a study in scarlette

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Summary

There are people who want to live forever, and then there is Shinichi, who just wants to live a little longer than this.

Notes

stuff that happened in the movies has happened in this story, because, uh, i like the movies, and unless the movie content directly contradicts the main verse canon i just plucked it and kept it, fudging the timeline a little. up-to-date with the manga as of chapter 920, episode 774, movie 18. this is a canon divergence! the rating is earned more through gore than anything else, but it's canon-typical of the first 100+ eps, before they got milder. if you think i need to add any warnings you let me know, i love warnings, they're amazing.

thank you to t, n, and h, for extensive beta work, as well as my new mwc fam <3 for encouragement.
At first glance, the murder of popular *haafu* model Scarlette Shinamoto is utterly mundane.

Division 1 had been called in over an hour ago to take over, as soon as the local police had reported in about the details of the case. Megure had been gruffly displeased to find that Mouri was already in the area, staying at a nearby hotel in order to have easy access to the foreign film festival sponsored by the Suzuki Corporation.

When Ran had asked if he’d like to come along, with Sonoko grumbling in the background, he’d agreed just for the sake of having something to do this weekend with his brain besides hunt stag beetles with the Detective Boys. But, well, trapped in this body, Shinichi isn’t really able to gain entry to the movies he’d actually want to see, and he’s never been the kind of guy that enjoys the more social aspects of these events, like seeing famous actors or mingling with big-shots in the industry, even though they all seem to be overly interested in him, for some reason.

Shinichi had gotten bored after the first four hours, and he’d been relieved when Mouri had caught wind of this kerfuffle on the news, and even more relieved when Mouri, the complete and utter lech, had jumped at the chance to involve himself in a case involving a beautiful, popular model.

Scarlette Shinamoto, Western enough to prefer her first name preceding her surname, was found dead a little past seven-thirty in the evening on Friday, October the 10th, by the late middle-aged maid at the extravagant French neoclassic modeled mansion of Scarlette’s wealthy aviation magnate boyfriend, Takeuchi Makoto. The maid came across her body in the ballroom, stabbed seven times in the chest and stomach with an unidentified murder weapon that the police preliminarily suspect was a knife.

"Ah, well, there were multiple stab wounds," Takagi says, squinting down at his little black notebook. "None of them hit her heart, but two nicked her lungs. The on-scene examiner thinks she probably died from blood loss, and when the medical examiner’s report comes in, we’ll have more information…"

Shinichi lets the rest of Takagi’s report wash over him as he considers.

There’s already an obvious suspect, of course. The two high-profile lovers, Shinamoto and Takeuchi, have been on the outs for months according to half the major gossip magazines littering Ran’s room, and head over heels for each other according to the rest of them, and there’s blood on the clothes that Takeuchi was photographed wearing by paparazzi just a week ago, found by police balled up in the back of his guest room closet.

Mouri’s already looking around the scene with his usual short-sighted determination to prove his initial, off-the-cuff suspicion correct. Shinichi fingers his dart-watch, wondering if it might be worth it just to put Mouri to sleep so that he can do his investigating in quiet.

"The security system here is state-of-the-art," continues Takagi, "and no one unexpected has been spotted coming or going from the mansion in days by the cameras, or the paid guards."

Or, amends Shinichi internally, the tabloid journalists, who have been faithfully camped out nearby since the couple’s public fight at a popular Shibuya night club four days prior, hoping to get a sound bite they could use as the couple went about their business.
Nothing. The only people in this mansion have been Takeuchi, the maid, and the victim herself, and Shinichi can admit that all the evidence in this essentially ‘locked mansion’ murder points in one direction, but...

Shinichi coughs, shaking his whole body, but he manages to stifle the noise of it before anyone notices. They’ve all been on a cold watch for him for weeks. Even Heiji’s getting in on the act all the way from Osaka.

"Open and shut case," Mouri bellows loudly, as if trying to yell over Shinichi's doubt and his coughing. "Obviously a crime of passion!" He laughs obnoxiously. "You don't even have to be the great ‘Sleeping Kogorou’ to see that the boyfriend is the killer! Ahahahahaha!"

Mouri Kogorou is, despite the positive qualities Shinichi has discovered buried in the man over the years, something of an idiot.

Shinichi plucks at the collar of his sweater vest, and wishes he’d brought his jacket. Autumn has set in fiercely over the past couple of days, and though it’s only early October, he can already feel winter creeping up on him.

Back when he'd been sixteen, a cool night like this wouldn't have bothered him at all; He’d often gone running out after a murder sans coat in the middle of a snowstorm.

And this ballroom is unexpectedly chilly, after the comfortable temperature in the front of the mansion. It’s cooler than should be accounted for by the marble floors and high ceilings, but Shinichi has no idea how you’d get a draft in only one room of a mansion like this, when none of the walls face the outside, and it’s not like no one has invented insulation.

"Uncle, isn’t it too early to say that?" Shinichi asks. "We don’t have a lot of clues, yet."

Kogorou crosses his arms and peers down at Shinichi with an air of superiority. "Look, brat, sometimes you have to trust in older, more experienced detectives to see things that regular, everyday people miss. Like guilt."

Shinichi feels an eye-twitch coming on, and he masks it by rubbing at his face.

"He does have the motive," Satou says reluctantly, tapping her lower lip thoughtfully with a freshly manicured finger. "I read three days ago that she might have been cheating on him with Clifford Groves!"

"The director?" Takagi asks, as Shinichi crouches down to run his finger along the body outline tape. The victim had been curled into the fetal position, according to Megure, who'd grudgingly briefed Mouri when they'd arrived on scene. They’d both refused to let Shinichi see the photos, but Takagi hadn’t put up too much fuss when Shinichi had inquired after them a few minutes later, when both the older men were out of earshot.

"Yes, from the new Gomera movie," Satou says. "He's a total playboy according to the tabloids; always having affairs with his leading actresses. Not that Takeuchi's much better, to be honest. Scarlette was just the most recent in a chain of model girlfriends. They have been together over a year, though…" She blushes when everyone turns to look at her, before she holds up a fist. "What? I can’t read a magazine?"

"Of- of course you can," Takagi quickly reassures her, his cheeks flushing, and Shinichi hides his smile behind his palm as he continues scanning for anything out of place. "We were just, um, impressed! By how well read you are, that’s all!"
"The suspect and the victim also, apparently, had a pretty volatile relationship in general, though Takeuchi-san denies it," Inspector Megure agrees. "Mouri is probably right, in light of what we currently know. The victim, Scarlette Shinamoto, was most likely stabbed here, and then Takeuchi ran into a guest room to change clothes and wash before returning to his own, so that when the police searched his room, they'd find nothing. He probably didn't count on anyone searching those dusty unused guest rooms for evidence."

Only, in the brief glimpse Shinichi’d gotten of Takeuchi, the man had been wearing a rumpled suit, looking for all the world like he’d slept in the thing, and he’s not the sort of man that’s ever anything less than put together. If he’d changed and showered, why would his suit be such a mess? Not to mention his bed-head. It doesn’t add up, so they must be missing something.

The familiar thrill of a challenge rushes through him, and he adjusts his glasses, reflexively pushing them up the bridge of his nose. This really is a much more interesting end to the day, Shinichi decides, as he surveys the rest of the ballroom with fresh determination, repressing another cough.

"Ah-re-re?" Shinichi raises his voice, and the words reverberate through the room. He looks at Takagi. "It’s really loud in here, don’t you think? If someone fought in here, you’d hear all of it, right?"

"Conan’s right about that." Takagi scratches his neck, face scrunched up in puzzlement. "If it was a crime of passion, like Mouri said, something in the heat of the moment, it wouldn't be premeditated, right?" He sighs. "Even if it was premeditated, this doesn’t make sense. Why would they fight in here, if it’s so loud? There are so many rooms in this house, without acoustics like this. Someone being stabbed is bound to make some noise."

"The maid didn't mention hearing screaming, either," Satou says. "Kanami-san claims to have taken a nap from six to seven, after dinner, feeling unusually exhausted. Takeuchi claims the same, but..."

"Naturally he's lying!" Mouri rubs his mustache, a pompous puff to his chest. "After stabbing the gorgeous Miss Scarlet, he was probably overcome with remorse at what he'd stolen from the people of Japan!" The expression he makes is nauseating, and usually reserved for thinking about that actress he’s obsessed with, Okino Youko. Shinichi rolls his eyes, wishing Ran would hurry back so she can run interference.

Suddenly sleepy, and unable to fight it? That sounds like... "I usually only get sleepy really suddenly when Ran-nee-chan gives me medicine."

Megure frowns, looking both at and through Shinichi... "Medicine?" He picks up his phone. "Chiba," he says, after a few rings, before Chiba can even answer. "You took blood samples from both Kanami and Takeuchi, right? I need you to run those for sedatives and the like."

Shinichi inwardly smirks with satisfaction.

"What about the card, sir?" Takagi asks. "The typed one?"

That gets Shinichi’s attention immediately. "What card?" he asks, immediately crowding Takagi. "No one mentioned a card, Detective Takagi!"

"It might have just been on Shinamoto-san’s person, since she had a photo-shoot earlier today." Takagi holds up a plastic bag with a white index card inside, not unlike the ones KID uses for heists. The paper is thicker, however, and the words are typed in a sans serif font in English. **LIGHTS OUT**, it reads. There’s no blood anywhere on the card.
Lights out… Lights out… Lights out? What, Shinichi ponders, could that mean?

"Probably from a fan," says Mouri, with pseudo-sagacity. "Fans give all sorts of strange things to celebrities!"

Still considering things, Shinichi pushes up again on his Conan-glasses, before refocusing on the body outline on the floor and its immediate surroundings. It's marble, this floor, and there is no rug, just runners going up along both sides of the room.

There's something off about this crime scene. A body, stabbed seven times and curled into a ball. Thin streaks of blood inside the outline from the corpse. A white marble floor. No screams in a room where screams would echo through the house. Where was...?

"Hey, Uncle," Shinichi asks, pitching his voice higher, into the childlike cadence he's perfected for situations just like this. Both Megure and Satou immediately look down at him, as Mouri rambles on and on about all the creepy fan-letters Okino Youko must get. Shinichi tugs hard on Mouri's trench coat sleeve until he looks down, disgruntled.

"What is it, brat?" Mouri jerks his arm away from Shinichi. "The adults are talking."

"Oi, oi, Shinichi mentally scolds the man. You're not talking about anything useful. At least Shinichi is too big to be picked up by the back of his shirt whenever he gets too close to things, these days, thanks to an unexpected growth spurt in the spring.

"Where's the blood?" He blinks up innocently at Mouri, whose face contorts with confusion. "If the body was stabbed here, wouldn't there be a lot more blood?"

"Takeuchi probably wiped it up," Mouri says. "Trying to clean up his mess."

"Why, though?" Shinichi turns at the unexpected input to find Ran has returned from the hallway, where she'd gone to field a call from an irritated Sonoko, who'd stayed at the festival to ogle some actor she's infatuated with these days. She's slipping her cell phone back into her purse as she walks toward them. "If he was going to pretend to have been asleep when it happened, why would he bother to clean up the blood?" Ran's eyebrows furrow in thought as she speaks.

"And how?" Satou crosses her arms. "The body was still warm when we got to it, so there wouldn't have been time for that."

"Maybe Takeuchi is a vampire," Takagi stage-whispers to Shinichi, bending down so he's face to face with him, and Shinichi laughs. "And he drank the blood. What do you think, Conan-kun?"

"Don't let Ran-nee-chan hear you say that," Shinichi replies, also whispering, fiddling with the neck strap of his bowtie. "She's afraid of the supernatural." He snickers, remembering how Ran and Kazuha had freaked out at the Torakura mansion almost a year ago, when they'd actually believed the old lord was an honest-to-God vampire and had made obscene amounts of garlic-filled gyozas to ward him off.

"So am I," Takagi confesses. "Aren't you, Conan-kun?"

"I'm not afraid of anything!" Shinichi grins at Takagi, who grins back. "But, hey, Detective Takagi, I was thinking, what if this isn't the crime scene?"

Satou seems to have come to the same conclusion. "We've already searched the whole maze-like place top to bottom," she muses aloud, "and found nothing but the blood-stained clothes."
"Maze-like?" Ran’s expression is thoughtful, her full lips drawn into a pout as she looks longingly at the doors, clearly wanting to explore the house. Shinichi would like that, too, but he knows he won’t be able to get up the stairs with the vigilant set of private guards requesting police identification for access to the upper level or anywhere past the main hallway through the front of the mansion.
"That’s a strange way to design a house."

"It’s like a giant funhouse," Satou explains, sheepish. "None of the turns lead where you expect them to, and several people on the forensics team got lost upstairs and it took an hour for Kanami-san to find them."

"What about the murder weapon?" Shinichi asks, suddenly, and Megure frowns.

"Still no luck. We were hoping to get Takeuchi to tell us the whereabouts of it when we wrung out his confession, but..."

"He’s still claiming he didn’t do it," Satou finishes. "And we still can’t prove he did; everything is circumstantial."

Walking away from the gathered detectives, and over to the runners, Shinichi keeps his steps slow, scanning for evidence. Nothing really catches his eye save for the brass plaques, measuring thirty centimeters across and twenty vertically, around the walls about a meter up from the floor, with engraved designs on them. The one closest to him is a snake. Did the decorator of this room like snakes? There are no other snake-like decorations on the walls when he looks around, though. The next plaque down is a dragon, and Shinichi wrinkles his nose. Eccentric, but probably not related to the case.

When he turns back, the bright light from the overhead chandeliers, designed to show off expensive jewelry, makes the marble floors gleam. Narrowing his eyes, he tilts his head sideways, noticing the uneven shine. It extends far beyond the body, and Shinichi suddenly realizes why the killer might have wanted the body to be here, after all.

LIGHTS OUT.

Activating his glasses, he zooms in on the floor to find that there is, indeed, a strange residue on the marble, and streak marks from being cleaned. Already cleaned? But not well. So what’s the point? "Hmm…"

"What are you doing, Conan-kun?" Ran asks, and Shinichi looks up to see her and Takagi watching him curiously. "Is there something on the floor?"

"Well," Shinichi hesitates, unsure how to couch his suggestion in a question, "shouldn’t we do a luminol reaction test to see if any blood has been wiped up? Like when the police found the blood in that bathroom stall during the Goth-Loli case."

Shinichi’s instincts tell him that the missing blood will be the key. In Watson’s first meeting with Sherlock Holmes, in a laboratory at St. Bartholomew’s, Holmes stressed the importance of latent bloodstains as evidence. Of course, back in Sherlock’s time, it was harder to find blood residue, if someone had tried to make it go away. Now, though…

Iron, he thinks, grimly, always gets left behind, even if one uses bleach. The killer would have to scrub the same area three or four times to get rid of what lingers. This killer hadn’t had that kind of time, and, if the card is the clue Shinichi thinks it is, didn’t have that objective, either. If the detectives follow his lead, they’ll definitely find something.
"Luminol," says Takagi, slowly, before he beams at Shinichi. "That’ll let us know whether or not this really was where the murder happened!"

"Can’t the luminol stuff be sprayed all over the floor, not just in one place?" Shinichi offers up his most guileless expression, and Satou, who is once more paying attention to him, gives him a searching look. Sometimes, Shinichi is sure that she knows there is more to Edogawa Conan than there should be, but people, he’s noticed, only see what they want to see. Satou wants to see a smart but normal boy when she looks at him, so she does, even when her gut tells her differently. Everyone does, for the most part, and Shinichi hates that it’s exactly what he needs them to do, because it’s so damn frustrating when people look directly at you and still can’t see you.

"Why do you think we need to do that?" Satou asks, grim but not seeming inclined to disagree. "Wouldn’t we just need to spray it around the body?"

Shinichi shrugs, rubbing at his cowlick as he leans closer to Ran. She smells nice, like sunflowers and summer, and momentarily, his stomach clenches, wanting to be big enough to throw an arm around her shoulders and pull her in even closer.

He never will be again, most likely, even if he’s reluctant to admit that even to himself.

"Ah," Shinichi laughs nervously, shaking that thought away, "it’s just, if the body was dragged, we could see which direction it came from? Or even if Shinamoto was carried into the room, shouldn’t drops fall?"

"You always have such good ideas, Conan." Takagi gives him a lopsided smile. "Maybe I should give you my job, eh?" It's clearly a joke, and Shinichi giggles in response, just like he's supposed to.

"I just read a lot of Sherlock Holmes stories," Shinichi replies, averting his eyes from Takagi and instead taking in the railing that winds around the second floor of the ballroom, allowing guests to look down to the main floor. From up there, Shinichi bets you can see the entire thing. "I guess I have a pretty good memory for his awesome methods!"

"You also live with the famous ‘Sleeping Kogorou’. Takagi jams his hands into his pocket. "You've probably learned a lot just by observing a master at work."

"Conan has always been observant." Ran ruffles Shinichi’s hair. "Smart, too."

Shinichi scratches anxiously at his cheek. "Eh, it's not really—"

"Conan's teachers want to move him up to middle school even though he’s eight," Ran tells them, which causes both detectives to look down at him with wide eyes. "And they keep encouraging Dad to get his IQ tested."

"He’s not my kid," Mouri mumbles. "His parents can come back from wherever if they want to do all that. I do enough putting up with the freeloader!"

"Dad!" Ran side-eyes him, and he backs down sheepishly in the face of her wrath. "Don’t talk about Conan like that!"

Satou’s smile reaches her eyes as she gestures across the room to an officer with a walkie-talkie. "Do you still want to be a detective when you grow up?"

"Absolutely," Shinichi replies, something terrible rising up from his belly to try and choke him. I already am a detective, he thinks, forcing a smile. "Just like you guys!"
Ran's adoring grin does nothing to push down whatever is clawing its way up his throat. "You'll be great at it," she tells him quietly, as the other officer reacts to Satou's summons. "Like Shinichi was. Is."

Her eyes dim, and Shinichi... No, Conan, looks away. Lately, every time she mentions his name she loses a little bit more of that light in her eyes, and that chills him more than the autumn ever could. "Ran-nee-chan?"

"Ah, it's nothing, Conan-kun. Don't mind me!" She waves her hand, the distant expression disappearing from her eyes. "Let's just think about the case, okay? We have to help Dad solve it."

Nodding, Shinichi looks away from her.

He still remembers the way she'd cried, in that restaurant over two years ago, sitting alone with an empty seat across from her. Shinichi had only been able to look up to her through Conan’s eyes and ask her to wait for him with Conan’s mouth, and at the time, he’d thought that was an all right promise to make.

It had been worse when he’d taken his last temporary antidote two months ago, just to see her, and told her that he’d probably never be coming back. She’d let him cup her cheek, and tell her he loved her and that he was sorry. He’d kissed her, at the corner of her mouth and let her hair slip through his fingers, and he’d wished, more than anything, that he could go back in time, to that day at Tropical Land, and stay with Ran instead of running headfirst into a trap that took everything from him in a matter of moments. He’d caught escaping tears at the corners of her eye with his thumb, even as the first painful pangs of transformation had begun.

Ran had waited until he’d left to sob, and Shinichi, a child once more thanks to an antidote that becomes less effective and more dangerous every time he takes it, had sat outside her door, arms wrapped around his legs, and wished he could do something to make it better, easier, as his own heart broke along with hers.

"What do you need, Detective Satou?" the beckoned police officer queries, jolting Shinichi from his darker musings, and Satou gestures to the entire ballroom floor.

"I need you to get at least five people from outside, and get another couple of forensics kits. Then spray the floor down with luminol and turn off the lights. All of you take a section, the glow won’t last long."

"Yes sir," the officer replies. "The whole floor, sir?"

Satou gives Shinichi another considering stare, and Shinichi stares back. "The whole thing," she confirms. "This little guy usually knows what he’s talking about."

When, five minutes later, the lights go out in Takeuchi Minato’s white marble floored ballroom, even Shinichi gasps, peering down from the balcony above, his wrist clenched in Ran’s hand as he takes in, stunned, what the luminol has revealed.

"Lights out," Shinichi whispers, under his breath, as Ran’s grip on his wrist tightens.
"No DNA?" Hattori Heiji asks, his voice too loud over the phone. "What kinda craziness is that?"

"Oi, Hattori, you don’t have to yell," Shinichi says, coughing wetly and then nervously checking the bathroom door. If anyone comes in, he’ll have to hang up. It's nearing two in the morning, and he's lucky Ran has been too distracted to notice the time. "Detective Chiba called twenty minutes ago to tell us that everything came back clean but the clothes with the blood on them, which did test positive for having been worn, at some point, by Takeuchi. He doesn’t deny having worn the clothes, but he said he thought he put them in the laundry already. But at the actual scene? Nothing but Scarlette Shinamoto’s DNA on anything in the entire ballroom."

"That's actually freakier, considering you found her in Takeuchi's house," Heiji says, thoughtfully. "You'd think there'd be some kinda hair or skin or something since she's been living with the guy."

"Exactly," replies Shinichi, coughing again. "There is no such thing as a clean contact between two objects."

"That a Sherlock Holmes quote I’ve forgotten or something?" Shinichi can hear the laugh in Heiji's voice, and smiles. "You're a geek, Kudou. Sounds like you have a cold again, too. Or is it the same one?"

"I don’t have a cold." He wipes at his mouth, and cringes when it comes away wet with blood. The weather is making it worse than usual. "Edmund Loquard, actually. He’s probably the real father of modern forensics. He once confirmed a man had strangled his girlfriend by the remnants of her cosmetic powder under his fingernails."

He turns on the tap and rinses his hand, then sits on the edge of the sink, his short legs dangling so far from the floor. It's even colder in the bathroom than it had been in the ballroom.

"That’s cute. So what else is weird?"

Shinichi shifts his weight. "It turns out Takeuchi and the maid's blood both came back positive for Temazapam, along with Shinamoto’s."

"The sleeping drug?" Heiji hums thoughtfully. "So both of them were being honest when they said they were taking a nap. It was a forced one."

"Yes," confirms Shinichi. "Better still, neither of the suspects nor the victim had a prescription for it."

"So you got no suspects, no murder weapon, no blood, no DNA, and a dead model." Heiji sounds almost jealous. "You got your work cut out for you, Kudou."

"There's one more thing," Shinichi says, blood running cold at just the memory of what they'd found with the luminol. "Scarlette was found positioned curled up on the marble floor of the ballroom."

"You said that already."

"I thought it was odd, when I first saw it," Shinichi continues. "Why a white marble floor? Then I noticed the residue. There was no smell of bleach, but there were the remnants of some kind of mild cleaning solution that had left a floor that was probably usually gleaming with a film on it. There was a card, too, that said LIGHTS OUT. So I nudged Satou and Takagi toward luminol."

"To see if there'd been spilled blood. Good thinking. But why not bleach? Surely a rich guy with fancy white floors has got some bleach 'round there somewhere."

"Because," Shinichi says, licking his lips and tasting blood, "whoever the murderer was chose that
big white ballroom so they could leave a message." Heiji swears, and Shinichi once again tugs at his collar, cold inside and out. "Hattori, it was the Kaitou KID caricature, painted in blood. Whoever did this wanted us to find it with luminol."

"That's creepy as fuck," mutters Heiji. "You don't think—"

"No," Shinichi interjects quickly, "I don't think KID had anything to do with it. I think it was a message for KID."

KID is a lot of things: flamboyant, reckless, incorrigibly flirtatious, clever. But Shinichi knows what KID isn’t, too, and something like this isn’t just out of KID’s prior behavior, it doesn’t fit his personality, either. He can’t see the guy who holds heists to rescue trapped puppies and refuses to use a real gun on a fellow human being turning, out of nowhere, to murder.

KID is one of the things that Shinichi trusts, in this new life of his. He trusts KID not to do harm while he’s playing around, and he trusts KID to be inherently good, even when he’s stealing and lying and cheating like hell at the little games he plays with Shinichi and the Division 3 officers.

Over the past couple of years, they’ve definitely formed a rivalry of sorts, but Shinichi thinks it looks more like an tentative alliance than anything adversarial, especially considering all the extra effort they’ve put into guarding each other’s backs despite Shinichi’s mild distaste for some of KID’s more outrageous antics.

KID has saved Shinichi’s life more than once, and last November, deep in the basement of the Beika City Building archives, KID had saved Shinichi’s life from a gunman, putting himself at risk of injury or capture to keep Shinichi from harm.

So KID is… an enigma, but not one that stresses Shinichi out. The fact that someone wants to lure KID in, to maybe hurt him, lights a fire in Shinichi to solve this case before this murderer gets what they want.

"Yeah, that KID’s a pretty decent guy, I guess, if you’re not talking about all the stealing and stuff. He’s just weird."

Shinichi closes his eyes and sighs. "His heart is in the right place, mostly."

"The fact that his face is involved is gonna be a shitshow when this business winds up on the news. Even down here in Osaka, KID’s got some notoriety, you know?"

"He apparently has some overseas fans, too, so Osaka isn’t much of a stretch." Shinichi had already figured on that. With more than thirty officers on scene, the relative fame of the victim, and the paparazzi circling beyond the front gate like piranhas, it is without question that what had been revealed in the dark of the ballroom will wind up on the morning news tomorrow, under one lurid headline or another. "But what," Shinichi asks, "would a murderer want with a thief famous for his non-violent ways, practical jokes, and no-gain heists?"

"Hell," Heiji says, dragging the word out, "if I was you, Kudou, I'd get to looking for a gem connected to this case."

"A gem?" Shinichi considers that for a moment, turning the idea over in his head as he switches his phone to the other ear so he can scratch at his neck. Does the killer want Kaitou KID to steal a gem for them? Did they know the old Kaitou KID and bear a grudge for some reason, for a gem already stolen? KID always gives back the jewels he steals, though. "I'll see if I can have that checked out."

"Yeah, that's the first thing I'd do. Wish I could come down to help you, but I'm a third year now.
College entrance exam stuff is crushing my free time."

Shinichi should be preparing for entrance exams, too. Instead, he spends these autumn days among his classmates at his old elementary school: making Halloween cards, or doing simple long division, or sitting in English class being taught how to introduce himself in a language he's been learning for over ten years. (Hello, my name is Edogawa Conan, and I am eight years old.)

He swallows, wishing it were possible that these miserable thoughts were weights he could set down and not pick up again until he'd prepared himself for the strain.

There are noises outside the bathroom, and Shinichi looks toward the sudden flutter of activity. After a moment, Shinichi identifies the sleepy voices of Takagi and Mouri, probably searching for the wayward child under Mouri's protection. "Look, Hattori, I have to go. I'll talk to you soon, okay?"

"Keep me updated, yeah?"

Shinichi agrees hurriedly before terminating the call, just as a knock sounds on the bathroom door.

"Conan-kun?" Takagi calls, and Shinichi takes a deep breath, wiping at the corners of his mouth and rubbing at his eyes. "Are you in here, Conan?"

"Yes, Detective Takagi?" He jumps down from the sink and opens the door.

"There you are," Takagi says, smiling down at him. He looks exhausted. "Miss Mouri is looking everywhere for you."

"Really?" Shinichi innocently tilts his head. "But I've been right here, playing games on my phone." He shows Takagi the screen, where a jewel-matching game flashes brightly. "This game is really popular at school these days."

"Is it?" Takagi squints at the screen, his eyes crossing comically. "I think Shiratori likes to play this one! He probably picked it up from your old teacher, Kobayashi-sensei."

"Actually, I was just thinking..." He looks down at the game to hide his face. "Since I was playing this game, it reminded me that Kaitou KID is a jewel thief."

"Right," Takagi says slowly, putting his hand between Shinichi's shoulder blades to usher him toward the front of the mansion, where Ran presumably awaits. "So?"

"Sooooo, doesn't that mean there should be a jewel, if someone wants his attention?"

Takagi stills, and Shinichi smiles up at him innocently until he wanly smiles back. "That's... very true, Conan." He scratches his cheek, where the faint growth of stubble indicates just how long a day it's been for the poor detective. "I'll... inform Inspector Megure." He pats Shinichi on the head. "Any more clues for us professionals?"

"Not yet," Shinichi replies cheerfully, and Takagi chuckles, leading onward toward the front of the mansion.

They arrive at the entrance, and Ran immediately grabs Shinichi's hand, a human shackle to keep him at her side. Her skin is so soft at the palm, despite the calluses she's built up on her knuckles from breaking boards in karate practice. Shinichi has always liked that about Ran. The contradiction of her superior fighting skills and the inherent gentleness of her heart that makes those skills her last resort. She's like her hands; strong and soft all at once.
"Conan-kun, you have to stop wandering off! You're getting too old for this!" Ran huffs, her bangs blowing up from her forehead with the force of the exhalation. "Especially when you haven't been feeling well!"

Personally, Shinichi thinks they should have figured out by now that he's not purposelessly roaming crime scenes, but only Takagi really refrains from chastising him over the matter. "Sorry, Nee-chan, I just wanted to play on my phone and be out of the way of the police."

Ran sighs. "I suppose that's a good excuse," she says, eyeing him suspiciously. "It's about time for us to head back to the hotel, now. It's way past your bedtime, young man. Plus, Dad's been asked to help out on the case, and if you want to go along like you usually do, we'll have to get you up early tomorrow. I hope Dad figures this out quickly! Sonoko's going to be really furious if I can't meet up with her for that movie tomorrow, after she went through all that trouble to get tickets!"

"I'm sure you'll be able to go, but if you can't, she'll understand. After all, it involves her KID-sama, right?"

"You've got a point, there," Ran says, with affectionate exasperation. "Oh, that Sonoko. Maybe I shouldn't mention KID unless I have to." She shakes her head, and tugs lightly on Shinichi's hand. "Come on, Conan, Dad's waiting for us outside in the taxi. You know how impatient he can get."

Shinichi is pretty sure Mouri is already asleep, head lolled back while he dreams about idols or beer or some combination of the two, but he nods anyway, earning one of Ran's gentle grins. As they walk out to the taxi, Shinichi turns to look at the mansion behind him, unable to dismiss the image of that twisted, haunting version of KID's signature.

What does this all have to do with you, Kaitou KID? Shinichi wonders, as he slides in to the back seat of the vehicle next to a snoring Mouri, who barely flinches when Shinichi accidentally elbows him. How are you connected to Scarlette Shinamoto?

*

Shinichi wakes in the morning to Ran's gentle prodding. "Wake up, Conan-kun," she whispers, words gobbled up by Mouri's dead-raising snores in the adjacent bed. "You should use the bathroom first, before Dad starts to stumble around in his morning comedy routine."

Ran’s breath smells like mint, and that has Shinichi opening his eyes to look at her. She’s still sleep-mussed, her hair a mess and her pajamas rumpled.

Some things never change, and the way Ran looks in the morning is one of them. When they were kids, they’d always had sleepovers at Shinichi’s, away from the Mouri parents’ messy, angry separation proceedings, playing hide and seek in the Kudou mansion until far too late at night. They’d fall asleep in the library under thick blankets that had been intended for fort-making, and Ran would wake him up in the morning looking as though she’d survived a tornado, teeth already brushed and eyes as bright as the morning sun.

Sometimes, it’s these simple, routine moments, subtly changed, that really underscore everything Shinichi has lost.

"Morning already?" His voice is a croak, and his head throbs. It feels like it’s only been minutes since he crawled into bed, not the hours that must have passed between him closing his eyes and opening them again.

"Yep," Ran answers cheerfully, pulling back his covers after brushing his hair out of his face.
"Detective Satou will be here in thirty minutes to get you and Dad, so if you want to tag along and play investigator, you’d better get ready." She wags her finger. "I know you especially love getting involved when it’s Kaitou KID."

"Okay, okay, Nee-chan, I’m up," he says, running a hand through his hair and yawning as he sits up, his legs hanging over the side of the bed. His toes almost touch the ground. *Growing*, he thinks vaguely. *I’m growing.*

He fights a wave of dizziness as he stands, his stomach rolling, and he takes a moment to hold on to the edge of the bed until the world stops spinning. The sting of bile in his throat is swiftly becoming familiar, even though this symptom comes and goes, along with the others. He presses a hand to his belly.

"Conan-kun? Are you all right?" Ran’s hand steadies him, resting warmly between his shoulders. "Do you feel sick again?"

"No," Shinichi lies, tasting blood at the back of his mouth. "I’m fine!"

"You’ve been getting dizzy more often. Don’t think I haven’t noticed!" Her hand moves up to the back of his neck. "Should I take you to a doctor?"

"No, no." Shinichi forces himself to grin at her. "Definitely not! Look, it’s already gone!" He steps away from the bed and her comforting hand, and another wave of dizziness rushes him, but he hides it long enough to shuffle into the bathroom.

When the door closes he stoops over the toilet to retch, watching in misery as a thin ribbon of blood and spit swirl together in the toilet bowl. This hasn’t happened in weeks, the blood, but maybe with the lack of sleep, Shinichi’s pushing his body further than he should.

*The possibility that there would be other consequences to turning back the clock on your body has always existed, Kudou,* Haibara’d told him, as she’d taken his blood pressure, guilt and worry covered by her dry and unapproachable bedside manner, and Shinichi had stared down at his uncovered knees, unable to even try to meet her eyes.

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The rap of Ran’s knuckles on the door pulls him back to his feet. He flushes the toilet and opens the door to retrieve the stool the hotel had left for him, dragging it in front of the sink so he can reach the faucet. Ran follows him in this time, retrieving her hairbrush from her toiletries bag and sidling up next to him. She’s more than two heads taller than he is, still, but with the stool, his head reaches her shoulder. She ruffles his hair mischievously as he squirts toothpaste onto the Masked Yaiba toothbrush Genta had given him for traveling on his made-up birthday last year.

Ran watches him as he brushes, making him slightly self-conscious. "What?" he asks, his mouth full of foam, and Ran shakes her head, as if clearing a haze.

"It’s nothing." She nibbles on her lower lip, and Shinichi…

*Sherlock Holmes once told Watson, "you see, but you do not observe"*. Sherlock had said it as though it were something disappointing, but occasionally, Shinichi envies the ability to look at the world as a forest, instead of noting the differences between each and every tree. As bad as he is with dealing with emotions, Shinichi always picks them out, reading every nuance without making a conscious decision to do so. Especially, he knows, when it comes to Ran, whose face, after years and years of shared moments and memories, has become a book Shinichi can quote by heart better than anything Sir Arthur Conan Doyle ever wrote.
"You look sad again," Shinichi says, without thinking, and Ran blinks at him, her eyelashes fluttering with surprise. Then her lips quirk in a smile that does nothing to make her look any happier.

"You brush your teeth the same way Shinichi did when we were small," she says, finally. "Methodically, starting with the back teeth and working your way forward. He always used to lecture me about it. About how it was efficient."

"It is." Shinichi stops brushing to meet Ran’s gaze in the mirror, and she quickly breaks it, moving to sit on the closed lid of the toilet. "Why does that make you sad?"

"Because I don’t know when I’ll ever see Shinichi again," Ran replies, "so it feels a little… Not nostalgic, but maybe like my heart is too heavy."

Her words, delivered with an unavoidable ring of melancholy, are a punch to the stomach, and Shinichi hurries to distract himself by brushing his front teeth, scrubbing at his gums with more force than he should as he tries to rid his mouth of acid.

"I keep thinking," Ran continues, "that he’ll definitely be back, and all that stuff he said, about how he doesn’t know if he’ll ever be able to..." She sighs. "That it was all something he made up to keep me safe. Shinichi can be like that, you know?" She laughs, a miserable, empty sound. "But he said goodbye so seriously that I can’t help but believe him."

Shinichi turns on the faucet to drown out the pitter-patter of his anxious heart. He hates lying to her. He’s here, right here, but if she knew, if he told her, she would be in even more danger. He knows her, better than he knows almost anyone else in the world besides himself, and she would let it slip one day, to Sonoko or to Kazuha, or worse, to Mouri, and then… they’d be targets, these people Shinichi loves. Then these past two years, of Shinichi slowly losing bits and pieces of himself to this child he’s become, would have all been for nothing.

"The truth is," Ran says, running her brush through her hair as Shinichi rinses the toothpaste from his mouth, blood from his gums swirling down the drain with the white foam, "that I’d always secretly imagined that Shinichi and I would get married."

Shinichi turns to look at her, his heart hammering in a chest that’s too small, his arms not long enough to wrap around her shoulders.

"And now..." Her eyes gain shadows. Those had never been there, before Tropical Land, and all that came after. "I don’t know, it’s probably not..." She purses her lips. "Shinichi is my best friend, and I know that he cares about me. I always just assumed we would end up together. We did everything together as kids. Shinichi was just like you when he was a kid, Conan-kun. You remind me of him so much, all the time."

"People always tell me we’re a lot alike," Shinichi mumbles as he cleans his toothbrush, rubbing his thumb across the bristles. "That’s probably why."

"We never had any secrets from each other, back then," Ran continues, looking up at the ceiling. "Now I have no idea where he is, or what he’s doing. I’d like to think that’s because of this one important case, but something tells me that Shinichi is doing something more than that. That he’s involved in something so dangerous he’s afraid to be near me."

"That’s—"

"I thought, for a while, that you were Shinichi." She looks at him, but he doesn’t think she’s really
seeing him. "You keep secrets, too. It’s like I recognized him in you." She laughs. "But that’s… It’s not possible, right? And Shinichi wouldn’t lie to me like that. He wouldn’t do that to me, would he?"

It hurts enough that Shinichi has to clench his teeth against it. He feels helpless, not sure what to say, especially when he knows that Shinichi would, is, lying to her, every day and every night, and has been for over two years. Every conversation he has with her is more lies than truth, and it’s all so twisted up now that Shinichi can’t always remember which parts are the lies, anymore.

"I don’t know," Shinichi says. "I am sure, though, that if he did, it would only be because he was sure it was the right thing to do."

"The right thing for who?" Ran slams her brush down on the edge of the sink as Shinichi gathers water in his cupped palms. "That idiot shouldn’t be making any decisions for me."

Shinichi splashes his face, once, then twice, before turning to Ran, who is still staring down at the tiled floor like the answers are written in the grout. "I shouldn’t even be asking you about this, should I? I always forget you’re only eight."

Eight. He stares at her, and sees Ran, the girl he loves, and Ran-nee-chan, his big sister, and little Ran, the girl he protected from ghosts when they were small. She is all these things to Shinichi, but to Ran, he’s two separate people, with two separate roles in her life, and right now, he can only fulfill one of them.

"Shinichi-nii-san telling you he can’t come back must have been very hard for him," Shinichi says. His heartbeat is erratic, and he’s feeling dizzy again. "He confessed to you in London, right? So telling the girl he loves that he can’t come back to her must have been one of the hardest things he’s ever done." He grips the edge of the sink. "Ran-nee-chan, you might think it’s selfish, but I think Shinichi-nii-san just wants what’s best for you, even if that means you not waiting for him anymore."

Ran’s head jerks up, her startled eyes finding Shinichi’s. She produces a wobbly grin as tears leak from her eyes, and Shinichi swallows harshly before responding with one of his own.

"You’re too smart for your age, Conan-kun." She combs her fingers through his hair, and Shinichi closes his eyes to relish the touch, briefly, before he swats her hand away. "Somehow, though, just telling you what’s worrying me makes me feel better."

"That’s what little brothers are for," he murmurs, words thick and horrible on his tongue, pushing his glasses onto his face and then staring at himself in the mirror. Edogawa Conan stares back. "We can’t just be annoying all the time."

Ran stands behind him, wrapping her arms around him and pressing a kiss to the crown of his head. "I don’t know what I’d have done these past few years without you," she says, and then, more quietly: "It’s like I can’t remember what things were like before you came." Then she presses a second kiss, and drops her arms, leaving him in the bathroom to finish getting ready.

Shinichi looks into the mirror. A child with eyes far too old stares back. There are spots of color high in his cheeks. He looks tired and sick. He is.

He puts his fingers up to the glass, touching the image of his nose. "Was I selfish, asking her to wait?" His reflection doesn’t answer. "Or am I selfish now, not giving her the choice?"

There won’t be a cure, though, without a miracle. Shinichi is fairly certain of that, even with all of Haibara’s forced optimism, covering her frustration and anger at yet another failed antidote. Time, even turned ten years back, is not limitless.
Maybe he’ll never tell Ran, that Conan is Shinichi and that Shinichi is Conan. Conan’ll just… go home, back from wherever he came from, and Ran will never know that Shinichi has been watching over her from this close, and that, when he leaves, it’ll be an irreversible departure.

Shinichi remains in the bathroom until he’s sure his face won’t say anything he doesn’t want it to; until frustration stops crawling up his insides like a desperate drowning spider scrambling for dry land, and pushes his oversized, lens-less glasses up until they sit exactly right.

Then, he viciously bends his thoughts toward the case as he exits the bathroom to get dressed for the day, knowing that the best he can do is take things one day at a time.

*

Takeuchi Minato is a tall, handsome man with fantastic taste in suits. Sitting across from the police on a sofa in one of his three reception rooms, though, he just looks tired and harried, slumped back against the cushions of his Marie Antoinette French Classic sofa as the hand holding his coffee cup shakes slightly. "I still can't believe she's dead," he says, voice unsteady. He’s unshaven, and his hair is messy, even if it’s cut well enough that it’s fallen into place sufficiently for him to look groomed at first glance.

There’s sincere grief in his eyes, and Shinichi hadn't been expecting that. Maybe he's spent too long looking for the guilt in people. It's nice to think that, occasionally, people will defy his expectations in a positive way.

That's something that's been happening more, since Shinichi became Conan, even though he sees just as many murders. It's possible, Shinichi concedes mentally, that before, he'd been too sure, too arrogant, to notice much beyond his own cleverness, and that it’s only because he’s forced to rely more on others that he can acknowledge their worth.

Inspector Megure clears his throat, staring at Takeuchi. "It was well known that you and the victim had a public altercation earlier in the week," he says, finally. "Why was that?"

"She'd been acting strange," Takeuchi answers. "Leaving at odd hours, and disappearing for days at a time. It wasn't like her. I thought she was cheating on me, you know? When I confronted her about it, though, in Shinjuku a few days ago, she said that wasn't it at all, and that she loved me. So..." He sets his coffee cup down on the table. "I've never been serious about a woman before Scarlette. I know what the gossip columns said, but that stuff was never true. We had something special, wonderful... I wanted..." He shudders. "I wanted to marry her, and I was pretty sure she knew that."

The maid, Kanami-san, Shinichi mentally corrects, enters the room, then, with a pot of fresh coffee. She refills everyone’s cups, and Shinichi takes a moment to note the way she avoids everyone’s eyes as she pours, her mouth drawn. Her hair is graying around the temples.

"You never found out where she was going?" Satou, standing behind the Inspector, asks, as Shinichi moves around the table to get a better view of Takeuchi's body language. He's pretty sure the man is innocent, but it can't hurt to play it safe.

"I'd been planning on hiring a private detective." Takeuchi shrugs, something listless in the motion as he averts his gaze. "Maybe I should have done it sooner. Maybe then..." His eyes are glassy, and out of sympathy, Shinichi studies the bookshelf instead of his face. It’s mostly filled with books about planes. Shinichi wonders if Takeuchi is an enthusiast, or perhaps the books were inherited with the house.

"Did Scarlette have any enemies?" Mouri, who is sitting next to Megure, asks. "Or rivals who would
want her dead?"

"Scarlette had a lot of rivals," Takeuchi says. "How could she not? Her rise to popularity was meteoric, and add that to her mixed-race parentage? You know how old-fashioned some people can be. Not as much with young people, these days, but it’s still there."

Satou nods along like none of this is news while Megure makes a note on his pad.

"I can’t imagine anyone would want her dead, though." Takeuchi runs a hand through his hair. "Scarlette was nice to everyone she met, and her keigo was above reproach, especially considering she was born and raised in America. She was always so polite, and in her free time, she mostly does…did volunteer work." He chokes on the past tense.

"Only a few more questions," Satou says, "and then we'll leave you to your mourning."

"I'm sure you're aware that the murderer drew the Kaitou KID caricature in blood on the floor of your ballroom," the Inspector says, after a moment's pause. "Was Scarlette connected, in any way, to any famous jewelry or gemstones?"

"No," Takeuchi says. "Actually she was approached for a contract with Kawakita Satomi, and she turned it down flat. She said she didn't have any interest in being connected with jewelry lines. I think she was more into old watches and stuff than any modern jewelry, anyway." Shinichi sucked his lower lip into his mouth and chewed it softly as he watched realization creep onto Takeuchi's face. "She did have a pendant she never took off, though, even in bed."

"A pendant?" Shinichi asks, causing Takeuchi to turn and look at him. "She wasn't wearing it when we found her."

"Then the murderer stole it," Takeuchi says. "She wore it everywhere, except when she was modeling. In the shower, to sleep, everywhere. She called it 'Lady Red', for some reason."

"Why is that weird?" Shinichi asks, and Takeuchi frowns.

"Because the stone was purple," he replies, holding up his hand to make a circle with his index finger and thumb. "About this big, and the color of an amethyst. I'd show you a picture, but I keep all my photos in my room, since I don’t carry a wallet with me. It messes up the line of my trousers, you know, and Scarlette…” He laughs, a choked sound. "She always liked that my name alone was enough to pay for things, or that I had tabs at all the best restaurants."

"Interesting," Shinichi mutters, pulling out his phone to look up pictures of Scarlette Shinamoto. He scrolls through until he finds a clear shot, and then shows it to Takeuchi. "Is this it?"


"It doesn't look very valuable," Satou says, leaning down to look over Shinichi's shoulder. "It must have sentimental value."

"I don't know," Takeuchi admits. "I asked, but she never told me." He looks away. "I never liked how many secrets she kept, but…"

"How often do you use the ballroom?" Shinichi asks, to keep the man focused, careful to keep from sounding too demanding. "I noticed the floor was smooth, but there was nothing to protect it."

"My grandfather used the ballroom all the time," Takeuchi says, looking over at Shinichi. His eyes
move at different speeds. A lazy eye? Shinichi hadn’t noticed before, since Takeuchi usually turns his whole head when he addresses someone, perhaps for that very reason. "I usually throw parties outside in the gardens, or have my friends over for billiards, so… Those are still the floors my grandfather had put in when he rebuilt this place. This mansion was constructed around a house built in the 1860s, heavily based on a French castle he fell in love with when he was young. The floor plans he worked from are still upstairs in my office, even if I can make neither head nor tail of them. I keep them for the nostalgic value, since I also have digitized ones on file with my attorney."

"Could you have a copy of the digital plans sent to the police station?" Satou asks, and Takeuchi nods.

"Of course, anything." He toys with his cufflinks, not nervous but at a loss for what to do with his trembling hands, and Shinichi types up an update in code for Heiji, to send to him via text.

He uses romaji to write everything out in a modified version of one of Poe’s ciphers, a mono-alphabetic substitution code, because he and Heiji had argued about a recent research paper on that very subject just last month. Shinichi doesn’t think Edogawa Conan’s phone is being tracked by anyone dangerous who matters, but it’s better to be safe than sorry, and Heiji is good with codes; better than anyone else Shinichi talks to, at least, with the exception of KID.

"Do you even know who Kaitou KID is, mister?" Shinichi asks, on a whim.

Takeuchi nods enthusiastically. "Actually, I’ve been known to follow his heists. I think he’s an interesting guy. Flashy, which is something I can identify with." His smile is real, if somewhat weak. "I always wanted to put up a jewel for exhibition that would catch his eye, but so far no luck. I guess my jewelry isn’t exciting enough."

"So you’re a fan," says Mouri, flatly, and Megure writes that down in his notebook as Takeuchi winces.

"I guess you could say that." He rubs a hand on his cheek, and winces as he encounters the stubble. "I appreciate a good salesman, in my line of work."

Shinichi barely represses a chuckle at that. What would KID think about being compared to a salesman? He’d probably hate it, which means Shinichi will try it out some time, to antagonize him.

"I think those are all the questions we have," Megure is saying when Shinichi hits send on his text, and he’s standing up, Mouri echoing him immediately.

Satou bows, thanking him for his time in a soft, considerate tone she saves for strangers. "If you think of anything else, let us know."

"Absolutely," Takeuchi says. He walks them to the front of the house.

Shinichi lags a few steps behind, looking around in a way he hadn't gotten to last night. It's tasteful and modern everywhere toward the front of the mansion, unlike the old-money extravagance to the rear, where the ballroom is. And even these front-most rooms are confusing, with the way the hallway changes width and direction.

"If the guy is a fan of Kaitou KID, who’s to say he didn’t set this all up to kill two birds with one stone?" Mouri is saying to Megure, when Shinichi catches up. Megure appears to be only half paying attention. "Kill his girlfriend and get the attention of the thief that has ignored him in the past! It’s the perfect motive, and it explains why the KID caricature was at the crime scene!"

Shinichi rolls his eyes.
"Why don’t you fall asleep and solve it, then, Mouri?" Megure says under his breath. "Since the things you say when you’re awake are always so useless."

Outside the gate, paparazzi swarm. They yell through the bars, asking about Scarlette, about Takeuchi, about KID. Inspector Megure gives a simple "No comment", before ducking into the front squad car, along with Satou.

Before he and Mouri join Takagi in the second car, Shinichi surveys the crowd. Amongst the clamoring journalists and fans, there’s one woman who is just staring at the mansion, a distant look on her face. He only has a few seconds to catalogue her face, taking note of her eyes, the absolutely unusual color of them, before she's swallowed up by hungry spectators, and he loses track of her completely.

* 

Shinichi is left to his own devices in the afternoon, after begging off seeing that predictable action flick showing at three that Sonoko is determined to watch. Ran seems excited though, and after their conversation earlier, he’s glad to see her go, wanting time to organize his own feelings without being under her watchful and sometimes too observant gaze.

He’d put everything aside, this morning, but now at a dead end on the case, he has nothing to drag him away from the tightness in his chest that he knows is about Ran and the mess that he’s left of Kudou Shinichi’s life that he’ll never get to fix.

"Are you sure you want to stay here by yourself?" Ran asks.

"Yes," Shinichi reassures her, "I’ll be fine, Nee-chan! I’m going to take a nap and play games on my phone." He grins at her, and returns it, reflexively straightening his collar.

"Don't get into trouble," she warns him sternly as she prepares to leave their hotel room. She's beautiful, dolled up in a pretty dress with subtle make-up, and Shinichi can only remember when she was twelve and wore lipstick for the first time, smudging it outside her lip-line and getting it on her teeth when she smiled.

Sonoko is in the hall, rant about incompetent police and her "wronged KID-sama" beginning before Ran’s even got her shoes all the way on. "Can you believe that some newscasters were even suggesting KID-sama might have had something to do with the murder!" Then louder. "Even worse, some people think KID was secretly dating Scarlette, and Takeuchi killed her out of jealousy!"

Shinichi winces at the shrillness of her voice, but at the same time, he knows Sonoko is the best person to cheer Ran up when she’s down. The girl might get on Shinichi’s nerves, but she’s one of Ran’s best friends, and Shinichi knows she’ll always be there for Ran when Shinichi can’t be. Like now.

Stop moping, he chides himself. What good will it do?

"The police don’t think that at all," Ran replies, laughing slightly. "Why would it be worse if KID were dating her?"

"Because that would mean KID-sama’s type is tall, glamorous models!" Sonoko wails, and Ran’s reply is lost to him, her voice fading as she exits, her red scarf covering her mouth.

Shinichi presses his face into his cupped hands after Ran closes the door, flopping back on the bed and closing his eyes. He has the beginnings of a migraine, constant and obnoxious behind his left temple, and this case isn’t making enough sense to distract him. He has no suspects, a very tentative
motive, and a nonsensical crime scene—who killed the model, and why?

"I can’t make bricks without clay," he mutters to himself, then shakes his head. "Not even the amazing Holmes could solve this entire case with so little in the way of clues."

He tosses and turns on the bed, wanting to change his perspective on the case, but no matter how he approaches it, he still doesn’t know how the ballroom crime scene was staged, or how a body that’s been stabbed seven distinct times can wind up posed so neatly, when there isn’t a secondary scene, or a separate location. The police had searched the whole house and hadn’t found any traces of blood, including in the bathrooms, which is where Shinichi would have checked first.

Wanting to clear his head, he decides on a walk, getting up and grabbing a jacket, slipping the hotel keycard into his pocket. Mouri is still down at the local precinct, where Inspector Megure has set up camp with his team, and he’s no doubt making a nuisance of himself with harebrained theories and no evidence to back them up.

Shinichi could head there, but… If anything important happens, he’s sure he’ll hear about it: from Satou or Takagi or even Mouri, as long as he asks the right questions. Realistically, though, he doubts they’ll make any breakthroughs on the case until someone (probably Shinichi) figures out how the killer got in and out of Takeuchi’s gated property, or what another possible motive might have been for Scarlette Shinamoto’s death.

Besides, when they’ve wrapped up for the day, Mouri will probably head out for drinks, meaning Shinichi is being given the rare gift of alone time, and he doesn’t have to worry about being back here, cobbling together a happy face, until Ran is due home in five hours or so.

Out on the street, with his hands stuffed into his coat pockets and the wind whipping at his face, Shinichi runs through the case one more time, as the tall buildings of the area funnel the wind.

First, Scarlette Shinamoto is killed between six and seven in the evening, most likely at an unknown location. She is then moved to the ballroom, where her blood is used to draw a cartoon of infamous gem-thief Kaitou KID, in a gruesome mockery of his calling card, and the pendant she always wears is missing from her person. All of this occurs while her lover and the longtime maid are asleep on small doses of Temazapam, enough to only keep them asleep for around an hour to an hour and a half, leaving them unable to commit the deed.

How, then, did the killer get on the property? Where was the actual murder committed? And what did this killer want with KID? If they wanted that gem, what would they need KID for, when they already had it?

He tilts his head back to look up at the sky. It’s overcast today, gray clouds encroaching on yesterday’s clear blue, the sun hidden away and giving the air a distinct chill. It won’t rain, not today, but the washed out look of the world matches what’s happening inside his head.

His stomach rolls. He’d passed on breakfast today, but he hadn’t been able to do the same with lunch. If Ran suspects that he doesn’t feel well, she’ll lock him up tight and dote on him, and while that’s not always a terrible thing, he’s got his hooks into this case and he won’t rest until he solves it. Not just for the victim’s sake, but also for Kaitou KID’s. He’d almost gotten blown up by the Black Organization while disguised as a grown up Haibara, after all, and even he knows the trade of letting KID go after that terrible Sera disguise was not a fair one.

Shinichi doesn’t know how long he’s been walking when he feels a shift in the atmosphere, the hair on his arms standing up and letting him know he’s being watched. He looks around with fresh awareness, but catches no one obvious. Glancing at the street signs, he takes careful note of his
He hasn’t made too many turns, and he’s only ten minutes or so from the hotel with shortcuts, or, if he keeps going forward, fifteen from the police station.

Assuring himself that it’s only his imagination, he starts walking again. He’s unable to stop his paranoid glances, though, casting his gaze from left to right in a sweeping search. Ayumi would make fun of him, if she were here. She’s moved past the fawning stage and straight into the pigtail pulling with her crush, even if Shinichi doesn’t exactly have pigtails.

He hunches at a strong burst of wind that’s partially blocked as someone falls into step beside him, and Shinichi looks up to see the woman from earlier, at the mansion gate, with the unusual colored eyes. She has a white-knuckled grip on her purse with her left hand, and her face is tense with stress.

She’s been looking for him, then. "I saw you earlier," he says, and she visibly startles.

"Did you?" She shakes her head. "I shouldn’t be surprised. You’ve always been preternaturally observant."

Always? Shinichi thinks, taking a closer look at the woman, wondering if he’s met her before, or if she’s just seen him in the papers. Her eyes. He knows them, somehow.

"You seem nervous," Shinichi says, after his careful perusal offers no other stirrings of recognition. "Is there some reason you wanted to talk with an elementary school student instead of the police?" He fingers his dart-watch, prepared to tranquilize her and run, if this turns out to be some kind of kidnapping attempt. "Do you have information you can’t go to the law about?"

"It wasn’t me, Meitantei," she says, breathy and quick, and Shinichi blinks. "I’ve barely even heard of this Scarlette Shinamoto outside of the news report this morning, and I don’t get involved with murders."

"KID?" Shinichi snorts, shoulders relaxing. "You’re going to give me a heart attack one of these days."

"Isn’t that my line, twerp?" It’s not KID’s real voice, but it’s KID’s taunting cadence, half-purring the words. "Usually it’s you surprising me, right?"

"What about that time with the stun-gun?" Shinichi’s headache had lingered for days.

"Ahh, but you got your revenge for that, didn’t you, little detective?" KID winces at the memory. It’s strange on the sweet, round face he’s donning.

But oh yes, Shinichi had gotten him good, with a soccer ball right to the back of the head and that index card identifying him to the other police. Some of his best work on a KID heist yet, honestly.

"I think you might be smirking," KID says, bending at the waist to look more closely at Shinichi’s face. "How vicious you are, when I have done so much for—"

"Anyway," Shinichi interrupts, "I know you weren’t involved in the murder, and so do the police." He squints at KID. "We know you’re not a bad person, even if you are a goddamn pain in the ass. Inspector Nakamori even called Division 1 to make sure we knew you wouldn’t have hurt someone, and that you were probably being targeted." He huffs. "As if I didn’t know that from the beginning. After all, the signature was a copy of the one you used when you left your second notice about returning the forged Ryoma artifacts for the Phantom Lady."

"I’m glad you have such faith in me." KID’s tone is laced with… relief? Did he actually think Shinichi would suspect him of murder, even after all the times he’s purposely let KID slip through
"Shut up. I memorize everything, asshole." Still, he’s flushing at the attention. KID’s so good at that, too. Making Shinichi blush, with frustration or embarrassment or triumph or whatever else, with just a couple of words and a certain tilt to his full mouth. "Don’t start thinking you’re special."

"Oh, I wouldn’t dare!" KID laughs, but it’s short, and lacks the usual air of whimsy that Shinichi associates with him. Everything about KID today, actually, is slightly off, now that Shinichi thinks about it. His reactions seem forced, and Shinichi wonders, not for the first time, how much KID is really like the grinning mask he wears to his heists. "Even if the mere suggestion turned you a delightful shade of pink."

"Like those heels?" Shinichi pointedly looks at KID’s shoes.

"Like a tomato," corrects KID. "Although it’s more pomegranate season now, isn’t it?"

"That’s not all you wanted, is it? To tell me you weren’t involved?" He licks his lips, and regrets it, the wind making them sting.

KID catches his own lower lip with his teeth. "Does my favorite critic have any idea why a murderer wants to get my attention with a dead model, then?"

"Since when am I your favorite?" Shinichi had thought perhaps Hakuba had that dubious honor, but maybe the other detective was too rigid a thinker for KID’s tastes despite his devotion to the cause. Also, Shinichi had noticed that Hakuba wasn’t as quick with dodging cards fired point blank from the card gun, so it might, at this point, be a ranking of how hard they make him work for his wins. In that case, Shinichi is the clear frontrunner.

"You’re different from the other detectives, for me." KID’s eyelids shutter. "Your motives are different."

"How so?"

"You want to defeat me in a match of wits, and that’s more important to you than bringing me to justice for my crimes." He flutters his eyelashes. "That’s the type of gentleman’s game I’m interested in playing, even if you play it too violently for my tastes."

"Gentleman’s game?"

"A battle between two minds." KID slides the hand not at his purse down the front of his jacket, pressing out wrinkles. His skirt flits and twirls around his knees as they walk. "Two gentlemanly minds."

"You squeezed Ran’s ass. That’s not very gentlemanly, thief."

"Well, I admit to getting a certain pleasure out of pissing people off." KID giggles, sounding disconcertingly like Sonoko. "I couldn’t pass up the opportunity to rile you up."

"Or you’re a pervert, plain and simple." Shinichi rounds a corner, and KID catches up easily with his longer legs. His smooth longer legs, hairless under sheer stockings. Shinichi isn’t going to think about that.

"It’s always a pleasure bantering with you, little guy, but you haven’t answered my question." The wind blows soft brown curls across a face that likely is nothing like KID’s real one. Even so, the anxiousness there, in his mouth and eyes and the curl of his fingers, though almost imperceptible, is
genuine, and it gives Shinichi pause. "Have you figured out what all this has to do with me?"

"Honestly, I was hoping you could tell me," Shinichi replies.

"No ideas at all?"

Shinichi hesitates. "It might be related to 'Lady Red'."

"What's that? A pet? A strip club?" KID cranes his head down to look at Shinichi more carefully. "Should little kids even know about strip clubs? Don’t glare at me like that, Tantei-kun, it’s a valid question."

Shinichi glares at him anyway. "Oi, oi, it’s a gemstone." He lowers his voice so he won’t be overheard. "One that Scarlette wore as a pendant on a necklace and never took off. Detective Satou didn’t think it looked very valuable, and we still don’t know why it’s called 'Lady Red' when it isn’t red."

"It isn’t red?" The click of KID’s pink high heels against the sidewalk stutters, and when Shinichi cranes his neck up to look, KID has stopped completely and is staring at him with an unreadable expression on his face. "Are you sure? Are you absolutely sure, Meitantei?"

"Yes," Shinichi says, confused. "It’s a soft purple. If you look online, she’s wearing it in most of her pictures." KID starts to walk again, and Shinichi keeps an eye on him as they pass a busy cosmetics store, so that he doesn’t lose the thief in the crowd. "I don’t get it. Why would she name a purple stone ‘Lady Red’?"

KID sighs, a heavy, shuddering thing, and Shinichi stares at KID outright. KID’s pretty eyes are wide and bright with excitement as they fix on his own feet, and Shinichi doesn’t know why he keeps noticing the color and shape of those eyes, when they’re probably just part of KID’s disguise-of-the-day.

"It's called ‘Lady Red’, even though it isn't red," KID repeats to himself, and his voice cracks.

Shinichi presses his lips into a thin line."You know something," he says, and KID’s lips curl down in a surprisingly honest expression of doubt.

"I..." That lower lip, caught again by his teeth. Is that a tell? Shinichi never thought KID would have one. "Maybe. I can't talk about it here, though."

"It could be about the stone, then. Hattori was right." KID flinches, and Shinichi doesn't know that he's ever seen KID look this... off-balance. "That’s a motive. So tell me, Kaitou KID, what would a notorious jewel thief need with a cheap-looking gem?"

"Not everything is that straightforward." KID tugs down on his blouse. "It's not about any kind of monetary value."

"That's obvious," Shinichi says, exasperated, moving closer to KID. People walk around them on both sides, put out with their pace, but Shinichi pays them no mind, keeping his gaze firmly settled on KID. "You give them back, so you clearly aren’t concerned with the bottom line. Your heists must serve a different purpose; I’ve thought so for years, even if no one else seems to have picked up on it."

"I only need one jewel." KID laughs lightly, with a tinge of self-deprecation that catches Shinichi off-guard. "So I return the ones that aren’t what I want."
Mind whirling, Shinichi watches KID twist a long strand of hair around his finger. "You’re searching for something specific." KID’s lips twist, and Shinichi sighs.

There isn’t much in common, among KID’s stone choices, save for the fact that they usually are all old… Gems with a history, Shinichi thinks, with myths and legends surrounding them.

So, KID is looking for something specific, but, maybe, he doesn’t know what it looks like, only what it doesn’t look like. After all, why else would he return the gems he works so hard to steal? And if he’s looking for something specific, it’s probably unique, meaning…

"You’re cute when you think too hard, Tantei-kun~," KID lightly grazes his hand through Shinichi’s hair, but Shinichi won’t be distracted, this time, following his thoughts to a natural conclusion.

"You're not the only one looking," he says aloud, with certainty, and KID gives him a sardonic grin. "You use the heists to flush them out! To get information!"

"You don't miss much, do you?" He starts walking again, and Shinichi hurries to walk alongside him. "Scary~! That's probably why you're such a tough audience."

"You don't know enough about them to track them down outside of the context of heists yet, so you drag them out into the open, and force them to tangle with you on your own terms."

"And if I, with my tricks and illusions, do the stealing, people are much less likely to be harmed." He taps his chin thoughtfully, and Shinichi almost raises an eyebrow at the pastel pink manicure. "Well, save for Inspector Nakamori's pride; I do my best to harm that on a regular basis." He winks.

"You're a flashy target, in all that white," Shinichi says. "You know you’re nuts, right? One good shot—" The City Building archives. Shinichi doesn’t finish the sentence.

KID is staring up at the sky, much like Shinichi had earlier, and seems not to have a reply.

Shinichi runs his tongue across the roof of his mouth. "So do you think the message at Takeuchi’s mansion was a warning for you, or a challenge?"

They stop at a crosswalk, and KID exhales heavily, his bangs falling into his eyes and blocking them from scrutiny.

"I don't know yet," KID says. "This isn’t the style of the people I usually deal with. I do know that if this stone is what I think it is, then you need to look into Scarlette Shinamoto and then figure out how she got it."

"You suspect a fake identity, then," Shinichi says, crinkling his nose. "That's such an easy thing to construct, if you know how."

At the very least, researching Scarlette will expand their suspect list. At most, it'll uncover the next layer of this case, or break it wide open.

"Is that so?" KID stares down at him curiously for a moment, the weight of his gaze heavy enough to make Shinichi hold his breath, before KID relents and looks away. Shinichi attributes KID’s circumspectness to KID understanding the importance, the necessity, of secrets, in a way no one else in his daily life aside from Haibara really can. "Hmm."

"What?"

"It’s nothing." He pulls out a phone, black and nondescript, and checks the time. "This is where we
part company, little detective.”

They’re almost back to Shinichi’s hotel. He wonders if KID knows that, and wouldn’t be remotely surprised if he did. He knows a lot of details about Shinichi’s personal life and daily habits that he shouldn’t.

It should bother him more.

KID gives Shinichi a jaunty little wave, fingers wriggling playfully. It’s a careless and easy gesture, when KID, despite all his jokes and casual conversation, has been nothing but anxious throughout this conversation. It doesn’t sit right with Shinichi at all.

He reaches out and grabs KID’s wrist before he can walk away. KID’s skin is surprisingly warm and soft, silky under his fingertips. Shinichi can feel the unsteady beat of KID’s pulse where his fingertips press into the vein.

"KID, be careful." He feels slightly embarrassed at how grave his voice sounds, but... He thinks again of the blood on the ballroom floor, a macabre invitation. "Just... Don’t be as reckless as you usually are." Don't get hurt.

Astonished, KID gapes at him. "I..." Closing his mouth, he smiles. It’s an authentic smile, Shinichi thinks. Lovely. It might even be KID’s real smile, which he’s never gotten the chance to see before. It makes his mouth go dry, and he swallows at how warm it makes him feel. "Don’t make that face. You're much too old for your age, little detective."

"Not really," Shinichi replies, dryly. "It’s more the opposite."

KID’s smile disappears behind the more familiar smirk. "I suppose that’s fair enough." He frees his wrist from the loose grip of Shinichi's small hand, cradling it like Shinichi has burned him with his hold. "You don't need to worry about me, Meitantei. I’m a magician of the highest caliber. I can’t be caught by amateurs."

"This is clearly not an amateur."

"Everyone is an amateur when compared with me." KID’s eyelids lower to half-mast. Shinichi smiles at his lofty tone. "I expect you to tell me what you know about ‘Lady Red’ later."

"Hmm, maybe I will," KID says. "If you're lucky~"

The crossing light turns to ‘walk’, and as Shinichi steps into the crowd of people moving toward the hotel, Kaitou KID disappears, as if he were never there, with only the tingling of Shinichi’s palm as evidence that he’d just been close enough to touch.

It isn’t until he’s back in their room that he realizes he not only has another lead to pursue, but also that he feels much better than he’d felt before he’d gone out in the first place. The warmth of that smile lingers in his chest.

Well, KID is a magician, and for all that Shinichi claims not to be affected by it, KID does have a tendency to surprise him.

* 

"What do you want, Edogawa?" Haibara snaps, answering on the third ring when Shinichi calls her three hours later.
"Ah-re-re," Shinichi responds, surprised, lying back on the bed, sprawling out, limbs extended like a starfish. "Are you watching the Big Osaka game or something? Is Higo on TV, so you wanna push me off the phone?"

"You’re interrupting my dramas." That vein in her forehead is probably throbbing, which makes Shinichi snicker. "So tell me what you want." Then she pauses. "Are you—Is everything all right? Did you have to take one of the pills I gave you?"

They’re blue. Haibara had given them to him a month after he’d started feeling sick. "Emergencies only," she’d said. "You can’t take these for long, or they’ll stop working."

"I’m fine. I haven’t taken one yet." He rubs at his eyes, swallowing down the still lingering nausea. "I need help with a case. I didn’t bring my laptop with me, since I didn’t know if there’d be free wi-fi, and I need to do some snooping into identities."

"You’re bad at it anyway. Just give me the name." Demanding, as usual, but the concern is gone from the edges of her tone. "I don’t have all day, Meitantei."

Over the past couple of years, Shinichi has come to regard Haibara as one of his closest friends, but there’s no denying that she can be difficult to get along with sometimes. He doesn’t mind. He’s hard to get along with, too. Or, well, he used to be, before. He thinks he’s better at patience, nowadays. It’s part and parcel of losing all his authority and needing to work with people who constantly condescend to him, as well as the slow wearing away of his rougher edges by the kids he hangs out with most of the time.

"Scarlette Shinamoto," Shinichi says, rubbing at his nose with his free hand. It’s still warming back up, tips of his toes stinging from his walk. Shinichi isn’t looking forward to winter this year if it’s already this cold. "The dead model on the news."

"The case linked with Kaitou KID?" Haibara suddenly sounds intrigued. He can picture the look on her face: wolfish. "You think she was famous under a false name?"

"Well, KID does." Shinichi stops to listen as he hears steps in the hallway. He’ll have to change the way he’s speaking if it’s Ran. "If it is a false identity, it’ll have to have been a really thorough one, considering how well known she’s gotten this year." The steps continue past their door. Ran and Sonoko are probably having dinner. Shinichi walks over to the table at the edge of the room and turns on the coffee maker.

"Oh, KID, is it? You’ve already talked to him?" Her voice lilts. Shinichi can feel the mocking amusement that always colors her expression when it comes to his interactions with KID. "He really knows how you think," she always tells him. "I find that hilarious."

He stares belligerently at the ceiling. "He found me," he says. "He was really concerned, even if he was trying to act like the same pain in the ass as usual. I did learn that Scarlette Shinamoto might have been in possession of a gem that KID is familiar with, though, so that might be the point of connection."

He can hear Haibara’s nails pause their tapping on the professor’s computer desk, before the sound of rapid typing begins again. "Her official profile says she was born in the United States, to an American mother and a Japanese father. According to her immigration files, she maintained dual citizenship until, at twenty, she chose to give up her American citizenship in accordance with Japanese law."

"That aligns with what I overheard from Takagi and Satou, and with what Takeuchi said when we
interviewed him."

"She graduated high school in the U.S., too, before moving to Tokyo to begin her modeling career." Haibara’s frantic typing ceases.

"That’s all you can find?" He massages his temples. I thought there would be something more.

"If I were an amateur," Haibara say, smugly, and then she laughs. "I’m running her through a facial recognition program, to see if I can catch her on digital yearbook photos, or—"

"Or what?" No reply. "Or what, Haibara? Answer me!"

"Or," says Haibara, almost at a whisper, "law enforcement records."

"Really?"

"Hold on," she chokes out. "I need to cross-reference Scarlette Shinamoto’s DNA recovered from the scene with what I’ve found…"

"Why do you sound so strange?" Shinichi demands, and Haibara clears her throat. "It can’t be that bad."

"You know better than to say things like that with luck like yours, Meitantei. Check your mail," she snaps back. "I’m sending you something."

Shinichi yanks his phone away from his ear when it vibrates, and quickly switches to speaker-phone before he inputs his mail passcode, watching as Haibara’s message pops up. The first thing he sees is an aged photo of the victim, her hair a dark brown instead of red, and wearing some kind of prison uniform. "She was a criminal? What did—"

"Kudou," Haibara interrupts, her voice deadly serious, and Shinichi notes the change in terms of address, "keep scrolling."

Genevieve Maisonrouge. Half-French, half-Japanese, incarcerated for armed robbery, fraud. Escaped from police custody in Belgium before sentencing. They’re pretty heavy charges, but nothing that means she should have been murdered. Nothing so bad it would make Haibara, who has seen the very worst of Them, nervous. "What am I looking for?"

"Dates," Haibara answers. "Look at the dates, Kudou."

"Born in 1945," he reads, mostly to himself, "arrested in 1963." Then he thinks about that, runs through it again, and shock flashes through his body, like he’s been doused in cold water. "Haibara, are you sure?"

"Of course I’m sure," she snaps. "I’m using the FBI access codes you got from Jodie to dig through the International Crimes Database!"

"This is impossible."

"Just like there’s no way you and I are a day over eight, right?" Shinichi’s heart clenches. "When you mentioned a secret identity, I never thought it would be something like this."

"Do you think she’s another victim of APTX 4869?" Shinichi asks. "Could she be…"
"This is far more than ten years, Kudou. This woman, who should be sixty and in jail somewhere in Belgium, was found dead, more than forty years younger than that, in Tokyo. She’d even been working as a model, so unlikely was the chance that anyone would connect her to her former identity. I don’t think this has anything to do with the apoptoxin I was working on. I think this is something else."

"The list of possible motives just got a whole lot longer," Shinichi says, "and while we might be able to use the police to figure out the rest of the ‘hows’, I’m going to have to work on the ‘whys’ without them."

"You can always ask your friend Kaitou KID." Haibara says. She seems to have regained her mental feet, her voice back to that laconic sarcasm Shinichi despises.

"He’s not my friend. We help each other out occasionally. Allies, maybe. In the loosest sense of the world." Shinichi narrows his eyes. "I will be getting him to tell me what he knows about ‘Lady Red’, though."

Haibara is quiet on the other end of the line. "Hey, Kudou."

"Yes?" Shinichi toys with the curled cuff of his sock, stretching the weave of it between his fingers. His mind is still racing, like a car careening along a dangerous mountain road, every turn a chance for him to get distracted, or lose control completely.

"If this is related to them, don’t get involved without thinking it through." She’s solemn, the way she always is, when it comes to the crows. "I know you like to rush into things, the same way that Osakan detective does, since you two are birds of a feather, but don’t give yourself up."

"I won’t," Shinichi promises. "I’ll play it safe, Haibara. On the other hand, I won’t let KID get hurt if there’s anything I can do about it, and I won’t miss the opportunity to find out more if it arises."

"I’m holding you to that."

"I know. See what else you can find out about the victim? I’d appreciate anything you can dig up."

"I’ll send you anything that I come across," she says shortly, ending the call without saying goodbye.

Shinichi scrolls back up to Genevieve Maisonrouge’s picture again, taking in the grainy quality of the photo, taken pre-digital cameras and the way her eyes have that same piercing look that’s made her a favorite of Japanese fashion mags.

"Who are you?" he asks the picture, before flipping back to his recent internet searches and pulling up a photo of the victim’s missing pendant. "And what are you?" Despite the seriousness of the case, Shinichi feels a spark of excitement deep in his gut, warring with the plaguing nausea.

The thrill of the case, after all, is why Shinichi became a detective in the first place: he loves mysteries, and more importantly, he loves solving them, watching them unravel before him as easily as they ever did for Sherlock Holmes.

The door beeps, and then swings open, a harried Ran peeping around it, one hand curled around the frame with the keycard trapped between her first two fingers. "Conan-kun, hurry up!"

