally spoke up. "The prosecutor was acting awfully towards you in court."

"You were watching it, were you?" Ema sighed again. "Seems like the whole world was, honestly."

Trucy was frowning in thought, arms crossed. "Um, Ema, isn't it a good thing you've met your quota?"

Ema raised an eyebrow at the teen. "How?"

"I mean, think about it," Trucy explained with a grin. "Not you don't have to be embarrassed about anything else all year!"

Apollo couldn't help a small smile of his own. "If only it worked that way."
Ema huffed, turning away. "It just bugs me to think that little kid outsmarted me. And it makes him even more suspicious now that we know he can see!" She gestured angrily to the other side of the room. "He could have seen the air duct, and he could have shot that revolver!"

"Not according to Lamiroir he didn't," Trucy insisted, giving Ema a stern look.

"You mean her saying she heard Detective Daryan's voice at the scene?" Ema replied. "And being in the air ducts at the time?" She hummed in thought, throwing another Snackoo in her mouth.

Trucy nodded, chest puffed out. "That's right."

Ema scoffed, looking away. "Why can't we have a normal, straightforward killing once in a while in this country!?

"Oh my," Flora muttered, a hand to her mouth.

Apollo rolled his eyes. "I'll pretend I didn't hear that," he told Ema.

Luke sighed, then stepped forward behind Trucy. "So, do you have any more information about what I found under the furniture?"

Ema didn't immediately respond, her hand in her Snackoo bag. After a moment she carefully folded it up and placed it in her purse. "I've been puzzling over that device we found under there," she explained, pulling out a small evidence bag with a tiny circuit board inside, bits and bobs soldered to one side with crimson wires connecting them all.

Trucy cocked her head to one side as she watched Ema remove the object from its bag. "What is it?"

"Part of something larger, I think," Ema replied, holding it out. "I still haven't a clue what. All I've found out is," she pointed to a short black wire sticking out of one end, "this is an antenna."

"An antenna?" Flora repeated. "To receive electronic signals, you mean?"

Ema nodded. "Not sure what it would do if activated, though. I'm kind of hesitant to try and force it."

Luke met Apollo's eyes, and the pair shared a look. Apollo didn't waste any time in reaching for his bag, pulling out the switch they'd found in the piano. "Ema, could you take a look at this?" He held the black object out towards her.

Ema hummed in thought. "Looks like a transmitter," she said. "Why?"

Apollo grinned. "This is just a hunch, but..."

Flora's eyes widened. "W-wait, Apollo-!"

Before he'd had time to process the call to halt, Apollo's finger had tightened on the red button of the switch, a faint click echoing as it registered the press. A millisecond later, the end of a silver cylinder on the device in Ema's hand suddenly lit up, a bright orange flame erupting from the end. Ema shrieked, dropping the device in surprise and causing Trucy and Luke to jump back, away from the flaming object. Even Apollo stepped back in shock, his finger lifting from the button, and Flora pressed against his back, eyes screwed shut as she sought protection from the miniature explosion. By the time the device hit the floor, the flame had fizzled out, leaving the open end of the tiny contraption a charred black.

Ema immediately rounded on Apollo. "What's the big idea!?"
"S-sorry!" Apollo cried, almost dropping the switch. "I-I didn't know it'd...!"

"I was trying to tell you!" Flora cried, nervously stepping back out from behind the young lawyer. "It looked like an igniter!"

Luke gave her a surprised look. "You know what it is, Flora?"

Flora sighed, brushing off her dress. "Sort of. We have little devices like that in the kitchen, for the old hot plates." She gave the object a critical look. "None as sloppy-looking as that one, though."

"It's likely homemade," Ema pointed out, carefully retrieving the object from the floor and dropping it back into its evidence bag. "At least we're getting somewhere with this case now." As she straightened up, she gave the switch in Apollo's hand a stern look, and he hurriedly shoved it away in his bag. "No no, let me see that for a second," she instructed, and Apollo reluctantly pulled the switch out again, handing it over to the detective. She studied it for a long moment, being careful to hold it only on the grip, her fingers never straying close to the bright red button.

Finally, Apollo got sick of the silence. "Well?"

"Well, this is definitely a little transmitter," she replied, handing it back to Apollo. "The signal's weak, probably only reaches thirty feet."

"Thirty feet?" Luke repeated, a hand stroking his chin. "That's about... ten metres?"

"Isn't that the same range as the headsets?" Flora pointed out.

Ema didn't answer, digging around in her purse again. A moment later, she pulled out a piece of paper with a cross-section diagram of the concert hall, showing the stage, the audience, and the dressing rooms in the backstage area down below it all. "Incidentally, looking at this..." She then pulled out a ruler, placing both flat on the dressing table as she spun the ruler around on the diagram. "Aha. Thirty feet from this room covers the backstage completely." She turned around, handing the diagram to Apollo. "It also looks like it would cover the stage."

Apollo nodded as he took the diagram, though he thought it unlikely someone on stage would have been the one to fire the switch. "Thank you."

"Keep that thing," Ema insisted. "I only printed it off just in case." Finally, she grinned, her first happy expression since their arrival. "I feel much better knowing what this device is. I'll have to look into igniters a bit more later."

"Good luck!" Trucy chirped.

Luke chuckled. "I'm glad. Paired with those fragments that were next to it, this being an igniter makes a lot of sense."

Ema's grin faded as she turned to Luke. "You said something on the night... that the timing of the murder was faked, correct?"

After a pause, Luke nodded. "You said those fragments were firecrackers?" he reminded her. "Put an igniter next to two firecrackers, then set them off from a remote location. They would sound like gunshots, wouldn't they?"

Ema didn't reply, staring at Luke for a long moment. Finally, she turned away. "I'd best be getting on with my investigation," she said.
Apollo nodded, securing the diagram he'd been given in his bag with the switch. "We'll be off to find more evidence then," he announced, and pulled out his Court Record. "Just let me get a picture of that igniter first."

"Sure," Ema agreed, holding up the small bag with its charred device.
It took a few minutes to tear Alfendi away from whatever riveting tale Lamiroir was treating him to, but eventually he was persuaded to leave with his sister. Apollo and Trucy made sure to give Lamiroir their goodbyes as they went.

"I will be here when you return," the singer promised them.

Outside, Apollo paused in surprise before closing the door. In front of them, not too far away, was Desmond Sycamore, casually chatting away with a man sporting an enormous pompadour... a very familiar man sporting an enormous pompadour.

"Uncle!" Alfendi cheerfully cried, running to Sycamore and quickly latching around his middle, where he peeked up at the stranger through the red hair falling over his eyes.

"Ah, Alfendi, there you are," Sycamore chuckled, resting a hand on top of the boy's head. "Had fun, did you?"

Alfendi mutely nodded, pressing tighter into his uncle's chest.

Flora, like the Wrights, was meanwhile staring in surprise at the other man standing nearby. "Aren't you... Detective Crescend?" she asked.

Daryan scoffed, shooting the two eldest Wrights in particular a glare. "What? Come to laugh at the murderer?"


"That old bag opens her pie hole," Daryan continued, waving a hand, "and wham-bam my life goes down the chute! Thanks. They won't let me work while I'm a suspect!"

Trucy leaned in close to Apollo and whispered, "He's not in the best of moods, is he?"

"Not many people are these days, it seems," Apollo quietly replied.

"Crime scenes aren't exactly the happiest place to hang out, though," Trucy pointed out.

Meanwhile, Sycamore was giving Daryan a sympathetic look, prying Alfendi off his abdomen. "It is a pity. A detective should be allowed to attempt to clear their name, should they not?"

"You bet," Daryan agreed, still fuming. "And Gavin had to go rub salt in the wound... My alibi's rock solid. Rock solid!"

Luke raised an eyebrow at Sycamore, but said nothing.

Flora thought a moment, still watching Daryan, then slowly smiled. "If I may say, Detective Crescend, I thought your performance during the concert was wonderful."

"You were in the audience, huh?" Daryan realised. Finally, he managed to crack a forced smirk.
"Heh. Thanks, little lady. Gotta apologise, but I'm not exactly in the mood for giving a fan the attention they deserve. Glad you enjoyed it, though."

Luke's confused and vaguely horrified look only intensified as he now turned to Flora, but he still kept quiet.

"My favourite of yours was 'Guilty Love'," Flora continued, still smiling. "It's a shame the concert was cancelled after that."

Daryan shrugged, softly chuckling. It seemed Flora's attentions were doing a lot to cheer him up. "Ah, one of our new ones. We recorded that one for the album just the other day, actually. One of Gavin's babies." His smirk faded. "Though not to the extent of Guitar's Serenade, I think. It's a classic tearjerker."

"Does he base them on real experience?" Flora asked.

"Probably not," Daryan replied. "He writes by 'feeling' more than memory." He shot a glare into the distance. "Of course, he changes the song and lyrics on a whim. Drives me up the wall."

Apollo rolled his eyes, muttering to Trucy, "Makes his court cases on a whim sometimes, too."

"He changed the lyrics to a song just before our last recording session, too!" Daryan continued, arms crossed. "Wants to put in this line about a university student obsessed with girls. Whatever!"

At that, Apollo blinked in surprise. 'Wait, what!?'

"Of course it always turns out good in the end," Daryan scoffed. "That's his talent, I suppose."

Flora tapped a finger against her mouth in thought. "He's a very good prosecutor, too. All of his cases turn out good in the end as well, don't they?"

"Guess so," Daryan muttered, clearly not happy the conversation had moved on from himself.

Sycamore nodded. "Although, as you said, your alibi is supported by hundreds of witnesses. It's a shame he can't see that."

"Exactly!" The detective huffed to himself. "This whole thing's a sham. I can't believe they aren't letting me work!"

Luke pulled at the brim of his hat. "There's no need to yell..."

Daryan didn't seem to hear, loudly continuing, "Man, I never even talked to that old windbag! How could she possibly identify me!?"

Apollo made sure to grab Trucy's arm where it wasn't obvious, just in case she decided to take offence.

"They won't let you work?" Flora asked, her head turned to one side.

"He won't let me work! Gavin!" Daryan specified, almost spitting his friend's name. "Says I gotta lie low till the suspicion is cleared. What suspicion!? He can be such a stick in the mud..."

"Mister Gavin?" Flora repeated, looking confused. "A stick in the mud?"

Daryan nodded. "He may look all flashy and showy, but he's straight as an arrow, man... 'cept when he's depressed, of course." He gestured to Apollo and Trucy. "You heard him whining the other
Apollo nodded, remembering the incident with the mixing board and the missed cue.

"He's just a perfectionist, is all," Daryan sighed, his anger finally seeming to fade. "Not a bad guy, really."

Flora nodded, an eager smile on her face. "I think so too! I love the Gavinners' music!"

Daryan grinned. "The band's fine, too. Gavin can write a good tune, I'll give him that."

"Although, come to think of it," Flora continued, "I was expecting to see him near the crime scene... but he doesn't seem to be here."

"Nah, he'll be down at the prosecutor's office, most likely," Daryan replied. He then looked away, a tight expression on his face. "The data on the victim should have come in from Interpol... Normally, I'd be down there dealing with it." His glare deepened. "Normally."

Apollo cleared his throat. "Well, we need to see him, so we'll be going now." He patted Trucy's back, signalling for his siblings to head back towards the front of the building. "C'mon, Truce."

"Say 'hi' for me, okay?" Daryan called. "Oh, and 'screw you'. And tell him I want into that crime scene!"

"We will, Detective!" Flora cheerfully told him, giving him a wave. She took her brother's hand and moved to follow the Wrights. Sycamore was at her heels.

"Hey, wait!"

The group stopped and turned as one, seeing Daryan jogging up to meet them. "Y-yes?" Apollo asked.

"What do you really think happened?" the detective asked, fixing Apollo with an intense stare. "Really? You don't think I did it, right?"

Apollo felt his mouth turn dry.

"Naturally, we think you didn't," Sycamore replied on Apollo's behalf, a friendly smile on his face. "There's nothing stronger than your alibi, is there?"

"Exactly!" Flora agreed. "Even the defence has to agree you were on stage during the third act!"

Luke gave the pair of them horrified looks.

Daryan gave them a proud grin, then turned to Apollo. "Listen to your pals, eh? Don't get led astray by some siren song. Get this one wrong, and you'll be eating humble pie for a year." He scoffed, turning to walk away. "I'll bake it myself."

As the man left, Trucy pulled at her eldest brother's arm. "Let's not talk to him anymore," she said.

"Agreed," Apollo muttered, and quickly led the group away. 'I'll certainly admit, Detective Daryan Crescend is one stone I'd leave unturned if I had a choice...’

"What was that!?!" Luke cried the moment he was sure they were out of earshot, looking between
Flora and Sycamore. "You two know he's the murderer, why were you agreeing with him!?!"

Sycamore laughed, pushing at his glasses. "I believe the correct term for what we were doing, Luke," he replied, "is 'sucking up'."


Flora nodded in agreement, frowning. "Mm, it's a pity. I was hoping talking about the Guitar's Serenade or Guilty Love might get him to slip up and say something incriminating."

Luke looked between them a moment more, then sighed, pressing a hand to his face.

"Wow, Flora!" Trucy gasped, and fixed the woman with a wide grin. "You're more devious than I thought!"

"Thank you!" Flora proudly chirped, brushing at her ponytail.

Apollo smiled, holding back a laugh at his brother's exasperation. "So you guys never believed him at all?"

"Goodness no," Sycamore chuckled. "I have no doubt the dear detective is a murderer... but I wasn't exactly going to say so in front of him." He shook his head. "As painful as it was, it was easier to just go along with him and keep him distracted, in case he tried to push his way inside." He frowned at the sky. "It's been a very long time since I had to put that much effort into an act."

Luke gave Flora a dark look. "You should be more careful, Flora. You're picking up Descole's tricks."

"How else am I supposed to keep up with the Professor on an investigation?" Flora asked with a knowing wink.

"And I was under the impression you'd forgiven me for all that, Luke," Sycamore added, shooting the young vet a smirk. "Are we reverting back to the glares and thinly-veiled barbs?"

Luke turned red, looking away with a chastened expression.

Although he was walking at his sister's side, Alfendi's attention was firmly behind them, frowning in thought. "So that's what a murderer looks like..."

Trucy put on her best airs of wisdom. "Yep. Get a good hard look, Alfendi, because murderers all look different on the outside; You gotta look at the inside to identify them."

Apollo rolled his eyes. "I'm a hundred percent sure that's not how it works."

Alfendi snorted, looking up at Apollo with a grin. "That's awfully sure for someone who's wrong!"

"Eyyy!" Trucy cried with a proud grin, holding up her hand. Alfendi giggled as he high-fived her.

Sighing, Apollo decided to ignore them.

By now, the group had reached the front of the building, and paused momentarily to slip out through the wire fence, the policeman on guard waving them through. With the din of the nearby crowd around the Coliseum's entrance, the group fell silent as they hurried past, heading down into the arena area immediately adjacent. As they passed the fountain of flowers, Flora turned to Sycamore with a puzzled look. "By the way, Uncle, what happened to Emmy? Wasn't she waiting with you?"
"Ah, Emmy... I forgot about her in the fuss with the detective," Sycamore muttered, pushing at his glasses. "Don't worry, she decided to return to the Bostonius shortly after you all went inside."

"Why'd she do that?" Luke asked. "I thought she wanted to help the investigation."

"She did," Sycamore agreed. "She's been dwelling on it, actually." His walk slowed as they approached the other side of the arena, and he sat down on the large steps, the group coming to a natural halt around him. "I'm sure you recall the pair of us once travelled to Borginia ourselves not too long ago?"

Apollo nodded. "You had that tourist phrasebook you lent us."

Flora looked worried as she sat at her uncle's side. "Is Emmy still upset it wasn't much help?"

Sycamore sighed. "Unfortunately." He patted the concrete seating at his side. "Feel free to sit down, everyone; This is a bit long."

At that invitation, Alfendi didn't hesitate to jump to Sycamore's side opposite his sister, grinning, and his actions seemed to convince Trucy, who shrugged and happily sat next to him. Apollo and Luke, seeing the line now in front of them, decided to gingerly lower themselves to the bricks under their feet rather than sit either behind the group or far enough to the sides that it would just be awkward trying to listen to Sycamore's story.

Once everyone was comfortable, Sycamore began to explain.

View the Court Record
"It was because of Emmy we decided to go to Borginia," Sycamore began. "It's a tiny country, with an even tinier emigration rate... Her editor thought it might be an unexplored venue for international gossip, and Emmy agreed." He shook his head. "Naturally, they don't speak English outside of the airport, so we took our time preparing before taking the plunge, as it were; Emmy would need to be able to communicate effectively with people if she wanted a story, and she was very insistent that she didn't want to rely on a translator if at all possible."

"Really?" Trucy asked.

Flora frowned in thought. "So... she was learning Borginian?"

Sycamore nodded. "She never became perfectly fluent, but it was enough." He smiled. "And what she couldn't say, I always could; That tourist phrasebook was mine."

"Hence why it was supposed to be in your study," Flora realised.

"Indeed," Sycamore chuckled. "In the end, Emmy just wrote an article about Borginia itself, nothing specific. We spent two weeks there in total." He frowned. "Although Borginia's customs are very strict. I feared they weren't going to let us leave at all... They refused to allow us to take off until they'd checked every inch of the Bostonius for illegal activity."

At that, Luke snorted. "Hope you hid the Descole outfit."

Sycamore gave him a wry look. "As far as I could tell, they'd never heard of him, fortunately."

Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead, thinking. "So, if Ms Altava could speak Borginian... How long ago was this that she couldn't talk to Machi for us?"

"A few years now," Sycamore replied. "After the hassle of trying to leave, we mutually decided we never wanted to return. Emmy threw out her Borginian books, I put my phrasebook on a hidden shelf, and the both of us willingly let go of anything we'd learned of the language; We didn't think we'd ever need it again."

Trucy huffed. "That's irony, right?" she asked. "When you think you won't need something, so you get rid of it, but then you do need it once you don't have it anymore?" She then smiled. "That's why I never throw anything out!"

"That's why your bedroom is a mess," Apollo pointed out, an eyebrow raised.

"And that's why Emmy has returned to the Bostonius," Sycamore continued. "Her books may be gone, but she still has her digital study materials in a back-up somewhere. She's determined she wants to refresh her memory and re-learn what Borginian she can, in order to aid you in communicating with your young client."

"Really?" Luke asked, surprised. "She's doing all that... for us?"
Sycamore nodded, giving the Wright brothers a smile. "Of course. We all want to help you succeed, if we can."

Luke blushed, embarrassed. Apollo gave the man a grateful smile, saying, "You've all been a lot of help. I don't know if we'd be as far along in this case without you guys."

There was a lull in the conversation, a moment of two of silence as the topic reached its natural conclusion... and was promptly broken by Alfendi, tugging at Sycamore's sleeves. "Uncle? What are we doing now?"

"That's a good question," Sycamore replied, again looking to the Wright brothers. "I believe you two are heading to the Prosecutor's Office, you said?"

Apollo nodded. "We need to talk to Gavin."

"I'll go with you!" Trucy cried, her hand shooting into the air.

"Me too!" Flora agreed, smiling eagerly. "I didn't get much of a chance to speak to Mister Gavin last time!"

Sycamore turned his attention to his nephew. "And what about you, Alfendi?"

The six-year-old thought for a long moment. "Um... If it's okay... I want to see that video of Lamiroir disappearing again," he finally replied. "I... think I might have figured out how he did it...? I'm not a hundred percent sure."

Luke giggled. "That's fine Alfendi, you can watch it again. We left it in the DVD player."

Trucy gave the boy a wink. "And you can tell us what you've worked out later when we meet back up! Polly and I will tell you what you've got right!"

Alfendi grinned in pride.

And thus the group split up to go their separate ways once more. Luke gave Sycamore detailed instructions on how to work their TV set-up, then Apollo refreshed them on the route back to the Agency, Trucy entrusting them with her keys so they could get inside. After promising to call them should he have any trouble, Sycamore took his young nephew and headed off for the train station a couple of blocks away, while Flora and the Wrights headed back to Luke's car. It was a much roomier journey with only the four of them, and it was easy enough for Apollo, having been to the Prosecutor's Office before, to direct his brother to its location.

"You've been there before?" Trucy asked in surprise.

"Uh, yeah," Apollo replied, waving a hand as if to brush her question off. "It was... for a case. I wanted to ask Uncle Edgeworth something."

Luke cast his brother a glance, his attention glued by necessity to the road. "Which case was that?"

Apollo thought a moment, steadfastly keeping his eyes out the window. "Don't remember," he insisted. "It's not important, anyway."

Finally, they arrived at the tall office building, just one in a group of identical office towers that filled the nearby streets, though it seemed to be the tallest in the immediate area. Luke circled for a while
before he found a nearby parking lot with free spaces, and the quartet made their way inside. Klavier, it turned out, was on one of the higher floors, with enough distance off the ground to look down on the surrounding buildings... as Trucy was happy to point out once they exited the lift, passing a window by the stairwell.

"Look at all the people down there! They look like rice grains!"

Apollo found the door matching the number the receptionist gave them, sitting slightly ajar. "Hello?" he called, and pushed it open.

The first thing that struck Apollo as he entered Klavier's office was how different it managed to be from Edgeworth's, despite having the same basic structure of the rectangular room and the floor-to-ceiling window at the back; The wooden floor-boards were the only identical thing between the two Apollo could pick out. On the right wall, where Edgeworth had tall shelves full of files, Klavier had a glass display case full of guitars, while the left wall was coated with a strange array of wooden blocks that stuck out, preventing anything from hanging on it. There was no curtain or shelves separating the view out the window from the room inside, making Apollo feel dizzy at just the thought of getting too close to it. From the ceiling along the left wall hung three truly massive computer monitors, all on and displaying what looked like evidence... though only one of them had anything Apollo recognised from LeTouse's murder, specifically a photo of the bloodstained carpet once the man's body had been removed. Aside from the floor and a small side-table holding a jug and glass, the only flat surfaces in the room were a pair of enormous speakers, red tablecloths draped over them: One carried a display full of Gavinners CDs and what looked like a stereo system (as well as an adorable ukulele), while the other held a miscellany of small objects and a familiar-looking charred guitar, wrapped in a white cloth. A stool stood amongst piles of folders on the floor, holding a covered tray, and, at the back of the room, a large massage chair sat on a round carpet, its back to the door and the black and white keys of a keyboard visible on an attached stand.

"Look, don't give me excuses, why isn't this information getting through?"

Apollo grabbed Trucy's shoulder as she tried to push past him. "Sounds like he's on the phone," he whispered.

Trucy gasped, a grin on her face. "Let's eavesdrop on him!"


"Maybe we should come back later?" Flora suggested.

"We're just waiting for him to finish!" Trucy continued, undeterred by her brothers' disapproval. "So what if we hear something scandalous about the band while we're here, innocently wanting to talk to him?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "What, you're an agent for Ms Altava now?"

From behind the massive back of his chair, Klavier sighed. "Just get me that report, okay? Chop chop." There was a beep, and Klavier groaned, his chair slowly beginning to spin away from the window and into their sight, a phone in hand. "It's times like this when I start to miss Daryan..." A moment later, his face came into view, a deep frown that turned to widened eyes as he spotted the quartet standing in his doorway. "Huh?"

Apollo sheepishly grinned, giving the man a wave. "Erm, hiya!"

Trucy giggled. "Just thought we'd drop in!"
"W-we can come back later if you're busy, Mister Gavin," Flora nervously added, her hands clasped together. "I hope you're not mad..."

Luke said nothing, hanging at the back of the group and staring at the floor.

Klavier gave them an easy grin, pushing himself off his chair as he slipped his phone into a pocket. "How could I be?" he told Flora, waving them in. "Have a seat."

Apollo raised an eyebrow as he looked between the two lone chairs in the room, one taken by the covered tray and the other with a German prosecutor still half-sitting in it.

"That's so kind of you!" Flora gushed as she eagerly stepped into the room, Trucy equally gleeful at her side. "We won't take up too much of your time, we promise!"

Klavier chuckled. "So, who have you come to see?"

The girls paused, shooting each other confused looks. "Huh?" Trucy asked.

"Klavier, lead vocalist for the Gavinners," Klavier asked, brushing at his fringe with a leisurely smile, "or Prosecutor Gavin, scourge of the courtroom?"

Flora and Trucy still looked confused, and Apollo couldn't blame them. "Are those our only choices?" he asked, joining the girls to stand at his sister's side. "The concert or the case?"

"Aren't they all the same thing?"

Apollo spun around in surprise as he heard his brother speak, seeing Luke still standing near the door with a small smile on his face. "Luke?"

"Lead vocalist and prosecutor, the concert and the murder," Luke continued, holding up his hands as though weighing half of each pair in them. "They're the same things. You can't talk to, or about, one without having to include the other."

Klavier shrugged, amused. "A good point, Herr Doktor." He chuckled, running his eyes up and down the vet. "I see we are on speaking terms once more, then."

Luke nodded, stepping forward to join his siblings. "I should apologise again; It was my own error to assume you could see the same things in Lamiroir's testimony that I could."

At that, Klavier's lazy grin seemed less genuine and more confused.

"I believe the phrase is," Luke continued with an innocent smile, "'never ascribe to malice what you can instead ascribe to stupidity'?"

Klavier's expression darkened into a glare. "I got your point, Herr Doktor." He brushed at his fringe. "Needless to say, your jibes will all mean nothing if you cannot prove your case in court tomorrow, which I have every confidence you can't."

"And yet you've still taken Detective Crescend off the case," Apollo pointed out with a raised eyebrow. "Isn't that admitting to the possibility?"

Klavier shook his head. "It is not up to my personal thoughts on the matter. Given the delicate situation, with him and Lamiroir both, I felt it would be kinder to separate him from the investigation."

Apollo shrugged. He couldn't really argue with that.
"I like your stereo!" Trucy cried, pointing to the nearby CD player on one of the massive speakers.

Klavier didn't seem to mind the sudden change of topic, giving Trucy a wide smile. "To me, a life without music is inconceivable," he told her. "I never turn down the volume, even when I'm working on a case."

"But these speakers are enormous!" Flora pointed out, surprised. "Surely they're awfully loud?"

Chuckling, Klavier gestured to the walls. "This room is completely soundproof, of course."

Luke smiled, looking at the oddly-designed left wall. "I thought so. It's been a while since I've seen such efficient sound-proofing."

Apollo tried not to visibly huff at the prosecutor. 'Lucky bastard. We can always hear if the neighbour turns on their TV...'

The younger brother then pointed behind them, continuing, "Although, the open door does defeat the purpose a little."

Klavier chuckled. "It is never left open by me, I assure you."

View the Court Record
Meanwhile, Flora's attention had turned to the tall chair. "Is that... the 'replica' Detective Crescend was showing off in court?"

Apollo looked back and noticed the covered tray did indeed seem to be holding the lump of white plastic they had seen from a distance only hours ago in the courtroom. It was sat under a bell jar, looking for all the world like a discarded stick of used gum.

"Oh yeah, the thing Mister LeTouse was looking for!" Trucy said, grinning. "Is that what your phone call was about?"

Klavier's eyes widened. "Wait a second! You were listening in!"

"Who? Us?" Trucy quickly replied, face paling. "I-I tried to stop them, really, but they forced me to!"

"We forced you?" Luke repeated with an unamused frown.

"Exactly!" Trucy only said.

Klavier just sighed, waving the girl's claims off. "We still haven't identified it, if that's what you're asking. You can take a closer look if you wish... although I really shouldn't be offering, should I."

Apollo decided not to look a gift-horse in the mouth and stepped away from the conversation to peer at the strange lump through the bell jar covering it. Just as Daryan had said in court, it appeared to be just a harmless blob of plastic, positively tiny at only four centimetres in length... Although Apollo's closer examination did give him an excellent view of the large 'SAMPLE' printed across one side, and the slightly ribbed texture of the cloudy-coloured exterior. 'It's amazing how something only an inch and a half big can be so important to a case...'

"What do you know about it?" Luke asked. "Other than it's a replica of whatever Mister LeTouse was searching for, of course."

Klavier shrugged. "Nothing, unfortunately. I've put in a request to Interpol via my contacts in Borginia, but apparently there is a block on information somewhere along the chain."

"Really?" Flora muttered in surprise. "That's odd."

"Indeed," Klavier agreed. "There's something about this little piece of plastic that Interpol doesn't want to tell Borginia. It's a real pain."

Flora frowned in thought, tapping a finger against a cheek.

Klavier sighed again. "I've sent someone to the Coliseum to fetch Lamiroir. Perhaps she knows something about it, being a Borginian." He shot the Wrights an unamused grin. "I think I can safely assume you all know why I couldn't have asked her in court, ja?"

Trucy nodded, giving Klavier a stern stare. "I told you to make sure someone was looking after her,
didn't I?"

Chuckling, Klavier returned her nod. "Indeed you did, Fraulein."

"That reminds me," Apollo said, moving away from the odd object and shoving a hand into his bag. "We found this on the floor backstage. I think it's yours?" He pulled out the small headset, holding it out for the musician to see.

As her brother arrived at Trucy's side, the teen's face fell. "Do we have to give it back?"

Apollo shot her an unamused look. "Yes. It's not a toy."

"I know that!" Trucy cried, crossing her arms. "I was just thinking we could use it in our show!"

"By stealing it?"

"We could get our own!"

"By stealing them?"

"Guys," Luke said, snapping the two out of their bickering with a stern look. "Can we save this for later, please?"

Klavier laughed. "Please, you may keep it," he told them. "Consider it a gift."

"Really?" Trucy cried, and she didn't hesitate to snatch the earpiece from the surprised Apollo's hand, putting it back on her ear with a grin. "Look at me, I'm concert security!" she giggled.

Flora gave the teen a warm smile. "You certainly look like you belong on a stage, Trucy!"

"Thanks, Flora!" Trucy happily replied.

Apollo rolled his eyes, but decided to leave it.

Meanwhile, Luke was watching Klavier, disconnected from the levity. "Is there any way to identify who would have worn it on the night of the concert?" he asked. "Were they signed out of a stash, for instance?"

Klavier shook his head. "There is nothing special about the tour-issue headsets," he explained. "Anyone who needs one, takes one. We inevitably lose a few here and there."

Luke frowned and nodded. "I see."

"Speaking of the concert," Klavier continued, frowning himself, "did you see the paper today?"

"Yes!" Trucy proudly announced, a gloved hand shooting into the air. "I always read the TV section, and Polly reads the funnies, don't you Polly?"

Apollo shrugged, looking away as he pretended his face wasn't turning red.

"Good girl," Klavier told her with a smile. He turned to Flora. "And you, Fraulein?"

Flora thought a moment. "Uncle picked up a copy of the Times at the courthouse," she replied. "I saw some of that over his shoulder while we were waiting for the trial to start."

"And I read the paper before leaving home this morning," Luke added. "Why do you ask?"
Klavier briefly snorted in laughter, though he didn't look all that amused. "Then you will not have seen this." He reached behind him and pulled a newspaper from the arm of his gigantic massage chair, holding it out for the quartet to see. Emblazoned across the top, above a glamour shot of the Gavinners on stage, was the headline: "Concert of Tragedy: The Prosecutor's Deadly Song".

Immediately Luke was biting back a grin, his attempts not to laugh almost more obvious than a simple smile would have been.

"What...?" Flora asked, shaking her head in confusion. "I don't understand..."

Trucy gasped in recognition. "The Guitar's Serenade!"

Apollo frowned. "Really? That's what the press latched on to?"

Klavier sighed, tossing the paper at the chair behind him. "Since getting back from the trial, my phone has been ringing off the hook," he explained, shooting a dirty look at Luke's stifled giggles. "'How does it feel to take a man's life with a song?' 'Have you ever hummed a man all the way to death row?' 'Do you think you could sing for me over the phone?' It is endless. Endless!" He threw his hands in the air with a groan.

Luke managed to bring his amusement enough under control to innocently suggest, "Maybe it was a bad idea to bring that theory of yours up during the trial then, Prosecutor Gavin."

Klavier glared at him. "I'm greatly looking forward to hearing your evidence against it in court, Herr Doktor."

"Is that another newspaper you have there?" Flora interrupted, pointing to the arm of the chair where Klavier had retrieved the first paper. "It doesn't look like it's in English."

"Ah, yes," Klavier replied, turning to retrieve it. "The Borginian Daily Bugle." He handed it to the young woman. "Go ahead, take a look."

Flora politely took the item, looking over the front page. "That looks like Lamiroir," she said, showing the front page's centre image to Trucy at her side.

"That's her promotional picture," Trucy explained. "The same one from her postcards..."

"Thank you," Apollo told Klavier, "but none of us can exactly read Borginian."

Klavier winced. "Oh, that's right." He shook his head. "Suffice it to say, this is big news over there as well... though they didn't go so far as to mention the lyrics to my song."

Luke was biting his lip again, failing to hide his smile. "I'm sure they could see there was little evidence for the outrageous theory and decided not to mention it."

Although he sighed in exasperation, Klavier seemed to decide to let the comment go. "Lamiroir's testimony will probably be in the evening edition, I'd imagine," he continued. "That's why I've had Daryan step down from the investigation for now."

"The 'delicate situation' you mentioned?" Flora asked.

"We did run into him moping outside the Coliseum," Trucy added with a sage nod.

Klavier smiled a little at that. "Lamiroir was my invited guest, remember. You understand why I want to solve this case... quickly, if possible."
"We want this case solved quickly just as much as you do," Apollo replied with a stern look. "It's more than just the situation that's delicate here; Lamiroir and Machi, for their own well-being, need these false charges lifted."

Klavier met Apollo's determination with a smirk that seemed almost proud. "I look forward to seeing your evidence in court tomorrow."

Flora broke the silence, folding up the Borginian newspaper in her hands. "Speaking of the song, I was meaning to compliment you on the Guitar's Serenade, Mister Gavin," she said. "It's a beautiful song."

"It was the best!" Trucy added with a grin, fists pressed to her cheeks. "Such a great atmosphere!"

Klavier laughed. "Thank you, Frauleins!"

"You co-wrote it with Lamiroir, right?" Apollo asked.

"That's right," Klavier replied. "It was last year; I had gone to tour Borginia's legal system, as a matter of fact."

Luke's giggles seemed to have finally halted, as he was now stroking his goatee with a thoughtful look. "And you first heard of Lamiroir while you were there?"

"It was at a small jazz club," Klavier explained, then sighed wistfully. "I wept that night. I knew I had to meet her, to talk with her... so I used my influence, which is not inconsiderable, to arrange a meeting." He grinned proudly. "Thankfully, she liked the work I did, and we wrote a song right there, backstage." He stared at the ceiling, a nostalgic smile on his face. "Machi on piano, that dulcet voice, and myself on a guitar that I borrowed from Lamiroir. It is a memory I hold dear."

"And music history was made!" Trucy squealed. "You wrote the Guitar's Serenade that night, didn't you?"

"Indeed," Klavier chuckled. "And the very guitar is right over there." He gestured behind the group, to the burned remains of the acoustic guitar laid out on one of his massive speakers.

Apollo blinked in surprise. "You mean that charred lump?"

"Don't call it a 'lump'!" Trucy protested. "That's a piece of history! And it's only browned, not really 'charred'!"

"It doesn't exactly look capable of ever making music again," Flora gently pointed out.

Klavier shook his head. "No matter. I shall never sing that song again. I wouldn't have used that guitar again either, even if I could have."

Apollo resisted the urge to point out it hadn't been Klavier who sang the song in the first place.

"What exactly happened to that poor thing?" Flora asked.


Klavier nodded. "I thought it was one of the staff playing a gag on me," he told Flora. "I never guessed that wasn't the end of it... They say the best guitars burn the brightest for a reason." He then turned to the Wright brothers. "I had a specialist analyse it, incidentally."

Trucy cocked her head to one side in surprise. "Oh? Did you find anything out?"
"He didn't have a lot of time, so it's still unclear," Klavier explained, shaking his head. "But the results he came up with were... intriguing."

"Intriguing?" Apollo repeated.

Luke seemed to have picked up on something else, frowning intently at the destroyed instrument. "Wait, you said this was Lamiroir's guitar?" he asked. "How did it end up with you?"

Klavier chuckled. "She gave it to me," he said. "It was a beautiful instrument. It was played lovingly for many years. A guitar befitting a woman like Lamiroir." He sighed. "I mentioned how much I enjoyed playing it that night, and she made a present of it."

"So it came all the way from Borginia?" Trucy realised.

Klavier nodded. "That it did. We couldn't carry it on the plane - changes in air pressure and humidity ruin the wood - so we vacuum packed it in Lamiroir's studio. I used a special shipping service available to me for transporting evidence." He grinned proudly. "They brought it right up to my office for me, pristine and untouched."

Flora gave the guitar a sad look. "It's such a shame it got burned."

In contrast, Luke's suspicious gaze only seemed to have hardened.

View the Court Record
"What was it you were saying earlier?" Apollo asked Klavier. "Something about intriguing results from an examination of the guitar?"

"That's right!" Trucy agreed. "What was that all about?"

Klavier thought a moment, then turned to Luke, dragging the young vet's attention from the instrument. "You will know this, Herr Doktor: The name of the hole in the front of a guitar?"

Luke nodded. "You mean the sound hole?"

"That's the one," Klavier replied. "They found something attached to the wood just inside, a broken device of some sort."

Flora's eyes widened. "A broken device?"

"Yes." Klavier walked past them to the speaker the guitar was lying on, and reached for one of the many small objects littered around it: A small evidence bag, the silver and green of a circuit board visible within. "This, in fact. The examiner is busy with evidence for the case now however, so he'll be checking this out once he's finished with everything else." As he turned back to face the quartet, he held up the evidence bag for them to see.

Apollo, Trucy and Flora gasped, gazes locked on the slightly-blackened device held in the clear plastic. Luke's eyes widened for a moment, then he frowned.

Klavier raised an eyebrow, looking between the four. "What is it? You recognise this?"

"Unfortunately," Flora muttered, looking to Apollo.

Apollo sighed, then reached into his bag to pull out his Court Record. "We saw another just like it only an hour ago," he explained, flicking through to find the photo he'd taken of Ema's igniter in its bag, her painted fingernails visible where she gripped it. "It was at the crime scene." He spun the tablet computer around to show off the picture, and Klavier gasped as he compared the two devices, one bright and new while the other was charred and worse for wear; It was beyond apparent that, apart from the coating of soot, they were identical in every way.

"What is it?" Klavier mumbled.

"Think about it, Mister Gavin," Luke replied. "You found one of these in your guitar, which burned to pieces in your hands on the same night as the murder. What do you think it is?"

Klavier frowned, not looking happy with the answer he had in mind. "Which raises the question of what an igniter was doing at the crime scene." He sighed, playing with his hair as he tossed the evidence bag back on the 'table' behind him. "Regardless... I believe that covers everything I'm at liberty to talk to you about."

"Oh, really?" Trucy asked, surprised.
"Thanks for dropping by," Klavier replied, giving the group a smug grin, "Herr Forehead."

Apollo felt his siblings' (and Flora's) confused stares on him, and felt he had to agree. "Thanks...?"

Klavier laughed. "Why, you gave me so much information! That igniter, for instance."

"Oh," Apollo mumbled, shooting the man a glare. "That."

"I've never met an attorney so forthcoming with the prosecution," Klavier continued, highly amused. "It's a big help. Or perhaps you're just a tad naive, hmm?"

Apollo heard Luke scoffing at his side. 'That's true, we could have refused to tell him anything... but he'd have found out when he next spoke to Ema anyway.' The young magician shook his head, then gave Klavier a grin of his own. "I could say the same to you, Prosecutor Gavin."

Klavier blinked, his smirk fading to a confused look.

"Thanks for the information," Apollo continued. "About your guitar, to name just one thing. It's far more important to this case than you realise. 'At least I hope it is. It can't be a co-incidence that both it and the murder happened at more or less the same time...'

Trucy snorted as she hid giggles.

Klavier softly laughed under his breath, shaking his head. "I've been thinking, Herr Forehead... We encounter many incidents in our lives, all of us... not all of them simple."

Luke looked away, contemplative. "You can say that again..."

"That is why I try to at least remain simple inside," Klavier continued. "And I keep a simple goal: to discover the truth." He gave Luke a pointed look, smirking. "And I prefer to keep relations civil, ja? That's all."

Aside from the widening of his eyes, Luke froze where he stood, face turning red.

Apollo felt a little embarrassed himself: He could remember how he'd reacted the first time they happened to run into Klavier at People Park, barely holding in his rage at seeing the man who'd accused their father of forgery... and, in a way, that hadn't stopped. He still blamed Klavier, at least partly, for Phoenix's disbarment, though his anger had faded as time passed, watching Trucy fall for him (though she kept her fangirling at a minimum), Luke deciding to trust him (even if that had so recently gone sour), Phoenix insisting Klavier wasn't to blame (while still treating him rather coldly when they ran into each other at the courthouse)... Klavier had apparently been trying to befriend them, being so affable at People Park, helping to convict Tiala, inviting them to the concert, arranging for Machi's defence request to go to the Wrights, and even now happily sharing information with the 'opposing side'. Despite the man's efforts, Apollo didn't think he could ever be friendly towards the rock star prosecutor, no... but civil? Civil he could do.

Apollo gave Klavier a smile. "I can live with that."

Klavier's returning grin was the most genuine Apollo had ever seen.

"M-me too," Luke quietly added, still red as he avoided Klavier's eyes. "I'm sorry again."

"Heh, maybe you should have given me a testimony yourself on the night, Herr Doktor," Klavier told Luke. "It would have saved us both a lot of headaches, ja?"
Luke nodded, hesitantly glancing up at the prosecutor's face. "I guess so. I'd say I'll be more careful next time, but that's just tempting fate."

Klavier laughed.

Trucy frowned thoughtfully for a moment or two, then, avoiding Klavier's eyes, asked, "Um, Mister Gavin?"

"Fraulein?" Klavier promptly replied with his usual friendly smile.

"Can I ask why you sing in a band?"

Klavier chuckled. "Because I want women to turn and look when I walk down the street."

Apollo rolled his eyes.

"That's very simple, too," Flora realised.

Still laughing under his breath, Klavier turned and began to saunter towards the door. "Now if you'll excuse me, I've got work to do," he announced, waving. "Another time perhaps."

"Until then, Mister Gavin," Luke replied, and led Flora and his siblings out of the room. Trucy lagged at the back of their group, giggling, but Apollo didn't get a chance to see what had caught her attention; She had already finished and was dashing past her eldest brother by the time he'd turned around.

Once Klavier had locked his office door behind them, he was quick to dash off, but the Wrights took their time, Apollo rounding on Trucy with a stern look. "What did you do."

Trucy grinned innocently. "Who says I did anything?"

"I heard you giggling back there," Apollo explained, gesturing with his head to the now-locked office they had exited only a minute ago. "What did you do?"

Luke joined in the stern look on their sister. "Trucy..."

"I didn't do anything!" Trucy insisted, still grinning brightly. "I was just thinking, while we're here, we could stop by Uncle Edgeworth's office and say hi!"

"Would he mind that?" Flora asked. "This is an office building..."

"He would mind that," Apollo agreed. "Besides, we don't have the time; We need to find this evidence for Machi, don't we?"

Trucy huffed, but she didn't complain.

"Let's hurry up," Luke reminded them. "We should get back to the Coliseum. Maybe Ema has something new for us."

On the way back to Luke's car, they passed Klavier standing out on the street with Daryan, the pair engaged in a quiet argument once more. Neither noticed the Wrights, and the quartet weren't eager to attract their attention, so they quickly slipped past in the crowds covering the pavement.

It was going to be a while until they got back to the Coliseum.
Hi Emmy this is Trucy, Luke wanted me to ask how you were doing.

Hi Trucy! I'm doing just fine. Found my old back-up harddrive and am going through it now. How's your investigation going? Desmond told me you went to the prosecutors office?

    Yep! We had to talk to Mr Gavin. Were going back to the colegseum now tho.
    Polly said to thank you for wanting to help btw.

Tell him it's no problem. ;) I'm going to get together everything I can and head to your office to join Desmond and Alfendi, so you guys be sure to call on me if you need me, ok?

    Ok! You can study in reception if Alfendis too loud. Daddy made us do homework in there a lot.
    Luke says he'll let you know when we want to try talking to Machi.

Great! I'll let you guys get back to your investigation then. Talk to you later!

    Seeya Emmy!

View the Court Record
"Whatever Mister LeTouse was looking for," Flora mused aloud as the group wound their way through the fence and into the closed-off car park, "it must be a very closely guarded secret."

"Why do you say that?" Trucy asked, skipping at the woman's side.

Ahead of them, Apollo noticed Luke frowning intently, a hand on his chin.

"Think about it," Flora explained. "Mister LeTouse didn't know what it looked like, which is why he had that small replica. Interpol won't tell the police what it is. Not even Mister Gavin seemed to be having any luck working it out."

Luke nodded in agreement. "It looked so nondescript, too. I can't even imagine what that replica is meant to represent."

Apollo looked behind him as they walked, watching Flora. "You're a cook; You've worked with all kinds of wild and wacky European food. Any ideas?"

Flora could only shake her head. "I'm sorry... It didn't look like any plant life I've ever seen."

"I have to agree," Luke added. "It didn't look like a plant to me."

"Which makes it what?" Trucy asked. "A rock?"

Apollo had opened his mouth to reply when he noticed movement ahead of them, the door to backstage swinging open rapidly as a woman in a white coat dashed outside. "Hold it," he said. "Is that Ema?"

The woman was already running in their direction, and paused in surprise as she spotted the quartet only a few metres away. Rolling her eyes, she stopped, watching them approach her. "Oh, it's you. You came at a good time."

"Hi, Ema!" Trucy cried, waving.

"Is something up?" Apollo asked.

Ema huffed, her eyes darting around the car park. "Any of you know where Lamiroir is?"

Apollo and Trucy shared a worried look. "We... saw her in the backstage hallway a while ago," the elder of the pair admitted.

The news only seemed to concern Ema further, making her fidget nervously. "Yeah? That's strange..."

"What's strange?" Trucy asked. Apollo noticed Luke's eyes widen; Had he already figured it out?

"I can't find her anywhere," Ema told them. "I was supposed to bring her to the prosecutor's office..."
Apollo froze. ‘Oh no... Mom...!’ He felt Trucy clinging to his arm.

"She can't have gone far," Flora pointed out, forcing a smile for her friends. "She is blind."

Ema nodded before Apollo had the time to panic that she hadn't already known; Apparently Klavier did manage to fill her in on the details of her own investigation after the trial that morning. "That's what's worrying me..."

"We'll help look for her," Luke offered. "She's probably still inside."

"Great!" Ema sighed, looking relieved. "Thanks. I'll look out here anyway, just in case."

Apollo nodded, feeling a rush of determination. Looking to his siblings and Flora, he started heading to the backstage door behind Ema, Trucy still clinging to his arm. "C'mon, guys. We'd better hurry."

More than ever before, the backstage corridors of the Coliseum felt like a maze. Once in the door, Luke suggested they split up, taking Flora up to the lighting boxes where the Wrights had watched the concert, while Apollo and Trucy looked around the staff rooms on the ground floor. When neither found anything, Flora suggested they meet on the stage, which she had noticed had gone completely dark; For a blind person like Lamiroir, the lights being off certainly wouldn't be an obstacle.

Apollo and Trucy, being closer, were the first to arrive in the wings. Just as Flora had told them via Luke's phone, it was pitch-black out on the stage, and Apollo was wary of exploring it before all four of them were there.

Trucy leaned forward, peering into the darkness despite her brother's hand on her arm. "Why do you think the lights aren't on here?"

Apollo shrugged. "The power breaker must be off." He sighed, frowning at the faint outlines he could barely make out of the equipment littered in front of them. "When you think of it... darkness is all Mom has."

Trucy's face fell as she stared out at the dark stage. She stood in silence for a few moments before frowning. "Polly, does something about the stage seem... different? Like, something's changed?"

Looking over at his sister, Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Aside from the lights?"

"I can't quite put my finger on it," Trucy continued, her eyes flicking all around the impenetrable blackness, "but it's bugging me."

Apollo turned his attention to the stage. ‘I think she's right... Great, now it's bugging me too...’

Before either could think of investigating, they heard rattling up the stairs behind them, and turned to see Luke and Flora arriving in the stage area. "Have you two started searching yet?" Flora called.

Trucy shook her head. "Polly wouldn't let me."

"Well, now all four of us are here," Luke pointed out with a smile, "let's use our phones as torches and sweep across the stage in a line. We'll be sure not to miss anything then!"

Nobody had any objections to his plan, so they obediently got out their phones, opening the relevant apps to light up their camera flashes a blinding white, easily able to cut through the darkness of the
Despite that, Trucy shivered a little as she kept close to Apollo's side; He wondered if it was purely fear of the dark, or worry for their mother that had her so on edge.

Stood in a row, Flora, Luke, Apollo, and Trucy headed out into the off-stage area, lights shining ahead of them. Flora was at the side that would be the edge of the stage ahead of them, while Trucy was more to the back, though all four had to navigate bits of equipment lying around the floor.

Trucy cast her gaze over a rack of guitars as they passed, then turned her torch on a red contrabass case right at the edge of the stage. "Hey, Polly?"

"What?" Apollo replied, the conversation bringing the entire line to a halt.

The teen pointed to the instrument case, tightly closed and with a length of white fabric sticking out. "Wasn't this open before?"

"Obviously it's been closed," Apollo sighed. "They even wrapped whatever's inside in that white cloth."

"N-no, wait!" Luke cried, dashing over to his siblings to get a better look. "I remember this contrabass case... this was empty before!"

Flora rushed over to join them, her worried face barely visible in the darkness. "Should we open it?"

Trucy gasped, pointing to the white fabric at the small end of the case. "P-Polly... that looks like...!"

Apollo's eyes widened, and he nearly dropped his phone as he realised what Trucy was trying to say. Shoving the still-brightly shining makeshift-torch in his bag, he dropped to the side of the massive instrument case, "Quick, get this open!", and shoved his fingers into whatever gap he could make beneath the lid. Luke was quick to join him, and even Flora tried to help, lifting the neck of the case while the boys worked at the body; With all three of them, it took only a moment to haul the lid up on its hinges, exposing its contents to Trucy's and Flora's torches.

Immediately, Trucy screamed, her phone clattering to the floor. As Apollo jumped to his feet in shock, she grabbed his arm and then clung to his torso, breaking into terrified sobs as her elder brother could only hold her, staring numbly at what they had found.

Lamiroir lay unconscious, curled up in the contrabass case. She was so still, Apollo couldn't tell if she was even alive.

"Flora, get Ema!" Luke barked, waving at his friend as he leapt to Lamiroir's side, immediately pressing two fingers to her neck. With his other hand, he reached for her veil, carefully pulling it off her face.

"R-right," Flora replied, already running for the stairs.

As the stairs rattled with Flora's fading footsteps, Luke kept his attention firmly on Lamiroir, pulling her veil free and shoving it absentely into a pocket. "She's alive," he announced, then shifted, trying to form a firm grip around her body in the darkness. "If we could just..."

A small voice at the back of Apollo's mind realised Luke was attempting to lift Lamiroir out of the contrabass case, and the thought was enough to finally shake the young lawyer from his frozen state. Registering again that Trucy was sobbing into his shoulder, he placed his hands on her to gently push her away, looking his sister in the face. "Truce, we need to get Mom out of that thing, okay?" he gently told her. "Why don't you shine a light so Luke and I can see what we're doing?"
Trucy's sobs quietened but didn't stop, and she nodded, heading for the bright light shining from the floor that indicated where her phone had landed; Miraculously, it appeared to be unharmed from its fall... at least as far as Apollo could tell. Apollo himself jumped to Luke's side; Together, in the light from Trucy's phone, they managed to pull Lamiroir out of the instrument case, laying her on the floor next to it. The moment the woman was safe, Trucy reappeared at Apollo's side, clinging to his arm as she softly cried... though she made sure to keep her phone's light trained on Lamiroir as Luke moved her into the recovery position.

It felt like hours before help finally arrived.

View the Court Record
Turnabout Serenade, Day 2: Investigation, Part 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

July 9, 4:59PM
Sunshine Coliseum
In the Wings

The moment Luke saw Lamiroir, Trucy's scream ringing in his ears as Apollo leaped away from the contrabass case, he didn't hesitate to take charge. He ran almost on autopilot, directing Flora to get help, entrusting Trucy to Apollo, ensuring Lamiroir was alive and safe... It surprised him a bit when Apollo and Trucy managed to put their shock to the side long enough to help pull their mother out of the instrument case, though, once that was done, he couldn't help noticing how Apollo just stood there, Trucy softly crying at his side, both looking utterly lost at the prospect of losing their mother before they'd even had a chance to properly reunite with her.

Luke had to admit, over the years since his adoption... he'd felt something like that more times than he could count.

When Ema arrived, Flora at her heels, she had her phone in one hand and a radio in the other, barking orders into the latter: "I don't care about the maintenance, this is an emergency! Turn them on now!" She shoved the radio in a pocket with a huff, stomping across the dark of the backstage area towards the tiny pocket of light that Trucy's phone was casting over Lamiroir's still form. Apollo seemed to come out of his shock long enough to step back a bit, taking Trucy with him, and the movement (or perhaps Trucy's quiet sobs) seemed enough of a signal that Ema immediately turned her focus to Luke, still crouched at Lamiroir's side. "She's alive?"

Luke nodded. "She's breathing, she has a pulse, and I haven't found any injuries. Of course, I only know basic first aid, so-"

"Aren't you a doctor?" Ema interrupted with a frown.

"Of veterinary medicine," Luke explained, unable to keep from feeling a little frustrated at the familiar refrain. "If Lamiroir was a border collie, then I'd have the expertise to help her further."

Sighing, Ema shook her head; It was too dark to see if she was embarrassed at the mistake or not. "You found her there?" She pointed to the contrabass case.

"Yes," Luke replied. "You've called an ambulance?"

Ema gestured with her phone, indicating it was them on the other end of the line.

Finally, the lights of the stage flickered back to life, allowing Flora and Trucy to put away their makeshift torches. Ema quickly passed on news of Lamiroir's condition to the emergency services on her mobile, taking pauses to direct Flora and the Wrights to clear the area for the paramedics when they arrived; Apollo and Trucy worked silently, mostly as a pair, and Trucy with tears still streaming down her face. Luke supposed his worry for his siblings as they worked had been clear to Flora, as she quickly volunteered to be the one to go meet the ambulance in the concert hall's carpark, and guide the paramedics through the maze of hallways to the wings of backstage.
Luke didn't keep an eye on the time, but he estimated it took around five minutes for Flora to return, a thundering of boots up the metal stairs announcing her arrival with two people in navy uniforms, one a man and the other a woman, each holding a bag of what Luke assumed to be equipment. The woman glanced around at them only once as she strode across the cleared path, then dropped at Lamiroir's side, asking, "What's her name?" Once Ema told her, she put a hand on Lamiroir's shoulder, gently shaking it as she called to her, "Hello, Lamiroir, can you open your eyes?"


The woman nodded, giving Luke the smallest glance before she returned her attention to her patient. "What happened?" the man asked, placing his bag down by his partner's and zipping them both open. "Was anyone present when she collapsed?"

Ema shook her head, pointing to the contrabass case. "She was found in there. Before that, we last saw her about an hour ago. It didn't seem like anything was wrong."

The woman reached into her equipment, pulling out a short plastic tube and a mask attached to a simple bag. Carefully lifting Lamiroir's head, she pulled off the star-patterned cloak, freeing the woman's tawny hair.

Trucy squeaked, rushing forward. "Did she stop breathing!?"

"No, she's breathing on her own," the paramedic assured her, sticking the tube into Lamiroir's mouth and twisting it, only the flat ring at the end visible sticking out. She gave the teen a friendly smile as she then slipped the mask over the singer's face. "The tube is to keep her airway clear until she wakes up, and this," she gestured to the bag as it began to subtly deflate, "is a non-rebreather mask, so she has plenty of oxygen."

Trucy thought a moment, then nodded. Apollo placed a hand on her shoulder and gently guided her back a few steps, out of the way. "It's looking like we'll have to take her to the hospital," the woman continued to the group at large, holding Lamiroir's head while the man pulled from his bag a curved strip of foam and plastic Luke quickly recognised as a cervical collar, not too dissimilar from the dog and cat ones in his surgery. "The doctors there will find out what happened."

The male paramedic slipped the collar around Lamiroir's neck, where it was firmly tied in place, and Trucy squeaked again as she realised what it was, clinging to Apollo. This time, she said nothing, a hand pressed to her mouth as she watched the busy emergency workers, now attaching wires, a blood-pressure cuff, even needles into various points all over Lamiroir's arms and upper body. Ema was recruited to hold up a bag of fluids connected to somewhere on Lamiroir's left arm, and had to answer a series of questions about the singer's medical history. "Does she take any regular medications? Have any allergies?"

"Sorry, I have no idea. Not to my knowledge, at least."

"Is there anyone here who would know?"

"Her manager, maybe? Except, y'know, we're in the middle of his murder investigation right now."

There wasn't really anything the paramedic could say to that. Nearby, Trucy whimpered as she pressed her face into Apollo's shoulder, getting a tight hug in return.
Luke watched his siblings with worry. In fact, he was so focussed on them that the light touch on his shoulder made him jump, spinning around to Flora at his side. "F-Flora! Uh, did you want something?"

Flora cast concerned glances between Luke and his siblings. "Are they okay? I know they're big fans of Lamiroir..."

"Y-yeah," Luke assured her, forcing a smile. "Don't worry, I'm sure both they and Lamiroir will be fine."

That didn't stop Luke from keeping a careful watch on Apollo and Trucy as two more paramedics arrived, fussing over Lamiroir and talking between themselves and their co-workers. By now, Lamiroir had been moved out of the recovery position Luke had put her in, and a large board had been placed at her side. The lead paramedic (the woman who had assured Trucy earlier) sat at Lamiroir's head, holding it still as she counted to three, then the team of four together rolled her onto her side, one of the paramedics shoving the board underneath before the lead once more counted to three, and Lamiroir was gently rolled back onto the board. As the other three continued to fuss over the unconscious singer, the lead paramedic stood to speak quietly with Ema, taking the bag of fluids. Once they were done, the four emergency workers together lifted Lamiroir on her board and began to carefully carry her towards the stairs.

Ema cast a look over the Wrights and Flora, a concerned frown on her lips. "They're taking her to Hickfield," she announced.

Luke was too surprised to immediately react. 'Why's she telling us...?'

"Hickfield?" Apollo repeated, Trucy looking up from his shoulder. "Hickfield Clinic, you mean?"

"It's the closest emergency ward, apparently," Ema replied with a shrug. Without another word, she spun on her heel and hurried off after the paramedics.

Apollo and Luke locked eyes, both wearing frowns, though Luke's was worried and Apollo's determined. They didn't need to say anything for Luke to instantly read his brother's intentions.

"We're going, right?" Trucy asked, quickly wiping her eyes dry as she put on a frown identical to Apollo's.

Apollo nodded. "To Hickfield," he said, and the pair quickly ran off together down the stairs.

Flora stepped forward to follow them, then noticed Luke hadn't moved, and stopped to look back at him in concern. "Luke?"

Luke sighed, walking to join his friend. "I'm sorry about this, Flora," he said. "First your holiday is put on hold for the concert, then this investigation, and now..."

The woman softly laughed, surprising Luke. "What are you apologising for? We're all enjoying getting to help you, and Lamiroir's accident certainly isn't your fault."

Luke gave her a weak smile in return. "Even so, we're not investigating while Lamiroir's..."

Flora cocked her head to one side, examining her friend. After a moment, she smiled. "Why don't you go check on her with Apollo and Trucy? I'll go see how Emmy's going; Maybe she's ready to question Machi for us."

At first, Luke was too surprised to react. "F-Flora..."
"Don't worry about us as well as them," Flora continued, her face an expression of fond sympathy. "You'll just explode that way. Take care of your family right now."

Luke stared at her for a long moment, then smiled and nodded. "Thank you, Flora."

July 9, 5:43PM
Hickfield Clinic
Parking Garage

Luke caught up to his siblings waiting for him at the car. They were so impatient to meet Lamiroir at the hospital, they didn't even waste time asking what had taken him so long to follow them, nor did they seem to notice Flora was no longer in their group. Everyone was totally silent as they set off, following the ambulance to Hickfield. To Luke's fascination, the vehicle never once exceeded the speed limit, nor turned on its siren or lights, though he didn't point the fact out; Apollo and Trucy had certainly already noticed, and he didn't doubt it was a source of additional worry for them.

Once at Hickfield Clinic, Luke took his time parking, though his siblings were out the doors the moment he shut off the engine. Unable to rush locking up his tiny car, Luke had quickly lost them, the caped duo dashing across the carpark in a blur of teal and crimson.

'I guess I can't blame them for racing ahead... This is their mother we're here to see.'

Luke took his time heading inside, pulling out his phone to send Flora a quick text.

We're at the hospital. We followed the ambulance the whole way, so there won't be any news on Lamiroir for a while. Are you finding your way back to the Agency okay? .

It was only a few moments before he got a response.

What did I just tell you about worrying about us? I know what I'm doing. :) Let me know when you get news on Lamiroir, though.

Luke had to laugh; Flora had always known what to say to cheer him up.

The waiting room wasn't hard to find, just inside the front entrance of the building on the ground floor. Three rows of black, boxy chairs filled the open area, facing a small TV sitting against one wall, next to a large floor-map of the hospital. Not far away, the reception desk was labelled by several small signs, just to ensure it couldn't be missed; Above the window into the smaller room beyond were large letters reading "Visitors" and "Patients". Eyeing the busy-looking receptionist inside, Luke reasoned Apollo would have already asked after Lamiroir and instead decided to just look for his siblings; They weren't hard to find, sitting near the end of one of the rows of boxy seats and attracting stares from various other people in the room. Trucy was cuddled up tight at Apollo's side, and both had their focus completely on the television, apparently unaware of the scrutiny the
two magicians were under.

Apollo looked over as Luke slipped into the seat next to him. "The nurse at reception said the doctors are looking at her," he said.

Luke nodded. Over his brother's shoulder, he couldn't help but notice the receptionist's head perk up, shooting a hawk-like glare at the boys. "Um, speaking of the nurse..."

"I know," Apollo interrupted, looking back to the TV with a frown. "I think my voice carries in here. And she probably recognises me from when Dad was here in April."

Although he raised an eyebrow at that, Luke decided to leave it, listening to the news report playing on the television:

"... murder during a concert at Sunshine Coliseum. Famous musician Klavier Gavin, with his current hit song 'Guilty Love', is in the courtroom as prosecutor, singing the defendant all the way to death row. International star Lamiroir, who performed with him on the night, served as a key witness in this morning's trial, although a verdict is yet to be declared. Their song, The Guitar's Serenade, is on sale now."

View the Court Record

Chapter End Notes

Endless thank yous to my little sister, who took time out of her very busy schedule to talk to me extensively about paramedic procedures for this chapter! Love you, Sisterling! - Sisterbig
Sixteen-year-old Apollo lay perfectly still in his bed, lying turned to the wall. On the other side of the room, he could hear the gentle breathing of his sleeping brother, muffled by the teddy bear pressed, as usual, to the teen's face. Not that Apollo could see him, as his eyes were closed, but he felt very alert, goosebumps prickling his side: His blankets had fallen from his chin to his chest and an arm was lying on top of the covers, exposing his skin to chilly night air of the early winter. A moment ago, he had been fast asleep. What had woken him?

It took him a few moments to work that out, his ears pricked to even the slightest noise in the silence of the dark building, the distant cars of the city buzzing outside the window. The floor was creaking, the padding of tiny footsteps on the carpet, so close he'd be able to touch the intruder if he turned around and reached out. Suddenly he remembered hearing the creak of the door opening, and realised that had been the catalyst that stirred him from his sleep.

Those footsteps... Was that Trucy?

The nine-year-old was stood, he guessed, in the centre of the room, the floor softly creaking as she shifted her weight side to side. Other than that, she wasn't moving or making a sound, simply standing on the carpet of her brothers' bedroom.

'What on earth is she doing...?'

Despite his burning curiosity, Apollo didn't dare move. It was the middle of the night after all, and she clearly thought he was still asleep... This had never happened before, not once in the now-thirteen months since he and Luke had been adopted and moved into the Wright household (they'd only just finished replacing all Apollo's paperwork at school with his new surname too). No, keeping his breathing slow and even, Apollo stayed perfectly still, listening intently to whatever his sister might do next.

'Is she trying to prank us? Play around with our things while we're asleep? Is that what she's doing?'

The wait felt like an eternity. A stand-off between the two, although Trucy was plainly unaware of the fact. Apollo wondered many times if he should just sit up and confront her, maybe even shift slightly to peek at what she might be doing just standing there, but the thought never quite reached his body, always vetoed at the last possible second.

'It doesn't feel like morning... She isn't hoping to just stand there all night and scare us when we wake up, is she?'

Finally, the tension broke: Trucy squeaked, sniffed, and turned around, her breathing loud despite the muffling effect of her hands on her face. She was leaving the room...

... crying.
Apollo shot up, the sudden movement seeming to startle Trucy and almost make her trip as she half-spun to face her brother, eyes wide from behind the fingers clasped tightly over her face. The two stared at each other for a moment, Apollo taking in his sister's ruffled pyjamas and tangled hair, before he pulled back his blankets, moving to sit on the edge of his bed. "Trucy? You okay?"

Trucy squeaked again, her hands curling into fists over her mouth as she blinked back tears. A second later, she had leapt back across the room, half-landed on Apollo's bed, and thrown her arms around his chest, her face buried in the fabric of his top. Apollo instinctively grabbed at the girl to keep her from falling, given the precarious position she had slammed into, and held her tight as she quietly sobbed.

'What on earth happened!?'

The door to the hallway was wide open, left as such by Trucy. Just as Apollo had suspected earlier, neither it nor the window opposite showed any hint of light outside (barring distant street lights, of course). From the angle his bed provided him, he could just make out the edge of another door, the main bedroom, also wide open. This in itself was surprising, as Phoenix always left it closed; The only conclusion Apollo could come to was that Trucy had opened it as she had their own door. 'Dad must not be back yet. What's the time?' Hugging Trucy tight with one arm, he reached for the phone on his bedside table, tapping the button once to bring up the clock on its lock screen: Midnight... or not long past it, anyway. Phoenix had told them that evening that he wouldn't be done at the Borscht Bowl Club until at least one.

"'M srry," came a mumble from Apollo's chest.

"It's fine," Apollo replied, leaving his phone to again hug his sister with both arms. Now why would she be up at this time, crying, and trying to seek comfort from Phoenix? Only one option came to mind: "Did you have a nightmare?"

Trucy froze with a squeak, then slowly nodded.

Apollo wasn't surprised. "Well, since Dad isn't home yet... did you want to stay with me for a bit?"

There was a short pause. Trucy nodded again.

Without a word, Apollo pulled back the covers and patted the mattress underneath, and Trucy obediently crawled around him to lie down. It didn't take long to rearrange the covers over the girl, and, as he lay down at her side, she pressed tight against her brother, clinging to his top as his arm wrapped around her back.

Just as the two had gotten comfortable, there was a shuffling of blankets from across the room, and their gazes snapped up to see Luke turning in his sheets with a sigh, his teddy clutched tight to his chin as his sleeping face came into view. Although he was facing them, he did not move again, unaware of the tension he had unintentionally woven into the air.

Trucy's eyes were wide as she stared across the room from behind Apollo. "Did we wake him?" she whispered.

Apollo smiled, turning back to his sister. "Nah. He's a heavy sleeper." Despite his words, he spoke no louder than a whisper himself. "Nothing wakes Luke up."

The girl nodded, relaxing a little despite her continued stare at the bed opposite. After a moment, she added, "Does he ever have nightmares?"

There was so much concern in her voice that Apollo couldn't help himself replying, shooting a
worried look at their brother. "All the time." They were no longer as frequent, but Apollo had lost count of the number of times Luke's crying had woken him in the middle of the night. Every time, without fail, he'd get up to check on his younger brother and the sobs would instantly stop, Luke frozen in a death-grip hug of his teddy, eyes screwed tightly shut; No matter how long Apollo sat at his side, Luke refused to admit he was awake, and eventually Apollo would have to admit defeat and return to his bed. For now, he quickly told Trucy, "Just don't tell him I told you that, okay?"

"I won't," Trucy promised. Finally, she broke her stare across the room, the top of her head pressed into Apollo's armpit as her eyes drifted closed.

Silence.

"Did you want to talk about your nightmare?"

Trucy thought a moment. "I was with Mommy. Then she disappeared. I couldn't find her."

Apollo hugged his sister tighter and said nothing. It was true, they hadn't exactly had much luck with tracking Thalassa Gramarye down... just as Apollo had warned Trucy months back, when they discovered she was still alive. He suspected they were more than likely never going to find her. She probably didn't want to be found; Why else would she have left the way she did, with a ridiculous story about not coming back from a disappearing trick?

"I was too scared to wake you up," Trucy added after a long pause, interrupting Apollo's inner monologue.

"Don't be," Apollo told her, putting all thoughts of their mother out of his mind. "If Dad's not home - even if he is - and you need help? I'll be here for you. And I won't be mad at you, either. I promise."

Despite the darkness, Apollo could see his sister's teary smile. "Thanks, Polly."

The first thing Phoenix had noticed as he trudged up the apartment stairs in the early hours of the morning was his daughter's open doorway, and the empty bed beyond it. Panic squeezed at his heart as he jumped into the hallway and noticed the similarly open doors of his own room and the bedroom belonging to his sons; When he looked into the latter and found the three sleeping figures within, he had almost collapsed in relief where he stood.

Luke was in his own bed, bundled up in his covers with his teddy bear sticking out at his side. Opposite him, Apollo was sprawled across his mattress, his blanket lying half off to accommodate the small figure at his side, pressed against her brother as though he were a massive teddy of her own. They were breathing almost in unison, eyes closed and expressions peaceful. Never before had they looked more like siblings... and never before had Apollo been more a big brother, even taking into account all the endless hours he was allowing Trucy to lock him up in her room practising magic (Only time would tell if he kept to his agreement of actually *performing*).

Phoenix was almost tempted to take a picture of the sleeping pair, but he knew the loud click and bright flash of the camera would only serve to wake them... and it wouldn't turn out very well in this light even *with* the flash. Instead, he simply watched them with a fond smile, committing the image to memory. After a long pause, he reached out and gently pulled the bedroom door closed.

'I am so going to tease them about this when they're grown up...'
View the Court Record
Turnabout Serenade, Day 2: Investigation, Part 13

July 9, 5:53PM
Hickfield Clinic
Waiting Room

It was Trucy suddenly jumping to her feet that finally broke Apollo's stare at the television, his mind's eye torn from the memories playing across it. He looked up, following his sister's mad dash, and quickly found what she was racing towards: A labcoated woman in high heels exiting from the direction of the wards. He cast a glance at Luke, who had similarly spotted the detective, and they jumped to their feet to meet her.

"Ema!" Trucy cried, arriving at the woman's side and looking only slightly panicked. "How's Lamiroir!? Is she okay!?

Ema smiled, looking over the trio. "Ah, you're here. We all owe you a big thanks, that's for sure."

Apollo blushed, looking away. He was pretty sure his presence hadn't made any kind of difference.

"So she's okay?" Trucy asked hopefully, her eyes lighting up.

Ema nodded, her smile wide. "Yep. She came to a short while ago. You found her before it was too late."

Trucy sighed in relief. "Th-that's good to hear..."

"So what happened?" Apollo picked up. "How'd she...?"

Ema frowned. "Someone attacked her," she explained. "She was struck on the forehead."

Apollo and Trucy were too shocked to immediately reply, hit by a fresh wave of concern for their only living blood relative.

"By whom?" Luke asked, his stern look seeming to say he had guessed the answer.

Ema could only sigh and shrug. "We don't know."

"Wh-what!?" Trucy cried. "But, they didn't speak!? She can recognise footsteps, couldn't she have-?"

"To recognise footsteps, you'd have to have heard them before," Ema pointed out, interrupting the girl. "She didn't say they were familiar." She shifted where she stood, gesturing behind her. "Anyway, would you like to see her now?"

"Would we!" Trucy repeated, a bright grin on her face; Her answer to the question was blindingly obvious.

"Is that alright!?" Apollo asked, equally hopeful.

Ema half-smiled, then waved for the Wrights to follow, heading back towards the wards. "She wants to thank you for saving her life."
Apollo had to bite back a giddy laugh as he and Trucy rushed to tail Ema down the corridor, Luke at their heels. Lamiroir was alive. She was alive and unharmed and very specifically wanted to see them. A part of him dared to hope that the physical trauma had knocked loose a few memories of her past, that maybe she had recognised the names 'Apollo' and 'Trucy' and why they were important. Hadn't Valant said it was the pair of them that had the best hope of uncovering her former self?

Finally, Ema stopped in front of one of the wards and waved the trio in without a word. Apollo and Trucy charged in without a second glance, quickly spotting the woman sitting on the lone bed within, pulling her cloak on over her head, her veil missing. "Lamiroir!" the pair called, running to her side with identical wide grins.

"Ah, Apollo and Trucy," the woman replied, smiling as she heard their voices and turned to face them. Apollo felt his heart skip a beat as he saw the full force of her happy expression without the veil to cover it, and was struck by how much she suddenly resembled the woman in the photo from twenty years ago; He wondered if Trucy was feeling something similar, thinking of her own fleeting memories as a five-year-old. "I'm told you were the ones who found me," Lamiroir was continuing. "Thank you, from the bottom of my heart."

Apollo almost had to force himself to breathe. "W-we're just glad you're okay," he insisted. "Tell us, what happened?" In the corner of his eye, he noticed Luke trailing in, closing the ward door behind him.

Lamiroir frowned, thoughtful, her hands clasped together. "It... was after I had spoken to young Alfendi in front of the dressing room," she hesitantly explained. "I sensed someone approaching. I thought it might be someone come to see me, but they said nothing. When I went to return to my dressing room..."

Apollo winced in sympathy. "You were hit?"

"I knew, that very moment I knew," Lamiroir replied, looking towards Apollo with a fierce look much like one of his, "the assailant was trying to kill me."

Trucy gasped, her hands to her mouth.

"It was lucky for me the first blow did not knock me out," the singer continued. "I turned and ran for the stage. Someone was chasing me, I could hear footsteps... yet, I reached the stage first."

Luke had a hand to his chin, thinking. "Why the stage, if I may ask?"

"I had overheard maintenance people talking," Lamiroir explained. "The power to the stage area was off, they said, for electrical work."

Apollo remembered Ema shouting something about maintenance and turning something on when she caught up to them after they found the unconscious singer; That must have been what she was talking about.

"Darkness is my ally," Lamiroir continued. "There was a contrabass case near the stage. That is where I hid."

"So the attacker couldn't see you!" Trucy realised.

Lamiroir nodded. "Once in the case... I'm afraid I passed out."

Apollo took a deep breath, relieved above all else that Lamiroir had escaped unscathed. "That was a really close call... Do you have any idea who it might have been?"
The woman shook her head. "Unfortunately, no. Whoever it was, they said not a word."

Luke nodded. "Like Ema told us."

"Yet, when I consider that I was struck high on the forehead," Lamiroir continued, a hand to her head as she frowned in thought, "I must conclude that whoever hit me was taller than I am."

"You're about the same height as Apollo and me," Luke pointed out, glancing between mother and son. "Detective Crescend is taller than us, wouldn't you say, Apollo?"

Apollo frowned, nodding in agreement. A part of him was impressed and proud of his mother's deduction, sure he would never have noticed that point on his own.

"But why would he attack Lamiroir!?" Trucy demanded, offended on the woman's behalf. "Why would anyone attack her!?"

"Because she's a witness," Apollo pointed out. "She heard Crescend talking to Mister LeTouse, and even recognised him in court this morning." His frown deepened. "He'll be wanting to silence her."

Trucy gasped, eyes wide in fear.

"And his attempt failed," Luke added. "Hopefully, with Ema now alerted to the threat, he'll know better than to try attacking her again before we can pin him in court tomorrow." He crossed his arms, glaring into the distance. "He confronted us as we left, remember? It must have been while we were talking to Mister Gavin he took his chance to act."

"Oh, that reminds me!" Trucy suddenly cried, digging around in her pouch. "I wanted to ask you, Lamiroir..." With a triumphant grin, she pulled out something tiny concealed in her fist, then grabbed Lamiroir's hand to deposit the object in her palm. "... if you knew what this is!"

Apollo's eyes widened as he recognised the lump of white plastic. "Truce! You stole the replica!?"

"I didn't steal it," Trucy replied, giving her brother an innocent grin. "We're just borrowing it! To ask Lamiroir what it is!"

"That was what Mister Gavin was planning to do with it," Luke pointed out.

"Why are you on her side!?" Apollo demanded.

Meanwhile, Lamiroir was running the small object over her palm, taking in its size, shape and texture with her fingers as she frowned deeply in concentration. "This... is the 'replica' of Mister LeTouse's?"

Trucy nodded. "Yep. The thing he was after!"

Lamiroir didn't immediately reply, brushing a thumb against the ribbed texture of the object. "So that's what he was doing..."


"Yes, I know, of course," Lamiroir replied, distracted, her attention still on the tiny lump of plastic in her palm. "This must be... a Borginian Cocoon. Or, rather, a convincing replica thereof."

'A... what?' Apollo thought.

"But, then... why was he carrying it?" Trucy asked, arms crossed in confusion. "Those don't sound like things you could find here..."
"I think that's exactly the point, Trucy," Luke pointed out, frowning. "Based on the name, I'd say they're unique to Borginia; Is that right, Lamiroir?"

The woman nodded. "As far as I am aware. All in Borginia know of them."

"And, like Flora said earlier, they must be a heavily guarded secret for Mister LeTouse to need something to identify it with," Luke continued, "and for Interpol to have him looking for them outside Borginia in the first place."

"I am sorry to say I do not know the details," Lamiroir replied, holding out the replica for them to see, "but there is another fact about the cocoon that all in Borginia know: They are not to be taken out of the country." Her gaze seemed stern. "If someone does, and is caught, they will be put to death."

Trucy gasped, her hands flying to her mouth. "T-t-to death!?"

"Why!?!" Apollo added, equally shocked.

"I do not know," Lamiroir admitted, running a thumb over the replica in her grip. "Yet, if Interpol was involved..."

Apollo bit his lip; Half of him wanted to snap and ask Lamiroir what she did know, while the other half of him was mentally kicking himself for daring to disrespect her, even if it was only in his own head.

"He must have been tracking smuggling of these cocoons," Luke pointed out, stroking his goatee with a frown. "I wonder if this same issue is what gave Mister Sycamore and Emmy so much trouble when they went to Borginia..."

Lamiroir sighed, her hands falling to her lap as she looked away. "It seems I was 'marked'..."

Trucy stepped forward with a worried look, placing her hands on Lamiroir's. "'Marked'?!"

The woman took a moment to respond. "Life changed for me with the popularity of my songs," she explained. "I began to travel around the world."

"Oh," Trucy muttered, shooting her brothers a look. "So they thought you could have brought those Borginian Cocoons with you...?"

Lamiroir nodded. "That was probably the suspicion."

"Hence why he posed as your manager," Luke mused, deep in thought.

"Borginia is a small, sheltered country," Lamiroir continued. "Not many of our people venture into the world outside."

Luke's frown deepened. "And these cocoons are so important even Interpol was working to keep them a secret... But what about them is so dangerous?"

"They're cocoons, right?" Trucy said. "So, they make silk from those, don't they?"

"I don't think it's silk that has Interpol scared of these things," Apollo pointed out. He reached out to gently take the replica cocoon from the woman's hand. "Thank you again for all your help, Lamiroir."

Lamiroir smiled, facing the direction of his voice. "It was the least I could do." Her smiled faded, a
hand brushing against her cheek. "Although, perhaps you would know... What happened to...?" She paused, gesturing to her face and struggling to find an appropriate word.

"Oh, your veil!" Luke cried, and was immediately digging around his satchel. "I'm so sorry, I had to check you were breathing when we found you and..." He shoved a hand into his pants pocket, "ah, here it is - and it was covering your nose and mouth so I had to take it off..." He took her hand and placed the strip of semi-transparent blue fabric into her palm. "I've been carrying it in my pocket for safe-keeping."

"Ah, thank you," Lamiroir said, smiling again as she moved to replace the item on her head. "I am glad to have this back, for the conditions of my contract if nothing else."

Apollo almost rolled his eyes as he recalled this strange contract that had their mother jumping through ridiculous hoops to hide so much about herself all for the sake of a 'mystery'... What was wrong with admitting she was blind, that she could speak English? Why did even her face have to stay so carefully concealed from the outside world? Given how long it had taken them to find her, he couldn't help but feel a little bitter about the image that had been forced on Lamiroir.

Trucy's eyes widened, and she glanced around the room fearfully. "Oh no...! What happened to Flora!?

Apollo blinked in surprise as he also noticed the woman's disappearance. "Wasn't she just with us!?

To Apollo's annoyance, Luke laughed. "You two took long enough! She left us back at the Coliseum, to go check on how Emmy's doing with her Borginian."

"Oh, right," Apollo muttered. "I forgot we..." He shook his head. "How is she doing? Is it enough to talk to Machi?"

"What's this about Machi?" Lamiroir asked, looking up curiously, her veil now re-attached and hiding her lower face.

Luke was already pulling out his phone, tapping away at the screen. "We don't speak Borginian and he doesn't speak English; We've been trying to find a way to communicate with him since the murder."

Lamiroir nodded, already in thought. "I see..."

It was maybe half a minute before Luke's phone beeped with the arrival of a return text. "Emmy says she could probably hold a basic conversation with him now, though she warns she's not completely confident with her vocabulary; Are you wanting her to come with us to the detention centre?"

Apollo winced, pressing a finger to his head as he thought hard. After their conversation with Lamiroir, he had a feeling it was more important than ever they spoke to Machi. Finally, he sighed. "Machi is our most important witness... If we don't talk to him now, we'll never talk to him."

He turned to Luke. "Could you ask Emmy to meet us outside the agency? We can pick her up on our way there."

Luke nodded, already tapping away.

"If I may...?" Lamiroir asked, looking in Apollo's direction. "If you need an interpreter, I would be glad to assist you."

Trucy shook her head. "B-but, Lamiroir, you're not well!"
"I'm well enough to travel," the woman insisted. "If your friend is not confident in her Borginian, I am happy to help her, as a back-up if nothing else."

Apollo felt his siblings' questioning gazes on either side of his face. True, Lamiroir had narrowly survived an attempt on her life, but she did seem to be recovering... and there was certainly nowhere safer for her to be than in a group instead of alone in a hospital ward. Plus, with her there, anywhere Emmy faltered in her translations, Lamiroir could pick up, allowing them to properly question Machi. He gave Lamiroir a determined look and nodded. "Thank you for your offer, Lamiroir. We're very grateful for your help."

It was high time they got to the bottom of this case, once and for all.
The journey to the detention centre went by pretty fast; Although reluctant about Apollo's decision, Trucy was happy to lead Lamiroir to the car she proudly called 'the Lukemobile', then they drove only a minute or two to meet Emmy outside the agency. She had been surprised to see the singer, but once it was explained to her what had been decided, the two women happily chatted the entire trip, Emmy practising her Borginian and Lamiroir happy to coach her. By the look on Emmy's face, and the slow speeding-up of her voice, it was clear by the time they arrived that her confidence had increased tenfold.

Finally, they were at their destination, and Apollo lead everyone in to request a meeting with Machi. As they turned to file into the visitor's room, he spotted a clock hanging on the wall and winced. Six thirty-nine. He and Trucy needed to be at the Wonder Bar in ten minutes; How had he not noticed how late it was getting!? They would have to be quick. If only he'd noticed earlier, he could have left his badge with Luke again... not that he wanted that to become a habit.

Inside, it was unanimously and wordlessly agreed that one of the two available seats would go to Lamiroir. Apollo offered the other to Emmy, but she refused ("I always question people standing up," she'd insisted with a wink, flipping open her notebook), so Apollo took it himself. Luke and Trucy stood at the back of the room, out of the way, Trucy even sitting on one of the tables resting against the wall as they watched from a distance.

Apollo took the chance to shoot off a quick text to Aderyn - "Family emergency, we're gonna be a little late tonight" - and hit the 'send' button just as the door opened on the other side of the glass wall, admitting a single guard and a small teenager in white. As the boy noticed his visitors, his slow walk to the chair paused, eyebrows knitted together in worry above his sunglasses.

Lamiroir looked up as she heard the door opposite them close. "Machi...?"

The boy hesitated, then stepped forward, carefully lowering himself into the chair. He avoided any kind of eye contact; Was he aware they knew he could see? They were about to find out.

"Machi, we came to talk to you about the case," Apollo said.

Emmy frowned, her eyes flicking across the open pages of her notebook. After a moment, she hesitantly translated the comment into Borginian; She seemed worried until Lamiroir nodded once she was done.

"We know you're not blind," Apollo continued. "But... that's not the only secret you're hiding, is it?"

Emmy shot Apollo a surprised look before she translated. Machi bit his lip, but otherwise did not react, remaining silent.

Lamiroir turned to Apollo with a frown. "Wait, Apollo... What do you mean by 'secret'?"

Apollo didn't have the time to wonder if Lamiroir meant the word itself or the suspicions that had been building in Apollo's mind since Trucy pressed that tiny lump of plastic into her hand... a tiny
lump of plastic he wordlessly pulled from his bag to show to the boy on the other side of the glass.

There was an instant reaction, Machi almost jumping in his seat as he flinched away from the object. Lamiroir must have heard the squeak of the chair moving, turning to the teen with a worried frown. "Machi...!" She then spun back to Apollo. "Please, tell me what this is all about!"

As much as he hated to, Apollo made himself ignore the woman's demand. "Machi, by your reaction just now, I know you know something about this." He gave the boy a determined glare as Machi slowly looked up to meet his eyes. "If you won't tell me... I might have to give this back to the prosecution, and have them look into it."

Emmy sounded uncertain as she translated; Apollo wondered if she was having trouble with the words, or was just vastly confused about what was going on - They hadn't exactly had the chance to explain it to her, after all. Machi only continued to stare back at Apollo from behind his sunglasses, and, as Emmy finished speaking, remained silent and unresponsive.

Apollo waited, but it soon became clear the boy was determined not to talk. With a sigh, he leaned back in his chair and moved to stand-

"Odota!"

-and stopped in his tracks, staring back at Machi in surprise. The boy was reaching out a hand to the glass, looking up at Apollo with a grimace of fear.

"A-ala… ole nin hatanen…"

Apollo turned to Emmy, and she hesitated for a moment before overcoming her own shock at hearing the teen finally speak. "W-wait, don't be so hasty," she translated.

Turning back to the boy, Apollo got comfortable in his seat, signalling he was prepared to listen.

"Tidatko... sina kaken?"

"Do you know everything?"

Apollo was tempted to reply 'sort of', but decided their father's famous tactic of bluffing would be a better idea; He simply nodded.

Machi sighed, his hands tightly gripping his arms in a self-comforting hug. "Hyva on."

"Very well."

The boy pointed to Apollo's hand where the replica was still visible in his grip. "Lekotelo, lasilki... Se on vomakas remede."

Emmy opened her mouth, then paused, staring at her notebook in confusion. "Um..."

"He's talking about the silk of the cocoon," Lamiroir filled in. "He says it's a potent cure."

"A cure...?" Apollo repeated.

"On remede Incuritis."

"A cure for Incuritis," Lamiroir translated, then gave Emmy a nod, signalling the handover of the translating back to her. Emmy sent her a grateful smile in return, momentarily forgetting the other
Apollo frowned, pressing a finger to his forehead. "But if it's a cure, why is it such a closely guarded secret...?"

"I do not understand the reasons myself," Lamiroir admitted.

Instead of replying, Apollo continued to think. 'So now we know what Mister LeTouse was looking for, if not why... And Machi...?' He looked up at the boy, studying his face. "Machi." He held up the replica. "You were smuggling these, weren't you?"

Machi was leaning back in his chair with a wince before Emmy had even begun to translate; Obviously Apollo's accusing glare had been enough to communicate his meaning. The moment Emmy finished speaking, the boy was already replying, barking rapid words that Apollo couldn't make out. Emmy didn't even have a chance to attempt to translate, as Lamiroir was interrupting him, speaking as Apollo imagined a disappointed mother would sound like. The pair exchanged angry words for several moments before Machi abruptly quietened, stubbornly turning his head away in a universal signal that he was ignoring her.

Lamiroir sighed, annoyed. "He won't say."

'First he plays blind, now he plays dumb.' Apollo stared at the boy, wondering how to progress from here. He didn't doubt at all now that Machi had been the person LeTouse was following... Was he planning to sell that cocoon to someone in LA? And how did all of this tie in to the murder?

"Vo mena kotin..."

Apollo blinked, refocussing on the boy sitting in front of him. He looked ready to cry.

"I can't go home," Emmy translated.

"Vo mena kotin Bohinya... En... En hala mena kotin."

"I can't go home to Borginia. I don't want to go home."

Lamiroir sighed again, now more sad than angry. "The penalty for taking a cocoon from Borginia... is death."

Emmy looked shocked - doubtless the full story was starting to come together for her.

"N-non lemurhasta…"

"Enta lemurha?" Lamiroir replied.

"He wants to tell us something about the case," Emmy filled in with an excited smile.

Machi thought a moment. "Lesitaya vo kerto," he forcefully spoke, staring at Apollo. "Tela on lupas ei yota kerto-!"

The door behind the teen slammed open, instantly attracting everyone's attention as they looked up to face the source of the noise - Even the officer on guard jumped, staring at the door with wide eyes as he pressed against the wall at his back. Apollo felt a spike of fear in his chest as he recognised Daryan Crescend, the detective's dark, stern eyes taking in the assembled group on the other side of the glass. "This meeting's over," he announced.

Apollo jumped from his chair, standing protectively with an arm in front of Lamiroir. "You can't kick
us out! Visiting hours aren't over yet!"

Daryan tsked. "There's a call for Machi from the Borginian Embassy," he said, no feeling in his voice except the vague sense of irritation. "This meeting is over." His eyes flicked to the side, a moment of thought. "Sorry." His words were anything but genuine.

"Just give us five more minutes!" Apollo demanded. "We can call them back after that!"

Daryan shook his head. "Sorry, no go." He strolled up to Machi's chair, gesturing to the boy frozen in the seat. "C'mon, piano-boy. We're leaving." When Machi didn't immediately respond, he forcefully grabbed the teen's shoulder, pulling him to his feet.

Apollo heard rapid thuds of footsteps, and a moment later Trucy had pushed herself in front of Emmy, standing protectively in front of Lamiroir much like her brother; Luke similarly appeared on Apollo's other side, both glaring at Daryan.

"Wait!" Trucy shouted.

"Detective Crescend, you can't do this!" Luke added.

Daryan paused, then slowly turned to face the Wrights, a calm anger in his eyes. He looked between the three for a moment in silence, then growled, "I never liked you. Any of you." With that, he turned around, dragging Machi out of the room. The nervous guard followed, clicking the door closed behind them.

Trucy growled, banging the table with a fist. "Darn it! We were so close! He was about to tell us!"

Emmy sighed, putting her notebook away. "Whatever he was about to say, it was something he didn't want the prosecution to know; He was asking we promise not to tell."

Apollo was still glaring at the door Daryan and Machi had disappeared through. "Crescend did that deliberately," he said. "He didn't want us to hear what Machi had to say."

"Exactly," Luke agreed. "This case is finally coming together, isn't it?"

Nodding, Apollo looked over to meet his brother's eyes, the pair sharing a determined frown.

Lamiroir sighed in her chair, downtrodden, her hand clinging to her right wrist where the cloak was covering her bracelet. "Oh Machi... please do not say..."

Trucy watched the woman sadly; She reached out a hand to offer comfort, but seemed to think better of it, withdrawing reluctantly. "Don't worry, Lamiroir. We'll get him out."

Apollo returned the tiny replica to his bag, then turned to head out the door. "If we can't talk to Machi, we'd better get out of here; Trucy and I have somewhere to be."

"You do?" Emmy asked, confused.

Trucy barely kept herself from shrieking, eyes wide as her hands flew to her mouth. "The Wonder Bar! Aderyn's gonna kill us!" She raced to follow her brother as they entered reception, well ahead of everyone else.

"Don't worry," Apollo chuckled. "I already warned her we'd be late: Family emergency."

"Ooh, naughty! You always lie to your boss like that?" Emmy asked, a sly smile on her face as she followed at the pair's heels.
Apollo blushed, having not noticed she was there. "Um..." He decided not to explain.

Luke led Lamiroir out to the car behind his siblings and Emmy, quickly unlocking it for everyone to get in. "We'll head back home for you two to pick up your things," he explained as they got settled inside, "then I'll give you a lift to work, save some travel time. Will you be alright performing without dinner?"

"We can get something in the restaurant," Apollo replied as the car's engine began to hum under their seats. "We'll manage until after, right Trucy?"

Trucy nodded from the back seat, right behind her eldest brother. "A professional magician can perform even on an empty stomach!"

Emmy laughed. "Well, good luck! Or do you prefer 'break a leg'?"

"Ah yes, I forgot you two were magicians," Lamiroir said, smiling behind her veil from Emmy's other side in the back seat.

"Oh, um, I'm sorry, Lamiroir," Luke replied, looking uncomfortable as he kept his gaze firmly on the road, guiding his car away from the detention centre. "Once I get Apollo and Trucy to their job, I can take you back to... well, wherever you need to be. I don't know if you want to go back to where you're staying, or to the hospital...?"

Lamiroir thought a moment, unaware all other eyes were turned to her. "I'm told magic is a very visual medium... but, truthfully, it has always intrigued me," she said. "I myself began performing in a small restaurant also. If you don't mind... I would quite like to hear your show."

"Really!?” Apollo replied, eyebrows raised.

Trucy squealed in glee. "That would be amazing!" she cried. "We'll be extra noise-y today, just for you! And-" She gasped. "Aderyn might let you sit backstage, where the best sound is! No-one will bother you there!"

Lamiroir laughed. "That sounds wonderful."

View the Court Record
Luke hadn't hesitated to race back to the Agency from the Detention Center (Why hadn't Apollo warned them showtime was approaching? Wouldn't it have been easier to send Luke on alone again, while he and Trucy prepared to leave?), pushing the road rules he usually followed to the letter as far as he dared. By some miracle, the traffic appeared to be on their side, as they actually arrived outside the Wright Anything Agency ten minutes earlier than he'd predicted. Even so, he didn't dare to turn off the engine once they arrived, Apollo and Trucy dashing upstairs only long enough to grab their equipment before returning to the car.

Emmy bid Lamiroir a thank you and a goodbye as she wriggled out of her middle seat in the back. "Have fun with the Gramaryes tonight!" she added as she slipped out the door after Trucy. "I have to boast to Desmond about how much my Borginian came in handy!"

It was only a few minutes' drive on to the Wonder Bar, and Apollo waved his brother and Lamiroir around to the back of the small restaurant, where the back door he and Trucy always used was. "Come in this way; We can explain everything to Aderyn and find you a place to sit, Lamiroir."

They didn't see anyone as they entered into the dark, quiet hallways of the restaurant's backstage, but somehow a message must have gotten through regardless, as they were accosted by an angry dark-haired woman about halfway to the Gramarye dressing room, storming towards them from the direction of the stage. "There you are!"

"Aderyn!" Trucy cried with a cheerful grin. "We made it!"

"You call this 'a little late'!?” Aderyn was already continuing, gesturing stiffly to a clock hanging above a doorway behind her and clearly trying her hardest not to shout. "We're already into the second act! If you 'ad a bleedin' emergency, why didn't ye just call the whole thing off toni-!" She paused, suddenly noticing the magician pair were not alone as her eyes snapped to Lamiroir. "I-is that...?"

Apollo couldn't resist a grin. "Aderyn Vogel, this is Lamiroir. Lamiroir, our boss, Aderyn Vogel." He rocked on his heels as he refocussed his attention on the shocked Aderyn. "She's come to listen to our show today."

"We were thinking she could sit backstage?" Trucy added with a hopeful look.

"Backstage?" Aderyn repeated, coming out of her shock. "God, no. It's far too busy, especially tonight." She shot Lamiroir a wide grin. "You just come with me, and I'll find ye a private seat out in the audience, ma'lm." She turned to leave, but then paused, studying the woman. "Although, if you're here in hidin', ye should probably take off that hood an' veil. It's a very distinctive look."

Lamiroir nodded, reaching up to remove her cloak from her head. "Thank you. You're very kind."

Luke giggled as he took the singer's cloak and veil, watching Aderyn chase Apollo and Trucy to their dressing room with a clap of her hands and a harried "Git along, you two! We need our finale ready twenty minutes ago!"
True to her word, once Aderyn had ensured the Gramaryes were (finally) getting ready for their act in thirty minutes' time (exactly half that of their usual preparation allowance), and she herself had dashed briefly onstage to act as the bridge between acts two and three, she led Luke and Lamiroir out through the door from backstage into the bar area, then around the back to a small table near a speaker.

"I'll be expectin' a full story for all o' this later," the woman quietly warned Luke as he led Lamiroir to her chair. "Y'know, once I'm not run off my feet keepin' this show goin'."

Luke grinned sheepishly and nodded. "I'll let Apollo know." He had a feeling his brother hadn't prepared an explanation for how they got from 'family emergency' to 'showing up late with international celebrity'... and he certainly didn't envy him having to face Aderyn's wrath should it not be up to snuff. *I'm sure it'll be okay. She's bound to give her best-sellers a little leeway... Right?*

Aderyn dashed away with a curt not. Up on stage, the current act was a single woman dancing in a medley of styles to a pre-recorded track, switching rapidly between different genres and time periods in matching time with the music. *Not exactly the best example of entertainment for a blind woman to walk in on...* Glancing at the nearby tables to gauge their distance and ensure he wouldn't be disturbing their neighbours, Luke shifted his chair closer to Lamiroir and leaned over to tell her what was going on.

"Ah, I see," she replied. "Or... don't see, in this case." She smiled at her own joke, and Luke giggled. "Since there is nothing to hear, I did have a few questions, if you don't mind."

"Go ahead," Luke prompted her; He was pretty sure they weren't missing anything by ignoring the dancer on stage, as talented as she appeared to be.

Lamiroir frowned, thinking. "I understand your last name is... 'Gramarye'?"

At that, Luke laughed nervously. "Ah, no, our last name is 'Wright'," he explained. "Apollo and Trucy, they come from Troupe Gramarye originally, so they use the name onstage."

The woman thought a moment. "The same as Valant Gramarye?"


Lamiroir considered his answer, then smiled. "Mister Wright, you had me under the impression your name was 'Triton'."

Pressing a hand to his mouth to stifle an embarrassed stutter, Luke again nodded. "Um, yeah, sorry. That is still my name, actually; I didn't change it when we were adopted. Apollo and Trucy did, though."

The singer gave a soft laugh in reply. "I should have guessed. You are all so close, I could not imagine why your siblings would not have joined you on your adventures with Professor Layton."

Luke blushed, giggling.

After the dancer finished her performance, Aderyn once more walked out in front of the closing curtains, idly chatting for a few moments before introducing the fourth act of the night, a stand-up comedian. The man wasn't all that funny in Luke's opinion, but he managed to get some positive reactions from the audience, so he at least had the makings of a decent performer. After him, the fifth slot of the night was filled by a guy with a guitar, who sang a few croaky songs in his allotted ten
minutes, to smatterings of polite applause.

"Apollo and Trucy are up next," Luke whispered to Lamiroir.

The curtains swung closed, and Aderyn strode onstage, doing an admirable job of talking up the guitarist... but she spent no longer on the man than she had to, changing the subject with a practised smoothness. "And, finally, meine Damen und Herren, that brings us to our final act of the night, the one I'm sure you've all been waiting for," she announced, to a couple of cheers from the crowd. "The most wunderbar of the Wonder Bar, it's our resident magicians: Apollo and Artemis Gramarye!"

Aderyn walked offstage to cheers as the curtains swung open, revealing Apollo and Trucy's usual set-up of props spread across the small stage. The pair themselves stood in the centre, stepping out as the curtains parted around them. Wearing identical grins and gripping identical yellow wands, they tipped their top hats to the audience, waiting for the applause to die down.

"Thank you, thank you!" Apollo called over the noise. "You are already such a wonderful audience, and we haven't even started yet!" As the cheers quickly gave way to a small laugh, he gestured to Trucy with his wand. "For those of you new to our show, this is my sister Artemis..."

"And this is my brother Apollo!" Trucy picked up, gesturing back at him with her own wand. She then turned to face Apollo with her hands on her hips and a thoughtful frown. "Y'know Apollo, we've been doing magic together for six years now. Don't you get bored?"

Luke bit back a smile as he recognised their current routine: He had last seen it only three days ago, when he accompanied Sycamore, Emmy, Flora and Alfendi on their trip to the Wonder Bar the day after their arrival in town. Although the Gramarye pair didn't have the resources to change their act every night, it was switched up often enough that, almost every time Luke saw it, it felt like something entirely new. Seeing the same routine twice was a true rarity.

"Bored?" Apollo replied to his sister's question, raising an eyebrow. "What madness are you spouting now, Artemis?" He gave her a sly grin. "You haven't been thinking again, have you? You know nothing good comes of that."

Trucy scoffed, giving the audience time to laugh. "Now now, Apollo. I just thought-" "So you were thinking," Apollo interrupted with a sly smile.

"Let me finish!" Trucy shot back, acting as though she couldn't hear the giggles in the audience. "I just thought we could try expanding our range a bit, and try other things. Like," she turned to the crowd with a cheeky grin, "I just flew in from Borginia yesterday, and boy are my arms tired!" She threw her arms out wide, as though expecting a standing ovation to her 'genius'; She got only groans and mild applause, sprinkled with genuine laughter at her audacity.

Luke snorted; Three days ago, it had been London Artemis 'flew in' from.

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Really? You're trotting out that tired joke?"

"Tired like my arms?" Trucy replied, still grinning widely.

The laughter was much louder this time, enough that Apollo and Trucy stood frozen on stage for a few moments, staring at each other as they waited for their audience to quieten. Finally, once the room had been silent for almost long enough to prompt another bout, Apollo said, "Let's just get on with the magic, huh?"
"Yeah, okay," Trucy quickly replied with a shrug, and the speed of their exchange elicited a fresh wave of amusement all its own.

Although Luke doubted they'd had any time to truly prepare, his siblings did seem to be keeping their promise of being a lot more... as Trucy had put it, 'noise-y'. That is, they put a lot of attention into describing what they were doing, played a little more roughly with their props closer to their microphones, and had more fun with puns and wordplay inbetween the visual tricks. Artemis even brought out Mister Hat at one point, comically drawing out the time Apollo was 'in pieces' in their zig-zag apparatus with the claim that he was now useless as a partner and she needed a replacement (Apollo, naturally, played up his distress for all it was worth). As always, the allotted ten minutes passed far faster than it seemed they should have, and the pair were soon bowing deeply to the enthusiastic applause of the small restaurant's audience, the curtains swinging closed in front of them.

"And that is it for our show tonight!" Aderyn announced over the speakers. "Danke schon for attending, ladies and gentlemen, and I hope the rest of your evenin' is just as wunderbar as the Wonder Bar! Guten Abend und auf Wiedersehen!"

The lights on the stage faded as the house lights came up, and the cheering of the crowd soon turned to the usual bustle of a restaurant in the middle of its dinner rush. Luke turned to Lamiroir with a grin. "Did you enjoy the show?"

Lamiroir nodded, smiling. "It was wonderful," she assured him. "I'm sure I would have enjoyed the tricks had I been able to see them... but their... what's the word?" She frowned. "In Borginian, we call it pilalu. Their talking."

Luke thought a moment. The wordplay in his siblings' banter would be much harder for someone unused to English to process. "Was it hard to understand their jokes?"

"Oh, no," Lamiroir insisted, shaking her head. "I was able to glean the meaning behind anything I didn't immediately understand." She smiled. "Never mind what the word I was looking for is. I did indeed enjoy the show."

"That's good," Luke replied, softly laughing. "They'll be delighted to hear it." After a pause, he added, "It's eight o'clock now. Did you want to catch up with Apollo and Trucy, or head home?"

Lamiroir thought for a long moment, her face falling. "I would love to tell them in person that I enjoyed their performance... but it has been a long day. If it is alright with you, I would very much like to return to my hotel for the night."

Luke nodded. "That's perfectly fine, ma'am." He stood from his chair. "I'll send them a message and get you home."

She loved your show. Said it was wonderful, and she even understood your foreign English wordplay. ;) However, it's been a long day for all of us and she seems exhausted, so I'm taking her back to her hotel.

That's awesome she enjoyed it! Guess it would be mean to make her stay and tell us herself, but she could probably do that tomorrow I spose. Trucy says to thank her for coming and we enjoyed performing for her
Passed on your message. Are you two okay?

We're fine. We'll see you and her at the courthouse tomorrow k?

Alright. I might see you later this evening, since I need to drop by the agency, but if not... Tomorrow at the courthouse.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Apollo's mind was buzzing as he entered the lobby, the events of the last few days flying back and forth in his head. He was almost certain of what had happened the night of the concert, if not all the whys; It was just a matter of proving it to the court's satisfaction, and it was that more than anything that was killing him right now. He couldn't let his new younger brother (as ignorant of that fact as Machi was) be convicted for murder... but, at the same time, the boy was still guilty of smuggling, and would certainly be convicted of that back in his homeland. It seemed death faced the teenage pianist at every turn; Was there anything Apollo could do for Machi?

Sighing, Apollo dropped onto the dirt brown sofa of the lobby, his head in his hands. 'Great job, Wright. After all these years, you finally find your mother and a brother you never knew you had, and immediately let said brother be sent to his death. Wonderful. Perfect, even. How could they fail to bring you into their family after this?'

The door opened and Apollo recognised Luke's footsteps entering the room. "Apollo! You're already here!" The footsteps sped up, and the sofa bounced under the attorney as his younger brother dropped into the neighbouring seat.

"Hey," Apollo muttered reluctantly, lowering his hands from his face.

Luke was looking way too cheerful for Apollo's tastes, clutching in his hands a small black laptop and a local newspaper. "I happened upon something very interesting! Well, a few things, really," he said, placing the laptop on the table as he flipped open the newspaper. "First off, I think I've found out what Crescend's goal was!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "His goal?"

Luke paused, finally noticing his brother's less-than-eager mood. "Mister LeTouse was looking for cocoon smugglers, right?"

"Right," Apollo agreed, wincing. "He'd probably figured out Machi was one of 'em..."

After a moment of concerned staring, Luke added, "And then Crescend killed him."

Apollo nodded. "I guess they somehow got into an argu-" He paused, cutting himself off with a frown. "Wait... Does that mean Crescend...?"

Luke slowly smiled. "Is also a smuggler," he confirmed. "I'm sure he and Machi were working together on this operation; Mister LeTouse discovered their partnership, confronted Crescend, and lost his life as a result."

Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead, running over the case in his mind once more. "So Crescend faked the time of death entirely to pin to blame on his partner... and Machi's too scared to speak out because he'll be killed no matter what."

"Exactly," Luke solemnly agreed, then held up the newspaper. "I think I've found why Crescend
was smuggling it, too: Those cocoons can be made into a cure for Incuritis, right?"

Apollo nodded, looking at the newspaper curiously. "And?"

"Remember the Chief Justice's son?" Luke continued, grinning. "How the judge was worried what
to say to a dying child?"

Apollo rolled his eyes, although he had truthfully long forgotten about the minor interruption to the
court proceedings the previous morning. "Get on with it, Luke."


It took Apollo a few moments to register the cry, and his eyes widened as he snatched the newspaper
from his brother's hands. "He's what!?" Sure enough, there in the corner of the page was a small
piece about the incurable disease, and how it was afflicting the young son of the district's Chief
Justice. Apparently, this was a fate the family had been openly fighting for nearly a year, seeking the
best doctors the world (and their money) could offer in the hopes a cure would magically materialise.
"This can't be a co-incidence..."

Luke nodded. "I'm almost certain Crescend was planning to sell the cocoon to the Chief Justice. He's
so desperate, in return for a cure, he'd protect Crescend from any backlash breaking international law
would cause. Doubtless he'd be charged a lot for it, too."

Apollo's frown deepened. "I wonder if Gavin's got any idea what his 'friend' has been up to all this
time..."

Luke didn't immediately reply, looking away as he thought. "He genuinely didn't realise Lamiroir's
testimony was important," he mused aloud. "Instead of ignoring Lamiroir's accusation, he actually
took Crescend off the case... or at least attempted to." He sighed. "I honestly think he doesn't know.
He said he simply tries to discover the truth... but I guess only time will tell if that holds up when
someone close to him is at stake."

As much as he wanted to say otherwise, Apollo had to agree; After their talk yesterday, he couldn't
see Klavier willingly aid in a cover up of the truth, even to protect a friend.

"But that's not all I've found," Luke continued, changing the subject as he reached for his laptop,
opening the lid and quickly tapping in his password. "While you two were finishing up at the
Wonder Bar, I dropped by the agency to pick up that CD Valant left us..." He paused, wincing
sheepishly. "And pick up Trucy's key from Mister Sycamore, too. I hope she found where I hid it."

Apollo couldn't help a wince of his own at that; They'd been so focussed on being late for their
show, and looking after Lamiroir, that they had completely forgotten about the Bostonius crew. "She
would have contacted one of us if she didn't. By the way, are those guys all set for today?"

Luke nodded, busy with his computer. "Emmy and Flora are here to watch the trial with Trucy and
Lamiroir, but Mister Sycamore's taking Alfendi out for the morning. They're fine."

"Good," Apollo sighed in relief. He then caught a glance of the time on the clock in the corner of
Luke's computer screen. "Oh geeze, it's nearly ten. Speaking of the trial, shouldn't we be heading
out?" He got to his feet, not waiting for a reply.

"Is it?" Luke muttered, noticing the time himself with a frown. Reluctantly, he closed his laptop and
moved to slip it, and his abandoned newspaper, into his satchel. "Well, I'll just explain this later... or
bring it up in court if need be."
The brothers headed to the hallway door, only for it to surprise them by opening itself, sending the pair jumping back in surprise.

A bailiff meekly looked up at the pair from the doorway. "Ah, excuse me, sirs...

"Y-yes?" Apollo replied, brushing off his costume in pretence he hadn't been surprised by the entrance.

"The scheduled starting time for the trial has been changed," the bailiff informed them, bowing her head. "The trial will not be commencing until ten thirty AM. Sorry for the inconvenience." Apollo and Luke shared a confused look. "Did something happen?" Apollo asked. "This is a first...

The bailiff shook her head. "It was by the judge's request," she said. "Some urgent personal business. Apparently, he's visiting the hospital again."

"The hospital?" Luke repeated. "You mean, the Chief Justice's son?"

"I believe so," the bailiff replied. "Apparently his condition worsened considerably this morning."

Luke and Apollo shared another glance, then Apollo gave the bailiff a nod. "Thank you. For informing us."

The bailiff squeaked under her breath, then, blushing madly, fled from the room, closing the door behind her.

Apollo sighed, crossing his arms. "Well. Guess we've got another entire half hour to fill, then."

"It's not too bad," Luke assured him, heading back to the sofa with a smile. "I can show you what I found in files Valant gave us!" With that, he dug his laptop back out of his satchel, arranging it on the small table as he sat down.

Apollo thought a moment, then followed his brother, sitting at his side. "Alright. What's so interesting about the Guitar's Serenade?"

Luke giggled, navigating through his digital folders. "This first one I noticed while I was showing the video to Fox before getting to bed last night," he explained, clicking on a folder that opened to reveal seven files, five of them audio and the sixth of a type Apollo didn't recognise. The final file, a video, was what Luke pointed at, selecting it with the touchscreen before hitting enter to open it. "Just watch."

Apollo raised an eyebrow as the video started, its sound muted. Luke adjusted the player to full screen, then, careful not to touch the screen, pointed to Lamiroir as the cameras pulled back from her. "See here? She's wearing that brooch we found."

"Yeah, and?" Apollo replied. "We met her just before this, we already know she had it."

Giggling, Luke tapped on his keyboard a couple of times, making the video skip ahead. "Look here, when she 'reappears'..." The star-patterned cloak fluttered on the screen, falling down to land perfectly on Lamiroir's raised arms. Immediately, Luke slammed the space-bar to pause the clip, and looked over to his brother with a wide grin. "See it?"

Apollo was tempted to shove Luke aside and demand he just say, but he instead decided to just tolerate his brother's enthusiasm for his find, reminding himself that at least this one wasn't being kept
a secret. He turned his attention to the figure of Lamiroir on the screen, running his eyes up and down until he noticed the problem. "She's not wearing the brooch anymore."

"Exactly!" Luke cried, dancing a little in his seat out of pure glee. "Not only does this prove she witnessed the murder, it proves the timing too! And that's not all!" He minimised the video to return to the folder of files, clicking on the one Apollo couldn't identify. It opened in a different program, and, once it had finished loading, Apollo recognised the horizontal bars across the program's window as the unmistakable patterns of sound-waves.

"Are those... the audio files?" Apollo asked.

Luke nodded. "Mm-hmm. I was putting them together last night, and, just for fun, tried listening to them all separately." He fiddled around the program a moment, greying out all but one of the bars. "Here, see if you can spot what's wrong with Lamiroir's track." He again slammed the space-bar, then rapidly tapped on another key, slowly raising the volume of the laptop.

Before long, Apollo could hear his mother's voice, unaccompanied by piano or guitar, coming from the speakers of the computer.

"When you stole away the keys,
"My heart held on to so tight."

His smile was almost involuntary. No wonder she had managed to find fame again on her own terms.

"Pleasure,
"But a fleeting melo-

Luke slammed the space-bar, bringing the song to a halt. "There! Right there! See?" He pointed at the waveform.

Apollo blinked, looking at the incomprehensible squiggle on the screen. "See what?"

After a second's pause, Luke fiddled in the program, selecting the portion of the song that had played and zooming in on it. "I almost didn't notice this, and it's practically impossible to hear with the sound so low..." He pointed at a specific bump in the waveform, smaller than the hills surrounding it. "That!"

Apollo stared at it for a very long time. Finally, he looked back at Luke. "What about it?"

Sighing, Luke tapped the space-bar again.

"-ight.
"Pleasu-

He gestured to the bump again. "Lamiroir isn't singing here," he pointed out. "So what is this sound her microphone picked up?"

Now that Apollo could understand. He frowned at the strange anomaly. "That's a good question. Is it possible to hear what it is?"

Luke grinned, quickly moving to again fiddle around in the program. Apollo had no idea what exactly he was doing, but before long the anomaly matched the surrounding hills of the overall waveform in height. Without a word, he again hit the space-bar.
Apollo almost jumped out of his seat, not even hearing the rest of the short clip. "What the hell!?"

Luke just stared at the laptop screen. "That was my initial reaction, too."

For several moments, Apollo could do nothing but sit, almost on his side from the shock of the noise on Lamiroir's mic. He took the time to forcibly slow his rapid breathing, calming down from the surprise and carefully sitting back up in his seat. Finally, he waved a hand at the computer. "That's... That's a gunshot, isn't it?"

Luke nodded. "Without a doubt. She must have only been close enough to pick up the one."

"And she probably dropped the brooch from the shock of it," Apollo realised, leaning back in his seat. "Geeze... Who'd've thought?"

"This won't prove it was specifically Crescend who killed Mister LeTouse," Luke reluctantly pointed out.

Apollo thought a moment, then gave his concerned brother a smile. "It proves Lamiroir is telling the truth," he said. "It proves Machi was onstage at the time of the murder. Even if we can't get Crescend, I'll be happy with that."

Luke still didn't look happy. "But then Machi will go home and be tried for smuggling. If Mister LeTouse was after him, Interpol will know what he did, and so will the authorities in Borginia before too long." He sighed, staring at his computer. "What do we do about that, Apollo?"

Apollo couldn't reply.

This was going to be a very tough case indeed.

View the Court Record
When it finally came time for the trial to start, Apollo and Luke stood ready at the defence bench. They didn't need to exchange words, having discussed their case all they needed to back in the lobby.

The judge cleared his throat as he settled into his seat at the podium, banging his gavel to call the room to order. "My apologies for the delay," he announced. "Court is now in session for the trial of..." He paused, squinting at his papers. "Erm, how do you say this name again? 'Marquis'?"

"Maki Tobayu," Klavier idly filled in, eyes closed. "Our suspect fortissimo."

Luke raised an eyebrow. "Wouldn't 'pianissimo' be more accurate?"

Klavier thought a moment, then shot Luke a grin. "Perhaps so, Herr Doktor. He is not exactly 'loud', is he?"

The judge looked between the two with vague confusion. "Right." He brushed them off. "It's his trial, in any case." He tapped his gavel, marking the start of the trial.

"The defence is prepared, Your Honour," Apollo replied.

"The prosecution," Klavier added, throwing out an arm to point across the room with a cocky smile, "is ready to rock."

The judge had fallen silent, frowning into the middle distance.

Apollo and Luke shared a worried look. "I-is something wrong, Your Honour?" Apollo asked.

"No," the judge insisted, then sighed. "Well, yes. It's just, I've been friends with the Chief Justice since we were students. It pains me to see him going through such a difficult time."

Apollo wasn't quite sure how he could respond to that.

"Herr Judge," Klavier spoke up, "let me say, with all honesty, I feel your pain." To Apollo's surprise, he actually seemed genuine, but his rare sympathetic look hardened quickly. "But, now is not the time for tears. Now is the time... for law."

The judge thought a moment, then nodded, back to business in an instant. "Indeed. We left off at quite the juncture yesterday."

"Quite a sensational ending," Klavier agreed, grinning. "Who would have thought Daryan would guest star in the season cliff-hanger... as a suspect?"

"I asked the prosecution to look into this matter," the judge continued, and gestured to Klavier. "Please tell the court your findings."

Klavier's grin faded. "Daryan Crescend is a member of my band, the Gavinners," he explained. "He
is also a detective, making the current charges serious indeed." He shook his head. "Yet, after investigation, I have found no cause to alter our case, or file new charges."

Luke sighed, eyes closed. He looked... disappointed.

"And your reason is?" Apollo asked on behalf of them both, arms crossed.

"Weren't you aware, Herr Forehead?" Klavier replied, smirking across the room. "He has an impeccable alibi."

Apollo rolled his eyes.

"An alibi?" the judge repeated.

Klavier chuckled. "Let us review the facts again, shall we?" He held up a hand, counting off on his fingers. "The concert held on the night of the shooting was in three sets. The Gavinners ripped up the stage during the first set."

Apollo resisted the urge to take that description literally.

"For the second set," Klavier continued, "our guest took centre stage. The only performers appearing were myself, Lamiroir, and Machi, along with a drummer and bassist, for a total of five."

'Huh, really? Could have sworn it was just the three of you,' Apollo mused. 'Guess the other two were offstage somewhere.'

"The shooting in the dressing room however, took place during the third set," Klavier said. "Lamiroir and the defendant, Machi Tobaye, had left the stage at that point, and the Gavinners were already rocking. This is when two shots rang out at the scene of the crime. Shots heard by Detective Ema Skye, mind you." He pointed to the ceiling, almost glaring at the defence bench. "Furthermore, Lamiroir herself witnessed the moment of the crime." He paused, a smirk forming on his lips. "Well, perhaps I should say, she 'heard' the moment of the crime; When she claims to have heard Mister LeTouse and Detective Crescend 'talking'."

Apollo's hands tightened into fists as he resisted the urge to loudly object.

"B-but that's impossible!" the judge gasped. "Detective Crescend was-!"

"Precisely," Klavier interrupted. "Detective Crescend was on stage, getting his groove on, no less." He waved his hands triumphantly. "Voila. A perfect alibi!"

It was becoming steadily more difficult for Apollo to keep his mouth shut. The judge hummed in thought. "Does the defence have anything to add to this?"

"Naturally," Apollo growled, and threw out his arm to point at Klavier. "Detective Crescend's alibi is not nearly as perfect as the prosecution would have us believe!"

The judge looked surprised. "Whatever do you mean, Mister Wright? I don't see any reason to doubt his whereabouts during the third act."

"Objection!" Apollo shouted. "It's not the third act that's at issue here! We were rudely interrupted during Lamiroir's cross-examination yesterday; She still had something very important to tell us!"

"Objection!" Klavier shot back with a stern look. "But it was determined that Lamiroir's testimony was insubstantial! There's nothing you can-!"
Apollo slammed his fists on the bench, then gave Klavier a hard stare, suddenly feeling very calm. "Lamiroir was taken to the hospital yesterday with injuries."

The courtroom fell silent. "What happened?" the judge asked.

"She was assaulted, Your Honour."

"Assaulted!?"

"Someone wanted Lamiroir dead," Apollo continued. "Thankfully, she was able to save herself."

Klavier scoffed in disbelief. "What!? I've heard no such report!"

Apollo only stared. "Prosecutor Gavin." Funnily enough, it seemed Apollo's solemn gaze was almost frightening the prosecutor, who stared back with wide eyes. "Why would anyone be out to kill Lamiroir? Can you think of a reason?"

Klavier shuffled behind his bench, uncomfortable. "W-well..."

"Think of how she is known here in America," Apollo continued, on a roll. "A singer from overseas who doesn't speak English, yes? Yet someone tried to keep her mouth shut." His glare at the prosecutor intensified. "Who could that have been?"

The judge's eyes widened as he realised what Apollo was getting at. "You don't think..."

Apollo nodded. "I do. It was the same person who shot Mister LeTouse." He pointed dramatically across the courtroom. "The killer was afraid of her, afraid of what she might say!" His calm began to slip as he pressed his fists to the bench, leaning on them heavily. "The true culprit of this murder knows there is a truth in her testimony that the prosecution has not yet seen, a truth that turns this entire case on its head! The defence demands that she return to the witness stand, and, this time, be permitted to give her entire testimony!"

There was a long pause in the aftermath of Apollo's outburst. Klavier avoided the Wrights' eyes, grimacing as he stared at his feet.

Finally, the judge hummed in thought. "If Lamiroir was attacked," he reasoned, "this has serious implications." He nodded. "Very well. There were some confusing points in her testimony during yesterday's trial. Perhaps we did not inquire as deeply as we might have. The court will hear Lamiroir's testimony once more!" He banged his gavel, and that was that.

Apollo let out a breath he didn't realise he'd been holding as he straightened up from where he'd been leaning on the bench. "That was close," he muttered.

"That was amazing," Luke whispered in reply, and Apollo looked around to see his brother giving him a wide grin. "I don't think I've ever seen you get so angry you loop back around into calm!"

At that, Apollo couldn't resist a small laugh. "No, guess not." He pointed to Luke's satchel. "We'd better get your laptop on standby; We're gonna need it to prove Lamiroir isn't lying."

"You got it," Luke promised, already moving to pull the computer from his bag.

Somehow Apollo was not surprised when, a minute later, Lamiroir showed up in the courtroom with Trucy at her side, the teen leading the singer to the witness stand before again skipping merrily to the
defence bench, giving her brothers a grin.

"You don't give up, do you?" Apollo whispered with a smirk.

Trucy playfully stuck out her tongue in reply.

"Lamiroir, I must apologise," Klavier told the woman at the stand. "We must ask you to stand again and speak."

"You need not apologise," Lamiroir insisted, looking every bit as strong as her children. "I know that Machi is innocent, and I will do all that I can until the court realises this."

"Let's review your testimony from yesterday," Apollo suggested, looking through his notes. "You told us you were in the air vents when you heard two gunshots and the shooter's voice, and that the voice belonged to Daryan Crescend?"

Lamiroir nodded. "That is correct."

"Which would all be quite impossible," Klavier pointed out with a frustrated look. "First of all, what reason did Lamiroir have to be in the air vents, and second, how could the killer have escaped that room with witnesses at both exits?"

Apollo smirked. "Not as impossible as you might think," he assured the prosecutor, then returned his attention to the stand. "Why not answer both his questions at once? Lamiroir, perhaps you could tell us... when exactly all of this happened?"

Klavier scoffed. "What on earth are you up to now!? Of course it-!"

"I didn't think I was asking you, Prosecutor Gavin!" Apollo shot back, silencing the man instantly. After a pause, he gave Lamiroir a nod. "Witness, please continue."

Lamiroir waited a moment more, perhaps to ensure she would not be cut off again. "Naturally," she replied, "it was in the middle of my performance."

"What!?" Klavier cried, jumping back.

The gallery erupted into noise, forcing the judge to bang his gavel repeatedly. "Order! Order! Order!" He huffed as the room reluctantly quietened. "B-but... that goes against the evidence!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "What does, Your Honour?"

The judge gestured with his gavel. "Lamiroir here... she was onstage during the second act!"

"Indeed she was," Apollo replied with a smile. "But not for the entire performance."

The judge blinked at the young man, confused. "What do you mean by that, defence?"

"Ach!" Klavier muttered, wincing with a glare as he realised what Apollo meant. "You can't mean to say-!

Apollo nodded at the prosecutor, then looked up to the judge. "We have a video of the second act, if you want to see for yourself, Your Honour."

The judge considered a moment. "Alright Mister Wright, you've intrigued me. Let's see this fateful performance."
View the Court Record
It took them a minute or two to connect Luke's laptop to the wireless network of the courtroom, and before long the video of the Guitar's Serenade was playing over the holograms. Unable to figure out how to connect his computer to the courtroom's little-used sound system, Luke had made do with turning the laptop's volume up full-blast, carefully placing it as far as reasonably possible from himself and his siblings in fear of blowing out their own eardrums.

The court sat in rapt silence, watching the clip. Lamiroir closed her eyes and simply listened, while Klavier stared at the screens with an intent frown. The Wrights, having seen it themselves a number of times already, mostly just waited for the video to finish, and eventually it did, the music fading out before the screen went black.

The judge clapped enthusiastically. "Oh, that was simply fascinating!" he cried.

"As we can see," Apollo announced, "Lamiroir was clearly not on stage for her entire performance." He held out a hand, gesturing to the screens. "Though I hate to delve into the workings of a grand illusion, it is clear that she is incapable of actually vanishing, let alone teleportation; During that time, Lamiroir was hidden from sight, moving to the back of the forum."

"But how is it possible?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Your Honour?"

"There is only twenty seconds between when she disappears and reappears!" the judge pointed out. "She couldn't have moved that fast!"

Klavier looked distinctly uncomfortable, avoiding anyone's eyes.

The judge didn't take long to notice. "Is something wrong, Prosecutor Gavin?"

"This was his concert, his show," Apollo explained, staring holes into the blond man's head. "He knows how the illusion was performed. He's just realising his own oversight." As the judge hummed in thought, studying the prosecutor, Apollo turned to his Court Record, throwing up on the holograms the diagram Ema had given him the previous day. "This is a cross-section diagram of the Coliseum: We can easily trace a route through these air vents," he highlighted the white area marking the air system below the concert hall itself, "from the stage, above the dressing rooms and out to the rear of the forum."

"Aha!" The judge seemed happy to understand what was going on.

Apollo brought up the previous day's transcript on his Court Record. "Lamiroir said yesterday, when she witnessed the murder, she was on her way 'from the stage to the backstage exit'."

"Why, that's a perfect description of this route above the ceiling!" the judge realised.

Klavier was sweating, glaring at his bench. "Why didn't he tell me...?"
Apollo couldn't resist a smirk. "Magicians only reveal the details of their acts on a need-to-know basis, Mister Gavin. You didn't need to know her exact route, so it was not shared with you."

"They're the bread and butter of a magician's life, you know!" Trucy added with a knowing nod.

The judge turned to the witness stand. "Is this true, Lamiroir?" he asked. "Did you use this route above the ceiling during the illusion?"

Lamiroir nodded. "I did."

"Well, that's that," the judge muttered, leaning back in his seat. "But I'm still a little confused... There was very little time between when she disappeared and when she reappeared. Twenty seconds, tops! How could she do it so fast?"

Apollo closed his eyes, thinking. After what Luke had shown him in the lobby, he knew the exact moment in the song when the murder occurred, and it was at a point when 'Lamiroir' was still onstage; It was going to be necessary to explain more details of Valant's illusion.

But Apollo had taken too long to reply. "Can the witness explain this to the court?" the judge demanded.

Lamiroir's face was turned downwards. "I cannot," she replied.

The judge stared at her for a long moment. "Very well." He turned to the defence. "Mister Wright?"

Apollo bit back a glare; Just because he'd known this was coming, didn't mean he had to like it. "It goes against every fibre of my being to share the secrets of a magic trick," he warned. "Against my very pride as a magician. I would rather die than ruin a fellow illusionist's career like that." He closed his eyes, sighing. "However... In this case, certain details of the teleportation illusion are necessary to understanding the events of this murder. As an attorney, I cannot allow anything to stand in the way of the truth... not even magic."

Klavier gave the young magician a strange look, a smile on his face. "Nicely put... Herr Gramarye."

At Apollo's side, Trucy seemed upset, but she didn't speak up. Apollo mused she didn't agree with his sentiments on talking about the illusion's finer details.

"So?" the judge replied, watching Apollo expectantly. "Can you explain how Lamiroir moved across the concert hall in twenty seconds?"

Apollo nodded. "I can. But first, I would like to confirm a few things." He turned to the witness stand. "Lamiroir, just to clarify... how much time were you given to move across the hall?"

The woman thought a moment. "Two minutes."

"Two minutes!" the judge repeated, astonished. "The mystery deepens! As does my curiosity!"

"I'm not sure the song itself is even that long," Luke muttered at Apollo's side.

Apollo frowned in thought. "And did hearing the murder slow you down in any way?"

Lamiroir reluctantly nodded, admitting, "Yes, I nearly didn't make it in time. You see... I stopped halfway."

"Above your dressing room?"
Again, Lamiroir nodded. "That is when I heard the gunshots, and Mister LeTouse and the detective talking."

"But you still made it to your mark in time," Apollo pointed out, giving her a smile. "That's very commendable, given the circumstances."

Lamiroir returned the gesture with a small, grateful bow of her head. "I have also been giving what I heard much reflection over the past few days," she continued. "I believe I can tell you what I heard the detective saying."

Klavier looked up in surprise. "You remember something that was said!??"

Of the Wrights, Luke was the first to react to this surprise, leaning forward over the bench. "Lamiroir, why didn't you tell us you heard his words!??"

"Though my memory is clear, I was afraid to speak," she admitted. "You see, I do not understand what was said."

Apollo and Luke shared a look. "You said it was the detective speaking?" Apollo asked. "What did he say?"

Lamiroir thought a moment. "It's over. Press the switch. Now."

"Switch?" the judge repeated, confused. "And the shooter said this to the victim, Mister LeTouse?"

"I thought it quite strange myself, afterward," Lamiroir admitted.

The judge hummed in thought. "It is a mystery..."

"Maybe not as much as it appears, Your Honour," Luke said with a grin, looking at Apollo. Apollo smiled back.

"Oh?" Klavier asked, raising an eyebrow at the pair. "There was nothing at the scene that could be called a 'switch', save the lights'."

Apollo shook his head. "True, there wasn't a switch at the scene. But, it just so happens," he held up a hand, twirling his fingers as the remote trigger seemingly materialised in his grip. "I have a 'switch' right here."

The judge leaned forward, examining the object. "That certainly does look like a switch, doesn't it," he agreed.

His hand lowering, Apollo's smile turned to a frown. "The problem is, this was found not at the scene of the crime, but on the stage. It was hidden there."

Klavier glared at his bench, thinking.

"Are you claiming that the voice Lamiroir heard," the judge asked, "was of someone commanding another to press this switch?"

Apollo nodded, resting the trigger on the bench. "It's a possibility."

"Objection!" shouted Klavier, turning his glare to Apollo. "Oh, Herr Forehead? I'd call that an impossibility."

"And why is that?" Luke demanded.
"It's hardly necessary for me to remind the court of the layout of the concert forum," Klavier explained. "The stage is quite far from Lamiroir's dressing room. Not to mention, even The Guitar's Serenade is not so quiet that a shout from backstage would be heard in the forum."

Lamiroir nodded. "The detective's voice was loud, but certainly not a shout," she agreed.

Klavier gestured to her as though her reply sealed the deal. "So, too, have Herr Forehead's cries of 'possibility' fallen far short of being heard."

Apollo just smirked at the prosecutor. "Sorry, but he wouldn't have needed to shout."

At that, Klavier's frustrated smugness faded. "Excuse me?"

"You heard what I said," Apollo replied. "Or do you need me to shout it for you?"

Klavier rolled his eyes, ignoring the barb.

"It would have been quite simple to be heard on the stage from that dressing room," Apollo continued. "You would only have to use..." He paused a moment, thinking, then turned to Trucy at his side. "Truce, that headset, if you could?"

Trucy blinked in surprise at being addressed, then gasped. "Oh!" She took a moment to dig around in her bag, then proudly held high the tiny earpiece they had found on the hallway floor. "You'd just need this!"

"Perhaps you're familiar with it, Prosecutor Gavin?" Apollo added, shooting the man another smirk. Klavier only glared back.

"What? What is it?" the judge asked, leaning forward to get a good look at the tiny device in the teenager's hand. "Is that some kind of new-fangled phone they invented while I wasn't looking?"

"This is a type of transmitter," Apollo explained to the old man. "A communications device."

The judge still looked baffled. "Communications? Device?"

"From what I've heard, that night everyone on stage was wearing one of these," Apollo continued, gently taking the item from his sister. "Isn't that right, Prosecutor Gavin?"

"Ah, yes, actually," Klavier admitted. "They're for talking between band members. We all had one on."

Apollo triumphantly brandished the earpiece at the man with a grin. "So you admit that, if you were wearing one of these, talking from the backstage to the stage would be simple!"

Klavier winced, then threw out an arm. "Objection! True, but wait! Those send out an electronic signal. To avoid interference with the audio systems, their range is quite limited."

"About ten metres, correct?" Luke asked. "Thirty feet?"

Apollo just continued to smirk, and placed the headset down on the bench to again summon on the holograms the cross-section diagram of the Coliseum. "Why don't you look at this again, Prosecutor Gavin?"

Klavier took one look and flinched; He'd already spotted the problem.

"Exactly." Apollo pointed at the screen. "The walk from the stage to the backstage seems far, but the
direct distance is less than thirty feet!"

"So, when Lamiroir heard the shooter's voice," the judge reasoned, "he could have been talking to someone on stage!"

"Objection!" Klavier cried, recovering remarkably quickly to grin at the Wrights. "Hah! You're claiming this is the 'switch' in question? Why did it have to be on the stage at the time? It could be placed in a pocket and carried anywhere! Someone could have hid it on the stage after the fact!"

"Uh oh," Trucy muttered at Apollo's side. "He's got a point there, Polly..."

Apollo felt his earlier smugness wilting. "W-well..."

"Actually, it's very easy to prove where it was at the time of the murder," Luke spoke up, giving Klavier a confident smile. He then turned to Apollo. "Because we know what it does."

'Oh yeah, we do!' His grin returning in an instant, Apollo turned to his Court Record. "Prosecutor Gavin," he called, "I'm sure you remember this?" With a swipe of his finger, he summoned to the courtroom's holograms the photo of Ema's igniter.

Klavier jolted in shock. "Ach! That's that...!" He cut himself off, digging through something underneath his bench.

"That what!?!" the judge asked, looking almost frantically between the two attorneys. "Is it another one of those new-fangled phones!?"

Apollo froze, eyeing the decorated circuit board on the screen. "This... is an igniter," he hesitantly explained. 'What phone looks like this!?'

"I-igniter?" the judge repeated. "You mean it's like a lighter?"

"Yes, actually."

Meanwhile, Klavier had stood back up, a familiar-looking plastic bag in his hands. He was examining the remote trigger on the defence bench, giving it a critical look. "You aren't saying this switch is a remote...?"

Apollo nodded. "I am." He held up the black device. "This is a remote trigger for an igniter. Did you want me to prove it?"

"Let me see that!" the judge called, holding out a hand towards Klavier.

Klavier looked reluctant, but pulled the igniter from its evidence bag and handed it over to a bailiff, who delivered the item to the judge. Immediately, the judge was turning it around in his hands, examining the blackened device from every angle.

"Your Honour, if you'll hold it pointing away from you for a moment," Apollo called, eager not to repeat the incident with Ema as he held the trigger in his grip.

It took the judge a moment to register the request, and he almost huffed childishly as he obeyed it. Nevertheless, once Apollo had pressed the red switch, the igniter's tiny gas canister burst into flame, and the judge cried out in surprise as he promptly dropped it on his podium. "Mister Wright!" he shrieked, giving the young attorney a glare. "You will cease and desist from burning down this courtroom!"
Apollo flinched. "S-sorry," he replied, hurriedly placing the trigger back down on the bench. "That was a bit more fire than I'd expected."

"If my whiskers had caught on fire," the judge darkly muttered, handing the igniter back to the bailiff to return to Klavier.
As the igniter was returned to its evidence bag, Apollo fixed Klavier with a stern look. "Prosecutor Gavin," he called, attracting the man's attention. "Let me repeat myself: This switch is a remote trigger for an igniter." He pointed at the device on the bench in front of him. Klavier looked at it with an unreadable expression. "Given what you now know about the timing of the murder... doesn't that suggest something to you?"

Klavier stared back at Apollo, his eyes only briefly flicking over to Luke. "You're... talking about what happened to me, aren't you?"

Apollo nodded. "Exactly. That night at the concert, there was one unusual burst of flame." He pointed at the prosecutor. "Your guitar caught fire, right in the middle of the second act!"

The judge looked between the two, confused. "Wasn't that part of the stage show, though?"

"Prosecutor Gavin was entirely unaware such a thing had been planned," Apollo explained, resting his hand back on the bench. "And the guitar that burned was a valuable keepsake."

"Yeah!" Trucy chirped with pride. "He got it in Borgia from Lamiroir!"

"And it was later discovered to have an igniter sitting just inside the sound hole," Luke added, then gestured to the trigger. "An igniter that was set off by this very 'switch', as ordered by the shooter to an accomplice over their headsets. And all this was only moments after Mister LeTouse was shot."

Klavier said nothing, his eyes closed in thought.

"But, wait a minute," the judge spoke up with a frown, "this crime was carried out according to the lyrics of that song, yes?" He turned to Apollo. "The 'bullet' came after the 'fire'!"

Apollo shook his head. "You're thinking about it the wrong way," he said.

"We've been saying this from the start," Luke added. "It makes no sense for the shooter to be following the lyrics in the first place. They only did so because it was advantageous for them." He sighed, crossing his arms. "In this case, because placing the shooting in the third act instead of the second would give the shooter the perfect alibi."

"You're saying the order was reversed on purpose?" Klavier realised, standing still behind his bench.

"And then went to the trouble of kidnapping Machi and stealing a guitar as a final touch," Apollo continued. "A ruse to make everyone think he'd followed the lyrics the whole way."

The gallery began to murmur, so the judge banged his gavel, silencing them with a single, "Order!" As the crowds calmed, he sighed. "I believe you've made the defence's case quite clear... but I am reminded that we were in the middle of something else before this little distraction." He gestured to Apollo. "Were we not explaining how Lamiroir could have been witness to the shooting in the first place? How she could have travelled all the way across the forum in only twenty seconds?"
Lamiroir smiled. "It was two minutes, actually."

Apollo looked up at the increasingly annoyed judge, deciding it was a good idea to get back to the discussion of the illusion. "Your Honour, Lamiroir was indeed offstage for those two minutes before she appeared behind the audience."

"But how?" the judge asked. "In the video, we clearly see her singing!"

Apollo almost smiled. "You see, that is not Lamiroir on the platform with Prosecutor Gavin."

"You mean..." The judge's eyes widened. "A fake!?" The gallery began to murmur, and the judge paused to bang his gavel. "Order!" Once they had quietened again, he rounded on Klavier. "P-Prosecutor Gavin!"

Klavier smirked. "From your expression, I gather you had no idea this was the case, Herr Judge," he said. "I, of course, knew about it already. Don't get me wrong. I wasn't hiding it; It just never occurred to me that the switch and the shooting took place at the same time."

"And now there was a switch!?" the judge huffed in reply.

"Just before the stage's tower rose," Klavier explained, 'Lamiroir was replaced'."

"And the magician behind the trick was the replacement," Apollo picked up. "Which reminds me," he turned to Lamiroir, "were you singing the entire time you were offstage, Lamiroir?"

Klavier chuckled. "Naturally. When the Gavinners play a show live, we play live. We aren't some kind of air guitar band!"

Lamiroir smiled. "Yes, Mister Gavin expressed a dislike for recordings. I used a headset to keep my voice onstage even while I was off it."

"B-but, if you were singing while you were walking," the judge pointed out, "wouldn't the shooter and victim have heard you? You were right over their heads!"

"Not necessarily, Your Honour," Luke replied with a smile. "Her voice was being projected from the air vent to the stage, and from the stage to the backstage speakers." He pointed a finger into the air proudly. "And one of those same speakers is situated right next to the air vent, set to full volume at Prosecutor Gavin's own request."

The judge laughed, impressed. "Ingenious! Her voice was hidden... by her voice!"

Lamiroir suddenly gasped, a hand to her veil.

"Lamiroir?" Apollo prompted her.

"I... have just remembered something."

The judge seemed intrigued. "Do tell."

"When I heard the gunshots... It startled me, so I..." She looked away, embarrassed. "I stopped singing. I forgot the words."

"What...?" the judge mumbled, confused.

Apollo noticed Luke grinning widely, a hand already on his laptop.
"Thankfully, it was the very beginning of the second verse," Lamiroir continued, "so not many would notice."

"Herr Doktor!" Klavier cried, pointing at Luke. "Play that video again!"

He didn't need to say it twice; Without a word, Luke hit the space-bar on his laptop, and the holograms again played the video for the courtroom.

"Sugar, Sugar,
"Oh that night in your embrace,
"When you stole away the keys
"My heart held on to so tight.
"Pleasure,
"But a fleeting-

With another slam of the space-bar, the video paused. "Right there!" Luke proudly announced. "The song stops!"

The judge's eyes flicked rapidly between Luke and the screens. "It does? I must have missed it."

Apollo pulled out the lyric sheet from his bag, examining it. "According to the lyrics, the second verse begins with the line 'Pleasure, pleasure'."

"Exactly!" Luke pointed out, fiddling with his laptop again. A moment later, the video skipped backwards a little, and again began to play.

"-heart held on to so tight.
"Pleasure,
"But a flee-

The video was again paused. "See it now?" Luke excitedly asked. "She only said 'pleasure' once, instead of twice!"

The judge was shocked, musing to himself for a moment. "This is evidence indeed! I believe we are guilty of making a terrible mistake."

Apollo nodded, and sent a stern stare at Klavier across the room; The prosecutor was once more glaring at his desk. "The crime didn't happen during the third set," Apollo pointed out once more, now it finally seemed to be sinking in for the prosecution. "It happened during the second, during Lamiroir's ballad."

"If that is true," the judge continued, "then no one onstage during the second set could have been the shooter!"

"Which takes Machi off the list of possible suspects," Apollo picked up, "and places Daryan Crescend firmly on it." He pointed at Klavier. "Not so watertight an alibi now, is it, Gavin?"

Klavier did not immediately reply, eyes closed as he retreated into his own thoughts. Finally, he mumbled, "Fascinating..." He looked up, gazing across at the three Wrights with an unreadable expression. "I don't believe I've ever seen a trial turned around quite so thoroughly." He shook his head, the sternness returning to his eyes. "Yet one problem remains."

"What's that, Prosecutor Gavin?" the judge asked.

"Herr Forehead's theory does have a certain kind of logic to it," Klavier admitted. "Yet, it is entirely
based upon Lamiroir's testimony."

The judge, much like the rest of the courtroom, gave him a confused look. "Yes? Is there a problem with that?"

"Well, it's quite simple, though it pains me to say it," Klavier replied. "What if she is lying to protect the defendant?"

"Objection!" Apollo immediately shouted. "But you have no proof-!"

"All I'm saying," Klavier calmly interrupted, "is that the truth is as yet unclear... until we hear directly from the man himself."

The judge tugged at his beard. "You don't mean...?"

Klavier nodded. "Yes," he sighed. "Though he is a friend, and bandmate, Daryan Crescend must take the stand. I see no other way."

"As... someone with a new perspective on the case?" the judge asked.

"As a suspect, to be frank," Klavier replied, clearly reluctant.

Apollo thought a moment. "How long would it take to call him?"

"No more than fifteen minutes," Klavier said. "He's not likely to be far away."

"Then is it alright if we call another witness until he's ready to take the stand?"

The judge looked at Apollo with surprise. "You wish to call another witness?"

Apollo nodded.

Klavier raised an eyebrow. "Exactly who else do you need to hear from?"

"A witness who, until now, had not been given a chance to speak in this court," Apollo explained. "Because he doesn't speak English."

Klavier blinked in surprise. "You don't mean...?"

'AFTER WHAT HAPPENED YESTERDAY... WE HAVE A VERY IMPORTANT DISCUSSION TO FINISH. AND I THINK I MIGHT KNOW WHAT IT WAS ABOUT.' "I do." He pointed dramatically at the courtroom in general. "The defence calls Machi Tobaye to the stand!"

"WH-WH-WHAT!?!" the judge cried. "But he doesn't speak English!"

Apollo resisted the urge to roll his eyes and point out he'd already said that. "We'll use an interpreter!"

Klavier gave a bark of laughter in disbelief. "Interpreter? I'm afraid you'll have to look elsewhere." He brushed at his fringe. "I only speak a few phrases, such as 'I love you', and 'Where is the toilet?'."

'I WASN'T GOING TO ASK YOU ANYWAY.' "The defence already has an interpreter in mind actually, and I believe she's in the gallery." Apollo ran his eyes over the crowds, but no distinctive yellow coats jumped out at him; He had no idea where their friends were sitting anyway. "MS EMMELINE ALTAVA?"

"I'M HERE!" came an excited cry from behind them, and the Wrights spun around to see Emmy's
brown hair bobbing up above the crowd in the raised gallery, her hand waving in the air. "I can interpret Borginian, Your Honour!"

The judge's eyebrows shot up as he spotted the woman. "Oh! Well," he turned to Klavier, "if the prosecution does not object...?"

Klavier chuckled, shaking his head. "The prosecution agrees with the defence's request," he said, and gave Apollo a teasing look. "Although I could not interpret myself, I know enough of the language to tell if your friend there lies, Herr Forehead."

Apollo nodded. "Duly noted."

"Woohoo!" came a cry from behind him, and a moment later a figure in yellow vaulted over the barrier of the raised gallery, sticking a perfect landing next to the defence bench, her boots squeaking slightly on the wooden floor. "You can count on me, Your Honour!" she proudly announced.

The judge simply nodded. "Bailiff, please show the defendant to the witness stand." As one of the court officials ran off to the defence waiting room, the judge then turned to the stand. "Lamiroir, thank you for your time."

Lamiroir smiled. "It was my pleasure to help," she insisted.

"Good luck!" Trucy whispered to her brothers with a wink, then she dashed off to escort Lamiroir back to the prosecution waiting room.

View the Court Record
"I'm glad Emmy was able to help," Luke sighed, smiling sheepishly.

"Why?" Apollo replied, raising an eyebrow.

"Otherwise we would've had to rely on Lamiroir," Luke pointed out. "I'm not sure Mister Gavin would have agreed to that..." He shrugged. "Plus, given she's a witness herself, it'd be like cross-examining two people at once."

Apollo snorted, smirking at his brother. "You and Dad've done that before. It can't be too hard."

Luke softly laughed. "There's a reason it's not usually done, Apollo."

Apollo was about to reply when he heard footsteps nearby, and looked up to see a bailiff walking across the courtroom, pushing Machi before him by the shoulder. The teen stared at the floor as he was escorted to the witness stand, arms tightly crossed in a self-hug. Waiting by the wooden podium was Emmy, giving him a cheerful wave and a quiet greeting as he approached, but he gave her no more than a glance as he stood at her side, behind the stand.

"I suppose there is a first time for everything," Klavier mused to himself with a smile, then gave the boy a nod. "Shall we proceed? Your name, to begin with." He then looked to Emmy. "If you would, Fraulein."

Emmy nodded, still grinning widely, and turned to Machi. "Nimi?"

"Machi Tobaye," Machi said. "Levastaha."

"Machi Tobaye, the defendant," Emmy translated.

The judge hummed in thought. "This is certainly a first for this courtroom," he agreed. "Not that we really needed an interpretation of that message in particular." He turned to Apollo. "Mister Wright, if you would."

Apollo stood in confusion for a moment until it registered that, as his witness, it was his job to request a testimony. "Um. 'Well, we've no idea what he was about to say last night... so...'

"Machi, we'd like to ask you about the night of the concert," Luke spoke up.

Apollo looked up at him in surprise, having not been expecting a rescue. "Uh, yeah," he hurriedly agreed, turning to the witness stand. "Tell us everything you were doing between the start of the second act and your arrest."

Emmy was quick to translate, and, as she finished speaking, Machi stood in silent thought for several seconds. Finally, he spoke, sounding almost frantic as he explained something directly to Emmy. She immediately looked nervous, holding up her hands and crying, "W-whoa, odata! Kero hitasti! En ymara teta!"
Machi paused only a second or two, then repeated his earlier speech, this time more calmly.

"What is he saying?" the judge asked as Machi finishing talking.

Emmy stared at the boy in confusion for a few moments, then turned to look up at the judge, an uncertain frown on her face. "Um... I didn't shoot him. I was on stage at the time. Besides, I didn't even know the lyrics of the song, so how could I have followed them?"

Klavier scoffed. "That is hardly proof. Lamiroir could have explained them to you."

"Not that the lyrics really matter at this point," Apollo pointed out.

"Machi, that isn't what we asked you," Luke told the boy. "I know this is hard, trapped in an unfamiliar country where you don't know the language, but you're only making it harder by avoiding the question."

Apollo felt his bracelet twinge as he watched the teen, who was already glaring guiltily at the witness stand as Emmy translated for him. 'Wait... Can he...?' Something Sycamore had said the day after the concert was coming unbidden back to his mind:

"I was actually thinking that there remained the possibility this boy had learned to read English on the internet or something, until a moment ago when I remembered he is blind, so it's entirely impossible."

Apollo hadn't given the idle comment much thought at the time, but... what if...?

Machi was staying stubbornly silent in response to Luke's question. The younger Wright sighed, giving his brother a shrug. 'I'm out of ideas,' he seemed to be saying.

Apollo stared at the boy, his mind racing. It was time to try a different tactic. "Machi... How did you know the lyrics had been tied to the murder?"

Emmy looked surprised by the change of subject, but she translated regardless. Machi mumbled a reply, and Emmy passed on, "I read it in the newspaper. They gave me the Borginian Daily Bugle in the detention centre."

Apollo's eyes widened. 'I was right!'

"What!?!" Luke asked at his brother's side, frowning in confusion. He promptly turned around, scanning the area of the gallery where Emmy had previously been sitting.

To his credit, even Klavier seemed suspicious of Machi's assertion, though he made no move to point it out, simply watching the goings-on.

"Machi," Apollo said, staring at the teen, "I've actually seen a copy of yesterday's Borginian Bugle... and, although I couldn't read it myself, I've been told by someone very reliable what the article on this case said." Already Machi was looking uncomfortable, even though Emmy had yet to translate a single word. "It didn't mention the lyrics, Machi."

Emmy paused before translating, then, as she spoke, began to idly dig around in the bag hanging off her belt. With a flourish, right as she finished speaking, she produced a very familiar newspaper, presenting it to the boy with a proud smile. To the Wrights, she explained, "Sorry, forgot I had it. I'm guessing you wanted him to see it."

Luke gave her a grin and a thumbs-up.
Machi was frowning as he took the newspaper, uncurling it and running his eyes over the front page article. After a few moments, he started nervously, pressing the paper to the top of the witness stand as he cried, "O-olin varasa! En tarkota lesanomalehti!"

"What does this mean!?” the judge asked, looking between Machi and the defence in confusion.

"L-lapolisi manitsi sen!" Machi continued. "Se oli miten tesin!"

Emmy was frowning again, looking a little uncomfortable with the teen's frantic cries at her side. "I was mistaken," she translated. "I didn't mean to say the newspaper; The police mentioned it."

Klavier shook his head. "Impossible. The subject of the lyrics was not brought up in police questioning. I read the full report myself."

"Meaning, the only place you could have heard about the lyrics was right here," Apollo pointed out to the teen, staring Machi down, "in this very courtroom, in English."

The judge added to the stern staring. "The witness will explain himself!" he demanded.

Emmy turned to Machi almost apologetically as she translated.

"Kulin... Kulin sen de Lamiroir," Machi said.

"I heard them from Lamiroir."

Apollo's fists were already moving to strike the top of his bench the moment he heard his mother's name on the teen's lips. "Bullcrap!" he cried, just barely keeping his anger in check enough to not shout something stronger. "Machi, I know you didn't do it, really, I trust you, but this is three lies in a row you have just fed us... and you're expecting Lamiroir to come back in here and lie on your behalf!?" Emmy opened her mouth to translate, but Apollo cut her off, pointing at her with a fierce gaze. "Don't translate that!" he ordered, then returned his attention to Machi, watching the teen with the kind of concerned older-brother gaze he usually reserved for Trucy and Luke. "If this is going to work, you have to trust me too, Machi. You can understand English. I know you can."

Machi was hugging himself tightly, staring terrified holes into the newspaper still sitting on the witness stand.

"W-witness, is this true?" the judge asked, looking between Machi and Apollo in amazement. "Do you understand English?"

There was a long pause as the entire courtroom watched the fourteen-year-old at the witness stand. Finally, he replied, "Y-yes. A little, only."

"What!?" the judge cried, jumping in his seat as the gallery murmured in shock.

"First he could see, now he can talk," Klavier muttered to himself across the room, playing with his fringe thoughtfully.

The judge huffed, banging his gavel to silence the audience. "How many secrets is this witness hiding!?"

"Last," Machi replied, fiddling with his sunglasses as he chanced a look at the tall podium. "This is... last."

Emmy looked around uncomfortably, then, rubbing at the back of her mass of dark hair, wandered
over to stand near the defence bench, somewhere out of the way. Her job was over, after all.

Apollo sighed, relieved that at least the boy was finally talking. "Machi, will you tell us now what happened?"

"No shooting!" Machi insisted. "I did no shooting!"

"Of course not," Apollo agreed, shaking his head. "You were on stage. But what about after? Where were you during the third act, when Ema and I heard those bangs?"

Machi didn't reply, looking away as he bit his lip.

"Apparently, the answer to that question isn't simple either," Klavier pointed out.

"I was in... dressing room," Machi admitted. "Behind desk. Manager, he on floor... Then, there is voice."

Apollo was too surprised to immediately react.

"W-wait," Luke spoke up, "you mean you in that dressing room? After Mister LeTouse was shot, and just before Ema and Apollo came in?"

Machi nodded. "Panel high up," he continued, miming pulling something off a wall high above him. "I take off. Run away, run away!"

"And you escaped through the air vent," Luke realised, hand to his goatee in thought.

Klavier began to laugh. "As the prosecution has held all along, no less," he pointed out with a smug grin and no small amount of relief. "The defendant has admitted to being at the scene. Might we take this as a confession?"

"Objection!" Apollo shouted, banging on the bench with a glare. "Machi has clearly denied he did it!"

"I no shooting!" Machi added, cowering behind the witness stand. "Manager on floor, already on floor!"

"Besides, the murder was during the second act!" Apollo continued. "He has hundreds of witnesses placing him onstage-!"

"Objection!" Klavier shot back, pointing at the defence. "And yet all you ultimately have to support that is Lamiroir's testimony." He gestured to the Machi. "The defendant understood the song lyrics. He was at the scene of the crime. This can only mean one thing: He is the shooter!"

Machi whimpered as he shied away even further from the witness stand. Apollo just barely kept his mouth shut, a stream of curses sounding inside his mind.

"Does the defendant have anything to say to this?" the judge asked.

Machi did not reply, breathing heavily as he stood, hunched over and staring at the floor.

Apollo was shooting death glares at Klavier. 'Just as we finally get him to open up, Gavin has to clamp down even harder! Can't you give the kid a break!? He's only fourteen!'

With no response from the defendant, the judge turned to the defence. "Mister Wright, will you require any further testimony from the witness?"
Apollo's anger at Klavier faded as he returned his attention to Machi. 'My little brother... The whole world's against him right now... No wonder he's so scared.' "Machi, please, tell us the truth," he begged, trying to be gentle. "About the murder, about everything. Let us help you."

Machi stood in silence for a very long moment. "No," he replied, his voice high in distress. "No more speak. Not... to any of you."

Klavier scoffed. "So much for your precious 'trust', Herr Forehead."

Apollo returned to shooting him death glares.

"Regardless," Klavier continued, "this brings us to an impasse."

The judge nodded. "It does seem that the defence and defendant are at odds," he agreed. "I doubt we are likely to learn anything more of value should this continue. I see no other course but to declare a ten minute recess!" He turned to Apollo. "The defence will work things out with the defendant so that we might proceed," he turned to Klavier, "and the prosecution's witness, Detective Crescend, should be here by now. Prepare him for court, Prosecutor Gavin."

Klavier paused, a serious look on his face. "I'm the last man who needs to be reminded of what his duties are."

"Very well," the judge replied, then banged his gavel. "Court is adjourned!"

View the Court Record
The moment the judge had stood from his podium to leave the courtroom, Apollo had raced to Machi's side, gripping the boy's shoulders in a half-hug as he guided the terrified teen out of the room, Luke at their heels. It took them no more than a minute to reach their assigned lobby. Apollo carefully sat Machi down on the sofa, placing himself at his side, and watched the teen breathe slowly, calming down from his fright in the courtroom.

Luke dropped into a crouch on the other side of the table, hugging his laptop close to his chest. "Are you feeling better now, Machi?"

Machi paused a moment or two, then nodded, briefly glancing up to meet Luke's concerned gaze. "I no shooting," he mumbled.

"We know you didn't shoot him," Apollo promised. "But we can't prove it without your help."

There was a short pause. "On the night of the concert," Luke said, "when we were alone on the stage, I asked if you could trust me, and you nodded. I thought you were just being polite, but... you knew what I was asking, didn't you?"

Machi's hands clutched tightly together, the fingers rubbing nervously against each other. "I sorry," he said. "I no trust you... I dream years of meet Professor Hershel Layton, ask for help Lamiroir... and I no trust you... I very sorry."

Luke smiled at him. "It's all forgiven. You'll trust us now, right?"

The teen thought a moment, then looked up at Luke. Forcing a small smile of his own, he nodded.

"Good," Apollo said, sighing in relief. "So, if you were in that room before Ema and I came in... Why? What happened?"


"The bangs," Apollo replied.

"Yes," Machi agreed. "But only sound."

Luke frowned in thought, then placed his laptop on the table, looking to his brother. "Apollo, did you grab your Court Record on our way out?"

Apollo nodded, pulling his tablet computer out of his bag. After a moment to unlock it, he handed it to Luke without a word.

"Thanks," Luke said, taking the tablet and scrolling through the case files. A few moments later, he held it out for Machi to see, on the screen the diagram of the dressing room. He pointed to a space between the hourglass-shaped table and the sofa. "You were here? Facing Mister LeTouse?"
Machi examined the diagram, then nodded.

"Would you say the bangs came from behind you?" Luke asked, gesturing to his back with one hand. "Around here?"

Again, Machi considered the question. Again, he nodded.

Luke gave Apollo a grin. "The firecrackers under the sofa."

Apollo shot his brother a smile, then turned back to the curious Machi. "Then you heard me and Ema outside, and fled through the air vent?"

Machi nodded. "I know, if I opening vent... I can leave stage and back... backstage."

The Wrights shared another glance. "Did Lamiroir tell you?" Apollo asked. "Or Valant? The magician?"

Machi paused, then nodded again. "Magician. Yes."

Apollo idly nodded back, biting his lip in thought. 'He must have been there while Valant was explaining to Mom what to do for the illusion...' He met the boy's eyes, hidden behind the sunglasses. "You're sure you won't testify?"

Machi didn't have to think about that, shaking his head with a fearful look. "No talking," he insisted, "no."

"Then we won't make you," Apollo sighed, looking away. 'Of course. To testify against Crescend, he'd have to admit to smuggling... It's death either way, and he knows that.'

The silence echoed in the room for maybe a minute, Machi sitting and watching the two Wrights while the brothers sat in thought. Luke kept glancing up at Apollo. "What now?" he asked.

Before Apollo could reply, there was a knock at the lobby door, which opened as the trio turned to look. To Apollo's shock, the figure that entered was wearing a grey hoodie and cyan beanie, fixing them with a cheerful grin as he closed the door behind him. "Hiya."

"Dad!" Apollo cried, he and Luke jumping to their feet with surprised smiles and running to meet him halfway. "What are you doing here!?"

"Secret mission is up, for now," Phoenix explained. "I thought I'd drop by. Wish you luck." He chuckled, giving Apollo a warm look. "I think you have it pretty much in hand, though. You'll get Machi over there," he gestured to the teen with a jerk of his head, "off the hook no doubt."

Despite the praise, Apollo couldn't smile. "Yeah, but..."

"But you're after that detective, aren't you?" Phoenix picked up, his own grin fading into a stern frown. "It won't be easy proving he did it. Especially not under the current court system."

"So what do we do?" Luke asked. "We know it will be difficult; All our evidence ties in to Lamiroir and Machi, and Mister Gavin keeps shooting them down!"

Phoenix didn't immediately reply, looking away. "Like I said. Good luck." He met Apollo's eyes. "And be aware that it will be impossible to prove his guilt by conventional methods."

Apollo winced. "Great..."
Chuckling softly, Phoenix took a step backwards. "I guess I'd better go find your sister and our English friends. Cheer you two on from the gallery."

"Please not literally," Apollo reminded him, though he couldn't resist a small smile.

"We'll see you after, then?" Luke asked.

Phoenix nodded, turning to the door. He reached out for the door handle, then stopped, turning back with a thoughtful look. "Every man has an igniter inside him."

Apollo raised an eyebrow, sharing a baffled look with Luke. "What...?"

"Find Daryan Crescend's igniter," Phoenix told Apollo, "and set it off." With that, he turned and left the room, the door swinging cleanly shut behind him.

Luke turned to Apollo. "So, what did he mean by that?"

Apollo sighed. "Aren't you the puzzle solver here, Mister 'I'm the Professor's Apprentice'?" he replied, turning back towards Machi. "What would the great Hershel Layton do in this situation?"

"He'd leave it to the lawyer," Luke admitted, following Apollo back to the sofa. "We dealt in mysteries, not court trials; The one time we did, we just assisted Papa." He paused in thought, looking off into the distance. "Although, the Professor did step in as an Inquisitor, just the once, as part of the ploy to help. I was busy with something else at the time, though."

Apollo stood by the short table, pressing a hand over his eyes. "So in this situation, the Great Hershel Layton would rely on the Great Phoenix Wright... and the Great Phoenix Wright would shrug and wander off to the gallery."

Luke snorted, but hid his giggles at Apollo's resulting glare. "To be fair, I'm sure Papa is only being flippant because he knows you can do it, Apollo."

"Yeah, well," Apollo darkly muttered, lowering himself back onto the sofa at Machi's side. "I just wish you didn't all have an annoying tendency to give pointlessly cryptic advice..."

Although he gave the boy no more than a glance, Apollo noticed Machi hiding a smile; No doubt he was enjoying their conversation... or at least the bits he could understand.

Luke stared at the ceiling, his smile fading as he stroked his goatee in thought. "Maybe... Papa just meant we need to find a way to make Crescend confess?"

Apollo cast a sidelong glance at Machi. "Guess so." Truthfully, he doubted Daryan would willingly go down alone... If he was truly working with Machi on the cocoon smuggling, he'd make sure everyone knew that before letting himself go to jail for murder.

Luke turned his gaze to his brother in concern. "Should we bring up the cocoon smuggling at all? I doubt Mister Gavin's going to."

Apollo didn't need to look to know that Machi was watching him carefully. Even so, he took his time musing on his answer: "I don't know yet. We'll have to see what he says once we're back in there."

There was a very long pause. "How much time do we have?" Luke asked.

Sighing, Apollo grabbed his Court Record off the table to check the time. "We should probably go," he admitted, moving to replace the computer in his bag.
Luke nodded, picking up his laptop. "Right."

Apollo stood, but didn't move to leave just yet. He thought a moment, then turned to Machi, watching the nervous teen as he twiddled his fingers in his lap. "We're almost at the finish line."

Machi looked up, meeting Apollo's eyes.

"You can trust us," Apollo continued, giving him the older-brother smile the young man had long perfected for his other siblings. "We'll sort this out, and I won't let anything bad happen to you. Okay?" He held out a gloved hand for the boy to take.

Machi's gaze flickered between Apollo's face and the outstretched hand for a few moments. Finally, he smiled, giving the lawyer a nod as he took the offered limb in his grip. "Yes. Thank you."

Apollo grinned, pulling the teen to his feet with a chuckle. "No problem. You just hang in there; This'll be over with before you know it."

[View the Court Record]
"Court is now back in session," the judge announced, banging his gavel. He turned to the defence bench. "Mister Wright, have you sorted things out with the defendant?"

Apollo nodded, stood tall behind the bench with Luke at his side. "Yes, Your Honour. We had a good talk."

"Very well," the judge replied. "So will he testify?"

"Your Honour, the defendant," Apollo paused to take a deep breath, still not quite believing what he was admitting, "will not testify."

The judge's eyes widened in surprise. "Wh-what!?"

Klavier scoffed, shaking his head with a smile. "Shame. And here I thought this was your big chance to turn the case around."

Apollo glared back. "Actually, it is," he replied. "Detective Crescend is ready to testify now, isn't he?"

The prosecutor looked away with a grunt. "He is in the witness lounge, ready to be called at any time."

The judge nodded. "Very well." He waved at Klavier, signalling to go ahead.

Klavier snapped his fingers in thought for a few moments. "Might I add," he told the court with a stern frown, "I don't believe any of this. He... Daryan was the first detective I ever worked with. We stopped working together when he moved to Criminal Affairs, Division Three... but his guitar playing?" He smiled, waving a hand. "It fires my imagination!"

"Criminals come from all walks of life and all skill sets," Luke pointed out, giving the man opposite an almost pitying look. "Detective or not, skilled guitarist or not... That bears no relevance in court."

"Oh, I know, Herr Doktor," Klavier replied, his smile fading.

The judge nodded. "Call the final witness to the stand!" he ordered. "Detective Daryan Crescend!"

It didn't take long for the bailiff to return, almost cowering next to the tall, swaggering figure walking at her side. Daryan didn't need an escort to the stand, sauntering up to the small podium and slamming his hands on the top with his nose wrinkled in disgust.

Klavier had his eyes closed, looking away. "Name and occupation, please." His voice sounded far away, the prosecutor barely paying attention to the courtroom around him.

"Daryan Crescend," the man at the witness stand barked. "Detective, Criminal Affairs, Division
Three. That's the International Affairs Division, for those of you who didn't know." He straightened up, arms crossed. "And I'm a guitarist for the Gavinners. Maybe you've heard of us?" He shot a grin at the gallery, where a few women squealed in delight.

Apollo rolled his eyes.

"Do you fully understand the circumstances under which you stand before us today?" the judge asked.

Daryan's smile died. "Yeah, I understand, Your Honour. What I don't understand," he turned to glare at the prosecutor's bench, "is how you let this happen, 'partner'."

Klavier did not react, still standing with his eyes closed.

"You gave me your word I wouldn't be standing here," Daryan continued, uncrossing his arms to again lean on the stand.

"The situation's changed, Daryan," Klavier finally replied, then opened his eyes to meet his bandmate's accusing stare. "And don't call me 'partner'."

Daryan scoffed, looking away. "So much for old friends."

Klavier turned away, his expression unchanging.

'Press the prosecution all you like, Crescend, it won't save you from the Wrights.' Apollo looked up to the judge. "Your Honour, if we could begin the trial?"

"Yes, it's high time we did," the judge agreed, turning to Daryan. "Let's hear your testimony. You may begin with your response to Lamiroir's testimony... if, in fact, you have anything to say about it."

"Oh I got plenty to say," Daryan spat. "Lying must be a national pastime in Borginia," he rounded on the defence bench with a grin, "and wherever you two are from, Misters 'Wright'." He laughed at his own joke.

Apollo raised an eyebrow. At his side, Luke just sighed and shook his head.

"The diva's lying, plain and simple," Daryan explained, leaning on the witness stand with a cocky grin. "She's got nothing to back up her story. In the first place, she never heard my voice! She 'forgot the words because she heard gunshots'? He scoffed. "As if! Didn't Detective Skye hear those gunshots during the third set, anyway? The shooting took place when I was on stage, man!"

The judge hummed in thought. "So you claim Lamiroir's testimony was a lie?"

Daryan held up his hands. "Hey, don't get me wrong, I dig what she's doing, trying to protect that kid." He waved a hand, scoffing. "And she's got the court eating vague statements out of her hand just 'cause she's blind."

The judge jumped in his seat, at the same moment as the gallery broke into muttering. "She's what!?"

Klavier glared at his friend. "You go too far, Daryan."

"Lamiroir is blind!?" the judge cried. "Is this true!?"

Daryan waved off the judge's shock and Klavier's disapproval.
Apollo sighed. 'I guess we'd better explain that, now the cat's out of the bag...' He looked up to the judge. "Your Honour, you remember Lamiroir and the defendant's relationship, right? How they would always walk together, hand in hand, at all times?"

The judge nodded. "Yes; Because the defendant was 'blind', wasn't it?"

"Except we now know that to not be true," Apollo continued. "So, we must ask, why the charade?"

"Well," the judge mumbled, "wasn't it part of their, er, performance?"

Apollo shook his head. "There's actually a much simpler explanation. Machi did not need to be led by the hand at all. That can only mean one thing: It was the other way around. The one who needed to be led by the hand was Lamiroir."

The judge still seemed shocked, looking around his desk as though it might provide a clearer explanation. "But... that makes no sense!" He turned to Klavier. "Prosecutor Gavin, please, shed some light on this madness!"

Klavier stood still, eyes closed. "Herr Forehead is quite correct: Lamiroir is blind. As it was not a necessary fact of the case, neither of us saw reason to bring it up before now."

The judge humphed to himself, then suddenly noticed the muttering crowds, and banged his gavel to silence them. "Well. If it is really so unimportant, I suppose we had best move on. Your cross-examination, Mister Wright."

Apollo nodded, then turned his attention to Daryan, who was still standing smugly at the stand. 'You're just so proud of yourself, distracting the judge and casting even more doubt on Lamiroir... Well, you haven't figured on us Wrights.' "You can claim disbelief all you like, but it's been proven without a doubt Lamiroir forgot the words at the start of the second verse."

Daryan just scoffed, unphased. "Oh yeah, there was a mistake. But blaming it on gunshots is just a lame excuse."

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"Exactly what I said," Daryan laughed. "That video of yours proves, what? There's a mistake in the song? A missed cue? So?" He shrugged, still grinning. "She just flubbed it up, big time. That's all. She spins this story about a gunshot to protect the kid, and cover for her own goof." He laughed again. "Man, I'd have to hand it to her... if she wasn't sticking it to me at the same time."

Klavier shot his friend a glare. "Daryan, watch what you say. Lamiroir is an artist." He waved a hand with an offended air. "She 'just flubbed it up'? That's no small accusation for a performer of her calibre."

Daryan scoffed. "She got to you, alright. I can see it your eyes." He waved the comment off. "I tell you, most of her stuff is so pretentious; It's way over my head."

Apollo's hands tightened into fists, and he resisted the urge to run across the courtroom and punch Daryan out then and there.

"Anyway, she's too close to the defendant," Daryan continued. "Her testimony can't be trusted. You ask me, I'd go with Detective Skye's story at the drop of a pick." He then laughed, turning to Apollo. "Actually, didn't you hear those gunshots too? The hell are you doing trusting Lamiroir over yourself?"
"We heard bangs," Apollo replied, returning the detective's laughter with an even gaze. "We didn't see the shooting."

Daryan's grin only widened. "Heh. I guess you and Lamiroir got the same excuse then."

"We know one thing for certain here," Klavier pointed out, looking between the two sternly. "There were gunshot-like sounds that emanated from that room during the third set. What we must determine is whether those sounds were actually gunshots."

"That is easy," Apollo replied, reaching for his Court Record. A moment later, he found the photo he was looking for, and a swipe of his hand on the screen sent it to the holograms for the court to see. "This is a photo from the scene of the crime, taken only hours after the murder; Specifically, it's underneath the dressing room's sofa."

Klavier minutely sighed, eyes closing. "You speak of what was found there, I presume."

The judge narrowed his eyes, leaning forward to study his screen. "That looks like... What is that?"

"The first is the remote-triggered igniter," Apollo explained. "The other is remains of some kind."

"The remnants carry traces of gunpowder," Klavier added. "We have a report that it was something like a firecracker."

Luke shook his head, looking sympathetic. "And did you understand their purpose when Detective Skye told you about them?"

Klavier didn't reply. "It was as I was looking over the reports again this morning I made my decision... to register Daryan as a witness in today's trial. Just in case."

Daryan's eyes narrowed as he stared at his friend.

"This raises another possibility," Apollo pointed out. "Those gunshot-like sounds during the third act could have been two firecrackers rigged to go off by remote control!"

At that, Daryan just laughed, pointing at Apollo mockingly. "You got an active imagination, don't you? But you shouldn't say every little thing you think." He ran his hands along his pompadour smugly. "Your explanation there seems a bit too convenient to me."

"How so?" Apollo asked, crossing his arms.

Daryan shrugged. "So, you're saying these firecrackers just happened to go off right when two witnesses came walking by?"

"You could say that about the shooting, too," Luke replied. "But, in this case, there's no 'just happened' about it."

Laughing, Daryan waved him off. "And you think I set them off, huh? I was on stage, man! How was I s'posed to know what was going on in the dressing rooms?"

"He may not look it, but Daryan is a gifted detective," Klavier warned the Wrights with a stern gaze. "Show any weakness, and he's sure to find it."

Daryan's grin faded. "'He may not look it', partner?" he repeated. "Gee, thanks, man."

"That reminds me," Klavier continued, "I happened to pass through that very hallway several times that day myself, and I saw something odd there just before the third set."
Apollo and Luke shared a look. "It wouldn't happen to have been one of your concert staff headsets, would it?" Luke asked.

Klavier nodded. "What if that headset wasn't dropped, but placed? And what if it was turned on?"

"It was turned on," Luke replied, turning his attention to Apollo's Court Record. "We have a picture of it on the night, with its LED lit and everything."

"You could use that headset to hear what was going on in that hallway," Apollo picked up. "Even if you were out on stage."

Daryan seemed unsure who exactly to glare at, but settled eventually on Klavier with a scoff. "Whose side are you on, Gavin?"

Klavier returned his gaze with an even stare. "Listen to me, Daryan: There are no sides in a court of law."

The detective did not reply.

"Which is why I now turn to you, Herr Forehead." Klavier ignored Daryan, looking to the Wrights. "I've a question for you: The igniter and the burnt fragments that were found at the scene of the crime... It's certainly a possibility that they were part of a ruse to fake the sound of gunshots. Throw the headset from the hallway into the mix, and you could fabricate an alibi. But." He snapped his fingers, his gaze stern. "We're still no closer to proving anything. Those gunshots might have been real, or fake. We can't say."

Apollo sighed. 'Of course not. Because why should this job ever be easy?'

"You've raised the possibility that the shots heard during the third set were faked," Klavier continued. "Now you need to prove the other half of the case."

Luke had his hand at his chin, stroking his goatee. "You mean, prove that the murder was during the second set."

Klavier nodded. "If you can't prove that, then to continue this cross-examination would be pointless."

The judge hummed in thought. "Well, Mister Wright?" he asked. "Can you prove the crime took place during the second set?"

Apollo couldn't resist a smirk. "Actually, I can prove it." He turned to his brother. "Luke?"

Luke grinned, and turned his attention to his laptop.

"The proof," Apollo announced, "is right here in the song."

He couldn't help but notice Daryan suddenly going pale.

View the Court Record
"Hmm? Are we watching the video again?" the judge asked, eyeing Luke's laptop with excitement in his eyes.

Apollo shook his head. "On the night of the concert, the Coliseum's equipment recorded every person's performance separately; We have here the five tracks from the Guitar's Serenade, as performed the night of the murder."


"Here, let me demonstrate," Luke said, hitting a button on his laptop. The sound of the song began to ring through the crowd, and, one by one, Luke began to mute and unmute the various parts.

The judge laughed, impressed, then paused in confusion. "But what does this prove?"

"According to Lamiroir's testimony," Apollo pointed out as his brother stopped the playback, "at the moment of the shooting, she forgot the words to the song."

Klavier smiled. "Ah. You intend to examine the recording at that moment, ja? We might even hear those gunshots."

Apollo grinned, barely holding back a proud laugh. "Exactly."

Daryan scoffed. "Ridiculous. How are you supposed to hear gunshots back in that dressing room out on stage?"

"Have you forgotten, Daryan?" Klavier replied. "We were all wearing those headsets."

The detective's amusement instantly vanished. "Oh."

"We were all deeply involved in our performance," Klavier continued, "but Lamiroir's headset would've picked up what she heard all the same." He nodded to Luke. "Take it away, Herr Doktor."

Luke nodded back with a smile, and returned his attention to his laptop. The song again began to play, but all the instruments were one by one muted, leaving only Lamiroir's voice, blasting at full volume. "This is rather quiet, so you have to listen closely," Luke warned, then fell silent.

"When you stole away the keys,"
"My heart held on to so tight."

From the laptop, the faintest sound of a bang.

"Pleasure-"

The playback stopped.
The judge gasped. "I did hear something faintly there, yes! Why, it sounded like a gunshot!"

"Wh-what!?" Daryan cried, sweating behind the witness stand. "This has to be some kind of mistake!"

Apollo saw the flicker of a smile on Klavier's lips. "I believe a case has been made," the prosecutor announced. "Gunshots were heard during the second act... which means Lamiroir's testimony was true."

Daryan grunted, looking around the room with wide eyes as the gallery began to mutter loudly.

"Order!" the judge cried, banging his gavel. With the courtroom quiet once more, he turned to Klavier with a curious gaze. "So, she was telling the truth about what she heard?"

"The shooter said 'Press the switch, now'," Apollo recounted. "Just after that, there was a gunshot, the second of two... and then the guitar caught fire."

Klavier was staring into space, his head pointedly turned away from his bandmate. "Detective Crescend... You weren't on stage during the second set. You could have done it."

The judge hummed in thought. "But why did we only hear one gunshot on the recording?" he asked. "Weren't two bullets fired from the weapon?"

"Lamiroir was moving through the air vent, Your Honour," Apollo explained. "She must not have been close enough for her mic to catch the first shot. But then, as she passed over the dressing room," he snapped his fingers, "the gun fired again, and Mister LeTouse's life was taken." He turned to the witness stand, giving the man stood there a stern stare. "Well, Detective Crescend?"

Daryan didn't say a word, stock still as he stared back.

"Ah, once again I am reminded of something."

Apollo looked over to Klavier, confused. At his side, Luke held his chin in thought. "Reminded of what?" the younger brother asked.

"Our performance that day," the prosecutor elaborated, running a hand through his hair. "Herr Doktor's makeshift mixing board jogged my memory. You were there too, Herr Forehead."

At that, Apollo's eyes widened in recognition. "You mean, the missed cue in 'Guilty Love'?"

Klavier nodded, giving his friend at the stand only a glance. "I thought it strange at the time. How could you miss such a simple cue?" He turned to watch Daryan, the other man looking away guiltily, almost hiding behind his pompadour. "I know you. I know how you play. You're better than that."

"Yeah, well, I..." Daryan mumbled, shrugging.

"You what?" the judge asked, looking between the two in confusion. "Prosecutor Gavin, what are you getting at?"

"I'm talking about the murder weapon," Klavier explained, turning his gaze to his desk. "Mister LeTouse's forty-five-calibre hand cannon. As we have learned, even the shooter doesn't go unscarred with a revolver that size. The kickback is enough to dislocate your shoulder, if you're an amateur."

Daryan scoffed. "You're forgetting something, there: I'm a trained police officer. I've had firearms training. Plenty of it." He waved his hand with a proud grin. "I'm no amateur."
"The standard sidearm issued to police officers is a thirty-eight-calibre weapon. A much tamer beast," Klavier replied, still avoiding anyone's eyes. "Also, the murder weapon belonged to the victim, Mister LeTouse... which suggests there was a struggle between killer and victim."

"So the killer might not have been holding the revolver correctly when he fired!" the judge realised with a smile. "Is that what you mean?"

Klavier stood in silence for a moment or two before nodding. "The thought had occurred to me, yes."

The judge thought for a few seconds, then turned to Daryan. "Well, does the witness have anything to say to this?"

Daryan didn't respond, crossing his arms as he looked over at the defence bench.

Apollo raised an eyebrow, looking right back at the man. 'What now?'

"Detective Crescend!" the judge called with a stern glare.

Daryan didn't react to the judge's anger, gesturing to the defence bench. "What I want to ask is what Mister Flappy-cape-and-ready-to-dazzle has to say." He turned to the Wrights, snapping his fingers. "Hey, you. Supposed 'attorney'."

Apollo glared. "I do have a badge."

"Whatever," Daryan mumbled, waving him off. "Exactly which piece of your evidence is decisive, again? You got a little noise on a tape that could be anything, and you have an alleged guitar cue miss due to a forty-five-calibre kickback." He looked over to Klavier with a small smile. "I weep for this case, Gavin, I really do."

Klavier didn't reply.

"You can line up your little weak pieces of evidence all you want," Daryan continued with a grin, not seeming to mind his bandmate's continued silence. "I didn't shoot that manager. And that's the obvious truth."

The judge hummed in thought. "The witness has a point. The defence's arguments, while persuasive, are not decisive."

Daryan held his arms out wide, as though waiting for applause. Apollo held back a groan, looking over to his brother: Luke was stroking at his goatee, staring hard at his laptop.

"I believe we should hear what the witness has to say in response to the case so far," the judge continued, then nodded to Daryan. "Your testimony please, Detective Crescend. Tell us your reasons why you couldn't have done it."

At that, Daryan scoffed, leaning casually on the witness stand. "C'mon! Why would I even want to kill that manager?" He paused to laugh. "You want a reason? Easy: I got no motive, man! This was that diva's first trip to this country, right? How could I possibly know her manager?" He waved a hand as though to announce 'voila', and slapped it on the stand. "If I didn't know him, why would I want to kill him?"

The judge humphed. "A simple reason indeed," he agreed, then turned to Klavier. "Prosecutor Gavin, is it the case that Mister LeTouse had not been to America before?"
Klavier sighed. "According to our records... yes. Not even once."

The judge's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "I see. Very well!" He turned to the defence bench, quickly moving on. "Mister Wright, you may begin the cross-examination."

Apollo nodded, paused in thought, then turned to Luke. "I guess we're bringing up the cocoon smuggling after all," he whispered.

Luke smiled sympathetically. "We can still save Machi," he assured his brother. " Couldn't Crescend have still met Mister LeTouse before the concert?"

"That's a good point," Apollo replied. 'Actually, isn't he...?' He looked to the witness stand. "Detective Crescend, aren't you with International Affairs?"

"Yeah?" Daryan answered, running his hands along his pompadour nonchalantly. "What of it?"

Apollo smiled. "Even if this was Mister LeTouse's first trip to this country, you could still have met him prior to the concert!" He felt his confidence grow when Daryan's only response was a look of confusion. "Or don't you take any international trips in International Affairs?"

"That's right!" the judge agreed. "Well, Detective Crescend?"

Daryan's surprise turned into a cocky grin, and he chuckled at the Wrights.

Suddenly Apollo's confidence drained.

"That's your game, is it?" Daryan asked. "Guess I'd better confess, then."

"Confess?" the judge repeated. He sounded as confused as Apollo felt.

"Yeah." Daryan shrugged, still grinning widely. "It's a bit of an embarrassment, but I've never been sent overseas."

Apollo stared in disbelief. "What!? But you're in International-!"

"See, me and planes got a difference of opinion," Daryan interrupted, hands in his pockets. "We don't like each other much."

Klavier nodded. "My condolences, Herr Forehead, but he's telling the truth. He's never set foot outside the country. I can guarantee it."

Apollo stared across at the prosecutor. It struck him how drained Klavier looked, how subdued he had been since they'd come back from recess. 'Does he know Crescend is the killer? Was... Was Luke right about him all along?'

"As it turns out," Daryan continued with a proud air, "my division has plenty of work to do locally as well."

Apollo chanced another worried look at Klavier, but the prosecutor was looking away, his eyes closed once more. 'Better to just get this over with.' Straightening his posture, the young magician held a hand up high. "Your Honour," he called, "take a look at this." With a twirl of his fingers, the tiny cocoon replica seemingly materialised in his grip, for all the court to see.

Daryan's grin froze.

The judge peered down at Apollo's hand. "That looks familiar... What is it?"
"Mister LeTouse's replica, from yesterday," Klavier realised, shooting Apollo a stern frown. "I was wondering when it would turn up."

"Oh, yes, his investigation," the judge recalled. "Did we ever learn what it was?"


Luke was grinning at Apollo's side. "Guess Mister Gavin managed to identify it on his own, then," he whispered.

Shooting his brother a quick smile, Apollo moved to add to the explanation: "Borginian cocoons such as this can make a powerful curative, a one-of-a-kind medicine for a disease thought incurable."

"Really?" the judge asked, amazed.

"However, it is illegal to take one of these healing cocoons out of Borginia," Klavier picked up. "We looked into the matter at some length: Apparently, it isn't difficult at all to manufacture the remedy from the cocoon... Yet, if you change the process only slightly, you can easily make a large quantity of something else entirely." He slammed a fist against the wall at his back with a hard glare. "A deadly poison, in fact."

Apollo gasped (as did most of the courtroom), sharing a look with Luke. 'So that's why...!'"There was an incident, several years ago," Klavier continued, "where some of these got out onto the black market. It caused quite the commotion in the global community, though the media was kept largely unaware."

The judge mused a moment, his shock fading. "Intriguing!"

Klavier didn't respond to the comment. "All this has led to a strict ban on the cocoons’ export, one rigidly enforced... by Interpol, among others."

Apollo almost gasped as he felt sudden connections forming in his mind, and he rounded on Daryan, brandishing the cocoon replica in one hand while he banged his desk with the other. "Detective Crescend! You insist on referring to Mister LeTouse as a 'manager', but that is misleading! Romein LeTouse wasn't killed as a manager; He was killed as an undercover agent, working for Interpol!"

Daryan stared Apollo down as the gallery muttered above them. "So I was trying to smuggle this gum-ball into the country?" he asked. "That's what you're trying to say?"

Apollo decided not to give a direct answer. "I'm saying that could well be a motive for murder."

The stare continued for a few more moments before Daryan smiled. "Oh, so I was going to sell it on the black market, make myself a pretty penny?" He scoffed, shaking his head. "Ridiculous. I mean, totally unthinkable."

"And why exactly is that so 'unthinkable'?" Luke asked.

"Perhaps it's time for another testimony, about this 'smuggling of cocoons' business," the judge suggested, tapping his gavel.
"International Affairs got a memo about these cocoons," Daryan explained, lounging casually at the witness stand. "Interpol's all hot and bothered about 'em. Can't sell 'em on the black market; Too dangerous." He chuckled. "Yeah, cocoon smuggling ain't exactly lucrative anymore." The chuckle turned into a laugh. "Man, I'm in International Affairs! I know the deal!"

The judge tapped his gavel in his hand, thinking. "Indeed. Interpol wanted these cocoons bad enough to send Mister LeTouse undercover."

Daryan shot a smirk at the Wrights. "You kids think up the craziest things... No way am I going to risk life and limb just to get my hands on some dirty cocoon money."

"Not the most noble of statements," the judge muttered, "but duly noted."

"According to reports," Klavier added, "these cocoons top Interpol's list. Selling them to an underground organisation would be risky."

The judge hummed in thought, then waved to the defence bench. "You may begin the cross-examination."

Apollo didn't say anything immediately, pressing a finger to his forehead as he ran over Daryan's testimony in his mind. "It's... 'too dangerous'?"

"Yeah," Daryan laughed. "Interpol finds you, they arrest you on the spot. Or another marketeer might think you're part of a sting and take you out himself." He shoved his hands in his pockets, smiling almost nostalgically. "Times have changed..."

"Why not choose a less dangerous buyer then?" Apollo asked, looking up. "I would."

Daryan snorted. "How clueless are you? Everyone in the market's dangerous! The second they found out I was a cop, I could kiss my keester goodbye."

Apollo felt a smile growing on his lips as he turned to Luke. Luke smiled back, already digging around in his satchel at the silent signal. "Why sell to a black market buyer?" Apollo asked, looking back to Daryan, arms crossed. "How about someone," he paused, giving Luke time to hold out the morning's paper, "like the Chief Justice?"

Daryan did not react, grin frozen on his face.

"A deadly poison can be extracted from the cocoon," Apollo continued, "but so can a cure... A cure for Incuritis!"

"I-incuritis!?" the judge repeated, shocked. "Th-that's what the Chief Justice's son has! You aren't saying...?"

"Our witness is a detective," Apollo pointed out, taking the newspaper from his brother to gesture
with it at the witness stand. "He would have contact with the Chief Justice."

"You are saying!" the judge cried, then frowned at the young man. "The Chief Justice would never deal in contraband!"

Apollo looked up at the judge's podium. "Not even to save his own son's life?"

The judge couldn't respond to that, looking around uncomfortably before sighing in sad acceptance. "But, even if the deal went through," he pointed out, "why, it's be an international scandal!"

"That's Detective Crescend's insurance!" Apollo cried, louder than he intended in his excitement at the realisation. "If word ever got out, the one with his neck on the line would be the Chief Justice!"

Daryan was staring off to one side, arms crossed and a dark look on his face. He didn't speak.

"Detective Crescend, is this true?" the judge demanded.

"First I'm a murderer, now I'm a smuggler?" Daryan quietly replied, then looked back to the Wrights with a grin. "How many crimes are you trying to pin on me, anyway?"

The judge shook his head, frowning. "Distasteful as it is to think about, if the Chief Justice were the buyer..." He sighed. "Why, a seller couldn't hope for a better deal." He shot a glare at nothing in particular. "A very cowardly seller!"

"Don't let Flappy over there trick you," Daryan replied, jerking his head towards Apollo before turning to the young lawyer himself. "So I made a deal with the Chief Justice? Where's your proof?"

Apollo didn't have the time to complain about the nickname; Although he hated to admit it, he knew full well they had no evidence of any kind of deal. "W-well..."

"Oh yeah, and you're forgetting one other important thing," Daryan added.

'What now!?'
"Do tell."

"Interpol isn't the only one out there watching this," Daryan pointed out with a grin. "Borginian Customs is very thorough. Everything and everyone gets checked, in and out." He snorted. "They barely sleep, they're so worried about cocoons getting out!"

Luke hummed in thought, his arms crossed. "Like Mister Sycamore and Emmy said; The Bostonius was grounded for hours and searched thoroughly before customs let them go."

"Cocoon possession will get you arrested on the spot," Daryan continued, "and then sentenced to death." He laughed. "Hey, man, if there's a way to get cocoons out of there, I'd sure like to know."

Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead, running over the entire case in his mind. There had to be a way to get a cocoon out of Borginia, where customs couldn't find it... And, if Daryan had in fact never been to Borginia himself, it had to be a reliable method he could trust someone else to pull off. And hadn't they not yet figured out why Klavier's keys were stolen, or his guitar burnt to a...?

Klavier's guitar. That was it.

"Actually," Apollo said, looking up with a smile, "there is one way."

Daryan went pale. "Wha-?"

"One way to get something out of the country, no checks." He pointed across the room. "You
become a prosecutor."

"A prosecutor!??" the judge repeated, sputtering in shock.

Klavier's eyes slowly widened as he registered the finger pointing in his direction. "I... I don't believe it..."

Apollo couldn't help but feel another twinge of sympathy for the man. "Believe it, Prosecutor Gavin. What was it you told me yesterday in your office? Your guitar couldn't travel by plane, or the wood would be ruined."

The prosecutor's gaze turned downwards. "Yes, exactly. I used a special shipping service normally used for transporting evidence."

"And it was delivered to your office 'pristine and untouched', correct?" Apollo asked.

Klavier nodded, sighing. "Quite. It was wrapped in several sheets and vacuum packed in Borginia. The pack was untouched until the day of the concert." He looked up, meeting Apollo's eyes with a tired gaze. "Are you saying the guitar was...?"

Apollo nodded, fighting off his growing pity for the prosecutor. He held up the cocoon replica, addressing the court just as much as Klavier. "With cocoons this small, it would've been very easy to use your guitar as a mule to smuggle a cocoon out of Borginia!"

"Wh-what!?" the judge cried, still shocked.

"Which reminds me, Prosecutor Gavin," Apollo continued, placing the replica down on his bench, "that guitar had some 'work' done on it recently, right?"

At that, Klavier managed to force a small smile. "Good memory, Herr Forehead. I had it investigated after the concert; That was where we found this." He held up a small evidence bag, containing the item that had nearly set fire to the judge earlier that day.

The judge tugged at his beard protectively. "Ah, the igniter. Let's leave it in its bag, shall we?"

"Consider this, if you will," Apollo called to Klavier. "What if that igniter wasn't the only thing that was attached inside your guitar?"

Klavier's smile died again. "You mean a cocoon."

The gallery began to mumble.

"There was a way to get a cocoon out of the country!" Apollo announced to the court at large. "They could use Prosecutor Gavin's privileged guitar as a mule!"

The mumbling grew louder. Daryan was frozen at the stand, sweat forming on his brow.

"And who better to do that than someone with access," Apollo continued, "like a member of the band!"

Daryan jerked back with a strangled cry. The gallery erupted into excited chatter.

"Order! Order!" the judge cried, banging his gavel. "Order!" With the courtroom finally calm again, he looked between the opposing benches. "So the igniter...?"

"Was placed in there for a clear reason, it seems," Klavier sighed.
Apollo nodded. "It was a safety precaution."

The judge raised an eyebrow. "A precaution?"

Klavier shook his head, smiling despite the air of fatigue still hanging off his every motion. "Ah, Herr Forehead... At last, it all comes together."

"Every strange thing that happened that day," Apollo agreed. "Care to review?" He looked to Luke with a grin. "Maestro, the gentle sounds of Lamiroir's ballad, if you please."

Luke hid a giggle, and fiddled with his laptop. A moment later, the Guitar's Serenade was echoing around them, the video playing through again on the holographic screens above them.

Klavier snapped his fingers, a business-like frown on his face. "First, my keys were stolen - A harmless misdemeanour - which forced me to break the lock on my guitar case."

"The key was stolen to retrieve the cocoon from the guitar," Apollo added. "But, things didn't go so well: The smuggler wasn't counting on the guitar being wrapped! Only a member of the band could get near that case; Unwrapping the guitar would raise too many suspicions." He shot the nervous man at the witness stand a look. "Then the concert began." He gestured to the screens, which had reached the beginning of the second verse; Lamiroir's missing word. "Right about this time, a very large problem presented itself to the smuggler."

"What's that?" the judge asked.

"Mister LeTouse."

The judge cried in shock.

"Mister LeTouse, an undercover agent, was on to something," Klavier picked up. "He would have known about the guitar; He'd only have to check the shipping records." He shook his head. "So, Mister LeTouse tried to examine the guitar himself."

"If the cocoon were confiscated then, the gig would be up," Apollo continued, the screens above them showing the gentle flight of Lamiroir's star-patterned cloak across the concert hall, Klavier's burning guitar in the background. "The only thing left for the smuggler was to get rid of the whole lot." He snapped his fingers, putting on a brief impression of Daryan: "It's over. Press the switch, now!" He pointed to the screens again. "The guitar burst into flames, and the cocoon was lost. And then, Mister LeTouse died."

On the holograms, Lamiroir had reappeared, her cloak landing perfectly on her head. "With Lamiroir there to witness it," Klavier added.

Apollo nodded. "There's your case."

As the song faded out above them, the courtroom fell into a long silence, punctuated only by the buzz of the holograms as they shut down, the signal of the video having ended. The quiet was almost long enough to start feeling awkward, Apollo wondering if he should speak up and ask for the judge's opinion or not.

Finally, there was a snort from the witness stand, and everyone looked over to see Daryan slowly fall into semi-hysterical laughter. Despite his grin, Apollo could still see the nervous twitching in the detective's eyes, betraying his fear. "Brilliant, man!"

"Detective Crescendo...?" the judge asked, giving the detective a curious look.
"I gotta know," Daryan continued, "you make all that up on the fly?"

Klavier watched his friend with a stern look. "For a made-up story, it makes a great deal of sense, Daryan."

Daryan scoffed, gaining confidence. "The Republic of Borginia? Sorry, man, but I haven't even been there."

"True, you haven't," Klavier admitted.

"Hah!" Daryan barked at Apollo, his cocky grin returning to his face. "Let's see you make up a story for that, kid! How'd I hide the cocoon in the first place, huh?"

Apollo almost smirked, but his concern for his youngest brother, whose terrified face had flicked across his mind, kept his gaze stern. "It's not so hard to imagine," he explained. "You had help. A Borginian accomplice." He closed his eyes. "That's all."

Daryan did not respond to that.

"That you had an accomplice was clear from the start," Apollo continued, looking up at Daryan's frozen grin with a fierce glare. "The voice Lamiroir heard, 'press the switch'? You made that transmission from backstage."

"While your co-conspirator was onstage," Klavier added, watching Apollo carefully.

The judge looked between the two attorneys with an excited air. "But... But who was it?"

Apollo closed his eyes, taking a deep breath. 'I can't believe I'm doing this, but... Don't you worry, Machi, I'll keep you safe.' Opening his eyes again, he turned his gaze up to the judge. "There is only one person who meets all the requirements of the accomplice... and that person... is the defendant. Machi Tobaye."

View the Court Record
The judge stared down at Apollo in disbelief. "But... Mister Wright... He's your client!"

Daryan scoffed, though his grin didn't seem as cocky anymore. "A defence attorney accusing his client? That's a new one!"

Apollo sighed, not bothering to hide his own displeasure. "I assure you, no-one is more unhappy about this than I. But," he pointed out at the court with a glare, "I am here to defend him in the murder of Mister LeTouse, and I stand by my statement earlier that he is innocent of that particular crime."

"Indeed," the judge muttered, thinking. "The defendant is Borginian; He does meet the basic requirements to be the accomplice... But, what if it was, in fact, Lamiroir?"

Apollo shook his head. "It couldn't've been."

The judge blinked in surprise. "Well, you seem sure of yourself."

"The reason," Apollo sighed, "is electronic signals, Your Honour." He picked up the trigger still sitting on the bench, holding it up for all to see. "This remote only works to a range of thirty feet. Beyond that, it's useless."

"Yes, I recall that being mentioned," the judge mused.

Apollo placed the trigger back on the bench, fiddling with his Court Record to bring up the side-view diagram again. "When the shooter made his transmission, Lamiroir was in the air vent," he explained, "right above the dressing room where the shooter stood." He highlighted a circle, the ten metre range of the remote according to the diagram's scale, and centred it above the dressing room. "This is the area that the remote could reach from the air vent."

The judge examined the diagram, no doubt noticing the circle still included the stage. "Well, looking at this, it seems that Lamiroir still could have done the deed."

Apollo shook his head. "No. When the shooter made that transmission, the stage was slightly different than shown here; It was in the middle of the Guitar's Serenade. Part of the stage was raised." As the judge gasped, Apollo tapped to add a five-metre platform to the stage, its top well out of range of the trigger. "Prosecutor Gavin and the Lamiroir stand-in were in the air, on a tower which happens to be fifteen feet tall! In other words, the remote couldn't have worked from Lamiroir's position in the air vent!"

Daryan was sweating again, his grin melting off his face.

"Well, Detective Crescend?" Apollo asked, turning to the man with a stern look. "What do you say to that?"

In the resulting silence, Daryan stood motionless, his nervousness fading. "Your Honour."
"Y-yes, Detective?"

"Could we see the video where Gavin's guitar burns?" Daryan asked, looking thoughtful. "Just one more time?"

The judge seemed confused at the request, but shrugged. "Well, I don't see why not." He gestured to the defence bench.

Luke obediently moved to his laptop, but paused with his hand on the touchpad, thinking. "You just want to hear Machi's playing, don't you."

Daryan gave the vet an even stare. "Is that a crime?"

At that, Luke smiled, and began to fiddle with the computer. "I'll just play his piano track then, save us all some time... Though I should warn you, you won't get what you're looking for from this."

Daryan just glared.

A moment later, as promised, the sound of a piano began to echo around the room, the gentle tune of Machi's part of the Guitar's Serenade. By now, Apollo had watched the video so many times he could see and hear the rest of the song in his mind's eye: The rising platform, Lamiroir's 'disappearance', Klavier's guitar catching fire, the floating cloak over the audience...

The song paused, Luke still smiling. "We've passed the point where the guitar began to burn," he explained. "That's all we need to hear."

Daryan began to laugh, pointing at Apollo. "Too bad, so sad, punk!"

"'Punk'...?" Apollo repeated, an eyebrow raised. 'I guess it's better than 'Flappy', though.'

The judge was looking equally confused, but for a different reason. "What exactly were we supposed to be listening for?" he asked. "If that is indeed what we were meant to be doing."

Klavier nodded, frowning at nothing in particular. "It was, Herr Judge."

"The punk says I ordered the wee pianist to set off that igniter, right?" Daryan explained with a grin. "In order to do that, he'd have to press a switch, wouldn't he?"

"What he's trying to say," Luke picked up, smiling calmly, "is that the piano didn't stop playing at any point in the song."

Apollo felt a spike of fear in his chest as he realised what Daryan's point meant for their case... but seeing his brother's confidence was enough of a boost that he found he didn't lose much to worry; In this case, he'd leave the 'music' argument to the musicians.

"Exactly!" Daryan crowed. "How's he s'posed to hit that switch if he's playing? You've got Ms Diva, the guitar, the bass, the piano, and the drums... the only one with her hands free was the diva!"

'Stop calling her that!' Apollo barely kept from growling.

"But, according to you," Daryan continued, grinning at Apollo, "she couldn't have been the accomplice, could she? Your accomplice would have had a hard time helping out if they couldn't even press a switch!"

Daryan scoffed, waving the comment off. "Your story is full of holes," he insisted. "I'd like to see you explain this one."

"No, Herr Doktor has a point," Klavier said, watching Luke curiously. "That piano track sounded... strange."

"Machi could very well have still pressed that switch and continued playing," Luke pointed out. "Or have you forgotten, Detective, that a piano is perfectly capable of being played with only a single hand on the keys?"

Daryan's grin suddenly became very forced.

Luke fiddled with his laptop a moment, then hit the spacebar, a section of the piano track echoing around them. "This is the second verse, the part when the guitar caught fire and the switch would have been pressed."

As the music was left to play, Apollo paid close attention, trying to find what about the track supported their case: It was much easier to listen to than Phoenix's attempts at music (though that wasn't hard), but he couldn't think of anything else remarkable to comment on. It was, simply, a piano. There was nothing more to it.

The music stopped, and Apollo noticed Klavier frowning intently in thought. "So you are saying, Herr Doktor, that Machi could have played that part one-handed?"

Apollo blinked. 'It was 'simply' a piano...? Yeah, it... it sounded kinda 'simple', didn't it?'

Daryan barked in laughter. "Aren't you a violinist?" he asked Luke with a smirk. "What do you know about pianos?"

Luke only smiled back. "Any musician worth their salt knows how a song is constructed, Detective," he replied, promptly ignoring how Daryan's eyes widened in rage at the jibe to add, "This song places the piano in the background, so it should play mostly the same throughout the piece," he turned to Klavier, "correct, Mister Gavin?"

Klavier nodded. "Indeed. I had Machi play specifically so that the piano would not draw attention to itself."

"So, outside of any modulation," Luke continued, "the verses of the song should all sound identical when listening only to the piano." He again moved to fiddle with his computer. "So, for comparison's sake, let's listen to the first verse, shall we?"

Once more, the lilting melodies of the piano echoed around the room. Although Apollo still had no idea what Luke was talking about, he still tried to pay attention to the notes, to how Machi had been playing on that fateful night. If anything, he had to say the two different sections of the track sounded the same... though something about them was definitely different. This one... seemed more complicated. Had there been those low notes in verse two?

Luke stopped the music, still smiling. "I'd say verse one was definitely two-handed; It used the entire range of the keyboard. But did it sound identical to verse two?" He left the resounding 'no' of his answer unsaid.

The gallery muttered to itself, quietened only by a bang of the gavel. "They... 'feel' the same," the judge admitted, "but they're clearly very different!"

Daryan was sputtering at the witness stand, searching for words. "B-but... I... Wh-what's that?
prove!?” he demanded, hands pressed on the small podium as he leaned over it, glaring at Luke. "So the two verses had different arrangements! Happens all the time!"

Klavier shook his head. "Not this time, Daryan. There's no point in changing an arrangement if you can't hear it clearly... and that wasn't the point."

"I think the fact we had to work so hard to prove there was a difference is enough evidence that this was not for the benefit of the listener," Luke picked up. "Machi played right-handed during verse two, for the lone reason of having a hand free to press the remote trigger... and set Prosecutor Gavin’s guitar alight."

Daryan choked an incomprehensible reply, jerking away from the witness stand as though it had burned him. Above, the gallery had burst into loud chatter, excited to see Luke's point landing. Apollo wondered how many of them were as lost as him in the middle of all the 'music' talk.

"Order! Order!" the judge cried, banging his gavel. "Order!" Finally, the gallery was silenced, and he turned to the prosecutor's bench. "I believe this ties all the facts together. Prosecutor Gavin?"

"Yes, quite," Klavier agreed, though he was frowning deeply. "Though, personally... this comes as a terrible disappointment."

"Very well," the judge replied. "Barring an objection from the prosecution, I will now state the court's opinion on this matter."

