The Grey Zone

by Icka M Chif (mischif)

Summary

Part Two: Trouble follows Kaito and Saguru out of Japan, onto England, and beyond.

A slightly cracky roadtrip of crossover proportions.

Notes

A few chapters are written by the wonderful Jaelle who is currently not interested in an Ao3 account. I have her written permission to archive them here, and should she join Ao3, edits will be made.
"Bonjour, C'est de la part de Catherine."

"Kon'nichiwa, Chat Noir-san."

"Ah, le petite Heisei Lupin. To what do I owe the honour of this call?"

"Nothing terrible. While I heard that you had retired from active duty, I wanted to make sure I was not stepping on any toes if I happened to be in the area. Professional courtesy and all that."

"Funny, I had heard that you had retired as well."

"Not so much retired as stepping back for a while."

"Japan too hot for you?"

"Something like that."

"Ah. Yes, I had heard some rumours along those lines."

"Mm."

"But as for stepping on toes, non. I am, as you said, retired. However, I do keep my ear to the ground. Perhaps you might be interested in scaring some terrible enfants?"

"Oh? What kind of infants?"

"Only the lowest of thieves. I'm afraid I must run at the moment however, business calls. Might I reach you at this number to discuss details later?"

"It is your phone."

"You held on to it? I'm surprised. I'll talk to you later tonight then. Perhaps you can bring your... - friend- Kaito Kuroba for a visit, oui?"

"Perhaps. Until tonight, my dear."

"Flattery will get you everywhere, mon garcon. Until then. A bientôt."

*click*

"Whew."
"Everything alright, Kuroba?"

"Just fine, Hakuba."

"If you say so. You don't get that panicked expression often."

"Just talking to an old acquaintance."

"Ah."

"Hey, Hakuba?"

"Yeah?"

"How do you fancy a trip to Paris?"

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

Notes: 'Ruby Jones' is Chat Noir's alias in 'Golden Eye'. Which meant she needed another name. Poking at the character in our head, she said it was 'Catherine', named after 'Catherine II', Empress of Russia from 1762-96, known as 'Catherine the Great'. Nevermind the rumours about the horses. *shrugs* So yet another piece of fanon is created....
Chapter 2

The Grey Zone: Morning
by Icka! M. Chif

Kaito woke up to the soft sound of the bedroom door opening. He kept his eyes closed and breathing even, feigning sleep, contently wrapped around his own personal heater as footsteps shuffled lightly in the room.

Until said personal heater sat up in shock, taking the duvet with him. "Mum!"

"G'morning, Sa-chan!"

"This isn't what it looks like!"

A shadow fell over the bed, Hakuba's mother petting her son's hair. "Of course not, dear. You aren't washing the sheets nearly enough if you were."

Kaito didn't need to open his eyes to feel Hakuba blush. He could feel the heat coming off of the blond's body. "MUM!!"

A high-pitched giggle. "Go back to sleep, Sa-chan. I'm just bringing in some fresh clothes."

"Thanks, Mum." Hakuba flopped backwards in the bed, mortification screaming from his tense body. His Mum giggled again, walking out and shutting the door behind her.

"Argh." Hakuba said. Kaito snickered, wrapping himself around the larger blond again. Mmm. Warm. Flannel. An arm wrapped around him, absently petting his back, so Hakuba couldn't be too upset. Really, he had no idea why Hakuba was so worked up over. Kaito had been given the guest room at Hakuba's mother's place the week before, but he'd only spent about two nights on it all total. The rest of the time they usually ended up passed out on Hakuba's bed while talking or out at some body's house.

This just happened to be the first time anyone had ever walked in. He supposed that he could have rolled out of bed and hidden himself like he did at Hakuba's father's house, but he'd had a long night and was exhausted.

He hadn't really known what to expect in England, it had just sounded good at the time, even if he might as well have admitted -who- he was when he'd made the suggestion. But he'd been the Kid non-stop through the entire summer, trying to keep himself and those close to him out of the Black Ops' grasp even as he worked to take them down. The chance to shut it all down and be Kaito again had sounded like a blessing.

He supposed he should be grateful that the odd people Hakuba had allied himself with had taken 'Kuroba Kaito's' abilities at face value and hadn't pried too deeply. Although it was a bit of a shame that they hadn't been able to enrol in University in time. So they were on 'mini-vacation' until the start
of February, when classes started up again.

Which was probably for the best, give him a chance to get his head straight after the summer. He wasn't quite sure he remembered how to be Kuroba Kaito anymore. 'Kid' and 'Kaito' had been separate in his head, different personas. But right now it was like he couldn't turn the Kid off any more. He'd had to be the Kid non-stop, just to survive. He still smiled and joked like Kaito now, but it was like Kaito was a mask, instead of the other way around, Kid masking Kaito.

Which was probably why he was scaring Hakuba by appearing in his bed, despite the fact that when Hakuba had fallen asleep, he'd been in his own. Hakuba was like a rock, not only he could take what Kaito dished out and toss it back at him, but he was a solid, stable presence. Like a good wall at his back, one quarter he didn't need to protect himself from. Unwinding from a heist at Hakuba's place had created a sense of safety.

It also helped keep the nightmares away. Emotions were dangerous for a Kaitou, but that didn't stop him from being human and having them.

Hakuba shifted again, turning on his side, legs tangling with Kaito's. It was kind of funny, really. Here they were, nineteen, curled up in what most observers would probably consider an intimate embrace in bed and they weren't doing anything. Except sleeping.

Because Hakuba loved him for his mind.

"I am going to be properly horrified when I look at this morning's paper, aren't I?" The detective murmured.

Upon their arrival to the Hakuba Household, the detective had been immediately called out for a few cases that demanded his attention. In turn, Hakuba had dragged him along to get his, quote “rather unorthodox view on things” unquote. This had led to several rather unusual scenes, Kaito getting a boost to go climb in rafters or in air ducts, the two of them conversing in rapid fire Japanese.

He was grateful as well for the half-Brit's previous language lessons. His English was good for Japan, but it was mediocre here. It was improving and would continue to improve --immersion into the culture and all that-- but it was still like they were speaking another language. Which they were. He doubted some things would ever make sense to him, such as fish --ugh-- in a can for breakfast. And why were they called 'kippers' if 'catching a kip' meant taking a nap?

Kaito snickered, tucking his head under Hakuba's chin to block the morning light. Mmm... warm flannel. "Yup. I had a date." With some of Europe's most lovely women.

Hakuba's hands on his back paused in mid-motion. Kaito shook his head, rubbing his face against the flannel as he squeezed the blond. "Nothing for you to worry about." Although he should introduce Hakuba to his partner in crime for this prank.

He'd contacted one Chat Noir in France, when they had arrived to make sure that he wasn't stepping on any toes in case the Kid needed to make an appearance here. Not that he really -cared-, but it was polite to make the motions. Jii had already made a few minor appearances as the Kid across Europe, setting his alibi up for when he came.

In return, she'd wanted to know if he was up to a little mischief. Chat Noir had faded into the background after finishing what she'd set out to do. She still kept her ear to the ground and her hand in, but Chat Noir wasn't nearly as much of a bright shiny attention grabber as Kid could. They hadn't actually -stolen- anything, but it would mark his presence on this side of the world.
His father had made his first appearance as the Kid in Paris about twenty years ago, it was only right that he make his first official appearance in Europe there as well.

With a bang. Not his fault they hadn't taken his warning note that Kid was visiting seriously.

Or maybe they had and he just hadn't noticed...

But like any good patriotic Kaitou, Chat Noir-san was worried about her country's treasures and hoped that they would increase security if they got a good scare. He wondered how long it would take for them to realise that he hadn't taken the Mona Lisa, just hung a sheet with the words 'Kaitou Kid Was Here' in front of the famous painting. The security cameras certainly wouldn't be able to tell the difference, the only question was how bright the security personnel was.

He was still kind of bummed that she wouldn't let him hang a sign on Michelangelo's David saying 'Naughty Bits'. Monty Python would have been -so- proud. But the following conversation about censorship in art had been entertaining.

He'd still added a bright pink feather boa around the Venus de Milo's neck. The lady could use a little fun.

But they'd both been very, very careful not to damage anything. It had just been a warning, or a prank, depending on who was looking at it. He -could- have taken anything he wished and within a few hours, if they didn't know it already, everyone and their siblings would know it.

Not that he wanted anything here in Europe. He had the one gem that mattered, tucked safe and sound inside the plushie elephant that lay not more than a finger's twitch away from their tangled selves. An elephant never forgot, after all. Especially if the elephant was now part immortal.

"Although you may be called in-" He yawned into Hakuba's collarbone. "-considering that you're the foremost expert on Kid the Phantom Thief on this side of the world."

In the meantime however, the three hour train ride from Paris through the Chunnel to London, and then the second ride from out of London to the Hakuba Household had been a long one, especially since he'd been under an assumed passport and appearance. Thank goodness for hang gliders which cut down on travel time and expenses.

And Hakuba made an excellent space heater and general blocker from the world, letting him relax and get a few hours sleep without having to worry about being dragged away by irritated cigar-smoking police inspectors. Not that he missed Nakamori-keibu at all, nope. Or Nakamori-keibu's daughter.

"Joy." Hakuba's tone was dry but the hands that resumed their absently petting his back were warm and gentle, taking the sting out as Hakuba relaxed. The blond had a bit of a possessive streak, not that Hakuba would ever admit it. Or Kaito would admit it about himself either. "I'm going to take you with, seeing as you're a fan of the thief and all."

He snickered in return. Ooo. Scary revenge. "Just don't make any comments about the game being afoot." He muttered. He made a mental note to return Hakuba's favour of dragging him along to teach detective stuff by showing him how to pick locks. Even Holmes knew how to pick locks and he'd feel a lot better knowing Hakuba had more of an edge when getting out of trouble.

Hmm... perhaps he should add alarm circumvention and blending into shadows as well. If it worked for bright white, it should work for tweed just as well.

"Certainly not. Watson flies." Hakuba informed him primly. "So does the Kid. Now go back to
sleep. I'm sure we'll be getting a phone call soon."

"And your Mum's gonna wanna tease us."

"Yes." Word came out as a sigh, with much loathing. Kaito grinned. He'd help Hakuba level the playing field later. He could easily play the 'lost innocent out-of-towner' card. If not, Hakuba's Mum was just as much fun to tease as Hakuba was. Only Hakuba didn't do high-pitched giggles, which was a bonus. He just squeaked. And turned bright red. All over.

Well, maybe not all over... hmmm... He'd have to test that theory sometime...

Hakuba pulled the duvet back over them, folding it to shield them both from the early morning sunlight without suffocating either of them. "Morning, Kuroba." Hakuba yawned, body relaxing. Kuroba yawned in response, burrowing his face against Hakuba's flannel nightshirt again. It would probably be a little while before Hakuba actually fell asleep instead of just dozing, the whole 'protector' instinct. His Mum was still somewhere in the house and if she was anything like 'Kaasan, there was going to be an appearance of a camera very shortly.

Which was what the extra pillow was for. Heh.

"Morning, Hakuba." He mumbled in return, allowing his breathing to level out again, to drop into sleep. Better to have a few hours of uninterrupted sleep before they headed to Paris.

And if he was really lucky, he'd get to introduce Hakuba to Chat Noir-san. They'd probably hit it off marvellously.

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Chapter End Notes

Was a bit of a shock to realise that in the SoG universe, they -are- 19 now. Cannonly, they're 17 and in their second year of High School, so they're that age at the beginning of the fic. Kaito (21 June) turns 18 between 'Lellyphant' and 'Hot'. Hakuba (29 Aug) turns 18 just after 'Hot', before 'Relative Truths'. Kaito turns 19 during 'How I Spent My Summer Vacation', Hakuba shortly afterwards. One of these days we'll get around to showing the whole time line, we were actually really careful of the months. That's why the 'out of sequence' stuff started, it hurt our head trying to fit them in too.
Kaito grinned, slapping Hakuba on the shoulder. "Just take it as a sign, Hakuba."

The blond looked like he wasn't sure to look depressed or shocked. "No."

"Yup." He returned his hands to his pockets.

Determination won out over depressed and shocked. "No."

"When a w-"

Hakuba cut him off. "I don't care what you say, that was NOT a-."

"-If it looks like a duck, talks like a duck, walks like a duck, then it must be a..."

"You've been reading too much Harry Potter." The detective sniffed disdainfully. It was amusing to watch Hakuba attempt to gather the shreds of his pride around him like a sort of battered cloak.

"And that would be who's fault...?" Kaito leered. Ha. Had him there.

Hakuba gave him a dirty look. Kaito laughed.

"The man," Hakuba enunciated very clearly "had a stuffed ferret on his hat."

"It wasn't stuffed. It was alive." Kaito shot back. "It winked at me."

"Was it moving?" The blond asked in the tones of someone talking to someone who was very very dull.

"No..." The scruffy looking white creature had been resting, partly wrapped around the wide brim of the battered black pointed hat, black beady eyes observing everything. This added to what looked like a well loved bathrobe and travel bag had made for a rather... eccentric appearance.

"It's a ferret. If they're not moving, they're dead." Said the voice of finality. "Period."

"He asked you for directions to King's Crossing Train Station."

"It's a common destination point!" Hakuba was starting to look a little frantic around the edges now, Kaito noticed smugly. It was one of his favourite looks to put on the usually stoic detective. Hakuba jabbed a finger in his direction. "Besides! -You're- the magic user! Not me!!"

"He thought you were dressed like one." In fact, the stranger had even commented how nice it was to meet a nicely dressed fellow wizard.

Game.
Hakuba sighed, fingering the rough woven texture of the antiquated Inverness coat he was wearing due to the cold wet weather. "Perhaps it is time to retire the coat."

-fin-
London to Ashford to Calais to Lille to Paris.

Three hours, twenty of them spent under the ocean in a claustrophobic tunnel, and they were in not only another country, but another bustling metropolis.

Different cities had different feels to them, he was beginning to learn. Tokyo felt different from Osaka, London different than anywhere in Japan, and Paris different from London. It wasn't just the language, --although that played a part in it-- or the weather conditions, but different moods to different cities.

But one thing remained constant about cities - the people. There were always LOTS of them.

Chat Noir had met them gleefully at the rail station, kissing their cheeks and ruffling their hair fondly and insisting that they stay with her before taking them on a whirlwind tour of the city. Hakuba had been here before and spoke the language fluidly, he and 'Catherine' making what appeared to be sharp tongued comments back and forth. When he asked Hakuba about it, the blond had commented that it was just a friendly rivalry between countries. Then Hakuba and Chat Noir had smiled at each other in such a sweet way he'd had to stop himself from checking to verify they weren't holding daggers behind their backs.

Kaito made a private note to learn French as soon as possible. He was already learning English, what was one more language?

But it had been a good day. Chat Noir knew the best secret places and French food was nothing like the French food he'd had in Japan. For one thing, it was better here. Although he'd had a little bit of a problem with the escargot, to which both Chat Noir and Hakuba had teased him about while daintily prying the grey creatures --slimy from butter and herbs instead of regular slimy snail slime-- from their shells and popping them in their mouths. Eventually they'd coerced him into trying one and found it not so bad but declined a plate of his own. One was enough.

It was also discovered that biscotti made a very useful weapon. Heh.

He'd wanted to visit the Musée du Louvre, since he'd only had a little bit of time to enjoy the treasures there, but Hakuba kept giving him funny looks every time he glanced in the direction of the glowing pyramid and Chat Noir kept giggling, so they saw some of the other sights in the central part of Paris instead.

Which was how they had come to watch the sunset from the top observation deck of the 'Tour Eiffel' or Eiffel Tower.
He was less certain how'd he come to be standing on the roof of the tower however. He glanced down. 324 metres, give or take the antenna behind them, was a long way down. Not quite the Tokyo Tower, but still pretty damn tall.

Chat Noir --she really did know the best secrets-- was standing next to him, goggle cat-eyes glowing. "You ready?"

"Just a moment." He smirked, pulling out cell phone. Hirokini read is his mind, dialling the number before he could. It rang a few times before being answered.

"Hakuba."

"Yo, Tantei-san."

He could almost see the detective startle at that. "You're up to no good, aren't you?" Came the dry comment. It was followed by a small sigh. "Never mind. Idiotic question."

"Will you be all right finding your way home?"

"Certainly." The tone was almost affronted, as if he was insinuating that the blond couldn't take care of himself wandering around a strange foreign city at night. "Hour and a half?"

"Sounds about right." He didn't think they were going to take that long. It'd take longer getting back-. And if they were late, it'd be a good excuse to badger Hakuba into learning lock-picking skills.

"Don't get caught." Hakuba said fondly, then disconnected the call.

Kid smirked in amusement, putting the phone away. Like he was going to get caught. Such lack of faith on the detective's part. Of course, he'd probably have the same reaction if Hakuba told him to be careful. He was always careful. Even when he was reckless.

"What did your husband say?" Chat Noir questioned, voice only slightly mocking.

"He's not my husband." And what did she mean was Hakuba 'his husband'? Did she think he was the blond's -wife-? If anything, Hakuba was the Kid's wife. -He- was the one to go out and get the jewels while the detective stayed home. Ha. "And I don't know how you were raised, but I was taught that it was manners to call and tell someone that you are going to ditch them." See? - Gentleman- thief.

"Hah." She didn't sound convinced.

He shrugged. "It's been a tough couple of months."

Her head inclined, adopting a thoughtful air as she looked at him. "He knows?"

"He figured it out about two years ago."

"And?"

"Apparently, he doesn't care." He rested his hands in his pockets, watching the hypnotic lights of the city. "If I get sloppy, he'll catch me. But he got involved with some pretty nasty stuff because of me in Japan." Took a bullet for him even. He was still boggling over that. The vest had stopped the bullet but still seriously bruised the ribs underneath. Hakuba had been wincing for days, every time he moved wrong. The stoic detective had tried to hide it of course, but he still saw it.
"I heard the men who killed your father were after you." Chat Noir commented. He raised an eyebrow and she shrugged. "I was curious and did a little digging. Magic's in the blood, non?"

"Oui." He agreed. "They're after him too, now."

"You're not happy about it." It was more of a statement of fact than a question.

"No." It was his fault. He should have said 'no' when the detective offered. He'd thought it the lesser of two evils at the time, keeping Hakuba safely in the background instead of attempting to mop up after the detective stepped into something messy trying to discover about the mysterious organisation. He wasn't so sure anymore that he'd made the right decision. Hattori and Kudo certainly seemed to think not and they made damn sure that he knew it.

Perhaps it would have been better to have let Hakuba stumble around, trying to find the organisation than to lead him to it. But what was done was done, there was nothing he could do to change it.

"Even though he's a detective." In this case, 'detective' was Kaitou speak for 'enemy'.

"We're... friends." Possibly --Probably-- more. Allies at least. Not quite rivals, not for a while now. "We watch each other's backs."

She chuckled, looking out over the light filled city as well. "You have a very strange relationship with each other, mon garçon."

"Tell me about it." He sighed. It helped, it hurt, it was confusing and he didn't know what to do with it anymore.

And dammit, he -owed- the bastard detective!

... he really shouldn't be thinking such thoughts while in uniform either.

"I'll not taunt him too badly then." She assured him, clapping him on the shoulder. "But for now... "

With a muted cackle, she launched herself off the Tour Eiffel. "Last one to the Arc de Triomphe is jail bait!!!" Her voice taunted on the wind as her dark para-glider opened up, lifting her up into the night sky.

"Oi!" He leapt off the tower after her. Neither of them were young enough to be jail bait anymore, thank you very much. And since she was heading north, he was betting that it was the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile across the Seine River to the north of the tower she was talking about and not the Arc de Triomphe de la Carrousel to the east.

Well, maybe he'd have to visit both of them, just to be sure....

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The next morning, Hakuba was almost smugly reading the newspaper at the local café that Chat Noir insisted at having coffee at. It wasn't quite the front page, but the Kaitous' night time flight hadn't gone unnoticed by the public.

The blond made a rather large point of glancing between Kaito and the article several times, a small smirk on his face. "I trust you had fun last night?" He inquired mildly.

Kaito smiled languidly back. "Tons."

"The Paris sky is just so much more magical at night." Chat Noir agreed silkily, sipping her coffee.
"Wouldn't you agree, Kaito-kun?"

He resisted the urge to raise an eyebrow at her comment. What kind of game was she playing? "Absolutely enchanting."

She nodded sagely in return.

Hakuba glanced back and forth between them, radiating curiosity. Then he started glancing between them towards the picture of the shadowy Kaitou in the night sky.

Kaito could -see- the instant Hakuba got it.

With a groan, Hakuba thudded his head on the tabletop. "Why me?" The detective muttered between thuds. "First him, then you and now this."

Kaito was slightly worried, but decided to let it go when he realised that the newspaper was cushioning the blond against too much brain damage. "I have no idea what you're talking about, Hakuba-kun." He said saucily. "Do you, Catherine-neesan?"

"Not a clue." Chat Noir said smoothly, watching the detective with amusement. "Not a one."

Hakuba stopped hitting his head long enough to glare sourly at them before resuming the rhythmic action. "Oh, stop that." Chat Noir scolded. "You're attracting attention."

Which, much to Kaito's unease, they were. Hakuba sat up straight, placing his hands on the table. Probably so that he had something to grip and so that the two Kaitou could see them, to know that he wasn't going to go for his handcuffs. People turned their attention elsewhere, towards more interesting things.

"So you two..." He said tentatively, motioning between the two of them with his eyes. Hakuba was a smart boy, he probably already knew that they knew who the other really was, but it never hurt to verify the facts.

"Japan." Kaito nodded. Well, she'd found out that Kuroba Kaito was the Kaitou Kid back then. It had taken him a little longer and some minor digging to get Chat Noir's name.

Hakuba rolled his eyes, grumbling. Chat Noir giggled. "All right." The detective ceded. "Then why let me in on it? It is a rather large risk, is it not?"

Kaito turned towards Chat Noir, wondering much the same.

She smiled. "Have you ever heard of a thief named 'Viper'?" She inquired.

"Female ex-thief, recently went 'straight'. Currently works as a security advisor." Hakuba recited from memory, frowning slightly. "Been known to have been mixed up in some rather unusual business involving objects rumoured to have magical properties."

"Very good." The female Kaitou applauded cattily. "How about one named 'Origami'?"

"Rumour had it that Viper had something to do with his recent arrest." Hakuba paused, then reluctantly added "Rumour also had it that he could turn himself into paper and change shape, hence the name 'Origami'. Specialised in stealing Asian artefacts."

"I knew you were good." Chat Noir smiled approvingly. "Oldest story in the book. She met a man. An 'Archaeologist', who specialises in Martial Arts."
"Went straight because of him?" Kaito questioned, trying not to smirk.

"Something like that. But last year she was in Paris with him. Took him down to the 'Fox and the Rat'. You've heard of it?"

Hakuba shook his head. Kaito nodded. In supposedly the seedier part of town, hangout for thieves and rogues. Good place to gather and exchange information, a sort of an underworld networking place. He caught Hakuba's eye, motioning that he'd explain it later.

"She took him there, looking for information on Origami. Evidently her friend had been framed by Origami and they were looking to clear him. Ended up causing a brawl at the 'Fox and the Rat'. Property damage, the whole nine yards. Got the police called in. She's now person non-grata in Paris."

Kaito winced. Hakuba shot him an inquiring look. "You know that saying 'honour among thieves'?"

"Yes." Hakuba nodded. "Depending on who you talk to, it means nothing at all or quite a bit."

Chat Noir gave him a small smirk. Kaitou were not ordinary thieves, they had a different standard to uphold, so were definitely part of the later category. However, Kaito had worked with --undercover, of course-- with some of the former before and much preferred to work alongside his own rare breed.

"Exactly. Lie, steal, whatever. But you don't tattle on other thieves."

"A sort of professional courtesy." Chat Noir interjected with a smirk.

Kaito smirked back, fangs politely hidden. "Kill, and you're a murder who steals. Squeal, and you're no longer a thief, you're a tattler."

"Viper," Chat Noir said with a grave finality "Is no longer a thief."

"Because she changed loyalties." Hakuba said cautiously. "So therefore, she is not to be trusted. By anyone."

She'd get no help and no resources from anyone on the 'wrong side of the law'. No one would take the risk that she wouldn't betray them to the authorities. The Law themselves would be hesitant to help her, because she had once been a criminal, someone they chased.

Chat Noir smiled. It wasn't a polite smile, more of the baring of teeth a cat would make before toying with a mouse. "Exactly."

Hakuba gave her a level look. She sparkled back at him, taking a sip of her coffee, eyes narrowed in cat-like pleasure.

Kaito raised an eyebrow. Just what was she getting at? He wasn't actively looking for heist jewels, but that was because he had found what he wanted, not because of the detective. And he'd all but told Hakuba who he was --either of him-- when he suggested coming to England. Hakuba wasn't going to use it against him.

... wasn't he?

No. Kaito trusted the detective at least that much. He wouldn't be here if he wasn't sure of that. Hakuba was at least as great of a gentleman as he was if not more so. He did not betray confidences.

Hakuba nodded. "I have no intention of asking him to do anything more than he chooses to do so."
Chat Noir's eyes narrowed down to mere slits. "Keep it that way." Somewhere in the background, a cat growled.

Kaito scowled slightly at her, torn between figuring out her motivation and defending the detective. She caught the look and smiled sweetly at him, any and all hints of anger gone. "You're away from your family on this side of the world, mon garçon." She reached over and ruffled his hair fondly. "Someone must watch over you in their absence."

His face grew hot and he wasn't sure if it was from embarrassment or pleasure that someone liked him well enough to want to keep an eye on him. "Ah," He swatted her hand away, embarrassment winning as he stammered. "Cha-Ca-Catherine-neechan!!"

She smiled at that, practically glowing in happiness. "Ooh! I like that. 'Cat-neechan'. You should call me that. Both of you." She gave Hakuba a small salute with her cup. "After all, we are family. Of sorts."

"A family of rogues." Hakuba quipped dryly, returning her salute. "Auntie Kitty."

'Auntie Kitty' grinned roguishly at him in response. Kaito sighed. He'd have to explain to her in more detail just what had happened in Japan. Later.

"So." The dark haired woman asked, brushing the serious business aside as she turned back towards him. "What do you and your husband want to do today?"

He and Hakuba gave her identical looks of not-quite mock horror. "AUNTIE KITTY!!"

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Chapter End Notes

Thanks to Dagron for the French help!

* Tokyo Tower is 333 metres tall.

Viper, Origami, and the bar come from 'Jackie Chan Adventures'. Details may be a little bit off because it's been so long since we've seen that episode.
Kid snickered to himself as he padded through the corridors of the museum. This job was going to be a cakewalk, no doubt about it. The security systems were lousy, the locks were a joke, and the guards were non-existent.

Of course, he hadn't sent a warning note yet, so that might be different by this time next week.

It wasn't his usual procedure to case a joint as the Kid before doing the actual job. But unfortunately the private museum of Monsieur Hulôt was not open to either Kaito Kuroba or any of his other possible aliases, the blueprints had been lost in a fire several years previously, and basically he didn't want to waste a day inventing someone to get in. Chat Noir had not been able to help either, although she graciously gave her permission for the heist.

"But of course, mon cher. I shall look forward to hearing about it. And tell your most adorable detective that I wish him the best of luck."

"Him, not me?"

"Mais oui. We are thieves. We do not rely on luck. We leave that for les police. They need it more than us, oui?"

"Most certainement."

Kid eased through the doorway like a... well, phantom thief, and paused, taking in the inner sanctum of Hulôt's collection. Ooooh, and the security system in here had gotten an upgrade recently too!
Now it was only FOUR years out of date. Kid was hard-pressed not to sneer as he carefully watched his footing and began to scan the room for the item he planned to steal a week from now.

Across the room, a matching door opened and a tall, good-looking woman entered, a confident smirk on her face.

Both faces went blank when they caught sight of each other, neither really believing this was happening.

*I can't possibly get caught like this!* They both thought.

There was a long, long pause.

Neither of them screamed for the guards.

*They're a thief too!* 

Kid eased forward into the dim light. "Bonjour mademoiselle," he started, with a very bad French accent. "Umm..."

"Kid! Kaitou Kid?!" The woman exclaimed in English as she got a better look at him. "What are you doing here?"

"... sight-seeing?" Kid suggested, in the same language. "What are you doing here?"

The woman stared at him for a long moment. "I don't believe it. How on earth do we keep meeting like this?"

Kid was awash in a sea of confusion. "Huh?"

"I mean, it's been twenty years," the woman squinted at him. "You haven't aged a day..."

She stepped back abruptly, reaching inside her jacket. Kid had a horrible sense of déjà vu as she withdrew a rapier and pointed it in his direction.

"I don't know how I missed it last time, or how you got so close this time without me noticing," the woman said tensely. "And I remember your reputation for non-violence and the fun we had last time ago, so I'm hoping that we can avoid needless bloodshed."

"That would certainly be MY preference." Kid put his hands in the air cautiously. "Mademoiselle...?" he trailed off hopefully.

"Amanda!" She looked hurt. "Darling boy, how could you forget me?"

"Uh, I think we might be misunderstanding each other a little bit, Mademoiselle Amanda."

Amanda suddenly looked disgusted and lowered her sword. "Oh don't tell me you don't know! Let me guess, you had an accident recently and thought you were dead, and ever since then weird things have been happening to you?"

Kid thought about it for a while. Weird things had been happening AROUND him for quite a long time, but he didn't think they were the same weird things that this Amanda person was talking about. Besides, he was usually the one causing them to happen in the first place.

"No..." he said finally. "Not really."
Amanda looked confused. "You haven't been... Challenged... or anything?"

"Uh, usually I'm the one doing the challenging." Kid pointed out. If Amanda really knew him then she should surely know THAT.

The sword came up to point at him again. Clearly he'd said something wrong.

"Would you mind putting that down? I really don't want to fight," he asked, smiling as sweetly and harmlessly as he could.

"Hmph, that attitude won't last you long."

"It's worked pretty well for me so far!"

"But you just said..." the sword began to lower again, slowly. "Challenges?"

"To the detectives," he reminded her. "To try and catch me."

"OH!" She lowered the sword again. "THOSE kind of challenges! Be more specific next time."

"Right." Clearly the woman was completely insane.

"So, you don't know what else I might have been meaning?" Amanda gave him a searching look.

"Nooo... should I?"

The two of them exchanged suspicious looks.

"It's just that, challenges and this lifestyle..." Amanda paused. "I guess I have to ask, are you planning on living forever?" She watched his reaction carefully.

Kid froze. Did she know about Pandora? He felt a chill of fear go down his spine. "Immortality? Don't you think that's a little over-optimistic?"

"Over-optimistic?" Amanda glared at him narrowly, and lowered the sword. "What do you mean by that?"

"I don't know, what did YOU mean by it?"

"I asked you first!"

"I asked you first'??" Kid repeated incredulously. "How old are you?"

The sword came back up. "Aha!"

"Aha? What aha?" Kid felt like tearing at his hair. "I accuse you of being juvenile and it's 'aha'?"

"Sure, that's what YOU say."

"Yeah that's what I say!" Kid wondered if he'd ever had a conversation this bizarre before. Well, there was that one time when he and Hakuba had discussed what kind of supernatural creature they'd be in an alternate universe and he'd come up with the theory of a zombie-attached Hakuba and his reaction to his magician-master eating pixie-sticks, but... he was getting distracted now.

He drew a deep breath. "Amanda-san, I assure you, I have no idea whatsoever about anything you might be talking about. I'm just here for the jewel in the third case to your left."
"Amanda-san?" Amanda was amused. "You used to call me Amanda-chan."

"I assure you, I've never met you before in my life!"

She pouted at him. "How can you say that? Alright, so it was just that one night in Calais, but still. Remember when you poured champagne into my cupped hands and drank from them? And then we..."

Kid blushed a violent crimson. "Please stop! I think we both might be making a huge, gigantic mistake!" Oh damn it, his voice had cracked on that last word.

Amanda was still in the throes of an apparently very passionate flashback, "And then you... what's wrong with your voice?"

"Nothing's wrong with it!"

Except for the fact that the last sentence had been delivered in a rather high-pitched squeak.

Amanda paced slowly towards him, avoiding the floor sensors as she did so. When she reached about halfway across the room, her eyes widened. "You're not him! You look like him, and you sound like him, but you're not him!" She concentrated briefly on his features for a moment, and then enlightenment dawned.

"His son?" She asked gently.

There was a long pause before Kid nodded, still blushing.

"And your father?"

He looked away.

"I'm sorry," Amanda's voice was kind. "You're right, we were both making a huge mistake." She straightened up and coughed. "So, you're probably curious now."

"No, I'm not," Kid assured her. "Far from it. Honest. I just wanted to get a look at the layout of the place before I come back next week for the jewel."

"Ah," Amanda nodded wisely. "Good plan. I'm here for that statue by your elbow. Mind if I grab it now?"

"Not at all." Most of the flush had left his cheeks now, and Kaito tried to gather himself together again. "Want me to throw it to you? That way neither of us sets off that alarm net that's blocking the middle of the room, which would result in even more confusion and an extremely embarrassing arrest for both of us."

"Perfect."

End

A/N: Ending kind of dribbled away. Ah well.
One of the things he hadn't expected from his little 'excursion' today was the pain. Not much pain, more like a residual tenderness, but it was enough to be irritating. It made sense of course, flesh had been ripped and was now trying to heal, but it still made finding a position comfortable enough to fall asleep rather difficult.

Saguru shifted next to him, sleepily responding to Kaito's restlessness. He probably should have slept in 'his' room tonight, but they'd ended up talking and he'd been too lazy to move. He sighed. He was losing his edge here, being lulled by the sense of security. It was becoming an old mantra, but he'd yet to do anything to stop it either.

Hell, in his head, he was still thinking as a Kaitou even though he didn't need to steal anymore. He didn't even really want to, but that part of his brain wouldn't turn off either. He really needed to make up his mind. Was he a Kaitou or wasn't he?

One of Saguru's hands brushed the sore part of his anatomy and Kaito hissed in reaction. Dammit, he was never doing that again. Once was enough. Never ever. What the hell were girls thinking when they did this? Voluntarily no less!

"Kaito-kun?" Saguru's voice was hesitant as the fingers lingered, just brushing the skin. The touch was gentle, but still enough to send flames of pain over the over sensitised flesh. "The hell-?"

The detective came all the way away, rolling over to turn on the bed-side lamp for illumination, grabbing the glasses that were laying there as well. Kaito sat up, grimacing at the increase in light, even as he understood Saguru's necessity for it. The blond's night vision wasn't nearly as good as his own.

"You pierced your ears?!" Saguru exclaimed as he reached out, tilting Kaito's face to tilt it this way and that as he examined the small studs in Kaito's ears.

"Yup." Kaito flinched again as Saguru poked one with a cautious fingertip. Kaito batted the hand away. "Stop that! They're still sore!"

"Good." Saguru frowned for a moment. "What were you thinking?! Piercing your ears?"

Kaito almost sighed in exasperation. "I thinking that I was tired of clip-on earrings hurting my ears. I was thinking I'd only wear these until they healed in a few weeks then not have to worry about wearing them again. I wasn't thinking it was a big deal." He glared at Saguru. Besides, what business of the detective's was it if he got his ears pierced? It was better than piercing other things! "It's not like I got a tattoo or something highly identifiable."

Saguru made a muttered comment about tattooing something on someone's ass that Kaito decided to ignore under the guise of maintaining their friendship without falling into a name calling fight that someone --namely someone named 'Mum'-- might over hear.
... that and Saguru was pretty creative about tattoo ideas... Points for filthy imagination there.

The detective gave him another disbelieving look. "I'm hoping you were at least hygienic about it and didn't use one of Mum's sewing needle or something."

"No, -Dad-." Kaito resisted the urge to roll his eyes. "I went to the tattoo place down the way and had them do it. All sterile and hygienic with a minimum of fuss. I'm not stupid, Saguru." Sticking oneself with needles... ouch. Besides, sewing needles were smaller than the earring studs. He'd checked.

Saguru had the grace to look abashed. "Sorry. Just... a bit surprised."

"I kind of got that." Kaito commented dryly. Tantei over-protectiveness in gear... check. Saguru was going to make a great parent someday. Probably got it from chasing his mother around when he was younger.

The detective got a thoughtful look on his face, cupping Kaito's chin again and examining the earrings once more. They were just regular silver posts with a black 'jewel' on the end. He hadn't been interested in the sparkling fake glass gems --something about stealing the real thing taking away your taste for the fake ones-- and the plain silver and gold hadn't attracted him in any way either. The black worked, it was subtle, went with the majority of his clothing, which was mostly dark anyway, and it matched his name. Well, partly anyway. He wasn't going to start wearing black feathers from his ears.

"They're not bad." Saguru finally commented, the contemplative look fading into something close to muted humour. "Think I should pierced my ears too?"

Kaito thunked him on the top of the head for the comment, then reached across the snickering detective to turn off the light. "Definitely not."

Saguru chuckled in return, obediently lying back down and taking off the glasses to place on the night stand as Kaito crawled back over him. "Look at it this way." Kaito grinned, curling up the way he had been before Saguru had turned on the light. "I hate your blue contacts, you hate my earrings. It evens out."

"Yes, but you can take off your earrings." Saguru pointed out. "I kind of need those to see."

"To hide, you mean." Kaito snarked. He really disliked how the blond looked with the blue contacts. Too foreign. He liked the glasses better. More honest.


Point. He made a face. But disguise was his job, not Saguru's. Saguru's job was to be honest, to uncover the truth. It was bad enough Saguru lied or misinformed others about not knowing the Kid. It irritated him that the detective crossed that line without questions or asking. He just did it. And Kaito couldn't, and wouldn't, ask him to stop.

Even if it was equally irritating that Saguru refused to learn lock picking because that was too far 'over the line'. He'd lie, but he wouldn't learn thieving skills to protect himself.

Saguru wiggled deeper under the covers, wrapping himself back around Kaito. "You do realise that Auntie Kitty is going to kill you for not letting her be there when you pierced them."

"Eeh?" Kaito raised an eyebrow.
The detective nodded firmly, if sleepily. "Trust me. You're gonna pay for that. Does Mum know
yet?"

"... No." Why did he have a feel of dread creeping up the back of his spine now?

This earned him a sleepy smug smile. "Just wait. She'll probably try to trade earrings with you."

He only had the one pair... And he hadn't been planning on telling 'Kaasan or Aoko. Suddenly
picturing what their reactions were going to be terrified him.

Saguru's breathing evened out beside him as his mind kept frantically running in circles.

... Just how long did it take pierced ears to heal up again?

-f-in-
"We're lost, aren't we?"

"We are not lost." Hakuba insisted, looking around with an utterly lost expression on his face. "We are merely taking a scenic tour through Paris."

Kaito sighed, shaking his head. They were lost. Stubborn British bastard had all the directional sense of a wooden bird in a coo-coo clock. "This is the last time I let you ask directions from a moving statue."

"I told you, it wasn't a moving statue." The blond informed him loftily. "They were L'Homme Statue, Human Statues. -Living- Statues."

"Yeah, yeah. What ever." He waved it off. People disguised as statues that moved when you tossed money at them. Or just ventured a little bit too close, causing people to scream and laugh.

... Privately, he thought they had a lot more damn patience than he did. Hm... that'd be something to consider to pull on Nakamori-keibu if he ever got back to Japan. When he got back. Something.

Hakuba muttered something in French he'd heard him say before but still didn't know the translation of, but still sounded either *Ichii*: Painful, *Ni*: Anatomically Impossible or *San*: All of the Above. Probably *San*.

"Do you at least know where we -are-?" He asked plaintively. All the French might as well been Greek to him. He could read the letters just fine, but lacked the vocabulary to make sense of the words. Well, okay 'Rue' was 'Street'. But 'rue' also 'regret' in English, so that wasn't much help either. And what was up with all these silent letters? English did it too. At least Japanese was straight forward, no silent, skipped or differently pronounced letters. Except for Kansai-ben, but that didn't count. It was Kansai.

He definitely had to learn more languages.

Well, if they got too lost, they could swallow their pride and ask the snickering Hirokini how to get back. Although the AI probably wouldn't let them live it down any time soon.

"I think we're somewhere around the Muséum Na-" Hakuba trailed off as the sound of a fight reached their ears. Angry shouts --in English-- and the clashing sound of metal-on-metal.

Hakuba straightened, getting that intent 'wolf on the scent of blood' look to his face. Oh, no no no no no. Iie, non, no, not gonna do it. You didn't run -towards- fights, you sure as hell ran the other way.
"Hakuba..." He warned.

"Come on." And the blond was off and running, brown coat flaring out behind him as he ran.

"BASTARD!" He spat. Stupid, idiotic, moronic, retarded, half-brained lummox!!! "TEME!!"

And then as if he had a hope in Hell, he followed afterwards like a good little Kaitou to attempt to keep his half-witted friend out of trouble. Detectives - couldn't take them anywhere, couldn't leave them hanging out to dry.

Sometimes he really wondered if he'd had made the right decision showing up at Hakuba's house that night with the handcuff dangling from his wrist. On the other hand, life wouldn't be nearly as interesting as it was if he hadn't. Although he wasn't really sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing. Wasn't it supposed to be a curse? 'To live in interesting times'?

He nearly crashed into Hakuba's back as the blond halted suddenly, an arm stretched out to stop him at the opening to an alley. The sound of swords had faded suddenly, leaving behind an awful silence. Something rolled, stopping at Hakuba's feet and he nearly lost what remained of his last meal.

It was a head.

The face was twisted in an angry snarl, the eyes still shining with the bloodthirsty rage that had been contained in the body that it had been just moments before. It was a head. It was dead. It was a dead head. He hadn't expected this when he'd left Japan. Shot maybe. Stabbed possibly. Hung or strangled. Poisoned. But not heads rolling merrily down the street like a deranged bowling ball ready to gnaw off their ankles.

Hakuba's arms gripped his shoulders and he held on to Hakuba's arms in return, the solidness of the form reassuring to his queasy stomach. Something wasn't right here. Something was very very wrong. "Don't look."

"It's a head." He commented stupidly, distracted by the obvious and a touch of vertigo. There was something in the air, he could sense it, making the hair on the back of his neck stand up. Some sort of pressure building.

"Yes." Hakuba agreed, not sounding completely composed himself. Mist crawled towards them, creeping over the uneven ground and tickling their shoes. "There's also no blood."

No blood. A head had been chopped off. There should be great big spurts of it, all over the place. Severed arteries gushing everywhere.

The pressure around them reached a fever pitch, the sound of someone moaning, as if in pain reaching them. He peered around Hakuba into the alley behind him to see a man with a katana and a pony-tail spreading his arms wide, as if in penance or acceptance of a gift from a wrathful god. Mist swirled around him like it was a living thing, whipping the long coat the man was wearing and half obscuring a second figure laying splayed on the ground. One apparently missing it's head.

Then things started exploding, sending showers of sparks cascading down the walls and skittering across the ground. Hakuba flinched, pulling both of them against the wall, wrapping himself around Kaito protectively. Kaito did the same, the two of them hiding their heads like turtles while the alleyway exploded, the sound of tortured screaming intermingling above it all.

Finally silence descended, the mist, the lightening and the pressure fading as if it had never been.

Neither of them moved for several moments, heart beat pounding in Kaito's ears. Okay... that was
freaky. People with guns, okay. He could deal with that. Bouncing heads, random lightning storms and back alley murderers with swords, not so much.

Without letting go of each other’s arms, they both peered around the corner, in time to see the pony-tailed man --head still intact-- stagger away, the katana waving like a tired flag.

"Are you alright?!" The shout was in English, footsteps pounded towards them as a tall lanky man in an oversized sweater ran towards them. Kaito tensed for a moment, then relaxed, seeing nothing but concern and worry in the man.

"Somewhat." Hakuba commented, voice detached as he released his grip on Kaito, straightening up. Kaito did the same, looking around. The head was gone. The body looked like it was still there, but the man had distracted Hakuba from the corpse.


"Something, anyway." Hakuba had gone stoic, the blue contacts reflecting strangely in the low light. "It appears that someone was injured, farther in the alley."

The lanky man followed the detective's stare to the body laying in the alley. "I don't think they're any hope for him." He said sadly. "Come on, I was just on the way to the bar. We can use the phone there to call it in. My name's Adam Pierson, by the way."

"Saguru Hakuba." Hakuba turned his hawk-like gaze towards the man, bowing slightly. "This is Kaito Kuroba."

"Nihon desu ka?" Pierson asked, bowing slightly to both of them. "Hajimemashite."

Kaito bowed in return. "Hajimemashite." Pierson had obviously spent some time in Japan to get the accent right. Hakuba picked up on the same fact as well, chatting quietly with the graduate student about travelling to various places around the world. Kaito followed silently behind, making the occasional comment.

Something was off with Pierson as well. He just couldn't put his finger on it, but he'd learned to trust in instincts. They rarely led him wrong.

Joe’s Bar wrapped itself around them with a blanket of soothing blues and the faint hint of tobacco smoke as they walked it. Compared to the alley, it was security itself, a shelter for people to unwind and forget the outside world for a bit. The owner Joe Dawson met them at the bar himself, a grizzled man getting on in his years, limping with what looked like prosthetics, but a big grin that spoke of a person who was at peace with themselves. He plied them with coffee slightly spiked with a bit of brandy and began drawing the story out of them.

He did it so subtly that it took Kaito a while to realize that they were being interrogated. It was the friendliest interrogation he'd ever been party to witness, the old bartender did appear to be worried about them, much like Pierson was, but he seemed more keen on finding out exactly what they had seen. And who they would be telling.

Kaito began to seriously doubt that any phone calls to the usual authorities would be made tonight.

The door behind them opened, both Pierson and Joe glancing up, --Pierson before Joe-- and then returning to the conversation. A pleasant looking man with a funny accent joined their group, looking tired.
And wearing a long coat that moved funny. Almost like it was carrying something.

"Ah, Mac. Just in time to meet some new friends." Pierson greeted him, doing the introductions as Macleod, or 'Mac' shrugged off his jacket.

A jacket which had a dragon handle hidden in its folds. And from the quick flash Kaito had seen, a handle that looked like it was attached to a katana.

Katana hidden in a long jacket in the possession of a pony-tailed man.

Hakuba had gone stiff and silent beside him, staring at Joe and Pierson's wrists. Their alleyway 'saviour' had pushed his sleeves up in the warmth of the bar, partially revealing a tattoo on the forearm that was holding the beer. Joe was in the process of rolling up his own sleeves to rinse some dishes, a similar tattoo in the same place Pierson had one.

Kaito had a very bad feeling about this.

"I think I need to get some sleep." Hakuba said very quietly, setting his mug down on the counter. "I think I might have hit my head and was seeing things."

"That's probably a wise idea." Joe agreed carefully. "Should I call you boys a cab?"

"Thank you, no." Hakuba rose, Kaito taking his cue from the detective and rising as well, automatically guarding the blond's back. "I think we can find our own way from here."

"Okay." Joe agreed easily. "You boys take care. Stop by any time you feel like it."

"Thanks." Kaito waved, following Hakuba out of the smoky bar. Behind them, Macleod jokingly asked Pierson if he had done something to scare them off. He didn't seem to be the type to be cutting someone's head off in an alley, but what did Kaito know? He masqueraded as an Internationally Wanted Criminal on the weekends.

The tense silence held until they found the main streets again, heading at a brisk pace back towards the brighter lights. He didn't pick up on anyone trailing them, but they took a few roundabout ways just in case. Only once both of them were satisfied that no one was following did they relax enough to talk.

"You recognized something?" Kaito questioned softly, fingering a smoke bomb in his pocket.

Hakuba shook his head, paused, then shrugged. "A few rumours, maybe."

Kaito raised an eyebrow. "Rumours?"

"Alleyway fights, secret organizations, freak electrical storms." Hakuba shrugged again. "They've been reported all over the world, but supposedly they're beginning to concentrate here and on the North West Coast of the States. Nothing's ever been proven, of course."

"Which is why we didn't see anything." Kaito concluded. If they had -seen- someone being decapitated, they might find themselves minus a head as well.

"Exactly." Hakuba agreed. Several things flickered across the detective's face for a moment. Sadness, worry, regret, protectiveness. "This hasn't exactly been the best first visit to the City of Lights for you." He apologized.

Kaito relaxed, nudging the blond with his shoulder. Poor Hakuba. He'd probably been hoping for a
relaxing trip. Maybe even slightly romantic. Not one dealing with teasing kaitou, people jumping off the Tour Eiffel, conspiracies, or dead bodies. Mainly the last one. Not like they could help it though.

Hell, he knew the risks of travelling with a detective. Hakuba should too, he -was- the detective.

"S'okay." He grinned. "It's been memorable."

That was for sure. Hakuba smiled back, Kaito coaxing some humour back into the detective's countenance.

"Just one thing, though..." Kaito drawled.

"Yes?"

"We're lost again, aren't we?"

"... Shyte."

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

Joe Dawson, Adam Pierson/Methos, and Duncan MacLeod are all from the Highlander TV series.
-there can be only one.
Drabble: Cliché

“I don’t want to say it.” Saguru leaned against Kaito slightly, facing away from the crowd.

Kaito eyed the restless crowd. “You have to.” He hissed back. “You’re the detective who figured everything out.”

Saguru growled, an embarrassed sound deep in the back of his throat. “But… it’s so cliché…”

“Saguru-kun…”

“I know, I know.” The detective sighed, then straightened, adopting a formal attitude as he turned and faced the gathered suspects and officers.

“Ms. White did it.” Saguru announced stiffly. “In the Dining Room. With the candlestick.”

“At least you didn’t say the butler did it.” Kaito muttered softly.

-fin-

Drabble: Darts

It took the guys at the local pub three different visits to figure out that he was good at throwing darts.

It wasn't until the fifth game that they insisted that he step back a few feet.

On the eight game, he stood on the other side of the small room. And still didn't miss a shot.

In retrospect, on the ninth game, landing the darts on top of each other may have been overkill.

After the twelfth game, he was allowed back to the line where the rest of them stood.

But now he had to play blindfolded.

-fin-

Billiards

"Um... Kaito-kun?" Saguru had a look on his face like he wanted to say something and wasn't quite sure how to go about it.

Kaito sighed. He knew what was coming. He had known what the detective was going to say when he had coaxed Kaito away from the dart board towards the open billiard table at the local pub.
"Yeah?"
"You suck." Saguru was not doing a very good job at hiding his disappointment. It was obvious that he'd been hoping for a challenge on the billiard tables and the rest of the pub patrons had enough sense not to play him.

And -Aoko- could beat Kaito when it came to pool. Which wasn't quite like billiards, but it was close enough.

"Shut up. I know." He grumbled back. "I can't be perfect at -everything- you know."

"Yes, but..." Saguru's face scrunched up. "I know eight year olds who could play better than you..."

"If you want me to trounce you, we can play darts." Kaito declared firmly.

"Perhaps I could give you some pointers?" Saguru offered, clearly not ready to give up the game.

"Won't work." He sighed. "Jiichan tried to teach me, and he used to be pro. It's like ice skating, there's just some things I can't do."

Saguru shrugged. "Couldn't hurt to try."

"That I doubt." Kaito chuckled. "Give me playing cards, I can make them dance and sing. Put a stick and a couple of balls in my hands, I can't figure them out."

A silent awkward pause followed.

Saguru cleared his throat delicately. "I'm sure you'll figure it out someday."

♦ ♦ ♦ Growth Spurt ♦ ♦ ♦

Kaito scrambled out of bed, not at the sound of the alarm going off which he was blatantly attempting to ignore and failing, but at the sound of a body impacting on the solid floor and the cursing that followed. He dashed down the hall, pausing at Saguru's door long enough to rap his knuckles on the surface twice before allowing himself in. "Everything okay?"

"Ta. Everything's peachy." Saguru growled, fighting with his duvet on the floor and loosing. "BLAST!"

Kaito shook his head and went to help untangle his friend from the fabric. "Uncoordinated day?" He questioned, not unsympathetically.

"Probably." Saguru sighed, finally getting his legs untangled enough to stand up. The blond had shot up several centimetres from his previous 180cm height since his arrival in England, either the change in climate or food agreed with him. The downside to the rapid increases in height was a decrease in hand-eye coordination, at least until his body adjusted to the change. And occasional muscle aches as well, which meant the detective was usually in a sour mood for a few days, until his body was back under his control and pain free.

Kaito had also noticed that Saguru was starting to fill out the taller frame as well. In some ways, Kaito was slightly envious of Saguru's change in height and frame. In other ways, he was glad he'd stopped growing where he had. He was never going to be big in the way Saguru was, but having a smaller lighter frame was better for magician and thief work. It was much easier to add padding than appear smaller than you actually were.
Although he probably shouldn't be thinking about the thief part, he was trying to be good and avoid that currently.

(Kaito: 174cm / 5'7 3/4" 58.14kg / 127lb
Saguru: 180cm / 5'10" 65kg / 143lb
-we're putting Hakuba at a little over 6 feet tall or about 186cm. )

♦ ♦ ♦ Shoujo Manga ♦ ♦ ♦

Saguru's shadow fell on top of him as the detective peered over his shoulder. "You're reading shoujo?" Came the disbelieving comment.

"Aoko left it for me." Kaito held up the volume he was reading. "Kamikaze Kaitou Jeanne. She left a note saying since I'm such a Kaitou fan, I might enjoy it."

"Ah." Saguru nodded. "How is it?"

"The cops are incompetent, the heists are easy, the costuming is flamboyant-

Saguru's dry comment cut off the critique. "Sounds normal for a Kaitou."

Kaito tilted his head back, grinning at the stoic-faced detective. "Yup."

"So who wins?" There was a tiny half smirk on the corner of Saguru's lips, if you knew what you were looking for, that told that the blond knew exactly who won.

"They all do." Kaito smiled, willing to play along. "But Jeanne ends up with this Chiaki guy who's been chasing her around declaring that both forms were his and no one else's."

"Ah." Saguru nodded sagely. A thoughtful look flickered across his face for a moment before he leaned over the back of the sofa, wrapping his arms around Kaito in a solid, if awkward embrace. Saguru's lips moved briefly against Kaito's neck and it took a moment to decipher the muffled determined word spoken there.

"Mine."

♦ ♦ ♦ Flexiable ♦ ♦ ♦

Kaito noticed that Saguru had an odd expression on his face as the blond watched him.

He glanced down, doing a cursorily check. Nope, pants on, not committing any thefts, no boogers hanging from his nose that he could see...

So he raised an eyebrow back at the detective. "What?"

Saguru blinked, as if pulling himself out of a haze. "Nothing."

Obviously, it wasn't nothing, or the detective wouldn't have been staring. "What?"

"Nothing!" The Briton was starting to get a little bit of pink on his upper cheeks from embarrassment. While it was one of Kaito's favourite looks for him, he'd prefer to know the cause.
"Saguru-kun." He growled.

"No, really. It's nothing." A nervous hand waved at him, in what he surmised was supposed to be an appeasing gesture. "It's just that... most men I know don't sit like that."

Kaito blinked. Puzzled, he glanced down. They were both sitting on the couch, supposedly reading. He had his legs crossed, right leg over his left knee. He often sat like that. "Huh?"

Saguru motioned to how he was sitting. His legs were also crossed, but his ankle was resting on his knee, leaving his legs open. "Most men can't sit like that without squishing something vital."

It took a moment for things to click for him to understand what Saguru was saying. "Oh." He nodded. "Right. But most guys can't do this either."

Keeping his face in a trained bored expression, he slid out of the sofa and onto the floor, legs splaying to the sides in a perfect split. The muscles in his hips and thighs let him know he was a little out of practice, but nothing too painful. He'd have to start doing this more often if he wanted to keep it up.

"See?" When he glanced up, the red on Saguru's cheeks had shifted and the detective had a very odd look on his face, like he was torn between two very conflicting emotions. And he was holding his book protectively over his crotch.

"Honestly," Saguru said, his voice sounding a little strangled. "I'm not quite sure if I should be impressed or in pain..."

-fin-

( Inspired by re-reading Golden Eye and noticing Kid sitting like that and a discussion a long time ago with some male co-workers about sitting with your legs crossed above the knee. Their emphatic opinion was squished nads = bad. )

◆◆◆ Drabble: Angry Johnny ◆◆◆

"'But either way, I wanna kill you, I wanna blow you away.'" Saguru raised an eyebrow. "These are song lyrics."

"Right. But she's done it on the water, dry land, in a church, just about any time or place." The frantic young man, named James, not Johnny, shivered horrifically. "Jezebel shows up with that horrible laugh..."

Kaito glanced over Saguru's shoulder, reading the note. "Reads like either a kinky exhibitionist list or a creative murder spree." He glanced up at James. "Ever consider she might be hot for your bod?"

He offered brightly.

The purple haired man looked stricken. "... No?"

-fin-

( Lyrics are 'Angry Johnny' by Poe. Used without Permission, no profit being made. During the course of plotting this fic, 'Johnny' somehow became Pokemon's James from Team Rocket, with his scary and highly disturbing not-fiancée Jezebel. ^^;; )
"Oooh.... gods...." Kaito groaned in ecstasy as the warm water sluiced over his head. "I sooooo needed this."

Saguru made a muffled comment that was most likely agreement.

They'd been chasing a suspect, due to the fact that both of them tended to be faster than the resident officers when the suspect had seeked refuge in a candy factory.

A toffee factory to be precise.

Long embarrassing story short, they'd both ended up covered in the sticky substance with a peppermint coating. Humbug, indeed. They couldn't -walk- without squelching and all manner of horrible noises.

The officers had offered them use of the communal showers to wash all the goop off before it hardened. They'd gratefully taken them up on the offer, both of them pointedly ~not~ looking at each other.

-or, in reality, trying to steal glimpses when the other wasn't looking in the age old tradition stealing glimpses in the shower.

Kaito thought he had the better deal on that part, Saguru couldn't see without his contacts or glasses. Ha.

Saguru pulled his head out from under the spray, wiping off his face as he did so. "Pass the soap, will you?"

"Sure." Kaito dropped the bar of soap he'd been using into Saguru's outstretched hand.

And missed.

Both he and Saguru looked down at the white bar of soap on the pale tiles.

The moment stretched.

"I'll... go get another bar of soap..." Kaito offered.

Saguru peered at where the soap might have been. "Ye-ah."

-fin-

-from a discussion over that dropping the soap was the ultimate Seme or Uke test. Uke: I'll get it! Seme: You get it!
'course, then problems arise if you've got 2 seme or 2 uke in the shower at the same time...
A 'Humbug' is a type of candy with a toffee centre and a peppermint shell, by the way. They're pretty good.
The decorated feather was carefully placed in the girl's hands. She smiled, her hands clasping around it as she brought it up to her chest, the feather disappearing inside her body with a flash of light and power. She blinked a few times as the glow faded, her colouring a bit brighter than it had been before. She stumbled a bit and the boy steadied her.

"Thank you." The boy handed him the elephant back, gratitude radiating from his face. Kaito smiled back, taking the plushie. A quick check revealed that Pandora was still safely inside, untouched. Good. He smiled back.

"Sorry for the trouble." The pale man smiled, a sincere one this time. Evidently he'd been expecting more of a fight. Which dark and scowly was grumpy about, because he had that look in his eye that he'd really like a good fight.

The pork-bun yawned. "Monoka tired." It complained. "Can we find someplace to sleep now?"

Kaito attempted to catch Hakuba’s attention. Don’t say it, don’t say it, don’t say it…

“You can spend the night here if you wish.” Hakuba said politely, looking exhausted.

Dammit. He said it.

Note to self: Talk to infuriating Detective about bad insane moves that would get them both killed. Especially when it involved strange glowy people. From out of town.

Waaaaaaaay out of town.

“We can move things around so that Sakura-chan and her brother can use the upstairs~”

Hakuba was cut off by the pale man laughing and Sakura and her guard puppy suddenly blushing and protesting.

Not brother and sister. Not by a long shot. He smirked at the slightly flustered detective.

“If you have a room downstairs we can rest in, that would be lovely.” The pale man hid a giggle behind a hand. “I can assure you we’ve slept in far worse and we’ll be gone in the morning. My name is Fai. This is Sakura, Syaoran, Monoka, and that’s Kuro-pi back there.”

Kuro-pi, or ‘Kurogane’ as tall dark and shouting proclaimed his name to be, proceeded to attempt to hit Fai over the head repeatedly with Monoka. Every time he did so, the words he was shouting would seem to fade out for a second or two, becoming illegible.

“Sorry for the trouble.” Syaoran apologized, looking grateful for the place to crash. “It’s been a long day.”

“Understood.” Hakuba ushered them into the house, shutting the door behind him.
Kaito sighed and went to fetch blankets from the linen closet.

Stupid stubborn English bastards.

✦ ✦ ✦

"I'm beginning to think it's you." Hakuba commented mildly as their guests disappeared in gust of wind, feathers and magic circles at a nearby local park. The blond was slouching slightly, hands tucked into the pockets of his new coat that Fai had given him as a thank you for shelter for the night. Kaito had been offered one as well, but the only clothing they had to offer was either way too big or too small, so he'd politely turned it down.

Besides, it replaced the Inverness coat, which he was slightly grateful for.

But Kaito found himself wondering just where magicians and sleight of hand artists fell into this whole 'Wizards' and 'Magick' scheme of things. He was -good- what he did, but he was starting to question his own potential as to what was out there and what he could do.

"What is?" He asked, shoving his own hands into his pockets. Hakuba was handling the whole 'whooshing' off to other worlds thing better than he was too. Maybe it was a scientist thing, trying to analyze how he could replicate it in a mathematical formula or something.

Either that or Hakuba was doing that whole 'deal with it now, panic later' bit. Both of them were good at that.

"The strangeness." The blond was looking at the ground, face blank. "Things weren't nearly this strange until I started spending time with you."

"Funny." Kaito grinned, slightly relieved to find their recent adventures weren't just shaking him up. "I was beginning to think it was you. They weren't this weird before I met you either."

Now Hakuba looked up at him and smiled. They were okay. "Home?" Kaito requested. "No more stops for weirdness?"

Hakuba nodded, looking much like he'd reached his limit of strangeness. "Sound like a plan."

"Good." No more of this detective tendency of running into trouble. Next bit of trouble that found them, they were running -from- it.

This was supposed to be a vacation from threats to their life, not a working holiday!!!

Hakuba bumped him with his shoulder, nudging him into motion. Kaito snickered and bumped back, the two of them playfully shoving each other out of the park and back down the street.

At least until a strange ‘vhrrop vhrrop’ sound caught their attention as what appeared to be a blue phone booth appeared. Only it wasn’t quite a blue phone booth, the windows were odd looking and there were the words ‘Police’ on it, which set his guard up. Hakuba appeared to be boggling at it for a completely different reason.

The door opened and a curly haired gentleman wearing a brown coat and the longest most colourful scarf he'd ever seen stepped out of a phone booth. "Oh, pardon me. Perhaps-"

"No." Hakuba grabbed Kaito's wrist and briskly walked off, pulling him along. "Not again."

Kaito waved to the man. "Gotta go."
Then he grabbed Hakuba's wrist and they -ran- home.

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

CLAMP owns Tsubasa: Chronicle Reservoir and all related characters, I dunno who owns Dr. Who, but it ain't us. Standard disclaimers apply.
Kaito -should- have known that it was going to be a bad day when Hakuba fell out of bed.

More specifically, he should have known it was going to be a bad day when he fell out of bed on top of Hakuba when attempting to make sure the blond hadn't injured anything vital on the way down.

Actually, the landing hadn't been -quite- so bad....

But it meant that Hakuba was suffering yet another klutzy day due to another growth spurt, which in turn meant the blond was usually surly the rest of the day because his limbs refused to obey with their usual grace. This was usually accompanied by Kaito learning several new and interesting English words when Hakuba either knocked stuff over or ran into things.

Then Mum decided to have kippers for breakfast. He'd had to end up eating over-cooked lumpy oatmeal because of an incident with the microwave involving the neighbour's cat, some fried tomatoes and a pot holder. Just because he couldn't risk eating anything that might have come in contact with the pan she'd used to cook the kippers. He wasn't quite ready to test the whole 'In -sickness- and in health' thing with the detective. Or spending the next day or so getting to really know British plumbing.

The best way to deal with a surly, grumpy, clumsy Hakuba was to stay out of his way, so after breakfast Kaito decided that today was probably a good day to curl up with a good book in 'his' room and ignore the rest of the world.

Which would have been a marvelous plan except for a phone call just before lunch. A phone call to Hakuba Saguru, noted expert on all things Kid the Phantom Thief. Because someone had reported receiving a heist warning notice.

Kaito may have been having some problems keeping the Kid part of his brain from sneaking out while he was supposed to be Kaito and thus giving himself away to the world, but he was very aware of when he sent out a heist warning. Which he had not. He signified this with a wide-eyed expression of innocence and a clueless shrug.

Hakuba tersely informed the person on the other end of the phone that -they'd- be there as soon as they could. The bastard then ignored all of his pleas and shoved him into a black taxi that he called, because it would be faster than catching the train up where the heist was supposed to be.

It wasn't until Kaito pointed out that Hakuba's namesake, a White Horse, was carved into the hillside that Hakuba realised hey were heading the wrong direction. They needed to go -North- and they were heading South and West. Very South.
The detective had tried to get the driver's attention to inform him of this when the driver suddenly keeled over in the seat, the car coming to a gradual stop. They didn't have to scramble out of the car and check the waxy-looking man's pulse to figure out the obvious.

The driver was dead.

And if the look on Hakuba's face was any indication, he'd been dead for at least a little while.

He'd pulled out his mobile phone to call in the authorities when it had started to rain. Which wasn't entirely unexpected, it rained almost every afternoon here. But this was early afternoon, and a deluge, forcing them to seek shelter inside the car. And the mobile didn't work, they were out of range of the network.

Which meant that they had to sit there. In the car. With nothing to do. Well, he had offered to play cards, but a blue-eyed glare had cut that short.

Kaito -really- hated those blue contacts.

The noise level was -just- enough to keep him from being able to take a nap, and playing 'I Spy' was definitely out, so he'd spent an uncomfortable length of time waiting for the rain to stop so they could call someone to take care of the dead guy in the front.

Yeah. Dead Guy. That put a lovely chill in the place.

And he was hungry. They hadn't eaten anything since breakfast.

Finally the rain ended and they trudged up to the top of the hill to try to call from there. Only to find that the battery on Kaito's mobile battery was now dead, and now the car was missing.

No taxi. No tire treads, no dry spot to signify where it had been parked.

No explanation.

To say that Hakuba was less than pleased was an understatement. Kaito philosophically thought it was about par for the course today and wished he'd had the sense to climb back into bed this morning and pull the covers over his head. Maybe with Hakuba. The blond made a nice space heater. When he wasn't being a jerk. Just because Kaito liked the guy didn't mean that he didn't want to throttle him within an inch of his life sometimes.

Fortunately, Hakuba's phone could get signal up on top of the hill. Just in time for the people who had contacted Hakuba to begin with to brightly announce that they'd figured out it was a hoax and they'd taken care of the moron.

It would have been debatable who would have killed the man first if he'd been within arm's reach.

Hakuba called Mum and informed her that they were delayed and not to save dinner for them. Kaito's stomach disagreed with this theory.