Shinichi looks out the window before returning his gaze to Ran. Night has fallen, and he doesn’t know where Ran wants to go that she’d need or want Conan to go with her. "Why are we hurrying?"
"Dad asked me to bring him some dinner down to the local precinct, and I thought you might want to come along."

Shinichi grins. "I've never been there!" He slides forward on the bed so that he can slip down to the floor without jumping.

"Plus," Ran says, cheeks pink from the wind and smile soft and sweet, "I thought you might be interested in meeting Scarlette Shinamoto’s mother."

Shinichi freezes, looking up at Ran so intensely she steps back, dropping her hold on the keycard.

"Her mother?"

"That’s what Satou said," Ran replies, squatting down to pick up the keycard she’d dropped. "What, did you think she wouldn’t have one?"

"It’s not that," Shinichi says, putting on his shoes and grabbing his jacket from where it lies on top of his open overnight bag. As he shrugs it on, he’s relieved when there’s no dizziness for the first time all day. "Let’s go, let’s go! Aren’t we in a hurry, Nee-chan?"

Ran holds out her hand to him, and he takes it, letting her lace their fingers together. It doesn’t mean anything, when Shinichi is Conan, and that’s all right, isn’t it? He’s still with Ran.

She’s humming as they walk, a smile playing at her lips. "You’re in a good mood," Shinichi observes, and Ran blushes.

"Oh, really?" She’s looking at shops, trying to choose a place for take-out. "I guess I am."

"Did something good happen?" It’s her eyes, Shinichi thinks, more than the lightness of her steps or the humming. Ran’s eyes are clear, when the last time they spoke, they’d been clouded with doubt.

"Nothing much." She tugs on his hand as they pass a bento shop, pushing open the door. The smell of pickled radishes and ginger wafts out the door and envelops them as they step inside. "Did you know Hondou-san was back in town?"

"Hondou Eisuke?"

Ran taps her chin as she surveys the choices, trying to pick one for Mouri, undoubtedly. "Yep! He’s transferring permanently to Teitan."

"Oh," Shinichi says, looking down at the plastic models of the different choices, hating the clawing in his chest. "And that makes you happy?"

"Well, it’s a small thing," Ran says, after a long moment, "but when we bumped into him, we invited him to watch the movie with us. Halfway through the movie, someone screamed. I looked left, thinking he’d be halfway out of his seat already, running toward the sound, but he just looked back at me." She laughs. "It turns out there was a spider in concessions. Funny, right?"

"I don’t get it," Shinchi says, looking up at Ran with both hands in his pockets, as she continues perusing the menu.

"It was just… nice to see the whole movie, for once." She shakes her head. "Don’t worry about it, Conan-kun. How about a number 4? Will that be okay?"

He nods slowly, and after she orders for them, Ran starts humming again.
Scarlette Shinamoto’s mother is obviously a fake. Oh, she might really be American, and she might very well be someone’s mother, but that, he thinks, is where the truths of her introduction end.

Shinichi wishes he had a cup of something warm that isn’t the dishwater that passes as coffee at most police stations. He settles for a massive can of orange juice and an envious look at the takeout coffee Satou is holding, instead.

"Mrs. Shinamoto?" Megure says. "Whenever you’re ready, we have just a few questions." He speaks Japanese slowly and clearly, in simple grammar, presumably out of courtesy.

The woman sitting before Inspector Megure’s requisitioned desk, legs crossed at the ankle and designer handbag settled comfortably in her lap, is in her late thirties or early forties, with long blond hair that curls down to the small of her back and expensive sunglasses that have Mouri salivating. "I flew in to Tokyo on a direct flight as soon as I heard," she says, her voice thick with tears. "I just got off the plane less than two hours ago. I had to find out what had really happened to my beloved Scarlette."

"I’ll bet you did," Shinichi mumbles to himself, looking up at the mysterious woman who cannot possibly be Scarlette Shinamoto’s mother. After all, Scarlette Shinamoto’s DNA matched perfectly with a woman named Genevieve Maiseronouge, who, despite her appearance, was seventy years old. And while it was possible that her mother possessed whatever secret to avoiding aging the victim had so obviously had, the fact remained that while Genevieve Maiseronouge was haafu, it was her mother who’d been Japanese, and her father who’d been a French National who’d found Genevieve’s mother during the war. No doubt switching the identity of the non-Japanese parent was made to help protect the lie.

With all that taken into account, it’s obvious this woman is a fake. What Shinichi does not know is her motive for talking to police, when it would have been fine for this particular character to have never crossed the Pacific.

"Excuse me, ma’am," Shinichi says, fixing a boyish smile onto his face. "Did Takeuchi-san call you?"

"No, he didn’t." She looks down at him with a smile that curls up the corners of her lips but does not change her eyes, cold as ice. "I’ve never met him. He wasn’t a serious boyfriend, you could probably tell that from the papers."

"That’s funny," Shinichi replies, as innocently as he can when he’s a shark with his prey already neatly between his teeth, "considering that Takeuchi-san was planning on proposing to Shinamoto-san. Apparently they were pretty serious."

"What kind of man in a serious relationship actually hires a private detective to spy on his love? They save that stuff for the movies, or for relationships going down the drain, don’t you think?"

"How did you know about the private detective?" Shinichi hides a triumphant grin when she flinches.

"Yes," Megure says, stroking his mustache. "How did you know about that? Takeuchi only mentioned he’d been planning to hire a private detective, not that he had."

"Scarlette told me, of course!" The woman waves a hand, and then dramatically covers her eyes. "My darling girl told me she’d found the business card of a private-eye in Takeuchi-san’s wallet
when he’d left it on the table one night, and that she’d noticed someone following her."

"Oh, I see." Megure takes note of that, and Shinichi glares at the woman, now completely certain that this woman had not talked to Scarlette Shinamoto in a substantial amount of time, if she’d ever met her at all. "Can you think of anyone who would want to kill her?"

"No, of course not." The woman’s hair falls forward, shiny and soft, across her shoulder. "My poor baby, so polite, so sweet."

The crocodile tears are giving Shinichi a headache. The imposter isn’t any more tolerable making those noises than Haibara.

"Not even anyone in America?" Shinichi makes sure the woman can see him smirking at her when she turns her gaze to him again. "I mean, since she spent most of her life there, it would make sense that she’d have met more people back in the United States, right? That means friends and enemies. You said you still live in Seattle, where Scarlette grew up, right?"

"I know you never met her, but if you had, you’d know Scarlette wasn’t the type of girl that made enemies easily. Besides, what would those people be doing in Japan?"

Shinichi pulls out his phone, discreetly pulling up a search, and when he finds what he’s looking for, he grins.

"Say," Satou says, cradling her cup of coffee in both hands, "you wouldn’t happen to know anything about that pendant she always wore, would you?"

"’Lady Red’?" The woman’s eyes gleam, and Shinichi feels his hackles rise. "She’s always had it. I can’t recall when she got it."

"It doesn’t look very expensive," Satou continues. "I just wondered if it had sentimental value, and if so, why it was the only thing the murderer took, and why they left a message for Kaitou KID, the famous jewel thief, if there wasn’t anything special about it."

"I couldn’t tell you," the woman demurs. She uncrosses her legs and then crosses them again. "Do you have any more questions, officers? I just got off an international flight, and while I want to be as cooperative as possible, I’m tired and I’d like time to mourn."

"Of course," Satou sets down her coffee. "We’ll call you if we need to ask any more questions, Shinamoto-san. I think you gave us your number?"

"Yes," she says. "Thank you." She casts a look down at Shinichi as she stands. "I might get lost trying to find my way out of the station. Do you think this helpful little boy could show me the way?"

"Sure!" Shinichi chirps, and the woman’s eyes glint again.

"Behave, and come right back, Conan-kun," Satou says, and Shinichi nods enthusiastically.

"No problem!" He lets the woman take his hand and lead him out into the hallway.

"What are you doing here, Vermouth?" Shinichi says, as soon as they’re out of earshot.

"Now, now, Silver Bullet," she replies. "I just came to check on the investigation."

"Why would you need to do that?" Shinichi narrows his eyes at her, taking in the lazy smile that
doesn’t fit the face Vermouth is wearing today. Certainly, it’s not the face of a grieving mother. "Don’t you know all about it, already?"

"Hmm," Vermouth raises both eyebrows, "not really. I am a bit curious, since KID is involved, but right now, it’s only an idle curiosity. Let’s call it me keeping an eye on something potentially problematic for me."

"You didn’t say us." Shinichi runs a hand through his hair. "You only said me."

"I did, didn’t I?" She tosses her hair over her shoulder. "Imagine that." She doesn’t break character as they move toward the front of the station. "How did you know it was me? I’m curious."

"I wasn’t sure at first," he says. "I just knew you weren’t Scarlette Shinamoto’s real mother." He holds up one hand and starts raising fingers. "One, you aren’t old enough."

"So you found even that," she murmurs. "You’re dangerous, aren’t you?"

"Two, you lied when you told us how you knew about the private detective. Takeuchi-san doesn’t carry a wallet, because he thinks they ruin the line of his suit. Scarlette was smug about his name having buying power, which, if you’d talked to her about Takeuchi-san, you would know. Or, at least, you wouldn’t have thought he carried anything in his wallet, since he makes a point of not doing that."

"I should have gone with the namecard case," she says. "But that’s so old-fashioned, these days, right?"

"Maybe," Shinichi says. "But there’s also the fact that Takeuchi claims he’d only considered hiring a detective, not that he actually had hired one."

"Oh," she said, "well, that’s not true at all." She offers him a tiny, sharp smile. "The dear bereaved boyfriend had definitely already employed a detective." She flicks her gaze forward again, face crumpling as they pass Takagi by the vending machine. He gives her a sympathetic nod before turning back to agonize over ice coffee choices for Megure. "Is that all?"

"No," Shinichi says. "The last thing was actually the first thing you said. You said you flew in on a direct flight as soon as you heard, and that your plane had landed less than two hours ago. But there haven’t been any arrivals of direct flights from Seattle into Narita since this morning, and you don’t have any luggage."

"Clever, clever," she says. "You really are another silver bullet."

"You aren’t usually this clumsy with your disguise work." Dropping her hand, he thinks quickly before firing off another of his questions. "Why is KID being involved intriguing to you?" Shinichi can tell his time to interrogate is running short. They’re nearing the front lobby, and he already knows he’ll be forced to let Vermouth walk away from this charade or risk some kind of greater consequence.

"Let us just say that if you’re the silver bullet, he’s the gilded metal cross." Her eyes fall half-lidded. "Don’t think it’s sentimental."

"Is anything sentimental with you?" Shinichi asks. "Or are you heartless?"

"If I were heartless, would you and Sherry still be alive?"

"You must have a plan for us," he says. "You always have a plan."
"It’s a secret," she tells him, leaning down to ruffle his hair.

Her sweet perfume wafts over him, and makes him cough. He presses the back of his hand to his mouth, and when he feels the stickiness of blood, he doesn’t lower it for her to see. No weaknesses, not in front of Vermouth. "Because secrets are what make a woman, a woman?"

"Exactly," she purrs. Then she’s gone, out the door of the precinct and out onto the street, once again out of his grasp and leaving too many unanswered questions. Shinichi is sure of two things, though: that the chance of Black Organization involvement is now too great to ignore, and that Takeuchi, with all his genuine grief, had lied to the police.

Shinichi’s throat burns, but it’s easy enough to ignore as he goes into the bathroom to wash his hands before returning to the officers to see what they made of Vermouth’s disguise.

You asshole, Heiji texts him, later, when he, Ran and Mouri have returned to their hotel. It took me three hours to decipher your message. And then another hour to wrap my head around all of it! Getting rusty in your old age, Hattori? replies Shinichi, plugging his phone in to charge for the night. He can feel a low-grade fever settling in, and he needs to get under the covers before Ran catches him shivering.

You’re getting rusty in your young age, Kudou, if a murder scene is unreadable to you.

Maybe it’s magic, Shinichi texts, ignoring Heiji’s return text as he snuggles under the blankets.

* Shinichi opens his eyes to a shadowy room, feeling watched. Mouri is snoring, and Ran is slumbering quietly in bed next to him, her hair splayed out across the pillow under Shinichi’s arm and her hand pressed flat on her bare stomach.

His head aches, and so does his chest, each breath spreading a burn between his ribs that makes it hard for him to force himself to take his next inhale. He wants to go immediately back to sleep, and hope he wakes up in the morning feeling better, but the weight of someone’s eyes is much too heavy upon his consciousness to ignore.

He looks around blearily, trying to clear the sleep from his eyes. He knows to trust his instincts on this, blinking as he adjusts to the darkness, and sitting up carefully so that he doesn’t wake Ran, clutching at his chest as his organs slush around until they resettle into a new position. When the world stills around him, Shinichi sighs in relief, and pushes a hand through his hair. He doesn’t bother with his glasses, running a hand over his face as he untwists the covers from around his legs, and then he climbs down from the bed, tucking the freed sheets in around Ran so she doesn’t get cold.

There’s only one window in the room, and Shinichi tiptoes past Mouri so that he can peek outside. Sidling up against the window ledge, hands spread out flat across it to support his weight, he leans to press his face to the glass when something crinkles under his hand. Almost falling backward in surprise, he lifts his palm to find an index card, white and unlined, with nothing more on it aside from an arrow pointing up and a tiny doodle of Conan, oversized spectacles and all.

Exhaling the breath he hadn’t known he was holding, Shinichi then scowls down at the index card. An arrow pointing up probably means the roof. Moving back to his and Ran’s side of the room, Shinichi pulls on his jacket, sticking the index card into the pocket before pulling on socks and his white trainers. His pajama pants are a little short, leaving a gap of skin at the ankle, but hopefully it’s
not so cold that it’ll be bad that he’s not bothering to get dressed. Haibara would give him hell for the choice, but she’s not here, and it’s not like it’ll make much of a difference in the long run.

He takes the stairs to the top floor, slowly and carefully, hand gripping the banister. No one can see him, so he doesn’t have to pretend that his lungs aren’t burning or that the upward motion doesn’t make him feel like he’s on a ship at sea during a storm. He’d have taken the elevator, but he’d noticed, when they first got there, that there are cameras in the elevators and not in the stairwells. It’s better to take advantage of that, and ascend the six flights to the roof without being seen by anyone who might be curious about an eight year old wandering around late at night.

If anything happens, the camera footage will reveal he went into the stairwell, but he can always lie and say he’d gone into the stairwell to think and had lost track of time. He’s gotten into the habit of disappearing for longer periods of time when they’re home, too, lately, so Ran will probably buy it. Mouri won’t even care, and no one else here knows him well enough to say whether it’s in or out of character.

He snorts to himself as he approaches the last level. He’s getting better and better at building these layered lies. Shinichi, the old Shinichi, had never been much good as a liar, despite how good he is at seeing through them. Conan, on the other hand, is nothing but a creation of progressively more complicated untruths.

The door leading out to the roof is locked, but from the inside, so it’s a matter of stretching up high enough to turn the deadbolt. Arm extended as high as it will go, he manages to push at the bottom of it, and listens with satisfaction as the tumbler clicks.

Not only is it cold, Shinichi notes, as he pushes the door open, but it’s also blustery. The wind nips at his cheeks and ears, and he flinches at the unexpected discomfort.

KID is sitting on the edge of a ventilation duct, his elbows pressed into his knees and his face cradled in his gloved hands. His cape flows outward behind him, dramatically spread by the wind, as he smiles that enigmatic smile that’s always made Shinichi want to punch him.

He looks like a superhero or something, and Shinichi criticizes himself for even making an association like that when the subject is Kaitou KID.

"So those glasses of yours are just for show?" KID drawls conversationally, like he hasn’t called Shinichi out in the middle of the night after somehow breaking into his hotel room without disturbing any of the three people in it. "I always wondered, you know."

"The last thing I need is another stalker," Shinichi says, after he’s carefully closed the roof access door behind him, fighting against the wind’s attempts to blow it wide open. "You’re a creep. Can’t you just call when you want to talk, like a normal person?"

"Ah, but wouldn’t it be creepier if I knew your personal phone number?" KID’s voice floats easily across the roof to him, as if he were standing much closer, and Shinichi wonders how he does it. Ventriloquism? KID’s talent with his voice is, to Shinichi, by far the greatest of the jewel thief’s abilities, especially in light of the fact that Shinichi can’t even carry a tune at karaoke. "What do you mean, another stalker?"

"Since when have you cared about being creepy? You’ve stolen Ran’s underwear and worn it for a disguise. After that, a phone number illicitly acquired is nothing."

"Those were replicas, little detective. Didn’t you know? I’m an excellent tailor."
"You're an excellent creep," Shinichi says. "Which is why I doubt that you don’t have my number.” KID has used his phone more than once, most recently on the Bell Tree Express, and he’d be shocked if KID hadn’t taken the obvious opportunity to snoop. Let alone the file Megure keeps on Edogawa Conan at the police station that he thinks no one knows about. KID could even call from a payphone or a burner, and Shinichi would be none-the-wiser about KID’s own number.

"You’re avoiding my second question." KID frowns, then covers it with a winsome smile that Shinichi hears more than sees, up here in the dark. "Your number may or may not be something I’ve picked up looking through your personal things. This is all theoretical, of course, and I admit to nothing."

"Theoretical, huh?" Shinichi shrugs, as another burst of wind rattles through the metal guardrail circling the roof. His next words blow white puffs of steam into the air. "I’m here, so what do you want?"

"To know what you found out about Scarlette Shinamoto," KID replies easily. "I know you’ll have found something by now."

Shinichi considers. KID had given him the tip in the first place, and maybe KID will know what to make of it. "Your tip panned out."

"I thought it might."

"Her real name is Genevieve Maisonrouge. She’s from Belgium, but her Dad was a French national. Her mother was born and raised in Yokohama."

"So the Mama-chan at the police station today was a fake?" KID asks, and Shinichi shuffles his way across the roof, closer to KID, aiming not to trip over his laces by dragging his feet.

KID allows his approach. Why wouldn’t he? It’s not like Shinichi hasn’t been closer, and Kaitou KID’s a master at hiding his identity, even when he’s wearing a disguise that shouldn’t hide much at all. "You bugged the police station?"

"Mouri’s phone," KID corrects. "Bugging a police station is nearly impossible, with the constant security sweeps. It’s much easier to temporarily bug an officer." With the way KID’s grin turns predatory, Shinichi has no doubt that by ‘an officer’ KID usually means Nakamori. It’s odd, but Shinichi gets the impression KID likes Nakamori, which is something for later thought. "It’s only a temporary way to listen in, but still, a better use of my time."

Shinichi would really like to know how KID makes it sound so reasonable.

"And yes," Shinichi says. "I… knew she was a fake at the time, but I didn’t get too much information out of her, since she was so cagey." Despite Vermouth’s interest in KID, Shinichi doubts KID knows anything about the men in black. It’s better, then, not to tell him anything, since it seems like he’s in deep enough trouble already. The less he knows about them, the better. "That’s not the interesting part, though."

"I shudder to think what you do find interesting, if a pretend mother isn’t it." He sits up, straightening his back, and his fingers tap against the metal under him in a steady, soothing, staccato rhythm.

"This is going to sound ridiculous," warns Shinichi, and KID’s finger pauses, before the tapping begins anew, in a faster rhythm this time.

"I love ridiculous things, detective. You could even say they’re my specialty!"
"Scarlette Shinamoto, or Genevieve Maisonrouge, was born in 1945, right after the end of World War II."

KID breathes in, then whistles, long and low. Out of the edge of his peripheral vision, Shinichi sees the rustling of bird wings. Probably KID’s trained pets. Shinichi has noticed that he uses doves for several of his tricks.

"That does sound ridiculous, Meitantei. So tell me why you, of all people, believe it’s true."

"We used an FBI network login to match the DNA from the IC cold-case database, after we pinged her with facial recognition, when fingerprint searches came up with nothing."

"FBI network login? You’ve got some seriously good connections for a little guy, don’t you? Scary, Scary~" He sounds fascinated, and Shinichi feels a rush of heat going straight up to his face at the fondness he hears mixed into it. Why in the world would KID be fond of him? "What did she do to end up in the database?"

"Armed robbery and fraud, along with a few other minor charges. She escaped from prison back in the early 1960s. I’ve got H—I’ve got someone looking into the situation, but so far I don’t know where she’s been between then and her reappearance as a model in Tokyo." KID’s fingers are still tapping, and Shinichi shoves his hands into his coat pockets, knuckles nudging KID’s crumpled index card note. "So the Scarlette Shinamoto who died ~tragically young~ was really, what, a woman in her seventies?"

Shinichi puffs his cheeks up with air, clenching his hands in his pockets. "I know it’s farfetched, but —"

"It definitely is," KID says, "but there are clearly known ways to shave years off one’s age." He turns his head pointedly to face Shinichi, and his last words come out as a whisper. "Aren’t there, Edogawa Conan?"

Shinichi frowns, and then stares down at his feet. He hadn’t bothered with the laces of his trainers. He won’t be able to kick anything, with his shoes so loose like this. He’s also not wearing his belt, or his watch, or his glasses, even though he’d known he was coming up here to meet Kaitou KID from the moment he saw that little doodle.

Earlier, he’d thought to himself that he trusted Kaitou KID not to do harm. He wonders if, subconsciously, he’s always trusted Kaitou KID far more than that. It’s unbelievable, he thinks, that he might trust KID further than as someone who won’t let him fall from a building, when he doesn’t know KID’s real name or what he looks like or any of his personal details. Perhaps, though, that can be attributed more to the fact that all those personal details are secondary to the fact that Kaitou KID has gone out of his way to help keep Shinichi and the people he loves from harm, even when there was nothing in it for him.

KID is a criminal, but he’s not a villain, and…After all the clues and hints Shinichi has left scattered like accidental breadcrumbs, KID has finally asked the question. Should Shinichi answer it?

"At first," KID says, breaking the silence that has fallen between them, "I thought you were the most precocious six year old I’d ever met. Finding out you were connected to another, much older, child prodigy, Kudou Shinichi, cleared things up some, but then it turns out that you’re a stranger to everyone in Shinichi’s life save for the old professor who lives next door. That struck me as strange."

"Who have you even been talking to?" Shinichi complains. "Or do you have bugs in my home?"
"A magician never reveals their tricks," KID says, reaching out and gently grabbing Shinichi’s arm, to pull him closer. "Especially to nosey detectives."

Shinichi had never noticed that the thread at the seams of KID’s gloves was sky blue before, an even, hand-done cross-stitch that would be hard to repair, but added visual interest to what had at first seemed an average pair of white gloves. "You’re the one being nosey."

"I thought a lot about your name," continues KID, as if Shinichi had never spoken. "It’s obviously an alias. Why does a little kid need to live under an alias? Why are you staying at Mouri’s? Those are the kinds of things I wondered about."

"And?" Shinichi asks, and is glad his voice comes out steadier than he feels. "Your conclusions?"

"The second part was obvious. Mouri Kogorou is a detective. Detectives get access to cases."

He stops, and waits for Shinichi to interject, but Shinichi continues to watch him, insides quivering.

"The first part, though, was giving me trouble. Was my Tantei-kun in witness protection? If he was, who was he hiding from? Could it be those people on the Bell Tree Express, who wanted to kill that woman I was disguised as?"

"Those people think I’m dead already," Shinichi replies, thinking quickly. KID would see through an outright lie, but parts of the truth… Shinichi could give him that, and trust it to go no further. "A… man tried to murder me with an experimental drug when I saw something I shouldn’t have. I was poisoned, and I managed to survive, when there was only a fraction of a percent of a chance that I could. I should be dead already."

KID is still, now, like a portrait, oil painted whites and sky blues against a black evening sky, the moon big and gold-tinged behind him. For the first time since they met, on that rooftop across from the Beika Museum, Shinichi feels like Kaitou KID is looking at him like he’s something new and rare.

"You don’t have to confirm anything if you don’t feel comfortable, but… You really are much older than eight, right?"

"Yes," Shinichi says, after an obvious hesitation. "Yes, I am."

"It’s a relief to know you’re older than you look, Meitantei. It’s no fun dealing with eight-year-olds that can outsmart me."

"I don’t do it often, since you’re so damn slippery." Shinichi’s pajamas aren’t enough to fight the wind-chill. He should have changed clothes, after all. He’s also getting dizzy again, and that, he’d prefer KID not to see. "Every once in a while, though."

"You’re more of a challenge than most," admits KID. "And the only detective I’d ever consider working with, whether you’re eight or eighty."

"I’m a teenager. Or I was, should’ve been." Ran, brushing her hair with shimmering, glassy eyes, not wanting to be protected when all Shinichi knows how to do is protect her. The professor and Haibara, who are only hidden because they aren’t connected to the missing and presumed dead Heisei Holmes. He has to keep them safe. "Not eight, or eighty."

"You’re a real hassle on my heists, either way."

"Did you know it would be like that, the first time you saw me?"
"Doesn’t that depend on which first time we’re talking about?” His laughter cuts off, abruptly. "So now you’re a teenager trapped in a little kid’s body, and you’re here staying with the Mouri family while you try to figure out how to get back to normal?"

"What makes you think getting back to normal is my first priority?” Shinichi asks, and KID slides a thumb down the lapel of his suit jacket.

"I've watched you, you know,” he replies. "To me it’s obvious that you don’t feel like you belong in the place you’re currently stuck.”

"Being myself right now might be too dangerous." KID’s head tilts inquisitively. "This face, this body… It’s my white suit and cape, to speak metaphorically.”

"You get more intriguing all the time, little critic. Comparing yourself to me? Maybe you aren’t one-hundred per cent boring.”

"Oh?” Shinichi bemusedly scratches at the back of his head. "You never thought I was one-hundred per cent boring, anyway. That’s why you always get over the top when I show up at your heists.”

"You’re arrogant.”

"Pot calling the kettle black, aren’t you?”

"I only wear white,” KID replies loftily. "It’s all right that you’re arrogant. All detectives are, especially the good ones.” His mouth thins, and without seeing his eyes, Shinichi knows his gaze is piercing. "But I also want to show you real magic, Tantei-kun. My father once told me it was the challenge of a magician to turn one’s greatest critics into one’s greatest fans.” His lips twitch, then. "I want the Heisei Sherlock Holmes to be one of my fans.”

Shinichi’s breath hitches.

"I’m right, aren’t I? That’s who you are, isn’t it?”

"That depends,” Shinichi replies, stomach all the way up in his throat. "On whether or not you’re willing to keep a secret.” If anyone can understand what it’s like, to carry two identities and want to keep them both, it’s KID, isn’t it?

"I’m very good with secrets,” says KID. "Another of my specialties.” He looks up, at the sky, revealing a long stretch of pale throat. "I’m not sure why you’re giving me your biggest one.”

Shinichi isn’t wearing his watch, or his belt. He doesn’t have his glasses, and he hasn’t tied his shoes. He’d come up to see KID with nothing to protect himself, because he knew he didn’t need to protect himself.

That’s trust, even if Shinichi doesn’t know why or how. "Who says it’s my biggest one?”

KID laughs. "Meitantei, you definitely are anything but boring.” He immediately drops his gaze again to focus on Shinichi intently. Shinichi wishes he could make out more of KID’s face, just to see the expression on it. "So, would you prefer me to call you Kudou Shinichi, then?”

"Stick with Tantei-kun.” Shinichi’s heartbeat is pounding to the same tempo Kaitou KID had set earlier with his fingers against metal. "I’ve gotten used to it.”
"Hmm," KID says. "Don’t big detectives in little bodies need a special name?"

"Then use Meitantei. You know that it’s…" Shinichi puts on hand on KID’s knee, and KID flinches, almost imperceptibly, but then forces himself not to recoil, easing as quickly as he’d tensed. "You can’t tell anyone that I’m alive. Not just for my safety, but for yours."

"That’s twice today you’ve been worried about me~" KID covers Shinichi’s hand with his own. "And you’re telling me your secrets. Have you decided to fall in love with me?"

"You’re an ass." Shinichi snatches his hand back. "I don’t want you to die because of me."

"I hear you," KID says. "Your warning has been duly noted. Now, back on topic. Could the trick that’s essentially hiding you in plain sight have helped Genevieve Maisonrouge?"

"No," says Shinichi. "The science, the poison, that resulted in this," he gestures to himself, with a wry grin, "is new. Genevieve Maisonrouge turned back her clock before it was even invented." He looks up at the moon. It’s full, and too close and bright. "What happened to me cannot possibly be what has happened to her. The image of her curled up, punctured body is vivid in my mind. "How did she end up…?"

"I think," says KID, carefully, not smirking or smug or any of his more familiar expressions, "that what happened to her wasn’t science at all."

"What else could it be?"

"Magic." The monocle charm glints.

"You aren’t talking about the execution of the murder, are you?" Shinichi closes the final distance between himself and KID, wondering if now, he’ll move away. He doesn’t. "I don’t believe in magic."

"Of course you don’t," KID retorts. "You’re a detective, and detectives have no imagination. There could be real magic in this world, and while I don’t know if it was responsible for her death, I do think it was responsible for her life." He stops, licking his lips. "Or, rather, her immortality."

"Immortality?" Shinichi’s tongue feels too thick in his mouth as he sits down next to KID. "And I was worried you’d think what I was saying was too outlandish. I should have known better."

The rooftop is cold against the undersides of his thighs, the chill seeping through his thin cotton pants to his skin. He shivers. KID chuckles, and then drapes his cape so that it hangs across Shinichi’s shoulders. It’s heavier than Shinichi had expected, and the silk lining skims across the material of his jacket before he catches a handful of it in his fist to keep it in place. It’s warm, and it smells of jasmine. KID, Shinichi thinks, smells like jasmine.

"Don’t freeze, my miniaturized detective," KID whispers, right into his ear. His breath tickles, but not in a bad way. It’s a warm puff across Shinichi’s cheek and neck, and it sends a different kind of shiver through him. He doesn’t know if it’s good or bad, only that it’s new. "You’re feverish."

"I’m not." He quickly checks his pulse. Still shallow. He should have told Haibara earlier, but he didn’t want her stressing when she’s too far away to help him anyway. "What did you bring me out here for?"

"I have a story for you, in exchange for what you shared about yourself earlier." KID tightens his cloak around him. "If you’re really all right."
Warmth skitters its way through him, down into his chest and all along his right side where KID sits, seemingly unperturbed by the proximity. Shinichi hasn’t been this close to him since that airship business, but at that time, KID had smelled like smoke and oil and too much cosmetic powder, and Shinichi had been too busy trying to stay alive to notice all the wiry muscle and the slide of thin, high-grade wool he’s noticing now.

"A story about what? About you?" He looks up, and KID is looking back. With the moon just behind him, he’s more shadow than face, but Shinichi can make out the shape of his mouth, his lips fuller than Shinichi’s and slightly wider. If they’re even his real lips, and not yet another layer to the disguise. "Or about immortality?"

"About Kaitou KID," KID corrects, leaning in, "but more importantly, about a gemstone named Pandora." He licks his teeth. "Which I think might have been our missing ‘Lady Red’." He breathes out, and it looks like the smoke from a cheap cigarette. KID’s lips are probably the real ones, not some disguise, because they’re wind-chapped and dry. "So yes, about me, and about immortality. Two for two."

"It’s only two in the morning," Shinichi replies. "We’ve got four hours before Ran wakes up and comes looking for me."

"Ah, ah, Meitantei, you’ve been out here twenty minutes already. We’ve only got three hours and forty minutes."

"Will your story take longer than that to tell?"

"Well it does cover at least twenty years," KID replies. "It could take awhile. Maybe I’ll just tell you about ‘Lady Red’ tonight, since cute little boys need their sleep."

"Don’t treat me like a child when you know I’m not one, KID."

"Oh, oh, oh, does that mean I should treat you like an adult, then?"

Shinichi can feel himself blushing at KID’s tone, and forces himself to ignore the teasing. KID’s just being his usual self, after all. Shinichi usually doesn’t get the brunt of this side of the phantom thief. "Weirdo."

"Are you embarrassed?"

"Anything you feel comfortable telling me about ‘Lady Red’ will help me find this killer," Shinichi growls, pulling more of the cape around him and scooting slightly closer to KID, until the space between them feels like it’s touching him, too, thick and solid and full of anticipation.

"You really want to protect me, don’t you?" KID produces a thoughtful hum. "You’re scared of this killer. You aren’t usually scared. Who is it?"

"I won’t let Them hurt you." He won’t give KID a name to research, or an alias. He wants KID nowhere near them, regardless of Vermouth’s blatant interest. "So tell me your story about immortality, Kaitou KID."

"You hurt me all the time, little bastard," he teases, but his body is stiff. Shinichi understands. He, too, is used to keeping so much to himself that the telling starts to become more difficult than anything else. "With those super sneakers and that loathsome soccer ball."

"Yes," he agrees, "but I’m only playing a… A gentleman’s game, you called it?"
"I thought you disagreed about my qualifications as a gentleman." A fraction of the tension in his shoulders loosens.

"Well, you did offer me your coat, sort of." Shinichi rubs his thumb across pale blue silk as he pulls the cape higher to shield his ear. "That is fairly gentlemanly."

KID chuckles. "It’s so rare to see you crack a joke."

"My life is in pieces and I solve murder cases," Shinichi replies, closing his eyes. "There isn’t usually much to joke about, KID."

"Touché," whispers KID. "Sometimes the jokes make it easier, though."

"Spoken from experience?" Shinichi avoids looking at KID. He’d only see his jaw, from this angle, but it feels… polite, to look away, especially when KID sounds so… distant, and lost.

They aren’t friends, he and KID, but they certainly aren’t enemies. Not when Shinichi, unfathomably, has handed Kaitou KID confirmation of his secret identity. He can practically feel Haibara laughing mockingly at him back in Beika. He narrows his eyes at the thought, and curses her in his head, even though that action would only make her laugh harder.

"The first Kaitou KID was active before I was born," KID says, after a few stagnant moments. "He was an amazing magician. He started teaching me to do tricks as soon as I could pick up a spoon. Simple vanishing illusions, or making things appear from nowhere with sleight-of-hand. How to open tough locks and pick pockets and choose the audience member most likely to play along the right way with your act."

His arm brushes Shinichi’s, and Shinichi doesn’t pull away from it, letting KID lean into him. He focuses on the soft ups and downs of KID’s voice, to distract himself from the need to cough, and the shivers he’ll no longer be able to blame on the cold. Hearing KID sound so nostalgic is strange, but Shinichi finds that he likes the way KID’s voice wraps around words and pulls at each end, stretching out the vowels even as he smothers the consonants.

"I looked up to him. I admired him more than anyone else in my life. I promised him, when I was six or something, that one day I’d put on a magnificent show in theaters as big as he did. Then a couple of years later, he suddenly… died."

"Ten years ago?" Shinichi asks, remembering the newspaper articles Agasa had pulled up. "It was ten years ago that Kaitou 1412 disappeared."

"Yeah." KID takes the hand further from Shinichi and brings it up to toy with the charm hanging from his monocle. "Two and a half years ago, I found out that the former Kaitou KID hadn’t just died: he was murdered." He laughs, but there’s no humor in it. "Not for stealing, but for refusing to steal."

"What do you mean?"

"Why do you think I steal?" The question is airy, but there’s intent behind it.

It definitely isn’t an idle question, so Shinichi treats it like a case, going over the facts. He doesn’t know who KID is, but he knows KID. KID, who breaks into museum exhibits to catch forgers. KID, who revealed himself to five children in order to keep an eye on them, keep them safe, when he could have been in and out before any of them were the wiser. KID, who gives gems back and says "it’s not the one I’m looking for."
KID, who once pushed Shinichi out of the way of a bullet that would probably have killed Shinichi then and there, long after he could have made his escape.

"Because you’re searching for something." Shinichi narrows his eyes. "It’s not for money, or profit, or because someone else wants you to." The fine wool of KID’s white, impractical suit, so contradictory to KID’s phantom moniker, tickles his bare wrist. Shinichi had once told KID he understood the purpose of the white suit; to attract the eyes of the audience so they wouldn’t see him when he dressed all in black. To gain attention and hold it when he needed it to perform his illusions. "Because you want to flush out others looking for the same thing. That’s why you have those flashy heists."

"Bingo~" KID tips his hat. "I don’t know exactly why the first Kaitou KID pulled heists. I can think of many reasons, and I think, in the end, a good argument could be made that it was for the thrill."

"You’re no stranger to that," Shinichi points out, and KID laughs. "I bet you’re just as tasteless in your everyday life as you are when you’re stealing things."

"It takes a certain kinda guy to wear this hat, don’t you think?" He twists the chain of his charm around his index finger. "What Kaitou KID does not do is steal on demand, for bad people. He doesn’t keep the gems he steals, and he doesn’t want anyone to be in danger. All those tenets would have been violated, if the first KID had taken an unnamed organization’s request in hand."

‘An unnamed organization’ leaves Shinichi stunned, and he hides his expression by looking down at his knees. "That request… was to steal a certain gem, wasn’t it?"

"It’s a doublet called ‘Pandora’. If the gem is held up under the Volley Comet during the full moon, it will cry tears of immortality."

"Tears of immortality?"

"Anyone who drinks them will live forever," KID says. "Or so the myth goes."

"There hasn’t been a Volley Comet in…” Shinichi calculates. "Something like 9000 years? Scientists don’t even think it exists anymore."

"Yeah," KID says. "I think the legend might be slightly off; there must be more to it, or the people who killed my—predecessor wouldn’t have been so anxious to get their hands on it."

An organization killed the first KID, Shinichi thinks, and Vermouth is interested in him. Could it be… He shivers. That… bears some thinking about. But when one eliminates the impossible, what remains must be the truth, right?

"So you think it’s inside Scarlette’s inexplicably lavender ‘Lady Red’ that your mysterious ‘Pandora’ is hiding?"

"Might be," says KID. His monocle glints as he lifts his chin. "After all the gems I’ve stolen, it would be funny if it was this one." The clover charm swings. "You’re shivering again, Meitantei. You’ll get sick if you stay out here too long in those thin pajamas of yours."

"You’re pretty warm," Shinichi replies, before pressing his lips together in mortification. He must be more tired than he’d thought, if he was saying things like that. "The clear air will help me think, anyway. We might have a motive, now. If only the actual murder made more sense. It’s basically like a locked room mystery."

"You’re assuming that the ballroom only has two entrances," KID says, tapping Shinichi on the nose.
"I…” Shinichi blinks. The floor had been seamless, hadn’t it? And the digital blueprints hadn’t shown anything suspicious, but what if… "The runners."

"There’s that mind of yours at work," KID says. "Smart is the new sexy." He smirks, and then, in a single fluid motion, puffs out of existence, reappearing on the other side of the roof, balanced somewhat precariously on the guardrail. His cape, dramatic as always, glows in the moonlight, and the rest of him is cast into shadow save for the bright red-orange of his tie. "I’ll have to stop the story here for tonight, it seems."

"Wait, where are you going?" Shinichi curls his hands into fists. "There’s so much more—" There’s so much more he hasn’t gotten to ask, yet, about KID’s organization, or about Pandora. About KID himself. "I thought you had twenty years’ worth of story to tell me?"

"It looks like your leading lady is awake early," KID replies, bowing, an exaggerated swoop of his arm cutting across his stomach. "So until we meet again, my darling detective."

Then he tilts backwards, falling over the building’s edge, and Shinichi wraps his arms around himself as the cold KID had chased away starts to seep back into him. He takes a deep breath of autumn night air, and catches the lingering scent of jasmine.

"Conan-kun!" Ran yells, leaning out the roof access door. "You can’t go running around late at night! It’s dangerous, and you need your sleep!"

"Sorry, Ran-nee-chan!" Shinichi replies, turning back to where the thief had disappeared, still feeling the phantom weight of his cape. "I had a nightmare, and I just wanted to think, and thought up here I would be out of yours and Uncle’s way!"

"You’re such a thoughtful boy, when you’re not stumbling across murders or disappearing at crime scenes,” says Ran, after he’s trotted over to her, and let her close them back into the heated hotel building, all her anger evaporating as she smiles at him. "Come back to bed now, though, okay? And when you have nightmares, you should tell me about them."

"It was something silly," Shinichi says. "Nothing to worry about."

"I feel like you need worrying about," Ran says, under her breath, and Shinichi reaches out and takes her warm hand with his cold one. "So I worry."

"I wish you wouldn’t," he says, and squeezes. "But thanks, Ran-nee-chan."

That night, Shinichi has trouble falling back asleep. Every time he manages, he remembers the smell of smoke and gunpowder, and the weight of KID on top of him, asking furiously over and over again if he’s all right, if he’s been shot.

When he finally gives up, opening his eyes with finality, Ran and Mouri are still asleep, and Shinichi has to take deep breaths to keep himself from shaking.

He doesn’t know why a nightmare about dying would keep him awake. After all, it isn’t like it’s any different from Shinichi’s current reality.

* 

Shinichi stands on his tiptoes to ring the doorbell, his scarf slipping from around his shoulders as he
stretches upward to reach. Had he really been this short the first time he was eight?

As the chime echoes, he adjusts the mask covering his face. He’d thrown up blood twice this morning, luckily before Ran had awoken, but he hadn’t managed to hide his wet coughs from her as he’d gotten dressed. She’d told him to stay put before she’d left with Sonoko to meet up again with Hondou for another film, but Shinichi had only waited five minutes after she left before calling up Takagi and asking him to bring him back to the Takeuchi mansion.

"Are you sure this is important, Conan-kun?" Takagi asks, and Shinichi nods enthusiastically. "If you’re sick, you should stay in bed."

"Yes, really important!" Shinichi rolls back and forth from the balls of his feet to the heels as they wait. "I had an interesting idea last night, and I really think it will help!"

"Well, when I listen to you, it always works out, so…” He chuckles. "I’ll listen to you this time as well."

The maid answers the door. "Ah, Detective Takagi!" She hurriedly ushers them inside, casting furtive glances out at the paparazzi that still loiter outside. They’d driven through a number of them to get up to the mansion in the first place. "What brings you back here?"

"Is Takeuchi-san here?" Takagi asks, after she’s closed the door. "As we told the guard at the gate, we have a few more questions for him."

"Yes, he’s upstairs in his office." She points up at a winding staircase. "I’ll show you up, since it’s so easy to get lost."

They follow the maid to the staircase. As they begin to ascend, Shinichi notices that the police tape is still up in front of the ballroom, even though the doors are closed now. "He hasn’t taken the tape down?"

"No," the maid (Kanami, he remembers, from the initial interview transcriptions he’d swiped from Mouri) says. "Takeuchi-san said the police still might need to investigate there, and he never uses that part of the house, anyway. His grandfather did, but neither he nor Miss Scarlette ever really went back there. Only the ballroom and the old library are back there."

"Old library?" Shinichi asks. "Does that mean there’s a new library?"

Kanami laughs. "Oh, yes, Takeuchi-san had a new library built as soon as he inherited the house."

"Why?" Takagi asks, as they reach the top of the stairs. "I don’t remember searching an old library at all."

"Oh, it’s impossible to get into from anywhere in the house, as it is now," says Kanami, and she looks left, toward what Shinichi presumes is Takeuchi’s office. "The truth is, Takeuchi-san has always thought that the old library was haunted. So he had it boarded up and shut away from the house. There’s even a plaster wall blocking it off, plaster ordered specially from Paris to match the rest of the walls. It’s as though it never existed."

"Haunted?" Takagi says, waving both hands. "Why would he think that?"

"Apparently there were always weird squeaking noises from the library at night, and as a child, Takeuchi-san was terrified that there were ghosts. His grandfather used to say things like "a big mansion needs a few ghosts", but the first thing Takeuchi-san did when he inherited this place was shut it away. I’ve worked here for the Takeuchi family for thirty years, you know, and I never saw a
"single ghost, but you know how kids are."

"Wow, you’ve worked here longer than Takeuchi-san has been alive!"

She smiles. "I have," she says. "I started working for his grandfather when I was very young. I took care of him when he was just a baby!" She rounds a corner, leading to a long red-painted hallway, with dark wood floors. "This way."

"This mansion really is like a maze," complains Takagi, and Kanami laughs.

"Old man Takeuchi loved that about this place. He was very fond of mazes and puzzles." The maid stops in front of a door with an embossed plaque reading ‘TAKEUCHI’ in romaji.

"Interesting," Takagi says, as Kanami raps on the door with her knuckles.

"Sir, Detective Takagi is here to see you." She covers her mouth with one hand. "Along with a little assistant."

"I’m shadowing Detective Takagi for a school project!" Shinichi lies with a wide smile, and Takagi just shakes his head.

"Yeah, a school project." Takagi rubs at his forehead, but there’s more resignation than irritation in the motion.

"Come in, come in." Takeuchi sits at an expensive mahogany desk, in a high backed red leather chair. He’s hanging up his cell when they enter, eyes closed and face, this time, clean-shaven. His suit is a dark brown, and sitting behind that desk, he looks strong and capable, if still utterly exhausted. "What brings you here, detective?"

"A couple of questions, that’s all," says Takagi, who, after adjusting his own, much less well-fitting suit with an air of self-consciousness, pulls out his notebook. "And we…" He looks down at Shinichi and grimaces, "I wanted another peek at the crime scene, so it was worth coming over."

"Ask about anything you need to," says Takeuchi, leaning forward until his elbows hit the desk. "I am at your disposal. I want to find the person who killed Scarlette more than anyone."

"Okay, then." Takagi clears his throat. "Shinamoto-san’s mother flew into Tokyo yesterday evening, and she said that Shinamoto-san was aware you had hired a private detective."

"Scarlette said she wasn’t on speaking terms with her mother," replies Takeuchi immediately. "They’d fought when Scarlette decided to move to Japan to pursue acting and modeling, and haven’t spoken since." He looks up. "Also, I never hired a detective. I interviewed one guy, but I never got back to him."

Shinichi, out of the corner of his eye, catches Kanami shifting her weight. "What was the detective’s name?"

"Ah, I can’t even remember," Takeuchi says. "It was something foreign, though. Louis, maybe? Kanami, do you remember?"

"Not at all, sir," Kanami replies, and Shinichi would have missed the slight waver in her voice if he hadn’t been looking for it. "He didn’t stay long."

"It just didn’t feel right," says Takeuchi. "I mean, Scarlette was sneaking around but that didn’t mean what she was doing was necessarily bad. I decided to trust my gut, in the end, since I wanted to
marry her. I would have to learn to trust her eventually, right? Besides, I knew she wasn’t with me for my money, since she was already independently wealthy."

"Does modeling make that much?" Takagi asks thoughtfully, as Shinichi unobtrusively makes his way to the other side of the lavish office. More books about flight line the shelves on either side of a plush leather sofa, with old-fashioned arms that give the entire office the feel of a smoking room in an old black and white Sherlock film. Two neatly framed pictures are hanging above the back of the sofa, and upon closer inspection, they aren’t pictures at all, but diagrams; old ones, with ink that is closer to gray than black now, on yellowing rice paper.

"She had a huge inheritance from her father’s family, apparently." Takeuchi’s phone rings again, and he sighs, before pressing the silence button on the side with his thumb.

"A-re-re, Takeuchi-san, are these the original floor plans for the mansion?" Shinichi crawls up onto the sofa to get closer.

"Right," says Takeuchi, standing up from his desk to come stand next to Takagi. "I had them professionally digitized for insurance purposes. Goodness knows I couldn’t read these, anyway. They look nice as a decoration, at least."

The plans were done in thick black India ink, the then elegant lines drawn with straight-edges and fountain pens, showing the original foundations of the house and the original layout, along with the extensive modifications to be made to turn it from a house into something closer to a castle. In the corner, faded out, are a series of notes, along with a faded, blurred signature that pings at his memory, but he can’t quite make it out.

KID’s words come back to him. "Haven’t we danced enough under the moonlight for you to know you need to look a little harder?" He pictures KID’s smug grin and sneers.

"I’m looking, you dumb thief," he says under his breath. "I’m looking.""Conan-kun?" Takagi asks from behind him.

"It’s nothing, nothing." Shinichi leans in, staring at the area of the mansion where the ballroom and the old library were. There is an ‘X’ drawn in ink on the ballroom floor. "Say, what do you think this ‘X’ mark is?"

"It’s just the center, right?" Takeuchi rubs at his hair, and his phone, sitting there on the edge of his desk, rings again. "I should get that."

"What’s wrong?" Takagi is leaning next to him now, narrowing his eyes at the blueprints.

"That mark isn’t in the center. It’s off to the side, isn’t it?" Shinichi sucks his lower lip into his mouth, and pushes up his glasses. "Actually, Detective Takagi, if you look at that mark, isn’t that exactly…"

"Where Scarlette Shinamoto’s body was found," Takagi says grimly. "Right in the center of KID’s monocle."

"And look," Shinichi continues. "There’s a second ‘X’ mark in the room behind it, and a third outside the gate. What could that mean?"

"You probably already have some idea," Takagi scratches at his cheek. "We should go check it out then, shouldn’t we?" He frowns at Shinichi. "One day, Conan-kun…" He stops. "One day I’m going to ask how you know so much."
"Hahaha," Shinichi looks away to cover his expression, eyes skimming past Kanami, who watches him like a hawk from where she still loiters in the doorway. Takeuchi’s voice is soft from over at his desk, and Shinichi hears him speaking lowly about Scarlette’s legacy or something. A charity?

Shinichi clears that thought away and returns focus to Takagi. "Maybe one day I’ll tell you." Most of the time, he thinks Takagi already knows, anyway. He won’t forget Takagi’s expression, as they waited together in Tokyo Tower for that bomb to go off.

"Hopefully by then I’ll have convinced myself I’m not imagining things," Takagi mumbles. "It’s a good thing you have so many social studies projects you can complete with the police, I guess."

"Yup," Shinichi says, sharing a little of his real smile with Takagi before he forces it back behind his mask.

Takeuchi is hanging up the phone, a pinched look on his face. "Sorry about that, Detective. I took time off work to mourn, but I’m very hands on with my company; I’m involved with the business side and the design side, so they can’t get much done without me. I’m lucky I have Kanami-san to run things around here." He smiles at the maid, who still lingers in the office doorway. She blushes, and waves her hands.

"No, no, it’s nothing," Kanami says. "I’ve always been happy to work here for you."

"She’s my savior," Takeuchi admits. "She even buys birthday presents for my coworkers for me, since I don’t bother with carrying a wallet and I’m terrible at picking things like that."

"Wow," Shinichi says, giving the maid another once over. "It’s like you’re the real lady of the house."

"No," says Kanami. "That was definitely Shinamoto-san. She was very particular, especially about foods and drinks, since she had to watch her calorie intake. I think she was just very interested in details of all kinds, though. She even insisted on a particular guest bedroom—Old Man Takeuchi called it the Swan Room."

"Did you have any more questions for me?" Takeuchi asks. "I need to head into work."

"Actually, would it be okay if we took another look at your ballroom now? We have a lead we’d like to follow up on."

"No one has been in there at all," says Takeuchi. "Take your time investigating, and Kanami-san will let you out when you’re finished."

"Thank you," Takagi says. "We won’t be long, I hope."

Kanami leads them back through the winding halls to the stairway, quiet and pensive. Shinichi watches her back, noting the stiff shoulders and the way she pulls anxiously at her navy-colored skirt. He also watches the way she checks the paintings hanging from the wall as they walk, turning down new corridors at certain paintings with purpose.

"Kanami-san," Shinichi asks, as they descend the same twisting staircase back down to the main floor, "do you use the paintings to help you find your way through the halls?"

"Yes, little boy," she says, unexplained stiffness easing from her spine. "If you turn at the paintings with swans in them, it will lead you back to the main staircase."

"And the paintings with pine trees lead to Takeuchi-san’s office, right?"
"You're awfully sharp, aren't you?" Kanami asks curiously, when they reach the bottom of the stairs. "How did you know?"

"Ahahaha, it was just a lucky guess," Shinichi replies quickly. "Are there codes like that in all the paintings around the mansion?"

"There sure are," Kanami confirms. "Only Takeuchi-san and I know them all, though Shinamoto-san knew a few. The rest of them are definitely written down somewhere in the old library, but since no one can access that place…"

"Takeuchi-san didn’t leave the books in there, did he?" Shinichi is appalled at the very idea, and Kanami laughs at him as she leads him to the taped off ballroom entrance.

"No, no," Kanami reassures him. "Are you a book lover, Conan-kun? Don’t worry, he just didn’t need the old filing system anymore when he relocated the collection. Everything’s done with computers, these days." She comes to a stop in front of the ballroom doors. Shinichi hadn’t seen them closed, before, but now he can see the juunishi, the twelve zodiac animals, carved into the gorgeous stained wood doors. Each symbol was amazingly rendered in the wood by someone with a deft hand, and Shinichi wishes he were taller, just so that he could run his fingers along the grooves.

"I'll leave you here. I’m afraid this room will terrify me for some time to come."

"Understandable," Takagi says, and pushes open the doors, holding them open so Shinichi can slip in ahead of him.

Across the ballroom floor, the caricature of KID has been marked with tape, showing its location even without the luminol’s short-term effects. Shinichi immediately makes his way over to where the body was found, inside the circle of KID’s monocle, and starts poking around.

"What are we looking for, Conan-kun?" Takagi asks, hooking his thumbs into his belt loops. "The 'X' would have been here, right?"

"Yes, but..." Squatting down, Shinichi drags his fingers across the marble, finding no gaps. "I think it was actually a little further toward the side, now that I can see it again."

Takagi walks toward the runners. "Here?"

Furrowing his eyebrows, Shinichi once again takes in the room. His eyes land on the plaques that decorate the walls, and he walks over to one, reaching up to touch it. The brass is pounded in relief to show the shape of a tiger. "A tiger?" A tiger, a snake, and a dragon.

What do they have in common? Mythology, of course—Chinese, Japanese, Korean... Hadn’t he just seen the same symbols? The door had been decorated with... ah, astrology! Juunishi. "Of course."

"Of course, what?"

"It's the twelve animals of the kanshi!" Shinichi moves down to the next one. "Like the image on the door. Each brass plaque is a different animal." He points across the room. "Detective Takagi, can you check the other side?"

"Sure, but what's so interesting about that? Is it really strange that there would be zodiac images here?"

"Well, no," Shinichi says. "Except the oddities in the layout remind me of something I've seen before. Considering this mansion was constructed around a house built in the 1860s..."
"Takeuchi did say that." Takagi crosses the ballroom again, stepping over the taped lines until he's closer to Shinichi again. "What's the significance?"

"This room," Shinichi replies, with deep satisfaction, pushing up his glasses and then crossing his arms, "is part of a Kichiemon puzzle."

"Eh?!" Takagi gasps.

"Samizu Kichiemon," Shinichi explains. "He was a doll-maker in the Bakumatsu Era who loved creating puzzles. Suzuki-san collects his different puzzles. He used one to guard the Kirin’s horn, and the safe in his house is the Iron Tanuki."

"And you think there’s a trick to this room that was designed by him?"

"I do." Shinichi drags his hand along the wall until he runs his fingers over a blank spot where there should be a brass plaque like the others. "See how there are twelve, evenly-spaced plaques along the wall, about a meter up from the floor?"

"I see them," Takagi says, walking over to one. "Here's the horse."

"Each one is a different animal of the zodiac," Shinichi explains. "And they’re equidistant all around the room except for right here, where there should be a brass plaque but there isn’t."

"But what would go there? Is there an animal missing?" Takagi asks. He moves along the wall in the opposite direction from Shinichi, stopping in front of the sheep. "It seems like they’re all here."

"None are missing." Shinichi smiles. "There are twelve animals, exactly as there should be. But this layout, the space between the plaques... It's made to accommodate thirteen. There's no way that a mansion so carefully and lovingly designed would include a mistake like that. It has to be purposeful."

"It could just be… space left for a buffet table?" Takagi doesn't sound too sure of that, and Shinichi smiles at him brightly. "Or something? Ahh, I sound like Detective Mouri, but before he does that sleeping thing, don't I?"

"It’s not that, Detective Takagi!" He feels around with his fingers, pressing at the wooden panelling, tapping and knocking and listening for changes in the sound. "This was a ballroom made for dancing. Isn't that why Takeuchi-san doesn't use it?"

"Then what should be there?" Takagi’s tone is inquisitive, not challenging. Shinichi values that about Takagi—he sometimes treats Shinichi like a child, but he never thinks children aren’t worth listening to. He’s often willing to hear Shinichi out when no one else will spare the time, and with Takagi, Shinichi bothers less with the pseudo-child act and can focus more on solving the mystery. The list of people he can be himself around is so short, and Shinichi is grateful for every addition to it.

Shinichi finally hears the wood press and snap under his fingers, loosening and rotating around to reveal a panel in tarnished brass, two thick wheels with tiny hiragana etched into them in black. "That's the puzzle."

"Amazing," Takagi says. "How did you know that was there?"

"There are always multiple components and layers to Kichiemon puzzles. First, you have to find the puzzle, then you have to figure out the answer, and finally, you have to deduce how to input it."
Shinichi toys with the wheel, spinning it entirely around, but hearing no clicks or other noises that indicate how to select the hiragana. There is a small arrow, to the left, and he bets that's where you have to line up the hiragana.

He looks up to find Takagi staring at him. "Or something like that...Haha..." He swallows as the brief play of childishness does nothing to alleviate the weight of Takagi's stare.

"There are forty-seven hiragana on each of the first two wheels," Shinichi says. "And there are five kanji on the last wheel... the five elements you can be born under." Running his thumb over that last wheel, he tries to think. "So we're looking for a two part answer, and the clue is this room."

"There are..." Takagi starts to do the math, but then frowns. "Well, a lot of possible combinations."

"But there’s only one right one," Shinichi confidently replies. "The wrong one will probably hurt, so we should be careful."

"What do you mean, hurt?" Takagi bends down to look at the revealed puzzle.

"The Iron Tanuki sliced out with a butcher knife if you turned the knob too far; almost chopped my nose off. Then it popped out a banner that said ‘You Lose!’ Even KID was surprised, and he's great at these."

"How comforting," is Takagi's nervous reply, as he immediately backs up and away from Shinichi, leaving him alone in front of the panel, fiddling with the brass wheels. "Are you sure you should be that close to it?"

"It's fine, Detective Takagi! Don’t worry," Shinichi says, his mind turning over the clues he already has. "Twelve animals, all represented, and an empty space."

A thirteenth animal. Shinichi laughs, and it echoes in the big empty ballroom.

Frowning, Takagi ruffles the hair at the back of his neck. "What's so funny?"

"All of the animals are here, except for the cat, who the mouse tricked and convinced to show up to the party a day late," Shinichi puts his hand on the first metal wheel and starts to spin it, stopping when he gets to the ‘ne’. "And neko has two syllables." He rotates the ‘ko’ into place, before contemplating the kanji. The five elements. Each element is assigned based on the auspices of that particular year. "Hmm."

"Do you know which element?" Takagi is watching Shinichi's hands carefully, but Shinichi hardly pays him any attention as he thinks it out. It wouldn't be the current year, and he doesn't know which year it was when this puzzle was made. He doubts it's Takeuchi's birthdate, as Kichiemon's puzzles are always slightly narcissistic, like when he'd made the abacus in the false-floored warehouse spell out his name in kanji...

His name! Samizu. Shinichi immediately slides the final wheel to the kanji for water. "Samizu Kichiemon. The kanji for ‘Samizu’ are ‘three’ and ‘water’. That would be one unhappy cat." Then he spreads his hand across all three wheels and presses, clicking the wheels into place. At first, there’s silence, but then a loud rumble sounds beneath them, and a low whining hum fills the air. "What’s that?" Takagi looks behind him as though he’ll be able to see through the wall.

"Takeuchi-san’s library ghosts." Takagi’s eyes widen. "And if I’m not mistaken, how our killer got into and out of the ballroom without leaving a trail of blood."

The floor of the ballroom shifts underfoot, and Shinichi and Takagi both move to stand with their
backs against the wall as the floor beneath the runner rug closest to them sinks down to reveal a staircase.

"A secret passage!" Bewildered, Takagi tugs at the neck of his tie, loosening it.

"I thought it was suspicious," Shinichi says, pulling on the runner until it’s trapped against the wall by his and Takagi’s heels, the expensive rug crumpled up with barely a thought to damage, "that there were runners up the sides of the room and nothing in the center. But it was to cover up an unevenness in the floor that couldn’t be explained away by wear and tear, not when the floors are so resilient. Takeuchi-san never noticed because he never redecorated in here."

"So where do these stairs lead?"

"My guess is inside the old library. Do you want out find out?" Shinichi tests the first step carefully, and it holds. "Or do you think there might be vampires?"

The look Takagi gives him this time borders on wry. "Haha."

Shinichi grins back at him, unrepentant. "It should be safe, but maybe call forensics?"

"Let me go first," Takagi says after quickly sending a message. He digs in his pocket and pulls out his keyring, from which hangs a miniature flashlight. Shinichi presses the button on the side of his watch, giving them two beams to shine down into the dark tunnel. "Unusually smart and observant you might be for an eight year old, but I’m still the officer on this case."

Between the two of them, there’s enough light to make out the dusty tunnel in front of them, and Shinichi kneels down to examine the floor. "Fresh footprints and blood," he says quietly.

Takagi gulps audibly. "Should we keep going, or should we wait?"

"A little further," Shinichi presses. "Just to make sure we’ve figured it out."

They continue down the tunnel for another ten meters, until they encounter another set of stairs. Going up, Takagi pushes at the roof with both hands, frowning when it doesn’t open. "Conan-kun, is there a latch or something? Can you see anything?"

Activating the night vision on his glasses, Shinichi casts around looking for a mechanism to control the door. Just next to Takagi’s feet, he sees a copy of the brass rat symbol in the ballroom. "Step on the mouse," he says. "The mouse tricked the cat, after all. The cat should get its revenge."

Takagi scoots sideways until his weight is on the brass rat, and above them, louder whines, more chilling than the ones they heard before, reverberate through the tunnel, as a trap door lifts above their heads. "I think you were right about Takeuchi’s haunted library," Takagi says, before scrambling up into the dark room.

They fumble around for a light switch, choking on dust and thick, uncirculated air. Shinichi can also taste copper at the back of his tongue, so similar to what has greeted him the past few mornings, and he knows what that means. "Detective Takagi," he says, "you might want to step carefully. I smell blood."

Takagi, moving glacier-like alongside the wall, locates the switch, and the overhead lights flicker before turning on. As the room floods with light, the bloodstained wooden floors come into view, and even Shinichi is shocked by the gruesome scene in the abandoned two-story library.

"I should have waited for backup," Takagi says faintly. "You shouldn’t be seeing something like this
at your age, Conan. I’m sorry.”

"I…” The blood is splattered across the walls on the first floor, and on the half-empty shelves in a thin spray, and handprints around the size of Scarlette Shinamoto’s hands have been left in a dragging pattern toward the stairs to the second floor, as though she’d struggled to get away only to be stabbed again. "What’s that behind you?"

"A bucket," Takagi says, pulling on a pair of plastic gloves and dropping into a squat, tilting the vessel sideways to look inside. "And a paintbrush."

"The killer collected the blood for his ballroom artwork after Shinamoto-san was dead and could no longer fight."

"Would there have been enough blood left to draw the caricature?” Takagi, his face ashen, looks around at the library in dismay. "The average human body contains 4.7 liters of blood, but it seems like most of it is on the floor and walls."

Shinichi moves closer to Takagi, walking around the patches of dried blood until he stands next to the police officer. "Ano sa," he says, taking in the stain left on the inside of the bucket, with its fading color as it gets higher, until it’s a shadow near the rim, "only if he used only blood. But if he diluted it with water…”

"It would be easier to clean up, too. To wash the floors and hide the message."

"Precisely." Shinichi steps back, still watching where he puts his feet. "Now, where is it?"

"Where is what?" Takagi sounds ill, and Shinichi isn’t feeling too great himself. He considers himself a veteran of crime scenes, but with the library having been boarded up so long, the scent of blood, dried and drying, is a thick, cloying cloud that makes it hard to breathe, and he’s already been struggling with nausea and dizziness this morning. "The murder weapon?"

"No. The killer probably took that with him. What we’re looking for is the card catalogue for this old library."

"But the books are gone," Takagi says. "What good would it do us, anyway?"

"Kanami-san told us." Shinichi eyes the shelves, looking for a filing cabinet like the one he’d seen at the Beika library when he was a little kid. They’d computerized the whole thing by the time he was ten, but he remembers his father teaching him Dewey-Decimal system after Shinichi bothering him one too many times to find something in the family library. "She said that Takeuchi-san had left the previous filing system here, in the old library, and hinted that all the mansion’s secret directions were in here."

Shinichi’s eyes alight on a dark gray metal cabinet in the back of the room, with labels on each door representing ranges of hiragana. "The killer clearly figured out how to get in here. After that, finding their way around the rest of the mansion, even if it were a maze, would be a piece of cake, right?" He crosses the room, until he’s in front of the cabinet. He takes out his handkerchief and wraps it around his index finger, then drags it along the top of the cabinet, standing on tiptoes so he can reach the surface. Examining his cloth-covered finger, he smiles triumphantly. "No dust here. We could check for fingerprints, but I doubt we’ll find any."

"Then why are you smiling?"

"Because what I’m looking for is definitely here. We’ll figure out exactly how this murder was done." Shoving his handkerchief back in his jacket pocket, Shinichi sucks on his lower lip. "But
"where would it be filed?"

"Maybe it has to do with the cat thing," ventures Takagi, and Shinichi looks up at him. He’s still a bit gray around the edges, but he’s thinking again, and Shinichi takes his comment under consideration.

"Maybe," Shinichi agrees, then begins to more carefully examine the card catalogue cabinet. "But instead of one card, what if we’re looking for many?"

"Many?"

"It seems to me that there would be a card for each room in the mansion, the old rooms as well as the new ones built off the maze hallways, mixed up among all of the books. If there weren’t, only a few of these drawers would have been disturbed." He ghosts his fingers along the closed drawers, stopping at one that’s slightly ajar. "Deciphering the whole code will take some time."

"Wouldn’t it have taken the killer time, too?"

"Not if they’d asked Kanami-san the right questions." Shinichi pulls his handkerchief back out and uses it to yank open the partially closed drawer, labeled ‘ha/ba’. "Or if they’d had more than one opportunity to learn the layout of the mansion. But we don’t need to figure out every part of this maze-like place. We only need to figure out how this murder was committed."

"So our culprit killed Shinamoto, used her blood to paint the ballroom and then cleaned it, so the evidence would only be revealed under a luminol reagent test. Then they moved Shinamoto’s body to the ballroom, all using the secret underground tunnel. What else would our murderer need to know?"


"The kitchen?" Takagi pulls at the knot of his tie with a hooked index finger. "To drug the food, I guess. Why Shinamoto-san’s bedroom?"

"The drugs in the food would make everyone who ate sleepy, so naturally they’d retire to bed. It was then that the killer struck, taking the passed out Shinamoto from her room and bringing her here, to the old library. No acoustics to worry about, and thanks to the walls Takeuchi put up to block out the weird sounds of Kichiemon’s old passageways, no one would even think to look here."

Shinichi uses the handkerchief to thumb through the cards, stopping when he comes across one with a bent corner. "The only problem was, whatever food the killer drugged in the kitchen, Shinamoto-san, with her weird diet, didn’t eat enough of it, and she woke up before our killer could finish the job. She struggled, and for some reason, the killer ended up stabbing her over and over again. Maybe they were angry, or seven is a propitious number, who knows?"

"What about the bloody clothes?"

"Probably found them in Shinamoto-san’s bedroom," Shinichi says. "After all, she and Takeuchi were, ah, thinking of marriage, so it’s not really that unlikely he’s left clothes behind in her room—"

"Conan!" Takagi is positively scandalized, and Shinichi sheepishly turns back to the card he’s pulled out of the index. *Hakuchou*, or ‘swan’. At the bottom edge of the index card are the words *white painted frame*."

"Ahahaha, I mean, um, maybe she had taken them from the laundry by mistake… or something…." Laughing with embarrassment, he hands Takagi the card. "Shinamoto-san stayed in the Swan Room, right?"
"Right," Takagi says, looking between the card and Shinichi, amazed. "So after the murder, and the paint job, he left the card clue and stashed the clothes in the first bedroom he found."

"There’s probably another way off the grounds, too," continues Shinichi. "Remember the third ‘X’ outside the gates on the blueprints?"

"The first two were places to go up from underground, so you think the last one is, as well. So all the killer would have to do, after depositing the bloody clothes and potentially framing Takeuchi-san, is leave the mansion."

"That way, they could have taken the murder weapon with them, and no one would have seen them on any of the external security cameras." Shinichi holds out his hand, and Takagi hands him back the card. "A perfect crime."

"With Takeuchi-san being publicly interested in KID, only Kaitou KID himself would have paid attention to the caricature, and the real murderer would have disappeared. The only reason we figured all this out is because I happened to be familiar with Samizu Kichiemon."

"Well, we have a crime scene, now, and know how the murder was committed, but we still don’t have a suspect."

"We do, though." Shinichi sets the card down on top of the cabinet. He still wants to figure out the other cards, but it can wait. He sighs, then wipes dust from his jacket and then pulls off his glasses to clean the lenses. "The private detective."

"Huh?" Takagi looks down at him, bewildered. "But didn’t Takeuchi-san deny that he’d hired one, even when we asked again today?"

"I don’t think he did the hiring at all," Shinichi answers, pushing his glasses back onto his face. "I think the private detective business was handled the same way everything else in this household is handled—by Kanami-san. I think she made a bad hire, and we’ll probably need a sketch artist to figure out who he is, or at least get an idea of what he looks like."

Takagi stares at Shinichi for a long moment, his eyebrows knitted together and his mouth drawn in a thin, thoughtful line. Then he breaks the gaze, pulls out his phone, and hits something on speed-dial.

"Inspector Megure? It’s Takagi. We’ve found the actual crime scene and figured out how Shinamoto-san was killed." There’s shouting on the other end of the line, but Shinichi, for once, can’t make out the distinct words. "And sir? We’re going to need to bring Kanami-san down to the precinct for questioning, and have her sit down with a sketch artist."

Takagi hangs up the phone after a few more words from Megure, and sighs, alternating between Shinichi and the phone and finally settling on his companion. "Why do you think we’re going to need a sketch artist?"

"Because whatever name this private-eye was using, it probably wasn’t his real one," Shinichi says. "After all, if you got the job just to kill someone, you wouldn’t give your real name, right? Especially if your client wasn’t going to run a background check."

"If you’re this good now," Takagi says, running a hand through his hair, "what are you going to be like when you’re thirty?"

"I just want to be good enough that no one will ever be able to get away with murder in front of me again," Shinichi replies, and if Takagi gives him a worried look, Shinichi definitely does not notice it.
Twenty minutes after backup comes, Ran arrives at the mansion in a taxi, with Sonoko in tow. "Conan! I thought I told you to stay home! You never listen!" She scoops him up off the ground and hugs him. "Detective Takagi says it was really horrible, what you guys found in there!"

"Ran-nee-chan?"

Satou climbs out of the driver’s seat of her police car, where she’s been fielding calls since she’d pulled up, walking around the back of the vehicle and up the driveway. "Conan-kun, you’ve helped us out again, it seems."

"I really like Kichiemon puzzles!" Shinichi replies cheerfully. "I was really excited to get to solve one!"

Bending forward, Satou gives him a hard look. "You figured out the rest of it, too. Wataru—" She pauses. "Takagi already told me you put it all together by yourself and dragged him along for the ride." She sighs. "As usual. Are you all right, though? Takagi still seems pretty shaken from that crime scene."

"I’m fine," he answers. "I mean, it was pretty bad, but… I guess we see so many murders…"

"Elementary school students need better hobbies," Sonoko says, as Ran relinquishes her fierce grip on him. "You’re gonna turn out like that jerk Shinichi, if you’re not careful!"

"Sonoko!" Ran scolds, "Shinichi is not a jerk!"

"He is," Sonoko says. "He’s just a jerk you like!" She glares down at Shinichi. "You’re brat enough already, so don’t end up being like that guy, you hear me?"

Shinichi glares at her. "Better than ending up like you," he mumbles, as Satou puts her hands on her hips, watching as Takagi escorts Kanami-san out of the mansion towards them.

"Well," Satou says, interrupting before Sonoko can get really fired up, "it’s thanks to Conan’s detective work that we have a fresh lead on this case, so maybe it’s a good thing he has a little in common with the famous Kudou." She tucks a strand of her short hair behind her ear. "We still don’t know what the deal is with the Kaitou KID picture, but when we nab this guy maybe we can get him to spill his guts."

"If anyone can, it’s you, Detective Satou!" Shinichi says, grinning up at her, and she grins back.

"You bet," she replies, and then starts walking toward Takagi’s car to unlock the back door for Kanami-san.

Ran grabs Shinichi’s hand, and holds on too tight for comfort. He’s worried her again, then. He sighs. Even as Conan, Shinichi brings Ran nothing but stress.

"We should get going," Ran says. "We’ve got to check out of the hotel by noon, and Dad is supposed to meet a client back at his office by four. The police can handle the rest of this case."

"Detective Satou!" Shinichi calls out, thinking quickly, as Ran leads him toward the taxi. When she looks over at him, he gives her an earnest half-smile. "When the sketch is finished, can you send it to me? It’s just that I saw a lot of people outside the gate when the murder was reported, and maybe the killer was one of them."

Satou’s mouth stretches thin and grim, and she sighs, resigned, even as she nods. "I’ll have it forwarded to Mouri-san," she agrees, and Shinichi beams at her as Ran shoves him into the back of
"Then Kanami-san admitted to hiring the detective, and sat with a sketch artist," Shinichi says, legs swinging as he sits on a gray swivel chair in the professor’s house, set up for research at the circular table. "She was worried about Takeuchi-san, since she’s known him all his life, and she wanted to make sure the girl he was going to marry didn’t have anything shady going on."

"Then she gave him too many details about the layout of the mansion, trying to help?"

"Yes," confirms Shinichi. "Only it turns out that the private-eye she ended up choosing was someone with his own agenda. She also recalled that he went by the name Louis Redhouse, but that’s turned out, as expected, to be a false name. So all we know about the guy is what he might look like, that he’s in his mid-twenties, that he stole a seemingly worthless jewel, and that he wanted to, in some way, contact or implicate Kaitou KID." He growls. "Oh, and that Vermouth is interested in the case, or KID, or something."

Shinichi looks again at the sketch, maximized on his laptop, as Heiji hums on the other end of the line. "This case gets more and more interesting. Wish I could head over to Tokyo to solve it for you with my superior detective skills, but—"

"In your dreams, Hattori," Shinichi replies, before covering the mouthpiece on the phone so he can shake with a cough. "Anyway, until we find this guy, we won’t know for sure if the gem he’s stolen is..." Hesitating, Shinichi runs his tongue over his teeth. KID had told him about Pandora, but he’s not sure he’s allowed to tell anyone else, so it’s better to talk around it. "Something of any significance to KID, or Them."

"With Vermouth sniffing around, there’s bound to be some connection to Them," Heiji says. "You just tread carefully, Kudou. You’re always about to get yourself blown to smithereens when you mess with those syndicate types."

"I’ll be cautious, I swear." Shinichi exhales heavily, ignoring how much it hurts his chest. "After all, now Ran’s watching my every move like a hawk, so it’s not like I can get into too much trouble. Coming over to the professor’s house today has been the first time I’ve had to myself in forty-eight hours. I’m almost glad I have school tomorrow."

"Nee-chan’s that worried about you, then?"

"Takagi told her the crime scene was particularly gory, and she keeps looking at me like I’m going to fall apart over it."