Apollo let out a relieved sigh. It seemed they'd finally reached the end...

... but then Daryan began to laugh.

Apollo stared in disbelief. 'You mean it's not over!? Wasn't what Luke said enough!?'

Daryan looked up from where he was leaning heavily on the witness stand, sarcastically clapping. "Good show, Flappy, Paperboy! No, great show!"

At Apollo’s side, Luke shot the detective a glare. "What's wrong now?" he demanded.

"You tell ’em, Gavin," Daryan panted, still grinning widely. "Tell ’em what's so disappointing!"

Klavier was stood tall behind the prosecutor's bench, eyes closed. "Personally, I'm terribly disappointed," he repeated, then opened his eyes to meet Apollo's confused gaze, "in you, Herr Forehead."

"M-me!?" Apollo cried.

Klavier nodded. "Don't get me wrong: Your case is solid, the facts all check out... but, even now, you have yet to show us a single piece of decisive evidence."

To his shame, Apollo had to admit that was true. "B-but the facts!" he sputtered, gesturing to Luke's laptop in front of them. "Anyone can see it was him!"

"Unfortunately, 'anyone' does not include the law," the judge pitched in, looking stern. "I'm afraid your case doesn't cut it."

"But that's not fair!" Luke cried, leaning forward on the defence bench with an expression bordering on panic. "We proved the gunshots were during the second act, didn't we!?"

"That is no proof it was the detective who pulled the trigger," the judge pointed out. "A thousand
facts might point to the same conclusion, but without decisive evidence, it's not proof. That's the rule of our current legal system."

Luke whimpered as he withdrew. Apollo patted his shoulder to offer comfort. It was becoming resoundingly clear there was nothing more they could do.

*View the Court Record*
"It does not seem as though the defence has any more evidence to present," the judge announced.

Daryan smirked. "Oh, I think if they did, we already would have seen it a long ways back."

"It is unfortunate," the judge continued, giving the Wrights a sympathetic look, "but, at present, this court is unable to acknowledge your accusation."

Luke didn't respond, apparently fighting tears as they faced what could very well be their first loss. In a bizarre way, seeing Luke so cut up about it only made Apollo feel all the calmer, standing strong for the both of them as he ran over the case once more in his mind. There had to be something they could do... but what? For some reason, Phoenix's words came back to him in a rush:

"Every man has an igniter inside him. Find Daryan Crescend's igniter, and set it off."

Luke had reasoned earlier that the piece of cryptic advice just meant a way to make Crescend confess... but maybe what Phoenix had meant was to find Crescend's weak spot, something that a single spark could ignite into a wildfire of emotion. 'Impossible to prove by conventional methods, huh? Well then, guess I'd better find some unconventional methods, and quick...'

"So, can I get back to work now, or what?" Daryan asked, leaning on the witness stand with a cocky grin. "It may look like I got a lot of time on my hands, but I got no more time to play pretend with this dead-weight attorney and his friend."

The judge hummed in thought. "Well, Mister Wright? We've come this far without decisive evidence... This witness won't be coming back to the stand once we let him go."

Luke looked up to his brother, eyes shining. "Apollo...?"

Apollo stood only a moment more in thought. "Every man has an igniter." Feeling the confused gazes of the court boring into him from all sides, he met Klavier's eyes with a fierce stare. "Didn't you say the best guitars burn the brightest, Prosecutor Gavin?"

"Ah, yes," Klavier agreed, nodding, though he still looked baffled by the question. "Good guitars are kept dry, is why. That provides the best sound."

"It's the same with violins," Luke quietly added, discreetly wiping away his tears. "With most wooden instruments, I imagine."

"So even a small spark could cause irreparable damage," Apollo reasoned, then turned to Daryan, a small smile forming on his lips. "Your plan has an 'igniter' in it too, Detective. It was there from the very beginning."

Daryan raised an eyebrow, unimpressed. "What, and this igniter's supposed to come 'burn' me up?" He snorted, smirking. "That's almost poetic there, Mister Attorney."
"All the better," Klavier said, watching with a smile of his own. "I'm rather fond of poetry... and I intend to hear this one through to the very end."

At that, Daryan's smirk died, shooting his friend a wide-eyed glare.

"Herr Forehead," Klavier continued with a stern look at Apollo. "You are accusing this man, Daryan Crescend, of two crimes: The murder of Mister LeTouse, and the smuggling of a Borginian Cocoon." He snapped his fingers. "This is your last chance to prove your case."

The judge nodded in agreement. "This trial has already run on for far too long." He turned to the defence bench. "Mister Wright, this will be my last warning. The moment this 'igniter' of yours turns out to be a dud is the moment this cross-examination ends. Understood?"

Apollo gulped down his nervousness and nodded. "Yes, Your Honour."

The judge stared back a moment, then gestured to the court at large. "Then, let's have it."

'I can't believe I'm about to do this after what I promised Machi, but...' Apollo took a deep breath, then stood tall, turning his gaze to Daryan. "Your 'igniter' isn't a piece of evidence."

Daryan blinked in surprise. "Huh? So what is-?"

"It is true that I couldn't show decisive evidence," Apollo continued. "Perhaps what I needed to prove my case all along was something else."

Klavier's eyes narrowed. "You mean a witness."

Apollo smiled, looking back at the prosecutor. "Proving his guilt is a tall order... but I've got just the person to do it."

The judge nodded. "Very well, Mister Wright. Who is this person who can prove Daryan Crescend's guilt?"

Again, Apollo paused, pulling himself out of his own disbelief at his actions. 'This is the only way. It's the best outcome for everyone.' "The person who can prove Daryan Crescend's guilt... is the defendant. Machi Tobaye."

"Y-your client?" the judge cried. "Again!?"

Luke frowned, watching his brother curiously.

"Machi Tobaye was an accomplice to the cocoon smuggling plot," Apollo explained. "Without him, Daryan Crescend could not have gotten the cocoon. Furthermore," he pointed dramatically, "he can easily prove that the one who plotted to smuggle that cocoon is the real criminal in this case!"

"How so?" the judge asked, tugging at his beard in thought.

"It would require just one of the very cocoons Mister LeTouse was looking for," Apollo replied, hoping this didn't sound as made-up-on-the-spot as it was. 'We Wrights have always thought best on our feet, after all.' "With the co-operation of the Republic of Borginia, we could burn a cocoon. The burnt cocoon would leave a particular residue, a residue we would, no doubt, also find inside the burnt guitar!"

The judge smiled, impressed. "Aha! Very scientific of you."

"Thus, if Machi Tobaye acknowledges his agreement with Daryan Crescend concerning the
attempted smuggling of a Borginian Cocoon," Apollo announced with a proud smile, "the case is solved!"

The resulting silence was broken by a quiet snort from the witness stand, followed by loud laughter. "Your unrelenting passion is... remarkable," Daryan said, leaning an arm on the small podium while his other hand wiped away false tears. "You really want to get me, don't you?" He bit back another laugh. "Too bad you'll never be able to."

Apollo's smile did not fade. "Why not?"

"The little key-tickler won't acknowledge anything!" Daryan replied. "Especially not anything to do with cocoon smuggling!"

"He has a point," Luke whispered at Apollo's side, looking worried.

The judge frowned. "What's this all about?"

"Taking a cocoon out of the country means death by Borginian law," Klavier explained.

"Yeah!" Daryan laughed. "See? If our pianist really was a smuggler, then testifying about it would be suicide!" He shook his head, still chuckling. "Believe me, he's not tal-"

"You're wrong, Detective Crescend."

Daryan paused, meeting Apollo's fierce gaze with a confused look. "What?"

Apollo stood unmoved, still smiling confidently. "It's the other way around: If Machi doesn't admit to smuggling here... he's in deep trouble." He spoke slowly, hoping Machi was listening in the waiting room; He wanted to be understood by even the teen's basic knowledge of English.

Daryan's grin had finally faded. "H-how?"

"If Machi admits to smuggling here," Apollo explained, "then he'll be tried in our courts, by our laws; You don't get the death penalty for smuggling in California."

"Ah," Daryan muttered, going pale.

"The victim in this case was an undercover Interpol agent," Apollo continued. "I'm sure that news has long reached Borginia."

"And they'll likely broadcast our dealings in court today," Klavier added. "Including the part about the Borginian Cocoon."

Daryan was starting to sweat. "Yeah, but... but..."

Apollo's smile only grew wider. "If Machi doesn't admit to smuggling now, he'll eventually be picked up by the Borginian police... and it's not like he's in any danger in our court; We're not going to find him guilty of murder here, not now."

"Yeah," Daryan reluctantly admitted, "but... you can't do this!" He glared at Apollo, his knuckles white where he was gripping the witness stand. "You can't accuse me!"

"Maybe the law doesn't allow it," Apollo said, his smile flickering only momentarily in his anger at that point, "but who's going to think you're really innocent after hearing this trial?" He crossed his arms. "The same goes for Machi."
Daryan's hands slipped off the stand with a strangled cry.

"The cocoon smuggling, your entire plan," Apollo continued, enjoying the opportunity to finally twist the knife. "Machi knows everything. There's only one way out of it for him, and that's to acknowledge his own crime, the crime of cocoon smuggling!"

The room fell silent. Apollo felt a poke on his right and broke from his fierce stare-down of Daryan to look over at his brother in confusion. Luke's eyes were wide, and he only jerked his head wordlessly, signalling for Apollo to look behind him. Although confused, Apollo did so, and his eyebrows shot up at what he saw.

Machi was standing not far away, having emerged from the defence waiting room while Apollo wasn't looking, a bailiff at his side. The teen was watching Daryan from behind his large sunglasses, eyebrows furrowed.

Daryan paled even further as he noticed Machi, eyes wide. Slowly, through the sweat pouring down his face, he forced a grin. "D-don't worry, there... I'll get... I'll get you out of the country." He laughed, but it sounded more desperate now than smug. "I'll set you up somewhere. A hidden mansion? Real nice."

Machi didn't react, silently staring back.

"You want a house made out of cookies?" Daryan asked, venturing out from behind the witness stand to take a few staggering steps towards the teen. "Or no, a house made out of pianos? C'mon..."

Machi stayed quiet.

"Please!" Daryan cried, jumping forward only to be body slammed by the bailiff at Machi's side, and quickly joined by two other bailiffs to pull him back from where he was still trying to lunge at the boy. "Don't taaaaaaalk!" he shrieked, shaking wildly to the point that his pompadour bounced around like a spring on his head, almost tossing the bailiffs off him all on its own. Nevertheless, with a final wordless shout, his tantrum seemed to have ended, and the detective allowed himself to be dragged away by the trio of bailiffs, who left him slumped over the witness stand.

Klavier was looking away, one hand at his fringe. "Daryan. I consider that my last session with you," he said. "We rocked."

Apollo shared only a single sympathetic glance for the prosecutor, then returned his attention to Daryan. "I'm guessing we can treat that outburst as a confession?"

At the witness stand, Daryan quietly laughed again... but he lacked even the slightest hint of his earlier confidence, instead sounding sick and desperate.

The judge shook his head, waving to the bailiffs. Together, they propped the limp man up and began to drag him away. "Well," the judge said, turning to Machi, "have you been listening to today's trial?"

Instead of replying, Machi looked over to Apollo and Luke; Apollo could only guess he was asking for permission, so he gave the boy a sad smile. "I'm... sorry, Machi. I didn't want it to turn out this way, but..." He sighed, shaking his head. "I'm not the kind of lawyer that can overlook a crime." 'Not even when it's my little brother committing it... but I saved you from two separate death penalties,
"Today's trial was all for your benefit, you know?" Klavier added, to the Wrights', and Machi's, surprise. He also gave the teen a friendly smile. "I see no reason why you should hesitate now."

Machi thought a moment, then slowly walked around the rope barrier to the front of the defence bench. He pulled off his sunglasses, folding the arms in with a practised air, and gave the Wrights a smile that seemed bright despite the boy's lingering nervousness. "I knew," he said. "From beginning, I knew."

Apollo could almost feel his heart breaking.


Machi's smile faded, and he placed the sunglasses on the bench. "Situation... I cannot explain. But money... I needed. Very much money."

The judge sighed. "Today's trial... raises a delicate issue with our legal system," he announced. "'The only thing definite in a court of law is evidence', the golden rule. However..."

"It has become apparent that not all things can be tried by this standard," Klavier agreed.

"Should another case of this sort surface," the judge continued, "we may have to consider an alternate system by which to administer justice. Anyway." He shook his head, dismissing his own musings, and turned towards the defence bench with a warm smile. "Mister Machi Tobaye?"

Machi blinked up at the tall podium. "Yes?"

"I promise you will receive a fair trial by the laws of our country," the judge said. "And, with regards to the current charges for the murder of Mister LeTouse, this court is prepared to announce a verdict."

Smiling, Machi looked back to the Wrights. "I thank you," he said, glancing away in guilt. "I... only lie... but you see truth!" He turned back to the judge, even giving Klavier a grin. "You find... truth."

The judge chuckled to himself, looking proud. "That's our job." He tapped his gavel on its base, then loudly called, "This court finds the defendant, Machi Tobaye, not guilty." He banged the gavel louder. "Court is adjourned!"

View the Court Record
With the exit of the judge and the end of the trial, Apollo didn't hesitate to dash around the defence
bench, wriggling past the rope barrier to Machi's side with a wide grin.

Machi was rubbing an arm nervously. "I sorry," he repeated, before either Apollo or Luke could
speak. "I make so hard you find truth."

Apollo almost laughed, resting a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Don't you worry about it for another
moment," he assured him.

"We knew from the beginning you didn't kill anyone," Luke added, grinning at the teen. "The hard
part was proving it."

"And thank you for telling the truth," Apollo continued. "That was very brave of you to admit to the
smuggling... and it really is the best option for you in the long run."

Machi nodded, giving Apollo a small smile. "I understand. Thank you."

Apollo suddenly found himself having to blink back tears. "Never any trouble for you, little bro."

Machi cocked his head to one side, confused. "Sorry?"

"Never mind," Apollo laughed, patting the teen's shoulder once more before reluctantly removing his
hand.

Luke shook his head with a fond smile.

"Machi Tobaye."

Apollo spun around to see Klavier standing nearby, hands in his pockets and an unreadable gaze on
Machi.

Machi stood ramrod straight as he turned to face the man. "Yes?"

"Paholani, little pianist," Klavier replied, giving the boy a short bow, "but I'm afraid you will have to
come with me; We must make arrangements for your next trial, on the smuggling charge."

At that, Machi's face fell, and he nodded.

"Detective Crescend has been arrested, right?" Luke asked, casting a glance to the doors the bailiffs
had dragged the man through earlier.

The prosecutor nodded. "He will be charged with the murder, and the smuggling... He's lucky we
won't be handing him over to Borgia for that."

Apollo watched Klavier carefully; Despite the prosecutor's efforts, it was clear he was taking the
betrayal of his bandmate hard. "I'm sorry about... what just happened. He was your friend."
Klavier shook his head. "Daryan will face justice," he insisted, "as we all must when we do wrong. The law does not distinguish between friend and foe." He sighed, eyes closed. "Even so, I think I will leave his trial for one of my colleagues; I have had quite enough of this entire case."

Luke frowned in confusion, glancing at the nervous teen. "What about Machi?"

At that, Klavier looked up with a smirk. "What about him?"

Apollo grinned at the boy. "You'll be going to Juvenile Court now, Machi," he explained. "It's specially designed for kids and teenagers; They're a lot nicer than here in adult court."

"And they have their own prosecutors," Klavier added, to Luke. "Your little friend here will be in safe hands."

Machi thought this over, then smiled up at Apollo and Luke. "Thank you," he said. "You work so much... a-all for I." He laughed, shaking his head. "I wish could speak English more..."

"Please, don't worry about it," Apollo chuckled.

"You certainly won't be lacking opportunity to practise," Klavier pointed out to the teen with a smile, then gestured to the doors, stepping away from the defence bench. "Come, we have work to do."

Machi nodded, then moved to follow Klavier. As he left, he turned to wave back at the Wrights with a grin. "Talus!"

Apollo didn't stop waving back until Machi was out of sight. It was only as he reluctantly turned around to gather his belongings he noticed the boy had left his sunglasses behind.

By the time Apollo and Luke had left the courtroom, Klavier and Machi were long gone, and the hallways filled with the crowds from the gallery. Sticking close together, the brothers wound their way towards the furthest corner from the stairs, where the entrance to the defendant lobbies was. As they reached the gap in the throng around the large double doors, the pair took a deep breath and promptly slumped against the wall.

"Now I see why we get out early," Luke muttered.

Apollo grinned. "It's worth it to have had that last conversation with Machi." In the bag at his hip, his hand tightened around the abandoned sunglasses.

Luke opened his mouth to reply, but cut himself off before a single word came out, looking off behind Apollo with wide eyes. "Mister Sycamore!"

Spinning around in surprise, Apollo quickly found what had caught his brother's attention: Sycamore, Emmy, Flora and Alfendi were approaching from the edge of the crowd, all cheerful smiles and waves. Apollo almost laughed at seeing them. "What are you two doing here?" he asked, looking between the man and the six-year-old. "I thought you weren't interested in the case!"

"Apparently, we got bored," Sycamore replied, giving Alfendi a wry smile.

The boy shrugged, shuffling side-to-side where he stood.
"They only *just* missed my big moment!" Emmy jokingly complained, slapping Sycamore's shoulder with a smile. "When am I ever going to stand in a courtroom and translate for someone like that again, huh?"

"Are all your trials this exciting?" Flora asked, hugging Alfendi close with a wary glance at the crowds. "It felt awfully close to Machi being convicted at several points..."

Apollo thought a moment, then shook his head. "Not really. We usually have actual *evidence* to help our case."

Alfendi looked up at Luke. "Where's... that guy? The one you were talking to before?"

"You mean Machi?" Luke asked. "Our client?"

Alfendi nodded.

"He's gone to sort out his next trial," Apollo explained. "He has to be charged for the smuggling."

"And the guy who killed the other guy?"

Luke giggled. "He's been arrested. He'll have his own trial later, too."

"Two of them," Apollo added with a grin.

Alfendi huffed, disappointed. "He didn't talk about killing that other guy at all!" he complained.

"Murderers generally don't," Sycamore told him. "They're trying to hide what they've done, so they don't get punished for it. It's up to the police and people of the court, like Apollo here," he gestured to the young lawyer, "to ensure they don't get away with it."

Listening to his uncle's explanation, Alfendi cupped his chin in one hand, frowning in thought.

'Speaking of lawyers...’ Apollo looked around the immediate area, scanning the crowds. "Where's Dad? And Trucy?" He presumed Lamiroir had probably caught up to Machi by now, and tried not to feel bitter that she would surely forget to say goodbye in her concern for the boy.

"They're in there," Emmy replied, grinning widely as she pointed to the nearby double doors.

"I think they said they'd wait for you in your lobby," Flora added with a smile.

Apollo and Luke shared a confused glance at that, wondering why Phoenix and Trucy would find it necessary... but Apollo saw the images of Lamiroir and Machi flash in front of his eyes and realised somewhere private to talk as a family probably wasn't a bad idea. "We'd better catch up to them, then," he said, giving their friends a grateful smile.

"We'll be right back!" Luke promised, and the pair hurried off into the defendant lobby hallway.

"Take your time!" Flora called in reply.

When Apollo pushed open the door to Defendant Lobby Number Two, the absolute last thing he was expecting was to come face to face with a familiar woman in a white dress. "L-Lamiroir!"

Phoenix grinned as the trio waiting in the room looked up towards the pair in the doorway. "Ah, there you two are! Stayed behind to talk to Machi, did you?"
Lamiroir smiled. "I owe you both my thanks."

Apollo could only stare at the woman, unsure if it was the longing or the guilt that was overwhelming him more. He was only broken out of his reverie by a shove at his back courtesy of Luke, and he stumbled forwards towards where Lamiroir stood, Phoenix on one side and Trucy on the other. "Lamiroir, I'm... sorry about Machi. I mean, he was your..."

Lamiroir's smile faded. "Yes, I thought of him as my own son. Even now, I do. Yet," she sighed, "something got a hold of him, something evil. I see that. And he must pay for what he has done." Although her tone was firm, her pale eyes still seemed so gentle as they pointed in Apollo's direction. "Is that not how it should be?"

Apollo was almost surprised at her sentiment; She was right, he just wasn't expecting her to truly believe it like that. Not that it helped his guilt. "I'm still sorry."

"Do not be sorry," Lamiroir insisted, shaking her head as the smile returned to her face. "You have given me courage."

Seeing Apollo's confused face, Trucy giggled, attracting her brother's attention. "You should've seen yourself in there, Polly!" she boasted, bouncing to his side. "You were so cool, fighting back against every argument, getting that detective to confess just by talking at him...!" She squealed, pulling at his arm.

Luke chuckled, walking up on Trucy's other side. "You were pretty amazing in there, Apollo," he agreed.

Apollo was certain his face was as red as his cape. "W-well..."

"Lamiroir, tell him!" Trucy cried, directing a grin at the woman. "Tell him what you decided!"

Lamiroir smiled, her eyes twinkling. "I am going to England," she announced, "and having an eye operation."

"It was my suggestion, actually," Phoenix chimed in with a grin and a wink.

Apollo and Luke shared a surprised look. "You mean, you'll be able to see again?" Apollo asked.

"You're going to ask the Professor to help recover your memory!?" Luke added, almost squealing in pure glee.

Lamiroir clasped her hands together, face downturned. "It's funny, I have always been afraid of the 'light'. Light seems so harsh, so unforgiving..."

"According to the doctor," Phoenix explained, watching Apollo carefully, "Lamiroir lost her sight due to some kind of 'accident'."

Apollo's eyebrows shot up. 'The accident Valant told me about...!'

"I feared that, if I could see," Lamiroir continued, "perhaps it would open my eyes to the truth I have been running from... the past I have been running from." She closed her eyes. "I was scared."

Phoenix stepped up to where his children had gathered, a smile growing on his face. "You know what changed her mind?" he asked, placing a hand on Apollo's shoulder. "Hearing your defence in there today. She could feel your gaze, unwavering, always looking straight at the truth."
Apollo blinked back tears. *'Laying it on a bit thick there, Dad...'*

Lamiroir smiled, hiding a small laugh at Phoenix's rather dramatic proclamation. "If the light returns to my eyes," she said, "I think I will take up painting."

"Really!?!" Trucy cried, gripping Apollo's upper arm so tightly he feared she might cut off the entire limb. "Like, become an *actual* landscape painter, not just of sound?"

Chuckling, Lamiroir nodded. "I will paint the three of you," she replied. "I promise."

Trucy gasped, pressing a hand to her mouth as she pressed tight against Apollo. He couldn't blame her, feeling pretty speechless himself; Not only had Lamiroir just promised them she would make efforts to regain her memory, but that she would be coming back to see them regardless. They really couldn't have hoped for a better outcome.

"That's very generous of you, Lamiroir," Luke spoke up, shooting his siblings a fond smile. "It means a lot to us."

Lamiroir bowed her head, giving the trio a warm grin behind her veil. "Apollo, Luke, Trucy... I hope that we will meet again someday soon."

Trucy nodded rapidly. "Y-you bet! Me too!" she chirped.

"We'll be waiting," Apollo added.

Luke nodded, then held out a hand towards the door. "Lamiroir, if you're heading to London to speak to Professor Layton, maybe it's time you discussed it with Flora? So everything is ready to go once you arrive?"

"Yes, thank you, Luke," Lamiroir replied, and took a few steps towards him, a hand outstretched. "They said they would wait for us outside, I believe."

Luke took the singer's hand, guiding her to the door. "Ah, you were in the gallery with them?" he realised.

With that, the pair left the room and door closed behind them, cutting off their conversation and leaving Phoenix, Apollo, and Trucy alone in the lobby.

*View the Court Record*
As the door closed, Trucy's hands slipped from their strangling grip on Apollo's upper arm, and she pressed tight against his side, arms wrapping around his chest. Despite the residual ache in his arm, Apollo wrapped it around her shoulders, holding her close. He couldn't help but feel a little relieved now Lamiroir was gone; After the high emotions of saying goodbye to Machi and only barely scraping a bittersweet victory, having to come face-to-face with his amnesiac mother and apologise for not being able to do better was a bit overwhelming. All he really wanted to do right now was crawl into bed and sleep for a million years, the rest of the world be damned... though Trucy was welcome to join him. She could do with a break just as much as him.

"Are you two okay?"

Apollo came out of his thoughts with a surprised blink, looking up to meet his father's concerned gaze.

Trucy nodded, giving Phoenix a smile. "We'll be alright, Daddy."

"Yeah," Apollo mumbled in agreement. She was right; They might not be okay now, but, given some time, they would be. He frowned as a thought occurred to him. "You figured it out, didn't you?"

A smile teased the corners of Phoenix’s lips. "You could say that," he replied. "After you asked me about her, I kinda had to look into it."

Apollo probably would have laughed at that were he not feeling so drained; Instead, he merely let slip a single silent chuckle. "Sorry I couldn't tell you outright."

"I don't blame you," Phoenix said, shaking his head. "Finding her was unexpected enough, but to have a murder and a case on top of it?"

"And Machi," Trucy chimed in, grinning up at Apollo. "You heard Mommy; He's our new brother!"

Apollo nodded, smiling back. "Yep. He's even already joined the list of family members I've had to defend for murder."

Phoenix laughed. "Ah, and I should warn you: I've not told anyone who Lamiroir is, but your Uncle Edgeworth does already know; He was helping me look into her the other day."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Your 'secret mission'?"

"My secret mission," Phoenix confirmed, tapping the side of his nose with a wink. "Watching your trial today reminded me we need to hurry things along on that."

"Right," Apollo sighed. He decided not to bother asking for details right at that moment; He needed some breathing room after said trial, and really didn't want to have to think, not yet.
There was a long pause as the trio stood in a comfortable silence.

Phoenix looked at his watch. "Lamiroir should be done talking to the Laytons by now," he said, then headed to the door, looking back at his children. "Ready to go?"

Apollo and Trucy looked at each other, then smiled as one. "Let's go," Apollo agreed.

As Phoenix had predicted, Lamiroir had long gone by the time they emerged, finding a third floor lobby that was quiet and empty except for the animated conversation going on between Luke and his English friends.

"Lamiroir's going to call us once she's in London!" Flora excitedly proclaimed as the rest of the Wrights joined them.

"She promised to tell me the rest of her fairy tale from Borginia!" Alfendi gleefully added.

Phoenix raised an eyebrow under his beanie. "You're excited about a fairy tale, Alfendi?"

Sycamore nodded. "According to what he was telling me yesterday, said fairy tale involves a troll cutting off people's hands in return for favours," he explained. "Everywhere he went, he left bloody handprints."

"We had to go yesterday, so I didn't hear the end of it," Alfendi added, "but Lamiroir said she'd tell me the rest when she meets up with us back home!"

With that, the group left the courthouse, walking together down the stairs to the entrance. Apollo ended up at the back of the group with Emmy and Sycamore, and Emmy turned to him with a grin. "I'm going to double down on my study of Borginian," she told him. "If the Professor's going to be looking into her mysterious past, he's going to need an expert on hand, right?"

"But Lamiroir speaks Borginian," Apollo pointed out.

"Yeah, but is she really going to be up to doing all that reading herself, assuming she gets her sight back as planned?" Emmy asked. "I know the kind of research we're going to need to do for this job, and it involves a lot of reading."

Sycamore sighed, pushing at his glasses. "I hope your work while we were here has impressed your editor enough to support such a long holiday assisting my brother, Emmy..."

"I wonder if we'll have to go back to Borginia?" Emmy wondered aloud, ignoring her friend. "At least this time we know why their customs is so crazy... and I'll know better than to buy marshmallows to bring home again."

At that, Sycamore hid a snort of laughter. "Yes, you were quite distraught when they confiscated those, weren't you?"

Emmy shot him a glare as Apollo began to giggle.

"I've decided!" Flora announced as they emerged into the entrance lobby, pulling the group to a halt as she proudly turned her gaze between the four Wrights.

"Decided what?" Apollo asked, confused.

Phoenix was grinning from where he stood next to Flora, one hand resting on the head of the very
excited Alfendi bouncing nearby. "It appears Flora wants to cook for us tonight," he explained. "Before your show."

"As celebration for your win!" Flora elaborated.

"Isn't that so cool!?!" Trucy cried, standing on Flora's other side and looking equally as happy about the offer as Alfendi did. "It'd be like going to a fancy restaurant, but at home!"

Flora laughed at that. "Oh, I may work in a restaurant, but that doesn't mean I have the capability of making some of the stuff we do... unless you happen to have specially made sushi knives hiding away in that tiny kitchen of yours?" She winked at Trucy, who giggled. "I'll definitely make what I can, though. Luke, are you okay taking me to a few shops on the way back to your office?"

Luke nodded. "Sure. We can go shopping while everyone else heads home."

"I'll come!" Trucy cried.

"Me too!" Alfendi added.

Emmy laughed, rolling her eyes. "And I'll come to actually help. Five is the maximum for the Lukemobile, right?"

Blushing at the reminder of his car's name, Luke nodded.

Phoenix chuckled. "The rest of us will meet you back at the agency, then."

Once back from her trip, Flora was quick to take over the Wrights' kitchen, her hands working a mile a minute while her mouth provided a semi-constant commentary.

"Now where are your frying pans, I know you have at least- Wait, you only have one? How do you live!?!"

"Geeze, this is the smallest cutlery drawer I've ever laid eyes on... Nothing but knifes, spoons, and forks, huh? And a lone fish slice!"

"You keep books in these cupboards...? That's new, a kitchen too big for its contents..."

"Wow, this is probably the cleanest oven I've ever seen! You... You never use it, do you?"

"Not one of these plates matches another... Actually, that's impressive."

Despite her many criticisms of their meagre supplies, and the Wrights' admissions that they very rarely did more than occasionally fry things, Flora refused to back down from her promise to make something, ploughing ahead with the harried cry, "Seriously, I'd go out and buy you this stuff myself if we weren't on a time crunch!" In the end, Flora sent out Emmy to buy the few kitchen supplies she absolutely could not do without, such as baking paper, a measuring cup, some tongs, a mixing bowl... Apollo hadn't bothered listening to her full list, tuning out as the words got ever more incomprehensible to him. Nevertheless, Emmy jotted everything down in her notebook and headed off to the supermarket a couple blocks away, Trucy accompanying her as a guide.

"I'm sorry, Flora," Luke muttered as he helped his friend gather her ingredients. "I guess it didn't occur to me that we never cook in this apartment..."

"No no, I should have guessed," Flora insisted with a sigh. "I mean this is, what, the tenth time I've
been in this kitchen? And you've told me in the past that Apollo and Trucy have take-out noodles every night, so I really should have known." She paused, noticing Alfendi standing nearby, eagerly waiting to assist. With a grin, she ruffled his hair, causing the boy to wordlessly whine and wriggle on the spot in semi-faked displeasure until she withdrew. "And hey," she looked up at the watching Apollo, "everything I buy for you guys tonight you can consider a gift!"

Apollo blushed in embarrassment, rubbing at the back of his head. "Y-you really don't have to, Flora..."

"Nonsense, I insist," Flora replied with a decisive nod, hands on her hips. "Besides, I can't exactly take them home with me. Maybe I could find you some cheap and easy things to make, and you could start cooking for yourselves! It's bound to be healthier than constant noodles every night!"

As much as he considered Guy Eldoon a friend, Apollo couldn't really argue with that.

View the Court Record
With their bellies full of Flora's glorious food, Apollo and Trucy had raced to the Wonder Bar that evening for their nightly performance. It hadn't occurred to them until they were putting on their stage makeup that there was another reason Flora had chosen this particular night to treat her friends:

"Aren't they going home tomorrow?"

Apollo paused, his eyes moving from the mirror's image of his own face to his sister's. "Hm?"

"Luke's friends," Trucy explained, staring at the brush in her hand. "It's Friday today. The Bostonius is leaving tomorrow."

"Huh, guess so." Apollo paused in thought, then gave his sister a grin in the mirror. "We'd better make tonight a worthy send-off for them, then."

Trucy blinked in surprise, looking up at her brother's reflection. After a moment, she grinned back. When they received the warning call, brother and sister stood hand-in-hand at the edge of offstage, watching the final chords of the plucky bass-player ring out from centre-stage; Apollo had to admit, that woman was quite talented. As she bowed to the applauding audience, the curtains swung closed, and the stagehands immediately set to work pulling out all of the Gramarye props, helping clear the music stand and stool of the musician from the magicians' way. Apollo shot the woman a thumbs-up as they passed each other, and she grinned back, her gigantic instrument in her arms as she hurried back to her dressing room.

"The time has come, meine Damen und Herren," boomed Aderyn's voice from the speakers on the other side of the curtains. "The finale of our show, the act you've all been waiting for! It's the most wunderbar of the Wonder Bar, it's Apollo and Artemis Gramarye!"

It was as easy as breathing to slip into routine as the curtains opened, the wide smile of his stage persona plastered across his face as the audience came into view beyond the blinding stage lights. He and Trucy stepped forward in unison, bowing to the crowd as they wielded their identical wands in hand. After quickly introducing each other and 'flying' through their current opener (Trucy changed her destination back to 'London' for their English friends, after having switched to 'Borginia' the previous day), they moved on to their first trick, a simple card-based series of illusions in which the gag was that the siblings were constantly trying to one-up each other; As always, it was being very well received by the audience.

Trucy rolled her eyes as Apollo flawlessly completed his last in the trio of tricks, by far the most complicated of their entire repertoire. "What a flashy piece of nonsense!" she cried, exaggeratedly shrugging in disinterest. "Anyone could pull that off!"

Apollo scoffed, clapping his hands together and discreetly palming the pack of cards into a hidden pocket of his gloves; When he pulled his hands apart, he gave the audience just enough time to notice the magically disappearing prop before turning to his sister with a sigh. "Artemis, we're not getting anywhere with this," he proclaimed with a sad air, exactly as scripted. "I think we need to call
"A third party?" Trucy repeated, cocking her head to one side, eyes wide. "I didn't know we'd had a first and second party!"

Apollo waited for the laughter of the audience to die down before waving off her reply; That particular pun was his idea, and it was harder to hide his pride at the reaction to it every night. "You know what I mean: We need to ask a random person off the street to come up here and decide for us." He slipped the microphone out of his bag, flipping it dramatically in his hand to give the sound engineer the signal it was time to turn it on, and stepped forward to the very front of the stage to peer down into the audience with a wide grin. "Okay, random people off the street! Any volunteers?" He raised a hand over his eyes to better see the raised hands that shot up all over the restaurant, accompanied by loud cheers and whistles as the hopeful strangers tried to draw as much attention to themselves as possible. "And who of you will be voting for me?" Apollo joked, getting the mixture of laughter, cheers and good-natured booing that he expected.

Behind him, he knew Trucy was already rolling her eyes, hands on her hips. "Apollo!"

"Just kidding, just kidding!" Apollo replied, still grinning. As scripted, his sister was pacified by the statement, and he began to scan the crowds more thoroughly for an appropriate contender to join them on stage. A sparkle of light from the front row caught his eye, and he instinctively turned his gaze to investigate the source: A silver chain, hanging around the neck of a tall figure in black, the glimpse of a familiar face before they turned their head to hide it.

Apollo froze as the recognition hit him, staring in disbelief at the figure below. The shock must have activated his perception abilities, because he felt time stop and the audience fall silent, his vision black except for the blond man in the front row of the audience. That hairstyle, and that particular shade of yellow... They belonged to only two men Apollo had ever met, one of whom was safely in solitary confinement. The loud-and-proud symbol hanging off the shiny chain around his neck clashed horribly with the clear intentions of the baseball cap and designer shades the man had pulled on his head, a hand visibly trying to cover his face as he avoided Apollo's gaze. There was only one possible person this could be...

... and this was a perfect opportunity for revenge.

Time restarted around him, the audience's mutterings again registering in Apollo's ears. He smirked, casually striding closer to his target and squatting down at the edge of the stage, microphone lazily dangling in his grip. "Hello there, sir," he called, eyes locked on the man with the silver chain. "You look like a reasonable fellow... if a bit of a diva. Up to mediating our little disagreement tonight?"

The man stayed perfectly still a moment longer, then his hand lowered, his gaze finally meeting Apollo's from behind his sunglasses.

Apollo's grin widened. "Yes, hello, I'm talking to you!" he continued. "Care to join me on stage, Herr Diva?" He shrugged nonchalantly. "I'm afraid we Gramaryes don't allow anyone to hog the spotlight though; You'll have to share it."

From behind him, Apollo heard Trucy gasp - She must have noticed her brother's odd behaviour (they made a point of never mocking paying customers, after all) and approached to see what was going on. To his surprise though, Trucy was quick to dash around to his side, leaning forward to fix an equally large grin on the man in the audience. "C'mon, Herr Diva! What fun is a magic show if you don't get to take part? Don't you want to boast to all your friends back in Deutschland about this?" She winked, shooting finger-guns at him. "Surprised I know you're German? The Great Artemis Gramarye is just psychic like that!"
Below, the insistent focus of the two Gramaryes, Klavier Gavin sighed and reluctantly pulled himself to his feet. "I don't know what you're talking about," he muttered, his usual accent gone without a trace. He pulled his cap further down over his face as he walked past the pair, on his way to the stairs at the end of the stage.

Apollo resisted the urge to snicker smugly as the man finally acquiesced, the young magician getting to his feet and holding out the microphone for the other to take. "Herr Diva, everyone!" he announced to the audience, hearing Trucy's muffled giggles as she skipped back to her post by their table of props.

The crowd applauded as Klavier stepped under the lights of the stage, one hand still self-consciously on his cap as the other took the microphone. "That's not my name," he quietly protested, a faint blush visible through the tan colour of his cheeks.

Apollo raised an eyebrow as he escorted the disguised musician to join Trucy at the props table. 'And how do you think I feel about 'Herr Forehead'?'

"Then what would you like us to call you?" Trucy asked, already shuffling her deck of cards in preparation for their upcoming trick.

Klavier paused, gripping the microphone tight. His free hand had moved to fiddle with the Gavinners symbol hanging on the chain around his neck. "K-Konrad."

A loud bark of laughter echoed from the audience. Apollo thought it sounded suspiciously like Luke. It was only because he knew Trucy so well Apollo could recognise the brief pause of surprise before she gave Klavier a bright smile. "Alright Konrad, you're going to help me and Apollo here with a couple of card tricks." She showed off the spread of cards in her hand to the audience. "But pay attention though; You'll have to judge which was more impressive when we're done!"

"You can do that, can't you, Herr Diva?" Apollo added, a smirk still on his face.

Klavier shot him a glare from behind his sunglasses.
The finale of the Gramaryes' act that evening was a variant of the zig-zag illusion they had thought up on the fly the previous night, for Lamiroir's benefit; With Apollo squeezed into the apparatus of the separated boxes, appearing for all the world to be in pieces, Artemis began to wail that he was useless as a partner now and she was going to need a replacement, hence, the bringing out of Mister Hat for a short comedy routine that Apollo would try his best to interrupt from his compromised position. Finally, he was able to pull himself back together, springing from the apparatus to the cheers of the audience. Artemis abruptly changed her tune at his grand escape, putting away Mister Hat as the two fell into their farewells, the curtain closing in front of them.

Apollo flicked off his microphone and immediately sighed in relief, moving to help the stagehands put away their Props as Aderyn gave her own farewells on the other side of the curtain. "I'll be glad to get to bed tonight," he whispered to Trucy.

Trucy nodded, her arms gripping either side of the table between them to carry it offstage, props and all. "Me too."

Alongside the stagehands, the pair proceeded with the ritual of the post-show clean-up silently, not needing to exchange any words in the monotony of the familiar movements. It took no more than five minutes to securely lock everything away in their dressing room, then the pair locked hands and exited their dressing room and the backstage.

It wasn't hard to find their family and friends, seated in the usual table Aderyn gave the Wrights when they had someone in the audience. Phoenix was happily chatting to Sycamore at one end of the table, while at the other Emmy and Flora were animatedly discussing some of the tricks they had seen on stage only minutes earlier. Alfendi, in the middle, perked up as he saw the approaching duo, slipping out of his seat and racing around to meet the caped pair. "That was great!" he shouted, shooting Apollo a grin before moving to bounce at his side. "How'd you stay in that box for so long? Did it hurt? Did you know Artemis was going to leave you alone for so long?"

Apollo grinned as they approached the table; After seeing their show on Monday, Alfendi had been full of questions about all their tricks, so it didn't surprise him he was this time focussing on the biggest obvious difference between the two performances. After all, he'd spent a whole day obsessing over Valant's illusion from the concert, too. He gave Alfendi a knowing wink. "Oh no, I had no idea Artemis was going to cruelly abandon me like that," he said. "But it was okay; The magic kept it from hurting at all."

Alfendi giggled.

Phoenix waved as the trio arrived at the table. "You two ready to go?"

Trucy was looking around with a confused frown. "Where's Luke?"
It was only when Trucy asked that Apollo realised their brother was indeed missing. "That's a good point."

Sycamore smirked, pushing at his glasses. "He ran off the moment Miss Vogel left the stage," he explained. "I imagine he had someone to talk to."

"Hey, speak of the devil," Emmy interrupted with a sly smile, pointing off into the crowds near the stage.

Apollo spun around just in time to catch sight of Luke as he emerged from behind a cluster of people at a neighbouring table, a massive grin above his goatee. Behind him, his blond head bouncing above Luke's despite his efforts to shrink out of view under that dark baseball cap, was Klavier, still wearing the competing dark shades and sparkling Gavinners logo.

"Hi, Konrad!" Trucy loudly called, waving to the pair as they joined the table. "You were a great volunteer!"

Luke was biting back giggles as he stepped back, leaving Klavier face-to-sunglasses with the table at large. Klavier himself cast a furtive glance at the crowds around them, then turned to Trucy with his usual easy-going grin. "Danke, Fraulein," he quietly replied, his usual affected accent back on in full force (a stark contrast to the personality he'd exuded on stage as 'Konrad'). "It was not what I was expecting when I came out here tonight, but it was a very enjoyable experience."

"And you kept yourself from hogging the spotlight for once," Apollo replied with a smirk. "Very admirable, Herr Diva."

Klavier shook his head with a chuckle. "Are you done, Herr Forehead?"

Apollo shrugged. 'Not until you stop calling me that, Gavin.' "Sorry we couldn't invite you backstage," he airily continued. "Didn't think you could afford the tickets, even at twenty percent off."

At that Klavier scoffed, waving off Apollo's smug tirade.

"If only you'd brought your Prosecutor's Badge, maybe we could have done a disappearing trick tonight."

Klavier frowned. "Low blow."

"Nonsense, that joke has like a million layers to it," Apollo shot back, his smirk growing. "Besides, it'd be more than fair for the five minutes it would be gone."

"Is it that top hat you're wearing?" Klavier replied, an eyebrow raised. "Is that why you are so much more confident here than in court?"

Apollo scoffed. "May I remind you which of us has ventured off neutral ground and into the other's territory tonight?" He gestured to the tables nearer the stage. "You were kinda asking for it, sitting in the front row."

"As much as I'm enjoying this," Phoenix interrupted, a small smile on his lips, "I think that's quite enough, Apollo. Leave the sauerkraut alone."

Klavier gave Phoenix a curious look, but said nothing.

"What are you doing here tonight, Mister Gavin?" Flora asked, giving the prosecutor a friendly
"Yeah!" Trucy agreed, arms crossed. "I was going to invite you after the concert, but..." She shrugged, glancing away.

Klavier chuckled. "I thought it was only fair," he explained. "You have seen my show, I should see yours." His smile faded. "I wanted to wait until after the trial was done... not that I could have imagined it would end the way it did."

"I imagine the rest of the band is in shock too," Emmy chimed in. "I'm looking forward to seeing what you decide to do next, though."

Klavier's smile was strained, but he nodded respectfully at the woman. "We'll certainly make an announcement when we do. By the way, you did an admirable job as a court translator today, Fraulein."

Emmy waved off his compliment, though she was grinning wide. "Aw, shucks, just doing my job!"

"But your job is as a reporter," Alfendi pointed out. Apollo suddenly noticed the boy had at some point wandered back around the table, now standing at his uncle's side.

"And today she was a court translator," Sycamore replied, shooting Emmy a smile. "It's just a shame we missed seeing it."

Emmy winked at the pair, still preening gleefully. "You bet it is."

Anything that might have been said after that was cut off by the arrival of Aderyn, squealing with joy as she appeared at Apollo's shoulder. "What on earth do you two get up to out there in the world!?" she laughed, looking between Apollo and Klavier. "First Lamiroir, now one of the Gewinners!?"

"That's 'Gavinners', Fraulein," Klavier gently corrected, then turned to Apollo. "You had Lamiroir here last night, Herr Forehead?"

As Aderyn gave Klavier a confused stare, Luke explained, "After she was attacked yesterday, she was interested in listening to their performance, so we took her along."

"We should tell you the full story sometime, Aderyn!" Trucy chirped to the woman, bring her out of her focus on the prosecutor. "We always have exciting adventures when Polly gets a case!"

"Not always," Apollo chimed in; He was hard-pressed to think of all the events of the past few days as 'adventurous'.

Aderyn laughed, and turned to Klavier. "Werden Sie ein Teil dieser Diskussion auch, Herr Gavin? Ich wäre sehr interessiert es zu hören!"

Klavier's casual grin froze. "Er... Pardon, Fraulein?"

"Nein, nein, du gehört mir," Aderyn scoffed, shaking her head with a smile. "Beantworte die Frage!"

There was no immediate reply from Klavier, still frozen in his stare at Aderyn... though Apollo could see sweat starting to form on his brow. "Ah... j-ja, um..." He took a few steps back, glancing all around. "I would love to stay and chat, but I have somewhere very important to be, so..." With that, he turned and fled.
Aderyn only laughed. Not far away, Luke was also suppressing an attack of the giggles.

"What did you say to him?" Flora asked, watching the man go.

"I just asked him if he was going to come back and help with this 'explanation' of yours!" she replied, still chuckling. "Honestly though, as excited as I am to have a celebrity here... he deserved being scared off after calling me 'Fraulein', the sexist bastard. It's been too long since I got to use any significant Deutsch." She turned and patted Apollo and Trucy on the shoulders. "See you two tomorrow. Have a nice night." With a wave over her shoulder, she then left, returning backstage.

ATHENA ATHENA KLAVIER GAVIN'S REAL NAME IS CONRAD .
I'M GUESSING ON THE SPELLING BUT I THINK THAT'S IT .

OMG ARE YOU KIDDING THAT'S AMAZING
CONRAD GAVIN, WORLD FAMOUS SEX OBJECT
(Actually I wonder if it's Konrad for the k thing)
How did you even work that out!? 

He was at Apollo and Trucy's show last night! He was speaking without the accent, said his name was Conrad, and was trying to hide behind a hat and sunglasses while also still wearing his massive chain necklace with his band’s logo on it! It was amazing! .
(Maybe it is Konrad, I really have no idea. His brother's Kristoph, so it's possible.) .

(I'm gonna assume it's Konrad then :D)
AAAA I WISH I COULD HAVE BEEN THERE TO SEE IT

Apollo was calling him Herr Diva and kept mocking him. It was very cathartic after the day we'd had in court. .

Oh yeah congrats on that! We gotta call sometime so you can tell me the full story! Something about a song, and smuggling?

Yes, we need to organise that. Tomorrow around this time? I'm busy today. .

Sure, tomorrow sounds good. Talk to ya later Luke!

Until then! .

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook

Chapter End Notes

As always, any actual Germans feel free to let me know if Aderyn’s too off-base in her (admittedly rusty) use of the language. :)
Farewell, Bostonius

Chapter Notes

For readers not on Tumblr: A handful of the past 300+ chapters have now been rewritten to match SOJ's new backstory. **New chapters are remaining free of major spoilers for now**, however there may be unavoidable small references that pop up in character conversations (tomorrow's update comes to mind); I'll warn for such individual minor spoilers until we get to a point that the major ones are no longer avoidable.

For the spoiler-free list of chapters to avoid, click here; However, if you don't care about spoilers and just want to see what's changed, click here instead.

July 11, 10:27AM
Moonlight Airport

"You were the light of my life this past week, my dear," Clay gushed, gently pecking his lips against Flora's hand in his. "It is my endless regret that we could not spend more time together."

Flora giggled, her cheeks red. "You're too kind, sir," she replied, playing along with a curtsy. "I shall count the days until we reunite."

Alfendi rolled his eyes and mimed throwing up.

The Wrights and Clay stood on the airport tarmac at the foot of the stairs leading inside the Bostonius, having gathered early to say farewell to Sycamore, Emmy, Flora, Alfendi... even Raymond and Keats, though the latter never ventured too far from the plane. Luke paused to watch, seeing everyone in their smaller groups spread out around him: There was Phoenix and Sycamore, exchanging regrets that circumstances forbade them from spending more time getting to know each other; There was Emmy and Apollo, the former boasting about her skills in Borginian while the latter simply hid smiles and thanked her again for her help; Finally, there was Trucy and Alfendi, half-watching Flora and Clay's over-the-top romantic scene and half-whispering conspiratorially between themselves, but of what Luke couldn't possibly imagine. After the week they had had, the things they had learned, the secrets they had kept... Luke was content simply to see his friends and family smiling.

The stairs creaked as Raymond made his steady way down, Keats balancing across his shoulders. "I've received a response from the tower," he announced, silencing the group and attracting their attention immediately. "We should be leaving within the hour."

"Thank you, Raymond," Sycamore replied. "We'll be up shortly."

Raymond gave a short bow, Keats meowing in protest as his perch shifted, then the old man carefully turned around and ventured back up the stairs.

"Then this is our final farewell for now," Sycamore pointed out to the group, focusing his smile specifically on the Wrights and Clay. "We had a lovely time; I look forward to whenever we can
next call in here."

"It was a pleasure having you," Phoenix replied.

Apollo ran a hand through his hair sheepishly. "Even with Dad being called away and the concert and trial messing everything up?" he asked Sycamore.

Emmy scoffed. "If you ask me, the concert and court case only made this whole thing even more exciting!" She laughed, patting Apollo on the shoulder. "I've got so many great articles written while I've been here, even with having to re-learn Borginian... This holiday has been jam-packed!"

"Yeah, you got to see a murder!" Alfendi added, bouncing excitedly. "And then you got to find the murderer and locked him up!"

Trucy giggled. "That bit's the most exciting part!" She winked at the boy. "Maybe Polly will have another case going on when you next visit too!"

"That would be awesome!"

Clay laughed. "Man, of all the things to miss..."

"We really should make plans to do all this again!" Flora said, her grin mostly directed at Clay. "Once this whole business with Lamiroir is sorted out, we should look into making this a regular thing!"


Luke tugged briefly at the brim of his cap. "I'm sorry work pulled us away from you this entire week," he told his friends. "What with Papa's secret mission, the trial... even the Wonder Bar and the Space Center. It feels like we wasted the opportunity."

Emmy shook her head, giving her friend a stern look. "Nonsense. Did you not just hear me? All of that only made this visit better."

Sycamore nodded in agreement. "We already knew about all of your prior commitments to the Wonder Bar and the Space Center," he added. "We planned around those. The surprises that came along the way were nobody's fault and, while I agree it's a shame we couldn't spend more time together as a group, there's little use in regretting the time we did have."

Luke wasn't sure what he could say to that, so mutely stared at the tarmac below his feet instead. Barely a moment later, a pair of shoes followed by a peach dress entered his field-of-view, and Flora was throwing herself on Luke, wrapping her arms around him in a tight hug.


Luke smiled, holding back tears as he returned the hug. "I'll miss you too."

With that, the group exploded into rapid individual goodbyes between the departing four and the remaining five. Sycamore was quick to grab Alfendi, overseeing the boy's leaping hugs on the Wrights and Clay before herding the six-year-old up the stairs into the Bostonius.

"Bye!" Alfendi called, pausing halfway up to wave at the group below. Getting waves and similar calls in return, he turned and ran up into the Bostonius, giggling.

Flora ran to Clay, giving him another curtsy. "I'll make sure I come back soon."
"I'm already looking forward to it," Clay replied, kissing her hand once more. They stared at each other a moment more, their usual theatrics oddly missing, then he flashed her a grin and began to walk away, keeping himself facing Flora. "The hours shall seem like years until I see your face again, my lady!"

"I'll write!" Flora called, waving madly even though they were still only metres apart.

Clay pressed his hands to his heart. "And I shall treasure every letter your gracious hand pens!"

Phoenix took that as his cue to start herding his children back to the terminus building, placing his hands on Apollo and Trucy's shoulders. "Alright, let's get out of here, or this ship won't ever leave."

"Goodbye Flora!" Trucy cried for the third time, jumping on the woman with a hug before running off after Clay, waving over her shoulder. "Keep in touch!"

Apollo gave Sycamore and Emmy a smile and nod. "Until next time." He then turned and strolled in the same direction his sister had gone.

"Next time should be a much smoother visit," Phoenix said with a smirk, getting chuckles from the gathered group. "Don't take too long, Luke."

"I'll be right there, Papa," Luke promised.

Giving his son a nod, Phoenix wandered off after the others.

Luke stood alone. In front of him, Sycamore and Emmy were already on the lower steps, Flora making her way to join them, a hand already on the rail. Luke took a deep breath and called, "Guys?"


The young man chewed his lip, uncertain. "It's... when you're talking to the Professor about Lamiroir..." He turned his head, glancing back at his family, gathering in the distance by the airport terminus. Even from this far, he could see the brilliant crimson and teal of his siblings' capes. After everything they had been through this past week... was what he was about to do the right thing?

"Luke?"

At Emmy's call, Luke spun back around, coming face-to-face with his friends' concerned gazes. He gave them a warm smile. "Never mind." With that, he turned and headed off to join his family, waving over his shoulder. "Come back soon!"

"Goodbye!" Flora shouted back, and Emmy was quick to echo it, but their calls soon disappeared behind the general hubbub of the airport, and Luke could only watch from afar as they finally retreated back into the Bostonius.

No words were said as the Wrights and Clay watched the pudgy red plane speed down the airstrip and disappear into the bright blue sky.
Good news: she said yes.

I'll assume you're referring to what I think you're referring to and say good. If it weren't for the very specific circumstances surrounding this case, I'd be very seriously suggesting you have a problem, Wright.

Does Maya know?

I've told her bits and pieces... what she needs to know. It's not exactly my place to tell her all of it.

Thanks for everything btw.

No need for thanks, I agreed to this long ago. Not that we were expecting this specific scenario to ever occur, but that is beside the point.

Do keep me informed of everything, as I would like to know post-haste when she returns from England. And I would tell Maya soon if I were you.

Don't lecture me. The kids are already suspicious after I had to bail on them earlier.

You honestly think this kind of thing is suitable to tell over a text or a phone call? Really?

Obviously not. I'm aware how busy Maya is, and how big most of this news is, however you are both my friends and I would hate to see your relationship suffer by the needless keeping of secrets.

It's not needless, but I guess I can see your point. Don't worry, Maya's aware I haven't told her the full story. We're still arranging a trip to Kurain of some kind.

I'm glad to hear it. I'll get to work on my end concerning what we discussed. Keep me informed of events on your end.

I will. Talk to you later.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
Disagreement

Chapter Notes

Minor SOJ spoilers in that changes made to chapters 42 & 318 are referenced - It won't make sense unless you've caught up, though.

_I'm at the office with Trucy. Papa left the moment we got back; Said he had a 'secret mission' to attend to. Any ideas?_

_I thought Dad's secret mission was over with already... Don't worry, I was planning to ask him on Monday what all that was about. I'll just add that to the list_

_Alright then, I'll wait for you to talk to him. I warn you though, Trucy's a bit impatient..._

_Tell her not to worry; Dad will talk to me about it on Monday, trust me._

July 13, 9:10AM
Wright Anything Agency
Phoenix's Office

Apollo couldn't help a smile as he walked through the office's front door that Monday morning. 'A new week after the chaos of that trial...' From his bag, he pulled Machi's abandoned shades, picked up from the courtroom on Friday afternoon. _'Not that he needed them anymore, but... If we ever see him again, I can return them.'_ Chuckling to himself, he circled his desk, the one closest to the front door, and laid the sunglasses in front of his chair. With one last longing look at the dark object, he turned to leave reception, headed into the office.

Had Apollo ever arrived at Gavin Law Offices at this time, he surely would have been fired without a second thought; At the Wright Anything Agency, his 'boss' was a lot more lenient... This was still more of his childhood home than a workplace, and they treated it as such, not as a professional office that demanded respect. Sure, they did work, saw clients, but every inch of space in the allotted 'office' area still echoed seven years of memories to Apollo, whether they be happy, sad, angry, or just neutral; The office Kristoph owned, for the year-and-a-half Apollo worked there, had exuded coldness, order... the exact opposite of everything the Wrights stood for. As embarrassed as he still was about it on occasion, Apollo wouldn't give up the chaos of his family's agency for the world.

He left the door half-open as he strolled through, grinning as he spotted his father sitting at his desk. "Hey," he called.

Phoenix looked up and smiled as he saw the new arrival. "Morning, Apollo. Good weekend?"

Apollo nodded as he crossed the room towards the desk. "Mostly just recovering from the trial." He gave Phoenix a grin. "I should be asking you that. Luke and Truce said you disappeared on another 'secret mission' after we saw off the Bostonius."
Grinning back, Phoenix shrugged. He didn't reply.

Apollo waited fruitlessly. Sighing, he decided to put that particular question to the side for now; He had something else he was planning to talk about anyway. Leaning on the desk, he cast a furtive glance to the kitchen door on his right. "Where's Trucy?" he asked under his breath. He didn't need to ask about Luke; After a week off from the shelter, he would now be repaying Fox's favour by working there a solid week himself, and wouldn't be returning to the office until the following Tuesday.

"In her room," Phoenix replied, his grin disappearing. "Why?"

Apollo thought a moment, then walked over to close the kitchen and reception doors, closing himself and his father in. "I have something to tell you... related to your secret mission."

Phoenix's eyebrows shot up. "Oh?"

"Oh," Apollo repeated with a nod, dashing back to the desk. "I had a talk to Valant before he skipped town."

At that, Phoenix's eyebrows curled down into a frown, eyes narrowing. "I see. What about?"

Apollo opened his mouth to reply, then paused and closed it again. How best to put this? "A few things," he admitted, his gaze turning to the window. "Luke has another lead for his mom, but I'll let him explain that... And..." He paused again, avoiding his father's eyes guiltily. "I... asked him about my birth father."

Although Apollo half-expected Phoenix to be upset, his voice sounded warm when he spoke, and one of his hands rested on Apollo's where it pressed against the desk. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Apollo smiled, a wave of relief washing over him. "He didn't say much. They didn't know each other very well... but," he looked up, meeting his father's eyes with a grin, "apparently it was 'Reylu' that was the stage name, not 'Justice'. We had it the wrong way round this whole time."

Phoenix slowly smiled, then chuckled. "So you were right all along. I did always wonder."

Laughing, Apollo nodded in agreement. "He was telling me how Mom left Troupe Gramarye to marry him, wearing two bracelets, then showed back up a year later with only one. Just like we thought." His grin then faded, eyes drifting down to the desk. "He'd recognised who I was the night of the concert, when Trucy and I ran into him backstage. Mom, too. He wished us luck helping her regain her memory."

Phoenix's hand gave his a comforting squeeze. "He's smarter than he looks, that Valant."

Apollo smiled at that, but it was quick to die. "He told me about Magnifi, too."

He couldn't see his expression, but Apollo knew Phoenix's eyes had narrowed again at that. His grip on Apollo's hand was frozen, tightly clutching his son's fingers as he listened intently to whatever he would say next.

"He..." Apollo took a deep breath to steady himself, then looked up to meet his father's eyes. "Valant didn't kill him."

Phoenix didn't immediately react, still staring at his son. "He what."

"He didn't kill him," Apollo repeated, gaining confidence. "He didn't elaborate, but he didn't kill
Magnifi. He wasn't lying."

"I see." Phoenix withdrew his hand from Apollo's, his chair spinning to face the window. His voice was clipped, dangerous. "Did you tell him his former partner said that too?"

Apollo bit his lip; He should have guessed his father would take this personally. "I did. Like I said, he didn't exactly elaborate."

Phoenix didn't reply, staring off into space. A hand curled around his chin.

"I know this is hard to take, Dad," Apollo said. "I promise you he wasn't lying."

"So you believe him," Phoenix replied, still glaring out the window. "You think Zak did it."

Apollo couldn't help but be thrown at the accusation; As much as he thought his sister's birth father was a jerk, he would hate to label someone Trucy loved and admired so much a murderer. "It's not like Zak is the only other option, Dad."

Phoenix glanced in Apollo's direction, an eyebrow raised. "What on earth are you talking about? Two pistols, two shots... he ordered them to shoot him. No-one else was ever there."

"Dad, you're forgetting someone," Apollo pointed out, a smile dancing at his lips. "Magnifi was there too. You proved in court that Valant altered the scene..." He paused, shrugging. "Well, sort of. Who's to say Magnifi didn't kill himself?"

Phoenix didn't reply.

Apollo sighed, pushing himself off the desk. 'Fine. Don't believe me.' "Whatever. I've told you what he said. Your turn."

At that, Phoenix finally reacted, turning to look up at his son. "My turn for what?"

"You were away most of last week on your 'secret mission'," Apollo reminded him. "You said you'd tell me about it."

Phoenix finally smiled, resting his interlocked hands on top of his beanie. "So I did," he agreed. "Later."

Now it was Apollo's turn to narrow his eyes. "You keep saying that. It's been a week, isn't it 'later' enough?"

The smile grew into a grin. "Not yet."

"Dad."

"You'll see," Phoenix insisted, giving his son a wink.

Apollo crossed his arms, glaring back. "Is this because you don't believe me about Valant?"

Phoenix's grin died, and he lowered his hands from the top of his head. "Of course not. Honestly, you brought up a good point; I never considered it might be suicide."

"Mmm." Apollo looked away, unconvinced.

Phoenix sighed. "Please, Apollo. I promise I have a reason for keeping this to myself for now. Trust me."
Apollo waited a few moments before meeting his father's eyes again, trying to stay calm. "You
promised me, six years ago now, that I could help you. That you'd include me in your investigation.
You obviously didn't want to, you've never wanted to, but you let me in, you let me help." He
paused to take a breath, taking a small amount of pleasure from the guilty wince on Phoenix's face.
"Why are you cutting me out of this, Dad?"

Phoenix stared back at Apollo with a sad frown, waiting a few seconds to quietly and calmly say,
"Apollo, in this case I have my reasons. Please, trust me; I'm not excluding you on a whim."

Apollo didn't reply. After a long while silently watching his father, he turned and left in the direction
of the kitchen. He didn't bother looking back.

Although Trucy hadn't taken long to drag Apollo back into the office, he refused to interact with
Phoenix again after their disagreement, following Trucy around on her various little time-filling
projects: designing sewing patterns for clothes and cute plush toys, then actually sewing them;
practising magic tricks both old and new; watching TV; even planning a locked-room murder
mystery for some reason (Apollo could only suspect their recent case had intrigued her). Phoenix left
them alone, and, although Trucy quickly noticed the friction between them, she ignored it, allowing
Apollo to stew at their father without comment.

"I'm hungry," Trucy announced, not long after midday. "Wanna make lunch, Polly?"

Apollo sighed, pulling himself to his feet. "May as well."

Phoenix rose from his desk, tugging his beanie firmly on his head. "Well, it looks about time for me
to head out. Have fun, you two."

Trucy and Apollo watched in confusion as their father moved to leave, Apollo surprised enough to
forget he was supposed to be not-talking to Phoenix. "Where are you going?"

"Out," Phoenix replied, giving the pair a grin that infuriated Apollo all over again. "Can't tell you
where; It's a secret."

"Again?" Trucy asked, nonplussed.

Apollo groaned. "Dad..."

"See you later!" Phoenix cheerfully told them, and dashed out of the apartment before either could
stop him.

Suspicious Minds

Dad's not telling me anything. The way he was smiling at us, I get the feeling this particular secret mission specifically centers on us... and he's just left the office. I'd keep an eye out if I were you

July 13, 12:30PM
Warren St Animal Shelter
Recuporation Room

Luke bit his lip as he read the message on his phone, free hand in the pocket of his labcoat. Truthfully, he'd almost forgotten about Phoenix's odd behaviour on Saturday, once Luke had returned Trucy and Phoenix to the agency after seeing off the Bostonius.

"I'll be back in a few hours, don't worry; I'm just seeing to another facet of my 'secret mission'. You'll never even notice I was gone."

Out of obligation to his sister, Luke had stayed with her a little longer, texting Apollo for help. When Apollo told them to not worry, Luke was happy to listen and put the entire issue out of his mind, distracting Trucy for a few hours before returning to his own apartment. However, the tables had turned since then, with Apollo all-but-outright telling Luke to worry; What now?

He dashed out the door, only briefly checking his ID card was still in his chest pocket, and pushed through the double doors into reception. As always on weekdays, Simba was sat at the desk, her shawl loosely wrapped around her neck as it had been ever since the previous December. She looked up as Luke came in, raising an inquisitive eyebrow.

"Simba, if a man in a grey hoodie and cyan beanie comes in, could you let me know?" Luke asked.

The young woman wrinkled her nose. "Um, sure?"

"Thank you." Luke ducked back into the vets' rooms.

The day progressed slowly, and Luke's nervousness over what Phoenix might be planning grew. He found himself taking every chance to walk past reception, asking Simba, "Has a man in a hoodie and beanie come in at all?"

Every time, Simba would sigh and reply, "No-one's here, Northpaw." As the question was repeated over the next three hours, she began to obviously count off on her fingers, then finally just shot Luke a glare and shouted, "If you keep asking me that, I'll lock you in the surgery!"

Even though Luke knew she hadn't the slightest capability to do so, he decided to heed her warning.

Dad's back. He looks really pleased with himself too. Was he at the shelter?

No, he never came by here. I actually got Simba mad at me for asking so often. Where did he go, then?
Just as Luke was reading Apollo's reply, Duck came in to the vets rooms, frowning in confusion. "Northpaw... apparently you have something urgent on tomorrow and Wednesday?"

Luke blinked. "Um... not to my knowledge."

"It's just, Fox is insisting she's working those days because you have an urgent family thing," Duck explained, scratching his head. "Seemed very cheerful about it. I told her I'd make a note of it but... You don't know what she's talking about?"

Luke stared, then sighed.

I figured out where Papa went. He's been talking to Fox: Something about an 'urgent family thing' we're doing tomorrow and Wednesday.

What!? Hang on I'll ask him

Dad refuses to admit anything!! Just says we'll find out tomorrow! And something about Pearly's birthday but I'm 100% certain that's a red herring

Her birthday is on Wednesday, though.

Guess that's true
Sigh Dad must have planned us a trip to Kurain. I can't complain I guess, I just don't know why he's making such a big deal of it.

Yeah, it's strange he's going to so much trouble behind our backs. After last week, it'll be nice to see Maya and Pearl again.

True. I've warned Trucy, so we'll be prepared. Don't forget to act surprised, I'm sure Dad would love that

Haha, yeah, he would! I'll see you tomorrow at the agency then, all ready to go.

Even as he sent off his final text, Luke couldn't stifle a niggling thought at the back of his mind: If Phoenix was planning a simple trip to Kurain for Pearl's birthday... why had Fox been so excited to help him?

That evening, as Luke walked in his front door, he immediately set about locating his roommate. Fox wasn't hard to find, holed up in her room dancing to JPop. When Luke knocked on her open door, she jumped in surprise, silencing her music with an embarrassed smile. "Hey, Northpaw. Didn't hear you come home."

Luke flashed her a smile back, then crossed his arms with a stern frown. "My father came to visit you today."

Fox stared in surprise for a moment, then shrugged, running a hand through her red hair with a wide
grin. "How’d you know?"

"I figured it out," Luke simply said in reply. "What did he tell you?"

Laughing, Fox dropped into the chair at her desk, where she quickly busied herself plugging a set of earbuds into her computer. "That he had a surprise and I'm not going to ruin it for you."

Luke resisted the urge to roll his eyes. "We already worked out he's trying to surprise us with a trip into the mountains for our cousin's birthday."

"Oh, really?" Fox asked, shooting him a surprised look. She then shrugged again and turned to her computer, popping the buds into her ears. "Well, why are you asking me if you already know what he told me?"

As much as he would have liked to respond, Luke wasn't sure how he could answer that question, despite Fox's careful refusal to make eye contact. After a moment of thought, he turned and headed into his room. Maybe he was over-thinking it.

Luke! Daddy's taking us to see Mommy and Pearly to tell them about Mommy and Machi!

Yes, I thought that might be the reason. We only just saw Maya and Pearl a week ago, after all.

You already knew!? :(

I guessed, that's all. Have you asked Papa about it? 

Polly spoke to Aderyn, and Daddy's excused us for tomorrow night, but I'm pretending I don't know yet. We gotta be surprised for Daddy's surprise remember!

I remember. :) I'm packing my overnight bag right now. I'll see you tomorrow, okay? 

Yup see you tomorrow! Good night Luke!

Good night, Trucy.

The next morning, Luke grabbed his overnight bag, his satchel, and his hat, then ventured out of his room. Fox was in the kitchen as he passed, and she gave him a cheerful wave, sipping her coffee with one hand while the other ran a brush through her hair, all dressed up for a day at work.

"Heading out, Northpaw?"

Luke nodded, shooting her a smile. "I'll see you Wednesday night then. Don't blow anything up while I'm gone."

Fox laughed at the joke. Luke headed on and was already at the front door when she called a reply: "Have fun in Kurain! Take your time coming back tomorrow!"

He was halfway to the agency before Luke realised he'd never told Fox where in the mountains they were going.

At the office, the electricity in the air was almost palpable. Everyone knew what Phoenix had in
store, yet he refused to formally share it, wandering around the apartment with a secretive grin on his face. Apollo stubbornly did not confront Phoenix on this, still fuming over whatever failed attempts he'd made the previous day to make their father talk, while Trucy, in stark contrast to her brother, kept silent quite gleefully, stifling giggles of excitement as she waited for the announcement they knew was coming. Luke simply sat back and watched everyone else in bemusement, wondering how they got into such a contrived state of constant tension, be it anxious or excited; He was certain Phoenix knew that the kids knew about the upcoming 'trip', so why was he deliberately leaving them to stew? How long would they have to wait?

By mid-afternoon, Apollo, Luke, and Trucy were lounging together on one of the sofas, idly watching the television and alternating between mocking commercials and mocking the programmes. Trucy was in charge of the remote, flicking through channels in an attempt to find something even vaguely interesting rather than just boring or annoying, while Luke and Apollo laughed at the snippets of voices her scrolling created.

"I just feel-"

"-kind and gentle-"

"-you mean, Martha?-"

"-tipping cows-"

"-Serenade is set to top the charts for weeks to come..."

It was then that Phoenix emerged from the kitchen, beanie on his head and a grin on his lips, and stood right in front of the trio, immediately demanding their attention. Trucy quickly turned the TV off.

"So I'm sure you're all wondering why I've called you here today," Phoenix said.

"No we're not," Apollo muttered.

"You bet we are!" Trucy cheerfully insisted.

"You didn't even call us here, you conned Luke out of two days of work and Trucy and I have nowhere else to be anyway."

"We've been pondering over your message all day! It was so intriguing, we just had to know what it meant!"

Phoenix chuckled, looking between Apollo's glare, Trucy's bright grin, and Luke's neutral gaze. "Ah, well, I guess I'd better come clean: I've arranged for you three to go up to Kurain to see your mother and cousin overnight."

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Friggin' finally."

Trucy gave a loud gasp. "Wow, really? That's so surprising!" She turned to the younger of her brothers. "Isn't that surprising, Luke?"

Feeling like he had no other choice, Luke reluctantly nodded. "Yes, it's very surprising."

"It's just so surprising!" Trucy continued. "I'll need to put together a bag of things for tonight! I won't take a second, Daddy!" With that, she sprang to her feet and dashed through the kitchen door.
"We've had them prepared since yesterday," Apollo said, and pointed across at the opposite sofa, where his own brown backpack was sat. "Mine's been sitting over there all day."

Luke nervously got to his feet. "I'll get mine from my car, then."

As he shuffled to the front door, Luke heard Apollo once more round on Phoenix: "Wait, did you just say 'you three'? You're not coming with us?"

"I have something else on, regretfully," Phoenix replied. "Maya understands; She and Pearls are only expecting you three."

Somehow, Luke knew that knowing smile that so infuriated Apollo had not once left Phoenix's face.

On the train, speeding up the mountain, Trucy hugged her duffelbag to her chest. "We need to be careful how we tell Mommy about Mommy, alright?"

Were they not already used to their sister's insistent method of referring to her four parents by the same two names, Apollo and Luke would have been confused by that statement. Even so, Apollo asked, "What do you mean? She'll be happy for us, won't she?"

Trucy stared out the window, the worried frown tightening. "Remember how sad she was after Daddy died and Daddy got arrested? And she got sad because she thought she wasn't our mommy anymore?"

Luke had to think a moment to parse the entire meaning of that question. "You mean when we gave her the locket."

Apollo pulled Trucy into a hug. "Then we'll just have to remind her she's still our mom, won't we? Finding Thalassa Gramarye hasn't changed a thing."

Trucy smiled, giving a small nod as she leaned into the embrace.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
A Night in Kurain

July 14, 5:01PM
Kurain Village

The first thing Luke saw as they exited the bus outside Fey Manor was Pearl's grinning face, pulling her cousins into a hug the moment they got within reach. "I'm so glad you're here!" she cried, pulling them away from the bus as it slammed the door shut to move on. "We've been reading about your case in the papers; It looked so exciting!"

Apollo blushed, a hand running through his hair. "Er, yeah, it was... Kinda."

"We're glad to see you too, Pearly!" Trucy proclaimed, hugging her cousin tighter as the bus chugged back down the mountain behind them, venturing out of sight and out of hearing. "Where's Mommy?"

"Mystic Maya is still busy with her Master duties," Pearl told them, a hand fiddling with the bead in her long fringe. "She should be finishing soon."

Luke pressed a hand to his chin. "So that's why Papa waited so late to send us up? So she'd be free when we arrived?"

Pearl nodded, then grinned again, gesturing to the clear road between them and the Manor. "Come on in! We can wait for her inside!"

Maya took a few minutes to finally appear, hurrying into the living room while pulling fistfuls of bobby pins out of the elaborate hairstyle perched on her head. "There you are!" she cried, greeting the trio with a grin and racing to give them all a hug and a kiss from where they were seated on their cushions around the low table (the same one that would be set up as a kotatsu in winter; In summer, it was too hot to need it, so the blanket and heater were removed). "Sorry I took so long; Those Elders really like to prattle on sometimes."

"It's okay, Mom," Apollo assured her as she kissed his forehead. "We know you're really busy."

"Speaking of busy, you three got up to a lot this past week, didn't you?" Maya replied, squeezing Luke's cheeks and making the vet giggle. "Pearly and I were reading the papers!"

Trucy scoffed playfully. "Come on Mommy, you know the papers never have the full story!"

Maya laughed, sitting down on the side of the table opposite Luke; Apollo and Trucy were on her left and Pearl on her right. "Then I guess you'd better fill us in, huh?" she told Trucy, the pins emerging from her rapidly-deflating hair forming a pile on the wooden surface in front of her. "What's with this whole business about killing to a song?"

"Yes, that part confused me too," Pearl agreed, chewing a thumbnail.

Luke's gaze turned to his siblings: Similarly, Trucy was also staring up at Apollo, who was sitting, arms crossed, with his eyes boring a hole in the table. He sighed, and his eyes closed. "It's a long story."
"We've got plenty of time," Maya pointed out, gesturing to the empty room around them. "You guys aren't returning to the city until tomorrow."

The Wrights did not react, Luke and Trucy still waiting for their older brother to take the lead while Apollo sat silent and still on his cushion.

Maya and Pearl shared a worried look. "This was a rough one, huh?" Maya asked, pulling a final pin that left her hair billowing out in parallel waves down her back. "I can understand that, believe me." She reached out a hand towards Apollo, resting it on the table between them as she waited for him to take it. "Nick said you guys needed the break."

At that, the trio all looked up at her in surprise. "Papa said that?" Luke asked.

Maya nodded. "That's one of the reasons we rushed to get you up here today."

"That and my birthday tomorrow," Pearl added with a smile, which quickly died. "It's just a shame Mister Nick couldn't be here."

"He's just as busy with his own thing," Maya explained, a grin on her face that Luke couldn't help but think was a carbon copy of Phoenix's own grin as he'd sent them off from the agency earlier that afternoon.

Apollo sighed, leaning forward until his forehead rested on the table. "Don't tell me..."

"You know what Daddy's secret mission is!?!" Trucy asked, amazed.

Luke was frowning in thought, a hand at his chin. "Is he planning something else...?"

Maya winked. "Now now, don't waste time asking me things... What about this trial of yours? Pearly and me still want to hear all about it!"

"O-oh, uh," Trucy muttered, her hands fiddling with her brooch as she worriedly returned her gaze to Apollo, who was still face-down on the table. Luke half-wondered if he should lean over and give his brother a shove back into action; He didn't feel at all comfortable being left with having to explain everything to Maya. Maya herself had certainly picked up something was wrong, her smile looking increasingly forced; Pearly was similarly worried, chewing a thumbnail as her eyes flitted between her cousins nervously.

After a short pause, Apollo pushed himself off the table, taking a deep breath and letting it all out in a long sigh. "Mom... you know you're our mom, right? And nothing will change that?"

Maya's smile finally dropped from her face. "Of course, kiddo. What's this all about?"

Apollo thought a moment, then got up from his cushion, moving around the corner of the table to sit at Maya's left. "I... we just need to make sure you know that," he said. "It's very important."

Trucy's bottom lip began to quiver, and she jumped to her feet to imitate Apollo, running to Maya's right. "You won't leave us, will you, Mommy!?"

Maya looked slightly alarmed as she pulled Trucy into a hug, drying the teen's tears before they could get very far. "I'd never do that! Why do you think I would ever want to leave you?" When Trucy didn't respond, she turned to Apollo, giving him a quizzical frown.

Apollo took a deep breath. "We found Thalassa Gramarye."
Maya froze. Nearby, Pearl gasped, slapping a hand to her mouth in shock.

"Apparently there was... an accident, when she left Troupe Gramarye," Apollo continued. "She lost her memory, her sight... She woke up in Borginia, working in a restaurant as a singer, and kept doing it because she loved performing for a crowd."

"You mean Lamiroir!?" Pearl realised, watching Apollo with wide eyes. "She's...?"

Apollo gave Pearl a brief nod, but otherwise kept his attention on Maya, who was still staring back at him in shock, Trucy held tight in her arms. "We recognised her the night of the concert because she still wears her bracelet. She doesn't remember us, or anything about her old life."

Maya looked close to tears herself as she continued her stare up at Apollo. "Oh, you poor babies..." She finally broke her stare to turn to Trucy, hugging her tighter with one arm while the other reached up to Apollo, pulling him down to her level. "All that searching you did and she doesn't remember you?"

Apollo sniffed, hugging Maya back. "I just thought it was important to tell you that bit first, Mom."

Trucy was shaking, her hat having fallen to the floor. "We love you, Mommy..."

Maya laughed, though tears were also streaming down her face. "No wonder Nick thought you needed a break... This has been a rough week for you, hasn't it?"

As the three of them descended into sniffling laughter, Luke turned his attention to Pearl: The teen was perched on her cushion, teary eyes wide as she watched the scene before them, hands pressed to her face. Luke couldn't help a smile, recognising she needed comfort in this moment just as much as Maya did. He shifted around the corner of the table towards her, and Pearl started as she noticed the movement out of the corner of her eyes, watching him quizzically as the young man settled at her side. Luke simply held out an arm, and, without having to exchange a word, Pearl smiled gratefully, leaning into the offered hug.

The Wrights told the story of the past week over the hours following their arrival, taking their time in sharing every detail of their experiences. Apollo took the lead, though he gracefully allowed Trucy and Luke to interrupt with their own viewpoints whenever the need struck them. They told Maya and Pearl about the concert, leaving Emmy and Flora outside the Coliseum, their 'seats' up in the re-purposed lighting box, and the first act that Trucy adored and Apollo tolerated (Luke kept carefully neutral).

"And when they finally stopped playing," Apollo explained, "Trucy decided we should go down and meet them before the second act started."

Trucy stuck her tongue out at Apollo, making Pearl giggle.

Apollo ignored his sister with a roll of his eyes. "And, while we were down there... That's when we met Lamiroir and Machi."

Pearl blinked, confused. "'Maki'?"

Luke nodded, looking between the bemused Feys with a raised eyebrow. "Didn't you say you've been reading the papers? Machi Tobaye, Lamiroir's pianist."

Maya shrieked in shock, jumping in her seat. "Machi is Lamiroir's pianist!?"
"We thought his name was 'Matchy'," Pearl explained, chewing a thumbnail as she glanced away.

Trucy snorted, hiding giggles. "M... Matchy!?

Apollo was watching Maya suspiciously. "You've... heard Machi's name before?"

Maya turned red as all attention turned to her. "Oh, uh..." She forced a smile, waving a hand casually. "Nick said it in passing while we were planning to get you guys up here. I... assumed he was a friend of yours or something."

Apollo's eyes narrowed, but Maya appeared to be telling the truth. He decided to leave it.

"Well, Lamiroir adopted him, so he is our new brother," Trucy replied, arms crossed in thought. "Technically."

"Not that he knows that," Apollo sighed, shaking his head and turning his gaze to the table. "And who knows how long it will be until we see him again... At least we know Lamiroir's coming back to see us anyway, with or without her memories."

There was a long moment of silence. Maya's smile fell off her face awkwardly.

"But, after meeting them," Luke picked up, reaching for his satchel, "then we got to watch the Guitar's Serenade."

"Oh yeah!" Trucy cried, her enthusiasm returning. "That was amazing!"

Pearl pressed her hands to her cheeks with a smile. "Aw, I wish we could have seen it!"

Luke giggled, pulling his laptop out and resting it on the table. "Give me a moment and you will," he promised, giving the Feys a wink.

As the attention of the room turned to Luke's laptop, Apollo cast another suspicious glance at Maya. He said nothing.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
The Real Surprise

July 15, 1:25PM
Kurain Village

It had been a very relaxing evening and morning in Fey Manor. The Wrights and Feys had stayed up late, chatting about the trial, Lamiroir, Machi, and the departure of the Bostonius, and ended up cuddling in a large pile in the living room as they fell asleep. As they awoke the next morning, all discussion of the past week was ended, the family instead relaxing and focusing their attentions on the happy celebration of Pearl's sixteenth birthday.

After lunch, the Wrights reluctantly packed up their few belongings and went out to the bus stop. Pearl announced when she spotted the white metal of the large vehicle approaching around the buildings at the edge of the village, and Maya immediately turned to hugging the trio tight. "You three be good, okay?"

"We promise, Mommy," Trucy replied, pressing her cheek to her mother's.

"We'll keep you updated, Mom," Apollo added, leaning down to hug the shorter woman.

Pearl ran around to give her own farewell hugs, while Maya moved on to Luke with a cheeky grin, telling him, "Say hi to the rest of your family for me, too? And stay out of trouble."

Luke snorted as he also leaned down to hug her. "Shouldn't we be saying that to you, Maya?"

Maya scoffed, pinching Luke's nose as the young man giggled.

The five didn't stop waving to each other until the bus, and Kurain, were long out of sight.

Trucy lead the way back into the agency that afternoon, dumping her bag on the nearest of the sofas as she strolled past. "Daddy, we're-!" She cut herself off, her gaze frozen on the piano: Normally, a red cloth rested on the keyboard lid, with several of Apollo and Trucy's older and currently unused props arranged across it. Right now, all of that was gone, moved across to Phoenix's desk, and the lid had been left open, exposing the little-used white and black keys of the piano for all to see.

Apollo and Luke filed in behind their sister, also noticing the odd sight with surprise. "Was Dad... practising?" Apollo mumbled, placing his bag by his sister's.

Trucy huffed, and stomped off towards the kitchen. "Daddy! You know we get complaints when you-!" The moment she stepped through the door, she again cut herself off, but this time with a quick shriek. Apollo and Luke shared a confused glance before running after her, only to freeze themselves.

Phoenix was sat at the kitchen table, an array of papers and his mobile phone before him. Across from his chair, perched on the edge of his seat with his hands clutched tightly in his lap around a phone of his own, was Machi Tobaye, staring back at the trio with wide, baby-blue eyes.

"Ah, you're back," Phoenix said with a lazy grin. "Sorry about the piano; We're going to have to rearrange your little display, I'm afraid."
Trucy had her hands pressed tight to her mouth, suppressing her earlier shout. She turned to look up at Apollo, speechless; Apollo could only stare at the boy, unable to form any words despite the movement of his mouth.

Finally, Luke let out a nervous laugh, stepping forward towards him. "Machi! This is a surprise... What are you doing here?"

Machi opened his mouth, but then sealed it shut again, staring at his lap.

"He went to Juvenile Court on Saturday," Phoenix explained, leaning back in his chair. "They sentenced him to a year's probation."

"Congratulations, Machi!" Luke told the boy with a proud smile. "That's great news!"

"Since Lamiroir is leaving the country for a few months," Phoenix continued, "he was going to have to go to a foster home to await her return; I figured, well," he shrugged, "we've got an empty bedroom now you boys have moved out, so I had a talk with some old friends and with Lamiroir and offered it to Machi." He fixed Apollo and Trucy with a wide grin. "I didn't think you'd mind."

Apollo narrowed his eyes at Phoenix. "So that's what you were doing on Saturday..."

Trucy emitted an ear-piercing squeal, running to Machi's side to pull the surprised teen into a hug. "Machi, this is wonderful! We'll get to spend so much time together-" she paused to gasp, "-Oh! I can show you around the city! It's your new home after all, and I bet you didn't get to see much of it before the concert, huh?" She squealed again, hugging Machi tighter. "You're gonna love it here!"

"Thank you," Machi muttered, a vaguely confused smile on his face at the rapid stream of speech above him, despite the strong grip of the girl's arms around his head and shoulders.

As Trucy continued to excitedly tell Machi all about his future in the Wright household, Apollo turned to Phoenix with a glare, arms crossed. "Mom knew about this, didn't she?" he asked. "Mom Maya, I mean."

Phoenix chuckled at Apollo's quick correction, both of them knowing full well he would have taken advantage of the potential misunderstanding otherwise. "I might have mentioned it to her, yes," he admitted, shoving his hands in the front pockets of his hoodie.

"And you told Fox, didn't you?" Luke added, laughing. "That's why she was so happy about taking more of my shifts so soon!"

Phoenix just grinned, shrugging his shoulders innocently.

"When were you planning to tell us this!?" Apollo asked, indignant.

Suppressing a snort of laughter, Phoenix gestured around the room. "Right now?"

Apollo rolled his eyes as Phoenix and Luke laughed. As upset as he was about Phoenix's unexpected addition to their family... he had to admit, he couldn't really be mad about it. 'So this is what Dad was planning for us... and I got so mad at him about it...’ He turned his gaze to Trucy and Machi, seeing Trucy had calmed down enough that she was trying to engage Machi in conversation, though the boy often could not reply without first consulting his phone, typing words into it (sometimes with Trucy's help); Apollo wondered if it had some kind of Borginian-English dictionary app they were using. Putting the pair aside for now, Apollo turned back to Phoenix. "Um... I guess I should apologise. For Monday."
Phoenix smiled. "You're already forgiven."

Apollo blushed, running a hand through his hair.

"Wow!" Trucy suddenly cried, turning to her brothers and father and waving to attract their attention. "Did you hear that?" she excitedly asked. "Machi turns fifteen in February!"

"Oh, really?" Luke replied with a polite smile. "Maya's birthday is in February too, isn't it?"

Trucy huffed, rolling her eyes. "That's not what I meant." The grin returned to her face. "I turn fifteen in August!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "And?"

"I'm older!" Trucy crowed, and pulled Machi to his feet, engaging him in another hug. To Apollo's surprise, it appeared the boy had lost several centimetres of height now he was out of the heels that were a part of his concert get-up, his eyes being level with Trucy's mouth when before the pair had been equal in height. Still grinning, Trucy began to stroke Machi's golden bob of hair. "Don't you worry, baby brother," she said. "Your big sister's here to look after you!"

While Phoenix and Luke laughed, Apollo scoffed, walking to his sister's side and tapping her shoulder. "I don't think a difference of less than a year gives you the right to call him a baby," he pointed out, not bothering to hide his smile. "Little brother, maybe, but not 'baby'."

Machi started typing into his phone again.

Still with one arm around Machi, Trucy looked up at her eldest brother with her free hand on her hip. "Well, there's seven years between you and me, and seven years between you and Machi, and you call me a baby."

Apollo had to stare for a moment to even register what his sister was saying, and crossed his arms. "Um, my age has nothing to do with this. And I only call you a baby when you're acting like one."

"Ah! Pikuveli!" Machi cried in understanding, looking up from his phone to give Trucy a blushing smile. "I... not mind be called that. 'Baby brother'."

Trucy's grin got even wider. "Well, there we go!" she announced, turning smugly to Apollo. "Baby brother it is!"

Apollo rolled his eyes, but didn't complain. "I'll stick to 'little brother'," he said, then patted Machi's head, giving the boy a grin. "Welcome to the family, Machi."

Machi grinned. "Th-thank you... isoveli."

"Um...?" Apollo raised an eyebrow at the unfamiliar word, but decided to just accept it with a smile.

"So, Machi was sentenced to 'probation'?" Luke asked, a hand on his chin as he looked between Phoenix and Apollo. "What exactly does that mean?"

Phoenix smiled. "Nothing much," he said. "The term is 'released home'; He just has to be in this apartment by seven PM every night, and I'll take him to visit his probation officer every month."

"What!?" Trucy cried, offended. "So he won't get to come see our show!?"

Laughing, Phoenix shook his head. "Sorry, Trucy. No can do."
"That's not fair," Trucy muttered, hugging Machi tighter in silent apology.

Apollo's eyes were on the papers littering the table. "And you're going to school here, Machi?"

Machi thought a moment, then nodded. "Yes. We are... in middle. Of plan."

Trucy leaned over, dragging Machi a little with her arm over his shoulders, and gasped as she looked over the papers. "Wait, that's my school!" She turned to Machi with a wide grin. "You're going to my school!?"

Phoenix laughed. "He is indeed. There wasn't any reason for him to be going elsewhere, after all."

Trucy squealed, hugging Machi. "This is going to be so amazing! When school starts back, I'll show you around and introduce you to my friends! They'll love you!"

Machi blushed. "Thank you. I hope be better in English then."

"We'll help you practise," Luke promised. "I'm sure you'll be perfectly fluent by September!"

"I'm signing him up for ESL classes anyway," Phoenix said. "Just in case." He shot Machi a smile.


"So you're in Luke's and my old room, huh?" Apollo asked Machi. "Settling in okay?"

Machi had to consult his phone before he answered. "Yes, Isa bought clothes for me."

"Isa?" Trucy asked.

"That's me," Phoenix replied, shrugging. "He just asked to call me that yesterday."

Machi blushed, clenching his phone tight.

Apollo hid a laugh; He'd suddenly remembered the day he'd moved in and been immediately dragged off clothes-shopping to get him out of his school uniform. "Well, I'll help you set everything up if you need to. This is going to be your home for the foreseeable future; Might as well make it comfortable."

"Ooh, yeah!" Trucy agreed, pulling Machi towards the stairs. "Let's get your room feeling like home!"

Phoenix and Luke watched as Trucy dragged Machi upstairs, giggling madly, and Apollo laughed as he followed. Phoenix turned to Luke with a smile. "I think they're going to be okay."

Luke nodded in agreement.
Machi still wasn't sure what to think of this enigmatic Phoenix Wright.

On the day of his trial in Juvenile Court, his new lawyer took him out to meet Lamiroir and found Phoenix there with her. "This is Mister Wright; He's offered to look after you while I'm away," Lamiroir told Machi in their native Borginian. "He's the father of Apollo and Luke, the men who were defending you in the other trial."

"I know; He came to see us," Machi quietly replied, casting nervous glances at the man in the hoodie watching them with a friendly smile. "But... why does he want to look after me?"

Lamiroir laughed. "He told me he has an empty room from when his sons moved out and wished to fill it," she explained. "I understand his daughter Trucy still lives there, however. She's about the same age as you, and I think you'd get along well."

Machi did not reply. He remembered seeing Trucy a few times: At Apollo's side on the night of the concert, and later in the detention centre when she and Luke stood up to Daryan. They'd never spoken, but Lamiroir had nothing but warm words to say about the girl, and the sister of the Apollo and Luke Machi knew couldn't be all that bad.

"You don't have to accept if you don't want to," Lamiroir assured him. "A home with people you know might be more agreeable than one with strangers, but if you don't feel comfortable with them you can choose somewhere else. It's entirely up to you."

Machi gave Phoenix one last wary glance. The man had a friendly smile. When he'd dropped by during the earlier trial, Apollo and Luke had been glad to see him and accept his help, even if Apollo was annoyed about said help's crypticness. The father of the Apollo and Luke he knew couldn't be all that bad, either. Besides, as Lamiroir had barely avoided saying, there was less risk to a home with people he knew... and he would very much like the chance to get to know Apollo in particular better than he already did.

Machi accepted the offer.

It took a few days for the paperwork to go through, with Machi staying in a foster home in the meantime. With his still-hesitant grasp of English, he had been relieved when the young couple caring for him didn't try too hard to connect. Lamiroir came to visit him every day with his new probation officer, Pru Bateson, talking to Machi about the progress of the application to move his approved address to the Wrights' home, and of Lamiroir's plans for her upcoming trip to England; Lamiroir also helped Machi practise his English, though he would have preferred not to. He didn't have very many belongings, but what little Machi did own (most of which he'd brought with him from Borginia) he kept packed away in his bag. When the day finally came that it was all to go down, Pru and Lamiroir came to pick Machi up in the middle of the day, they bid his foster parents goodbye, and drove to the airport, where Phoenix was waiting for them.

Phoenix greeted Lamiroir and Machi with a grin and a cheery "Good afternoon."
"Hello again, Mister Wright," Lamiroir replied in English. "You are here to give me goodbyes too?"

"You've seen right through me, ma'am," Phoenix laughed. "My kids would kill me if I didn't see you safely off." He then turned to Machi. "Everything's all ready for you back home, Machi. And thank you again for accepting my offer."

Machi didn't reply, clinging tighter to Lamiroir's hand.

Pru guided the blind woman to a designated carer for her flight, and she was quickly checked in. They walked together to the security gate, which Lamiroir as both blind and a celebrity was permitted to be fast-tracked through, but she asked to stop before heading on. "I must say goodbye to you here," she explained to Pru and Phoenix, her hand still holding Machi's. "Ms Bateson, my thanks for your kindness since Machi's trial. I trust you will keep him out of any further trouble."

Pru grinned, tipping a non-existent hat. "It was my pleasure, Lamiroir. And don't you worry about little Machi; It's my job to keep kids out of trouble, and I'm pretty good at it if I do say so myself."

Lamiroir smiled, then turned to Phoenix. "Mister Wright, the level of kindness we have received from your family was already astonishing even before your generous offer. I don't think I can ever repay you for everything you have done."

Phoenix chuckled, shaking his head. "Please, my sons did all the hard work. You can repay us by going ahead with this operation."

Although Lamiroir softly laughed in return, Machi felt her grip on his hand tighten. "And... you will look after Machi?"

"Like he was one of mine," Phoenix replied, a hand over his heart. He gave Machi a warm smile that seemed to be hiding so much more meaning behind that thin layer of stubble, even if Machi couldn't decipher it. "We'll all be waiting for your return."

"Thank you again," Lamiroir softly replied, looking relieved. Finally, she turned to Machi, kneeling down a little to match his shorter height and placing her hands on the boy's cheeks. In Borginian, she said, "Machi, you will be good for Mister Wright, won't you?"

Machi nodded, blinking back tears as he held her hands in his. "I will. I promise. And you'll come back with stories of England, won't you?"

"And hopefully my sight and my past, if all goes well," Lamiroir added with a smile that looked excited despite her sadness. "I will be back the moment my quest is over." She took in a deep breath. "I will miss you terribly... pokani."

Machi could not stop the water trickling from his eyes when he heard that word. "I-I will miss you too, Aska," he sniffed.

Lamiroir kissed her adoptive son on the forehead, then turned and reached out for her guide. Once the man handed her his arm, they walked off to the security gate and were soon out of both sight and reach.

Machi silently wiped the flowing tears from his eyes as he watched. When he felt a hand on his shoulder, he didn't need to look to know it was Phoenix.

Somehow, Machi and Phoenix ended up hand-in-hand as they left the airport; Machi had slipped
back into his blind act a little, his mind consumed with thoughts of Lamiroir, and the familiar feeling of a guiding hand in his helped comfort him enough to at least stop the embarrassing crying. There would be no safety net of a Borginian translator anymore... Machi's existing grasp of English would have to be enough.

He missed Borginia more than ever.

Pru showed the pair to her car, having offered to drive them to Machi's new address. Although Machi expected to see Phoenix get in the front with Pru, like Lamiroir had, he instead asked to sit in the back, still watching Machi with that enigmatic smile. Machi kept his gaze out the window instead, watching the passing scenery as the airport, and Lamiroir, fell further and further behind them.

"Are you okay, Machi?"

Machi turned, seeing Phoenix's concerned gaze. "I okay," he insisted. "Th-thank you... for offer."

Phoenix grinned. "It's no trouble at all," he replied, then chuckled. "In fact, my kids are out of the apartment for the night, so you'll have some time to settle in on your own before they come back and throw everything into chaos. I haven't told them you're moving in."

Machi had to run the words over in his head a few times before he could put together the gist of it; Apollo and Luke didn't know he was seeing them again so soon?

"Ah, that reminds me," Phoenix said, reaching into a pocket. "I acquired a little something for you; Should help you get settled." To Machi's surprise, he promptly produced a small mobile phone, holding it out towards the boy with a grin. "Welcome to the family."

Machi's eyes flicked up and down between the phone and Phoenix several times before he felt confident enough to reach out and take it. "This... mine?"

"Yours," Phoenix confirmed with a nod. "And there's an app I got for you..." He leaned over, reaching out to tap on the phone screen. As Machi watched with wide eyes, he opened a program, a familiar Borginian keyboard on screen with two windows to type into and a gear-shaped button to one side. "A translator. Borginian to English, English to Borginian... probably a few other languages too." He straightened back up in his seat with a grin. "If you're stuck on a word, that should be able to help you."

Again, Machi had to run Phoenix's explanation through his head a few times, but he could already guess the purpose of the program just by looking at it. Regardless, he tested it out by typing 'talus' into the window; Promptly, the program filled the second window with the less familiar words 'hello' and 'goodbye'. Machi felt a grin spreading across his face, and he met Phoenix's expectant gaze, feeling like he was about to cry again. "Thank you, Mister Wright..."

Phoenix chuckled, pleased. "You can call me Nick if you want; It's much easier to say."

Machi nodded, turning back to his phone. A thought came to mind, a thought he suspected he would never have had were it not for the so-recent scar of Lamiroir's goodbye, and the still-burning question of Apollo's final words to him hanging over his head. "Nick?"

"What is it, Machi?"

"Is okay if... I call you 'Isa'?"

Machi hadn't had the courage to meet Phoenix's eyes, but he could hear the confusion in the man's
voice regardless: "Esah? Is that a Borginian word?"

"Isa," Machi corrected, clutching his new phone tight. "Yes."

Phoenix mused on this for a moment. "May I ask what it means?"

Machi resisted the urge to fidget. If Phoenix insisted on knowing that particular embarrassing fact, he'd prefer to withdraw the question entirely.

In the end, the boy's silence said it all. "Alright, you don't have to explain," Phoenix agreed, and Machi warily looked up to meet the man's smiling eyes. "Yes, you can call me that if you want to."

"Th-thank you, Isa," Machi sighed, smiling in relief.

Pru saw them off outside, and Phoenix walked Machi up the stairs and through the door at the top, which was labelled 'Wright Anything Agency'; Machi was quick to type those words into his phone to learn their meaning. "This your... work?" he asked.

Phoenix nodded, waving Machi through into the door beyond with a grin. "Has been for ten years now," he explained. "The 'home' is upstairs and beyond this wall," he knocked on the wall to their right, "and these two rooms are the office."

Machi slowly nodded as he mentally translated, only to gasp as he got a good look at the inner half of the 'office': Aside from the piles of miscellaneous props, the single desk, the two small sofas, and the walls packed with bulging bookshelves... there was a piano. It was an upright, a little dusty, and with more strange props arranged across its closed lid, but the shine of the black paint indicated it was reasonably new, and likely to still be in tune despite the signs of disuse. Instantly Machi's fingers itched to play it. He hadn't touched a piano since the night of the concert, a week ago now, and doubted it had been anything less than years since he'd not touched a keyboard for that long. He couldn't even remember a time before America when he hadn't had a piano to play constantly within reach in his home.

Phoenix's chuckling brought Machi back to earth. "I see you noticed the piano."

Machi blushed.

"It's mine, technically," Phoenix explained with a grin, "though I don't really play it. We get complaints." Laughing to himself, he began to clear the strange collection of items from the piano lid; Machi took advantage of the pause to quickly type Phoenix's more complicated words into his phone. "You, on the other hand, are sure to charm them," Phoenix continued, moving the small display to the desk, next to a bulky computer monitor. The lid now clear, he flipped it open to reveal the array of white and black keys underneath, and gestured to them with a smile. "Did you want to have a go?"

Machi didn't need to type anything into his phone to understand the offer. In moments, he was already sat on the piano stool with a wide grin, his hands on the keys.

"Hey, maybe I could get lessons from you," Phoenix remarked, though Machi could barely hear him over the notes he was coaxing from the disused piano; He could only guess that the man was making some kind of private joke. "I wouldn't have to pretend to be able to play anymore. Although, that might clash with your contract as part of 'Lamiroir', huh? I know all our regular performances are past your curfew, so it's probably for the best."
Machi decided not to comment.

Once Machi had had his fill of music for now, Phoenix showed him through the nearby door into the ‘home’ section of the apartment, from the kitchen and dining area next to the office, to the laundry and backdoor beyond, to the bedrooms and bathroom upstairs. Machi’s new bedroom was next to the master bedroom that was Phoenix’s and opposite from the bathroom across the hallway; Trucy’s room was next door. As they moved around the apartment, Phoenix briefly explained the house rules, that there was no going into bedrooms without asking permission, that the bathroom was to be locked at both doors when it was in use (and so was the downstairs toilet for that matter), and that failure to do household chores would be punished (though he promised Machi there would be no punishments until he was actually put on the chore list); Machi thought they all sounded reasonable enough, though he spent most of his time inputting various words into his phone before he understood what he was being told.

View the Court Record
Eventually, Phoenix left Machi alone in his new bedroom to settle in, telling him to come downstairs when he was ready, so the boy took his time becoming familiar with the sparse room; A single, neatly made bed was pushed against one wall, a short table with a single drawer at its side. A closet stood at the opposite wall, next to a section of wall that was spotted with damage, patches of dark, ripped paint that indicated a lot of somethings had been stuck or taped there. High on the wall nearby was a squat window, the tops of nearby buildings visible beyond. Machi ran to jump up against the white plaster and catch glimpses through the glass, but saw only an alleyway out the back of the apartment, and quickly realised the window’s only purpose was to let in light, lacking any kind of significant view.

As he opened the empty closet to toss in his lone bag, Machi found it hard to imagine this room had once been Apollo and Luke’s. It was so small; How had two adult men ever fit? Staring at the pockmarked wall, he could maybe imagine a second bed in the gap, but surely neither had been happy with that arrangement. ‘Maybe that was why they both moved out,’ he told himself, plopping down on the bed and kicking off his uncomfortable concert heels.

(It didn’t occur to him until later that the two figures he was imagining would not have been adults when they first slept in that small, shared bedroom.)

Downstairs, Machi found Phoenix idly paging through a magazine at the table, a small stack of papers to one side. He looked up with a smile as he heard the boy’s feet on the steps. “Ready?”

Machi had already pulled out his phone before he decided he was confident enough to take a guess at the man’s meaning. “Yes…”?

Phoenix chuckled, flipping the magazine closed. His eyes ran up and down the boy, looking concerned. “Are those the only clothes you have?”

“Thought so,” Phoenix muttered, nodding to himself. “It’s too bad I long ago donated Apollo’s and Luke’s old stuff, but…” He pushed himself to his feet, giving Machi a smile. “Why don’t you go get your shoes? We have a little trip we have to get done before your curfew starts.”

It turned out that Phoenix’s little ‘trip’ was to the local shopping centre a few blocks away. It was such a contrast to what Machi was familiar with back in Borgia: This ‘mall’ was bright and shiny, white angular surfaces everywhere he looked, so much space, and what seemed to be hundreds of different kind of stores, small and large, all housed together in one massive building. Back home, Machi had seen a place like this only once, and it had been a cramped affair, full of pressing crowds, dark colours, and smooth curves; The individual shops inside had been similar varieties of ‘small’, and there were nowhere near as many… not that he had much of a chance to look around. Phoenix knew exactly where he was going, and led Machi quickly through the snaking hallways without
room to pause.

It was in one of the larger shops they stopped to look at clothes. Machi tailed Phoenix as he picked out a few differing sizes of the same simple white shirt and black pants, then he sent Machi into a changing room. "Try these on," he told the boy. "Find which one fits you."

This was a new experience for Machi, and it took him a minute to translate what he had been asked to do; Back in Borginia, he'd started out wearing hand-me-downs from the older kids in the orphanage, then, once Lamiroir took him in and they began to gain fame, all his new clothes were tailor-made, designed specifically for performing in and becoming casual wear only after they wore out. It was strange to be taking off his clothes in a semi-public area and trying on things. How was he supposed to know which fit best?

Despite his issues, Machi eventually picked out the top and bottom that he decided hung on his torso or waist the most like his performing outfits, and took them back out to show Phoenix. The man examined them for a moment, muttering to himself, then gave Machi another smile and led him back out to the piles of clothes. "Now we know your size, let's find some stuff you like, shall we?"

It was a similar story in the shoe store they dropped by on their way out, minus having to change in a dressing room. Machi's favourite part of that trip was that he was allowed to wear what he picked out almost immediately. He wasn't going to miss those concert clothes, or those uncomfortable heels.

Halfway back to the agency, Phoenix spotted a cart being pulled down the street towards them, and pointed it out to Machi with a grin. "Do you like noodles, Machi?"

Machi paused, then typed 'noodles' into his phone, just to double-check the similar-sounding word did indeed mean what he thought it meant. "Yes, I like noodles."

Phoenix chuckled. "What about salt?"

That word Machi had to look up out of pure confusion. "Uh... Yes?"

Laughing, Phoenix checked his watch. "We've got just long enough... Hope you're more certain about that than you sound." He gave Machi a wink, then slapped a hand on his shoulder and guided him down the street.

The man pulling the cart looked up as they approached and broke into a smile. "Hey, Phoenix!"

Slipping out from behind the pull-bar, he jumped around to the back of his cart, suddenly full of life. "No kids today?"

"Afternoon, Guy," Phoenix replied. "Nope, I sent the kids away for the night. Just got this one for now." He patted Machi's shoulder and laughed, leading the boy around the side of the cart just as a window there opened, revealing the man with the noodle-hair he had been speaking to. "I should introduce you; Machi, this is Guy Eldoon of the famous Eldoon's Noodles cart."

Eldoon scoffed, already whipping something up in a red bowl much like the one sitting on his head. "Flattery ain't getting you anywhere, Phoenix."

Machi decided to give the man a polite smile anyway, his hands laden with the bags of their shopping trip. "Hello yourself, Mikey," Eldoon replied, pausing in his work to lean over his counter and give the boy a smile. "What are you doing with ol' Phoenix here, huh?"

Phoenix was laughing before Machi could even begin to process the question. "It's a long story," the
man said. "Short version is, Machi's staying with us for a while... and he has to be home by seven."

Eldoon thought a moment, then dropped a red bowl of steaming noodles on the counter. "I won't keep you then," he said, getting to work on a second bowl. "I'll mix you up one of Pollo's special mixes, Mikey-boy. You don't look like a salty kid to me."

Machi had no idea what Eldoon was saying, but mumbled a nervous "Thank you," regardless.

Back at the agency, Machi took his time putting his new clothing in his closet, then ventured back downstairs to play some more of the piano. Phoenix sat and listened for a while, working at the desk, but eventually got up and left, shooting Machi a smile that assured him the reason was nothing to do with the music. Even so, after a while Machi grew bored of playing, and decided to take the chance to explore his new home a little, starting with the crowded office, right where he was sitting at the piano stool. He began by picking a random direction: Anti-clockwise.

Directly in front of him, the large portrait overlooking the piano immediately drew Machi's attention. He made a note of it to ask about later.

To his left as he slipped out of the stool were the bookshelves around the desk. Out of curiosity, he translated a few of the book titles using his phone. To his surprise, every one he tried seemed to be on a different random topic.

There was a movie poster hanging on the wall behind the desk, next to the window. It didn't have a title, but Machi could have sworn he'd seen a similar poster hanging somewhere before.

The windows themselves looked down on the street outside. Across the road was a posh-looking hotel, and Machi amused himself for a little while 'spying' on some of the lower-leveled rooms foolish enough to leave their curtains open.

Opposite the movie poster, on the other end of the room-width windows, was an old-looking television. It was sitting on top of an array of ancient devices, and a small pile of remotes sat next to it. Machi wisely decided not to fiddle.

Past a few more bookshelves was the door into reception, and a tall plant sitting in a white pot. Next to that was a set of staircase drawers, with a trophy-top-hat tower on the highest step, and a poster hung on the wall above: Apollo and a slightly younger Trucy, decked out in their crimson and teal top hats and capes, pointing identical wands at the camera. Machi paused, staring up at the poster. He hadn't looked too closely at Trucy before, but now he saw Apollo in that top hat and at Trucy's side... Why were they wearing outfits almost identical to that yellow magician from the concert? The capes lacked the card suits on the ends, and they wore a different style of brooch at their necks (not to mention their hip-pouches were entirely unlike Valant's belt and gun holster), but the similarities were impossible to ignore. He'd just written Trucy off before as some kind of fan, but... This would explain why Apollo had been so knowledgeable about the illusion at the concert. Hadn't there been a moment when the illusion first came up, when Apollo had made some kind of declaration that Machi hadn't been able to decipher before the court had moved on? The text on the poster was minimal, and Machi didn't need his translator to read it: "Apollo & Artemis Gramarye".

The door opened and Machi jumped back as he turned to look, seeing Phoenix stepping into the room. The man smiled as he spotted the boy, his eyes taking in Machi's position next to the staircase drawers. "Admiring Apollo and Trucy's stuff?"

Machi blushed, casting a glance back at the poster. "Um..."
"Oh, right, I haven't told you anything about the Agency itself yet, have I?" Phoenix laughed, walking over to the desk and picking up a slip of paper before circumventing the piles of props as he headed to the boy's side. "Did you know Apollo is more than just a lawyer?"

Machi wasn't sure how to answer that. He wasn't even sure what he was being asked.

Seeing the boy's non-response, Phoenix chuckled, then handed him the slip of paper - a flier boasting the same image as the poster, but with illustrated borders and a lot more text. "For now, I think you'd better understand just reading this. You can ask all the questions you want when they get home tomorrow."

As Machi examined the flier, Phoenix strolled away.

It was a couple hours after they got back that Phoenix seemed to suddenly remember 'going to bed' was something they needed to do. After being directed to have a shower, Machi headed into his bedroom, getting used to his new pyjamas as his bare feet walked small circles into the carpet. In his head, his mind walked similar circles over everything that had happened that day, everything he had learned. Tomorrow, Apollo and Luke and Trucy would be here too. Would they appreciate his invasion of their home? He couldn't help but worry, despite all their kindness to him, that he would not be wanted. That question was still burning at the back of his head, the question he had been asking himself again and again since the murder trial had ended, only harder after he had quietly asked that German prosecutor what it meant in a moment alone:

Why had Apollo called Machi 'little bro'?

Machi was lying on top of the covers of his bed, fiddling with his phone, when a gentle knock at the door heralded Phoenix's arrival. The man slowly pushed it open to poke his head in the doorway. "Ready for bed?" he asked.

Nodding, Machi quickly put his phone on the bedside table, and started wriggling himself under the blankets.

Phoenix chuckled, entering the room and sitting on the edge of the bed as Machi settled down on his pillow. "The first day in a new place is always chaotic, but I hope you'll grow to love it here. We'll certainly love having you."

Machi didn't reply.

After a pause, Phoenix shook his head, then reached over and patted Machi's shoulder with a smile. "Goodnight, Machi. Don't stay up too late." As he stood, he flicked on the lamp on Machi's bedside table, then headed to the door.

Without pausing to think, Machi called back, "G-goodnight, Is-... Thank you."

Phoenix stood at the door a moment, then turned his head to give the boy a warm smile. Without a word, he flicked off the light and left the room, closing the door behind him.

View the Court Record
"She should be in touch with us shortly," Flora said, sipping her tea. "She didn't seem to want to delay at all."

Hershel nodded, a hand on his chin as he sat back in his chair at the cafe. He mused quietly on the rather long explanation he had just been given, a slight hum his only noise.

The Bostonius had arrived back in London earlier that day, greeted at the Aerodrome by Hershel and his parents, Roland and Lucille; Once the elderly couple had showered their affections on their grandchildren (and, to his discomfort, Sycamore), and Hershel had given his own 'welcome backs' to the group, they all moved on to a nearby cafe to discuss the outcome of the trip... although, despite her pleasure at seeing her son and grandchildren, Lucille's worries for them spiked enough at the tale of the murder at a concert that she and Roland left early, leaving the three younger Laytons and the two members of the Bostonius crew to chat alone.

Discussion of the week in Los Angeles passed quickly, Alfendi happily talking about the murder and the magic trick, Flora of the concert itself, and Emmy of how she "single-handedly saved Apollo's case in court"; Sycamore merely resigned himself to reigning all their wild exaggerations closer to reality. Flora finished the story off, passing on the details of Lamiroir's plight, the singer's upcoming surgery in England to restore her sight, and her desire to find and recover her past.

"Yeah, Luke said Machi is a son to her," Emmy added, idly tapping a finger against her empty cup. "He'll be stuck in LA now, serving a sentence for smuggling."

Hershel nodded. "It would be very hard for Lamiroir, yes," he agreed. "In which case, it would be prudent to start looking into leads as soon as possible."

Sycamore glared at the tabletop in front of him, but said nothing.

"Are we starting the investigation early, Papa?" Alfendi asked, swinging his legs back and forth under his chair.

"Indeed we are," Hershel replied, giving his son a smile. "Nothing too exciting just yet, but we can get started researching what we can while we wait for Lamiroir to contact us."

"That should be easy enough," Flora said. "She's famous; There should be loads about her, right?"

Emmy gave a bitter laugh. "You'd be surprised," she said. "She only recently entered the English-speaking world, and even in Borginia her main draw is that she's intensely private, withdrawn... and mysterious." She sighed. "I did some researching myself for work - Not much of a holiday in the end, really - and there's literally nothing before her debut in that tiny restaurant."

Sycamore looked up from his glare at the table. "Is this a figurative 'literally' or a literal 'literally'?"

"As far as I could tell, a literal one," Emmy replied with a smirk. "I read like five Borginian articles that outright said there was no Lamiroir before the Restaurant de Chanson."
Hershel hummed in thought, rubbing his chin with a stern frown. "If that's our only lead, I fear we won't be getting far..."

Alfendi gave a world-weary sigh, leaning back in his chair. "That's not fair."

"There is another."

Everyone looked up at surprise to Sycamore, who kept his gaze uncomfortably on the table. "What do you mean?" Hershel asked.

"There's another lead," Sycamore clarified, meeting his brother's eyes. "I don't know what it is, but someone we know does."

Emmy cocked her head to one side. "You mean Luke? That strange goodbye he gave us?"

Hershel's eyebrows shot up. "Luke?"

"Oh yeah, that was strange, wasn't it?" Flora agreed, then turned to her father to explain, "As we were leaving, Luke stopped us with a message to pass on to you about Lamiroir, but he changed his mind before telling us what it was."

Instead of replying, Hershel frowned, staring at his teacup as he mused on the information.

"Are we going to ask him about it, Papa?" Alfendi piped up, tugging on his father's sleeve. "Get him to tell us what it was?"

"I'm more curious as to why he changed his mind," Sycamore admitted. "He seemed especially excited for Lamiroir to regain her past. Why would he hold something back like this?"

Hershel pressed his hand tighter to his mouth, his frown deepening. "I think I might have an idea."

Hershel wrote a letter to Luke that very night, though he waited a few days to send it. He chickened out of mentioning what he'd been told of the aborted message half-given, assuring himself Luke would surely offer the information himself in his reply the following week. In the intermission, Lamiroir had arrived in the country and officially hired the famous Professor Layton to look into her past, although she freely admitted it would be a tough search and there was little they could do until after her surgery was done: All had agreed their one major lead was to go to the location of Lamiroir's earliest memories in person, with Lamiroir in tow, and simply ask questions until a clue surfaced. Unfortunately, this was going to be impossible for another month or two, depending on how the upcoming surgery went and how fast the middle-aged woman recovered. In the meantime, Emmy had firmly promised to continue her Borginian language studies and do her part to help, gathering and translating all the Borginian articles related to the famous singer to pass on to her former boss; Until then, she and Sycamore were once more off to travel the world, agreeing to return when the investigation itself started for real.

In all honesty, Hershel was wary about confronting his former apprentice as Sycamore had suggested. He knew Luke like a son from the years they had spent together as teacher and student, travelling England, travelling the world, and solving puzzles of all sizes left, right and centre. Only once before had Luke held something back from an investigation: He'd been a frightened ten-year-old, terrified his father was killing the very town he ruled, seeking out the help of a man he didn't know and couldn't make himself trust fully until they were already almost done with the investigation... after they'd cleared Clark's name. If there was one thing that would convince Luke to not tell his beloved Professor everything he knew, it would be his family. The only other option was...
that Luke didn't think whatever he knew was important or relevant, but, somehow, Hershel didn't think that very likely.

It was a regular rainy afternoon in London that Wednesday. Alfendi had locked himself up in his room, the occasional shrieks of play escaping through the thin walls. Quite happy to leave his son to his own devices, Hershel retreated to his office, sitting at his desk with a sigh. He'd been trying to distract himself with his archaeological work, but the question of Luke kept returning to him every time he looked up and saw his wall of photos, his eyes invariably landing on the images of either Luke himself or his parents; Try as he might, Hershel still felt a twinge of guilt that he somehow hadn't been in California himself when the Triton family had their fateful accident. What kind of godfather was he, that he wasn't there for Luke in his greatest time of need? What kind of friend was he, that he hadn't been there to prevent Clark's death, to stop Brenda's kidnapping?

For the millionth time since the incident, Hershel dismissed his guilt with a shake of his head, firmly turning away from the wall of photos. It didn't do to dwell on the past. A gentleman looked to the future.

And yet.

Hershel grabbed his phone off the desk and dialled Luke's number.

There were a handful of rings before the other end picked up. "Professor?" came the voice of the young man who had once been Hershel's self-proclaimed apprentice. "It's not often you call me!"

"No, it isn't," Hershel agreed, smiling as he pictured the young vet sat in that sparse room of his apartment, from the photos he'd sent when he moved in earlier that year. "It's not too early for you, is it?"

"Just gone seven," Luke assured him. "It'll be... three in the afternoon over there?"

Hershel chuckled. "About that time, yes."

"Ah," Luke laughed, then fell into silence. When Hershel did not reply, he continued, "Papa tells me a friend of the family - she's been pregnant for a while now - finally gave birth last night. It's a girl, I think. Apollo's promised to show me their announcement when I get in to the agency before I head off to the shelter."

"Pass on my congratulations," Hershel replied. "Am I likely to recognise their names?"

Luke thought a moment. "I'm not sure. We don't see the Gumshoes often, since they live outside the city. Mostly they keep in touch with Papa and Apollo. The others might go visit them today, though."

Hershel nodded. He didn't recognise the name, but that didn't mean Luke hadn't written about them in his letters at some point. "My last letter to you hasn't arrived yet, has it?"

"No, no letter yet," Luke replied, and Hershel could almost hear him shake his head before he started to laugh. "I'm looking forward to writing my response already! I have to tell you all about our new addition to the family!"

"Oh?" Hershel asked. "This baby?"

Luke laughed louder. "No, Professor!" He stopped talking for a few moments, calming himself down. "If Lamiroir's contacted you yet, she knows all about it. If not, it'll be in my next letter."
"I see," Hershel muttered in surprise; He would have to ask Lamiroir what Luke meant later. "Speaking of Lamiroir, she arrived in London after I sent that letter. She's safe and unharmed, and preparing for her surgery soon."

"That's good!" Luke chirped. "I'll tell everyone that when I next talk to them."

Hershel nodded. He was running out of topics to stall the inevitable.

There was a long pause from the other end of the phone line. "Why did you call me, Professor?"

Hershel winced, and almost chickened out... but then his gaze fell on that happy graduation photo of himself, Claire, Clark, and Brenda. He steeled his nerve. "I'm told you very nearly had a message for me. Before the Bostonius left Los Angeles?"

"O-oh, that," Luke muttered. "They told you about that...?"

"They did," Hershel confirmed, a note of sternness in his voice. "Did you want to share it with me?"

Luke didn't immediately reply, and when he did, it was with a high-pitched, nervous laugh. "I-it was nothing, Professor, honest. I know you'll figure it out in no time."

Hershel almost sighed; So Luke was intentionally withholding information, not just dismissing something as irrelevant. "Luke..."

"D-don't worry about it," Luke insisted. "I, um, I have to get going. Trucy will be impatient to see me, and Apollo will be excited to introduce Maggey to Machi. I'll talk to you later, Professor!"

"Wait, Luke-!"

There was a beep in his ear as Luke hung up.

Sighing, Hershel put the phone back down on his desk. He thought a moment or two, running over Luke's words in his head, then frowned, a hand rubbing his chin. "Is that what you're hiding, my boy...?"

Hershel immediately made plans for another visit to Lamiroir.

View the Court Record
Machi's second evening and morning at the Wrights' home was a lot noisier than his first. All that was thanks to Trucy, who, despite disappearing after dinner with Apollo, was apparently trying to spend every waking moment with her new 'baby brother'. The exertion of constant concentration to translate her endless stream of words and actually reply to them was tiring, but mostly Machi was just relieved that, despite their initial reactions to seeing him, all of the Wrights were happy to have him in their home. He had never had much of a family before... it was nice to finally have one he could call his own, even if it was only temporary.

He'd been woken that morning by a bang at his door, his new 'big sister' calling, "Machi! Come and get breakfast!" He didn't need his phone to translate, though it still took him a moment or two. Rubbing at his eyes, he slipped out of bed and went to follow Trucy's footsteps downstairs.

Over the simple cereal that was serving as their first meal of the day, Trucy happily prattled about her show the previous night, detailing her and Apollo's illusions as though they were actual magic and not just tricks. Machi briefly regretted not bringing his phone to make notes and translations, but soon found on listening carefully to Trucy's words that he could understand more than he initially thought he could (or at least could guess from the context of her rambling). On reflection, that was how he had gleaned what was going on during his murder trial too.

Trucy insisted on showing Machi how to wash up when they were done eating. He didn't have the words to tell her Phoenix had already shown him the previous day.

Machi found Trucy waiting outside his door when he had gotten dressed. She gave him a big grin, grabbed his wrist, and proudly announced, "Machi, you're about to see the private show of a lifetime!" before dragging him down the stairs and through into the office.

Phoenix looked up from his desk as the duo burst in, raising an eyebrow. "Where's the fire?"

"Not now, Daddy!" Trucy cried, leaving Machi by the piano (the former display from the keyboard now being rearranged around the portrait on top) as she dashed to the staircase drawers, digging around in them almost madly. "Is Polly here yet?"

"If he was, he'd be in this room," Phoenix pointed out, sharing a confused look with Machi. "Why?"

Trucy turned away from the drawers with a grin, pulling out a black top hat and a wand identical to the one in the poster. "If Machi can't come to the Wonder Bar, we'll bring the Wonder Bar to him!"

"Wonder Bar...?" Machi repeated.

"That's the restaurant where they perform every night," Phoenix explained.

"It's been a while since I performed alone," Trucy added, running back around to grab Machi's wrist and drag him towards the sofas. "If Polly doesn't get back soon, I'll have to make do and give you a solo show."
Machi fell down on the cushions of the red sofa, his back to Phoenix's desk. "You are... magician?"

Trucy nodded, sitting opposite Machi and placing her hat and wand on the table. "Yep! Polly and me come from a long line of magicians!" As she spoke, she reached into the top hat and pulled out a deck of cards and a handful of metal rings that looked far too big to actually fit in there. "We've been keeping up the family tradition, even though Polly insisted he wanted to be a lawyer like Daddy used to be."

"And you never stop bugging me about that, too."

Trucy spun around in surprise, both she and Machi turning their gazes to the reception door as it opened, a young man in a crimson cape standing on the other side with a smirk. "Polly!" Trucy cried.

"We've been eagerly awaiting your arrival," Phoenix called from his desk. "Apparently."

Apollo softly laughed, pulling the door closed behind him. "Morning, Machi."

"Good morning," Machi automatically replied.

Trucy patted the seat at her side. "Polly, come here!" she ordered.

Apollo didn't move, crossing his arms as he eyed the small pile of props on the table. "You're planning to give Machi a private performance, I take it?"

Huffing, Trucy turned away from him, nose in the air. "You don't have to help if you don't want to."

At that, Apollo laughed, heading to the staircase drawers. As Machi watched, he took the teal top hat off the top of the tower there, then the crimson one below it, and replaced the teal hat on the trophy. "You should have warned me; We could have taken home some of our props last night."

Trucy blinked, then looked up in surprise to where Apollo was rounding the couch, grinning down at the pair as he placed the red hat on his head. "Really?"

"Really," Apollo laughed, then pointed to the kitchen door. "And, if we want to give Machi a real show, we're gonna need more space than we have in here."

After a moment of confused thought, Trucy whooped, scooping up her small pile of props before skipping off towards the kitchen.

Machi nervously got to his feet, watching Apollo as the young man waited for the boy to join her. "Uh... thank you, isoveli."

Apollo snorted, reaching out a gloved hand to ruffle Machi's hair. "No thanks necessary; We love showing off. Now c'mon," he patted Machi's back, gesturing to the door, "you've got a magic act to see!"

Machi noticed Phoenix hiding a smile behind a hand as they raced past.

Just as they had promised, Apollo and Trucy's double act was quite the sight, despite their assurances they were using an act as old as the spare props they were wielding and the version they were currently using on stage was much better. They'd appropriated the dining table to store their props, moving one of the chairs across the room for Machi to sit in as he watched, although even then they
were frequently reigning themselves in as though used to a larger space, occasionally whacking their wands or hats against the ceiling or backing into the kitchen counter or neighbouring wall. It took Machi a moment to register the name Apollo started calling Trucy was 'Artemis', the same name attributed to her on the poster and flyer, confirming his suspicion after seeing said poster that it was her stage name (he had come across the Greek mythology connection purely by chance not long after). The pair shot a lot of banter back and forth, but kept slipping into what Machi assumed was their routine, a rapid delivery that he had no real chance of deciphering with his still-minimal knowledge of the language; Usually, Machi's confused look as a reaction seemed to be enough of a reminder for them to slow down, even if they would only forget themselves and resume their speed a minute later.

The final 'trick' of their show involved the black top hat, giving it briefly to Machi to confirm it was indeed empty with no hidden pockets, only to then proceed to use it as a pair with Trucy's Magic Panties, disappearing items into one, pulling them out of another, and endless variations on that, even pulling what appeared to be the same thing out of both at the same time... and Trucy briefly pulling Apollo's gloved hand into view from the brim of her panties.

"Apollo, stay out of my panties!"
"Keep your panties out of the Magic Hat and I will!"
(This exchange was another victim of the language barrier that Machi didn't fully comprehend until much later.)

Trucy dramatically sighed, poofing her Panties away into the ether. "Well, I guess that's it for-"

"Nope, I think I see something else in here," Apollo interrupted, making a show of examining the inside of the Magic Hat. Ignoring Trucy's confused stare, he reached in, feeling around for a long moment, then triumphantly emerged with a dark object clutched in his hand. "Aha! I think this belongs to you, Machi." Grinning, he held the object out for the boy to take.

Machi blinked, glancing between Apollo's face and hand for a few seconds before hesitantly reaching out to take it. It wasn't until his fingers curled around the cool lens that he realised what it was with a gasp: His sunglasses. He lacked the words in English to gush about how he'd owned this particular pair since his 'blind' act began, that he'd lost track of them after the murder trial, that he'd forgotten until now that they'd even disappeared. He couldn't find the words to ask Apollo where he had found them, lacking any memory of where they'd been misplaced. Instead, all he could do was look up at Apollo with wide eyes and whisper in wonder, "Thank you."

Apollo just grinned in return.

The pair wrapped their show up with a bow, and Machi clapped enthusiastically, calling, "Bis! Bis!"

"Thank you, thank you!" Trucy replied, tipping her hat with a grin. "You're a lovely audience!"

Apollo bit back laughter, a hand on the brim of his hat. "Just wait 'til tomorrow; We'll take home some of our newer props to give you a proper show!"

"Ooh, yeah!" Trucy agreed, spinning her wand in her hand as she turned to her older brother. "Maybe we could try out some of our new ideas while we're at it!"

"Just the illusion-based ones, yes," Apollo replied, shooting a glance at Machi. "I think our 'jokes' will be hitting a language barrier more often than not."

Machi blushed, an arm pressed to his chest as he clung to his elbow. "Sorry..."
"It's not your fault, Machi," Apollo insisted with a smile. "Nobody expects you to be instantly fluent in English."

Trucy giggled, dropping her wand on the table and jumping to Machi's side, enveloping him in another of her tight hugs. "Don't you worry, baby brother. Luke's promised to teach you, remember? And we're all going to help!"

Machi started to nod, but then paused, frowning. "Luke..." He looked around the room, confirming it was still empty apart from the three of them. "Where Luke?"

"He's not coming in today," Apollo explained, cleaning up their props into a neat pile. "He'll be at work until... the Tuesday after next, I think he said."

"That long?" Trucy asked, surprised.

Machi stood, gently disentangling himself from Trucy's loosened grip. "But... this work," he said, gesturing to the office and hoping his meaning was clear. "Yes?"

Apollo paused a moment before smiling, a hand pulling at the brim of his hat. "Ah, I meant his other work. Luke is a vet."

"He looks after animals!" Trucy explained, seeing Machi immediately reaching for his phone. "You know what an 'animal shelter' is, right?"

Machi thought a moment, then pulled his phone from his pocket.

"You want me to spell out those words for you?" Apollo offered, heading to Machi's side.

Just as Machi was about to accept the offer, Trucy loudly squeaked, bouncing forward and grabbing her brothers' arms. "I've got a better idea!" she announced. "Let's go visit Luke! Then we can show Machi what an animal shelter is, and what a vet does!"

Machi blinked, staring at Trucy as he translated her words in his head.

Apollo opened his mouth with a frown, then closed it again. "Alright, I have to admit, Luke would probably love that," he said, "but would Dad mind being stuck here alone while we're all out?"

"Don't worry about me, I'll be perfectly happy," came a shout from the next room.

"Stop listening in to our private conversations!" Apollo shouted back.

"Daddy agrees!" Trucy crowed, clapping her hands. She then rounded on Machi with a grin. "What about you? Wanna go see Luke?"

Machi thought only a moment or two before nodding with a smile.

View the Court Record
Even though their visit was ostensibly to show him what a 'vet' and an 'animal shelter' were in person, Machi still looked the words up on his phone during the bus trip, Trucy bouncing at his side and Apollo sat sideways on the seat in front of them. The teen had to admit, he found the thought of going to this shelter exciting, having never been to one before and never really getting to interact significantly with dogs or cats back in Borginia. Would Luke let them play with the animals? He hoped so. A part of him wondered if the Wrights were allowed to have pets, or if it would be crossing a line to ask.

Trucy took Machi's hand the moment they got off the bus, leading him and Apollo around the corner and down the road to where the shelter was. He could hear the loud revving of a machine floating in the air, and found as they walked down the path that it was a green lawnmower, being pushed up and down a short strip of grassy lawn by a tall man with black hair, a large pair of headphones on his head. Nearby was a large sign, a cartoony dog and cat pointing to the building from atop the words "Warren St Animal Shelter" written at their paws in a bold and colourful font.

Apollo laughed under his breath, fiddling with the mesh gate of the property with the mowing man. "This is new."

"Luke mentioned they added a fence, didn't he?" Trucy replied over the din of the nearby lawnmower, pulling Machi through onto the concrete path beyond.

The buzz of the mower abruptly ended, and Machi turned to see the man seemed to have spotted them, pulling his headphones around his neck. "Aren't you Northpaw's family?" he called.

"That's us!" Trucy replied, she and Apollo both waving to the man. "We thought we'd come and visit him!"

The man laughed, and gestured to the building beside them. "He'll be inside somewhere. If you can't find him, just ask Simba at the front desk."

"Thank you, Mister Duck," Apollo replied, nodding his head respectfully before waving his younger siblings inside. Behind them, the man replaced his headphones and started up the loud mower once more.

Inside, Machi let himself be briefly distracted looking around the reception. It wasn't all that big a room, but the double doors on either side seemed to imply the same thing could not be said for the rooms beyond. A desk stood between them, high enough at the front to be comfortable for a standing adult to lean against; Behind it, he could see the top of a computer monitor, indicating there was space for someone to sit on the other side. Aside from Apollo and Trucy, looking around curiously on his left and right, there didn't seem to be anyone else around.

"So where will Luke be?" Trucy asked, crossing her arms and looking up at Apollo. "Dogs or cats?"
"Like I have any idea," Apollo mumbled, his eyes flicking between the double doors. "He might even be in the vet area."

Abruptly, one of the doors on the left swung open, a blonde woman with a blue shawl wrapped loosely around her neck coming in with a sheath of papers in her hands. She paused as she spotted the trio, eyes widening behind her pointed glasses. "Y-you're-!

Trucy grinned, giving the woman a wave. "Hi!"

"Ms Simba, isn't it?" Apollo asked, arms crossed. Machi saw a spark in the lawyer's eyes that he remembered seeing during his murder trial, a stern glint that cast judgement upon whoever he turned his gaze on; Despite that, his expression was casual, matching the polite words coming from his mouth. "Nice to see you're doing well."

"Y-you too," Simba mumbled, avoiding Apollo's gaze as she slunk behind the desk, busying herself with the shuffling of her papers. "Southpaw, wasn't it? That cape's new."

"It's 'Apollo' actually, but Southpaw's fine," Apollo replied, ignoring her comment on his cape. "You haven't repaired that necklace, I notice. How did it break, again?"

Machi cast a glance at Trucy; She seemed as confused by the conversation as he was, blue eyes flicking between the two adults with a slight frown.

Simba paused. "My cat, Servalan," she eventually replied, laying her papers on the desk. "Sh-she got it pretty good; It's unrepairable, actually." Abandoning the papers, she turned back to the doors she had come out of. "I'll go get Northpaw for you." With that, she disappeared.

Apollo let out a quiet sigh as the woman disappeared, staring at the doors. The spark faded from his eyes. "Be careful with her."

Machi and Trucy shared another confused look before returning their gazes to Apollo. "Polly?"

"She is... bad?" Machi added.

Apollo's eyes turned down to the two teens, his expression suddenly uncertain. "Just... be careful."

Before either could reply, the double doors were again shoved open, this time admitting a red-haired woman in a labcoat, a stethoscope slung around her neck; Her eyes locked on to the trio and then to Machi with a massive grin. She let out a squeal and jumped forward towards the boy. "You must be Machi!"

Machi's eyes widened, and he stepped backwards. "Y-yes...?"

Trucy giggled. "Hi, Fox!"

"Our dad told you, I assume?" Apollo asked, smirking.

The woman laughed. "Him and Northpaw!" She turned back to Machi, hands resting lazily on her hips. "You enjoying it here so far? I was just telling Northpaw, Luke to you, that he had to take you up here or by our place so I could meet you myself, after all that trouble I went to covering for him the other day." She laughed again. "And then he was telling me he spent that morning wasting time anyway, so someone didn't think their plan through before sharing it with me, huh?"

Half of her rapid stream of words had flown over Machi's head. He could only stare up at her
blankly, unable to comprehend if she expected a reply.

"You have to slow down!" Trucy informed the woman with an accusing glare, one arm slung over Machi's shoulders protectively. "He's not that good at English yet!"

Fox blinked in surprise, then gave Machi a sheepish grin. "Oh, um, right, sorry. I forgot you're Borginian."

Apollo sighed, then rested a hand on Machi's shoulder by Trucy's arm, giving the boy a smile as he gestured to Fox. "Machi, this is Fox. She shares an apartment with Luke."

"And work with him, too," Fox added, then held out a hand. "A pleasure to finally meet you, Machi."

Machi paused a moment to mentally translate, then smiled and shook the woman's hand. "Nice to meet you."

"Fox!"

Everyone turned to the double doors as they once more were pushed open, a harried Luke standing in the doorway, Simba meekly standing beside him with a box in her hands. Surprisingly to Machi, Luke was lacking his distinctive hat, wearing a labcoat and stethoscope identical to Fox's. He was slightly hunched over, a happy cat (white except for its ears and the tip of its tail) perched on his shoulders and rubbing lovingly against his brown hair. Raising a hand to hold the cat, Luke stepped forward carefully, giving his siblings a small smile, "Hi guys," then turned back to Fox with a frustrated look. "Could you not wait three minutes to finish up!?"

Fox snorted, though she did look sheepish. "Can you blame me for being excited?" she replied, walking back to Luke's side and reaching out to pull the cat from his shoulders. "C'mere, Dottie."

The cat meowed in protest, but its claws were quickly detached from Luke's labcoat and the feline was held tightly in Fox's arms, where it quickly seemed to settle down into a contented purr (Trucy quietly cooed at it from Machi's side). Behind them, Simba shifted from foot to foot in the doorway, eyes downcast.

Luke stretched his back as he returned to his full height, clearly relieved to not be so awkwardly hunched over anymore. His smile seemed much more genuine as he then turned his attention back to his siblings. "So, not that I'm complaining, but what are you three doing here?"

Machi felt Apollo and Trucy's eyes on him, and briefly panicked that they expected him to explain until suddenly Trucy was talking: "Machi didn't know you had another job, and instead of just telling him what a 'vet' and an 'animal shelter' were, we thought we'd show him!"

"We figured you wouldn't mind," Apollo added with a smirk.

Luke chuckled, shaking his head.

Machi took a deep breath, pulling out his phone to show Luke. "I look up words on way," he admitted. "B-but I never go to animal shelter before... It very interesting." He couldn't bring himself to meet Luke's eyes for more than one hopeful moment, fearful of rejection.

"Well, in that case, I'd better show you around then," Luke promised, chuckling. He turned to Fox. "You okay finishing up with Dottie alone?"

"Of course I am," Fox replied, her eyes on the dozing feline she was actively stroking in her arms. "Isn't that right, you cutie?" she cooed, her voice going up an octave or two as she blew kisses at the
cat's black and orange ears. The cat ignored her, its tail dangling over Fox's elbow, the orange tip lazily swinging back and forth.

"We'll see you later," Apollo told Fox, holding up a hand in a small wave.

"Take your time, hey?" Fox replied with a grin, carrying the cat back through the doorway Simba was still standing in. Simba herself cast her eyes over the Wrights only once before mutely following.

Luke and Apollo shared an amused glance, Trucy giggling at Machi's side. Luke then gestured to the other door, giving Machi a friendly smile. "We'll start over here. Do you like dogs, Machi?"

Machi nodded, jumping to Luke's side as the pair headed through the doors together. "Owner of restaurant had one," he explained, "but I not see it much."

The doors closed behind them, and Machi gasped as he registered the new room they stood in, stretching out before him into the middle distance. Aside from a small nook with a door on his immediate right, the lengthy hallway was lined on either side with the transparent doors to small enclosures, each holding somewhere between one and three dogs that all ran to investigate the new arrival, their barks sounding muffled through the plastic.

"Welcome to Warren Street Animal Shelter, Machi," Luke said with a grin, slowing leading the shocked teen down the path. "Who would you like to meet first?"

Machi felt his heartbeat quicken as he numbly walked at Luke's side, the soft giggles and gentle footsteps of Apollo and Trucy behind them. He would... get to play with an animal? That had been a dream of his for years, as far back as he could remember; The glimpses he had seen of other kids cuddling cats, playing fetch with dogs... They'd filled him with such longing, but he had always told himself that was a pointless dream, that he had no means to support a pet, and later that he had no time, too busy acting as Lamiroir's 'seeing eye dog' himself (not that he could ever hold that against her; he'd done it gladly). The yellow dog belonging to the owner of the restaurant they'd met in, the Restaurant de Chanson, had never been allowed inside, and Machi himself was never allowed outside after dark without an adult escort, so he never saw more than a glance as he arrived and left either end of his performances, no matter how much he asked to stay and give the dog a hug as he'd seen so many other, more fortunate, children doing to their own pets without even a thought. And finally, years later, here Machi was, about to indulge in that dream for the very first time.

Machi's vision blurred. He pressed his hands to his face, his lungs fighting for air, and found his cheeks wet under his fingers.
Trucy was the first to notice Machi's suddenly-distressed state, cooing the same way she had over the cat back in reception. "Aw, don't cry, Baby Brother." She wrapped her arms around him in a hug.

"Are you okay, little bro?" Apollo asked, jumping around in front of Machi with a worried expression, the same way he'd been looking at Machi the entire last day of the murder trial.

Machi felt a fresh wave of tears coming on at their words, and rubbed his eyes to clear them. He didn't trust his voice not to waver, so he just nodded, giving Apollo a grin.

Luke minutely sighed, relieved. He jerked his head towards the end of the corridor, smiling at Machi. "There's a bench out the back; Why don't you come sit down for a bit?"

Despite Trucy's comforting arms around his shoulders, Machi felt guilty and embarrassed as they went through the door; Thanks to his ridiculous body deciding to cry against his wishes, he was missing out on the chance to meet those dogs, was ruining their trip, making his new family worry. He rubbed harder at his eyes, willing them to dry, but nothing changed. A moment later, they were through another door, emerging back into the sunlight; Machi could hear the distant hum of the lawnmower out the front, and the padding of small feet on grass.

Feet? Or... paws?

Machi looked up and gasped. In front of him was a tall fence encircling a sizable enclosure, a variety of small dogs racing around inside. One paused from its mad dash, its black eyes on the Wrights as it moved to the fence and stuck its nose inquisitively through the wire.

The teen felt the clenching hand on his heart loosen. Maybe Machi hadn't missed his chance to meet a dog after all.

Trucy guided Machi to a bench against the wall nearby, where they sat down together. Apollo sat at Machi's other side, but Luke remained standing. "Feeling better?" Luke asked.

Machi nodded. "Yes, thank you." He turned his gaze back to the enclosure, watching the single dog that had taken notice of their arrival. It was white, fur sticking out in every direction, and probably no taller than Luke's knee; On top of its head, pointed ears stuck straight up, and behind them a short tail did the same, shivering slightly in some kind of restrained wag.

"We give all the dogs time out here to run around," Luke said, and Machi realised his interest had not gone unnoticed. "Looks like Donnie there has taken a liking to you."

Machi smiled, watching the dog shove its nose against the fence as if it might move away at its touch, still watching them intently. Machi hid a sniff by rubbing his nose.

A door to their left, one Machi had not noticed until now, swung open, and Fox emerged in her white labcoat, the mostly-white cat stretched out over her chest and hanging sleepily from one shoulder, supported by the crook of Fox's elbow. The woman grinned as she spotted the quartet,
approaching with a call of "Hi again!"

Luke sighed, giving his co-worker an exasperated look. He pointed at the cat. "Fox... why?"

Trucy leaned away from Machi, pressing a hand to her mouth to stifle giggles.

Fox shrugged innocently. "She didn't want to go back in her box. She's not hurting anyone."

At that moment, a peal of deep barking erupted from the nearby enclosure, and Machi looked around to see it was coming from the small white dog who'd been watching them. Its barking quickly attracted the attention of several of the other dogs, who joined it with barks and yaps of their own, all directed at the cat. In response, said cat simply turned its head the other way, tail curling from where it hung over Fox's arm.

Luke directed a glare at Fox, then turned and took a few steps towards the enclosure, holding out a hand. "Okay, that's enough. No barking at the cats; We discussed this."

At his call, the dogs settled down into various states of whining, a few obediently giving up to return to their play while several others sat or lay in the area, trying to hide their continued gaze on the group at the bench. Only the white dog Machi had seen earlier continued to stand at rapt attention, ears and tail on alert as it stared the cat down with an audible growl.

Luke gave it a warning look. "Donnie, no growling either."

The growls stopped, but the white dog continued to stare, its tail shivering in excitement.

Sighing, Luke turned back around, returning to the group. Machi was shaken out of his amazement at the ease with which Luke had calmed the dogs by movement at his sides, and he noticed Apollo and Trucy shooting each other excited grins, engaging in some kind of silent, secret conversation between themselves.

"Seriously, you gotta tell me your secret sometime," Fox told Luke, her free hand gesturing to the dogs. "What are you doing that they always listen to you like that?"

Luke's cheeks turned pink, and he shrugged. "Oh, I just talk to them, that's all," he insisted. Before Fox could argue, he was pointing to the cat in her arms. "Hey, if you've got Dottie out here anyway..." He looked to Machi with a smile. "Did you want to meet her? She's a very friendly cat, I promise."

Machi was already nodding excitedly before he'd even fully translated the question in his head, guessing the request from Luke's gesture alone. "Yes thank you!"

Fox laughed, adjusting the cat in her arms as she stepped towards the boy. "Here you go. Be careful of her claws." She detached the sleepy feline from her labcoat, laying Dottie down in Machi's lap; Dottie pressed up against Machi's front and immediately lay back down in a tight ball, purring against Machi's abdomen.

For a few moments, Machi was in too much shock at finally being friendly with a cat to move. Finally, he forced his hand into his lap to pet Dottie's head between her mismatched ears, the grin on his face immovable.

"Dottie's a girl?" Trucy asked, her own hand straying into Machi's lap to scratch behind the cat's ear.

Fox nodded. "All calicos are. Well, almost all."
Apollo frowned, his eyes flicking between the two vets. "Really?"

"It's genetics," Luke explained, hands slipping into the pockets of his labcoat. "The tortoiseshell pattern, orange and black; That's caused by two differing X-chromosomes."

"Naturally," Fox picked up, "a male cat with two X-chromosomes is extremely rare. Usually sterile, too."

Apollo hummed to himself, staring off into the middle distance. "Interesting."

Machi longed to pull out his phone and look up their complicated words, but Dottie was lying right on top of his pocket and he didn't want to move her.

"But Dottie's a calico, not tortoiseshell," Trucy pointed out, looking at Fox. "Didn't you say she was a calico?"

At that, Fox remained silent, shooting a smirk at Luke, who sighed. "We don't use 'calico' in England," he explained. "We'd say Dottie is tortoiseshell and white."

"If it's more white than not," Fox said, turning to Trucy, "it's a calico; 'Caliby' if it's got tabby patterns too, and then 'torby' if it's not got much white."

Luke repressed another sigh, pressing a hand to his face. Machi got the feeling this was something they'd probably argued about in the past; Given Luke's frustration, Fox had probably won.

Trucy cooed, her attention back on the cat in Machi's lap. "We're learning so much today!"

Apollo chuckled, getting to his feet. "So if it wasn't for that black ear, she'd just be a white cat with orange bits," he pointed out.

"We had one of those classic calicos come through here a few months back," Fox said. "You know, just like the pattern they paint on those waving lucky cat figurines?" She held one hand up in the air, gesturing like a cat trying to bat at some high object.

"Oh yeah, those," Apollo replied, arms crossed in thought. "Didn't think that pattern had a name."

Luke was looking at Fox. "By 'classic calico', are you talking about Lucky? She disappeared fast. We only had her a few days."

Trucy scoffed, still scratching Dottie's ear. "That's not surprising; It'd be cool to have a real-life cat exactly like one of those figurines!"

"It's more than just that," Luke explained. "They paint that pattern in the first place because it's traditionally lucky. Cats with Lucky's pattern are very rare, and worth a lot of money to the right people; I'd hate to guess how many zeroes a male with that pattern would go for."

"That'd be super rare," Trucy realised, and smiled. "And that'd make it more lucky, right?"

"Don't get your hopes up," Apollo warned. "None of us are allowed to keep pets in our apartments, remember?"

Trucy huffed, crossing her arms, and gave Dottie a longing look.

Machi continued to pet Dottie in silence, hiding a smile. He was pretty sure the Wrights were already lucky without the aid of a cat... At least, they'd been lucky when it came to Machi. "Is alright if I meet dogs now?" he asked.
"Sure thing," Fox replied, leaning down to pluck the sleeping cat from Machi's lap. She gave Luke a grin. "Northpaw?"

Luke laughed, and gestured to the dog enclosure. "Right this way, Machi."

---

I'm bored. What r u doing?

We're at Luke's animal shelter showing Machi around. Right now he's being literally dogpiled :P .

Dude. On his first day with u u took him to see someone he's already met? Harsh
Sides space is way more interesting than some lame pets ;)

I am going to tell Luke you said that and he is going to kill you and I am going to get him a not guilty verdict because you deserved it .

Jk dude, u no that ;) Of course u no this means u gotta bring him round to mine tmrw

The space center you mean? .

Duh. What kid doesn't love space? Take him to the museum at least

I'll ask him if he's interested once we finish up here .

He's gonna say yes ;)

I think I'll leave what he's gonna say to him. :) Seeya tonight .

Til then dude

---

View the Court Record
I have just been informed via a very excitable detective's texts that Maggey Gumshoe has given birth to a daughter. Just so you all know when you wake up :) And Apollo: Maggey says to check the forum for her announcement.

Apollo: OMGOMGOMGOMG I'LL GET ON THE FORUM RIGHT NOW
Apollo: HER NAME'S FELICIA AND MAGGEY'S INVITED EVERYONE TO VISIT HER IF THEY HAVE TIME

Trucy: AAAAAAAAA DADDY CAN WE GO VISIT THE BABY?!
Trucy: Wait Machis not in this group CAN WE INTRODUCE MACHI TO THE BABY AND MAGGEY AND MR GUMSHOE?!

Luke: That's good news! I have work still, but you guys can go ahead if you want.

Apollo: Luke seriously can you drop by the office before going in to work? I want to at least show you the pictures Maggey posted!

Luke: I suppose I can do that. I'll have to be gone by 8:40 at the latest.

Trucy: Hurry up! Daddy's letting us go visit her today!

After waking us all up with excited screaming, yes.

Trucy: WE CAN'T SLEEP WE HAVE A CUTE BABY TO MEET

Apollo: I'm on my way ;)
Apollo grinned as he threw himself through the door into the agency's office, already pulling his laptop out of his bag. "Dad! Truce! Machi! Is Luke here yet?"

Phoenix looked up wearily from where he sat at his desk, one hand fruitlessly trying to eliminate that one curl of hair that hung down from his spikes more often than not nowadays. "Not yet."

Hiding a smile, Apollo walked to the table, laying his laptop down on the glass surface; Looking around, it appeared it was just the two of them in the room. "Not get much sleep, Dad?"

Phoenix scowled. "I'm regretting not waiting until morning to tell Trucy."

Apollo fought not to laugh. Instead of replying, he decided to leave his laptop where it was and headed towards the kitchen. "Could you let me know when Luke arrives?"

"Sure," Phoenix muttered, waving a hand.

In the next room, Apollo found Trucy and Machi sat at the dining table, hunched around Trucy's school laptop. At the sound of the door swinging closed behind him, they looked up as one, grinning excitedly as they recognised him. "Isoveli!" Machi called, waving in greeting.

"Polly, Polly!" Trucy cried, beckoning for their older brother to join them. "I'm introducing Machi to Maggey and Mister Gumshoe!"

Apollo laughed at her enthusiasm, waving in reply as he wandered over to join them. "Aren't we doing that later anyway?"

Trucy scoffed. "We can't waste time with introductions! We have a cute baby to see! A cute baby, Polly!"

As he shook his head at her insistences, Apollo got close enough to see what was on the screen of Trucy's laptop, and recognised a photo from their family gathering at Edgeworth's a few Christmases ago. This particular photo was Maggey and Adrian sitting together - a moment Apollo realised in retrospect must have been when Adrian realised who her online friend 'Blackbird' was - and smiling up at the camera in a break from their chat. Obviously Trucy's idea of an introduction was showing Machi pictures and talking at length about who they were as people.

"Trucy tell me Maggey is friend of you," Machi explained.

Apollo nodded, and gestured to the photo. "Adrian too. Did Trucy tell you about Adrian?"

Machi looked back at the picture on the screen. "Little, only."

"What do you take me for, Polly?" Trucy said, arms crossed. "Of course I told him a little about everyone else in these photos!"
Apollo laughed, reaching for the arrow keys to page through the image files. He felt the nostalgia of that night prickling at his mind as he saw the snapshots flip past his eyes; There was Edgeworth, Franziska, Gumshoe, Kay... even Pearl and Maya. He paused on a photo of Maya and Phoenix, taken from a distance and without their knowledge; Even if he didn't know them as well as he did, he suspected the way they were looking at each other was more than enough evidence the pair were romantically involved. "Even...?"

"W-well," Trucy muttered, looking away, "I didn't go into Mommy Maya and Pearly much. That's too much to explain."

Apollo nodded. He noticed Machi watching them curiously; At first, his instinct was to ignore it, but upon further thought, he decided to hold back information was to be cruel, and turned to their little brother with a smile. "Like Trucy says, it's very complicated, but... Maya here," he pointed to the photo, "is Dad's girlfriend. She's been our mother, because our other one disappeared when we were little."

Machi's eyebrows shot up. "Oh! Then, why she not here?"

"She lives up in the mountains," Apollo continued. "Her job keeps her very busy, so we don't get to see her much."

"We'll take you up to see her when we next visit!" Trucy promised, grinning. "You can meet Pearly too!"

"Pearly is Maya's cousin," Apollo added, unsure if his sister had mentioned that already. "And, by extension, ours too. She also lives in the mountains."

Machi giggled, turning to Trucy. "Thank you. I like that very much."

When the shout of "Luke's here!" came from the office, the trio in the kitchen wasted no time abandoning Trucy's laptop to charge back into the office, finding Phoenix and Luke standing around the former's desk; Luke seemed a little distracted, but still smiled and waved as he saw his siblings coming.

"Luke!" Apollo cried, almost amazing himself by how much more enthusiastic than Trucy he was to see their middle brother, a true reversal of their usual roles. Jumping forward, he grabbed Luke's shoulder and pulled him towards the sofas. "C'mon, I want to show you what Maggey posted on the forum this morning!

Luke allowed himself to be dragged back across the room, and sat on the nearer of the red seats. "Her announcement, right?" he asked. Trailing behind them, Trucy and Machi sat on either side, wearing identical grins of excitement.

Apollo nodded, sitting opposite and reaching for his laptop. "Yep!" He busied himself pulling open the lid and typing in his password, revealing the open webpage of Maggey's announcement that he'd left up when he left his apartment earlier that morning. "Here it is." He spun the laptop around, pushing it towards his siblings with a smile.

Luke pulled the computer closer, Trucy and Machi leaning forward to read it. "Ah, I thought I'd remembered right that it was a girl."

Trucy pressed her hands to her mouth, muffling the high-pitched squeal coming from it. "She's so cute!"
Machi frowned a little, then pointed to the screen. "This is... her name?" he asked. "Fel-iz-ah... Gumshoe?"

"It's usually pronounced 'Felicia', I believe," Luke corrected. "Although, if I'm wrong, I'm sure you'll know when you go to see her."

"We can let you know later if you are," Trucy giggled, elbowing Luke with a wink.

Luke chuckled, shaking his head.

The back cushion of the sofa the trio sat on creaked as it was pushed down by a weight, Phoenix leaning down over Luke's shoulder to look at Apollo's laptop screen. "I'm surprised Maggey's had the time to post an announcement, to be honest. I wonder if she asked for Gumshoe's help."

"You guys will have to pass on my congratulations when you see them," Luke said, pushing the laptop back towards Apollo. "Oh yes, and the Professor's, too."

Apollo almost dropped his computer as he reached to grab it. "The Professor?"

Machi's eyebrows shot up. "You mean... Professor Layton?"

Luke nodded. "I got a surprise call from him this morning, and mentioned the new arrival."

"Uncle Professor called you!?" Trucy repeated, surprised.

"Huh, that's unusual," Phoenix muttered, frowning as he pushed himself off the back of the sofa. He curled his fingers around his chin, slowly rounding the lounge and the trio sat there. "What did he want? You usually keep in touch purely through letter."

Apollo couldn't help but notice Luke's sudden avoidance of eye contact, the small pause before the vet replied, "He wanted to let me know Lamiroir had arrived in London. She's preparing for her surgery."

Machi's face lit up with his smile. "I-is... Lamiroir okay, yes?"

Luke giggled, nodding. "Don't worry, she's fine; The Professor is keeping an eye on her."

"Mm-hmm," Machi mumbled, his cheeks pink as he curled up in his chair. News of his adoptive mother's safety seemed to have made his day all on its own, and he must have been a little embarrassed at how obvious that fact was.

"So when are you planning on leaving?" Luke asked, his eyes on Phoenix.

Apollo's eyes narrowed. Luke was being as transparent as ever that he was hiding something.

"Ooh yeah, we can't keep them waiting, Daddy!" Trucy chirped, jumping to her feet with a wide grin.

Phoenix laughed; Apollo had no idea if he'd noticed Luke's avoidance and was letting it pass, or just found the sudden change of subject amusing. "If you're so impatient to get going immediately... Let me go find my hat." With that, he headed off for the kitchen. "Be warned, visiting hours might not start for a while yet."

"We'll survive a little wait, Daddy," Trucy replied with a knowing nod of her head.

With a chuckle, Phoenix disappeared through the kitchen door.
Luke got to his feet, reaching into his pocket. "Y'know, I almost forgot..." He pulled out his phone, looking between his three siblings with a smile. "I thought maybe we could get a picture of you guys... send it to Lamiroir once she gets her sight back."

Machi gasped, jumping out of his ball to land feet-first on the carpet. "Really!?!" he cried. "W-we send Lamiroir picture of us!?"

Trucy squealed in delight, running around the couch at lightning speed to grab Machi in an excited hug. "Yes yes yes! Quick, Luke, take a photo for her!"

Apollo couldn't help laughing as he shoved his laptop into his bag, rushing to join the pair. "Actually, yeah, that sounds like a great idea!" He made sure to arrange himself on Machi's left, his other hand on the teen's back as he leaned down to match his younger siblings' height. "C'mon Luke, hurry up! Dad'll photobomb us if he gets back!"

The others laughed, though Apollo doubted Machi really understood what he had said; Trucy jumped at Machi's right, pressing the three of them together in a half-hug, and Machi giggled as he raised his arms to hold across their backs.

Luke held up his phone, opening his camera app. "Say cheese!" he called.

Apollo raised his left hand in a wave, grinning widely. He didn't need to look to know Trucy and Machi were doing much the same thing, shouting in unison, "Cheese!"

The camera in Luke's phone went off with a flash and a loud click.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
It was nearly a new month, the end of Machi's first in the Agency, and still he had had only minimal time with Luke. Sure, the vet had still spent plenty of time with his family, but so far they had all been hurried weekday visits in the morning before Apollo arrived... excepting the handful of longer weekend stays that tended to take up the whole day. It had been a surprise for Machi to learn that, in addition to being a vet, and the famous Professor Hershel Layton's former apprentice, Luke was also quite a talented violinist.

"I brought this!" Luke had announced as he met Machi and Trucy that first weekend, proudly holding up a small black violin case for Machi to see. "I thought we might be able to play for each other today!"

"This?" Machi repeated, watching as Luke lay the item down on the table, opening it to reveal the instrument inside. "One... viulu?"

Luke nodded. "A violin, yes," he replied, taking out both violin and bow. "I've been playing since I was eight or so."

"We didn't mention that?" Trucy asked, grinning. "That's Luke's role here at the agency; He plays the violin."

Trucy had gone on to explain to Machi how she had wanted to use Lamiroir's music in their magic act, but Apollo had talked her into instead recording something of Luke's, 'inspired' by the Lamiroir song she wanted. Machi had thought the entire charade was incredibly funny, but the notion of hearing a 'cover' of his music intrigued him greatly (once he'd looked up what it meant, of course). Luke playing his versions had led to Machi playing his original accompaniments had led to the pair playing together; Their separate arrangements meshed together surprisingly well, with Luke taking his cues more from Lamiroir's vocals than Machi's piano, creating a final product that was similar to the original while at the same time being something totally new. Machi had never played with a violin before, only with Lamiroir's voice and guitar, and he couldn't help but find the whole experience inspiring... He couldn't wait for Lamiroir to return, for the three of them to one day play together.

This particular Wednesday was the first weekday Luke had off from the shelter since before Machi moved in. He'd arrived at the agency shortly before Apollo, and now the two musicians were happily playing an arrangement of one of Lamiroir's songs, Machi on his piano while Luke's violin played over it. Apollo chuckled as he passed through, shooting them a proud smile before moving off into reception with a handful of papers; Phoenix similarly tugged on his beanie with a smile before disappearing in the direction of the kitchen.

Trucy leaned over the back of the nearer sofa, pouting as the music came to a halt. "I wish I played an instrument..."

Luke lowered his bow with a laugh. "Are you jealous, Trucy?"
The teen huffed, burying the lower half of her face in the sofa cushion. She grumbled something incomprehensible into the red leather.

Machi twisted on the piano stool, his phone in his hand as he ran 'jealous' through the translator; The result he got almost made him laugh, but he bit down his amusement to give Trucy a sympathetic smile. "You can sing?" he offered.

Trucy sighed dramatically, dragging herself off the cushion. "But I don't know the words! I can't speak Borginian!"

Machi opened his mouth to tell her how easy his native language was, but changed his mind when he realised he didn't know how to say so in English.

Luke lowered his violin, placing it down on the desk with a thoughtful frown. "So... if the lyrics were in English, you'd have no problem, right?"

"Yeah," Trucy agreed, dangling her arms over the back of the sofa as she slumped back down again. "'Cept I don't know 'em, I can't translate 'em, and you know online translators never work..."

Laughing, Luke turned back to his younger siblings. "Well then, you have a very important question to ask Machi, don't you?"

Machi's grip on his phone tightened in surprise.

Trucy took a little longer to register Luke's meaning, her confused stare slowly extending into a wide grin. "Oh!" She perked up immediately, spinning to face her younger brother. "Machi! You know the lyrics, don't you?"

"L-little, only," Machi admitted, his fingers interlocking around his phone. "I not sing, I play piano."

"We can look them up online, can't we?" Luke suggested.

Machi paused, thinking. "Yes, it is possible... but I not write well in English."

"Trucy and I can make the words match the rhythm and meter," Luke replied. "All you’d need to do is translate them."

Machi wondered for a moment why they couldn't just do 'Guitar's Serenade'... but it was only one song, had been involved in Mister LeTouse's murder, and had been playing almost non-stop on the radio ever since; Each on its own was an adequate reason to avoid it... not that that seemed to have stopped Apollo using it as his new ringtone. Regardless, Machi gave his siblings a smile and nod. "Yes, I will do that."

Immediately Trucy leapt from the sofa with a loud cheer, running a lap of the room. "I'M GONNA SING!"

Luke laughed loudly as he watched his sister stop on her heel and charge through the door into reception. "Don't go too far, Trucy!"

Machi pressed a hand to his mouth to muffle his own giggles as he heard the resulting conversation through the open door:

"POLLY, I'M GOING TO SING SOME OF LAMIROIR'S SONGS!"

"I heard. Congratulations."
"You wanna sing with me?"

"No thanks."

"Aw, c'mon, you don't wanna be like Lamiroir at all?"

"It's not that: I'm a magician and lawyer, not a singer, and certainly not anywhere near Lamiroir's range. Besides, I have work to do today."

"... Spoilsport."

Apollo groaned. "I'm not ruining your fun by not joining in. Honestly, you'll enjoy it more without me."

"... Still a spoilsport."

Although he sighed, Apollo didn't argue further, and Trucy soon returned to the office.

Before long, Luke, Trucy, and Machi were settled in the sofas, Luke's laptop on Machi's knees as the teen copied across Borginian lyric sheets from Lamiroir's official website; At his side was Luke, idly watching over Machi's shoulder, and Trucy sat across from them, hands fidgeting in her lap.

"How long is this going to take?"

Luke shot his sister a glare. "Don't be rude, Trucy. This is going to take time." His gaze softened as Trucy looked away guiltily. "You'll just have to think of something else to do while you wait. Any ideas?"

Trucy chewed her lip, frowning. After a minute or so, she turned her eyes up to Luke with a wide grin. "You know what you haven't done yet, Luke?"

"What do you mean?" Luke asked, equally as confused as Machi.

Trucy giggled. "You haven't told Machi your stories about Uncle Professor!"

Machi's eyebrows shot up, and he paused in his copying of the final song's lyrics. Wasn't 'Uncle Professor' what Trucy called...?

"True," Luke muttered, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "I have been holding back on that; I wasn't sure your English was up to the task, Machi."

"It... is better than used to," Machi said.

Trucy nodded insistently. "Exactly! We can tell him..." She hummed, arms crossed, then the grin returned to her face. "Oh! We can tell him the story of how you met Flora! That one's the shortest, right?"

"Ah, I see," Luke said, a small smile growing on his lips. "A test to see if Machi thinks he can understand it all."

"Yes!" Machi cried, almost knocking the computer off his lap in his excitement. "Yes please, I would like to!"

Luke chuckled, watching the teen. "I'm sure you're eager. Although," his smile tensed with concern,
"are you sure you can multitask translating those lyrics and listening to my story?"

Trucy huffed, arms crossed as she frowned at nothing in particular. She seemed to be weighing which of the translations or the story was more important to her... and coming up blank.

Machi turned his attention from her to look at the document on the laptop monitor. Luke had a point there. "Maybe... we try anyway?" he asked, giving Luke a hopeful look. "As test?"

"Ooh, yes, let's do that!" Trucy agreed.

"Two tests in one," Luke laughed. "We're being awfully adventurous today!" Machi blushed, and Luke's laughter intensified. "Alright, Curious Village it is!" He patted Machi's shoulder as his giggles subsided. "Let me know if I say something you don't understand, or you want me to slow down. I have this particular one all written out in book form if you want to look at it later."

Machi nodded. "Yes please," he said, twisting in his seat to face his older brother. "Thank you!"

"You're gonna love this story, Machi!" Trucy cried, curling up on the sofa cushion with a grin. "The twist at the end is amazing!"

Luke shushed her with a smile. "Who's telling this story, Trucy?"

Trucy giggled, pressing a hand to her mouth, but stayed quiet.

"Let's begin then, shall we?" Luke announced, and the story began to unfold.

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
It had now been four weeks, and Machi already felt like a proper member of the Wright family.

He had his *isa*, Phoenix, who always watched over them in their apartment home with that strong paternal air... who also didn't hesitate to tease his four charges, ruffling their hair with that gleeful grin. Every night, before he went off to work and after Trucy returned from hers, he would tuck Machi and Trucy into their beds with a hug and a kiss on the forehead; Every morning, they would both return the favour by making breakfast for him when he finally woke up.

He had his *isoveli*, Apollo, who always had a smile for his three younger siblings, no matter how much they (Trucy in particular) loved to gently mock his serious nature. He showed up at the office at nine every weekday, and, shortly before Machi's curfew began, the entire family would go out to eat noodles for dinner from Guy Eldoon's cart; Phoenix would take Machi back home, while Apollo and Trucy headed off for another night of magic, Apollo promising to repeat the highlights for Machi the next day.

He had his other *isoveli*, Luke, who, despite his initial absences, had nonetheless spent much of his free time with his family. Already, Machi and Luke had spent hours playing together on the piano and violin, and almost as much time poring over puzzles side by side; The puzzles reminded Machi of Borginia, and Luke almost seemed happier to give Machi a puzzle and watch him solve it than to solve one himself... Machi couldn't help but wonder if this was something he shared with his former mentor, Professor Layton.

Finally, he had his *sisko*, Trucy, who always had an eye out for her 'baby brother', but never treated him like a helpless toddler. Sleeping only a few short metres apart, they spent almost every waking hour together, Trucy's near-constant stream of words helping Machi practise his English almost as much as the books and computer programs specially designed to teach him; None of them were in Borginian, but Machi found he was becoming confident enough anyway that he could even contribute to some of the girl's one-sided conversations.

All considered, having his new *perhe* around helped a lot to distract him when he most missed his *aska*, Lamiroir...

... and that *perhe* was about to get a little bigger.
"You're gonna love Mommy and Pearly!" Trucy insisted as they left for the train station that morning. "They've been really looking forward to meeting you!"

"Just like everyone else we know, apparently," Luke added, giving Clay a wry look.

Clay scoffed; He'd shown up at the agency next to Apollo only minutes earlier, simply insisting he wanted to see the family off for their weekend away. Machi had previously met him barely a handful of times, but he knew enough about Clay from his initial visit to the Space Center that first week to know that he was obsessed with space; It didn't take much thought to realise what was in the cylindrical package tucked under the young man's arm. "Hey, maybe if you'd been decent enough to get the new little brother a few years earlier," Clay told Luke, tapping his friend's arm, "we wouldn't all need to catch up on getting to know him, huh?" He shot Machi a wink, and the teen giggled.

"You're just upset he didn't go gaga over the Space Museum," Apollo said, shooting his friend a smirk; Although Machi didn't understand the exact phrasing, he was reminded of how upset Clay had been when first they met, that Machi hadn't been able to fake enough excitement to please him... To be sure, space as a concept was fascinating, and he could see how much Clay loved the subject, but it simply didn't spark all that much interest in Machi, and it had killed him that simply being himself had disappointed his brothers' friend so much... even with the Wrights laughing at the young astronaut for taking it all so seriously at the time.

Clay waved the comment off. "I'm over that. We all have different interests, after all. I mean," he grinned at Apollo, "I hate your dumb obsession with law, right?"

Apollo's smirk turned to a glare. "Shut up, Clay."

"Now now, that's enough of that," Phoenix ordered from the back of the group, though he was clearly hiding a smile. "Less arguing, more walking."

Once on the platform, Clay pulled out the package under his arm, brandishing it proudly in Machi's direction. "Here we are! I brought this for you to borrow while you're up in Kurain!"

Machi blinked in surprise as he took the gift. "Um... Thank you."

Apollo sighed, pressing a hand to his face. "Please don't tell me that's a telescope."

"It's a telescope," Clay confirmed, grinning. He ignored Apollo's and Luke's resulting groans, turning back to Machi. "This is an old one of mine, actually. When you're that high up, and a little further from the city lights, you get a much better view of the stars. If you get the time tonight, you should go out and take a look."

Machi regarded the package for a moment, wondering if Clay had forgotten Machi's probation required he be back at the Agency by seven. Not wanting to disappoint him, he gave the astronaut a smile regardless. "Thank you very much, Clay."

"No prob, dude," Clay replied, visibly preening.

Trucy peered over Machi's shoulder, frowning. "Why didn't you ever lend this to us?"

Clay shrugged. "I guess you didn't seem interested... Plus, you only go up there to visit your mom, not to look at the sky."

The girl seemed to accept that answer. "Can I use it too? And Pearly?"
"Sure."

Apollo rolled his eyes, muttering something that sounded like 'probation' and 'home' under his breath.

"Just so you know," Luke spoke up, patting Clay's shoulder sympathetically, "none of us are going to come back as converts to how amazing space is. We already have the highest opinions of it we're ever going to get."

Clay chuckled. "Yeah, I know. I can dream though, right?"

After that, Phoenix alerted them to the approaching train, and they had to bid Clay goodbye.

The sun was high overhead as the Wrights got off the bus in Kurain Village. Machi found the entire thing fascinating, looking all around at every opportunity he got. The buildings reminded him of the book on Japan he had secretly read, in preparation for the Gavinners tour passing through there (before the whole business of the murder had thrown all that out). The giant boulder near the bus stop also caught his attention, as did the out-of-place phonebooth on the other side. As he looked down the road after the disappearing bus, he noticed the perfect placement of the mountain beyond, its blue-green peak seeming to rise up out of the road as it crested a hill and disappeared down towards the train station. Grinning, he turned to Trucy at his side and pointed to it. "Pretty."

Trucy giggled, nodding. "That's Mount Mitama. It's owned by the Fey family!"

Apollo snorted. "They own this mountain, too. Hazakura Temple is on the other side of the peak, higher up."

"And, if that mountain wasn't there," Luke added, pointing at Mitama, "you'd be able to see the sea. It's just beyond it."

Machi was so busy admiring the mountain, absorbing all the surprising information he was getting on it, that he failed to realise Phoenix wasn't with them anymore until he heard two shouts from very close by:

"Nick!"

"Maya!"

As he spun to see where their father figure had disappeared to, Machi noticed the large building just across from the bus stop, its front door wide open. On the porch by the stairs down to the road stood a woman with long, dark hair, dressed in purple robes, and currently locked in a rather passionate make-out session with Phoenix, who stood on the second step from the top... and even then, he had to lean down a little to match her height. Machi wanted to look away from the rather confronting sight, but found himself frozen in place, cheeks red.

"Get a room, you two!" Apollo called, making his siblings laugh.

The shout shocked the pair out of their kiss, looking around to where the four stood with very wide grins and only a small amount of embarrassment. "Is that a request?" the woman asked, a hand on her hip.

Phoenix chuckled, waving them off. "Give us a break, we've both been busy lately." Without giving anyone a chance to snidely reply, he looked to Machi, gesturing to the woman he still had one arm wrapped around. "Machi, this is Maya Fey. Maya, Machi Tobaye."
"Welcome to Kurain, Machi!" Maya said, bouncing down the steps towards the boy and holding out her hand. "I've heard a lot about you!"

"Th-thank you," Machi replied, forcing a nervous smile as he shook her hand. "It is nice to meet you."

"He was just admiring the view," Luke explained, gesturing down the road. "The sky's very clear today."

Trucy giggled, patting Machi's shoulder. "Do you get views like that in Borginia?"

Machi thought a moment, then shook his head. "Not where I live. My town in valley, far below."

"There's a pretty good view from over on Mitama too," Apollo chimed in, grinning cheekily. "Maybe we could show you someday."

"As long as you don't go any further than that this time, I'll be happy," Maya warned, though her smile indicated she wasn't as serious as she sounded; Machi couldn't help but wonder what she was referring to as he saw the mixture of embarrassed looks and gleeful grins across the faces of his new siblings. "Anyway," she continued, clapping her hands and fixing Machi with a maternal smile, "why don't you come in, Machi? Anyone who calls the Wright Anything Agency home is always more than welcome here."

View the Court Record
It wasn't until they were all inside and shoving their shoes into the nearby cubbyholes that Trucy paused and looked around in confusion. "Mommy... Where's Pearly?"

"Oh yeah, she's out the back," Maya explained, casually waving a hand. "I forgot to tell you guys about that in all the excitement..."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Meeting us at the bus stop isn't that exciting."

"That's not what I meant," Maya replied, leaning against the doorway further into the house. Her smile was beginning to look a little forced. "These past few days have been busier than normal."

Machi noticed the Wrights exchanging surprised looks.

"But you're already super busy!" Trucy cried. "Did something happen?"

Maya sighed, crossing her arms. "The latest in a long line of somethings..."

Phoenix frowned, stepping towards her and resting a hand on Maya's shoulder. "Maya...?"

"It's nothing I can't handle," Maya insisted, waving off Phoenix's concern. "It's just that... You remember Bikini, right?"

Apollo's face twisted in disgust. "What about a bikini!?"

"Of course I remember her," Phoenix replied, ignoring Apollo's outburst. "Why?"

"Her back's gotten so bad, she's finally agreed to retire," Maya explained. "We couldn't leave Iris up there alone, and Hazakura is never all that busy, so..."

Machi leaned over to Trucy, who stood the closest to him, and whispered, "What is talking about?"

"I don't know for sure," Trucy whispered back, then waved at the two adults with a frown. "Mommy, Daddy, what are you talking about?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Phoenix muttered, watching Maya with concern. "Has Hazakura shut down? I thought business was improving since Iris got back."

Maya didn't immediately respond, opening and closing her mouth a few times. "It hasn't shut down," she eventually settled for saying. "Just, while it's sitting there unused, Iris is staying here in Kurain instead of all alone in that cold temple. She forced a grin. "All this kinda happened in a rush just the other day, so she's here in Fey Manor until we can get her her own place in the village."

Phoenix grunted to himself, staring thoughtfully at nothing in particular.

Luke was frowning, rubbing his goatee. "Iris'... Is this is the same Iris that came to visit us once a few years ago at the Agency? Pearl's half-sister, one of a pair of twins?"
"And Dad's ex-girlfriend," Apollo added with a smirk at Phoenix. Phoenix just shot him a glare in reply.

"Oh yeah, I remember that story!" Trucy cried, then turned to Machi. "We'll have to tell you later! Or, well," she paused, shrugging, "get Polly to tell you, cuz I don't remember it so well..."

Maya giggled, poking the unamused Phoenix in the arm although her eyes stayed on the kids. "Pearly and Iris are out the back. Maybe you'll run into them while you're showing Machi around?"

Trucy squealed, grabbing Machi's arm. "Yeah yeah, we need to show you Mommy's house!" she cried, then dragged him past Maya and into the hallway beyond, Machi tripping over his feet as he struggled to keep up. "C'mon, c'mon!"

"I'm coming!" Machi replied, getting his bearings as they tore down the hallway. Behind him, he could hear the laughter of his older brothers as they followed, and Machi couldn't resist joining in as the exhilaration of the chase washed over him.

Fey Manor was much larger than Machi had expected from what he saw of the building from outside; Instead of a small floor space, as he expected from a single floor, the mansion seemed to sprawl out in every direction, with almost as much garden as there was house inside the tall, white wall that circled it. The snaking hallways were just as much open to the outside as they were walled in, and Trucy didn't pause as she took Machi down them all, heading steadily towards the back, her head spinning every which way as she searched for any sign of their target.

Finally, they turned a corner to a porch overlooking the back garden, and Trucy's run suddenly came to a halt, sending Machi running headlong into her back as her grip on his arm loosened. He peeked over her shoulder at first opportunity, and saw two women sitting by a rock garden, looking up in surprise as they heard Trucy's loud shout of "There you are!"

"Trucy!" the shorter of the two replied, jumping up from where she was kneeling in the dirt. Pausing only to brush the dust off her pink kimono, she dashed to meet Trucy at the foot of the nearby stairs, where the pair hugged. "I completely forgot you were coming!"

Luke laughed, gently guiding Machi forward with a hand on his shoulder. "That's not like you, Pearl."

Pearl blushed as she and Trucy separated. "A lot's happened over the past few days." She gave the boys a wave. "Hello Luke, Apollo."

"Hello yourself," Apollo replied with a grin, leaning on the wooden railing of the walkway. "Dad's with Mom right now, but I'm sure you'll see him later."

"Oh, of course!" Pearl giggled. She moved up the steps, holding out a hand to Machi. "You must be Machi. We've heard a lot about you."

Machi nodded, shaking her hand. "It's nice to meet you. You are...?"

"Pearl Fey," the girl replied, pressing her hands together and giving Machi a short bow. "Welcome to Kurain."

"Th-thank you," Machi mumbled, rubbing his arm and trying not to look as awkward as he felt.

Meanwhile, Trucy had skipped away from the stairs to where the older woman still sat, kneeling in
the dirt by the rock garden. Seeing the teen approaching, the woman's eyes widened and her hands clutched at the purple magatama on her chest; Machi couldn't help but sympathise with her fear.

"Hello!" Trucy called, rocking on her heels as she gave the woman a bright grin. "It's Iris, right? Pearly's big sister?"

Iris nodded, slowly pulling herself to her feet and brushing off her purple robes. "It's been a while since we last met," she said, a shy smile on her face. "I... wasn't expecting to see you so soon."

"We kinda weren't either," Apollo pointed out, chuckling. "Mom told us when we arrived that you're staying here until you get your own place?"

"Yes, that's right," Iris replied, brushing a stray lock of dark hair behind an ear. "It was very kind of Mystic Maya to offer... She and Pearl have been my only contact with the outside world for a long time."

At that, Pearl jumped back down the steps, running to her sister's side and taking her hand with a fierce look. "But all that's going to change now; You're here in Kurain, disgraced or not, so you're going to make lots of friends of your own."

Iris sighed, but gave the teen a smile. "Yes, I'm sure I will." She then turned her gaze to the Wrights. "I hope I might be able to count the four of you among them, with how much I've heard of your lives."

Luke laughed as he left Machi's side, moving to join the growing group by the rock garden. "I'm afraid we can't say as much for you in return, Ms Iris; You'll have to tell us about yourself while we're all here together."

Iris hid a giggle. "Just Iris is fine. There's nothing much to tell anyway."

Trucy scoffed. "I'm positive that's not as true as you think it is."

Machi took his time descending the steps after Luke. "Um, Pearl?"

"Yes?" Pearl replied, the entire group turning to face him with a curious look.

"It's nice to meet you, but," Machi rubbed at the back of his neck awkwardly, "I have return home tonight, so not much time... I hoping look around before I go."

"But we've got plenty of time before you have to leave," Trucy pointed out.

Luke nodded. "True, but it's only polite to show him around, at least a little."

"And Mom kinda asked us to," Apollo added with a grin. Despite everyone else having moved to stand in the dirt below, he remained on the walkway, leaning on the railing.

Pearl gave Machi a warm smile. "It would be a pleasure to give you a tour, Machi," she insisted. "After all, you are a member of the family now; Fey Manor will always be open to you."

Machi blushed, shoving his hands in the pockets of his pants. "Trucy said you are... cousin?"

"First cousin once removed," Pearl boasted, the closest she had come to what Machi would call 'pride'; It was the same exact phrase Trucy had used, and he still had just as much of an idea of what it meant... that is, none at all.

"What was it you said was the Borginian word for 'cousin'?" Trucy asked, looking upwards
thoughtfully. "Seh-koo?"


"Yeah, that!" Trucy giggled, turning to Iris. "That makes you one of our serku too!"

Machi opened his mouth to tell her the plural form of the word, but decided not to bother with a laugh.

Iris blushed. "Thank you," she said, then looked to Machi. "You said earlier you have to return to the city tonight; When are you going?"

Unsure of the answer, Machi bit his lip. "I..."

"I'm taking him back home on the five o'clock bus," Apollo spoke up, attracting everyone's attention. "It'll get us back to the agency in plenty of time for his curfew."

Luke frowned. "You're taking him? I thought Papa was."

"I offered," Apollo explained, shrugging. "Dad's been stuck in the city the last two times we came up here, so I figured he deserved to stay the night more than me." He sighed, rolling his eyes. "Plus, if he and Mom are gonna make a big deal out of being apart for so long, I don't want to be here."

Luke shivered. "They seem to be restraining themselves around us, at least."

Trucy huffed, her hands on her hips. "But where are you going to sleep!? You can't go back to your apartment and leave him alone!"

"I'll be in Dad's room," Apollo laughed. "You think Clay would have forgotten Machi can't stay here overnight if I was going to be back at my place come evening?"

Machi blushed as he remembered the gift of the borrowed telescope, still in Trucy's bag where they had shoved it once on the train. "I leave telescope with you," he told his sister. "I can not use it back home."

Trucy's eyes widened for a moment before her expression turned to a disappointed pout. "Alright..."

"You have a telescope?" Pearl asked, intrigued.

"Clay lent it to Machi," Luke explained, and gestured to the garden, "but, weren't you going to give Machi a tour, Pearl?" He looked to Iris. "If your sister doesn't mind us stealing you away, of course."

Iris giggled. "I don't mind. In fact, I'd quite like to join you."

Trucy cheered, throwing one arm around Iris' waist and the other over Machi's shoulders. "We can do a tour together!" she cried, and began to drag them off into the garden. "C'mon, Pearly!"

"Coming!" Pearl replied, hurrying to catch up.

Luke chuckled, moving to follow, but paused as he noticed Apollo was still stood quietly on the walkway. "Not planning to join us?"

Apollo shrugged, pushing off the railing. "I'll catch up later. I have something to ask Dad."

"Alright." Luke gave his brother a quick wave before running off after their siblings. "See you later!"
View the Court Record
This chapter is dedicated to everyone who asked me why Maya isn't in Khura'in yet. :D
Potential minor spoilers for SOJ.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

August 8, 10:02AM
Fey Manor
Master Bedroom

Once the kids had all run off looking for Pearl and Iris, Maya had sighed, given Phoenix a tired smile, then gestured down the hall before heading off in a different direction to the thundering footsteps of the younger Wrights. Phoenix had only picked up his bag and followed her.

Phoenix had spent his Kurain Village nights in Maya's bedroom ever since they had finally acknowledged their long-overdue romance. At first, he shared her bed purely at Maya's insistence, but by now it was an unspoken tradition. It was only Phoenix's sheer force of will (or, as Maya called it, 'being a prude') that had kept anything too physical from ever going on between those walls; Phoenix suspected they would have outed their secret relationship a million times over by now if he hadn't - Maya's childish dislike of condoms only strengthened his resolve.

On this particular day though, the physical elements of their partnership were the furthest thing on Phoenix's mind.

Phoenix sighed as he put his backpack down by the door, which he closed behind him. "Maya, what's the matter?"

Maya's head jerked around to face him, eyes wide for only a second before she forced a grin. "Now c'mon Nick, who says anything's the matter?"

He only narrowed his eyes, arms crossed. "Maya. You know better than anyone I can tell when people are hiding something."

Maya kept up her façade a moment longer before dropping it with a sigh, falling onto the nearby bed. "I can handle it."

"That seems to be your catchphrase as of late," Phoenix gently pointed out, moving to sit at her side. He rested one hand at Maya's back, rubbing up and down her spine. "Every single time I've asked you about work these past couple of months, it's 'I can handle it, don't worry about me, I can look after myself'... You do know telling me not to worry only makes me worry, right?"

Maya weakly laughed. "That's cuz you're a worrywart."

"Maybe so," Phoenix agreed, "but it's clear I'm worrying for a very good reason." He paused, but Maya didn't reply. "It's not just Hazakura, is it?"
After another pause, Maya shook her head. "The mess at Hazakura just added to everything... but I can hold out. I've made it this long."

Phoenix's eyes narrowed in concern, his hand still moving against Maya's back. "How long? What are you holding out against?"

At first, Maya didn't react, pretending she hadn't heard... but finally she sighed, leaning over to rest her head on Phoenix's shoulder. "Things aren't going as well up here as they should..."

"What?" Phoenix asked, his hand freezing at the base of Maya's ribcage. "But you've been so busy, training acolytes, visiting with the Elders... Hasn't Kurain's reputation only been climbing?"

"Sure, our reputation is great," Maya almost spat. "The acolytes and Elders, though? The acolytes are either quitting their training early or outright just moving to the bright flashy city, and the Elders are all dying off!"

Phoenix blinked, unsure how to react to that.

The moment of anger passed, and Maya again sighed, pressing her face into Phoenix's shoulder and wrapping an arm around his back. "Even though I've been working so hard at my own training, to live up to their expectations... they say I'll never be ready to pass the test to be Master of the Kurain Channelling Technique, not unless I go on intensive training in the country where it originated."

"That doesn't sound so bad."

"For two years, Nick."

Phoenix nearly leapt off the bed, staring incredulously at the top of Maya's head where it rested on his shoulder. "Two-!? They want you to go on a two-year training course!? Overseas!?"

Maya nodded.

"But... that's..." Phoenix bit back his objections, slumping in his seat. "Well, if it's split up into chunks, at least we'd-"

"Can't split it up," Maya interrupted. "It's ascetic training; It works best when there's minimal breaks... not nearly long enough to fly back here and visit."

"But two years?"

"Mm-hmm."

Phoenix sighed, moving his hand from Maya's back to her head, gently stroking her hair. He couldn't imagine being apart from her for two entire years... The longest they'd ever managed was eight months, the gap between his disbarment and that first family trip to Kurain with the kids... except, even then, he was prepared to stay away from her for much longer if it was for her own good. This was the same thing, wasn't it? It was for the good of Kurain Village, for Maya... They had their phones to keep in touch, he had his kids as a distraction... If it was for her, he might be able to manage such a long time apart... even though he felt it would kill him.

Taking a deep breath, hand still stroking Maya's dark hair, Phoenix managed to force out the quiet words, "Wh... When are you going?"

"I'm not."
Phoenix froze. "Huh?"

Maya pushed herself off Phoenix's shoulder, giving him a stern look. "I'm not going. I refuse to leave you, or our kids."

Phoenix stared back at her as her proclamation sunk in... then the gears began to turn, and his eyes narrowed. "Maya... how long have you been fighting this?"

"Since April."

"April!?"

She shrugged. "Thereabouts."

Phoenix sighed, unsure if he should be relieved it was 'only' since April, or upset that she had been fighting this battle for so long without a word to anyone. "Maya..."

Maya scowled. "Don't give me that look. I'm not going, so why would I need to tell you? It's not happening."

"Right." Phoenix closed his eyes, trying not to look like he was judging her. Honestly, that was a very good reason not to share... but. "Even if it's not happening, I'd like the chance to support you if you need it."

At that, Maya had the decency to look a little guilty. "I can handle it. I didn't want to bother you."

Phoenix nodded, lacking the energy to be annoyed at hearing that phrase again. "I hate to play devil's advocate, but if going away for two years is the only way to be recognised as Master... what's your back-up plan?"

Maya's eyes went wide as she paused. "Um."

Her reaction nearly made him sigh. "You don't have one."

"Of course I do!" Maya protested, but the way her face turned red and her cheeks puffed out said it all.

Phoenix shook his head. "Maya, we'd survive two years without you if we had to... We'd hate it, but we'd survive. I'd come visit you if I had to."

Maya turned away from him, arms crossed in a sulk. "I know."

"Then why?" he asked. "If you don't have a back-up plan, why are you so insistent you can't go?"

"I..." Maya whimpered, then sniffed, and Phoenix suddenly realised she was crying. "I can't..."

Without hesitation, Phoenix pulled Maya into a hug. "Maya, I love you. I'll support your decision. I just hate seeing you suffer, okay?"

Maya nodded, hugging Phoenix back and burying her face in his shoulder. "This has been on the table for a while now," she admitted. "I just refused to discuss it with them, they always dropped it... Then, this past April, they said I'd avoided it long enough. They'd even arranged it all for me, got tickets to send me to Khura'in at the end of May."

'Khura'in?' Phoenix thought, frowning. 'Why does that sound vaguely familiar...?'
"Then..." Maya paused, sniffing. "You remember what happened in April."

Phoenix had opened his mouth to ask before he suddenly remembered. "My trial."

Maya nodded. "You were arrested. Trucy's dad died. Apollo was all stressed out about his first ever trial, putting his mentor in jail. Luke was struggling to be there for them both with those ridiculous restrictions you put on him." She sniffed. "I... I told myself, after all that, it might be better for me to go after all. I mean, only Trucy called me 'Mommy', I was just a friend to Luke and Apollo..."

Phoenix decided not to comment on her last sentence; They both knew Apollo and Luke were far closer to Maya than she'd just implied. "You were actually planning to go?" he instead asked, surprised.

"I didn't say anything at the time because there was enough going on for all of you," Maya replied. "I was planning to tell you later, I promise I was, but..." She paused, pulling away from Phoenix only to wipe her eyes. "Then Mother's Day came around, and I guess a part of me was waiting to see what would happen if I wasn't there. What the kids would do."

Phoenix smiled. "They came up here to visit you, didn't they?"

Maya giggled, nodding, then pulled the locket from her obi, flipping it open to look at the photo within. "They gave me the best gift in the world... not just this thing, but all those reassurances that they loved me, that I would always be their mom... or big sister, in Luke's case."

Seeing her welling up again, Phoenix pulled Maya into another hug.

"Apollo started calling me Mom!" Maya cried, somewhere between hysterically laughing and crying. Her hand closed into a fist, snapping the locket shut, and it slipped from her shaky grip as she clung to Phoenix in response. "How could I leave after that!? They're my kids, I couldn't leave my kids!"

"Maya, Maya," Phoenix murmured, holding her tightly. "Yes, they're our kids... but they're all grown up. They'd understand if you had to leave, and be waiting here for you when you got back."

Maya's sobs quietened, but she remained clinging to Phoenix's hoodie. "And now Apollo and Trucy's mom has re-appeared," she quietly pointed out. "If those two have ever needed me to be around, it's now."

Phoenix had to admit she had a point there.

"I haven't even told Pearly about this," Maya continued. "I know she'd be okay on her own, and she'll do even better with Iris nearby to keep an eye on her... They can't exactly come with me to Khura'in."

Phoenix returned to gently rubbing Maya's back in an effort to offer comfort. "So... this 'Khura'in' place is where you'd have to go?"

Maya nodded. "It's a tiny country in the Himalayas," she explained. "The spiritual capital of the world, they say. It works a lot like Kurain Village, but at a larger scale: The leader, a queen in this case, keeps the peace with the neighbours by channelling people for the other country's leaders. Only the women of the royal family can channel spirits... They say Ami Fey herself was a former princess before she fled to Japan."

"And then to here, I presume," Phoenix added.

"Uh huh." Maya sighed, pressing closer to Phoenix. "They're not going to leave me alone until I
agree to go. I don't want to go. Don't make me go, Nick."

Phoenix held her tighter. "I won't make you do anything," he promised. "And you're right, now is a bad time to leave anyway... but Thalassa will be coming back eventually."

Maya didn't reply, her face still buried in Phoenix's hoodie.

"As we speak, she's lying in an English hospital, getting her sight back," Phoenix continued. "Eventually, she'll have her memories too, and she'll be here in California again to reunite properly with Machi, Apollo, and Trucy."

"And they won't need me anymore," Maya morosely pointed out.

"And everything will calm down," Phoenix corrected. "Apollo's an adult, and he and Trucy won't need the same kind of reassurance they need now once Thalassa is a part of their lives... I can certainly promise you you won't stop being their mother just because you have to go away for two years, or because they've reunited with their birth mother, and I'm positive they'd tell you the same thing if they knew about this. You can't use them as an excuse anymore when that happens. You need to do what you need to do."

Maya just sniffed. She didn't reply.

"Like I said, I'll support your decision no matter what," Phoenix continued, "but we all want what's best for you... and if what's best for you is two years in this Khura'in place... Well, we'll miss you a lot, but we won't stop you going."

For a long moment, Maya remained silent, then she gave a muffled, tearful giggle into his hoodie. "Thanks, Nick."

Phoenix smiled, holding her tight. "Promise not to keep me out of the loop on this stuff anymore?"

Maya laughed, rubbing her face against his chest. "Promise."

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Chapter End Notes

(Maya wasn't going to reveal any of this to Phoenix for another few months, but you people forced my hand! xD I have actually had this in the back of my mind since Maya's announcement for SOJ though; If you go back to look at Turnabout Trump and Mother's Day, Maya's been hiding this the whole time.)
Apollo was halfway down the hallway towards the Manor's Master Bedroom when he heard a loud cry from somewhere ahead, a sobbed laugh that was on the verge of hysterical:

"Apollo started calling me Mom!"

Was that... Maya?

"How could I leave after that!? They're my kids, I couldn't leave my kids!"

Her sobs quietened, and Apollo could hear the distant murmuring of his father's voice replacing it. A part of him said this was a bad time, to turn around and leave and come back later to talk to Phoenix... but the rest of him was oh so curious to know what they were talking about. Maya had said his name after all... Were they talking about him?

Phoenix's murmurings were again replaced by Maya's, but much quieter and indistinct than before; Her words were impossible to decipher from where Apollo was standing.

Against his better judgement, Apollo crept forward and pressed an ear to the tiny gap between the door and its frame, just in time to catch the end of Maya's short monologue.

"-come with me to Khura'in."

Apollo felt his heart stop.

"So... this 'Khura'in' place is where you'd have to go?" Phoenix asked.

"It's a tiny country in the Himalayas; The spiritual capital of the world, they say. It works a lot like Kurain Village, but at a larger scale: The leader, a queen in this case, keeps the peace with the neighbours by channeling people for the other country's leaders. Only the women of the royal family can channel spirits... They say Ami Fey herself was a former princess before she fled to Japan."

"And then to here, I presume."

"Uh huh." Apollo heard Maya sigh, and when she next spoke, her words were too muffled to make out.

"I won't make you do anything," Phoenix said. "And you're right, now is a bad time to leave"
anyway... but Thalassa will be coming back eventually."

There was a pause. Apollo's heart had restarted, pounding a million times a minute, and he pressed a hand to his chest as if to muffle the sound in his ears. First Apollo, then Khura'in, now Thalassa? What were they talking about?!

"As we speak, she's lying in an English hospital, getting her sight back," Phoenix continued. "Eventually, she'll have her memories too, and she'll be here in California again to reunite properly with Machi, Apollo, and Trucy."

Maya mumbled something in response, again too muffled to make out.

"And everything will calm down. Apollo's an adult, and he and Trucy won't..."

Apollo fought the urge to suddenly stumble backwards, reigning in enough control of his limbs to step back as quietly as he'd stepped forwards. Phoenix's words faded back into incomprehensible murmurs, exchanging private words with Maya, then Maya laughed.

Once he'd finally gotten a good distance from the door to the bedroom, Apollo turned and fled.

He wasn't staying the night, but Apollo didn't think anyone would mind if he went to lie down for a while in the guest room that was usually assigned to him. He firmly closed the door and threw himself down on the bed before finally letting the panic of what he had just overheard flow through him. Maya was going to Khura'in? And, from what he could tell, was planning to take him and Trucy with her once their mother came back? Did... did they know? He could remember telling Phoenix and his siblings that his biological father had died in Khura'in; Had Phoenix passed that on to Maya? Had they looked up what happened? Had they found out what Apollo had been doing in the eight years after?

Apollo pressed his face into the pillow, forcing his breathing to slow down. No, of course not. How could they possibly know anything about Apollo's life that he hadn't told them himself? Even if they did, why would they be talking about sending him back there? Not to mention, what would Trucy and their mother have to do with it?

Apollo groaned, flipping over onto his back and staring at the ceiling. He forcefully reminded himself he had no idea what Maya and Phoenix had been talking about, so what use was there jumping to conclusions? Surely if they were actually planning something to do with him, they'd let him know... and Maya had sounded pretty upset, too.

But if they weren't planning to take Apollo and Trucy to Khura'in once Lamiroir returned, what were they talking about? He almost wanted to cry in frustration.

"I'm fine," Apollo muttered, pressing his gloved hands over his eyes. "My name's Apollo Wright and I'm fine." He didn't move a muscle from where he lay for a long time.

It was only when he woke to the sound of voices outside his door Apollo realised he had dozed off. Rubbing at his eyes, he sat up; Listening carefully, he could make out Trucy and Pearl, and there was Machi, and Luke... even Iris. They must have finished their tour. I hope they didn't worry when I never caught up to them."

Footsteps came close, followed by a gentle knock on the door. "Apollo?"
Apollo held back a sigh as he recognised his brother's voice, swinging his legs over the edge of the bed. "I'm here."

The door opened only a little, and Luke's head soon appeared in the gap, giving Apollo a worried smile. "Hey. Did you talk to Papa?"

Sighing for real this time, Apollo shook his head. "He was talking with Mom. I didn't want to disturb him."

"Oh." Luke paused a second in thought, then redirected his gaze to Apollo, an undisguised look of concern on his face. "Well, if you need us, we'll be over in the living room, okay?"

A part of Apollo was surprised Luke wasn't chasing up whatever was bothering the elder brother (he knew for a fact he wasn't hiding it very well), but he didn't question it, nodding with a smile. "Yeah. Thanks."

Luke smiled back, then gently closed the door. A few moments later, the voices of the group faded away down the corridor, and were gone.

Left alone again, Apollo lay back down on the bed, his hand rubbing at his bracelet. 'What am I doing? Worrying over literally nothing like this... I need to just forget what I heard, go back and spend time with my family, since we've never had so many of us together like this...' Despite his own internal objections however, Apollo couldn't make himself move to get up, or stop dwelling on the strange conversation.

Those tears were threatening again. 'Family doesn't abandon each other,' he repeated to himself. 'This is my family now. We don't abandon each other.'

Apollo didn't know how long it had been since Luke left, too wrapped up in his thoughts to be paying attention to the time. It was only the sound of footsteps in the hallway that dragged him back to his surroundings once more, and he quickly sat up when the approaching feet were followed by another knock at his door. "What?" he called.

"It's me," Phoenix called. "Luke tells me you wanted to talk to me?"

Apollo winced as he turned to place his feet on the floor; He was starting to regret that snap decision to go talk to Phoenix after seeing Iris in the garden. "Uh, yeah, I did."

There was a short pause, then the door opened, Phoenix standing in the doorway and watching Apollo with a smile. "Well, I'm free now. What was it you wanted?"

Sighing, Apollo looked away. He wasn't exactly in the mood anymore for the teasing remarks he'd originally been planning to make... and he didn't think he could handle asking about whatever it was he'd overheard. "It doesn't matter."

This time, the pause was longer. Apollo heard Phoenix enter the room, closing the door behind him. "You overheard Maya and I talking, didn't you?"

Apollo tried his best not to react, but couldn't help tensing up a little. He didn't reply.

Phoenix lowered himself onto the bed at Apollo's side. "I can't think of any other reason you'd be acting this way, considering you apparently wanted to talk to me, told Luke you didn't because Maya and I were busy discussing something, and now you're locked up in your room sulking. You've got
everyone worrying about you now."

"I'm just tired," Apollo insisted, hands tightening into fists in his lap. "I didn't want to bother you."

Phoenix sighed. "Apollo, don't lie to me. I know when you're hiding something."

Apollo stubbornly remained silent. He refused to meet his father's gaze.

There was a long pause before Phoenix accepted there would be no reply. He shifted in his seat a little, making Apollo wonder if he might just up and leave, but didn't get up. "Alright," he finally said, "given the circumstances, I don't think Maya will mind if I tell you. You just have to promise not to share this with the others just yet, okay?"

Apollo frowned, tempted to chance a look up at Phoenix's face, but didn't dare move. "Tell me what?"

Phoenix took a moment or two to reply. "Maya is being pushed into attending a two-year training course overseas."

At that, Apollo froze. 'That... was not what I was expecting to hear.'

"She's been pushing back and putting it off," Phoenix continued, "because you and Trucy just located your mother, and she doesn't want to disappear for two years at a time when she feels you need her the most; Once she leaves, she won't be able to come back and visit until she's done."

Slowly, Apollo turned and looked up to meet Phoenix's concerned gaze. "Mom's been doing that... for us?"

Phoenix nodded, giving his son a small smile. "She didn't want us to worry, so she's been keeping it a secret. I didn't know myself until today." He chuckled. "Let me guess, you heard us saying your name and jumped to conclusions?"

Apollo turned red, looking away again.

Laughing, Phoenix patted his son's back. "I'm just teasing," he assured him. "This country she's going to... I assume you heard us talking about it?"

A part of Apollo wanted to snap an emphatic 'no' and avoid the subject... but after all the stress he'd just put himself through, and the secret he'd just been let in on, he decided his father deserved to be trusted with the truth, a truth Apollo himself had been denying for a very long time. He nodded. "I can tell her what I remember, but it's been a long time since I was in Khura'in," he whispered. "It's probably changed a lot."

Phoenix only nodded. He didn't speak.

After a short pause, Apollo sighed and leaned over to rest against his father; Phoenix responded by moving his hand to rest on his son's opposite shoulder. "Honestly, I've spent... eleven or twelve years trying my best to forget it," Apollo continued. "That's why I've never talked about it. There's no-one there I'm interested in seeing again, and nowhere I'd want to revisit. I'd miss Mom - it's two years, after all - but I don't ever want to go back to Khura'in. Not for anyone."

"I understand," Phoenix said, his hand rubbing Apollo's shoulder through the cape covering it. "We won't ask you to."

Apollo sat still, leaning against his father, the comforting pressure of Phoenix's grip on his arm. He
could feel all the anxiety that had been building these past couple of hours float off into the ether, his concerns fading away with them. Finally, after all the stress that morning had brought him, a smile came to his face. "Hey, Dad?"

"Mm?"

"Y'know your secret mission? The one you ran off on just before Machi's trial?"

Phoenix's hand stopped its comforting motion. He'd shared that story with Apollo in a private moment shortly after Machi joined their household, though it wasn't all that exciting to anyone other than lawyers like them. "The initial planning sessions to get the Jurist System approved for testing? What about it?"

Apollo grinned, resisting the urge to laugh. "When you have everything ready, and get the perfect case to test it with... Are you going to include Iris in the jury?"

Phoenix sighed, and Apollo bit back giggles. "I'm going to be professional about it, Apollo. Not everyone on that jury will be friends, and I'm certainly not going to ask family."

"Not your ex-girlfriend, then?" Apollo pressed. "She's more than just a friend, and she's not close family. Are you asking her?"

Groaning, Phoenix pushed his laughing son off his shoulder, making a show of being disgusted as he got to his feet. "If you're only going to mock me..."

Apollo made no attempt to stifle his amusement as he also stood. "Aw, I'm only teasing, Dad!"

Phoenix scoffed, but didn't hide the small smile on his face. When he reached out to ruffle his son's hair in payback, Apollo didn't object. "C'mon," Phoenix said, jerking his head to the door, "let's go catch up with everyone else."

As they walked through the hallways towards the living room, Apollo heard the familiar sounds of Machi on the piano, and sighed in relief through the massive grin still on his face.

After all, family didn't abandon each other.

View the Court Record
Post-Tour Family Reunion

Chapter Notes

Potential minor spoilers for SOJ in this chapter, but nothing new if you read 363 a.k.a. Phoenix and Maya's conversation.