Phone calls made, they'd done the only logical thing they could do, being stranded in the middle of no where an not knowing where they were. They'd started to walk, keeping a vague eye on the road as they did so, intending to cut along the green fields as soon as they spotted some sort of civilization from their viewpoint on the hill top.

Then the road disappeared.

Most of the time, Hakuba had a pretty fair sense of direction. So did Kaito, but his sense of direction was usually better off in mid air with the wind in his face to guide him. So while on the ground and in Hakuba's other home country, he usually let Hakuba lead. But every so often, Hakuba's directional sense just seemed to go on the fritz.

It appeared to be one of those 'every so often'. Since Kaito couldn't point them in the 'right direction', he went along with it. At least it was still Autumn, the air crisp but not too incredibly chilled to be uncomfortable.

Then darkness fell. It was the new moon, which meant there was no additional moonlight to help them see. Kaito's night vision was better than Hakuba's, but even he was having trouble seeing with the cloud cover blocking the starlight as well.

Finally, after stumbling for an untold amount of time --although Hakuba probably would have been able to tell-- down a pothole filled hill towards some lights in the unknown distance, they decided to stop for a bit. Both of them were tired, hungry and cranky and decided that it probably would be a good idea to lie down and get some rest before they killed each other.

So they'd curled up, using Kaito's shorter coat under them to keep at least some of the grass stains to a minimum and Hakuba's coat as a blanket by virtue that it would actually cover their legs.

Kaito woke up at false dawn, the start of a fresh day, the sky just beginning to lighten enough for everything to be visible. He'd nudged his sleeping partner and second blanket --the detective had a tendency to cuddle in his sleep-- in an attempt to wake him up and finally gave up, squirming out of the detective's grasp and getting up, taking the coat with him.

Upon looking around, he realised that they had spent the night on one of those chalk hill carvings that he'd spotted earlier. Which explained the pot holes they'd been tripped on, the long white trenches that formed the lines of the carving. Only this figure wasn't horse shaped. This one was man shaped.

Very man shaped.

They'd spent the night on a hill carving giant's left nut, the rest of the large phallus pointing up towards the top of the hill.

Hakuba finally woke up when he kicked the detective in the shin and tiredly explained that they were in Dorset, on the Cernes Abbas Giant. Evidently there were only two human shaped hill carvings in Britain and only one had a dick. This was both bad and good news, bad because there was a fence around the giant to keep people from spending the night on it -- a fertility ritual for childless couples-- and good because there was town within walking distance.

Kaito decided he needed to do some reading as far as the folklore of this island. It wasn't as if he could find a Shinto shrine to make offerings to if the native spirits here got pissed off at you.

So they'd put on their coats, climbed over the barb wire fence before anyone spotted them --they didn't need help in the childless area, thank you-- past the spring that was dedicated to someone called St. Augustine at the base of the hill and began to trudge down the road towards the town.

Along the way down the road, half heartedly attempting to straighten his clothing and comb the grass out of his hair, Kaito came to one very firm decision.

He was going to staple Sir Stinky to Hakuba's backside if they ever left the plushie behind on a trip.
again.

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

The chalk hill carvings do exist, by the way. The other humanoid chalk hill carving is ‘The Long Man of Wilmington’, who is distinctive because of the two long poles he carries, one on either side of his body. The joke about Sir Stinky is from 'Shades of Grey', Hakuba’s commented that trips have gone horribly wrong whenever he's traveled without the plushie. Dunno where the phantom taxi came in tho…They have a Phantom Bus in Scotland!
The Grey Zone: Taken, By Jaelle

Chapter Notes

Semi-sequel to "Stealing Immortality", randomly set somewhen in The Grey Zone timeline. All thanks to Icka as usual for not minding me playing in her Universes. Disclaimers to follow.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

♦ ♦ ♦

The Grey Zone: Taken
By Jaelle

♦ ♦ ♦

"Well, this is somewhat awkward."

"You're telling me," The Kaitou Kid gave a half-bow to the man whose fingers had tangled with his own when they both reached for the elegant crystal necklace. "I had no idea Europe had so many thieves. Uh, speaking of which, please tell me you're not going to pull out a sword or reveal that you've had an affair with my father?"

The other thief laughed gaily. "What an interesting tour you must be having! Be reassured though, I have no sword, and I fear I must disclaim that particular honour. Although..." his free hand reached down and caressed Kaitou's cheek softly. "If he was anything like you in looks, I fear I may have missed a great opportunity."

Kid felt a hot blush crawl up his face. "Uh, thanks, I think."

"Can I dare to hope that opportunity is knocking a second time?" His rival asked seductively.

"Glurk," Kid swallowed hurriedly and ordered himself not to let go of the necklace. "Unfortunately not."

The other thief's head tilted inquiringly. "Not interested?"

Kid decided to go with honesty. "Already taken."

"A thief who is taken?"

"I know," Kid said, a little of his self-possession coming back as he thought about Hakuba... who was probably leading a squad of policemen through the art gallery right now as a matter of fact... "But, sometimes it's not so bad."

"No," the other thief was amused now. "Indeed it's not so bad to be taken."

Kid told himself firmly that that hadn't been meant as sexual innuendo. Oh, who was he kidding? He blushed again.
The sound of running and shouting began to filter into the gallery. There was also a gunshot, which made Kid raise his eyebrows. It wasn't like Hakuba to lose control of the cops like that.

"Oh dear, it seems as my annoying rival has once more arrived upon the scene." The other thief smirked and disengaged from Kid and the necklace. "As an appreciation of your charming company, and as an apology for my rival's boorish behaviour, I leave the necklace to you."

"Thank you very much," Kid said steadily, neatly slipping the necklace out of the display and tucking it into his coat.

"But..." and before he knew it, Kid had been swept closer to the other thief. "I do claim one prize tonight."

**

"Rude poncy bastard with a stick up his ass..." Hakuba had been ranting furiously ever since he'd returned from the heist. Kaito was watching him thoughtfully, not saying anything, as the detective paced backwards and forwards across the room. "Just waltzed in and took control! Told me to stay out of the way, that this wasn't a game for kids! Creep! Moron! Bozo!" He struggled with himself for a moment. "Creep!"

"You said Creep," Kaito pointed out helpfully.

"Yes, but I was inserting it in place of a much ruder word," Hakuba explained tightly, before sighing and letting his shoulders slump. "He kicked me out of the scene," he said dejectedly. "I had to watch the whole thing from the sidelines."

"Never mind," Kaito soothed. "You'll get another chance."

"Should I be happy about this?" Hakuba raised his eyes to the sky and consulted the heavens for an answer, before shaking himself and looking annoyed. "Ugh, that man just got me so angry and wound up, I'm acting like an amateur thespian!"

Kaito's mouth twitched. "It's been a bit of a night for dramatics, all told."

"Oh, and how was the play backstage then?" Hakuba looked hopeful. "By any chance did a certain annoying leading character make a pratfall of an entrance?"

"There were no pratfalls," Kaito sniffed. "This was a quality performance thank you." He paused, "There was an epilogue though. A, er, a gift, from one thief to another."

"You got the necklace AND a gift?" Hakuba raised his eyebrows.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Kaito said innocently. "And who said the gift was for me?"

Standing up, he swooped upon Hakuba, grabbed him and dipped him gently in one smooth motion.

"A prize," he explained to the astonished detective, "from one thief, to another."

Leaning down, he kissed Hakuba quite thoroughly, his arms straining at the weight of the other boy.

"Not that I'm complaining but... this was the prize?" Hakuba asked when they broke apart.

"Mmmm," Kaito hauled him up with an effort.
"From Eroica, with love."

End

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimers: Kaitou Kid and Hakuba are the property of Gosho Aoyama. Eroica and Klaus are the property of Aoike Yasuko. The Grey Zone Universe was the cracked out idea of Icka M. Chif. No infringement intended, blah blah blahdiddy blah.

A/N: Well, uh, I was just reading volume 2 of Eroica and it just came to me. I TRIED to send it away...
Hakuba had always gotten a lot of stares while walking down the street, Kaito had privately observed. Previously, it had been more along the lines of the 'Check out THAT freak' variety, people looking at the Inverness coat and not at the person wearing it.

Ever since Hakuba had 'retired' the Inverness coat and started wearing the duster-style coat that their odd feather searching companions had given him, Kaito had noticed that Hakuba was still getting stares. Only now they were along the lines of 'Check out THAT cute guy' variety. Most of the time he watched people do this with a sense of amusement.

But sometimes Kaito wanted to point out that too bad, so sad, the blond was -off- the market. Hakuba was the Kaitou Kid's. Or something like that.

Only he couldn't and didn't dare say that out loud. For one thing, the Kaitou Kid was an internationally wanted thief. For another, he was Kuroba Kaito the majority of the time, not the Kid. And it wasn't Kaito that was dating Hakuba, the Kid was.

... so if he flirted with Hakuba, did that mean he was encroaching on his own territory?

It made his head hurt.

It was much easier to glare at the tall pale blond dressed in velvet, lace and pants so tight no one wore them like that any more who giving Hakuba an appreciative eye, like the detective was a piece of fine art he'd like to hang on a wall to admire. Kaito bristled slightly, but kept walking with a determined air.

Hakuba caught sight of the long haired blond pervert as well, but instead of letting his eyes just glaze over like he normally did at someone staring at him, an expression of realization and delight crossed his face. "DORIAN!" He shouted, waving and rushing towards the older man.

A look of shock and recognition flashed across the other man's face before he held his arms out,
catching the running Hakuba in a crushing bear hug. They started not-quite squealing in joy, rambling at each other at top speed about how long had it been since they’d seen each other --about three years--, where had they been --Japan and all over, respectively-- , when had Hakuba gotten so tall --they were about equal height-- and how Marvellous it was to see the other.

Kaito just sat back and boggled. He'd never seen Hakuba -bounce- before. Or sparkle. And both of them were definitely sparkling, enough to light up the entire street. So he just watched and wondered what the hell it took to get that kind of reaction out of the usually composed detective. And why the hell hadn't he seen that greeting before?!

"Kuroba, this is my Uncle, the Earl Dorian Red Gloria." Hakuba explained as the two blonds stepped apart slightly, an arm still wrapped around the other. The detective was still beaming, a wide pleased grin on his face. "Uncle, this is my friend from Japan, Kaito Kuroba. He's here to go to school."

"Wonderful to meet you, Darling!" Kaito shook the hand of Hakuba's uncle, quietly surprised by the strength of the grip. Uncle Dorian's calluses on his hands, although faint, were very peculiar. And the man seemed familiar somehow, but Kaito couldn't quite place it.

He was also slightly horrified to realise he'd just been thinking Hakuba's Uncle was a perverted old man.

Then as he found himself pulled into a quick hug, he considered that of what he'd met of Hakuba's family, it was probably best to reserve judgement on the perverted or not...

He was then held out at arm's length, Uncle Dorian's hands on Kaito's shoulders as the blond examined critically from head to toe, not as if he were a piece of meat, but as if he were good enough to run with Uncle Dorian's cherished nephew. From the slight curve of his mouth, the Earl liked what he saw. "A Watson to your Holmes, Angel?"

Kaito almost took affront. Almost. He was no one's sidekick. That was the hawk's job.

Hakuba grinned back. "Nah." A mischievous look was tossed in Kaito's direction. "More like my Moriarty."

Kaito grinned back as the Earl laughed, releasing him. He elbowed Hakuba in the stomach, leaning over to whisper in Japanese: "You say the sweetest things."

This earned a laugh from the tea-coloured blond. The pale-gold blond twinkled approvingly at both of them. "Exquisite taste, Saguru."

"Thank you, sir." Hakuba blushed slightly, -in pleasure- Kaito realised with a bit of a shock. If Hakuba's Mum had said that, the detective would have thrown a fit.

"And you must be the reason why our adorable Saguru has gotten rid of that god awful coat." The Earl grinned at Kaito. "I simply must thank you for that."

"It wasn't awful!" Hakuba protested. "-IS- not!"

"Is too." Kaito and the Earl chorused. Kaito grinned at Hakuba's Uncle. He could get to like this relative. Possibly. Especially since this relative could get Hakuba to turn that many shades of red with only a little bit of effort.

"We must celebrate this." Uncle Dorian decided. "I have the perfect idea!"
"Oh, no." Hakuba groaned in Almost-But-Not-Quite Mock Horror. There was some very real horror mixed in there. Kaito looked on inquiringly.

"Shopping!"

"Bugger." This was said very very quietly.

But not quietly enough. The Earl slung an arm around each of their shoulders, casually draping himself between them. "Why, Saguru. One must have a decent wardrobe to show off such a lovely figure as yours. Really, you must flatter your natural beauty, not hide it away from the eyes of the world."

Hakuba looked pained. Kaito looked on with interest, ignoring the too-casual contact in favour of watching his friend's embarrassment. He got the feeling that this was going to be very interesting. And most likely entertaining.

"I do believe there's a Grace Brothers around the corner." Uncle Dorian continued blithely, quickly escorting them away. "They're not the -best-, of course, but they'll do for now."

"What about your accountant?" Hakuba inquired, a hint of panic creeping in. "James will have an absolute heart attack."

"Jamsie has a heart attack nearly every day." The Earl casually dismissed it. "And it is not like I can't afford it. Hurry now, I see him coming."

Kaito could just hear a faint wail behind them as both he and Hakuba were bodily escorted through the doors of a department store and towards the elevators. He remembered the one time that Hakuba's Mum had tried to take them shopping with her. Hakuba had cursed a blue streak the entire way to the store, then grabbed Kaito and enlisted his help in disappearing as quickly as possible.

He somehow doubted that was going to happen this time. For one thing, the detective was reluctant, not adamantly against the whole thing. For another, he looked strangely pleased in his Uncle's presence. Which was odd, because Kaito got the feeling that if the Earl of Gloria wasn't toning things down right now to give someone the slip, he'd be more flamboyant than Hakuba's Mum. If he wasn't already.

They ducked into the elevators, Uncle Dorian primping slightly in the reflections there, an amused smile on his face. Hakuba watched with fond amusement, looking one step away from chuckling. Then the doors opened and they were both bodily ushered from the confined space, into the clothing section of Grace Brothers Department store. A very stiff looking middle aged man with an even stiffer moustache greeted them as they came down the stairs. "Welcome to Grace Brothers. My name is Captain Peacock. If there's anything I can help you find, please don't hesitate to ask."

"The Men's Department." Uncle Dorian smiled. "We require a new suit."

"Of course, right this way." Captain Peacock --what kind of name was THAT?!-- directed them off to their left. "Mr. Lucas, Mr. Humphries, and Mr. Grainger.... Where is Mr. Grainger?"

"In the back, sir." The brown haired man, Mr. Lucas from the looks of it, answered promptly. "He's quite busy with... whatever it is he's doing."

"Oh, I'm quite sure he is." Mr. Humphries, who had the palest hair of anyone Kaito had seen on anyone this side of forty, twittered. Both he and Hakuba peered behind the curtain to spot an elderly gentleman fast asleep, a tape measure around his neck. Kaito and the detective exchanged looks.
"Saguru here requires a new suit. Something form flattering." Uncle Dorian nudged Hakuba forward. Kaito grinned at the desperate deer in the headlights look Hakuba shot him. The desperate look sharpened into a glare, silently inform Kaito that he'd get his later. Kaito wiggled his fingers in return as Mr. Humphries squealed and escorted the reluctant detective into the back, nattering about various styles and colours.

After all, who was he to interrupt an obvious family bonding moment?

Speaking of family, a quick glance around revealed no sign of the Earl on this side of the room. The tall blond was on the women's side, charming the two ladies from the lingerie department. Grinning to himself, Kaito stuck his hands in his pockets and wandered over.

Surprisingly enough, Uncle Dorian was talking about... pantyhose. And the difficulty it was to find properly fitting ones in his size that didn't form ladders at the slightest snag. And that didn't pinch in all the wrong places.

"Have you tried garter belts?" Kaito questioned, having faced a similar problem in the past. "You have to make sure the straps don't twist when you sit down, but they don't pinch nearly as much."

Not to mention the thigh-highs created a lovely hiding place for lock picks and small trinkets that went boom.

This launched them into a lively debate about garter belts versus pantyhose for cross dressing, both of them tossing questions to the ladies for points of clarification to add strength to each side's arguments. The elder lady with the impossibly coloured hair, Ms. Slocombe, didn't offer much in the way of opinion, but the younger lady, Miss Brahms, seemed happy to talk to them about it, willing to give them pointers on how to fit a bra so it was more comfortable as well.

The topic of conversation didn't sink in until Hakuba joined them several minutes later, a bit of pink staining his upper cheeks. Mr. Lucas was pointedly looking somewhere else as Mr. Humphries was looking at them with something akin to admiration on his face.

Correction, Mr. Humphries was looking at the Earl, who was leaning over to chat with the ladies in those impossibly tight pants.

Kaito almost laughed.

"If you are done..." Hakuba drawled.

"Oh?" Uncle Dorian blinked at the detective, as if surprised to see him so soon. "Of course, darling. Just a moment." The Earl then proceeded to purchase a garter belt and several silk stockings, which waved dramatically when he tossed them over an arm and sashayed back over to the men's side.

Hakuba sighed. Kaito leaned up, propping his elbow up on Hakuba's shoulder. "I have to admit, I wasn't expecting any of your family to be so..."

"Flaming?" Hakuba deadpanned.

"Flamboyant."

"That too." Hakuba admitted with a small chuckle. "Mum sent me to live with Uncle Dorian the summer before I moved back to Japan. It's rather difficult to have the usual teenage angst and confusion over sexual orientation while your Uncle is down the hall screaming and demanding to know who stole his eyeliner."
THAT was an amusing mental picture. "You did, didn't you?"

"Actually, it was one of Uncle Klaus' men." Hakuba admitted. "Uncle Dorian forgave G for that, saying that if you were going to borrow eyeliner, it was best not to borrow an inferior product."

Made sense, in a certainly twisted way. "Uncle Klaus?"

"Uncle Klaus Heinz Von dem Eberbach, otherwise known as 'Iron Klaus'. He works for the German NATO. Uncle Dorian chased Uncle Klaus for years until he got caught."

"Caught Klaus?"

"Uncle Klaus caught Uncle Dorian."

Kaito tried to figure that one out and decided to give it up as futile. His head was really beginning to hurt. Fortunately the Earl chose that moment to call them back over to the men's side of the store -- much to Captain Peacock's visible relief-- to look at suit styles. Hakuba sighed and trudged over, Kaito following along with.

"Garter belts?" Hakuba questioned.

"Sometimes I have to pose as my own Magician's Assistant." Kaito posed, doing a little flourish with his hands. "Ta-da!"

The detective rolled his eyes. "I do -not- want to know how you keep everything from bulging out."

"Oh, they have special underwear for that now, Darling." Uncle Dorian assured him. "Much better than the old days, when you used to have to use a string and a ping-pong ball."

Kaito nearly applauded as Hakuba's brain appeared to explode, his face turning the colour of a flashing red police siren.

Uncle Dorian winked at Kaito. "Disguise expert. It comes in handy sometimes."

"Yes." Kaito agreed. "Yes it does."

"That reminds me, Uncle." Hakuba frowned, a forbidding expression crossing his face. "I'm rather cross with you over another matter."

"Oh?" This earned them a raised eyebrow and a artful hair flip of golden curls that smelled of roses. Kaito allowed himself a small frown. Roses... Dammit, why did Uncle Dorian seem so familiar? It was right there, nagging at the edge of his brain...

Hakuba made a not-quite pointed glance around the store. "Later." He promised.

The Earl nodded, then began flipping through the magazines there, pointing out styles and colours with a rapid non-stop chattering. Hakuba looked pained, rapidly sorting clothing into 'possibly' and 'not unless hell froze over' as if his life depended on it. Kaito merely stood back and tried not to smile too much, incase the detective took it the wrong way. It was amusing to see the half-briton's sharp-eyed focus on something other than a murder, theft, or himself, even if it was in a form of self defense.

Finally the sorting stopped, the two blonds looking at each other like Generals out over a battlefield. "All of the clothing you chose is so... old!" Uncle Dorian finally snapped, almost childish.

"Yes." Hakuba agreed. Kaito glanced over the picture that was being pointed at as evidence. It was
old-fashion, leaning more towards last century than this. The detective spared him an amused glance. "One of us should remain retro."

Kaito's mind flashed over to his white Kid outfit, which should have been impossibly impractical, and yet worked. He snorted in amusement and debated the merits of kicking Hakuba in the ankle for the jibe, but thought better of it. He didn't want to have to explain the joke to the Earl, who was looking at them quizzically.

Instead, he gestured at his own clothing, with the zipper down the front of the long turtle-neck style jumper. Out of the three of them, he was definitely the most modern looking. Uncle Dorian, who looked like he'd just stepped from the late 70s, nodded, but not without some question to his gaze.

"Yes, but Darling, surely we can do better than that." The Earl lamented. "Something less... covered."

"It's more fitted than a lot of the modern styles." Hakuba stubbornly pointed out. But a hell of a lot less fitted than some of the clothing that looked like the majority of it was made of either translucent veils or spandex. Uncle Dorian paused, then ceded that point.

"You have a terrible eye for colours and fabrics." The Earl lamented, turning his attention towards the fabric swatches, clearly intent on taking over that part of the decision. "Must be your father's side, everyone from my family has excellent taste for fashion."

Hakuba's mouth opened, then he shut it again, clearly biting off a comment. "I'm not wearing red." He finally growled.

Kaito had heard Hakuba's Mum grumble about her troublesome youngest brother before. He was starting to wonder if it wasn't because they were so much alike that they didn't get along. Not that he would ever voice this observation within earshot of either Mum or Uncle Dorian. Ever.

"Most of his wardrobe lately is browns and earth tones." Kaito offered, feeling just a little bit puckish. He had a slightly vested interest in this endeavour after all. He had to live with Hakuba after this. "Maybe go along those lines? That way everything matches, even if he gets dressed with his eyes closed." Hakuba gave him a -look- for that and Kaito shrugged in return. Wasn't his fault the detective dressed like he was partially colour-blind. Perhaps he was.

"I'm a Detective." Hakuba said firmly. "The formal clothing help people to take me seriously, instead of dismissing me because of my age, like they would do if I wore jeans and a colourful jumper, much some of my schoolmates."

Kaito thought about it and realised that he had a point. Kudo Shin'ichi used to show up to mysteries in a tie and everyone took him seriously. People's first reaction to Hattori Heiji, with his jeans, denim jacket and baseball cap at a crime scene was usually along the lines of 'what does that guy think he's doing?'. If you dressed like you were serious, people took you seriously.

However, this didn't explain the inverness coat or the blue suit-lavender shirt-green tie combo he wore at Sunset Mansion...

"Fine." Uncle Dorian agreed. "But no tweed."


"He has argyle socks too." Kaito informed the Earl sadly.
Uncle Dorian looked at his nephew with great pity. "Oh, my poor, poor boy."

"What?" Hakuba bristled defensively. "Mum buys them!"

The Earl rolled his eyes imploringly upwards as if looking to heaven for guidance or patience. Kaito was pretty sure he heard the curly haired blond mutter something along the lines of 'Lord save us, his mother dresses him funny', but he wasn't entirely sure.

Things went pretty much as could be expected after that, Uncle Dorian making outrageous suggestions, Hakuba --resigned to the fact that his favourite uncle was going to dress him up like a doll no matter how he protested-- working frantically at damage control, the two of them bantering back and forth. Mr. Humphries watched the entire spectacle with great delight, rooting for both sides as he made making occasional suggestions and possible compromises. Kaito certainly couldn't begrudge him for it, Mr. Humphries would come out well no matter the outcome, especially if he worked on commission.

Most of the clothing they made an arrangement to meet sometime next week and pick up, but Hakuba did walk away with one piece of clothing he appeared to be especially pleased with. It was an old-fashion waistcoat, like a train conductor might wear, specifically designed to carry a pocket watch. Uncle Dorian decided it 'fashionably retro' when Hakuba clipped the watch where it was supposed to go, the gold chain dangling slightly and gave his approval.

Kaito stayed back in the shadows, feeling slightly smugly superior. -He- wasn't the one being dragged around for a clothing makeover. Of course, his own clothing --Kid tuxedo aside-- tended to be on the looser casual side, mostly because one of his main requisites for clothing was being able to do gymnastics in it. They got into enough trouble in daily life that restrictive clothing that prevented a clean getaway was a serious no-no. It'd also be highly embarrassing to do the splits and suddenly find his trousers splitting as well.

And he could blame the mostly dark clothing on the fact that -everything- went with black. Heh. Clothing really was all about disguise after all.

So they left the store, Hakuba happy to have gotten off what he considered to be lightly, Uncle Dorian happy to have gotten to play dress up with his favourite nephew, Grace Brothers and their associates happy for the sale, and Kaito if not thoroughly, then mostly, entertained.

Hakuba and Uncle Dorian chattered away about where and when they should meet when Hakuba did a slight double take, blue eyes slightly widen in what Kaito swore was either malicious glee or not-so muted mischief.

"Uncle?" Hakuba asked, his voice almost -too- bright and innocent, but only if you knew the sarcastic bastard.

It was a warning sign that the Earl obviously missed, turning his wandering attention towards the detective. Kaito watched with some confusion as Hakuba's eyes narrowed in what looked like anger, but his mouth curved up in a smirk. "I would appreciate it, that if in the future you did not casually molest my thief." The words came out flat, almost casual, but with a hint of muted violence in them.

It took a moment for the words to sink in.

"YOU!!" Kid the Phantom Thief jabbed an accusing finger towards the Art Thief Eroica, who was waving a finger back at him.

Dammit, he KNEW that the Earl Gloria had seemed familiar!!!
A tall dark shadow fell over them. "You, what?" An accented clipped voice demanded brusquely.

Kaito glanced up to see a tall, dark, and handsome man staring down at them. Kaito almost backed up, recognising the maniac with the gun from the art museum he'd run into Eroica at. Hakuba was not-quite grinning at the new man, looking pleased with himself. "Hullo, Uncle Klaus." Hakuba greeted the man formally. "May I introduce my friend, Kuroba Kaito? He and Uncle Dorian were just realising that they've meet before."

"So I hear." Uncle Klaus said. There wasn't quite ice crystals in the voice, it was more like muted steel, the sound of a gun being taken off of safety in preparation of being fired.

Kaito knew without a shadow of a doubt, that Uncle Klaus --IRON Klaus, suddenly the nickname made sense-- had heard Hakuba's comment towards his uncle.

Somehow he got the feeling that Uncle Klaus was nothing but severely territorial. And that he hadn't know about Eroica's little... late night epilogue. Or if he had, he hadn't known about the kissing part. It was not going to be a quiet night in that household.

It suddenly struck him that Hakuba had probably been more annoyed at Eroica's gift than he'd let on. It also meant that he'd had passed on a kiss from Hakuba's Uncle to Hakuba... ew. Kaito made a mental note to both selves: Pass on only personal kisses in the future.

But then he supposed the bastard had deserved it. Especially since the bastard detective hadn't -mentioned- that he knew exactly who Eroica was. Dammit, no wonder Hakuba hadn't had a major problem with him being a Kaitou, there was one in the family! One who lived with his own personal rival, another law enforcer!

"Nice to meet you." Kaito said politely, bowing to Uncle Klaus, keeping his thoughts in his head and not in his voice. Iron Klaus certainly didn't look the hugging type.

Funny thing was, he could see more of Hakuba in Uncle Klaus than Uncle Dorian. The strong focused look, like a wolf on the hunt, even when idle, was similar. The main thing marking Hakuba as being related to Uncle Dorian was the golden colouring, especially with the stupid contacts in.

Uncle Klaus grunted in return, attention clearly focused on his partner. Uncle Dorian smiled back, clearly unfazed by the look that probably sent most people trembling in fear. "Perhaps while you are here, you could answer a question for me." Kaito ventured, keeping his tone mild. Hakuba raised an eyebrow at him.

"Certainly." Uncle Dorian smiled at the distraction.

Kaito took a slight breath and asked the question that had been bothering slightly him since he'd run into Eroica. "Why is your name 'Pervert Squid'?" Although part of that was probably self-explanatory... The first half anyway.

The noise of the street suddenly got impossibly loud as the two and a half Europeans stared at him.

"Eh?" Okay, he'd probably completely blown that, but at the time he hadn't wanted to ask the irate detective. But since they were here, he figured it was as good of an opportunity as any He glanced at Hakuba for help, switching to Japanese. "'Ero' means 'Pervert', and 'Ika' is 'Squid'..."

Hakuba made a noise somewhere between a cough and a choke. "It's an English word."

Kaito frowned. So he had gotten it wrong then. "Erotica?" He tried again. The name on the card wasn't one he recognised. He'd wondered if the other thief had made a typo on the card or
something. It'd been annoying him.

This earned a coughing fit from Uncle Klaus. "Close enough." The stern man commented, taking a hold of Uncle Dorian's arm. "We'll see you later. Saguru, we'll be expecting you to stop by while you're on this side of the world."

"Yes, Uncle." Hakuba said dutifully, although happily.

Uncle Klaus grunted again, dragging his thief off. Uncle Dorian waved at them looking not at all unpleased to be dragged off by the man he obviously adored, skipping slightly to keep up with Uncle Klaus' long strides. "EXCELLENT taste, Darling!" Uncle Dorian shouted after them. "Bring him along too!"

"I think I'm embarrassed." Kaito muttered. Not only about Uncle Dorian's comment, but for his own blunder. He hadn't quite meant to make -that- big of a tactical and grammatical error. Hakuba rolled his eyes in agreement.

"Better watch out, he may try to recruit you." Hakuba grumbled back. "He's very committed to Uncle Klaus, but that doesn't stop him from admiring. Especially since you've got a brain in your head."

Kaito raised an eyebrow, refraining from making any of the obvious 'committed' jokes.

"Uncle Klaus has his Alphabet of Agents, Uncle Dorian has his Rouge's Gallery." Hakuba explained, motioning for them to head the other way with a tilt of his head. "And the word 'Eroica' comes from Beethoven's Third Symphony."

"Oh." Kaito shrugged. Stupid English words. Like he was going to understand the references.

"However, I think that Uncle Klaus is going to get a good deal of mileage out of the 'Erotica' comment." Hakuba added cheerfully.

Kaito glanced back over his shoulder, but the Uncles were already out of eyesight. He supposed, that to Uncle Klaus, Eroica was Erotica...

Ack. Bad mental picture.

"Nice timing back there." He commented instead, changing the topic. Why use strong arm tactics when a well spoken comment at the right place would work even better? However, he did have one minor nigling point of contention. "And who ever said Kid was -your- thief?"

Hakuba smiled, but didn't comment, looking highly pleased with himself. Kaito followed, glaring, more for form's sake than anything else. The detective already knew most of his secrets, he didn't need to know that Kaito would steal for him too. Among other things. He owed the bastard anyway.

Kaito turned the focus of his attention towards the people around them again, not wanting to dwell on introspection at the moment. People were staring admiringly at Hakuba again, the blond completely ignorant to the attention he was getting.

This time however, Kaito mentally shrugged and dismissed it. Let them stare. The blond wasn't bad to look at, even if he was a sarcastic bastard.

They weren't the ones Hakuba was going home with.

-fin-
Disclaimer: Characters from "Are You Being Served?" (which is where 'Grace Bros' comes from) and "From Eroica with Love" are being used without permission, no profit is being made, we don't own them.

Called 'Shades of Red' because of Dorian's middle name and all the funny colours Hakuba turns.
"My, my. Is that a ruby in your pocket, or are you just happy to see me?"

Kid paused halfway out the window, and looked back over his shoulder. The woman standing in the doorway smiled at him seductively, pushing out her... assets as she did so.

"Uh, it's a ruby," he said, and shot her a quick grin. "Nice meeting you! Bye!"

He kicked off and out into the night air, his glider wings smoothly catching an updraft and wafting him away from the shouting police, annoyed detectives, and one ENORMOUSLY pissed off woman who spluttered speechlessly in the room he'd just left, while two other men collapsed in hysterical laughter at her feet.

"Did you... the NERVE of that... OHHHHH!!!" she snarled angrily. "I bet he's gay!"

Lupin the Third stood up slowly, clutching his sides in pain, while Jigen just rocked on the floor in silent gales of laughter.

"Never mind Fujiko honey, I still love you."

"And then what happened?"

Hakuba shuddered, a wild look in his eyes. "And then... and then he said... 'The ice will hold our weight – keep going'. And we drove across the river... and the cars were falling through all around us, and then there was this massive cracking sound and it broke beneath us. I sent Watson away, and jumped clear and so did he, then we both tried to outrun the cracks. I nearly made it, but I had to swim the last metre or so. And then he was shouting at me to keep going... and some woman went past us on a motorcycle and he started chasing her... and the yelling... and, and, and..."

"And?"

"And that's when the runaway circus careened through the field, and some clowns grabbed me, and we chased after the people in the mini, and Watson didn't come back because there were lions, and..."
tigers, and bears."

"Oh my."

"We followed the mini up the hill and through the tunnel... and then we heard the train whistle blow. So me and the tigers jumped clear, and then the train hit the trucks, and then the rest of the police reinforcements arrived, and while they were organising to continue the pursuit I convinced a nearby farmer to give me a lift home."

Kaito patted the lump of blankets that was all he could see of his detective soothingly. "There, there, it's all over now."

Hakuba whimpered. "I want to go back to Japan, when all I had to worry about was robot duplicates, hang gliders, and disguises."

"And a huge secret organisation that wants to kill us."

"Did I mention the part about the bull in the field and Inspector Zenigata's red tie?"

"... Japan it is."

End

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Okay, I KNOW Icka's done a "something in your pocket" fic, but I don't think it was quite like this, so hopefully all is well. For those who don't get the joke, Fujiko Mine is the "sex siren" of the Lupin the Third universe, and Lupin has the SERIOUS hots for her. She can get almost anything with her "feminine wiles". Just... not this time. *

A/N: He's just so cute when he's traumatised.
Mum had handed them some money and politely requested that they go to the local market to pick up some things for dinner. It was a thinly veiled order in disguise but it wasn't like either of them could easily refuse any of her 'requests'.

Thankfully, she hadn't quite seemed to realize that. Or if she had, she wasn't taking advantage of it. Yet.

And grocery stores were interesting. There were certain things that you could go anywhere and find at any market - vegetables, fruits, hopefully fresh meat, cleaning goods and some toiletries. Anything a standard household might need or run out of at a moment's notice.

But there were differences too. The scent was different, the spices and vegetables that were 'local' in Japan were 'exotic' here. Standard staples of food home weren't the same staples here. But food was food and as long as it tasted okay, he didn't care overly much.

And the differences were interesting to look at, just as the small similarities were soothing. His speech was improving a lot faster than his reading was, so he used it as an excuse to peruse the shelves, looking at the strange canned goods while Saguru got what they needed and put it in the basket he carried. It was amusingly domesticated, shopping together for dinner.

He was in the dessert section now, having passed the beans --having a brand name like 'Bachelor's' for canned foods made only too much sense, even if the peas they sold were mushy-- and looking at the pudding names.

'Treacle' pudding threw him for a loop the first time he'd seen it, he'd gotten it mixed up 'tentacle'. Saguru had to explain it to him, red faced from attempting not to laugh until Kaito had finally given up and asked him to laugh. He'd been almost afraid of the blond hyperventilating if he didn't. And it was good to hear Saguru laugh, even if it was slightly at his expense.

'Trifle' didn't only mean 'just little bit', it was also a not so small dessert, kind of like pudding. And puddings where everywhere. He'd thought he was used to pudding, the little plastic containers of flan from the convenience marts in Japan, but the British seemed to have taken it up to an art form. Or at least, a several course meal.

Yorkshire Pudding, Chocolate Pudding, Creamed Rice Pudding, --lotta creamed puddings, really-- Tapioca Pudding, Black, Pudding, White Pudding, Spotted Dick Pudding, Sticky...

Spotted DICK?!
In a CAN?!

Kaito did a double take, examining the row of cans.

Heinz Spotted Dick Pudding. In a can.

Gingerly, he picked up one of the cans and examined it.

Spotted Dick. That's what it said. Kaito grimaced, knowing that bit of slang at least. He glanced below his belt, sending a brief mental prayer for the suffering of whatever or whom ever had sacrificed for this dessert.

To have it shoved in a can for people to buy off of market shelves.

And it was spotted too. What the hell did they do get it like that? Wait for it to rot before slicing it off?

This was a Dessert?!

"Oi, Kaito-kun!" Saguru called, walking up with the basket slung over one arm. "You done look... Kaito-kun? Is everything all right?"

Kaito just held up the can. "Ow."

It was Saguru's turn to do a double take, then to glance at Kaito's crotch. Kaito realized belatedly that he was holding himself rather protectively of that area of his anatomy.

"Kai-hee-to, it's not -snerk- what you're -chortle- thinking it -hee hee- is..." Saguru's face was turning pink again, the blond obviously having trouble breathing. The detective had one hand in front of his face in an effort to hide or smother the grin on his face, not that it did any good.

Kaito sighed, rubbing his forehead. "Laugh, Saguru-kun. Get it allllll out of your system first, then tell me."

Saguru promptly did that, an arm draped over him to act as a prop to keep the detective both vaguely upright instead of doubled over laughing. Kaito could see tears started to form on the corner of Saguru's eyes as the detective attempted to control his laughter from drawing the attention of everyone in the store.

Not that it was doing any good. Saguru didn't laugh all that often, but when he did, it was memorable. Stupid detective didn't do much half way. Kaito sighed and bore it stoically, waiting for the amusement to fade and people to stop staring at them, wondering what was so funny. Obviously, he'd gotten something mixed up again.

Stupid desserts anyway. Who needed them?

Yeah, okay, he did. Dammit. Stupid sweet tooth.

"You done?" He finally asked as the laughter wound down to more manageable levels, Saguru practically draped across him like a second coat. The blond nodded, little more than rubbing the side of his face against Kaito's neck, still snickering softly.

"It's a pudding." Saguru finally got out, slightly wheezing from the effort of not laughing again. "With raisins and currents in it to make it spotted."

So it wasn't rotted, moldy or disease filled. He wasn't sure if he was relieved or not.
"And it's called 'dick'?-?" He ventured, bracing himself for another fit of giggles.

"Because it's a type of puddick, pudding. No body parts added. Oh, jeez."

Saguru pushed himself off of Kaito, rubbing his eyes, shoulders still shaking slightly from the muted giggles.

"Spotted -dick- indeed." He murmured, walking towards the front, where the checkout girl was giving them funny looks.

"Oh, shut up." Kaito finally growled, debating tossing the can at Saguru’s head before sticking it back on the shelf. He was NOT going to eat that, thank you very much. At least not tonight. Especially when he just -knew- that Mum was going to find out about this and was going to tease him mercilessly about it.

He’d try the dick later, when they weren’t looking to tease him about it.

"Like you've never had a culture shock before!"

-fin

Chapter End Notes

Chat window:

Dogmatix says:
.

.....Ickaa? Have you in any of your TGZ fics had Kaito encounter the British desert(think it's a desert...) known as the Spotted Dick?

Not Actually Ysabet this time says:
not yet

Dogmatix: says:
Because I would ~love~ to see his face for that.

And then, of course, Morgan and Linda had to jump on it too and Voila! Story. Typed the whole thing out in the chat window. ^^;

Heinz is a brand that sells spotted dick in a can. You can find and buy it on-line. From what I can find, it got it's name from 'puddick', a nickname for 'pudding'. It then got shortened to 'dick', hence 'spotted dick'.
Kaito looked around the elaborate room with mixed emotions. Primarily confusion and the distinct feeling that he was being tricked. He crossed his arms, looking at his friend and current tour guide, who was looking at him with an aura of distinct amusement.

"Let me get this straight..." Kaito drawled in Japanese. He should be practicing his English, especially considering their current location, but he was in the mood to be particularly difficult at the moment. Besides, if he was going to be clueless, he'd rather that everyone in the room not realize this as well. "Sherlock Holmes was a fictional character, written by Sir Conan Arthur Doyle at the turn of the century."

"Correct." Hakuba agreed, the corner of his mouth curved up in a very distinctive smug smirk. From Hakuba's belt, there was the sound of a suspicious snicker. Kaito knew he'd rue the day he'd figured out how to turn their cell phones into portable cameras/walkie-talkies for Hirokini-kun to observe what they saw in the outside world. From waist level, anyway.

"However, this..." He swept a hand around to encompass the sitting room they were currently occupying "Is where Holmes lived from between 1881 to 1904." At least according to the flyer they had been handed at the door explaining the history of the house-cum-museum at 221b Baker Street.

"Also correct." Hakuba agreed.

"And that's Mrs. Hudson standing at the entrance way, answering questions."

"Yes."

"Despite the fact that she'd be -well- over a hundred years old now and remarkably good looking for her age. In addition to being a fictional character."

"Yes."

Kaito almost-but-not-quite sulked. "I hate you."

Hakuba practically glowed at him. "Noted."

Kaito sighed. There was just no dealing with Hakuba when it came to his Holmes obsession. The blond was as stubborn as a brick.

A laugh from the side startled them. "Attempting to explain The Game, are you?" There were capitals in the words that you could just -hear-, even in Japanese. They turned, mirroring each other as a middle aged Japanese man joined them, an amused expression on his face. "My apologies for interrupting, but I couldn't help but to overhear your conversation."

"Game?" Kaito echoed, feeling positively outnumbered. Although it was nice to meet someone else
Hakuba grinned at him, his expression wide and gleeful with not-so hidden mirth. "'The Game' is what we Sherlock Holmes Fanatics call it. To us, Sherlock Holmes is not a fictional character, but was a real man who actually existed."

Kaito blinked, feeling something click into place. No wonder so many Holmes fans were fanatical. They weren't just defending some mystery fantasy, this was -real- to them. "Oh." Hakuba smiled politely at him, as if quietly waiting for the shoe to drop. Kaito shoved his hands into his jeans pockets, slouching slightly. "You're still nuts."

Their gentleman friend laughed again, a hearty laugh that drew the attention of the other visitors to the museum. Kaito ignored them. Stupid Holmes Freaks.

"You look vaguely familiar." Hakuba bowed slightly to the older man. Have we met before?"

"I don't believe so." The man bowed in return, then held out his hand. "Kudo Yusaku. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

"Hakuba Saguru." Hakuba shook his hand, then motioned to Kaito. Kaito bowed quickly and shook the man's hand as well. The grip was strong, but not overly so. "This is my friend, Kuroba Kaito."

Kaito glanced over at the blond in mild surprise before returning his hand to his pocket. Not only had Hakuba introduced him --a silent way of saying that Hakuba was taking responsibly for Kaito socially-- but he had introduced him as 'friend', not 'classmate', like he had done in Japan.

Kid and Hakuba were friends. More than friends, really.

Kaito and Hakuba he was still trying to figure out.

"Hakuba Saguru?" Kudo-san looked at Hakuba with a bit of surprise. "My son mentioned you recently. You're the expert on the Kaitou Kid."

"An expert." Hakuba demurred. "Nakamori-keibu has been chasing him for over twenty years."

Kudo... Kudo... Kaito blinked, pieces falling into place. They were talking to Kudo Shin'ichi --Edogawa Conan--'s father. "You write the 'Night Baron' series."

Kudo-sensei looked slightly surprised, then smiled. "You know them?"

"I've read some." He shrugged in return. "Hakuba's the mystery fan. Are you in town for research?"

"Something like that." Kudo-sensei gestured around the room. "I found myself with a bit of a mental block, so decided to visit an old friend in the hopes of clearing my head. Did you know-"

Kaito tuned out their conversation as it delved into the idiosyncrasies of the Sherlock Holmes universe. He trailed along behind, enjoying the rooms for the historical value if nothing else. It was like stepping back in time to a completely different era.

Kudo-sensei and Hakuba continued to talk as they made their way downstairs and into the gift shop. Kaito slipped away momentarily to buy a handful of postcards. He bought some stamps and quickly filled one of them out along the lines of 'Weather is here, wish you were beautiful' and sent it off to 211b Beika Street, unsigned.

It was slightly petty of him, but the shrunken detective was going to be -insanely- jealous. He could
practically hear the screams of outrage from here.

If they ever ended up on the Orient Express, he'd send one to Hattori as a thank you for keeping up correspondence during the summer. Even if the Osaka Detective was an Ellery Queen fan, he'd still probably love the Agatha Christie reference.

One of the postcards was going to Hakuba's house in Japan. He'd already sent a few others there, mostly while he was in Paris. It'd make a nice surprise when Hakuba got back to Japan, a sort of scrapbook of places they'd been. He was debating sending one to his Mom or Aoko, but that might alert the highly annoying men in trench coats as to where they were and that would be bad. Maybe to Jii-chan, then. To pass it on.

As far as Aoko knew, he was going overseas to go to school. She was still living with her father, so he wasn't overly concerned about her safety. There wasn't much to connect her to the Kid. Mom was taking the opportunity of an empty nest to do some travelling of her own, visiting family.

And last he'd heard about Akako, something had happened in Las Vegas resulting in her being insanely wealthy and connected to some of the mob bosses there. He wasn't going to inquire too deeply. As long as she was happy--and far away from him-- he was happy for her.

A cheerful feminine shout drew their attention from Kudo-sensei congratulating a confused Hakuba about something towards a nicely curved blond woman with curly hair waving at them. Kaito blinked, looking over at Hakuba. The blond detective shrugged in return. Not any of Hakuba's relatives then.

Then the woman slid her arm around Kudo-sensei's waist and things made sense again. "Hakuba-kun, Kuroba-kun, this is my wife, Yukiko. Darling, this is Hakuba Saguru and Kuroba Kaito."

"Kuroba?" Yukiko straightened, examining him closely. "You wouldn't happen to be related to Kuroba Toichi, would you?"

A glance flickered between him and Hakuba. The blond was as confused as he was. "My father." He said politely.

"Ah! I knew it! You look just like him!" She bounced at him, arms open wide and Kaito abruptly found himself being suffocated in her not-insignificant cleavage. Just when he was afraid of passing out, she released him, keeping her hands on his shoulders as she bounced. "You probably don't remember, but I learned disguise from Toichi-sensei. You must have been about knee-high at the time, cute as a button. Are you still friends with that little adorable girl who'd follow you around and give you orders?"

"Ah... Aoko? Yes." He was blushing, partly from the lack of air he'd just had, partly of mortification. He spared a glance at Hakuba, who thankfully wasn't laughing. Nothing unpleasant in Hakuba's bed tonight then. "She, Hakuba, and I just graduated from High School in the spring."

"Ooh, how wonderful!" She slid an arm around his waist, like an overly-familiar aunt. "Anata, I just had the most brilliant idea! I just found this little Japanese restaurant that makes food just like in Japan. We--must--all go out to dinner!"

Another glance at Hakuba, who shrugged slightly. "That's very kind of you."

"I insist." Kudo-sensei smiled brilliantly. "Our treat."

Hakuba raised an eyebrow. Kaito tilted his head slightly. Why not? Couldn't hurt anything. And if he was honest with himself, he was a bit homesick and some familiar food sounded like a great idea.
"We'd love to." Hakuba agreed.

Kaito nodded. He'd had enough of Holmes for the time being. Besides, no one ever talked about the interesting things about the great detective, like the fact that Holmes was a recreational cocaine user. Some role model. At least Arséné Lupin didn't do drugs.

They took a taxi to the restaurant, the Author and the Night Baroness being a little bit too big of celebrities to ride the Underground without attracting too much attention, but not so big that they rode around in a limo. Over friendliness aside, Yukiko-neechan, which she politely insisted as being called instead of 'Obachan,' --because did she look like a mother to you and oh, Kaito looked just like her son, whom she missed so much-- was good to talk to. He'd had so little time to actually learn from his father, most of what he knew of disguise he'd had to make up on his own via trial and error from what was laying around and Jii-chan's occasional helpful comment. It wasn't as if a manual had been laying around for him to learn from.

Kaito also shut up about her mothering after the comment about looking like her son. Which he did. Besides, he missed his Mom, so he kind of knew where she was coming from.

The restaurant was extravagant and expensive, but the tatami mats and gentle wisps of incense smelled like home. Gentle koto music and the sound of trickling water from the scattered fountains were a balm to his soul. The Hakuba household was all Étè style, art deco and antique Egyptian artefacts everywhere, couches with carved lion's paws for legs and the like, with only a few things that said 'Japanese', most of which were in Hakuba's room. It was a friendly enough place, but still strange.

They were given a small-screened room with a low table and cushions to sit on. Shoes were taken off before they stepped in and they relaxed, sharing a pot of green tea as they chatted. The only interruption to the mellow mood was when Kudo-sensei went to ordered sushi for the table and Hakuba intervened, commenting that Kaito was allergic to and would complain all night about fish breath if Hakuba ate any. The order was then laughingly changed to tempura, much to Kaito's barely concealed relief.

He probably -would- have grumbled all night at Hakuba. It wasn't just the sight of fish that made him climb the walls to flee, but the scent of it was nauseating as well. He could deal with it if he had to, but he'd much rather not have to if he didn't have to.

Fish. Ugh.

Conversation wandered as they shared the meal, current events around the world, adapting to strange cultures, odd jokes, veiled reference as to what the Black Organization was up to and the efforts to knock them down farther. Kaito kept up the main flow of chatter for their side of the table. There was a feeling that Kudo-sensei had something he wanted to talk about, but was taking an indirect route to bringing it up. Hakuba appeared to sense this as well, watching the charismatic couple with thoughtful blue eyes.

Finally the subject Kudo-sensei appeared to be waiting for came up, talking about Kudo-sensei's latest Night Baron book in progress.

"Actually, I'd been hoping to run into you here in London, Hakuba-kun." The writer admitted after a bite of light flaky tempura. "Meeting you at Baker Street was a set of unexpected luck. I was hoping to enlist your help, or at the very least, your opinion on something."

Kaito glanced over at the expressionless detective. Luck? Or planning?
Or was he just reading too much into things?

"My opinion?" Hakuba questioned. "On what?"

Kudo-sensei smiled. "Kid the Phantom Thief." The words fell like raindrops, resonating and echoing in the muted calm of the room.

The Prime Meal that makes every detective's mouth water, Kid had been referred to before. What ever else this conversation was, 'casual' was not it.

"Oh?" There was a world of meaning in that one word, Hakuba showing no expression other than the arch of one eyebrow.

The writer picked up his cup of tea, swirling the yellowish liquid thoughtfully. "I was thinking of adding him to an upcoming book. A contest, between him and the Night Baron. See how the two fare against each other."

Kaito kept his face placid, but he was frowning on the inside. A contest between Moonlight Magician and the Night Baron. It would probably create a larger public uproar than the one had followed when Chat Noir challenged the Kaitou Kid.

But Kaito had read some of the Night Baron books. And while they were a good read, he didn't like the idea of being -in- them.

"And you would like my honest opinion on the idea?" Hakuba mused. "Perhaps assistance in writing the Kaitou Kid?"

"Yes." Kudo-sensei nodded. "Nakamori-keibu is a fine man, determined and stubborn -both good traits in an officer. But he's not very keen on research or analysis. It's the details that are your area of expertise that would be an immense aid to my research."

Hakuba picked up his own cup of tea and appeared to contemplate the idea, pointedly not looking in Kaito's direction. If it weren't for the fact that both Yukiko-nee and Kudo-sensei were both watching them so carefully, he would have liked to have nudged the detective or something. Instead, he could only watch the blond as well, wondering what was going on in the half Briton's head.

And if nothing else, that was what back up plans were for.

"I think that is a fascinating idea." Hakuba finally said slowly. "It would probably be a bestseller as well, with your writing style, Kudo-sensei. But I do not believe it to be a -good- idea."

Kudo-sensei's face did not change, nor did he stop swirling his tea. "Could you expound on your reasoning?" He inquired politely.

How about started with the fact that he was a -Phantom- thief? C'mon! How ghostly could you be if you were in black and white print? Not very mysterious there.

Besides, if one person started writing novels with him in it, other people might start to get ideas.

"A number of things, really." Hakuba sat back with a small sigh, his face still bland. "But primarily, I believe that the Kaitou Kid would take offense to the deal."

"Oh?" Now they had Kudo-sensei's attention. He set the cup down, lacing his fingers together in front of his face, elbows resting on the table.
"Kid the Phantom Thief abhors murder." Hakuba explained. "Your Night Baron is an accomplished thief, but he has little to no qualms with homicide. That alone would I believe would be enough for the Kaitou Kid to disdain the idea."

"Because he is dealing with a murderer."

More like an assassin. Killers could steal as well as thieves, but the killing was what separated them from a true thief. Thieves took objects. Killers took not only the non-tangible, but the non-returnable. You couldn't give back a life at the end of a heist.

"Precisely." Hakuba agreed, setting his hands on the table, still cradling the cup of tea. "The second reason is a bit more tangible, perhaps. Money."

"He would expect royalties?" Kudo-sensei's voice was almost mocking.

Well, the money would be nice, but where would they send the cheque to? Besides, if he were interested in the money, he could just knock a bank over or something. Hah.

"Quite the opposite." The blond smirked, voice ironic. "He doesn't believe in making money from theft."

Yukiko-neechan let out a small giggle at the comment. Hakuba smiled slightly at her in return. "Yes, I am quite aware of how facetious it sounds. Perhaps you heard about the debacle with the Giant's Star at Ono Department Store a few Christmas' past?"

The married couple exchanged looks, then shook their heads. Kaito hid a snicker. That was before Hakuba's arrival as well.

"The Department store owner at the time decided to stage a fake Kid Heist, the ornamental star covered in sapphires and diamonds topping the large Christmas Tree outside the store as the object of interest. Nakamori-keibu caught their fake thief, of course. Then the real Kaitou Kid made his appearance, not only stealing the star from the police but toppling the tree into the department store as a 'gift' to the owner."

Yukiko-neechan's eyes were wide. "You're joking."

"No." Hakuba shook his head. "The man was selling Kid souvenirs, earning money on the Kaitou's name. He made enough money to repair the damage. -If he hadn't been in jail for fraud."

"That was a while ago." Kudo-sensei pointed out. "And I believe he saved the life of the woman who framed him at the Twilight Mansion. Perhaps he's since changed his opinion."

"Not bloody likely." Hakuba smirked. "Last year there was an incident with a porn company."

That got everyone's attention. "Porn company?"

"Let us leave the details vague other than the fact that the Kid was polite enough to request them not to use his likeness and they ignored it." Hakuba took a sip of tea. "I understand they went out of business after a rather embarrassing spectacle with the police shortly there after. Pity. The tone was perfectly dry, the detective might have been talking about a boring day at the park.

Although Kaito knew that Hakuba still had the master copy of that movie too. Kid had once snuck into Hakuba's house and caught the detective snickering over the movie while making notes about all the details they'd gotten wrong as far as costuming and procedure. Kaito hadn't previously realized that police handcuffs purposely only had two links instead of three, like the ones you could buy at
the stores. Handcuffs were handcuffs to him, regardless of the links.

Although that did account for why police cuffs were a bit harder to get off...

-He hadn't let Hakuba know he was there, although he'd read the notes later and laughed himself sick. Didn't matter that nothing improper had been going on, you just didn't interrupt another guy's porn.

"So you're saying that if I wrote him in and he disagreed, I might find myself in an... uncomfortable situation." Kudo-sensei mused.

More like a mortifying one. Like the editors he was so fond of ditching knowing where his every move was for the next year. Or his fans knowing... being a public figure could be such a hassle...

Heh.

"Precisely." Hakuba set down his cup. "I could be wrong, but that is my conjecture on the subject."

"Shin-chan mentioned that you have contact with the Kid." Yukiko-nee-chan spoke up brightly. "Could you mention it to him the next time you see him?"

Hakuba sighed, looking pained. "I am getting rather tired of that rumour. As I told your son, I have no control over the thief's movements. As point of fact, I have not seen him since my arrival to Europe."

Which was true. Hakuba had been looking the other direction when he and Chat Noir had gone for their sky night tour. Heh. Sneaky detective. He knew there was a reason why he hung out with the silly Brit.

"I haven't seen him either." Kaito added cheerfully, grabbing what looked like a piece of tempura squash. "And since I'm pretty much always in Hakuba's company, it'd be pretty hard for us to both miss seeing him."

Kudo-sensei got an odd expression on his face, almost like he wanted to comment that maybe they shouldn't spend quite so much time together if it was scaring the thief off, before it shifted into a very calculating look. One that made Kaito just a little bit leery of what was going on in the murder writer's brains.

"I shall take your advice on the matter." Kudo-sensei finally decided. "But if you do happen to run into the thief and could pass that I'm interested in a crossover, I would be appreciative."

"It is unlikely, but I shall keep it in mind." Hakuba agreed smoothly. He then moved the conversation on to other subjects, the slight tension that had been gathering in the air fading away as they talked about safer subjects, the conversation about the Kid apparently forgotten by everyone.

... if you were the casual observer, maybe. Which none of them were. Writer, Actress, Detective, Magician, observing people was not only their livelihood, but also their way of life.

So they all smiled and pretended that it was forgotten by everyone which worked just as well. They made pleasant talk as Kudo-sensei paid for the meal and they left, going their separate ways and promising to keep in touch after an exchange of e-mail addresses. By that time, the sun had set, casting the city into a mixture of darkness, bright lights and the beginnings of fog.

Kaito shivered slightly, tucking his hands into his coat pockets, still not completely used to the dampness in the air. Japan was a rainforest, but the weather still felt different. Hakuba nudged him and silently shepherded him towards the nearest Underground. From there they'd ride the train back
to the Hakuba Household. Funny how trips back always seemed to take longer than the trip there at
the end of a long day.

Hakuba nudged him again, gaining his attention. "So what did you think of our hosts?"

"Interesting couple." Kaito shrugged. "Can see where their son gets it from. What did you think?"

"Very... inquisitive." Hakuba said diplomatically. Kaito laughed quietly to himself. Hakuba's people
skills had come a long way from when they had first met. He wasn't jumping and shouting
accusations for everyone to hear anymore.

"And now you have a question for the Kid." Kaito teased. "For the next time you see him."

The area around them was quiet, people moving around inside, watching the telly or cooking a late
dinner. Very peaceful.

"You mean besides what's behind that monocle?" The blond smirked back.

"True." He agreed, falling a step behind Hakuba. He reached out, one hand covering the larger
blond's mouth, the other grabbing him around the waist as he spun the detective into a dark alley they
were passing like it was an elaborate dance manoeuvre. Hakuba's eyes were wide but unafraid as he
pinned the half-Briton against the wall.

"My eye-" Kid informed Hakuba with a smile. "-is behind my monocle."

"And what a lovely eye it is too." Hakuba smiled back, a predatory smile Kid couldn't remember
seeing on the detective's face towards anyone else. It was like pleasure and anticipation at the same
time. "Hullo, Kid. Fancy running into you here."

"Yes, quite." Kid agreed. "You have a question for me?"

"From Kudo Yusaku. He wants to write you into one of his books."

"Pass." The Kaitou smiled. "One writer starts writing about the Kaitou Kid and the next thing you
know they -all- want to start writing about the Kaitou Kid."

"And we couldn't have that." Hakuba was nearly purring in his grasp.

"No." He agreed. People might start to get a bit too close. And there were only a few people he
wanted getting too close, and one of them was right there in front of him smirking like he'd just won
first prize.

Probably because he hadn't been this close to Hakuba in a while. Not since Japan, anyway.

Memories of Japan hit him with a bit of an ache. Hakuba, the freaking idiot, attempted to save his life
by jumping in front of a bullet, even though it was Kid's fault Snake had found him in the first place.
If he hadn't checked up on Hakuba, stopped by to visit, the detective would have remained safe and
dead to the Ops. He still wasn't sure if they realized the detective was alive. He hoped that Snake
hadn't passed that bit of knowledge on to his superiors.

Nor did he remember ever having thanked Hakuba for it. Now seemed to be as good of a time as
any. "Thank you." He said sincerely before proceeding to do his best to kiss the detective silly.

It had been over half a year, before finding Pandora and the nightmarish summer, since he last kissed
his detective. He was pleased to find that it had lost none of its appeal.
Nor did it seem to have lost its appeal to Hakuba.

Yet another odd thing about the detective. If he wanted to, he could break Kid's grasp on him easily. Hakuba had over nine kilograms and ten centimetres in height advantage, thanks to his latest growth spurt. He'd -seen- Hakuba practising Judo and self-defense with the FBI agent over the summer. Kid's skills were more for evading capture, not capturing. Yet Hakuba allowed himself to be physically manhandled, even playing with him.

The detective didn't make sense. To either his Kaito-self or his Kid-self. But he did know he could trust him.

And the Kid was a lot closer to the surface lately. It used to be more compartmentalised, Kid did certain things, Kaito did certain things. Different reactions. But lately, he was reacting, over-reacting, as the Kid instead of Kaito.

Kid's behaviour around Chat Noir had been off as well, he'd been reacting as Kaito. Kid would never have put a feather boa on a priceless classical statue, that was a Kaito-style joke. Much less attempting to explain to her what he was doing in the company of a detective.

It shouldn't have been that easy to cross over into the thief, just right now, yet it had been. Another sign that his mindsets had started to blur. It was dangerous, not only to himself but to Hakuba as well. Acting like Kaito while being the Kid could get himself caught or killed. Acting as the Kid as Kaito could hurt someone else.

The problems that came from being -too- comfortable in one's skills...

And these really weren't the type of thoughts he should be having while sucking on the tongue of the person who counted most as his best friend and remaining link back home to Japan.

"Um... Niichan?" Hirokini's voice spoke from their waists. "I hate to break up this appalling display of affection, but if you don't move soon, you're gonna miss the next train back home."

Which was as effective as a bucket of cold water in killing the mood. They both startled, breaking off the kiss. "Thanks, Hirokini-kun." He muttered dryly as Hakuba muttered something that was most likely unprintable in some language and thumped the back of his head against the wall a few times.

"You're welcome." Hirokini cheerfully chirped. Kaito made a note to self to strangle AI at nearest early convenience.

"We'd better go." Hakuba sighed, sounding disappointed. "You ready?"

"As I'm gonna be." He stepped back, releasing the detective. Hakuba pushed himself off the wall, staying in Kaito's personal space. They paused, taking a moment to gather themselves together again before heading back out in public.

The street was as empty as it had been before, a small thing Kaito was grateful for. He wasn't quite up to his usual masks at the moment. They made their way down the sidewalk with reasonable companionable silence, shoulders and arms bumping every few steps.

It wasn't until a few blocks had passed that Hakuba spoke up again. "Damn."

"What?"

"I just remembered." Hakuba sighed. "Mum's a Night Baron fan. She's going to kill me for not getting an autograph."
Mornings had a certain ritual.

Wake up, --usually next to Hakuba, sometimes not-- stumble down the hall to the bathroom. Take a leak, brush hair, brush teeth, put on deodorant. Surrender bathroom to Hakuba and stagger back to 'his' room, pull on whatever clothing was laying around.

Totter downstairs, put on coats. Mutter curses as they stepped into the brisk cold air, and headed towards the pen and the mews.

He'd brought two doves with him when he came from Japan, tucked into his clothing. Embarrassing as it was, he'd forgotten that he had them on him when he got on the plane and only realised it halfway through the flight. They'd converted an unused chicken coop into a pen for them and they had adapted without being any worse for wear.

So every morning, he'd toss the doves outside for a morning flight, fill up their food and water dishes, stock them with hay and straw for insulation from the cold and occasionally clean the pen out. The droppings were put in a compost heap for fertiliser for the gardens.

The reason for the chicken coop being abandoned was due to the fact that it was right next door to where Watson was housed. The Sparrow-hawk had an entire building to herself, a former shed which was called the 'mews'. The chickens hadn't been able to handle that and had killed themselves off in a blind panic. There was a solid wall between the doves and the raptor and his doves were used to being in odd situations, so they coped.

Birds were considered high maintenance animals, but Kaito had been taking care of the family's doves since about the time he could walk, there wasn't much he hadn't seen or taken care of when it came to the birds. So he usually finished first and went to help Hakuba with Watson.

Hawks were much higher maintenance than doves were. Doves were fairly timid, they'd peck or scratch you when nervous, but nothing too deep. But Watson was a raptor, granted a 'Accipiter Nisus', the smallest of the true raptors, but she could still cause some serious damage if she felt she was being mistreated.

When Kaito carried his birds with him, it was in small cloth bags that were hidden on his person. They were content to stay in them so long as he didn't smother them. It was kind of like being a chick again, protected by the mama bird. It wasn't good to do so for more than a few hours, he usually found one reason or another to release them when he'd been going to school, but there was no need to carry them around in England.

That and he was kind of afraid that they'd still think that Japan was home, and that was not a flight he
wished on his birds.

When Watson travelled, it was with equipment. Or 'Hawk Furniture' as it was called. Hoods with some of the most delicate leather stitching he'd ever seen to cover the raptor's head, jesses --ties for the hawk's leg--, leashes, gloves, bells, lures to train and play with. He'd made comments about the amount of leather bondage material Hakuba had in the past. The most mild of the retorts back had been a suggestion of where he could pull a bird out of. It didn't make it any less true.

Sometimes he helped Hakuba maintain the furniture, he had a more delicate hand than the detective did for repairing small stitches, or oil some of the leather if it had stiffened up --that had also caused lots of suggestive comments, but it just wasn't as funny before the blond woke up-- but most of the time he headed back inside to grab some scones that were usually laying around and make a thermos of tea.

Hakuba had a 'take care of the animals before you take care of yourself' mentality which Kaito sometimes admired. But flying the hawk took a fairly large chunk of time that his stomach protested could be spent on breakfast. He was more a of a coffee person as well, but he put more in more cream and sugar than Hakuba liked to make it more palatable to himself, so it worked as a compromise. By the time it was done, Hakuba usually had Watson on a large glove and was ready to fly the hawk.

The first time he'd seen Watson catch her prey had been a rather large shock to him. Not because of the bird, but because of Hakuba. Sparrow hawks lived up to their name, specialising in catching small to medium sized birds, like pigeons and doves. Nothing as large as say, a rabbit. Unless it was a baby one.

Watson had flown low over a hedge, startling the birds out of it, then snatching one out of mid-air and landing with it. The raptor had then -stared- at them, waiting they caught up. Hakuba had calmly taken the dead bird from the raptor's claws, fed the proud bird a scrap of raw meat from a pouch --you never fed a raptor from its kill-- with words of praise and sent the bird back up into the air once Watson had finished eating it. Then Hakuba had proceeded to pull a knife out and dress the dead pigeon as Kaito had watched him with a queasy sense of shock.

He really wasn't fond of dealing with dead bodies, any dead bodies, voluntarily. Probably why he was a thief instead of a detective.

Several days later in the middle of dinner, he found out that one of Mum's specialities was pigeon pie. Kaito was disturbed, but they didn't make any comments about eating -his- doves, so he didn't make a spectacle of it. And it wasn't half bad, as far as food went.

Hakuba had made arrangements with some of the local farmers in the area to let him fly Watson in their fields. In exchange, the farmers got a portion of the birds the Sparrow hawk caught. It worked out for both sides, Watson got the exercise and the hunting practice, the farmers had a few less pests to worry about and both sides got something to supplement their dinner table with. It also gave Kaito an excuse to explore the local area. He was especially fond of the Hundred Acre Woods.

He was conversant enough in English now that he didn't need to hang around Hakuba for translation help, but it was a lot more enjoyable to explore with company and an excuse.