"You’re supposed to be eight, Kudou, not eighteen. You should be falling apart over it."

"I’ve seen hundreds and hundreds of bodies, even if I’m only counting what I’ve witnessed as Conan. I think it was just the smell that upset Takagi, honestly, since the scene itself wasn’t actually any worse than some of the other stuff we’ve come across."

"You sound so casual about it."

"I’m not," Shinichi protests. "I just don’t see the point in getting worked up about things like that, when I need all my faculties to see the things that other people miss."

Shinichi doesn’t have nightmares about scenes like that, anyway. Shinichi’s nightmares always play out as slow-motion replays of his close-calls. Of times he hasn’t been fast enough, or clever enough,
and had to be saved by someone else. Handprints in blood in a stuffy room is someone Shinichi can’t
save, because they’re already dead. Not someone who might die because of him.

That’s what really scares Shinichi, even if he’ll never say so aloud.

There are footsteps on the stairs, and Shinichi looks up to see Haibara descending. She walks past
him and into the kitchen as Heiji scoffs on the other end of the line. "So what are you going to do
now?"

"I don’t know," Shinichi says, watching Haibara return from the kitchen with a glass of water. As
she passes him this time, she stops, and Shinichi looks down at her to see her staring up at his laptop
in shock. "Haibara?"

"I know that face," she says, and Heiji gasps, static-y through the speaker, as Shinichi spins on his
chair to look at her fully. She hands him her glass and pulls herself up onto the swivel-chair next to
him, dragging his laptop in front of her. Shinichi sets her glass on the table and switches to
speakerphone mode. "In fact, I just saw it, two days ago. Without the mustache, but…"

"Where?" Shinichi asks, as Haibara’s fingers fly across the keys, pulling up the FBI’s database faster
than Shinichi can finish the word.

Genevieve Maisonrouge’s name pops up, followed by her picture, but Haibara just clicks through,
pulling up a second profile. "He doesn’t have much of an alias. Not a stretch to get from Louis
Maisonrouge to—" Then she pulls up a basic translation site on Glegle, typing in Maison Rouge as
two words, and Shinichi’s eyes focus in on what the translator spits out.

"Louis Redhouse. Literally ‘Red House’," Shinichi says, and Heiji snorts. "Genevieve
Maisonrouge’s brother, and partner in crime."

"Creative guy," he says. "Like no one woulda figured out it’s him, like that?"

"We nearly didn’t," Shinichi points out. "It didn’t even occur to me, because I don’t speak French."

"Besides," Haibara says, "Louis Maisonrouge died in prison twenty-six years ago, according to the
FBI’s profile. It’s not like he’d have popped up on a wanted list, even if someone had been looking."

"So either that information is wrong, and he’s alive, or it’s someone in disguise as him," Heiji says.
"Which one do you think it is, Kudou?"

"I’m not sure, Hattori, but if he was her brother, why would he kill her?" Shinichi runs his hand
through his hair. "There are so many missing details that this case doesn’t make sense. Why would
someone go through all this trouble to get KID’s attention?"

"I was wondering about that," Heiji says. "It looks to me like the killer was trying to get everyone’s
attention, not just KID’s, and the bizarre murder of a famous person while calling out another famous
person is a surefire way to get lots of news coverage."

"News coverage," Shinichi repeats. "Too many motives."

"One thing is for sure, though," says Haibara, pushing Shinichi’s laptop back to him. "Whatever kept
Genevieve Maisonrouge so youthful was keeping her brother just as young."

Shinichi stares at the picture of Louis Maisonrouge, with his dark, serious eyes and strong
cheekbones, and thinks: Where do I go from here?
"Hey, Kudou, one other thing before I let you go," says Heiji. "Did you ever figure out who the lady was meeting up with and calling?"

"What?"

"When you first started talking about this case, you mentioned Takeuchi wanted to hire a private eye because Shinamoto-san was acting weird and stuff. So did you ever figure out what had her on edge before her death?"

Shinichi gapes at the phone sitting innocuously on his lap. "Hattori?"

"It’s just a detail that’s been bugging me, that’s all. It might not be important, but there might be a motive hidden in that."

"Looks like one point is going into the ‘Detective of the West’ column," murmurs Haibara, as Shinichi continues to gape. "If you can get me the phone records, I’ll do the hard part, Meitantei."

"R-right," Shinichi says. "Hattori, I need to make a few calls." He’ll have to use Mouri’s voice, and the phone over at the agency, if he wants to get any real information.

"Did I get one over on you, Kudou?"

"You may have just helped me break open this case," Shinichi replies, and hangs up before Heiji can gloat about it.

*
For the next week, time crawls by, as though Shinichi is going about his day-to-day activities with hundred-kilo weights attached to his every limb. He waits, anxiously and impatiently, for a chance to do more investigating, but ever since he’d found his way with Takagi into that gruesome library, Ran’s kept him on a short leash; if not for that, then because of his obviously poor health.

He’s known for two months that there would be some decline, but he hadn’t expected it to strike so suddenly; for him to be fine one day and not the next. He has a case to solve, and he can’t afford to be trapped in bed with a cough that aches down to his bones. It doesn’t matter, anyway. Shinichi needs to make the most of every hour, every minute, regardless of the spinning in his head and the aches that shadow his every move.

It isn’t until the following Monday that Ran once again resumes her karate practices, unable to meet with him after school anymore and escort him to the professor’s or the park, leaving him to his own devices.

He spends the entire morning plotting his next move.

"Conan!" Ayumi yells, and Shinichi startles, dropping his English book to the floor.

"Don’t scare me like that!" Shinichi bends down to pick the flimsy thing up, pushing his glasses up on his nose as he sets it in the center of his desk. His hands are shaking. He clenches them into fists so no one will notice. "What is it?"

"I called your name three times! Are you okay?" Ayumi’s hair is cute today, pulled into two pigtails, and she does look worried, sitting turned away from her desk, hands on her knees. A little Ran, in that moment. Shinichi softens at the similarity. Maybe Ayumi would do well with martial arts? Especially if she’s going to be investigating crimes without him to look after her in the future. "Are you still sick? You should have stayed home if you were still sick!"

"I’m—"

"Conan, I heard you saw Scarlette Shinamoto’s murder scene!" Mitsuhiko says, leaning down so his elbows sit on Shinichi’s desk, his freckled face flush with enthusiasm. "What happened?"

"I can’t talk about it," Shinichi replies, as Haibara explains the homework to Genta at the seat next to him. Genta isn’t paying much attention to her, though, his focus having shifted over to Shinichi as soon as Mitsuhiko had spoken. "I did see it, though."

"Did you really?" Genta asks, scratching at his bald spot. "My mom watched the news about the funeral on TV, so I couldn’t watch Yaiba! Did you catch the killer?"

"No," Shinichi admits. "Not yet."

Ayumi sucks her lower lip into her mouth, and peers up at Shinichi beseechingly through her bangs. "You don’t really think it was Kaitou KID, do you? The newspaper said it might be Kaitou KID, but I don’t believe it! Kaitou KID is really nice!"

"Definitely not," Shinichi says, firmly. "It’s not Kaitou KID’s style."
Ayumi sags in relief. "Then what are you worried about? The real killer?"

"He’s worried that the person might go after Kaitou KID, probably," says Haibara, setting her pencil down. She yanks absently on the left string of her hoodie, and meets Shinichi’s eyes. "Also, I think Edogawa-kun hates not being able to solve cases. He already had to get help from Hattori."

"Conan’s detective master?" Mitsuhiko huffs and crosses his arms. "Why does Conan always get to do the fun stuff?"

"I know," Genta chimes in. "Geez!"

Shinichi tries to imagine the Detective Boys in that grotesque bloodbath of a library, and shudders. "I don’t know if it would have been fun for you guys… Detective Takagi and I saw some pretty gross evidence." He frowns. "Worse than we’ve ever seen, probably."

Mitsuhiko and Genta continue to pester him about the case until their art teacher arrives, carrying an armful of brightly colored yarn while another student in their class, Mayumi, carries a stack of construction paper as tall as she is, and everyone save for Shinichi and Haibara gets distracted in the ensuing craft project.

"Can you cover for me after school today?" Shinichi asks quietly, as Haibara hands him two construction paper cats so he can punch holes for their mobile. "I need to do some investigating."

"Is this about the phone records?" Haibara asks. "We can’t go with you?"

"No," Shinichi says. "I don’t like that Vermouth was peeking in on things, and if she’s not the only one, then I don’t want you or the others anywhere near this mess."

"So only you get to throw yourself into trouble?" Haibara raises her brow archly. "Don’t you think that’s a little hypocritical?"

"It’s not like that." Shinichi punches both holes and threads purple yarn through them, knotting it neatly. "It’s just that one kid asking a couple of weird questions will be less memorable than a group of kids asking weird questions, and…" He gulps. "I don’t know, Haibara. That crime scene was brutal, and the killer hasn’t been caught. The Detective Boys are good kids, and clever enough, but they aren’t subtle, and I don’t want them to draw attention to themselves investigating this." Shinichi musses his own hair. "Plus, I’m not a child. I might look like one, but like you, I still have my older mind. So it’s not hypocritical. I am much more prepared for this than they are. And if this case is connected to the Black Org, I can’t bring you along. Any wrong moves and information could get back to the crows. The last thing we want is for Ayumi, Genta, and Mitsuhiko to be on some kind of watchlist."

Haibara’s lips curl down, but she nods. "All right," she says. "I’ll play along this time, as long as you tell me the plan."

"All of Shinamoto’s— or Maisonrouge’s, I guess— All of her incoming calls came from payphones, but thanks to you, we know that they all came from payphones in a certain area of Kinza."

"You’re welcome," Haibara says, handing him another cat, leaving behind a sticky partial fingerprint in gluestick. Shinichi rubs it away with his thumb instinctively, before cutting another piece of purple yarn. "Specifically, two payphones on one street. Use other colors, too, Edogawa."

"Whatever," Shinichi mumble, reaching for the green. "Anyway, I’m just going to scope out the shops along that street and see if there are any shops of note. Check into cafés about regular customers, because maybe that’s where she was meeting the person who kept calling her. Things like
that." He frowns when the frayed end of the green yarn refuses to go through the punched hole. It’s because his damn hands are still shaking.

Haibara sighs, and takes it from him. "I’ll take the Detective Boys over to Hakase’s after school. You have a doctor’s appointment, set up by your mother, who e-mailed you this morning to remind you. You forgot to tell Ran about it, if anyone asks." Her knot looping the yarn is neat, the frayed end tucked into the tie. She gathers the other cats, attaching them to the frame that their teacher had handed out to each pair at the beginning of the lesson.

"Ah, Conan, Ai, your kitten mobile is so cute!" Ayumi says, and Shinichi jumps for the second time that day at Ayumi’s voice. "I’m surprised Conan let you make a whole mobile of kittens, Ai-chan! He complained when I was his partner for the poster project, and made us do everything about soccer."

"It seems that Edogawa-kun is worried about his doctor’s appointment today," Haibara says loftily. "I don’t think he even noticed when I started cutting out the cats."

"So you are still sick!" Ayumi asks, peering closely into Conan’s face, making him lean back at the intrusion to his personal space. "Why can’t you just go see Araide-sensei?"

"My mom made the appointment," he says, laughing nervously as he rocks treacherously on the unevenly balanced chair. "I don’t have any say in it. It’s just a check-up kind of thing, haha."

"I wonder what kind of woman Conan’s mom is," says Mitsuhiko, who is standing up to show his and Genta’s stag beetle themed mobile. "I bet she’s calm and cool, like Conan is!"

Shinichi thinks about his actual mother, and barely keeps himself from snorting derisively at the description.

"Well," says Haibara, "either way, Edogawa-kun will be busy after school, so why doesn’t everyone come over to the professor’s for cake?"

"Yeah!" Genta cheers, throwing one fist up in the air, as their art teacher walks toward them. "Cake!"

"Genta always thinks about food," Ayumi says, laughing, before turning back to her own partner to finish their project.

"What do I owe you?" Shinichi mumbles, after their mobile is appraised and complimented.

"I’ll think on the subject," replies Haibara, with a small grin, but then the smile falls as her eyes narrow, and her fingers come up to grip the edge of his jacket tightly. "Later, there’s something else I need to talk to you about."

"Something else? What?" He turns his whole body towards her, looking intently at her face. "Is it important?"

Haibara is still gripping his jacket. "Didn’t I say later, Meitantei?"

Shinichi acquiesces, slumping back into his seat. "Why’d you even mention it, then?"

"To torment you."

"Sadly, I believe you." Shinichi slants his gaze up at the clock. Two more hours, he thinks, then it’ll time to go investigate.
"Are you sure," ventures Haibara, voice low and uncertain, "that you should be out and running around by yourself?" She drops her gaze, and Shinichi’s hands have continued to tremble. "You could always—"

"It doesn’t matter," Shinichi replies, reflexively wanting to hide his weakness from her. "Did you just expect me to lie down and die?"

"No, I suppose not." She’s so quiet, and Shinichi can’t see her eyes, shadowed by her bangs.

"This is something I can do. I can catch this murderer, and maybe strike one last blow against the people who ruined my life. You won’t be able to stop me."

"You wouldn’t be you if I could," she replies, and then is silent for the rest of the afternoon.

*

Shinichi exits the yellow line train at Kinza station, almost getting crushed by the press of people pouring out of the train to flood the passageway toward the ticketing area exit. Pulling his backpack straps tighter, Shinichi weaves his way between legs, keeping an eye on the yellow line to guide him as he makes his way through the crowd.

Don’t these people have better things to do on a Monday? he thinks, as someone’s purse smacks him upside the head.

At least everyone else should be headed out the exit toward the shopping district. Shinichi, on the other hand, will be headed out in the opposite direction, away from the Nichiuri Station and the Shiodome.

The police had managed to easily trace the calls made to Scarlette’s phone from payphones in Kinza, and when Shinichi had called up using Mouri’s voice, Shiratori had happily handed over the information.

"We already sent Detective Chiba to check it out," Shiratori told him, "and it turns out that these numbers don’t track back to one payphone, but a set of three adjacent ones. They’re also in a very popular area, and get more use than the usual payphones because of the high number of bars in the area. You know how it is; cell phones going dead or getting lost while people are out drinking, people needing to call a taxi but not wanting their wife to see the calls to unknown numbers on their cell phone bills…"

Shinichi had just laughed and asked if the information could be mailed to Conan’s cell phone, and Shiratori hadn’t even hesitated. "Maybe he’s your number one apprentice, instead of the elder Yokomizo twin," the detective had joked before hanging up.

When Shinichi passed the info over to Haibara to double check on Sunday night, she’d managed to pull up maps for him and mark up the exact locations of each phone within an hour, calling it child’s play to figure out which phone exactly had made the calls by matching up outgoing call data she’d hacked from the telecom company that managed the area payphones. Shinichi had just considered himself lucky that Haibara was on his team.

So with his Haibara-approved map tucked into his pocket, Shinichi is ready to do his legwork. First, he’ll get the scoop on regular customers at local restaurants and cafés, asking staff using his innocent boy routine to see if he can come up with any that match Scarlette Shinamoto’s general stats. He has no doubt she would have had to disguise herself, but given how little her appearance had changed before she started modeling professionally, she clearly wasn’t an expert at it like his mother or KID
or Vermouth, so he’d be looking for someone of the same height, build and age, at least.

After that, he’ll casually start slipping in questions about people she might have seen or met, and hopefully that will dig up information on this mysterious caller. He’s pretty sure the meetings weren’t amorous in nature, given what Takeuchi said about her excuses for the strange outings. And—

"Aren’t you a little young to be out and about in Kinza by yourself, young boy?" A hand grabs his backpack right as the ticket gates come into view, halting his progress. His captor turns out to be a young woman in her early twenties, wearing a skintight white skirt and a silk fitted top. Attractive. Her hair is pulled up into an effortless bun, and her earrings and watch are expensive, as are her handbag and sunglasses. Well-off. She smiles at him, gently. "Well?" Charming.

"Actually, I’m not here by myself," Shinichi hedges, already looking for escapes. He checks the floor, to see if there’s change he can pretend to pick up, that will allow him to bend further away, and pull his backpack free of her hold. He blinks when he sees her shoes, pink heels, and then he smirks, looking back up to look again at her face. "Am I?"

"What do you mean?" she asks, as Shinichi relaxes, letting his smirk get bigger as she looks at him curiously.

"Careless, wearing the same shoes again, nee-chan." He tilts his head. "Why are you stalking me today?"

She pouts at him. "Meitantei, you’re going to give me a complex about my disguise ability if you always pick me out like this." Her lower lip juts out playfully. "How do you always ruin my fun?"

Shinichi has the sneaking suspicion that KID had worn the shoes on purpose, to give him a hint. "My mother is better than even you at disguises. I learned from the best."

"So that’s how you became so adept at seeing through them," KID says, pout somehow growing even more exaggerated as he twists one loose lock of hair around his finger. "So what brings us to Kinza this afternoon without your cute friends, little-big detective?"

"So you don’t have bugs at the professor’s house." Shinichi lets KID take his metro pass and pass it over the reader for him, and then walks through the gate ahead of him. "That’s good to know."

"I don’t want to try to get anything past his paranoid little house-guest," admits KID. "Besides, I’m not interested in the professor. I’m interested in you."

"You’re such a creep." Shinichi grabs KID’s hand when they get to the escalator, since there’s another swell of people. "I’m trying to track down who Scarlette Shinamoto was taking frequent calls from around here. The problem is, they used various payphones. Since all the calls came from this area, this is at least a place the caller frequents, so it’s my best shot."

"I see," KID says. "So how do you go about figuring out who used a payphone?"

"You want to be my apprentice for the day?" Shinichi looks up at KID, grinning cheekily. "I know you secretly love detective work."


"Did you know Takeuchi’s mansion was built around a Kichiemon puzzle?" He tucks his metro pass into his pocket, and tugs on his bowtie. "Or were you just guessing?"
"That Takeuchi guy has tried to get me interested in his collections before, so I checked out his house a couple years ago." KID’s nails are carefully manicured again, a French manicure, the cheeky bastard, and he shows off the white tips as he taps his index finger against his lower lip. "Naturally I was unsatisfied with the digital floor plans I, ahem, borrowed from the insurance company, and did some further research. It turns out that Grandpa Takeuchi is as fascinated with puzzles as his grandson is with planes."

"You could have told me what I was looking for," Shinichi says, using the hand still clasped in KID’s to pull him in the right direction.

"I wasn’t sure, though, so I didn’t want to give you any preconceived notions that would interfere with your ~detecting. I just noticed some discrepancies between the measurements of the foundations and assumed there was more to the layout."

"You measured the entire residence without being seen by security?" Shinichi is kind of impressed. KID shrugs. "Well, I didn’t need to. I can figure out the dimensions of buildings by sight, and since I have perfect recall, I just commit that information to memory."

Shinichi’s face goes slack with shock before he schools his expression. "Impressive."

KID flashes square white teeth at him. "Did you find out anything else interesting?"

Now that they’re clear of the crowd, Shinichi drops KID’s hand, reaching into his jacket pocket to pull out his annotated map. "The maid, Kanami-san, had hired a private eye to follow Scarlette around. She didn’t know much about him beyond the fact that his name was Louis Redhouse."


"You speak French?" Shinichi’s not sure he’s actually surprised by that. With an ear as good as KID’s, picking up foreign languages probably comes easily to him. Shinichi’s eye twitches with irritation. As formidable as ever.

"Enough to get by," KID replies. "Not as well as other languages, but enough. I have a rival, you see, from Paris." He hums, disgustingly cheerful.

"You know that Arsene Lupin isn’t real, right?"

"He’s real in my heart~" Shinichi gets the impression that KID’s not telling him something, but that’s fine. He doesn’t really care about competitions between jewel thieves. "He’s related to Miss Shinamoto, then, this Louis Maisonrouge? Married?"

"Her brother. The sketch Kanami-san helped with was a match for the mug shot taken in 1963." Shinichi looks around, searching for cafés. He doesn’t see any here, just a myriad of high-end clothing shops, handbag retailers, and what looks like some kind of clocks and timepieces specialty store, along with a clearly upscale jewelry vendor.

"You’re telling me he’s still young too," KID says, and Shinichi makes a noise of agreement as he stops at a corner, dragging his finger along the map. "Are you lost, Meitantei?"

"Or someone is disguised as a young him, although that seems less likely, since that woman didn’t help." Shinichi starts forward, walking past a set of three payphones that Haibara hadn’t marked. "Of course I’m not lost, who are you talking to?"

"’That woman’?" KID puts a hand on Shinichi’s shoulder and looks down at the map, his cheek
touching Shinichi’s. It’s not warm, and all Shinichi can feel is cosmetic powder. He smells silicon, not jasmine. But still, KID’s hand is hot through the material of Shinichi’s jacket, and KID’s breath does tickle his chin. "Who do you mean?"

"No one you should worry about." Shinichi jerks away from KID, and points at a phone booth ahead of them. "That’s one of them. The phones that Hai… A friend marked for me."

"Hmm, there are a lot of people on this street. Our mystery caller probably chose it because it was busy, no?" He finishes his question with an overblown rising intonation like some socialite girl in a family drama, and Shinichi thinks there’s got to be a limit to what KID can do with his voice, but he hasn’t found it yet. "There are also a lot of foreigners around here, so Miss Shinamoto’s looks might not have stood out so obviously."

"True, but most of the repeat visitors in this area are going to be people who work here. We know for a fact that Shinamoto didn’t. So she should stick out in people’s memories, in one way or another." Shinichi has to take two steps for every one of KID’s even in those heels. He’s pretty sure KID is doing that on purpose, the asshole. "We might not need her to have stuck out, though."

The payphones are in front of a convenience store. "Super high traffic location," KID whines, and Shinichi frowns at him. "Good for disguising, bad for finding! Trust me, I love crowds like this." He flashes a sharp, devious grin at Shinichi, but quickly hides it behind a hand so no one else sees it.

"Convenience stores like this get a lot of traffic, but usually the workers have fixed schedules, since they’re also students or rounin. The calls were usually made around this time, so whoever is behind the register now was probably there then. We need to ask about regulars."

"Didn’t the police think to do that?" KID looks skeptical. "It seems like the logical thing."

"They probably asked about someone suspicious, or out of place." Standing in front of the payphone, Shinichi looks it over. Nothing stands out about it, except that it’s furthest from the front door of the store, just out of view of the person behind the register. "Ah, smart," he mutters, and KID leans down.

"This is the phone I’d choose, too," KID says. "If I stood here, I’d be out of the cashier’s sight-line."

Shinichi side-eyes him, taking in that lip-gloss shiny smirk. "Don’t think like a criminal in front of me. It makes me want to show you up close and personal what my dart watch can do when it hits its mark."

"Ah, but Meitantei, I am a criminal!" He nudges Shinichi with his shoulder. "Plus, weren’t you thinking the same thing? You can think like a criminal, too. That’s what makes you so good at catching them, am I right?"

Shinichi grunts instead of answering, and walks into the convenience store, right up to the desk. A young man with a scraggly haircut and a backwards turned cap is slumped behind the counter, and Shinichi walks right up to him, picking up a package of Ran’s favorite candy and setting it on the counter to get the cashier’s attention.

"Just this, kiddo?" he asks, in a low, sleepy voice, and Shinichi smiles at him.

"Yep," he says, and then a bar of chocolate is set next to it. "Hey mister, do you work here every Monday?"

"I guess. Unless I’m sick or whatever."
Shinichi jams his hand into his pocket, pretending like he’s looking for change to buy time. "Can I ask you a question?"

The man picks up the candy and runs it across the price scanner. "No, can’t you see I’m busy?"

"You don’t look that busy," replies Shinichi, slightly put out. "So—"

"150 yen," the cashier interrupts.

A bar of chocolate slides across the counter. "This too, please," KID says sweetly, and he pulls a change-wallet out of his purse. It’s brown leather, with tiny clovers stitched into it. "How much is it all-together?" Smiling, KID slides down his sunglasses and makes sure his eyes connect with the cashier’s, and suddenly the guy is standing up a bit straighter, a light flush to his cheeks.

Smitten, the cashier gives them the price, and KID fishes out the appropriate coins from his purse and sets them on the coin tray, making sure their fingers brush when he reaches out to take the payment. "Is that all, Conan-kun?" He winks.

Seeing the opportunity, Shinichi widens his eyes into his most puppy-like expression, and looks up at KID. "Nee-chan, I wanted to ask the cashier-man if there was anyone in this area that comes in around this time every day, but he said he’s too busy."

"Oh, but Conan-kun, your question would only take a minute, right?" He smiles down at Shinichi, then tilts his head so he can look up at the cashier through thick lashes. "Can you think of anyone, sir?"

The man’s blush darkens, and he stammers out: "There was a cop that stopped in earlier asking me the same question, but really, nobody suspicious has been here in a while. I remember people that look weird, because I’m supposed to keep an eye out for shop-lifters."

"I’m not looking for anyone weird, mister!" Shinichi grins up at him earnestly. "I’m looking for someone you must see lots and lots. It’s just I found a wallet and it had a lot of receipts from here in it."

"You should take the wallet to the police box, then," says the cashier, rubbing at his nose. "That’s their job, you know?"

"I wanted to try and find the owner on my own first! It’s a mystery!" Shinichi grins. "Nee-chan and I were just going to walk around this afternoon, so…"

"I didn’t see the harm in it," KID adds, with an exasperated but indulgent smile he shares conspiratorially with the cashier. "He loves playing detective, and it’s a kind thing he’s trying to do, so…"

"Ahaha, yeah, I guess it’s no big deal…" The cashier pulls off his cap to flatten the mess of his hair, and sneaks another look at KID before returning his attention to Shinichi. "So what other clues do you have?"

Shinichi thinks fast. "I think most of them were from Monday afternoons. I couldn’t read all the kanji, and Nee-chan told me I had to read it by myself!"

The cashier frowns. "Monday afternoons? Now that you mention it, there is this older guy who comes in every Monday afternoon for cough drops. I think he works with his hands, or something. He’s always got black oil under his nails. Takizawa or something, maybe. He likes the cherry cough drops. He’s usually carrying coffee, too, so maybe it’s not oil, I dunno."
"Thank you, mister!" Shinichi says, reaching up to take KID’s hand. "We’ll be sure to find him, now!"

"Thanks for being such a sweetheart," says KID, peeking again over his sunglasses at the man, and he crumples under the weight of KID’s advances.

"C-come back anytime," the cashier says, entirely to KID, and he waves back at him flirtatiously as they leave.

As soon as the automatic doors close behind them, Shinichi drops KID’s hands and crosses his arms. "You’re completely shameless, aren’t you?"

"It worked, didn’t it?" KID puts on hand on a slim cocked hip. His legs really are so long, Shinichi thinks, and smooth even without stockings, which is a weird thing to notice, probably. "You should be thanking me, Meitantei. He didn’t want to give you the time of day."

"Thanks, then," Shinichi says, grudgingly.

"You’re welcome~! Anything for my favorite detective." Unimpressed, Shinichi stares at him. "So where to now, Sherlock? The other payphone?"

"Eventually, if this doesn’t pan out."

KID is playing with his hair again, bottom lip caught between his teeth. He’s not very tall, Shinichi realizes, definitely shorter than Heiji, and he’s thin enough that in a shirt that hides his shoulders, his body does look like a young woman’s. "Was that really a lead?"

"It might be. Someone who has a reason to be here in the area every week on Monday afternoon, and is a familiar, non-threatening face… people would stop noticing, right? I once solved a case where the victim was woman who walked her dog every morning at the same time. The murderer killed her, and then put on her coat and walked her dog, and no one knew the difference. Not a single person, who saw her every day, knew that it wasn’t her, because it was her dog and her coat. The human mind is like that. Easy to fool. People see what they want to see."

"Did you forget you were talking to a magician? I know all about how easy it is to distract and mislead the mind."

"Another of your specialties, I presume," Shinichi plucks at the strap of his backpack. "Anyway, there’s a café across the street. If this man, Takizawa, always has coffee, chances are he’s a regular there, too. Let’s ask a couple of questions and see if we can rule him out."

"Boring," KID says, puffing his cheeks out in a manner strangely reminiscent of Ayumi. "Is this why detectives are so stuffy?"

"Think of it like casing a building for one of your heists," is Shinichi’s dry response. "The final result is the actual theft of the jewel, right? For a detective, that’s figuring out how and why the crime was done. Everything before that—the interviews, the research—that’s casing."

"I suppose I did get to use my disguise." KID buffs his nails on the smooth silk of his shirt and then reaches down to pluck their bag from the convenience store from Shinichi’s hands. "I will need chocolate to get me through this mind-numbing detective-brand reconnaissance, though."

"You know, you don’t have to stay. I can take care of myself." He walks up to the crosswalk, and starts to cross. KID effortlessly catches up to him, chuckling. "Especially if you’re bored."
"I’m not that bored," replies KID. "After all, you always manage to keep things interesting, don’t you?" He’s not smirking down at Shinichi as he speaks, though, and despite the sunglasses blocking his eyes from view, Shinichi can read some of KID’s apprehension in the unconscious licking of his lips.

"This case… It scares you, doesn’t it?" KID flinches, and Shinichi breathes out through his nose. "Because the killer painted your caricature in blood."

"Is that so unreasonable?" KID takes a bite of chocolate, then licks it from the corners of his lips. Shinichi quickly looks away, discomfited. "I’d rather find this person and put an end to this mystery. I live for a different sort of thrill."

Standing on his tip-toes to pull open the door to the café, Shinichi chuckles darkly. "And here I thought you had a death wish, the way you keep pissing off Ran."

"That’s what I call flirting with danger." He reaches out and holds the door open with his free hand. "It’s my choice to get involved with that, and well within my ability to get out of trouble as swiftly as I get into it. This killer… I don’t know anything about them, and it seems they have or want the thing I’ve been searching for since I became KID."

"Pandora," Shinichi says.

"Yeah." KID takes another bite of chocolate, and maybe Shinichi imagines it, but KID’s hands seem to tremble slightly as he peels the foil away from the candy. "Not going to lie, Meitantei, I’d rather be pulling off a complicated jewel theft from that old Suzuki-san." Frowning down at Shinichi, he takes the chocolate and folds the foil wrapper down to close it, before tucking it into his purse along with the candy Shinichi had picked.

"I’d rather be attending one of your heists right now, myself," Shinichi mumbles, looking around the café. It’s quaintly designed, with small round tables meant to seat two, and comfortable looking wooden chairs. A woman in the back types away at her laptop, and an older couple, in their seventies, enjoy their coffees at one of the two window tables. "Let’s grab the other table by the window."

KID nods, then walks over to sit at the seat behind the old woman, sliding into it and boldly crossing his legs at the thigh, so his skirt rides up. Shinichi raises both eyebrows, and KID smirks at him. Strangely amused, Shinichi hoists himself up into the chair opposite him. If he stretches, his toes touch the ground.

"Why this seat?" KID asks, after a smiling waitress leaves menus on the table.

Shinichi leans forward so he can whisper, and KID follows his lead. "We can see outside and observe the usual foot-traffic patterns."

"Oh?"

Shinichi holds up a finger. "That’s first." He raises another. "Second, the couple behind you are regulars, the woman has a frequent customer punch card and the old man picks up the mug without looking at it even though it has a rather odd-shaped handle, so they might be familiar with Takizawa, if he comes here every Monday to get coffee right before he goes to the convenience store. Also, from here, you’ll be able to watch everyone who comes in the door, and I’ll be able to watch the restrooms."

KID blinks. "You thought of all that in the thirty seconds you looked around before choosing this
seat? While simultaneously having a conversation with me?"

"Of course," Shinichi replies. "You can’t always expect to have a long time to figure things out."

"You’re a little bit scary." KID tucks the stray lock of hair behind his ear. "No wonder you always keep me on my toes."

"Someone has to. Inspector Nakamori is a little too rigid to keep up with you, even though he knows most of your common tricks."

"It’s more fun when you come." KID turns to look out the window. "I always have to think a little harder about playing with Suzuki-san now. It’s honestly delightful. I’ll impress you, yet."

Before Shinichi can respond to that, the waitress comes to take their order. Shinichi asks for a cup of black coffee with no sweetener, and KID scowls at him before ordering a frothy latte drink, asking for extra whipped cream with his order.

"Hey, miss," Shinichi says, as she starts to move away to put in their orders. "I was wondering if you’ve seen that old guy today? The one who always comes here on Monday? I usually see him on my walk to Nee-chan’s job, but today I didn’t." He smiles at her brightly, and she smiles back.

"I’m sorry, I don’t usually work Mondays. I’m filling in for a friend, so I don’t know who the usual Monday customers are."

"Awww," Shinichi says, loud enough to catch the attention of the table behind KID. "Now I’m worried about Takizawa-san, because I see him every Monday with his coffee and cough drops, but I didn’t see him today!" He sighs exaggeratedly, and kicks his legs under the table.

"Now, now, Conan-kun," KID says, "I’m sure he’s fine. I did come get you a little early today, after all."

The old woman behind KID turns around in her seat as the waitress excuses herself and walks away to put in their order. "Excuse me," she says, "I couldn’t help but overhear the young one asking after Takizawa-san."

"Oh," KID says, lowering his eyes like he’s embarrassed by Shinichi’s behavior. "I’m sorry, Conan is always like this, he worries so much when people break their routines. I don’t think he’s old enough yet to really appreciate that people aren’t as bound to time slots as his cartoons are." He laughs lightly, this airy, pretty thing, and then turns more fully in the chair. "He doesn’t mean to disturb anyone."

"Oh no, dear, it’s no problem," the old woman says, before returning her attention to Shinichi. "And, little boy, I saw Takizawa-san yesterday at his shop. He got a new shipment from France, and I’m sure he’d love it if you stopped by to see."

"Wow, really, from France?" Shinichi leans further forward on the table, as KID shoots him an alarmed look. "He gets stuff from France a lot, doesn’t he?"

"He has an old friend there, doesn’t he, dear?" the old woman asks her husband, and he nods, even as he stands up to go take care of the bill at the front desk.

"That’s right," the old man agrees. "I never caught the name, but apparently they went to school together."

"I wonder if Mitsuhiiko and I will still be friends when we’re old men," Shinichi wonders aloud,
tapping his chin. "I think we will be. What do you think, Nee-chan?"

KID is smothering a laugh. "Of course you will be," he says, and the old woman laughs as she leaves her seat, pulling on a pale pink jacket.

"I hope you get to see Takizawa-san today," she says, turning away. "After all, you wouldn’t want to miss him," and then bids them farewell as the waitress comes back with their coffee.

She sets Shinichi’s coffee in front of him, and then carefully moves KID’s to the table, the tower of whipped cream shaking as the bottom of the rounded coffee cup touches the table. "Is that enough whip?"

"It’s perfect, thank you, miss," KID says, and Shinichi cups his hands around his own mug and offers his own thanks. The waitress leaves them, then, and KID picks up a spoon and dips it into the whipped cream, taking a bite of it while Shinichi watches in disgust.

"Chocolate and whipped cream? Let me guess, you live on a diet of sugar?" Shinichi takes a sip of his own black coffee and sighs happily. Ran is always policing his caffeine intake, and Shinichi has missed the ability to sit down with a good book in his family library with a full pot of coffee or a cup of cocoa and just… drink it slowly, prepared the way he likes it. He’d taken a lot of things for granted, living by himself, and now, he knows the value of them.

"Ah, and it’s no surprise to me that you’re so violent, since it’s clear to me now that you’ve got acid running through your veins." KID sneaks a sip of the actual coffee under the whipped cream, and cringes. "Bitter~"

"We learned a lot, from that old couple," Shinichi says, as KID takes a napkin from the holder on the table to wipe smeared cream from his nose. "Hey, idiot, are you listening?"

"Tsk," KID says. "Of course I am. France? I mean, that’s suspicious, considering where our first victim is from, but…" He rolls his shoulders. "Did you pick up something else?"

Shinichi closes his eyes as KID reaches for the packets of sugar. "We already heard from the cashier at the convenience store that Takizawa-san works with his hands, and often had oil under his fingertips. He also needs cough drops pretty often. And from that old couple, we know that he runs a local shop, and that it receives imports from abroad on a frequent basis from a long-time friend." He cradles his chin in a ‘v’ of his thumb and index finger. "Chances are, he’s into leatherwork, or maybe antiques of some kind. We can rule out clothing, with hands like that, and his throat wouldn’t get dry from selling jewelry."

"Ohhh," KID says, sitting up straighter and clapping his hands. "Good show, Meitantei. 10 points from me!" He looks at Shinichi over the rim of his sunglasses, and there they are again, those bright eyes.

"Is that the real color?" Shinichi blurts out, without thinking, and KID’s eyebrows rise in tandem, his sunglasses slipping lower.

"What are you talking about?" KID rests his face in a cupped hand, pushing his sunglasses up to once more obscure his eyes. "Hmm?"

"Your eyes," replies Shinichi, looking away, out to the street. It’s beginning to get dark, even though it’s only a little before seven. Another sign that winter is coming. "I’m not asking to unmask you, or anything, it’s just that every time I see them, I— Well, the color is really… unexpected." He can feel the heat rushing to his cheeks as he adds with a mumble: "I guess they suit you, in that case."
KID makes no response, so Shinichi risks a look at him, only to find KID’s borrowed face of the day caught in complete and utter surprise. It’s only for a moment, before it smooths out into a large, sharky grin. "You’ve noticed my eyes? How romantic." He puckers his lips, and Shinichi picks up a sugar packet and throws it at him.

"Don’t flirt with me. I’m not a member of your fanclub, you perv."

"I think it’s you who’s flirting with me, Meitantei," KID replies, catching the sugar packet and casually making it disappear with one flick of his wrist. Shinichi watches his hands, but doesn’t know how KID makes it appear in his other hand a moment later, when he hasn’t once moved them to touch each other. Then KID suddenly has five sugar packets in his left hand, and Shinichi gives up. "Besides, didn’t you tell me not to treat you as a child, even if you look like one?"

"That’s not what I meant and you know it!" Shinichi’s phone rings, and he’s almost thankful until he looks at the screen and sees it’s Ran, calling Conan’s cell number, looking for her wayward ward. He sighs, and presses ignore.

"Shouldn’t you take that?" KID asks. "You don’t want anyone to worry about you."

"I have a good excuse lined up." Shinichi rubs his thumb along the edge of the coffee cup. "If necessary, I’ll get my mom to call and back up whatever lie I end up having to tell."

"So your parents know? That you’re like this, I mean."

"Do your parents know that you’re like this?" Shinichi purposefully looks KID up and down, but KID just grins at him and casually shifts so his skirt rides higher.

"I learned all my best make-up tips from my mom, so naturally."

"Phantom Lady, right?" Shinichi pushes at the nose-bridge of his glasses. "Yes, my parents know. My mom dresses up to be Conan’s mom, sometimes."

"You mentioned she was quite good at disguises, earlier," KID says. "Why aren’t you in training? Would you like to be my student next week?"

"Pass," Shinichi says. "I’m going to go pay the bill, and we should get a move on. An elementary student can only stay out so late without getting the wrong kind of attention, and the stores will start closing."

"Shouldn’t your Nee-chan pay the bill?" KID gets up, so graceful it’s disgusting, and Shinichi glares up at him.

"You’re just a high school student," says Shinichi, and then holds up a hand when KID opens his mouth to put up a fuss. "Don’t waste your time denying it, I already know. I’ve known since the first time I saw you, but even if you only told me a little of KID’s history the other night, it was still easy enough to put together a timeline. Yes, you’re a high school student, or if not, at least high school aged. So we’re about even."

"I’m actually the same as you," KID says. "Our birthdays are only a month apart, if I remember correctly. Kudou Shinichi and I are in the same year, but not at the same school." Shinichi, surprised at the free information, almost trips over his own feet. "Maa, you can treat me next time then."

"Next time?" Shinichi scoffs, eyeing that brown leather wallet with clovers as it makes its second appearance of the day. "The next time we run into each other, I’m going to tranquilize you and then handcuff you. Stop stalking me."
"Leave out the tranquilizers and I might find that interesting," KID replies in a low voice. "Handcuffs can be kinky."

"Gross," Shinichi manages, even as his traitorous body decides to be embarrassed. KID’s too good at that. "Why are you here, anyway? You can leave this to me."

"You’re the only one I can trust to find this killer," KID says, after he’s paid at the front desk for their beverages, and nudged Shinichi back out into the chilly evening. "And there are some things little kids can’t investigate without help."

"I’m not—"

"I know that," KID says. "Even before I knew for sure, I knew, you know? You played cute kid around Miss Mouri and some of the police you spend time with, but you’ve never played cute kid with me outside of that very first time, when I was trying to get the Suzukis to put out the real Black Star."

KID presses a hand to his stomach to smooth out an imaginary wrinkle in his green silk shirt. "I do my best not to underestimate you, but you should already know, there are things I can do that you can’t do as a little version of you. So since this case is important to me, I’ll help out when I can." He stares down at Shinichi, and Shinichi tries to get a read on KID but for the first time in a while he can’t. "Only you, though, understand? I don’t call truces with detectives on principle. I have values."

"I’m an exception?"

"You’re a detective that thinks like a criminal," answers KID, with a tiny smile. "My favorite, most clever, detective."

Shinichi swallows, the weight of KID’s words like a boulder in his stomach. "KID…"

"Where to? I think we have another hour before we have to pack it up and call it quits for the night, don’t you think?"

Shinichi scratches at his temple with one curled finger. For all his deductions in the coffee shop, he hadn’t seen the right kind of store nearby, despite taking note of every sign. "Oil on his fingers, cough drops, imports… what does Takizawa do? What could he be—" His question is interrupted by the faint chime of the Wako clock in the distance, hailing the arrival of seven o’clock, and Shinichi’s eyes widen. "Clock repair!"

"Eh?"

"Clock oil is clear, for the most part," Shinichi says, as he grabs KID’s hand and starts to pull him down the street and back toward the station, in the direction they came. "But in 18th century French clocks, the oil they used to use is a dark brown, almost black, and it get stuck inside the gears and mechanisms, so even now, when you’re fixing them, it rubs off the metal gears."

KID grabs his hand more firmly, adjusting his grip so their fingers are laced together, and the part of Shinichi that isn’t focused on piecing the rest of this little puzzle together is fascinated by the roughness of KID’s hands that easily marks him as a gymnast. "And if he deals with warped woods and glazes, he’d need the cough drops, right?"

"Why are you in such a hurry, all of a sudden, though?" KID asks, sounding put-out even as he easily keeps up, in his tight mini-skirt and pink high heels. "There’s no guarantee this is even related to what we’re looking for, despite the whole France thing."
"Something Takeuchi said," answers Shinichi, feeling the triumphant smile pulling at his lips, "about Shinamoto. She liked 'old watches and stuff' more than she cared for any modern jewelry. But nothing like that was found in any of her possessions. So why did he think that?"

"So you think he saw her looking at pictures of old watches or clocks or something, and assumed that she was interested in them?" KID clicks his tongue behind his teeth. "Ah, now I wish we could look again at her phone, and make a copy of the memory card. Maybe I’ll do that tomorrow."

"You can break into the police station?" Shinichi looks around. It was only two streets away, now, that clock shop, and he slows down to catch his breath. "Don’t answer that. The less I know about that, the more plausible deniability I have."

"That’s the spirit!" Then KID frowns. "If Takizawa-san is the person we’re looking for, don’t you think he’d be nervous, knowing Shinamoto-san was murdered?"

"I think—"

A scream, and Shinichi, without stopping to consider anything, drops KID’s hand and immediately takes off running, rounding the corner only to see that the glass on the second story of the old clock shop has shattered, spraying out to the street below.

"There was a gunshot!" A woman clutches her purse to her chest, and an alarmed man runs over to her, yelling "Honey, are you hurt!" as he checks her over for cuts from the shower of glass.

Shinichi immediately approaches the entrance of the antique shop, yanking the door open and running up the narrow stairs, making it halfway before an arm wraps around his waist, strong and firm.

"Careful! Whatever caused that could still be happening!" KID hasn’t bothered with a woman’s voice, his own slinky tone hissing desperately right into Shinichi’s ear.

Shinichi shivers before he rests both hands on KID’s arm, and squeezes. "I know that," he says. "The gun that shot that has one bullet left in the barrel."

"There were five shots?" KID’s arm eases, once he realizes Shinichi is actually thinking things through. "How could you tell?"

"There was one shot," corrects Shinichi, passing the room where the glass has been shot out. The emergency exit to the back alleyway is wide open, and the fire escape sways in the absence of any wind at all. A shotgun, with a silencer affixed to the barrel, is on the ground below the fire-escape. Shinichi exhales. "Damnit." He returns to where KID stands in front of the wide open door of what appears to be a workroom. "They escaped. Left the shotgun behind, though."

There’s no one in the room besides one slumped figure on the floor, propped against the window and sprawled at an awkward angle. It’s too dark in the workroom to see much else from this far away. The lights had never been turned on, and in the last vestiges of sunset, there’s not enough natural light to give Shinichi a clear picture. He turns on the night vision on his glasses.

KID hesitates at the door, letting Shinichi pass him and carefully approach the body. "How did you know it was a shotgun without seeing it?"

Two steps, and three, and now Shinichi can see the blood pooling out, growing into a larger and larger ring around the corpse. Male, definitely in pretty good shape, but pale skin, like he didn’t spend much time outside. His apron tie is undone, like he’d been putting it on when the killer had come in.
"Shell casing by your left foot," replies Shinichi. "But even without that…"

Wary of the spreading puddle of blood, Shinichi looks more closely at the body, noting the oily fingertips and the odd clinging of baby powder to the man’s forearms, where his sleeves are rolled up. His hands are smooth, and unwrinkled. His hand is curled into a cupping shape, as if he’d been holding something, and it was wrenched away from him.

"Without that, there’s the sound. Every gun sounds different, depending on the type, the length of the barrel—all those sorts of things. That woman outside heard a gunshot. Even with a silencer, shotguns make noise; not enough that you need hearing protection, but enough that it’s clearly audible." The clothes on the body are plain, but expensive. He’s wearing a waistcoat. The shoes are Italian leather, but well worn. "But in this case, it was the way the glass shattered. It takes a certain kind of bullet to go through someone’s body and hit the window."

"What if… what if it hadn’t hit him?"

"No one brings a shotgun to a confrontation intending to miss," Shinichi replies darkly. The blood has settled around the body, now, and forms a ring around the corpse. "And at the range this was fired, a miss would have to be intentional."

Crouching down, Shinichi takes out his phone, photographing details of the man’s hand grasping at nothing. He glances up at the top of the corpse and just as quickly looks away, his stomach turning.

"The bullet went through his head and broke the window, shattering glass on the street." He switches the power off on his glasses, and turns to look up at KID, who still lingers in the doorway. "Can you turn on the lights?"

KID leans carefully against the wall, tucking his sunglasses into his purse before pulling on a dainty pair of pink gloves. Then he flips the light switch, illuminating the workroom. In the distance, the sound of sirens grows louder. "You know, Meitantei, I didn’t sign up for police and mutilated bodies."

"If you’re going to stalk me, you’d better be prepared," Shinichi replies, concerned by the way KID is leaning back against the door. "Oi, oi! Are you going to faint?"

"Probably not. But no promises."

"You’ve seen corpses before." After all, KID is no stranger to dangerous situations.

"Not like that. Just dead is different from…” He sighs, a wobbling thing. "From that."

Shinichi tears his gaze away from KID, knowing every second counts, as he steels himself to look at what must remain of the victim’s head. When he finally does, all the air in his body leaves him. It’s not the gruesome remains of the man’s face that unnerves him, though. Instead, it’s the blood splattered white top hat, blue ribbon wrapped around the base, and the monocle, complete with a clover charm, pushed into the victim’s empty eye-socket, that have the coffee he’d drunk earlier threatening to come back up.

"KID." Shinichi can hear how grim he sounds. "I think," he says, turning around to meet KID’s eyes, "that we’ve found our mystery caller. And his killer is probably the same person that killed Shinamoto."

"What makes you say that?" KID’s voice cracks unevenly. The silicon mask can’t hide the trembling of his jaw.
"They left a message for you," says Shinichi, slowly, and KID pushes off from the wall and walks over, dread evident in every step. "You don’t have to look."

"Oh," says KID, when he finally sees what Shinichi has seen, and he gags. Shinichi reaches out and wraps a too-small hand around KID’s bony wrist.

"I've got you," Shinichi says, quietly. "I never leave a case unsolved." He looks up at KID, whose eyes are riveted on the monocle, splattered with blood, bits of human skin stuck to the chain of the charm. "The police will be here soon. Before they get here, see if there’s anything useful, since you’re already wearing gloves."

KID heaves a shaky sigh, then starts to poke around the room, while Shinichi looks again at the victim’s clothes. There’s an odd print in blood along the lower half of the waist-coat that Shinichi snaps a picture of for later analysis.

"It’s just delivery receipts and repair tools on the workbench. Some of this stuff is like the tools I use for jewelry fabrication when I make fakes," KID says. "Nothing of note, really. Takizawa-san is Takizawa Morisuke, by the way. Clock repairs and appraisals." A jingling sound. "He has a lot of coins. For the payphones?"

Shinichi tosses KID his phone. "Get good pictures of the receipts," he says, when KID’s caught it easily out of the air. "I’ll look through them later, and see what I can find out about his past."

There are the sounds of heavy footsteps on the stairs, and a familiar voice directing the officers to "step slowly, just in case."

"Take off your gloves," Shinichi hisses, and pushes KID back towards the door until his back hits the wall. "And don’t get any ideas about adding your own twist on things right now, I know these officers, and if they catch you it’ll be your own fault, not mine."

KID obeys, taking off the gloves and dropping them into his purse. With his left hand, KID slides his fingers into Shinichi’s hair, letting strands slip between his fingers. "All right, Meitantei, don’t worry, this isn’t my first rodeo."

"Don’t think I’ve forgotten Doito Katsuki," he replies, as KID continues to card fingers through his hair, those French manicured tips scratching gently at his scalp. "Why are you fondling me?"

"Image is everything," says KID, calmer. "After all, whatever lie you tell about who I am, we want it to look natural, right?" Shinichi looks up and bright eyes look back at him, wan smile fixed on a face that is probably pale under the his mask. "Besides, this is hardly worthy of being labeled fondling, and Doito Katsuki was a fantastic anagram."

"Am I supposed to be thankful for your restraint?" Shinichi murmurs, as Inspector Megure leads Satou and Chiba into the workshop, quickly taking in the scene before his eyes land on Shinichi.

"Conan! What are you doing here?"

Chiba and Satou both look over at Megure’s exclamation, and Shinichi laughs nervously as KID’s hand tightens in his hair before resuming its casual back and forth pattern. "Katsumi-nee-san and I were coming here to see Takizawa-san this afternoon," he says. "We were walking here from that coffee shop two blocks over when we heard that woman scream. I ran inside to see what happened, but by the time I got up the stairs, the killer had already escaped out the emergency exit! I didn’t see them at all, but the fire escape was moving, and there’s a shotgun on the ground down below."

One of the officers immediately goes to retrieve the gun without needing further instruction, and
Megure soothes the stray hairs of his mustache with his thumb and forefinger.

"Takizawa-san?" Megure looks at the body, and another officer, with plastic gloves, pulls a wallet out of his pocket and hands it to a similarly gloved Chiba.

Chiba flips open the wallet. "Takizawa Morisuke, sixty-three years old." He looks over at Shinichi. "He works here, Conan-kun?"

"He fixes clocks!" Shinichi holds up his watch. "I wanted him to check out something on the watch the professor made for me, so I came here after my doctor’s appointment!"

"Who’s your friend, Conan-kun?" Satou is rifling around on Takizawa’s desk, picking up the shipping notices and using her thumb to flip between them. "I’ve never seen you around before, and I’ve known Conan a few years now."

"She’s a family friend," Shinichi replies. "My mom mentioned I’d be over here to her best friend, and so her best friend sent her daughter! Katsumi-neechan and I stopped at the convenience store, and then went to get hot drinks, and then we were going to get my watch looked at before she took me home, but when we got here, Takizawa-san was dead!"

KID flutters his eyelashes, and pulls Shinichi into his chest, head pressing just below his non-existent breasts. "It was really scary, but Conan is such a brave little detective that I’m okay."

Megure smiles at her. "You’re in good hands with Conan," he says, then turns to look at Chiba, who’s just let out a strangled gasp. "Chiba, what’s wrong?"

"Inspector, you need to see this." Chiba’s soft face is set in hard lines. "The top hat, and the monocle… I think this is connected, somehow, to the Shinamoto case!"

Satou looks up from the receipts and shoots Shinichi a searching look that he immediately avoids, instead taking in details of the workroom he hadn’t gotten a chance to examine before. On the far wall, in a gap where there are no clocks, are a few old pictures.

Pulling KID with him, he goes to get a closer look. "Nee-chan, come this way with me?"

"What have you noticed, mister detective?" KID whispers, and Shinichi points up to the pictures.

"Another connection between our victims, maybe," he whispers back. "We need someone else who knows Takizawa, though, to confirm."

The photos are in color, but it’s faded out. In one of them, a Japanese man stands next to a foreign man with pale red hair and freckles, much taller than him. The two men are holding matching pocket watches in the picture. In the second photograph, that same Japanese man is with a young girl, her hair in two braids, and she’s holding his pocket-watch as he stares at her adoringly. The rest of them are the same, and the watch is in every one of them.

"It’s that pocket watch, right?" KID asks. "That’s what you think is important."

"That and the man in that top picture," says Shinichi. "But first…"

KID looks at Shinichi curiously as Shinichi clears his throat, and then smirks when Shinichi relaxes his face from his thoughtful expression into something more childish. "Oh, is it show-time?" KID’s eyes glimmer, and Shinichi can’t help but want to stare at them, which is… Not important. Possibly another one of KID’s distraction techniques.
"A-re-re, Detective Satou…" Shinichi says, and Satou walks over to him, stopping beside him to look at the pictures. "Do you think this Japanese man is Takizawa-san when he was younger?"

"Hmmm," Satou says, leaning in closer to inspect the photos. "Probably. Why?"

"If you look at Takizawa-san’s hand, doesn’t it look like he was holding something?" Tugging lightly on Satou’s sleeve, he points to the corpse behind him. Then he looks up at KID, who taps the photo with one of those manicured French nails.

"I think Conan means this watch," he says, "that Takizawa-san is holding in all these photos."

Shinichi slips out from between KID and Satou to return to the corpse. "Look, isn’t this the pattern of a chain on his waistcoat?"

"It is," Satou agrees. "You think he was shot, and then the watch was taken from him?"

"It seems like it was very precious to him," KID says, still in the back of the room, looking at the pictures. "I don’t think he’d take it off."

"Like Scarlette Shinamoto’s pendant," Satou says. "So we have the KID reference, and a stolen personal item."

"And a missing killer," Shinichi says, forcing himself to look at Takizawa’s body one last time.

"And a missing killer," Satou agrees, before leaving Shinichi to go speak with Megure.

It’s another thirty minutes of repeating the same story about how they arrived at the clock repair shop before they’re allowed to leave, KID promising to take ‘little Conan-kun’ home right away, as it’s getting late.

They walk quietly out of the shop, KID ducking under the tape out front to get back to the sidewalk. "Looks like we’re at another dead end, Meitantei," he says, snapping his fingers and making Shinichi’s phone appear out of thin air, handing it back with a pert upward curve of his lips.

Shinichi pockets it, and shrugs. "No, I don’t think so."

"Because we know this killer is collecting jewels?"

"Ah, of course you noticed," Shinichi replies. "That Takizawa’s pocket watch wasn’t shaped right."

"It was too thick." KID opens his purse and pulls out his half-eaten bar of chocolate, taking a discreet bite before shoving it back into the bag. "Pocket watches are usually slim, meant to fit in the pocket of a waistcoat without being distracting. Takizawa’s was much too large for that."

"Also," Shinichi says, "Takizawa was sixty-seven years old."

"So?" KID puts a hand on Shinichi’s shoulder, pulling him in closer when the crowd thickens as they approach the station.

"So why didn’t his hands have any wrinkles?" Shinichi replies. "I found baby powder on him, too, and his clothes were old fashioned, but expensive. He’s no master of disguise, but…"

"He was making himself look older," interjects KID, and Shinichi nods. "Why?"

"Maybe he wanted to stay longer in this area. Maybe he needed to. I’m not sure. But even the most recent pictures of him on that collage showed a man who hasn’t aged very much. He probably
managed to convince the people he interacts with daily that he’s got good genes, and used make-up for effect."

"Then he’d be able to move around as both a young man and an old one. Smart." KID sighs. "But just because we found a connection, that doesn’t mean we have a lead, right, detective?"

"We might have a lead," Shinichi replies. "I’ll let you know when we get on the train." He pulls his backpack in front of him, unzipping the front pocket and pulling out his train pass.

"Who says I’m coming with you?" KID’s hair is starting to fall free from its bun. "We might run into three more headless corpses wearing a sartorial signature of mine on the train."

"Ah, but didn’t you promise Detective Satou you would take me home, Katsumi-nee-san?" Hooking a thumb in the strap of his backpack, Shinichi looks up at KID mischievously. "How ungentlemanly of you to go back on your word."

"You little bastard." KID pulls out his own train pass. "I thought you didn’t want me around?"

"I want you to go over the delivery receipts with me, actually." Shinichi looks up to check the platform number, but KID seems to know where they’re headed, and Shinichi is all right with following him.

"You think something’s fishy? What use would I be for that?" KID grins down at him. "Despite today’s adventure, I’m not one for solving mysteries. I much prefer to create them."

"You speak French," says Shinichi. "I wasn’t paying attention, but I did notice that most of those notes weren’t in Japanese. If it’s in English, I’m fine, but I don’t speak French."

"Are you admitting to needing me, Meitantei?"

"You’re here," Shinichi answers. "I might as well make you useful."

"And here I thought you were coming to like my company."

"Don’t get ahead of yourself."

There’s only one free seat on the train, and KID takes it after making sure that no one older needs the seat. Shinichi intends to stand in front of him, but KID slides his purse into the space between himself and the pregnant woman next to him and pulls Shinichi onto his lap.

Shinichi lets out an oof of surprise as he suddenly finds his backpack between KID’s legs, tucked under the seat, and himself, once again, too close to Kaitou KID.

"What are you doing?" Shinichi growls, as one of KID’s arms grips him just under the ribs as the other lies harmlessly on his left leg. KID’s chin digs into his shoulder.

"This way we can both look at your phone without risking anyone else seeing it," KID says, and his chest against Shinichi’s back is strong and warm. "Think, Meitantei."

"Whatever," he mumbles, shifting on KID’s thighs to dig his phone out of his pocket. Wriggling around to make himself more comfortable, he ignores the way KID’s arm tightens to hold him still and starts flipping through the photos they took at the scene, determined not to blush.

"You’re warm." KID’s voice has lost the teasing note. "Feverish, even."

"Nothing for you to concern yourself over."
"I didn’t think your lovely Miss Mouri was the type to let sick little boys wander around distant neighborhoods alone."

"She’s at karate practice," Shinichi admits. "Otherwise I’d have never gotten away." He tries to turn his head, but KID’s cheek is in the way. He concedes, slumping back in KID’s grip. "I’m not sick. At least, not in a way where lying down would be any better than doing something productive."

"Your version of productive is quite different than the average inhabitant of an eight-year-old body’s. Take care of yourself."

"I get enough of that from people in a better place to say it," Shinichi snaps, and KID falls silent as Shinichi unlocks his phone. He uses his thumb to swipe through the pictures until he gets to the first of the delivery receipts, and zooms in on the image. "Takizawa Morisuke is obviously the recipient." Using the touch screen to push the image around while zoomed, Shinichi drags focus to the sender. "Baal Villon?" The name is familiar, but he doesn’t know where he’s heard it before. "I’ve heard that name before."

KID’s quiet laugh reverberates down his spine. "Do you know much about the theater?"

"What?" Shinichi tries to turn his head again, but KID’s face is too close, and his nose brushes KID’s cheek. It’s frighteningly intimate, and he quickly recoils.

"The theater, of course! Plays and operas and the art of performance." The arm around Shinichi’s waist loosens slightly, and Shinichi can feel KID’s thin fingers playing with the hem of his jacket.

"No," Shinichi says. "Not really."

"This name," and KID’s words tickle Shinichi’s neck, hot breath giving him goosebumps, "is a two-fold reference. The ‘Baal’ comes from the Bertholt Brecht play, about a poet who lived outside the law. The ‘Villon’ comes from François Villon, the real life Parisian criminal he was based on."

"Le Grand Testament!" Shinichi says, surprised, and the hand that had been innocuously resting on his knee pats it lightly.

"Very good, Meitantei!" He chuckles. "Never figured you for a reader of medieval French poetry."

And Shinichi had never figured KID for one either. But KID is always full of surprises, and Shinichi wonders what else KID bends his impressive intellect towards, when he’s not pulling off complicated magic shows.

"I’m not," Shinichi replies, hating how aware he is of KID’s proximity and warmth. "But my mother is." He licks his lips. "So the name is a fake, but what can we figure out about the address?"

"Possibly a P.O. box," KID says. "Again, that’s what I’d do. I’d get a P.O. box at a non-local post office, and have my mail sent there, or use it as a return address." He leans back, and Shinichi swallows after he takes a deep breath. Jasmine. Is it a cologne, or something in KID’s make-up? "That will make it hard to trace."

"I know someone who might be able to work around that," Shinichi says, closing his phone.

"Breaking the law? My, my, what a naughty detective you are."

"Shut up," Shinichi retorts. "I’m interested in justice and protecting lives, and as long as what I do doesn’t hurt anyone, I don’t see the problem with bending a few rules."
"That’s what makes you my favorite," says KID. "Because you’ll understand."

"Understand what?" Shinichi asks, and KID’s arm drops from around him as the train pulls to a stop.

"This is us," is KID’s reply, as the stop is announced, and he gently pushes Shinichi off his lap, standing up and collecting his purse as Shinichi fumbles for his backpack. He’s slightly dizzy, and it’s sort of a relief when KID grips his elbow to balance him.

"You don’t have to get off here," Shinichi says, blinking to try and settle his gaze. "It’s only ten minutes walking to the agency."

"I thought I promised Detective Satou I’d take you home?" Light, but with an undercurrent of authority that Shinichi instinctively rejects, pulling his arm free.

"We already talked about the receipts." Standing in front of the double doors, he looks at KID’s reflection in the plexiglass. "I’m not a child who needs to be escorted."

"You don’t need to keep reminding me of that." KID rests his hand on Shinichi’s shoulder, thumb lightly brushing the nape of Shinichi’s neck as his fingers curl into the bunched material of his jacket just above the collar bone. "I’m well aware."

The way he says it makes Shinichi’s tongue feel thick and his mouth feel dry, so he doesn’t respond, just rushes off the train as soon as the doors open, knowing KID will be able to keep up even as his hand slips away.

The walk to the agency is quiet, and Shinichi watches KID out of the corner of his eye. He’s never still, and as they walk, he’s constantly fussing with a 5 yen coin, making it appear and disappear, multiplying it and then reducing the number back to zero. When they stop in front of Poirot, KID leans forward and pulls the 5 yen coin from right behind Shinichi’s ear, handing it to him. "Here you are, my darling detective, home sweet home."

"How can I reach you?" Shinichi asks, as KID turns to go, eyeing the lights on at the agency, MOURI TANTEI JIMUSHO in black kanji against the backdrop of the well-lit room.

"Hmmm, I’ll reach you, instead," KID replies. "Not too long from now, really."

"You’d better not be planning a heist." Shinichi suspiciously narrows his eyes. "Do you actually think that’s a good idea, when someone wants to kill you?"

"People always want to kill me, Tantei-kun~ I wouldn’t want the others to get bored while my focus is elsewhere. Bored assassins are dangerous."

"Then that sniper, at the archives—"

KID presses a finger to his lips, stilling his words. "Anticipate my notice." And then KID is gone in a flash of smoke, no one at all where he’d been standing milliseconds before. Shinichi looks up to the sky, and sees a white, triangular glider glowing against the night.

"You’d better be kidding," he grumbles, and then, with a sigh, Shinichi heads inside and upstairs, opening the door to the agency with an I’m home! that has Ran rushing out of her room to greet him, her hands on her hips.

"Why didn’t you tell me you had a doctor’s appointment? I would have taken you!" She squats down in front of him, her hair spilling across her shoulder, and Shinichi laughs nervously. "Conan-kun, you’ve been ill all week!"
"I forgot all about it until I was already at school! Mom e-mailed me about it last week but I forgot I had to go!"

Ran sighs and bumps her forehead lightly against his. "You’re a really independent kid, aren’t you?"

She’s as close as KID was, earlier, and Shinichi blushes but his heartbeat doesn’t quicken, like it had when it was KID. Probably because he knows Ran, and is more comfortable around her. He’s been this close to Ran hundreds of times by now, whereas KID is an entirely new entity invading his personal space.

"Sorry," Shinichi says. "I like doing things by myself."

"Still, what did you need to go to a specific doctor for?" Ran stands up. "Come into the kitchen, I saved you some dinner."

Shinichi glances at the clock. It’s a little after nine, and he has to get up for school at five-thirty. He’d made it home in plenty of time. "I don’t know," he replies, brushing the question away like it’s a summer mosquito. "Oh, but Katsumi-nee-chan was there! I haven’t seen her in a long time! And then we ran into Inspector Megure, Detective Satou, and Detective Chiba at a murder!"

"Another murder?" Ran puts rice from the open rice cooker into a small white bowl, setting it down on the table while Shinichi gets into his usual seat. "And who is Katsumi?" She puts the rest of his dinner in front of him, and Shinichi pokes at his vegetables.

"Ahaha, a friend of my mom’s," Shinichi replies, settling on a piece of winter squash and taking a bite. Still crisp. "Ran-nee-chan, this is delicious!"

"You’re the only little boy I’ve ever met that loves to eat his vegetables." Ran sits down across from him. "How did you come across a murder?"

"My watch was acting funny, so Katsumi-nee-chan and I went to a nearby clock repair. When we got there, though, he was dead!"

Ran frowns. "How do you run into murders as often as Dad and Shinichi do? I swear!" But then she smiles. "I guess that’s how it goes for detectives."

"Yup!" Shinichi offers her a bright smile. "Anyway, it turns out that it might have been the same killer as in the Scarlette Shinamoto case. The culprit left a top hat and monocle at the scene of the crime."

"Oh no, really?" Ran chews on her lower lip. "I hope Kaitou KID really doesn’t have anything to do with this."

"He doesn’t." Shinichi takes a bite of pan-fried chicken. "Kaitou KID is a thief, but that’s all he is. He makes a scene, sure, but he’s… you know, not like that."

"He knocked you out with a stun gun!" Ran slams her hands on the table. "And undressed Masumi-chan in the men’s bathroom!"

Also he made exact copies of your underwear and wore them, Shinichi thinks to himself, but he knows better than to say that aloud. "I never said he wasn’t a pervert. He’s just not a murderer."

"Yeah, you’re right." She rests her chin on laced-together hands. She’s dressed for bed already, in soft-looking pink pajamas, and her face is washed clear of any cosmetics. She’s so pretty, and Shinichi wishes he could push back the piece of hair falling into her eyes so bad he can taste it.
"Hurry up and finish eating, so you can go to bed. You can tell me all about the murder tomorrow. Did you have any homework?"

After she’s hustled him into the bathroom, shoving his freshly laundered pajamas into his arms and shutting the door, Shinichi finally takes out his phone to text Heiji. As he does so, something else falls out of his pocket to the tiled floor. When he picks it up, he realizes it’s a photograph, one of the ones from the workroom.

Shinichi blinks, twice, then turns the photo around to see that there’s a sticky-note attached to the back. In a scrawly handwriting that can only be KID’s is written For your FBI facial recognition thingy~ and a tiny heart.

"When did…?" Shaking his head to clear it, Shinichi sets his phone and the picture on the edge of the sink. "That guy is...

Still, the photo will come in handy. Shinichi fights to hide a smile, and opens a new message to Heiji. Today, he thinks, he’ll use a Caeser shift cipher, just to keep Heiji on his toes.

*

Sometimes, in the middle of the night, Ran has nightmares. Screaming nightmares that have Shinichi climbing out of his covers and going to sit by her bedside, holding her hand until she quiets.

She was never prone to nightmares as a child. She’d dream about being a princess, or going on adventures like Indiana Jones, and then the next day on their walk to school she’d tell Shinichi all about the temple she’d discovered or the knight she’d had to save from her pet dragon.

Now, though, Ran has nightmares all the time. Nightmares where her mother is shot, working on one of the many cases they run into with her dad. Sometimes it’s Mouri whose name she screams, sitting straight up in bed in a cold sweat. And sometimes… Sometimes it’s Shinichi’s name she murmurs. Don’t die, Shinichi or watch out, Shinichi, and Shinichi sits by her bedside and knows that it’s because of what happened at Tropical Land, because that’s when her best friend disappeared and Conan arrived in his stead, dragging her inept father into cases he’d never have been a party to if it weren’t for Shinichi’s detective skills, and pulling Ran herself into dangerous situation after dangerous situation, with the crows breathing down his neck and his own curiosity unable to let him walk away.

Tonight is one of those nights. Shinichi, who’d been up already, thinking about the way KID’s monocle had been embedded in the torn up flesh of Takizawa’s face, is sitting on the edge of Ran’s bed when she finally pulls herself out of whatever terrible dream she’s having, eyes red and watery.

"Shinichi?" She blinks to clear her vision. "Oh, Conan-kun, it’s you." She laughs, and it turns into a muffled sob. "Of course it’s you. Shinichi’s much older now, huh?" She reaches out for his hand. "Besides, Dad would never let Shinichi into my room. That’s probably the only thing that could wake him from his sleep, don’t you think?"

"Are you okay, Ran-nee-chan?" Shinichi asks, and Ran smiles at him and nods, her sweaty hair spread out around her on the pillow.

"Yeah, I’m good. You don’t have to get up over silly nightmares."

"What was it about?" Shinichi crawls up further onto the bed, until he’s close enough to look into her eyes. They’re clouded with sleep and worry. He brushes the hair out of her eyes, and her eyes widen at the action.
"I was at Tropical Land with Shinichi. We were on a roller coaster, and when it went through a dark tunnel, I reached for his hand. But there was nothing there. And when the tunnel ended, and we were back in the light, Shinichi was gone."

"Gone?" Shinichi’s hand isn’t big enough to cup her cheek. She isn’t looking at him. Her eyes have swerved toward her desk, where a picture of them sits, Shinichi’s arm over Ran’s shoulder as they both give peace signs and smiles.

"Just… gone. Disappeared into thin air." She sighs. "Not much of a nightmare, when it’s real."

"Will you be able to go back to sleep?" He doesn’t bother with childish words or manner. Ran isn’t completely awake, and he doesn’t have it in him, right now, not to be the person she wants, whether she knows it’s him or not.

"You’re not supposed to be worried about me," she murmurs, her eyes already closing again. She struggles to keep them open, the words tumbling from her soft and almost indistinguishable. "It’s my job to worry. About Dad and Mom and Shinichi and you."

"Shinichi-nii-chan told me to watch out for you." He smiles at her, wobbly. "It’s my job. I wish I could do more."

"I can look out for myself," she says, raising her hand to catch the one still at her cheek and squeezing it. "You want to sleep in here with me?"

He does. He wants put his ear to her chest and listen until her breath evens out, and she falls into a sleep where she dreams about taming lions or winning karate championships or being Cinderella. But one day, when he’s… when he’s not here anymore, someone might tell her that he was Conan, and when that day comes, he wants to be sure he’d done everything he could to be as fair to her as possible, considering the circumstances. That includes things like this, when he’s already given up his claim to her heart.

"I’ll go back to my own," he says, softly, as she casts a glance at her cell phone. The late hour glows on the screen, and the Sea-Cucumber Man charm dangles down over the side of her bedside table. "Sleep well, Ran-nee-chan."

"Good night," she whispers back, and he can hear the way she wants to say Shinichi by the catch in her voice. "And thank you."

For what? Shinichi thinks, and doesn’t get much more sleep of his own, only dozing off after the sun has risen.

*

Shinichi wakes up the following morning to a message from Heiji that consists mostly of profanity, interspersed with occasional warnings not to get his head blown off by a shotgun while traipsing around crime scenes alone.

He calls the police station that afternoon after school as Mouri to get updates on the case, but they haven’t made much progress. No forensics came up at the scene beyond confirming that the shotgun found below the fire escape was the actual murder weapon. Takizawa’d had no cell phone, and no connections to Scarlette Shinamoto were found at all.

"We did find out that Takizawa-san’s pocket watch was stolen," Takagi informs him, when Shinichi presses for more details about the victim. "He had no family, but a part-time employee who did most of the cleaning informed us that the watch was called ‘Cardinal’," Takagi stumbles over the English,
"and said that we’d know it by the way the face glowed red in the dark when the watch was open."

That doesn’t tell Shinichi much more than he and KID already suspected—that the watch is somehow related to Scarlette Shinamoto’s ‘Lady Red’, and that the same person had wanted both items, right alongside with KID’s attention.

The facial recognition gambit had also come up dry.

"Nothing on the FBI servers, or in any Japanese databases beyond his National Identification, which all matches up with the official data the police are working with." Haibara sighs as she slides last night’s math homework into her backpack. "Takizawa Morisuke, also known as Morris Takizawa, was a sixty-three-year-old man with an expensive apartment about thirty minutes from his small but relatively well known shop in the Chuo area. He has no wife and no children, but a lot of friends overseas. He apparently studied in London during university. He’s never had any brushes with the law, or anything like that."

"Really?" Shinichi reties his shoelaces as Haibara puts on her sweatshirt. "Nothing?"

"Absolutely clean," Haibara confirms. "Come along, Edogawa. We’ll be late for school."

It isn’t until Thursday that Haibara makes a breakthrough on the P.O. Box. They’re at the professor’s house, all the Detective Boys are crowded around the floor working out a puzzle that the professor had given them when they’d walked in after school. Haibara is at the computer, and Shinichi, who has already figured out the answer, is carefully leading the kids through the problem, teaching them how to figure out the solution while keeping an eye on the news channel the professor has running on the television.

There were ten days between the last two murders. That could be fluke or design, and it has Shinichi on edge, waiting for the next one. Today’s news is nothing big so far—a couple of traffic violations and an unexpected cold front that, in Shinichi’s opinion, isn’t very unexpected when the nights have been dropping to 2°C and leaving behind mist on the windows.

"Conan!" Ayumi says, elbowing him in the stomach, "stop watching TV so we can figure this out!"

"Yeah, yeah," he replies. "I’m sure you’ve noticed that if you read all these numbers aloud they make words, right? Like how Uncle uses 5563 as a password for his PC. GO-GO-RO-SAN. Kogorou-san." He rolls his eyes. It’d be so easy to hack. In fact, Bourbon… Furuya Rei, whatever his name is, probably has hacked it.

"Oh!" Mitsuhiko says, and then they’re off again, scribbling answers in the margin right as Haibara stops typing on the computer.

"Edogawa-kun," Haibara says, quietly, cutting through Genta’s excited yell as they decode the first word. "Come here."

Getting up from the floor, he walks over to Haibara, hoisting himself up to share the seat in front of the professor’s old computer with her. "Did you get it?"

"I did," Haibara says. "He was clever. I had to backtrack through six separate shadow identities to get back to someone who exists in the CIA database."

"How did you get into the CIA database?" Shinichi asks, then shakes his head. "No, never mind, tell me what you found."