August 8, 10:47AM
Fey Manor
Living Room

Phoenix led his eldest son back through the hallways to the living room, following the sound of the piano. It was a relief after his earlier conversation with Luke to know that all was well.

Maya had been the first to enter the living room, hearing the laughter of the children ahead of them. She clapped her hands, Phoenix behind her closing the door at his back, and told the quintet around the table, "Aha, we found you!"

"Hi, Mommy!" Trucy called, giving her a wave. "We finished showing Machi around!"

"Your house is very big," Machi added.

Maya laughed, moving to join the group. "You can blame my ancestors for that. It's handy when we've got a lot of people hanging around, though." She shot him a wink.

As Phoenix approached the table, it was hard to miss the round eyes of Iris focussing on him, and he gave her a friendly smile and wave, remembering their conversation when last they met. "Iris."

Iris nodded. "Hello, Fe-Phoenix." Her eyes glanced at Maya, then looked firmly away, cheeks flushing.

"Ah, Papa," Luke spoke up, "Apollo was looking for you earlier."

Phoenix paused, surprised. "He was?" He shared a look with Maya, both equally confused. "We haven't seen him since you all ran off together."

"He didn't come on our tour," Pearl explained, chewing a thumbnail.

"Yeah, he just ran off after saying hello to Pearly and Iris," Trucy agreed, crossing her arms with an air of frustration that didn't do much to hide her concern, "and now he's hiding away in his room."

Luke nodded. "He told me he heard you two talking and didn't want to disturb you."

At that, Phoenix felt his worries solidify into an iron ball in his stomach, sharing a startled look with Maya. Had Apollo overheard...? "I'll... go talk to him," he decided. Tapping Maya reassuringly on the arm, he turned and hurried to the bedrooms.
And now, only five minutes later, Apollo was in on Maya's secret about Khura'in and back to his usual cheerful self. Phoenix would have to tell Maya what had transpired, but the smile on his son's face was enough of a boost to his mood that he wasn't worried about it.

Phoenix grinned as he slid open the living room door, watching the group circled around the piano in the far corner of the room. It was strange how that piece of furniture disappeared so easily into the background until someone moved to play it, and Maya kept it in much better condition than Phoenix did his. Right now, Machi was sat on the piano stool, playing some kind of classical piece from memory as everyone else listened intently in their circle around the corner of the room the instrument sat in. Phoenix turned behind him, holding a finger to his lips as a signal to Apollo, then gestured for him to enter.

Apollo bit back snickers, slipping inside behind Phoenix. His eyes quickly locked on to the group in the corner, and he looked up at his father, an eyebrow raised in question.

Still grinning, Phoenix gave his son a nearly imperceptible nod, then gently closed the door behind them and ventured forward. The pair tip-toed ever closer to the piano, the melody helping to mask any sound they might have made. Phoenix was only a metre away from where Maya stood at Machi's back, he held up a hand to signal Apollo...

"Hey, Nick. Apollo."

Phoenix started, then laughed, slipping his hands into his pockets.

Apollo groaned as the music came to a surprised halt, the group around the piano turning to face the two intruders. "How'd you know we were here!? We weren't making a single sound!"

Maya laughed, the only person of the group at the piano not surprised to see the pair. She gave Apollo a wink. "Simple: I'm a spirit medium!"

At that, Apollo shot her a glare. "That doesn't answer the question!"

Phoenix eyed the shiny surface of the piano behind Maya, and smirked. Turning to Apollo, he shrugged. "Ah well, I guess we'll never know."

Apollo's glare turned towards his father. "Dad."

Laughing, Phoenix turned and casually walked away.

"Polly!" Trucy cried, jumping on her oldest brother with a hug, only to then step back and give him a stern look. "Were you trying to scare us?"

Apollo's anger disappeared as he shot his sister a smirk. "Why, were you scared?"

Trucy whacked his arm in reply.

Phoenix hadn't gotten very far before Maya caught up to him, holding his arm as they separated themselves from everyone else in the room. Shooting a worried look at the group around the piano, she whispered, "Did he...?"

"He did," Phoenix replied, keeping his voice low. He returned Maya's gesture, their arms wound around each other as they each gripped the other's elbow. "Considering what exactly he heard, I told him all about it. Sorry."
Maya just smiled, relieved. "As long as he's not spreading it around. We should check the door next time we do that."

Phoenix chuckled, leaning in close. "I made him promise. But really, they should know better than to listen in on us."

"Are you implying something, Phoenix Wright?" Maya replied, smirking. Her free hand pressed against his chest, though it acted more to move him closer than to push him away; In response, his other hand moved to rest on her obi, right above Maya's hip. "Is there something we should be doing in private that we're not already?"

"Hmm, let me think," Phoenix muttered, his face so close to Maya's their noses were nearly touching. "I'm sure something will come to-"

"Mom, Dad!" Apollo shouted. "Time and place, please!"

Phoenix and Maya looked up to find the group at the piano had taken notice of their private conversation (truthfully, they'd both forgotten they were even there). While Apollo, Luke, and Trucy were all fixing them with various intensities of a disgusted look, Machi and Iris simply looked confused; Pearl, the odd one out, seemed about as surprised as Phoenix and Maya.

Maya was quick to recover, crossing her arms as she turned to face the 'kids' with a smirk. "What about the time and place? I thought it was pretty good, myself."

Apollo rolled his eyes. "You know what I mean."

Luke was much more reasonable: "Didn't you two get that out of your system before? You've spent almost an hour together already today."

"What, talking?" Phoenix replied, resting an arm across Maya's shoulders. "Cause that's all we've been doing. I didn't know there was a time limit on talking now." He gave Maya a smirk. "Did you know there was a limit on talking, Maya?"

Maya shook her head, playing along. "Nope, I've never heard of a time limit on talking."

Trucy took a deep breath, as though psyching herself up for something. "Mommy, Daddy, we love you, and we're glad you're together..." Her calm demeanour flipped like a switch, shaking a finger at the pair. "But you need to stop being so mushy and gross right in front of us! Go do that in your room!"

"Is that an invitation?" Maya asked, unphased. She held a hand up towards Phoenix, and he high-fived it without a thought, neither of the pair breaking their gazes on Trucy.

"Don't you dare high-five that!" Apollo demanded. "That wasn't clever, that's the exact same line you always say!"

A soft giggling from behind him drew everyone's attention to Iris, stood next to Machi and Pearl by the piano. "Oh, Trucy," she said, giving the teen a warm smile, "you must not have very much experience with the world at all if you think that was 'mushy'."

Trucy cocked her head to one side. "What do you mean?"

Maya gasped, excited. "Ooh, yeah, I heard all about that from Sis!" She giggled, elbowing Phoenix as she shot him a wink. "Nick doesn't look it, but he can be very mushy."
Phoenix stepped back from his girlfriend warily, his face turning red. "Um... we really don't need to discuss this... I was never that bad."

Apollo burst into badly hidden snickering. "I've read the trial transcript, Dad. You were hopeless."

"I was a kid!" Phoenix argued.

"You were my age!"

Phoenix shot his son a stern look, pointing a finger. "You're a kid."

"I'm twenty-two!"

"He has a point, old man," Maya added, giving Phoenix a cheeky wink.

"And you were twenty-one at the time, Feenie," Iris pointed out, equally amused.

Phoenix shot them both unamused looks. "You're not helping."

"We're not trying to!" Maya gleefully replied.

By the piano, Machi leaned towards Pearl, who was standing next to him, and whispered, "Is this... normal?"

Pearly nodded. "Oh, sure. They play this game at least once every time the six of us are together."

"Game...?" Machi repeated, eyebrows raised. This was by far the strangest 'game' he'd ever witnessed in his life.

Trucy squeaked, having noticed Machi's quiet conversation (if not having heard the words). "Oh, that reminds me!" She turned to Apollo, tugging on his cape. "Polly, you still need to tell Machi that story, remember?"

Apollo blinked. "Me? Why me?"

"Exactly," Luke agreed with his brother, gesturing to the woman stood nearby. "Why not ask Iris?"

"Ask me what?" Iris asked, surprised.

Apollo didn't seem to have heard her: "Yeah, and Dad, Mom, and Pearly were actually there; I'm like the least qualified person to tell that story."

Pearl gasped, a hand to her mouth. "Oh, are you talking about...?"

"Now now, don't sell yourself short, Apollo," Phoenix cut in, recovered from his earlier embarrassment. "You were there for that trial, too... and on the day I wasn't, no less."

"I wasn't even there until the last five minutes!" Maya cheerfully pointed out. "And Pearly was channelling my sis most of the time!"

"You both know full well that's not what I mean!" Apollo shot back.

Iris's hand lingered near her mouth, eyes uncomfortably avoiding everyone's gazes. "Oh... You mean Dahlia's story."

Phoenix's cheeky gaze faded to a sympathetic look. "We can handle it if you're still uncomfortable"
discussing her, Iris."

Iris paused only half a second before shaking her head, her hand settling on the purple magatama hanging around her neck. She gave Phoenix a determined stare. "No. I can't avoid that subject forever... nor should I pretend I never had a twin. If anyone is going to tell Dahlia's story now, it should be me."

Phoenix nodded with a proud smile.

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Machi had listened intently, enraptured by Iris's tale. The story started out so sad, with the two sisters taken from their mother by their father, and said father then giving Iris away to be raised as a nun, separating the girls purely because he was re-marrying and acquiring a step-daughter. Through Iris's eyes, Dahlia sounded so confident, and Iris clearly admired her despite all she had done... even if she sounded so ashamed talking of how she had assisted with whatever her sister asked, starved of any other kind of contact with the outside world and desperate to keep her only remaining family member close. She described how she had first seen the danger signs when, at fourteen, Dahlia presented her plan to leave the Hawthorne family and steal their father's most precious diamond, with the help of her step-sister, now a police officer, and a tutor she had charmed, who she wanted to take the fall. The plan hadn't gone well, the diamond vanishing into Eagle River, but Dahlia's 'murder' stood firm; Despite her fury at Iris, Dahlia stayed in the area, and eventually her journey led her to Ivy University. As a direct result of the failed plan, Dahlia later murdered her step-sister, and the former tutor when he escaped from prison, but didn't escape notice from a pair of defence attorneys by the names of Mia Fey and Diego Armando. Armando's attempt to question her in a public library resulted in him being poisoned, left in a coma, and she successfully hid the incriminating evidence by charming one Phoenix Wright who had been studying nearby.

"I think you can tell I had no experience with romance," Phoenix muttered as an excuse, blushing madly.

"I begged Dahlia that there be no more death," Iris continued. "I told her I could get that necklace back, that Feenie would never even know... and she reluctantly agreed. I started taking her place at Ivy University, meeting Feenie and trying to convince him to give the necklace up willingly."

Phoenix's face got even redder, and he hid behind a hand.

Surprisingly to Machi, Phoenix had never agreed to return the necklace, and Iris grew too fond of him to force the issue by stealing it and thus removing herself from his life... so Dahlia lost all patience, meeting Phoenix behind Iris's back with a plan to poison his cold medicine. As it turned out, Dahlia's former boyfriend, from whom she had stolen the poison, realised what was happening and tried to warn Phoenix, resulting in the boyfriend's death and Phoenix facing the punishment. By chance, Mia Fey, Armando's partner and Maya's older sister, took up Phoenix's defence and finally managed to convict Dahlia for murder. She was sentenced to execution five years later, and Iris never saw her again.

But that wasn't the end of the story.
Machi had had 'spirit channelling' explained to him by Trucy, less than a week ago, and he still wasn't sure if he could completely believe it... though the way everyone else treated it as such a matter-of-fact truth was very convincing. Phoenix's embarrassment spread to Pearl and even Maya as Iris described Armando's return, his discovery of the plan to murder Maya and his counter-plan to foil it, which resulted in the murder of Maya's mother and Iris taking the fall. Despite all the odds, Phoenix unravelled the complicated story, confronted Dahlia for the last time, and finally learned the truth about the woman he had dated five years earlier. Iris had gone to jail for accessory to murder, and Armando's poor health gave him a life sentence all on its own.

"I didn't get the choice of probation like you did," Iris told Machi, giving him a warm smile. "But, then again, I willingly aided trying to cover up that murder, and you were just smuggling drugs, weren't you?"

Machi nodded, hands fidgeting. "I didn't kill manager," he mumbled.

"We know you didn't," Apollo assured him, patting the teen's shoulder. "That's why we defended you, remember?"

After they had eaten lunch, the various members of the family split up into smaller groups, separating out around the manor on their own individual pass-times; Machi elected not to join any of them, returning to the living room to play the piano and muse on his day so far.

If he was being honest, Machi still found the whole 'spirit channelling' thing hard to swallow... but he wasn't going to demand proof from people who were kind enough to take him into their family. Iris's story was also very out there, but Machi found himself more inclined to take it as truth, with Phoenix, Maya, and Pearl still harbouring sorrow over the events and Apollo telling Machi afterwards of how he'd watched the ongoing trial from the gallery, and found it massively confusing at the time (he'd even promised to dig out Phoenix's case files to show Machi later if he was interested - Machi still wasn't sure if he'd take Apollo up on that though). All said, Machi couldn't help but identify with Iris: She was very quiet, like him, and had stood in court falsely accused of murder, also like him. Iris was much older than Machi, around Phoenix's age, and came across as so wise... much like Phoenix himself had appeared to be when Machi first met him, before getting to know the teasing fatherly goofball underneath. Would he find Iris was the same way once he got to know her? Or maybe it was only thanks to the rather goofy and teasing Maya that Phoenix was the way he was; His isa had certainly sounded like a completely different person when he was dating Iris, although he was much more familiar by the time of the incident at this Hazakura Temple place Iris worked at.

Machi's thoughts stilled as his fingers relaxed from the closing notes of Für Elise. Although he could think of plenty of pieces to play next, he found himself craving something new, and his eyes flickered to a box of books sitting on top of the piano. Maya had told him earlier it housed all the music books the Feys had collected over the years, cheerfully adding, "And you're a member of the family now! Feel free to take a look, see if there's anything you're interested in playing."

Machi smiled. Maya really was like a second aska, and just as welcoming as the Wrights. He slid off the stool to his feet and reached up on his tip-toes for the box.

"Do you need help?"

The boy jumped, spinning around. Only a metre or two away stood Iris, one hand reaching out as if to take down the box on top of the piano herself.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle you," Iris continued, hands clutching together in front of her. "I
was listening to your music... Pearly told me that you performed professionally with Lamiroir; Is that right?"

Machi paused, then nodded. He had already guessed the story of his trial had been passed on to the three Feys, likely by the Wrights. "I like play piano. I play since I was little."

Iris smiled. After a pause, she stepped forward, again gesturing to the box. "Were you wanting to look at Mystic Maya's music?"

"Yes, thank you," Machi mumbled, stepping aside sheepishly.

Without a word, Iris moved to the piano, reaching up to grasp the box and take it down, resting it by the edge on a corner of the wooden frame around the keys. "I hope there's something interesting in here for you."

Machi nodded in agreement, stepping forward to page through the contents of the box. Much as Maya had said, it mostly looked old, with books that had long fallen apart lingering at the bottom, while the top was more instruction books for learners to hone their skills. Right on top though was the most interesting item, immediately grabbing Machi's attention: A hand-written piece of music on a lined piece of notebook paper. He put it aside at first, wanting to evaluate what else was there, but his focus soon returned to the odd page. Who had written it? And when? He picked it up, eyes running over the fading pencil lines that marked out the notes of a simple tune. Letters were scrawled below, and Machi quickly realised they indicated chords for the left hand, in the absence of any space for another bar.

"What's that?" Iris asked.

Machi shrugged, then placed the paper on the stand. He dropped back onto the stool, his feet jumping to the pedals; Iris disappeared somewhere behind him with the box, he guessed taking it to the table to put down. It was hard to make out the scribbled notes and five bar lines around the blue ones designed for words, but Machi studied carefully what he could see to commit it to memory before his hands once more rested on the keys.

On the first go around, Machi played only the right hand, getting used to his best guess of how the author had intended their melody to go. Once he had it down, then he added the left hand's bass line, fleshing out the simple tune to the best of its author's ability.

"That's very pretty," Iris said from behind him. "I wonder who wrote it?"

Machi shrugged again, pausing in his playing. "Maybe we ask Maya?"

"True," Iris agreed. She moved around to Machi's side, studying the paper. "I suppose it must have been one of the Feys who lived here... probably recent, since it was right on top. Or at least recently used."

Machi nodded in agreement, his hands resting in his lap. Truthfully, with no clue to the melody's author, he had already put the issue out of his mind for later, instead turning his eyes curiously to Iris. "Um... may I ask a question?"

Iris blinked in surprise, looking at the boy. "Of course. What is it?"

"How long... you in jail?"

Iris paused only a moment, then she smiled. "Three years. How long is your probation?"
Machi tried not to look too relieved she hadn't been offended by his question. "One year. Was hard? In jail?"

"No," Iris replied, shaking her head. "I kept to myself... and three years isn't all that long in the grand scheme of things, especially once you get to my age." She laughed, brushing a lock of hair behind an ear. "Even so, I think we can both agree standing in court accused of murder isn't a pleasant experience. All we can do is learn and move on."

Machi nodded, hands fiddling in his lap.

After a long pause, Iris continued, "I did what I did because I was faced with the choice of family or justice. I always chose family, first for Dahlia and then for Pearly. Maybe, if I had chosen justice much earlier, I could have stopped all that pain sooner... before so many people died."

Machi frowned, running a hand through his hair. "I... also chose bad," he admitted.

Iris looked surprised. "Oh?"

On the day of his trial, Machi didn't have the words to explain his situation in English, why he'd agreed to smuggle that cocoon for money. In the weeks after, he'd become determined to share the story with his new family, and spent a night arranging how he'd tell the Wrights what had happened; It was this same speech that came back to his mind as he prepared to pass the story on to this new member of his family. "I grew up in orphanage, in Borgia. We were like family, before I go to Lamiroir." He paused, biting his lip. "But orphanage in small town, and government want to break up, send everyone to other towns. They always looking for money, send letters to Lamiroir asking... but I not tell her." Machi hugged himself tightly, ashamed; He could remember how tightly Trucy had hugged him when he admitted this to the Wrights. "I not want her to worry. I send them my own money, but I not have much, and I can not get more as I pretend be blind. Then Lamiroir get email from overseas, friend of Mister Gavin, and he offer lot of money." He sighed, unable to meet Iris's eyes. "I not want family home to be broken, so I accept. I no tell Lamiroir."

There was a long pause, then Machi felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up to see Iris giving him an empathetic smile. "I understand exactly what you mean," she said. He free hand reached into her robes and pulled out a small purple phone. "If you want to talk more with someone who knows what it's like and won't judge you... maybe we could exchange numbers?"

Machi smiled, reaching to pull out his own phone. "Thank you. I like that very much."
It was the Tuesday after the Wrights' weekend in Kurain Village. Despite having to return to the Agency with Apollo over the night, Machi had greatly enjoyed himself up in the mountains, playing piano with Maya, exploring Pearl's collection of board games, and looking around the garden and extensive house with Iris; As he had told them before leaving on the second day, Machi was greatly looking forward to whenever he and his new family could see them again.

In the meantime, life had returned to normal. As was usual for a Tuesday, Luke wouldn't be in until after lunch; Unusually, Trucy had decided today was the perfect day to try out a recipe Flora had sent them. She had asked Machi to help, but, knowing his English was nowhere near up to the task of handling the unique language of cooking, he had declined. Luckily, Phoenix had been happy to step in, so father and daughter were now all-but locked up in the kitchen, testing to see if their cooking skills were up to the task of achieving Flora's suggestions.

(Machi highly doubted it, after everything he'd heard about how amazing Flora's food was, and the fact that he'd never seen any kind of significant cooking going on in the Wrights' kitchen.)

In the office next door, Apollo was sat at Phoenix's desk, using the office computer to do some unspecified work of his own. Nearby, Machi sat on one of the sofas with his workbook and the sheets of paper Luke had printed off at the library especially for him. The sounds coming from the kitchen were cheerful, but loud enough that Apollo ended up closing the door, and Machi made sure to thank him; It was much easier to concentrate in the silence.

They worked quietly. Machi had quickly filled out a page's worth of his exercises - this particular one focussed on correct word order - and was already exhausted. Normally he would pass on what he had to Luke, and if Luke was not around to Phoenix... but Phoenix was busy. Who could he ask for help? His gaze turned up to Apollo, seeing him totally focussed on the computer monitor. He didn't look like he had the time. Machi wondered what else he could do if not his English practise.

"You okay, Machi?"

Machi blinked in surprise, turning his eyes back to the desk, where Apollo was watching him in concern. Immediately he felt guilty. "Um... I finished my homework."

Apollo smiled. "Well, seeing as Luke's not here and Dad's busy... You want me to check it over for you?"

Blushing, Machi nodded.

Apollo laughed, setting a piece of paper off to one side in front of him as he beckoned the boy to join him at the desk. "C'mon, bring it here." His free hand jumped to the computer mouse, obviously closing windows on the monitor.

Machi picked his workbook off the coffee table and left the sofa, running around behind the desk to
hand it over to Apollo. He watched the young lawyer lay the book down to read it... but, as much as he knew he shouldn't, his attention was quickly drawn to the piece of paper lying nearby, the one Apollo had put to the side and directly in front of where Machi now stood. It was clearly rather old, lined with thick creases where it had been folded again and again, bends in the paper marking where hands had firmly gripped it to read the short blurb of text below the faded picture. Despite it having been folded when Apollo moved it aside, some kind of lingering tension in the greying fibres was slowly opening it again, showing its contents to the world.

Machi cast a wary glance at Apollo. He still seemed wrapped up in going over Machi's English exercise, the monitor behind him displaying the default beach cave of the empty desktop; Apollo hadn't noticed the discarded paper, nor was paying any attention to Machi right now. If Machi was going to snoop, this would be his one and only chance. But did he dare to take such a brazen peek at whatever it was Apollo was working on?

Yes. Yes, he dared.

Casting a final wary glance at Apollo to ensure he was still busy with the assignment, Machi leaned over slightly to give the paper a closer inspection; It appeared to be some kind of newspaper article, the headline prominently displaying the word 'Gramarye' next to 'daughter' (Wasn't the correct phrasing 'Gramarye's daughter'? English was so confusing...) and then 'leaves'... although 'Troupe' at the end was not one as familiar to Machi as the other three were. The unfamiliar word didn't do much for Machi's confidence in understanding the article itself, so he instead turned his attention to the picture, his eyes jumping instinctively to the face of the young woman sat front and centre.

It was Lamiroir.

Machi didn't believe his eyes for a moment, staring at the young face in front of him... but it was impossible he was mistaken. He knew his aska's face better than any other, and age had not changed her features at all, save for a few small lines here and there. She was even wearing that old bracelet of hers... and, apparently, a second identical one on her other wrist.

The teen's gaze flicked briefly back to Apollo; He had always thought it strange that his new brother had a bracelet just like Lamiroir's.

Blue eyes scanned the article itself for a reference to the photo, and he soon spotted a small italicised caption at the bottom, beginning with the word 'pictured'. Although a good chuck of the sentence was beyond Machi's understanding, he knew enough to see that it was labelling the woman with a name, a name that was most decidedly not 'Lamiroir'. Further searching of the text located a date, the year 2003, long before Machi was born.

Hand shaking, Machi reached out and picked up the paper. "A-Apollo... What is this...?"

"Hmm?" Apollo tore his eyes from the worksheet, looking up to Machi before suddenly going pale, eyes wide. "D-don't-!" He grabbed at the paper, tearing it from Machi's grip and hurriedly folding it up along its well-worn crease lines. "I-it's nothing," he insisted, shoving the small bundle somewhere in the direction of the bag at his hip, but his own hands were shaking so much he kept missing.

"Nothing!?!" Machi repeated, making a swipe to reclaim the article. "That is not 'nothing'! That is photo of Lamiroir! That is Lamiroir's name!" Apollo had by now managed to hide the paper in his hip pouch, but Machi didn't let that stop him from fighting to claim it, pushing against Apollo's hands as the lawyer stood, Apollo covering the bag's opening with one hand and twisting his posture so said bag was harder to reach from Machi's position. With the desk on one side and the chair on the other, Machi was forced to shove his weight against Apollo himself, straining to shove a hand into the heart-shaped bag to retrieve the article within. "You knew Lamiroir's name and you not say!"
"How long you know this!?"

"M-Machi, please," Apollo begged, holding the boy back much better than Machi thought he should be able to. "It's not what you think, I promise!"

"How not what I think!?" Machi asked, shoving Apollo with all his strength before reluctantly stepping back, abandoning the fight for the article. He could feel his heart pounding in his ears, his face red from the stress and exertion, and he was pretty sure those mutinous tears were streaming down his cheeks again. "You knew Lamiroir's name and you not tell her! You not tell me!" He spun around, intending to run (he didn't know where, just wanted to get out, to get away), but only got a step or two before a gloved hand clamped down on his arm.

"Machi, please," Apollo sighed, "will you at least hear me out before you jump to conclusions?"

Machi fruitlessly tried to pull out of Apollo's grasp, but soon gave up, wiping the angry tears from his face. He didn't understand Apollo's exact phrasing, but he could easily guess it meant something like 'passing judgement'. He wanted to tell Apollo 'no', to run and hide in his room; How could he have held something back like this? Wasn't he Machi's isoveli? How could he have betrayed him like this? Betrayed Lamiroir like this? What gave him the right to dig up Lamiroir's true identity and then hide it from her? All thoughts of running faded, Machi shaking with rage where he stood... but even then, he couldn't make himself take it out on Apollo; Not even when the other person deserved it did Machi like to shout at people.

After a long pause, Apollo sighed again, and his hand released Machi's arm. A moment later, Machi heard rustling paper, and turned to see Apollo holding out the folded article for Machi to take, the lawyer's face utterly miserable. "If we'd told you before," Apollo quietly said, "you wouldn't have believed us."

Machi stared back for a second or two before hesitantly reaching for the lump of paper and clutching it gingerly between his fingers. He watched Apollo with narrowed eyes. "Why not?"

"Because... a lot of reasons," Apollo muttered, lowering himself back down into the chair, where he slouched forward, his elbows on his knees. "She... You're right, her real name is Thalassa. I've been piecing together her story for a long time now."

Although he wanted to be angry about it, the fact Apollo was clearly upset kept Machi from reacting to the implication the lawyer had known who Lamiroir was from the very start. Instead, he stood still and silent, holding the old article tight in his hands as he waited to hear Lamiroir's... Thalassa's... story.

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"Thalassa's dad was a famous magician," Apollo explained. "He travelled the world, impressing everyone with his abilities, and he passed his trade on to his daughter. She performed with him, and with his apprentices, as she grew up." He sat up in his chair, though his gaze remained on the floor. "When she was eighteen, or maybe even younger, her father contracted a performer as a guest on their show; His name was... well, I don't really know, except that it ended in 'Justice'." He shook his head, his hands resting on his knees. "Thalassa and Mister Justice fell in love, got married, and left on their own travels. They even had a kid, a son... and, only a year later, Mister Justice took their baby son off to perform for royalty... on the very night someone assassinated the queen, setting fire to the building. They never came back. Her husband died an anonymous musician."

Machi's eyebrows shot up. Was this... true? He unfolded the paper in his hands to look at the picture within; Growing up travelling the world explained how Lamiroir knew English so well... and it was certainly fitting that she had been a mother before taking in Machi. Surely this one tragedy could not be the reason she was so scared of her own past though... right?

"Alone and grieving, Thalassa had no choice but to return to her father," Apollo continued. "Eventually, she was able to move on from the deaths of her husband and son, and fell in love again, this time with one of her father's apprentices; His name was Shadi Enigmar." His hands clutched his knees, knuckles white. "She married again, had another kid... but this time, she stayed with her father, and the baby was a girl. Everything went pretty great for about five years, until..." Apollo's eyes screwed shut, pained.

Machi's grip on the article tightened. "Until...?"

Apollo sighed, face turned away. "They had a trick, a famous one. They were in rehearsal, maybe trying a new spin on it to make it more impressive for the audience... but something went wrong. Thalassa got hit by a bullet."

"Bullet!?!" Machi repeated, face pale. "She got shot!?!"

"Guns were part of the trick," Apollo admitted. "The whole point was that they appeared to hit her, but didn't. Even so, her husband, the other apprentice, even her own daughter were led to believe she'd died. One of the two men holding those guns had hit her, and it's impossible to ever know which of them it was."
Machi pressed a hand to his mouth. Was it this that had Lamiroir scared of her past?

"But her father knew she was alive. He must have known," Apollo said, eyes glaring a hole in the bookcase at his side. "He let everyone think she was dead, but she was instead spirited away, out of the Troupe, away from her family... and that's all we knew about her for a long time." Apollo suddenly spun around in his chair, facing the computer, where he re-opened the minimised internet browser: Another article, this one a machine-translated overview of Lamiroir's career, from a Borginian newspaper Machi recognised. "But a year or so later, Lamiroir shows up at this restaurant, still performing on stage. She's just singing now instead of doing magic... and her sight is gone anyway, so she'd find it hard even if she wanted to."

Machi's hand lowered from his mouth. The amount of research Apollo had done was staggering... but... "If you know this from start... why you not tell her?"

Apollo didn't reply at first, staring at the computer monitor. "You remember the night of the concert? When Trucy and I came to see you after Mister LeTouse died?"

After a second of thought, Machi nodded. "Yes, I remember. I left room."

"You did," Apollo quietly agreed. "That was when we recognised Lamiroir as Thalassa... but, with everything going on with the murder, we didn't think it was the right time to tell her."

Machi had to admit Apollo had a point there. This was a lot for him to take in now, and it would have been even harder to hear in the middle of the chaos at the concert. He returned his gaze to the article in his hands. "How you know? Why you try find her?"

A muffled laugh escaped Apollo's throat. Leaving the computer, he turned his chair to look at Machi with a sad half-smile, his left fist held in the air; The bracelet on his wrist glittered in the reflected light from outside. "There are only two of these in the world, Machi. I have one, and I knew Thalassa had the other. That's how I recognised her."

Machi's eyebrows shot up. He'd always known Lamiroir's bracelet was special, but to think it was so unique only two existed? In fact... how had the other one ended up with Apollo?

"As for why I was looking for her..." Apollo continued, the sad smile growing as he lowered his hand. "Well, you remember her first husband, and their baby son? Actually, although Mister Justice died in the fire, he was able to save the baby. The problem was, the country was in such turmoil over the murder of the queen that no-one was trying to find this baby's mother, nor help Thalassa find her husband and son. Unknown to her, the baby was still alive. That was twenty-one years ago now."

His hand rubbed at the bracelet in his lap, his eyes far away.

Machi gasped. Was Apollo saying...?

"After Thalassa vanished, once Lamiroir was performing in Borginia, her father suddenly died," Apollo continued, his expression hardening. "After that, her second husband got into a spot of trouble: Mister Enigmar decided the only way to escape was to 'disappear' in front of crowds of witnesses, leaving his and Thalassa's daughter behind." He turned in his chair, giving the door to the kitchen a fond smile. "And that was how Dad came to adopt Trucy."

He was saying. Machi looked down at the picture in his hands, seeing it now in a new light.

"Dad found that article not long after," Apollo gestured to the paper Machi was holding, "while he was looking into Trucy's family... the Gramaryes. He heard that Thalassa Gramarye had only one bracelet after this photo was taken... and that was how he recognised me, when we happened to meet
a few months later. It's how Trucy and I know we have the same mother." He sighed, rubbing at his bracelet. "We searched for her for years, but we never thought we'd actually find her, certainly not the way we did. How could we tell her we were her children? She wasn't going to believe us, and it wasn't fair to dump all that on her right after she'd heard her manager being murdered. It was enough of a shock for us."

Machi had to agree with that. "So... you send her to Professor Layton? Wait for her to find out on her own?"

Apollo nodded, a sad look on his face. "If anyone could uncover her past without the advantage of our prior knowledge, it's Professor Layton," he said. "She'd believe him over us, too. Once her amnesia and blindness became public thanks to the trial, I'm sure there were people lining up, hoping to trick their way into her life; If she didn't recognise her own surname Gramarye, her former stage partner Valant, how could we expect her to recognise the names Apollo Justice and Trucy Enigmar, her children?" He shook his head, wilting in his chair. Quietly, he ended his rant with, "How could we expect to be treated with anything other than suspicion?"

Machi mused to himself, placing the article down on the desk, where he'd found it. So Lamiroir was Apollo's and Trucy's mother... His aska was their aska, even if she didn't know it. In fact... "You knew all this since concert?"

Apollo nodded, meeting Machi's eyes.

"So," Machi continued, one foot shyly kicking at the carpet, "you knew... we were brothers. You defend me and you call me 'little bro' because you knew."

At that, Apollo blushed. "Oh, um... Yeah, I knew you were my little brother. But," he grinned, ruffling Machi's hair, "I defended you because I knew you weren't a murderer. There was no way I was going to let Herr Diva send an innocent kid like you to prison."

Machi giggled. "And you let me live here, as family."

Apollo laughed. "That was all Dad's doing," he pointed out. "But, y'know, none of us are going to complain about getting to know you, little brother."

The pair chuckled together for a moment. Now he knew the full story, Machi's heart felt light as a cloud, his anxieties and anger blown away into nothingness. "I never had on perhe before," he admitted. "Now I have Aška, Isa, du isovelet, on sisko, and so many serkuset..."

Apollo blinked, then his eyes widened. "All those Borginian words you call us... they're family words."

Machi nodded. "You say in English, 'a family', 'Mum', 'Dad', 'two big brothers', 'a sister', and 'cousins'." He giggled, cheeks red. "I always want a family, so I pretend... I was too embarrassed to tell you."

At that, Apollo laughed, getting up from his chair. "Well, you don't need to pretend anymore. We're family for real, and family doesn't abandon each other." He pulled Machi into a hug, which the teen was happy to return. "I'll always love you, little bro. We can wait together for Mom to return."

Machi grinned, giggling as he clung tightly to Apollo's vest. "I love you too, isoveli," he whispered back. "Thank you."
When Luke arrived at the agency an hour or two later, Trucy was quick to drag him through into the kitchen, calling for Apollo and Machi to follow. The recipe she had been attempting turned out to be lasagne, though it was a little crisp at the edges, and fell apart easily on their plates. No one really minded though, happily talking and jokingly calling the dish "the best meat cake we've ever had".

As the conversation fell into silence, Apollo swallowed his mouthful and lazily waved his fork around the table. "By the way, I told Machi about Mom," he nonchalantly announced. "Mom Thalassa, I mean."

Everyone looked up in surprise, and Machi saw their gazes flicker between him and Apollo. Were they going to be upset...?

After a few seconds of silence, Luke shrugged, smiling. "Okay then. It's good we're all aware who Lamiroir is." He immediately continued eating.

Phoenix chuckled, giving Machi a nod. "Shouldn't be too much longer 'til you three have your mom back, huh?"

Trucy squealed, leaning over to pull Machi into a one-armed hug. "Don't you worry, baby brother. We've got each other until then; We can wait together!"

Machi allowed himself to relax, giggling. "Yes, we can wait together!" he agreed. Now more than ever, he was looking forward to life with the Wrights... and it turned out they'd been looking forward to it just as much as him.

View the Court Record
A Successful Surgery

August 13, 4:16PM
Theia Hospital

The first thing Lamiroir saw when she opened her eyes was a blinding brightness. 'White... and a hint of orange...'. Amazed that the names of colours thought long-forgotten had returned so easily, she lay there staring upwards for several minutes before she realised her eyes had adjusted to the light. Although she still felt a little groggy from the aftermath of the surgery, she lifted her head to look around the room.

The walls are white too. More yellow than orange. There's the door, brown, and it seems to be made of wood. I think I can make out the grain. All that medical equipment... I couldn't possibly name any of them. It's all clustered around my bed, against the walls. My blanket is green... or is that blue? I like blue. Wasn't it my favourite colour...? Oh, and there's the window. It looks like the orange on the ceiling came from those curtains. Whose decision was it to put orange curtains in a hospital? Can't say that would be my first choice... Oh, look at me, I've had my sight back for less than a minute and I'm already criticising colour choices... They should have gone with blue.'

It took an hour for her post-surgery check-ups to complete, her doctor confirming she had, indeed, regained her sight... though to what extent they would have to wait to determine exactly. Lamiroir hoped her eyes had not deteriorated in the years since she last used them, not to the point that she would need glasses. Regardless, she was allowed to receive visitors once more, so she hoisted her bed up and waited for that familiar, eager knock at her door:

KNOCKKNOCKKNOCKKNOCKKNOCK

Lamiroir bit back a grin, feeling the excitement shivering up and down her skin. "Come in."

The door burst open, a red and blue blur dashing inside and bouncing at the side of her bed. "Lamiroir! Lamiroir! Did it work? Can you see? Do you still have ammy-knees-ah? We're still going on an investigation, right?"

Unable to resist a laugh, Lamiroir gestured for the seven-year-old boy to slow down, taking in his appearance. "And that must be little Alfendi Layton. You look just as I imagined you might."

Alfendi grinned, slowing his bouncing as he obediently stood still, his hands on the edge of the bed. "Really?"

"Really," Lamiroir assured him. "That wild, unkempt hair, a flaming blood red... That sharp little nose and chin." She poked at the boy's nose, causing him to giggle. "I couldn't imagine you looking any different."

Alfendi took a deep breath, letting it all out with an extended, "Well, it's not really 'blood' red." He picked at a clump of hair hanging in front of his face, examining it carefully. "It's, like, if the blood's been left to dry, but not too long, cuz it goes brown after a while..."

Lamiroir heard chuckling, and looked up to see two adults standing at the foot of her bed, watching the boy with amusement; One was a brunette woman, streaks of red in her curls and ponytail, while the other was a man in a suit and turtleneck, a top hat in his hands. Lamiroir smiled, looking between the pair. "And you must be Flora and Professor Layton."
Flora giggled, curtseying. "That's us, ma'am."

Hershel gave a short bow. "Are you feeling well? I see you've regained your sight."

Lamiroir laughed, nodding. "Yes, thank you. I'm still a little tired from the anaesthetic, but mostly I am just happy to be able to see."

Flora chewed her lip as she rounded the bed, standing opposite Alfendi at Lamiroir's side. "Have... you started remembering things now? Or is the amnesia still in effect?"

"That's what I said!" Alfendi cried, pouting.

Lamiroir frowned in thought. Frankly, she had also hoped the simple act of being able to see would start opening the floodgates to her locked memories, but so far there had been little more than a trickle. The doctor had warned her this would happen though, so she couldn't be too disappointed; She would just have to go chasing her past, find something more concrete to kick down those locked doors in her head. "I'm afraid not," she told Flora. "Nothing more than colours."

"What's your favourite?" Alfendi immediately asked. "Mine's blue!"

"Mine too," Lamiroir replied, smiling at the boy. "I like a light cyan - that's a shade of blue."

Alfendi thought a moment, then grinned, pointing to his blue shirt. "I like dark blue!"

"Ah, yes," Lamiroir said, playing along with a smile as she made a show of studying his shirt, "that looks like an azure. The colour of the sky on a clear night."

Hershel laughed, stepping up behind his son and patting the grinning boy on the head. "Colours are a start," he said. "Anything that comes to mind, however small, could act as a lead in our investigation."

Lamiroir nodded, though she didn't see how knowing her favourite colour could possibly aid them. "I should probably ask... have you had any luck since we last spoke?"

Just as Lamiroir expected, Hershel replied with a shake of his head. "No new leads, I'm afraid... or at least, nothing concrete." Exactly the same words he had used every other time Lamiroir had asked after his progress. "We shall just have to see what happens when we go to Borginia."

After all the frank discussions they'd had about this investigation since Lamiroir arrived in London, she couldn't bring herself to be mad at the Professor even if she wanted to; From here, all he could do was consult the results of other people's investigations into Lamiroir's past, and they both knew that if anyone else had ever uncovered a good lead, it would have found its way back to her long ago. Their only hope was to return to the restaurant she debuted in, the Restaurant de Chanson, and see what happened from there.

"Although, that reminds me," Hershel continued, reaching into an inner pocket of his jacket, "I did bring this along, just in case." He pulled out a small box, as wide as his hand was long.

Lamiroir studied the box thoughtfully. "Is that...?"

"Your bracelet," Flora confirmed with a smile. "We promised we'd look after it, didn't we?"

Indeed they had. As the item on her wrist would have only gotten in the way during her surgery, Lamiroir had entrusted her precious bracelet to the Laytons during her stay in hospital. It had been very strange at first not having the familiar metal ring on her arm, but she had comforted herself with
the knowledge it was only temporary, that she would have it back the moment she was released. "I think it is still too early for me to wear it again," she pointed out.

Hershel shook his head. "No, I brought it along for a different reason." He paused, examining the box in his hand. "You told us this is your only physical connection to your life before your amnesia. Wearing it for so long has clearly not affected you, but maybe seeing it..." He met her eyes again. "If you feel you are prepared, of course. We can always wait to-"

"I will try now," Lamiroir insisted, holding out a hand to take the box. "If seeing it might give us a lead, I want to get it over with quickly."

Hershel paused a moment in surprise before nodding, handing the box over without a word. Lamiroir rested the cardboard cube in her lap, taking a deep breath. Although she was determined to face her past, to take hold of any clue and not let go... she couldn't help but feel a little apprehensive. Steeling herself with thoughts of her son, she flipped open the lid and grabbed at the item hidden underneath.

The bracelet felt cool to the touch, separated from Lamiroir's body heat for longer than she had ever before allowed (in her memory, anyway). As it rose out of the shadow of the box, it glittered in the sunlight from the window, a bright white that faded to soft yellow and then to a deep gold that was almost brown. Her thumb brushed over the patterns she had studied with her fingers so many times over the past years, seeing now that they were eyes, staring unblinking in every direction. She clutched the metal ring tightly in both hands, feeling it slowly warm, and intently studied the object, hoping, praying, that it might tell her its secrets.

bright wrapping paper ripping apart a box torn open squealing as she beheld her gift a tight hug cold metal on her wrists as she slipped them over her hands for the first time

Lamiroir frowned, holding the bracelet closer to her face, close enough that she could smell the lingering hints of her own perfume on it.

pushing warm metal into tiny hands that grasped with pudgy fingers "far too big for his wrist" "it's more of a crown" tucking the bracelet into wrapped linen so it would never be lost

Were these... memories?

"Lamiroir?" Flora asked, hands tightly grasped together with worry. "Have you remembered anything?"

Sighing, Lamiroir leaned back against her raised bed, the bracelet in her grip falling to her lap. "Nothing substantial. Nothing that would help."

"Nothing substantial. Nothing that would help." Hershel's fingers tightened around the top hat in his hands. "As small as it is, it may still help. We can only know if we try."

Although she was still frustrated with herself, Lamiroir had to accept that. "I remembered playing
with a baby," she admitted. "Nothing else about it, just playing with him and the bracelet." She turned her gaze back to the item itself, frowning intently. "The only other thing is the memory of receiving them, putting them on for the first time... but not who gave them to me."

Alfendi looked confused, his eyes flicking between Lamiroir and the bracelet. "Them? But you only have one..."

At that, Lamiroir blinked in surprise, staring at the lone bracelet in her grasp. "Oh. I meant 'it'. 'Why did I say 'them'? Of course I only have one.'"

Hershel had shoved his top hat under an arm, then pulled out a small notebook that he was now writing in, brow furrowed with concentration. "Colours, a baby... and your bracelet was a gift," he muttered, then looked up at the singer with a smile. "For your first day, that's quite an impressive list of memories you've regained."

Lamiroir didn't think so, but decided to accept the compliment, slotting her beloved bracelet back into its box. She looked forward to getting out of this hospital already, impatient to slip her bracelet back on her wrist and go to Borginia to chase down her past... but at the same time, all she wanted to do was lie down and sleep the week away.

"That reminds me, there is one more thing I must do before we leave," Hershel continued, slipping his notebook and pen back into a pocket.

Alfendi groaned. "Aw, do we have to leave already?"

Flora rested her hands on her hips, giving the boy a stern look. "Lamiroir is recovering from surgery, Alfendi. She needs to rest."

"I'm alright for now," Lamiroir insisted, though she had to admit she was tired. She handed the box containing the bracelet back to Hershel. "What else did you need?"

Hershel chuckled as he returned the box to another of the pockets inside his jacket. "Nothing at all, actually; Quite the opposite." As his hand emerged once more, he had in his grasp a slip of paper, lightly creased. "Luke sent this to me a few weeks ago, to pass on to you once your sight had returned."

Alfendi gasped as his father held the paper out for the singer to take. "Oh! I remember that photo!" He bounced in place, grinning. "You'll love this, Lamiroir!"

Lamiroir raised a curious eyebrow, then reached out to take the paper. Noting there was indeed an image printed on it, she held it close to study... then gasped. "This is...?"

Flora and Alfendi both giggled, but it was Flora who answered, reaching out to tap the centre of the picture. "That's Machi, as of a few weeks ago. Either side of him is Trucy in blue, and Apollo in red."

Lamiroir had to force herself to resume breathing, her eyes locked on the happy boy in the middle of the picture. It had not occurred to her, in the excitement of regaining her sight, that she wouldn't know what her own son looked like until she returned to California... but it seemed it had occurred to someone else, someone else who had been sure to supply her with a photo. She didn't spare a glance for the two faces on either side, instead brushing a finger along the edge of the blond head grinning up at her from the paper. "Machi... pokani..." He had bright blue eyes, shining with the kindness he had shown her so many times, his arms wrapped around the figures either side as though pulling himself up by their shoulders; They similarly had their gloved hands on his back, all clinging together
as a trio. Blinking away tears, Lamiroir folded the sides of the paper back, so that only Machi was visible. "Thank you, Professor... And be sure to thank Luke for me." She wiped at her eyes, wondering how long it had been since she last cried. "This means more than I can possibly say."

Hershel chuckled, bowing his head as he replaced his top hat there. "I shall pass on the message."

View Layton's Notebook
It was the last day of the summer term at Gressenheller University, a week since Lamiroir's surgery had been regarded a success. Her eyes had not deteriorated significantly after the years of disuse, to her endless relief, and she had been released from the hospital to recover on her own and get used to using a sense she had lived without for as far back as she could remember.

The memories still came slowly. The Laytons had been very encouraging and helpful, Flora and Alfendi in particular showing Lamiroir around London, to see all the tourist destinations and the more local personal favourite hangouts they used (almost entirely centred around the university their father worked at). Flashes of images in her head told Lamiroir she had been to London before, and with someone else, but she couldn't extract anything more than that; Hershel had quietly mused to himself upon hearing this, and silently wrote it down in his notepad along with everything else.

With the end of term, Hershel was suddenly much more available, and Lamiroir requested to see him that very afternoon to discuss their upcoming trip to Borginia; It would be another couple of weeks before she was well enough to travel again, but she disliked waiting and was eager to see some progress. She was now once again used to using her eyes to navigate her surroundings, and had regained her sense of depth perception after a few days of bumping into things and knocking objects off tables, so she was confident in her ability to find her way to the address he had given her: the Layton family's home.

From the street below, Lamiroir looked up from the tiny slip of paper to the apartment building above. It looked so nondescript, identical to all the buildings lining the street around it... but it was definitely the right place. Placing the paper in the pocket alongside her photo of Machi, she stepped forward to push through the green doors and into the building's interior.

A flight or two of stairs later, and Lamiroir found the door matching the number of the Layton's. She reached out to gingerly knock on the wood, listening carefully for a reply.

She only had to wait a few seconds for the distant shout: "Coming!" Not more than half a minute later, the lock shifted, and the door swung open to reveal a smiling Flora. "Hello, Lamiroir!"

Lamiroir nodded, smiling back. "Good afternoon, Flora. Is your father in?"

"He got back from the uni not too long ago," Flora replied, stepping aside to wave the woman in. "Please, come inside."

"Thank you." Lamiroir slipped into the narrow hallway, then through an open doorway behind Flora, where she remembered the living room was; Although she had been here before, it had been before her surgery, so this was the first time she'd lain eyes on the apartment's interior. The room was longer than it was wide, a window at the far end that looked out over the street, and a pair of sofas against the walls by the door. A small television sat on a table at her left, a radio on the shelf underneath. The floor, covered by an orange rug, was littered with small toys, a mess she didn't doubt was the handiwork of young Alfendi.
"Feel free to sit down," Flora told her, pausing in the doorway. "I'll go get the Professor." She promptly disappeared down the hall.

Lamiroir took her time walking across the room, sitting down on the sofa at the opposite wall. 'I wonder where Alfendi is? I suppose they must frequently have clients meeting them here, given how practised Flora is at directing people in. Actually, she lives elsewhere, doesn’t she? She must have decided to stay here after taking Alfendi home, for the meeting I requested today.'

Flora returned not long after, Hershel at her side. He gave Lamiroir a smile as he entered the room, his hand reaching automatically to tip a hat he wasn't wearing. "Lamiroir, always a pleasure to see you," he called, crossing the floor to shake her hand. "You wanted to discuss our investigation?" He moved to sit on the other sofa, Flora following to take the seat at his side.

Lamiroir nodded. "We went over the basics when I hired you for my case, but I don't believe we have the details set in stone." She paused. "I'm... rather impatient to get my memories back in full."

"That's understandable," Hershel replied, though he seemed a little amused. "And we do indeed still have details to organise; I believe we were waiting to decide on a date until after your surgery, for example."

"We were," Lamiroir agreed, but as she opened her mouth to continue, a loud and rapid knocking at the door interrupted her, all three people in the room snapping their attention towards the sound.

After a pause, Hershel and Flora exchanged confused looks, evidently as surprised by the interruption as Lamiroir. "I'll go see who it is," Flora decided, getting to her feet and speed-walking out of the room.

Lamiroir watched the girl go. Would it be appropriate to continue her conversation?

"Did you have a date in mind?" Hershel asked, answering her unspoken question. "When has your doctor said you will be well enough to travel?"

"In two or three weeks," Lamiroir replied. "I'm not sure how that might fit with your timetable."

Hershel closed his eyes, thinking. "Alfendi will be back at school. It should be easy enough for us to arrange time off for both myself and him." He looked up at Lamiroir, smiling. "They are quite used to arranging sudden absences for us by now."

"Alfendi is coming too?" Lamiroir asked, surprised.

"He has no-one else to watch out for him while we are away," Hershel explained. "You needn't worry; He has been on many of my investigations by now, so he knows what to expect." He chuckled. "Flora will be accompanying us as well, and Emmy and my brother plan to act as our translator and transportation respectively; All told, we will have quite the sizable party."

Lamiroir nodded, musing over the information. She didn't have any objections to it.

"Professor!" came a feminine shout from the hall, and a teenage woman appeared in the doorway with a flash of yellow, her orange hair spiralling down from a bow on the side of her head. "I just! Oh!" She paused, noticing Lamiroir with a blink of her large blue eyes. "I'm sorry, I didn't know you had a client."

Hershel got to his feet. "Miss Cykes?"

Flora appeared at the teen's back, brushing a lock of hair behind her ear sheepishly. "Athena, I tried
to tell you..."

"I could come back later?" the girl continued, watching Hershel. "Will you be done in one hour, or two? Or, wait," she moved to fiddle with a small device hanging around her neck, which generated a small holographic screen that she studied with a gloved hand, "it's almost six, so I'd better just come back tomorrow..."

Lamiroir stood. "Miss Cykes, was it?"

The teen paused, shutting down her screen with a click of the device around her neck. "'Athena' is fine, ma'am." She frowned, suddenly seeming to take in who she was talking to. "Aren't you... Lamiroir?"

"I go by that name, yes," Lamiroir agreed. "Are you one of the Professor's students?"

"Oh, um, no," Athena admitted, running her fingers through her ponytail. "I, um..." She pulled her hands from her hair forcefully, looking sheepish. "I'm actually no-one's student as of forty minutes ago. And... I'm a friend of Luke's." She fixed Lamiroir with a grin. "He told me all about how he and Apollo defended your son for murder last month! You must be planning to fix your amnesia right now, huh? I'll get out of your way."

Lamiroir held up a hand before Athena could turn to go, shaking her head. "No, that's alright," she insisted. It was surprising to hear this girl was a friend of the Wrights, though that they would run into each other while at Professor Layton's house was not. "We have two, three weeks to plan. I don't mind waiting a few minutes, if your business is quick."

Athena blushed, her hands back to her ponytail. "Oh, yeah, I just..." She stepped into the room, looking to Hershel. "Like I said, I've handed in my final assignments, and all my exams are done. My professors don't think I'm likely to fail, so my time at Gressenheller is over."

"Congratulations, Athena!" Flora said, rushing to the teen's side with a grin. "You've worked so hard at this; You'll do brilliant!"

Hershel smiled. "Indeed, you deserve congratulations. A student as hard-working as you is rare."

Athena blushed harder. "I... just wanted to thank you, Professor. I never would've gotten as far as I have without you."

At that, Hershel chuckled, shaking his head. "Nonsense. All I did was convince your professors to give you a chance; All your academic achievements since have been by your own hard work alone."

"He's right," Flora added, patting Athena's shoulder. "How many people take on two full-time courses at once? And at such a young age, too!"

Lamiroir couldn't help but be impressed, hearing that. This young woman couldn't be older than seventeen or eighteen, and she had earned two university degrees simultaneously? "What did you study?"

"Psychology and law," Athena replied, still blushing from the compliments the Laytons had already paid her. "I was too busy with both courses to take any internships, but..." She flexed her hands into fists, grinning determinedly. "Once I get my results back, I'm going to apply to take the Californian bar exam! Before you know it, I'll be over there with Luke and Apollo and Mister Wright, and I'll get all the practical experience I need with them! And, in the meantime, Professor Cattell's hooked me up with a mentor who'll let me work under her until I'm ready to go, so I can hone my psychologist skills!"
"Wow, really?" Flora asked, surprised. "I didn't realise you'd be gone so soon..."

Lamiroir nodded in agreement, though she was mostly surprised Athena had been working so hard only to apply for work in a separate country entirely. Why not stay in America if that was the case?

Hershel chuckled. "If I recall, Apollo's badge took a month or so to arrive, and it will be a while before your final results are released... Let's not get into how much time arranging to take the Californian bar exam from here would swallow up on its own." His smile faded as he rubbed his chin in thought, watching the girl. "Are you planning to attend the graduation ceremony?"

Athena shook her head. "Nah. Aunt Eury will probably kill me, but I'll be eighteen in January, so she can't stop me going back to America. I'll be long gone by next year's ceremony."

Hershel nodded. "That is a good point."

Again, Lamiroir was impressed; Apparently there was more to Athena's story than she'd realised. "I should give you my congratulations also," she told the young woman, smiling. "Once you are working with the Wrights, maybe we will run into each other again."

"Oh, really?" Athena replied, and grinned. "I'd like that. Can't let Luke and Apollo have all the fun meeting the celebrities, after all!"

Lamiroir laughed. "I suppose not."

View the Court Record
The Siren's Secret, Prologue

September 12, 5:02PM
The Bostonius

Lamiroir started, blinking as the arm of the memory became the arm lying across her lap, bracelet glinting in the light. She looked up to find Flora standing with a small tray, watching the singer with a worried frown.

"Are you alright?"

The Bostonius had been in the air since early that morning, winding its way across Northern Europe towards Borginia. Although Lamiroir had offered to put Professor Layton and his investigative team up in a hotel there at her own expense, it didn't change that the journey was long, and the plane rather small, as luxurious as its cabin was. She couldn't deny she was still a little worried about returning to the country after Machi's trial; Although she had nothing to do with the smuggling, LeTouse had not been assigned as her manager for no reason... Borginian Customs had demanded the Bostonius stop by the international airport in Poma, Borginia's capital, on their way both in and out of the country, for the staff there to thoroughly investigate the plane top to bottom. She had no doubt that the reason had been her.

"Yes, of course," Lamiroir insisted to Flora, her hand brushing against the bracelet on her wrist. "I was just trying to see if I could remember anything more."

It was now ten minutes since they left Poma, headed to the small town that had served as her home as far back as she could remember. Lamiroir sat in the soft lounge chair that encircled the lower floor of the cabin, desperately trying to drag something useful out of that locked part of her brain that steadfastly refused to co-operate. Just as before, just as she had since regaining her sight, all she was able to catch were flashes of feeling, quick pictures or thoughts, and never with context or any kind of explanation that made sense to her. She felt useless, like a burden to her own investigation... She could only hope that, despite her inability to be of any help, Professor Layton was still able to find some clue that no-one else ever had.

Flora forced a smile, taking a small step towards where Lamiroir sat. She held out her tray, indicating the cups of black liquid sitting in their saucers. "Tea?"

Lamiroir nodded back, reaching for a cup. "Thank you."

As the older woman sipped at her drink, Flora placed the saucer on the table, then sat down opposite,
the tray resting on the cushion at her side. "Have... you had any luck?"

At that, Lamiroir had to pause. Eventually, she shook her head. "No luck." With a sigh, she placed her cup back on its saucer. "I am beginning to regret not taking Machi's advice the day he first presented it to me..." Almost on autopilot, she reached into her pocket, pulling out the photo within of the blond boy, smiling so cheerfully at the camera. "He would not have had to resort to such desperate measures... and maybe it would have been easier to recall anything with so much less of my new life in the way."

"You mustn't speak like there's no hope, Lamiroir," Flora pointed out, perched on the edge of her cushion to be as close to the older woman as possible. "To dwell on the past, on regrets of things you didn't do... All that does is take away from the present. You can't change what's been done; We all just have to deal with things as they are."

Lamiroir regarded the young woman with surprise. "A very wise observation."

Flora blushed. "Oh, the Professor taught me that. I'm not sure if he came up with it himself, or..."

"Oh hey, is that Luke's photo the Professor was telling us about?"

Lamiroir looked up to see Emmy leaning over her shoulder with a grin, her gaze on the photo in the singer's hand. "Yes, this is the one he sent me," she replied, holding it up for Emmy to see more clearly. "If it were not for this, I would not know what Machi looked like."

Emmy reached out to gently take the photo, giving it a critical look. "Why is it folded up like that?"

As she spoke, she was already unfolding it to reveal the picture in its entirety.

"For convenience," Lamiroir explained. "I need to fold it so it will fit in my pocket."

At that, Emmy nodded. "Yeah, it makes sense you'd arrange it to be just Machi then," she agreed, then turned to the unfolded picture in its entirety, regarding it with a frown. "Huh. That's odd."

"I know, right!?" Flora agreed, waving her hands with a frustrated look. "It's so unlike him!"

Lamiroir raised an eyebrow, looking between the two. "I'm sorry?"

Emmy didn't seem to have heard, giving Flora a curious look and gesturing with the photo. "You mean how it's just Machi, Apollo, and Trucy, right? No Mister Wright or Luke?"

"That's exactly what I mean!" Flora replied, her voice audibly pulled back from the brink of a shout. "The Professor just said," she crossed her arms, putting on a deep voice similar to Hershel's, "I'm sure Luke had his reasons, it's nothing to worry about, Flora," she dropped the impression with a groan, "and Alfendi agreed with him! I thought I was going mad!"

"Really!?" Emmy whispered, eyes wide. "The Professor dismissed this?"

As Flora nodded energetically, Lamiroir reached out to take her photo back. "May I ask what you are talking about?"

Emmy jumped as she registered the singer was still there, handing the picture to her with an embarrassed smile. "Sorry, it's just... It's weird, for Luke to have taken that photo. It's not like him."

Lamiroir looked over the photo, still confused. "What about it is so odd?"

"If Luke was taking a photo of Machi, it would just be of Machi," Flora explained, looking calmer
now she had someone on her side. "If he was taking a photo of his family and Machi, it would be his entire family and Machi. But instead it's Machi and just Apollo and Trucy."

"Mister Wright isn't there," Emmy added. "And neither is Luke. You only need one person to take a picture, so one of them should be there."

Lamiroir still wasn't sure what the problem was. "Maybe Mister Wright was simply not there when he took the photo," she pointed out.

Flora shook her head. "Luke had an entire month to plan this picture and get it to you in time for your surgery," she said. "If Mister Wright wasn't there, he'd wait to take it until he was."

"Which means Luke must have intended for only Apollo and Trucy to be in this," Emmy added, pointing to the paper in Lamiroir's hand. "The question is, why?"

Sighing, Flora leaned back in her chair. "Luke really is the Professor's apprentice; He's grown to be just as infuriatingly mysterious when he wants to be."

Lamiroir looked over the photo. She would just have to bow to the greater experience these two had with Luke Wright... although surely there was no cause for concern if the famous Hershel Layton wasn't as worried about it as his daughter or friend?

In the end, it had nothing to do with her. Lamiroir folded the photo back up so only Machi was visible, and dismissed the question from her mind.

Sycamore paced back and forth along the deck, hands clasped behind his back as his mouth moved in muted mutterings. Even so, it was his constant movement more than any sound that made him stand out so much, his speech and the sound of his shoes on the wooden floor silent under the deafening buzz of the propeller nearby.

Hershel restrained a sigh, leaning on the railing. Although he had started out trying to ignore his brother's inability to stay still, the constant pacing was becoming increasingly difficult to keep himself from noticing. "Do you have a problem?"

Sycamore paused, his brother's voice only just above the sound of the rushing wind around them. "Not a 'problem', per se," he insisted, sheepishly shoving his hands in his pockets. "More... concerns."

"Concerns?" Hershel repeated, turning to face the older man. "Such as?"

Sighing, Sycamore rocked on his feet a moment, then stepped over to stand at Hershel's side, leaning on the railing. "What's your plan?" he asked. "Go to this tiny town and just ask the locals questions? You do realise you're far from the first to try that, surely?"

Hershel nodded, turning back to the railing to look out over the mountains below. "I'm aware," he admitted.

"So then, what's your plan?" Sycamore pushed. "When you don't get anything new, what are-?"

"Who says we won't find anything new?" Hershel interrupted, a knowing smile on his face. "We
will have Lamiroir herself with us; If anything, that will make people more open to sharing what they know than with a complete stranger."

Sycamore paused, conceding the point, but he was still unconvinced. "And what if there's nothing more to learn? What if there are no leads in Kopunchiville?"

Hershel didn't reply, staring out at the view with a neutral expression.

After a long pause, Sycamore sighed. "At least tell me you spoke to Luke."

"I spoke to him," Hershel replied, a smile twitching at the corners of his lips. "What he doesn't want to share, I won't force out of him."

Sycamore stared incredulously at his brother. "He...? Are you telling me Luke Triton refused to tell you what he knew about your current investigation?"

Hershel chuckled. "I'm sure he has his reasons. Besides, we will soon have more than enough information simply asking around the town."

"Asking around...!?" The incredulous look on Sycamore's face grew stronger. "Have you not been listening to a word I've said!? This whole thing will be dead in the water if you can't find a lead in this middle-of-nowhere village! You don't have a plan!??"

"You don't have to come if you object so strongly."

Sycamore instantly quietened, chewing his lip as he stared out at the orange sky. The silence stretched out between them, broken only by the rushing wind and the buzz of the plane's propeller. Finally, Sycamore sighed. "I can't exactly leave you all alone to get into trouble, can I? You've proven you can't look after yourself."

Hershel didn't react except for the small smile on his lips.

"Papa! Uncle!"

The brothers turned to see a seven-year-old boy charging towards them with a grin, the wind blowing his already wild hair every which way. "What is it, Alfendi?" Hershel called.

"Mister Raymond says we're 'beginning our descent'," Alfendi told them. "That means we're landing soon!"

"Indeed it does," Sycamore agreed with a chuckle.

"Thank you for informing us," Hershel told the boy with a warm smile. "We'll be in shortly."

Alfendi giggled, nodded, then raced off back to the cabin.

Sycamore grunted to himself, shoving his hands in his pockets. "It will be dark by the time we land."

Hershel nodded, moving to follow his son. "The investigation starts bright and early tomorrow."
Madame Noisette, or 'Rose' as she preferred, spoke only minimal English, so mostly Emmy took charge when anyone in the group needed to communicate with her (Unfortunately, Rose was more often than not too star-struck by Lamiroir to remember to reply to her questions). But, Kopunchiville was a very small town, and Rose's bed and breakfast was the only (private) lodgings Lamiroir had been able to find. If anything, it was at least much more able to accommodate the six of them than the Bostonius was (not that that had stopped Sycamore 'threatening' several times to go back to his precious plane rather than stay the night in the unfamiliar house of a stranger), and wasn't as public as the local hostel.

It had been dark when they landed on the unmanned airstrip just outside town, parking the Bostonius somewhere out of the way before the investigation team headed off together to find their lodgings. Alfendi was practically falling asleep on his feet, and it was difficult enough to navigate in the dark; Lamiroir was forced to admit that she'd had little idea of the town's layout when she lived there, and regaining her sight, if anything, only seemed to make her feel even more lost. Regardless, they'd finally come across their destination and stumbled into their beds; The largest room went to Hershel and Alfendi, the second to Emmy and Flora. Sycamore and Lamiroir had their own rooms to themselves, and it was likely for that reason alone that Sycamore didn't immediately turn around to return to his plane.

Lamiroir was woken the next morning by a cheerful cry of "Breakfast is served!" from Rose, promptly followed by the patterning of Alfendi's excited feet down the stairs, shouting, "Papa, it's breakfast!"

It didn't take long for everyone to gather at the dining room table, Alfendi full of energy as he wolfed down everything that was put in front of him (except for the bacon, which he deemed 'too crunchy' and promptly picked out of his sandwich with great care). Hershel held up a hand, quietening any conversations, and announced, "We should discuss our plans for today while we are all together."

Sycamore huffed. "Finding locals to question? I don't imagine that requires much discussion."

"And we could easily split up for that," Emmy added. "There are two of us here who speak Borginian, after all."

Flora shook her head. "But we don't even know our way around," she pointed out, and looked to Lamiroir. "Didn't you say last night you never went anywhere without a guide?"

The singer nodded. "I more-or-less knew the path from the restaurant to my cottage," she explained, "but that was it. If I ever needed to go anywhere else, I always had Machi with me."

"Even groceries?" Sycamore asked.

Lamiroir smiled. "I had my groceries delivered to me; A special deal, considering I couldn't shop alone."

Emmy frowned. "So... it wasn't a secret you were blind?"
"Only after I gained fame," Lamiroir replied. "I had no reason to keep it hidden, but even so only people in regular contact with me would have known."

Hershel had his hand curled around his chin, frowning in thought. "That will have all changed after the murder trial, of course," he pointed out, then gave the woman a smile. "Doubtless most everyone we meet will still be expecting you to be without sight."

Lamiroir nodded; She hadn't exactly advertised her plans to the world, and it would have been enough of a shock to Borginia to learn she was blind. She almost laughed at the thought of giving the country a second shock by announcing her blindness had been cured only weeks later, essentially reverting their image of her back to 'normal'.

"Regardless," Hershel continued, turning to the rest of the table with a serious look, "Flora is right that we don't know our way around, so it would be best that we stick together for now."

"Ah, I see," Sycamore muttered, his own hand on his chin. "Our first task is simply to learn the town layout, become familiar with the area?"

Hershel smiled, giving his brother a nod. "Exactly."

"A reasonable idea," Sycamore agreed.

"And we could find the Restaurant de Chanson while we're at it," Emmy added, grinning. "As the first place Lamiroir performed, it'll be our best lead."

Lamiroir frowned. "I'm not sure Monsieur Salinen will be of much help," she admitted. "I... rather, Machi, asked him about my past multiple times, but he always said he knew nothing about it."

"Monsieur Salinen is the manager?" Flora asked.

"He is," the singer confirmed.

Emmy scoffed, slamming a fist into her other hand. "I'm sure we can persuade him to tell us the full truth."

Hershel gave her a glare. "Emmy, please. We are not going to threaten anyone with violence."

"Of course, Professor," Emmy replied, a smile on her face. "I'm not going to hurt anyone except in self-defence; I know the rules."

Lamiroir found herself wondering exactly what had happened in the past that there existed a rule of 'non-violence' specifically for Emmy. Across the table, she noticed Alfendi looking a little disappointed at his father's proclamation, but he said nothing.

Sycamore chuckled, tidying up his empty plate and dirty cutlery as he got to his feet. "I shall start getting ready to leave then. We have a busy day of information-gathering ahead of us."

Alfendi gasped, bouncing in his seat. "Uncle! Uncle! Can we wear our capes!?"

The man laughed, reaching out to ruffle his nephew's hair. "That's why we brought them, isn't it?"

"Finish your breakfast and we can leave all the sooner," Hershel reminded the boy with a knowing smile.

"Yes, Papa!" Alfendi chirped, practically vibrating in excitement as he shoved the entire rest of his sandwich in his mouth at once.
Flora squeaked, horrified. "Alfendi, *chew your food*!"

Kopunchiville was only a small town, so they took their time exploring it, chatting to the occasional curious local. There was a library in the centre of town, opposite the town hall. To the immediate south, between the town centre and the river, was the 'shopping district', a handful of streets full of small shops of various different specialities, while to the west was the more 'artsy/food district', restaurants, a museum and even a games centre. Beyond that centre circle, expanding out in rings, was the residential slash industrial slash rural space; Across the river they left alone, informed by Madame Noisette that it only contained a single street.

After coming across a signboard outside the town hall with a map, Alfendi happily scribbled out a copy of it, which he passed to Lamiroir with a cheerful, "You can use this now, Lamiroir!"

The singer smiled, taking the piece of paper. "Oh, thank you so much, Alfendi."

"No problem!" the boy chirped, and pointed at the pencil-scrawled map. "See, there's the river, and down here is the forest. I wrote what they are because it's hard to tell."

Lamiroir nodded. "Yes, I can see they're clearly labelled. Is this the library here?"

Alfendi grinned, seeing her finger pointing to a small book he had drawn in the centre of town, labelled with an 'L'. "Uh-huh! And that's the town hall above it, with the 'TH'!" He frowned. "Papa said town halls have bells, so I tried to draw one, but it didn't turn out good."

"Ah yes, I can see the bell," Lamiroir assured him, then turned her finger to a large box with the word 'SHOPS' written inside. "And there are the shops."

"And that house is where we're staying," the boy added, pointing to a house on the eastern side of town, drawn on its side with 'BNB' scribbled above it. Beyond was a tiny drawing of a plane, with a large 'B' below. "And there's the airport, where the Bostonius is!"

Lamiroir laughed. "I thought that's what that was." She gave the boy a smile, folding the paper up to place in her pocket. "I'm sure this will be very useful."

Alfendi grinned in pride.
The people they spoke to were the kind of unique, colourful characters Lamiroir remembered from her own time in the town, those few short years ago. Although none of them spoke English, they did speak the universal language of ‘puzzles’, which the Laytons were very happy to communicate with; Lamiroir herself watched with amusement, having never been able to engage in this subset of Borginian culture in the years she was without her sight. She and Emmy handled all the actual speaking to everyone, and Lamiroir was quite happy when the sun began to set and only three people that day had recognised her.
Hershel hummed in thought as they headed towards the food district. "I think it's time..."

"Time?" Flora repeated. "For what?"

Sycamore chuckled, his two-tone grey cape fluttering as his arms crossed underneath. "Time to bite this investigation where it really hurts."

Alfendi skipped at his uncle's side, his own miniature blue version of Sycamore's cape flapping from his shoulders. "Yeah!"

"I wouldn't have put it in such a colourful term, but yes," Hershel replied. "It's time we sought out the Restaurant de Chanson."

Lamiroir nodded. "I won't be able to direct you, I'm afraid."

"Don't worry," Emmy replied, shooting the singer a wink. "We'll find our way soon enough!" With that, she dashed to the front of the group. "I'll start asking for directions, Professor."

At the back of the group, Lamiroir sighed in relief, happy to leave that chore to Emmy and give herself time to think; She had never seen her former workplace after all, and had no idea what to expect. From the shadowed depths of her mind, her thoughts kept dredging mismatching images of fancy tables, rickety chairs, a stained spoon, a row of sparkling forks of varying sizes, a napkin folded into a swan, lights that flickered uncertainly above her head... Half of her wondered which of these were lived experiences and which exaggerated fantasies of a younger her, while the other half tried to sort through and connect the pictures to her blind memories of the restaurant. Distracted as she was by her own musings, she followed Flora ahead of her without even thinking, not noticing the various corners they turned or the roads they crossed. She doubted the Restaurant de Chanson was overly fancy, but was equally sure it wasn't some hole-in-the-wall, barely clean dirt pit either. It was probably in the middle of the road between the two... but was it a gaudy place, or plain? Large or small? Dark or brightly lit?

"Lamiroir? We're here."
The Siren's Secret, Restaurant of Song

September 13, 6:12PM
Restaurant de Chanson

A clean white building on a corner, not too large but not overly small either... exceedingly average. An equally average sign hung over the entrance doors: music notes and a stylised microphone around the Borginian text that spelled out the business's name. A menu hung on the wall of the small porch over the double doors, lights fashioned into fake candles either side of it.

This was not what Lamiroir had imagined... but somehow it fit.

"So this is the Restaurant de Chanson?" Flora asked.

"Says so on the sign," Emmy replied, pointing. She grinned at the group, gesturing to the door. "Shall we?"

Inside, the floor was packed, every table filled by people. Waitresses dashed about with notebooks and trays, worker bees buzzing back and forth between their kitchen hive and flower tables. The ceiling sloped up from the entrance, reaching its peak directly above the stage at the far wall, a large wooden box with a single microphone in its stand. A middle-aged man stood up there, crooning a warbled melody into the mic while a group of his buddies at a table below cheered him on.

Alfendi made a disgusted noise, covering his ears with his hands as he pressed up against his father. "It's loud in here."

Hershel patted Alfendi's shoulder, holding the boy close at his side. "We'll find somewhere quiet to sit."

"I must say, I'd rather not listen to that performer myself," Sycamore added, arms crossed. "He's not exactly talented."

"That'll be because it's karaoke night," Emmy remarked.

Sycamore raised an eyebrow, turning to look at her. "I know what I just said, but just because he isn't a singer, it doesn't mean-"

Emmy snorted, pointing to a poster on the wall. "It says so right here, Desmond." Indeed, among the Borginian script of the paper sign was the romanised word 'KARAOKE' in large letters, understandable by even the English-speaking Laytons; The text below, Lamiroir read, added that this was a Sunday night tradition for the restaurant, and even how to join the queue to perform.

Sycamore regarded the poster with wide eyes for a moment, then sighed and turned away with a glare. "Right."

Flora looked to Lamiroir, curious. "Is this how you got discovered, Lamiroir?"

Lamiroir searched her mind for dusty memories from her earliest days without sight, but found nothing. "I'm afraid I have no idea," she admitted. "Although I can't say I recall this kind of festivity happening before, I don't think I ever sung on Sundays; This may have been going on and no-one ever mentioned it to me."
Hershel nodded, a hand on his hat. "Let's find somewhere free, and quiet, to sit down and eat," he said. "Then, we will need to ask after the manager."

Lamiroir had eaten at the restaurant regularly back in her days performing there, meals provided as part of her contract before she was 'discovered' and she and Machi left for pastures unknown. To her relief, the quality of the food had not decreased in the slightest, being exactly the way she remembered... though now she could admire the artistic appearance of her salad and calamari just as much as its enticing aroma. Everyone else in their party seemed to enjoy their food too, with the exception of young Alfendi: After complaining about there being 'nothing good' and being forced to settle for fish and chips, he promptly picked any trace of greenery off his food and ate only the battered fish.

Up on stage, the festivities continued, with a steady stream of singers of varying skills taking their turns at carrying a tune. Most picked local songs in their native Borginian, but a brave few picked foreign songs, usually in English, and the results were nearly incomprehensible to the group at Lamiroir's table... as well as to the rest of the audience, who generally only clapped politely; The younger members of the Layton family mostly reacted by hiding hysterical giggles.

In a pause between songs, Emmy called over their waitress, asking in Borginian, "Excuse me? Do you know if Monsieur Salinen is around?"

The waitress looked a little shocked. "Y-yes, he is. Did you want to talk to him?"

Emmy nodded, gesturing to Hershel. "If he's in the building, we would like to speak to him in private. Is that okay?"

"Y-yes, that should be okay," the waitress muttered, then dashed off.

Lamiroir chuckled, saying in English, "You needn't worry about being turned down; Monsieur Salinen always loved talking to customers. I believe he even has his own table in the audience."

Hershel looked surprised. "Has he agreed to speak to us?"

"I just asked the waitress," Emmy explained, shrugging. "She said he's around, and we should be okay talking to him."

"I'm looking forward to this," Sycamore said, smirking. He turned to his brother. "Mind if I join you and Emmy?"

Hershel thought a moment, then nodded. "I suppose so."

"Can I come too?" Alfendi asked, picking at the crumbs on his plate.

"Better not; We should keep our group small," Sycamore explained.

"Agreed," Hershel added, and gave his son an apologetic smile. "We don't want to overwhelm him with too many people. You stay here with Flora and Lamiroir."

Alfendi pouted, but didn't complain.

The waitress returned, clutching her notebook as she said in Borginian, "Madame? Monsieur Salinen will speak with you now." She beckoned for Emmy and Hershel to follow, then turned to weave her way back through the tables. Emmy, Hershel and Sycamore got up to follow her.
Lamiroir carefully watched as the trio were led across the room. She wanted - no, needed - to know the moment anything happened.

Hershel paused as the waitress left them at a booth in the corner of the room, opposite from where they had sat to eat. Sitting at the table within, closing a book in front of him, was an aging man in green, glasses perched on a round nose as he regarded his visitors with a polite smile. Hershel made sure to smile back, tipping his hat. "Thank you for agreeing to meet with us, Monsieur Salinen."

Emmy brushed her hair behind her shoulder, speaking to the man in Borginian. She asked a question, gesturing to the round bench of the booth, and he replied affirmatively with a nod. Shooting her friends a grin, Emmy explained, "I've told him we have business to discuss; He's invited us to sit down."

"Thank you very much," Sycamore replied to the man, and the trio slipped into the booth, Emmy and Sycamore on one side and Hershel on the other.

"Minkalanen de liketominta tila on minun kansani?" Salinen asked, hands clutched together on the table in front of him.

"What kind of business do you have with me?" Emmy translated, looking to Hershel.

Hershel thought only a moment before turning to Salinen with a stern expression. "My name is Hershel Layton, and these are my colleagues Desmond Sycamore and Emmy Altava. We are here on behalf of Lamiroir."

Emmy gestured between the three of them, repeating their names. "Oleme tala pulesta de Lamiroir."

Salinen's eyes widened, and his face went pale. "Lamiroir?" he repeated.

"We are investigating her life before this restaurant," Hershel continued. "Her earliest memories are here, so we hoped to ask you what you might know."

The man stared at Hershel as Emmy translated. As her words came to an end, Salinen's eyes flickered out to the restaurant floor, locking on to something Hershel could only guess at; The archaeologist kept his gaze steadfastly on the manager, not backing down to glance back and confirm what Salinen had found out there. After several moments of silence, Salinen looked away from the view of his restaurant. "Mina en tida mitan."

Emmy blinked, surprised, and shot back a quick question in Borginian. Salinen nodded as he replied. "What did he say?" Sycamore asked, watching Emmy.

"He..." Emmy shook her head, baffled. "He said he doesn't know anything. We've come to the wrong place."

Hershel and Sycamore shared a confused look. "Is he sure?" Hershel asked.

Emmy nodded. "That's what he said."

Frowning, Hershel pressed a hand to his chin. "Hmm..."

"How can you not know anything?" Sycamore picked up, shooting Salinen an incredulous glare. "You hired her to work here, at a time she was highly unlikely to be capable of taking care of herself!"
"You must know something!"

Emmy nodded in agreement, turning back to Salinen to translate. In reply, Salinen only laughed, waving them off with a lengthy explanation in Borginian that left Emmy glaring, red-faced.

"What did he say?" Sycamore demanded, looking between Emmy and Salinen.

"He said we don't know anything." Emmy muttered through gritted teeth. "Lamiroir applied to perform here alone, and looked after herself just fine."

Sycamore's eyebrows shot up, then he joined Emmy's glare. "Is that so."

"Let's not call anyone a liar," Hershel gently reminded them, arms crossed. "We shall just have to-"

"Poppycock!" Sycamore cried, waving his brother off as he kept his attention on Salinen. "If Lamiroir was mentally functioning normally when she began work here, that must have been before the accident that caused her blindness, and her memory issues. Am I correct, Monsieur?"

Emmy crossed her arms as she translated, fixing Salinen with a stern glare as she barked something in Borginian. "Miten han meneti nakonsa ja mustin?"

Salinen blinked, blankly. "Nakonsa?"

Her demeanour unchanged, Emmy nodded. "Mita tapatu, Monsieur Salinen?"

Face paling, Salinen's eyes once more darted out across the floor of the restaurant, only to widen as he apparently failed to find what he was looking for. "Eh... Mi...

The amateur performer on stage reached the end of their song to a smattering of applause, and silence fell over the restaurant. A scant few seconds later, the quiet gave way to cheering, and the entire building was soon being shaken by rapturous clapping.

Hershel spun in his seat, looking up to the stage. Sycamore, Emmy, and even Salinen were quick to follow.

"Talus, kaki," Lamiroir announced from the stage microphone with a smile that cut through the noise like a knife.
At their table, Lamiroir intently watched Hershel, Sycamore and Emmy slip into the booth. That man there... That was Lalu Salinen? She wasn't sure what she had been expecting her former manager to look like, but a grey-haired man with a spider-web of wrinkles across his face was not it. Although, now she thought about it, she could picture all those pauses in his speech being filled with the fiddling of those glasses, taking them off to clean, or simply pushing them up his nose under the hot lights of the stage.

The conversation began in earnest, and Salinen's eyes widened, quickly moving to scan the audience before locking on to Lamiroir at her table. She returned the stare calmly, hoping her presence, even at this distance, would smooth the discussion out to its destination much sooner.

Salinen seemed to be sweating as he returned his gaze to his visitors... or was that Lamiroir's imagination, misinterpreting the shine of the lights on his skin? Emmy looked shocked, the others confused, then Sycamore threw up a fist, barely restraining himself from slamming it on the table. Salinen laughed as he spoke again, and this time Lamiroir was sure she wasn't imagining the perspiration of a liar. Her bracelet felt tight on her wrist, and she reflexively moved to rub at it. Her eyes pricked as she instinctively focused on the man at the table, all else becoming non-existent. Salinen was sweating. His easy smile was tight on his face, twitching at the corners. Although the movements were minute and far away, she could see them clear as day, could see the intentions behind them to hide and to confuse. In fact, they were all she could see right now.

This strange sensation... This was a part of her. Just as much as the memories. This was important, what allowed her to read what people were thinking, all without them having to say a word.

Salinen was lying.

Lamiroir's focus broke with a gasp, her surroundings swarming back into her awareness all in a rush. She knew Salinen was lying to them. How had she known that? The moment the question occurred to her, the explanation popped into her head as though it had always been there, 'it runs in my family, I'm unconsciously copying body language, I have the ability to hyper-focus on the tiniest details, my bracelet just tells me when,' and she didn't doubt it always had been there, hidden under the same veil that covered everything else about her life 'before'. Suddenly, looking back on her years of blindness, she felt even more lost; Hadn't she relied so much on this 'ability' to understand the hidden depths of everyone she met, whether to play them on stage or simply in everyday life to form a first impression?

...

Wait, 'play them on stage'?

"Lamiroir? Are you okay?"

The singer blinked, looking down at young Alfendi, who had moved into the now-unoccupied chair at her side. "I'm alright," she insisted, forcing a smile. "I... just remembered something, actually."

"Really?" Flora asked, curiosity piqued. "What did you remember?"
Instead of replying, Lamiroir returned her gaze to the distant table. Salinen was still engaged in conversation, faking confidence that Lamiroir could see right through. "I'll tell you later," she told Flora, getting to her feet. "I'm afraid I have something I need to do first."

"Can I come?" Alfendi called.

Lamiroir shook her head, patting the boy's shoulder. "Next time," she promised, then ran off through the sea of tables before she had to see Alfendi's disappointed face.

She would have to impart this 'stage' clue to Hershel later... but, right now, she had more important business to conduct with it.

Lamiroir rode the high of her discoveries all the way to the corner of the stage, where she found a young woman sat at a desk, staring lazily at a computer screen and tapping her fingers on a clipboard at her side. Nearby, a teenage girl stood, equally bored, waiting impatiently for the current singer two short metres away to finish up. As she approached, Lamiroir cleared her throat, then called in Borginian, "Excuse me?"

"Current queue is about twelve minutes," the young woman automatically replied, "if you want to- HOLY-!" She cut herself off with a stream of loud curse words as she finally turned her gaze up to see who her latest 'customer' was, jumping in her chair. "You're Lamiroir!"

The girl nearby squeaked as she also turned to look, eyes wide.

At first, Lamiroir wasn't quite sure how to respond, used to the serene nature of her 'image' stilling people's foul mouths in her presence. "Language, young lady."

The woman blushed, shrinking in her seat. "I-I'm so sorry, madame! D-did you...?" She feebly pointed to the stage. "Were you wanting to sing, or something...?"

"Or something," Lamiroir replied, giving the younger woman a polite smile. "You said it was a twelve minute wait...?"

The woman nodded. "Yes, that's-"

"I'm up next!" the girl stood nearby cut in, her grin threatening to split her face in half. "But you can take my spot, Lamiroir!"

"That's very kind of you," Lamiroir replied, "but I don't want to cut in front of the queue."

"It's no problem, madame!" the girl insisted, and Lamiroir began to fear she was in danger of hyperventilating from the excitement of giving up her spot in line to a celebrity. "You can go ahead!"

The woman at the desk surveyed her computer and clipboard. "That... shouldn't be a problem," she decided. "Did you have a preference for what to sing, madame?"

Lamiroir paused. She hadn't thought this far ahead. "I'm rather new to karaoke," she admitted. "Perhaps something easy... Do you have any of my songs in there?"

The woman nodded, clicking madly at her computer. "We just got 'Guitar's Serenade' in; That one's very popular."

"Maybe not that one," Lamiroir quickly decided, restraining a wince. "It's too soon." And it was in
"Veil of Time!" Lamiroir cried, grinning as the song crossed her mind once more. "That one would be perfect!"

The woman nodded, clicking something on her computer. "We can certainly do that, madame." She glanced up at Lamiroir's eyes. "The lyrics will be running on the little screen behind the microphone stand. They're programmed to follow the timing of the recorded instrumental."

"Thank you," Lamiroir replied. "I will appreciate having the reminder on hand."

"You'll be up shortly," the woman added, returning the singer's smile as the music of the ongoing performance faded out into silence. "Good luck... and thank you for coming back, Lamiroir."

It was only as Lamiroir left the desk and climbed onstage she recognised the young woman's voice as that of a teenage waitress from years past.

The silence of the restaurant gave way to cheering and loud applause as the crowd, many of them likely regulars since her earliest days as a singer, recognised Lamiroir approaching the microphone onstage. She gave them a cursory smile as she adjusted the stand, taking stock of the small monitor at her feet and the sheer size of the restaurant floor before her; Just as always since before she could remember, the size of her audience didn't phase her in the slightest. "Hello everyone," Lamiroir announced into the mic, her words finally calming the sheer noise of the excited crowd. "Please, go easy on me: This is my first time doing karaoke... as far as I can remember, anyway."

The audience tittered in amusement, then fell silent. A moment later, the speakers around the building began to emit the familiar opening piano chords of Veil of Time, exactly the way Machi would have played them had he not been on the other side of the world at that moment... In fact, that was Machi playing them, but from three years before, in a recording studio back in Poma. But Lamiroir couldn't spare any further time musing on her son; Instead, she cast her eyes across the still crowd, searching the sea of tables. There was Flora and Alfendi over there... and there was Salinen's booth. He and his three visitors were all watching her intently, the same as the rest of the crowd, though she couldn't miss the vaguely confused looks on the Laytons' faces. Naturally, they would be the only ones to miss the subtext of her song, not speaking any Borginian... Another thing she would have to explain to them later. For now though, she fixed a determined stare on Lalu Salinen, just in time for the intro to end and the words to begin.
"Ja kaki on menetety laverho de ajan..."

Lamiroir's final notes echoed across the restaurant for a moment or two before the applause started, the crowd giving her a standing ovation as their cheers drowned out the end of the music. She smiled serenely, curtseying and saying "Kitos," into her microphone.

"Bis! Bis!" came the cries from the crowd.

Lamiroir shook her head, turning down the calls for an encore. She curtsied one final time, shot the booth in the corner a look, then ventured down off the stage, back the way she had came.

"What was that about?" Sycamore muttered, fingers tapping on the table. "I thought she wasn't interested in karaoke?"

Emmy sniffed, frantically wiping at her eyes. "That's... one of her songs," she hurriedly explained. "The Veil of Time, I think it's called. Very moving."

Hershel raised an eyebrow. "I see." He then turned his attention to the man with them, who was staring up at the empty stage with wide eyes, lost in thought. "Monsieur Salinen?"

The man jumped, looking between the three, then sighed, staring down at the closed book in front of him. "Mina tulen puhuman."

Emmy gasped, jumping back into business as she asked him a question in rapid Borginian.

Salinen nodded, morosely adding to his earlier statement.

"He's going to tell us what he knows!" Emmy happily translated.

Hershel and Sycamore exchanged surprised looks. Had it been Lamiroir getting up to sing that had changed his mind?

Salinen slowly began to explain in Borginian, his tone low and his gaze unmoving from the table in front of him. Every few sentences, he would pause, and Emmy would translate for Hershel and Sycamore, the full sad tale of what he knew of Lamiroir's past:

"Nine years ago, a man came to see me in my restaurant. He had business to conduct, a potential act for my stage, and begged for me to come and see 'her'. He told me 'she' was his niece, blind since birth, and a brilliant singer, but she had suffered a car accident recently and had no memories in her head. She couldn't even count past twenty before forgetting what she was doing, but she would always finish a song. Naturally, I agreed to see her, and he took me to her house, where he was looking after her."

At this point, Salinen began to rub at his eyes, gesturing beyond the stage.
"She lived just over there, in a house on the street behind the restaurant. Her voice was so beautiful, and she reminded me so much of someone I knew when I was a child. I had to accept her, and gave her Saturdays to sing. I would go to her house, collect her from the front door, and keep an eye on her as she performed. She always did so well, and the audience loved her. I think it was even the routine that helped her start to retain things again."

Sycamore frowned, arms crossed. "She suffered from short-term memory loss as well as long-term?" he mused. "I wonder how long that lasted before she recovered it?"

"I never saw her uncle again," Salinen continued, through Emmy's translations. "I asked after him once, but Lamiroir had no idea who I was talking about; She looked after herself. She always had, in her memory."

Hershel rubbed his chin, deep in thought. "May I ask, where did Lamiroir's name come from? Did this uncle give it to her?"

Emmy translated, and Salinen took a moment to reply. "I gave it to her, on her first night singing," Emmy replied on Salinen's behalf. "I suddenly realised I hadn't been told her name, and she couldn't remember one, so I just called her 'The Siren' and it stuck."

"What about this uncle?" Sycamore picked up. "Did you ever get his name?"

Salinen sighed once Emmy had translated. "Geary," he said. "Hanen nimensa oli Geary."

"Geary?" Hershel repeated, under his breath.

The manager nodded. "Se on kaki mita tidan," he said. "Lupan."

"That's all he knows," Emmy sighed. "He promises."

"Where was this uncle staying?" Sycamore asked. "With Lamiroir, I presume?"

"Oli Geary asu latalosa Lamiroir?" Emmy translated.

Salinen nodded. "Lamiroir asu sina talosa kunes han lahti kapunkin. En tida misa Geary meni."

"Lamiroir lived there until she left town," Emmy explained. "He doesn't know what happened to Geary."

Hershel closed his eyes, musing on the information. After a long pause, he opened them again to give the old manager a smile. "Thank you for your help, Monsieur. You've been a great aid to our investigation." He stood, slipping out of the booth.

Emmy gave Salinen a polite grin as she translated, moving to follow. She added something of her own in Borginian, and Salinen nodded as he briefly replied, waving a goodbye.

As the trio walked away from the booth, the warbling sounds of the current karaoke singer ringing out from the stage over their heads, Sycamore poked his brother's arm with a glare. "No, he wasn't."

Hershel raised an eyebrow. "Wasn't what?"

"Wasn't any help," Sycamore clarified. "This 'Geary' disappeared nine years ago. He'll be long gone. If that was all Salinen truly knew, what hope do we have for finding out anything else?"

"Don't be such a misery guts, Desmond," Emmy gently chided him. "Surely someone else will have heard of him."
Hershel nodded. "We still have avenues to explore before we can declare Kopunchiville out of information for us," he agreed, then gestured ahead of them to their table, where Flora, Alfendi and Lamiroir sat together waiting for them. "Speaking of..."

Alfendi noticed the approaching group with a gasp, bouncing in his chair as he waved to them. "Papa! Did you see Lamiroir singing?"

"It was beautiful, wasn't it?" Flora added, shooting a grin at the proud singer at Alfendi's side.

"It was indeed," Hershel agreed, quickly moving to his seat and turning his attention on Lamiroir. "I imagine you were attempting to help us?"

Lamiroir nodded, only barely biting back a grin. "I could see Monsieur Salinen was lying to you, so I thought a reminder of who it was behind those questions might convince him to tell the truth."

Emmy laughed, dropping into her chair. "Well, it worked! And what a perfect song to choose too; Did you originally write that about your amnesia?"

"And my blindness," Lamiroir replied, smiling. "By then, I had my 'image', so I was careful to keep the lyrics vague."

Sycamore frowned in thought, sitting at Alfendi's other side. "You said... you could 'see' Monsieur Salinen was lying to us?" he said, watching Lamiroir closely. "How could you know? We were quite a distance away, and you've never seen Salinen before this evening."

At that, Lamiroir laughed. "I suppose I must confess... I've remembered something else about myself." Her cheer faded a little as she added, "Not that it will help the investigation, I fear."

"Whether it helps the investigation or not, returned memories are always a good thing," Hershel insisted with a smile.

Emmy nodded in agreement, leaning forward eagerly. "What did you remember?"

Lamiroir's smile grew again, her hand on the golden ring at her right wrist. "The purpose of my bracelet! I can use it to more accurately read body language, to see what people are thinking!"

The rest of the table exchanged surprised looks. "Your... bracelet? How does it do that?" Emmy asked.

"You don't have to believe me," Lamiroir sighed, "but this is a part of me I had no use for when I was blind... A very important part of me, something that runs in my family." She closed her eyes, her hand held to her chest. "I have a very unique ability to focus completely on something, to see the smallest twitch or movement in perfect clarity; My bracelet was specially made for me, and it helps me know when someone tenses up, so I can focus to see what is wrong... If they are lying, I can usually tell what about." She looked up again, proud. "I used to use my ability all the time... on stage."

Hershel raised an eyebrow.

Flora gasped, grinning as she reached over to pat Lamiroir's arm. "Oh, that's brilliant! So you were a performer before you lost your memories, just like you thought!"

Lamiroir nodded. "The stage has always been a home to me; I couldn't imagine my old life any other way."
"What did you used to do?" Alfendi asked. "Did you still sing?"

"I'm not quite sure," Lamiroir admitted. "It probably doesn't matter; Surely if I was well-known, someone else would have discovered my past identity long ago."

Sycamore shot Hershel a look. "Very true."

Hershel ignored him. "Any little thing can help. This family ability could be a vital clue." He gestured towards Salinen's booth. "In fact, Monsieur Salinen mentioned you were in the care of a family member when he first hired you to work here: Do you remember an uncle by the name of 'Geary'?"

Lamiroir frowned, thinking hard. "An uncle Geary...?" she mused aloud. After a few moments, she sighed, shaking her head. "It's vaguely familiar, but nothing is coming to mind. I'm sorry."

"Don't worry, we'll find another clue to follow," Emmy assured her. "We aren't done with this town yet."

"Emmy is right," Hershel agreed, ignoring his brother's subtle eye-rolling. "If we're all ready to finish up here, we can start with a look at this house you stayed in when you lived in town. Do you think you could find it?"

Lamiroir thought a moment, then nodded. "If we walk around to the back door, I should be able to locate it. It wasn't far away."

The Restaurant de Chanson was ringed on three sides by road, though it had very few neighbours in this outskirts area of the small town. Out the back, the western wall, was a small car park that extended to the south, dotted with employees' and tourists' vehicles and a row of bikes locked to a rack along the wall. The car park itself was well-lit and the bikes nearby hid a line of colourful signs directing visitors around to the front door on the eastern side of the building. To the north, across the road, was a small cottage, looming out of the darkness with the rolling, empty hill behind it. To the west, across the battered local road, were two long buildings, one small and the other a little larger.

Lamiroir walked straight to the back door, where a yellow, long-haired retriever was tied to the wall. Seeing someone approaching, it jumped to its paws, tail wagging, and sniffed in her direction. Lamiroir smiled, waving to the animal. "Talus, Keltanen." The dog smiled in reply.

Putting Salinen's dog out of her mind, Lamiroir turned her back to the door; Although she wanted to close her eyes, she worried about tripping over without the guide she was used to following, so she simply focussed her mind on her ears and her feet. "Let's see if I can..." She stepped forward gingerly, holding a hand out as though to grasp the arm of her guide of old; It had always been Salinen to escort her between home and the restaurant in the old days, before she and Machi were 'discovered' and left for good. From what she remembered of her route, it involved walking straight ahead from the back door, dodging cars and drifting to the right; She tried to follow that now, her eyes watching the ground in front of her as she followed the mental path as best she recalled. As she reached the road, the Laytons behind her, she paused only to check both ways for any approaching traffic before hurrying across the aging tarmac, dodging a pot-hole along the way (although she heard Alfendi gleefully bounce into it, splashing a little in the puddle that lingered inside). Once on the grass on the other side, she looked up at the building looming before them, judging the distance to its neighbour to the south.

Nodding once, Lamiroir turned to Hershel, gesturing to the small house. "This was it. I used to live
Emmy looked between the house and the restaurant across the road with wide eyes. "Wow, that's not far at all..."

"If it had been any further away," Lamiroir replied with a smile, "I would not have been able to find it so easily."

Sycamore pointed to the neighbouring building, its windows as unlit as the one in front of them. "Do you know who lives there?"

"I know it was unoccupied at first," Lamiroir explained. "Shortly before I left, a young couple moved in; I've no idea if they still live here, though."

"Understandable," Sycamore admitted with a sigh, crossing his arms.

"What about over there?" Flora added, pointing to the house to the north. "Do you know who lives there?"

Lamiroir nodded, smiling. "Monsieur Salinen. He likes to be close to his restaurant at all times."

Hershel hummed in thought, pulling out a notebook that he began to write in. "Something we can look into tomorrow..."

Alfendi fidgeted at his father's side, looking around. "There's so few people living here..."

"That's Kopunchiville," Lamiroir laughed. "It's like this around the house we're staying in too, remember?"

Hershel finished his note-taking, replacing the book in his jacket. "Speaking of, I think it's high time we returned there," he announced. "We can pick this investigation up again tomorrow."

Sycamore sighed heavily, but said nothing as the group moved to cross the road once more.

View Layton's Notebook
The rising sun on the morning of the fourteenth of September saw the Laytons heading south to the Magi Joki, the river that ran alongside, and partly through, the town. Their information gathering the previous day had told them it was this river that had allowed the settlement to thrive the way it did: With the town itself, ringed by a horseshoe of farms on the northern banks, serving as a meeting point for similar small farming settlements in the surrounding mountains, trade with the wider world sprung up at the docks lining the riverside (the southern bank was too shallow and rocky for boats to safely approach, thus so little of the town had spread in that direction). The river also had what the locals called a 'little sister', the Rapi Joki, a faster and more furious stream of about equal size that raced through the southern foothills, straight down from the slopes of the nearby mountains; Its icy rapids made it nearly impossible to traverse, so it stayed in the wild forests where it belonged, meeting up with its tamer 'big sister' further downstream. Up in Kopunchiville however, there were two bridges across the Magi Joki, the western Valka Silta and the eastern Musta Silta, the latter of which was directly south of the crossroads their bed and breakfast sat by; It wasn't such a great distance to traverse for a little exploring of the tiny section of town on the other side.

And Alfendi and Flora were very eager to see the Magi Joki at least once before they left.

Faced with the shameless begging from his children, Hershel had quickly agreed to explore the other side of the river before the group threw themselves back into their investigation; Emmy and Sycamore had laughed before deciding to wait for the family at the library in the town centre, while Lamiroir had instead offered to join the three Laytons, just in case they found themselves needing a Borginian translator.

Alfendi ripped his hand from his father's grip as they reached Musta Silta, blue cape flapping behind him as he ran to the wire fence that lined the edge. "Papa, look!" he cried over the sound of the rushing stream, grinning down at the black water beneath. "Isn't it amazing?"

Hershel chuckled as he followed. "A remarkable river," he agreed, then gripped his son under the arms to lift him up with a grunt, allowing Alfendi to look over the fence. "Very different to the Thames."

Flora meanwhile was looking in the opposite direction, directly up to a large mechanism over the bridge, and an identical one on its neighbour to the west. "It looks like they can open up these bridges to let boats pass... though I can't see how they'd do it."

Lamiroir looked around, peering across the river to where a small hut sat on the river's edge, exactly between the two bridges; It even had two short and wide windows on its corners, one facing upstream and the other downstream. She gently poked Flora's arm and pointed to it. "That looks like the control room over there."

"Oh, so it does," Flora agreed, then frowned as her attention turned to the great grassy green beyond, where a dip in the landscape was barely visible. Over the top of the hill, the tops of heads kept poking up, the sound of distant shouts was just audible over the river below them. "What's that behind it?"
Hershel looked up from where he was still holding Alfendi securely against the fence, scanning the opposite bank.

Lamiroir thought a moment, then smiled. "Ah! That must be the old arena!"

"Arena?" Flora repeated.

"Yes, I completely forgot about it." Lamiroir continued, chuckling to herself. "It's not been used since before I lived here, but I'm told it's been there since the town was founded: A public area to perform, make others laugh... or simply an open area to hold a festival, separate from the farmland and any crops to ruin or livestock to scare."

Flora snorted at that, images of drunk vandals tramping through a wheat field or trying to ride bulls crossing her mind. "Very true."

Clearly not paying any attention to the conversation, Alfendi cooed at the rushing river from where he was leaning over the wire fence, held firm by his father's grip under his armpits. "I wonder how long it'd take to drown if you fell in..."

Hershel paused a moment before laughing, lowering Alfendi from the fence rather quickly. "Let's not find out right now, shall we?" He held out his hand for his son to take. "We can look it up in the library later if you want."

Alfendi grinned and nodded, taking his father's hand. "Yeah!"

Just as Rose had told them, the buildings were sparse on this side of the river, giving Lamiroir and the Laytons peeks of the grassy arena as they progressed down the road, turning right at the first crossroads they came to (of the other two paths, one backtracked to the river and the other left the town and followed the river upstream). The arena itself didn't seem all that exciting, a dip in the grassy field ringed by stone; To one side was a small cottage, made of the same grey rock and looking worse for wear in its age. The heads they had glimpsed earlier appeared to belong to a gaggle of children, though it was still hard to make out anything else from around the few houses dotted around the road.

"Lamiroir, I need to add to my map!" Alfendi announced as they approached the arena, and, the moment the singer handed him the folded paper from her pocket, he was scribbling away to add the stone circle and its nearby building. While he was at it, he also scrawled in the Restaurant de Chanson and two of its neighbouring houses.
"Done!" the boy announced as he handed it back. "I tried to write 'Lamiroir' by your old house, but I ran out of space."

"Ah yes, I see," Lamiroir replied, giving Alfendi a smile as she looked over the paper. "A very good job."

Alfendi giggled with pride.
Finally, the quartet rounded the final building, coming into full view of Kopunchiville's arena. It sat like a bowl in the landscape, at a slight angle in the top and side of the hill, its rim the single row of stone seating circling the centre. On the far side, the small cottage perched in the grass, its lone window boarded and wooden door firmly shut. Within the fairy ring of stone frolicked six or so children, ranging in age from a toddler to a boy about ten years old. In the seats sat an old woman, a book in her lap, casting the occasional glance up at her charges before returning her attention to the pages in front of her.

"Oh look, some of those kids are your age, Alfendi," Flora exclaimed, poking her little brother's arm with a grin. "You should go and play with them!"

Alfendi suddenly looked wary, clunging to his father's hand. "But they don't speak English," he pointed out.

"I don't imagine that should matter," Hershel replied. "They appear to be playing tag; I'm sure they wouldn't mind you joining in."

The boy's face grimaced in disbelief, but he said nothing.

Flora giggled, holding her brother's shoulders and walking him forward, pulling his hand from the safety net of his father's loose grip. "Now come on, don't be shy! Don't you want to make friends?"

"No..." Alfendi mumbled, but his protests were ignored as his sister marched him towards the gaggle of children ahead.

Leaving the boy in his sister's care, Lamiroir turned her attention to the old woman with the book. "Maybe she will know more about this area of town, Professor," she offered.

Hershel nodded. "More information is always useful," he agreed, and the two headed towards her.

Lamiroir waved as they approached the elderly woman, calling in Borginian, "Hello there, Madame. I hope we are not disturbing you?"

The woman looked up, and smiled as she saw the pair, closing her book. "Good afternoon, Lamiroir. Long time, no see! I heard you were back in town!"

"Ah, yes, I forget word always travels quickly here," Lamiroir laughed to herself. Remembering what had dragged her up on the Restaurant de Chanson's stage the previous night, she glanced back at Hershel and found Flora had rejoined them, grinning proudly and with Alfendi notably now absent; The father and daughter were now quietly talking between themselves, so Lamiroir decided to leave them to it. Turning back to the woman in front of her, it occurred to the singer that her voice was very familiar. "It's... Madame Bonte, isn't it? From the orphanage?" Which would make the nearby kids, as Lamiroir had suspected, the younger batch of orphans enjoying a day out.

"That's me, indeed," the woman chuckled, but her expression quickly turned serious. "We got your messages. How is Machi doing after that nasty business in America?"

Lamiroir sighed, instinctively reaching for the photo in her pocket. "As well as he can be." On impulse, she took the photo out to show Bonte, sitting at the woman's side. "He's serving out his punishment for the smuggling, staying with some new friends we made there. Once I'm done here, I plan to join him."

Bonte cooed as she regarded the photo. "The little dear... or, not so little now I suppose. Look at that smile!"
To run into Madame Bonte was a stroke of good luck for Lamiroir. The older woman ran the orphanage near the northern edge of town, where Machi had lived for a not-insignificant portion of his life. She had raised him, alongside his similarly orphaned brothers and sisters, from the age of three to when Machi had finally moved in with Lamiroir at ten, the start of their career together. It had been Bonte who had encouraged Machi to play the aging piano in the orphanage's living room, had personally tried to teach him when she could and left him alone with her old learner's books when she couldn't, and Lamiroir suspected it was a joint decision of Bonte's and Salinen's that had led to the young pianist first performing with the amnesiac singer oh so long ago. Before, Lamiroir had only known Bonte through those performances, as the elder lady had always made sure to escort Machi to and from the restaurant personally. The two women had been close friends before Lamiroir's career took her and Machi out of Kopunchiville and into stardom... but Lamiroir never heard another word from her after they left. Once the murder trial was done, after LeTouse's death, she learned this was only because Machi had been hiding the letters Bonte sent, not wanting his aska to worry about their old friends struggling to keep their 'family' together in the face of lowered funds and threats to send them to larger towns, away from their home and from each other; For Bonte and the other orphanage parents, such an act would surely mean unemployment, not to mention the unspoken pain of tearing them away from their children. After regaining her sight, and rediscovering her ability to read and write, the first thing Lamiroir had done was write a letter to her old friend, explaining the situation on her end... and a few other things she wanted to take care of once she was back in town, in addition to her missing memory.

"I'm afraid you'll have to come by the orphanage later for that all-important paperwork we have to do," Bonte quietly pointed out, returning the photo to its owner. "Monsieur Lomake is there; He'll be able to sort it all out in a heartbeat."

"I'll make sure to," Lamiroir promised, noting to herself an additional mental reminder to do so before leaving. "I actually came here - specifically, south of the river - simply to explore the town, since I have never seen any of it before I arrived the day before yesterday." She gestured around the arena. "Would you happen to know anything about this place?"

"Oh, naturally," Bonte replied, nodding sagely. "Sit tight, and I'll tell you the whole sad tale."
"I've seen this place rise and fall, you know," Bonte explained, pointing emphatically at the arena. "This very spot was the pride of Borginia, the home of Troupe Gramarye itself!"

Lamiroir frowned in thought. "Gramarye... I believe I performed with one of them in my recent concert. They're magicians, aren't they?"

"Mm-hmm," Bonte replied. "Or at least they were. The Gramaryes haven't performed here in decades, not since Magnifi revoked his citizenship... and the troupe broke up when he died, poor soul."

"Revoked his citizenship?" Lamiroir repeated, confused. "I assume Magnifi was...?"

"The head of the clan, you could call him," Bonte sighed, her eyes on the cloudy sky above. "He wasn't Borginian by birth, but his wife was; She was a classmate of mine too, in fact. When she died, he never came back here, not to Kopunchiville; The rest of the town saw it as a snub, hated the Gramaryes ever after, but I can't blame him for not wanting to be reminded of his wife." She gestured to the arena again. "This place was so associated with the Gramaryes that people actively avoided it after... even the caretaker abandoned it, left the old hut to fall to ruin." She bitterly laughed, looking towards the road. "They can't even comprehend that our quiet Gaia is buried almost next door!"

Lamiroir could remember hearing a mention of the town's graveyard on the southern bank, and wondered if it would be worth a visit. Out loud, she chuckled, "Gaia Gramarye... What a name!"

Bonte laughed in agreement. "Oh, Gaia wasn't her real name of course, just what everyone called her: Gaia Takala. Her real name was..." She paused, and her smile slowly faded into a frown. "Hm. I can't remember." She shook her head. "You'd have to ask Lalu Salinen. He and Gaia were thick as thieves back in the day."

At that, Lamiroir's amusement died. "Salinen? Monsieur Salinen, who owns the Restaurant de Chanson?"

"That's the one," Bonte replied. "He was much younger than us, though; Lalu and Gaia were brother and sister, the first two of the orphanage kids."

"Really?"

Bonte nodded sagely. "Gaia broke his heart when she left to seek her fortune. She came back with the Troupe a few times over the years... but I hear she got very sick near the end, and she never even told Lalu she was in town. Didn't want him to see her dying."

Lamiroir frowned, musing over the gossip she had just been given, and it was definitely gossip. To think her former manager had a past that was connected, however tenuously, to Valant Gramarye, who had so boasted of how he would bring Troupe Gramarye back to its former glory... and thus also connected to young Apollo and Trucy Wright, who had come from that same troupe. She didn't think she was likely to ever meet Valant again, but maybe, if she mentioned Gaia's name when she
returned to America, the Wrights might know who she was talking about?

A shout cut through Lamiroir's thoughts, a high-pitched shriek in English: "Hey! Get away from there!" Lamiroir looked up across the arena, and the first thing she noticed was a red-faced Flora stomping across the grass at high speed. "What do you think you're doing!?" Before her, gathered around the tiny cottage on the other side of the stone ring, the gaggle of kids looked back at her curiously, eyes wide; Two of the older ones were stood under the window, its boards pulled off, and a terrified Alfendi was perched on their shoulders.

Bonte lifted herself from her seat with a roar, charging at surprising speed after Flora, her eyes locked on the children around the cabin. Hearing her coming, the group instantly scattered, Alfendi dropped to the grass as his supports fled from underneath him. "Come back here!!" Bonte ordered in Borginian, turning to make for the nearest group of her charges. "I have told you so many times...!"

Lamiroir jumped to her feet, following Hershel as he rushed after Flora to where Alfendi lay below the window of the cabin. Flora hung back as she got close, looking around worriedly at the spread of running children and their angry caretaker around them, but Hershel didn't pause, running straight to his son's side and dropping down into the grass, pulling Alfendi into a hug. Now she was closer, Lamiroir could see the boy's breathing was shallow, his hands pressed hard to his forehead; As he willingly leaned into his father's embrace, a faint whine of restrained tears could be heard in the air. Hershel stroked the back of his son's head, rocking back and forth and muttering calming noises in Alfendi's ear. "It's alright. You're safe now. It's all over." Flora wiped away tears of her own as she stood nearby, gazing down at her brother with a parental worry.

Lamiroir turned her attention back to the arena. Bonte had by now managed to herd the younger children into the centre of the arena, where she was shouting a brief lecture about respecting other people's boundaries inbetween ordering the older stragglers to join the group already. Giving up, she sighed in frustration, then cried, "I expect to see you all right here by the time I get back in two minutes!" and spun around, stamping across the grass towards the cabin. Lamiroir stepped towards her, holding out a hand and opening her mouth to talk, but Bonte waved her off, sharply ordering "Not now!" as she walked straight past and towards the Laytons.

Hershel looked up, holding Alfendi tighter as he watched Bonte curiously. "Madame?"

"That one's yours?" Bonte asked in Borginian as she jerked a hand in Alfendi's direction, huffing from the after-effects of her rage, though Lamiroir could see she wasn't angry at the trio of tourists, only wary... though to the average onlooker, especially one who couldn't comprehend her words, that wasn't exactly easy to make out. "He should know better than to try climbing into an abandoned building! You not learn that where you come from?"

Although it was obvious neither of the older Laytons had understood a word of the woman's tirade, that didn't stop Flora from stepping forward with a glare, shouting, "Don't you dare try and pin that on Alfendi! He was clearly being egged on by those other kids!" She waved a hand accusingly at the group sitting in the arena. "He never would have-!"

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Lamiroir started as she belatedly realised she was the only option of communication open between Bonte and the Laytons; Racing forward, she first looked to her English friends to explain, "Bonte didn't mean to come across as angry, she was just worried," and then to her Borginian friend, "Alfendi is a quiet boy; He would not have tried to climb in that window without prompting."

The trio stood in silence for a moment, the Laytons still watching the elder woman warily while
Bonte looked a little surprised to hear them speaking in English. Finally, Bonte recovered, nodding decisively. "I didn't mean to accuse the boy," she explained. "I can certainly believe he was pushed into helping them." At that, she shot a glare at the gathered children behind her - It appeared, in her absence, the entire group had finally congregated together again, fidgeting in the grass.

"She didn't mean to accuse him of anything," Lamiroir translated for the Laytons. "She can believe he was pushed into it."

Flora looked to Hershel, who smiled appreciatively and replied, "Thank you for your concerns. We'll keep a closer eye on him in future."

Lamiroir again translated for Bonte, who shot the Laytons a smile, then nodded to the singer, "Until next time," and returned to her children, shouting orders as she marched in their direction. "Right, you lot are returning home right now! Don't groan at me like that, you've just proven you can't be trusted to be out and about, so we are going home!" The gathered children muttered amongst themselves as they got to their feet and were promptly led down to the road, heading off towards the western bridge over the river.

As the sound of the group faded into the distance, Hershel returned his attention to Alfendi, pulling out of the hug and brushing the boy's hair from his face. "Alfendi, what happened?"

Alfendi sniffed, reluctantly lowering his hands from his face. He mumbled something, but it was incomprehensible from where Lamiroir was standing.

"I know you didn't mean to," Hershel quietly assured him. "I want to know what those other boys and girls said to you."

"Nothing!" Alfendi declared, breaking into a fresh wave of tears. "They didn't say anything! They don't speak English, Papa!"

Lamiroir noticed Flora go pale, looking away guiltily as she tightly hugged herself.

"Alright, alright," Hershel muttered, calming Alfendi again remarkably quickly. "In that case, what did they do?"

Alfendi sniffed for a moment or two. "I told them my name... then they grabbed my arm and were talking a lot. Then they were pulling off the boards up there," he briefly pointed to the window above him, "and started lifting me up. I thought maybe they were allowed to, like they'd lost something inside and wanted me to get it...

Hershel nodded, pulling Alfendi back into the hug. "It's alright, it's over now. Besides, you know better than to wander into an abandoned building like this; I know you would never have tried to go in there on your own."

Alfendi nodded, sniffed, then was silent.

Flora suddenly let out a loud whine, shaking her head. "This is all my fault, Professor!" she cried. "If I'd just seen those kids were trouble-makers, I wouldn't have pushed Alfendi to play with them and they wouldn't've-!"

"Flora, please," Hershel interrupted, looking up at the young woman fondly, "this was no more your fault than Alfendi's. No one could be expected to accurately judge the character of a group of children so quickly." He held out a hand towards her, and Flora smiled through her fears as she took it, kneeling at his side to join in the hug with her little brother.
Lamiroir watched the family bonding moment with a warm smile... then turned and softly walked away. She missed Machi more than ever.
August 8, 5:12PM
Train Carriage

'I wonder how Lamiroir's doing?'

Machi shook the thought from his head with a frown, leaning his cheek against the vibrating glass of the train window as they trundled down the mountain. On this day, a day he had been given three cousins for his new family, he refused to dampen his mood worrying about his aska. He had Iris' number if he wanted to vent or just talk about their experiences as law-breakers who faced justice, and Maya's number if he wanted someone to share his love of the piano with (the knowledge it had been her who wrote that melody he and Iris found still blew his mind a little), and even Pearl's number if he wanted to... well, talk to Pearl. He already loved the girl like an older sister, but he didn't have a specific shared interest with her yet, not the way he did with Maya and Iris.

The train's wheels clacked as it exited a copse of trees, emerging onto a bridge over a steep valley. Below them was a sea of green treetops, and above two towering mountain peaks, barely visible from the very limited view of the train window Machi's face was currently pressed against.

Opposite the teen sat Apollo, taking no notice at all of his surroundings as he fiddled with his Court Record tablet computer. His eyebrows were pressed together in concentration, brown eyes utterly focussed on the computer screen under his fingers. Machi was a little amazed that his isoveli was apparently so used to this trip down from Kurain Village that he didn't even pay attention to it anymore... or maybe he was a little bitter about having to leave his family and return home with Machi?

The teen shook his head, turning back to the window. Apollo had offered to be the one to take him home, after all... but there was only one way to know for sure. Machi screwed up his courage.

"Apollo?"

Apollo blinked as he looked up to meet the teen's eyes. "Mm?"

"Are you okay?"

To Machi's surprise, Apollo smiled at that. "Sure, I'm fine. A little bored, maybe. We've got an hour and a half until we get home."

Machi raised an eyebrow; It had been barely five minutes since they left Kurain Village's station.

Apollo snorted in laughter, pointing out the window as the train barrelled off the bridge and into the
trees of the neighbouring mountain. "Hey, looks like we're on Mitama already. If we didn't have a
deadline to get home, I could have shown you the caves."

At that, Machi looked out the window in surprise, searching the wall of rocks they were currently
passing. "Caves?"

"Yup," Apollo chuckled, slipping his computer into his bag. " Didn't we mention that earlier? That's
why we're forbidden to go up there." Seeing Machi still searching for them, he laughed loudly.
"You'd have to climb a fair way to find the cave entrance; You can't see it from here."

Machi frowned in disappointment, reluctantly tearing his gaze from the window. "Why you...
'forbidden'?" he asked, hoping to guess the meaning of the word from the answer.

Apollo grinned. "The four of us went exploring once," he said. "A bit of a long story. When we got
back, Mom made us promise never to go in there ever again. "The smile turned nostalgic as he
looked out at the trees, not really seeing them. "Man, that would have been... six years ago? She was
just 'Maya' then... wasn't even dating Dad yet."

Machi found himself looking back on his own life: At that time, his eight-year-old self was still living
at the Kopunchiville orphanage, though he performed with Lamiroir most nights in the nearby
restaurant; He wouldn't move in with her, wouldn't start thinking of her as his aska, until later. "We
have time for long story," he pointed out. "What happened?"

"S'pose we do," Apollo agreed, shooting the teen a grin. "Why not?" He shifted in his seat, getting
comfortable, and began: "Like I said, all this was six years ago. I don't think we'd been a family for a
single year at that point, even... Trucy would've been eight, Luke fifteen and I was probably
seventeen. Dad took us up here for Pearly's birthday - she would've been turning nine I think, maybe
ten - and, just like you did, Trucy first noticed Mount Mitama on the horizon..."

- Six Years Earlier-

As they stepped off the bus, sixteen-year-old Apollo sighed in relief, glad the lengthy journey up the
mountain was finally over. At his side, eight-year-old Trucy looked around at the village in wonder,
admiring the summer view just as she had the winter view on their first visit there six months before.
This visit wasn’t as frantic as that one, but just as mysterious; Phoenix had suddenly announced it
after all, just over a week ago, and now here they were, ostensibly to celebrate Pearl's tenth birthday.

Fourteen-year-old Luke sighed, leaning against the back of the bus shelter. In his arms, he was
tightly hugging the lone photo album that had been returned to him after the car accident, an item
Maya had very specifically insisted he bring, though for what reason Apollo couldn't possibly guess.
Even so, Luke was understandably a bit possessive of the book, and even more so after he’d bailed
on watching the fireworks with them on Independence Day. Apollo hoped he was okay, but he felt a
bit awkward asking.

Phoenix chuckled as the bus drove off down the road, leaving their path to Fey Manor wide open.
"Ah, Kurain Village. It never changes." Picking up his bag, he casually crossed the road, waving for
his kids to follow. "C'mon, we can just go right in. Maya and Pearls will be waiting."

Apollo, Luke and Trucy obediently followed, but Trucy paused halfway across, lingering to watch
the back of the bus as it disappeared from view. Apollo, noticing her distraction, stopped to keep an
eye on his little sister, seeing her gaze slowly turning upwards to the sky as their brother and father disappeared into the manor behind them. "Wow!" she cried. "There wasn't this nice a view last time we were here!"

Raising an eyebrow, Apollo took a look himself; Indeed, the winter clouds and their associated fog were gone, a clear summer day spread out before them. In the distance, he could even make out the blue-green silhouette of the neighbouring mountain, looming high over the village. "Wow. Didn't realise the next peak over was so close."

Trucy gasped as she turned her attention to it. "Oh yeah, it is! That's so cool!"

A laugh rang out behind them, and the siblings turned to see Maya descending the stairs from Fey Manor's entrance to meet them. "So that's what was holding you two up? Mount Mitama?"

Apollo grinned sheepishly, waving at the woman. "Hello, Maya. Sorry, it's just that it was really cloudy last time we were here."

"Miss Maya, you have an amazing view!" Trucy cried, pointing in the rough direction of the distant peak. "Why didn't you mention that before!?"

Maya laughed, joining the pair and promptly poking the girl in the cheek. "Well, I guess when you see it every morning, you kinda forget about that kind of thing."

Apollo nodded to himself, then quickly stifled the thought process his mind was attempting to follow. "So, uh, it's called Mount Mitama?" he asked, gesturing to the distant mountain, and then to the ground beneath their feet as he added, "What's this mountain called, then?"

Maya snorted. "Depends on who you ask."

"I'm asking you," Apollo pointed out with a smirk.

Before the young woman could reply, a squeal came from behind them, and they turned to see a blur of pink just before Pearl collided with Trucy, the two girls bouncing up and down in glee, shouting "Pearly!" and "Trucy!" as they spun in circles around each other. Behind Pearl, Phoenix and Luke appeared in the doorway, watching the proceedings curiously (in Luke's case) or with great amusement (in Phoenix's case). Although they had both removed their shoes and lost their bags, Luke still hugged his family photo album to his chest.

"Hey, speaking of Mount Mitama," Maya called with a grin, waving to Luke, "it's got your favourite type of moss up there, Luke!"

Luke frowned. "My favourite...? Oh!" Face red, he looked away. "J-just because I know what it's called, doesn't make it my-"

"We're talking about Mount Mitama?" Pearl realised, pausing in her reunion with Trucy to look out at the mountain in the distance. She then turned her grin on the two nearest Wrights. "Did you know the sea is just on the other side?"

"Really?" Apollo asked.

Maya gasped, running towards Phoenix and Luke at the entrance to the manor. "Luke, is that your photo album!?"

Luke hugged the book tighter, twisting to keep it from Maya's grasping fingers. "Yes, this is it," he admitted. "I can show you inside." With that, he turned and went back in, Phoenix and Maya at his
"Oh, I want to see too!" Pearl cried, running after the group. Apollo and Trucy shrugged at each other before following.

We didn't think much of that conversation until later. Pearly's birthday itself the next day was a bit... 'busy'. Let's just say we found out why Mom was so eager to see those photos of Luke's parents, and I showed her the photo we had of Trucy's and my mom too, since that was our first visit after we found out we were half-siblings. By the end of the morning, Mom and Dad had disappeared together somewhere in the manor - and, I'll remind you, they weren't dating yet at this point - and Pearly came looking for where the rest of us had ended up...

Despite the air of hope as they had all promised to search together for their missing mothers, it was hard to deny the three Wright children were feeling down after all the revelations that morning had brought them. They still sat in their row along the raised walkway of the Winding Way, Apollo in the middle with his siblings huddled close on either side, Luke still paging through his photo album. Trucy strained to see Luke's photos as he leisurely mused aloud on the memories associated with them; He was much more relaxed talking about them now, having rushed through a little at Maya's and Pearl's constant questions the previous night, and been distracted by other things on his birthday, leaving his siblings to look through his family photos on their own. Apollo himself sat back and listened, happy for the moment of calm after the rush of finding out their mothers still lived while Luke's father had died... as much as he wished the general mood was much happier, for the sake of his younger siblings; He hated knowing they were sad and there was nothing he could do for them.

Their quiet was interrupted when the nearby door to the Meditation Room slid open, and Pearl poked her head out, smiling as she spotted her cousins nearby. "I found you!" she cried in triumph, cutting off Luke's musings as she padded in her bare feet across the wooden walkway to meet them. She paused in concern as she noticed the trio's solemn expressions. "Are you all doing okay?"

Apollo nodded, one arm around Trucy and the other hand resting on Luke's shoulder. "We're fine, Pearly," he insisted.

Luke forced a smile. "We'll be alright."

Pearl still looked worried, and her eyes drifted away as she silently mused over their response. Apollo would never know the train of thought she followed in that moment, but eventually she grinned and turned her attention back to her cousins. "Hey, remember how you guys were curious about Mount Mitama when you arrived yesterday?"

Apollo blinked at her, thrown by the sudden change of subject; He'd completely forgotten about that conversation after their busy morning... and so had Luke, who frowned in confusion.

Trucy instantly cheered up with a gasp, pushing away from where she'd been leaning against Apollo. "Oh yeah! Didn't Miss Maya say something about Luke's favourite kind of moss?"

At that, Luke paled, hands tightening around his photo album. "U-uh..."

"That's right, she did say something like that," Apollo agreed, turning to Luke with a teasing grin. "I didn't know you had a favourite type of moss, Luke!"

Luke groaned, closing his album. "It's nothing like that," he mumbled, not meeting their eyes. "It's..."
from when we were in Labyrinthia together."

Pearl chewed a thumbnail, frowning in thought. "I don't remember anyone ever mentioning moss in that story before..."

"It wasn't anything important," Luke explained, hugging his book to his chest. "There was phosphorescent moss growing in the ruins. That's what she was referring to."

"Foss-fer-ess-ent?" Pearl repeated, still chewing her thumbnail.

"That means 'glowing', right?" Apollo spoke up.

Pearl gasped. "Oh! Glowing moss!" She grinned. "That grows in the Mount Mitama caves too! Mystic Maya and I used to go down there to look at it when I was little!"

Trucy gasped in excitement, pulling herself to her feet. "Really?!" She dashed around her brothers to join Pearl, grabbing her hands. "Can we see the glowing moss too?"

"If you want, I could take you," Pearl agreed.

"Really?" Apollo asked, pulling himself up to join them; He couldn't deny he was as intrigued as his sister. "It's possible for you to take us off to a neighbouring mountain to explore some caves?"

Pearl nodded, smiling proudly. "It's easy! Mount Mitama is the next train stop over from ours!"

"Cool!" Trucy cried, bouncing on her heels. "Let's go look while Miss Maya and Daddy are busy!"

"Sounds fun," Apollo agreed, grinning. "Shall we?"

The trio were about to run off towards the manor's front door before Luke called "Wait!", pulling himself to his feet. He looked between the three with a worried frown, hugging his photo album to his chest. "Are you sure that's safe? Exploring caves on our own, without even telling anyone?"

Apollo snorted. "Of course it's safe. Pearly said she and Maya used to go there all the time!"

Pearl nodded in agreement. "We only stopped going because we got so busy with training," she said. "Besides, I know the path down to where the glowing moss is; We'll go in, look at it, then come right back out."

"Exactly!" Trucy chirped. "We'll be back before anyone even knows we're gone!"

Apollo and the girls turned to continue their path through into the Meditation Room. They had gotten as far as pulling on their shoes by the front door before they heard hurried footsteps behind them and turned to see Luke running to catch up, carefully placing his photo album on top of the cubby shelves before reaching for his own strapped court shoes. "As the only other one of us who's ever been in a cave," he explained, "I'd better come along to keep an eye on you..."

Apollo hid a smirk, but decided not to comment.
We slipped out of the house, down to the train station, and took the next one headed to the city. Pearly took us off at the next stop over - that station we just passed, actually - and led us up the path there that leads to a lookout over the ocean. Halfway up, there's a smaller path leading into the forest, though there was a sign telling people it was dangerous to follow.

I remember thinking how annoying Luke was being when we saw that sign. "It's dangerous! We shouldn't be doing this! What is wrong with you three!?!" We just laughed at him, told him to stay behind if he was so scared, but he refused to leave us, so he kept following along where Pearly was leading.

I don't remember how long the hike took. It was much easier with Pearly guiding us, since she knew the way. I remember there being a flat area right at the cave entrance, dropping off fast down the slope, kinda like a stage... not that that would have occurred to me at the time - I wasn't a magician yet, though Trucy was teaching me. Anyway, despite Luke's objections, Pearly brought us inside.

The quartet filed in a line down into the depths of the Mitama cave. Pearl was at the head, her hand trailing along the rough wall at their left as she strode confidently into the darkness. Behind her was Trucy, then Apollo, and finally Luke at the back, wringing his hands nervously in the absence of his satchel to grip. "Are you sure you know the way, Pearl? We didn't even bring a torch..."

"Of course I know the way," Pearl happily called over her shoulder. "Once we get deep enough, we won't need a flashlight, because then the moss will be lighting the path."

"I can't wait!" Trucy squeaked.


They wandered in silence for a minute or two, descending deep enough that the light from outside was almost gone. Pearl turned to her left at a dip in the wall, only to stop suddenly, sending Trucy thudding into her back and Apollo very nearly running into Trucy. "Oh," Pearl muttered.

"Oh!?" Luke repeated. "What does that mean!?"
"This passageway has gone," Pearl admitted.

"Gone?" Trucy asked, reaching out a hand into the dark to feel the rough stone in front of her cousin. "How can it be gone?"

Apollo peered through the dim light. He could definitely see the faint outline of what was once another passage, now filled in with long-settled rocks and stones. "Did it... cave in?"

"Cave in!?" Luke squeaked, jumping forward and clinging to the back of Apollo's t-shirt. "Are you saying these caves are unstable!?"

Ignoring the niggling at the back of his neck, Apollo firmly shook his head. "C'mon, we have no idea how long ago this cave-in happened. It could've been ages ago."

"This was the path Mystic Maya and I took to see the moss," Pearl admitted. "This is recent."

That niggling at the back of Apollo's neck was getting harder to ignore.

Trucy scoffed, arms crossing as she turned to Pearl. "You know another way, right? You came down here loads of times!"

Pearl nodded. "Oh, I'm sure we could find a way around," she agreed.

"Th-that's a bad idea!" Luke cried, his voice jumping up an octave. "If this cave has collapsed recently, it's really, seriously unsafe to explore it, especially without anyone knowing where we are!"

"Don't be such a baby, Luke," Trucy replied, waving her brother's concerns off. She turned to Pearl, gesturing down into the pitch-black pathway of the cave. "C'mon, let's keep going! I'm not turning back until I see some glowing moss!"

"Alright," Pearl said, and continued down the path, Trucy at her back.

Apollo paused a moment before following the girls. "Go back if you want to, Luke," he shot over his shoulder, quietly so the girls wouldn't hear him.

Luke fretted to himself for a few seconds more before hurrying after them without a word.

Soon it got too dark to see, and we all ended up having to hold on to the person in front of us so we didn't lose each other. In retrospect, I should have gotten out my phone to light the way, but I guess that just didn't occur to us. Pearly kept us against the wall at all times, telling us when our path ahead was clear, or if some other cave-in had sealed it. Luke got more and more frantic, but he kept quiet, pulling on the back of my shirt. In contrast, Trucy just got irritated, managing to talk Pearly into going on ahead despite all the rest of us having growing reservations about it. Stupidly, I kept telling myself nothing was going to happen, we'd come across the moss any minute now and then we could turn around and get out... and I guess I was as excited about wanting to see it as Trucy. After all, apart from that first cave-in we came across, we had no idea when all those other passages got closed up.

Even so, we really should have listened to Luke's greater experience when it came to exploring caves.
Finally, Pearl stopped in her tracks with a sigh. "Guys? I think I'm lost."

"Lost!" Luke squeaked, pulling his brother's shirt.

"That's fine," Apollo was quick to choke out, his grip on Trucy's cape falling loose to pull the collar of his shirt away from his neck. "We'll just turn around and follow the wall back out." His brother's tugging on his shirt stopped, and Apollo reached out a hand in an attempt to find his sister's cape once more. "We didn't switch sides, did we, Pearly?"

Trucy groaned loudly, and Apollo could tell by where her voice was coming from that she had moved since he'd let go of her. "We're not turning back!" she demanded. "We haven't seen the moss yet!"

"B-but Trucy, we're lost," Pearl pointed out. "What use would it be seeing the moss if we never get back out?"

"We'd find our way out eventually!" Trucy argued, and the trio could hear her boots stomping away from them. "It's a maze, and mazes are puzzles, and Luke's really good with-!"

Trucy's ranting was cut off by a scream and the scraping of stone, echoing around some large, unseen space.

"Trucy!" Apollo and Luke cried in unison, jumping forward towards where they'd heard their sister last.

"H-help!" Trucy replied, fortunately still somewhere close by. "Th-there's a ledge!"

Apollo dropped to his knees on the cold stone, hands stretched out before him as he inched forward. "Keep talking, Truce. Just hang on."

"I'm hanging on as hard as I can already!" Trucy shrieked, beginning to sob in sheer terror. "I don't wanna fall!" Her voice was magnified by the invisible open space behind her, hitting Apollo's heart like a mallet.

"I've got you!" came Luke's voice, from the same direction as Trucy's crying. "Apollo, there's a cliff here. She's hanging on the edge, but I've got her left arm."

Apollo nodded before remembering none of them could see a thing in the pitch-blackness, hence their current predicament. "Right." He moved faster towards the sound of his siblings, and quickly located, in order, Luke's elbow, the cliff edge, and Trucy's right hand barely clinging on to it. Much like he suspected Luke was doing, he lay down on his front over the sheer drop, reaching down to grasp his sister's shoulder with one hand and her arm with the other. "We pull her up on three," he ordered. "You count."

Luke shifted at Apollo's side for a moment, then began: "One... two... three!" With a great heave, they both pulled their sister up by the arms, shifting their hands to under her armpits and pulling themselves up into sitting positions to haul her the rest of the way. The three Wrights ended up in a pile on the floor, the boys on their backs and Trucy belly-down on top of them, and the girl only cried louder, throwing her arms around their necks as she let out the aftermath of her brush with death. Apollo reacted quickly, sitting up again to hug her tight, and Luke did the same; It was only now, with a hand on his sister's head, that Apollo noticed her top hat had fallen off somewhere in the darkness.

A careful shuffling of sandals marked Pearl's approach, and her searching hands quickly collided with the back of Apollo's head before she rested a hand on his shoulder and sat down at their side,
"I'm so sorry... I shouldn't have offered to take you here."

"It's my fault," Luke insisted. "I've been in plenty of caves like this, I should have stopped you coming."

Apollo shook his head. "It's not your fault we didn't listen," he pointed out. "Let's just... get back to Kurain, okay?"

Trucy sniffed, nodding firmly against Apollo's shoulder.

After that scare, we got out of there as quick as we could. I can only guess Truce lost her hat when she slipped off that cliff, and it's a miracle she was able to grab the edge; We never confirmed how far the fall was, but the sound of that echo... That said it all.

Once we emerged back into the light, my phone suddenly started buzzing with a million text messages from Mom and Dad. They'd figured out we'd disappeared, and when we didn't answer, just got scared... understandably. I told them we were safe and heading back, and we'd meet them at Fey Manor real soon; They accepted that at least. The four of us didn't talk amongst ourselves much on the way down the mountain, or on the train... but we had a nasty surprise awaiting us when we got off it at Kurain Station.

"I knew it!"

The quartet nearly recoiled back under the archway as they spotted the angry young woman in purple robes standing near the bus stop outside the train station, hands balled into fists at her hips. "M-Maya!" Apollo cried instinctively; Behind him, Trucy suddenly clung to his shirt, hiding her face in the small of his back.

"M-Mystic Maya, what are you doing here?" Pearl asked, lingering close to Apollo's side, much as Luke was doing opposite her.

"You went to the Mitama caves, didn't you?" Maya barked in reply. "What the hell possessed you to go up there!?"

Apollo didn't even think as he opened his mouth to respond. "This is my fault. Pearly told us about the caves and I wanted to see the glowing moss. The others just tagged along."

To her credit, Maya gave him a disbelieving glare. "Did Pearly tell you why we stopped going there?"

Pearl blinked, confused. "Because... we didn't have the time?"

At that, Maya's anger faded as she stared at her young cousin, her wide eyes giving way to a sympathetic frown. "Oh, Pearly... Aunt Morgan never told you? That wasn't why we stopped."

"It... wasn't?" Pearly asked.

"No," Maya softly replied, shaking her head. Stepping towards the quartet, she sighed. "Aunt Morgan found out what we were doing and gave me a huge talking-to. She made me promise never to take you back up there, then gave me heaps more training to do as punishment. There's a reason that cave was abandoned."
"Abandoned?" Luke repeated. "What do you mean?"

Maya almost laughed, crossing her arms. "Mount Mitama is owned by the Fey family. When Kurain Village was founded, a small temple was set up deep inside the mountain, where all the moss grows... but then a cave-in happened or something, and it was abandoned. The ruins are still in there somewhere."

Luke gazed up through the trees at the neighbouring peak, thoughtful. "Ruins, huh?"

"You got in trouble because it was dangerous?" Apollo asked, noticing Pearl at his side staring guiltily at the ground, her hair-loops drooping. "The caves might collapse?"

Maya nodded, her gaze again turning stern. "And when you lot vanished like that, not answering your phones... What was I supposed to think had happened? You're lucky I remembered we were talking about Mount Mitama yesterday, or I'd've never figured it out!"

Apollo winced. At his back, he felt Trucy's hands shift to his side, peeking out under his arm to whisper, "Does Daddy know?"

"I haven't told him anything," Maya answered. "I didn't want him to worry if I didn't know for sure." She then frowned, leaning over slightly to get a better look at the brown head. "Trucy, where's your hat? Did you lose it in the caves?"

Trucy began to tear up, then pressed tight against her brother.

"It was my fault," Apollo again insisted, quickly speaking up before anyone else could. "I didn't keep hold of her in the darkness and Trucy nearly fell off a ledge. We came right back out, though."

"N-no, it was my fault!" Luke cried. "I knew the caves were dangerous, but I didn't try harder to stop them all going in!"

"The whole thing was my idea anyway!" Pearl added, hands pressed to her face as she held back tears. "I just wanted to cheer everyone up after this morning!"

Eyes wide, Maya quickly stepped forward, pulling Trucy out from behind Apollo and drawing her, then the other four, into a hug. "No, no, don't all take the blame yourselves..." She looked down at Trucy, held tight under one arm. "Are you hurt at all?"

Trucy sniffed, shaking her head against Maya's obi.

Maya sighed in relief, then looked between the other three with a stern gaze. "Alright, I'm going to cut a deal with you. Do you all promise never to go into those caves ever again? Not even for a second?"


At that, Maya's face softened into a smile. "Then I promise not to mention this to Nick. We don't want him worrying, and no-one got hurt after all."

The four kids laughed in relieved agreement, then all pressed together for one more hug. Trucy's tears had finally dried.

- Six Years Later -
Apollo grinned as his story came to an end. "I joke, but I'm sorry to say I have no intention of taking you into those caves. It's too dangerous, and I promised Mom I'd never go back." His smile faded as he turned to Machi. "But that's no kind of cue for you to try and wander in there alone. There's no guarantee you won't get trapped, or badly hurt, like Trucy almost was."

Machi hurriedly shook his head. "I won't go to cave," he promised.

Apollo stared a moment, then smiled, satisfied. "Mom told Dad we'd been exploring in the forest and wandered out of cell-phone range. I'm pretty sure he still doesn't know... and he never will. We'll never give him a reason to."

Machi nodded in agreement.

View the Court Record
Despite the allure of a cemetery to the west, Alfendi decided upon being asked that he wanted to go back over the eastern bridge and go the long way around to the library; Madame Bonte had taken the orphans towards the western bridge after all, and he was obviously wary about going in the same direction as them.

As they walked, Lamiroir passed on who Madame Bonte was, and everything she’d told of the arena and its connection to the Gramaryes.

"How strange," Flora pointed out. "I mean, we're friends with Apollo and Trucy - Magnifi was their grandfather, which I suppose makes Gaia their grandmother - and we happen across a town so closely connected to their family?"

"And Valant Gramarye planned the illusion in my last concert," Lamiroir added. "It's almost a shame I can't contact him to ask what he knows."

"Likely nothing," Hershel said, holding his son's hand tighter as they crossed the bridge. "I must confess, I've done some research into the Gramaryes myself, and Magnifi was already a single father by the time he took on apprentices. I don't imagine the Wrights will know much about their ties to Borginia either."

Flora held her arms behind her back as they ambled down the pavement. "So... this was a total coincidence? Happening across their grandmother's hometown?"

"Obviously," Alfendi said, rolling his eyes; Despite his attitude, all else present were happy to see him somewhat returning to normal after the incident earlier. "This doesn't even have anything to do with Lamiroir's past!"

Hershel chuckled. "It would seem so," he agreed. "Let's hurry to the library then, and refocus on our investigation."

As they had established yesterday, Kopunchiville's library was in the centre of town, opposite the town hall. It wasn't a particularly grand building - certainly not when compared to the one immediately across the road - but it was very big, made of rough local stone and clearly well kept over the decades it had existed. A handful of people were dotted around outside, several with books in their hands, but two in particular shifted as they noticed the family approaching, moving to join them with a wave.

"Hey everyone!" Emmy called. "How was south of the river?"

Sycamore's smile faded as he saw the awkward looks cross everyone's faces, their eyes glancing at Alfendi as the boy pressed close to Hershel's side. "Did something happen?"

"We had a small upset," Hershel explained. "Learned a few interesting things. Maybe we will take you down there later to see for yourselves."
"I ran into an old friend," Lamiroir picked up. "She was telling me about the old grass arena there, how this town used to be closely associated with the Gramaryes."

Emmy's eyebrows shot up. "Oh yes, I forgot all about that!"

Flora frowned. "You already knew?"

Chuckling in embarrassment, Emmy nodded. "I was looking into all those Borginian articles about Kopunchiville, remember? I came across a few mentions of the Gramaryes performing here; This was their hometown or something, right?"

"In a sense," Lamiroir replied.

Sycamore shook his head. "Well, we've been doing our own research, looking into this 'Geary' person," he said, shooting a glare at nothing in particular.

"Any luck?" Hershel asked.

"Unfortunately, no," Sycamore growled. "We were able to extract permission to go through the town records, but there's no trace of anyone by that name ever living here."

"We even looked up the house Lamiroir used to live in, and its history," Emmy added. "It was registered under her name in 2017, but before that it was owned by an Ami Ystava."

Lamiroir frowned. "Ami Ystava?"

Emmy nodded, watching her closely. "It it familiar?"

After a short pause, Lamiroir shook her head. "I'm sorry, no."

Hershel hummed in thought, his free hand on his chin. "Could this Miss or Missus Ystava be related to Geary? A wife perhaps, or a sister?"

"It could be Lamiroir's name," Flora suggested, shrugging as she turned to the singer. "I know you didn't find it familiar, but..."

"It is possible, yes," Lamiroir agreed. "It's certainly not a terrible name. I wouldn't object to it."

Hershel was unconvinced. "I want to do some more research before we make any decisions."

"Agreed," Sycamore added, gesturing to the library doors. "We'll take you in."

The second storey of the building was open to view as they came in under the entrance archway just beyond the doors inside. Tall bookshelves lined the walls, separating both floors into sections and hallways that hid the sheer length of the library's space. Sycamore led the group in to the reception desk on one side, waving politely at the woman behind the desk. "Us again."

Emmy scoffed at him, stepping forward. In Borginian, she struck up conversation with the librarian. "We're back. Could you kindly let us back into the records room, Madame?"

The woman sniffed, regarding the group. "I'm afraid I can't let all of you in at once, and especially not any children. Those records are fragile."

"Oh, we understand that," Emmy replied, shooting a glance back at Alfendi standing by his father's
side. "How many of us specifically can come in, then?"

The librarian thought a moment. "Three."

Emmy nodded, turning back to the group. She took a deep breath, wondering how to break the news.

Lamiroir decided to come to her rescue. "Obviously Professor Layton should be one of the three she is allowing in," she said. "Either yourself or Mister Sycamore should be the second, Emmy."

"Only three of us are allowed in?" Flora asked.

Sycamore sighed, arms crossed. "Naturally, they didn't tell us that earlier."

Hershel thought a moment, then turned to Alfendi with a smile. "You'll have to stay with your sister for a while, Alfendi. Would that be alright?"

The boy gave the proposition great thought, then nodded, releasing his father's hand from his grip. "Okay, Papa." Flora smiled as she rested a hand on his shoulder.

"And I think you are the vital third person who should join us, Lamiroir," Hershel continued. "This is all about you, and anything we find I should like to be able to present to you immediately."

"In which case, I'd better come to show you where we found what we have," Sycamore added, then turned to Emmy. "I imagine Flora and Alfendi will be needing someone who speaks Borginian with them."

Emmy grinned. "Sounds like a plan!"

As the two women wandered off with Alfendi to find any books in English, the librarian led Lamiroir and the two men to a dark corner of the library, where a single locked door stood in a nondescript wall. She unlocked it for them and then left, leaving it to Sycamore to take the lead inside; He flipped on a light switch and waved for his brother and the singer to follow him down one of the lines of drawers, to one that had been left slightly ajar. "Here are the property files for that area of town," he explained, pulling it open fully. "I'm not so good with written Borginian myself, but I can at least read names on forms."

Hershel nodded. "I imagine you and Emmy were going to look for anything else owned by Ami Ystava before you came out to meet us?"

Sycamore smirked. "Of course we were; You know us too well."

Lamiroir stepped forward, peering down into the folders of files in the drawer. "There is a lot to go through..."

"Indeed there is," Sycamore agreed. "We were just finishing going through this when we left off."

As Hershel had trouble with Borginian script, he couldn't do much to look through the files himself, so he ended up sitting back and directing the other two as they went through the drawers, searching for any trace of either 'Geary' or 'Ami Ystava'; Leaving Sycamore to the property registers, Hershel took Lamiroir across to another row of shelves, stacked with old newspapers.

"We need to find around 2001 or so, and work backwards from there. There's an item that would have been reported on I want to check; An obituary."
"Obituary?" Lamiroir repeated, eyeing the numbers on the shelves to find the requested date. "Of who?"

"Gaia Gramarye," Hershel replied, a small smile on his lips. "Call it a hunch, but I think she may be important."

Lamiroir soon fell into the monotony of flipping through the old papers, scanning the endless names, and the back of her mind began to wander: Was Ami Ystava her real name? She didn't think she could be sure either way, but something told her it wasn't. Surely something as big as her name would trigger something, wouldn't it? But, then again, 'Uncle Geary' had not triggered anything either (as 'right' as the phrase felt to say), and neither had years of idly studying the bracelet on her wrist with her fingers. Was it only her sight that could break down the steel door to her memories? And why did Hershel think Gaia Gramarye was important? What did the Gramaryes have to do with anything?

Finally, Lamiroir's eyes stopped their roving, jumping back to a name at the top of the page. "Gaelle Gramarye," she read aloud.

Hershel paused from his slow pacing of the hallway, looking back. "You found her?"

"December, 1990," Lamiroir replied, glancing up to see the date. She pulled the article closer, translating the text to continue, "Gaelle Gramarye, nee Takala, passed away last week in her home in Kopunchiville of complications from cancer. Known to her friends as Gaia, she grew up in Kopunchiville Orphanage and left town to seek her fortune, but Gaia's hometown was always close to her heart and she frequently returned as part of Troupe Gramarye before being forced to retire when her health became poor, and finally failed. Her funeral was held yesterday in the Etelaranta Cemetery. She is survived by her family, husband Magnifi and daughter Thalassa, and her closest friends, Winfred and Lalu."

Hershel concentrated on Lamiroir's words as she spoke, frowning. Once she had finished, he paused, then his expression turned to a smile. "Thank you for your help, Lamiroir."

Before Lamiroir could reply, ask him if the obituary was at all helpful, a shout came from above the shelves: "I found something!" She and Hershel exchanged shocked looks before rushing around the shelves to find their way back to the property registers.

Sycamore was clutching a form tightly in his hands, and looked up triumphantly as the pair arrived. "Ami Ystava owns another building," he announced, holding the form out for them to see.

Hershel gave it only a cursory glance, unable to read the script. "Where is it?"

"Ru Pojinen," Sycamore replied. "Not too far away."

"Pojinen?" Lamiroir repeated, eyes wide as she took the form to study herself. "At... number ten?"

The brothers watched her closely. "You know it?" Hershel asked.

Lamiroir nodded. "It's right across from the orphanage. Machi used to speak of it: the haunted house."

Sycamore scoffed. "Childish rumours, no doubt."

Hershel shot him a glare, a signal to be quiet, then returned his gaze to the singer. "Do you know anything else about it?"
"Only that it's supposed to be abandoned," Lamiroir replied, handing the form back to Sycamore. "The children would talk of hearing wailing at night or seeing faces at the windows, and would dare each other to break in... but the windows were all barred and the door had a puzzle-lock they couldn't solve."

Sycamore chuckled, giving Hershel a knowing look. "Sounds like just our cup of tea."

"There was one more thing," Lamiroir added. "The word was that the ghosts there came from the arena."

"The arena?" HersHEL repeated, holding a hand to his chin in thought. "And you said earlier the last caretaker abandoned it..." His gaze turned to the shelves around them. "Might there be a way to identify him?"

Sycamore rolled his eyes. "I hardly think this is a lead worth chasing."

"I respectfully disagree," Hershel replied with a smile. "Every lead is worth chasing."

Sycamore huffed, moving to replace the property form in its drawer.

Lamiroir turned her attention to the drawers around them. On a hunch, she moved to one yet untouched by Sycamore and pulled it open, scanning the files within.

"Lamiroir?" Hershel called.

A moment later, the singer smiled. "Here we are." She pulled out a form, showing it to the two men. "The arena is owned by its caretaker, as I thought."

Hershel adjusted his hat, looking proud.

Sycamore raised a sceptical eyebrow as he took the form to examine. "Alright then, this arena is owned by..." His face paled, his eyes wide as he turned towards his brother in disbelief. "How did you...!?"

The other man only blinked blankly. "How did I what?"

"It's..." Sycamore shook the paper in his hand. "It's owned by Ami Ystava."

Lamiroir gasped, a hand to her mouth. "It is?"


Hershel slowly smiled. "That's not what I was expecting, but it's very convenient."

Sycamore gave him a dark look. "Convenient," he repeated with a haughty air. "How is this convenient?"

"I was hoping to ask the caretaker if they knew Ystava or Geary," Hershel explained with a smile. "Obviously, as said caretaker is Ystava, they do."

Groaning in disgust, Sycamore tossed the form into the air, where Lamiroir hurriedly caught it. "And how did you know to ask the caretaker?"

Hershel chuckled. "The children of the orphanage believed Ten Ru Pojinen was tied to the arena. I doubted they would have come up with that idea for no reason."
Lamiroir thought as she carefully returned the form to its place in the drawer. "I suppose one of them recognised a face in the window from seeing Ystava at the arena."

"My thoughts exactly," Hershel agreed.

Sycamore groaned again, rolling his eyes. Finally, with a flutter of his cape, he pushed past them towards the door. "Let's just get on with this investigation, shall we?"
The Siren's Secret, Running

Chapter Notes

Okay guys, a certain important event is coming up soon (I think we all know what), so I'm just gonna warn you:

In one week from now, I will no longer be marking potential spoilers for Spirit of Justice.

The chapter going up exactly a week from this one's uploading will be the last to feature a warning. I'm sorry to anyone who has yet to finish the game and still wants to go in knowing nothing, but continuing to mark spoilers for individual chapters after that point would just be unfeasible, and I do have to stop marking them eventually anyway.

September 14, 8:53AM
Kopunchiville Library

Flora held her brother's hand tight as they followed Emmy up the stairs to the second floor of the library. According to the signs, the foreign-language section was supposed to be up here, and she hoped there would be something interesting for them to read while they waited... Maybe some kids books for Alfendi, or at least a murder mystery or two (a genre the both of them adored). An encyclopaedia would do in a pinch, especially if it was illustrated. If all else failed, they could just pick out some picture books from the regular children's section to look at.

At the top of the stairs, Flora noticed on her right a cosy corner had been set up, with chest-height shelves and several beanbags dotting the floor. "That looks comfy, doesn't it?"

Emmy paused, looking over to see what had caught Flora's eye. "Oh, that must be the kids books." Alfendi pulled out of his sister's hand, running across the carpet and throwing himself with a laugh on top of the nearest beanbag.

The girls giggled, shooting each other amused looks. "Y'know, I always did the same thing when I was his age," Emmy whispered. "Uncle Leon used to get so mad..."

"We didn't have beanbags in Saint Mystere," Flora mused, her smile fading. "I kind of feel like I missed out, now..."

"They're not all that exciting; The fun wears off after a minute or two," Emmy assured her, patting her friend's shoulder. "They are comfortable, though."

Alfendi's giggling, and the sound of his bouncing around on the beanbag, came to a sudden halt, and Flora instantly turned her attention to see why: A small face had appeared around the corner of the nearest shelf, followed by a small body... a little girl in a green dress, watching Alfendi with a grin as he stared back at her with wide eyes. She giggled, waving. "Talus!"

Flora smiled; 'Talus' was the one and only Borginian word she knew, the all-purpose 'hello' and
'goodbye' of the language. Leaning forward, she gestured to her brother. "Say 'talus' back, Alfendi."

Alfendi only continued to stare, lying as he was with his belly on the beanbag.

The girl's grin faded into a concerned frown. "Sopiko?"

Flora and Emmy exchanged worried glances, wondering if they should step forward, but their wondering was cut short by the rustle of the sack of styrofoam as Alfendi rolled off the beanbag and took off, running right past his sister and into the nearest row of shelves. "Alfendi!" Flora cried, making a failed grab for the boy as he passed before running off after him. "Alfendi, come back!"

Alfendi didn't pause, and Flora found to her surprise that he was incredibly speedy when he put his mind to it, weaving between rows and even doubling back with u-turns in clear attempts to lose his pursuer; Flora would have been impressed if she weren't so concerned about catching him as soon as possible. She ran until her lungs burned for air, until she rounded a corner and could see no trace of where her little brother had disappeared, until she looked around and realised she had no idea how to make her way back to the stairs where she'd left Emmy behind.

Flora was lost.

Biting back the fear that Alfendi was all alone somewhere in that suddenly-enormous building, Flora leaned against one of the heavy shelves of books, pulling out her phone.

"Emmy? I've lost Alfendi and now I'm lost too ;_;.

Hold on, we'll come find you
I've teamed up with that little girl who scared Alfendi. Her name's Ihana. She's offered to help us look for him

She knows where he might be? .

Says she hangs out here all the time and knows all the best places to hide :) We'll find him in no time.
And you too, of course
Just stay put, we'll be there in a flash

Thank you Emmy :) .

It took about five minutes for the cavalry to arrive and rescue Flora, who greeted Emmy with a hug. With her was the girl in the green dress, Ihana, although the only way Flora could talk to her was through Emmy. She seemed a nice girl though, and she promptly led the two women through the books to an open space between sections, where there were railings set up for a big heavy curtain of some kind, likely designed to form a temporary wall if one was needed. It was stowed away at the moment against a bookshelf, and, chattering in her native Borginian, Ihana ran straight there to pull aside the mass of crimson fabric and reveal a boy in a blue cape huddled within.

Alfendi noticed Ihana with a squeak and ran off again without a word.

Emmy grabbed Flora's arm before the younger woman had a chance to get lost once again, and Flora had to blink back tears as she saw her friend's questioning look. Even Ihana looked a little guilty as she led the women on to her next hiding place, a seating area in the next section, where they found Alfendi hiding under a bench.
This time, Alfendi saw the group coming and ran off before Flora could even begin to try and chase him.

Emmy's frown deepened. "Flora. I don't think he's going to stop running." She turned her intense reporter's glare on the younger woman. "What happened this morning?"

Flora winced; She hadn't wanted to be the one to explain this. "It was my fault... There were some kids there, from the orphanage, and I pushed Alfendi to go play with them, but they just grabbed him and tried to shove him in this old abandoned hut there..." She pressed her hands to her eyes, holding back tears. "This is all my fault..."

A hand rested on Flora's shoulder, Emmy's, and she heard her friend quietly talking to the young girl in Borginian. None of the words made sense, but their exchange continued for maybe a minute or so before Flora finally moved her hands away from her eyes to watch them.

Emmy looked up with a small smile. "Ihana was actually telling me earlier about one of the boys at the orphanage: Brutus. Apparently he has a reputation as a bit of a bully, and he's a little older than Alfendi too, so he'd have no trouble pushing the kid around." She paused then grimaced apologetically as she realised the implications of what she said, hurriedly moving on to gesture in the direction said child had disappeared. "As for Alfendi... we have a plan for him."

Ihana grinned proudly as she skipped off into the shelves, beckoning for Flora to follow. "Sera mina!"

This time, the girl led the two women to the end of a row leading to another between-sections seating area. She tugged on Emmy's sleeve, signalling the reporter to lean down, then whispered something in her ear. Emmy shot her a grin and whispered a reply, then straightened and turned to Flora. "C'mon, he's probably over here." Waving for her friend to follow, Emmy went on ahead, while Ihana waved encouragingly from where she stood, making no move to join them.

This particular seating area had a ring of large plants in equally large pots right in the centre; In between them was a tiny gap, and as Flora got closer, she spotted a familiar mess of red hair hiding within. Squeaking in shock, Flora left Emmy behind as she dashed to the pots, peering through the greenery to her little brother. "Alfendi?"

Yellow eyes shone in Flora's direction for a moment or two, then an azure blur dashed out of the white pots and latched on to her waist. "Flora!"

Clinging tight to her brother, Flora sank to the carpeted floor, Alfendi almost in her lap. "Oh 'Fendi, you scared me so much, running off like that! Why didn't you stay with us?"

Alfendi sniffed, burying his face in her shoulder. "'M sorry... I thought that girl..."

"There wasn't any girl in a green dress at the arena, was there?" Flora gently pointed out. "She's been here at the library the whole time, same as Emmy and Uncle." She paused, a worrying thought occurring to her. "All this running away... It wasn't because of those kids from the orphanage, was it?"

The boy was quiet for a long moment. "No one ever wants to play with me," he whimpered into her dress. "I'm never going to get any friends because no one likes me."

Flora froze, unable to speak. Her own words from back at the arena echoed in her head.

"Now come on, don't be shy! Don't you want to make friends?"
The possibility that Alfendi, just being who he was, would be unable to connect to other children his age was a fear Flora and Hershel had endlessly and privately fretted about when first sending him to school. In the end though, despite the occasional confrontation with a teacher who misinterpreted the boy's passions as disrespect or some sign of an unstable mind (one had tried to accuse Hershel to his face of abuse, but luckily the charges were quickly blown off for the exaggeration they were), he never seemed to have any problems with the other children. Even though Alfendi still had yet to make any close friends, he never stopped being his happy self at home. Flora and Hershel had dismissed their own concerns as without merit, but had that happiness been a mask this whole time? Had Alfendi, just like Hershel, hid the pain of rejection at school behind a grin and buried himself in the things he loved to suppress his problems? He had just started a new year of school two weeks ago; Had something happened that cemented these issues in his mind? It broke Flora's heart that she had never even considered this possibility before. Blinking back tears, she hugged her brother tighter.

"Oh, 'Fendi, that's not true. Papa and I like you, and Uncle, and Emmy, and Luke-"

"You don't count, you have to like me," Alfendi muttered with sniff. "And you're all old. No one my age ever likes me."

Flora blinked back tears as she pressed a kiss to her little brother's forehead. She couldn't think of anything to say in reply.

Footsteps nearby make the young Laytons look up, and they saw Emmy and Ihana standing hand in hand about a metre or so away; To his credit, Alfendi made no move to run this time. "Alfendi, this is Ihana," Emmy said, gesturing to the girl. "She wanted to say sorry for scaring you."

Alfendi studied the girl carefully, then sniffed, rubbing at his nose. "Thank you."

Emmy translated for the girl, who nodded. Letting go of the older woman's hand, Ihana cheerily gave Emmy a reply, then skipped off, waving to the group as she called, "Talus!"

"She says she hopes things get better for you," Emmy explained, her eyes flicking to Flora. "Both of you."

Flora felt fresh tears spilling down her cheeks as she hugged her brother tight. "Me too." Once all this was over, she and Alfendi had a very serious discussion with their father to organise.
Lamiroir, Hershel and Sycamore had to wait a while at the library reception before Emmy, Flora and Alfendi came down to meet them. Hershel gave his children a concerned look as they approached, hands tightly clinging together, but Alfendi seemed as muted as he had before and Flora only gave them a cheery smile; He ultimately said nothing.

The group headed out to the streets; It wasn't too hard to get to Ru Pojinen, requiring a turn to the left then to the right, and a straight walk to find number ten. Hershel and Sycamore filled the girls in on what they had found in the library as they walked, so everyone was caught up on the investigation... although Flora remained rather quiet, the polite smile still pasted on her face. Alfendi seemed equally silent until he tugged on Lamiroir's dress a little way along their journey.

"Lamiroir? I need to update my map for you again."

"Of course," the singer told him, handing over the paper of pencil scribbles.

A few blocks north of the town centre, Lamiroir noticed a large building on the other side of the road, coming ever nearer to them as they stopped at the quiet intersection it was nestled by. A young teenager sat on the step, a sketchbook in her lap and a pencil in hand. The building itself looked like a converted house, additions made over the years to extend it as the number of charges it took on grew; The white paint peeled a bit on the older sections, but the wood panelling was otherwise kept neat, if a little patchwork, and brightly coloured curtains were visible in the windows, tied back with cheerful bows.

Their group crossed the road, and Hershel called them all to a halt. "Number ten should be coming up," he announced. "Naturally, no matter what we may find, it would be unwise for all of to try and go in."

"Agreed," Sycamore replied. "Ystava or Geary may be inside, and we can make no guess on their mental states or willingness to co-operate... There is still this connection with the arena to worry about as well."

Emmy turned to Lamiroir. "Shall I act as translator again, or would you rather do that yourself, Lamiroir?"

The singer pondered for a moment, her gaze turning to the building across the road. "Actually, I have other business I need to attend to, at the orphanage." She bowed her head. "My apologies."

"None necessary, ma'am," Hershel replied, shaking his head with a smile.

Alfendi cried in surprise, handing the singer back his hand-drawn map. "Here you go, Lamiroir! I'm done!"

"Thank you, Alfendi," Lamiroir told the boy, smiling as she took the paper. "I'm sure it will be a lot of help."

"You have business to attend to?" Flora repeated, watching Lamiroir curiously. "What kind of
“business?”

Lamiroir shook her head. "I'm afraid it's personal... something I've been unable to do for a long time." Once Flora made an 'oh' with her mouth, the singer promptly turned and made to cross the road. "I'll be in touch when I am done, Professor Layton."

"We'll see you later!" Emmy called after her.

Flora's grip on Alfendi's hand tightened a little, and she couldn't help checking that the road was indeed clear as Lamiroir crossed, heading straight for the large building opposite. Her own feet were moving on autopilot at the tug of her brother's hand in hers, following the rest of their family as they proceeded to finding number ten. After what had happened at the arena, and in the library, Flora couldn't help but feel a spike of fear at their group splitting up yet again... and what was Lamiroir planning to do at the orphanage, anyway? She could only watch as the woman in the white dress spoke to the teenager on the step, then pushed open the door and disappeared inside.

"Did you see that!?"

Flora's head abruptly spun back to the ongoing conversation at Alfendi's shout, seeing her brother pointing excitedly up at the two-storey house they were now stood in front of; It was probably about as old as the oldest section of the orphanage opposite, but lacked the additions or the care and upkeep of the aging mansion. Its wooden outer walls were unpainted, a vine growing steadily up one side, and the windows were all grimy and dark, barred with iron on the ground floor. A mailbox sat near the road, tipping over at a severe angle; On its side were the rusted numbers '1' and '0'.

Number ten.
Ystava's house.

Everyone else was looking up at the house too, eyes searching for whatever Alfendi was pointing at. "See what?" Sycamore asked.

"In the window!" Alfendi cried, pointing more insistently at the upper floor. "There was an old man there!"

Hershel and Sycamore reacted instantly, eyebrows shooting up as they gave each other a look.

"It must be Geary," Emmy said, and charged down the overgrown path to the front door of the house. Before anyone could object, she had thrown up one leg in a roundhouse kick and firmly landed the sole of her boot next to the steel doorhandle. Despite the loud thud, the door did nothing more than shake in its frame, the hinges and large lock rattling from the attack. Emmy huffed as she registered her failure, examining the doorhandle more carefully as Hershel and Sycamore ran up behind her; Flora kept Alfendi by the mailbox, where it was safe. "Looks like a puzzle-lock," Emmy announced. "A sliding-block one, move this bit over here to open it... It's built into the door, so we'd have to solve it to get in."


Hershel wasn't so sure, pulling at the brim of his top hat as he looked up to the top floor windows. "We know this house isn't as abandoned as we'd heard," he said. "It would be poor form to just break in without even attempting to get the attention of its resident."

Sycamore scoffed. "He would have seen us through the window, and I think it would have been hard to miss Emmy's unique knock just now." Leaning down, he turned his attention to the lock. "If he was going to let us in, he'd have alerted us so already."

Hershel still looked unsure.

"He has a point, Professor," Emmy said. "Geary and Ystava are clearly running some kind of underground life here, keeping themselves so separate from the rest of the town. The only way we're going to talk to them is if we fight for it."

Flora looked around to the nearby intersection, at the road that ran perpendicular to Ru Pojinen. "Isn't the Restaurant de Chanson down that street?"

Alfendi shook his head, pointing back towards the town centre. "Next one down." He grinned. "I'll show you on Lamiroir's map when she gets back!"

"No, that's alright," Flora replied. "I was just thinking, if it's so close... Why did they have to buy another house for Lamiroir? They just dumped her on Mister Salinen."

Hershel nodded in agreement. "A very good question, Flora. We shall have to ask Geary that when we meet him."

A few moments later, the lock in Sycamore's hands opened with a click, and he straightened up, gesturing to the lock with a proud grin. "Thank you, thank you, I'm here all week."

Ignoring his brother's preening, Hershel stepped forwards, resting a hand on the handle. After a short pause, he pushed it down and the door swung open.

An empty hallway. On one side, stairs led up to the first floor, while doorways to other rooms lined the walls either side. It was surprisingly clean and dust-free, the one indication the house was being
actively lived in. There was no sign of the man Alfendi had seen in the window.

Without a word, Emmy dashed past Hershel into the house, giving the doorways around her cautious glances before disappearing up the stairs. A few moments later, she hopped back down, looking confused. "There's no-one here."

Hershel and Sycamore shared another glance, then both entered after her, giving the ground floor a sweep of their own.

Flora nervously approached the door, Alfendi's hand in hers, unsure if she should follow them in or not. "Did he slip out the back?"

Emmy shrugged. "Upstairs is empty, and he's unlikely to have gone out a window."

"Then where is he?" Alfendi asked, confused. "Magic isn't real, so he can't have disappeared!"

Sycamore and Hershel returned to the hallway, faces stern. "He's definitely not here, and there's no back door," Sycamore agreed, meeting his brother's gaze. "Shall I head to the arena?"

Hershel nodded. "A good idea. Emmy, Flora," he turned to face the two women, "you two go with him. Alfendi, you stay here with me."

Flora and Emmy shared a surprised look.

"O-k-o-kay," Alfendi hurriedly responded, pulling out of Flora's grip to run to his father's side. "But, um, isn't this house abandoned, Papa?"

"Maybe so," Hershel admitted, taking his son's hand with a small smile. "But, with the two of us together, for the cause of an investigation... we can break that rule just this once."

Alfendi thought a moment, then nodded.

Sycamore gave the boy a proud smile. "We shall meet up later, my bravest little nephew," he said, then turned a more serious look to Hershel. "But we should hurry to the arena. Contact us if you find anything."

"The same to you," Hershel replied.

"Naturally, Professor," Emmy said, grinning widely as she gave her friend a mock salute.

Sycamore waved towards the door. "Ladies?" With that, he strode out, his cape flapping behind him.

Flora gave her family a nervous wave before following the much-more-confident Emmy back to the road, heading back down south towards the river. Memory of the town's layout told her going straight would take them to the western bridge, and across to the arena there... though she wasn't sure why they were going. After what had happened that morning, she wasn't particularly wary about going back there, not like Alfendi was, but she hated the idea of leaving either her father or brother behind, for any reason... and her protective instinct over Alfendi after all the pain he'd suffered that morning wasn't helping.

"Are you alright, Flora?"

Flora blinked, looking up to meet the concerned gaze of her uncle. She opened her mouth to answer, but couldn't bring herself to lie, so just stared guiltily at her feet.

"If you're worried about Alfendi," Emmy spoke up, "I don't think you need to. The Professor will
"I know he will," Flora replied, "it's just..." She sighed, shaking her head as the real cause of her shock occurred to her. "I thought the Professor had outgrown sending me away when he thought it was too dangerous..."

To Flora's surprise, Sycamore responded with a laugh, resting a hand on her shoulder; she turned her gaze from her shoes to see him giving her a fond look. "Flora, if my brother was trying to keep you out of danger, he'd have told you to stay with him."

Flora blinked in surprise. "He... would?"

Emmy gasped in sudden realisation. "Of course! Desmond's got his sword, and I'm pretty good at physical combat..." She mimed a few punches, grinning with pride. "That's why we're heading to the arena, because Geary might have fled there after we broke into his house!"

"Exactly," Sycamore replied. "My brother and nephew will look for clues in the house, and the three of us will hopefully cut Geary or Ystava off at the pass, before they can get too far away."

Flora couldn't help but smile at that. "Maybe without having to threaten anyone with violence, though."

"Oh, of course," Emmy replied, waving off Flora's concern. "That's just a back-up, if they don't co-operate." She shot her friend a grin.

Giggling, Flora nodded. Her worries about her little brother weren't entirely gone, but she was glad in the meantime that she could be useful to her father in some other way.
"Where are we looking first, Papa?"

Hershel considered as the footsteps of Sycamore, Emmy and Flora disappeared down the road. "We may as well start at the top, I suppose," he decided, "and work our way down." Turning to the door, he fiddled with the handle, confirming it was much easier to unlock from the inside than the outside. "And we'd better close the door; Don't want anyone else wandering in, after all."

Alfendi nodded, a serious frown on his face. "But it's their own fault if they break the rule about going into an abandoned house," he said. "It's dangerous."

"Indeed," Hershel agreed, a small smile on his face; He was glad that particular rule had been instilled in Alfendi at an early age, given how many hazardous archaeological sites the boy had ended up visiting before the age of five. He closed the front door, then reached out to take his son's hand. "Upstairs first."

Alfendi nodded, happily leading the way up the nearby staircase.

There was less floor-space upstairs than downstairs, though wasn't immediately obvious just looking at the three doorways visible at the top of the stairs. The first led to a bedroom, sparse except for an old mattress on a rusted bed-frame, and dusty enough to make Alfendi cough as they peeked their heads in the door; It was clear whoever lived here didn't use the room, so they moved on. The second door led to a bathroom, a rather large one that had clearly been designed for use by someone who was wheelchair-bound, given the low sink, the railing by the toilet, and the lack of a lip at the shower entrance.

"Do you think that old man I saw uses a wheelchair, Papa?" Alfendi asked.

"He might," Hershel admitted.

Alfendi frowned, looking back towards the front door. "Then how does he get up and down the stairs?"

Hershel also looked back, and smiled. "A good point. I suppose he doesn't, then."

"Then why is the bathroom set up like that?" Alfendi continued, gesturing at the room in question. "How'd anyone in a wheelchair get up and down the stairs to use this?"

"I imagine there used to be a wheelchair lift," Hershel reasoned, examining the wall alongside the stairs for any marks of a removed contraption and finding none. "Whoever it was may have also had a friend to help them."

Alfendi frowned, but didn't have any more questions.

The last of the three doors on the top floor led to a second bedroom, a little smaller than the first. This one was also a lot cleaner, mostly free of dust and regularly used. The bed was neatly made, and a desk in the corner featured a pair of photo frames sitting against the wall, and a small remote control
of some kind. Alfendi immediately ran to investigate the desk, and Hershel wasn't far behind him, both turning their attention to the two photos the owner of the house had thought to display.

On the left, the smaller frame held an old photo, black and white, of two pre-teen boys sitting on a low wall, arms slung over each other's shoulders as they grinned wide for the camera. The format was not kind to one of the boys, who sported a dark skin tone that almost silhouetted his face around his eyes and mouth; He was dressed in a cape, a stark contrast to the other boy's more casual wear. At his best guess, looking at the photo itself and the style of the lighter-skinned boy within it, Hershel had to say it was from the fifties or sixties... somewhere between sixty and seventy years old.

The photograph on the right was much newer, bright colours and bold styles marking it as from the mid-eighties, only forty years old. It appeared to feature the same two boys from the other photo, now grown men in their thirties, their arms slung over a younger woman stood between them, holding a baby in her arms. The darker-skinned man was still in a dark cape, though now sported a thick pair of sideburns, and the lighter-skinned man was loosely holding a screwdriver in one hand, a hammer visible sticking out of a pocket. All three gave the camera happy grins, the baby in the woman's arms sucking on a fist.

Alfendi pointed at the photo on the right. "She looks familiar."

"You think so?" Hershel asked.

"Yep." Alfendi held a hand to his chin, almost a perfect imitation of his father. "I think she looks like Lamiroir. Maybe she's related."

Hershel smiled. "A logical deduction. I was thinking the same thing."

Alfendi grinned at that response.

"And what about this man?" Hershel asked, pointing to the lighter-skinned figure with the screwdriver. "Does he look anything like the face you saw in the window?"

The boy frowned, studying the photo silently for several moments. "I... don't know," he eventually admitted, looking unsure. "The guy I saw was super old."

"This photo is itself rather old," Hershel pointed out. "It could very well be the same man."

Alfendi made a whining noise, rocking on his heels, and shook his head. "I don't know."

"It's alright if you don't." Hershel patted his son's back, deciding to drop the subject with a calm smile. "Let's go downstairs, shall we?"

The ground floor was probably about a third bigger than the top floor, by Hershel's best estimation. On the side Sycamore had examined was a kitchen and laundry, a small table with a chair or two serving as the dining area, with access to a cupboard under the stairs. On the side Hershel had examined was an open space with a ratty old sofa, and beyond it a dark room that Alfendi was quick to shy away from, pressing his face into Hershel's arm and clinging tightly to the sleeve to keep it there... a room Hershel had kept to himself when he first saw it. The archaeologist used his free arm to search the nearby wall, flicking the light-switch the moment he located it under his searching fingers.

Although there were windows, this room was hidden from sunlight by thick curtains stapled to the wall around the frames. It was empty of furniture, with only a few boxes in one corner gathering dust. Against the back wall, a staircase descended into the ground, lit by a row of caged lights following the path downwards and out of sight.
Alfendi's hands around his father's arm tightened their grip. "P-Papa... Did the man I saw go down there?"

Hershel tugged at the brim of his top hat. "I'd say he did."

There was a short pause as Alfendi considered this. "Are we going to follow him?"

"We are."

It was more spacious underground than Hershel was expecting, though not by much. At the bottom of the stairs, with just enough clearance for Hershel's hat, was not a basement but a tunnel, a series of concrete archways mined out in the rock, stretching out on a downwards slope into the distance to the south. The caged lights continued in regular intervals along the wall, their wires dangling loosely between them; Inbetween were thick doorways, left open and swinging on their hinges.

Father and son stood at the foot of the stairs for maybe half a minute, holding each other's hand tightly as they surveyed the path ahead. Alfendi was the first to break the silence, crouching down and out of his father's grip to examine the floor. "There's marks here."

Hershel turned his gaze downwards, kneeling at his son's side. "So there are." He brushed a finger against the black streaks of rubber on the concrete floor. "Tyre tracks."

Alfendi gave his father an incredulous look. "A car can't fit down here, Papa!"

"I didn't say they were car tyres, did I?" Hershel replied, giving his son a smile. "All sorts of things in the world have tyres, not just cars."

The boy stared at the tracks, deep in thought. "A bicycle?" he suggested.

"Maybe." Hershel pointed to the identical tracks not far away. "Although it looks more like a four wheeled contraption from this."

"So what is it, then?"

Hershel thought a moment, then stood. "I'm afraid I can't say for sure." He waited until Alfendi had also returned to his feet, then took his son's hand. "Are you ready to do a little exploring?"

Alfendi's fingers tightened around his father's, and he grinned. "Yeah!" He then paused, frowning. "But, you won't leave me behind, will you, Papa?"

"Of course not," Hershel chuckled, tugging at his hat. "What kind of gentleman would leave his child alone in a place like this?"

The pair walked down the path slowly, venturing through archway after archway and past light after light, descending gently down to whatever hideaway the secret passage led to; Hershel greatly doubted anyone other than its builder was even aware of it. Hershel wasn't sure how much time passed, the monotonous beat of his shoes on the concrete turning his attention to his hearing, ever wary of what else might be down in that tunnel; He refused to let anything get the drop on them, not in a place as confined, or as echo-y, as this.

Finally, Alfendi tugged on his father's hand, pointing ahead of them. "Papa! The tunnel's ending!"

Hershel looked up with surprise, his attention snapping back to his eyes. "So it is." At Alfendi's pull,
their pace towards that final archway sped up, bringing the room beyond it into view, bathed as it was in artificial light. Something was in there, something large and covered in cloth, and as they finally reached the doorway to the area beyond, Hershel was able to see the unmistakable limbs of some giant machine; Whatever it was, it took up the entire ceiling, a great metal bowl hanging imposingly over their heads.

Alfendi pressed against his father's side. "What's that?"

"I don't know," Hershel replied. Turning his gaze from the ceiling, his eyes landed on another doorway, a dark shaft and a single cage lift inside. "Let's see if we can find out..."

Hershel suspected the cage lift was recovered from a mine, as it looked well-used, the yellow paint chipped from years of being banged and brushed against. He guided his son inside, then closed the mesh door and gently pulled the nearby lever. The cage shuddered and groaned (sending Alfendi clinging tighter to his father), then slowly began to rise into the darkness. A few metres up, Hershel saw a second lift lowering opposite them in the dim light. "The two must be connected," he mused aloud as it passed them, distracting Alfendi from the darkness.

Finally, the lift they stood in reached the top of the shaft and groaned to a shuddering stop. Hershel waited for the cage to stop swinging on its cable before opening the mesh door, and Alfendi didn't waste any time jumping straight out. This room was much smaller, another concrete box; On one side was a doorway leading to a metal corridor half-hidden behind a roller door, while on the other was a ladder leading to a trap-door in the ceiling. The corridor was unlit and quickly disappeared into pitch black shadow, but the trap-door was ringed by distant sunlight. Alfendi made the choice of where they were to go, running to the ladder and pointing straight up. "This way, Papa?"

Hershel gave the dark corridor one final look, then turned his attention back to his son with a smile. "Above ground it is," he replied. "Let's find where we've ended up..."

Flora sat on the stone steps circling the arena, twiddling her thumbs. On her right sat Emmy, reading a pocket-sized book. In front of them, Sycamore paced back and forth across the grass, his flapping cape and hushed mutterings making her warm, kindly uncle surprisingly imposing; She knew he was simply worried about her father and brother, but there was enough bubbling anger in him that she found herself too scared to offer any comfort.

"This... pa...?"

Flora perked up, looking around the arena. "Did you hear that?"

Emmy looked up from her book. "Hear what?"

Sycamore's pacing halted, watching his niece carefully.

"I thought I heard Alfendi." Flora got to her feet, looking around the windy plain. Her eyes quickly locked on the caretaker's cottage, not far away from where they had settled as a group.

Sycamore immediately noticed her gaze, striding towards the door. "From here...?"

"Let's... end..."
"That sounded like the Professor!" Flora cried, running after her uncle towards the cottage.

A thud rang out from inside the cottage, following by a boyish cry of "It's a shack!", much clearer and closer than what they'd heard before.

Emmy snapped her book closed, jumping to her feet. "That is Alfendi!"

Sycamore and Flora, standing outside the cottage's door, shot each other a quick look before moving as one to the handle. To their surprise, it was not locked, and they were easily able to tug the wooden board open with their combined strength. Inside, they found a very surprised Alfendi standing next to a trapdoor, but his face broke into a wide grin as he recognised his family. "Uncle! Flora!"

Flora smiled as she watched her brother race for their uncle to give him a quick hug before turning his attention to his sister. "Hello, Alfendi."

"What are you doing here?" Alfendi asked, bouncing in place as he looked between them. "How'd you know where we'd come out of the tunnel?"

"There's a tunnel?" Emmy asked from behind them, critically examining the hill they stood on. "Is that how Geary escaped?"

"Presumably," came Hershel's answer as he climbed the ladder and exited the trapdoor Alfendi had been standing by earlier. Around him, Flora noticed the rest of the cottage looked as run-down as its exterior suggested, cluttered with the miscellany of a garden shed and covered in dust and cobwebs.

Emmy waved as the signature top hat came into view. "Nice to see you again, Professor."

Alfendi finally peered out into the world outside the cottage, and looked a little taken aback as he recognised the grassy plain and stone ring. "Oh... We're here..."

"There's been no-one around but us since we arrived," Sycamore said, half assuring Alfendi and half informing Hershel, his hand resting on his nephew's head. "But the existence of a tunnel does explain why Ystava owns both properties, and how Geary vanished so easily."

Hershel closed the trapdoor behind him, briefly considering pulling a nearby rug over it before leaving it alone. "I suspect this was his one and only trick. He may know better than to try it again."

Sycamore scoffed, pushing at his glasses. "I can certainly believe Geary is simple-minded enough to think his 'one trick' would be sufficient to escape capture. It would be child's play to catch him this time."

"This time?" Flora repeated.

"Of course," Sycamore chuckled, turning his smirk on his brother. "You do plan on heading back to that house to see if he has returned, don't you?"

Before Hershel could reply, a loud buzz rang from his pocket, startling everyone into silence. Quickly reaching into his jacket, Hershel pulled out the source of the noise, a mobile phone, and pressed it to his ear. "Hello?" After a pause, he smiled. "Lamiroir, a pleasure to hear your voice. Naturally, we shall come to meet you shortly. There's something in particular I want to show you."
"Is Madame Bonte free, if you know?" Lamiroir asked the teen on the step as she approached the orphanage door.

The girl grunted, giving the woman little more than a glance as she attended to filling up her sketchbook. "Got back a while ago. The littlies are in trouble again."

"I gathered," Lamiroir chuckled as she walked in, feeling the teen's confused gaze on her back.

It was a very unique pleasure, to be able to enter an unfamiliar building and immediately form a personal opinion of its decor, a mental map of its layout. It was something she'd taken for granted her whole life, and then she lost her sight and her memory and never even knew what it was she had lost. It was with a smile she looked around the well-loved room, the muddy trail of shoe-prints leading up the nearby stairs, the old desk with the wobbly leg held up by an old doorstop, the array of half-open doorways that marked the passage of a bored teen or an over-excited child. A house that belonged to the fifteen-or-so children who lived in it so much more than the two caretakers who watched over them.

As the singer stepped forward, one of the half-open doors tentatively opened, and a middle-aged man peered out, his face lighting up as he spotted the woman outside. "Lamiroir! Bonte said you were coming by!"

Lamiroir laughed, giving the man a wave. "Monsieur Lomake, I assume? It's a pleasure to finally meet you in person."

Lomake grinned. "That's me, Madame. Why don't you come in," he gestured to the room behind him, opening the door wide, "and we can get started?"

"Of course," she replied, heading in to what she quickly realised was the office, bulging with filing cabinets and paper. "I've been looking forward to this moment for a long time."

When Lamiroir had first met Machi, he was seven, already considered a talented pianist and with several years playing under his child's belt. She had been singing covers before then, limited to her voice in her instrumentation, but after Machi's beautiful piano began to play its own melodies behind her, Salinen or maybe Bonte (she couldn't remember which) had suggested the pair try something original, gifting Lamiroir with a cheap keyboard to keep at home for Machi to use.

Their first composing session together had been rather awkward, the pair still getting to know each other and never having worked musically with anyone else before. Eventually they settled into a routine, one of the pair making a tune and the other joining in; Mostly Lamiroir herself wrote the lyrics, but Machi frequently gave his own inputs that she valued even if they didn't make it into the final song. They started out meeting before performances, Machi escorted by Bonte, then he was entrusted to make the trip there on his own, then finally he began to make his own way unannounced to Lamiroir's little house to make music with her on any day of the week. The shy and quiet boy she barely knew except through his music became the kind and endlessly generous Machi, who finally
opened up to share many conversations with the blind woman he had befriended... and he was her closest friend in the world. There was something about this boy that connected to her, and not just because he was one of only three real friends she had in their small town. He reminded her of something, a lost part of herself from 'before'. She was, in return, the closest he had ever had to a parent since being brought to the orphanage, and she was all too aware of that... But, scared of what change might bring, she made no move to step forward with their relationship, and kept the status quo.

Machi was ten when everything changed. Salinen came to Lamiroir's house the day after a performance, bouncing excitement in his voice.

"We had a man in the audience last night, a very important man!" he explained, the sound of his shoes on the kitchen tiles underlining his glee. "He's offered you a contract, Lamiroir! You could go out into the wider world, share your voice and your marvellous songs with... well, with all the people out there, who've never heard of Kopunchiville's siren and never will until you go out and show them!" He paused, breathless. "**The whole world**, Lamiroir! Think of how many people you could make happy with your music! You could...! Well, not **see** the sights, but travel the world, eat exotic foods..."

Her manager's ramblings faded into the background. Sat in her chair, Lamiroir felt uncertain. To leave Kopunchiville, leave all she had ever known? Immediately, her heart hardened. "I cannot go," she told him, bringing his ongoing speech to a halt, along with his pacing of the kitchen.

"You... You're turning this down? B-but, Lamiroir, this is an **opportunity** for you! Why won't you take it?"

"I won't leave Machi behind," Lamiroir firmly replied, surprising herself as she realised the truth in her words. "I... I **cannot** leave him behind." Something nudged at the back of her mind, a deep chasm of loss she could not comprehend, and neither did she want to; She shoved it deep into her subconscious and slammed the door, not wanting to know what it might reveal.

There was a long pause before Salinen responded. "I understand," he said. "I'll talk to Bonte."

Lamiroir frowned, confused. "To Bonte?"

Salinen chuckled. "Well, I'll see if this guy will extend the offer to Machi too, but if you're serious about wanting to stay with the kid..." He paused. "You're practically his mother already. He's not gonna say 'no'."

After that, everything moved so quickly. Her new manager had agreed to hire Machi too, and Machi, just as predicted, immediately said yes to travelling the world with Lamiroir. The only hurdle was in their last goodbye to Bonte, the last day in that small village.

"I brought over all the paperwork for this adoption," Bonte explained once Machi had finished bouncing off the walls in his excitement to be leaving (only two hours and counting). "Lamiroir, should we sit down?"

Machi, ever the kind soul, pulled out the singer's chair for her, taking her hand to guide her to its back. "Here you go, Lamiroir."

"Thank you, Machi." Lamiroir sat down, wishing now she had more than two chairs at her table for Machi to join them. "What do we need to do for this paperwork?"

There was a ruffling of paper as Bonte laid it out on the small table. "I've filled in all the particulars..."
although there are many details I couldn't account for. I... presume 'Lamiroir' is your legal name?"

"I assume so," Lamiroir agreed. "That is what my contract is written out to."

"Alright." A pen scratched against paper. "And your birthdate?"

Lamiroir paused. "I'm afraid I don't know. At my best guess, my age is somewhere in the mid-thirties. My birthday, I have no idea."

"You can have my birthday," Machi offered. "Seventeenth of February. We can share it."

At that, Lamiroir smiled. "Machi, you are too kind."

Bonte chuckled, writing in the form. "For age, I'd say you're about thirty-six, which puts your birth-year as... nineteen-eighty-six. Nice and neat."

There were other details that needed writing down, and then the entire 'contract' of sorts had to be read aloud, so they could be certain Lamiroir understood it fully in her inability to read it. Once that was done, Bonte arranged the final sheet of paper in front of Lamiroir, and Machi placed the pen in the singer's hand before guiding it to the line she had to sign on. She marked it with a cross.

"Once the approval gets back," Machi whispered as Bonte left, "can I... Can I call you 'Aska'?"

Lamiroir smiled. "Of course you may, pokani."

Mother and son. It felt like it was meant to be...

... but then it wasn't.

In the weeks after, 'Lamiroir, Landscape Painter of Sound' became an overnight sensation across the country. The mix-up with her overeager new producer not realising she was blind before marketing her first album (a series of home-recordings of her and Machi in the Restaurant de Chanson) had somehow extended to not only the public but whatever government office handled Machi's adoption papers: Seeing only a cross on the signature line, and no place that officially recorded her blindness, they had returned the papers to Bonte as a hoax. Any chance of an official relationship between Lamiroir and Machi was dead in the water, and the memory of the boy's sudden tears as he read the rejection still tore at Lamiroir's heart. They were both heartbroken, but, unable to challenge the image their contract dictated, there was nothing they could do.

Machi never took up calling Lamiroir 'Aska', 'mother', as he had asked.

In return, Lamiroir kept 'pokani', 'my son', to the confines of her head.

On the day she left America, Lamiroir knew what she must do before she saw Machi again. As she reached out to take his teenage face in her hands, she had finally broken that unspoken rule between them:

"I will miss you terribly... pokani."

"I-I will miss you too, Aska."

The trial had outed her as blind to not only Borginia, but the entire world. The attempt on her life had prompted enough of a medical examination to discover her blindness was curable. The determination of the Wrights to fight for Machi's innocence against all odds was inspiring. This time, Lamiroir
wouldn't let anything stop this paperwork from being accepted. The moment she had left the hospital in London, she had written to Bonte to detail her plans, and sent the letter to Kopunchiville's orphanage post-haste... a much longer and more detailed message than the short notes she had asked Machi to help her write in California.

As they arrived in the small office by the orphanage's entrance, Lomake didn't take long to pull out the file from the desk sandwiched between the tall cabinets. "Here it is," he said, laying it out for Lamiroir to see as she sat in the free chair. "We've been preparing it since your letter. All Machi's details are in, we just need yours."

Lamiroir found herself pausing before reaching out to take it. "My details...?" Sure enough, just as before, the form was complete except for the details she remembered Bonte filling out for her on that long ago day she left Kopunchiville with Machi.

"Do you need help?" Lomake asked, pulling a pen from a nearby cup jammed full of them.

"No, I... I'm sure I'm fine," Lamiroir replied, still looking over the form. "It's only... I'm trying to recover my memories, but I still don't have enough of a hold on my past life to be able to answer those questions."

Lomake paused in thought, tapping the pen in his hand on the desk. "Well... if you want to take the form away with you to fill out once you know the answers, that's fine." He shrugged. "Or, you could just put in whatever you wrote on the last form. Bonte said the only reason they rejected it was your signature."

As Lamiroir examined the papers, she noticed the empty space at the end, for the signatures of the applicant (that was her), the child's guardian (either Bonte or Lomake, currently left blank) and the child themself, marked 'if applicable'. "Machi will have to sign this?"

"Yep," Lomake replied. "Once we send it in, they'll forward a copy to the embassy in America; They'll handle Machi's side."

Lamiroir nodded absently. "I think... If it is alright, may I take this with me, and return it to you before I leave?"

Lomake grinned. "Sure. As long as everything's all filled out to send in by then, we'll arrange for it to go through for you."

Sighing in relief, the singer clutched the paper in her hands. "Thank you."

Before she left, Lamiroir wanted to see Bonte again, to explain what had happened out at the arena that morning. A quick visit turned rapidly into a lengthy stay, as the teenager who witnessed her entrance had, it turned out, recognised her and spread the word among the children that 'Lamiroir, Landscape Painter of Sound' was in the building. Bonte had apologised, but Lamiroir quite liked the attention of the young ones, even a boy named Brutus who, Bonte noted, had been the one to orchestrate the bullying of Alfendi at the arena; At Lamiroir's stern stare, he had promised he was sorry and wouldn't do it again, though Lamiroir suspected he was anything but genuine.

By the time the children and teenagers had finally let her go, Lamiroir noted with surprise over an hour had passed. She quickly moved to call Hershel.

"Hello?"
"Hello, Professor," Lamiroir greeted him, standing out on the street as her eyes searched the nearby 'ghost house' for any activity. "I'm sorry for taking so long."

"Lamiroir, a pleasure to hear your voice," Hershel cheerfully replied. "Naturally, we shall come to meet you shortly. There's something in particular I want to show you."

Lamiroir blinked, confused. "Show me?"

Hershel chuckled. "If you are still outside the orphanage, wait right there. We may have found something you will recognise."
When Hershel arrived from the south, only Sycamore was accompanying him, their combined top hat and grey cape making the pair stand out all the more from Kopunchiville's regular citizens. Lamiroir waved as she crossed the road to join them, achingly curious to know what they had been doing since she departed the group earlier. "Professor Layton, Mister Sycamore!"

"Lamiroir," Sycamore replied, waving back. "A pleasure to see you again."

The singer nodded, turning to Hershel. "You said you had something to show me?"

Hershel smiled, tugging on the brim of his hat. "Indeed. We believe we have located Geary."

The two men lead her to the supposed 'ghost house', where Sycamore made short work of the puzzle-lock on the door - "Was there ever any doubt?" - and led her inside. Hershel took the lead up the stairs, only to pause halfway and signal the others with a finger to his lips, pointing upwards. They were not alone. Sycamore gently took Lamiroir's wrist and motioned for her to stay back as he and his brother continued ahead up the stairs.

Hershel was the first to reach the top, turning to the door he remembered led to the room with the photos inside. The door was ajar, so he gently pushed it open. Beyond, stood at the desk, was a man in his mid-seventies, crouched over the now-empty picture frames that lay discarded on the nearby floor. Although he was distracted shoving papers into a satchel, the slight creak of the opening door still managed to catch his attention. Pausing, the man turned, his wide eyes meeting Hershel's wary gaze.

Sycamore joined his brother, casting brown eyes around the room before settling on the man inside. "Monsieur Geary, I assume?"

"Or perhaps you prefer," Hershel picked up, "Ami Ystava?"

It was impossible to miss the man's sudden intake of breath, nor Sycamore's briefly confused glance his brother's way before returning to watching the elder man before them. Geary clutched his satchel close to his chest, one arm flung out behind him...

... and suddenly a blast of stinging air from the sides of the door-frame assaulted Hershel's eyeballs, sending him staggering back as he flung his hands protectively to his face. At his side, he heard Sycamore also stepping back, then felt a firm hand on his midsection shoving him aside; Geary was escaping.

Lamiroir gasped as she saw the man coming into view, shoving aside the brothers - Hershel clutching his eyes in pain while Sycamore's glasses were merely fogged up, taking the brunt of the stinging spray - and ran for the stairs. That face coming towards her, Geary, Ystava, her mysterious 'uncle'... There was no doubt she knew that face.

"Stop!" Sycamore cried, wiping his glasses with a sleeve.

"Wait!" Lamiroir shouted, holding out a hand as she searched Geary's expression, hoping to trigger...
something more concrete from the back of her mind. Geary paused only half a second, studying her with grey eyes, then lunged forward and grabbed Lamiroir's arm, ducking into a nearby doorway. She couldn't help but cry out in surprise. "What are you-?" Although she could easily pull herself out of his rather feeble grasp if need be, she found herself deciding to go along with him; She knew that face, knew that gentle grip on her arm... If anyone held the answers to her past, it was this man.

"Come back here!" Sycamore's hand similarly clamped down on Hershel's arm, and the archaeologist found himself being dragged back down the stairs and into a side-room; Despite the stinging in his eyes, he made himself open them long enough to register what was going on, and pulled himself out of his brother's grip to run without aid.

Geary ignored the shout, pulling Lamiroir into a dark room and down a staircase beyond into some kind of hand-carved tunnel. He paused to kick a section of wall on the stairs, then tugged Lamiroir to one side, where a wheelchair sat, a massive motor under the seat and a platform at the back. "Don't you dare follow me!" he shouted up the stairs, gesturing Lamiroir towards the chair. "I warn you!"

The brothers reached the entrance to the tunnel, and Hershel noticed Sycamore's hand stray inside his jacket as he dashed down the steps. "If you touch one hair on her head-!"

"Mister Sycamore," came Lamiroir's cry, "don't harm him!"

As they arrived underground, Hershel heard a high-pitched revving, and glimpsed a motorised wheelchair speeding away from them, Lamiroir sat in the chair and Geary standing on a small platform at the back, just before the nearest set of heavy doors slammed shut. Moments later, they heard the distant bangs of every other door in the tunnel closing one by one, each thud more distant than the last.

Sycamore growled as he sprang to the blocked passageway. "More puzzle-locks!" he declared, moving to solve them. "Let's get this over with..."

Hershel frowned, a hand on his hat. "No," he said. "At this point it would be faster to follow him above ground."

The other man paused, abandoning the puzzle in his hands. "Good point."

As the brothers ran south on Ru Pojinen, dodging passing pedestrians and stopping only to cross a busy road, Sycamore nudged his brother's arm. "So, how did you work out Geary and Ystava were the same person?" he asked. "I thought we were assuming Ystava was a woman."

Hershel smiled from underneath his grip on his hat. "Because in English, we would be correct in assuming 'Ami' was the name of a woman. We neglected to consider that, in many foreign languages, names that sound feminine to us are actually considered to be masculine." He chuckled. "It seemed unlikely to me that there would be only one person in that house if there were indeed two people behind this secret of Lamiroir's."

"So you kept this a secret yourself?" Sycamore asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Nonsense," Hershel replied, pausing to circle a woman with a pram. "I simply waited to confirm my theory before wasting anyone else's time with it."

Sycamore scoffed and rolled his eyes, but his smile betrayed that he wasn't as annoyed as he pretended to be.
Hershel couldn’t see much of the arena as they dashed across the western bridge to the river’s south. They cut the corner of the road ahead as much as they dared, sprinting the last stretch onto the green grass. There, clustered around the caretaker's hut, was some kind of small commotion, loud shouting between three women and one elderly man.

"Why won't you leave me alone!??" the man shouted.

"Oh, I don't know, why did you kidnap Lamiroir!??" Emmy replied, a fist raised threateningly in the air.

"Don't hurt him!" Lamiroir demanded of Emmy, standing between them.

Flora, Alfendi huddled at her back, nodded in agreement. "Mister Geary, please calm down! We only want to talk!"

Although his lungs were burning in protest, Hershel didn't dare slow down, pushing his aching legs to run towards the hut. "Mister Ystava!"

Geary looked up from his argument with the women, face paling as he saw Hershel and Sycamore approaching. "You again!" He didn't waste a moment spinning around and disappearing back into the hut, slamming the door shut behind him.

Hershel fought not to collapse as they joined the group, panting from the sprint across town and leaning heavily on his knees. Flora and Alfendi rushed to his side, Flora trying to help take his weight.

Sycamore wordlessly shouted in frustration, smacking at his cape. "I am not running all the way back to that house!" he declared, then pushed past Emmy and Lamiroir to the door of the hut. With Emmy's help, it was quickly pulled open again, and the pair disappeared inside.

"We'd better stop them using excessive force," Flora pointed out, leaving Hershel's side to follow them.

Hershel nodded in agreement, and was about to add something to Alfendi when Lamiroir stepped forward, taking the boy's hand herself.

"We will stay here where it's safe," she said. "Please, don't let Uncle Geary come to any harm."

"Of course," Hershel promised, giving the singer then his son a warm smile before running inside.

The room beyond the trapdoor and down the ladder was much the same as it had been the last time Hershel was there, except that, this time, the corridor with its metal walls and floor was lit-up, the roller door pushed open. Sycamore was sprawled on the floor nearby, Emmy and Flora busy pulling him to his feet. He brushed the two off in irritation the moment he'd regained his bearings; Hershel could only guess his brother had slipped off the ladder in his exhaustion from the sprint across town.

"Don't waste time," Sycamore growled, flapping his cape. "He went this way!"

The quartet followed Sycamore's lead and raced into the metal corridor. Now it was lit (and by the same caged bulbs that lined the tunnel below), Hershel could see it extended forward maybe twenty metres before making a sharp left turn out of sight. Around them, they could hear the faint groaning
of machinery... and suddenly Hershel remembered the enormous contraption hanging from the ceiling of the underground chamber. "Wait-!"

A crackling overheard interrupted his warning: "I told you all to leave me alone!" The group paused, locating a speaker on the wall nearby. "Why couldn't you let me live out my life in peace!?"

Sycamore huffed, hands curled into fists. "Geary, where are-?"

The corridor groaned, then shifted, knocking everyone off their feet and tumbling to the floor. Hershel managed to glance back long enough to see the doorway they had come in by disappear, replaced by a concrete wall; Whatever that machinery had been, they were currently inside it... and it was moving. "Everybody hold on!" he cried, making a grab for the nearest limb - Emmy's arm.

The floor angled forward, moving them down the corridor, a great ripping sound of grass and tumbling dirt echoed above, then a great light flooded the area, blinding them all momentarily before they could register it was sunlight. The floor tipped back, and Hershel's attempts to grab on to any section of the corridor, anything other than Emmy's arm, proved to be fruitless: In moments, he found himself tumbling several metres down onto grassy terrain.

"Papa!"

Hershel shook his head, barely registering his hat had come off in the rough landing, and looked up. Before them was, unmistakably, a mecha, standing on four stout legs as it rose at a steep angle out from the gaping hole that had emerged in the middle of the arena. At its back, directly above, was the doorway leading to the corridor they had been in moments before; Flora clung tightly to its edge, fighting for a foothold to drag herself back inside lest she fall into the gaping chasm of concrete below. Above, on the steeply sloped flat top of the bowl-shaped body, Lamiroir clung to a gap in the metal sheeting between the large clumps of dirt and grass, her arm held tight around young Alfendi.

Hershel wasted no time dragging himself to his feet, worry for his son gripping tightly at his heart. "Alfendi!"

"Papa!" Alfendi shrieked in terror, then the mecha began to level out as it climbed out of the hole in the arena, and singer and child disappeared over the lip of the bowl-shaped body. The mecha itself began to creak and grow as its legs moved to propel it south, towards the road.

At Hershel's sides, Sycamore and Emmy also stood. "Lamiroir!" Emmy added.

Now the corridor they had fallen from was once again at a reasonable angle, Flora pulled herself up inside the mecha and waved to the trio on the ground. "Don't worry Professor, I'll go talk Mister Geary down!"

"Flora-!" Hershel tried to protest, but the young woman only pulled the roller door shut and disappeared inside. By now, the mecha had reached the road and was continuing south to the forest. It was rapidly picking up speed, and would soon be too fast to catch on foot.

"In the meantime, let's shut that thing down!" Emmy declared, grinning determinedly as she dashed off towards the mecha.

Once again, Hershel only had time to shout "Emmy-!" before she was out of reach.

"They won't be fast enough," Sycamore grumbled to himself, fiddling underneath his cape. "I'll get Alfendi." With that, he dashed off, pulling out a rapier from somewhere underneath his suit.

"Wait-!"
The following moment, Emmy leapt onto the rearmost leg of the moving contraption, fiddling to uncover whatever mechanisms its sheeting hid. It didn’t take long for Sycamore to copy her, using his sword and his bare hands to climb beyond the legs and onto the body, making rapid progress towards the flat roof.

Hershel’s eyes strayed to the forest, studying the lay of the land beneath the treetops and recalling the official map he had picked up the previous day. ‘Maybe if I...’ He stepped forward to follow the rapidly disappearing mecha, only to kick something on the ground, and paused to find it was his forgotten top hat. With a small smile, he bent to retrieve it. ‘Claire, if there was ever a time I needed your help, it’s now. Keep an eye on Alfendi and Flora for me.’

Top hat firmly pressed on his temple, Hershel Layton made a run for the forest, heading south-east.
When Hershel had followed Sycamore, Emmy and Flora into the hut, Lamiroir had thought she was out of danger. With Alfendi’s hand in her's, she took him out to the centre of the arena, and they both watched the hut intently, fully expecting any moment to see Geary come back out, their friends surrounding him, all calm and finally ready to talk to Lamiroir about what she most wanted to know.

And then the ground had begun to shake, metal creaked from far below, and Lamiroir had only enough time to grab the boy tightly before the thing had torn through the grass, throwing them off their feet and lifting them high into the air. Alfendi had shrieked for his father and began to cry, but his panic only seemed to strengthen Lamiroir's calm; She clung ever tighter to the boy, her free hand finding the first handhold it could in the metal beast underneath them before they fell whatever insurmountable distance had erupted between them and the concrete chasm below. She caught only a few fleeting glances of Hershel, Sycamore and Emmy before the platform they clung to levelled out and began heavily stomping south, into the forest at the foothills of the nearby mountain range.