Hawks were also extremely temperamental and picked up on moods easily. Kaito privately thought that one of the reasons Hakuba took care of Watson early in the morning was because the blond usually didn't completely wake up until his first cup of coffee or tea, therefore was in a sleepy-calm state. Hakuba was more high-strung once he woke up. Not nearly as much as he had been when they first met, thank goodness.
But this meant that if he and the detective were fighting --which didn't happen often and was usually about stupid stuff like toothpaste, but neither of them was used to sharing living quarters with anyone other than their parents--, the fight had to be either worked out before hand or put on the back burner while they flew Watson. Kaito wasn't going to not go because they were fighting, that would be like giving in or admitting he was wrong. And if either of them were annoyed or angry, Watson would pick up on it. You did NOT want a raptor on your arm to be angry with you.

It was bad enough when they were travelling because of cases and Hakuba had to call someone from the local Falconry group in to fly Watson that day. The raptor sulked the next day when they did that.

So over the hills and fields in the cool morning air off they'd trample, either talking softly about whatever came to mind, or without talking at all. Both of them were night owls for various reasons and it usually took a little while for their brains to wake up enough to talk in more than grunts. His doves were usually back in their pen by this time too, so he didn't worry overly much about them while they hunted.

"Ready, girl?" Hakuba asked, stopping at what Kaito thought was a random spot but suspected was a carefully calculated location. Watson perked up, making a soft sound. She knew what this meant. Hakuba removed the hood from over her face --the darkness kept her calm-- and untied the jesses from her legs. She looked around intelligently as he stroked her feathers, smoothing those that had gotten ruffled from the bindings.

According to the research he'd done with Hirokini's assistance, Sparrow hawks weren't very good for novices, being hard to train, but he'd never seen Watson act any way other than in perfect control. She hadn't even left any slicings, or droppings, anywhere that he had seen at Sunset Mansion. As far as he could tell, there was a lot of mutual respect between the detective and the bird and they both responded well to it.

Watson spread her wings out, eager to fly. The wings flapped as and he bounced her a few times before tossing her up into the air, casting her off the glove. She soared up in the air, wings pumping as she circled around them. They watched her a few minutes before beginning to walk, doing their 'job' of flushing the birds out of their hiding holes with their appearance.

In the wild, Sparrow hawks flew low over the hedges, scaring the birds with their shadow and presence, but Kaito figured there had to be some sort of symbiotic relationship between them and the bird. Hawks were at the top of the food chain, Watson didn't -need- their help in catching food. And it wasn't like Hakuba needed the extra food to bring to the table. And it was laughable to think of any sort of raptor as a 'pet'. They owned you, not the other way around.

"Hey, Saguru...." He trailed off, catching his mistake. They were friends, yes, but to call the detective by his given name instead of his family name was presumptuous of him. He didn't mind if people called him 'Kaito' instead of 'Kuroba', but the blond was a lot more formal than he was. Even if they had dropped using the honorific. Of course, at the time, it had been more to be insulting than a sign of familiarity. "Um. Sorry, Hakuba."

"I don't mind if you call me 'Saguru'." The blond glanced at him, then turned his attention back towards the hawk to hide a faint blush, his expression almost shy. "It must be odd being the only to call me 'Hakuba' when everyone else uses my given name."

"Call me 'Kaito' then." On a bit of whimsy, he stuck his hand out, like they were two people meeting for the first time.

Haku-, no, Saguru grinned like an idiot, taking his hand and shaking it. "Pleased to meet you, Kaito-
"Same to you, Saguru-kun." The 'kun' was a bit heavy in his mouth, but he'd probably slip up and forget to add that in the foreseeable future. He playfully leered as they released each other and continued walking. "At least I didn't slip up and call you 'Sa-chan', like your Mum."

He got a grimace in return. "Believe it or not, I've been called worse." Saguru informed him wryly. "There was a girl in grade school that insisted on calling me 'Goo'."

"Sa-GU-ru." The blond carefully enunciated. "In retrospect, I think she might have liked me. Of course, you do realise that I -will- be forced to hurt you if you call me that."

"I could always call you 'Guru'." Kaito grinned gleefully. "Oh Wise and Benevolent Teacher of the English Language."

"Hah." Saguru grumped at him. "You had a question?"

"About Watson." There wasn't much he hadn't learned about Sparrow hawks now, thanks to Ha... Saguru and Hirokini, but it still didn't explain why he kept the predator. "Just wondering why you keep her."

"Hmm." The blond looked thoughtful. "I suppose she's not the most affectionate of creatures."

"Would you even consider her a 'pet'?" Kaito gave him a teasing half-grin. "She's worse than a cat. And cats still haven't forgotten that they were worshipped as Gods thousands of years ago."

Saguru smiled, amused, before his expression turned slightly rueful. "I suppose keeping a bird of prey is a lot of work. They're never really truly tamed, only less feral. They're obstinate, stubborn, fierce, you -never- know if they're just going to take off and never come back... And yet there's just something..." He shrugged, watching Watson catch a bit of a cross breeze and play in it.

"I guess the question should be why she flies with you-?" Kaito ventured.

"That may be closer." The blond nodded. "She doesn't need -me-, exactly. Not for food, at least around here. Guidance, possibly. They have a tendency to run into things when they focus on catching prey. They're terrible show offs, so I suppose I'm an automatic audience-"

Watching Watson play in the breeze, Kaito could agree with that.

"But mostly, I suppose it's because I can provide a safe haven." Saguru shrugged.

"Don't have to worry about predators or catching enough to get by." Kaito mused.

Saguru made a thoughtful sound but didn't say anything. They lapsed back into silence, walking along the path.

It took Kaito several minutes to realise that they weren't just talking about the hawk.

-fin-

Chapter End Notes
A/N: We did a lot of research and talking to people on Falconry before working on this chapter, but if we got anything wrong, please let us know so we can fix it. We could find a lot on the -history-, but not much on actual care.

In Medieval times, there was a class system to Falconry. Female Sparrow hawks are towards the bottom of the class list, a Priest or higher could fly them. ^^;;

The Eurasian Sparrow hawk is considered 'Near Threatened' on Japan's Red List of Endangered Birds.

-A common nickname for a Sparrow Hawk is "Rocket Pocket", by the way. Write your own jokes here.
"Yes!" The blond pulled a book out of the case with a triumphant grin, holding it up for Kaito to see. Kaito raised an eyebrow.

"After his son died, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle turned his focus towards studying Mysticism and the Occult." Saguru explained happily. "The books he wrote after Sherlock Holmes were mostly studies about that. Of course, there was the debacle about the girls and the garden fairies, sticking paper cut-outs on strings and taking pictures of them, but he was very serious about it. He was even friends with Harry Houdini, whom he believed had psychic abilities, you know."

"... Actually, I didn't..." Kaito blinked, taken back. Okay, note to self. Saguru wasn't just a Holmes nut, he was a Sir Arthur Conan Doyle nut.

"Oh yes." Saguru nodded, oblivious to the shock he was delivering as he flipped through the book he was holding. "For someone who was a medical doctor, he was always highly interested in the supernatural. Some of his earliest works were ghost stories. He even originally intended for Sherlock Holmes to be a 'psychic'-detective before the whole 'eyes and brains' thing took off. This is a copy of his last book, 'The Edge of Unknown', which are accounts of his own psychic experiences."

Before he could back away slowly from the doppelganger of his formerly logical friend, he was distracted by a second robed figure entering the store, this one from behind a door in the back. This one was obviously female, with a white horse-like face with a single horn spiraling from her forehead. She glanced at them before walking over to the Lion-headed one, the two of them talking softly.

Kaito frowned to himself, carefully observing them from the corner of his eye, warning bells going off in his head. They seemed familiar somehow.

Then the Lion one reached for something on a high shelf behind the counter, the hem of his robe rising slightly.

The feet underneath were NOT human. Partially obscured by what looked like to be a furry tail and the tips of wings, they were paws, tipped with wicked looking claws on the ends of them.

Kaito's eyebrows rose into his hairline. The features were completely different, but suddenly he knew why they were triggering his alarms.

He'd had a run-in as the Kid in Ishimura with a group of creatures that were stone statues by day, mobile flesh and blood at night. He'd had difficulty observing them in order to steal a jewel inside of the compound that they guarded, they were extremely adept warriors, and suspicious on top of that.

Despite that, he'd still sent the warning notice and set the heist for at night, curious to place his skills versus theirs. Sneaking into the compound had been a challenge and he had gotten the jewel, but it was the escape that he ran into difficulty.

The guardians --he'd never gotten exactly what they called themselves-- glided on the exact same air
currents he did. Only they had wings and tails, both of which were much more versatile in the air than his hang-glider, able to perform aerodynamic acrobatics that he could only dream about with a great deal of envy.

They were also faster and stronger than he was, both in the air and on the ground, able to use claws and talons in addition to the weapons that they carried. He’d had just enough time for a quick check of the stone to verify it wasn't Pandora before being forced to land and surrendering his target.

There had been a minor argument once he’d landed. Several were NOT happy that he knew about them, even if some protested that he had acted honourably —granted a twisted honour— announcing his intention and challenging them fairly instead of attacking in daylight, when they were asleep. Others commented he was just stupid for doing that, which he’d had trouble arguing with at the time.

In the end he'd tossed down a smoke bomb and a pepper bomb to hide his scent and disappeared into his surroundings, being forced to lay low until they’d had to return to their castle before dawn.

He’d made a mental note to never EVER mess with their kind again. He’d gotten lucky that night and he knew it.

However, if these were anything like those, they were extremely territorial. On the other hand, them running a magic shop and being ‘mystical’ creatures themselves, they probably wouldn’t think he was a loon for asking about magical items either.

Kaito left Saguru happily reading the preface of Doyle’s last book, wandering over to the shop keepers. Now that he knew what he was looking for, and comparing it to the ones he had seen, the more certain he was that they weren't human. "Excuse me." He said politely, once there was a slight pause in their conversation.

Both of them looked up at him, their expressions neutral. "Can we help you?" The Unicorn asked.

"I was wondering if you had any books on the Philosopher's Stone." In all of his research on Pandora, he’d discovered an amazing amount of similarities between it and the legends of the Philosopher's Stone, the greatest being both red and granting immortality. He hadn’t seen Pandora turn lead into gold, but then he hadn't been trying to either.

"The books on how to create a Philosopher's Stone are in the Alchemy section, on that bookshelf there." The Unicorn pointed towards where a boy wearing a long red jacket and his blond hair pulled back into a braid was perusing the selves, a large suit of armour watching over him. Without a doubt, Kaito knew that all he’d get was the confusing Medieval codes that he'd already skimmed through and probably some histories on Nicholas Flamel and ‘Abraham the Jew’.

Or if they did have any books on how to create one, it wouldn't be there, where the public could get to them.

"I don't need to know how to make one." Kaito explained patiently. "I need to learn how to -destroy-one."

There. Now the cat was out of the bag, they knew he most likely had one. He also had their undivided attention.

But if he could learn how to destroy a Philosopher's Stone, he might be able to destroy Pandora.

"You won't find that knowledge in the books here." A third voice, this one young and old at the same time answered him. He turned to find a boy, a young teenager really, looking at him under a cap of curly light brown hair with tired eyes that had seen too much, most of which couldn't be
explained. If Kaito squinted slightly, it almost looked like the ears were pointed as well.

"Emrys!" the Unicorn scolded. "You should be asleep!"

The boy shrugged in return, as if to silently say that it couldn't be helped. "Follow me." He instructed Kaito, turning to wander off towards the bookshelves again. Kaito gave the two guardians a shallow bow and quickly followed.

The boy Emrys was muttering to himself about spending the night here instead of with someone named Arthur as he wandered through the bookshelves, pulling out a handful of books seemingly at random. Still muttering to himself, he ushered Kaito towards a nook he hadn't noticed before and pushed him into an overstuffed armchair that was resting there.

"Preventive measures." The boy said curtly before handing the books to Kaito one at a time. "This is as accurate of a history on the Isles as you're going to find. These are people you'll find here and how to stay on their good side. These are people to avoid and things to stay away from. If you do run into them, possible ways to get out of trouble is also included. Read them, memorise them, remember them."

Kaito blinked, slightly taken back. "O-Okay. Thank you." The last was said tentatively, he wasn't entirely sure if he should be thanking the younger boy much less what he was thanking him for.

Emrys snorted, brushing it off. "Just stay out of trouble. And if you do get into trouble, don't come running to me. I've got enough to take care of as it is." With that, the boy stalked off, muttering to himself about magic and daft lucky people mentioning wrong things to the right people.

Kaito shrugged and cracked open the first book, starting to read. After a while, somewhere in-between Gargoyles, Gremlins and Grims, he noticed a two cups of tea on saucers on the table next to the chair. Saguru was curled up with a book in the chair on the other side of the table, contentedly reading. In the background the Lion and the Unicorn were giving someone named Miss Readman her special order book, which from the sound of it, she seemed to have an absolute orgasm over, complete with panting, moaning, and drooling.

He shrugged, took a few sips of still warm sweet tea and continued reading.

The next time he looked up, he'd finished the books he'd been handed to read and he could see the sky starting to lighten outside. The tea was gone, but Saguru was still curled up in the other chair dozing, his breathing still light and shallow, a book carefully cradled in his lap. The store appeared to be empty, the Lion and the Unicorn were no where to be seen.

His head spinning with White Ladies, Evil Eyes, Bogies, Kelpie, Coimimeadh, Sithe, and other strange European folklore, he rose and stretched, feeling sluggish due to the lack of sleep and sitting still for so long. "Oi." He crouched down in front of Saguru, tapping the blond. "Wakey-wakey Sleeping Beauty. Time to go."

Saguru startled, mumbling slightly as he drooped, appearing to go back to sleep. Kaito toyed with the idea of seeing if he actually could kiss Saguru awake, but decided it probably wasn't a good idea for a variety of reasons.

Instead, he shook Saguru again, finally succeeding in waking him up. "Sun's up." Kaito explained as Saguru blinked sleepily at him. Sleeping in his contacts again. The blond was probably going to regret that. "Time to head home."

The blond made a sound much like what Kaito supposed an irritated bear might make coming out of
hibernation and hauled himself out of the chair with a mighty yawn. "Coffee." Saguru growled.

If the detective was skipping tea in favour of coffee, he really was exhausted. "Books first." Kaito reminded. Saguru grunted and gathered the books he wanted to take to the front register. Kaito picked up the ones that he'd been given to read as well, shepherding Saguru to the front of the store.

Emrys was sitting behind the counter, watching the sky lighten outside the windows with a thoughtful expression on his face. He glanced over at them, that old-young look in his eyes again. "Thanks." Kaito commented softly, putting the books on the counter.

The curly-haired boy waved it off, taking the books and setting them on a stack behind the counter of books to go back on the shelves. "Just keep your noses clean."

Kaito nodded, stepping to the side so that Saguru could set his books down on the counter. Emrys quickly rang the sale up, put the books in a bag, slipping the receipt in with it. With the absentminded seriousness of someone dealing with a lack of sleep, the detective then trudged towards the door.

Kaito hesitated. "Your friends..." He ventured. "They're not human." It was more of a question than a statement, but Emrys seemed to understand his meaning.

The boy shrugged in return, as if to say 'who is?' before waving him out the door. Kaito grinned and waved back, buoyed by this knowledge as he slipped out the door.

He wasn't fool enough to face them again, but if he ever ran into some trouble, he knew where to go for help if things got desperate.

Still grinning, he caught up to Saguru, who was yawning tiredly and had a definite staggering tilt to his walk. He was tired too, but he could operate better on less sleep than Saguru could. He moved alongside the detective, his shoulder brushing Saguru's arm every so often so he could steer them towards coffee and the Tube.

Kaito pulled out a business card he'd slipped into his pocket before they left, examining it in the light.

'Into the Mystic. Open all Night.'

He'd have to send the business card to the Gargoyle Clan in Ishimura, just for kicks.

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

All that stuff about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle? True.
The Ishimura clan shows up in the Gargoyles episode 'Bushido', BTW.
'Into the Mystic', Una and Leo are from the Gargoyles episode 'M.I.A', where Griff also makes his first appearance.
Emrys is from the Gargoyles Saga 'Pendragon', a fan continuation of the Gargoyles series. But he's more widely known by his other name, Merlin. ^__^ Emrys just showed up and started giving Kaito books to read. o_O;;

Kudos (not Shin'ichi) to those who spotted the 'FullMetal Alchemist' and 'Read Or Die' references.
All recognizable characters belong to their owners, not mine, used without permission.
Kaito loved chocolate.

And while Kaito not-quite-freely admitted to having a sweet tooth, it had taken several days of on-and-off pestering, blackmail and cajoling to get Saguru to admit to a fondness for dark chocolates.

Fortunately, Saguru's Mum was also fond of chocolates. Willy Wonka brand chocolate in particular, Mum was mad about the top hat wearing man's candy. The name sounded odd, but the candy were absolutely marvelous. But this meant that when she finished off a box of assorted chocolates, he and Saguru got to split the remains of the chocolates that she didn't like. Kaito got the sweet milk chocolates and Saguru got the more bitter dark chocolates.

And after some further embarrassment and minor discomfort on the half-Briton's part, Kaito got the ones with the nuts in them. Or at least the nuts out of the dark chocolate ones.

Kaito had his fish phobia, Saguru had a mild allergic reaction to various nuts. After meeting much of the blond's family, Kaito was quietly un-surprised.

So with the above reservations, Mum's leftover chocolates were gleefully divided up between the two of them. And with Saguru's usual fastidious, it was usually divided up fairly.

Usually.

Except when it wasn't.

Like if Kaito stole a chocolate when he thought Saguru wasn't looking. Or maybe just pieces of chocolate. Flakes, really.

Or if Saguru took an extra piece because he -thought- he'd seen Kaito steal a chocolate.

Which was horribly unfair of the blond.

Because this was -chocolate-. Wars had been fought over for less.

Wars had also been fought for more as well, Kaito reminded himself as he lunged at Saguru, who was using the extra centimetres of height to his advantage by holding the last piece --dark chocolate with caramel centre-- above his head. And laughing. Well, snickering.

Which turned into muffled gasps as Kaito proceeded to attempt to climb Saguru like a pole. Kaito smirked as Saguru began to shake with muffled laughter. He'd forgotten that Saguru could be ticklish.
That was not to say that the detective was without defenses. With a yell and a judo twist, Saguru flung Kaito off of him and took off running through the house, still holding on to the piece of chocolate. Kaito flipped and rolled to his feet, avoiding hitting anything as he took off after the obnoxious blond.

"You won't get away with this!" He hollered, pounding down the stairs, following Saguru's trail. "That's MY Chocolate!!" The bastard was probably heading for a door. He took a shortcut by jumping over the banister and shortened Saguru's lead. The blond dived into the dining room, scurrying behind the large table that took up most of it.

Kaito grinned, more of a showing of teeth as he quickly moved to block Saguru's retreat into the kitchen. The two of them danced back and forth, Saguru smiling as feraly as Kaito was, eyes sparkling at the thrill chase. "Deciding to turn the tables for a change?" The blond taunted.

"Why? Tired of always watching my skinny ass ahead of you?"

That was probably the wrong thing to say, he realized slightly belatedly as Saguru opened his mouth to retort. That just left himself wide open for comment.

Fortunately, Saguru was a gentleman and leapt-on then over - the table to escape back through the hall with a cackled laugh instead of a reply. Kaito bit back a curse and chased after him, down the hall, around the living room, through the kitchen, past Mum screaming for them to take it outside, back down the hall, charged up the stairs, and nearly hit himself on the door to Saguru's bedroom as the detective slammed it shut in his face.

"Bastard!" Kaito howled, turning the still unlocked doorknob and pushing against it. Saguru leaned on the other side, the hand holding the melting chocolate waving in and out of view.

Saguru half-laughed, half-grunted as he attempted to push Kaito back. "w-Wanker!"

The contest of wills might have lasted longer if Saguru hadn't been thrown off balance by desperately trying - not- to hit anything with his sticky-chocolate covered fingers and get the dark confection all over the place. Kaito used that to his advantage, pressing inside the room and knocking Saguru off to one side. The door belatedly slammed shut behind them, causing both of them to flinch as Mum's voice shouted for them to keep the racket down echoed faintly from downstairs.

They both paused, breathing slightly hard as they waited to see if her vengeful wrath would ascend the stairs and scold them for rowdiness. It didn't and they both breathed partial sighs of relief.

Then Saguru made an abortive attempt to move the chocolate covered hand out of range, both visually and physically.

Kaito pounced. Saguru made a slight muffled yelp as Kaito sat on him, pinning the larger blond to the ground, one hand firmly wrapped around the wrist below the chocolate covered hand.

He almost sulked. The chocolate and the caramel had been squished during the chase, melting and running over most of Saguru's hand. There was no way to pick it up and eat it now.

Then again, why waste good chocolate?

With some effort, a few insults and a bit of muttered cursing on both of their parts, he got Saguru's hand right where he wanted it. Saguru protested the casual appropriation of his limbs, but shut up about it when Kaito began to carefully lick the chocolate off of Saguru's fingertips.

Kaito then proceeded to thoroughly clean every last trace of chocolate from Saguru's hand and
fingers with all the smugness and pleasure of a cat polishing off a bowl of cream. There was a bit of a soapy aftertaste - they'd just washed their hands before getting the chocolate -- and a bit of sweat salt tang mixed in with the stronger flavours of chocolate and caramel. The caramel in particular was stubborn in leaving the skin, requiring a judicious use of licking, sucking, and nibbling to get all of it off.

When the chocolate and caramel were all gone, he released his grip on Saguru's hand and carefully licked the remaining chocolate off his lips. Not bad. Now he was all sticky and covered with chocolate though. He got up, absently licking the hand that had been holding Saguru's wrist, getting some of the flavour off of his skin as he headed out the door. Time to wash his hands.

Saguru glared after him, eyes dark as he continued to breathe hard, his face with a wild flushed edge to it as he pointedly did not move.

"Prick!" Saguru's slightly strained voice echoed down the hall.

Kaito almost flinched. He may have taken that a -bit- too far. He should probably expect retribution in some form or another in the near future. But what did Saguru expect, stealing his chocolate and then waving it around like that? He stopped licking long enough to shoot back "Tease!"

Kaito -loved- chocolate.

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

Inspired by legal drug vol 2
"Oh wow." Kaito's eyes widened as he viewed the contents of Saguru's package. "Um. Wow. That's a really impressive piece of meat."

Saguru grinned at him. "It is, isn't it?"

"Yeah." Kaito nodded. "When you first mentioned it, I wasn't expecting it to be quite so..."

"Large?" The detective commented with a smirk.

"Something like that."

"Here." Saguru grinned, offering it to him. "You hold it."

"You sure?" Kaito glanced up at him, then the long cylindrical object Saguru was holding.

"Yeah."

Kaito couldn't even get his fingers all the way around it. "Wow. It's harder than I expected too." Heavier too.

"That's because you're used to those little weenie things you find in Japan." Saguru informed him loftily. "This is fine European stock."

"Yeah." Kaito agreed. "My mouth is drooling just looking at it."

"Don't worry, you can have some soon." Saguru assured him. "But we should probably take this into the other room."

Probably a wise idea. He nodded, following Saguru. "I don't know how I'm going to get my mouth around that."

"That's what the knife is for."

Kaito turned as he heard the unmistakable sound of someone suddenly impacting against the wall. Both he and Saguru turned to find Mum half-in half-out of the doorway, rubbing a bump on her head, her face bright red.

"Hey, Mum!" Kaito waved the summer sausage Saguru brought back from the deli like a baseball bat. "Saguru's back!"

Mum nodded, her face flushing even brighter vermillion as she ducked back into the other room. Kaito blinked. "What's her problem?"

"Don't know." Saguru shrugged with a small eye roll that clearly conveyed that his mother was
strange. "You hungry?"

"Starved."

-fin-
“Hmm..” Saguru looked out of the window with a thoughtful look.

Kaito raised an eyebrow, looking up from re-reading one of the Harry Potter books. He was trying to see if he could work out a way to pull off an ‘Alohamora’ on a heist, just to royally confuse people. Simple unlocking spell – possibly not so simple trick. Especially if he wanted sparkles. “‘Hmm’? What is this ‘Hmm’? Sounds like you’re plotting something.”

“Possibly.” The blond smirked slightly as he rose to his feet. “It’s supposed to snow tonight.”

“So?”

“So I should take care of the Garden Gnomes before that happens.”

Kaito looked at Saguru, looked at the book, then back up at Saguru. “Gnomes?”

“Yes.” Saguru grinned. “You want to come along? You’ll probably enjoy this.”

“Gnomes.” Kaito repeated incredulously. “Like small little human shaped looking things?”

He was just a little bit wary of Saguru’s motivations at the moment. He was pretty that after the blond had tricked him into the fish section of a pet store —they’d been politely requested not to come back after he’d screamed loud enough to disturb shoppers two stores away— that they were even from the chocolate incident. Although he wasn’t quite sure. Saguru did have a sense of humour, abet a more subtle one than his own, that tended to pop up at odd times.

“Yes, exactly.” The detective had an anticipatory gleam in his eyes now.

Kaito looked down at the book again. Well, they were in England, so he guessed it was possible… “Okay.” Couldn’t hurt to go with.

Saguru made a sound that wasn’t quite a muted cackle of delight, but somewhat close. “Good. Come on, we’ll need our coats.”

With a shrug, Kaito got to his feet as well and followed the blond down the stairs. They paused to put on warm outer garments before stepping outside into the garden. The wind howled, bringing the heavy moist scent of snow in the air and there was still some snow in patches on the ground.
Saguru grinned wolfishly, rubbing his hands together. “Gnomes… gnomes… where could they be this time? Ah-ha!” With a triumphant cry, the detective leapt forward, a hound on the scent of its prey.

Feeling slightly confused, Kaito followed, wondering what exactly they were looking for. The gardens were cut back for winter, there weren’t many places for much of anything to hide out here.

“Here.” Saguru enthusiastically thrust something at him without looking, Kaito grabbing it on reflex. It was heavy, long and hard, kind of bumpy feeling, with a long smooth shaft at the top of it.

“Uh…” He glanced down to find a face dimpling cheerfully up at him. It was a little round person wearing a long tall red conical hat. Made out of what felt to be concrete, then painted over. “What is it?”

“It’s a Gnome.” Saguru said matter-of-factly, holding two more small smiling people in his hands. One of them appeared to be sitting on a mushroom, smoking something in a long pipe.

Kaito blinked. Saguru had to have been kidding him. They didn’t look anything like they did in the Harry Potter books. “And we’re supposed to toss them over the fence?” He ventured.

Saguru looked at him with a dumbfounded expression for a moment before snorting in amusement, obviously trying to keep from laughing. “No, we’re going to hide them.”

Hide them? Kaito looked down at the statue he was carrying. Just what kind of drugs were Saguru on and why wasn’t he sharing them? “Okay?”

This time Saguru did laugh. “Mum’s not going to be home until late, after dark. It’ll snow tonight and tomorrow when she comes outside, they’ll all be in different places, but with no foot prints. Therefore they must have moved on their own.”

“Magic.” Kaito supplemented.

“Exactly.” Saguru beamed at him. “I used to do this all the time when I was younger, moving the gnomes about so it looked like they were alive at night. There’s seven of them here, total.”

“Heh.” He grinned at the blond. There was an image. Saguru as a kid playing tricks in the garden. Kaito’s grin grew bigger. “Hey, Saguru-kun?”

Saguru gave him a slightly leery look. “Yes?”

“I got a better idea. Do we still have yesterday’s newspaper and some glue around the house?”

The look became definitely leery. “Yes…?”

Kaito smirked at him. “What do you say to holding some gnomes for ransom?”

“I’ll go get the glue sticks.”

-fin-
It was like looking in a mirror.

At least, that's what Kaito hoped that's what it looked like, sans the right-left flip thing.

He'd been hoping to surprise Saguru and possibly drive him up the wall just a little bit by dressing up and mimic Mum when he got home. He'd had some errands to run and Kaito had been feeling antisocial, so he'd stayed behind. Mum had also been out, not expected back until later that night.

His voice was still deepening and he was slightly worried about losing the upper range of his voices from disuse. It wouldn't do any good if he could only imitate -male- voices without electronic aid, appearing as a female came in too handy when hiding in plain sight.

Much to -his- surprise however, Mum was the first one to arrive back. And evidently, he'd done a good job of disguising himself as her because she'd let loose with a crow of delight and complimented him on his disguise skills.

He really shouldn't have been surprised, after all this was the lady whom after they had ransomed her Garden Gnomes for chocolate and root beer, had demanded they steal some of the neighbour's gnomes while she wrote the ransom notes as a way to get back some items that had been borrowed and never returned. Saguru had grumbled while they did so, claiming that he wasn't the thief so why did he have to come along?

Privately, Kaito thought it was because he was a Mummy's boy. Kaito didn't voice this opinion out loud because when you got down to the heart of it, he was a 'Kaasan's boy as well. Not that his 'Kaasan had ever -asked- him to steal any thing before... He'd heard stories about Twenty Mensou and was privately glad his 'Kaasan were nothing like the Man of Twenty Face's.

After quickly and bluntly informing Mum that he was NOT going into imitate her at any boring social functions she didn't want to attend, they'd sat down to tea and started to chat. One thing he'd noticed was that British women frequently pitched their voices up high, like a falsetto, when talking. It was straining the edge of his range, and he'd probably be hoarse tomorrow, but at the same time it was a novel experience to be mimicking someone who was right there and -knew- that you were impersonating them.

He wasn't entirely sure if she was aware of it or not, but as she fed him the latest gossip and news -- some of which would be useful, it never hurt to be aware of current events as a kaitou--, but she was also teaching him about local customs and accents, and how to serve tea. 'High' tea was actually not, more of an informal way to relax before the end of the day.

"Tadaima." Saguru's voice called out as he opened the door. Even if they were in a different
country, some habits were hard to repress. Kaito still found himself bowing to people.

"Okaeri!" They both called back. Mum giggled into her tea cup, tossing him a mischievous wink.

They could hear Saguru pause in the hallway, then quick make his way to the kitchen. Kaito made a private note to remind Saguru to walk softly as well. The blond did it occasionally, but it would be a useful habit to get into all the time. Well, except for when walking up on him. "Mum?" Saguru called. "Do we have company..." The 'ni' sound trailed off as Saguru stopped in the doorway and stared at them --Kaito, more specifically-- a beautifully dumbfounded expression on his face.

Both Kaito-Mum and Mum raised their hands and wiggled their fingers at him, smiling cheerfully. "How did your day go, Sa-chan?" Kaito inquired in Mum's falsetto.

Mum waved her son towards a chair with a graceful motion of her hand. "Come, sit. Join us for tea."

Saguru closed his eyes, shook his head a little bit and wandered back down the hall towards his room, muttering about idiotic people with too much time on their hands.

"How rude." Kaito-Mum pouted, setting the teacup down on its saucer with a small 'clink'. "He didn't even say hello."

"Such poor manners." Mum agreed sadly, sighing dramatically. "Really, dear. Where did we go wrong?"

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

The root beer and chocolate are thanks to Mel Redcap. ~_^
The Grey Zone: Revenge of the Revenge of the Pr0n

A sudden scream from the depths of the house nearly made Kaito jump out of the guest room window. It wasn’t just a ’eek! I saw a mouse’ or ’oh, no we’re out of coffee’ scream, but one of true abject horror. The kind of scream you’d expect to rise out of the depths of hell.

And to top it off, it was a male’s voice. Saguru’s to be exact.

Expecting the worse, he had his card-gun out of the its hiding place in the room and in his hand and was out the door in a matter of seconds. In deference to expediency, he decided to forgo the stairs and simply jumped over the banister, grabbing the bottom of it on his way down to swing himself clear of the stairs, like a gymnast on the horizontal rails. He hit the floor running, momentum carrying him the rest of the way into the living room, where the scream originated.

Mentally braced himself for worse case scenarios and card-gun in hand with the safety off and ready to fire, it was a bit of a shock to find no one in the room other than Saguru and Mum.

A Saguru with no composure at all, pale-faced, wide eyed and pointing at the screen in terror. It took a moment for his mind to catch up and realise what was being shown on the screen.

Someone who was NOT the Kid was currently in the process of screwing like rabid ferrets with someone who looked somewhat similar to Saguru on the screen.

It was that porno that Kid had given Saguru for safe keeping. So that no one else would ever see it.

And Mum was watching it.

Feeling suddenly out of his depth, he quickly flicked the safety back on the gun, tucking it into the waistband of his pants, pulling his loose shirt over it to hide the bulge.

"MUM!!!" Saguru roared. "WHERE did you find this Richardson?"

"Oh." Mum twinkled at her son --Kaito could almost see the sparkles in the air as she smiled-- "I discovered it in your room. I was in the mood for something a little different to watch. It was inside of a hollow book on your bookcase."

Saguru squeaked, looking both pale and red at the same time.

"Of course, I did have to break the lock on the box on the inside of the book to get to it. I used a hammer and a screwdriver, so it may not work quite as well anymore." She added as an afterthought.

"... You went -looking- for porn?!" Saguru questioned, his voice rising an octave or so higher during the course of the sentence. "In MY room?!"

Kaito was privately amazed she’d think to look in her son's room. He still hadn’t found Saguru's porn stash, if the detective actually had one at all. Of course, he didn't have one here either, but he was a guest in the house so that was beside the point.
Mum shrugged. "I was missing your father, dear. We used to watch it together." She sighed wistfully.

The expression on Saguru's face clearly stated that he was in desperate need of a wire scrub brush and a large bottle of industrial strength cleaner to get those images out of his head. Kaito wasn't far behind.

"Saguru, dear..." The look on her face turned conniving. "Is there something you'd like to talk with Mummy about?"

"No." Saguru's voice was crystal sharp and clear on that point.

She giggled.

Kaito felt a bead of sweat slide down the back of his head. This looked really really bad from an outside perspective, now that he thought about it. Saguru didn't keep any visible porn that a normal teenage guy would normally keep around and the only hidden stuff was of someone who looked like him starkers and boffing with the phantom thief Saguru had sworn to catch.

"Mo-ther." Saguru said through gritted teeth. "That was given to me for safe keeping."

"Really?" Mum brightened. "Who?"

Kaito could see Saguru's clenched fists and white knuckles from where he stood. The blond was -mad-. "Someone important to me." He growled.

"Was it that Kaitou Kit you're so fond of chasing?" She chirped, almost clapping her hands in glee. Kaito rolled his eyes. Kid, not kit. He wasn't a baby fox.

"If you must know, yes." Saguru stalked over to the entertainment centre and hit the 'eject' button on the dvd player with more force than strictly necessarily. "Some moron attempted to publish this rubbish and sell it. The idiot thief stole the master copy and gave it to me as a -courtesy- to my -privacy-. Something which it would be nice if other people would respect as well."

Mum responded by sulking. "So I'm not allowed to watch?"

Geh. Very geh.

"No." Saguru said bluntly. "And you get to pay for fixing the the lock on the strong box. -This- is going somewhere else."

Posture perfectly straight and carrying himself like a battlefield banner, Saguru walked out of the room and up the stairs. Mum pouted upon spotting Kaito.

"Do you-"

Kaito held his hands up and quickly retreated back upstairs as well. "Not a chance."

Scary woman, scary woman, scary woman.... He was pretty sure 'Kaasan would give him an interesting talk if she found the dvd too.

... come to think of it, that was one of the reasons he'd given it to Saguru in the first place. He didn't -think- 'Kaasan knew about Oyaji's hidden room, but he really wasn't sure....

He'd barely made it to Saguru's door before the blond's hand reached out, grabbed him by the front of the shirt and dragged him inside, the door slamming shut behind them. Part of mind screamed in
horror at being locked in a room like this, but the rest of his mind was too occupied with Saguru's irritated face centimetres from his own.

"You." Saguru growled, pressed close enough against him that Kaito was pretty sure that the detective could feel that yes, that was a card-gun in his pants and yes, he was happy to see him. "Are going to help me do two things."

"Oh?" Pride hackled at the bit. Lock -him- in a room and tell him what to do? Not bloody likely.

"One." The disk, sans cover was held up between them. "You are going to help me hide this where Mum can never find it again."

Okay, that one he could agree to. Fair enough. "And?"

"Two." Saguru's fierce expression faded to a somewhat shaky leer. "Want to watch this sometime when Mum's not around? You've never seen it, have you?"

Only once, but he'd been too busy tried to hide his reactions to Saguru's reactions at the time. And he was pretty sure that Saguru still had that list of errors around here somewhere.

Together, it'd be entertaining to find a few more things mock it with. Especially since this time he didn't have to worry about keeping a straight face while watching it.

He grinned, grabbing the disk from Saguru's hand and making it disappear with a snap of his fingers and a puff of smoke.

"Deal."

-fin-
When Kaito heard a muffled yelp of terror and the thud of a body hitting the floor from the room next to him, he didn't go charging out to find out what happened. Instead, he took a moment to finish pulling on his pyjama pants before charging out of the guest room, down the hall and into Saguru's room, barely hesitating at the door long enough to rap his knuckles on it twice. "Everything okay?"

Saguru was picking himself off the ground, red faced, bare-chested and glaring. A portion of Kaito's mind pointed out that yes, the blush did go farther down than just the collar bone, but not by much. "No." The detective growled, leaning over to pick up his pyjama top that had fallen, then motioned to his nightstand. "Mum left us a present."

"Present?" That did not sound good. Glancing at Saguru warily, he crept towards the open drawer of the night stand as Saguru pointedly ignored him putting on his top.

What Kaito didn't see was what was usually in the drawer - Saguru's glasses case. What he did see was foil packages.

Lots and lots of foil packages. All of them rectangular. In a variety of colours.

Kaito blinked. "And what does Mum think we need these for?"

All things considered, it was probably a good thing that Mum was gone for the night, visiting friends. Then again, that could explain the timing.

Saguru glared at him for a moment as if to inform him that he was a complete and total moron before turning around to finish changing clothing, the dark mutters under his breath, too fast and harsh for Kaito to understand completely. Kaito shrugged and picked up one of the foil packets, glancing at the text on it before opening up the package.

Strawberry flavoured.

It was kind of powdery on his fingers as he unrolled the condom from, shook it out and proceeded to blow it up like a balloon. It wasn't until he had tied a knot on the end of it that he realized that Saguru had stopped ranting and was staring at him. "What?"

"What are you -doing-?" Saguru burst out with, arms flailing wildly as he tried to both point at Kaito and not at the same time.

"Plotting." Kaito licked his fingers thoughtfully. Didn't really taste like strawberry. Too sweet. While he didn't mind sweet, the aftertaste was annoying.

This earned him a beautiful stare of disbelief. "Plotting?"

"Plotting." He waved the inflated magenta-ish balloon at the blond. "You think we have enough of
these to fill a bed?"

"Huh?" Saguru walked over, peering at the drawer full of foil packages. Kaito could almost see the calculations spinning through the detective's head. "Inflated?"

"Yeah." Kaito allowed a smirk to show. The detective had a pranksterish side Kaito was discovering more and more. "With a duvet over the top."

"Air mattress?"

"Air mattress." Mum was going to get a rather large surprise when she climbed into her bed to sleep.

"Right." Saguru pulled out a foil package and ripped it open. "Let's blow."

-fin-
"Someone help my brother!!" A small child's voice cried out in worry and panic as they walked down the streets of London. Saguru automatically tensed, like a tracking hound, attention immediately pointed in the direction of the voice. With instinct borne of practice and familiarity living with a detective for several months now, Kaito kept a weather eye on the surroundings, watching for anyone looking suspicious or running away. He didn't see anything odd, but that didn't necessarily mean that there wasn't. They briskly headed towards the voice, a speckled boy looking up at the top of a street lamp in distress.

"What's the problem?" Saguru questioned, excluding a quiet sense of authority. The kid seemed to calm down slightly, having an 'adult' arrive at the scene.

"It's my brother!!" He pointed two stories above their heads, to where some balloons had gotten wrapped around the light. "He's stuck up there!"

Kaito and Saguru exchanged looks. There didn't seem to be any possible way for someone to get - up- there, much less be hidden by the balloons. Yet the boy's concern seemed genuine, at least to Kaito's senses.

"I got it." He said, slipping the woollen muffler off of Saguru's neck and tucking it into a coat pocket. With a small 'hup!', he launched himself at the lamp post, wrapped his legs around it and began to shimmy up it. He could hear people gather and chatter below him, but kept his attention on his goal and what his limbs were doing. He would bet that Saguru had positioned himself under him, to catch him should he slip, but wasn't going to look down to check.

He got to the top of the pole and carefully freed one hand to toss the muffler over the horizontal limb, then wrap the loose ends of the loop around his hand. Using that for both balance and a brace, ankles locked around each other, he reached out towards the balloons tangled at the end of the limb.

"Oh, thank heavens!" A tiny relieved voice greeted him. The ribbons the balloons were tied to began to wiggle as a figure made itself known from the tangled mess. "I thought I was either going to fly off and get eaten by a hawk or never get down!"

It was a mouse. A little white mouse, to be precise. Wearing clothing. Including what looked like trainers on his feet.

The mouse half-waved a paw... hand. "You okay?"

"Yeah." He shook off his surprise. "Head rush. Sorry."

"If you can get me down, I'll forgive you anything." The mouse replied with good humour.
"Right away." Kaito smiled, partly because of the quip, partly to reassure the skittish looking mouse. He reached into another pocket, pulling out his Swiss Army pocket knife --that conveniently hid some of his lock-picking tools-- and opening the scissors with his teeth. "Ready?" He asked, poising the scissor blades over the mouse's head.

"Ready." The mouse gave him a nervous smile, hands grabbing hold of Kaito's dangling sleeve. "I'll just... ah... hold on to this here, okay?"

Just in case one of the ribbons that he cut was the wrong one and dropped the mouse. "That's fine." He nodded. "Here we go."

It was a bit like de-fusing a bomb, not that he'd ever had that pleasure. He had to be cautious to cut the ribbons that were tangled around the mouse, but not the ones that were keeping the mouse from being street pizza. While dangling from one hand two stories above the ground.

The mouse seemed to have more faith in him than he did, flicking his tail out of the way, kicking ribbons loose and away from where Kaito was cutting. The twisted mass finally unravelled itself to two ribbons cradling the tiny form. "All right?" He asked.

"I'm okay." The mouse gave him an edgy thumbs-up. "What's next, boss?"

"Next, I'm going to grab you." Kaito shifted his grip on the muffler, his hand going numb from the fabric cutting off the circulation to his fingers. "Is it okay if I put you in the hood of my jacket for the trip down?"

"Whatever works." The mouse agreed easily. Kaito nodded, shifting the pocket knife so that he was holding it in two fingers, like one would hold a cigarette. The rest of his fingers he wrapped around the small figure, taking care not to squeeze too hard. The mouse grabbed on to him, sliding free of the ribbons. "You got me!"

"'Kay." He carefully pulled his hand away, just incase he'd captured some ribbons in his fist. He hadn't and his arm came away freely. Slowly, he moved his hand to the hood behind his head, the mouse scampering from his hand into the confines there.

"You good?" Kaito questioned before moving his hand again.

"I'm good." The mouse called back happily. "Tucked like a bug in a rug."

"Okay." Kaito folded the scissors back up, returned the swiss army knife into his pocket, then carefully shifted his weight back to the main vertical pole. He could hear people breathing a sigh of relief below him as he unlooped the muffler, wrapped it in a fist began to slowly slide back down, mindful of his passenger.

"STUART!!" The boy called gleefully as Kaito's feet hit the ground. Kaito paused, then knelt so that the boy could pull his brother out of the hood, which the boy gleefully did, admonishing his 'little' brother for getting into trouble. Stuart reassured his bigger brother that he was fine.

Kaito got the feeling that this was a regular occurrence.

Saguru stepped next to him, coat brushing against Kaito's arm. "Good job."

"Thanks." He smiled back, unwrapping the muffler from his hand and placing it around Saguru's neck. "Thanks for the loan."

"Welcome." The blond nudged him, motioning with his head that they should take the opportunity to
leave. Kaito nodded and quickly herded Saguru away, resisting the urge to toss down a smoke bomb. In the background, he heard the brother exclaim about where had they gone, but he ignored it.

"You okay?" Saguru questioned, brushing against Kaito, his familiar presence grounding.

"I'm fine." Kaito assured him. He hesitated slightly. "... That was a mouse, right?"

"Yes." The detective agreed. "The boy's brother."

"That's what I thought." Kaito nodded, his forehead wrinkling. "... Saguru?"

"Yes?"

"London is -strange-."

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

Stuart Little and his brother George are the creation of E.B. White. Used without permission, no profit being made.
Around the end of November, they ran into a small problem.

The original plan for them was to go to University upon arriving in England, but that had fallen through, leaving them with spare time on their hands to travel and take care of detective-type business. But this also meant that Kaito's passport, which was good to visit the country for three months was expiring in a few weeks, because he hadn't entered University and dealt with visa and passport issues there.

Saguru, who had a dual passport for Japan and England didn't have this problem. He did have a solution however.

The solution was to visit Uncle Dorian and Uncle Klaus in Schloss Eberbach in Bonn, Germany. Which would mean that Kaito's passport would be good in Germany for three months—even if they were only planning on staying for a week or so— and then would once again be good for three months once they came back to London, meaning they wouldn't have this problem again until after February, after school started up again.

It was a good plan and a workable one. So off they headed to Schloss Eberbach with Uncle Klaus' blessing and to Uncle Dorian's delight. Kaito just hoped the eccentric earl didn't decide to dress him up this time. He respected the art thief, but that respect was mixed with a good sense of self preservation.

After all, Earl Dorian Red Gloria was related to Saguru.

And Mum.

The trip actually went better than either of them hoped, Kaito and Saguru getting informal lessons in art and history, Uncle Dorian's specialities as they explored the castle. Uncle Klaus, when he wasn't working, gave them less cerebral training in firearms and weaponry, his speciality. Saguru turned out to be a better shot than Kaito had realised. But then he'd never -seen- Saguru shoot before either, guns being almost impossible to get a hold of in Japan.

Kaito also attempted to draft Uncle Dorian in his cause to get Saguru to learn lock-picking, to no avail. Uncle Dorian wasn't going to coerce his justice driven nephew into something potentially law breaking if he was dead set against it.

Kaito did get an invitation to the next Rogues' Ball however. 'Uncle Eroica' mentioned that Chat Noir was invited too. He said he'd think about it.

It wasn't the castle where he ran into trouble, it was a day trip to a town a few hours away where
trouble found him. It was the most innocent of encounters, he and Saguru had been meandering down the street when he'd spotted a doll in an antique store window.

It wasn't just any doll, it was a cat. A very sleek, elegant cat, every inch the lady, dressed in turn of the century clothing complete with umbrella and bonnet, emerald green cat's eye stones looking at them with alarming intelligence. Without telling the blond detective what was going on, he wandered inside, looking around the stop. A middle age woman greeted him and he'd struck up a conversation, talking about various pieces in the shop, eventually directing it towards the Lady Cat.

The cat belonged had belonged to a friend of her mother, half of a pair that had been separated before the war. Unfortunately her mother's friend had died before being reunited with her sweetheart, who lived overseas, hence the doll's melancholy expression. The Lady Cat, named Louise, was not for sale, and was sitting in the window in hopes that someone would know who she was.

Kaito steered the conversation towards other topics, not daring to hover on that particular topic for too long, eventually finding a broach for Mum as a souvenir.

Saguru was silent as they left the shop, a pensive look on his face as he watched Kaito with wise eyes. Thankfully, the detective didn't ask questions, content to let him deal with his own business.

He sent a letter out that night, express mail. Three days passed by without a response.

On the fourth day, he sent out another letter.

The next morning he found Saguru reading the newspaper, a frown creasing his brow.

On three of the local newspapers had a warning notice from the Kaitou Kid on the front page. Uncle Dorian thought the whole thing was terribly exciting and shot him a sly wink. Uncle Klaus frowned sternly as he drank his usual morning Nescafe and declared the capers of a delusional thief not worthy of NATO's attention. The stern dark haired man had clasped Kaito's shoulder before leaving for the day however.

From what he had heard, Uncle Dorian had been good for Uncle Klaus. Evidently the NATO intelligence officer had mellowed in the art thief's presence. Or thieves presence in general, considering Eroica's troupe. However, from the mutterings Uncle Klaus made as he stormed off to work, thieves who sent a note -before- the heist instead of -after- made no sense to the stiff man.

Saguru had watched him with worried dark eyes, despite the damnable blue contacts. He'd cornered Kaito after breakfast, capturing Kaito’s head in his hands and leaning over him, bringing their foreheads together, so close Kaito could almost taste the tea Saguru had drunk for breakfast on his breath. For a several long tense moment, Kaito thought Saguru was going to kiss him.

Part of him, roared in possessive jubilation and a heady bit of arousal. It had been over a month since the last time they'd kissed and it was About. Damn. Time. The detective was -his-. The rest of him watched like a stunned fish --correction-- a stunned fly on the wall, doubts and uncertainties swirling.

Saguru wanted the thief, the Kaitou Kid, not the prankster magician Kuroba Kaito. Instead, the detective whispered in a low voice for him to be careful. Before Kaito could make a quip back, Saguru abruptly released him, briskly informing him that he was going to spend the day in the library reading, would appreciate his solitude and then stalked off without a backwards glance.

The detective's equivalent of plugging his ears, closing his eyes, and singing 'la-la-la-la-can't hear you', leaving Kaito with the day free to prepare. The detective -knew- he was the Kid, but Kaito usually made his own excuses to prepare for a heist, doing so without Saguru's knowledge,
surprising him along with everyone else when the note came.

Not that he had much to prepare, but having the lee-way without excuses was unprecedented. But he'd taken advantage of it, slipping out of the house and taking care of a few minor details and watch people scramble to catch up. The German police weren't used to the Kaitou Kid, and while he couldn't understand the language, it was fascinating to watch them prepare. Fortunately, he was wanted alive, not dead. If he was dead, he couldn't tell anyone where the few jewels he hadn't returned had gone to.

-Not that he'd kept any, other than the one. Which was safe in Saguru's bedroom, napping with its own Kaitou Kid rag doll. A doll that had its own transmitter that alerted Hirokini whenever the it and the elephant were separated by more than a dozen metres. There was also an emergency communicator in the Kid doll, but that was usually switched off. They deserved some privacy while in bed, even if they weren't doing anything other than sleeping.

Just because he didn't -think- anyone would look for Pandora inside of Sir Stinky didn't mean that he wasn't a suspicious bastard.

The shopkeeper was putting up only a minor amount of fuss, especially since her sleepy little shop had suddenly become the centre of attention of about half the world. Kaito figured that having slipped in the line about 'lovers reuniting' had helped.

He supposed he could have just explained that he knew where the Lady Cat's other half was, and gotten the doll that way. Or just have quietly stolen her on the sly. But since he hadn't gotten a reaction back from the letter he had sent, he needed another way to get his acquaintance's attention. Hence, the heist.

Night-time rolled around, approaching the time listed in the heist note and he donned the garments of one of the officers guarding the shop. It hadn't been hard to catch one of the officers off balance -- he'd chosen one with a slight cold who wasn't talking much, hiding his own lack of the language and covered the officer well with a few spare blankets, letting the man sleep off both the gas and the illness-- and taking his place.

His other preparations made themselves known in the surrounding area, a constant background noise as he casually approached the window. The idea was to remove one of the multi-paned window's glass panes and take the doll that way, under the cover of a smoke cloud. Simple, but effective.

Unfortunately, he was stopped, just as he reached for the window. By someone he had not expected to see this time or any other time for that matter.

Europe's supposed Number One Policeman, Delon. The detective whose claim to fame was killing suspects if he could not capture them.

And Kid had made a fool of him when he had appeared in Japan, protecting Princess Anne of Sublina. Not only by getting away, but by tricking the officer into falling out out of a fourth story window. Then to add insult to injury, Kid had publicly praised Nakamori-keibu's skills while Delon had hung from a flagpole, allowing Aoko's father to keep his job.

But most likely also the reason for Saguru's worry, probably having read it in the newspapers, which Kaito couldn't read, being in German and not English or Japanese. And probably the reason why Saguru wasn't here, keeping it from escalating by not allowing this to turn into a competition between the two detectives. Not that it was common knowledge that Saguru was in the country.

The look in Delon's eyes as he ordered Kid to show himself --while at gunpoint, no less-- was
nothing short of possessed. If he hadn't been positive that Koizumi was still in the States, he would have started looking for charmed necklaces or spells.

He'd lost the disguise then, his white-clad garb sparkling in the spot lights that flashed on once his appearance was known, much to the cheers of the crowds on the other sides of the policeman’s barriers. He'd given them all a courtly bow, keeping his hands where everyone could see them. Not that it would prevent him from pulling something.

Delon had ordered him to step away from the window, a request he replied he couldn't honour. He simply here as a courtier, he explained, to take the Lady to her beloved. He'd reached towards the doll, the glass wavering like water around his hand, allowing his limb to slip inside into the shop. Louise's eyes flashed as she moved, reached forward, a tiny hand elegantly resting on his thumb as she took a few steps to sit on the palm of his hands if she were resting on a throne.

He'd pulled his hand back out, the glass wavering around both of them before solidifying back the way it had been, Louise primly balanced in his hand, an enigmatic smile on her face, green eyes sparkling in the bright lights. The cheers had nearly been deafening as he'd tipped his hat towards Delon, letting some drops from a vial secreted in his hand spill onto the ground.

The effect was almost instantaneous. Cats came charging from all directions towards the scent, like a multi-coloured furry wave. While Delon and the officers scrambled to deal with their sudden appearance, he tossed a combination smoke and flash bomb to the ground. A second pellet was lobbed at Delon, impacting against the cursing cop and covering him with an oily like substance as Kid made his escape. He didn't stay to watch as the cats swarmed the man, yowling their pleasure.

He'd laced the area with female cat pheromones and catnip, bringing every tomcat and probably quite a few females within scenting distance to the area. The stuff he'd tossed on Delon had been the concentrated pheromones.

Until Delon washed it off, every single tom he came into contact with thought he was the sexiest beast ever. And would demonstrate this, with love songs of delight and LOTS of attention.

-It would probably take a while to wash all the pheromones off too.

Cackling happily to himself, he changed out of the Kid clothing and made his way back to Schloss Eberbach, taking an erratic route to prevent from being followed. It was more habit than anything, like his circumventing Schloss Eberbach's security system to climb into Saguru's room, but it was a good habit and a useful one.

The Lady Cat he placed on a table in front of a window, setting her to watch the rising moon. The doll hadn't moved since climbing into his hand, but the smile hadn't left her face.

In retrospect, he wasn't sure if the window had been his doing, or hers. He certainly had no explanation for it. And the amount of cats that had come charging far exceeded the amount he'd anticipated from his perusal of the amount that had gathered before he'd made his appearance.

In the end, he'd dismissed it with a tired yawn, stripped down to his boxers and climbed into bed with the still slumbering Saguru, wrapped the warm blond around him and drifted off to a contented sleep.

He woke up briefly around false dawn, the hushed sound of voices and a bird's flapping wing gaining his attention. Opening his eyes a crack, he'd seen two cat-eared figures embracing on the window, the dim light casting their shadows over the bed. The two small figures then disappeared out the window with a salute and a wave, a bird flying away.
Kaito smiled to himself and went back to sleep.

The next morning, when he woke up for real to get up and pack because they were leaving around noon, he found a black and white feather, striped like a magpie's wing, and a small note where the Lady Cat had been sitting that night.

'Deepest apologies for not replying to your letter sooner, there were some unforeseen delays in our arrival. My sincerest gratitude in reuniting my fiancee and myself.

Should you ever need anything, please do not hesitate to contact us at the Cat Agency. We are indebted to you for your act of kindness.

Sincerely,
Baron Humbert von Gikkingen'

Saguru peered over his shoulder, reading the letter with confusion. In the end, the blond scratched his head and shrugged, his sleepy brain not up to dealing with impossible acts early in the morning. Kaito smiled at him, kissed his cheek in thanks for his help yesterday and wandered off to his own room to put away things from last nights escapades and pack up to head back to England.

If they ever made it back to Japan, he'd have to introduce Saguru to the Baron. They'd probably get along well.

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

The Baron, Louise and their story are originally from "Mimi wo Sumaseba/Whisper of the Heart", a Studio Ghibli movie. The Cat Agency is from "Neko no Ongaeshi/The Cat Returns".
-We've been wanting to do a fic with Louise and the Baron ever since we saw Whisper of the Heart years ago. #^^#
The original idea for TGZ was a passing reference from Saguru to Klaus, to see if a picture of Louise was familiar. Then this came out. ^^;; Written in under 2 hours.
Sorry, Ann. I really didn't mean to use Delon before you did.
The Grey Zone: Dreams and Nightmares

Chapter Notes

Fujiyama-san is thanks to Jaelle's TGZ fic, 'The Evidence Never Lies'.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Grey Zone: Dreams and Nightmares
by Icka! M. Chif

♦ ♦ ♦

Flesh.

Skin against skin, the smell of shampoo, sweat and sex. Murmured words, soft gasps and pants.

Touch.

He wanted more. It wasn't enough, just hands and lips and tongues. Taste. Silk and salt. Texture.

More, he wanted more. More contact, more heat, more everything.

Golden brown eyes laughed at him as lips touched and tangled. He reached up-

And Kaito sat up in bed, gasping for breath and breathing hard. That wasn't the only part of him that was hard, much to his own embarrassment and painful arousal.

He pushed the warm duvet off his legs, loosely curling up in the cooler air, resting his arms on his knees. Hellooo Hormones. Hadn't seen you in a while.

He'd gotten a reputation early in High School for being a bit of a pervert, flipping Aoko's skirt to see her panties, picking the lock on the Girl's Locker room doors. Then came the discovery of Oyaji's night job, Aoko being family, Oyaji being murdered, actually being shot at as the Kid...

He'd grown up, matured, and set such thoughts and ideas aside as pointless. And while it was fun to tease Kudo about the colour of his not-girlfriend's underpants, thinking with his little head would get himself and others killed. He'd even stopped flipping Aoko's skirt, not that anyone seemed to notice. He knew what buttons to push around her, to set off the Nakamori temper for her to chase him without it. The locker room was for both the pretext that everything was the same as much as it was for the lock picking practise.

Then had come Hakuba with his bet... And the after-heist visits. He could --and probably should-- have stopped visiting, but it slowly became comforting. The detective was a challenge, not the same 'sword at the throat' challenge that Kudo was, but a steady one, subtly pushing at his abilities, encouraging him to grow.

The detective had also grown safe, comfortable to be around in his own sarcastic way. And he liked
that. He liked Saguru, being around him, how he felt, the way he smelled. It wasn't a familiar feeling, but it wasn't one he really wanted to fight either.

Then he'd found Pandora, the gem ripping everything away and pitching everything into chaos. The Summer from Hell.

He still had nightmares. The blond stepping in between Snake and himself, catching the bullet in the chest and NOT having the armour that kept the bullet from piercing his heart was frequent enough horror he was thinking of naming it 'George' and keeping it as a pet.

But mostly he dreamt that he'd failed. And in doing so, taking others down with him. Not just the half-Briton, but 'Kaasan, Nakamori-keibu and Aoko too. The night terrors didn't stop there, just like the organisation in black wouldn't stop there.

Kudo Shin'ichi in Edogawa Conan's fragile body, broken and bleeding. His girlfriend-nee-chan, Mouri Ran, slaughtered with him. Hattori Heiji's smiling face cracked open, his brains spilling onto the ground, dark skinned body attempting to shield his childhood friend Kazuha's mangled corpse.

Agasa-hakase, Kudo's neighbour, slaughtered along with Ai, the not-child's body had been torn apart as if ravaged by beasts, the Organisation taking it's time in prolonging her death. The small bodies of the Shonen Tantei, their glassy eyes wide and unseeing as they stared at him, silently asking why he'd allowed it to happen.

That one was the worst, the small kids. No matter how many nightmares he had, those images always haunted him throughout the day.

On the other hand, he didn't have to worry about his dick being too hard to move anymore. Attempting to find the words to explain to Ayumi-chan --who had greeted the Kid so fearlessly on her bedroom balcony one night ages ago-- why he'd let her die always slaughtered any sort of mood.

With a groan, he fell backwards onto the bed, limbs sprawled out. He wasn't getting anymore sleep tonight.

Saguru... kept the nightmares away. It was stupid, trite, and true. He slept better with the detective either beside him or in the next room. It was good to know that he had back-up beside him, should he need it.

And the lizard-part of his brain really liked the human physical contact.

But Saguru wasn't home right now. Neither was Mum. The house was empty, save for himself, Hirokini and the birds outside. The detective had been off at some Police Conference for the past few couple of days that was either a punishment or a reward to attend, depending on who you were talking to. Saguru had strongly suggested Kaito not attend, him being both a strange foreigner and not affiliated with law-enforcement. Not to mention bored to tears --or so Saguru said.

Although it might have been amusing to watch a large room full of law officials all trying to manoeuvre themselves so that none of them were sitting with their backs to a doorway. Heh.

Mum had been around the house until this afternoon, when she left for one of her excursions or whatever her job was that kept her busy most of the time. He still wasn't entirely sure as to what she did.

And now the house felt too big, too empty. And neither of the blonds would be home until the day after tomorrow.

He sighed, rubbing his head and messing up his hair. Shower. It was still early, the sun wasn't up yet.
He'd take a shower, get dressed and pull some money from one of the slush funds he and Hirokini had set up for emergencies and just go somewhere. Anywhere with people.

It was against his sense of honour as a Kaitou to -steal- without returning, but it tickled his sense of humour to use money they skimmed from the organisation to avoid the killers they sent after them.

"Kaito-niichan?" The AI's voice spoke from his charging mobile phone, where a light on it indicated that the video camera was on, the computer ghost-boy watching him. He'd probably noticed Kaito's sitting up and was worried. "You okay?"

"Peachy." No need to worry the kid. Weird dreams were his problem, not Hirokini's. "Just up a little earlier than usual." Not quite a lie, not quite the truth either.

"Hmm..." Since they couldn't -see- him and Hirokini had lost the machine-whirring noises when they moved, Hirokini relied on a lot more on audio cues to convey his emotions. This was an 'I don't entirely believe you but I'm not going to push it' hmm.

"Train ticket to the conference?" Hirokini finally commented neutrally, as if he didn't have the website already pulled up somewhere, making reservations.

Kaito sat up, staring at the mobile.

Hirokini said nothing.

Kaito chuckled ruefully, running a hand through his hair. That probably would have been where he would have ended up anyway, without realising it. To hell with it. "You're starting to know me too well." He grumbled half-heartedly.

The young AI made a happy sound in return. Kaito gave up and went to take his shower.

♦ ♦ ♦

Saguru appeared to be surprised to see Kaito outside of his hotel room door. Affection, amusement, and wariness quickly flashed across his face before being replaced by a bland facade as the blond invited him inside, quickly glancing around the corridor to see if anyone had seen Kaito's appearance.

No one had, Kaito had made sure of that. His Kaitou skills were good for that at least.

Saguru had bade Kaito to make himself comfortable while he finished getting dressed. Kaito curled up in one of the room's armchairs, watching the blond buttoning his shirt and rummage around for a tie.

He was half-anticipating a comment about his inability to stay home alone, at least until he noticed the slight grey smudges under Saguru's eyes. He wasn't the only one who hadn't gotten much sleep the night before.

So when Saguru fumbled with tying his tie into a Windsor knot for the third time, Kaito rose and did it for him, awkwardly standing behind the larger blond with his arms wrapped around him to do it right. He was fairly ambidextrous, but even he had trouble tying a tie when it wasn't around his own neck.

... Or a close approximation there of.

Whatever. It gave him an excuse to touch Saguru, which Saguru didn't seem to mind, even seemed
to lean back against him a little. Although that could have been just to get the knot tied faster. Right.

Saguru absently thanked him as he finished getting dressed, advised him to crash in the hotel room -- I.E: Not to be seen by anyone-- and informed him he'd be back sometime in the early afternoon.

Then Kaito was left by himself again. He sighed, falling backwards on the bed, his limbs sagging with mild weariness now that he'd made it to his destination and the caffeine rush that had sustained him on the train had faded. His arms brushed against some papers that were tossed out on the bed, something Saguru had been looking at before his arrival.

Curious, he picked up one and glanced at it. It was the convention schedule, notes scribbled about various lectures with Saguru's tidy hand. One interest in particular caught his eye.

A lecture on the International Criminal 1412 aka the Kaitou Kid, given by a renown expert on the subject, Saguru Hakuba.

Held the day before. Blast. He couldn't do anything to play with everyone. Well, maybe he could leave a card somewhere, 'The Kaitou Kid was Here' or something, just to set everyone off and play with their minds.

No wonder Saguru hadn't wanted him to come along. He dismissed the idea with reluctant sigh. Be good. He had to be good. A prank like that would draw unwanted attention to Saguru and his possible connections to Kid.

He picked up a few of the other papers, shuffling through them for a moment before realising that he was looking at Saguru's notes for the lecture. Most of them were basic statistics, basic height and weight, age, overview of his heist record, profile on likely targets. And a few random notes, once again written in Saguru's neat hand, mostly in the heist sections. 'Steals Men's Underwear' and 'Blanket Thief' being two of the more personal and amusing ones.

No wonder Saguru was paranoid over his being seen here, it was stated quite plainly that the Kid was of Japanese descent. Saguru's name was obviously Japanese, but with that information in mind, any officers who attended the lecture would probably be super sensitive of anyone of Asian descent for a while.

Glancing back at the schedule, he noted that Saguru had a lecture on DNA testing to attend this morning. It would have worried him, if the police had any samples of the Kid in their records. But they didn't.

Not any more at least.

They'd gotten his blood type from the case on Valentine's Day, the year before Saguru came, when Akako had made a voodoo doll of him. He'd switched the labelled samples of blood that the police had collected with fruit punch, then personally gone back and cleaned up the blood trail he'd left in the museum, just in case. The strand of hair Saguru had collected he'd also gone back and switched with a cat's hair, but that was before they had started their strange courtship.

Poor Fujiyama-san, the Kaitou Kid Task Force's DNA specialist... always suffering from asthma attacks at the worst possible time....

He chuckled to himself, looking over the rest of the schedule. New weaponry and security measures... that one would have been interesting to attend. It was always a good idea to stay on top of the latest there.

A yawn blind-sided him. He rubbed his eyes with the heel of a hand, still idly looking over things.
Saguru had scribbled notes on which of the lectures and demonstrations he wanted to attend, most of them being the same ones that caught Kaito's eye as being interesting to a thief. Made sense in a strange sort of way. Best way to catch a thief supposedly to think like a thief and all. There were one or two on homicides, but that was about it.

Curiosity satisfied for the moment, he kicked off his shoes and wiggled farther onto the bed, pulling the pillows down towards him. They smelt like the hotel detergent, but of Saguru too. He should recognise it by now at least, having spent enough time in close contact with the detective.

Contentedly sprawled across the bed --consequently taking up most of it in the process-- he allowed himself to drift back off to sleep, willing himself not to dream. Not the old nightmares, nor the newer, more intimate kind either.

♦ ♦ ♦

Snake had changed his mind. Instead of aiming for heart, which had been protected so many times before, he aimed for a less protectable area.