"Baal Villon is actually a man by the name of Claude Arbogast, who lived near the Cévennes, in
France." Haibara types furiously, her fingers racing across the keys. "He does have a criminal record— for forgery and counterfeiting, and he served ten years in prison."

"Forgery?" Forgery could explain things, especially if it was for the falsification of official documentation and the like. "What else?"

"Well," Haibara says, her mouth pursed and her eyes staring hard at the screen, "apparently he died in 1999." Shinichi leans over her shoulder as she starts swiftly typing again, data racing past faster than he can process it. "But someone is still paying his bills and manages his bank accounts using identity number three."

"You think he’s still alive," Shinichi says, and Haibara closes her eyes for a moment, before turning to look at Shinichi.

“Yes,” she says. "And I think he’s over a hundred and thirty years old." Haibara props her cheek in her hand, staring at the screen. "Even considering how we are," she gestures between them, "I don’t know how this is possible."

"Just because we don’t know how, doesn’t mean it can’t happen," replies Shinichi. "And it’s connected somehow to the jewels this murderer is stealing."

"But how is it connected to Kaitou KID?" Haibara taps her fingers impatiently on the table when Shinichi hesitates. "You have some idea about that, but for some reason, you can’t say."

"I can tell you that the old Kaitou KID was tasked with finding a jewel with a similar effect, and that he was murdered when he refused to cooperate," Shinichi says, finally. "And if the enemy thinks it’s the same Kaitou KID, this might be a further attempt to lure him into their own territory."

"A further attempt?" Haibara’s gaze sharpens. "So you think, or know, that that sniper attack at the City Building archives—"

"I don’t know anything for sure, but I have my suspicions." Shinichi exhales, the air blowing his bangs out of his face. "I also think that the people searching for KID are in some way related to our crows, given Vermouth’s interest in the case."

Haibara hisses. "Kudou, that’s—"

"Yes, it’s dangerous, but… If it’s them, nothing good can come from jewels that extend your life span, right?"

"This could easily be a trap."

"Maybe," Shinichi says, "but I want to bring the Black Organization down enough to take the chance that this is a trap." He looks down at his hands, and remembers when they were large enough to hold a soccer ball with only one of them. "I owe them." He looks up to meet Haibara’s gaze. "Also, I don’t like that they’re targeting KID."

"You have a soft spot for that criminal, Meitantei." Her eyes gleam mockingly.

"No, it’s—" Complicated, he wants to say, but that feels like slicing open his palm in a tank of hungry sharks when Haibara’s watching him this closely. He casts around for some way to change the subject, when he remembers the cryptic remark Haibara made at school, before he’d ventured out to check on the payphones. "Anyway, didn’t you have something to tell me?" Shinichi frowns. "You told me on Monday, at school, that you had something to tell me. What was it?"
"Oh," Haibara says, shifting her weight. "That’s… not when the kids are here."

"Why are you nervous? Is it bad?" Shinichi doesn’t think it could get much worse.

"Not bad, but—"

"Conan!" Mitsuhiko is standing up and pointing at the television. "What are you doing over there?"

Shinichi begins to stammer a response about their homework when Ayumi clasps her hands in front of her and says: "Kaitou KID announced a heist!"

"What!" Shinichi scrambles down from the seat and rushes over to where the Detective Boys have gathered around the TV, sliding under Genta’s arm to get a better view. "To steal what?"

"One of Advisor Suzuki’s special treasures," Ayumi answers, her eyes sparkling. "The Concubine’s Heart!" She clasps her hands. "It’s a jeweled hair comb worn by a real lady of the court during the Heian era!"

"But the police still haven’t figured out when KID will strike." Genta punches his fist into an open palm.

"They can’t figure out the notice, then." Shinichi wrinkles his nose. "Figures."

Professor Agasa comes into the room with a tray of cakes and milk. "Did you kids figure out my puzzle yet?" he asks, and looks from the half-completed message on the floor to where they stand clustered around the television. "Did you give up?"

"Kaitou KID is having a heist, Professor!" Mitsuhiko suddenly deflates. "Only Conan will get to attend, though, probably."

"I wasn’t planning on it," Shinichi hedges, and then points down at a puzzle that remains only partially solved. "You guys shouldn’t give up so quickly."

"Conan! How can we work on the professor’s puzzle when there’s a KID heist notice to solve!" Ayumi’s shrill tone makes him wince. "Ai-chan, can you pull it up on the computer?"

Haibara shrugs, and with a few strikes to the keyboard, the printer spits out a sheet of paper. Picking it up, she brings it over to them, laying it down atop the incomplete puzzle. Professor Agasa, still holding the tray of cake, mopes slightly as the Detective boys pore over KID’s notice.

"Was that even released to the public?" Shinichi whispers to Haibara, and Haibara gives him a small smirk.

"I wouldn’t know, I hacked it directly from Inspector Nakamori’s division-wide encrypted e-mail."

She shrugs. "I don’t just hack for you, Meitantei."

The doorbell chimes, and Shinichi, not yet willing to fight his way through the three excited eight year olds for a glimpse at KID’s latest riddle, shuffles to the front door to answer it as the professor pours himself a cup of tea. Rising to his toes to undo the lock, Shinchi peeks out between the cracked open door before undoing the chain latch.

Okiya Subaru is at the door, scarf wrapped firmly around his neck and eyes half lidded behind his glasses as usual. "Subaru-san!"

"Hi, Conan," he says, looming tall in the open doorway. "Is the professor home?"
"He is," Shinichi opens the door wider, implicitly inviting Subaru in. Taking the invitation, Subaru steps out of his shoes and into a pair of slippers. As he hangs his jacket on the coat rack, Shinichi notices him fumbling with the package in his arms. "What's that?"

"It was delivered today to the house, for Kudou Shinichi. The professor told me that when mail came for Kudou-san, I was supposed to bring it over here to be forwarded."

"Ehehehe, that's right! The professor is the only person who knows where to reach Shinichi-nii-san, after all." Shinichi holds out his hands. "I can go put it with the other stuff. Do you want to eat cake with us? We're trying to figure out the Kaitou KID heist note."

"I thought you were only interested in murder cases, Conan-kun?" Subaru smiles, agreeably handing Shinichi the package, before immediately reaching up to adjust his glasses. "Or is this a lark?"

"KID is an exception." You're an exception, Shinichi hears in the back of his mind, in KID's easy, teasing tone. The only detective I'll work with. He flushes, for reasons unknown even to himself, and then grins up at Subaru. "After all, KID’s heists are so much fun! It's nice to be a part of things where no one gets hurt."

"I can see that being the case." Subaru pushes up the sleeves of his sweater, as he follows Shinichi into the house. "Are you sick?"

"Do I look sick?" Shinichi had looked better this morning, when he’d stared at himself critically in the mirror. His face had lost some of the deathly pallor, and he’d been able to eat breakfast under Ran’s careful monitoring.


Haibara looks up when Shinichi returns to the living room with Subaru in tow. "Subaru-san brought mail for Shinichi-nii-san!"

"Oh?" Haibara looks intrigued, but knows better than to ask about it in front of the others.

"Subaru-san, are you going to help us figure out KID’s heist notice?" Mitsuhiko asks.

"Yeah!" Genta agrees, icing all over his face and fingers. "Subaru-san's good like Conan is, when it comes to mysteries and stuff!"

He is. He’s also one of the few people who treats Conan as an equal even without having been told the truth of his identity. There are very few people like that, in his life, and it reminds him of… Well, Shinichi has his guesses, but he understands that discretion is important, and he’ll keep it to himself for now, even though he’s pretty sure Haibara harbors similar suspicion.

"I'm just going to take this upstairs," Shinichi says, gripping the package Subaru had handed him tight to his chest. It doesn't weigh much, and it bends slightly in his arms. "I'll be back down in just a second."

"Hurry up, Conan," says Ayumi. "This one's harder than the professor's!"

"Okay, okay," Shinchi hurries in socked feet up the stairs.

When he's escaped into the professor's bedroom, he holds the package up for closer scrutiny. It's thin, triple taped closed in a stiff cardboard mailing envelope. On the front, under the sender's address, it says nothing more than M.H., and an address that's been blurred with water, leaving blue gel pen ink
smeared across the white tag, bleeding into his own name. Probably on purpose, Shinichi decides, since the rest of the envelope is dry and shows no signs of water damage.

It's been sent to him via airmail, the insignia stamped in big block letters at the corner of the reinforced envelope. Sucking on his lower lip, Shinichi runs his fingers across the sealed flap. "Well, no time like the present."

He tries to peel back the tape, but it's stuck fast, so he scurries into the professor's bathroom and grabs a small pair of manicure scissors from under the cabinet, and uses one blade to score the tape. Still standing in front of the sink, he pulls at the tape again, and this time it tears, revealing bubble wrap and a piece of thick cardstock. With trepidation, Shinichi grabs his handkerchief out of his back pocket, and using it to avoid touching anything, slides his hand into the envelope and takes the cardstock out out.

It's mostly a plain white sheet, and the message on the front has been typed entirely in thick black hiragana, like the kind used to teach neat writing in first year workbooks:

*beware, little detective, of crows. there’s too much attention on you right now.*

Shinichi’s heart stops in his chest; the world comes to a complete standstill as he stares at the two simple sentences. *Who...?*

"Edogawa-kun?" Haibara's voice floats into the bedroom from the hall, and Shinichi hears her steps as she makes her way toward him, opening the door to stand in the doorway. "Kudou, what's wrong?"

"Haibara..." Shinichi looks up at her, and whatever she sees has her taking an involuntary step back. He holds out the card, and with trembling fingers, Haibara takes it.

"Who sent this?" she asks, and Shinichi shakes his head, feeling numb.

"I don't know. M.H. was the only thing under the sender's name, and the address was water-damaged."

"Was there anything else in the package?" She sounds frantic, and her fingers are gripping the cardstock tight enough that it's crumpling in her hand. She looks like she did that day they rode the Bell Tree Express, hunted and terrified, and Shinichi knows how that feels, but doesn’t know how to fix it when he’s just as scared. "Quick, check! Make sure there are no trackers or listening devices!"

He picks up the envelope from the floor, along with his handkerchief, and digs around inside it for anything he might have missed. Something small touches the tips of his fingers, and he grabs it, pulling it out and holding it in an open palm. "A USB."

"Who could have sent this?" Haibara’s voice cracks, and Shinichi takes the cardstock back from her, looking at it again. "Whose attention? Is this a warning or a threat?"

Reading it again, Shinichi closes his eyes and steadies his shaking hands.

"My gut is telling me that it’s a warning from someone trying to give me a heads up," he says. "If it were a threat, the language would be harsher, right?"

*M.H.*

Shinichi wonders what the significance is. Is it an actual name, or is it like one of KID’s plentiful pseudonyms, a playful hint at the sender's identity?
"We have to go back downstairs." Haibara has composed herself, and Shinichi remembers, suddenly, that he was supposed to have just been leaving the mail with the pile of things to send to his older self. "The kids will come after us soon, and we don't want them to see this."

"Right." Shinichi pockets the USB, and slips the card back into the envelope. He'll shred it later. "I'll run the USB on my laptop, since we don't know what's on it, and all your research is on the professor’s computer."

He slides the opened envelope under Professor Agasa's desk, and then follows Haibara out into the hallway, and back down the stairs, where their elementary school-aged friends wait.

"What took so long?" Mitsuhiko complains, and Shinichi forces himself to laugh, rubbing at the back of his head.

"I got a phone call from my mom," he replies. "She wanted... um..."

"She had to ask Edogawa-kun about his doctor's appointment," Haibara says. Her expression is smooth, all of her earlier panic hidden away as if it were never there. "He was just hanging up when I went up to get him."

"You could have talked longer, if it was your mom," Ayumi says, after taking her last bite of cake. She looks a bit guilty at having interrupted what, in her view, might have been an important conversation.

"It was long distance," Shinichi replies. "We usually don't talk much." He takes a deep breath, and then sits down between Ayumi and Genta. "How's the notice going?"

"I don't get it at all." Genta huffs, crossing his arms. "KID's notes aren't usually this hard."

"Yes, they are," says Haibara. "Usually Edogawa-kun just solves them too fast for you to get frustrated."

Sheepish, Genta flops down on the floor, sprawling like a starfish. "Then tell us how to solve it, Conan!"

Shinichi picks up the piece of paper, and closes his eyes, pushing aside the weight of the ominous USB in his pocket to focus on KID’s newest act of idiocy. KID had told him he'd hold a heist, but Shinichi had only half believed him.

Attention!
To my darling Advisor Suzuki
In the second period of the cat’s arch-nemesis,
When you can see the entire rabbit, not just the nose
As Genji stole the heart of Lady Fujistubo from the Emperor
So shall I steal the Concubine’s Heart from you!
From the painted birds and gentle wisteria of a juunihitoe
All evidence will Vanish into the Clouds!

"Okay," Shinichi says, shaking his head at KID’s sheer audacity in using the zodiac, referencing Shinamoto’s case. Absolute moron. "Mitsuhiko, do you know anything about the history of the
Concubine’s Heart?

"It’s supposed to be a jewel passed down through the royal family during the Heian period, and it was given as a gift from Emperor Suzako to his favorite concubine! When she died, it was lost, but about fifteen years ago, it turned up in a temple in the mountains, just outside Kyoto!"

"Suzuki-san apparently bought the gem at auction for an exorbitant sum," Subaru says, scrolling through news articles on his phone.

"Ah," Shinichi says. "Well, let’s take it piece by piece." He sets the printout down again and smiles. "The cat’s arch nemesis is the rat. Remember the old story?"

"Where the rat tricked the cat into missing the gathering, so it couldn’t become a member of the juunishi!" Ayumi claps. "Kobayashi-sensei told us that story last year!"

"In the Heian period, the whole day was divided into twelve, just like the zodiac, instead of twenty-four. You’ve probably heard it on the news, right? It’s the hour of the horse, meaning noon. The hour of the rat was the time from 11PM to 1AM." He holds up four fingers. "Each hour was divided into four complete intervals. So, the second period, or interval, of the hour of the rat…"

"Would be eleven-thirty!" Mitsuhiko says, as Genta holds up four fingers and stares at them quizzically.

"Exactly," agrees Shinichi. "And when can we see the entire rabbit?" At the blank stares he receives, Shinichi points out the window, to the darkening evening sky. "What shows a rabbit at night?"

"The moon," Mitsuhiko says, excited. "So we can only see the whole thing—"

"On the night of the full moon!" Genta holds one fist up in the air. "My mom always buys rice cakes when it’s a full moon!" He drools a little, and Mitsuhiko elbows him until he’s paying attention again.

"The rest of it is more tricky," Shinichi continues, pulling up and discarding ideas in milliseconds. "It’s referencing *Genji Monogatari*, the famous Heian novel. The last line, the ‘Vanish into the Clouds’ part, references the title of a chapter toward the end of the novel, which doesn’t have any text, and it’s supposed to represent the death of Genji, or maybe the disappearance of Genji in the fabric of life." He pulls at his bowtie. "And juunihitoe being the formal kimono of the time… knowing KID, that could mean anything…"

"You’re certainly well-read for an eight-year-old," Subaru says, amusement playing at his lips as he casually takes a bite of cake. "I didn’t read Genji until I was a second-year student in high school."

Shinichi, annoyed, licks his teeth, before adopting his most-saccharine sweet Conan voice. "Aahahaha, there was an Nichiuri Television documentary about it that I happened to watch one day while Uncle was drinking, that’s all!"

"Ah," Subaru says, and Shinichi can hear his laugh. Subaru is perfectly aware of his intelligence. After all, it had been Shinichi’s idea for Subaru to exist. "I see." He sets his plate down on the table in between the purple sofas. "What do you make of the painted birds part?"

"Not sure," Shinichi admits. "KID has trained birds, so it could reference that he’s going to use them in his trick, but…” He instinctively knows that isn’t right. Something about the juunihitoe…

"I guess we’ll find out in a little over a week, regardless." Shinichi glances over his shoulder at Haibara. "The full moon is the weekend after this one."
"It is?" Shinichi rubs at his head.

"Aren’t you and Ran, Sonoko, and Sera-san going to that moon-viewing party Suzuki-san is throwing at the Beika Traditional Gardens?" Smirking, Haibara raises one eyebrow. "Looks like KID is planning to crash it."

"I’m sure Sonoko is thrilled," Shinichi mumbles, as Ayumi, Genta, and Mitsuhiko all moan in unison about Shinichi getting to go along on another heist without them. "Great, another night with a KID fan." Then he brightens. "But Sera-san will be there, too, and she definitely isn’t a KID fan."

"She isn’t?" Subaru leans forward. "Why not?"

"Let’s just say KID disguised as her, and his portrayal was anatomically incorrect," replies Shinichi with a snicker, remembering KID’s face as he scrambled to escape from the enraged Sera Masumi running down the hall in her underwear.

"It’ll be good if you’re there to keep an eye on him," Haibara says lightly, but she catches his eye, and he knows what she means. Shinichi thinks it’s better that way, too, and he hopes nothing happens to KID during this heist. "After all, he might be brilliant, but all the smartest people I know do the silliest things."

"Hey!" Shinichi replies, as Mitsuhiko clenches both hands into fists.

"Conan will catch Kaitou KID this time! For the honor of the Detective Boys!"

Shinichi laughs, letting himself collapse onto the couch, but the laugh dies in his throat at the press of the USB against his thigh.

Because while Shinichi wants to solve this serial murder case, and figure out the mystery of the stolen jewels, he’s always most concerned with bringing down the syndicate in black, for his sake and Haibara’s and all the people who have lost too much to them, and if the crows have figured out who Conan is, that Conan is… was Shinichi, that’s going to get much harder to do.

* 

With his heart in his throat, Shinichi creeps out of his covers, out of Mouri’s room and out of the apartment, heading down a flight of stairs and using the spare key to let himself into Mouri’s office, keeping his footsteps light. Ran and Mouri had gone to bed two hours ago, and Shinichi had waited, palm sweaty as he rolled the small USB back and forth across it with his thumb, his eyes closed and tongue dry sandpaper in his mouth.

The mysterious package and its sender have occupied his thoughts since he’d left Professor Agasa’s house to return home for dinner. Ran had made some of his favorites, but not even the crunchy panko crust on his chicken could bring him out of the frantic crush of panic that makes each of his breaths feel like agony.

there’s too much attention on you. On which him? On the missing Kudou Shinichi? On Haibara? What could possibly be on this USB?

The floor is cold under his bare feet. He shivers as he crosses the room, avoiding the spot by the bathroom door that always creaks loud enough to hear upstairs as he approaches the couch. His pajamas are too short at the wrists now, too, he notes absently, and as eases up onto the sofa, the legs of them ride halfway up his thin calves to bare his legs to the air.

His relatively new laptop, disconnected from the wi-fi, sits closed on the table. Sitting on the edge of
the sofa seat, Shinichi presses the catch and opens the lid, watching the screen flicker immediately to life. Agasa had given him this laptop as a present for his birthday, and Shinichi isn't the type to spend much time on the internet, so the keys are still glossy with disuse.

The benefit of using his laptop is that he only rarely connects it to the network here at Mouri's, and its default setting isn't to search for wi-fi. That means whoever might have a tap on Mouri's desktop computer, as Shinichi expects Bourbon does, won't be able to connect to it until he's had a chance to wipe the hard drive.

He pushes the USB into the first port, watching as a new icon appears on his desktop almost instantaneously.

[S_B] is the name of the disk, and Shinichi hesitates briefly before exhaling and double-clicking to open it.

There are seven images, saved as jpegs, numbered 001 to 007. Running his tongue over his teeth, Shinichi selects them all and the image-reader pops up onto the screen.

The first picture is of Bourbon, in an unknown parking lot, leaning back against his new car and wearing his Poirot uniform, his white-blond hair falling into his face as he takes a photo of Edogawa Conan from an unidentifiable woman across from him. Sitting on the hood of his car is Chianti, a gruesome smile stretched across her face like it has been put there by the slash of a knife.

The woman across has nails painted purple, and she’s dangling the picture in offering between her index finger and thumb. They look like bruises against her pale skin. He scrolls down to the next one, which is almost the same except now Chianti is holding on to the photo, staring at it, memorizing his face, maybe.

Shinichi’s heart is slowly turning to ice as he clicks through to the next one, wanting to see the unknown woman’s face, so he'll know where to look, or what to watch out for, or something. But even as he goes to the fourth picture, and the fifth, he finds nothing, just more variations of the same thing.

At least, in these pictures, none of them seem to have a picture of Haibara, and that's... a small relief, but it does nothing to loosen the yoke of fear that seems to be wrapped around Shinichi's neck. The sixth photo... Shinichi narrows his eyes, searching the background. He can pick out the name of the building behind Bourbon and Chianti, or part of it.

I L A

He racks his memory for where he's seen that logo before. 'I L A'...

Skipping to the last photo, Shinichi can see one more letter, an 'O', and now he knows. It's a stationery store in Ekoda, he thinks, that Ran had dragged him into back when he was still Shinichi, when they'd gone to one of her martial arts competitions. He knows that place. VOILA. Close to a train station. High level of foot traffic. Whoever had taken these photos had taken advantage of the Black Org members wanting to blend in to blend in themselves.

Bourbon is safe enough, only dangerous when prodded in the wrong direction, but Chianti is short-tempered and dangerous, and the unknown woman... There's another one of Them, that Shinichi doesn't know, and they're looking for information on him. there is too much attention on you.

He spends an hour looking at the pictures, just flipping through them, one by one, trying to pick out significant details but not managing to do more than figure out the time of day by cast shadow length
(between one and two PM) and zoom in enough on the third picture to see that the woman's hair is black underneath the cream colored scarf she has wrapped around her hair.

He catalogues everything: her coat is Burberry. Bourbon’s shoes are probably new. There’s an elderly couple with a grandchild swinging between their arms coming out of the store. There’s a middle school-aged girl walking out to a car where an older man is behind the wheel. Her father? Her uncle.

It’s a whole lot of nothing, and in the end, his eyes return, inevitably, to Bourbon’s face, and the fire in his eyes as he holds out Edogawa Conan’s face.

Shinichi closes his eyes, and fights the nausea that never seems to go away anymore. His chest constricts, and he considers, for a moment, those blue pills he keeps hidden away in his backpack’s front pocket, before he fiercely pushes the thought away.

When he finally manages to fall asleep that night, he dreams of long, pale, menacing fingers with dark purple nails, wrapping around his neck and choking the life out of him until everything goes black.

*

Haibara is waiting for him outside Teitan Elementary, leaning against a tree in the yard, her drawn face and somber, serious mouth a sharp contrast to her adorable pink fleece sweatshirt.

Shinichi walks straight over to her, and she scans his face, undoubtedly noticing the dark circles under his eyes that had alarmed Ran this morning, prompting her to press the back of her hand to his forehead to check for a fever, leaving him flustered and almost trapped in bed.

"Well?" She turns her head to meet his gaze directly. "What was on it?"

"A few photos," Shinichi replies, before digging into his pocket. "I printed one for you—" He holds up his free hand as she starts to interrupt. "I plugged my computer directly into the printer— I didn't use the wi-fi at all, and I wiped my harddrive. The USB is currently in my backpack, so there's nothing to find at the agency."

"I guess you can be trained." She expectantly extends her hand, and Shinichi sets the folded up piece of printer paper in it after checking around for their friends. "It was just photos?"

"Seven of them," he confirms. "They were mostly the same, but Haibara... There’s a new one of them looking for information on Edogawa Conan."

Haibara looks down at the photo, and her hand starts to tremble. "Just you?" Her eyes are wide, the pupils dilated with fear, the way they always are when the Black Organization is involved.

"Just me, I think. At least in those photos. I don't know if the meeting went on much longer or if..."

"Or if it’s just you they find interesting," finishes Haibara. "Either way, it's a problem."

"They're in Ekoda," he adds. "I've been to that store, once. With Ran. The picture was taken recently, too, because B—Amuro-san just started wearing scarves for the weather last week." He waits, but Haibara doesn't respond. She's still staring at the picture, mouth pinched tight. "Do you know the woman?"

"No." Haibara shakes her head. "I've never seen her. She could be new, or a nobody, or someone so high up I've never even heard of her." She shakes her head again, like the motion will clear away her
fear. "Edogawa, you have to be careful. Bourbon hasn't done anything to you, to either of us, and he’s with the Japanese secret police, but we don't know what he’ll do to keep his cover."

Left unspoken is that he’d called secret police to Shinichi’s home to try and capture Akai Shuuichi for the Black Org. Whether it’s the grudge he seems to hold or a sincere desire to cement his place with the syndicate, Shinichi isn’t sure.

"I know that," Shinichi says. "And Chianti’s a wild card, with that temper of hers. I'll find out who sent this, Haibara. I promise."

"When I first met you, I thought our situation was hopeless." Haibara folds the picture up again, and returns it to him. Her hand has steadied. "Now that I know you, I know that it isn't. I turned down Witness Protection to stay with you, Kudou. I… have more faith in you than you could possibly imagine."

"Are you telling you that you trust me?" Shinichi asks, looking into Haibara's eyes. They glimmer with more emotion than usual, and despite the terror that has Shinichi feeling like he's running full speed on an empty tank, he wants to smile at her.

"Haven't you noticed, Kudou? You tend to inspire that in people." She licks her lips. "And I won't let you die before my trust can be rewarded."

Then she cuts her gaze to something behind him, and a moment later, Mitsuhiko comes to a stop next to them, panting, with a cheerful smile.

"Good morning!" He turns expectantly to Shinichi after he's blushed a little in Haibara's direction. "Have you figured out the rest of KID’s heist note yet?"

"No," Shinichi says, and the cloud of doom that's hovered over him all morning finally lifts in the face of Mitsuhiko's boundless enthusiasm and countless theories.

The mystery of KID’s heist note is a good distraction, giving him things to doodle on the edges of too-easy worksheets throughout his classes, and keeping him from dwelling on that woman, Chianti, and Bourbon when there's nothing he can do about them. KID’s heist is something he can work towards, and plan for, and the note is something he does have the ability to solve, unlike all of the larger mysteries he's found himself embroiled in lately.

By the time the school day ends, Shinichi has drawn entire sheets of graph paper full of formal kimono from the Heian period, of all the possible layers, and scribbled about thirty different theories along the edges, from locations to types of birds to traditional motifs. He’s no expert on this, but his father wrote a book, once, about a killer who left clues using kasane no irome, or color layering, and he’d looked up a lot about the subject out of general curiosity.

"Cranes?" Haibara asks, and Shinichi nods.

"One of the most common birds drawn onto kimono. There's an historical element to it, too, symbolizing…"

"Symbolizing what?" Ayumi asks.

"Longevity." Shinichi scowls down at his drawing, wondering if KID had done that on purpose. Shinichi wouldn’t put it past him; KID is absolutely brilliant, he probably sees about four or five ways every line he writes could be understood, and delights in that confusion. "That's probably not what this is referring to, though."
"Cranes are also the bird of happiness." Mitsuhiko’s whole face is scrunched up as he reads Shinichi’s notes, and belatedly, Shinichi realizes he’s used a lot of kanji he shouldn’t know. It’s fine, though, as long as no adults get their hands on it. "They also represent wisdom."

"Didn’t his heist note say ‘painted birds’?" Ayumi peers over Mitsuhiko’s shoulder at Shinichi’s kimono. "Why would they be painted?"

"The way kimono are made." Haibara zips up her backpack. "Often the designs are hand-painted and gold-leaf embellished before the embroidery is done."

"Sounds complicated." Genta looks patently uninterested, and Shinichi laughs, reclaiming his paper and shoving it deep into his backpack, not caring one way or the other if it survives the walk home. It’s all in his head, anyway.

"We should head out," he says. "Otherwise we’ll get roped into helping with cleaning duty."

That has all of them hustling from the classroom and into the general flow of traffic toward the entrance.

They check Genta’s shoe locker, and there’s a request to find a stolen pack of gum, but the Detective Boys unanimously dub the mystery solved when they see the requester’s friend chewing about six pieces at once down by the gym. They happily exchange their indoor shoes for their outdoor ones, Ayumi and Genta excitedly discussing last night’s episode of Detective Samonji as they walk out the door, Mitsuhiko walking in between them and casually adding his analysis of the special effects used, much to Genta’s consternation.

Shinichi and Haibara hang behind, both of them deliberately not discussing what is definitely running through both of their minds. Shinichi knows they’ll talk about it again later, along with the case he’s working on, and whatever has been weighing so heavily on Haibara’s mind for the last week or so, but with Ayumi, Genta, and Mitsuhiko here—children in more than just name—it’s impossible for them to discuss anything more serious than the KID heist.

There are still a lot of their fellow students clustered around the door, and Shinichi is amused at how many are talking about the KID heist.

"He’s unreasonably popular," Haibara says. "I don’t get the appeal myself."

"It’s the theatrics." Shinichi smiles crookedly at Haibara. "His heists are escapism at its finest."

"That must be why you like them so much." She shrugs. "I suppose I can understand that."

"I don’t—"

"Who’s that?" Ayumi cuts Shinichi off. "She’s so pretty!"

Shinichi looks in the direction she’s pointing to see a familiar figure leaning up against the school gate, wearing jeans and those damn pink heels along with a loose-fitting pink sweater. She’s scanning the students as they walk out of the building, and her eyes light up as she spots Shinichi.

"Damned idiot," Shinichi mutters, when KID waves at him enthusiastically, and Mitsuhiko and Genta are suddenly both crowding into him, talking over each other with cries of "Conan, why is she waving to you?!" and "Conan, do you know that pretty lady?"

"Edogawa-kun, busy after school again?" Haibara says it lightly, but with her eyes, she’s asking if everything’s all right, or if the person smiling so eagerly over at him is dangerous.
In light of the photo he’d shown her this morning, he doesn’t blame her for the protective caution.

"I don’t know what that person is doing here." He shifts his backpack, and angrily plucks at his left suspender as he sizes KID up. "But it’s not a big deal. Nothing to panic about. Nothing to do with any crows."

"If you say so," Haibara says, the concern in her gaze replaced by intrigue. It’s scary, he thinks, that he’s learned to read Haibara this well.

"Conan-kun!" KID says, when they reach the front gate. "I’ve been waiting for you!"

"I didn’t know you were here, Katsumi-nee-san!" Shinichi grins up at KID. "You should have told me you were coming! I’m supposed to play soccer today with my friends!"

"Introduce us, Conan!" Ayumi demands, hands on her hips. "Don’t be rude."

"Yes, Edogawa-kun, don’t be rude," Haibara says, as she looks KID up and down appraisingly. KID looks vaguely uncomfortable under her scrutiny, but he gamely stares back at her until she seems to come to some sort of decision, relaxing almost imperceptibly.

Grudgingly, Shinichi introduces the Detective Boys to KID, who compliments Ayumi’s headband, and apologizes to all of them for stealing their soccer buddy. "I just have to borrow him for today," he says, playfully ruffling Shinichi’s hair, before resting a hand at the back of his neck. "Sorry about that."

"That’s all right," Haibara says. "It’ll be better with only four. Two even teams. You can keep him."

"Oi, oi," Shinichi protests, at the same time as Ayumi yells "Ai-chan, how could you?! Conan is one of us!!"

"Maybe I will keep him," KID teases, and then he’s grabbing Shinichi’s hand and leading him in the opposite direction from the Detective Boys, toward the post office. "Beika’s nice, Meitantei. I wandered around for an hour before your school let out to get a feel for your neighborhood."

"Don’t you have your own classes to attend?" Shinichi asks. "And what are you doing here?"

"Didn’t I say I would contact you?" KID appears pleased by Shinichi’s irritation. "Did you like my heist note?"

"What were you thinking?" Shinichi asks, when they’re out of sight, the feeling of Haibara’s eyes burning holes into the back of his head still giving him chills. "A heist? Now?"

"I was thinking that this would serve two purposes. The first would be to make them think I either don’t know or don’t care about whatever they’re trying to do. The other thing is that I’m trying to figure out if my usual heist guests are connected to this new killer."

"So you’ve thought this through, then."

"I think everything through. Even talking to you is something I’ve thought through completely." KID’s long-haired wig, let down today in honey-colored loose waves, drapes across his shoulder as he looks down at Shinichi. "Calculated risk."

"What’s the gain?" Adjusting his glasses, Shinichi cuts his gaze over at KID. "Calculated risk implies that you stand to gain something, from talking to me."
Shinichi catches the obvious hesitation in KID’s eyes before it’s covered with good-natured cheer. "Well, you know, it gets kinda lonely, being me." The corner of his mouth turns up. "It’s not like I can ever totally be myself, around my normal friends. If I did, I’d get caught, and I’m too pretty to go to jail." He flutters his eyelashes, and Shinichi blushes, looking ahead.

Officer Yumi’s traffic patrol car is sitting at the corner, so Shinichi bumps into KID slightly to nudge him around the corner, taking them toward the museum. "You have friends?" Shinichi replies dryly. "They must all be masochists."

"I’ll have you know that most people find me quite charming." KID winks, and produces a fresh red rosebud, proffering it to Shinichi, who glares at it. "Your friend Miss Suzuki, for example." KID spins the rosebud between two fingers, then sticks it behind his own ear, letting it get lost in his hair.

"Sonoko’s taste is extremely questionable." Shinichi toys with his watch, glancing over at the rosebud and wondering if it’s real or fake. "So let me get this straight. You’d rather talk to me, even though I’m a detective with an obligation to catch you."

"I’m pretty sure you understand what it’s like in a way that most other people can’t. Living two lives."

Isn’t that what Shinichi had thought, before, when he’d told KID his secret? "If it bothers you, stop being a thief and live an honest life."

"Can you stop being a detective?" KID wags his finger at Shinichi. "Even when it leaves you ten years younger and afraid for your life every day?"

"It’s not the same."

"Isn’t it?" KID leads him to a bench, and sits, and Shinichi pulls himself up next to him, careful to leave space between them as he sets his brown backpack on the ground in front of him, recalling how his heart had beat so strangely fast, last time, and how the scent of jasmine had clung to his jacket. "So, my tiniest detective, have you solved my heist puzzle yet?"

"Most of it," Shinichi replies, bringing his hand up to stroke his chin. "I haven’t figured out the part about the kimono."

"But that’s the star of the whole shebang!" He reaches over and grabs Shinichi’s hand from his chin, his larger hand wrapping completely around Shinichi’s. "You look like an old man stroking his beard, especially with that bowtie and suspenders. Doesn’t match your eight-year-old face at all." He laughs, slowly lowering their hands to fall into Shinichi’s lap. "Then again, neither does your mind."

"Don’t you understand the concept of personal space?"

"I do," answers KID. "I just don’t care." He looks up at Shinichi through his eyelashes, face suddenly quite serious. His eyes change color as his focus shifts, and contacts, Shinichi thinks, can’t do that, so that startling color must belong to KID’s real eyes, after all. "Does it bother you, to be touched?"

Shinichi should say yes, but something in KID’s expression makes the words stick in his throat. In each of KID’s touches, there’s an offer of something that might be… comradeship, and it’s not as though Shinichi would ever expect KID to express himself like a normal person, when there’s an opportunity for mischief.

"I…” He looks down at KID’s hand, flipping it over so that he can study the calluses. "You do gymnastics."
KID licks his lips, then nods. "Since I was three or four." He flexes his fingers, and a 5 yen coin like the one he was playing with on Monday appears between his pinky and ring finger, easily flicking over and under his fingers back and forth in a weaving pattern before Shinichi’s startled eyes. "Along with magic, naturally."

"You’ve been in training your whole life to be a criminal?" Shinichi runs his thumb across KID’s palm, and KID giggles, snatching back his palm, closing it into a fist and opening it to reveal that the coin is gone.

"No fair, you know I’m ticklish!" He tosses his hair. "I’ve been training my whole life to be a magician. It just so happens that it helps a lot in being a jewel procurement connoisseur."

"A thief is a thief."

"But that’s such a boring word to describe my artistry." From nowhere, KID produces three small individually wrapped chocolates, with different colored foil on each one. He shows them to Shinichi, each chocolate held between two fingers. Then he proceeds to make each one disappear and reappear, and then make them all change positions in the time it takes for him to flip his hand over from back to front. "Did you get anywhere with Baal Villon?"

"His real name is Claude Arbogast, and he’s apparently either dead, or well past the century mark."

With a low whistle, KID pops one of the chocolates in his mouth, pulling out the wrapper a few moments later, already shaped like an origami crane.

Shinichi’s eyes bulge as KID sets it on his knee, but it’s dry, no saliva, and with the rippled texture, Shinichi doubts he’ll get fingerprints from it. Still, it’s kind of… cute.

"You…" Shinichi doesn’t even know how to finish that statement. "Did that actually go in your mouth?"

"I don’t know," KID says. "Did it? You’re the detective. What do you deduce?"

"A crane, like your heist note."

"My, my, you have been working hard." He taps his cheek, smirking. "Work a little harder, Meitantei." Then his face takes on a more serious expression as something occurs to him. "There’s a well-known jewelry appraiser with the last name Arbogast, currently living in London. It could be coincidence."

"I don’t think coincidences are something we can afford to overlook." Shinichi sighs, leaning back. His arm and KID’s are pressed together, and it’s surprisingly comfortable. "I can get off school if necessary, to go check it out."

"I’ll come with you," KID says immediately, and Shinichi peers up at him sidelong.

"You can get off school for a week?"

"I have perfect grades and if I’m not sleeping, I’m making a general nuisance of myself. My teachers will sign off on it and leave an offering at their local shrines in thanks for my absence." His lips twist. "A few of my classmates will probably join them."

"You must be an absolute terror," Shinichi says, amused at the thought of what Kaitou KID’s daytime antics must be like. He’s getting a taste of KID’s sense of humor, lately, and while it’s unpredictable and occasionally embarrassing, it’s also… fun. Fun like KID heists. KID, in general, is
fun.

"Now, now, no one gets hurt," KID says, opening his second chocolate the normal way, laying the square on his tongue and closing his eyes in a moment of bliss. That’s another new expression, and Shinichi would try to file it away but there’s really no point, when KID’s face is completely different to this. "Would you like a chocolate?"

"I don't like most candy," Shinichi says. "Too sweet. I like vanilla cakes."

"I think it's you that has the questionable taste," KID says, around a mouthful of melty chocolate that sticks to his teeth. "Blood made of unsweetened hot beverages and tastebuds that lack refinement..."

"You'll give yourself cavities." Shinichi picks up the crane. The foil crinkles in his hand, so he's careful with it as he brings it up to his face for closer examination. Every fold is precise. For some reason, that doesn't surprise Shinichi at all. "Can I ask you a personal question?"

"Depends on the question." He turns his whole body toward Shinichi, this time, and their knees bump. "I'll tell you all sorts of personal things~ My favorite food is anything sweet but especially chocolate. I like long walks on the beach, and I'm more of a cat person, but my best friend tells me that I'm like a dog—"

"Stop flirting with me," Shinichi says flatly, curling his fingers gently around the foil crane. "Not that kind of question, geez, what's wrong with you?"

"Then what is it?" With one arm along the back of the bench, and KID leaning so close, Shinichi feels like he's surrounded by the scent of jasmine. It's subtle, but at the same time, overwhelming. "Ask away, Meitantei~ The worst I can do is not answer."

"I want to know about the people who killed the last Kaitou KID."

KID's body freezes, every muscle in his body pulling taut at once as he pulls his lower lip between his teeth again, worrying at it. "What do you want to know?"

"Everything," Shinichi says. "As much as you're willing to tell me."

"Why?" KID’s smile is lazy, but Shinichi is close enough, KID is letting him close enough, that he can see through it to something colder underneath.

"You said they were part of a syndicate." He faces KID head on, not letting himself avert his eyes from KID’s despite how disarming he finds them. They stare at each other in silence, people walking by them probably giving them confused glances. He can see KID’s thoughts racing, and they glitter in that brilliant blue.

"Ah," KID says, exhaling slowly, and he closes his eyes. Shinichi realizes he'd stopped breathing, and takes a quick breath that turns into a hiccup. KID’s unreadable visage falls into a surprised laugh, and the coin appears again, tripping too quickly to keep track of between KID’s dexterous fingers. "I made things too heavy, didn't I?"

"You're allowed to take things seriously, every once in a while," says Shinichi, scowling. "I didn't mean to upset you."

KID shifts, so that now his back is once more against the bench, his arm still extended behind Shinichi's head. "I take plenty of things seriously. But if we dwell too much in negative thoughts, isn't that a waste?"
It makes some sense, and it's so KID that Shinichi can't help but offer the man a half-smile. "You don't have to answer," he says. "It's just... the people who did this to me are also part of a syndicate. And I wonder how many extremely powerful organizations can run alongside each other in Tokyo without coming to blows."

"It's just a matter of whether or not we have a common enemy?" At that KID's gaze sharpens. "You think your syndicate is connected to our case."

"Our case?" Shinichi discreetly fingers the wing of the foil crane, frowning up at KID. "Since when?"

"I'm the Bonnie to your Clyde," KID teases, and then reaches forward with his far hand to pull the 5 yen coin from behind Shinichi's ear. "Right, Mei-tan-tei?"

"Bonnie and Clyde were criminals," is Shinichi's deadpan response. "You might be a criminal, but I'm decidedly not."

"Sherlock and Watson?" KID shudders. "No, no, I deal too much with you Sherlock Holmes fanatics, give me a break!" He grins. "Maybe I'm the shadow to your light."

"You'd be the light, wouldn't you? In that flashy white suit." Shinichi looks up, where tree branches, filled with leaves turned red and gold, hang above them, protecting them from the afternoon sun. "I'm the shadow, trapped like this, and hiding."

"There are more places to hide than just the shadows," says KID; Shinichi returns his gaze to the disguised man, whose face is unexpectedly solemn. "Why do you think your syndicate and mine are connected?"

"It was the imposter at the police station, playing Scarlette Shinamoto's mother. I...She's a member of the organization that... Well, she's the only one alive that knows about me. I think." Shinichi runs a hand through his hair. "We have an... I don't know, understanding. She... I guess she knows my mom, and... it's complicated."

"It sounds like you're dating her," KID says, and then hums. "I thought you were dating Miss Mouri, though. At least big you is. Am I wrong?"

"I'm not dating Vermouth!" Shinichi cringes. "She's the same age as my mom, at least!"

"And Miss Mouri?" He tosses the 5 yen coin into the air and catches it, wiggling an empty hand at Shinichi tauntingly. "Are you dating her?"

"That's none of your business." Looking down at his lap, Shinichi does his best not to think about Ran's sad eyes, or what she'd said to him in the bathroom, at the hotel. "Can't you stay on topic?"

"So why was she there?" KID asks, after a prolonged silence. "The woman from your organization?" Shinichi swallows, and lifts his head up in surprise when KID pulls back the arm that's behind him, to cross his arms in front of him. The material of his sweater rumples and pulls, revealing a slice of collarbone.

"When I confronted her, she said she was there... or, well, implied that she was there because she was interested in you."

KID shudders. "About the people after me— I don't know much. They knew... the old Kaitou KID, but they don't know me. They're after Pandora, and they'll do anything to get it. I know one of them is an angry man named Snake with a horrible mustache and a fedora, but, I don't know much beyond
Snake. Is that a type of liquor? Shinichi isn't sure. He does know that a codename like that, even if it isn't obviously related, is not something common.

"He’s a little hopeless, though," KID says. "He’s not very smart, and he’s too quick to shoot, ruthless and violent."

"You think I’m violent," Shinichi points out, and KID gives him a serious look.

"Not like Snake."

Shinichi looks into KID’s eyes, and sees an intensity that mirrors his own.

"We call them the Black Organization." He sighs. "The syndicate after me. We call them the Black Org, because they all dress head to toe in black, like a uniform. Each member is named after alcohol, but... maybe there're other types of naming conventions in different divisions or... I don't know enough, even with more than one ex-member on my side." Shinichi pulls at his hair. "But if our organizations aren’t the same... then I'm worried, KID. You definitely don’t want that woman interested in you."

"I—" KID starts, but then he’s interrupted by someone calling out for Shinichi.

"Conan-kun?" He and KID both look up to see Ran crossing over to them from the other side of the street. "Conan-kun, what are you doing here? Who is this?"

Before Shinichi can reply, KID puts an arm around his shoulders and pulls him close. "Oh, you must be Mouri Ran!" KID smiles at her, innocent and sweet.

Shinichi refrains from snorting as Ran blinks, surprised. "Ah, yes, I am."

"Ran-nee-chan, this is Katsumi-nee-chan! I told you about her, remember?"

Ran’s face clears, and she tentatively smiles at KID before her eyes flick back and forth between them. Shinichi is suddenly conscious of the way their thighs are pressed together, and how he can hear KID’s heartbeat through the material of his sweater. He wonders… what it looks like to Ran, who knows how finicky Conan is about who touches him. "How do you know Conan-kun, again?"

"Our mothers are great friends." KID giggles, and Shinichi side-eyes him. "When I heard Conan was going to the doctor near where I work, I decided to check in on him. Today I had some business in the area, and I knew Conan went to Teitan Elementary, so since I was free, I decided to pester the little guy!" KID nuzzles his cheek against Shinichi’s.

"Oh!" She looks between them again, and seems satisfied that Shinichi isn’t panicking. "Well, are you taking him out to dinner, or can I take him home with me? My dad has a case, and Conan often helps him out, so…"

"Oh, that’s fine," says KID, loosening his grip and sliding his hand into Shinichi’s hair like he had back at the clock shop. It’s all about image, KID had said. What image were they giving off, like this? "I’ll let him go for the day. After all, I’m sure we’ll be seeing each other very soon!"

Shinichi’s head jerks up so that he can glare at KID furiously, all of a sudden remembering that there will be a heist in a little over a week. KID winks back at him as he gathers up his small brown bookbag with one hand and settles it onto his shoulder, letting Ran’s hand between his shoulder blades nudge him forward, in the direction of the agency.
Ran clears her throat, and both KID and Shinichi look up at her. "Katsumi-san, you should come by for tea one of these days. It would be nice to get to know more of Conan’s family friends."

"Oh, but I think you know him best," says KID, and offers Shinichi this small, wicked smile that has Shinichi immediately looking away. "I should go. Bye, Conan-kun~"

"She’s… interesting," Ran says, as they walk home. Her hand absently curls around Shinichi’s neck, warm and comforting.

"Only if by interesting, you mean annoying." Shinichi scowls. "Or infuriating. Or careless."

"You didn’t seem annoyed," replies Ran, quietly, looking down at Shinichi all soft and sweet. "You seemed like you were enjoying yourself. It was strange, though."

"What?"

"You didn’t look like the Conan I know at all. Something about you…” She chuckles, her hand falling as she pushes open the door to the stairway. "Ah, I don’t know. I’m not a detective, after all. Not like Shinichi, or like you, even." He can’t see her face, but he can hear it in her voice, that slight tremor.

It’s been two years, and it doesn’t feel any less terrible.

"And Miss Mouri?" KID had asked. "Are you dating her?"

"Ran-nee-chan," Shinichi says, grabbing a handful of her school uniform shirt, his knuckles brushing her back. She pauses, one foot on the stairs, and looks over her shoulder, like she has a thousand times before, only Shinichi was taller, Shinichi was…

"What is it, Conan-kun?"

"I’m sorry," he says, and her eyes widen. The light streaming in from outside makes her glow gold, and she’s beautiful, like this. Shinichi thinks this is the way he wants to think of Ran, always— golden and perfect— and he fixes her expression in his memory. "I’m really sorry."

"For what?" she asks, turning around to face him, hands on her knees as she leans down to look at him at eye-level.

For lying, Shinichi thinks. Lying to you all the time. For not being good enough for you. For being too selfish, every single time. For getting myself killed, even if it’s been a long and drawn out death scene.

"I can’t stay for dinner, after all," he says, in a steady voice. "I forgot, there’s something I have to do."

"Oh!" Ran smiles at him, and ruffles his hair. "You don’t have to apologize so seriously for something like that!" She straightens. "Don’t come home too late, okay?" She reaches out and snags his backpack. "I’ll put this upstairs, okay?"

"Okay!" He smiles at her and then runs back out the door, down the street, his vision blurring oddly as he moves toward the park.

It’s sunset, now, and the world around him swims orange and purple as he collapses into the grass at the park, near the flower clock. The Detective Boys are probably already at home, soccer game long finished, and while there are older people taking walks, he’s the only child. He lies on his stomach in
the grass, and it tickles his cheeks as he turns his head sideways, resting his head on one arm as he uses the other to set down the now slightly rumpled crane. The blades of grass catch its wings and keep it from hitting the dirt.

He doesn’t know why he kept it. Maybe it’s because he hasn’t figured out the trick yet, or because he thinks it’s a hint about KID’s heist.

It’s easier to think about KID’s heist than it is to think about Ran, or the Black Org, or anything else right now. He stares at that foil crane, and it wobbles in front of him. His eyes burn.

He’s so… lonely. It’s always loneliness, even when he’s surrounded by people, because all the layers of falsehood have made it impossible for anything to touch him at all.

"I thought you went home for dinner?" A warm body settles beside him, and fingers slide into his hair.

"What are you still doing here?" Shinichi asks, closing his eyes. KID’s calloused fingers massage his scalp. The faint scent of acetone mixes with grass, and Shinichi turns his head to see that it’s a boy sitting next to him, face obscured by the brim of a black baseball cap, and a long sleeved black shirt covering his arms. "You changed?"

"Had some work to do," KID says, impishly. "I was just heading back to the train station when I saw a cute little detective looking sad, and I couldn’t just leave him that way."

"Ah," Shinichi sighs, and then he turns his face back toward the crane. "Do you have to put the nail polish on every time?"

"Yeah," KID says. "Honestly, it’s a pain, but it’s the little details that sell a disguise. As an investigator, you should understand." He laughs, low and amused. "That’s how you often catch me out, right?"

Shinichi doesn’t reply, since the answer is obvious. KID’s hand continues to comb through his hair. It’s soothing, and Shinichi had never thought a time would come when KID was the person he found it simplest to be around. There’s no pretense to this moment; just Shinichi, unable to choke down his emotions, and KID, not asking him what’s wrong, like anyone else would.

"You know, Meitantei, I fell in love with my childhood friend, too." He feels KID shift beside him, his knee against Shinichi’s bent arm. "She’s really… important to me. I don’t know when I fell in love with her. I just looked at her one day and realized maybe I’d always been in love with her."

Shinichi wonders if he’s supposed to reply to that, but then KID continues on his own.

"She’s got a nasty temper, and a huge appetite, and her bust-line is really mediocre. She’s always yelling at me, or nagging me, and she thinks my magic is annoying, most of the time." He laughs. "She’s also one of the kindest, sweetest, and most loyal people I’ve ever met. I really love her."

Still staring at the foil crane, Shinichi shifts back, so that more of him is pressing into KID’s side, his ribs to KID’s strong, warm thigh, silently encouraging KID to keep talking.

"But if she knew about me… About who I really am, she’d probably never forgive me."

"Does she hate Kaitou KID?" Shinichi asks, reaching out to smooth his thumb along the crane’s short bent wing, smoothing it out until he can barely see the crease in the foil.

"No," KID is brittle, cracks along the seams of his voice as he speaks. "Well, I think she hates
thieves in general, and she’s not very pleased by how popular I am. She’s always insulting Kaitou KID, and complaining about all the attention paid to him."

"That’s because anyone would be mad about a criminal getting idolized," Shinichi replies, switching to the left wing, crushed by being smushed into Shinichi’s palm as he walked. "Still, if she knew you were doing it for a reason—"

"I lie to her every day," KID says. "These days, only about one in every ten things I say to her is true." He takes a breath, and then, in someone else’s voice, he says: "Where are you going, idiot? Didn’t we have plans?" It sounds almost exactly like what Ran would say, and Shinichi’s chest tightens. "She’ll say something like that, and I’ll lie to her and tell her there’s a family emergency, or that I made plans with someone else, or whatever comes to mind. I’m a good liar. You’re probably not surprised."

KID’s hand stills in his hair, and Shinichi just watches the dying sunlight bounce and reflect on that crane’s shiny silver wings.

"So she could probably forgive me for being Kaitou KID, but she’d never forgive me for not being honest with her." He winds the wild piece of hair at the crown of Shinichi’s head around one finger, and tugs. "It’s hard, when you can only show a person a part of yourself to keep them safe."

"The thing is," Shinichi says, "Ran would forgive me for lying to her. She always does. But it doesn’t matter if she does or not, because I’ll still…" He grips a handful of grass and uproots it, the dirt under his nails.

"You’ll still what?" KID asks. "If she’ll forgive you, why don’t you tell her?"

"At this point, it will only hurt her." Shinichi’s nails dig deeper into the dirt. "Because Shinichi is never coming back."

"You never struck me as someone who gives up." Shinichi’s stomach rolls, and he’s not sure if it’s from KID’s words or from the neverending nausea. Haibara had told him that it would only get worse, as his liver continued to decrease in function. "I’m not giving up. I’m accepting reality, and working within the confines of it."

"Spoken like a true detective." He leans over Shinichi, freeing the hand in his hair and picking up the crane. "You should believe a little more in magic."

"Magic can’t fix death."

"I know that better than anyone," KID says quietly. "Believe me, I do. Kudou Shinichi isn’t dead, though."

"He might as well be." Shinichi rolls onto his back, arm falling across KID’s leg, and he watches as KID’s fingers, nimble enough to pick locks, easily remove every single crease from the crane. "I don’t want to talk about this."

"Okay." He sets the crane on Shinichi’s nose. Shinichi crosses his eyes to look at it, and KID laughs. "I must say, Meitantei, you look very cute right now."

"Shut up," Shinichi mumbles, but he feels calmer when he picks up the crane, moving it out to his chest, and stares up at KID’s shadowed face. There’s a sticky residue on his neck and a stray piece of plastic peeks out from under the collar of his shirt. His mouth is a straight line, and…
Shinichi thinks this is KID’s real face, but it doesn’t matter, because whether it is or not, Shinichi feels like he’s seeing KID for the first time—beyond the smug smirks and mocking insults and dangerous, infuriating stunts to the person beneath them, who might be the only person who can possibly understand the way Shinichi feels, because Haibara had nothing left to lose, in terms of people, and Shinichi had everything.

Every single one of KID’s touches makes it all the way to skin.

"But thanks."

"Thanks for thinking you’re cute?" KID grins down at him. The bow of his upper lip is slightly uneven, but his teeth are white and straight, with sharp bicuspids that give him a predatory look. "Any time! I’ve always been an avid appreciator of—"

"Not that," snaps Shinichi, flushing, and he’s… lighter. It’s not that anything is better, because someone Shinichi can’t identify still gave a picture of Conan to Bourbon and Chianti, and Ran is still sad, and he doesn’t know what Vermouth is up to or who wants to kill KID, and Shinichi is still dying, but. But for now, at least, Shinichi doesn’t feel like he’ll be crushed under all of it. "For…"

"What are rivals for?" KID teases. "But you should really get home, Meitantei. It’s getting late for you to be out alone."

"I’m not alone, though," Shinichi replies, closing his eyes against the sun’s last rays. "Am I, nee-chan?"

"Look, squirt, I’m not dressed up right now. You’d better call me KID-sama~"

"In your dreams," Shinichi replies. He takes a deep breath. The air is cold but KID, next to him, is warm. "But you’re right, I should go back, or Ran’ll start to worry."

"I also need to head back," KID says. "I’ve got homework I’ve got to get done before the weekend." He makes a high whine in the back of his throat. "So boring~"

Shinichi snorts. "You want to trade? I’ve got some thrilling long division to work on."

Snickering, KID shakes his head, pulling the brim of his hat lower. "Nah, I’ll stick with my physics homework. It’s easy, but not that easy." He stands up, long limbs unfolding with a casual grace Shinichi never has off the soccer field, like KID’s in complete control over every part of himself at all times. "I’ll walk you home. Just in case you tell on me to Detective Satou."

"You don’t have to," Shinichi says. "The agency’s not far."

"For my peace of mind, then." KID holds out a hand to help him up, and Shinichi takes it.

Later, when he’s speedily finishing up the last long division problem on his homework, Ran, fresh from shower, leans over his shoulder and picks up the foil crane that’s found a new home on his desk, next to pictures of the Detective Boys and the Mouris, and a model car that his dad had given him for his birthday this year, an emerald green 1954 Pontiac Bonneville Special.

"Conan-kun, what’s this?" She holds it gingerly, like she’s afraid it will tear, right in the center of her palm. "You don’t usually save things like this."

That’s true. Shinichi isn’t overly sentimental. He never has been. Keeping the crane isn’t like that, though. It’s… something else, that Shinichi hasn’t completely worked out, yet.
"Someone gave it to me today," he says. "A... a friend." The word tastes strange in his mouth, when he’s using it to refer to KID, but it doesn’t feel wrong. "It’s made from the foil around a piece of chocolate."

"They must have really careful hands," replies Ran, her wet hair clinging to Shinichi’s cheek. She smels like peaches. "It’s hard to fold something this small unless you’re really practiced." She turns, until her nose barely brushes his. "Your friend must be really talented."

"You have no idea," Shinichi whispers, as Ran smiles at him. He smiles back, helplessly, and wonders if he’ll ever love her any less than this.

"But, hmm," she says, carefully extending the crane’s wing with her pinky finger. "It doesn’t look exactly like other origami cranes, does it?"

"Eh?" Shinichi stares at it. The wings are shorter, he’d noticed that, earlier, but it looks mostly like a crane to him.

"These folds are different, here at the mid-section. It’s made the stomach bigger. Also, the short wings and beak. It’s almost like your friend was trying to make a different bird." She laughs. "Oh, well, to modify the folding technique like this means your friend is even more talented than I’d thought, huh?"

A different bird? Shinichi thinks, then internally groans, remembering KID’s smirk when Shinichi had confidently said it was a crane. "Work a little harder, Meitantei."

"He’s certainly talented at being frustrating," Shinichi says, but amusement pulls at his lips.

Ran’s phone rings, and she moves away, pulling it out of the pocket of her robe and smiling when she sees the name on the caller ID. Shinichi watches the smile grow as she answers.

"Hondou-san?" She walks toward the door. "The homework? I’ve finished it already." Whatever he says next makes her laugh. "I should take you to a beginner’s karate class!"

Shinichi stops listening, then, pulling out a blank sheet of paper and scribbling KID’s puzzle out again, and thinks about the weight of KID’s hand in his hair, and the weight of the understanding in KID’s words.

It’s surprisingly comforting.

*

KID shows up twice more during the following week, in his Katsumi disguise, to steal Shinichi away from his afternoon plans.

"You need a hobby," Shinichi informs him, on that Thursday, after KID waves him over, dressed in an oversized floppy brimmed hat and knee-high boots, bright floral mini-skirt earning him a disapproving eye from several mothers who catch their husbands staring. "Isn’t it weird to wear a skirt like that in the autumn?"

"Sometimes you have to mix things up." He scrunches up his face. "And I have lots of hobbies. I was just in the area. Might as well take advantage of it to pester my favorite detective, don’t you think?"

"Whatever," Shinichi says, but he doesn’t protest when, as they walk toward the park, KID produces a handful of 5 yen coins from nowhere and starts to juggle them, catching them all into his clasped
hands and then yelling *ta-da* when he opens them again and a dove flies out.

"Are you impressed, Meitantei?" he asks, and Shinichi rolls his eyes, dropping the soccer ball under his arm to the ground so he can pick it up with the toe of his sneaker. He enjoys KID’s reflexive grimace, and starts to bounce the ball.

"It can’t be comfortable for the dove, hiding under your wig hair like that until you’re ready to pull off that trick," answers Shinichi, eventually, and KID sighs with exasperation.

"You have no appreciation for the finer things in life, my cute detective." KID wags a finger. "I’m a patient predator though, and I’ll eat your skepticism for dinner."

"I hope you have a big appetite." Shinichi hides a smile as he kicks the ball behind him in a curve, so it comes right back in front of him, for a nice lift with his knee. "I’m hard to fool with illusions."

"Because you’re a critic." KID reaches out and snags Shinichi’s soccer ball, spinning it in the air and then making it vanish in a puff of smoke, to Shinichi’s ire. "It’s okay, no one’s perfect."

"Give me back the ball," Shinichi says, stepping into KID’s space, and KID puts both hands up, wiggling his fingers.

"Who knows where that pesky thing went?" He chuckles as Shinichi eyes him up. "I wouldn’t recommend feeling around for it, Meitantei. You may get an unpleasant surprise." Then he rests a hand on Shinichi’s head, earning a scowl. "But speaking of appetites, don’t cute little boys have to go home for dinner?"

Shinichi looks down at the grass. It’s yellowing as it dies, the weather turning it crunchy underfoot. "She won’t be home," he says. "It’s dinner with Hondou-san tonight. They’re studying for entrance exams so they can go to Sonoko’s Halloween party tomorrow." He’d always imagined it would be Shinichi she studied with, but it’s not possible, and he’d never begrudge Ran the company, even if the company is someone he’d thought would stay in America, where he belonged.

"Oh-ho," KID says, and the hand on top of Shinichi’s head slides down the side of his face, to cup his cheek. He lifts Shinichi’s chin, quirking a grin at Shinichi’s surprise. "How about dinner with me, then?"

Shinichi bats away KID’s hand, ignoring the tingling where the rough pads of his fingers had brushed, and the heat left behind by his palm. "Your idea of dinner is probably a dessert buffet."

"I was thinking katsudon," KID replies, singsong. "Opinions from the peanut gallery?"

"I—" Shinichi looks into KID’s eyes, and they’re so warm that something swoops inside him, like a great swallow whose wingtips drag against the insides of his ribs. "Don’t you have a heist to plan?"

"I'm excellent at time management." He holds out a hand, and Shinichi scoffs and ignores it, shoving his hands into his pockets.

"Stop forgetting I’m not a child."

"You keep saying that."

"It feels like I have to. To everyone who knows."

"There has never been a single moment that I’ve forgotten that, Shinichi," KID says, unexpectedly serious, but then it’s quickly covered with a wolfish glee. "You’re an adult I can pick up!" He winks.
"Should I toss you over my shoulder?"

"I'll walk," Shinichi mumbles, unsure why that flash of somber recognition in KID’s eyes makes him hyper-aware of how close KID is still standing, or how the usual jasmine scent is mixed with autumn wind. "And katsudon is okay."

Ran, later, comes home smiley and pleased with an armful of national exams prep books. "Did you eat, Conan-kun?"

"With Katsumi-nee-chan," he tells her, and she gives him a long, probing look, before shooing him off to the bath.

"What game are you playing with Kaitou KID?" Haibara asks him, the next day at school, while they copy English words down on the large lined paper their teacher has provided for the exercise. "Don’t bother telling me Katsumi-nee-chan isn’t Kaitou KID. We both know I’m smarter than that."

"I’m not sure what he’s up to," is Shinichi’s reply, as he traces O-W-L next to the large drawing of a barn owl, his letters precise and even. "He… helps, though."

"Helps with what?" Haibara gives him a critical look, and Shinichi just shrugs, moving down to the next picture, and writing ‘SHARK’ in a steady hand.

When Haibara’s attention is claimed by Ayumi, he pulls out the 5 yen coin he’d found slipped into the left side of his bowtie last night. He’s knows it’s KID’s, because it’s been cleaned with acetone, and it smells like KID’s nail polish remover. No fingerprints save for Shinichi’s own, now. He presses it into his palm with his thumb to hide it away before anyone sees it, and holds it for the rest of class.

*  

The morning of the full moon, the first day of November, Shinichi wanders down to the police station before Mouri even wakes up, just to check into the Takizawa case. He doesn’t know how much information he’ll be able to get out of Takagi, but he’ll have better luck with him than he’d ever have with Satou, and Shiratori isn’t on the case at all.

When he finds Takagi, though, it’s to see him frantically looking through the papers on his desk. "What are you looking for, Detective Takagi?"

"Oh, Conan-kun, hi." He pauses, doing a double take, and then staring down at Shinichi with wry amusement. "Do you have some kind of …radar for when things are happening around here?"

"Not really," Shinichi says. "I just had some free time, since Ran-nee-chan is out with her friends getting their nails done for Suzuki-san’s party tonight, I think." He beams. "Is something happening? Can I help you find whatever you’ve lost? I’m pretty good at that."

"I can’t find Kanami-san’s number," Takagi says. "I need to call her, so she can come down to the station."

"Why?" He gets onto his tiptoes, taking in the mess of Takagi’s desk and knowing that Takagi’s lucky Satou isn’t here to see it. "Didn’t you write it in your special notebook, too?"

"Ah!" Takagi’s eyes light up. "I did! You’ve saved me again!" He digs the notebook out of his back pocket. "Something weird happened, actually. We got a match on the sketch Kanami-san sat with the sketch artist for, of the private eye, Louis Redhouse. An exact match, actually. Several officers immediately recognized him."
Taken aback, Shinichi falls back down onto his heels, grabbing the edge of the desk to steady himself. "Really?"

"Really," Takagi says. "Only, we have a problem if he is a match." He picks up his cell phone but then reconsiders, setting it down and picking up one of the police landlines. He dials the outbound call extension, then Kanami-san’s cell number deliberately, looking back and forth between the notebook and the keypad with his usual dithering uncertainty.

Shinichi pulls on the ends of the scarf Ran had wrapped twice around his neck before he left the house today. "What kind of problem?"

"If he is the guy, there’s no way he should have been able to commit the crime, seeing as he’s a long-term inmate at Beika prison."

"What?"

"If the officers hadn’t been so sure it was him, that the sketch was a spitting image, we wouldn’t even bother. But now there’s the possibility that Kanami-san saw his face on the news and conflated the two, or that she’s lying, so we have to do a show-up."

"Can’t you just use a photo?"

Show-ups aren’t really a common police practice anymore, Shinichi had thought. Since they’re often unreliable, like most forms of eyewitness testimony, it makes the process expensive and rarely worthwhile.

Kanami-san had had a lot more exposure to the mysterious Louis Redhouse, though, and that would make it more viable.

"Since a key part of her identification will be the suspect’s voice, it was simpler to have the prison remand custody of the inmate to the station."

"What do we know about him?" Shinichi buttons and unbuttons the collar of his shirt just for something to do with his hands, since he’s been forbidden by Satou and Megure from kicking a soccer ball around inside the station.

"His name is Ueda Junichiro, and he was busted three years ago for arms dealing." Takagi’s brow is furrowed. "He’s an orphan, apparently, with no known siblings."

"Known?"

"The elderly couple that took him in knew his parents," and here Takagi flips a page in his notebook. "They were too young for children at the time, but either one of them might have had more children. The older couple has been dead over ten years, and he has no other family."

"So you want to bring him in and get his DNA, just in case it’s someone related to him?" Shinichi narrows his eyes. "You also want to make sure that Kanami-san’s description isn’t based on some known villain from the news."

"Ueda-san took part in an NHK documentary series, recently, on Japan’s underground gun trade." Takagi rubs at his forehead, the phone trapped between his cheek and raised shoulder. "Within the last few months. His face would be fresh in her memory, if she watched that."

It is a common enough phenomenon, Shinichi knows. Human recall is so fickle, and he’s actually interested to see what happens.
"Can I stay?" Shinichi asks, and Takagi resignedly sighs. "I’m rather curious, actually."

"Aren’t you always curious, Conan-kun?" He clears his throat as presses the button to call Kanamisan. "Would I really be able to stop you? Maybe you’ll see something useful."

After he places the call, Takagi takes Shinichi back to the holding cells in the rear of the station, past several sets of armed guards. "He was transferred this morning," Takagi says. "Don’t tell Ran-kun I let you back here." He pauses. "Or Inspector Megure, for that matter."

"Our secret," Shinichi vows, as they approach the glass walled interrogation room. He’s just tall enough to see over the glass, and what he finds steals his breath away.

The man sitting at the long white table, both his wrists handcuffed to the chair, looks almost exactly like the photo of Louis Maisonrouge that Haibara had shown him. His hair is unkempt, tangled around his face where it’s slipped free of its tie, and there are lines at the corners of his eyes, but everything else about his face is shockingly accurate to the photograph.

"Doesn’t he look like the sketch?" Takagi says, grimly, wiping his hands on the front of his slacks. "It’s impossible, but…"

"Well, you know, Detective Takagi, they say every person in the world has someone else that looks just like them wandering around out there."

"Ahahah, I hope my twin isn’t a hardened criminal," Takagi says, laughing nervously. "This guy, he’s done a lot of bad things. He lowered his sentence by giving information, but he’ll still be in jail a long time."

"Why does he think he’s here today?" Shinichi studies the man. He has big hands, and thick arms. They don’t match the fine bone structure of his face, so similar to Scarlette Shinamoto’s. "I mean, normally, wouldn’t the police question him at the prison?"

"You know a lot about these things, Conan-kun." Takagi’s eyebrows are both lifted in amusement. "We let you Detective Boys hang out around here too much!"

"Uncle Kogorou teaches me things he learned while he was a police officer all the time!" Shinichi quickly reassures Takagi. "I also really like to watch crime shows while Ran is at karate!"

Takagi runs a hand through his hair. "Either way, you’re right. We told Ueda that we caught another member of his ring, and that he might be able to bargain his way down a couple more years by testifying." He muses the hair at the crown of his head. "Normally we would do an interview for corroborating testimony at the prison, but we can’t take Kanami-san there."

"Because she’d be seen by him, right?"

"Right."

"I don’t know what we’ll learn from this, but it’s worth a shot. Kanami-san was insistent she’d be able to pick him out from a lineup, and at least this will help us refine the sketch."

"Seems interesting!" Shinichi says, shoving his hands into his pockets and looking innocently up at Takagi, who grins back.

It takes Kanami an hour to arrive from the other side of Tokyo, entering the station with an air of trepidation. "Detective Takagi?" She smiles down at Shinichi. "And the little boy detective, too. Still working on that social studies project?"
"I just happened to be here," Shinichi says, scratching the back of his head and grinning sweetly back.

"Right this way," Takagi says, jumping up from the long padded bench, where he’d been playing hangman with Shinichi for the past twenty minutes. He gestures down the center hall with one hand, while the other fiddles with his keyring. "We’ll take you to a secure room. The suspect won’t be able to see or hear you."

"That’s a relief," Kanami-san says. "I don’t know what I would do if I had to talk to him again. I trusted him, and to think he might have murdered Shinamoto-san…" She lays her hand flat against her breastbone. "If he killed her, it might be my fault, and I…"

"No, no," Takagi says, cutting her off. "Of course it’s not your fault, Kanami-san. It’s the murderer’s fault." His eyes are puppydog earnest, and Shinichi doesn’t think it was a coincidence that Megure gave Takagi this particular task.

Kanami’s eyes shine with relief. "You’re too kind, Detective," she says, and follows him down the hall, Shinichi lagging behind as he notices Kanami’s Prada handbag. Haibara is into purses, and he’s seen her looking at purses like it before, on her phone.

Hers is rather large, and made of black leather, with a metal embossed logo and matching zippers. If he recalls correctly, they run on the higher end of the price spectrum for a purse, around 360,000 yen. Shinichi narrows his eyes, taking in further details, like the equally expensive designer shoes and well-made jacket.

She has been working for Takeuchi’s family a long time, he rationalizes, as they get closer to the interrogation rooms. It makes sense that she would be well-compensated for that kind of long-term service, and it isn’t as though she pays for rent or food, seeing as she lives at the mansion.

He shakes the thought off as they come to a stop in front of the room. Inside, Ueda has slumped down into his seat, clearly bored. A nervous looking rookie officer that Shinichi recognizes is standing nervously at the door. Satou is waiting for them, too, tapping her foot and checking her watch.

"Satou-san," Takagi says, "Kanami-san is ready." He turns to Kanami, but she’s staring wide-eyed through the glass, transfixed, on the prisoner. "Kanami-san?"

"That’s him." Her eyebrows pull together in confusion. Shinichi is shocked at the vehemence. "That’s his face." Then she hesitates. "Something isn’t right, though. His body language… The private detective was thinner, more refined?" She frowns. "He also had a hint of an accent."

Satou crosses her arms and nods seriously. "I’ll go in and speak with him. You just listen carefully, Kanami-san."

She nods, shakily, and Shinichi looks between her and Ueda, his mind flitting from one theory to the next. Though he’d joked with Takagi earlier, he doubted this inmate should be able to pass so well as a person Kanami had met with several times upon close inspection.

Satou, in the interrogation room, sits down across from Ueda, her hands folded together calmly on the table as another officer slides a folder onto the tabletop next to her. She ignores it.

"Ueda-san," she says, "you’ve given us information on several lackeys in the past."

"I told you what I know, mostly." Shinichi blinks at the Okinawan dialect, and looks up at Kanami, whose lips are parted in shocked befuddlement. "I wasn’t nobody important, so I only knew about
specific deals I was involved in. Never knew nothing about customers or something like that."

"Nothing? There have been several recent crimes, and they…” She pauses, then coughs. "Well, they seem to connect back to you. Any help you can give us will reflect well on you with the parole board."

Ueda, with his high cheekbones and striking eyes, twists his face into a truly ugly expression of puzzlement. "We never even used real names," he explains. "The guy in charge of us, I don’t know his name, but he had a boss, and that guy was called Rum."

"Rum, you said?" Shinichi can barely hear Satou’s question over the loud pounding of his heart in his ears. *Rum.* His stomach twists into knot upon knot, and his knees feel weak. *Rum.*

He looks up at Kanami-san, but her face is still a mask of confusion.

Ueda had been arrested for gun-running. Gin and Vodka had been in the middle of an arms trade when Shinichi had been struck from behind and fed the apoptoxin. He’d known they were involved in that kind of thing, but…

He breathes out, trying to release some of the tension inside him along with the air. What were the odds that someone involved with the Black Organization was here, in front of him, in connection with this case, if the syndicate had nothing to do with any of this? It feels like a confirmation of his and Haibara’s suspicions, but…

But Kanami is shaking her head. "That can’t be him," she tells Takagi. "The voice is wrong, and his body is wrong… It’s not right at all. I was sure, when I saw his face, but it’s not him. Is he going to jail for something else?"

"Arms trafficking." Takagi sighs. "We’ll have you sit again with our sketch artist, so that we can revise it." He taps his cheek. "We’ll also have you make a list of other physical attributes, and if you could tell me all about his voice and this accent, that would be good too."

"All right," Kanami says. "I told Takeuchi-san I would be gone all afternoon, so anything you need. He’s working on a new project, anyway. I’d only be underfoot."

"Great." Takagi raps his knuckles on the door to the interrogation room, and when Satou rises from her seat and comes to the door, he gives her a subtle shake of his head.

"Kanami-san," Shinichi says, catching the older woman’s attention. "What kind of accent did the private detective have?"

With a hand pressed flat to the tinted glass screen, Kanami-san continues to watch Ueda, who has a prison guard on either side of him as his ankles and wrists are shackled back together for transport. "Actually, it was French, I think. He spoke like Shinamoto-san did."

Shinichi’s gaze sharpens on her. "But Kanami-san," he replies, when Takagi says nothing, "wasn’t Scarlette Shinamoto from America?"

Kanami stills, and slowly turns to look down at Shinichi, a guilty look on her face. "Don’t tell Takeuchi-san I told you," she confesses, "but we’re both pretty sure she lived for some time in France. That’s another reason Takeuchi-san wanted to hire a private eye, you understand. Scarlette had a lot of secrets, and I just wanted to make sure."

"Oh, I see."
Takagi hurriedly starts to write that down in his notebook. "So Takeuchi-san didn’t want the police to know?"