Although they were now able to stand, Lamiroir didn't dare let go of her handhold, lying on the cold metal and holding Alfendi tightly. He was outright crying now, clinging to her dress and sobbing into the fabric. The groaning of the metal echoed around them, and Lamiroir found herself with a sudden desire to oil the offending joints; Even a beast of this size could be made to run silently, something told her. Looking around, she quickly noticed a bulge in the otherwise flat roof, at what she could only guess was the ‘front’. It was probably some kind of cockpit, though any glass to see out of was on the opposite side to where they lay.

There was a clang of metal on metal, then a grunt, then another clang. As Lamiroir watched, Sycamore vaulted over the edge of the platform, a sword in hand. His face lit up as he spotted the pair, running to meet them.

Sighing in relief, Lamiroir finally released her grip on the sheeting, sitting up and gently prodding Alfendi. "Look, it's Mister Sycamore."

Alfendi gasped, running to meet their rescuer with a loud cry of "Uncle!"

Sycamore returned the boy's hug only briefly, looking around the roof. "We need to get you two off this thing. Is there some kind of hatch around, or a ladder?"

Lamiroir got to her feet, searching for a sign of something between the clumps of dirt still littering what used to be the arena floor. "Nothing that I've seen but... Might that do?"

The man grinned as he spotted the handle of a hatchdoor she was pointing to. "Perfect!" The trio ran towards it, Sycamore bending down to clear the dirt from around it. It took a few seconds to open the hatch, revealing a metal corridor below that extended both ways at a slight slope before turning off in unseen directions. After checking the coast was clear, Sycamore directed Lamiroir inside before handing Alfendi to her through the opening. "You should be safe in there," he told them.

"Aren't you coming?" Lamiroir asked, lowering the boy to the ground and shooting confused looks up through the door.
Sycamore shook his head, frowning. "I need to convince Geary to bring this thing to a stop."

Before Lamiroir could object, the hatch door had slammed closed.

Alfendi squeaked as he clung to the singer. "W-w-what did Uncle mean?" he asked, sounding panicked again now his rescuer had left as quickly as he arrived. "Why didn't he come with us?"

"I-I don't know," Lamiroir lied, hugging the boy. Concern gripped at her chest for her Uncle Geary.

"Alfendi! Lamiroir!"

Alfendi squeaked again, pulling himself out of Lamiroir's hug to run for his sister as she rounded the corner of the corridor. "Flora!"

Flora held her brother tight, looking around in surprise. "I thought you were outside?"

"Mister Sycamore found us a way in," Lamiroir explained, hurrying to join the pair. "He's... gone to find Geary."

The younger woman's eyes widened. "O-oh, um..." Her gaze soon returned to her brother, who was clinging to her chest as though his life depended on it... and very likely it did. "Let's get you two out of here first. I'm sure Uncle won't do anything drastic."

Lamiroir suspected Flora's doubts on that statement equalled her own.

The trio descended through the small maze of corridors, following the trail of lipstick arrows on the walls, marks Flora had left behind her to track her path. Lamiroir counted four levels of sloping floors before they turned a corner and collided with Emmy, who knocked herself, Flora and Alfendi to the ground.

Emmy grinned as she recognised the trio, pulling herself to her feet. "Hey, you're all safe!"

"What are you doing here!?” Flora demanded as she followed suit. "Both you and Uncle fell out into the arena; I saw you!"

"Climbed back up," Emmy said with a shrug. "Desmond went up the outside, but I was trying to shut down the legs." She gestured behind her, where Lamiroir saw a panel missing in the wall, sunlight glinting through it. "I got one, but the other three aren't as easy to get to as they look."

Flora, having helped Alfendi back into a standing position, sighed as she handed her brother off to their friend. "If you have a way out, get Alfendi and Lamiroir back on solid ground. I need to go stop Uncle before he does something he'll regret."

"Wait, what?" Emmy said, taking Alfendi's hand more by instinct than anything else.

"Please be quick," Lamiroir called as Flora dashed back up the corridor.

Flora paused only to shoot the singer a grin. "I'll try," she promised, then disappeared around the corner.

Alfendi whimpered, his grip on Emmy's hand tightening. "Flora..."

"D-don't worry, kiddo," Emmy assured him, forcing a smile. "She'll be back before you know it."

Turning around, she led the pair down the passageway towards the open panel.
Halfway there, the entire mechanism around them shuddered and rocked back and forth, throwing everyone to the ground once more before resuming its thudding across the outside terrain, now at a greater speed than before.

"That's not a good sign," Emmy mumbled, trying to extricate the seven-year-old from her waist so she could stand up again.

Lamiroir threw herself to the open panel, sticking her head into the opening. Below her, she could see a sea of wires and pulleys, the great iron bones of the beast and the heavy-duty pistons that served as its muscles, desperately in need of oiling.

...!

*How many times, from childhood to adulthood, had she helped set up and put away that complicated stage equipment? They never entrusted that vital task to stage-hands; Dad said they didn't care as much about the lives of the magicians using it, and doing it themselves helped keep their tricks a secret. For years, it was her and Dad, then her and Zak and Valant, setting up the pulleys, wires, mechanical beasts of the backstage and side-stage and under-stage and over-stage, so their show would always go off without a hitch, whether it was a false balancing act or her favourite of all: floating through the air on her invisible harness. She never turned down the chance to fly, after all.*

Lamiroir shook her head as the memory fled from her eyes. Comparing what she could see of the machinery below her to her intimate knowledge of all the old stage equipment, she could easily put together how the leg worked, and exactly how Emmy had managed to disable it in her path of destruction from bottom to top. With no power flowing through its veins, the dead limb bobbed and bounced off the ground as the mechanical beast above sped through the open forest outside.

"We're going too fast," Emmy said from behind her, and Lamiroir noticed the woman had managed to stand despite Alfendi clinging to her coat. "There's no way we can safely go back down there, and it would be suicide to jump from this height."

Behind Emmy, Lamiroir noticed the corridor they stood in ended with a rolling door, of the kind used in garages; Sunlight peeked through from underneath, where it had not been fully closed. An idea forming in her mind, she turned back to the wires in the disabled leg, reaching out to test their elasticity.

"Lamiroir?" Alfendi quietly asked.

"Help me disconnect these," Lamiroir instructed the pair. "I think I know how we can get out."

For the third time since chasing Geary underground, Flora found herself climbing the inside of his unstable mecha. The half-hearted maze of corridors wasn't at all hard to navigate, especially not with the help of her improvised trail markings. Not even the sudden jump in speed after she left her brother and Lamiroir with Emmy had injured her resolve, fighting back to her feet and running up the sloped floors all the harder.

Once she passed the point where she had first found the distressed pair, Flora knew she must be close. The corridor's floor levelled out, directly beneath the flat roof of the mecha's top, and she found herself facing a T-intersection at the edge. Further down, Flora had always gone right first, but
here, so close to her destination, she paused and listened, silently marking the wall with her lipstick in case she needed to turn back once more.

Smashing glass echoed from her right. She hurried to follow it.

"Stop this madness right now!"

"Get out, leave me alone!"

"You gave that right up when you put an innocent child in danger!"

"What are you talking about!?"

Finally, Flora reached a door, and threw it open to find a small cockpit, closer to a plane's than any other mecha she had seen. Cowering in a chair behind a bank of switches and levers was Geary; Standing above him, the only thing not covered in broken glass, was Sycamore, eyes wide in rage and a rapier in hand as he perched on the shattered remains of the cabin's window. Flora didn't even think, leaping into the room towards the man with the sword. "Uncle, stop!"

Sycamore blinked, coming out of his anger long enough to notice his niece. "Flora?"

Just as she reached Sycamore, grabbing for the sword in his grip, Geary lunged at the controls in front of him, slamming a bank of levers that sent the entire mecha swinging to one side, once more throwing Flora and Sycamore to the ground.

"Now what are you doing!?" Sycamore growled, fighting to get back up.

"Uncle, put that down!" Flora ordered, ignoring the broken glass pressing into her cheek as she clung to Sycamore's arm.

A crunching sound echoed from below, then the mecha began to tip forward. Flora became very aware of running water rippling ever closer.

"The Rapi Joki!" Geary shouted, jumping out of his chair.

Before Flora could make any further move to react, the mecha landed nose first in the icy river with a gigantic splash.
The Siren's Secret, Confrontation

September 14, 11:06AM
Riverside

Flora wasn't quite sure how she got out of the mecha's cockpit, whether she was thrown out in the impact of the fall, was pulled out by one of the other two men (likely Sycamore in that case), or somehow managed to swim out on her own and forgot in the shock of the impact with the icy rapids below. All she knew was that she found herself shivering on the banks of the Rapi Joki, coughing up water as she dragged herself along the shore, then flipped onto her back.

The sky above was a little cloudy, enough to dull the harsh sunlight of the midday. The rushing water was accompanied by the rustling leaves of early autumn, which she could see above her if she moved her head a little. With an idea of where she was, she quickly took a mental tally of herself, establishing she was whole and mostly uninjured: The cuts on her hands and face from the glass stung with river water, and she seemed to have a bruise developing on her right shin, but otherwise she was perfectly healthy.

Grunts from nearby pressed into Flora's consciousness, and she forced herself onto her side; From here, she could see Sycamore, his normally immaculate curls limp on his head and his glasses askew, dragging a half-conscious Geary out of the water. In his hand, Flora saw her uncle was still gripping his rapier.

Footsteps approached from the tree line, and Flora shifted onto her front to see Lamiroir, Emmy and Alfendi arriving, the three tied up in a makeshift harness of wires that trailed behind them; Each was idly disentangling themselves as they walked. "Are you all okay?" Emmy asked.

Flora nodded, running her eyes over the trio to check they were all unharmed.

"By some miracle, we all seem to be alive," Sycamore said, shoving Geary onto the grass before standing over him, rapier tight in his grip. "No thanks to the man who put us through that ridiculous farce to begin with."

Geary whimpered, pushing himself onto his hands and knees. "I-I didn't think-"

"Clearly not!" Sycamore interrupted, beginning to gesture wildly with his rapier. "There's been enough death in this world without you adding to it! There's been enough death in my family without you adding Alfendi's name to it!" His hand swung up with a roar, the sword ready to fall down on Geary's head.

Flora threw herself between Sycamore and Geary, arms held out wide. "Uncle, stop!"

Sycamore paused, surprised, then lowered his rapier to give his niece a glare. "Flora, get out of the
"No!" Flora shot back. "I heard what he said to you back in the cockpit: He had no idea Alfendi and Lamiroir were in danger. Scaring him half to death was never going to calm him down enough to stop that thing before we crashed into the river, never mind answering our questions about Lamiroir!" Seeing her uncle's disbelieving look, she huffed and gestured to the prone man behind her. "There's enough death in this world without you adding Mister Geary's name to it, Uncle!"

"She has a point..."

The rustling of bushes attracted Flora's attention to the tree line once more, away from where Emmy's group stood. Out from the foliage came Hershel, a hand on the brim of his top hat as he fixed Sycamore with a stern glare.

"... Descole."

Sycamore sharply inhaled, staring at his brother with wide eyes.

Alfendi, hiding behind Lamiroir, wailed and ran to Hershel immediately, clinging to his father's chest. "Papa!"

"Professor!" Emmy cried, sighing in relief. "How'd you catch up to us?"

Hershel, patting his son's head, gave her a quick smile, though his attention was mostly on Alfendi. "I took a short-cut. I'm glad to see you're all alright."

Flora returned her attention to her uncle, watching Sycamore shift guiltily from foot to foot, a range of expressions flitting across his face. Finally, he walked around her, stopping at Geary's other side. "Count yourself lucky, Mister Geary." He slammed his rapier blade-first into the mud, where it stuck straight up like a silver tree. "You've just been saved by a Layton." With that, he stalked off into the forest.

Something about Sycamore's final words felt directed specifically at Flora... and she couldn't help but feel a swell of pride in her chest.

Emmy jumped forward to retrieve the sword, casting nervous glances at Geary; The way she carefully and uncomfortably balanced the rapier blade-down in her hands, it was clear she didn't intend to use it.

As Emmy stepped back, Lamiroir stepped forward, watching Geary carefully. He squirmed a little under her gaze, pushing himself up on his knees and rubbing mud from his hands into his pants as he brushed against them to still his nerves.

Lamiroir took a deep breath, perhaps steadying her own nervousness. "You are my Uncle Geary, aren't you? The real 'Ami Ystava'?"

Geary paused, then nodded. "Yes," he quietly admitted. "On both counts. You... recognised me?"

"Sort of," Lamiroir replied, wincing. She turned her attention to the mecha, half sunken in the river behind him. "That... contraption of yours: It's made up of stage equipment. Just like all the stage equipment we used to use."

Again, Geary nodded. "I built it all, generally," he explained. "I was always much more mechanically minded than your father." He bitterly laughed, rubbing his eyes with the back of a hand. "But of course you recognised my work before you recognised me. You were only five..."
"If I might interrupt for a moment," Hershel spoke up, "you were Lamiroir's caretaker after she lost her memory, correct?"

"Yes, that was me," Geary sighed. He turned to Lamiroir. "I'm sorry, Thalassa... I wasn't able to take care of you like I'd promised your father. The whole situation just..." He shook his head, voice wavering. "It reminded me too much of Gaia. Then, after what happened to Magnifi..." He sniffed, pressing the back of his hand to his nose. "It wouldn't have been fair to anyone to just send you back to people you didn't and couldn't remember. I set you up with a new life to live, then I ducked out of it like a coward. If your parents were alive, I know how ashamed of me they would be..."

Flora couldn't help but feel sorry for the man immediately. Something about him reminded her of Bruno.

Lamiroir didn't reply, her eyes staring off to one side as she frowned in thought.

"We used to travel together, remember?" Geary continued. "Before Gaia got sick... before I was just an 'uncle' to you." He shook his head. "I suppose we were both under Magnifi's 'spell' in a way..."

Alfendi emerged from where he clung to his father, nose wrinkled in disgust. "'Magnifi' is a weird name."

"'Fendi!" Flora hissed in warning.

Geary only laughed. "Ah, yes, but it's a magician's name; When we were kids, he used to be known as the extremely ordinary 'Magnus Grammar'."

"Grammar?" Emmy repeated, frowning. "Magni-... You're not saying your friend was Magnifi Gramarye, are you?"

"That's him," Geary sighed.

"But that's impossible!" Emmy argued. "If Lamiroir's father was Magnifi Gramarye, that would make her..." She shot confused glances at the singer, who wasn't visibly reacting to the ongoing conversation around her. "That would make her..."

Flora shook her head. "That's definitely not it," she insisted. "Lamiroir performed with Valant Gramarye very recently; He would have recognised Magnifi's daughter, wouldn't he? And Apollo and Trucy!" She threw her hands up. "They were such massive fans of yours, Lamiroir; Surely they would have recognised if you were their...!"

Flora had barely registered it was Lamiroir lying in the contrabass case before Trucy had screamed, dropped her phone and leapt to Apollo's side. Apollo himself just stood in shock, clinging to his sister. It was up to Luke to take charge, sending for the detective and doing his best to care for the unconscious singer, and his distracted siblings, until the paramedics arrived. The two Gramaryes were so beside themselves with fear, they did everything that afternoon as a pair, and Flora doubted they took any notice of what was going on outside the small circle of Lamiroir's still form on the floor. After learning which hospital the singer was going to, they had raced off so fast, Flora worried they would run under a car or something and be in need of emergency treatment themselves. The day after, Trucy had attended to Lamiroir's every need in the courthouse, guiding her everywhere and entertaining her with stories of her brothers; Flora had simply smiled as she watched, happy on Trucy's behalf the teen was getting to spend so much time with an idol. She had
seen the longing looks both Trucy and Apollo gave Lamiroir when they thought no-one was looking, the sheer rapidity with which they jumped to her defence, the way they had grinned like they were sharing a secret as they praised Lamiroir's song the day after the concert. It was beyond obvious they were fans, even if they hid just how deep their admiration went; After all, that was only the logical assumption to make... wasn't it?

Flora's eyes widened, her hands flying to her mouth as she gasped in sudden realisation. "Oh... Oh no."

Finally, Lamiroir moved from her still pose, her eyes meeting Flora's. The singer's expression was unreadable, too many emotions vying for attention. One hand rested on the pocket where Flora knew Lamiroir kept her photo of Machi, the one Luke had prepared that had so confusingly included Apollo and Trucy. After a moment or two of silence, the singer turned and walked off into the trees without a word.

Of all the faces Flora could see around the clearing... the only one to not be shocked or confused was Hershel's.
"I'm sorry, Thalassa... I wasn't able to take care of you like I'd promised your father."

The moment Geary said it, she'd known that was her name. It had been Mama's idea, she was told, the name of an ancient Greek incarnation of the sea. She had loved hearing that story as a little girl, and it had fuelled her love of the colour blue. Even after she grew out of such child-like reasoning, she kept her fondness of the colour her whole life, and an appreciation for the oldest of the old Greek myths. It was on her suggestion that Jove took the name 'Hyperion' while with the troupe, that their son was named 'Apollo'.

"The whole situation just... It reminded me too much of Gaia."

She had been very young when her mother died... 'only five', Geary said, and as Gaia's caretaker in her final years he would know that better than most. She could remember getting to visit being a special occasion, Mama's bald head hidden under a thick woollen hat as she lay in bed, or struggled into a wheelchair. She particularly recalled one painful day, when Mama tried to sing to her, but was overcome with coughing; Dad had dragged her away so quickly, she feared she had killed the fragile older woman there and then.

"It wouldn't have been fair to anyone to just send you back to people you didn't and couldn't remember."

Even now, she couldn't recall the accident entirely clearly, and doubted she ever would. They were practising Zak and Valant's Quick-Draw Shoot'em, a variant where she would go into the air instead of remaining on the ground. All she could bring to mind was the sensation of spinning wildly, her feet leaving the floor, the bangs of the guns... She could only guess she had been shot. She didn't know what her mental condition had been like in the aftermath, but she hesitated to believe returning to her father, to Zak, to Trucy, wouldn't have helped her recover quicker.

"We used to travel together, remember? Before Gaia got sick... before I was just an 'uncle' to you."

She didn't know exactly when Dad had first told her it was Uncle Geary who built their stage equipment. She'd been told he used to travel with them, like Mama did, before Mama got sick and he left to look after her. Only a baby at the time, she had gone with Dad as he continued travelling the world and performing his magic. After Mama died, after that cold day in the cemetery of a country
she didn't know, Uncle Geary never rejoined them, staying away to build his equipment elsewhere, on his own. Dad told her he had no idea why. Even now, she didn't know if he'd been telling the truth.

"You're not saying your friend was Magnifi Gramarye, are you?"

No-one had the courage to voice it, but the unspoken words still echoed in her head.

"If Lamiroir's father was Magnifi Gramarye, that would make her Thalassa Gramarye. That would make her Zak's wife, Jove's wife, the object of Valant's badly hidden affections he never acted on."

"Apollo and Trucy were such massive fans of yours, Lamiroir; Surely they would have recognised if you were their mother, the woman who abandoned her children twice over, who left her son for dead."

So she fled.

She blinked back the threatening tears in her eyes, needing her vision more than ever to dodge trees. She didn't dare stop moving, had to keep herself occupied so the full force of what she had recovered didn't knock her down with the sheer weight of it all.

This was why she'd been so scared of her past. Somehow, despite the iron door she had built to keep it all away, she had always known it would hurt this much to go back to who she used to be, and the shame of knowing on some level exactly what she was doing had only grown heavier by the day; She had ten long years of guilt built-up for her daughter, and twenty-two years worth for her son... though, for her first-born, it felt like so much more. That the two of them were, after all these years, alive and together as siblings was some kind of miracle, but it did little to soothe her pain at the knowledge they had grown up without their mother.

Her father was dead. This was news, and brought a pain all its own. What had happened to him? Why wasn't she there for it?

Her son wasn't dead. What had truly happened to her baby in Khura'in that she never found him, that had kept them apart? How had he ended up in California, with Trucy?

On that note, where was Zak? Why was he no longer with Trucy? Had something happened to him too, just as with Jove before him?

Had Valant recognised Thalassa during the rehearsals of the concert? She remembered him being very friendly to her, but nothing that specifically hinted either way that he'd known Lamiroir's face.

Speaking of Valant, she remembered him boasting about how he was going to 'bring back Troupe Gramarye'; Whatever had happened after the death of her father, whatever had caused Zak's mysterious disappearance, it had clearly torn the Troupe apart. She couldn't resist thinking it was a shame that it had been left to Valant to rebuild it (though he was certainly a better option than Reus would have been), especially when Trucy and Apollo were out there proving themselves as worthy successors to their grandfather's name. She felt a brief surge of pride at the memory of how well they had played off each other on stage, even if she hadn't been able to understand all of it, and couldn't see the tricks they were no doubt performing with the professional air expected of a Gramarye.

Finally, her feet stilled. As she had been longing to do since Flora said their names, she pulled the folded photo from her pocket, and gazed upon the smiling face of Machi looking up at her. Slowly, she straightened out the right and then the left folds, truly looking for the first time at the figures in
"L-Lamiroir... your bracelet... May I... ask where you came by it?"

"I... I'm afraid to say I do not know. I remember nothing of the time before I was given it. I hold on to it because it gives me comfort... even if I do not remember why."

"Then we won't press you. We're sorry for bringing it up."

Apollo, in red. The resemblance he bore to his father was uncanny... even more so now he had surpassed the age Jove had been when he died. His left hand was held up to wave at the camera, the bracelet she had given him proudly displayed for all to see.

"Hi, Lamiroir! Are you doing okay on your own?"

"I am surviving. Were you worried about me?"

"Of course we were worried! Do you have someone to show you around the courthouse? It's real easy to get lost around here if you don't know the way."

Trucy, in blue. Ten years had not altered that gleeful grin, that spark of innocence in Trucy's eyes that echoed the four-year-old who used to bounce on her mother's knee. Although Trucy and Machi were indeed the same age, the girl was a little taller than her younger brother, and proud of it.

"We can get something in the restaurant. We'll manage until after, right Truce?"

"A professional magician can perform even on an empty stomach!"

"Ah yes, I forgot you two were magicians. I'm told magic is a very visual medium... but, truthfully, it has always intrigued me. If you don't mind, I would quite like to hear your show."

"Really!?"

"That would be amazing! We'll be extra noise-y today, just for you!"

They looked so at home in their magician costumes. Trucy's was clearly patterned after her mother's, the same teal blue of her eyes. Apollo's was a bright crimson red, much brighter than Zak's pinkish shade, and featured a high collar all the men in Troupe Gramarye sported. Their capes were pinned around their necks with some kind of symbol she couldn't make out, only that it was a golden colour. Although Trucy's scarf was a crimson red similar to her mother's, Apollo wore a tie that was a very distinct teal... the same colour as his sister's cape.
"Lamiroir, tell him! Tell him what you decided!"

"I am going to England, and having an eye operation."

"You mean, you'll be able to see again?"

"If the light returns to my eyes, I think I will take up painting."

"Really!? Like, become an actual landscape painter, not just of sound?"

"I will paint the three of you. I promise... Apollo, Luke, Trucy... I hope that we will meet again someday soon."

"Y-you bet! Me too!"

"We'll be waiting."

Thalassa let her tears freely stream down her cheeks as the voices in her head merged with the smiling faces in front of her eyes. Flora was right; They had recognised her almost immediately. They had seen how scared she was of her past self and they had kept that truth to themselves. No wonder Apollo and Trucy in particular had sounded so emotional as they said goodbye to her after Machi's first trial. For all they knew, that could have been the last time they saw their mother, ever. Her tears only strengthened as she wondered how much pain they had suffered, hiding that part of themselves (for the identity of their mother was surely a part of them, as much as the identities of her own parents were a part of Thalassa) and defending a brother who had that childhood with her they had missed out on... although, she doubted Apollo and Trucy were jealous of Machi, not after how strongly they had fought for his freedom. Had they let him in on their secret? Judging by the photo in her hands, all three of her children had accepted each other as family. Really, that was all she could ask for right now.

"Lamiroir?"

Thalassa jumped, clutching the picture tight in her hands as she spun around, blinking the water from her eyes. Sycamore was standing nearby, still sopping wet from the river and with his cape draped over one arm, dripping into the grass below. He watched her carefully, confused and concerned.

"Are you alright?"

Thalassa nodded; Naturally, Sycamore had left before Geary started to talk, so he was still ignorant of all they had learned from him... of all she had learned from him. "I'm... I'm fine." She sighed, looking back at the photo in her hands. "This is... the first time I've lain eyes on all three of my children." Sniffing, she wiped the water from her cheeks, struggling not to descend into sobs out in the middle of nowhere.

There was a long silence. Footsteps crunched through the grass towards her, and Sycamore's hand rested on her shoulder. "Listen, by now, the authorities will have noticed something happened at the arena, and will be gathered there waiting for us. If we take a slightly longer route, I think we can avoid them by going through the cemetery and taking the western bridge." He paused slightly before he continued: "If you'd prefer, I can take you back to the Bostonius instead of the bed and breakfast. It will be quieter there."

The smile on Thalassa's face fought with the grimace of her restrained tears. "Thank you, Mister Sycamore. I appreciate your help." She pressed the photo of her children to her chest, as if it might
send her love for them straight to their hearts halfway across the world. 'Just a little longer, my dears. I have a few more things to do first.' "However, if we are passing through Etelaranta Cemetery, I believe there's someone there I need to visit."

Sycamore looked confused, but didn't comment. He shook his cape out in an attempt to dry it before draping the wet fabric over his shoulders and securing it there. With a wave of his arm, he directed Thalassa to follow his lead. "This way, then. To the cemetery."
Hershel tugged on his hat as he watched Lamiroir - or was that Missus Gramarye, now? - walk off into the trees. As gratifying as it was to know his theory had been correct from the beginning, he hoped the singer would be able to cope with what she had relearned all at once.

Alfendi clung tight to his father's jacket. "Is Lamiroir okay?"

Before Hershel could assure his son, Geary sighed, slumping in the dirt. "She's right. I don't deserve forgiveness."

"She has just recovered thirty years worth of memories all at once," Hershel pointed out, resting a hand on Alfendi's unruly red mop. "She will need some time alone to recover from that. I'm sure she will be wanting to talk to you more then, Mister Geary... Or do you prefer Mister Ystava?"

Geary scoffed bitterly. "I've been running for so long... Whether she forgives me or not, maybe Thalassa coming back is a sign." He moved to stand, and Flora hurried to help, pulling the old man to his feet. "Running from her, running from Magnus... Magnifi... Even running from Gaia. That's enough for me." He looked up to Hershel with a tired smile. "Winfred Geary... though perhaps better known as Varlous Gramarye, one of the founders of Troupe Gramarye."

Flora patted his arm, giving the man a warm look. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mister Gramarye. My name is Flora."

Geary chuckled. "I owe you my thanks in particular, Flora. I've... never been threatened with a sword before."

"And we'll be telling Desmond off for that later," Emmy promised, shooting a glare into the trees behind her. "Honestly, I thought he'd got over that anger that drove him to try and kill people..."

"And yet you knew he was carrying his rapier," Hershel pointed out, though he gave Emmy a small smile when she wheeled round in shock. "You weren't at all surprised when you saw him using it to climb Mister Gramarye's contraption back at the arena."

Emmy blushed, fiddling with the sword in her hands. "W-well... Speaking of the arena, do you think anyone will have noticed the giant gaping hole that's suddenly appeared there?"

Geary sighed. "Oh... that definitely goes against my contract as caretaker..."

Hershel thought a moment, then held out his hand. "Give that to me, Emmy. We had best return to town and explain what happened."

Emmy handed over the sword, looking concerned. "Are you sure that's a good idea, Professor?" She shot a noticeable glance at Geary.

"It's certainly not a good idea to just leave the entire town in the dark," Hershel pointed out. "They need to be given an explanation for the destruction of their ancient ruin."
"But won't Mister Gramarye get in trouble?" Alfendi asked, sticking to his father's side.

Geary chuckled. "I will indeed," he replied. "As I should. If I had been less paranoid, less scared of facing Thalassa, I would have stopped and talked to you all when you first showed up... This never would have happened." He shook his head. "I need to face responsibility for this. I am too old for running."

Flora moved to his side, taking the man's arm. "We'll help you, Mister Gramarye. It's quite a way back to town from here, after all."

Emmy snorted, hiding a smile. "You can say that again."

Hershel only smiled as the group moved away from the river and into the forest. If only all his cases wrapped up as nicely as Geary had described.

Just as Sycamore had said, Thalassa was certain she could see a commotion over at the arena as they skirted the edge of town towards the western bridge. The old cemetery south of it was ringed by a low stone wall, and, instead of going around to find the gate and idling uncomfortably close to the circled vehicles at the nearby arena, Sycamore decided they should just climb over. It was difficult with Lamiroir's long skirt, and one of her hands still desperately clutching the photo of her children she refused to put back in her pocket just yet, but with Sycamore's help she was able to swing her legs over the worn stone and enter the graveyard on the other side.

"You said there was someone here you needed to visit?" Sycamore prompted as they walked through the graves, passing under the occasional trees that littered their autumn leaves on the grass below.

Thalassa nodded. "Gaëlle Gramarye. She was buried here in... December, 1990."

Sycamore raised an eyebrow. "Magnifi Gramarye's wife? I don't mean to be rude, but... whysyever for?"

Instead of responding, Thalassa turned her eyes to the graves, looking for any sign of her mother's name. She didn't feel she could face having to say her reasons aloud. "I don't remember where exactly she is. I'll need help looking, if it's alright with you, Mister Sycamore."

The man didn't react for a few moments, then finally nodded. "Of course."

Together, the pair wound their way through the cemetery, until Sycamore called Thalassa to a stop with a hand on her arm, pointing behind her without a word. When she turned to look, it didn't take her long to spot the older man crouched in the grass, laying flowers at the foot of a well-manicured grave site. The stone in front of him was clean and stood out from the much older gravestones closer to the road, the leaves from the nearby tree cleared into piles all around the rectangle of clear grass that marked the grave itself. Silently, Thalassa held up a hand, signalling for Sycamore to wait where he was, then walked down the path to where the man sat.

Hearing the crunching of the leaves behind him, the man at the grave jerked and looked around, wide eyes flitting between Thalassa and the still-damp Sycamore behind her. "L-Lamiroir?" Salinen asked.
Thalassa gave him a smile. "Actually... it's Thalassa," she told him in Bordinian, then turned her gaze to the gravestone behind him. "Thalassa Gramarye."

Salinen stared at her a moment, then sighed, returning his attention to the grave. "Of course it is," he muttered, the tone of his voice more sad than bitter. "You always looked so much like her..."

After a moment, Thalassa moved to sit at the man's side, reading the words on the stone in front of them: 'Gaelle Gramarye' was spread across the top, then 'Takala' in brackets below it. Underneath it all were the dates of her birth and death - 'Only thirty-three when she died?' Thalassa mused - then at the very bottom a quote that was attributed to Gaia herself: "Live magnificent and live marvellous, for Mother Earth watches over you". Considering how long it had taken her mother to die, Thalassa wondered if Gaia had planned the layout of her gravestone herself, lying in that cold bed day after day as her strength slowly sapped away.

"She was a singer too," Salinen muttered. "My isosisko... She left to seek her fortunes, and fell in with those magicians instead. Came back a few times over the years, then just disappeared off the face of the earth, not long before I finally founded the Restaurant de Chanson." He sighed, shaking his head. "I never knew what had happened until her letter arrived, after she died. She hadn't wanted me to worry about her, and didn't want me to see her when she was sick... Said I had to remember her as she was, when she was full of life."

Thalassa nodded. "I remember she loved singing. I don't recall much about her, but I do remember she loved to sing."

"I always hoped she'd sing on my stage one day," Salinen continued. "When you showed up, you reminded me of her so much, I couldn't bring myself to ask too many questions and spoil the fantasy. 'Lamiroir', the name, was hers originally. We came up with it, as the name she'd use on stage when she became a famous singer... but that never happened."

"It happened through me," Thalassa pointed out. "And, from what I remember of her, Mama never regretted taking up magic as her career. She was happy with how her life turned out, even though it was cut short."

Salinen sighed, then looked up at Thalassa. "That man who used to look after you... You found him?"

Thalassa nodded, returning his gaze with a stern stare. "Yes. Why did you try to lie when my friends asked you what you knew?"

At that, Salinen flinched guiltily, looking away. "He... I saw Geary a few times after hiring you at the Restaurant," he admitted. "Although he refused to answer any of my questions, he did tell me one thing, and made me promise I wouldn't share it with you, for your own safety."

"Safety?" Thalassa repeated.

"He said your life before had been in an evil place," Salinen explained. "That a new identity was the perfect escape you needed and you couldn't be allowed to go back."

Thalassa wrinkled her nose.

Salinen chuckled as he saw her disgusted expression. "Exactly my thoughts. He was insistent, though. Eventually, against my better judgement, I agreed not to tell you anything should you ever ask, or anyone else ever ask on your behalf. That was relatively easy, since I knew so little already... especially after I realised you'd forgotten about Geary once your short-term memory came back."
"Even so," Thalassa said, "I deserved to know... and I shouldn't have had to sing you a song to convince you of that."

At that, Salinen laughed. "True. And I apologise, Lamer, Thalassa."

Thalassa smiled. "Everything is forgiven, Monsieur Salinen." After a pause, she held up the photo still in her hand. "So, you must have a clearer memory of her than me: Do you think my mother would approve of her grandchildren?"

Salinen's eyebrows shot up in surprise as he looked over the photo. "You have two others?" When Thalassa only laughed in response, he shook his head. "Ah, she loved kids. I'm sure she'd be thrilled." He chuckled. "We were the hippie generation, you know. All about life and love." He gestured to the quote at the bottom of the gravestone. "Maybe it's time I followed her advice: Live for the moment, because Gaia is watching. She'd be terribly disappointed in her pikuveli if I showed up at the Pearly Gates with a sub-par life of misery behind me."

Thalassa laughed a second time, staring at the photo of her children in her hands. "A good idea," she agreed. "It's time I started living my life to the fullest, too. I have a lot to catch up on, after all."

Salinen smiled as he patted the singer's back. They didn't need to exchange any further words.

View Layton's Notebook
Thalassa said her goodbyes to Salinen and left the cemetery, heading north across the river. To protect her precious photo of her children, she was forced to return it to her pocket, but it was still too big to go in unfolded; She compromised by re-using the existing fold-lines, but this time folding Apollo and Trucy towards her, so she could open the picture like a book to reveal all three at once. At her side, Sycamore remained silent, having not said a word since their brief conversation in the cemetery; Thalassa could see he was burning with curiosity about what had happened in his absence, casting frequent glances at her and hiding annoyed frowns behind concerned smiles. Although she still felt unready to fully talk about it all - Where would she even start? And wouldn't she have to say it all over again for everyone else anyway? - she decided there was one way to at least catch him up to what everyone else had heard, and take care of her own burning questions at the same time.

As they left the town square behind them, heading east towards the airport, Thalassa turned to Sycamore. "May I ask you something?"

Sycamore blinked in surprise, meeting the singer's eyes. "Of course, Lamiroir. What is it?"

"Do you know anything about Troupe Gramarye?"

The man paused, pressing his glasses to his face. "W-well, I know a little, but not as much as Emmy. She did quite a bit of research into the troupe while we were in America; At their request, she was writing an article on the young Wrights... or Gramaryes, I should say."

Thalassa nodded, frowning in thought. "So, she would know how the troupe broke up? And what happened to Magnifi, and Zak?"

Sycamore watched her carefully. "Magnifi, I believe, is long dead," he said, surprisingly bluntly. "If I remember correctly, he was murdered. They couldn't make the evidence stick to Valant, and Zak vanished, so the culprit was never determined."

"He vanished," Thalassa repeated, a barely audible whisper. It broke her heart to think that Zak and Valant both had been accused of her father's murder... and that said accusation had driven Zak into hiding. "And Trucy?"

"Was left behind," Sycamore confirmed. "Mister Wright adopted her not long after."

Thalassa mutely nodded. She couldn't help thinking she should have been there for her daughter... though it did seem Phoenix had a habit of taking in her children when she could not, first with Trucy and now with Machi... "And Apollo?"

"He and Luke were adopted a short time later," Sycamore replied. "Although I wasn't in touch with the Wrights at the time, so I'm not too familiar with the details." He watched her a moment more, concerned. "Are you alright, Lamiroir?"

It took Thalassa a moment before she decided how to respond. "Actually... my name is Thalassa," she told him. "Thalassa Gramarye."
To his credit, Sycamore's stride faltered only half a step, sticking close to Thalassa's side. He didn't say anything, staring back at her with wide eyes before returning his attention to the path before them, his expression somewhere between a resigned frustration and awe... but mostly just thoughtful. Finally, he turned back to Thalassa with a smile. "The Bostonius isn't far ahead, Missus Gramarye. We can talk more there... if you feel up to it."

Thalassa nodded gratefully.

By the time the red plane came back into sight on the horizon, Thalassa felt she had finally recovered from the shock of rediscovering her past... although the pain of knowing what she had done to her children, even unintentionally, still stung deep. She let Sycamore lead her up the ladder to the open door and into the Bostonius' cabin.

"I'm sure Emmy won't mind you taking her bed tonight, if you'd rather not return to Madame Rose's."

Thalassa nodded. "Yes, thank you. Your offer is very kind."

Sycamore took her to a small bedroom on the lower level of the plane's back rooms, telling Thalassa to seek out either him or Raymond in the main cabin if she needed anything, then left her be.

Sitting on the bed, finally alone in the quiet, Thalassa felt the wave of grief building up at the back of her eyes, threatening to overwhelm her. She reached into her pocket, emptying it of the three pieces of paper within: First, Alfendi's hand-drawn map of the town; Second, Machi's adoption form, only half filled in; Third and last, the photo of her children. The map and adoption form she placed to the side for now, hugging the photo to her chest as she lay on her side, finally letting out her tears for the listening pillow.

It was a few hours before she felt anything close to normal again.

When Thalassa finally felt ready to face the outside world once more, the first thing she did was locate the plane's bathroom to wash her face. The second thing she did was head to the main cabin.

"Mister Sycamore?" she asked of the now-dry man, who was standing at an ironing board that had his suit jacket draped over it. "May I borrow a pen?"

Sycamore returned her gaze blankly for a moment. "Of course, Missus Gramarye," he agreed, placing the iron down and heading to a nearby chest of drawers, opening one to dig around inside. "Emmy keeps them all over the place. Can I ask why you need one?"

Thalassa smiled as she took the offered pen. "Something I've been meaning to do for a long time." From her pocket, she pulled out Machi's adoption form and settled down on the sofa to fill it out.

With the gentle sounds of Sycamore drying out his wet clothing nearby, Raymond doing maintenance in the cockpit, and Keats purring from the other end of the lounge, Thalassa crouched over the adoption form to dig out long-forgotten minutiae about herself that would finally satisfy the Borginian officials in Poma that she was worthy of Machi. Her birthdate in particular made her laugh, realising she had accidentally made herself a year younger than she actually was when they filled in the first form four years previous... though her birthday was only four months off, which was certainly closer to the truth than it could have been.

Once Sycamore had finished with his suit jacket and put away the iron and board, he approached the singer, slipping his jacket back on and finally looking back to normal - What had happened to his
cape, Thalassa had no idea, only that it had vanished sometime during her self-exile in Emmy's room. With an overly practised air, he pulled the frills of his shirt from his sleeves, looking over the paper on the table curiously. "Is that some kind of government form?"

Thalassa nodded. "So I can adopt Machi," she explained. "I've been trying for years, but my blindness always got in the way."

Sycamore hummed in thought, slowly lowering himself to sit at her side. "Apollo and Trucy would love that, I'm sure," he mused. "They get their mother back, and a new brother."

At that, Thalassa had to laugh, pulling her photo of the three from her pocket to show him. "Do you think they might have told Machi? He's getting a brother and sister out of this deal, after all."

"Possibly," Sycamore admitted, smiling. "In any case, he'll know when he signs that." He gestured to the form on the table. "You've given your name as 'Thalassa Gramarye'; He'll have to guess that means 'Lamiroir'."

Thalassa smiled. "Then I will consider it permission for Apollo and Trucy to tell him," she decided. "If they haven't already, of course."

Raymond cleared his throat from the cockpit above, attracting the pair's attention. "Master, Emmy is returning... along with the Layton family."

Sycamore sighed. "Thank you, Raymond." He turned to Thalassa with an apologetic grimace. "I had to tell them where we'd gone; I can only assume my insistences we were alright have been ignored."

"I understand," Thalassa replied. "I'm sure they have many questions for me... and I have questions for them." She turned her eyes to the photo in her hands. "You said Emmy was the expert on Troupe Gramarye, didn't you?"

After a short pause, Sycamore nodded. "Yes, that's right." He groaned as he pushed himself to his feet. "I'll go let them in, then. I'm quite looking forward to asking my brother to explain himself."

Thalassa raised an eyebrow, but the man didn't elaborate, instead turning around and heading off to the closed door on the far wall of the cabin. Deciding to leave him be, she turned back to the form on the table, folding it up to return to her pocket.

A meow from the end of the sofa brought Thalassa's attention to the plane's resident cat, padding along the cushions towards her. He bumped his head against her arm, then curled up at her side, lanky limbs neatly folded up underneath him as he quickly dropped off to sleep, purring against her leg.

Thalassa smiled. "Me too, Keats." She held up the photo of her children, smoothing out the creases. "Unfortunately, I have a lot more to do before I can rest today."
The Siren's Secret, The Story Comes Together

September 14, 1:32PM
Kopunchiville Airport

It had been a very strange morning, Flora mused to herself, even when taking into account that it was one of her father's investigations. After Varlous Gramarye had told them who both he and Lamiroir were and apologised for all the trouble he caused, they had escorted him back to the arena, which they found crawling with officials and curious bystanders. Needless to say, their odd group emerging from the forest attracted attention, two of them still dripping wet from their dip in the Rapi Joki and Hershel visibly holding an unsheathed sword in one hand, Alfendi clinging to his side. Emmy and Varlous handled talking to the officials; Using them as translators, Hershel insisted with a smile that the sword was his, and that he'd been practising fencing in the woods. Once their story was out, Varlous left in a police car to be questioned at the station.

With Varlous taken care of, Hershel turned his attention to Flora, still standing in her soaked dress. The group promptly hurried back to Madame Rose's, to allow her to dry off and change; Madame Rose had cried in shock when she saw the state the young woman was in, and spent the next few hours fussing over Flora, even inviting her into the kitchen to make lunch together. In that time, Sycamore gave Hershel a call, explaining he was with Lamiroir at the Bostonius; Despite his insistences they were both okay, none of the group really believed it.

Thus, after lunch, they headed straight for the airport.

It was Alfendi who spotted the flapping cape on the railing of the Bostonius' upper deck, where it had apparently been secured to dry off in the wind. The retractable ladder that only came out in the absence of airport stairs was missing, likely folded back into its cubby-hole below the plane's closed door.

"Well, just like Desmond said, they're in there," Emmy said, leading the wary group closer to the plane.

Flora held the paper bag in her hands tight. "Do you think Uncle...?"

"He's had plenty of time to calm down," Hershel pointed out, the rapier in his grip swinging loosely as he walked. "I'm sure he's been taking excellent care of Lamiroir."

Alfendi said nothing, but pressed a little tighter to his father's side.

As the quartet reached the shadow of the plane's wing, the door in the fuselage above swung open, revealing Sycamore glaring down at them. "I thought I told you we didn't require assistance."

"Who said we didn't believe you?" Hershel replied with a smooth smile, and held up the sword in his hand. "I merely intended to return this."

"-and Madame Rose gave us some food for Lamiroir," Flora added, holding up the paper bag. "In... case she hadn't had lunch?"

Alfendi was less subtle about their true intentions: "Are you and Lamiroir okay, Uncle?"

Sycamore sighed, deciding not to react to their claims. "Well, the four of you are in luck," he said.
"Missus Gramarye happens to be willing to take visitors right now." He leaned down, fiddling with the panel directly under the door, and a moment later the retractable ladder popped out of the fuselage with a clunk, snapping noisily into place. As he stood up, Sycamore singled out Emmy with a glare. "She has questions in particular for you, Miss Reporter."

Emmy blinked, confused. "Me?"

"You're the expert on Troupe Gramarye, aren't you?" Sycamore replied with a raised eyebrow, then stepped back into the plane and out of sight.

It didn't take long for them all to climb the ladder and enter the Bostonius' cabin. Hershel was quick to hand the rapier back to its owner, and Sycamore took it with averted eyes before disappearing into the back rooms. With the rest of them still awkwardly standing around the door as Emmy closed it behind them, Flora decided to take the lead, approaching Thalassa on the sofa. "Lamiroir?"

Thalassa looked up with a smile, moving a piece of paper from her lap to the table; As Flora got closer, she noticed the paper was the unfolded photo of Machi, Apollo and Trucy, and a familiar ball of purple fluff was curled up against the woman's side. "Please, 'Missus Gramarye' is fine."

Hershel chuckled as he joined his daughter, taking off his hat. "I'm glad to see you're doing better, Missus Gramarye."

Flora nodded, then held out the paper bag in her hand. "We told Madame Rose you weren't feeling well, so she gave us something to pass on... if you haven't eaten lunch yet."

Thalassa looked a little surprised, then took the bag gratefully. "I shall have to thank her later. I've been so... distracted these past couple of hours, I didn't even notice the time."

It was then Flora noticed Emmy and Alfendi joining them, the young boy racing to Thalassa's side with a worried look. "Are you okay, Lami- um, Missus Gramarye?"

"I'm doing better than I was earlier," Thalassa admitted with a kind smile, placing the paper bag on the table. "Though I've certainly felt happier."

Alfendi nodded solemnly. "I get Papa to read me a story when I'm feeling sad," he said. "Maybe we could tell you a story and you'll feel better?"

Thalassa laughed. "Well, there was something I did have in mind to ask." Her smile died as she looked up to where Emmy stood behind Hershel. "I'm told you know what happened to Troupe Gramarye in my absence."

Emmy looked uncomfortable, glancing behind her to where Sycamore had reappeared from the back rooms. "Y-yeah, I guess I know more about that than anyone else here," she agreed.

Without a word, everyone settled down on the horseshoe of purple couches; Alfendi sat at Thalassa's side, opposite from where Keats was still curled up, and Hershel sat next to his son, placing his hat on the empty cushion beside him. On the other side of the table, Flora, Emmy and Sycamore filed in, Emmy facing Thalassa with a determined frown.

"You disappeared... in 2016, right?" Emmy asked.

Thalassa nodded. "An accident in rehearsal," she explained. "I don't remember the exact details, but I'm sure that's what happened."
Emmy thought for a moment. "It wasn't long after that Magnifi got sick," she began. "It was liver cancer, I think."

At that, Thalassa sighed. "Of course it was cancer."

"The troupe settled around L.A. while he was in the hospital," Emmy continued. "He was bedridden, and, one day, he sent letters to his two apprentices; That night, he asked them to come to his room and shoot him in the head."

Flora gasped, while Thalassa simply gave Emmy a horrified look. "Why did he do that!?!" Flora asked.

Emmy shook her head. "No-one knows... but, for some equally unknown reason, neither Zak nor Valant disobeyed him."

Thalassa stared for a moment before her gaze turned down, glaring at the table. "Dad, you didn't..." she whispered.

"Zak went first, then Valant," Emmy continued. "Magnifi was shot in the head, just like he asked. And the police arrested Zak for the murder." She paused, brushing at her hair. "When the case went to court, Zak's attorney brought up the possibility that Valant had rearranged the crime scene... but it wasn't enough to remove suspicion from Zak. Right as the judge was about to call his verdict, instead of taking it quietly, Zak called the trial to a halt and... disappeared in a cloud of smoke."

"He vanished," Thalassa quietly repeated to herself, remembering Sycamore's words.

"Gone from the courthouse, just like that," Emmy replied with a nod. "Nobody ever saw him again. The police turned to Valant next, but the evidence stuck to him even less than Zak, so they ended up just letting him go. The troupe was broken."

Sycamore sighed, pushing his glasses up his nose. "And thus Trucy was left behind," he pointed out.

Flora found herself thinking back to the yellow-caped man they had so briefly met in the Wrights' home, so enthusiastic and professional, just like the honorary niece he was so proud of. Speaking of... "Wait, Valant seemed pretty close to Trucy. Why didn't he adopt her instead of Mister Wright?"

"The police suspected him of murder," Sycamore pointed out. "Trucy was likely the last thing on his mind... and even if she wasn't, he couldn’t adopt a child while facing a charge as serious as that."

Thalassa tapped at her bracelet idly. "I wonder if it was for similar reasons to why Uncle Geary left..."

"Why didn't Trucy mention her uncle before?" Alfendi asked. "He visited her, didn't he?"

Hershel shook his head. "I'm afraid not. Luke mentioned in his last letter that this concert was the first time he and Valant had ever crossed paths; If Valant had ever visited Trucy, it was before either of the other Wrights were adopted."

Thalassa gave him a curious look. "When was that?"

"2019. October, specifically," Hershel replied. "The whole mess with Magnifi was in April or May, if I recall correctly."

At that, Thalassa nodded thoughtfully, her gaze returning to the table.
Sycamore scoffed, giving his brother a humourless smirk. "You knew the whole time, didn't you? Who Missus Gramarye here really was?" He crossed his arms. "This is what Luke was hiding. He told you all about it."

Hershel just smiled.

"Wait, really?" Emmy asked.

Flora sighed. "Of course Luke knew. Apollo and Trucy knew. They would have told him!" She huffed. "So why'd they hide it from us? And why didn't you tell us, Professor!? Why'd we come to Borginia at all!?"

Instead of answering his daughter, Hershel turned to Thalassa. "Apologies if I'm wrong, Missus Gramarye," he said, "but you hired me to recover your memories, correct?"

Thalassa smiled. "I did. And I'm sure simply telling me my name wouldn't have done much to help in that regard."

Hershel nodded, turning to Flora. "And, despite all the evidence for it, I was reluctant to say anything for sure until said memories were recovered in full."

Sycamore rolled his eyes. "Of course you were."

Flora felt she had no choice but to reluctantly accept that. "W-well... Then, why did the Wrights insist she come to us instead of just telling her themselves?" she asked. "They knew for sure!"

"I can't blame them," Thalassa spoke up. "At the time, Apollo and I had just witnessed a murder. It was the worst possible time for a revelation as big as that."

"Ooh, yeah!" Alfendi chirped. "You had to find the murderer first before he killed again!" He giggled, wriggling his fingers by his face. "Like by hitting someone with his hair."

Thalassa raised an eyebrow; It took Flora a moment to remember she had never seen Daryan Crescend's unusual hairstyle.

"But how did they recognise you at all, Missus Gramarye?" Sycamore wondered aloud. "Trucy would have been very young when you disappeared, and I'm sure I've heard Apollo couldn't remember anything at all about his birth parents. With that veil you were wearing, I doubt anyone got a good enough look at your face to remember it."

Thalassa smiled, her hand resting on the bracelet around her right wrist. "They saw my bracelet," she explained, and looked to the photo resting on the table in front of her. "I see Apollo still wears his, too."

"That's how I realised who you were, myself," Hershel replied with a knowing smile. "Or, at least, it helped raise my suspicions."


Hershel chuckled. "I said no such thing," he said. "Luke kept everything he knew firmly to himself."


Sycamore grumbled, "So you weren't lying when you said he kept quiet..."
"He didn't hide it very well, but hide it he did," Hershel continued. "I suspected the only reason he would make such efforts would be on behalf of his family, and my suspicions were only strengthened when that photo arrived." He gestured to the photo on the table. "I saw Apollo's bracelet was similar to Lamiroir's, and that Apollo and Trucy were in this photo while Mister Wright and Luke were not. I'm sure they were very careful to plan all that, specifically for when Missus Gramarye remembered them."

Flora huffed. "And you said that photo didn't mean anything!"

Hershel chuckled. "I said Luke had his reasons," he gently corrected her. "I never said it didn't mean anything."

Although she grumbled, Flora had to admit he was telling the truth there.

Thalassa had stopped paying attention to the conversation, sad eyes turned on the photo of her children. "I have missed so much of their lives," she quietly spoke up. "Apollo is grown... Trucy is a teenager..."

"All the more reason not to miss anything more," Hershel assured her, shifting in his seat to face the singer. "To dwell on what you've lost in the past is only to lose the present as well. It's the hardest thing you'll ever do, but you must learn to forgive yourself, and move past it."

Flora felt her anger at Hershel instantly fade away. When he kept secrets like this, it was always for a good reason... and if anyone knew how to deal with the pain of loss, a pain Thalassa was clearly drowning in right now, it was her father.

Thalassa thought for a long moment, then slowly smiled. "Thank you, Professor Layton. I will certainly try."

Hershel smiled back, then reached into his jacket. "In the meantime, maybe these will help." He took out a closed envelope, stuffed full. "Every photo of his family Luke has sent me over the years; It took a while to make all these copies, but I thought you might be interested."

Thalassa hesitated before taking the envelope, and paused before meeting Hershel's eyes. "Thank you." As Hershel nodded in reply, she gently pulled open the flap and grabbed the small pile of paper within. Placing the envelope down, she frowned in confusion at the photo on top. "Is that...?"

Alfendi grinned, peering over at the photo from her side. "That's Luke," he told her, then his smile faded. "Is his arm broken there? That looks like a cast..."

"He broke his arm just after he moved to America," Flora explained. "That's probably from around the time he was adopted."

Thalassa softly laughed to herself, staring at the photo. "They all look so young..." Her gaze turned back to Hershel, looking slightly teary. "Thank you so much, Professor."

Hershel only smiled. "It was no problem at all, ma'am."

**View Layton's Notebook**
It was quiet when Thalassa pushed open the door to the orphanage... probably, she mused, because she had waited until all the kids were likely to be in school. If she was right, only Madame Bonte and Monsieur Lomake were going to be in the building, and she looked around for any sign of where they were as she gingerly approached the front desk.

A chair scuffed across carpet in the next room, and a moment later Bonte poked her head around the door to the cramped office. "Ah, Lamiroir!" she cried as she spotted the visitor, quickly emerging to circle the desk and shake her friend's hand. "What are you doing back here so soon? We just saw you yesterday!"

Thalassa laughed. "Actually, I'm leaving town today; I just had a couple of errands to run, then I'm heading back to England."

Bonte paused, staring at the singer with wide eyes. "You're leaving already? But you only just arrived!"

"That is true," Thalassa admitted, her smile fading. "But, my business here is done. I would be heading straight back to America if I could, but I still have health check-ups to attend after my operation."

"Ah, yes, back to Machi," Bonte realised, nodding. "He'll be waiting for you indeed." She rested a hand on the nearby desk. "Did you come to say goodbye?"

"Actually, I had some business," Thalassa replied, grinning again as she reached into her pocket. A moment later, she had pulled out a piece of paper, holding it out for Bonte to take. "I've filled in Machi's adoption form."

Bonte gasped, smiling wide as she took the paper. "Oh, Lamiroir, that's perfect!" She scuttled around the desk, laying the form down on the wooden surface and flattening it out to peruse. "Yes, yes, looks like we've got everything we need!" She paused, then pointed to one of the answers Thalassa had filled in. "Didn't you have Machi's birthday on the last one?" she asked. "On account of your missing memory?"

Thalassa hid a smile. "I did," she agreed. "I think Machi will still know it is me, though... even with my real name on it."

Bonte blinked, giving Thalassa a confused look, then turned her gaze back to the form. She gasped as she saw the name at the top, eyes wide. "G-Gr-Gra...! L-Lamiroir!" She pointed at the name. "That's your real name!?"

At that, Thalassa couldn't help but laugh. "Who'd've thought? And neither one of us suspected when you so happily told me all about my mother and father at the arena yesterday."

Bonte stood in silent amazement for a few moments before sighing and laughing herself. "My my... You really are a siren of many secrets, aren't you?" She picked the form off the desk, folding it back up again. "I'll finish filling in our details, and send this off later today."
"You have my endless thanks, Madame Bonte," Thalassa replied. "You've been so much help over the years, to both me and Machi."

"Oh, dear, I'm just doing my job," Bonte insisted, but she blushed with pride. Circling the desk, she held out her arms. "Come here; Let me give Gaia's daughter one last hug goodbye before she heads off for her new life."

Thalassa didn't hesitate to accept the offer.

The officers at the police station, just as Thalassa had hoped, were all too eager to assist the famous Lamiroir when she came to them for help... even if they clearly questioned why a celebrity such as her was wanting to speak to the hermit who had destroyed the town's ancient arena only the previous day. To their credit, they said nothing to her face, leading her through to his holding cell at the back of the building.

It was a sparse room, cut in two by a row of metal bars. On the near side was a messy desk and a couple of chairs. On the far side, an old man lay on a lone bed, staring with wide eyes at the women coming through the door.

"Just call if you need us, Madame," the young officer told Thalassa.

"Of course," Thalassa replied. "I'll come get you when I'm done."

The officer nodded once, then left, gently pulling the door closed behind her.

Geary got up from where he'd been lying on the thin mattress, sitting on the end of the bed. "Th... Thalassa?"

Without a word, Thalassa grabbed the nearest chair and pulled it over opposite to where the man sat, sitting down to face him. She took a deep breath as she settled, then asked, "Are you alright in here, Uncle Geary?"

"Of course, of course," Geary insisted, nodding. "I... did a pretty terrible thing, so I need to face punishment. Mostly they're still figuring out what it's going to be, though."

Thalassa paused. "I've recovered everything I could of my life before the accident, but there's still a year or so in the middle that's just blackness. I was... hoping you could shed some light on it."

Geary gave her a tight smile, tears pricking at the corners of his eyes. "Magnifi told me you were shot."

"I think I was," Thalassa admitted. "The last thing I remember is rehearsals for one of Zak and Valant's gun tricks, and the doctors told me it was an injury to my head that caused my blindness."

The old man absorbed that information silently. "The troupe was in Poma at the time. It looked like you were going to die, so Magnifi sent you to me. He was distraught... but he had his apprentices to look after, or at least that was what he told me." He ran a hand through his thinning hair. "I think he couldn't bear to see you fade away like Gaia, or maybe he thought you'd want to go to the same place she did... maybe both."
"But I didn't die," Thalassa pointed out. "Did he never send for me back?"

Geary shook his head. "When you woke up, you couldn't see, and needed to stay in one place to adjust... but you'd also lost both your existing memories and any ability to make new ones. A human goldfish. You weren't fit to be going back to the troupe, even if you were alive."

Thalassa sighed; She had to admit that was a good point. "But I adjusted to my blindness. My short-term memory came back. You sent me to Monsieur Salinen to set me up as a singer like Mama. I know I had recovered that much by the time Dad died."

Geary winced, looking away. "Don't get me wrong, Thalassa, I kept Magnifi up-to-date on your condition. He... He thought you'd be happier in one place, somewhere safe to recover all your memories." His eyes closed. "Failing that... we both agreed giving you a new life of your own to live was the kind thing to do. If you remembered who we were, you'd come looking for us."

"And I did," Thalassa pointed out.

"You did," Geary agreed, nodding. "And I ran, because I had given myself a new life, and I had long put you in the past as... as yet another someone who was better off without me around to ruin everything."

Thalassa stared at him for a moment, pondering over his choice of words. "When I was young, Dad told me you used to travel with us, before Mama got sick," she said. "Why didn't you come back after she died?"

Geary didn't meet her eyes for a long moment. "Did you know Magnifi and I became friends as children?"

Although she wasn't sure why he was asking, Thalassa nodded. "I think I remember being told that."

"Our names were next to each other on the class roster, so we were sat together in school," Geary continued. "Geary and Grammar, Winfred and Magnus. We became friends, and did everything together. I found my talents in building things, and Magnus was always fond of acting and tricks, so it all got combined into magic shows we'd perform for our families and friends." A nostalgic smile settled on his lips. "'Y'know, it's generally accepted nowadays, but back then homosexual relationships were frowned upon greatly."

Thalassa's eyebrows shot up at the sudden change of subject. "Were you two...!?"

Geary laughed, shaking his head. "No, no; As far as I know, Magnifi was always straight. I harboured such love for him for so many years, but I was too terrified to voice it, so I kept it to myself and settled for merely being his back-up, his brother in all but blood. We left home as young men, changed our names to Magnifi and Varlous Gramarye, and took our act on the road. We travelled all over Europe, looking for work, and endlessly improving our act. Eventually, it got to the point we needed a second person on stage."

At that, Thalassa frowned. "But weren't you...?"

"No, I've always hated being the centre of attention," Geary explained with a smile. "I made my contraptions and left it to Magnifi to be the star. When we simply couldn't do without someone to assist him up there, we decided to audition for a third member of our act."

Thalassa gasped. "Oh, I think I know this part... Isn't this how Mama joined you?"

Geary nodded. "Yep, that was when we met Gaia, and she became a Gramarye." He chuckled to
himself. "I remember thinking, when I first saw her, what a hippie she was... This was the late-seventies, and she still acted like it was the mid-sixties!" His laughter faded. "She was such a free soul. Not even we could contain her, though we wanted to; She caught both our eyes, and I think she knew the moment it happened."

Thalassa felt a frown tugging at her lips. Two Gramarye men, both in love with a younger Gramarye woman? The entire situation was far too familiar for comfort.

"But, to her credit, Gaia truly believed in all that hippie stuff about free love," Geary continued. "She sat us down and told us she refused to let our friendship be ruined out of a rivalry for her affections; She loved us both equally, and she wanted it to stay that way." He paused, then gave Thalassa a concerned look. "He never told you about any of this, did he?"

Thalassa shook her head. "I was told how Dad and Mama met, and that they fell in love after," she replied. "This is the first I've heard of any 'free love'..."

Geary snorted bitterly. "I don't think it ever fully sat well with Magnifi. He went along with it for Gaia, and I'd like to think he did it for our friendship too... but he was always such a good actor. Neither of us suspected...." He sighed, dismissing the subject with a wave of his hand. "Anyway. When Gaia became pregnant with you, she was adamant that it mattered not one bit whether you were mine or Magnifi's, that you belonged to all three of us equally; Gaia was Mama, Magnifi was Daddy... and I was Papa."

Thalassa blinked in surprise. "You... You weren't always my uncle." Just like he'd said the previous morning. No wonder this solution had never been proposed between her, Zak and Valant. It was hard enough learning to love again after Jove's and Apollo's deaths (or supposed death in Apollo's case, as it turned out)... Even if she had known it was a possibility, she doubted she could have allowed both men into her heart at once the way her mother had for Magnifi and Geary.

Geary only nodded. "You were a couple of years old at the time Gaia was diagnosed with cancer," he continued. "She couldn't continue travelling, not in her condition and with all the treatments she had to undergo... but, at the same time, we couldn't afford all those treatments with all four of us staying put for so long. After a lot of discussion, we came up with a plan: Magnifi would continue travelling, performing on his own; I would stay with Gaia to look after her and provide support, building the props and set-pieces Magnifi needed and sending them to him to put up himself; Gaia, obviously, would stay put for her treatments, and wanted to return to her hometown - here in Kopunchiville - to do that." He paused a moment. "Gaia was in no state to look after a two-year-old, and I was going to be too busy with her to keep an eye on you myself. You ended up going with Magnifi."

Thalassa bit her lip in thought. Her earliest memories were of the days she travelled alone with her father, while her mother slowly withered in a place far away.

"I think you had just turned five when I learned you were no longer mine," Geary quietly said. "You and Magnifi were visiting, and before running in to see Gaia, you gave me a big smile and said 'Hello, Uncle Geary...'" He sighed, eyes closed. "I was too stunned to reply. Once you ran off, Magnifi told me he'd discovered you had his eyes, his ability to read body language and perceive what people were thinking... and that meant you were his. Not mine." The old man paused, holding back tears. "It wasn't just that I wasn't your Papa anymore, it was that the new name Magnifi had taught you... Uncle Geary. I wasn't even a Gramarye anymore." He pressed a hand to his eyes. "I'm sorry, I..."

"No, it's alright," Thalassa insisted. She couldn't help but feel sorry for the man, despite barely remembering him; If there was anything she could sympathise with, it was the simultaneous loss of a
child and a spouse. That was the kind of pain that never truly got better.

Geary took a few moments to regain control of himself. "I never told Gaia, though I'm sure she heard you calling me by my new name; She was so weak by then, needing a wheelchair to get around. I practically rebuilt the entire house for her as her condition deteriorated... not that it helped. She still died." He sighed. "After her funeral, Magnifi and I didn't even discuss it. I stayed in that house, building my contraptions... and he continued travelling with you."

Thalassa wished they were close enough to reach out a comforting hand. "So, where does 'Ami Ystava' come into this?" she asked. "And that walking tank under the arena?"

Geary snorted. "'Ami Ystava' was an invention of Gaia's," he explained. "We didn't want to use the Gramarye name, to keep ourselves secret, so she gave me an alias to use while I was out and about." He smiled. "The arena came on sale a few years after she passed. We'd performed there so often, I started to feel like I owed it to Gaia to keep it intact. Eventually, I gave in and bought it, took over as caretaker." The smile died. "I built the underground tunnel to connect the two and travel between them secretly, since I dreaded having to walk the streets. There wasn't much space for building things in the house, so the large room under the arena came about as a workshop for all the grand ideas Magnifi sent me to make. After he died..."

"You didn't have anything to make anymore," Thalassa realised. "That's why you build the tank?"

After a moment's pause, Geary nodded. "I always had it in the back of my mind that I could use it to flee if anyone came looking for me," he admitted. "I was... very ready to leave everything about the Gramaryes behind by then."

Thalassa felt she couldn't blame him; After everything that had happened, she was starting to think the Gramarye name was cursed... and maybe she wasn't alone. "You told Monsieur Salinen I had come from an 'evil place', that it was better I didn't remember it. Did you truly believe that?"

Geary winced. "Maybe," he admitted. "My relationship with Magnifi certainly never recovered after Gaia's death... Maybe I was just wanting revenge. Maybe I was still bitter deep down that he took you from me, and I didn't want to send you back." He sighed, shaking his head, and his voice wavered as he added, "I don't know anymore."

Thalassa stared at the old man. He had lost two spouses, a child, and his life as a Gramarye... He had briefly kidnapped her, twice, but had never intended to hurt anyone. There was only one thing she needed to say, that he needed to hear: "I forgive you, Papa. For everything."

Geary looked up at her in surprise. A moment later, tears began to spill down his cheeks, a smile on his face. "Thank you, Thalassa."
"I haven't laughed this hard in so long!" Thalassa cried, leaning back against the sofa to keep from looking at the spread of photos from the past seven years arranged on the table in front of her, caught in a fit of hysterical laughter. "Of all the things to dress up as, they picked *Troupe Gramarye*!"

Alfendi scrunched up his nose. "It's not *that* funny..."

Opposite them, Flora hid giggles of her own. "Actually, I know the story behind that one," she said. "Trucy was using Halloween as an excuse to make Apollo a magician's costume, to convince him to join her on stage."

"She had to convince him?" Emmy asked in surprise, sitting next to Flora. "Apollo's such a natural up there; I'd've thought he'd jump at the chance to perform."

Flora shrugged. "From what I remember, Luke said Apollo was a little reluctant to learn magic, and he always grumbled when Trucy pulled him up on stage." She tapped a finger against her cheek in thought. "I can't recall exactly what made him change his mind, though. It was *years* ago."

Thalassa's laughter finally calmed, and she was able to look back down at the old photo of the young Wrights in their Gramarye costumes without being attacked by another round of giggles: Apollo was dressed in something nearly identical to Zak's outfit, standing with feet spread apart and his fists on his hips... although, the forced half-smile on his face diminished the confident pose somewhat. In front of him, short enough that her top hat didn't even reach her brother's chin, was Trucy; Her blue outfit was similarly a replica of Thalassa's own costume, the identical pose topped off with a wide grin undoubtedly taught to her by her father. Next to them, closer to Apollo's height than Trucy's, was Luke in the banana-yellow outfit of Valant's, complete with black streamers to imitate the man's hair; He was clearly hiding giggles, waving to the camera as he gave his siblings room to pose. Opposite Luke was the man the Laytons had introduced to her as Phoenix Wright, clad in a recreation of Magnifi's suit, complete with a fake beard that completely obscured his face; He gave the camera a smirk, shrugging and clearly making no attempt to 'get into character' like his children were. Although he similarly made her laugh, Thalassa returned her attention to her son. "I trust Apollo stopped looking so grumpy about wearing that eventually."

Flora nodded with a grin. "By the time I first met Apollo in person, he was as enthusiastic about it as Trucy!" She leaned forward, paging through some of the newer photos before picking one up to show to Thalassa: Apollo and Trucy, the latter now tall enough that she had to stand at her brother's side to keep from obscuring his chin with her hat, both of the pair posing much more confidently in outfits very like the ones they wore in the photo with Machi. In fact, the only difference Thalassa could see was that they wore different brooches to pin their capes together. "Here, this is one Luke brought back after Christmas holidays while he was at Gressenheller!"

Thalassa took the offered picture to compare to the Halloween one. Now she had the direct comparisons, she suddenly noticed how the newer outfits lacked the card suits on the cape ends, as well as numerous much smaller details that made Apollo’s magician get-up more distinctive to him... and even a few that moved Trucy's ever-so-slighter closer to her brother's crimson colour scheme. Already she found herself looking forward to asking the pair about their careers once she reunited
"We don't really do Halloween in England," Alfendi said, distracting Thalassa from her train of thought. "Did you ever do Halloween, Missus Gramarye?"

"A few times, yes," Thalassa replied, placing the photos in her hands back on the table. "If we were in America at the end of October, my father would let me dress up and take me trick-or-treating. We did the same thing for Trucy, too." She resisted the urge to wince. "We only managed it once for her, before the accident."

Emmy bit her lip in thought. "Magnifi Gramarye was originally American, wasn't he?" she asked. "I'm sure I read that somewhere."

Thalassa nodded. "I think so, yes. We travelled all over North America and Europe, but we seemed to spend the most time in the states." She paused, tapping a finger against her bracelet. "Considering how much he missed my mother, I'm a little surprised Dad took us back to Borginia as often as he did. We never went back to Kopunchiville, at least."

"That's how you knew the language?" Flora asked. "You said you were five when she died, so I assume you didn't keep it up after...?"

At that, Thalassa laughed. "My mother did teach me Borginian, yes," she agreed. "Maybe that was why Dad kept going back; It was only in Borginia we ever spoke Borginian to each other... the last link to Mama."

Alfendi huffed. "Mums are overrated," he declared. "Me and Flora don't have one, and Luke doesn't have one, and Uncle didn't have one either."

Emmy looked uncomfortable, scratching the back of her neck.

Flora gave her brother a disapproving look. "Alfendi..."

Thalassa patted the boy's back, hiding her amusement. "Maybe so," she agreed. "But I am Apollo and Trucy's mother, and even if they don't want a relationship with me, I still want them to know I care about them."

Alfendi thought her statement over a moment, then nodded. "That's okay then," he decided. "You can tell them that."

"Thank you, Alfendi," Thalassa replied, being sure to give the boy her warmest smile. "I can promise I will."

Outside, on the upper deck, Hershel and Sycamore stood in silence side by side, their hands resting on the railing as the massive propeller of the plane beat out its deep rhythm nearby. Below them, the Borginian countryside flowed past, green hills dotted with brown and grey settlements and the occasional flash of sunlight reflected off a river or lake.

"I feel like I should admonish you for keeping secrets," Sycamore said.

Hershel looked up with surprise at the silence abruptly being broken. "You're still upset?"
Sycamore sighed. "Not really," he admitted. "I suppose you had no reason to trust we could keep that secret also; You didn't want her to know because you didn't want her inventing false memories, correct?"

"Correct... but to your earlier point, no, I know you're capable of keeping secrets," Hershel pointed out, then smiled. "Isn't that right, Descole?"

Groaning, Sycamore rolled his eyes, ignoring his brother's amused chuckles as he stared out to the countryside below. "You're very fond of throwing that in my face lately."

Hershel shook his head, though his smile didn't fade. "Not really. Yesterday you needed something to snap you back to normal, but a few moments ago? I was just teasing you."

"I noticed."

It was hard for Hershel not to laugh again hearing his brother's dark tone. He paused before responding, the smile on his face fading away. "On a more serious note... that is the only name I've really called you by since we got back in touch."

Sycamore's stormy expression calmed. "That is true," he quietly agreed. "We've both been avoiding calling each other by name, haven't we?"

Hershel briefly managed to smile, but it quickly died. "The time never felt right to ask what you'd prefer," he admitted. "It felt overly familiar to call you 'Desmond' like Emmy, and you weren't a professor anymore, so falling back on 'Professor Sycamore' was out of the question... and I felt it would be an insult to call you 'Descole' when you were out of that mask."

"And 'Mister Sycamore' felt overly formal?" Sycamore picked up, giving his brother an empathetic smile. "That's why I stopped calling you just 'Layton', or even 'Professor Layton'... and only your closest friends called you 'Hershel', so..."

Hershel nodded, looking away. "I was also concerned... if I asked, your answer might have been to use our birth names."

At that, Sycamore scoffed. "Really? You honestly thought I'd want to take back the most important thing I ever gave you?" Before Hershel could do more than give him a stunned look, Sycamore laughed. "It was the name 'Hershel' that ensured you had a safe and happy life; I gave it away gladly. And I haven't gone by that name since I was seven, so it's not like I respond to it anymore." He snickered, shaking his head. "I mean, you'd never respond to 'Teddy' if anyone called you that either. I might as well ask to call you 'Bartholomew'!"

Hershel slowly smiled; To hear his secret fear dismissed so firmly was a great relief. "I thought my birth name was 'Theodore'?"

"Yes, well, that was what our father called you," Sycamore admitted, pushing his glasses up his nose with an embarrassed look. "To me, and to Mum, you were always Teddy."

With nothing to say in reply, Hershel looked out at the countryside below, deep in thought. When he heard details of his young life from Leon Bronev - and rarely had he ever asked for them - it had always felt like they were being forced on him... but from Sycamore, they were only brought up when requested, pure statements of facts intended to be looked at from a distance with none of the desire to return there that Bronev harboured; Hershel never had to feel guilty that he remembered only the barest of facts from that time, and that none of them were happy.

"Let's make an agreement, here and now," Sycamore offered, eyes sparkling with an excitement that
reminded Hershel of Alfendi somehow. "You call me Desmond from now on. No awkwardness."

Hershel smiled, then gave his brother a nod. "And you call me Hershel."

"It's a deal," Sycamore replied, holding out his hand with a grin. Hershel didn't hesitate to shake it.

View Layton's Notebook
It had been a very long time since Machi had attended a regular school... and he was very quickly finding out just how different this large American 'High School' was to the tiny Kopunchiville Ekole that had maybe forty students total at any given time. To have so many students they had to be separated into birth years at all was intimidating enough; His old school had mostly informal groups of maybe ten to twenty students, with his former Kopunchiville classmates varying in age from four to eleven at the time he left. Here, he was beyond grateful to have been placed in the same classes as Trucy, and that she was extroverted enough to distract any unwanted attention away from him while also somehow being entirely focussed on making sure her brother understood what was going on. The only times they were really separated was during the more English-intensive requirements (English itself, History, and a few others he could never remember the English names for); While Machi went to a special ESL class, Trucy joined the rest of their classmates to do something far more complicated for the young Borginian to comprehend. Machi had only a month of American schooling under his belt, and though he felt much more confident in his English, he knew it was nowhere near good enough to take on the kinds of things Trucy did for homework.

This day in particular had been like any other: Machi and Trucy got up early for school, quietly ate and got dressed, kissed the sleeping Phoenix goodbye, and headed off alone to the bus-stop, as they did every school morning. Once there, they hung out with Trucy's friend Jinxie until the bell rang, and they all had to hurry to class. Recess and lunchtime were also spent as a trio, talking about their teachers and their homework and whatever other topics the girls had on their minds that day - Today had been all about a supernatural-themed TV show Jinxie had come across, and she had seemingly ranted all day about "the stuff they got wrong". Trucy and Machi had mostly just amused her, and once school ended she even apologised for her unusual talkativeness.

"Don't worry about it, Jinxie," Trucy assured her friend, arm slung over her shoulder.

Machi nodded in agreement. "We all do that sometimes. It good to let out."

Jinxie fidgeted for a moment before managing a small smile. "Thank you," she said. "I'll let you guys do the talking tomorrow."

Giggling, Machi shook his head. "You mean Trucy," he said. "She does talking for all three of us!"

Trucy only playfully scoffed as the pair laughed.

After a few minutes talking to Jinxie outside the school gates, Trucy and Machi finally headed off to the bus-stop to return home. It wasn't too long a journey, especially when they passed the time talking between themselves, and soon they were back on the street outside the agency, heading for that familiar flight of stairs.

"Today is Wednesday," Machi mused aloud. "Luke will be home."

"Ooh, yeah!" Trucy squeaked, bouncing at his side. "Think we should run to see him quicker?"

They saw Luke two afternoons of every school-week, and very often on the weekends too, but Trucy and Machi both were always excited to spend time with him regardless. Machi grinned, then
elbowed his sister. "Race you!" He didn't even wait for his words to finish leaving his mouth before charging off down the street, laughing loudly.

"Hey, no fair!" Trucy shouted after him, running to catch up.

Bag bouncing against his back, Machi paid little heed to his sister's protests, shoes skidding on the concrete as he spun on his heel and moved to dashing up the stairs. "I'm winning!" he called over his shoulder, then charged through the unlocked front door and into the Agency's reception. "I won!" Jumping up and down on the carpet, Machi made sure to give Trucy a big grin as she finally caught up, pointing as he triumphantly told her, "I won race!"

"You cheated!" Trucy protested, face red from exertion as she closed the door behind her. "You didn't give me any time!"

"But if I did that, it would be you cheating?" Machi innocently pointed out.

Trucy was thrown for a moment, then shook her head, slipping her bag off her back. "That's not what I meant! I demand a do-over! I'm telling on you to Daddy!"

Machi grinned. "Isa!" he shouted. "Trucy is lying!"

"No, I'm not!" Trucy immediately shouted back, pushing past her laughing brother to charge past into the office, bag dangling from her hand. "Daddy!"

Slipping his bag off his back and hugging it to his chest, Machi turned to follow, only to notice Trucy had frozen in the doorway, one hand on the door and the other holding the handle of her school-bag. His own laughter gone, Machi stepped forward to her side to see what she was staring at.

Around the small table, sat in the twin red sofas, sat Trucy and Machi's older brothers and father, along with a strange man with tawny hair. He stared back at the pair in the doorway, one hand fiddling with his thin glasses, his dark suit crisp and clean on his lean figure.

"Ah, there you two are!" Phoenix cheerfully cried, giving the two a wave as Apollo and Luke hid giggles. "We thought that might be you making all that racket."

The strange man got to his feet, holding out a hand. "Machi Tobaye."

Machi stared for a moment before hurriedly nodding and running around to shake the man's hand. "Y-yes, that is me."

"My name is Halinto Byrokrata," the man said, and Machi was surprised to register it was in Borginian. "I'm from the Embassy."

"Oh, y-yes, I remember talking to you," Machi stuttered in the same language, recognising Byrokrata's name and voice from the person on the other end of the scratchy phone line of the detention centre. "Why are you here? D-did I do something wrong?"

Byrokrata shook his head and sat back down on the sofa, pulling a nearby suitcase into his lap. Opposite the man, Machi noticed Apollo and Luke moving aside to leave a space, and he decided to sit at Apollo's side, opposite where Byrokrata was now pulling a small sheaf of paper from his things. As the man arranged the paper on the table, he continued, "Actually, this arrived for you, Monsieur Tobaye. Take your time reading it over."

Machi moved his bag from his lap to the floor, then reached over to pull the paper towards him.
Trucy dropped her bag and fell into the empty space next to Phoenix, on the other end of the sofa from Byrokrata. "What's going on?"

"Mister Byrokrata here is from the Borginian Embassy," Phoenix explained. "Said something about paperwork for Machi, but wouldn't tell us anything else." He looked up, shooting Apollo a grin. "Even though Machi's lawyer is here and everything."

Apollo pretended he hadn't just been peering at the paper over Machi's shoulder and rolled his eyes. "Dad." Luke pressed a hand to his mouth to hide giggles.

Machi slowly smiled as he read through the form on the table in front of him. It was written in Borginian, the government seal at the top, and he didn't need to read its title to see what its purpose was: "This is... adoption form!"

"It is!?” Luke cried in surprise.

Apollo slapped a hand on Machi's back with a grin. "Hey, congratulations! Finally making it official!"

Trucy bounced in her seat at Phoenix's side with a loud squeal, making their father cover his ears with a wince. "Machi, that's so cool!” she cried. "Are you gonna change your name?"

Machi shrugged, still looking through the papers. Sure enough, the entry for 'child name change' had been left blank. He remembered, the first time they filled this out in that tiny kitchen back in Kopunchiville, how unsure he'd been about whether he could adopt 'Lamiroir' as a surname; 'Machi The Siren' had just sounded silly, and Lamiroir hadn't any other name to give him, so in the end he'd opted to just keep 'Tobaye'. He hadn't mentioned anything to her of course, letting Lamiroir and Bonte go through everything else on that form, and telling Bonte his decision in private.

"By the way," Byrokrata muttered in Borginian, giving Machi a sympathetic look, "I'm sorry this isn't from Lamiroir."

At that, Machi's smile turned to a grin. In English, he replied, "What do you mean? Of course this from Lamiroir." He pointed to the bottom of the final page, right next to where it asked for his signature. "It says 'Thalassa Gramarye' right here."

"It does!?” came identical shouts from Apollo and Trucy, the latter jumping out of her seat to run around to Machi's side while Apollo just leaned over his brother's shoulder to peer down at the indicated signature. "He's right, it does!" Apollo added.

"She got her memory back!" Trucy squealed at the top of her lungs, jumping once before dropping to the floor, hands held over her mouth as she stared at the form lying on the table. "You think she remembers us, too?"

"I'm sure she does," Luke promised her with a sympathetic look. "She's probably getting everything ready as quickly as she can to meet up with the three of you again."

Trucy squeaked, wiping away tears. "I hope so..."

Byrokrata looked between the Wright children with a confused look, but didn't say anything.

"Then I guess you'd better sign that so she can get here sooner," Phoenix told Machi with a warm smile, picking up a loose pen from the table and holding it out for the teen to take. "So, what's it gonna be: Machi Tobaye, or Machi Gramarye?"
Machi grinned as he took the pen; This choice was an easy one. "Machi Gramarye." He only giggled in pride as Apollo and Trucy gave him wordless hugs.

This time, when the response arrived in the mail a week later, the Borginian government accepted his request.

View the Court Record
Phoenix resisted the urge to pace as he stood at the edge of the small crowd that always seemed to exist outside the doors from the baggage claim. This was a moment he'd been anticipating equally as much as dreading for three months now, and it was finally time to face it. Would she hate him for stealing her children? For not telling her what they'd found out about her before she left? The message she'd sent him about today didn't sound angry, but that didn't mean she wasn't. Maybe she planned to tell him off in private and take Trucy and Machi back by force, and Apollo would go where they went despite being an adult and capable of making his own decisions; This was the beginning of the end for him, he just knew it. And calling her by the wrong name would only make it worse for sure: Was it 'Lamiroir' or 'Ms Gramarye' that she would prefer?

The sharp elbow to his arm caused Phoenix to yelp and spin around, coming face-to-face with a short woman wearing a Pink Princess cap and a half-hidden smirk. She rolled her eyes behind the large sunglasses on her nose and said, "Nick, calm down. We're meeting someone at the airport, not waiting for a public execution."

"I-I know that, Maya," Phoenix muttered, pushing his hands deeper into the pockets at the front of his hoodie. "It's just... I need to get along with her if I want any kind of relationship with Apollo, Trucy or Machi in the future."

Maya scoffed, crossing her arms over the red purse hanging off her shoulder. "They already love you, you dork. Having their mom around isn't going to change that, and you know that full well."

Phoenix shifted his weight from foot to foot. "But it won't help if she resents me for-"

"Mister Wright?"

Although it was only a softly-spoken question, Phoenix still cried out in shock as he leapt away from it, eyes wide; To his surprise, all he found at the source was a concerned-looking woman in a white dress, watching him with the same blue eyes as his daughter and gripping two large travel suitcases in her hands. He laughed nervously, giving the woman a wave. "Ah, s-sorry, I-"

"Thank goodness I found you!" Thalassa cried with a grin, leaving her bags to jump forward and shake Phoenix's hand. "I was afraid I wouldn't recognise you and be forced to start asking strangers!" Before Phoenix could do more than smile back, Thalassa had turned to Maya. "And... You're Ms Fey, aren't you? Their mother?"

Maya paled at that. "U-uh... I'm Maya Fey, yes." She forced a grin. "It's a pleasure to finally meet you... um... you."

Thalassa quietly laughed, and Phoenix noted she seemed as nervous as them; She certainly shared Apollo and Trucy's tendency to hide fear behind a smile. "Well, as we are all Apollo and Trucy's parents, it feels like we should use first names with each other; I'm happy to be called Thalassa."

"Then Thalassa it is," Maya cheerfully replied, holding out her hand to shake. "You can call me Maya, Thalassa."
"A pleasure, Maya," Thalassa said as they shook, looking relieved.

"Then I guess it's 'Phoenix' for me," Phoenix added, scratching at the back of his head. "And it looks like your disguise skills need work, Maya." He shot his girlfriend a grin, eyes running up and down her sky-blue blouse and black ankle-length skirt. "She recognised you straight away!"

Maya stuck her tongue out at him. "Remind me whose idea the dumb 'disguise' was again, Nick?"

Phoenix snickered, then turned back to Thalassa sheepishly. "Um, sorry for not having a sign. I wasn't sure what I could write on it that wouldn't attract attention."

Thalassa shook her head. "No, no, I understand. I wasn't expecting one for the same reasons." She forced a smile, still looking uncertain. "It's a good thing Professor Layton showed me all those photos of you, or I never would have known what to look for."

Maya blinked, nonplussed. "Photos?"

"Copies of ones Luke sent him over the years," Thalassa explained, and reached behind her to pull forward her bags. "I have them somewhere in my luggage still."

Phoenix nodded, smiling; That made sense, now he thought about it. She hadn't exactly seen what he looked like before she left, and had never met Maya before now at all. "Well, welcome back to LA anyway," he said, then reached forward to take one of her suitcases; Opposite, Maya did the same with the remaining one. "We'd better head to the bus station."

As they left the arrivals hall, Maya and Thalassa engaged in small talk, comparing the recent weather in California, England and Borginia. Phoenix left them to it, happy that the two women seemed to be becoming friends already, and ended up taking the lead as they headed for the buses. He waited until they were standing in front of the signboard indicating what buses went where to finally interrupt them: "Thalassa, where are we headed? Did you take my advice about the Gatewater?"

Thalassa paused, then nodded. "I did, yes," she replied. "Let me get out the address of the hotel I chose..."

Soon they were settled on the bus, Thalassa's bags around their legs as they sat in the circle of four seats they had managed to snag. The two woman had the window seats, Phoenix at Maya's side. "So, Nick warned you away from the Gatewater to keep you a secret, right?" Maya asked, watching Thalassa with concern as the bus started moving underneath them. "You don't want them to know you're here?"

Phoenix nodded. "She asked me not to tell the kids she was coming back." He shot his girlfriend a small smile. "Though I figured it was safe to tell you, even if you act like one sometimes."

Maya whacked his arm as Phoenix hid giggles.

Thalassa briefly smiled at their antics, a hand petting her hair where it lay over her shoulder. "This will be the first time I've seen Apollo since he was a baby... and it's been ten years since Trucy and I were last together. If I am to rebuild my relationship with them, the first impression is going to be the most important."

"But that's already happened, hasn't it?" Maya asked with a frown. "You met them at the concert."

"They met Lamiroir," Thalassa explained. "They still haven't met me. Not even Machi has met the
real me." She sighed. "I can't let this one chance I have be ruined by anything, least of all myself. This has to go well."

"You told me you wanted to get settled here in LA first," Phoenix said.

Thalassa nodded. "I know I have a lot of questions for them, and they surely have a lot for me, too. I don't want to disappoint them by being too busy to give them the time they deserve."

"You could never disappoint them," Maya insisted. "They've been waiting for you for years, they'd understand if you were a little busy moving in!"

Thalassa didn't reply, only staring out the window.

Phoenix patted Maya's leg on the cramped seat, a silent signal of reassurance. "Thalassa," he said. "I understand this is hard, and that we can't know what this is like for you... but the simple truth is that there will never be a 'perfect' moment for a reunion. If you put this off now, you'll just keep putting it off and it will never happen."

"Yes, that's probably true," Thalassa quietly admitted, still staring out the window.

"Apollo, Trucy and Machi already know who they are to each other, and who you are as the person that connects them," Phoenix continued. "It's not fair to them to keep yourself hidden away. But." He closed his eyes, sighing. "If you want some time to settle in first, we will give you that time."

Opening his eyes, he gave Thalassa a smile. "How about next Saturday?"

Thalassa blinked, turning her eyes to Phoenix in surprise. "Saturday?"

Maya gasped. "That's perfect!" she cried. "Today's Friday, right? That gives you a week to settle in, the kids won't have to wait long to meet you, and they'll be off work and school 'cause it's the weekend so you'll have all day to spend together!" She then paused. "Oh. And, speaking of putting things off... I should probably start making plans to leave, too."

Phoenix gave her a sympathetic look, taking hold of her hand.

"Leave?" Thalassa asked.

"For... well, for my 'job'," Maya reluctantly explained. "I have to go overseas to do a training course, and I can't come home for two years." She sighed. "I've been putting it off for the better part of a year... Actually," she forced a smile, "I was waiting for you to come back first. Apollo and Trucy were so shaken when you just appeared out of nowhere like that... I couldn't leave until they were okay."

Thalassa returned her gaze out the window, her hand resting on the bracelet on her right wrist.

"The sooner you go, the sooner you come back," Phoenix gently reminded Maya, giving her hand a squeeze. "We'll all be here waiting for you."

"I know, I know," Maya whispered, gripping Phoenix's hand with both of hers. "But can I... Can I at least wait a couple weeks? Just to be sure they'll be okay?"

Phoenix sighed, but nodded. "I'm holding you to that."

"Then I suppose that's our plan," Thalassa said, giving them a smile. "I will meet them on Saturday... and then maybe I can get started repaying the both of you for everything you have done."
Chuckling, Phoenix shook his head. "Thalassa, your children, in the time they've been my children, have already repaid that debt a million times over. You don't owe us anything."

Thalassa's eyes subtly narrowed in the same way Apollo's did when he suspected a lie. "They are still your children now I am back," she insisted. "The last thing I want to do is take them away from a family they love and who love them in return." Her eyes turned sadly to her lap. "The two of you have been Apollo and Trucy's parents far longer than I have."

"That's... not quite true," Maya mumbled sheepishly. "Apollo's only been calling me his mom since May..."

Thalassa looked up. "And Trucy?"

Maya blushed. "Oh, well, Trucy tried that when she first met me, but-"

"Five years," Phoenix answered for her, smiling fondly at his girlfriend. "After two years of planning to get us together."

Although she mumbled protests, Maya didn't add anything to that, hiding her red cheeks behind a sudden interest in fiddling with Phoenix's hand in her lap.

Thalassa smiled. "Well, regardless of whether they called you one or not, even five months is more than enough time to be considered a mother... That's how long I had with Apollo, before we were separated: May to October. And five years is also how long I had with Trucy."

Maya looked up in surprise. "O-oh, I'm so sorry..."

"It's alright," Thalassa insisted. "What use is dwelling on what I've lost? I have years ahead of me to get to know my children all over again... to spend the time with them that has been robbed from all three of us."

Phoenix slowly frowned, looking between the two women. "It will be up to Apollo, Trucy and Machi what happens after this reunion," he said. "Whether Trucy and Machi go to live with you, how often the three of them visit... even if they want to keep working at the agency. Apollo always preferred the idea of working in a law office to an 'anything agency' anyway."

"You'll work it out," Maya promised. "I mean, I live two hours away, and I still manage to see you all often enough; That's the important thing here, right?" She reached into her red purse, pulling out a small locket pendant, its golden chain detached from its usual home on her obi. She shook the object pointedly in Phoenix's direction. "The kids didn't give us these with the intention of ditching us once they found their mom, Nick."

Phoenix rested a hand on the identical locket hanging around his neck, and couldn't resist a small smile. "Guess not," he agreed.

Thalassa nodded in agreement. "This new family we are making together is certainly unusual," she said, "but that is nothing new. We will make it work." She grinned, even looking a little excited. "I'm quite looking forward to it, actually."

_View the Court Record_
Phoenix was just finishing putting Trucy and Machi to bed when the call came:

"Wright? Drew Misham has just been murdered."

Paling, Phoenix dropped into the nearest chair at the dining table, glad he'd thought to go downstairs and away from the kids to answer. "You're kidding."

"As much as we might like that, I'm not," Edgeworth continued. "I've taken control of the investigation, but as the chair it's up to you to call the next step. I'm sure you realise, whether we are ready or not, this will be our one chance to get the truth of that case out there."

Phoenix couldn't reply for several moments, sat still in his seat. "Y-yes, that's true," he mumbled, then shook his head, trying to pull himself together. "Then I guess we're moving ahead... A little quicker than anticipated, but we would have lost out entirely if it had been any earlier."

"A good point," Edgeworth agreed. "Apollo will still be the attorney?"

Phoenix nodded, forgetting his friend couldn't see him. "Apollo is going to hate me for this, I know, but I'll need you to sort out my choice for the prosecutor. I'm sorry to say, for this case in particular, there's a certain someone who deserves it more than you."

Edgeworth chuckled. "If we're thinking of the same man, I whole-heartedly agree."

After hearing the details of the case and finalising who was doing what, Phoenix checked his youngest two children were in bed and raced out the door.

In the four days since Thalassa's arrival back in the country, she had managed to narrow down existing options found in her search online and bought an apartment not too far from the agency: A penthouse overlooking People Park itself. Phoenix couldn't help but internally envy the kind of money Lamiroir had been able to accumulate over her short career, especially that first time he'd visited the apartment only yesterday, helping Thalassa move in her minimal belongings from Borginia. Although she was so close, she had told him when they last spoke earlier that day that she was too scared to go into the park, or even to take a single step in the direction of the agency once out on the street; With all the careful plans she, Phoenix, and Maya had been making about the planned reunion with her children on Saturday, she was more fearful than ever of accidentally running into one of the three by chance and ruining the whole thing... and Phoenix's assurances she wouldn't 'ruin' anything were failing to comfort her. On his end of things, Phoenix had been throwing off the kids by blaming his 'secret mission' for his frequent departures from the office that past week - After all, he told himself, that was technically true, even if it was unrelated to the Jurist Trial system.

Using his spare key, Phoenix entered the apartment building across from the entrance to People Park and took the elevator to the top-most floor it could access, then charged for the final flight of stairs.
separating him from Thalassa's apartment above. He checked the time with a wince as he ran across
the hall, then pressed a finger to the doorbell, hoping it wasn't too late at night for a home visit.
"Thalassa?" he called as loudly as he dared. "Are you available, or...?"

"Phoenix?" came a muffled call from inside, then the door opened to reveal Thalassa, a dressing
gown wrapped tightly around her body and her tawny hair piled in a towel on top of her head. She
gave Phoenix a cursory examination from his beanie to his worn sandals with a concerned frown.
"What is it?"

"I'm sorry for coming by so late," Phoenix said with a grimace, hands pressed together, "but
something really important just came up and it's something I need to ask you in person." He paused
half a second. "I'm almost certain you'll be interested to hear it."

Thalassa watched him in confusion for a moment more before nodding and stepping back. "Alright,
come in then."

The living room was unchanged since Phoenix had been there earlier that day, helping Thalassa
transport boxes of flat-pack furniture that still filled the otherwise empty and echoing room. He
followed Thalassa to stand somewhere away from the door, a rare free space amongst the boxes, and
she turned to him with a concerned frown, her arms tightly crossed. "What's going on? Is this about
the children?"

Phoenix paused. "Sort of. But not really." Seeing Thalassa giving him a vaguely frustrated look, he
shook his head and started again. "I'm sure you noticed, watching Machi's trial back in July, that our
current system of law here isn't the best equipped for finding the truth when evidence is minimal."

Thalassa slowly nodded. "Yes... Why?"

"I've been working on plans for an alternate system that might work better," Phoenix explained,
almost breathless with excitement. "It's been a few years, and, finally, we've gotten to the point
where we've been approved to test it out, on this coming Thursday." He took a deep breath. "The
verdict will be real. Apollo is defending. All I need now, for this 'test' of the Jurist Trial system, are
the six volunteer jurists who'll be casting the vote."

Thalassa's eyes widened. "You want me to be part of a jury...?"

"To be a jurist, yes," Phoenix clarified, grinning. "You and five other people would be watching the
trial, then we will call a vote from the six of you on whether the defendant is guilty or not guilty
based on common sense. The judge will use the outcome of the vote to call the verdict. The life of
Apollo's client is going to depend on it."

Thalassa frowned, a hand reaching up to where her hair usually rested on her shoulder.

"I can trust you'd make the right decision regardless," Phoenix told her. "And, think of it this way:
You get to watch Apollo, Trucy, and very probably Machi too, working together in court without
any chance of being seen yourself. It could be a warm-up to the reunion on Saturday... provided this
doesn't get stretched out to three days and we have to delay that to Sunday or something."

Although she had yet to say anything, Phoenix could tell his wheedling was starting to convince
Thalassa. Finally, she sighed. "Alright, I'll do it."

"Yes!" Phoenix cheered, grabbing her hand to enthusiastically shake. "Thank you so much,
Thalassa!" With that, he spun around and headed for the door.

"Wait, Phoenix!" Thalassa called, running after him as he paused, his hand on the door handle.
"What exactly is this trial even about?"

Phoenix resisted the urge to laugh. "Thalassa, the most important thing about this trial is that everyone is going into it on Thursday knowing as little as possible. I don't want preconceptions getting in the way here."

Thalassa gave him a disbelieving look.

"Just trust me," Phoenix told her. "I know what I'm doing."

---

We have a go on the new jurist.

Good. She will be a much better option than Kay, providing you aren't lying about her trustworthiness.

My two contacts have replied with positives. That leaves the last three to you.

They'll say yes. I'm calling them now.

Don't give me their answers until AFTER you've contacted them, Wright. This is important.

You're telling me?.

Just be quick. It is far too late to be calling people out of bed for this.

---

"I don't know why you're so reluctant about this," Apollo said, hands busy redoing a popped seam on his vest. "You've always enjoyed our magic show."

"Your magic show," Clay pointedly replied, lounging on the small sofa in their apartment's living room. "Honestly, I don't know why you're so excited about going to someone else's; You do that kind of stuff every single day! You were literally doing exactly that only an hour ago!"

Apollo scoffed, eyes on the vest in his lap so he wouldn't accidentally stab himself with the needle in his hand. "Not this kind of stuff. These are tricks no-one's seen in seven years, 'cause they've been locked up in performance rights issues. We might not get another chance to see them first-hand."

Clay groaned, leaning back so hard he began to slip off the seat. "Dude, I get it's your grandfather's stuff, but-"

A series of space-themed beeps and bips filled the air, and Apollo paused in his sewing only long enough to register it was his friend's phone. Clay took a moment longer to react, sitting up and digging in his pocket to retrieve the offending device. He frowned at the screen for a moment, shooting Apollo a glance, then stood and pressed the phone to his ear. "Yello?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, watching his friend stepping away. Pulling the last stitch on his vest tight, he set about securing the new seam.
"Really?" Clay was saying. "That soon? No, no, I'm still happy to do it. It's just short notice, is all."

Apollo cut the spare thread with his teeth, wrapping it around his hand to return it and the needle to his sewing kit. He still kept a curious eye on his friend's conversation.

"Nah, don't worry about it," Clay continued, grinning as he shot a look at Apollo over his shoulder. "I'll tell Director Cosmos tomorrow and see ya on Thursday." He paused, listening to the reply, then laughed. "You got it, sir!" With that, he hung up the phone and turned back to face his friend.

Apollo raised an eyebrow, arms crossed. "What was that about?"

Clay scoffed, waving off the question. "Secret, dude. I am capable of keeping them."

"You are not," Apollo replied. "Who's calling you at this time of night? What are they asking you to do?"

"It's just some guy I know," Clay insisted with a shrug. Turning, he headed off towards his room. "We're doing something on Thursday. He was just checking I was ready."

"Somehow I don't believe you," Apollo said, clutching the repaired vest in his lap, but Clay only laughed as he disappeared. Apollo was forced to drop the subject with a sigh.

View the Court Record
Apollo stopped as he arrived at the bottom of the stairs leading up to the front door of his childhood home, watching the street with a smile. A small blue car was neatly parking itself in a free space, and, once it had stopped, he could see his brother slipping out of the driver's seat, dodging traffic to circle around to the pavement.

"Good morning, Apollo!" Luke called, giving his brother a wave as he approached. "Not often we arrive at the same time, huh?"

Apollo laughed, nodding in agreement as he waved back. "You're late," he joked. "Normally you get here at least five minutes early."

Luke scoffed. "Which is more than I can say for you," he retorted. "You're usually five minutes late."

Shrugging, Apollo brushed the comment off, his amusement fading. He held up a hand, keeping his brother from heading inside just yet. "Oh, um... Have you spoken to Clay since last night?"

After a moment of thought, Luke shook his head. "No, not since... Monday, I think. Why?"

"He got a weird call last night," Apollo explained, "something about Director Cosmos and a thing tomorrow... but he won't say what, and now he's acting all strange about it."


"I know," Apollo muttered, glad to have someone agree with him on that point. "He just keeps smiling at me, hinting at whatever it is he's doing without saying what... Actually laughed at how frustrated I was getting as he headed off to work this morning."

"Hmmm." Luke shook his head. "There's not much we can do about it now. How about I come home with you after your show tonight, and we ask him together?"

Apollo sighed, then nodded, giving his brother a grateful smile. "Sure."

The brothers headed up the stairs and through into reception without a word. Closing the front door behind them, they could hear the murmur of the television in the office, and shot each other grins as they imagined their father conked out on the sofa watching it, as he sometimes was when they arrived in the mornings.

But it was not Phoenix they found on the twin red sofas when they entered the office.

"Hi Polly, hi Luke!" Trucy called, waving enthusiastically as her brothers paused in the doorway. At her side, Machi smiled and gave his own small wave.

Apollo and Luke gave each other confused looks, taking in the two teenagers on the sofa facing the
TV, lounging in their casual dress (for Trucy, this meant her magician's outfit, while Machi was in a t-shirt and pants). "Why aren't you two in school?" Luke asked. "You're not even in your uniforms."

Machi nodded. "Isa was awake early this morning. He said we have rest of week off."

"Then he had to go out for his secret mission," Trucy added, frowning. "He wouldn't tell us why, though. Or what exactly he was doing."

"Likely boring paperwork," Apollo told her, moving to sit opposite his youngest siblings; Luke copied him, sitting at his side. "He told me everything's wrapping up soon, so it'd just be minutiae at this point."

"Min-oo-sha?" Machi repeated, confused.

"Little details," Luke explained. Once Machi had nodded in understanding, Luke then turned to Apollo. "But why has Papa taken Trucy and Machi off school? We're not doing anything today, are we?"

Apollo shook his head, frowning. "Not to my knowledge. 'First Clay acting strangely, now Dad. What's going on with everyone all of a sudden?'

"There's nothing happening at school either," Trucy added, arms crossed. "We were hoping you guys might know why. Not that we're complaining, of course." She grinned. "We could use the extra time to do all sorts of things, like go up to Kurain, practise a new trick-"

"Catch up on your school work," Apollo interrupted with a knowing smirk.

Trucy glared, sticking out her tongue.

Luke laughed. "Well, for now, let's just stick around the office. Once Papa gets back, we can ask him what's going on and see if he'll talk with all four of us here."

An hour and a half later, the four Wright kids were arranged on the floor and sofas, transfixed by a dazzling yellow figure on the television screen. "Look, look, look!" Trucy cried from the front, pointing excitedly as the man bounced into the air and floated above the stage with no apparent effort. "Isn't it amazing?"

"He's certainly loving the attention!" Apollo laughed, lying across the sofa with his elbows planted on the arm rest.

Luke sat opposite, his notebook lying open and forgotten on his lap. "I'm surprised he came back so soon; I thought the incident at the concert would have scared him off for much longer than this."

Machi, sat at Trucy's side, hurriedly shushed him: A female voice had started speaking over the footage: "What you're now seeing is a rehearsal for the greatest magic show on Earth, happening right here at our very own Sunshine Coliseum!"

"Where the concert was?" Luke noted with surprise.

"Only three more days until miracles happen here, right before your unbelieving eyes!" the announcer continued, and the clip of Valant faded into a still grey-scale image, a much younger
Valant standing with Zak at his side and Thalassa in front of them both. "The legendary Troupe Gramarye is performing for the first time in seven years!"

Apollo felt a pang in his heart; He wasn't sure if it was longing to be a part of it himself, as Valant had asked them three months previous, or jealousy fate had decided it was Valant and not any of Magnifi's descendants that were continuing the Troupe's name. After all, Valant had warned them of his plans, and even generously offered a place in the reborn Troupe to 'Apollo and Artemis' once Trucy was old enough. Maybe, now he thought about it, part of that ache in his chest was simply the reminder that the first fifteen years of his life, the years he should have been under the Troupe Gramarye banner already, had been taken from him by circumstances beyond anyone's control... the lost childhood with Thalassa and with Trucy - and even Magnifi, Zak, and Valant - that he would have happily traded in the one he ended up with for.

"This is going to be so great!" Trucy squealed, bouncing on the floor, and Apollo dragged himself out of his thoughts to plant a wide grin on his face. "We're so there!" She turned expectantly to her eldest brother. "Right, Polly?"

Seeing his brothers give him confused looks, Apollo laughed, reaching into his bag. "Ah yes, I was wondering what this strange letter was that arrived this morning."

Squeaking in excitement, Trucy jumped to her feet. "They arrived already!?"

"What arrived?" Machi asked.

Apollo produced the opened envelope from his bag with a flourish, then pulled out a small stack of pink-and-purple pieces of card hidden inside. "I happen to have five tickets to see the Troupe Gramarye Grand Magic Show on Sunday."

Luke's eyebrows shot up. "Five?"

"One for each of us and Isa?" Machi realised. After a moment, his growing smile froze, then faded. "Um... When is this show?"

Apollo hid a sympathetic laugh, returning the tickets to the envelope. "The Sunday show ends at five," he explained. "Plenty of time to get back here before your curfew."

"Don't worry, baby brother," Trucy said, gently elbowing Machi with a smile. "We made sure you wouldn't be left out of this one."

Machi blushed. "Th-thank you."

The door to reception suddenly opened, distracting the kids from the conversation as Luke automatically moved to silence the television. "Ah, you are here. Working hard or hardly working?"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "That joke is old, Dad."

Phoenix laughed, waving off Apollo's complaint as he strode past, headed towards his desk. A plastic bag hung from the crook of his elbow, and his hands were clutching a collection of papers held close to his chest.

"Hi there, stranger!" Trucy cheerfully replied, following him across the room. Machi tagged along at her heels.

Luke got up to follow his younger siblings. "Papa, what's going on? Where've you been all morning?"
"To the store!" Phoenix proclaimed, placing his papers face-down on his desk and pulling the plastic bag off his arm. "I got a little something for the four of you."

"Ooh! Ooh! What is it?" Trucy demanded, bouncing on her heels. When Phoenix held out the bag, she grabbed it from his hand and looked inside with a gasp. "Yay! Pudding!" She grabbed one and held it out to the curious Machi with a grin. "You'll love these, Machi! They're even farm-fresh!"

Machi still looked confused, but took the offered cup anyway.

Trucy returned to digging around in the bag, pulling out a second she held out to Luke. "We've got one each!" she announced as Luke took his.

Apollo sighed, finally crossing the room to join his family... and definitely not because he wanted to make sure he got his promised pudding cup. "I get the feeling you're trying to butter us up," he told Phoenix as he gripped the treat tight in his hand.

"Oh, of course not," Phoenix insisted with a grin, dropping into his chair. "You four are just 'pudding' up with me."

"I get it!" Machi cried with a grin. Luke and Apollo only rolled their eyes.

"Just until you 'egg-splain' everything, Daddy," Trucy fired back with a smile.

Machi frowned. "I not get that one."

Phoenix shook his head. "Mm. I did come here to explain a few things, didn't I?"

The elder three looked surprised. "Really?" Trucy asked.

"You're going to tell us what this whole 'secret mission' thing is?" Luke added.

"I think it's time," Phoenix confirmed, leaning his elbows on the desk and interlocking his fingers together in a way that screamed 'mastermind'. "It has something to do with you, anyway."

Apollo raised an eyebrow; He couldn't work out which of them exactly Phoenix had been looking at when he said that.

"And telling you about it is why I dropped by," Phoenix added, then looked between the three youngest of his children. "You three... You won't have heard of the Jurist System yet."

Trucy and Machi shot each other confused looks. "The what?" Trucy asked.

Luke frowned, a hand at his chin. "Is... this a different system of court? With a jury, like in England?"


"There's six Jurists instead of twelve," Apollo explained. "They analyse the case from different angles, and help the judge decide on the verdict."

Apollo's siblings all turned to face him with confused looks. "You knew already?" Machi asked.

Phoenix chuckled. "Apollo's agreed to help, yes."

"But why'd Polly get to know about it and not us!?" Trucy demanded.
"Would you have seriously cared?" Apollo pointed out, gently teasing his sister. "This is all boring legal stuff; Only lawyers like me - or former lawyers like Dad - find it interesting."

Trucy just stuck her tongue out at him in reply.
"So this 'Jurist System'," Luke spoke up, stroking his goatee. "That's your 'secret mission'? The one you've been hiding for years?"

Phoenix shrugged. "More or less. New ideas like this are always risky, so it needed a lot of preparation... and a lot of negotiation. We're going to give it a shot, anyway."

"Is it finally ready?" Apollo asked. "No more secrets?"

"It's as ready as it'll ever be," Phoenix replied, smiling enigmatically. "At long last, the Jurist System is getting a trial: I'm acting as chair of the Jurist System Simulated Court Committee, constructing the ideal situation... choosing the case, the jurist candidates..." He paused, chuckling. "Even the judge and the courtroom."

Trucy snorted. "Wow, it's like you have a real job."

Phoenix only grinned. "I was never that good at the piano, to be honest."

"Definitely not compared to Machi here," Luke added with a laugh, and Machi blushed as Trucy promptly pulled him into a side-hug.

"When's the trial?" Apollo asked Phoenix, bouncing in anticipation. "It's all ready to go now, right? That's why you're telling them?"

Phoenix chuckled. "I picked out a simple case to start with. This will be the first run through of a new system, after all."

"That makes sense," Trucy said. "No point wearing yourself out on something too serious."

"True," Phoenix agreed. "It's a murder."

Apollo froze, staring at his father. "Dad, that's not simple at all!!"

"Simple?" Luke repeated, thoughtful. "You're saying the defendant is guilty?"

"Most likely, yes," Phoenix said, watching Apollo with a grin. "Good luck tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!?!" Apollo cried, paling.

Luke, Trucy, and Machi gave each other confused looks. "I-isoveli... What is happening?" Machi asked.

Apollo groaned. "I agreed to help out with this thing by being the defence attorney," he explained, shooting a glare at Phoenix. "What kind of warning is this, Dad!? A single day, and with a guilty client!?"

Trucy scoffed. "C'mon Polly, it's just a test case. No sweat!"

"There's still a verdict to be decided!" Apollo shot back.

"And a potentially serious sentence," Phoenix agreed, smile gone. "The most serious, in a worst-case scenario."

Machi gasped, his free hand over his mouth. "This is real trial!?"

"I can't mount a proper investigation on this little warning, Dad!" Apollo was continuing. "What if my client is innocent and I run out of time to put together a case!?"

"We did have a bit of an upset last night," Phoenix admitted, shrugging. "Had to make a last-minute change. But, all the forms have been filed. The trial begins tomorrow at ten. There's no turning back now." He shot his eldest son a grin. "Besides, I know you can pull this off, Apollo."

Apollo sighed, pressing a hand to his face.

"Oh! I almost forgot!" Trucy cried, changing the subject as she clung to the edge of the desk and bounced on the spot with a grin. "Daddy! The tickets for Uncle Valant's show arrived this morning!"

Phoenix leaned back in his chair, looking interested. "Oh, really? That starts on Saturday, right?"

"We're going on Sunday," Luke added, shooting Machi a grin. "The Saturday show runs too late."

Humming in thought, Phoenix nodded.

"It's at Sunshine Coliseum!" Trucy continued, and turned towards Apollo. "Let's go today! We can say hi to Uncle Valant!"

Apollo paled. "Truce, we have an investigation! I'm excited too, but we don't have the time to-!"

"Nonsense," Phoenix chuckled, the teasing grin back on his face. "Go ahead and drop by to see him. Don't worry about the case; You'll hear all about it tomorrow, regardless."

Apollo's eyes narrowed. *The hell are you hiding, Dad?*

Trucy whooped, jumping on the spot. "We're going to the Coliseum!" She spun around to give Machi a hug. "We can introduce you properly to Uncle Valant!"

Machi nervously laughed. "Yes... It will be nice to meet him again."

"Ah, that reminds me," Phoenix said, snapping his fingers. He straightened up in his seat, then reached into a pocket and pulled out a pink envelope, the flap at the back neatly tucked inside without any sign of having been glued closed. As the older man flipped it between his fingers, Apollo noticed a highly simplistic and unreadable signature on the back; On the front, a large symbol resembling a man in profile, wearing a distinctive silk hat.

Trucy leaned forward, examining the item with a frown. "Isn't that the Gramarye seal?"


"The official Gramarye seal," Apollo quickly explained. "Troupe Gramarye used it on all their official stuff."

"Consider it a birthday present, Trucy," Phoenix told his daughter, handing the letter over to the
confused teen.

"Thanks," Trucy replied, but her usual enthusiasm was oddly muted. "But today isn't my birthday; That was two months ago."

Apollo leaned over his sister's shoulder, examining the envelope himself. "Who signed this? How'd you get a hold of it?"

"What is it, Isa?" Machi asked, turning to Phoenix. "Is it something to do with our mother?"

Phoenix sat unmoving for a moment or two. "Don't open it yet," he instructed his daughter. "You'll need it someday soon. You can open it then."

Trucy regarded the envelope with wide eyes, and Apollo felt his protective instinct kick in as he shot their father a glare. "If she doesn't need it now, why'd you give it to her!?"

"It's something to do with Troupe Gramarye," Luke mused aloud, "and yet you've given it specifically to Trucy...?"

Phoenix didn't immediately reply, eyes closed. A few moments later, he looked up towards Apollo. "About your case tomorrow: I want everyone to start without preconceptions. A blank slate, as it were... but, if you are so desperate for information, I can give you permission to examine the scene of the crime."

Apollo stared back at his father. 'Changing the subject...? Alright, I'll bite.' "Thanks, I guess."

"But you can't talk to anyone involved with the case."

"What!?" Apollo shook his head, unable to believe his ears. "How is that supposed to help!?!"


Phoenix ignored his middle son, keeping his attention on Apollo: "You let me worry about the details. Remember, I'm in charge of this trial. All of it. The entire affair is my responsibility, for good or for bad."

Apollo couldn't argue with that, though he still thought the situation a little unfair.

"Just do what you can, and don't worry," Phoenix continued. "I know what I'm doing."

Sighing, Apollo nodded. "Alright."

Trucy was still staring worriedly at the envelope in her grip. After a moment, she slipped it into her bag, along with the pudding cup still in her other hand.

"I'd recommend going down to the detention centre," Phoenix said, a lighter tone to his voice. "Your client's waiting for you. You can ask about the scene there; Just ask the guards about the Misham case."

"Misham, right," Apollo muttered. "But didn't you just say I couldn't talk to anyone involved?"

At that, Phoenix smiled. "Oh, you can talk to your client... if you can get her to talk."

Apollo raised an eyebrow at that.

"Well, time's a-wasting!" Trucy cried, dashing around her brothers and into the kitchen. "Let's hurry
up and go, and we can eat our pudding on the way!"

Machi sighed, shaking his head as he clutched the plastic cup in his hands. "I'm still confused..."

Apollo patted his youngest brother's shoulder. "Don't worry about it. We all are."

"That's usually how all our cases start, isn't it?" Luke wryly pointed out, raising an eyebrow in Phoenix's direction. "It's just that usually the mysteriousness isn't coming from within our own ranks..."

At that, Apollo couldn't help a snort. "Luke, you do this all the time; You can't talk."


"I'm back!" Trucy announced, running from the kitchen with four spoons in her grip. She headed straight for her brothers, handing the cutlery around between them. "Let's go already!"

Apollo nodded. "To the detention centre." Putting his pudding and spoon in his bag, he turned and headed towards reception, his younger siblings at his back. "You don't mind us eating in your car, Luke?"

"As long as you don't spill anything," Luke replied, slipping his own desert and cutlery into his satchel. "I'm not sure how I'd get it out if it were to-"

"Ah, Luke?"

The quartet paused, turning back to the desk to see Phoenix standing behind it, one hand raised. He had a smile on his face that, infuriatingly, Apollo couldn't quite read.

"Yes, Papa?" Luke replied.

"I actually have an important job for you," Phoenix explained, leaning on his desk. "I'm afraid you can't go with Apollo this time."

The two elder brothers paused, shooting each other confused looks. "You what?" Apollo muttered to their father.

"You're perfectly capable of conducting an investigation without him, Apollo," Phoenix promised, a small smile on his lips, then waved for him to leave. "You head off to the detention centre."

Apollo turned to Luke. "Will you be...?"

"I'll be fine," Luke immediately insisted, giving his brother a smile that failed to hide how uncertain he was. "He's right, just go on ahead. I'll catch up when I'm done."

Apollo nodded, then waved for Trucy and Machi to follow him. The trio headed out the door as Luke returned to the desk to speak with Phoenix.

The last thing Apollo saw of his father and brother was Phoenix flipping over the papers on his desk as the two leaned over to discuss whatever was on them.

View the Court Record
"The whole court descended into chaos... except for you. You stood there, still, eyes calmly watching... It... made quite the impression."

"... I'm used to finding myself in outrageous situations."

As Drew Misham shuffled his daughter into the room, Phoenix felt himself involuntarily tensing up. This was the creator of the forgery that had cost him his career? She was so... young. Older than Trucy, or Pearl, but still young regardless. He almost sighed; Why were there so many small girls attached to this awful case?

"Vera, this is Phoenix Wright," Drew told the twelve-year-old, who had planted herself firmly next to a small desk to peer at Phoenix from behind the chair. Just as Drew had warned, she seemed too scared to approach any further. "He's nice. He just wants to talk."

Phoenix couldn't blame the paint-covered Drew for not fighting the girl; In only two days, he would be taking young Trucy Enigmar - or rather Trucy Wright - into his own home, and he was already terrified of taking on the new moniker of 'Daddy'. The entire purpose of this overdue visit to his forger had been as a distraction; The last thing he'd been expecting to find out was that the forger himself was a forgery...

Drew sighed, leaving his daughter where she was, then moved over to the table Phoenix was still sitting by. "Be gentle with her."

Phoenix nodded. "I know how to talk to kids." Carefully getting to his feet, he took a few steps across the room, closer to the girl. "Vera, was it?" he asked her. "How about a friendly chat, huh?"

Vera stared, wide blue eyes not dissimilar in shade to her hair. In her arms, she clutched a sketchbook that was in the shape of a teddy bear head. She made no move to react to his question.

"Uh oh. This could be tough." Phoenix took another few steps forward to the desk. "My name's Phoenix Wright," he said. "I used to be a lawyer, actually... But, if you want, you can call me Nick; It's much easier to say."

Although she didn't run away, Vera still didn't reply. A hand raised to her mouth, and she began to nervously chew on her thumb.

Phoenix refused to give up; After Drew had mentioned her unique connection to their mysterious 'client', he knew it was more important than ever that he find some way to get through to young Vera. Kneeling down into a crouch, he cast an eye over the desk she was hiding behind: A small family photo, a familiar-looking bottle of nail polish... and was that a stamp in that tiny brown frame?

"D-don't touch those," Drew called from behind. "That's all Vera's - She doesn't like anyone else
going near them."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, turning towards the man. "Isn't that nail polish Ariadoney?" he asked. "A friend of mine wears that. It's supposed to be very expensive."

Drew shrugged. "I wouldn't know," he admitted. "It was a gift from the client."

At that, Phoenix gave the crystal bottle another once-over, grateful one of the subjects presented to him as a distraction over the past week had been, of all things, nail polish; He'd have to ask Kristoph for more information later. For now though, he returned his attention to the two photo frames, and specifically to the stamp. "And that stamp... is that the Gramaryes?"

"A commemorative stamp, yes," Drew explained, nodding. "The post office issued it last year, when they were at the height of their popularity." He forced a smile, but it didn't stick. "Vera's been a dedicated fan since I took her to one of their shows, many years ago; Watched them every time they were on TV... right up to the end."

Phoenix tried not to show any bitterness in his expression; Whatever Zak or Valant had done, it was unrelated to the Mishams.

"I'm not sure where she got it though," Drew added, a hand running through his hair in the exact location of a yellow stripe of paint. "It's supposed to be hard to come by."

It was then Phoenix noticed the photo in the tiny stamp was of more than just Zak and Valant: Between them, dressed in blue, was a woman, a hand gripping one of two brown plaits that draped over her shoulders. 'That must be the mysterious Thalassa,' Phoenix realised. 'Trucy's mother. I can see the similarity.' But he had no time to muse on the girl who would be his daughter soon; He turned his attention back to Vera, giving her his best smile. "So, you're a fan of Troupe Gramarye, huh?"

Vera blinked, staring up at him. "Ah..."

'Well, that's a start.' "They're amazing, right? My favourites are Zak and Valant. They're, uh," he paused, racking his brain for anything else Trucy had said to him about her family business. "They're just so magical!" 'And that was lame. You can do better, Phoenix."

Regardless, Phoenix's imitation of Trucy seemed to be working, as Vera slowly smiled. "Aren't they?" she said.

Phoenix nodded. "Yeah! Whenever I go to one of their shows, I'm like..." He waved his hands, as if to imitate an explosion. "Whoa! Magic! You know?"

"Me too, me too!" Vera cried, bouncing a little in her growing enthusiasm. "I love them! They're so cool!" She grinned, shyly hugging her sketchbook. "I went and saw them with Father the other day... The opening ceremony at the Gramarye Museum of Magic!"

"The Gramarye M-museum?" Phoenix repeated, thrown. "They have a...?" Shaking his head, he decided to leave it; He could ask Trucy later. "So, you've been to their show?"

"Just once, when I was little," Vera replied, looking wistful. "It was like a dream! Disappearing, reappearing, cutting apart, putting back together... they do it all!"

Phoenix nodded. 'Okay, she's talking. Now to change the subject without scaring her off again.' "Did... you never go see them when you were older? To... paint them, maybe?"
Vera grimaced, looking away. "I... don't go outside much," she admitted. "There's bad people out there."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "Well, true, but there're lots of good people too."

Drew cleared his throat, and Phoenix turned to face him. "Actually, I should tell you," the painter admitted, "Vera was almost kidnapped once." Seeing Phoenix's shocked expression, he hurriedly continued, "After that, she refused to ever leave the house again."

"But she said she went to the Gramarye Museum the other day," Phoenix pointed out, gesturing to the girl. "With you."

Drew blushed, hand brushing at the paint streak in his hair. "Y-yes, she was quite insistent on that... the first and last time she's expressed such a desire, to my knowledge."

"That person gave me a good luck charm," Vera quietly explained. "For when I absolutely had to go outside."

"Oh?" Phoenix asked. "What person?"

"The client, actually," Drew filled in. "She won't say what it was."

"Father!" Vera cried accusingly, giving the man a glare. "I told you to keep that a secret!"

Drew winced, his hand in his hair. "S-sorry..."

Phoenix frowned, going back over the objects on the desk. Hadn't the nail polish also been a gift from the client? And Drew hadn't known where the supposedly-rare stamp came from either. "Your father tells me you're good at all kinds of paintings," he said. "Is that true?"

Vera nodded. "I really like painting. Father is always very happy when I paint them exactly the same."

Phoenix paused, musing on the girl's words. She had no idea what it was she was doing. His heart dropping, he pulled out his Court Record from the front pocket of his hoodie and brought up the image of the page from his final trial. "So... you did this, too?"

Vera leaned over to see the picture, and her face lit up. "Oh! Yes! That was so much fun!" She giggled. "All I used to do was paint the same thing I saw, but this was totally different!" She swayed back and forth, her expression wistful. "The way the pen slips, the way the writer held it, the pressure on the nib... I had to use a microscope and analyse it on the computer!"

She really didn't know what it was she was doing... and Phoenix found his eyes drifting back to the stamp on the desk. He wasn't going to be the one to break it to her that her 'work' had been the final nail in the Gramarye coffin.

"They're the best in the world."

"Huh?" Phoenix looked up, and found Vera had rounded the chair to step closer to him, watching Phoenix with a smile. He realised she must have noticed his gaze on the stamp, and quickly forced an embarrassed grimace. "Oh, Troupe Gramarye. Of course."

"Father gave it to me," Vera whispered, grinning.

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, shoving his tablet computer back in his hoodie pocket. "Oh really?" he
asked, bluffing his best conspiratorial smile. "He told me he didn't know where you got that, though."

Vera blushed, her grin fading. "Oh, um... I guess I just took it," she admitted.

"'Took' it?"

"Father got a letter, from that person," she whispered, then grinned again. "We talked about the Gramaryes forever that day! I'm sure that's why I was sent that stamp!" She blushed again, shooting her father a guilty look. "I didn't want to just send it back... so I took it."

Phoenix slowly nodded, and gave her a small smile. "Your secret's safe with me," he promised. 'Which makes both the stamp and nail polish gifts from the mysterious client. They're a sneaky one, alright.' “They gave you a 'good luck charm' too, didn't they?”

Vera stepped back towards the chair, chewing on her thumb again. "I can't talk about it."

Recognising she was on the verge of running away, Phoenix leaned back a little, keeping his distance. "Why not?"

"They said, if I do, it won't work anymore!"

Phoenix felt a pang of sympathy for the girl. "I'm sorry Vera, but I really, really have to know."

Vera firmly looked away, at the exact same moment Phoenix saw the spiritual chains and twin psyche-locks rattle into existence around her. He sighed, one hand already gripping the magatama in his pocket.

"I can't," the girl whispered, blinking rapidly. "I really can't."

This was going to hurt.

"Vera, you trust this client a lot, don't you?" Phoenix asked. "Because they gave you that stamp?"

"N-no," Vera replied, shaking her head. "Because they listened to me... to my problem..." She sniffed, rubbing at her eyes. "They said, 'Don't go outside if you don't want to'... but, when I absolutely have to, all I had to do was use a good luck charm."

Phoenix's gaze returned to the desk. If the charm wasn't the stamp, and Vera received two gifts from her client... Well, the answer was obvious... and the implications were massive. "It's your nail polish."

Vera's eyes widened, the psyche-locks smashing into pieces and fading away.

"The bottle on your desk," Phoenix elaborated, his heart sinking. "That's your good luck charm?"

The girl blushed, looking away with a distinctly uncomfortable expression. "I heard somewhere, cosmetics were once thought to ward off evil." She turned back to Phoenix, forcefully whispering, "That's a magic bottle. It has the power."

Phoenix just nodded. "Of course it does. And the person who gave it to you..." He pulled out his Court Record, pulling up a photo he had taken only a few short days ago. "Is this him?"

As the computer spun to face her, Vera gasped, eyes wide. She didn't speak.

"He's a friend of mine," Phoenix continued, fighting to keep the bitterness out of his tone. "A lawyer
by the name of Kristoph Gavin."

"I-I promised!" Vera cried, stepping back almost in a panic and hitting the chair, her momentum knocking her onto the seat. She quickly pulled her legs up, hugging her sketchbook tight and biting hard on her thumb. "I promised not to tell!"

"V-Vera?" Drew called from the table behind Phoenix, sounding worried as he stood, the scraping of his chair against the wooden floorboards punctuating his concern.

Phoenix slowly got to his feet, putting his computer back in his pocket. He couldn't make himself meet Vera's eyes.

"I'm sorry," Vera mumbled, looking away.

"I understand," Phoenix quietly replied. "You can't break the spell of your good luck charm."

There was a long silence, none of the three in the room daring to move. Finally, Vera sniffed, rubbing at her nose with a sleeve. "I think... they might be the Devil," she said. "Or maybe an angel."

Phoenix frowned, taking a careful step towards her and leaning forward on his knees. "What do you mean?"

"I saw the Devil's face," Vera whispered, meeting Phoenix's eyes again. "Or, I think I saw it, when they gave me my charm."

Phoenix paused, thinking. "Your client looked like the Devil?"

"No!" Vera insisted, shaking her head with a frown. "The client was... gentle. With a gentle smile."

'That's definitely a more apt description of Kristoph,' Phoenix mused. 'Although... I'm not so sure anymore he's as 'gentle' as he appears...’ "Where'd you see this 'devil' then?"

Vera bit her lip, clutching her sketchbook. "I don't remember," she admitted. "I saw it so quick... but, when I did, I knew that person wasn't like other people. That's how I know my good luck charm works."

Phoenix couldn't reply for a long moment, doubts on his case both old and new pricking at the back of his mind. Finally, he straightened up. "That's all I wanted to know," he softly announced, and turned towards the door.

Drew, much closer, got to the entrance first, pausing with his hand on the door handle and, intentionally or not, blocking Phoenix's path. "I... am sorry for what happened."

Phoenix tried and failed to keep himself from giving the man a glare. "If you want to apologise, try my client, Zak Gramarye," he hissed.

The painter stepped back, wincing. He said nothing.

"Um..."

Hearing the small voice so close, Phoenix turned in surprise, finding Vera had followed him, nervously chewing her thumb.

"Did I... do something bad?" the girl asked.
Phoenix hid a wince behind a smile, leaning down closer to her height. "What makes you think that?"

Vera returned his gaze, studying it intensely. After a moment, she removed her thumb from her mouth. "Your eyes are sad," she said. "Very sad."

Phoenix froze at hearing that, the false smile fading. It was true, he'd not been taking the loss of his badge well... hence his visit. He hadn't known it was quite so obvious, though. He sighed, dropping the act; it was suddenly a lot harder to hold himself together. "I'll... put on my smile next time I visit. I promise." He paused only to blink back the itch in his eyes. "I hope to see you smile then too, Vera."

Vera thought a moment, then gave him a small smile of her own. "Okay."

The corner of Phoenix's mouth twitched upwards in a half-smile. "Take care." As he straightened up, he pulled the hood of his jumper over his distinctive spikes - the best defence against being recognised he'd been able to scrape together - and turned to leave. He refused to give Drew even a second glance.

View the Court Record
I'm sorry Apollo, it looks like I won't have the time to help you at all for this one... and I'll have to cancel the offer to help talk to Clay tonight. This job Papa's given me is bigger than I thought.

No, don't worry about it, I understand. It's not your fault Dad's acting weird.

Thanks. I am sorry though. Good luck tomorrow, and I'll catch up to you once the trial's over. :)

Sure. Seeya then.

October 7, 11:40AM
Detention Center
Reception

Apollo tried not to fidget as he led his younger siblings into the drab grey building of the detention centre. First Clay was acting strangely, then Phoenix... And now Luke, his closest ally against all the suspicious behaviour, had turned on him and essentially fled. The prospect of pulling off a difficult case without help from his brother also terrified Apollo more than he wanted to admit; After locking his own employer up for murder back in April, he'd never taken on a case without Luke at his side, picking up the slack where the elder brother faltered. Even when Luke knew more than he was letting on, Apollo had always been able to trust he would share what they needed to know, would speak up and fight for the points Apollo couldn't, whether Apollo had missed them or simply not seen them at all. None of that was going to happen this time, when it was more important than ever that they get the right verdict... and it was forcing Apollo to admit he'd been relying much more than he should on his younger brother's help.

'This case is going to be way more difficult than I thought...'

The young man at reception smiled as he spotted the newcomers. "Well, if it isn't Apollo Wright! Long time no see!"

Apollo forced a smile for his former classmate, approaching the desk. "Hey, Ernest. I'm just here for a client... The defendant on the Misham case?"

Ernest stared at Apollo a moment. "Wow, you're here to talk to her?" Shaking his head, he looked down at his computer. "Good luck..."

"Your tone isn't exactly inspiring confidence," Apollo muttered with a frown.

"Do you know anything about the case?" Trucy asked, leaning on the desk with a hopeful smile.

"I never do unless I'm working on them myself," Ernest replied. "All I know about this one is that it's so special only a small number of officers with way higher ranks than me are working on it, and even they had to be passed by higher-ups. No idea why, though."

Trucy huffed, disappointed.

Ernest finished his work at his computer and looked up, noticing Machi with a frown. "You're
familiar. I've never seen you hanging out with the Wrights before, though.

Machi tensed up, stepping closer to his siblings.

"This is our new little brother, Machi," Apollo explained, resting a hand on the teen's shoulder. "That's all you need to know."

"Oh yeah, is it okay for us to eat in the visitor's room?" Trucy asked, putting a hand into her bag and promptly pulling out her pudding cup to show off. "Polly wouldn't let us eat these on the bus."

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'Excuse me for not risking Machi's probation status on freaking pudding...'

Ernest thought a moment, then shrugged. "Sure, there's no rule against food in there. Go ahead."

"Yes!" Trucy cried, fist-pumping triumphantly.

Apollo hid a laugh as he waved his sister through into the next room. "C'mon you little glutton, let's go wait for our client."

As they entered the visitor's room, Apollo pulled over the second chair without thinking, sitting down and pulling out his Court Record. Trucy and Machi followed him, only to both stand awkwardly by the one remaining chair.

"You sit down," Trucy said.

Machi shook his head. "No, you sit. I am happy to stand."

Trucy scoffed. "You have to sit down to eat!"

"Then sit down," Machi replied. "I will eat later."

Apollo rolled his eyes. "If you can't decide who's sitting down, either share the seat or stand."

"Oh, that's a good idea!" Trucy chirped, grabbing Machi's arm. "We'll share it... The share-chair!"

Apollo sighed as his sister giggled madly at her own joke.

It took only a few minutes for the two teenagers, squeezed into the single fold-up chair, to work their way through their individual puddings. Apollo didn't bother with his, wanting to be ready for his client when they came in... though, by the time his siblings were scraping the last bits of food from their plastic cups, he was starting to wonder why he'd bothered.

"Now we jutht gowwa fin' a trath can," Trucy mumbled through her spoon.

Rolling his eyes, Apollo reached into his bag and produced two small evidence baggies. "One for the trash, one for the dirty spoons," he told her, holding them out.

"Thank you, isoveli!" Machi chirped, taking the bags.

As the pair busied themselves cleaning up, Apollo checked the time on his computer. 'Ten minutes. We've been sitting here ten minutes and still no sign of my client.' Resisting the urge to grumble, he turned his gaze through the window into the other half of the room, only to jump in shock. "Augh! Wh-where'd you come from?!?"

Trucy and Machi gasped as they also saw what Apollo had noticed: Standing in the shadows, next to the door, was a young woman with long, blue hair, dressed in a pink striped turtle-neck and
clutching a large sketchbook in her arms. She stared across the room at the three Wrights, eyes wide.

How this woman had entered the room without any of them noticing, Apollo had no idea, but he wasn't going to let her odd silence unnerve him. "Anyway... Please, have a seat." He gestured to the chair on the other side of the glass.

The woman stared a little longer... then slowly stepped forward and gingerly lowered herself into the chair. She still didn't speak.

Apollo could feel the suspense of the continued silence building... and if there was one thing being a magician had taught him, it was how to handle suspense. "Well, my name's Apollo, and these are my little siblings, Trucy and Machi," he said, gesturing to the pair at his side. "I'm your defence attorney, actually." With a grin, he waved his hand and produced one of his business cards from thin air, slipping it through the small gap under the glass. "Here!"

The woman minutely gasped, a hand at her mouth. She continued to silently stare at Apollo, making no move to take the card.

"Did you want a bigger trick?" Trucy asked, jumping out of her seat with a wide grin. "C'mon, I'll introduce you to the third member of our act!" Before anyone could reply, Trucy's cape was fluttering with the movement of a hidden contraption underneath, a wooden puppet in a cape of its own spinning out into the air before grabbing the top hat off the teenager's head and placing it firmly above its own painted face.

"Hello there!" the puppet 'said', clattering up and down with the movement of its jaw. "I'm the Amazing Mister Hat!"

The woman fainted.

Shrieking, Trucy quickly withdrew the puppet, knocking her hat to the floor in her panic to retrieve it. "I'm sorry!"

Apollo had jumped to his feet, pressing his forehead to the glass in an effort to check on his unconscious client. "Miss!?"

The guard, an older woman with pink hair, quickly noticed what had happened, running over and dropping out of sight below the desk. "She's fine," she called.

Sighing in relief, Apollo sat back down in his chair. "Well, that was fruitless..."

Clutching her hat, Trucy sank into the free space on the other chair, muttering, "I'm sorry..." Machi quickly pulled her into a hug.

"It's not your fault," Apollo assured her. "I guess she's just... super skittish." He had to admit, it hurt a little that she didn't appear to be much of a fan of magic; He wasn't sure how else to get the woman to talk.

The guard helped the younger woman back into the chair, where the blue-haired girl busied herself looking through her pockets. A moment later, she pulled something out, fiddling around in her lap. The guard had returned to her post.

"Is she... painting her nails?" Machi whispered.

Apollo sighed, realising what the light pink colour of the mysterious object had been. 'Well, she obviously won't, or can't, speak to us... This was a complete waste of time.' "Let's go," he said,
getting to his feet.

"Excuse me..."

Apollo paused, his siblings already half off their chair. Did his client just... talk to them?

The young woman reached out to take Apollo's business card from the gap under the glass, leaving a second business card in its place. "C-could you... Could you read this?"

"Um, sure." Feeling almost like he was passing notes in class, Apollo reached out to take the business card. He had just raised it to his face to study when his siblings slammed into his sides, both eagerly wanting a look themselves.

"It's so pretty!" Trucy cooed. "Almost looks like a postcard!"

Machi pointed at the name and address on the front. "Vera... Misham? Is 'Drew Studio' where you work?"

The woman, Vera, didn't reply, in the middle of putting away her nail polish. A moment later, she was getting up from her chair and heading back towards the guard.

Apollo sighed, lowering the business card. "Well, looks like we're finished here."

Trucy snatched the card from his hand with a giggle, dashing out of the room.

Machi stepped towards the glass. "Thank you for your help, Ms Misham," he called. "Don't worry, Apollo will find truth in trial!"

Vera gave Machi only a tiny glance, then hurried out the door.

Apollo tapped his brother's shoulder, directing him to leave, but paused in the doorway, watching the guard disappearing into the hallway behind their client. 'Vera... Misham? Why is that name vaguely familiar...?'

Back in reception, Trucy had already pulled Machi into a new conversation, pointing to the back of Vera's business card. "Then people would remember what you look like, too!" she said.

Machi nodded. "That is good idea," he agreed.

Seeing Apollo approaching, Trucy waved him over with a grin. "Polly! Give me one of your business cards so we can put a portrait of you on the back!"

Apollo just waved off her request. "The address on that is for a 'Drew Studio', right?"

Machi nodded. "That is what it says." He pointed at the card, reading, "Fifty-seven Cape Rivers... D. R.?"

"Drive," Trucy told him. "They live in Yachtsville, not too far from here!" She turned her grin on Apollo. "You think it might be the scene of the crime?"

Apollo only smirked, taking the card from his sister. "Let's go find out."

[View the Court Record]
As he led his siblings back towards the bus-stop, eyes on his phone, Apollo heard his siblings chattering away behind him.

"Anyway, she seemed really nice! Her name was Vera, wasn't it?"

"Mm-hmm. She is not seem like murderer."

"Nope. I think Daddy was just teasing us when he said she was."

"That is good. Apollo can prove she not kill anyone."

"Yeah! We'll find all sorts of evidence at the crime scene, and get her off tomorrow! Won't we, Polly?"

It took Apollo a moment to register his sister was addressing him. "Huh? Oh, yeah, if we can." He kept his eyes on his phone, reading the bus route it displayed.

Hurried steps marked the appearance of his siblings at his sides, Trucy on his left and Machi on his right. "What do you mean, Polly? Of course you're gonna win," Trucy said.

Apollo sighed, putting away his phone. "If Luke was there, he would have convinced Vera to talk."

The two teenagers shot each other confused looks. "I don't think he would," Trucy hesitantly argued. "She was just too scared of us. Not even Luke could have made her open up."

"You can't know that," Apollo replied, shoving his hands in the belt of his hip-bag. "Luke's not here, and he's not going to be here. It's always been Luke who found the clues that really shook everything up; How am I supposed to fight in this trial without him!?"

Trucy scoffed. "Well, that's not true. You helped Luke and Daddy when they got accused of murder! And it was you who found all the missing panties in Wocky's case! A-and, in Machi's case, you worked out how Uncle Valant's illusion worked, and how it tied in to the murder!"

"It was Mister Gavin who defended Luke, not me," Apollo corrected, rolling his eyes. "And he was helping me for Dad's case, before Dad helped me himself. For Wocky's case, Luke outright took over the investigation, and..." He sighed. "What better example is there of how good he is at this than the fact that he saw through Machi's 'blind' act immediately?"

Machi flinched. "I-I'm sorry..."

"N-no, I didn't mean anything by that, little brother," Apollo quickly added, resting a hand on Machi's shoulder. Shaking his head, he turned back to Trucy. "If it wasn't for my badge, what reason would I even have to appear in court? Even Herr Diva has said Luke would be a better lawyer than me."

Trucy glared up at her eldest brother for a long moment. "Polly, Luke doesn't want to be a lawyer,"
she forcefully replied. "He never has! Even when we were little, he thought of being an archaeologist before being a vet!"

Apollo huffed. "That doesn't change the fact he's better at it than me."

"Yes it does!" Trucy argued, grabbing Apollo's arm and pulling them to a halt in the middle of the pavement. "You've always wanted to be a lawyer, long before you ever met Daddy! You wanted it so much, you kept pursuing it, even though we had our magic career to keep us busy!"

'And you never stopped bugging me about 'wasting my time' with it, too...’ Out loud, Apollo said nothing, avoiding his sister's determined gaze.

"You're better at card tricks than I am," Trucy continued. "And you're the only one of us who can go into the zigzag boxes. Do you think I should quit because I'm not as good as you? Let you replace me?"

"That" got his attention. "What!?" He wheeled on his sister with wide eyes. "Truce, of course not, you've wanted to be a magician since you were a kid! I only became a magician because-!"

"Because you wanted to help me?" Trucy filled in. "Because I asked you to? Because it's a family tradition?" She crossed her arms. "That's why Luke has been helping you. He never wanted to replace you; He helped because he wanted to make sure you did your best, that you lived up to Daddy's name, and you asked him to do it!"

Apollo could only stare blankly back at his sister. He wanted to argue the help he got from Luke wasn't the same thing as the help he gave Trucy, but the order wasn't making it to his mouth.

"Yeah, Luke's super-good at investigating, but he's no lawyer," Trucy softly continued, eyes sad. "Not like you are, Polly."

A hand rested on Apollo's arm where it hung at his side, and he turned to see Machi watching him nervously. "You are great lawyer, isoveli," he said. "If not for you, I not have told truth in trial... and Aska not have courage to go to England. I love Luke, but... it not him to do that."

Apollo stared at his youngest brother for a long moment before reaching out and pulling both his siblings into a hug. "I'm such an idiot. You two are so right... I'm sorry."

"S'okay," Trucy mumbled, hugging him back.

Machi nodded, his golden hair tickling Apollo's cheek. "We love you, isoveli."

"I love you guys too," Apollo replied, giving them one final squeeze before releasing them from his grip. As they stepped back, he gave them a sheepish smile, hands resting on their shoulders. "So... would you both be okay with helping me out in Luke's place? Just until he gets back?"

Trucy scoffed. "Duh. We came with you to the detention centre, didn't we?"

Machi giggled, nodding. "We will do our best to help you do your best."

Apollo laughed. "Can't ask for more than that," he pointed out, then patted the pair's shoulders once and headed off down path. "C'mon, we've got a possible crime scene to look at!"
The address on Vera's business card turned out to lead to an old house near Gourd Lake. The single-floor building sat low to the ground and close to the road. Nearby a public bench, a short path led to the green front door, and next to that was a bright red metal box, the number '57' painted on its front. Above, Apollo could see a large window on the lower half of the roof, likely streaming in the midday sun. Leading his siblings across the paving stones, Apollo hesitated only a moment before reaching out to the yellow door handle and giving it a firm tug. To his surprise, the door turned out to be unlocked, pulling open easily. Shooting a surprised glance at his siblings, the trio slipped inside.

As Apollo looked around, he said the first thing that came to mind: "Wow, this looks like... It looks like a studio."

Soft yellow walls and lemon-coloured floorboards highlighted the bright sun rays falling from above, through the wooden beams that formed the building's structure. Multiple small paintings hung, dotted against the plaster in whatever free space remained around the tall cupboards and shelves containing supplies of paint and empty canvasses. The near half of the room was dominated by three easels, each holding a large painting. Nearby, a table constructed from half a tree trunk sat with two cups on top; On one side was a simple chair, and on the other an upturned stool, next to an outline marked in white tape and surrounded by plastic numbered cards.

"It's like life imitating art, or maybe the other way around," Trucy said, and pointed to the shape of a body marked on the ground. "But that is a bit jarring."

Machi pressed close to Apollo's side. "So this is crime scene?"

Apollo nodded. "Looks like it."

Trucy cooed, jumping over the tape outline towards the line of paintings. "Polly, Machi, look at all of these!"

"Hey, don't touch those," Apollo warned, following his sister.

"It's okay, I'm just looking," Trucy said over her shoulder, waving off her brother's concern. A moment later, her attention was captured by one of the end paintings, a landscape partly obscured by a well-used artist's palette resting on the easel in front of it. "Hey, Polly, look at this one."

Apollo frowned as he gave the landscape a second look. Above the palette, where there was clearly supposed to be blue sky, was a mass of grey pencil scribblings on bare canvas... a spot that lacked any of the paint that covered the rest. "Looks half finished."

Trucy nodded. "And the rough sketch doesn't look like the rest of the painting at all."

Indeed, the pencil sketch appeared to be of dark, rolling clouds, lit from below; A stark contrast to the sunny sky next to it. "Yeah, good point."

Machi joined them, looking between the three paintings. After a moment, he pointed at the one closest to the door, an abstract piece of mostly black lines on white. "That looks like a person... thinking about something."

"Maybe they're worried," Trucy suggested. She pointed to the middle painting, a photo-real painting of a seascape. "I like the porcupine-fish in this one! It's so spiky!"

Apollo still stared at the unfinished landscape, a surreal impressionist piece of a giant peach floating down a river. "They're all different styles," he realised. 'What's going on here?'

Footsteps echoed from somewhere else in the apartment, and Apollo peered through a gap between
the paintings, past a small desk littered with bits and bobs. Through an open door wandered a woman in a lab coat, her distinctive red-lens glasses perched in front of her brown ponytail. As she spotted Apollo watching, she frowned, moving to join them. "Ah, I thought I might find you three here."

Trucy grinned, waving at the scientist as she rounded the line of paintings. "Ema! Long time no see!"

"Oh? Seems like I run into you far too oft-" Ema's grumbling was cut short as she noticed Machi standing next to Apollo. "Wait, aren't you Lamiroir's pianist, the smuggler? What are you doing here? And where's Luke?"

Machi grabbed Apollo's arm, hiding behind him.

Apollo shot Ema a glare. "There's nothing in Machi's probation that says he can't be here."

"Yeah!" Trucy added, arms crossed. "And he's officially our little brother now, so you gotta be nice to him!"

Ema stepped back a little in surprise. "He's...?" After a moment of complete bafflement, she shook her head with a sigh. "Whatever. You're here about the test trial tomorrow, aren't you?"

Apollo nodded, relaxing out of his glare. "We don't know much about it, though. Just that it's a murder."

"Yep, the artist who owns this studio," Ema replied. "Mister Drew Misham."

Trucy gasped, hands to her mouth. "Misham?"

Machi peeked out from behind Apollo. "Like Vera Misham...?"

Ema nodded. "His daughter. You've met her?"

"We just saw her at the detention centre," Apollo explained, frowning. 'I guess Dad was calling this the 'Misham' case... I should have noticed that earlier.' He stifled the thought Luke would have noticed immediately.

"It was funny though," Trucy continued, tapping her chin in thought. "She seemed more like a victim than the kind of person who could commit murder."

Ema shifted her stance, hand on her hip. "You don't say. Not even by poisoning?"

Machi tilted his head to one side. "Poyz-ning...?"

"Poisoning's a common way to get the job done, when the murderer is a woman."

Apollo shivered. Maybe that was why Phoenix had chosen this case; He knew how much their father hated that tactic. Even so, he still didn't think Vera was capable of murder.

Trucy stepped over to Machi's side. "I can type it into your phone for you," she offered. "I don't know how to explain it."

Machi nodded, pulling out his phone to hand over to his sister.

"Anyway, Mister Wright told me you'd be coming," Ema continued to Apollo, ignoring his younger siblings. She gestured around the room. "Feel free to look around. I'll just be over here. With my Snackoos." She promptly spun on her high heels and moved over to the chair at the tree-trunk table,
which Apollo suddenly noticed had a small pile of equipment hidden behind it. Once Ema had navigated around the pile and sat down, she pulled out a bag of chocolate and quickly started munching away.

Apollo set his shoulders as he pulled out his Court Record, deciding to leave the detective be for now; With Phoenix's proclamation they couldn't talk to anyone related to the case, it was unlikely they'd get much help from Ema this time... which made their examination of the scene more important than ever. And he didn't intend on letting anyone down.

[View the Court Record]
'Myrkytys..." Machi muttered to himself. "That is terrible way to die..."

Trucy nodded sagely. "Our last two cases were people getting shot," she said. "No matter how you die, it's awful."

"At least Meraktis died instantly," Apollo muttered. He finished taking his photos of the three paintings, then gestured around the room. "C'mon, let's investigate. And don't touch anything."

"We won't," Machi promised.

"Of course we won't!" Trucy scoffed. "What do you take us for, Polly? We're not children!"

Apollo just rolled his eyes. 'Could've fooled me.'

Trucy grabbed Machi's hand, pulling him around Apollo and towards the table Ema was sat at. "Well, if Mister Misham was poisoned, I bet these cups have something to do with it! Right, Machi?"

Machi shrugged. "I guess?"

"What do you mean, you 'guess'?’" Trucy cried, offended. "There's no food around, so it must have been something he drank!" She gasped. "Unless he was eating the paint!"

Ema failed to hide a snort as she shoved a handful of Snackoos into her mouth.

"Why would he be eating paint?" Apollo pointed out. "Nobody eats paint."

Trucy shrugged. "Maybe it was special edible paint," she said. "You know, like the kind you put in food."

"That is called 'food colouring', yes?’" Machi asked. "We used that in Home Ec. class just last week."

"He's right," Apollo agreed, shooting his scoffing sister a smirk. "It's nothing like paint."

Ema put down her bag of food and gestured to the cups, barely hiding a smile. "The blue one is the victim's coffee mug," she explained, apparently deciding to help after hearing Trucy's outlandish theory.

"Aha!" Trucy cried. "So the poison was in here!" She leaned down, examining the piece of pottery with a grin. "This is my first time seeing a real poisoned mug of coffee!"

"I would hope so," Apollo muttered, raising his tablet computer to take a picture.

Finally released from Trucy's grip, Machi hugged himself tightly, shooting Ema nervous looks as he stepped back behind his siblings. Apollo decided to let him be, knowing the boy was uncomfortable being so close to one of the detectives who had arrested him for murder.

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"No traces of poison were found in the coffee," Ema explained.

Trucy straightened up with a gasp. "What!?"

Ema shook her head. "You'll have to figure out the rest yourself. I'm officially not on your side, after all." She tossed a chocolate stick into her mouth.

Apollo resisted the urge to point out she never had been, and it had never stopped her before.

"What about this?" Trucy pointed to the pristine white cup and saucer sitting near the mug.

"I imagine that one was for guests to use," Ema said.

"Did the police analyse the cup too?" Apollo asked, arms crossed.

Ema scoffed. "Not a trace of poison was found on that cup."

Apollo couldn't help but feel annoyed by her smug tone. 'So the killer was after Drew Misham alone.'

Meanwhile, Trucy had returned her attention to the mug. "Hey, Polly, look! That stain doesn't look too healthy."

Turning his gaze to what his sister was looking at, Apollo found a bright blue mark on the lip of the mug. "Um, Ema...? What's this?"

Ema's eyes widened. "Ah, th-that! Yes!" She cleared her throat, fiddling with the glasses on her head. "It's just a rumour, but I've heard there's a kind of coffee called 'Blue Mountain'!"

"Ooh, I've heard of that too!" Trucy cried.

Apollo shot the detective a glare. "I'm pretty sure it isn't actually blue, Ema."

Ema blushed, looking away. "R-right. Okay, you got me." She sighed. "That's left over from my testing spray."

"Forensic science!" Trucy cried triumphantly, then giggled. "I knew your hobby was behind this somehow, Ema!"

"It's not a 'hobby'!" Ema protested.

Trucy ignored her. "So, what kind of scientific stuff were you up to?"

Instead of continuing to complain, Ema proudly pulled a small spray-bottle from her pocket, showing it off. "This spray, that's what. It turns blue when it touches poison."

Apollo frowned, staring at the mug. "So, the poison that killed the victim was on this mug?"

Ema nodded. "See? It wasn't in the coffee. The killer applied it to the rim of the mug itself!"

"Wow!" Trucy said. "Science is amazing!"

'It's certainly helpful,' Apollo privately agreed. 'Maybe if we butter her up, Ema would be more willing to help us out a bit more...'}
Dragged from his musings, Apollo looked up to see Machi had wandered off at some point during the conversation, and was now standing by a small chest of drawers next to the front door. "What is it, Machi?"

Machi pointed between the drawers and the wall behind them. "There is other painting here."

Apollo and Trucy shot each other surprised looks before hurrying to Machi’s side. Sure enough, hidden behind the drawers and against the wall was a fourth canvas, the same size as the three on the easels. "Hey, you're right," Apollo muttered. Putting away his Court Record for now, he got down on his knees to see if he could extricate the extra painting from its hiding place.

"What if it's embarrassing somehow, and he didn't want anyone to see it?" Trucy suggested.

Apollo shot his sister a look over his shoulder. "You certainly seem pleased by the possibility."

"If he want to hide it," Machi mused aloud, "why not find place harder to see? It is easy to find next to front door."

"That’s a good point t-," Apollo said, only for his words to fail him as he pulled the painting into the light with one last tug. This canvas wasn’t just the same size as the ones on display: The impressionist-style scene painted across it was a surreal image of a giant peach floating down a river, a farmer watching on from underneath a sweeping blue sky.

"Huh," Trucy mumbled, disappointed. "It's so... normal."

Apollo could only stare at it. The sky covered the top of the canvas, and there was more detail and colour in general across the entire piece, but... Was he the only one seeing the similarity here?

"I think I know that story, though," Trucy continued. "You remember, right Polly? The one where the old woman is doing the wash in the river, and this giant peach comes a-floatin' on down." She giggled. "I'm pretty sure that's how it went."

Apollo didn't reply, not even to tell his sister off for her strange story.

"Is something wrong, Isoveli?" Machi asked.

Steeling himself, Apollo got to his feet and swept past his siblings, rounding on the detective sat at the table. "Ema, what's going on here?"

Ema stared back, wide-eyed. "Ah, th-that painting back there? What about it?"

"What about it!?" Apollo repeated in disbelief.

"Yeah, what about it, Polly?" Trucy added, hands on her hips.

Behind her, Machi was looking back and forth between the new painting and the ones on display with a frown. "It's... the same."

"Wait, what?" Trucy cried, following her younger brother's gaze.

Apollo nodded, and pointed to the landscape on the easel. "That hidden painting is exactly the same as this one, only complete. Surely you noticed that, Ema."

Ema winced, looking away sheepishly. "I was hoping you wouldn't find that," she admitted. "You're
right, though. Drew Misham was copying this painting."

"What for?" Apollo asked, eyes narrowed.

Ema only looked away, shrugging, and shoved another handful of Snackoos into her mouth.

"It's pretty good," Trucy said, admiring the unfinished painting on the easel. "For a copy."

Sighing, Apollo turned his back on Ema; It was clear she wasn't going to share anything else without a fight, and they still had a room to examine. "C'mon, let's look over here." He directed his siblings to the other side of the room, behind the three displayed paintings. "We can't afford to miss anything."

The back half of the room was very different from the entrance: An iron beam above them blocked the light from the high windows, casting a dark shadow over the already-dark walls and making the lights of the electronic equipment stand out all the sharper. On the wall was a light-box, several x-ray-like images hung on it, and a green hook hung from a contraption on the iron beam. A table circled the wall in the corner, holding what Apollo could only guess was some kind of x-ray machine, and a purple barrel bolted to the wall hid something else equally complicated behind it. All over were small sticky notes and intricate plans for more machinery. Below the light-box were all the components one would need for developing images, and nearby a metal cart with two large gas bottles and a Bunsen burner. In the opposite corner, blocking the view of the door further into the apartment, was a drafting table, a microscope, and a surprisingly normal (though old) desktop computer.

Trucy was quick to examine the complicated-looking equipment on their left. "What's all this for?" she asked. "It doesn't look very artistic, really."

"Victim was painter, yes?" Machi added, warily watching the gas bottles on the cart. "Why would he need this?"

"He had everything from a lathe to a laser cutter," Ema filled in, and Apollo spun around to see she had got up from her chair and followed them, still munching on her Snackoos. "Looks like he was ready to work on metals and wood too... Though his equipment's a bit old, to tell the truth."

Apollo gave the equipment another once-over: Now he was looking closer, he could see it was mostly covered in dust. "Had he even used any of it recently?"

Trucy squeaked as she dropped to the floor, pulling open a drawer on the cart. When she jumped back to her feet, she was holding a deadly-looking lathe. "Can I borrow this? I want to cut a quarter in half to make a trick coin!"

"No, Trucy!" Apollo ordered, gesturing a request to put the lathe back. "This is a crime scene! You can buy a trick coin if you want one that bad!"

"But they cost like fifty bucks!" Trucy whined. Regardless, she put the lathe away.

Machi patted his sister's shoulder. "Maybe you could ask Aska when she come back," he offered. "She could buy one as late birthday present."

Trucy chewed her lip in thought. "Yeah, I guess."

Ema scoffed, throwing another handful of Snackoos in her mouth.

As he spun around to ask Ema what she was even doing, Apollo noticed the small desk near where
she was standing, the one he'd seen earlier as she greeted them. Deciding to leave the detective be, he waved to his siblings, pointing them to the table. "Guys? Let's take a closer look at this."

Trucy and Machi shot each other a confused look, and hurried to Apollo's side, looking over the small desk. In the corner, replacing the sunlight blocked by the paintings, was a table lamp, yellow bulb shining within. Next to it were two picture frames, one tiny and seemingly empty, and the other larger, with a photo of a small girl and a man in his forties.

"So this is Drew Misham?" Apollo realised, pointing to the man in the photo.

"And the little girl must be Vera!" Trucy added.

Machi frowned. "She is young here," he pointed out.

"Yes, they took that some years ago," Ema said. "They look close. A happy little family."

Apollo shot her a glare. "Until you arrested his daughter."

Ema jumped with a squawk, and sputtered out, "L-look, I was personally against that, okay?" She huffed, brushing down her lab coat. "She just didn't seem very suspicious. Scientifically speaking."

"Uh huh," Apollo muttered, rolling his eyes. "Right."

Meanwhile, Machi had picked up a feather that was lying on the other side of the desk. "Is this pen?"

Trucy shook her head. "It doesn't have a pointy end."

"That was most likely for sweeping detritus off the desk," Ema explained, making a sweeping motion with her hand.

"Wow, you sure know a lot, Ema," Trucy said, shooting the detective a smile.

Ema grinned proudly. "Bold and scientific, that's my motto."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. 'Exactly what about that was 'bold' or 'scientific'?' His internal snarking was interrupted by Machi's giggles, and the teen began wagging the feather in Apollo's face, causing the elder brother to sputter and close his eyes. Unable to resist laughing in response, waving his little brother off. "Bro, please, this is a crime scene!" Still grinning proudly, Machi put the feather back where he'd found it. Now Apollo could see again, he noticed Ema had wandered off while he'd been distracted.

"Ooh, Polly, look!" Trucy cried, directing her brothers' attention to a wooden artist's figure near the lamp. "It's you, making one of your flamboyant gestures!"

Apollo grinned, making a show of brushing a hand through his hair. "Please, I'm a professional." As his siblings giggled, he gave the figure a closer look: Just as Trucy said, it was arranged into the same pose he used when pointing in court... but it wasn't like that particular pose was unique to him, or even to lawyers as a whole. 'I wonder why it's posed like that? Coincidence?'

Machi turned to a green book, flipping through the pages. "This is... empty. Why buy book if you not write in it?"

"I guess it was new," Apollo said.

"Aw, cute!" Trucy cried, and pointed to the small frame next to the family photo. "Look at that! It's tiny!"
Machi gasped. "It is!" he agreed. "You would need photo two, maybe three centimetres wide to fit!"

Apollo nodded. *True. The frame as a whole is barely two inches high.* "And there's no glass in it... What do you suppose was in there?"

"Probably nothing," Trucy sagely decided. "Let this serve as a lesson for us all: Be sure to check the size when you buy frames!"

[View the Court Record]
Apollo noticed a small drawer underneath the top of the desk that was sitting ajar. Shooting a glance up at Ema to check she wasn’t watching, he gently slid it open, finding inside only a bright crimson envelope. It lay with the flap facing upwards, and Apollo could see at a glance that it had been ripped open in the past, then taped shut. "This envelope's been opened and resealed," he told his siblings, knowing they couldn't see the inside of the drawer from where they stood. As he spoke, he took a picture with his Court Record.

Machi looked confused. "How would you...?"

"I know how to do that!" Trucy gleefully told him. "You take a pot of boiling water, and hold the envelope up to the steam. The glue melts and it opens! Cool, huh?"

"Mm," Machi muttered, looking thoughtful.

"You can do it with stamps, too," Trucy added, clearly angling for the enthusiastic reaction she had yet to elicit. "Luke used to let me take the stamps Uncle Professor sent him, but they were all the same, so I gave it up."

Machi frowned in thought, then pulled out his phone.

"Anyway," Apollo spoke up, taking the envelope out of the drawer, "whoever opened this thing first wasn't nearly as delicate as that." Trucy gasped as she spotted the ripped flap, and Apollo turned the object around to examine the front. Above the studio's address was an ordinary stamp and the postmark; He almost double-taked as he read the latter. "April twenty-nineteen!? The postmark on this is from seven years ago!"

"Really!?" Trucy cried, a hand over her mouth. "Why keep a letter that long!?

"Ah!" Machi looked up from his phone with a grin. "I read somewhere, when you lick back of stamp, you eat one tenth of calorie!"

Trucy wrinkled her nose at him, shooting a brief glare at his phone. "You looked that up!"

Machi shook his head, showing off his phone screen: His translation app, with an unreadable (to them) string of Borginian characters in the top box and ‘calorie’ in the bottom.

In response, Trucy's eyes narrowed. "You win this time..."

Apollo rolled his eyes and left them to it, making sure to take a picture of the envelope's front before slipping it into his bag.

"What now, isovel?" Machi asked.

"I have some questions for our detective friend," Apollo replied, and gestured for his siblings to follow him as he headed back to the other side of the room.

As the three Wrights slipped past the displayed paintings, Ema looked up from her chair at the table.
"Done already?"

Apollo nodded, stepping over the taped outline on the floor. "You said Drew Misham is an artist?"

"Apparently," Ema replied. "Did a lot of illustrations for books, I hear. Had a lot of female fans too, for what it's worth."

"Oh?" Trucy blinked in surprise, looking over the displayed paintings. "Well, I guess his stuff is kinda pretty."

Ema shrugged. "He was an odd bird, Misham. Hadn't shown his face to anyone until the end."

"To anyone?" Machi repeated. "He... did not go out?"

"Nope. He was always locked up here in this studio, apparently." Ema pointed to the red letter box mounted on the wall next to the door. "His only connection to the outside world was through letters he'd put in that letter box."


"Yeah, wouldn't email be easier?" Trucy added.

"Personally, I agree with you," Ema said, "but it seems Mister Misham couldn't stand technology. He did everything through physical mail: Put his letters in the letter box, and the postman took them away from outside."

Machi nodded thoughtfully. "There is nothing like physical letter. Maybe he just like feel of paper."

Trucy shrugged. "It's impressive just to find someone who still writes letters in this day and age," she said. "Or wrote, rather."

"In any case, the only person besides him allowed in here was his daughter, Vera," Ema continued. "We took some fingerprints of course; The only ones found in the room were Mister Misham's and Vera's, basically."

"Basically?" Apollo repeated, giving her a suspicious look.

Ema wriggled uncomfortably, avoiding his gaze. "Actually, last night... Mister Misham gave an interview to a reporter for the first time," she admitted. "It happened during the interview, apparently."

Trucy looked like she wasn't sure whether to believe that or not. "His first interview ever...?"

Ema shrugged. "I guess mysterious painters who never go outside make for good articles."

Apollo narrowed his eyes at the detective. "And it just so happened that he died the night of his first interview?"

Ema shot Apollo a brief glare. "At around nine PM every night, Vera always made him a cup of coffee. Last night, he drank his usual coffee, and suddenly became violently ill."

"And died?" Trucy picked up, in disbelief. "She poisoned him on the night of his interview!? Wouldn't the reporter see?"

"He wasn't near Mister Misham when she brought her father the coffee," Ema explained, arms
crossed. "He was checking out the equipment in the back of the room." She looked off beyond the paintings. "Supposedly, that's why she didn't notice he was there. It was the reporter who called the police, in fact."

Machi looked as confused as Apollo felt. "But, why is Vera suspect?"

Apollo nodded. "Exactly! If anyone is suspicious, it's the reporter!"

"Yet the reporter never got near Mister Misham's coffee," Ema replied. "Even Vera acknowledges that."

Apollo just watched the detective carefully. 'Regardless, I want to know more about this 'reporter'...' Shaking his head, he decided to move on for now. "Alright then, what about Vera? Was she as closed off from the outside world as her father?"

"She did kind of give off a withdrawn sort of aura," Trucy muttered.

"Yep," Ema said, nodding. "A real sickly girl, ever since she was little. She was home-schooled by her father, apparently."

"No wonder she not like people," Machi commented.

"It was quite a scene when they took her to the detention centre," Ema continued. "She was screaming about how she'd die 'if they took her outside'." Apollo's eyes widened. "That... does sound like a scene."

Ema only nodded in agreement. "In the end, she agreed to leave if she was allowed her 'good luck charm' for company."

"Her 'good luck charm'?” Trucy asked.

Ema huffed, waving a hand dismissively. "Apparently, she has this charm that magically gives her the courage to go outside."

Apollo glared at Ema for mocking the teenager's coping mechanism... though he did wonder how such a strong fear developed in the first place.

"But if she was scared of outside," Machi asked, "why kill her dad? She would have to go out then, yes?"

Ema shrugged. "Don't look at me."

Crossing his arms, Apollo set his gaze on the mug on the table. Drew Misham had died after drinking his coffee, and they could see the results of Ema's tests proving there was poison on the mug, not in the coffee itself... but why would the killer have done that? Wouldn't it be easier to poison the coffee itself? And then there was that mysterious identical painting Machi found, the one Drew had been copying. Maybe it was time they worked their Gramarye charms on Ema's favourite hobby.

Fixing the detective with a grin, Apollo innocently grasped his hands behind his back. "Hey, Ema... What is it we always do when we meet up at a crime scene? You know... scientifically?"

It was impossible to miss the sparkling in Ema's eyes as the question was posed to her. She resisted for a moment or two, then finally broke out into a wide grin. "Aw, you know me too well!" Jumping
to her feet, she snapped her fingers at the trio. "Okay, just this once! Bring me anything you find suspicious and we'll check it out!"

"Yay!" Trucy cheered, bouncing on the spot. "I knew we could trust in you, Ema!"

Machi just looked confused.

Apollo hid an amused snort, and pointed to the coffee mug. "So, we may as well start here: The poison analysis?"

Ema's grin turned to a pursed frown. "I was afraid you were going to ask about that." With a sigh, she retrieved her small spray bottle from her pocket. "See, this solution is used to test for atroquinine."

"At-ro-ki...?" Machi muttered, counting the syllables on his fingers.

"Atroquinine!" Ema repeated, the spark of excitement returning to her eyes. "The deadly poison found in the autopsy! It's one of the most virulent poisons, but is absorbed into the body astonishingly slowly. It takes at least fifteen minutes from the time of ingestion for adverse effects to show." She squeaked, clutching her spray bottle tight. "Oh, and guess what!? Recent research has shown-!"

"Th-that's fine, really," Apollo interrupted, holding up his hands in surrender. "We don't need to know all the gory details..." *Maybe it was a mistake to tease her like that...'*

"I think I get it," Trucy picked up. "You just spray this stuff on something you want to test, right?"

"Precisely!" Ema replied, proudly showing off her bottle. "You can find even the slightest trace of poison with this!"

Squealing herself, Trucy ran around the table to Ema's side, holding out her hand. "I wanna try too, Ema! Pretty please?"

Ema laughed. "You don't have to ask twice!" She placed the spray bottle in Trucy's hand. "I already used it on everything suspicious, of course."

"Yay!" Trucy cheered, and immediately set about spraying the substance in the bottle on whatever was within reach... including her brothers.

"Hey!" Machi cried, hiding his face behind his hands.

"What are you doing, Truce!?!" Apollo added, flapping his cape to clear the air and giving his sister a disapproving look.

"I was just seeing if I got a reaction off of you," Trucy innocently explained, a grin on her face.

Apollo glared. "How's this for a reaction: *Never do that again!*"

Trucy froze, her smile fading. "Oh... I'm sorry, Polly."

"It's fine," Apollo muttered, brushing off his suit and avoiding his sister's eyes; Even though it was a genuine accident, and Trucy had immediately apologised, he couldn't help feeling guilty at upsetting his sister. "Why don't you and Machi go looking for any other trace of poison, huh?"

The two teens looked at each other and nodded, then turned back to Apollo. "Where should first we look, isoveli?"
Apollo hummed in thought, casting his eyes over the room. Ema had likely already checked all the obvious places, hence finding the traces on the mug. With a smile, he directed his siblings back to the other side of the room, behind the line of paintings. "How about over here?"

"Over there?" Trucy repeated, following her eldest brother across the room. "Why?"

Meanwhile, Machi was looking around at the equipment, then across the drafting table and to the small desk they had examined earlier. He held out his hand to Trucy. "Can I try?"

Trucy thought a moment, then handed over the spray bottle with a grin. "Go ahead. It's fun!"

Apollo smiled as he watched the teenager make a beeline for the desk, spraying it carefully with the substance in the small bottle. Even Ema seemed to have drifted closer, though she was pretending not to. Trucy stuck close to Machi's side, looking over his work and occasionally directing him to a spot she thought he'd missed.

As Machi turned the spray over the two frames by the lamp, Trucy suddenly shrieked, jumping on the spot and waving to her eldest brother. "Polly, we got a reaction!"

Ema shouted in surprise, racing around the paintings towards the desk. "Where, where!?"

"Here!" Machi proudly announced, pointing to the tiny frame.

"Well, would you look at that," Ema muttered, studying it intensely. She shot Machi a grin. "Nice going, kid."

Machi giggled, blushing.

As Apollo came up behind them, Court Record in hand, Trucy turned to him with a suspicious look. "Polly, how'd you know we'd find poison there!?"

Apollo shrugged, though he couldn't resist a proud smile; From here, he was able to see the blue stain that was the cause of the excitement, a rough square right in the middle of the tiny, glass-less frame. "I didn't," he told his sister. "I just figured we'd be more likely to find something in a spot that didn't seem suspicious."

Trucy glared at him a moment more, then sighed and gave up.

As Ema wandered away, madly scribbling in her notepad, Machi turned his attention to his siblings. "Why would killer put poison here?" he asked. "It... not make sense."

"No, it doesn't," Apollo agreed, snapping a picture of the small frame. "Just another mystery we gotta find the answer to."

*View the Court Record*
Apollo led his siblings back to the table, where Ema had resettled in the chair, still writing her notes. "Ema?"

"Mm?" the detective replied, glancing up.

Hiding a smile, Apollo pulled the red envelope out of his bag. "We found this in the desk."

Ema froze, staring with wide eyes. "Oh! Th-that!" She quickly looked away. "My lips are sealed."

Machi watched her carefully. "Did... you open it?"

"What!?" Ema cried, a hand on her hip as she shot the teen a glare. "Please. I would have steamed it open."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "But you know what's inside?"

Ema grinned. "Sure. I read it, after all."

"How?" Trucy asked. "You just said you didn't open it!"

Smugly fiddling with her glasses, Ema only gave a haughty laugh. "I have a powerful weapon on my side."

Machi paled a little, stepping behind Apollo. "Weapon!?"

"Yes!" Ema replied, apparently not noticing the boy had taken her literally. "The use of tools! Highly specialised tools for information gathering."

Apollo patted Machi's shoulder to reassure him, then returned his attention to the detective. "Could we take a look at it?"

"Sure!" Still grinning proudly, Ema reached down next to her chair, out of sight. A moment later, she stood up, lifting a machine about the size and shape of a printer onto the table. "Here it is! My X-Ray Analyser!"

Trucy cooed in amazement. "Like the x-rays you get at the dentist?"

"That's right!" Ema replied, pulling open a large lid that uncovered a panel more reminiscent of a scanner than a printer. "At least, that's what I call it; It has a real name, but it's much more complicated."

Machi seemed to have regained his courage, stepping closer to the table with Trucy to admire the machine. "What is its real name?"

Ema paused, thinking for a moment. "The X-Ray Spectralization... something," she replied, then shrugged. "How am I supposed to remember all that?"
"So, basically, it lets you see inside things?" Trucy realised. "Like envelopes?"

Nodding, Ema patted the machine with pride. "That's right. You're sharp, Trucy!" As the girl preened at the compliment, Ema frowned. "But it's a bit more complicated than that in practise, of course. Actually, to tell the truth, I'm not really sure how it works, scientifically."

Apollo couldn't blame her, though, at his best guess, he would assume it was probably more similar to ultrasounds than x-rays... however they worked.

"Can we try it out, Ema?" Trucy asked, bouncing on the spot. "Please?"

"Yes, that sounds fun!" Machi agreed, grinning at Ema. "Would that be alright?"

Ema waved a hand dismissively, but couldn't hide the smile on her face. "Oh, I suppose. Of course, I've already checked out everything suspicious myself."

Trucy and Machi cheered, then Trucy immediately rounded on Apollo, grabbing the envelope from his hand. "C'mon Polly, let's give it a spin!"

Apollo rolled his eyes, then resigned himself to sitting back and watching his siblings having fun.

After showing them how her machine worked with a lottery ticket she had on hand, Ema placed the red envelope inside her machine and closed the lid. While Machi handled the dials that controlled the microscopic layer of card displayed on the smaller screen, Trucy worked at putting together the images it gave them on the larger screen, constructing a copy of the letter inside the suspicious envelope; Apollo wasn't sure exactly how, but it seemed to involve a lot of rubbing at the touchscreen as it picked up seemingly random traces of carbon from the microscopic layers of paper. It turned out there were two pages for the teens to gleefully reconstruct, and Apollo quickly learned when they were done that their machine's resemblance to a printer wasn't coincidental: Once Trucy had gleefully announced "We're done!", Ema set her machine to print off their hard-earned results... but, the moment the detective was holding both pages in hand, she bypassed the excitable teens and instead handed the paper to Apollo with a solemn expression.

"Here."

Apollo took the papers with some trepidation, recognising there was something Ema knew about the contents of this letter she wasn't telling them. Once he'd turned his attention to the letter itself, he couldn't resist a gasp.

"What is it, Polly?" Trucy cried. "What's it say!?"

Machi fixed his sister with a confused stare. "Did you not read earlier?"

"I was busy fixing the image!" Trucy argued. "I didn't have time to read it!"

Apollo sighed. "Here, I'll just read it out loud," he offered.

"Mr. Drew Misham
"I've deposited the $100,000 in the designated account. Please send a receipt once you've confirmed the transfer."
He flipped to the second page.

"Sign the papers and send in the enclosed envelope with the enclosed stamp within 3 days. I need not remind you to speak of this to no one."

"That's all it says," Apollo muttered. "Not even a name of the sender."

Trucy and Machi were silent for a long moment. "Wow, Mister Misham's paintings must be really valuable," Trucy mumbled.

"So," Machi ventured, "letter was about pay for painting?"

"Guess so," Apollo agreed. "But, in that case, why all the secrecy? And..." He paused, staring at the letter. "Why was this letter the only one there? It's seven years old, right?"

The trio thought the problem over for a few moments. "Maybe was special painting?" Machi suggested.

"That's probably it," Trucy decided, and turned to Ema with a grin. "Well, Ema?"

"Well indeed," Ema muttered, her eyes firmly pointed away from the Wrights.

Apollo watched the detective carefully, but it seemed clear that, whatever she was hiding, they weren't going to worm it out of her just yet. He folded up the copy of the letter to place in his bag. "So, Ema, I was wondering: What's the story about this reporter that came here for a story the night of the crime?"

Ema's attention was dragged back to the three with a gasp, and she sighed in resigned sorrow. "I'm afraid I can't tell you, because he's going to be a witness tomorrow, I hear."

Trucy nodded sagely. "I thought so."

"I'll never forget that face, but what was his name...?" Ema continued, a hand digging around in her purse. A moment later, she pulled out a small white card with a triumphant expression, which faded as she read it. "Oh, right. Brushel."

Apollo raised an eyebrow as he noticed a cartoonish drawing of a grinning head on the back, a speech bubble reading 'Top dollar for information' above it.

Not noticing the card, Trucy and Machi shared a confused look. "Brushel?" Machi asked.

"He's after a scoop to sell to the papers," Ema explained, rolling her eyes.

Apollo frowned. "So a reporter comes for an interview with a painter, his first interview ever, and that night he's killed. Seem strange to you?"

Trucy and Machi nodded in agreement. "Really strange," Trucy said.

To Apollo's surprise, Ema didn't argue, admitting, "It does raise a few questions."
Glad they were on the same page, Apollo decided to push his luck: "I'd like to speak with this reporter if I could."

"Well, I hear he's on the beat today too," Ema readily replied, shrugging. "He said something about covering a magician."

Apollo and Trucy's eyes widened, shooting each other a look. "Magician?"

"D-do you know," Machi picked up, giving Ema a similarly intense gaze, "was it Valant Gramarye?"

Ema thought a moment, then nodded. "Yeah, something like that. He's got some big show lined up, I hear."

Apollo almost laughed in amazement that Ema apparently didn't remember Valant from the incident at the Coliseum... or perhaps simply never even knew he was there.

"Here, I'll give you that reporter's card if you want," Ema continued, holding out the business card for Apollo.

"Thank you," Apollo managed to force out, taking the offered item. "You've been a lot of help, Ema."

Ema grunted in reply, sitting back down in the chair. "Don't mention it. Especially not to Mister Wright."

Trucy forced a carefree giggle. "Don't worry, we won't tell Daddy."

Machi nodded. "Your secret safe with us."

As they headed back to the bus stop, Apollo took the chance to examine the business card Ema had given them. "Spark Brushel, Freelance Journalist," he read aloud. "A journalist can be freelance?"

Trucy and Machi leaned over his shoulders to take a look themselves. Trucy hummed in thought, saying, "Well, he's got a good business card anyway."

Machi frowned, pointing to a symmetrical pattern behind the name. "Is this... camera?"

"Looks like one," Trucy said. "Do reporters take photos too?"

Apollo shrugged. "I guess if he's freelance, he'd have to. A bit like how we do whatever job people have for us at the agency."

Trucy didn't reply, only nodding in thought.

Apollo slipped the card into his bag, and the trio continued down the street in silence. It was only as they approached the bus stop Machi finally broke it:

"So we are going to Coliseum now?"

"Oh yeah!" Trucy cried, grinning. "We get to go visit Uncle Valant after all!"

"We will be there on business," Apollo sternly reminded her. "We're just after this reporter guy; By some co-incidence, he happens to be trying to interview someone we know."
Trucy just giggled, ignoring him. "And we can introduce you properly, Machi! Uncle Valant doesn't know you're officially our brother now!"

Machi grimaced, hugging himself. "Will... he mind?"

Apollo resisted the urge to laugh, ruffling the teen's hair. "Of course not, little bro. I think he'll be happy to see you safe."

"Yeah!" Trucy enthusiastically agreed, pouncing on her younger brother with a tight hug. "You're family, after all!"

Machi just blushed. "Th-thank you."

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After a brief stop in Twilight Station to grab lunch, the three Wrights headed down Dawning Street to the square that held Sunshine Coliseum. It was quieter now than it had been after the concert, though not by much; The large billboard was now an intense pink-purple, and an orange hot-air balloon hovered above, both proudly displaying the Gramarye seal to boast of the Troupe's long-awaited return, and below there was a line of people at the front doors, attended to by workers with bunches of balloons. The love of balloons seemed to be a theme, Apollo mused, noticing there seemed to be far more giant ones holding signs over the Coliseum's curved façade... and this time they were advertising the show, not just the nearby mall.

Machi clung to Apollo's arm, pressed to his side. "There is lot of people here..."

"Don't you worry, baby brother, Polly and I are here to protect you!" Trucy assured him, flexing an arm. "Besides, no-one's gonna hurt you here: This is the place where magic and dreams converge!"

Apollo hid a smirk. "Just three months ago it was the place where murder and nightmares converged."

Trucy smacked his arm with a glare. "Polly!"

Machi giggled, his grip on Apollo's other arm loosening.

Seeing their brother's reaction, Trucy paused in surprise, then brushed off Apollo's comment and skipped ahead of them. "C'mon, let's go find Uncle Valant!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow as he and Machi moved to follow. "How, exactly? All those workers are busy, and they're not going to believe a couple of strangers who say they're related to the Valant Gramarye."

"We'll just go find him ourselves then!" Trucy announced, pointing to the fenced-off car park.

Machi gasped. "Just go in back way!?!"

"Truce, we don't have backstage passes this time," Apollo sternly reminded her. "Just regular tickets, remember?"

Trucy scoffed. "Details, shmetails! Uncle Valant won't mind!" With a giggle, she sped up and dashed off ahead.

Machi hugged himself worriedly. "Are we going to be in trouble?"

"Hopefully not," Apollo sighed. "We should run into this reporter before that happens... either him or Valant." He then grinned, ruffling his brother's hair. "C'mon, let's introduce you properly to your new uncle."

The brothers caught up to Trucy alongside the fencing separating the Coliseum's entrance area from...
the backstage car park. She had paused to wait for them, shifting from foot to foot impatiently, and beckoned them to follow with a loud "Hurry up!" as she hopped backwards towards the gate.

"I still think this is a bad idea, Truce," Apollo called. "Machi especially can't afford getting into trouble if we're caught."

Machi mutely nodded, clinging to Apollo's hand.

Trucy scoffed, and was about to reply when the trio heard loud, pompous laughter echoing from somewhere nearby. Trucy frowned in thought, then smiled. "Only a performer laughs like that!"

Apollo sighed in relief. "Oh thank goodness... It's-

"The Marvellous Valant Gramarye!" As if waiting for its cue, the nearby gate through to the car park flew open with a bang; In the gap stood a triumphant man in a yellow cape and matching top hat, waving his cane with a grin. "If it isn't the young Miss Trucy and Sir Apollo!" he called. "How often I hoped we'd meet again only to tell myself it was an impossible dream!"

"Uncle Valant!" Trucy cried, running to meet him. "How's it going? We're glad to see you, too!"

Valant laughed again as Apollo and Machi followed their sister. "Of course you are!"

Apollo could only smile at the man's boasting. "It's always a pleasure, sir."

The elder magician's eyes then turned curiously to the golden-haired boy at Apollo's side. "Hm? And is this not the premier pianist whose honour you fought for last we met?"

Machi nodded, nervously stepping closer to Apollo.

"Machi's our new baby brother!" Trucy announced. "He's staying with us until Lamiroir gets back from overseas!"

"She officially adopted him a couple weeks ago," Apollo added, shooting his brother a warm smile. "Why don't you tell him your new name, little bro?"

Machi hesitated, but, seeing his siblings' encouraging looks, gave Valant a small wave. "Hello Mister Gramarye. It is nice to see you again." He paused. "I... My name is Machi Gramarye. I'm sorry."

Valant stared for a moment, then laughed. "Ah, wonderful! So our serene siren has secured her forgotten history! That is good news indeed!"

Machi's eyes widened. "You not mind?"

Trucy's jaw dropped. "You're not surprised!?"

Valant chuckled, looking between the two. "Well, of course I'm not surprised! Who wouldn't want a name as grand as 'Gramarye'?" He turned specifically to Machi, raising an amused eyebrow. "And I'm certainly not going to argue against anyone passing on their name to their children."

The pair stared in shock for a moment more, then Trucy sputtered out, "You knew?"

Apollo snorted. "Of course he knew. You think Uncle Valant wouldn't have recognised someone he worked with for years?"

Trucy only rounded on her brother with a glare. "And you knew he knew!??"
Machi gasped, giving Apollo a smile. "Oh! That is why... you knew he not mind!"

Valant laughed, spinning his cane in his hand. "Ah, Sir Apollo... You have been keeping secrets from your partner?"

"Only the fun ones," Apollo replied, shrugging.

"Why didn't you say!?" Trucy demanded of her eldest brother. "I wanted Mommy coming back to be a surprise!"

"In that case, I must apologise dear Trucy," Valant said, bowing to the girl. "Though your mother's reappearing act was indeed a grand one."

Trucy sighed, arms crossed. "Yeah, I guess..." She shook her head, putting on a bright smile that everyone watching knew was false. "Oh yeah, we came here to congratulate you on your big magic show, Uncle Valant, and to wish you luck!"

Valant grinned, a twinkle in his eye. "Oh? But it is I who wish to congratulate you!" He threw his arms out wide. "Not everyone is so lucky as to witness miracles as I shall perform!"

Apollo hid a snort of amusement.

Machi frowned in confusion. "Congratu-?" He turned to Apollo. "I don't understand."

Trucy immediately moved to her younger brother's side, sandwiching him between his siblings. "You know what 'congratulate' means, right? Like 'congratulations'?"

"Y-yes?" Machi muttered. "Maybe?" After a short pause, he reached for his phone.

Apollo chuckled, patting his brother's shoulder. "Don't worry about it; It's in a magician's nature to be deliberately obtuse at times."

Valant tipped his hat proudly. "Indeed!"

Machi only looked confused, staring at Apollo. "To be...?"

"Hard to understand," Trucy translated.

"The world will watch in wonderment as Magnifi's illusions are reborn!" Valant boasted. "Here, on stage! By my hand!"

Apollo smiled. "We're looking forward to it."

"You bet we are!" Trucy added, fists held high in excitement. "We got tickets the moment we heard about it! Who could miss the return of the 'Gramarye Miracle' after seven years?"

Valant paused, giving Trucy a mournful look. "Miss Trucy, I must apologise; This show, and this honour, should have been his."

Trucy stared for a moment before she realised what the man meant, and her glee faded.

Machi looked between the two, clutching his phone in his hands. "'His' who?"

"Zak Gramarye," Apollo explained, watching his sister with concern. "I told you about him, remember? Shadi Enigmar, Trucy's father."
Gasping, Machi spun to face the girl. "T-Trucy...!"

"He was my co-magician-in-training," Valant added. "If that terrible thing hadn't..."

"It's okay," Trucy insisted, though she didn't meet anyone's eyes.

Machi quickly slipped his phone back into his pocket and gave his sister a hug. She gratefully returned it.

"Your father was a great magician, Trucy," Valant continued. "If he were alive, then I, Valant Gramarye, would have been proud to stand upon this stage as his assistant."

Apollo briefly panicked that Valant had heard of Zak's death, before remembering Zak was officially declared deceased regardless and mentally kicking himself for forgetting; That was a part of their story he hadn't told Valant about... or Machi, now he thought of it.

"Thanks, Uncle Valant," Trucy quietly said, then pulled away from Machi to give the older man a smile. "You know, I'm happy you're doing the show. To think, we get to see the Great Magnifi's illusions again!"

Valant laughed proudly, jumping back into character as easily as Trucy. "Ah, my mentor! The Magnificent Magnifi Gramarye was a true deity among magicians! A creator-god who gave birth to magic and illusions that defied our very imaginations!"

"Yeah, yeah!" Trucy agreed, bouncing on the spot as she turned to her brothers. "You two are gonna love it! I was so little when I last saw one, but I still remember his shows! He did wheelies in a sports car through the air above the audience! A-and then sped off to outer space, faster than the speed of sound!"

Apollo hid a snort; Every time Trucy told him about what she remembered of their grandfather's shows, the story got more and more embellished.

"For seven long years, the world has been waiting for a miracle to match his," Valant continued, giving a determined stare to the sky. "As heir to the Gramarye Troupe's secrets, it falls to me to provide one. It is my god-given destiny!"

"Oh, I want ask," Machi spoke up, looking around at everyone nervously, "why is there gap? Why wait seven years do show again?"

Apollo tried not to wince. "That's... complicated."

Valant nodded. "It appears the lad is uninformed." He turned to the teenage boy, gripping his cane. "Perhaps you have heard of the magic known as 'law' which governs our land?"

Machi just frowned, looking confused.

Sighing, Apollo waved Valant back and turned to Machi himself; Legal issues were best explained by lawyers, after all. "You remember how I was explaining copyright a few weeks ago?"

"Yes?"

"Well, Magnifi had a copyright on his magic tricks," Apollo continued. "When he died, the right to perform them was passed to..." He paused, then turned to Valant. "Was it just Zak, or the both of you as a pair?"
"Just Zak," Valant confirmed, looking away with an uncomfortable expression. "He was the lone inheritor of the Gramarye Miracle."

Machi gasped, looking to Trucy. "Really?"

Trucy only looked confused. "I... guess?" She shot Apollo a suspicious look.

Apollo decided to hurry his explanation along: "But, after Magnifi died, Zak vanished. He was classified 'missing', and, after seven years' time, missing persons are considered legally deceased." Noticing Machi looking puzzled again, Apollo quickly clarified, "They're dead."

Machi sharply inhaled, eyes wide. At his side, Trucy was avoiding eye contact with anyone, a thoughtful frown on her face.

"It pains me to say it, Miss Trucy," Valant picked up, "but this past spring, April to be precise, my former partner was legally declared deceased." He bowed his head solemnly. "In the absence of a formal will, the secrets of our mighty mentor Magnifi passed to me. This was, in fact, stipulated in the will by Magnifi himself."

Trucy was silent, staring at nothing in particular. "Is... that how it works, Polly?"

Apollo nodded. "Valant and I discussed it a bit already; You and me are alright using the Gramarye name, we just can't form a troupe with it or encroach on Valant's rights to Magnifi's tricks."

Trucy only continued to stare into the distance. "Okay."

"But, hey, we only have to work hard for four years at our own stuff," Apollo continued, trying to look nonchalant as he turned his eyes to Valant. "That is... if you still want us...?"

There was a short pause, then Valant once again laughed. "Ah, but of course! I am carrying the Troupe all on my little lonesome! And," he shot a wink to the caped siblings, "'twould be rather fitting for Magnifi's grandchildren to be a part of his legacy, wouldn't you agree?"

Finally, Trucy turned her eyes towards her uncle, giving him a smile. "You bet, Uncle Valant!"

Machi giggled. "I will come and see you when you do!"

"You'd better," Apollo said, jokingly punching the boy's arm.

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"Oh yeah, I almost forgot..." Trucy reached into the bag at her hip, rifling through its contents. "Do you possibly know what this is, Uncle Valant?" Out came a purple-pink envelope, which she held out to the older man.

Apollo held his breath; As much as he trusted Valant wasn't a murderer... he wasn't sure he could trust the magician with an item as precious as that.

"Aha!" Valant cried, taking the object. "Why, that bears the Gramarye Seal!" As quickly as he'd said it, the man paused, face falling.

"What is it?" Machi asked, looking between Trucy and Valant in concern. "Is something wrong?"

Valant stared at the envelope in silence a moment more. "Trucy. Where... did you get this?"

Trucy shrugged, avoiding her eldest brother's disapproving stare. "Daddy gave it to me."

At that, Valant paled, jumping back in shock. "Y-y-your D-D-D-Daddy!?!?" He pressed his cane to his chest, holding the envelope in his other hand at a distance, as though it might burn him. "My partner, Zak Gramar-!?!"

"No, no, no," Trucy interrupted, shaking her head. "My other daddy, Phoenix Wright!"

Apollo found himself wanting to see how much they could have scared Valant by not correcting him, but kept that thought private.

Valant sighed, but didn't look very relieved, giving the envelope a closer look. "Why now... Why would your Lord Daddy...?!?"

"Lord Daddy...?!" Machi quietly repeated, looking confused.

"This signature upon the back; Do you recognise it?" Valant asked, showing it to Trucy. When she only shook her head, he explained, "That belongs to none other than Zak Gramarye!"

Trucy and Machi both gasped, but Apollo restrained himself to no more than a subtle widening of his eyes, keeping his gaze firmly on Valant and the purple-pink object in his hand.

"Might I be so bold," Valant continued, his other hand reaching for the envelope, "as to open it?"

"No!" Apollo didn't hesitate to snatch the item from Valant's grip, shooting him a glare. "No-one is opening it, not yet!" As Valant visibly recoiled with a grunt, Apollo quickly turned to his sister, holding the envelope towards her. "Trucy, put this away and don't take it out again until Dad says you can open it, okay?"

Trucy looked a little scared in the face of her eldest brother's intensity, but nodded, silently taking the purple-pink paper to return to her bag.

Apollo resisted a sigh of relief that that little episode was over; His suspicions of what might be in
that letter were growing stronger by the minute, and he dreaded to think of what Valant might do with its contents... Nevertheless, the man was now almost cowering in the opening of the fence they stood by, and Apollo found himself doubting Valant wanted anything more than to just confirm his fears; If Phoenix hadn't instructed so sternly that they were to leave it closed, Apollo would probably have opened it himself, just to put the elder magician out of his misery.

Shaking his head, Apollo reached into his own bag, and said in a gentler tone, "Actually, we didn't come here just to wish you luck with the show." Pulling the business card Ema gave him from his bag, he held it out for Valant to see. "We're looking for someone: A journalist we believe was here on a story, by the name of Brushel."

Valant leaned forward, examining the card. "Brushel... Brushel..." He frowned, tapping his cane against his head. "That cloying smell of mint when he smiles, yes..."

"You remember?" Machi asked.

Grimacing, Valant nodded. "A man by that name called on me just now."

"Just now!?" Apollo repeated, looking behind them. Had they walked right past their reporter as they approached the Coliseum?

"You just finished up your interview with him?" Trucy asked, deceptively bright after the earlier altercation over the envelope. "How'd it go?"

Valant was shooting a glare somewhere over the trio's shoulders. "I am to perform a big magic show, yes?" he asked. "I wanted someone to cover it... Yet, he had ears only for that incident."

Machi scratched the side of his head. "Incident? What incident?"

The teen was only ignored: "In any case, I requested that the rapacious reporter remove himself."

Huffing, Valant spun his cane around his forearm with a scowl. "So a painter has died; What of it!? It is but a footnote in the footlights compared to the magic of Gramarye!"

Apollo frowned to himself in thought; Why was this Brushel character bringing the Misham murder case to Valant? Was there some kind of connection between the two that Apollo didn't know about?

"Uncle Valant, do you know where the reporter went?" Trucy asked.

Valant fumed for a moment. "I recommended he visit that place popular with penalised perpetrators."

"Huh?" Machi muttered, confused.

"He was a rude individual," Valant continued, then turned to Apollo, holding out his hand. "Might I see that card?"

Not seeing any harm in it, Apollo shrugged and handed it over.

Immediately, Valant ripped the card in half. "He would tear apart my respectability? I will tear apart him!" Very quickly, the card was shredded into scraps of paper, almost unrecognisable had they not seen it destroyed right in front of them.

Trucy grinned, elbowing Machi. "Ooh, ooh, here it comes, Machi! Uncle Valant's big trick!"

Apollo eyed the small pile of shreds as they collected on the ground at Valant's feet. Somehow he doubted the elder magician had a spare. Valant himself only stood proudly where he was, one arm
twirling his cane while the other rested on his hip.

Machi ran a hand through his hair. "Uh... Is card... fixed?"

Trucy's face fell. "What happened to the big magic?"

Valant laughed. "Is it not more miraculous for it to stay ripped?"

'It's a good thing we didn't need that anymore,' Apollo mused. 'He must've really hated that journalist...'

"Now," Valant continued, snapping his arm out as he halted the spinning of his cane, "the time has come when I must return to make my prestidigitation preparations!" He bowed deeply. "By your leave, Miss Trucy, Sir Apollo."

Trucy waved with a bright smile. "Thanks, Uncle Valant!"

Apollo nodded in agreement. "You've been a lot of help. Good luck for your show!"

Valant winked. "Three days from now... make ready for a miracle!" With that, he pulled the gate closed and sauntered off into the car park behind the Coliseum.

Machi frowned as he watched the man through the mesh fencing. "So... where we go now? Is he okay?"

"He'll be fine," Apollo assured the teen, patting his back and turning away from the building. "He has a big show to prepare, so he's probably just a little stressed out from that."

Trucy nodded, elbowing her little brother as the trio headed back across the square at the Coliseum's entrance. "Yeah! And we've still got a reporter to find, right? It's time to pay the detention centre another visit!"

Machi thought a moment. "To see Vera?"

Apollo shook his head. "That's what this Brushel guy is doing; We're going to see Brushel himself..."

It was a short trip back to the detention centre, and they found their quarry the moment they walked in the door.

"I think I hear what you're saying. 'We're All Doing It For The Money', end quote."

"No no no no! Not at all!"

Apollo paused just inside the doorway, Trucy and Machi at his sides. Standing at the front desk, scribbling on his arm and talking to a red-faced Ernest, was a tall, unshaven man with a short mohawk, a creased shirt hanging loosely off his lean frame. He paused, fiddling with the thick glasses on his nose, and turned towards the trio at the door as he heard it close, nostrils flaring dramatically. Apollo couldn't help but notice the small shirt pocket on the man's front was stuffed full of odds and ends, including a large feather, a toothbrush, and a ruler; In fact, the only thing missing from his person was an actual notebook.
Somehow, Apollo found himself strongly reminded of the cartoonish portrait on the back of Brushel's business card.

"Oh, it's you," Ernest sighed in relief, also noticing the visitors. "Could you-?"

"Hey there!" the stranger interrupted, jumping forward with a big grin and enveloping the trio in a strong minty aura that Apollo had to fight not to choke on. "How ya doing? Who might you be?"

Apollo felt his siblings gripping his arms, and had to agree the man confronting them right now was certainly unnerving. "Uh... I'm an attorney. Apollo Wright."

"You?" the man cried, looking Apollo up and down in surprise. "You're Apollo Gramarye!? You!?"

For a moment, Apollo wasn't sure how to respond. "You... know me?"

The man scoffed. "Do I know you? Of course I know you! 'Magician-Attorney Tricks People On Stand And On Stage', end quote." He snorted in some kind of half-laugh, then returned to scribbling on his arm.

"Th-that's not true!" Apollo cried, paling. "N-not in that way!"

Trucy gingerly stepped forward, loosening her grip on Apollo's arm. "Are you a reporter by any chance?"

The man jerked back in surprise, grinning once more as he spotted the girl. "Woo! You!" He pointed his pen at her. "You're Trucy!"

Hearing her real name coming out of the stranger's mouth clearly shocked the girl a little, her hand tightening on Apollo's elbow. Regardless, she pushed through with a smile. "Am I famous?"

"Oh yeah, oh yeah!" the man laughed. "'Artemis Gramarye Hates Carrying A Bag: Puts Everything She Owns In Her Panties', end quote."

Trucy squeaked, face turning red. "That's so not true!"

Before Apollo could stop him, the man had turned to Machi, slipping his pen behind an ear. "Now you're certainly familiar," he said, not seeming to notice how the object of his examination promptly hid his face behind Apollo's shoulder. "Ooh, I know! 'Siren's Smuggler Gets Off Scott-Free, Escorted Everywhere By Attorney', end quote!"

"That's not true, either!" Apollo cried, only barely holding himself back from punching the man in his over-large nose. "And if I ever catch a whiff of your lies making it to print, I swear to god-!"

"Just hold on to your breeches, there," the man interrupted, nonchalantly waving a hand as he turned back towards the reception desk. "I'll wrap this interview up in a jiffy."

Apollo caught a glimpse of Ernest's face falling and felt a wave of pity for his former classmate.

"So, guard, I think I know what's going on here," the reporter continued to the young policeman, his pen back in hand. "'Guarding Rooms Is My Life, What Else Could I Possibly Need?', end quote."

"No!" Ernest cried, looking about as fed up as Apollo felt. "How many times do I have to tell you this?" He groaned, turning to Apollo. "Look, I've got work to do. You deal with him." Before Apollo could object, Ernest had fled into a back room.

Apollo resisted the urge to sigh. All in all, he really couldn't blame him.
Trucy was the first to regain the courage to speak, emerging from behind her brother to confront the baffled newsman. "Um... Did you come here to interview the guards?"

"Ooh wee, what a pickle!" the man sighed, turning to face them again. "'Accused Wouldn't Talk, Had To Interview Someone Or Go Plum Crazy', end quote."

"Huh," Trucy muttered.

Apollo rolled his eyes. "I should've guessed."

The man suddenly laughed. "Where're my manners!?" He held out a hand towards Apollo, which the young lawyer only reluctantly shook. "Name's Brushel. Spark Brushel. I'm Not Picky - Journalist Just Closes Eyes, Writes', end quote." The moment Apollo's hand left his, he was already scribbling on his arm again, his eyes remaining almost constantly on Apollo. "Until you've been interviewed by me, you don't know what thrilling is! 'Wild Romp Through Crossroads of Mayhem, Madness', end quote."

Although still unnerved by the reporter, Apollo tried to cheer up now he knew for certain they'd found their quarry. "I can see that."

'No wonder Valant was so upset at the reminder of this guy...'

He couldn't resist subtly stepping a little more firmly in front of Machi, who still clung fearfully to his arm.

"So, Mister Brushel," Trucy spoke up, pushing through with her usual professional cheerfulness, "you're a journalist?"

"Ah, me?" Brushel chuckled, shaking his head. "Look, let me state one thing for the record: I'm the interviewer. You understand, yeah? 'I'm The One Asking Questions Here', end quote."

Trucy's grin held fast despite her uncomprehending eyes. "Okay..."

"For instance!" Brushel continued, holding his pen high. "You think a movie director watches movies?"

Trucy only looked more confused. "Well, I think he probably does."

Brushel nodded. "Exactly! I knew you'd understand."

Apollo could have sworn he could see his sister blue-screening in that moment. Undaunted, she shook off her confusion and tried again: "So, the night of the murder, you were at Drew Studio?"

"Who? Me?" Brushel asked. "Look, let me state one thing for the record: I may look calm and collected, but I'm busy. Real busy. Always on the road. 'Journalist Always Buys One-Way Tickets, Never Looks Back', end quote."

"I can understand that philosophy," Trucy gamely replied, "but-"

"You want to know the thing about one-way tickets?" Brushel interrupted, not even seeming to notice she'd spoken. "Once you use them, they're gone. All because you have to give them to the guy at the airport."

Apollo saw Trucy's eye twitching a little at the corner. 'You've got this, Truce. Don't give up yet.'

"True enough," the young magician said. "But don't they give normal tickets away too?"

Brushel grinned, the nauseating smell of mint growing stronger. "Exactly! See? It's the same thing!"
Trucy was struggling to keep up her smile over her blank expression. "What is?"

Apollo resisted the urge to sigh.

Behind Apollo, Machi was gradually inching his way back out of hiding, watching the verbal tennis match between Brushel and his sister. Perhaps noticing her younger brother's growing bravery, Trucy gathered up her courage for one last attempt: "So, you went to do a story on Drew Misham, and he'd never had a story done about him before?"

"That's right!" Brushel announced. "Look, let me state one thing for the record here: I'm sure you're going to want to know about my source. What tipped me off to Drew? Why do the interview in the first place?"

'Why ask Valant about it when he died?' Apollo resisted adding aloud.

Trucy only meekly nodded. "Well... yes."

"Look, it's like," Brushel continued, only to pause, tapping his pen against his head. After a few moments, he grinned again. "Oh! I've got it! Say there's this burger joint with fabulous ketchup. You think the burger guy's going to tell me where he got it?"

"At the supermarket, maybe?" Trucy guessed, shrugging.

"Exactly!" Brushel cried. "See? That's what I'm talking about."

Apollo almost surprised himself at the realisation that that analogy actually made sense.

"Well, there's nothing I can talk about really," Brushel almost sheepishly added, nervously throwing a glance at the empty reception desk over his shoulder. "'Walls Have Ears, Eyes - Especially Ones In Penitentiaries', end quote."

Apollo nodded, placing a protective hand on his sister's shoulder. "Right. Guess we'll leave then."

"Ah, but since you're here," Brushel interrupted, slipping his pen back behind his ear, "might as well tell you a tidbit of news I saw. Just for the heck of it."

Trucy brightened up instantly. "Sure, tell us! Just for the heck of it!"