The Head.

Exit wounds really were larger than entrance wounds, Kaito noticed distantly. It looked like Hakuba had a smudge of dirt on his forehead, between wide surprised eyes, yet his blood and brains coated Kaito's body as he cradled the detective's dead one.

Snake raised his gun again, this time aiming for Kaito's forehead. There was no where he could move, not with Hakuba's larger body sprawled over his, trapping him with dead weight.

The door opened and shut, footsteps muffled on the carpet walking closer to him. A hand touched him on the back of the shoulder. He lashed out, fists and feet swinging towards the intruder. His strikes were blocked and he found himself grabbed, flipped, and pinned to the bed.

"Dammit, Kaito!!" Saguru's voice snapped. "WAKE UP!!"

Kaito opened his eyes, staring up at fierce blue ones staring at him from close range. "Hakuba?!

The blond frowned at being called by the less familiar name. Kaito grimaced. "Sorry, Saguru." That's right, Saguru was familiar with both Judo and Wrestling. Not good for escaping, but damn good to kept someone from doing so. "I didn't get you, did I?" Nightmare. He'd been having a nightmare. Obviously, 'George' had mutated.

"I'm fine." If Saguru's tone was any dryer, his mouth would be too deprived of moisture to talk. The detective's expression was one of concerned however. "Are you okay, Kaito-kun?"

"I'm fine, I'm fine." Kaito waved it off. Or would have anyway, if his hands hadn't been pinned down by Saguru. Now that he had a chance to notice it, most of him was pinned down by Saguru. With Saguru.

This morning's dream returned with startling clarity. Saguru's face was looming over his, if he leaned up or Saguru leaned down, they could re-enact some of it right here on the bed...

"Ahh..." Poker Face... Poker Face... dammit, Poker Face! Which Poker Face?! Kaito's face was rarely still while Kid's was always still. If he went expressionless, Saguru would -know- something was up. Ack! Bad word choice!! Bad word choice!! He felt the blood rushing to his head and cleared his throat nervously. "You can let go of me, y'know." He commented, angling for a casual tone and not entirely sure he succeeded. Thank goodness for loose trousers. Although with this close
of a proximity, it wasn't going to do much to hide anything.

Saguru looked confused for a moment, then his eyes widened as his cheekbones turned pink. "Oh. Right. Sorry." The detective quickly scrambled off of him in a tangle of pointy arms, long legs and jabbing knees, and elbows. Saguru finally rolled off of him and the bed, smoothing his waistcoat down in an effort to regain some dignity.

Kaito decided that not moving for a moment was a good idea. He could have hurt Saguru. He'd almost hurt Saguru. He'd promised himself after he'd accidentally tossed Saguru into the wall as the Kid that he'd never cause injury to the detective again, a promise he'd nearly broken.

The other reason being he was still a little shaky from the adrenaline rush. Both of them.

"You bring any luggage with you?" Saguru questioned, changing the subject. He moved towards where his bag was sitting open, casually grabbing a shirt to fold.

"None." Kaito sat up and swung his legs off the bed. "This was kind of an unplanned visit."

"Would you fancy a jaunt, then?" The blond shot him a small half-grin. "Mum asked me to check on someone while I was in the area. And to be frank, the convention's a bore."

Kaito glanced at the clock. It was still mid-afternoon and the convention didn't end until tomorrow. "You sure you want to check out early?"

"Positive." Saguru growled, pulling off his tie and tossing it in with the rest of his clothing. The Half-Brit let loose a rapid fire grumbling in Japanese about stuffed shirt old men who thought that you had to be grey-haired and walk with a cane to know anything more on any given subject than they did.

Obviously Saguru was -not- having fun being the youngest person here. Although, Kaito mused with a grin, it was nice to see some of the more teenager-ish personality come to the fore instead of the mature facade Saguru usually maintained.

Hirokini made a snickering sound from the cellphone at Kaito's waist. He'd probably known about this when he 'suggested' that Kaito come here. Although it did raise some questions in his mind as to when they had become so co-dependent on each other, and if it was healthy for their well being, both physically and mentally.

But then who was he to talk about healthy? He was a Kaitou living with a Detective. Hah.

Which meant that Saguru was a Detective voluntarily living with a Kaitou, so that didn't say much for his own mental health there either....

Kaito distracted himself by grabbing Saguru's toiletries from the bathroom and helping the blond pack.

♦ ♦ ♦

Kaito eyed the clouds gathering around the red brick Gregorian house they were walking towards. The clouds were starting to gather, a looming grey presence that heralded rain.

It rained here a lot, the imminent threat of rain shouldn't have been that big of a deal, but it just further soured his irritable mood. It was also possible that he was taking Saguru's pet cat analogy to heart too. No sunbeams to crawl inside of.

But he hoped that Saguru would be able to wrap this up quickly, he did not relish the idea of walking
back to the terminal in the rain. The detective seemed impervious to the weather, walking along with a bland look on his face, most likely mulling over what ever facts to the case he was here about.

Saguru set his bag down --Kaito had been previously unaware that they still made old-fashion carpet bags, but that was Saguru for you-- and rang the doorbell, patiently waiting. Kaito picked the bag up, mostly to have something to keep his hands occupied with, and waited not-so patiently despite what ever his expression was.

A thin, almost fragile looking woman opened the door, her blond hair held back in a messy ponytail at the back of her head. She blinked owlishly at them, pushing her glasses higher on her face. "I'm afraid we're not interested in buying anything today." She apologised.

Kaito almost grinned at that. "Good." Saguru smiled slightly as he pulled out his identification that identified him a consultant to the police. "We're not here to sell you anything. I was requested to inquire about a former case at this residence. Do you know a Dr. Honey?"

"He was my father." The woman said slowly, opening the door a bit wider. A second pair of eyes peered curiously at them from about waist height. The blond woman put a hand on the small brown haired girl's head, absently smoothing the strands.

Kaito crouched down until he was eye level with the girl, setting Saguru's bag down. "Hullo. My name is Kaito."

The girl gave him a serious look for a moment. "Your accent is different."

Saguru let out a small snicker. Kaito ignored him. He'd done well, learning as much as he had in the past year. "I'm from Japan."

The girl looked up at Saguru. "Are you?"

"Yes." Saguru admitted. "But I was raised in London, my Mum is English."

"Oh." The solemn wise eyes studied them both. "Do you speak Japanese?"

"Matilda!" The woman scolded. "I'm sorry, she-"

"It's okay." Kaito pulled out a square of of paper from his pocket, then carefully folded it in half, then half again. "Watch. Ore wa maho-tsukai." He clasped the folded piece of paper between his hands, then counted, clearly for the girl to hear. "Ichi. Ni. San!"

He opened his hands and where a folded piece of paper had rested was an even more folded piece of paper, now in the shape of a butterfly. He carefully picked it up by the body of the origami insect, the wings slowly flapping as he did so.

Then for a bit of fun, he gave a little flick of his fingers, tossing the butterfly into the air. It's paper wings flapped, fluttering in the air. He quickly glanced up at Saguru, who was smirking in a resigned amused sort of way.

A quick glance at the girl and her Mum showed no amusement however. Both of them were staring at him with more shock and trepidation than anything else. Feeling guilty and unsure why, he landed the floating butterfly on the girl's head, it's wings flapping a few more times before stilling.

Time seemed to pause, everyone staring at everything and nothing at once. Then the small girl reached forward, touching the side of Kaito's face with a tiny hand. "Your face isn't hot." She said, in a small voice filled with awe and confusion. "And your eyes didn't go all sparkly."
The butterfly fell off her head. Kaito simply stared back, not having a response to that.

"Why don't you both come in?" The blond lady said looking a little shaken as she opened the door and invited them both inside.

Saguru nodded, putting the identification back in his pocket and picking up his carpet bag. The girl picked up the butterfly, examining it carefully as Kaito rose slowly, following the detective.

"Did your brain feel like it was whooshing past the stars when you lifted the butterfly up?" The girl chattered excitedly, following them while her Mum shut the door behind them. "Or like you had thousands of little hands reaching out of your eyeballs and picking it up?"

"Kaito's a Magician." Saguru explained, smiling fondly at them both. "He's always doing tricks or pulling things out of no where."

When Saguru said it, almost sounded lewd. But it saved him an explanation. A Magician never explained his tricks after all.

"Oh." The girl's excited expression fell slightly. "How did you make this? A paper butterfly! Can you make other things out of paper?"

"Matilda!" Her Mum scolded. The girl looked abashed, fiddling with the butterfly.

Kaito grinned. Kids were so curious about everything. That was one of the neat things about them. People got so cynical when they got older and stopped asking questions.

"I'm Jennifer Honey, by the way." The blond lady said by way of apology. "This is Matilda."

"Saguru Hakuba." Saguru gave her a small half bow. "This is my associate, Kaito Kuroba."

Kaito smiled back. 'Associate' was he now? Well, it worked better than saying that the detective was dragging a thief around with him because they were friends. "Pleased to meet you. And yes, I can make other things out of paper." He looked up at Ms. Honey. "I can teach you if that's okay with your Mum."

"That would be lovely." Ms. Honey smiled back. "I'll bring you tea in a bit. Saguru and I will be in the kitchen if you want to try it in the living room."

The living room was easily viewable from the kitchen, Kaito noted with a vague sense of amusement. They would be able to keep an eye on each other without being obtrusive.

So while Saguru talked to Ms. Honey about some recent discoveries that her father's supposed suicide might be murder after all and if she knew anything about a woman named Ms. Agatha Trunchbull, Kaito and Matilda sat on the floor of the living room with scissors and notebook paper and he taught her how to make origami animals.

Matilda was a bright young child who picked up his explanations easily and chattered, asking questions about -everything-. What was life like in Japan, how did he become a Magician, could he teach her how to speak Japanese, why did he come to England, did he like it here, and on and on. He could barely keep up with her.

She chatted about herself too, how her parents left for Spain and she had moved in with Ms. Honey which was absolutely wonderful, things she read about in books --she read an awful lot of books--, possible jobs she could go into when she got older but there was so much to learn! How she and Ms. Honey had met, things The Trunchbull had done but no one would ever believe --he almost didn't,
but he didn't think she was lying either-- and she liked bread with butter and jam, did he?

Actually, he did and Ms. Honey made wonderful bread with butter and jam.

He keep an ear out for Saguru and Ms. Honey as well. Mum had been a friend of Dr. Honey's before his sudden death and asked her son to look into what had happened to her friend and his daughter. Mum had influence in some circles and had no qualms using it if she thought that it might correct an injustice. Saguru didn't get his drive for helping people and justice just from his father.

By the time Kaito realised what time it was, darkness had fallen and the storm outside had gotten worse. Saguru had gotten himself roped into helping to prepare dinner in the kitchen, wearing a spare apron. A pink one. Kaito received death threats about what would happen if Mum ever heard about this.

He ignored the death threats in favour of straightening the living room with it's menagerie of paper animals. Kaito behaved himself and not positioned them in a variety of naughty ways. He had -some- tact after all.

Some. Not much.

Ms. Honey invited them to spend the night and catch the train in the morning due to the weather and time of night. She was highly apologetic, she only had one bed in the guest room, but she had spare blankets if one of them wished to spend the night on the couch.

He and Saguru exchanged a look and commented that they'd share the bed. They were used to sharing accommodations, or so they explained. Which they were. It was just that some of the time they weren't travelling and didn't necessarily have to share accommodations and they did anyway.

There was some bickering before they went to bed, Kaito stole some of Saguru's clothes to sleep in and Saguru protested about it. Kaito pointed out that unlike Saguru, he didn't have anything to sleep in, it was too cold to sleep naked even with a personal bed-warmer --Saguru turned red at that-- and Saguru would have to smell his wrinkled stinky clothes all the way home otherwise. Besides, Saguru was so tidy and fussy, his dirty clothes probably weren't really dirty anyway.

He won in the end and curled up in bed feeling rather triumphant. The triumphant feeling lasted until Saguru climbed into bed, a warm presence stretching out against Kaito's back.

Then he didn't want to sleep. Sleep meant dreams. Dreaming was becoming increasingly not good.

He did NOT want to have a repeat of this morning's dreaming with Saguru. Right. There.

Not that he didn't think that Saguru would heckle him about it --they were both guys--, or that he couldn't talk his way out of it, but it would be damn embarrassing. And really really really awkward. Possibly awkward enough that they wouldn't share accommodations again.

Saguru rolled over, an arm brushing across Kaito's side, then sliding down his waist, Saguru curling around him. "G'to sleep." The blond murmured, his lips brushing the skin on the back of Kaito's neck. Kaito shivered slightly, burrowing a bit more into the blankets. -And Saguru.

Who was now apparently fast asleep. Which meant that he wasn't going to be moving until the half-Brit woke up.

Kaito sighed, which quickly turned into a yawn. With Saguru wrapped around him like a second blanket it was now comfortably warm under the duvet. Almost uncomfortably so. It was dangerous to drift off, but he needed to sleep.
Aw, hell. He'd deal with it in the morning.

◆◆◆

Kaito woke up, jolted out of sleep by the creek of floorboards outside the door. He opened his eyes a slit, senses on alert as the door slowly opened. Saguru slept heedlessly behind and around him, a snoring dead-weight between him and the door. He couldn't move, pinned by Saguru's arms, causing him to panic slightly.

Dead, dead, they were dead because he'd let his guard down around the detective and he could spot something shiny peeking through the doorway, dammit they were both gonna die horrible messy deaths and he hadn't even gotten -laid- yet...

Then Matilda peered at them from behind the door, the dim light glinting off the spine of the book she was carrying. "You awake?" She whispered in that voice kids use when they're trying to be really quiet but it didn't quite work.

"Yeah." He opened his eyes, tossing off the illusion of sleep. No guns, no death, no embarrassing dreams, just a curious little kid. The remains of the adrenaline rush was enough to make him giddy.

He got a shy grin in response. "O-ha-you." Matilda carefully pronounced the word.

"Ohayou gozai masu." Kaito whispered back. Matilda giggled, creeping into the room, still cradling the book. He could see the title of the book she was holding as she stopped next to the bed. It was a book on learning Japanese, old and battered, like it had been printed in the last world war.

"I said it right?" She asked excitedly, her voice still in the quiet-but-not-quite hushed tone.

"Hai." He couldn't help but to tease. She looked confused for a second, probably thinking he said 'Hi', then her expression cleared, giving him a big grin. "Can you help me with this? I can read the hiragana and the katakana and some of the kanji okay, but I don't understand how to pronounce them correctly and-"

Kaito laughed quietly, wiggling Saguru's death grip on him from his chest down towards his waist so he could sit up. It was awkward to do so, with one of Saguru's arms wrapped around the small of his back, but at least he could sit up. He rearranged the blankets so Saguru was covered but not suffocating, then motioned for her to climb up on the bed.

She did so creeping over to his side of the bed before scrabbling up, all knees and elbows, plopping the book down next to him and pointed to the things she didn't understand. He helped her through the pronunciations --she had some problems with the 'R-L' sound-- and wondered what time it was. Saguru would know, but he wasn't waking the blond up.

Although it was awfully tempting when Saguru decided to half roll over and he found himself with a lap full of slightly snoring detective. He turned bright red and Matilda laughed. Which brought a confused looking Ms. Honey looking for her wayward daughter.

Followed by a hushed lecture on annoying sleeping guests that woke a befuddled Saguru from his sleep. Who turned a brilliant shade of red upon discovering his face in Kaito's lap and tried to pretend he was still asleep, much to Kaito's amusement.

All in all, not a bad way to wake up in the morning.

He'd have to thank Hirokini later.
Chapter End Notes

Matilda, Ms Honey, the Trunchbull belong to the fabulous Roald Dahl. Used without permission, no profit is being made from this publication.
"Yeah, okay, we've established -what- this shit is..." Kaito groused as they squished as fast as squishily possible towards the back door and laundry room of the Hakuba house. The back garden was going to thank them for this in a few months. "But what the hell was this shit doing in a spray fertilizer lorry in the middle of frikkin' WINTER?!"

They'd been peacefully walking back from lunch and a game of darts at the local pub --they'd made him stand on the other side of the room as a 'handicap' and he'd still beat them soundly-- when a large sprayer lorry had pulled alongside them and blasted them both with liquid fertilizer.

Liquid fertilizer, as Saguru explained, was manure --like pig shit-- that was saturated in water, then sprayed over the fields to help the crops grow. It REEKED. However, this usually took place in spring, for the growing plants.

"Actually..." Saguru cleared his throat, looking embarrassed under his several coatings of liquid shit,"I think I may possibly know why...

"Yeah?" Kaito raised an eyebrow. Saguru had taken the brunt of the spray for three reasons. A: Saguru seemed to be the intended target, B: Kaito was better at dodging and running like hell and C: Saguru had managed, once again, to place himself between Kaito and the source their current troubles. It was beginning to be a habit that Kaito wasn't sure if he should be annoyed about or thank him for.

"I... sort of apprehended the driver's brother a few years ago." Saguru muttered.

"Yeah?" Okay, that was making a bit of sense. He could sort of understand that, revenge for a slight on a family member. "What for?"

"Misappropriation of a swine."

"..." Kaito paused, staring at the detective. If it wasn't for the brown-grey goop all over them, he'd say that the blond was bright red.

"He was the primary suspect for a murder at the time." Saguru muttered, slogging on and forcing Kaito to jog a few steps to catch up with him. "He could not have done it however, not with him committing pig theft at the time. So I cleared him of the accusation of murder, but he was still arrested for the theft."

"... So now his brother finds out that you're back in town and covers you in pig shit in retaliation."
"Essentially, yes." Saguru nodded, serene once again as they approached the house.

Kaito snorted. Ugh. Shit stink. He was going to be lucky if he didn't lose his sense of smell for days after this. "This stinks." Literally. To hog heaven, even. "You gonna tell the police?"

Saguru shrugged tiredly. "Possibly. I don't know."

"Feh." Kaito shrugged his shoulders and trudged up the single stair into the small laundry room -- more of a mostly enclosed porch on the back of the house-- dismissing the idea for now. Right now getting out of the damp clothing, getting warm and getting clean had priority. He grimaced as he stuck his hands into the coat pockets and pulled the various articles there and tucked them on one of the shelves. He noticed Saguru doing the same, after lifting the lid to the washer. They both shucked out of their coats and tossed them in. Shoes came off and set outside for rinsing later. Socks followed.

Kaito hesitated at the shirt --it was -cold- outside-- before peeling it off and using it like a rag to clean the worst of the poop off his face and hands. His trousers had a relatively clean line where the shit had hit the coat instead, but had absorbed the water from the disgusting goop and were damp at the top. He made a face, wrestling them off his hips and tossed them in the washer as well, leaving him in his chilly underclothes.

Saguru tossed his trousers in as well, a disgusted look on his face. "We stink."

"Yup." Kaito picked at his undershirt, which seemed to have picked up the moisture as well. It had certainly picked up the scent. "Under garments?" He questioned. He did NOT want these sitting in his bedroom for any length of time. For all he knew, the scent was contagious, everything it touched, it turned to stink.

The blond sighed, sounding weary. "Yes, I suppose so."

Kaito nodded, pulling off his undershirt and tossing it in with the rest of the shit soaked clothing. He paused, his fingers on the waistband at his hips, realizing that if he took his underpants off, he'd be naked. Which really shouldn't be a big deal, it was just like changing into gym clothes for Phys Ed with the guys in school. Or using the public baths.

Except this wasn't Phys Ed and this wasn't the public baths. This was his friend and partner in crime. This was the guy he slept next to half the nights. Whom he kissed and made out with, except it had been months since they did that regularly and some quick necking in a side alley didn't count. This was Saguru, the person he was having some sort relationship with and some how that made it A Big Deal.

Saguru tossed his garments into the washer, his face expressionless. A second glance revealed -- damn, Saguru wasn't just taller than him-- that the high blush that marked Saguru being embarrassed was visible under the grime that coated his face. The detective was as nervous as he was.

Okay then.

He slipped out of his last remaining shred of clothing and tossed it in the washer. Saguru tossed in the laundry soap, shut the lid and started the washer. "Ready?" Saguru asked as the water began to pour into the washer.

"Yeah." He agreed, then paused, frowning. He could hear the washer... but now there was another sound too.

The detective paused as well. "Something wrong?"
"Do you-" There it was again, high pitched and on the shrill side. "-hear laughter?"

"Laugh..." Saguru trailed off, frowning. "...ter. Oh, shit."

No, the shit was in the washer, all over their clothing. "What?"

Saguru looked almost terrified. "Tea. It's Mum's turn for holding the Women's Tea."

Women's tea... which meant that there was a gaggle of women sitting downstairs, drinking tea and gossiping.

A gaggle of women sitting Right. By. The. Stairs.

Well, shit.

Well, he -could- probably scale the wall to the guest bedroom if he really needed to. However, it was frikkin' cold and he'd probably freeze his balls off in the process.

And their clothes were all in the washer, covered in pig shit, water and laundry detergent. And there wasn't any spare fabric or boxes to cover their dignity with.

"The way I'm seeing it," Saguru said carefully. "We have three choices."

Kaito raised an eyebrow. "Which are?"

"One." Saguru held up a finger, the other hand casually draped to over himself that did nothing to hide the fact that he was indeed a natural blond. "We somehow manage to sneak upstairs to our rooms without attracting notice."

Kaito nodded. Figured that one out for himself, thanks. Although he still hadn't figured out how to get Saguru up there.

"Two." Saguru unfolded his thumb. "We brazen it out, walk upstairs like nothing is wrong."

Kaito nodded. That was one possible way to escape notice. Worked wonders in heists. Act like you knew what you were doing and people didn't ask questions.

"Three." A third finger joined the other two. "We run like hell and hope they don't see anything they shouldn't."

Kaito nodded.

"Any suggestions?" Saguru queried.

Another trill of laughter caused them both to grimace. "Three is good." Kaito commented.

"Three it is then." The detective nodded. "On three?"

"Perfect." The faster they got inside and out of the cold, the better he was about it.

"THREE!"

Saguru, by virtue of being closest to the door, opened it while Kaito dashed inside. Saguru wasn't more than a step behind him however, as they dashed through the kitchen --fortunately, no women--down the hallway --no women-- around the banister and dashed up the stairs, mooning the living room, full of women.
They were up the stairs, down the hall, and slammed the door to Saguru's bedroom shut, leaning against it as they panted for breath before the first screams of laughter caught them.

"Well..." Kaito grinned over at the flush-faced detective. "That went well."

Saguru responded by opening his bedroom door and abruptly shoving Kaito back into the hall.

Kaito grinned in retaliation, quickly trotting the hall before Saguru could follow. "Dibs on the shower!"

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

Every so often we give ourselves a fic challenge. Usually it’s some random line. This time, it was a bit of an... um... activity. Streaking. Because we thought it was a funny mental picture.

Thanks to Ysabet for brainstorming the beginning with us. “So, Ysabet... I kinda need a reason for them to shed their clothes really quickly...”
It was time to get his hair cut, Kaito decided silently. When it came to the point that he'd been wrestling with a comb and his hair for more than a minute and losing, it was time for a trim.

Stupid bed head.

Saguru yawned, staggering into the bathroom without knocking on the previously closed door. Kaito spared a glance at him, mentally shrugged and turned his attention back to attempting to untangle his hair. He didn't mind as long as Saguru shut the door to keep Mum out. You never knew where she was going to pop up with a camera sometimes.

Saguru yawned again, grabbing a toothbrush and began brushing his teeth, eyes drooping closed in the manner of one who was clearly not awake. Kaito snickered to himself and attempted to figure out how his hair had stopped tangling around itself and tangled the comb instead.

They worked at their own tasks soundlessly, too used to each other being in the other's space to complain much. That and trying to point something out like that to Saguru at this stage of the morning would earn him a bleary eyed 'huh?'.

-Or so Kaito teased. Saguru was quite bright when he needed to be. Mornings were rarely that time.

Was that a Gorgon knot? How the hell had his hair done that?!

Saguru glanced over at him and paused, still holding the toothbrush in his mouth. After a moment of what appeared to be sleepy deliberation, he backed up a few steps, squinting at Kaito. He'd forgotten his glasses this morning, which meant that to focus on things, he had to back up. It was something that amused Kaito to no end. It made Saguru look kind of horse-like.

"Are... you in my pants?" Saguru questioned, speech slightly muffled by the toothbrush still in his mouth.

Kaito glanced down. He'd forgotten he was wearing a pair of Saguru's boxers. They were plaid, but functional. "Yeah."

"...." There was a world of commentary in that bleary statement.

Kaito shrugged. "I needed to do laundry." He muttered.

"...." Saguru continued to stare at him, his head tilted slightly in befuddled concentration. Kaito pulled the boxers up a little higher on his hips. Saguru was bigger than he was, these kept sliding down. But he was out of clean undergarments, so these would do in the mean time.

He didn't quite understand why Saguru was staring. Saguru'd been there when Kaito had unpacked, he knew his underwear drawer contained everything from dancer's belts to red flannel long johns. He was especially grateful for the latter during the winter heists.
Kaito paused, trying to pull the comb out of his hair, but now it was stuck fast. "Do you mind?" He questioned.

Saguru shuffled forward, then tugged at the waist band a little, as if to verify that yes, it was his boxers. "Not really." The blond mumbled, straightening up, toothbrush still in mouth.

"Good." Kaito commented, wincing as he pulled some hair out in his attempt to untangle the comb. Scissors, scissors, he'd just cut the damn thing out. "Cause you're using my toothbrush."

That caused the detective to pause. Slowly, with great deliberation, Saguru pulled the toothbrush out of his mouth and squinted at it. The toothbrush was green. Saguru's toothbrush was blue. "Oh." Saguru commented. "So it is."

Kaito barely muffled a chuckle.

"Should I bleach it or something?" Saguru offered, holding the toothbrush out for him to take.

"Nah." Kaito made a face, finally getting part of the comb free. That was a half-hitch knot. Definitely a half hitch. Most likely with a twist. How -was- his hair doing that?

Besides, he'd had Saguru's tongue in his mouth and his tongue in Saguru's mouth before. If there were any harm to come from it, they'd probably know it by now.

Saguru hesitated a moment more, then half shrugged and continued brushing his teeth. Kaito worked at unknotting the comb. Maybe he could just leave it in there for the day, no one would notice...

"Here." Saguru's hands covered his own, taking the comb from him. In seconds, the unruly dark strands fell from comb as if touched by magic. Kaito blinked in shock as Saguru then handed him the comb...

"... Thanks." He managed. Dammit, how the hell did he do that? Some sort of Neatness Power? Would explain why the blond's room was always so neat, compared to Kaito's sporadic jumble.

"Welcome." Saguru mumbled, then gave him a slight shove towards the door. Kaito blinked stupidly for a moment, still sidetracked by the comb before he got the clue. Time to vacate the premises, someone needed to use the john. There were -some- limits to sharing a bathroom.

He opened the door, heading out into the hallway examining the comb as he did so. It didn't -look- like a hair eating monster. Maybe there was an on-off switch on it he wasn't aware of...

"Hey." Saguru's still blurred voice drew his attention back to the bathroom.

"Yeah?"

"You can keep the boxers." Saguru smiled, just on this side of a leer. "I like you in my pants."

Kaito threw the comb at him.

-fin-
On the Twelfth Day before Christmas, they pulled the box of Christmas ornaments and decorations down from the attic. Mum was like a drill sergeant, having a battle plan to decorate the house and woe to those who might lollygag or attempt to duck out of decorating duty.

Kaito was a Magician. He had mastered rope tricks about the same time most kids learned to tie their shoes properly. Evasion tricks were his secret speciality, escaping from impossible situations, usually while bound, blindfolded and sometimes gagged. Complex knots and handcuffs opened for him with a roll of his wrists. He was put in charge of untangling the strands of sparkling holiday lights.

The third time Saguru had come to his rescue and gotten him free of the lights, the detective had smirkingly threatened to decorate him instead of the tree. Kaito thought it was partially unfair. There was no way the lights should have gotten so tangled up in just a year. Well, two. Mum had been in Japan last year. He'd seen how obsessive compulsive Saguru was when packing things away.

And somehow, all Saguru had to do was seemingly touch the lights and they fell away in nice neat little circles. Kaito still wondered if Saguru had some sort of neatness freak factor that made messy tangles just fall apart neatly.

If he did, it was that express ability Mum wanted Saguru to use to place decorations symmetrically on the tree.

But they'd let Kaito literally scale the walls to place decorations in high places without a ladder, so it all worked out.

On the Eleventh Day before Christmas, Kaito and Hirokini called up Uncle Eroica and sang bawdy and twisted holiday songs.

The art thief was appreciative. Saguru was not.

Saguru also wanted to know what he was giving Auntie Kitty for the holidays. Kaito refused to tell him, which sent Saguru into a temporary snit, muttering about stolen gems.

Kaito thought that was mightily tacky of Saguru.

You never gave another Kaitou gems unless you knew that no one was going to be able to track them as stolen. Using friends as pawn shops for jewels just was not done.

He'd sent her a holiday card instead with a coupon for a day at the spa.
He and Hirokini had specifically hacked the spa’s database just for her. After all, what good was being a thief if you couldn’t steal your fellow felons a holiday gift?

♦♦♦

*On the Tenth Day before Christmas*, he helped Saguru hunt down several suspects on a case. Everyone hated cases during the Holidays and petty crimes like shoplifting seemed to suddenly increase.

Unfortunately, this time the chase lead to someone being pushed off off a bridge. Kaito did the first thing he could think of, a tossing out a line of knotted silk scarves. And miraculously, perhaps magically, it worked, the leading scarf had wrapped around the guys wrist, the man grabbing the scarves like a life line.

Saguru and the officers had been impressed as they’d helped to haul the unfortunate person in. Kaito had smiled and shook of their praise uneasily before wandering off to sit in the shadows by himself for a while.

He'd only had a few scarves up his sleeve, not a rope length of them. The Kaitou Kid was the one who did three impossible things before breakfast, not Kuroba Kaito.

As the panic faded and logic returned, he found himself wondering just how long he'd been doing things like this and if this was the first time he'd actually realised what he'd done instead of being distracted by other things going on.

By the time Saguru eventually found him he had sufficient control over his expressions again. The detective kept him close for the rest of the day anyway.

♦♦♦

*On the Ninth Day before Christmas*, Hakuba and Saguru each received a package in the post.

It was from Kudo Yusaku and his wife. Curious as to what they had been sent, they’d torn open the packages to find Publisher's Proofs of the latest Night Baron book inside. Each book was personalised and autographed by Kudo-sensei, with a note thanking them for their help.

Curious and wary, they’d each retreated to a different part of the house to read their copies. Only to meet up with each other about midway through the book, mutual thoughts of homicide on their minds.

The Kaitou Kid wasn't in the book. However, there were two side characters, a Mr. Black and a Mr. White, who appeared to be in an ambiguous relationship. Mr. Black had dark hair and was a person of questionable skills who worked with/for/under Mr. White, an information broker with pale hair.

Hirokini-kun had helpfully added that rumour of the characters had reached the internet and female slash fans of the Night Baron books were already squealing in delight.

The books were quickly finished and revenge plotted out.

Then delayed until after the New Years.

The Kudo couple would probably be hard pressed to figure out why the publishers they were usually hiding from suddenly knew where they were at all times after the first of the New Year. Kaito wished them a peaceful Christmas, it was the last bit of peace they were going to get for a while.
On the Eighth Day before Christmas, Saguru informed him that he could not go around asking people 'Cake or Death'. Especially around the holidays when everyone was stressed out. Kaito countered with he had more than three cakes. Which he did. He also had a large mallet on the cart as well, just in case. It never hurt to be prepared.

Saguru groaned and proclaimed he was never ever allowing Mum to educate Kaito in British history again. And certainly not by showing him 'Black Adder' or 'Eddie Izzard'.

On the Seventh Day before Christmas, both he and Saguru were forced by Uncle Dorian to attend some sort of Upper Class Holiday party. Uncle Dorian had also gleefully dressed them for the occasion. Saguru had been put in a tailored cut-away jacket with tails, a style more appropriate for a hundred years prior but still classy. It definitely made him stand out.

Kaito had been put in a black version of his Kaitou Kid suit. There was even a monocle. He wasn't nearly as amused as he should have been and refused to wear the monocle. However, he kept the gloves and Saguru kept a close eye on him. There were quite a lot of sparkling jewels around.

--In his defense, he didn't take any, but he did swap various pieces around, the wearers none the wiser.

The highlight of the evening had been Sir Integra Hellsing, a pale cold woman with an icy gaze who didn't appear to be happy to be there. She'd set his instincts screaming, raising the hairs on the back of his head. But not nearly as much as her subordinate, a busty blond haired woman with red eyes in a blue uniform had. He'd physically hidden behind Saguru when she'd passed them on her way to giving Sir Integra a message.

Kaito had watched as the the blond talked briefly to Sir Integra. Saguru, paying attention to his own particular set of instincts, had watched a dark haired guy panic and attempt to run.

Only to have the busty blond suddenly intercept the runner. She'd crossed the room in less than a blink of an eye. Kaito had seen a brief flash of a gun barrel, then the runner dissolved into a pile of dust and ash.

Saguru had grabbed Kaito's hand, fingers clenching Kaito's so hard he'd sworn that he'd have bruises come morning, blue eyes staring at where a man had been a moment ago. The busty blond saluted at her superior, then disappeared. Sir Integra left shortly there after, puffing on a slender cigar despite the no smoking rules.

No one had seen anything. Or if they had, their minds had dismissed it. People didn't turn to dust when killed.

People weren't shot dead in the middle of high class holiday gatherings.

Therefore, no one had seen anything.

Kaito had unintrusively clung back to Saguru, whispering at him not to logic it away, not to dismiss what he had seen, but to accept the facts. After all, Kaito had seen it too.

Kaito had also spent years searching for a jewel that caused immortality. It had existed.
So this could exist too. No matter how frightening the thought was.

♦♦♦

*On the Sixth Day before Christmas,* Kaito attempted to find out what everyone was getting for Christmas as Saguru attempted to wrap presents. Saguru was a better gift wrapper than Mum —that neat freak factor again— so she usually gave him gifts in taped boxes to wrap for her.

This involved sneaking around the house to discover all the places Saguru and Mum had hidden gifts.

Get dragged out Saguru's wardrobe and shoved out of the room.

Climb outside to peer into room from window ledge.

Get locked into his room for pulling such a stupid stunt.

Cunningly distract Saguru out of his room with plate of cookies stolen from downstairs where Mum was baking.

Get dragged out from under Saguru's bed and shoved out of the room.

Stare at Mum make chocolate chip cookies until realisation that she was doing this as a distraction so Saguru could wrap her gifts sinks in, sneak upstairs to invade Saguru's room.

Get dragged off Saguru's ceiling and shoved out of the room.

-Kaito spent a good portion of the day locked in the mews with Watson, because Mum would kill him if he damaged the hawk's housing to escape.

The hawk said several unkind things to him about sharing her space.

♦♦♦

*On the Fifth Day before Christmas,* Saguru's Dad showed up unannounced, as a present to both himself and his wife. Mum was thrilled. Kaito hid. This time not in any ceiling corners where he would be spotted by the jolly laughing man.

Saguru's Dad also brought a bunch of mistletoe as a Christmas Present that Koizumi had specifically given him to give to them.

Both he and Saguru quickly decided to have nothing to do with it. The logical detective may not have believed in sorcery, but he was wary enough of it's effects.

Kaito just knew better.

♦♦♦

*On the Fourth Day before Christmas,* they found out exactly what kind of spell Koizumi had put on the mistletoe.

From the way that Mum and Hakuba's Dad were making out on the sofa, the odds of it being a high level lust spell were pretty much certain.

Saguru declared he was blind and shuddered the rest of the day every time he glanced towards the living room. Kaito couldn't blame him. That was one scene he could have lived the rest of his life.
without seeing. He also couldn't blame Saguru for wanting the sofa steam cleaned before he sat on it again.

Kaito had to give them points for throwing distance. The range on the clothes tossed about the room had been impressive.

As Saguru walked up stairs muttering about gouging out his eyes with various blunt objects, Kaito pulled out his mobile phone and took a picture, one feminine leg showing above the couch, one very large pair of men's underwear prominently showing.

Which he then e-mailed to Koizumi without Hirokini's help, with the message that Saguru's Mum and Dad enjoyed her gift immensely. There were some things he didn't feel right showing the young AI.

♦♦♦

On the Third Day before Christmas, Saguru greeted him at the breakfast table with a whack up side the head with a bundled up folded up newspaper. When he mutely protested innocence to the swat, the detective had unfolded the papers and shown both he and Mum the headlines on two of the London Papers.

The Kaitou Kid had broken into the Queen's sleeping chambers.

And left a Christmas card.

Scotland Yard, the Guards and all the various law enforcement officials were in an uproar over it. There had been no evidence of the kaitou's entrance or exit, no witnesses, nor any indication of anything missing. Just the card miraculously appearing on the Queen Mum's night table.

News of prank had somehow been smuggled to the associated press, there had yet to be any official word from her Royal Highness.

Kaito smiled and helped himself to another sausage as Saguru, his Dad and Mum debated the display of devilment.

Later that day, after Saguru had gone through several hours on the phone calming various law enforcement down, he found his cellphone had been reprogrammed to play 'God Save the Queen' as the ringtone with a Union Jack as the background. He tried all day to change it back with no success.

♦♦♦

On the Day before Christmas, they attended Midnight Mass. Kaito had never been in a church before. He'd attended a few Western style weddings before, but that was the extent of his introduction to Christianity.

The stained glass, the carvings and the statuary were beautifully made, but the expressions on some of the statues faces were a little confusing. With the exception of the Mother statue, they all seemed to be either highly constipated or in the process of rolling their eyes. The bloody tortured guy on the cross didn't help the festive mood much.

The stand up, sit down, rah-rah-rah didn't make much sense either, but from the whispered comments Saguru made when the mass of people weren't silent to listen to the guy wearing an embroidered dress in the front talk or singing, the detective explained it was the birthday of the bloody tortured guy on the cross, named Jesus Christ.
Kaito thought that they would have let the poor guy have the day off for his birthday and taken him down.

Saguru and his father looked mostly bored during the service, but Mum had sort of a tranquil glow around her, like the rituals brought her peace, which he figured was the point of it. People needed to believe in something greater than themselves sometimes.

So he amused himself by naming off various gods -- Bishamonten, Guardian of the Divine Treasure House was a favourite -- and figuring the best way to break in and steal the candleholders. At least until Saguru told him not to take anything from the offering plate that was passed around.

Then he planned pranks to pull on the detective.

♦♦♦

On Christmas Morning, Mum assigned Kaito the task of waking Saguru up after Kaito had finished taking care of his doves and the detective still hadn't risen. Animal tending took precedence, even on a major holiday.

Saguru grumbled, sluggishly refusing to leave his bed and function after less than six hours of sleep. After repeated jabs and off key carols, the detective finally mumbled into his pillow that he was up.

Kaito pulled back the covers and checked. Parts of the blond certainly were anyway, which he cheerfully informed Saguru.

He'd never seen anyone fall out of bed so fast before. The bellow that followed Kaito as he quickly fled out the door had been impressive too.

He'd stayed out of the way as Saguru had made his way down stairs and to take care of Watson's food, the two of them intending to take the Sparrow hawk flying later, after gifts and the holiday festivities mellowed some.

Saguru had come back in, only a few minutes later as Kaito was warming his hands around a mug of tea, a perplexed expression on the detective's face.

"Kaito? You wouldn't happen to know why Watson is -eating- a Partridge in a Pear Tree, would you?"

-fin

Chapter End Notes

The gift wrapping with Kaito was inspired by How To Wrap A Gift (With Help From Your Furry Friend...)

The part about Midnight Mass is not intended to insult anyone, it is intended to be the viewpoint of someone walking into a Roman Catholic/Anglican/Christian Church for the first time.

Sir Integra Hellsing and Seras Victoria are the brainchild of Kouta Hirano, who placed the Hellsing series in London and set about destroying the country with zombies after being treated rudely by a London Hotel Clerk. Not kidding. Used without permission,
not for profit.
Saguru wasn't talking to him.

No, that wasn't entirely right. Kaito could talk and the detective would answer in grunts and monosyllables, but that was it. Stupid bastard was sulking. Or pouting. One of the two.

It was not Kaito's fault. It was not and he refused to accept any blame for it.

It was that red-haired woman's fault. Either the one with the orange-y red hair that had directed them to the godforsaken house, or the pinkish-red haired devil inside, he didn't particular care which one. But it was all their fault.

The orange-y red headed woman for directing them towards the house to begin with. Kato-sensei seemed nice enough, if a little distracted, collecting papers she had graded after her case had burst open, scattering them everywhere.

He and Saguru had been in the area, looking into rumours about odd things happening in the area by people dressed in black. And like the well mannered idiots they were, they helped the damsel in distress collect her wayward papers and received directions from her as a grateful reward.

Which would have been absolutely -lovely- if the directions hadn't included them going through a BOG. If Kaito heard any sort of squelching sound any time in the near distant future, he was getting the hell out of that location. There were -things- in the squelch.

Then, they got to The House. It was a nice enough house, well maintained, a little out of the way, somewhat antiquated looking, but a nice enough house.

With the smiling creepy bastard at the door. Oh, sure. The bastard LOOKED like a nice, polite kid with an ever present creepy smile with lovely fresh warm towels as a distraction waiting for them at the door, but Kaito figured him out pretty quickly.

Just not quickly enough to avoid the pinkish-red haired one.

So while -Saguru- got to sit in the parlour with the creepy bastard and the kitty with wings that made snarky comments that Saguru responded to but never seemed to realise who was making them, Kaito got chased around by the pink one.

Nakuru, Naraku, Nataku, what ever her name was. Or even if she really was a she. Hell, she could have been a crossdresser, she was damn flat for a girl. All he knew was that she had somehow decided that he was a Nummy Treat. Or a Play Thing.

Only Kaito had quickly figured out that her definition of 'Play Thing' probably included something
along the lines of black leather and a riding crop. Not a chance, not in hell... Well, not with her in any case.

She had started innocently enough with off comments about needing a nice hot bath to get the bog off of him, with her there to help him.

Which lead to the Rubber Duckie Incident. That had been a pretty good sized clue right there.

And the Boa Incident. With the Feather Boa and the Boa Constrictor. Proving once and for all that Yes, Kaito Really Was That Flexible.

And then there had been the Incident with the Gravy Boat, the Chocolate Sauce, and the Squid. The less said, the better.

The Ribbon Incident.

The Toilet Incident --which was partly Kaito's fault, he should have KNOWN that a locked door wouldn't serve to be much of a deterrent.

The Sugar Incident. Which was how he learned that the Cat-With-Wings-That-Didn't-Exist was allergic to sugar. Although he was still trying to convince himself that the laser beams out of the kitty's mouth were just his imagination. The scorched hairs on his head kept trying to convince him otherwise.

The Doujinshi Incident. Man, those artists were sick.

The Handcuff Incident --thank Kami-sama for lock picks and the knowledge to use them-- which lead to the Satin Sheet Incident.

But nothing, NOTHING could top the Hedgehog Incident. He was going to twitch spasmodically every time he saw one of those little pincushions for years to come, he just knew it.

And somehow, Saguru managed to walk in, glance over, stumble upon them at the Worst Possible Time. Every single damned time.

Which was why Saguru was currently sulking. Kaito had -tried- to explain but it didn't seem to be getting through the thick stubborn blond's head. What was Kaito supposed to say anyway? He wasn't attracted to the pretty pinked haired girl that was suggestively draping herself across him because he liked Saguru?

Never mind the fact that Kaito was Saguru's -friend-, the Kaitou Kid was the one Saguru wanted. Not Kaito.

It would probably be a few days before Saguru calmed down enough to talk to him again, the half-briton tended to have a tendency to carry grudges. But it was easier to let the detective work it through his system than having a knock-out brawl or a screaming fight on the street.

Especially since they had some how acquired some mysterious shadows with butterfly wings trailing them. Which he'd really like to mention to Saguru and get some feedback on.

Except Saguru wasn't talking to him.

This really wasn't his fault.

-fin-
Many thanks to Meg for letting us include references to her fic 'Better than the Hedgehog'.

Kato-sensei, Eriol, Ruby Moon, and Spinel Sun all belong to Clamp. Used without permission.
The Grey Zone: Aoko Visiting

Chapter Notes

Thanks to Dogmatix for being a sound board and putting up with random questions from everything from leather fetish wear to what do you call a large gathering of mimes. (a silence of mimes? o_O)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

♦ ♦ ♦

"Little Sister!" Kaito held his arms open. "Come! Leap into mine arms and let us celebrate our joyful reunion with an embrace!"

Aoko stared.

Saguru bopped him on the back of the head with a fist.

"And just what-" Aoko's stare turned towards Saguru. "-have you been feeding him, Hakuba-kun?!"

"Pudding." Saguru deadpanned. "Lots and lots of pudding. Have you all your luggage?"

Kaito sulked, rubbing the back of his head. Well, -he'd- thought it was funny...

"Yeah." Aoko carefully skirted Kaito, walking on Saguru's other side as she allowed the blond to take a duffle from her. She kept a careful grip on the other suitcase, clearly not relinquishing it.

"Thanks."

"No fair teaming up on me!" He protested, catching up to two of his favourite people in the whole world to tease. He gave Saguru a set of his best innocent eyes. "I thought you were going to protect me from her!"

"Protect WHO?!" Aoko roared, her hair flaring out.

Kaito grinned, reaching over to tap her nose with a fingertip. "Gotcha."

Her face wrinkled up, torn between emotions for a minute, before sticking her tongue out at him. "Baka-Kaito." She muttered dourly, but her eyes sparkled happily at him.

"Good to see you too." He replied back honestly. "Did you have a good trip here?" She was only here for a week and he wanted her to have a good time while she was here.

She laughed, giving him a small shove, knocking him into Saguru. The blond reached a hand out,
steadying him. He didn't need the hand, but it was welcome none the less and he slung an arm around Saguru in thanks.

Aoko gave them a funny look, then launched into a story about the funny smelling lady in the seat in front of her on the flight who was terrified the wings were going to fall off. She then coaxed Saguru into telling them about the time that the plane did have to land because of an emergency.

The stories carried them out of the airport, to the taxi and all the way home.

Mum greeted their laughing faces at the door, squealing in delight that had Kaito doing a double take to make sure they were at the right house. Aoko looked ready to bolt as Mum ushered them in for tea, reminding Kaito of the first time they had met the woman.

It was strange to realise he'd gotten used to her. It was almost five months since he'd left Japan.

Had it really been that long?

Aoko distracted him from his ruminations by asking why there was an autographed tweed sock in a frame in the hallway.

He'd kept his mouth shut while Saguru turned red and muttered about embarrassing birthdays, stupid thieves, and poorly time phone calls. Fortunately Mum called them to dinner before THAT story got out.

+++ "Kaito?" He could hardly hear Aoko's hesitant voice in the darkness. He smiled to himself, staring up at the ceiling. He'd half been expecting her appearance.

"Over here, Aoko." He called back, keeping his voice soft. They wouldn't wake Saguru up, the blond could sleep through just about anything, once asleep. Mum was another story. The woman had ears like a bat. "Come on in."

She did so, creeping into the room like she was a burglar afraid to get caught. He chuckled and pulled the covers back, sitting up as he motioned for her to crawl under and warm up. Aoko dipped her head, embarrassed, then dove under, elbows and knees scraping the mattress as she attempted to not crawl on him. The air was chilly, but it was warm under the duvet. He lay back down, pulling the thick warm covers back over them.

"Sorry." She whispered and he didn't have to see clearly in the dark to realise she was blushing. "I was just..."

"Homesick." He filled in for her. "Yeah. I know." He did, very well. It wasn't that the people here weren't polite or friendly, it was just that there were so many of them, and they were all speaking a different language. It was almost like being sucked into another universe.

"Yeah." Aoko sighed, settling into the mattress. "Exactl-eeep!" She nearly jumped horizontally as she discovered the other body in the bed. Luckily Saguru had a big bed or they'd never all fit.

"You're not the only one who gets homesick." He commented with a slight sardonic smile. "Watch out, he cuddles in his sleep." But he did make an excellent personal space heater. Aoko's eyes were wide in the dim light as she squeaked again.

"You... ah, him... um..." She stammered slightly. Kaito chuckled. His sister was so much fun to tease.
"It's cheaper to share accommodations when travelling." He explained. "You get used to sharing after a while."

Not quite the whole truth, but a truth. Sometimes after a long, hard day of travel, all they wanted was a bed to fall into at the end of the day and weren't exactly particular about if it was with each other or not. Other days, they couldn't stand the sight of the other person and got separate rooms. But usually they ended up sharing a room, sleeping just a few metres away from each other. It had gotten to the point that coming back and sleeping 'his' room felt strange, because the room was suddenly too big, too quiet and too cold.

Which was why he hadn't protested sharing Saguru's room and letting Aoko sleep in his.

"Oh." She nodded, then squirmed slightly, getting comfortable between them. Saguru shifted in his sleep, making room for her. After a rare night that Kaito slept more than Saguru, the detective had commented that Kaito tended to be a restless sleeper. After gaining a decent shiner that had lasted for a few days, Saguru had added 'dangerous to wake up' to that list as well. Which was probably why the larger boy automatically moved to accommodate the body next to him.

He'd slept --when he'd been able to sleep-- in a few less-than friendly places while attempting to keep the mysterious organisation from killing everyone he knew last summer and the instinct was slow to fade. But waking up swinging was better than not waking up at all.

Having someone near tended to help with the occasional nightmare too. Fortunately they were starting to fade, coming less frequently than in the past.

"Don't worry about waking him up." He added. "He won't budge until it's daylight." Nice good safety blanket, like a brick wall to hide beside.

"Okay." Aoko agreed, looking less likely to run at the slightest movement. She looked serious, dark eyes searching his face. "Kaito?"

"Yeah?"

"Are you... happy here? Are they treating you okay?" She asked seriously, her voice worried.

"Yes." He didn't have to think about it. Yes, to both questions. He -missed- some things about Japan, like blending in, knowing the language without thinking about it.

But... he liked the adventure of living here, learning new things. And almost everyone had been nothing but kind to him. He wouldn't want to move here permanently, but... it was nice.

It was also nice not to get shot at, or worry about that.

"Good." She smiled sleepily at him, then covered her mouth with a yawn. "Sleep well, Kaito."

"Sleep well, Aoko."

She drifted off almost immediately. Kaito wasn't surprised. It'd been a long flight, about fifteen hours in the air, not counting the travelling to and from the terminals and dinner with Mum.

He stayed up a little while longer, just listening to Aoko and Saguru breathe.

+++ Kaito woke up when Aoko did, her small movements bringing him to awareness. He didn't have to
see her to feel the blush rising from her when she realised where she was. "Morning."

She squeaked. "Touchan's going to kill me if he ever finds out that I spent the night like this."

"Unlikely." He yawned. "For one, I don't think either of us are going to tell. And for another, it'll probably be okay with him if he does find out."

"Eeh?" She turned her head to stare at him. "But... I'm... girl... guys... bed..." She stammered.

Kaito snickered in return. "Exactly. Guys. Plural. Guys usually won't try to pull anything on a girl in front of another guy, or a group of guys, cause the other guy is usually going to intervene. So we're chaperoning each other. And you know us, we're not going to molest you in your sleep."

He wasn't going to mention the other facts, such as that he was interested in Saguru, and Saguru was interested in his other half, not her. And she was his sister, so unless he was for that whole incest thing --which he wasn't-- she was as safe here as she was sleeping in the room next door.

Unless Saguru accidentally put his hands somewhere he wouldn't while he was awake... but then that was just entertainment.

"I'm gonna grab the loo." He yawned, rolling out of bed. "Saguru'll be up shortly, we gotta take care of the birds."

"Okay." She glanced over at Saguru --still sleeping the sleep of the undead-- blushed again and scrambled out after him. He chuckled tiredly and staggered off to the toilet to take care of business.

He did so, washing his hand and wondering if he was going to have to wake up Saguru himself. He stretched, opening the bathroom door and promptly ran into Aoko.

"Eep!" She squeaked, taking a step back.

"Sorry!" They danced back and forth for a moment, before he simply stepped back to let her in. Her cheeks turned faintly pink as she stepped in.

"Kaito..." Aoko stopped his retreat from the bathroom by grabbing the waistband of his boxers, a perplexed expression on her face. "Why do your underwear have a tag saying 'Property of Hakuba Saguru' on them?"

"Eh?" He twisted around to look, accidentally knocking the door shut. Sure enough, right next to her hand a little tag on the waistband said 'Property of Hakuba Saguru'. He felt his face heat up slightly as he chuckled, embarrassed. "Um... 'Cause they're his."

".... You're wearing Saguru-kun's -underwear-?!!" Aoko's wide blue eyes were even wider than usual.

"Yup." He agreed easily, shoving the embarrassment aside to deal with later. "I kinda steal them to sleep in. Or if I'm low on laundry." Or if he felt like it. Whatever.

"Does he know this?!!" She exclaimed, tugging on the already loose waistband some more so she could flip the tag around to examine it better. It was just a fabric loop sewn into the waistband, the letters printed in Katakana with a black marker.

Kaito wondered the if the ink had rubbed off on his skin, leaving a backwards 'Property of Hakuba Saguru' on his butt.
"I would imagine so." He said dryly. "I doubt he would have otherwise left the label."

"Oh."

The bathroom door opened, a very blurry looking detective staring at them with glazed eyes that slowly became less glazed. Aoko chose that moment to realise exactly what she was doing and blush very very hard. However, like a kid with his hand stuck in a cookie jar, she didn't let go either, obviously uncertain as to what to do now.

The detective slowly backed away, shutting the door behind him, a most -peculiar- look on his face, one that almost made Kaito want to chase after the blond and explain that it wasn't what it looked like. Because it WASN'T what it looked like.

It was only after the door shut that Aoko eep'd and released his underwear. The elastic snapped back into place, falling precariously lower. He quickly grabbed the waistband before it could decide that gravity really was it's cruel mistress and take a dive off of his hips.

"Sorry." Aoko squeaked.

"Don't worry about it." He waved it off, heading for the door. "I'm... gonna go get dressed." And calm down a certain detective....

"Right." She hastily agreed, shutting the door behind him.

+++ 

Aoko had been giving him odd looks all day. Which was weird, cause she hadn't been giving him odd looks the previous days they'd been playing tourist around London. Usually London was for business trips, so it was kind of nice to relax and see all the famous monuments they were usually racing by.

And they'd already visited the Tower of London, which hosted the Crown Jewels. Saguru had kept a close eye on him then. And while some of the stones were fascinating, he liked the legend of the Koh-i-Noor diamond in the consort's' crown, he already had his magic stone and wasn't interested in stealing his host country's.

.... Unless someone WANTED him to try, but that was another story entirely...

He raised an eyebrow at his sibling. "What?"

She gave him another strange look, not at his face he realised, but just past it. He checked his ears. Nope, Auntie Kitty's earrings were still there.

"What?!!"

She shook her head. "Nothing."

He growled. Stupid, stubborn police inspector's daughters. "Something's bothering you. What?"

"Nothing...." She trailed off. He refrained from growling again. "It's just that... why didn't you just TELL me that you and Hakuba-kun were dating?!"

"Huh?" Kaito stared at her. What?!

"You could have told me, you big jerk!" She continued, getting a good rant started. "I'm not going to freak out or anything!"
"Wait, no, no, no, no..." He waved his hands, trying to figure this one out. Girls even made detectives seem rational by comparison. "Back up. Dating?!"

"Oh, don't try to hide it, it's completely obvious once you look for it." She swung her bag at him, which he automatically dodged. They'd already explained the whole 'sharing the bed thing' and the 'stealing the underwear' thing --which, really, was just fun-- and they hadn't snogged at all, least of all in her company, mores the pity, so what exactly were they hiding?

Well... there was that whole 'Thief and Detective' thing, but they'd been doing that for ages, that wasn't a secret at all...

"Huh?"

"The Jewellery!" Aoko jabbed a finger towards his head. "You can't tell me that those earrings don't match the ring Hakuba-kun's wearing! And when the hell did you get your ears pierced?! And not tell me?!"

Ah. Anger over 'not telling', not over anything they actually did. Got it. "I got them pierced a while back, it wasn't a big deal." He defended, avoiding another swing of the bag. "And yeah, the earrings and the ring match! That's cause they were given to us for Christmas presents!"

"Presents?" The bag swinging slowed down.

"Yeah." He stopped dodging, but kept a respectful distance. "You even know her. Remember Ruby Jones-san?"

"The nice lady from when the Kid tried to steal a ring from Touchan's finger." Aoko nodded slowly, keeping a suspicious air around her. He kept forgetting, she was used to him pulling tricks on her.

"She lives in Paris. Right across the Chunnel." He shrugged. "Saguru and I visit her every time we pass through there. Her Dad made jewellery before he passed away, these are ones he made."

"Really?" She hesitated, then got suspicious again. "She GAVE you family momentos?"

He shrugged. "Said that he made them to be worn, so we are." He did a quick think, casting around for where Saguru disappeared off to. "Would you like to visit her?"

"Visit Ruby-san?" Aoko clearly wavered. "In PARIS?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"But... but... I don't have anything to wear for -Paris-!!" She looked down at her usual practical clothing.

Kaito sweatdropped. "I'm sure she'd be happy to help you with that, if you want..."

+++ Auncie Kitty was MORE than happy to go shopping with Aoko, to give her a real Parisian experience.

Kaito and Saguru glanced at the bouncing girls and quickly declined joining the two women on a shopping experience. Especially since Aoko knew that Kaito would cross-dress for her sake if she asked hard enough. And if he went with them dressed in drag, they would force Saguru along as well, cause he couldn't -possibly- leave three women to fend for themselves.
So they fled.

All the way to the Paris Collection, which Kaito hadn't seen.

He thought he'd be more impressed by a fashion show, but found he was less than impressed in many ways. The makeup was wonderful, the hair was interesting, the music was loud but the clothing was impractical and models were all stick thin and boring to look at. Aoko had more interesting curves to look at and she wasn't very busty at all.

Hell, Saguru had more curves than some of the women. And he was a guy.

He'd leaned in to comment about that to the detective, only to discover that Saguru was naming possible causes of death for being that dangerously skinny. Seizures, reduced immune system, personality disorders, heart disease, weakened bones, organ failure.

They spent the show muttering back and forth about possible weapons found on the clothing and causes of death if someone dropped dead right there. He noticed some people edging away from them, but ignored it.

There were -some- perks with hanging out with a detective. Like being able to be your average gore-minded teenager with the bloody data to back it up.

Afterwards, they met up with the girls, had dinner and everyone else went to bed.

Kaito, or more specifically, the Kaitou Kid, hung out for a few hours on Notre Dame Cathedral, playing among the gargoyles and trying to imitate the faces on the statues.

+++ 

The next day, they visited the Louvre.

Kaito and Auntie Kitty wandered around the entire time with grins on their faces. Saguru started developing a nervous tick because of this. Aoko didn't get the joke.

At least, not until Saguru translated the pamphlet for her, which mentioned that some areas might be closed off due to an upgrade in security after a visit from the Kaitou Kid.

They were still able to see the Mona Lisa and the Venus de Milo however.

Kaito wondered what happened to the feather boa he'd put around the armless statue's neck. Ah, well.

He noticed Auntie Kitty looking at the statue with a secretive grin on her face. She'd gotten what she'd hoped for when she'd asked him to join her the late night jaunt here when he first arrived. Security heightened, people paying more attention to their local treasures.

He sidled over to her, casually using ventriloquism to make sure they weren't over heard. "What are you grinning at?"

Auntie Kitty wiped a tear from under her eye. "I was just wondering what she would look like in a moustache and glasses." She muttered back, obviously trying to control herself from laughing out loud and gaining the attention of the museum guards.

Which left Kaito wondering what kind of markers would easily wash off of antique stone and if he could get up there, scribble it on and vanish before security was alerted. And how long it would take
for people to notice...

Saguru cleared his throat, giving them both a -look-, clearly stating for them to behave. Ah, the joys of thieves travelling with detectives.

"He doesn't know what we're talking about, does he?" She whispered at him.

"Prolly not." Kaito agreed.

"We just look guilty. Ish. Maybe."

Kaito adopted as innocent an expression he could muster. "So... lovely weather we're having."

"Lovely to be having weather." She agreed.

"What are you two talking about?" Aoko asked guilelessly.

The looked over at her and grinned. "Weather."

Saguru was wholly un-amused.

"Oh." Aoko tilted her head, watching them sceptically. "Oh! That reminds me! Akako-chan asked me to ask you how you liked your Christmas presents. She loved what you sent her."

Kaito laughed nervously. Well, he was glad she liked charms they'd found, but as for the gifts she sent them...

"She never did let me see what she sent." Aoko frowned. "What did you get?"

Saguru paled. Kaito cleared his throat nervously. Auntie Kitty began to look interested. "Nothing worth mentioning." Kaito squeaked, looking around the museum. There had to be SOMETHING interesting to distract everyone with.

Auntie Kitty went from interested to predatory. "Yes, mon garçon. What -did- you get?"

Kaito glanced over at Saguru. The blond had pretty much shut down, doing his version of a poker face. He sighed, running a hand through his hair. "I got a book."

"A very interesting book, no?" Auntie Kitty smirked.

Aoko squeaked delightedly. "Kaito's blushing!"

"I am not blushing." He muttered back. Dammit. He could feel it now.

"He is blushing." Auntie Kitty agreed with Aoko, the two women clasping each other's hands and bouncing in delight. "What kind of book was it?!"

Kaito glared in return, trying to keep some semblance of control over the conversation. See? This was why women in packs were dangerous. They egged each other on.

"I could... always find out on my own." Auntie Kitty leered at him while commenting in a sing-song tone of voice. "We have our ways..."

Dammit, she did too. "If you must know, it was a book on Care and Feeding of Your Horse." He muttered darkly. The girls looked confused. Saguru gave him a startled look. Kaito had taken one look at the gift and quickly covered it back up with the wrapping paper. Although he was pretty sure
Mum had found where he had hidden it afterwards.

But that wasn't the embarrassing part. The embarrassing part was the leather riding crop he'd gotten with it.

"What did you get Hakuba-kun?" Aoko asked, undaunted.

Saguru gave her what had to be one of the best 'stiff-upper-lip' looks Kaito had ever seen the half-briton give. "I respectfully decline to state."

Dammit. He still didn't know what Koizumi had given the blond either. Saguru had squeaked, blushed red enough to out shine the Christmas lights and shoved it back in the box before Kaito could make out any more details other than the fact that it was leather and apparently had straps.

The box had mysteriously disappeared after that and even Mum hadn't found it. Kaito knew this for a fact, he'd asked.

Before the girls could pester him further on it, Saguru's expression changed to mild amusement. "Oh, look. Mimes."

Oh, sure. A silent war between a brigade of mimes and the museum security breaks out when SAGURU needed a distraction, but not for Kaito.

Still, it -was- entertaining to watch.

Although interviewing the mimes afterwards might be a little difficult...

+++ "Bye, Kaito." Aoko gave him a tight hug, nearly cutting off all his breathing circulation. "Take care of yourself. And Hakuba-kun."

"Will do." He agreed, his arms at his sides. It wasn't socially acceptable to hug... screw it. They were half a world away and Mum would have his skin for garters if he didn't give his sister-friend a proper send off.

She squeaked when he hugged her back, then giggled and squeezed him tighter.

New note to self: Aoko really was as strong as an ape. Ow.

She released him and latched on to Saguru while Kaito tried to get his neck back into alignment.

Aoko and Saguru commented back and forth to each other other for a moment, then Aoko released him, looking fiercely proud. Kaito smiled and handed her her duffel bag, the suit case having already been checked in. With a tiger's eye hair clip from Auntie Kitty carefully hidden inside for Aoko to discover when she got home.

He wondered if Nakamori would recognise it from the sketches passed out during the Golden Eye case.

"Travel safe, Aoko."

"Thanks." He got another glomp for that, her arm wrapped around his neck and pulling him down to her height. "And I'm glad you and Hakuba-kun have each other. Even if you're not. You know." She kissed him on the cheek and quickly dashed towards the security gate. "See you later!" She called.
Kaito felt his face heat up and shoved his hands into his pockets, trying to hide inside of his jacket. It didn't quite work. Saguru noticed, letting his hand drop from waving her off.

"What?" He muttered sulkily. Stupid, stupid, stupid. He was supposed to have perfect control over his facial expressions. -Except for this damn blush!

Saguru just continued to give him odd looks the rest of the night, but didn't say anything. He was doing that a lot lately.

+++ Epilogue +++

Saguru had been called away for the day doing administrative work on a couple of cases he had assisted with recently in London. Kaito had the option of joining him, but after a very minor debate, deciding against it.

Instead, he waited until after Saguru had left, pulled out some of his costuming, dressed as a bookish type of girl, and took the train after the blond to town.

After travelling around London with Aoko, Kaito noticed the difference on how people reacted, being a guy versus being around a girl. It was even more different 'being' a girl than being a guy. Doors were suddenly held open, he wasn't shoved -quite- as much on the Tube, shopkeepers were a bit more attentive...

Okay, so that last one was a little freaky, being a thief and all, but it beat being stared at like he was going to mug someone because he was a teenage guy.

He revisited the Tower of London as well, this time keeping a closer eye on the security, just in case. And being a girl gave him an excuse to stare at the jewels without arousing as much suspicion. Cause he was a girl and girls like shiny things, right? Right.

Or something like that.

Lunch was fun too, he just chose a cafe at random and took a seat outdoors under the balcony, enjoying watching people pass by. And cooing about being on a diet, just cause Aoko did it, and it always amused him. Or made him want to strangle her. One or the other. Either way, it was fun to pull.

Except when he suddenly noticed a tea-coloured blond among the mass of people wandering by. He knew that particular shade of blond very well, he woke up because it was attempting to suffocate him in his sleep on a fairly regular basis.

Saguru's gaze seemed to sweep past him, then the detective paused, looking down at something. The crowd blocked Kaito's view of what it was, then Saguru continued walking forward.

Kaito quickly turned his attention to what he was eating as the the blond passed by without pause, disappearing around the corner. In the direction of the police station, Kaito realised. Saguru must have been on a lunch break or something.

He glanced down and discovered there was a business card sitting on the table. There was some writing on it. Curious, he picked it up. It was one of Saguru's business cards with his cellphone number on it, with Japanese writing on it. -In Saguru's handwriting.

'Nice Legs. See you when you get home.'

Kaito blinked. Then blinked again. He did a quick glance around. Nope, no one was shouting
'crossdresser' or giving him odd looks. A quick glance in the reflection of his cutlery showed that nothing was out of order either. His disguise was fine and none of the clothes belonged to the detective or Mum.

So how the bloody hell had Saguru known?

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

The Autographed Sock comes from the same fic Mum does. "And Many Happy Returns" by Ysabet, written for Saguru and Only One Truth's birthday last year. -No, we didn't create Mum, Ysabet gets all the credit. Muwahaha. Um. Used with her permission.
"Hey, Chuckles?" Saguru's congested voice wheezed in his ear. Kid grinned. It was a lovely night for a heist, the only downside being his favourite blond detective had caught a miserable cold and was home sick, watching the heist on 'Aunty Beeb' instead of chasing him in person.