"To protect her memory." Kanami frowns. "It’s better if people remember her fondly, and everything else about the case leaked so quickly to the press that we thought…"

"The officers who communicated with the press were reprimanded," Takagi assures her. "This won’t go beyond the assigned detectives. Could you follow me, Kanami-san? I’ll escort you to one of the conference rooms and send the sketch artist."

"Of course." Takagi makes a shooing motion at Shinichi, who instead waits for Satou to emerge from the interrogation room.

"What can I do for you, Conan-kun?" Satou asks, when Shinichi tugs lightly on the sleeve of her blazer.

"I was wondering exactly what kinds of crimes Ueda-san committed."

Satou squints at him suspiciously. "Well, I guess it’s not anything you couldn’t find out if you knew how to search for it." She opens the folder in her left hand, the one the officer had given her. "He was convicted for the illegal possession of firearms, three counts of assault, and one count of homicide."

"Assault?"

"He was caught at a sting after a buyer cooperated to get out of an extended sentence, and he resisted arrest." She flips the page. "The arresting officer team was led by—" She stops, and brings her free hand up to trace the name, reading it again. "Date Wataru," she finishes, and Shinichi gapes.

"The one who was friends with Detective Takagi?" Shinichi adds that to a growing suspicion he has about the deceased detective. It’s too big a coincidence, he knows, that Detective Date’s name keeps coming up whenever Shinichi edges closer to the Black Organization.

"The very same," Satou says, rubbing at her tired eyes. "He—"

She’s interrupted by the shriek of sirens and shouts from the front of the building. Shinichi takes off running, sprinting down the hallways toward the sounds of screams, pausing, winded, near the front lobby, where a crowd of people have gathered while officers attempt to calm them down.

Shinichi uses his small stature to his advantage, weaving between people to see what they’re crowding around. When he finally pushes his way to the front, it’s only to find the wide open, lifeless eyes of Ueda Junichiro staring in horror at nothing, a ballpoint pen pushed through the man’s throat as he lies crumpled on the tile floor of the lobby.

He squats down next to the corpse, checking the body over, but there are no other wounds, just the still trickling squirts of blood from Ueda’s jugular, adding to the massive pool of blood under the man’s head and neck and soaking the front of his prison fatigues.

His head is crooked to the side, and Shinichi scans his face, taking in every detail. He pauses at the scars that extend up the underside of the man’s jaw, to behind his ears, and more along his hairline. They’re small, almost unnoticeable scars, but this close, Shinichi can see the entire pale extensive network of them.

Looking up, Shinichi can see that both of Ueda’s guards are unconscious, bleeding from head wounds but still breathing. EMTs are already attending to both of them, and Shinichi is glad that
they, at least, will survive. Scattered pieces of a bowl or cup litter the floor just beyond Ueda’s shackled ankles.

In moments, Satou is crouching beside him. "Someone tell me what happened."

"I don’t know," says one babbling secretary. He’s sweating profusely. "A man in all black came in through the front doors as the prisoner was being escorted out. He passed through the metal detectors, and he looked like he was going toward the restrooms, but then he swiveled to the right and picked up the ceramic penholder from my desk—you know the one my daughter gave me, for my birthday—"

"Focus, Saguchi," Satou says, and the man wipes his brow with a handkerchief.

"He hit the guard on the right with it first, then the guard on the left, both of them in the head. Then he dropped it—that’s it, on the floor—and he took a pen and just stabbed it right through the prisoner’s neck."

Another woman, whom Shinichi recognizes as usually working the night shift, cuts in with a tremulous addition. "There was so much blood. I screamed, but the man was already leaving, and several officers ran out after him, but—"

"We lost him," an officer says. "A train had just arrived, so there were a ton of people pouring out of the station."

"What did he look like?" Shinichi asks, and the secretary, Saguchi, wipes again at his face.

"Tall," Saguchi said. "Strong. He had on a black trenchcoat and a black hat."

"Did he have long hair?" Shinichi’s heart is beating so fast that he raises a hand to press at it, just to keep it in his chest. "Long white hair?" Something that efficient, that brutal, could only be Gin, right?

"No," the woman says. "He had a mustache, and a tattoo on his neck, I don’t know what it was, though, it was mostly covered by his coat."

Satou nods. "I’ll take all your official statements in a moment." Then she looks at Shinichi. "Why do you look like that, Conan-kun?"

"Detective Satou, someone knew Ueda-san would be here today," Shinichi says, "and they came specifically to murder him."

"Looks like it," agrees Satou. "Which means we have a departmental leak of some kind."

"Also," Shinichi wavers, wondering if he should bring it up, before deciding it can’t hurt, "look at the edges of his face."

Satou bends down to examine where Shinichi’s finger is hovering, over the tiny scars. "These are… plastic surgery scars?"

"I think we know why this man looks exactly like Louis Redhouse." He licks his lips. "The question is, when and why?"

Satou’s eyes flit over to him, searching, before they return to Ueda’s face. "This case keeps getting more and more complicated."

"What on earth is going on out here?" Megure’s voice booms through the lobby.
Satou stands, wiping her hands on her suit. "Sir, there’s been a murder."

"In the station!" Takagi’s voice comes, shocked, from the hallway behind them, and when Shinichi turns to look, Kanami is just behind him, her eyes fixed on the dead body of the inmate, her face completely impassive. "How?"

"We’re going to figure that out," Satou says. "First, shut down the station. Set up temporary officer shifts for outside at the closest police box, and redirect people there. Man the phones, but no one else comes in." She points at Shinichi. "Go home, Conan-kun. No civilians until we finish viewing the security footage."

Frustrated, Shinichi almost replies that they’ll have better luck figuring out what happened if he stays, but one look at Megure’s blustery expression and he backs down.

His mind is a mess as he walks away from the police station, and all he knows is that he needs to talk to Haibara as soon as possible.

*

"Rum?" Haibara is hunched into herself on one of the purple sofas, tracing the pattern on the professor’s coffee-stained Persian rug with a socked big toe. "I told you everything I know about Rum. Rum is more of a reputation than a person to me. They have one eye, and could be anything from a young woman to an older man. It’s not much to go on."

She looks so small, Shinichi thinks, small and afraid. Haibara comes across, so often, as fearless, and it’s only when the hovering shadow of the crows is brought into clear focus that Shinichi can see the cracks in her façade.

"I know," he says, "and the first lead in months and months was killed inside the police station."

Angry, Shinichi smashes his fist into the countertop. "It feels like every step forward is accompanied by two steps back."

Worse, still, is that Shinichi is running out of time. He’d woken up this morning covered in sweat, and he’d had to crawl to the bathroom to empty the meager contents of his stomach. Then he’d lain, panting, with his cheek pressed to the toilet bowl as he’d struggled, for minutes, to even breathe.

When he hadn’t felt better, he’d finally been forced to take the first of the blue pills just to get dressed and start the day. It had made the pain lessen, and he’d almost felt normal.

"We’re just two people," Haibara replies, quietly. "Against a deeply rooted syndicate that’s been active for at least sixty years. We might have the FBI on our side, and a few ex-members, but their network is extensive, and entrenched in so many types of crime."

"I don’t care how difficult it is, I’m going to bring them down if it’s the last thing I do."

"How morbid of you."

"I had to take one of those pills today," he replies, and Haibara’s gaze sharpens.

"Is that the first one?"

"Yes." He sighs. "I’ve been avoiding it, but my symptoms were worse this morning. I couldn’t stop throwing up, and it felt like I’d never be able to get up from the bathroom floor." Shinichi curls his toes up in his socks. "It wasn’t supposed to happen this soon. I’ve still got too much left to do."
He can feel Haibara watching him. "So, Kudou-kun, I have something to talk to you about."

"That thing you mentioned at school to irritate me?" Shinichi opens his eyes again, and sure enough, Haibara is staring. "What is it?"

"I’ve been running simulations in the lab."

"What?" Shinichi stretches his palms out flat on his thighs. "What kind of simulations?"

"I’ve been running experiments alongside my usual work with the apoptoxin." She clenches her jaw. "Trying to figure out how to slow down the decay of your internal organs. I’ve had a few breakthroughs."

"You…" Shinichi clutches at his chest, now, where his heart beats too fast. "You’ve made progress?"

"Of a kind." She looks toward the lab. "When you were force-fed the apoptoxin, it stimulated rapid apoptosis across all the cells in your body. However, due to something rare in your DNA, the cells that survived began to rapidly express telomerase, and that’s how you survived."

Shinichi’s rubs at his eyes. "So why are my organs failing?"

"Because we didn’t take the same version of the apoptoxin," Haibara says. "I took a stronger version than you, and my transformation was complete. Yours was not. You still have your internal organs from when you were Kudou Shinichi, and they’re partially destroyed by the apoptoxin. Your body was trying to repair the DNA damage, through various means at its disposal, and that hid the symptoms for a while, but the damage is extensive, and your immune system was essentially destroyed by the drug, which was designed to prevent the body from rejecting it." Haibara’s tone is so clinical, but Shinichi knows that distance is carefully crafted. She’s worried. "It’s not just a few of your organs, Kudou. Your whole body is shutting down. This is just the beginning."

"You said you’d made progress," Shinichi chokes out.

"I have. I might be able to slow down the degeneration, by essentially giving you a part of the original APTX 4869 formula, refined. In you, with your unique DNA, it will stimulate the expression of more telomerase, which is essentially what kept you alive before."

"So why haven’t you just done it?" Shinichi scratches at his neck. "Why have you been so secretive about it?"

"If it works, and that’s a big if, you’ll never be able to be Shinichi again." Haibara looks straight into his eyes. "Do you understand that? The pill I have you on now was made as a stopgap until I could find a cure, but we don’t have that kind of time anymore. There will be no going back to your former life, and I don’t know how much longer it will give you of this one."

Shinichi’s palms are sweaty. "If that’s all, then you shouldn’t have worried."

"Kudou?"

"No one is waiting for Shinichi, anymore. I’ve told Ran and my parents that I’m not coming back." His chest aches. "They’re not the only reason I wanted to be Shinichi, but it would be… bearable, not to be older me. He’s gone, I guess."

"Ah, that explains it."
"Explains what?"

"You’ve looked sadder." Haibara holds up a hand when he opens his mouth to protest. "It’s not something the kids would notice, but lost isn’t a good look on you, Kudou." She points at him, her finger getting startlingly close to his nose. "Only that thief playing with you after school has made you really smile, lately. So I wanted you to know that... I’m working on it, and that I’m hopefully going to be able to buy us a little longer." She drops her hand. "I’m going to do my best to fix what I’ve broken, Kudou."

"You didn’t feed me the apoptoxin." Shinichi’s heart is beating too fast. It’s painful. "Gin did."

"I just made it," Haibara replies, bitter. "I don’t need conciliatory words from you. I don’t know why the apoptoxin worked differently on you than it did on me, not entirely, but I’m not going to quit when there’s still a chance that you’ll survive this."

"You’ve changed, Haibara." Shinichi smiles at her. "You’re nicer."

"Have I?" She glares at him even as she blushes. "You haven’t changed at all. You’re still a complete idiot."

Shinichi’s phone rings, and Shinichi’s glad that the tense atmosphere is broken. "Hello?"

"Conan-kun?" Ran sounds irritated and concerned in equal measure. 

"Ran-nee-chan? What’s wrong?" Shinichi looks down at his watch, and jumps at the time. "Ahhh, I’m late! I’ll be home in five minutes!"

"Hurry up!" She hangs up before he can reply. He stares at his phone for a few seconds, and then returns to Haibara.

"You’d better go," she says, back to tracing the pattern on the rug with a toe. "You’ve got a KID heist to get to."

"Are you going to be okay? About Rum, and that guy getting killed, I mean."

"It’s not as though my sleep is ever easy," she tells him, wrapping her arms around herself. "I always make it through the night. And you, Kudou? Will you be all right?"

"I have other things to think about," he says, putting one hand on her shoulder for a long moment before grabbing his jacket and heading out the door, back to the agency.

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Suzuki Jirokichi has spared no expense.

The Beika Traditional Gardens, always beautiful, have been tastefully transformed for the evening, lush orange and gold silks lining the tables, and platters of seasonally appropriate rice cakes and other treats spread out across them, alongside hundreds of bottles of expensive champagnes and sparkling teas.

The resplendent décor in no way outclasses the autumn leaves, despite the fact that it’s a bit early for Japanese maple viewing; Shinichi had looked up the schedule for this year, and the peak shouldn’t be until the last week in November. Still, the leaves have begun their color shift, and under the setting sun, they cast a lovely gold across the entire garden, flooding across the stone pathways and the shallow streams that run perpendicular to the main path.
There are lights set up a single meter apart in a perimeter of the lawn in front of the wooden teahouse, interspersed with special outdoor space heaters, for after dark falls. Suzuki, who had chosen the location for the lack of hiding places, seems pleased with his preparations, rubbing his hands together in glee. Shinichi hadn’t seen most of them, but he assumes it’ll be the usual: motion sensors, a cage of some kind, and too many guards to know by face, making it easy for KID to mix himself up in them.

The lights also point like a huge arrow at the Concubine’s Heart, but Shinichi supposes that’s par for the course, since none of their hiding methods ever seem to fool KID for long.

Shinichi still hasn’t figured out KID’s heist note. He knows it’s probably something simple he’s overlooking, and he’s pretty sure KID has slipped several hints into their conversations, but it’s a measure of how tricky KID can be, how carefully he chooses every word, that Shinichi remains unsure what he’s actually been told.

Smoothing down the front of his dress shirt, Shinichi continues scanning the area. He’s yet to find anything odd beyond a few suspicious-looking scratches on a couple of low-hanging branches. He’d like to climb higher to check out the upper boughs, but Ran would scold him, especially after she’d warned him to be on his best behavior.

Ran is pouring herself another glass of juice over at the refreshment table. Her hair is pinned up tonight, twisted loosely to pull it from the back of her neck, so as not to cover the collar of her kimono. She looks majestic in dark maroon, with a white fjubakama pattern to celebrate the swelling autumn, with a simple brown obi tied slightly lopsided behind her back; most likely Sonoko’s work.

He’d been floored, earlier, when she and Sonoko had stepped, giggling, out of Ran’s room. He hadn’t been able to look away from her.

"You look beautiful," he’d said, and Sonoko had stuck her tongue out at him.

"Try again in ten years, Conan-kun!" Sonoko had said, and then she’d thrown an arm around Ran’s shoulders. "Maybe someone will fall in love with you tonight." Her eyes had shimmered. "Like that movie we watched with Terumi-san in it at the film festival!"

"Sonoko!" Ran had shouted, her face flushing, and Shinichi smiled up at her.

"Can I take a picture?" he’d asked, and she and Sonoko had put up peace signs, as Shinichi had captured the moment on his cell phone.

Now, though, as the party gets underway, they’ve separated, drifting in different directions to talk to different friends.

Sonoko is distracted, talking with one of the night’s surprise guests, Makoto, who is as embarrassingly besotted with Sonoko as usual, hanging on to her every word as she looks at him with hearts in her eyes, while they sit side by side on a bench in front of the largest maple in the gardens.

Ran keeps looking to the entrance, as though waiting for someone, and checking her make-up in her compact. He hasn’t seen her do things like that in a long time.

"Why so pensive, Conan-kun?" Sera’s dressed in a tailored black suit, with a white shirt underneath. "Not having fun? I thought you liked KID heists."

"I’m not sad," Shinichi protests, refusing to return his gaze to Ran. "I’m still trying to puzzle out KID’s heist note, that’s all."
"It’s rare for you not to have figured out the whole thing already, isn’t it?" She taps her chin. "Maybe Ran-kun is right, and you are sick. She’s been worried about you the past two weeks!"

"I’m not sick!" Shinichi yells, before it mortifyingly transforms into a cough. He covers his mouth with his hand and hopes there won’t be any blood mixed in with the mucus.

"Sure, sure," Sera says. "Not sick, and definitely not lost on the subject of a KID note…"

"Sometimes I have to see elements of the, err, venue before I can piece together how he’s going to carry out his theft." He looks back at the trees. "This time, I don’t have much of an idea. His note mentioned clouds." He points up at the sky. "It’s clear today, and I think the night will also be clear."

"And we’re outdoors, away from large or high buildings, so a lot of his usual tricks won’t work."

"That’s probably why he needed so much prep, this time." Shinichi narrows his eyes and looks around. KID’s probably already here, mixed into the crowd. Actually, his assistant is probably here, too. Shinichi’s not sure, but he thinks KID’s assistant is an older man, the one KID had been forced to rescue when Shinichi had messed up KID’s teleportation trick that time in Kinza. The man had been wearing a cap pulled low, but his hair had been steely gray, and he’d had an equally gray mustache. Maybe, though, his assistant is also a master of disguise. "Out of his element."

"What are you talking about?" Sera’s eyebrows lift. "How do you know how much prep time KID needed?"

Realizing he’s spoken aloud, Shinichi nervously chuckles. "I mean, there were two weeks between the note being sent and the heist," he says. "Usually it’s only one, right?"

Sera, nonplussed, stares at him for a moment, before she shrugs easily. "Well, either way, this time we’ll get him." Her eye twitches. "I’ve got a fist with the back of his head’s name on it. I’ll teach him to knock me out in the bathroom!"

"Scary," Shinichi thinks, and then, as though in response to Sera’s threat, a yelp of pain comes from Shinichi’s left.

"Ow! Ow ow ow, Aoko!" Shinichi swivels his head in the direction of the shouting. A pretty girl, much shorter than Ran, has the ear of boy next to her in a tight grip as she glares up at him. "Ease up, you bridge troll!"

"Bridge troll?" The girl’s voice reaches a dangerously high shrill, and Shinichi wants to back away himself as her free hand clenches dangerously into a fist. "If the shoe fits, you bridge troll!"

"If the shoe fits," the boy replies, and then suddenly, before Shinichi can even blink, he’s on the other side of the girl, her hand grasping at nothing. The boy has an arm around her shoulders, and he’s presenting her with a bright red rose. "If it’s any consolation, you’re my absolute favorite bridge troll." Something about the way he drawls the word favorite pings in Shinichi’s memory. The exaggerated vowels, the teasing edge to the cadence…

"Don’t think you can just win me over with a rose every time, Kaito!"

Belying her words, she blushes, and almost smiles until he adds: "Especially when you’re wearing those cute pink panties with the hearts on them underneath your kimono~"

Then he’s dodging again, skipping backwards, and Shinichi doesn’t have time to move out of the way before the boy, distracted, trips right over him, collapsing with him onto the stone path. Shinichi smells jasmine, and when he looks up, into clear blue eyes, in such an unusual shade that he doubts
anyone else will ever possess the like, he knows.

It’s nothing Shinichi could prove in a court of law, and nothing he could go to police with, but his blood rushes at the recognition, and he doesn’t doubt himself. The next question, then, is why? KID has to have known Shinichi would recognize him, meaning he’d made, at some point, a conscious decision. But why?

The boy is up, eyes averted and laughter anxious as the girl with him begins berating him anew. He’s a flurry of motion, his soft brown hair flying in every direction as he dusts off his suit jacket, and Shinichi can’t take his eyes off him, noting that the upper bow of his lip truly is uneven, that wide mouth as real as his eyes. He looks like Shinichi, grown up Shinichi, and it’s weird to see a face so similar to his own making unfamiliar expressions like that.

"Conan-kun!" Ran says, picking him up and setting him down on his feet as Sera laughs, hands in her pockets. "Are you all right?"

"I’m fine!" he says, adjusting his bowtie as he reassures her, coughing into his fist. "How about you, nii-san?"

At that, both the boy and the girl cease their fight, turning to look at him.

"I’ll live!" he says cheerfully. "This brutish girl next to me does worse damage on a daily basis. I’m glad you’re not hurt, either."

"Sorry that Kaito’s such a pest," the girl says, bowing at Shinichi and Ran. "And to think, we’re only both here because Dad assured Suzuki-san we wouldn’t be any trouble." She gives the boy a nasty look.

"Not my fault you’re so aggressive," Kaito mumbles, but then he turns away from her to give both Ran and Shinichi an over-the-top stage bow, complete with an arm behind his back. "I am sorry, though, kiddo. Didn’t see you there, since you’re so small." His smile is opaque, and Shinichi can’t read anything in his countenance.

"Your dad got you into this party?" Sera asks. She seems more interested in the girl than the boy, and the girl presses a hand to the breast of her kimono to push the wrinkles out of the navy colored silk.

"Ah, yes," she says. "My dad is Inspector Nakamori." She points over to the man, who appears to be engaged in a shouting contest with Suzuki. Shinichi can see the resemblance. "I’m Nakamori Aoko, and this clown is Kuroba Kaito."

"A pleasure to make your acquaintance," Kuroba says, and Shinichi’s eyes widen.

"The son of Kuroba Toichi?" Shinichi asks, because that’s the missing piece, isn’t it? There can be no doubt that this is Kaitou KID in front of him, in the flesh. Not that Shinichi had thought he might be wrong, with the way his body had instantly recognized KID’s presence, when Kuroba had crashed into him, but… "The famous magician?"

"Indeed, I am," he replies, smile twisting slightly. "You’ve heard of him?"

It all makes sense, he thinks, as Ran introduces herself, ‘Conan’, and Sera to the two. Kuroba Toichi had been killed in that fire, along with his audience, and it hadn’t been an accident, even if the news had reported it as such. Then there was the way KID talked about the old KID, like he’d been more than just a mentor, and Shinichi had already known that KID’s mother was the Phantom Lady; it’s no stretch to imagine that the original KID was his father—
"Conan-kun!" A hand is shaking him, and he looks up into Ran’s chiding eyes. "You’re always spacing out!" She looks toward Nakamori Aoko and Kuroba. "He’s probably just excited about the KID heist; he always gets that look on his face when he’s plotting."

"Oh ho, is the little boy a Kaitou KID fan?" His eyes are half-lidded, eyelashes dark at the corners of them, and though the words are playful, there’s no emotion behind them. There’s something careful, vulnerable, even, in how he’s watching Shinichi, and it’s disconcerting to see that from KID.

"More like a rival," says Sera, her hand landing on Shinichi’s other shoulder. "We’re detectives, and a detective always wants to catch a thief." Her one sharp bicuspid looks particularly vicious. "Conan here is known as the KID-Killer."

"It’s just a game," Shinichi quickly says, when Aoko’s eyes light up with recognition.

"Conan-kun’s a pretty good detective, though," Sera says. "He almost—"

Sonoko calls Sera’s name, beckoning her over as Makoto holds both his hands up defensively, probably trying to nix one of Sonoko’s more outlandish plans before it can get out of hand.

"Ah, I’ll be right back," she says, and Kuroba watches her go speculatively, before focusing in on Shinichi.

"A detective, hmm?" Kuroba tugs at the lapels of his jacket. It’s a medium brown, slightly lighter than his hair. With his lopsided, toothy smile, he doesn’t look as much like Shinichi as it had previously seemed, at a more cursory level. His face is too round for that, and his eyes are a different shape. It’s a distorted similarity, and if they were standing next to each other, no one would mistake one for the other unless KID made an effort, not with a mask, but perhaps with more subtle make-up techniques. "What a pity, then, Tantei-kun." His voice lilts, silky. "It seems we’re rooting for opposite sides."

"You’re rooting for KID, then?" Ran asks.

"Of course I am!" He sounds scandalized. He twists his wrist and produces a handful of fujibakama like the pattern on Ran’s kimono, and hands them to her as Ran gapes and Aoko rolls her eyes. "Why would I root for anyone else? Magicians have to support their fellows!"

"Normal people don’t support criminals, Kaito," Aoko says firmly. "Magician or no."

"KID is not just a criminal!" Kuroba defends. "He’s an artist." He has his arms crossed in a fit of petulance. His eyes glimmer with repressed mirth, though, and Shinichi’s gaze is drawn to the twitching corner of his lips, with that uneven bow. It makes him want to smile, too, something contagious in that almost grin. "I think living with police officers and detectives must make you inherently boring." He shakes his head with overelaborate sadness. "Poor Aoko, destined to never enjoy anything—"

"I just don’t live with my head up in the clouds like you do," Aoko snaps back, whupping him upside the head. "Always playing pranks and reading obscure poetry and sleeping through math class."

"Not my fault the curriculum is too slow," Kuroba replies facilely. "If it were interesting, I’d stay awake."

Ran laughs, something nostalgic in her expression, and Aoko, poised to deliver another blow, stops mid-swing and turns to Ran, face suffused with chagrin.
"Ahaha, sorry, Mouri-san," Aoko says. "He’s such an idiot that I sometimes get carried away."

"Oh, sorry, I’m not laughing at you," says Ran. "It’s just that Kuroba-san reminded me of Shinichi just then, complaining about the lack of a challenge."

"Shinichi?" Kuroba asks. "Does he also find school boring?"

"He hasn’t come in two years," replies Ran. "I think if he did, though, he would still look out the window to the soccer field instead of paying attention." She casts her eyes down at the smooth stones underfoot. "Or maybe he wouldn’t. Who knows, anymore."

Kuroba winces, and it would have been imperceptible if Shinichi wasn’t looking for it.

Shinichi has to force himself to change the subject. "So, you like poetry, nii-san?" The cheeriness in his own voice is grating, but it works, breaking the odd tension.

"Very much." Kuroba pulls at his tie, unconsciously straightening it. "It’s beautiful, and I like beautiful things." He smoothes his thumb over the smart Windsor knot. "Which is why I can only barely tolerate Aoko—" His words are cut off by his backbend of a dodge, Aoko’s fist clenching and unclenching after the near miss.

Beautiful things. KID is always talking about presentation, about aesthetics and style and art.

It brings him back to the Genji-themed clues in the heist note. That period had been the height of Japanese aesthetic. The poetry, the pottery, the paintings… Many of today’s customs came into being during the Heian period, when Genji was written.

Kuroba is teasing Ran and Aoko about something, now, but Shinichi doesn’t bother keeping up with their conversation, falling into his own musings as he ponders the most troubling part of KID’s note.

Juunihitoe… The aesthetics of the twelve layered kimono of the Heian aristocracy had adhered to a fairly strict social code. Color, season… The decadent layering of silks upon silks, in a fastidiously chosen order to dictate the seasons—The Concubine’s Heart, for example, with its peony pattern, would have been perfect with a mid-spring outer robe—

Shinichi pauses, because that’s just the sort of thing KID would know about. He thinks back, to the foil origami not-crane, to KID’s bright flowery skirt, to the constant simple vanishing tricks with the 5 yen coin.

He pulls out his cell phone, typing in the search terms with both thumbs to the touchscreen keyboard. Could it be that…

Shinichi laughs when his hunch pans out.

"Conan?"

"It’s seasons!" When Ran, Aoko and Kuroba look down at him, Shinichi elaborates. "That line of KID’s Heist note that’s been tripping me up. From the painted birds and gentle wisteria of a juunihitoe. It must be about seasons, right?"

He looks up, delighted at having finally gotten it, and Kuroba’s eyes flash, subtle shifts in the brilliant blue Shinichi had been sure was part of a disguise. To find out they’re real, that KID has been showing him real parts of himself all this time, has his stomach bubbling with confusion and something else, something that burns hot in his veins.
"What makes you say that, Conan-kun?" Ran has a thoughtful frown on her face. "Were there any references to seasons in the note?"

"Ran-nee-chan, can you wear this kimono," and he lightly touches the material, "in the spring?"

"No, this is an autumn kimono," she replies. "See this pattern? It’s fujibakama. They only grow in the autumn, so this pattern is very seasonal."

"In the spring," adds Aoko, "you would want something like watercress or fresh bamboo, right?"

"Right!" Shinichi holds up his phone. "Juunihitoe are the same, only it’s more complicated!" He hands Aoko his phone. "See? Each layer has a recommended or approved color, depending on the month!"

"You’re interested in kimono lore?" Even the lilt of Kuroba’s regular speaking voice is KID, settling over him and making him almost forget they’re not alone, and that he has to be Conan right now.

"It’s really interesting! During the Heian period, women in the court, like the Emperor’s concubine, would put on twelve layers of robes, each one selected to match both the season, the current trends, and the personal station of the wearer." At Ran and Aoko’s blank stares, he hurriedly stretches his face in his most childish grin. "Shinichi-nii-san told me that once!"

One of Kuroba’s eyebrows twitches, and there’s that haughty curl of his lips again, before it’s covered by an outwardly friendly grin. "Oh, did he? I’m surprised that guy bothered with something like this! When you grow up, don’t become someone bland who doesn’t like true artistry, okay?" He ruffles Shinichi’s hair, and those familiar calloused fingers brush along his scalp.

"I’ve read a lot on my own, too! Uncle Yuusaku wrote a Night Baron book with clues based on seasons! So I ended up reading about it." Shinichi pushes up his glasses, and stares straight into Kuroba’s eyes. "Not only are the colors important, but also the choice of fabric, patterns, linings… all of that has important significance in the language of kimono."

Hand withdrawing from Shinichi’s hair, Kuroba gives him a small, private smile. "Uncle Yuusaku, huh?"

"Wait!" Aoko’s eyes are wide. "So that makes ‘Shinichi-nii-chan’ Kudou Shinichi, the high school detective? One of our classmates last year, Hakuba-kun, really wanted to meet him."

"He’s a great detective," Ran says. "Before he… had to go away, he solved a lot of crimes with the police." She tucks a piece of hair that’s come loose behind her ear. "Now we just have Conan-kun to help out with his random observations."

Aoko hands him back his phone. "Conan-kun seems to be doing better than Dad, right now." She gestures over to where her father is pacing back and forth in front of the jeweled comb. "KID’s not going to appear until it’s later at night. He’s wasting a perfectly good party."

"Well," Kuroba replies, "we’re talking about KID now, too, so are we much better?" He flashes her a peace sign, then. "What else have you deduced, mini-detective?"

"KID also talked about birds," Shinichi says, thinking again of that foil bird. "At first I thought it might be a crane, but the other part, about the gentle wisteria, wouldn’t make sense if it were."

"Why not?" Aoko taps her chin. "Cranes are a traditional kimono pattern, right?" She looks down at her kimono. "My mother had one with cranes on it, left with her things, and when I was home alone, I would try it on and pretend I was an old-time theater dancer." She pulls at her sleeves. "My hands
were covered and the bottom pooled on the ground enough to trip me, but I used to pretend I was graceful and beautiful."

Aoko’s eyes sparkle, and her tender smile transforms her face. Kuroba is staring at her, too, soft with affection and a familiar kind of longing, and Aoko, he thinks, is Kaitou KID’s Ran, close enough to touch but still so far from reach.

"Man, remember that time," Kuroba says, laughing too loud, enough to garner the disapproving attention of a group of older women wearing expensive fur shawls over their kimono, "in sixth grade when you took traditional dance class, and you had to give a performance!"

"Shut up," Aoko growls, but she leans into Kuroba anyway, no bite to her words. Their shoulders bump.

"Not my fault you’ve got the grace of a goat in high heels," replies Kuroba, cheerfully, and Aoko just gives him a dirty look, letting him throw an arm over her shoulder.

Kuroba’s taller than Shinichi had thought. He stands around 174cm, somehow, even though Shinichi is sure that when he’d been dressed up as Ran, once, he’d seemed shorter. It must be magic, Shinichi thinks, watching the way the fabric of Kuroba’s suit crushes in toward his body when Aoko elbows him. Shinichi has always suspected, from how KID carries off cute dresses, that he is bordering on slight, bulked up by the suit and the multitudes of tools he always carries, but now, with just his blazer, dress shirt and tie, along with fitted black trousers, Shinichi can see those suspicions confirmed. KID is all wiry muscle, a toned strength present in every calculated movement.

"If cranes are a traditional pattern, why did you decide your first idea was wrong?" Ran asks, jarring Shinichi from his odd thoughts.

"Well…" He hooks his thumbs under his suspenders and debates how he’ll lead her to the right answer. "Cranes are only a good pattern for a kimono worn in December. When you think of cranes, you think of snow! Wisteria, though, isn’t wintery at all!"

"Eh, that’s true," Aoko says, and Ran frowns down at him.

"Wisteria only grows in the spring," Sera says. and Shinichi jolts at her sudden presence behind him. Her hand is heavy on his shoulder. Kuroba reacts viscerally to the sound of her voice, and though Sera doesn’t notice, Shinichi has to look away to keep from laughing. "And the color, fuji-iro, is a spring color."

"Masumi-chan, you know about kimono, too?" Ran asks.

"Sure." Sera gives Ran a thumbs up. "I was really into things like that, while I was living in America. It helped me stay connected to my heritage." She wiggles her fingers menacingly at Ran. "Plus there are a lot of ghost stories about haunted kimono."

Ran laughs, and Sera grins.

"Sera-san, do you like ghost stories?" Kuroba seems interested, but Sera just shrugs.

"They can be fun."

"They don’t freak you out?" Aoko asks. She, Shinichi is pretty sure, is on Ran’s team as far as ghosts are concerned.

"I’m not the easily freaked out type," she replies. "I’m a detective, I always look for the logic,
instead. It’s fun to puncture holes in ghost stories, or figure out the trick behind a paranormal event!"

Kuroba snorts, but turns it into a cough when Aoko gives him a death stare that has Shinichi shivering like he does when Ran is mad at Mouri.

"The interesting thing," Sera picks up again, as Shinichi pulls at his bowtie absently, watching Kuroba unrelentingly, "is that both the pattern and the color clash with October, and KID undoubtedly knows that."

"It would most appropriate in May," agrees Shinichi. "Late spring and early summer. Along with peonies, bitter oranges, and young bamboo." He grins. "And to evoke the chill of winter, plovers, of course."

"Wading birds with short wings and fat middles, used a lot in watercolor art and—" Sera’s like a cat that caught the mouse as they zero in.

"And in silhouette for kimono patterns, along with swallows," Shinichi finishes, staring straight at Kuroba and thinking of the origami plover he’d been gifted.

Kuroba doesn’t react. Instead, he’s observing Shinichi as carefully as Shinichi is observing him, and though his body language doesn’t speak of any discomfort, Shinichi can tell he’s not sure what Shinichi’s move is going to be.

If this had happened a year ago, Shinichi meeting KID in his everyday life, maybe Shinichi might have tried to trap him. Then again, Shinichi thinks, if this had been a year ago, Shinichi might not have been able to pick him out of a crowd at all. He’s only ever as close as KID lets him be.

"So Kaitou KID’s puzzle is pointing to spring?" Ran shakes her head. "But Suzuki-san’s party is organized around the autumn leaves viewing."

"For some reason, though, KID is referencing a spring arrangement of juunihitoe," Shinichi says. He tears his eyes away from Kuroba to look around the gardens. "It won’t be a mistake. KID doesn’t write meaningless Heist notes."

"It could be because the Concubine’s Heart is a jewel seat in a spring patterned haircomb," Sera says. "Did you notice the color of it, Conan-kun? What a bright pink."

"That no good thief could just be trying to convince us he’s not coming for the gem tonight," Aoko says, clenching her hands into fists, and Shinichi shakes his head, catching Kuroba’s impassive stare at the girl that he rapidly shuffles behind an amused and innocent grin. "To throw us off track, or humiliate my dad more in the news."

"No, I doubt it." When Aoko and Ran both start to protest, Shinichi holds up his hands. "I’m not saying he doesn’t do outrageous things, or embarrass people—" He shoots an amused glance at Sera, who is watching him with narrowed eyes, "but for the most part, he doesn’t make your dad look stupid. He just makes himself look extremely clever. Which he is."

"Aren’t you a smart one," Kuroba says, bending at the waist to get a closer look at Shinichi. "You think KID is clever?"

Shinichi smiles at him, calmly, because… He wants to beat KID. He wants to catch him on a Heist, and figure out all the illusions before KID can abscond with whatever his target is, but what he doesn’t want is to throw the strange kindness that KID has offered him back in his face, not when he knows that KID is just as isolated as Shinichi himself is.
He doesn’t want to catch him like this, because his gut told him to trust KID with his secret, and KID should be able to trust him back.

"Yes." Shinichi raises both eyebrows. "Very." Kuroba’s eyes flash again, his tongue peeking out to lick his lips, and Shinichi mimics him subconsciously, his throat so unexpectedly dry. "He always gets away, even with some of the best chasing after him. He has to be clever, to manage it, right?"

"That’s why he’s my idol~" Kuroba says, the moment breaking as he flashes a cheesy peace sign. "Take that, KID Killer—OW!" he yelps, as Aoko’s fist slams down on the back of his head in such a well-practiced motion that it has Shinichi cringing in sympathy.

"Don’t try to influence Conan-kun with your stupid KID fanboy opinions," Aoko screeches, and Sera, who still has a hand on his shoulder, looks down at him, laughter in the parted grin she sports, revealing her one crooked tooth. "Ignore Bakaito, Conan-kun, and continue being a good boy that helps the police!"

"R-right, nee-chan!"

"Guess we don’t have it that bad with our friends, eh?" Sera asks, when Kuroba mentions something about Aoko’s underwear of all things, and she lunges for his jugular. "I’m sure things are even rowdier where those guys live."

"You’re not the same size as Haibara." Shinichi curls one hand up to his chin, into his thinking pose. "A spring themed heist note in autumn… Hmmm…"

"Hey." Sera puts her hands on her hips, cocking one hip out as she contemplates it. "I guess there’s no point worrying until it happens, at this point."

"I’m sure," he says in reply, as Ran seems to internally debate whether or not to break up Kuroba and Aoko’s catfight, "it’ll be a little fun either way."

Kuroba finds him alone, later, as he sits at the edge of a souzu water fountain, the bamboo tilting back and forth with the weight of the water, with a plate of fruits and tiny finger treats in front of him.

"Where’s Miss Mouri?" he asks, squatting down next to Shinichi, stealing a strawberry from his plate without asking permission. "Doesn’t she usually watch you like a hawk at these things?"

"Hondou-san came," Shinichi replies. "He’s already tripped over two of the buffet tables. She has her hands full."

Hondou Eisuke had been the person Ran had been waiting for, her gaze on the entrance. Sonoko had invited him, and he’d come because Ran had said she’d like it if he did.

She’d cried once, when Shinichi had proven Hondou Eisuke innocent of murder. That’s the only time Hondou has made Ran cry, and it wasn’t even his own fault. That’s a better record than Shinichi has, and maybe that’s why Shinichi hadn’t even been able to make himself glare when Hondou had looked down at him, serious and full of purpose, as he’d asked Ran if she’d like him to get her something to drink.

"Do you like him?" Shinichi had asked her, quietly, when he was far enough away.

Ran had blushed, and looked uncomfortable. "I don’t know," she’d said. "I’ve only ever liked Shinichi. For two years I’ve waited around for him, and I don’t regret that, but… I’m almost nineteen, now, and this is the first time I’ve thought about anyone else."
Shinichi had stared at his shoes. They were just regular shoes, nothing special about them to make up for Shinichi’s size. He’d bought them in a store, new, a week ago. An eight-year-old boy buying an eight-year-old boy’s shoes.

"It’s scary," she’d admitted, after a few moments, and Shinichi looked quickly back up at her. "Because Shinichi makes me feel comfortable, even just hearing his voice, but…” She plays with the edge of her obi. "With Eisuke-kun, we have so much in common. A lot of the same interests, and… It’s different? It’s exciting, to talk to him."

"What’s scary about that?"

"It’s scary because sometimes I wonder if I’ve mixed up loving someone and being in love?" She’d buried her face in her hands. "I’m confused, Conan-kun."

_I wonder if hearts grow apart, when they’re separated?_ she’d asked him once.

He should have told her yes, he thinks. He hadn’t realized, then, even though he gets to see her every day, she never, ever gets to see him in return.

Hondou had come back, then, with Ran’s favorite drink, and Shinichi had exhaled, slowly. He’d looked up at Hondou and nodded before walking away to give them time to talk.

"I won’t tell you it stops hurting, Meitantei." Kuroba, _KID_, sets the leafy inedible end of his stolen strawberry on the side of his plate. "It does get easier, though."

"Really?" Shinichi takes a small maple leaf-shaped candy, and puts it in his mouth. It’s a dull sweetness. Nothing _KID_’ll like, probably, judging by how he takes his coffee. "How long does that take?"

"I’m not sure," _KID_ says, and he slants his gaze over at where Aoko is talking to a Division 3 officer Shinichi always sees with Nakamori. "It's a work in progress."

The bamboo tilts again, the heavier end smacking against the rock with a sharp, echoing sound. "Am I right, about the kimono?"

"Where’s the fun in giving the game away, detective?" In profile, face unobscured, Shinichi can see how the slope of _KID_’s nose isn’t like his, and the way his full mouth stretches further when he grins. "You’ll find out with everyone else. I’ll impress you for sure, this time."

"That is the real color of your eyes," Shinichi says. "You were laying groundwork to give me your identity."

"Are you going to arrest me, Meitantei?" he asks, lightly, and Shinichi immediately shakes his head. "If we’re going to travel together, you’re going to see my passport."

"No, that’s not why. You revealed your eyes to me before that, when you showed up outside the mansion, and then in Kinza, and when you picked me up from school."

"That first time was by accident," replies _KID_. "I was actually recovering from an eye infection. I shouldn’t have been using disguises at all." He runs a hand through already messy hair. It looks fluffy. Shinichi wonders what it would feel like between his fingers, if he played with it the way that _KID_ plays with Shinichi’s. "You were so earnest, when you offered to help me. Like you really wanted to make sure I was safe. You’re not usually so visibly concerned."

"Most of the situations you get yourself into, you’re perfectly capable of getting out of. I know that
jumping from a building won’t kill you, so I have no qualms about letting you fend for yourself." KID takes Shinichi’s last strawberry, unrepentantly, and Shinichi mildly glares at him. "This is different."

"You also told me things you didn’t have to tell me." KID twists his tie repeatedly, and when he lets it go, it’s changed colors before Shinichi’s eyes, from a plain navy to a vivid orange the same color as the maple leaves. "Did you know that our faces are like mirrors, you and I?"

"We don’t look that much alike, if you’re really paying attention." The mochi, after a tentative bite, is revealed to be filled with red bean paste. KID wrinkles his nose, and Shinichi takes a second nibble.

"I don’t mean it like that." KID leans, and rests his cheek on top of Shinichi’s head. KID’s thighs pull at the material of his trousers, the seams straining, and the hand closest to Shinichi is stained red from strawberry juice at the tips of his first two fingers. The smell of jasmine settles over him like a warm blanket, chasing off the cool night. "I meant that when I looked into your face, I saw my own loneliness."

"Oh," Shinichi says.

The bamboo tips again.

KID moves away, standing up and stretching. "Aoko is about to start looking for me," he says, "and Sera-san is looking for you."

With a soft sigh, Shinichi reaches into his pocket, and pulls out KID’s 5 yen coin. He’d thought it might stand for May, the fifth month, and that it was another clue to KID’s designs. Now, running his thumb across the raised image of a rice plant growing wildly from the water and pushing the fleshy part of his thumb-tip through the hole, he thinks maybe KID had given him a 5 yen coin as an offering of friendship, like a tithe at a Shinto shrine. Go-en. Connections.

"I won’t tell anyone, if you were even worried."

KID’s gaze flickers between Shinichi and the coin, and for the second time, Shinichi is treated to KID’s real smile. The ice around his heart at seeing Ran so happy with someone else next to her thaws a little, in the sun of that expression.

"I’m not worried," KID says. "You’re my favorite detective, after all. By right, I should be your favorite thief."

Shinichi watches him walk away, and picks up his scavenged plate to take it to the trash.

Three hours later, the moon is bright in the sky, and surrounded by stars.

"It's a clear night," Sera says, as she checks her watch. "Beautiful, really."

"It is," Shinichi agrees. More people have arrived, and several older businessmen are drunk and placing bets on how long it will take KID to steal the Concubine's Heart. Above them, a dove has settled into the treetops. KID is probably listening then, and gloating.

"Tonight," Suzuki says, "I'm going to catch him." His mustache twitches with excitement.

Shinichi hasn’t seen KID in a good half hour, but that doesn’t mean much, considering the fact that he and Sera have been casing the perimeter for escape routes for the past while. As far as Shinichi knows, KID’s still at Nakamori Aoko’s side, and maybe he’ll remain there for most of the heist.
"You know, as hard as we try to catch him, it really is enjoyable to come to one of Kaitou KID’s magic shows," Sera says. She squats down, pressing her fingers into the soft, freshly pressed ground where Suzuki has spent way too much money installing a cage that will rise up and electrocute anyone or anything that touches it. Naturally, it's too slow for KID, but Shinichi hadn't mentioned that when Suzuki had triumphantly shown it off. "I mean heists."

"No corpses lying around, right?" Shinichi takes the opportunity, as the time before KID’s stated heist begins winds down, to closely examine tonight's target. "Most of the time, at least."

Shinichi has to admit it's magnificent. The primary jewel is a bright, shimmering diamond in orange-pink, high lustre and oddly pigmented. It's been cut into the shape of a multifaceted peony, and set in gold with tiny chips of sapphire embedded into it in between chunks of molten-finish bronze. It would have looked beautiful in the hair of a woman wearing those heavy, complicated court robes, and thinks it's more attractive than some of Suzuki’s other challenges to KID.

"So what do you think of that guy courting Ran-kun?" Sera says, out of the blue, and Shinichi plans to say something noncommital, hand closing around the coin in his pocket, but then he catches Sera's calculating look, like she's expecting a different sort of answer, and it throws him.

He often wonders how much Sera knows. He's asked her, more than once, if she knows him, or he knows her, and she's always dodged the question. It's just that she's so familiar, in her eyes and in the way only one of her eyes squints when she grins.

He's probably overthinking it. It's more than likely that Sera is just like Jodie; willing to take him at face value as a child far wiser than his years, and respecting his ability to solve mysteries more than his lack of adult status. Both of them intitally made him uncomfortable because of that, since he lives in constant fear that he’ll be found out, or Haibara will, and the safe place they’ve created for themselves in Beika will be lost.

Sometimes, though, Sera looks at him like she knows he's Shinichi, like now, and it feels like spiders are crawling on his skin.

"I met him the last time he was in Japan," Shinichi says, stepping past the jewel and moving toward the teahouse behind it. It’s an open floor plan, just four large tatami rooms with sliding screen doors. It was built during the Edo period, according to Suzuki, and it hadn’t been knocked down because of the paintings on the walls. "He's a good person, and he really likes Ran-nee-chan."

"Are you jealous?" Sera teases, as she examines the far wall of the largest room, not touching but leaning in very close. It’s a painting of seaside cliffs—not a very Tokyo image, but perhaps representing the longing of the artist for some place where mist rises from the sea. At that thought, Shinichi has an inkling of an idea, and looks closer at the wall, finding a small gap between it and the floor.

"Why?" He looks to the other seams, and save for the bottom, they all match up. How does KID even find these things?

"Sonoko is always talking about how you have a crush on Ran." That has him snapping over to glare at Sera, because Shinichi doesn’t think it’s fair that Sera, who doesn’t know that Ran is flowing water that’s slipped through his fingers, gets to pick at his wounds before he’s had a chance to heal them up some.

"Ran-nee-chan is almost an adult," Shinichi says. "And I'm eight years old. It wouldn't matter even if I was jealous, would it?" He can feel the coin digging into his palm. "There's ten years in between."
"Ah, that's true." Sera sheepishly rubs at her neck. "I didn't mean to upset you, Conan-kun, I was just teasing, you know? It's easy to forget you're a little kid."

Staring up at the sky, Shinichi smiles. "I know," he says. "It's hard to forget when you are the little kid, though." He frowns, and Sera pets his head. "Since no one wants to listen to children, no matter how often they prove themselves."

"I think the police take the Detective Boys pretty seriously." She leads the way out of the teahouse and into the garden, both of them slipping back into their shoes. The wind, full of the evening’s chill, blows lightly, enough to send a few leaves their way, to scatter across the stone and crunch underfoot as they walk. "Detective Takagi should give you guys your official detective badges and a patrol car."

"Only now," Shinichi says, "because we've spent two years handling things ourselves half of the time, because not one of those kids has a shred of common sense." He fights a smile, because they're not fearless, but those kids, Shinichi’s friends, are as brave as they are reckless.

"Now you sound like my grandmother. Don't veer too old, Conan-kun. That's not as cute." He gives her an unimpressed glare, and she laughs at him, petting him again. "I won't look down on you," Sera tells him, honestly. "Especially since you solve all those cases for Mouri and never take credit for them."

"Wha— I don't!"

"Sure you do," Sera says. "I'm sure you have your reasons, but you're a way better detective than he is, and anyone else who's a real detective can see that."

Thrown by Sera's words, Shinichi struggles for a reply. Sera doesn't seem to be seeking one, though, turning her attention to the case holding the haircomb.

"This is the perfect night for a heist, actually," he says, when he looks back up to the sky, his glower having proved ineffective.

"How so?"

"Sera-san, do you know why it's hard to see any stars clearly right now, even though there are no clouds?"

"Eh?" She looks up. "It's true! Only the moon is bright."

"It's because we're inside the disk of the Milky Way." Shinichi rocks back and forth on his heels. "The way the earth is turned, right now, the brightest stars are out of view. Also, when the moon is this bright, it steals all your focus."

"How does that answer my question, kiddo?" Sera blows her bangs out of her face with a huff.

Shinichi rolls his coin between his fingers. "KID, dressed up in that white suit? He's the moon. On a night like tonight, with no high buildings, no fancy entrances or exits, just an open area with lots of property he won't want to harm, KID’s best bet is to draw all the attention to himself." He snorts. "And Suzuki's helped him out with that, with the way he's lit the display area up like a beacon."

"Yeah," Sera says. "He might as well have put a huge lock on it and then left a key with 'STEAL ME' taped on the shaft."

"Exactly." Shinichi pulls out his phone. "Five minutes."
He looks around, still not spotting KID or Nakamori Aoko. There is a suspicious looking figure near the old teahouse though. He's wearing a dark coat, and his hat is pulled low. Shinichi can't make out his face, or anything else about him from here. Probably KID’s assistant, he thinks, moving his attention to the trees, where he'd seen the marks on the low-hanging branches.

There are about fifty ways Shinichi can think of, off the top of his head, that KID could be planning to use those branches, but he can already discard many of them, seeing as, when Shinichi is going to be at a heist, KID never repeats tricks he's done for Shinichi before.

"There's something sticky on the case," Sera says. "I can't tell what it is, but it's also on the stone."

Dropping to his hands and knees, Shinichi crawls closer, pulling out his handkerchief so he can pick up a clump of the stuff. "It smells like… beeswax?"

"What could he need beeswax for?" Sera mutters, and Shinichi has no clue either, and starts to tell her as much when the sound of a clap resounds across the garden, and the lights dim, and flicker out, before returning fully to life.

"Three! Two!" A voice comes from behind them, and they turn around as one. The crowd erupts into anticipatory cheers at the magician’s voice, and starts to gather, pushing in closer until it feels like there’s a wall of people at Shinichi’s back. "One!"

Shinichi picks out the slight whirring sound of KID’s grappling hook. There’s nothing for it to grab, out here, just like there’s nowhere high enough for him to escape via glider. He can’t find the wire on sight, but he thinks it was to the far left, back where the first scored branch Shinichi had sighted is. "What are you up to?"

"Showtime!"

As the word rings across the lawn, the sky seems to burst with spring peony blooms, separated from their stems. As the crowd gasps with delight, Shinichi and Sera both look immediately to the trees.

"The lights dimmed because…" Sera starts, and Shinichi, holding an arm over his head to protect his eyes from the deluge of blossoms, finishes the thought.

"He needed power for the fans and it taxed the already overwhelmed generator," he says. "Because outside in the windy autumn, smoke would have dispersed too fast."

Sera snags a few peonies in her fist, and brings them up to her nose. "They smell like… Beeswax!"

Shinichi gasps, and calls out to Suzuki. "Some of the flowers are covered in beeswax!" When Suzuki replies with a muffled, furious "What!", Shinichi elaborates. "It’s highly flammable!"

"Damn! Shut down the electric fence!" Suzuki hollers at his guards. "If we leave it up, it’ll start a fire!"

He can barely make out Suzuki in the whirling sea of pale oranges and pinks, the same as the gem on the Concubine’s Heart, and at his feet, the flowers are starting to pile up, making it hard for him to move. It’s not just him thinking that, either, as Nakamori swears, loudly, shouting orders into his microphone to set up a perimeter around the main garden, and not to let any guests come or go.

"My dear Suzuki," KID says, as the rain of flowers slows, KID emerging from the flurry unruffled, a few stray petals sticking to the blue silk ribbon around his top-hat and into the black of his hair. "Thank you for deactivating that pesky cage."
"You won’t get away!" Suzuki says, wiping peony petals from his face and running toward KID, who is perched easily, legs crossed at the knee, on top of the jeweled comb’s case.

"However, shame on you for displaying a spring jewel in the height of autumn," KID adds with a wag of his finger. He stands in a single, fluid motion, and as the petals thin even more, Shinichi can make out the smirk. "Don’t worry, though, I’ve ameliorated the situation for you!"

He laughs, and Shinichi sees an odd flicker of red light before it’s gone. Is that part of KID’s setup?

The peonies must have been suspended in the highest parts of the maples, in camouflaged nets. The scores in the lower branches that Shinichi had noted must have been some kind of mark from KID hoisting the nets.

Then KID had utilized small, high-powered fans of some type, blowing in a circle around them, to make the flowers swirl around them, and used some kind of staggered release system in order to make the inundation constant.

It’s an absolutely ridiculous thing to do, and now Shinichi completely understands KID’s heist note.

As Nakamori swears up a storm, Shinichi wades through the mess alongside him, toward the Concubine’s Heart and its captor, Kaitou KID.

KID holds the comb up to the moonlight, letting the light filter through it. "I can never resist the heart of a woman," he says cheekily in Suzuki’s direction, as the private guards and the officers both try to navigate their way to their stations to prevent anyone from leaving. "Or perhaps it’s that the heart of a woman can never resist me!" His monocle glints. "Either way, I’ll be taking this!"

"What is all this?" Nakamori asks Shinichi in frustration, sweeping his arm across the lawn. "It’s worse than the smoke!"

"It’s spring in autumn," Shinichi replies dryly, as the flowers settle on the ground in a thick pale pink carpet that reaches above Shinichi’s knees, to Nakamori’s mid-calf, just enough to slow him down.

The thick layer of spring stretches across the entire main garden lawn, to the perimeter of lights. Shinichi spares a moment to wonder, incredulously, where KID got this many fresh wild peonies in October.

"And now that I have my prize," KID says, "I’ll take my leave." He tosses the comb up into the air, and when he catches it, it disappears. Shinichi shakes his head at the drama of it all as KID gives him his own, special, megawatt grin. "As always, a pleasure doing business with you—"

His words cut off in a strange gurgle as the sound of a gunshot shatters the amazed murmurs of the party guests, followed by a cacophony of screams.

Sera’s pushing him down in that same instant, covering his small body with her own, and Shinichi looks up from the bed of peonies he’s being crushed into, over Sera’s bicep, toward where the shot had been directed.

KID crumples into a forward hunch, and all Shinichi can hear in his head is his own voice, chiding KID: "no one fires point blank with a shotgun if they don’t intend to kill."

"Who fired?" Nakamori’s voice, enraged and wild, ignites the crowd. "Who the hell fired on Kaitou KID?"

KID manages to stay on his feet, swaying, as the crowd around them dissolves into a loud, tumultuous panic, and then with a swirl of his cloak, he’s gone, leaving behind nothing but lingering
spots in Shinichi’s eyes from one of his flash bombs.

He can’t have gone far, and Shinichi’s already aware of the escape route.

"Find the shooter!" Nakamori roars out, recovering quickly, and Shinichi looks away from where KID had been standing to Sera, to see her already slogging through the flowers in the direction the gun was fired from. Shinichi catches a glimpse of a snarling man, his face contorted in a rictus of fury, and Sera has seen him too.

She might get him. From the distance, Shinichi’s dart watch won’t do any good, and he’s slower than Sera in these conditions, with his short, child-length legs barely able to move in the sea of peonies, even if he were in good health. As it is, he’ll probably run out of breath and energy before he can even catch Sera, let alone the shooter.

Torn with indecision, Shinichi stares at the shooter, committing his face, with his unattractive mustache and thick eyebrows, to memory. Then, spurred by a flashback of the way KID’s words had choked off, his body curling in around the pain of getting shot, he leaves the shooter to Sera and Nakamori and heads after KID.

Shinichi struggles to the teahouse, stepping with relief onto the raised wooden platform. He doesn’t bother shedding his shoes, leaving an unavoidable trail of flower petals in his wake as he scrambles to that wall painting of a misty cliff—because, of course, disappear into the vanishing clouds isn’t being used by KID as a metaphor for death as it had been in Genji, even if irony would like that to be the outcome of his words. As he’d deduced, the tatami floor hides an underground tunnel, and Shinichi’s sense of urgency rises at the dripping blood running down the length of the tunnel like horror-movie breadcrumbs to Shinichi’s Hansel.

The tunnel emerges back above ground at the very back of the grounds, away from all the lights. Shinichi can still hear all the panic from the crowd, but it’s distant now.

KID is leaning against a maple, eyes closed, trying to catch his breath, and as Shinichi steps on a twig, KID’s eyes jolt up, whole body tensing, before he sees it’s just Shinichi and he relaxes again. His face is pale, as ghostly as his suit in the midnight moonlight, and what’s singing through Shinichi’s veins right now is fear.

"Ah, Meitantei, it seems I was a little careless not wearing my bulletproof vest tonight." KID’s hand is pressed to his stomach, and his white glove is soaking a dark red in front of Shinichi’s eyes. The blue of his shirt spreads navy up his chest, and there is a glaze of red on his teeth. Blood in his mouth. It could be from nausea and vomiting, or it could be as simple as KID having bitten his tongue or cheek while in shock. "I thought this would be over before I had the chance to get shot."

"Can your assistant treat bullet wounds?" Shinichi asks, considering what he knows about gunshot wounds, and KID’s face contorts.

"Maybe," KID replies. "I’ve never actually been shot before." Shinichi hesitates, and then pulls out his phone, dialing the professor’s number, and doesn’t let KID’s slurred query of "Meitantei?" distract him.

"I’m getting help," he says, grimly, as Agasa answers the phone. "Professor, I need you to get to the Beika Traditional Japanese Gardens as quickly as you can with the Beetle. Spread out towels in the back and bring along a few extras that you don’t care about along with that black blanket in the upstairs closet."
"What are you doing?" KID asks. "I'll be fine, I just need to…" He presses his back harder to the tree, and Shinichi moves closer to him to grab him, pulling his cloak so that it's spread out behind KID. No blood on the bark for them to follow. No evidence. Great. Shinichi is aiding and abetting a criminal.

But this is KID. He's often made exceptions for KID, hasn't he?

"Shinichi?" The professor's voice is worried, and he's yelling into the mouthpiece of his phone. "Are you hurt?" Shinichi can hear Haibara's urgent murmuring in the background.

"Not me," Shinichi replies. "A… friend. A friend who can't go to the hospital."

"All right," Professor Agasa says. "I'll be there in ten minutes, Shinichi. Where should I meet you?"

"Across the street," Shinichi says. "We're going to use the cover of all this panic to slip into the greenhouse parking lot, where they load the out of season vegetables into trucks. Do you know that driveway? It's just before midnight, so there should be several delivery trucks parked there. Just pull up between the two furthest to the left, and that's where we'll meet you. Hurry, before the police can calm people down enough to search out beyond the perimeter." He hangs up.

"Where are we going?" KID asks, straightening up. His jaw is clenched tight, and now, as much as Shinichi knows his wound must be extraordinarily painful, KID's heavy breathing would be the only clue Shinichi had that something were amiss if he couldn't see the spreading stain of blood. "Not going to turn me in?" He laughs. "We are on a heist, after all."


"Not far." A slight tremor in his voice. Shinichi wishes he had enough light to examine the wound, and check for serious internal damage. He knows the basics: don't let KID drink anything. Keep a moist, sterile dressing over the wound. If there's any tear to the intestines, secrecy will have to fall by the wayside because KID will die of infection or bleed to death, otherwise.

How long had it taken him to pass out from his wound? He'd stayed awake at least twenty minutes, if he recalls correctly. Genta had been carrying him, though, and KID is holding up his own weight. KID is also bigger than Shinichi, and the wound is much closer to the side than right in the center of his gut. He's not a doctor; he has no idea how to calculate something like this.

"We don't have to get far," Shinichi says. "Just out the back gate and across the street. The professor will pick us up."

"Then what?" KID asks, and Shinichi finally looks up at him and glares. "Okay, detective, lead the way, and I'll try not to pass out."

"Good thief," Shinichi murmurs, "now follow me."

He leads KID past more of the Japanese maples in full autumn color, bright even in the night, and out past the back gate he and Ran had discovered once when they were small, narrow and meant for a gardener's short cut instead of a public exit. KID hisses when he has to step over the high wooden beam that had been installed to hold in the gravel, and Shinichi turns back sharply. "What happened?"

"My insides did a thing insides aren't supposed to do," KID replies.
That doesn’t sound like anything good. "We’re almost there. We just have to cross the street and we’ll be behind those big white delivery trucks. Then you won’t stand out like a sore thumb."

"It’s good to know I’ll be bleeding out in obscurity," jokes KID, and Shinichi fights a wave of dizziness as he snaps his head around to glare at KID.

"Shut up," he snaps. "I’ve had enough people die in front of me. You won’t be one of them."

Shinichi remembers what it felt like, Irish dying as his body covered Shinichi’s own from a rain of machine gun bullets.

He’d shaken and shaken that night, in the shower, as he washed the blood from his skin and thought about how close he’d come to dying himself. It would be worse, if it were someone like KID.

KID is silent, and Shinichi’s temper fizzles out as quickly as it had sparked. "It’ll be fine."

"I hope so," KID replies, "because as reckless as my stunts seem, they’re always carefully orchestrated to be safe. I’ve got no desire to die before I finish what I set out to do."

The back street is empty, and Shinichi looks back over his shoulder toward the center buildings of the garden, where helicopters hover with spotlights, trying to pick out a shooter that’s probably long gone, or the elusive KID, who is being helped by one of the detectives that is supposed to catch him.

Shinichi exhales with relief when they make it to their hiding spot, but it’s only a small accomplishment. KID, despite the steady pressure he’s been applying to his wound, is still bleeding.

"Where were you shot, exactly?"

"Not through any organs, most likely, or I wouldn’t be walking. Could be just a graze, but the bullet didn’t come out. The problem is the blood loss. I’m starting to get dizzy; I feel light-headed."

"That could be shock instead of blood loss," Shinichi replies. "My house isn’t very far from here, so we’ll be okay."

"You’re taking a thief to a detective agency?"

"Not Conan’s home. My home. My parents’ house." He rubs at his face. "You’ll be safer there. Do you really want me to put you in handcuffs that badly, KID?"

"I dunno, Tantei-kun, that still sounds pretty tempting." He offers Shinichi a small grin, and with the hand not pressed to his belly, he holds up the jewel-encrusted comb. "But I suppose you’re not big enough for me to say that, so I’ll just remind you of what a naughty boy I’ve been and console myself with the fact that I’ve got the Concubine’s Heart."

"Shot in the stomach and you’re still this shameless?" Shinichi frowns as KID wobbles, and he wishes he were bigger, so that he could take a little of KID’s weight, but he isn’t bigger. He’s physically eight, and the best he can do is get close enough to KID that he can press another hand on top of KID’s to help maintain constant pressure on the wound, and remind KID that he’s here. The bleeding has become sluggish, slowing down, and that’s good news— pointing to KID’s organs being undamaged by the bullet "You should call your assistant. They’re probably worried."

"I sent him a message via transmitter as we were walking here," says KID. "I’d planned on having him take me home, but I live… pretty far from Beika, at least thirty minutes by car, if there’s no traffic. He has a tracer on me, so he’ll find me wherever you take me."

That last part is apologetic, and Shinichi sighs, the warm blood seeping between his fingers as his palm sticks to wet wool-blend.

"That’s fine," Shinichi agrees. "I… trust you, for the most part, at least about stuff like this. The
location of my home isn’t a secret.” He looks up at KID carefully. “I know you live in Ekoda, anyway. Your best friend has an Ekoda High phone strap, and it’s no stretch to find out where Inspector Nakamori lives.”

“Yeah, well, it wouldn’t have been hard to find out where I lived anyway, now that you know my name.” He coughs, and a tiny trickle of spit leaks out from the corner of his lips. “I might have been wrong about the internal organs thing.”

“Shit,” Shinichi replies.

The yellow Beetle is noisy as it pulls into the lot, right as a phone starts to ring. It’s Conan’s ringtone. Ran.

Agasa, who hasn’t bothered to turn off the car, and Haibara both emerge from the Beetle. Upon seeing KID, slumping against Shinichi, Agasa pauses with shock, but Haibara doesn’t even react beyond a raised eyebrow, opening the back door and spreading out the towels.

“Answer the phone, Edogawa-kun,” says Haibara. “Otherwise you’ll make her worry.”

Nodding, Shinichi accepts the call. "Ran-nee-chan?" He holds the phone with his shoulder as he and the professor work to get KID into the back seat of the car. Shinichi slides in first, leaving a bloody handprint on the towel, and then KID slides in after, his head falling into Shinichi’s lap and top hat tumbling to the floor of the professor’s car.

"Where are you, Conan-kun? You’re still sick! You shouldn’t be running off by yourself!"

Shinichi wavers. It’s only been about ten minutes since the heist, so it won’t make sense for him to have gone far. Then he hears Nakamori Aoko, ranting to Sonoko about how ‘that Bakaito’ has disappeared, loud enough that KID hears it, too, and he’s struck with an idea.

"Ahahaha, sorry, Ran-nee-chan, once KID disappeared, I wanted to investigate if there were any places his assistant might have been hiding. I saw that nii-san who was with Nakamori Aoko-san as I was leaving, too! He said now that KID was gone, the fun was over!"

Haibara spreads a black blanket out over KID, covering the white of his suit, and then Haibara and Agasa are back in the front seat, leaving KID and Shinichi alone in the back. Agasa pulls out of the lot, driving slowly and carefully.

"Oh, you saw Kuroba-kun? How did you two get past the perimeter? It’s supposed to be closed!"

"I don’t know," Shinichi replies, hesitantly putting his clean hand into KID’s messy hair. It’s stiff and tacky under his fingers. A wig? He pulls at it, and it comes free, revealing KID’s natural, dark brown hair. That, sliding between his knuckles, is soft and silky, though damp. "We just walked out, and no one stopped us!"

Ran sighs wearily. "Stay safe on your walk home, Conan-kun. I’ll tell Nakamori-san that Kuroba-san already left, too, okay?"

"I’ll probably stay at the professor’s house tonight," he adds, before Ran can hang up. KID’s face turns, pressing into Shinichi’s belly, and since Shinichi can feel his every exhale, he immediately notices the unevenness of KID’s breathing. "So don’t worry about me!"

"All right," Ran says, and Shinichi’s stomach clenches when he hears Hondou’s voice over the phone, murmuring to Ran, right as she’s ending the call.
"Thanks," KID murmurs. "I’d planned on walking home with Aoko tonight."

Shinichii looks down at KID. He’s ghostly white underneath the lingering summer tan, but his lips are a sticky red with the blood in his mouth.

Wanting to touch KID, the way KID is always reaching out and touching him, Shinichi fingers the charm hanging from KID’s monocle. "Kuroba," he whispers, too low for Haibara or Agasa to overhear. "Clover."

"My dad liked puns," KID replies, just as quiet, as Shinichi allows the charm fall back, to slide from KID’s cheek into his hair. "Kaito, for example." His laugh is more of a gasping rasp. "Edogawa Conan should understand that, right?"

"I was in a hurry." Shinichi pushes up his glasses with the back of his bloody hand, smearing a bit across the glass. "You try turning ten years younger and having to come up with a plausible backstory within an hour."

"I’m a gifted liar," says KID. He swallows. "I could have spun out a whole story for myself and eleven other people."

KID’s head is heavy on his thighs. "Yet Inspector Nakamori from Division 3 is your best friend’s father, and you’re a magician named Kaito." Shinichi’s fingers skate across KID’s cheekbones up to his forehead. He’s feverish, skin slick with sweat. "Are you sure you really have a secret identity, KID?"

"Doesn’t that just prove my point?" KID clearly can’t even laugh. His nose brushes Shinichi’s stomach with the lightest of touches, and Shinichi presses his palm along the curve of KID’s neck, pinky and ring finger slipping under the collar of his shirt to slick, hot skin. His pulse is erratic and weak. "Think of the insurmountable odds I face on a daily basis."

"Stop gloating and be quiet." Shinichi hisses. "Haibara," he says, louder. "I think I know enough to keep this guy alive, but I’ll need some help."

"I’m not a surgeon, Edogawa-kun." He can hear the disdain in her voice. "You should have been clear with Professor Agasa on the phone that KID had gotten shot at his heist, and I would have told you that he needed to go immediately to the hospital."

"He can’t," Shinichi replies. "He’s Kaitou KID."

"We should change Kaitou KID-san’s clothes, stage a mugging, and then call the police."

"The same night KID held a heist where shots were fired?" Shinichi shakes his head. "I’m sure Sera-san and Inspector Nakamori saw that KID was shot, too."

"So what happens when an injured KID-san shows back up in his everyday life? You said to Ran that the ‘nii-san with Nakamori Aoko’ had left as well, from the party. I assume that’s Kaitou KID-san, and that Nakamori Aoko is Inspector Nakamori’s daughter. Today is Saturday. You’ll be found missing and the same conclusions will be reached. It’s better to get the best medical care possible, in that case, isn’t it?"

She says the entire thing in a flat, even tone, and Shinichi winces.

"But…"

"Either way, there’s enough plausible deniability. If the shooter hasn’t been caught yet, we can even
claim it was the same shooter. KID-san, in his real life persona, of course, attempted to tackle the man, believing him dangerous, and was rewarded with a grazing shot to his outer abdomen for his troubles."

"That sounds all well and good," Shinichi says, "and normally, it would be worth the risk that Inspector Nakamori or Sera would connect the dots."

"What’s the hold-up, then?" Haibara spins in her seat to look at them, her eyes immediately dropping to stare at Shinichi’s hand where it cups KID’s neck, monitoring his pulse. Her lips twitch.

"The shooter knows he only fired one shot. Anything makes it onto the news, about a second victim, the shooter will know not only that KID survived his shot, but his real life identity, and KID won’t be safe even if he gets guards at the hospital, and that shooter could tell other people, if he doesn’t work alone."

Haibara sighs. "And that shooter might not have been a part of the group of people leaving threatening messages at the previous two murders for KID-san, right?" Facing forward again in her seat, Haibara clicks her teeth. "I guess you’ve thought it through then. But I have another idea."

"You do?"

"Yes," Haibara says. "We drive out to Yokohama and put KID-san in the hospital there, using Kudou Shinichi’s medical card. You can stay with him, that way we won’t find out his identity, and the professor and I can burn all his things before the Detective Boys come over in the morning. How about it, Edogawa-kun?"

"Better than us trying to keep him alive," Shinichi agrees, after a few moments’ consideration. "Professor, step on it!"

"R-right!" Agasa says, and the car speeds up, turning down familiar roads and out to the main highway.

"Jii-san can pick us up in the morning," KID says, into the silence. "My assistant."

It’s a smarter plan than Shinichi’d had. "Haibara," he says.

"Hmmp?" She leans forward and turns on the radio. The news is Kaitou KID’s heist, of course. They don’t have a lot of information—Shinichi is only hearing that KID had successfully nabbed the gem, and that there had been a shot fired. Nothing about KID getting hit, or blood being found at the scene. Good. That buys them time, and hopefully no one in Yokohama will have heard a thing about it.

"Thanks."

Haibara laughs. "I’m here to keep foolish detectives from making bad decisions. I think I’ve finally found my calling, Edogawa-kun. I was only fooling around in the lab when you called. This is more entertaining."

"Yeah, yeah," Shinichi replies, reminding himself to check up on Haibara’s progress in the lab later, and KID’s lips curve in a tiny amused smile.

KID’s pulse is getting weaker, but it’s not shallow enough yet that Shinichi thinks he’s bleeding out. "KID, can you tell Jii-san to dress as the professor? Is he good enough at disguise for that?"

"Not really," KID says. "That’s not where his talents lie." He pushes the blanket down, now that
"They're racing down the highway."

"Don't do that," Shinichi says. "You're feverish, and wearing all white." Still, he starts to undo KID’s tie and pulls it free from KID’s neck, dropping it to the ground along with his hat. Then he undoes KID’s shirt collar. "Hmm, then we need some other way for your assistant to have the authority to sign Kudou Shinichi’s discharge papers, since it’s the professor who has temporary jurisdiction over his medical affairs."

"I do?" Agasa sounds dumbfounded, and Haibara snorts.

"It’s a good thing Kudou Shinichi is capable of making his own medical decisions, most of the time, isn’t it?" Haibara’s sounds bored. "Well, perhaps Fujimine Yukiko could call and vouch for her long-term personal assistant to sign her son out, since the professor can’t stay."

"That might work," Shinichi replies. "She’s in Los Angeles right now, so if I call her around 4AM, it won’t be too late in the evening. Then, hopefully, KID and I can get him home before too many people are awake."

"I can’t… go home," KID says. "Not tomorrow, anyway."

"Because of Nakamori Aoko, right?" Haibara types something into her phone, and suddenly it’s spitting out directions to a hospital in Yokohama. "Nothing to be done. You’ll have to stay at the Kudou mansion, after all."

Shinichi takes KID’s monocle from his face, carefully, and slips it into his inside breast pocket. "I’ll take care of it," he vows, when KID’s feverish eyes look up at him. He’s definitely going into shock; his eyes are dilated. "Promise."

"There’s a knife in my left pocket," KID says. "You’re going to have cut my jacket off. The safest place to do that would be up the outsides of the arms. Anywhere else, you might find surprises."

Surprises. Of course. He’s probably armed with a million of those flash bombs.

"Okay," Shinichi says, lifting the blanket just enough to locate KID’s left trouser pocket, and taking the hand keeping watch over KID’s pulse to slip in, alongside lean thigh, to find a Swiss Army knife. "Wire cutters, too?" he asks, amused, and KID’s brow furrows.

"Regular nets wouldn’t have cut it," KID replies. "For the flowers, I mean. They tangle too easily."

"Makes sense," Shinichi says. "I think I figured out the entire trick, by the way."

"Don’t you think my day has been bad enough, Meitantei?" KID closes his eyes again as Shinichi starts to cut him out of his jacket. "Were you impressed, at least?"

"Maybe a little," Shinichi says, closing his eyes against his own dizziness. Then he raises his voice. "Professor, do you have any of my Kudou Shinichi clothes in the trunk?"

"I have a jeans and a t-shirt," the professor says. "And a pair of sneakers. For emergencies."

"I’m going to need those jeans and sneakers," Shinichi says. "KID cannot go into the ER with anything from this outfit besides the shirt."

"Will it be safe to burn that jacket, or should I lock it up in the lab?"

"It won’t burn," KID replies, strained. "It’s fire-resistant, and there’s metal in the back of it, that
extends and connects to the cape. Which, by the way, is silk and suede on the outside, but inside it’s parachute fabric."

"So that’s how your glider works," Shinichi says.

KID coughs again, lips chalky with sunbursts of blood at the corners. "That’s been the great mystery about me, Meitantei?"

Shinichi smoothes back his hair. "One of a few that linger. Maybe you’ve become boring."

"Never," KID says, as Shinichi starts cutting away at his pants. "Never that."