Apollo was suspicious, but kept quiet, figuring there was no harm in hearing the strange man out.

"I remember it like it was yesterday," Brushel said, pulling the toothbrush from his shirt pocket. "I'd seen a movie on a trip, and wandered into this burger place with amazing ketchup, when an article in a tabloid caught my eye. "'Famous Oil Painting Stolen From Art Dealer's Gallery', end quote, I believe it was."

Apollo frowned. "An oil painting...?"

Brushel snorted. "Happens every day, right? But, I thought I'd seen that painting somewhere before."

He paused, his eyes firmly on Apollo's. "A painting of a giant peach floating down a river."

It took a second or two of wondering why someone would steal a painting of a giant peach before Apollo made the connection.

Seeing the lawyer's wide eyes, Brushel nodded sagely, nostrils flaring. "'Journalist Can Smell Scoop Better Than Burgers', end quote. With that, he spun around and returned to the reception desk.
"A painting of a peach...?" Trucy muttered, confused.

Machi emerged from his hiding place, tugging on his brother's arm. "Isoveli, did he mean...?"

Apollo nodded, a determined frown on his face. "C'mon, you two; We need to talk to Ema."

[View the Court Record]
Once back at Drew Studio, Apollo let the way up the stairs, throwing open the door and storming into the crowded room. "Ema!"

A moment later, the detective peered out from behind the three paintings, smiling as she saw the three Wrights filing in. "Well, how'd it go?" she asked, emerging properly into view. "Find anything out?"

"Actually, there was one thing I wanted to check with you," Apollo sternly replied, taking a stand in the centre of the room, arms crossed. Behind him, he heard his siblings carefully latching the door shut.

Ema glanced away nervously. "Wh-what's with that scary face you're making?"

Apollo didn't let up his glare, pointing to the drawers near the door. "The painting we found behind that dresser; It was stolen, wasn't it?"

Ema winced, sheepishly fingering her bag of Snackoos. "I was hoping you wouldn't figure that out."

"So, painting was stolen?" came Machi's nervous voice from near the door.

Apollo kept his gaze on Ema, but tried to lessen the intensity. "Do you think you could tell us a bit about it?"

Ema sighed, moving towards the chair at the table. "I suppose." She lowered herself down, hand already in her Snackoos bag. "It's what you think: Drew Misham... was a forger."

A sharp intake of breath went up Apollo's nose.

"A forger?" Trucy repeated, she and Machi approaching the pair at the table. The two teens exchanged confused glances, and Apollo suspected it was for her own sake as much as Machi's that she then asked, "What exactly is a forger?"

Ema sighed, shaking her head. "Well, basically, it's someone who makes forgeries. Fakes, in other words."

Machi was examining the three displayed paintings, still looking confused. "Fakes?"

"Copies of an original," Ema elaborated. "Exact copies, so precise, you can't tell them apart."

"Well, why not just photocopy them?" Trucy asked with a shrug.

Ema paused a moment before answering. "The big problem with forgeries, is that people try to sell them as the real article. It's a crime, of course."

Machi gasped, arms held tight across his chest. "So, Drew Misham is...?"

"A criminal?" Ema filled in. "I'm afraid so. He received money to create elaborate forgeries," she
indicated the displayed paintings, "to... supplement his work in illustration, I guess."

Apollo looked away, frowning. "I see."

"Actually..." Ema leaned forward, patting the bulky machine still sitting on the table. "That's why I brought this here in the first place."

Turning back to the detective, Apollo raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

Ema grinned. "When you're trying to determine if a painting is a forgery, the rough sketch underneath can be a valuable clue."

Trucy gasped, a grin on her face. "So the rough sketch is like practise for the real thing!" She turned to Machi. "Like doing a magic trick in front of a mirror, or playing a song again and again before you go on stage!"

"But not in the case of a forgery," Ema added, one finger held in the air. "Not necessarily, anyway. You know what the finished product is going to look like, after all."

"Oh, yeah," Trucy muttered, tapping her chin in thought. "I guess you would."

"That's why I brought this," Ema continued, patting the x-ray analyser with a proud grin. "I was going to use it to see what's under the paint of the finished pieces." She shrugged, her enthusiasm fading. "Not that I really needed to go to such lengths, seeing as how one of the paintings was only half-finished anyway." She gestured to the half-finished painting, its half-visible sketch clearly different from the finished product.

Machi studied the painting curiously. "It would interesting to see, though. 'Rough sketch'."

Trucy grinned, nodding in agreement. "Yeah, kind of like what he was drawing when he thought no one was looking!"

'True,' Apollo mused. 'And potentially valuable for our case, too... ' Clearing his throat, he put on a charming smile. "So, Ema, if you were planning on doing it anyway... Mind if we have a look at them?"

Ema waved a hand with an exaggerated sigh. "Oh, fine. Fine!" Jumping to her feet, she made her way over to the trio of paintings. "Just this time, though."

Trucy and Machi cheered, dashing around the table to where the analyser sat. Before long, Ema had inserted the half-finished landscape inside, and the pair were once more at work.

Apollo couldn't resist a smile as he saw how excited his younger siblings were to play around with Ema's machine. Even Ema herself seemed to be having a good time, standing at Machi's side and occasionally guiding him with the dials, while Trucy rubbed her hands all over the screen to 'fix' whatever part of the underlying sketch each layer of canvas gave them. Feeling a little like he was missing out, Apollo moved around behind his sister, watching over her shoulder. Slowly, an image began to take shape on the screen: Black, rolling clouds formed a dramatic looking background, coming into more and more detail as the pair worked, but a large white area in the centre stood in stark contrast. A high, narrow platform of metal girders formed, atop it a silhouetted figure with long hair, holding a guitar. Strangely, as it came into focus, Apollo realised the white area was actually a halo of fire.

"That... looks pretty much complete," Apollo pointed out.
Ema gave the screen a critical look, then nodded, satisfied. "Okay, let's print this one out."

Trucy and Machi gathered around the printer as it ejected its results, Trucy snatching it up before Ema could even try. "Wow, he really blows!" the girl declared. "The finished painting isn't anything like the rough!"

"Devices like mine didn't exist until recently," Ema boasted. "He probably thought he could draw any sort of thing he wanted to for the rough."

Machi gave her a curious look. "What do you mean?"

"Well, in the past, you could only analyse the composition of a rough sketch," Ema explained. "In other words, the traces of charcoal between paint and canvas. So, you could tell if there had been a rough sketch, but not what it looked like."

"Ah, I think I follow you," Apollo replied, pressing a finger to his forehead. "So, in essence, it wouldn't matter what was underneath the finished painting."

Ema nodded. "Some pros would actually paint out a rough sketch entirely, then do a completely new painting on top of that."

Trucy frowned at the image of the rough sketch in her hands. "So Mister Misham was drawing whatever he wanted before painting over them...?"

"Possibly," Ema replied. "Is there a problem with that?"

The girl looked up, first at the vaguely uncomfortable Machi, then to the solemn Apollo. "Um..."

Apollo shook his head; Undoubtedly his younger siblings had noticed the similarity between the picture and the painful incident that had brought them together. "Could we look at one of the other paintings, Ema?"

Although she seemed confused, Ema nodded. "Sure." She opened the machine to remove the unfinished landscape, shooting Apollo a smirk over her shoulder. "You like this detection stuff, don't you?" Chuckling, she moved to replace the canvas on its stand.

Trucy handed the paper she was holding to Apollo. "It's just a coincidence," she said, to both of her brothers.

Apollo forced a smile. "Sure."

Machi reluctantly nodded.

Before long, Ema had placed the second painting, the acrylic seascape, into the machine and closed the lid, and the two teenagers returned to their posts. While Machi turned the dial to scroll through the layers of paint and charcoal, Trucy rubbed at the larger screen to 'fix' the emerging image; Looking over her shoulder, Apollo gradually saw the outline of a pointed roof taking shape against a clear sky, the black blobs around it forming into trees. The house-like structure in the centre soon attracted a tall flag at its back and two wheels at its sides, a skeletal figure at its front pulling on a tow-bar. In the foreground, a single bowl rolled towards a lone footprint in the mud.

Apollo felt himself go pale.

"It's done!" Trucy cheerfully announced.
"Then let's print it out," Ema replied with a smile, pressing a button and waiting at the printer end of the machine.

Machi noticed Apollo's silence with a worried look. "Isoveli?" Apollo could only bite his lip, watching Trucy retrieve the printed page from Ema.

Trucy examined the image for a moment, then skipped over to show it to her brothers. "Look, this one's nothing like...!" She paused, frowning. "Polly, you okay?"

Taking the paper, Apollo turned to Ema. "And can we look at the last one, too?"

"Fine by me," Ema said with a shrug, already retrieving the seascape from the machine. "Knock yourself out."

With the final painting, the abstract portrait, in place, Trucy and Machi got back to work. Apollo stood behind his sister, the first two rough sketches clutched firmly in his hands as he stared at the larger screen. This time, the focus of the image took shape quickly: A spread of five playing cards, two of them aces. In the gloom behind them, a table, a glass bottle, and a figure in shadow, indistinct apart from a hat and the cards in his hand.

Painfully aware of his two younger siblings, Apollo fought not to immediately demand an explanation, standing back as Trucy once more cheerfully announced her reconstructed image was complete. She and Ema waited for the image to print, but Machi hesitated, his eyes watching Apollo with concern. Apollo himself felt in too much of a daze to try and reassure the teen, fighting to keep himself calm until suddenly he realised Trucy was standing in front of him, holding out the paper and giving him a concerned look.

"Polly, are you sure you're okay?"

Ema was watching from a distance, one eyebrow raised. "You're white as a sheet. What's going on?"

Still fighting to keep himself calm, Apollo took the print-out of the final sketch from his sister, waving it at Ema with a stern glare. "What the heck is this?"

The detective only looked confused. "It's the rough sketch of the final painting; What about it?"

"What about it!?" Apollo repeated in disbelief, then turned to his sister. "Trucy, you noticed, didn't you?"

Trucy slowly shook her head, a little scared. "N-noticed what?"

Resisting the urge to scream, Apollo reshuffled the papers in his hand, showing off the first. "Okay, we all noticed this one is reminiscent of when Gavin's guitar caught fire at the concert, right?"

Machi winced a little as he nodded. Trucy frowned, deep in thought.

Apollo switched to the second sheet. "And this one, a dead man pulling a noodle stand in a park; Remind you of anything, Truce? Ema?"

Ema's eyes widened. "Wait..."

Trucy remained silent, her head down-turned to hide her face behind the brim of her hat.

"And this one!" Now on a roll, Apollo held up the third and final sheet of paper. "This is clearly the murder over a poker game at the Borscht Bowl Club, from back in April! These are my cases, all
three of them!"

Machi gasped. "Th-they are!?!"

Ema shook her head in disbelief. "But... what could it mean? How could he have painted those things... and why?!"

"That's what I want to know!" Apollo cried, waving the three papers in his hand. "Has this guy been watching me!? There's no possible way this is just a co-incidence!"

"Oh!" Ema gasped, turning to Apollo with an inquisitive gaze. "Is Drew Misham... your real father?"

Apollo fought not to be offended at that question, growling, "My 'real' father is Phoenix Wright. And in what world is me being related to Misham even remotely possible?"

Ema sheepishly shrugged, stepping back. "S-sorry."

Trucy still stood silently, having not moved at all since making the connection between the three sketches. "Polly..."

The single, quiet word from his sister was enough to reign in Apollo's rage. Ema clearly didn't know what was going on, and neither did his young siblings; It was pointless getting mad at them. Despite seemingly-everyone's best efforts to stall them, they'd discovered quite a lot today... none of it really helpful to his case, but enough that he could at least prepare for whatever he'd face in court tomorrow. There was nothing left to look into, nothing to do except prepare his case for trial. Sighing, he folded up the papers in his hand and shoved them in his bag. "Machi, Truce... I think we're done for today. Let's go home, huh?"

Machi gave Trucy a worried look and meekly nodded. Trucy only wordlessly followed her brothers out of the room.

View the Court Record
Apollo puzzled over Drew Misham the entire way home. This painter, a man moonlighting as a professional forger, had been *spying* on him, drawing pictures based on his cases? Was he some kind of crazed stalker like that university student obsessed with Trucy's Magic Panties had been? They'd seen an old picture of him, and he didn't look familiar from their audience, but what if that was only because he'd grown older since then? The name 'Misham' was still bugging Apollo as something vaguely familiar, but he couldn't place it at all... Where had he heard it before? Why had Brushel immediately gone to ask Valant about Zak's disappearance when Misham died? Why had Phoenix given them an envelope with Zak's signature and the Gramarye Seal but forbidden them to open it?

... Was this why Phoenix chose this case for the Jurist Trial?

All three Wrights filed silently into the agency's office as they arrived, finding it empty.

"Daddy! Luke!" Trucy called, hands cupped around her mouth. "Are you here?"

Machi shook his head. "I not think they are."

Apollo made a beeline for Phoenix's desk. "Dad'll be busy with preparations for the trial," he said, eyes on the drawers behind it. "Luke... well, he'll be busy with whatever job it is Dad gave him."

The younger pair exchanged a worried look. "Polly, are you still upset about those paintings?"

Apollo sighed and leaned against the edge of the desk, his back to his siblings. "It's not just that. Dad chose this case for a reason. Something big is going on here, bigger than just a simple murder."

There was a short silence. Finally, Machi stepped forward. "Um... Maybe I miss something, but... I don't understand, um, *everything*. There... are so many problems, i-it is hard to keep track."

"Yeah, it's really confusing," Trucy agreed, arms crossed. "Like you said, just... *everything* about today. Nothing's making sense."

Turning to face the pair, Apollo sat on the edge of Phoenix's desk. "That's true. First Dad takes you two out of school for no apparent reason, then he dumps the Jurist Trial on us, runs off with Luke to do god-knows-what, gives Trucy a mysterious envelope we're not allowed to open..." Shaking his head, he pressed a hand to his face. "And that's not even getting into this case..."

"So this Drew Misham guy is a painter, right?" Trucy said. "He forges paintings on the side, and he's real secretive... then that reporter guy comes along and gets him to agree to an interview."

Machi nodded. "And Mister Misham has daughter, Vera. She not know reporter there, and brings coffee that has poison on mug."

"And then he dies," Apollo picked up with a frown. "And Brushel goes to ask Valant about it for
some reason... and, equally strangely, all of Misham's original sketches were of my cases." He glared out the window. "This case ties to us, as both Wrights and Gramaryes, and Dad knows that."

Trucy shook her head. "Nah. I bet it's just a co-incidence." She gave her older brother a bright smile. "That Brushel guy was probably asking everyone about his big scoop, and maybe Mister Misham was a fan of our show! That'd explain it, huh?"

Apollo thought a moment more, then silently turned and knelt down behind the desk; Tucked away in the drawers down here was where they kept the agency's case-files, from Mia's first trial after opening the Law Office to Apollo's defence of Machi back in July. Over the years, he'd read through all of the older cases multiple times, and knew his own three by heart... but there was one Apollo had studied more than the rest, and it was this one he searched for now, paging through the labels that stuck out near the very front of the drawer.

Somewhere behind him, Trucy huffed. "He's not even listening to me," she decided. "Well Machi, it's obvious Vera didn't do it, right?"

"Right," Machi replied.

His hands in the drawer, Apollo paused, eyeing a suspicious gap between two files labelled "FEB '19" and "APR '26". 'Wait... What the...?' Spinning on his heels, he pulled open the desk drawers to search there.

"So, therefore, it must've been the reporter!" Trucy continued. "There wasn't anyone else there, after all!"

Machi hummed in thought. "But detective said reporter didn't go near coffee."

Trucy sighed. "Oh yeah... Well... It can't have been Vera. She would never have killed her dad. She would never have killed anyone."

Apollo frowned as he came up with nothing from his investigation of the drawers. Standing up, he turned his attention to the bookcase behind the desk. "Where the hell is it!?"

The two teens paused, their attention back on their elder brother. "Polly?" Trucy called.

"He's deliberately hidden it!" Apollo cried, running his hands fruitlessly along the bent spines of the aging law books. "He knows it's related to this murder and he's taken it away to make my job even harder!"

"I-isoveli?" Machi stuttered, edging closer to Trucy. "What's the matter?"

Although he felt he was at the end of his rope, Apollo fought to calm down, not wanting to scare his siblings. "It's..." He sighed, running a hand through his hair. "One of Dad's case-files is missing."

Trucy blinked in surprise. "Really?" Without waiting for an answer, she dashed around the desk and took a peek in the drawer that Apollo had left open. "Huh. That's weird." She shrugged, giving her brothers a grin. "It doesn't really matter anyway; You've got a new one to write, Polly!"

Apollo glared at her for a moment before pressing a hand to his face, all his pent-up rage of the day's injustices fading away. "Yeah... Yeah, I do." Sighing, he leaned against the bookcase behind him. 'No point getting worked up about it now. I'll ask Dad about the missing file when he gets back."

"Good," Trucy replied with a nod, then skipped over, took Apollo's hand, and dragged him over to Machi. "Now, I've been thinking..."
At that, Apollo couldn't resist a smirk, obediently following his sister across the room. "Now now Artemis, we all know what happens when you think."

Machi giggled, hiding behind a hand.

Trucy just stuck her tongue out at her eldest brother and continued, "Luke's not around to help you out in court, and Daddy's busy too... So, y'know," she shrugged, "since me and Machi don't have school tomorrow, maybe we could help you out!"

At that, Machi gasped, turning to Apollo. "Oh, yes, I would love to help!"

"See?" Trucy replied, grinning as though it was decided already.

Apollo wasn't sure how to respond for a moment, seeing his siblings' excited grins. "I... uh..." He shook his head, then sighed; As much as he hated the idea of taking his youngest siblings into court with him, it was true he didn't have anyone else to turn to... and being his assistant in court was something Trucy had been wanting to do for many months now. "I... guess there's no reason to turn you down."

Before he could say anything else, Trucy tossed her hat into the air and cheered, already bounding around the room.

Apollo turned to his younger brother, who was laughing at their sister's antics. "Will you be okay with that, Machi? Going into a courtroom again?"

Machi frowned, puzzled for a moment, then realised the reason behind his brother's question and gave him a wide smile. "I will be okay," he said. "You will be there to look after me, Isoveli."

Apollo couldn't help a fond look hearing that. He ruffled his brother's hair with a smile, opening his mouth to reply...

... Only for Trucy to slam into them both with a tight hug. "We'll be the best helpers you ever had!" she cried. "That courtroom'll never know what hit it when we take the stage!"

"This isn't the Wonder Bar," Apollo gently reminded her, unable to shake off the glow of her enthusiasm. "You two will have to listen to me, okay? I'm the lawyer, so I'll be the one doing the talking; You two can talk to me, but otherwise you have to keep quiet."

Machi obediently nodded, but Trucy scowled. "Luke gets to talk!" she pointed out.

"Only when he has to," Apollo replied. "Luke talks if he knows more about the subject than I do, and I'm sure even he agrees he probably speaks up more than he should. "The incident where he lost his temper at Herr Diva comes to mind..." "Unless you have expertise in something I'm not aware of, I'm expecting you to do what Luke normally does and talk only to me. Do you understand?"

Trucy mused over that tidbit for a moment before reluctantly nodding in agreement. "Okay, I'll be quiet..."

Apollo grinned, ruffling his sister's hair. "Thanks, Truce." The teen giggled, and Apollo gestured to the sofas. "Now, why don't you two settle down and relax? I've got a case to prepare for court, and I'll need my two assistants rested and alert to help me out."

"We will do best to help tomorrow!" Machi promised, fists held up in determination.

"Yeah!" Trucy agreed. "You can count on us, Polly!"
The hours passed in a bit of a blur, and before Apollo knew it, his and Trucy's nightly act at the Wonder Bar was over and he was heading down the final stretch to the front door of his apartment. Phoenix had failed to reappear at the Agency. None of them had heard a peep from Luke. Trucy had even tried calling Maya at one point, but Maya had regretfully told them she, Pearl and Iris were all very busy this week and would call them back when they were able... which clearly wasn't going to be today. He couldn't help but think they were facing this case completely alone, and at even more of a disadvantage than had become usual.

Apollo noted with some surprise that there was no sign of Clay in the living room as he entered, with everything shut off and closed up for the night already. His phone confirmed his suspicion it was only eight twenty. Even when they'd been at college, Clay had never gone to bed sooner than midnight, no matter how early the next day's class was; It was a bad habit that he'd started when they were at Turner's, but, without the everpresent eye of Nanny K outside their doors, Clay's night-owl tendencies had only gotten worse over the years. Here at the end of a very confusing day where everyone was acting oddly already, that this unnatural act followed Clay's strange phone call the previous night only heightened Apollo's fears; He regretted more than ever that Luke had ultimately been unavailable to question their friend as he'd offered.

Tugging the brim of his top hat nervously, Apollo locked the front door behind him and ventured inside towards the hallway, finding Clay's bedroom door closed. He only briefly allowed himself relief as he noted the ring of light around its edges, and rapped his gloved knuckles against the painted wood. "Clay? You alright?"

There was a pause, then the door opened a crack, just enough for Apollo's room-mate to show his grinning face and characteristic cracked visor. "Yo, dude! What is it?"

Apollo gave his friend an incredulous look. "'What is it'!? It's not even nine and you're hiding away in your room!"

Clay snorted, waving off Apollo's concerns. "Did you forget? I've got something very important on tomorrow that I need to be ready for... hence me turning in a little early."

Belatedly, Apollo remembered Clay's call being about something on Thursday - tomorrow - and his eyes narrowed. "Are you going to tell me what it is?"

"Course not, it's a secret!" Clay laughed, and he retreated into his room. "I might not see you tomorrow, so later, 'Pollo!" With that, he closed the door.

Apollo was left staring at the painted wood in the dim light of the apartment. "I've got something important on tomorrow, too," he muttered dejectedly, then turned and headed in to his own room.

This was going to be a very tough week.
A good night's rest had not improved Apollo's outlook on the remainder of his week.

Clay had been awake far earlier than usual, and in smart-ish clothes that were very much not the blue jumpsuit and jacket he normally wore to work at the Space Center. He had given Apollo a grin and a wave before charging out the door; Whatever he was up to, he still refused to say.

As Apollo headed out, a text arrived from Luke: "Good luck on your trial today! I wish I could help you, but I'm still very busy. I know you'll do just fine, though." Similar messages of luck had come to him over the online forum, with Maggey and Adrian replying astonishingly fast with promises to watch from the gallery (although they added they would be unable to meet up with anyone until after the trial was over); Everyone else had too short notice to make it, though there were offers to clear their schedules if the trial extended to two or even three days. Of Pearl, there had been no answer, and Apollo could only guess she was still 'busy' with Maya and Iris... and probably had school to attend to boot.

'And speaking of school-goers...' Apollo found Trucy and Machi waiting for him outside the courthouse; Trucy, perhaps to imitate her eldest brother, was in her regular magician's outfit only up to the diamond earring, the blue top hat she normally wore with pride conspicuously missing. Next to her was Machi, out of the casual wear Phoenix had bought for him after he moved in, and not in his school uniform either; No, Machi was wearing his white frilly outfit from the concert back in July, replacing the blue heels and sunglasses with his black school shoes and a nervous look. They both perked up as they spotted their brother approaching, Trucy waving a gloved hand with a wide grin.

"Hey Polly!"

Apollo hesitantly waved back, watching Machi with a raised eyebrow. "I thought you said that outfit was uncomfortable."

"It is," Machi replied, one hand fiddling with the frills on his sleeves. "I not wear heels, though."

"We have to look good for our performance in court today!" Trucy argued, then crossed her arms to pout at her younger brother. "'Cept Machi didn't want to. And his shoes don't go with his outfit!"

"I not wear heels," Machi insisted, looking annoyed. "I wear this make you happy, but I not wear heels!"

Apollo resisted the urge to laugh. "Well, there's no time to go back and change anyway," he told the pair. "Let's go inside and find our lobby."

A few minutes later, the trio filed into Defendant Lobby Number Six, where they ended up sitting on the couch, Apollo going over his case one final time while Trucy and Machi idly watched over his shoulders.

"By the way, did either of you see Dad yesterday or today?" Apollo casually asked.
The younger pair shook their heads. "Haven't seen him at all," Trucy replied.

Apollo hid his disappointment behind a firmer study of his case-file.

It didn't take long for the bailiffs to arrive, escorting Vera into the room. She still clutched her sketchbook tight in her arms, one fist held tight around what looked like a short pencil, and she stared at the three Wrights with wide eyes, only a handful of steps away from the door.

Apollo quickly stood up, slipping his case-file into his bag. "Good morning." At his sides, Trucy and Machi also got to their feet, though they stuck close to their eldest brother.

Vera continued to stare, unmoving.

Trucy cleared her throat, then skipped around the table, closer to where the young woman stood. "So! You're Vera, right? I'm Trucy!" She gestured behind her. "And these are my brothers, Apollo and Machi! We're the Wrights; That's 'Wright' with a 'W', but without an 'e'... right?"

Machi rushed over to rescue his sister from her quickly floundering monologue. "It is nice to meet you, Vera," he added. "I am not so good at English, but you can trust our big brother Apollo to find truth of murder... And, Trucy and I help you too, okay?"

Trucy nodded. "We're on your side," she said. "You can tell us anything!"

Apollo slowly rounded the table, standing behind his siblings as he watched their client. Vera seemed to be thinking over what they had told her, fingers fiddling with the pencil in her hand... and, finally, she gave them a small nod and said, "Good morning."

Machi broke out into a wide grin. "Hello!" he enthusiastically replied.

Apollo bit back giggles as he rested a hand on his brother's shoulder, pulling him back a little. "You said that already, Machi." Mostly he was just thankful they seemed to have convinced Vera to talk... The trick now would be to keep her comfortable enough with them that it was no longer an issue, and he and Trucy had enough experience doing that on stage that he didn't think it would be a major problem.

Trucy tapped her chin thoughtfully as she watched the young woman. "Hmm, not bad, not bad. But I think you'd do better with a little smile, you know?" She grinned, fanning her hands next to her face as though to show off her teeth, demonstrating what to do. "You're so pretty! You need to sell yourself!"

"Sell yourself?" Machi repeated, confused. "As in, promote? In courtroom?"

"Yes, 'in courtroom'," Apollo replied with a smile. "In fact, it's more important than ever today."

Vera seemed to think on their words for a few moments, then flipped open her sketchbook and drew something very quickly on a blank page. As she flipped it around to show them, Apollo noted with some surprise that it was a large smiley face, that even sported a 'Misham' signature in the corner. Her own face as expressionless as always, Vera said, "Thank you for taking my case."

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The Wrights weren't quite sure how to respond to that, staring in shock at the young woman's sketchbook. Apollo was the first to recover, and gave her an encouraging grin. "Well, that wasn't quite what Trucy meant, but it's still a pretty smile! And, hey, no thanks necessary! We'll figure out what happened and get you out of here as soon as we can."

Vera stared back at him for a few moments before she shoved her sketchbook under an arm and
reached into the pocket of her overalls. Out came a small crystalline bottle of pink nail polish, and Vera was quick to unscrew the hand-shaped bottle cap and use the brush within to begin painting the ends of her fingers.

Apollo tried not to look as put off as he felt. *What is it with her and this nail po-... Wait... Isn't that the same kind of bottle that...?*

"That's great, really!" Trucy was telling Vera. "It's so cultured!"

Machi nodded. "Very pretty."

Vera looked between them for a moment, then placed the brush back in its bottle, using her free hand to hold up her sketchbook with the smiling face on it. "Want to try?"

Trucy gasped, excited. "Really!?"

"Th-that is... very kind of you!" Machi agreed.

As Apollo watched, Vera tucked the sketchbook back under her arm, and within moments was painting Machi's nails. Trucy hurriedly pulled off her gloves to join in, and the siblings were soon excitedly showing off the progression of shiny pink polish across their hands. Apollo stayed back from it all, leaving the three to their fun (at least, he assumed Vera was having fun...). *There's more than one person in the world who buys that kind of nail polish,' he reassured himself. *I'll just leave those three to be friends with each other. In the meantime... I have a case to prove.*

Enough time had passed when the bailiffs summoned them to Courtroom Number Three that the pink polish covering the younger Wrights' nails had dried, and Trucy forced herself to stop admiring them and pull on her gloves once more. They left Vera in the waiting room with their further assurances they would do everything they could, and filed through into the court itself. Apollo didn't miss how Machi drifted ever closer once they entered that wide expanse, and he couldn't blame the teen for being nervous after what he had gone through the last time he was in a courtroom.

As always, Apollo readied himself behind the defence bench. Machi took up a position on his right, where Luke had always stood for Apollo's previous trials, while Trucy bounced excitedly at his left, where she typically placed herself during their shows. Apollo paused as his Court Record connected to the network, giving both his siblings a careful look. "Either of you can still sit this out if you want," he offered, more for the nervous Machi than Trucy. "I'm sure Vera would appreciate having a friend with her."

"No way!" Trucy cried, nodding decisively. "We're helping you, and you can't stop us!"

Machi thought a moment, then also gave Apollo a decisive nod. "I will stay. I want to help, Isoveli."

Apollo smiled. "Thanks."

Machi's attention was suddenly grabbed by something across the room, and he pointed with wide eyes. "Th-that is... That is prosecutor! From other trial!"

"Ooh, yeah!" Trucy agreed. "Are we seriously facing Prosecutor Gavin again?"
Apollo snorted, watching the man in question casually stride behind the prosecutor's bench, attention on his own Court Record as he undoubtedly busied himself connecting it to the network. "Yeah, didn't you realise earlier? Ema's assigned to him, remember?"

Machi took this new information in his stride, but Trucy sighed, saying, "But I thought Daddy was controlling everything about this trial? Doesn't he not like Mister Gavin? Don't you not like him?"

"Of course I don't like him," Apollo replied, huffing a bit. "Personally, I'd prefer not to be facing him again either, but at least this is a foe we know rather than one we don't."

Trucy just pouted. "Daddy could have got Uncle Edgeworth to face us," she pointed out. "He's a prosecutor."

At that, Apollo paused, frowning. "Well... Dad was going to put me against Uncle Edgeworth," he admitted. "But, I guess he was just too busy today to do it in the end."

Trucy mused over this information. "That's too bad."

Suddenly Machi pressed against Apollo's side, and the elder Wright turned to his brother with a concerned look, asking, "Machi?" The boy said nothing, gazing fearfully across the room, and Apollo looked up to see what had scared the young pianist: Klavier had finished setting up his tablet computer, and was watching the Wrights with a slight frown. Noticing Apollo's attention on him, the prosecutor raised a questioning brow, eyes flicking to Machi. Apollo only glared in return. 'Mind your own damn business, Herr Diva.'

Trucy had her eyes on the raised gallery above, watching the crowds filing in. "Where's the jury?"

"They'll be in another room," Apollo explained, tearing his eyes away from Klavier. "They're going to watch the trial through the cameras."

"Cameras?" Machi repeated, looking around the room. "But I not see any cameras..."

Trucy squeaked, pointing above the double doors at the back of the courtroom. "Look, there are two above the door!"

Sure enough, there were a pair of small cameras mounted above the door frame, one pointed straight ahead and the other tilted upwards.

"All the way over there?" Machi asked.

Apollo chuckled, turning his attention to the judge's podium opposite. "There's the last one," he said, pointing to a small black hemisphere mounted at eye-level. "That's for the witness stand, and maybe the benches as well; The other two are for the judge and probably a general overview of the courtroom." He gave them both a teasing grin. "Did you not notice them before? Those cameras have always been there."

Trucy stuck her tongue out at him. "We didn't even know there were cameras here before, Polly!" She paused, frowning in confusion. "Actually, why are there already cameras set up?"

Apollo shrugged. "Dunno. They generally aren't used, as far as I know." Although he didn't point it out to his siblings, he noticed with a glance at their bench that the tiny microphone set up in a corner was also unchanged; It was a little strange to think that it, along with the similar hidden pieces of equipment on the witness stand and judge's podium, was potentially already recording their discussion. He would have to keep the extra audience in mind for his 'performance' today.
Machi stared at the nearest camera. "Are cameras on?"

Apollo grinned. "Probably. Wanna give the jurists a wave?"

Machi shook his head, shrinking back.

"Ooh, maybe we could do a trick for them!" Trucy suggested. "They must be bored stiff waiting for the trial to start!"

"No, Truce," Apollo firmly told her. "No magic in the courtroom." He paused. "Unless absolutely necessary."

Trucy huffed. "You do magic all the time..."

'That's different; I'm using it to present evidence,' Apollo replied, but kept the thought in his head so as not to encourage her. "Let's wait to perform for an invisible audience another time, huh?"

Above them, the babble of the gallery quietened; The judge had entered the courtroom.

View the Court Record
The judge banged his gavel as he settled atop his podium. "Well, we will now... er..." He coughed, clearing his throat, and his eyes flitted around the room nervously. "Begin the, er, trial of... V-v-v-... Vera Misham!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow.

"Is judge okay?" Machi whispered, voicing their thoughts.

"Yeah, his voice is all raspy," Trucy agreed. "Like you when you used to overdo your Chords of Steel, Polly!"

Apollo quickly shushed her.

Above, the judge cleared his throat. "The repercussions of today's trial will, most likely, be felt for a long time." He took a deep breath. "And may, indeed, alter our legal system forever."

'If it goes well,' Apollo mentally added.

Opposite them, Klavier nodded. "Today is a test of the Jurist System," he announced for the gallery, "and the first step toward a new order in our courts."

"Daddy's secret mission!" Trucy quietly reminded her brothers.

"The jurists will function like a jury," Klavier continued. "It is hoped their inclusion will help the courts to better reflect the people's will." The gallery began to mutter amongst themselves, so Klavier held up a hand, instantly silencing them. "Three closed-circuit cameras watch this courtroom at all times. The jurists have access to everything that transpires." Lowering his hand, he curled it into a fist and slammed it against the wall at his back, shooting a stern look at the camera on the judge's podium. "Jurists! Judge well, and judge cool."

"N-now see here, Prosecutor Gavin!" the judge complained. "I-I was going to say that!"

Klavier gave the old man an easy grin. "Ah, my apologies, Herr Judge."

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'Same old Herr Diva.'

Above, the judge cleared his throat, turning his focus to the cameras on the wall opposite him. "Jurists! Today, er..." He shook his head, then tried again. "Judge today's trial 'coolly', if you would be so kind." He nodded, satisfied with the borrowed wording, then turned to Klavier. "Very well, Prosecutor Gavin. The details of the case, if you would."

Klavier brushed at his fringe, a stern expression on his face. "The victim is the painter Drew Misham. He was killed in his own studio. His coffee... was poisoned. By whom, you ask?" He pointed towards the waiting room behind the defence bench. "By none other than the defendant, Vera Misham."
Apollo slammed his fists on his bench. "Objection! There wasn't any poison in the coffee!"

Klavier only smirked. "Achtung, someone has been doing their homework!" He chuckled. "Indeed, poison was not present in the coffee... but on the mug itself."

"The mug...?" the judge repeated, looking through files. After a moment, he paused. "Ah, residue was found on the rim, I see."

"The autopsy report describes the manner of our victim's death," Klavier continued, a hand at his computer as he briefly tossed the file up on the holograms.

The judge nodded. "The court accepts this as evidence."

Apollo saw the file download to his Court Record, and gave it a quick look; Aside from a more recent photo of Misham, all he learned that was new was that the man had been fifty-two and had died between nine and nine-thirty at night.

The judge hummed as he examined his own copy of the file. "According to this report, the victim's death was caused by 'atroquinine' poisoning."

Klavier nodded. "A chemical compound that does not occur naturally. Lethal dosage is a mere point-zero-zero-two milligrams." He flicked at his hair, thoughtful. "A touch of atroquinine in the body is the touch of the Reaper's scythe."

Machi shivered. "That is such tiny amount," he pointed out. "Almost nothing."

The judge hummed in thought. "Very well, Prosecutor Gavin. You may present your witness."

Klavier grinned. "I have for you today a simple man, for a simple case... A man who witnessed the murder in its entirety." He gestured to the witness' waiting room, where a bailiff promptly emerged, doing her best to escort the fidgety Brushel through to the witness stand. Once he was in place, scribbling on his arm, the woman promptly fled.

'A simple man, yes,' Apollo mused. 'A simple case, though? The jury's still out on that.'

Klavier brushed at his hair proudly. "The witness will state his name and occupation."

Brushel jumped, jamming his pen back into his shirt pocket. "Ah! Right!" He grinned, and the strong mint smell instantly permeated the courtroom. "Well, for starters, my name's Spark Brushel! My job is... a lone observer of the world!"

"In other words, a freelance journalist," Apollo explained, fighting not to choke on the minty aura.

The man only cleared his throat in response. "If you don't mind, I'd like to state something here for the record."

The judge raised an eyebrow. "Yes, Mister Brushel?"

"I dislike conclusions, specifically, the 'jumping to' aspect of conclusions," Brushel explained, pulling the toothbrush from his pocket and tapping it against his head. "'Preconceptions Make Park Sandbox of Endless Desert Waste', end quote."

Now Apollo was fighting not to roll his eyes. "But you are a journalist. You said so yourself yesterday."

Brushel paused. "Well, that's true, yes," he admitted, before hurriedly continuing with an excited
grin, nostrils flaring, "But you must understand, I stand before you today a man with a dream! I'm offering you my testimony in exchange for exclusive rights to the story! 'Scoop Turns Mister Brushel Into That Mister Brushel!', end quote."

The courtroom stared at him in silence for several moments.

"Let's hear your testimony then, shall we?" the judge asked, and lightly banged his gavel.

Brushel jumped with a sharp cry, then fidgeted for a moment cleaning his glasses with his toothbrush. Once he was satisfied, he fixed the courtroom with another nauseating grin. "I visited the studio around nine o'clock that night to do the interview. The first outsider to enter the atelier! 'Journalistic History Made', end quote!" He chuckled proudly. "His daughter brought us coffee right after we started... And you know what happened next: 'Star Falls!', end quote. No one else entered the room besides her the whole time."

The judge hummed in thought. "That does sound like a simple case. Unless..." He fixed a stern glare on Brushel, "you were the one who poisoned him!"

Brushel shrieked, jumping on the spot and flailing his arms wildly. "W-w-w-what are you saying!?" he spat out in flurry of sound. "Judge!"

The judge hid a smile, clearing his throat. "Need I remind you, the cameras are rolling today." The smile grew. "I felt the need to be a bit dramatic."

Apollo resisted the urge to laugh; At his sides, his siblings were hiding giggles of their own.

Klavier shook his head, turning his attention to the witness. "You didn't do it, did you?"

Brushel madly shook his head. "M-m-m-m-medaotinglikethat!?" he shrieked, before getting enough of a hold of himself to slow down, laughing nervously. "Come on! That's like... 'Newsmaker Making the News', end quote. Or even 'Contemporary Witch-Hunt', end quote!" He took a deep breath, eyes still wide, before another idea occurred to him: "I know! 'Wild Accusations Rock Courtroom', end quote."

Klavier laughed. "'Rock', indeed."

"Prosecutor Gavin sure looks like he's having fun," Trucy pointed out.

"I'm so happy for him," Apollo muttered, rolling his eyes. 'At least the judge's joke was actually funny.'

"You not look happy," Machi pointed out.

Apollo shushed him.

"Very well, Mister Wright," the judge announced, turning to the defence bench, "your cross-examination, please."

Nodding, Apollo loaded up the updating transcript on his Court Record. "Mister Brushel, you said you went to the studio at nine that night," he said. "Isn't that a little late for an interview?"

Brushel shrugged. "If the great painter Drew Misham says 'come at nine', believe you me, I go at nine! The first, and as it turned out, last interview with such a prolific painter!"

Apollo crossed his arms, musing over the information. "And you were the first reporter ever in 'Drew
"Studio'?"

The man nodded eagerly. "Posterity will look back on that night as a turning point in journalistic history! 'A Basically Insignificant Step For All Mankind, But a Giant Step For That Brushel Guy', end quote."

Klavier smirked. "If no one on the outside ever had access to the studio, then it would serve to reason that the deed was done by an 'insider'."

Shooting the prosecutor a glare, Apollo continued to Brushel, "And you can say for sure no one but Vera entered the room the whole time?"

"For sure?" Brushel repeated. "Sure! I'm sure." He snorted, the combination of large nose and large grin making the stench of mint stronger. "Drew Studio isn't a big place, kiddo. I'd know it if someone else had come in!"

"What if they had been hiding in there from before!?" Apollo pressed.

Immediately an "Objection!" rang from across the room. "Even if someone had been hiding in the studio, they hardly could have poisoned that mug without anyone noticing," Klavier pointed out, still giving the Wrights that infuriatingly smug smile that so made Apollo want to punch his lights out.

"You think I, Spark Brushel, would miss something as obvious as that?" Brushel picked up, huffing a little. "Nooooo way."

Apollo sighed, deciding to leave that line of questioning alone. "Alright then, you said Vera took out coffee after you started. Would you mind being a little more specific?"

Brushel whistled proudly. "Ooowee, let me tell you, I enjoy a cuppa! In fact, it all began when I was in third grade, no wait, fourth grade-"

"That's not what I meant!" Apollo interrupted, frantically waving an arm at the man to stop. 'Why do all my witnesses either never shut up or never open up at all!?'

Klavier chuckled. "I believe I know what Herr Forehead is driving at: This coffee the victim was served... Did anyone other than the victim touch it?"

Apollo nodded, his frustration only growing that it had to be Klavier who bailed him out. "Right, that."

Brushel scoffed, waving his toothbrush disapprovingly. "Well, now, if you've got a question to ask, you'd best straight up ask it! That's what I tell all the new recruits. Several times, if necessary. 'Write for a grade-schooler', that's my motto." He paused, eyes widening. "W-which isn't to say I can only write grade school level stuff, mind you-"

Apollo cut him off with a slam of his bench. "Who touched the coffee!?"

"Dunno," Brushel replied with a shrug. "I was in the back, looking at the studio's equipment, when she served it."

Apollo resisted the urge to sigh. He felt Machi's hand gently patting his back in sympathy.

"And what happened next?" Klavier asked. "I believe you put it as 'Star Falls', correct?"

Trucy giggled, not bothering to be quiet. "That sounds like an old telegram! 'Send Money, Over'!"
Apollo shot his sister a warning glare.

"Zowie!" Brushel cried. "You don't know? That's like a journalism code word. An important personage passes away... a star falls. Get it?"

"But there's no gravity in space, not like that," Trucy pointed out. "Stars don't 'fall', not really."

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'Mental note: Tell Trucy off once trial is over. Also, kill Clay.' "Does this matter?"

Brushel thought a moment, then replaced the toothbrush in his hand with the pen from his pocket. "Hoo boy, this is good stuff, good stuff!" He began tapping it against his arm. "How about 'Star Breaks'... Nah, lacks punch. I know, I know: 'Star Dies'! Nah, lacks imagination." He frowned. "Of course, you could go with 'Drew Dies'. Straight, to the point." He grinned again. "I like it." He began scribbling on his arm.

Machi tapped Apollo's arm. "Was there point to that question?"

Apollo couldn't answer; He was too irritated at Trucy to remember whatever the last question had even been. 'Time to come up with something a little more substantial...' "Hold on," he told his brother, then turned back to Brushel. "Mister Brushel, you say Mister Misham had the coffee too, but did you actually see him drink it?"


Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Yet?"

"I guess I can't say I 'saw' him drink it, really," Brushel sheepishly admitted. "He had one so-called 'sip', if that. 'Man Puts Lips To Mug, Drinks?', end quote."

The judge hummed in thought, tugging on his beard. "That poison is quite virulent, I hear."

"My stomach did a so-called 'somersault'," Brushel continued, slipping his pen back into his shirt pocket. "Since I'd gulped down that coffee without so much as a second glance at it." He paused, eyes wide. "Wait, maybe something's there! Some kind of so-called 'trick'!" In an instant, his pen was back in his hand, and he was giving Apollo a hopeful look, nostrils flaring. "Anyone want to venture a guess? For the record?"

Apollo narrowed his eyes at the reporter. He hated to be doing what Brushel was telling him to, but it was an important question to consider. "Give me a second." He pressed a finger to his forehead. 'Misham put his coffee to his lips, then immediately fell over. Brushel doesn't seem to be lying, which means it must be true. And it was definitely atroquinine that killed him, which means...'

"Do you have a problem with the witness's testimony or not, Mister Wright?" the judge asked.

Apollo slowly smiled, turning his eyes up to the judge's podium. "Actually... yes, I do."
"Mister Misham was killed by atroquinine, correct?" Apollo asked, snapping his fingers. He kept his gaze firmly on Klavier, but the prosecutor refused to meet it, staying silent. "I have an objection to a specific property of that particular poison, Prosecutor Gavin." 'Damn, that alliteration! Valant would be proud.'

The judge nodded. "He was quite clear about it, I thought: A lethal dosage of just point-naught-naught-two milligrams paralyses the central nervous system. If you drank that, even you would be reduced to a quivering pile, Mister Wright."

Apollo tried not to be offended at being used as an example. "Unfortunately, he didn't tell us everything. There was a vital omission in his information!"

Klavier was still avoiding eye contact.

"An omission?" the judge prompted.

Apollo nodded. "Atroquinine is as virulent as he says... but death doesn't come upon ingestion, not immediately: Atroquinine is slow-acting."

The courtroom gasped in shock, and Brushel even jumped at the stand, shouting, "Whatwhatwhatwhat!?!"

"According to one forensic scientist," Apollo continued, leaning forward on the bench, "it takes at least fifteen minutes for adverse effects to show after ingestion! If we suppose that the moment Mister Misham sipped the coffee was when he sealed his fate, then he would still have had time left to enjoy his last cup of joe!"

The gallery abruptly began talking amongst themselves at the revelation, forcing the judge to bang his gavel. "Order! Order!" He huffed to himself as the courtroom quietened. "What's the meaning of this!? If what the defence says is correct... Why, that contradicts the entire testimony we've just heard!"

Apollo turned to the witness stand with a smug smile. "Well, Mister Brushel? Anything to say, 'on the record'?"

Brushel stared back for a moment before jamming his pen against his arm, muttering, "Slow-acting, S, L, O, W, A, C, T... It was virulent, alright. Even then, it had already begun digging its claws into the journalist..."

"I think he is not listening," Machi whispered.

Apollo sighed, pressing a hand to his face.

"Objection!" came a call from across the room, and Klavier fixed a stern gaze on the man at the witness stand. "It's 'Brushel', ja!?" He grinned. "Herr Brushel, let's take a trip back down memory
Brushel looked up from his notes, blinking owlishly at the prosecutor. "Huh?"

Apollo narrowed his eyes in Klavier's direction. 'What are you doing now, Diva?'

"Did the victim really die the instant he took a sip?" Klavier asked, serious despite his smile. "Think it over. This is vital."

The reporter mused over the question for a few moments. "You know what I think? I think that was... 'A Not-So-Subliminal Suggestion'... end quote."

Klavier grinned, flipping his hair. "I admit, it does cause a problem if he died when you say he died. I would be forced to say auf Wiedersehen to my simple case... and you would be forced to say farewell to your article."

Brushel blinked. "Come again?"

"You can't write a story based on conjecture, can you?" Klavier pointed out. "And, as the case drags on, other reporters will pick up the scent... and you'll be forced to kiss your exclusive scoop goodbye."

"Scoop, scoop," the reporter muttered to himself, spinning his pen in his hand. The silence dragged on, long enough that Apollo wished he could just shout at the man to be done with it... and, finally, Brushel jolted, dropping his pen. "Look, wait. Just wait a second. Just one second."

"We're waiting, we're waiting!" the judge cried, clearly as impatient as Apollo to get this question over with. "Out with it!"

Brushel squeaked, madly scrabbling for his pen on the floor. "I think I just recalled a so-called 'important detail'! 'A Revival of Recollection', end quote! 'A Story's Survival', end quote!"

"'Attorney Utterly Confused', end quote," Apollo muttered to his siblings.

"Actually, I did notice something when I visited the studio," Brushel continued. "I'd heard of poison that 'takes its sweet time', see!"

Klavier smirked. "But not what I've been saying for the last few minutes, apparently."

The judge gave the witness a stern look. "Mister Brushel! Are you saying you noticed something that explains what happened?"

"You bet I am!" Brushel proudly replied. "The 'Antidote For A Poisonous Contradiction', end quote, you might say."

"Or 'I Still Have No Idea What You're Talking About', end quote, I might say," Apollo muttered. His siblings bit back giggles.

"I figured it out, but only after an in-depth interview! See, thanks to my journalism skills, I know who poisoned that coffee!"

The courtroom once more exploded with noise, forcing the judge to slam his gavel and call for order. Klavier sighed. "As far as I can tell, the witness is standing by his testimony; That Mister Misham died the instant after he drank."
"Of course I'm standing by my testimony!" Brushel cried. "And my dream of exclusive rights to this story!"

"Ach," Klavier muttered, turning away from his witness. "I suppose it was too much to hope for... Of course he wouldn't choose a simple case, not him..."

Apollo's eyebrows shot up. Was Klavier saying...?

The judge also gave Klavier a curious look. "Him?"

"Phoenix Wright, who else?" Klavier almost spat.

At that, Apollo bit back a laugh. "Aw, you didn't believe him, did you? Don't you know we Wrights attract complicated cases?"

Klavier shot a glare in return. "I don't need to hear it from you, Herr Forehead." Ignoring Apollo's amused snort, he turned his attention back to the witness stand. "Achtung, Herr Brushel! Report for us, if you would: What is it that you noticed?"

Brushel had once more swapped his pen for his toothbrush, and was nervously passing it back and forth in his hands as he avoided eye contact.

"This court is a critical trial of the Jurist System," the judge ominously reminded him. "I'm afraid no room for doubt is permissible. You will testify to the court about what you noticed!"

Brushel jolted a little, then seemed to give up resisting. Reluctantly, he explained, "When I arrived at the studio, Mister Misham was at his desk. He seemed to be writing a letter... but he quickly sealed the envelope. I thought nothing of it at the time, of course." He perked up. "Now that I think about it, what if he was writing a suicide note?"

The judge hummed in thought, tugging at his beard. "A suicide note?"

Brushel nodded. "Yes, he had this look on his face. 'Man's Face Inscrutable As A Quadratic Equation', end quote."

"Suicide?" Trucy repeated with a gasp. "Poor Mister Misham..."

"In-scroo-ta...?" Machi muttered to himself.

"Inscrutable; Hard to read, basically," Apollo explained. "Besides, I think it's unlikely Mister Misham would have killed himself in the middle of an interview."

Trucy tapped her chin in thought. "Oh yeah..."

The judge shook his head and turned to Apollo. "Very well, you may begin your cross-examination."

Apollo nodded, focussing his attention on the reporter at the witness stand. "This letter Mister Misham was writing... When you arrived, he put it away?"

"'Early Reporter Gets Worm', end quote," Brushel replied, grinning. "That's my secret!"

The Wrights shared a confused look. "I'm not sure I follow," Apollo said.

"It's the night of the interview," Brushel explained, excited. "I arrive fifteen minutes ahead of schedule! The handle turns, the door opens, and I barge in!"
Apollo narrowed his eyes. "Isn't that unlawful entry?"

Brushel only snorted. "Mister Misham sure seemed to think so! You shoulda seen him! He crammed his letter into that yellow envelope as fast as he could." He tapped his toothbrush against his head. "I know a secret when I spot one, and that was one!"

The judge nodded in agreement. "It does seem significant."

"I heard it was left at the crime scene," Brushel added.

Apollo frowned, staring at Brushel. "And you saw him seal this yellow envelope with the letter?"

"Hey, don't look at me like that!" Brushel complained. "I saw what I saw!"

Machi gasped. "Isoveli!"

"This is our big break!" Trucy agreed with a giggle.

Apollo smiled, one hand already flipping through the images stored in his Court Record. "As it just so happens, there was a single letter in a desk drawer at the scene," he said, then tossed up on the holograms the picture of the open desk drawer from the previous day. "In a red envelope!"

The gallery muttered in shock, and Brushel jumped with a loud of shriek of "What!?"

Apollo kept his attention on the bench opposite. "Prosecutor Gavin!"

Klavier looked reluctant to reply. "Yes?"

"Was a yellow envelope found at the scene of the crime?"

"Unfortunately, no," Klavier said, shaking his head. "But, Herr Forehead," he grinned, "it's easy to mistake the colour of an envelope."

"I guess," Apollo conceded, "but not this envelope." He switched the picture to the photo he'd taken of the front. "You see, it was postmarked already: April, twenty-nineteen. Seven years ago."

Klavier's smile died.

"Well, Mister Brushel?" the judge asked.

Brushel thought a moment, tapping his toothbrush against his head. "I can explain that," he said, and waved his toothbrush knowingly. "Drew, right, he wanted to get that letter in an envelope, pronto! Get it out of sight of my beady eyes, right?" He grinned proudly. "So he grabbed the nearest envelope and crammed away!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow, arms crossed. 'It won't be that easy to just explain away this contradiction, chump."

"Well, Mister Wright?" the judge added, turning towards the defence. "Have you anything to say to the witness's claim?"

Apollo smirked, shaking his head. "That's impossible."

Klavier chuckled. "Ah, I like your expression. So full of confidence."

"It's simple, really," Apollo continued, hands moving to his Court Record. "As it just so happens, the
defence team investigated the contents of this envelope." He paused. "With, erm, the assistance of a forensic scientist."

"What...?" Klavier muttered, giving the Wrights a suspicious look.

Apollo threw up on the holograms a photo he'd taken the previous night, of the two print-outs Ema had given them, side-by-side. "Note that this letter is addressed to 'Drew Misham'," he pointed out. "Why would he address a letter to himself? Let alone send a suicide note to himself!"

Brushel stared with wide eyes. "I... I've been scooped!"

The gallery was already muttering loudly, so the judge banged his gavel. "Order! Order! Order!" He grumbled to himself as the crowds quietened, then turned to the witness stand. "Mister Brushel! Can you explain this to the court?"

"Oh, my, my, my, how could I have forgotten?" Brushel was muttering to himself, pulling at his tie. He gave the court a sheepish grin. "I suppose this happens to the best of us! 'Reporter Gets Old, Forgets Lots', end quote."

The judge's eyes narrowed. "I'm still waiting for an explanation, Mister Brushel."

"Well, that's the thing, see: After he put his letter in that envelope, Mister Misham sat there searching his desk drawer for something!"

Apollo frowned, thinking. "His desk drawer...?"

Brushel nodded. "Yes! A stamp! A so-called 'Postage Stamp', end quote!"

Trucy shrugged. "He coulda had one of mine."

"I don't think you can re-use stamps, Truce," Apollo whispered in reply.

"No; They are fattening," Machi joked, eliciting an eye-roll from his sister.

The judge's attention was still on Brushel. "A stamp? Whatever for?"

"To mail his letter, what else?" Brushel replied, toothbrush tapping against his scalp. "And then, why yes, I think I saw him put it in his letter box." He grinned. "Yes, it was a yellow envelope, and he put it in that box!"

The judge sighed. "Well, apparently, this yellow letter has nothing to do with this case."

"Oh, how I wish it did!" Brushel crowed. "Just think if that were a suicide note... What a story! 'Star Writes Suicide Note In Front of Reporter, Falls', end quote."

"I thought we agreed stars don't fall!" Trucy protested.

The judge cleared his throat. "As I was saying, that has nothing to do with this case." He frowned at the small hologram screen atop his podium. "That said... It makes me wonder about the contents of this red envelope. A hundred thousand dollars is quite a good deal of money!"

Klavier was regarding the letter with a much sterner air. "So this was from April, twenty-nineteen, ja...?"

Apollo watched the prosecutor carefully, but gave him only a nod. His suspicions from the previous day circled at the back of his mind.
Brushel thought a moment, then his eyes widened, his nostrils flaring dramatically. Grinning nervously, he looked around the courtroom. "So am I finished? Here, I mean. Am I finished here?" He began to hop from foot to foot, anxious to leave. "I was thinking of, you know, going home, to start writing..."

Apollo narrowed his eyes at the reporter. "Mister Brushel... You know something about this letter, don't you?"

"Ack!" Brushel shook his head, sweating. "C-c'mon! 'Magician-Attorney Has Active Imagination, Little Else', end quote."

"It's beyond obvious," Apollo replied, arms crossed. "You have a very unique expression you always pull when you catch the scent of a story."

Brushel sputtered wordlessly, but any reply was cut off by the judge, who proclaimed "Even I noticed something, and my eyes aren't what they used to be." The old man chuckled proudly. "You know, I'm starting to understand what all this 'perceiving' stuff is about!"

Apollo gave the judge a half-lidded stare.

"Please, continue with your testimony," the judge ordered Brushel. "Tell us about the scent of a story!"

Brushel seemed reluctant, but stayed put. "Hey... I'm the one asking the questions here. Usually." Regardless, he began his next testimony.

View the Court Record
"Actually, it took a bit of work to get a thumbs-up on the interview," Brushel explained. "'Reporter Leverages Story, Gets His Interview', end quote. The story concerned a certain case from seven years ago; That red envelope probably had something to do with it." He shook his head. "Say what you will, but Drew's talent was without compare."

Apollo's suspicions only strengthened, as much from the words as the pinch at his wrist. 'A case seven years ago...?'

"So you threatened to go to press with this 'story'?'" the judge asked, unimpressed. "That's how you got your interview? Blackmail?"

"Well, yes," Brushel automatically replied, before the judge's words sank in and he hurriedly added, "I mean no! No, no, no, no! It wasn't exactly black-, I mean, I'm not..." He gurgled, his panicky tugging of his tie causing the strip of fabric to tighten considerably around his neck.

The judge raised an eyebrow. "Something wrong, Mister Brushel?"

The reporter pulled his tie loose again, sweating. "L-look! This is my story! My tidbit! 'Journalist's Info Is Livelihood', end quote."

"I see."

"While you have me chatting away in here, what's going on out there?" Brushel continued, gesticulating wildly. "What if some Wally Wordsworth or Sally Scooper gets wind of my story? They could be going to press while I'm going to waste!"

The judge shook his head. "The court feels your pain, Mister Brushel." His expression failing to show any kind of empathy for the journalist, the old man turned to Apollo. "Mister Wright, let's pick up the pace."

Apollo nodded; He wanted this case to be over with already too. As much as he dreaded the answer, he only had one question in mind: "Mister Brushel, could you... tell us about this case, from seven years ago?"

Brushel scoffed, waving the question off. "Let me state one thing, Mister Magician, and you can quote me on this: I... can't talk about that case!"

Instantly Apollo's hackles were up. "Why not!?"

"It's about journalistic pride, and staunchness, and credibility, and connections! 'Journalist Reveals Sources Only Over His Dead Body', end quote," Brushel argued, watching Apollo with determined eyes. "So what'll it be? Gonna cut me in half? Dead men don't tell tales, not even for magicians!"

'They do for spirit mediums,' Apollo resisted from shouting back.
Trucy hummed in thought, tapping her chin. "Our chances of breaking his will aren't looking good."

"We could break his story," Machi suggested. "Mister Prosecutor did."

Apollo thought a moment. "I've got a better idea." Turning his attention to Brushel, he called, "So, on the one hand we have your 'story', and on the other, this letter." He gestured to the picture still displayed on the holograms. "What makes you think the two are related?"

Brushel's eyes widened, and he started cleaning the collecting sweat off his glasses with the toothbrush in his hand. "Ah, er, I was just saying it's possible. Call it 'Reporter's Intuition', end quote." He laughed nervously. "Hey, I say a lot of things. You going to pick all of them apart? Be my guest!"

Apollo rolled his eyes. 'All of them? No, just the incredibly suspicious ones.' "Alright then, we'll change the subject: Mister Misham was incredibly talented, you said?"

The new topic didn't do anything for Brushel's nervousness, though he did laugh harder to hide it. "Was he? Hoowee, boy. I mean, hey! He's a star, man, a star! The flow of his brush is like a great, undulating river across the canvas! 'Artist's Paints Light Up Studio Like Sun', end quote."

Feeling the pinch at his wrist, Apollo's hand flew to his bracelet, and he grimaced at what it was he'd spotted this time around.

"You see anything, Polly?" Trucy asked.

"See what?" Machi added, confused.

Apollo sighed. "Unfortunately." He turned to the reporter with a glare. "Sweat much, Mister Brushel?"

Brushel's nervous tugging of his tie pulled it tight around his neck again, and he fought to loosen it. "Er, yeah, well..." He shoved his hands under his arms, as if to hide them. "A man can't help his glands, you know!"

"It's more than that," Apollo replied, shaking his head. "I could see your disgusting pit stains growing ever time Mister Misham's 'talent' was mentioned." He leaned forward on his bench, angry just as much for spotting the man's tell as for the lie it gave away. "You knew, didn't you? That's what you were blackmailing him about: His real talent!"

Brushel shrieked, his panicked flailing pulling his tie tight around his neck again. "Th-th-th-that's r-r-r-ridiculous!"

"Real talent?" the judge asked, looking between the two as the gallery muttered quietly. "What are you talking about, Mister Wright?"

"I'm sure the prosecution knows what I'm talking about," Apollo continued, shooting a glance across the courtroom: Klavier didn't reply, though he did raise an eyebrow. Apollo ignored him anyway, and, with a flick at his Court Record, he pulled up on the holograms the photo of the painting Machi had found. "This painting was found in Mister Misham's studio."

Brushel went pale, but said nothing.

"There are two problems with it," Apollo continued. "The first is, Mister Misham didn't paint it. The second?" He switched out the photo for the unfinished one that had been on display. "He did paint this one."
The gallery's mutterings grew louder. Likely they were starting to connect the dots.

"Then we have this letter." Apollo switched out the photo on the holograms back to the copy of the red envelope's contents. "A payment of a hundred thousand dollars suggests a certain business operation, doesn't it? Specifically, the business of *making forgeries*.

Brushel howled, his flailing managing to throw him to the ground. The gallery gasped and muttered louder.

Apollo crossed his arms, standing tall behind his bench. "That is all, Your Honour."

At the witness stand, Brushel was pulling himself to his feet. "Everyone! Please, everyone! Can we keep this private?" he begged. "Please!? This is my story! My *scoop*!"

"Forgery," the judge repeated to himself in wonder. "That's a serious crime!"

Apollo looked across the courtroom and noticed Klavier was still quiet, though now his eyes were closed and he was frowning deeply; Apollo could only guess whether or not Ema had told him about Misham the forger.

Brushel whimpered, then seemed to give up on his 'exclusive'. "Drew Misham is known as an artist these days," he explained, "but there were rumours he dabbled in *another* kind of art until a few years back."

"'Another art' meaning... forgery?" the judge asked.

Brushel nodded. "Drew Misham was talented, alright: Talented at making precise, detailed fakes... a fact that certain criminal elements were quick to discover."

Apollo felt a shiver go up his spine and tried not to muse on exactly what Brushel meant.

"The rumours he was forging evidence started circulating about seven years ago, incidentally," Brushel continued.

"Forging *evidence*!?!" the judge cried, jumping in his seat with shock. "A-are we to understand this letter... this payment of a hundred thousand, from seven years ago...?"

Brushel nodded. "Exactly. 'Forged Evidence Nets Tidy Profit', end quote."

As the noise of the gallery increased, the judge paused to bang his gavel, calling for order.

Apollo felt a tap on his arm and turned to see Machi watching him with a concerned look. "*Isoveli*, are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Apollo insisted, giving his brother a smile. "Don't worry about me."

Once the unruly crowd was back under control, the judge sighed. "Why, it's like our victim was living a double life..."

Apollo quickly pulled himself together, unwilling to let this chance slip through his fingers. Slamming his fists against his bench, he announced, "So the victim had ties to the criminal world, right? He could have had *plenty* of enemies we know nothing about!"

"Objection!" came a shout from across the room, as Klavier finally sprang back to life. "This is my first time hearing of this 'criminal world'," he said, fixing Apollo with a glare. "We certainly found no criminal connections when we conducted our investigation."
Apollo couldn't believe his ears at that, but decided not to argue if Ema had failed to mention it to her 'boss'. He threw out an arm to point at the prosecution. "Objection! How do you explain all this money, then? Even you have to admit there's a possibility of illegal activity here, Herr Diva!"

"Objection!" Klavier shot back, pausing a moment before pointing out, "But there is no proof tying this letter to our case."

Apollo paused, arm lowering. 'That... is a good point.'

"Our case was, and remains, simple from the beginning," Klavier continued, hands in his pockets. "Only the defendant could have poisoned that mug that night." He grinned, shooting a look at Brushel. "And you, of course."

"Hey, hey, hey, the only thing I poison is my pen," Brushel protested, "when I'm writing reviews!"

Klavier just shook his head, amused.

"Mister Brushel, your testimony to this point has been quite unreliable," the judge spoke up, giving the man a disapproving look. "It doesn't speak well of your reporting acumen."

Brushel sputtered for a moment, clearly offended. "What're you talking about!? My journalism is rock solid! 'Journalism So Solid, You Could Stand An Elephant On It,' end quote."

The judge shook his head. "In any case, let's hear a summarised recap of your testimony. If we can ascertain the situation in that studio from the recap, the trial is over." He tapped his gavel decisively. "Mister Brushel, your testimony please!"

"Wh-what he talking about?" Machi asked, hands picking at the frills around his neck. "Trial end already!?"

Apollo sighed. "The cross-examination showed Mister Brushel didn't have reason or means to poison Misham," he explained. "As long as there's no other suspects, then the killer had to be Vera. This next testimony is our last chance."

Trucy gasped, and fixed her brothers with a determined glare. "We can't let that happen!" she declared. "Not yet!"

"Don't worry," Apollo told the pair, smiling. "I've still got one trick up my sleeve, and I'm not letting this trial end before I pull it off."

At the witness stand, Brushel finished his fidgeting and began his final testimony: "The only other person in the studio that night was the defendant. It was Vera who poured the coffee; She admitted as much herself. The only thing that touched Drew's lips during the interview was that mug, and nothing left that studio after he died, nothing." He nodded, proud of himself. "Clearly, the only one who could have poisoned him was his daughter!"

"A nice testimony," Klavier said, watching with an easy smile. "Clear, succinct... and without room for doubt."

"Aw, shucks, you really think so?" Brushel asked with a wide grin.

The judge thought a moment. "I believe this clarifies the situation that night," he decided, then turned to the defence. "Mister Wright, you may begin your final cross-examination."

Apollo nodded. 'You heard him, Wright. Time to pull off that 'trick' you were talking about... and
save Vera from an unlawful end!

[View the Court Record]
"Nothing left the studio after Mister Misham's death?" Apollo sternly asked. "You're sure?"

Brushel nodded enthusiastically. "Yep, sure as sure can be." He paused, tapping his toothbrush against his head. "Well, with one exception."

The judge perked up. "One exception? What?"

The reporter grinned. "'Journalist Spark Brushel Does Interview, Leaves Studio', end quote." He promptly burst into loud laughter, slapping his knee and leaning on the witness stand. "C'mon! It's a joke! Get it?" When the courtroom still failed to join in, he calmed down, waving off the non-reaction. "Not funny, I know, but still!"

Apollo paused. 'But... No, I'm certain! There was something else!'

The judge sniffed. "Now that we've proven our witness is a comedian of sorts, I'd like to turn to our defence attorney." He raised an eyebrow at Apollo. "Do you have any idea what, if anything, might have left the studio that night?"

Apollo nodded. "I think one thing might very well have left the studio that night, actually: A certain something that has vanished from the crime scene."

"By which you mean something other than our witness?" the judge clarified.

Although he hated he had to answer, Apollo bit back a groan and replied, "Of course."

Klavier chuckled, brushing the hair from his eyes. "Don't tell me: 'Vera Misham'?"

Apollo narrowed his eyes at the prosecutor. "I save my comedy for the stage, Herr Diva; If I was trying to be funny, believe me, you'd know."

"Then let's see what you've got for us, Mister Wright," the judge said, gesturing to the holograms; It was clear he was expecting to literally see whatever it was Apollo had in mind, and the young lawyer was almost sad to disappoint him.

"Unfortunately, this thing wasn't at the scene of the crime, so I can't show it to you," Apollo explained, "but, I do have evidence that shows how it could have been taken from the scene!" With a flourish and a loud "Take that!", he threw up on the holograms a photo he'd taken the previous day, of the bright red box just inside the studio's entrance. "This letter box is the only link between that studio and the outside world."

The judge only seemed confused. "A letter box?"

"What did Mister Brushel just tell us?" Apollo explained. "When he entered the studio on the night of the murder, the victim had just finished writing a letter!"

Brushel happily nodded. "Yeah, I said that. And yeah, it was true."
"Furthermore," Apollo said, "you went on to tell us that he put the letter in a yellow envelope and put it in the letter box."

The judge gasped as he realised what Apollo was getting at.

"But that very same letter box was empty! In other words, that night, the 'yellow envelope' disappeared!"

"Objection!" came a shout, and Klavier chuckled as he shot an easy grin across the room. "Ah, yes, intriguing. So an envelope has disappeared from the scene of the crime." He shook his head. "Of course... this changes nothing."

Apollo blinked as the wind abruptly left his sails. "Huh...?"

"He has a point, Mister Wright," the judge agreed. "What we're trying to figure out here is how the poison got into Mister Misham. Is it really important that this envelope the witness says he saw disappeared?"

"Nothing could be more serious than an envelope disappearing from the studio that night!" Apollo argued. "That seems very important to me!"

Klavier softly scoffed, shaking his head. "I don't argue the possibility that a letter disappeared from that studio... But, Herr Forehead, isn't there a much more serious question before us?" He chuckled. "I still think this fails to change anything."

Apollo could only glare across the room, too angry to allow himself to talk. Suddenly he wished Luke was there, just to see his little brother launch into one of his trademark justified tirades... hopefully this situation would have been enough to warrant one.

The judge mused over the exchange. "Well, we will have this correction added to the testimony," he decided. "You may continue with your cross-examination, Mister Wright."

"Isoveli?" Machi whispered. "Was that your 'trick'?"

"I haven't even started yet," Apollo quietly replied. "This isn't a problem, I can still do this... Just gotta do what Luke does, right? Organise my argument in a flash and lay it out passionately enough they can't deny it!" He turned his glare on the man at the witness stand. "Mister Brushel! You said the only thing that touched Mister Misham's lips was the mug. You're sure about that?"

Brushel thought a moment, tapping his toothbrush against his head. "Well, to be really, really precise... I was busy gobbling mint candies the whole time." He grinned, sending his aura once more across the courtroom.

Klavier chuckled, brushing at his hair. "Don't tell me you're still trying to prove this," he called to Apollo. "You think the victim ate, drank, or otherwise ingested something other than coffee?"

"Naturally," Apollo shot back with a confident smirk. "And not 'trying' - I can prove it."

"Oh really?" the judge asked, surprised.

Klavier's eyes narrowed, as if he didn't seem sure whether or not to believe the young attorney. "How, may I ask?"

Apollo threw out his arm in a dramatic pointing pose. "I have proof of the disappearing envelope!"
Brushel perked up. "I saw him writing a letter, I did!"

"Which was picked up by the mailman, I assume?" the judge asked.

"Of course," Apollo replied, arms crossed, "which means... that envelope had a stamp on it."

"A stamp..." the judge mused aloud, then gasped.

Apollo grinned, sending a silent 'thank you' to his missing brother. "I'm sure we all know stamps come with dried glue on the back, right? In the old days, you would have to lick this glue to stick a stamp to a letter."

"Old days!?" the judge repeated, offended. "I'll have you know the postal industry is still alive and kicking, young man! Complete with stamps!"

"You misunderstand, Your Honour," Apollo replied, shaking his head. "Nowadays, stamps are self-adhesive; Just press them to the paper, and they'll stick on their own, no licking necessary."

The judge paused, confused. "They... do? For how long has this been the case?"

Apollo couldn't immediately reply. "I, uh, don't know for sure," he admitted, "but at least since twenty-nineteen. Regardless, case in point," he turned to Klavier with a smirk, "how many people of Mister Misham's generation, let alone a reclusive shut-in like him, actually know that?"

Klavier was leaning forward on his bench, sweating. Pressing his weight on a clenched fist, he pushed himself up and shouted, "Objection! Okay, I'll accept he licked this stamp... but how does that explain the atroquinine on the rim of the coffee mug!?"

"Objection!" Apollo shouted back. "Haven't you heard you consume a tenth of a calorie when you lick the back of a stamp?"

Machi softly gasped, almost glowing with pride at hearing his factoid from the previous day being repeated.

"The poison got on his tongue, and then he put that coffee mug to his mouth." Apollo crossed his arms with a confident smirk as Klavier winced. "You tell me how those traces got on the mug."

The judge watched with wide eyes. "What!?"

"The coffee mug didn't poison Mister Misham," Apollo explained. "Mister Misham poisoned the coffee mug!"

Immediately, the gallery erupted into noise, and the judge pulled himself out of his own shock to bang his gavel and call for order.

"You listened!" Machi squeaked in awe. Too shy to outright hug his elder brother in court, he made do with pressing against Apollo's side, clinging to his arm. "Yesterday, you listened!"

Apollo snorted, biting back a laugh. "Of course I listened," he quietly replied. "You were giving me valuable information."

"You've helped put the other guy on the ropes, Machi!" Trucy added, miming a few punches.

"I wouldn't say that yet, Truce," Apollo more solemnly told her.

Finally, the judge managed to calm the gallery, and looked between the sweating Klavier and the
stern Apollo with a frustrated look. "B-but that doesn't add up... Does it?"

Apollo decided to lay his point out a bit more clearly for the old man: "Recall, if you would: Atroquinine is a slow-acting poison, yes? The poison entered his body when he put the stamp on that envelope, but his time wasn't up until the very moment he touched his lips to that cup of joe."

The judge thought a moment, then looked down to the witness stand. "You have something to add, Mister Brushel?"

Brushel was back to scribbling on his arm, nostrils flaring. Noticing the court's attention on him, he looked up and grinned, quickly shoving his pen back in his shirt pocket. "As I believe I mentioned earlier, Drew was searching his desk drawer for a stamp for the letter he stuffed in that envelope?" He paused to snicker to himself, then frowned thoughtfully. "But you know, I don't seem to remember him ever finding one."

"Maybe he'd just run out?" the judge suggested.

Klavier had calmed down from his earlier upset, and was now merely frowning deeply. "Incidentally, we searched the desk drawer at the scene of the crime. There were no stamps. Not a single one."

Apollo was a little surprised to hear that.

"Hmm, that does pose a problem," the judge mused, tugging at his beard. He turned to Apollo. "How will you prove that the stamp was coated with poison?"

It took only half a second for Apollo to give the man a confident smile. "Actually, I'm glad no other stamps were found; It makes proving the stamp he used was poisoned possible!"

Klavier broke into loud laughter, giving the defence a slow clap. "Good show, good show." He shook his head, making no effort to hide his amused smile. "You can't even prove there was a stamp at the scene in the first place!"

Apollo snorted, rolling his eyes.

The judge only looked thoughtful. "Well, let's hear what the defence has to say anyway." He turned to Apollo. "Where's your evidence that proves the existence of this poisoned stamp?"

His hands at his Court Record, Apollo grinned and made to locate his photo of the tiny frame from the desk, complete with the blue smear of the atroquinine reaction. With a loud "Take that!", he dramatically flicked upwards on his screen to call it up on the holograms without another word.

The judge leaned forward, interested in the picture. "Well, that certainly is a cute little frame. And by little, I mean really little."

"It was on the victim's desk, Your Honour," Apollo explained. "Quite empty, as you can see for yourself."

Klavier frowned at the picture. "I noticed that too during my investigation," he said. "But... that stain... That was not there before."

Apollo smirked, shaking his head. "No, it wasn't. That pale bluish stain... is atroquinine residue."

The gallery begun to mutter loudly.
"What!?” Klavier cried, jerking backwards. "Why wasn't I told about this!?

"The frame is only two inches square,” Apollo continued. "The face of the frame is even smaller, maybe an inch wide at most."

Klavier glared across the room. "You aren't saying...

"Oh, but I am," Apollo replied, relishing in the opportunity to be the condescending one for once. "Tell me: What fits in such a small frame? A commemorative stamp, perhaps?"

The noise of the gallery began to overtake the entire room, forcing the judge to take action, banging his gavel. "Order! Order! Order!"

"So that what was there!” Machi gasped.

The judge finally calmed the crowd, sighing to himself. "The poisoned stamp was in this frame...!?”

"Impossible!” Klavier shouted, slamming his fist against the wall behind him with a scowl. "Why would he put something like that on his desk? Don't tell me he had it there so he could commit suicide if the mood struck!"

Brushel was fidgeting madly at the witness stand. "You know, can I say something? I had a thought, see!"

"What, Mister Brushel?” the judge asked with a world-weary look. "And please stop jittering around like that!

"The victim was a forger, right?” Brushel cried, no sign of calming his movements. "There's a lot of money in that line of work. 'Forger Forges Friends, Makes Enemies Too', end quote."

"So the poisoned stamp might have been a murder weapon," Apollo picked up, pointing dramatically at the courtroom at large, "aimed at him!"

Klavier promptly imitated with a shout of "Objection!" He shook his head, making a noise somewhere between a sigh and a groan. "Oh, rich. That's rich. Leave the ridiculous flights of fancy to your stage act, please."

Apollo rolled his eyes. "I don't make fun of your songs," he pointed out.

"The stamp was a 'murder weapon'?" Klavier continued, scoffing. "Nonsense! Murder is a simple business. Who would go to such lengths? No one." At that, Apollo couldn't help but laugh. "Oh, I disagree."

Klavier winced. "C-come again...?"

"Recall, if you would, the victim's reclusive lifestyle," Apollo explained, snapping his fingers with the same air of presenting a magic trick on stage. "Drew Misham hid from the world. He avoided meetings. His only contact with the outside world... was the mail." He heard the judge gasping in realisation, but didn't pause to let the man interrupt. "Now, if you wanted to kill someone you couldn't meet, but you knew read letters, a person at the right age to have formed a life-long habit of licking things he didn't need to... a stamp would be the perfect weapon!"

"Ridiculous!” Klavier shouted, slamming his fist against the wall a second time. "Where's your proof? I want proof! Show us evidence that this poisoned stamp was sent to him as a murder
weapon!

Apollo had to take a moment to breathe, as much as he would have liked to call out his opponent's childish demand; The answers had come to him in such a rush as he spoke that he had to curl his hands into fists at his sides to keep from trembling, throwing on his stage persona all the harder to cover. He felt a tap on his arm and turned to see his sister giving him a worried look.

"You okay, Polly?" Trucy asked.

He gave his sister a quick and subtle nod, then turned his attention back to the courtroom. "Luckily for you... I can do exactly that."

The judge gestured impatiently to the holograms. "Well, fill us in, Mister Wright!"

Apollo nodded, hands already at his tablet computer on the bench to prepare. "A certain piece of evidence points to the truth, Your Honour," he said. "Someone with the intent to kill sent Mister Misham the stamp of death... through this!"

[View the Court Record]
The gallery muttered loudly as the image of the red envelope once more appeared on the holograms above them. The judge frowned in confusion, asking, "Isn't this the envelope...? The seven-year-old one from twenty-nineteen?"

Apollo nodded. "Think about the text of the letter again." He swapped out the image of the envelope for the one of its contents. "Right here, at the top of the second page: 'Send in the enclosed envelope with the enclosed stamp within three days'. The enclosed stamp, Your Honour."

The judge gasped in shock. On the other side of the room, Klavier watched with a glare.

"In other words," Brushel spoke up, "if I have this straight... 'The Stamp! Poison! On The Stamp! Lick, Lick, Gasp...' end quote!"

Apollo just smiled. "Now, what if he had done exactly as the letter asked?"

"He would sign the document," Trucy picked up, "put it in the envelope, and put the stamp on it, right? And he'd lick it, because he didn't know he didn't need to!"

"A-and then put in letter box!" Machi added.

"Fifteen minutes wouldn't have elapsed between affixing the stamp and mailing the letter," Apollo continued, unable to feel upset this time that his siblings were speaking up. "But the clock started ticking, and when the time came, he drew his last breath... and the murder weapon would be taken away from the scene."

The judge nodded to himself. "Quite conveniently, thanks to the postal system."

But, before Apollo could dare to consider his case won, Klavier laughed, shaking his head. "Such a splendid imagination you have, Herr Forehead!" Ignoring Apollo's wordless glare, he waved a hand dismissively. "Let me confirm one thing with you, if I might: This 'poisoned stamp' was inside this seven-year-old envelope, ja? Is that what you'd have us believe? Really?"

Hearing it worded that way, Apollo felt his confidence draining quickly. "W-well..."

"Alright, so it's a little bit of a stretch," Trucy cried, and pointed across the room in an imitation of her eldest brother, "but it's still possible!"

Klavier almost laughed again, brushing the hair over his eyes. "Yes, there's a small chance it may be possible... But how small a chance, I wonder?"

Trucy wilted a little at that, looking to Apollo for support. "Um..."

"A poisoned stamp in this envelope?" Klavier continued. "A stamp that then became the murder weapon? How do you intend to prove this seeming coincidence?"

"W-well," Trucy muttered, stepping back from the bench and avoiding eye contact.
"Hey!" Apollo slammed his bench, shooting a glare at the prosecutor. "You leave her out of this!"

Klavier just softly chuckled, flipping his hair. "I was simply asking a question, Herr Forehead."

"Then you ask your question to me," Apollo pressed, leaning forward on the bench. "I'm the defence attorney here, Herr Diva... Or did you forget that already?"

The prosecutor was unfazed. "Then I ask you: How are you intending to prove your case here, defence attorney? What evidence is there that your 'poisoned stamp' was in that letter?"

Apollo said nothing, only glaring across the room. As much as he might have wished otherwise, he had no answer to give; After all, the envelope lacked a return address, or any other indication of the identity of its sender, and was now seven years old, long past any reasonable time-frame that might have let them track its path.

Klavier smirked, shaking his head. "All that bluster and your answer is silence." He moved to shut down the holograms, standing tall behind his bench. "In that case, I move to-

"It's not nice to pick on a Fraulein and not apologise, Klavier."

Opposite them, Klavier jumped a little, a confused look on his face. Apollo similarly jerked in surprise, his eyes jumping to Klavier's right and finding a familiar silhouette half-hiding by the corner of the gallery box. Half confused, half surprised, Apollo called out, "Ema!"

The lab-coated detective was grinning widely, and emerged from her hiding place with a confident posture. "Well? Like my Kristoph Gavin impression? Did I sound like him?"

'Nothing at all, actually...' Instead of saying his first thought aloud, Apollo hesitantly replied, "Don't quit your day job."

Klavier merely gave her a disapproving look. "Don't you have a crime scene to be looking after, Fraulein Detective?"

Ema shrugged. "Someone had to come dig you all out of the mess you're making of this case."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Mess?"

"Y'know, none of this would happen if you just trusted in science a little more," Ema continued, her heels clicking on the floor as she strode out into the courtroom. "You can find out if that stamp was in that envelope, easy."

Klavier gave her a stern stare. "Care to explain yourself, Fraulein Detective?"

"Glare at me all you want, but science is on my side." Still smirking, Ema lowered her red-lensed glasses over her eyes, then turned to Apollo, pulling from her purse a familiar-looking red envelope in a plastic evidence bag. "It's all in the residue, right?"

Apollo had to think a moment, but grinned and snapped his fingers as he realised what she meant. "That's right! The poison detection spray!" He immediately turned his attention to his bag to dig the small item out.

The judge tapped his gavel decisively. "Extract that envelope at once! You can open it on the authority of the court!"

"Can I try it this time?" Trucy immediately asked. "Please, Polly?"
Apollo almost laughed as he pulled out the spray. "Just don't spray it on us again, okay?"

"I won't!" the teen promised, snatching the small bottle and dashing around towards Ema.

Machi leaned in close to his older brother with a smile. "Next time is your turn," he said.

Apollo snorted. "Guess so, huh?" Truthfully, he couldn't think of how that small bottle would ever be useful again after this.

To Klavier's great displeasure, Ema commandeered the prosecutor's bench to prepare the red envelope for testing: She pulled from her purse a tiny pair of scissors to cut open the flap, then carefully removed the two sheets of paper inside and unfolded them across the wooden surface. Shooting a grin at the impatient Trucy, she waved the teen forward and gestured to the waiting letter.

Trucy squeaked in excitement, rushing forward with the spray bottle clutched tight. She pulled off the cap in one swift motion, then, frowning hard in concentration, began to spray the substance inside evenly across the paper. Above her, the courtroom fell into total silence, all attention completely focussed on the young magician. Even Klavier, who had retreated from his bench in disgust, stepped closer to watch.

Although Apollo and Machi had stayed at the defence bench, they kept their eyes on their sister, eager for whatever results she might turn up: It was impossible to miss when Trucy stepped back triumphantly from her work, capping the spray in her hands once more. At her side, Ema was grinning widely, and behind them Klavier deeply frowned. Without a word, Ema took hold of one of the sheets of paper that made up the letter and held it up high to show off to the courtroom: Right next to the words "you've confirmed the transfer" was a clear blue stain... exactly the size of a stamp.

The gallery gasped and quietly muttered amongst themselves. Apollo couldn't blame them, sharing a look with Machi that was somewhere between 'proud of their case' and 'sad someone had to die over this'.

"Well! Would you look at that!" the judge breathed in amazement.

Ema nodded decisively, lowering her arm to replace the paper on the prosecutor's bench. "No mistaking it. That's atroquinine residue."

Trucy skipped happily back to her brothers at the defence bench, taking her place once more on Apollo's left. "Easy as pie!" she declared.

"I-I don't believe it," the judge was muttering to himself. "A murder weapon from the past... Now, seven years later, it bares its fangs at last!"

Apollo frowned; Had the judge intended to rhyme, there?

"Objection!" Klavier shouted, banging a fist against the wall behind him and glaring at the paper in front of him. "Absolutely outrageous!" He paused for a moment to breathe, Ema nearby standing to one side to keep out of his way. "Tell me why!" the prosecutor demanded. "Why didn't this murder take place seven years ago!?"

Apollo opened his mouth to reply, then stopped, closing it again. That was a good question. "Well, um..."

"There's one possibility," Ema suggested. "Maybe Mister Misham figured it out."

"Figured what out?" the judge asked.
"He realised the person who sent that letter wanted him dead," Ema explained, "so he sent his reply with a different stamp."

The judge tugged at his beard, musing over her words. "And put his decisive evidence in a frame."

"Hold it!" came a shriek from the witness stand, throwing the entire courtroom into a sudden and stunned silence.

Apollo jumped in shock, turning his eyes to the reporter stood there. "You're still here!?

"C-can I make a statement here, on the record?" Brushel asked, nostrils flaring as he fidgeted with the pen in his hand. "I, Spark 'Razortooth' Brushel, claim this scoop as mine! 'Drew Misham Killed In Cold Blood By Sender Of Seven-Year-Old Letter!', end quote." He frowned, tapping his pen against his head. "Hmm, no, maybe something more succinct. 'Star Falls After Seven Year Delay', end quote."

The courtroom fell into loud chatter. Behind the defence bench, Trucy pouted, arms crossed. "Seriously? Still going with 'star falls'?"

Apollo sighed, pressing a hand to his face.

"Order! Order! Order!" the judge called, banging his gavel.

Ema rolled her eyes, then rounded on the reporter with a glare. Brushel yelped once, then allowed himself, finally, to be herded from the room and out of sight.

With the courtroom was quiet once more, the judge hummed in thought. "I see no room for further argument here... though, I admit, this is all coming as quite a shock. To think that the murder weapon reached his mouth after seven years...! 'Stamp Is Ticket Straight to Afterlife', end quote!"

"Uh oh, I think the witness is a bad influence on our judge," Trucy whispered. Apollo silently nodded back.

"I see no need for further debate on this matter," the judge continued. "The sender of that letter seven years ago could hardly have been our defendant!"

Machi gasped, turning to his brother with a smile. "I-isoveli...!"

"I think we just won!" Trucy chimed in.

"Very well!" the judge announced. "This court finds the defendant..." He raised his gavel, ready to slam it down as he spoke his next words.

Apollo himself stood in shock, unable to believe they'd reached a verdict so quickly...

"Objection!"

... and, indeed, it was too good a feeling to last.

Klavier huffed behind his bench, seeming somewhat at the end of his rope. "Is this the bright future of our legal system?"

The judge raised an eyebrow, having dropped his gavel at the shout from his right. "Prosecutor Gavin?"

"A ticket to the afterlife from seven years ago?" Klavier paraphrased, scoffing. "Tickets for
Gavinners shows are invalid after two weeks."

"B-but it doesn't make sense any other way!" the judge pointed out.

Klavier shook his head, laughing under his breath. "It boggles my mind that so many people haven't noticed this." He pointed across the room. "There's a fatal contradiction in Herr Forehead's claim!"

Apollo's eyes widened as the courtroom gasped. "A c-contradiction?"

"A poisoned stamp was placed in this envelope seven years ago, whereupon it was framed, until now," Klavier explained. "If that's the case, then why would Drew Misham have done what he did?"

"Ema explained that!" Apollo cried, leaning on his bench and trying not to look as desperate as he felt. "He must have realised it was poisoned!"

Klavier only shook his head. "Therein lies the rub."

Apollo remained silent, too scared to reply; What on earth was this 'contradiction' Klavier was angling at...?

"Seven years ago, the forger Drew Misham sensed a trap, and put the stamp in a frame; I do not debate this," Klavier continued. "But this begs the question: Why, seven years later, did he use that stamp on the night of the murder?"

At Apollo's sides, Trucy and Machi gasped. Apollo himself was frozen in place, a cold sweat forming on the back of his neck.

Now he was in his stride, Klavier shot a smug look across the room. "Surely you don't mean to suggest that Mister Misham simply forgot? He put the murder weapon in a frame on his desk for seven years... and forgot? You expect us to believe he sprang the trap on himself?"

Apollo had to fight not to say anything, lest he only end up stuttering nonsense. He staggered back from his bench, eyes wide and face pale.

"While I admit this is all quite shocking myself," the judge spoke up, "it does seem highly unlikely that he would fall afoul of a trap that had been sitting on his desk for seven years."

"I-isoveli...!" Machi squeaked in alarm.

"I don't think we're winning anymore..." Trucy whispered.

Klavier laughed, holding his arms out wide. "Ah, I'm glad to see we're all back in the real world now! Welcome back to reality! We've been waiting for you!"

Seeing the prosecutor's smug attitude sparked Apollo back into action, and he slammed his fists on his bench with a loud shout of "Objection! Okay, then how do you explain the poisoned stamp that was in the envelope?"

"The 'poisoned stamp'?” Klavier chuckled. "Where exactly is this poisoned stamp again? Have you brought it to court for us?” He shook his head. "I see no proof that such a thing existed."

"Objection!" Apollo shouted back. "What about the atroquinine residue, huh!?"

"Oh, I agree, that does seem to be atroquinine residue," Klavier readily agreed, still grinning. "But, Herr Forehead, it's certainly no stamp."
Apollo was lost for words for a moment or two. "Y-yeah, but-!"

"Even if your precious poisoned stamp did exist," Klavier interrupted, a stern look overtaking his usual easy grin, "Drew Misham never would have used it." He brushed at his hair for a moment or two, eyes closed. "That is all."

As much as he might have wanted to... Apollo couldn't deny Klavier's argument.

View the Court Record
The judge shook his head, disappointed. "I believe we've come to a conclusion," he said. "Again."
"W-wait!"
Apollo's own forming objections were called to a halt as he heard the shout from his right. "Machi?"
"That not fair!" the teen cried in Klavier's direction, face red. He slammed on his bench, a slightly weaker imitation of Apollo. "Everything make sense, you not just say 'no' and ignore!"
Klavier continued to give the defence an easy grin. "I'm afraid your English still needs work, little pianist," he said. "I don't know what you're trying to say."
Machi fumed for a moment, as angry as he'd been the day he learned Lamiroir's real name. Banging the bench again, he shrieked, "Sanon et kuntele, sina... sina alio!"
"Machi!" Apollo hissed. "Please, calm down!"
"And neither is my Borginian any better than it was last time," Klavier laughed. "At least, I hope I am misunderstanding what you called me just now."
"Wow, what'd you say?" Trucy asked, giving Machi an impressed look.
Apollo hurriedly shushed his sister, placing a hand on his brother's shoulder to guide the red-faced Machi away from the bench. "Maybe you should go keep Vera company," he quietly suggested.
Machi shook his head, glaring at his feet. "I stay here."
Nodding, Apollo left his brother be to calm down, and turned his attention to the judge's podium. "Your Honour, with all due respect, the defence refuses to believe all those traces of poison match up only by co-incidence. There has to be something we're missing here!"
The judge thought a moment. "I'd like to bring some closure to this issue, sometime this year. Mister Wright, let's review the facts, and see where we stand." He leaned back a little in his chair, stroking his beard. "Seven years ago, late April twenty-nineteen, Drew Misham received a red envelope. There were traces of the poison atroquinine on the document inside that envelope. A similar trace was also found at the crime scene," he paused to fiddle with something on his desk, and Apollo's photo of the frame returned to the holograms, "on this tiny picture frame. The defence has indicated the possibility of a yellow envelope, an envelope that left the scene of the crime with the poisoned stamp on it."
Klavier scoffed, brushing at his hair. "Yes, but even if this envelope contained a poison stamp - and Drew Misham, knowing this, put it in a frame - he never would have used that stamp!"
The judge nodded. "I'm afraid you're right... which means there is a fatal flaw in the defence's case."
'No need to rub it in...' Frowning, Apollo crossed his arms and pressed a finger to his forehead.
"There's no way we're on the wrong track with this. There has to be a reason he framed that stamp, a reason that led to why he finally used it so many years later... Man, if only Luke was here. He'd figure it out in a snap."

With a wince, he banished that thought from his head - He was here just as much to prove he could do this alone, wasn't he? 'Well, time to pull out Mia's best advice, I guess: Let's turn this sucker around. Assume your theory is right; What else has to be true? Well, for one thing, Drew Misham didn't know about the trap, so... it wasn't him who framed it? The only other person who could is...!' He froze, mind racing. 'But... but that means...!'

"Well, Mister Wright?" the judge asked, interrupting the young attorney's train of thought. "Do you have a conclusion for us?"

Apollo took a deep breath, processing the option that had just come to mind. "I do, Your Honour. I think I've just figured this whole thing out."

"Oh, I'm looking forward to this," Klavier replied, grinning. "And whatever you've 'figured out' will prove your wild fantasies quite reasonable, ja?"

Apollo smirked. "You have no idea." He slammed his fists against the bench, announcing to the court, "Drew Misham was not the forger!"

There was a short pause as the courtroom stared at Apollo in silence. Eventually, the judge cried, "Excuse me!? The victim wasn't...?" He sighed, shaking his head. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"I'll explain," Apollo agreed, having expected the multitude of blank looks pointed in his direction. "April, twenty-nineteen, our forger sniffed a trap and stepped aside. Seven years later, October, twenty-twenty-six, the forger stumbles into that very same trap and dies. Why?"

"Because the forger who was killed was a fake!" Apollo announced.

Klavier blinked, nonplussed. "Come again?"

Apollo held up a single finger. "One forger smelled the trap." He held up a second finger on the same hand. "One forger fell into the trap. That's two forgers! And one of them was a fake!"

The gallery buzzed with activity, forcing the judge to start banging his gavel and call for order.

Klavier fixed the young man opposite him with a glare, not caring for the sound of the gallery above. "So you are telling us that Drew Misham, the victim, was a fake?" he asked, then threw a hand into the air in exasperation. "Well, if he was the fake, who was the real forger? You'd better not be claiming there was some kind of switcheroo!"

Having calmed the crowd, the judge nodded in agreement. "I'm afraid you're going to have to back up your story, Mister Wright. If not our victim, who is the real Drew Misham?"

Apollo crossed his arms, standing proud behind his bench. "There can only be one explanation, Your Honour: The real forger behind that name is none other than his only daughter," he swung his arm out to point at the courtroom, "Vera Misham!"

The crowds immediately burst into noise again, and the increasingly-irritated judge rapped his gavel madly to quiet them. "Order! Order! Order!" As the chaos died down, he turned to Apollo with a sigh. "Mister Wright, this is going out on a limb, even for you!"

"I kinda agree," Trucy whispered, giving her eldest brother a concerned look. "I mean, Vera, a
"I think it make sense," Machi replied, idly tugging on the frills at the end of his sleeve. "She draw. She paint. Only other person in studio is her."

Apollo decided not to point out painting one's nails wasn't the same thing as painting with paint. "Let's consider it before you write it off entirely," he told the court, and moved his hands to his Court Record. A moment later, the three paintings on display at the crime scene came up on the holograms. "If you look at the paintings in the studio, one fact becomes quite clear: Forgery had been taking place in that studio for quite some time." He pulled the photos down, not needing them anymore. "The forger wasn't caught in the trap seven years ago; This can only mean that the one who was caught in the trap wasn't the forger!"

The judge blinked, eyes wide. "Well... Actually, that does make a certain kind of sense."

"One more thing!" Apollo added, holding up two fingers. "Only two sets of fingerprints were found in the forger's studio: Drew Misham's... and Vera Misham's. If we know that Drew Misham isn't the forger, that leaves only one possibility, by process of elimination: The forger was Vera Misham." He crossed his arms, proudly eyeing his silent opponent. "Well?"

Klavier stared for a long moment, a slight frown on his face. "Fascinating..."

The judge rapped his gavel, waving for a bailiff. "Bring the defendant in here immediately!"

As the young bailiff dashed off into the defence waiting room, the gallery above broke into quiet murmuring, and Apollo turned around with a sigh to face his siblings, leaning against the bench at his back. "Well. Can't say I started this trial expecting that."

"You're telling us?" Trucy pointed out, an eyebrow raised.

Machi was looking worried, staring in the direction the bailiff had run off to. "Vera will be okay?"

Apollo frowned, following his brother's gaze. "I hope so. She was opening up to us this morning..."

"Being on trial's different, though," Trucy pointed out. "What if she faints again?"

"Don't bring out Mister Hat and she won't," Apollo muttered.

"Do you see a hat on my head right now!?" Trucy hissed in response, pointing at her bare head. "And I didn't mean to scare her, anyway!"

Machi was still staring past his siblings with a worried look. Without a word, he slipped past the older pair, leaving the defence bench behind.

"Machi?" Apollo asked, watching his brother in concern.

The bailiff had returned to the courtroom, doing his best to guide the meek Vera forward. She still hugged her sketchbook tight, and her emotionless eyes were locked on her own feet as she slowly took step after step towards the witness stand. Machi approached her carefully from the side, giving her a friendly smile and holding out a hand, and she stopped her trek to turn her gaze towards his face, studying him curiously. Machi said a few quiet words to her, though they were too far away for Apollo to hear exactly what. Vera mutely considered for a few moments, then nodded. The bailiff stepped back, and Machi led the cautious young woman over to the witness stand, where he stood at her side to offer the nervous Vera comfort.
Apollo couldn't help a proud smile for his youngest sibling.

The judge peered down at the silent defendant as the courtroom quietened once more. "Vera Misham?"

Vera paused, her gaze very briefly flicking up towards the judge from her stare at the floor.

"You've been paying attention to the trial so far?" the judge asked, a grandfatherly tone in his voice.

Vera's fingers twitched where they gripped her sketchbook. She made no move to reply.

Klavier sighed, brushing his hair. "Let's just ask her and be done with it, shall we?" He leaned casually against his bench, fixing the young woman with a stern look. "Who are you? Who is the forger Drew Misham?"

For a moment, it almost looked like Vera would continue her long silence, but her eyes flicked up towards Klavier... and double-taked, widening ever so slightly as she fixated on the prosecutor's face, cowering a little from the glare he was giving her. Apollo was almost too surprised to register that it was the first hint of an emotion he'd seen Vera express; She didn't even react when Machi patted her arm, whispering words of comfort.

Klavier took the extra attention in his stride with a practised rock star's smirk. "I'm used to being stared at by Frauleins, believe me... though they usually talk to me, too." He shot a group of cooing women in the gallery a grin, then returned a business-like look to Vera. "Tell us: Were you the one who forged those works of art?"

Vera continued to mutely stare for a long moment, then, finally, turned her attention away and flipped open her sketchbook, spinning it in her hands to show the smiling face she had drawn earlier for the Wrights. "Yes."

"So... So the forger, Drew Misham," the judge hesitantly asked, "was you?"

Vera stared for a long moment, then spun her notebook back around and flipped to a new page. She retrieved her pencil from a pocket, quickly sketching something on the paper, then turned her sketchbook around again to show the court a second emoticon, this one with a wibbly line for a mouth and a massive teardrop that covered one eye and dripped down over half of the face. "Yes, it was me."

The judge jerked back in his seat. "Wha... What!?"

The gallery burst into uproar, sounds of disbelief and shock echoing above. Vera hugged her sketchbook tight to her chest, stepping away from the witness stand, and Machi stuck to her side, trying to offer her comfort despite his own nervousness.

"Order! Order!" the judge called from his podium, fruitlessly banging his gavel. When the crowd failed to react, he was forced to wave a hand in exasperation. "This court will break for a ten minute recess!" With that, he promptly got up and descended from his podium.

Apollo didn't waste any time, shoving his Court Record in his bag with one hand while he kept the other gripping Trucy. "Machi!" he called, leaving the bench. His youngest brother's head perked up at the sound of his name, and the teen quickly realised what was going on, turning his attention to Vera to lead her away from the witness stand.
Together, the Wrights and Vera fled in the direction of the lobby.
When they arrived in the lobby, Apollo herded everyone in and closed the door behind them, resting his head against the wood with a sigh. Behind him, Machi guided Vera to the brown couch, sitting her down with a few quiet reassuring words.

"Polly?" Trucy called.

Apollo took a deep breath to steady himself before pushing off the door and turning to give his sister a forced smile. "Hey. Still confused about the case?"

Trucy thought a moment. "Well... I guess I understand what... just not why."

Apollo decided he had to agree there. He turned his attention to the couch, finding Vera sitting there with her sketchbook on her lap. In her hands was her crystal bottle of nail polish, reapplying the pink paint to her fingers.

Machi stood at Vera's side, watching his siblings. "When we go back... They ask Vera to stand again?"

"They will ask her to the stand, yes," Apollo replied, nodding as he and Trucy moved to join their brother. "We've asked Brushel everything we can, so it's up to her now."

Vera briefly paused in her appliance of her nail polish, then resumed her work in silence, ignoring the eyes of the Wrights on her.

Apollo sighed. "Vera... You made all those forgeries?"

The young woman paused, then slowly put away her bottle. She carefully picked up the sketchbook to show the sad face she had drawn in court, her own down-turned. "Yes... For Father." She lowered the sketchbook. "I know it was wrong."

"Could you tell us how it happened?" Trucy asked.

Vera sat in silence, and Apollo worried for a moment she wouldn't reply... but, as always, the trick with Vera was to be patient for her reply: "My father was a painter. I've loved painting ever since I was a child." Her fingers twitched nervously. "One day, Father saw it in me... He saw that I had the 'talent'."

"Talent?" Machi repeated. "You mean... make forgeries?"

Vera almost nodded, but stopped mid-motion. "How should I say it? It was not only paintings I made. Given the materials, I could make... anything."

Apollo felt his suspicions from the previous day rearing its ugly head at the back of his mind. "Anything?"

The young woman flipped her sketchbook to the happy face, propping it up on her knees. "Father
was so proud, and I, so happy..." She paused, then flipped to the sad face. "But, in the end, I was making... those..."

"The forgeries," Apollo filled in, looking away.

"I've never had a good constitution, nor... personality," Vera continued, laying the sketchbook down again.

"Th-that not true!" Machi insisted. "You have wonderful personality! You just... quiet, and shy. I quiet and shy, too. That not mean you not have one!"

Vera didn't react outwardly to the teen's short speech, but, by now, they expected that from her. She looked away. "I know very little of the world outside my door," she told them. She paused, taking a deep breath, and even sounding a little choked up. "Now, because of me... Father... is..."

Machi patted her arm. "It okay to cry if need."

She made no move to react, but Vera did seem to calm down at that.

Trucy and Apollo exchanged worried looks before returning their gazes to the young woman. "So, um," Trucy spoke up, "did you know about the red envelope?"

Vera didn't immediately reply. "I remember the envelope. It was some time ago."

'A full seven years,' Apollo mused. 'Hard to think it's been that long I've had Dad, Luke and Trucy.' Aloud, he asked, "You were already a, um... You were already creating your 'works' back then?"

Vera nodded. "I started when I was only twelve years old."

"So the one who figured out the stamp was poisoned," Apollo continued, "that was-?"

"Mister Wright!"

All four jumped as the doors opened, and a bailiff poked his head in.

"It's time! To the courtroom, please!"

Apollo hurriedly gave the man a wave of acknowledgement. "R-right!"

The bailiff nodded, then was gone.

Machi frowned and pulled out his phone. "Ten minutes already...?"

Apollo sighed, mentally preparing to herd his siblings and client back to the courtroom. "C'mon, let's get going."

"Wait!" Trucy ordered, holding up a hand, then turned to Vera. "Just one more thing, please! Those three paintings in the studio..."

Vera hugged her sketchbook tight as she stood up, eyes on Trucy. "I painted those, as part of my work."

"Right," Trucy replied, nodding. "See, we checked them out and we saw what was underneath..." She shot her brothers a nervous look. "We... saw the rough sketches, underneath the three finished paintings..."
Apollo nearly kicked himself. 'Oh, right... I almost forgot about those. There are so many other strange things going on, I lost track...'

"I see." Vera thought a long moment, then finally turned her eyes to Apollo. "Mister Wright... Father knew of you. Your family."

"He... did?" Apollo muttered. Somehow, he wasn't surprised; It was the only connection, the only explanation for the three specific sketches they'd seen... and those suspicions about why Phoenix had chosen this case still prickled at the back of his head, ignoring his half-hearted attempts to quash them.

Vera nodded. "He was watching, gathering information... All about the 'Wright And Co Law Offices'."

Apollo's eyes widened, and he shared a surprised look with Trucy; How long had it been since they'd had someone coming to them with that name on their lips?

"B-but, we don't just do law," Trucy pointed out with a nervous laugh. "I mean, we've got Polly doing it now, but only since this year...!"

Vera nodded again. "Yes... You do tricks, gags to amuse... and play piano, and violin."

Trucy looked a little put out by that description of their magic show, pouting as she muttered, "Well, they're not really 'gags'..."

Although he privately agreed, Apollo whispered, "It's not important, Truce."

"Yet when Father heard you had resumed the legal business..." Vera pulled up her sketchbook, opening it to the happy face. "How pleased he was."

Apollo stared back at her for a long moment, unable to think of anything to say in response. Those suspicions at the back of his head were getting stronger.

The long silence was finally broken when Machi reached up and hesitantly tapped Vera's arm. "Um... You okay at stand? I still go with you if you want."

Vera hugged her sketchbook to her chest. "Yes... That is very kind of you."

Trucy frowned, head cocked to one side. "So, you do want him with you, or...?"

Vera nodded.

"I am happy to help," Machi assured her with a smile, then looked to Apollo. "We go back to court now?"

"Yeah, we should do that," Apollo muttered, and waved his siblings and client towards the door. "C'mon, let's go."

The defence team were, again, the first to arrive in the courtroom, bar members of the gallery; Apollo suspected the bailiff hadn't bothered waiting anything near the full ten minutes before summoning them back. Machi once again escorted Vera to the stand, staying by her side in his self-appointed
support role... not too dissimilar to what he'd done for Lamiroir now Apollo thought about it. Apollo and Trucy returned to the defence bench, and Apollo quickly moved to set up his Court Record, more for something to do with his hands than because it was vital he go through the trouble of disconnecting and reconnecting it to the courtroom's network. His mind was buzzing with what Vera had told them in the lobby, and the possibilities of what more she might say once the trial started up again. Vera was a forger, under her father's name. Said father was aware of Phoenix, of the agency, and was happy that Apollo had picked up Phoenix's law career after it was torn so thoroughly to ruin. Why? Somehow Apollo doubted it was merely because Drew was a fan... As much as he was awful with names, he was beginning to suspect he'd been wrong to dismiss the feeling of familiarity when he'd first heard 'Vera Misham'. *If only Dad hadn't run off with that case file...'*

"Polly?"

Dragging himself back to reality, Apollo looked up to meet his sister's worried eyes. "Mm?"

"Why do you think Mister Misham was watching us?" Trucy quietly asked. "Maybe... he was a fan of Daddy? Like you?"

Apollo opened his mouth to insist she surely had exactly the answer, but couldn't make himself believably lie, not with his little sister's fearful eyes on him. "I... I don't think that's it. Whatever's going on..." He sighed. "I don't know, Truce. I wish I did."

Trucy stared a moment, then nodded. Silently, she reached a hand out for his, and the pair leaned against each other in a kind of semi-hug, Apollo's head resting atop Trucy's.

The noise of the gallery stilled, and Apollo looked up to see that, not only was Klavier finally in place at the bench opposite them, but the judge was sitting down atop his podium. The young magician was loathe to let go of his sister's hand just yet, so he merely lifted his head, the pair sticking close together as the trial resumed.

*View the Court Record*
"Court is now back in session," the judge announced, and banged his gavel, the courtroom silent.

Apollo, like the rest of the court, turned his attention to the witness stand: Machi was a little nervous, but stood proudly as Vera's support regardless, steadfast at her side. Vera herself was clearly tense, the fingers of one hand rubbing against her lips as she fought not to chew on them.

"Perhaps you could begin by telling us how it all worked," Klavier asked, watching Vera carefully.

"How did you set up this 'Drew Misham forger' persona?"

Vera blinked once, her eyes jumping up from the floor to the prosecutor's face. As before, her only reply was a cower and a silent stare.

Apollo and Trucy shared a worried look.

The judge shook his head, recognising Klavier's question was never going to be answered. "Very well, miss, if you would." He leaned forward, giving her a stern stare. "Did you really make those detestable forgeries?"

Vera's eyes shot up to the judge with a slight jump. She still made no move to speak.

"Perhaps you'd rather answer my question," Klavier suggested, a friendly smile on his face. "Were you the one who painted that painting? The remarkably similar one?"

Finally, Vera's mouth opened, and for a reason other than to stick her hand in. "Ah... Yes..." She pulled up her notebook, opening it to the smiling face that she showed the court. "I painted it, yes."

The notebook lowered. "Father praised me quite highly for it."

A murmur spread across the gallery.

"So," the judge sighed. "She was the one who made the forgeries."

"Yet, she did not wish to reveal the truth of their operation," Klavier replied, a frown tugging at his lips as he snapped his fingers in thought. "So the victim was a stand-in, a decoy. To the world at large, he was the forger, not her."

Vera looked between the prosecutor and the judge for a moment before her eyes turned back down to the floor. "I've done... a bad thing. I have, haven't I?"

Machi patted her arm, silently offering comfort.

Klavier shook his head. "Regardless, we need a little more information. About, for instance, this."

He picked up the red envelope from where it still lay on his bench, holding it high for the court to see, and watched Vera carefully. "You have seen this before, ja?"

Vera studied the envelope for a moment, then reluctantly nodded. "Y-yes. It was in the desk drawer."
The judge nodded. "Very well, you may proceed with your testimony," he ordered. "Tell us everything you know about this envelope."

Vera shrank away at first, clearly not wanting to speak, but turned at the gentle touch of Machi's hand on her arm. His smile seemed to give her the courage to face the court again, and, although still scared, she gave her hesitant testimony: "I created things, and Father sold them. This envelope," she looked to the red paper visible lying on Klavier's bench, "came after my first work... that was other than a painting. Father handled the deal, all of it." She paused, then pulled open her sketchbook and a pencil; In a few moments, she had finished her new illustration and spun the book in her hands to show a stamp, the silhouettes of three people taking up most of the picture... though the only detail she had given them was a hat on the tall figure in the middle. "I received the stamp that was in that envelope," Vera explained, then looked away. "It was after that job that we moved to the current studio."

The judge hummed in thought. "There certainly was much of great interest in your testimony."

Klavier had a hand in his hair, looking away with a frown. "Not that the witness realises it."

The judge didn't seem to notice the comment, turning to Apollo. "Very well, please begin the cross-examination!"

"Right!" Apollo replied, and looked to Vera. Her attention was back on the floor, her thumb in her mouth as she ground her teeth against the nail. 'Poor Vera... but the show must go on.' He shot a look to Machi, who smiled back. 'I can trust my little brother to keep her spirits up, though.' "So, Vera... These 'things' you were making were, um, paintings identical to other paintings, right?"

Vera nodded. "The closer they were, the happier Father was." She paused, then opened her sketchbook and flipped to the smiling face. "I was happy too."

"Still, you're quite young now," the judge pointed out. "When did you begin this work?"

Vera thought a moment, pulling her sketchbook back to her chest. "My first painting sold when I was twelve."

Apollo quickly did the maths in his head. 'Seven years ago? Surely that means...' He turned to the judge. "Your Honour! She had no idea what she was doing was illegal!"

"Objection!" came a cry from across the room, and Klavier gave Apollo an amused look. "Easy there, little attorney; You're not here to defend her for the crime of forgery."

The judge nodded, humming in agreement. "True."

Apollo tried not to blush. 'Can't blame me for trying... What's next to ask?' He returned his attention to his client. "Okay, Vera... You said the red envelope came after your first work that wasn't a painting? So, you'd only done paintings up to that point?"

Vera nodded. "Yes... But Father had a realisation. He noticed my talent extended to making things other than paintings."

Apollo felt those suspicions prickling at the back of his mind again. "For instance?"

"For instance..." Vera thought a moment. "A letter someone had written... or a fingerprint left upon a cup... or a signature on a document... a seal upon a letter..."

"And the hundred thousand dollars promised in this letter was the start," Klavier added, mercifully
bringing Vera's incriminating list to a halt as he held up the papers that had been inside the envelope. "The beginning of a new industry for Drew Misham."

The judge frowned. "A new... 'industry'?”

"The creation of items to be used in criminal proceedings," Klavier darkly explained, replacing the letter on his bench and shooting Apollo a look. "Forging evidence, in other words."

Atop his podium, the judge gasped.

Apollo merely bit his lip, thinking 'You don't need to tell me twice...' before returning his attention to Vera. "You didn't know how the things you were making were being used?"

Vera didn't immediately reply, opening her sketchbook to the smiling face again. "I enjoy painting very much."

Klavier nodded to himself. "I think I understand. The Fraulein has lived in an... unusual little world."

Ignoring Klavier, Apollo continued, "Can you tell us what happened to the 'papers' that were in that red envelope?" He gestured to the letter on the prosecutor's bench.

Her sketchbook lowered, Vera thought a moment. "Father signed them and sent them back I believe."

"But... he didn't follow the instructions, did he?" Apollo pointed out. "'Send in the enclosed envelope with the enclosed stamp'... You took that stamp, right?"

Vera stared at Apollo before returning to her sketchbook, this time showing the crying face. "Did I do something wrong...?"

Apollo stopped himself short from hounding her for an answer, feeling a bit panicked as it became increasingly clear she had no idea what he was talking about. "You... realised it had the poison on the back, right? Th-that's why you took it, and put it in the frame!"

"Herr Forehead, you can't force an answer upon the witness," Klavier called across the room, a small smile on his face.

Apollo glared in silent reply.

"Now then," Klavier continued, turning to Vera, "perhaps you would tell me, Fraulein Vera? Why did you 'receive' this stamp?"

Vera hugged her sketchbook close, her thumb back in her mouth as she cowered behind the stand, staring silently at Klavier. Machi patted her arm, but she didn't react to the offered comfort.

The judge raised an eyebrow. "Is something wrong?"

Finally, Vera moved, flipping open her sketchbook and showing the court her picture of the stamp. "It was... beautiful," she gave as explanation.

After a moment of thought, the judge smiled. "Ah, you mean it was one of those commemorative stamps?"

Vera stood silently for a second or two. "Yes, I think it was."
"So... you didn't know about the poison?" Apollo quietly asked.

Vera stared at him for a moment before flipping to a new page of her sketchbook and taking to it with her pencil. Once she spun the book back around, the frowning face with a small black cloud billowing from its forehead said it all.

Apollo sighed, mentally throwing up his hands. 'I guess not!'

"So the trap failed by chance," Klavier mused aloud. "By mistake... Thanks to this commemorative stamp."

The judge hummed in agreement. "Quite the close call!"

Apollo decided not to grumble, reviewing the transcript of Vera's testimony on his Court Record. "Vera... You say you moved to where the current Drew Studio is?"

Vera nodded, hugging her sketchbook. "Yes... We saw very few people there. I began drawing picture books..."

"This single job had tied them to the criminal underworld," Klavier pointed out to the court. "I'd think Mister Misham wished to reduce their visibility in the world at large."

"When we had to meet someone for some reason," Vera continued, "Father posed as the creator of the work."

Apollo crossed his arms, frowning. "So that was the real essence of the artist, 'Drew Misham'. You did the work, and he supplied the face."

The judge nodded, giving Vera a sympathetic look. "So... you really didn't know anything, did you? You had no idea how much danger you were in."

Vera flipped open her sketchbook, showing the judge her drawing of the crying face.

"Apparently not," Klavier filled in.

View the Court Record
Apollo was still stuck on the stamp, wondering why it was kept if not because Vera knew about the poison. "About this 'commemorative stamp'... could you tell us more about it?"

Vera stared at Apollo for a long moment before opening her sketchbook to the drawing of the stamp. "It was very pretty. And, more than that..." She paused, until Machi's hand at her arm prompted her to continue. "It was a picture of people I liked at the time."

Apollo's eyes widened. 'That's new...'

Klavier chuckled, and briefly mimed some air guitar. "Apparently we've got some testimony yet ahead of us," he pointed out. "If you would be so kind as to tell us more, Fraulein."

Vera stood still for a moment, still holding up her picture of the stamp. "The stamp was a picture of my favourite magicians... so I kept it."

"Hold it!" Apollo shouted, eyes wide in surprise as his fists banged against the bench. "M-magicians!?"

Vera nodded, lowering her notebook as her hand strayed to her mouth. "I love mysterious things, I always have."

Trucy turned to her elder brother with a raised eyebrow. "Even though she fainted when she saw Mister Hat...?"

Apollo shrugged.

"Father took me when I was very young," Vera continued, nibbling at her thumbnail. "It was a great magic show. I loved it so much."

Quickly getting over her shock, Trucy scoffed, moving to pose with her hand on her hat. "Well, obviously!" She briefly fumbled as she realised too late she wasn't wearing her usual top hat, and quickly shifted to put both hands on her hips instead. "Magic is the best, after all!"

Although he moved to shush his sister, Apollo couldn't help a smile in agreement.

Vera didn't respond, eyes down-turned as she flipped through her sketchbook. "But the magic troupe we saw disbanded soon after." She lifted the book, showing the crying face. "I was quite sad."

Apollo's smile fell in an instant, face pale. "D-dis-!?" He paused only half a second, then turned his attention to his Court Record, navigating through to his older files.

Trucy watched her older brother was a concerned expression. "Polly...?"

"Vera, th-those magicians you liked," Apollo called, finding the folder he was looking for in his search. He paused briefly to debate whether to use a photo of the poster that hung in their dressing room at the Wonder Bar, but ultimately decided to go for a slightly later promotional picture that
more closely matched the image Vera had drawn on her stamp. "Was... Was this them?" Hand shaking, he tossed the image of Valant, Zak and Thalassa up on screen, the Gramarye Seal partly visible behind them.

Vera stared at the picture a few moments, then flipped over the pages of her sketchbook to show the court her drawing of a smiling face.

To his intense disappointment, Apollo was not surprised.

The gallery was murmuring to themselves above their heads. At Apollo's side, Trucy gasped, mouth opening in a wide grin. "Really!?" she squeaked.

Vera hugged her sketchbook to her chest, her hand once more moving to her mouth.

"Hmm, I see!" the judge said, nodding to himself. "Still, I have to wonder... Why include a commemorative stamp like that in a business letter?"

"Good question," Apollo muttered, too shaken to do much else other than stare at the image on his computer screen.

Trucy scoffed, waving a hand. "Well, pretty stamps are always better," she declared, "and you can't beat Troupe Gramarye!" She grinned, turning to her brother. "Right, Apollo?"

Apollo blinked in surprise as he realised he was being addressed, and hurriedly nodded. "Uh, y-yeah, right... That's right, Artemis."

Trucy frowned, watching him carefully.

"But, the whole murder plan was a failure because of it," the judge continued, no longer paying attention to the defence. "Ironic, don't you think...?" He turned to the prosecutor's bench, only to pause, confused. "Prosecutor Gavin?"

It was only as he heard the man's name Apollo thought to check on his opponent, the only other person in the courtroom who had a chance of being on the same page as him: Klavier was leaning on his bench, a tense grimace on his face as sweat poured down his brow. He was breathing heavily, and his hands were curled into tight fists, the skin pale where his fingers dug into the palm.

The lack of a response only make the judge visibly concerned. "Prosecutor Gavin?"

Klavier didn't immediately reply. "Gr... Gram... Gramarye..." His eyes locked on Vera, he asked with a laboured tone, "Might I ask just one question of this witness?"

Vera looked back at him blankly. No-one objected to the request.

"In your testimony just now," Klavier forced out, "you stated this was your 'first work that was other than a painting'..."

Vera nodded, nibbling on her thumbnail.

Klavier was looking more and more pained. "Please tell me... what exactly did you make?"

There was a very long silence as Vera stared back at the prosecutor. "Can I ask why-"

"No! Answer the question!" Klavier shouted, and banged a fist against the wall behind him. "Now!"

Vera shrieked, jumping back, and Machi was quick to comfort her, pulling the young woman into a
loose hug.

"P-prosecutor Gavin!" the judge cried in surprise, giving the man a disapproving frown. "You're usually not the one whose volume concerns me!"

Klavier seemed unable to keep still, turning back and forth and running a hand through his hair. "Yes, it is unbecoming of me," he hurriedly agreed. "I apologise. But... I must know." He leaned on the bench again, staring intensely at Vera and begging, "Please, Ms Misham, tell me."

Vera stared back with wide eyes, and it took her a long moment to regain the courage to leave Machi's embrace and return to the stand. "It was... a book," she hesitantly explained, her eyes flicking between Klavier and the floor as she chewed on her thumb. "A single page... in a 'book'..."

"A 'book'?' Klavier repeated. "Please be more specific."

Vera thought for another long moment. "It was a handwritten book. Like... like a diary."

Apollo felt his insides turn icy cold.

Klavier took a moment to react to Vera's answer, his normally orange skin going deathly pale. "N... no!" he shouted, spinning around to punch and then kick the wall behind him, startling the members of the gallery directly above. "I don't... No!" His outburst over, he stood with his back to the court, his head in his hands.

"Wh-what's wrong?" Trucy asked, worried eyes jumping between Klavier and Apollo. "Polly, what's going on?"

Before Apollo could formulate an answer, Klavier spun around again, leaning on his bench with a pained grimace directed at Vera; His right hand was being handled very gingerly, and had likely been bruised from the prosecutor's assault on the wall. "Ms Misham, this 'book': Was there a picture of a man's head wearing a top hat on the back cover?" he demanded. "Yes or no!?"

Vera's eyes widened as she stared at Klavier, her thumb finally leaving her mouth. "How... How did you know...?"

Before Klavier could reply, Apollo slammed his fists against his bench, shouting, "Objection!" The moment he had the attention of the court, he shot a stern look at the attorney across the room. "Prosecutor Gavin, calm down! She's answering all your questions, stop badgering her!"

Klavier held his injured hand to his chest, still leaning on his bench with the other arm as he stared at Apollo in distraught disbelief. "He's told you nothing, has he? Your soiled, sullied father? Nothing!?"

Trucy was looking even more worried. "D-Daddy...?"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "Don't be ridiculous. As if I'd let my dad pull a move as stupid as that." Before Klavier could reply, he turned his attention to the witness stand. "Vera, that page you made was used as evidence in a trial seven years ago, and ultimately cost one man a fair verdict and another his career as a lawyer." A small gasp rang through the crowds above, and Trucy squeaked at his side, but Apollo ignored them. "It's very important you tell us who it was that asked you to make it."

The gallery muttered amongst themselves, but were quickly silenced by a tap of the judge's gavel; Although he looked confused, the old man on the podium seemed curious to hear where the two attorneys below him were going with their questioning.
Vera stared at Apollo for a long moment, chewing on her thumb. "We... only met once."

Apollo dared to let his hopes rise, but was careful to stay calm and treat the young woman gently. "You met the client? Who was it?"

"It was..." Vera's gaze returned to Klavier, taking a small step back. "It was..."

Machi jumped to comfort her, a hand on the woman's back.

Still cradling his injured hand, Klavier gave Vera a puzzled look. "Yes, what? Is there something about me?"

Vera didn't reply. After a long silence, her eyes never straying from the prosecutor, she continued, "I remember clearly... I remember who gave me the book... the diary..." She trailed off again, her breathing starting to quicken.

"Vera?" Apollo prompted, fighting to stay calm. "Who was it?"

The young woman didn't reply, standing in silence. Finally, she coughed, choking on something in her throat. Before everyone's stunned gazes, her eyes rolled up in her head and Vera tipped backwards.

"Vera!" Machi shouted, jumping to catch her, but Vera's weight was too much for him and they both fell to the floor with a loud thump.

Pushing his sister behind him, Apollo dashed out from behind the bench and ducked under the ropes towards the witness stand. "Vera!" He reached the collapsed woman in a flash, where Machi was crouched at her side, trying to keep Vera awake, and was just in time to hear her final words:

"The... De... vil..."

With that, Vera's eyes closed and she fell unconscious.

View the Court Record
"Vera! Vera!" Machi cried, shaking the woman's shoulders in increasing panic, tears spilling from his baby-blue eyes. "Vera, wake up!"

"Machi, stop," Apollo firmly ordered, gripping his brother's arms. With a glance up, he saw Ema running for them, a first-aid official at her heels, and gently began to pull Machi backwards, away from their unconscious client. "C'mon, let's get out the way."

Machi stumbled as he followed his brother's guiding hands, mute except for the sobs escaping through the hands pressed to his mouth. Once they were far enough away that Apollo stopped moving, the teen spun around and clung to his brother's vest, burying his face in the crimson cape that was draped over Apollo's shoulder.

Apollo instinctively wrapped his arms around Machi, one hand on the back of the boy's golden bob as he whispered comforting words into his chest; His eyes, however, were on the young woman still lying on the floor. While his attention had been on Machi, the courtroom around them had erupted into a ruckus, calls for the first-aid crew, orders for the gallery to calm down, demands to know what was going on. At the witness stand, Ema was radioing for more help between helping the first aid worker look Vera over. The young woman's collapse was replaying over and over in Apollo's mind... They were so close to finally answering the question of who'd been responsible for the loss of Phoenix's badge once and for all; Was it Kristoph as they'd always suspected? From what Apollo remembered of Phoenix's notes (If only he'd reread them more recently!), the identity of the forger's client had been a secret under the care of 'a little girl'... which, considering Vera was a few years younger than him, would certainly match who she'd been in 2019.

Apollo frowned. So this was why the Jurist System's test trial was so last minute, why Phoenix had chosen this case specifically. Without ever letting slip to them the full importance of what was hanging over their heads, Phoenix had assigned Apollo their one and only chance to clear his name. Drew's life had been forfeit, and now Vera's hung in the balance... and Phoenix's name as a lawyer was now tied to her.

Footsteps nearby broke Apollo from his musing, and he saw Trucy dash around behind Machi, giving her brother a worried look as she pressed against his back. Apollo moved his own arms to Machi's shoulders, then gently stepped back to check on his brother's state. Machi seemed to have calmed down, rubbing at his eyes as he looked up at Apollo silently.

"You okay?" Apollo asked.

Machi nodded.

"Good." Apollo chanced another look at Vera; A couple more first aid officers had arrived by now with a stretcher in tow, and were carefully lifting Vera onto it... a scenario Apollo couldn't help but mentally compare to when they'd found Lamiroir unconscious in the contrabass case. He resisted a shudder at the memory. The sooner Vera recovered and pointed the finger at someone, whether it was Kristoph or not-
Wait.

Finger. Kristoph.

*Nail polish.*

Apollo's head spun to face his siblings, eyes wide. "Truce, could you get out that poison spray Ema lent us?"

Trucy frowned in confusion, but reluctantly reached into the bag at her hip regardless. "Okaaay..."

"And take off your gloves, too."

The girl double-taked, her hand already half out of the bag, and gave her eldest brother an incredulous look. "What? Why?!"

Apollo leaned forward to snatch the small spray-bottle from her hand, shooting his sister a stern glare as he snapped, "Just do it, okay!?" With Trucy hesitantly pulling at the white fabric that covered her hands, he turned to his other sibling, who was watching them worriedly. "Machi, hold out your hands for me." Apollo held up his free hand, fingers together and nails facing the ceiling, to demonstrate. "Like this."

Machi stared a moment, then copied his brother without a word.

Apollo popped off the bottle's cap, then, biting his lip, carefully sprayed across the ends of his youngest brother's fingers. To his horror, Machi's nails turned from pale pink to a bright blue.

Machi squeaked in surprise, face paling as he stepped back. "I-isovelie...!"

Looking over her brother's shoulder, Trucy gasped, clasping her removed gloves in one hand. "But... but that means..."

Apollo didn't waste any time, turning to his sister with a beckoning gesture. "Trucy, hands!"

Trucy stepped around Machi, shoving her gloves in her bag, and obediently held out her own fingers for testing. She only stared with wide eyes as the atroquinine spray did its work, confirming with its blue tinge that the poison coated her nails as much as her brother's.

Apollo's heart was pounding in his ears as he stared at the spread before him of nails painted blue. Never before had anything, let alone a simple colour, scared him so much, shaken him so thoroughly to his core that he almost couldn't move with fear. This was more than Vera's fate, more than Phoenix's reputation; This was the lives of his teenage siblings, two children who should have had nothing to do with this case, who were only here and only in danger because Apollo had put them there... and it was only because of that he was able to stir himself back into action, clumsily shoving the cap back on the spray-bottle in his hand before shoving the whole thing in the bag at his hip, freeing his hands to grip his siblings' wrists. "Ema!"

"Geeze!" came a cry from the other side of the witness stand, where Ema was standing with Klavier, shooting the Wrights an annoyed glare from between the hands on her ears; Even the first aid officials nearby flinched at the sound of Apollo's shriek as they rolled Vera out of the room on her stretcher. "I'm right here, no need to shout!"

Apollo didn't have the time to feel guilty, dragging his siblings across to the witness stand. "Ema! Vera's been poisoned with atroquinine in her nail polish!"
Klavier raised an eyebrow. "**Herr** Forehead, atroquinine doesn't absorb through the skin, and especially not through nails; It needs to be ingested to work. And who in their right mind eats nail polish?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Diva!" Apollo cried, rolling his eyes. "**Even you** must have noticed Vera bites her nails when she's nervous! She was practically chewing them off during her entire testimony!"

"But how do you know it was atroquinine in her nail polish?" Ema interrupted before Klavier could reply. "She's only just collapsed."

Apollo was shaking so hard he almost couldn't reply for a moment. "Because she's been constantly applying that stuff over the past two days," he explained, feeling like he was about to burst into tears. "And, before the trial, she put that same nail polish on my brother and sister." He shoved forward the hands of Trucy and Machi, whose wrists he still held tightly in his grasp.

Ema and Klavier gasped as they both saw the blue on the teens' fingers. Klavier quietly swore in German, but Ema jumped forward, saying, "Well, that's good enough for me," and giving the two worried teens a smile. "I have some acetone to get all that off; Why don't you two come up to the first aid office with me?"

Trucy gripped Apollo's hand with her free one, giving him a smile that failed to hide her fear. "Polly, you can let go of us now."

Too late, Apollo realised both Trucy and Machi sported pained grimaces, and released his hold on their arms. Immediately, Machi began rubbing his wrist, blinking away tears that were as much the result of fear as pain... or, at least, Apollo hoped that was the case.

Ema stepped forward to guide the young pair towards the doors at the back of the room, where Vera's stretcher had disappeared, and Apollo was moving to follow when a hand suddenly gripped his arm.

"Not you, **Herr** Forehead."

Everyone paused, looking to Klavier. "Why not!?" Apollo demanded.

"The judge hasn't yet called an end to today's proceedings," the prosecutor pointed out. "Neither of us can leave until then."

As much as he wanted to, Apollo couldn't debate that. "B-but..."

"We'll be okay, Polly," Trucy said, smiling at Apollo strong enough to mask her concern from all but him, then turned to her younger brother. "Won't we, Machi?"

Machi was still cradling his left wrist, looking pale and avoiding eye contact. Regardless, he managed a quick nod.

Trucy turned back to Apollo. "We'll see you later, 'kay?"

Apollo still hated the idea of letting his siblings out of his sight while they were in so much danger, but forced himself to nod. "Mm-hm."

Ema opened her mouth to say something, but reconsidered, giving Apollo only a small smile before returning her attention to Trucy and Machi. "C'mon, kiddos." A hand each on their backs, she guided the pair through the double doors and out of sight.
Although they were gone, Apollo couldn't tear his eyes from the spot where he'd last seen his siblings. He barely registered Klavier's hand loosening its grip on his arm, his mind laser-focused on the well-being of the sister he'd only had for seven years and the brother he'd only had for three months. This wasn't fair. He couldn't lose them, not to something that wasn't even their fault. Why hadn't he stopped them from playing with that nail polish the moment he recognised the bottle? Why hadn't he insisted they stay home, or at least in the gallery, and faced this trial alone? Why hadn't he been enough on his own to protect them?

A banging from behind him jerked Apollo from his thoughts, and he blinked back tears as he spun around to see the judge calling the room to silence from atop his podium, flanked on one side by a bailiff and on the other by a familiar young man in a blue vest and paper-boy cap.


The judge's eyes swept across the room before coming to rest on Apollo and Klavier below, still stood either side of the empty witness stand. "With the defendant on her way to the hospital, I see no way we can continue this trial today," he announced. "We will resume proceedings tomorrow." With a final bang of his gavel, the courtroom was dismissed.

Apollo barely gave the old man a glance, his eyes focussed on his brother, the younger man who was now heading down the stairs at the side of the judge's podium. Waving, he ran for the wooden barrier that blocked off the passage between the bottom of the stairs and the door out the back of the room. "Luke!"

A few steps from the bottom, Luke paused, one hand on the stair railing while the other clutched his laptop securely in the crook of his arm. His eyes quickly found the caped attorney running towards him, and he grimaced. "Apollo, I'm really sorry, I'm not supposed to talk to you until-"

"Until the trial's over, I know," Apollo interrupted, giving his brother a relieved smile. "Why else would Dad have sent you off on another project instead of helping us? I don't blame you for that."

Luke minutely sighed, and managed a small smile. "Thank you."

For a few moments, Apollo could only stare at his younger brother, savouring the knowledge that at least one of his younger siblings was safe, that he hadn't screwed up so badly all three of them had been dragged into danger. He tried to speak, but there was nothing he could really say; He had only just acknowledged the subject of the trial was off-limits, and the weight of the situation made any attempt at small talk feel out of place. He could tell Luke about what had happened to Trucy and Machi, but... where would he even start?

Luke frowned with concern. "Are you okay, Apollo?"

"Y-yeah, I'm fine," Apollo insisted, trying to force a laugh and ending up making a sound more like heavy breathing. "L-listen, um..." He ran a hand through his hair, briefly glancing back at the empty defence bench behind him. "When you next see Dad... Tell him I'm looking after Trucy and Machi no matter what, okay?"

"Well, of course you are," Luke replied, confused. "Why would...?" He paused, eyes widening as he hugged his laptop to his chest. "Apollo, what happened?"

Apollo shook his head, not wanting his brother to worry. "They'll be fine. I'm looking after them." He smiled. "We can tell you all about it once the trial's over." His calm exterior nearly snapped at the thought that, with Vera downed from atroquinine poisoning, the trial might be over already, but he shoved the thought aside, refusing to fall to despair.
Luke stared back at Apollo a few moments before reluctantly nodding, taking the last few steps down to ground level. "A-alright." He paused, clutching his laptop tightly, then shoved the computer under an arm and stepped right up to the barrier. Without a word, he reached over and pulled his brother into a hug, and Apollo didn't hesitate to return it.

The two brothers stood for a long moment clutching each other tightly, then mutually let go and stepped back. Luke forced a smile, then turned and hurried out the nearby door.

Apollo watched his brother disappear in silence, his own smile fading. All that self-assuredness for Luke had just been a front; He still wasn't entirely sure he could keep to his promise that Trucy and Machi would be okay... And that was before bringing Vera or Phoenix into it too. He felt numb, separated from his younger siblings, from his father, from both of his mothers... not even his cousins or best friend was there for him right now. He was all alone.

"Herr Wright?"

Blinking back tears, Apollo glanced at the rapidly emptying room behind him and noticed Klavier watching, only a short distance away; Clearly the prosecutor had followed the younger attorney as he'd hurried to greet his brother.

"Do you know the way to the first aid office?"

Apollo had to think. *I'm sure I've seen it on a map of the courthouse... But, which floor is it on? It's near the library, isn't it? Or is that the cafe I'm thinking of? I'm sure I remember something about turning left off the stairs, so... but is that going up or going down?*

Apparently his silence was enough of an answer, as Klavier smiled enigmatically. "I will take you there myself. But first..." He gestured to the defence bench, still littered with Apollo's Court Record and case files. "We had better clean up, ja? We are not the only ones using this courtroom today."

Unable to make his mouth move - neither to thank Klavier nor to agree with his statement, both of which he wanted to do - Apollo simply nodded, and moved to collect his things without a word.

View the Court Record
Apollo's arms were tightly crossed as he trudged down the corridor, half a step behind Klavier. He hadn't spoken a word since his discussion with Luke, answering questions with a nod or a shake of his head, and found it hard to summon the energy to be interested in the path they were taking. No matter how much he worried, he was almost certain Trucy and Machi would be okay; His case, on the other hand, was truly a fate that hung precariously in the balance, right along with Vera's and Phoenix's.

As they exited a flight of stairs, Klavier gently cleared his throat. "Herr Wright, if I may... Were you aware beforehand?"

Apollo frowned, his gaze moving from his feet to the man at his side. "Of what?"

Klavier avoided eye contact, shrugging uncomfortably. "Of... Of exactly how deep the rabbit hole went, you could say."

It took a moment, but eventually Apollo realised Klavier was referring to the Mishams, and how intrinsically they were tied to the Gramarye case back in 2019. He almost smiled. "I suspected," he admitted. "A forger, and a letter about a payment dated to the same month and year of that trial? I figured it had to be more than just a co-incidence."

Klavier nodded, his stern eyes still on the path ahead. "I see."

"And you, Prosecutor Gavin?" Apollo found himself asking. "I've read my dad's notes enough times that I thought 'Misham' was a familiar name. Did you not recognise them at all?"

The prosecutor sighed. "It has been seven years, Herr Wright," he pointed out. "I have made no such efforts to keep the lowest point of my career in my memory."

Apollo watched the older man in shock, almost stopping in his tracks; Klavier Gavin, openly admitting the Gramarye case was a low point of his past? Was... Was he dreaming!?

"Once I have refreshed said memory and court reconvenes tomorrow..." Klavier shook his head, expression distant. "I must admit, I would appreciate finally knowing for sure what happened."

It took Apollo a moment to get over his surprise to register the comment, and he nodded in agreement. "If it helps... my grandfather committed suicide."

Klavier stopped walking, bringing the pair to a halt, and finally turned to look at the younger man with a raised eyebrow. "Excuse me?"

"My grandfather; He shot himself," Apollo repeated. When Klavier's confused expression didn't change, he realised what the prosecutor's actual question was and smiled. "My biological grandfather, Prosecutor Gavin. Magnifi Gramarye?"

Klavier's eyes widened. "Your...?" He then frowned, irritated, and looked away, hurriedly heading
Apollo laughed as he followed. "You didn't know that? I'm Trucy's older brother, I perform with her onstage, and you didn't realise we're the only two people in the Wright family who are biologically related?"

"Your family dynamics aren't nearly as obvious as you think they are, Herr Forehead," Klavier shot back, flicking at his hair. "Besides, however you believe your grandfather died, there isn't any evidence either way."

"True," Apollo admitted, shrugging. "I mean, not even Dad trusts Valant's word... but it's not like we have a legal way of asking Zak anymore. Or Grandpa Magnifi, either."

Klavier frowned in thought. "If the dead could talk, my job would be a lot easier," he mused aloud.

Apollo stared at the side of Klavier's face for a long moment. "The only reason they don't talk is because no-one asks them to, Prosecutor Gavin... and there's a very good reason for that."

The older man paused only half a second, looking back at Apollo curiously. "You speak of the infamous DL-6 Incident, I assume?"

Although surprised, Apollo nodded. "Yeah... You know about it?"

"Every budding attorney at the time did," Klavier replied, smirking. "A case as strange as that, with a prosecutor as famous as Miles Edgeworth wrapped up in it, unexpectedly solved in the middle of a separate murder case on the day its statute of limitations was up? It was the talk of Themis Academy for months."

Apollo softly laughed, shaking his head. "Good point... Although," he grinned proudly, "you don't know the full story until you've heard it from both my mom and dad and my Uncle Edgew-..." He paused, eyes widening as he spotted a door ahead of them, a nondescript sign hanging nonchalantly at its side.

'First Aid Office'.

Not wanting to waste a single moment, Apollo ran for the door, any thoughts of the previous conversation dismissed for a fresh wave of concern for his youngest siblings. The door didn't immediately budge as he landed against it, forcing Apollo to fumble with the handle for a few moments before finally pushing through into the office within.

The room wasn't all that big, just enough for three beds wrapped in white blankets and a plain desk littered with paper. Sitting on two of the beds, facing each other, were Trucy and Machi, Ema stood between them. They all looked up at the sound of the door opening, but had no time to react as Apollo was already running to meet them.

"Trucy! Machi!"

"Polly!"

"Isoveli!"

The teens had just enough time to get to their feet, and Ema enough time to jump to one side, before Apollo was upon them, pulling his siblings into a hug. "Oh, please tell me you two are okay!"

"Of course we are!" Trucy laughed, returning her eldest brother's hug. "You don't need to cry,
"Polly!"

"I'm not crying!" Apollo insisted through a sob, wiping his eyes.

Machi patted Apollo's back under his cape. "There there, isoveli."

"We've removed all traces of atroquinine from their hands," Ema explained from behind Apollo. "I'd suggest keeping a close eye on them for another ten to fifteen minutes just in case, but I don't think any of it got into their systems."

Apollo just nodded, hugging his siblings tighter. He was afraid he'd start sobbing again if he opened his mouth, and was having enough trouble keeping the tears from spilling down his cheeks.

"Have you heard anything on the defendant?" came Klavier's voice, followed by the gentle closing of the door.

There was a short pause; Apollo assumed Ema shook her head. "She'll still be on her way to the hospital," the detective explained. "I told them she's been hit with atroquinine though, and I'm sure they'd let us know immediately if she'd... you know."

"So she's still alive," Klavier sighed. "A small comfort, but at least it's something."

Apollo gave his siblings one last squeeze, then pulled back out of the hug, keeping his attention on them. "You're sure you're fine?"

Trucy groaned in exaggerated frustration. "Duh!"

Machi giggled, nodding. "We are fine, isoveli."

"Good," Apollo replied, giving them a watery smile. "I'd hate to break my promise to Dad and Luke." He pulled them into another brief hug out of pure relief.

"Um... I have question," Machi meekly said as they pulled away for a second time. "Before we left... You ask Vera about other trial?"

Apollo glanced behind him, where Klavier and Ema stood silently watching, their expressions betraying nothing. "Yeah," he told his brother. "You're... asking for more details, aren't you?"

Machi nodded. "Way you ask her... It sound important."

Trying not to wince, Apollo nodded. "It is." At their side, he noticed Trucy was solemnly avoiding eye contact, and couldn't blame her. Sighing, he returned his attention to his brother. "It's a long story, Machi."

"Okay." Machi promptly turned and sat down on the edge of the nearest bed, watching Apollo expectantly. "Ema said have ten minutes."

Ema looked at the pink watch on her wrist. "Closer to five now," she said, "but go ahead. I'm very curious to hear this."

Apollo tried not to grumble under both Ema's and Machi's expectant gazes, but, with nothing to distract them with, decided to just give in to their demands. Reluctantly, he moved to sit at his brother's side, and Trucy followed, sandwiching Apollo between his youngest siblings. "Seven years ago, there was this really important trial about to happen," Apollo explained. "The victim and defendant were both world-famous celebrities, so there was an awful lot of people watching." He
paused, frowning in thought. "In a way, the prosecutor and defence attorney were celebrities, too. There weren't many people not watching this thing."

Out of the corner of his eye, Apollo noticed Klavier shuffle uncomfortably, looking away.

"Before the trial, someone asked Vera to make a fake page from the victim's diary," Apollo continued. "They then slipped the page to the defence attorney... and Vera's work was so good, the attorney thought it was real, and presented it in the trial." He screwed his eyes shut, minutely sighing. "But it wasn't. And the prosecution already knew that."

"How?" Machi asked, and Apollo opened his eyes to see the teen's head cocked to one side curiously. "Did Vera's client tell them?" He then gasped. "Was prosecution Vera's client?"

The attorney glanced at Klavier, but the prosecutor was frowning to himself, thoughts unreadable. "I can't say," Apollo admitted to his brother. "All I know is that the prosecutor called out the forgery the very instant it appeared; He said someone had warned him, and put him in touch with Vera's father. The defence attorney immediately lost his case, and, because everyone thought he was Vera's client, he lost his badge too." His own hand moved to the attorney's badge on his vest, an idea forming in his mind of how much it would hurt to lose it. "Instead of waiting to be declared guilty, the defendant simply vanished into thin air, and ran away. The police never found him, and no-one ever heard from him again. The victim's murder is unsolved to this day."

Machi's eyes were wide as he listened. "That sound awful," he sympathised, then frowned in thought. "So... You ask Vera who client was, and attorney is innocent... and then defendant come back? Have fair trial?"

Apollo winced. "I'm afraid this defendant won't be coming back, Machi. He's been gone too long; He's dead."

"Possible he still come back," Machi insisted. "Like Trucy's father. He is also disappeared and 'dead'."

"Machi, my daddy's not coming back," Trucy suddenly spoke up, glaring at the floor. There was a harsh tone to her voice that slowly faded as she continued, "Whether they solve Grandpa Magnifi's death or not... Daddy isn't coming back."

Apollo wordlessly wrapped an arm behind his sister, holding her close to his side.

Machi just looked confused. "Wait... You are saying-?"

"You're Magnifi Gramarye's granddaughter!?" Ema cried from across the room, one hand pressed to her cheek as she stared at Trucy with wide eyes. Next to her, Klavier was giving the detective an incredulous look. "Are you kidding me!?!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Did you seriously not know? We call ourselves 'Gramarye' and everything."

"What!?" Ema shot back, glaring. "Of course you don't! You're the Wrights! You've always called yourselves that!"

"Only since we got adopted!" Apollo pointed out, crossing his arms. "Before that, our family name was-!" He paused, thinking. "Well, technically, we were 'Enigmar' and 'Justice' respectively, but..."

Trucy got to her feet, watching Ema carefully. "Our mommy's name is Gramarye," she explained. "We perform with her name, like my daddy did, because she and Grandpa Magnifi were magicians
too." She briefly gestured to Apollo with her head. "Just like how we use our daddy's name for Polly's lawyer stuff because Daddy was a lawyer..." Her eyes turned down to the floor. "At least, he was until Grandpa Magnifi died, anyway..."

Ema was staring at the pair with wide eyes. Apollo didn't doubt she believed them now.

"I don't understand," Machi quietly said from his seat at Apollo's side, looking worried. "Defendant in trial was Trucy's father? And attorney was Isa?"

Apollo nodded with a sigh. "You'd recognise the name of the prosecutor, too." Without any further word, he turned his gaze beyond his brother, to the man standing at Ema's side.

Klavier didn't react, his eyes on the nearby wall and arms crossed.

Machi only gasped, staring at the man with wide eyes. "M-mister Prosecutor...?"

"He speaks the truth," Klavier muttered, making a show of nonchalantly brushing his hair from his face. "That was my very first trial, against the famous Phoenix Wright, to solve the murder of the even more famous Magnifi Gramarye... and his apprentice Zak Gramarye was the one on trial. Much like Miss Misham's, his should have been a very simple case." He shook his head, still looking away. "Alas, it was not to be."

Machi leaned against Apollo, and the young lawyer was quick to pull him into a half-hug. With his other hand, he reached out to take his sister's grip in his.

The room rang silent for a long time.
The opening door interrupted the quiet contemplation of the five people within, who all looked up to see one, then two figures appear in the doorway; One wore a blue vest and cap, while the other was in a grey hoodie and cyan beanie.

"Trucy! Machi!" Luke cried, dashing inside without pause towards his siblings; Much like they had with Apollo, the teens both smiled at him, Machi getting to his feet and giving Luke a hug as the vet arrived at their side. "We were so worried about you!"

Trucy giggled, removing the hand Luke had placed on her shoulder to pat it sympathetically. "Don't you worry about us, Luke; We're fine, just like you and Polly are always saying!" She reached into her bag and pulled out the small bottle of atroquinine spray, which she pressed into Luke's hand so the young vet could examine it himself. "See, we even used the poison detecting spray, so we know for sure there's not a drop left on us!"

Machi nodded, stepping back to give their worried brother a grin, assuring him, "We okay, Luke. *Isoveli* is look after us."

"Oh, yes, I know that," Luke hurriedly replied, giving Apollo an embarrassed look as he held the small spray-bottle close to his chest.

Apollo just laughed.

Phoenix closed the door as he entered the room, giving his children a warm smile. "We're just glad to see you all in good spirits. Can't let you two get yourselves killed before your mother gets back, can we?"

Trucy and Machi giggled, shaking their heads. Luke bit his lip, badly hiding a grin.

Ema waved at the older man as he approached. "Mister Wright! You got my message?"

"I did; Thank you Ema," Phoenix replied, giving her a grateful nod. He walked slightly past her and Klavier, standing at the end of the beds his children were arranged between. "You've all done very well today. That was very kind of you to try and look after your client the way you did, Machi."

Machi blushed. "Thank you, *Isa.*"

"And I did a good job helping out Polly, right Daddy?" Trucy asked, giving their father a bright and innocent grin.

"Oh, of course," Phoenix readily replied, playing along with her blatant fishing for compliments. "I'm sure he appreciated the help. Didn't you, Apollo?"

Apollo frowned, deep in thought. Slowly, he slid off the bed and got to his feet, eyes on Phoenix. "It would have been a lot easier if you'd given me more information from the start, Dad."
Phoenix's smile faded a little. "Now now, the whole point of this was no preconceptions," he reminded his son.

"Yes, I get that," Apollo replied, holding up a hand, "really, I do... but, did you honestly think I wouldn't notice a certain case file of yours has gone missing?" He rested his hands by his sides, curled into angry fists. "I would have recognised who Vera was a lot quicker if you hadn't gone and hidden it."

Phoenix closed his eyes, expression unreadable. At Apollo's sides, his two youngest siblings were looking uncomfortable (though not nearly as much as Klavier had been since Phoenix's arrival), while Luke had scrunched up his shoulders, staring guiltily at the floor; Ema simply watched with a curious look, saying nothing.

"If I'd known who she was sooner," Apollo continued, "I might have realised there was something up with her nail polish, and managed to keep her from putting it all over her hands and..." He paused, unsure how to mention her current condition considering how up in the air it was right now. "This case would be solved already. What if Vera doesn't recover before telling us what she knows?"

Finally, Phoenix responded: "This trial is my responsibility, no matter what happens." He looked up, giving his eldest a stern look. "It's my job to worry about it. You just focus on your case."

"If Vera dies, I won't have a case to focus on!" Apollo pointed out with a frustrated wave of his arm. Regardless, he gave up on the topic with a sigh. "At least tell me where you hid the Gramarye case file, Dad. If Vera survives... I'm gonna need it for tomorrow."

Phoenix looked away, deep in thought... and Apollo didn't miss how his father's eyes briefly rested on Klavier, who was still pressed uncomfortably against the wall as he watched the conversation. "I'd suggest heading to the archives before you leave the courthouse today," Phoenix suggested, his gaze somewhere between the young attorney and prosecutor. "They have video records there; Argue your case well enough, and they'll give you a copy of Zak Gramarye's trial to watch. Unlike the public transcripts, those things aren't censored."

"Video...?" Trucy quietly repeated, shocked. Luke, standing at her side, slipped the bottle in his hand into a pocket and wrapped his arm around his sister's back in a half-hug.

"And what would I have to gain, doing that?" Klavier asked through a pained grimace, one hand in his hair. "Who would want to relive such a horrid trial?"

Phoenix finally turned to face the prosecutor, his expression unchanged. "As I recall, you didn't think it was quite so 'horrid' at the time."

Klavier flinched at that, looking away.

But Phoenix wasn't done, continuing in a gentle voice, "The change of perspective alone might show you something new."

Surprised, Klavier looked up again, meeting Phoenix's eyes.

Without waiting for any kind of response to his unexpected advice for the young prosecutor, Phoenix turned back towards Apollo. Until now, his hands had been firmly stuck in the pockets of his hoodie, but he finally removed them, emerging with a familiar case file that he held out for Apollo to take. "State versus Shadi Enigmar, as requested."

Eyes wide, Apollo quickly took the offered file, bulging with all the handwritten notes and much-
examined court documents that he had read countless times over the years... the same case file he had always been told was never to be removed from the office under any circumstances. "Th... Thank you."

"Good luck tomorrow," Phoenix said, then gave Klavier one final look. "Both of you." With that, he turned and began to leave, beckoning over one shoulder. "Luke, we have work to do."

"C-coming, Papa!" Luke called, then quickly gave his siblings one last smile. "We'll see you after the trial. I know you'll do great!" As Apollo, Trucy and Machi watched, the vet hurried off after their father, disappearing into the hallway. The door closed behind them with an almost ominous click.

Apollo stared at the mass of papers in his hands. As upset as he'd been at Phoenix, it was still a little shocking to just be handed the missing case file and watch his father immediately walk out again. There hadn't even been an apology for keeping information from them, or for the fact that doing so may have led to Vera's current situation and Trucy and Machi's near-brush with death themselves... but Apollo's attempt to blame Phoenix for that was just a distraction from blaming himself, and he knew that. Sighing, he turned his gaze off to one side, away from the others. Maybe an apology was in order when he saw his father next.

Trucy pouted at her eldest brother. "You seriously need to stop fighting with Daddy."

Apollo gave his sister an incredulous look. "Dad seriously needs to stop sabotaging his own efforts to clear his name!"

Machi had instead turned to Ema. "We are safe to go now?"

"Oh, sure," Ema replied, glancing at her watch. "If you'd been poisoned, we'd definitely know by now."

"Good." Machi nodded, then turned to his siblings. "We go get video like Isa said?"

Apollo sighed, hugging the case file to his chest. "Yeah, I guess we should. I must admit, a video of that trial would be interesting to see... I didn't even know there was one."

"Every trial is recorded," Klavier explained, his expression still distant. "The recordings are kept under secure lock and key however; Only those who can prove they need access to a specific trial tape are permitted it."

Apollo remembered Phoenix's instruction to 'argue their case well enough' and realised what it meant. Any hopes he'd be able to pull it off were conflicting with the new knowledge that all three of his previous trials existed as video files somewhere in the building, and he had to resist the urge to ask for access to them too, purely to see how well he'd performed in the past.

"What about Vera?" Trucy asked, concerned. "Will she be okay?"

There was a short silence as everyone mused on the impossible question. Finally, Ema stepped forward. "Apollo, I don't have your number, do I?"

Apollo thought a moment, then shook his head. "No, I don't think so. Why?"

"I'll keep you updated on anything I hear about the defendant," the detective promised, holding out her hand. "I'm guessing Mister Wright wouldn't be able to pass that on if I just told him, huh?"

"N-no, he wouldn't," Apollo muttered in agreement, pulling out his phone. He quickly navigated to display his phone number, then handed it over.
In the resulting silence, Machi turned to Trucy, stood next to him. "I not wear this outfit tomorrow."

"Why not!?" Trucy demanded. "You look cute!"

"It unlucky," Machi muttered. "People try kill me when I wear it."

Trucy whined. "Aw, but... But you still have to wear it for Mommy when she gets back!"

"He doesn't have to wear it if he doesn't want to," Apollo sternly told his sister. "Mom has pictures to look at... and we still have that video from the concert, remember?"

The teen huffed. "It's not the same..." she sighed. Instead of arguing further, she reached into her bag and pulled out her gloves, which she busied herself putting back on her hands.

Ema finished copying Apollo's number, returning his phone. "I'll let you know the moment I hear anything."

"Thanks," Apollo replied, giving her a grateful nod.

"I trust that counts for me too, Fraulein Detective," Klavier said, managing a small smile Ema's way.

Ema's open expression instantly hardened, shooting the prosecutor a glare. "Sure."

Klavier just laughed, passing Ema and heading to the door. "Well, I had best head to the archives then. Until tomorrow, Herr Wright." He waved over his shoulder.

"Until then, Prosecutor Gavin," Apollo replied.

The door closed with a click.

Apollo suspected it was going to be a very tense twenty-or-so hours until court resumed tomorrow.

View the Court Record
A loud gasp rang through the room as they saw Vera collapsing on the live feed from the courtroom. Phoenix, sat at his small table next to the screen, stared with wide eyes, putting down his Court Record in shock. Across the room, at his own small desk opposite the larger table with the six jurists, Luke leapt from his workstation, slamming his laptop closed with a clatter.

"Papa, I can go check on her if you need me to!"

Phoenix shook his head, getting to his feet and circling the table to approach his son. "We'll learn her condition faster through the live feed... but there is something I'd like the judge to know."

Luke nodded, a determined frown on his face. "You can count on me!"

The young man had dashed off with his message only moments before a new development came to light in the chaotic courtroom:

"Ema!"

"Geeze! I'm right here, no need to shout!"

"Ema! Vera's been poisoned with atroquinine in her nail polish!"

"Herr Forehead, atroquinine doesn't absorb through the skin, and especially not through nails; It needs to be ingested to work. And who in their right mind eats nail polish?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Diva! Even you must have noticed Vera bites her nails when she's nervous! She was practically chewing them off during her entire testimony!"

"But how do you know it was atroquinine in her nail polish? She's only just collapsed."

"Because she's been constantly applying that stuff over the past two days, and, before the trial, she put that same nail polish on my brother and sister."

Phoenix's heart skipped a beat as he listened to the words coming through the microphone on the witness stand. He didn't need to be able to see Apollo's pale face to know how panicked he was, how scared Trucy and Machi were as they huddled at their eldest brother's side. Phoenix felt trapped, unable to leave thanks to his duties as chair, incapable of doing anything but simply watch the unfolding situation on the screen as Ema hurried the two teens out of the room after Vera, leaving a reluctant Apollo behind.

"Mister Wright?"

The voice of the nearest jurist - Number 5 if he remembered correctly - shocked Phoenix back into
the chamber, and he turned to face the young man; Despite his best efforts, he couldn't effectively bluff a calm exterior. "D-don't worry, I'm sure they'll be alright..."

A worried look crossed Jurist 5's face, but he quickly gave Phoenix a grin. "Hey, of course they'll be fine! They've got 'Pollo, right?"

The assurances didn't do much for Phoenix's brewing panic, but he forced an appreciative smile regardless. "Right." Getting back to business, he headed back towards the screen, on the other end of the table.

The judge was banging his gavel to attract the court's attention, and Phoenix didn't miss the unmistakable figure of his middle son at the man's side.

"With the defendant on her way to the hospital, I see no way we can continue this trial today. We will resume proceedings tomorrow."

"Luke!"

On the screen, Apollo was running to meet his brother, Klavier at his back, while the judge simply left the courtroom. With the trial dismissed, Phoenix shakily ran back to where he'd left his Court Record, and cut off the live feed. Behind him, a good chunk of his jurists were already talking.

"Mister Wright, what's going on?"

"Is the trial over...?"

"Phoenix, are you okay?"

Spinning around, Phoenix held up a hand to silence them, trying not to snap, "I'm not a judge, so I don't call for order!" That seemed to be enough to silence them, though he still felt guilty for being unable to completely hide his fear. Sighing, he ran a hand down his face, forcing himself to calm down. "The trial is over for today. We're going to have to ask you to come back tomorrow."

Next to Jurist 5, a blonde woman - Jurist Number 4, if Phoenix remembered right - placed a hand to her mouth, eyes wide. "Tomorrow? But..."

"I've said from the start that this trial would probably extend to two or three days, so you can't say you weren't warned," Phoenix continued, standing at the head of the table to stare down at the six jurists sat before him.

"Adrian has a point, though," Jurist Number 3, sitting opposite Jurist 5, spoke up, getting to her feet and giving Phoenix a concerned look. "We just heard the defendant's been poisoned. It's been made abundantly clear today how virulent atroquinine is. And..." She paused, adjusting her glasses. "We all have personal investments in the safety of the kids, too."

Phoenix bit back any kind of emotional response. He wasn't here as these people's friend, or a lawyer, or even as a father; He was here as the Chair of the Jurist System Simulated Court Committee. As much as it hurt to be cold and brush aside the very real fear of what might happen to Vera, Trucy and Machi, he was going to have to in order to do his job. It wasn't like there was anyone else to pick up the pieces if he failed.
To Phoenix's surprise, the woman on his immediate left - Jurist Number 1 herself - got to her feet and gave the table a stern look. "Well, obviously, the Committee will be in touch if anything changes before trial resumes tomorrow." She turned her stare on the woman opposite - Jurist Number 6 - then to Phoenix. "And the kids will be just fine. Won't they?"

Jurist 6 quietly squeaked, a hand pressed to her mouth as she blinked back tears. She mutely nodded.

The sound of Jurist 1's voice alone nearly broke Phoenix's resolve, but he managed to keep himself together for her sake, choking out, "Yes. That. Exactly."

Although they were still uncertain, finally the jurists agreed to end the trial for the day and slowly began to file out of the room. Phoenix lagged behind, struggling to hold on to his professionalism despite, finally, putting his job aside for now. Sat at his small table in the corner, he pretended not to watch how Jurist 6 remained in her seat out of lingering shock, or Jurist 1 quietly talking with her neighbour, Jurist 2.

"You go meet up with Pearly and I'll catch up at the hotel later, okay?" She continued to talk, her voice quavering. "Alright, Mystic Maya. You'll... let us know if anything happens, won't you?"

"Of course. I'll see you later."

Jurists 3 and 4 had a much quieter discussion at the other end of the table, then Jurist 3 dashed to Phoenix's side. "You promise you'll keep us updated, Mister Wright?"

Phoenix forced a wry smile. "Don't you have a baby to get home to and a husband to rescue, Missus Gumshoe?"

Maggey rolled her eyes, then sighed. "I'm just saying, as a mother... I know how much it'd hurt if something like that happened to Felicia. Look after yourself, okay?"

Phoenix's smile turned genuine, and he nodded. "Of course."

With a final warm look, Maggey dashed back to where Adrian was waiting, and the pair left the room together. Iris wasn't far behind them, shooting Phoenix a worried look over her shoulder.

Instead of following the women, Clay stubbornly headed to Phoenix's table. "Mister Wright, you're going to visit Truce and Machi after this, right?"

"Naturally!" Maya cut in, standing tall next to her seat with arms crossed. "We've gotta check they're okay, don't we?"

"We?" Phoenix repeated with a raised eyebrow, getting to his feet. "Maya, there's no 'we'; You're supposed to be busy up in Kurain, remember?"

Maya huffed, hands on her hips. "I'm not lying to them, Nick!"

"I'm not asking you to lie to them," Phoenix retorted. "Just stay away like you're supposed to, and they'll draw their own conclusions."

"Wh-!? Draw their own conclusions!?!" Maya repeated indignantly, cheeks puffing out in anger. "What, that I don't love them enough to be there when they need me!?!"

Phoenix hurriedly shook his head, holding up his hands in surrender. "No, no, of course not! Why would they have any reason to think that when they don't even know you know what happened!?!"
"But I do know what happened!"

"And they can't be allowed to know that!"

"So you're going to go in there and lie on my behalf!?"

"Maya, the topic of what you're doing isn't even going to come up!"

Maya was opening her mouth to shout something colourful in reply when a high-pitched series of beeps cut her off, and she paused in confusion. "Is that...?"

Phoenix didn't hesitate to pull out his phone, checking it quickly before sighing in relief. "It's a text from Ema," he explained. "Trucy and Machi are in the clear. They're safe."

Everyone else in the room visibly wilted in relief, and none more so than Thalassa, who dropped her face to the table in front of her with a sob. "Oh, thank goodness! If something had happened to them, I..."

Her anger gone, Maya rushed to the older woman's side, crouching down to give her a somewhat awkward side-hug. "Don't worry, Thalassa; Those two have an awful lot of people looking out for them. There's no way they won't survive to see you on Saturday."

Phoenix nodded, leaning on the table to be a little closer to Thalassa's eye line. "Maya's right. In fact, I'll head down to check on them myself; You can trust I'd made sure they're okay, can't you?"

There was a short pause, then Thalassa nodded.

"Actually... I think I get it now."

Phoenix turned around, Maya and Thalassa also looking up to fix Clay with a curious stare. "Get what?"

"Why we can't visit Truce and Machi," Clay explained, and shrugged. "We're jurists. Checking on them would be talking about the case, and talking about the case is grounds for ineligibility, so we'd need to be replaced, and the trial would be invalid, and 'Pollo would have to do all of that all over again..."

Phoenix thought a second or two, then nodded. Clay's conclusion wasn't entirely correct, but it was close enough. "More or less. It's safer you three stay away for now, and maintain no contact."

It was at that exact moment the door was thrown open and Luke jumped in with a panicked look. "Papa, I think something's happened to Trucy and Machi!" He skidded forward enough from pure momentum that the door closed behind him, and was talking again in a rush before anyone could interrupt. "I ran into Apollo in the courtroom and I swear we didn't talk about anything but he was acting strange and said something about looking after Trucy and Machi so I think something bad has happened to them!"

There was a long pause as the four people in the room stared back at the slightly panicked vet, before, finally, Luke looked around the room, rubbing the back of his head.

"Did... Did I miss something?"
As they headed down the courthouse's long corridors back towards the room set aside as the Jurists' Chambers, not half an hour since they left, Phoenix remained silent. All in all, he was glad he'd decided to take Ema up on her offer to personally check on Trucy and Machi, even if it had led to the blow-up with Apollo. In the end, he'd been given the perfect opportunity to impart some advice on both his eldest son and young Klavier, and had handed over the Gramarye case file as he'd been intending to do anyway. He was pretty sure he could trust the young attorneys to do the right thing when court resumed tomorrow.

*If* court resumed tomorrow.

"Apollo didn't mean any of that," Luke said, keeping pace at his father's left. "He was just upset because Trucy and Machi were in danger."

"No, he had a point," Phoenix muttered. "If I'd known that stamp or that nail polish had been poisoned... I could have stopped both of the Mishams from being hurt years ago."


Phoenix just sighed, his eyes on the floor ahead of his feet.

"And even Apollo understands the reasons for your 'no preconceptions' rule," Luke continued. "He knows you couldn't have broken that for him. Like I said, he was just upset. And Trucy and Machi are fine, so it all turned out okay, didn't it?"

"You're forgetting someone there," Phoenix reminded his son with a hollow smile.

Luke frowned, opening his mouth to ask who... only to suddenly remember and close it again with a blush. "Oh... B-but, I'm sure Vera will be fine too. She *has* to be."

Phoenix didn't speak. He couldn't think of anything positive to say in return.

Luke dejectedly moved his hands into his pockets, only to suddenly cry out in shock. "I completely forgot!" He pulled out a small spray bottle, which he showed to Phoenix. "The poison detection spray! I was going to give this back to Trucy!"

Phoenix frowned in thought, then held out a hand. "It probably belongs to Ema. I'll get it back to her."

Luke nodded gratefully and handed the object over. "I hope they were done with it back there..."

"I'm sure they were," Phoenix assured him, slipping the bottle into a pocket.

Their destination, the re-purposed room serving at the Jurists' Chambers, was right around the corner.

View the Court Record
The first of the group outside the Jurists' Chambers to look up as Phoenix and Luke came into sight was Thalassa. Blinking back tears, she ran to meet the pair, hands tightly clutched together. Predictably, the first words out of her mouth were, "Are they alright?"

Luke immediately smiled and tipped his cap like a true gentleman. "Of course they are, Missus Gramarye. Apollo's looking after them, just like he promised."

Thalassa sighed in relief, then chuckled at the young man. "Luke, please... You may call me Thalassa."

Before Luke could do more than blush in reply, Clay arrived on the scene with a "WHOOP!", crashing into the young vet and throwing his arms around his friend's neck. "I knew our 'Pollo would pull through! He's, like, a genius at this law stuff, right?"

"Clay-!" Luke choked, pulling at the astronaut's arms. "Careful, please!"

Phoenix snorted, shaking his head. "As proud as I am of him, Apollo's no genius, not yet."

"Very true." Edgeworth pushed his glasses up his nose as he joined the group, Maya at his side. "He needs another year or two of experience before he can hope to reach that level."

"And obviously he will," Maya boasted, heading straight to Phoenix's side, the pair automatically pressing their arms against each other's backs. "He's all set to take after his dad, right, Nick?"

Phoenix laughed. "Oh, naturally. Better than me, if he keeps a good eye on his evidence."

"I don't know very much about law," Thalassa said, a faraway smile on her face, "but Apollo seems very good at his job to me."

Edgeworth nodded. "Speaking of, its time we made said job, and the jobs of everyone else in that courtroom, easier." He reached into a pocket, pulling out a small memory stick. "Once I heard what happened, I took the liberty of procuring the video recording of a certain case whose connection to this one has just come to light." He held it out for his friend to take. "I trust you don't mind, Wright."

"Ah, I did wonder what you were doing here, Edgeworth," Phoenix gently teased his friend, reaching forward to take the small item, which he quickly placed in a pocket. "Thanks, though. We'll need it to use the Mason System effectively."

"The what system?" Clay asked, face contorted in confusion as he continued to lean heavily on Luke.

"The Mason System," Luke explained, pointing a finger into the air with a knowing smile. "It's a new program we're putting together to help Jurists go over past cases and even follow prosecutors and defence attorneys on recreations of their investigations!"
Clay’s eyebrows shot up, impressed. "Huh. That actually sounds kinda cool."

Phoenix huffed, pretending to be offended. "Kinda?"

"Is it not ready?" Thalassa asked.

"Not yet," Luke admitted with a bashful grimace. "I should have it ready this afternoon, though."

Maya cooed in excitement. "Will we get to play with it, then?"

"We'll see," Phoenix replied, and turned to Luke with a serious look. "I'm afraid you might end up with an entire extra section to program, Luke; I have some people to see today."


"Oh?" Edgeworth asked, eyebrow raised. "I hope you know what you're doing, Wright."

Phoenix scoffed, waving his free hand. "Please. I always know what I'm doing."

"Past experience with you says otherwise," Edgeworth replied, a small smile on his lips. "Regardless, I have other things to attend to, so I must be going. Keep me informed, Wright." With that, he stepped around the group and continued down the hallway behind them.

"Talk to you later, Edgeworth," Phoenix promised, giving his friend a wave.

Luke sighed, crossing his arms. "I hope this isn't too much more you plan to add, Papa... I'm only just finishing up what you already gave me!"

"It doesn't need to be too complicated," Phoenix assured him. "I'll be quick, then we can write it out together, huh?"

"Alright," Luke quietly replied, looking away in a poor attempt to hide the concern still written across his face.

"Hey, cheer up, dude," Clay told his friend with a grin. "Even if it's unfinished, this program of yours is gonna be awesome to play with!" He paused, frowning. "When are we going to play with it?"

"Hopefully, before the trial tomorrow," Phoenix replied, then gave the two women apologetic looks. "I'm afraid I'll have to hammer out the details later; For now, you three should really get back to the hotel."

Maya sighed, pouting. "If we have to."

Thalassa nodded. "We'll wait for news, then." She turned to the younger men. "It was... Clay, wasn't it?"

"That's me, Missus Gramarye!" Clay chirped, a hand adjusting his visor. He giggled at the back of his throat, nudging Luke. "And you two say I can't keep secrets; 'Pollo isn't hearing this one from me!"

"That's because you're literally not talking to him until after the trial," Luke pointed out with a wry smile.

Thalassa hid a laugh behind a hand. "Clay. I hope we will have more of a chance to talk while we wait for tomorrow."
"Oh, sure!" Clay happily agreed, his arm finally falling from around Luke's neck. "That sounds awesome!"

Maya gave an exaggerated sigh, pressing tighter against Phoenix. "Well, if we have to go, I guess we gotta..."

Phoenix smiled and nodded. "Yup. We'll see you tomorrow."

Maya huffed. "You're such a slave-driver, Nick." Ignoring Phoenix's laughter, she pushed away from him and beckoned Thalassa and Clay, heading off down the hallway. "C'mon, we have a hotel to get to." She paused only to shoot a wave over her shoulder. "See you tomorrow, Luke."

"Bye, Maya!" Luke called, waving back. "Until tomorrow!"

Thalassa shot the Wrights a friendly smile, then moved to follow Maya.

Clay giggled as the women left, elbowing Luke and whispering, "I am so gonna get all the dirt on baby 'Pollo!"

Luke rolled his eyes, pushing his friend away and hiding his own smile. "I'll see you tomorrow, Clay."

The young astronaut laughed as he ran to join Maya and Thalassa, and the trio soon disappeared around a corner.

With the Wrights left alone, Phoenix turned to face his son. "We'd better get going too; We've both got work to do."

Luke sighed and nodded. "Yeah. I'll try and keep in mind we're adding stuff later... Leave options open to add in whatever you bring back."

"Good idea." Phoenix rested a hand on Luke's shoulder, then began a slow walk down the hallway. "They can fit in with the Zak scene. Split the entire thing into 'past' and 'present'."

"Mm." There was a short pause, then Luke looked up, his eyes on the round badge sitting above Phoenix's left eye. "How long does that typically take to download footage?"

Phoenix shrugged. "I don't babysit it," he admitted, then shot his son a grin. "Your computer might even do the job quicker! Can't exactly drop by the office today, can we?"

At that, Phoenix finally chuckled. "Yeah, I guess so." The smile died. "I hope the others will be okay... I don't think we ever told Machi any details about how you used to be a lawyer, and Apollo seemed really upset about... you know. I bet it was a shock to Trucy to discover this all tied in to her father and grandfather's deaths, too."

"They'll be alright." Phoenix moved to pull Luke into a half-hug. "They've got each other. And it's only temporary; Once Apollo wraps this up tomorrow, we can talk it all out as a family."

"If it doesn't take him another day," Luke mumbled. "If Vera even survives long enough for this trial to end."

At that, Phoenix laughed. "Now what was it you were saying to me literally ten minutes ago? 'Vera will be fine'?"

Luke's face turned red, and he looked away. "I-I'm sure she..." he mumbled, then scrunched up his
face and firmly shook his head. "I'm fine! Apollo's fine! The trial's fine! Vera will be fine, too!"

"That's the spirit!" Phoenix cried, hugging his son closer. "All that shouting you boys love to do!"

"Chords of Steel, Papa!" Luke proudly reminded him, a smile finally back on his face. "Never leave home without them!"

With that, the pair left the courthouse, happy for the brief moment in each other's company.

"Ah, Mister Wright, I'm glad you picked up!"

"Do you have news?"

"Yes, actually: We've received word from the hospital."

"... And?"

"The dosage was just under lethal. She's alive, but unconscious, in intensive care... and not to be disturbed for any reason."

"..."

"Mister Wright?"

"Thank you, Ema. Be sure to tell Apollo and Prosecutor Gavin, will you?"

"Of course... and the trial?"

"I'll work it out... I always work it out."

It's been a long seven years since I carried an attorney's badge. The world has moved on. Laws have changed. A new generation is stepping forward, finding their place, doing the job I couldn't... and Apollo will be just brilliant one day, I know it. But, that leaves me with one very important question:

... Am I even meant to pick up a badge again?
Phoenix self-consciously adjusted his beanie as the security guard led him through the prison hallway. Before today, he'd only ever done visits to prisoners in the jail attached to the detention centre. To be in an actual, dedicated prison, and one as large as this, was incredibly intimidating... Not to mention, the person he was here to see, the suspicious man who had slowly become increasingly dangerous as the year progressed, was someone he hadn't seen for a full six months now. Was he still the 'Coolest Defence In the West', or had his time in prison eroded that image away? How would he react to seeing the man who orchestrated the uncovering of his crimes?

They heard the violin long before they arrived. Down a long, white hallway the guard took Phoenix, until finally they reached a room on the left, enclosed by metal bars. The far wall was dominated by an ornate bookcase, several large novels on display between the occasional space filled with ornate crockery, or a mechanical bird in a cage, or even a statue of some kind of goat on a rock. In front of the bookshelf was a large purple chair (complete with cushion) and a small side-table. Nearby, his back to the bars, was a man in a blue suit, playing a violin on his shoulder and standing in the patch of light shining in from a high window on the wall above.

The guard pulled out an ID card, swiping it through a panel on the wall. The machinery beeped, and he pushed the barred door open, calling, "Kristoph Gavin, you have a visitor."

Kristoph didn't visibly react, still running his bow over the strings. It was only as Phoenix entered the cell and the guard closed the door behind him that the music came to a stop, and Kristoph turned to look at Phoenix with his usual cool smile. "Well well, isn't this an unexpected surprise?" He promptly turned around again, busying himself replacing the violin in an empty space on the bookcase. "What errand brings you down to my cramped confines?"

Phoenix didn't allow himself to feel any relief at Kristoph's civility, still watching the man carefully. At the forefront of his mind, he was seeing his children... and then Vera, collapsing on the stand. Trying to sound neutral, he could only say, "Gavin..."

The violin back in its place, Kristoph turned to face Phoenix, arms crossed. He looked his visitor up and down for a moment. "You look well, Phoenix Wright."

"You too... Gavin," Phoenix replied, giving the man a curt nod.

Kristoph grunted to himself and sat in his chair. "I'd offer you a seat, but I'm afraid I only have the one," he explained. "I don't regularly receive guests, you see."

Phoenix didn't reply. After a moment, his eyes drifted to the small side-table at Kristoph's elbow. A yellow envelope, resting against a thick red tome.

"Mister Misham sure seemed to think so! You shoulda seen him! He crammed his letter into that yellow envelope as fast as he could."
Phoenix didn't allow himself to gasp, eyes back on Kristoph. He couldn't check it out while the owner of said letter was right next to it. He needed a distraction...

Kristoph chuckled, gesturing to the bookcase behind him. "It's strange, you know? Here I am in solitary, and yet the books keep piling up."

Again, Phoenix refused to react - He half-wondered if Kristoph thought he'd been looking at the book, not the envelope. That thing is pretty massive, I guess.' He nodded, briefly pointing to the violin. "Looks like you've got more than books up there."

"Ah, yes, my 'collection'," Kristoph replied, a proud smile on his face. "I've a few friends on the prison staff. They show me a little kindness."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, examining the items on display more carefully. After a moment, he recognised the entire bookcase and contents as having come from Kristoph's own home; Was that what he meant? He did recall thinking any one of Kristoph's elaborate choices in home decor was more valuable than the entirety of the Agency... but, considering where Kristoph, and his furniture, now resided, he couldn't let himself feel jealous anymore. Looking around, he confirmed his theory by recognising a chest of drawers behind him, complete with a small photo and a vase. Aha, flowers. Not sunflowers, not tulips... Are they roses? I'm going with roses.' He gestured to the two red flowers, turning his attention back to Kristoph. "You taking care of this one here?"

Kristoph smiled, getting to his feet. "Ah, yes, she's surprisingly delicate, you know. Requires careful tending." He walked past Phoenix, towards the drawers, and the visitor never let his eyes leave the prisoner. "But, she is my 'best friend', as they say."

"Best?" Phoenix repeated, eyebrow raised. He shot the other man a grin. "Come on, now I'm starting to feel bad for you."

"Oh?" Kristoph replied, giving Phoenix an amused look. "Of course, she's known to bite if handled roughly."

"Y-your rose bites?" Phoenix paused, eyes wide. "Oh? Kristoph replied, giving Phoenix an amused look. "Of course, she's known to bite if handled roughly."

Phoenix paused, eyes wide. "Y-your rose bites?"

Kristoph stared back at his visitor for a long moment. "I was speaking of the photo. Surely you remember my retriever, Vongole?"

'Ooh, right...' Too late, Phoenix noticed the small frame did indeed contain a photo of the former attorney's beloved dog. The Wrights hadn't met the animal often - If anyone was sure to remember her, it would be Luke - so Phoenix only allowed himself a guilty shrug in response. Wonder what happened to her after her owner got arrested? Eh, even Gavin here wouldn't let a dog be abandoned without care. Wherever she is, she's fine. ' His eyes drifted from the photo back up to the flowers. Hey, whaddaya know... I was right! Those are roses! Or, at least, Gavin didn't correct me, anyway.' He resisted the urge to study the flowers carefully, so as to imprint what a rose looked like in his mind and up his list of flower identification to three.

Kristoph grunted to himself, turning his back on Phoenix to examine his photo. "Life has been full of surprises... for both of us."

Phoenix didn't reply, watching the man carefully.

"I've no doubt you never expected to lose that attorney's badge of yours."
"And I'll bet you never expected to wind up here," Phoenix quietly replied, tossing all thoughts of flowers and dogs from his mind to get back to business. Although he knew the answer he would get, he had one question in particular he had to ask. "Shadi Smith... the man you killed. Did you know who he really was?"

Kristoph looked over his shoulder, watching Phoenix with an expression that exuded carefully composed curiosity. "Who he was?"

Phoenix's frown deepened. "Zak Gramarye. You know, the defendant."

Kristoph stared for a long moment in silence, then turned away again. "I remember him, of course. But you say Smith was Zak? Impossible."

"Don't even try to tell me it was a coincidence."

"What did I just say?" Kristoph shot Phoenix a smile. "Life is full of surprises. Don't you think?"

Phoenix refused to drop the issue just yet. "You were found guilty of his murder, but your motive was never made clear... A mistake I plan to remedy."

Kristoph chuckled, turning to face Phoenix properly. "You're not an attorney anymore, Phoenix Wright. What possible conclusion do you think this 'investigation' of yours can lead to?" He waved a hand in the air. "I killed a man named 'Smith' because I am an evil human being. Isn't that enough?"

He moved past Phoenix, back towards his chair. 'Not for me, it isn't.' Phoenix paused only briefly to calm himself before following the man with his eyes, watching Kristoph again sit in his chair. "You recall that case, back in twenty-nineteen?"

The other man thought a moment. "Ah, yes, the trial where Zak Gramarye pulled his famous vanishing act!" He chuckled, shaking his head. "My brother won his fair share of praise and adoration for that trial, as I recall. 'Genius Prosecutor Reveals Crooked Attorney', was it?"

Phoenix refused to rise to that bait - He'd had seven years practise, after all. "That was when I met you, wasn't it?"

Kristoph didn't meet Phoenix's eyes, pressing his glasses up his nose. "Was it now."

He knew he didn't need to, but if Kristoph was feigning ignorance, Phoenix was going to explain: "The Bar Association review board voted unanimously for the 'strictest punishment'... Well, unanimous save for one dissenting opinion: Yours."

Again, Kristoph took a long time to respond, still avoiding Phoenix's gaze. "It was my brother who was responsible for putting you in that position, after all."

Phoenix could only watch the other man with confusion, studying him carefully. "For seven years we've been friends... and yet I still don't understand you."

Kristoph chuckled, finally looking Phoenix in the eye. "But Wright, your 'friendship' toward me was never pure... and likely your son's relationship with me was equally poisoned from the start." He stood from his chair. "You suspected me then as you still do now, don't you?"

Phoenix stared back, the mention of Apollo making him long to reach for the locket hanging around his neck. It was true, he had suspected Kristoph nearly from the start, and had believed several scary things in the chaos his mind was in post-badge... but seven years was a long time. Although he'd never let his guard down, he'd spent a lot of it doubting himself when it came to Kristoph... and
Apollo's skills, the pain on his face as he'd argued his case against his former mentor back in April, were testament to how good the man could be when he wanted to. Phoenix sighed, eyes downturned. "Honestly, right now, I'm not sure what I think."

Kristoph huffed, then walked around his chair to study his bookshelves.

'Now's as good a time as any.' With the other man's attention elsewhere, Phoenix casually walked forward towards the chair, within reach of the side-table. As Kristoph still seemed occupied, he dared to look down, picking the yellow envelope up off the book it was perched on.

"It's not nice to peek at other people's mail."

Phoenix dropped the letter with a jerk, stepping back. Panicked, he threw out the first thing that came to mind: "You get mail here in jail?" Immediately, he mentally kicked himself. 'Of course he does, even people in solitary get the basic human right of letters!'

Kristoph chuckled, turning around. "That I do, though they read it first, apparently. Still," he shook his head, moving back around his chair, "I am allowed the pleasure of correspondence. Packages and the like are a different matter, however."

Phoenix nodded as though he didn't already know all that.

Kristoph stared at him for a few moments. "But that's not why you're here."

Instead of replying, Phoenix shook his head. He took only half a second to psyche himself up, then glared Kristoph right in the eyes. "You didn't just brain a guy with a juice bottle for no reason. Tell me why you did it."

Kristoph raised an eyebrow. "Persistent, aren't you?"

"I came here... because I remembered something," Phoenix explained; It was a half-lie, but, technically, it was correct. "The night of our 'game', Zak Gramarye mentioned your name, Gavin. After that, he was killed, and I asked you to help me because I remembered your kindness back when everyone had turned on me." A little exaggerated from the truth, but, again, close enough. "I have to know: Why did you kill Shadi Smith?" He paused, then shook his head. "No... Zak Gramarye?"

Kristoph stared back, a hand on the bridge of his glasses. After a long moment of silence, five Psyche-Locks shimmered into being with a rattling of non-existent chains.

Five black Psyche-Locks.

Phoenix couldn't help jumping back in surprise, eyes wide. Unlike normal red Psyche-Locks, these black ones seemed to exude an aura of despair, of a coldness so thick he didn't think it was even possible to unlock them lest he lose himself in the darkness. What were they? And what made Kristoph's secret so different from every other he had encountered over the years? One hand reached into his pocket, clutching the magatama within. Pearl had never mentioned the possibility of different colours back when she first explained all this to him nine years ago.

"Something wrong, Wright?"

Dragged back to reality, Phoenix rapidly blinked, the image of the chains and locks vanishing from his eyes. "N-no, it's nothing."

Kristoph dismissed the curious expression on his face with a shrug. "You shouldn't push yourself so
hard. Life is to be taken easy, you know.” With that, he circled Phoenix and returned to his drawers, where the roses and photo of Vongole rested. As Phoenix watched, Kristoph pulled a familiar bottle of nail polish out of his pocket, resting it next to the vase while he began to apply it to his nails.

"You're thinking, 'What self-respecting man would use nail polish'?"

Phoenix looked up from where he was crumpled on the floor, still dressed in the remains of his beloved suit and with a hand on his empty lapel... It had been two days now and he still hadn’t taken it off, a disgraced lawyer hiding in his disgraced law office in between the too-brief bouts of determination that were the only thing getting him doing anything right now. "Oh, no, of course not.Appearances seem to be a big thing with you." His voice was barely more than a whisper, and he suspected Kristoph was only putting those words in his mouth purely to drag the now-former lawyer out of his depressed shell.

Kristoph smiled, sat with legs neatly crossed on the black leather lounge. "You know what I say? One cannot live a beautiful life without beautiful nails. First rate, in all things. Accept nothing less."

Phoenix managed a half-smile, watching the man work on his hands. "That certainly does look like first rate nail polish. I like the sparkly bottle."

"It's crystal," Kristoph replied. "I'd offer you one to keep, but I don't have a spare on me currently, I'm afraid."

"No, it's alright," Phoenix insisted, shaking his head. "I wouldn't have a use for it anyway... since Maya and Pearls aren't..." He flinched, looking away; Not even now could he make himself voice that, if only for the well-being of their village, he might never see either of the Feys ever again. The pain of everything he had lost, including them, was still too fresh.

Kristoph stared at Phoenix for a moment, then nodded and returned to his nails. "If you insist."

The memory of the conversation echoed in Phoenix's head. Although he gave the small bottle a long look, he said nothing, and made to leave.

Kristoph gave no indication he even noticed his visitor go.

View the Court Record
Turnabout Succession, Day 2: Investigation, Part 2

Any idea where that reporter ran off to after the trial? .

Last I heard he was bugging my people at the crime scene. Why do you want to know? We've got everything we can from him

Thanks Ema. Long story short, I have a few questions only he can answer .

Alright. Good luck Mr Wright

October 8, 3:16PM
Cape Rivers Drive

It didn't take Phoenix long, as he approached the small building that housed Drew Studio, to spot the fidgety reporter lingering outside. The man was circling the bench that faced the park opposite, twirling a toothbrush in his hand and muttering to himself, eyes flicking every which way... Naturally, he noticed the approaching Phoenix equally quickly, and dashed down the concrete path to meet him.

"Well well well, what do we have here?"

Phoenix paused, waiting for Brushel to join him. "Remember me?"

Brushel scoffed. "Of course I remember you! 'Journalist Meets Ex-Attorney In Bar', end quote." He grinned widely, the strong smell of mint exuding from his blindingly white teeth.

'You know more about me than I do about you, then...'. Phoenix gestured to the nearby building, resolving to put up with the smell without comment. "Can I ask what you're doing here? Mister Misham was poisoned, and his daughter's..."

"Oh, yes, I know," Brushel explained, nodding. "Oh, how I know! Yes. It's caused me no end of grief, to be honest." He turned, headed for the bench he'd been circling. "'Journalist Wishes He'd Tracked Down Case Just A Little Quicker', end quote."

Phoenix frowned in thought, following the reporter. "Were you on the trail of this case the whole time?"

Brushel nodded, lowering himself onto the bench. "Zak Gramarye... was a good friend."

"He said something to that effect back at the Borscht Bowl Club," Phoenix mused aloud, settling at the man's side.

"What a character, what a man!" Brushel crowed, reaching behind his thick glasses to rub at his eyes. "If a little... No, a lot... No, extremely rough around the edges!"

Phoenix decided not to comment; He could recall clearly how Zak had so casually punched Brushel out when his role in the events that night was done. "Do you think I could ask you a few questions?"

Brushel turned to Phoenix with an incredulous look. "Oh? You serious? I mean, I'm usually the
interviewer, not interviewee! 'Journalist Asks Questions, Not Other Way Around', end quote."

Phoenix just raised an eyebrow at the man.

Sighing heavily, Brushel waved a hand. "Fine, shoot, I don't care!" Leaning back on the bench, he crossed his arms, fingers tapping in a frustrated sulk. "People have been asking me all sorts of things lately."

Hiding a smile, Phoenix nodded. He turned his gaze to the forest of Gourd Lake across the road, half-hidden behind its high brick wall. "It was tragic what happened to Drew Misham and his daughter."

"Forgery is a serious crime, and they paid the price," Brushel muttered. He cocked his head to one side, watching Phoenix carefully. "You know what really did them in though, don't you?"

Phoenix didn't move his gaze from the trees. "Yes: A forged diary page."

Brushel leaned forward, whispering, "The night I 'interviewed' him, I found out something about Mister Misham I hadn't known."

Intrigued, Phoenix finally turned to face the reporter. "What's that?"

"You know, he always felt like he was being watched?" Brushel continued, an excited gleam in his eyes. "Every day, for seven years. 'Walls Have Ears, Potatoes Have Eyes', end quote."

Phoenix frowned. "Being watched...? You mean, he felt guilty?"

"Nerves?" Brushel scoffed. "No, it's nothing so mundane... I stopped paying attention to my nerves a long time ago!" He nervously looked around again, lowering his voice back to a whisper. "But I felt it too; 'Journalist Sure He Is Being Watched', end quote." He fixed a determined gaze on Phoenix's. "Don't you wonder why Zak Gramarye got rubbed out after seven years, right after coming into contact with me!?"

At that, Phoenix's eyes widened.

"He completely vanishes from that courtroom," Brushel continued, "then, for seven years, he talks to no one. Not a soul! Then, just as the 'remaining time' was almost up, he contacts me in order to have that rights transferral of his made."

"And then he dies," Phoenix muttered, his gaze moving to the ground.

"Starting to put the pieces together, are we?" Brushel asked, a smug tone in his voice.

Phoenix ignored him, studying the reporter carefully. "And you were being 'watched' this whole time?"
"Maybe not just me," Brushel suggested with a shrug. "Maybe you were, too!"

Phoenix paled, looking away. He'd been faking his friendship with Kristoph for seven long years in order to keep a close eye on the man... Had Kristoph been doing the exact same thing with him? Suddenly he remembered the week after he and Maya finally sorted out their mutual attraction, how Kristoph had immediately known Pearl was hanging out in the city with her cousins. Had their visits to Kurain truly been as secret as he'd thought? And what about the night of Zak's murder; Had Kristoph visited that day knowing full well who would be dropping by later? Just how much danger had the Wrights and their extended family been in without ever even knowing?

Brushel sat up in his seat, twirling the brush in his hands. "I met Zak through that case, actually."

Phoenix dragged himself back to the present; Whatever Kristoph might have done, he was firmly in jail now, and couldn't harm them anymore... Although, just in case, he made a mental note to check they didn't have any 'gifts' from the former attorney lying around anywhere. "You mean the shooting of Magnifi Gramarye?" he asked Brushel.

"No, before that," Brushel replied, shaking his head. "It's not widely known."

Phoenix thought a moment, then a story Thalassa had told him in the past week sprang to mind. "You mean the accident? During the Quick-Draw Shoo'em practise?"

The toothbrush in Brushel's hand ceased its spinning as the reporter gave Phoenix an impressed look. "My my my, you're well informed!" He chuckled, grinning proudly. "You should've seen me back then; I'd dug up quite the scoop. I wanted it all: Money, fame, women, a little puppy... all for me!" He sighed longingly, clutching his toothbrush with both hands. "I was younger then, and my days and nights smelled of fresher mint than they do now.... In fact, I was on close speaking terms with Magnifi Gramarye at the time." He paused, thinking. "I knew his daughter too, of course. Thalassa, was it?"

At that, Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "Really..." He couldn't help but wonder if Thalassa remembered Brushel at all... Regardless, although he knew her side of this story, and Zak's side of this story, Brushel's might prove to be a different matter.

"Then Thalassa disappeared," Brushel sighed, contemplative. "Quite suddenly, at that. And Magnifi wouldn't say a word about it." He shrugged, giving Phoenix a sheepish look. "Yeah, my evil habit got the better of me. 'Journalist Catches Scent Of A Scoop, Goes On Feeding Frenzy', end quote. I set up a one-on-one interview with Thalassa's husband, see."

"You mean Zak Gramarye," Phoenix filled in. 'As opposed to her first husband, Apollo's father. He was long dead by then, I suppose.'

Brushel nodded, his eyes intense. "Something strange was in the air over at Troupe Gramarye in those days. The whole screwy mentor-controlling-disciples scene'd started by then, I'm guessing." He grinned. "Thalassa, she was part of it all, right? C'mon, you can tell me, off the record!"

It was very easy for Phoenix to bluff a blank look, shaking his head. "Sorry, I don't know."

Brushel studied him for a moment before giving up with a sigh. "Anyway. I kept prying, and eventually became friends with Zak." He shrugged, looking a little beleaguered. "Sure, he punched me once or twice... or five times..." He perked up with a grin. "But, over time, he came to see me as his confidant."

'It doesn't sound worth it to me,' Phoenix mused.
Brushel was tapping his toothbrush against his head again, frowning in thought. "Y'know, Valant's been waiting this whole time. Seven years, eh?"

Phoenix blinked in confusion, thrown by the change of subject. "Waiting...?"

"For his big comeback, of course!" Brushel laughed. "A big 'revival of the Magnifi Miracle'..." His smile faded. "Course, it was all a dream."

"The performance rights," Phoenix muttered. His mind flew to his daughter, certainly at home by now, and the purple envelope he'd left in her possession; Had Apollo worked out what it was? Phoenix was starting to wonder if he'd made the right choice, waiting so long to pass the document on, only to make its recipient wait even longer before allowing her to read it. Thalassa didn't know about the rights yet either... though he doubted she would have the kind of issues with it Valant might.

"In the absence of any official documents, he was golden," Brushel elaborated. "Who's to say the old man didn't give his rights to both Zak and Valant?"

'Zak would have, if Valant had tried this stunt any earlier... Not that it really matters, now he's dead both literally and legally.'

"The time finally comes," the reporter continued, "and Valant's like a kid on Christmas morning!"

Phoenix stared contemplatively at the forest across the road. "He's getting ready for his show at the Sunshine Coliseum, you know."

Brushel nodded. "If that document sees the legal light of day, it's going to put a bit of a damper on the big show." He sighed. "He's a sorry one, that Valant Gramarye. Lost out to his partner at work, and in love, too."

Raising an eyebrow, Phoenix returned his attention to the reporter. "Love?"

"It's the same old story, really," Brushel explained, waving his toothbrush in the air. "Two disciples, and their mentor's only daughter. What has three sides, and all of 'em pointy? A love triangle."

Phoenix hummed in thought. "That is pretty classic. 'I should really stop this gossip right here, but I'm actually curious if Thalassa knew about this.'"

"When you're in a performing troupe, that's your world," Brushel continued. "It's like family... One with an entire high school's worth of drama, intrigue, and backstabbing."

His frown deepening, Phoenix looked away. The few words Thalassa had given him on her time in the troupe seemed happy enough, and Trucy certainly looked back on those days fondly... but the both of them had grown up in it, hadn't known anything else until Thalassa's accident and Trucy's 'orphaning'. He'd worked out a long time ago that Magnifi had been using the guilt of Thalassa's 'death' to control his two apprentices and goad them into killing him - a heavily disapproving Thalassa had only supported the theory since her return to America - and the whole mess had been the root cause of Zak going on trial in the first place, the catalyst to his death that past April. Maybe Zak was right to decide not to see Trucy again; Kristoph likely would have killed them both.

"You know about Thalassa's first husband, right?"

Phoenix blinked as he was abruptly dragged back to reality, looking over to see Brushel's curious eyes on him. "O-oh, uh... You know about him?"
Brushel scoffed, grinning. "Course I do! Tragic story, really: They were only married one year, then he goes and dies in an accident on stage."

"That's not quite the story I heard, but okay."

"Then Thalassa married Zak and had Trucy - I've known her since she was a little thing, too - and the kid she had with her first husband had vanished off the face of the earth! Another orphan, slipped through the cracks!"

Phoenix couldn't help a smile hearing that. "Did he now."

Brushel giggled at the back of his throat, rolling his eyes sheepishly as he realised Phoenix already knew whatever he might say. "Yeah... It's tough to figure out which got the better deal, really. They've got each other now at least, eh?"

Chuckling quietly, Phoenix looked out at the forest across the road. "Family is more than just blood relations; They've both understood that from the start. All I want to do right now is give what's left of the Gramaryes the answers they deserve."

Brushel sighed, leaning back on the bench. "People and events all get tangled together and get bigger and bigger... don'tcha think? Sometimes, you just gotta accept that you won't be able to untangle it all, I think."

Phoenix smiled. "Maybe so," he admitted. "But still, I have to do what I can... and tell what I find to those who come next."

Brushel twirled his toothbrush thoughtfully. "'Next', you say?"

"I'm not the one who will close the curtain on this little play," Phoenix explained, staring hard at the rainbow of leaves behind the brick wall. "Apparently, that's not my role anymore."

Humming in thought, Brushel followed his gaze. "I wonder what Magnifi would think of all this."

"What do you mean?"

"Haven't you seen it in Trucy?" Brushel asked, the hint of a laugh in his voice. "She's got his power."

At that, Phoenix smiled. "Ah, the Gramarye perception... Apollo has it, too. And Thalassa before them."

"Magnifi told me once, back when Zak married Thalassa," Brushel continued. "He said Zak had good 'eyes', but not good like a Gramarye's eyes. Not that good."

Phoenix just nodded, staring out at the treetops. "Maybe those Gramarye eyes will be what solves this case once and for all."

Brushel didn't reply, for once simply sitting in silence at his side.

It was a long while before either felt ready to leave.

View the Court Record
It had taken a great deal of patience, and more than a little persuading, but finally Phoenix had wormed his way through the small crowds permanently surrounding the Coliseum's entrance and found his way to an actual staff-member. With a bit of serious talk and flashing an official-looking paper signed by top prosecutor Miles Edgeworth, he convinced them to let him through immediately to speak to the star of the upcoming show.

"As you can see, this is a very important police investigation. If I don't speak to him right now, there may indeed be dire consequences for anyone who stands in my way. Specifically... have you ever heard of 'obstruction of justice'?

"... We'll let you in right away, sir."

Through the dark and quiet foyer, Phoenix was led through a side-door and into a small office, empty except for a large table and a circle of chairs, and the large whiteboard that hung on a wall.

"Mister Gramarye will be along shortly, sir."

With that, he'd been left alone. Not that Phoenix minded, really. He wasted some time idly searching for markers for the whiteboard, found them hidden under a chair, then took to doodling on the smooth surface provided.

"Funny I find myself drawing when I was doing so much of that yesterday. And I'm pretty sure I'll find even more to do once I get back to Luke. Ah well. I could use the practise."

Halfway through a rough impression of his eldest son under the red marker, Phoenix heard the door of the room opening behind him.

"Well, this is a blast from the distant past."

Grinning, Phoenix turned to face the magician, capping the marker. "Long time no see, Mister Valant."

Valant didn't look impressed, closing the door behind him and staying put next to it, gripping his cane tightly at his side. "Seven years, has it been? Frankly, I didn't think I'd ever see you again."

Phoenix stepped forward, depositing his small collection of whiteboard markers on the table and lowering himself casually into a chair. "I should apologise; I always meant to talk to you again before the police released you, but..." He couldn't help a small smile. "Something came up."

Valant's expression didn't change. "I've spoken to the press. I've nothing more to say."

"I've spoken to a lot of people myself," Phoenix replied, shrugging, "and come to some conclusions. But then I realised..." He paused, leaning forward to rest his arms on the table and fixing Valant with
a stern look. "I needed to hear it from you. Not from Apollo."

Valant stared back for a long moment, then, finally, looked away guiltily. Sighing, he stepped forward and sat in the nearest chair. "I have walked a difficult road these past seven years."

Phoenix didn't allow himself to feel relieved at making the man talk. "Because you couldn't perform Magnifi's repertoire?"

"Do not be deceived!" Valant cried, holding up a finger in a revival of his usual theatrics. "Valant's skill is the 'real deal'. I do not require my mentor's hand-me-downs." He lowered his hand. "No, it was my partner who slowed me on my way."

Phoenix looked away, thinking. "Zak Gramarye."

Valant nodded. "His rather well-performed disappearing act in twenty-nine was the end... or so I thought."

"'Zak Gramarye murdered our mentor and fled to escape punishment for his crime'," Phoenix said, returning his stern gaze to Valant. "You said something to that effect at the time, didn't you?"

The magician only chuckled, shrugging almost sheepishly. "I remember it as if 'twere only yesterday." He sighed, anger forming on his face as his gaze flicked to the doorway. "Yet, that was not the way of it, in the end. For while he vanished, the suspicions upon my own person never did! 'His partner Zak vanished to protect him'... That's what those thieving magpies of a press said!"

Phoenix closed his eyes in a silent acceptance of the truth. To be honest, the pervasive rumours were probably thanks to his own tearing apart of Valant's testimony in the trial... but Phoenix was never going to apologise for seeking out the truth, especially not when it came to the case that had cost him so much.

"Yet that very same press comes to me now, feigning interest," Valant continued, waving an arm with a glare. "They cover the greatest magic show in history as if it were a vaudevillian distraction! And here must I stand, smiling at them all. What am I, if not a player in some fiendish farce!?"

Phoenix gave the man a wry look. "Might I suggest it's because you never made it clear what happened? Magnifi's death is still a mystery to this day... which is why I came here to get the answer from you."

Valant shot Phoenix a brief glare before returning his gaze to the door, arms crossed. "I already told Apollo."

"I don't want to hear it from Apollo," Phoenix patiently repeated. "After everything that's happened over the years... I need to hear this from you."

The magician didn't react. Around him, Phoenix saw spiritual chains rattling into existence, a pair of chunky red padlocks hanging off them.

Phoenix almost sighed in relief; He'd been expecting to see Psyche-Locks, but the worry had never left him that they might turn up as dark and cold as Kristoph's had been. *Thank goodness these ones are normal...'*

"The audience has no business stepping upon the stage," Valant said. "They must be content to sit and stare at the spotlight."

'Funny, Trucy's always said exactly the opposite.'
"Ask what you will, you'll get nothing from me."

Phoenix shook his head, one hand in his pocket to grip his magatama. "I'm as much a part of this affair as you are now. I have to know what happened."

"For seven long years, I have endured," Valant continued, seemingly ignoring the former attorney. His arms unfolded, one hand reaching out as if to grab hold of the thin air. "Now, finally, the curtain lifts on my new golden age! All the miracles of our troupe, within my grasp!"

'No need to be quite so literal.' Despite his internal snark, Phoenix couldn't help but feel sorry for the magician opposite him. As much as he'd hated and blamed the man for being one of the many causes of the loss of his badge... ultimately, he couldn't ignore how much affection Apollo and Trucy had for him. He trusted Apollo's word that Valant was innocent of Magnifi's murder. 'Sorry to do this, Valant... but right now, I need answers, and you're not giving them to me.' With a sigh, Phoenix gave the man a stern look, pulling out his Court Record. "Valant, I wouldn't be so sure about those miracles. Not as long as I have this." The appropriate photo set to display on his screen, he slid the tablet computer across the table.

Finally, Valant returned a curious gaze to Phoenix. Silently, he reached out for the computer, studying the image on the screen: a white sheet of lined paper, embossed with a familiar symbol of a man's head wearing a top hat. "And what might this be? I see it bears the Gramarye seal..."