Hirokini had had a gem of an idea however, modifying a hands-free device for their cell phones to work as walkie-talkies so that they could talk. He'd turn his off while he was in the spotlight, but it was amusing to get the commentary in the background before he made his grand appearance.

The AI was having a blast as well. In addition to scrambling his and Saguru's connection to prevent people from listening in, Hirokini was also keeping tabs on people's reactions worldwide via the internet. He'd been toning down the heists since his arrival to Europe, but there were some things he just couldn't pass up.

Such as blatant challenges. Heh.

Even if he did get the detective and Chat Noir's opinion on any potential appearances before doing so. Sometimes he wondered when he had gotten married and gained In-laws. Although technically, 'Auntie Kitty' would be from his side...

"Yeah, Wheezy?" He grinned back. Saguru couldn't complain at the nickname, using a variety of alias' had been his idea, just in case someone physically over heard. Even if it was more of a danger on Saguru's end instead of his. The odds of someone listening in to him from the rooftop's shadows were highly unlikely.

"If ya don't stop humming da 'Mission Impossible' theme, I'm gonna stagger down dere and belt you one." The announcement was followed by the flemy hacking cough that kept the detective both miserable and home.

Kid snickered. "Yes, dear."

Fortunately, or unfortunately as the case may be, Saguru didn't appear to have heard his retort. "Jus' a moment, phone call."

"'Kay." He took advantage of the pause in conversation to change rooftops. He was still dressed in dark grey, watching the proceedings with cackling glee. Nothing like a heist to get his blood racing.

Saguru got back on the line. "Dat was Auntie Kitty." The detective announced with grave dignity. "She called ta say that she can hear you hummin' in France."

Kid paused. There was no way the cat burglar could have heard him. Especially not all the way in Paris.
"-And if you don't stop, she's gonna come down dere and smack you one." Saguru continued. There was no way the bastard should have been able to sound smug, but he did.

"I'd like to see her try..." He mused.

"I wouldn't go for it." Hirokini advised. "She can be -scary-.

"She's a woman." Saguru grumped as if that explained it. Perhaps it did, just take a look at the women in their lives. Koizumi - witch, Aoko - temper, Saguru's Mum - insane, his Mother... Okay, so she wasn't all that scary. Except for the continuing habit of trying to get him to eat fish...

Okay, yeah. Women were scary.

"I'll be good." He promised.

Saguru harrumphed in return. "Like dat's possible."

"There's a first time for everything." Hirokini mused. Good Hirokini-kun. At least the AI was on his side. "I suppose..."

What was that supposed to mean?! "Hey!"

"Dey're startin' a countdown." Saguru advised. "Is like an early New Year's Eve down dere..." He marvelled.

"I'll get you back later." He promised, reaching up and switching off the communicator, the sound of Saguru's wheezing laughter mixing with Hirokini's lighter giggles fading as he put the device in his pocket.

He'd think of something suitable for revenge later. Preferably messy and on the embarrassing side.

Right now however... it was Showtime.

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

Aunty Beeb - the BBC, British Television.
The Grey Zone: Fight Scene

Chapter Notes

Thanks to The Keet for answering our Canada question.

♦♦♦

The Grey Zone: Fight Scene
By Icka! M. Chif

♦♦♦

Violet.

Deep, dark, rich, unmistakable violet.

Kaito, no, Kid stared at his eyes in the mirror in shock, icy tendrils of shock wiping away the last vestiges of heated anger from his mind.

He and Saguru had been fighting. It had been building for weeks, the tension between them brewing since before Aoko had come to visit them. It had gotten worse in the days after his sister left, Saguru silent and distant most of the time, refusing to comment on his broody behaviour when Kaito asked. The blond seemed to lurk a bit as well, constantly watching Kaito as if the detective was expecting him to vanish at any moment.

It was enough to make a thief paranoid. He hadn't stolen anything in ages --well, since Christmas anyway-- nor was he planning to. So he'd done the only thing he could think of.

Waited until after dinner, when Mum left to spend the night on one of her usual odd disappearances, asked Hirokini to turn off the microphones for a little while, then went and tracked down Saguru for a calm, rational discussion on what the hell was going on in what passed for a brain in the blond’s head.

He didn’t -like- fighting. Heists were one thing, it was a match, a contest, a game of wits. It had rules, guidelines of sorts. Bantering was great, it was duelling with words and ideas. Snark was lovely.

Fighting? No. Too much potential for damage of all sorts. He just wished that Saguru had gotten that memo.

The past several minutes --however long it had been since he’d walked into the room and asked Saguru what was going on-- were a blur of meaningless loud voices. They’d both been too angry to think very clearly. At least until Saguru shoved a hand mirror in Kaito’s direction then demanded to know what colour his eyes were.

They were the same colour they usually were. Blue. Not the clear bright blue of Saguru’s contacts, but a darker blue, like an indigo.

Then Saguru had moved, straightening up and squaring his shoulders in an imposing posture, placing
himself between Kaito and the window. Kaito had locked the door himself, a chair pressed up against the knob to make sure Saguru didn’t weasel out of their conversation. A stupid move in retrospect, as his mind had registered ‘law enforcement official’ and ‘blocking escape route’.

He’d reacted accordingly, preparing to flee out the other window, if need be. The detective was bigger and stronger, but he was faster.

Saguru had asked what colour his eyes were then. He’d glanced quickly, then done a double take. Not blue. Violet.

“I -always- knew who I was talking to.” Was Saguru’s comment, strangely calm and detached.

He touched the mirror, then his face, part of his mind rebelling and crying it was a trick. But as he watched, the violet faded back towards blue, hovering somewhere between the two colours.

“It’s been like that since we met again in August.” The detective sighed, losing the impressive aura and shrinking back down to his usual self. He tiredly sank down on the bed, looking drained. “It used to be almost a physical change, your switching between the Kaitou Kid and Kuroba Kaito. You’d… shift, and the colour would change. But since we moved here, they haven’t been one or the other. Like you haven’t known who you are. I thought you might want space to figure it out.”

Kaito suppressed a flinch as the comment hit a little too close to the truth. Especially at the beginning, when they had first moved here, he’d had a hard time coming back from being the Kid for such an extended period of time. Even now, he still wasn’t sure he’d succeeded in doing so. It was far too easy to slip, one way or the other. React the wrong way.

“All,” The blond continued uncomfortably, running a hand through his hair. “You’re kind of isolated here. Visits from Aoko-chan aside, this is ‘my’ territory. House, country, even the language. There’s no neutral zone here, no separate dwellings to retreat to like there were in Japan. I didn’t want you to think that you –had- to do something just so that you could stay here.”

He hadn’t even thought of that. “Sometimes, you think too much.” He informed Saguru as he grabbed the computer chair to sit on. Antiquated sense of chivalry and honour… He wasn’t some girl Saguru had to protect.

“Firstly,” He counted down on his fingers. “You’re not ‘making’ me do anything I don’t want to. If you were, no matter how fucked up in the head I am, I’d be out of here.”

“I know.” Saguru agreed dully. “You’d be out of here, winging it back to Japan or something. Hence, my not wanting to pressure you into something you’re not interested in.”

The phrasing of the last bit of sentence caught his attention. Did Saguru thought he wasn’t interested…

Come to think of it, the blond seemed to have the worst timing lately. Especially at that one house with the that one pink-haired girl and the *shudder* hedgehog incident. He had kept trying to get Saguru to help him escape the pink menace, but if Saguru thought he was interested in the girl, he’d do exactly what he had done, turn away to give him an opportunity… And then that time with Aoko in the bathroom with the tag on the boxers, he hadn’t gotten a chance to clear that up either.

“Who said anything about not being interested?” He finally ventured.
He wished he had a camera for the look Saguru gave him, wide-eyed with surprise and tentative hope. The detective gaped at him for a moment, his mouth moving silently.

Kaito shrugged, ducking his head slightly. “You’d only kissed the Kid, thought you were only interested in him, not boring old Kaito.”

Saguru’s jaw closed with a snap. “No. Definitely not.” Before confusion had a chance to sink it, Saguru amended himself. “Boring is something you certainly are -not-. Either of you.”

“Ah.” Kaito nodded, faintly embarrassed and strangely pleased.

Silence fell, both of them reflecting and pondering what to do next.

“So…” Kaito finally drawled. “Just to clarify-“

“You like me and I like you.” Saguru was blushing slightly, a small smile on his face. “Er. Both of you. More than like, really. Um. Romantically.”

“I’d gotten that.” Kaito smiled back. “And ditto.”

Saguru grinned, looking relieved. “Good.”

It was. “Yeah.”

“So. Um…” Saguru laughed nervously. “God. What next?”

Good question. Things were suddenly awkward. Not the awkward of the past several weeks, but a different kind. A better kind of awkward, a good feeling awkward. But still awkward. It was still just him and Saguru just hanging out… but suddenly there was -more-. Stuff. Potential. Something.

“Sleep?” He suggested. “After that, let’s just take it as it comes? Uh. Figure it out as we go along?”

The detective paused a moment, then nodded in agreement. “Sounds good. But I think it’s best if you sleep in your room tonight. Less possibly that we’ll do something we’ll regret later.”

Kaito debated about it for a moment, then agreed. Less opportunity for trouble. Even though the fight was over, it’d still be all too easy to start up again. They both had a habit of looking too deeply and over-analysing things sometimes. Like what started this whole mess. And it’d give them a chance to back off for a moment and reflect. He at least needed a chance to get his head on straight with this whole ‘Kaito-Kid-Eyes’ thing.

He rose, heading towards the door when a thought hit him. There were other things they could end up regretting other than fights. “Hey, Saguru?”

“Hmm?” Saguru had stood up as well, looking extremely self-conscious as he stood there.

“You’re not -that- traditional, are you?” Kaito ventured. “No sex before marriage and all that?”

Saguru looked thoughtful. “Well… the United Kingdom does have legal Civil Unions now, which isn’t -exactly- marriage but is as close as you’re going to find it outside of Canada. And we are both above the marriageable age of consent…”

Kaito stared, unable to properly phrase a response to that.

The blond chuckled, a rolling amused sound. “I don’t believe I am -that- traditional, as you say.”
“Okay.” He wasn’t quite sure if he was relieved or not… Did that count as a proposal?

“But…” Saguru’s amusement faded, to be replaced by a thoughtful expression. “I would prefer not to go rushing into things.”

For one thing, that wasn’t precisely in the detective’s nature to do so. Unless someone had died and or a mystery needed to be solved.

“We have a lot of potential to damage each other, more so than a lot of couples because of what we are.” Saguru continued. “If things between us go south there’s the very real possibility of either one or both of us ending up a lot more than our feelings hurt.”

“Like dead.” Kaito finished for him. The fact that they were both guys would be a factor in the relationship, certainly, but when it came down to the wire, the fact was that they were still a thief and a detective. Opposite sides of the law, even if they had a common enemy. And they both knew where to hide the bodies.

“Exactly.” Saguru looked like he had bit into something sour for a moment, then the expression flickered away. “And I’d really prefer if we didn’t tell Mum for a while.”

Kaito was about to ask why when he remembered Mum’s habit of appearing in unexpected places. With cameras. Plural. Not to mention they were allowed a great deal of privacy and freedom because they were ‘just friends’. “Right.”

Mum squealing over what a cute couple they were… The thought sent shivers down his spine. Ugh. “No problem.”

Although, knowing Mum, she’d figure it out within minutes of walking in the door. Mum-sense or something.

“Thanks.” Saguru looked relieved and Kaito would have bet his monocle the detective was thinking along similar lines.

Kaito nodded, moving the chair away from the door and putting it where it normally stayed. “So… um. See you in the morning.”

“Yeah.” There was that awkward air again. “Night.”

“Sleep well.” He waved, feeling lame. He was a magician, a showman, he should be able to do more than a weak wave and ‘sleep well’. He could face down masses of blood hungry policemen, walking out of a bedroom should be a piece of cake.

He darted over to Saguru and kissed the surprised blond. It wasn’t a ‘suck the tonsils out of your throat’ or a quick peck. Just a nice, simple kiss. The kind they hadn’t shared in almost a year, since before he found Pandora. Gods it felt nice to do again.

“Pleasant dreams.” He grinned before ducking out of the door and heading towards his own room for the night.

Saguru’s grin followed him out.

-fin-
Just when Kaito thought the day couldn't get any weirder, it had.

It had actually started out the night before, when Kaito asked Saguru what his mother did for a living. She was away travelling pretty frequently, always had visitors over, yet never seemed to have to worry about the money or expenses for travel.

So they had decided to tail her. It gave Saguru a chance to practise his skills, it gave Kaito something interesting to do and it gave them both a chance to discover the Women's Knitting and Rifle Auxiliary Club.

Not only could those women shoot like professionals, they knitted a lovely gun cosy while doing it.

And Kaito swore he recognised some of those shrieking laughs from that one shitty day he and Saguru had to streak upstairs during tea.

She also visited the local Butcher, --she got sausages-- the Baker --she picked up some odd looking creme buns-- and the Candlestick maker. She came out of the last shop with some rather... interesting looking candles.

And then she went to the local Adult Shop. The one with a lot of leather and lace in the window. Kaito and Saguru had both looked at each other and decided -not- to go in, both of their faces just a bit pink with embarrassment.

She came out with several bags full, chirping about what a wonderful party this was going to be.

That was the point Saguru deduced that she was most likely preparing for a lady in the Women's Knitting and Rifle Auxiliary Club's Bachelorette Party and therefore was doing nothing today that anything whatsoever to do with whatever her occupation was. They called off the tailing and decided to get dinner at their local pub.

Which was where he was now, staring at a boisterous group of men and women dressed in bits of plate mail, chain mail, ruffles and padded armour, carrying weaponry. And a Viking. At least, Kaito was pretty sure it was a Viking. He had horns on his head, anyway.

Saguru wasn't finding this weird in the least, taking quite a bit of amusement in Kaito's wary looks. Kaito just figured that the blond's brains were fried after all the places they'd been to today.

"Relatives of yours?" He questioned, raising an eyebrow.

"Ha." Saguru snickered back. "Scadians."

Kaito let the puzzlement show on his face. Some other country he hadn't heard of?

"Like those guys who dress up in samurai armour around some of the castles for the tourists?" He questioned.

"Not quite. The S.C.A. does more than dress up in funny clothing-" Saguru's lips twisted into a brief wiry grin "They also re-create the crafts and clothing of the various historical periods. Calligraphy, artwork, spinning, weaving, tapestry work. And fighting. But they are creating essentially living history."

Kaito grinned, motioning towards the laughing men and women. "Like your funny old-fashion clothing?"

"Turn of the Century isn't old enough." Saguru informed him loftily. "Four hundred years ago, or the sixteen hundreds is the most recent they'll accept. But I know a few of them, finding fabric and patterns isn't always easy."

"Ah." Kaito nodded sagely. He'd have to do some internet searches tonight. "So those knives and everything are real?"

The large Viking, who had been listening in on the conversation with some amusement, laughed. "Those aren't knives!" He boomed. Their table suddenly shook as a sword about as long as Kaito was tall was suddenly placed across the middle of it. "THAT'S a knife!"

Kaito's eye went wide. "Ooooo...." Shiny. He grinned up at the large man. "Do you have throwing ones too?!"

A few of the non-dressed up regulars laughed, knowing his skill at darts. "Thank you." Saguru said dryly, standing up. The blond reached across the table and grabbed Kaito's arm, pulling him out of his chair as well. "Come on. I'll go kick your butt at billiards."

"You just want me away from the neat sharp pointy objects." Kaito accused.

"Yes." Saguru didn't bother to deny it. "And kick your butt at billiards."

Kaito gave him a dirty look. It wasn't his fault he stunk at billiards.

"Perhaps I might offer more of a challenge." An amused voice drawled.

Saguru's face lit up. "Mogi-san!"

"Mogi?" Kaito's eyebrow raised.

"Yo." A tall scruffy looking man waved at them. Kaito recognised him from his stint as Mouri Kogoro at the Twilight Mansion, the guy with a sweet car. And who'd been shot by the Mafia in Chicago, USA before joining them.

Of course, -Kaito- didn't recognise him, the Kid did. But that was okay.

"Mogi-san, I'd like to introduce you to my best friend, Kuroba Kaito." Saguru grinned, motioning Kaito forward. "Kaito, this is Mogi Harufumi, a detective. We met at the Twilight Mansion case."

"Chasing the Kaitou Kid, right?" Kaito grinned, holding out a hand. He could practically feel the Halo floating above his head. -Propped up by the horns, of course. "I hear he got away from you."

"Alas." Mogi groaned in mock-theatrics, shaking Kaito's hand. He had a strong grip, but not over
"He did. Ah, well. Will have to chase him another day."

"You'll have to forgive Kaito-kun." Saguru commented drily. "He's a -fan- of Kid the Phantom Thief."

"The horror." Mogi deadpanned. Kaito grinned. He could like this detective, he had a sense of humour.

"Ha-ha." He waved them off. "You go play with your sticks and your balls. I'm going back and playing with the people with the weird costume fetish."

They laughed, like he'd hoped they would, then dragged him off to at least watch the game, which he hoped they wouldn't.

Kaito sighed and found himself a barstool to watch the game from. Both Saguru and Mogi were good billiard players and it gave Saguru a chance to do some of the fancier shots.

And it gave both detectives a chance to 'network'. Kaito listened in as the detectives talked about their most recent cases and some of the odder cases that detectives in their acquaintance knew.

His mobile phone went off and he gratefully excused himself to answer it, stepping outside to do so despite the cold. The pub owner and most of the patrons frowned on phones being left on while they were drinking.

It was Hirokini. "Hey, Kaito-niichan. Just checking, did Mogi-san say how he found you?"

Kaito had similar thoughts. It was just a little bit too convenient and sudden for his tastes. "Nope. Just that Mum told him where to find us."

"Mum's not home." Hirokini kept track of people's presence in the house, if no one was home, he could blare the speakers for his video games. "He's not on our list of people we've looked into as possible Operatives... should I check him out?"

"I can do that when we get home." Kaito chided gently. "You're not our private web navi, you know." He'd had this fight with the AI before, Hirokini wasn't their personal slave or secretary. He was still just a kid. Who happened to live in a computer.

"I know, I know." Hirokini sighed. "But no one's online... C'mon, it'll gimme something to do."

"If you want to." Kaito agreed reluctantly. "Hold on." He pulled out a small ear bud, slipping the tiny speaker into his ear and threading the cord down his shirt, plugging it into the mobile phone. "Okay. I have you plugged in if you want to make any comments."

Any comments Kaito, or anyone else within the phone's speaker range made Hirokini would be able to hear. The trick was making comments to Hirokini without catching other people's attention.

"Thanks! See you later!" The child's voice faded out, humming slightly to himself as he dove back into the mess that was the world wide web.

Kaito sighed, shaking his head. Now there was a boy who was -born- to surf the web.

He waited a few moments, enjoying the cleaner frozen air outside and keeping a circumspect eye out for anything else that didn't belong. It was quiet and nothing stood out, but the seeds of unease had still been planted.
Mogi and Saguru were just winding up their game, in Saguru's favour. Mogi seemed to be taking his loss with amiable grace. Kaito retook his seat at the barstool, watching Saguru make the last shot with understated flair.

"Well, since you won the game and I've still got to race to the airport, I'll pass on a bit of information you might like." Mogi grinned, reaching under his coat to pull something tucked into his waistband in the back. Kaito tensed for a moment, then relaxed as Mogi pulled out a folded magazine.

"Advanced release." Mogi tossed it towards Saguru. It landed on the game table in front of the blond. "If you need a safe place to get away, I'll be in Chicago for the next month or so. Catch you boys later. Thanks for the game."

With that friendly offer, Mogi walked out of the pup, shrugging on his trench coat as he did so. Kaito raised an eyebrow at Saguru. "Chicago, outside of Tokyo, or Chicago, in America?"

"The latter, I presume." Saguru deadpanned, picking up the magazine. "Urgh. One of those penny awful things."

"Penny Awful?" Kaito questioned, attempting to glance around Saguru's shoulder.

"Mum calls them that. Gossip rags." The detective looked thoroughly unimpressed by it. "Lovely. It's the Top Bachelor edition..." His voice trailed off as his eyes widened.

Then Saguru squeaked.

"What?" Kaito demanded. He didn't get a response, the blond's attention firmly on scanning an article. "What?!" Finally he stood on his toes to peer over Saguru's shoulder. Stupid tall blonds.

He had just enough time to see a picture of Saguru in the magazine before Saguru squeaked again, his face turning both pale and red at the same time. "Vis-ca... Uncle Dorian never mentioned anything about this!!!"

"WHAT?!" Fed up, Kaito grabbed the magazine from Saguru's grasp and looked it over. "Grab the coats." He instructed, nudging Saguru.

"Huh?" Saguru looked at him stupidly, still processing the article.

"This isn't the place to discuss this." Kaito nudge him again, drawing Saguru's attention to the attention they were getting. Several of the regulars were watching them, although it was difficult to tell if it was because Saguru was making a spectacle of himself, or because people wanted the billiard table.

"Oh." Saguru nodded, heading off to gather their coats. Kaito quickly set the billiards table back up for the next person. The detective quickly joined him, coats in hand and they hastily made their escape, calling farewells.

"Viscount." Saguru grumbled as he pulled on his coat. "No wonder everyone's been congratulating me lately. Viscount, ha! I'm a Detective, not a Lord."

"Hmm?" Kaito queried. Saguru pointed farther down on the short blurb for him. "It mentions that I'm rumoured to be next in line to become the next Earl of Gloria. Uncle Dorian's never mentioned that at all."

It made sense. Uncle Dorian didn't have any children and if he and Saguru's partnership continued, Eroica would have an heir too. The Earl of Gloria had been sending them out to high society social
functions together too, probably to see how well they would do. If that was Uncle Dorian's plan. There was nothing to confirm it yet.

"What concerns me more is this." Kaito pointed up at the picture. It was a decent picture of Saguru, probably taken during the holiday party due to the fancy tux. Kaito was standing behind him, blurry but still recognisable. "How long before this hits Japan?"

"What?" Saguru looked at him with a puzzled expression before he paled, finally catching what Kaito was concerned about. "Dammit. And we were doing such a good job keeping my name out of the papers."

Their being in England worked, so long as it wasn't obvious that he was here. He was out of the way and presumably dead or at the very least not interfering with the mysterious organisation in black. But if it was publicised...

Saguru grabbed the paper back, squinting at it. "You're listed as my unknown Watson-"

Kaito had a few choice words about that. Most of which he'd voice later. "-And it lists that I live on the outskirts of London. And my fan club."

"You have a fan club?!" Kaito grabbed the paper back. Yup. Saguru had a fan club. "Bet it's not as big as mine." He muttered softly. Saguru elbowed him and stole the paper.

"But to answer your question, if this magazine has distribution to Hong Kong as a former Colony of the Crown, probably less than a week." Saguru flipped it back to the front cover. "It's a slightly advanced copy, it's not scheduled to come out until tomorrow."

"Wonder what Mogi was doing with it." Kaito mused. From what he had observed of the guy, if he had stumbled upon the information, he would be the type to pass it on. But the question was, was that really Mogi? And what was Mogi doing in England?

"He travels a lot." Saguru waved it off. "Huh. I'm in the bottom quarter. Prince William's up at the top, of course."

"Saguru!" Kaito aimed a kick at his shins which didn't connect. "Stop worrying about that rot. Black Organisation? Knows you're alive? Imminent death? Hello?"

"Right." Saguru folded the magazine up and stuck it in his coat pocket. "Mum's going to love this. I wonder if she knows." He added miserably.

"Erk." That was enough to distract Kaito's train of thought as well. "Okay. Battle plans. First, we survive Mum. Second, we survive the Black Ops."

"Right."

-fin-
"Shower...." Kaito yawned, wandering into the bathroom. Saguru had already finished his shower and was standing at the sink with a towel wrapped around his waist, shaving. They'd been unexpectedly called away from the house for several days now and they were pretty scruffy from the travel.

Fortunately for Kaito with his adhesive disguises, he wasn't inclined to be all that hairy and didn't have to shave all that often if he didn't want to. After about a week, a very sad moustache would try to form, but that was about it. Oyaji had had a moustache, so he supposed that it might change in the future but for the moment he was content as it was.

Saguru was a bit hairier than he was. After a few days, he started to look just plain scruffy, something the meticulous detective loathed. And he complained that it itched. Saguru was fussier than he was anyway, so he wasn't too surprised to see Saguru, damp towel wrapped around his hips, shaving off the few days growth with a vengeance.

"Hey, Kaito." Saguru smirked, wiping the shaving foam off of his face, his glasses having fallen down to the end of his nose. The blond had shaved his cheeks, but hadn't gotten to around his mouth yet, leaving a scruffy blond goatee. "What do you think?"

This was Saguru.

This was Saguru looking like a wannabe Evil Overlord, plotting to take over the world.

Kaito raised an eyebrow.

The Dread Pirate Saguru?

Saguru... Lord of the Underworld....

Kaito shook his head, opening up the shower curtain and stepping inside the bathtub. "No."

Saguru snickered, reapplying the shaving foam and began shaving the rest of the hair off.

-fin-
The phrase "Set a thief to catch a thief" had by this time (after strong representations from the Thieves' Guild) replaced a much older and quintessentially Ankh-Morporkian proverb, which was "Set a deep hole with spring-loaded sides, tripwires, whirling knife blades driven by water power, broken glass and scorpions, to catch a thief."
-Guards! Guards! by Terry Prachett

♦ ♦ ♦

The Grey Zone - Appearances and Disappearances
By Icka! M. Chif

♦♦♦

Saguru made a tired sound in the back of his throat as he rubbed between his eyebrows. It had been a long day's worth of travel, for almost nothing.

It had been a stupid case. Utterly, totally stupid case. They had been called out on a case of suspected murder most foul. The victim had been a wealthy gentleman who had retired to the country to grow flowers in peace.

Saguru had scoured the insides, looking for information that the police might have missed. Kaito had taken the more preferable job --despite the snow and the ice-- of exploring the outsides, looking for signs of a possible break in. He hadn't, but while hanging upside down from the rooftop to talk, his shirt had fallen over his head, baring waistband and part of his stomach.

He had been immediately been accused by Saguru for stealing his boxers again. Which he had protested, he had found them in -his- drawers, fair and square. Saguru protested who's fault had that been, Kaito was constantly stealing his clothing so of -course- they had migrated to Kaito's room.

The muffled snickering of the officers around them had interrupted their bickering.

Kaito's snooping had revealed that the outside of the cottage was filled with rhododendron flowers. Lovely flowers. A maid had commented that he been drinking tea mixed with honey from a beehive on the edge of the gardens.

Rhododendrons were lovely flowers, harmless to bees, but the honey made from those flowers were poisonous. He'd drunken tea with poisoned honey and had died because of it.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

And so they were slogging their way home when they could have spent the day at home, nice and warm, plotting what to do now that it was well known and advertised that Saguru was both alive and currently living in England. And possibly snogging. Possibly. Mum was home.

She has cameras. As in Multiple. Kaito still hasn't been able to find and steal the film from all of them.

"Almost there," he commented softly. Saguru made a soft sound, nodding dejectedly. Sometimes
Kaito thought Saguru was too kind for murders. He hadn't seen it before, with Saguru hiding behind that smug mask of his, but deaths bothered Saguru. It might be one of the things that drove him towards solving the murders, but Kaito thought the half-Briton was better suited to chasing thieves, where no one died.

But that wasn't going to happen any time soon. Because like it or not, Saguru was good at being a detective.

Just like Kaito was good at being a thief.

"Let's go in through the back." Saguru muttered. "Don't wanna deal with Mum fussing about the case."

"Agreed." Shoes off at the back door, drop the bags off on the floor, climb upside and crash on the bed for a while. Good plan. Short, simple, no spine breaking techniques required to pull it off. Kaito gave it his full approval.

They slogged on a little farther until the the Hakuba residence was within sight. Kaito frowned, noticing something unusual out front. "Oi." He nudged Saguru. "Mum say she was expecting visitors?"

"Not that I know of." Saguru shrugged. "But she always has friends stopping by unexpectedly, you know how she is."

"Yeah..." Kaito frowned. Saguru was right, but something just felt... off. It was possible that he was over nervous because their 'alive' status was now known, but there was always the chance that it wasn't just nerves.

Kaito trusted his instincts. Oftentimes they did mean the difference between life and death.

But then, it could just be because the unknown car in the driveway was black. He'd definitely developed an aversion to large doses of the colour.

Saguru raised an eyebrow. "Something wrong?"

"I'm... not sure." He admitted. "It's probably nothing." He smiled, but it felt fake and probably looked faker.

"If you say so."

They continued on, but Saguru stepped back a little, letting him take the lead. Kaito led them around the side of the house that wasn't visible from the living room where Mum usually hosted. If it was nothing, he was going to have a good laugh at himself. It was... well... Better off safe than sorry.

He peered in the window. Mum was talking animatedly to a woman with short blond hair and large round glasses. "Oh." Saguru commented with mild surprise as he peered over Kaito's shoulder. "$t's Auntie Sharon."

"Sharon?"

"Yeah. One of Mum's older sisters." Saguru smiled fondly. "$haven't seen her in a while. When Grandmum left Granddad and Uncle Gloria, Auntie Sharon went with her. We don't see her very often, I wonder what she's doing here."

Kaito dropped down under the window sill, out of eyesight and dragged Saguru along with him.
"Hey, Saguru? You know that thing you do?"

That got him an odd look. "Which thing?"

"That thing where no matter how I'm disguised, you still know it's me?" It still annoyed him to no end how Saguru did that. What was worse was that the blond couldn't seem to explain how he did it either.

"Yes?"

"Do that thing to the blond haired lady talking to your Mum."

"Auntie Sharon?"

"Yes." Kaito nodded. Saguru gave him a strange look but stood up, looking through the window again.

Kaito waited. Saguru squinted, paused, rubbed his eyes and squinted again.

Saguru dropped back down next to Kaito.

"That's not an Auntie." Saguru commented, rather deadpan.

"No." Kaito agreed, resting his chin on a hand.

"That's a young woman."

"Yup."

Saguru gave him a rather deadpan look. Kaito raised an eyebrow back. "Unless I miss my guess, that looks a lot like our photos of Vermouth-san in disguise." Kaito explained blandly. He recognised the makeup techniques. After all, he used them himself.

"Ah." Saguru nodded. "Panic now?"

Kaito was waaaaaaaaay ahead of him there. His pulse had been going double time since he first glanced in the window. But he was used to panicking and not letting it show. And for the first time in months, he was thinking clearly, feeling only the cold sharp touch of logic cover his brain.

"Escape now, then panic." He instructed, picking up his back and motioning for Saguru to follow him. He hadn't seen any other strange cars watching the place or any other suspicious behaviour on their approach. The blond nodded, following him as quietly as possible as they scurried back towards the mews. Sneaking silently was one talent Saguru had been happy to learn from him and he put it to good use now. He wasn't quite as good as Kaito, but that would come in time.

"You sound like you have a plan." Saguru commented once they were safely hidden behind the wooden structure hiding the hawk.

Kaito had several, most of which he was quickly going through and sorting between acceptable, needs revision and dismissing them out of hand. Dammit, they really should not have gone to that murder today. That could have all too easily been a trap. "You mind running?"

"Works." Saguru agreed easily. "What can I do?"

Kaito pulled out his phone. "First, call Mum from phone. Hirokini-kun, I hate to ask this of you-" The mobile in his hand made an impatient 'About Time!' noise. Hirokini had offered his complete
assistance before but Kaito was loathed to use the AI like his personal online servant, he wanted the ghost to have some time to play as a child online. "-but can you imitate the background noise of the London Tube?"

"I think I can muffle the sound a little." Hirokini's voice mused. "But I can definitely fake the triangulation point."

"Good on you." Kaito grinned. "Saguru, if you'll call Mum and tell her that we've been called off on another case?"

"Taking the Kudo approach?" Saguru asked drily. Disappearing, saying they were off on a case for years on end.

Kaito grimaced. "You can clear it up with once you're out of reach. Take my mobile and-

"Call the local falconer and explain to him that I think it's time to release Watson to the wild." Saguru took the phone. "I'm going to miss her, but I do think it's time."

"I'm sorry." Kaito whispered regretfully. Saguru had talked about releasing Watson back into her natural environment before, but he had hoped to do it in Japan, where the Sparrow hawks were on the 'Near Threatened' Endangered Animals list in their native country. Add some new blood to the increasingly smaller circle of birds.

"Do what you have to." Saguru instructed, waving him off. Kaito nodded.

"I'll be back in five minutes." He instructed. "Head towards the woods if you need to run."

"Got it." Saguru gave him a mock salute, then opened his phone. Kaito gave him a half-smile back, then vanished.

Technically, he didn't vanish, he simply hoisted himself up on top of the Mews and made his way back to his window. There were patches of ice hidden under the snow he had to watch out for, but this danger was a familiar feeling, one he accepted with not quite glee.

He was rusty, he could tell from the slight pull in his muscles, the faint lagging in his timing. The occasional roof climb and back-flip weren't enough to keep him in shape. He'd gotten lazy, lulled by the illusion of safety here.

Well, he'd had his chance to lick his wounds, time to return to the hunt.

Last night he'd made some small plans, stashing his Kid gear under the eves of the house above his window along with some gadgets he'd been working on. He'd hoped at the time that he wouldn't need them, but the Black Organisation was moving faster than he thought they would. It should have taken several more days before the magazine reached Japan.

Thank the Seven Lucky Gods for Mogi, or they wouldn't have had any warning at all.

He gathered the small bundle and tucked it between his backpack and himself, he'd put it inside the pack when he got to the ground, then carefully connected two small incongruous looking wires on the window sill together. Sparks zapped his fingers and he bit off a curse, quickly scurrying over to Saguru's room, where he did the same thing, minus the burnt fingers.

Hooking the wires together formed an electromagnetic loop in his room, and set up the ground work for one in Saguru's, where most of the computers were stored. Hirokini would retreat back to the internet, on a server they had prepared for him, erasing and taking files with him as he went. The
loop in Saguru's room wouldn't be armed until someone opened the door, presumably for the computers.

The burst of backwards current probably wouldn't erase everything, but it would erase enough. He just hoped Hirokini got himself out of there before anyone opened the door.

Package retrieved and booby trap set in place, he made his way back to where Saguru was.

The blond was inside the mews when he got his feet back on the ground, presumably saying farewell to Watson. It left the detective hidden, but there weren't any exits other than the one door, so it made Kaito a little nervous. He opened the cage door to free his doves instead.

Saguru came out, looking more exhausted than he had when they were walking here in the first place. "Ready," he said quietly, not looking at Kaito.

There was a lump in his throat that took a moment to fade before he could swallow again. His fault. This was all his fault. If he hadn't gotten Saguru involved in this mess in the first place...

Regrets later. Run first, bluff second, fight third. Keep it together until it was safe to break down. Survival always first priority.

He nodded and they were off, slogging their way towards the forest. They knew it, it had cover to hide in and Kaito had backup plans hidden in there.

"You called Mum?" Kaito asked, keeping an eye out for trouble.

"Yes." Saguru wasn't looking at him, instead looking down at the ground. Kaito did a double take, realising that the crease on the blond's forehead wasn't just because of their leaving. Something was bothering the detective.

"What'd she say?"

"To have fun and not to worry about her." The wrinkles in Saguru's forehead increased as the half-Briton finally looked at him. "She said she was having tea with her sister. The one that looks twenty years younger than she actually is."

Holy shyte.... Mum -knew-. Mum knew who she was having tea with.

Vermouth was Mum's sister. Holy Shyte.

What else did Mum know? Was Mum part of Black Organisation that was trying to kill them? They still didn't know what she did for a job. That would explain so much. No wonder Saguru was worried.

He set that worry aside to deal with later, reaching out and grabbing Saguru's hand and giving it a squeeze. The blond looked at him, giving him a wane smile and squeezed back.

"I'll be right back." He instructed, releasing the detective's hand. It took a moment to climb some trees to retrieve the bundles of disguises he'd hidden there after the second snow, hoping that all the little forestry creatures that were going to hide from the cold had found their hidey holes after the first snow, therefore not in his disguises. There didn't seem to be any sign of damage, for which he was grateful.

"You have a plan, I take it?" Saguru's voice was quietly amused as he finished his retrieval. Of course he had plans. He had SEVERAL plans.
"Yes." He set the bundles from the trees down and pulled out the one he retrieved from the house eves. Under the dark outer covering, it was a mass of white silk and silver electronic threads, ideas and plans not yet fully made. A small fabric bag laid tucked away in there too, which he grabbed and shook the contents out. The largest item was his monocle, which he quickly put back into the bag, which left him with the smaller items.

Kaito leaned forward, biting off Saguru's top button with his teeth. Saguru jumped slightly and he could feel the quick rise in heat from the blond's skin. Before Saguru could do much more than that however, he slid in one of the pieces of 'jewellery' he'd been working on, fastening the shirt shut.

"That can double as a tie pin if you want." He explained, smoothing the shirt down. "It's a small camera lens for Hirokini-kun." He unfastened the tiger's eye earring that Auntie Kitty had given him out of his left ear and replaced it with one that looked like an identical piece but was actually another camera. The backing was part of a transmission sender, getting power from the battery under the lens. It's wasn't very powerful, but it didn't have to be.

He placed an earcuff on the same ear. The cuff looked like there was a tiger's eye embedded to the side of it, but it wasn't. He reached out and put a similar one, sans stone, on to Saguru's ear. "Speaker. I adapted it from those sticker things Agasa made for Kudo." He explained. He hadn't made a microphone yet, he'll have to do that later.

Agasa's speaker stickers reacted to the body's heat to function and metal held heat better than air, saving the charge a bit longer. Plus, it was re-usable. Ha.

Saguru fiddled with the cuff for a moment. Kaito knew how weird it felt to get used to a band of metal around the cartilage of your ear if you weren't used to it, but after a while it got comfortable and easy to forget it was there.

"Where from here?" Saguru asks calmly as Kaito crouched down and began to sort through the piles.

"Kid has an appointment in Ireland in two days." He muttered, mentally flipping through disguises. It was easy enough to disguise himself, but Saguru was harder. "You're heading to the States-"

Kaito found himself hauled from the ground and slammed into a tree trunk before he could retaliate. Furious cold blue eyes stared at him from an uncomfortably close distance. Distractedly, he noticed that he really really really hated those blue contacts.

"No." Saguru informed him bluntly.

"No?"

"No." Saguru gave him a little shake, his expression unusually grim. "Dammit, you are NOT leaving me behind again, locking me up somewhere 'to be safe' or any of that rot! You are not going to go out and play big shiny target and yourself shot at again! We are NOT going to repeat the same damn mistakes we did last time!"

The blond sighed, resting his forehead against Kaito's. "I don't even know if you can come back this time." He said in a tone that sounded strangely like honesty.

Kaito closed his eyes. Dammit. He could feel himself waver, losing the cool detachment that let him function as the Kid when things got rough.

Saguru wasn't talking about physically. If he let himself be taken over by the Poker Face again, isolated himself like had over the summer, he wasn't entirely sure if he -could- come back as Kaito again. He still wasn't completely himself. Either of himselfs.
"All right." He agreed slowly. "Do you have a better plan?"

"Not yet." Saguru admitted, relaxing his grip on Kaito but not moving away. "But isn't that why we teamed up in the first place?"

"True." He sighed, resting his head on Saguru's shoulder for a moment. Just a moment, he needed to focus, he needed -think-.

Right. Priority.

"All right." He nodded and Saguru stepped back a step, giving him a bit of space. He gave the blond a weak smile. "Care to run off to the land of green and little people, oh Great Detective?"

"Sounds nice to me." Saguru agreed, a faint smile on his face. "So where is this land of little green people?"

It took a moment for Kaito to understand what he had said. Palm quickly met face.

"Right." Saguru leaned over and picked up one of the bags. "Off we go-?"

"We should put on disguises first. Gimme your coat." It wasn't much, but their clothes were probably the easiest to spot. They could do hair dye and the rest of it once they got to some place safer. He pulled a short coat out of one of the bags and handed it to Saguru, who took everything out of his jacket pockets and traded coats. Kaito traded his coat as well, wearing a longer one than usual. Saguru gave him a dark look for that. On the blond, the bomber jacket didn't even cover his ass. Kaito just leered in return. It wasn't what Saguru usually wore, and that's what was needed. A difference from their usual garb.

"Okay then." The remaining packages were quickly divided up and placed in their bags. They'd have to be changed at some point as well, but later. Right now they needed distance. "Ready."

"Looks like our Gap Year continues." Saguru commented, picking up Kaito's bag and slinging it over his shoulders. Kaito gave him a wan grin and picked up Saguru's bag. "Ready."

As ready as they were going to be, anyway.

"Hey, Saguru?" He asked, pulling a hat from the bag and putting it on.

"Yeah?"

"How many more relatives do you have, anyway?"

"Well... There's Mum, Auntie Sharon and Auntie Elena, but Auntie Elena died in a car accident years ago." He mused. "She was a scientist who married a Japanese scientist. Had a couple of cousins that disappeared after her death. Uncle Dorian, of course, and Uncle Klaus. Uncle Ernest, and I think that's about it."

Kaito scratched his chin. "That's your Mum's side, right? What about your Father's?"

"I..." Saguru frowned. "I'm not sure. Holidays were usually spent here."

Great. "So... We still don't know what Mum does, but you've got an assassin and an art thief in your family. You really are the White Sheep of your family."

Saguru looked thoughtful for a moment. "Maybe I -should- become a thief."
"No."

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to edenfalling and marzipan_mikan for the grammar corrections!
"I don't like this." The huge older man grumbled as his eyes peered around the dark room. "Something feels off."

"How so?" The small lanky teen questioned in an Irish lilt back as he too looked around, shining the torch around to illuminate various things around the dusty room. "Old lady with a shotgun off?"

Now -that- must have been an interesting story...

"Not quite-" The younger boy's torch landed on Kid, illuminating him. Fortunately he'd had his eyes closed in preparation of being blinded.

"Yo." He greeted them with a smile, raising both hands to show that while he wasn't necessarily unarmed, he'd at least come with peaceful intentions.

The large man instantly had a huge gun aimed at him, the snap of the safety being taken off echoing through the room. The teen, and Kid's intended target, raised a hand, stopping further action. Both sides paused, figuring out the next move from there.

The teen straightened, losing the what tenseness he'd gained upon discovering the thief. "Kid the Phantom Thief, I presume?"

"Correct." Kid tipped his hat to the small criminal mastermind, dropping his hands to rest on the small statue resting between his legs. "I would expect nothing less from the second Artemis Fowl and his Butler." He grinned. "-Or should I say 'The Fairy Thief'?"

"Artemis Fowl is fine." Fowl bowed slightly in return. "From your presence, I would surmise that you are here for some reason-?"

"Peaceful reasons, if your Butler would be so kind as to lower his weapon. I'm not particularly fond of guns." Kid allowed a bit of nervousness to slide through his smile. "And I'm not here to fight over the statue."

There was another slight pause as the bodyguard and his young master seemed to weigh their decisions before Fowl nodded his head once and Butler put the gun not just down, but away. Kid breathed a sigh of relief. He -could- take care of the gun, but he'd rather not have to.

"Thank you." He smiled. "I have a bit of a business proposition for you."

"And you interrupted a heist to do so?" Fowl questioned, vaguely irritated. Either the boy had a better poker face than he did, or he just wasn't very expressive.

"Since rumour has it that your parents went 'straight', I figured it would be impolite for me to knock
on your front door for potentially shady dealings." Kid pointed out. And he'd taken care of the group who had stolen the statue in the first place. So there.

"Good point." Fowl concurred. "What did you need?"

"Passports." Kid admitted honestly. He got the feeling that beating around the bush with the young criminal would be counterproductive.

"Passports?" That got a slightly raised eyebrow.

"Two sets." Kid clarified. He gave a rueful grin. "Retirement from the business is not as easy as one would assume."

"No, it never is." Fowl agreed, looking thoughtful. "Two sets? One for yourself..."

"One for a friend."

"I see..." Crap, crap crap. He had known that the younger Fowl was quick when he'd debated this plan, but he hadn't realised HOW quick. "If I might venture a guess, Saguru Hakuba would be the other?"

Kid was silent. Screwed either way. Silence was assent, but at least he didn't -say- it.

Fowl smiled back, the grin of a friendly predator. "Why would a detective and a thief be travelling together?" The dark haired boy mused, almost playfully.

"When they're both being targeted by the same organisation who wants them dead." Kid replied back, just as cheerfully. "We reached a bit of an agreement. My part is keeping us both alive."

"Hence the passports."

Kid nodded. "Hence the passports."

The criminal genius mused this over. "What are you offering in exchange?"

"One of two things." Kid held up two fingers and counted down. "Information on the international organisation trying to kill us, known for wearing all black."

"I've heard of them." Artemis mused. "Go on."

"Or. A favour. To be exchanged at your convenience."

That... was the tricky part. They had paid for their safety with that information before. And honestly, it was the cheaper price.

To pay with an unknown favour was putting himself on the line. Artemis Fowl could ask him for anything at any point in the future, and he couldn't say no. But Fowl abhorred murder, much like himself, which was why he had chosen to offer this deal to the young genius.

For fake passports, they could have easily asked Uncle Dorian, Uncle Klaus, or Auntie Kitty for the fake identification. But that was probably not only expected, but would draw further unwanted attention towards their family.

And with their questions about Mum also cast some uneasy suspicion on the rest of the Hakuba family. So not only did they not want to bring trouble to the family, they didn't want the family to bring them trouble.
Besides, they turned twenty this year, they should be able to fend for themselves without relying on their families all the time.

"And you would... honour this favour?" Fowl questioned.

"I'm a gentleman as well as a thief." Kid raised an eyebrow, slightly affronted as he motioned towards the statue. "No one has ever complained that I haven't done what I've said." Quite the opposite, really.

Fowl nodded. "All right. Agreed." They'd worry about contact later. Fowl had Hakuba's name as well, he could find them easily enough that way. "Do you have photographs?"

With a flick of his wrist, Kid pulled an envelope out of mid-air. He paused for a moment to allow Butler to see it before tossing it to Fowl. "Those are for Hakuba. Anything for me." He'd temporarily dyed Hakuba's hair dark brown with similar brush in hair dye that Hakuba had used before, then made the half-Briton look older, like a business man.

"That's right, you're a master of disguise." Fowl seemed vaguely amused by that. "As well as a 'magician'."

Kid just grinned.

"One question." Fowl asked, passing the envelope to his Butler. The giant man took it and made it disappear into the depths of his fitted suit coat. "Why did you ask me for a favour? Surely there were other criminals you could ask.

"True." Kid agreed. The younger boy was probably thinking that it was because of his age. Younger people had a habit of being underestimated, as he well knew. "But you seem like the type of person I wouldn't mind being acquainted with." Ruthless when need be, but also honourable.

He got the barest hint of a smile in return. "Good answer."

+++  
Queues.

He -hated- waiting in queues.

Usually when there was a queue to stand in, Saguru would go stand in the queue while Kaito stood off to the side, generally entertaining small kids. Because usually while travelling, there were always small kids who hated standing in line and they generally seemed to find him. So Saguru got to do what generations of Britons seemed to have been ingrained to do, find a queue and stand in it, and he got to make people smile and everyone was generally happy with the agreement.

Except that this time, he had to wait next to Saguru. Wait -patiently-. Because he was currently Zendama Robin, travelling with -her- business associate Kishu Tsuchiïro from Ireland to New York for business purposes.

So they stood in the queue and looked bored like everyone else in the queue and tried not to yawn. Or panic. Which ever emotion beat out the other first.

Finally their turn arrived and they passed over their passports to the people at the ticket counter. Hakuba did the talking because 'Kishu-san' was more fluent in English that 'Robin' was. Despite the nerve racking waiting as the woman who was checking them in typed in their passport information was, their fake identification went through without a hitch.
He had to give Artemis Fowl points for being very good at what ever the genius put his mind to.

So with much lighter hearts, grabbed their luggage --carry on only-- and headed for the queue for the security check so they could stand in a queue to board the six and a half hour flight to New York.

As they did so, he could hear some people debating today's headline in the newspaper. Hakuba heard it too and gave him a concerned look.

Evidently, there had been a -reverse- robbery. Thieves had broken into the All Souls Roman Catholic Church in Peterborough and returned a stolen statue of St Anthony of Padua, the Patron Saint of Lost and Stolen Items.

There had been a little note attached at the base of the statue, and that was what was causing the uproar.

"Tony, Tony, please look around,
Your statue was lost and now is found."

Signed, The Fairy Thief and The Kaitou Kid.

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

Kishu Tsuchiiro - "Pale Rider"
Kishu: 'Horseman, rider'
Tsuchiiro: earth (colour); ashen; deathly pale

Zendama Robin - "Robin Goodfellow"
Zendama: Good Person

Tradtional St. Tony Chant:
"Tony, Tony, please look around,
something is lost and must be found."

The theft of a statue of St Anthony of Padua from All Souls Roman Catholic Church in Peterborough really did happen.
We haven't heard of it having been returned yet. ~_^

Artemis Fowl, 'The Fairy Thief' and Butler belong to Eoin Colfer, no permission, no profit is being made, just having fun.
The Grey Zone: Picking the Big Apple

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

♦ ♦ ♦

The Grey Zone: Picking the Big Apple
by Ick! M. Chif

♦ ♦ ♦

"Aw, man...." Kaito shut the door behind him with a contented sigh. He was SO happy to be out of the hustle and bustle of the city and into the peace and quiet of the hotel. "You would NOT believe how crazy New York City is."

Saguru glared at him, his glasses hanging on the tip of his nose. Kaito could practically see the storm clouds hovering above the detective's head. "Try me."

Kaito pulled the wig off his head, tossing it on to the bed next to the blond. "New York City," He proclaimed with grave dignity as he pulled off the pumps and gave his feet a brief massage. Stupid heels, pinching his toes. Good thing his balance was good or it'd be impossible to walk, much less run in them. "Is FULL of freaks."

This proclamation didn't appear to impress Saguru. A vein twitched on his forehead.

"You know that -really- tall building in the middle of Manhattan? The one with the castle on the top? Turns out monsters live up there. Really territorial ones." He reached up his skirt and undid the snaps on his garter belt, sliding the thigh-high stockings off his legs and wiggling his bare toes against the carpet in relief. Of course, he'd met their kind before, twice now, but Saguru didn't need to know that part.

"Turns out they glide too." He added, unzipping the short skirt and sliding that off, tossing it next to the wig on the bed. The stockings joined the skirt as well, leaving him in his white slacks and blue socks. "By the way, hang glider versus wings? No contest. They almost caught me when I accidentally interrupted a couple of guys kissing on top of a police station and one of them took a couple of shots at me. Only got away because I hid behind a gargoyle."

There should have been something wrong with taking off a skirt and suddenly finding himself in his Kid work clothes, but he'd decided it was better not to question such things. If it worked, it worked.

"A stone, non-moving gargoyle anyway." He continued, pulling out the falsies in the sports tank under the fuzzy sweater he was wearing. "Which was fine until some guy dressed in webs landed on top of the gargoyle and started talking to it, calling it 'George'."

He pulled both the tank and the sweater off, tossed on the bed as well. A quick wipe of his face and the costume was off, leaving him in his Kid clothing. He loosened the tie, undoing the top button. Finally, he could breathe normally again.

"He was really surprised when I started answering back. Turns out it was one of New York's spandex-wearing heroes. Spidey, I think he called himself." Tie came off, gloves came off, monocle came off, all of it went into the hat. Hat went on to the desk, not the bed. Coat followed, folded up
over the chair. "Bad thing, he recognised me. Good thing, he was in a good mood and once I assured him I was only sight seeing, he decided against covering me in cobwebs and hanging me upside down outside the police station."

Kaito undid the gun holster holding his card gun, automatically unloading it and slipping the cards into pocket of his coat on the chair. He then unbuckled the his belt and slid it from the belt loops, adding it to the pile. "Turns out he's a fairly nice guy. By the way, we do -not- want to head up to Westchester County. Evidently they breed super-powered spandex folks up there."

"Lovely." Saguru sniped.

"Yeah. Just what we need, a mind-reader loose and causing havoc." He agreed, pulling the blue shirt out from his pants, then unbuttoning the buttons on his wrists. "Oh, yeah. You were right by the way."

"Yes?" Saguru looked thoroughly unimpressed as Kaito wandered over and straddled the blond's legs, not quite sitting on his lap.

"Turns out they really do have pizza-eating humanoid turtles in the sewers. They fight with the large packs of roving ninjas occasionally." Kaito smiled sweetly. "So. Would you like me to unhandcuff you?"

"I'd say you made your point." Saguru agreed, his hands trapped behind his back, attached to the headboard. When Kaito had left to tour the city, Saguru had been asleep, his hands above his head. The detective had obviously done some wiggling around. And from the fallen over Sir Stinky, he'd gotten the note as well.

He'd been fighting with Saguru, trying to convince him to learn lock picking. His hero Holmes knew how to after all. Saguru had been adamant about not learning, and Holmes hadn't had to deal with Breaking and Entering Laws.

The note had been a simple scenario. Saguru captured by the mysterious men in black, his family or friends in the next room.

And Kaito-Kid wasn't in the picture.

How as Saguru going to get them and himself to safety?

It was a cruel trick to play, especially considering that Saguru had gone through just a thing. Only that time, Kaito had gotten him out.

But if it could save Saguru's life, he would play all the dirty tricks he needed to.

"You'll learn lock-picking?" He asked, making sure that Saguru wouldn't wiggle his way out of this.

"If you're willing to teach me, I'll learn it." Saguru agreed.

That's all he wanted. He pulled the keys from out of the nightstand drawer, not more than an arm's reach from where Saguru lay. "Thanks." He climbed over Saguru, unlocking the handcuffs.

"You're welcome." Saguru said mildly.

The Detective then grabbed Kaito, rolling him over and pinning him to the bed, snatching the handcuffs from his hands. Saguru quickly handcuffed Kaito to the headboard and sat up with triumphant glee. "Now stay there."
"Oh?" Kaito raised an eyebrow.

"I'll be back in an hour." Saguru said firmly, pulling the medical tape off his wrists that Kaito had put on so that he didn't cut himself up while trying to escape. "I'm going to use the loo, then get something to eat and when I get back, I expect you to be here EXACTLY as I left you, Kaito-kun."

With that, the irritated detective rolled off of him, grabbed a coat, a room key, shoes and stalked out of the room, growling to himself.

The door shut, locking itself with an audible click.

Kaito grinned to himself, slipping his hands out of the handcuffs with a twist of his wrists and settled down for a nap.

Turnabout was fair play after all.

-fin-

back?

Chapter End Notes

Spider-Man, Gargoyles, Ryo and Dee from Fake, Turtles, and other assorted characters aren't mine either.
Saguru was laughing as Kaito entered the hotel they were staying at. The thief gave him a dirty look as he pulled off his jacket --he was dressed as a guy this time-- and tossed it in the former-blond's face.

The detective sniggered some more as he pulled the jacket off his head. "Congratulations." Saguru pointed to the television, which was blaring the local newscast. "You are tonight's top story."

"Oh, shut up." He gritted back as he began to shed the costuming layers. He'd been extra careful returning tonight, taking detours both above and below the street. The last thing he needed was to be caught. Again.

Saguru's snickering increased again as the footage came back on the news. Kaito sighed. He'd seen it several times as he'd made his way back.

He'd come up with the bright idea of hiding Pandora somewhere along their gallivanting tour of America. The problem being, finding a place where no one would find it. He hadn't stolen it just so that a random person on the street could accidentally stumble across the magical blood sucking stone.

Hence his not-so late night escapade across the Gotham City skyline. Gotham was dark and mysterious, holding its secrets fast.

Unfortunately for Kid, one of those secrets had taken a severe displeasure in his snooping around. He hadn't had any warning as he examined the odd spotlight on the top of the police station, just a low gravely voice informing him that they didn't care what his purpose was for being here, he wasn't going to get away with anything.

And then he'd found himself hanging upside down from a lamppost outside the police station he'd been looking at, a rope wrapped around him from his shoulders to his ankles.

Evidently, this was a common occurrence in Gotham City, due to its Bat Protector and some wise person had set up a video camera across from the police station to catch said occurrences on film.

Which was now being broadcast across the city. And by tomorrow night, probably the world if it was a slow news day for BBC and CNN. Everyone needed a 'feel good' story.

The television was showing his escape, one arm sliding out of the coil of rope as if it wasn't restricting him at all to reach for his falling top hat. In slow motion, the Kid had proceeded to simply fall out of the rope, disappearing in a cloud of smoke before the rope cocoon could start to unravel.

He'd found himself in an alleyway several blocks away. A second cloud of smoke had followed,
leaving him more mundane clothing. He'd slipped away, resolutely -not- following the adage of the
criminal always returned to the scene of the crime. He certainly didn't want to get caught again.

Upon reflection, he didn't know how he had escaped or summoned the clothing, but if it worked, he
wasn't going to question it. Attempting to explain or applying logic to magic had a tendency of
neutralising it. He'd come to the conclusion that Magic was better off accepted, but unexplained.

"Ha, bloody ha." He snarked back as Saguru proceeded to have giggle fit right off the bed, landing
with an ungraceful thud.

"You got caught..." The detective pulled himself back up on to the bed, one hand still clutching the
television remote control as he snickered. "...by a man who dresses as a giant BAT."

"And is rumoured to be the World's Greatest Detective." Kaito shot back, pulling off his shirts and
tossing them at Saguru for good measure too. "Bastard. I -should- dye your hair purple in your
sleep."

Saguru made a face back at him. The half-Briton still wasn't happy about Kaito's choice of disguises.
They'd dyed his hair black with a more permanent dye than the brush-in kind, making the blond's
skin look even paler than usual. Then to add to the detective's displeasure, Kaito had dragged them to
used clothing shop and proceeded to collect the most used looking scruffy black clothing they could
find.

Black - the universal colour clothing option for outcasts everywhere.

Saguru had grumbled, it was too much like wearing the enemy's skin for him. Kaito had mused
about the option of having a mohawk... a little bit of egg yolk, some watered down glue, he could
make his hair stand straight up.

The detective had glanced around the store then muttered softly enough so that only Kaito could hear
that if Kaito -did- wear his hair in a mohawk, he'd be sleeping by himself. Double score, it had shut
Saguru up and made him blush.

But Saguru still wasn't comfortable in the strangely baggy clothing that made them look like gothy
punks, or rebellious youth. He had been even less comfortable when Kaito had then hauled them to
some place called 'Hot Topic' to pick up spiky and metal accessories. Much to the amusement of the
sales people, Kaito had offered to dye Saguru's hair violent purple, to which Saguru had venomously
rejected.

And Kaito had to admit, the clothing gathered stares, but no recognition.

After all, Hakuba Saguru, Detective and Probable Next Earl of Gloria was known for wearing fitted
antique-style clothing, not overly-large worn-out clothing.

And hopefully it would keep people away from them as well, in the case of cross fire.

Kaito shrugged the thoughts off as Saguru absentmindedly folded his clothing and tossed it towards
the equally ratty duffel bags that they had gotten. "You find what you were looking for?" Saguru
inquired, mirth slightly subdued for the moment.

"No." He sighed, rolling his shoulders and beginning stretching exercises. With dancing and
gymnastics, the body tended to reach it's peak around age thirteen. He was turning twenty in less
than six months, practically an old man. If he wanted to maintain his agility, there was no time like
the present to start practising again. There was enough room on the floor to stretch out too, if he was
careful.
Saguru looked like he was going to say something, then forgot what it was. The detective just watched as Kaito sank to the floor, crossing his legs into a lotus position. "... What are you doing?"

"Stretching exercises." He would have thought it was obvious. "With a bit of yoga thrown in."

"Oh." The former-blond had a strange look on his face.

"Give me about twenty minutes and I'll be done if you want to get ready to sleep." He offered, arching his back and twisting his torso around.

"No... that's fine," Saguru didn't -sound- exactly fine. The detective slid off the bed and headed towards the small bathroom in the back. "I'll just be back here until you're done."

Kaito paused. "... 'Guru?" Saguru certainly didn't need to take another shower, the hair dye had already set and the extra washed out. And the half-Briton usually took his shower in the mornings...

"Think about it." Was Saguru's curt reply as he disappeared behind the partition.

It took a moment for Kaito's brain to switch over from 'Plans, Theories, Disguises and Keeping them Alive' to 'Normal Hormonal Teenager'. And then his face heated up. "Oh."

"Yeah."

"Sorry." Kaito continued with his stretching. "You should probably practise your skills too. Don't think we can do Fencing here, but what about Judo and Wrestling?"

"Pass." He could hear Saguru sit down in the doorway with his back against the wall. "Judo Kata and Wrestling are both easier with an opponent."

Kaito liked Saguru. Saguru liked Kaito. They both knew this and acknowledged it. And while they weren't exactly doing what you could call normal 'dating', they were together as a couple or a partnership or whatever.

However, they also both acknowledged that life was a bitch and the moment they started making out or something, someone would start shooting. Or drop dead. Or something equally inane that only seemed to pop up when they were distracted by each other. And it was relatively easy to get distracted when you were attracted to each other and in close quarters like they were.

Hence, Saguru was hiding while Kaito twisted himself into pretzels and tucked a leg behind his head.

"Maybe not the pins, but what about the throws?" He questioned, trying to come up with a compromise.

Saguru considered it. While neither were anticipating an actual hand-to-hand close combat fight, it still didn't hurt to be prepared. Or in shape. "Maybe if we get a room where we could put the mattresses on the floor. I don't want you to accidentally get injured."

"Okay." Great. Every person's dream, being used as a wrestling dummy.

They both lapsed into silence for a bit, distracted by their own thoughts. The television droned on the background, Saguru still had the remote with him. The Kid hanging upside down the police station played again.

"Hey, Saguru?"
"Yeah?"

"No more cities with superheros, okay?" He had a hard enough time with just the regular police, he didn't need super people too.

"What about Spider-man in New York?" Saguru questioned back, obviously amused by either the change in topic or the topic itself. "You said he was pretty cool."

"True." Kaito thought it over. "But he didn't have a cape." Apparently, that made all the difference.

"So cities with superheros with no capes-?" Saguru ventured.

"No capes." Kaito agreed. "NO capes."

-fin-
The Grey Zone: Miami

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Holly came from Miami, FLA
Hitch-hiked her way across the USA
Plucked her eyebrows on the way
Shaved her legs and then he was a she
She says, Hey babe. Take a Walk on the Wild Side
-Walk on the Wild Side, Lou Reed

You just can't change old habits.

And Kaito should have expected something like this. The trip from Gotham to Florida had been reasonably quiet. They had by-passed Washington DC, just in case, caught a rest in a sleepy little town in South Carolina, given Conan's e-mail to the Chief of Police's son who had a memory like an Encyclopaedia in some place called 'Idaville', and spent a lovely week in Orlando playing Tourist.

Dressed like tourists too, much to Hakuba's relief. Black was not a good colour for either the Florida humidity or the water rides. They'd had a lot of fun. And there were no worries about possibly not blending in during their stay; tourists from every part of the world came to visit.

They were back in scruffy army surplus cast-offs as they left through Miami to avoid leaving an obvious trail. Their plane left in three hours, and seeing as neither of them were entirely fond of the snacks referred to as 'meals' on domestic flights, they were eating before hand.

Which was where the trouble had started. Literally. They'd been eating their meal, as pleasant as could be while they discussed how to spot cross-dressers. They were getting some weird looks from the booths around them, mainly because Kaito -was- dressed as a tomboy-ish red-headed girl today and suddenly no one was certain what gender he really was.

Saguru knew about the moving the hips while going up and down stairs --men's centre of balance was up towards their chests while women carried it in their hips-- and that the placement of the hands and elbows while walking were slightly different.

Women were generally built to carry things more then men were, one of the reasons why men and women caught things differently. A man held his palms up, parallel to their face while a woman would hold her arms outstretched, like one would when cradling an infant, catching it in their cupped hands. Or, if they dropped something, by closing their thighs quickly. Something no man could do without pinching vital bits. Ouch.

Eye-Hand coordination was also different between the genders. Threading a needle was a prime example. Men would hold either the thread or the needle still and move the other. Women, as Kaito
demonstrated, moved both the thread and the needle at the same time.

Of course, what he hadn’t told Saguru was that he’d had to practise for weeks before he’d been able to do that.

They had just moved on to the subject of Adam’s apples when it happened. 'It' as in a in a drug deal turned homicide in the restaurant they had chosen to catch a quick bite in.

Which resulted in them being delayed as officers attempted to wrangle any and all details that they could out of the surrounding ‘witnesses’.

Kaito thought the plan was simple. They just had to sit still, comment that they didn't see anything and they'd be home free.

Except that Saguru had obviously gotten fed up with the slow course that justice was taking and stood up, walked over to the closest examiner and announced that there had been four men who had been sitting at the table, the murderer and two others.

Saguru hadn’t gotten a good look at the murderer, but the two men who had been at the table and chased the first man out had both been between five-foot nine and five-foot eleven, one was Caucasian, the other African American, possibly of mixed descent, both wearing pastel sports coats over tee-shirts and jeans and had driven off in a black Ferrari Testarossa.

He also believed they referred to each other as 'Sonny' and 'Rico', but wasn't entirely sure as the 80s style music had been too loud for him to hear clearly.

The police detective had stared at Saguru for a minute, the information obviously taking a moment to process, before turning to the side. "Hey, Horatio!!" The middle aged man shouted. "I got something here for you."

A man with sandy reddish hair turned towards them, slowly walking over. "What can I do for you gentlemen?" He asked, deliberately taking off his sunglasses.

"Repeat what you just told me, son." The detective requested.

Saguru did. Kaito resisted the urge to beat his head against the nearest hard surface. Great. Now not only had they drawn attention to themselves, --police attention-- but now they were probably going to miss their flight.

"Fascinating." ‘Horatio’ fiddled with his sunglasses. "What did you say your name was?"

"Ha-"

"Hobbit." Kaito quickly cut him off with a impatient feminine snap. "I'm Puck, 'e's Hobbit and we're gonna be late fer our flight." Silently, he gave a little mental note of thanks for dressing like a girl today. And the bright red hair was kind of fun. People tended to do a double take then give him a wide berth, un-naturally red hair being an unconscious message of danger or something.

"Flight?" Horatio questioned. Kaito rolled his eyes, pulling their tickets out of the bag and holding them out. Horatio took them, scanning the information.

"Raymond de Saint-Veran." He said slowly, reading the names off the tickets. "And Roberta Goodfellow. Good name, Raymond. Although awful tall for a Hobbit, aren't you?" Horatio commented, handing the tickets back and putting his glasses back on.
"I'm the Earth's Tallest Hobbit." Saguru deadpanned, taking the tickets. "As well as the World's Smallest Giant."

"'E's a lit major." Kaito explained, taking the tickets from Saguru and putting them back in his bag. "Don't say much but s'real observant."

"And 'Puck'?' The original officer asked, looking vaguely mused.

"'Robin's short fer 'Robert'." Kaito squared his jaw, shifting his weight from hip to hip. "Robin Goodfellow."

"Puck." Horatio smiled. "Clever."

Kaito shrugged. "'e toldja wot yer lookin' for. Can we go now?"