It takes them forty-five minutes to arrive at the hospital Haibara had selected. KID, wearing Shinichi’s jeans and his own blue shirt, unbuttoned with the sleeves rolled up, is helped by two EMTs onto a gurney, headed for immediate surgery, within two minutes of walking in, as Shinichi, in his most childlike voice, spins out a pretty pathetic lie about how they’d been mugged, as a frantic nurse tells him how he’s such a brave little boy, and that his nii-san will be fine. He has KID’s transmitter in his pocket, and when KID is wheeled into surgery, he taps a message KID’s assistant out in Morse code, telling him where to come to get them.

Then he can only wait. Left alone with his thoughts, the adrenaline that’s kept him running until now starts to fade, and he’s forced to come face to face with his own actions tonight. It wouldn’t be fair to say he regrets them. He doesn’t. It was the right thing to do, to protect KID like this, to keep him from harm at the hands of unscrupulous assassins and police alike, especially when KID getting arrested right now would just drop him into the hands of whoever is pursuing him with murderous intent.

It’s more that Shinichi hadn’t expected to want… to need to help KID so much. There were undoubtedly still clues at the scene, and with Sera there, no one would have tried to stop Shinichi from scouting for them. He wouldn’t have been able to catch the shooter, not with his body so frail that extended running was likely to leave him passed out, but he would have been useful. Shinichi is always useful, when a crime has taken place.

If he’d weighed that usefulness against helping KID, and rightfully found KID heavier on the scale, that would be different. What had actually happened, in the moment, though, is that Shinichi had wanted to go after KID enough that he’d followed the tug of his heart before he’d run through the rationalizations with his mind.

Haibara calls him, interrupting his vigil, around two in the morning.

"We got home all right," she says. "We burned the blanket, but we locked all of KID’s clothes and the Concubine’s Heart up in an opaque plastic bag and put it in the safe in the lab. No one should find it before he is able to take it away himself."

"Perfect," Shinichi says, sitting in a blue plastic chair that’s far too large, hyperextending his knees so that he can lean against the back. He feels especially small in the bustle of this hospital, unfamiliar and busy even at this hour, and he can feel the curious stares of doctors and patients alike as he keeps an eye on the entrance. "We’ll hopefully be back in Beika by six if everything goes according to plan." He sighs out in a tired whisper: "Hey, Haibara, how is it going in the lab? Any more useful information?"

"Nothing we should talk about over the phone," Haibara replies promptly. "I may have a couple of things for you, but nothing I feel comfortable feeding you like you’re a lab rat. I’m not going to play roulette with this, no matter how willing you are to trust me."
"Right, of course."

She clicks her teeth. "Try not to get into too much trouble, Kudou. I doubt we were followed, but just in case."

"I know, I know," he says, and hangs up, worried about his cell phone battery. To kill time, he mentally runs through his current open cases, making a map of it all in his head. There are so many facts he doesn’t have yet, and he hopes there don’t have to be more bodies for him to gather them.

He takes out his Shinichi phone, then, and sees two missed calls from Ran. It would be an ideal time to call her back. He’s alone, no one to interrupt, and yet... He thinks about her smile, as she picked tiny pebbles from Hondou’s suit, and he doesn’t feel like a big enough person to call her, in more ways than one.

When an older man in his sixties walks in, with gray hair just past his chin and a matching mustache, Shinichi waves, gaining his attention. "Jii-san, Jii-san, over here!" The man, Jii, has tired looking eyes, and his jaw is tense with stress. As soon as he sits down in the seat next to Shinichi, dropping a tote bag at his feet, Shinichi drops his childlike voice to a low whisper. "KID is going be fine. After this, you’re going to drive us both back to Kudou Shinichi’s house. He can stay there all of Sunday and start recuperating. I think he’s worried about Nakamori Aoko barging in on him?"

Jii starts, perhaps at how adult Shinichi sounds, and he nods when the explanation is finished. "That makes sense. Surprisingly forward thinking," he mumbles, and Shinichi laughs.

"It was a team effort," he replies. "He’s checked in under the name Kudou Shinichi, by the way, and he’s using Kudou Shinichi’s medical card, so you’re here as one of Fujimine Yukiko’s personal assistants, and Kudou is working on a top secret case for the police, so everyone is going to have to sign confidentiality agreements. And all of his, err, things, are back in Beika, in a locked safe."

"Thorough," Jii agrees. "I remember Fujimine Yukiko. Young Master’s father was very fond of her, when she studied under him."

Shinichi, at the new information, blinks. "So the original KID had a rivalry with Kudou Yuusaku and taught Fujimine Yukiko?"

"That’s right," Jii-san says. "It’s—"

"Excuse me, are you here with that gunshot wound patient?" The nurse, a kind looking woman in her late thirties, looks left and right, then whispers, "Kudou Shinichi?"

"Yes," Shinichi replies, and thinks, belatedly, that now he’ll finally have a gunshot wound to the stomach listed in his medical history, to match his scar.

"That’s us," Jii confirms. "Is he all right?"

"Just fine," she says. "The bullet completely missed the abdominal cavity. It went in at an odd angle, and stuck in the muscle, so we did have to do invasive surgery, but it looked a lot messier than it was. After sewing him up, we had to give him a blood transfusion. Did you know his blood type was listed incorrectly on record? He’s B, not A; that could have been terrible. He’s awake, already—the anesthesia should have kept him down longer, but it took a much higher dosage to even knock him out." Shinichi hides a smirk. Of course KID has worked up an immunity to that sort of stuff. He probably plays around with it for fun just to make sure it works correctly. "He’ll be up and around again before you know it. Lucky guy. A few centimeters further in and there would have been real trouble."
"Can we see him?" Jii asks.

"Now the police are taking his statement about what man who mugged him looked like, and then you'll be free to visit him."

"Actually," Jii says smoothly, "We’ll need discharge papers for him. His mother insists on her personal physician seeing to him." He puts his hand up, like he’s telling her a secret. "It will be hard for her to visit a public place, you understand."

The nurses eyes go wide. "Oh, yes, I’ll get those immediately, along with the procedure printouts. You can go wait up by his room on the sixth floor."

After the police corner Shinichi, too, to take a statement ("I was so scared, Officer, I didn’t see a thing!"), they’re let in to see KID, who doesn’t look nearly as pale anymore, even if the dark circles under his eyes are just as deep.

"I didn’t think I could get visitors this late," he says.

"Exceptions are made when you're being checked out before dawn." Jii holds out the tote bag he’d brought with him. "A change of clothes."

"What time is it?" KID asks, slowly plucking at his hospital gown. The shaking of his hand reveals that he’s probably still in shock, and that plus the anesthesia has probably left him half in the moment and half out of it. "By the way, Meitantei, I was too dizzy to tell you earlier, but don’t think I didn’t notice that you cut my pants off me." His eyes don’t focus completely.

"Maybe I should have let you bleed to death," Shinichi replies, and KID laughs, weak but not dangerously weak, so Shinichi smiles. "It’s almost four in the morning. You need to change quickly. Time is of the essence."

"It always is," he says, taking the tote bag from Jii’s fingers. "Thank you. I’ll be ready to go in a few minutes."

It’s only twenty minutes before they’re on the road again. Jii drives a 1965 Vanden Plas Princess, with comfortable back seats and the original upholstery. He’s thrilled when, as he’s driving, Shinichi grills him about the engine and the replacement glass in the dashboard elements.

As they merge onto the highway, though, Shinichi slumps back into the comfortable seat next to the washed out, curled up KID, who immediately leans into him, pressing his cheek to Shinichi’s hair like he had earlier in the garden.

"You like cars, Meitantei?" His voice is slurred and hazy. Still doped, then. Shinichi had read online, while they were finishing up with KID’s discharge papers, that superficial gunshot wounds like KID’s could keep someone off their feet for three days. They don’t have three days. KID has to be back on his feet in a little over 24 hours, and ready to perform.

"Classic cars," Shinichi replies, pushing that aside. "So does my mom. She drives a Series 2 Jaguar E-Type. She paid an exorbitant amount to buy it from a German collector and fully restore it— It was made in 1968, but it still runs like new, thanks to the full restoration she had done as a personal favor— That’s probably too much information."

"I… don’t know anything about cars," KID admits. "I know some about motorcycles, but not cars. You can teach me sometime."

"Oh, that’s right, you know how to drive motorcycles." Shinichi plucks at the loose hem of KID’s
flannel shirt. It’s soft, soft like KID’s hair. "What else can you drive?"

"Anything, really," KID replies. "Better safe than sorry." He sighs, and Shinichi can feel his hair move with it. "I’m only screwed if I fall into the ocean."

"You can’t swim?" Shinichi’s hands continue up to the lowest button of KID’s shirt, his nail catching on the edge of it and leaving blood, KID’s blood, behind. He’d washed his hands, but he hadn’t had a change of clothes. He’s still wearing just what he wore to Suzuki’s party. There are flecks of blood on his dress shirt, too. He’ll have to get rid of it before he sees Ran again, along with his jacket, with its bloodstained sleeves. "Unexpected."

"I can," KID says, "but there are… things I don’t like in the ocean." His arm is warm, flush against Shinichi’s side.

"So all we’d have to do to protect a jewel is drop it into the bottom of the ocean around some giant squid?" He laughs. "Kaitou KID, defeated at last!"

The sound of the car moving down the road fills the silence, and then KID sighs audibly.

"Hey, Meitantei," he murmurs, "you saved me."

"You’ve saved me before, too." Shinichi clutches the flannel of KID’s shirt closer. "It’s only fair I return the favor."

"It’s funny," KID’s every word is hot on his scalp. "When you first told me you’d protect me, I thought it was weird how relieved I felt." A pause, and his hand comes up to cover Shinichi’s. It’s an odd touch, that doesn’t serve any purpose, that Shinichi can see. KID isn’t holding his hand, or anything like that. He’s just… there. "I’ll protect you, too. That way we both have someone watching our backs from the faceless people in the dark."

KID smells like the hospital, like antiseptic and cleaner and borrowed soap, and yet, somehow, it’s still comforting, to have him there, wrapped around Shinichi like this. A cloak on a windy roof.

Subaru is in the kitchen reading something on his laptop when Jii drops them off at the Kudou residence a little past five. He raises both eyebrows at Shinichi as he walks in with KID, but KID just looks like a regular guy, albeit a sickly one, so when Shinichi says "we had a bit of an emergency," Subaru doesn’t bat an eyelash.

"Isn’t it a bit late for an eight year old to be awake?"

"It was an emergency," Shinichi repeats, and he moves further into the shadows, hoping Subaru can’t see the blood on him.

"Is that why Haibara-chan was here earlier? She dusted Kudou-kun's room, by the way."

He seems innocuously curious, but Shinichi is well-aware that he’s asking, in a roundabout way, for Shinichi’s status. He won’t ask questions he doesn’t need to ask, in front of others, just in case. It works out well for the pair of them, both with secrets to hide.

"Thank you for letting me know, Subaru-san!" Shinichi laughs anxiously, edging back. "I’d mentioned we might sleep over here because Shinichi-nii-san needed me to find some things in the library."
"It’s no problem," Subaru replies. "He clearly gave you the access codes, and it’s his house, not mine." He smiles, glasses glinting. "I’ll be out of the house all day tomorrow anyway, working on a project at school, so don’t mind me." He waves them off, returning to his laptop.

The clear dismissal lets Shinichi return his attention to KID, who looks seconds from collapsing.

"Don’t pass out until we get upstairs," he tells him, and KID nods, following Shinichi over to the stairs, gripping the rail with a white-knuckled hand as he forces himself up. "That’s Okiya Subaru," he adds quietly, once they’re up the stairs. "He’s ostensibly an engineering post-grad whose apartment was burned down in a case a while back." Shinichi bites his lip. "There’s more to him than he says, and… well, I know what, but it’s better if you don’t. He’s hiding out here the same as you are, so there’s no need to be concerned about him, even if he does ascertain your identity. Which he probably will, fair warning. He won’t say anything, regardless. It’s how we operate."

"Is your life a series of tacit agreements?" KID asks, in a wobbling, worryingly faint voice, and Shinichi grins up at him even as he reaches to steady him.

"They’re not always tacit."

His bedroom has, indeed, been dusted, and there are fresh sheets on the bed. Shinichi plugs in both of his phones, the same models, to the spare chargers he keeps here, earning a curious look from KID, and then pulls back the covers. "Lie down," he demands, and KID sighs with relief, favoring his side as he eases into the bed, not bothering with his clothes. "I’m going to take a shower, then I’ll be right back."

When Shinichi returns, washed clean of blood and sweat and near exhaustion collapse himself, it’s to KID, completely asleep, stretched out on the bed with his shirt riding up to reveal clean white bandages bleeding through lightly in a few spots. His face is lax, and his eyelashes flutter as he breathes. He looks young. Not as young as Shinichi does, like this, but there’s a sweetness to his face that Shinichi has never had.

Dressed in a pair of his childhood pajamas, from when he was ten instead of eight, Shinichi retrieves KID’s monocle from his messy blazer before he pushes his bloodstained clothes into the back of the closet. Then he climbs up into the bed, next to KID, close enough to feel his body heat but not close enough to touch, and holds the monocle up in front of his face with both hands.

"Kuroba Kaito," he says, into the dark, quiet room, testing the name on his tongue, and the only response is KID’s even breathing. ‘Kaito’ doesn’t fit those certain movements and sure touches and sharp grins, not like ‘KID’ does. Shinichi opens the drawer and puts the monocle away until tomorrow, along with his tracker glasses, then pulls up the covers and closes his eyes against dawn’s encroaching light.

*
To Kill a Snake

Part III: To Kill a Snake, Cut Off Its Head

The shrill ring of his Conan ringtone drags him out of the comforting fog of sleep. He’s unfathomably warm, and the bed beneath him is so soft: two things Shinichi never expects at this time of year, when he’s waking up on his futon with freezing toes at the Mouri Detective Agency. And there’s a hand running up and down his back, slowly, palm firm against his spine, and that’s the most unexpected thing of all.

Cracking his eyes open partway, Shinichi finds KID staring at him, forehead full of worry-wrinkles as he continues to stroke Shinichi’s back. “You had a nightmare,” he says, voice hoarse and sleep-rough, and Shinichi shivers at the melt of KID’s tone that seems to follow his hand down Shinichi’s backbone. “You were gasping like you couldn’t breathe, and you’ve had a fever for the past hour.”

Shinichi’s phone goes silent, but his thoughts remain loud. A nightmare? He closes his eyes again, because KID’s gaze on him is too intense, looking at Shinichi like he’s aiming to turn him inside out. Behind his eyelids, it comes rushing back. Shinichi had been inside that coin locker, at Kenbashi station, with Gin and Vodka’s voices getting louder and louder. Lightheaded, afraid, not enough air —

“Meitantei?”

“I always have a fever when I wake up, and it wasn’t a nightmare,” he says, and his own voice crackles. “It was a memory.”

“A memory of not being able to breathe?” KID’s hand stills between his shoulder blades. “I can feel your heart beating too fast.” He audibly swallows. “It’s not normal to have a fever when you wake up every day.”

“The man that did this to me…” He doesn’t have to elaborate on what he means by that, since even with his eyes closed, he can sense KID sharply examining his childlike frame. “He almost caught me, once. More than once. He doesn’t know that I’m like this. He thinks Kudou Shinichi is dead.”

Tasting the cotton of exhaustion in his mouth, Shinichi licks his teeth. “I tried to trick his partner into taking a tracer, and he found it. I hid inside a coin-locker at the station as he paced down each row with his gun in hand. There wasn’t enough oxygen, and I was breathing too fast; using it up too quickly. He started opening the lockers one by one, and when he started to open the one I was in, he said ”What am I thinking? An adult can’t hide like this.” Then he and his partner left, and I passed out, I think, because when I woke up it was mid-morning.”

KID hums, his thumb rubbing at a knot at the base of Shinichi’s neck. It hurts, but it helps, releasing the tension in his muscles. His head is fuzzy. He hasn’t gotten enough sleep.

“Maybe it was a nightmare, actually,” Shinichi mumbles, after a short silence. “Because I kept imagining Gin opening the door and seeing me, recognizing me.”

He opens his eyes completely, to look at KID. His brow is still furrowed, and Shinichi lazily reaches up to press fingers against the wrinkles and smooth them out.

“I can’t breathe pretty often, lately, and I think it brings back that memory. When combined with the fact that I know one of Them was passed a photo of Edogawa Conan by an unknown woman
recently... It might be real, the next time I see Gin’s face while he holds a gun to my head.” His throat aches, and the nausea is overwhelming.

KID opens his mouth to speak, but Edogawa Conan’s cell phone starts ringing again, insistent.

“That’s the third time,” KID says, instead of whatever else had been on the tip of his tongue. “Someone must really need to reach you.” His hand withdraws, and like a gust of wind, Shinichi suddenly realizes how cold the room is, without KID sharing heat.

Sitting up, he crawls over to the edge of the bed and jumps down to the floor, shivering as the cold seeps immediately up into the soles of his feet. He steadies himself with his fingertips against the edge of the bedside table, and stifles the urge to run to the bathroom and empty out the non-existent contents of his stomach. Not now, not in front of KID. Not in front of anyone.

Falling to his knees by the surge bar, he yanks his phone free of the charger. He squints at the caller ID. “Oi, oi, Hattori, what do you want?” He runs a hand through his hair.

“Why didn’t you answer before!” Heiji yells.

Shinichi holds the phone away from his ear and winces. “I had sort of a late night.”

“Kudou, are you near a television?” Heiji’s voice is urgent, and Shinichi’s irritation fades.

“I can be.”

“Turn it on to the national news.”

As KID carefully sits up, clutching his bandages and panting as he grits his teeth, Shinichi turns on the small television opposite the bed, flipping through to channel 4, where NNN is broadcasting a breaking story.

*Murder in front of the police station!* the subtitle reads.

“Hattori, when was this first reported?”

“They first started running the story around seven,” Heiji replies. “I got up early to practice kendo with my mom, but it turns out this business was more interesting.”

“The decapitated head was found in front of the police station at the 5AM shift change by a group of several young officers, along with a note that said ‘taking out the trash’, the reporter says. “Police are still looking for the man’s body, and welcome any leads coming in through the tip-line about the whereabouts of the body, the killer, or the man’s identity.”

She rambles off a number, and then her face is replaced with a sketch that has both Shinichi and KID gasping aloud.

“Hey, KID,” Shinichi says, hushed, covering the mouthpiece of the phone, as the news continues to show the sketch while the reporter’s voice details the crime, “that’s the guy that shot you last night.”

“That’s Snake,” KID says, choked, his eyes riveted to the screen. “He... Killed my father. That’s the man from the syndicate who’s been searching for Pandora.”

“Kudou!” Heiji says. “Who’s with you right now?”

“Ah, no one you know,” Shinichi says, removing his hand from the receiver. “Has there been anything else?”
“I called Pops to find out if there was anything else, ‘cause for some reason, a death this gruesome seemed to have your buddies in black written all over it.” Heiji snorts. “He told me to fuck off of Tokyo cases, but I did manage to get Otaki-han to tell me that the decapitated guy’s also been confirmed as the suspect in that murder you were at the police station for yesterday. That Ueda guy, the weapons dealer.”

“Thank you, Hattori. That’s really valuable information. But I have to go.”

“You trying to hang up on your best bud got anything to do why you’re with someone whose voice I don’t recognize? Don’t put me off, Kudou; you’re up to something, aren’t you?”

Shinichi rolls his eyes with exasperation, feeling the beginnings of a headache. “Hey, Hattori, I’ll call you back later, all right? I’m going to head down to the police station and see what I can find out.”

“Kudou!”

Unrepentantly cutting Heiji off, Shinichi tosses his phone down on the floor and looks up at KID. KID is still staring at the television, as pale as a ghost. “He’s… Snake is dead?”

“Decapitated and left like a trophy, no less.” Shinichi crosses his legs and rests his chin on his folded hands, elbows digging into his thighs. “The question I have is, why was he killed, and by whom?”

KID’s gaze clears, and Shinichi watches the cunning flood back into his bright eyes. “I’m wondering, too. It’s not the first time he’s failed to kill me. Was this the straw that broke the camel’s back?”

“He’s also the man that stabbed that convict as he was being escorted back to the prison, right in the police headquarters lobby,” Shinichi says. “Ueda Junichiro. I never told you, but that man, the one who was killed… he was brought out of prison for questioning because he perfectly matched the sketch of Louis Redhouse that Kanami-san worked up with the police sketch artist. He can’t have committed the crime: he was in prison. Still, Detective Takagi thought he might have a brother, or something like that, considering he was adopted. It was a long-shot, but even I was taken aback when I saw the resemblance to Louis Maisonrouge.”

He blows his bangs out of his face, narrowing his eyes and looking at the blank wall just beyond KID, his brain painting it with theories and ideas. ‘But his body-type was wrong. The refined features didn’t match the general largeness of his frame. When I looked at the body, I found plastic surgery scars. Extensive work was done on Ueda-san, to make him look like Louis Maisonrouge. And…’

Shinichi stands, walking over to his closet and pulling out a soccer ball to help him think. He starts juggling it with his foot as KID leans back against the bedframe and closes his eyes. “And?”

“And Ueda knew about the Black Organization. Worked for them. Worked for Rum. He probably had to be killed in order to ensure his silence.”

“But Snake was too careless,” KID says, following Shinichi’s train of thought immediately.

“Yes.” Shinichi catches the ball with his hands. “He was seen at the police station, and then again at your heist, and with the combination of the blurry security footage and Sera-san’s physical description…”

“Two previously unconnected things become connected. Snake became a liability.”

“Like Pisco,” Shinichi says. “Gin shot him when he was caught killing Nomiguchi Shigehiko at the
Haido City Hotel by the police.” He bounces the ball off his knee, rocketing it back into the air. “Although, in Snake’s case, it might have been that he was on thin ice before this, and they needed a human sacrifice to take the fall for the necessary elimination of a leak. In that case, the aggressive shooting at your heist instead of a demand for the jewel you’d stolen might have been a last ditch effort at revenge.”

“Why do bad guys always think they’re entitled to revenge when they’re thwarted by their targets?” KID asks in a dragging whine, and then he shakes his head, messy locks falling across his forehead and into his eyes. “There’s something else that’s worrying me about this, too.”

“What?” The ball goes over Shinichi’s shoulder, behind him, and he uses his heel to keep it in the air as KID traces, absently, along the line of his bandages.

“How did they know that prisoner would be moved to and from the prison, and when, unless there’s someone among the police force or the prison guards that’s feeding information?”

Shinichi misses the ball, and it thuds to the floor in front of him. “That was my concern as well. I brought it up with Detective Satou already, and I’m sure everyone is on high alert.”

“From personal experience, I know it’s impossible to place bugs in police stations, thanks to the routine scans for that kind of thing. I have to bug my officers individually each and every time if I want information from them that way, and they always find them when they return to the station to make their reports. And you didn’t know before you got to the station, right?”

“No,” Shinichi replies. “I didn’t. I think it was all very hush, hush.”

“The way I see it is, you’ve got a leak somewhere, and until it’s plugged…”

“I wasn’t planning on involving the police with the Black Organization anyway,” Shinichi says, letting the ball roll away. “It’s too dangerous. I don’t want any of them to get killed.”

“Too dangerous for them, but not for you?” KID smirks. “My, my, little detective, how hypocritical.”

“You sound like Haibara,” Shinichi mumbles, and then he belly flops onto the bed next to KID, pushing his face into a pillow, and screams, the sound muffled by feathers and cotton.

“She’s not a normal little girl, either.”

“I’m not at liberty to say,” Shinichi replies, face still mashed into the pillow.

“That’s response enough, really.” KID sighs. “So what we’ve got is that Snake, the man who killed my father, is responsible for the death of a man who looked exactly like the suspect in the murder of Scarlette Shinamoto, and possibly Takizawa Morisuke. Both Shinamoto and Takizawa had special gems that were stolen, and both were found with items or markings meant to call me out. And…”

“And Ueda was connected to the Black Organization, while Snake was connected to the syndicate that’s been chasing Kaitou KID for more than ten years.” Shinichi turns his head to look up at KID through his eyelashes. “I don’t think we can ignore the obvious connection.”

There’s also, Shinichi thinks, the real fear that the crows might know who he is now, what he looks like, but that hangs heavy in the air between them unmentioned. KID knows what it is to fear being unmasked.

“You’re right,” KID says. “We can’t.”
“There’s some tie-in between the people after you and the people after me. Whether or not they’re actually both the Black Org… well, we’ll have to figure that out.” Shinichi pulls his knees up to his chest, resting his forehead against them. His insides are rioting, and he should probably take one of Haibara’s little blue pills. Those, though, are still in his backpack at the Mouri Agency, and he’ll have to just ride it out.

KID’s loud exhale has him looking up again. “So our only leads, right now, are Claude Arbogast and the still unaccounted for criminal with Louis Maisonrouge’s face.”

“It’s not much, but we should endeavor to go and find Mr. Arbogast, or whoever is running his P.O. box, and find out if these transactions between him and Takizawa are connected to Shinamoto and Takizawa’s frequent meetings, especially since I suspect their jewels are involved.”

“Are you saying we should go to France, little detective?”

“If we have to,” Shinichi answers. “See, I knew I kept you alive and out of prison for some reason.”

“To speak French,” KID says, softly. “I remember.” He closes his eyes, then, and rubs at his face, sinking into himself with exhaustion. “I thought I would feel better, for some reason.”

“About what?” Shinichi asks, allowing the change of topic. He needs to get up and change clothes, and then head down to the police station and investigate where the head was found. “You’ve just been shot. I think the fact that you’re moving around at all is—” He stops when he notices the suddenly lost expression on KID’s face. He reaches out and tugs at a plaid sleeve. “KID?”

“Snake being gone. Of course, I always imagined him in prison, but… either way, now he’s gone. I don’t feel better. I thought I would.”

“It’s because justice is important, but it doesn’t make the dead come back,” Shinichi replies. “At the end of the day, they’re still dead.”

“Yeah,” KID says, opening his eyes to stare up at the ceiling. “I guess you’re right.” He tangles his hand with Shinichi’s, though, his long calloused fingers thick between the narrow spaces between Shinichi’s much smaller ones. “So, Meitantei, let’s catch this murderer and destroy your syndicate before too many more people go somewhere they can’t return from.”

“Idiot,” Shinichi says, watching the twitching corner of KID’s mouth, juxtaposed with the sadness in his extraordinarily blue eyes, alive and bright and burning. “That’s been the plan the whole time.”

*  

Shinichi leaves KID asleep in his childhood bedroom—his childhood bedroom the first time around, at least, and heads over to the professor’s. It’s only nine, and Ran won’t be expecting him home for a couple of hours yet. Longer if he calls and tells her he’ll be out with friends, even though she’ll be fussy about it, since he’s been unable to completely hide his illness from her. She holds on to him like she’s afraid that if he’s out of sight too long, he’ll disappear. She’s probably right, to worry like that.

“You look terrible, Kudou-kun,” Haibara says, as he hangs his jacket at the door.

“Charming as usual, I see.”

“Did you get KID ensconced at your place safely?”

“I did,” he says. “Did you see the news this morning?”
“I did,” replies Haibara. “I suppose you know something that wasn’t broadcasted?”

“That guy—he’s the one that killed the inmate.” Shinichi rubs at the back of his neck, and for some reason, thinks about the way KID’s dexterous fingers had been massaging the same spot, and barely keeps himself from blushing at the memory of that touch.

Haibara’s gaze sharpens. “Oh?” She rubs thoughtfully at her chin. “So he was one of the crows, then. Did they kill him to keep him from saying anything else?”

“That man is also the person who killed the original Kaitou KID, ten years ago, while searching for a doublet jewel called Pandora.”

“So KID…”

“He steals because he’s been trying to find Pandora before Snake. Only now, we’re pretty sure Snake is somehow involved with Them.”

“Meaning that KID is an ally, not an adversary?” Haibara crosses her arms. “We already tentatively knew that, didn’t we? Or at least that he’s reliable when he wants to be, when it comes to you.” She tosses her hair. “Well, I wondered why we were suddenly harboring him injured from the police, but now I see that it was because his identity getting out really could spell his death.”

“Precisely.” Shinichi ruffles his hair. “I feel like we’re so close to having a lead, and I can’t let it slide and keep my head down again, Haibara. Not when that guy will get himself killed if I do.” He meets her eyes firmly. “We’re going to stop this killer, and bring as many members of the syndicate down as we can.”

Haibara stares him down, her face a mask, unmoving and unreadable. “The best way to kill a snake,” she says, “is to cut off its head. If this all leads you to Rum, that’s only one step away from That Person.” She looks away, staring at the professor, who is asleep in front of his computer, his bottled soda knocked to the floor. “It would be nice, to wake up unafraid of what the day might bring.”

“I just don’t want it to be for nothing, when I…” Shinichi stops when Haibara flinches. “I want to get Them.”

“Rome wasn’t built in a day, Kudou-kun.” She smiles, brittle. “And expansive evil syndicates aren’t destroyed in a day, either.”

“I know,” Shinichi says. “But I won’t let this lead get away. Not again.”

“Well, I’ve made a file of all the data I’ve collected on that jeweler you asked me to look up. He’s known as the one to call in when it comes to extremely rare items. A lot of this information is meaningless to me, though.”

“Maybe I’ll be able to find a connection to Pandora,” Shinichi says, following Haibara to the professor’s computer, and watching her produce a key from her pocket to unlock the drawer.

Inside are three smart-cards. “Stick this in your laptop like you’re downloading pictures from your digital camera memory card.”

Shinichi bends down and stuffs it into the ankle of his sock. “Got it.”

“So are you returning home to your pet invalid, now?”

“No,” Shinichi replies. “I’m going to head down to the police station and see what I can find at the
“They’ve probably moved the head already, since it’s a public disturbance.”

“Might find something else, like some clue to who decapitated him.”

“They don’t leave a trace,” Haibara warns him. “Besides, they might be watching, and you look like you’re going to pass out any second. Don’t be stupid.”

“I won’t stay long,” he replies. “I have to get back to the house, anyway, so I can look through these files you gave me. I’ll use my old laptop, and I won’t connect it to the internet before I wipe it, don’t worry.”

“I feel like a mother bird watching her Luddite chick child leave the nest. Maybe you’ll stop leaving messy digital trails yet, Kudou Shinichi.”

“I can’t be good at everything,” Shinichi replies. “I’m actually a fairly decent hacker, you know? Certainly not a Luddite.”

“You’re arrogant about things like that. You never assume that the observations you easily make can also be made just as easily by someone else. That’s why you leave tracking devices where they can be found, and access things on traceable computers. It’s not ignorant, it’s arrogant.” Haibara slams the drawer closed, locking it again. “You’re learning, though.”

“Arrogance has gotten me killed, now.” He spins, waving a jaunty goodbye over his shoulder. “I just came over to talk, since the kids are coming over this afternoon. I’ll be back for KID’s clothes later.”

“Meitantei?” Shinichi turns back, and Haibara tosses something to him. He catches it in his left hand, and when he opens his fingers, he finds a little blue pill. “Take it, and don’t run yourself down so much, or I’ll tell Ran-san.”

“You can’t,” Shinichi replies. “You can’t tell Ran. I haven’t even told my parents, yet.”

“Were you planning to keep it a secret forever? From your parents, and the professor, and Hattori, too?” She stares at him as he pushes the pill between his lips. It leaves a bitter aftertaste as he dry-swallows. “Which is worse, Kudou? That they know in advance or that one day, I might have to call and tell them you’re dead?”

“I thought you weren’t going to let me die?” Shinichi says lightly, as he pulls on his jacket and pushes his feet back into his shoes.

“Kudou…”

“Besides,” he says, facing the door, “if I tell them, it’ll be real, won’t it?”

“You’ve never been one to hide away from the truth,” replies Haibara. “Don’t start now.”

“I’ll let you know if I find anything,” Shinichi says, eyes firmly focused on the front door.

“Likewise,” Haibara replies, sotto voce, as Shinichi walks away from her.

*  

He takes the train to Chiyoda City, getting off at the Imperial Palace stop and walking toward the police station. There’s still something of a crowd gathered, and he thinks he catches sight of Detective Chiba fending them off. Using his small height to weave through the gathered people, he
makes it all the way to Shiratori without getting caught up in the swell.

“Why are there still so many people here?” Shinichi asks, and Shiratori jumps, before suavely smoothing his hair and then straightening his jacket.

“Oh, Conan-kun, you surprised me.” He looks down at Shinichi. “There was a murder here today. I’m sure you saw it on the news.”

“That was hours ago, though,” replies Shinichi. “Shouldn’t it have calmed down already?”

“Probably. Except we found his body a few blocks from here, and now the rubbernecking is beginning anew.”

“Was there anything interesting about the body?”

Shiratori makes a thoughtful noise in the back of his throat. “Well, there was a shotgun, a cigar case, and a couple of photos in the man’s jacket pocket. His actual body... It’s with forensics, but initial sweeps for outside DNA or anything of that nature came up empty.”

“Photos?” Shinichi blinks up innocently at Shiratori, who crosses his arm as he rests against the window, surveying Chiba’s clumsy shooing off of spectators.

“Yes.” Shiratori nods. “Two. One photo was of a man named Kuroba Toichi—facial recognition turned him up as dead, though, and over ten years ago at that.” Shinichi sucks his lower lip into his mouth. Snake hadn’t known KID was Kuroba Toichi’s son. He’d just thought the man had abandoned his identity. That might be, Shinichi thinks, the only thing keeping KID safe in his daily life; the belief that normal people could act like the Organization, throwing away the people they love. “The second photo was of some foreign man we haven’t been able to place with foreign registration cards or the like.” Shiratori pulls his phone out of his pocket, inputting his password and shifting through photos. “This man.” He hands Shinichi the phone.

The man isn’t familiar, but Shinichi immediately recognizes the Tube station in the background. He quickly texts himself the image then deletes it from Shiratori’s sent message history, before catching his attention. “Ah-re-re? Inspector Shiratori, isn’t this London?”

“What?” Shiratori bends down, and Shinichi points behind the man in the photo, who seems to be smiling easily for the camera. “Do you recognize it?”

“This Tube station, it says Knightsbridge! That’s near Hyde Park! Professor Agasa and I went walking there, when we were in London!”

“Oh?” Shiratori smoothes his hair again. “Why would he have pictures of these two men in his pocket? Especially if one of them is dead.”

“Maybe they’re both dead,” Shinichi replies. “You should run this blond man through any international crime databases you can find.”

Shiratori heaves an agreeing shrug of his shoulders. “That’s a good idea, Conan-kun.” Then he pats him on the head. “You’ve been helpful, as usual, but for today, I’ll have to send you home. We’re going to be restricting the area to badge holders only, this time.” He narrows his eyes at Shinichi. “We’re not having another situation where you sneak into an elevator where a bomb is set to blow and disarm it on your own.”

“Ahahahaha,” Shinichi takes a couple steps back. “That was a complete accident!” he tells Shiratori, blatantly lying, but Shiratori doesn’t seem to be buying it, still looking down at Shinichi with a
contemplative tilt to his eyebrows.

“I’m sure,” he replies. “Go home, Conan-kun, or I’ll call Mouri-chan to come get you.”

“Okay, okay,” Shinichi says, scanning the taped off area beyond Shiratori but seeing nothing out of place beyond the uneven blood drop pattern. The rest has been cleared away, and Shinichi figures where the body was found will be the same, gone as quickly as possible for public safety and convenience.

Allowing himself to get sent away, Shinichi sets off in the direction of home. The trip wasn’t a complete waste, he thinks, pulling up the photo of the foreign man on his phone. Perhaps if they can match this man to a name or an identity, they’ll find him alive, or— It’s best not to get ahead of the facts. He’ll pass the photo along to Haibara, and see what she makes of it.

* 

He calls Ran as Conan while he’s on the train. She answers chirpily, clearly in a good mood, and asks him about his evening plans.

“If it’s all right, can I stay out for dinner?” he asks her, and he can hear her hesitating.

“Well, Eisuke-kun is coming over to eat with us tonight. I told him you’d be home, but...”

“Do you really need me there for that?” Shinichi doesn’t want to spend time with Ran and Hondou. Really, he could live without that forever. It would be preferable, in all ways, to have dinner with KID, and change his bandages, and go over the files Haibara’d passed along, still nipping at his ankle from where he’d stuffed the flash cards into his sock. “If you’re worried about my health, I promise I’ll stay put in one place.”

“If you swear to stay inside and not aggravate your cold...”

He quickly puts the phone on mute as they approach Haido station, and unmutes it after the announcements finish.

“Conan-kun? Are you still there?”

“I’m here, Ran-nee-chan! I’ll stay inside, I swear!”

“All right,” she says. “Don’t stay out too late, though, you have school tomorrow.”

The next stop is Beika, and Shinichi goes up from that station using a different exit than usual, emerging near a shop that sells excellent soups and stews. He picks up three different kinds, not sure what KID will or won’t eat, and then returns to the Kudou mansion.

He finds KID still in bed, one hand pressed to his bandages and his eyes closed. There’s a thin sheen of sweat on his face. “I half-expected you to be climbing the walls when I got back,” Shinichi says, dropping his purchases to the center of the floor and climbing up onto the bed. “Are you okay?”

“Pain-killers wore off,” KID says. “I know it’s just a flesh wound, but it hurts like a bitch.”

“Why didn’t you take more?” Shinichi picks up the unopened bottle of Oxy by KID’s bedside and thumbs the lid of the prescription pills. “Before they wore off?” He climbs on the bed so KID doesn’t need to keep his head turned to talk to him.

“It makes me hazy,” KID says. “Out of it. I didn’t want to be here by myself and out of it.”
“Oh.” Shinichi had only been gone three hours, but KID would have had no way to know when Shinichi would return, and while he wasn’t immobilized, he’d been encouraged heavily by the doctor not to do even moderate physical activity for the next couple of weeks for fear of tearing the wound open again. “Well, I’m here now, so—“ He opens the lid, and pours out a single pill into his palm. Then he drops the bottle down into the crumpled blankets and picks up the pill with his left hand. “Open up.”

He presses the pill to KID’s tongue, fingertips lightly brushing the wet muscle, and then stretches over him to reach the water on the bedside table, untouched from when he’d set it there this morning before leaving. “Can you drink this on your own?”

“Maybe,” KID says, his tongue sticking out with the pill. “Sitting up sounds terrible right now.” The words are garbled, and Shinichi rolls his eyes.

“Idiot,” Shinichi replies, looking between the glass and KID. Then he sighs, and carefully, he straddles KID’s hips. With one hand, he cups the back of KID’s neck, lifting his head enough that it’s safe to dribble water into his mouth. “Am I hurting you?”

KID swallows, and licks stray drops of water from the corners of his lips. Putting one hand on Shinichi’s thigh, he takes a shaky breath.

“No,” he says, and his eyes are bright and clear as he watches Shinichi’s face. Shinichi is conscious of the warmth of KID’s narrow hips between his thighs, and the dampness of the curly hair caught under Shinichi’s fingers. “You look better than you did this morning, Meitantei.”

“It’s worst in the mornings,” Shinichi says, scrambling off KID. “I brought soup, so when the painkillers kick in I’ll help you sit up and eat.” Now, from next to KID, blankets tangling around him, he can see that KID’s eyes are dark-circled underneath, and it’s obvious he feels terrible. “Are you really going to be able to go to school tomorrow?”

“I have to.” KID smiles at him, wan. “I’m very good at playing pretend.” He closes his eyes. “It’s nice that I don’t have to, right now.” His hand reaches out and grabs Shinichi’s, pushing their palms together. Shinichi’s fingers only reach halfway up KID’s, and KID bends his fingertips down to cover Shinichi’s nails. "Right, little detective?"

Shinichi jerks his hand away. "Haibara did some research on that jeweler you mentioned," he says, fumbling for the tiny memory cards, pulling them out of his sock. He clutches them in his hand, ignoring the rapid beat of his heart and the tingle from KID’s touch. "Also, I got something from my visit to the crime scene." He hands KID his phone, and isn’t even surprised when KID immediately inputs the code and navigates to his pictures without a moment’s hesitation. "Creep."

"You love it," KID replies, eyes narrowing at the most recent photo in Shinichi’s camera roll. "Knightsbridge, London?"

"The first thing I noticed," Shinichi says, already opening the bottom drawer of his bedside table and pulling out an old laptop. It had been state of the art when he was in middle school. He unplugs his lamp and plugs in the power cord before booting it up, denying it access to Professor Agasa’s wi-fi and instead leaving it in offline mode. As he waits for the start screen, he returns attention to KID. "Do you know him?"

"Yes," KID replies. "His name is James Hopper." He frowns. "Or was. His name was James Hopper." KID’s hands both curl around Shinichi’s phone, and he uses his thumb to zoom in on the man’s face. "He was my father’s teacher. A magician. He’s dead… also presumably murdered." He turns the phone toward Shinichi, zoomed not on James Hopper’s face, but on the architecture behind
him. "Look how old this photograph is. This picture must be from when he was a younger man. The seventies, probably, wow. It looks like someone ran it through Photoshop to update the color profile."

Now that Shinichi is studying it more carefully, he agrees that the photograph is old, just recolored. "You're right."

"Plus, in 2004, this narrow entrance area," he points to the congestion of passengers behind Hopper, "became an open circular area, in order to battle the constant traffic jams. These are the tiles from the thirties, too."

"You know a lot about London Underground stations," Shinichi says, as KID reclaims the phone, continuing to study the photograph.

"I like architecture," KID replies. "I'll probably major in it at university." His words are a little slurred. The painkillers must be starting to work. "My dad used to take me to London for shows, when I was a little kid. Hopper’s magic troupe was amazing. He’s the one who inspired me to train doves for more than stage tricks. My dad didn’t really take to using animals for messages, or transformations, save for a few."

"You’ve turned yours into little spies."

"Only a few of them. I have to keep an eye on you, Tantei-kun. You get into far too much trouble." KID’s eyes are fixed on the photo. "Where’d the police pick up this photo?"

"That photo, along with a picture of Kuroba Toichi, was found on Snake’s headless body," Shinichi says, as he slides in the card as Haibara had told him to, into the memory card slot. "My guess is that Snake thought you were your father, and that James Hopper might still be alive as well, and perhaps looking as young as you appear to be even in costume."

"Not a bad guess," KID replies. "We’ll never know now, huh?" He locks Shinichi’s phone and tosses it onto the bed in the space between his thigh and Shinichi’s calf.

Shinichi selects everything on the first disk and double clicks, bringing up hundreds of windows at once. He scoots back, until his back presses against the bed’s backboard. KID, wanting to look at the screen, rests his cheek against Shinichi’s arm.

"These are appraisal records." KID’s lips, dry, tickle the skin at the crook of Shinichi’s elbow. "And international sales brokering of rare gemstones and metals. Click through to the next one."

"You can read that fast?" Drugged and injured, KID can still pore through all these numbers and sift meaning from them? Impressive, even if Shinichi won’t say it aloud. He wouldn’t want KID to get smug, after all.

He clicks to the next one as asked, and while the records mean nothing to Shinichi, KID, despite his drug-hazy eyes, seems to find something interesting in the myriad of receipts and transaction details. "What is it?"

"Everything mentioned in these records is high-end, save for what was sent to our P.O. box in France. The stuff sent there was all on the low end of the cost spectrum, but shipped with the highest level of insurance, which often cost more than the billed amount for the item."

"So the records are lying about what was sent," Shinichi says, and KID nods.

"Also it’s clear that my hunch about the notable English jeweler and our French-vampire owned
P.O. box wasn’t completely off the mark. There’s a connection there.”

“They might be the same person.” Shinichi pulls out the disk, and then inserts the other. “The post office box would just be a filter, then.”

“Or related,” KID says, as Shinichi opens the contents of the second card.

A full profile appears for Marc Arbogast, and this is more Shinichi’s speed. He quickly roots through the biographical data, and finds that while this appraiser slash jeweler is originally from France, he doesn’t seem to have any strange gaps or missing links in his biographical information. He even went to some special academy in middle school, so Shinichi’s hypothesis that he would only appear at an adult age hadn’t been the correct one.

“He’s not Claude Arbogast,” Shinichi says, after constructing a full timeline in his head. “He’s listed as his great-grandson, and he probably actually is.”

KID hums, and Shinichi checks the time. Almost two in the afternoon. KID needs to eat before the painkillers put him to sleep. He pushes lightly at the head resting on him and KID groans melodramatically.

“What now, Meitantei?”

“Food,” Shinichi says. “Then more sleep while I finish organizing my notes.”

KID tilts his head up to look at Shinichi. “You’re cute and you feed me,” he says, his lashes fluttering. “Can I keep you?”

“No,” Shinichi replies flatly, but when KID’s eyes close again, he smiles.

Reaching into the drawer, he pulls out KID’s monocle. He pushes it into KID’s hand, and KID’s fingers close around it, and then bring it up to his heart.

“You kept it safe for me.”

“I said I would.”

“Do you always keep promises?”

Shinichi could never have imagined, even a month ago, curling up like this with Kaitou KID, sharing plans and ideas and research. Protecting KID from the police. Wanting to hear that teasing lilt in his voice when he asks a question.

“I do my best,” Shinichi replies. “That’s all anyone can do.”

KID’s eyes, when they open again, are so dazzlingly bright that Shinichi has to look away.

* 

Subaru comes home a few minutes past five, carrying his laptop case and his car keys, and finds Shinichi in the kitchen pouring hot water into a bowl. “What’s that for, Conan-kun?”

Shinichi casts a thoughtful look over his shoulder at the man. “That nii-san I brought home is injured,” he says. “I need to change the bandage on the wound, and I wanted to clean it while he was still asleep.”

Subaru comes over to stand next to him, rolling up his sleeves. From this angle, with his glasses
sliding down the bridge of his nose, Shinichi can see the bright green of his eyes. “Would you like some help?”

“That depends.” Shinichi stares down at the hot water, letting the steam open the pores on his face. The pill Haibara gave him earlier is wearing off, and he’s starting to feel weak again, and like his insides are mush. There’s also the beginnings of his nausea starting up again, and he doesn’t know how long he has before his hands will shake too much to do a good job with KID’s bullet wound. “Are you going to tell anyone where he’s hurt, and how?”

Pushing his glasses back up, he then turns the faucet back on, running hot water on his hands before lathering them up to the elbows. “Are you involved in something dangerous again, Conan-kun?”

“Sherlock Holmes often had to get involved in dangerous cases,” Shinichi says. “It’s part of being a detective, don’t you think?”

“Perhaps,” Subaru agrees, with an easy smile. “I’m not exactly a detective, but another part of being a detective is knowing when to keep a secret. Your secrets are safe with me, just like mine have been safe with you.”

Shinichi licks his dry lips. It’s true that Subaru—Akai—had trusted him with his identity, and even let Shinichi set up the entire disguise and identity with just Shinichi’s word to go on. They’d kept almost everyone in the dark, even Jodie and Camel. Even if KID’s secret isn’t Shinichi’s, the fact that Shinichi is helping him is. Still, Shinichi trusts Akai implicitly. “Then could you help me bring this upstairs? I would carry it myself, but…” He holds his hands out, and Subaru’s eyes widen at how much they tremble. “I’d probably make a mess.”

Subaru takes in Shinichi’s shaking hands, and frowns. “Then allow me,” he says, taking the bowl from the table and leading the way up the stairs.

KID is awake again when Shinichi opens the door. “I hoped you’d still be sleeping.”

“I got cold.” KID’s voice crackles. “Where did you go?”

“I need to change your bandage,” Shinichi replies. “Jii-san won’t be here for another six hours, and you’re bleeding through.”

Subaru sits down on the edge of the bed, and Shinichi barely pays him any mind as he tugs on KID’s already unbuttoned shirt. “Trying to strip me again, Meitantei?”

“Hello again, mysterious visitor,” Subaru says. “I have some experience with this. Do you mind if I give Conan-kun a hand?”

“He wouldn’t have asked if he didn’t think it was okay,” KID replies, sitting up slowly and carefully. His hair is an absolute mess, and Shinichi’s heart does this weird double beat thing when KID immediately searches to meet his eyes. Shinichi nods, reassuring him, and KID pulls his shirt away from his bandages.

“You should be in the hospital,” is the first thing Subaru says, after Shinichi cautiously unwraps the bandage around his torso. “I’m assuming that’s not possible?”

“For several reasons,” KID says, biting his lips.

“It looks like your surgeon did a set of three nice, neat stitches.” Subaru hands Shinichi a towel. “Don’t touch the wound directly, Conan. Just clean the skin around it. We want to keep the actual wound as dry as possible.” Subaru’s eyes then narrow in on KID’s face. “Never assume you’ll be all
right without your bulletproof vest again.”

“Lesson well learned.” KID laughs, full of self-recrimination. “I knew it was risky, too. It’s just mine doesn’t fit right, since it was made for someone else.” For the old KID, Shinichi immediately realizes. And unlike everything else, KID wouldn’t be able to alter it himself—soft armor cross-plied polyethylene like Spectra can be tricky, and KID needs flexibility more than most things, with the stunts he pulls. “Can’t buy them openly in Japan, and I can’t have the purchase associated with me, anyway. I’d planned on having one fit to me the next time I went to visit my mother, but…”

Shinichi drops the bloody towel pack into the warm water, and looks at the cleaned wound. It’s swelling, some, but in KID’s school uniform, it should be hidden enough, as long as he doesn’t let that Nakamori girl hit him.

“If you had some friends in a non ‘Japanese-police-officer’ type of law enforcement,” Subaru says, lightly, while studying Shinichi’s bookshelf, “you could probably find out where to get one specially fitted.” His glasses catch the light, making it hard to read his expression. “For both of you.” He stands. “You can wrap the bandage, right, Conan-kun?” At Shinichi’s nod, he picks up the bowl. “I’ll be downstairs if you need me.”

“Thank you!” Shinichi smiles at him.

“You should be at a hospital, too,” Subaru says quietly, for only Shinichi to hear, and as Shinichi’s eyes widen, Subaru looks directly into his eyes. “Stay safe.”

When he leaves, Shinichi looks immediately to his phone, now resting on his pillow. It might be too late at night to call Jodie, considering it isn’t an emergency.

“What did he mean by non Japanese police-officer-type law enforcement?” Kid asks, dragging his finger lightly across the bared flesh. “This is going to scar.” He pouts.

“That was less subtle than usual for him.” Shinichi makes a mental note to contact Jodie next week. “He must be worried.” Unrolling gauze, he swats lightly at Kid’s hand. “Don’t be vain, scars add character.”

“Less subtle?” Denied poking at his own bruised ribs, he instead nabs Shinichi’s glasses, playing with them. “And I have more than enough character already.”

Shinichi slowly rewraps KID’s wound with a fresh bandage, ignoring KID’s little shivers every time his fingertips brush skin, or the smoothness of the back of KID’s ribcage, where Shinichi has pressed one hand to keep KID upright enough for him to wrap the bandage securely. “He’s telling me I should ask Jodie-sensei to help us acquire specially fitted bulletproof vests, because she’s unlikely to ask uncomfortable questions or feel guilty for passing that information along to me.”

“Jodie-sensei?”

Double-checking his work, Shinichi helps KID settle back among the pillows. “Ah, Jodie Saintemillion. She’s an FBI agent who used to be undercover as Ran’s English teacher. She tends to let me get away with a lot.”

“Does she know? That Conan is actually Shinichi?”

“No,” Shinichi replies. “She doesn’t.” He looks back toward where Subaru had left. “That guy, though… I’m not so sure.”

“Meitantei…” KID yawns. “As much as I’d like to know why you’re all buddy-buddy with the FBI,
"I'm going to fall asleep again."

"Good." Shinichi falls onto his side, his face close enough to KID’s to count his eyelashes. They’re thick, and curl upward naturally at the ends, dark against his cheeks. “Sleep as much as you can now, because if last night was any indication, you spend a lot of energy riling Nakamori-chan up and then dodging the resulting rage.”

“It keeps me young,” KID murmurs. His dry lips stretch into a half smile. Even half asleep, KID is smirking at him. “Don’t go anywhere, Tantei-kun.”

“Where am I going to go?” Shinichi replies, but he settles down next to KID and watches his face smooth out, trailing his eyes down to his neck and down his bare chest until he gets to the bandages.

KID’s not built like Shinichi. Shinichi had always had the body of a soccer player; thick enough to take a hit but lean enough to avoid one with a burst of speed. But KID is all thin bones and long muscles, built for speed and flexibility, with narrow shoulders and wrists small enough that were Shinichi big again, he could wrap his ring finger and thumb around in a circle like a bracelet.

The more he looks at KID, the less he sees the similarities in their faces, and the more he fixates on the fascinating differences. It’s the exact opposite of how he’s been reacting to KID’s personality, which had at first seemed so very contradictory—now, all he can see is the ways in which they are similar.

Shinichi dozes off for a while, only waking up when the pain stirs him. It’s worse than it’s ever been, and he’s simultaneously hot and cold, shivering so hard he might shake apart. His lungs and belly both burn, and he can barely summon the strength to pull himself out of bed.

He catches a glimpse at the clock—only seven? He’ll have to go home in a couple of hours, only he doesn’t want Ran to see him like this, and Hondou Eisuke is there, pulling Ran further away from Shinichi, and— There’s something else, too, but it slips his mind as he uses the door to guide himself to the bathroom. His head feels so heavy, and the cool of the tiles is a relief to the heat of his skin until another wave of being freezing hits, and Shinichi wishes more than anything they were hot.

He throws up three times, clutching the sides of the toilet, and he gets blood on his face and his shirt. He pulls the shirt off, wiping at his face with it before tossing it to the ground, and he can feel the sweat evaporate from his skin as every second passes with agonizing slowness.

"You’re not well, are you, Shinichi?" KID’s hand on the small of his back is warm.

“You should be in bed.”

“I know,” KID says. “But I heard you, and I’m terrible at minding my own business.”

Shinichi’s entire chest aches as he breathes.

“I’ve been watching you, Tantei-kun. There’s something really wrong with you. It’s not just a cold, or the flu. Your back and arms are covered in bruises.”

Contusions. A side effect of absent or deficient blood clotting elements in his blood, from the little blue pills. They contain immunosuppressants that keep Shinichi’s child body from rejecting the slowly failing organs that should belong to an older, dead Kudou Shinichi. He must have gotten them when Sera had shoved him down last night to protect him.

“I don’t want to talk about it.” He closes his eyes against the bathroom lights.
“You don’t have to,” KID replies. The hand slides up his back and curls into Shinichi’s hair, soothing him. “My mom used to do this when I was sick. Play with my hair, I mean.”

“I don’t need you to be a parental figure in my life,” Shinichi says, as his stomach revolts again. The nausea is unbearable, and KID doesn’t move away from him as he retches, staying close and never pausing his slow, comforting motions, carding through Shinichi’s hair.

“That’s the last thing I want to be to you,” KID replies, when Shinichi’s finished, and it takes a few moments for Shinichi to register the words.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” he rasps, laying one hand on his stomach to rub at his own gunshot scar. Even with his eyes closed, the world feels like it’s spinning.

“Hmm.” KID’s fingers, calloused and rough, pull free of Shinichi’s hair and trail down his neck, along every bump in his spine, and then retrace their steps back up in a regular, even pattern. “It means that I won’t ever forget who you actually are, Shinichi.”

The promise in those words curls Shinichi’s toes, even if his first impulse is to ignore the relief KID’s words bring him. Is this how KID had felt, when Shinichi had said, without hesitation or qualification, that he believed in KID’s innocence? Why do Shinichi’s words mean anything to KID? And more importantly, why do KID’s words mean anything to Shinichi?

Shinichi spares a thought for how uncomfortable it must be, with a gunshot wound, and KID shouldn’t be on the floor with him, like this, when he’s still recovering from his own injury, but most of him just relishes the unflinching assurance of that hand on his bare skin.

Still, Shinichi is not an actual child, and he doesn’t need coddling. He remembers all too well the pain of recovering after being shot. “You’re hurting,” he says, attempting to swat at KID’s hand. “Go back to bed.”

“Hmm, I think I’ll wait,” KID replies lightly. “At least until you can move. It looks like we both need someone to take care of us tonight, and didn’t I say we should watch each other’s backs?” He grins. “Plus, they’re showing Star Blades V tonight on Fuji TV, and you know that’s the one where Sashim changes sides, so he and Beijyuu work together to stop the evil Dark Takio. I think we should watch it together, in the spirit of teamwork.”

“Teamwork, huh?” Shinichi chuckles, and is relieved when it doesn’t start another round of retching. He tentatively opens his eyes, and KID is watching him, face too close. He’s on his knees, torso held rigid, and his other hand is taking some of his weight by pushing against the sink. “Who says I want to be teammates with a criminal?”

“Only you can be the Clyde to my Bonnie.” KID just smiles, the real one, and though its brightness is diminished by the tightness around his eyes, Shinichi still gets that squeezing feeling in his heart. “Are you going to be difficult about it?”

“I’m not so sure anyone could stop you, if you wanted to do something.” He snorts. “You’re a pain in the ass like that.” Extending an arm upward, he flushes the toilet, watching the pink water swirl around in the bowl before disappearing from view. “Maybe I should put you in jail, to keep you out of trouble. Prison orange might be even flashier than your whites.”

"Now, now, Meitantei," KID says, and his hand stretches out across the breadth of Shinichi’s back, the stretch of his fingers wide enough to feel like it’s covering most of the available skin, a comfort that extends far beyond just the physical touch. "I thought I was the one in this partnership in charge of saying all the ridiculous things."
"You are," Shinichi says. “I’m just offering a rational alternative to you having heists at a time like this. I can’t believe there’s a murderer out there leaving you terrifying death threats and you broadcasted your whereabouts.”

“It’s so cute, the way you worry about me,” KID coos. “The way you worry about everyone, really. It’s your charm point. Did you know that your face scrunches up like you’re constipated when you’re worried?” His hand comes up to Shinichi’s cheek, cupping it, and KID’s hands make him feel so small, the way his long fingers can curl all the way around to the back of Shinichi’s neck as his palm rests along the curve of Shinichi’s jaw. “There’s no need to carry the weight of the whole world on your shoulders. They’re pretty narrow right now.”

“Who else is going to do it?” Shinichi can’t tell if KID’s hand is cool or warm. It feels nice, though, and involuntarily, he leans into it. “I’m the silver bullet, after all.”

“Is your crime syndicate composed of werewolves?” KID’s thumb catches at the corner of Shinichi’s lip. “That could be interesting.”

"Leave me alone." He grabs again at KID’s hand, this time catching it accidentally, and KID immediately laces their fingers together. “KID?”

KID’s face, which had moments before been teasing, has suddenly gone serious, his gaze boring into Shinichi’s with an intensity that gives Shinichi chills. He can’t read it, exactly, even though he doubts KID is trying to hide his emotions. It’s just that there’s something unfamiliar in the shifting blues of his eyes; something that reminds Shinichi of the ocean and makes him feel a little like he’s drowning.

“I don’t want to leave you alone." KID’s expression changes again, then, and Shinichi is suddenly back on solid ground, the waves receding and leaving him on dry land as KID’s expression morphs into something playful. His mercurial nature is going to give Shinichi whiplash. "While you take a shower, I need to plan something spectacular for class tomorrow, to counter the rage Aoko undoubtedly feels about me leaving last night without warning."

Shinichi can imagine. If she’s anything like Ran, KID will get an earful. "Are you really going to pretend to be completely uninjured?” KID hasn’t been hiding that every movement is painful for him, and it’s only been a few hours since he’d been shot. No time at all for recovery.

"Hakuba won’t be there," KID says, his physical warmth disappearing as he gingerly stands. "It’s only Aoko I’ll really need to convince, and that’s not as difficult a proposition as it might seem. Not for me.”

“Cocky, as usual.” Shinichi’s voice cracks. His throat feels raw.

“Every magician worth their salt knows it’s easier to fool people that want to be fooled.”

“You don’t have to be a magician to know that,” Shinichi says, thinking of Ran. “It’s common sense.”

“Well, I don’t have too much of that.” KID leans against the doorframe, wincing. “As you’ve probably surmised.” He offers up a tired grin. “I’m an open book for a detective like you, right?”

Shinichi looks at KID, taking in his open shirt and his jeans riding low on his hips, and despite how tired and pale he is, and the bandage starting just below the widest point of his ribs, he’s still, somehow, like a painting, even in his everyday clothes.

It’s strange, to think of KID like that, when he’s always in motion, doing simple magic tricks or tapping his feet or playing with something, but Shinichi thinks that if he were to take a video of KID,
every still frame would be a distinctly graceful portrait.

It’s even stranger that KID is here, in his home, has slept in his bed, and is in Shinichi’s bathroom right now, bantering back and forth with him like they’re old friends when it’s only been about a month since KID first approached him outside of a heist. It’s not in Shinichi’s nature to let people get so close so quickly. It’s not in Shinichi’s nature to trust.

But perhaps it’s because if KID is a painting, he’s like Picasso’s ‘The Blue Room’, where beneath the famous image of a woman in the bath is the hidden form of someone else, disguised under brush strokes in opposite directions meant to keep the eye from seeing the entire picture. KID is that reclining man under layers and layers of paint, and Shinichi is someone who can’t rest until he’s seen every bit of a thing.

KID pulls Shinichi in, like the star painting at a gallery, and Shinichi comes back to look time and time again, finding something new with every visit; because every time he learns something new about KID, he realizes there are a hundred things he doesn’t know, and Shinichi has always been relentless in his pursuit of a mystery, hasn’t he?

“You’re not.” Shinichi meets KID’s eyes. “I can’t figure you out at all. You don’t make sense.”

KID raises one eyebrow, his smile pulling more firmly at the right corner of his mouth. “I think I can make it back to Beika on Friday night so that we can compare everything we know, to see if there’s anything we might have missed.”

“Good idea.”

KID smirks at him. "I do have those occasionally," he replies, shutting the door and leaving Shinichi alone to take his shower.

They end up watching Star Blades V and Star Blades VI back-to-back, lying side by side on Shinichi’s childhood bed. Shinichi can’t ignore the weight of KID next to him, or the heat of their closeness.

Being so aware of someone else’s physical presence is something Shinichi has always reserved for moments of danger, but KID… Is a different sort of dangerous, isn’t he? With his unpredictable choices and willingness to put himself at risk for all sorts of reasons… Shinichi is never truly a step ahead of the man, because it’s impossible to know what he’ll do next, especially when he’s cornered.

When KID next looks at Shinichi’s phone, running low on battery again, it’s almost eleven. “Miss Mouri has left you three texts.”

“I should head back to the agency.” He sways as he hops down from the bed. He’s swaying, but he should be fine to get home. He watches KID slowly buttoning up his flannel shirt with those deft fingers, and then gingerly standing, running his fingers down his jeans to smooth them. “Your assistant will be here soon, right?”

“I’m sure he’ll ring the doorbell.” KID reaches down and tugs the neck of Shinichi’s clean shirt. “This is a bit big for you, isn’t it?”

“It’s what I have left around here.” Shinichi shrugs, collecting both of his phones and the disks Haibara had given him. “I didn’t keep everything, from when I was a kid the first time. Pretty soon I’ll have to buy new things, since Ran will start remembering what my clothes looked like.” He opens the door. The house is quiet, but Subaru is a quiet person, so it doesn’t mean no one is home. “On the other hand, maybe I won’t have to go shopping at all, since I’ll be——"
“How morbid,” KID says, interrupting, as he walks slowly down the hall, using the wall to support some of his weight as they approach the stairs. From the top of the stairwell, you can see into the huge library. “I’ll bring you some of my old things for you to mix in. She’ll never have seen those.” He smiles down at Shinichi, who watches him over his shoulder. “You’ll look cute in my old T-shirts, Tantei-kun.” He tilts his head. “You’d look a different sort of cute in some of my grown-up clothes, too~”

Shinichi blushed. “Why do you say things like that?”

“You’re defenses are so low,” KID answers, gripping the rail tightly as his gaze flickers away to take in the stairs. “I can’t resist.”

“Has anyone ever told you you’re a pain in the ass?”

“Did you say something down there, detective?” KID replies. “I can’t hear you all the way up here.” Shinichi’s lips twitch even as he glares. “Oh, don’t make that scary face.”

Then the buzzer rings, signaling someone is at the front gate, and Shinichi leaves KID to make his way down at his own pace.

There is no sign of Subaru in the kitchen or the living room, when Shinichi checks for him, and when he returns to the front entryway, KID is staring balefully at his shoes. With a sigh, Shinichi crouches down and ties his Converse sneakers, and then puts on his own.

“How will you change shoes tomorrow?” Shinichi pulls out his keys and carefully locks the heavy oak front door, before setting the alarm. Then he and KID walk down to the front gate, where a car is parked and waiting. “Don’t hurt yourself worse overdoing things.”

“The real trick will be changing back,” KID says. “My school shoes don’t have laces. Maybe I’ll leave early so I can walk home with them untied.”

Shinichi blinks at him, unimpressed. “How will you leave early?”

“I’ll lie, of course.” KID winks at him. “Didn’t I tell you I was excellent?”

“Of course,” Shinichi echoes. “I don’t know if I’d be as proud of that as you are. I feel terrible, lying.”

“That’s why you’re so clumsy with it.” KID says, as Shinichi locks the gate behind them. Jii is out of the car, waiting with the backseat door opened for KID to get in. “Just because you use a saccharine voice doesn’t mean the things you say sound normal coming from an eight year old.”

“Lying is not really a skill I needed to practice in my previous life.” Shinichi can feel himself pouting.

“It’s not always about ill-will. You know that. Sometimes it’s about survival. The ability to lie is just another tool, and the person using the tool is what determines the nature of it.” He eases himself into the backseat. “Catch you later, Meitantei.”

The door closes, and Shinichi nods to Jii, who gets into the driver’s seat. “Thank you for your assistance,” he says gravely, and closes his own door before Shinichi can reply.

“See you later,” Shinichi replies, to the empty street, as Jii’s sage-green Vanden Plas Princess turns off Beika 4-cho-me and onto the main road toward the expressway.
His phone vibrates. He pulls out his regular phone, but its screen is dark. Then another vibration, and Shinichi pulls out the special phone he uses mostly to call Ran or the police.

**One New Message.**

*I hope you don’t mind, Meitantei, but I’ve put my number in your phone~* The sender is listed only as ‘B O N N I E ’ in all caps Roman letters, and Shinichi stares at it blankly for a moment before he scowls.

“Oi, oi,” he mumbles, before he types back *Creep.*

*I’ll see you Friday to pick up my suit and ♪ hair accessory ♪* KID replies, text coming so quickly that Shinichi almost drops his phone at the unexpected notification.

Shinichi shakes his head, and then he heads toward the Mouri Detective Agency. The streets are empty, and Shinichi’s jeans drag on the ground with every step. He’s a little woozy, but he just holds tight to the 5 yen coin in his pocket and focuses on getting home.

It’s no good that without the medication he’s this weak. It’s a liability, and he’s on a case, damnit. There’s no time for Shinichi to fall apart. Not emotionally, not physically.

The apartment above the agency is still lit up. Hondou Eisuke is still hanging around, when he opens the door, laughing nervously as he says something to an amused Ran. He’s sitting on the sofa with an icepack held to a swelling bruise on his forehead, and Ran is on her knees in front of him, examining his glasses.

Shinichi looks at them, at how comfortable they are, in each other’s space. Hondou is looking at Ran like she’s hung the moon, and Ran’s grin is indulgent, in her element as she returns the clumsy man’s glasses to him.

“I’m home,” he says, and Ran’s eyes jerk toward him.

“Conan-kun!” Her face suffuses in a blush. “I… thought you’d be home earlier!”

“I fell asleep,” he replies, shucking his shoes. “I’m just… going to go to bed.” He smiles at her, crooked and bemused, a Shinichi expression that he tries his best not to use around her, and her eyes widen. “School tomorrow.” He shifts his gaze to Hondou. “Nice to see you, Eisuke-nii-chan!”

“Ahh, yeah, you too, Conan-kun.” He smiles, and ruffles his hair sheepishly. His eyes, though, are sharp, and unsettlingly knowing. “Sleep well.”

He snags the little blue pills out of his backpack and goes into the bathroom, quickly dry-swallowing one and turning on the faucet so he can brush his teeth. He hears Ran’s sweet laughter over the running water, and… maybe KID was right, and there’s hope that someday, giving her up will hurt a little less.

He spares a glance at his desk as he prepares his futon for bed, and his eyes land on the origami plover KID made for him, foil crinkling in the light. Plovers cry *chiyo,* he thinks, a homonym for the word expressing ‘a thousand generations’. Enjoy a long life.

How auspicious. Shinichi climbs into bed, but he can’t fall asleep. Instead, all he can do is listen to Ran’s sweet laugh through the door, and wish, inexplicably, that KID were here, mashing his cheek into Shinichi’s arm and splaying his warm arm across Shinichi’s stomach like he had the night before. At least then Shinichi wouldn’t feel so cold, or so alone.
Shinichi’s attention drifts more than usual at school. He can’t bring himself to focus, no matter how much he tries. Instead, he covertly looks up things like recovery periods for non-serious gunshot wounds, and haphazardly prices the cost of tickets to Europe for two.

Edogawa Conan has a passport, now, an American one, thanks to some legal finagling by his father that took over a year. Shinichi hadn’t seen the point, when his dad had started the process, but back then, he’d thought he’d be finished with all this by now.

But Edogawa Conan is still here, and the longer he’s here, the more real he becomes.

“He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it,” Shinichi mumbles to himself.

“George Orwell?” Haibara’s square-cut nails click against the table. “My mother quoted the same essay in the tapes she left me. Unexpected that you’d have had any interest, Edogawa-kun.”

“My father is a novelist. Naturally I’m well-read. I don’t know why everyone keeps being surprised.”

“Your father is a mystery novelist, and I wouldn’t have been surprised if you’d quoted a book about true crime, or a Detective Samonji novel. But an Orwell essay about British Imperialism? You’ve surprised me.”

Shinichi scrolls down the SKY JAPAN flight schedules. “I bought the book of essays for one in particular, where Orwell calls the Sherlock Holmes novels ‘good bad books’.” He selects a flight three weeks from now, knowing that even then it will be difficult for KID to fly. At least they’d gotten the bullet out. “He described the Holmes mysteries as a book that ‘remains readable when more serious productions have perished’.” Many of these flights have layovers, and Shinichi doesn’t think it’s a good idea to drag KID from one side of a foreign airport to another to make a connection. Direct is better. “Trashy, melodramatic writing that resonates emotionally with the reader.”

“Rather like the novel form of Kaitou KID, then,” Haibara says. “It’s no wonder they both ‘resonate’ with you.”

“It’s not like that.” Two direct flights that leave in the early morning during the last week of November. Early morning means no one remarks on a high school boy and an elementary school student going abroad while school is in session. Early morning implies an emergency flight. He’d like to leave earlier, but he knows from personal experience how much it hurts to move around while your body tries to repair a hole forcibly created.

Plus, they’ll have to do a lot of legwork, tracking down Marc Arbogast, and possibly tailing him, and KID at his best will come in handy, since he’s proved himself a capable stalker—

Haibara’s nails stop their rhythmic clicking. He looks up from his phone to see his teacher writing out the life cycle chart of a plant on the board, while Haibara, next to him, unabashedly stares at him instead. “What are you looking at me like that for?”

“You found out something related to the case, or you’re worried about that thief.”

Shinichi cringes.

“Or both,” she adds, as an afterthought. “Anything I should know?”

“Not really,” Shinichi says, and Haibara continues to stare at him. “Well, KID and I might have
found a lead in those files you gave us.” The teacher turns around to look at them both, and Shinichi slides his phone back into his pocket. “Tell you later.”

He doesn’t get a chance to talk to Haibara for the rest of the day, as Ayumi is feeling especially clingy and Genta and Mitsuhiko exceptionally jealous about that fact, so Shinichi spends his time fending off complaints from both sides during each break between classes. Haibara seems blatantly amused by the whole thing, which Shinichi hates. How does Haibara find it so much easier than he does, to be a child again?

They all have separate plans after school. Mitsuhiko has a dentist appointment, and Genta’s going grocery shopping with his mom. Haibara and Ayumi have plans that Shinichi has been warned ‘not to ask too much about’, and Shinichi himself plans to spend the afternoon helping Mouri with a disappearance case that he suspects is more of a ‘runaway groom with cold feet’ case than any real sort of disappearance.

Ran, Sonoko, Hondou and Sera drop by to pick them up, and with the teenagers distracting the three actual elementary schoolers, Shinichi and Haibara fall back to talk.

“So, Europe?” Haibara asks, and Shinichi side-eyes her.

“You mentioned getting a lead from my research,” Haibara says, “and you were looking up flights to London.”

“Marc Arbogast is definitely relevant to the case,” Shinichi says. “Whatever was being sent to Takizawa was most likely coming from Marc Arbogast, and we’ll have to figure out what and why. Maybe it’ll help us figure out why Scarlette Shinamoto was murdered, and what the murderer still wants from KID.” He sighs, tugging on his bowtie. “How does this connect to Them? Snake is dead, and he was hunting KID, too. He also killed Ueda, who was definitely connected with Them.”

“I don’t think it’s a coincidence that Vermouth showed up at the police station to get information,” Haibara adds.

“I know,” says Shinichi. “It’s never a coincidence, with Vermouth.”

“There’s also the fact that you found Snake’s body at all.” Haibara frowns. “That means it was probably a sign or a warning to someone else, possibly an unknown third party in all this.”

“The fact that this was all planned so well scares me. From beginning to end, this was all orchestrated without us knowing anything was even going on. Shinamoto and Takizawa are murdered. The only suspect is a man that looked just like a known convict, and also like Shinamoto’s brother. The moment the police bring the convict to HQ for questioning, he’s murdered by this Snake guy, and then later that same day, Snake fires on Kaitou KID, who had been left ominous messages at both Takizawa and Shinamoto’s murder scenes. Then Snake winds up dead, head on a stake in front of police headquarters as a warning sign.”

The wind blows, and Shinichi shivers. His medication is starting to wear off, too, but he won’t take another pill in front of Haibara. He’d seen the worry in her eyes when the interval between the last two had been less than four hours, and he can definitely make it home.


“There are too many angles.” Shinichi’s thoughts are racing. “The most confusing thing for me is
“He mentioned Rum.” Haibara’s eyes narrow. “That’s enough to get him killed.”

“It’s not that. For Ueda to have gotten plastic surgery to look like Louis Maisonrouge means that They knew it would be necessary to have a double of him at some point.”

“I’m more concerned that someone with that face is still running around free,” Haibara replies. “With that face connected to the crows, there probably isn’t any doubt about Them being behind all of this, somehow. We just need to figure out why.”

They stop in front of Genta’s house, and they all chorus a goodbye as they start walking in the direction of Mitsuhiko’s. Ran always insists on walking everyone home on days like this, even though the Detective Boys go all sorts of places on their own that are far more dangerous than ‘home from school’.

Of course, they mostly lie about stuff like that to keep from getting in trouble with their parents. What had KID said? Lying is a survival skill?

Sometimes, maybe. Other times, lies are just ways to get away with doing something evil. Not everyone is KID, after all, and liars on cases always give Shinichi the most trouble. Unreliable eyewitnesses can be an endless source of false leads—

False leads. Unreliable eyewitnesses.

“Haibara,” Shinichi says. “I might have overlooked something really simple.”

“It wouldn’t be the first time.”

“I need you to look up Kanami Reika for me when you get home from Ayumi’s tonight.”