"I should have brought this to your attention sooner," Phoenix said, a half-apology, "but I didn't imagine you'd be planning your comeback quite so fast."

As Valant read the contract on the screen, his eyes widened. "What is this...?"

"A document showing the true recipient of the performance rights to Magnifi's miracles," Phoenix explained. "Or, at least, a photo of it."

"Wh-what!?" Valant choked, jumping to his feet as he stared at the computer in his hands. "Zak... He wrote this! What!?" He fell forward, leaning on the table as his breathing came in gasps. "He passed everything to his daughter!?"

Phoenix just nodded, though he spared a glance of concern for his precious Court Record. "To Trucy, yes... though she's officially my daughter these days."

"Preposterous!" Valant spat, whacking the computer to slide it back towards its owner, who he glared at. "Zak's... Zak is gone! Vanished into the void!"

"This is the genuine article, an unaltered photo," Phoenix repeated, keeping his eyes on the magician even as he moved to rescue his tablet computer. "Zak was alive when he wrote this. Both myself and the notary can testify to this... and the document itself is safely in the hands of the person he wrote it for."

Valant stared, face pale, for a long moment, then, finally, squeaked, his whole body shaking. With a long, loud cry of despair, he spun around and fell to the floor with a twirl of his cape, his cane clattering to the floor at his side. "Why...!? Why does Fate toy with me so!? Why must my life be lived in thrall to the dead!??"

Any pity Phoenix had for the man quickly dried up at the theatrics. "You're not the only one with that problem," he muttered as he got to his feet, slipping his Court Record back into his pocket.

Turning around, Valant poked his head up over the edge of the table, gloved hands clinging to the wooden surface. "But he shot Magnifi!" he insisted. "Yes! It was Zak! It was! And then he left..."
He slipped down, bumping his forehead against the tabletop. "And my career as a magician fell into darkness..."
Despite Valant’s over-the-top display on the floor of the small room, it was clear his emotions were real. Phoenix tried not to roll his eyes, stepping away from his chair on the other side of the table. For the sake of his children, it was time he showed the man some kindness. "Did you think there might be some way out of it?" he asked. "Say, if you could prove Zak Gramarye shot Magnifi? Was that why you testified?"

"Yes!" Valant cried from below the table. "My way out... It should have been my way out!"

Slowly, Phoenix approached the sobbing magician, keeping his tone and expression neutral. "Well, it might not be too late, Mister Valant. All you need is a way to prove your case... and I believe I have the answers to your prayers right here."

Valant paused, peering out from his self-made hidey-hole and watching the former attorney silently. Phoenix dug around in his pocket for a moment. "Who really killed Magnifi Gramarye?" He pulled out a folded piece of purple paper, holding it up for only a moment before dropping it to the floor in front of the crumpled magician. "Zak Gramarye wrote one more thing before passing on." His piece said, he turned and headed back to his seat.

Valant gingerly retrieved the paper, pulling himself into a chair as he unfolded it to examine the contents. "To whom it may concern: April 2019, I, Zak Gramarye, murdered my mentor, Magnifi... Gramarye..." He sputtered, shaking his head. "This... But this is a confession!"

Phoenix nodded, leaning back in his seat as though he might fall asleep there. "In which he admits to the killing of Magnifi Gramarye," he pointed out, not bothering to hide the bitterness. "See? All according to your plan."

Valant stared at Phoenix for a long moment before returning his gaze to the paper in his hands. "I am... a magician by trade," he whispered. "Deception is my life's work. I fool the audience, give them a fleeting dream..." He paused, pulling the brim of his hat down over his eyes with a sigh. When he continued, it was with more confidence in his voice: "Yet, it seems the tables have turned. Now I am the audience, believing in the deceptions I have wrought upon myself."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, studying the sullen man opposite. "Zak wrote that right in front of me... after I explained your situation to him."

Valant looked up in surprise, then smiled sadly, his attention back on the letter. "Allakazam..." The smile faded, and he met Phoenix's eyes with a serious look. "You do know that this 'confession' is nothing but lies?"

"Yes." Phoenix kept an even stare on the magician. "It's my opinion that Zak Gramarye killed no one."

Valant chuckled. "Then you must be thinking the truth is a simple matter of elimination. Two received instructions to kill, but if one is innocent? Then the one who remains is guilty."
Phoenix nodded, preparing himself for an assertion he knew was coming. "That would be the logical conclusion, yes."

"So he vanished to protect me, his partner..." After a short pause, Valant broke into laughter, his usual pomposity returning. "A stirring tale, 'tis true."

Leaning forward in his seat, Phoenix watched the magician closely. 'I know what he told Apollo, but I have to ask this myself.' "Did you shoot Magnifi Gramarye in the forehead?"

Valant stared back, his performer's grin fading. "If I had, and I told you, what would you do? Run to the police, perchance?"

Although the reply was unexpected, Phoenix didn't react, staying silent. 'I suppose I did get this meeting with him under the pretence of being with said police...'

Sighing, Valant tossed Zak's confession onto the table in front of him. Unlike his earlier theatrics, he seemed, simply, spent. Tired. "Do as you will. There is nothing left for me now."

Phoenix blinked, frowning slightly in confusion. He still said nothing.

"It is true, after all," Valant quietly continued, his eyes somewhere far away. "I have little talent. I needed my mentor Magnifi's repertoire." He paused, thoughtful. "It was... as if a little demon grabbed hold of me..."

'Is... Is this a confession!?' At hearing the exact opposite of what he'd been expecting, Phoenix finally broke his silence: "But... you told Apollo..."

Valant chuckled, returning his gaze to the former attorney. "I did indeed... and I didn't lie to him: It was not I who shot my mentor."

'Ah, there it is. A return to making sense.' "So, Magnifi...?"

The magician slowly nodded, his face deadly serious despite the smile. "Yes. The Great Magnifi Gramarye himself was the shooter."

Phoenix couldn't reply, looking away. 'So Apollo was right. It was a suicide, all along... and I'm still not sure how I feel about that.'

"When I arrived that night," Valant explained, dragging Phoenix's attention back to him, "the old man was still alive. He appeared to be asleep. I..." He sighed, almost frustrated with himself. "I could not shoot him. But when I turned and made to leave the room... the old man called out to me."

Phoenix was a little surprised to hear that. "So you spoke with Magnifi that night?"

Valant nodded. "And this is why I knew what he had done; Magnifi transferred the rights to his repertoire to my partner, Zak Gramarye. Not me."

"I see." Phoenix thought to himself for a long moment, then got to his feet. "Then I guess I owe you an apology. I always thought you were the one who did it."

Chuckling, Valant shook his head, looking away. "You owe me no apology."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "Huh?"

"My crime was, in a way, more serious than that of murder."
"W-what!?" Phoenix cried. 'What could possibly be more serious than murder!?'

Valant waited a long moment before explaining: "You see, I knew that two letters had been sent. There are no secrets between partners. It was easy to find out... That was when I understood Magnifi's plan."

Already, Phoenix was connecting the dots in his head. "He wanted to die by one of your hands...?"

"Little did I expect it had anything to do with the rights to his repertoire!" Valant laughed. "That was when I heard it: The little demon whispering inside my heart." He shook his head, then, seeing Phoenix's confused look, continued, "Let me confess: I had intended to shoot Magnifi. And... I planned on framing my partner for the crime."

Phoenix's expression hardened as he nodded. 'Just as I've always thought you did... before you revealed the whole thing was a suicide."

"That night, I prepared something before going to Magnifi's hospital room."

"Which was...?"

Valant chuckled. "IV fluid, of course. I'd seen it on an earlier visit. If Zak did not shoot, I would do the deed!" He waved a determined fist in the air. "Then, I would use the IV liquid to place the murder on his hands. That was my plan."

Phoenix stared, musing on the new information. "But... you didn't shoot him."

Sighing, Valant nodded. "I could not. The demon in my heart fled when the moment came. But then Magnifi called me back. He said he was giving his magic to Zak, that I still lacked the draw he had... and asked me to help my partner, if I could." His eyes closed in pain, facing away. "I left the room... and then I stopped. The shock of what I had just been told consumed me. That is when I heard that fateful gunshot."

"Magnifi Gramarye... killing himself," Phoenix muttered.

"Then, the demon awoke anew within me!" Valant continued, eyes opened with a determined gaze. "Zak killed him, he was the one... Frame him, and the magic will be yours... I..." The pained look returned. "I altered the scene of his suicide. I took the pistol from his hand, wiped off the prints, then used the syringe to add the IV liquid I'd brought."

Phoenix simply nodded, having worked out the story as Valant spoke. "So in the end, things happened pretty much as planned," he pointed out. "Magnifi died, and you framed Zak for his murder."

Valant didn't reply for a long moment. "'As planned', indeed. Of course, the outcome was somewhat different than I had anticipated." He sighed, then got to his feet, watching Phoenix with a smile. "Well, what do you think? Do you believe my story? Can it be believed, truly?"

Phoenix took his time mulling the question over, eyes elsewhere. "That was seven years ago. I don't know what to believe." He took a deep breath. "But..."

Valant waited expectantly. "Yes?"

"I'm glad I heard it from you, Mister Valant," Phoenix said, meeting the magician's gaze. He even managed a smile. "Thank you."
Chuckling, Valant shook his head. "It is I who should be thanking you, Mister Wright. Only when I had lost everything could I make my decision." He turned and leaned down, retrieving his dropped cane.

Phoenix was almost too shocked to speak. "You're going to turn yourself in?"

"My partner may have vanished, but not so my guilt," Valant explained rather matter-of-factly, also grabbing the dropped confession as he straightened up. "And as my guilt stays, all else begins to leave me: My friends, my performance rights, my magic..." He sighed, shoving the paper in a pocket in his costume. "I've had enough of vanishing acts."

At that, Phoenix could only nod in agreement. "I understand."

The magician stood still, eyes far away. "I thought my life was ruled by a dead man, but I find I was wrong... for Zak Gramarye was alive..."

'Well, not anymore.'

"Just as his wife was."

At that, Phoenix smiled. "Ah, yes... Apollo mentioned you knew about Thalassa."

Valant chuckled, meeting Phoenix's eyes. "We never saw proof of her demise... Her body, I mean. Truthfully, were it not for a certain conversation I overheard, I may not have realised it myself."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. 'Does that mean I should take back that you're smarter then you look?'

Shaking his head, Valant began to twirl his cane around his arm, heading for the door. "I can only hope that the day will come when I again meet my partner, Zak Gramarye, or our mentor's dear daughter, Thalassa... then I shall apologise for my terrible mistake." He paused, ceasing the twirling to reach for the doorhandle, but didn't yet open it, instead looking over his shoulder to Phoenix. "I am glad we had this chance to talk. Thank you."

Phoenix nodded, unable to reply.

Valant exited the room with a flash of his yellow cape, and left Phoenix's sight.
Is it possible to arrange a search of Gavin's cell while he's not there?

Wright, what are you planning?

He has a yellow envelope on his table but I can't take a look while he's right there.
You WERE watching the trial weren't you?

... I'll see what I can do. I can't promise anything, though.

Yes! You're the best Edgeworth!

Don't thank me yet. I certainly can drop hints to certain people to pull Gavin out for a while, but I can't do anything about the guards. You're on your own there.

Thanks anyway buddy :) I'll tell you later how it goes.

Please don't. I'd prefer not to know how many laws you're breaking.

Cmon, you know me better than that don't you?

And that's exactly why I don't want to know.
I'll talk to you later, Wright.

October 8, 5:15PM
Central Prison
Solitary Cell 13

'There's only one person left to see...'

Just as before, one of the prison guards led Phoenix down the white hallways of the Solitary wing, headed for Kristoph's cell. And, just like last time, Phoenix could feel his stomach churning with worry. He was taking a gamble coming back. He didn't have anything else to ask the man himself about, he was just hoping to create a better distraction this time. After all, Edgeworth gave him no guarantee that Kristoph wouldn't be waiting there for him when he showed up.

There was no sound of a violin this time as they approached their destination, and, when they reached the cell, the guard ahead of Phoenix paused. "Um..." Turning, she stepped aside, revealing the empty room and wide-open door. "Sorry sir. Prisoner Kristoph Gavin is currently 'occupied'..."

Phoenix nodded, pretending not to see the flash of worry on the young woman's face. "I see. Do you know when he'll be finished?"

The guard shifted from foot to foot, stuttering. "Erm, well..."
Raising his eyebrows, Phoenix put on the look of an important and annoyed superior. "Could you go find out?"

"Ah..." The guard hurriedly nodded. "Certainly, sir. Please wait here a moment." She promptly turned and fled down a nearby hallway.

Phoenix waited until she was long gone to smile. 'Poor thing... I'll apologise to her when she gets back.' Checking one final time he was alone in the hallway, he slipped into the cell and made a beeline for the table by the large chair.

'Bingo.'

Just as he had left it, the yellow envelope sat propped up against the thick red tome Kristoph was likely reading. Making one last paranoid check that he was alone, Phoenix picked the item up and examined the return address written on the back of the sealed flap, right below where it had been torn open.

'And the sender is Drew Misham. Just as I thought. This is his final letter.'

Without wasting another moment, Phoenix spun the letter around in his hands, looking for the commemorative Troupe Gramarye stamp he remembered seeing on Vera's desk all those years ago. Indeed, it hadn't changed from his memory, though it was somewhat obscured now by the postmark. Although a quick glance at the address told him it wasn't directly for Kristoph, he didn't bother worrying about that; It was only to be expected after Drew had told them so many years ago he never knew his client's true name.

'And since this is Drew Misham's final letter, then there's only one final thing I need to do.'

From his pocket, Phoenix pulled out the atroquinine spray, popping off the cap. 'Here goes.' A click or two of the bottle got enough of the substance on the envelope to see a reaction, and Phoenix almost felt a little sorry to see the faces of Thalassa, Zak and Valant disappear below a blue stain.

"Well, there's no mistaking that," Phoenix muttered.

After shoving the cap back on the spray and returning it to his pocket, Phoenix turned his attention to the letter inside, pulling it from the envelope and holding the pair together as he read.

"The interview request came, like you said it would, and they're looking into the case. I swear on my life I won't tell them about you. So please, release the "spell" you've put on my daughter. I'll write later with a report.
"Drew Misham"

Phoenix couldn't resist a grin. "Gotcha."

"What's this? A burglar, in jail?"

Phoenix jumped, automatically hiding the letter and envelope behind his back as he spun around; Kristoph was entering the cell, a guard behind him closing the barred door. "Gavin!"

Kristoph smiled, stepping towards his drawers. His eyes never left Phoenix. "I didn't know you moonlighted in larceny, Wright."
Shrugging, Phoenix tried to look casual. 'Quick, distraction!' "Gavin... There's something I have to ask you."

"Can I steal your stuff?" Kristoph suggested, eyebrows raised in amusement. "The answer is 'no'." He shook his head, turning his attention to his roses. "My apologies, but there's not much I care to discuss."

Phoenix made no move to leave just yet, staring at the other man. "Vera Misham hasn't received her verdict yet," he said. "You follow me, Gavin?"

"There are no known survivors of atroquinine poisoning," Kristoph pointed out, idly picking up the photo of his dog. "But it never hurts to hope."

Phoenix stared for another moment or two of silence, then nodded. "Okay, I'll be leaving now." He moved towards the door, the guard on the other side already reaching to open it for him.

"Wright. Wait."

Pausing, Phoenix turned, seeing Kristoph replacing his photo on the drawers. "Yeah, Gavin?"

Kristoph looked over his shoulder, his expression unreadable. "Would you mind leaving that letter? It's private."

Phoenix's grip on the paper in his hand tightened, and he plastered a sheepish look on his face. "Oh, sorry. Forgot I had it." Reluctantly, he stepped back to lay the envelope and letter back on the side table.

"Many thanks." His piece said, Kristoph returned his attention to his photo, his back to the door.

Hiding his frustration, Phoenix headed for where the guard was pulling open the bars to let him out. He gave the letter one last longing look before walking out.

'Seven long years... and that's all the clues I'm going to get on this case. I think it's time. Every story has an ending, after all. We need to get this final chapter underway...'
Finally, Luke turned, peering at the screen over his shoulder. "Looks great, Papa." He turned back to his laptop.

Phoenix paused, raising an eyebrow at his son's muted reactions. "Luke? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine."

At that, Phoenix frowned, placing his Court Record on the bed beside him. "Well, now I definitely know something's wrong." He shifted as close as he could without getting up - he briefly cursed there wasn't anywhere else to sit but the bed - and watched Luke carefully. "Are you still worried about Vera?"

Luke took a moment to respond, eyes still on his computer. "N-no, I know she'll be alright... probably." He sighed, shaking his head, then reached for an item on his desk. "I... was watching this earlier." Still keeping his gaze forward, he held up a small memory stick for his father to see.

Phoenix's eyes widened as he recognised the same item Edgeworth had handed them after the trial, and he turned a concerned gaze to what little he could see of his son's face. "Luke..."

"I just had it on as background noise, while I was working on other stuff," the vet continued, placing the USB device next to his computer, where a similar device - a yellow round object with a shocked face on the front - was currently plugged in. "I thought, sure, I've only ever glanced at the transcript, but I already knew what was going to happen, so all I was doing was checking the video played correctly while I was busy writing... but..." He sniffed, rubbing at his nose. "I guess it just... got me thinking and... hit me harder than I thought..."

"Oh, Luke..." Finally abandoning the bed, Phoenix got up to stand by Luke's chair, leaning down to hug his son as best he could. "It was a long time ago. You know I'm alright now, huh?"

Luke nodded, pulling off his hat. "You were hurt so bad... and I didn't even know for three months. It took you two to tell the Professor. And it just..." He sniffed, leaning against Phoenix's chest. "The look on your face... reminded me of Labyrinthia."

Phoenix blinked, surprised. "Labyrinthia?" He stepped back, trying to get a good look at Luke's face. "Why Labyrinthia? That was," he paused to count in his head, "an entire six months earlier."

Luke avoided eye contact, wringing the hat in his hands. "I... I never told you this, but..." He sniffed. "The night we thought Maya was dead, when we were staying in Rouge's tavern..."

The reminder of that terrible night no longer brought a spike of anxiety to Phoenix's chest as it once had, but he still couldn't help a small wince. Certainly, if the loss of his badge could be compared to anything, it was to the loss of Maya. However, curiosity burned at the first thing out of Luke's mouth. "Never told me what?"

Luke was silent for a moment, facing away from his father. "I couldn't sleep that night. When I woke up, you weren't there."

Phoenix nodded, deciding not to interrupt; He remembered clearly how he had found Luke awake and waiting for him when he returned from his brief outing down to the bar. Had something else happened while he was out of the room?


For a long moment, Phoenix could only stare. After all these years, he only vaguely remembered the pep talk Rouge had given him that night; His own breakdown, and the calm of accepting the grief so
he could move ahead for Luke's and Espella's sakes, stuck out far stronger. The thought that one of
the worst moments of his life had been covertly watched by a third party, though? "You... heard all
that?"

Luke nodded, only briefly glancing up to Phoenix's eyes. "I didn't want to upset you more, so I went
back to the room. And later... well, I guess I didn't want to upset everyone else by telling them how
hard you took it... thinking Maya was gone."

"Well, I... I can certainly understand that," Phoenix mumbled. After a moment or two, he gave his
son a smile, and moved to ruffle his hair. "Thank you for telling me. You must've been really
worried, huh?"

Blushing, Luke again nodded. "You're not mad?"

"Of course not," Phoenix replied, chuckling as he left his hand to rest on top of Luke's head. "Why
would I be? That was an awful time for both of us, and I think you did the right thing." He pulled his
son into a hug. "I'm proud of you, Luke. I always have been."

Seeing how awkward a position they were in, Luke got up from his chair to return the embrace.
"Thank you, Papa."

The pair stood in silence for a long moment.

"We should probably get back to work," Luke pointed out.

"Probably," Phoenix agreed.

Neither of them moved for a good while after that.

View the Court Record

Chapter End Notes

The night Luke and Phoenix spent at Rouge's Tavern was previously covered way back in Chapter 33, for the curious. :)
"You're sure that set-up will work?"

"Of course it will... As long as the Mason System is ready in time, of course."

"It'll be ready, trust me. I'm just not comfortable with a time delay."

"If you hadn't insisted on one last 'quick investigation'..."

"C'mon Edgeworth, I never would have got that final evidence we need if we went ahead with Luke's work as-is."

"I'm aware. My point is, you have made your bed and must now lie in it. There is little use complaining."

Phoenix sighed as he and his friend walked through the shining hallways of the high-class hotel. Given the Gatewater Group's 'special' relationship with the police, and the Imperial Hotel's proximity to the courthouse, he supposed he shouldn't have been surprised it was here Edgeworth had arranged for their six jurists (and one hanger-on) to stay during the trial. With groups of rooms closed off from each other in order to give the hotel's guests privacy along with their luxury, it was actually surprisingly perfect... a thought Phoenix never expected he could have after what had happened the last time he set foot in this particular branch of the Gatewater Group's hotels.

'At least Maya and Pearls weren't fazed coming back here, which is a blessing.'

Pearl was a last-minute addition to the party of jurists; Although she was perfectly capable of looking after herself up in Kurain, the teen refused to sit back up on the mountain and not come down to the city herself to watch such an important trial. Not wanting to ask Pearl to keep so many of the secrets Phoenix had decided were necessary, and not wanting to burden Apollo with yet another head to keep track of in addition to Trucy and Machi, it had been arranged for her to stay with and be subject to the same contract of secrecy as the jurists... although she watched the trial in the courtroom itself instead of from the Jurists' Chambers, and wasn't going to be voting on the verdict; Not only would her presence up the count from six to seven, she was too young to be allowed the responsibility of someone's life in her hands.

Speaking of, it seemed to Phoenix that every last-minute change involved with taking on the case they had was causing its own unique avalanche of problems as a result. Pearl tagging along with the Jurists was the smallest one, easy enough to brush off with a lie or two about exactly how dependant she was on her sister and cousin, but by far the largest was the issue of bias: There was no system set up to automatically assign six strangers from the city at large to a case, not yet, and Phoenix and Edgeworth both were long resigned to the fact that the test trial would by necessity have a jury of six of their friends. Their solution, the one they had pitched to the Bar Association and the Prosecutorial Investigation Committee and every other organisation involved in the criminal trial system as it stood before them, was that the six jurists of admittedly biased individuals would be biased towards both the defence attorney - Phoenix's son, Apollo - and the prosecutor - Edgeworth himself - thus
cancelling each other out and, the theory went, ensuring a fair trial. Klavier wasn't exactly unknown to them (what kind of world-famous rock star would he be otherwise?) but the only member of the jury to have ever met him was Thalassa, and her ties to Apollo cancelled out any kind of casual friendship she may have struck up with Klavier during their concert together. It had been out of a kindness to her that Phoenix had suggested she be added as a jurist, swapping out the rebellious Kay that Edgeworth had repeatedly suggested was likely to break all the rules they gave her 'just because'. Edgeworth was happy to have an alternative and, despite his doubts about Thalassa, he kept to his promise to trust Phoenix on her ability to be impartial. Anyone outside their immediate circle, though? Well, Phoenix refused just yet to dwell on how the various associations and committees would take all the last-minute changes... Not until this whole stressful trial was over.

Outside the final pair of doors in the hotel's hallways stood two police officers, who saluted Edgeworth on sight and waved the two men through. Phoenix would have huffed about not being recognised - He was the one in charge, after all! - but he didn't feel in the mood for kidding around. Instead, he turned his attention to the hallway beyond, quickly finding one of the doors propped open, the sound of conversation echoing from inside.

"Ah good, looks like they're together already," Phoenix pointed out with a grin, nudging his friend. Without waiting for any kind of reply Edgeworth might be preparing to accompany his raised eyebrow, the former lawyer headed straight for the open room.

Just as lavishly set up as any other Gatewater establishment, this room was identical to its neighbours, with a large king bed, a wide-screen TV, a soft lounge, and even both a desk and small table, each with their own chair... though it appeared an extra had been dragged in from one of the surrounding rooms. Spread out between chairs and bed were five adult women, a single young man, and a teenage girl, happily chatting between themselves.

"Because Truce is impossible to embarrass," the young man was announcing, lounging in a chair. "Talk about her as a baby, she'd just own it and go on about how 'cute' she was. Now, 'Pollo on the other hand? Talk about him as a baby, and he'll go red as a lobster!"

"I still think it's a little mean to tease him like that," the teenager muttered, watching disapprovingly from where she was sandwiched on the bed between two dark-haired older women. Everyone else simply laughed.

Half-lying on the lounge chair, a brunette woman looked up as Phoenix entered, giving him a tired smile. "Mister Wright, Mister Edgeworth."

"Ladies," Phoenix replied with a grin, stepping forward to where the group could see him and only then giving the young man a nod. "Clay." The chatter had died down, all attention now directed to his battered hoodie and Edgeworth's spotless white cravat.

Maya grinned, giving them a wave. "Yo."

"Aw, c'mon, I was just about to get all the hot gossip from Missus Gramarye!" Clay complained. Thalassa chuckled from her chair at his side. "Maybe later," she promised, a twinkle in her eye.

"Ready for bed, Maggey?" Phoenix asked the brunette in the lounge chair.

"I'm recovering," Maggey insisted, propping herself up on an elbow. "This is the longest I've been away from Felicia and, honestly, I love her to death, but she's been having trouble sleeping more
than two hours at a time an’...” She moaned, lying back down against the armrest.

Thalassa gave her a sympathetic look. "The things we give up to become a mother."

"Yep," Maggey darkly chuckled.

"We only require a few minutes of your time," Edgeworth assured her. "With any luck, you'll be home with your family by this time tomorrow."

Next to Thalassa, Adrian perked up on her chair. "This is about the trial?"

"Is the defendant alright?" Iris added, a hand playing with the magatama hanging around her neck.

"Miss Misham is recovering in hospital," Edgeworth explained, pushing his glasses up his nose. "Given our dire situation, we have decided the trial will continue as scheduled without her, in the hopes we can call a satisfactory verdict before her condition worsens... should it do so."

"In other words," Phoenix picked up, "we're going to ask you to come to the courthouse as it opens tomorrow; There are some things we want to test out before the trial starts, and we'd like to get moving as soon as possible."

Maya narrowed her eyes at Phoenix, crossing her arms in such exaggerated fashion it was clear she was mostly intending to mock him. "And what 'things' are we talking about here, Nick?"

Refusing to rise to the bait, Phoenix only returned a small smile. "It's called the Mason System. Luke and I have been working very hard on it over the past few days, and we think it will give you all the missing details you'll need to accurately judge this case." He didn't miss the slightly surprised look that crossed Maya's face, as well as the faces of Thalassa and Clay, the only three who had heard the name before.

"The 'Mason' System?" Maggey repeated thoughtfully, sitting up a little in her chair. "Sounds interesting."

"Why's it called that?" Pearl asked.

"No real reason," Phoenix admitted with a grin. "Just thought it sounded catchy."

Edgeworth hid a roll of his eyes behind a sudden need to fiddle with his glasses.

"It's in two parts, actually," Phoenix continued, pretending not to notice his friend's reaction. "As I'm sure you all noticed, it turns out this case is intricately tied to a much older, unsolved, case from seven years ago." He pulled a CD from his pocket, showing it off to the group. "To save time tomorrow morning, we'd appreciate it if you could all give this a watch tonight. The prosecutor and defence attorney will be doing the same thing, and everything you learn from this will be relevant in the Mason System and how this trial continues."

The jurists briefly exchanged glances, then Adrian got up to retrieve the CD. "We'll be sure to watch it, Mister Wright. Mister Edgeworth."

"Our thanks, Ms Andrews," Edgeworth replied with a polite nod.

Phoenix gave her a grateful smile. "That's all we wanted to tell you," he added to the group. "The friendly officers outside will want you all ready before nine... Except for you, Pearls. You can take your time."
Pearl blushed, pressing her hands to her face.

"Wait, is that it?" Clay asked, confused. "That's all you had to say?"

"It's still important, even if it isn't much," Adrian pointed out, returning to her seat.

Maggey nodded, getting up from her chair. "Exactly. In fact, if that's all you had for us, let's get this video out of the way right now. I'm dying for a nap." With that, she moved to the TV, searching for the manual.

As Adrian moved to help the tired brunette set up the television, Phoenix turned his attention to the Feys sitting on the bed. "Actually, I also had something I wanted to ask you three about, if you have a moment." Giving them a serious look, he turned and headed back out to the hallway.

Once out of the room, Phoenix made sure he was a small distance from the doorway before he stopped walking, not wanting the upcoming delicate conversation to be overheard by the other jurists. The first thing he spotted as he spun on his heel was Maya exiting the doorway he had just come through, watching him curiously. "What is this about, Nick?"

Before Phoenix could reply, Edgeworth had emerged from the room, Iris and Pearl at his heels. While Iris paused to close the door behind them, Edgeworth approached his friend with loosely crossed arms. "Do be sure your project is actually ready tomorrow morning, Wright. We're too late to back out now if it isn't."

Phoenix scoffed. "It will be," he insisted. "C'mon, trust Luke a little, won't you?"

"Luke I trust implicitly," Edgeworth retorted, a small smile on his lips. "You, however, I know far too well to make that mistake."

"Oh ha ha," Phoenix muttered sarcastically, rolling his eyes. He pretended he couldn't hear Pearl giggling nearby. "Some friend you are."

Maya snorted. "Don't you have very important prosecutor work to get back to, Mister Edgeworth?"

"Other than this? Regrettably, indeed I do, Ms Fey," Edgeworth replied, pushing at his glasses to hide his smile. "Give Luke my regards, Wright. Until tomorrow." He turned and headed back into the main building.


Once Edgeworth had gone, the two elder Feys both rounded on Phoenix with concerned gazes. "Phoenix, what's going on?" Iris asked.

"It's nothing serious," Phoenix assured her, only to pause and frown in thought. "Well, I don't think it is. Regardless," he shook his head with a sigh, "like I said, I have a question and, if none of you three can answer it..." He shrugged. "Well, in that case I'm just screwed."

Maya huffed, whacking his arm. "Get to the point, Nick. What is this important question only one of us can answer?"

Phoenix paused in thought, then pulled his magatama from his pocket and turned to the teenage girl. "Pearls, you were the one who taught me how to use this."
Pearl nodded, smiling proudly. "Did you want a refresher, Mister Nick?"

"No, thank you," Phoenix chuckled, then turned to the older women, who were both frowning in thought. "I shouldn't need to re-state what we all already know: People hide secrets behind Psyche-Locks, and this," he briefly brandished the faintly glowing stone in his grip, "allows me to see and break them to uncover the truth... Psyche-Locks being, usually, red in colour."

Maya shrugged. "I guess so. We don't bother with them, usually. Wearing a glowing magatama around your neck is just irritating, and attracts the wrong kind of attention more often than not..."

"The colour is important, isn't it?" Iris asked. "I remember reading about the colour of the locks we had in Hazakura, that they had something to do with Psyche-Locks."

"In this case, the colour is immensely important," Phoenix replied, and met the Feys' gazes with a stern look. "What do you three know about black Psyche-Locks?"

The trio stared back with wide eyes, momentarily stunned by the question. "Black?" Pearl repeated.

Maya sighed, resting her head against a hand. "I really don't know anything about strange Psyche-Locks off the top of my head... You've got the most experience with them out of us four, Nick."

Iris was biting her lip, fist pressed to her chin. "I... know where I could look up the information..." She shook her head, huffing in frustration before giving Phoenix a sorrowful look. "But I can't remember anything either. I'm sorry, Phoenix."

"That's fine," Phoenix insisted, though he had to admit he was a little disappointed. "You can look it up after the trial, I guess. 'Not that it'll be of any help by then, but at least I'll know.'"

Pearl suddenly perked up, giving everyone a wide grin. "I'll go look it up!"

"You'll what?" Iris replied, stunned.

"But Pearly, you were so excited to stay with us here in the hotel!" Maya pointed out. "If you head up to Kurain now, you'll be too late to come back to the city tonight!"

Phoenix nodded, hand on his chin. "And if you leave tomorrow, you'll miss the trial. You sure you're okay with doing that?"

Pearl pressed her hands together, bowing cheerfully. "I'm always happy to help, Mister Nick!" she insisted. "Sure, I was excited to spend time with Iris and Mystic Maya in the hotel, but it's not like I completely missed out on that. If I go now, I can come back tomorrow morning and watch the trial like I planned."

"That's true," Iris agreed, patting her sister's shoulder. "If you're alright with it, I am too."

Maya sighed, but gave the girl a smile. "It's your choice, Pearly. And it's very kind of you to give up a night in a swanky hotel like this just to help out old Nick here." She elbowed the man with a smirk.

"Hey," Phoenix muttered in reply, though he didn't bother hiding his smile.

Pearl blushed, hands pressed to her cheeks. "Oh, I don't mind," she insisted, then looked up to her sister. "Where do you keep your books on Psyche-Locks, Iris? I'll go find them right away!"
"Mister Wright. You have just presented illegal evidence to this court. My court."

"..."

"Mister Wright?"

"Yes."

"Do you have an explanation for yourself?"

"If I did, would the court hear it?"

"... Probably not. Forging evidence is a serious crime. And presenting it in court, a serious mistake. A fatal mistake, for an attorney."

"Fatal, too, perhaps, for your client, I fear."

Phoenix paused at the inner door into the office, listening to the familiar voices echoing from inside. He'd specifically waited to return home with the thought that the errand he had advised his kids to go on would be long over by now. In fact, Apollo and Trucy were supposed to be at the Wonder Bar at this very moment, getting ready for their show... and he hoped to be gone again before they got back, hiding out with Luke or the Jurists until it was time for him to head off to the Borscht Bowl Club. Only Machi should be in their small apartment... and Phoenix fought not to run as he realised what the boy was doing. Screwing up his courage, he took a deep breath and quietly opened the office door.

"Tell me, what kind of defendant relies on forged evidence? The answer is quite clear: A guilty one!"

"Objection! Your Honour, wait! I understand that presenting forged evidence in court is a serious crime, but you cannot hold my client responsible for actions I undertook as an individual!"

"... I am sorry, Mister Wright."

"Your Honour?"

"Another close call, I dare say. If the prosecutor's office hadn't received that hot tip, everything would have gone the way you wanted it to, ja?"

"..."

"I even gave you a chance. Too bad you decided not to think before embarrassing yourself."
Machi sat curled up in a ball on the carpet, his eyes glued to their old TV. Playing on the lower half of the screen was a cross-section of a courtroom, as they had looked seven long years ago. In the top half, an image of the judge; On one side was an overview of the room from the camera above the doors, while on the other was an image of a ripped page with simple handwriting in pen, the piece of evidence displayed on the holograms. Below, a grey-haired man covered in paint stood behind the witness stand. On the right, a teenage man in a leather jacket wearing sunglasses and a boastful grin. On the left, an older (but still young) man with spiky black hair dressed in an immaculate blue suit, leaning forward on his desk with a haunted look.

"Mister Attorney?"

"Yes?"

"Could I... ask your name?"

"... Phoenix Wright."

"Mister Wright... I have seen and studied many people, but none like you. I'll remember you, Mister Wright."

"Isa!"

Phoenix didn't react immediately, taking his time to move his gaze down to the shocked teenager in front of the television, watching him with wide eyes. He waited a moment, then wordlessly moved towards the two couches; Spread across the table between them, he quickly recognised the contents of his seven-year investigation into Zak's disappearance... including all the papers from the ill-fated trial playing on the TV nearby.

Machi scrambled to his feet, turning to watch Phoenix. "I-isa... I did not know you return today."

"I won't be here long," Phoenix said, eyes on a page detailing his visit to the Mishams, complete with a small doodle of the stamp and bottle of nail polish he had seen there. "Apollo's looking after you?"

"Yes," Machi replied with a nod, one hand nervously straying to his opposite elbow in a self-comforting hug. "Apollo and Trucy at work now."

Phoenix smiled. "I figured they would be." He turned to finally meet the boy's eyes, giving the television a noticeable look. "I can't imagine this is the first time you're watching that."

Machi blushed, shaking his head. "I... I'm sorry..."

"There's nothing to be sorry about," Phoenix insisted. On the screen, he couldn't help noticing the cocky look on young Klavier's face, nor how his past self simply stood behind his desk, looking far more... together than Phoenix remembered feeling at the time. 'You'd think even the master of bluffing would look more broken with his life shattering around him...'

Machi seemed to notice where the man's gaze had gone, and glanced back at the screen. "No, I... I
am sorry for what happen. Apollo told me... that was your last trial."

"It was." Phoenix tore his gaze from the television, looking back at the papers on the table. "I made a mistake and I faced the consequences." His hand itched to reach for the spot on his chest where his badge used to sit on the lapel of his suit, a gesture Phoenix had not felt the urge to do for years. "That's all there is to say about it."

"N-no!"

At that, Phoenix turned back to Machi in surprise, finding the teen watching with a determined gaze. "No?"

"That not all!" Machi insisted, eyes shining. "Prosecutor so mean, for no reason, and set up trap! Not your fault!"

Phoenix almost smiled. "Apollo's caught you up, then."

Machi blushed, backing down a little, but still pressed his lips together as though biting back something harsher.

On the television behind the boy, the brief recess to call the gallery back into the courtroom had ended. Behind the witness stand stood a man in a pale red cape and top hat, a bright bow-tie at his neck.

"Though I deeply regret having to declare a verdict in this way... This trial is over. You have the right to find a new attorney and make an appeal. However, this court must-"

"Ah, Your Honour?"

"Y-yes, Mister Zak?"

"There is one thing I wish to make clear: Today, in this courtroom, you cannot declare me 'guilty'. It is impossible."

At the sound of voices from the TV, Machi turned to look, transfixed by what they both knew was due to happen next.

"I'm afraid the defendant is quite mistaken. I most certainly have the authority to declare a verdict on you."

"Except... tell me, how do you plan on announcing your verdict... when your defendant does not exist?"

"Doesn't exist'...? What are you talking about?"

"I am talking... about this!"

A blast of smoke erupted from Zak's hands, quickly enveloping the witness stand and a good chunk
of the courtroom, forcing the two attorneys and some of the gallery into coughing fits. It was quick to clear, making the suddenly empty space at the stand blatantly visible.

"M-Mister Enigmar!"
"The defendant's escaped! Find him! Quick!"
"Bailiff! Close all exits from the building! On the double! He must not be allowed to escape!"

The noise of the gallery grew loud enough to be heard even through the short-range microphones. Klavier had left the prosecutor's bench, waiting impatiently by the back doors where Zak had escaped. Phoenix simply leaned forward on his elbows, head down and held tightly in his hands. When the doors once more opened, the hapless bailiff beyond almost shivered with fear, hands grappling with a megaphone hanging off his shoulder as he found himself face-to-face with an angry seventeen-year-old.

"Well? Where is he!?"
"U-uh, Mister Prosecutor sir, I-!"
"Where's the defendant!?"
"H-he... he vanished, sir! Right in front of my eyes, he did!"
"What!?"
"Bailiff, are you saying...?"
"I saw him running into the lobby sir... but he wasn't there when I followed him! He's... he's gone!"

Klavier seemed too shocked for words, turning to look up at the equally shocked judge helplessly. Even Phoenix had lifted his head from his hands to watch.

"V... Very well. I suppose I have no choice but to end the trial here. We will pick this up once the defendant is found."

With the rapping of the judge's gavel, the screen turned black, the recording coming to an end. 'Too bad the trial itself never did...'

Machi sniffed, rubbing at his nose. "It not fair," he mumbled. "Prosecutor Gavin... He cheat."

Phoenix shook his head. "No, he didn't. The cheater was whoever asked Vera to make that page."

Machi thought over Phoenix's words for a moment, then turned to face him, his back to the TV.
"Isa... Why you go home now?"

"You mean *come* home?" Phoenix gently corrected him with a smile. "I just had a few things to pick up. I thought it would be better if I avoided Apollo for the moment; He'll be able to focus on his case without me around to distract him."

Although he clearly didn't like the answer, Machi accepted the reply with a sad nod. "Is... Is Vera okay? Apollo said she...

"Still unconscious," Phoenix explained. "Sleeping. I think she'll be alright, with time."

Machi thought a moment, then stepped forward and pressed against Phoenix's chest, clinging to his hoodie. "Everyone hurt... I can not help..." he muttered, the strain in his voice betraying his fear.

Phoenix was a little surprised to hear that, only to immediately mentally kick himself for not realising it was in Machi's nature to try and help everyone he saw who was in pain. "Oh, Machi, of course you're helping," he replied with a soothing tone, hugging the boy. "You're Apollo's assistant in this case. The whole reason everyone is hurting is because it hasn't been solved yet. You are helping by being there for Apollo, to bring out the truth of what happened and bring an end to everyone's pain. Do you understand?"

The teen didn't immediately reply, sniffing to himself. After a long moment, he mumbled a quiet "Y-yes," into Phoenix's chest. "I... I help by helping Apollo..."

"Exactly," Phoenix said, ruffling the boy's hair. "You helped Vera be brave enough to stand in that courtroom and tell Apollo what she knew. And, from what I hear, you've been helping a lot on the investigation too."

Machi pulled away, rubbing at his nose; The gesture hid a small smile on his face. "I... I found frame with poison. And told Apollo fact about stamp. I helping."

Phoenix chuckled, resting his hands on the teen's shoulders. "Feeling better?"

"Y-yes," Machi said, giving Phoenix a much brighter smile. "Thank you."

"No problem." Shoving one hand back in his hoodie pocket, he patted the boy's arm. "Want to help me grab my things? We've got an entire hour before Apollo and Trucy get back."

Machi thought a moment, then nodded. "Okay, Isa. I will help."

"Good boy." Ruffling Machi's hair one final time, to the boy's giggles, Phoenix headed towards the kitchen. 'Maybe some quality time with Lamiroir's son will help me feel better, too.'
FLASHBACK: Forged

- Seven Years Ago -

April 19, 9:28AM
District Court
Defendant Lobby No. 2

The first thing Phoenix ever heard out of Trucy Enigmar's mouth was a squeal of delight as she opened the door into the lobby.

"Morning, Daddy!"

Zak grinned and got down on one knee, holding his arms out wide as his daughter ran in for a hug. "Ah, I'm so glad you came!"

After squeezing her father's neck firmly, the little girl leaned back, giving the magician a stern look. "You okay, Daddy? They picking on you?"

Laughing, Zak shook his head. "I am fine, as always." He gestured to the lawyer stood nearby. "This old boy is here to help me, after all."

Although initially confused by the sudden arrival of a child (and wearing an outfit identical to his client's), it didn't take long for Phoenix Wright, ace attorney, to put two and two together. Brushing aside his annoyance at being referred to as an 'old boy' - 'That's 'young man' to you.' - he also leaned down to give the girl a friendly smile. "Good morning. That's a cute outfit you have on." 'She can't be any older than Pearls. Another reason to try my hardest today.'

The girl giggled, preening proudly. "Thanks! My first show's today, after all!"

Despite having no idea what she was talking about, Phoenix decided to be polite and just roll with it. "Oh, I'm sure it is!"

Suddenly the girl gasped, and bounced towards the lawyer with a determined look. "Oh! Old boy!"

"Huh? Me?" Phoenix asked, pointing at himself. 'Great, now she's calling me that, too...'

The girl muttered under her breath, digging around in a small bag hanging off her hip. After a moment, she pulled out a folded piece of paper, which she held up with a wide grin. "Here."

Warily, Phoenix took the paper. "What's this...?"

"I dunno!" the girl admitted with a shrug, then gestured to the door. "I just got it over there in the hall. They told me to give it to the 'old boy in the blue suit with the spiky hair'. They said it was really important!"

Phoenix hummed in thought, straightening up as he unfolded the paper to give it a look. It was ripped down one side, as though torn from a book, and handwriting in pen covered the front. 'What...? It seems fate's clock will make me wait a little longer... From a diary, maybe? It's signed 'Magnifi Gramarye'. Is this related to the case?'
Zak watched curiously. "What's this? A memo for you or some such?"

"Not from the looks of it," Phoenix admitted, then shook his head and folded the paper back up, slipping it into a pocket of his jacket. "I'll give it a read later."

The trial had proceeded as all trials did for Phoenix. After the small personal rivalry involved in taking down as many points in Gumshoe's testimony as he could, it was time for the teenager serving the role of the latest in a long line of prodigies from the Prosecutor's Office to bring out his 'decisive' witness: Zak's stage partner, Valant Gramarye.

"The doctor examined the body before the police arrived... He was quite clear about the time of death: Ten past eleven at night. And the one in the room at the time was my partner... not me."

It was easy enough to prove Valant was suspicious, with his 'lucky colour' nonsense about the green-not-yellow IV liquid and the clearly washed syringe. The rookie prosecutor, one Klavier Gavin, was even thrown for a moment; There was no substitute for experience and Phoenix was happy to show it.

"As you pointed out yourself, the IV liquid makes the perfect clock... One that you could manipulate at will!"

Just as Phoenix was daring to hope he could drag the trial out another day to do some much-needed investigation work, Klavier had decided to get cocky.

"Truly, there's no substitute for experience. Nothing blinds one to the truth so effectively. A word to the wise: Underestimate the young, and they'll sweep your feet out from under you, in a way you never, ever expected."

There was no proof either way Valant falsified the time of death, and both experienced attorney and first-time prosecutor admitted that. Claiming he had decisive evidence, Klavier produced a book, a diary, which the victim had written in on the night of his death. He even read aloud the final page, with no small amount of delight.

"Tonight's IV is in. Maybe the last. I leave the rest to them. The first should come soon. This journal may end here or it may go on... but not long. That depends on his hand. All that is left to mine is to lay down this pen."

Phoenix just stared back calmly as the teen continued with his argument. Sure, what Klavier was saying made sense... but he refused to believe even a rookie like the teenager across the room could miss the major issue with his so-called 'decisive' evidence.

"Well, how do you like me now, Herr Wright? Still too 'green' for your tastes? Hmm?"

Phoenix just narrowed his eyes at the teenager.

"Well, Mister Wright?" the judge asked. "The witness's testimony we heard was lacking, but, put together with this evidence, it seems quite sufficient for a case."

Sighing, Phoenix knew to stay silent any longer was to lose his case. "I'm left with no choice but to show my own evidence."
The judge jerked in surprise. "What!? You have some evidence that overturns this diary!?"

Klavier's grin only seemed to widen as he hummed in thought. "It's not too late to rethink this and avoid more... embarrassment."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow at that.

"Very well," the judge continued. "Please show us your evidence, Mister Wright."

"Incidentally, don't even think of showing us this diary I've just shown the court," Klavier added. "Now that we've come this far, I hope you have something a little more... decisive. Show us evidence that proves the victim continued writing his diary!"

Phoenix refused to give away his annoyance at hearing the ultimatum; So Klavier had noticed the torn page - it was impossible to miss! - and was dismissing it as yet another 'could have' or 'might have' that Phoenix had been reduced to throwing out to make up for his client's refusal to testify. Luckily, he was pretty sure he had something else on hand that would make up for the sudden handicap... despite how suspicious the circumstances of how he'd obtained it had been. "Alright. I'd be happy to." With one hand, he pointed up at the holograms, while the other reached into his jacket pocket for the small paper within. "First, take a close look at this diary. Note that a page has clearly been ripped out."

"What's this!?" the judge cried, leaning back in his chair in surprise. "I hadn't noticed that at all!"

'Seriously!?!' Keeping his incredulousness to himself, Phoenix carried on: "As it just so happens, I have here what I believe to be the missing page." He held up the small paper, unfolding it to show the handwriting all down one side. Even the pattern of the rip matched the image above him.

At the witness stand, Valant's eyes were wide with shock as he clutched his cane tightly. "Allaka-I-don't-believe-it."

"Looking at this page," Phoenix continued, "it's hard to imagine that the first visitor that night shot Magnifi Gramarye. That's the defence's position."

The judge beckoned furiously at the defence bench. "W-wait, let me see that!"

Happy to oblige, Phoenix quickly located in his Court Record the photo he'd taken of the suspicious page during the last recess, and threw it up on the holograms to replace the diary. "Note the torn edge of the page," he pointed out. "It's a perfect match with the torn remains of the last page in Magnifi's diary!"

Valant was frozen in place, still staring at the physical page in Phoenix's hand. "Quite... remarkable..."

Klavier stood behind his bench, still smiling as if nothing was wrong. "Would you care to explain what all this means, Herr Attorney?"

Dropping the page, Phoenix leaned palms-down on his desk, feeling like he was stating the obvious to a particularly dim child. "The diary continued after his first visitor came, which means that the victim was still alive after Zak Gramarye left, leaving no one to take his life but the second visitor, Valant Gramarye!"

"N... No...!" Valant cried, jumping back from the stand, his face white as a sheet.

The judge, meanwhile, was still examining the image on the screens, flicking between the page and
the diary. "The handwriting too matches that on the other pages," he added. "This is, without a doubt, the genuine article!" The court promptly erupted into a noisy clamour, forcing the judge to repeatedly call for order so proceedings could continue.

"But, but wait!" Valant protested, his gaze finally on the holograms above. "This is... That's impossible! That old man couldn't have written that..."

Klavier smirked from behind the prosecutor's bench, and threw out his arm dramatically in Phoenix's direction. "Objection!" he called, then relaxed and laughed to himself. "Finally. You just couldn't resist, could you, Herr Wright?"

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, still leaning forward on the defence bench. "Resist what?" he asked, an almost patronising tone to his voice. "Presenting solid evidence?" 'We'll just ignore for now that I wasn't nearly as sure about it five minutes ago...' Klavier smiled cockily at the attorney for a few moments before turning towards the tall podium to his left. "Herr Judge?"

"Y-yes, Prosecutor Gavin?" the judge replied.

"Might I request we put the current cross-examination on hold? The prosecution would like to call a new witness."

"B-but, Prosecutor Gavin," the judge weakly protested, "this evidence overturns the current witness's-

"I ask only to put it on hold," Klavier repeated, a stern glint in his eyes. "Please. My new witness has a very, very important piece of testimony to give."

There was a short pause. The judge still looked wary.

"Five minutes," Klavier continued. "No more. I promise, Your Honour."

Finally, the judge relented. "W-well, if you put it that way..." He turned towards the defence, ignoring Klavier's relieved smile. "Mister Wright, what's your take on this?"

Phoenix studied the young prosecutor carefully, trying to ignore the triumphant smirk the teen was currently giving him. 'Oh, what the hell. Can't deny I'm intrigued.' "Well, Your Honour, judging from his enthusiasm, we'll have to hear this new testimony sooner or later anyway." He shrugged. "So it might as well be sooner."

Sighing, the judge nodded. "Then, though this is highly, highly irregular... we will put the current cross-examination on hold. The witness may step down."

Valant didn't stop staring at the image of the page on the holograms as he was escorted out of the room.

The sudden bad feeling in Phoenix's gut increased with the wait, the gallery above them being cleared from the room as part of a judiciary deal with whoever was to replace Valant at the stand. Klavier had been expecting to see that page, Phoenix couldn't deny that. His true purpose behind putting the diary itself off the table was to goad Phoenix into presenting it, and he fallen right into the trap. 'Just what does he have planned, though? What is it about this ripped-out page that's so special?'
The grey-haired man in the green suit, and covered head-to-toe in paint, was not the kind of person Phoenix expected to see once the room around them was emptied.

"Erm... My name's Drew Misham. I'm... a painter."

While both Phoenix and the judge watched him in confusion, Klavier only pointed to the image on the holograms above them.

"Mister... Misham, was it? Do you know what this is?"

Drew nodded. "Oh, yeah. I know it well."

Phoenix frowned. "How's that possible? Have you seen this diary page somewhere before?"

"Oh, yeah," Drew meekly muttered, running a hand through his hair. "I mean... I made it."

"You... what?" Phoenix replied, feeling his insides go cold. "You made it!?"

Drew nodded. "Yes. You might call it one of my 'works'."

"The regional prosecutor's office received a tip-off yesterday," Klavier explained, grinning as he fiddled with his hair. "'Illegal evidence has been prepared for the trial of Zak Gramarye'."

The judge frowned. "Illegal... evidence?"

"I initiated an investigation," Klavier continued, gesturing to the nervous man at the witness stand, "and found this witness. A painter to the world at large, Drew Misham has another side, you might say. He is skilled in making perfect reproductions of certain things." He paused, smirking at Phoenix. "Forgeries, in other words."

Phoenix blinked, mind still reeling as a part of him realised what was going on. "F-forgeries!?"

"W-well!" the judge cried, looking rather nervous himself. "So, we are to understand that this page here is..."

"A fake," Klavier answered, smugly resting his hands in his pants pockets. "Prepared by a certain defence attorney."

At the direct accusation, Phoenix finally managed to spring into action, throwing out an arm and shouting "Objection! Hold it! I didn't 'prepare' this evidence!"

"Objection!" came a responding shout from the other side of the courtroom. Klavier clapped his hands together, leaning forward as he grinned at the attorney opposite him. "Ah, the attorney speaks!" he almost sang in delight. "Something about this page, I presume." As he stood tall again, he began to play with his fringe, a patronising tone to his voice. "But what is he saying? It makes no sense! After all," his tone suddenly became dark as he threw out his arm to point at the defence bench, "it was you who presented this evidence to us, Phoenix Wright!"

The sudden memory of the trial of Lana Skye, and how Edgeworth had barely survived his own accusations of forged evidence, was enough to quieten Phoenix on its own, leaving him staring at the bench under his hands.

The judge turned to the stand. "Witness! Er, Mister Misham, was it? Who requested this forgery!? Who was your client!?"

Drew winced. "That... I don't know."
Phoenix looked up at that. "What...!?"

"Most of my clients prefer to remain anonymous, even to me," Drew explained. "I make the items they want, and receive my payment. That's the extent of my contact with them."

Seeing his chance, Phoenix slammed his bench. "Objection! B-but...!" He grabbed the page and waved it in the air. "There's no proof this is a fake!"

"It's a fake."

Phoenix halted at that, his eyes on the witness.

"To avoid just this sort of problem, I always put a special mark on my 'works'," Drew continued. "I can say, without a doubt, this is mine."

Unable to argue, Phoenix's hands lowered back to the bench, releasing the page.

The judge looked down at the defence with a stern frown. "Mister Wright. You have just presented illegal evidence to this court. My court."

Phoenix barely heard him, his mind racing. 'It was careless of me, that's all I can say. I knew from the beginning there was something up with that thing... It was all a trap. A fatal trap.'

"Mister Wright?"

Finally, Phoenix croaked out a "Yes," his eyes on the wooden bench he was leaning so heavily on.

"Do you have an explanation for yourself?"

"If I did, would the court hear it?"

Sighing, the judge shook his head. "Probably not. Forging evidence is a serious crime. And presenting it in court, a serious mistake. A fatal mistake, for an attorney."

Across the room, Klavier was still grinning. "Fatal, too, perhaps, for your client, I fear."

Had Phoenix not been feeling the weight of the broken evidence law on his back, he might have snapped his attention to Klavier instantly. Instead, all he could manage was a glance upwards.

"Tell me, what kind of defendant relies on forged evidence?" Klavier asked, almost mockingly. "The answer is quite clear: A guilty one!"

That snapped Phoenix back into action, throwing out an arm to point across the room. "Objection! Your Honour, wait!" He slammed his palms against the bench. "I understand that presenting forged evidence in court is a serious crime, but you cannot hold my client responsible for actions I undertook as an individual!"

The judge thought for a long moment, then shook his head with a sad look. "I am sorry, Mister Wright."

Phoenix blinked, staring up at the judge's podium in disbelief. "Your Honour?"

Klavier chuckled, playing with his hair. "Another close call, I dare say. If the prosecutor's office hadn't received that hot tip, everything would have gone the way you wanted it to, ja?"

Unable to fight back, Phoenix could only stare at the smug teen. 'No... I fell into the trap, and
everything went just the way you wanted it to...

"I even gave you a chance," Klavier continued, a boastful grin on his face. "Too bad you decided not to think before embarrassing yourself."

The judge kept his gaze firmly away from the defence bench. "I see no need for further discussion on this matter. Special witness dismissed!"

And, just like that... the illustrious career of Phoenix Wright, Ace Attorney, was over.

View the Court Record
If you've been following this AU's tumblr blog, you'll already know this, but for those who don't, I'm currently in the process of re-uploading this story in smaller, more manageable chunks. Since the first few chapters are nearly two years old now, the first step of that process is updating them so I'm not cringing at them anymore, which involves heavily rewriting and expanding at least the first two (which have stretched to four so far). Right now, I'm taking turns between the rewrite and continuing the existing story, so entirely new chapters won't stop coming but they will slow down a bit. I'll mention here when the re-upload starts happening so you can bookmark or subscribe to the series the new stories will all be going up under. Until then, updates will, as always, be faster on Tumblr.

SUBJECT: URGENT: For the trial
SENDER: "Phoenix Wright"
RECIPIENT: "Apollo Wright"

Apollo,

Some evidence I uncovered after we last spoke... in the cell of one Kristoph Gavin. They're small and a little grainy, but these pictures should do well enough for court. They're taken from a small video camera I happened to have on me at the time, actually. I've tried to reproduce what it said and, though I think we both know how presenting that in a trial might turn out, it's worth a try. These are all I have, so they will have to do.

Do you remember Kristoph giving Trucy some of his nail polish after she cooed over the pretty bottle, years and years ago? I still have it in my room, and she's still forbidden from using it (though I doubt he'd be so stupid to have poisoned this one). I left it on my bedside table for you. It might come in handy during the trial.

Another interesting tidbit: Spark Brushel was a friend of Zak Gramarye's. I didn't mention it at the time, but I met him on the night of Zak's death, the first time Brushel had seen Zak since his disappearance. Brushel told me he and Drew Misham both felt 'watched' these past seven years... and not out of guilt, they were genuinely being watched by someone. He thinks it was no coincidence Zak died right after coming back into contact with his old friend. And, keep in mind, we've been close friends with Kristoph Gavin in that time, too. Anyway, do with that what you will.

That's all I have for you right now. Whatever happens next, I'm proud of you, son.

Good luck.

Dad

ATTACHED: envelope.png, stamp.png, address.png, letter1.png, letter2.png, letter3.png, reproduction.docx
By some stroke of luck, all six jurists were at the courthouse in good time to get the Mason System up and running. Even with the time saved watching the Gramarye trial the previous night, they wouldn't finish Phoenix's little 'game' before court reconvened; Luke's estimation was that it would take about an hour and fifteen minutes, though he made sure to warn that he could be off and it might take much longer should a jurist have difficulty with some of the puzzles. Regardless, Phoenix trusted Luke's ability to tell a truthful story as well as his ability to craft a fun yet easily solvable puzzle; Paired with Phoenix's own artwork and the design software Edgeworth had commissioned from a local gaming company, it made quite a formidable little program in Phoenix's opinion. He was certain it would inform as well as it entertained... and it hewed pretty close to reality, outside of the heavy simplifying and the time-travelling paradoxes involved in Luke's puzzles. Regardless, the trial would be already running once the game was done; The plan was then to queue up the livestream on a time-delay, and hopefully catch up during a recess.

All the pieces were in place. It was time for Phoenix's longest running case to finally come to an end.

"That trial seven years ago was the beginning of it all, this I know beyond a doubt. The mysteries of the past work their magic on the present... but you'll soon be finding all of this out for yourself. Which of Magnifi Gramarye's disciples pulled that trigger? Where did the vanishing defendant, Zak Gramarye, go? What dark truth lurks behind the forged diary page? And what about the girl who was left behind? The past left us these four 'keys' to unlocking the truth. But that's not all: There are four 'keys' in the present, as well. And when all the questions have found their answers, the final trial will begin. But first, you must chase the truth through then and now. Think of it... as a game."

Although not much of a programmer, Luke had familiarised himself with how the software worked very well in the two days he'd been totally absorbed in its inner workings. With the six jurists sitting around the table, their borrowed tablets laying in front of them, the young vet slowly circled, acting as tech support as he repeatedly checked each copy of the Mason System's program was working as intended. Phoenix himself sat back and watched from his table in the corner, idly checking his phone for updates from the world outside the Jurists' Chambers' locked door.

I got your email Dad. Thanks. I'll try and give you a reason to be proud today <3

Morning Mr Wright. No change in the defendants condition overnight. I'll let you know the moment anything changes tho

Are you at the courthouse, Mr Nick? I'm back in the city and I looked into those special sike locks you mentioned
At the last one, Phoenix smiled and quickly tapped out a reply.

*You're a great help Pearls. Meet me in the 4th floor lobby*

Slipping his phone into his pocket, he got up from his seat and casually approached Luke, who was watching over Iris' shoulder as the nun tapped through dialogue. Keeping his voice low, Phoenix called, "Luke."

The vet jumped a little, but quickly smiled as he recognised his father. "Papa?" he whispered in reply.

"I'm heading out for a bit. Will you be okay handling things on your own?"


Phoenix chuckled. "It's complicated. I'll explain later."

Although clearly unhappy with that answer, Luke reluctantly nodded. "Alright. I'll let you know if something goes wrong."

It was only as he approached the lobby it occurred to Phoenix that there was a chance, however small, that he or Pearl might run into Apollo there. 'Damn. I hope he's either not here yet or already in the defendant lobby... That would be hard to explain if he runs into me talking to Pearls... and there's no way Pearls could lie effectively if she's alone.' His pace quickened, eyes scanning the room for any sign of either a crimson cape or a soft pink kimono.

By some stroke of luck, it was the latter he spotted first.

Pearl grinned as she saw the man in the grey hoodie rapidly approaching. "Mister Nick!" Waving, she dashed forward to meet him.

"Good morning, Pearls," Phoenix replied. Although he smiled in greeting, he was still quick to place a hand on her shoulder and guide her away from the lobby, somewhere they would be out of sight if Apollo happened to pass by. Once they were down the hallway a little and partially hidden behind a plant, he gave the lobby once last check for red capes then turned his full attention on the teen before him. "You researched those Psyche-Locks?"

Pearl nodded, a serious expression on her face. "According to Iris's books, a red Psyche-Lock protects a secret a person is consciously trying to hide," she explained. "If the person folds under questioning, the lock breaks and the truth comes out."

"Yup," Phoenix agreed. "That's how it's always worked for me."

"But a *black* Psyche-Lock," Pearl continued, "protects a secret from the deepest place in a person's heart... A secret that that person isn't even consciously aware of."

Phoenix paused, frowning as he mused on the information. "So even they don't know it's there... "I guess this explains how cold and dark they felt... They must have been reflecting Gavin's heart.'"

Pearl nodded. "Whoever it is you saw with this kind of Psyche-Lock, they weren't trying to keep
anything from you on purpose. For some reason, they've locked off part of their heart and memories even from themself." She gave Phoenix a worried look. "Is it... Is it someone we know?"

Phoenix didn't immediately reply, biting his lip as he pondered the question. Finally, he sighed. "Since you went to so much trouble on my behalf... It was Kristoph Gavin."

Pearl gasped, a hand to her mouth.

"Thank you again for doing all that research for me," Phoenix continued, before she could speak. "These Psyche-Locks can be broken just like any other, right?"

"Oh, n-no," Pearl hurriedly replied, shaking her head with wide eyes. "No, they can't! According to Iris's books, a black Psyche-Lock is like a heavy chain wrapped directly around one's heart. If they are ripped off by force, it could cause permanent damage to a person's soul!"

Phoenix stared for a moment as he absorbed that information, then sighed. "In other words, if I'm not careful, even someone as soulless as Gavin could be traumatised breaking those things." He pressed a hand to his face with a frustrated groan. "I guess it's a good thing I didn't use my chance to take a crack at them yesterday. At least he's capable of standing in court to answer for his crimes."

"I'm sorry, Mister Nick," Pearl muttered, downcast. "I guess I wasn't much help after all."

"What?" Phoenix cried in surprise. "No, of course you helped, Pearls! I mean..." He shrugged. "Well, admittedly, I don't think I'll be able to break those Psyche-Locks, but that's not exactly your fault, is it?" He gave her an encouraging smile. "At least now I know what it means if I ever see black Psyche-Locks again."

Pearl thought a moment. "I suppose so," she agreed, and sighed. "I wish there was more I could tell you."

"You were a lot of help," Phoenix repeated. "No matter what you told me, I don't think I'd've had a chance to break them anyway." He sighed. "Whatever Gavin's motive is... the only chance we have of learning it is in court."

Pearl mutely nodded. "Do... Do you think Apollo would be able to bring out the truth? Without hurting him?"

After a short pause, Phoenix was only able to shrug. "I really can't say. I'm sorry, Pearls."

"It's okay," the teen muttered, fiddling with the bead in her hair.

There was a long pause. Finally, Phoenix broke it: "I should probably be getting back to the Jurists' Chambers now."

"Okay, Mister Nick," Pearl replied.

"And you'd better head in to the courtroom and get a good seat," Phoenix continued, gesturing back towards the lobby with a grin. As Pearl giggled, he added, "We'll see you after the trial."

"Sure." Looking much more cheerful, Pearl left their hideout behind the plant and headed off down the hallway, waving over her shoulder. "See you later!"

Phoenix waved back. He waited a moment longer before leaving himself. 'I have a job to get back to.'
'It's all up to you now, Apollo.'

View the Court Record
It had been a very tense twenty-or-so hours since Apollo last saw Phoenix in person.

After picking up the video file from the archives, Apollo took his youngest siblings straight back to the Agency. Once Machi had, happily, changed out of his 'unlucky' concert outfit into something more casual, they stuck the CD they'd requested into their aging DVD player. The entire afternoon, they'd played that final trial of their father's on repeat, practically memorising Phoenix's arguments, Klavier's rebuttals, Valant's lies, Drew's explanations... and Zak's disappearance. Apollo hadn't been able to look the first time around, at the moment when Phoenix presented the diary page, though morbid fascination finally turned his head the second time it came around, and he was able to watch it every time after that. Trucy always went silent at that moment, and usually made excuses to leave the room at the same time as Drew left the screen, clearly not wanting to see the trick she had helped pull off despite her false cheer as she boasted to Machi about her 'debut act'. Machi himself mostly absorbed all the information they gave him with a thoughtful quiet that Apollo almost found soothing; Although clearly worried for his family, the Borginian teen was a lot calmer about the whole thing than his siblings... or, at least, he looked calmer than Apollo felt.

With the trial in the background, Apollo spread out Phoenix's case file across the glass table between the sofas, going through every page of notes in a kind of meticulous detail he hadn't given them since the first time he saw them nearly four years ago. The transcript they mostly skipped, though Machi used it a few times to help practise his English, reading along with the trial on screen. Aside from official courtroom files, everything else was meticulous notes Phoenix had made after the trial, everything from recounting his brief meetings with Zak, when and how he'd been given the forged page, his questioning sessions with Valant in the detention centre, a breakdown of the trick Zak had used to escape, and his meeting with the Mishams. Between the words were some of Phoenix's characteristic doodles, sketches of notable items such as Vera's stamp and nail polish, or Mister Hat. There was even a page of notes on the Gramarye family, Phoenix musing to himself on the mystery of Thalassa and who had killed Magnifi and why neither Zak nor Valant could refuse an order to shoot him; This one Apollo had looked at fondly, eyes on a brief sketch Phoenix had made of Thalassa's bracelets - Clearly, this was one of the older files in the collection, from before Luke's parents died and Phoenix first met Apollo, bringing the two boys into the Wright family. "It's been seven years," he muttered.

Trucy looked over from the TV with a raised eyebrow. "Yeah, we know."

"N-no, I'm not talking about the trial," Apollo replied, staring at the paper with a growing smile. "October fourth, twenty-nineteen. The date Dad adopted me and Luke."

Machi's eyes widened. "Seven years and four days!"

Trucy hummed in thought, arms crossed. "True. Last Sunday was the anniversary."

Apollo chuckled, placing the paper in his hands down on the table. "We never do anything special to mark it, but... I could never forget that date." He paused, smile fading a little. "Or thank Dad enough for taking me in... Even clearing his name feels like it wouldn't do that."
Trucy gave him a funny look. "Who says Daddy wants us to thank him? We're family. We try to help each other anyway."

At that, Apollo laughed. "True."

It was as he'd dropped back by his apartment to pick up his magic props before their show Apollo decided he couldn't leave his young siblings alone that night. With Clay still out, he had to resort to sending his friend a text, still wondering what it was that had the astronaut acting so strangely.

_I'm staying at the agency tonight jsyk ._

_Cool. I won't be home either. This thing I'm doing involves a sleepover you could say ;) might even extend to tmrw ;)_

_Clay ._

_I'm not saying a word ;) seeya whenever law boy_

Maybe it was because of the stress of what had almost happened to Trucy and Machi, but once Apollo curled up on Phoenix's bed that night, he'd dropped right off to sleep. Not that sleeping seemed to have helped: It was a restless night for Apollo, punctuated with nightmares of trials past and present replaying in his mind, merging together all the worst moments as predictions for what might happen the following day's trial.

He was missing Luke's help more than ever.

"You two should watch from the gallery today."

Trucy and Machi looked up in surprise, standing in the hallway outside their assigned lobby. "Polly?" Trucy asked. "W... Why can't we...?"

Apollo sighed, taking his hand off the doorhandle and turning to face the two teenagers behind him. "I don't want you two at the bench today. Not after yesterday."

The pair's eyes widened, though Trucy was quick to adopt a scowl. "What!?(""

"B-but isoveli, we want to help!" Machi protested.

"What does yesterday have to do with anything!?" Trucy demanded, stomping a foot. "It wasn't because we were with you that we got in trouble, and it's not like what happened yesterday is something that could ever happen again!"

"That doesn't matter!" Apollo argued. "After what happened, I don't want you two in the firing line at the bench! You're safer in the gallery!"

The only word that Apollo could think of to describe Machi's expression was 'heartbroken'. "But-that's not fair!" Trucy interrupted, face turning red. "Why aren't you letting us help you!? We're
"Because I can't risk that you're not!" Apollo cried, and he didn't even register his own words until after they had shocked his siblings into silence. "I... There's enough riding on this trial already," he forced out around the sudden lump in his throat. "I-if something happens and Vera dies, o-or I can't prove Dad was framed... If something else unexpected happens and you two end up in danger again, I'd... never be able to forgive myself." He choked back a sob, quickly rubbing at his eyes with an arm. "The witness I want to call today is dangerous. I don't want him anywhere near you."

Machi was the first to react, stepping forward and hugging Apollo tightly around the middle. "We want to help you, isoveli," he said. "We know you look after us. We safe with you."

Trucy nodded, her anger gone. "You're being as stubborn as Daddy with his 'secret mission'," she sadly pointed out. "Honestly, we'll be safe with you. Why won't you let us help, Polly?"

"Please, Apollo. I promise I have a reason for keeping this to myself for now. Trust me."

"You promised me, six years ago now, that I could help you. That you'd include me in your investigation. You obviously didn't want to, you've never wanted to, but you let me in, you let me help. Why are you cutting me out of this, Dad?"

Apollo sighed as the three-month-old conversation echoed in his head - 'We were talking about Machi... and I didn't even know it yet.' - and he hugged his youngest brother tight. "I..."

"Please, isoveli," Machi mumbled into Apollo's vest. "No want you hurting. Want to help."

Trucy wordlessly stepped forward, placing a hand on her eldest brother's arm. The words of a much older conversation, one from less than a year after his adoption, rang in Apollo's head:

"As much as I love your sister, she's incapable of keeping a secret that doesn't involve magic. You and Luke I can trust on that, but Trucy would quite rightly demand to know the details if I told you both, and this is a secret that's too dangerous to allow to get out."

"Dangerous? More dangerous than you being accused of forgery?"

"I was led into a trap, my last day in a courtroom. I foolishly walked into it, but I'm not allowing the same mistake to happen a second time. No one else can do this but me."

"I'll keep the secret. Let me help you, Dad."

"... I knew I could count on you."

Blinking back tears, Apollo reached out and pulled his sister into the hug. It had been a long six years since then - he'd been the same age Trucy was now - and he knew she had grown into someone he'd trust with his life. Maybe it was time he proved it. "Alright," he relented. "You can help me."
The pair looked up at him with surprised grins, then held Apollo tight. "We will!" Machi promised.

"We'll be the best help ever!" Trucy added. "Even better than Luke!"

Apollo couldn't help a laugh. "I doubt that," he quietly pointed out, "but... I'll be glad to have someone with me today."

The teens both giggled, pressing their faces into his shoulders. "You couldn't drag us away if our lives depended on it!" Trucy boasted.

Resisting the urge to point out they very well could, Apollo just weakly laughed and held the pair tighter. "I knew I could count on you."

View the Court Record
Apollo stood tall behind the defence bench as he had the previous day, with Trucy on his right and Machi on his left. Were it not for Machi's casual clothing, it would have looked like no time had passed for them at all, though they each felt like it had been a lifetime since the atroquinine scare that had chased them out the previous day. Opposite them, Klavier waited behind the prosecutor's bench, idly going through his files with a terse frown. Apollo wondered if, just like him, he had the Gramarye case file sitting alongside the Misham files on the desk in front of him.

The gallery was calmed by the rapping of the judge's gavel, the old man sitting comfortably at the top of his podium. "Court is now in session for the trial of Vera Misham."

Apollo nodded. "The defence is ready, Your Honour."

Klavier's eyes didn't leave his files, though he arranged them neatly one final time. "Prosecution's ready to rock."

The judge turned his attention to the distracted blond. "Prosecutor Gavin. How is the defendant-Vera Misham's condition?"

"Acute atroquinine poisoning." Klavier flipped his hair with one hand, and Apollo caught the flash of a disgusted expression before the man carefully covered it with a business-like frown. "According to her physician, she could die at any time... thus, her absence from the courtroom today."

"What!?" Trucy muttered, crossing her arms with an offended look. "They can't put her on trial without her being here!"

"It is unusual," Apollo quietly admitted. Truthfully, he'd been expecting this: Last he'd heard, Vera was still hospitalised and in a coma, so she was unlikely to be well enough to attend anything for a while. This was a trial too important to put off, and waiting for Vera to recover was more likely to result in her death than a verdict.

Trucy huffed. "They should wait for her to get better and do it then. It's so bureaucratic of them!"

"It is unusual," Apollo quietly admitted. Truthfully, he'd been expecting this: Last he'd heard, Vera was still hospitalised and in a coma, so she was unlikely to be well enough to attend anything for a while. This was a trial too important to put off, and waiting for Vera to recover was more likely to result in her death than a verdict.

Machi simply looked worried, rubbing his arm with his other hand. "I think it make sense..."

Whether Klavier had heard Trucy, Apollo couldn't say, but the prosecutor did continue, "A trial without a verdict can only cause grief... The records of this case, and experience, tell us this."

'That's the truest thing I've heard all day...'

"Apologies to the defendant," Klavier said with a solemn nod to the empty witness stand, "but the show must go on."

The judge thought a moment, then nodded. "Very well. Your opening statement, Prosecutor Gavin."

With a quiet sigh, Klavier stood tall behind his bench, putting on a stern expression. "The
prosecution's case is unchanged by recent events. Why did Vera Misham succumb to poison? Because she couldn't live with the guilt of what she'd done."

Although Apollo knew Klavier was only doing his job, he couldn't let that stand without a loud "Objection!", pointing across the room. "But Vera was poisoned with atroquinine! The exact same poison that took her father's life!"

Although he didn't make eye contact with the defence, Klavier managed a small smirk. "What better confession could you ask for? Being the killer, she would have had access to the poison. Significant, since it's rather hard to come by."

The judge hummed in thought. "That is true."

"In other words," Klavier continued, "I see no need for further discussion. We could have had our verdict yesterday."

Apollo heard Machi gasp in surprise at his side. True, they disagreed with his words... but after what had happened yesterday, Apollo knew not even Klavier truly agreed with what he was saying.

"Well, Mister Wright?" the judge asked, turning to the defence bench. "If you have no objections, I see no reason to postpone a verdict."

Apollo shook his head. "What we need to worry about isn't the verdict, but the trial itself," he proclaimed. "The defence holds that Vera Misham is the victim, not the killer!"

Klavier's eyes were closed, and he ran a hand through his hair. "The poison that felled our defendant was in her nail polish," he explained.

The judge looked confused. "Nail polish...?"

Apollo couldn't help raising an eyebrow at the old man.

"Paint for nails, Herr Judge," Klavier briefly explained, looking up at the podium. "Know any women with red nails?"

"Ah! My wife has red nails!" the judge cried, eyes wide. "I see... So she's been painting them all this time!"

Apollo screwed up his nose in complete confusion. 'How do you miss your own wife painting her nails every day?'

Klavier didn't react, closing his eyes again. "During her testimony yesterday, the defendant bit into her painted nails and ingested the poison right in front of us. The defence itself informs us she put that polish there of her own volition. How, then, do they propose her poisoning was caused by anyone else but her?"

The judge nodded in agreement. "The prosecution's objection is sustained. I ask the defence to prove its claims to this court."

Apollo took a deep breath. "Vera Misham was poisoned through nail polish she applied herself. I can't argue that. But." He pointed across the room, deciding to be dramatic even though Klavier had yet to even glance at the attorney opposite him. "She had no idea that poison was there! Someone else saw her nervous habit of biting her nails and planted that nail polish just as they planted the stamp that killed her father!"
The gallery muttered to itself, silenced by a tap of the judge's gavel. "Mister Wright. Am I to understand you are about to accuse someone of this poisoning? I hope you realise the weight of such an accusation."

Apollo nodded. "I understand, Your Honour," he replied. 'Don't worry, I know exactly what I'm doing.' He turned towards Klavier. "Did the prosecution find the bottle of nail polish that was poisoned?"

Klavier didn't immediately reply, though Apollo spotted a wince crossing his face. "We did." He reached under his desk and produced a very familiar-looking bottle: Blue crystal, with a curled hand extending upwards from the lid. Inside was a faint tinge of pink from the liquid within.

"What's this...?" the judge muttered, leaning forward. His eyes widened as he saw the object, and he smiled. "My, what a beautiful bottle. I'd like to give whoever designed that a hand." He frowned, turning to Apollo. "But what does this bottle have to do with the defence's culprit?"

"Because of this." Holding his hand up in the air, Apollo showed off for the courtroom a small bottle of nail polish, identical to the one in Klavier's hand... except for the lack of pink from the colourless liquid inside. 'Thanks Dad for keeping this thing on hand and telling me where to find it...'

Trucy gasped from Apollo's side. "Oh! Isn't that...?"

"Know someone else who might have owned this bottle?" Apollo prompted Klavier. "A someone who gave it to my family, several years ago?"

Klavier gave the bottle in Apollo's hand only a glance, lowering the one in his hand to his bench. He said nothing.

"Who was it?" the judge asked, perked up with undeniable excitement. "Do you have a name?"

Apollo nodded, placing the bottle on the bench in front of him. "On the matter of both Drew Misham's murder and Vera Misham's poisoning... the defence accuses Kristoph Gavin."

The judge only had enough time to gasp in shock before Klavier was slamming a fist against the wall behind him, shouting, "Objection! There's no way he could do a thing like that!" He took a shuddering breath, subtly shaking his hand - the same one he had injured the previous day - and Apollo didn't miss the pained look on his face as Klavier finally met his opponent's eyes. "You should know that better than anyone else!"

The judge nodded, concerned. "Indeed. He is behind bars."

"I know," Apollo calmly replied, keeping his focus on Klavier. "However, that doesn't mean it was impossible to do what he did."

Klavier stared back, silent, eyebrows furrowed in a mixture of suspicion and what Apollo could only assume was denial.

"Ask yourself when he put the poison in the bottle," Apollo continued, giving Klavier a pointed look. "It could have been yesterday. It could have been a month ago. Maybe it was a year ago. Or, perhaps... it was seven years ago."

"B-but," the judge muttered, confused, "Kristoph Gavin had no motive for killing this poor girl! It's simply inconceivable!"

Apollo kept his eyes on Klavier, who was sweating mutely behind his bench. "Prosecutor Gavin
doesn't seem to think so." Klavier looked away, pained, and Apollo sent him a silent apology as he pointed a finger at the prosecutor, turning to look up at the judge. "That face tells me one thing: Kristoph Gavin's own younger brother doesn't find it inconceivable at all."

The judge hummed in thought, watching Klavier with a concerned look. "Well, Prosecutor Gavin? If you feel there is a clear and pressing need, then we may have to summon Kristoph Gavin from jail as a special witness."

For a long moment, Klavier didn't respond, leaning forward on his bench with his face hidden from view. "Fine," he finally muttered, voice hoarse. "I've known for some time that an impenetrable darkness lurked at the bottom of this... a darkness that has swallowed even myself."

Apollo couldn't help but feel a wave of pity for Klavier in that moment. 'It's funny... I'd've thought watching the video of how he took down Dad would have made me hate him more... but it's only made me realise just how much he's changed since then. He's a totally different person now.'

Klavier sighed, standing tall and running a hand through his hair. He avoided any kind of eye contact with anyone else. "Okay. The defence's wish is granted. Let prisoner Kristoph Gavin take the stand."

The judge nodded once before waving to the nearest court official. "Bailiff, begin proceedings to call a special witness: Kristoph Gavin, currently residing in Solitary Cell Thirteen at Central Prison!"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. 'How does the judge know that offhand?'

The bailiff scurried away, out of the courtroom. At the prosecutor's bench, Klavier turned around to lean on his desk; It was clear he needed some time to process what was going on... although Apollo suspected he'd had an idea of what might happen today the moment he laid eyes on Vera's bottle of nail polish.

"Court will reconvene once the special witness arrives," the judge announced, and banged his gavel once before getting up and wandering off.

As the gallery muttered above them, gradually filing out of the room, Machi turned towards Apollo in vague confusion. "Isoveli... This is dangerous witness?"

Apollo nodded, shooting Trucy a glance only to see she was looking away, fingers playing with her brooch. Keeping his eyes between the pair, he explained, "He was my mentor for over a year; I know better than most what he's really like." He sighed. "This is your last chance to sit out. You two can still go watch from the gallery if you've changed your minds."

Trucy's eyes shot up to meet his with a glare. "We're not leaving you."

Machi nodded in agreement, equally determined. "We stay and we help, isoveli. We help you and we help Isa."

Apollo could help a smile. "The best helpers I could ever ask for." Patting their shoulders, he led them back out of the courtroom to wait for the inevitable.

"You bet we are," Trucy replied with a proud grin. Machi just giggled.
Central Prison wasn't far from the courthouse, so Apollo was confident as they entered the lobby that the wait for Kristoph to arrive wouldn't be too long. Even so, he tapped at his bracelet nervously as he wandered ahead of his siblings. Although he had never known when it would come, or how it would happen, this was the moment he had been preparing himself for for six years now. It was finally time to confront Kristoph on his forgery, and clear Phoenix's name. If only it didn't involve actually questioning Kristoph...

Behind him, Trucy sighed loudly as she closed the lobby door behind herself and Machi. "Boy, I hope this doesn't take too long," she said. "It'll be weird seeing Mister Gavin again, though."

"You said used to be friend?" Machi asked.

"Mm-hmm," Trucy replied. "Like we said yesterday, he made friends with Daddy after that trial. We used to see him all the time, until..." She trailed off, just as she had yesterday whenever the subject of her father's murder loomed its ugly head over the conversation.

Apollo glanced back at his siblings, seeing Machi patting Trucy's shoulder sympathetically. The previous day, he'd ended up waiting until Trucy was out of the room to explain to Machi what had happened to Zak, and he wished once more the pair had agreed to go wait in the gallery for this upcoming cross-examination... but they'd made their stance quite clear that they wanted to help. He looked away, his fingers still tapping against his bracelet. 'Actually... there is one way they could help...'

Trucy dismissed the previous conversation with a shake of her head. "Well. He's in jail now. There'll be guards and everything... and he'll be all the way over on the witness stand, so it's not like he can do anything. We didn't eat his nail polish, after all."

Machi bit his lip. "Vera did."

"Yeah," Trucy admitted with a sigh. "She'll be okay, though. She didn't eat enough to kill her, so she'll get better, right? She just needs to wake up." She grinned. "And when she does, we can tell her the good news of how we proved her innocent and found her dad's killer!"

Machi thought a moment, then nodded with a smile.

"You're sure you want to help?"

The pair looked over to Apollo with surprise, seeing him still standing with his back to them... though he seemed to be fiddling with something out of sight. Trucy shot him a glare, arms crossed. "Um, duh? We've already told you like five times, we're not leaving you!"

"I just wanted to check," Apollo replied, sounding a little distracted. He turned with a flutter of his cape, then held out his left hand, the glove missing and clutched in his right; Said glove-less hand was holding his bracelet, removed from its home on his wrist. "While I'm asking him questions, you can watch for tells. It'll be a lot easier if I'm not trying to do both at once."
Trucy's eyes widened, stepping backwards. "P-Polly..." Her hands twitched, torn between reaching out for the bracelet or staying at her sides.

"You said you wanted to help," Apollo pointed out, "and you've always been jealous Mom gave me this instead of you, I know you have." He smiled, though it didn't reach his eyes. "This is your chance. You can try it out while I'm questioning Mister Gavin."

Machi's eyes flicked between the two, uncertain on what to do. The importance of Apollo's bracelet as both an heirloom and an aid for his siblings' perceiving ability had been explained to him many weeks previously; He knew enough to know he had no place in this discussion, but he still hated to see any of his loved ones in pain.

"B-but I don't know to use it," Trucy pointed out.

"It's easy," Apollo assured her. "The moment you mirror any tension from the witness, it feels tighter on your wrist; I find it's easier to concentrate on what it's telling me if I'm also touching it with my other hand."

Trucy squirmed on the spot for a moment, still visibly torn. "B-but I don't know Mister Gavin as well as you do. I won't know what to look for."

"And who says I do?" Apollo replied with a shrug; He was finding it harder to keep up his false smile. "Mister Gavin's always been a master of keeping calm... I've only once or twice sensed he's lying, and I've yet to notice the source for that. It'll be easier for you, because I'll be the one actually talking to him; You just have to watch, like in Dad's poker games."

Trucy said nothing, still staring uncertainly at the bracelet in her brother's hand.

Apollo sighed. "Truce, just take it. My arm is getting tired."

Finally, Trucy screwed up her courage, stepped forward... and shoved her brother's bracelet into his chest. "I'm not taking it."

Machi gasped, his hands to his mouth. Apollo, shocked by the force of his sister's push, took half a step back. "Truce...?"

"Mommy gave it to you," Trucy insisted, glaring intensely into Apollo's wide eyes. "I don't know how to use it and I don't know what to look for. Mommy gave it to you and I don't want it."

Machi looked between the two rapidly, unsure what to do. His siblings stood in silence before him, staring at each other in a long silence that he wasn't sure he was able to break.

Finally, Trucy's glare faded. "Mommy gave it to you," she whispered. "I'll watch for tells if you want me to, but using your bracelet isn't going to help me do that."

Apollo stared for a long moment before wordlessly slipping his bracelet and then his glove back on his hand.

Trucy sighed in relief. "Thank you, Polly."

When Apollo finished pulling on his glove, he gave his sister a smile that rang more genuine than any they'd seen since the trial started.
Twenty minutes after the judge sent his request to the prison, court reconvened as though it had never had a recess in the first place. The gathered crowds watched in silence from the gallery as a pair of very scary prison guards escorted in through the double doors a tall, blond man in an impeccable blue suit, idly adjusting his glasses as he strode to the witness stand.

Even after all this time, and without his badge, Kristoph Gavin looked every inch the sophisticated attorney who had earned the nickname of The Coolest Defence in the West.

Kristoph looked up at the judge's podium with a calm smile. "Ah, Your Honour. How nice to see you again."

"I-it's been quite a while, hasn't it?" the judge replied, adjusting some papers awkwardly as he avoided eye contact.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of your company?" Kristoph asked, ignoring the almost fearful reaction as he kept up the friendly and polite façade he wore so easily. "It's not every day I'm summoned from my solitary cell. In fact, it's never."

Apollo had to admit... even he was still scared of Kristoph. He'd been wary enough back when he only suspected the man of forgery and deceit, but knowing he had killed someone, suspecting that he had attempted to kill two others and succeeded at least once... He screwed up his courage and called across the room, "I think you already know, Mister Kristoph Gavin."

Kristoph's gaze turned towards the defence bench, and his head followed soon after. "Ah, Mister Apollo Wright. I hear you've been doing quite well for yourself."

Apollo tried not to wince guiltily at the subtle dig in his former boss's words. Somehow, he still felt like the student intern under the gaze of the senior partner who had mentored him. He'd never really had the courage to disagree with Kristoph on anything, not without his father backing him up... How could he have expected to be able to fight this alone?

Machi patted his brother's arm with a smile. "You can do this, isoveli," he whispered. "I believe in you!"

Trucy shot him a quick grin in agreement, before returning her attention to watching Kristoph carefully; Just as Apollo had asked her, she was already spotting for the man's tells.

At the teens' encouragement, Apollo managed to retrieve his bravery from wherever it had fled. 'That's right... I may not have back-up this time, but I do have someone to protect.' Keeping his siblings close to the forefront of his mind, he grabbed the nail polish from his bench and held it high. "Does this bottle look familiar?"

"Ariadoney nail polish?" Kristoph asked, still smiling as though he was only there for a friendly visit. "Why yes, I use it myself. As did the late defendant, I hear."

"She's not dead yet!" Apollo immediately objected, nearly slamming the nail polish back on the bench as he shot the man a glare.

"And?" Kristoph continued, paying no attention to his former mentee's words. "Was there something
concerning this bottle you wished to ask me about?" He waved a hand with a chuckle. "I admit, I respect her for her taste in nail polish."

Apollo almost bit his tongue as he spat out, "Her taste indeed!" He gestured across the room, barely noticing the meekly withdrawn stance of the prosecutor as he focussed on indicating the bottle on the desk there. "This nail polish was how Vera Misham was poisoned!"

Kristoph gave the bottle on the prosecutor's bench only a glance. "Atroquinine, was it?"

The judge was watching suspiciously from atop his podium. "You're well informed about the case, Mister Gavin."

"Even in solitary, much comes to my desk," Kristoph explained, shrugging nonchalantly, "and I have nothing to do but read." Finally, he turned his attention to the lone figure of the courtroom he had yet to address, still smiling serenely. "Well, Klavier?"

Klavier subtly flinched, a hand picking at his hair as he stared at the bench in front of him. Apollo was sure he could see a thin coating of sweat under the prosecutor's pale fringe.

Kristoph didn't seem to notice his brother's uncharacteristic silence. "Maybe you can explain this?"

Kristoph remained quiet and unmoving for long enough, Apollo began to worry he was completely shutting down. 'C'mon Diva, you're the prosecutor! You're allowed to take your brother's side on this! I certainly wouldn't blame you!' Regardless, he kept his support in his head, chewing his lip nervously.

Finally, though he stayed very still, Klavier spoke up: "You're being accused again." His usual German accent was oddly muted, more like the 'Konrad' who had dropped by the Wonder Bar three months earlier. "By him. Again."

Kristoph slowly nodded. "Ahh." He then raised an eyebrow, watching Klavier like a stern parent. "And? You agree with his accusation, do you?"

Klavier didn't reply.

Machi leaned close to Apollo with a worried look. "Is prosecutor okay...?"

Apollo could only wince in response.

"Let's hold a proper trial, shall we?" the judge announced, tapping his gavel. "Kristoph Gavin, your testimony, please."

Kristoph only smiled, though it didn't quite reach his eyes. "I'd be delighted."

The judge glared back. "The charges against you are quite severe, Mister Gavin. You are suspected of the poisoning of the defendant, Vera Misham. Please testify on this matter to the court!" With that, he tapped his gavel.

Apollo gripped his bracelet tightly. Kristoph had always disapproved of him using his perception during a trial... but, then again, he hadn't played by Kristoph's rules in a long time. He certainly wasn't going to start again now.

In the resulting silence, the entire room's attention on him, Kristoph began to chuckle to himself, then shook his head. "Owning the same nail polish does not a murderer make," he pointed out. "I have been in solitary confinement for half a year. How could I poison her?" He shrugged nonchalantly.
"Her father died of the same poison... the meaning of which should be clear. The prosecution's case holds: She poisoned her father, then attempted to poison herself." He scoffed, pushing his glasses up his nose. "Surely, you aren't going to suggest I was responsible for poisoning her father, too?"

His bracelet twitched on Apollo's wrist, and he almost gasped as he caught a glimpse of a ghostly face over Kristoph's. 'W-was that...? What was that!?'

The judge suddenly looked very unsure of himself. "Well... I'm afraid the defence's claim is sounding rather unlikely."

"Naturally," Kristoph replied, smiling warmly despite the ice in his tone. "For one, I don't even know the Mishams. Isn't that so, Mister Wright?"

Apollo could only stare in silence, his hand still gripping his bracelet.

"Very well," the judge sighed, and tapped his gavel. "Mister Wright, begin your cross-examination."

The young defence attorney gave the old man a quick nod. Instead of turning his attention to the witness stand, he instead leaned close to his sister: "See anything?"

Trucy looked up, an uncertain frown on her face. "I thought I did," she admitted. "I... saw a face. Right when he said 'her father too'."

Apollo nodded again, biting his lip in thought. "Me too." 'Dad's notes mentioned Vera saw 'the devil' when she spoke with her client, didn't they? Is this what she meant?' He took a deep breath and returned his attention to the rest of the court. 'No more second-guessing myself. It's time to go.'
"Kristoph Gavin, it was you who killed Drew Misham."

Kristoph scoffed at Apollo's confident accusation. "A bluff worthy of your father."

"Thank you," Apollo replied, crossing his arms with a glare. "But I'm not bluffing."

Kristoph raised an eyebrow.

"I know you've never liked the idea of me using my perception during a trial," Apollo continued. "It's a crap-shoot, tense witnesses aren't necessarily guilty witnesses, it's not evidence and evidence is everything in court..." He shook his head. "I listened to you, don't get me wrong... but over the past six months, I've found exactly the opposite: Being able to tell when someone is lying is the most useful skill an attorney can have, in and out of court."

"And?" Kristoph asked, unfazed.

"And I finally spotted your tell!" Gaining confidence, Apollo threw out his hand to point at the witness stand. "Right when you said 'her father too'. That little demonic face Vera saw during her only face-to-face meeting with her client, with a man who hid his identity behind a mask! It was on the back of your hand the entire time!"

Kristoph only shook his head, chuckling at his former apprentice. "Alright, Apollo: Let's assume, for the sake of argument, that you 'saw' some proof of a lie. Tell me, was Drew Misham fond of nail polish too?"

"Sorry, but there's more than one way to poison a man," Apollo replied, leaning on his bench. "You don't need nail polish to get to someone's mouth."

"Ah, then I must be very talented indeed." Kristoph crossed his arms, reminding Apollo strongly of all the times the man had ever given him advice in the past. "You see, Drew Misham was killed on October six, while I was already in my solitary confinement cell at Central Prison." He shook his head, brushing at his hair with a smug laugh. "If that's not an alibi, then I don't know what is."

Apollo nodded, conceding the point. "But you found a way, all the same. And I found it, too."

Kristoph pushed his glasses up his nose, watching Apollo closely.

One hand at his Court Record, Apollo activated the courtroom's holograms and tossed up the old image of Vera's prized stamp Phoenix had sent him. "This is how you poisoned Mister Misham!" He crossed his arms with a stern glare as the gallery broke into mutters above them. "I'm sure it requires no introduction."

Kristoph didn't react, simply staring in reply.

"The night Mister Misham died, he was seen writing a letter," Apollo explained. "Atroquinine was
found on this stamp, Mister Gavin."

As cool as ever, Kristoph only looked up at the displayed picture thoughtfully. "So am I to understand this stamp was the murder weapon?"

"Yes, you are. Oh, and yes," Apollo switched out the crisp photo for a blurry one of the stamp on a yellow envelope, "this stamp was found in your prison cell!"

He didn't outwardly react, but Apollo caught a glimpse of Kristoph's eyes subtly widening. Above, the mutterings of the gallery grew steadily louder.

Apollo turned to the judge. "That is all, Your Honour."

On top of his podium, the old man was banging his gavel, shooting glares at the gathered crowds. "Order! Order! Order!" Huffing to himself, he then turned to Apollo. "P-poison on the back of that stamp!?"

Apollo nodded. "After the trial yesterday, someone paid a visit to this witness's cell! Phoenix Wright, in fact."

"There, he found this stamp," Apollo continued, moving his gaze from the judge to the witness stand. "You made Drew Misham write you a letter! That's how you killed him!"

Across the room, Klavier looked up from his sullen stare at his desk. "What...!?"

"My my." Kristoph gestured to the prosecutors' bench, his eyes on the young man opposite. "You've upset my poor brother to the point of uselessness." He crossed his arms, smiling smugly. "Allow me to clarify this matter, Wright: All you need to do is recall witness Spark Brushel's testimony."

Apollo frowned. "You didn't know what we'd figured out about the stamp, but you do know what Brushel told us?"

"He said Mister Misham put his letter in an envelope and began 'looking for a stamp',' Kristoph explained, and pointed to the holograms. "Ergo, he had no intention of using this stamp."

Apollo remained suspicious. "What are you getting at?"

"What I'm arriving at is that this commemorative stamp was in a frame!" Kristoph almost laughed. "It was mere coincidence that he used it that night."

The judge frowned in thought. "That would... seem to be the case."

"Or perhaps you mean to suggest that I can somehow manipulate coincidence?" Kristoph continued, eyes turned on Apollo. He raised a single eyebrow to emphasise his point.

Apollo paused. Any retort he might have had stuck in his throat and refused to go any further.

"He does have a point," the judge agreed. "How would this witness know if the victim was going to use that stamp?" He shook his head. "Without that, he couldn't have planned the murder!"

"W-what!?” Apollo cried, looking up at the man in disbelief.

Kristoph scoffed, turning to the prosecutor's bench. "Really, Klavier. You should be seeing through
these weak-spined bluffs by now."

Klavier only stared mutely at the floor.

Apollo tried to speak up and defend himself, but still found himself unable to conjure the words. 'He's right... How could anyone have known Mister Misham would use that stamp that night? Least of all Kristoph Gavin locked away in his cell...' He leaned forward on his bench. 'Now what do I do?'

"Isoveli?" Machi whispered, looking worried.

Trucy remained silent, eyes on Kristoph as she stood tall at her brother's side.

"Well, it seems that the defence has run out of things to say," the judge pointed out.

Kristoph scoffed. "You assume he had something to say in the first place. I believe Mister Wright's bluff," he pushed his glasses up his nose with a smirk, "has been called."

"Mister Wright's bluff?"

Apollo looked up in surprise, seeing Klavier's eyes moving from the floor to the elder Gavin with a glare.

"I'm not sure I agree with you there, Kristoph."

Kristoph's eyes widened, staring back at his brother. "K-Klavier?"

"Honestly, I wanted to believe you." Klavier shifted behind his bench, turning to more firmly face the witness stand. "But Mister Wright wasn't the one trying to get away with a bluff. You were, Kristoph!" As he spoke, the German accent that had drifted out of his voice returned in full force.

"W-what are you saying?" the judge asked, looking between the Gavins in shock. "Prosecutor Gavin!"

Klavier turned to the defence bench, snapping his fingers at Apollo. "Herr Forehead. What was your accusation again?"

Apollo was too surprised to reply for a moment. "Uh, it was that-

" 'This poisoned stamp killed Drew Misham', ja?" Klavier gestured briefly to the holograms above them. "To which my brother responded thusly: 'There was no way to know when Misham would use the stamp'."

The judge nodded. "Yes, that's right. Which is why it couldn't have been planned."

Klavier shook his head, a hard frown of disappointment on his face. Apollo found himself reminded of the end of Machi's trial, how Klavier had looked at Daryan as the guitarist was incriminated. "Tell me: It needs to be 'planned'... why?"

Apollo blinked. That's... a good point."

"Why couldn't it have been a 'coincidence'? The defence's case is simply that Drew Misham died by that stamp. That's all." Pointedly staring his brother in the eyes, Klavier slammed a fist against the wall behind him. "Kristoph, you tried to slip out from under his accusation by changing the subject! If that's not bluffing, what is it?"
Kristoph simply stared right back, eyes narrowed. "What are you up to, Klavier?"

"I could ask you the same question, Kristoph."

In response, Kristoph simply smiled. "I silenced the defence with the fewest words possible. It's called 'efficiency'."

Finally, the judge spoke up: "B-but Mister Gavin, that's impermissible testimony!"

Kristoph shrugged. "Very well. I shall take his claim head-on, then." He turned to the defence bench. "Wright."

Apollo tried not to flinch, standing tall. "What?"

"You accuse me of Drew Misham's murder, yes?" Kristoph chuckled, shaking his head. "Then, allow me to ask you: What possible reason could I have to kill a painter?"

Trucy gasped, then leaned behind Apollo towards Machi. "He's talking about a motive!"

The judge hummed in thought. "Indeed. It's hard to see how an attorney could come to want to kill a painter."

Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead. 'Now here's something: Why didn't he bring up the motive from the very beginning? Unless he was afraid it was a battle he might lose...'

"What does that mean?" Machi asked, looking between his siblings. "What we do now?"

"It means we have a weak spot to find," Apollo replied, a grin spreading across his face. "And we probably have the evidence to prove it, too."

Up on his podium, the judge was tugging idly at his beard with a stern frown. "A motive for murder. This is a vital, if not the most vital element in this case." He turned to Apollo. "Please consider this when making your statement, Mister Wright."

Apollo nodded, standing tall and confident behind his bench. It was hard to miss just how much was riding on his next move. "Understood, Your Honour. I'd like to present evidence."

Kristoph's expression didn't change, but he seemed to be watching Apollo very carefully regardless.

"Then let's see what you have for us," the judge said. "What reason did Kristoph Gavin have for wanting to murder Drew Misham?"

Apollo turned his gaze to one of the two case files sitting on the bench in front of him. With a determined frown, he opened the older of the two, resting his hand on the scrap of paper resting on top. "Kristoph Gavin's motive becomes clear... when we consider why the stamp came to Drew Misham's studio in the first place."

The judge's eyes widened. "And why was that?"

Apollo's gaze snapped up to the podium. " Forgery, Your Honour. Go back seven years. Drew Misham accepts his first job," holding the scrap of paper tight in his hand, he held it high to show the court, "creating forged evidence."

"I've... seen that before!" the judge cried with a gasp. "A page from a diary, wasn't it? Magnifi Gramarye's diary!"
Kristoph chuckled. "Ah, when attorney Phoenix Wright lost his badge, yes." He gestured to the paper in Apollo's hand. "This was the 'evidence' he presented... to his loss."

Apollo nodded, placing the scrap back on his bench. "This evidence is a fake, yes. But did Phoenix Wright request the forgery be made?" He pointed accusingly at Kristoph. "*That* was never proven!"

"Objection!" Klavier cried, slamming the wall behind him as he gave Apollo a stern glare. "He was the defence attorney on that case. Who, other than him, drunk with the prospect of victory, could have done it? And why would they?"

As Apollo looked, he could see the thin film of sweat still coating the prosecutor's face. It was hard not to take an accusation against his father personally... but Klavier was likely fighting the same battle when it came to Kristoph, and that thought kept the young magician's temper in check. "Just out of curiosity..." He flicked at his Court Record, recalling the contents of the red envelope to the holograms. "Do you remember this letter?"

The judge nodded. "That was presented in court yesterday. It was sent to Drew Misham by the client who requested that forgery."

"The 'enclosed stamp' was none other than the poisoned commemorative stamp!" Apollo pointed out. "Drew Misham drew his final breath just last Tuesday, *however*, the motive for his murder was already seven years old!"

Klavier was watching Apollo suspiciously. "Seven years old...?"

"The client who requested this forgery was very cautious," Apollo continued, getting into the swing of his explanation. "He tried to erase anything, and anyone, with connections to the forgery!"

The judge frowned in thought. "To keep them from talking?"

Apollo nodded. "But he made a mistake. The stamp he sent was a rare commemorative stamp of Troupe Gramarye, and Vera, a loyal fan, loved it too much to allow her father to return it." He snapped his fingers, emphasising his point. "The killer's 'time bomb' was delayed. The poisoned stamp was sealed within a glass frame, where it sat for seven whole years."

Klavier was still watching Apollo suspiciously. "*Herr* Forehead. Do you understand what you're telling us?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow.

"The one who schemed up the forged diary page was the one who poisoned the stamp, and it was Phoenix Wright who presented the forged evidence seven years ago." Klavier snapped his fingers, imitating Apollo. "Adding the two statements together, the one who schemed to kill Drew Misham was none other than *Phoenix Wright!*"

"Objection!" Apollo cried, interrupting any kind of reaction from the gallery as he slammed his fists into his bench with a glare across the room. "Sorry, but that's *not* how this is going to go down."

Klavier's suspicious look only deepened. "Oh? Then how will it 'go down'?"

"I believe I said this yesterday, in your hearing: The person who requested the forgery had it given to Phoenix Wright, with not an inkling to him of what it truly was."

"And I heard you," Klavier replied, though he didn't look convinced. "But my question is this: who exactly does Phoenix Wright claim 'gave' it to him? The forger's client? The forger herself?"
Apollo shook his head, trying not to look as nervous as he felt about being made to answer that question. "Neither. That person is unrelated to this-"

"I did."

View the Court Record
The courtroom's attention immediately turned to the teenage girl at Apollo's side, standing tall with a determined frown.

Apollo's eyes widened. "Truce! What are you doing?" he hissed. On his other side, Machi looked between his siblings with a worried grimace.

"You, Fraulein?" Klavier asked, confused.

"I was going to visit my daddy in the defendant's lobby, before the trial," Trucy explained. "Then somebody stopped me... wearing a Blue Badger mask. I thought they were some kind of official courthouse person or something..." She shrugged. "They gave me a piece of paper and told me to pass it on to the 'old boy in the blue suit with the spiky hair'... so I did." Her frown faded as her eyes turned to the scrap of paper sitting on the bench in front of them. "They just said it was really important... They wouldn't tell me what it was."

Klavier watched Trucy in silence, an unreadable expression on his face.

The gallery above them was muttering loudly, so Apollo decided to silence them, slamming his fists against the bench. "Keep in mind, Trucy was only seven or eight at that time," he announced to the crowds. "All she knew was that her grandfather was dead and her father was on trial." He turned his gaze on Klavier. "Like I said: Unrelated."

"Your point is accepted," Klavier replied with a neutral tone. His eyes lingered on Trucy a moment longer before looking away.

Machi slipped behind his brother to pat his sister's back. She gave him a small smile in return.

"And one other thing," Apollo continued, fiercely pointing a single finger into the air. "Phoenix Wright wasn't hired for that case until the day before the trial. He didn't have time to request a forgery!"

"The day before...?" Klavier muttered, eyes wide.

But Apollo wasn't done. "Now here's a question: Just who was Shadi Enigmar's previous defence attorney?"

Face pale, Klavier's gaze moved to the man at the witness stand. "N-no..."

Kristoph stood unmoving, arms crossed and expression neutral. If it weren't for his lack of eye contact, Apollo would have sworn he hadn't even heard anything they'd been discussing.

Klavier was shaking his head, expression pained. "Th-this can't all be..."

"But it is all true," Apollo said, keeping his attention, for now, on the younger Gavin. "There was another man, a defence attorney with a badge on his collar." For the sake of the gallery, he took a
dramatic swing of his arm to point firmly at the witness stand. "It was you, Kristoph Gavin!"

The gallery immediately erupted into noise, forcing the judge to start banging his gavel and call for order.

"I'm sorry, Polly."

Lowering his arm, Apollo turned to his sister. "Hm?"

"I'm sorry for speaking up like that," Trucy muttered, one hand fiddling with her brooch. Behind her, Machi continued to pat her back.

"It's fine," Apollo assured her, giving the teen a smile. "You didn't do anything wrong, then or now."

Trucy tried to return the smile, but it came out as more of a grimace. "Are... Are you going to bring up how Daddy...?"

Apollo nodded, smile fading. "Probably."

The determined look returned to his sister's face. "Alright."

Finally, the judge calmed the crowds, and huffed as he turned his attention to the witness stand. "What is the meaning of this, witness? I mean, defendant! Er," he shook his head, confused, "former lawyer?"

Kristoph stood calm for a long moment, pressing his glasses up his nose. "Let me begin by denying this. As I'm sure the defence is aware, attorneys are registered with the court the day before the trial begins. In other words, no record of this 'previous defence attorney' remains in the court." He turned to Apollo with a smile. "How exactly did you intend to prove Phoenix Wright's claim?"

Apollo tried not to wince. After all, he'd known for six years that they couldn't prove this particular problem; If Kristoph wouldn't confess, there was nothing they could do.

The judge hummed in agreement. "That would be difficult. I'm afraid this line of inquiry won't yield."

"Objection!" came a shout from the other side of the room, where Klavier was leaning on his bench, sweat covering his face. His eyes were focussed firmly on Apollo's. "Herr Forehead. Are you sure you don't have evidence?"

Apollo stared back at the prosecutor in confusion.

"What is wrong with...?" Machi whispered from behind.

"Evidence!" Klavier repeated, slamming his fist against the wall behind him. "Evidence that shows this man, Kristoph Gavin," he gestured to his brother, "requested that forgery seven years ago!"

A surprised look managed to break through Kristoph's calm exterior. "Klavier...?"

"Just... prove it!" Klavier demanded, attention on Apollo. "Clear up these doubts now, or I swear, I'm off this case!" He swung an arm wildly, his breathing heavy under the emotional roller-coaster he was going through.

Machi gasped, running behind Apollo to retake his place on the attorney's right. "He must know of evidence!"
"That's right!" Trucy agreed. "You know what he means, Polly?"

Apollo could only stare back at the distressed prosecutor opposite him. *Is Machi right? Does Diva know of something we could use to prove this?* His gaze hardened, turning to his Court Record as he reviewed his evidence. *Dad, Zak Gramarye, both Drew and Vera Misham... They're all victims of this case. Who'd've thought I'd ever be so tempted to add the Diva to that list?*

"Well, Mister Wright?" the judge called. "You claim Kristoph Gavin requested a forgery of Drew Misham seven years ago. Prove it."

Near the end of his list, Apollo's eyes landed on a group of photos he had not taken, that had been sent to him the previous night. He gave the pictures only a stern look before meeting the judge's gaze. "It can be proven."

Kristoph stared at Apollo for a moment before scoffing. "Simply ridiculous. Why even discuss it? This 'evidence' does not-"

"Objection!" Klavier interrupted, eyes firmly on the attorney at the defence bench. "Are you... telling the truth, Apollo Wright?"

Apollo met the prosecutor's pained gaze with a confident nod. "I am."

Klavier minutely sighed in relief, straightening a little behind his bench. "Then... I say we give him the benefit of the doubt."

"Very well," the judge agreed, and turned to Apollo. "Mister Wright, show us the link between our witness and Drew Misham."

Taking only a deep breath to prepare himself, Apollo placed a single finger on his computer's screen and flicked it upwards. "Take that!" On the holograms above, a fuzzy image formed of a handwritten letter, held in someone's hand with the yellow tinge of its envelope peeking out behind it.

The courtroom only had enough time to gasp before there was a shout from the witness stand: "Objection!" Krishoph was glaring at the defence, sternly enough that Apollo almost recoiled at the sight of it. "That... blurry piece of nothing? I'm afraid I can't let you submit that."

"It's still readable," Apollo insisted, and turned to his Court Record to swap out the displayed photo for the other two he had been given. "These are of a real letter, sent by Drew Misham, and we even have a reproduction of what it says!" He threw on the display the typed file, detailing the words obscured by the low-quality images.

"Reproduction?" the judge repeated, suspicious.

Kristoph's glare faded, replaced with a disarming smile. "Ah, I see now. Yes, of course."

The judge turned his frown on Krishoph. "What do you mean 'of course'?"

"I just remembered I had a visitor yesterday," Kristoph explained. "Phoenix Wright came to my cell... except I wasn't there."

Klavier mouthed Phoenix's name, watching his brother carefully.

"When I returned, I saw he had something of mine in his possession." Kristoph chuckled. "Of course, I had no intention of letting him get away with reading my personal mail."
"Mail?" The judge gasped. "You mean, this letter was in your cell?"

Kristoph only shook his head. "It appears Phoenix Wright has yet to be cured of his bad forging habit."

"We have the photos!" Apollo protested, banging his fists on his bench, then gestured to the holograms. "And I stated outright this was only a reproduction of what that letter said!"

"You have unreadable images," Kristoph corrected. "And a reproduction cannot be submitted as proof."

Apollo huffed as he pulled the text file from the screens. "Fine then, forget the reproduction!" He threw up the clearest of the three photos. "We still have these images Dad took when he visited you yesterday! He recorded your entire conversation, Mister Gavin, and the contents of your 'personal' mail, with a small video camera he brought with him!"

Kristoph's eyes widened. "What...?" He shook off the shock, glaring at the young magician. "Regardless, this mockery of a piece of unreadable evidence will never be accepted by the court. He gestured to the photo on display. "Evidence taken from a 'video' a man with no authority whatsoever 'claims' he took? A man who happens to be an ex-attorney suspected of forgery?"

Apollo opened his mouth to object, only to pull himself back at the last minute, barely reining in his rage. Looking up at the holograms, he had to admit even the clearest image of the three was still small and blurry enough that it was borderline impossible to decipher. With the reproduction off the table... Phoenix's photos meant absolutely nothing. And that only made Apollo even angrier.

Machi patted his brother's arm, looking worried. "Isoveli?"

The judge hummed in thought, then turned to the other side of the courtroom, only to pause in surprise. "Prosecutor Gavin?"

One arm propped against his bench, Klavier had turned away from the witness stand, his back to his brother. Even his head was clearly facing away from the defence opposite. He made no move to react to the judge's call.

Apollo held back a gasp. "Herr Diva?"

Kristoph only smiled, shaking his head. "As embarrassing as this is for me to say, I'm afraid my brother is incapable of making rational judgements at the moment." He held out an expectant hand towards the judge's podium. "Your Honour, your decision, please."

The judge leaned back in his chair, tugging at his beard. After a long moment, he shook his head. "The defence's claim is denied."

"What!?!" Trucy shouted.

"Only actual, readable, evidence is permitted in a court of law." The judge tapped his gavel. "Please remove the defence's 'evidence' from the record."

Apollo felt his face turn even redder as he watched his photos disappear from the holograms. 'B-but... all of Dad's work, for seven years... It can't just end like that! I won't let it!'

Kristoph smirked. "Better luck next time, Wright."

Apollo turned his glare on the ex-attorney at the stand. He didn't dare open his mouth to reply.
"Well, we've certainly taken a detour from our cross-examination," the judge continued, "but the defence appears to be lacking proof. I'm forced to end the cross-examination of Kristoph Gavin at this point."

Trucy turned to her eldest brother with a fearful look. "P-Polly, do something!"

"I'm thinking!" Apollo snapped, turning his glare on his computer as he flipped through his evidence list.

"We... can't do anything," Machi whispered, stepping back with a solemn look. He knew as well as Apollo did that there was no other evidence they could present to change the judge's mind.

The sound of a banging gavel brought the panic at the defence bench to a halt. "Very well," the judge called. "This ends the special witness's cross-examination."

"Objection!"

View the Court Record
Klavier slowly turned to face the courtroom, one hand pointing firmly at his brother though his eyes
didn't follow it. His expression was torn, somewhere between a determined frown and a painful
grimace. "The show's over, yet the crowd screams for more. Only now do I understand why."

The judge looked as confused as Apollo felt. "Prosecutor Gavin?"

"Frankly, I'm relieved." Klavier's hand lowered to the bench, and he leaned his weight against it with
a sigh. "This has been bothering me for seven whole years... and I'm tired of the whole youthful
angst scene." He looked to the witness stand, eyes narrowed in a tired glare. "Now's our chance.
Let's clean out the family closet, eh, Kristoph?"

Kristoph wasn't impressed. "Klavier, you're spinning out of control. Calm yourself before you say
something you'll regret."

"Spinning out of whose control?" Klavier pointedly replied, rounding on his brother. "Mine? Or
yours?"

"Take a moment to consider everything you've built, your reputation as a prosecutor, your fame with
the masses." Kristoph's gaze hardened. "You could lose it all, Klavier."

Machi gasped, tugging Apollo's cape. "He is trying press prosecutor!"

Apollo nodded. 'Hopefully Diva will do the right thing regardless... It can be tough to stand up to
your older brother, but I know I've always tried to listen if my little siblings need me to.'

Trucy huffed, lacking the same trust in Klavier as her eldest brother. She bounced up against the
defence bench, calling out, "Prosecutor Gavin! Try to remember what's really important to you,
okay?"

Klavier's eyes moved to the teen, his glare softening into a laugh. "Please, Fraulein. I couldn't forget
what's really important to me, even if I tried. In fact, I haven't. Not even once." As the Wrights
watched, his smile faded to a distant look. "That trial, seven years ago... There's something else you
mentioned yesterday, Herr Forehead. A certain something that has been hanging over our heads
since the very moment we met, and keeps coming up again and again without fail. A certain
something we've always avoided more than touching on."

Apollo felt his gaze hardening, and turned his eyes to the scrap of paper sitting on the bench in front
of him.

The moment they were alone, Apollo glared at Klavier. "Just so you know, I don't trust you," he
spat. "You try anything else on my family, I'll make sure to take you down like you took down our
dad."
The prosecutor stared evenly for several long moments. "Your wariness is reasonable, Herr Wright," he replied in a neutral tone, nodding in acknowledgement as he stepped back. "I won't argue you on that."

Luke shoved Apollo's hand off his shoulder with a glare. "I am perfectly capable of keeping calm. There is no way you can talk me out of supporting you; Isn't it you who's always talking about what happened the last time Gavin faced one of us alone?"

Klavier grunted from behind Apollo. "Low blow, Doktor..."

Apollo hid a laugh. "If only you'd brought your Prosecutor's Badge, maybe we could have done a disappearing trick tonight."

Klavier frowned. "Low blow."

"Nonsense, that joke has like a million layers to it," Apollo shot back, his smirk growing. "Besides, it'd be more than fair for the five minutes it would be gone."

"I think it's time we stopped avoiding it, ja?"

Apollo's hands tightened into fists as he felt the familiar disgust bubbling in his gut, the burning anger at the injustice served to Phoenix seven years ago. It was all too easy to brush aside the relationship he had reluctantly forged with Klavier in the months since they met, to superimpose that image of the haughty seventeen-year-old from the tape over the solemn young man opposite him. When his gaze snapped up to meet the prosecutor, it was with a tight glare. "You knew," he hissed. "From the very beginning, you knew." He snatched the forged diary page from his bench, waving it in the air as he continued, "You knew Dad had this thing, and what it was!" It took a great amount of self-control to not roughly slam the item back down, enough that his voice slipped and gained volume in his growing rage. "You baited him into presenting it, didn't give him any choice! It was because of you he was falsely accused of forgery, convicted in the court of public opinion and stripped of his badge! You wouldn't even let his client have a retrial with a new attorney, directly causing his decision to run away, and leaving that entire case unsolved to this day!" By now, his face was red, and Apollo was only barely aware of exactly how loud his Chords of Steel were projecting. "If it weren't for you, Zak would still be around, and Dad would still have his badge, and Magnifi's death would be solved! Everything goes back to that damn forgery, goes back to you," he slammed his fists into the bench, "because. You. KNEW!"

The courtroom was deathly quiet as Apollo panted heavily in the aftermath of his outburst, leaning on the defence bench. He felt strangely calm getting that off his chest, though he had never planned on losing his temper to that extent in court, especially not to Klavier, the one person in the room who wasn't currently staring at the young attorney in shock. 'Is this how Luke feels whenever he does this?'

At the prosecutor's bench, Klavier stood with his eyes closed, having listened to the tirade in total calm. "You are correct." His eyes opened, a sad look on his face as the court's attention snapped across the room. "I did know."

Kristoph's eyes narrowed. "Don't do this, Klavier."
"What!?" the judge cried above them. The gallery was already muttering in agreement, though Apollo wasn't at all surprised. At his sides, Trucy and Machi were exchanging shocked looks.

"It was the night before the trial," Klavier explained, eyes firmly on Kristoph. "You came to the prosecutor's office and informed me we would no longer be facing each other for my courtroom debut... but in exchange, you had information for me." He snapped his fingers in the air. "The attorney who takes my place is not to be trusted, I believe were your exact words. 'Don't even give him the benefit of your respect'. And I listened." He leaned on his bench. "I called in your special witness, I pressed and played for time until that forged page finally showed up. I carried out your plan exactly the way you gave it to me." He sighed, shaking his head as he finally broke the stare-down with his brother. "I wondered about it at the time. 'How did Kristoph know so much'?"

Machi pressed his hands to his mouth with a sympathetic sigh. "Poor prosecutor..."

"Kristoph!" Klavier shouted, slamming his fist against the wall behind him. "We were supposed to face each other in that trial! A fair fight, brother to brother! I deserved that much!" He shook his head, though Apollo thought he seemed more disappointed than angry. "You let me borrow the victim's belongings... You showed me all your research on the case."

Trucy frowned, thoughtful. "The victim's... belongings?"

"Grandpa Magnifi's things," Apollo clarified for his sister, then returned his attention to the Gavins. "Which would've included his diary, wouldn't it?"

The judge looked down at the man behind the witness stand, who had yet to react to Klavier's short speech. "Mister Gavin?"

Finally, Kristoph chuckled. "My my, Klavier. You disappoint me. You find trees, yet miss the forest!"

Apollo shook his head. "You're the one missing the forest, Mister Gavin."

Kristoph only pushed his glasses up his nose, looking away.

"You can't sweep this under the rug, not anymore!" Klavier threw out an arm to point at the witness stand. "Tell me what was going on behind that trial!"

For a long moment, there was no reply. Finally, Kristoph shrugged, still smiling. "Why not? I've achieved what I came here to do. I see no harm in reminiscing."

Machi laid a hand on his brother's arm, eyes wide. "Isoveli, do this mean...?" Opposite him, Trucy watched with similar concern.

Apollo took a deep breath, resting his hands on his siblings' backs. "I think we've done all we can at this point," he whispered. "I hope it's enough."

"April, twenty-nineteen," Kristoph announced, contemplative. "The day before the trial. I visited the detention centre at the request of my client, Zak Gramarye."

'At least he's admitting to that now...'

"He didn't want to talk about his case. He only wanted to play poker... and won." A glare flickered across Kristoph's face, but it was quickly gone. "To be honest, I don't know what his reasons were to
this day. As far as I could tell, he dismissed me as his representation because *I lost in a game of poker.* He scoffed, frowning. "I can come to no other conclusion."

"Daddy used to say something," Trucy said, just loud enough for the court to hear. "If you want to know a man, you have to compete."

Apollo rubbed his hand against her back to comfort her. *Zak was never watching the cards. He was watching the man across the table.*

Kristoph didn't seem to have heard the girl, huffing as his attempts to cover his anger behind his usual serene façade gradually faded. "I couldn't believe it. Phoenix Wright? A second rate attorney who relies on luck and bluffs? He dismissed *me* and went with *that* pitiful excuse for a man?"

Apollo only barely retained the self-control not to shout something at that, making do with death glares and a tight grip on his siblings' shoulders.

Kristoph shook his head. "He deserved to die for that error alone."

'Right, that's it!' Moving away from his siblings, Apollo slammed his fists against his bench, shouting, "Hold it!" He kept his focus firmly on the witness stand. "So you confess to requesting that forgery?"

Smirking, Kristoph raised an eyebrow at the young attorney. "Oh, I'm not admitting to anything. My point is," his expression abruptly returned to a glare, "these two men shamed me, and I could not forgive that. Phoenix Wright and Zak Gramarye both deserved what they got."

Apollo bit back a demand to take back the insults against his family. Much like when he had argued for Lamiroir's second testimony, he was finding himself feeling dangerously calm. "So you asked Mister Misham to forge that evidence, so you could 'win'. But then, when you were dismissed as Zak Gramarye's attorney, you used your forged evidence as a trap."

"You fed me information about the forgery you made," Klavier picked up, giving his brother a glare similar to Apollo's. "Then you gave your dirty evidence to him."

Kristoph shrugged, again planting a smile on his face. "You're free to imagine what you will. My point is that all I had imagined came to pass. Everything went perfectly."

There was a short pause, barely long enough for Apollo to do more than mentally swear incoherently, then a snort sounded from the other side of the room.

Klavier was *laughing.*

Machi leaned close to Apollo. "I do not think he is okay..."

"He's fine," Apollo whispered back. *Honestly, I kinda agree with that reaction.*

"Incredible." Doubled over on his bench, the young prosecutor shook his head, a hand running through his hair. "If I wasn't laughing, I'd *weep.*"

The judge watched with a mixture of confusion and concern. "Prosecutor Gavin?"

"Perfectly?" Klavier didn't seem to have noticed the judge's question, still laughing as he looked up at his brother. "You're *mad,* Kristoph. Stop fooling yourself."

Kristoph watched with narrowed eyes. "What are you talking about, Klavier?"
Klavier stood tall, keeping his eyes on the witness stand, and snapped his fingers in the direction of the judge's podium. "Tell me, how did that trial end?"

"Cancelled, when the defendant vanished," the judge replied.

"Precisely." Klavier's laughter had faded, though he still smiled. "Kristoph... you've been living in fear ever since."

Kristoph's eyes widened, a hand on his glasses. "What...?"

"You were afraid your forgery would be revealed, and your reputation trashed," Apollo picked up. Another instance of Kristoph forging evidence sprung to mind, but he hurriedly quashed the thought. "You couldn't leave things to chance, so you watched everyone involved with the case, for seven long years." He threw out an arm to point at the witness stand. "That's the only reason you ever became my dad's friend, isn't it? Why you took me as an apprentice? You've spent all this time gloating as we struggled to make ends meet, getting nowhere into Dad's investigation into what happened!" He slammed his fists on the bench. "Not to mention, Drew Misham mentioned in his final interview that he'd felt 'watched', and you know who else agreed with him? A certain friend of Zak Gramarye's, by the name of Spark Brushel. Can you honestly tell me it was a coincidence that it was only after getting back in touch with him seven years later that Zak was murdered?"

"W-wait just a minute!" the judge interrupted, jumping in his seat. "Zak Gramarye was seen by this reporter? How is that possible? Was he alive after being gone for so long?"

Apollo opened his mouth to reply before pausing, listening to the confusion in the gallery. Even Klavier seemed to be throwing them a confused look. Apollo simply turned to his younger sister, finding her standing solemnly at his side. The two locked eyes, and Trucy subtly nodded, biting her lip. Just as on stage, they didn't need to exchange any words, locking hands silently behind the defence bench. With the permission and support from his sister, Apollo returned his attention to the courtroom. "Allow me to refresh the court's memory: Six months ago, Kristoph Gavin was charged with murdering a 'mysterious traveller'."

"I remember him quite well," the judge replied. "Shadi Smith, was it? Poisoned in a Chinese restaurant." He shook his head with a sad look. "Tragic."

Apollo bit back an incredulous reply. "Th-the details don't really matter right now. What matters is," he slipped his left hand out of Trucy's to point across the room, and felt his sister at his back doing the same... just as they always did together on stage, minus the wands. "That traveller was Zak Gramarye!"

View the Court Record
The gallery was muttering loudly, repeating Apollo's assertion between themselves. He had no idea how many of them were aware of Kristoph's trial back in April, but, as he'd told the judge, the details didn't really matter. The important thing was that Zak Gramarye was dead, and Kristoph Gavin had killed him. As he and Trucy lowered their hands, he gave her a quick glance, noting the determined look on her face, and felt the twitch of a proud smile at his lips. 'Don't you worry, Truce. We're getting justice for both of your dads here.' Once their hands were once more behind the bench, he was quick to resume their mutual tight grip on each other, fingers interlocked.

At the witness stand, Kristoph stood unmoved, as Apollo had, sadly, expected. Klavier had his eyes on the defence bench, watching the Wrights with an unreadable look.

"Someone please explain this!" the judge demanded. "Mister Wright! Can you explain this?"

Apollo nodded. "It all started seven years ago, with the death of the Grand Magician, Magnifi Gramarye. His student, Zak Gramarye, was the suspect. Whoever defended Zak in court successfully would be famous beyond belief." He wanted to snap his fingers, but, with his left hand still tightly gripping his sister's, he instead made do with gesturing with his right. "Thinking that, Kristoph Gavin did the unthinkable: He forged evidence."

The judge frowned in thought. "Drew Misham?"

"Actually, it was his daughter, Vera, who really did the work," Apollo reminded him, then turned to Kristoph. "You took precautions when you had that forgery made, didn't you, Mister Gavin?"

"Of course," Klavier picked up, running a hand through his hair. "To keep people from talking. The Mishams knew everything, or at least enough to identify him. Left alive, they might 'cause trouble'."

Apollo nodded. "That's when you planned to poison them."

"Atroquinine, applied to a commemorative stamp." Klavier threw the picture of the stamp - the clearer of the two - onto the holograms.

"But luck was on Mister Misham's side. The bomb didn't go off."

The judge gasped. "His daughter...! She saved him by taking the stamp, I see!"

Kristoph simmered at the stand, eyes locked on the two attorneys in front of him.

"But that wasn't the only bomb he set up," Apollo continued.

Klavier picked up the pink-tinged crystal bottle still sitting on his bench. "This Ariadoney nail polish."

Apollo returned his gaze to Kristoph. "You noticed something when you requested that forgery: When Vera Misham is nervous, she has a bad habit, a tendency to bite her nails." Although it felt
wrong to do so with his off hand, he pointed his right index finger firmly at the bottle in Klavier's hand. "That nail polish was her 'good luck charm'. She is intensely agoraphobic - terrified of the outside world - and couldn't bring herself to leave her house without the protection she imagined that nail polish gave her... A bottle which, by the way, happens to have been a gift from the client who requested that forged page!" He lowered his arm, glaring at Kristoph though his words were for the court at large. "It was his insurance."

"Insurance?" the judge asked.

Apollo turned his gaze to the judge's podium. "As long as she lived quietly at home, there was no danger to her. But what if she had to go outside?"

"If she ran into any trouble, she'd become nervous," Klavier picked up, "and the nail polish would do the rest."

"His time bombs sat there for seven years," Apollo continued, "and then they went off almost simultaneously."

The courtroom sat in silence as Apollo's story reached its conclusion. Across the room, Klavier was frowning as he placed the bottle of nail polish back on his bench. Apollo simply brushed his free hand against Machi's arm, briefly checking on his youngest brother; Machi glanced up in acknowledgement, so Apollo assumed he was doing okay.

Finally, Kristoph sighed. "If you're finished, may I return to my cell now? I'm not accustomed to standing for such long periods of time."

Apollo scoffed, rolling his eyes. "Mister Gavin, have you heard a single thing we've said?"

"Oh, I listened quite closely to your little tale," Kristoph replied, smiling. "Quite an entertaining piece of fiction."

At that, Apollo's eyes widened in both rage and shock. "What...?"

Ignoring his former mentee, Kristoph turned towards the prosecutor's bench. "Klavier. Surely you understand."

Klavier's eyes were closed, his hands in his pockets. "We're back to the evidence. The lacking evidence. Nothing proves a link between him and the atroquinine that took Drew Misham's life."

Apollo pulled his hand from his sister's grip, smacking his fists against his bench with a glare at the witness stand. "Objection! What about the Borscht Bowl Club? You killed Zak Gramarye! Was that to keep him from talking, too? Did he know about your forgery? Have you had murder plans for everyone ever connected to the forged evidence you've used in the past!? Including me? Including Luke!?"

Trucy and Machi almost jumped in surprise as they gave their eldest brother shocked looks. "Luke?"

Machi repeated.

Kristoph chuckled, shaking his head. "I have never knowingly touched a piece of evidence that was forged, and neither did I kill a man of that name. Read over the report again, if you like." He waved a hand, every inch the teacher Apollo had once respected for his knowledge. "The victim was a traveller by the name of Shadi Smith, about whom we know little else. You can't seriously think I knew he was that particular fugitive." He scoffed, adjusting his glasses.

Apollo had to bite his lip for a moment to reign in his temper, siphoning some of it off into another
smack of the bench under his fists. "Objection! Okay then, why did you kill him?"

Kristoph thought a moment. "I plead my right to remain silent. Remember, this court did not convene to put me on trial. The defendant's name is 'Vera Misham', suspected in the murder of her father." He grinned, and the way he raised his head made the light fall across his face quite unnaturally. "My trial's been finished for six months now."

The judge leaned back in his chair, tugging on his beard with a soft hum. "I'm afraid we have strayed considerably from our purpose here." He nodded, sitting tall. "This court concurs with the witness. It is defendant Vera Misham who is on trial here."

Trucy groaned in frustration. "But you were doing so good, Polly!"

"As long as there is no evidence to support the accusation against him, this course of inquiry cannot find Vera Misham innocent."

Apollo felt a cold shiver of panic up his spine, and nearly leapt over his bench. "Objection! Your Honour, my dad spent seven years collecting this evidence-!"

"Objection," Kristoph interrupted, and laughed. "You still don't get it, do you? Let us assume there was poison in the nail polish."

"There was," Apollo grumbled.

Kristoph ignored him. "Who then, was responsible for causing Vera Misham to bite her nails? It wasn't me, I know that much." He scoffed, casually brushing hair from his eyes. "The one who brought that poison to her lips was you."

Apollo paled. "Wh-what?"

"No!" came a shout from Apollo's right, and Machi stepped forward with a glare. "Vera bite nails, yes... but should not have been problem! If not for poison, Vera would be fine! It is fault of person who put poison there in first place, not Apollo!"

Kristoph tsked, waving off the boy's complaint. "Not that it matters. Evidence is everything in court. There is nothing more."

The sound of the gavel attracted everyone's attention back to the judge atop his podium. "I believe this discussion has reached its conclusion."

'No no no no no!' Apollo had to hold himself back from again attempting to jump the bench, feeling cold sweat pricking at his brow. "Y-your Honour-!"

"Mister Wright." The old man turned to the young attorney with an expression Apollo suspected he often showed his oft-mentioned grandchildren. "You have performed admirably well for a novice attorney. And I respect your father's determination as well. You certainly take after him a great deal."

Apollo was too panicked at feeling the trial slipping through his fingers to be able to reply.

"However, without direct proof, you have nothing," Kristoph added with no small amount of smugness. "Isn't that right, Klavier?"

Klavier was standing behind his bench, eyes closed. "Unfortunately, yes, Kristoph. You're right." His eyes then opened, watching his brother with a disappointed look. "That is, you would have been right, until now."
Apollo's gaze instantly snapped to the prosecutor. *You mean... there's still hope?*

Kristoph was openly shooting Klavier a warning glare. "What?"

"Did the news not reach your desk in solitary?" Klavier asked, sounding incredibly tired... much like he had by the end of Machi's trial. "The eyes of the nation are on this courtroom today. This is the trial case for a new judicial system."

'*Of course! How did I forget that?* Apollo grinned, turning his attention to Kristoph. "That's right! The Jurist System!"

Kristoph blinked, his eyes flicking warily between the two attorneys. "Jurists, you say?"

"The current judicial system has been deemed too 'closed off' from society," the judge explained. "This new system attempts to inject the wisdom of common citizens into the law."

It suddenly struck Apollo that the judge hadn't once forgotten their trial today was anything but normal. *I guess that explains why he was looking at me like that earlier...*'

"Common citizens? *Wisdom*?" Kristoph nearly spat, disgusted. "Is this some kind of a joke? What could we possibly gain by entrusting our judicial system to a mindless, emotional mob of irrational *mouth-breathers*?"

"Common citizens have something called 'common sense'," the judge calmly replied. "Common sense is not restricted by the law."

Kristoph was beginning to sweat, arms crossed so tightly Apollo thought he was in danger of tearing the fabric of his suit. "Nonsense! There is only room for two in this court: Me, and *the law*!" Any remnants of his calm façade were long gone, the former attorney shooting death glares into the gallery on either side of the courtroom. "Keep the riff-raff *out!* Out, I say!"

The crowd recoiled and were silent at the direct attack, and Apollo couldn't blame them. He shook his head, almost feeling sorry for his old mentor. "They're not in the court, actually. They're watching everything by video camera." He turned to look at the tiny twin cameras over the back doors, and noticed his siblings and even Klavier following his gaze with smiles of their own.

Kristoph glanced behind him in a panic. "H-how can you... *allow* this?"

"Incidentally, the one responsible for making this happen," Apollo crossed his arms, facing the witness stand with a proud smirk, "was Phoenix Wright."

Kristoph stared back, eyes wide. "Phoe... Phoenix Wright...?" He leaned forward over the stand, slowly raising one fist into the air before slamming it hard on the wooden structure with a loud bang that echoed in the quiet room. "So... Everything was leading to this. Of course." His hand moved to grip the stand, knuckles white. "Right... Wright..." With an almighty scream, Kristoph threw his head back, fingers curled into claws at his chest as his hair blew in an invisible wind, coming loose out of its carefully styled curl and hanging in limp waves over his face and shoulders.

Apollo jumped back, arms held protectively in front of his younger siblings. *Is he shouting our name, or...?*'

"I won't accept... *I can't* accept!" Kristoph shrieked, clutching his shoulders as he hunched behind the stand, his previously perfect posture gone as he glared through his fringe at the various members of the court staff in front of him. "This is no *court*! Law... The law is *everything*! Law is *absolute*! You'd let ignorant swine *soil* your courts?"
At the prosecutor's bench, Klavier's head was leaning back, facing the ceiling, though his eyes were closed. "Kristoph... It's over."

Kristoph's gaze snapped to his brother. "K-Kla-!

"The law is 'absolute'?" Klavier continued, apparently ignoring Kristoph. "You can't be serious."

"W-what...?"

"Odd. I thought you spent your life looking for loopholes. The law isn't 'absolute'." Klavier lowered his head, watching his brother with a sad look, an expression that conveyed perfectly how ready he was to see the back of this trial. "It's filled with contradictions."

The judge nodded. "The law is the end product of many years of history, the fruit of human knowledge. Like a gem, polished to a gleam through trials... and errors." He sighed, regret in his face. "It is this fruit we receive, and pass on, and face in our time, and it is always changing, growing. Nurturing it is our task as human beings."

"That's what this whole trial was about," Apollo picked up, though he felt every bit the novice next to the years of experience the judge - and even Klavier to an extent - boasted. "Because our trial system hasn't been this way forever, it was changed to how it is now just over a decade ago! The purpose of a trial is to find the truth, and being able to do that with evidence is fantastic in theory, but what about when there isn't any evidence? There has to be some other way to make sure justice is served to the right person, to make sure innocent parties don't end up with a punishment they don't deserve." He gave his young brother a smile. "Because that seems to happen a lot more often than you might think, and you can't always be lucky enough to find another way."

Machi was a little surprised to have Apollo's eyes turn on him, and blushed as he realised what Apollo was referring to.

"And yet you haven't changed, Kristoph," Klavier picked up. "Not once, since the moment you received your badge. You've stopped. You're not needed anymore."

Kristoph stared back at his brother, breathing heavily. He made no move to reply.

"I see no need to further prolong this trial," the judge announced. "This began as the trial of Vera Misham, accused of murdering her father, the painter Drew Misham." He sighed. "However, several other incidents were reviewed, and we seem to have reached a conclusion." There was a long pause, and he directed his attention with a stern frown at the small camera pointed at his podium. "Before this court declares a verdict, I await your decision, Jurists of the court. For the death of Drew Misham, how do you find the defendant, Vera Misham? Innocent... or guilty? I turn to you now to consider this matter." Closing his eyes, he leaned back in his chair.

Now, all that was left to do was wait.

[View the Court Record]
Phoenix stepped in front of the screen as the live feed to the courtroom switched off. In the corner, Luke sat with his father's Court Record, tapping away at the screen as he underwent the final and most important technological step of the trial: setting up the voting system. At the door, Edgeworth flipped on the light, bringing the room out of the darkness. The six jurists sat at their table, their assigned computer tablets lying in front of them, screens flashing as Luke adjusted their displays.

"This ends the trial for this case. Only the verdict remains to be decided. Defendant Vera Misham is currently in intensive care. If a decision cannot be reached today, it may never be reached." Phoenix was sure to look each of the five women and single young man in the eye as he gave his short speech. "The factors involved are simple: Did the defendant poison her father that night? If so, she is guilty. Or, was there another reason for Mister Misham's death? Did another person poison him? If so, she is innocent." He pointed to the six computer tablets on the table. "A panel has been provided for each of you to input your decisions."

Five of the six reached out to take their tablets, the screens displaying large buttons saying 'Guilty' on one side and 'Not Guilty' on the other, with a smaller 'Confirm' at the top. Only Jurist 6 hesitated, looking up at Phoenix as if about to ask something. She looked over to Jurist 1 opposite, the younger woman giving her a small smile that encouraged Jurist 6 to dismiss her doubts, taking her assigned computer from the pile.

"It's time for your verdicts. Make your decision in the case against Vera Misham. After seven years, the truth is ready to be heard." Phoenix took a deep breath, letting it out in a quiet sigh, then turned a stern eye on the six people in front of him. "Judge wisely. Judge well." With that, he turned and walked over to where Luke sat, hoping he'd come off more impressive than he felt.

Luke gave his father a smile as he approached. Phoenix only gave him a quick smile back, then the pair together headed to the door. Edgeworth, waiting there, joined them as they all left the room. It was going to be a long wait before the verdict was called.

Phoenix's method for trying not to think about what the jurists were voting on was to pace back and forth in the hallway outside. Luke and Edgeworth stood far more calmly either side of the door, essentially acting as the guards to ensure there was no interfering with the vote. Although he wasn't surprised, Phoenix wondered how they managed it. This was the true conclusion of the Gramarye case, the trial that had cost him so much, that he had been fighting to solve for seven long years. Regardless of whether Vera lived long enough to see it, this verdict would send ripples across the entire state, sealing not only her own fate but Phoenix's and Kristoph's and everyone else involved with this trial. If she was guilty (not at all unlikely given the complete lack of approved evidence otherwise), Kristoph would face his execution as only a murderer, and Phoenix was out of options. If she was innocent... Well, Phoenix hesitated to say all their problems would be solved, but it would certainly be a step in the right direction. If only the letter he'd sent Apollo had been approved, at least then they would have evidence of the connection between Kristoph and the Mishams.
Phoenix briefly paused to acknowledge his son had spoken, only to resume his slightly panicked walk. "I know."

"We can certainly trust that the right decision will be made today," Edgeworth added, arms crossed. "The whole point of a Jurist Trial is to judge the actions of the witnesses and defendant emotionally as well as logically. Following the evidence is just as correct as following the arguments of the attorneys."

Luke nodded. "Even Prosecutor Gavin agreed Vera wasn't the person to kill Mister Misham, and no-one knows his brother better than him. I don't think we have anything to worry about, really."

Phoenix wanted to reply, but he was too busy hearing all the potential arguments in his head calling the entire trial a fraud. Emotions aren't proof. Just because someone acts suspicious, doesn't mean they are. If you can't prove it with evidence, who's to say your argument has any basis in reality, any resemblance to the truth? He was sure he'd be seeing every one in the headlines over the next few weeks, regardless of what happened... give or take an all-new smear campaign against his credibility.

"Are you even listening to us, Wright?"

"Of course I am," Phoenix muttered.

Edgeworth narrowed his eyes at the other man, his gaze never leaving Phoenix. "I haven't seen you this on-edge since you lost your badge."

"For good reason," Phoenix bitterly laughed. "This is the same trial, after all."

Luke squirmed uncomfortably, clutching his father's computer tight in his arms. "Well... no matter what happens... You have us this time, Papa. We're not going anywhere."

Finally, Phoenix's pacing slowed to a stop, and he was able to meet his son's eyes. After a moment, he even added a warm smile.

Luke blushed, looking away. "You really meant what you wrote in the Mason System, didn't you? Saying we were your 'light' after you lost your badge?"

Phoenix chuckled. "Why wouldn't I have meant it? You three gave me a reason to keep going, and keep fighting."

"I hope that wasn't the only reason you adopted them," Edgeworth remarked, hiding a smirk behind a sudden need to push his glasses up his nose.

Phoenix only snorted at his friend, waving off his comment.

Luke giggled, but his smile was quick to fade, replaced with a thoughtful frown. "That reminds me... Apollo suggested Mister Gavin had murder plans for everyone connected to his forgery, right?"

"I doubt it," Edgeworth assured him. "Zak Gramarye had no reason to even suspect Gavin forged evidence, so the motive behind that murder won't be the same as the Mishams."

Phoenix bit his lip about the transferral of rights - There's no way Zak would have told Kristoph about that in four days when it took him seven years to tell Phoenix.

Luke was still frowning in confusion, staring at the floor. "But then... Apollo thought he might have
had plans to kill his own apprentice... and to kill me. What kind of connection do we have to that forgery, aside from being related to Papa?"

Phoenix and Edgeworth's eyes met for only a moment before returning to Luke. "You two are the oldest," Phoenix suggested. "Apollo probably thought he would have seen you two as a threat the same way he saw me."

"Not that he had plans to kill anyone else, I suspect," Edgeworth quickly added. "If he'd been planning to murder anyone in your family, he would have done it years ago."

Luke's frown deepened, and he reluctantly nodded.

"It's just a shame we couldn't dig up a motive for why he killed Zak Gramarye," Phoenix sighed. "I knew it was unlikely, but I doubt we'll ever have another chance to."

"Another mystery for the ages," Edgeworth mused. "My best guess would be the humiliation he said he suffered when Mister Enigmar let him go."

Luke looked up. "Not much of a motive, is it?"

Phoenix shook his head. "Kristoph's always been intensely private. The Psycho-Locks that are hiding his motivations won't be easily broken, probably not even by his brother."

Edgeworth scoffed. "You and your Psycho-Locks."

"These aren't usual ones, either," Phoenix continued, adamant. "Pearls went and did some research for me overnight, and she says, whatever this motive is, Kristoph's keeping it a secret even from himself."

Humming in thought, Luke stroked his goatee. "Interesting... Not even Mister Gavin knows why he killed Shadi Enigmar?"

Edgeworth just rolled his eyes. "Not that it matters. He's already been convicted of that murder, as he himself pointed out. Only his connection to the Mishams matters here."

"Maybe," Phoenix reluctantly agreed. "It still bothers me that we'll never know, though."

Apollo had no idea where the prison guards took Kristoph after the courtroom emptied. He knew Klavier hadn't gone with them - Who could blame him, really? - as he'd seen the prosecutor slinking into his assigned defendant's lobby as the two opposing teams escaped the crowds. Apollo had simply wrapped his arms around his younger siblings, and they stuck close to his side as he led them back to their lobby.

Once through the doors, Machi leapt past his brother to latch on to Trucy with a tight hug. "I so sorry about your father!"

Trucy smiled, returning the embrace. "I'm alright, Machi. He's been gone six months now. Up until then... I always knew he was alive."

Machi jumped back, giving her a surprised look. "You did?"
Nodding, Trucy giggled. "He promised me, the day he went away... 'We may not meet again for some time, but I will always be watching, and one day I'll return. You're the next Gramarye, after all.'"

Wincing in sympathy, Apollo patted his sister's back. *They never met again, though he did return... but I think we both know he certainly wasn't watching, not if he didn't know about me.*'

"But it's okay. I have my new family now." Trucy gave her brothers a wide grin. "Not just you two, but Daddy Phoenix, and Luke, and Mommy Maya... and Mommy Thalassa, when she comes back. And Pearly and Iris too."

"I'm glad we make your list," Apollo joked.

Machi just gripped his sister tight in another hug. "You sure you okay?"

Trucy nodded, patting her little brother's back and blinking away tears. "I'm fine, baby brother. Just like Polly and Luke are always saying. At the tops of their voices." She shot her eldest brother a cheeky grin. "At five in the morning."

"I get your point," Apollo muttered, failing to hide his smile. As the two teens giggled, pulling out of their hug, he directed them to the nearby couch. "C'mon, we've got a long wait ahead of us for the verdict. May as well get comfortable and find something to occupy ourselves until they call us back..."

View the Court Record
In the end, the three Wrights had enough time to go down to the cafe and get lunch, and were back in their lobby long before a bailiff came to fetch them with the news the verdict had been decided. This time, Apollo hadn't the heart to ask his siblings to not follow him, so Machi and Trucy stuck close to his sides as they once more entered the courtroom and took their place behind the defence bench. Opposite them, Klavier wasted no time doing the same at the prosecutor's bench. Apollo couldn't help but worry for the young rock star, seeing him keeping his eyes down and clearly hiding the emotional turmoil of having to essentially prosecute his own brother. *I hope he didn't spend the break crying...*

The prison guards entered the room with Kristoph in tow, escorting him to the witness stand in the absence of the trial's defendant. He was still in pieces from his breakdown earlier, the former attorney's hair a complete mess and his normally immaculate suit crumpled in the grip of his clawing fingers. He glared up at the judge's podium with wide eyes behind his glasses, sparing not even a glance for either his brother or his former mentee. For the latter, Apollo was very glad.

The murmuring gallery quietened as the judge sat down in his seat, tapping his gavel. "This court is ready to announce its verdict." He studied a piece of paper in his hands. "The Jurists have unanimously reached a decision, and, on the charge against Vera Misham of the murder of Drew Misham, they call for a verdict of not guilty."

Apollo took a sharp breath in, his hands clutching his siblings' as the three anxiously watched the judge.

"Taking their decision into consideration, I have also come to my own verdict." The judge readied his gavel. "Regarding the aforementioned charge of murder, this court finds the defendant, Vera Misham... not guilty."

The second tap of the gavel was quickly lost among the roar of the gallery and the bangs of the confetti guns. Apollo couldn't help a sigh of relief, letting out the breath he hadn't noticed he was holding.

"We did it, Polly!" Trucy cried, grabbing at Machi's arm while her other hand gripped the back of Apollo's cape.

"Vera is innocent!" Machi gleefully added, bouncing against Apollo's right and making similar grabs at his sister.

"You bet," Apollo chuckled, and hugged his giggling siblings tight.

Across the room, Klavier simply closed his eyes, leaning on one arm against his bench.

A soft laughter broke through the cheering, and Apollo looked up to see Kristoph doubled over behind the witness stand, his entire body shaking. The former attorney spoke no words, only continued to laugh, louder and louder, as the confetti settled on the ground around him. Even the gallery was silenced as his voice overpowered their celebration, the entire courtroom watching in
silent wonder at the true culprit of Drew Misham's murder mindlessly cackling in front of them. After a few moments, the prison guards stepped forward to escort him away, one at each arm. Kristoph never once stopped as he was led out of the room and out of everyone's hearing.

Even with the source gone, Apollo heard that laughter echoing through the courthouse for the entire rest of the day.

Phoenix could only close his eyes as the verdict was announced, leaning against the nearby wall with a quiet sigh. Seated at their table, the six jurists were joining in the celebrations of the courtroom, with Clay, Maggey and Adrian actively cheering while Iris clapped. Luke rushed to his friend, the vet and astronaut loudly congratulating each other as Clay resumed his customary hanging off his friend's neck. Nearby, Thalassa grinned widely, her eyes firmly on the live feed of the courtroom. Opposite her, Maya similarly grinned, getting up from her seat and turning towards Phoenix, who was stood behind her chair. He barely had the time to raise his eyebrows before she had pounced, hands on his shoulders and lips on his. He was so surprised by the rush of endorphins in his brain, his hands already moving to her hips, that it took him a moment to register when she pulled away, cheekily waving a familiar blue beanie in her grip.

"Won't be needing this anymore, old man!"

Although Phoenix agreed, a part of him was still doubtful, stuck in the entrenched habit and the fear that had led him to make the cyan hat such an integral part of his daily wear. "Maya..." He reached out to take the item back, but Maya only moved it behind her back and deftly switched hands, shoving the beanie deep underneath her obi.

"Nuh-uh, Nick." Maya gave Phoenix a wink. "No more hiding."

Phoenix couldn't do more than look at Maya with an expression somewhere between fond and irritated exasperation, shoving his hands back in his pockets.

The laughter at the witness stand brought the Jurists' Chambers to silence just as quickly as it did the courtroom, attracting everyone's attention to the man in the centre of the screen. Phoenix's hands curled into fists, and he kept a stern gaze on the screen. 'You lost, Kristoph. It's over.'

The screen abruptly flickered and turned off, killing Kristoph's cackles from the speakers. Confused, Phoenix spun around to where his son stood by Clay's chair, tablet computer in his hands.

Luke looked around the room with a proud and determined look, his eyes landing on his father's. "I don't think we need to hear whatever Kristoph Gavin has to say."

Phoenix could only smile back.

Edgeworth stepped forward from where he'd been lingering by the door, clapping his hands once to attract the room's attention. "On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you all for participating in our little experiment today." He adjusted his glasses, half-hiding the smile he had directed at the six jurists. "Even if nothing comes of this in the long term... You have all chosen to save an innocent life, and should be very proud."

Clay punched the air with a loud "WHOOP!"
Luke dodged his friend's fists with a laugh. "I think they are, Mister Edgeworth!"

"We're just doing our duty to see justice done," Maggey insisted, sitting back in her chair with a relaxed grin. "We wouldn't have agreed to this otherwise."

"I imagine this is what you all live for as attorneys," Adrian added, staring up at the ceiling thoughtfully. "Franziska's right. You really have to experience it yourself, don't you?"

Iris brushed her fingers against her chin, eyes down. "I'm not so sure I'd want to be in the actual courtroom, though."

Maya clapped her hands together with a grin. "Well, I thought we all did good today! And I'm sure the chair of the committee agrees, don't you?"

Phoenix grunted as the spirit medium shoved an elbow in his gut, and nodded. "Yup. Sure."

"So let's party, huh?" Giggling, Maya ran to Thalassa's side, giving the older woman a hug.

The room once more sparked with conversation, the jurists all getting to their feet and talking between themselves. Phoenix stood back against the wall, watching the small groups and how they split off to intermingle. Iris moved to join Maya and Thalassa, while Luke and Clay similarly stuck together, and Maggey and Adrian passed through both before gravitating to Edgeworth. Luke then moved towards Thalassa and the Feys, Clay joining him, and the five seemed, to Phoenix, very enthusiastic as they discussed whatever it was they were talking about. Phoenix couldn't help a smile, proud to see his family happy.

"Mister Wright?"

The voice to his left surprised Phoenix from his train of thought, and he turned to see Maggey standing nearby, Adrian and Edgeworth not far behind her. He gave them a polite smile. "Missus Gumshoe?"

Maggey crossed her arms, a single eyebrow raised. "You knew this case tied to your disbarment from the start, didn't you?"

"Oh, no, of course not," Phoenix readily replied, grinning widely. "Learning what Drew Misham really was was a complete surprise."

"So switching to this case at the last minute was a total coincidence?"

"Yup."

Maggey stared at him a moment longer, then sighed, shaking her head. "Well. I'll be sure to tell Dick everything that happened over the past couple of days. He'll be happy to know there really was nothing he could have done... He still feels guilty about it, you know."

Phoenix blinked. "Really? But Gumshoe had nothing to do with it."

"Neither did you," Maggey pointed out. "Didn't stop you blaming yourself. And don't say you didn't, because it was written all over your little 'Mason System'."

Trying not to wince, Phoenix turned away, running a hand through his hair. It still felt a little weird not wearing his beanie, but at least his spikes would be somewhat neater now. "Technically, Luke wrote that."
"And who'd know you better than your own kid?" Maggey chuckled. "Doesn't matter. That's all I had to say. Oh, and congratulations."

Phoenix looked back at her with a raised eyebrow. "Congratulations...? For what, exactly?"

Adrian giggled. "What do you think? Like Apollo was saying today, the court of public opinion is a very different beast to the court we just sat through, and I think you've been proven innocent after all this."

"Oh, uh, maybe," Phoenix muttered, shrugging as he tried not to blush. "I suppose so."

"Nothing was ever officially proven in the first place," Edgeworth pointed out with a smile. "I agree with Adrian. After all the work we've put into this, we seem to have emerged with at least one of our goals met."

Phoenix bit back a twitch at the corners of his lips. "I guess so."

"No need to hide the infuriatingly smug grin, either," Edgeworth added, though his smile didn't fade. "For once, you have every right to be proud of yourself."

"Why, Edgeworth, that's not like you," Phoenix joked, letting the grin spread across his face.

Adrian laughed. "So, when are you getting your badge back, Mister Wright?"

Phoenix froze, his cheerful expression fading. "Uh..."

"I'm sure you won't wait a moment to retake the bar exam, huh?" Maggey snickered, then turned to Adrian. "Actually, I need to get going. You wanna drop in on Apollo with me before I head home?"

"Sure!" Adrian chirped. "We gotta congratulate him, too!"

Edgeworth nodded as he waved the women towards the door. "I'll accompany you. I have my own work to get back to as well."

"See ya later, Mister Wright!" Maggey called, and the trio headed to the door.

Phoenix only sighed as they left the room.

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It was Machi who led the charge towards the defendant lobbies, hurrying after the figure in purple who was scurrying away ahead of them. They caught up just inside the doors into the private hallway outside.

"Mister Prosecutor!"

His hand already reaching for the door into his assigned lobby, Klavier paused and looked around, though it was abundantly clear he had to force the thin smile as he saw the three Wrights approaching him. "Ah, our victorious defence team. Greetings."

"Are you alright?" Apollo asked. "I mean, we just watched your brother get hauled off in chains..." He paused, shrugging uncomfortably. "Again..."

Klavier shook his head. "You were just doing your job to see justice done... as was I. Kristoph must face the punishment for his crimes." He sighed. "I would hope, were the situation reversed, you would still fight for the right outcome." A smile twitched at his lips as he turned to Machi. "Am I correct, Monsieur Tobaye?"

Machi blushed, gripping his elbow tight. "Oh, um, that is not..."

"I heard you were under probation, but I never imagined you had been taken in by the Wrights." Klavier chuckled, then turned to Trucy. "And you, Fraulein? Discussing your father's death can't have been easy."

Trucy subtly winced, quick enough that Apollo was sure only he had noticed. "I'm alright," she insisted through a forced smile. "I already knew he was gone. And he disappeared a long time ago."

Apollo rested a hand on her shoulder in silent support. To Klavier, he continued, "Talking about that case can't have been easy for you, either. I..." His mouth felt dry, and Apollo had to mentally kick himself to get the words out. "I'm sorry for blaming you all this time. I guess you really did have nothing to do with it."

Klavier laughed, surprising the young attorney. "On the contrary, my failure to think and my inexperience condemned an innocent man. Potentially two innocent men, if you tell the truth about your grandfather."

Apollo noticed his siblings shooting him confused looks out of the corner of his eyes.

"It was the least I could do to correct the mistakes made in my youth." Klavier ran a hand through his hair, smile fading. "He must have known from the beginning. That's why Prosecutor Edgeworth personally asked me to take this case at the last minute."

"Oh! Uncle Edgeworth!" Trucy turned to her eldest brother. "Didn't you say he was supposed to prosecute this trial?"
Apollo nodded. "I was actually looking forward to it, too. They used to call him Dad's rival, and Dad said he was once known as the Demon Prosecutor. I probably would've lost, given my skills right now, but it would have been interesting to face off against him."

Unnoticed, Klavier's gaze focussed behind the Wrights, eyes wide.

"Maybe will still happen one day," Machi suggested. "On other case."

"Maybe," Apollo agreed, giving his brother a smile. "Maybe I'll be good enough by then to have a chance, too."

"As long as your client is innocent, I don't think you'd have anything to worry about."

Apollo paled, spinning on his heel to find the source of the voice: A smirking man in a burgundy suit, standing by the hallway door behind them, and flanked by two shorter women. Apollo could barely contain his surprise. "Uncle Edgeworth!?"

Trucy squeaked, also turning to face the three new arrivals. "Maggey! Auntie Adrian!"

"Hi!" Adrian chirped, giving the girl a wave.

"Hello!" Machi replied, waving back.

"W-what are you three doing here!?" Apollo cried, eyes wide.

Maggey snorted in laughter. "We were watching the trial, weren't we?" She poked Apollo's arm with a wink. "We even told you we were!"

Apollo blushed, running a hand through his hair.

"Congratulations on the trial, both of you," Adrian added, looking between Apollo and Klavier. "I'm sure Franziska would say the same, were she here."

Trucy giggled. "She'd just say it wasn't perfect enough."

"I agree with Trucy," Edgeworth added, smiling. "I think that would have been more of a nightmare trial for Franziska."

"It was a nightmare trial for us," Apollo muttered, arms crossed. He noticed Klavier nodding behind him.

Maggey snorted, waving off the complaint. "Well, if I could stick around and discuss it, I would, but I have to get going. Congrats again, huh?" She patted Apollo's shoulder. "We'll talk later, won't we?"

Apollo nodded, giving her a smile. "Sure."

"Until later, Maggey," Adrian added, waving as the other woman turned and walked away.

"Say hi to little Felicia for us!" Trucy called, bouncing on her heels.

"I will!" Laughing, Maggey slipped through the doors and left the hallway.

Apollo turned to Edgeworth, scratching the back of his head nervously. "So, um... Did you mean what you said earlier? That I wouldn't have had anything to worry about?"
The prosecutor smiled, his eyes lost in thought. "You've learned your courtroom tactics from your father... which isn't surprising. Or, should I say he's taught you the tactics he learned from the great Mia Fey?" He chuckled, pushing his glasses up his nose. "She would have been before your time, Prosecutor Gavin. I'd look her up if I were you. Truly a legend of her era."

Klavier quickly nodded, and Apollo noticed he was staring at Edgeworth with something closely resembling awe. "O-of course, Prosecutor Edgeworth."

"I criticise, but Ms Fey and Wright were both highly accomplished and widely respected defence attorneys over their careers... before said careers were suddenly cut short, anyway. It's not a bad idea to emulate their methods," Edgeworth then looked between Apollo and Klavier with a stern gaze. "However, what made Wright and I such a good team when we faced each other had nothing to do with that. We attorneys fight to find the truth, yes, but the only way to ensure that happens is to give your all doing so... and to trust your opponent is doing the same. As long as the truth is on your side, you should always be able to shoot down any arguments to the contrary."

Apollo nodded. He'd heard that speech before from Phoenix, but a glance at the closely listening Klavier told him this was all new to the young prosecutor. Klavier's eyes certainly seemed to say he was taking this direct advice to heart.

"In theory, anyway." Edgeworth smiled, then turned specifically to Apollo. "One last thing before I go: With suspicions raised against Kristoph Gavin as a forger, doubtless there will be investigations at the prosecutor's office into all his past cases. If he's had anyone else falsely convicted or acquitted, we need to know."

Klavier frowned, pained, and looked away. Apollo tried and failed to not tense up in response.

Machi gasped. "You think he do that to someone else too?"

"Really?" Adrian gave the eldest Wright a concerned frown. "You worked with him, didn't you, Apollo? Did you suspect him of forgery before?"

Apollo couldn't reply, avoiding everyone's gazes. The chaos of that trial the previous year still haunted him for a reason... and, somehow, he was hearing Kristoph's unhinged laughter weaving through it.

Trucy watched her eldest brother carefully. "Polly?"

"If I am required for these investigations," Klavier said to Edgeworth, interrupting the two, "I must ask-"

"There's no need for you to be involved," Edgeworth assured him. "I think the prosecutors who faced him should be handling the responsibility of their own trials... although we shall have to improvise for any he faced who are no longer working in this district." He returned his attention to Apollo. "In any case, I'm sure you made notes on all the cases you assisted him with. I'd advise you go over them. You know how to contact me if you find anything even the slightest bit suspicious."

Apollo remembered his first visit to the prosecutor's office nearly a year ago, and smiled, meeting his uncle's gaze. "Yeah. Thanks, Uncle Edgeworth."

Edgeworth only smiled and gave his nephew a nod. "I'm sure I'll see you three again soon at some or other kind of family get-together."

"Oh yes, Mister Wright will be wanting to get his badge back!" Adrian laughed. "We'll probably see each other for some kind of celebration then, huh? Franziska can threaten to defeat him in court in
Trucy giggled, bouncing on her heels. "Daddy will love that!"

"You sure, Truce?" Apollo asked her, not bothering to hide his smirk.

Edgeworth shook his head, similarly failing to hide his amusement. "Until then." With that, he turned and left.

"See you three later!" Adrian added, and moved to follow.

"Bye, Auntie Adrian! Bye, Uncle Edgeworth!" Trucy called, waving. Machi waved with her.

As the pair disappeared out the door, Klavier sighed, a dreamy look on his face that Apollo had never seen before. "Prosecutor Edgeworth gave me advice..."

Apollo and Trucy hid snickers. Machi just looked confused.

View the Court Record
"Papa!"

Phoenix grinned as he approached his son, joining the excited group that had formed from the remaining members of the jury and committee. "Yo."

"Your name's been cleared, Feenie!" Iris cheered, much more energetic than Phoenix had been expecting. "You can be an attorney again!"

"Ooh, yeah!" Clay laughed boisterously, arm looped over Luke's shoulders. "The way 'Pollo used to talk about you, the fact that you had a fan club? There'll be a ton of people happy to see you with a badge again!"

Phoenix hid an uncomfortable grimace behind a grin. "Ah, yes, I'm... sure they would be."

"That reminds me, we should probably go find Pearl and congratulate Apollo," Luke said, elbowing Clay with a grin.

Iris gasped. "That's right! I promised Pearly we'd meet up right after the trial so I could ask about the research she was doing!" She hummed uncertainly, twirling a finger in her hair. "I hope she found all my books okay..."

"She did, don't worry," Phoenix was quick to assure her. "She was a lot of help."

Maya waved at the three, pressing against Phoenix's side with a hand pressed to his back. "You guys go ahead, we'll catch up. And don't forget," she held a finger to her mouth with a conspiratorial grin, "not a word about our new friend here, 'kay?"

Thalassa chuckled, self-consciously brushing at her hair.

Clay laughed loudly. "Aw, don't worry, Ms Fey! I've not told 'Pollo anything so far, right?"

Luke gave him an unamused look. "You literally haven't spoken to him since you found out."

Clay just snorted, shoving his friend and heading for the door. Luke sighed, gave his father a wave, and followed.

"We'll see you later then, Mystic Maya," Iris said, rushing after the boys.

Left alone with Maya and Thalassa, Phoenix took a deep breath and let it out with a loud exhale. "Well. That was certainly a trial, huh?"

Maya giggled. "Yeah, your name's been cleared and everything!" She nudged him with her hip. "So no more excuses about your reputation ruining Kurain, huh?"

Phoenix rolled his eyes. "Sure, sure." He gave her a tired but genuine smile. "You're just dying to show me off up in the village, aren't you?"
"Duh." Maya pressed tighter to his side, winking. "So, five years dating. When are you planning on marrying me?"

Thalassa's eyes widened. "You two have proposed?"

"I guess so!" Phoenix laughed, but then he paused to think, rubbing his chin. "Which would make the wedding... the day you get back from Khura'in?"

Maya's smile died, and she stepped back. "Oh. Yeah."

Phoenix winced. "S-sorry."

"N-no, it's fine." Maya sighed, shaking her head. "It's true, after all."

Thalassa gave the two a sympathetic look. "You do have until Maya leaves, don't you?"

Phoenix and Maya could only look at each other for a long moment, their hands silently reaching out and clinging tight. Phoenix quietly asked, "Have you decided on a date? Booked your plane?"

Maya shook her head.

Phoenix forced a small smile. "Well... It's not the end yet."

Releasing a quiet whine at the back of her throat, Maya leaned forward to press her forehead against Phoenix's shoulder. "I hate this, Nick..."

Although he was trying not to laugh, Phoenix patted his partner's back. "I know. Maybe we should catch up to the kids?"

"I'll walk with you a little way," Thalassa offered.

Maya quickly pulled herself together, forcing a smile for the older woman. "That's nice of you, Thalassa. We can keep the kids occupied while you sneak out, and meet up again for the reunion tomorrow."

Phoenix nodded. "A good idea. We need to go talk to them, anyway."

"Apollo!"

The young defence attorney looked up from his snickering at Klavier, surprised to see the door into the hallway once more opening to admit a small group of people. "Is that-?"

"Luke!" Machi cried, running to meet the first through the door and immediately clinging to the vet's middle. "We won!"

Luke laughed, hugging the boy back. "Of course you did! Vera didn't kill anyone, did she?"

Coming in at Luke's back, Clay made a beeline for Apollo, slapping the shorter man's shoulder. "Y'know... that really wasn't that bad, 'Pollo. Well done."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "The hell are you doing here? Weren't you busy?"
Clay snorted, tapping the side of his nose. "Told you I could keep a secret if I wanted to."

"Mister Nick said it was a very important case, so I had to come." Pearl gave her cousin a tight hug. "He also told me not to tell you so you wouldn't worry about me. He said you had a lot to worry about without me hanging around as well."

Apollo winced, rubbing the back of his head. "Y-yeah, he... Dad probably had a point there."

"You came too, Iris?" Machi asked. "Does that mean Maya is here?"

Apollo sighed, then rounded on Clay with a whack from the back of a hand. "If you were so 'busy' because you were watching my trial, why was it such a secret? And how'd you know it was happening before I even got assigned to it? Dad didn't tell me anything until the day after you got that call!"

Klavier hummed in thought, snapping his fingers. "Tell me, Herr Forehead... Did this call you mention happen to be after nine this past Tuesday evening?"

Apollo frowned, tapping a finger against his forehead. "Um... Yeah, it was after Trucy's and my show at the Wonder Bar, on Tuesday, and it wasn't until Wednesday Dad put me on the case."

Klavier grinned. "I also wasn't assigned to this case until Wednesday. Tell me, aside from Herr Wright and Prosecutor Edgeworth, who else unrelated to the case would have known about the trial almost immediately after Drew Misham's death, before even us attorneys?"

Apollo could only shrug, nothing coming to mind. "Um...?"

"Phoenix asked us to be jurists," Iris explained, gesturing between herself and Clay with a smile. "He actually asked us weeks ago, though we didn't know when the trial was happening until Tuesday evening."

"You WHAT!?"

Clay laughed, shaking his red-faced friend via his grip on Apollo's shoulder. "You oughta thank us, 'Pollo. Making us sit through a boring trial? We did that for you, you know." Before Apollo could sputter a reply, the astronaut had turned his grin to Klavier. "I was actually going to vote for you, too. Like your music, man."

"Danke," Klavier replied, returning a small nod of his head. "Though I'd hope you'd vote for the truth rather than a person, Herr... whatever your name is."

"Clay Terran." The astronaut grinned widely. "Nice to meet you, Mister Gavinner."

"'Gavin', actually."

Apollo finally regained his ability to speak, gesticulating wildly towards the prosecutor as he shot his friend a glare. "You were going to vote for him!? Why!?"

"Hey, I can't vote for you just cuz you're my friend, can I?" Clay pointed out with an innocent grin. "Gotta follow the evidence and witnesses and stuff, like Mister Wright said. 'Sides, we all voted for
"That's true," Iris agreed. "It was a unanimous 'Not Guilty'."

"So you can't be mad at me." Clay leaned heavily on his friend's caped shoulder, tapping Apollo's chest with one pointed finger. "Cuz I did vote to free Vera. We all did."

Apollo grumbled, arms tightly crossed, but said nothing.

"Maya was a jurist too," Luke explained. "And I was helping out behind the scenes with the technical side of things. You know how awful Papa is with that stuff."

Trucy let out a slightly exaggerated gasp. "That's what you were doing!" She firmly tapped her brother's elbow with a stern look. "We really missed having you around for the investigation, you know!"

Luke waved her off with a good-natured scoff. "Oh, I knew you'd be just fine without me. Papa needed my expertise more than you did."

Apollo sighed, shoving the laughing Clay off his shoulder. "Still missed having your help..." He frowned. "Wait, were Maggey and Adrian...?"

"They were jurists," Luke giggled. "Papa told me everyone was picked to have equal bias between you and Mister Edgeworth," he shrugged, "even though that kinda got messed up by the change of prosecutor."

Apollo pressed a hand to his face. "Great."

Klavier laughed. "As long as the right verdict was reached, I suppose it doesn't matter who they were." He turned to Clay. "Speaking of, if you are a fan of the Gaviners, Herr Terran, I'd advise you keep an eye on the news over the next few days."

Clay shrugged. "Well, I wouldn't really say I'm a 'fan'. I just like good music."

Trucy gasped, jumping to Klavier's side with a grin. "News? You mean you're finally working on a new album?"

"I'm afraid not, Fraulein. We haven't officially announced it yet only because I was waiting for the right time... to see if I would change my mind." Klavier sighed, shaking his head. "It's not every day you get a trial that rocks harder than one of our gigs, ja? That's why it's over. The Gaviners are breaking up."

Clay's eyebrows shot up. "Huh. That's a shame."

"What?" Trucy squeaked, already blinking back tears. "But you can't be... You can't be breaking up!"

Apollo was shocked for an entirely different reason. "Huh. I thought you already did that after Detective Crescend's arrest."

"Polly!" Trucy slapped her brother's arm, ignoring his quiet "Ow," as he took a step back. "I really liked their music! I was even going to buy some of their stuff now we know Prosecutor Gavin didn't deliberately take Daddy's badge!"

"Trucy, there's no need to hit anyone," Luke softly pointed out, stepping forward and gently guiding
his sister away from their elder brother. "Besides, I thought Athena already gave us all their music."

"We didn't get any of their tour videos!" Trucy protested, spinning around to face Luke. "Or their other merchandise! And there was a CD she missed! Um... I forget its name right now, but it was from around the same time she sent us those!"

Luke shrugged, then gave his sister a smile. "Well, why don't we go look for them on the way home? I'll buy some for you."

Trucy sniffed, rubbing at her nose, but was undeniably intrigued. "You will?"

Apollo scoffed. "At least make her get them with her own pocket money..."

Klavier laughed. "Ah, Fraulein, I do apologise. Perhaps I can come by your office some day and sign your CDs, in return for all the help you have given us over this past year."

Trucy's awed gaze turned to the prosecutor. "R-really?" She grinned. "Thank you, Prosecutor Gavin. I'd really like that!"

Apollo rolled his eyes, but decided not to ruin his little sister's dream with a snide comment.

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"Ooh, I hope we're not late for the party!"

Apollo looked up from his grumbling, seeing Maya coming through into the hallway like she owned the place, shooting everyone a cheerful grin. Behind her, Phoenix was carefully closing the door into the third floor lobby. Apollo sighed. "Mom. Dad. Always a pleasure."

"Mommy!" Trucy ran to give Maya a hug. "Luke said you were a jurist!"

"Aw, Nick was begging me to help out," Maya said with a grin, hugging the teenage girl back. "I just couldn't say no!"

"Objection, I didn't 'beg'."

While Maya was laughing at the response, Apollo turned his attention to his father, eyes widening. More than hearing the word 'objection' coming from his father's lips again, there was something else that had changed since their brief meeting the previous day. "Dad... You're not wearing your hat. In public."

Everyone's attentions turned to the former lawyer sheepishly running a hand through his spiky black hair. Pearl gasped, "Oh yes! I didn't even notice!"

Phoenix chuckled, his cheeks a little pink. "Ah, well... I figured it's kinda warm in this courthouse, so I may as well take it off and-"

"Oh, you mean this hat?" Grinning, Maya pulled the familiar cyan beanie from her robes, waving it triumphantly. Immediately, Phoenix lunged for it, but Maya only continued to hold it out of his reach, cackling. "Nuh-uh, Nick! You don't need this anymore!"

Undeterred, Phoenix continued to make grabs for the hat. "At least give it back!" Sighing, he stepped back and gestured to the giggling Trucy nearby, changing his tactic with a smirk. "Trucy here made that thing for me! Don't you think it would upset her if I stopped wearing it so suddenly?"

Trucy broke into hysterical laughter, while Luke bit his lip to hide laughter of his own. Apollo just shook his head with a chuckle. "Dad... By far, that is the worst decision in bluffing you've ever made."

Phoenix raised an eyebrow at his eldest son. "Ha ha. Believe me, it's not."

By now, Trucy had managed to calm herself, and shook her head with crossed arms and a knowing look. "Daddy, I made you that beanie to wear because everyone was being so mean to you after everything that happened with that trial. You weren't going to change your hair, so covering it to hide who you were was the only thing left to do."

Luke nodded. "Exactly. It wasn't hard to figure out why you were so attached to wearing it even in the summer, Papa. And we don't blame you for being so terrified of being recognised."
"I wasn't terrified," Phoenix muttered, running a hand self-consciously through his hair.

Apollo scoffed. "Yes you were. You're always readjusting it on your head, constantly trying to hide underneath it." As he spoke, he mimed the actions he had seen Phoenix do countless times over the years, though not as much in more recent years. "I'm pretty sure even Luke noticed eventually."

"Hey, what about me?" Clay asked, faking offence. "I noticed, too!"

"Sure you did," Apollo shot back with a smirk.

Maya shoved the beanie back into the depths of her kimono, while her other arm elbowed the badly blushing Phoenix. "Look, you trained him well! Now he's using his 'nervous habit spotting' on you, Nick!"

Phoenix hadn't moved the hand from his hair, glaring off to one side. "I didn't come down here to be mocked."

Machi stepped around to Phoenix's side, a hand on his arm. "B-but Isa, is not trial over? You not forger, so people not hate you now."

"Exactly!" Apollo laughed, gesturing to his youngest brother. "Why do you think we were fighting so hard for you all this time?"

Luke nodded. "What happened seven years ago wasn't fair to anyone. Not any of the Gramaryes - let alone Trucy - certainly not you," he gestured to Klavier, "and not even the prosecutor."

Apollo noticed Klavier blush heavily and take a step back. 'Man, I totally forgot he was even here. It's true though, what Luke said.'

"Speaking of," Maya took a few steps towards the prosecutor, giving him a concerned look, "I hope Nick didn't put you through more than you can handle, Prosecutor Gavin. He probably didn't warn you, huh?"

Klavier shook his head, managing a gentle chuckle despite his clear distress. "Do not worry, Fraulein. I did not warn Herr Wright of my plans for our trial seven years ago, either." The smile quickly faded as he turned his attention to Phoenix. "And... I cannot apologise enough for that. If I had given even the slightest bit of thought to Kristoph's plan, I wouldn't have-"

"Don't beat yourself up about it." Phoenix gave the younger man a smile, his hands in the front pocket of his hoodie. "Mistakes made in our youth, right? I made a few in my time too, thinking I was doing the right thing." He shrugged, grinning. "Probably."

"What do you mean 'probably'?" Maya muttered with a smirk.

Phoenix ignored her. "I'll admit, I was reluctant to fully believe Edgeworth when he said we could trust you after I lost my badge... but finally knowing what really happened after all these years is... heartening." He stepped past Maya, then held his hand out towards the young prosecutor with a smile. "No hard feelings, Klavier Gavin."

Klavier ran a hand through his hair, eyebrows pressed together as though he couldn't believe what was happening. "Herr Wright..." Finally, a genuine grin spread across his face, and he grabbed Phoenix's hand to enthusiastically shake. "Thank you, so much. Once your badge is returned, perhaps we can face each other in court again, ja? This time, we shall have a fair fight!"

Phoenix laughed. "After all this time, I'd have to retake the bar exam first."
Klavier held back a gleeful giggle, then released Phoenix's hand and turned to offer it to Apollo.
"And Herr Forehead, the same goes for you! We must face each other once more in a courtroom, just as Prosecutor Edgeworth said, ja?"

Apollo grinned, happily taking the prosecutor's hand to shake. "I look forward to it, Herr Diva. 'And a part of me still doesn't believe I actually mean that, but I do.' "And if you ever decide to go back into performing, Trucy and I will always be happy to help if you need a magician handy." Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed said sister restraining excited gasps, and knew he'd made the right choice on what to say on her behalf.

"I shall keep your kind offer in mind," Klavier replied, still smiling hard enough to stun a Gavinners fangirl at twenty metres. Releasing Apollo's hand, he turned his gaze over to Trucy, Luke and even Machi. "You're the real stars, now. I look forward to our next jam session, however it may happen."

"Us too!" Trucy bounced on the spot, barely restraining her excitement.

Luke gave a calm nod. "Until we meet again, Prosecutor Gavin."

"Thank you," Machi added. "For everything."

Klavier gave them all one final grateful look, then headed out of the hallway with only a confident rock star wink as his goodbye.

Apollo stared at the door, a smile lingering on his face. "You know... he wasn't such a bad guy in the end. Prosecutor Gavin."

"We always knew that," Luke pointed out. "Circumstances just made it difficult to accept."

"Plus, you're kinda naturally suspicious of people, 'Pollo," Clay added. He only snorted with laughter when Apollo replied by whacking his friend on the arm.

Iris nodded, looking out over the assembled Fey-Wright family. "At least it's all over now. Kristoph Gavin's crimes will face justice, and Phoenix can get his badge back. The nightmare is over."

"It is," Phoenix agreed, his voice sounding far away. After a moment, he turned to Apollo with a smile. "I almost forgot. You did really well in there today. Congratulations."

Apollo blushed, shrugging. "Well... It was something I'd been preparing myself to do for six years. I had to be at my best for you, Dad."

Phoenix stared back at his son, his expression full of pride and fatherly adoration. He pulled Apollo into a hug, which the young lawyer gladly returned. "You're always at your best, in my opinion. I knew you wouldn't let me down."

Apollo had to squeeze his eyes shut to hold back the happy tears. "Thanks, Dad."

"Aw, we're so proud of you, kiddo!" With a thud, Apollo felt Maya slam against their side, joining in the hug, and as Apollo opened his eyes, he saw Trucy, Machi, Luke and Pearl all hurrying to join in, thoroughly sandwiching the two eldest Wrights in the middle. Only Iris and Clay stayed away, the former hiding a laugh while the latter linked his hands behind his head, grinning widely.

"Today's like... the end of an era!" Trucy cried, from somewhere in the vicinity of Apollo's left shoulder. "We're friends with Prosecutor Gavin, the secret mission is over, Vera is innocent... and Daddy can get his badge back!"
"Everything's looking up!" Pearl agreed.

With a laugh, the group broke the hug, and Apollo stepped back to wrap his arms around Trucy and Machi, who had ended up either side of him. Around him, all he could see were the smiles of his friends and family shining back at him, and he couldn't keep his own grin off his face. "You know what? That's what this trial was really about in the end: Hope. We were fighting to find the hope we'd lost seven years ago. And I think we found it."

Phoenix chuckled, placing his hands on the backs of Maya and Pearl, who had also ended up either side of him. "That we did."

Luke giggled, similarly linking Pearl and Trucy at his sides. "So, we're heading home now?"

"Yes!" Trucy enthusiastically agreed. "We need to celebrate Polly's win!"

"You kids have fun!" Maya leaned against Phoenix's side, not noticing the confused look he was giving her. "Pearly, would you be okay staying with your sister or cousins tonight?"

Pearl's and Trucy's eyes met, excited grins spreading across their faces. "Sure, Mystic Maya!" The young spirit medium leaned forward to achieve eye contact with her sister outside the circle. "Iris, would it be okay if I stayed with Trucy tonight?"

Iris smiled, nodding her head. "That's fine with me."

Phoenix was still frowning at Maya. "Why? What are you planning?"

Maya rolled her eyes. "Duh. Your reputation's been cleared. I'm taking you up to Kurain for the night, Nick." She poked his chest, smirking at the former lawyer. "We're in desperate need of some private time to 'celebrate', ourselves."

"I don't like the way you said 'celebrate' there," Phoenix muttered.

Apollo and Luke shared an amused look. "We'll see you when you get back, then," Luke offered.

"Have fun," Apollo added.

Phoenix sighed, but gave in to his partner's demands without further complaint. "Alright. You kids will be okay tonight?"

Machi rapidly nodded. "We will, Isao!"

"I'll look after them," Apollo promised.

"Good." Finally, Phoenix dropped his hand from Pearl's back and turned to Maya with a smile. "Shall we go, then?"

Clay snorted as he waved at the pair. "Seeya tomorrow, then? For the thing?"

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "What 'thing'?"

"Clay's just joking," Luke hurriedly explained, his grin forced. "Y'know, all the secrets we've been keeping from you over the past few days."

Apollo didn't miss Phoenix, Maya, Iris and Pearl shooting Clay various levels of disapproving frowns. Although he was still suspicious, the young lawyer decided to let it go. "Fine. Whatever. I've had enough of secrets for one week.'
They wasted no time leaving the courthouse together.
After leaving the rest of their family at the courthouse (Iris stayed behind, planning to return to Kurain alone at a later time), Phoenix and Maya ventured up to the small village in the mountains and on to Fey Manor. Maya took the lead, though Phoenix didn't mind so much, focussed on the lingering nervousness inherent in being hatless in public for the first time in seven years. Despite the pep-talk from his children and the comforting knowledge that word would quickly spread of his cleared name, he was still fighting the urge to pull up his hood or keep a hand over his spikes to hide them from view. In a way, it was a good thing Maya had physically taken his beanie away, because he was pretty sure he'd've kept wearing it otherwise. It didn't matter that it had been seven years since he'd last been at the receiving end of a bad reaction to someone recognising him, he'd been dwelling on the possibility for long enough it was habit to do so. Having Maya so close, her hand in his, helped distract him.

The nervousness of his missing hat faded once Phoenix got off the bus in Kurain Village, and Maya wasted no time in dragging him straight into Fey Manor.

"Well, that wasn't so bad, was it?"

Phoenix scoffed good-naturedly, pulling off his sandals to throw in the cubby-holes by the front door. "I dunno, I saw at least four different people looking our way."

Maya gasped, giving Phoenix a scandalised look. "Ooh, you should have told me! If it were another woman, I could have slapped her for staring at my man!"

Laughing, Phoenix shoved his hands in his hoodie pocket. "I didn't take you for the jealous type. Besides, what if this other woman was gay?"

"Then it's your job to slap her for looking at your woman, isn't it?" Maya stuck out her tongue, shooting Phoenix a wink. As he chuckled at her reply, she flounced off into the house. "Now come in here. I've got limited time with you tonight and I want to make the most of it."

Phoenix shook his head. "Impatient, aren't you?" Regardless, he followed his partner through to the hallway.

Maya was first to the master bedroom, pulling the tie and beads from her hair as she hurried to her desk. She wasted no time in dumping the hair decorations and her necklace with it, sighing as she
turned to piling up the loose papers littered nearby. "Man, I forgot about all this stuff..."

Phoenix smiled, leaning against the door-frame as he watched her from behind. After everything that had happened that day, and knowing they were completely alone in her large mansion, he simply couldn't resist a chance to admire the woman he loved. How long had it been since they'd last had a truly private moment like this between them? Already he didn't want it to end.

"Sorry, I'll have to sort it out properly later." Maya shoved her papers into a drawer, then paused. She reached into her obi, pulling out Phoenix's beanie and turning it until she found the shocked-face badge pinned to its front, studying it carefully. "So... this is a spy camera?"

Phoenix pulled his eyes up from Maya's legs. "Uh, yep. Yes, it is." He wandered into the room, closing the door behind him purely out of habit. "Ema gave it to me when she came back to America at the beginning of the year."

Maya stared at it a moment longer. "How do you turn it off?"

"Can't." Phoenix shrugged. "It just records everything until its battery runs out. Or it gets plugged in to a computer."

Maya snorted, turning to Phoenix with a grin and waving the beanie. "Is that why you've always been such a prude? 'Cause you had this in your pocket the whole time?"

Phoenix shot her a smirk, making a grab for the beanie. As he expected, Maya immediately moved it out of his reach. He sighed, shoving his hands in the front pocket of his hoodie. "Would you believe me if I told you I honestly forgot about it most of the time?"

Laughing, Maya flipped the beanie inside-out in her hands. "Well, I certainly don't want it spying on us tonight!" With that, she pulled open another drawer of her desk and tossed the item inside, then slammed it closed again. "There!"

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "Well, I guess that would be enough to muffle our voices." He narrowed his eyes at her. "You are planning on giving it back eventually, aren't you?"

"Maybe." Grinning, Maya skipped to the bed and dropped onto the mattress, patting the blankets next to where she sat.

Rolling his eyes, Phoenix moved to sit at his girlfriend's side. "So, when was the last time we had this entire house to ourselves? Five years ago?"

"Nah, we've had the kids out a few times over the years." Maya snickered. "Is that why you've always been such a prude? Worried about the kids listening in?"

"After Apollo overheard our discussion a month or two back, that's a legitimate concern." After a pause, Phoenix shot her a confused look. "Is there a reason you've asked me that 'prude' question twice in two minutes?"

Maya just laughed, then slipped off the outer jacket of her traditional outfit. "For a former ace attorney, you're remarkably dense sometimes, Nick." She tossed the purple fabric unceremoniously on the floor. "What did you think we were planning to do up here tonight?"

Phoenix's eyes were on the abandoned jacket on the floor. "I... think I have an idea on what you're planning. 'To be fair, your flirting today isn't all that stronger than your usual level, Maya.'"

Maya fell back on the bed, badly hiding her giggles. "You honestly didn't suspect until now, did
"You?" Her hands were on her obi, unclipping the sash from around her waist. "You thinking of joining me, or am I relegated to having fun on my own again?"

"I guess I can't stop you." Phoenix sat back, watching with amusement as Maya struggled to pull her obi out from underneath her without sitting up, and she did finally extract the sash to toss on the floor with her jacket. The golden chain of her locket sparkled in the light as it moved, but Maya made no move to rescue it. Phoenix grinned. "Shall I wait outside, or did you want me to pose for you?"

Maya sighed, the smile fading from her face. She pushed herself back up into a sitting position, her hands holding the final layer of her robes closed over what Phoenix knew was only her bra and underwear underneath. "Nick... How long have we known each other?"

Phoenix frowned, eyes far away. "I'd say it's been... ten years now, huh? Ten years and just over a month since Mia died." The image of his mentor's crumpled body under the office window flashed across his mind, and he whispered, "I didn't even realise it had been that long."

Maya nodded, looking away. "We decided to be a couple in secret five years ago. Now your name's been cleared, so there's no need to be secretive." She turned her stern gaze to meet Phoenix's eyes. "You know that, don't you."

Phoenix just nodded, returning the solemn expression.

A smile twitched at Maya's lips, but quickly vanished. "Well then. I've been throwing myself at you for an entire decade now." She pressed a hand to his chest, clenching a fist around the grey fabric of his hoodie. "If you don't stop being a prude and give in now, today of all days... I am seriously going to explode."

Phoenix could only stare for a moment, surprised by his partner's intensity. After a few seconds' pause, he pulled his hands from his pocket and gently removed Maya's grip on his hoodie. As he tugged on the zipper, he pretended he couldn't see the small secret smile on Maya's face, taking off his beloved grey jumper and carefully placing it out of the way on the floor. "Don't step on it or anything."

Maya hid a snort. "I won't forget." To show how serious she was taking the request, she followed it up with a warm smile. "Thanks, Nick."

Phoenix smiled back, then shot her a cheeky look. "You were throwing yourself at me when you were a teenager?"

"Nick!" Maya gently whacked the giggling man with the back of a hand. "How could I not? My sister had just died and then this handsome stranger in a suit came out of nowhere and stopped at nothing to defend me against the entire world! Of course I had a crush on you!"

"So you've said." Phoenix crossed his arms, still grinning. "Y'know, if I'd given in back then, it would've been highly illegal."

Maya rolled her eyes. "I know that now. You honestly think a seventeen-year-old with a crush cares about a paedophilia law? Besides, when I came back from training, I was eighteen!"

"Still would've been creepy."

Maya just glared at Phoenix.

In return, Phoenix's grin faded. "I'm serious. You haven't heard of the 'creepy' rule?"
Confused, Maya shook her head.

"It's to calculate how much of an age-gap there can be in a romantic relationship before it gets creepy: Half the older person's age plus seven." Phoenix pointed at himself. "I was twenty-three when we met. The youngest my romantic partner could be before it was creepy would have been eighteen. You," he pointed at Maya, "were younger than that at the time, even ignoring that us dating would have been illegal then."

Maya frowned. "But then I did turn eighteen."

"Ah, but then I turned twenty-four. The lowest acceptable age went up to nineteen then."

Maya crossed her arms. "Nick, that was nearly an entire year. Our birthdays are three months apart! Are you saying those three months are when it's 'creepy' for you to date me!?"

Phoenix laughed. "No, of course not. The acceptable age goes up six months for every year, so it was still nineteen when I was twenty-five, and you turned twenty right after that. Once you were nineteen, it was officially not creepy. For the rest of our lives."

Maya stared in confusion a moment longer, then smiled. "Ah, I see. You were keeping track, weren't you? Waiting for it to not be 'creepy' that you liked me that way."

Phoenix grinned. "Possibly." Before Maya could do more than snort in amusement, he reached a hand into his pants pocket. "Oh yeah, almost forgot about this." He pulled out a small box, passing it casually into Maya's curious hands. "We were friends five years, dating another five... Let's not wait five more to take the next step, huh?"

Maya took her time carefully looking over the item. "Is... Is this...?" She pried open the box, only to gasp as she saw the simple silver ring inside. "Nick...!"

"I've had that hiding away in my room since my mother gave it to me when I was twenty," Phoenix explained. "Planned on proposing to Dollie with it, too. We both know how that turned out."

Squealing, Maya pulled the ring from the box to shove on her hand, only to huff when she found it too big to fit her finger. Ignoring Phoenix's chuckling, she put the ring back in the box and jumped to her feet to deliver the precious item to the desk across the room. "We'll have to get it resized before I go. And I think there's some traditional Main Family rings somewhere, too. We can pretend you proposed with those."

"Does it really matter?" Phoenix laughed. "Besides, you already asked me after the trial when we were getting married, so wasn't it you who proposed?"

"Details, schmetails." Maya waved off the comment, then dashed back across the room and leapt on Phoenix, pinning him to the mattress with a cheeky grin. Phoenix couldn't help noticing how the new position allowed her kimono to fall open, giving him a pleasantly enjoyable view of the lacy bra and bare skin underneath. "The important thing is, we both said yes. Shall we get to celebrating?"

Phoenix bit back a snort. "A bit of an uncomfortable position, and I can't get my clothes off at this angle, but sure, we can try."

Maya leaned down closer, lying on Phoenix's chest with their noses nearly touching. "I've been waiting ten years for this," she purred. "I want to savour every moment."

Phoenix could only smile, his eyes closing as Maya tilted her head and pressed her lips to his. Whatever she wanted to do tonight, he was open to follow Maya's lead.
View the Court Record
You may or may not have noticed, but the revised re-upload I mentioned has started going up over [here!](#) It's called 'Turnabout Adoption', specifically focussing on 2019 and heavily rewritten because those chapters are nearly 2 years old and desperately need it. xD

As for this version, it will continue until a good natural stopping point between Turnabout Succession and the next major storyline, then I will be moving updates to a new story under the same series as 'Turnabout Adoption'. I don't know yet where that point is, but you guys will know once I've figured it out. In any case, bookmark or subscribe to the [Luke and Apollo Wright series](#) if you want to be notified once this story stops.

"Mister Wright!"

"Hey, Ema... Any particular reason you woke us up from our well-deserved sleep-in this fine morning?"

"Us...? Ugh, never mind, I actually had some news for you about the defen-, well, Vera Misham!"

"Oh?"

"I *knew* you'd want to hear this! It's good news: She woke up!"

"She did? That's *great* news!"

"Eight-thirty on the dot, according to the doctors! She's in Hickfield Clinic actually. I'm on my way to give her the good news of her trial."

"Ah, a good idea. I'll want to see her myself, but the trip back into the city would take about an hour."

"You're outside the city?"

"Yeah, I... I decided to spend the night in the fresh mountain air. Vera shouldn't have to wait for me to hear the outcome of her trial, though. You go ahead and let her know that, and I'll see her as soon as I can."

"Sure. Did you want me to tell Apollo while I'm at it?"

"... Nah, I'll pass the message on. You can tell Prosecutor Gavin, though. I don't have his contact details."

"Eh, if I have to... Sure, I'll let the fop know. And I'll tell Vera you'll be dropping by, Mister Wright."

"Thanks a bunch, Ema. Talk to you later."
Once Phoenix had passed on Ema's message to Maya, the spirit medium hadn't wasted any time collecting up the piles of Steel Samurai DVDs Phoenix had only recently returned to her, shoving them into bags and dumping half into Phoenix's arms.

"Maya-!"

"C'mon Nick, you should know personally how mind-numbingly boring a hospital is to stay in!"

"True, but-"

"Then help me get these down to that hospital! Besides, I want to congratulate her personally."

Grinning, Maya managed to juggle her bags long enough to elbow Phoenix. "If she hadn't opened up, you'd never have cleared your name."

Phoenix could only laugh and shake his head.

"Oh!" Maya paused in her mad dash, running to her desk and pulling a blue pile of wool from a drawer. "Almost forgot!" She tossed it at Phoenix, warning him, "I better not see that on your head!"

It was a struggle not to drop the bags of DVDs, but Phoenix was able to catch his old beanie, giving the item a nostalgic smile. "Don't worry. I don't need it anymore." He didn't hesitate to stuff it in his hoodie pocket.

It was only as they saw the city outskirts flying past the train window Maya suggested they contact Thalassa.

_Vera woke up this morning so Maya and I are going to visit her. Did you want to join us?_

_That sounds like a good idea. Where is she?_

**Hickfield clinic, walking distance from People park, though I'd go through the park itself and down Kitaki Ave if I were you. We'll be there in about 20 min. See you outside?**

_I'll see you there_

The three-strong group - Phoenix couldn't help mentally referring to themselves as 'the Wright parents' despite only him bearing that name - entered the hospital reception together just as a much younger woman entered from the opposite side. She grinned as she spotted them, waving and rushing to meet them.

"Mister Wright!"

Phoenix smiled, his hands still full with plastic bags. "Ema. How's she doing?"

"Pretty good." The detective met them in the corner where the path from the door met the path into the wards, and shot an apologetic grin at the surly nurse manning the nearby reception desk. "She's stable, so they've moved her out of intensive care. I told her she's clear of suspicion and gave her a
... so she'll know the full story of what happened once she finishes with those. Obviously this isn't the end of her troubles, but at least she's free to mourn her father now." She then turned to Maya at Phoenix's side. "I don't believe we've met."

"Nope!" Maya carefully placed one of her bags on the floor, then stuck out a hand. "Maya Fey. Nick here's my fiancé. You must be Detective Ema Skye! I've heard a lot about you."

Ema smiled, though her eyes frowned in confusion. She hesitantly shook the offered hand. "I guess he told you about when he defended my sister, then? I wasn't aware he had a fiancée, though."

Maya snorted, rolling her eyes. "Yeah, hard to believe anyone would want to marry him, huh?"

"Hey..."

Ignoring Phoenix, Maya continued, "Anyway, I did hear that story from him, but mostly I've heard about you from the kids." She shot the younger woman a wink. "They never leave the detective out when they talk about one of Apollo's cases!"

Ema shrugged, blushing. "Aw, well, I do my best, despite the glimmerous fop they assigned me to." Releasing Maya's hand, she then turned to the woman next to her. "And yo-?" The moment her gaze took in the face in front of her, she jumped back, eyes wide. "Y-you're Lam-!"

Thalassa smiled. "Not so loud, if you could? I'd prefer not to attract attention." She held out a hand. "It's been a while, Detective Skye. I never expected to be blessed with the knowledge of what you looked like."

Ema managed a proud grin as she shook Thalassa's hand. "Oh, then, congratulations on getting your sight back! I never expected to see you again myself, especially not here of all places." She gestured to the room around them with a nervous laugh. "The very hospital we took you to after you got attacked back in July?"

"That was here?" Thalassa looked around curiously.

"It's a pretty big place, despite appearances," Phoenix cut in. At his side, Maya was picking up her dropped bags. "So, Vera?"

"Yes! Of course!" Clapping her hands, Ema gestured for the three to follow her, heading further into the building. "Right this way!"

Down the corridor Ema led them, to an otherwise inconsequential door on their left, a room Phoenix recognised as the same one he'd been stuck with following his run-in with Doctor Meraktis' car in June. Inside, sitting on her lonesome with her eyes glued to the TV on the neighbouring shelf, was young Vera Misham, hugging her knees. On the bed in front of her was her open sketchbook, a pencil lying on the blank surface of the paper.

"This is most unusual... Exactly what was going on with you folks? What exactly was your 'Troupe Gramarye' up to?"

"... By which you mean?"
"I'm just having trouble envisioning a man who would ask his students to kill him. Both of them, no less!"

"It's just my opinion, Herr Judge, but from these letters, I'd say he was coercing them, not asking them."

"We walked the magician's path together, and in so doing, shared much of our lives. When people are so close, there is strain; A warping of relations, you might say... Yet this has nothing to do with the case at hand."

The image of his younger self on the screen, staring suspicious holes in Valant's head, didn't bother Phoenix as much as he thought it might... though it occurred to him as he glanced at the frowning Thalassa that it might not be the best point of that trial for her to walk in on, whether she'd already seen this tape or not. With Ema waiting outside, he took the lead and strode towards the teen's bed, placing his bags on the floor. "Vera."

The young woman jumped, television forgotten as her wide eyes turned to her visitors. Her hands clenched tighter around her legs, knuckles white.

Phoenix kept up the friendly smile, standing beside the small table at the end of the bed and shoving his hands into his hoodie pocket. "My name's Phoenix Wright. I came to visit you and your father seven years ago. Do you remember that?"

Vera studied Phoenix's face for a long moment. Slowly, her tenseness eased. "I remember you." She turned away, fiddling with the TV remote to turn the device off, though she took her time returning it to the side table, the entire time keeping her eyes away from Phoenix. "The man with the sad eyes. You asked me a lot of questions... and promised to smile the next time we met."

"And I hoped to see you smile in return." Phoenix cocked his head to one side, watching the young woman with concern. "I'm just sorry it had to be under these circumstances."

At first, Vera didn't seem to have heard him, but finally she looked up again, meeting Phoenix's gaze. When he gave her a small smile, she was able to return a hesitant one of her own. "I think I'll be okay," she said. "I still don't fully understand what happened... but once I finish watching the videos the detective gave me... I will understand then."

Phoenix nodded. "It's all over now, at least. As much as we might like otherwise, we can't go back and change any of it."

Vera carefully considered his words, then nodded, another small smile flitting at the corners of her mouth.

"But, when you're done with the boring trial videos..." Maya bounced forward with a grin, holding up her plastic bags. "Nick and I brought something exciting for you to watch!" She laughed as she placed them on the table at the end of the bed. "Sure, it's not Troupe Gramarye, but it's at least as exciting as one of their shows!"

Vera grabbed at her sketchbook and pencil, hugging them to her chest as she stared warily at Maya. Phoenix hurriedly gestured between them. "Vera, this is Maya. She's-"

"Nick here's my fiancé," Maya boasted, then patted the plastic bag. "I lent him these when he was stuck here himself with a sprained ankle. They're perfect for staving off the boredom of a hospital
Vera looked at the bag a long moment before returning her gaze to Maya. "Thank you." Although she still seemed a little wary, she relaxed enough to loosen her grip on the sketchbook pressed to her chest.

Phoenix noticed with a glance behind him that the other two women of their group had also entered the room, Ema hanging back and watching as Thalassa stepped forward. The elder woman rounded Phoenix, headed to Vera's bedside. "Miss Misham, it's a pleasure to meet you." She held out a hand for the teen to shake. "My name is Thalassa Gramarye."

Ema suddenly descended into a coughing fit that sounded suspiciously like the word 'Gramarye'.

"I understand you were a fan of my father's troupe many years ago," Thalassa continued, ignoring the detective. "I can only apologise for how we ultimately failed you with that commemorative stamp."

Vera thought a moment, studying Thalassa's face. "That wasn't your fault." She bit her lip a moment, glancing away. "I... I recognise you. From the stamp. I used to stare at your faces... if I felt lonely."

Thalassa smiled, quietly withdrawing her unshaken hand without comment. "Then I'm glad our presence was of some help to you in a difficult time. As were my three children, from what I saw."

The choking sounds from Ema suddenly got louder. Maya left Vera's bedside to go attend to her. Vera spared only a glance for the detective in the doorway before returning her gaze to Thalassa. "Your... children?"

"Apollo, Trucy and Machi. My three treasures." Thalassa chuckled at the thought of the trio, seeing them in place of the hospital ward she stood in. "They don't know I'm here yet. I've been away for a while." The focus returned to her eyes, and she renewed her fading smile. "But if you still appreciate magic as an art form, Apollo and Trucy have followed in my family's footsteps and are rather accomplished in their craft now." She shrugged. "Admittedly I've not seen their act, but, from what I could hear, it was quite remarkable."

Vera thought in silence, nodding absently.

Phoenix chanced a look behind him, seeing Maya guiding a red-faced Ema out of the room. Hiding a smile, he returned his attention to Vera and Thalassa. "Y'know, it's a real miracle the both of you are alive today." He held a hand towards Vera, "Surviving atroquinine poisoning," then towards Thalassa, "and that bullet only giving you blindness and memory loss instead of killing you."

Thalassa laughed. "Fate is a strange thing, isn't it? Sometimes a life is taken, sometimes a life is spared." She frowned, pressing a hand to her chest. "Though, in a way, I didn't 'survive' that bullet. I left the troupe. My father used my 'death' against my husband and my 'brother'. Lamiroir was born in my place." She looked up towards Phoenix. "'Thalassa' was dead... right up until just last month."

Humming thoughtfully, Phoenix rubbed his chin. "You know what I've been thinking? People don't die that easily, really." He looked to Vera with a smile. "As long as they've got something worth living for."

While Thalassa nodded, Vera mused on Phoenix's words for a long moment. Finally, she looked up at the man with a smile that quickly turned into a grin. "Thank you, Mister Wright." She turned to Thalassa. "And thank you, Ms Thalassa. Even if you didn't do much... you tried to help me. Taking my good luck charm... and being an inspiration when I most needed one."
“Mister Wright helped organise your trial,” Thalassa was quick to point out, gesturing proudly to the man at her side. “He's done a lot on your behalf.”

"Ah, but it was you and the other jurists who ultimately gave Vera the not guilty verdict,” Phoenix shot back with a smirk.

Thalassa laughed. "And we made our decisions based on the arguments presented to us in the trial. If anyone deserves credit for that, it's Apollo and Prosecutor Gavin."