Saguru gave him a look that could have almost been considered a glare. This was -justice-. One did not interrupt the pursuit of righting wrongs.

Kaito sighed and waved it off, rubbing his forehead with a long suffering sigh. They could catch a later flight.

You -really- couldn't change old habits.

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

'idaville' and all it's characters are from the Encyclopaedia Brown series of books. All mysteries solved for 25 cents a day, plus expenses.

'Horatio' and the police officers are from CSI: Mami, 'Sonny' and 'Rico' are from Maimi Vice (hence the 80s music)

'Raymonde de Saint-Veran' is the name of Arsene Lupin's wife whom Sherlock Holmes shoots and kills while aiming for Lupin.

All recognisable characters belong to their owners, used without permission, no money is being made.
And in the background was a Giant Twinkie.

It was bright yellow, about fifty feet high, wearing a cowboy hat, cowboy boots, gloves and a blue bandana covered in red hearts under its smiling face as it walked down Diversey Avenue.

The hat proclaimed that the giant walking snack food was 'Twinkie the Kid'. Kaito's inner Kid took offence to this, but was slightly distracted from the rampaging sponge cake by a group of men in black suits chasing after them. And since the men in suits were -not- carrying briefcases unlike the office workers attempting to get to work on time, this was a Bad Thing.

Especially considering that they'd been in Chicago for less than two hours, having just stepped off the bus from the airport. Obviously their fake aliases of 'Raymond de Saint-Veran' and 'Roberta Goodfellow' had already been discovered. And somehow, he doubted it was the fault of Artemis Fowl, the criminal mastermind he'd gotten them from.

Which meant that somehow, the Black Organisation had already found a way to track them.

Or it was sheer dumb luck.

Somehow he doubted that. Especially since the men in black --he had to find a better name for the annoying prats-- were moving in what was obviously a pincher move, cutting off all exit routes from the alley he and Saguru had ducked down to avoid the men in black suits who had paused in the middle of the street rather than being crushed by the Giant Twinkie's booted heel.

"Any ideas?" Saguru breathed in his ear, the blond staying as close to him as possible.

"A few." Kid glanced up at the fire escapes above them. He could scramble up there, but Saguru was slower, they'd be obvious targets for the gaijin with guns. He really needed to give Saguru a few more thieving lessons, it would come in SO handy during times like this.

A bullet whizzed passed their heads, striking the wall. Distraction. They needed a distraction. Kid was a good distraction, but Saguru wasn't.

A plan quickly formed and he realised that A: Saguru was NOT going to like it, B: there was no time to explain it to the detective properly so that Saguru -might- like it enough to go along with it and C: Saguru was REALLY not going to like it and Kid would be lucky if Saguru didn't use Kid's guts for garters afterwards, whatever that meant. But it sounded gruesome.

"Okay. Got one." Kid announced, his tone overly bright for facing certain painful doom in a number of levels and by a variety of different people. "Hold on to me."
Saguru immediately did as requested, even though it meant stopping their run, with a trust that would melt Kid's heart under other circumstances. As it was, he tossed down a smoke bomb, white smoke filling the alley and hiding them from view.

It would only last a few seconds, but a few seconds was enough to carry out the next bit. "You can kill me later." He murmured as he pressed a handkerchief laced with sleeping gas on it to the blond's face, Saguru's eyes going wide as he struggled against it for a moment before going limp in Kid's arms.

He quickly hid Saguru and their duffle bags in some flattened cardboard boxes, thankfully still dry unlike the slush that coated most of the city, then pulled a dummy hang glider from his back, unfolded it with a snap of his wrist and tossed it into the air. The small motor would get it above building level and keep it flying for a while.

With Saguru safely hidden and not likely to cause any valiant self-sacrificing trouble this time, he quickly changed outfits... into Hakuba Saguru, complete with trademark suit and inverness coat. He did a quick check as the smoke thinned out, then dashed down a side alley.

-and right into a large, bright red object. "Geh." He stumbled back a step, only to be steadied by a firm hand on his elbow.

"Are you all right?" A crisp voice asked. It was accented slightly differently than the local accent they'd heard since getting off the plane at O'Hare International Airport.

"M'Fine." He assured the person, one hand on his nose check to make sure that the disguise hadn't broken as well as for bruising. He paused, realising that the person holding him was a Mountie. As in from Canada. Funny pants, red jacket, wide brim hat and all. "Thank you. Um."

.... What was a Mountie doing in Chicago!?

In the back of his mind, he had visions of Mounties singing "I'm a Lumberjack and I'm Okay".

"Yeah, he gets that a lot." A nasally voice drawled. The Mountie released his grip on Kid's arm to smile slightly at the lanky blond haired man who came up beside him, flashing a badge. "Detective Ray Vecchio, Chicago PD. This is my partner-"

"-Constable Benton Fraser of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police." The Mountie introduced himself and offered Kid his hand to shake, which Kid did. "I first came to Chicago on the trail of the killers of my father-"

"-And for reasons that don't need exploring at this juncture he's remained, attached as lesbian with the Canadian Consulate." Detective Vecchio drawled sounding like he'd heard this spiel a thousand times.

"Really?" Kid asked, raising an eyebrow as he gave the Mountie a look over. The Constable certainly didn't look like a lesbian...

"Ah." The Mountie tugged on an ear in what looked like a nervous tick. "I believe you mean 'Liaison', Ray."

"Isn't that what I said?" Detective Vecchio demanded hotly. "Anyway. Got reports of a disturbance in the area. You see anything, kid?"

"Quite a few things." Kid said dryly, smiling faintly. "Which one might you be referring to? The giant walking confectionary or the men with the guns?"
"The last one." Detective Vecchio gave him a dirty look for being a snarky bastard. Kid smiled back.

"Now, Ray. There have been quite a few phone calls..." The Mountie soothed.

"No, Frase. I am -not- gonna investigate someone's mass hallucination. Now if it was a Giant Rubber Duck or something believable, maybe-"

The rant got cut off by the retort of gunfire. All three men crouched down, immediately looking for cover. Kid hoped to all the Seven Lucky Gods that the shots weren't because they had found Saguru.

"Okay, ya see anything that has to do with the guys shooting at us?" Detective Vecchio snapped as they were joined by a large white dog.

"Yes." Kid said briskly. "I believe they're shooting at me."

Detective Vecchio shot him a glare. "And you couldn't have told us sooner!?"

Kid shrugged. "It was distracting welcome to Chicago." Giant Twinkies, Guns, Mounties. They all flinched as a bullet whizzed over head.

Detective Vecchio muttered several uncomplimentary things under his breath. "Ready, Frase?"

"Ready when you are, Ray." The Mountie nodded back. "Deif, stay."

The dog grumbled a response, but sat down next to the car.

"Right. You-" Detective Vecchio glared at Kid. "-Stay here. Frase, on the count of three."

"THREE!" Both men yelled, moving forward.

"CHICAGO PD. PUT YOUR GUNS DOWN NOW!!!"

Kid watched with a bit of awe as the two men moved in complete synchronization with each other, approaching the men in black. Kid could hear the hitmen's footsteps run off, fleeing from the police.

"OI! ASSWIPE! I SAID FREEZE! DON'T -MAKE- ME KICK YOU IN THE HEAD!!!"

Kid knew they wouldn't catch the men in black, but the effort was appreciated. He debated slipping off while they were gone, but Saguru wouldn't run off. Saguru would run -towards- the danger, like the moron he was. The dog looked at him, making a low whining sound in his throat, as if to advise him not to attempt to run. Because if he ran, the dog would have to chase.

And Kid got the feeling that having a dog chase him instead of a person would be a lot harder to shake off.

He sighed, leaning against the car. The dog walked over and sat next to him, as if saying he was a good boy. Kid wrinkled his nose back, grumbling quietly. The dog snickered. This was why Kid was more of a cat person. Cats bloody well didn't care what everyone else did.

The Mountie and the Detective eventually returned, the scruffy blond muttering dark things about stupid people. "They got away?" Kid said blandly in Saguru's dulcet tones.

He got a dirty look in return for that. "Cute, smart mouth." Detective Vecchio snarked.

"Ah, perhaps it might be worthwhile to have this young man come back with us to the station and peruse the mug book in the hopes of identifying the gentlemen who were firing upon us?" The
Mountie suggested, his expression the epitome of helpful innocence.

No, he had to go... brush his teeth or something equally important. Police stations were -bad-. That's where the cops were.

"Excellent idea, Fraser my friend." Detective Vecchio grinned, rubbing his hands together. "What did you say your name was?"

Crap. The dog made a slight snickering sound. Stupid dog. "Hakuba." Kid deadpanned. Just how he wanted to spend his afternoon, scanning mug shots for people who were trying to kill him. "Saguru Hakuba at your service. Pleased to meet you."

"Oh, no." Detective Vecchio grinned as he pulled Kid towards the car they were standing beside. It was -not- a regular black and white, Kid noted with some amusement. This car was someone's -baby-. "The pleasure's all ours. After all, I just -love- getting shot at. It just brightens my whole day."

"Really, Ray?" The Mountie followed, a slightly quizzical expression on his face. "I was under the impression that an imbalanced meal of sugar, caffeine, and carbohydrates brightened your day."

The Detective made a rude gesture at the Mountie, then motioned Kid into the back seat. Next to the dog.

Kid growled back, then got in the damn car.

"Look out." The detective offered with a slight smirk. "He likes to lick ears."

Joy.

+++  

They introduced him to a lovely young woman named 'Franny' at the station, who sat him down to do exactly what Detective Vecchio had threatened, spend several hours flipping through books of mug shots. Franny was not an unattractive woman, a bit ferocious in her man hunting, especially towards the Mountie. Who seemed rather uncomfortable under the scrutiny and disappeared with Detective Vecchio into a local closet.

Kid's attention was distracted from this peculiar occurrence by being offered a cup of coffee and a donut. He would have killed for a coffee right about then, except Saguru preferred tea, so he'd requested that instead. He'd gotten some sort of sludge that tasted like something they'd scraped off the floor and filtered. He smiled politely anyway and thanked Frannie, who swooned and cooed over his polite manners and British accent.

Fortunately, she did have some legitimate work to do as a Police Assistant and eventually wandered off, leaving him alone at Detective Vecchio's desk. He flipped through the books and managed to spot one of the people who had been shooting at them. He bookmarked that page and kept flipping.

Eventually, people got used to him sitting there and he felt safe enough to relax slightly. And to do something sneaky.

"Ready, Hirokini-kun?" He whispered, touching the hidden cuff under the latex mask. The earring camera wasn't useable while wearing this disguise, so he made do with what he could.
"Ready, Kid-niichan." Hirokini whispered back, voice soft despite the fact that no one else could hear him. Kid casually 'accidentally' knocked a pen off the messy desk on to the floor. "Oops." He slipped out of the chair and crawled under the desk.

The dog was there, waiting for him. The dog opened his mouth, pink tongue lolling out as if to say 'nice try'. Crap.

"I'll give you the remains of my doughnut." Kid whispered.

The dog thought about it for a moment, then put his head back down, feigning sleep. Kid took that as the dog was therefore going to ignore his actions, as long as he got his treat. He pulled out a USB flashdrive that contained a copy of Hirokini's program out of his pocket and plugged it into the computer. Hirokini could have probably hacked into the system sooner or later, but if they put Hirokini at the source, the AI could access the files easier, then worm his way out and combine with the rest of himself on the net, like a Trojan virus.

In his ear, Hirokini made various soft whirring sounds. Hirokini didn't need to make the noise, but it was a reassuring sound, that everything was working well. It made him just a bit nostalgic for Japan as well, late nights at the Hakuba Laboratory. He sat back up on the chair, flipping through the mug book again, as if he'd just dropped his pen. A second 'accidental' movement with his elbow dropped the remains of his doughnut to the ground, where the dog quickly snapped it up.

Dog teeth next to his ankle. Ugh. He tucked his ankles under the chair legs.

Hirokini's noises stopped suddenly, replaced by a high-pitched squeal. Kid grimaced, clutching his ear. "Hirokini-kun?" He whispered. "You there? Everything all right?"

"There's... another..." Static gibberish filled his ear, causing him to wince again. "... Me...." The noises stopped.

"Hirokini-kun?" Kid hissed, alarm gripping him. "Hirokini-kun?!"

The speaker was dead for several heart pounding moments, then it came back to life with a faint crackle. "Hirokini-kun?"

"I..." Hirokini's voice was slightly garbled, lower than normal and strangely electronic sounding. "I'm fine. Everything is just fine."

Kid let out a small sigh of relief. "Don't worry me like that."

"... Sorry..."

"As long as you're okay." Kid flipped a page and went silent as the Detective and the Mountie made their reappearance, talking animatedly about Rugby versus Football. Kid assumed they meant American Football and not Soccer and tuned out the conversation, glancing at the clock on the wall and mentally groaned at the amount of time that had passed.

The sleeping gas usually worked for a maximum of a half hour. Saguru had been hit with it a few times before, his body should have started becoming accustomed to it, so maybe a little bit less for him. He hoped the police presence had scared the bad guys away from where he'd hid Saguru and they hadn't found the detective.

He reported the one person who looked familiar to Vecchio and the Mountie. The person had gangster connections, but no obvious ties to the men in black, as far as Kid could figure from the comments he overheard from the officers.
Hirokini continued to make strange sounds in his ear as he flipped through the books, which didn't ease his concern any. The AI wasn't mentioning anything about how Saguru was doing, which he was uncertain if that was a good sign or a bad sign. And with the Mountie, the Detective and Frannie hovering around him, he didn't dare ask.

At least not until a disturbance at the front door drew everyone available in that direction to help. Some officers were attempting to escort several men on high stilts into the station for booking. The men refused to come down from their tall, attention grabbing props. Which might not have been such a problem it it weren't for the kilts they were wearing.

Several of the kilt-wearing stilt walking men were going regimental.

There was a lot of screaming over this, the shouts of horror from many of the male officers not quite covered up by the cat-calls from the females.

Kid decided he probably wasn't going to find a better distraction and that was his cue to leave. A quick dive under the desk to retrieve the flashdrive revealed it to be in the dog's mouth, who guiltily spat it out. Kid thanked him for the small courtesy and quickly fled to the stairs with a mixed sense of urgency and profound relief.

Walking out on to the rooftop was a breath of fresh air, quite literally. Okay, so it a bit on the smoggy side, but so were most cities. But after being stuck in a -Police- Station of all things, he could be in a sewer and it'd be a breath of fresh air.

... not that he had experience in sewers, of course.

"Hirokini-kun." He tapped the earcuff. "Report."

He got an earful of static in response. Bugger.

"Leaving so soon?" A voice drawled. He turned around to find that somehow the Mountie and Detective Vecchio had somehow managed to beat him to the rooftop. Considering that he had seen them moving towards the front doors and not the stairs, this was an admirable feat. Mountie Magic, perhaps? He seemed like that sort of type.

"Just catching a breath of fresh air." He smiled, Saguru's polite grin for company he didn't really care all that much for, but wasn't going to say that.

"S'funny." Vecchio commented. "Most people I know don't stand on the building's -edge- to catch a breath of fresh air. "

"Not unless they're about to fly off." The Mountie agreed blandly. "Are we correct, Mr. Kaitou Kid?"

Kid paused for a moment, mentally reviewing where he might have slipped up.

"The pocket watch." The Mountie said. "Or lack of one, actually. A quick check on 'Saguru Hakuba' revealed that he was usually found chasing the International Jewel Thief, the Kaitou Kid. It is a well known fact has a habit of carrying a pocket watch around with him. His fan club site was most informative."

And Kid had checked the clock on the wall to find out what time it was. "I shall have to inform him of this the next time our paths cross." He commented dryly, tossing down a small smoke bomb and dropping the Saguru Disguise, standing there in his trademark white outfit. He was going to have to change anyway, it was just sooner rather than later.
"Oh, shit." Detective Vecchio scrambled for his gun, to be stopped by his partner. He looked both surprised by Kid's 'appearance' and the Mountie's actions. "You're under arrest- Fraser, y'mind?"

"On what charges, Ray?" The Mountie raised an eyebrow. "Impersonating a private inspector's appearance is not technically a legal offence since he has not actually stolen anything. And I believe that this gentleman here is much too young to have been the perpetrator of the jewel robberies done in the Kaitou Kid's name over a decade ago. You cannot arrest a man for a robbery he did not commit."

... The Mountie was good, he had to grant him that. No one else had bothered to notice that.

"Yeah? Then what the hell is he doing in Chicago?!" Detective Vecchio demanded stubbornly.

"To paraphrase our friend here, I first became the Kaitou Kid to seek out the killers of my father." Kid grinned. "And for reasons that don't need exploring at this juncture, the same people are currently attempting to kill both myself and the good detective."

"You discovered the jewel your father was looking for." The Mountie deducted. "Hence your recent cessation from jewel heists."

Okay, now that was starting to get a little creepy. If he stayed around too much longer the man in the red suit would probably soon tell him what his own name, favourite sandwich and style of underwear he wore. "Does that ever get annoying?" He asked Detective Vecchio.

"All the time." Vecchio grumbled, putting his gun back. The Mountie looked miffed. Kid nodded.

"I'm afraid, gentlemen, that it is my cue to leave." He bowed. "With luck, I will have a rather annoyed detective waiting to strangle me and I don't wish to disappoint him."

"Best of luck with that." Detective Vecchio gave him a sarcastic half wave. "Step outta line in my city and we'll be the first ta arrest ya."

"I'll keep that in mind." He agreed, flipping backwards off the building. There was a brief dizzying moment of freefall, then he hit the button for the hang-glider. It snapped open, catching a thermal off the street below and sending him soaring up into the sky. He waved to the Mountie and the Detective, who where watching him below before moving towards some of the skyscrapers to hide his flight path in.

Chicago wasn't called 'The Windy City' for nothing and he made good time. If it weren't for the fact that it was daylight and he increased his chances of attracting a great amount of unwanted attention, it would have been a nice day for a scenic tour of the city.

Although the Giant Twinkie was still walking around, doing battle with some glowing beams. And honestly, he would think that would be a bigger attraction than a retired jewel thief wearing the wrong coloured clothing at night.

He took a roundabout route, changed disguises into a punkish teenage girl and made his way back towards the alley that he'd hidden Saguru in. He found a gentleman reading a newspaper with a weird headline on it and a blind lady with a large german shepherd in the alley he thought they had originally ducked down, but no dumpster.

The dumpster, with non-bullet ridden cardboard was in the next alley, minus Saguru.

He breathed a hearty sigh of relief at that. Their duffels were gone as well, so he could surmise that Saguru was awake and moving around. If they had killed Saguru and taken his body, it was unlikely
that they'd take the duffels as well.

Unless it was to look through them for evidence of where he had gone, but he didn't think so. The goons in black tended not to be quite that particular.

He wandered off, changed disguises, took a few random buses, changed disguises, took some not so random buses, changed disguises again and attempted to find the place that he thought Saguru was most likely to go.

And nearly got run over by a girl wearing what appeared to be football armour and waving a bright orange smoking disk thing. "I don't know how long we got containment on this thing!" She was shouting back towards the Hispanic guy on her heels.

"Man, can't we take the plane back?" The guy whinged, lugging a heavy looking backpack with a sort of vacuum attachment to it. "It's gonna take -hours- to drive back to New York!"

"I told you." A teenager in a jump-suit and carrying a similar strange backpack snapped back. "The packs contain radioactive elements and ever since nine elev-"

"Yeah, yeah, 'busting equipment isn't allowed on the plane." The Hispanic guy muttered. What ever else he might have said was cut off by a guy in a wheelchair, also in a jump-suit and the same backpack.

"'Scuse me, pardon me, hot stuff comin' through, make way. Ghostbusters coming through..." He shouted happily, looking like he loved whatever they were doing. "And quit your belly-aching, Edwina!"

"Blow me, Garrett!"

"Guys-"

The motley crew vanished off into the distance, shouting at each other the entire way. Kid watched them go, feeling slightly bemused.

America was weird.

He found the correct door and knocked on it, keeping a weather eye out for any more strange happenings. After a moment, the door opened, revealing a man in a black business suit and a dark trenchcoat.

Kid stepped backwards, giving himself some room to move. "Thanks again, Mr. Mogi." The man was saying behind him. A redheaded woman in a dark suit followed him, putting on her jacket.

"Anything I can do to help the FBI, Agent Mulder, Agent Sully." Mogi's voice said jovially. "A pleasure seeing you, as always."

"Thanks." The woman said with a wave. Kid nodded politely to them as they passed him. They nodded and smiled back, heading down the street, talking quietly between themselves.

"Kaito-kun, I presume?" Mogi grinned at him. "C'mon in, it's cold outside."

"Ah, thanks." Kid did so, scraping his shoes on the mat outside before stepping into the dry house. He glanced around, quickly noting any possible exits, just in case.

"Hakuba-kun has been waiting for you." Mogi motioned for him to follow him down a hallway.
"Right this way."

Kid nodded and followed. It wasn't a large flat, but it was obviously home. A few pictures on the wall showed Mogi with various people, some famous, some not. The detective led him into a living room, where Saguru was sitting, his glasses perched on the end of his nose, reading some thick tome or another, very much alive and well.

It was a lovely sight to behold.

"Something to drink?" Mogi asked. "There should be some leftover coffee."

"That would be wonderful." Kid thanked him. Mogi waved it off, wandering down the hall towards the kitchen.

Saguru didn't appear to notice him and Kid might have believed that he was wrapped up in the book if it wasn't for the tense set of the shoulders. Yeah. Saguru wasn't happy with him.

Kid sighed. "I'm sorry." Reined coiled tenseness was somehow worse than shouting. He had known Saguru would be angry with him, but it still hurt to deal with it.

"Do you trust me?" Saguru asked, his voice clipped and very British sounding. He turned a page in his book, not looking up.

"Yes." Kid admitted. "With my life."

Saguru looked up and he remembered just how -gold- Saguru's eyes could look, very much like a raptors as he pinned Kid down with his gaze. "Then bloody well act like it." He snapped.

"I-"

"Mogi-san has some information for us." Saguru rolled over him, turning his gaze back towards the book. "I think you'll find some of it interesting."

Kid nodded, his face a placid mask while Kaito silently screamed and ranted in his head.

They trusted the blond with their lives.

It was Saguru's life they didn't trust Saguru with.

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

Due South, Early Edition, Extreme Ghostbusters, X-files. All characters belong to their respective owners, used without permission, not for profit.
There were pros and cons to riding both the buses and the trains.

Buses got you places reasonably around on time, but were on the cramped, noisy, jostling side.

Trains were late. Not just minutes late, like you would occasionally get warnings for in Japan or Europe where the trains ran like clockwork, but up to half a day late. And no one seemed to care.

On the other hand, they didn't have any set plans or destinations and the trains had an Observation Lounge. Which was a central area for people to sit, talk, occasionally watch movies and catch an over priced bite to eat in the cafe downstairs or the diner car, the next car up.

But with windows that took up the side and the roof of the car, the Lounge car was the least claustrophobic place on the train, which is why Kaito liked it. Saguru didn't seem to mind keeping him company up there either, reading or talking to train aficionados.

"Step right up, Ladies and Gents, try your hand." A young voice called, interrupting his musings. "Poker! Place your bets here."

Kaito spotted the origin of the voice, a boy, pre-teens with spiky blond hair and wearing a red shirt. The boy had attracted several of the other train's children and a few adults. Kaito grinned to himself, rising. Saguru gave him a dry glance, silently admonishing him not to do anything stupid. Kaito patted him on the shoulder as he passed by, joining the crowd.

He watched a few games, waiting until people started to realise that the house always won before offering himself as an opponent. The boy sized him up, decided that he was probably an easy target and went with it.

Kaito won the first hand.

The boy frowned and offered another game.

Kaito won that game too. And the third and the fourth as well.

In the middle of the fifth game, a woman in a green dress and the tallest blue gravity defying hair interrupted them. "Bart! I can't believe it! You're trying to con these nice people! What have I told you about doing this?!"

"But Mom!! You don't understand!" The boy didn't have enough time to let out a proper whinge before his Mother had him by the ear and was marching him down the aisle. "The deck was stacked in MY favour!!! And he won every hand! Hey, Mister! Let me be your disciple! Teach me your
tricks! Teach mee-"

The doors slid shut on the boy's pleading.

A spiky blond haired girl wearing a red dress who'd been sitting nearby, sighed gustily. "Sorry about that." She said, folding up the thick tome she'd been reading. "My brother is a real idiot sometimes."

"No problem." Kaito smiled, setting down the hand he'd been holding to show off five aces. "We all meet someone better than us sometime or another."

The real trick was making it -later-.

+++

Kaito wasn't even aware that Amtrak had steam engine trains. But the conductor had taken their tickets without hesitation, so on a steam train they were riding.

Saguru was happy as a geek with a new toy. He hadn't quite been -bouncing-, the half-Briton had too much dignity for that, but it had been damn close as the detective looked around.

Kaito had trailed behind, feeling fondly indulgent as he made a mental note to try to find more historic things for them to visit. American didn't have quite the same depth of history that Europe did, but there had to be some things that Saguru would enjoy.

So they explored the train, getting funny looks from the people as they passed --for once, Saguru's really retro style would have blended in nicely-- until they reached the baggage car.

Where Kaito's sort of luck came into play and they found a poker game. Which, after being sized up as a suitable sucker, they were invited to join by a guy with silver hair and a strange tattoo over his left eye. A spiky redhead with an eye-patch over his right eye had tried to wave them away, but Kaito had grinned and taken the challenge.

He wasn't quite sure if he was pleased that he had or not. It was rare that he ran across someone who was -good- at cheating at poker. Most of the guy's tricks were so subtle Kaito barely caught them.

It was even rarer to meet someone of his same skill level.

Exact. Same. Skill. Level.

He and the silver haired guy who had introduced himself as 'Allen Walker' grinned at each other, like sharks frustrated at the lack of a kill. On the table were their cards, Kaito's hand held two aces, two kings and a two. Allen also had two aces, two kings and a two.

The previous hand, Kaito had held a royal flush, all hearts. Allen had also had a royal flush, all clubs. This.... was getting ridiculous.

"You're pretty good." Allen drawled pleasantly, his voice all daggers-sheathed-in-velvet while his friend, Rabi, looked on worriedly.

"Thanks." Kaito drawled back. "So are you." In the background, Saguru flinched. Both he and Rabi were nervously pressed up against each other, ready to flee or grab their respective friend at a moment's notice.

Allen leaned forward. "Teach me some of your tricks and I'll teach you some of mine."
Kaito held his hand out, the silver-haired boy taking it and they shook on it. "Deal."

Ah, the joys of learning.

+++ 

Saguru stared at the large suit of armour sitting on the seats across from them. Kaito gaved Saguru a worried look and tried to ignore the intense gaze of the golden-eyed blond sitting protectively next to the giant suit of armour.

This had been going on for a while and it was starting to make him uncomfortable.

And he was sure that Amtrak didn't have any steam engine trains. He'd checked after the ride on the last one.

Finally Saguru cleared his throat. "You.... look familiar." He hesitantly, oh-so-politely, broached the topic. "Have we met before?"

The suit of armour turned and looked towards him. "I don't know... I was thinking you seemed familiar to me too." The polite voice coming from the armour was smaller than expected, as well as much much younger.

Kaito resisted the urge to pound his head against the back of his seat. What was someone in a giant suit of armour doing on a train anyway?

... well, aside from the fact that there was no way in hell someone in a giant suit of armour would make it through airport security....

"Have you ever been to New York?" Saguru inquired.

"No." The armour seemed to think it over. "Are you from Amestris?"

"No." Saguru shook his head. "Frankfurt?"

"No... Xing?"

"No... Paris?"

Kaito sighed and pulled out a chocolate bar. After a moment's deliberation, he broke it in half and offered the other blond kid half. The boy took half, giving him a slight smile in return as he motioned to the large suit of armour and Saguru as if to say 'What about those two, eh?'

"No... Aerugo?"

Kaito grinned back, rolling his eyes as he settled back in his seat. They'd probably be at this for a while.

-Politely, of course.

+++ 

"Where's New Zealand?" Saguru muttered, peering out the window. "I don't see New Zealand."

Kaito rolled his eyes. Figured. Something interesting happened and the detective was worried about Geography.
"So. Um." He raised an eyebrow at their hosts, who had picked up them up somewhere in New Mexico. "Anal probes? What's up with that?"

The two grey figures with the wide black oval shaped eyes glanced at each other. ~We don't know.~
The one with the more triangular face responded.

~We where hoping you could tell us.~ The other one, who was a slightly more pale shade of grey added.

It was kind of weird hearing their voices without them actually moving their lips, or hearing it with his ears, but they were nice enough to give them a ride, so Kaito was willing to overlook what might be considered oddities.

Even if it took them -really- off the beaten track.

+++ 

Stormclouds gathered ominously in the background, the occasional dramatic lightening strike illuminating the footpath to the hotel.

Kaito looked up at the run down sign advertising the motel with it's flickering light and the crows flying around it. "Oh, Bleep no."

Saguru looked at him suspiciously, eyes squinting slightly to focus in the dark. "Did you just say 'bleep no'?"

"Yes." Kaito said firmly. "And I meant it."

He pointed up to the sign.

'Bates Motel'.

Saguru blinked. "Oh, bleep no."

"That's what I said." Kaito shrugged. The curtains of the upstairs window flickered.

"Right." Saguru squared his shoulders. "Keep walking. Maybe there's a 'Dewdrop Inn' up ahead or something. Someplace a little less psycho."

++++ 

Kaito grabbed Saguru's arm, pulling them around the corner of the building, then peered around the wall suspiciously.

"What's wrong?" Saguru queried.

"There's some guys out there." Kaito frowned. "With suspicious bulges under their coats."

Saguru glanced down at the bulge in his pants. "... Don't most guys?"

Kaito gave him an unamused glare. The detective always picked the weirdest times to have a sense of humour. "Black suits, carrying guns clear enough for you?"

"Oh." Saguru paused. "Ohhh..." There was a quiet unspoken 'shit' on the end of that sentence.
"Yeah." His first instinct was to flee, head for the rooftops. It was his usual instinct, but it was slowly being sublimated by the one to protect... He could get away, of course, but it would mean leaving Saguru behind, which he wasn't going to do.

So. No running. Second choice. Bluff it out. He glanced around, noting the mass of high school students --probably just freed from the hallowed halls of learning-- meandering down the streets of the small town in a screaming, laughing talking tangle.

Or camouflage. Camouflage was good. "C'mon." He grabbed Saguru's hand and pulled him across the street, blithely dodging the cars speeding joyously from the local high school, terrifying Saguru in the process. He was dressed as a girl, so he took the opportunity to thread his fingers through Saguru's and walk down the street while holding hands.

"Hey." He greeted a slip of a blond girl who was chattering excitedly at a couple of guys with long-suffering expressions. "You wouldn't happen to know a good place to get a cup of coffee, would you?"

"You're obviously not from around here." The shorter of the guys deadpanned.

"You would be correct." Saguru said dryly in his cultured British tones. That got a chuckle from the teenagers, their body language relaxing as they mentally classified them as 'way out of town'.

"There's only one place -to- get coffee around here," The taller guy explained, smiled shyly. "The Talon. We're headed there now, if you want to follow us." The two nodded in agreement.

"Ta." Kaito smiled warmly back, purposely keeping his body language casual as he kept an eye on the two men in black suits who were looking around the crowd, watching the smaller groups of people suspiciously.

Saguru was explaining to the girl that no, the Loch Ness monster was in Scotland, he was ENGLISH and no, he'd never seen the damn Scot's mythical monster when the rumbling noise started.

Kaito was taken back; he was quite sure that Kansas did not have earthquakes. The men in black, pausing in the middle of the street, were surprised as well.

Especially when a rampaging herd of glowing green mutant sheep trampled them during a headlong dash down the town's main street, taking out a few of the cars that didn't speed out of the way in time.

The local teenagers didn't appear to be surprised, much less impressed by the freaky sheep.

"'Nother one for the Wall of Weird." The girl commented as the last of the sheep disappeared.

The tall guy shrugged. "Welcome to Smallville."

"And another thing." Saguru ranted, still in the middle of a good proper British snit-fit. "We don't do funny things to our sheep!"

+++

"Should be safe, you said! Not risk other people, you said!"

Kaito sighed, idly playing with a stick while Saguru paced the boulder they were currently hiding on
and ranted. When he'd first met the stoic British detective, Kaito thought he'd never get a reaction out of Saguru other than determination or smug arrogance. And while he was pleased that Saguru was comfortable enough with him now not to always show his public face, he sort of missed the silence.

"You were the one who said that they didn't believe in Grabiods." Kaito growled back, poking at a few rocks that fell off the boulder, hitting the desert sand below with heavy thuds. He would have thought after the Roswell Grey Aliens and the Mutant Sheep Saguru would know better than to say things like that.

"I said I didn't believe in giant man eating worms!" Saguru waved his arms around. "THAT thing is not a giant worm! Worms are something that you use for bait for FIS-"

Thankfully the rest of Saguru's tirade was cut off before he could finish the accused word. Unfortunately, it was cut off by the humongous white THING that rose out of the red desert soil, it's beak like maw open as it's wriggling serpent like tongues searched the boulder's sides to see if it could grab them. Kaito watched as one of them almost touched his shoe before the creature sunk back into the earth with what sounded like a disappointed groan.

The earth around the boulder rippled a surprisingly little amount as something the size of several elephants put together moved through it.

"Well." Kaito mused thoughtfully, tapping the boulder with the stick again. "It -could- be worse."

"Do NOT say it could be worse!" Saguru ranted. "Bad things ALWAYS happen when someone says it could be worse so don't... don't... Okay, HOW could it be worse?" The detective finished the sentence with a defeated groan.

"Well..." Kaito drawled, pointing with the stick to a clump of boulders several hundred metres --out of bullet range-- where two men in black were currently being harassed by the giant white monstrosity. "We could be over there."

+++ 

"Oh, shut up." Saguru snapped.

Kaito sniffed. "-I- didn't say anything."

"You don't have to." Saguru grumped. "After long periods of close exposure of how you think, I can now read your MIND."

Considering Kaito was trying to remember what pair of underwear he was wearing currently, if any, and when was the last time they stopped for breakfast, he sure hoped that Saguru couldn't. So they missed the bus. Big deal. Wasn't like they were in a hurry to get anywhere, they didn't exactly have a schedule that they were following.

"We could always hitch-hike." He said cheerfully, sticking out his thumb, half in jest. "You do have your towel, right?"

"Oh, Ha bloody, Ha...a... uh?" Saguru blinked as a slick looking black sports car pulled up to a stop in front of them.

"Are you in need of a ride?" A slightly mechanical voice inquired as the red light on the front of the car moved back and forth with a small swooshing noise.
"Um... yes?" Kaito blinked. There didn't appear to be any driver in the car...

Both doors opened. "Hop in. Where are you going?"

Saguru paused. "Puck?" He ventured, switching to code names out of paranoia's sake.

Kaito blinked, debated a moment then switched over to Kid. Kid looked at the car. Yup, black car, whooshing red light, no driver, offering them a ride. It didn't seem to be overly hostile, if nothing else it seemed to have a sort of dry patient aura around it.

"No where in particular," Kid shrugged, wandering over to the driver's seat. "We're just travelling the country. Tantei-san? You coming?"

Saguru gaped a moment more, then clambered into the passenger's seat. The doors closed behind them as they fastened their seatbelts. "I am KITT by the way." The car announced, smoothly pulling away from the kerb. "My usual driver is making an ass of himself with a woman, so I decided to go for a drive."

"Fair enough." Kid agreed. Hirokini made a chirping sound in his ear, signalling that the either the cell phone battery was dead or they weren't getting a connection. Kid disconnected the camera and the speaker he wore to save those small batteries. "This is Hobbit and I'm Puck. We're travelling the country before school starts up again in England."

"Excellent." KITT commented. "If you would not mind telling me of some of your adventures, I am in need of intellectual conversation. Consider it a trade for the ride?"

Saguru's shell shock wore off as he smiled slightly. "That, I think we can do."

+++ 

Chapter End Notes

(the 'Where's New Zealand' is a joke from the Star Trek: First Contact movie, where when Picard shows Lily the view of earth from space, New Zealand is missing.
-Nothing to do with the fact that we live here currently, I swear.)
The Grey Zone: Impersonating Ethel Merman

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Michael Shanks: Wow – secrets that Daniel Jackson has... He’s a cross-dresser. Secretly, what’s happening is there’s an episode where Teal’c comes over to visit him and, um, Daniel’s impersonating Ethel Merman.

Behind the Stargate: Secrets Revealed!

♦ ♦ ♦

The Grey Zone: Impersonating Ethel Merman
by Icka! M. Chif

(note: this fic takes place in the middle of 'The Mid-West Snippets'

♦ ♦ ♦

When Kaito finally tracked down where Saguru fled to, he found the detective involved in a discussion with a blue-eyed *ahem* lady about whether or not a pint of Guinness beer and a banana actually did include all the nutritional value needed for a meal.

And Saguru appeared to be, well, if not quite drunk then at least well on his way to tipsy.

But not nearly as tipsy as the other person, if the amount of sloshed beer on the bar was any indication.

Which would have been really funny under most circumstances, but they were trying to keep a low profile and a loud debate on 'Homer's Odyssey' versus 'Alice in Wonderland' complete with sweeping arm gestures really wasn't the way to do it. For one thing, most of the other patrons were discussing football and undergarments.

But still, he supposed that he couldn't blame Saguru for ditching him. It probably hadn't been the greatest of ideas for Kaito to announce to the women's --and he used the term 'women' very loosely here-- restroom that Saguru was crossdressing because he was preparing for the gender-switching surgery. The detective was uncomfortable with dressing in drag as it was. But it was as good of an excuse as any to teach him how to dress as the other gender for a change.

"Sa-chan." He commented softly, tapping the former-now-current blond's arm. If nothing else, he had to admit Saguru in a long blond wig was a bit of a distracting sight. Especially since it was now crooked. He straightened Saguru's wig. "I think you're having a blond moment."

"Sarah?" Saguru's blue-eyed companion peered at Saguru. "I thought your name was Sa-"

"Ah, Kaito." Saguru grinned at him. "This is Danny."

Danny, definitely short for 'Daniel' and not 'Danielle', despite the beaded vintage dress. "Hi." Kaito waved. Danny saluted Kaito with a beer glass, causing the amber liquid to slosh as 'Hello Dolly' played in the background.

"Danny knows Mum from Uni." Saguru explained, slurring slightly. "He's offered to put us up for
"I remember my OEs." Danny grinned fondly. It took Kaito a second to remember 'OE' meant 'Overseas Experience'. "If nothing else, you can grab a shower at my place."

Mum was still a wild card in their whole hierarchy of 'safe/not safe', but Danny didn't seem to have any sort of bad or weird vibes. He just seemed like a guy who'd been stressed at work and wanted to catch a beer and forget about things for a while.

And if it happened to be at one of the two Gay Bars in Colorado Springs on Crossdressing Night, so be it. There probably was a good reason for it.

Such as the fact that not many people were going to look for someone in a place like this, which was Kaito's logic for dressing both he and Saguru like women and hiding out for a few hours here. Even if Kaito made a convincing girl while Saguru definitely did not. But that was okay. Half the people in the bar didn't make good women either, but they made up for it with enthusiasm.

While Saguru, no matter what he was dressed in, was thoroughly himself. Which was both an asset and a liability.

"All right." Kaito agreed. "But I drive back."

Danny appeared to debate this for a moment, then agreed. "Okay."

Kaito let out a small breath at the agreement. They might be taking some strange risks on this venture, but being killed by a friendly drunk while driving wasn't in the plans.

Never mind the fact that Kaito didn't have a driver's license in this or any country. It just wasn't practical in Japan. And there hadn't been a reason to get one in Britain.

Saguru and Danny's conversation drifted off towards which country had the worst drivers, 'Guru was leaning towards France, but it sounded like Danny had him beat with Egyptian driving.

With a small sigh, Kaito set himself at the bar behind Saguru, watching the dancing and the flirting going on. It was his fault Saguru was being chased after by an international organisation, the least he could do was watch the detective's back while Saguru had fun and let his guard down.

+++ A loud knocking woke Kaito up.

Actually, it was more of a pounding. A really heavy pounding.

Accompanied by shouting. "Open up, Danny! I know you're in there."

Crap. Okay... Mr. Blue Eyes from last night evidently had friends. Loud friends.

It took a moment to squirm out of Saguru's grasp --he really needed an escape hatch or something-- and stumble over to open the door, thankfully dressed in sweatpants and an old t-shirt that needed washing. "He's asleep." He growled curtly.

Then did a mental double take as he realised that the guy with the silver-ish hair was Military. The US Airforce jacket was a bit of a dead give away. Double crap. At least he was carrying two coffees, so it most likely wasn't a military kidnapping.

"You're not Danny." The Military guy commented blandly.
Kaito scratched the back of his head. "You wouldn't happen to be a money collector, would you?"
He ventured hopefully.

"No." Military guy growled, then proceeded to push his way past Kaito. Kaito debated putting up a
fight for a moment, then let him pass. Saguru was the hand to hand fighter, not Kaito. "DANNY!"

Military guy was definitely gearing up to wake up their gracious host. And despite their initial rather
unusual greeting, Danny had been a pretty cool host.

Or had at least offered them blankets and shower before crashing into bed.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa..." He quickly shut the door and scurried between Military guy and their host's
doors. "I don't know who you are or what your relationship with Danny is, but he's been a nice guy to
us and I don't think he really wants or needs you barging in while he's sleeping."

Brown eyes evaluated him for a moment. "Colonel Jack O'Neill." The older man growled, obviously
irritated by the interruption. "US Air Force. Dr. Jackson works with me."

Oh, that was a deep can o' worms they'd stumbled into. "Right. Okay." Quick... think think think...
did NOT need to be messing with the US Military... Wasn't their motto 'Shoot First, Ask Questions
Last' or something like that? "Tell you what. I'll go wake up Danny, let him know that we're heading
out. You... just sit on the couch over there and stare at my friend until he wakes up, okay? Okay."

Before the Colonel could protest that plan of action, Kaito stole the coffee and disappeared to
Danny's bedroom. He felt better having a door between him and the authority figure, but also guilty
for leaving Saguru unprotected against the Colonel's wrath. Not that glaring at Saguru would do
anything, the detective was impervious when asleep.

"Hey, Danny?" He got no response from the lump in the middle of the bed. Great. Another non-
morning person. He sighed as he crouched down, shaking their host's shoulder. Or what they hoped
was his shoulder. "Wake up, Dr. Jackson. I've got coffee."

The lump stirred, zomibish sounds coming out from under the blankets. A hand reached out from
said lump, blindly groping around. "Coffee..." Kaito tempted again. "You have to sit up first."

Danny did. Kaito winced. While he and Saguru had taken a shower last night --separately--, their
host had not. Forget sounding like a zombie, Danny LOOKED like one. The tastefully done make-
up was now all over his face. He handed Danny the coffee. "Here."

He got a mumbled reply in return as the coffee was promptly drained. "You awake?" Kaito queried.

Danny grunted.

"There's a guy in the front room, calls himself Colonel Jack O'Neill." Kaito commented.

Suddenly Danny was a WHOLE lot more awake. "Shit."

"He brought the coffee." Kaito offered cheerfully.

"Peace offering." Danny groaned, running a hand through his hair. "We had a fight."

"I kinda got that." Kaito agreed. "Do you want us to hang around in case you need to kick him out?"

"It's not like that." Danny paused, then corrected himself. "-He's- not like that. There's just some...
stuff going on. Work-related stuff."
Yeah. Had gotten that sort of feeling. "Okay. Um... He's waiting in the front room, I wouldn't let him come back here."

"Thanks." Danny drew a knee up, looking tired. "Yeah. Sorry about that."

"No problem." Kaito paused. "Er... You wanna grab a shower? Get the make-up off? He doesn't know about that, does he?"

"No." Danny smirked, a bit of merriment glinting in his eyes. "Military personnel aren't allowed at that -particular- establishment in case of blackmail. The dresses aren't so bad, once you get used to them too. The pantyhose pinch like a bitch though." Danny stretched slightly, grabbing his glasses off the table and putting them on. He blinked owlishly at Kaito. "Damn. You really are a guy. I owe Saguru five bucks."

"Thanks." Note to self: Strangle Saguru for not letting him on the bet. And for telling Danny his real name. "I'll make some coffee while you're in the shower. Then we'll pack up and get out of your hair."

"No rush." Danny assured him, peeling back the blankets and slowly sliding his legs out. "You're merely helping to postpone the inevitable."

"Always glad to be of service." Kaito gave him a half smile. "We could probably smuggle you out of here without his notice if you needed."

"Thanks, but no." Danny waved him off. Kaito stood up and beat a hasty retreat.

"Um, hey, Danny?" He paused by the door as Danny staggered over towards the master bathroom. "In case I forgot to tell you, thanks for letting us crash the night." Then he was out the door and gone before Danny could respond.

Kaito found the good Colonel doing just what Kaito had suggested, sitting on the couch, glaring daggers at Saguru's still sleeping form. He hid a wince, tugging on the back of his scalp to ease a headache that was starting to form. Coffee. Right. He'd need some to wake up Saguru.

"Oi, Guru." He walked over to the former blond and nudged him with a foot. "Wake up." Saguru muttered, rolled over and attempted to snuggle with Kaito's foot. Kaito resisted the urge to blush. Oh, yes. that was really going to impress the cranky Colonel. "Up. Wake up."


"Guh?" Saguru sat up, blinking and looking around sleepily.

Kaito patted the top of Saguru's head. "Good boy." He wandered off towards the kitchen, ignoring the Colonel as Saguru squinted and peered at the military guy as if seeing him for the first time. Which he was.

He was probably going to look back at that scene and laugh. Later. Much later, away from any possibility of weaponry firing in his direction. Well, Military directed weaponry in any case.

Coffee was easy enough to figure out, although the layer of dust on most of the appliances was a bit puzzling. Probably a lot of out of town missions or something.

Kaito poked his head in the living room. Saguru and the Colonel still seemed to be in the middle of a staring contest. Although on Saguru's side it was probably because he couldn't see the daggers the Military guy was shooting him. "'Guru! Up!"
He got some rude grumbles back about bossy mothers and the like that he ignored in favour of finding clean cups. That found, he discovered the milk was at least two weeks past expiration date and quickly put it back and looked for sugar instead. "GURU!"

"Bloody 'ell!" Saguru snarled back and Kaito finally heard the sound of the detective up and moving around. Saguru probably had a bit of a hangover too, so Kaito was probably being a bit on the cruel side. Ah, well. Once they got out of here, he'd make it up to Saguru with breakfast or something.

Then the Colonel made a sudden appearance in the kitchen, having beat a hasty retreat from the main room. In the background he heard a zipper. Saguru getting dressed. Ah. So that's why the Colonel fled, giving Saguru some privacy to change. Decent of him.

"So..." The Colonel took a sip of his coffee. "Where exactly did you say you know Daniel from?"

"Danny knows 'Guru's Mum." Kaito commented, sticking his hands in his pockets for lack of anything to fiddle with. "From the UK."

"I'd picked that up. The accent is kind of distinctive."

"Yeah."

Saguru stumbled in, glasses halfway down his nose, dressed but not tucked in and his hair sticking every which way. "Coffee."

"Brewing." Kaito grabbed one of the mugs he'd found for coffee and quickly filled it with tap water. "Drink this until then."

Saguru took the glass, sniffed it suspiciously, glared at Kaito accusingly for handing him something non-caffeinated. Kaito shrugged it off. "I'm gonna go get dressed. Be right back. Stare at each other some more or something in interim."

He beat a hasty retreat. From the silence that echoed from the kitchen, the staring war had resumed again. He sighed, realised he was doing that more than usual and quickly tossed on some clothing that didn't stink too horribly --they needed to get to a laundromat sometime soon-- and quickly began packing things up with an efficiency borne of weeks of practise.

Plans, plans... Breakfast as soon as they left. Then... yeah. South was at least warmer, although not by much, but things were at least getting above freezing.

"Coffee." Saguru called.

"Thanks." He quickly folded up the sheets and blankets and tossed them on the couch. It was messy, but somehow he doubted that Danny would complain all that much. The Colonel might, but Danny wouldn't.

"So your name is Saguru." The Colonel was drawling as Saguru fixed up two cups of coffee. One with lots of sugar, one without. "Hmm... Why does that sounds vaguely familiar?"

"He's a Teenage Detective from Europe." Kaito belatedly realised that the shower had stopped running and Danny was now walking into the room. Saguru passed him the pot of coffee. For a moment Kaito wondered if Danny was going to drink it right out of the pot, then the blue-eyed man took one of the mugs off the table. "Not some internationally wanted criminal, Jack."

"Right, right..." The Colonel had a sharp look in his eye. "Weren't you recently in some paper. Eligible bachelor or something?"
"You read that kind of rot?" Kaito raised an eyebrow. Danny and Saguru looked at the Colonel inquiringly.

"Eh. If there's nothing better laying around." The Colonel shrugged easily. "So. 'Zat you?"

"Can you blame for travelling overseas if it was?" Saguru grumbled back, cradling his coffee.

"Hmm..." The Colonel shrugged and Kaito realised that was all the answer they were going to get out of him.

"You ready to go?" He asked Saguru instead. The detective glared at him, holding the cup protectively.

"He's a morning person, isn't he?" Danny offered sympathetically to the detective. Saguru nodded. Kaito sighed, then remembered he was trying not to do that so much. Saguru shot him a slightly worried glance. Kaito jerked his head, motioning for them to go. Saguru sighed and drained his glass in a couple of gulps.

"Ready." Saguru announced. "Thank you for your hospitality." The Colonel and Danny exchange a similar glance to the one Kaito and Saguru had shared, only this one asking if they had said something to drive them away.

"We've got a bus to catch." Kaito explained, giving them a hasty bow. The two older guys had things to talk about and it would be best to do it without an audience.

Or as Kid would think, Get The Hell Outta Dodge. What ever that meant, he was pretty sure he'd picked that one up somewhere around Kansas. Still, what ever worked.

Saguru grabbed the bag that Kaito had finished packing, shoving his feet into boots and wrestling his coat on in an ill-coordinated dance. Kaito grabbed the bag from Saguru as he shoved his feet into his shoes, then handing the bag back once Saguru had a free hand to put on his own coat. Danny followed them out, the Colonel hovering by the kitchen door.

"Will call you later tonight, make sure things are fine." Kaito commented softly, shaking Danny hand. "Your car is out front."

He was grateful that no-one inquired as to -how- he got the car back safely, without a scratch. It involved a flash of lights and sirens from a local cop car, some trees and a flying car. He'd really rather prefer to be out of town before Danny heard any stories about that one.

"I'll be fine." Danny waved it off, but there was a tired gratitude in his eyes. Evidently this was an old dance between friends and Kaito felt a twinge of sympathy. "Take care. And have fun touring."

"We will." Saguru agreed. "Take care of yourself. I'll tell Mum when we see her that we saw you."

"Thanks." Danny waved them out as they walked out into the cold Colorado air. Kaito shivered, glaring at the sky. Stupid winter. After this, he wanted summer, some place WARM. Maybe they should go to the other hemisphere, New Zealand should be warm this time of year and he'd heard it was beautiful.

Or Fiji. Yeah. Fiji would be nice.

Saguru grumped behind him, muttering dark things about light as he stalked through the snow. Kaito pulled out a pair of sunglasses from his pack, or was it Saguru's pack? Eh, one of their packs and passed it back. Saguru grunted his thanks and put them on.
"C'mon. Breakfast." Kaito sighed, striking off in a random direction. Saguru made a rude sound. "Yeah, well it's your own fault for getting tipsy last night."

"I was not tipsy. I've had more than that to drink at Mum's parties." Saguru said with great dignity, which would have been a lot more convincing if he wasn't swaying slightly.

"Right. And it's only a mild hangover."

"It is." Saguru agreed. Kaito groaned, rubbing his head and wondering where he put his hat.

"And who's the moron who gave a stranger his real name?" He growled.

"I...." Saguru paused, then frowned. "Oh, dear."

"Yes, exactly."

Saguru was silent. Just as Kaito was starting to worry, he heard a faint noise behind him. "Sorry."

"Not your fault." Kaito rubbed his hands down his face. Saguru was an inherently honest person. Subterfuge and lies were not his standard way of thinking. And cross-dressing was way out of Saguru's comfort zone, yet the detective had done it anyway, because Kaito has asked him to.

The detective got a stubborn look to his face. "Yes. It is."

Kaito debated arguing and gave it up as lost. "Eh, don't worry about it." He waved it off. It looked like the Colonel and Danny had enough on their hands without delving into some teenager's secrets. "Besides, doesn't the US Military have that 'Don't ask, don't tell' policy anyway?"

Saguru paused a moment. "I don't think that's really what they mean by that, Kaito-kun."

Kaito grinned.

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

The beaded dress and 'Hello Dolly' is in tribute to Ethel Merman, BTW. Hello Dolly was written for her.

-Evidently the thing about pint of Guinness beer and a banana is true, but just barely. So's the thing about military officers not being allowed to enter or be seen around GLBT places, in case someone takes a photo and attempts to blackmail them with this information.

Dodge City is also in Kansas, BTW.

See the stuff you learn from fanfics? ^__^

The New Zealand and Fiji comments are a bit of an inside joke, since while TGZ was taking place in Britian, I was writing it from the States. They go to the States and I'm now in the most British city in New Zealand/the Southern Hemisphere.

-we're planning on visiting Fiji as well. XD
"Where are we now?" Kaito yawned and stretched, then hastily fixed his wig. Gods, it felt good to get off the bus and move around for a minute.

Saguru ran a hand over his hair, wincing at the gel in it. "Someplace called South Park. We're still in Colorado."

"Ah." He paused in mid-stretch, luxuriating in the feeling of some of his bones and tendons finally sliding into alignment again as he watched some grade school kids, bundled up in winter clothes cross the street. "Seems like a quiet place." At least the bus depot was a lot quieter than some of the other places they'd visited.

Then a car ploughed through one of the kids, leaving him laying there in a pile of mangled orange fabric and blood.

"Oh my god!" One of the kids screamed. "You killed Kenny! You Bastards!!!"

"Oh, give it a fuckin' rest." The largest kid of the group snarled as the rest of them continued on their way without any apparent shock at the indent.

"Yeah, Kyle." The other member agreed as first kid joined him. "It's like, what? The third time this week? Give it a rest already."

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

The kids wandered off.

Kaito and Saguru stared.


Saguru shook himself out of his slight stupor, closing his mouth. "No." He decided as a dog wandered up and sniffed the carcass. "I don't think I will. I'll be on the bus if you need me." And with that, he turned and got back on the bus.

Kaito glanced at the dead body again, now being dragged of by the dog. No screaming and the people around acted as if it was normal. He shivered and got back on the bus.

This place was -creepy-.
"Where are we going NOW?" Kaito groaned as he peered out from under his arm, which he had slung over his eyes to block the light. The bus jolted him from side to side as it travelled down the road, occasionally jostling him into Saguru.

"Not sure yet." Saguru commented blandly. He looked tired too.

"Just so long as the people look reasonably normal this time." Kaito groused, sliding his arm back down and covering his vision. "If I see another duck..."

"I would have thought you would have liked that Darkwing character in St. Canard." Saguru commented mildly. "Same fashion sense."

"Oh ha bloody ha." He had to stop saying that. Britain had not been good for his speech patterns. "Did you see his gun? And the opening speech? And what was up with 'Suck Gas, Evildoers'?"

"Or the pilot and the two small children that followed him around." Although the term 'pilot' was used loosely in this case.

"I just wondered where he got all that gas from." Kaito shifted in his seat, trying to keep his legs from falling asleep. "Eat a lot of beans? And besides, he had a cape."

"No capes." Saguru agreed.

"No capes." Kaito paused. "Well, except Kid's. But that's actually a hang glider, so it doesn't count."

Saguru wisely changed the subject. They'd had that argument many times before. "So what about that hero in Duckburg?"

"He was more obnoxious than the Darkwing guy." Kaito muttered.

"You're just mad that when he got flustered and starting pushing his buttons and randomly began throwing fish." There was just a touch of smugness in Saguru's tone.

Kaito swung the hand that wasn't covering his face out, smacking Saguru in the chest. The blond chuckled. "But yes, the posturing and blathering was rather annoying. What was his name again? Roboduck?"


"Don't tell me you-"

"No."

"Good."

They lapsed into silence again. "Ducks?" Saguru questioned, as if he couldn't quite believe it himself.

"Whole towns of them." Kaito agreed. "Where are we going now?"

There was some rustling as Saguru pulled a map out of his pocket and looked at it. "Mouseton."
Kaito lifted his arm up again to peer at Saguru. "You're kidding."

"Nope." Saguru put the map back in his pocket. "We're stopping at Spoonerville first."

"Spoonerville?"

The bus rumbled to a stop, the bus driver shouting for Spoonerville.

Yup. Spoonerville.

Just so long as it was anything but ducks. Not that he had anything against ducks. It was just kinda creepy to be like giant ape-faced creatures surrounded by cities filled with ducks. Even if they were friendly ducks. Mostly, anyway.

"C'mon, Maxie!" A cheerful called, voice cracking slightly on the last syllable. "We're gonna be late for Mickey's picnic! A-Hyuck!"

"Coming Dad." A much younger voice called. "Of all the days for the car to break down..."

"Dogs?" Saguru mused out loud. "Beagles?"

Kaito firmly put his arm back over his eyes. "I'm not looking, I'm not looking, I'm not looking..."

Well, at least it wasn't ducks.

+++ 

If he wanted to be honest --and really, where was the fun in that?-- Kaito started it. There was only so much 'safe' conversation that could be tolerated before you could start to feel your brain dribble out of your ears in rotten oozing green masses.

Without consulting the other, they had each gotten a chocolate bar from what passed as the local convenience stores and smuggled it on to the bus. After the ride had started they'd each casually handed the other the sweet, only to be pleasantly surprised to receive one in return.

For two guys on the run, that had actually been pretty impressive of themselves.

After some quiet snickering and eating of said chocolate bars, the debate had started.

"I think I should get two chocolates." He commented in Japanese. Partly to hear his native language again --Americans had different accents and dialects depending on where they went, but in general it was a more staccato sound than the British he'd gotten used to-- partly for security reasons. They were dressed as Japanese students currently anyway.

One of Saguru's eyebrows had almost touched his hairline. "-Two- chocolates?"

"One for me, one for my other half." He announced loftily.

Saguru frowned, peering at him suspiciously. Except for a slight twitching of his lips, Kaito had kept a pretty straight face. "In that case..." Saguru said slowly. "I should get two chocolates too. One from each half."

"You did." Kaito pointed to the chocolate wrapper that was the remains of Saguru's chocolate. "It came in two pieces."
The former blond pulled out the wrapper and held it up, like he was holding a snake by the tail about to bite him at any moment. "That doesn't count."

"Why not?"

"It has coconut in it." Saguru pointed under the word 'Mounds' on the red and white wrapper to where it said 'coconut'. "Therefore it doesn't count as Valentine's Day chocolate."

It was Kaito's turn to look sceptical. "Since when does coconut have anything to do with it?" At least he hadn't gotten the one with the nuts in it.

He got a smug smirk in return. "Coconut's White. So it's for White Day."

Okay, so the detective had a point. "But there's chocolate. So it's for Valentine's Day." He'd chosen it because it had dark chocolate, unlike the rest of the chocolate bars at the store. "Would you prefer if I had gotten you the one with nuts?"

Saguru given him a sour look. The former blond was mildly allergic to nuts. Hence, the comment.

"So you still got two pieces of chocolate and I only got one." Kaito continued. Still, his had been a solid chocolate bar. Not quite as creamy as the Meiji chocolate bars back home, but still, chocolate was chocolate.

"Do you want to check the weights and see if they're equal too?" Saguru snarked. The tone might have been bitter sounding, but his expression was amused.

Kaito grinned back, warming up to the friendly dispute.

It was St. Valentine's Day and they were arguing about chocolate.

No flowers, red hearts and soppy romance for Valentine's Day for them, thanks. They'd continue on as they had began.

+++ 

Kaito stretched as they got off the bus, making a surreptitious glance around the bus depot. Both he and Saguru were tired, stiff and sore from travelling on the bus for hours. Fortunately, so was everyone else, so they fit in perfectly.

Next stop, a nice hotel room and hopefully a good night's sleep.

"Keystone City." Saguru read a pamphlet that had been floating around, one of those supposedly informative ones that most cities had, stating the big attractions in hopes of drumming some tourist business. "Home of the Flash and the Flash Museum."

Kaito snorted. "They celebrate their streakers here?"

Wooooosh! A red blur passed by them, the breeze that followed blowing stray papers around, flipping skirts up and knocking hats off of people's heads.

Kid pulled his white cape off of his head and blinked, watching his silk hat merrily bounce down the street.

Saguru blinked. Kid blinked. Everyone else when on with their business.
Woooooosh! A red and white blur stopped in front of them, forming into a lanky young teen in red and white spandex and the wildest mop of brown hair he'd ever seen. The teen grinned, holding Kid's white top hat out to him. "Hereyago,youdroppedyourhat."

Wooooosh! The boy was gone again, moving faster than the speed of sight.

Kaito blinked again, dressed again in his normal clothing, backpack over his shoulder.

"-Now opening the Impulse Wing." Saguru continued reading the pamphlet.

Kaito scratched his head, then shrugged. "No capes." He offered gamely.

Saguru gave him a dry look before turning around and walking away. "How soon before the next bus leaving for -anywhere-?"

+++  

There were various advantages of buses over trains and trains over buses.

The buses made frequent breaks at truck stops, where you could rent a shower and catch a meal. Quite a few of the drivers seemed to love their job, telling stories and on one instance, the driver with a lovely Mississippi accent taught them trucker's lingo. Just simple things, but you never knew when the strangest things could come in handy. And the buses tended to be on time, therefore faster. Unless there was a new driver who got lost.

Trains couldn't get lost nearly as easily, but were often having to pull over to allow for the freight trains to go by so therefore did not adhere to any sort of schedule. On the up side, you could stand up and walk around on a train, or hang out in the observation lounge and talk with people. Especially the old guys who tended to be train freaks. Or occasionally catch an overpriced snack in the lounge or a meal in the dining car.

The walking around was a bonus for Kaito, who didn't like enclosed places. Saguru had once commented after Kaito had managed to rope some kids into cheerleading routines that if he was that eager to burn off calories, he should try beating his head against the wall, it burned one hundred and twenty calories per hour. Maybe more if he was really active.

Kaito wanted to know how Saguru knew that. And who thought of finding out how many calories an hour it burned. Or how they tested it and what was the size of the painkiller the test subject needed afterwards. Saguru had merely smirked back and gone back to his book.

Saguru read a lot of books. It was funny, how it seemed like all they did was sit around and eat, and yet he was always tired and hungry. Saguru said it was a factor of things, their bodies constantly adjusting their balance to moving at high speeds and their brains having to deal with a constant influx of new information.

Kaito thought Saguru was full of it and it was the sheer boredom.

On the other hand, with the bus drivers, they tended not to put up with loud riotous music. The American train conductors, for the most part, appeared not to give a flying flip about most things that went on. Such as the current musical duel between the hip hopper on one end of the train car with his bitches, hos, and sexy mamas and the heavy metal guy on the other end of the car with his loud indecipherable emo wailing.

And there was a baby wailing.
Kaito didn't blame the baby. Next to him, Saguru was making little wincing noises while he rubbed his eyes. The half-briton was looking like he had an eyestrain headache. Kaito glanced around.

"One... Two... Three." He whispered quietly.

The entire train car went dim for a moment, then the dim lights went out again. Except for the thin high wail of the baby, silence descended. Wails came from the owners of instruments of musical torture. Several people stirred and someone clapped a few times.

"And the baby?" Saguru whispered back, looking amused.

He'd heard the infant's parents trying to quiet their noisy child. The child wasn't hungry or needing a nappy change, which meant that it probably would quiet down now that their eardrums weren't being assaulted. "I'm a Magician, not a Miracle Worker." Kaito grumbled back, settling down to try to get some sleep.

+++  

"'Guru?" Kaito mumbled as Saguru shook him awake. He could feel the train slowing down around them.

"Come on." Saguru pulled their bags from the overhead bin. "Let's go."

"Huh?" Kaito glanced around him. People were already gathering bags and lining up to disembark the train. He scratched his head, stretched and joined Saguru. He'd primarily switched over to a nocturnal existence, sleeping during the day when Saguru was awake, then staying awake while Saguru slept. But it meant that it took a little while to adjust when woken up unless it was an emergency.

They trudged in line down the small stairs, then into the bright outside. Kaito grimaced and put on a pair of sunglasses. "Where are we?" He questioned. The tickets they had went to Los Angeles.

"Tucson, Arizona. I have a friend here who's invited us to crash on her futon for a few days," Saguru said, pulling out his own pair of sunglasses and putting them on. "Met her via on a Mystery internet community. I already gave her a call before the train stopped, look for a short bouncing red-headed woman."

"'Kay." Kaito yawned. "What's her name?"

"Ysabet."

+++ Fin +++

Chapter End Notes

Please don't kill me for the last part, had that in mind for -ages-. It's a bit of an in-joke, since I wouldn't have met her, or many of my friends if it hadn't been for the Detective Conan fandom.

-If you don't know who Ysabet is, head over to her site and read the Windfall series.
You won't be sorry.
The Grey Zone: The Highwayman

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

♦ ♦ ♦

The Grey Zone: The Highwayman
by Icka! M. Chif

♦ ♦ ♦

The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees, The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas, The road was a ribbon of moonlight, over the purple moor, And the highwayman came riding, the highwayman came riding...

... up to the hotel door.

Kaito shoved the song out of his head as he concentrated on what was going on below him. He made a mental note not to listen to Saguru's music list anymore. Stupid Loreena McKennitt.

He could see Saguru from his vantage point on the rooftop, the blond bound and gagged with ripped bed sheets next to the window of their second floor room. The two bastards in black -wanted- Saguru to see Kaito coming, so that the detective could try to warn Kaito away. Just like Bess, the landlord's daughter in the song.

Course, in the song, both Bess, --the landlord's black-eyed daughter-- and the Highwayman both end up dead. Bess from shooting herself in the chest during an attempt to warn the Highwayman away with a gun they had tied to her. As for the Highwayman, they shot him down on the highway, --down like a dog on the highway..."}

... Stupid song. Things were not going to end up like that, not if he could help it.

Which he could, provided that he could get Saguru away from the creeps in black. How they'd managed to track them down to this empty rundown dump of a resting place he didn't know.

He did know how to lose them however. Even if it had required some... unpleasantness on his part.

Kaito sighed, nervously rubbing his damp hands against his thighs. He was wasting time. Not that he didn't have some to waste, he'd told Saguru he'd be back from exploring the area around midnight.

--heard the dead man say, 'Look for me by the moonlight; Watch for me by the moonlight; I'll come to thee by the moonlight, though hell should bar the way--

... But Saguru was going to kill him if he ever found out that Kaito was mentally referring to him as the 'Damsel in Distress' from an overly dramatic romantic tragedy.

Right. Enough with the cracking jokes to cover his fear, he had work to do. Kaito closed his eyes, mentally reaching for that state of calm, where everything was both distant and hyper-aware at once.