Shifting the weight of her backpack, Haibara’s eyebrows come together in thought. “The maid at Takeuchi’s place?”

“Yes,” Shinichi says. “Kanami-san found this private eye, hired him, and was responsible for describing him to the police. Now that I’m thinking about it, the resemblance between Shinamoto and Redhouse is unmistakable. Don’t you think it’s odd that Kanami-san wouldn’t notice?”

“Japanese people can often be unreliable when describing foreigners to police. Certain features don’t stand out as much.”

“Yet Kanami-san’s sketch was frighteningly accurate,” Shinichi whispers back, as Sera looks back over her shoulder to look at them. “To the point where an inmate was pulled out of prison for questioning due to the description.”

Haibara’s frown deepens. “You think Kanami-san purposefully described the prisoner in order to have him pulled out for questioning, don’t you?”

“It would give the crows an opportunity to shut off a leak, wouldn’t it?”

“Then why would Takeuchi’s vague description match?” Haibara doesn’t seem like she disagrees with Shinichi’s theory, though, her own agile mind making the same connections as Shinichi just has. “Is he in on it?”

“Maybe. Or the real Louis Maisonrouge really came to the mansion. Kanami-san could have
orchestrated this however she wanted, and if she’s behind some of this, it explains how the killer was able to figure out how to get around the mansion so easily, doesn’t it?”

“I’ll look into it,” Haibara says. “As soon as—“

“Conan-kun, it looks like it’s getting a bit serious back there!” Sera says, and Shinichi looks up to see that they’ve stopped in front of Mitsuhiko’s house, and everyone is looking at him. “What are you two talking about so intensely?”


“I’m telling her it’s ridiculous,” Shinichi immediately corroborates. KID is probably somewhere laughing at him. “There’s no way the Spirits would take him, considering their main feeder team is Noir Tokyo. Also he wouldn’t leave Endo behind.”

“Ai-chan and Conan-kun are always whispering together,” Ayumi complains, as Mitsuhiko looks back and forth between them, as if deliberating on whether they’re being honest.

“Keeping secrets from us,” Mitsuhiko confirms, with a nod, crossing his arms.

“Is it a secret romance?” Sonoko asks, wiggling her eyebrows.

Shinichi blanches as Ayumi’s face takes on a betrayed cast. “No, no, no, it’s just soccer,” he says quickly, as Haibara snorts quietly beside him.

They’re saved by Mitsuhiko’s mom calling out to them from the front door, and Shinichi makes it a point to let Haibara walk with Ayumi the rest of the way to the fancy high-rise apartment building where Ayumi lives, falling in next to Sera as Sonoko, Ran, and Hondou walk in front of them.

Hondou trips every other step, and Ran has gotten into the habit of catching him, her hand reaching out lightning fast to catch hold of his uniform jacket and keep him on his feet without him ever hitting the ground. She blushes every time he gushes out his thanks, and Shinichi finds it a bit unbearable.

“The KID heist sure was something, wasn’t it?” Sera says, pulling him from his thoughts.

Shinichi’s eyes widen, and he purposely looks down at his shoes. “Did Inspector Nakamori ever find out where all the peonies came from?”

“Nope,” Sera replies. “Not a clue. There weren’t any stolen from any flower shops in the entire Tokyo Metropolitan area, and apparently Nakamori filed for subpoenas for official sales records from several large flower chains but those haven’t come through yet.”

“Nakamori won’t find anything.” Shinichi smiles, and hopes the angle hides it from Sera. “He’s too thorough for that.”

In front of Ayumi’s building, they wave goodbye to the last of the Detective Boys save Shinichi himself. Haibara meets his eyes steadily before she follows Ayumi inside. She’ll call him later, of that Shinichi is certain. He’s pretty sure in his deductions, too. There’s something more behind Kanamisan’s façade. He shouldn’t have ignored all the smaller hints.

Sera clears her throat, dragging Shinichi’s attention back to her as they start making their way to the Mouri Detective Agency. “That wasn’t the most interesting part of the heist, though,” she says. “KID will probably be mad to know he was upstaged by his would-be assassin.”
“Thank you, you know, for pushing me down,” says Shinichi. “It seems like you’re always protecting me from bullets.”

Sera ruffles his hair. “It’s nothing. I made a vow to Ran-kun, after all.” Then she looks up to Ran, Sonoko, and Hondou walking in front of them, and purposefully slows her step to create a larger gap. “You noticed, right?” she says, under her breath, and Shinichi looks up at her from the corner of his eye without turning to face her. “KID got shot at the heist.”

“Yes,” Shinichi acknowledges. “I saw you going after the shooter, so I went after KID.” He carefully considers his words. “I saw that he’d taken a secret path out of the gardens, and trailed him for awhile, but I lost him at the exit. His assistant must have picked him up. I ended up looking around to see if he left any other clues, and then I went to Professor Agasa’s to spend the night.”

“I wonder why that guy tried to shoot him.” Sera fiddles with the button on her uniform jacket. “I also wonder who killed the shooter. Seems like KID might be involved in something bigger than we thought, right?”

“It’s something to take under consideration,” Shinichi replies neutrally.

“Why didn’t you come back, after you looked for KID?” Shinichi’s gaze shifts forward, to land on Hondou, who is walking too close to Ran. “Because of Hondou Eisuke?”

No, but that excuse works as well as any, doesn’t it? Shinichi just shrugs, and Sera links her fingers together and puts her arms up behind her head.

“You don’t like him, do you?” There’s something wistful in her tone.

“I like him fine.” Shinichi tugs on his bowtie. “I just don’t want to get in the way.”

“That’s new, for you. You’ve always gotten in the way before.” Sera flashes him a bit of that sharp tooth of hers. “He must pass muster, then.”


“Oh?” Sera is giving him a very interested look. “That’s—“

“Masumi-chan!” Sonoko yells, and both Sera and Shinichi jump. “You know who Marie Mercier is, right?”

“Eh?” Shinichi looks up at Sonoko, unimpressed. “Who?”

“The actress!” Sonoko clasps both her hands in front of her. “The beautiful and fashionable actress that was in the last Detective Samonji movie!” She sighs. “I bet she never has boyfriend problems.”

“You make it sound like you have boyfriend problems,” Shinichi says, and Sonoko glares at him.

“Don’t talk like you understand the heart of a girl in a long-distance relationship, you little brat!” She sticks her nose up in the air. “Anyway, Masumi-chan!” Sonoko holds out a magazine, shoving it into Sera’s face. “Which actress do you think is Clifford Groves’s girlfriend? Ran-chan says it’s probably Chris Vineyard, but—“

“Sonoko-chan, it’s not that serious! She just looks like her mother, and I was a big fan of Sharon Vineyard ever since I met her in New York, so Chris Vineyard is the only one I know!”

“And Eisuke-kun says he has no opinion.” Sonoko scowls at him, as if the very idea of him not
having a clue about entertainment gossip is a fundamental flaw, “so we need a tie-breaker! Plus, you lived in America so you’ve probably seen a lot more of them than we have!” She shakes the magazine for emphasis. “Who do you think it is?”

“Isn’t any guess at this point arbitrary?” Shinichi muses aloud, and the look Sonoko gives him is like acid. “Right, right, little kid, no opinions, got it.”

“Damn straight, little brat.”

Sera takes the magazine. “I’ve never seen any of them together before,” she says, narrowing her eyes at the picture. “It looks like there are two men and two women, coming out of a restaurant?”

“Exactly!” Sonoko says. “I don’t know who the other guy is—probably some nobody—but two men and two women coming out of one of the most expensive kaiseki restaurants in Osaka? It must be a double date!”

“A picture of Chris Vineyard?” Shinichi reaches up for the magazine, taking it from Sera’s lax hands. He pushes up on his glasses, and then examines the paparazzi photograph.

It really does look like her, and Shinichi takes in the plunging neckline of her dress with amusement before taking in the other woman, an equally attractive brunette with dark skin and deep brown doe eyes. With them are two men, one of them Shinichi recognizes as the director, and the other… Shinichi’s breath gets caught in his throat.

He realizes, is Marc Arbogast, the jeweler whose profile he and KID had just looked at yesterday. It’s a clue, it’s a connection, and Shinichi’s mind is racing, trying to figure out any gossip he’s heard about Mercier, about Groves. Hadn’t Satou mentioned he was rumored to be having an affair with Scarlette Shinamoto? How old is this photo? “When was this photo taken, Sonoko-nee-chan?”

“This weekend,” Sonoko says, snatching the magazine back from him before he can do more than catch the page number. “You’re looking at her breasts, aren’t you, you little pervert?” She swats at him with the now-crumpled magazine, and he bares his teeth at her.

“Get out of my face, you harpy!” Shinichi snaps, before putting a hand over his mouth. Ran is looking at him like she’s seen a ghost, and Shinichi’s had this interaction with Sonoko hundreds of times—maybe it’s the only interaction he had with her when they were in middle school—but never as Conan, no matter how much he’s thought it in her direction. “I mean… Sorry, I’m really tired. I guess I’m not up for cake, after all!”

“Conan-kun?” Ran is still staring at him, and Sonoko is looking at him with the strangest expression on her face. Hondou’s usually expressive eyes are flat and indecipherable, and suddenly, Shinichi is so damn tired.

He breaks away from their stares, studying the cracked sidewalk instead. He’d let his guard down, hadn’t he? He’s not sure if his nausea is because sick or because he feels trapped. “I’m going to go to Professor Agasa’s house, all right, Ran-nee-chan?” He rubs at his hair, at the stubborn cowlick that won’t lie down, and he’s already stepping backwards, and when she doesn’t stop him, he turns to run in the opposite direction, his backpack bouncing on his back as he leaves the high-schoolers behind.

He stops running after he rounds the corner by his favorite bookshop, his thighs trembling from the strain. Great, he can’t even run anymore without consequences. His lungs burn, and he’s lightheaded from the brief amount of exercise. How is he supposed to chase down criminals like this?
He leans back against the side of the building, letting people walk past him as he collects his thoughts. There had been recognition in Ran’s eyes, just now. Not for the first time, certainly, but…

He shakes that away. He’ll explain himself later, and maybe mention the home movie from his thirteenth birthday, when he and Sonoko had gotten into a screaming row that had ended with cake on Shinichi’s face. Shinichi will just tell Ran he’d watched it, recently, and that’s why… It’s not perfect, but it will work.

He digs out his Shinichi phone from the bottom of his backpack, and opens his phone to recent messages. Seeing the one KID sent him last night, he selects it, and then, after a brief hesitation, types Monday mag, p. 67.

It’s a few minutes before KID gets back to him. Shinichi, in that time, has made it all the way to the local shrine where last year, they’d viewed the cherry blossoms. There aren’t many visitors, since dogwoods and cherry blossom trees aren’t much to look at in the autumn. He sits on a cold stone bench, and pulls his knees up to his chest, wrapping his arms around his shins to think.

If Marc Arbogast knows Chris Vineyard, knows Vermouth, and she knows Clifford Groves, who has been linked with Scarlette Shinamoto, there’s a definitive connection.

When his phone vibrates, he jumps in surprise, before picking it up to check the message. baal villon’s great-grandson!

and scarlette’s fake mom, one of the key ingredients in a manhattan.

!!! code 96?

Shinichi smiles crookedly. 96, ku-ro, black. KID really just can’t help himself.

more to discuss on friday. He hesitates, before adding: stomach?

you’re cute when you worry~ is KID’s only reply, and Shinichi wants to call him on it, and tell him it’s not a real answer, but he’s afraid the question will get turned back on him, and with the way everything hurts right now, he thinks he’d dodge, too.

Not by being playful, though. That’s KID’s thing, not Shinichi’s.

So instead he just closes his messages, and, after a few seconds hovering over his contacts list, calls Heiji.

“Kudou!” Hattori says, after barely one ring. “Why did you hang up on me yesterday, asshole?”

“It wasn’t a good time,” Shinichi replies. One of the shrine priests is sweeping the steps, casting cautious looks up at the sky before hurrying up.

“What, was nee-san there?”

“No.” Shinichi rests his forehead on his folded up knees. The fabric is refreshingly cool, which means he probably has a fever. “I just had to hurry to get to the scene.”

“Did you learn anything?”

“The Black Organization is definitely involved.” Shinichi takes a breath, but he doesn’t get enough air. He’s so dizzy. “Involved with the jewel thefts, the murder, and the hunt for KID. Or at least Vermouth is.” He clenches his eyes shut.
“Kudou, you don’t sound so good. You nursing another cold?”

“I’m fine.” Fine. He licks his lips. “That man on the news. The one who was beheaded. His name was Snake, and he was involved in the murder of Kaitou KID.”

“What? Kudou, what in the world are you talking about?”

Even with his eyes closed, Shinichi can’t stop the spinning in his head. Oxygen deprivation again. He tries to take slower breaths, and finally, finally there’s enough air.

“Kudou? You still there?”

“The original Kaitou KID, I mean. The original Kaitou KID was murdered, and it was made to look like an accident. No evidence, no clues, and his civilian identity was laid to rest with no one the wiser.”

Heiji lets out a low whistle. “Sounds familiar, doesn’t it?”

“It really does.” He digs his nails into his shins, and the burst of pain anchors him. He opens his eyes and reaches into the bag, pulling out the plastic container of pills. He pushes one into his mouth with a hand shaking so badly he almost drops it. “The other two murders were both clearly in connection with jewels, which was the same reason the first KID was murdered. In connection with some jewel.”

“So this is really a cold case with a few new leads, then.”

“It’s not cold at all. I haven’t figured everything else out, but there are a couple of leads in Osaka. A man named Marc Arbogast and a director named Clifford Groves. I was wondering if you…”

“I’ll see what I can find out about where they’re staying, then.” He can image Heiji messing around with his hat as he speaks, pulling the brim to the side. “You and your girl going to come down here to investigate?”

“Ran’s not my girl,” replies Shinichi. The last of the elderly visitors to the shrine are making their way down the steep stairs. The shrine priest looks over at Shinichi, like he’s wondering why he’s here, but Shinichi just smiles at him wanly. It must be enough, because he nods to himself and goes back into the main building. Now Shinichi is truly alone out here. It’s rare that one can be truly alone in the heart of Tokyo.

Heiji grunts. “You always say that, but I’ve heard you confess to her!”

“I took the last temporary antidote I can safely take about six weeks ago. I told her I wasn’t coming back.” Shinichi digs into his pocket until he finds the 5 yen coin KID gave him. Rubbing his thumb along the raised metal is comforting. “I think… She’s seeing Hondou Eisuke.”

“The whiny guy with the CIA sister still doing deep undercover with the syndicate?” Heiji scoffs. “You’re better than some random guy off the street, Kudou.”

“He really likes her, and she likes him, too. He’s also here, you know? And now that he’s found his sister, and knows where she is, he’s staying out of things. So it’s…” He follows the grooves of the 5 yen coin like KID’s hand had followed the vertebrae up and down his spine. “It’s fine. I’m fine, and everything else is fine.”

The traffic out on the street gets noisier as rush hour arrives. Taxi drivers grow more impatient, and pedestrians are flooding out across the crosswalk every other minute as everyone rushes to get home.
before the inevitable storm.

“So Ran’s going off getting involved with somebody else, and you’re all right with that?” Heiji sounds outraged, and Shinichi doesn’t know at whom. All he knows is that it’s bad enough to feel this way, without Heiji rubbing it in. It’s a lot different than KID’s offhand empathy and quiet companionship. “Why didn’t you tell me?!”

“Because I knew you’d be like this,” replies Shinichi. “I have to be okay with it, don’t I? What else can I do? Forbid her from living the life that I desperately want her to have?”

“If it were Kazuha…” Heiji coughs. “Well, I just don’t think I could’ve taken someone moving in on my girl lying down.”

“She’s her own girl, and I… I need her to have what I can’t have. I want to see her happy face again, not just the sad one that’s all my fault.”

“Why?” He sounds pissed off, now. “You’re not giving up on finding a cure, are you, Kudou?”

Shinichi takes a deep breath, and smells the dying dogwoods, and the scent of early winter, creeping in too soon. “I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to go back to being Kudou Shinichi, and it’s not fair of me to keep her hanging on to my memory like that, when there are months between phone calls and longer than that between brief visits that can never last more than a few hours. It’s really not fair to Ran, Hattori, and I won’t do it anymore.”

“You really love her,” Heiji says. “Isn’t that enough?”

“I do love her.” Shinichi looks up at the sky. Overcast. The clouds are a dark gray, too, promising rain. “That’s why I can’t be cruel.”

“It’s not cruel to fight for the person you love!” Heiji sounds full of the sort of righteous fury Shinichi has trouble mustering these days, even when he thinks about how unfair all this is—that Shinichi, only sixteen years old, stumbled across an arms deal and had his life stolen from him, not all at once, but day by day, like holding river water in his hands and watching it slip between his fingers until he’s left with empty palms and a lingering dampness on his skin as a memory of all there had once been. “You could become Shinichi again tomorrow! Then what will you do?”

“What does happen if I turn back into Shinichi tomorrow? What difference will it make? Those crows still think I’m dead, save for Vermouth and maybe Kir, and it’s because they think I’m dead that Ran, Mouri, and my parents are safe. That the professor is safe. That the kids are safe.” The world is steady, and the coin grows warm in his hand. “I’ll have to go into hiding, or at least away. Drop out of contact with everyone, without the ability to keep an eye on them like I do now. Should I take Ran with me then, Hattori? Away from her parents and her friends and her life?”

“Kudou…”

“Should I ruin her life as much as mine has been ruined? Jodie-sensei has been fighting them for years, Hattori, watching person after person she cares about die. This isn’t a criminal I can catch and put behind bars. This is an unknown number of people, living double, triple lives, and it will be a long time before it’s safe enough for me to even think about returning to Beika as Shinichi, and I cannot, will not, ask Ran to wait for me.”

All his justifications come tumbling out, and under the scrutiny of being said aloud for the first time, Shinichi is both relieved and miserable that they continue to hold up. There’s enough evidence, he thinks, for him to close this case, even without the final proof: the ticking clock on the rest of
Shinichi’s life.

Heiji swears, muffled by the speaker, and Shinichi laughs weakly at it. Heiji tries to understand, but he’s a really straightforward guy. That’s what Shinichi likes about him, really, the way Heiji’s feelings are always written on his face and in his body language. What had Hakuba called him? Hot-blooded? That quality, it makes him compassionate and brave and tough, but it doesn’t allow for him to see all the shades of gray involved in the tightrope that is Shinichi’s daily life.

The only people that Shinichi can talk to that really understand are Haibara and… and KID. KID, with his hand in Shinichi’s hair and that teasing lilt in his voice, who knows exactly what it’s like to spend every day beside the girl you love and know that there’s a brick wall between you and her. KID, who is warm and all lean muscles and quicksilver smiles and endless mystery—

The heat in Shinichi’s chest that blossoms slow and vivid has his eyes widening, and he almost drops the phone. That’s…

Not something he can afford to think about. Not now or ever.

“Kudou? You still there, Kudou?”

“I’m here,” Shinichi says, as the promise of those heavy gray clouds comes to fruition, the sky opening up and rain pouring down. “Isn’t it funny how the weather always seems to mirror my mood?”

“What are you even talking about?” Heiji’s voice has lapsed into concern, and Shinichi laughs lightly, closing his eyes as the cold raindrops soak his clothes and drip down his cheeks.

“It’s raining,” he says. “I should get home. I’ll fill you in on everything soon, okay?”


“I’ll try.” He blinks to clear the raindrops that have caught in his eyelashes. “You’re… you’re a good friend, Hattori. I really… I’m really glad we met.” Shinichi ends the call before Heiji can respond, and stares out across the empty shrine. He doesn’t want to go back to the agency, yet. He wants…

His phone vibrates again, with another text message alert. B O N N I E.

Shinichi has no idea why he hasn’t changed it in his phone.

*with weather like this, I can conveniently catch a cold and miss class tomorrow. lucky!!*

Shinichi’s fingers are almost too numb to reply, but he writes out: *adding truancy to your list of trespasses?*

*today, aoko’s panties were white with pink bows.*

Shinichi laughs, rubbing at his eye with the heel of his hand, displacing his foggy, wet glasses. *you overdid things, then. did you rip your stitches?*

*i can imagine your face right now, tantei-kun. grumpy, i bet.*

Shinichi can imagine KID’s face, too. Before this weekend, he would have only known the expression: that wicked, taunting smirk that pulls up at the right corner of his mouth, and those bright blue eyes that can never settle for a single color, shifting shades like the sea under the sun. Now, though, he knows that KID’s eyebrows are thin and arched, and that there’s a slight cleft in his chin.
He has a light dusting of freckles across his nose, that probably disappear in the winter. His mouth is wide and his lips are thick, framing that smirk of his just right.

And Shinichi’s fingers might be cold, but the warmth in his chest won’t abate. have you ever been to Paris in December?

if we weren’t chasing murderers, i’d think you were being romantic. Shinichi stares at the text, unsure how to reply. The obvious response is ‘stop flirting with me’, but that’s been proven to have little to no effect on KID. He’s saved from responding by KID’s next text. what color panties are YOU wearing?

next time, i’ll shoot you myself Shinichi replies, looking out to the street, watching the multitude of colorful umbrellas passing by. He should get back.

It isn’t until later, hiding in the bathroom and letting the steam from his hot shower clear his head and chase away his shivers, that he has the chance to check Kudou Shinichi’s phone again.

There’s one last message from KID. mine are purple, it says, and Shinichi hates the flash of heat in his belly that spreads up his chest, hot like KID’s hands up and down his spine, hot like lava, because he doesn’t understand it. It makes no sense, that thinking about KID leaves him feeling like this.

It’s almost like… But that, Shinichi knows, is impossible, and so he dismisses it, letting that heat swirl down the shower drain along with rainwater and sweat as he breathes in steam.

* *

They find out Kanami Reika is a sixty-one-year-old woman from Yokosuka, with an absolutely unremarkable past. She has no siblings, two now-elderly parents, both still living, and has worked for the Takeuchi family since her mid-twenties. Nothing comes up in any databases, through facial recognition or any other flags. Kanami is, for all intents and purposes, clean.

Sitting in the professor’s living room the next evening, shortly after the other Detective Boys have gone home, Shinichi almost throws his laptop in a fit of pique. “What am I missing?” He runs fingers through his hair, knowing it’s probably a mess from how much he’s pulled it in frustration. “I know I’m right about this.”

Professor Agasa sets a glass of orange juice in front of him, and then sits down on the opposite couch. “Maybe it doesn’t have to do with her background at all, Shinichi-kun.”

“True. Haibara, do you have anything on her interests, or hobbies, or anything?”

“Apparently she’s very into fashion,” Haibara replies, typing furiously at the desktop computer. “After taking a peek into her financials, I’ve found that most of her money is spent on shoes and purses. A woman after my own heart.” She looks over her shoulder. “Still, that doesn’t make her a criminal.”

“No, it doesn’t, but I can’t believe that all those connections are meaningless. Even if she’s not… one of the crows, it doesn’t mean she’s not working for them. What would they even have on her, though?”

“There are no strange additions or subtractions from her accounts that stand out.” Haibara pushes back from the computer. “You may have to get information from her the old fashioned way. She did visit Paris two years ago, but it seems Takeuchi-san went along as well. Apparently he had a business meeting and they stayed for three days.”
“The location is suspicious, but Takeuchi works with a lot of foreign companies, especially when it comes to his charity work. He’s apparently getting funding from several places in the United States to pay for a new international aid hospital for the poor in Shinamoto’s honor. Between ventures like that and his corporate moves, it definitely can’t be ruled out that the trip was entirely above-board for them both.” He sighs. “I just need an excuse to go talk to her, or to get Takagi to talk to her.”

“Tread carefully, Kudou-kun. If she’s one of them, she might see Detective Takagi as expendable.”

“I know, I know,” Shinichi replies. “I’ll... come up with something.” He picks up the orange juice. “The members of the Black Organization that exist within normal society usually have holes in their backgrounds. Vermouth for example. She was Sharon Vineyard, and then when that identity got too old, she became Chris Vineyard—” Shinichi stops, mid-sentence, the rim of his glass pressing into his lower lip.

“Shinichi? Are you all right?” Agasa asks, leaning forward to peer at him, his mustache twitching in concern. “What’s wrong?”

“Vermouth,” Shinichi says, and Haibara’s eyes widen along with his own. “She abandoned the Sharon Vineyard identity because—”

“Because Sharon Vineyard got too old.” Haibara’s voice is grim. “Kudou-kun, do you think...?”

“I think we should figure out how old Vermouth is, and whether or not Sharon Vineyard is her first identity.” Shinichi takes a sip of his juice, and the acidity burns his raw throat. “I can’t believe it slipped by me, even after I was confronted with Vermouth at the police station. She’s just like Genevieve Maisonrouge and Takizawa Morisuke. Unaging.”

“What a terrifying prospect,” Haibara says, looking down at her own hands, studying the childish shortness of her fingers. “Staying forever the same age.”

“So someone is killing off people who don’t age, and taking gemstones from them, all while calling out KID. And KID, all this time, has been trying to lure out the people who...” He hesitates, before deciding this information is need-to-know, at least for Haibara, since she’s so involved with the case, “—killed his father, the first KID, for information. He’s also searching for Pandora, a doublet gem that supposedly grants immortality.”

“A gem that grants immortality?” Haibara gets up from the computer and walks over to sit next to the professor, picking up her own glass of juice. “That’s ludicrous.”

“Almost as ludicrous as a poison that turns teenagers back into children, right?” Shinichi takes another sip of his juice. “When I questioned Vermouth about why she was at the police station, she said: ‘Let’s call it me keeping an eye on something potentially problematic for me’. I pointed out that she’d said ‘me’ and not ‘us’, and she didn’t argue the point.”

Agasa rubs at his mustache. “Could she be a target of this killer as well?” he asks, and Shinichi’s eyes widen, before he slams his half-empty glass down on the table and rushes over to the door, where he left his school bag. He yanks out the Monday magazine he bought this morning, and opens it to page 67, holding it out to Agasa. “What’s this?”

“Vermouth, with director Clifford Groves, actress Marie Mercier, and Marc Arbogast.”

“Marc Arbogast? Our jewelry appraiser?”

“And Clifford Groves, who was spotted out with Scarlette Shinamoto enough that Satou, who is a casual reader of gossip tabloids, thought they were having an affair.”
Picking up Shinichi’s laptop, Haibara runs a search for Clifford Groves. “Director, born in the late 1970s. American, from Chicago. Handsome.” She looks up from the screen. “Don’t stare at me like that. Detailed profiles take time, and it won’t go faster because you’re watching me.”

“Right,” Shinichi says, pulling out his phone to check the time, and then jolting when it buzzes, before he sighs, resigned.

It’s his Shinichi phone. He doesn’t usually carry them both to school, but he’d been afraid to leave it at home this morning, for some reason. He’s not likely to mix the two up, considering how keen he is on details, but it’s still dangerous to carry them both at once, in case someone grabs the wrong one away from him. Especially Ayumi, who doesn’t seem to see the problem in snatching his phone out of his hands or creeping up on him while he’s having private conversations and then listening in.

It’s a good thing he’d followed impulse and brought it along. KID has texted him four times today, already, with small puzzles and cyphers that end up standing for nothing but mundane status updates the likes of which he’d find on KID’s Twitter, if he has one.

This one is a seemingly random string of *romaji*:

IAICNNTSTHGDSFHAMANUJNYGONIGBETWIIAS#

There are thirty-six letters, no spaces, all caps. Shinichi bites his lip. That leaves a lot of possibilities. He could need to get rid of every third letter, or put spaces in and read it backwards. The only hint is the hash key, which could mean any number of things. Is it a number? Perhaps it represents the British pound, or a musical sharp. It could even be possibly that Shinichi needs to think of it in terms of the Baudot code, but that seems unlikely considering the Roman letters—

“Kudou-kun?” Shinichi looks up from his phone to find Haibara staring at him pointedly.

“I’m sorry,” Shinichi says. “Did you find something?”

Haibara tilts her head quizzically. “You’ve been distracted by text messages all day.”

“What did you find?”

“Clifford Groves is most likely a stage name,” Haibara replies. “It goes back to his first credit as an assistant director, but I can’t find any high school records, or yearbook photos. He could be home schooled, that’s a thing in the U.S., but… it’s strange for there to be nothing.”

“How is his Japanese proficient enough for him to find employment here in Japan?” Shinichi asks, dropping his eyes back to KID’s text. An anagram of some kind? A word scramble? What’s behind that hash key? “He’s not part Japanese, or anything like that.”

“He mentioned in an interview in 2011 that he lived with a Japanese host family for a couple of years when he was young, but I can find no records of a child Clifford Groves receiving a visa for long-term stay. It adds more credence to the pseudonym theory.”

“Or the secretly a hundred years old theory.” He rubs at his cheek. “Marc Arbogast is definitely not Claude Arbogast, though. Digging through that profile information you dug up, we did find two pictures of them together.”

What else, what else? He doesn’t know why he’s bothering. It’s probably something just as silly as the last messages had been. *taught a new dove how to pick pockets* had been first, in a Baconian cipher, and then *how do you feel about sushi, meitantei?* had come next in a one time pad, alongside an encryption key that had been based entirely on the sushi menu at the sushi place near the Blue
Parrot bar where Shinichi had solved a murder for Mouri involving a film canister as a weapon, which KID had attached to the message.

Shinichi had responded to that one with *no opinion*, which had prompted a reply in Skip that had had Shinichi puzzling all the way through math class, letting the conversations of his school friends wash over him as he tried to figure out if KID had employed a singular or double skip method for the katakana. In the end, he’d had to actually scribble down alternatives until he realized it was layered: A skip code disguising an early 1940s two-kana telegraph code using I-RO-HA ordering for the syllables, instead of the more modern A-I-U-E-O. When he’d finally gotten down to the message, which had been *i’m bored without you so entertain me*, he’d almost thrown his phone across the classroom.

Instead, he’d responded with a line from the poem ‘Iroha’, *asaki yume miji*. And we shall not have superficial dreams.

*what does that mean?*

*i’m not here to entertain you, so grow up*, he’d written back, before amending it quickly with a second text. *if you make a joke about my size i’m blocking your number*

“Could those pictures have been fabricated somehow? We live in a new era of photo manipulation, like that Photoshop,” Agasa says the word Photoshop like it’s an obscure word from a Star Blades movie, and when he looks up, it’s to Haibara covering her mouth with one hand as her eyes scan the screen.

“Yes, but it’s a lot harder to realistically alter photos taken before the digital revolution of photography,” Shinichi replies, before his eyes gravitate back down to the text.

Tic-tac-toe boards are shaped like hash keys. Grids. Grids? Thirty-six letters. Thirty-six is six squared. A six-by-six grid? A grid cipher, then. Mentally, Shinichi arranges the letters, filling them in left to right, English style, one letter per box. Then he reverses the direction the letters are read, top to bottom and left to right.

*ITSNOTASFUNWITHJIICHANGINGMYBANDAGES.*

Adding in the spaces, it’s *it’s not as fun with Jiichanging my bandages*. With the all caps, it’s like KID is shouting. From what Shinichi has seen of KID’s everyday identity, it’s not too hard to picture him shouting.

*changing bandages isn’t supposed to be fun*, he replies. Then he smirks. *you know, this is something you and Hattori have in common. he also loves codes.*

KID sends him an emoji of a grumpy cat, and Shinichi laughs outright, before remembering he’s not alone. Haibara and Agasa are both watching him, with differing expressions on their faces.

“What?” he snaps, and Haibara raises an eyebrow.

“I’ve called your name twice, Kudou-kun.” Haibara’s lip pulls upward at the corner, and Shinichi feels trapped by it, like she’s looking into him deeper than he’d like. “Can you be pulled away from your phone for our investigation?”

He swallows, and licks his lips. “Sorry,” he says, tucking his phone into his pocket. It bumps against his other phone, reminding him of the time. The sun has long since set, and the professor’s fluorescent lights feel hot on his neck. “I’m listening.”
“I’ve found a photograph of Clifford Groves from the 1970s,” Haibara says, turning Shinichi’s laptop around in her lap. “Ignore the hair, and the clothing, and just look at the face.”

“But wouldn’t he have been—” He stops, and stares. Clifford Groves, American director of Japanese films, stares back at him, with that same thirty-something face, even though his eyes and hair are different shades, in faded color. He’s dressed to the nines, in an expensive tailored suit, and he has his arm around a woman that Shinichi doesn’t recognize. They’re in Rome, at what Shinichi thinks are the Spanish Steps. “He’s another one.”

“Yes,” Haibara says. “It’s only chance that I found this photo through a facial recognition site crawl. It seems to be the only one of him, and there’s no name for the subject listed. It’s attributed to a random blog run by an Italian amateur photographer who was doing a retrospective on his earlier works. I doubt we’ll find any others.”

“Could it be a relative? An odd likeness?” Like himself and KID, maybe, or even the similarities between Aoko and Ran.

“It’s easy to find people that look similar, but matching on certain key points is nearly impossible, even for identical twins.” Haibara hits a couple of keys, and the image zooms on Groves’s left ear. “Things like moles on the ear, for example.”

Shinichi looks down at the magazine on the table, sitting next to his orange juice glass. “He’s in Osaka right now, according to this picture. His security, if he’s smart, is on alert, considering Takizawa and Shinamoto have both been killed.”

“Do you think they’ve heard about Takizawa?”

“In spite of him not being a public figure like Groves, Arbogast, or Vermouth, he was clearly in contact with at least Arbogast. They’d notice, and it was on the news. Hard to suppress something like that, when the media is jumping on every tidbit that comes out about KID.”

The story that had run, about Takizawa, had been severely edited, but the fact that a monocle and a top hat had been found at the murder scene had been one of the details included.

“Clifford Groves was interviewed in Paris last year in March,” Haibara says, suddenly. “The timeline matches up with when Kanami and Takeuchi went to Paris.”

“Did Scarlette Shinamoto go with them?” His phone vibrates in his hand, but he’s focused now. “And was Chris Vineyard there, then, too?”

Haibara’s eyes gleam with triumph. “The Sofia International Film Festival was held that weekend. It seems Takeuchi and Shinamoto attended together. Chris Vineyard, Marc Arbogast, and Clifford Groves were also in attendance.”

“A film festival is a great excuse for several famous people to appear in the same place at once without comment,” says Shinichi. “It could also be a good cover for something else, too.” He takes off his glasses so that he can rub at his eyes. “We need more information on Groves. I want to put a bug on him, but if he’s anything like Vermouth, he’ll find it too quickly.”

Agasa frowns. “I could come up with something new, if you give me some time for thought.” His eyes cloud thoughtfully. “It would need to be able to pass through airport security, and it would need to stay on him a long time, huh?”

“His wallet or his watch,” Shinichi says. “Articles that are on or carried all the time. The wallet is a better bet, since people look so often at their watches, anything there might get spotted.”
“So a lightweight plastic casing and non-metal conductors. I’ve been working on something similar for that space shuttle radio I’ve had in mind, so I could probably put that together.”

“How about by Friday?” Shinichi asks. “I think over this weekend, I’ll be taking a trip to Osaka.”

“Going to get Hattori involved?” Haibara asks, and Shinichi nods.

“I’d ask you along, but then the kids would want to come.” Shinichi settles his glasses back onto his face.

“Are you going to have Hattori come and get you, or have Ran-san take you, then?” Agasa asks, and Shinichi worries at his lower lip.

“I have another plan,” he says, feeling the press of his phone against his thigh. “Don’t worry, I won’t go alone.” He catches a glimpse of the clock. “I should head home.”

“Make sure you don’t go alone.” Haibara closes Shinichi’s laptop and sets it down beside her. “Before you go, I need to take another set of blood samples.”

“That’s fine,” Shinichi says, getting up to follow Haibara to the lab, where she’s set up, over the past few years, a pretty extensive pharmaceutical testing area.

“What are the blood samples for?” Agasa asks. “More work on an antidote to APTX?”

“Something like that,” Haibara replies, distantly, giving Shinichi an irritated glance.

When they’re in the lab, door shut, she bears down on him. “You need to tell Professor Agasa what’s going on, Kudou-kun.”

“He’ll worry,” Shinichi says. “I don’t want that. Even you knowing is bad enough.”

“How many of these”— she shakes a plastic container of the special blue pills—“are you taking a day, now?”


She hisses, blowing air out between clenched teeth. “That’s too many, Kudou-kun. They’re losing effectiveness.” She ties off his arm, quickly and efficiently sterilizes the crook of his arm with alcohol then inserts a needle into his vein, drawing out a tube of blood. Then she takes a second vial and fills it too.

“It’s like morphine addiction, right?” He laughs as she quickly cleans the area again, putting a tiny circular Band-Aid over the puncture. “What else can I do? I’m dizzy, I can’t focus. Sometimes I can’t breathe, and even walking short distances leaves me exhausted.”

“Have you been coughing up blood?” She’s turned clinical, and Shinichi winces.

“Throwing it up.” At Haibara’s sharp look, he hurries to reassure her. “Only in the mornings, with mucus. It feels like my chest is going to cave in. And my lips… they look blue. It usually fades, after I’ve woken up some.”

“And your heart rate?” Shinichi’s first thought is of KID, his hand on Shinichi’s back, and how his heart had raced. Haibara isn’t asking about that.

“My pulse is shallow and quick.” He holds out his arm for her to take his pulse herself.
She frowns, and makes note of his heart rate on a sticky note on her desk. “Carbon dioxide, then. Have you been passing out or losing track of where you are?”

“Is that going to happen to me?” Shinichi looks at Haibara with wide eyes. “Am I going to be disoriented and forgetful, on top of weak?” Losing physical strength has been a blow, but Shinichi’s mind is everything for him. It’s what he’s clung to, through the de-aging and the slow relinquishing of Kudou Shinichi’s life. At least, he’s always comforted himself, he still has Kudou Shinichi’s mind.

“There’s a reason I don’t want you going by yourself,” Haibara says quietly. “Before next week I’ll have something for you to try. A better pill, or a shot. Normally I wouldn’t want to test it on you, but we’re running out of options.”

“I know,” Shinichi says, pressing a hand to his stomach. “I know we are.”

Haibara is looking down instead of at him. “There has to be a cure. I will find it.”

“It’s so much easier to break something than it is to fix it.” Shinichi’s hand clutches at his sweater, fingers digging into the knit. “Easier to take a life than save it. That’s the way it works, Haibara.”

“That’s not a lesson I ever needed to learn.” Haibara glares at him. “Don’t quit on me, Kudou.”

“Not planning on it,” Shinichi replies, eyes averted. “Just to be sure, though, I want you to know that I don’t blame you for this.” Her gaze is like ice, and he shivers. “I’ll see you at school tomorrow.”

“I won’t be there,” she says. “I have work to do.”

“Haibara…”

“Go home,” she says, turning away from him. “Before Ran-san comes looking for you.”

“Right,” Shinichi says. “See you, then.” He heads out of the lab. He finds Agasa in the kitchen, washing dishes.

“Headed out, Shinichi?” Agasa smiles, and Shinichi’s words get stuck in his throat. It’s impossible, he thinks, to tell Agasa. To tell anyone. God, the idea of telling Ran, when he hasn’t even told her he’s Shinichi, or telling his mom… It’s all impossible, and he just can’t.

Shinichi has risked his life so many times to solve a case, or to save someone else. It’s never filled him with the kind of fear that dying like this, slowly and out of his own hands, does. It’s the knowing, he thinks, and the fact that it’s not something he can prevent by being fast enough, strong enough, smart enough. It’s the guilt, and all the time he has to think about what he’s going to lose. It’s also, he thinks, that his death might not, in the end, mean anything at all. Just another victim of the faceless behemoth that he and Haibara call the Black Organization. Another person who couldn’t stop them.

“Hey, Professor?”

Agasa must hear something in Shinichi’s voice, because he stops scrubbing at Shinichi’s orange juice glass to look at him more closely. “Shinichi?”

“I just wanted…” He offers up a grin. “I just wanted to say thanks.” For his kindness, and his odd form of reliability. For his inventions that closed the gap between this body and Shinichi’s old one. For protecting his secret.

“Thanks for what?” Agasa grins at him. “For the new tracker? Don’t thank me yet! I’ll definitely
come up with something, though.”

“You always do,” Shinichi says quietly. “Later, Professor.”

As he’s walking back to the agency, he calls Heiji.

It’s barely one ring before Heiji answers. “Kudou?”


It’s night. The streetlamps have all come to life, and despite the cold, moths still congregate at the brightness. Shinichi feels smallest in the dark like this, when he’s walking alone. It doesn’t make him afraid, because Shinichi’s fears have never run the risk of being practical, but it does make him unnecessarily aware of his size.

“I thought you were angry with me, because of yesterday. Guess I was wrong.” Heiji’s voice is rough and uncertain, and Shinichi sighs at it.

“I’m not angry. It’s not your fault that you don’t get this. Someone else’s emotions aren’t really like a mystery with only one possible answer.”

“That’s true,” Heiji replies. “Especially not yours.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means you can be hard to read when you wanna be.” Heiji laughs wryly. “Anyway, what’re you calling for? I found out that guy’s schedule, by the way. He’s in Osaka until next Tuesday doing Gomera reshoots, since the movie’s set down here this time.”

“I guess someone got tired of constantly stomping down Tokyo. I was planning on coming down Friday.”

“Just you?” Heiji asks carefully, and Shinichi remembers, suddenly, that he’d gotten another text on his other phone. “Alone?”

“No,” Shinichi replies. “Probably not. I’m going to bring someone with me. We’ll get a hotel—“

“Bullshit you will,” Heiji replies. “My mom’d have my hide if I let you stay at a hotel. There’s plenty of room at my family house for you and one more.”

“Thanks, Hattori.”

“No problem, Kudou. Did you want me to look into who’s working security for Groves, too? I could get Otaki-han on that.”

“That would be fantastic. I’d also like to know if his security has substantially increased in the past couple of weeks.”

“In line with the murders, then.” Heiji clicks his tongue. “You think he’s in danger, Kudou?”

“I’m not sure.” Shinichi looks both ways before crossing the street. “I haven’t seen any evidence of a jewel he wears constantly, yet, and I did look.”

“Seems like it’d be an easier thing for a man to hide under his clothes,” Heiji muses aloud. “So what, you just wanna talk to him, or get close enough to bug him?”
“The latter,” Shinichi replies. “If Mouri was along, I could maybe talk to him, using that guy’s fame to open some doors, but right now, he’d be more of a hindrance than a help. I’ll settle for getting close enough to get some kind of tracer on him.”

“I’ll do my best to get as much as I can on his hotel and all that before you get here,” says Heiji. “We’ll cook up something.”

“We’ll have expert help,” Shinichi mumbles, and Heiji goes quiet.

“You bringing one of your parents along or something, Kudou?”

“No at all,” says Shinichi, amused. “Until Friday, Hattori.”

“Hey, wait, Kudou—“

Shinichi ends the call as he looks up at the agency. Walking in the front door, he rests his back against the hallway wall just past the entrance to Poirot, which is full of evening customers, and pulls out his Shinichi phone, with its Aston Martin phone strap. There’s one new message from B O N N I E.

"i don’t like codes, i like puzzles" the message says, no cipher needed.

*then why did you send me ciphers all day?* Shinichi texts back. His phone is warm in his hands.

*because you like them, meitantei* KID replies, and there it is again, a flutter in his chest, along with that inescapable heat that sits low in his gut. *you’ve always liked them.*

*how do you know that?* Shinichi’s eyes are trained on the “… next to KID’s name as he waits. KID… has actually spent a lot of time around Shinichi, over the past two years. He’s solved mysteries at Shinichi’s side, and lately, seen Shinichi when he’s not solving anything at all. Someone as good at reading people as KID turning that intellect on him is… Well…

*hmm, i wonder~* types KID, and Shinichi stares at it for a moment, before turning all notifications off, locking the phone, and putting it into the bottom of his backpack, before shoving his hands into his pockets and climbing his way up to the apartment where Ran and Mouri are probably waiting for him.

*

On Wednesday, Shinichi and Mouri go out to the convenience store for snacks and more beer for Mouri, and wind up stumbling across a double-homicide at the next door tailor shop. Shinichi wonders if the location is cursed, since there have been three other murders in the various shops that have occupied the space. It must be a nightmare for the realtor.

"You again?" Megure says, when he and Chiba arrive at the scene, and Mouri laughs nervously while Shinichi examines the cloth measuring tape that had been used as the murder weapon. "I swear, you’re a Death God, Mouri-san."

Shinichi hides a smirk behind his hand as he decides that yes, indeed, the killer is the tailor himself, and he’d used a brief blackout to loop the tape around both victims’ necks and feed the soft fabric tape measure into the industrial grade sewing machine he uses for leather alterations. Clever, but not really clever enough to trick Shinichi.

He doesn’t have proof, yet, or a motive, so he’ll keep the method to himself until he's got more to work with.
He shadows Chiba through his examination of the bodies, making comments and listening carefully, and in the end, Shinichi doesn't even need to dart Mouri, because they find the dead couple's wedding rings locked in the top drawer of the tailor’s desk, the computer cords pushed aside when it was hastily opened and closed.

Shinichi listens impassively as the tailor blabbers on about how the two had been regular customers for a couple of years, and how over a decade ago they'd defrauded his wife of a family heirloom, and he just wanted it back... It's nothing new, really. There's always a motive, and sometimes, it hurts Shinichi to see people consumed by their anger, ruining what's left of their life over someone who isn't worth it.

"Then why did you take the rings?" Mouri asks, as Chiba rolls them around in his gloved hands. They're plain gold, 14 karat, no gems, but there is an interesting engraving done on the front surface of the rings, deeper than is usually done on jewelry.

“They’re keys,” admits the tailor. “To a lockbox they keep inside their home. I’d planned to go get it tonight, before any of their things were moved or distributed, because my late wife’s diamond locket is there. They showed it to me, gloating, the last time I went over to fit Koshida-san for an evening dress. She asked me if it would look nice with the gown, then locked it back up in that box.”

Shinichi takes out his handkerchief. “Detective Chiba, can I see them?”

Chiba hesitates, looking questioningly at Megure, and he sighs before nodding his permission. The rings are heavy in his hands, and Shinichi peers at them closely as Megure handcuffs the tailor and starts to lead him out to the waiting patrol car. “How does the key work?” Shinichi asks, and the man looks over his shoulder, eyes dropping to the rings longingly. “Do you press a ring into a lock?”

“It has to be both of them,” the tailor says. “You need to press both rings into the lock at the same time. Those two”—he looks down at the two victims—“they didn’t even trust each other, you see? When untrustworthy people share a secret, they need fail-safes.”

Fail-safes. The two-man rule? Shinichi turns the rings around in his palm, the sound of metal rubbing against metal giving his thoughts a focus. What if…

The idea grows and spreads out in his mind, like a sprout pushing out of soft spring ground and flowering for the first time.

What if the gems stolen from Scarlette Shinamoto and Takizawa Morisuke after their murders weren’t Pandora, but keys of some kind? Something that the murderer needed to access something else?

That still leaves the mystery of Kaitou KID being challenged at both murders. What could KID have to offer, if he doesn’t have a key?

“Conan-kun? Conan.” Chiba’s voice interrupts him, and he blinks up at the round-faced officer, who is gently shaking his shoulder. “I need those back to enter into evidence.”

“Oh, right,” he says, and then smiles. “Sorry, Detective Chiba!”

“It’s fine.” He holds out a plastic evidence bag, label already filled out, and Shinichi drops the rings into it. “But Conan-kun, you look…” He frowns. “Maybe you should get more sleep, instead of sticking around to solve murders. You’re a little pale and thin.”

Shinichi rubs at the back of his neck, smiling widely enough that he knows Chiba won’t be able to see his eyes. “You’re right! We should both watch less Masked Yaiba late at night, huh?”
Chiba grins, worry chased out of his eyes by amusement, and he peels off his glove, and rests a hand on Shinichi’s head. “All right, you’ve got a deal. An early night for both of us.”

Mouri whines the entire way home that his beer has gotten warm, only to quail upon walking in to the apartment and finding Ran standing there forbiddingly, her hands on her hips in front of the veritable mountain of empty beer cans scattered across the floor of the living room.

Shinichi just helps clean up, all the while thinking about keys, and whether his hunch might have anything to do with this case at all.

After Mouri has gone to sleep, Shinichi stays awake despite the exhaustion pulling at his eyelids, with the covers pulled over his head to block the light from his phone. He searches for more pictures of ‘Lady Red’, staring at the pendant that hangs from Scarlette Shinamoto’s neck in almost every picture of the model. There is nothing irregular about the shape. He wishes he could examine it in person.

Switching to the message he’d sent Heiji of the photo KID had snatched from Takizawa’s workshop, he zooms in on the pocket watch. He can only see parts of it, but aside from the thicker than usual depth, only the elegant beauty of the case is worthy of note. There could be more behind the face than gears, especially considering Takizawa’s skills with clock construction and restoration.

He rubs at his eyes. *what if they’re keys* he texts KID.

*how very the hunt for red october of you, tantei-kun* KID texts back.

Shinichi is going to stop being surprised by the breadth of KID’s knowledge one day, but he doesn’t know when that day will come.*the reason for having two missile keys is so that no one man may arm the missiles*

*how many keys, then, supersleuth?*

*i hope it’s not more than two* He taps his thumb along the edge of his smartphone. *friday, Osaka, investigate third key?*

*how many days?*

*3, stay with hattori, home sun night*

*are detectives contagious?*

Shinichi bites his lip to muffle his laughter. *what do you mean?*

*if i spend time with one very special detective, will i get a detective rash?*

Rolling his eyes, Shinichi debates several responses. *i’m going to bed*

*you texted me first, clyde. osaka ✓ ✓ ✓* The ellipsis indicates another message coming. *Good night, little detective ❤*

*disgusting* Shinichi replies, but after he’s tucked his Shinichi phone away, out of sight, and he closes his eyes, his thoughts actually quiet, and he falls asleep.

*“What?”* Shinichi asks, when he looks up from the latest Night Baron novel, just published last week, to see Ayumi sitting in Haibara’s seat, staring at him fixedly. “Is there something on my face?”
“You’re in a good mood today,” she says, resting her cheek in her palm. “You haven’t been in a good mood in a long time.”

“I… haven’t?”

Ayumi shakes her head. “No.” Her eyes are guileless and wide. “I was worried.”

“Why?” Shinichi sticks his bookmark in to save his spot, and closes his book. There’s no one else in the classroom. Everyone else has gone outside to play, and Haibara hadn’t come to school yesterday or today.

“Ai-chan’s been watching you so carefully.” Ayumi is nervous, all of a sudden. “I just… wanted to make sure you were okay.”

Shinichi can’t brush her off. Not when she’s looking at him like that. Ayumi is only eight, almost nine, but she’s Shinichi’s friend all the same. If Shinichi is honest with himself, he’s never been able to make friends easily. Before all this had happened, he’d been unapproachable, and overconfident, and dangerously self-absorbed. He’d had acquaintances and people he said ‘hello’ to in the hallways, the professor, and Ran.

As Conan, Shinichi has made real friends, and Ayumi is one of those precious people. Ayumi, who worries about him and cries for him and is brave for him, too, when he needs her to be brave the most. Ayumi, who has so many questions and rarely gets answers.

“I’m worried about a lot of things right now,” he tells her.

“Can you tell me about any of them?” She hesitantly pulls on the sleeve of his shirt.

Ran is dating someone that isn’t him. He’s sick, and he’ll probably die before he turns nine a second time, or nineteen even once. Someone’s hunting KID. Someone’s hunting Edogawa Conan. There might be a gem out there in the world that offers immortality to anyone who can reach out and take it. The list seems so long.

“There are a couple of murders that the police haven’t been able to solve,” Shinichi says, tenuously, and Ayumi nods.

“The ones with Kaitou KID, right? I was watching about it on the news with my mom.”

“Yeah,” Shinichi says. “The killer hasn’t been caught yet, and we don’t know who else might get hurt.”

“You’re upset because you don’t want Kaitou KID to get hurt, right?” The yellow ribbon holding back Ayumi’s bangs slides sideways as she pulls on a piece of hair in the front, wrapping it around her finger as she bites her lip. “Since he’s your friend.” She colors. “And people don’t want their friends to get hurt!”

“Why do you think KID is my friend?”

“Ai-chan said that rivals are just friends that challenge you. And the newspaper said that KID was your rival.” Ayumi smiles at him. “Also, you’re so serious when you solve mysteries, but when you’re solving KID’s mysteries, you always look happy.”

“No one dies,” Shinichi says. “That’s why.” It’s true, but it clearly sounds like an excuse to them both. “But yes, I think…” He ruffles his own hair. “I think KID is my friend. I don’t want anything to happen to him. I keep trying to figure it out instead of sleeping.”
“My mom always makes me go to bed at nine.” Ayumi grins. “Maybe Conan-kun needs a bedtime, too!”

Shinichi grins back. “No chance, Ayumi-chan.” He is worn down, though. He’d gotten up at five in the morning to shower, throwing up a lot of nothing as the shower water beat down on his back, hands pressed to the tile wall to keep him from falling to his knees.

“Did something good happen today?” She drops her gaze to his book. “Is it that book?”

“Maybe?” Shinichi shrugs. “I’m not sure. I didn’t know I looked any different today.”

“Sometimes, you have eyes like my grandmother.” She plucks again at Shinichi’s shirt. “Like you have a really, really old person living inside of you.”

“I…”

“Today though, you just look like Conan.” She stares at him so earnestly it makes Shinichi’s chest clench. “I like it when you just look like Conan, because it means you’re not angry or sad.”

“Sometimes people are angry or sad, Ayumi-chan. That’s part of life.” He sighs. “I… I’m sorry I worried you.”

“I know it’s not just that,” Ayumi says, and Shinichi prepares excuses, but she just shakes her head. “But I didn’t think you’d tell me anything, since you’re always keeping secrets, and I thought only Ai-chan got to hear them, so…” She looks away, flush darkening. “If you ever want someone to talk to, you have us, too! Me, and Mitsuhiko, and Genta, too! So don’t forget us, okay?”

“I could never,” Shinichi says, and before he can overthink it, he reaches out and grabs Ayumi’s hand, squeezing it carefully before pulling back into his own space and hiding his own red face in his book, focusing on his dad’s new book instead of Ayumi’s luminous smile.

It isn’t until after school, when he’s back at the agency packing for Osaka, that he thinks about the conversation again. What good thing had happened, to improve his mood even though everything is coming to a boil? He fingers the 5 yen coin he can’t stop carrying with him everywhere, and realizes the only thing that it could be is KID, which… is strange, and Shinichi has no idea what to do with that.

* Shinichi has to take three blue pills before he even finishes school on Friday. After that, the Detective Boys sans Haibara go together to Genta’s house, and while his mom serves them enough snacks to feed fourteen children instead of four, they watch last season’s finale of Masked Yaiba for the third time in a month in preparation for the new season premiere at the beginning of December.

"We should meet up this weekend for soccer," Mitsuhiko says. "Before it gets too cold."

"I’ll be gone this weekend," Shinichi says. "To Osaka with Katsumi-nee-chan."

"Really?” Genta crosses his arms. "You’re always going on adventures without us, these days!"

Shinichi, standing up and brushing crumbs from his shirt, sheepishly pushes up his glasses. "I’ve just been busy, that’s all."

"We’re going to solve a bunch of mysteries without you," Mitsuhiko says. "Just you watch, Conan-kun."
"If you need to reach me, just use the Detective Badge," says Shinichi. "I'll definitely answer."

"We're going to solve them on our own," Genta says, and Ayumi nods.

"Definitely! We'll tell you all about our deductions when you get back and you're going to be impressed!"

Shinichi checks his watch. He's supposed to meet KID in twenty minutes or so at the Mouri Agency. "No using Heiji-nii-san to cheat," he says, smile pulling at his lips, and all three of them look sideways, abashed.

"That was one time!" Genta protests, at the same time as Mitsuhiko says "That was a year ago, Conan, come on!"

Shinichi laughs. "Still, have fun this weekend. We'll play soccer next week after school, okay?"

"Okay," Ayumi says, giving Shinichi a small, reassuring smile when the others turn back to Yaiba, and then Shinichi is out the door and walking home. He feels slightly feverish, so he grudgingly takes another pill, hoping it takes effect quickly. Ran won't let him leave if he looks sick, and he doesn't know if she'll be home from karate before he leaves.

It only takes ten minutes to get back to the agency. The smell of coffee and pastries wafts out from Poirot when Shinichi opens the door to head up. As soon as he steps inside, though, a tall figure blocks his path to the stairs, and Shinichi looks up to see Bourbon standing there, dressed in his uniform, holding a broom in his left hand with his right on his hip.

"Here alone tonight, Conan-kun?" he says, with that kind, soft voice that makes everyone instinctively like him.

Shinichi knows better than to trust that voice. This is the man, after all, who tried his best to kill Haibara last year, in an effort to keep his cover. This is the man giving pictures of him to other people. He might not be an enemy, in the wake of his truce with the FBI, but Shinichi is wary to call him friend, when even Akai does his best to steer clear. "Not really, Amuro-san," Shinichi says. "I'm going away with my nee-chan for the weekend."

"Oh, with Mouri-chan?" Bourbon's eyes are fixed on his face, and Shinichi shivers at how piercing that gaze is, even when it's partially obscured by the fall of blond hair into the man's face. It contrasts with the congeniality of his smile.

"No," Shinichi hedges, eyes darting around to see if there's an easy path for him to get around Bourbon without directly answering any of his questions. Bourbon has helped Shinichi before, but he's also hindered him, and with those pictures still fresh in his mind, he can't help keep an eye on the man. "My mom's friend's daughter." He swallows. "Why?"

"If you were home alone, I was going to invite you to do word puzzles with me inside the café," says Bourbon, gesturing to the warm shop beside him. Azusa is grinning at a couple of the only customers there, a young couple more interested in their phones than each other. About to break up, Shinichi deduces, before he darts his eyes to the hunched figure of a woman at the counter. Chianti, he realizes, and she must have put Bourbon up to this, to pulling Shinichi into the café for a conversation. He drags his gaze forcibly back to Bourbon. "As you can see, it's not very busy, and I'm always impressed with your knowledge and insight." His head tilts. "You're rather clever for an eight-year-old. I like to watch you work. And we could talk about current events. A lot of interesting things on the news, these days."
"Maybe next time," Shinichi makes himself say, taking one step right. He needs to get away from this situation, and away from Chianti. The note from the mysterious M.H. had told him to beware, and his instincts agree. "I have to—"

"Surely you can spare a few minutes?" Bourbon interrupts him, putting a hand on his shoulder. Shinichi is small and powerless, and he has options— the dart watch, his shoes, a soccer ball from his belt, but all of those options mean revealing how nervous he is to Bourbon, who already knows there is much more to Shinichi than meets the eye. Surely Bourbon wouldn’t be expected to make a move now, in public, when it’s still light outside?

“Conan-kun, I’m sorry I’m late,” cuts in a voice behind him, along with the chime of the door, and KID’s arm drapes around his shoulders, effectively dragging him from Bourbon. Shinichi looks up to see KID—as Katsumi, dressed in a loose blouse and a short skirt, the honey blond wig once more hiding away his tousled brown hair. “I hope you’re all packed?”

Bourbon, visibly surprised, takes a step back, easily putting a little more space between himself and Shinichi, and Shinichi breathes out in relief. Bourbon… puts him on edge in a different way than Gin and Vodka do, or even that the way Vemouth does. Perhaps because Shinichi wishes he could trust him, knowing he wants to bring down the crows, but knows he won’t or can’t, because Bourbon is ruthless down to the core when it comes to preserving his cover. He thinks like Shinichi does, too, like a detective instead of like a criminal, and he asks questions like a detective too, as if determined to peel back the layers of every person he talks to until he finds the truth.

“Almost,” Shinichi replies, and KID smiles down at him before turning that same smile on Bourbon. "Did you need something else, waiter-san?" KID’s tone is perfectly friendly and polite, but Shinichi knows that doesn’t mean a thing when KID’s fingernails are digging slightly into his arm.

"I guess you really don’t have a minute," Bourbon says, tone perfectly affable, and Chianti looks over sharply. Shinichi uses Bourbon to block her view of him. "See you later, Conan-kun." Then he’s back in Poirot, leaving Shinichi and KID in the hallway alone.

"You looked cornered," KID says. "I hope you don’t mind the interference."

"Not at all," Shinichi says, finally breathing again, and he looks up to smile at KID. "Good for more than just French, I suppose."

"Glad to be of service," KID replies, his arm falling from Shinichi’s shoulders, and setting his duffle bag on the floor beside him. "Wouldn’t want anything to happen to my favorite little detective, would I?"

KID drops to his knees in front of Shinichi, skirt riding up his thighs and revealing lean, strong quadriceps through the stretch of his sheer black stockings. Thin fingers reach out and tug at Shinichi’s sleeve, and Shinichi’s breath hitches as he’s brought this close to KID’s lipstick-red mouth, with its uneven bow. "KID?"

“All right, there, Tantei-kun?"

“What are you doing?” Shinichi asks, as KID’s hand slides up his front, along his sternum and then pushing into the gathered folds of his sweatshirt. “KID?"

“Checking for bugs,” KID replies, his voice barely a whisper, the words muffled by Shinichi’s cheek. When did his face get so close to Shinichi’s? “He touched you. I’m making sure he didn’t leave any listening devices or trackers on you.”
“O-Oh.” Shinichi licks dry lips and rests his hands on KID’s shoulders as KID’s nimble fingers skim down his ribs and then past his hipbones. He shivers when KID brushes the backs of his knees, and KID’s lips quirk.

“What did you think I was doing?” KID’s voice has shifted from Katsumi’s silky contralto to KID’s own tenor, and the purr of it leaves Shinichi a little breathless.

“I don’t know,” Shinichi replies. “You’re so weird. How am I supposed to know what you’re up to?”

“Surely the great Detective of the East can figure out my motives.” KID’s eyes, that extraordinary, unnerving blue, meet Shinichi’s own, and Shinichi’s throat is a desert.

“I find you—” His voice cracks, and it’s embarrassing. Shinichi takes a breath to steady himself, and then promptly takes another as KID’s hands skate up the inseams of his jeans, abandoning their upward trail halfway up his inner thigh. “You’re not easy for me to predict.”

“You always find me on heists.” KID’s eyelashes flutter every time Shinichi breathes, he’s still that close.

“Every predictable thing you do is followed up with something unpredictable.”

“Well, I have to keep you on your toes, don’t I? I wouldn’t want to stop being stimulating for that brain of yours.” He pushes his fingers into Shinichi’s hair, pushing bangs that have grown annoyingly long back from Shinichi’s forehead. “All clear, Meitantei.”

Shinichi had forgotten, for a moment, that KID had been sweeping for bugs, and at remembering, he drops his hands from KID’s shoulders, taking a step back. “Good,” he says, one hand pressing to his stomach to suppress the discomfiting feeling of something alive waking up there, and the other flattening against the hallway wall for balance. “Our train is in two hours.”

“I need to retrieve the Concubine’s Heart and return it to Inspector Nakamori somehow,” KID says, standing with barely a wince and picking up his duffle bag. “It is, after all, not the one I’m looking for.”

“I have to stop by the professor’s, anyway,” Shinichi agrees, moving around KID to start ascending the stairs. “That was Bourbon, by the way. He’s actually with the PSB, but Chianti, who was waiting for him to bring me inside like a lamb to the slaughter, is genuine Black Org.”

“He lives here?” KID asks. “And here I thought me living next to Nakamori was daring.”

“He works at Poirot and he occasionally tails Mouri on cases under the guise of being his student.” He cuts his gaze up to KID. “Do you know, by any chance, anyone with the initials M.H.?”

“Two high school girls, a cartoon character, and an old man who can’t walk without a cane.” KID hums. “If it’s the other way around, last name H, first name M, I know two. None of them fit the profile of someone involved with anything underhanded.”

“You never know. Anyone can be suspicious. Your instincts can lie.”

“That’s true,” KID agrees. “That’s why I trust my instincts only after I’ve run a thorough background check.” His smirk is humorless. “Did you know yours comes up with nothing before two years ago?”

“Obviously.”
“I suppose you are only eight,” KID muses. “That’s probably all right.”

Shinichi digs in his pocket until he finds his keys. Ran won’t be home from karate for another twenty minutes, and Mouri had left in the morning for Kyoto, having acquired a ticket from a fan for the Kyoto Sho Fantasy Stakes. He’d grudgingly asked Ran if she and Shinichi wanted to come along, but neither of them particularly wanted to watch him make a fool out of himself betting egregious amounts of money on horseracing. Ran had confiscated his credit card, though, demanding he take a set amount of cash out at the bank to limit his gambling.

“I’ll just be a few minutes,” Shinichi says, after he and KID have shucked their shoes in the genkan, KID’s black leather ankle boots next to Shinichi’s bright red sneakers. The image of those two pairs of shoes next to each other is rather striking, to Shinichi, and he looks away from it to KID, who is looking around the Mouri apartment like it’s somewhere he needs to break into. Today his blouse is white, and his lipstick is a pretty dark red, drawing attention to his mouth. Shinichi averts his eyes. “I mean, do you want something to drink, or…?” He waves his hand, and KID laughs.

“Not used to having guests here?” He tilts his head, letting hair fall over his shoulder. “Water would be nice.” He hasn’t switched back to Katsumi yet, with his mannerisms or his voice, and his relaxed posture as he examines the photograph of Kisaki, Mouri and Ran on the wall reminds Shinichi of how he’d looked leaning against the bathroom doorframe, all lazy stretches and lack of pretension.

“I try to avoid it,” Shinichi answers, heading toward the kitchen. KID follows him, laughing when Shinichi goes to grab the stool so that he can reach the cabinets. “Don’t laugh!” He sets the stool in front of the kitchen counter and climbs it, pulling down a clean glass and setting it on the countertop. “It’s not easy being small again when you’ve already grown up once.”

“I’m sure it isn’t,” KID says, as Shinichi looks over his shoulder to glare. It loses its effect when he’s struck with an unexpected wave of dizziness. Grabbing at the countertop for balance, Shinichi closes his eyes.

There’s a sudden warmth, and it takes longer than it should to realize it’s KID’s chest pressed against his back. KID’s body pins him upright against the counter, his belly pressing into the lip of it as KID’s arms wrap around him.

“Easy there, Meitantei,” KID says, chin brushing the crown of Shinichi’s head. “ Wouldn’t want you to fall from such great heights.”

The smell of jasmine surrounds him, and unconsciously, Shinichi leans into it, letting it fill his senses as KID rubs up and down his back in a slow, comforting gesture.

He hears Ran’s laughter before he hears the key in the door, and his eyes fly open. She’s early. Lightly, wary of KID’s injury, he pushes at KID, who lets him go without a fuss, taking a few steps back to create space between them. Shinichi is flushed and strangely winded, and KID is watching him with indecipherable eyes. “Let me get that water.”

He gets the pitcher out of the fridge, and he’s just handing KID the glass when Ran walks in, Sonoko at her heels.

“Oh, Katsumi-san!” Ran says, as Sonoko gives KID a suspicious once-over. “You’re here to pick Conan-kun up already?”

“I have a couple of errands to run,” KID says, transforming into Katsumi so fast that it gives Shinichi whiplash. “And since that’ll leave us closer to the station, it’s easier if we leave now.”
“I… see…” Ran says. “Well I hope you have fun.” She smiles and shifts her attention to Shinichi. “Tell Kazuha-chan and Hattori-kun I said ‘hello’.”

“I will!” Shinichi chirps, his own mask falling easily into place.

“You must be the girl Ran told me about,” Sonoko says. “Who knows why you’d want to spend time with this little monster.” She gives him the evil eye, clearly still pissed about Monday’s incident, despite Shinichi’s cobbled together apologies and excuses. “Anyway, it’s nice to meet you.”

“And you as well, Suzuki-san,” says KID. “Personally, I’ve always found Conan-kun to be delightful.” His smile is devious. “Even for a know-it-all.”

Shinichi barely resists the urge to kick KID. “I’m all packed, I just need to pack my chargers and my bathroom things,” he says instead. KID nods, taking a sip of his water. “You can talk with Sonokonee-chan while I finish up! She’s a big KID fan, just like you!”

Sonoko’s eyes light up as KID almost chokes, and Ran shakes her head fondly as she reaches for Shinichi’s hand. “Sonoko-chan, could you sit with Katsumi-san in the living room while I make sure Conan has packed everything he needs?”

She tugs Shinichi back toward Mouri’s room as excited squeals start pouring out of Sonoko, and Shinichi would feel sorry for KID if he didn’t know that KID’s ego is roughly the size of Jupiter, and he’ll probably have a blast singing his own praises for a few minutes.

Ran drops to her knees and pulls Shinichi’s phone charger from the surge bar as Shinichi unzips his toiletries bag to see what he’s already put in there. “I can do this myself, Ran-nee-chan,” he says quietly, and Ran doesn’t look at him as she winds the cord around the adapter neatly.

“I know you can,” she tells him. “You’ve been capable of doing most things by yourself since I met you.” She smiles, but it’s small. There’s a tiny wrinkle in her brow that Shinichi aches to soothe, the one that means she’s thinking too hard about something. “I don’t know why, but I feel like I should spend as much time with you as I can, lately.”

Shinichi looks down at the folded up futon, where he’s slept almost every night for the past two years. “When I get back from Osaka, we can spend the day together,” he says. “Just you and me.”

He gathers himself, and then lifts his head to meet her eyes once more. “It’ll be fun!”

Ran offers him a wobbly smile. “That sounds nice, Conan-kun.” She holds out her pinky. “It’s a promise.”

He links his own with hers, and the familiar warmth of her turns his smile more genuine. I love you, he thinks, remembering simpler times, when the same gesture had meant a vow not to be late for a movie because he was solving a murder or that he’d be sure to attend her karate competition. He’d
broken those vows more than once. He won’t, this time. He owes Ran that, at the very least.

“It’s a promise,” he echoes, and Ran ruffles his hair.

“I’ll grab your toothbrush. I wouldn’t want to hold Katsumi-san up.”

“Okay,” Shinichi says, his heart up in his throat as he watches her walk away from him.

When Shinichi emerges back into the living room with his packed bag, KID must see something in his face, because he hurries to interrupt Sonoko waxing rhapsodic about how good Kaitou KID looks in his tailored white suit and slowly gets up from the couch. He’s not obviously favoring his side, if you’re not looking for it, but Shinichi is, and while a part of him wants to make KID sit back down, the rest of him knows it’s time to go.

The flurry of goodbyes and thank-yous flow over Shinichi like he’s a pebble on the bottom of a gentle stream, and he lets KID take his hand and walk him out of the agency, his other hand holding his own duffle.

“Did something happen?” KID asks, when they’ve walked awhile. He’s slowed his pace, and when Shinichi looks up at KID, he can see the strain at the corners of his mouth. More likely, KID is allowing him to see that strain.

Maybe that’s why Shinichi answers. “I’m going to have to leave her.” Ran, clinging to his arm when they were seven. Ran, teaching him how to roundhouse kick when they were ten. Ran, chiding him about their homework when they were fifteen, and Ran, wiping rice from the corner of his mouth when he was seven all over again. “Soon, probably, and it’ll hurt her. I’ll hurt her again.”

“Miss Mouri?” KID squeezes his hand. “If there’s nothing you could have done differently, then you just have to carry that regret.” He laces their fingers together. KID’s hand is reassuring with its calluses, and KID keeps his eyes on the sidewalk in front of them. “You and I just come with some baggage.”

That draws Shinichi’s attention to KID’s black, nondescript duffle, which he holds gingerly in his left hand, and remembers how he’d felt, two or three weeks after getting shot.

“Do you want me to carry your overnight bag?” Shinichi asks, and KID’s eyes flicker down to look at him briefly before looking forward again.

“That’s all right, Meitantei, I’ve packed light.” He grins, wryly, and Shinichi chuckles. “You know, to compensate.”

“Right,” Shinichi says, and it’s… weird, but now Shinichi feels lighter than he had before. KID is… KID is good at that.

“Still, such a gentleman. You know how I love gentlemen~”

Flushing, Shinichi glares at the sign for Beika 4-cho-me ahead. “Because you got shot, you ass.” He pulls his hand free of KID’s, gentler than he normally would because he doesn’t want to hurt him.

“Of course, of course,” KID teasingly agrees. “I would never presume you had a soft spot for me, detective.”

It’s dusk when they knock on Agasa’s door. He answers the door with his cell phone cradled to his ear, and when he sees it’s Shinichi he grins. “Your father,” he says, pointing at the phone with his free hand, and then he blinks in surprise at KID. “Oh, you brought a friend?”
He moves aside to let them in, and Haibara stands there waiting with her arms crossed. “It’s just Kaito KID-san,” she says, after a once over. “I suppose you’ll be wanting your things?”

“If you don’t mind, little miss,” KID’s face splits into a wide grin, and Haibara just stares back at him, studying him.

“I like your earrings,” she says, eventually, and KID’s grin softens, or maybe eases.

“Thank you, Haibara-san,” he says, and then she beckons him, and he looks quickly down at Shinichi, for some reason, before following her down toward the lab.

Agasa, who still holds the phone, offers it to Shinichi. “He called for you, actually.”

“How did he know I’d be here?” Shinichi asks, taking the phone.

“A lucky guess,” his father says, on the other end of the line. “Did I hear Kaitou KID was with you?”

“Yes,” Shinichi replies. “I guess you’ve heard about the case?”

“I have,” his father says. "I’m calling because I have some information for you."

"Really?" Shinichi trails after the professor, deeper into the house, as his father clears his throat on the other end of the line.

"Your mother and I met an actress friend of Scarlette Shinamoto’s about a year ago, at a boutique in Paris." His voice goes razor sharp, like Shinichi’s own does when he’s put together a few clues but hasn’t reasoned through an entire conclusion yet. "She was very interested in me, even though she used people she and your mother knew in common to start the conversation."

"Dad, I don’t want to hear about how a hot actress hit on you in Paris." His mother had probably thrown a fit, queen of melodrama that she is, and she’d probably even mostly meant it.

His father laughs. "No, not interested like that. She asked me a lot of questions about Kaitou KID, and my public rivalry with him, and about his reappearance. She kept bringing the conversation back around to his recent crimes, and whether I still kept up with his work." There’s a shuffling sound, of papers, and Shinichi still can’t believe his dad would rather check a newspaper than read the news online. "It was actually pretty subtle, and were she dealing with anyone but me, the turns might have felt organic."

"So a friend of Shinamoto’s was interested in KID," Shinichi says. "And Shinamoto winds up dead with a taunt for KID left behind at her murder scene."

"Precisely why I called," his father replies. "I only recently heard about the case from Professor Agasa, and the KID details brought that incident immediately to mind."

"Who was the friend?"

"A woman named Marie Mercier. She’s a French actress, and given Shinamoto’s real identity, I also found that to be of relevance."

"Marie Mercier…” Shinichi has heard that name recently, hasn’t he? But where?

Then it comes to him. He’d seen it in *Monday*, when Sonoko had been debating over Clifford Groves’s romantic entanglements. She’d been the beautiful brunette in the photo with Vermouth,
Arbogast, and Groves. Triumph bubbles in Shinichi’s stomach and he grins.

"Dad, you’ve just helped me immensely." Shinichi watches as Agasa pulls a locked briefcase out of his safe, and sets it on the counter. "By the way, the new book is great. I haven’t figured out how he successfully broke out of that dungeon, yet."