Vera placed her sketchbook back on the bed in front of her. "I knew those costumes. If Apollo and Trucy come from the same magic act I loved... Now I understand why."

"They'll probably come by to visit you themselves later." Phoenix grinned. "Maybe you could ask them to show you some of their tricks? They always love to show off."

Vera giggled and nodded.

"But do remember not to mention me to them," Thalassa added, holding a finger to her lips. "I'm surprising them later today."

"I won't. I promise." Vera then turned to Phoenix, reaching for the bag Maya had left on her bed. "Mister Wright? Please thank your fiancée for these. I appreciate it a lot."

Phoenix smiled. "I will, don't worry. And it wasn't any trouble."

[View the Court Record]
Chapter Notes

Make sure you haven't missed yesterday's chapter, guys! It went up eleven hours later than usual thanks to the AO3 outage.

October 10, 9:53AM
Hickfield Clinic

"You've got to be kidding me! All this time, Lamiroir was not only actually a member of Troupe Gramarye, but Apollo and Trucy's mother!?!"

Maya grinned. "Got it in one."

Phoenix copied her, also giving the stunned detective a nod. "That's a pretty good summary, yeah."

Thalassa was more sympathetic. "I'm sorry for surprising you. I was quite surprised myself, to be honest."

Ema huffed, clearly struggling not to pace the hallway and shooting furtive glances towards the bustle of the reception area. "Well. I guess it makes sense. They were telling me just the other day their mother was in Troupe Gramarye... and something about Machi being 'officially' their little brother." She chewed her lip for a moment. "They know, then?"

"As I understand, they figured it out the night of that concert," Phoenix explained, shrugging. "Apollo told Machi about a month later. Thalassa here knew once she regained her memory back in Borginia."

"They don't know she's back in the country yet, though." Maya winked, still grinning. "We're planning to surprise them later today."

Ema nodded. She seemed to have calmed down now, frowning in thought as she rested a hand on her hip.

"That reminds me." Phoenix pulled out his phone, idly composing a text. "I was waiting 'til we were done to tell Apollo Vera was awake. The kids'll probably want to come by themselves, after that trial."

Thalassa cast a fearful glance towards reception. "Are we meeting them here?"

"Oh no, don't panic," Maya was quick to assure, resting a hand on Thalassa's arm. "We'll be out of here before the kids arrive. There's no way we'll make you do this reunion in public. Okay?"

Sighing in relief, Thalassa gave Maya a grateful nod. "Yes... Thank you, Maya."

"Don't worry," Phoenix added, though he only glanced up from his phone. "We can go hide in the park or something until the kids are back in the office. I'll ask Luke to keep us updated on what
they're doing so we know a good time to drop in." He looked up at Thalassa with a grin. "They're gonna be ecstatic you're back for good, y'know."

Thalassa tried to smile, though she still looked worried, running her fingers through the hair laying over her shoulder. "I hope so."

"Oi!" Maya held her fists straight down from her shoulders with an offended glare. "Do you need me to give you another pep-talk? I'm gonna give you another pep-talk!"

Thalassa had to fight to restrain a laugh. "Maybe once we've left here? You both go to so much trouble helping me."

Maya rolled her eyes, crossing her arms. "Duh. That's what family does."

Phoenix hid a smile, slipping his phone back into his pocket as he turned to the quietly watching detective. "Thank you for all your help, Ema. We'll get out of your hair now."

Ema grinned. "That's fine, Mister Wright. I won't mention you were even here."

---

**Veras awake. She's in hickfield if you want to visit her.**

She is? Awesome! We'll go and see her then!

_Btw when are you and Mom coming back into the city?_

We'll work it out. Sometime today maybe :) .

Alright just let us know when you do. Pearly can't stay here forever yknow :)

---

_I'm assuming you're with the others so if they ask I'm telling you Vera's awake and where she is. I'm headed to the park with Maya and Thalassa rn. Could you keep me updated on your movements?_

Sure. Are we getting ready for the reunion, then?

Got it in one ;) .

_I'll let you know once we arrive at Hickfield. We're heading there now._

You're a godsend :) .

---

October 10, 9:51AM

Wright Anything Agency
Even though it was a Saturday, and the office wasn't technically open, Luke still showed up that morning at nine on the dot to check on his siblings and cousin after the emotional roller-coaster of the previous week. The leftover glee from the win in court had yet to fade, Trucy and Pearl still giggling together as they had for most of the night, enjoying their 'sleepover' in Trucy's room. Machi, having turned down joining the pair, showed no regret in doing so, and was happy to simply absorb the cheerful atmosphere with whoever he was standing closest to. Even Apollo was finding it hard to stifle his grin, still riding the high of finally fulfilling his promise to clear Phoenix's name. The five milled about the office and apartment almost aimlessly, waiting for news from Phoenix and Maya, so it wasn't hard for Apollo to call everyone to attention when the important text arrived on his phone.

"Guys! Vera's awake!"

The group was ready and out the door in a flash, though Luke lingered at the back, pausing to pull out his phone in the middle of locking up. He frowned as he read the message, then smiled as he tapped out a reply.

Apollo, waiting at the bottom of the stairs and ready to herd his younger siblings and cousin down the road, watched his brother curiously. "Luke? What is it?"

The vet jumped as he was addressed, and gave his brother a smile as he quickly finished locking the door. "Oh, nothing. Papa was just telling me about Vera."

Trucy scoffed and rolled her eyes. "Did Daddy not realise you would be with us while we waited for him and Mommy to get back?"

Pearl hid giggles, pressing her hands to her cheeks. "Oh, I hope they had fun!"

Luke chuckled as he hopped down the stairs. "I'm sure they're having so much fun, the thought I'd be with you guys slipped their minds." With one hand, he finished up the message he was typing and sent it off, stuffing his phone quickly back into his pocket. "Let's go see Vera, huh?"

Machi nodded impatiently, tugging on Apollo's arm. "Yes! We must hurry!"

It didn't take long to reach the clinic, despite Apollo's care to walk slowly so he could ensure none of his teenage charges were likely to run off out of sight. Once inside, Apollo headed straight for reception to ask after Vera, Trucy and Machi at his heels. Luke hung back a metre or two, a hand on Pearl's shoulder.

Pearl looked back in confusion as she was prevented from following the others. "Luke?"

"I think too many of us in there at once is more likely to scare Vera than anything else." Luke kept his voice low, eyes watching his siblings. "We should let the others go in, and wait out here. She already knows them, after all." He met Pearl's eyes with a smile. "Besides, there's something else important happening today, isn't there?"

Pearl glanced to her cousins at the reception desk. Hiding giggles, she kept her reply to a simple nod.

Apollo came running back, Trucy and Machi bouncing behind him. "Okay guys, I know you haven't met Vera in person, but did you want to come in too?"

"No, thank you." Pearl didn't bother hiding her grin, hands held tightly behind her back. "I think Luke and I will just scare her."

Trucy pouted. "Why would she be scared of you?"

"I think that a good idea," Machi chimed in, and began to tug on Apollo's cape. "Isoveli, we go in to see her now?"

Apollo laughed, waving his youngest siblings in the direction of the wards. "Alright, c'mon then." He waved at Luke and Pearl as he left, promising, "We'll be back soon!"

Luke and Pearl exchanged a grin as they waved back, watching the trio disappear down the corridor.

Apollo couldn't deny the rising tension the closer they got to Vera, from the moment they'd heard she was awake. The trial over the past two days had been primarily for her, after all: Clearing Phoenix's name, laying out the truth of not only Zak's and Drew's deaths but Kristoph's entire seven-year plot... all that had been a bonus, technically. The worry she wouldn't wake had plagued Apollo throughout the final day and a half of the trial, and, once the verdict was called, hadn't lessened but had dimmed in comparison to the sheer delight of everything that had finally, after all these years, gone right.

Trucy gasped as she spotted the door ahead, the number on the side matching the one the nurse at the desk had given them. "There it is! The same room Daddy was in!"

"Vera!" Machi left his siblings behind, rushing for the door, only for it to open in front of him, and the teen collided with a woman in a lab coat coming out. The pair grunted in surprise, stepping away from the door as it swung closed on its own. "S-sorry!"

The woman smiled as she noticed who her unwitting assailant was. "Oh, no problem, kiddo. Mistakes happen."

"Ema!" Apollo almost laughed in relief as he recognised their friend.

"What are you doing here?" Trucy added.

"I came to catch up your client on what happened while she was unconscious," Ema explained, looking very proud of herself. "Just finished summarising everything, since she isn't too big on watching those super-long court videos right now."

Apollo frowned. "You... told her everything?"

Ema nodded, her grin fading. "She has a right to know. And she wanted to know. That 'work' of hers caused a lot of pain, even if she wasn't aware of what she was really doing. Besides," she shrugged, "she has to face criminal charges for the forgery, too."

Trucy gasped, hands over her mouth. "B-but... she didn't know!"

"I don't think there's anything to worry about, Truce," Apollo was quick to assure her. "She was a minor at the time and had no idea what she was doing. They won't be able to make anything stick."

"Not to mention her severe agoraphobia," Ema added. "Worst she'll get is a fine."

Machi frowned. "A 'fine'?

"She'll have to pay the court money," Apollo explained. "It probably won't be a problem, since the Mishams were apparently rather well-off anyway."
Ema shrugged. "That's for the judge of her next trial to decide." She stepped forward, gesturing into the room with a smile. "Go ahead and talk to her about it yourselves if you want."

"Great!" Trucy cried.

Machi quickly nodded. "Thank you!" The pair didn't waste any time charging through into the room.

"Thanks for everything, Ema," Apollo added, giving the detective a wave. He didn't wait for a reply before following his siblings inside.

[View the Court Record]
"Vera!"

Apollo entered the room just in time to see his youngest brother collapse against the bed at the stunned Vera's side, tears streaming down his cheeks. 'Can't blame ya, little bro.'

"Y-you are okay! I... I so worried you..."

"Don't cry, Machi!" Trucy called, pulling her brother off the bed and into her arms. "I'm happy, too. And proud. We were right there helping Polly, and," she sniffed, rubbing her eyes, "and when I thought about... what if Vera..."

Apollo almost sighed, rushing forward to pull his sobbing siblings into a hug and accidentally knocking off Trucy's hat in the process. "Hey now, don't both of you start." He blinked back his own happy tears, determined to stay strong for his siblings and the quietly watching Vera, who he gave an apologetic smile. "Sorry you had to see us like this."

Machi and Trucy both sniffed, rubbing at their eyes and noses. "S-sorry," Machi mumbled.

"Don't worry about it," Apollo insisted. He could see the relieved smiles on their faces, and he wasn't going to tell them off for that. 'Besides, I would've burst into tears myself if you two hadn't beaten me to it.'

Vera stared at the three for a long time, as silent as she'd always been. Then... she smiled. "Thank you so much. Apollo, thank you."

Apollo was almost too stunned to reply, hands clinging to his equally-frozen siblings. "Uh..." He shook his head. "N-no, I'm sorry... I shouldn't have pressed you like that. If... If I hadn't, you never would have bitten your nails."

"That not your fault!" Machi stepped back from where he'd been pressed to his brother's side, giving Apollo a stern look. "You cannot listen to evil man when he say that, isoveli! It not true!"

Vera shook her head, sad eyes on the sketchbook lying on her lap. "It was me who was wrong. Staying locked inside like that... clinging to my 'good luck charm'..."

Trucy sniffed, wiping away the last of her tears. "Vera..."

"When I opened my eyes, and saw you... I finally understood. It's important to be a part of the world." Vera looked up, meeting Apollo's gaze with another smile. "To see things with your own eyes."

Apollo slowly smiled back. 'I guess that poison had some effect after all. It's killed off whatever was holding her back.'

"I knew you'd pull through, Vera!" Trucy boasted, finally pulling away from her eldest brother. "I mean, that's what Polly was fighting for the whole time: Your future!"
Vera giggled. "I won't forget it. Here, let me thank you!" She grabbed her sketchbook, flipping it open with her pencil already in hand.

Apollo tried to protest, "No, really, it's okay...", but recognised the determined look on Vera's face above her smile, and couldn't put his heart into it.

With a flurry of pencil scratches, Vera finished her drawing, gently pulling the paper from the sketchbook and handing it to Trucy. The teen took it with an excited gasp, showing the picture off to her brothers: A simplified caricature of her face beneath a top hat, winking as she stuck her tongue out the corner of her mouth. "Look! It's me!" Trucy loudly cried, bouncing up and down as she turned to Vera. "I love it! Thanks!"

Vera didn't seem to notice, already working on her second picture. Before long, she was pulling the second sheet from her book, handing it to Machi.

"Th-thank you," Machi was already saying as he took the paper. He examined it carefully, a growing smile on his face. Apollo had to lean over his brother's shoulder to see what Vera had drawn for him: The exaggerated swirl of Machi's hair over a similarly simplified caricature with large eyes and the boy's kindly smiling face, the collar of his old concert outfit sticking out underneath his chin like a blooming flower.

"Machi loves his, too," Trucy informed Vera with a wink. "It looks just like him!"

Vera smiled, already pulling the third drawing from her sketchbook and handing it to Apollo.

"Thanks." Apollo almost took his warily, worried about what he would find. It turned out to be, just like his siblings, the exaggerated spikes of his hair above a confident expression that Apollo only recognised as his from their own promotional material. She had even included the high collar of his cape, the brooch that held it together, and the hint of his tie behind it. He smiled, looking to the young woman in front of him. "Actually... Yeah. Thank you, Vera. Really."

Vera's smile twitched larger, only to fade. "That reminds me... do you know where the other lawyer is?"

"Other lawyer?" Apollo scratched at the back of his head. "You mean Prosecutor Gavin?"

Trucy gasped at Apollo's side. "You mean Daddy! 'Cept he's not a lawyer anymore." She shrugged nonchalantly.

Apollo raised an eyebrow. 'Hasn't been for seven years. It wasn't exactly recent.'

Vera hugged her sketchbook to her chest. "It's my fault, isn't it? I'm sorry."

"Oh! No, no, no, that's not what I meant!" Trucy hurriedly continued, clutching her drawing carefully.

"No, it's okay." Vera sighed, laying the sketchbook back down in her lap and pressing her hands against the cardboard cover. "I'm through looking away from the things I've done. I hope I can look him in the eyes again someday and apologise."

Apollo cast another glance at the drawing in his hands, then to his siblings on either side. With a smile, he told Vera, "He understands it wasn't your fault. I can promise you that."

Vera seemed relieved, but looked away to the other side of her bed, where Apollo noticed a small pile of plastic bags were sitting. "He... His fiancée... brought all those things for me... when they
Machi frowned, studying them from a distance. "What is they?"

"Are they," Apollo automatically corrected, also eyeing the bags. "And I think they're... Mom's Steel Samurai collection?"

Trucy snorted, pressing a hand to her mouth to hide a laugh. "Mommy and Daddy must've come straight here to deliver them!"

"That was nice of them," Machi said.

Apollo frowned, pulling his phone from his pocket and quickly reopening his conversation with Phoenix. "But... if Dad's already been here with Mom..." He reread the words on the screen, then groaned. "'Sometime today maybe'. In other words, 'We're already here, but I didn't want to tell you'." He shoved the phone back in his pocket with a glare.

"Wait wait wait!" Trucy squealed, a wide grin on her face. "Vera, you just said 'Daddy's fiancée'!"

She turned to her brothers, free hand in a vice-grip on Apollo's arm. "That means Daddy proposed!"

"Really!?" Machi cried, eyes wide.

Apollo had to pause and absorb the news. "Huh. Finally." He looked down to his sister with a smirk. "But c'mon Truce, we both know it would've been Mom who proposed."

"But Daddy's name was cleared yesterday!" Trucy crossed her arms, careful not to damage the sheet of paper still in her grip. "He would've been so happy, of course he'd be the one to ask Mommy to marry him!" She turned to their younger brother. "You agree with me, right Machi?"

Machi hummed in thought, carefully considering his choices. "I think... Maya was one to propose."

Apollo grinned triumphantly. "Thank you."

Trucy huffed. "Well. I guess we'll just have to ask them when they come back to the agency."

Vera hid laughter.

"I don't think they were expecting us to find out from Vera anyway," Apollo pointed out, shooting the young woman an apologetic look before eyeing his siblings. "Why don't we pretend we didn't hear it so they can surprise us later?"

Vera's smile faded. "I'm sorry."

"No, it's okay." Trucy waved off the woman's concerns. "They probably didn't realise they had to ask you to keep it secret."

"Maya probably very excitement about it," Machi added, then frowned in thought. "I wonder if they wait for Aska to come back before wedding?"

"Ooh, that'd be nice!" Trucy cooed, already fantasising. "Mommy comes back from Borginia, then Mommy and Daddy get married! Maybe Mommy could ask Mommy to be a bridesmaid, and they could be really good friends!"

Apollo noticed a confused look on Vera's face and laughed. "Truce, maybe try specifying between Mom Thalassa and Mom Maya next time you start on a monster sentence like that?"
Trucy just shrugged, grinning.

Vera giggled. "Oh, Trucy?"

The teen turned to Vera with a smile. "Mm? Yes?"

"I was wondering... Could you show him to me once more?" Vera nervously fingered the corners of her sketchbook despite the smile on her face. "Sir Hat, was it?"

Trucy grinned. "Oh, he's not been knighted. Yet." Handing off her prized drawing to Apollo, she ducked down to retrieve her hat from the floor, placing it carefully on her head. She kept her eyes on Vera as she slipped easily into her usual magician pose, one hand on the hidden mechanism built into her bag. It was only thanks to his extensive experience performing with her Apollo could tell she was still nervous about facing rejection. "Here goes!" With a flurry of movement, the wooden puppet sprung from underneath her cape, snatching the top hat off her head and coming to rest at her side.

Vera smiled, an awed twinkle in her eye. "Oh...!"

Trucy's sigh of relief was so small, Apollo didn't think anyone else had seen it. She plastered a smile on her face that appeared for all the world to be perfectly casual, though Apollo knew how much work had gone into the carefully controlled expression his sister currently sported. "Do us an impersonation, Mister Hat!"

The puppet clattered up and down with the movement of its mouth. "Objection! Ahem."

Apollo scoffed, quietly handing the two drawings in his hand to Machi. "Mister Hat, that was just pitiful. You call that an impression?"

"If you have any complaints, you can give them to my secretary," the puppet 'argued'. "But I don't not impersonate someone just because they ask."

Apollo would have laughed at his sister's audacity if they weren't both already in performing mode. "Oh, I don't mind you trying to be me. Who wouldn't, after all?" He shook his head with a pompous air, an (in his opinion, at least) flawless impression of Klavier. "No, that was just a terrible impersonation. You weren't nearly loud enough."

Trucy just barely bit back a giggle. "Your impersonation of Prosecutor Gavin just now wasn't much better, Apollo."

"She's right, you know," Mister Hat clattered.

Apollo waved off their comments, though he had to remind himself not to preen at the giggles from Machi and Vera. "You can't talk, Artemis. You taught Mister Hat everything he knows, after all."

"And I know everything there is to know!" Trucy boasted, bouncing once on her toes. "It's a perfect combination!"

"As long as by 'everything' you mean 'everything except how to do an impression'!"

Trucy put on an offended look. "Well, keep up that attitude, and you won't be learning anything from me."

Mister Hat clattered at Trucy's side. "Please, Mama, Uncle, don't fight!"

Vera laughed, hands pressed together in delight. "If this is what your show is like... I look forward to
seeing it myself!"

Apollo and Trucy didn't bother to hide their triumphant smiles.

View the Court Record
Surprises

They're coming out now.

Great. Let me know when you're all back at the office

October 10, 10:25AM
Hickfield Clinic

When Apollo led his youngest siblings back out to reception, they found Luke and Pearl sitting in the chairs near the TV, giggling over Luke's phone. Before anyone could ask what they were doing, Luke had put the device back in his pocket, the pair getting to their feet with identical grins.

"How was Vera?" Pearl asked.

"We were talking to Clay," Luke added, gesturing to his phone. "He wanted to know how she's going, too."

Apollo rolled his eyes. *That explains it.* "She's fine. Doing really well, actually."

"She's going to come and see our show!" Trucy stuck out her chest with no small amount of pride. "She's not scared of Mister Hat anymore!"

"I hope we're not seriously planning to knight him, though," Apollo snickered.

Trucy shrugged, grinning. "Maybe."

Luke and Pearl shot each other confused looks.

Machi tugged on Apollo's cape. "We should visit again soon, once Vera out of hospital."

"Oh yeah, we know where she lives and everything!" Trucy agreed.

"Why don't we just get back to the agency for now?" Luke suggested, holding up his hands. "Papa and Maya should be getting back soon."

Apollo snapped his fingers. "Oh yeah, apparently they were here earlier, so they're back in the city already."

Pearl looked surprised. "They are?"

"Oh yes!" Machi squealed, bouncing towards Pearl. "And Vera said they've-!"

Trucy hurriedly shushed him, hiding a giggle. "Don't tell them! It's a surprise!"


Apollo scoffed, waving off the question. "Ask Mom and Dad when they finally deign to show up."
We're back at the agency. Apparently Vera told them you and Maya are here, and I think she also
told them something else, but they won't say what.

She did? Actually if she mentioned Maya I think I know what it is. We won't be too long. Just keep
the others busy in the office and we'll be there soon

Got it.

Even from the street below, they could hear the music.

It wasn't hard to identify the three instruments and their players: Machi's bouncing rhythm at the
piano, the rapid melody of Luke's violin, and Trucy's jaunty (though indistinct) words bringing the
two together. There was even clapping to the beat, though it was harder to tell who was doing it from
down here.

"I know that song," Thalassa muttered, pausing below the window. "But those are not my words."

Maya sighed wistfully. "Aw, I forgot they were translating the Lamiroir songs! I wanted to hear 'em
for the first time up in Kurain..."

Phoenix snorted, patting his fiancée's shoulder. "I'm sure they'll be more than happy to play for you
later." He moved on to the stairs, where he paused, facing the two women. "Maya, you'd better wait
down here. Thalassa... You ready?"

Thalassa took a deep breath, calming herself. After a moment, she nodded, a determined frown on
her face. "As I'll ever be, I suspect." She smiled, looking between the two. "Thank you for pushing
me into this. I'd have never had the courage otherwise."

Maya shook her head, hiding a grin. "Don't waste time thanking us." She pointed to the stairs. "Go
meet your kids, Thalassa."

Phoenix held out his hand, similarly hiding a knowing smirk. After another deep breath or two,
Thalassa took it.

Phoenix didn't think he'd ever been more careful to be quiet as he entered the front door of the
apartment that had been his home for nearly a decade now. As usual, the door had been left
unlocked, and he pressed down on the handle with both hands to unlatch it without a squeak from
the mechanism. With only a glance behind to check Thalassa was at his back, Phoenix tip-toed
across reception to the door into the office itself. It had been left ajar, so he made less of an effort to
be quiet and careful as he pushed it open, stepping through into the room beyond.

Just as they had surmised from the street below, there was a small group around the piano, playing an
energetic tune that was fun enough to dance to. Machi was sat on the stool with a big grin, his hands
at the keys, though their view of him was obscured by the teenage girl stood at his side, her back to
them as she loudly sang the English words to the Borgiaian song. She eagerly bounced to the
rhythm, making her cyan cape flap behind her, and alternated holding the brim of her top hat and
clapping to the music. Beyond the two teens, Luke had his violin resting on his shoulder, his bow moving back and forth in front of his face. His eyes lifted to the door with a smile as he saw the visitors, but he didn't pause in his playing.

It took Phoenix a second to find the missing two members of the family: Apollo and Pearl were sat on one of the red sofas, the one facing the piano and thus with its back to the reception door. Pearl was watching the piano with hands clapping along like Trucy's, but Apollo was bent over some papers resting on the table in front of them. He also noticed the door opening behind them, chuckling to himself as he glanced up.

"Hey Dad, nice of you to finall- WAH!?"

With a loud cry of shock, Apollo double-taked hard enough to throw himself off the sofa, falling with a crash to the floor and tossing his papers into the air in a fluttering white cloud. In an instant, the music was silenced, everyone looking to the eldest Wright with shocked concern... but it didn't take long for their eyes to lock on to what had caused the kerfuffle in the first place.

Phoenix didn't need to look to know Thalassa was sheepishly standing just behind him, in full view of the four younger members of the extended family.

Trucy gasped, stepping away from the piano with her hands over her mouth.

Behind his sister, Machi found himself suddenly with a clear view of the door, and his face lit up as he recognised their visitor. "Aska!" Slipping off the piano stool, he raced past Trucy to circle the sofas, and Thalassa moved to meet him, the pair slamming into each other halfway. "Aska! Olet tala!"

Luke quickly and quietly put his violin back in its case, which was resting on the edge of Phoenix's desk, then stepped forward behind his sister, placing his hands on her shoulders. Trucy's eyes were still locked on Thalassa, but she reacted to her brother's touch, pressing against him and moving her hands from her mouth to grab one of his in her grip.

Thalassa and Machi both were laughing in relief as they conversed in Borginian together. Her hands rested on his cheeks, her eyes drinking the teen in as though she had never seen him before... and, outside of photos and video footage, this was the first time she had really seen him. Thalassa was even blinking back tears as she brushed back her youngest son's golden hair with one hand, planting kisses on his forehead, unable to keep herself from touching the boy she had been separated from for three months.

With Pearl's help, Apollo finally recovered enough to get to his feet, his papers forgotten on the floor. Although he watched Thalassa with wide eyes, he cast continued glances towards Trucy, stepping warily away from Thalassa. Behind him, Pearl tried to accommodate her cousin's clear desire to run to his sister, pressing herself into the small pathway between the sofa and the staircase bookshelf that housed their magic display. Finally, Apollo made his move, dashing through the thin gap between sofas and piano to stand at his siblings' side.

Machi noticed the movement out of the corner of his eye, glancing back at the trio by the piano. He paused only half a second, then returned his focus fully to Thalassa and stepped back with an excited grin, holding her hands tightly in his. "Aska, you need meet my big brother and sister!"

Pearl clapped her hands, an equally large grin on her face. "Yes! And I need to go find Mystic Maya!"

"Coming, Papa!" Cheerfully ignoring Apollo's incredulous look, Luke placed Trucy's hands on their elder brother's arm, dashing off towards the door.

"Hey..." Apollo muttered. At his side, Trucy clung to his hand, eyes flicking between her siblings and Thalassa.

Machi giggled, bouncing away from Thalassa to follow Pearl and Luke out the door. "I help too, Isa!"

"If you insist." With a grin, Phoenix waved the boy through into reception, then moved to follow, pulling the door along with him. "Have fun, you three!" With that, the door closed with a decisive click, leaving Thalassa, Apollo, and Trucy alone in the office.

There was a very long moment of silence.

Thalassa kept her eyes on her children, unease written across her face. One hand played with the hair draped over her shoulder.

Trucy gripped the brooch at her neck, gaze moving from the door to her mother. Her other hand still clung to Apollo's, her eyes wide as she stared silently at the woman watching them.

Apollo continued to give the door an incredulous look for many seconds. Finally, he groaned and rolled his eyes. "Is it even possible for what they were doing to have been any more blatantly obvious...?"

View the Court Record
"I mean, seriously, you'd think a walking dictionary like Luke would know the meaning of 'subtlety'!"

Once Apollo had started complaining, he suddenly found himself loathe to stop, keeping a glare on the reception door they had just watched the rest of their family disappear through and waving a hand indignantly.

"And, no surprise, of course Dad was keeping this one last secret from us, because he just can't resist once he's latched on to one of his 'secret missions'!"

Keeping his mouth moving delayed having to acknowledge the situation, having to acknowledge the identity of the woman only a scant two metres away from them. Despite knowing for three months that this day would come, Apollo had never come up with a plan for what to do when it finally happened. Personally, he'd always imagined this reunion would happen at the airport, and they would keep up the charade of 'Lamiroir' until... well, he hadn't thought that far ahead.

"He just let it slip he and Mom Maya were engaged so we wouldn't see this coming. I know he did. I bet Luke and Pearly were in on it, too. Remember how they were giggling over Luke's phone when we got back from seeing Vera? I knew they were being suspic-"

"Mommy?"

Apollo froze as his sister spoke up, finally turning his attention to her. The teenage girl was still staring at Thalassa, her eyes shining as her free hand clutched tightly at the brooch on her cape.

Thalassa was still blinking away the tears leftover from her reunion with Machi, but was clearly on the verge of shedding even more. She opened her mouth to talk, but quickly changed her mind and instead nodded, biting her lip and forcing a smile.

Trucy's hand slipped from Apollo's, and she didn't hesitate to run across the room. "Mommy!" With enough force to knock her top hat to the floor, the girl enveloped Thalassa in a tight hug.

That was all Thalassa needed to open the floodgates a second time, clutching her daughter tight. "Oh, Trucy, my baby girl... My little baby girl..."

Apollo's feet felt nailed to the carpet. Of course Trucy had taken the lead. She actually remembered her time with their biological mother. Apollo didn't think he could exactly follow her example, and was still at a complete loss on how to react to the ongoing situation. All he was able to do was shove his hands inside the belt of his bag (to keep from grabbing at his bracelet) and awkwardly watch from a distance.

Thalassa and Trucy finally pulled apart, Thalassa caressing Trucy's face and leaning down to match her height, the same way she had done for Machi. "You have grown so much... I have missed so much of your life..." She planted a quick kiss on her daughter's forehead, her thumbs brushing away the tears at the teen's cheeks.
"S’okay, Mommy," Trucy giggled, though she sniffed loudly. "It wasn't your fault. Same with Polly. We always knew you'd never have left us behind by choice." She turned to her brother with a grin. "Right, Polly?"

Shifting slightly from foot to foot, intensely awkward, Apollo managed a quick nod and a small smile. He tried not to think about the fact his mother was looking directly at him.

Thalassa straightened, one hand petting the top of Trucy's head. "Apollo?"

Apollo could only manage brief glances to maintain eye contact with his mother. "H-hi." He couldn't deny it: He was frankly terrified right now.

Leaving Trucy behind, Thalassa stepped forward towards Apollo, standing right in front of him. They were the same height, so there was no need for her to lean down like she did with his younger siblings. Instead, she simply placed her hands on his cheeks, like with Machi and Trucy before him, and Apollo could no longer make himself avoid his mother's gaze. She was intensely studying her eldest child's face with those blue eyes that Apollo knew so well from his sister. "My Apollo," she breathed, and her expression tightened as she failed to hold back even more tears. "I didn't look for you nearly as hard as I should have... All these years, I thought you were dead." She shook her head, eyes locked on Apollo's. "Your entire life, I wasn't there for you... Is it even possible for you to forgive me for that?"

For a moment, Apollo was unable to breathe, his left hand reaching up to grip the back of his mother's right. "Of course I do. From what I've heard, everything was pretty chaotic when we got separated. No-one's ever blamed you for assuming the worst and leaving. It..." He took a shuddering breath, finding himself struggling to hold back tears of his own. "It wasn't your fault, Mom."

Thalassa made a noise somewhere between a sob and a laugh, using her left hand to push Apollo's head forward so she could kiss his forehead as she had for his siblings. "My precious baby boy..."

Hiding an amused smile, Apollo decided to just let her attempt to comfort him, unsure how else he could respond to his mother being far more distressed by this reunion than he was. His eyes landed on her right hand, still clutched in his left, and he waved it in his grip, making their identical bracelets brush against each other with a clack. "Hey, at least you left me a way to find you again, huh?"

Thalassa noticed the bracelets and laughed. "I very nearly didn't. Jove thought I was mad for insisting you had it that night, but I wanted you to have something fancy for an audience with the Queen."

In the corner of his eye, Apollo saw Trucy giving them a confused look, slowly approaching the pair, but he had no time to wonder what had caught her attention. It was hard to miss a certain word he'd just heard coming from Thalassa's lips: "Jove?"

"Your father. Birth father, I mean." Thalassa stepped back, looking Apollo up and down with a large smile. "You look so much like him... though you're older now than he was. He would have loved to see how you turned out."

In the corner of his eye, Apollo saw Trucy giving them a confused look, slowly approaching the pair, but he had no time to wonder what had caught her attention. It was hard to miss a certain word he'd just heard coming from Thalassa's lips: "Jove?"

"Your father. Birth father, I mean." Thalassa stepped back, looking Apollo up and down with a large smile. "You look so much like him... though you're older now than he was. He would have loved to see how you turned out."

Apollo couldn't resist looking down at himself. "I... look like my father?" From the day he'd learned Trucy was his half-sister, Apollo had heard many comments saying they looked alike, and the occasional remark comparing them both to their mother. Even more often had people compared him to Phoenix, especially in court... but never before had he heard anything about his biological father, a man he still knew practically nothing about. "His name was Jove?"

Thalassa nodded. "Jove Justice. Oh, there is so much I could tell you about him..." She laughed,
looking between the still confused Trucy and the stunned Apollo, and placing a hand on each of their shoulders. "I think all three of us have a lot to explain and share with each other, of our lives since we were separated. I want to know everything."

They sat down on one of the red couches, Thalassa in the middle and her two children either side, the pair perched on the very edge of the cushion so they could face both each other and the woman between them. As the youngest, and most eager, Trucy started them off, describing how her mother had simply not come back from rehearsal one day, and how she was told it was a disappearing trick gone wrong. Magnifi fell ill and was confined to hospital, pinning the Troupe to California, and then the whole terrible drama of his death, Trucy hesitantly described, ripped her from her birth father and uncle all in one fell swoop.

"Lucky Daddy Phoenix was there. He adopted me and promised to look after me until Daddy Zak came back." She shrugged, managing a smile despite the subject matter. "And then we got Luke and Polly, and even Machi, so it all turned out okay in the end."

Thalassa brushed a lock of Trucy's hair behind her ear. "I heard about Zak. He didn't deserve any of what happened to him."

Trucy leaned against her mother with a pout. "Well. Daddy and Polly got Mister Gavin convicted at least. I... never got around to asking Mommy Maya to channel him, though." She sighed. "He told Daddy he wasn't planning to come see me before he died..."

"He probably knew Mister Gavin was watching him." Apollo wished he was close enough to physically comfort his sister, but was forced to make do with simply giving her a sympathetic look. "He knew how dangerous he was... He just didn't want you possibly getting hurt, Truce."

Trucy nodded, but didn't meet either her brother or her mother's eyes.

Thalassa brought her hand up to rest on top of Trucy's head, patting the teen's hair. She turned her head towards her son. "And you, Apollo? How did you end up here, when we parted in Khura'in?"

Apollo shrugged, and was opening his mouth to reply when Trucy suddenly sat up, calling, "I have a question!"

Thalassa and Apollo both looked at Trucy, glanced at each other in confusion, then turned back to the teen. "What is it, Trucy?" Thalassa asked.

"What do you mean by 'koora-een'"?" Trucy crossed her arms, pouting. "It sounds like you're just saying 'Kurain' weird... And weren't you overseas when Polly's daddy died?"

Apollo snorted. "Truce, haven't I told you this before? My dad took me to visit the queen of the country we were visiting, but someone set fire to the palace and he died rescuing me."

Trucy frowned, musing over his words. "I don't remember."

"Well, I know I've told you at least that much," Apollo replied. "Back when we first found out we were related, remember? We went to the library with Luke and Clay and did all that research."

Trucy's gaze drifted away, focussed on whatever she was seeing in her mind's eye.

Apollo shook his head, turning his attention back to Thalassa. "Apparently, before he died, my dad... Jove befriended a local man, by the name of Dhurke." He felt a twitch in his brain at the name that
had just left his lips, a name he had promised himself so many years ago he would never even think, let alone say aloud. 'Well, I never thought I'd find my mother, so I guess a lot of old promises are being broken today... and Mom deserves to know all this, anyway.' "He didn't tell Dhurke very much about himself... 'Jangly Justice from California' was pretty much it, I'm told."

Thalassa laughed. "He always had a talent for making fast friends with people... and somehow without ever exchanging very much information at all."

Apollo snorted. In a way, he supposed that would be a good description for Dhurke, too. "Well, after the fire, Dhurke took me in. He had a son of his own, a little older than me... Nahyuta. I think he and my dad mostly discussed us when they met, honestly." He shrugged, taking enough confidence from Thalassa's amused reaction to continue. "Dhurke told me he tried to find you. All of Khura'in was in turmoil, and you would definitely have heard what happened to my dad... It just... Without knowing your name, or Jove's name, or even having a picture of him to show around..."

Thalassa rested a hand on Apollo's shoulder. "This Dhurke couldn't be blamed for not being able to find me."

Apollo decided not to reply to that, hiding that he was more torn on the topic than he let on. "He said he had no choice eventually. He had to leave the city and go up into the mountains with me and Nahyuta, and abandon the search. He always made sure I knew you had only left me behind because of that fire, because you'd more than likely thought I'd died with my dad. Even though he didn't know anything about you, he said he never stopped trying." He sighed, looking away. "My earliest memories are of Khura'in... growing up in the mountains with Nahyuta and Dhurke. The only family I'd ever known. I thought we were happy."

Although he was studiously avoiding eye contact, Apollo noticed Trucy cock her head to one side, watching her brother curiously. "Were you not?"

The memories of what happened next still infuriated Apollo even all these years later, enough that he had to pause to calm himself down before speaking again. "When I was eight years old, Dhurke sat me down and told me I was a foreigner, that I didn't 'belong' in Khura'in. It was too dangerous for me to stay, he said, so he was sending me to California, where my dad came from... where I 'belonged'." He paused again, hands gripping his knees hard enough he was sure he'd see white knuckles even if he weren't wearing gloves. "He sent me away with the empty promise he'd come back for me once it wasn't 'dangerous' anymore. Nahyuta got to stay. I never heard anything from either of them ever again."

There was a very long pause. Apollo felt Thalassa's hand move from his shoulder to his back, rubbing small circles of comfort.

Trucy's hands were pressed to her mouth. "Oh, Polly..." She lowered her hands, curling them into fists, then leaned forward and slapped her brother's arm.

"Hey!" Apollo recoiled, clutching his forearm and watching his sister incredulously. Thalassa's hand fell from his back out of sheer shock, wide eyes on her daughter.

Trucy crossed her arms with a glare. "Why didn't you ever tell us this!? You went through something so awful, and just kept it to yourself?" She huffed, stomping a boot on the carpet. "I've told you all about my life before Daddy adopted me, and Luke's told us so much about his life in England, and even Machi told us stuff about Borginia, and he's only been living with us for three months! All this time, seven entire years, and you never told us anything?"

"Because I didn't want to remember it!" Apollo snapped. "Don't you understand? Dhurke never
wanted me! I even tried running back to Khura’in all on my own when he didn’t write, and it took me three years to realise he was never going to write, he was never coming for me! I never wanted to think about that part of my life ever again, because every moment I spent in that place, every memory I have of it... I wasn't wanted, Trucy!" He paused for breath, surprised to find himself panting, blinking back tears of mixed frustration and despair for his lost childhood. "I was nothing but a burden to Dhurke, and he was glad to see the back of me."

Trucy's glare had faded, her expression more one of surprise as she stared back at her brother. "Polly..."

Thalassa reached out and pulled Apollo towards her, his head ending up pressed against her neck as her arms wrapped around his shoulders. "Oh, Apollo... If only I'd known, I would have run to fetch you in an instant. You were always wanted by me."

Apollo took a deep, shuddering breath. "Yeah... Yeah, I know. Thanks, Mom."

One of Thalassa's hands moved to Apollo's head, patting his hair a few times before she released him, allowing the young man to sit up again. "And where does Phoenix come into your story? I've heard you were adopted some time after Trucy, but I don't know much else."

Apollo quickly wiped his eyes and nose with the back of a hand. "Dad? Oh, I knew of Dad as a famous defence attorney for ages before I ever met him."

Trucy snickered. "Polly was a fan!"

Apollo shushed her, hiding a smile. "After his disbarment, I thought that was it for any chance I had of getting to meet him. I was fifteen at the time, or thereabouts. Phoenix Wright was all over the news, the 'Forgin' Attorney' who'd tried to defend a disappearing client. I was heartbroken, but there wasn't exactly anything I could do about it." He shrugged. After a short pause, he chuckled, looking off into the distance with a nostalgic smile. "Later that year, once summer had passed, a new student transferred to my boarding school: This kid from England, with a broken arm and a blue hat..."
The story of how Apollo met Luke turned into how the pair were adopted by Phoenix turned into how Phoenix had recognised Apollo and Trucy were siblings turned into how Trucy had first dragged Apollo on stage to perform with her and the beginning of their partnership. After that came many brief and disconnected tales as the Gramarye siblings jumped back and forth in time, searching for ever more interesting stories to impart on their mother from the past seven years.

"There was this time we had a small earthquake, and Luke totally freaked out and thought the building was collapsing!"

"Oh man, the first time Dad took me to the Borscht Bowl Club to teach me how to spot tells the way Trucy did..."

"Daddy got so mad when Polly took me to get my ears pierced. That was probably the biggest fight we ever had."

"We never do much for Fathers Day, but I always remember how Luke talked us into making simple cards that first year, and how much Dad loved them."

"And there was that time Mommy Maya tried channelling Luke's mom and dad, and then you, and we found out you and Luke's mommy were still alive!"

"I should have told Machi what we knew about you much sooner than I did. He was pretty upset when he first found out."

"You should've seen the look on Polly's face when he realised Mister Sycamore from Luke's stories was a real person!"

"You gotta see Trucy around Halloween. She always makes all of us the most ridiculous and tenuously 'themed' costumes, even though we're all way too old now to go trick-or-treating."

"This one time, Polly was meant to be watching us and lost my friend Jinxie at a fair. She was telling Machi about it a week or two back."

"Oh yes, and I was telling Machi not too long ago about that time Trucy here nearly got herself killed exploring a cave."

Their descent into bickering was broken only by Thalassa's laughter, which was enough to rein the pair in. Thalassa patted their shoulders as they settled sheepishly back into their places at her sides.

"Oh, my darlings... I love you both, but maybe that is enough for now. You have long answered all of my questions for you."

Apollo blushed, and was glad to see the same reaction on Trucy. It took him a moment to properly register their mother's wording. "Wait, so... now we can ask you questions?"

Thalassa nodded. "I'm sure you have plenty. You deserve to have them answered."
Trucy hummed in thought. "Well... How about..." She cocked her head to one side, watching Thalassa with a look somewhere between sheepish and curious. "I've kinda always wondered how you met Polly's daddy, honestly. I know you met Daddy Zak because he was Grandpa Magnifi's apprentice, but..."

Apollo frowned. "Wasn't my dad a guest performer in Troupe Gramarye? That would've been how they met."

"It was," Thalassa sighed, and she leaned back in her seat, a hand at her chest. "But, like all stories, it gets more complicated below the surface."

Apollo and Trucy shared a glance, both intensely curious to hear whatever would be next out of their mother's mouth.

Thalassa closed her eyes, deep in thought. After a long pause, she began to explain: "I was very sheltered growing up. My mother died when I was five, and had been bedridden since I was a toddler. All I knew was the endless travel across the globe at my father's side, watching him perform magic for never-ending streams of delighted audiences. It was expected of me to follow in his footsteps, though I was never passionate about magic... not that I had the life experience to recognise that at the time. I think my father always knew, though." Her eyes flickered open, though she didn't meet either of her children's gazes. "I was sixteen when all of that changed. My father was nearly fifty. I think he worried about the future of his craft, knowing I would eventually realise I had no interest, and go off on my own. He began advertising for hopefuls to come try out and potentially become his apprentices. Eventually, he hired Zak and Valant, and suddenly all his time was devoted to them instead of me."

"Oh, but, you knew Grandpa Magnifi still loved you, right?" Trucy gripped her mother's leg, eyes intently on Thalassa's face. "Even if he wasn't around as much?"

Thalassa laughed. "I'm sure I did, but that didn't make getting used to it any easier. His new apprentices were three and six years older than me, and I wasn't interested in socialising with them. All they wanted to talk about was work, anyway. It was much easier, as a grumpy teenager, to just lock myself up in our caravan and pretend they didn't exist."

Apollo pressed a hand to his mouth, failing to hide a snort. "You... weren't interested in Zak and Valant? At all?"

Trucy looked confused. "So... did Polly's daddy not join up with them?"

"No." Thalassa smiled. "He wasn't interested in magic... but he did think to take advantage of the Troupe." She turned to Apollo. "Jove did come from here. California, I mean. We were camping in a small town here for a show. I was alone in the caravan while everyone else was rehearsing at the venue... and someone knocked on the door."

- Twenty-Five Years Earlier -

Sixteen-year-old Thalassa Gramarye froze for all of two seconds before flinging her Walkman at the bed. She could still hear her music from the headphones (her dad would kill her if he knew she'd turned the volume up so high again), but she had no inclination to go and turn it down, her ears focussed on the noise she was sure she'd just heard reverberating through their small caravan.
Knock knock knock

There it was again! She definitely wasn't imagining it. 'Who would seriously be knocking on our door? Dad would just come straight in, and Whack and Gallant are with him.' She sneered at the names of her father's apprentices, enjoying the rush of mocking their stage names without being told off for once. She had no idea what their real names were. Magnifi had never told her. Thalassa suspected he knew full well she would actually use them.

"C'mon, I know someone's in there!" came a loud voice from outside. "I heard singing!"

Thalassa huffed, crossing her arms. "How dare you listen to my singing without permission!" Truthfully, she didn't actually mind being listened to - Magnifi had always praised her tendency to sing as they went about their daily chores together, and she shared his love of performing - but this was a stranger on what amounted to their front porch and it was the principle of the thing. She stomped towards the front door, intent on telling the stranger off to their face. "I only perform for paying audiences," she flung open the door, shooting the person on the other side a glare, "and people line up to-!"

It was then she actually registered what she was looking at.

A teenage boy, or potentially a young man... certainly much closer to her in age than her father's apprentices. He had dark brown hair that hung limply in front of his face in two long spikes, flattened by the most battered old cowboy hat she had ever seen in her life. His hands sported worn black gloves, and held protectively in their grip a shiny new guitar, hugged tight to his chest. His fingers twitched at the wood, betraying his nervousness and cementing his attachment to the instrument above all else. Hanging off his shoulders was a red jacket, at least two sizes too big by her estimation, and a scruffy backpack that rested so far down his back only its shoulder straps were visible. His dark brown eyes were wide, staring up at her from the dirt ground outside the caravan door. If it weren't for the elevation the caravan gave her, Thalassa suspected they'd be the same height.

Thalassa nearly gasped. 'He... He's cute...!' She quickly assessed her own outfit: Her black strapless dress she performed in, and knee-length teal socks on her feet. It was her usual casual outfit after a show or dress rehearsal, intended purely for lounging around their small caravan. 'Ugh, I guess I don't look too awful. Why did I clean off all my make-up!?!'

The boy recovered first, clearing his throat and looking rather conspicuously pink in the cheeks. "Uh, miss, is Mister Gramarye in? M-Magnifi Gramarye, I mean?"

Thalassa was almost hurt he was there to talk to her father. Everyone wanted to talk to her father. She sighed, leaning against the door frame and crossing her arms. "Why?"

The boy recovered some of his courage, puffing out his chest. "I'm a musician, miss. I sing, and I play the guitar, and I want to do so with Troupe Gramarye."

Thalassa raised an eyebrow. "Do you have a name, Mister Musician?"

"Jove Justice, miss."

Immediately, Thalassa was intrigued all over again. "Jove? Like... Jupiter-Jove? Zeus-Jupiter-Jove?"

Jove's confidence drained. "Uh...?"

Thalassa thought he looked like a lost puppy, and had to bite back a giggle. "Sorry. You probably hear that a lot."
"N-no, actually." Jove shook his head, still looking confused. "I've... never heard that before."

"Really?" Thalassa found that hard to believe, but decided not to pursue it. She pushed off the door-frame, clutching one of her bracelets with her other hand. "So, um... my dad's out rehearsing right now. You'll have to come back to talk to him."

Jove sighed, shifting his guitar under an arm. "Right... When might he be back?"

"He won't be long," Thalassa lied, her smile growing as she reached behind her for her stage boots. "What kind of music do you play?"

Jove hesitantly began to move his guitar back into place. "Well... I can do Wonderwall."

Thalassa barely noticed the time passing after that, perched on a couple of crates they had found around the lot the caravan was parked in, while Jove played any and every song he could on his guitar. It wasn't hard to figure out he was new to the instrument, learning covers and arrangements by ear. Thalassa suspected he'd used all his savings on it, judging by the hand-me-down, falling-apart nature of his clothes and bag compared to the sheen of the fresh wood that made up the guitar. He was very cheerful once he got past his nervousness, and had a booming singing voice that matched better with some songs than others. Thalassa tried to sing along with him if he was playing something she knew, and Jove seemed happy to let her, sometimes even silencing himself to grin and listen to her over the sound of his strings.

It had been after one such song that Thalassa and Jove's playtime was abruptly called to a halt: Thalassa had forgotten the words halfway through a song and been forced to make up her own, mostly just babbling half-remembered syllables and whatever strings of words she could pull together about her plight.

"And something, something, oh no I've, forgotten the words, and something something love you, This song is, out of my range anyway, and why is every popular song always a love song?"

Eventually, the silliness proved to be too much for both, so Jove had pulled his fingers from the strings with a discordant chord, the pair allowing themselves to fully descend into giggles at last. When Thalassa looked up... There was Magnifi, staring at them from beneath the brim of his dark hat. Behind him, the red and yellow capes of his apprentices flapped nervously in the still air.

Thalassa and Jove got to their feet with a gasp. Thalassa spoke first: "Dad! You're back already!"

Magnifi turned towards his apprentices, snapping his fingers. "Zak. Valant. Inside."

The two young men exchanged a glance, then scurried off without another word, straight to their own caravan on the other side of the lot.

Thalassa stuck her nose into the air. Judging by the stern look on Magnifi's face, she was about to face a verbal thrashing, and she refused to let it bother her.

Magnifi sighed as he returned his eyes to his daughter. "Thalassa... no strange boys in the lot. We've discussed this."

"He's not strange, Dad!" Thalassa huffed. "His name's Jove Justice! He was auditioning!"

Jove gave her a blank look. "I was?"
Magnifi raised an eyebrow, turning his attention to the boy. "You're a guitarist."


Thalassa noticed Jove's fingers twitching on the neck of his guitar again. She hoped he would be able to work past his nervousness without her help.

Magnifi merely gave the boy a long, hard stare.

"I could be your opening act. Warm up the crowd for you." Jove shrugged, shifting from foot to foot. "You... You wouldn't have to pay me much. If you don't want to. I'll just... tag along, and-"

Magnifi cut Jove off with a wave of his hand. "How old are you, boy?"

"Sixteen, sir."

Thalassa bit back a gasp. 'He's the same age as me after all?'

Magnifi's eyes flitted to his daughter, but quickly regained their focus on Jove. "Where are your parents?"

Jove's eyes hardened. "I live alone, sir."

"So on the streets, then."

Jove flinched, his grip on his guitar tightening. "I get by just fine. I busk."

Magnifi looked less than impressed, and Thalassa resisted the urge to speak up in Jove's defence (she had no idea what she would say, anyway). "Go home, boy. This is a magician troupe, not a boy band." With that, he spun on his heel and stalked towards the caravan he shared with his daughter. "Thalassa, come."

Thalassa was fuming. Ignoring her father, she turned to Jove, and found him sticking his guitar back under an arm, trudging back out towards the street. "Hey!" She leapt after him, halting the surprised teen with a hand on his arm. "Don't listen to him. I think you were great."

Jove smiled. "Thank you. I knew he'd say no. I just wanted to ask."

Thalassa tightened her grip, keeping the boy from trying to leave. "But... You can't go! Not because my dad is being a moron!"

Jove gave Thalassa a strange look. "He has a point: Troupe Gramarye is a magic act. I knew it was a long shot before I ever knocked on your door."

"But...!" Thalassa huffed, cursing the unfair situation. She liked Jove. She liked his music, even if he needed practise with that guitar. "Well... You should come back anyway. You can..." She looked out at the street, then grinned. "You can busk out there! I'll come and listen to you!"

Jove glanced in the direction she was pointing, the gears turning in his head. "Actually... Yeah, I'd like that." He gave her a grin.

Thalassa giggled, trying not to look too touched at his sweetness.

"Thalassa!" came a roar from the caravan behind her. "I hope you weren't wearing those headphones at that volume!"
Paling, Thalassa quickly began to drag Jove towards the street. "C'mon, let's start right now."

Jove cast concerned glances at the caravan. "Is your dad-?"

"He's fine," Thalassa insisted, quickening her pace. "I just want to finish that song already. He won't mind."

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"Grandpa Magnifi turned him down?" Apollo could barely believe what he was hearing, and had to restrain himself from laughing.

Trucy crossed her arms, humming in thought. "It makes sense, though. I never really thought about it before, but why was a musician performing with a magic troupe?"

Thalassa chuckled, eyes shining with the memories playing across them. "I think my father tolerated his presence more than anything. Jove had stuck to his promise to stay nearby, and I snuck out every moment I could to meet with him in the town, the two of us getting to know each other. I tried to talk my father around in the evenings, but he wouldn't hear it, just gave me his usual disapproving look whenever I deigned to return to the caravan." Her smile faded. "But eventually the week ended. It was time for us to move on."

- Twenty-Five Years Earlier -

"This is so unfair!"

Jove jumped as the young woman dropped onto the pavement next to him, her arms crossed and her back pressed to the brick wall behind them. "Thalassa? Something wrong?"

Thalassa continued to pout, glaring at the street. Fresh off a performance, she was still in the trademark Gramarye cape and top hat that were her favourite shade of teal, a crimson neckerchief visible under her copper hair. "We're leaving tonight!"

Jove stared for a moment before looking away, trying to hide his disappointment under the brim of his dying hat. "Oh."

Thalassa bit her lip, quickly wiping at her eyes with a gloved hand. "This isn't fair. You deserve to come with us."

"It's alright." Jove's fingers were tightening on his guitar again, though Thalassa didn't need her perception to know he was lying. "I'll... get a job somehow."

There was a very long pause as the two teenagers considered their futures ahead of them... their separate futures. Thalassa was torn between rage at her father and sorrow at having to say goodbye to her new friend. Sure, she'd said goodbye to many friends over the years, but that never made parting with them any easier. In fact, it only made it harder that Jove was cute, and sweet, and he was far more fun and paid far more attention to her than Magnifi had in weeks. Plus, even if he wasn't very good at the guitar, he shared the same passion for music and singing that she did, and loved to perform just like everyone else in the troupe. After all the time she'd spent that week on the streets with Jove, singing over his guitar to help attract money to his battered, falling-apart-at-the-seams
hat... she was starting to think she had more things in common with Jove than with the troupe.

Thalassa pounded her fists against the concrete they sat on. "I'll stay with you."

Jove blinked, looking up at her blankly. "Huh?"

"I'm staying with you." Thalassa grinned as her plan began to formulate in her mind. "We'll change our names so Dad can't find us: I'll be Theia Gaelle, and you can be Hyperion Reylu! We'll busk together, and travel the country, and sing for everyone!"

Jove stared with wide eyes for a long moment before shaking his head. "Th-Thalassa... We can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because!" Jove sighed, pressing a hand to his face. "Thalassa, I'm not letting you throw away everything you have just to stay with me."

Thalassa's excited smile turned to a glare. "What!?"

"Life on the street isn't easy." He patted the guitar in his lap. "This gets me only just enough money to support me, and I still go to sleep hungry more often than not. Even together, there's no way we'd make enough busking to get by."

Thalassa shrugged. "Well, I'll get a job then!"

Jove scoffed. "If it was that easy for someone our age to get a job, I'd have one. What did you think I was doing going to your dad?" He looked away with a sigh. "I mean this in the best possible way, but... you have no idea, Thalassa."

For a long moment, Thalassa could only stare at Jove, eyes wide. Finally, she got to her feet and stalked off.

"Thalassa, wait! I didn't mean that in a bad way!"

She ignored Jove's calls.

It was a good thing the Gramaryes rarely locked their caravan, as, had the door been jammed closed, it might have given way after the pounding Thalassa gave it while stomping inside. She paid no heed to her father sitting in their makeshift living room, having partially undressed from his stage-suit down to his shirt and trousers, socked feet crossed under a newspaper in his hands. He looked up curiously as Thalassa headed past him and straight through into the bedroom, slamming the door closed behind her. Once alone in the small room, she wasted no time climbing up the ladder into her bunk above Magnifi's. It wasn't as dramatic an action as throwing herself straight onto the mattress, but she had to make do with what she had. Shoving her beloved Walkman aside and tossing her top hat to the floor, she shoved her face into her pillow, fruitlessly trying to calm her shaking body.

The small door creaked open, followed by the deep rumble of Magnifi's voice. "Thalassa?"

Thalassa tried to ignore him. She'd run all the way straight into her bed without taking off her stage boots, a massive no-no since she'd been very young. Likely her father would have something to say about her unceremonious ditching of her hat, too. 'Get it over with, Dad... I feel awful enough already...'
There was another pause, then the bunk creaked as Magnifi climbed the ladder, squeezing himself into the space between his daughter's mattress and the caravan's roof. "Thalassa." His hand rested on her shoulder. "Tell me what's wrong."

Thalassa choked out a sob into her pillow. "What do you think, Dad? We're leaving tonight, and I won't ever get to see Jove again!"

Magnifi didn't immediately reply, unmoving from where he was awkwardly stretched out across her bunk. "That's it? You're upset over... this boy?"

Offended, Thalassa pulled her face out of the soft mass of her pillow to glare at her father's baffled expression. "His name is Jove, Dad. And it's your fault he can't come with us." She promptly buried her face into the pillow again.

There was another long pause, Magnifi removing his hand from his daughter's shoulder. "Thalassa, why does it matter so much that this bo- Jove cannot join the troupe? He's no different from any other of your friends you made over the years. Besides, we only just took on Zak and Valant, and they are actual magicians."

Thalassa snorted at the mention of her father's apprentices. "Blackjack and Gallivant are all you care about anymore."

"Come now, that doesn't even sound anything like their names."

The teen scoffed. "Why do you get to bring friends along and I don't? You spend all day 'teaching' them now, and I'm stuck in this boring caravan with nothing to do and no-one to talk to... not even you anymore."

The silence stretched out between them. Thalassa's tears had dried, but she was still angry enough at her father that she refused to look up from her pillow, the occasional sniff being her only movement. Finally, the wood creaked, signalling Magnifi pulling himself off the bunk to descend the ladder. Thalassa listened carefully to the sound of his socked feet meeting the floor, then Magnifi paused. A moment later, he left the room, the door creaking softly at his back.

Only then did Thalassa dare to look up. Over the edge of her bunk, she found her hat had been moved from the floor to a side table (the reason for her father's pause before he left), and the door was pulled to a close. Confused, she waited and listened, wondering why Magnifi had left so abruptly and without a word. She heard a series of shuffling in the next room (likely Magnifi pulling on some shoes), followed by, to her surprise, the sound of the caravan's front door closing.

'Oh no."

She slipped off her bed, falling to the floor with a thud. "Dad!" She stumbled only a second, then threw herself through into the living area. As expected, she found it empty. 'What's Dad doing? Is he going to fire Crack and Extant?' She shook her head. 'No way. He's too in love with them to do that. So he must be going to...' She squeaked in fear as her father's destination popped into her head, and ran for the door. "Dad, wait!"

Outside the caravan, standing in the dying sunlight, Thalassa paused to regain her bearings. Across the square, she could see Zak and Valant sitting on crates outside their own caravan, in idle conversation. They stopped as they spotted her, the trio staring at each other across the way for many long seconds. On one side, a sixteen-year-old girl, and on the other, two men, one nineteen and one
twenty-two years old.

Well. Thalassa had never socialised with those two before and she certainly wasn't going to start now. Shooting them a glare, she ran for the street, teal cape flapping behind her.

It was lucky Jove wasn't busking too far away, as Thalassa only had to look to her left as she arrived on the pavement to find the spot he'd claimed not long after they met the previous week. Jove was right where she'd left him, though now on his feet, holding his guitar under one arm with his eyes wide. In front of Jove, his back to his daughter, was Magnifi, arms crossed.

Thalassa bit back a gasp, forcing her feet to move already. "Dad!"

Man and teenager paused, Magnifi turning to face his daughter with an amused look. "Thalassa? You object?"

"Dad, you can't send him away!" Thalassa stomped one of her white boots for good measure. "We're about to leave anyway, so-!"

Magnifi chuckled deep in his throat. "I'm doing what now?"

Thalassa paused, staring at her father. "Uh... You're... telling him to go away, aren't you?"

Jove still looked stunned, but a small smile spread across his face as he watched the girl. "Thalassa, he... He's offered to let me join the troupe. As a guest performer."

Thalassa could only stare right back at him. "He...?" Thalassa turned to her father. "Dad?"

Magnifi was still chuckling, and gave his daughter only a simple nod.

Squealing, Thalassa pounced on her father with a tight hug, clinging to the back of his white shirt. "Oh Dad, you're the best! Thank you so much!"

The man laughed, patting the cape hanging around his daughter's neck. After a few moments, he moved his hands to her shoulders, gently pulling her away to look Thalassa in the eyes. "I think we have been travelling alone for too long. Zak and Valant upset the balance, and I fear I left you out in the cold as a result. It's only fair you have someone else around to be there for you, someone to be a friend, for when I cannot." He gestured to Jove with a smile. "And we can even send him out on stage to earn his keep, too."

Thalassa giggled, seeing Jove's face flush bright red. "You won't regret this, Dad! Jove's a great musician! He'll be pulling in crowds of his own one day!"

Magnifi snorted, and, despite his good humour, Thalassa could see from the twitches on his face that he doubted that. "We've all heard his music, dear. He's been 'auditioning' out here all week."

"I-I'm sorry, sir," Jove mumbled, fidgeting with his guitar. "I know you sent me away the first time we met, but-"

"All forgotten, boy." Magnifi waved a hand, dismissing the apology. "Collect your things, and I will find you somewhere to sleep until we can sort out something more permanent."

Jove grinned despite his red face, and leaned down to collect the small bag he always kept on him. Thalassa dashed forward to help, taking the bag as she knew her friend would prefer to hold on to his precious guitar. She giggled, saying "Y'know, if you're staying with us now, you need a good stage name."
"A stage name?" Jove frowned, confused. "What's wrong with my real name?"

Thalassa scoffed. "No-one in Troupe Gramarye uses their real name around here." She paused. "Well, except me, but that's only because mine is too good to replace."

Magnifi hid another snort.

"And we already have the perfect one for you to use: Hyperion Reylu!"

Jove's face scrunched in thought. "That again? Why do you like that name so much?"

Thalassa grinned. "'Reylu' is Borginian for 'justice', and Hyperion was a Greek Titan, the father of the god of the sun and the goddesses of the moon and dawn!" She decided not to mention the Titaness who had given Hyperion said children happened to be Theia. It wasn't a name she was going to need anymore, anyway. "Don't you like it? It's less pompous and in-your-face as a name than 'Zeus' would be."

Jove still looked confused. "Well, okay for Hyperion, I guess... though I've never heard of a language called 'Borginian' before."

"The native language of Borginia, a small country in Northern Europe," Magnifi explained. "I'm sure we'll travel through it again one day." He stepped forward to firmly pat Jove's shoulder. "Welcome to Troupe Gramarye, Hyperion Reylu. I'm sure we'll enjoy having you around."

Jove still seemed unsure for a moment, but then shrugged and gave the man a grin. "Thank you, sir. I won't let you down!"

Thalassa bounced on her heels, grabbing Jove's arm. "C'mon Hyperion, I wanna introduce you to Knack and Talent!"

View the Court Record
"And that's why Valant didn't know his real name..." Apollo hummed in thought, fingers brushing against the grooves of his bracelet. "And why that article we found didn't know it either."

Trucy kept her attention on the woman sat between them, her hands resting on Thalassa's knee. "So then you and Polly's daddy fell in love and got married and had Polly, right?"

"More or less," Thalassa laughed, laying a hand on top of her daughter's. "Jove travelled with us for two years as Hyperion, and we were certainly very close. He had to share a trailer with the props for a few days, then my father bought a third caravan for him to stay in. I spent nearly all my free time there, helping Jove practise, or just talking. I offered to fix up that old hat of his, but it just fell apart, so I simply bought him a new one. He got a new bag, new clothes... That jacket survived, and he eventually grew into it." She smiled, her eyes far away. "We spent so much time together... and, perhaps because of the isolation we had from the outside world, it was a genuine surprise when I fell pregnant at only eighteen."

Apollo gave her a surprised look. "What, you never got the sex talk?"

"No." Thalassa shook her head with a chuckle. "My father was so embarrassed when we found out what was going on. He sat Jove and I down and we had a long talk. Jove and I loved each other, we knew that, and we certainly both looked forward to becoming parents. We were both adults, so when Jove admitted he wanted to break away from the troupe, and I wanted to go with him... My father gave us his blessing. We left and got married in Borginia, the birthplace of my mother."

"So Polly came first, then you got married." Trucy grinned with pride over her concise summary.

Apollo frowned in thought. "Our grandmother was Borginian? Is that why so much of our family history is tied to there?"

Thalassa nodded. "It's because of her my father made sure I learned Borginian growing up, even though she was gone and we rarely went back there. I think my giving Jove the name 'Reylu' also spread rumours he was Borginian, though he'd never heard of the place before meeting me." She smiled. "Of course, he was never very attached to that name. Once we left the troupe, he changed it to Jangly Justice."

Trucy snorted, pressing a hand to her mouth. "Did he seriously choose Jangly Justice himself?"

Thalassa nodded. "Yes, he did. He promised me it was only temporary at the time, but he never came up with anything better... and he always brushed off my suggestions." She turned to her son. "He never had any complaints about 'Apollo' though. He always liked that one."

Apollo felt his face turn red, and sheepishly rubbed the back of his neck with one hand.

Thalassa rested a hand on her son's shoulder, watching him fondly. "We travelled all over, and especially to places Troupe Gramarye had never gone. Jove and I performed in cafes and bars, taking turns looking after you when we had to be separated. That was how we came to be in Khura'in when
you were five months old."

Trucy nodded, thinking. "So then Polly's daddy took Polly to this queen... and died in a fire?"

Thalassa was quiet, a pained look on her face. After a long pause, she explained, "I fell ill when we arrived. Food poisoning from the plane, we guessed. To give me a chance to rest, Jove took Apollo out to look for work. I spent the day alone, sleeping through my sickness and waiting for their return..."

- Twenty-Two Years Earlier -

Thalassa stirred as she heard the clatter of a key in the lock of their door. "Jove?" She pushed herself up from where she'd been sleeping on the bed, arranging herself into a sitting position just as the door opened.

The first thing to appear to Thalassa in the doorway was Jove's grin, the young man slipping through into the room. "Hey, 'Lassa. Hope we didn't wake you." Nestled in one arm was the bundle of white sheets containing their son, brown eyes wide as he silently watched his surroundings.

Thalassa shook her head, holding out her arms. "How was it?"

Jove shrugged as he quickly delivered the baby to his mother. "Pretty good pickings, actually. They love their music, these Khura'inese."

Absently nodding, Thalassa focussed on Apollo, pulling him into her lap and placing a hand on his belly, where her fingers were quickly claimed by tiny claws. "That's good."

Jove chuckled, brushing Apollo's cheek with the back of a hand. After a moment, he stepped back, shooting Thalassa a grin as he wandered over to where they kept their suitcases in a far corner of the room. "The little man and me have to head out again, though. Got a pretty big gig tonight." Placing his guitar to one side, Jove dumped his backpack on the floor to go through its contents.

Thalassa turned to watch him over her shoulder with a confused frown, barely registering the baby in her arm beginning to suck on her fingers. "You do?"

Jove laughed, swapping out some random objects in his backpack for a small set of clothes from his suitcase. "You'll never guess, so I'll just tell you: Apollo and I got invited to the royal palace for the night. To play for the queen."

"What!?" Thalassa almost fell off the bed trying to spin around to face her husband, stopping at the last moment only thanks to the reminder of Apollo in her lap. "How on earth did you manage that?"

"Aw, and ruin the surprise?" Jove laughed, securing his belongings in his bag. He got to his feet, swinging the backpack over his shoulder. "I've got my guide waiting outside, but I told him you were performing elsewhere, so you don't have to show your gross face to anyone if you don't want to."

Thalassa tried to snort at that - she had described her pale, sickly demeanour as exactly that while chasing him out earlier that day - but was interrupted by a tickle in her throat that instead resulted in a cough, which she was forced to direct into her shoulder to avoid spraying her son with germs. Once she recovered, she shook her head and returned her attention to her husband. "So you'll be staying
the night in the palace? With Apollo?"

Jove was busy securing his guitar underneath his backpack, but gave his wife a nod regardless. "I didn't want to stick you with him overnight if you're not up to it. Also, there's apparently another little boy a little older than Apollo there, so he'll have a playmate while I'm busy."

Thalassa turned her attention to the baby in her arm, to his pudgy little hands gripping her fingers tightly. He seemed to have tired of trying to suck on them, and looked up to meet his mother's eyes curiously. She could only smile at him. "What kind of mother would I be to deny my son a rare play-date?" She giggled, raising the baby to her face to rub their noses together. Apollo promptly laughed with her, reaching his tiny hands up to press against her cheeks. Despite the awkward angle she was holding him in, Thalassa was loathe to break the physical contact, keeping her son where he was as she got to her feet. "You'd just love having another baby around to play with, wouldn't you, Apollo?"

The baby babbled happily, still patting his hands clumsily against her cheeks.

Jove hid a snort of amusement, watching Thalassa carry Apollo across to the table they'd designated as the baby's changing area. "I think Apollo missed his mama." He followed the pair, standing nearby as mother laid son down on the waiting blanket. "Actually, that's a good idea. I've got his changing supplies and diapers if you need them."

Thalassa shook her head, indicating the spares sitting by Apollo's head. Her hands were busy unwrapping the baby from his bundle, and she paused only to tickle his bare tummy before busying herself changing his nappy. It didn't take long (it helped she and Jove had plenty of practise by now), and she was about to wrap the wriggling baby back into his bundle before stopping in her tracks. "Actually..." She grabbed one of her bracelets at random - the one on her left arm - and pulled it against her wrist until the metal adjusted, slipping it off easily. She placed the object, still warm from her body heat, on Apollo's chest, and the baby didn't hesitate to reach out and grab it as best he could with his pudgy hands, attempting to pull the new plaything directly into his mouth.

"What...?" Jove scratched his head under his hat, and Thalassa could almost feel the wave of confusion from him. "Thalassa, are you serious? That thing's far too big for his wrist."

Thalassa hummed in agreement, holding the bracelet in place as she waited for Apollo to tire of trying to taste it. "It's more of a crown." She grinned, using her free hand to start wrapping the baby back into his bundle. "Very fitting, in my opinion. He needs something fancy to show off if he's going to see a queen, Jove. Besides, he was always going to get one of them eventually."

Jove snorted. "Can't it wait until he's old enough to wear it, at least?"

"Too late, it's Apollo's now." Thalassa scooped the giggling baby, tightly contained in wrapped linen, into her arms, showing him off to his father. "He's ready to meet royalty."

Jove sighed and rolled his eyes, but didn't argue further, holding out his arms with a smile. "Alright, alright... I'll make sure he doesn't lose it." Once Thalassa had handed over their son, he laughed. "If your bracelet is a crown... does that make Apollo the Gramarye Prince?"

Thalassa scoffed, shoving the amused Jove in the shoulder. "Get out of here, already." She leaned down to give her son one last kiss on the forehead, cherishing every second of his quiet babbling. "I'll see you tomorrow, Apollo. Be good for Daddy, okay?"

Once Thalassa had straightened, Jove wasted no time planting a quick kiss on her lips. "You just focus on getting better. I'll be right back with Apollo before you know it."
"I know you will." Thalassa gave her husband a warm smile, holding back a threatening cough at the back of her throat. "Have fun. I'll want to hear all about it later."

Jove chuckled, holding Apollo close. "Gotcha." He winked once, then headed out the door.

Thalassa never saw him again.

View the Court Record
Trucy gave their mother a tight hug. "I'm sorry about Jove, Mommy. It wasn't your fault, though."

Apollo shook his head in agreement, gripping Thalassa's hand with both of his. "No-one ever blamed you, Mom."

Thalassa let out a shuddering sigh. "No. No-one except me." She shook her head, clutching both her children. "I slept through the night, and in the morning, I waited for Jove's return. Midday came, and I didn't worry. With such an important venue as the royal palace, it was understandable he'd be held up a little. It was only as the sun began to set I realised something must have happened. Despite my illness, I headed out to the street, looking for anyone who could speak English to ask them if they'd seen a foreign man with a guitar and a baby. Every single one of them just brushed me off with a 'no'." She frowned. "At first, I thought I was only imagining that everyone on the street seemed as frantic and confused as me. I couldn't possibly imagine why I wouldn't be... and besides, I had Jove and Apollo to find, and no worry to spare for the strangers around me." She closed her eyes, seeing the dark night of so long ago projected against her eyelids. "I don't remember exactly how I found out anymore. Maybe someone eventually took pity on me that night. Maybe it was the next day I heard, when I saw that photo of the burning palace on a newspaper. Either way, someone told me a musician had died in the fire. Not that anyone cared, so focussed on looking for the arsonist that had killed the queen." Her eyes opened once more, looking up to meet Apollo's concerned gaze. "I stayed in Khura'in for as long as our savings would allow, fighting through my illness, looking for you. It was only a week, but it was the longest week of my life." Blinking back tears, she reached up to cup her son's cheek. "Being forced to leave, to return to my father, simply because I couldn't afford to stay any longer... That was the absolute hardest thing I ever had to do. I regretted it the moment I decided to do it."

Apollo found himself having to hold back tears of his own, placing his hand over Thalassa's. "You did your best, Mom."

Thalassa stared at him for a long moment before taking a deep breath, pulling Apollo into the hug she was already sharing with Trucy. "Oh, the words my father had for me when I showed up at his caravan, deathly pale, completely hysterical, begging for help to return to Khura'in to find my baby... or just to prove for sure whether it had really been Jove who died in the fire... He had to be harsh to make me understand you were both gone. Running off on that wild goose chase would only end in me working myself to death along with you, and he couldn't allow me to do that."

"Why didn't he help you, though?" Trucy still clung to her mother's torso. "Nobody'd said Polly was dead!"

"But my dad was dead," Apollo pointed out, pressed against Thalassa's side where her arm was holding him. "I was only a baby, Truce. If no-one knew I even existed to tell Mom I was okay, what else was she supposed to think had happened to me?"

Thalassa leaned over to kiss her son's forehead. "My father had also suffered the loss of a spouse when my mother died. His experience helped convince me to stay put, to let myself grieve and
recover. I didn't leave the caravan for a long time... I certainly never sang again, not as much as I used to... but eventually I talked myself into rejoining the act. I became the assistant to Zak and Valant, as I had always been for my father before them."

Trucy grinned. "And then you fell in love with my daddy!"

Thalassa chuckled. "Eventually. It took a long time to not feel like I was betraying Jove and Apollo by trying to move on." She looked off into the distance. "Jove would never have wanted me to waste the rest of my life looking back at our time together. It was just hard to make myself stop."

Apollo noted his mother's hand clinging to his other arm, holding him in place at her side, and twisted one of his own hands around to hold it and offer comfort.

"My father was already getting too old to perform, not that he ever stopped entirely," Thalassa continued with a sigh. "The three of us gradually took over. Valant was too shy to socialise much with me, but Zak was persistent enough that eventually I agreed to start leaving the lot with him, and explore the places we visited like I used to before. He was... very charming. And I was grateful for all his efforts, even if it took years to stop putting Jove and Apollo between us. He never knew I was doing that, though. It hurt too much to ever talk about them."

"That makes sense. He didn't know about me, after all," Apollo mumbled, frowning in thought. "Except Valant did, or at least suspected. He thought it was just wishful thinking for Zak."

Thalassa gave her son a thoughtful look. "It may have been. Zak highly valued honesty and loyalty, and had more than enough pride in his convictions that you could always trust he would tell the truth, even if it was only to admit he couldn't say. He would never have made an assumption as large as that without first hearing confirmation from me or my father." She smiled, turning to Trucy. "That's part of what I loved about him. He had such great passion for magic, rivalled only by his love for poker. So often he thought he could use his poker tricks to hide something from me, but it never worked. He'd get all flustered every time, then laugh and promise to slip one past me one day. He knew he never would, of course."

Trucy giggled, huddling closer to her mother, only for her smile to turn sad. "You said you heard what happened to him, right? To Daddy Zak?"

Thalassa nodded. "Phoenix brought me up to speed, before Vera's trial. He asked me to be a jurist for that, actually."

Apollo jumped out of her grip, perching on the edge of the seat to face his mother with an incredulous look. "What!? You were on the jury, too!?"

Thalassa chuckled as she nodded. "I thought you were very impressive. Just like when you defended Machi."

Apollo turned red as his cape, looking away.

Laughing, Trucy leaned forward to tug her brother's arm. "See, Polly? It's a good thing you had us helping you in court, huh?"

Apollo waved off the teen, returning his attention to their mother and counting off on his fingers. "So... Luke knew about you because he was helping with the jurists. Mom Maya and Iris knew about you because they were jurists, and they probably told Pearly while they were at it."

"I met Pearl and Iris during the trial, yes," Thalassa replied, smiling. "Maya I met when I arrived last week. She and Phoenix came to collect me from the airport. I couldn't have asked for a lovelier
woman to be your mother in my absence."

Trucy wiped imaginary sweat off her forehead with a grin. "Phew! I'm glad Mommy Thalassa and Mommy Maya are friends already, right, Polly?"

Apollo gave his sister a quick nod (he could see Trucy had worried about that, and he was happy to hear it too), but his focus remained on Thalassa. "So that means Clay knew about you, too. How on earth did you get him to not talk about you?"

Thalassa laughed. "Apparently your friend is more trustworthy than either you or Luke think." She ignored Apollo's huffing, shifting in her seat to be closer to both her children. "Either way, it seems we were so careful keeping me a secret, there's a certain something else we neglected to ask Vera not to mention."

Apollo and Trucy's eyes met, the girl gasping loudly. Although it was a surprise to hear Thalassa had been with Phoenix and Maya at the hospital that morning, the reminder that their adoptive parents had finally proposed was what they mutually decided to concentrate on. Trucy giggled, bouncing in her seat. "Oh, it's so awesome they're finally going to get married! Do you think they've told the others yet?"

Apollo scoffed. "Please, it's not like it's a surprise. Those two were already married when Dad adopted us. They've just finally decided to make it official."

"Oh really?" Trucy snorted, arms crossed as she raised a knowing eyebrow at her brother. "You were the only one of us who didn't believe they were a couple at first. You told us off for trying to get them together."

"Um, duh?" Apollo rolled his eyes. "Because it's not a group of kids' place to interfere in other people's love lives? Luke even tried to talk you out of it, but you wouldn't listen."

"Ah, but if it wasn't for me and Pearly, Mommy and Daddy would never have admitted they liked each other." Trucy nodded, chest puffed out with pride. "So, really, you could say this whole wedding was thanks to us."

"It hasn't even happened yet. You can't just take credit like that!"

"Sure I can!"

Thalassa laughed, breaking the pair from their bickering. "Speaking of, I think it's high time we caught up with the joyous couple. I want Machi here to talk about my trip back to Borginia." She pushed herself to her feet.

"Oh yeah!" Trucy sprung up at her mother's side. "He ran off with everyone else!"

Apollo hummed in thought as he stood. "Where are they, though? They said something about going to find Mom Maya, but..."

Thalassa grinned, placing her hands on her children's shoulders. "Just follow me. They're not far."
Apollo was a little surprised when Thalassa led them across the road and down the street to the nearby park. A glance at his phone told him it had been over an hour since everyone else left the office, so that they'd been hanging out so close for that long was impressive.

"Ooh, People Park!" Trucy bounced excitedly at Thalassa's side. "Mommy, we need to show you where Polly found those-!"

"That's enough of that," Apollo hurriedly interrupted, shoving a hand over his sister's mouth. "We can talk about the murder of Doctor Meraktis another time."

Trucy complained through his hand. Thalassa laughed.

They found the rest of their family on a small hill, sitting below a tree that Apollo recognised as the same place the Wright family had had their first picnic, shortly before he and Luke were adopted. They saw Phoenix and Maya first, their backs to the approaching trio and heads leaning against the other. Phoenix even had his arm around Maya, pinning them even closer together. Beyond, a little further down the slope, Luke, Pearl and Machi were sat in more of a circle, apparently busy trading around puzzles written in the back of Luke's notebook.

Trucy squealed loudly, running up and falling on top of Phoenix and Maya in her efforts to hug them, surprising the pair into jumping apart. "And now my whole family is together! Thank you, Daddy!" She planted a kiss on her surprised father's face, then did the same for Maya. "Thank you, Mommy!"

Phoenix and Maya laughed, glancing at each other. "No need to thank us, kiddo," Maya said, turning her gaze up to Thalassa and Apollo. "You three found each other."

"That's a lie and you know it." Apollo crossed his arms, pretending he wasn't smiling.

Luke, Pearl and Machi had also noticed the new arrivals by now, and Machi got to his feet with a grin. "You are back!" He dashed up the hill, bypassing where Trucy was still hugging Phoenix and Maya to head for Thalassa and Apollo. "Did you have nice talk?"

Apollo immediately pulled his youngest brother into a headlock, ruffling the giggling Machi's mop of golden hair. "You are a devious little brat!" He released the boy, crossing his arms again. "Did you know, too?"

Machi shook his head, still grinning.

Phoenix gently detached Trucy from his neck, gesturing between Thalassa's children. "The whole point of keeping it a surprise was that all three of you didn't know. Machi deciding to leave surprised us just as much as you."

"I think you and Trucy deserve time with Aska more than I," Machi explained with a shrug. He turned to Thalassa. "I am glad you are back, Aska."
"I am, too," Thalassa chuckled, running her hand through her youngest's hair. She turned her smile then on the nearby couple. "Though, if not for Phoenix and Maya here pushing me so hard, I may never have worked up the courage to see the three of you again."

Maya grinned. "You're glad you did though, huh?"

Thalassa laughed, nodding. "Indeed I am. Very much so."

"That reminds me." Apollo headed past his parents, down towards where Pearl and Luke were still sat in the grass. "How the hell did you manage to keep Clay quiet about all this?"

"I know, right?" Luke jumped to his feet, eyes wide. "I mean, he nearly spoiled the surprise after the trial yesterday, but apart from that, he actually kept himself in check!"

Apollo laughed as he approached. "Oh yeah, he did say something weird, didn't he? Good thing you were there to cover for him, huh? Y'know," he tapped his brother's arm, "aside from the fact you're a terrible liar."

Luke shrugged with a chuckle, replacing his notebook in his pocket. "To be fair, that doesn't exactly mean much coming from the living lie detector."

Trucy giggled loudly, skipping down to envelop the younger of her older brothers in a hug. "Aw, you've always been an awful liar, Luke! Don't worry, though. We like that about you."

Luke just grinned as he hugged his sister back.

Thalassa, her hand in Machi's, moved around to sit on the grass not far below where Phoenix and Maya had settled at the top of the hill, Machi remaining at her side. "Well, that's one of today's surprises out of the way. Was there another one anyone wanted to share?" She directed her grin up at the nearby couple, and Machi, Trucy and Apollo all copied her, hiding giggles.

Luke and Pearl exchanged a confused look. "I don't understand," Pearl said. "What do you mean, Missus Gramarye?"

Phoenix and Maya glanced at each other sheepishly, shifting closer together. "Well, we can't agree on who asked who," Maya explained, waving a hand, "but it looks like... Nick and I are engaged now."

Pearl's eyes widened dramatically, her hands held over her mouth as it dropped open. "You are?"

Luke gasped, but quickly covered his surprise with a laugh. "Wow... Congratulations!"

Trucy squealed, gripping Luke's arm tightly. "That's such a surprise! Who'd've thought Mommy and Daddy would finally decide to get married now?"

"That is so good to hear!" Machi badly hid a giggle. "I have always known you were close, Isa!"

Phoenix gave a good-hearted scoff. "We know Vera let slip. You don't have to pretend, you two."

Luke turned to the grinning Apollo. "Oh, that's what you three were talking about earlier."

Apollo gave his brother a shrug, then moved his attention to his adoptive parents. "It's about time you two finally made a move. Dad's already on the brink of elderly."

"Hey, objection," Phoenix called with a frown. Maya just laughed.
"So when's the wedding?" Pearl asked, hands pressed to pink cheeks. "It's so long overdue, Mister Nick! You and Mystic Maya deserve such a romantic one after all the time you've wasted!"

The pair's expressions fell, Phoenix watching Maya with concern. "It's... not that easy, Pearly," Maya mumbled, pulling her legs up to hug her knees.

Phoenix patted his fiancée's back, turning his eyes to the children. "Before she can do the test to be recognised as the Master of the Kurain Channelling Technique, Maya has to go do a very important training course overseas. She's been putting it off all year."

Apollo held back a gasp. He was remembering a certain conversation between the pair he'd overheard by accident only two months previous.

Pearl frowned, pressing her thumbnail to her lips. "Oh, I think I heard the Elders talking about that. The trip to Khura'in, right?"

"To where!?" Trucy's eyes widened, her gaze flicking towards Apollo and Thalassa.

Apollo studiously ignored his sister's eyes, though he noticed Thalassa giving her a warning look.

Machi and Luke both looked confused, though it was Luke who spoke next: "So, how long is this trip?"

"Two years," Maya mumbled.

"Two years!?!" Machi looked around at his family, clearly hoping he had misheard. "But... That cannot be true!"

Trucy forced a smile. "Oh, that's not too bad. You'll be coming back for breaks and stuff, right?"

Maya shook her head. "No breaks. It's ascetic training, so the whole point is I do it all in one go."

Trucy's smile fell. She was too shocked for words.

Pearl similarly looked heartbroken. "We... We won't see you for that long?"

Luke frowned, deep in thought. "That's awful. No wonder you were putting it off..." He looked up, watching Maya curiously. "When are you going?"

"That's a good point," Phoenix agreed, eyes on his fiancée. "Have you picked out a date yet?"

Maya nodded, meeting his gaze sheepishly. "I'm thinking the twenty-fourth. It's exactly two weeks from now."

Phoenix almost laughed, giving her a fond look. "Of course it is."

"But that's not fair!" Trucy cried, blinking back tears as her voice increased in both volume and pitch. "You can't go away! Not just as Mommy Thalassa finally comes back!"

Luke reached out to comfort his sister, placing his hands on her shoulders. "Trucy..."

Trucy shook her head, eyes watering. "You're supposed to be friends! I'm supposed to have two mommies now! Why can't you stay!?"

Apollo had had enough, glaring at his sister as he snapped, "Don't you think if Mom had any choice in this, she would be staying? This is something she has to do, Truce! All you're doing by
complaining is making her feel even worse about it!"

Trucy paused, returning her attention to Maya and finally noticing how withdrawn the woman was, hugging her knees tight as Phoenix comforted her. Trucy remained silent.

Luke kept a firm grip on Trucy's shoulders, frowning at Apollo. "Did you already know about this?"

Apollo winced, looking away guiltily.

"Apollo overheard us discussing it a couple of months ago," Phoenix filled in.

Pearl glanced at Machi and then Apollo. "A couple of months...? You mean, the time you came up to Kurain right after Iris moved in? The first time you brought Machi?"

Apollo just nodded. He couldn't maintain eye contact with any of his family.

Machi fidgeted, turning to Maya. "I only just meet you, Maya. It is sad you have to go. We will miss you." He gave her a smile. "But we stay in touch while you are gone? And we spend lot of time together before you go."

Maya managed to perk up enough to nod, wiping her eyes with a grateful look. "That would be great, Machi."

Barely holding back tears, Trucy ran back to fall on her adoptive mother with a tight hug. "I'll miss you, Mommy..."

Hugging the girl back, Maya lowered her knees, laughing through her own restrained sobs. "I'll miss you too, sweetie."

"It's only two years." Phoenix shifted closer to the pair, rubbing his daughter's back to offer comfort. "It'll be over with in a flash, you'll see."

Luke and Apollo barely needed to even glance at each other before they were walking over to add themselves to the group, sitting around Maya to place her in the centre of the family circle. Maya laughed again through her tears as she reached out to include the pair, her arms slung over Trucy and Apollo. "I'll miss you three so much. You'll be good for your dad and... and your mom while I'm gone, won't you?"

"Other mom," Apollo corrected with a smile.

"We'll miss you while you're away," Luke said, his forehead pressed to Maya's while his hands rested on his siblings' backs. "But we have two weeks until then. If we make the most of them, the wait until we next see each other won't be so bad."

Maya just grinned, firmly hugging the three. "You kids are angels."

View the Court Record
It took a while for the hug between the Wright children and Maya to end, none of the four quite ready to leave each other's touch just yet. Even when they did finally pull back, they remained in their close circle, hands still resting on each other to share comfort and reassurance. Apollo was surprised to notice when he next looked up that the intimate moment seemed to have tightened the entire family group, Pearl having shifted herself up the hill and near Phoenix while Thalassa and Machi were equally close on Maya's side, the Borginian teen pressed tight next to his mother.

Trucy wiped her eyes, a determined frown covering the raw pain of the unpleasant surprise. "Well, school's off on Monday for the public holiday. We have today, tomorrow, Monday, and then next weekend too, and you're leaving the Saturday after."

Maya nodded. "That's pretty much it, yeah."

"Then, if that's all the time we have left before you go," Trucy declared, "we're spending it with you! If you can't come down to the city, we'll go up to Kurain! We can stay the night, so we don't waste a single moment!"

Maya laughed, glancing at Thalassa. "Thank you, honey... but you're sure you don't want to spend any time with Thalassa, now she's back?"

Trucy faltered only a moment, looking between her mothers with horror before regaining her resolve. "We have the rest of the week for that, and the two years you're away." The fear returned as she looked to Thalassa. "Th-that's okay, Mommy?"

"Of course." Thalassa smiled. "Who am I to deny you time with your other mother?"

Trucy sighed, relieved. "R-right."

Luke patted his sister's back, hiding a smile. "Everything will turn out fine, Trucy."

"I don't have any objections to this plan," Phoenix added, grinning. "Of course, I am planning to go with her, stay a week or two in Khura'in to help her settle in."

Apollo snorted, restraining laughter. "Of course you are, Dad."

"Now now, it was very gentlemanly of Nick to insist like that." Maya badly hid a snicker. "Really out-of-character for him, I know."

Phoenix narrowed his eyes at the giggling pair, and the three teens who had joined them. "Now I have an objection."

Apollo waved his father off, calming his amusement. "I guess I'm on babysitting duty again while you're gone. Feels like I've spent barely any time in my apartment this past week."

"Oh, that remind me!" Machi waved to attract everyone's attention, waiting until all eyes were on him until he continued, "What we do now? I stay in agency?"
Thalassa frowned in thought. "I did want to discuss that with you today. I've put a lot of thought into it this past week."

Apollo noticed Trucy looking worried, and wished he was sitting closer so he could take her hand.

"I think it might be easier if you stayed with Phoenix for now."

Trucy blinked, surprised. "Really?"

Machi turned his head to one side, confused. "Why is that?"

"Partly because I understand your probation is tied to there right now," Thalassa explained, smiling at her youngest son. "And partly because... as much as I hate for this to happen, it will be necessary for Lamiroir to perform in the meantime. Alone." She winced, hands clasped together. "I may have to travel across the country. I most certainly will be singing primarily after your curfew. I can't guarantee I'll be home every night to satisfy the conditions of your punishment." She sighed. "It seems needless to put you through the rigmarole - leruljansi - of reassigning guardianship to Phoenix every time I cannot be there to look after you for a night or two."

Machi frowned, thinking over Thalassa's words.

"Do you need me to explain again in Borgenian?"

Machi shook his head. "I think I understand." He looked up at her with a smile. "You must go sing, so I stay with Is,,-" his face turned red, "um, Phoenix, until probation is over?"

Thalassa chuckled, pulling the boy close to kiss his forehead. "I'm glad you understand, pokani. And you may continue to call Phoenix your father if you wish to."

Instantly, Phoenix turned as red as Machi. "What!?"

Maya and Trucy broke into identical wide grins, gasping in unison. Pearl similarly emitted a quiet squeal, her hands pressed to her cheeks. "Aw, that's adorable!" Maya breathed, then looked to Thalassa. "No wonder you wouldn't tell us what 'Isa' meant!"

Machi hid his face in his hands.

Trucy crawled over to sit at her younger brother's side, hugging him tightly. "Aw, it's okay, baby brother. You're staying with us, and he's our daddy, so that makes him your daddy too!"

"I mean I don't mind," Phoenix sputtered nearby, running a hand through his spiky hair. "It makes sense and all, and you're been calling me that for long enough. It's just... unexpected, is all."

Apollo and Luke burst into laughter, leaning on each other in their hysterics. Apollo was able to get out, "Come on, Dad! You didn't work it out?"

"What else would he logically be calling you, Papa?" Although madly laughing similarly to Apollo, Luke was able to keep himself slightly calmer, just enough to talk clearly. "You never even looked it up?"

Phoenix huffed, crossing his arms. "Well... I figured Machi didn't tell me what it meant for a reason. I was just respecting his decision by waiting for him to tell me himself."

Apollo shrugged, his laughter descending into chuckling. "Okay, yeah, I only found out what it meant 'cause Machi told me, but you gotta admit it was blindingly obvious."
"I only looked it up to confirm my suspicions," Luke agreed. "The same with that thing he calls Apollo, 'isoveli'.'

"Yeah, 'big brother'." Apollo shot his father a smirk. "What else would he call me?"

Phoenix pouted as he looked away.

Maya giggled. "I think it's cute!" She leaned forward far enough to pat Machi's knee, the closest part of him she could reach. "You don't need to be embarrassed about it, kiddo. Nick can't help being a dad to anyone younger than him."

"Hey..." Phoenix muttered.

Machi finally peeked out from behind his hands, the redness in his face having faded. "It is okay, Isa?"

Despite his annoyance at the teasing, Phoenix was able to force a smile for the boy. "Of course it's okay. Why wouldn't it be?"

Machi nodded, slowly removing his hands from his face. Trucy giggled as she hugged him tighter.

Pearl gasped, turning to Phoenix. "Oh, Mister Nick, I almost forgot! If you're a lawyer again, you should try to get another case so Mystic Maya can help you like she always used to, before she goes!"

Phoenix laughed, scratching at his cheek. "Not quite, Pearls..." He couldn't fully hide a vaguely uncomfortable look.

"All that trial did was clear his name," Luke explained. "Papa isn't an attorney again just because he's not a forger."

Pearl frowned, putting a thumbnail to her lip. "Really?"

Apollo nodded. "Dad would have to retake the bar exam, and that's not gonna happen in two weeks. Unfortunately."

Maya sighed, disappointed. "Oh well." She grinned, elbowing Phoenix. "Guess we'll have to do that when I get back, huh?"

Phoenix ran a hand through his spikes, avoiding everyone's eyes. "Uh, yeah, guess so..."

"In the meantime, you can start studying for your test, Daddy!" Trucy giggled. "We'll all help you, too! Then you can become a lawyer again even quicker!"

"That's very nice of you to offer, Trucy," Phoenix muttered, still avoiding anyone else's gaze.

Machi gave Phoenix a concerned look. "Isa? Are you okay?"

Phoenix scratched at the back of his head, frowning off into the distance. "Sure."

By now, everyone was aware of Phoenix's odd behaviour, exchanging worried glances or just watching him with undisguised concern. Apollo was the first to break the silence: "Dad, what is it?"

Phoenix didn't reply, busy pretending he hadn't heard his son's question.

Thalassa sighed, the first to accept the conclusion everyone else was too afraid to come to: "You're
not planning on becoming a lawyer again."

Every other member of the group stared at Phoenix with mixtures of shock and horror, crying "What!?" in such a chaotic, mistimed mess it was hard to tell what had even been said.

"But that not make sense!" Machi cried.

"Why would you not want to be a lawyer again?" Maya demanded.

"Wasn't the whole jurist system idea about clearing your name?" Luke asked.

"You promised Prosecutor Gavin you'd face him in court again!" Trucy argued.

"But you were such a famous lawyer!" Pearl whimpered.

Apollo was too shocked to speak, simply staring with wide eyes.

Phoenix huffed, turning a stern gaze to the group as he held up a hand to silence them. "Okay, first of all." He pointed at Machi. "It makes perfect sense once you know my reasons." He pointed at Trucy. "I didn't promise anything, I just said I'd have to retake the bar exam before it was possible." He pointed at Pearl. "Just because I was well-known isn't a good enough reason to become a lawyer again." He pointed at Luke. "It was about making Kristoph pay for his crimes, and clearing my name was a side-effect of that. Mission accomplished, as far as I'm concerned." He pointed at Maya. "And, just think about it: I've been playing piano in that hole-in-the-wall restaurant for seven years. I was a professional defence attorney for three. Any skills I did have will be long gone by now, and the court system has moved on without me." He sighed, leaning back on his hands and looking away. "Who would I be kidding, trying to go back to the way things used to be?"

Apollo finally found his voice. "Dad, you've got to be joking. What kind of lame, bullsh-," he quickly glanced across at Pearl and Thalassa, "bullcrap excuse is that?" He got to his feet, staring his father down. "From the very beginning, even if you never said it outright, we could see you always intended to get your badge back once your name was cleared. Being a defence attorney was more than just what you're known for, it was your life. Even back in April, it was plain to see how much you love being in court and pinning the culprit to save an innocent life. I saw that same passion from the gallery when I was a kid, and seeing that passion, seeing you, inspired me to seriously think about becoming an attorney myself. Every moment I was studying for the bar exam, my biggest wish was to make you proud! Why..." Apollo halted, feeling tears pricking in the corners of his eyes. When he continued, it was in a quiet, defeated voice: "Why are you throwing that away, Dad?"

For a long moment, Phoenix didn't reply. Finally, he turned his gaze to meet his eldest son's. "Tell me, Apollo: What reason is there for me to retake the bar exam? To become a defence attorney again?"

Apollo frowned, recognising that expression he'd always mentally called Phoenix's 'courtroom look'. Before the trial in April, he'd known it best from the many times Phoenix had ran him through fantasy cases to test Apollo's reasoning, and he guessed this was a similar scenario. He shrugged. "Because it's what you want to do?"

"Who are you to tell me what I want to do?" Phoenix shook his head. "You'll have to do better than that, Apollo."

Apollo frowning, crossing his arms. "Because it's what you're best at?"

Phoenix nodded. "I'll admit I'm a better lawyer than pianist... but I'm a better poker player than lawyer. I've never lost a game, after all."
"That's only because you had me and Trucy to help you!"

"I had help in court, too." Phoenix pointed out. "And you two weren't there every time I had a game. I may not be that good, but I'm still good."

Apollo tried not to groan as he realised he couldn't argue that point. He thought a few moments, then snapped his fingers. "Alright: Because your name is in the agency's name, so you have to be prepared to do 'anything' for a client if they ask you to, including defending!"

Phoenix laughed. "Clients asking for defence aren't exactly common. If we get one of those, we have you, and I doubt we're likely to get more than one at a time. Besides, your name is 'Wright' too, isn't it? Can we expect you to play a musical instrument if asked?" He shook his head with a smirk. "C'mon, you knew that one was a long shot. You're out of ideas already?"

Apollo crossed his arms, tapping his forehead in thought. He had to admit, he was finding it hard to shoot down any of his father's arguments. *This really is one of his mock trials... Wait a second...* He met Phoenix's eyes with a frown. "Well... The fact that you're winning right now is pretty good proof."

"And yet it would vanish into meaningless words were it enough to prove your case." Phoenix smiled. "Trying to invoke a paradox as your decisive evidence is scraping the bottom of the barrel a bit, don't you think?"

Apollo shook his head. "No, that's just it. You're being a lawyer right now! Talking about my 'case' and 'decisive evidence', arguing like we're in a courtroom... How is that not proof!?"

Phoenix's smile died, replaced with a stern frown. "You're a lawyer, Apollo. I'm making my case in a way you can best understand it." He got to his feet, hands in the front pocket of his hoodie. "And since you didn't bring it up: You know how much money your cases have brought the agency over the past half-a-year. What would be the point in splitting that share between us, and taking me out of my steady job at the Borscht Bowl Club just so I can take an exam to wear a suit and a fancy sunflower pin? Any ideas there?"

Apollo stayed silent, looking away.

Phoenix sighed, his frown softening. "Believe me, I've presented myself every possible argument I can find, and I've yet to find any concrete reason to take that exam again." He shook his head. "My time as a defence attorney is long over. It's painful, I know... but it's true. You can't argue with the truth."

Apollo met his father's eyes. He couldn't shake the sudden feeling this had been an argument Phoenix had dearly hoped he would lose.

Phoenix dismissed his pain for a bright smile, sitting back down in the grass at Maya's side. "Hey, now the Jurist System trial is over and done with, I have extra time on my hands again. Maybe I should take piano lessons." He looked to Machi. "You any good as a teacher, Machi?"

Although the air was still awkward, Machi managed a small shrug and a smile. "Maybe. Maya is good, too."

"Hey, yeah, I taught you how to play in the first place!" Maya shoved her fiancé's arm, sticking out her tongue at him. "I can teach you how to not be so terrible before I go."

"In only two weeks?" Luke asked.
Trucy snickered. "That *would* be a miracle."

"Hey, objection," Phoenix called, though the smile on his face showed he wasn't as offended as he pretended to be.

Apollo sighed as he sat back down in the grass. As much as he wished otherwise... it seemed certain the world would never see Phoenix Wright, Ace Attorney ever again.

View the Court Record
The New Normal

October 10, 12:46PM
People Park

The time came for the group to leave the park, all getting to their feet. Thalassa offered to show her children where she was living now, so they could always come by if they needed her.

"My apartment isn't far. Just outside this park, in fact."

Trucy and Machi shared a grin, jumping either side of her. "Of course!" Trucy cried.

"That sound great, Aska!" Machi agreed.

Apollo shrugged, hiding a smile. "Sure."

Luke giggled, nudging his elder brother. "You don't have to hide that you're excited, Apollo."

Apollo shooed him away.

Pearl hid a grin, giving the Gramaryes a wave. "Have fun!"

Maya and Phoenix linked their arms, hands gripped tightly together. "We'll be back at the office when you're done," Phoenix told them.

"Oh, yeah!" Trucy bounced towards Maya. "We have to plan going up to Kurain tomorrow, and Monday, and next weekend! You have to stay in the city today, Mommy!"

"I already plan on it." Maya gave the girl a conspiratorial wink, then patted Phoenix's arm. "Can't let your dad mope because his brilliant fiancée left him all alone, huh?"

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "Brilliant? 'Childish', maybe."

Maya elbowed him. "Hey! Is that any way to talk about the woman you're engaged to?"

"I'm just being honest." Phoenix shrugged, grinning. "Isn't that the backbone of any good relationship?"

"Wait!" Surprising everyone into silence, Machi sprung forward, tugging on his sister's arm. "We cannot go to Kurain tomorrow! We have magic show!"

Trucy gasped. "Uncle Valant's show!"


Pearl clapped her hands together. "Oh yes, that sounds so exciting! Mystic Maya and I shall have to come down to the city!"

"You could all get tickets too!" Trucy giggled, turning to Thalassa. "Uncle Valant was telling us how he's going to revive Grandpa Magniffi's tricks! The first time they've been performed in seven years!"
Thalassa looked intrigued. "Oh?"

Luke frowned, watching his sister. "You spoke to him?"

"We had to drop by Sunshine Coliseum during our investigation for the trial," Apollo explained. "Brushel was headed there to talk to Valant, and we were trying to catch up to him. Speaking of," he turned his attention to Trucy and Machi, "I'm afraid we're not going to the magic show."

The three teens frowned in confusion, looking between each other. Trucy quickly fixed her gaze on her eldest brother. "What are you talking about? Why wouldn't we be going?"

Apollo sighed. "I got an e-mail this morning. I don't know what happened, but the entire thing's been cancelled. Our tickets are useless, and my money's been refunded. There isn't a magic show to go to anymore."

Machi's eyes turned to the ground, disappointed. "But I not get to see actual magic show before..." Pearl patted his back sympathetically.

Trucy frowned, still staring at Apollo. "But why would it be cancelled? This is such an important show! Nothing was supposed to stop it from going on!"

Apollo held up his hands to calm his sister. "I know, I know... Honestly, I have no idea why it was called off. The e-mail didn't say. I guess we'll just have to wait to see if Valant tries again."

Trucy huffed, unimpressed. "It's not fair..."

"No, it's not," Phoenix agreed, expression carefully neutral. "I know you were all looking forward to it, but Valant wouldn't have let his big show be cancelled at such a late stage for no reason, right?"

Maya nodded. "He would have had a very good reason to put it off. Maybe he'll make an official announcement or something."

"That's a good point." Apollo crossed his arms, thinking. "I'll have to keep an eye out for that."

While Phoenix, Maya, Luke and Pearl headed back to the agency, Thalassa took her children to the tall building overlooking the park, going inside, up the elevator, up a final flight of stairs, and through her front door. It was very spacious, with an entrance hallway that opened right up to a large living room, an equally sizable balcony on the other side of wide, glass doors that made up the opposite wall. The room itself though contained only a ring of modest lounges, a coffee table, and a stand with a TV that was still in its box, a clear sign Thalassa hadn't been here long. The biggest sign of mess Apollo found was a pile of cardboard stacked in a corner near the kitchen, most of it having tipped over from where it had been placed leaning against the wall. Beyond the living area, Thalassa showed them several empty rooms, outlining her plans for them.

"A few of them I have set aside for if you three if you ever want to stay over, once Machi's probation is done. This one here is the largest, and would make a good recording studio once I outfit it with sound-proofing, get a piano. This smaller one might make a good office, I thought. I have no idea what I might do with this one over here. Maya suggested a home cinema. Phoenix thought I might turn it into a painting studio. I haven't decided yet."

Once they were done looking around and discussing ideas for the penthouse, the four sat squashed into a corner of one of the lounges, a tight circle in the middle of the massive room. Thalassa sat in the middle, holding Machi and Trucy close either side, and Apollo sat on the edge, closest to Trucy.
As Machi had been absent before, Thalassa prompted him to talk, to tell her all about his three months with the Wrights. Machi was proud to show his mother how much his English had improved, and refused to switch back to Borginian for even a single word, despite Thalassa's offers when he struggled on a term or expression. As he spoke, Trucy frequently jumped in to help, and dragged Apollo into the conversation with her, talking of their trip to Kurain, how Machi found out about Lamiroir's true past, and how he'd been faring at school with his sister.

"I think that is all my interesting things to talk about." Machi grinned up at Thalassa. "How was your trip to Borginia, Aska?"

Thalassa paused in thought, then smiled. "I think I shall start before that, in England... when I met Professor Layton."

Over the next hour, Thalassa told her children the story of how she had befriended Hershel, Flora and Alfendi, the wait for her surgery and how it was replaced by the wait to be medically fit enough to travel, and the excitement of the day Emmy and Sycamore arrived in the Bostonius to finally take them across to the mainland and to Borginia. She showed them the photo Luke had sent, explaining how suspicious of it Flora and Emmy were. She told Machi all about Kopunchiville, about their old friends and the places they had frequented together and how they had changed over the years. She spoke of the true inhabitant of the 'haunted' house across from the orphanage, how the scared old man had briefly tried to kidnap her in an effort to avoid facing his past, and the subsequent crash into the river.

"It was only then he finally agreed to talk, and I got my memories back. It turned out... he was my Papa."

She told her children the story of young Magnus Grammar and Winfred Geary, of how the two had formed the first incarnation of Troupe Gramarye as Magnifi and Varlous. Around the same time, Gaelle 'Gaia' Takala had grown up in Kopunchiville Orphanage alongside Lalu Salinen, a younger brother who had invented the nickname 'Lamiroir' for his older sister. She hesitated only briefly before talking of how Gaia met the young Troupe, how the trio of young adults had formed a three-person relationship that had resulted in her. Gaia's illness threw the fragile situation into chaos, the infant Thalassa travelling with Magnifi while Varlous, under the new name Ami Ystava, took Gaia back to her hometown, caring for her as she slowly withered away. After Gaia's death, Ystava stayed in Kopunchiville and Magnifi kept Thalassa, his biological daughter, on his travels permanently, with her former Papa now only her Uncle Geary, forever out of reach.

"I never really thought about him, outside of knowing he built all our stage equipment. I certainly forgot how close we had been once. That status quo didn't change until I was much older, when I was shot during rehearsal."

She explained how, as they had been in Borginia's capital at the time of the accident, Magnifi sent his daughter to Geary, where she had only very slowly recovered. Knowing she was unfit to return, and wanting her to be happy even if she didn't remember them, Magnifi and Geary set her up with Salinen as a singer in the restaurant, where she was given her new name. As her short-term memory returned, Geary even gave her a new house, giving her independence and keeping her firmly away from any further reminder of him. Lamiroir's career kicked off, despite her blindness, and with not a single memory of Geary or of any other part of her life before her new name.

"Thalassa Gramarye was dead, for a long ten years..."

"But you were not dead, Aska." Machi laid a hand on Thalassa's arm where it rested in her lap. "Just because you forget everything, does not mean you are not alive."
Trucy nodded, pressing against her mother's side. "Yeah! You met Machi, and travelled the world... You two had loads of fun together, didn't you?"

Thalassa frowned, watching her daughter. "But I made no effort to regain my past. I wasn't there for you or Apollo."

"So?" Apollo shrugged. "Sure, it sucks we weren't together then, but we are now."

"And we always knew we'd find you one day!" Trucy giggled. "After me and Polly found out we were blood-related, we asked Mommy Maya to try and channel you."

"I asked her, you tried to stop me."

"-and then she couldn't, so we knew you were still alive out there!" Trucy threw her arms around her mother with a proud grin. "And we have the entire future to spend together now: You, me, Polly, and Machi." She paused. "Oh yeah, and Daddy, Luke, Mommy Maya, Pearly..."

Machi laughed, imitating his sister and hugging Thalassa tight. "We have big family now. I like have big family."

"It can be a pain sometimes, but I wouldn't give it up for anything." Apollo joined in the hug, wrapping his arm behind his sister. "What can the future compare to a decade or two?"

Thalassa could only smile, returning the hug from her children. "True. I certainly intend to make the most of it."

View the Court Record
The small family had lunch together before they decided to return to the agency. Trucy seemed highly excited to go, chomping down the fancy meal Thalassa had painstakingly ordered for delivery. "It's great, Mommy!" In no time at all, she was done, and grabbing at Apollo's arm. "Hurry up, Polly! We need to get back to everyone else!"

"Let me finish eating first!"

Thalassa gave her daughter a stern look. "We'll wait for all of us to finish eating, Trucy. Then we will go."

Although the girl pouted, she reluctantly sat still.

Machi was helping Thalassa start to clean up when finally Trucy's patience ran out. "We'll go wait by the elevator, Mommy!"

Thalassa looked up from the kitchen sink. "Trucy?"

The girl had already grabbed a surprised Apollo's arm, dragging him through to the front door. "Don't take too long!"

Apollo was too surprised to object as he was dragged downstairs, only regaining his voice as Trucy tugged him towards the lift. "H-hey, Truce, wait!"

As they reached the metal doors, Trucy finally stopped, looking around the empty hallway before turning on Apollo with an accusing glare. "Machi doesn't know."

Apollo blinked. "Doesn't know what?"

"And neither does Luke. Or Pearly. And I'm pretty sure Daddy and Mommy Maya don't know either."

Sighing, Apollo shook his head. "Don't know what, Truce?"

"About Khura'in." Trucy almost hissed the words, checking the hallway around them for eavesdroppers. "You lived there for so long, and it was such an important part of your life, and you never told us!"

Apollo's eyes widened, casting a fearful glance around the room himself. "I already told you why I didn't!" he whispered. "I didn't want to remember any of it myself! And of course Dad knows I came from there, it was in my adoption papers."

Trucy frowned. "Daddy knows? What about Mommy Maya?"

Apollo shrugged. "I dunno if Dad told her or not. I told him I wanted to forget about it when I overheard them talking about her trip a couple months back, so he might have kept it to himself or he might have told Mom and asked her not to mention it. I really don't know."
Trucy contemplated this for a moment or two. "Well, Mommy's leaving for Khura'in in two weeks. If she doesn't already know, she deserves to know. So, even if you won't tell Machi and Luke and Pearly, at least tell Mommy Maya about it, okay? Before she leaves?"

Apollo bit his lip, wanting to object... but eventually sighed. "Fine, sure."

Trucy let out a relieved breath, giving her brother a smile. "Thank you, Polly."

Footsteps echoed from the nearby stairs, and Apollo turned to see Machi and Thalassa emerging into the hallway, the latter with thunder in her expression. Trucy squeaked, jumping to jab a finger on the button to summon the lift.

Thalassa crossed her arms, blue eyes glaring at her daughter. "Trucy Artemis Gramarye. What was that all about?"

Trucy grinned sheepishly. "Nothing, Mommy. Honest."

Thalassa's disapproving look only deepened.

Apollo was almost too surprised to say anything. This was the first time he'd seen Thalassa in discipline mode. *I'm tempted to say she's being a parent... She's definitely serious about staying with us, huh?*

Trucy wriggled in place, and gave up resisting with a sigh. "I'm sorry, Mommy... I guess I was just... impatient to get back."

Thalassa stared a moment more before nodding, her frown and arms falling away. "You're forgiven, then. But have more patience next time."

"I will." Trucy grinned.

The wall beeped, and Machi gasped, leading the family towards the opening doors. "The elevator is here!"

It was only a short distance from the building that housed Thalassa's apartment to the agency, involving following Park Street around the corner, passing the large hotel, and crossing the street to arrive at the building in which the Wrights kept their office. Trucy and Machi giggled as they dashed off ahead across the road, Thalassa and Apollo hanging back at a more sedate pace.

Thalassa chuckled. "So full of energy."

"And this is them when they're tired," Apollo muttered, hiding a smile. "They feed off each other, I swear."

Thalassa laughed.

As they approached the street-level entrance to the Wright home, the teens ahead suddenly stopped in their tracks, catching the attention of the two adults behind them. It didn't take long for everyone to see what had caused the hold-up.

Valant Gramarye was standing by the stairs, cane missing and replaced by a mid-sized, open-topped box clutched tightly in his hands via handles cut into its sides. Much like the family opposite, he was staring with wide eyes, unsure quite how to react as his eyes flickered between the four.
Trucy gasped, grinning widely. "Uncle Valant!" She moved forward to meet him, but Apollo leapt after her and grabbed the teen's arm, pulling her to a stop. She looked back with a confused frown, but Apollo only subtly shook his head, keeping his eyes on the man in front of them.

Thalassa slowly walked up behind her children, watching Valant with an expression somewhere between awe and sympathy. She mouthed his name, unable to make herself speak.

Valant grimaced as he noticed Thalassa's attention, looking away guiltily. He studied the wall at his side for a few moments, then turned his gaze to Trucy, holding up the box with a small smile. As she watched, confused, he placed the object carefully on the ground in front of him, as far forward as he could reach. He took a single step back, then gave the family of four a deep bow, tipping his top hat. Without another word, and with none of his usual attempts at theatricality, Valant Gramarye then turned around and walked away.

Trucy gasped, pulling at her brother's grip as she attempted to follow. When she spoke, it came out far too quiet for the man to hear. "Uncle Valant...?"

Apollo could only stare after the man. Seeing him outside the agency had been enough of a surprise... Somehow, Apollo felt this was related to his strange behaviour when they last spoke to him, and to the sudden cancellation of the magic show.

Thalassa was the first to move, walking forward to pick up the box Valant had left behind. She examined it for a moment, her back to her children, then turned and held it out with a sad smile. "I believe he was delivering this to you, Trucy."

Apollo frowned, dropping his hand from his sister's arm. "Why? What is it?"

Released from her brother's leash, Trucy took a few careful steps forward, eyes on the box in her mother's arms. After a moment, she gasped, running towards it. "Wait, that book!" She plucked the very top item from the box, a black journal with a strap keeping it firmly closed, held in place with a small lock. On the front, in the middle of the faint pattern bordering the cover, was a large symbol in purple: the unmistakable Gramarye Seal. "I know this book! This is...!" She frowned, then looked up at Thalassa. "Why was he giving me this?"

Machi crept up to Apollo's side, taking the elder brother's hand. Apollo could see the boy felt just as confused as he did.

Thalassa looked back at her daughter with a pained expression, full of regret. "I'm afraid there's one more final secret we have been keeping from you... something we didn't think it would be right to reveal for some time yet."

Trucy glanced back at her brothers, all three surprised.

Apollo couldn't help a groan. "There's something else?" He held up his free hand, counting on his fingers. "You came back, Mom and Dad are getting married, Mom's going away for two years, Dad's not getting his badge back... And there's something else!?"

Thalassa grimly nodded. "I think we had better go inside. Phoenix should be the one to explain."

Trucy was staring at the book in her hands, a worried frown on her face. Apollo wondered if she was even listening to the conversation anymore.

Thalassa shifted the box under an arm, then placed her other hand on her daughter's shoulder. "Come." Gently, she directed Trucy towards home, the girl mutely following.
Apollo watched the pair disappear up the stairs. He had a funny feeling about what was going on... suspicions that had been circulating in his head ever since Phoenix had handed Trucy that strange envelope, since he saw Valant’s reaction to it, getting that email about the sudden cancellation of the magic show, and now Valant’s strange behaviour as he hand-delivered a box of objects marked with the Gramarye Seal, specifically to give to Trucy... and Thalassa knew what it was all about. *This all leads back to the Gramaryes... To Magnifi. Did Zak tell Dad something else back in April, that he didn’t pass on to us?*

"Isoveli?"

Apollo shook himself out of his thoughts, turning to his brother. It was clear by Machi’s concerned look he was intensely worried for their sister, and Apollo gave him a smile. "Don’t worry, Trucy will be fine."

It took Machi a moment or two to believe that, and he forced a thin smile in return.

Grip on his brother's hand tightening, Apollo gently guided him towards the stairs. "C’mon, let's catch up to the others." Together, the pair headed up to join the rest of their family.

Apollo dearly hoped this last bombshell of the day would run smoothly.

[View the Court Record]
The Gramarye Wrights Return

Chapter Notes

Apologies for such a long, unexpected delay! Cyclone Debbie knocked out our power, and all the repair people were apparently elsewhere so it took 27 hours to get fixed. I'm fine though, just exhausted from such a long blackout. :)

October 10, 1:44PM
Wright Anything Agency
Phoenix's Office

Thalassa led the Gramarye family through the open door into reception and beyond into the office. Trucy lingered at her side, still staring at the book in her hands. Behind, Apollo cast worried glances at his sister, hand held tight around Machi's.

As they filed into the office, the four found Phoenix and Maya standing near the piano, and the way they looked up at the new arrivals in surprise told Apollo they'd probably interrupted a rather intense discussion. Maya even stepped back, and Apollo could only guess she'd been pushing Phoenix toward the piano in an attempt to teach him while they had the chance. Regardless, the pair quickly noticed the sombre aura. "Is everything okay?" Maya asked.

Thalassa headed to the glass coffee table, placing the box in her hands firmly on its surface. "We ran into Valant outside. He had some things to pass on to Trucy." She gave Phoenix a pointed look. "Things that previously belonged to my father."

Machi and Maya gasped in unison. Phoenix, although also surprised, grimaced and ran a hand through his hair. "Right..."

Apollo couldn't take the suspense any longer, demanding of his father, "What's going on? Those are Magnifi's things? Why is Valant giving them to Trucy? And why'd he wait so long to do it!?"

"These were Grandpa Magnifi's top secret illusion plans," Trucy mumbled, standing behind Thalassa and with her eyes still locked on the black book in her hands. "Uncle Valant needs these for his magic show..."

Thalassa placed a hand on her daughter's shoulder, offering silent comfort.

Phoenix sighed, heading towards the twin red sofas. "I think it's best you all sit down for this. I'll explain."

Apollo still watched his father suspiciously, but led his youngest brother from the office doorway and around to sit on the nearest sofa. Trucy was guided into the spot at his side, while Thalassa, Phoenix and Maya all took their place on the seats opposite.

Phoenix leaned forward on his knees and pressed his palms together, eyes on the glass surface of the table between them. "Back in April, after Zak died... I'm not sure if you two remember me mentioning it, but there were a few things that happened that night I didn't tell you about."
Apollo frowned, crossing his arms. "I... do remember you saying you weren't prepared to tell us everything just yet. I thought you just wanted to wait until it wasn't all so recent, but you never did explain, did you?" His glare deepened. "And you said in that email you sent me Brushel was there that night. If Zak knew he was in danger, why did he go to the trouble of bringing his friend to meet you?"

"Because Brushel is a certified notary." Phoenix's gaze lifted to focus on his daughter. "Trucy, that envelope I gave you on Wednesday... You can open it now."

Trucy's eyes finally snapped up from the book in her hands, meeting her father's. She stared for a moment before reluctantly placing the book on the table in front of her, turning her attention to dig through the bag at her hip.

Apollo shot suspicious glares at Phoenix, shifting to prop his left arm on top of the seat cushion at his back, allowing him to better protect his sister should she need it. The evidence was already circling in his head again, everything that had come back to him on the street combining with the new information of how it all linked back to Zak and to Magnifi's illusions... and he wasn't sure how he felt about the conclusion he was coming to.

Trucy pulled out the pink envelope with the Gramarye Seal on its front, quickly flipping open the flap from where it had been tucked closed. She reached inside, paused, then screwed up her face and pulled out two pieces of paper, each folded neatly in half. The one on top was smaller, ripped down one side, while the paper below was larger, boasting four smooth edges that almost looked sharp enough to deliver a nasty paper cut. Trucy stared at them for a long moment, then turned her head away, handing them to her brother.

Apollo blinked, surprised, but took the items regardless. Keeping a concerned eye on his sister, he flipped open the top paper, the smaller ripped one, and read its contents aloud.

"I hereby give all rights to the secrets, staging, and performance of my magic to the recipient named below.
"Recipient: Zak Gramarye.
"Magnifi Gramarye."

Apollo held his breath. This wasn't anything new. Valant had told them the rights had been passed to Zak only a matter of days ago. He cast a wary eye over the shape of the paper in his hands, thinking it familiar... but decided there was no time for such musings right now. He placed the paper in his lap, unfolding the second and similarly reading it aloud.

"I, the below signed Zak Gramarye, hereby pass on all rights to the secrets, staging, and performance of Magnifi Gramarye's magic to my daughter Trucy Enigmar.
"Signed, Zak Gramarye.
"Notary: Spark Brushel.
"Witness: Phoenix Wright."

Apollo could only stare at the paper for a long moment, the silence of the room ringing in his ears.
His suspicions had been confirmed... and the only emotion he could summon was a sense of relief that the mystery had been solved.

On Apollo's left, Trucy slowly leaned forward in her seat, pressing both hands against her face as she silently shook with unshed tears.

Machi immediately jumped up from Apollo's right, running past his oldest brother and squeezing into the narrow gap between his sister and the sofa's armrest, pulling Trucy into a hug. "Is okay. You can cry if need to."

Apollo left the two hand-written contracts in his lap, placing a hand on his sister's back and out of the way of Machi's arms. He wanted to offer further comfort, but couldn't think of the words.

A clatter erupted from the kitchen door, which promptly opened. "Papa!" Luke stepped out, looking around the room to locate Phoenix. "We're done with." He paused as he noticed the group on the sofas. "Oh, you're back."

"They are?" Another voice laughed, and a second later Clay emerged from the kitchen, greeting the Gramaryes with an enthusiastic wave. "Finally! We've only been waiting for you guys to get back for-!"

Luke held up a hand, silencing their friend. His eyes were locked on Trucy with a concerned frown. "Trucy? Are you okay?" Without waiting for an answer, he crossed the room to join them.

Apollo wanted to answer Luke's question, but couldn't say for sure how their sister was feeling right now. Not only was this news very big and equally unexpected, it had all kinds of implications big and small that would affect how Trucy reacted, and he knew even his knowledge of the girl's mind was inadequate to predict that. He wasn't even sure how to begin explaining what they had just learned. As for what Clay was doing hanging around the agency (and, for that matter, where Pearl had disappeared to), Apollo decided he could wait to find out.

As Luke arrived by the sofas, standing next to Trucy and Machi, he cast his eyes over the situation: The box of items on the table, and the book with the Gramarye Seal on the front next to it, the opened pink envelope in Trucy's lap, and the two sheets of white paper in Apollo's. Apollo could see the gears turning in his brother's head, and Luke gave their sister a sympathetic look as he crouched by Machi, resting a hand on her knee. "Oh, Trucy..."

For once, Apollo was incredibly thankful Luke had always been the quickest on the uptake out of the three of them.

Clay ran up behind Thalassa, watching the group in confusion. "What's happened?"

"Trucy's inherited the rights to Magnifi's magic," Maya quietly explained.

"Oh, that." Clay frowned, watching Trucy. "Huh, I thought that was an awesome thing, not a sad thing."

Apollo shot his friend a suspicious glare. "Did you know?"

"All the jurists knew," Luke stepped in. "Papa decided it was vital information to understanding Vera's case."

Apollo looked to the sofa opposite, finding Maya sheepishly looking away and Thalassa putting all her concentration into fiddling with her bracelet. Clay, in stark contrast, was just watching with a blank look, evidently unaware of the tension in the room. Apollo turned his focus to Phoenix, who
was still leaning forward on his knees with his hands clasped together. "Dad?"

Phoenix sighed. "Those rights were the entire reason Zak ran from the courtroom rather than face a verdict. They're the reason Valant altered the scene of Magnifi's suicide. Zak risked everything to see me in April, not just for a petty poker game, but because of those performance rights. He lost his life because he was ensuring they went to Trucy instead of Valant." He turned his eyes up to meet his eldest son's. "To understand Vera's case, you would have to understand the Gramarye case first... and you couldn't hope to fully understand the Gramarye case without knowing the story of those performance rights."

Apollo decided he could understand that reasoning, but something still rang false: "But what about those of us in the courtroom? None of us knew this supposedly 'vital' information."

"You all had the next best thing: An intimate understanding of Kristoph." Phoenix flashed a wry smile. "Besides, I knew I could trust my jurists with that information, but not everyone in the courtroom was as trustworthy as the select few in the Jurists' Chambers... either that, or you weren't necessarily ready to hear it."

Apollo thought that over for a long moment. To be given this news in the middle of an already highly stressful trial would indeed have pushed the limits of what he and his siblings could bear... Finding out on a day already packed high with shocking revelations wasn't exactly ideal, but at least it was better than the alternative. His eyes landing on the box on the table, another thought occurred to Apollo. "Valant cancelled his show. He knew, didn't he? He must have only just found out."

Phoenix nodded. "He forced my hand, unfortunately." He turned his attention to Trucy. "When Zak gave me those contracts, he asked me to pass them on you when the time was right. I was going to wait until you were much older, but I couldn't ignore Valant trying to claim those performance rights for himself, not after everything Zak had given up to secure them for you."

Trucy's hands slowly lowered from her face. "Grandpa Magnifi... killed himself?"

Apollo mentally face-palmed, and, judging by the look on his face, Phoenix was doing the same. *That* was a detail they both completely forgot they'd been keeping from Trucy, for the exact purpose of not upsetting her. This was far from the ideal way of spilling the beans. 'Nice to keep the theme going, there.'

Thalassa shifted forward, perched on the edge of her seat. "He was dying of cancer. My mother died the same way, and I'm sure he never forgot a single moment of the years she slowly wasted away right in front of us. He wouldn't have wanted to subject anyone else to that pain, so he decided to go out on his own terms. A true performer to the last." She closed her eyes, pained. "Of all the things he did in the years I wasn't there... his reasoning behind that final action is probably the only thing I fully understand."

Trucy nodded thoughtfully, nestled in the ring of silent assurances from her three brothers. "Okay."

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Finally, Trucy sniffed, quickly rubbing her nose with an arm. The signal was enough for Machi to pull out of his hug, and Luke took his hand off her knee. "Well, I guess I really am the next Gramarye, like Daddy said before he left." She turned to Apollo with a frown, gesturing to the papers in his lap. "We're gonna have to write another one of those."

Apollo raised an eyebrow, taking his hand off his sister's back. "Why?"

Trucy tutted, rolling her eyes. "Apollo and Artemis Gramarye? I'm not performing these alone!"

Apollo rolled his eyes right back at her. "Obviously not, you'd be giving me permission. You're the rights holder, not the one person in the world allowed to do this stuff!"

Trucy considered his words for a moment. "Well... It's still not fair that you can't be a 'rights holder', too!"

"Truce, honestly, I don't mind." Apollo sighed, waving a hand. "It's easier legally if there's a lone rights holder than trying to share it, anyway. We're a double-act, right? It's not like we ever perform alone."

The girl pouted, crossing her arms. "Still not fair."

Phoenix laughed. "That's a lawyer for you."

"That's why I was asking him to write the new contract!" Trucy huffed.

Apollo sighed and shook his head, hiding a smile as he moved the contracts in his lap to the table.

Clay laughed, clapping his hands. "I for one can't wait to see you guys perform this stuff! 'Pollo was going on for days about seeing your uncle do it, and now you get to perform it yourself? That's awesome!"

Trucy put on a grin and shrugged, though Apollo could tell she wasn't as happy about it as she seemed.

"I can always help if you need it." Thalassa gave the pair a smile. "It's been a long time, but I helped my father develop many tricks back when it was just the two of us. I'm sure at least one of those is in his notebook there." She pointed to the black journal on the table in front of Trucy.

Trucy frowned, tossing the empty envelope on her lap on top of the two contracts near Apollo, then grabbing the book in its place. "I always wondered what was in this. He carried it around everywhere..." She poked at the lock holding the journal shut. "I guess we just have to unlock it."

Apollo quickly shooed at his brothers, only half-jokingly. "You guys can't look, you're not magicians!"

Machi pulled himself out of his narrow niche with a giggle, slipping past Luke to run around behind
the other sofa. Luke similarly laughed as he got to his feet, saying "You haven't opened it yet!"

"Doesn't matter," Apollo insisted, continuing to brush off his brother. "Very important book, non-
magicians shouldn't even be looking at the cover."

Luke scoffed, smiling as he retreated behind the other sofa.

"Wouldn't you have to find the key first, anyway?" Maya pointed out, raising an eyebrow with a
restrained laugh.

Thalassa got to her feet. "It's probably in the box with the rest of his things." She moved closer to her
children, picking through the contents of said box on the table. "I'm sure Valant will have kept them
together. He was never all that good at lock-picking."

Apollo suddenly found himself curious about the grandfather he'd heard so much about, eyes on
what little he could see inside the box. "What exactly is in there? It doesn't look like much."

"You don't tend to carry much with you when you live on the road," Thalassa pointed out with a
smile. "These would be what little he had, trimmed to whatever he deemed worthy of leaving
behind..."

Apollo could almost hear the significant pause adding how Valant may have kept an item or two as a
keepsake.

Trucy jumped forward to the edge of her seat, placing the journal on top of the nearby contracts.
"Well, we have his notebook." She reached into the box and pulled out a black piece of folded
fabric. "And this must be..." The fabric unfurled in Trucy's hands, revealing a pointed collar at one
end and a series of white diamonds along the other, decorated with purple symbols of the four suits
of cards.

Apollo gasped, having to keep himself from grabbing it. "Is that his cape!?!"

Trucy grinned, offering the item to her brother. "Yep. He wore this for all his shows."

"Whoa..." Apollo couldn't stop staring as he took the fabric in his gloved hands. It was exactly the
same in every way as the one Trucy had made for Halloween oh so long ago now, but, at the same
time, it couldn't have been more different. Apollo had seen this exact same cape he was now holding
in so many posters and photos and old videos over the years, tightly wrapped around the shoulders of
the grandfather he had never had the chance to meet. Holding something in his hands that was so
intrinsically tied to the image of such a famous magician... It felt almost like seeing Magnifi himself
in person.

Thalassa chuckled, then held up two more items from the box. "There's these, too."

Apollo tore his eyes from the cape to examine them: In one hand, a purple brooch in the shape of a
spade. In the other hand, a black top hat with a white stripe around the brim. He blinked, then
frowned. "Is his entire costume in there?"

Thalassa shook her head, returning her attention to the box. "Just these, I think." She tossed the
brooch into the hat, then placed them both on top of the journal, in front of Apollo. "Oh, and this." She
pulled out a bamboo stick, which had been sticking out at one of the corners, and revealed the
other end featured a shorter length of bamboo attached in a T-shape, making a handle.

Trucy gasped, jumping forward to grab it. "Grandpa Magnifi's cane!" She gleefully showed it off to
everyone. "He used this to walk everywhere, but really it was just for show. He used it in some of
his tricks, too!"

Machi had perched himself on the armrest next to Maya, watching with interest. "What he do with it?"

"Balancing tricks, mostly." Trucy grinned. "The one that made him famous was when he used loads of smaller ones to make all sorts of animals float, right up to a massive elephant!"

"That one was when I was very young." Thalassa returned her attention to the box, then laughed. "I don't think this was originally part of my father's things." She pulled out a small and very fat photo album, which she handed to Trucy.

Squealing, Trucy placed the cane on the coffee table, taking the book. "My baby pictures!" She flipped it open to a random page, showing it off to Apollo. "Wasn't I so cute?" Without waiting for an answer from her eldest brother, or even giving him much of a chance to examine them, she looked up at her mother. "How'd Uncle Valant get these?"

Thalassa shrugged. "I'd guess Zak left them behind after his arrest," Phoenix mused, scratching a cheek. "Everything of Zak's became Valant's in his absence, so he probably made sure to include the personal stuff together when he was passing it on to you."

Trucy giggled, closing the book and placing it in the pile under Magnifi's hat.

Thalassa's nostalgic smile faded as she once more looked into the box. "Hmm." She reached in to the very bottom, lifting out a rather hefty looking small chest made of wood, decorated on all sides with carved swirls and painted flowers. "Would you look at that..."

Apollo looked to Trucy, folding his grandfather's cape in his lap. "What is it?"

Trucy shrugged, giving her brother a confused look. "I dunno. I've never seen it before."

"My father kept this in his caravan," Thalassa explained, still studying it. "He never let me see what he kept inside."

Trucy jumped to her feet, running to examine the chest. She promptly gasped again, reaching to take it from her mother. "It has a lock just like the notebook!" She dropped back into her seat, showing the bronze keyhole on the front to Apollo. "See?"

Apollo nodded, taking the surprisingly heavy chest from his sister. "Do we have the key?"

Thalassa was already back in the box, and pulled out a small piece of worn bronze with a purple spade symbol on the end: a key, just the right size for both the locks on the journal and on the chest. "The last thing in there."

Trucy squealed in excitement, taking the key. "Let's try it out!" She gleefully stuck it into the lock on the chest, but turning the key did not open the lid as they expected, nor did it result in any kind of sound that would indicate an unlatching of mechanisms deep within. Apollo even tried tugging the chest open, but it remained tightly locked. Trucy frowned, pulling the key back out to examine it. "Huh. That's weird."

"That key must be for the notebook," Luke pointed out, leaning on the back of the empty seat Thalassa had previously occupied. "Is there another way to get the chest open?"
Trucy stared at the key for a second, then tucked it into the bag at her hip. "But how can we get it open without breaking it?"

Apollo bit his lip, adjusting the chest to better look at the lock. "Dad, don't look." He reached into his bag and dug out a small metal pin he always kept hidden in a seam near the top.

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "Why me specifically?"

Clay laughed as he saw the pin in Apollo's hand. "Aw, are you picking the lock, 'Pollo?"

"Of course not." Apollo grinned, picking away at the inside of the keyhole with his little pin. "What kind of self-respecting lawyer picks locks?"

Phoenix chuckled. "We're all well aware you two have that particular skill."

Trucy giggled. "What do you mean, Daddy? We have no idea what you're talking about."

Apollo kept his eyes on the chest propped up in his lap. "Exactly. Magicians never reveal their secrets, and lawyers would never learn a skill as unsavoury as... picking... a..." He paused, frowning at the lock as his shifting of the mechanism inside failed to enact any kind of change. Pulling out his pin, he peered into the keyhole, seeing only the black depths of the lock. "Man, this thing's well made..."

"Is there other way in?" Machi asked.

Clay shrugged. "Guess you have to break it open."

Trucy forcefully shook her head. "No! It's such a pretty box! Grandpa Magnifi must have really liked it to keep it for us!"

Luke hummed, a hand stroking his goatee. "It would be a shame to break the lock just to open the chest. Is it even meant to open with a key?"

Thalassa gasped. "Of course!" She ran around behind the sofa, sitting in the empty seat next to Apollo. "It's been so long, I forgot, but the lock is only a decoy." She took the wooden box from her son, holding it carefully in her lap. "My father had a special way of opening this chest, without a key." Her thumbs pressed to the corners of the lid, bookending the lock, while her fingers wrapped around to the sides, finding specific knots in the carved swirls that she dug her nails into. A few moments later, the chest gave an audible click, then popped open.

Luke watched in amazed wonder. "It's a trick box!"

"Very fitting for a magician," Phoenix admitted.

Trucy squealed, leaning heavily on Apollo's leg as she leaned over him to look. "What's in it, Mommy? What's in it?"

Apollo winced at the pressure on his leg, belatedly slipping his lockpick back into his bag. He couldn't deny he was as curious as his sister, though.

Thalassa was torn between her own curiosity and the uncomfortable truth that whatever was inside must have been deeply personal to Magnifi if he had never told even his own daughter what was inside such a heavily secured box. She hesitated a second or two, then slowly lifted the lid, warily watching to see what they might find.
As the inside of the chest emerged into the light of day, Apollo frowned. "Are those... letters?"

"Aw, it's a memory trick box," Maya sighed, dreamily. "He must have got a lot of nice letters from fans." She paused, scratching a cheek. "Weird he'd hide them away like that, though."

Thalassa was picking the topmost envelope off the stack inside, staring at it thoughtfully. "These aren't from fans."

Machi slipped off the armrest next to Maya, rushing across to instead lean on the one by Thalassa. "Then from who?"

Thalassa didn't immediately reply, staring holes into the opened envelope in her hands. "They're from... They're from me."

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"From you?" Maya watched Thalassa with a sympathetic look. "Do you need us to leave?"

Thalassa shook her head, still staring at the envelope in her hand. "No, no... I just... didn't think they still existed after all this time." She began to page through the pile in the box, subtly frowning. "I wrote these every couple of weeks, the year I left the Troupe with Jove... When Apollo was born."

Apollo looked at the aged paper in surprise. "They're that old?"

"How were you able to write back?" Maya asked, scratching a cheek. "Didn't you say earlier the Troupe was always moving?"

Thalassa nodded, giving the woman a smile. "My father had a P.O. Box set up in Borginia. He'd check it himself if he was nearby. When we were away for a while, and settling down for a few weeks, he'd ask a friend to empty it for him and forward everything on."

Machi thought a moment. "Friend is your Papa, yes?"

"It must have been. He wouldn't have had to travel all that far from Kopunchiville." Thalassa returned her attention to the letters, leafing through them.

Clay leaned towards Luke, holding a hand to his mouth and not-so-subtly whispering "Did she just say her dad was writing to himself?"

"Of course not!" Trucy huffed, shooting their friend a glare. "Grandpa Magnifi was writing to Grandpa Geary, who lived in Borginia!"

Clay's eyes widened for a moment, then narrowed into a frown. "Waaaaait a minute. Magnifi is Thalassa's dad, so a second grandpa would be the dad of one of your dads, right?" He gestured between the trio around Thalassa on the opposite sofa.

"Incorrect," Phoenix informed the young man with a grin. "Thalassa has two fathers."

"Wait, what!?"

Luke grunted in mild surprise. "That's interesting." He looked to Clay with a smile. "I would have asked in a more polite fashion, though."

Clay huffed.

Maya giggled. "Me, Nick and Thalassa here had a lot of time to talk this past week, and it just happened to come up. You could call it... parent preparation group." She and Phoenix promptly high-fived with identical grins.

Apollo rolled his eyes. "That was not a quip worthy of a high-five."

"In your opinion." Phoenix winked.
Apollo sighed.

Trucy peered into the chest as best she could from her position in Apollo's lap. "Are all of those from you, Mommy?"

Thalassa opened her mouth to reply, then paused, frowning. "Actually..." She bunched up the letters she had accumulated so far, checking a few at the back before passing them to Apollo. "Hold these for a moment." Once Apollo had hesitatingly taken the bundle, she grabbed the next envelope on the remaining bottom half of the pile. "This isn't from me. And neither are any of the rest of these."

Apollo studied the new envelopes. "Most of them look even older than yours." He quickly assembled a timeline in his head, knowing his mother had been eighteen when she went off with Jove before his birth. "So... these older ones might be from when you were a kid? From Geary, maybe?"

"Now there's a thought." Shooting her son an impressed look, Thalassa gently teased the fragile and yellowed letter from the ripped envelope in her hand, unfolding it to read.

It struck Apollo as he saw the faded cursive on the letter that it was a good thing its writer had chosen to use pen. After all this time, he was fairly certain pencil would have vanished completely.

Thalassa smiled. "Correct on all points. It looks like my papa sent this shortly after my mother's death, when I was only five." She frowned, folding the letter again and staring into the pile still in the box. "These must all be from him. The newer ones will probably be from after my accident... and the older ones from when Mama fell ill and they had to stop travelling with me and Dad."

Luke pushed off his perch leaning on the back of the other sofa. "With how old most of those letters are, it would probably be a good idea to digitise them. You could keep them forever then, even after the paper has rotted away. I'd be happy to help, if you don't know how."

"That sounds good." Apollo turned to Thalassa. "We could do that later, right?"

Thalassa thought a long moment, then gave Luke a smile. "You're very kind, Luke. That would be wonderful."

Luke grinned. "It won't be a problem at all, Thalassa."

Apollo hid a grin of his own, taking a more careful hold of the stack of envelopes in his hand. He was already looking forward to copying them onto a computer, and being able to safely read the day-to-day adventures of his birth parents and, possibly, his infant self too.

Machi leaned forward, then pointed into the small chest. "Aska, there is something below letters!"

Everyone's attention returned to the wooden box. Thalassa gently re-inserted the letter in her hands back into its envelope, then bunched up the remainder of the pile just like she had with the others. Apollo held out his free hand, taking the new bundle the moment his mother finished preparing it, and Thalassa wasted no time returning her attention to the small black books left sitting at the bottom of the chest. "Now, what are these?"

"Are they notebooks?" Trucy asked, her weight concentrated on the two hands pressed into Apollo's leg as she leaned over to see.

Apollo grumbled, "Could you lean back a bit, Truce?"

"I don't think so." Thalassa picked one of the books at random, studying it in her hands. "This is... a
small photo book."

Trucy gasped, leaping off her brother's leg and racing around the back of the sofa, throwing herself over the small gap between Apollo and her mother. "Let's see, let's see!"

Thalassa laughed, then pried open the slightly-sticky plastic pages to a centrefold.

Apollo was quite surprised to see the two images within. On the left was a landscape, looking out across a seemingly endless desert. On the right, a man wearing sunglasses and a proud grin stood in the shade of a building, the desert stretching out on one side, while in his arms he securely held a baby in a tiny blue dress, staring towards camera from behind sunglasses that were far too big for her open-mouthed face.

Trucy giggled, pointing at the baby. "Is that you, Mommy?"

Thalassa chuckled. "Must be. And that's my Papa."

Machi studied the man closely with a frown. "So that is ghost man."

Thalassa turned the page. On the new spread were two more photos, both prominently featuring people. On the left, a young Magnifi was posing dramatically at the desert's edge in the light of the setting sun, his pompous image broken only by one arm pressing a sleeping baby Thalassa to his shoulder. On the right, a woman who bore a significant resemblance to her daughter and granddaughter sat in the middle of a daylit bench, the baby in her arms. Either side of her sat the young Magnifi and Geary, all three grinning at the camera. Even baby Thalassa was looking up, chewing on a fist.

Apollo placed one of the stacks of envelopes carefully on top of the cape in his lap, then pointed to the left photo. "So that's Magnifi and you," he moved his finger to the right photo, "and that's Magnifi, Geary, you... and our grandmother? Gaia?"

"That's her," Thalassa breathed, still taking the image in. "The brief time we were travelling together, before she got sick." She sucked air in through her nose, firmly closing the book with a forced smile. "Let's see what the other one is, shall we?" Placing the first photo book in her lap, she reached for the second one still in the chest. Although she seemed apprehensive about exploring the contents of the second book, she didn't hesitate in similarly prying open the plastic pages to a random centrefold... only to immediately gasp, a hand to her mouth.

In the left photo, lying asleep in bed, was a young Thalassa on the cusp of adulthood, a tiny baby in her arms. In the right photo, an equally young man perched at her side, having claimed the sleepy baby for himself with an open-mouthed, slightly cheeky smile that he directed straight into the lens, his arm stretched off to one side where he was holding the camera.

Apollo's eyes widened, any words choking in his mouth. He couldn't take his eyes off that second photo.

"Is that...?" Trucy pointed at the photo book. "Is that Polly's daddy? And Polly as a baby?"

Thalassa was having as much difficulty as Apollo regaining her voice. "It is. That's Jove."

Across the room, Clay laughed. "Hey, 'Pollo, you have baby pictures!"

Apollo couldn't take his eyes off the photo book, unsure if he was more intrigued by his younger self or the first image of his father he'd ever seen. "Yeah... I do..."
Clay's laughter died, the young man rubbing his neck with an embarrassed look. Luke snickered, gently elbowing his friend.

Trucy giggled, throwing her arms around Apollo's neck from behind the sofa. "Now we have Luke's baby pictures and my baby pictures and Polly's baby pictures! We're an entire set!"

Apollo chuckled, resting his free hand on his sister's arm just in case her grip got too tight. "We don't have Machi's, though."

"Oh yeah." The girl shot an apologetic look at her younger brother. "Sorry, Machi."

Machi just grinned. "Is okay. I do not need pictures of time I don't remember. I do not think any were taken, anyway."

Trucy stuck out her bottom lip. "It's still not fair."

Thalassa wiped tears from her eyes, beginning to page through the photo book. "I sent all these back to my father in my letters. I had no idea he kept them all this time..."

Apollo kept his eyes on the pictures as they flipped past under his mother's fingers, seeing glimpses of landscapes and his infant self in the arms of his young parents.

"We could digitise the photos along with the letters," Luke offered. "I know I've done that already with the old family photo albums my parents left me."

"Ooh, yeah!" Trucy finally released her hold on Apollo's neck, bouncing behind the sofa. "Then we can take our time going through them as a family!" Her giggles paused as she looked around the room. "Speaking of family... Where's Pearly?"

Phoenix and Maya laughed, though it was the latter who explained: "She went up to Kurain to fetch my rings. We were hoping to get them fitted as soon as possible."

Clay gave the couple a surprised look. "Whoa, 'rings'? You mean you guys are engaged now?"

Luke and Apollo both hid snickers at their friend. "Did we not mention that?" Luke asked.

Thalassa smiled, finally closing the photo book in her hands. "In any case, if it is alright with you Luke, I'd like to get started with these letters. I hate to think they may fall apart at any moment."

"Of course, Thalassa." Luke gave the woman a grin. "I'm always happy to help."

View the Court Record/Luke's Notebook
A Successful Summary

The Revived PW Fan-Club Forum!
Home > The Wright Anything Agency
Thread: Different Trial than Normal

steeljusticelover "Apollo", 10/07/2026 05:23:44PM
I meant to tell you guys this much sooner but I've been very busy today with this last-minute investigation Dad threw on me.
I have a new case, and the trial is tomorrow. It's not a usual one either, it's a system with a jury Dad's been trying to test out for a while now. It should run mostly the same as a regular trial, just how the verdict's decided will be a little different.
This was short notice even for me, so I get if you guys aren't able to come.

BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN] "Maggey", 10/07/2026 05:30:52PM
I'll definitely be there to cheer you on! I won't be able to hang around and meet up with anybody, not until the trial's properly over, but I can promise I'll be watching the trial. :)

CelestialImpacts "Adrian", 10/07/2026 05:41:21PM
I'm in the same boat as Maggey, I'm afraid. I'll be watching the trial, but I can't meet up with anyone afterwards if it extends another day. This new court system sounds interesting, actually. Maybe you could explain what it's about, when you're less busy preparing?

Liztropical "Liz", 10/07/2026 06:33:58PM
Wow, that's a lot more people able to make it than normal, huh?
Sorry Apollo, I'll be very busy tomorrow myself. I'm wishing you luck, though. I'm sure your dad wouldn't ask you to do something he thought you'd be bad at.

Drewby "Drew", 10/07/2026 06:56:03PM
Can't come but good luck on that. What's with the weird trial system btw?

steeljusticelover "Apollo", 10/07/2026 07:26:05PM
Thanks guys. I hope this case is over with in a single day, but I doubt it. Maggey and Adrian, I hope to see you guys once its over.
Dad's been working on it for a while now. Instead of just the judge deciding the verdict, there's a panel of jurists who watch the trial and vote on what they think the verdict should be. The idea is that they analyse the case using common sense, which can help make up the gap when there isn't much evidence.

Drewby "Drew", 10/07/2026 07:59:27PM
Ok I think I get it. If you think there'll be a second day I'll see if I can come by for it, but I'm not sure
I can get off work.

**Thunderdome "Max", 10/07/2026 08:40:30PM**
Good luck Apollo. I wish I could come to cheer you on, but yeah, kinda short notice. I'm all wrapped up with this work thing until the weekend.

**steeljusticelover "Apollo", 10/07/2026 09:13:33PM**
I understand, Max. Thanks anyway. :)
Let me know if you're able to come by, Drew.
And I'm guessing Pearly hasn't replied yet because she's busy with her family. I'd better go to bed now, so I'll catch you guys up on how the trial goes tomorrow.

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**Liztropical "Liz", 10/08/2026 01:42:19PM**
Apollo, are you okay!?
Does anyone have Apollo's cell number to check on him!?

**ForgetMeKnot "Knox", 10/08/2026 02:26:44PM**
Why? What happened?

**Liztropical "Liz", 10/08/2026 02:30:45PM**
Go read the news about his trial! The defendant collapsed and there was an uproar in the court and apparently "the defence attorney's two teenage assistants were also suspected of being exposed to the poison" according this srtivle and someone just check of Apollo!!!!!

**ForgetMeKnot "Knox", 10/08/2026 02:51:03PM**
Wait what???? Should we call his ofice? Would anyone be there?
And did that article seriously call Luke 'teenage;?

**steeljusticelover "Apollo", 10/08/2026 03:24:51PM**
Don't panic, we're all fine. Luke wasn't in the courtroom at all, Trucy is fine, Machi is fine, I'm fine. Vera's being treated for the poison and is in a coma, so the outcome of the trial is still up in the air at the moment. It's up to Gavin if we continue without her or wait for her to recover.

**Liztropical "Liz", 10/08/2026 03:58:57PM**
You have no idea how loudly I just shouted in relief that you're all okay over there! How did your brother and sister get poison on them at all? And I know this is a bit presumptuous to ask, but did
your client do that to herself or...?

steeljusticelover "Apollo", 10/08/2026 04:31:08PM
I'm not sure I can really say, since it's related to the case. It'll come up in court, if we continue tomorrow like we should.
I might be a bit slow replying again today. I have a big file related to this case I need to go through.

ForgetMeKnot "Knox", 10/08/2026 05:11:04PM
Oh right I forgot you're apparently the spawn of FRIKKIN LAMIROIR and her pianist is your little brother now. Still can't believe you have so many connections to famous people. Seriously though, I'm glad you guys are safe. Hope your trial still goes well. Actually, weren't Maggey and Adrian going to watch? You'd think they'd of popped in to let us know what was going on. Or Pearly even.

Drewby "Drew", 10/08/2026 05:37:15PM
Pearly's been missing for a few days now. I guess whatever's keeping her busy is also keeping her away from the trial?
I'm glad you're all okay btw Apollo. Say hi to Machi for me.

Liztropical "Liz", 10/08/2026 06:18:50PM
As long as no one else has their life threatened, I'm happy.
Do keep us updated whenever you can, Apollo.

Liztropical "Liz", 10/09/2026 02:23:25PM
Congrats on the NOT GUILTY verdict! :D

ForgetMeKnot "Knox", 10/09/2026 02:27:56PM
WHOO CONGRATULATIONS APOLLO AND MR WRIGHT!
awwww I was so close to beating you to it Liz xD

Liztropical "Liz", 10/09/2026 02:30:28PM
Early bird gets the worm ;)

Drewby "Drew", 10/09/2026 02:31:03PM
I knew Apollo would pull it off. Course, no one listens to me on these things but... ;)
Congratulations, Apollo and Mr. Wright! :D
Just to check, everyone else knows they proved Mr. Wright never forged anything?

How could we not? This is like the moment we've been waiting for since way back before the original forum died! Do you think if we made this place public again we'd attract back all the people who turned on us way back when?

Honestly, I don't want the people who turned on us to come back. The people who quietly left, or who weren't able to keep in touch with our core group (like Apollo couldn't, I might point out), I would happily welcome back. It's up to Maggey, though.

Aaaaand I'm back! :D Sorry for the unexplained disappearance, but Mr. Wright pulled me and Adrian into helping out with his jurist trial, so we couldn't talk to anyone about it until it was over. Who could've expected that ending though?
As for whether we'll make the forum public again... I guess we'll have to discuss that more in-depth later. I'll get a new thread started in the main chat forum. We'll need to wait for Aria to get back from her vacation and Penny's latest production to calm down for their inputs.

Thanks guys! You have no idea how much seeing the end of this trial meant to me. It wasn't just clearing Vera's name against all odds, it was clearing my dad's too, and finding out how little Gavin actually had to do with the whole forgery thing in the first place, and even getting what happened to Trucy's birth father out there... It already feels like a lifetime since Dad even gave me this case. He knew what the true purpose of this trial was from the start, and he trusted me to see it through. Dad's out 'celebrating' with Maya tonight, so I can pass on congratulations tomorrow. Pearly says she might drop by here later, too.

Ah, the party won't be ending for a while yet, my little nephew. ;) Meaning, obviously, Vera still has to wake up and hear what her verdict was. She'll be thrilled.

Yeah, I guess she will. :) There's not much point worrying about her until then, but I'm sure my dad or the detective will let us know when she comes out of the coma.
So, I've got some big news.

Maggey. Adrian. I just want you to know how much I hate you right now. ...

So, yeah, my birth mother's back in town.

BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN] "Maggey", 10/10/2026 5:00:00PM

:D

Love you too, Apollo. ;)

Liztropical "Liz", 10/10/2026 5:02:33PM

Oh my goodness, congratulations! I hope you and Trucy and Machi are enjoying having her back! (Maggey, did you and Adrian know or something?)

CelestialImpacts "Adrian", 10/10/2026 5:03:09PM

Sorry for teasing you like that yesterday, but I couldn't resist. ;)

I heard Vera was awake, too. If she was such a fan of the Gramaryes, she might appreciate knowing it was Thalassa Gramarye's children defending her.

BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN] "Maggey", 10/10/2026 5:13:36PM

Liz, yep, Mrs. Gramarye was helping out with the trial too. She'd only just got back and was already being dragged into the grand family affairs of the Wrights. ;) It put off her surprise reunion a bit, I think.

Precious-Fairy "Pearly", 10/10/2026 6:09:19PM

No, she was always planning to meet them today. And that's not all our big news, either! Mr Nick and Mystic Maya are engaged!!!!! :D It's so exciting!!!

BlackbirdLuck [ADMIN] "Maggey", 10/10/2026 6:23:42PM

OMIGOSH REALLY? Tell them congratulations, and IT'S ABOUT TIME. ;D

ForgetMeKnot "Knox", 10/10/2026 7:15:25PM

Oh man, congratulations all around. My congratulations muscles are getting tired after this past week. Say hi to Lamiroir for us, huh?
Drewby "Drew", 10/10/2026 7:49:48PM
Pearly you jest. Mr Wright is getting married!? And right as Lamiroir comes back too? You guys are just all trying to outshine each other now. Apollo clears Mr Wright's name, Mr Wright gets engaged, Lamiroir shows up again...
Congratulations, though. And remember to take a break. I think you've long earned it.

steeljusticelover "Apollo", 10/10/2026 9:21:31PM
Thanks everyone. I'll pass on your messages to Dad and both my moms. Don't worry, Drewby, I plan to take a VERY long break after all this. :/
After the chaos Saturday had thrown them into, it was an immense relief for the Wrights to be looking forward to a quiet Sunday up in Kurain Village. Thalassa met Phoenix and the four children at the station and they headed up the mountain together to the house she had heard so much about from the Feys over the past week. Machi and Trucy were eager to show her around, taking her off on an impromptu tour the moment they met back up with Maya and Pearl at the manor by the bus stop. Pearl had rushed to join them, while Maya had headed off with Phoenix. Apollo and Luke wandered off elsewhere on their own, though they made their younger siblings and cousin promise not to take too long.

Half an hour after their arrival, Thalassa found herself in the Winding Way, overlooking the garden from the walkway. The three teenagers, once they'd shown her every inch of the mansion, had run off on their tour's completion to find the older boys, and, as much as she loved them, she was happy to take a break from their excited noise for a few minutes and lagged behind. 'I only have myself to blame for becoming the mother to two teenagers at once. And Machi's usually so quiet, too. Trucy and Apollo have been teaching him bad habits.' She chuckled, leaning on the railing of the walkway. 'Even so, I could never be anything but glad I have them all back.'

"Aha, I thought I'd find you out here."

Thalassa looked around and soon locked eyes on the door to the nearby Meditation Room, where Maya was emerging with a smile. Thalassa gave the other woman a wave. "You perhaps have more practise than me, but I needed a short rest. Three rambunctious teenagers are a bit much for me at the moment."

Maya laughed, heading over to join Thalassa at the railing. "Why do you think we usually let the boys take care of them? Luke's a calming influence and Apollo's a master at reining them in if they go too far."

"Ah, therein lies my mistake." Thalassa restrained another chuckle. "I let the both of them stay behind instead of requesting their help."

The two women stood in shared amusement for several moments, both leaning on the railing that looked out over the garden. There was a long, but comfortable, silence before Maya again spoke.

"I actually came out here to talk to you."

Thalassa raised her eyebrows, turning to face the younger woman. "Oh?"

Maya traced the grain of the wooden railing with a finger, frowning slightly. "I've been thinking about it since you found those photos yesterday... and I only have two weeks before I go, so if I'm going to bring it up, now's my only chance." She sighed, then met Thalassa's eyes. "I told you I'm a spirit medium and can channel the spirits of the dead."

Thalassa nodded. "And I believe you. I've certainly lived through far stranger things... and no-one else in our family has even the slightest doubts about it, so why should I?"
Maya softly laughed, looking relieved. "Well... I don't remember if I mentioned this, but all our usual clients here are people saying goodbye to loved ones they missed the chance to. I realised yesterday, thanks to everything that happened... You never got to say goodbye to your father, or either of your husbands."

"No, I didn't." Thalassa's eyes turned to the garden, though all she saw were the images of her lost family members. "I was too young to understand what was happening with my mother, and then the way Dad and Papa handled my accident... I lost Dad and Zak and Jove all the same way, simply because I wasn't there when they struck hardship."

Maya nodded, waiting a few seconds before she replied. "All I need to know to channel someone is their name and their face. You have their names, and I've seen Magnifi and Zak on all Apollo and Trucy's posters... and now, because of those photos, we have Jove's and your mother's faces too. I could, over a couple of days, channel all four of them to let you - and the kids too, if they want - say goodbye properly."

Thalassa mused over the offer for a long moment. It was very tempting, she had to admit. The grief of sudden loss hadn't gotten any easier from Jove to Magnifi to Zak, and she had always been very curious about the mother she barely remembered. "Would it be very hard for you to do?"

Maya opened her mouth with a bright smile, "Not at-!", then paused, a serious expression on her face. She sighed. "Actually, to tell the truth, there are factors for every individual that make it easier or harder. How long ago they died is one, and how different they are physically from the medium. Any channeling takes a lot of energy out of you though, so I could probably only try for your family members twice in one day." Her frown deepened. "Pearly could give it a go too, up that to four attempts in one day, but I'd rather not drag her into something that was my idea."

"No, if channeling is truly so tiring, I will not ask her." Thalassa decided to keep to herself that she doubted she had the energy to confront all four so close together anyway. She could handle two at a time, though. "In that case, it would be prudent to try them in the other they died, I suppose. My mother died... thirty-six years ago. Jove twenty-one. My father seven. Zak only six months."

Maya snorted. "And split up your mom and dad? Honestly, it would be easier on me to alternate them between hard and easy. Your parents one day, Zak and Jove another?"

Thalassa met Maya's eyes with a concerned gaze. "If you are sure you wish to do this for me..."

"I wouldn't have offered if I wasn't." Maya smiled. "It's a big job, sure, but nothing I can't handle."

Thalassa thought a moment, then nodded gratefully. "It would mean a lot to me. Thank you, Maya."

They found the children with Phoenix in the living room, the older pair sat at the table quietly discussing something over Apollo's tablet computer, while the younger trio attempted to push their father into trying out some of the learn-to-play-piano books Machi had dug out of Maya's stores.

"C'mon Daddy, if you're not going back into law, you need to actually be good at something else!"

"It is not very hard, Isa. You will see if you just try."

"Do you want Mystic Maya to be the one to teach you, Mister Nick?"

Phoenix pressed a hand to his face from where he sat on the piano stool, the three teenagers surrounding him. "Y'know, when I asked if you would give me lessons, I was joking..."
Apollo and Luke hid snickers, pretending not to listen in. They noticed the arrival of the two women first, and Apollo waved. "Hey, Mom and Mom."

Phoenix groaned as he turned to give them a pleading look. "Maya, save me..."

"Save yourself." Maya shot him a cheeky wink, then beckoned to her cousin. "Pearly, I need your help in the Channelling Chamber."

Pearl grinned. "Coming, Mystic Maya!" Waving goodbye to her cousins, she raced to meet Maya at the door, and the Feys left the room.


Trucy frowned at her mother. "Why are they preparing the Channelling Chamber?"

Machi was the one person in the room to seem simply confused, stepping a little closer to Phoenix.

Thalassa rested a hand on her bracelet, rubbing a finger across the pattern engraved on the metal. "Maya has offered to give me the chance to say goodbye to various members of my family... Chances I was denied at the time they died by circumstances beyond my control."

Trucy gasped, her hands to her mouth. Phoenix was mildly surprised.

Apollo and Luke chuckled. The younger of the pair noted, "She likes to do that for her friends and family."

"She's probably told you she's done that for Luke and his dad," Apollo added. "And it was how we found out you were still alive."

Machi frowned thoughtfully. "I have never seen channelling, but everyone has told me lots about it."

Thalassa smiled. "Well... I would like you three to join me."

Trucy squeaked. "Really?"

"Really," Thalassa laughed. "We're trying my parents today. If nothing else, I would love to introduce you to them." She looked to Trucy. "I know my father would be delighted to see how much you've grown," her gaze moved to Apollo, "and that you were alive all this time." Finally, her eyes turned to her youngest. "And we were performing together before he died, so I'm sure he would be interested in meeting you too, Machi."

Machi blushed.

Trucy squealed, bouncing across the room to envelop her mother in a hug. "That would be so cool to meet Grandma Gaia, and to see Grandpa Magnifi again!"

"That... does sound kinda cool," Apollo admitted, rubbing the back of his neck as he got to his feet.

Phoenix gave his eldest son a grin. "It definitely isn't something you should be turning down. A chance like this may never come again."

Luke nodded, then picked up Apollo's Court Record to hand the tablet to its owner, a knowing smile on his face. "You'll probably need those photos from your grandfather's memory box. I know you've already copied a couple."
Apollo turned red, snatching his computer with a hushed "Shut up!" He pretended not to hear the rest of his family hiding giggles.
It didn't take long for the two Feys to prepare the special chamber. While Luke, Phoenix and Pearl waited outside, Maya led Thalassa and the Gramarye children into the small, dark room, lit only by the rows of candles lining the rug on the floor and the shelves on the walls. Apollo hung back at the entrance, keeping a tight hold on his siblings. They didn't need to exchange words to understand the look on his face, and all huddled up on the floor with their backs pressed to the thick wood of the doors. Despite the bright colours of their clothes, it was all too easy for the trio to fade into the darkness that coated the edges of the room.

Maya knelt down with her back to the simple altar set up at the end opposite the entrance. Thalassa hurried to copy her, the two women facing each other on the rug, nervous energy tingling through the air around them.

"Can I see a photo?"

Thalassa nodded, holding out the tablet computer Apollo had handed to her out in the hallway. On its screen was a picture of one of the first photos they'd seen in Magnifi's memory box: Young Magnifi, Geary and Gaia with baby Thalassa in her mother's arms.

Maya took the computer into her arms, examining the photo carefully. After a long moment, she nodded and placed it on the ground at her side. "What name would she most identify with?"

Thalassa frowned. "I'm not sure. I imagine she would answer to 'Gaia' more than 'Gaelle', but I don't know if she thought of herself more as 'Gramarye' or as 'Takala'. She never officially changed it, after all."

Maya bit her lip for a few moments. "Well, I'll try 'Gaia Gramarye' first, then if that doesn't work, I'll try 'Gaia Takala'." She adjusted her posture a little, then pressed her hands together, index fingers curled above her thumbs. "I'll need you to close your eyes for the channelling itself... Oh, and you might have to explain what's going on. She's essentially been unconscious since the moment she died, so she won't have any concept of how long it's been."

Thalassa nodded. "I'll keep that in mind." Folding her hands in her lap, she lowered her head and closed her eyes.

In the resulting silence, Thalassa found herself musing on how easy it seemed to go back to listening to the world, as she had been forced to for a long ten years. Without her sight to distract her, she could hear the soft breathing of Maya nearby, the crackling of the numerous small flames that lit the room, the subtle shifts of movement from her children behind her. Although she knew she could live this way, and be reasonably independent too, she didn't miss being blind. She couldn't forget how grateful she had felt to discover it was even curable, knowing how truly rare that kind of chance was.

Maya huffed, shifting in her seat a little and grumbling under her breath. A moment later, she fell silent again.

Not for the first time, Thalassa wondered what her mother was like as a person. She knew Gaia
loved singing, had left her home village to perform the moment she was able to, had been polyromantic and adored her two partners and the daughter they raised together... She knew the story of Gaia's life, but that story, and the scant memories Thalassa still had of the dying woman in her bed, weren't enough to really form a clear picture of her personality. Was she the kind who knew what she wanted and went after it with full conviction? Or was she a quiet type who followed her dreams and tried to stay out of other people's way? Was she spiritual at all? Would she appreciate being brought back from the afterlife to say goodbyes she'd already said? Suddenly she remembered the blatant fear on Apollo's face when she had shown up unannounced on his doorstep the previous day, and sympathised even more deeply than before. At least Apollo had the chance to meet his mother as Lamiroir first, and had three months' warning she was coming back as Thalassa... and that wasn't even getting into the fact that she was still alive and as much time had passed for her as for Apollo.

Maya grunted, shifting again. "Come on, I can see you! Why are you being so difficult?"

Frowning, Thalassa looked up. Maya was glaring furiously at the inside of her eyelids, hands pressed tightly together in front of her face while sweat beaded on her brow. Thalassa gripped her bracelet. "Maya, are you okay?"

Sighing, Maya relaxed out of her carefully held pose, shaking her head. "No, I... I can't reach her." Emitting a soft whine that threatened to become something stronger, she buried her face in her hands. "I can see her, she's right there... and I can't reach her..."

Thalassa couldn't think of any words to say in reply. 'I'm... not seeing Mama after all?'

Maya took a deep breath, trying to calm herself. "I'm sorry, Thalassa..."

Something thumped against the wooden floor behind Thalassa, followed by the hurried footsteps of Trucy as she raced across the room to drop at Maya's side, hugging the woman tight. "It's okay, Mommy! You always get it in the end, right? You can just try again later!"

"No, no," Maya mumbled, wiping her eyes. "I think... I think she's been dead too long. And she died slowly, of cancer, right? So she was fully prepared for it and didn't leave behind any loose ends or regrets... Or at least none big enough to keep her close to the living world."

Thalassa hummed in thought, gaze locked on the tablet computer still lying on the floor nearby. Its screen had long gone black, but she could still see the photo it had displayed in her mind's eye.

Machi stepped over and gently moved the computer aside, sitting down in its place to join the hug Trucy had started. "Is okay, Maya. If too hard for you, we not mind."

"He's right." Apollo stepped forward, retrieving his computer to put back in his bag while keeping his eyes firmly on Maya. "If you can't do it, we don't want to push you. I mean, you're about to go off on a two-year training course, right?"

Maya sniffed and nodded. "Yeah... To fix exactly this problem." She pressed her lips into a pout, then looked up at Thalassa. "I hate to make you wait two years for me to fulfil a promise, though..."

"Promise?" Thalassa met the other woman's eyes, managing a smile. "Maya, you said from the beginning you might not manage to channel anyone. There was never any 'promise' for you to break." She took a deep breath, letting it out in a slow sigh. "And I suppose it is for the best the attempt for my mother failed. It's been thirty-five, thirty-six years. I barely remember her. What would I possibly have to say to a woman I don't know?"
Phoenix paced the Meditation Room nervously. Luke and Pearl stood nearby, watching the thick doors to the Channelling Chamber. He wanted to tell himself he had no idea how they were staying so calm, but the truth was he had every idea why he was incapable of keeping calm himself. It didn't matter that it had been nine years since the fateful day a man had been murdered in that very room, with Maya locked inside with him, and that the two perpetrators were long dead. It didn't even matter that he had similarly waited outside this door in the years since with nothing of consequence happening, whether for Luke to speak to his deceased father or for Apollo and Trucy to check there was no trace of their mother in the afterlife. It didn't exactly help that he was on the verge of having to say goodbye to his now-fiancée for two entire years. Also, Maya was his fiancée now. That latter point he was still in slight disbelief about. And, unlike previous times, she had taken the key of the Chamber inside with her, so Phoenix was robbed of the very easy way of jumping to her side should the worst happen (again). Not that he thought Thalassa or the kids were in any way likely to be murdering each other, of course. Still, he'd thought she was alone with Turner Grey too, and the events that followed had proven him very wrong indeed. Who was to say the same couldn't happen again?

"Papa, nothing's wrong."

Phoenix managed to call himself to a stop long enough to give his son a firm nod. "No, of course not. Why would anything go wrong? That's ridiculous."

Luke's concerned frown intensified. "Then why are you panicking?"

"I'm not panicking." Phoenix resumed his pacing, avoiding his son's eyes. "Why would I be panicking? There's nothing to worry about. They're all going to come out of that room just fine. Why wouldn't they?"

Pearl shared a worried look with Luke. "Mister Nick, what's the matter?"

Before Phoenix could answer, they heard the click of the door unlocking, far earlier than it should have, and Maya emerged with a down-turned expression.

"Maya!" Phoenix dashed to his fiancée, grabbing her hands. "What's the matter? Did something happen?"

Maya shook her head, mutely avoiding his concerned eyes.

From the doorway behind her came Thalassa and her children, all equally quiet and solemn. Apollo had his hands on his siblings' shoulders, all three stealing worried glances at Maya. Thalassa had a hand on her bracelet, meeting Phoenix's searching gaze. "The channelling failed."

Phoenix's eyes widened, looking back to Maya. "It what? But... You've never failed a channelling!"

Maya glared up at him with a huff. "Nick..."

"What?"

Shaking off his grip on her hands, Maya gestured towards Pearl. "You think that just because it's
super easy for me and Pearly to channel Sis, it works that way every time?"

Phoenix blinked, surprised. "It... doesn't?"

Maya made a frustrated noise, then stormed off into the nearby hallway.

"Maya?" Phoenix hurried after her. "Maya, what's wrong?"

Everyone else shared various levels of confused looks. The silence was only broken when Luke finally decided to speak up, raising a finger into the air. "So, um... This doesn't answer why Papa was panicking just now."

Apollo rolled his eyes. "C'mon, when is he not panicking on some level about one of us meeting a gruesome end of some kind?"

Luke thought a moment, then nodded. "True."

View the Court Record
Phoenix caught up to Maya in her bedroom, finding her slumped over her desk with her head face-down on her folded arms. She didn't seem to be crying, but he didn't want to risk anything, so he gently pulled the door closed behind him and approached his fiancée warily. "Maya?"

"I shouldn't have snapped at you."

He was a little surprised to hear that muffled admission. "Did... something else happen? Other than the failed channelling?"

"No." Sighing, Maya pushed herself off the desk, rubbing a hand across her cheeks. "I just... I've never failed one for family before. Not one where the person I was going for was definitely dead."

Phoenix wasn't sure how to respond to that. He rested a hand on Maya's shoulder in silent support.

Maya reached up and placed one of her own hands on top of Phoenix's, gripping it tightly. "This is why I'm not Master yet. After all the training I've done over the years, pushing myself to all my limits... my success rate still isn't high enough for the final test. It won't ever be until I go to Khura'in."

Phoenix simply nodded. He had a feeling what she needed most right now was simply a sounding board.

After a pause, Maya got up from her chair and turned to face Phoenix, giving him a hug that he quickly returned. "I'm sorry, Nick. I keep not-telling you how serious things are up here. Even before we got engaged, you should have known all of this from the start." She sighed again, turning her face downwards to press into his hoodie. "I'm just not a very good girlfriend, I guess."

"Nonsense. You're a great girlfriend." Phoenix patted her back, planting a kiss on the top of her head where it rested on his chest. "And I can guarantee you're an even better fiancée."

Maya laughed, though she didn't move. "Even though I'm going away for two years?"

"It's not like you have a choice in the matter." Phoenix shrugged. "Besides, us getting engaged? That's more of a promise than anything. We're getting our lives back on track, and we're going to mark it with a wedding."

Maya hummed in thought. After a long moment, she pulled out of the hug, looking Phoenix in the eyes. "Channelling Mia is the easiest thing in the world for me. We're sisters, so we're physically very similar, she was suddenly murdered with a lot of loose ends left behind, she only very rec-" She paused, frowning. "Oh. Ten years isn't exactly 'recent', is it?" She shook her head, ignoring the small smile on Phoenix's face. "And she had a lot of spiritual power herself. All of those are, or were, points in her favour, channelling-wise."

Phoenix grinned. "Kinda funny to hear you say that, considering how much trouble you had at first."
Blushing, Maya nodded. "Yeah... That's why I only did enough training to ensure I could channel her every time before I came back. I knew that was the most you'd ever really need from me, even if I wouldn't be as good at anyone else." Her frown deepened, eyes far away. "All those girls I trained with back then... None of them are around anymore."

Phoenix blinked, smile fading. "Huh?"

"They all left." Almost in a daze, Maya turned and headed towards her bed, sitting on the edge. "A lot of them were really devoted to Aunt Morgan, and didn't like me very much, so they gave up their training pretty quickly. The rest... I guess we just couldn't make spiritual training up here sound any more exciting than a life down in the city. They wandered off just like everyone else."

Phoenix sat at her side, hands clasped in his lap. "The acolytes are leaving and the elders are dying off. You said that before, didn't you?"

Maya nodded again, hands gripping the blanket on her mattress. "But no medium has a hundred percent success rate. The Master of the Kurain Channelling Technique is supposed to be around seventy percent at the least. I'm... I'm only thirty right now."

Phoenix raised a disbelieving eyebrow. "Thirty percent? No way."

Maya snorted, shooting him a glance. "Yes way." She leaned against him, resting her head on his shoulder. "Maybe if it wasn't just me and Pearly still capable of channelling for clients - whatever clients we still get, anyway - I'd be more worried about that... Enough that I would've gone along with this trip much sooner."

Phoenix hummed in thought, wrapping an arm behind her back and holding her tight, his head leaning on hers. "For what it's worth... I am glad you were here on the day my name was cleared. And helping Thalassa this past week would've been a lot harder on my own. Maybe putting it off like this was for the best in the long run."

"Maybe." Maya chuckled in her throat, pressing harder against her fiancé's side. "Thanks, Nick."

"For what?"

"Just..." Maya giggled. "Just for being you."

Phoenix smiled. "I am very good at that."

Maya laughed in response.

It took a few hours for Maya to recover from the failed channelling, by which point everyone else had scattered all over the grounds of Fey Manor. The younger trio of Pearl, Trucy and Machi were in the garden, playing some kind of three-person ball game that looked like a mix of soccer and basketball. The elder trio of Thalassa, Apollo and Luke were sitting in the dining room, engrossed in a conversation that was cut short as Phoenix and Maya entered, seeking a midday meal.

"Hi Maya," Luke called, giving them a wave. "I hope you're feeling better."

Maya forced a grin and nodded. "Oh yeah, I'm loads better now."
Phoenix patted her on the back, then quietly wandered off towards the kitchen.

Sighing, Maya moved towards the table, sitting on the nearest cushion. To her right was Luke, with Apollo opposite him and Thalassa at Apollo's side, across from Maya. Feeling self-conscious, Maya brushed at her fringe. "I'm sorry the channelling didn't work."

Thalassa chuckled. "No need to apologise. I remember so little about my mother, I may as well have never known her. What could I possibly say to someone I don't know?"

Maya bit her lip, thinking back on the single day she had the chance to meet Misty Fey, even though she'd not known who the woman was until days later. Even with that short meeting, she had never asked Pearl or any of the other few remaining mediums of the village to channel her mother. Much like Thalassa, she hadn't known what she would say.

"Honestly, I can relate," Apollo mumbled, shrugging as he traced the grain of the wooden table with a finger. "I had fantasies all my life of finding my birth mom again, but when it finally, actually happened..." He looked up at Thalassa with a red face. "I had absolutely no idea what to do about it."

Thalassa smiled, patting her son's back.

"I'm sure you'll have much better luck with Magnifi," Luke pointed out, giving Maya a reassuring look. "He died relatively recently, and Thalassa and Trucy knew him really well, so they know how to handle him."

Thalassa nodded, a slight frown to her brows. "Yes... I have quite a lot to ask my father."

"He died suddenly, too," Maya mused. "That, and him being close to you and Trucy... Those are certainly good signs. Though suicide generally isn't." She sighed. "I just hope at least one of these channellings I promised you goes well... I'd hate to have made this offer and not manage to actually follow through on anything." She turned her eyes on the young man opposite her. "Especially not your dad, Apollo."

Apollo looked too surprised to respond.

"I made my peace with Jove's death long ago." Thalassa gave Maya an encouraging smile. "It would be lovely to say goodbye and show him how Apollo has grown, but whether or not we can doesn't impact our lives in the long run. Or even in the short run."

"R-right." Apollo nodded. "I mean, I was a baby when he died. I've always known I'd never get the chance to meet him. What would I talk to him about?"

"And it's the same with Zak, though I have questions for him just as I do for my father." Thalassa's smile faded a little as her eyes drifted away. "Something went deeply wrong in the Troupe when I had that accident... or maybe there was always something wrong, and my accident only made it more clear to see. If Valant couldn't stay and talk about it... Maybe Zak or my father will."

Apollo frowned. "I would be interested in hearing that story Geary gave you from Magnifi's perspective... Especially since we can't get Gaia's."

Maya winced. "Sorry."

Blushing, Apollo shook his head. "N-no, I didn't mean anything by that! Just... Just a statement of fact, y'know?"
Luke reached out to take Maya's hand, patting it in comfort. "Honestly Maya, we don't mind whether or not you fail a channelling. No matter which happens, we're more concerned with you. Nobody wants to see you beating yourself up about this, especially since these last two weekends together will be all we have for the years you're away."

"He's right," Apollo added, watching Maya with concern. "We won't be able to visit, not like we always can here."

Maya thought a long moment, then gave the pair a smile, blinking back tears. "You boys are so sweet."

"You know who to blame for that," Apollo quipped with a grin.

Luke held back a snort. "The foster system?"

Apollo whacked his brother's arm. Maya and Thalassa just laughed.

**View the Court Record**
When the Gramaryes gathered in the Channelling Chamber for the second time that day, the meeting started out much as the first: Apollo, Trucy and Machi settled down on the floor in front of the door, their backs pressed to the wood. Thalassa knelt down on the mat near the altar-like set-up at the far end of the room, and Maya sat in front of her.

"I already know pretty well what he looked like. He'd prefer 'Magnifi Gramarye', right?"

Thalassa nodded. "As far as I know, he has used no other name since becoming a magician."

"Right." Maya took a deep breath, then pressed her hands together and closed her eyes.

Thalassa folded her hands in her lap and turned her gaze to her knees. Just as she had told Maya earlier, she had a whole list of things to talk to her father about. Now she was imminently seeing him again, she found herself wondering what to bring up first. She wanted to tell him how her life had turned out, introduce him to his grandchildren, tell him how their lives had turned out... but she also wanted to ask about his own childhood, the time he spent travelling with Gaia and Varlous, and those three short years between her accident and his death. She was torn between the happiness of seeing him again and the disappointment of everything she had learned about him since. She had always known that her father had flaws, but that didn't make it easy to acknowledge their existence.

"Thalassa?"

Blinking, Thalassa returned her gaze to the figure kneeling opposite her. Although they wore Maya's clothes and sported her long black hair, the dark skin and broad build were entirely someone else's. It was tough to recognise the hairless face and focussed eyes that now stared back at her... but she knew there was only one possibility for who it could be. "Dad?"

Magnifi's surprised face relaxed into a fond smile. "You remember me..." He then frowned, confused, first looking over Thalassa and then turning his attention to the room around them. "This... cannot be the afterlife."

Thalassa couldn't help a laugh, shaking her head. "No, this is the world of the living. I happened upon a way to bring you back, momentarily. What else could I do but take that chance to talk to you one last time?"

Magnifi grunted to himself, tearing his eyes away from the candles circling them. "I suppose I am forced to believe that is true. This is certainly beyond any kind of illusion I have ever crafted." He met his daughter's gaze with concern. "You're all better. I never thought that was possible... How long has it been?"

"Since you died? Seven years." Thalassa rested a hand on her bracelet, already bracing herself for the coming conversation. "But it wouldn't have taken me so long to recover had I not been separated from my family."

Magnifi winced, looking away. "You're probably right. I must ask for your forgiveness, Thalassa. I..."
thought I was doing the right thing."

Thalassa’s grip on her bracelet tightened. "I already heard the story... from 'Uncle Geary'. From Papa."

Eyes wide in shock, Magnifi met his daughter's gaze. After a moment, he relaxed again, shaking his head. "You deserved this conversation while I was still alive... but it wasn't until I was on my literal death-bed I stopped hiding it long enough to realise that." He looked up. "Of all the mistakes I made in my life, poor Varlous bore the brunt of most. He was the brother I never had, a stage partner I trusted with my life... and I let petty jealousy over Gaia and over you ruin it. That was all on me." He sighed. "I cannot blame him for finally dealing the revenge he deserves. He certainly never took it out on me in life."

Thalassa wasn't quite sure how to proceed. "He... He really loved you, you know. Even when he was apologising for how you both treated me, I don't think he could ever bring himself to blame you."

Magnifi stared back at her, eyebrows furrowed.

Shaking her head, Thalassa decided to move on. "It doesn't matter. I've made my peace with Papa, and with what happened. I just wanted to hear your side of the story."

"I see." Magnifi clasped his hands together, humming in thought. "I suppose... I know you never wanted to talk about it, but, as far as I could see, you never recovered from Jove's and Apollo's deaths."

Thalassa couldn't help a small wince at that. She wouldn't deny there was an element of truth to his deduction.

"I saw my beautiful, cheerful daughter leave to get married and travel the world, have an equally beautiful baby... and, only a year later, come back broken, alone and childless. You stopped singing, and I know how much singing was your passion." He sighed, shaking his head. "I hoped when you decided to marry Zak, and had another baby, that I would see you at least start to sing again. But you never did."

"How could I?" Thalassa almost choked out the words. "There wasn't any joy in it anymore."

"Not even for your new husband and daughter?"

Thalassa looked away. "Zak wasn't a lover of music, not like Jove was... and how could I sing for Trucy when I knew it would only give her pain eventually?"

Magnifi raised an eyebrow.

"Mama sang for me. That's all I remember about her." Thalassa ran her fingers through her hair where it lay over her shoulder, trying to calm herself. "It's because of her I fell in love with singing myself, I'm sure of it. It was singing that led me away from the troupe, and it was because we were away from the troupe that Jove died, that I lost Apollo." She frowned. "That isn't what I was consciously thinking... but I think that was why I didn't sing for her."

Magnifi nodded, frowning in thought. After a long moment, he continued, "The last thing I expected to ever happen was for Zak and Valant to come running to my caravan in a panic because you'd been shot. The one thing I'd impressed on them from the start was to always double and triple-check everything to prevent these kinds of accidents... and they'd slipped and put you in mortal danger. We all thought you were about to die." He closed his eyes, letting out a quiet exhale through his nose.
"You were in a coma at the hospital. I couldn't contain my rage at Zak and Valant for what had happened, so I simply said nothing, and avoided them. For Trucy... I couldn't bear to tell her the truth. I simply told her you'd gotten lost in a disappearing trick. I hoped, should you recover, I'd be able to tell her you found your way out."

Thalassa nodded. Although it was cruel in retrospect, she supposed the white lie seemed reasonable enough in the context it had been given. At barely five years old, Trucy wouldn't have been able to fully grasp much more.

"When you finally woke up, your memory was destroyed and your sight was gone. You weren't in any condition to rejoin us... and we needed to leave Borginia. I..." Magnifi paused. "I'd contacted Varlous when you were hurt, and he came up to Poma to meet me. When you woke up, we both agreed you would go back with him." He sighed, distress pinching at the corners of his eyes. "Part of it was that I wanted to know you were happy again, even if it was only because you couldn't remember us... but part of it was to punish Zak and Valant for what they did. That's why I let them believe you'd died. At the time, the only thing I regretted was that I had to take you from Trucy, but I told myself you'd survived just fine with only your father to raise you, and Trucy would do the same. It was worth it if Varlous could work the miracle of giving you your independence back, of letting you sing just like you'd always loved to do."

"So you let me become Lamiroir." Thalassa rested a hand on her bracelet. "I know I was performing by the time you died."

"You were." Magnifi gave his daughter a warm smile. "Varlous sent me photos every so often. Last I saw, you had a boy on the piano accompanying you."

Thalassa grinned, and was about to say her youngest son's name when muffled voices from behind interrupted her. She turned her head, both her and Magnifi's attention attracted to the noise, and listened to the hushed whispers and quiet protests from the barely-visible silhouettes at the other end of the room. Hiding a laugh, she held out a hand towards the trio. "Machi?"

The voices silenced, then one of the silhouettes stood and haltingly stepped forward into the candlelight. Machi's golden hair and fair skin popped out of the shadows quickly, bright blue eyes watching Magnifi warily as the boy edged towards Thalassa and took her hand in his.

"Pokani, come and meet Askanisa Magnifi." Thalassa guided the boy to sit at her right, resting a hand on his back as she showed him to her father with pride. "Dad, this is Machi. I finally adopted him just last month."

"H-hello," Machi muttered, then stiffly held out a hand towards the man. "I-it is nice to meet you."

Magnifi leaned back, his hands resting on his knees as he scrutinised the teen with amusement. "Well. I certainly never expected to have a grandson I got to see in person." He reached out and took Machi's hand in a hearty shake. "It's a pleasure to meet you too, young Machi. How long have you been learning English?"

"Three months?" Machi quickly returned his hands to his lap, clutching them tightly together to keep from wringing them. "Is longer exact, but... I not remember when I start."

"He learned in secret for a while," Thalassa explained, rubbing the boy's back to offer comfort. "We live here in America now, so it's easy enough to practise."

Magnifi nodded thoughtfully, giving Machi a smile. "You certainly have a good grasp of it already. I imagine Trucy has been helping you practise."
"Yes!"

Before Thalassa could turn to look, a teenage girl had catapulted herself forward from the back of the room with a squeal, her cyan cape flapping behind her as she landed on her mother's left.

"Yes, I have! We have almost all the same classes at school, so I help explain if he's having trouble, or if he has to look up a word and misses what's going on." Trucy grinned proudly. "He's doing way better than he used to," she turned to face her younger brother, "right, Machi?"

Machi turned red and hid a smile, simply nodding in reply.

Magnifi laughed. "My my Trucy, look at you. So grown up since we last spoke! Learning the family business already?"

Trucy giggled, preening. "I've been doing magic for seven years now. I'm not as good as you, but," she shrugged, "I hope I will be one day."

"Ah, it is only a matter of time before you surpass me," Magnifi chuckled. "And Zak too, I'm sure."

Trucy's giggles ceased, her expression tightening. "Oh, yeah... of course."

Thalassa felt her throat constrict, and rested a hand on her daughter's shoulder.

Magnifi frowned, his eyes glancing to the final silhouette sitting at the doorway. "Now, when I woke up here, I assumed our onlookers were to do with how you were able to bring me back from the dead, if only, as you say, momentarily. When young Machi emerged, I assumed it must be Trucy and Zak back there. Was I wrong both times?"

They sat in silence for a long moment, none of the three replying. Finally, Thalassa turned and held out a hand towards the door. "It's time. Come and meet your grandfather, Apollo."

Magnifi was already gasping before the final figure got to his feet, stepping forward. His outstretched hand was the first thing to enter the circle of light, his bracelet glinting as he gripped his mother's hand. As Thalassa had expected, he avoided having to acknowledge his grandfather's eyes on him, keeping his focus on the floor as he slowly sat down in a space Machi hurriedly made for him, the younger boy shifting aside to leave a gap on their mother's right. Apollo didn't release his grip on Thalassa's hand, kneeling on the rug and staring hard at his knees.

"Dad..." Thalassa shifted her gaze between her eldest son and her father, a nervous smile on her face. "This is Apollo... my firstborn."

View the Court Record
Magnifi could only stare for a long moment. "Apollo... You are alive."

Apollo nodded, his eyes darting up to meet his grandfather's.

The old man chuckled, eyes still locked on Apollo as he shook his head. "You're the spitting image of your father... except for the parts of you that are Thalassa's." He frowned, then turned his gaze to his daughter with an air of horror. "Thalassa, I am so sorry."

Thalassa blinked, confused. "For what?"

"I told you not to look for him." Magnifi shook his head, full of guilt. "If it weren't for me, you would have found Apollo far faster..."

"Nonsense." Thalassa huffed, her grip on Apollo's hand tightening. "You were right to tell me not to go back. I would have killed myself long before I found Apollo, the state I was in."

Apollo nodded, his eyes on his mother and sister both. "The important thing is, we found each other eventually, right?"

"Yeah, thanks to Daddy and Luke!" Trucy giggled, hands gripping her socked feet where they stuck out from underneath her crossed legs. "If it weren't for them, who knows what would have happened?"

Apollo couldn't help a laugh. "We'd still have grown up perfectly normal? Or as normal as we could be, anyway."

Trucy scoffed. "Who wants to be normal?" She stuck out her tongue in Apollo's direction, pretending she wasn't smiling. "Normal's over-rated."

Machi pressed a hand to his mouth to stifle a giggle.

Magnifi sighed in relief, watching them fondly. "I am just glad the grandson we thought was long gone was simply lost... and has since been found. It is a pleasure to finally meet you, young Apollo."

Apollo turned red, again avoiding having to look at the old man wearing Maya's kimono. "Um... Hi."

Thalassa gave her eldest son a grin, enjoying every moment of the long-forgotten fantasy from when her firstborn was still an infant: She had always intended on returning to the Troupe one day on a visit, to show off her baby boy to her father... Jove's death and Apollo's disappearance had shattered her fragile plans long before she could even begin to put them into fruition. This wasn't anything close to how she'd always imagined, but aging a baby to a grown man would do that to any situation. Trucy tutted at her elder brother. "C'mon Apollo, do you always have to be so bad at saying 'hello'?

Apollo seemed to snap out of his embarrassment, fixing his sister with a smirk. "I didn't hear you
doing any kind of greeting, Artemis." Releasing Thalassa's hand from his, he crossed his arms.

Thalassa restrained a sigh as she clasped her hands together, closing her eyes. Magnifi simply looked between the pair with a baffled expression.

"That's only because we didn't need to be introduced," Trucy insisted, sticking her nose in the air. "I'm too amazing for a simple introduction."

Apollo shook his head. "A 'greeting' isn't the same as an 'introduction'. Besides, we both know it's always me who does the work greeting our audience every night. You're just lazy."

Trucy scoffed, crossing her arms to imitate him. "Me? Lazy? If you ask me, it's because you do it all the time that you're too lazy to say 'hello' properly now."

Rolling his eyes, Apollo let out an exaggerated sigh. "Oh, you are such a hypocrite..."

"Am not a hypocrite!"

"Alright, that's enough." Thalassa raised her hands towards her elder children, giving them both a stern look. "I know you two love your debates, but could we keep them to the stage, please?"

Magnifi laughed. "I guessed from your outfits. You two are partners!"

"Yep, me and Polly!" Trucy puffed out her chest in pride, then turned to Apollo. "How long have we been performing together as Apollo and Artemis? Six years?"

Apollo nodded. "Nearly. First time was our second Halloween together, though you were still going by 'Trucy' then. We made it a regular thing after the next New Years, and that was when you took up 'Artemis'."

"Right." Trucy scrunched up her face, crunching numbers in her head. "So... Five years and nine months? Yeah, I think that's right."

Machi leaned over and tapped Apollo's arm, whispering, "Isoveli? What is 'hypocrite'?"

Apollo gave his brother a grin. "Someone who tells people not to do something, but then does that thing themselves. Like Trucy being terrible at saying 'hi'."

"Am not!" the girl protested, shooting him a glare.

Machi hid giggles behind a hand.

"Why else is it always me who writes the greetings?" Apollo shrugged, though his grin indicated he wasn't entirely serious. "Clearly I'm just better at words."

Thalassa sighed, burying her face in one hand. She may not have been back with her children for long, but she had quickly picked up that, with her knowledge of the players involved, this was not a situation she could easily salvage.

"I write them too!" Trucy huffed, then reached up to her head as if to grab her hat. She faltered only when her hand grasped at nothing, then looked behind her with a frown. "Aw, we should have brought our hats."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Why? We specifically planned to pick them up before heading to the Wonder Bar tonight."
Trucy rolled her eyes. "You know why!" She subtly jerked her head in their grandfather's direction.

Apollo sighed. "Truce, we didn't know this was going to be happening until a few hours ago. And it's not like we have much room in here anyway."

Magnifi laughed. "A very logical thought, young Apollo. It is a shame I cannot see your show myself, but I trust Zak and Valant trained you both well in my absence."

The trio's smiles died. Trucy frowned at the floor, while Apollo and Machi shot her worried looks.

Thalassa raised her head slowly from her hand, watching her father. "Dad... Whatever your plans were for what would happen after you died..." She took a deep breath, shaking her head. "They didn't happen."

Magnifi frowned, looking around the group. "They were the only people I had a chance to say goodbye to. That is not why they aren't here?"

Thalassa shook her head, eyes turned downwards.

There was a long silence, no-one quite sure how to proceed. Finally, Trucy pulled herself to her knees, crawling across towards her brothers. "Polly, you need to show him!"

Apollo blinked, eyes wide. "Show him?" Before he could ask for further clarification, his sister had reached his side and started reaching under his cape, grabbing at his belt. "Hey, get off!" In return, Apollo grabbed her arms, forcing Trucy back.

Trucy huffed, pressing against her brother's clinging hands on her forearms. "Get out your thing!"

"What thing!?"

"Oh, I know!" Grinning, Machi jumped forward to the heart-shaped pouch on Apollo's belt, pulling out a tablet computer before Apollo could stop him.

"Good going, Machi!" Pulling back out of the surprised Apollo's grip, Trucy grabbed the computer and jumped to her feet.

Apollo was quick to follow, bouncing to his socked feet with a glare. "Truce, give that back!" Around him, Machi, Thalassa and even Magnifi copied him, all standing on the thick rug.

Trucy skipped to the back of the room, her brothers on her heels. "What's your password?"

"I'm not telling you!" Apollo made a grab for the tablet, only for Trucy to promptly hide it under her cape, leading to a grappling match as they fought over the object.

Thalassa stomped a foot giving them both a stern look. "Trucy. Give your brother back his computer now."

The pair paused, looking up at their mother in surprise. It took them a moment to react, Apollo stepping back and holding out a hand expectantly. Trucy pouted, but eventually produced the tablet, returning it to Apollo.

"Thank you," Apollo muttered, holding his precious Court Record close.

Trucy rounded on him with a glare. "I know you copied all the stuff from that old trial! I just wanted to show Grandpa Magnifi what happened."
Magnifi shook his head. "Show me or not, I'd like to know what has happened to Zak and Valant. Did they have nothing to do with the four of you uniting?"

Machi was the only one brave enough to shake his head. "I never meet Zak. Apollo did not, also. Valant, we only meet twice."

"Oh?" Magnifi turned his gaze to the other three, who were all avoiding him sheepishly. "Is someone planning to explain?"

There was another long pause. Finally, Apollo sighed, pulling out his computer and tapping away at the screen. "Long story short... If popular opinion had their way, one of either Zak or Valant would've gone down as your murderer."

Magnifi's eyes widened, and only Thalassa and Trucy recognised the kindling rage behind them. "What."

"Valant re-arranged the scene after you died," Thalassa picked up, holding up a hand to calm her father. "He wanted the rights to your magic for himself, so he tried to blame your death on Zak."

Magnifi stared back at her for a second or two before sighing, looking away. "I didn't wait long enough for him to leave."

Apollo approached, reading aloud from his computer: "That night, I visited the hospital room at the time Magnifi requested. The smell of gunpowder hung in the room, and my mentor had taken his final bow. I did not imagine my fellow student might have received the same instructions. Yet, a deal with the dead is still a deal. Death's sweet kiss, I gave to the clown. Then I informed the doctor and the police." He looked up to meet the man's eyes. "Valant's exact words in the murder trial."

Magnifi closed his eyes, shaking his head.

"They were going to convict Zak," Apollo continued. "Not enough evidence pointed at Valant, and no-one ever suspected suicide as an option. Just as the judge was calling the verdict, Zak pulled off his final illusion: He disappeared from the courtroom. And left Trucy behind."

"What!?" Magnifi looked ready to break down the door and hunt Zak down himself. "After all I entrusted to him, he-!?"

"But it's okay, Grandpa Magnifi." Trucy gave him a sad smile. "After Daddy Zak left, I got adopted by Daddy Phoenix. He did loads of research into the Troupe, and found out all sorts of stuff about Mommy Thalassa and Polly, so that we were able to find them."

Thalassa chuckled. "It still took a long time to find me... but I will always be glad it only took you two a matter of months."

Apollo shrugged, hiding a bashful smile. "I'm just happy I got the opportunity to have a real family while I was still young. How many lifelong foster kids get to be adopted at fifteen?"

Machi giggled, then launched himself at Apollo to hug his older brother tight around the middle. "We do! Fourteen and fifteen best age for adoption!"

Laughing, Apollo patted the boy's back. "Guess so. Luke was fourteen too, or nearly at least." With his other arm, he returned his Court Record to his bag.

"I was seven!" Trucy boasted, joining in the hug.
"Ah yes, the absolute worst age to be adopted," Apollo quipped with a grin, patting her back just as he was patting Machi's.

Trucy shoved her eldest brother in the stomach, but didn't stop hugging him or let up her own smile. Apollo only laughed.

Magnifi sighed. "And after Zak's disappearing act... May I ask what happened to him and Valant?"

Thalassa nodded. "Valant continued performing on his own... but the rumours he'd been your murderer followed him everywhere. Zak, we can only assume, left the country, and remained in hiding until this past April."

Trucy's smile died, clinging tighter to Apollo.

"He met Trucy and Apollo's adoptive father, Phoenix Wright, and entrusted him with his own will: He wished to pass on the rights to your magic, to Trucy."

"He still didn't know about me, that we were performing together," Apollo picked up. "It had been almost exactly seven years since he disappeared, so he was about to be declared legally deceased... but then he got killed anyway."

Magnifi closed his eyes, nearly flinching in pain.

Thalassa sighed. "We plan to speak to him later, the same way we are speaking to you now." She shook her head. "Regardless... When Valant learned the rights hadn't passed to him, he gave everything of yours and of Zak's that he still had to Trucy. As far as we know, he's given up magic for good."

Deep in thought, Magnifi nodded. "I can only expect as much from him. It was hard to say it to his face, but he was never as talented as the rest of us." He opened his eyes, looking to Thalassa's three children still locked in their hug. "I know I can entrust my legacy to you, my grandchildren. Though this will be our last meeting..." He grinned, holding a hand to the top of Maya's hair as if tipping his hat. "A true entertainer always keeps a smile on their face."

Apollo and Trucy held each other tighter, giving their grandfather their biggest grins. Machi giggled and nodded.

Thalassa wiped a tear from her eyes. "Thank you, Dad."

View the Court Record
"Grandpa Magnifi gave me and Polly his blessing!" Trucy proudly announced, bouncing in her seat with pure glee. "He trusts us to carry on his legacy!"

"As he should," Luke chuckled, patting his sister's shoulder. "You two will be amazing once you've sorted out what's in that book of his."

The gathered Fey-Wright-Gramarye family was seated around the square table, all eight of them in a circle on the cushions where they had placed themselves after leaving the Channelling Chamber a matter of minutes earlier. Machi sat closest to the piano, having shot it several longing glances before finally settling at Apollo's side. Opposite them sat Thalassa, while Phoenix and Maya took up a remaining side and Luke, Trucy and Pearl were lined up along the other.

Maya shot a grin at Apollo, who had ended up next to her around the corner. "And when is that happening? I'm sure you guys weren't the only ones to be disappointed Valant's revival of the famous Troupe Gramarye got cancelled."

Apollo scratched the back of his head, trying not to look too embarrassed. "Well, there's a lot in there... and we may be pretty practised with what we do, but we're not up to the Great Magnifi's level. We still do nearly all our performing in the Wonder Bar, for goodness' sake..."

Trucy scoffed. "What's wrong with the Wonder Bar!?"

"Nothing's wrong with it," Apollo insisted, waving a hand. "It's just... It's not exactly the biggest and best place to attract new audiences, is it?"

Thalassa nodded. "That's a reasonable thought. In our early days, my father usually performed in places like that restaurant of yours, but by the time we were forming the full Troupe, we played to ever larger venues and sold out every time."

Trucy pouted, but she seemed to accept their point.

Phoenix rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "That's not a problem. You two just need to work up a bit of fame before relaunching the Troupe, that's all."

Machi patted his eldest brother's shoulder. "That okay. I have to wait long time before I can perform with Aska again. Maybe we do so at same time?"

"Yes, you could all relaunch at once!" Pearl clapped her hands, gaze moving between the four Gramaryes. "Lamiroir is very famous, and people will come to see a new Troupe Gramarye, so you could both help each other!"

Trucy grinned. "Yeah, that sounds great!"

Apollo was more restrained, looking to his mother. "That gives us a deadline of about ten months, though. Will we even be ready by then?"
Thalassa clutched her hands together where they rested on the table. "A good question. Even with a boost from Lamiroir, I'm not sure you will be."

Trucy's face fell. Apollo simply nodded with a solemn look, saying "I thought so." "That doesn't mean you can't still perform together one day," Luke pointed out. "Exactly!" Maya grinned, clapping her hands together. "Maybe that could be how we celebrate me coming back!"

Trucy gasped, a wide smile returning to her face. "That's perfect, Mommy! A Gramarye reunion show, October of twenty-twenty-eight!"

Thalassa laughed. "Sounds wonderful."

Apollo just snickered, shaking his head.

Maya winked. "I'm already looking forward to it."

"Speaking of performing..." Luke turned to Thalassa, stroking his goatee. "How exactly is that working for you, Thalassa? You're living here now, but you said before you have a Borginian producer. Did you ever hire a new manager after Mister LeTouse died?"

Thalassa shook her head. "Lamiroir has neither manager nor producer right now. The Borginian producer you mentioned, we both agreed our contract was voided after the concert in July."

Trucy quietly hummed to herself, chewing her lip with a deep frown. "Voided?" Apollo glanced to Machi, who looked a little confused himself, before returning his gaze to his mother. "Why?"

"Many reasons, in the end." Thalassa glanced Machi's way, then carefully focussed her attention on the table. "For one, it specified Machi always be present, which would be impossible going forward."

Machi turned red, withdrawing into himself. "Also, I planned on leaving Borginia, and it would be difficult to maintain a working relationship so far away." Thalassa shook her head. "And we disagreed on the wisdom of admitting my blindness and amnesia to the public, despite the circumstances."

"But I didn't think you had a choice," Pearl said, pressing a thumbnail to her lips. "Wasn't it necessary to tell everyone, because of the trial?"

Apollo pressed a finger to his forehead. "Not exactly. Herr Diva just announced the amnesia before Mom testified, then Crescend let slip about the blindness later. We probably could have managed that trial without revealing any of it."

Thalassa shrugged. "No matter. What's done is done. I will simply find a new producer here in America."

Trucy perked up as Thalassa finished speaking. "Oh! And a manager, too!" She shot her mother a grin. "Managers are like agents, right? And you get agents from agencies..." She wriggled her eyebrows up and down, a blatant cue to infer what she was thinking.

Most of the table laughed at Trucy's antics, the only one not to being a slightly confused Machi.
Maya placed her hands on her hips and leaned forward over the table, giving the girl a smirk. "Am I to understand you wish to hire both members of Lamiroir to the Wright Anything Agency, Trucy Wright?"

Apollo shrugged, hiding a grin. "It's a good idea. I mean, we'd actually have a proper pianist on our books, finally."

Phoenix snorted, only managing to fake extremely mild offence.

"Oh, that is what Trucy meant?" Machi frowned, then gazed up at Thalassa with a hopeful look. "We can do that, Aska?"

Thalassa smiled. "Which are you asking: If it's possible, or if we're going to?"

Machi thought a long moment, vaguely confused. "Both?"

"It's certainly possible," Luke pointed out. "We were a talent agency long before we changed the name, after all. Music has always been one of our primary offers. The only problem I can see," he looked between the members of his family with a worried expression, "would be that Lamiroir is an international celebrity... or rather, two international celebrities. Would we be capable of handling a 'talent' that big?"