Kid opened his eyes a moment later, smiling slightly, his mask firmly in place as he took off his jacket and wrapped it around an arm.
Showtime.

On the mental count of three, he tossed a smoke bomb through the window, shattering the glass. Shouts followed as the light in the room suddenly became erratic, the smoke filling up the room. Shots rang out as the bastards in black attempted to shoot anything that moved, and a few things that didn't.

Such as his detective.

Kid swooped off the rooftop onto the balcony below and dashed towards the room where the bullets were flying from, ignoring his instincts shouting at him that he was supposed to go the -other- direction, -away- from the flying projectiles. Depending on the gun, it could hold anywhere between six and eleven rounds and he wasn't sure how many guns they had on them.

He ignored the door, smashing and sweeping the remains of the window with his jacket covered arm before grabbing Saguru and hauling him through. He winced in silent sympathy for pulling Saguru through the glass, but it didn't stop him.

He continued running, not bothering to cut Saguru free just yet. They jumped, shadows running across the parking lot, towards the dubious shelter of the large rounded propane storage tank that heated the water for the hotel. The gun shots hesitated, the men in black scrambling out of the room and exchanged their empty guns for loaded ones.

Shots rang out again, striking the propane tank.

The resulting explosion shook the area, knocking the assassins over, shattering windows and breaking off chunks of the rooftop.

The men quickly returned to their feet, running down the stairs, then across the parking lot, as close as they dared to the burning explosion.

Two bodies writhed in the flames, the heat constricting the muscles and tendons of the corpses even as it burned away flesh and fabric from the bones.

Satisfied, the men quickly left, eager to leave before the explosion attracted any unwanted attention.

Kid ran a hand through Saguru's blond hair, the detective's face hidden against his shoulder. The blond was shaking slightly, not that Kid blamed him. He reached around and carefully undid the gag, freeing Saguru's face.

Saguru wheezed, gasping repeatedly, his face pale in the flickering firelight as the detective struggled to keep his stomach where it belonged. Kid rubbed his back until the dry heaves stopped. "Who?"

Saguru finally choked out.

"The Landlord." Kid said softly, untying the rest of Saguru's bonds. "And his daughter, Bess."

--Bess, the landlord's daughter, the landlord's black-eyed daughter... died in the darkness there--

Subtle, the Black Organisation weren't. Like a sledgehammer to kill a fly, they had been known to blow up entire buildings just to kill one person. But they were thorough. That was how he had discovered all was not well... he'd stopped by the front desk to ask a question about a wake up call and found them with large gaping holes through their head instead.

Moving their still warm bodies and propping them next to the propane tank... Kaito was going to have nightmares later. The calm facade of the Kid was the only thing keeping him focused currently.
"I'll be right back." He said apologetically, freeing the last of Saguru's bonds. "I'm going to get our stuff. Try not to throw-up."

He slipped from the rooftop, sticking to the shifting shadows as much as possible as he returned to their room. Neither of them had unpacked when they had arrived, so he gathered it up, quickly attempting to make the room look as unused as possible. He'd already removed their traces from the record books.

The Black Organisation might not come back and check for what happened, but there sure as hell would be police and curious investigators. Better to not leave any sign that they had been there at all.

Saguru was shivering by the time he got back to the shelter of the rooftop, not all of it from shock. It was damn cold out. The blond had used some of the bedding that had been used to tie him up to bind the worst of his injuries.

"Here." Kid draped Saguru's coat over the detective.

"We're going to need to move quickly, get as far away from here as fast as we can." Saguru commented, his stoic resolve back up and running, although he was still pale. "Any suggestions?"

"The owner has a motorcycle out back." Kid offered with a detached air. He could drive a motorcycle. He could drive a car too, although it was trickier driving on the wrong side of the road, so to speak.

Saguru closed his eyes. "... if we empty the cashbox..." His voice wavered slightly. "... it'll look like a robbery that went wrong."

"Okay." Kid agreed. They'd ditch the motorcycle some place, then put the money in a church offering box or something. There was no way he was going to spend that money.

Saguru nodded again, looking weary. They were going to need to stop some place to take care of those injuries, get some food and water into Saguru. He was slightly afraid of the detective going into shock. Saguru could handle murders and dead bodies, but adding kidnapping and assault to that... There was only so much a mind could bend.

He wondered how much he could take before he snapped.

"Come on." He said, helping Saguru to his feet. "Let's go pay Koizumi a visit."

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

Original poem "The Highwayman" by Alfred Noyes. Sung by Loreena McKennitt in her album "The Book of Secrets."
Chapter Notes

After the dinner with Orla and Icka, I wandered home vaguely thinking about TGZ and how there should be other things happening. Only I couldn’t think of anything where they currently were which would work. Then I thought of one that would work ANYWHERE.

Icka, this one’s for you.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Grey Zone: Encounter in Black
by Jaelle

♦ ♦ ♦

Waking up to find oneself completely immobilised was not an uncommon event when travelling with Kuroba Kaito. So far, Hakuba had woken up to find himself handcuffed, chained to the bed or otherwise bound no less than three times in the last two months. However, this was the first time he found himself to be naked as well. Clearly Kaito was escalating. Hakuba resolved to say something to him about it, as well as a few choice words about making sure the temperature in the damn room was warm before pulling stunts like this...

Funny how Kaito wasn’t there to laugh at the joke.

Funny how Hakuba didn’t recognise the room.

Funny how he couldn’t REMEMBER going to bed last night.

Funny how the last thing he did remember was a blinding flash of pain in his head.

His eyes roamed across what he could see of the room and fell on a tray of what looked suspiciously like implements of torture.

“Oh crap,” Hakuba began yanking at the restraints binding him to the table, trying desperately to remember what Kaito had taught him about escapism.

Nearby, a door opened.

Hakuba craned around to see a tall man in a dark suit and sunglasses approach the tray of implements and pick one up thoughtfully. His mouth went dry. Was this it? After all their running and hiding, they’d still been caught?

The man turned to speak to him...

And went down with a thief in his back.

“Yo,” Kaito said, kicking the guy in the ribs to make sure he stayed down for a while. “Is this a good time for a rescue?”
“God, yes.” Hakuba continued to tug at his bonds. “Let’s get out of here!”

Kaito fiddled with the restraints and managed to loosen them enough for Hakuba to wrench free.

“Clothes?” Hakuba asked hopefully, taking in Kaito’s oversized black suit jacket, which was just covering the young man’s dignity.

“Haven’t found em yet,” Kaito replied, yanking the matching black jacket from the wheezing man on the floor. “Look at it this way, it’s marginally better than nothing.”

Hakuba nodded and donned the offered jacket, quickly doing the buttons up. “Which way out of here?”

“Well, we both came from THERE, so let’s try THIS door,” Kaito pressed a hidden panel, and a door slid open.

The two boys stared at the individual on the other side of the door and screamed.

“Run away! Run away!” Hakuba yelled.

“BACK away! BACK away!” Kaito retorted.

They retreated before their new enemy, each wondering if they’d finally met their match.

“Yeah, you boys are in trouble NOW,” a threatening voice growled from behind them, and they both quickly glanced in its direction.

A white light went off in their eyes, signalling the end.

♦

J snorted and rubbed his side where Kaito had kicked him.

“I come all the way up here to rescue you two, and what do you do? You attack me, treat me like I’m the enemy.” He ranted at the motionless boys. “I didn’t have to come here you know! I didn’t have to come up here to save you from this tentacle monster... don’t you go waving those things in MY direction, pal. You think these two are in trouble? You ain’t seen nothin’ yet. There ain’t a restraining order BIG enough for me to slap it on you right now. What in the hell do you think you are doing? You abducted these two poor boys for what?”

Tentacles waved and gurgles were made.

“Oh, sure. For artistic purposes. Artistic purposes my ASS!”

“I don’t think it’s interested in YOUR ass, slick,” K staggered through the door, rubbing his head. “Damn, that little one is slippery.”

“You’re telling me,” J turned to glare at the boys, noticed they were beginning to come to, and neuralysed them again. “I’ll deal with you two in a minute.”

J and K proceeded to inform the Tentickalyon that it was under arrest for numerous violations of the treatment of humans code, abducting without a permit, and double parking. A cleanup crew began to teleport onboard.

“Oh hey, hey, wait up...” J rushed over to the two men who were carefully steering the two neuralysed boys away. “I haven’t done them yet.” He neuralysed them one more time. “Okay...
you... you both speak English, right?”

They nodded.

“Okay. You’ve both been out all evening, having a good time. Some girls invited you to a party, and you went along because you thought it would be a good time and they were really hot, but someone spiked the punch there so when you wake up you’re both gonna have incredibly painful hangovers, and will promise to never, ever do that again, until the next time. There are no such things as aliens, especially not big ones with tentacles who apparently want to draw you both naked.” He rubbed his sore ribs. “Oh, and one other thing...”

♦

Hakuba opened his eyes and groaned.

“Shut up,” someone near him whimpered.

He rolled an eyeball roughly in the direction of the sound to find Kaito lying next to him.

“Wha’ th’hell?”

♦

“Why are we watching this?”

“Cos you weren’t listening when I did my thing on those two last night,” J retorted. “Now shhh... they’re finally getting to the verbal stage.”

“This is abuse of power, J.”

“How’s your head today?”

“...”

♦

Having finally ascertained who they were, that they were majorly hung over, barely dressed in a pair of suit jackets, and apparently in a barn, the two boys tried to remember what had happened the previous evening.

“Why the hell did we go to that party?” Hakuba asked, massaging his temples.

“You know, I have no idea, but those girls were really pretty,” Kaito said, remaining very, very still so as not to upset the delicate state of his stomach. “Not that THAT explains anything.”

Hakuba blinked. “Oh no.”

♦

“Here it comes.”

♦

“Did we really kiss each other in front of all those people?” Hakuba demanded as his memories flooded back. “And then the dancing? And the touching? Oh God, the touching!”
Kaito sat up abruptly. “Oh wow, it’s all coming back to me now.”

“Isn’t this a little too much?”

“Aw, I told them to remember that it was just the alcohol, no big deal. They’ll get over it.”

Kaito grinned and leaned over to smirk at Hakuba. “Well, at least the evening wasn’t a COMPLETE loss.”

Hakuba sighed and smiled back. “Guess not.”

“...”

“Well... DAMN!”

-End-

ottono O! MA! KE! ottono

Kaito yawned and stuck his hands in the jackets' pockets.

"Huh?" He drew out a long, cylindrical device. "What the heck is this thing?"

"Uh oh."

"Damn it, I KNOW I had that in my SHIRT pocket!"

"You sure it wasn't in the jacket?"

"YES! Why that little... he picked my pocket!"

Kaito fiddled the device a little and a light went off. He blinked.

"Whoa, must be some kind of flashlight or something. Oooh, and it has THREE settings." He turned to grin at Hakuba. "Well, come on... a perfect double entendre like that and you're not taking advantage of it? Or me? What's wrong with you?"

"..."

"Um... Hakuba? Why are you staring at me like that? Hakuba? Uh... oh... what are you doing?! HAKUBA!!"
Okay, I'm stopping now. Really.
WARNING: Morbid Comedy, Spit-take Warning.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Grey Zone: Seattle
by Icka! M. Chif

♦ ♦ ♦

We're not scaremongering, this is really happening, happening...
Mobiles working, Mobiles chirping.
Take the money and run. Take the money and run. Take the money...
Here, I'm alive, everything all of the time.
Here, I'm alive, everything all of the time...
Radiohead, "Idioteque"

In the Pacific Northwest, they caught a ride with a nice elderly lady named Jessica Fletcher. Ms. Fletcher was a mystery novelist from Cabot Cove, Maine and was doing a cross-country trip of her own to visit old friends and come up with more exciting story ideas.

Seven bad directions, three murders, a case of food poisoning ---thankfully no one in the car-- and a flat tire later, Kaito and Saguru said goodbye to Ms. Fletcher and decided to strike out on their own again. For one thing, being shot at by assassins was beginning to appear the much safer option.

The similarities to Kudo Shin'ichi and Edogawa Conan hung silently in the air, but neither of them mentioned it, lest it bring that sort of karma upon their heads.

So it was with a vaguely giddy feeling of exhalation --and having once again slipped past a bullet-- that they found themselves backtracking back to the outskirts of the home of Starbucks Coffee: Seattle, Washington. Washington the State, not the country's capital. Why they had two places named the same thing on opposite coasts was a mystery to Kaito.

Only to discover that the police were looking for them and Ms. Fletcher, because Frank, the head cook and owner of a diner that they had stopped to eat at the day before was missing.

... Karma was a bitch sometimes. Especially Karma brought on by close proximity to someone who had obviously done grievous harm in a past life.

They ended up hanging out with some other travelling pairs while the Police went over everything. A blond girl named Millie was supposed to have met someone at the diner the day before for an appointment and was rather worried about missing it. A friend of hers, a scruffy British bloke named Mason, was keeping her company, alternately comforting and teasing her about it. They were nice enough, although they felt kind of weird to Kaito.

A pair of brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester were in the area on a hunting trip. They seemed nice enough, but people tended to give them strange looks and some leeway once they found out what the brothers were hunting.
Kaito wasn't entirely sure what a 'something-squash' was, but the idea of going out to hunt squash with big guns was kind of weird. So he played cards with Millie while Saguru and Mason discussed the mangling of the English language by Americans in general.

By the time evening rolled around, Frank's Wife, a quiet woman who Kaito had yet to get her name, offered to serve her mother's famous 'Donner Family Beans and Weenies' to everyone involved in the case and was promptly heralded as a saint. The woman had blushed, brushed it off and happily bustled off to the kitchen to serve it.

The officers cheered, visibly brightening at the prospect of hot home-cooked food during a worrying case as they wofled down the food as soon as they got it. The people at the tables Kaito and Saguru were sitting at were last to be served, but the food was no less welcome.

At least until Kaito got a chance to look at the food. "Hobbit?" He inquired, picking at a bit of meat floating among the beans and holding it up. "My slang might be mixed up, but I thought 'Weenies' were a sort of sausage?"

Saguru paused, his first forkful halfway up to his mouth. "My god." Saguru croaked a distinctly green pallor to his already pale skin as his fork dropping out of his suddenly slack hand with a clatter. "It's not Beans and Weenies, it's FRANK and Beans!"

+++ The police found the rest of Frank in the freezer. Lots of them had to go be sick in the bushes, despite comments from superiors that the vomit was evidence. The Winchester brothers left and Millie and Mason seemed to try to communicate with their food.

Saguru decided that he'd rather not know the motivation for this case and they left as soon as they got permission. Privately, they both discussed the merits of going Vegetarian, but eventually discarded the idea. And Kaito couldn't get the image of man-eating squash out of his head.

They caught a ride into town and caught a random bus, Kaito falling asleep as soon as they started moving. He was aware of time passing, then Saguru woke him up to get off the bus. They bought tickets for another city, changed disguises, then settled down for a wait, Kaito curling up for a nap. He was aware of Saguru leaving for a while for a while, then returning with something edible and Kaito allowed himself to drift off into a deeper doze, trusting Saguru to wake him up to get on the bus.

When he woke up, it was with the feeling that more time had passed than he would have thought. The bus terminal had almost completely emptied out except for the group that was gathered around the small television set at one end of the lobby. Saguru was sitting next to him, a slight frown marring his features.

Kaito yawned and stretched, getting the blood moving in his limbs again. "Everything okay?" He asked softly, glancing around. He didn't sense anything out of the ordinary, other than a sense of excitement from the crowd around the television, which wasn't really all that unusual. Probably an American Football game on.

"We missed our bus." Saguru said, quite clearly not looking at him. Kaito blinked, then gave Saguru his full attention. Saguru had a few tells for when he was lying or feeling guilty and not looking towards the person he was talking to was one of them.

"Okay." He agreed slowly. So they missed their bus. They did that frequently, it wasn't the end of the world.
Then some of the conversation from the crowd around the television drifted over. Something about an explosion. And a bus.

Saguru was examining the floor with rapt interest. "Hobbit?" Kaito questioned, feeling the first tendrils of dread creeping in.

"I was testing a theory." Saguru considered softly, his tone of voice completely miserable. "And misplaced my mobile."

"On purpose?"

"Yes." Saguru nodded.

Kaito thought about it for a minute. "On the bus we missed?"

"Yes." The level of misery in Saguru's voice rose a notch.

Kaito raised an eyebrow and idly rubbed his chin, the slight stubble scratching at his fingers. Theory. Misplaced Mobile Phone. Explosion. Bus. While he was getting better at this detective stuff and Saguru was getting better at the thieving stuff, he still didn't quite fit the puzzle pieces together quite as instinctively as Saguru or even Kudo and Hattori did. There was something here he was not getting.

"Where's your mobile?" Saguru questioned softly, rubbing the toes of his shoes against the tile floor.

"In my bag." Kaito responded immediately, knowing where all of his stuff was at any given time. Saguru knew this. "The battery died yesterday while I was talking to Hirokini and I haven't had a chance to recharge it."

"I called Hirokini right before I lost the mobile." Saguru's voice was flat, lacking its usual smug inflections. "Told him which bus we were taking."

And then left the mobile on the bus.

The same bus that was the current source of excitement in the bus station, having been in some sort of explosion.

The puzzle pieces clicked.

Kaito stared in Saguru in shock, a sense of horror rising even as he tried to deny what the detective was implying. "Hirokini-kun..."

Saguru rubbed his forehead, looking like he had a headache. "It was a pattern I noticed shortly after our visit to Chicago. If we were incommunicado with him, such as our joyride with the talking car, it appeared we had a bit more breathing space. At least until we told Hirokini where we were again."

No... The word was right on the edge of his lips, but his throat was too tight to actually say it. The AI was their friend, had been helping them out since the beginning. There was no -way- that Hirokini would be...

Except that the Black Organisation had to be tracking them somehow. He reached up and fiddled with one of the camera earrings he wore.

"I disabled the batteries in them." Saguru said softly. "Your other devices as well. I wasn't entirely certain, didn't -want- to be certain, but I couldn't to take the risk either."
"So your theory..."

"Appears to be correct." Saguru appeared to take no pleasure in having been proven right, Hirokini was his friend as well.

Hirokini was helping the men in black find them. Kaito pinched his eyes shut, struggling against the rising bitter feeling of betrayal and losing.

"'Guru?'" Kaito swallowed, studying the floor as well, his face tight.

"Yes?"

"I'm gonna switch over for a bit." He said mechanically, allowing the cooler, analytical and more importantly, slightly detached Poker Face rise to the surface of his mind and take over. "Okay?"

Saguru finally glanced at him, a silent message of 'do what you have to'. He nodded back, just once, and Saguru leaned back in his chair with a tired sigh.

"Take a nap." The Kaitou Kid advised. "We still need to figure out where to go from here."

+fin+

Chapter End Notes

Millie and Mason are from 'Dead Like Me', Sam and Dean are from 'Supernatural'. 
The Grey Zone: Cascade

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Grey Zone: Cascade
By Icka! M. Chif

♦ ♦ ♦

I remember when, I remember, I remember when I lost my mind
There was something so pleasant about that place.
Even your emotions had an echo, in so much space
And when you're out there, without care,
yeah, I was out of touch
But it wasn't because I didn't know enough
I just knew too much
Does that make me crazy? Probably...
-Gnarls Barkley, "Crazy"

"Ore wa Hirokini ja nai."
The dial tone buzzed in Kid's ear as he stared at the pay phone's receiver.
'I am not Hirokini.' That's what the strange voice had said, so much like Hirokini's familiar boyish
tones, but so distinctively not.

"It's not Hirokini-kun." He said, almost giddy with relief as he hung up the phone and stepped out of
the booth. "I don't know who it is, but it's not him."

Saguru let out a small breath, a sigh of relief, some of the tension in his shoulders he'd been carrying
fading slightly. "Come." Saguru said, sticking his hands in his pockets, ostentatiously -not- reaching
out to touch Kid. "We'd best leave before trouble arrives."

Kid nodded, picking a direction at random and going with it. Saguru followed, a step or two behind,
instead of beside him like they usually walked. His detective had been acting slightly edgy since they
had left Seattle, looking guilty as he hovered just out of arm's reach, and it was starting to get really
annoying.

He walked in silence, trying to mentally pick apart the prickly puzzle that was the English detective.
Saguru was usually a solid presence, dependable and driven. It was unnerving to see Saguru shaken,
even slightly. But his detective had also spent more time with Hirokini than either Kid or Kaito had.

Although he was mildly irritated that the half-Briton had kept the possibility of how they were being
tracked secret. Kid was more irritated at himself however, for not having noticed it sooner.

The other question was, what other secrets was his detective keeping? Kid had no more to hide, the
blond knew them all. That had previously been a comfort, now it was a distracting hurt. That was
one reason he had worked by himself for so long, trusting someone left himself wide open to be hurt. Or captured.

"Hobbit?" Kid questioned, looking up at the sky. Saguru startled, looking up at him. "One thing I
don't get."

"Yes?" Saguru waited, looking like he was expecting to be hit.

"When you left the mobile behind on the bus, you knew that there was a high probability of the bus
being attacked by 'them'." He avoided mentioning the people in black, lest he inadvertently summon
them. "What about the passengers on board?"

Saguru let out a heavy sigh, one that visibly did nothing to ease his detective's tenseness. "I thought
about that as well." Saguru admitted, fists clenched in his jacket pockets. "One of the reasons I chose
that bus was that it was practically empty. I had hoped they would do something like try to hijack it,
not slip an explosive behind a tire. But mostly...."

He trailed off, lips white from being pressed together so hard. "Mostly?" Kid prodded.

"This is going to sound completely ludicrous." Saguru frowned. "But I trusted your luck that no one
would be injured."

"My- luck?" Kid raised an eyebrow. "What would my luck have to do with it?" So he seemed to do
the improbably, big deal. He was a Magician.

"Because you -do- things." Saguru muttered, a bit of pink rising in his cheeks as he warmed up to the
topic. "Just by being in your local proximity, Things Happen. You do it -constantly-."

"Do what?" Kid raised an eyebrow.

"Change the Odds. We'll be followed or chased and a street lamp above us will go out, giving us
time to hide, or a truck will pass, or a bird will chose that moment to take dump on someone." Saguru
motioned expansively as he talked. "Or we will get the last slice of cake at a diner, or the first
batch of something really good or we'll get a little something extra when we're starving. Or someone
will forget something and we get things for free. It makes no sense, but it happens All The Time."

Saguru made it sound like that sort of the thing was out of the ordinary. "Why wouldn't it?"

"Exactly." Saguru's frown deepened. "These sorts of things happen to you. They do not happen to
other people."

.... They didn't?

"Then, there is the STUFF you do." Saguru continued on, counting points off on his fingers.
"Materialisation, mostly. Both of you have always pulling things out of mid-air that you shouldn't be
able to.-"

... pulling a man out of the river with a line of knotted scarves he knew he hadn't hidden on himself
that day...

"-Second most common is Levitation or Telekinesis, your other half started doing that shortly after
we moved in with Mum-"

.... Crawling around on the smooth walls and ceiling of Saguru's room while the half-briton was
wrapping presents, making an origami butterfly he'd pulled out of the air fly for a little girl...

"...You've recently started to Teleport, I think you first started to do that in Chicago, I woke up in the next alley over.-"

...He hadn't been able to find the cardboard boxes he'd hidden Saguru in when he went into the alley he knew they had run into...

"Stop." He croaked, feeling somewhat dizzy. Kaito in the back of his mind gibbered madly, trying to deny that he had done anything out of the ordinary even as the information sunk in with harsh reality.

The Kaitou Kid was a figure of fantastic myths and legends. Kuroba Kaito needed some shred of normalcy to cling to, to act as a stabilising influence so he didn't get swept away in everything that was the Kid and lose himself.

Kid was the one who did impossible things, Kaito was merely a talented sleight-of-hand artist.

Except he wasn't. They were the same person. It might have originally been compartmentalised 'That-Is-Kid' / 'This-is-Kaito', but the two had started to overlap and merge after the previous summer.

"-Puck?" Saguru put a hand on his shoulder, jolting him out of his thoughts. It wasn't the first time Saguru had called him. "Puck?!"

He pulled his hands away from his head, slightly surprised to realise he had been gripping it so tight that it hurt. It was even more of a surprise to realise that he wasn't wearing his gloves or monocle, he could have sworn he had felt the eyepiece digging into his flesh.

He made a croaking noise, the words 'How' and 'Why' getting tangled up in his throat. Saguru bodily turned him towards him, running a pale thumb across the bridge of his nose. He was startled to realise that he hadn't entirely imagined it, he could feel the dent against Saguru's skin, where the monocle would usually rest.

"I watch you." Saguru said softly, looking like he wanted to do nothing more than grab him up in a hug and not let go for a while, but was refraining because they were in public. "I've watched you for years, I don't think I can stop anytime soon."

He laughed softly. Only Saguru could make stalking him for years sound like a compliment. In a way it was, it meant that he was interesting enough to follow for years. "I know." He managed to smile crookedly. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." Saguru smiled back, his own smile crooked with worry. "Come on, let us go find you some chocolate."

"Chocolate doesn't solve everything, you know." He smirked, stepping away from Saguru, then bumped his shoulder as they resumed walking again. He wouldn't say no to a painkiller however, he had the start of a bad headache growing right between his eyes.

"That's not what your sister says." Saguru said primly.

He glanced around, making sure that no one was within listening distance then leaned towards his detective as they stopped at a traffic light. "My sister also thinks that both of us are straight."

Saguru released a bark of laughter. "That's not what she thought during her last visit."
"Really?" He pressed the button to signal the pedestrian crossing. "I thought we were rather convincing."

"Conniving, you mean."

"That too." The light changed and they stepped out into the crosswalk.

A second later, Saguru grabbed him by the arm and yanked him backwards. "Kuso!!" The blond cursed, staring in the direction of the dark car that had nearly struck them.

"Guru!" He snapped, grabbing Saguru's arm and spinning him away. A large blue truck barreled past, the force of it's passing pushing him into Saguru, just as his detective attempted to pull him away. They both overbalanced, rolling across the blacktop, coming to a stop next to the kerb, Saguru's larger mass pinning him against the rough surface.

They lay there a moment, hearts beating rapidly, breathing heavily. "Ow." He commented, feeling buzzed.

"K-Puck?" Saguru questioned, his detective's breath tickling the hairs next to his ear. "You okay?"

"Gimme a sec." He requested, squeezing his eyes shut, trying to find the pain through the adrenaline buzz. He knew he hurt, it was just hard to figure out how or why. Saguru nodded and lurched to the side, removing his weight. It was slightly easier to breathe, but he missed the contact. It had at least been something solid he could cling to. "You?"

"I've been better." Saguru said dryly.

"Oh my god!!! We're SO sorry!!" A frantic voice shouted. He was vaguely aware of footsteps stomping towards them. He tried to look up, stopped by Saguru's hand on his chest. Saguru's golden eyes were looking at him with concern, but silently telling him to Stay. Put.

He carefully nodded back. If the people approaching were trouble, it would be better to surprise them by being in better shape than expected. Although at the moment, he wasn't quite sure at just how much better of shape he actually was as compared to how he was pretending to be.

Two pairs of blue eye looked down at him, one surrounded by a mass of curly hair, the was hardened in a way that screamed 'cop'. Things snapped clear for a moment, the mental confusion fading as Kid retreated, Kaito coming back up to the surface. He was just a harmless teenager on an overseas experience, no world renowned jewel thief here...

"You okay?!" The curly-haired guy asked, practically vibrating. "So sorry about that man, we didn't even see you there, you just appeared out of nowhere-"

"Just catching my breath." He smiled weakly, lifting a hand up for assistance.

"Hold on." The cop guy instructed. "This may hurt, I'm going to check to see if you hit your head."

"... All right." He hesitantly agreed, glancing at Saguru. Saguru nodded back. The strangers weren't setting off any warning signs for his detective. And they had stopped instead of continuing, so that was a point in their favour.

"It's okay." The curly-haired guy nodded. "You can trust Jim. He's a trained medic."

"Although if you find anything, I will be shocked." Saguru quipped as 'Jim' ran his hands over Kaito's head. His hands were large and calloused, but competent feeling and extremely gentle. Bonus
for the guy. "His head is harder than a rock."

"I don't feel anything. All right, follow the tip of my finger with your eyes." Jim reported, holding up his pointer finger and moving it from side to side, then up and down. Kaito, feeling like a daft fool, did. Jim nodded, looking pleased. "I don't think he's got a concussion. Let's try sitting him up."

Hands on his shoulders and arm helped him up to a sitting position. He was going to need some new jeans after this, he'd torn the crap out of the legs on these. Saguru's trousers looked like they hadn't fared much better, the blond looked like he'd gone several rounds in the dirt. He leaned forward to poke fun at Saguru for it and was startled by the wave of pain.

"Puck!" Saguru grabbed him again, holding him upright as tears stung his eyes. Oh shit, that hurt.

"Okay, so maybe not okay." Kaito grinned weakly, picking up his right arm and cradling it against his chest. It hurt, pain throbbing with each beat of his heart.

"Let me see it." Jim instructed.

Horns honked, startling them. "Out of the road first?" Saguru suggested. "Can you stand?"

"Don't think there's anything wrong with my legs." Kaito agreed as they helped him stand. His knees were a bit sore, but nothing some disinfectant and ice packs couldn't cure. They were both probably going to have some -lovely- bruises after this. They all hobbled over to the sidewalk and sat down again, Kaito's back against a sun-warmed wall.

"I'm Detective Jim Ellison, by the way." The cop introduced himself, picking up Kaito's arm again and probing it with those oddly strong but gentle hands. Kaito mentally re-wrote 'Jim' and replaced it with 'Mr. Ellison'. "Major Crimes, Cascade P.D. This is my partner, Blair Sandburg."

"You don't look like a cop." Saguru commented, raising an eyebrow.

"I get that a lot." Blair grinned. "I'm an anthropology student at Cascade University-"

"He rides with me." Jim cut him off, but not without some small sense of humour. "Chief, if you could get the first aid box out of the truck?"

"Right away." Blair agreed, scurrying off.

"Puck." Kaito introduced himself before motioning to Saguru. "This is Hobbit."

That earned them a raised eyebrow. "Nicknames."

"We're gamers." Saguru deadpanned, straightening the collar of his scruffy jacket. Well, scruffier jacket now. They certainly looked like stereotypical gamers. "Currently backpacking across America as our Big O.E."

"From Australia?" Ellison guessed.

"England." Saguru corrected, doing his snooty British impersonation.

"Sorry, we've got an Aussie on our staff." Ellison flashed a small grin. "The accent is similar."

"It is not." Saguru muttered. Kaito quietly snickered.

"This may hurt." Ellison instructed, turning business like again. "But I'm going to need you to flex your wrist."
Kaito nodded as the wrist was examined, giving short brief responses to the questions of 'Does this hurt?' as he tried not to scream when it was flexed too far. The curly-haired guy came running back, carrying a white metal case.

"Hope you're a lefty." Blair commented with good nature. Kaito gave him a weak grin. Unfortunately, he wasn't. While he could and frequently did shoot left-handed, he was predominately right-handed. Which, unfortunately, was the arm that was currently in pain and under scrutiny.

"I think it's just a bad sprain." Ellison reported. "But we should probably take you to the hospital and get it x-rayed to be sure."

"I'd really rather not." Kaito said through ground teeth as Ellison pulled an ace bandage out of the first aid kit and began to wrap his wrist. "We're not exactly working on a big budget here."

Bit of a lie. Between Saguru and himself, they were carrying over ten thousand each on them, the contents of the slush funds Kaito had set up. They'd emptied the accounts before Kid had called Hirokini because it was too risky to continue using the bank accounts they'd set up with Hirokini.

"The department can cover it." Blair assured him. "After all, it is Jim's fault for almost running you over."

"I was in pursuit!" Ellison growled. The words sunk in and he ran a hand over his face. "Of a vehicle and suspects who got away. Simon's going to kill me."

Kaito chuckled, glancing over at Saguru. "Black or dark blue sedan. Mid-model. License plate started with 'B-A-K-4.'" Saguru commented, crossing his arms. "Driver was male, caucasian, on the tall side, dark hair, wearing sunglasses. I didn't get a good look at the passenger."

The officers stared at Saguru. Saguru stared back. "What? Dad's an officer. I grew up around this sort of thing."

"... Right." Ellison nodded, gathering the first aid kid and rising to his feet. "I need to call in what happened. Chief here will get your -real- names and contact information."

Blair nodded in agreement, then patted down his pockets, his face falling as he realised that he didn't have any writing implements. "Or I'll do that as soon as I get some paper and a pen. Be right back."

The curly-haired man quickly trotted after his partner. Saguru sighed and crouched down next to Kaito. Kaito gave him a small smile. "How are you doing?"

"Nothing requiring immediate attention." Saguru waved it off. "However, I must admit that this latest turn of events does perturb me."

Kaito nodded, slowly flexing the fingers in his right hand. Even that much was enough to make him hiss in pain, there was no way he going to be able to do anything dexterous with this hand for a while. Which left them at a disadvantage if they needed to make a quick escape or attack.

"Kaito..." Saguru said softly, catching his attention. "What about-"

"No." Kaito growled.

"I can spare the-"

"No."
"But-"

"What part of 'No' aren't you getting?" Kaito snapped, cradling his injured wrist against his chest. "The whole point of finding it was to keep people from using it!"

"Including us." Saguru said flatly.

"This isn't serious." Kaito waved it off. "A couple of weeks, it'll be fine."

Saguru made a growling noise of frustration. They might not have a couple of weeks, the mysterious organisation was closing in on them -now-.

"Besides." Kaito momentarily wished that Saguru was standing on his uninjured side, so that he could unobtrusively touch his detective. "We don't know what other effects it has. On either party."

For all they knew, the stone could bleed Saguru dry without their realising it. Pandora was still an unknown entity in this equation and Kaito was a bit leery using anything that bore the name of one that was reported to have unleashed all the evils in the world.

Saguru nodded, brushing Kaito's shoulder with a hand, a silent apology. Kaito shot him a smile, leaning towards him. "Thanks, though."

"Welcome." Saguru shot him a small smile back. "I just..." He trailed off, looking embarrassed. Saguru was the protective sort and hated seeing anyone hurt. Especially someone he cared about.

"I know." Kaito leaned his head against the wall. "I'd probably be the same way in your shoes."

The blond chuckled, rising to his feet again as Blair ran back towards them. "Sorry about that." The curly-haired man motioned back to the truck. "I had to assure Simon that it wasn't me that got hit this time."

"Simon?" Kaito questioned as Saguru traded places with Blair, moving to stand on Kaito's other side.

"Our boss." Blair shrugged. "The way he and Jim act, you'd think that I get kidnapped on a daily basis."

"Do you?" Kaito inquired cheerfully.

Blair gave him a glare. "No."

Kaito chuckled and reached out to nudge Saguru. Or where Saguru had been standing. Kaito blinked, looking around. No sign of his detective. "Hobbit?"

No response. He called again. "Hobbit?!"

"Where'd he go?" Blair asked, standing up and looking around.

"Don't know." Kaito said, stumbling to his feet and clutching the wall for balance. Saguru would -not- have ducked off without saying anything. Especially not with the mysterious organisation so close to their trail. They were only a block or so away from the phone booth they had just called from. "-He's not the kind to run off..."

Unless....

No. He wasn't going to think about the men in black capturing Saguru.
"Jim!" Blair called his partner over. Ellison waved back, saying something into the radio before walking over. Kaito glanced around, feeling somewhat frantic. They had yet to replace their mobile phones and they could no longer track each other's location through Hirokini. Blair patted his shoulder. "It's okay, Jim'll find him. He's good at this sort of stuff."

"Sandburg." Ellison called, his tone grim. Both the curly-haired man and Kaito walked over and the officer pointed to the ground, where there were some drops of fresh blood, the drops leading away from where they had been standing.

"He wasn't hurt that badly." Kaito commented. Saguru shouldn't have been dropping blood, unless he'd picked at something until it bled enough to leave a trail. Which sounded like something the half-Briton would do.

"This way." Ellison's demeanour changed, he looked grim, like a hunter on the prowl. Kaito shivered slightly and followed him, privately glad to not be prey. There was a gathering of drops about mid-way into the alley, Ellison crouching over them and sniffing as Blair hovered over his shoulder.

"Bit of a scuffle here." Ellison motioned to the pattern of the drops. That was one of the things Saguru had taught him while they were investigating cases in England, how to read some of the basic blood splatter patterns. In this case, a few went back in the direction that they had just come from, Saguru making a break for it, then getting pulled back. "He didn't go without a fight."

Kaito nodded mutely as they continued on. The blood trail disappeared where the alley intersected with another one. Most likely some sort of car that they had dragged Saguru into. He looked around, then up. He could hit the rooftops from here, get a bird's eye view on things. Most police officers were nice enough people, but couldn't see the obvious if it was in a brown paper evidence bag with the contents written on the side of it.

"They went that way." Ellison reported, pointing towards the closer of the side alley's two exits. "Some sort of van by size of the tread marks. Not moving quickly. They're not going to get very far anyway, not the way the vehicle is leaking fluids."

... Or he could stick with the nice police officer and use the resources at hand. He was supposed to be a ordinary guy, just travelling the country with his best bud. And while he could probably find Saguru on his own, at the moment appeared to be faster work with the police.

And at the moment he had a bit of a handicap. He flexed some of the fingers in his right hand and flinched. Definitely not doing anything with that hand for a while.

"Can we track them from a vehicle or will we need to remain on foot?" Kaito questioned. Both police looked up at him, surprised. He glared back. "What? He's my best friend, yer daft if you think I'm gonna leave him behind."

Ellison and his partner exchanged looks. "Truck." Ellison said. "I'd prefer to know that we can call for backup if we need to."

Kaito nodded, following them as they quickly jogged back to the large truck. It would also give them something to hide behind in case of a fire fight.

There was a bit of a mad scramble as they climbed into the vehicle, trying to figure out who sat next to Ellison and ultimately Kaito got the window seat. Something that Ellison growled about, muttering about people grabbing people off the streets.
"Any idea why someone would grab your friend?" Blair questioned, bouncing slightly in his seat. "Anybody in town that doesn't like you?"

"Not a clue." Kaito shrugged. "We haven't been in town long enough to piss anyone off. We got off the bus, made a quick phone call to my cousin to say were arrived safely, nearly got run over by a couple of cars ignoring traffic signals and met you guys. It's been a hectic past half hour."

"And before that?" Ellison questioned.

They had been using different aliases in Seattle, Kaito had been more of a blond up there as well, so the probability of them being tracked to there was remote. "Vegas."

"Score big?" Blair asked, scrabbling for purchase as the truck went around a corner. Ellison appeared to know where he was going at least.

Kaito smirked. "Well... there was this one hot blond in a jacuzzi... and a really dreamy red-head that wouldn't leave us alone..."

Ellison made a comment under his breath about teenage hormones, dogs and table legs. Blair made a mocking face in the direction of his partner at the comment. Oohhh. Kaito raised an eyebrow. Someone wasn't getting any.

"There's some things about you that are irritating me." Ellison commented. "You're travelling light, using nicknames, and trying to avoid a paper trail by not going to the hospital. And you smell like cosmetics. Seems to me that something has you scared and running. All the way from Australia."


"Whatever." The truck abruptly slowed, then coasted to a stop. "When we get your friend back, I want all the full truth from the two of you. All the details." Ellison growled. "In the mean time, Stay In The Truck."

The large officer got out of the car, reaching into his jacket and undoing the snap that held his gun into the holster. He disappeared down the side of the truck.

Kaito looked at Blair.

Blair looked at Kaito.

"Grouchy lots?" Kaito inquired.

"He's actually a nice guy." Blair shrugged. "Once you get past the whole Cro-Magnon 'stay in the truck' over blown Protector sense."

"I'll take your word for it." Kaito undid his seat-belt.

"You sure that's a good idea?" Blair questioned even as he unbuckled his own seat-belt. "Jim told us to stay in the truck."

"And how often do you actually follow that?" Kaito questioned, opening the door as silently as possible. It was tricker to do so using only his left hand, but he managed it. Just.

"You have a point." Blair flashed him a nervous smile as he followed Kaito out. Kaito eased the door shut behind them, then they scurried down the length of the truck, crouched down for cover.
Ellison met them at the entrance to the alley with an icy glare. "I thought I told you to stay in the truck."

"Hey, I just was following him." Blair said with complete innocence as he motioned to Kaito. "Gotta stick with the witness, right?"

Kaito shrugged back, fighting back a glare of his own as Kid momentarily flitted across the surface. He was following Saguru.

Ellison grounded his teeth together and motioned for them to stay down and follow him quietly. Which they did, Blair skulking behind Jim, Kaito pussyfooting his way behind Blair. They made it down the dark rubbish lined narrow passageway with relative stealth. Well, relative stealth compared to his own Kaitou skills that was.

Blair was chanting questions and observations to Jim, who had a look of intense focus as they crept up on a grungy looking white van that had definitely seen better days. The rear doors were open and he couldn't hear or see anyone around it. Still, appearances were deceiving.

"I'm only picking up one person." Jim whispered. "And exhaust fumes. Either this car died here or someone left before we showed up."

"Probably the latter." Kaito piped up. Jim gave him a wary glance before stepping forward.

"CASCADE POLICE! FREEZE!!!!"

"... Eh?"

The confused sounded echoed out of the back of the truck. Kaito blinked. He -knew- that 'Eh?'. He stepped forward, past Jim who made a grab at him and missed.

It was Saguru.

It was -Saguru-.

"Oh..." Kaito groaned, running a hand down his face. Only Saguru could get himself into these sorts of situations. "-Fuck."

"Puck?" Saguru lifted his blindfolded head up, turning to face them. He was clearly visible through the open doors of an obviously disused van. His detective was tied to a wooden chair which stood above a very nasty looking contraption with lots of wires spiralling out of it. "Is that you?"

"Yeah." Kaito tried to sound reassuring. The officer and his partner quietly back and forth behind him but Kaito didn't need to listen in to know what was going on. A bomb. Saguru was sitting on top of a frikkin -bomb-. "It's okay, we're going to get you free-

"DON'T!" Saguru snapped, looking fierce despite the fact that they couldn't see his eyes. "Do not get any closer! It is a Trap."

"Yeah." Kaito deadpanned. "Thank you, Captain Obvious." All it needed was a giant flashing arrow pointing to the bound blond. Elision touched his arm, gaining Kaito's attention.

"Keep him talking and calm." The officer instructed softly. "Blair's on the horn for the bomb squad."

"Bomb squad is not going to arrive here in time." Saguru said calmly, despite the tremor that shook his body. "They were kind enough to explain about the situation I am currently in in great detail. The
flat of the vehicle that I am currently resting on is a pressure sensor. Any changes in weight, either an increase or a decrease will trigger an immediate explosion."

So they couldn't climb up and untie him, nor could they approach the bomb itself, since Saguru was set more than an arm's reach inside the van.

"I was further informed that if that fails to happen, the bomb itself is timed to explode in approximately seven minutes, twenty-three seconds. But as I cannot see the contraption, I cannot verify this." Saguru added. "They left approximately two and a half minutes after that."

"You've got to be shitting me," Blair muttered, looking up from his mobile phone.

"No, his sense of timing is usually that good." Kaito admitted, Kid simmering beneath the surface again, trying to calculate how to defuse this situation. "Anything else, Hobbit?"

"My nose itches." Saguru said, the complete epitome of dignity. "And I cannot reach to scratch it."

"It never fails." Ellison agreed with morbid humour, his hand still on Kaito's arm. He dropped his voice, talking only to Kaito. "Right. We need to clear this area out. That includes you, Mr. Puck."

"No." Kaito said flatly.

"Kuroba." Saguru snapped. "Do not do anything stupid."

-Said the man who'd gotten himself kidnapped and bound to large bomb. Hah.

"I'm not." Kaito narrowed his eyes. "But if you're going out in a giant fiery explosion, I'm going to personally be here to roast marshmallows over what's left of your mangled burning corpse. Moron."

Blair snickered, hiding a grin behind a hand.

"Besides." Kaito gave a pointed look at Ellison. "Someone needs to talk to him to keep him calm after all."

The large man debated this for a moment. "All right." He grudgingly agreed. "But the first step you make out of line and I'm sending you out with the rest of the civilians."

"That's fine." Kaito agreed. Ellison nodded, grabbing the mobile from Blair and talking to other officers about the process of setting up a secure perimeter before prowling off for more evidence for who grabbed Saguru.

"I do not need you 'to keep me calm'." Saguru snapped. "I am doing a perfectly reasonable job of that myself. You do not see me ranting or screaming like a loon, do you?"

"Oh, blow me." Kaito snarked back. "Who's the one who is always going on about not wanting to be treated as a blond in distress? Guess what?!"

"Uhh... guys?" Blair spoke up. "I don't think this is exactly 'keeping calm' here."

"Stress relief." Saguru tossed his head, trying to get some of the hair out of his face before lowering his head tiredly. "We've been rivals longer than we've been friends."

"And don't you forget it." Kaito snarled. Kid pacing in the back of his head like an angry caged tiger, defiant at those who would steal his gold-eyed treasure, waiting to be unleashed. "And you're supposed to be chasing -my- ass, not the other way around."
"Yes, well." Saguru sighed. "I do not believe they were expecting you to find 'my ass' until just before the bomb went off. Or after."

"I had help." Kaito admitted. "Officer Ellison and Blair were most impressive."

"Blair!" Ellison called his partner over for assistance, it looked like he had found something on the far side of the van. Kaito took a small breath of relief as the curly haired anthropologist trotted off.

"Hey, Kaito?" Saguru tilted his head slightly, lips twisting in a slight fond smile.

Kaito laughed, Kid's sharper tones mingling with his. "I know." He loved him too. They hadn't said it yet, but he didn't want to hear it now. "But you're not dead yet. Gimme a few minutes to think and I'll get you out."

"You'll run when it gets under a minute." Saguru corrected sternly. "And we have four minutes, twelve seconds."

Ellison and Blair would be back any minute to escort him away. He could hear people running in the background as the words 'bomb' echoed around them. Kaito slipped back, allowing Kid's knowledgeable eyes to look for weaknesses in the setup.

He had no way to reach the bomb to attempt to disarm it without setting off the pressure plate. He might be able to pull Saguru out with a rope... he peered closer at the chair in the van. It was attached to both the floor and the bomb. And Saguru was tied to the chair, so that was out.

"How'd they set the pressure plate?" He asked.

"I heard someone below the vehicle." Saguru reported. "I would not recommend checking however, I heard glass shattering afterwards."

Someone had broken several glass bottles --non-tempered glass with lots of long sharp edges-- around the van, preventing anyone from easily looking underneath, much less getting under the vehicle. It was an obvious trap to entice someone to get closer and be caught in the explosion as well. Which meant that he might have been able to do something from the underside if they had more time, or he had less disregard for his well being.

And there was no guarantee that it was actually a count down from the time they had said as well. If it was him, he'd set the timer a little fast, just to prevent 'last minute' rescues. Especially since he and Saguru had a habit of making impossible escapes.

"Three minutes, thirty seconds." Saguru reported helpfully.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Ellison and Blair start to head his way, no doubt to escort him to a 'safe' distance.

"I have an idea." He announced.

"Is it a stupid one?" Saguru questioned warily.

"No doubt." He agreed, pulling a white silk cape out of mid-air. He wrapped a corner of it around his injured wrist, grimacing as the injured appendage protested the treatment. He wasn't going to be able to hold anything with that hand, but hopefully this would stay. "I'm gonna steal you back. If this doesn't work, we're both going out with a bang."

Literally. Although it kind of agreed with Kid's sense of dramatics.
"Then do NOT do it." Saguru snapped, straining towards him. "Kaito!"

Too late, he was already running towards him, the white silk whipping around him like a storm cloud.

Saguru had said that Kaito --not just Kid-- had Magic. Real magic. He'd said it in technical terms, like 'Levitation' or 'Materialisation'.

Or 'Teleportation'.

Kaito didn't know how it worked, didn't care how it worked, all that he cared about was that it did work. That it got them to safety. As he leapt towards Saguru all he could pray was that this did work as his brain screamed 'Teleport-teleport-teleport-teleport' like it was a mantra.

He impacted against Saguru, the white material wrapping around them like a shroud as there was a very fatal sounding 'click'.

He closed his eyes as the world exploded around them in a rush of sound and light.

When he opened his eyes again, he could hear the remains of thunder echoing through an alleyway. He felt dizzy and drained, like he'd just been turned inside out and upside down. He was wrapped around Saguru, the blond's head resting against his shoulder, the soft exhalation of air against his cheek the only sign that Saguru was alive.

The outline of people moved towards him, carrying swords. He felt a brief flush of deja vu, wondering if they were back in Paris as he fumbled into his pocket and pulled out his card gun, pointing it towards the sword-wielding figures with his shaky left hand as flickers of lightning illuminated them from the background.

"You're NOT..." He ground out as the world swirled around him, dancing like spilled ink on paper. "-Taking our heads."

And then he passed out.

+++ Finis +++

Chapter End Notes

Jim Ellison and Blair Sandburg are from 'The Sentinel'.
The Grey Zone: The Price of Immortality

The Grey Zone: The Price of Immortality
By Icka! M. Chif

The first time Kaito drifted to consciousness, he was aware of being wrapped up in detective. Solid, warm, -breathing- detective.

Reassured that they were both among the world of the living, or at least not dead and somehow still together, he slipped back into slumber.

There were voices the next time he gained consciousness. Saguru wasn't curled around him anymore, but was close enough that Kaito could feel the blond's warmth next to him. The timbre of the detective's voice seemed to be on guard, slightly strained, which worried Kaito.

The responding voices were vaguely familiar, tripping something in his brain. Heads. Swords. Lightning. These people were dangerous.

If they wanted Saguru's head, they were going to have to go through him first. The detective was -his-. He reached up, grabbing Saguru and wrapped himself around the blond's head, the two of them crashing onto the soft horizontal surface they were resting on. Saguru let out a muffled yelp, hands grabbing Kaito as the magician slipped back asleep, stubbornly refusing to let go of his partner.

The third time he woke up, the room was quiet. Saguru was a peacefully slumbering hulk wrapped around him, his quiet breathing blowing air past Kaito's ear. He did a quick mental checklist, hands, toes and limbs all attached. Although he currently wished his head -wasn't- attached, it felt like someone had completed their attempt to drive stakes through it at every possible angle. His right wrist hurt, a throbbing ache under the wrappings and a bone deep weariness lingered, seductively trying to pull him back to sleep. Other than that, everything was still intact.

They were alive.

Despite the hurt and the pain, he felt a brief surge of triumphant joy. Alive. As in 'Not Dead'. Hah.

"Ah, I see our thieving young magician is awake." A droll voice commented. Kaito opened his eye a slit, spotting a lanky thin man sitting in a chair next to where they were laying, a book cradled in his hands. "You're a long way from Paris, my friend."

Kaito paused as his brain spun, trying to place the man. Paris. Jazz bar. Freak lightning storm. Bouncing heads. "I assume that you're not taking our heads." He said. Or tried to say. He was vaguely surprised by how disused his voice and throat felt.

The man, --Pearson? Pierson-- smiled condescendingly at Kaito as he attempted to sit up, dislodging Saguru's limbs as he did so. "No, we are not interested in removing your head from your shoulders, you are currently in Seacouver,
Washington, on the west coast of what people call the United States of America, and you've been asleep for almost three days."

"Oh." Kaito cleared his throat. "'anks."

"Welcome. There's water next to you. Your friend Saguru has been keeping you hydrated as much as he can. If you need to pee, you are holding your own dick."

Kaito blinked. Okay... that was a mental image he didn't need. He reached over and started to pick up the half-filled glass. He froze as the pain from his injured wrist struck and he switched hands to pick up the vessel with his currently good arm. He was startled by how badly he shook as he drank. But thankfully, he didn't spill any of the quenching liquid and safely returned the glass to where it had been.

"And that-" Pierson said airily, like he had all the experience of the world backing his words. "-is why most Magicians don't survive their first year. Doing idiotic things with abilities they don't understand. You're damn lucky you didn't end up in the middle of Mount Saint Helen."

Kaito gave him a limp shrug. He supposed he should be grateful for Pierson taking care of them -- and he probably would be later-- but at the moment he was too tired to summon the energy. "I couldn't."

Pierson paused, waiting for him. Kaito's thoughts drifted and he startled slightly when Pierson gave him a small verbal nudge. "Couldn't what? Teleport into the middle of an active volcano?"

"No..." Kaito gave a small woozy shake of his head. "I couldn't leave him. To die."

The older man gave him an odd indescribable expression, like Kaito had just handed him a puzzle when he was expecting an apple. Kaito listed to the side, trying to find the words to explain.

"S'not that I can't live without 'im... I don't need him... An' he doesn't need me." Kaito mumbled, his energy already fading from just this little bit of exertion. "But... I want him. Around. I like him." He said with bare honesty.

Saguru was a stubborn, uptight, moralistic, sarcastic bastard who somehow had the bad grace to be attracted to an international thief. And Kaito was stupid enough to fall for him back. He was used to Saguru, his little twists and quirks. And if it took doing something stupid and irrational to try to keep Saguru healthy and breathing, well, he'd do it without a second thought and pay the consequences later.

He looked blearily up at Pierson. "...Does that make sense?"

"Yes." Pierson said quietly. "Go back to sleep. You're as safe here as one can be."

"Okay." Kaito agreed quietly. "'anks."

And with that, he listed to the side and fell asleep on Saguru's solid form.

♦♦♦

When Kaito drifted to consciousness again, he found himself curled around Saguru, instead of the other way around. The blond was sitting up on the bed reading a book, Kaito's arms wrapped around the leg he was using as a pillow. He was probably cutting off the circulation to Saguru's legs something fierce, but at the moment he was too lethargic and comfortable to move.
The tips of Saguru's fingers gently traced one eyebrow, then followed the curve of the eye, down the bridge of the nose, then traced the contours of Kaito's lips. The feather light touch went down to his chin, up the jaw-line and around the shell of his ear, making Kaito shiver slightly. The room was quiet, he couldn't hear anyone else in the vicinity.

"This okay?" Saguru asked quietly, fingers resting on the pulse point just behind the ear.

"Mmm." Kaito agreed, sleepily nuzzling Saguru's leg. Saguru made a pleased sound, fingers continuing their exploration down Kaito's neck, over one shoulder and down his spine. Kaito hummed slightly, vaguely amused by Saguru's actions, subtly checking that Kaito was here and whole.

Kaito shifted slightly so that he was looking up at the blond, Saguru's gentle touch sliding over the tee-shirt he was wearing, then down to the patch of bare skin on his hip this action prompted. Saguru absently traced small circles on the skin there, before tugging the shirt down to cover it and travelled northward, this time along Kaito's belly. He muffled a squeak as Saguru outlined his belly button, tickling the indentation. The blond smiled slightly, his eyes never leaving the book he was reading.

Saguru looked tired, Kaito mused, content for the moment just to let his thoughts wander. He couldn't hear anyone else and Saguru's gaze wasn't flickering around, tracking where other people were, so it was most likely just the two of them. And that was just fine with him. He hadn't had any quality time with his boyfriend since Las Vegas.

Not that he really had the energy to -do- much at the moment, which was a pity. And it still sounded weird to say that in his head, 'his boyfriend'. He smiled as Saguru's fingers paused, hand splayed and pressed across his chest as if he could feel Kaito's heart beating beneath his ribs. His boyfriend. His detective. His friend, his travelling companion, his rival, his lover, his Saguru.

That had a nice ring to it, 'His Saguru'.

The Kaitou portion of his brain cackled possessively over the one stolen golden treasure he didn't have to return, 'His Saguru'. Mwuahahahahaha.

Saguru's hand continued it's exploration, drifting over his collarbones, then up over his shoulder and down his arm. Kaito shifted slightly, contentedly watching Saguru's face with half lidded eyes. His boyfriend really was pretty. Saguru's features were an exotic blend of both his parents. Strong fine features from his British ancestry, rounded and gentled by his Japanese linage without leaning too far one way or another. The nose was a little on the long side, a gift from his mother, but he'd gotten her beautiful clear skin that blushed so well, so Kaito thought it was a fair trade. Especially when Saguru blushed.

He had kind eyes as well. Oh, they could be fierce when he was riled up, but most of the time Saguru had some of the gentlest eyes Kaito knew. And such an attractive colour as well, like the high quality polished tiger's eye that Chat Noir used to target, set under dark lashes. He had Japanese almond shaped eyes under the European eyelid, another striking blend of Western and Eastern.

Broad in the shoulder and narrow at the waist, Saguru had a nice figure, when he wasn't hiding it underneath an unflattering suit. His legs that went on forever, most of his height was in his lower limbs, unlike Kaito, who had the gymnast's short legs and flexible long torso. Saguru was broader than almost everyone their age that Kaito knew, save for maybe Hattori with his kendo-skills.

Strong hands, not nimble like Kaito's long fingers, but steady and considerate in their strength. He'd never be the thief Kaito was, but Kaito would never be the detective Saguru was.
He even smelled good, warm and musky and so very -male-. Well, okay, his feet didn't smell so great if he didn't change his socks every day, but then neither did Kaito's. They were guys, not romance novel leads with tragic pasts and few flaws.

"What are you thinking about?" Saguru questioned softly, interrupting his thoughts as his fingers ran over Kaito's eyebrows before brushing Kaito's dyed hair out of his face.

'You', Kaito almost said, then bit his tongue. He toyed briefly with commenting that he could see a booger up Saguru's nose, just to get one of detective's fond, exasperated smiles. "We need a shower." He finally commented ruefully. The last time they had bathed had been the day before the whole bomb thing, and he'd been drifting in and out of consciousness for days now. He probably reeked, although Saguru hadn't said anything about it.

Saguru's lips twitched in a muted laugh. "I took one already, but we can take one later." He assured Kaito, running his hands through Kaito's hair again. 'We' meant 'Together' and Kaito smiled lazily at that, silently cheering. Soap and water and naked Saguru. Yay.

He resisting the urge to purr as Saguru twined his fingers in Kaito's hair, massaging the scalp and drifted off again.

♦♦♦

The sun had shifted by the time Kaito rose to awareness again. Saguru was still reading, one hand holding the book up, the other loosely wrapped around Kaito's hand, fingers lightly pressed against the inside of his wrist.

Saguru seemed to have a wrist fetish, Kaito thought wryly. When they'd first started their clandestine meetings as Kaitou and Tantei, Saguru would usually kiss the inside of his wrist upon Kid's leaving, in the gap between his cuffs and his gloves. He'd once gotten Saguru to admit that it was one of the few places that was always bared, regardless if he was Kid or Kuroba. Privately, Kaito thought it was a Victorian thing, little bits of bare skin hiding and unhiding being more tantalising than the full monty.

And it was a pulse point, he usually had to repress the urge to shiver whenever Saguru kissed him there. But that was probably why Saguru was resting his hand there, tracking Kaito's heartbeats, assuring himself that Kaito was still alive. The sap.

He'd finished the other book and was silently moving his lips as he slowly read this one. He was obviously struggling with it. Kaito twisted his head slightly, peering at the title, unable to make out more than something about 'Mystere'.

"I feel like I am studying Shakespeare again." Saguru commented softly, fingers tracing small circles against Kaito's wrist. "Some of these books I do not think you will be able to read without several dictionaries and a massive painkiller for the headache. Olde English is not friends to many."

Kaito thought about it and decided that the half-briton was probably right. While mimicking an accent or a language wasn't a large problem, understanding what he was saying often was. And Saguru did tend to enjoy learning strange bits of esoteric knowledge. "Gimme the condensed version later?"
Saguru nodded, releasing Kaito's wrist to turn the page before putting his hand back down where it had been. Kaito smiled to himself, watching Saguru's eyes flicker across the page with an expression of intense concentration. Not only was his boyfriend really pretty --not that he'd admit that out loud-- and not only did he have a good personality, obsessions aside, but he was both smart and clever as well.

Smart because he learned stuff quickly and was able to remember it, and clever because he could then later on turn around and use that knowledge when it was needed. Or come up with a solution. All the knowledge in the world was useless unless you could apply it to practical purposes.

He shifted on to his side, nuzzling Saguru's leg and drifting off again, making plans. Reading later. Shower definitely first. Together. Mostly for practical reasons, falling asleep while in the middle of a shower and falling down sucked, but it was also a really good excuse to touch his boyfriend. Maybe an accidental grope or two to keep Saguru awake and on his toes. And blushing. And they could wash each other's backs. And stuff.

They could play 'Drop the Soap' later, when they were both feeling more energetic, but silly naked time was not to be overlooked. Especially not after the jacuzzi in Vegas.

Mmmm... jacuzzi....

Kaito fell asleep with a happy smile on his face.

♦♦♦

When he woke up the next day, after a pleasantly silly soapy falling-over-in-the-shower experience with Saguru, he discovered that the detective was gone. That side of the bed was cold.

However, he still had company of the British kind sitting on his other side. Pierson with a look akin to a smug satisfied cat, a beer in one hand and a book in the other. Kaito stared at him for a moment, then closed his eyes most of the way and debated how much energy he had.

Pierson turned a page in his book. It was a feat of marvellous agility, he did it one-handed, the beer never sloshing in the other hand. It was something that obviously required lots practise to get it right.

But then if one was immortal, one had time to perfect such manoeuvres.

"Your friend is downstairs with MacLeod." Pierson said quietly, not looking up from the book. "Mac heard he'd done some fencing in school and his teaching instincts came to the fore. From the look of things when I checked in earlier, your friend is going to be quite sore when MacLeod lets him go."

Poor Saguru. Ah well. More excuse to stay in bed then.

"What's it like?" He questioned, sitting up. Okay, that sucked. Kaito scooted back, leaning against the back of the bed to remain upright. "Being immortal?"

Pierson was silent for a moment, turning the page one handed again. "It has it's perks, and it's downsides." He said with dry charm. "Civilisations rise and fall, friends grow old and die, the quality of beer improves and drops. Life goes on."

Kaito snorted. An ambiguous answer if he ever heard one.

"Why?" Pierson flicked an eyebrow up in his direction. "Would you want to live forever?"
"Quite the opposite." Kaito gave him a tired smile. "I wish to destroy immortality."

Pierson did not move, but Kaito got the impression that he suddenly had the immortal's full attention.

"You have the means... to create immortality." Pierson said slowly, as if sounding out a land mine. "Men would kill for that."

"Men already have." He glanced down and realised that he was gripping the blanket tightly. He forced his hands to relax.

Pierson glanced down. "Amanda said that she knew your father. The first Kaitou Kid, I presume?"

"Yeah." Kaito closed his eyes, feeling weary to the bone again. "They killed Oyaji for trying to find it before they did."

"But you found it. A means to create immortality." It was not a question.

"The price is too high." Kaito shook his head tiredly, fingers twining in the blankets again. "It takes blood to fuel. The price of immorality is a never ending flow of blood."

"You make it sound like that would be a problem for some people." Pierson gave him a dry dark smile. One that made Kaito wonder just how old this immortal was and what he had done in his lifetimes.

Not everyone could live the life of a saint. He knew that lesson well.

Kaito gave him a wan smile in return. "For some."

Pierson laughed, a low dark ancient sound. One that made the hairs on the back of Kaito's neck stand up for a few seconds. The kind that said that this man was intimately familiar with Death. "A few lifetimes back, that would have been cheap, boy."

"And now?" Kaito ventured.

"Not anymore." And suddenly, Pierson was just a normal person again. One with a very whimsical morbid sense of humour. "-Too troublesome to hide the bodies."

Kaito nodded. "Of course." Made perfect sense.

Pierson smiled, looking pleased with himself. "So you want to destroy immortality." He said, returning the conversation back to the first subject. "Any luck on that?"

"Not yet." Kaito admitted ruefully. "I'm beginning to think finding it was easier." Fire, pressure, freezing, drowning, acid, at this point he was almost tempted to start looking for some way to launch the damn thing into the sun.

Or possibly throwing all the alchemists on their ears and creating alkahest, a solvent that could destroy anything, instead of creating the philosopher's stone. But then the question arose, just how would he store the alkahest?

"May I?" Pierson sat forward, shutting the book and setting it down next to him. Kaito inclined his head, partly out of curiosity, partly in acquiescence. The immortal reached across him and picked up Sir Stinky, cradling the plushie in his hands. "You kept it with you, even when you let your bags out of sight. And since you're a jewel thief, it only stands to reason that your loot is here."

Pierson made Sir Stinky's head nod at him. There was resemblance between the two in the length of
their noses.

Kaito smirked. "Close, but not quite."

Both Pierson and Sir Stinky stared at him, heads tilting to the side to express confusion. Kaito reached into the air, twisting his hand as he did so, pulling a pale gem out of the ether.

Pierson's eyes went slightly wide, then flickered between the elephant and Kaito. "Okay, now I'm slightly impressed."

Kaito smiled wanly, feeling his energy drop dramatically. He'd removed the stone from the elephant just before they'd arrived in Cascade, just in case they end up losing the bags.

Although, if he was being brutally honest, it kind of itched, carrying the gem like that.

The immortal traded him the plushie for jewel. Pierson inspected the stone, rolling it over in his hand, holding it up to the light. "Mind if I do some research?" He finally queried, all business.

"She's called Pandora." Kaito yawned. "Supposedly drips tears of immortality every ten thousand years, when held up to the moonlight while the Volley Comet flies over head."

"Sounds like a good fairy tale." Pierson agreed.

"Oldest recorded legend of Pandora and her urn is from about seven hundred b.c." Kaito shrugged, feeling sleepy. "Ten thousand years ago is eight thousand b.c... about the time Atlantis sank, according to Mr. Rudolf Steiner. Take your pick."

Kaito paused, looking at the immortal. Just how old was he-?

"I'm not -that- old." Pierson grumbled, rising from his chair. "But glad to see you've done some homework."

Kaito yawned, his jaw popping. How else was he supposed to figure out how to get rid of that blasted stone? Besides, the link to Pandora's red light and the Atlantis' mysterious red stone Orichalcum had been too tempting to ignore. "Bit of warning... Pandora'll heal any injuries, but it'll damage healthy flesh. Y'might wanna wear gloves."

It had blistered Saguru's fingers, the one time Saguru had held it.

"Thanks." Pierson paused, Pandora in one hand, beer in the other. "I'll return it to you before you leave."

"M'not worried." Kaito smiled, sliding back down under the blankets. He grabbed the poor abused elephant and tucked him under the blankets next to himself.

Pierson paused. "... You're not?" He seemed confused by this. After all, they had just met.

"The guys who killed Oyaji are after us for the gem." Kaito mumbled, eyes already falling shut as his limbs went lax. "If you have the gem, they're after you instead." And he'd make damn sure everyone knew exactly who had Pandora if he didn't get the stone back. He'd make sky writing and forty piece brass bands look subtle.

"You may have a point." Pierson said decisively, as his footsteps turned and started to walk away. "I'll have this returned to you as quickly as possible."

Kaito smirked as he drifted off. He wasn't sure whom he would feel more sorry for in that instance...
The immortal swordsman or the men in black...

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"God." Saguru fell onto the bed next to him. "Remind me not to do that again."

"Mmurph?" Kaito opened an eye. "Y'have fun?"

"I think I just learned more than I ever forgot in fencing class." Saguru mumbled. "Kill me now."

"Nah." Kaito reached out and patted his large rather warm boyfriend. He'd put too much work into keeping Saguru alive to kill him now.

"Good job, Saguru." MacLeod's voice commented. "Looking forward to sparring with you tomorrow."

Saguru waved a hand up in acknowledgement, then it flopped back down on the bed.

MacLeod and Pierson talked for a while, the subject of 'beer' coming up occasionally. Evidently they were out again, and it was 'the Old Man's fault.' Pierson won the verbal debate and MacLeod left to pick up more foodstuffs. And beer.

Saguru sat up with a groan, pulled out a book out of the stack and started reading. Pierson wandered by. "Aztec."

Blood sacrifices. If one needed large amounts of blood to fuel Pandora, it made sense. "Spanish invaded 1512." He pointed out. "Less than a thousand years old."

"Bering Land Bridge." Pierson said. "Could have brought it over then."

There were still debates about when the last people could have crossed the ice bridge between Siberia and Alaska. "Kon-Tiki." Kaito countered. "Pre-Columbian."

Pre-Columbian fit their time period nicely, starting about the time that people first arrived in the Americas and ending about the time the Cristóbal Colón landed in what was now South America. Kon-Tiki was the name of the balsa wood raft Thor Heyerdahl used in 1947 to prove that older cultures could have crossed the Pacific.

There was also that thing about the 'Bay of Jars', where a Roman vessel had sunk off the coast of Brazil before the Roman Empire had collapsed. That was a major oops in the navigation department.

"Viking." Pierson pointed out. "Greek to Roman to Celtic to the local Indians to Aztec."

Leif Ericson having possibly landed in North America around the year 1000. Romans invaded what was now Great Britain in the first century.

"China." Kaito offered. There were claims that the Chinese landed on the Americas anywhere from four thousand to one thousand five hundred years ago, depending on whether or not California was actually Fusang. Although those expeditions had been more interested in bringing things back -to- China, rather than bringing things from.

"Hmm." Pierson said, then wandered off again.

Saguru made a questioning noise. "History debate." Kaito mumbled and drifted off to sleep again.

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When he woke up again, it was the next day. Saguru was gone and there were the sounds of sword fighting from down below. It was Saguru's voice and a strong Scottish brogue shouting instructions, so he relaxed again. Poor Saguru. Although, despite the blond's grumbles, he did seem to be enjoying himself. What was that roman adage? Healthy body, healthy mind?

Speaking of healthy body... Kaito rolled out of bed with a groan, his body protesting the movement. He ignored it for the moment and staggered off into the bathroom to take care of business. He sat down on the toilet to take a leak, dismayed at just how little energy he really had. Just this tiny effort had his hands shaking from fatigue.

He finished up, pulled himself upright and got over to the sink to wash his hands. He glanced up in the mirror and grimaced at his reflection. He looked like he'd been sick for weeks, pale skin, dark circles under his eyes and he'd lost weight again, his collarbones sticking out in a way that Americans seemed to prefer their supermodels, but was unhealthy and unattractive on everyone else. Not even his Kid suit could make this look flattering. No wonder Saguru had been keeping track of his pulse, he looked almost like one of Kudo's corpses.

Kaito sighed. Okay, life lesson for using Magic like that. Yes, it gave him one hell of an ace up his sleeves if they needed it. But it also took a hell of a lot out of him.

The question was, was the price he paid worth it?

A shout came from downstairs, followed by a loud thump. Saguru's voice echoed up, alarm and worry. Evidently he'd scored an unexpected hit on his teacher.

Okay, yes. The price was worth it. He'd rather look like death for a little while than have to bury Saguru. This wasn't permanent.

He wobbled back to sofa-bed in the middle of the living room and collapsed on it. Amendment to previous statement: Yes, it was worth it. It still kind of sucked though. He hated not being having the ability to get up and -move-.

Pierson wandered by. "Have you read any of the books?" He inquired, a not so subtle hint.

"Not yet." Kaito admitted, closing his eyes. He really wasn't up for focusing on doodles on a page right now. "Guru's reading them currently, what I don't read, he'll catch me up on."

The immortal snorted, pulling something, probably a beer, out of the refrigerator. Kaito listened to him open it, noting the pinging sound of metal striking somewhere and the sound of bubbles overflowing their container. Yup. Beer.

"Hey." Kaito called, a thought hitting him. "When was Amanda here?"

"Hmm?" Pierson made an inquiring sound from the kitchen.

"You said Amanda had been here, and recognised me." That was how Pierson had known that he was the Kaitou Kid. And the first time he'd woken up, Pierson had referred to him as 'our thieving young magician'.

He still did NOT want to know what she and Oyaji had gotten up to that one night in Calais. Ew. Although at least, it seemed to have left a favourable impression on her. And the champagne thing might be fun to pull on Saguru sometime...

"A few hours after we found you." Pierson took a long sip of beer. "She dragged Macleod out after that and they spent half the night re-hiding all of her jewel stashes."
"I don't steal without a notice." He pointed out, tiredly rubbing his eyes. Where was the brain bleach when you needed it? "And I already found what I'm looking for, so I don't need to break in to see them anyway."

Pierson made a noncommittal sound. "Doesn't really matter. You don't get to live to be as old as she is without a large healthy dose of paranoia."

Kaito thought about it for a minute. "And how old is Amanda-san?"

The immortal grinned cheerfully back. Right. Bastard wasn't going to say. Kaito rolled his eyes and plopped his head back down on the pillow. He should have known better than to inquire about a lady's age was anyway.

He drifted for a bit, comfortably half dozing while Pierson read and Saguru got his ass kicked downstairs.

"Where did you find the gem again?" Pierson inquired, speaking loudly enough to wake him.

Kaito yawned, covering his mouth part way, then scratching his nose. "Japan."

Pierson was unimpressed. "Care to be more specific?" He quipped dryly.

"You want the name of the museum?" Kaito questioned, shifting to grin lazily at the immortal. Pierson gave him a look like he was debating if it was worth the effort to bop Kaito on the head. "Kidding. It was in a supposedly cursed necklace from the 1700s, known for having an association with the undead and the occult. First recorded known location was Haiti."

"Which doesn't help much." Pierson mused. "Because in the 1700s, Haiti was a common port for both the Spanish and the French."

"Yup." The French, who were colonising the world like mad at that time --which was really just a polite way of saying that they were going out and fucking what no European had ever fucked before, they made wonderful colonists-- and the Spanish, who were active in South America, looking for gold. And killing or enslaving what no European had never killed or enslaved before.

Pierson made muttering noises as he started grabbing various books and flipping through their pages. Kaito watched him for a moment, then let his head drop down again. He drifted off, waking up again when someone's irregular clomping footsteps approached.

"Hey, Old Man." A rumbling voice called as the limping footsteps got closer.

"Hey, Joe." Pierson said quietly and Kaito relaxed slightly again as he placed the name with the footsteps and voice. Joe, the bartender in Paris. Who probably knew about the whole 'immortality' thing. Although he didn't have quite the same buzz as MacLeod or Pierson, which meant he probably wasn't an immortal as well.

The two talked quietly, the cadence of their conversation soothing as they bantered back and forth. He allowed his mind to drift, picking and poking at various puzzles as his body relaxed.

At least until Joe inquired as to the status of their guests. Then he opened his eyes and waved a lazy hand in greeting. "Oh, there you are." Joe said as he limped over and looked down at him with a guarded amused look on his face. "Fancy running into you here. Long way from Paris."

"Yes, we've gotten that a lot." Kaito agreed. "How are you doing?"
"Hanging in there." Joe agreed amiably, leaning on his cane. "Looking better than you, in any case."

"... Thanks." Kaito muttered as Pierson chuckled in the background. He closed his eyes again and Joe limped away to snark at Pierson some more.

His brain wandered down various pathways until it got stuck on a problem he had been pondering for a while. Magic. He could do magic. Not the stuff Oyaji had taught him, the sleight of hand, but the really magical mystical freaky weird stuff.

The stuff that Kaito couldn't figure out and the Kaitou Kid took for granted.

Seeing as he was both Kaito and Kid, it was making his head hurt.

But he wasn't really the Kid anymore, he was supposed to be retired. He'd found Pandora after all. Now he just had to figure out how to get rid of it. Which hopefully Pierson would be some help with. If not, at least Pierson seemed to be having fun having a currently non-lethal puzzle to figure out.

And he had to get the Black Organisation off their backs for good. Without Saguru getting killed in the process. But to do that, he still needed the Kid's talents, not just Kaito's classroom antics. But at the same time, he was both, and they were crossing over more frequently lately.

Such as the magic as Kaito...

He rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands. Argh. His thoughts just kept going in circles. He was going to go crazy at this point, trying to make it make sense.

"Looks like someone's thinking too hard." Joe commented, startling him. Kaito opened his eyes to find the old man looking down at him with a fondly amused look on his face.

"Just trying to work things out logically." Kaito dismissed it. He paused, a stray thought hitting. "Hey, Pierson? You've had to change aliases, haven't you?"

Joe snickered. "Just a few times."

Pierson gave his friend a dark look.

"If you're lookin' for advice," Joe advised. "You're lookin' at the wrong guy. Adam doesn't do advice."

"While 'Uncle Joe' rarely ceases with his helpful hints." Pierson quipped dryly. "A regular fount of knowledge he is. Wisdom of the ages, even."

Kaito stared at them for a minute, then decided to let that one go. There was probably something there that he was missing, but he wasn't going to be able to figure it out at this very moment.

"Have you ever had troubles switching between names and personalities?" He questioned in their vague direction. "There's a carry over or a blending the two? Or have you ever started questioning which one you are?"

The last part was said very very quietly.

Pierson ignored the question, his nose stubbornly buried in a book. Joe chuckled. "Now see, that's where you're going wrong, kid." The grizzled man grinned at him. "You're thinking that this guy's actually sane."
Kaito stared at the barkeeper as suddenly several pieces clicked into a new, but strangely comfortable configuration in his head. "... Oh."

♦♦♦

"I am going to die." Saguru announced dramatically as he fell onto the bed next to Kaito after he finished being beaten up by MacLeod.

"No." Kaito glared at him. "You're not."

"You are right." Saguru agreed blandly. "Please kill me first."

Kaito briefly debated smothering his boyfriend with a pillow, but really, that would just accomplish what Saguru had just requested. So therefore it was out of the question.

"You're steadily starting to improve." MacLeod commented as he jauntily passed by. "We'll how much improvement you do tomorrow."

Saguru waved an acknowledging hand in the air and let it flop back down. Kaito smirked fondly at the blond. He would be up at it again tomorrow, unlike Kaito, who was just proud of being able to hobble to the bathroom and back on his own.

The blond looked at him from under his weary eyelashes. "Hey. Your eyes are violet. Something wrong?"

"No." Kaito shook his head, his smirk changing to a fond smile. "Just been figuring things out."

"Have some tea." Pierson interrupted, handing them each a cup of warm tea. "Mother's own milk, as it were. Makes everything better."

Kaito took the cup and gave it a dubious look. Pierson had been quite adamant about -not- fetching any sort of food or beverage for 'the invalid'. Saguru rolled over to sit up and took the cup with an eager look and grateful gratitude. Kaito peered at his drink, then glared suspiciously up at Pierson. Pierson looked back guilelessly.

"You're up to somethin', aren't you?" MacLeod commented. Pierson smiled innocently back at the Scotsman. Macleod rolled his eyes. "Never mind, stupid question."

Which really didn't make Kaito feel that much better. He poked at the tea with a fingertip, noticing the odd pearlescent sheen, almost a thin oily coating on the top of the tea.

The skin of the fingertip pinked slightly, like he'd touched something scalding hot instead of merely body temperature. Not just tea then. Next to him, Saguru happily drained his cup.

Kaito gave one last look at Pierson, quickly judged just how much he trusted Pierson, how much he valued his current life, the odds that this would kill them, then emptied the cup of tea in three gulps.

"I'll just go wash these." Pierson said, taking the cups back from them and heading towards the fireplace. Saguru plopped backwards on the bed and relaxed, happy to have some familiar comfort drink. Pierson threw the cups into the fireplace, grabbed a match, lit it and tossed the lit match into the fireplace as well. There was a large 'WHOOSH' and a small fireball as whatever was in the fireplace ignited.

Hmm... so maybe that was the best way to get rid of Pandora... Or at opened up a few ideas... Although the blowtorch hadn't worked.
"Hey!" MacLeod protested, realising what Pierson had just done. "Those were mine!"

"Absolutely hideous too." Pierson agreed without complaint. "I'm doing the world a favour, MacLeod."

"Ye bloody well are not!" MacLeod snarled, grabbing the tongs and fishing the cups out of the fire. They were a little sooty, but otherwise intact. Kaito laughed softly as the two bickered, feeling a warm lassitude slide through his body.

Saguru made a soft questioning sound as he also relaxed, apparently having the same trouble staying awake. Kaito rolled backwards, landing partially on Saguru. Saguru mumbled, reaching and wrapping an arm around him, pulling him close as they both fell asleep.

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When Kaito woke up yet again, the sun had set and risen again.

And Kaito, for the first time in over a week, woke up feeling refreshed. More precisely, he woke up feeling like he had just downed several cups of Koizumi's coffee and was happily buzzed. He stretched, luxuriating in the feel of being able to move freely again. Enforced confinement, especially due to his own body sucked. He hated being sick.

"Your friend is downstairs with MacLeod." Pierson said. "MacLeod's starting to have to put a bit of effort into it now that he's got some energy. I imagine that you'll be on your way tomorrow."

"Tired of us already?" Kaito inquired with a grin as he started stretching his shoulders.

"Yes." Pierson said bluntly, tossing him something. Kaito caught it on reflex, slightly amused to discover that it was Pandora. "Now get out."

Kaito snickered, casually sliding the stone back through the plush fabric into Sir Stinky's head. The fabric sealed itself back up behind the stone as nothing had just passed through it. "That was a dangerous thing you did." He commented idly, leaning down and touching his toes.

"Curiosity." Pierson dismissed it. Kaito could admit to a similar curiosity, wondering just how well Pandora's elixir would work with the blood of someone who had lived for several mortal lives instead of just one. Pretty well as it turned out, although he wouldn't have tried it if he hadn't been drained and injured. Or if Pierson hadn't volunteered it. "It was your choice to drink it however. You could have just as easily died."

"True." Kaito admitted. He wasn't sure how long the effects would last, but it would at least be a temporary assist. "-But then we wouldn't have found out if it worked or not."

The immortal chuckled at that. "There is that."

Kaito smirked, stretching out his legs. "Anything we can do as a thank you for your hospitality?"

They'd pretty much taken over MacLeod's living room, eaten their food and taken up their time.

"Yeah." Pierson nodded. "Don't take MacLeod with you. He's got a thing about causes."

"No problem." Kaito agreed, sliding out of the bed and pleased to discover he didn't wobble back and forth as he did so. "I've already got my white knight type to keep me on the straight and narrow. I'd go nuts with a second."
Or at least that was the reading he'd gotten off of MacLeod the few times he'd heard the man. Or overheard from Pierson and Joe.

"Boy scout, actually." Pierson smirked. "We have a deal then."

"Rather cheap, isn't it?" Kaito questioned.

"So survive this and pay us back later." Pierson waved it off. Kaito nodded. Another favour he owed. But it wasn't too bad of a price, as long as it was to people he didn't mind paying. And they seemed like decent folk, head slicing aside.

"All right." He agreed. Pierson grunted.

Saguru and MacLeod tromped up the stairs, both sweating and looking pleased with themselves. "You're up." Saguru greeted Kaito with a grin. "Feeling better?"

"Lots." Pierson agreed. "We may actually have some privacy around here again."

Kaito paused, a stray thought hitting as he glanced between Pierson and MacLeod. MacLeod was opening the refrigerator, bending over to grab a bottle of cold water and Pierson was....

Pierson appeared to be admiring the view.

... Oh.

Right.

Well, that would explain the lack of freaking to two boys constantly wrapped around in each other while in bed...

Although MacLeod didn't really seem to notice Pierson's attention. Kaito would have thought MacLeod would have been preening slightly under such an appreciative look.

"I think we should probably plan on heading out of here soon." Kaito said in a stage whisper as Saguru stopped next to him, wiping the sweat off his face with a sleeve.

Saguru nodded, as if he'd been expecting it. "After a shower." He paused, thoughts flickering past his amber eyes. "You look like you have a plan." He said softly, looking pleased.

Kaito smiled. He did, and Saguru wouldn't like it.

But really, that was part of the fun.

+fin+
The Grey Zone: On The Way Home

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

This was originally supposed to be about three different chapters. Then one day, it decided frack it, it'll do it in one foul swoop. So it did.

♦♦♦

The Grey Zone: On The Way Home
By Icka! M. Chif

♦♦♦

According to the online map sites, the trip from Seacouver to Los Angeles should take just under a full day in a car, not scheduling any breaks.

Kaito and Saguru made it in about a week.

First, there had been the accidental detour to a local Anime Convention. They'd been hitchhiking and ran into a couple of girls from Iowa heading in that direction and they'd got dragged along. The fact that they could both speak Japanese and English was proven to be an asset. The girls requested doujinshi translations in stead of gas money, which worked in their favour.

And then they got to the Convention and Kaito discovered Cosplay.

Actually, it was more along the lines that he realised that with a little bit of adjustment to their coloration and a quick trip to the thrift store for suits and trench-coats, they could pass for Muraki and Tsuzuki from some of the Doujinshi they had read in the car.

Since this meant that since Saguru was Muraki to Kaito's Tsuzuki and therefore got to grope him in public, Saguru -liked- this idea.

The Convention ended much too quickly in a flurry of colourful exhausted con-goers that resembled nothing more than either sprawled corpses or ex-animate zombies, no one wanting to return quite yet to reality.

From there, they made it to San Francisco and had a rather bizarre time of it involving a neurotic detective and a lost princess. Or an even more neurotic than usual detective. They never did get to see the Golden Gate bridge however.

From San Francisco, they made it through central California, stopping to take a photograph in front of a billboard that said 'Welcome to California - The Land of Fruits and Nuts'. It was probably referring to the Nut Groves on one side of the road and the Orchards on the other. Probably. They snickered over it anyway.

Los Angeles was larger than anticipated and they got lost looking for the only people they knew how lived in LA. The fact that it was an unlisted address did not help matters. However, after a run in with some vampires, some vampire hunters and a vampire who was a vampire hunter and happened to moonlight as a private investigator, they finally managed to track down Kudo Yusaku and Yukiko.
The author and actress were a bit wary at their sudden appearance, despite their friendly invitation to stay a while, which Saguru and Kaito agreed to, just for a few days.

Kaito had learned the Art of Disguise through what his father had left behind and his own innate talents, but there were holes in his education. Holes, that Yukiko, having learned the Art first hand from his father, knew how to fill. Which was something that Yukiko was more than happy to have someone else to play with and teach.

So while Yukiko and Kaito played with make-up, Saguru went and wandered around Venice Beach, figuring that it didn't matter what he wore, he'd blend in. The detective had run into a group of relaxing scientists and had wonderful time in the sun and the sand, at least until the leader's very large kid showed up.

'Large' as '50 metres tall', reptilian, green, spiky, and breathed radioactive fire.

That had been weird. Evidently they were on vacation from New York. Kaito was privately glad they hadn't stayed in New York longer than they had, no capes or not.

Then he'd gone to kiss Saguru and found someone else in his boyfriend's body. At least 'Sam', the person in Saguru's body, had been contrite about it, after he stopped screaming and the funky patterned person that followed him around stopped laughing. Kaito really couldn't see 'Al' very clearly, he'd just see badly patterned clothing out of the corner of his eye and some laughter, but it was enough for him to believe Sam's story about him stepping into other people's bodies to make things right.

According to 'Al' and Sam, it wasn't quite general knowledge just yet, but Kudo Yuusaku wrote what he knew in the Night Baron books. Murders, robberies, assassinations. He'd retired from that world when he'd met Yukiko, but the mystery novelist constant travel wasn't just to hide from his editors... it was to hide from those who thought he wrote a little too much into that dark world.

Together, they'd warned Yuusaku and Yukiko, and the four of them had fled to Hawai'i. Well, technically five, but Al and Sam had left mid-flight, leaving a very befuddled Saguru behind. And Kaito hadn't minded leaning against a slightly possessive Saguru up as he brought his partner up to date.

Hawai'i was fun. It rained a lot more there than anywhere else in the country, but over all it was warm and friendly, except for the one island where their left shoes were stolen by a furry blue thing that jabbered gibberish at them as it did so. The little girl who travelled with the blue thing had been very apologetic about that, apparently it was something they were working on.

Kaito insisted on visiting Kilauea, one of the most active volcanos in the world while they were there, idly taking Sir Stinky along with them. He removed Pandora from the stuffed elephant while they watched the explosions and tossed the annoying stone down one of the lava tubes, into the volcano, an offering to the Goddess Pele who resided there.

Pele hadn't been happy. Kilauea threw up a large amount of lava, spewing molten rock everywhere. One of which, against most odds, landed in front of their hotel room, a glinting stone sticking out from the side of it. A very annoyed Kaito had retrieved Pandora from the warm rock, wondering why after searching so long and hard to find the damn thing why he couldn't get rid of it. First it didn't want to be found, then it didn't want to leave.

He'd bought five wooden tiki at the airport gift shop after they'd said farewell to Yukiko and Yuusaku and shipped them to various people they'd met on the trip around the world. Saguru had watched him do it with a curious expression, but hadn't pushed him on it, for which he was grateful.
They used the last of their fake passports to leave the United States of America to fly home to Japan. The flight attendant gave them amused looks when 'Rosie Krantz' and 'Guiles Stern' checked in to fly out and asked if they were dead.

Kaito hadn’t gotten it.

Saguru told him that he'd explain it on the way home.

+++Fin+++
They looked up at the two story building, hands in their pockets with bland expressions on their faces to hide their nervousness. They were back where they started, in Japan.

"Ready for the beginning of the end?" Kaito asked his partner. Saguru pushed his glasses higher on his face, the wind mussing his tea-blond hair. They were back in their original faces and styles of clothing, which felt strange after hiding their appearance for so long.

And, Kaito had to admit with a slight smirk, he'd missed this Saguru.

"Is that not a song?" Saguru mused. "'Every end is a new beginning? You don't have to go home, but you can't stay here'?"

Kaito grinned. "Well, we won't be here long anyway." They were in Beika, to pick something up. He lapsed into seriousness. "Saguru... You don't have to do this you know. You could go home... I can take care of it myself."

Saguru gave him a dark look in return. "I did not go traipsing across the bloody United States of America just to back out now. You'll not be free of me that easily. Deal with it."

"Alright." Kaito breathed out a slightly shaky breath, loosely twining his fingers with Saguru's. Saguru curved his fingers around his, giving Kaito's hand a firm squeeze. They were in this together. Which was both a worry and a relief to Kaito. On one hand, Saguru would be right there, acting as support and backup. On the other hand, if things did go south, he wouldn't have that polite fiction that Saguru might have made it out alive.

They'd been running for months now, there was no guarantee that this would change, if one was killed. The Black Organisation was notorious for leaving no loose ends at all.

"Ready?" Saguru inquired.

"As I'll ever be." Kaito smiled back. The released each other's hands, waltzing up to the front door of Beika-cho 2-22, right next door to a grand old Victorian-style house. They rang the doorbell at the modern looking house and waited for the answer.

A shout from inside met their ears, followed by the scuffling sound of someone large making their way to the doorway. A balding white-haired man opened the door. "Yes?"

"Agasa-hakase?" Kaito smiled at the man. "Is Kudo in? We need to speak to Sherry."

"He... I don't know who you're talking about." Agasa frowned, attempting to shut the door in their faces. Kaito casually stuck his foot to block it. "You have the wrong house."
"He means Conan and Haibara." Saguru corrected, ruining Kaito's fun. "If you could tell them that Hakuba and Kuroba are here."

"It's okay, Hakase." Kudo's serious voice said as the small boy walked up, glaring darkly at them. "We know them."

"Shin... Shin'ichi!" Agasa frowned.

"It's quite urgent." Kaito added with a smile. Agasa grumbled, then opened the door. They stepped in, toeing off their shoes as the door was shut behind them. Saguru leaned over to drop a word in Agasa's ear, advising the inventor to run an errand while they talked. Agasa didn't like this, but after a nod from Kudo, he agreed, wandering off to buy milk.

"I thought you were dead." Kudo glared up at them. "The news had it that Hakuba was killed last April."

"Rumours of my demise were greatly exaggerated." Saguru said blandly. "Your mysterious men in dark clothing attempted to prevent my leaving the country and unfortunately killed someone in my stead. The Kaitou Kid and our friends in the FBI were most helpful in hiding my lack of termination."

"We've been on the run almost ever since." Kaito added. "A few months underground here, a few in the UK and a few across the States. Would you like to pull on our faces to make sure we're not in disguise?"

"No. That's fine." Kudo grumbled. "You've been busy." He added grudgingly.

"We're about to get busier." Kaito bounced. "We need to ask Haibara a question or two and then we'll get out of your hair."

"That I'll believe when I see." Kudo motioned them to follow him. "This way."

He lead them downstairs into what was obviously a work lab. Haibara was perched on a tall chair, typing away at a computer, keeping a wary eye on them in the reflection of her monitor.

Saguru however, had a different reaction. He stopped dead in his tracks, looking like he'd just been hit over the head. "Shi-chan?!" He questioned, his voice almost cracking on the last part of the word.

Kudo sputtered. "Shi... SHI-CHAN?!

Haibara's reaction however, was much the same as Saguru's as she turned around to face them, her grey eyes wide and disbelieving. "Sa-kun?!!"

"You are the same age you were when I last saw you!" Saguru exclaimed, walking over to the startled little blond girl. "What happened? You always said that you'd be taller than me!"

"I... I..."

"Where's Akemi-chan?" Saguru asked, looking around with a small eager smile on his face. "Is she around here?"

Haibara's eyes filled with tears that didn't fall. "She... they... Akemi's -dead-!"

Saguru's face crumpled. "Oh... Shiho..." He knelt down, looking like he wanted to hug her but wasn't sure. She solved that by launching herself at him, wrapping her arms around his neck. He
hugged her back, the two of them grieving silently.

"Gin killed her." Kudo supplied. Kaito glanced at him, giving the blonds some privacy. "I arrived too late."

Kaito sighed, nodding. He knew that one all too well.

"Why didn't you contact me?" Saguru asked, his voice thick. "Or Uncle Dorian. We never heard. We would have come if you had called."

"I... I..." She hiccuped, burying her head against in his shoulder. "I thought you would hate me!"

Haibara Ai was the former Black Ops agent, Sherry. They'd just never made the connection from Sherry to Shiho before.

"She obviously doesn't know what Uncle Dorian does for a hobby." Kaito commented dryly, resisting the urge to hit his head against something.

"It wouldn't have mattered." Saguru muttered fiercely. "It -doesn't- matter."

Shiho clung to him, the only noises she made might have been sobs. Kaito scratched the back of his head with a sigh. Maybe now she could heal from her sister's death. It'd be interesting to see the sombre 'little' girl when she wasn't grieving all the time.

Sometimes all someone needed was the support from your family, somebody who knew.

"Shiho's mom is my Mum's sister, Aunt Elena." Saguru explained, more for Kudo's sake than Kaito's, not looking at them. "Cousin Shiho and Akemi disappeared after her death, we never found word of them afterwards."

Well, at least they knew now. Although that did put a slightly nasty spin on what had happened to Aunt Elena.

"The Black Ops forced her to work on the Apotoxin that shrunk us." Conan said quietly. "They used her sister's life as barter. After they killed Akemi, Haibara escaped."

Saguru nodded. They'd both heard the story from Hattori.

"It was the only way I could think of to keep them from killing my precious nieces." A cool woman's voice purred. "To have them work for our little organisation."

Haibara went tense in Saguru's arms, her skin turning pale, almost grey. Kaito turned to find a long cool woman in a black dress standing in the doorway, holding a gun.

"Vermouth." Conan hissed.

Kaito silently cursed. He hadn't even heard her approach. Or had she gotten there before them? Dammit, so much for his danger sense...

Saguru gave his cousin a squeeze, then set her down on the floor. Haibara whimpered as he did so, clinging to him until he pulled away, walking towards Vermouth. "Auntie Sharon."

Kaito made a face and tried to wave him away. At his side, Kudo did the same, only with a much more panicked aura.

"Long time no see." Saguru commented as he kissed her cheek, then gave her a hug, not so
coincidentally pinning her arms to her sides.

"You can't possibly think that I believe you're happy to see me." Vermouth commented dryly.

"It -has- been a long time since I have seen you." Saguru pointed out, equally as dry. "And-

*pfft!* 

"It gives Edogawa-kun a chance to hit you with sleeping dart." Saguru finished calmly, gently setting his aunt down on the floor. Of course, if Conan hadn't done it, Kaito had a rose full of sleeping gas up his sleeve, waiting just for her.

"Gods." Kaito muttered, running a hand down his face. "All my in-laws are insane."

"HA!" Kudo pointed at them victoriously. "I -knew- you were sleeping with the Kid!"

"Who ever said -I- was the Kid?!" Kaito demanded back, making a length of rope to tie up Vermouth appear with a flick of his hand. He knelt down and began tying Saguru's aunt up. Saguru knelt down and started helping.

"...Aunt Sharon?" Haibara asked from the other side of the room.

"Long story." Saguru commented, tossing the ends of the rope over to Kaito to tie off. "The short version being that our family isn't as sterling as most people think."

"What are you going to do with her?" Kudo asked, standing defensively between the fallen Black Organisation member and Haibara.

"Simple." Kaito said, helping Saguru lift his aunt onto his back. He shot the miniature detective and scientist a grin. "Ever heard the phrase 'Take me to your leader'?"

The two midgets stared back, eyes the size of saucers.

"... Are you INSANE?!!"

"That is a very distinct possibility." Kaito cheerfully agreed. "Anyway. We've got to fly. If we survive, which I truly hope we do, we will have to get back together again sometime for coffee or something."

"Shi-chan." Saguru said, turning towards his cousin. "Do me a favour please, and contact Uncle Dorian. Kaito and I dropped off the radar a few months back and he is probably most frantic. Let him know you are alright as well, okay? Ask him about his adventures with Uncle Klaus, you have nothing to be afraid of from him."

Haibara gave him a shaky nod. "Ah... okay."

Saguru grinned. "Take care. I will let you know how this goes, one way or another."

Kaito gave them a cheerful wave and tossed down a smoke bomb, the two of them quickly retreating up the stairs so their small party did not have a chance to grow any larger.

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"Why do I let you drive again?" Kaito asked, resting his head against the window from his seat in the back of Vermouth's car.
"I am a perfectly safe driver." Saguru informed him loftily as he parked the car.

"Yeah. That's the problem." The blond was just a little bit -too- safe, in Kaito's opinion. And too polite. It took forever to get from point A to point B because Saguru was always letting people turn in front of him.

"Better than always driving like one has the police on their trail." Saguru snarked back, putting the parking brake on and pulling out the key.

Kaito sulked. "I don't drive like that." Much. Wasn't his fault that he had 'cop' and 'flee' irrevocably intertwined in his brain.

Vermouth's breathing shifted slightly, signalling a rise back to awareness. Her eyes didn't open and it slowed back down, the assassin feigning sleeping. "Good Morning Auntie Vermouth." Kaito said brightly.

She opened an unamused eye at them, before opening both eyes and sitting up. Kaito was privately impressed with her strength, considering they'd tied her from her shoulders to her wrists. "What do you want?"

"A possible cessation of hostilities." Saguru said blandly, turning around to face her.

"Which is why you knocked me out and tied me up." She said coldly.

"Nah." Kaito snapped his fingers and the ropes fell away. "The sleep gas and the tying up was primarily to get you away from the chibi."

Saguru nodded. "We do require your help however."

"I see." Vermouth rubbed her arms. "And a phone call wouldn't do?"

"Not if we don't know your number." Kaito shrugged. He probably could have figured something out, but they'd really rather get this done and over with -sooner- rather than later. "And you wouldn't have trusted us if we had."

But they had known that she was keeping an eye on the shrunken Kudo. And since they had entered the country on their own passports and names instead of the aliases they'd left Hawai'i with, red flags should have been going up all over the mysterious organisation. They'd been hoping that she'd be the one to find them and luck had smiled down at them.

"True." Vermouth sat back on the seat, a lounging noblewoman. "And what is it I can do for my charming young nephew?"

Saguru smiled back, recognising the dry snark for what it was. "As my partner here so wittily put it, if you would be so kind as to take us to your leader."

She stared at them, eyes wide in surprise. "Are you -mad-?" Vermouth finally demanded.

"I keep getting asked that." Kaito mused, before nodding in all seriousness. "He isn't. We're pretty sure I am."

"Which is why I would like to run this plan past you and get your opinion on it before we proceed." Saguru sighed, running a hand through his hair. "If not, Auntie, we'll get out here and think of something else."
Vermouth raised an eyebrow, then nodded. "All right. I can listen."

They told her.

She stared. "I take it back. You're both mad."

"But will you help us?" Saguru pressed.

"I think I'm mad."

Kaito grinned. "I'll take that as a yes."

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It was almost amazing how easy it was. They didn't know where the head of the Black Organisation was. They still did not know who the head of the Black Organisation was.

But Vermouth did. A quick phone call later and they were on their way, Vermouth driving the car while Kaito and Saguru sat quietly in the back. Kaito fought hard against fidgeting, his brain spinning in overdrive. Was he doing the right thing?

There was the very real possibility that they wouldn't walk out of this at all. There was a slim possibility that this would work. It was hare-brained, it was mad-cap... it was the way his mind had been working lately.

Since their trip from Seacouver through California, things had gotten... weird. Weird enough that he knew that he should have been freaking out three ways from Sunday, but hadn't. Volcanos, giant monsters, people visiting through Saguru's body... this was not normal. Even for him. But it -felt- normal and he was having a hard time figuring his way between what his brain said and what his gut said.

But if worse came to worse, he was going to at least teleport Saguru out. Teleporting was still a messy trick, and one that Saguru had made him promise to hold in reserve. Not only for the element of surprise, but because of how badly it wiped Kaito out. If he got Saguru out, he probably wouldn't get out.

The funny thing was knowing that if Saguru had the opportunity to let Kaito get away, even at the cost of his own freedom, Saguru would probably do it. Because they were both the stupid, noble sort when it came to other people. Or at least, he was now.

He wondered if he was going to die before his twentieth birthday. Kaito poked that thought for a moment. It didn't feel entirely right. Had he accomplished everything he'd hoped to do? Found the person who shot Oyaji, found Pandora, had a steady boyfriend, got to travel, see the world. Yeah, pretty much. Although he'd always expected it to be a steady -girlfriend-, but he wasn't going to be terribly fussy about that part.

Although he would have maybe liked to have gotten laid before he died, but mind-numbing terror really wasn't conducive to a romantic atmosphere. And they'd promised they'd do that -after- they solved this mess.

Hmmm... Live, and get laid. Okay, that was definitely a point towards the surviving category.

"We're here." Vermouth announced, pausing in front of a large ornate gate. The gate had a plaque on it with the word 'Kurogane', using the kanji for 'Iron' on it. Past the gates was a manicured lawn the size of a small country with a fancy sprawling mansion in the distance that looked to roughly be the
size of an enclosed city.

Wow. And to think he'd been expecting something like a military bunker, not opulence.

"Last chance to flee while you can." Vermouth said wearily.

"Thank you." Saguru said quietly. "But no."

"What he said." Kaito smiled. Well, at least they knew where the head of the Black Organisation was based out of. That was something at least.

"It's your death." Vermouth shrugged, typing a code into the front gate. There was a slight pause, then the gates swung open for them. Vermouth's car moved smoothly forward, the gate closing behind them. Kaito looked around, noticing the funny patches of grass on the lawn that probably hid either access tunnels or weaponry. In the distance, swarms of people in black suits swarmed around. The closer they got, the whiter Vermouth's knuckles turned where she gripped the steering wheel.

Kaito caught Saguru's eye and tilted his head towards Saguru's aunt. Saguru's eyes widened fractionally when he saw what Kaito had seen.

"Thank you for bringing us." Saguru said quietly. "I know it was a lot to ask."

"Consider it a belated Christmas present." Vermouth waved it off. "You can get me something if you survive."

"Somehow I don't think roses are going to cover this." Kaito grinned. She snickered, pulling up front of the grand house. Several people, all dressed in black suits stepped forward to meet them. Kaito noticed more on the rooftops and in the gardens. It was opulence, but it was also a fortress.

"I trust you to be creative in your gift giving." Vermouth assured him, pulling the keys out of the ignition and stepping out of the car. Saguru and Kaito followed, immediately flanked by the mass of men in black. "Hope you're ready boys, because we're going straight to the head honcho themselves." She informed them, walking up the stairs at a brisk clip. They scrambled to follow.

"... We're not being searched for weapons?" Kaito queried, eyeing the bulges under the coats of the very large men who followed them.

"Did you bring any?" Vermouth asked, her tone crisp and businesslike.

"Not really." Saguru confessed. "No."

"There you go." She tossed them a smirk. "You're not the type to assassinate someone, either of you. Otherwise you wouldn't be here right now."

"We could have changed." Kaito mused out loud, briefly walking backwards so he could stare up at the tall white and gilt ceilings, looking like something out of a old historic palace, or a museum. They would be perfect for a trapeze set up. "Y'know, running for our lives for several months, nearly getting killed on a frequent basis, it does things to your head."

Vermouth made a sound suspiciously like a snicker. "And the reason you came in the front gate instead of through disguise?"

Kaito shrugged. "You were probably expecting it." That had been one of the reasons behind his learning disguise from Yukiko-san, so they would think he was going to sneak in. "We needed you because we couldn't exactly walk up to the front gate and shout 'Parley', now could we?" Kind of
needed to know where the place was to in order to do that. They'd had a rough idea, but it had been nowhere near here.

Saguru nudged him with an elbow as he spun around again, still staring up at the ceiling. He stared at Saguru for a moment, then turned to walk forward again, eyeing the windows and the walls. Nice, tall windows, with lovely long dark red velvet curtains and security people standing on either side of each one. That certainly ruined the view. How rude.

"Here we are." Vermouth said, pausing in front of a large ivory coloured door with gold gilt. Someone seemed fond of that colour combination. Two men in black, dressed like butlers instead of thugs in business suits standing in front of it. They reached forward and opened the door for them.

Kaito craned his neck upwards again, realising that the doors appeared to go halfway up to the trapeze height ceilings. Wow. Those were big doors. He wondered how much they weighed.

And then they were stepping through the doorway and the elegant ivory-and-gold colour theme continued. Which included the two blond women standing in the room. One was about Vermouth's age, dressed in black with a brooch at her throat. The other about their age, dressed in a schoolgirl uniform and a black hairband in her blond hair. Mother and daughter from the looks of it. They also looked a bit like Vermouth.

"Moroha." The older woman turned to the younger one with a slight nod, clearly dismissing her.

Moroha nodded, giving a slight bow before she turned and walked out, eyeing them as she passed with thinly veiled curiosity. Kaito smiled and waved, causing her to giggle. Saguru rolled his eyes.

The door shut behind her, leaving them in the room with just Vermouth and the other blond woman. She smirked at them, crossing her arms under her chest. "Rather bold of you, coming here."

Saguru was a stiff tense presence next to him. Obviously, this wasn't going as the detective had hoped. Although he was probably wondering if this was a farce, they had both been expecting to face off against a man, not an elegantly dressed woman.

"Well." Kaito shrugged. "Running away wasn't working. Figured trying something new couldn't hurt."

The woman stared at them for a minute before laughing. It wasn't exactly a nice laugh, but it wasn't entirely cruel either. But that was only by the barest of margins, like a slip of a mask was all that was keeping the harshness at bay.

The laughter stopped as soon as it had started, the woman giving them a cold smirk. "And now that you've gone to all this trouble to find me, why should I not give the order to kill you now?" She asked in haughty mocking tones. "A tracking device? A bomb? Some information squirrelled away that will be automatically forwarded to the authorities if you don't send the signal in a certain amount of time?"

"That's actually a really good idea." Kaito mused. He should have thought of that. It made perfect sense.

"Kaito!" Saguru hissed, looking at him frantically.

Kaito blinked. "What?"

Saguru's palm met Saguru's forehead with a resounding smack. This had been Kaito's plan to get them here. "You know." Saguru muttered plaintively. "I had hoped to get all the way with my boyfriend before I died. And then I remembered he is a lunatic with a death wish."
Well, it was nice to know that they were on the same track. Now all they had to do was make it out past the next several minutes to accomplish that goal together. He’d had a plan around here somewhere. What they needed now was something random, something unexpected, something-

The woman in black snickered. It wasn't exactly a nice sound. "And see, that's precisely why I left Dorian with your Grandfather when I left him." She said, a bitter twist to her voice.

-Yup, that would do it.

"Ah... bwah?" Saguru blinked, staring at her with his mouth partially open. Kaito not-so subtly kicked him in the ankle and the detective closed his jaw with a snap. Saguru glanced at Auntie Vermouth, then back at Madam Lady in Black. There was definitely a resemblance there, more of a resemblance between the two women than between Sharon and Saguru.

"You certainly do not look your age." Kaito commented. The woman didn’t look -nearly- old enough to be Vermouth's mother. But then, Kaito vaguely remembered, Vermouth hadn't aged in... twenty odd years or so. Maybe it was a family trait.

"A chemical reaction, that happened by chance." The woman... Saguru's Grandmother... said dismissively. "It affected us all differently. I returned to my youth, Sharon stopped ageing all together. It didn't affect Elena until she almost died, in which case she also de-aged. You saw her moments ago, Moroha. My current husband named her and my youngest son, Yaiba. He has a thing for Kendo."

Yaiba... Yaiba... That name sounded familiar...

Wait a minute... Kurogane Yaiba. Insane swordsman with a pet tiger, a vulture and some sort of frog-demon thing. Hung out at the Mine house in Ekoda. He’d tried to steal a sword from them before he and Saguru had started courting. Man... That had been a weird heist. And -this- lady was related to -Yaiba-?

"But..." Saguru glanced between the two women again. "I don't have have a Grandmother."

"None that you know of." Vermouth corrected him.

"Your Mother made arrangements when you were born to keep you out of the family business." Saguru's Grandmother said primly, looking disgruntled. "Neutral, so to speak, because of your Father's job and connections. It worked, until you started hanging around with -that- boy."

"Hey." Kaito protested churlishly, not liking her tone. "I tried to keep him out of it too!"

Grandmother sniffed disdainfully, obviously not believing him.

"He is correct." Saguru said quietly, scraping his little grey cells together and getting his brain working again as he looked at his Grandmother defiantly. "Kaito succeeded in keeping me out of your battles until some of your men captured myself, a dear friend of ours and several other officer's children and attempted to blow us all to kingdom come. Then I became involved, of my own free will."

"What?" Grandmother recoiled slightly. "My men are under strict orders not to touch you! Vermouth, I want the names and I want them taken care of. Before nightfall."

Now it was Saguru's turn to recoil, and then snap forward, reaching towards Vermouth. "Don't!"

"They disobeyed orders." Grandmother overrode him primly. "They must be dealt with."
"Not by killing them!" Saguru said stubbornly. Kaito watched his boyfriend with a sense of glowing pride. Forget the white knight analogy, Saguru was the white horse of the family!

"Actually, I believe they already have been... 'dealt with'." Vermouth commented, glancing between her mother and her nephew. "They had a history for 'misunderstanding' orders."

Saguru glared at the wall between the two women, the muscles his cheek twitching as he ground his jaw, hands clenched in fists. The two women were similarly looking at a space between each other, all three of them obviously trying to think of the next thing to say. Kaito wondered if he should mention the two agents that had chased them across the States, then decided against it. Everyone was worked up enough as it was.

Hm... perhaps it was time for another unexpected plot twist. Now all he had to do was pull a rabbit out of his hat and presto, everything would be fine. Really.

... Maybe if he was wearing a hat.

A beep came from the desk behind Grandmother, startling all of them. Grandmother glanced behind her and sighed. "We'll discuss this later." She said, her voice gentler, but still strict. "Vermouth, show them to quarters where they can rest until I am free to talk to them later."

It crossed his mind that for not having had an active part of Saguru's life, the lady in black certainly ACTED like a Grandmother.

"Separate. Quarters." She added as an afterthought.

"Awwww...." Kaito protested as Vermouth escorted them away. "But...."

"Not now." Vermouth said briskly, taking them both by the elbow and tugging them away. They exited through a side door built to look like part of the wall and walked down a long corridor, this one plain white without the fancy trappings. The walls were nice and slick, just right for sliding across in socked feet.

Actually, that sounded like fun. He glided across the floor until a hand at his elbow stopped him. It was Saguru, holding on to him as he stared straight ahead with a sort of vague, glazed expression. Oh, dear. He hoped the detective wouldn't start hyperventilating again. "'Guru?" He prodded.

"I have a Grandmother?" Saguru finally said, his voice slightly higher than normal in shock and disbelief.

Vermouth laughed. "It's not surprising you don't know. Mummy left Father when Dorian was still wearing shorts, after Dorian took after Father's man-chasing ways. Mummy could deal with her husband leaving her for another man, but not her son. She hasn't spoken to either of them since the divorce was settled."

Saguru blinked, absorbing this news. "Oh, dear." And here Saguru was, her grandson, dating another man.

"I could always break up with you." Kaito suggested brightly. "Y'know, if it means she'll let us live."

He got a dark glare in return. "Don't you dare," Saguru growled, reaching over and taking Kaito's hand, twining their fingers together so Kaito couldn't escape. Saguru muttered something about 'chasing him', 'too long' and 'effort', so Kaito figured that was probably a 'No'.

"You're cute." Vermouth informed him as the corridor dead-ended into a hallway. She turned them
towards the right. "But you're still being put in separate rooms."

Kaito shrugged. Wasn't his intent, but when put that way, it was a worth a shot. Vermouth moved closer to them as they walked down the carpeted hall, dark-clad people scuttling around in the distance. They lapsed into silence as they took a few more twists and turns down the hallways, passing by and avoiding the various thugs, mugs and assassins.

It was a sort of novel experience, to walk past someone that you knew had probably tried to kill you in the past and not have them look at you at all. It was tempting to do something... He wondered how they would look wearing hot pink with black polka dots instead of their current monochrome colour scheme.

Saguru tightened his grip on Kaito's elbow as Kaito began to eye the passing minions. Vermouth glanced between the of them, then at her co-workers and smirked. "I wouldn't recommend it." She murmured. "Whatever you're thinking."

"You are merely encouraging him by say that." Saguru muttered back. Kaito grinned back as Vermouth gave him a suspicious look as they turned another corner.

"Saguru in here." She announced, sliding a card through a reader next to a plain looking door. It opened up into what looked like to be a fancy hotel room, one without any windows. "Someone will be with you later, either to bring you dinner or to take you to Mummy."

Saguru gave Kaito a worried look, then released his elbow. "I shall see you later." He said simply, stepping into the room with a great deal of dignity. "Thank you again, Auntie Sharon."

"You're welcome, dear." Vermouth said fondly, then shut the door behind Saguru. Kaito could hear the locks click into place as Vermouth put the card into an inside pocket, then buttoned her coat. "This way, Kid."

"Yes, ma'am." Kaito said dutifully as she put a hand on his arm, escorting him back through the halls. They walked around in circles and Kaito -knew- she took him down several wrong turns as they meandered through the mansion. But then one rarely trusted a thief in their house.

Saguru really was a strange exception to that rule. But that was something that Kaito liked about him. Of course, if he was logical, it really would have been harder to get to know him and get to like him if it hadn't been for that exception.

"You're being rather co-operative." Vermouth finally commented, looking at him suspiciously.

Kaito shrugged. "Nothing to be gained by not." They had walked into the Lion's Mouth knowing they could have gotten their heads bit off. There was nothing to achieve by being troublesome.

"Good point." Vermouth opened another plain looking door and motioned Kaito in. "Here's your room."

"Thank you." He stepped into the stark grey room, one that looked more like a prison than Saguru's posh penitentiary. The door swung shut behind him, closing with an almost ear deafening clang, the locks clinking and clattering as they fastened behind him. Ooooo... Maximum security. Wow. He was -really- styling tonight.

He looked around the room, examining the single bed, the sink and the toilet. Bland, bland, bland BLAND. Booooooooodding oooring. He fell backwards on the bed and looked up at the ceiling for a while. One... two... three... Three cameras. Maybe four. He hoped the people watching got decubitus ulcers on their butts.
Kaito drifted in and out for a bit, almost dozing while idling wondering what colours the room would look better in. Maybe maroons and creams, to go with the gold-and-ivory that had been in the other parts of the mansion. Or a nice floral print. In day-glo.

Thoroughly disgusted, and slightly nauseous, he rolled to his feet and wandered to the door. Maybe Saguru could use some company. The door looked like a door. Metal reinforced, hinges on the outside. He could probably pound on it all day and no one would ever hear him.

So instead, he closed his eyes, took a deep breath and took a step forward. When he didn't hit anything, he took another step. And another. And another.

And when he opened his eyes, he was standing in the middle of the corridor, the undisturbed locked door behind him. Sweet.

With a bounce in his step, he began wandering down the halls. He came to an intersection of corridors, pulled out a coin and flipped it. Heads. Right.

He wandered around this way until he found a door that looked kind of familiar. So he opened it and stepped inside. Saguru was sitting on the edge of the bed, his elbows on his knees, looking tired and worn out. "Yo." Kaito waved.

"Got bored?" Saguru deadpanned.

Kaito shrugged, strolling inside. "Thought you could use the company. How are you holding up?"

"I just discovered that my Grandmother, whom I did not know I had, is in charge of a huge criminal syndicate, and may or may not want me dead." Saguru said snippily. "I am just peachy, thank you."

"Welcome." Kaito fell backwards on the bed next to Saguru. Wow. Textured ceiling. Even had trim on the edges. "Your room is more colourful."

"Please tell me that you did not leave your room some hideous shade of puce." Saguru drawled.

Kaito mused this. He should have thought of that. What colour was puce anyway? Some awful combination of pumpkin and prune? "Nope. Left it as it was."

"Oh, good." Saguru fell backwards on the bed as well, his arm brushing Kaito's. They lay there for a bit, until Saguru finally let out a sigh, his body relaxing. Kaito smiled and moved his hand over so that their fingertips touched. Saguru made a soft chuckle, twining their fingers together. "Hey."

"Hey." Kaito grinned to himself. "Want to make out?"

Saguru startled, then laughed. "Thank you, but no. Too many eyes."

Only two, in Saguru's room. But it would be rude to make out while Grandmother was watching. "Worth a shot."


"Yeah." After. Once they made it through this and they weren't being chased to death. When, not if.

"You are doing something." Saguru said quietly.

Kaito mused this. "Yes." He wasn't aware how obvious it was. "How could you tell?"

"You are acting strange. Scatterbrained." Saguru's voice had that detached note to it that he got when
he was analysing something. "You are Altering Luck, are you not?"

"Possibly." He was doing -something-, but it was hard to tell what. If he thought about it, he'd stop. "I have to turn off part of my brain to get it to work."

Saguru stiffened at his words. "You have to..."

"Yeah." He nodded. "You know when you're looking down the edge of a cliff and part of your brain wonders that if you fall, you'll fly, while a part of your brain tells you that it's a bad idea to lean too far forward because if fall down it'll hurt when you go splat? That part. The logical part."

The detective was quiet. That sort of logic was anathema to Saguru, who was ruled by rationality and reason. "It sounds tricky. Like tightrope walking. Too far one way or the other-"

"And it doesn't work." Kaito agreed. If he went too far over one way or the other, he couldn't do it. Right now he was having a hard time keeping the balance, it'd be too easy to start thinking that what he did was crazy. And it was. But that's what made it work.

He wasn't sane.

And he was enjoying it.

Saguru tightened his grip on Kaito's hand. Kaito closed his eyes. He didn't know if this would work, but they were alive so far. His luck had gotten him through before. It had failed before too, but it usually worked if he trusted it.

"Think we've got time for a nap?" Kaito mused idly.

"Probably." Saguru sat up, tugging on Kaito's hand. "Come on, we might as well be comfortable."

Kaito muffled a yawn as he did as Saguru bid, kicking off his shoes before climbing under the covers that Saguru held up for him. Saguru followed him, curling around Kaito, a solid warm presence between Kaito and the door. It still made him paranoid, but it was kind of a reassuring comfort too.

+++ 

When he woke up, someone had dimmed the lights and Saguru was snoring softly in his ear. He was still slightly fuzzy-headed feeling, but not nearly as bad as it had been previously. He lay there a few minutes, breathing in the sounds and scents of the detective. Good old Saguru. Always a solid presence at his back, in one form or another.

He rolled over in Saguru's grasp, watching the blond sleep for a moment. He'd like to say that Saguru looked innocent as he rested, but at the moment he mostly just looked worn down and tired. They really hadn't been sleeping well lately. After this, they were both going to go someplace and not move, for like a month.

"Sleep well." He murmured, leaning forward and brushing his lips against Saguru's forehead, a silent benediction. Saguru really should have never been involved in his mess at all. And it was time to correct that.

He carefully eased out of Saguru's grasp and out from under the blankets. It was tricky, making sure that Saguru didn't wake up and shoving a pillow into Saguru's arms. The blond made some comment about plaid as he cuddled the pillow, making Kaito muffle a laugh as he finally made his getaway out of the bed.
Escape accomplished, Kaito stretched, various joints cracking as he loosened up, doing some minor callisthenics. He nearly groaned as the muscles loosened up, releasing some minor tensions.

Show time.

He walked to the sole entrance of the room, the door falling open at his touch. The Kaitou Kid stepped through, dressed in his usual pristine white attire, the cape flowing around him. It had been a while since he had last worn his working clothes. Felt good. Strange, but good.

Confidence in his step, he turned and walked down the maze of corridors, navigating it like he knew where he was going. Which he did. Straight towards the hallway with the smooth floors, that lead to the lair of the head of the mysterious black organisation. He wasn't disturbed as he did so, the people patrolling the halls mysteriously finding someplace better to be.

Kid knocked on the door to Saguru Grandmother's office before walking in. Grandmother was sitting at her desk, looking like she was anticipating him. "Greetings." He inclined his hat towards her. "Lovely night, is it not?"

She looked at him with none of the fondness or humour that she did at Saguru, more like he was an annoying rodent to be exterminated. "I should shoot you where you stand."

"But if you do that," He smiled, trying to keep a faint edge mockery out of it and not entirely succeeding. "You'll never know."

That got Grandmother's attention. "Know what?"

"Where Pandora is."

The wind blew past the windows, audible in the stillness of the room.

Grandmother put down the pen she had been writing with. "A pretty bluff. The stone is inside the plush elephant's head. The one that Saguru has been carrying since he was three. You've been carrying it with you since before you first started running."

"Noble Sir Stinky." Kid grinned, summoning the stuffed animal in question with a flick of his hand. Sir Stinky appeared in a puff of smoke, dropping a few feet to land in Kid's gloved hand. Kid stepped forward, setting the elephant on her desk, Sir Stinky facing her. "Schrödinger's Cat. I will make you a bet."

"Schrödinger's Cat?" She raised an eyebrow, really looking at him for the first time. "What sort of bet?"

"Schrödinger's Cat." Kid said grandly. "Gives us several options. Is Pandora in the Elephant's head? Is Pandora not in the Elephant's head? Philosophically, is there a Pandora? Or, according to our good friend Mr. Terry Prachett, is Pandora bloody well pissed off from being stuck in the Elephant's head in the first place?"

"The latter is certainly out." Grandmother looked at the elephant, as if trying to sense out his trick. "What sort of bet?"

"If Sir Stinky is carrying Pandora, you may have it." Kid smirked. "If Sir Stinky is not, you let Saguru go, and don't interfere with his life anymore."

"Including not killing him." Grandmother added without prompting. "Very well. I shall take your 'bet'."
She pulled a pair of scissors out of the desk and cut open the back of Sir Stinky's head. Kid would have winced at the scars the elephant was incurring, but he kept his face a bland mask, not daring to show any weakness, not even sympathy for the elephant.

Grandmother reached in and pulled out a small plastic capsule. With a puzzled expression, she set Sir Stinky down and opened the capsule. A pair of tigers eye earrings and a ring fell out.

"The correct answer is, there is no Pandora." Kid said softly. "You do not have it, I do not have it, and I do not have the means to get it. Pandora is where none of us can get it."

She looked at him with a tight, angry expression. "Very well, my grandson shall go free, as per the terms of our bet."

"Thank you." He bowed.

"However, our bet did not include what to do with you." Grandmother set the jewellery down on the table, leaning forward.

"No." Kid agreed. "It did not."

"The problem is, if I get rid of you, I imagine that my grandson will be most distraught. He seems rather taken with you for whatever reason." Kid bit his tongue at her comment. He was working towards removing Saguru from play, not involve him further. If he needed to, right here, right now, he could escape. He would escape. And Saguru would be safe. The rest was negotiable.

"But not getting rid of you is not an option. You've haunted our footsteps for too long, been too large of a flashy pain." She frowned. "And the loss of Pandora must be dealt with."

"I will not work with you, lady." Kid said firmly. He didn't work with others well.

"No." She sighed. "Which leaves us with one option."

"Yes." Kid nodded sadly. "The Kaitou Kid must die."

-fin-

Chapter End Notes

The mansion, the goons in black, and Yaiba Mom can all be found in Yaiba volume 24.

Omake:

"In this prison cell, some day I'm going to be be free... Oh, Somebody!"

"somebody."

"Somebody!"

"somebody."

"Somebody find meEEEE... Some... Body... toooo loooooooovee!!!!"

A guard poked his head in, trying to find the radio or anyone else in the room other than
Saguru, as he had done several times in the past. Saguru just looked at the guard impassively as they failed yet again to find either Kaito or the illusionary radio. The guard grunted, returning to his post.

Kaito chuckled. Saguru just looked disgruntled. "Thanks for singing along." Kaito commented with a slight smile, resting his head against the wall. Gave him something to do while stuck in the small cell that was somewhat entertaining.

"No problem." Saguru shrugged apathetically. "It's either sing or throttle you."


Saguru gave him a dirty look.

-fin-
'"You didn't have to do that, you know." Kaito said softly as he watched the swath of white fabric float off into the distance, like a pale ghost against the dark backdrop of the ocean. Saguru stood next to him, close enough to touch if either of them moved even slightly, looking as haggard as Kaito did.

They -looked- like they'd been abducted, drugged and managed to escaped. The Black Ops were good at their job. Kaito was still feeling slightly woozy from the truth serum, but at least he'd stopped babbling to everyone in hearing distance about how cute his boyfriend was.

It was a vague memory now, being pushed back into Saguru's room after talking to Grandmother, his throat slightly hoarse from rambling the past hour about the virtues --both mental and physical-- that his boyfriend possessed. He thought Grandmother had been amused. Saguru had been less so. Downright horrified actually, as Saguru had grabbed Kaito's boneless body as Kaito had muttered adorations at him before passing out.

They hadn't talked about that yet, but Kaito had not doubt that they would eventually. That had -not- been how Kaito had intended to inform Saguru that he more than liked him. A bit.

However, that conversation was currently on the back-burner, pressed by more immediate concerns. Their suddenly release. And Grandmother's admonishment to remember their agreements.

Kaito had made an agreement. The Kid was dead from here on out. He had not been aware of Saguru making a similar agreement.

Saguru had agreed never to offer his assistance as a detective again.

Kaito felt sick about that too, although it could have still been the after effects of the drug. The reason he'd made his arrangement with Grandmother was so that Saguru wouldn't have to pay the price for Kaito's freedom. He didn't want Saguru getting hurt because of him again.

And yet, Saguru had.

"Yes, I did." Saguru said, equally quiet. "They could not allow me to go free anymore than they could you. A Detective, a -known- detective, who knew more about them than any outsider was too great a risk. So therefore, I am not a detective anymore."

Kaito swallowed. So they weren't thief and detective anymore. They'd given up those defining parts of themselves in exchange for freedom and their lives.

So what did they do now? Where did they go from here? The enormity of the question left him almost speechless.

Sirens wailed in the distance. The police were on their way. Nakamori-keibu and his men, with any
luck. Saguru shifted slightly, their arms touching and they both grabbed each other's hand, fingers twining as they held on to each other.

"Love you too." Saguru whispered with a slight smirk. Kaito felt his face heat up. He'd been chanting 'love you love you love you' before passing out, back at the cell. Definitely -not- how he intended to tell Saguru.

Kaito squeezed his hand back. "Bastard."

Saguru smiled faintly before dropping his hand. The police cars squealed to a stop around him, their noise deafening. Nakamori bounded out of the head car. "WHERE IS HE!?"

They stared at Nakamori as the older man dashed around the dock, scanning the skies furiously, as if expecting something to appear out of nowhere. "We got reports of the Kaitou Kid around here! Where is he?!

Saguru cleared his throat, catching Nakamori's attention. "He's dead."

It would have been silent enough to hear a pin drop if it hadn't been for the blaring sirens all around them. "WHAT?"

"He's dead." Kaito repeated. "We saw him die."

More metaphorical than literally, but none the less true. The Kaitou Kid would not be coming back. A few of the older Task Force members, the ones who treated Saguru like a little brother, started shouting things about 'shock', 'blankets' and 'ambulance'. Kaito wasn't sure if he needed an ambulance, but the blanket draped around his shoulders was warm, stopping the ocean's chill. One of the guys with medical training pulled out a flashlight and began checking their pupils and pulse.

Kaito gave up and let them. He couldn't think right now and it was kind of nice to let someone else take charge for the moment.

"What's that?" Nakamori asked, pointing to the slip of white dancing in the waves. "... Is that the Kaitou Kid?"

"No. Never was." Kaito said softly, as one of the officers started to steer him towards a squad car. He glanced back to see the remains of the Kaitou Kid's cape as it start to sink beneath the waves. "... Just a ghost passing through."

+++ Kaito stared at the ceiling of his bedroom. HIS bedroom. He was home, he was safe, his loved ones were safe and he couldn't sleep.

The Kaitou Kid was now declared dead, or at the very least, missing in action. Nakamori currently had men searching the harbour for a body. Kaito wished them luck, they might possibly recover the top hat and cape, but they'd never find a body. The media frenzy had already started outside of Task Force headquarters, everyone trying to solve the mystery of what had happened.

Kaito and Saguru's names had been kept out of it, but there had been a few other eyewitnesses to the Kaitou Kid's body hitting the water. Tied with the fact that they had obviously been abducted and drugged, they hadn't been pressed too closely. Questions about their whereabouts had flown fast and loose for a while, until Saguru had started swaying in his seat, nearly falling over.

Saguru privately claimed, as they were waiting for the patrol cars that were going to take them home
to arrive, that he had been acting, to enable them to leave faster. Because Kaito didn't like Police Stations all that much. Kaito had informed him that it was no wonder he had brown eyes, cause he was full of shit. And then the car had shown up and they hadn't talked much after that, just quietly leaned against each other as they rode home.

'Kaasan had been crying when he got back, happy to have him back home and safe. He felt bad in retrospect, he really should have kept in better touch with 'Kaasan. He'd given her a quick run down of events, not leaving out the mysterious people in black parts or the Kaitou Kid stuff as she'd taken his laundry and escorted him to the shower before he'd fallen into bed.

And now he was unable to fall asleep because he couldn't get his brain to shut off. They'd won. He'd found Pandora, --hadn't been able to destroy it just yet, but he'd do that eventually-- hidden it from the people searching for it, faced down the whole of the Mysterious Organisation that had killed his father, and now he was home to tell the tale.

Somehow, he didn't feel very triumphant. He felt tired, and empty.

And, if he was bluntly honest, just a bit lonely. He kept straining his ears, trying to pick out the sound of Saguru's breathing. Either next to him, or across the room, but it wasn't there. He could hear the old familiar sounds of the house he had grown up in, which sounded strangely foreign to him now.

How did one stop travelling, after doing nothing but travelling for all of one's most recent memory?

He finally sighed and picked up his mobile phone, now that he wasn't afraid to use it. It was almost odd, to have to press the buttons to pick out speed dial again, he'd gotten used to Hirokini's presence within all his electronics.

If the gist of what he had picked up from Saguru was right, there was more than one Hirokini. The reason for Hirokini's strange behaviour since Chicago was because they hadn't been dealing with Hirokini, but the self-proclaimed Hirokishi. Hirokishi and Hirokisan, two different versions of the original Noah program had been under the control of the mysterious organisation when their Hirokini had met and partially merged with them.

He hadn't gotten all of the story from Saguru yet, but evidently Hirokini had convinced the other two AIs to leave the Black Organisation. But in exchange for their not working or contacting Grandmother, Hirokini couldn't contact or aid them. Yet another change wrought in their lives in such a short time.

Saguru picked up on the first ring. "Can't sleep?" The half-briton asked, his voice rough from his own lack of sleep.

"Can't sleep." Kaito agreed. "You?"

"Can't sleep." Saguru sighed wearily and Kaito could easily picture the blond running a hand through his hair.

"Wanna come over?" He offered.

"God, yes." Saguru breathed. "I'll be there in less than a half hour."

"Kay." Kaito agreed, and the phone went dead in his hand. He stared at it for a moment, watching the timer flash how long the call had taken. Then he set it down and sprawled out on the bed, waiting for Saguru to arrive.
Less than twenty minutes later, Saguru stepped out of a taxi and towards his house. Most of the time had probably been spent waiting for the taxi to get to his house before dropping him off at Kaito's, it wasn't that far of a distance. Saguru climbed in through the bedroom window and plopped down on Kaito's bed with a massive sigh, his eyes drooping shut as soon as he hit the mattress.

"Perfect." Saguru decreed. Kaito snickered as he wrestled them under the bedcovers, Saguru sleepily helping him and just getting them both tangled up in the blankets. They both quickly gave up and sprawled out as they had been for the past several months, Saguru pressed against Kaito's back and Kaito attempting to take up as much space as he could.

With Saguru's breathing reassuringly tickling the hairs on the back of Kaito's neck, he drifted to sleep almost immediately.

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Several hours later, he woke up to the sound of the door opening.

Kaito immediately sat up from the bed, cardgun in hand from where ever he'd last had it stored and pointing around the room, expecting someone to start shooting at them at any minute.

Instead, he found his mother standing in the doorway, a basket of clean laundry in her hands. "Kaasan!" He exclaimed, setting the cardgun down and taking a deep breath. He'd been expecting trouble from the noise she was making.

"Good Morning....?" She looked at him, and then down at his sleeping bed-mate in clear confusion.

"This is isn't what it looks like!" Kaito said quickly, hiding the cardgun. Saguru snuffled in his sleep for a moment, his arms drifting around until they found Kaito again. Saguru's breathing evened out again, once he had his usual snuggle buddy in his grasp. Kaito scratched his head and tried not to die of embarrassment. "Okay, so it -is- what it looks like. 'Kaasan, you know 'Guru. He'll say something intelligent when he's awake."

'Kaasan stared for a minute longer before nodding and setting the clean clothes down on his desk chair. "I expect both of you down for breakfast when you both wake up." She instructed firmly with the clear indication that there would be -talking- then. "Go back to sleep, Kaito."

"Yes, 'Kaasan." Kaito agreed, and did just that.

-end, the Grey Zone-

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