Apollo, Trucy, Pearl and Machi frowned in concern, but the three adults shared a smile. "Actually, we already discussed that," Phoenix said.

"We had a lot of time to talk about things this past week," Maya added with a wink.

Apollo rolled his eyes with a scoff, crossing his arms. "Oh really. Planning out how much about our lives you were going to change all at once?"

Thalassa chuckled. "We're very sorry my dear Apollo, but me moving here all on its own necessitated a lot of change. Everything else has been unfortunate coincidence in timing."

Although he grumbled, Apollo seemed to accept that.

"Lamiroir may be internationally known, but concerts have never attracted as much money as album sales. Not to say they are not profitable, but they have always been lesser ever since our initial producer hired us," Thalassa explained. "It does give me some leeway, however: I don't plan to perform outside the country until Machi's probation is over. When I find a new producer, hopefully as soon as possible, they will be handling the recording process and album sales, the international side of things. Concert management will be localised for a time, giving whoever else I hire plenty of time to prepare for Machi re-joining me next July, and Lamiroir returning to the international stage." She gave the four Wright children a smile. "Plus, wouldn't handling Lamiroir give you experience in handling a celebrity, for when Troupe Gramarye makes its return?"

Apollo and Trucy's eyes widened as they locked gazes for a moment, turning back to their mother. "Really!?" Trucy cried, a growing grin on her face. "You're actually joining the Agency!??"

Machi gasped, equally excited. "We are!?"

Thalassa giggled and nodded.

"You think we'd just turn down that kind of opportunity?" Phoenix snorted, gently mocking his kids, then followed it up with a gentle smile. "Seriously though, we've always made big decisions like these as a family. I'm not making anything official unless you guys-"
"Yes!" Trucy was bouncing on her cushion, her grin threatening to split her face in half. "Yes, yes, yes, they can join, yes!"

Apollo laughed, briefly sticking a hand in the air. "I'm down with this."

Luke nodded. "It's fine with me, Papa." He looked between Machi and Thalassa with a smile. "May I be the first to welcome the members of Lamiroir to the Wright Anything Agency?"

Machi giggled, on the verge of bouncing much like his sister. "Thank you! Thank you so much, Isa and Aska!"

Thalassa laughed, a hand on her chest as she gave the Wrights a warm look. "I think I speak for both of us when I say we are happy to join you."

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Dear Professor Layton,

Thank you for the detailed description of your trip to Borginia, and thank Flora for hers too! I shall have to ask Thalassa later for her own account, and maybe write it up as part of my stories. I suppose at this point we could classify them as a full-on biography of you? I was erring on the side of 'autobiography' before, but I didn't accompany you to Borginia, which makes you (or your unnamed counterpart) the lone recurring figure now. It's a shame, because it sounds like it would have been very exciting to witness in person. I simply couldn't keep myself from reading the whole thing before writing my reply!

Speaking of Borginia, Thalassa has arrived here safe and well. Papa and Maya were keeping her return a secret to surprise the others, but the rest of us all ended up finding out first. We still managed to surprise them, luckily. I think it was a bit of a shock for Apollo and Trucy to see her appearing at the office out of nowhere, but they're all happy to be back together now. She lives around the corner from us, so she's not far away, and we've even signed 'Lamiroir' up at the Agency. With Thalassa and Machi actually working with us now, I think it's safe to say they're a permanent part of daily life around here!

I suppose I should explain why the surprise had to be ruined for everyone else. Papa's 'long game' for clearing his name unexpectedly reached a head, when the original forger whose work got him disbarred (sort of, it's complicated) was poisoned and died. He and Mr. Edgeworth had a new system of trials ready for testing, so they put the two together at the last minute. Apollo went off to defend the accused, with Trucy and Machi helping, but Papa asked me to be his technical aide handling the jurists. It was quite fun, actually. I not only was writing a story based on real events, but I was including puzzles for the jurists to solve in order to proceed. Papa did a lot of artwork for it, too. It would take a long time to explain why, but Maya, Clay and Thalassa were three of the six jurists, and the trial is how we found out she was back before the others did. Naturally, we weren't open to discussing the case with the defence, so that helped to keep the secret for a while. Prosecutor Gavin made up with Papa and Apollo in the end, after helping shine a light on what his brother did. Even though this trial was only to find a verdict for Vera, I think word of mouth will do for Kristoph Gavin what it did to Papa back in 2019. Besides, he's already serving a life sentence for Zak Gramarye's murder, so he's long out of harm's way. No, that's wrong. Mr. Gavin set up methods for murdering the Mishams that didn't activate for seven years. We just have to be careful not to set off any more.
I don't know if Papa or Maya called you to share the news themselves, but they're engaged now! I think they sort of both mutually agreed that was happening after Vera's verdict was declared. We don't know when the wedding will happen though, because Maya has to go and do some kind of special spiritual training course before she can properly be Master of the Kurain Channelling Technique. It takes two years to complete, so she's going to be out of the country a long time. We only have a fortnight until she flies out, so we're making sure to spend as much time with her as we can until then.

This letter has gotten very long already. I suppose that's what happens when a lot goes on in only a few days! I hope you're all doing well. Pass on my love to Flora and Alfendi.

Puzzles are enclosed.

Your friend,

Luke Triton-Wright

11th October, 2026

View the Court Record
Although it was Tuesday, the first school-day of the week had finally come for Trucy and Machi. Despite Maya's assurances she'd be down in the city the next day, Trucy had spent the entire Monday up in Kurain Village whining about the lost time with her adoptive mother, until Apollo had pointedly suggested she go back down into the city and into school regardless of the public holiday. She wisely kept quiet after that.

As promised, after unearthing Magnifi's trick box of memories the previous Saturday, Luke had already begun the process to make digital copies of the old letters and photos. While Apollo had secretly used his Court Record to take pictures of a few favourites in the photo-books, Luke had fetched an old, somewhat portable scanner from his apartment, setting it up alongside his laptop on Phoenix's desk (said laptop being a much more recent piece of technology than Phoenix's ancient desktop computer). However, with all the activity in the office on that day, not much progress had been done on the task, so it was only on Tuesday, with Luke, Thalassa and Apollo alone in the apartment, that work could finally begin.

The first job, which Thalassa had tackled on Saturday, was separating the letters in the box into piles based on age: The oldest were written by Geary and Gaia, from the years before Gaia's death, mostly all kept together; The newest, interspersed around all the other letters, were written by Geary alone, updates on Thalassa's health and life as 'Lamiroir' following her accident, ending shortly before Magnifi's death; The middle pile was the remainder, the letters Thalassa had sent home while travelling with Jove and baby Apollo. The two photo-books sat to one side, the least-fragile and thus last things that would be digitised for the Gramarye family's newly-founded archives.

Thalassa regarded the piles on the glass coffee table with hands on her hips. "I know we're doing the letters first... but I don't know where to start. Do we go from oldest to newest?"

Luke looked up from the desk chair, where he was setting up his laptop around the mess his father always left surrounding the old computer. "It's up to you. This won't take us more than a few days, and even the oldest letters will survive that long. The order we scan them doesn't really matter, in my opinion."

Thalassa stared at the piles a few moments more, then turned her attention to the young man sitting on the nearby sofa. "What do you think, Apollo?"

Apollo's eyes widened as he looked up at his mother. "Um." His face flushed red, gaze back on the table. "W-well, I... I was kinda curious about..." He ran a hand through his hair, then gestured to one of the piles, unable to do more than glance at the woman he was speaking to. "Th-the ones you wrote? While you were away from the troupe with my dad?"

Thalassa gave her son a warm look. "Then we'll do those first." She picked up the indicated pile to deliver to the desk.

Apollo bit his lip to hide a pleased smile as he followed. It took several minutes for the redness to leave his face.
After that, everything went very smoothly, with Thalassa extracting the letters from their envelopes, Apollo placing them one by one on the scanner, and Luke sitting at his laptop to manage settings and save the scanned images. Luckily, Thalassa had always dated her letters in the same place, so Luke made sure to read out the dates as soon as he saw them.

"This one's November, 2003. The eighth."

"Oh, back to October. The twenty-fifth.

"And this one's also from November, but the twenty-second this time."

Although the letters weren't quite in order, jumping back and forth, they seemed to roughly follow a semblance of a timeline, yet to reach the point at which the young couple became a family of three.

"And we've hit 2004. Third of January."

"Back to December. The twentieth."

"And now February? Valentine's Day."

The closer they got to the mid-point of the pile, the more Apollo felt the tension creeping up his back at what was coming.

"And twenty-seventh March."

"Ah, January again. Thirty-first."

"This one's April, the twenty-fourth."

When the next letter's image came up on Luke's screen, he stared at it in silence for a moment before smiling. "Eighth of May. The day after you were born, Apollo."

Barely withholding a gasp, Apollo jumped to his brother's side and leaned down to see the laptop screen. It wasn't a long letter, and the image was slowly sharpening as the scanner continued its work, but Apollo couldn't help trying to read the whole thing at once anyway, catching only the occasional phrase in neat cursive.

You have a grandson!

We've decided to name him Apollo

amazing to think a person can be so small

I'm sure you felt like this with me

Jove's trying to teach him to sing

says his lungs are clearly ready for it

sure he will be musical once he's older

teach him to appreciate magic too

We hope to move on soon
Hands rested on his shoulders, and Apollo looked up to see Thalassa behind him. She gave her son a warm smile, and whispered into his ear, "You can read it later."

Blushing, Apollo nodded, quickly straightening his posture. "Y-yeah, I know. I was just... curious."

Luke hid giggles as he named and saved the completed scan: '2004-05-08.jpg'. "We're halfway through, now. Not much longer to wait."

"Shut up," Apollo mumbled, trying not to turn any redder as he retrieved the paper from within the scanner.

Before Luke could laugh at him again, the door opened and Maya flounced into the office, shooting the trio at the desk a wide grin. "Guess who's officially engaged?"

Phoenix rolled his eyes as he came in behind her, closing the door. "Geeze, you're even doing that to people who already know?"

Luke waved. "Hi Maya! Hi Papa!"

Apollo snorted. "Got your ring fitted?"

Maya beamed as she crossed the room, wriggling the fingers of her left hand to show off the silver band there.

"She's been announcing it every time we walk through a door," Phoenix sighed, hands shoved in his hoodie pockets. "I'll admit, the cheers were nice, but it was just embarrassing to have entire streets stare at us, supportive or not..."

Maya scoffed. "Weren't so grumpy when the bus driver gave us a free ride because of it."

Phoenix thought a moment, then shrugged and nodded. "Yeah, that was nice of him actually."

Thalassa smiled, taking the letter Apollo had removed from the scanner and busying herself carefully replacing it in its envelope.

"Well, it looks good, Mom." Apollo shot Maya a grin as he crossed his arms. "It suits you."

Maya softly gasped, turning suddenly-teary eyes to the young man. "Aw, thank you, baby!" She leaned across the desk, grabbing Apollo's shoulders and pulling him towards her to plant kisses on his cheeks. "You're so sweet!"

Apollo laughed. Once Maya had released him, he circled the desk to approach Phoenix. "You gonna get an engagement ring too, Dad? Or just wait for the wedding?"

Phoenix snorted. "I'll wait, thanks."

Maya spun to face him with wide eyes. "What?" She huffed and waved him off, turning back to the desk with a sniff. "Fine, be boring. We've got two years to wait, after all."

Shaking his head, Phoenix simply sat down on the nearest sofa, leaning against the back cushion as
if ready to take a nap.

Apollo glanced behind him to see Thalassa and Luke returning to work on the letters from the memory box, Maya chatting away about her trip to the jeweller's as she took Apollo's place at the scanner. Glad to leave them to it, Apollo continued on to sit on the sofa next to Phoenix, casting wary glances back at the desk to ensure his question wouldn't be overheard. "Dad?"

Phoenix jumped a little, lifting his head from the cushion with wide eyes. "Ah. Apollo." He shifted in his seat, turning his attention more fully to his eldest son. "Did you want something?"

Apollo nodded, biting his lip and casting another glance at the desk. He kept his voice low. "I just wanted to check... if you told Mom Maya about..." He took a deep breath. "About me and Khura'in?"

Phoenix stared back at Apollo for a few moments before his eyes drifted away with a thoughtful frown. "No, I'm pretty sure she doesn't know. It's never come up in my presence since Thalassa arrived, anyway." He looked back to the younger man with concern. "Why? I thought you said you were trying to forget it."

"I am." Apollo sighed. "But, you know, considering it was where I got separated from Mom Thalassa, it kinda came up with Trucy and... she got mad I never said anything before." He shook his head. "I promised her I'd at least tell Mom Maya about it before she leaves."

Phoenix nodded, glancing up at the commotion around the desk on the other side of the room. "Did you want me to make an excuse to get you and Maya alone? Get Luke out of the room?"

Apollo thought a long moment. Finally, he shook his head. "I'll tell both of them. If Trucy knows now, Luke deserves to know as well."

"Okay." Phoenix gave his son a smile. "Knock 'em dead."

Snorting, Apollo decided to just take the support.

View the Court Record
Maya's chattering halted as Apollo approached them, and she gave the young man a bright grin. "Sorry. Did I take your job?"

"Nah, it's fine." Apollo rubbed the back of his head, unsure quite how to proceed. "I, um... I actually wanted to talk to you. And Luke."

Luke and Maya shared a curious look, while Thalassa watched her son with concern. Luke indicated the nearby scanner, saying, "I've just set it to start on the next page. We can put everything on hold for a bit if you need our full attention."

Apollo thought a long moment, then decided making everyone move would only succeed in him putting the conversation off. He shook his head, glancing up at Maya. "No. I... I promised Trucy I'd do this before you left for Khura'in." He took a deep breath. "You guys know my dad got invited to play music for the queen of a distant country when I was a baby, but then died in a fire, and I got separated from Mom Thalassa in the aftermath."

Maya nodded, glancing at Thalassa. "That was all you ever found out about it, right? I remember you kids talking about that years ago."

"Y-yeah," Apollo muttered. "Thing is, I never told you what happened after."

Luke frowned, stroking his goatee. "I seem to remember there being some confusion back then over exactly where your birth father actually came from, if it was Borginia or California. I'm guessing he told someone 'California' before he died, so that's where you were sent when no one showed up to claim you." His frown deepened. "I never really thought about it before. I can see why you were sent away, but..." He turned a curious gaze towards his brother, suspicion lurking at the edges. "If you were a baby at the time, how did you already know so much about what happened by the time we met? I doubt that kind of information that would have been available to your foster families here."

Apollo winced, clutching his bracelet tightly. He couldn't make himself meet his brother's eyes, instead staring at the floor. "I... I wasn't sent back immediately. The guy who rescued me from the fire, he..." He choked on his words, too chicken to proceed. "He..." Apollo could feel the weight of the long-held secret tightening around his heart and lungs, making it difficult to breathe, and all he wanted to do was bail from the conversation and erase it from existence, to once more ignore the agony of the invisible scars he'd been left with.

Phoenix's shuffled steps crossed the room behind him, and Apollo felt his father's hand rest silently on his shoulder. With the touch of the older man supporting him, Apollo was able to take a deep breath and calm his rapid heart rate. He was too far in to stop now.

Apollo took another breath and forced out, "He raised me. Sort of. For eight years, anyway." He looked up to meet Luke's and Maya's shocked gazes. "He was the one who told me about the fire, and what little I knew about my dad. His son was my big brother. We used to play together, in the mountains, and..." His resolve faltered, eyes returning to the floor with a glare. "And then he sent me
away. Just me, not my foster brother, because I was the 'foreigner'. Me, the eight-year-old, who considered himself just as much a native of that country as everyone else. It was 'too dangerous' for me to stay, in the only home I'd ever known." He closed his eyes, holding back tears. "I wasn't family to him. Family doesn't abandon each other. He sent me away and he promised he'd come back for me... but he never did."

There was a long pause, broken by Maya dashing around the desk and pulling Apollo into a tight hug, her chin resting on his shoulder where she'd ripped it from Phoenix's grasp. "You poor baby! I'm so sorry!" She paused, then pulled back, placing her hands on his shoulders and staring into Apollo's eyes with undisguised concern. "Why didn't you ever tell us before? That's so awful!"

Apollo shrugged, unable to look at Maya's sad eyes in fear of the hot tears threatening the back of his eyeballs. "I 'unno... I just didn't want to think about it at all. Pretend it never happened."

"Oh, baby..." Maya pulled him back into the tight hug. Apollo returned it.

Luke got up from his chair, coming around the desk on the same route their adoptive mother had taken. "I can see why you kept this to yourself. I imagine it... It probably really hurts to think about, doesn't it?"

Apollo looked up to meet his brother's worried gaze over Maya's shoulder. Unable to speak for fear of sobbing, he just nodded.

Luke returned a sympathetic smile. "If it helps, you're not the first person I've seen react that way to trauma. The Professor himself suppressed memories of his birth family because of the pain of losing them at a young age." He stepped forward to pat his brother's shoulder. "But thank you for trusting us with this. I don't think I need to tell you that you can count on us never to abandon you."

Apollo couldn't help a choked laugh. "I know you guys too well to ever think you would." He pulled back from Maya's hug, rubbing the few escaped tears from around his eyes.

Luke turned his attention to Phoenix and Thalassa. "I'm guessing you two already knew about this."

Phoenix nodded. "Most of it." His concerned gaze bore into the back of Apollo's head, the young magician acutely aware of how little he'd actually shared with his father. "I knew about this far-away country from the adoption process, but when Apollo didn't want to talk about it, I didn't ask."

Thalassa had her hand on her bracelet, hanging back from the conversation with a sorrowful look. "We discussed it when I came back. Trucy was quite shocked to hear the story."

"She made me promise that same day I'd tell you guys as well," Apollo sighed, ignoring Maya's hand running through his hair (brushing back his spikes in the process). "And... that's not the entire story yet."

Maya paused, removing her hand from Apollo's head as the fear for his wellbeing returned to her gaze. "There's more?"

Apollo nodded. "The country, the kingdom, where my dad died in a fire while performing in the palace for the queen... That was Khura'in."

Maya's mouth fell open, and she jumped back half-a-step. "What!?"

Luke stared for a long moment. "It was?" He glanced between Phoenix and Maya. "So, when Apollo overheard you two talking about Maya's trip...?"
"There was a bit of a misunderstanding at first," Phoenix admitted with a shrug. "He heard us saying 'Khura'in', presumably among other things, and must have jumped to some conclusions."

Apollo turned red, looking away. "That's why I hid in my room that day. I thought the same thing might be happening again... until Dad came to tell me what was actually going on." He met Maya's eyes. "That's partly why Trucy made me promise to tell you this before you left, since you're going to the same place I spent most of my childhood."

Maya stared with watery eyes for a second before pulling Apollo back into a hug. "You poor thing... If I knew you had such awful memories connected to Khura'in, I'd've..." She paused, then stepped back with a fierce frown. "Who was your foster father? I have half a mind to drag him out of whatever hole he's hiding in and take him hiding back here to apologise to you!"

Apollo decided to entertain Maya's offer for a few moments. It was extremely tempting, he had to admit. He could easily picture his former foster father being dragged to California by the ear, so terrified by Maya's wrath that he would fall to the floor at Apollo's feet and beg for forgiveness. At his back would be Apollo's former foster brother, also apologising on the man's behalf, though he himself was blameless of the whole affair. Maybe some of their old friends from those days would be there too, though his memories of them had been squashed along with the rest of Khura'in... But his mental eye kept returning to that man, the man who had once called Apollo his son but hadn't ever meant it. Apollo had no idea what he was doing right now, all these years later. At a guess, he was still hiding away in the mountains, still the fierce, dragon-obsessed, never-yielding leader of the rebel freedom fighters. If the regime hadn't found him by now, Maya certainly never would... and Apollo told himself it was for that reason - certainly not any lingering fondness - that he finally shook his head. "Nah. If he wants to see me again, he knows where to look. As for me... I don't need him." He gave Maya a smile. "I'm perfectly happy with my real family, here in California."

Maya's eyes shone with unshed tears of happiness. "Awww!" She pulled him back into the hug. "You're so sweet, little Apollo." She paused, then stepped back again, looking worried. "So, when I head off to Khura'in next week...?"

Apollo laughed. "You still count as real family, Mom. It doesn't matter where you are."

Maya shrugged, blowing off his comment with a flippant "I knew that," that didn't hide exactly how much it had truly concerned her.

Apollo just chuckled as he pulled her back into the hug.
It had been exactly a week since that unfortunate day in court that had resulted in Vera Misham's poisoning. Much like that unfortunate day, the Wrights found themselves waiting on Vera's health... except this time, their hopes were higher than they'd ever been.

Ema escorted the young woman out to the hospital's reception, their arms full of plastic bags containing a variety of DVDs, and Vera specifically hugging her sketchbook to her chest. The young artist paused at the point where the hall met the open room of reception, shying away from the usual small crowd beyond. It took her a second to notice Ema was moving on without her, and she jumped back into motion, keeping her eyes low and her feet close to Ema's. The detective, hearing the squeak on linoleum behind her, slowed down to check on her charge, but kept a steady pace towards the nearby desk, heels clacking a regular rhythm on the floor.

From the rows of seating nearby, Vera saw a pair of white boots approaching. Thinking them familiar, she raised her eyes across black pants, a red-and-white belt, and a red cape framing a black, double-breasted vest with shiny, round buttons. By the time she reached the face in front of the cape's high collar, she knew who had come to her aid. "Apollo..."

Apollo grinned, giving her a quick wave with a gloved hand. "Hey, Vera. We heard you were being discharged today, so we thought we'd check you were okay." He reached out and gently pried the plastic bags from her hands, carrying them in one of his.

Vera smiled, happy to hand the bags over and even happier to see a friendly face. "Thank you." She glanced down at Apollo's sides, but found them devoid of the two teenagers she expected to find there. "Where are...?"

"Oh, uh," Apollo laughed, rubbing the back of his head, "Trucy and Machi are at school." He pointed to the chairs behind him. "Our mom, Thalassa Gramarye, is here with me, and my dad. My brother Luke is here too, but I don't think you've met him."

Vera thought a moment, then shook her head.

"That's okay." Apollo gave her a bright grin. "I'll introduce you to him later. Thing is, he's the only one of us who has a car, and we figured you'd prefer a direct drive back to your home instead of having to take public transport. Less walking out in the open, less crowds..." He shrugged. "Sound good?"

Vera considered the offer for a long moment. "That is..." She gave Apollo a smile. "Very kind of you."

Ema interrupted the conversation, placing a hand on the younger woman's arm. "Vera, we just need to fill out a few forms, then you can get out of here. Okay?"

Vera was glad to have Apollo and Ema at her sides as she filled out the final pieces of paperwork discharging her from the hospital and allowing her to go home. She felt more secure, better able to
pretend the room wasn't quite so big and there weren't quite so many people in it. When they turned to leave, she again kept her eyes on the floor, focussed on following Ema's black heels and Apollo's white boots. She was so busy trying not to think about the scarly open world beyond the hospital doors that she almost didn't notice when her two escorts stopped, two further pairs of feet (and one floor-length white skirt) entering her field of vision.

"Are you ready to face the outside world, Vera?"

Vera looked up. The person who had spoken, the owner of the white skirt, was indeed Thalassa. Nearby, the owner of the bare feet and sandals proved to be Phoenix. Between them both was a young man around her or Apollo's age, an oval face sandwiched between a blue paperboy cap and a pointed goatee. Like Thalassa and Phoenix, he showed Vera a smile. It didn't take much thought to realise he must be the brother Apollo mentioned earlier, and even so, given the company he was keeping, Vera decided she could trust him.

Phoenix gestured behind him, to where Vera noticed the glass doors of the hospital's entrance were. "Well, it's pretty quiet right now, and Luke's parked not far away. Even so, I'm sure he'd be happy to drive a bit closer if you're still nervous."

It was only then Vera realised she'd been so distracted studying Luke that Phoenix had spoken up to break the silence. Embarrassed, she returned her eyes to the floor, hugging her sketchbook. "Thank you... for going to so much trouble for me."

"It's no trouble, Miss Misham." Luke tipped his cap. "We're happy to help!"

Vera thought a moment, managing a small smile of her own. "I think... I would like to try the longer walk. I... need practise... being out in public."

"Of course." Luke stepped aside, holding an arm out towards the entrance. "Shall we go? I'll show you the way." He turned and headed to the glass doors, which slid open as he approached, and stood in the opening, waiting and watching for Vera to join him.

Apollo placed his free hand on Vera's arm. "Just let us know if you're having any trouble, okay?"

Vera nodded. Holding her sketchbook tight, she gathered together all her courage and forced her feet forward.

It was only a short walk to where Luke stood, but the yawning abyss of the world beyond made it feel much longer. The sun was out, casting the street outside in a bright light that took a few moments to adjust to. Vera stood on the edge for a long moment, acutely aware of the roof above her falling away to the endless void of the blue sky. She had studied that sky from behind the safety of her skylight for so long... to lose that protective cover was still a terrifying prospect. But, she had managed to keep her fear in check with her belief in the magic of her lucky charm. She just had to transfer that absolute trust to herself. Taking a deep breath, Vera put on a determined expression (her best imitation of how Apollo had looked in court while fighting on her behalf), and stepped out onto the pavement.

"This way, miss."

Luke had appeared so promptly at her side, Vera nearly jumped, but managed to restrain herself. She kept her feet moving one in front of the other mostly out of shock, but at least was now able to direct them to follow the young man in blue down the path alongside the road. 'I can do this. I can do this. I can do this.' It was less of a surprise when Vera noticed Apollo catching up to her, and she was glad for the reminder she wasn't alone. A part of her couldn't help imagining that, any second now,
something would swoop down on her from the infinity above and carry her away, and she would be helpless to stop it.

Luke stepped off the path and onto the road, keys jangling in his hand. In nearly the same instant, the lights of the blue car he was standing next to flashed twice, and this time Vera did jump.

Apollo smiled, resting a hand on Vera's arm. "Don't worry, that's Luke's car. He just unlocked it so we can get in."

Luke paused, looking back at them. "Oh, sorry." He stepped back up onto the pavement, then pulled open the nearest door, leading to the passenger side of the front of the car. "You can sit here next to me, Vera. This seat gives you the most room to yourself."

Vera nodded. She only hesitantly moved forward, torn between the lingering fear of being out in the open and the usual terror of a place she'd never been before. It wasn't the first time she'd been in a car, of course: The police had shuffled her between her house, the detention centre, and the courthouse in their cars, though she'd always sat in the back, separated from anyone else by a black grill. She only dimly remembered riding in cars in her childhood, before her mother left... and certainly not enough to be able to draw on the memories for reference now. As she settled into Luke's, relieved for the feeling of a roof above her head again, she took the opportunity to quickly look around. There was no barrier at all between front and back, save the seats themselves, though she hadn't seen enough of the dashboard before to be able to compare what she saw there. The door next to her slammed closed, making her jolt in her seat, and was followed by the door behind her jerking open.

"You comfortable, Vera?" Apollo asked, slipping into the back seat. He shot Vera a grin as he shuffled into the exact middle of the cushions, dragging the bag of DVDs along the floor in front of him.

Vera nodded. "Yes... Thank you."

The other doors all opened as the rest of the group settled into the small car. Thalassa settled in the seat behind Vera's, while Phoenix pulled in on Apollo's other side with the second bag. Next to Vera, Luke slid into the driver's seat, the last to pull his door closed behind him. "Is everyone strapped in?"

There was a chorus of clicks behind her. When Vera turned to look, all she noticed was the three people in the back seat shifting around each other and getting comfortable, grey straps across their torsos and waists. Apollo laughed, gesturing at Luke with a "You're not."

Luke rolled his eyes with a smile, then reached behind him, pulling a grey strap down across his front and clicking the attached buckle into the corner of his seat. "There." He looked over to Vera, smile fading. "Oh, you need to strap in too, Vera. If the worst happens, I'd hate for you to go flying."

Vera wasn't sure exactly what he meant, but there was enough of an implication that she realised this 'strap' was a protective measure. Suddenly she retroactively felt even more fear of her time in the police cars, where she had spent the entire trip clinging to the seat every time they turned a corner. Maybe that time spent keeping herself from sliding back and forth was what Luke meant by 'go flying'. It didn't take too much searching for her to find the strap in question, hanging just behind her seat with the buckle prominent by her head; Whether or not dim memories from long ago aided her, she couldn't say. She twisted around to grab it, but found the buckle and strap didn't move all that easily, and no amount of tugging would stretch it far enough to cover her seat the way Luke's did.

Thalassa leaned forward from behind, gently taking the buckle from Vera's hand. "You must be
gentle. If you pull too quickly, the mechanism thinks you are being thrown from your seat, and locks up to protect you." Sure enough, she pulled the strap forward as far as she could reach from the back seat, the strap easily loosening in her hand. "Here. Try again."

Vera took back the offered buckle. With a steady hand, this time she was able to pull the buckle down to the opposite corner of her seat, where she found the clip to hold the strap in place with a click.

"There you go," Thalassa said, a smile in her tone.

Luke grinned, then reached under the wheel. With a soft hum, the engine started up, the dashboard around Luke lighting up with all sorts of displays Vera couldn't comprehend. Before long, they were pulling out onto the road. Luke shot her a friendly look as he joined the city traffic. "Let's get you home, Vera."
When the car pulled up by the side of the road, Vera wasn't sure if she found the area familiar or not. There was a house out her window, a single-floor with a large skylight in the roof and a public bench on the path out front. She turned, and out Luke's window glimpsed the tops of trees behind a tall orange wall made of brick.

Luke smiled as he shut off the car's engine. "Welcome home, Vera."

Vera blinked, then turned to look at the house again. That was home? It had been so long since she'd seen the outside of the studio - she hadn't looked behind her when the police took her away, and not left it beforehand for a number of years now - she didn't feel any recognition for the building in front of her.

There was a chorus of clicks, then the doors all opened as the members of the Gramarye-Wright family left the car. Thalassa, having been directly behind Vera, was the first to reach the young woman's door, pulling it open with a gentle smile. "Are you ready? It's not too far from here."

Vera thought a long moment, then nodded. She moved to stand, only to be stymied by the seatbelt pressing against her chest and hips. It took her a moment to wrestle with the buckle, and she couldn't help jumping a little at the suddenness with which the strap recoiled back to its position behind her seat. Free of the restraint, she took Thalassa's offered hand and stepped out into the open.

There were less buildings and traffic, but Vera felt no difference compared to the parking lot outside the hospital: The sky was still an endless expanse of nothing hanging over her head, and the street's complete lack of comforting walls only made her feel exposed. Vera hugged her sketchbook tight, keeping a firm grip on Thalassa's hand. 'I can do this. I can do this.' With the older woman's comforting guidance, and the three Wright men all in sight around her, Vera was able to keep herself moving long enough to reach the front door, the bright red mailbox at its side cheerfully announcing hers was house number 57.

Apollo moved to the door and jiggled the handle. "Locked." He turned to Vera with a sheepish grin. "You have keys, right?"

Vera nodded.

"Good." Apollo sighed in relief and stepped back.

Releasing Thalassa's hand, Vera moved forward to the door, reaching into the pocket of her overalls. It didn't take long to fish out the house key attached to its cute puffball key-chain (an item she chose as a child, never thinking she would use it for anything other than play), and she didn't hesitate in using the key to open the door and rush through into the room beyond.

She was home.

Vera nearly collapsed out of sheer relief as the familiarity of the room enveloped her, though she settled for lowering herself into the stool at the nearby table. The studio looked exactly the way she remembered it... almost. The three paintings she'd been working on (all copies, she admitted) were
gone from their easels, and the gap behind the drawers next to the door was similarly empty (not that she minded, now she knew the painting her father had shoved there was stolen from its owner). There was also a conspicuous gap on the floor at her feet where she'd last seen her father's body, the spot where he had died and lain so still before the ambulance arrived to take him away. Looking over her father's workstation at the back of the room, hidden in the shadow of the natural light from the window above, she noticed everything there looked off, as if someone had meticulously picked everything up and then put it back in only a slightly different position. On closer inspection, Vera was pretty sure someone had cleared the layer of dust off everything too. Maybe that was why it looked so wrong.

The Gramarye-Wrights filed into the room behind Vera, Phoenix gently closing the door at his back. Apollo was the first to venture forward, gesturing to the empty easels. "Aw, they took your paintings."

Vera nodded. "Yes. I suppose... because they were copies."

"She has a point." Luke joined his brother. "The police wouldn't allow forgeries to be left in private hands." He turned to Vera with a sad look. "It's a shame your drawings underneath are gone, though."

Vera had to think a long moment before she realised what Luke was referring to, and she smiled. "Those were Father's. He liked to sketch on the canvas... and I would paint something else on top." The smile faded. "He was going to sell them anyway. I have other things he made."

Luke thought a moment, then nodded. At his side, Apollo frowned to himself, then pulled out his tablet computer and busied himself tapping away at the screen.

Phoenix stepped forward, hands in the front pocket of his hoodie. "So, what are you planning to do now? Your father handled the business side of things. Will you be okay taking that up? Carrying on as just an illustrator?"

Vera sat in silence for half a minute, thinking over her answer carefully. "I want to keep painting. Originals only, of course. It will be hard to get used to... but I think I can do it." She turned her eyes to the skylight, to the distant blueness that didn't feel nearly as big when viewed through the glass. "I suppose I'll have to see a bit of the world outside to find what to paint... but I know there are good people out there now." She looked down, her eyes moving across the four guests of her house with a smile. "I've met them."

Phoenix and Thalassa gave the young woman warm smiles of their own. Apollo sheepishly bounced his computer in his hands, staring at the screen and fighting to hide his bright crimson cheeks.

Luke giggled, glancing at his brother. "Well, we'll all be happy to help you any way we can."

"Indeed." Thalassa moved over to the other chair at the table, opposite from Vera's stool. "And if you want a friend to paint with when you go out... I've been thinking of taking up painting myself. If you don't mind a beginner tagging along, of course. Oh," she turned to Phoenix, "and you are quite an artist yourself, aren't you, Phoenix? Maybe you could join us too."

Phoenix blushed, running a hand through his hair with a nervous grin. "Um, not with paints, I'm afraid. My art's... more of a hobby these days."

Apollo snorted, hiding a smirk as he returned his tablet to the pouch on his hip. "You studied art at college, Dad."
"Yeah, but that was a long time ago." Phoenix shrugged. "I mean, if you want me to, Vera, I'll tag along with a pencil and spare notebook. Only if you want me to, though."

Vera smiled, nearly laughing at the man's embarrassment. "That would be very nice. Thank you. I would love for you both to join me."

"Then it's settled." Thalassa shot Phoenix a grin, the latter sighing with a bashful smile. "We shall have to organise some art outings later. For now though, more important are your daily necessities." She turned a concerned frown to Vera. "Did your father go out shopping, or did he have everything delivered?"

Vera thought a moment. "He went out. Every two weeks."

Apollo raised an eyebrow. "Really? It's super easy to have it delivered."

"Online it is," Luke pointed out. "Mister Misham didn't trust modern technology, right? That's why he conducted all his business through the mail. He probably didn't even have a website set up."

Humming in thought, Apollo crossed his arms. "True."

Vera shook her head. "Father never liked anything to do with the computer. When I was young, Mother taught me how to go online to find art, and tutorial videos." She looked to the floor. "After she left, Father wouldn't let me use the computer very much anymore."

Apollo gave her a sympathetic look. "That's a shame."

"Well, I'm not the best with tech myself, but you can't run a business nowadays without some kind of online presence." Phoenix scoffed. "However he managed for so long without that, I'll never know..."

Thalassa chuckled, shaking her head. "We'll sort it out." She looked to Vera. "Where is your computer?"

Vera placed her sketchbook on the table, next to the cup and saucer she had left there on the night her father died, then got to her feet and crossed the room. Just as she'd left it, the old computer still sat in the corner next to her father's equipment. She pointed it out to the Gramarye-Wrights, waiting for the quartet to follow her. "Father rarely even turned it on. I always had to beg to use it for reference photos... or to learn how to design with it."

"Design?" Luke gave the computer a thoughtful frown, examining the LCD monitor and wireless mouse. "It has an art program, then?"

"Sort of. I used it to design our business cards." Vera remembered well how she had struggled with the simple images of the program she only knew as 'Publisher', using the templates it provided to make something pretty to bear her name. Not that she'd ever had a use for the cards until the day Apollo came to visit her in the detention centre. It was a good thing in retrospect she'd always kept one on her, just in case.

Apollo stepped forward to take a look himself, quickly locating the computer tower under the desk. He crouched to turn it on, then popped up and shot Phoenix a grin. "Y'know, despite the newer-looking stuff on top, I think this thing's actually even older than yours, Dad."

Phoenix rolled his eyes. "Ha ha."

Luke joined his brother. "I wonder what kind of operating system it has." He frowned at the monitor
as it came to life, the start-up screen on its display. "Is that Vista!?" He slipped into the nearby office chair and grabbed the mouse to click the lone user icon on-screen. He was visibly shocked when the system immediately began logging in. "And no password!?"

Apollo chuckled, leaning over his brother's shoulder. "Shouldn't be surprised, really. He probably figured there was nothing worth protecting, if he so rarely used it."

"You'll need to update this computer, Vera," Luke muttered in the young woman's direction, eyes locked on the monitor. "Vista hasn't been supported for a very long time now, so it's vulnerable to all sorts of malware. I doubt it was still supported at the time your father bought this, assuming that was when he got all the peripherals too." He gestured between the keyboard, monitor and mouse.

Vera thought a long moment, unsure how to respond. She didn't know anything about the history of the computer, nor did she understand half the words that had just come out of Luke's mouth.

"One thing at a time." Thalassa stepped forward, standing at Vera's side and watching the young woman with a smile. "Why don't we get your necessities sorted out first, then we can let these two loose on the technical things." She leaned in close. "To tell the truth, I'm not too good with all this, either. We were always behind the times in the troupe anyway, and once I left, I soon discovered there aren't many who think to make websites accessible to the blind."

Apollo and Luke froze, eyes wide.

Phoenix laughed. "Very true. I don't think accessibility for the blind ever came up for the Agency's website, did it, boys?"

"N-no, it didn't," Apollo admitted, the brothers sharing an embarrassed look.


Thalassa giggled, holding her hand to her mouth. "Ensure that it is, and you can consider yourselves forgiven."

Vera had no idea what they were talking about, but didn't mind so much this time. She simply smiled, enjoying the company of the good people who had become her friends.

_The door is open. The world is waiting._

_Thank you._
Thalassa felt much more confident this time as she strode into the small, dark chamber with her three children and Maya. She had discussed this day with Maya on and off throughout the week, over texts more than in person, and had a concrete plan she had formulated in her alone time for what to do and say in any event. Finally, the day to execute them had come.

Just as she had the previous week, Maya knelt down on the rug in front of the altar at the back of the room, and Thalassa settled down in front of her. Unlike last time, Thalassa's three children didn't wait in the shadows around the door, instead stepping forward to join her from the beginning: Trucy sat on Thalassa's left, and Machi next to her, holding his sister's hand tight between them. Behind the two teens, Apollo settled at an angle to everyone else, a wary eye constantly on his younger siblings. Thalassa worried he was being a touch over-protective, considering who they were meeting today... but, then again, it had been at least seven years since any of them had seen the man Maya was preparing to channel. Just as Thalassa had changed in that time, so undoubtedly had Zak.

Just in case, Thalassa reached over and placed a hand on Trucy's knee.

With their eyes down-turned, none of the Gramaryes saw Maya press her hands together, or the magatama hanging around her neck beginning to glow.

Thalassa wondered as she waited, how Zak would react to what they were going to tell him. She knew how he had died; Would Zak assume when he woke that he'd just been knocked unconscious from that killing blow to the head? He'd always been very hard to convince of anything once his mind was made up. She hoped on this occasion he'd be willing to listen before doing that.

"Thalassa...?"

Hearing her name, Thalassa looked up, her children quickly following her cue. Although initially thrown by Maya's ill-fitting robes and hair, she couldn't deny the aged face looking back at her was one she knew very well. She smiled. "Zak."

Zak's shock at seeing his wife melted only a little to return the smile, then his concerned gaze moved left. "And Trucy..."

Trucy nodded, blinking rapidly and biting her lip in her efforts to keep from crying. At her side, Machi gripped her hand tighter, and Apollo watched over her from behind, casting wary glances at Zak.

Thalassa tightened her grip on her daughter's knee, keeping her eyes on her husband. "I'm sure this must be quite a shock. The last thing you'd remember is someone hitting you over the head with a bottle... Is that right?"

Zak frowned. "Yes, exactly that." Finally, he turned his attention to the room, looking all around at the candle-covered shelves and the shadows that hid the door. "Where are...?" His eyes moved to Trucy's brothers, passing over Machi and nearly doing the same to Apollo before he double-taked, a suspicious look focussed on the young man.
Apollo narrowed his eyes in return, minutely inching closer to his sister.

"You're dead, Daddy."

All eyes turned to Trucy, the teen staring up at her father with tears beginning to drip down her cheeks.

"You died, in the basement of the Borscht Bowl Club. Six months ago. But it's okay." She began to sniff, smiling despite her tears. "Daddy Phoenix an-, and Polly made sure Mister Gavin went to jail... and I got those performance rights, or whatever, that you were keeping safe..." Trucy's tears became only more prevalent as she spoke, overwhelming her words despite her attempts to wipe them away with her free hand.

Machi was quite alarmed. "Trucy!" He jumped closer to the girl, hugging her tightly. "It's okay! No need cry, okay?"

Apollo similarly moved right up against his sister's back, placing his hand on her shoulder with nothing more than a sympathetic look at the back of her ear.

Zak watched his daughter with no small amount of confusion, glancing only briefly at his brothers. "What do you mean?" He paused, then looked down at his hand, his attention caught by the twine bracelet wrapped tightly around his wrist. His gaze moved from there to the white fabric in his lap, then up to the obi and Maya's purple haori that topped the outfit off. He tapped curiously at the magatama on her necklace. "What is this... overly tight dress I've been put in?" He only then seemed to notice the hair, picking at the black tails tied at their ends with purple beads. "What...?!"

"It just like Trucy said," Thalassa explained, keeping a hand on her daughter's knee. "You died six months ago. A dear friend of ours, Maya... She summoned you back for a little while, so we could have the chance to say goodbye." Zak was watching her with wide eyes, and Thalassa saw only confusion in his face. "The hair, the robes... Those are Maya's. I'm sorry if they're tight, but she does have a much smaller frame than you."

Zak frowned, considering her explanation for a long moment. Finally, he turned his gaze back to Trucy, still sniffing and wiping her eyes while huddled in the ring of support given by her brothers. Judging by the sad look in Zak's eyes, Thalassa was pretty sure he believed them now. "Trucy, I am sorry."

Seeing the man's attention back on them, Machi released his sister from the hug, face red.

Trucy smiled despite her tears, clinging to Machi's arm so he couldn't go too far. "It's okay, Daddy. You didn't want to put me in danger. I understand." She briefly looked over her shoulder to meet Apollo's eyes, then fixed her father with a much brighter grin. "We have a lot to catch up on. Mommy and me need to introduce you to my brothers!"

Zak's gaze flicked over the pair, Apollo still wary and Machi embarrassed. "Your... brothers."

"Well, two of them." Trucy huffed. "There's Luke too, but I guess I forgot to ask him to come in with us."

"C'mon, Gramaryes only, remember?" Apollo muttered, a smirk on his lips.

Trucy snorted despite herself. "Still should've asked him in."

Thalassa decided to take charge, lifting her hand from Trucy's knee to gesture in the direction of her youngest. "This is Machi. He's Trucy's age. I adopted him while I was... away."
"Ah, I see." Zak gave the bashful boy a grin. "My guess was you were a boyfriend... but you seem a fine brother for my little girl."

Machi's face only got redder. "Th-thank you."

Trucy giggled proudly, and finally released her younger brother's arm. Machi didn't seem to notice, trying to hide his face in Trucy's cape, where it bundled at her shoulder.

Her grin growing, Thalassa moved her hand behind Trucy to point it at her eldest. "And this is Apollo. We only recently reconnected, but..." She bit her lip, wondering how best to describe him.

"He is the child you had with Hyperion," Zak filled in, watching the wary Apollo with an unreadable expression. "I didn't want to believe it at first, but... that ex-lawyer wasn't lying. About either of you." He turned to Thalassa with a small smile. "Just as he said... you are alive."

Thalassa smiled back, and was about to open her mouth to respond when she heard a quiet grumbling from her eldest son. Pausing, she directed a glare at the young man. "Apollo, did you have something you wanted to say?"

To his credit, Apollo had the decency to look ashamed as all eyes turned to him. "N-no, Mom," he mumbled, arms tightly crossed. "Well, nothing nice, anyway..."

Trucy pursed her lips with a glare, and sharply jabbed an elbow behind her, right into Apollo's side. "Ow!" Apollo leapt back, a hand where she had poked his ribs. "What was that for!?"

"Be nice, Polly!" Trucy ordered, unfolding her legs so she could spin around to face her eldest brother. "You promised you'd behave!"

"And I am." Apollo scoffed, jabbing a finger into his sister's chest. "I didn't say anything, did I?"

Trucy glared, then lifted a gloved hand and poked Apollo's chest right back. Apollo's eyes narrowed, a hand lifting to return the attack.

"Alright, that's enough." Thalassa lifted a hand towards the pair, who luckily quit their battle to look up at their mother with wide eyes. "Bickering is one thing, but I won't have you two trying to kill each other."

Apollo and Trucy sheepishly backed down, turning away from each other. Trucy muttered, "Sorry, Mommy."

Thalassa sighed, returning her gaze to the baffled Zak. "They were doing this for my father too. I think it's a sibling thing: They're too similar for their own good."

Said children looked back at her with disbelieving looks. "No we're not," they said in unison, before jerking their heads back towards each other with confused glares.

Zak raised an eyebrow. "So they are."

Trucy scoffed. "Come on, Daddy. The whole reason we're good partners on stage is because we're different!" She jerked a thumb at the young man behind her. "Polly's stuck-up and loves rules and stuff-"

"Hey, objection!"
"- and I'm fun and bubbly!" Trucy grinned, ignoring her brother's pouting. "Our adorable banter is what makes us stand out from the crowd!"

Apollo rolled his eyes. "And our magic, Truce?"

Trucy paused, surprised. "Oh, um..." She resumed her grin. "Once we get in a bit of practise with Grandpa Magnifi's magic, and work our way into the public eye a little more, naturally we'll become better known as his inheritance!"

"Inheritors," Apollo corrected. "And you're his inheritor, remember? Not me." He cast a quick glance at Zak, but made no move to further acknowledge the man.

Zak hummed in thought, and moved to rub his chin. He was a bit thrown to find no beard, but quickly brushed it off, keeping his gaze on Apollo. "You are a magician too? I was told you were an attorney."

Apollo nodded, opening his mouth to speak.

"He is!" Trucy giggled. "Polly does lawyering on the side, but mostly we're both magicians! He defended Daddy when the police thought he'd killed you, and Machi when everyone thought he'd killed Mommy's manager!"

Machi turned red again, biting his lip.

Apollo glared at his sister. "He was asking me."

Trucy turned her head towards him and stuck out her tongue with a smile.

Zak raised an eyebrow. "I see."
Thalassa chuckled. "Maybe it's time I explained what I've been doing the last ten years."

"Indeed." Zak frowned. "You died. One of us shot you. How can you be here, without the same aids I am restricted to?"

Thalassa almost winced. "I... did die, in a way. Though I was still alive, I was not myself." She sighed. "That bullet hit me in the head. I lost my memories, and I lost my sight. My father sent me away, thinking I was on my deathbed... but, against all odds, I recovered... almost." She closed her eyes, thinking back to her earliest memories after the ill-fated accident. "I didn't remember anything about my life before, so the decision was made to give me a a new one. I became a singer in Borgia." She looked up, smiling at Machi. "I met a very talented young pianist while I was there. And I took him in as my own."

Machi blushed. Trucy giggled, pulling him into a hug, while Apollo shot the boy a proud smile similar to his mother's.

Thalassa returned her gaze to Zak, smile fading. "It wasn't until after your death I came back to America, and only by pure coincidence that, on that same trip, I happened to bump into Apollo and Trucy." The warm look returned as she looked to her biological son and daughter. "Because of that chance meeting, I was able to restore not only my memories, but my sight... and finally reunited with my family." The smile died, her eyes drifting to the floor. "Or what was left of it."

Zak frowned, his thoughts flickering across his face. Finally, he leaned forward and rested a hand on Thalassa's cheek, lifting her head to face his. She saw dark eyes wet with threatening tears, and was too surprised to do anything before he began to speak: "Thalassa, it pains me to think you were just hidden from view all this time... but I couldn't be happier to have been mistaken of your death." He smiled that funny sort of half-smile Thalassa always found so charming, pulling upwards one corner of his mouth while leaving the other. "And who could I trust more to watch over our daughter in my absence?"

Thalassa laughed, placing one of her hands on his. "Zak... I appreciate the thought." She returned her eyes to her children: While Trucy was watching her father with an expression both sad and happy, and Machi was sitting back and simply watching, Apollo was glaring daggers at the man... and Thalassa knew why. "I will certainly be watching over them as any parent would... and as Phoenix and Maya are, too."

Zak raised an eyebrow. "Who?"

Apollo scoffed.

"Daddy Phoenix and Mommy Maya," Trucy decided to explain, giving her father a sheepish look. "Mommy Maya's the one channelling you, remember? And she's engaged to Daddy Phoenix."

"And don't you dare say you don't know who 'Phoenix' is," Apollo snapped. "You dumped Trucy on his doorstep when you left."
Trucy spun around to shoot her brother a glare. "It wasn't like that!"

"Apollo," Thalassa hissed in warning.

Zak sighed, removing his hand from his wife's cheek as he leaned back. "So I did. It is for the same reasons then, that both you and he have such resentment towards me."

Apollo nodded, still giving the man a death glare. "Call it growing up without one... but real family doesn't abandon each other. Especially not over a ridiculous contract dispute."

Thalassa's disapproving frown deepened. "Apollo, that's enough."

Trucy lowered her face, a hand clutching at the brooch on her cape.

"If you really cared, you'd have told Dad, you'd have told the police what was going on from the start." Apollo leaned forward on one hand, the other curled into a fist. "Dad wouldn't have lost his badge - his entire career - and you would have been found 'not guilty' no problem. There certainly would have been no reason for that forgery of Kristoph Gavin's to ever see the light of day, not with those performance rights standing as listed evidence."

"Apollo...!"

"So you say." Zak rested his hands in his lap, studying Apollo with a stern look. "That is what you would have done in my position? Lay out in the open all your darkest secrets, and condemn your closest friend to death?"

Apollo looked confused for a moment, then sighed. "If Valant found himself the lone suspect, that was his own fault for altering the scene of the crime. Besides, he would've been quick to admit what really happened when put under pressure, and neither of you would be charged with murder."

Thalassa gave up her protests, pressing a hand to her face. Apollo may have inherited her stubbornness, but Zak had plenty of his own to counter it.

"You still would have risked that he wouldn't?" Zak's eyes narrowed. "Allow someone you love to be falsely accused, all the while indirectly admitting your guilt of a different crime?"

Apollo said his next three words very deliberately: "Yes. I. Would. It's called 'facing justice'... but I guess you've never heard of that."

"Polly, please stop."

Apollo paused, his and Zak's gazes moving to the girl in surprise. "Truce?"

Trucy looked up at her brother with tearful eyes. "What's the point in being upset about what happened seven years ago? Have you even thought about what else would be different as a result?"

"I dunno, Dad would still be a lawyer?" Apollo shrugged as he spoke, looking puzzled. "You wouldn't have been abandoned, either."

"No, Daddy Phoenix would never have adopted me," Trucy agreed. "He'd never have done all that research into my family and found out about Mommy and her bracelets, either. And because of that, when Luke's parents disappeared, he wouldn't have adopted you."

Apollo winced a little, rubbing the bracelet on his left wrist. "Y-yeah... but I'd've been fine in the end anyway."
"But we never would have met," Trucy insisted. "I never would've even known you existed. And, without Daddy and you doing all that investigating of Kristoph Gavin, he probably would've killed both Vera and her daddy and gotten away with it. And Prosecutor Gavin wouldn't have been interested in us to invite us to his concert, so no-one would have been there to protect Machi when that detective killed Mister LeTouse."

Machi blushed again, picking at the sleeves of his shirt.

"Neither of us would have ever found Mommy, and she'd still be blind and amnesiac." Trucy sighed, staring into Apollo's eyes with a pleading look. "Yeah, it really sucked when Grandpa Magnifi died, and Daddy had to go away, and then my new Daddy had lost his job... but the past seven years have been really awesome, because I had you, and Luke, and Daddy. We made the best of some really bad situations together." Her voice cracked, tears spilling from her eyes. "And I'll take those bad situations, because they gave me the most awesome family I could have ever asked for... and things are only getting better now Daddy's name has been cleared, even if he won't get his badge back..."

Apollo immediately pulled his sister into a hug. "Truce, I'm so sorry," Apollo whispered into her ear. "I'll stop talking about it. You're right, I'd have to be insane to give up our family the way it is... even though we had to live through so many awful things first to get it." His eyes glanced sidewards, where Machi was perched on his knees and fingertips, ready to comfort his sister at a moment's notice. Apollo smiled, then held out an arm and pulled the boy into the hug. "And that includes you, kiddo."

Trucy giggled as she also grabbed her younger brother, cementing him in their circle. Machi grinned, resting his forehead against his sister's.

Thalassa couldn't help a warm smile at the sight of her children being so close, and the proof that, when it really mattered, they could always count on each other as support. It was only the touch of a hand on hers that distracted her from it, and she turned to see Zak's eyes on her. Much like Apollo, his anger had calmed at Trucy's words, replaced with a concern that Zak was stubbornly trying to hide behind a tight-lipped frown. Although it pained her to think it, she had never seen her husband so reluctant to display his emotions to her; The decade they had been apart had not changed him for the better.

"Thalassa," Zak whispered. "They are good children."

Thalassa almost laughed. 'That, they are.'

"I'm sorry I can't be around to help... but I know you will look after them." Finally, Zak allowed himself a small smile. "You've already done such a good job."

Thalassa screwed up her mouth in disapproval. "I didn't really have much to do with that. Just as you haven't."

Zak winced, and moved his hand away, but Thalassa reached out and grabbed it, holding his fingers firmly in hers.

"But they are good children. I will always be here for them in future, and on your behalf." She gave her husband a teasing smile. "And I'll pass on your words to Phoenix and Maya. They deserve the praise for raising them so well."

Zak blushed and looked away. Thalassa couldn't help but laugh at the undisguised embarrassment at owing Phoenix so much, especially given their history.
"Oh, speaking of Daddy!" Trucy threw off her brothers, reaching into the pouch on Apollo's waist and pulling out his Court Record. Apollo shot her an annoyed glare for all of half a second before letting his irritation go with a sigh. "We need to tell you, Daddy, what we've been doing and everything!" Trucy attempted to turn on her brother's computer, only to be instantly stumped at the log-in screen that popped up, staring at it with a frown. Apollo, watching with a smile, gently took the item and quickly tapped away at the screen, handing back the unlocked device without a word. Trucy grinned, cried "Thanks, Polly!", then scurried closer to the curious Zak. "C'mon Daddy, I'll show you...!"

Thalassa was glad to say, after that initial blow-up, there were no more tears or raised voices in their final goodbyes to Zak.
"Do you have any threes?"

"Go fish."

Phoenix watched as Pearl reached for the pile of cards on the floor, exactly between her and Luke. They'd only just started their latest game, the third since the doors to the Channelling Chamber closed an hour ago, so neither had earned a 'win' of collecting all four of a number yet. As for their previous games, Luke had won one and Pearl the other, so this one, they'd told Phoenix, would be the tie-breaker.

Luke studied his hand of cards with an intense frown. "Any jacks?"

Pearl pouted, and handed over a card from her hand.

Unlike the younger pair sitting on the floor, Phoenix was perched on the cubby-holes that housed their shoes, leaning against the wall. Normally he would stand, or just sit on the floor himself, but today he was particularly tired, so standing wasn't an option... and he wasn't physically capable of sitting on the floor right now. He'd had a series of particularly quiet nights at work, and hunching over the piano all night in that freezing cold restaurant wasn't doing wonders for his back. It had never really bothered him before - he'd reasoned he was still young and the ache always went away eventually - but it was getting to the point he might have to admit he had a problem. 'I guess I am in my thirties now. Not exactly a 'young man' anymore... And at least the lingering pain is distracting me from worrying about the others.'

"What about tens?"

Pearl grinned and shook her head. "Go fish."

Luke made a noise of mock disgust, and grabbed a card from the pile with a smirk.

Phoenix smiled. 'Them, too. They're a good distraction from the worrying and the pain.' Not that he wanted to inadvertently start down that spiralling path of fear again this week; The mere fact that they'd been in that room so long was enough of an indicator that the channelling was successful. Despite who said channelling was summoning, Phoenix was certain he could trust Thalassa and Apollo to keep themselves and young Trucy and Machi safe. 'Besides, if Zak had started a physical fight, we'd've heard it by now. Even through those doors.'

The click of the door unlocking echoed around the room, instantly alerting the three occupants. Luke and Pearl waited until they saw the door moving, then dumped their cards on the floor and scrambled to their feet. Phoenix hurriedly copied them, biting his lip to keep from groaning in pain.

Maya pushed the doors wide open, shooting the three outside it a grin before stepping aside. Behind her, Trucy stepped out first, wiping her eyes. She paused in the doorway, looking up at Luke. Giving her brother a tired smile, she walked forward to meet him and wrapped her arms around Luke's chest, pressing her face into his shoulder.
"Love you, Luke."

Although surprised, Luke made sure to return the gesture, resting his hands on his sister's shoulders. "I love you too, Trucy."

Phoenix stepped forward to join the pair, concerned for his only daughter. He looked up to see Machi and Apollo leaving the Chamber hand-in-hand, Thalassa at their back, and cast a worried glance over the solemn group. "Did everything go okay in there?"

Apollo nodded, forcing a smile. "Yep. Had a nice, long talk with him. Seven-to-ten years of catching up."

Trucy lifted her head from Luke's shoulder to look up at Phoenix, then reached out with one arm to pull him into the hug, now burying her face in her father's chest. "I love you too, Daddy."

Phoenix rested a hand on the girl's arm, near where she had just shrugged off one of Luke's. "And I love you. That's never gonna change."

"Good." Despite the shortness of her statement, Trucy sounded more tired than anything else, hugging her brother and father even tighter.

Machi dashed forward to his sister's side, pulling the equally concerned Apollo along with him. The boy was quick to attach himself to the girl, standing as close as he could and pressing an arm along her back. "We here for you, Trucy." He'd ended up on the same side as Luke, who smiled and moved his own arm to include the teen in the circle. Machi grinned, throwing an arm around Luke in return, though he kept his attention on their sister. "I love you too."

Trucy giggled, looking up from Phoenix's chest and moving her grip on Luke to Machi. "Same for you, baby brother." She turned the other way to shoot a grin at Apollo. "And for you too, Polly." She held out the arm that had previously been curled behind Phoenix, beckoning her eldest brother closer.

Apollo ran a hand through his hair, scratching at the top of his head. "You... already know how much I love you, Truce. Is there really a need to say-"

Phoenix laughed, grabbing the young man to pull him into the circle. "Join the hug, Apollo."

Pearl grinned to herself as she tidied the abandoned deck of cards off the floor, then hurried off to leave the laughing circle of the Wright family alone.

Still standing by the Channelling Chamber's doors, Thalassa leaned close to Maya. "If you feel well enough today for another channelling... I feel only Apollo and I should be present next time."

Maya turned to Thalassa in surprise, though kept her voice low to match the older woman's. "You've decided to try Apollo's father?" She glanced at the young man, still blushing red as he endured the teases of his siblings and father. "I mean, it makes sense to have the younger ones sit it out. Trucy especially needs a break."

Thalassa nodded. "I have given it a great deal of thought this past week. I don't want to force on you any undue pressure, but as long as there is even the slightest chance I may see Jove one more time, I must take it." She paused. "Even if the channelling fails... I will be content with having tried."

Maya considered this for a few moments, then smiled and patted Thalassa's arm. "I heard once that the first step to success is trying. If nothing else, we can at least do that."
The day progressed very quietly in Fey Manor. Not wanting to bother Trucy by asking how the meeting with Zak went, the extended Wright family settled in the living room, playing Pearl's board games and chatting about unrelated things over Machi's occasional tinkering at the piano. When it came time for lunch, Iris arrived to join them in the kitchen, helping make food and promising to stick around a while when Machi and Pearl all-but-begged her to.

Once the meal was over and the plates were being piled up in the kitchen sink, Trucy threw her arms around Pearl and Machi with a grin and announced, "Last one back to the living room has to wash up later!" The last word was barely out of her mouth before she was already racing out the door into the hallway, cape flapping behind her.

Pearl and Machi shared a stunned look before jumping into action, Pearl shouting, "Trucy, wait!" as they dashed after her.

Luke rolled his eyes. "I'd better 'volunteer' for that before someone's feelings are hurt. Excuse me." He slipped past the rest of the group and followed the younger ones into the hallway.

Maya snorted. "Normally I'd insist they leave it to us, but this is a perfect opportunity to keep a certain something on the down low..." She turned to Iris. "I was hoping you could help me set up the Chamber for another channelling before you run off with the kids."

Iris nodded. "Of course, Mystic Maya."

Apollo frowned, staring intently at Maya. "Wait, you're...?" He glanced over to Thalassa, who nodded, then returned his gaze to Maya. "Why aren't we telling the others?"

Phoenix rubbed his chin with a finger. "I think I can guess." He raised an eyebrow at his fiancée.

Maya stuck her tongue out at Phoenix only briefly, quickly putting on a solemn air as she turned back to Apollo. "Thalassa decided it was best Trucy and Machi didn't accompany you for this one. After the channelling this morning, I thought it would just cause unnecessary grief to tell them about it only to then cut them out of the whole thing."

"You're worried they won't take it well," Phoenix summarised with a smirk.

"Nick!" Maya hissed back at him with a glare.

Apollo mulled over the explanation with a small frown. "That... makes sense."

"When will you be ready?" Thalassa asked.

"It shouldn't take very long at all," Iris replied, smiling. "If you wait in the Meditation Room, we'll be ready for you in no time."

Sure enough, it wasn't long before Iris and Maya were done with the preparations. With Phoenix again perched on the cubby-holes outside, Maya took Thalassa and Apollo into the Channelling Chamber and locked the doors behind her.

Iris sighed in relief; She'd hurried a little getting everything ready, and hoped there were no major blunders. Maya hadn't said anything, at least. Although Iris was a nun, she was more studied in the art of training than in actually channelling. With Hazakura all but shut down, she'd been trying to
expand her knowledge, and with Maya about to leave for two years, it looked like Iris was the next in line to assist preparing the Chamber if Pearl was required to use it. She didn't want to let either of them down.

Phoenix jerked his head towards the hall. "If they ask what the rest of us are doing, just tell them we're busy."

Iris had to stare for a moment before she registered what Phoenix was talking about. "Oh, the kids." She frowned. "Why?"

Phoenix shrugged. "Well, we don't want them to know what's going on just yet, right? If you lie, Trucy sees though it instantly and the deception is gone. So, you tell an edited version of the truth that still omits what we're doing." He smirked. "But then you gotta be careful not to give too much information, or you'll tip off Luke. I honestly can't see how better to do it than 'we're busy'."

Iris thought over the advice for a moment before nodding, giving Phoenix a smile. "I'll do that then. Thank you, Feenie."

Phoenix just chuckled as she left the room.

View the Court Record
"It's Jove Justice, isn't it?"

Thalassa nodded. "Yes, that's it."

"Could I see a picture?"

Apollo stumbled forward from where he'd been lingering by the doors, pulling up a photo of his birth father on his Court Record. They hadn't yet started digitising the photos like they had the letters, but he still had a few favourites he'd copied on his own. His hand was shaking, so he didn't bother picking out a particular one of the handful he'd acquired, instead jabbing a finger at the first one he spotted and handing the computer to Maya.

While Maya studied the image on the screen, Thalassa laid a hand on Apollo's leg, highlighting that the young man was still on his feet while the two women were already sat on the floor. She stared up at her son with a concerned frown. "Are you alright, Apollo?"

Apollo nodded, shoving his hands under the belt of his hip-pouch. "I'm fine. I'm fine."

Even Maya was watching him now, raising an eyebrow. "You said that twice."

Apollo stopped himself from repeating the words a third time. "I, um... I'm gonna..." He turned and hurried to the back of the room.

Thalassa jumped to her knees, poised to stand. "Apollo?"

His feet stopped walking, but Apollo found himself shifting from side to side anyway, unable to keep still. "I'm not leaving the room, I just..." He made himself turn back around, facing his two worried mothers. "He doesn't know me. I'll sit back here until-"

"Of course he knows you!" Thalassa sighed, a hand pressed to her chest. "Apollo, you were the apple of his eye!"

"I was a baby." Apollo took a deep breath in a concerted effort not to snap at his biological mother. "If... If this works, and Mom Maya channels him... It won't have been twenty years for him." He pressed a hand to his face. "He'll be fresh off that fire... trying to rescue a baby."

Slowly, Thalassa lowered herself back to the ground, reflecting on Apollo's words.

"He is right." Maya spoke quietly, placing Apollo's computer on the ground at her side. "No time will have passed... He might even think he's still alive."

"He won't expect an adult when I tell him Apollo is here," Thalassa muttered. After a short pause, she looked up to meet her son's eyes with a small smile. "I'll explain what's happened to him... and introduce you."

Apollo managed a weak smile in return. He felt a lot calmer as he settled down on the floor in front
of the room's lone exit.

Thalassa turned back to face Maya, the older woman rearranging her dress where it was tangled around her legs; All the moving around had shifted it oddly, and she wanted to look perfect for Jove... even more so given it was her alone he would see when he 'woke'. *If this channelling succeeds, of course... but I shouldn't be so negative. That's just asking for this whole thing to fail.*

Maya was frowning in sheer determination as she arranged herself into the channelling pose Thalassa knew very well by now. Thalassa hurried with the last of her skirt arrangements, then closed her eyes and bowed her head to await whatever would happen next.

Having witnessed two channellings in just the past week, Thalassa was pretty sure she would be able to pinpoint the moment it either succeeded or failed by the sound of Maya's breathing. Ten years of blindness had trained her how to use her ears to their fullest, and without the distraction of her children at her side, it was much easier to focus on them, locating the deep, calm breaths in front of her. There was no sign of change for a long while, and Thalassa worried the channelling was going to fail after all... until, finally, Maya's breathing hitched. Although the resulting breaths remained about as deep, Thalassa could tell they were slightly faster, maybe a bit panicky, and were slow to calm, shallow to the average level of relaxed breathing. The fabric of Maya's robes jostled, and the beads of her necklace softly clinked together. If Maya wasn't talking... surely that indicated the wearer was examining their surroundings, and possibly even themselves. That, Thalassa knew, could only mean one thing.

Thalassa smiled, and raised her head. "Jove."

Jove jumped, in the middle of picking at Maya's fringe. He grinned nervously, settling back into a neutral position with red cheeks. "Th-Thalassa! Hey..."

Seeing her goofy husband in the midst of noticing, before anything else, his *different hairstyle* made Thalassa laugh, and she couldn't resist jumping forward to pull him into a hug (it took quite an effort not to kiss him, something Maya had warned her was forbidden for a reason). "Oh, Jove... You have no idea how good it is to see you."

Jove chuckled, patting her back. "I'm... glad to see you safe."

Thalassa sensed the nervous hesitation in the careful way he was holding her, and leaned back to see him biting his lip. "Jove?"

Jove's eyes darted around the room before finally returning to his wife. "Thalassa, please don't take this the wrong way, but..." He scanned her up and down, and Thalassa wasn't sure if it was more confusion or resignation in his expression. "You look... old."

Thalassa laughed. "*I am* old. Forty-one this year."

"F-forty...?" Jove's face contorted in shock, almost disgusted to hear the confirmation. "You had a magic trick to bring me back from the dead and you waited *twenty years* to do it?" He scoffed, crossing his arms to cover the smile twitching at his lips. "I'm disappointed, Thalassa. *Extremely* disappointed."

Thalassa giggled, though it was hard to keep up a smile when she registered his words. "Not quite a magic trick, I'm afraid." She began to pick at her hair where it hung over her shoulder, acutely aware of Jove watching her closely. "How did you know you were dead?"

"How could I not? Even if I *had* gotten out of that fire alive, why would I have been left in a dark,
candle-lit room, in a sitting position, with only you at my side?" Jove shrugged, tapping Maya's magatama hanging below his neck. "Plus, no pain or signs of scarring... I can believe the clothes, but the hair?" He brushed a hand over Maya's fringe, flopping it back into his face, only to then discover the knot of hair on top, patting it curiously. "It's growing out of my head, but there's no way it's mine." Placing his hands back in his lap, Jove sighed. "When I saw how much older you looked... I figured the stories about Khura'in spirit channelling must've been real after all."

Thalassa grunted, biting her lip. "Not... Khura'in spirit channelling, in this case..."

Jove looked up, raising an eyebrow. "What do you mean?" He frowned. "Wait, is this why you took so long to...?"

Grinning in embarrassment, Thalassa shrugged. "I wasn't in Khura'in long after the fire, and I never went back. The woman channelling you, Maya... She's American - Californian - and a good friend of mine. A very talented spirit medium who I owe so much already, even though we've only known each other a matter of weeks."

Jove thought this over for a moment, glancing down at his body, then shot Thalassa a smile. "Well, thank her for me, then. Even though it took you forever to find her."

Thalassa laughed. "You're incorrigible."

Chuckling, Jove's gaze turned to the floor, and his amusement quickly faded into a sorrowful frown. "I was worried... there was another reason you waited so long to see me again."

Thalassa waited a moment before replying, confused: "Another reason?"

Jove nodded. "It was my fault, after all. Sure, I was never going to turn down a gig at the palace, but I should never have listened to all the talk about that guy's son and dragged Apollo along with me."

"Jove, it was never."

"Don't interrupt Thalassa, I have to say this." Jove planted his hands firmly on his thighs, staring his wife down with a firm look. "If I had just left Apollo with you that night, he would still be alive right now."

Thalassa blinked, but was too shocked by the declaration to protest.

Jove sighed, eyes down in misery. "He was only five months old. He didn't deserve to die for my mistake. And what would even be the point of channelling someone that young? He was still awake and screaming when I passed out... Who knows how much longer he suffered before burning alive?"

Thalassa opened her mouth to correct Jove's misconception, only to change her mind and close it again. She wasn't sure where to start.

"You have every right to blame me for failing you, and for failing our son. You both deserved better." Jove turned a meek gaze warily towards Thalassa. "I guess... you probably went back to your dad, right?"

After a moment of thought, Thalassa nodded. "I waited as long as I could. When you never came home, I gathered my strength and went looking. I found only a country in turmoil, and since I didn't speak the language, it was nearly impossible to figure out what had happened... but I did, eventually." She looked away, the memories of those terrible days playing across her mind. "I forwent any self-care, any auditions for gigs... I did nothing but scour the streets until I simply couldn't afford to stay any longer. I returned to the Troupe, and my father made the awful decision I
wasn't strong enough to make myself." She closed her eyes, hands clutched together at her chest. "I gave up the search. And I never went back."

Jove leaned forward, clutching her arms. "Thalassa, I am so sorry."

"It wasn't your fault."

"No, it was." Jove hung his head. "All those plans we had for our future, for Apollo... Because of my stupid mistakes, they were all cut short. I promised our son a bright future, a father who would never abandon him and always be there for him... He didn't get that, Thalassa..."

Thalassa placed her hands on Jove's shoulders, leaning in close to his ear. "Jove... I think I need to tell you why it is I owe Maya so much."

There was a short pause, then Jove straightened, staring in puzzlement at his wife. "Huh?"

Thalassa couldn't help a small giggle, clutching her hands in her lap. "This gets a bit complicated, but bear with me. There's a relevant point at the end, I promise."

Jove looked doubtful, but didn't protest. "Okay..."

"Good." Thalassa took a deep breath. "After you died, I eventually remarried."

"Hey, that's great." Jove shot her a grin and a thumbs-up. "I'm glad you were able to move on."

Thalassa giggled. "Thank you. It took me a while, of course. I even had another baby: A daughter, Trucy."

Jove was intrigued. "A little girl?"

Thalassa nodded. "We were very happy, for a time... but then we had an accident in rehearsal. I was forced to leave the Troupe again to recover, and I... lost contact with them." She decided it was better not to go into her father's odd plot, or the amnesia; She didn't want to confuse Jove too bad. "While I was gone, my father was diagnosed with cancer, and passed away. The Troupe fell apart, and Trucy was... separated from her father." Again, she decided it was better not to go into the whole suicide/murder confusion and the difficult decision Zak had made; Not even she fully understood that one.

"What?" Jove scratched his head, puzzled. "Troupe Gramarye fell apart? And how did you and your new husband both lose track of your little girl?"

"Like I said, it's complicated," Thalassa sighed. "Trucy was all alone... until she was taken in by a man named Phoenix Wright." She smiled. "Phoenix treated Trucy as his own daughter, and loved her enough that he never gave up the search to reunite her birth family. He looked for her father, and he looked for me... He found out about my past, about you, and about Apollo."

Jove raised an eyebrow. "How'd he find out about Apollo? Me I can understand, but we never 'announced' our son. I thought you hated your private life becoming public."

Thalassa bit her lip (though it did nothing to hide her grin) and held up her right wrist, showing off the bracelet there.

Frowning, Jove looked back and forth between Thalassa's face and the bracelet. "Did... Did you never recover the other one? Y'know, after the whole 'Gramarye Prince' thing?"
Thalassa laughed. "Oh, Jove... Apollo didn't die in that fire."

It took a few moments for the man to react, eyes widening until they were nearly bugging out of his head. "He...!?"

"I never knew it myself, but he ended up back here in California, and Phoenix found him." Thalassa tapped her bracelet proudly. "He recognised our little 'Gramarye Prince', and took him in just like Trucy. He's raised them these past seven years, as family. And Maya?" She placed a hand on Jove's arm, still internally giggling at his shocked expression. "Maya is Phoenix's fiancée. She's been Apollo's and Trucy's mother in my absence. I owe them both everything for the love and care they showed my children when I couldn't be there for them." She paused, and laughed. "And for the continued love and care they still show, because Apollo and Trucy are just as much their children as mine now. We're a very big, very strange, family."

Jove stared back at her for a very long moment before letting out a breath Thalassa hadn't noticed he was holding. "Apollo's... Apollo's alive? How old is he now? He'd be all grown up, right?" He held a hand to his head, looking around the room. "Why isn't he here?"

"I am here."

Thalassa and Jove both looked up into the shadow that cloaked the end of the room. Wood creaked underneath them, followed by the gentle padding of socked feet on carpet... and Apollo stepped out into the candlelight, the only sign of nervousness his tight grip on the bracelet at his left wrist. He met Jove's stares with a wary expression Thalassa recognised from their own reunion (had it really been only a week since then?), an expression that told her the young man wasn't quite sure how to react just yet.

Apollo cleared his throat. "Hi... I'm Apollo."

[View the Court Record]
Jove tried to jump to his feet, but stumbled on the trailing ribbons of Maya's obi and fell back to the floor with a thud. "Um..." He gave Thalassa an embarrassed look. "It was Maya, right? I think I'll just make her indecent if I try to get up..."

Thalassa hid a giggle, and turned to their son, holding out her right hand. "Apollo, come sit down and meet your birth father."

Apollo hesitated a second or two, then stepped forward and placed his left hand in his mother's outstretched palm. Keeping his grip on her tight, he dropped to the floor at Thalassa's side, legs crossed.

Jove stared at the young man with undisguised wonder. "Oh wow... Our little baby boy, all grown up..." Apollo blushed and stared at the floor, and Jove chuckled. "You'll be... about twenty, right? Older than me."

Apollo nodded. "I'm twenty-two." He frowned, then looked up to Thalassa. "And it's October, so..." Jove's eyes widened. "Really? So it's been...?"

"Twenty-two years this month since you died." Thalassa rubbed her thumb along the back of her son's hand. "It's been so long, we weren't even sure we'd be able to channel you at all."

Jove mused on the information for a long moment, then turned back to Apollo. "So, this Maya whose body I'm borrowing... She's your mom too?"

Again, Apollo nodded, his eyes meeting Jove's curious gaze. "Mom Maya and Mom Thalassa. Mom Maya's been our mother since Dad adopted us, and Mom Thalassa..." He glanced at the woman with red cheeks before looking to the floor. "Well, it's only been a week since she got back."

Thalassa chuckled, watching over him with fond eyes. "Pretty much exactly... and only if you discount the months of amnesia."

Jove raised an eyebrow. "Amnesia?"

Laughing, Thalassa waved his question off. "It's not important, dear."

Jove hummed in thought, then gave his wife a smile. "So, if you've known our adult son for a week now..." He leaned forward conspiratorially, not bothering to lower his voice. "Do you ever stop marvelling at him?"

Thalassa grinned as she leaned forward to meet him, also not bothering to lower her voice. "Not for a second."

Apollo blushed crimson, pulling his hand from Thalassa's grip to slap it to his face. "Moom!"

The pair laughed, pressing their foreheads together before both straightening and directing grins at
their son. "I'm beyond thrilled you're alive, Apollo," Jove said. "And that you and your mother found each other."

Slowly, Apollo peeked out from behind his fingers, then lowered his hand. "Y-yeah... Me too." He still watched his parents warily.

Jove laughed. "How'd it happen? How'd you get out of that fire, and back to California?"

Apollo winced, looking away as he scratched his head.

Thalassa frowned in concern, resting a hand on her son's arm. "You don't have to explain."

"N-no, I should." Apollo sighed, dropping his hands into his lap. "If anyone deserves to know the details, it's him."

Jove glanced between the two, worried. He waited patiently for Apollo to explain.

"You mentioned earlier, the man who invited you to the palace, who had a son a year older than me?"

"Yes, little Nahyuta." Jove frowned. "Funny, I don't think I got his dad's name, though."

Apollo smirked. "He didn't get yours, either."

Jove scoffed. "Nonsense. I told him I was Jangly Justice. That's good enough."

Thalassa giggled. "You're sure you want to go down in history with the name 'Jangly'?"

Jove blushed. "Yeah, I never did come up with anything better, did I?"

Apollo couldn't laugh with them, busy building up the courage for his next words. "His name was Dhurke."

Jove looked up in surprise. "Dhurke?"

"When he heard the palace was on fire, he ran inside to try and rescue everyone," Apollo forced out, only his stage training keeping his words distinct. "He found me, next to your dead body."

"Ah." Although Jove was saddened by the mention of his own corpse, he forced a smile. "I knew that guy had a good heart... and lots of courage."

Apollo just barely bit back a series of choice words, and tried to reign in a stormy glare. "Well, he rescued me. After the fire, like Mom said, it was a bit chaotic all over the place. Dhurke told me he tried his best to find her, but he didn't know what to look for or where, because he knew nothing about Mom and next-to-nothing about you."

Jove blushed, scratching the side of his head. "Ah... That was my fault."

"Indeed it was." Thalassa gently nudged his arm with a smile. "Now why don't you be quiet and let Apollo finish?"

"R-right..."

Apollo flashed a small smile in appreciation for his mother. "Anyway, after a week or so, he said it got too dangerous to stay in the city, so he took me and Nahyuta up into the mountains. We grew up there together... lived as a family."
Thalassa slipped a hand under Apollo's cape, rubbing the small of his back. He was grateful for the comfort, though it still took him a while to work up the courage to continue.

"But then all of that changed. When I was eight years old, suddenly Dhurke decided it was 'too dangerous' for a foreigner like me." He couldn't help spitting the words out, still disgusted by the painful memory. "He sent me to California, alone, and I was dropped into the foster system here. It took me three years to figure out he was never coming back for me."

Jove stared open-mouthed for a long moment. He moved to speak, but soon changed his mind and simply closed his mouth with a sympathetic frown.

Apollo took a deep breath, already mentally returning Khura'in to the box labelled 'forbidden' at the back of his mind. "I learned to survive on my own. Went to school. Made friends." His eyes landed on his Court Record still lying on the floor at Jove's side, exactly where Maya had left it, and he smiled. Snatching it off the floor, he quickly unlocked the tablet computer and began navigating through his photos. "Then I made one friend in particular who'd just moved from England. He'd been in a car accident and his parents had disappeared, so he was kinda just stuck in foster care until a friend who lived nearby could put through the paperwork to adopt him." It wasn't entirely accurate, but the details weren't really important for this part of his story. "Anyway, Luke took me along to meet his friend, and..." His fingers landed on the picture he was looking for, the very first picture taken of him and his two younger siblings. Apollo couldn't help grinning as he spun the computer around to show Jove. "This is us the day after the adoption. Luke's on the left and Trucy's in the middle. Dad was the one taking it, so he's not there."

Jove gingerly took the machine, studying the photo displayed on the screen with a smile. He glanced up to Thalassa. "Can I talk now?"

Thalassa smirked and pretended to think over the request for a long moment. "Hmm... Oh, alright. I suppose so."

Apollo hid a snort of laughter.

Jove grinned, admiring the picture in his hands. "This is great... I can tell Trucy is a Gramarye." He laughed, giving Thalassa an incredulous look. "Why is she dressed like Blackjack?"

Thalassa seemed confused for half a second before breaking into hysterical giggles, pressing a hand over her mouth.

"Oh, please." Jove rolled his eyes, smirking. "Don't tell me you married Knickknack after I died."

Apollo raised an eyebrow, looking between the two. "Huh?"

Thalassa calmed down enough to explain, "He means Zak."

"Oh." Apollo frowned, thinking. "But Mom, didn't you say it was you who had the funny nicknames for Zak and Valant?"

Jove snorted. "Who do you think I picked it up from?"

Thalassa giggled harder.

Apollo rolled his eyes.

Jove handed the computer back to its owner, smile fading. "In all honesty, I'm so sorry to hear Dhurke wasn't good to you, Apollo. You deserved so much better than that."
Apollo turned red and meekly nodded. He kept his focus on the computer, flicking through his photos.

"When you were a baby, I promised you a father who would always be there for you for a reason."
Jove leaned forward, resting a hand on his son's knee. "My mother died when I was very young. It was just me and my dad, growing up... and my dad was never there for me. He never supported me in anything I did, sometimes forgot to get us food... Sometimes he even got drunk, and my dad was a very mean drunk."

Apollo couldn't help a wince hearing that, meeting his father's eyes. "R-really?"

Jove moved his head in a solemn nod. "After one particularly bad night with him, I gathered up what money I could and left home. It was safer for me out on the streets, and I was old enough to have a job by then, even if it didn't pay much. But, I was too scared to stay in the area, in case someone tried 'returning' me home... so I used the last of my money to get myself a guitar, left town, and started busking to get by." His eyes moved to Thalassa with a smile. "And that's when I met your mother, and I finally got a steady home, a paying job... even a family."

Thalassa smiled back, eyes shining with the memories of their time together.

"Mom told me that story..." Apollo placed his computer on the floor in front of him, watching Jove with a new appreciation for the man. "I didn't know about your dad."

"Neither did I," Thalassa replied, her smile replaced with undisguised concern for her husband. "You never told me all that, Jove."

Jove shrugged sheepishly. "I didn't want to worry you... And I really didn't want to be dwelling on a bad past when I had such an awesome present I could be living."

Thalassa turned to Apollo with a smile. "That sounds familiar."

Apollo blushed, scratching his head. "I-it's not exactly the same..."

Thalassa laughed, placing a hand on Apollo's shoulder and pulling him close enough to kiss the side of his forehead. "Close enough."

Jove chuckled, folding his hands in his lap. "Well, I may have failed at keeping that promise of being there for you, and Dhurke just failed outright at being your dad. What about this Phoenix character?"

Apollo returned his attention to his Court Record lying in front of him, looking over his collection of family photos still on the screen. He couldn't help a small smile. "Dad's... awesome. He likes teasing us and making jokes, and he does really stupid or embarrassing stuff sometimes... but we can always count on his support whenever we need it." He spotted a photo from their first Christmas together, just Apollo and Phoenix with their arms around each other's backs and smiling for the camera. He tapped to bring it full-screen, just staring at the beginnings of the close relationship he felt had always been there between him and his idol-turned-family. "I mean, I was already fifteen when we met and he still decided to adopt me, even though I was nearly all grown up and he could barely afford to take in Luke as it was. It would have been really easy for him to just keep in touch with me as Luke's friend... but Dad's really stubborn about taking the easy way for anything." He shot a smirk at Thalassa. "Not when there's a Wright way to go instead."

Thalassa snorted and shook her head. "And how many times has that particular pun been raised in your household?"

Apollo scoffed. "Why do you think we call ourselves the Wright Anything Agency, where you've
always come to the *Wright* place? We Wrights live on the things."

"That I can believe," Thalassa replied, amused.

Jove laughed. "That's his name, huh? 'Wright'?

Apollo nodded. "Trucy and I changed our names when we were adopted... though we use 'Gramarye' as a stage-name." He blushed. "I-I don't use 'Justice' as a name anymore. Sorry."

Jove waved off his son's bashful apology. "No no, that's fine. You clearly have exactly the loving family and bright future I promised you. What does a surname matter?" He frowned in concern. "Though do tell me you became a magician because you wanted to. I don't want you stuck in a job you don't like."

Apollo laughed. "I'll be honest, I only started learning tricks because Trucy made me... but I do really enjoy performing, and stage magic is super fascinating once you know all the ins and outs." He shrugged. "I'd never really encountered it before coming to America, so if it weren't for Trucy, I probably wouldn't have taken it up... but I'm glad I did." He snorted, shooting Thalassa a grin. "Plus, I wouldn't have figured out Valant's trick at the concert. It would've been way harder proving Machi innocent in court!"

Thalassa chuckled. "I call that a reason to be grateful you are also a lawyer. Machi would not have stood a chance without you defending him."

Jove blinked, looking between the two. "Apollo's also a what?"

Apollo threw back the right side of his cape with no small amount of pride, and pointed to his attorney's badge on his waistcoat. "I'm a qualified defence attorney. I've had four cases so far, and I won all of them!"

"Phoenix used to be one as well," Thalassa added for the still-stunned Jove. "He's been a good mentor for our son."

"I already wanted to be a lawyer before I got adopted," Apollo continued with a shrug. "Dad used to be really famous, actually; I used to watch him in court. He inspired me to turn my fascination with the justice system into actually getting out there myself and defending the innocent... Standing up for people, and being on their side when no-one else is." He grinned, holding up both fists with a determined air. "And we Wrights don't rest until we've fully uncovered the truth of the case!" After a short pause, Apollo noticed Jove still staring at him and blushed, putting his hands back in his lap. "I... I just really like both my jobs. I entertain people in one, and I save lives in the other."

Finally, Jove smiled. "Well, it's a bit out of left field to hear you're a lawyer, but it's still impressive. It's a lot of work." He paused, eyes far away. "My mother was a lawyer, actually."

Apollo and Thalassa shared a shocked look, both asking, "Really?"

Jove laughed. "I don't know if she was the same kind of lawyer as you, Apollo - Like I said, she died when I was young - but maybe you'd be able to look her up."

Apollo nodded, snatching up his Court Record to make a note. "What was her name?"

"Rhea Fortuna. R, H, E, A." Jove smiled to himself. "I don't remember much about her, but I do know she was always busy with work. She wasn't always able to spend as much time with me as she wanted."
"R, h, e... Fortuna." Apollo grinned as he saved the note. "I'll definitely look into her later."

"What a stroke of luck," Thalassa mused. "I never imagined there was another lawyer in your bloodline, Apollo... Or yours, Jove."

"You're telling me. Who'd've thought our son would develop a passion in the same field as her?" Chuckling, Jove pointed to the computer. "Now Apollo, I must admit, I caught a glimpse of your dad earlier and now I'm curious. Do you have any other good pictures of your family I could see?"

Giggling, Apollo promptly navigated back to his family photos. "You bet I do."

View the Court Record
Apollo already felt accomplished at having this chance to meet the man who was his biological father... Though all the same, it was also a relief to know this was his one and only actual meeting with Jove Justice; There wasn't any pressure to form a long-term relationship with him, and he had handily avoided calling the man 'Dad' so far - Much like he remembered Luke saying seven long years ago, that was a name reserved for one man and one man alone, and it felt wrong to be giving it to anyone else. But Jove was a nice guy, especially when compared to Magnifi and Zak, and he seemed fascinated with every aspect of how Apollo's and Thalassa's lives had turned out since his death. Apollo had found it fascinating in return to see what his birth father was actually like after hearing so much about him from Thalassa, and even learning completely new things, like that his paternal grandmother was a lawyer and exactly how Jove had ended up busking on the streets as a teenager. He found himself impatient to return to the rest of his family just to tell them all about it, though he was wary of leaving while there was still the chance of learning something more.

They had spent about twenty minutes going through Apollo's collection of family photos from the past seven years: Apollo's initiation into magic and eventual acceptance of it as a career, Apollo and Luke finishing school and heading on to college and university, Apollo and Clay's move into their shared apartment, Apollo and Luke graduating, the arrival of Apollo's badge and his first trial... and now they had reached the most recent stretch, the three months since Machi had moved in to the Agency. It had necessitated finally explaining Thalassa's stint as a blind amnesiac celebrity and how Machi had ended up on trial, but Jove had just been all the more intrigued to hear it.

"Oh, this is the last one, from just last week." Apollo flicked the screen to the last file in the folder, from the day Thalassa had returned: The four Gramaryes in her apartment, huddled close together so Trucy could take a selfie with her phone. "Remember this, Mom?" He held it out for his parents to see.

Thalassa laughed. "Trucy had us holding that pose for ages so she could get it just right. 'It's a memento of the day we got back together, Mommy! It has to be perfect!'"

Jove snorted, admiring the picture. "Well, any photo of your family is already perfect, in my opinion."

Apollo chuckled, moving the computer to his lap. Without any more photos to show, he didn't need it now.

Jove sighed, watching the tablet computer go away. "Aw, is it already time for me to go?"

"It seems so." Thalassa placed a hand on her husband's arm, eyes already teary as she gave him one last, longing look. "We've been speaking a long time, and I cannot think of what else to tell you... but it feels like there is so much more to say."

Jove smiled, grasping her hand and holding it tight in his own. "Thalassa, I will be able to rest easy knowing the both of you have moved on, and are so happy together. I love you, but I don't want your happiness tied so completely to me that you can't live without me."
Thalassa laughed despite her tears, placing her other hand on top of his. "Somehow, I always knew that's what you'd want. I never would have been able to fall in love again in the first place without the thought that you'd be cheering me on."

"Why wouldn't I cheer you on? A beautiful girl like you?" Jove snickered, then corrected himself with "Well, beautiful woman would be more appropriate now. Not that you look nearly as old as forty."

"Flatterer." Thalassa giggled, and the pair leaned in close, resting their foreheads against each other. "It's a good thing I'm forbidden from kissing you, or there'd be a lot more going on right now."

Apollo gagged, face red. "Mom! You're as bad as Dad and Mom Maya!"

Thalassa fell sideways, laughing hysterically.

Jove raised an eyebrow at the young man. "Are they known for being a bit mushy?"

Apollo shivered in disgust, arms tightly crossed. "They never stop flirting. And their favourite thing to do is insinuate to us the kind of stuff they get up to behind closed doors." He sighed. "I don't mind them kissing, it's just that it doesn't stop at that with them."

"An exaggeration, of course," Thalassa laughed, sitting up again. "They aren't quite as wrapped up in each other as all that. Don't get me wrong, they have their moments, but they pick them well."

Apollo rolled his eyes.

Jove shrugged, hiding a smile. "Okay." Dropping the subject, he promptly turned to Apollo. "I'm glad I got to meet you, Apollo. Even though I lost the chance to raise you, I'm beyond proud you turned out so well regardless."

Apollo blushed, scratching his head. "Um... th-thank you."

Jove chuckled, then looked between his wife and son and snapped his fingers. "Oh, and there was one last thing I wanted to ask before I left."

Thalassa and Apollo exchanged a curious look. "What is it?" Thalassa asked.

"Did they ever get the guy who hit me?"

Mother and son stared back at Jove for a long moment, too stunned to speak. Slowly, Thalassa placed a hand on her chest, and quietly repeated "Hit you?"

Jove nodded, then frowned as he registered their expressions. "Did... you not know I was knocked out before I died?"

Thalassa shook her head. "Weren't you overcome by the smoke?"

Apollo bit his lip, then snatched up his Court Record and reopened his notes. "Nope." Jove crossed his arms, looking a little confused himself. "Someone came up behind me and whacked me on the head, with a lighter. I fell forward and passed out."

"On head... lighter," Apollo muttered, madly tapping away at his touchscreen keyboard. He cast a quick glance up at Jove. "Did you see them at all?"

Jove pressed his lips together, apologetic. "I... don't think so. I mean, I glimpsed their reflection in a
fallen plate after I fell, but I wasn't exactly focussed on that at the time."

Thalassa sighed, clutching her hands together in distress. "From what I remember, the story was that you were trapped in the blaze. Your body burned to ashes in that fire."

Jove hummed in thought. "Yeah, that would make it pretty hard to tell how I'd died, huh?"

Apollo finished his notes, staring at them for a moment before returning his gaze to Jove. "Uh-Father? Could you tell us everything about what happened that night?"

Although the man seemed a little thrown at being addressed in that way, he nodded. "Sure. I left you with little Nahyuta and his dad - Dhrurke - while I performed for the queen. When the show was over, I picked you up and Dhrurke showed us to our room for the night." He paused. "I don't know exactly what it was that woke us up, whether it was the fire or just a coincidence... All I know is, you starting crying."

- Twenty-One Years Earlier -

Jove Justice groaned as he rolled to the side of the bed. "'Pollo, baby..." It took him a moment to locate the crib that had been provided for them, struggling to keep his eyes open long enough to stumble to its side. "S'okay, nothing to worry about..." Pulling the bawling infant into his arms, he blindly trudged back to the bed and dropped back down on the mattress. "You want me to sing, champ? Or are you just hungry?"

Apollo slightly calmed now he was in his father's grip, but he still wailed plaintively.

The young father sighed as he bounced the baby. "Well, your formula's in the kitchen. That's probably what you want, huh?" Knowing he wouldn't get a reply, he got to his feet again and opened the door into the hallway. No sooner had he taken a step outside than he noticed the carpet of flames consuming the end of the hallway, climbing up the walls and blocking the door to the nearby kitchenette.

Jove stepped back into the room and slammed the door, spinning around and pressing his back against the timber with wide eyes. He wasn't feeling drowsy anymore.

And that's when I discovered the building was on fire.

I hurried to get dressed, grabbed my guitar and your mother's bracelet, and wrapped you up in your blanket to try and protect you from the heat. The way we'd come in was blocked, so it was either find another way out or fight a path through it... and, despite my best efforts to find a way around, we still somehow ended up running right through the thick of it...

The nineteen-year-old father may have left the visible flames behind him, but the heat of the fire still permeated the air, making it hard to breathe. It was probably for that reason Apollo had stopped crying. Jove refused to stop moving, though. He dashed down the latest hallway, eyes alert for a possible way out, ears listening for any sign of someone else lost in this inferno.
And then, over the crackling fire, he heard something.

_I'm not sure exactly what it was... maybe a wail? A cry for help? It seemed to have come from a door nearby, so I ran through... and I found someone._

The room was lined with shelves, full of urns and various crockery. A long table filled the centre, and a woman in white robes hunched over it in a chair, face buried in her arms. She immediately struck him as familiar, as someone he had last seen only a matter of hours ago.

Apollo started to cry again.

Jove bounced his son in his arms, holding him close. "Shh, shh, it's okay, I'm getting us out." It didn't help, but he felt better for trying. He almost wanted to cry himself in the oppressive heat, and it was only the knowledge Apollo was depending on him that kept him moving. He returned his attention to the woman nearby.

_I recognised the woman then - the queen! - and I opened my mouth to call out to her... but then someone hit me on the back of the head. I was on the floor in the blink of an eye._

Jove was too stunned by the sudden spike of pain to move at first, his chest pressed to the hot, wooden floor and eyes still wide in shock. A metal plate was lying directly ahead of him, standing upright against something he couldn't make out; In its reflection, he saw something brown moving.

Was there a lot of smoke in here, or was Jove's vision going blurry?

A lighter dropped to the floor in front of him with a clatter, and the brown thing left. Apollo's crying pierced the air, making the pain in Jove's skull worse. Nevertheless, he fought through the overwhelming ache, reaching out to where his tightly-wrapped baby son had fallen nearby.

_I knew from the moment I discovered the fire that if I lost consciousness, I would never wake up again. And without me awake to protect you, you didn't have a chance of getting out either. To let myself pass out was to doom us both... but I was powerless to stop it. All my strength left me, and... and I died._

_View the Court Record_
A Mystery Abandoned

October 17, 2:35PM
Fey Manor
Channelling Chamber

Jove sighed, sorrowful eyes locked on the carpet in front of him. "I failed you, Apollo. I'm so sorry."

Apollo didn't reply, staring at his Court Record in his hands. He'd made dutiful notes of every detail Jove had told them, no matter how small, and was still quietly absorbing them, comparing them to the slightly different versions of the story he'd heard from Thalassa and from his former foster father. Thalassa's story meshed very well with Jove's, especially since she'd known so little of what happened that night... but the version Apollo had grown up with? He remembered so clearly when he'd first heard it as a six-year-old, had begged to know why he wasn't allowed to call that man 'Dad' the same way Nahyuta did, and was given the story of his 'real dad' instead.

"Because I'm not your real dad, Apollo. 'Dhurke' is fine. But I did meet your real dad once, and he was a great man. A great musician, too."

He frowned. 'And yet somehow I still never saw the signs until long after you dumped me on the other side of the world. You have a lot to answer for.'

"Apollo doesn't blame you, Jove."

Apollo looked up with the start, eyes flicking between his parents. "Huh? I what?"

Thalassa smiled, a hand resting on Jove's arm where she'd been comforting him. "So you did zone out. You were hit with a lighter, which seems to suggest it was the arsonist who killed you. You'd found the queen, the only other person who died that night. But, by the time Dhu-" he nearly choked when he realised how rapidly the unwanted name had left his mouth, "by the time he arrived to rescue me, there mustn't have been any sign of her, because there's no way he wouldn't have mentioned if he'd found her, dead or not."

Jove and Thalassa shared a puzzled look, then returned their gazes to their son. "Surely that means the queen was either buried in rubble or ran away when she was attacked," Thalassa reasoned. "That would put her out of sight, wouldn't it?"

Apollo bit his lip for a few moments. "I guess... But that still doesn't explain the arsonist. " He dropped the computer, looking his parents in the eyes. "They set this fire to kill the queen, right? Then they go into the burning building to kill her in person, kill you because you got in the way, ignore me because I'm a baby..." He frowned, returning his attention to his notes. "It just doesn't make sense to me. They'd already set the fire, and started attracting attention. Why did they stay at
the scene of the crime and risk getting caught to kill the queen? Wasn't that the point of the fire? If they could sneak in anyway, why bother with the fire at all? They could've just killed her in her sleep!"

Jove crossed his arms, thinking. "I remember there being quite a few guards hanging around when I was performing. The fire may have been to clear the building, to open up access to the queen in the first place."

"But if she had guards at the time of the fire, why didn't they get her out?" Apollo huffed, pressing his finger to his forehead again. "Argh, something more is going on here, I just know it!" He shot a glance up at Thalassa. "And the second we explain all this to Luke, he's gonna figure it out in an instant. He's always been better than me at this."

"Oh, Apollo, don't sell yourself short." Thalassa patted her son's shoulder sympathetically. "You would not have won so many trials if you couldn't see a case through to its logical conclusion. I would know; I've seen, or at least heard, two of them."

Apollo paused, then gave his mother a half-lidded stare. "Mom. If it weren't for Luke, we literally never would have realised you were blind."

Thalassa retracted her hand in both shock and embarrassment, unable to reply in the knowledge Apollo had a point. Ignoring Jove's quiet chuckling, she folded her hands in her lap with a frown. "Well. Just because he notices things you don't, that doesn't necessarily make him so much better. I'm sure you see things he doesn't as well. That's why you work so well as a team, covering each other's weak points." Her expression softened, eyes on her son. "And Luke didn't have anything to do with your last trial. I thought you handled that one in particular very well indeed."

Apollo blushed. Now it was his turn to admit she had a point. Jove grinned, reaching forward to briefly pat Apollo's knee. "Whatever the problem is, it probably doesn't matter by now anyway. This fire was over twenty years ago, right? The Khura'inese police probably got that regicidal arsonist long ago."

Apollo paled, biting his lip.

Thalassa nodded. "That's very true. If nothing else, we can take comfort in-"

"No, we can't."

"They didn't find the culprit." Apollo ran a gloved hand through his hair, bashful eyes locked on the carpet in front of him. "Remember how I said D-... Dhurke rescued me? I think because of that... they pinned the blame on him."

"What!" Jove scoffed, disbelief in his eyes. "Look, he may have made bad choices raising you, but he was no murderer."

Apollo nodded. "He tried to clear his name, but he couldn't find any trace of the culprit himself, so the authorities decided it had to be him." He sighed, busyng his hands slipping his Court Record back into the pouch at his hip. "That's... That's why he took me and Nahyuta up into the mountains. We were in hiding, from the corrupt regime. As far as I know, he's probably still out there, trying to clear his name. And now he'd said it out loud, the similarities to Phoenix's situation struck him; Phoenix's wasn't nearly as bad, and had recently turned around in fact, but it was still uncomfortably similar. After all, Apollo's Khura'inese foster father had once been an attorney too... a fact the young
man longed to forget was the originating spark for his interest in law.

Thalassa's eyes widened in concern. "Is this the real reason why you didn't want Maya trying to find him?"

Apollo wanted to deny it, to insist it was a co-incidence... but he knew there wasn't any point trying to lie to a living lie-detector. "A part of it, yes. If Mom Maya accidentally led the regime to his rebellion, she'd just get caught up in the whole fiasco herself... And knowing her luck, she'd probably wind up on the wrong side."

"Rebellion?" Jove's eyebrows shot up, impressed. "Geeze, I said he had courage, but that really takes balls."

Thalassa thought over Apollo's words, her face pinched tight with worry. "I... cannot argue that."

She clutched her hands together. "But if you wish not to tell any of this to Maya, and you do not plan on ever meeting Dhurke again... is there any reason to pursue this case now?"

Apollo frowned, confused. "What do you mean?"

Thalassa sighed, then shifted slightly to face Apollo and placed her hands on his face. "My darling... I want to see whoever killed your father brought to justice too, but if doing so brings you back into contact with Dhurke, and with Khura'in, and drags you into so much danger..." Her eyes shone in concern, tears threatening at their corners. "Are you prepared for that? Is it worth all those consequences? Is this what you want?"

Apollo placed his left hand over her right, their bracelets clacking against each other. He was surprised to realise he'd been so wrapped up in trying to solve the mystery, he hadn't noticed that, to bring it to a logical conclusion, he would have to face that part of his past he'd been trying so hard for so long to pretend hadn't happened. To find that arsonist would require returning to Khura'in, and talking to Dhurke, and almost certainly putting himself in the unenviable position of being in the regime's cross-hairs. He closed his eyes, leaning forward slightly, and Thalassa's forehead met his, her thumbs stroking his cheeks. It was comforting, but ultimately couldn't stand up to the frustration building in Apollo's chest. It wasn't fair, to hold that mystery hostage behind all that pain he would had to suffer again first. He released the anger with a sigh and a few tears, cursing out his former foster father under his breath. For once, he didn't care in the slightest about swearing in front of his parents.

"For what it's worth, I'm happy to leave taking care of that arsonist to Dhurke."

Apollo looked up, moving away from his mother's hands to see his birth father clearer. "You are?"

Jove nodded, a sincere smile on his face. "That you and your mother are alive, together, and happy is all I could have hoped for." He shrugged. "Knowing the guy who jumped me faced justice would have been a bonus, but they did only kill me because I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. There wasn't anything personal about it. I figure they'll make a mistake and out themselves to the authorities eventually."

Apollo looked down, deep in thought. He was a little surprised to note Jove hadn't been lying.

Thalassa moved her other hand to clutch Apollo's between both of hers. "I'll take your lead, Apollo. Whatever you decide is best."

There was a long moment of silence as Apollo considered his options. It was comforting to know he had the full support of his birth parents... and it was probably because of that he was able to stomach
the sting of deliberately leaving a mystery unsolved. He sighed. "I... I hate to take the easy way over the right way, but..." He pressed his free hand to his face, tears spilling from his eyes. "I can't. Not Khura'in. Not Dhurke."

Thalassa pulled the young man into a hug as he descended into sobbing. "Apollo, this is a very hard choice to make. Neither way is 'easy'. You can only choose what is best for you, and I believe any option that keeps you out of unnecessary danger is the better one." She lifted a hand to the back of his head, stroking his hair. "If you cannot face Khura'in, you don't have to. Leave that place to its own devices. It's not your responsibility."

Apollo nodded into his mother's shoulder, clinging to her white dress. He was shaking too hard to say anything in reply.

Fabric scraped against carpet, and soon a third body had joined the hug, pressed against Apollo's back and gripping the young lawyer's shoulders. "We have always loved you, Apollo. We just want the best for you. Nothing about that will ever change... whether I'm here to see it or not."

Apollo smiled (though no-one could see it with his face still buried in Thalassa's shoulder), and moved a hand up to rest on top of Jove's. "Th-thanks. I... I love you, too." He sniffed, feeling a lot calmer already. "Even if it's just this once, I'm glad I got to meet my birth father. You really are as great as Mom said."

Jove and Thalassa both laughed.

They stayed in their hug for a long time.

_View the Court Record_
Apollo wasn’t sure how much time had passed, sitting on the floor sandwiched between his birth parents, clinging to Thalassa in front while Jove rested against his back. It was... comfortable. He was reminded of the first time he’d hugged Phoenix, and been hugged back, and how strange it felt at first to be enjoying such a small thing. He’d been so nervous back then, he’d always pulled out of the hug very quickly, but over time he’d learned to put that fear to rest. He knew now from experience, there was little better than a lazy afternoon with nowhere to go and nothing to do... and spending it wrapped up in the arms of someone you loved. He’d never done it with Luke - their relationship wasn't that touchy-feely - or with Machi - the boy simply hadn't been around long enough for the opportunity - but Apollo fondly remembered hours spent with Trucy or with Phoenix (and even once or twice with Maya), just hugging in comfortable silence after a difficult conversation or an exhausting morning. He felt a sense of pride to be able to add Jove and Thalassa to his mental list.

The body against Apollo's back shifted, pulling their hand from his grip. There was a pause, then they leaned back in, holding Apollo's upper arms far tighter than before. "Are you okay?"

Maya's voice. Apollo sighed, then pushed himself up into a proper sitting position. Maya remained pressed to his shoulder-blades and clinging to his arms, the feel of her figure starkly different to Jove's. "I'm fine, Mom." He shot her a quick smile over his shoulder.

Thalassa sniffed, wiping her eyes. "Thank you, Maya. We both really needed that."

Maya grinned, gave Apollo's arms a short rub, then pulled back and got to her feet. "I'm glad I was able to help you," she said in a serene tone, then paused, pressed her hands to her mouth... and emitted a muffled squeal, bouncing rapidly on her heels. She was done a moment later, removing her hands to reveal a massive grin. "Honestly, I am terrified it had been too long and I'd just mess it up like I did with Gaia."

Thalassa weakly laughed, standing up. "Must you insist I repeat myself on that?"

Maya hid a giggle. "Sorry." She gestured to the door, taking a few steps towards it. "Shall we head out and see if the kids have noticed yet?"

"Wait!" Apollo jumped up, tripping over his feet before managing to stand, and grabbed Maya's upper arms just as much to help himself stay upright as to hold her in place. "Mom, I have something to tell you first."

Maya gave him a blank stare for a second, glanced briefly over to Thalassa, then returned a concerned look to the young man. "What is it?"

Apollo took a deep breath to steady himself. "When... When I left Khura'in, it was in a pretty terrible state. A corrupt regime, and a rebellion trying to overthrow them... Not the ideal place to be." He tried not to dwell on this being why he was sent away; After all, if it had really been that bad, Nahyuta would have been sent away with him.

"Really?" Maya bit her lip, musing on the information. "So... Is it still like that?"
Apollo sighed. "I don't know. You'll probably be fine if you just stick to your training and keep your head down..." He swallowed a lump of panic building in his throat. "Just... Just be careful over there, okay? Just in case?"

Maya stared at him a moment before giving Apollo a warm smile. "I promise." She wrapped her arms behind his back, pulling her eldest child into a hug. "Don't you worry about me, kiddo; That's my job, to be worrying about you."

Apollo couldn't help a laugh, hugging her back.

"I'll be back before you know it. I can promise that, too."

Despite the worry still lingering at the back of his mind, Apollo decided he could believe her.

The first thing Apollo saw as he emerged from the Channelling Chamber (besides the back of Maya's head, of course) was his three siblings and young cousin all huddled together in the centre of the Meditation Room, watching the doors eagerly. Maya stepped aside, and Apollo and Thalassa stepped forward into the open doorway.

"Polly!"

Apollo barely had the time to look up before a fifteen-year-old had barrelled into his chest, her arms tightly wrapping around his back. She looked up at him with plaintive eyes, too close to his face to really focus on properly.

"Are you okay, Polly?"

Apollo smiled, patting the girl's back. "Of course I'm okay, Truce."

A little ahead, Luke, Machi and Pearl visibly sighed in relief.

Apollo smirked as he leaned in closer to his sister's ear. "By the way... My dad hates your dad."

Trucy paused, then leaned back to give her eldest brother a confused look. "Really?"

Thalassa scoffed, lightly whacking Apollo's arm with the back of a hand.

"What!?" Machi's hands flew to his chest, the teen looking pale. "But that awful! How he just hate-?"

"Machi," Apollo chuckled, "I'm joking."

Machi paused, then his cheeks flushed red and the teen ran a hand through his hair. "Oh."

Luke hid a giggle, walking up behind Machi and resting his hands on the boy's shoulders. He kept his eyes on his elder brother. "We're just glad you got the chance to meet him."

Apollo blushed. He couldn't help but notice Thalassa nearby watching over them with a warm look.

Maya skipped over to where Phoenix and Iris were standing, near the cubby-holes against the back wall. "So, how long did it take for them to notice we were gone?"
"Oh, not long." Phoenix grinned. "They came charging in here about half an hour after you went in."

Iris blushed, pressing a hand to her reddening cheek. "I did only tell them you were busy when they asked."

Pearl chewed a thumbnail, watching Apollo and Thalassa with concern. "But when you didn't come join us, we got worried."

"And 'they're busy' just got increasingly suspicious after that," Luke added. "We found Papa, and he told us what was going on."

Phoenix shrugged. "If you were determined enough to get past Iris, you deserved to know."

Iris continued to sheepishly avoid everyone's gazes.

Thalassa stepped towards her children, and pulled Trucy into a hug. "I'm sorry we didn't give you the chance to meet Jove yourself. He certainly wouldn't have turned down the opportunity to meet you in person."

"Oh, that's okay, Mommy." Trucy gave her mother a tight squeeze, then stepped back with a bright smile. "You weren't sure it'd work anyway, and we had a really busy morning."

Apollo hid a smirk. 'That's one way to put it.'

Machi moved to join them, slipping out of Luke's grip. "Isoveli, was your father good person? He nice to you?"

Apollo almost laughed, but settled for a nod. "Yep. We had a good long talk." He shot a glance at Thalassa, who was smiling in agreement, then he rested a hand on his youngest brother's shoulder. "C'mon, let's go sit down and I'll tell you all about it."

Machi and Trucy grinned, and the girl cried "That sounds great!"

Pearl ran to join them. "Is it okay if I come too?"

"Of course it is," Apollo chuckled. "We're all family here, aren't we?"

Pearl blushed, hiding her face in her hands.

Maya stretched dramatically, leaning her back against Phoenix. "Well, I am totally exhausted, so I'm afraid I'll have to sit out. Nick, carry me back to my room."

Phoenix began to struggle as the woman's full weight pressed against him, his arms gripping her waist tight. "M-May, I really can't..."

"C'mon, stop being such a whiny baby and carry me." Maya scoffed, and more insistently rested against him.

"Maya, I really can't carry you, not today!"

Luckily, Maya seemed to pick up on the slight note of panic in his voice and instantly straightened, turning to face her fiancé. She studied his pale face for a second in concern, then shrugged with a nonchalant air. "Okay, I'll let you off just this once. You can give me a massage or a foot rub or something."
Phoenix sighed in relief, gingerly rubbing his back with one hand.

The group split into two, the Gramaryes, Iris and Pearl heading back to the living room while Phoenix and Maya wandered in the direction of the master bedroom. Luke was the last to move, lingering in the Meditation Room for a few moments before choosing a direction and hurrying to catch up.

"Papa! Maya!"

Phoenix and Maya paused, turning to see the young man rushing to join them. "Luke?" Phoenix asked.

Luke adjusted his cap nervously as he came to a stop. "Maya, I just... This just occurred to me, and I'm not asking you to do this today, but... You know, we'll still be up here tomorrow, so I just thought..."

All signs of exhaustion vanished in an instant as Maya placed a hand on Luke's shoulder, giving him a concerned smile. "What is it, kiddo?"

"Could..." Luke took a deep breath. "Could you channel my dad one last time? Before you leave?"

Maya restrained a giggle, pulling the young man into a hug. "Of course I will. First thing tomorrow, okay?"

Luke sighed in relief, hugging her back. "Thank you, Maya."

"I know: I'm awesome."

Luke laughed. Phoenix watched them both with a fond smile.

View the Court Record
In all, Clark Triton had been channelled three times since his death: The first had been in July 2020, the very moment Luke had learned his father was dead; The second had been in 2021, a Christmas gift from Maya while the Wrights were in Kurain for the holiday; The third was also over Christmas, in 2025, a treat and a chance to catch up after Luke's horrific experience as a defendant the previous month. Today, only ten months later, would be counted on that list as number four.

Luke had kept his request to Maya quiet overnight... helped greatly by the fact that he'd been the one to take Machi back into the city and stay at the agency with him (and what a strange experience it had been to sleep in Phoenix's bed instead of his own!). With nothing else to talk about, he'd eventually admitted to the boy his plans for the next day. Machi seemed very excited, but had promised not to tell anyone when they returned to Kurain in the morning. And thus, with everyone else gathered in the living room, Luke and Maya slipped away to the Channelling Chamber, leaving the door unlocked.

Maya was quick to settle down in front of the altar, giving Luke a wink. "Say hi to him for me, huh?"

Luke grinned and nodded. He knelt on the floor in front of Maya, but didn't bother to sit still or even close his eyes, his attention focussed on his notebook as he finished jotting down reminders to himself for the incoming conversation. It may have been less than a year since he last saw his birth father, but so much had happened in the interim (and not even counting the past week alone) that it was difficult to keep track of without help.

'Iris wasn't in Kurain at the beginning of the year, so she'll need introducing just like Thalassa and Machi. Apollo's actually handled trials on his own now too, that wasn't happening yet last Christmas. Oh, and can't forget Papa and Maya's engagement. Also, I should probably outline how much detail to go into for how we found Thalassa and Machi, because that's a complicated story. Dad might be interested in Thalassa's trip to Borginia with the Professor, too. And then there's... that tiny bit of progress I made on finding Mum... if you can even call it that. It's not much, but it's more than I had the last time Dad was channelled...' 

"So how long has it been this time?"

Luke almost jabbed his pen through the paper in surprise, jerking his head up. It was no shock to see the amused face watching him from beneath Maya's straight, black hair, though even now it still threw him a bit to not see the hazel beard as well. He grinned, dropped his pen, and jumped forward to envelop his father in a tight hug. "Dad!"

Clark laughed, patting his son's back. "Don't tell me it's been another four years. You don't look twenty-four."

Luke giggled, pulling back from the hug. "No, I'm still twenty."

"Really?" Clark raised an eyebrow. "Less than a year?"
Luke retrieved his dropped pen, returning it to his satchel. "To be honest, this was a last-minute decision. A lot's changed in just this past week, and Maya's about to go away for two years, so this was my last chance to see you before she gets back."

"Two years!?" Clark frowned, confused. "What on Earth would require her to be away for that long?"

"Spiritual training, apparently." Luke sheepishly smiled and shrugged. "She'd be able to explain it better than me."

Clark considered this for a moment, then nodded. "In that case... If you say a lot has changed for you recently, I suppose you'd better catch me up."

It didn't take long to give Clark the run-down of the three new members of the family, or to touch on the more minor changes to their lives... though exactly how Thalassa and Machi had stumbled across their path took a while just on its own. Exactly as had happened the previous two times his father was channelled, Luke took Clark's hand and led him out of the chamber, headed through the snaking hallways to the living room.

"No one knows you're coming except for Papa and Machi," Luke whispered as they rounded the final corner. "Just to remind you."

"I'll try not to be too surprising, then," Clark chuckled.

Luke gingerly slid open the door, grinning at the assembled group within. Most were sitting around the table on the floor, though Machi was up on the piano stool and Iris stood next to him. On the table itself, Pearl had set out another of her board games, this one called 'Ticket to Ride', which it seemed she, Trucy, Apollo and Thalassa were playing. Phoenix, though he was at the table, was just watching, and it was him who first spotted Luke's arrival, waving across the room.

"There you are, Luke. Finally decided to join us."

The activity around the table paused, all attention turned to the doorway as Luke sheepishly stepped in. "Hi." He pulled the door fully open behind him, watching as Clark followed him through, a polite smile on his face.

Trucy gasped, jumping to her feet. "Mister Triton!" She ran to the doorway, pausing in front of the man to bounce on her heels. "I didn't know you were coming today!"

Clark laughed. "No, Luke told me. It seems much has changed for you all since we last spoke, so this is a last-minute visit."

Luke noticed Apollo glancing his way as the latter stood from his cushion. "It's nice to see you again, Mister Triton." He smiled as he followed his sister. "It's only been ten months, hasn't it?"

"If you say it is, I'll have to believe you." Clark turned to his son with a raised eyebrow and a smirk. "I'm afraid I don't know the exact date."
Luke blushed, and hurriedly turned his attention back to the room. While Phoenix and Pearl were watching with similar grins, Thalassa and Iris simply looked confused. Machi was staring with wide eyes, a smile spreading across his face. Luke gestured to the man in Maya's robes. "Thalassa, Machi, Iris... This is Clark Triton. My dad."

Machi leapt from the piano stool and across the room, grabbing Clark's hand to vigorously shake. "Hello, Mister Triton! It is nice to meet you!"

"And it's nice to meet you, too." Clark looked the boy up and down with a friendly smile. "You must be Machi. Luke was just telling me about you."

Machi nodded. "And Luke tell me, you go to university with Professor Layton?"


Luke only blushed harder as he noticed his siblings snickering nearby. "Well... it's true."

"Mmhm." Clark returned his smile to Machi. "I imagine Luke's also told you all about the various adventures he went on with my old friend. The only reason I know anything about Hershel's travels over the years is because of Luke's stories; Hershel was always too modest to talk about them himself."

Luke tried and failed not to turn even redder. "I don't talk about them that much..."

Trucy gave him a knowing grin. "Yeah, you do."


Luke bit his lip and tried his best to ignore his siblings' continued snickering and his father's chuckling. Even Machi was hiding giggles.

Iris stepped away from the piano and directed towards Clark a modest bow. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mister Triton." She pointed to the nearby table. "Would you like to sit down? The children were in the middle of a game-"

"But we can finish it later!" Pearl grinned, already working to move the various piles of cards and counters away from the edges of the table, to be most out-of-the-way.

Phoenix snatched up the box with a snort, standing to carry it elsewhere. "I'll go get the extra cushions, shall I?"

It didn't take long for everyone to sit back down around the table... though Clark did stumble a bit, fighting to keep Maya's skirt from riding up his legs. He ended up sitting between Luke and Machi, with Apollo and Trucy on Machi's side and Iris and Thalassa on Luke's. Phoenix and Pearl sat opposite.

"Mister Triton." Thalassa held out her hand across the table. "Thalassa Gramarye. I'm not sure how much Luke has told you about me."

"Ah yes, Apollo's and Trucy's mother." Clark shook her hand with a polite smile. "I didn't hear the details, but it sounded like a long story." Their handshake over, he folded his hands neatly in his lap. "Apparently you were privy to one of Hershel's famous 'trips'?"

Thalassa almost laughed. "Yes, we went to Borginia to recover my memory. Professor Layton and his family more than lived up to the rumours... in a very dramatic way."
Clark snorted. "He's always somehow had a knack for that. Even so, when Luke here wanted to tag along," he rested a hand on his son's shoulder, "Brenda and I knew we could trust Hershel to look after him."

Iris cocked her head to one side. "Brenda? Who's she?"

View Luke's Notebook
A resounding silence fell upon the room. The Wrights, Feys and Clark all stared at Iris with wide eyes. Thalassa and Machi merely looked just as confused as Iris. Luke turned bright red, shrinking in his seat and staring at the floor.

Pearl reached over and tapped her sister's arm, whispering "Iris! She's Luke's mother, remember? I told you!"

Iris gasped. "Oh! I'm so sorry, I forgot!" She winced, twirling a finger in her hair. "It's been a while since it was explained to me..."

Machi leaned forward to look around Clark, to where Luke was sitting. "Luke, you said your mother go to university with Professor Layton also, yes?"

Luke recoiled further, hiding his face behind the brim of his cap.

"She did indeed." Clark rested a hand on the boy's shoulder. "That was where Brenda and I first met, in fact. After we both graduated, we got married and eventually had Luke. We even appointed Hershel as his godfather."

Machi frowned, then pulled out his phone, muttering "Godfather..."

"Kumiseta," Thalassa translated for him.

"Ah!" Machi dropped the phone, turning back to Clark and Luke with an excited smile. "Professor Layton is Luke's kumiseta!?"

Apollo rolled his eyes, sharing a smirk with Trucy. "Here we go..."

"Careful, Machi," Phoenix chuckled. "When the Professor actually has time to visit us again, you're just going to lose your mind fanboying at this rate."

Machi blushed, but his grin didn't fade, and he kept his attention on the Tritons. "We get meet Luke's mother too, yes?"

"N-no, Machi." Trucy awkwardly grinned, patting her younger brother's arm. "Not for a while yet. We gotta find her first!" She tried to laugh, but it only sounded even more awkward when faced with Machi's confused look.

Clark watched the exchange with concern, then turned to Luke, who was still hiding his face. "Did you... not tell them what happened?"

Another silence. Apollo and Trucy edged closer together, sending embarrassed glances towards Thalassa and Machi, who shared the same kind of confused expressions as Iris and Pearl, though for different reasons.

Phoenix stared at Luke with the same kind of worry as Clark, but hid it under a grin. "Oh, I'm sure
it's come up. We've mentioned that car accident before, haven't we, Thalassa?"

Thalassa reluctantly nodded. "A car accident that led to Luke's and Apollo's adoption, yes... But I'm afraid that's all the information I was ever given."

Clark sighed. He shot one final concerned glance at his son before turning to Thalassa with a polite smile. He pressed a hand to his chest. "I'm an archaeologist, same as Hershel. I was working in the research department at the university, when I got offered a job here in Los Angeles." He lowered his hands, clutching them tightly together on the table. "Myself, my wife Brenda, and our son Luke were all set to make the big move from England... but, upon our arrival, our car crashed into something on the road. My wife was kidnapped, and I... passed on thanks to my injuries." He cast another worried glance at Luke. "By some miracle, they left Luke alone. It's only thanks to Miss Fey's abilities I have been able to see my son grow up, with a family that cares about him as much as Brenda and I do."

Luke bit his lip hard, then collapsed forwards into a half-ball, burying his face in his hands as he began to shake with erupting sobs. "D-Dad, I'm so sorry!"

Clark jumped, alarmed, and moved to pat his son's shoulder. "Luke, what could you possibly have done to be sorry about?"

Trucy leapt to her feet, circling the table to her middle brother's side, and Apollo wasn't far behind her. She plopped down next to Luke, her back to the table, and threw her arms around his front in a tight hug. "It's okay, Luke. We're here for you, okay?"

Apollo knelt behind Luke, a hand on his back. "Yeah, no-one blames you for not wanting to talk about it. It's fine."

"That's not it!" Despite his loud sobs, Luke managed to shift his arms out from between him and Trucy, returning her hug. "I'm... I'm never going to find Mum!"

Clark froze, disbelief on his face. "What?"

"That's nonsense." Apollo jumped up on his knees, hopping closer to his brother's side to look him in the face with a stern frown. "What about what Valant told us after the concert? We've made progress, Luke."

"No, we haven't." Luke reluctantly pulled away from Trucy, looking up to his elder brother's face. "Think about it, Apollo: It's illegal to make large quantities of identical face-masks in California, and has been for over a decade. Whoever was, is, behind the Forest Road kidnappings has unrestricted access to that kind of technology. More than likely, they've put up a front of a legitimate business to recoup the costs of getting that technology."

Apollo nodded. "Exactly. That puts us much closer to finding your mom."

Luke sighed. "No, it doesn't." He pressed a hand to his face. "I thought it did too at first, but once the trial was over, and everyone had left, and I actually had time to think about it..." He met Apollo's gaze again with a pained expression. "Even assuming their business is still running all these years later... How would we identify them now?"

Apollo paused. He opened his mouth to reply, then closed it again, frowning in thought.

Trucy held Luke's forearms tight, looking up at him with a worried look. "You could do what you were doing before, couldn't you?"

Luke shook his head, turning his attention to his sister. "Before, we were just directly asking them for
access to their records to investigate a murder. The ones that were agreeable told us outright they'd never filled big orders, and the other ones just... told us to get lost, in not-so-nice words." He hung his head. "Exactly how much better do you think it would go if we were asking them, 'Did you kidnap an untold number of people seven-to-ten years ago and kill a few in the process'?

Trucy winced, looking away.

"All Valant did was invalidate our entire investigation," Luke continued, his voice quiet. "We're so close... but we're further away than ever."

Trucy leaned forward to hug him again. Luke returned it.

Clark continued to watch his son with growing concern, his grip on Luke's shoulder tightening. "Luke..."

Machi jumped up from his cushion and circled behind Clark before again dropping to the floor, gripping Luke's back in a hug that mirrored Trucy's.

Apollo moved his hand away from the incoming fourteen-year-old just in time, shifting it to Luke's shoulder, opposite to Clark. "There has to be something we could do," he muttered with a frown. "We could... We could go back to the records of all the kidnappings. Or re-investigate Forest Road itself. If we contacted Ema, I'm sure she'd agree to help us out."

Luke sighed. "If we didn't find anything on Forest Road seven years ago, we certainly won't find anything now. And I've already gone back over the records; They're exactly as useless as they've always been. What could Ema possibly help us with?"

Apollo shrugged. "Well, she's a detective. She might be able to do something from the police side of things."

There was a long pause, then Luke pulled away from Trucy to stare his elder brother in the eyes. "Apollo, it's been seven years. As far as the law is concerned, all those people are dead now. Why would they care anymore?"

Apollo winced, removing his hand. "W-well... They'll still have that unsolved case just sitting there, and re-classified from just disappearances to serial murders! I'm sure they want to close it just as much as we do!"

Across the table, Phoenix got to his feet, silencing anything Luke may have been preparing to say in reply. He passed the awkward Fey sisters and Thalassa, and came to a stop next to Apollo. Seeing his stern eyes, the eldest Wright child hurriedly shifted back to make room, and Phoenix carefully lowered himself to the floor in the newly-available space. Once he was settled, he looked his middle child in the eyes. "Luke. What you need right now is a break."

"A break!?" Luke nearly burst into tears again, frantically waving a hand. "All a break is is sitting around doing nothing! I've been doing so much of that ever since Mum disappeared, that's why I've lost any chance I had of finding her and-!"

Phoenix held up a hand, again silencing Luke in an instant. "Believe me, I know: The years pass, and you don't make any significant progress, and you feel completely useless to the point of wondering why you even bother, since it's clear you're never going to reach your goal no matter how hard you try. I know." His gaze turned stern. "What do you think I've been doing for the past seven years?"

Luke bit his lip, looking down. It was all too easy to forget he and Phoenix had been in the same
Phoenix's expression softened. "I understand. It's very easy to get wrapped up in the investigation at the expense of everything else... and it's the hardest thing in the world to put it down and ignore it when it means everything to you. But you have to recognise when you're doing more harm than good, and step back for a bit. You've been banging your head against a wall over this since July, right?"

Luke blushed and nodded.

"Then it's time to put the problem down for a little while. When you come back to it, you'll have a clear head to re-evaluate the entire thing from scratch, and work out what to do next. And don't be afraid to ask for help, either." He smiled. "I did promise you, right after that crash, that I'd help any way I could, no matter what. That offer's still open, any time you want to take it."

Luke sniffed and rubbed his nose, giving himself time to think. He remembered that first weekend after his and Apollo's adoption, when they went to Forest Road to look for clues. All they'd found was a blood-soaked bracelet Brenda had bought back in New York when the Tritons got off the boat, abandoned under a bush. Just like the police had, they made no further progress... until Maya first channelled Clark, but even then all they'd learned was that Brenda had been kidnapped by a group of twenty-to-thirty people in identical face-masks. For months afterward, Luke tried to locate and contact every single manufacturer of face-masks in the region, but was forced to give up when none agreed to talk to a child about a thing as private as their client history. Having hit a brick wall, Luke put the entire investigation on hold, going to England to study at Gressenheller and managing to completely forget about the search until nearly a year after he'd returned... the day he'd remembered co-incidentally being the American Mother's Day right after Apollo's first trial. He and Apollo had visited quite a few companies in person over the following months (being faced with two adults and an attorney's badge made their targets much more willing to talk), though they'd not managed to do much else other than cross a few helpful companies off Luke's list. Valant's hint that the large order they'd been looking for was illegal had explained why they'd been having such a difficult time on their existing strategy, but it hadn't given them a new lead to follow. Luke hadn't been privy to the investigation into Phoenix's disbarment until it was coming to an end, but he suspected his adoptive father had hit just as many obstacles over the years, if not more... and hadn't put the entire thing on hold for four years to focus on something else. It made sense Phoenix had more experience with burn-out than Luke did.

"Okay." Luke sighed. "I'll... I'll take a break."

"Good." Phoenix plopped a hand on top of Luke's head, smiling warmly at his son. "Don't worry. You're making more progress than you think you are. We'll find your mother."

Luke managed a weak smile of his own. "Thank you, Papa." He leaned past Trucy to give Phoenix a quick hug.

Phoenix chuckled, returning the gesture. "That's what I'm here for."

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View the Court Record
After Luke's breakdown, the conversation in the Feys' living room had progressed much more smoothly. Apollo and Phoenix returned to their seats, though Trucy and Machi stayed huddled around Luke, and Pearl even joined them. Clark got along well with Iris and Thalassa once the awkwardness of his death was overcome, and Luke suspected this was mainly because they were in his age-range - After all, Clark had been thirty-five when he died, putting him close to Iris' thirty-two and Thalassa's forty-one... though adding the seven years since his death put Clark slightly older than Thalassa if Luke wanted to be technical. He even pointed this out when the discussion next came to a natural pause.

Clark hummed thoughtfully when he heard Thalassa's age. "If it's been seven years... Brenda will be that age by now."

"Oh?" Thalassa seemed intrigued.

Luke bit his lip at the thought of his mother being as old as the Gramarye matriarch, but didn't say anything.

Clark didn't seem to notice his son's reaction, giving Thalassa a smile and a nod. "I think the two of you would really get along."

Thalassa laughed. "I can't wait."

Finally, the hour allotted for Clark's visit came to an end.

"It was wonderful to meet you all," the elder Triton insisted, patting Machi's head as he got to his feet. "Maybe, if Luke remembers to have me channelled when Miss, or Missus Fey returns in another two years time, we can all meet again."

Luke blushed, standing at his father's side. "Dad, I won't forget."

Machi giggled. "I hope so. It was nice to meet you, Mister Triton. I hope we see you again."

"Absolutely perfect English." Clark grinned at the proud teen, then returned his attention to Luke. "Shall we go?"

After a few more waved goodbyes, Clark and Luke headed out to the hallway. It had become a part of the tradition, Luke couldn't say when, that whenever Maya or Pearl channelled someone for the Wrights, it always began and ended in the Channelling Chamber. He supposed the reasons were to do with Fey traditions, though he couldn't name them. Regardless, Clark had followed it himself twice now, so there was no need to discuss it on this third occasion.

Clark rested a hand on Luke's shoulder as they walked back to the Meditation Room. "You seem to be having a rough time of it lately."

Luke blinked, meeting his father's concerned eyes. A moment later, he blushed and looked away.
"Oh..." It was easy to forget that, the last time Clark had visited, Luke was still recovering from the chaos of Pound's murder, his own terrifying trial, and Reindeer's conviction. He'd burst into tears the moment Clark appeared, and it took him ten minutes to calm down. Today's visit, with Luke's complete breakdown over the search for Brenda, hadn't gone much better in comparison. "I-it's just... two bad days. That both happened when you were here." Luke clutched his arms together, staring at the floor beneath his feet. "That's all."

Clark's grip on his son's shoulder tightened, and Luke didn't need to look to know he'd not exactly been very convincing. "Luke..."

"H-honest, Dad. I've gotten over that trial now, and work's going really well." Luke couldn't make himself look up, and briefly lamented his role as the lone Wright family member who couldn't lie to save his life. "A-and, with Papa and Apollo to help me, I'm sure looking for Mum will go much better in future. When I next see you in two years time, I... M-maybe we'll even have found her by then. You'll see."

"Luke." Clark pulled his son aside, placing both hands on his shoulders and halting their walk. Luke couldn't help but finally meet his father's concerned eyes. "I just want you to be happy. Time may pass in an instant for me, but it's no less painful to think that, when Miss Fey next lends me her body like this, you'll have faced untold suffering in my absence."

Luke blinked back tears. "Dad..."

"I know you have your papa and your brothers and sister to look out for you, but I'm your father, your Dad. I can't help but worry."

"Even when you were running off with Hershel, I worried about you."


"No." Clark gave his son a warm look. "Because it was what you wanted, and we trusted Hershel to look after you. But we still worried."

'And by 'we', he means him and Mum...' Luke sniffed, then leaned forward and wrapped his arms around his father's chest. "Sometimes, I forget... how much I miss you and Mum... and our life back in London. It... It's been seven years, but... It still hurts, having lost you. Having lost everything."

Clark moved his hands to Luke's back, giving the young man comforting pats. "If we'd had any idea of what was going to happen that night, you know we would have avoided it. The painful truth is, we simply couldn't predict that crash. There's nothing we can do but the old British spirit of 'keep calm and carry on'."

Luke choked on a snort of laughter through his restrained tears, holding Clark tighter. "I just keep telling myself I'm fine. Apollo and Clay taught me that. Just keep saying it as loud as you can until you believe it."

Clark chuckled. "It's the same thing in the end."

Luke belatedly remembered he'd told his father about the Chords of Steel routine before. "I-I am fine, though. I've got Papa, and Apollo, and Trucy... and Maya and Pearl, and Machi... and Thalassa and Iris would probably help me too, if I needed them. I... It was because of all of them I decided to stay here in California. I turned down going back to England, because my family is here, and I didn't want to leave them. Not just Mum, wherever she's been hidden... but everyone else too."

"Precisely." Clark gave Luke a squeeze, then pulled out of the hug with a smile, resting his hands on
his son's shoulders again. "That's why I know I can trust them to look after you... despite me being a big old worrywart."

Luke snorted. "Dad..." He got the feeling he'd just hijacked a speech Clark was gearing up to say.

"Although you don't need 'looking after' anymore, do you?" Clark sighed, his expression nostalgic. "You're a grown man now, as hard as that is to believe. I may be restricted only to snapshots of your life since the crash, but it still feels like it was only yesterday you were born."

Luke could only blush in response.

"You'll find your mother. I know you will." Clark planted a quick kiss on Luke's forehead. "Just don't let this investigation kill you in the meantime, huh?"

"I won't." Luke adjusted his hat, thinking. "I will take a break, like Papa suggested. Though..." He winced. "There is one last thing I need to do first."

"What's that?"

"Maya." Luke glanced up and down the kimono Clark was wearing, covering the body that wasn't truly his. "Before she goes, I need to ask her to try channelling Mum... just to check she's still alive."


Back in the Channelling Chamber, father and son gave each other one last hug.

"See you in two years, Dad."

"For me, it will be only a second."

Luke chuckled, tightening his grip around Clark's chest. He focussed on the hug, not wanting to know the moment his father left. Hands alternated patting and rubbing his back, and Luke pretended it was Clark moving them for as long as he possibly could.

"You okay, kiddo?"


Maya grinned. "That's what I'm here for."

Luke managed a small giggle in reply before his smile faded. "There was... one more thing, though. Could you check on my mum?"

"Brenda Triton?" Maya winked. "I'd be happy to." She shifted back a bit, closer to the altar behind her, and knelt on the floor. Her hands moved into her channelling pose in an instant, her eyes already closed.

Taking a deep breath, Luke shuffled back and dropped to the floor himself, his head lowered. He always dreaded doing this. The possibility that he'd look up and find himself face-to-face with his mother was terrifying. He trusted Maya to do her best to succeed regardless of his feelings, but he was pretty sure he would never be capable of handling a situation where Brenda had died before he could find her. He'd searched too long and too hard to accept a failure of that magnitude. The fear of losing her was the primary motivator behind his investigation since he'd restarted it earlier that year, and he could feel the panic rising that she was still out there in that mountainous forest, perhaps only
days from death, and that he couldn't risk wasting a single moment locating her if he ever wanted to see her again... outside of Fey Manor, anyway.

'Now come on, Luke. It's precisely this fear that Papa is trying to protect you from by ordering the break. If Mum's survived this long, she'll last a little longer. I'm not doing anyone any favours by killing myself on this, least of all Mum.'

His own scoldings didn't do much to calm the panic, though.

"Luke?"

The young man jumped, head up with panicked eyes. "Huh?"

Maya smiled. "I couldn't find her. She's still alive."

Luke abruptly burst into tears again with sheer relief, leaping forward to throw his arms around Maya. "Oh thank goodness..."

"Hey, it's okay." Maya patted his back. This was, to Luke's frustration, his usual reaction to a failed channelling of Brenda, so she was very practised in calming the young man down. "You get all those tears out if you need to, kiddo."

Luke shook in her arms for a minute or two as he slowly brought himself back under control. It took far longer than he wanted, but finally he felt able to unwrap himself from her neck and sit back on his own legs, rubbing the wetness from his eyes and cheeks. "I'm... I'm sorry."

Maya gave him a stern look. "Don't apologise. I keep telling you." She smiled again, patting his shoulder. "I know how awful it is not to have your mom around when you most want her to be there. It's important to be able to have a good cry about that every once in a while."

Luke sniffed and nodded. "Then thank you. And thank you for checking on my mum."

"No problem, kiddo." Maya watched Luke fondly as they both got to their feet. "Are you ready to face the others?"

Luke thought a moment, then shook his head. "I'll just go rest in my room for a while. Will you tell the others I'm okay?"

"Of course." Maya gave Luke a second, much shorter, hug. "You take all the time you need."

Luke smiled as he hugged her back.
Mondays were always a very quiet day for the Agency. Luke had his other job at the shelter to attend to, and Trucy and Machi were at school, leaving only Phoenix and Apollo around on a usual day.

Unfortunately, today was not quite 'usual'.

It had now been a week since Thalassa's return to California, and hers was a presence Apollo was still adjusting to. He loved that she was back in their lives, and that he had ready access to his birth mother whenever he wanted it (within reason, of course), but they'd only had four 'office' days with her so far and Thalassa had yet to settle in to a regular schedule. Whether or not she would appear on any particular day was so far turning out to be a perfect fifty-fifty: Tuesday, she'd showed up on time, helping Apollo and Luke process most of the letters and photos from Magnifi's memory box. Wednesday, she'd been absent getting started with converting some of the various rooms of her apartment into studio workspaces, so she would never have to go far when she wanted to record a quick demo... and Thursday, she'd been late joining everyone else at Hickfield precisely because she was getting down a sudden song idea that had hit her overnight. Lastly, on Friday, she'd been out interviewing various producers to replace her former Borginian one, and it was this same reason she'd given Apollo the previous evening to pre-emptively explain her absence today. Though there was nothing about her that was 'usual' yet, at least Apollo knew not to expect to see her. It would probably be another several weeks before Thalassa had a 'usual'.

Relatedly, with the passing of Thalassa's first week back in their lives, Maya's final week in America had begun. She was only going to be away for two years, but it still felt to Apollo like it was going to be forever, and he suspected everyone else was harbouring similar feelings... not just their family, but in what was left of Kurain Village's aging Council of Elders too. Somehow, Maya had convinced them to give her this final week off for an early handover of her 'duties', and she showed up at the office that morning happily boasting:

"I mean, they're taking over everything in my absence anyway, so why not start a week early while I'm still around in case they get it wrong?"

Phoenix raised an eyebrow. "In case they get it wrong? Aren't they the ones who decide when something's been done wrong?"

Maya scoffed and waved him off. "Anyway, I figured there's no point wasting my time doing spiritual training - I'll be doing enough of that once I'm in Khura'ìn - so I thought I'd make the most of my time with my fiancé and future step-children!" She grinned at Apollo, only to then pause and tap her cheek. "Not that most of them are actually around today..." She shrugged. "Oh well. I'm here now."

Apollo couldn't help laughing.

It had taken five minutes for the engaged couple to disappear into the apartment, leaving the office in Apollo's sole care. He could only sigh and settle himself down at his father's desk.
The Agency was very quiet indeed with only Apollo inside.

He didn't feel like watching TV, so Apollo passed the time browsing through his Court Record's files, organising old case records and the random notes that accumulated when he wasn't paying attention. He suspected he'd picked up the habit of constant note-taking from Luke, and it hadn't helped that it was so easy to do so once he had his own Court Record; The computer tablets had their own text program, and, after struggling to get used to the touch keyboard, Apollo had ended up setting it to display in all-caps, rather than the mishmash of upper- and lower-case that was the results of his attempts to use the new-to-him touchscreen keyboard at speed. Over a year later, he'd gotten used to both the keyboard and the display as it was, so, although his typing skills were much improved, he hadn't bothered changing it. The only problem was that his files tended to get named random assortments of letters - 'BNOABO', 'OHUSBUG' and 'ASDFOKINBTG' were some of his latest - and Apollo so rarely remembered to go back and rename them later, so as not to get lost in the sea of unintelligible filenames. It was easy to get distracted reading the old notes, so he tried only to scan them to figure out their topic, then rename the file (splitting it into separate files if he had to) and move to the appropriate folder. Some he was able to consolidate - such as separate to-do lists he found, one in its own file and another tucked away at the bottom of a block of text where he mused on ideas for potential magic tricks - or outright delete - such as a page of ideas for things to ask Magnifi about when he was channelled two weekends back. Some functioned more as diary entries, his own version of the journal he knew Luke kept, except that his 'diary' took a lot longer to get down to his own satisfaction; He was still finishing up his entries on Machi's trial, after all.

Tossing another file into its allocated folder, Apollo opened up the next one, expecting to see more notes on the events of Vera's case for his 'diary'. 'I really need a better way to keep track of my goals while in the middle of an investigation...' Instead, he found the top of something he'd nearly forgotten about:

**RHEA FORTUNA - LOOK UP LATER**

**HIT ON HEAD WITH LIGHTER, SAW NOTHING**

**LEFT ME WITH NAHYUTA WHILE PERFORMED, WENT TO BED, WOKEN BY ME CRYING, FOUND BUILDING ON FIRE, TRIED TO ESCAPE BUT PATH BLOCKED, HEARD WOMAN NEARBY, WENT TO HELP, WOMAN WAS QUEEN, HIT ON HEAD, FELL TO FLOOR, SOMETHING REFLECTED IN PLATE ON FLOOR, LIGHTER FELL, THING LEFT, TRIED REACHING FOR ME BUT PASSED OUT**

Below was a rewriting of Jove's story, using the bullet point notes as a guide and with added details Apollo hadn't had the time to write down originally. He vividly remembered, that night after meeting Jove, lying in his bed up in Kurain as he fleshed out the hurried notes into something more readable. Underneath that was a diary entry, his own musings on getting to meet his birth father for the first, and more-than-likely only, time. Apollo had to force himself not to read it, knowing he would get sucked in to the memories of that day in an instant. He closed the file, quickly renamed it 'JOVE JUSTICE', then tossed it into the folder labelled 'PERSONAL'.

'There. Now back to organising.'

Apollo reached out with his finger to open the next file... but paused before touching the screen.
He'd been planning to run a search on his paternal grandmother's name once they returned to the city... but, after the curveball of how Jove died, and the visit from Clark Triton the next day, Apollo had instead forgotten all about it. If he didn't do something about that right now, he'd just forget again, and never find out what kind of lawyer Rhea Fortuna was, or where she worked, or even the kind of cases she handled... but, if he got distracted looking her up right this instant, he'd only be putting off the important work of organising his notes til later. Again.

'On the one hand, I always have notes to organise, so it would be great to actually finish this job for once. On the other hand, just putting my grandmother's name in a to-do list feels kinda wrong...'

Apollo sighed, then navigated to and re-opened the file labelled 'JOVE JUSTICE'. Soon enough, there would be a 'RHEA FORTUNA' to join it.
ALL OVER CALIFORNIA JUST TO FIND WHERE SHE LIVED.

View the Court Record
Phoenix couldn't help but feel concerned for whatever his eldest son was up to today.

Maya's arrival at the office had been unexpected, but Phoenix welcomed it all the same. He hadn't meant to let her drag him off into the apartment for two hours (and what they did in private he would never tell Apollo on his life), but he couldn't say he hadn't enjoyed the opportunity to spend more time with her before she left. After their... *activities*, he did one last check to make sure neither he nor Maya had somehow put their clothes back on wrong, then they'd gone downstairs for lunch... only to find Apollo in the midst of heading out.

"I need to go to the library, to look some stuff up. Can I leave the office with you, Dad?"

"Um, sure."

Phoenix and Maya stayed in the office that afternoon... and didn't get up to anything else purely thanks to Phoenix's fear of a potential client walking in on them, which Maya luckily listened to. Thalassa's interview with her potential producer had ended earlier than expected, so she arrived at the office to join them sometime around two. Just the three of them sitting around chatting reminded Phoenix so heavily of that first week, before the younger Gramaryes knew their mother had returned. Of course, that was the past now, and much of their talk was specifically about work and how said children fitted into it, which was enough to remind Phoenix not to drift off into the memories.

"Speaking of the children..." Thalassa looked around the office curiously from her spot on one of the couches. "Where is Apollo?"

"He left earlier," Maya explained, sat opposite with Phoenix at her side. "Said he had to look something up at the library."

Thalassa frowned. "And what is he looking up?"

Phoenix shrugged. "Search me. He didn't say. Any ideas?"

Thalassa sighed and shook her head. "No. I'm afraid I'm as lost as you are."

Apollo returned in the middle of the afternoon, wandering into the office with his eyes scanning three sheets of paper in his hand. He was so distracted, he didn't even glance towards his three parents on the sofa, his focus on heading straight for the desk at the back of the room.

Phoenix and Maya both fought to stifle their giggles. Once Apollo was passing the piano, Phoenix shot a grin over his shoulder. "And a good afternoon to you, too."

Apollo jumped a bit at being addressed, glancing to the sofas. "Oh, um, hey Dad, Mom." He took another few steps before pausing again, giving them a double-take and staring at Thalassa. "Mom?! When did you get here?"
Maya scoffed. "I've been here since this morning. You forget already?"

Apollo blushed crimson as the three adults laughed. "Mom Thalassa. You knew I meant her."

"I finished early, and thought I'd join everyone here." Thalassa smiled. "Phoenix and Maya told me you went to the library."

"Yeah, I did." Apollo bit his lip as he shuffled the papers in his hand. "I, um... I found some things."

Phoenix raised his eyebrows. "Oh really? Going to share?"

Apollo nodded, still looking awkward. He didn't make any move to join them.

Thalassa patted the sofa at her side. "We're always ready to listen, when you want to talk."

Apollo considered her words for a long moment. Finally, he managed a small smile and moved across to sit at her side.

Maya jumped forward in her seat, leaning towards their son with a wide grin. "So, what you got for us, kiddo?"

Chuckling, Apollo deliberately held his papers close to his chest so not even Thalassa could peek. "Well... I don't think you two were there when I was telling the others about this." His gaze on Phoenix and Maya opposite, he jerked his head to point at Thalassa next to him. "When we met my birth father on Saturday, he was telling us about his mom, and that she died when he was a kid."

"Ah, yes: Rhea Fortuna was her name, I believe." Thalassa turned her eyes to the ceiling thoughtfully. "He said she was a lawyer of some kind, but that's all he remembered about her."

Phoenix blinked, eyes wide. "Really?"

Maya gasped. "That's awesome! You've got more than two lawyers in your family tree, Apollo!" She bounced a bit in her seat, still grinning. "Is that what you were doing at the library? Looking her up?"

Apollo nodded. "I couldn't find anything online, so I thought I'd try the newspaper archives at the library." He indicated the papers in his hand. "And... well, I found her."

Maya shuffled even further forward on her seat. "And?"

Phoenix rolled his eyes. He would never let on that it was Maya's (incredibly adorable) enthusiasm that was keeping him looking so outwardly calm about the whole thing. In truth, he was as intrigued as her.

Apollo stifled a giggle, turning his attention to his papers. "Just like he said, she was a lawyer in California. Not down here though; She lived in this really small town in the north, past San Francisco." He showed the top sheet in his collection to Thalassa, who reached out a hand to take it. "Once I found this article about her death, it was a lot easier to trace her. Apparently she was shot when a gunman stormed the courtroom mid-trial."

Maya gasped again, though this time with sorrowful eyes. "Aw, that's so sad..."

Phoenix rubbed his chin with a hand. "She was a trial lawyer? What kind?"

"A defence attorney, actually." Apollo shrugged, a slight blush on his cheeks. The hint of pride soon faded as he solemnly continued, "The guy who shot her was the brother of a guy the prosecutor had
convicted the previous day, so he was after revenge and... well, I guess he got confused about which side of the room was the prosecution."

Thalassa had a slight frown on her face as she read the article in her hands. "He killed both lawyers, the judge, and even a bailiff before he was disarmed and taken into custody."

Apollo nodded. "This was back in nineteen-ninety, which is why I couldn't find anything online."

Thalassa leaned back against the sofa cushions, still reading the article. "The same year my mother died... Rhea Fortuna was only twenty-five. Jove would have been six at most. I wonder if his father ever even told him what had happened?"

Phoenix frowned, thinking. He wanted to say such a situation would never happen today, especially with the kind of security their district's courthouse boasted, but said courthouse once had a defendant literally disappear from the witness stand, and anything that could be broken out of could equally be broken in to. It also concerned him that Apollo's grandmother and father had in turn died progressively younger... though, as Apollo had already surpassed Jove's age of death, it was more likely Phoenix was just seeing a pattern where there wasn't one.

Maya watched their son with concerned eyes. "Did you find out anything else about her?"

"Not much." Apollo sighed, his eyes on the two sheets still in his grip. "Her death was the biggest news-worthy thing to happen to her, which is why the article about it was the first thing I found... and it's from a San Francisco paper." He shrugged. "It gave me a location to find her in, but there really wasn't anything else new."

Phoenix gestured to Apollo's papers. "So, what are those? You found something other than that article, didn't you?"

Apollo snorted, flashing their contents to his father. "One's her obituary, the other's her birth announcement; It's not news that she was born or died." His smirk turned to a frown, the young man looking down at the papers in his hands. "These are the only other mentions of her in our library's archives, and both from papers covering the San Francisco area. I'd probably have to actually go to the town she lived in to find anything else."

Thalassa rested a hand on Apollo's shoulder. "If it's what you need to do, dear."

"That's just it: I don't know if I do." Apollo sighed, placing his papers on the table in front of him. "Don't get me wrong, it's super interesting finding out all this stuff about my biological ancestors that I never knew before... but, like... I don't know if it's really worth it going to that much trouble to find anything more." He pressed his hands to his knees, leaning on the outstretched arms. "From what my father told us, the man Rhea Fortuna married was an abusive asshole. I found out his name when I found her obituary, and... and I really don't want to know anything more about him. Finding out more about my grandmother will inevitably give me more about him, and I don't know if I want that." He chuckled bitterly. "Besides, it's kinda a bad time to be running off right now, isn't it?"

Maya scoffed, placing a hand to her chest with a mock-offended look. "Oh, you mean me? I didn't know you felt that way, Apollo."

Apollo blushed, failing to ignore his parents' muffled laughter. "Uh, n-not like that... I mean, with you leaving, and Dad going with you, right now is a bad time for me to be going anywhere too... You know?"

Maya grinned, reaching forward to pat her son's hand. "Don't worry, I know what you meant."
Apollo sighed, trying to look annoyed, but he couldn't hide the tiny smile on his lips.

Thalassa placed the article she'd been reading on the small pile next to Apollo. "Whatever you do next, you can count on our support, no matter what it is."

"Yeah, I know." Apollo hid his blush behind a tight focus on collecting the papers he'd walked in with. "Thank you. All three of you."

[View the Court Record]
And here it is, the beginning of the end.  
You may or may not remember, but a while ago I decided I was going to go ahead and finally break this monster of a fic into multiple smaller ones... but I didn't want to end the original in the middle of a storyline, so I was waiting for the beginning of the next major arc to mark this as 'complete' and move on.  
And that time has finally come.  
The actual story itself will continue, just in a new 'work' under the Luke and Apollo Wright series. If you're already subscribed to that, or are following Turnabout Adoption, you'll know when the next storyline starts going up. For now though, we've got six more chapters being uploaded over the following week. I hope you all enjoy them!

October 20, 1:53PM  
Drew Studio

Five days had passed since Vera had returned home from the hospital. Today marked two weeks since her father had suddenly collapsed in the middle of their shared studio in the front room, the beginning of the whirlwind that had given Vera the courage to put away her 'lucky charm' and work to overcome her fears for herself and herself alone. It was difficult, getting used to the house being so empty... but the Wrights had left a list of their phone numbers and assured her she could call them any time she needed to, for whatever reason. Knowing she wasn't the best talker, Luke had even assisted her in picking out what he called a 'mobile phone'; Once it arrived, he told her, she would be able to 'text' - send short written messages - instead of having to use her voice on her father's old landline. In the meantime, Vera tried simply to get used to living alone: She'd handled her very first grocery delivery the previous Friday, and though she'd felt stupid staring wordlessly at the kind man bringing everything in, at least now she knew how the whole thing worked. She was certain, next time, she'd have the courage to thank them before they left.

Today marked another important step in Vera overcoming her agoraphobia: As had been arranged last week, Thalassa and Phoenix were coming to visit, and the three planned to go out together to paint and draw. Vera had been fretting over the outing all weekend, getting out her nervousness in repeated sketches of dark corners of the house, so black the paper was nearly completely covered in graphite. She'd worn her pencil to a stub in the process, and was quickly working her way through a second. Now the day had come though, she had made herself put the sketchbook down, collecting together an easel, her stool, a canvas, and some assorted paints, all ready to go out and capture whatever might catch her interest in the world outside.

Vera just hoped her courage would hold out long enough to do so.

Knocks on her front door never failed to startle Vera, no matter where in the house she was. It was still an effort not to run and hide at the sound, as she used to, but she was getting better at heading straight for the door rather than away from it. There had been knocking on her door that very
morning - a smiling woman with a package and a small device for Vera to sign - so she felt a little more practised as she hurried to attend to the problem a second time. At least now she was reasonably certain who she'd see when she opened the door.

"Hello, Vera!"

Vera couldn't help a stare, her hands clutching the edge of the door. "Luke..." The young man was standing on her doorstep, hugging a silver rectangle to his chest with a friendly smile. Behind him, she could see his car on the road, with Phoenix and Thalassa stood nearby, the pair deep in conversation.

Luke giggled. "Sorry, did you forget I was coming, too?" He pointed a thumb behind him. "Thalassa was worried about carrying her new easel and paints all the way out here, so I offered to drive. That's why we had to wait for this afternoon, because I have my other job to go to on Tuesday mornings."

Now Vera thought about it, she did remember it being mentioned that Luke would be going with them, providing his car to carry their easels. She gave Luke a nod.


Vera nodded again, and stepped back to open the way inside, still clutching the edge of the door.

Luke stepped in, casually looking around. It didn't take long for his eyes to land on the table, where Vera had arranged her supplies. "Oh!" He slipped the rectangle in his arms into his satchel, hurrying towards the pile. "Your new phone came!"

Belatedly, Vera remembered the white box sitting next to her supplies, the item she had extracted from the parcel she received that morning. "Yes... I was not sure how to make it work..."

"That's alright. I'll show you everything you need to know." Luke shot her a friendly smile, picking up the box to tuck away in his satchel. "I'll get started setting it up while you three are painting. We can save time that way."

Vera thought over his words for a long moment. Finally, she managed a small smile. "Thank you."

It was a lot easier this time to make the trip from her front door to Luke's car out on the road. Vera supposed it was probably because she had her painting supplies to focus on, carrying them out to join Thalassa and Phoenix. Once again, Vera was directed into the front seat. At first, she simply watched the others arranging her things in the back of the car, but soon enough everyone else was joining her in their seats and they were able to get moving. It wasn't a long journey, certainly not when compared to her past trips to the detention centre or from the hospital; Luke took the car down the road and around a corner, then turned left to the side of the road, neatly slotting themselves between other cars either side. The nose of the car faced an orange brick wall, the same one Vera knew was across the road from her house.

"Here we are: Gourd Lake Park." Luke gestured towards the orange structure in front of them. "This is the closest I can get to the entrance... Sorry, Vera."

Vera followed the wall with her eyes. To her right, only barely visible around the other cars, she could see the gap Luke was referring to, where the wall opened into the tree-lined path beyond.

"Like we said last week, this is the perfect place to start," Phoenix said from behind her. "It's not too
far from your home, and it's very quiet compared to other parks. Plus, the lake should be quite impressive for you two to paint, if there's not too much fog today."

"And for you to draw, Phoenix." Thalassa chuckled. "That is why you came with us."

Phoenix nervously laughed, rubbing the back of his head. "Ah, yeah, of course..."

Luke turned to Vera with a smile. "Are you ready to go?"

Vera thought a moment, then nodded.

Like Phoenix had said, it seemed quiet... not that Vera had the experience to compare to anywhere else. Carrying their stools, easels, canvases, and other various supplies, the group of four headed down the path to the opening into the park. Vera stuck close to her friends, keeping her focus on the bag of paints, brushes, and canvas in her arms and her eyes on the concrete beneath her shoes. It was easier this way, to ignore the occasional passer-by as they progressed into the park. She caught only glimpses of the trees they walked past, watching the gravel path turn to grass, listening to the subtle crunching of their steps as it changed in the transition.

"There's a lot of people over there, Papa..."

"Don't worry, I know a spot around here that's pretty much guaranteed to be quiet."

"I thought you said you hadn't been here in years, Phoenix."

"Just trust me."

Vera followed the faint slap of Phoenix's sandals as they left the path, stepping over the ankle-height fence and into the open woods. The feel and sound of the leaves under her feet was very calming, and the branches above dimmed the bright sunlight, making it easier to pretend they were merely in a corridor of a building. The distraction of needing to step over tree roots helped too, as long as she pretended they were just an incredibly messy floor.

Finally, their path emerged into a clearing, and Vera made herself look up long enough to register where she was: Phoenix had led them along the shore of the lake, where the grass extended nearly to the water's edge. The ground was scuffed in several places, and sections of grass flattened. Nearby, Vera spotted a sign reading 'No Camping', complete with pictures of a tent and a campfire.

"See? Just like I said." Phoenix gestured around the clearing with a proud grin. "Nice and quiet, with a great view of the lake. This part of the park will never change."

Luke raised an eyebrow at the flattened grass. "Have people always been ignoring that sign, too?"

"For at least a decade." Phoenix placed the stools in his arms down on the ground, one by one. "Shall we set up here, ladies?"

It was very strange for Vera, setting up her easel and stool on ground that wasn't solid wood... but, then again, it was also strange to be getting out her paints and brushes anywhere other than her studio. Regardless, she pushed through it, sitting on her stool and putting her brush to the canvas like she was back home. In her head, she pretended she had the world's most amazing painting in front of her, provided by her father, and, as always, it was her job to copy it. She only allowed herself very quick glances towards her companions, enough to see Thalassa making her own hesitant brushstrokes with a deep frown of concentration, and the slight smile on Phoenix's face as his pencil made repeated, rapid movements across the paper of his sketchbook. Luke sat in the dirt behind them, the packaging of Vera's new phone piled in front of him as he worked on the device itself.
Vera smiled. She knew her anxiety would only soar again when they packed up and left, but for now... Now was just perfect. For the first time in her memory, she was outside, with friends... and she was finally relaxed.
It was almost becoming a regular thing, Apollo and Thalassa going to meet Trucy and Machi as they left school for the day. Sure, they hadn't done this every day since Thalassa's return, but Trucy still sported the biggest smile every time she saw her mother and oldest brother waiting outside the gates, as if every instance was the first time all over again. Machi met them with a much more sedate grin, but his tight hugs proved he still appreciated their efforts as much as his sister did. The only downside to the whole thing, in Apollo's opinion, was that going to his younger siblings' school meant hiding his distinctive hair spikes under his magician's top hat: All these years later, Jinxie was still wary around him otherwise. As Apollo wasn't keen on rekindling her enthusiasm for slapping paper wards on his forehead, wearing his top hat offstage was an acceptable (though annoying as hell) alternative. At the very least, Jinxie was able to greet him with a smile of her own before bidding her friends farewell and heading off home herself.

As they usually did when it was just the four of them, the Gramaryes headed back to Thalassa's apartment for the afternoon, stopping only briefly by the agency to drop off school-bags and wave hello to Phoenix, Maya, and Luke. Apollo took the chance to drop off his hat while they were there, and only rolled his eyes at the teasing jibes Phoenix and Maya threw at him in the process. He knew they were aware of what Thalassa and Apollo were planning to share with the two teens once they were alone. Just in case, it was good to have the rest of their family so close nearby.

Trucy led the way into their mother's apartment, dashing ahead to admire the view from the balcony at the back. She sighed dramatically. "You could never get sick of a landscape like this..."

Apollo smirked, locked eyes with his mother, and counted to three on his fingers.

"Well, I'm sick of it now." Trucy spun around with a grin, and bounced to the sofas.

Machi hid a giggle and ran to join his sister.

Thalassa shook her head. "Must you say that every time you come over?" She sat down at her daughter's side, petting Trucy's hair with a soft smile. "I may start to think you don't appreciate it here."

Trucy stuck out her lip in a pout, whining, "Mommy..."

Apollo snorted, moving to sit with his family. "Truce, save the jokes for our show, huh?"

"You can't turn off funny, Polly." Trucy crossed her arms, sticking her nose in the air. "Just like everything else in life, you gotta practise to be good enough to perform it."

"Then why do you waste so much time practising terrible jokes instead of good ones?"

Trucy paused, then stuck out her tongue at him in reply.

Thalassa sighed. "Maybe if the two of you could stop bickering for a moment?"

Apollo and Trucy grinned sheepishly.
Machi, who had ended up between them, giggled. "But that just who they are, Aska."

Thalassa nodded, giving her children a warm smile. "True." She let the embarrassed pair squirm for a moment before gesturing to the table in front of them. "Apollo, don't we have something to show your siblings?"

"Yup." Apollo shot the confused teens a wink as he pulled his Court Record from his bag. "Guess what we finally finished doing today?"

Trucy cocked her head to one side. "What?"

Machi gasped, pointing to the computer in Apollo's hands. "You finished the letters and photos!"

Thalassa laughed. "Indeed we did."

"Wow, cool!" Trucy clapped her hands, leaning forward impatiently. "Let's see, Polly! C'mon!"

Apollo grinned, fingers tapping away on his computer screen. "Calm down, it's coming." Finally, he laid his Court Record down on the table where all four of them could see it, the display showing an open folder full of image files, neatly labelled by date. Apollo scrolled through the files, showing where the yellowing paper turned to more colourful photos. "As cool as the letters are, I think it's the pictures that are the most interesting."

"Because you in some of them," Machi pointed out.

Apollo shushed him.

Trucy giggled, grabbing the computer herself. "Well, I want to read the letters first." She scrolled back to the top, checking everything was in order, then tapped the first file in the list. "Is this one from Grandma Gaia and Grandpapa Varlous? We can start with that."

As Apollo had already discovered, Trucy found that afternoon that the old letters were, for the most part, not all that interesting. She read aloud the first few from Gaia and Varlous, but as the descriptions of daily life began to repeat and blur together with all the unfamiliar names and confusing references, she began to skim more and more. Although his command of written English still struggled, Machi soon took over, intrigued by the occasional mention of "the orphanage across the road" and particularly of Gaia's "former classmate Sami Bonte, who has taken over the old place" and "younger brother, Lalu Salinen, who now runs a restaurant in town". However, even Machi began to burn out eventually; Thalassa's Mama and Papa had taken turns writing to Magnifi every week for just over two years - a period Apollo had dubbed 'the first era' - and Magnifi had kept every single one, resulting in a thick pile of one-sided correspondence that very slowly detailed Gaia's decline in health as village life droned on around them. Even worse, without the context the letters' authors could have provided, much of it was incomprehensible. During a four-month gap, Gaia's letters stopped, and were replaced by irregular and much less frequent letters from Varlous, who had started signing his letters as 'Winfred Geary' instead. Most of these were strictly business-related, talking about various machines he had built and discussing ideas for Magnifi's illusions. This period of thirteen years - what Apollo had dubbed 'the second era' - held interest only to the young magicians thanks to its discussion of their craft, but even Apollo and Trucy were keen to mostly skip over it. This lead easily into what Apollo called 'the third era': The era of the Justice Family.

With Thalassa around to give context, reading her own letters to her father for the year she was away was a very interesting journey indeed for her children... and especially for Apollo. Every new letter
led Thalassa on a wistful trip down memory lane, telling her children of the various adventures she and Jove got up to on their travels, including the time they were forced to settle for a while thanks to the late stage of her pregnancy. Apollo couldn't keep the grin from his face as he listened to his mother read aloud the letter that announced his birth:

"Dear Dad,

"I have some long-awaited news for you: You have a grandson! He arrived early yesterday morning, and actually woke the both of us up, though we can't help but forgive him for the rude awakening. I'm sure he'll give us many more in the years to come! We've decided to name him Apollo, by the way: Apollo Justice-Gramarye. I hope you approve? It was Jove's idea to give him both surnames. When he's older, he can choose just the one if he wants to. Looking at him, it's amazing to think a person can be so small... He's so tiny, Dad! Though I'm sure you felt like this with me, didn't you? I remember you talking about it before, though I forget the details. I'll just have to ask to hear it again when we next meet in person, huh?

"Little Apollo's been given a clean bill of health, and the two of us have spent the past day recovering. We were both pretty exhausted, but apparently sleeping it off was much easier for the baby than for me. Apollo always seems a little restless if one of us isn't actively holding him. Jove's trying to teach him to sing to keep him calm, never mind how ridiculous that sounds given our son is barely two days old. Jove just says his lungs are clearly ready for it, and I'll admit Apollo does sound like a belter with how loud his crying can be. I'm sure he will be musical once he's older, but we'll need to wait at least a few months to find that out for sure. And we'll teach him to appreciate magic too, Dad, don't you worry. I remember enough tricks to let him give the Gramarye name justice even if he doesn't follow your path. Ha, I didn't even realise I'd made that joke until I wrote it down! Jove says he will give the Justice name justice, too! We will both be proud of him no matter what the future might bring for us all.

"We hope to move on soon, and get back to travelling. I know it's recommended that very young babies don't travel, but they say the same about heavily pregnant women, and that never stopped me. Until it did, I mean. As soon as we're all ready again, we won't be wasting time. I can't wait to introduce you to Apollo.

"As always, love you Dad.

"Thalassa"

The letters that followed proved just as exciting: Although their travels slowed down with a baby on hand, Thalassa and Jove never stopped performing. They took turns, one of them caring for Apollo while the other took Jove's guitar and sang wherever they were permitted to. Jove was self-taught when it came to the instrument, but he'd picked it up well in the years since first meeting the Gramaryes, and had passed on his hard-earned knowledge to his wife. No matter which of them went out, they always brought back enough money to live on. Every time they entered a new country, Thalassa would write to Magnifi about their adventures, though her letters were much more focussed now on the adventure of raising their son than anything else. Apollo, Trucy, and Machi listened in rapt attention as five months passed over the span of nine digital sheets of paper.

"Our next destination is a little country in the mountains, by the name of Khura'in. It's possible to
take the road up, but it's far safer to fly, so we've decided to shell out for plane tickets. We'll only be there a couple of weeks, but it sounds far too interesting to not drop by and take a look around. I'll tell you all about it in my next letter."

Thalassa's face was pained as she returned Apollo's computer to the table. "But I never wrote that next letter."

Trucy bit her lip and gave her mother a hug.

"Khura'in...?" Machi tugged his shirt collar, deep in thought. "That is... where Maya going to, isn't it?"

"Oh, right, you didn't hear that part." Apollo blushed, running a hand through his hair. "I told you how my father died, right?"

Machi nodded, watching his brother. "He performed for a queen, and died in fire."

Trucy released Thalassa to shoot Apollo a glare. "You didn't tell him?"

Machi looked between the two, confused. "Tell me what?"

Apollo glared back at his sister. "I promised I'd tell Mom Maya, and I have."


Thalassa placed a hand on Trucy's shoulder, calming the girl. "Luke knows. Apollo told him last week."

Trucy bit her lip, but kept quiet.

Apollo sighed and turned to Machi. "So... That queen my father was performing for? She was the Queen of Khura'in."

"Oh." Machi frowned. "Why that such a big secret?"

Apollo bit back the lie that it wasn't, knowing Trucy would just jump down his throat if he did. "It... just wasn't important enough to mention. This was over twenty years ago, after all."

Machi thought a moment, then nodded. "Okay."

Trucy fidgeted, but said nothing.
With the end of the era of the Justice Family, Geary's irregular business letters resumed. Although the family returned to skimming his words, they picked up enough in what little wasn't about magic or machinery to guess Magnifi was keeping the man informed on Thalassa. Five years after Jove's death, and Geary was praising Thalassa's decision to remarry. Another couple of years later, Geary was happy to hear of the birth of her daughter. Every so often, he would leave a vague comment at the end of his letters - "Trucy sounds so adorable", "Little girls are supposed to be well-behaved, from what I've heard", "It seems Trucy takes after her mother and grandmother in that regard" - that they could only guess were in reply to stories Magnifi had detailed in the now-missing other half of the conversation.

Four years worth of paper passed in a moment, and the letters entered what Apollo called 'the fourth era', the final few years of correspondence: The Era of Lamiroir. Suddenly, Geary's letters were regular and often, and, instead of business, they detailed Thalassa's recovery after her accident. Geary's attempts to rebuild Thalassa's broken memory were heart-breaking to read, and for none of them more than Thalassa herself. They read aloud Geary's side of a heavy conversation about what to do for her, including a steadfast routine in an effort to repair her memory, and putting her in her own house to return her self-sufficiency. With nothing they did producing results, Geary was very nervous indeed about getting Thalassa a job.

"On the contrary, you are not worrying enough. We've tried routines, we've tried giving her her own place. None of it is working, Magnifi. I appreciate that you miss her singing, but I don't think doing more of it will help her. I especially don't want to resort to putting her in Lalu Salinen's hands. You may not remember, but this is the man Gaia thought of as her little brother, and she loved him so much she refused to let him see her on her death bed so he would remember her as she used to be. If anyone's going to recognise who Thalassa is, it will be him. That won't be much of a fresh start for her, will it?

"On top of that, there is the issue of how shady your idea sounds. 'Hello there sir, here is a blind woman with goldfish memory, but she sings beautifully and we want you to put her on your stage. Please don't ask me literally anything else about her.' No one in their right mind will accept that at face value. I'll be lucky if he doesn't call the police on me."

Even though they knew what was coming next, the kids couldn't help laughing when they moved on to the next letter:

"Holy cow, Salinen went along with it. I don't know if he recognised Thalassa or not, but he heard her sing and agreed to everything. He's personally escorting her from her front door to the stage, and back again when she's done. You should see Thalassa on stage, Magnifi. She's truly at home up there, far more than anywhere else in this town. Salinen has dubbed her 'The Siren', and she's
already accumulating a few fans among the regulars. Obviously, I've been dropping in to check on her, and I don't know if it's just wishful thinking or not, but she seems to be improving. If nothing else, I hope she regains her short-term memory. That was the option you considered the happiest for her, wasn't it?"

From that point on, Geary's correspondence decreased in regularity, and returned to being mostly business-talk. However, Geary always put a paragraph aside to discuss Thalassa, keeping Magnifi updated on whatever distant glimpses Geary could get of their daughter.

"I've been going in later and leaving earlier to visit Thalassa. She is definitely improving. There weren't any panic attacks today about losing her train of thought, or not knowing where she was. I think we're close to the point where she doesn't need me around at all."

"Thalassa has regained her short-term memory! I know for sure because she joked after her song today that the audience are cheering harder for her every week. She is still going by The Siren - or Lamiroir to be specific - so no word yet on if her existing memories are close behind."

"I discovered today that Thalassa is getting herself to and from the restaurant, no escort needed. She has truly become self-sufficient, as we hoped she would. I've removed my name from the ownership of her house, and replaced it with 'Lamiroir'. It's her's now, after all."

Two years' worth of letters passed their eyes. Worries about Thalassa were replaced with worries about Magnifi, news having reached Geary of his old friend's diagnosis of liver cancer. Geary's letters grew shorter, discussion of work disappearing from the pages. When he did mention Thalassa, it was only to assure her father that she was doing well.

"Have I mentioned how Salinen supports the local orphanage? Apparently they've picked up a young talent there, good enough that he's been paired off with Thalassa. I've included a photo so you can see for yourself. The boy plays the piano, and Thalassa sings. They make a good pair. Gaia would be proud, I think."

Machi grinned. "He talking about me!" Taking the computer from Apollo, he swiped a finger across the screen to read the next letter... only to pause and frown. "Isoveli?" He showed his brother the photograph on the display, one of a young Magnifi and Geary. "Where is next letter?"

Apollo flashed an awkward smile. "Well... There isn't one."

Trucy's eyes widened. "There isn't?"

"No." Thalassa sighed, a sad look on her face. "That must have been the final letter my father read before his death."
"Oh." Machi lowered the computer to his lap, disappointed.

Apollo patted the boy's back. "Hey, it's okay. You got to meet Grandpa Magnifi in the end anyway, remember? He knows about you."

Machi smiled. "Yes. And Grandpapa Varlous saw us perform, at beginning."

"And Mister Salinen was the one who hired you!" Trucy giggled, turning to Thalassa. "He's, like, our great-uncle, right? 'Cause he was Grandma Gaia's brother."

Thalassa chuckled, eyes far away. "I suppose he is. I told him about the three of you, too."

"They all know we're together, then." Apollo took his computer, scanning through some of the photos there. "After everything everyone went through, at least they know we had a happy ending."

Thalassa frowned, thinking. "But I spoke to Monsieur Salinen and Papa when I was actually in Borginia. They knew I was going back to you three, but we hadn't reunited yet. Her eyes drifted far away, unfocussed. "I couldn't tell them much of anything about my biological children... I didn't even know the two of you yet."

Apollo looked up from his screen, watching their mother with concern.

Trucy huffed and crossed her arms, an expression on her face that Apollo didn't doubt was an impression of Luke. "Well that won't do. We can't have family, however distant, not know for sure we're alright. Even Uncle Valant knows we're all together now!" She held up her fists, giving Machi and Thalassa determined looks. "You know Mister Salinen and Grandpapa Varlous's addresses, right? We'll write them a letter, like all the ones Grandpapa Varlous wrote to Grandpa Magnifi! We can tell them ourselves how great everything is now!"

Machi gasped, mouth open in a wide smile. "That is great idea! Can we do that, Aska?"

"I... don't see why not, I suppose." Thalassa slowly grinned, a twinkle in her eyes as she watched her children. "Your thoughts, Apollo?"

Apollo shrugged. "No objections here." He couldn't resist ruffling Machi's hair with a chuckle. "Only question is, are we writing them letters individually, or as a group? And can Mister Salinen even read English, or will Trucy and me have to sit out his one?"

"That two questions." Machi grinned cheekily.

Apollo gently shoved the boy's head downwards with a smile.

Thalassa hid a laugh. "I don't think he can read English, no. I think, perhaps, all of us should write a short letter to each of them, and Machi and I will translate your and Trucy's letters to Monsieur Salinen. That would work best."

"I will do translating!" Machi bounced in his seat, throwing his arms around his siblings. "It will be good practise for me, yes?"

"That sounds great! Let's do it right now before we forget!" Trucy hugged her younger brother tight, then jumped to her feet. "Mommy, where do you keep your paper?"
"Papa,

"It's been a while, hasn't it? Knowing what I know now about the family I was born into, I couldn't rest easy thinking of our last discussion as the only contact I would ever have with my papa. I'm all settled in here in America, and my delightful children have talked me into writing you some letters, so we might all have the chance to get to know each other. I'll admit, it was mostly prompted by a stash of letters we obtained from Dad, ones he had kept for years. They all came from you, and from Mama, and there were even some from me, which was a real trip down memory lane. We spent the afternoon poring over them, talking about everything inside... Mama's illness, Apollo's birth, my accident, Dad's illness... After so much pain in the Gramarye family, we wanted to make sure one of its oldest members knew there was a happy ending to it all. The children have written their own letters. Poor Machi still struggles with his English, so his is in Borginian. I hope you don't mind, as I assured him you must surely be fluent with how long you've lived there.

"If you want to write back, I'm sure we would all appreciate it. I don't know how easy it would be for you, but I've included my new address if you're able to respond.

"Love, Thalassa"

"To Mr. Salinen,

"Hello. My name is Apollo, and I'm the oldest child of Thalassa "Lamiroir" Gramarye. I don't speak Borginian, so Machi's translating this for me, and we're both sorry if I come across as awkward as a result. I'm sure our mother told you in her letter that we decided to write to you because you were the brother of our grandmother, and thus a member of our family. I don't think we're ever likely to meet, but it can only be a good thing to make sure you're aware we exist, so you know everything turned out okay in the end. Mom and Machi tell me you got them performing together, and looked after them until they got picked up by that producer. We've also read some of Grandma Gaia's old letters to our grandfather, where she talked about how proud she was to see you starting up a restaurant even though she was too ashamed to talk to you. We could send you copies of those ones if you want them. Oh, and thank you for all the help you gave Mom, and Machi, even though they were just a strange blind woman and an orphaned kid to you. If it wasn't for everything you did for them, Trucy and I might never have found our mother, or got to meet our little brother Machi. We've all been together for a week and a half now, and I'll always be grateful for the chance to know my mother, when I spent so long thinking it would never happen. Getting Machi as part of the deal is a bonus, really.

"I'd better wrap this up. Thank you for reading, if you've gotten this far.

"Apollo Wright-Gramarye"

"Dear Grandpapa Varlous,

"Hello! My name is Trucy Wright, but my fans all know me as Artemis Gramarye. I don't know everything Grandpa Magnifi told you about me, but it was all a long time ago, and Mommy agreed we had to catch you up so you know we're all doing okay. She told us everything that happened while she was in Borginia too. You aren't being punished too badly, are you? I was really sad when I heard how unkind Grandpa Magnifi had been to you, and it wasn't fair that I had another granddad all this time I didn't even know about! Once Apollo and I revive Troupe Gramarye, maybe we can come and visit you in Borginia one day? The rights have been passed down to me, but we're
still amateur compared to The Great Magnifi, so it might take a while. I don't think Machi will be able to come with us, but Mommy might. I guess we'll have to see, huh?

"Mommy told you how Apollo and me got adopted together after Grandpa Magnifi died, didn't she? Daddy Zak had to leave, so Daddy Phoenix took me in, and then he found Apollo and recognised his bracelet as one of Mommy's, so he got adopted too! I was so surprised to find out I'd had a big brother all that time! Although I only didn't know about him before because everybody thought he'd died when he was a baby. We've been performing together for six years now. If we ever get to visit you, we'll show you our act!

"I'd better go now. It was great to get to talk to you!

"Trucy"

"M. Salinen,

"It's been a while since we last met in person. Lamiroir told me the news of what I did has reached Kopunchiville. I wanted to say first of all how sorry I am for disappointing everyone like that. There's no excuse for what I did, and I should have known better than to think I could get away with it. I can only hope you can forgive me for my terrible mistake. I'm just thankful it was Apollo Wright who stood up for me when I was caught. He knew so quickly that we were both Lamiroir's sons, brothers, and he didn't stop trying to help me no matter how hard I made it for him. I won't ever feel safe returning to Borginia, but please know I am happy here. I have my mother Lamiroir, my brother Apollo, and my sister Trucy, and a whole extended family beyond them, and we all love and support each other in everything we do. It's a bit like life in the orphanage, except Trucy and I are the youngest by far. Well, technically cousin Pearl is our age too, but after her is our brother Luke, and he's grown up. He works as a vet at an animal shelter near here. (By the way, how is Keltanen doing? Could you give her a pat from me? Or a scratch behind the ears?) I'm going to school again, and learning English. Because of my punishment for the smuggling, I can't perform with Lamiroir right now, but I'm keeping up my piano skills so we can travel again once my probation is over.

"Before I go, I want to thank you again for everything you did for us. I've never forgotten it was you who introduced me to Lamiroir in the first place, and it's only because of that I have the family I have right now. That sort of includes you, doesn't it? You were my grandmother Gaia's brother, so you'd be our grand-uncle, right? I'm not sure what the proper Borginian word is for that, so I'm just guessing.

"Thank you again,

"Machi Gramarye"

View the Court Record
Another Saturday had come and gone all too quickly, and at last it was time for the extended Wright family to say goodbye to one of its members.

"I'll take those for you, Maya."

Maya nearly jumped, so lost in her own head as she leaned over the open back of Luke's small car. Standing at her side, holding out one hand in his trademark polite fashion, was Luke himself, giving her a warm smile. Maya hid her surprise behind a laugh and a wink, waving the young man off.

"You going to hide them away so I have to stay and spend more time with you, huh?"

Luke's face tightened a little, though his smile stayed firm. "It's the job of a gentleman to carry a friend's bags for them... and you have a lot more to carry than Papa."

Maya fought to keep the grin on her face despite the awkwardness in the air. Behind Luke, she could see the rest of the Wrights - Phoenix, Apollo, and Trucy - waiting on the pavement for her to join them. Phoenix had already pulled out his lone travel suitcase (indeed a smaller one than either of Maya's), and Trucy was idly playing with the extendible handle as she pretended not to be listening. Phoenix and Apollo mostly had their attention on the teenage girl, but cast frequent and furtive glances towards Maya. She didn't need to be as familiar with them all as she was to see how concerned they were... and she hated seeing anyone in pain, let alone her own family. Sighing, Maya let her grin fall to a more neutral smile and patted Luke's shoulder. "I was just joking. You guys really need to stop worrying about me." Before Luke could reply, she stepped back and gestured to her bags in the back of his car. "You can take them if you want to."

Relieved to have something to do, Luke gladly pulled out the two large suitcases, then slammed closed the back door.

"Don't forget to lock up the Lukemobile!" Trucy called.

Luke bit back a displeased look, digging out his keys from a pocket. "I was just about to."

Maya hid a giggle, skipping over to join the rest of the immediate family. "We'd better go look for the others now, huh? Don't want them to miss saying goodbye."

Phoenix nodded with a wry smile. "We got separated pretty quick. Hopefully Clay found his way here alright."

"Clay may seem like a ditz, but he has a knack for never getting lost." Having waved off his father's concerns, Apollo then pulled out his phone. "I'll just tell Mom Thalassa where we are so they know where to find us."

Trucy bounced up on her toes, scanning the slow-moving cars of the busy parking area. "Will they take very long?"

Luke had locked up his car by now, and was pulling Maya's suitcases onto the pavement. "I'm sure
they'd... Oof." He grunted as he dragged the wheeled bags over the lip of the gutter with a final tug. "They'd have let us know if they were too far behind."

Maya felt Phoenix's eyes on her, and looked up to meet them. His furrowed brow told her he was already running over the possibility the other half of their party would be late, calculating the delay and comparing it to everything else he and Maya had to do before boarding their plane. Maya couldn't help a snort at his typical worrywart nature, and jabbed a finger in his arm. "Stop it. They'll be here in plenty of time, Nick."

Phoenix didn't look convinced, lips pursed in a frown. "Maybe... we should go ahead and check in our bags anyway. Then we'll be all ready to go through security once they've arrived."

Maya huffed and rolled her eyes, but agreed.

It had been a bit of a hectic day for Maya and her extended family. She'd left Kurain Village early that morning, bidding her goodbyes to the Elders and various friends and acquaintances. With Pearl and Iris helping carry her bags, she'd headed straight for the Wright Anything Agency to surprise her fiancé. It wasn't much of a surprise really, as he (and Trucy and Machi, of course) was fully expecting her arrival, but he'd played along anyway and Maya loved him all the more for it. Apollo, Luke, and Thalassa caught up not long after, and though the group hadn't specifically done anything else that day, just hanging out with her family was all Maya really wanted... especially knowing this would be the last time she saw them all together for a very long and lonely two years. She found herself paying extra close attention to every little detail of everything everyone did, trying to memorise the events of the day so she would have something to treasure until her return.

Naturally, when Maya actually got on her plane at the airport, her family all wanted to be there, to spend as much time with her as possible while they could. The only problem was, her bags were a bit bulky to be carrying around on public transport, and Luke had happily offered to take them in his car instead... his car which could only carry five people maximum of the nine that made up their group, none of which could drive except for him. It had been Apollo who'd found the solution when the problem was discussed earlier that week, calling in his housemate Clay, who had been more than happy to help. Clay showed up at the Agency that afternoon, and somehow Maya and the four Wrights had ended up in Luke's car while Pearl, Iris, Thalassa, and Machi all ended up in Clay's. Maya expected the other car to arrive at the airport soon enough.

It didn't take very long for Phoenix and Maya to check in their suitcases, Phoenix's lone medium-sized blue one and Maya's two larger purple ones (Luke had only given them up reluctantly when she insisted on making him wait with his siblings). As she idly chatted with the worker handling their tickets, Maya could feel the drowsiness already tugging at her body. It had been a long day already, and she only had an even longer journey ahead of her, flying across the Pacific Ocean and into Asia before arriving in Khura'in. She hoped to get some sleep on the plane, but until then she had no choice but to plaster a smile over her exhaustion and push on. She didn't want her family worrying about her, after all.

Phoenix wrapped an arm around Maya's back as they finally left the check-in counter, his hand resting on her hip. "You holding up okay?"

Maya nodded, idly fiddling with the ring on her finger. She had a feeling she would be drawing a lot of comfort from it over the next two years. "Of course. I'm always okay, Nick."

Phoenix raised a disbelieving eyebrow.
"I am." Maya tried not to sulk, whacking her fiancé with the back of her hand.

"Sure." Phoenix cracked a small smile, but it was obvious he was just lying to appease her.

As they approached the place they'd left the three Wright kids, Maya quickly noticed their patience had been rewarded: The half of their party that had been in Clay's car had arrived, all eagerly awaiting the travelling couple's return. Pearl particularly was waving excitedly to her cousin.

"Mystic Maya! We were worried we'd miss your plane!"

Maya grinned, skipping to meet the teen and enveloping her in a hug. "Aw, I wouldn't leave before getting to say goodbye to you, Pearly."

Pearl squeezed Maya tight in response. "I wouldn't want you to miss your plane either, Mystic Maya..."

"Well, we're not leaving just yet." Phoenix patted the girl's shoulder with a smile. "You've got at least a few more minutes with us."

Machi stood at Thalassa's side, his face scrunched tight as he clung to her hand. He whimpered quietly, then flung himself at Phoenix and grabbed the man around the middle. "We will miss you both while you are away, Isa!"

Phoenix looked a little bewildered at the boy's reaction, enough that Maya had to hide her laughter at the sight. He gently placed his hands on Machi's shoulders, pushing him back and leaning down to match his height. "Machi, I'm only going to be away for two weeks. I'll be right back in no time. You don't have any objections to Apollo looking after you until then, do you?"

Machi shook his head, rubbing at his eyes with a hand.

"Then what are you so upset at me for?" Phoenix smiled, then gestured to the woman at his side. "Why don't you tell Maya how much it'll suck not having her around?"

Blushing, Machi reluctantly withdrew from the man and turned to Maya, stepping into the space left by Pearl as she retreated out of his way. "I... I really will miss you, Maya. I wish you not have to leave for so long."

Maya bit back a giggle and patted the boy's shoulder. "And I'll miss you too, Machi." She pulled him into a hug. "Anyone would miss being around you, sweetheart."

Machi's cheeks only reddened all the more as he sheepishly returned her affection, trying his hardest to ignore the chuckles of the rest of their family.
Phoenix didn't wait long to direct their group closer to the security checkpoint, the furthest in visitors could go to see their loved ones off. The youngest of their group - Machi, Trucy, and Pearl - all clung close to the departing couple, not exactly eager to say goodbye. Apollo and Luke similarly stood close, though they were better able to hide their discomfort with the situation behind a forced nonchalance. Iris and Thalassa had the advantage of not being quite as attached to Phoenix and Maya as the couple's children, though they still cared greatly that it would be so long until Maya was back for good. Clay, on the other hand, was barely paying attention, his hands in his pockets as he casually sauntered behind the group, curiously watching the crowds around them. Maya mused he was probably the luckiest of them all, having met her so rarely over the years despite his status as 'honorary brother' to her eldest sons; Not seeing Maya for two years was nothing too out of the ordinary for Clay.

Once they'd found a space in sight of security, Phoenix and Maya waited until the last possible second to go through with the heartbreaking inevitability of the actual goodbyes. It was bad enough to watch the terror flick across their kids' faces every time one of them looked up to the clock on the nearby display. Finally, Phoenix sighed, waving the conversation to a halt. "Okay, we honestly can't waste any more time. We have to go, or we're in danger of missing the plane."

The group fell into an awkward silence, most everyone staring at the floor with a sad look. The first to break the atmosphere - perhaps unsurprisingly - was Clay, stepping forward to shake Maya's hand. "Good luck in Asia, ma'am. I hope you have fun, and we'll all be waiting for your return."

Maya couldn't help a smile, shaking the young man's hand vigorously. "Aw, thank you, Clay. That's very kind of you." She cast a cheeky look over Apollo and Luke before returning her gaze to Clay. "You'll look after my two boys until I get back, won't you?"

Clay laughed, a hand on his visor. "You bet! I'll keep 'Pollo and Luke out of trouble for ya, no problem."

Apollo rolled his eyes. Luke just giggled.

"I'll be running a check-up on them when I get back, just to make sure." Maya gave Clay a wink. "And if they have gotten into trouble, you better watch out, 'cause I'll be seeking revenge on you, mister."

Clay smirked and winked back. "Try and catch me, old lady." He promptly shot her twin finger-guns with a click of his tongue, then walked backwards out of the conversation. Maya was too amused to stop him.

Iris stepped forward into the empty space, hands folded at her belly. Her eyes flicked up to Maya's only occasionally, and her mouth was twisted in a worried smile. "Mystic Maya, I... I cannot express how thankful I am to you for everything you've done for me over the past four years. I truly don't deserve any of your kindness."
"Don't say that!" Maya slipped into a stern glare, gripping the other woman's upper arms. "Iris, you're family. You deserve so much more than what you got, and I told you long ago I don't want to hear another word about it."

"I know. I'm sorry." Iris tugged on a lock of hair, nervously twirling it between her fingers. "I just... It won't be the same in Kurain Village without you around. I know how important this training is, but... I really will miss you."

Maya's eyes crinkled in sympathy. "I'll miss you too, cuz." She pulled the other woman into a hug, her arms wrapped around Iris' purple kimono. "You'll keep an eye on Pearly for me, won't you? And on the Elders?"

Iris laughed - They had already discussed Iris becoming her sister's guardian in Maya's absence - and patted her taller cousin's back. "You needn't worry about me, Mystic Maya. I will keep the village ready and waiting for your return." She pulled out of the hug with a smile. "You remembered to pack the hood and gloves I gave you, didn't you? I hate to think of you getting too cold up in those mountains."

Maya scoffed and waved a hand. "Sure I packed 'em. You think I'm gonna turn down a thoughtful gift like that?" She turned to the others, proudly jerking a thumb at her elder cousin. "Iris here found out Khura'in's average altitude is about the same as Hazakura, so she's been prepping me for the cold and the snow."

Pearl gasped. "Oh! I didn't know you did that, Iris!"

Iris blushed, then turned to Phoenix. "I'm sorry I don't have a spare hood to give you, Feenie. I... didn't think to bring one today."

"Don't worry about it; I've already got one." Phoenix shot her a grin and pulled up the hood of his sweater. "I'll only be up there a couple of weeks, anyway. I can hold out that long."

"We'll see about that, Nick." Maya elbowed him with a smirk, bumping him enough that his hood fell back behind his neck.

Phoenix shushed his fiancée before returning his gaze to Iris. "Thank you for thinking of me. And of Maya too, of course."

Iris blushed harder, dipping her head in a polite bow before shuffling out of the way.

It was Thalassa who stepped forward next, gripping Maya's hands with a sad smile. "Goodbye, Maya. I may not have been here very long, but even I can tell it will not be the same with you away. We will all eagerly await your safe return."

"Thank you, Thalassa." Maya pulled the woman into a hug. "We didn't have nearly enough time to get to know each other before I had to go. Life just sucks sometimes."

Thalassa chuckled as they pulled apart. "Indeed it does."

Maya ran her eyes over the younger half of the group, trying not to show her concern on her face. "Thalassa, you'll... You'll look after the kids for me, won't you?"

"It's the least I could do." Thalassa glanced back at them with a warm look: Apollo had his arms over Trucy and Machi on either side, both teens clinging to his vest under his cape, while Luke stood nearby, patting Machi's shoulder sympathetically. Opposite him, Pearl imitated Luke's actions for Trucy. All five watched the conversation with various levels of embarrassed distress.
continued, "You looked after them when I couldn't be here, so it's only right I return the favour." She turned to Phoenix, who was also watching the younger group with the kind of concern Maya expected to see from him (and, though she'd never admit it out loud, the same kind of concern she was busy hiding). "Especially for these next two weeks, while both of you are away."

Maya heard a grunt from Apollo, and was still turning her head towards him when Machi catapulted himself onto her torso, arms wrapped tight around her upper body so that all she could see when she looked down was a golden bob of hair at her chin... and even that was hard to make out over how hard the boy was shaking. His voice was muffled, the boy speaking directly into her chest: "P-please... Please not go..."

"Oh, Machi, you poor baby!" Maya hugged the sobbing boy, unsure what exactly to do for him and trying not to burst into tears herself. "I... I can't not go, I have to...! Please don't cry, kiddo..."

In an instant, Phoenix and Thalassa had joined them, already working to comfort the boy: Phoenix was crouching at Maya's side, one hand on her back while the other patted Machi's arm, while Thalassa focussed on Machi, standing behind him and rubbing his shoulders.

"Machi?" Thalassa murmured something, but Maya couldn't make out the words. It was only when Machi reluctantly pulled away from the hug and choked out a lengthy reply that she realised the pair weren't speaking English. The boy sobbed and stumbled over his words, clinging to Thalassa's arm with one hand while fruitlessly drying his eyes with the other, but Thalassa simply nodded in understanding as she listened intently. Once he had finished, she hugged Machi close and looked up to Maya and Phoenix. "He is... scared to see you both leaving at once. Two years is such a long time as it is, and he says any kind of accident on the way would mean we don't see either of you for... for even longer than that."

Maya pressed her hands to her mouth, blinking back the tears. She hated herself for breaking down so easily just because one of the children was crying, but she couldn't stop. 'I can't let this be the last they see of me for two years... Get a hold of yourself, Maya! Aren't you supposed to be the Master of the Kurain Channelling Technique? Where's your composure!?'

Phoenix stepped forward and pulled the boy into a hug, and Machi didn't hesitate clinging to the man's hoodie. "Machi, no-one's saying two years isn't a long time. And it's true that every time we part, there's a danger we'll never meet again... but that's a danger we face every single moment of every day. If you make the decision to worry about that kind of thing, you'll only find you're too busy being scared of the possibility something will go wrong to enjoy the time you do have with us." He paused, and Maya realised in the silence that Machi's tears had finally quietened. Phoenix gently pushed the boy away and leaned down to meet Machi's blue eyes on their level. "Even if the worst does happen, do you want to live with the regret of having been too scared of saying goodbye to actually say it to our faces?"

Machi could only sniff in reply, his cheeks stained with wet streaks as he studied Phoenix's face with wide eyes.

"You should listen to Nick about this, Machi. He's the expert on worrying about our safety."

Immediately, the kids all broke out in muffled giggles, including Machi himself.

Phoenix turned to Maya with a raised eyebrow. "Gee, I wonder why that is. It couldn't possibly be because my closest friend for ten years now kept getting herself killed the first three years I knew her... Or, at least, getting herself killed as far as I knew."
Luke suddenly found it a lot harder to hide his laughter. Even Iris was covering her grin with a hand.

Maya scoffed and waved the comment off. "Excuses, excuses."

Machi wiped the worst of the tears from his face, then hugged Phoenix tight. "Goodbye, Isa." He then walked over to Maya, hugging her just as hard. "Goodbye, Maya. Be safe while you are away, okay?"

Maya grinned as she hugged him back. "That's a promise, kiddo."

With one last sniff, Machi pulled away. He gave Maya a small smile before once more retreating to Thalassa's side.
Pearl stepped forward, taking Machi's place to pull Maya into a quick hug. Holding her cousin's hands, she stared into Maya's eyes with a stern look. "Mystic Maya, you will keep talking to Mister Nick once he comes back home, won't you?"

Maya snorted, and raised her left hand to show off her ring with a flutter of her fingers. "You think a little thing like distance and time-zones is gonna keep me from my stubborn fiancé?"

Phoenix raised an eyebrow, hands shoved deep in the pockets of his hoodie. "Who's the stubborn one here? Besides," he turned to the teen with a small smile, "Pearls, you won. We're getting married. Why isn't that enough for you to stop bugging us?"

"Everyone knows getting together is only the beginning of the story, Mister Nick." Pearl gave him a triumphant grin, ignoring Phoenix's groan, then returned her attention to Maya. "We'll all miss you, Mystic Maya."

"And I'll miss all of you, Pearly." Once more fighting tears, Maya pulled her young cousin into another hug. "No amount of intense training could stop me there."

Pearl parted from the hug with a wide grin, then retreated to join her sister.

Checking off the list in her head, Maya knew she had only three people left to say her goodbyes to... and they were going to be the most difficult of all. It was hard to keep the smile on her face, however strained it was, as she lifted her eyes to meet the huddled trio. "Hey, kids."

Trucy squeaked once, tears already forming, then tore herself away from Apollo's side to leap at Maya and cling to the woman's kimono. "I'll really miss you, Mommy!" Her hat, tossed sharply at Maya's face, slipped back on the girl's head, but still blocked Maya's view.

Surprisingly, Apollo wasn't far behind, throwing his arms around the pair (though he spared a hand to catch the top hat before it slipped too far off his sister's head). "We'll all miss you, Mom."

Seeing them trying so hard not to cry made Maya's own battles somehow even harder, and she hugged the two back. Unable to speak for fear of sobbing, she peered over the top of Trucy's head to find Luke had also followed his siblings, though he now stood apart from them. His hands were curled into fists at his sides, slightly shaking, and his face was strained, only just holding back tears; Maya couldn't help but be filled with concern for him, enough to instantly dry her own eyes. She slightly pushed Trucy away to allow her to look at the young man properly. "Luke? Are you okay?"

Luke stood in silence for a moment, his eyes trained on Maya's feet so he wouldn't have to look at her - or his siblings' - faces; Given he was the tallest of all of them, this was quite an impressive feat. "G-gentlemen don't cause scenes in public..."
Maya's worry for him grew. She felt the other two Wright children stepping away, and took the movement as a cue to step towards their brother and pull him into a tight hug. A part of Maya idly wondered how many times she had done this exact action today... but most of her simply didn't care, hungry for every last bit of physical contact with her family she could get. As for speaking to her middle son, she couldn't think of anything to say. Perhaps it was better she keep quiet.

Luke loosely slung his arms behind Maya in a half-hearted hug, his hands pressed to her back. "I-I'm sorry, Maya..."

"There's nothing to be sorry about." Maya pulled back and pushed the young man's chin upwards to force him to look her in the eyes. Suddenly the tears were threatening again, making it hard for her to speak. "I will miss you so much while I'm away. All three of you." She turned, forcing a smile for Trucy and Apollo (the former clinging to the latter's arm). Trucy blinked back tears, then ran to grab Maya around the middle once more. As Maya hugged the girl, Apollo moved to join them, and patted his brother's shoulder with a small smile. Luke was busy wiping his eyes, but managed to force one in return.

After a short pause, Trucy pulled away to give Maya a stern stare. "Mommy, if you ever have the chance to come back and visit us, you'll take it, won't you?"

Maya winced. "That's not gonna happen, sweetpea..."

Trucy's pout deepened. "Promise."

Maya sighed. It was more difficult than it looked not to let herself be tempted by the idea of the possibility, no matter that she knew listening to it would only lead to heartbreak. "If by some miracle I had the opportunity to see you sooner, of course I'd take it. You know that, baby."

Trucy's hard expression wavered for only a moment. "Mommy, you have to promise."

"I promise." Despite the pain of knowing it would never happen, Maya managed to force a smile for her daughter, and was happy to see a relieved grin in return before Trucy once more enveloped the woman in a hug.

"Thank you, Mommy."

Before Maya could even register she was blinking back tears again, Luke and then Apollo had joined their sister, arms firmly wrapped around both Maya and each other. They said nothing, but they didn't need to speak; Maya knew her kids well enough to know exactly what they were communicating. All she could do in return was wriggle her arms out from where her sons had pinned them (she still questioned how the pair got so much taller than her) to encompass them just as their arms were encircling her and Trucy.

Maya wasn't sure how long they held their position before she felt a tap on her shoulder, and the huddle was broken as the four of them turned to see Phoenix. He watched them sympathetically, and jerked a thumb towards the screens above. "It's time for us to go."

Trucy sniffed, and slipped past Maya to give her father a quick hug. "Bye, Daddy. You be careful too, okay?"

"Of course I will." Phoenix chuckled, kissed his daughter on the forehead, then moved to also hug Luke. "Love you all."

Luke couldn't help a smile as Phoenix pulled down the young man's head to plant a kiss above his eyes as he had for Trucy. "Love you too, Papa."
Apollo put on airs of discomfort as Phoenix continued the small ritual for him, but the embarrassed smile said he enjoyed it more than he let on. "We'll see you in a couple of weeks, Dad."

Phoenix nodded, but followed it up by giving his eldest child a stern look. "Now you'll remember to keep a close eye on Trucy and Machi while I'm away, won't you? Make sure they get to school, and that they get home again in a reasonable time, make sure you're available if they need help with homework, make sure they do their homework-"

Apollo rolled his eyes; If it weren't for Trucy's top hat in his grip, he probably would have crossed his arms too. "Dad, this isn't the first time I've had to babysit, I know what I'm doing! Would you stop worrying? What were you literally just telling Machi about worrying?"

"Well, I'm not expecting you to get into any life-or-death situations," Phoenix replied, raising an eyebrow, "unless you're saying I should be worrying about that."

"Dad!"

"Papa, we'll be fine." Luke stepped forward, diffusing the tension with a smile. "And if anything does happen, you know we'll be in touch as soon as we possibly can."

Phoenix nodded, satisfied. "Two weeks, then." He parted from his kids, gave the rest of their group a wave, then patted Maya's shoulder and headed off towards security.

Maya moved to follow her fiancé, only to pause after a couple of steps and run back to give their three children another hug - "Love you, kids." - followed by her two cousins - "Take care of each other." - and finally Machi and Thalassa - "Be safe for me." She spared only a quick wave for Clay, but didn't dare to linger any longer, running to catch up to Phoenix. They'd wasted enough time that they would have to run to make sure they made their plane.

Waiting in line at security, Maya stood close to Phoenix. At some point, she'd grabbed hold of his arm, fiddling with her ring. Although she longed to turn around and check on her family, she was terrified of bursting into tears and not being able to muster the strength to keep walking forward. She was already worried she would do so even without the prompt of seeing them in person for what could easily be the last time. The next two years stretched out in front of her, feeling like an eternity. She longed for the freedom to cancel her training outright so she wouldn't have to leave them behind.

Phoenix pulled his arm from Maya's grip, wrapping it around her shoulders to push her against his side. She looked up just in time to catch his smile before he snuck a quick kiss on her lips.

Instantly, Maya felt a lot calmer. Though she could feel tears silently sliding down her cheeks, she managed a small smile and cuddled up tight to her fiancé. Two years was going to be a long time... but her family was strong enough to stay together even when they were physically apart. She just had to remember that it was more than her own strength that would be getting them through these two years of heartache.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all from the bottom of my heart for reading Luke and Apollo Wright v1.0, whether you have been following along since the first chapter or read the whole thing at
once now that it's 'complete'. Although this fic may be over, the story continues, and I hope you guys enjoy v2.0 at least as much as 1.0, if you choose to read both. Seriously, it still blows my mind whenever someone comments saying they enjoyed this fic. Whether or not you ever commented yourself, dear reader, I still appreciate that you spent time reading this; I know it's a bit of a monster. :) Thank you all so so much. <3 - Unicornfoal/WrightFamilyAgency

Works inspired by this one: Turnabout Adoption by WrightFamilyAgency (Unicornfoal)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!