"That’s because you’re still my apprentice," his father replies promptly, and Shinichi grins. His father is not one for open warmth, but there’s a ‘you’re welcome for the information’ embedded in his admonishment. "I have faith you’ll figure it out before I reveal it. You’re not my average reader, after all."

"I still have half the book to go." Shinichi watches Agasa unlock the briefcase. "I haven’t had a lot of time to read, lately. Dad, I’m going to have to go. I have to catch a train to Osaka in…” He checks his watch. "An hour and twenty minutes."

"One more thing," his father says, when Shinichi is about to hang up the phone.

"Yes?"

“Shinichi, look after Kaito, won’t you?” It’s a jolt, hearing KID’s real name from his father’s lips. Has his father met KID? This KID?

“What?”

“I wasn’t able to protect Toichi. I didn’t even know he was in danger. So protect his son.” His father’s voice is grim. It’s rare, to hear so much emotion in it, but Shinichi supposes that his father is a lot like Shinichi, in this: a man of few friends, who makes himself responsible for protecting them and feels the loss deeply when he’s unable to do so.

“I will,” Shinichi says, solemnly, thinking of KID with his back to that tree at the gardens, blood seeping out between his gloved fingers. “As long as I can.”

“Be careful. Call if you need anything.”

“Edogawa Conan’s passport,” Shinichi says, before his father can hang up. "Could you send it via registered mail to Professor Agasa?"

“I’ll do so tonight, after my book signing,” his father agrees. “Let me know what you think when you’ve solved Night Baron’s newest case. It’s based on a real one, as my novels often are.” He laughs. “Actual human impluse is so often more surreal than fiction. Until next time, Shinichi.”

He hangs up, and Shinichi sets the phone on the table, giving the professor most of his attention while some remains with his father’s request.

He gets up on one of the chairs at the table for a better view when the professor says: “I’ve got a new tracker for you, Shinichi.”

The bug, when he sets it in Shinichi’s hand, is light. It’s clear, and less than a square centimeter in size, and as it sits in his palm, it slowly grows more tacky. “The adhesive is activated by body heat?”

“Yes,” Agasa says. “If you want to stick it to an object, press it between your first finger and thumb to warm it up. The adhesive lasts, even in contact with human skin, for up to fifteen hours. After that, the adhesive will start to degrade the bug itself, and the bug will destroy itself completely.”

“Meaning I don’t need to retrieve it, and it has a greater chance of going unnoticed.” Shinichi beams
at Agasa. “Professor, this is perfect!”

“Can I have the adhesive formula?” KID’s arms drape over his shoulders, pulling Shinichi back against his chest. Shinichi leans sideways and looks up at him, and his formerly loose hair is pulled up and held with the Concubine’s Heart. It gleams bright under the fluorescent lights.

“Are you really flaunting your theft in front of a detective?” Shinichi asks, as the touch of KID’s arm against his neck warms him. “You’re shameless.”

“One of my best qualities,” KID agrees easily. “You don’t think it suits me?”

“That’s not the point,” Shinichi mumbles, eyes flicking away. It does suit him, at least in this particular guise. It would suit KID without the disguise, too, though, Shinichi thinks. His Katsumi disguise isn’t a mask, after all, and the color of the hair comb, that bright orange-pink that seems to sparkle with an inner light, sets off the gold undertones of his skin, and contrasts just so with his eyes, and that’s something that won’t change whether KID is wearing the wig and make-up or not. “The point is, I’m supposed to catch you.”

Haibara quirks an eyebrow when she enters the room. She’s carrying her own small box, and now, Shinichi can see that she’s worn out, dark circles under her eyes and the skin on her forehead dry. She hasn’t been eating or sleeping enough, even though she’s been skipping school.

“I can write it down for you?” Agasa tells KID, giving Shinichi a questioning look.

“It’s your invention,” Shinichi says, noncommittal, and he doesn’t need to look at KID to know he’s grinning too wide, impish and borderline dangerous. “You can tell whoever you’d like.”

“Kudou-kun,” Haibara says, climbing up in the seat next to him and sliding the box toward him. “Here.”

“What’s this?”

“Something new,” Haibara replies, and Shinichi opens the box. Inside are several sealed plastic vials, alongside a mostly plastic syringe, with a metal tip needle. “Twice a day, Kudou-kun, twelve hours apart.”

Shinichi can feel KID tense, his arms tightening almost unnoticeably around Shinichi’s shoulders. “This is why you’ve been holed up in here, Haibara?”

“It should be more effective than the pills. Throw those away. Do not take both of them in combination.”

“I know better than to mix medications,” Shinichi says, and Haibara looks away.

“I don’t like giving this to you untested, but we have to try something.” She darts her gaze up to KID. “Do you know how to give injections? I know Kudou-kun can do it himself, since it doesn’t require finding a vein, but just in case, I can teach you.”

“I know how,” KID says. Shinichi can’t look at him. He waits for KID to ask, but KID doesn’t. He just drops his arms as Shinichi takes the small box and closes it again, holding it and the new tracking bugs in his too-small hands. “Shouldn’t we head out, Meitantei?”

Shinichi’s voice is caught in his throat, but he pushes out words, somehow. “Only if you take that comb out of your hair.”
“Spoilsport,” KID teases, nuzzling his cheek against Shinichi’s hair, and whatever is clawing at Shinichi’s ribs relaxes, settling, and he’s able to pull out of the circle of KID’s arms carefully to growl warningly at him. “Don’t worry, I’m sending this off to Nakamori as soon as we get outside.”

“Where’s your suit? How are you hiding it?”

“I have my ways,” answers KID mysteriously, and Agasa chuckles from over where he’s pulling a freshly printed A4 from the printer, folding it into quarters. He walks back over to them, handing it to KID. “Thank you very much, Professor. I promise to use this only for evil.”

Haibara sighs. “Perhaps it’s too much to hope that you won’t get into too much trouble with your combined recklessness,” she says, offhandedly, but then she suddenly glares at Shinichi. “Do not endanger yourself needlessly.”

“I’m not planning on it,” replies Shinichi. “But if the opportunity to get information falls into my lap, I’m not going to ignore it.”

“I know you well enough to know that by now,” says Haibara, as Agasa worriedly strokes his mustache.

“I’ll look after Tantei-kun,” KID says, and Shinichi sucks his lower lip into his mouth, thinking of the similar promise he made to his own father, minutes ago, to look after KID.

Haibara’s intense gaze shifts focus, and KID does squirm under her appraisal. “You will, won’t you,” she says, as if certain, and then, with that, she slides down from her seat and heads toward the bathroom. “Have a safe trip, Kudou-kun.”

Shinichi grips the two plastic cases in his hands. “Right,” he replies, and then he jumps down from his own seat. When he looks up at KID, he’s looking down at what Shinichi is holding, an odd look in his eyes. “Ready to go?”

“If you are,” KID says, but his smile doesn’t reach his eyes. “I do have one last order of business before we go.”

Out front of the professor’s, KID whistles, and one of his doves comes flying from the trees, landing easily on his shoulder. It chirps into his ear, nipping at the shell of it. "Do you recognize him?"

"He's the one Ran and I took care of?" Shinichi watches as KID whips out a small sheet of paper and writes a number on it. "What are you doing?"

"Giving the Heart back," KID says, winking at Shinichi. "I have a locker reserved at Shinjuku station. We'll pop the comb in it and lock it up, then I'll mail the key to the police station. They'll get it in the morning."

"And the message?"

"Just informing Nakamori that he should be expecting a letter from me tomorrow morning. Otherwise it could get screened out."

"You think a letter from Kaitou KID is going to get screened out? Yeah right. You just want to watch him fume."

"Ah, can't get anything past you, can I?" He tickles his dove's chest and sends her off. "It's also to let him know I'm alive. Aoko said he's been worried. I wanted to wait until I was away from home to send it, in case he checks what direction she's flying from."
"Smart," Shinichi admits.

KID laughs. "You look pained, Meitantei." He straightens the collar of his blouse. "I'm the only criminal you compliment, right? It makes me feel special."

"I'm leaving without you," Shinichi says, walking toward the subway.

"Mean~" KID singsongs, but when he quickens his pace to catch up, Shinichi slows to allow it.

* *

KID’s injury reasserts itself when they’re on the train, in tiny winces and muffled groans. He’s long for the seats, despite not being tall, and Shinichi can see that his side aches before they’re even an hour into the four-hour trip by shinkansen. He’s small enough still that his own seat is more than big enough, and after testing the armrest between them, Shinichi finds that it can be put up.

“What are you doing?” KID asks, and Shinichi scoots as close as he can to the window, and pointedly looks out of it.

“You can lie down,” he says, gesturing vaguely to his lap. “It might feel better, with your stitches.”

He can feel KID’s quiet surprise, and he waits; waits for KID to exhale and smile at him. He keeps his eyes toward the swiftly passing landscape, until KID’s head lands in his lap, blond hair spilling across Shinichi’s bony knees and legs folded up to fit into the other seat. It’s an echo of their position in the car last week, and Shinichi absently reaches for KID’s hair before stopping himself.

“You like my real hair,” KID whispers, and his lips curl at the right side. “Don’t you?”

“It doesn’t matter to me,” Shinichi replies. KID’s head is heavy on his thighs, and warm. His eyes are half-lidded as he looks up at Shinichi, and the lines of discomfort at the corners of his eyes have disappeared. “Better?”

“Much,” KID replies. He’s watching Shinichi through his long, curled lashes, and… well, abstractly, Shinichi thinks KID is a little beautiful, with the fullness of his mouth and the natural softness of his jaw and the color of his eyes. “It’s surprisingly difficult to go through your daily life pretending you haven’t been shot.”

“I can imagine,” Shinichi replies. He feels hot, uncomfortably hot, like every nerve ending in his body is attuned to where KID touches him, and he can’t seem to look away from KID, who looks up at him without a mask of any kind right now. “Especially when you can’t seem to help making girls mad at you for being a pervert.”

KID smirks. “Everyone would know something was wrong, if I didn’t.”

“Fair,” says Shinichi, looking around and finding most of the people around them aren’t paying the least bit of attention to what they’re doing. Hesitantly, he reaches down to the hem of KID’s blouse, lifting it slightly until he can see the edge of the bandage. The wrapping is neat and even. “Did Jii-san do this?”

“Right before I left,” KID says. It’s his real voice, but it’s so soft and low that Shinichi can barely hear him, and as his fingers absenty skim the edge of the bandage, goosebumps rise on KID’s skin. “What are you up to?”

“Making sure everything is still in place. We got jostled a lot in the station when we were walking to the platform.”
“Nothing too bad.” KID’s muscular stomach flexes under his fingers. “Most of my problems this week have come from me wanting to twist out of the way of things, and then being painfully reminded how bad an idea it would be halfway through.”

“I couldn’t get out of bed for a week and a half after I’d been shot,” Shinichi says, pressing his hand flat on KID’s belly, just below the bandages. His pinky dips slightly into KID’s navel. “You definitely shouldn’t be doing contortions to dodge Nakamori-san.”

“Despite all the blood, it wasn’t serious. It just hurts, and it’s taking longer to heal because sitting still isn’t my forte.”

“I’m shocked, really,” Shinichi says, dryly. KID’s belly is completely hairless, smooth, just like his legs and forearms. “Do you wax?”

“I thought you didn’t want to ask me those sorts of personal questions, Meitantei.”

Shinichi blushes. “You don’t have to answer.”

“How can I resist, when you’re blushing so cutely?”

“You’re flirting with me again.” Shinichi furrows his eyebrows. KID takes one of his hands and settles it atop Shinichi’s on his stomach, and Shinichi realizes that he’d started absently moving his thumb, and it had probably tickled the very ticklish KID. He moves to retract his hand, but KID presses down, keeping it there.

“I’m not sure I’m the one flirting tonight, little detective.” Something glints in KID’s eyes, but as fast as it had come, it’s gone again, leaving only that distinct playfulness. “I don’t like the way the hair rubs against silk or nylon. It’s uncomfortable. So I wax it off.”

“It probably doesn’t hurt your disguises, either,” Shinichi says, too aware of the weight of KID’s hand on his own, the brush of KID’s ear against his inner thigh, how he can feel every single one of KID’s intakes of breath. His tongue is so dry in his mouth.

“It doesn’t,” KID says, and after that, they let silence fall between them. KID dozes off, sometime between Shinichi looking out the window in an attempt to calm his wild heartbeat and looking back down to check on him. Like when they had slept in Shinichi’s bed, KID’s face takes on a distinctly childlike softness in slumber. Shinichi resists the urge to press his index finger to the uneven bow of KID’s lip, and tries to doze off himself.

He must succeed, because suddenly, he glances at his watch and two hours have passed. His mouth tastes of cotton, and his eyes are gummy. He’s a little feverish, but he won’t worry about it, since there’s no nausea.

For a while, he amuses himself with a newspaper that had been left by a previous passenger in the back of the seat. Nothing much of interest in today’s news, though Shinichi does see an article about Takeuchi Makoto and the hospital he’s building to remember the deceased Scarlette Shinamoto, and another about the lack of leads on the beheading case in front of the police station.

Even after he’s finished with the paper, KID is still sleeping, his head turned sideways, away from Shinichi, revealing the long line of his neck and a freckle behind his ear. “You should cover up distinguishing marks,” Shinichi quietly chastises the thief, his voice scratchy from having just woken up. He can hear the fondness in it, too, and he doesn’t know what would inspire it. He takes his free hand and lightly brushes his pinky across the tiny mark. “I’d catch you over something careless like this, KID.”
“You could call me Kaito, if you wanted.” KID’s tongue sneaks out to wet his lower lip as he turns his head back toward Shinichi. “That’s my name, and it’s not as if you don’t know it.”

Shinichi startles. He hadn’t known KID was awake, or he wouldn’t have spoken. He feels like he’s been caught doing something he shouldn’t. The freckle is hidden again from view, under the collar of the soft white blouse.

Kaito. Kuroba Kaito. It’s a name he might have wanted to know, once upon a time. Maybe back when he’d first met KID, and only seen the arrogant thief who thought himself superior to police and superior to the law. He might still think himself those things, Shinichi admits, but there is a lot more to KID than that.

Shinichi has met Kuroba Kaito, who is loud and likes to push buttons and likes poetry and produces flowers from out of nowhere, and those are all things he sees in KID, too. But just a part of KID, not the whole of him. KID is also quiet conversations in the park, and a man in a white suit keeping him warm on the roof, and full of secrets that he is sharing with Shinichi one by one. KID is also a vixen in high heels and an incorrigible flirt and all of these other things that Kuroba Kaito can’t be, to stay safe.

“I don’t want to.” Shinichi closes his eyes, but it doesn’t help. KID’s lower abdomen under his hand is even warmer, and the smell of jasmine even headier.

“Why not?” The train car is quiet, passengers falling asleep due to the late hour. It’s a bit past eleven, and the train-car’s lights have been dimmed for comfort. KID’s voice barely disturbs that peace.

“Calling you Kaito would be the same as calling you Katsumi-nee-chan.” He can feel the lower abdominal muscles beneath his hand clench. “It’s only when you’re KID with me that you can just be you, and you said you valued that.” Shinichi inhales. Jasmine. “Kaito is one of the costumes you wear. I can call you Kaito when you need to be Kaito, and I can call you Katsumi when you need to be Katsumi. But to me, you’re KID, so unless you’d actively like me to call you something else, I don’t want to.”

He opens his eyes, and even in the dim car, he can make out KID’s parted lips, surprise flashing his straight white teeth in the dark. “Did you know, Tantei-kun, that I once thought you were cold?”

“Cold?”

“Cold and boring.” KID says. He’s doing the trick with his voice again, where it sounds like he’s whispering in Shinichi’s ear, despite how impossible that is from where he’s lying. “But you, Shinichi, are stunningly rocambolesque.” He purrs the last word, like a satisfied cat. “The very personification of a Ponson du Terrail adventure, full of plot twists. I’m absolutely riveted.”

“I’m sure that analogy has nothing to do with the fact that Maurice Leblanc was an avid fan of Rocambole novels,” Shinichi says, trying not to reel from the way KID’s words crash into him like a wave upon a beach. “Stop associating me with criminals.”

“If you insist,” KID says, taking the hand Shinichi has left on his stomach and lifting it so he can lace their fingers together. Shinichi wonders if KID can hear how fast his pulse is. “By the way, you can call me whatever you like.” His eyes are bright, gemstones in the murky darkness. “I don’t mind at all.”

* 

Heiji and Kazuha are waiting for them at the station, Kazuha wearily resting her head on Heiji’s
shoulder as Heiji keeps his eyes on his watch and tries not to blush.

“That’s adorable,” KID says, already back in his Katsumi persona, his bag held carefully in one hand, and Shinichi’s hand in the other. “I bet he writes her name with hearts around it in his diary.”

“Don’t say that to him,” Shinichi replies. “Trust me.”

“Does he know who I am?” KID tosses his hair back, and straightens his posture so he’s not obviously favoring his side.

“I didn’t tell him. I have no doubt he’ll figure it out eventually.”

“This could be fun.” KID grins wickedly. “It’s showtime, Tantei-kun~”

“I’m not aiding and abetting, this time.” Shinichi pulls on KID’s hand, and walks straight for the waiting Heiji.

Heiji grins when he sees him, and then the grin slips, slightly, when he sees his companion, unsure how to react to an unknown escort. Kazuha opens her eyes blearily.

“Heiji?” She blinks. “Oh! Hello,” she says, embarrassed, wiping at her mouth and blushing.

“Don’t worry,” KID says to her, warmly, “I slept the whole way here. I also had a cute pillow.” He winks in Shinichi’s direction, and Shinichi can’t help the full body blush that mirrors Kazuha’s as Heiji gives him an intrigued look.

“Welcome to Osaka, Miss…”

“Katsumi,” KID says, with a small bow. “Doito Katsumi.” She looks up at him through her eyelashes. “A pleasure, Hattori-san.”

“O…kay,” Heiji replies, off-balance, and yes, Shinichi decides, this will be amusing, as long as it lasts.

They get a cab back to Heiji’s family home, since Heiji’s motorcycle can’t accommodate four, and Kazuha takes the front seat and promptly falls asleep again, while Heiji sits with Shinichi and KID in the back.

“So how do you know Ku… Conan?” Heiji is eyeing KID speculatively, and Shinichi presses his lips together into a flat line as KID picks up his hand and starts to toy with his fingers. Heiji notices it, and raises both of his eyebrows, before subconsciously turning his baseball cap from the front to the side, the way he always does when he’s thinking.

“Oh, we’ve been having playdates for years,” Katsumi replies. “Surely you’ve heard of me before?”

“Playdates?” Shinichi pushes up his glasses. “Must you?”

His frank tone has Heiji’s eyes snapping up to examine his face. “So not playing cute little kid,” he says, and Shinichi shrugs. “She like Jodie-sensei or like me, then?”

KID laughs, and Shinichi contemplates saying something along the lines of I’m not the KID in this conversation, but he’ll let KID have his fun. “Like you,” he says instead.

“I’d like to think I’m not like anyone.” KID turns Shinichi’s hand palm up, and traces the lines there. Shinichi’s life-line is long. Not that he’s ever put much stock in fortune-telling. He wonders if KID likes that sort of thing. He probably wouldn’t get a straight answer if he asked him. “But if you mean
am I aware that Conan-kun is currently a little smaller than he should be, then yes, I am certainly in your category.”

Heiji stares at KID, his eyes flicking from the face to the hair and then back down to the hand fiddling with Shinichi’s. “Kudou,” he hisses under his breath, “you brought Kaitou KID with you to Osaka?”

“It was either that or he’d follow anyway,” Shinichi says.

“Less than an hour,” KID remarks, as the cab pulls to a stop in front of the Hattori residence. “Not bad, Detective of the West.”

“You made it easy on him,” says Shinichi. “Too many hints.”

“Well, he doesn’t know me as well as you do.” KID smiles at him, and for a moment, Shinichi just stares at him. KID’s real smile always gets him, because he’s never expecting it. “I had to make it fair.”

Heiji shakes his head. “Only you, Kudou.”

“Tantei-kun is also one of a kind,” says KID, and Shinichi ignores them both, pulling out his wallet and making KID use the cash to pay the driver.

Heiji doesn’t want to wake Kazuha, so he picks her up, carrying her close to his chest and inside the house. They’re quiet, since both of Heiji’s parents are already asleep, and Shinichi already knows the way to the guestroom he and Mouri stayed in last time they were here.

When they get to the main hallway, Heiji hesitates. “You gonna sleep in my room, Kudou?”

“No,” Shinichi replies, when KID subtly tenses. He would, if it were Mouri. But KID won’t sleep if Shinichi’s not there, will he? Sleeping means letting his guard down, and this is an unfamiliar place, safe for Shinichi but unknown for KID. “I wasn’t planning on it.”

Heiji looks between them. “See you in the morning, then. Futons are already out of the closet for you.”

When Shinichi gets back from the bathroom after brushing his teeth, it’s midnight on the dot. KID has already spread out the futons next to each other, barely ten centimeters between them. Shinichi frowns at him.

“Too close?” KID asks loftily, and Shinichi watches, fascinated by the twitch of the muscle in KID’s jaw, and the nervous bite at his lip.

KID wants Shinichi close, to feel safe. Shinichi is a bit miffed that KID thinks he’d begrudge him that. “No, idiot, you’re not supposed to strain yourself. You should have let me lay out the futons.”

“You’re not in any better shape than I am to do that,” KID replies, with an undercurrent of refusal.

Shinichi looks down at his unsteady hands, and sighs, before walking over to his futon and dragging it the rest of the way to KID’s, so that they line up. "I move in my sleep a lot," he lies, steadfastly remaking the futons into a single bed. "And it's cold."

He peeks up at KID, only to find him staring at Shinichi like... like Shinichi is a jewel he wants to steal or something, and that's... Shinichi doesn't know what that is, because no one has ever looked at him like KID is looking at him right now.
KID has taken off his wig, revealing that the hair underneath is flattened and damp. He'd washed his face already, but traces of his eyeliner linger at his waterline, and the remnants of lipstick linger in the grooves of his lower lip.

But it's the vulnerability of KID's expression that has Shinichi curling his hands into fists, nails digging into the fleshy heels of his palms, wondering why his heart feels like one of KID's doves, beating its wings against his ribs and waiting for KID's next command.

"Well, I wouldn't want you to be cold," says KID, then, so softly that it's a verbal caress, KID's words stroking down his spine like a single dragging finger. Shinichi watches, and waits, as KID starts to roll his stockings down his legs, revealing pale, smooth skin. His nails are painted pastel pink. Shinichi hadn't noticed until now, as he sees them dragging black nylon down thighs.

Shinichi is unsettled, this time, by the warmth in his lower belly, and the weird urge to move closer to KID and find out if that skin is as soft as it looks. He jerks his gaze away instead, and crawls under the covers, pulling them up over his head.

The rustling of clothes continues, articles hitting the floor and remaining unfolded, as far as Shinichi can tell. The loud sound of a zipper. The soft fall of something thin as KID pulls it on. Shinichi's face is hot, burning him up, and even hiding under here, he can't seem to get the image of KID out of his head, another portrait for an increasingly intimate collection.

When KID gets into bed next to him, tugging the covers down and out so that he can get under them, Shinichi squeezes his eyes shut. He doesn't understand why KID is suddenly so... Or maybe it's not suddenly. Maybe it's just because they're spending time together, now, that Shinichi can't ignore the awareness of KID he's always had. The thrill of being close enough to see the wicked glimmer in his too-clever eyes. That brilliant mind and that playful personality, and...

KID's long legs are still bare as they press against Shinichi's, and he wriggles in closer, pulling Shinichi into him, until Shinichi's cheek presses against KID's chest, resting above his heart. KID's wiry arm is firm around him, and whatever KID's wearing, it's silky and soft.

"I'll hurt you," Shinichi says, his words muffled by KID's chest.

"You'll be careful enough for the both of us," says KID. "Go to sleep. Lots of boring investigating to do in the morning with your detective friend."

"KID..."

"Meitantei, sleep."

And Shinichi does, wrapped up in warmth and jasmine and his own confusing feelings, with KID's arm pressing him into the futon, an armor against the chill night air.

*  

He doesn’t get sick until almost seven in the morning. He has to wake KID to even get out of bed, and KID, when he realizes what’s happening, helps Shinichi up and walks him to the bathroom, guiding him down onto the bathroom floor in front of the toilet so Shinichi can throw up. It’s all mucus and blood, since the onigiri they’d gotten at Shinjuku station was at least twelve hours ago. He hurts, everywhere, and it feels like when he changes bodies—like his bones are melting, like his insides are liquefying. The pain has things turning black around the edges of his vision, and KID’s hand, normally so hot, is cool when it presses to his forehead.

“'You’re burning up,” he says. “When’s the last time you took any medication?”
“Yesterday on the way home from school,” Shinichi says, he thinks he says, and then KID is gone, and when he comes back, it’s with the case Haibara had given Shinichi yesterday.

“I’ve got you, Meitantei,” KID says, into his ear, and then Shinichi passes out.

He comes to only to find himself sitting in the shower, his back against something warm and heated water spraying into his hair, drops sluicing down his neck and collecting in his collarbones. He’s still wearing his underwear, but the rest of his clothes are in a pile outside the shower, in front of the toilet.

KID is behind him, rinsing shampoo from Shinichi’s hair. Reaching out to steady himself, he encounters KID’s thighs on either side of him. They’re strong under his hands, muscles bunching at Shinichi’s touch. The warmth at his back is KID’s chest, and the soaking wet material of his silky nightclothes slides against Shinichi’s skin. “KID?”

He sounds terrible, and KID chuckles. “Hey there, Meitantei. If you were still passed out by the time I finished rinsing you off, I was going to call an ambulance.”

Shinichi leans back, and KID flinches. “You can’t do this,” Shinichi says, the fog clearing from his mind. “You’re supposed to keep the actual wound as dry as possible.”

“You had blood all over your face and chest,” KID replies. “It was freaking me out, Tantei-kun. I had to get you clean.”

“I’m sorry.” Shinichi tilts his head back to look at KID, who leans forward so that they can see each other. KID’s hair is soaked, as is the emerald green lacy thing thing he’d worn to bed. “You gave me the injection?”

The world keeps getting clearer. Now Shinichi can feel KID’s faint trembling behind him, and taste the blood in the back of his mouth. He flexes his fingers, gripping KID’s thighs tighter as KID drops the shower head and pulls Shinichi back into him closer until there’s no space between them, Shinichi’s wet skin sticking to KID’s. KID buries his face in Shinichi’s clean wet hair. “You scared me, Shinichi.”

“It’s not usually… like that,” Shinichi says. “I really am sorry.”

They sit there for a while, until the cooling beaded water on their skin has them both shivering. “Let me rewrap your bandage,” Shinichi says.

“Can you get up?” KID asks, and Shinichi nods.

“The shot is better than what I was taking before, I think.” Shinichi lifts one of his hands, and holds it in front of him. It’s steady. “She didn’t want to give me something like that unless it was necessary.”

KID watches him struggle up and get out of the shower, before rising himself, slowly, carefully, pain suffusing the movement. Shinichi stamps down the flash of guilt, knowing it’s pointless, and instead offers KID one of the towels Heiji had left for them on the shelf above the toilet, somehow keeping himself from dwelling on the way KID looks, drenched, silk and lace shift gone see-through, clinging to every muscle of his frame, one strap slipping down a slight shoulder and lacy hem catching at the insides of his thighs.

Rubbing his own hair dry with the other towel, Shinichi looks in the mirror instead. There’s color in his cheeks. He hasn’t looked this healthy in over a month, has he? He drapes the towel around his neck, letting it hang long to his knees, and digs into his toiletries. He needs to brush his teeth, to get rid of the taste of iron.
KID waits for him to finish, and then allows Shinichi to pull him back to their shared room, hand around KID’s slick wrist. He loosens his hold when he closes the door, then moves toward KID’s luggage, stepping over yesterday’s discarded clothes.

“Where did you pack the bandages?” Shinichi is briefly dizzy as he bends forward, but he pushes it aside. KID took care of him already this morning. Now he’ll return the favor.

“First aid kit,” KID replies. “Side pocket.”

“Is anything going to blow up if I unzip it?”

“Sometimes you have to play a little Russian Roulette with your luggage,” says KID, looking over his shoulder, smile stretching his mouth. With his back to Shinichi, he pulls up his wet shift carefully, taking it off over his head and one arm, then pulling it down off his other arm on the wounded side so he doesn’t stretch the skin.

His underwear, cut high, stretches lacy and black across his backside, and Shinichi clears his throat as he remembers he’s supposed to be finding gauze. “So I have a five in six chance of safely getting the first aid kit?”

“I prefer to think of it as a one in six chance of having an exciting new twist to your morning.”

“I think this morning was exciting enough,” says Shinichi, and KID laughs, quietly, and slowly starts to unwrap the bandage around his torso.

Nothing attacks him when he retrieves what he’s looking for. Someone with a less chaotic mind than KID’s packed it, and Shinichi easily finds the carefully prepared kit, and moves to stand in front of KID. He pushes the clean, rolled up bandages into KID’s hand as KID lets the old ones fall damp to the floor around his feet.

Swallowing harshly, Shinichi presses his hand to KID’s good side, just under his floating rib, and then brings the other hand, with the soft pad soaked with cleaning solution, up to press to the puffy skin on the outsides of the three small stitches. “These look pulled.”

“I would have destroyed surgical tape closures,” KID admits, hissing as Shinichi applies a thin layer of antibiotic ointment to the wound. Gooseflesh rises under the hand Shinichi has resting for balance, and a blush rises up KID’s chest. Shinichi refuses to look up and see how high it climbs as he takes his hand away, so that he can use both hands to wrap the bandage securely. “You’re good at this.”

“You’re just saying that because you think I’m more fun than Jii-san.” Shinichi snorts. “Whatever that entails.”

“He gets worried,” KID replies. “And sad, and frustrated, because he was my dad’s assistant before he was mine. It’s hard to take, lately.” He lifts a hand, and rests it along the side of Shinichi’s neck. “You know what it’s like, I think.” His fingers tangle in Shinichi’s damp hair. “You don’t have a fever anymore.”

“No,” Shinichi says, finally looking up at KID. He has more freckles, dotting his shoulders and leading down to his pectoral muscles. Shinichi drops his eyes and secures the bandage. “I don’t.” He steps back, away from KID, whose still dripping hair sends water droplets down his shoulders and chest. “Have a fever, I mean.” He finds KID’s eyes again. “I do know what it’s like to hate making people worry.”

KID’s hand drops from his neck, and he presses his palm to the bandage. “Thanks, Tantei-kun.”
“Thank you,” Shinichi says. “For the injection, and… taking care of me. I didn’t mean to…”

“Now we’re even again,” KID says. “Since you did help me last week.”

“I don’t keep score with friends,” says Shinichi, with a small, barely there smile.

As KID gapes at him, Shinichi walks around KID, over to his own backpack, and pulls out the blue sweater Ran had knitted for him, for Conan, last winter. He sets it out on the futon to put on later, and then self-consciously drags on fresh underwear and his jeans while his back is to KID, before he goes back to the bathroom to gather his pajamas and make sure there’s nothing else he left in there on the floor.

When he returns, KID is already dressed, in a simple black dress that falls loosely around his hips, and his thin black stockings. He’s sitting cross-legged on the futon and texting someone furiously and his blond wig is spread out on the pillow beside him, combed free of tangles. KID’s face is scrunched up as water from his bangs falls into his face and splatters on the screen of his phone, and Shinichi sighs, picking up the towel he’d left draped across his backpack. Then he drops to his knees next to KID, his jeans brushing KID’s stocking-clad thigh, and taps KID’s forearm with two fingers. KID looks up quickly from his phone, surprised, and meets Shinichi’s eyes.

“Your hair,” Shinichi says, before taking the towel and throwing it over KID’s head, then reaching forward and vigorously drying it.

KID pulls the towel free, and he’s laughing now as he looks at Shinichi. “You look so different from this morning. More like my usual little detective.” And suddenly, the mood shifts, KID setting his phone down and angling toward Shinichi more fully, resting one hand on Shinichi’s thigh and bringing the other one to cup his face. “My one true challenge.” He leans in, and their noses brush. Shinichi turns his head away.

“You’re flirting with me again.”

“Is it really all that bad, Meitantei?” KID’s thumb strokes his cheek, and then his hand slides down his neck to his shoulder.

Shinichi shivers. “You can’t… do things like that.”

“Hmm?” KID’s fingers slide down his inner arm, from his armpit down along the edges of fading bruises to his wrist. “Are you ticklish?”

“Not as ticklish as you are.” Shinichi stares at the floor, unable to stop the blood from rushing to his face, and KID’s fingers return to the crook of his elbow, right at the vein.

“Tantei-kun,” he says, and his breath is hot on Shinichi’s forehead. When did he get so close? Shinichi’s heart is hammering in his chest, so loud he can barely hear himself think. “I have some questions about the apoptoxin, if you’re willing to answer.”

The change of subject is unexpected, and as distracted as he is by KID’s actions, he doesn’t think through his reply. “What more do you want to know?” Shinichi’s voice cracks embarrassingly, and he swallows. This is… he knows what this is, burning in his gut like a raging inferno as he trembles under this lightest of touches. He knows what it is, because he used to feel this way when Ran hugged him from behind, her breasts pressing into his back and her lips at the nape of his neck in a ghost of a kiss. “It turned me into a six year old. Only now I’m eight.”

“An ordinary eight year old?” The pad of his thumb rubs in soothing circles just beside his elbow, but it makes Shinichi’s skin tingle. “What’s the science?”
His lips brush the tip of Shinichi’s nose, this time lightly, maybe accidentally, but KID rarely makes any move by accident. He’s a man who risks his life walking on wires between buildings with no one to catch him. He’s the master of his own body, precise and perfect with every motion.

“I… well, my circulatory, cardiovascular, and endocrine systems are virtually unchanged by the shrinkage. My mind is the same as ever, of course.” Shinichi pulls his arm away, and sits back on his heels. It’s drafty, without KID’s body heat, and the floor is freezing under his bare feet. “So not exactly ordinary. Some parts of me are eighteen, and some parts of me are eight.”

“You’ve got eighteen-year-old hormones in that eight-year-old body?” KID’s hands press against the tatami now, on either side of Shinichi’s knees, as he leans forward. He’s staring at Shinichi carefully, his eyes, his captivating eyes, bright with millions of things Shinichi can’t read.

“Yes,” Shinichi says. “Sort of. Not that I can act on them, but…”

“Because you look like this?” KID’s tone is very deliberately light, but his questions are pointed. Shinichi doesn’t miss that there’s intent, even if he doesn’t know what the intent is. “Do you think no one can accept you like this? In this body?”

“No just that,” Shinichi admits. “If it were just that, I would have… I would have told Ran.”

“But you didn’t.”

“I didn’t.”

“You’re worried about your Black Organization finding out about her.” KID’s dark hair falls into his eyes, and his wide mouth is serious, not a hint of teasing as he searches Shinichi’s face.

“Yes,” Shinichi says. “She’s many things, but secretive is not one of them. It’s charming. She’s honest, like Hattori. Open.” Ran wears her feelings like a lined winter kimono, beautiful and heavy all at once, immeasurably gorgeous in Shinichi’s eyes amidst all the untruths that surround him like knee-deep December snow. “If she knew who I was, she’d let it slip. She would never be able to treat me as Conan if she knew I were Shinichi. I don’t blame her for that.”

“You said before that you told her that ‘big you’ wasn’t coming back.” KID straightens up again, but before Shinichi can exhale at the reprieve, KID is pulling him in instead. Shinichi is conscious of his bare torso now that one of KID’s hands rests at the small of his back as the other stretches out across his ribs, just under Shinichi’s frantically beating heart. All the while he’s looking at Shinichi, not breaking their gaze, and his eyes are so very blue.

“He isn’t.” Shinichi closes his eyes under the onslaught. He should move away from KID, but he can’t. He can’t, because KID is touching him, looking at him, like he’s Kudou Shinichi and not Edogawa Conan, and he’s also looking at him like Shinichi’s found himself looking at KID in return, sometimes. Shinichi had never imagined that flickering flames of affection could turn into a wildfire hot enough to burn him alive. “It’s no longer even a possibility.”

“There really is no cure for this, is there, Meitantei?” His eyes aren’t demanding anything. They’re just asking, and…

KID hardly ever tries to pry Shinichi’s secrets from him, and this morning, not knowing had scared KID enough that he’d shaken, as he held Shinichi to his chest. And Haibara’s words still have their claws dug into him. You’ve never been one to hide from the truth.

"When the apoptoxin shrunk me," Shinichi says, "it wasn’t a perfect change. Some parts of me were affected by it the same way everyone else is. I was still poisoned."
He tastes the blood in his mouth, even now, when there’s only toothpaste mint.

“For a year or so, I didn’t notice anything was wrong except for having a weak immune system. I was always catching colds and getting fevers, but it was never anything serious. Then I got shot.” He rubs his fingers over the scar. “Things got worse. My… well, Haibara is my doctor, I guess… She told me that my organs are all failing, at different speeds. My liver is going the fastest, followed by my lungs.”


Shinichi lets himself lean forward and rest his head lightly against KID’s shoulder. "It’s not impossible that I’ll be able to live a while longer. Haibara’s drugs will keep me alive. Halt the degeneration." He breathes in jasmine. "But the temporary cure to the apoptoxin, becoming the old me, is no longer an option, and a permanent cure is probably out of the question completely."

"That’s what you mean, when you say Kudou Shinichi is dead." KID’s voice is barely even a whisper. "He can’t come back anymore, not in that body, so you had to either really end things with Miss Mouri or tell her." KID nuzzles his nose into Shinichi’s hair. “But it wasn’t worth it to tell her, if…”

“Yes,” Shinichi says, relieved because KID gets it, because KID is warm, because KID is here.

They sit in silence, awkwardly twined together, as Shinichi takes short, uneasy breaths.

"I don’t want you to die," says KID, hushed. "I’ve grown rather attached to my tiniest detective."

"That makes two of us." Shinichi struggles to breathe in, his chest constricted and tight. "But if I’m going to die, it’s going to be taking some of those Black Org bastards down, as many of them as I can." He licks his lips and turns his face into the crook of KID’s neck. “Before the confusion and hallucinations set in.” He laughs, dry, empty. “It’s funny, but that’s much scarier than the thought of being bedridden, isn’t it?”

"Haibara-san thinks she can help you?"

Shinichi lifts his head, so that he can look at KID. It’s still strange, to be given this unvarnished, unmasked view of his whole face, without pretense or posturing.

“The injections are some kind of intermediate drug to buy time to work on something more permanent?”

“Right,” Shinichi says. “Since my body will probably reject any sort of transplant, the only hope is that we can save what I already have.” He drops his head again.

“It kind of puts the search for a stone that grants immortality into perspective, doesn’t it?” The lips against his hairline gather heat in his stomach.

“Eh?”

“All these people out there risking their now for a chance at forever.” Shinichi looks at KID out of the corner of his eye. His jaw is tight with a tension Shinichi can’t feel in the steadiness of his grip. “When some of us are just very thankful for our now.”

Shinichi sits back, enough that he can see KID’s whole face.

KID hesitates, and Shinichi watches as something flashes in KID’s eyes. It’s a decision, of some
kind, and Shinichi has no idea what sort of decision needs to be made right now, when there’s just the two of them and the inevitability of Shinichi’s fate between them. What could KID possibly be deciding about?

KID leans down, then, and presses his lips to Shinichi’s shoulder, just a brush of skin to skin, but the effect of it ripples out from the point of contact until it feels like his whole body is ablaze.

Shinichi whispers, as KID presses his lips there a second time, "What are you doing?"

“Hmm,” says KID. "Why don’t I let you work it out on your own?” His thumb comes up to lightly skim the place his lips had just been. "Up to that, Meitantei?"

"Maybe," Shinichi says, licking his lips, and watching KID’s face for clues. “Then again, maybe I don’t actually want to know the answer at all.”

“Maybe you don’t,” KID agrees. “But you do hate leaving mysteries unsolved.”

He can feel the lingering brush of KID’s lips on his shoulders, and the roll of his stomach this time has little to do with his nausea. “I—"

KID’s eyes flick to the door, and he pulls away from Shinichi completely and puts on his wig as the door slides open, transforming completely into Katsumi before Shinichi’s eyes. Without a mirror, he begins to apply his eyeliner, as Shinichi wraps his arms around himself and turns to look at Heiji, who stands in the doorway sleep-rumpled but clothed in a Koushien sweatshirt and baggy jeans, hat perched sideways on his fluffy hair.

“Almost dressed, Kudou? Kazuha and my mom are already starting breakfast, and I figured you’d wanna get going after we eat and begin looking into things over at the hotel.”

“Almost,” Shinichi says, grabbing for the sweater that’s caught half under his leg, and quickly pulling it on. “Okay."

“What about you?” Heiji asks, directing his attention to KID. “You don’t need to do all that, do you? It’s just us.”

“Kazuha-san is friends with Miss Mouri, isn’t she?”


“Then I do need to do ‘all this’,” KID replies. “Or Conan-kun will be in a bit of trouble with his nee-chan.” He opens a tube of pink lipstick and applies it carefully, and Shinichi watches as he presses his lips together to smooth it. “Besides, Tantei-han, how do you know I don’t dress like this every day anyway?”

Heiji scratches at the side of his face, unsure how to respond to that. “I guess that’s true,” he says, after a long pause. “Do you have anything you don’t eat?”

“Fish,” KID replies promptly, and Shinichi hides a smile in the high neck of his sweater as he rubs his glasses lenses clean.

“All fish, or just—“

“All fish,” KID says. “In general, I tend to avoid anything that comes from the ocean, but fish, especially.” He cocks his head to the side. “Don’t mention that to Hakuba, if you should ever encounter him again.”
“I wouldn’t spit on Hakuba if he were on fire,” Heiji replies. “I wouldn’t want him to accuse me of being too rash again. I’d have to make sure he was really on fire or something, first. Run a few tests. Check my watch once or twice to make sure of the exact time for an official police report. Get a warrant. Investigate alternate hypotheses.”

KID grins, catty and slightly evil. “Oh Tantei-han, you and I are going to get along just fine.” He rises gracefully to his feet without a hint of a wince, all of it hidden away now, tucked behind a smiling mask. “I’ll go see if I can help your mother with anything.”

Heiji watches him leave as Shinichi fits his glasses back onto his face, and puts both his phones into his left pocket and the small plastic container of the professor’s new bugs in the other. He debates bringing his voice-changing bowtie along, but KID is here, isn’t he? A natural voice changer. He just shrugs, leaving it in his bag, and fits his watch onto his wrist, fastens his belt, and looks at Heiji in askance as he folds the futons.

“You’re still here, so you have something to say.”

“He’s a weird guy,” Heiji says, shrugging, helping Shinichi fold the blankets. He tugs at the neck of his sweatshirt. “Don’t know what I imagined Kaitou KID to be like, but it probably wasn’t like that.”

“What do you mean?” Shinichi asks carefully, keeping his voice neutral, and Heiji shrugs again, this time looking even more uncomfortable. Shinichi picks up KID’s clothes from yesterday, and the wet nightgown thing, and lays them over his bag.

“He’s touchy,” Heiji finally mumbles, making grabbing motions with both hands. “And you don’t much like being touched. I thought he’d be more aloof or something, I dunno.”

Shinichi relaxes. “So you’re being overprotective.”

“Bullshit,” Heiji spits, then looks left and right down the hallway to make sure his father hadn’t overheard him. “You trust him, though, right?”


Heiji blinks in honest surprise, but then he grins. “Well, Kudou, you’ve got pretty good taste in people, if I do say so myself. If you wanna bring Kaitou KID on a case, I’m sure you’ve got reasons.”

“He has useful skills,” Shinichi says, pulling on a clean pair of socks and then following Heiji into the hall. “And… they’re after him, and he’s got just as much right to investigate as I do. It’s better if we team up, right?”

Heiji shoves both hands in his pockets. “You been spending a lot of time with him?”

“Sort of. Sometimes as Katsumi, and sometimes as himself. I know…” Shinichi looks down at his feet. “I know his real life identity.”

“Shit, Kudou, how’d you get that intel?” Heiji rubs at his nape.

“He told me,” Shinichi replies, and that has Heiji stopping. Up ahead, they can hear noise from the kitchen, and Kazuha’s laughter mixing with Heiji’s mother’s. KID is being his usual charming self, it seems. “Not directly, of course, but in that roundabout way he has of telling people things, sometimes.”

Heiji studies him, then, and Shinichi lets him, wondering what he’s trying to figure out.
“Did I… interrupt something, when I came to get you?” Heiji rubs aggressively at his nose. “It’s just, you were red as a chilli pepper when I opened the door, even though you and Kaitou KID weren’t saying anything or doing anything, which, I dunno. It was…”

“I’m not sure yet,” Shinichi replies, stepping around Heiji to walk ahead of him to the kitchen. “I don’t think so.”

Heiji slings an arm around his narrow shoulders, pulling him into his side. “Ah, forget it. Welcome back to Osaka, Kudou. May there be no murders today.”

The ‘Suzuki Delightful Sakura Hotel’ is as opulent as most things associated with Sonoko’s family dynasty are: the hallway molding is essentially Italian in design, according to KID, and the cherry blossom motif carries through every room in gold leaf, and even in the elevator, there’s an overwhelming sense of ‘expensive’.

“Rich people,” KID murmurs under his breath with no small amount of disdain. “This just makes me want to steal on principle.”

“I’m rich,” Shinichi replies, just as quietly, as Heiji argues on the phone with Kazuha. It’s going more poorly than usual, since the elevator is fucking up the signal and they both keep hearing only half of what the other is saying. “Or, well, my family is. Do you want to steal from me?”

“Nothing material,” KID hedges, smiling secretively as the elevator dings. Heiji stomps out first, down the hallway to their room, and Shinichi has to take a second to pull his gaze away from KID’s shiny pink mouth to follow. KID falls into step with him, humming something unrecognizable, as Shinichi’s heart beats too quickly in a percussion accompaniment.

Otaki has come through for them, not only getting them the hotel information but also booking a room under Heiji’s name on the same floor as Groves using his power as an officer, to give them an excuse to be there.

In the taxi, Heiji and Shinichi had pored over Scarlette Shinamoto’s phone records as KID dozed next to him, his fingers tapping irregularly on Shinichi’s knee with no discernable motive, as far as Shinichi can tell.

They’d found numerous calls to a number registered as Unlisted, over ten of them in the month before her death, which, in the thousands of calls she’d made, had previously seemed insignificant. KID, upon hearing their debate on the possibility of the phone number belonging to Groves, had plucked the travel netbook right out of Heiji’s hand and proceeded to do some kind of hacking, over a phone hotspot, that was so fast that it might well have been arcane, and pulled up a trace on who had last paid for the number.

It had indeed been Clifford Groves.

Now, on their way to the room Otaki had reserved for them, Shinichi tries to think about how he wants this to play out. If Groves is anything like Vermouth, he won’t get any answers by just asking. The best method would be to bug the man, then spook him to see where he runs, just like Sherlock Holmes had in ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’ when he’d lied his way into Irene Adler’s home and tricked her into revealing the location of her safe, to obtain an old photograph.

Heiji is six meters ahead of them, still on the phone, but his "You’re not listening to me at all, jackass!” echoes down the hall to them, and KID snickers.
“They’re a kiss-kiss-fight couple, aren’t they?”

“The very definition,” Shinichi confirms.

“We’re not like that, are we, my darling Clyde?” KID bats his eyelashes, and Shinichi elbows him in the hip.

“How many times do I have to tell you we’re not Bonnie and Clyde?”

“At least once more. Also you didn’t change my name in your phone, so I’m taking that as acceptance.”

“I changed my password two days ago!” Shinichi glares up at KID, who unrepentantly grins back at him.

“Do try harder not to be such a Sherlock Holmes nerd,” KID replies. “I didn’t look through anything else. I was just going to change my contact name back to Bonnie, but lo and behold, you hadn’t altered it at all!”

“What would be the point?” Shinichi examines the carpet with more focus than should be absolutely necessary, noting the classical Japanese branch motifs that climb up to the painted cherry blossom tree walls. “I can’t very well write KID in my phone, even if it is my Shinichi phone.”

“You could have written any number of other things.” Shinichi peeks up at KID, only to notice that KID is watching him, and that makes him blush, remembering, suddenly, that kiss to his shoulder, that had been… not something Shinichi would describe as friendly, exactly. It’s ridiculous that he’d been flustered by it, when he knows KID is flirtatious, and knows that he only does things like that because they make Shinichi flustered. “I think you like it.”

“I—"

Ahead of them, just in front of Heiji, a door opens, and a tall man, standing about 186cm, opens a room door and steps out into the hall. He’s wearing a cream colored suit, tailored to perfection, and the gold of his pocket square matches the ring he wears on his right middle finger, a massive ruby, perhaps, shaped like a phoenix. It’s almost gaudy, and KID notices it immediately, squinting at it calculatingly as Shinichi moves on to other things, like the tan leather of his shoes and the way he can smell the man’s cologne from this far away.

It takes Shinichi a moment to recognize him as Clifford Groves, and he immediately reaches for the trackers in his pocket, pulling one out and holding it between his index finger and thumb.

“It’s your turn to chase me,” he says, just loud enough for KID to hear, and then he pushes the slightly tacky bug into his hand and takes off running, right at the man, his eyes closed as he laughs. “Nee-chan, nee-chan, I bet you can’t catch me!”

“You little rascal!” KID shouts after him, in his Katsumi voice, and Shinichi lets a real grin escape as he barrels right into Groves, knocking them both down to the ground. “See? What have I told you about running inside!” Then KID is lifting Shinichi off the man, and then helping him up himself, dusting at his jacket with a fretful look on his face, long hair spilling coquettishly across his shoulders as he looks up at Groves through his lashes. “I’m terribly sorry sir— Oh my, aren’t you the director of the new Gomera movie? Now I’m even more embarrassed! Conan, apologize immediately!”

“I’m really very sorry,” Shinichi says, scuffing his shoe against the carpet.

Groves is staring at KID, clearly charmed despite himself, and he clears his throat. “Yes, well,
children shouldn’t be running in the halls at this time of day,” he says. He has a nice voice, low and soothing, just like it is on television.

Shinichi sneaks a look at Heiji, who still has the phone pressed to his ear, Kazuha’s voice yelling his name over and over again, and he’s looking at the two of them, impressed, a smirk pulling at his lips.

“I know,” Shinichi says, trying to project repentance, but Groves isn’t looking at him. He’s looking at KID, head cocked to the side with interest. “I love the Gomera movies!” He says that slightly louder, to get the director’s attention, not liking the way his eyes linger on KID’s mouth.

“So do I,” Groves replies, briefly taking in Shinichi before his eyes return to KID. “Are you staying on this hall?”

KID makes a show of looking through his purse, and then pulls out the card key Otaki had handed to Heiji earlier, prompting Heiji to frantically search his pockets and grimace when he realizes that somewhere between the front desk and now KID had pickpocketed him. He narrows his yes at KID, and Shinichi stifles a laugh.

“I am,” says KID. “Four rooms down from you! What an honor!”

“You should get dinner with me tonight, if you’re available. My previous dinner date is a bit mad at me.” Shinichi flips through possibilities. Vermouth? That other actress? He’s pretty sure Vermouth is in Tokyo, since she was on a live variety program just yesterday for foreigners.

“Maybe,” KID says, demurely lowering her eyes. Groves’s smile spreads, and Shinichi resists the urge to kick him for even looking at KID like that, when KID is… He stops that thought in its tracks.

“Nee-chan, let’s go, let’s go,” Shinichi says, reaching up to grab KID’s hand. KID’s eyes drop to meet Shinichi’s in confusion.

“A pleasure, Mr. Groves,” KID says, in clear English. “Perhaps we’ll see each other this evening.”

“That,” Groves says, also switching to English and straightening his suit, “would be my honor.” Shinichi’s stomach tightens into knots. He hadn’t felt this way when KID had flirted with the man at the convenience store. What’s the difference, now, when it’s still just KID using his natural charisma to get what they need? “And you, young man,” he adds. “Behave. This is a nice place, not a playground.”

“Yes sir,” Shinichi replies.

Groves spares barely a glance for Heiji, who has been watching them with the air of a man engrossed in a nature documentary, and then sets off toward the elevator.

“What the hell?” Heiji bursts out, once they’re in the room, closing his phone and disconnecting the call from Kazuha.

“Tantei-kun wanted me to plant a tracker on Groves,” KID says. “So I did. Right under the knot of his bowtie.” Heiji looks startled at the immediate drop of KID’s voice into something definitively male, but then he raises both eyebrows.

“I mean, obviously,” Heiji says. “I’m not going to ask why you guys have a whole big sis-little bro routine already worked out, either. But I’m talking about you!”

“What about me?” KID asks, eyes crossing as he tries to focus them on the finger Heiji is pointing right between them. “Flirting with men is just as easy as flirting with women, and everyone is
distracted when they’re flattered. How do you think I get inside so many secure buildings?” He crosses his arms, almost defensive, and Heiji huffs.

“Not that,” he mutters. “When did you steal my keycard?”

“Oh!” KID blinks at him innocently, and if Heiji believes that, Shinichi has a dinosaur he can sell him. “Right after you got it. Actually, when you thought you put it in your pocket after Detective Otaki gave it to you.” He winks. “Don’t fret, Tantei-han, I didn’t touch anything I shouldn’t.”

“How did you manage that without me knowing? I always catch pickpockets!”

“Magic, of course!” KID grins, and oh, it’s his heist-grin, and Shinichi’s mouth goes dry at the way his heart trips and stumbles over its next irregular beat.

“Of course,” Shinichi echoes. To distract himself, he turns on the tracker, and twisting the arm of his glasses, activates the receiver for the bug, and ups the volume to max. “Let’s see what we’ve got.”

The red dot shows Groves pacing in the lobby, near the guest phones. His voice comes crackling over the speaker, slightly muffled by fabric.

“Did you book your flight to Paris yet?” Groves doesn’t sound panicked, exactly, but he’s far from the calm he’d displayed when talking to KID and Shinichi in the hallway less than five minutes ago. “I’m not heading out until Monday. I have to finish with edits for the film or it’ll look too suspicious.”

A silence, during which KID starts looking around the room, pushing aside curtains and running his fingers along the seams of walls and furniture.

“Paranoid bugger, isn’t he?” Heiji remarks, and Shinichi shrugs.

“It’s hard for you to understand, Hattori.” When Heiji starts to protest, Shinichi shakes his head. “No, I don’t mean that as a bad thing. It’s just, you don’t have to always be afraid.”

Heiji strokes his chin. “You mean of those crows.”

Shinichi watches KID as he slowly drops to his knees to check the bedframe. A barely visible wince has Shinichi wanting to go do it for him. “Haibara, KID and I… we have to be.” Heiji’s gaze sharpens, and his lips part, like he’s figured something out. “What?”

“Nothing, Kudou,” he answers, and then they’re interrupted by another outburst from Groves.

“You can’t count on Sharon for anything, Em. She’s playing her own game, and she’s got her own ends, regardless of her connections. She’ll protect us about as well as she did Genny and Morris. That is to say, not at all. Best Genny gets is a hospital with her fake name on it, and last I heard no one attended Morris’s funeral. The cops are useless, too. You know what happened the last time we got the police involved—Date’s investigation nearly led to us all getting outed.”

Shinichi’s eyes widen, and he looks over at KID to see KID with a mirroring expression on his face. That, he thinks, is confirmation of Groves’s complicity, and connects Vermouth to this case with chains made of steel instead of thread. And Date Wataru again… Shinichi won’t consider it now, but later…

“I’ll meet you in my room in an hour. I need to go down to the filming location to check on the last reshoot. It’s just city footage, so they don’t need me to stick around. See you then.”
Shinichi turns off the speaker when, after Groves hangs up the phone, he walks into the bathroom and the sound of his zipper sliding down makes Heiji cringe.

“Should I go bug his room?” KID is pulling his hair up into a ponytail, away from his face, and Shinichi’s eyes drop to that freckle, only to find it’s been covered up. He catches KID’s eyes, and KID gives him an indecipherable look that clings to him even when he diverts his attention back to Heiji.

“Too risky?” Shinichi asks Heiji, and Heiji turns his cap thoughtfully.

“You can break into rooms with electronic card readers?”

KID shoots him a look. “I am not an amateur thief,” KID replies, with exaggerated offense. “I’m the great, the amazing, the undefeated Kaitou KID.”

“Then yeah, bug the shit out of it,” Heiji says. “Meanwhile, I’m gonna go down to the lobby and see if I can get a list of outgoing calls in the last half an hour from those guest phones in the lobby.”

After Heiji has left them alone in the room, KID relaxes, rubbing lightly at his side. “The bugs, Meitantei?”

“You love this adhesive, don’t you?” Shinichi asks, producing the small case and handing it to KID. Their fingers brush, and there’s a jolt between them.

“Not as much as Inspector Nakamori is going to love it after my next heist~” KID teases, and Shinichi’s lips quirk.

“You’re impossible.”

“No,” KID says, making the box disappear and a 5 yen coin appear, flitting between his fingers as Shinichi follows its path. “I make the impossible, possible.” There are three coins, then, and KID tosses them into the air and catches them, before opening his hand to reveal a single 100 yen coin. Then he closes his fist, opens it again, and the three 5 yen coins have reappeared.

Shinichi has no idea how he’s done it, when he’d never once tricked Shinichi into looking away.

“And Tantei-kun?” Shinichi looks up, his hand sneaking into his pocket to find his own 5 yen coin, the one KID had left in his bowtie months ago, and he holds it, trying to make the knots in his belly unravel as KID’s voice washes over him. “I thought your worried face was the cutest, but your jealous face is not uninteresting.”

“Jealous?” Shinichi tries to ask, but KID is out the door, gone, leaving Shinichi alone in the hotel room, cheeks hot and thoughts racing.

Heiji comes back empty handed. “No one here has access to that data,” he says. “We’re better off listening for Groves to give away the name himself. Who could Em be? Any ideas, Kudou?”

“Not really. Emily? Emiko? We don’t know enough. Could be a surname, too.”

“Could be,” Heiji agrees, sprawling out on the bed. “Where’s Kaitou KID? Still off planting listening device?”

“Most likely,” Shinichi replies. “I didn’t think that would take very long, considering his expertise.” He pokes at the glasses sitting between them, which have offered them very little besides the sounds of Groves offering imperious directions to his staff in flawless Japanese, and the sounds of big city
The door opens, and with it comes the smell of curry. “It didn’t,” KID says. “But I thought we could all use lunch while we’re holed up in here.”

“Would you stop moving around when you don’t have to?” Shinichi says, climbing down from the bed to take the bags. “You’ll never heal if you don’t quit it.”

“Sorry, Mom,” KID replies breezily, letting Shinichi take the bags and set them up on the small table in front of the television.

They eat as Groves takes a taxi ride back to the hotel. He chats with a bellhop in the elevator, gracious in a pretentious way, and then they can hear him through the door and the glasses when he gets all the way to his door. He’s chatting on the phone in French about his movie, and KID whispers brief interpretation to them as Heiji looks suitably impressed and Shinichi tries not notice how KID’s leg is pressed completely against his own.

The chime of Groves’s door unlocking is followed by the sound of him entering and taking off his shoes. He ends his phone call, and sighs. The room goes silent, and Shinichi switches the feed from Groves’s personal bug to the one KID has presumably put somewhere central in his room, and switches it from speaker to personal earphone.

“Heiji, you take the emergency stairs. KID, you take the hall. I’ll take the elevator waiting area.”

As Shinichi waits, watching the elevator numbers climb up and down, never stopping on the eleventh floor, he taps his foot impatiently. It’s after one, and Groves’s appointment should have been up to see him about ten minutes ago, judging from when he’d made the phone call.

He cradles his own phone in his hands. There’s been no text from either KID or Heiji, which means no one’s come their way, either.

He sighs, leaning back against the wall. There’s an odd interference, with the bug, and he uses the left arm of his glasses to switch back to the personal feed on Groves. The interference is louder, now, and it sounds like…

He makes the connection right as the beeps start to speed up, and breaks into a sprint. “Hattori, bomb,” he yells down the hall, and Heiji bursts through the doors as they both rush toward KID, who is looking at Shinichi, alarmed.

“Tantei-kun, what—?”

Then Shinichi pushes into KID, dropping them both to the ground. KID yelps in pain as they hit the floor, topping the table and vase that had been next to them, and then there’s a rush of heat followed by smoke. Shinichi can hear a ringing in his right ear, and Heiji’s voice, as though coming over a great distance. Debris rains down over them, and the ground shakes, and when it’s done, Shinichi looks up to see a raging fire coming from Clifford Groves’s suite, flames licking up the walls and out into the hall amongst black smoke.

Groves stands there by the door, clawing at his own face, screaming, fire swallowing him up. The screams echo faintly in Shinichi’s ear through what’s left of the disintegrating listening device, and he can’t look away, even when Groves falls forward, and the screams stop completely.

People pour out into the hall, and there are shouts from other hotel guests, who run for the elevators and stairs. Heiji is approaching the door with a fire extinguisher, possibly checking to make sure Groves isn’t alive, and Shinichi looks down to KID.
What he sees terrifies him. KID is shaking, pale and distraught, his body tight like an anchor chain during a raging storm. His eyes are wild, and he’s hyperventilating, the gray ash across his cheek like a scar.

“KID! KID, can you hear me?” When he gets no response, he lightly slaps at his face. “KID!”

“Meitantei?” His eyes flit over to the room, and Shinichi can see the flames reflected in his glassy eyes.

“KID, listen to me,” Shinichi says, forcing himself to remain calm in the face of a KID who is not. He rubs his thumb across KID’s cheekbone, scraping away ash. “Go to the room, okay?”

KID nods, and when Shinichi gets off him, he gets unsteadily to his feet, clutching at his side.

Heiji emerges, all the flames dampened and leaving behind a burned out husk of a room, and watches KID go with confusion before looking back at Shinichi. “Dead,” Heiji says. “No surprise there.”

Shinichi nods, putting a finger in his ear and then pulling it out. No blood. His eardrum hasn’t burst, then, probably. “Not much of a bomb.”

“Small,” Heiji confirms. “Loud but not much of an explosion.”

“How did it burn him up, then?”

“When I tried to check the body I smelled accelerant. It was all over his suit, and all over the bed. Someone wanted him to burn alive, not die in the blast. The bomb was for show.”

“For show,” Shinichi says. He tries to step toward the room, but his knees wobble, and he braces himself against the wall for a moment before trying again. “Anything likely to collapse on me, in there?”

“Don’t think so,” says Heiji. “Let’s see what we can find. Police are almost here.”

“How do you know?”

“How do you know?”

“Can’t you hear the sirens?”

If Shinichi concentrates, he can, faintly. “Yes, sorry,” he says. His eyes drift down the hall, but KID is gone, into the hotel room, where hopefully he can’t smell smoke. “I’m focused, now.”

There’s nothing much left of Groves’s luggage. As Shinichi pokes at it, he finds shreds of tailored suits and patches of the expensive Italian leather of his suitcase, but not much else. Borrowing Heiji’s pocket knife, he cuts into the front pocket where the zipper had melted, and the things inside have somehow been protected from the blast. Contact lenses, a shoe brush, and a photograph.

The photograph’s right edge is blackened, but it’s mostly whole. Walking over to the balcony where light streams into the room, Shinichi holds it out on his white handkerchief. There are six people in the picture. They’re all smiling. Groves, Shinamoto, Takizawa, Sharon Vineyard, the actress Marie Mercier, and… who Shinichi thinks is Louis Maisonrouge, right next to his sister. All of them are standing side by side, holding wine glasses. The wine is dark, sepia in the aged exposure.

“Who are you?” Shinichi asks the figures in the photo, as Heiji swears at the desk crumbling under his light touch, center wood burned out. “What do you have that makes you live so long?”
He looks over at Clifford Groves’s scorched body, and steels himself as he remembers the man’s screams.

“How old do you think that picture is, Kudou?” Heiji asks, and Shinichi looks at the quality of the film, at the thickness of the paper. He looks at their clothes and their hair, and the scenery behind them. New York City, he realizes. “1940s, I think,” he says. “I think this picture means our victims are much older than we ever imagined.”

“But how?” Heiji takes the photo and slips it into a plastic bag, before handing it back. “How is this possible?”

“How am I possible?” Shinichi replies. “The world is full of things we don’t know about.”

“You’re starting to sound like one of that magician’s heist notes, Kudou. Better watch out for brainwashing.” He sighs. “We didn’t learn much of anything, in the end.”

“I think we did.” Shinichi tucks the photo up under his sweater, and gives Heiji back his pocket knife. “What did they take from him?”

He makes himself approach the charred corpse, and squats down beside it. Had Groves been wearing…

He thinks back to the ring, and immediately searches for it. Both his hands lack jewelry at all, and it would have survived a fire, Shinichi is sure.

“Well?”

“A ring,” Shinichi says. “He had a ring, of a phoenix. Big red stone cut into the shape of the bird, gold band. Very ostentatious, impossible to miss.”

“And it’s gone now?” Shinichi nods. “That means…” He pushes at the balcony door, and they’re both unsurprised to find it unlocked. “Whoever set this bomb was in here while Groves was in here, and they took the ring, then, before they killed him.”

“He wasn’t drugged. How did they get the accelerant on him?”

“Not sure yet,” Heiji replies. “Any ideas?”

“Sprayed it into his eyes, onto his face, to blind him?”

“Snatched the ring, then escaped, setting off the bomb after they were clear of the room.”

Shinichi pushes up his glasses. “DNA gained from fighting off his murderer would be burned away with the body. Smart.”

“I hate it when they’re smart,” Heiji says with a sigh.

Hotel security arrive less than five minutes later. Shinichi watches Heiji continue perusing the scene with half his thoughts returning to KID and his uncharacteristic reaction. KID never panics, really. He lands planes with injured arms and jumps from towering buildings with nothing but a hang-glider and can come up with twenty plans in a minute to deal with everything Shinichi throws at him.

KID doesn’t freeze up, or hyperventilate, or stagger away from Shinichi with his shoulders hunched like that. He just doesn’t.

It can’t have been the fire. KID had rescued him from a burning building before. So why…?
He walks out onto the balcony, noting the odd click of the lock, and takes a breath of fresh air. His lungs aren’t any good, anymore, and the air in there isn’t ideal even if they were.

“All right there, Kudou?” Heiji rests his hand against the swinging balcony doors.

“Just the smoke.” He breathes in, and forces down a cough. Now isn’t the time. “You can handle things here?” Shinichi rubs at the photo under his sweater.


“The previous two murders left messages for KID,” Shinichi says. “But everything here is burned out.”

“So where’s the clue, is what you’re wondering?” At Shinichi’s nod, Heiji’s eyes flit to the door, where KID had escaped as soon as he’d seen the lingering fire. “You think he knows?”

“Something spooked him,” Shinichi says. “I’ve never seen him act like that. He was a little pale around the edges when we saw Takizawa, but nothing like that.” He’d seen the whites of KID’s eyes, when KID saw that fire. KID’s whole body had gone rigid under him, and he’d gripped Shinichi tightly enough that it probably left bruises on his back. “So…”

“I’ve got this, then,” Heiji says, waving him off. “If we find anything of interest, I’ll let you know.” Another question is on the tip of Heiji’s tongue, but then Heiji wrinkles his nose and frowns. “Must be important, for you to skip out on examining the rest of the scene by yourself.”

Shinichi has found himself doing a lot of strange things, lately, when it comes to KID. “Thanks, Hattori,” he says, lowly, and then he’s out into the hallway, breathing fresh air.

It takes Shinichi a while to spot KID in the room, because he’s left the lights off, and he’s out of line of sight from the door. Taking a few steps in, though, Shinichi looks left and sees him, and his breath catches in his chest.

KID grips the monocle he wears as part of his night costume with both of his hands. He’s curled up as small as possible with his back to the wall, under the writing desk, and Shinichi can’t see KID’s face, like this. But reading KID is in the smaller things, like the subtle shake of his hands or the slight raggedness of his breathing.

Shinichi should have come back sooner. “KID?”

KID doesn’t answer, and Shinichi walks further into the room, until he’s closer to the desk. Then he gets down onto his hands and knees and crawls under the desk with KID, wiggling into the space next to him, his own back to the wall.

Unsure what to do, Shinichi rests his head on KID’s shoulder, pressing into his side as closely as he can. For a while, they just sit and breathe, KID occasionally shivering and Shinichi running one finger up and down KID’s bare forearm, from the end of his sleeve to his wrist and back up again.

“Hi,” KID says, eventually, and Shinichi looks up to find KID looking back already, the eye make-up running on his face, leaving him with the scars of it: lingering mascara and eyeliner, and his lips stained slightly dark from the remnants of his shimmering pink lipstick. His wig is already on the floor on his other side, leaving KID looking vulnerable and undisguised as he stares into Shinichi.

“Hiding under tables is no way to treat a bullet wound,” Shinichi says.

“Yeah, I know, Meitantei, I know.” His eyes shimmer, unshed tears bright atop forget-me-not blue.
“Neither is dodging bombs. Did you find anything useful in there?”

“What happened?” Shinichi asks, pushing his palm to KID’s, and letting KID lace their fingers together.

KID breathes out. “My father died like that.”

Shinichi remembers, all of a sudden, what he’d read about Kuroba Toichi. Burned alive at his own magic show, along with most of the audience. A tragic accident. A problem with the breaker, or something in the wiring. Not much left of his body, and identified through dental records. “I…”

“I guess that was the message left for Kaitou KID this time,” KID says, his eyelids falling to half-mast. “I’ve had nightmares about it since I was in elementary school. About my dad burning to death, about how all the magic in the world couldn’t save him from—” He chokes, and swallows. “Sometimes in my head, I can hear him screaming. Do you think it looked like that? Do you think that’s what it was like for him?”

KID’s eyes are so distant, now, even as he looks at Shinichi. His face is a mess, soot streaked across his face, and his hair is tangled. His dress is sliding off one shoulder and twists about his thighs. Shinichi’s chest hurts. Aches, really, and he can’t help but lift his free hand and weave it into KID’s almost-curly hair, pulling his head down until they’re resting forehead to forehead.

Eyes coming back into focus, KID blinks at their sudden proximity. “Meitantei…” He shudders. “Shinichi.”

“I’m here,” Shinichi says. “I’ve got you, just like you’ve got me.”

He doesn’t know how long they sit there in the dark, faces touching and shared air passing between them, before KID puts a hand on Shinichi’s cheek. “You’re awfully pretty looking so concerned, Meitantei.” His thumb brushes the corner of Shinichi’s mouth.

“Before, you said I looked constipated,” Shinichi replies, aiming for deadpan but only succeeding at breathless. KID’s full attention borders on too much, and right now, Shinichi is a safe that KID somehow knows how to open, the combination at the tip of his fingertips as they stroke along the underside of his jaw. “I’m not pretty.”

“You’re a doublet.” Ash clings to KID’s eyelashes, and streaks across the bridge of his nose. “This shell…” The pad of his thumb drags across Shinichi’s lower lip, and Shinichi shakily breathes in, “Is just a disguise for your inner brilliance.”

“You can’t see the real me if you hold me up under the moonlight,” Shinichi manages, as KID’s fingers spread, index finger brushing the corner of his eye and ring finger resting just in front of his ear. “That’s not how it works.”

“I’m a jewel thief,” KID says. “I don’t need any special light to know a rare gem when I see one.”

“How… can you…” Shinichi’s heart is up in his throat, and he can feel KID’s pulse through where their palms touch at their interlocked hands.

The lights flicker on, and KID draws back, dropping his face to his knees, and Shinichi tugs his hand loose, creating space between them that feels vast in the wake of such closeness.

Shinichi’s head is spinning, and KID’s words and KID’s smell and KID’s heat are all around him, swallowing him up. Shinichi presses a hand to his chest, pushing down on his ribs, and looks toward the door, trying to calm himself, to make the red he knows is spreading across his face fade before
Heiji can see him and come to any unwelcome conclusions.

“This might be a weird question,” Heiji asks, when he walks further into the room and spots them, “but what are you guys doing under the table?”

“Talking,” Shinichi says, wanting to cover KID, since Heiji is looking at him intently, taking in the color of his real hair and the masculine thinness of his hips where his dress has ridden up around his ripped stockings. Filing clues, like Shinichi does, but KID is only offering these clues because he’s not at his best. “What did you find?”

He crawls out from under the table to stand in front of Heiji, blocking his view of KID.

“Security finally got the outgoing calls from the lobby,” Heiji replies, giving Shinichi his attention, with a raised eyebrow of curiosity. “Turns out our ‘Em’ is Marie Mercier, and she’s still here at the hotel. Someone from hospitality went down and found her in her room. She hissed at them to go away and slammed the door.”

“So she’s still alive.”

“They’re going to take her into custody,” says Heiji.

“Why? To protect her?”

“No.” Heiji spins his cap. “She had Groves’s ruby phoenix ring hanging on a chain around her neck, and from the room next door, it was easy to spot a rope out on her balcony. They’ll want to arrest her on suspicion of murder.”

*
Shinichi doesn’t know what to say. He and Heiji are never wary in each other’s presence—not since their first meeting, anyway, when Heiji had been more interested in beating him in some imagined competition than in being Shinichi’s friend.

Right now, though, Heiji looks anxious, in addition to his characteristic impatience, as the two of them wait for KID. Shinichi is sitting on the edge of the bed, and Heiji has his back to the wall in a lazy lean, and the two meters between them are filled with an unsettling static.

"So, uh…" Heiji shifts his weight from foot to foot, and Shinichi braces himself. "That guy all right?" He gestures vaguely toward the bathroom, to where KID had excused himself, face hidden and wig in hand.

That… is not the question Shinichi was expecting, but it is one he feels comfortable answering, unlike anywhere else Heiji might have ventured in his curiosity.

"I told you the original Kaitou KID was murdered, didn’t I?" Shinichi says, taking off his glasses and trying to wipe the ash from them. His cheek still tingles from KID’s palm, KID’s eyes, KID’s… well, KID’s everything, really. KID… His gaze drifts toward the bathroom door; closed, the splash of running water in the porcelain sink the only sound. Shinichi lowers his voice. "I can’t give you the details, but he was burned alive while out of costume."

"Holy shit," Heiji says. "So that’s why the killer let Groves burn like that? To make sure that…" His face scrunches in a mixture of anger and confusion, revulsion clear in the gathering of his eyebrows. "But doesn’t that mean our killer knows who KID was?"

"Yes," says Shinichi. "Knows who he was, and how he died. That speaks to an above average level of intel."

"You’re really thinking it’s all connected to the crows, aren’t you?" Heiji takes off his cap and musses his own hair, eyeing the bathroom door. The water’s stopped running. "No wonder he didn’t wanna stick around. The old KID probably meant something to him, and—"

"He was my father," KID interjects, and Shinichi looks up to see KID has emerged from the bathroom remade, looking like he’s carefully put himself back together, with fresh make-up and a new pair of stockings and his wig combed free of tangles. His eyes, though, Shinichi thinks: those still look a little shattered.

"Oh. I’m—"

"Don’t," KID replies, holding up his hand. "I’m pretty sure the man who did it is dead now, anyway."

Heiji sucks his teeth, and looks away. "Mercier is still down in her suite on the fifth floor." A cough, awkward and strained in the oppressive silence. "My Old Man is going to be here, for sure, since the victim was majorly high-profile, so we need to figure out whatever we can before that happens, or we’re not gonna be able to keep any secrets from him."

"We should hurry, then. Personally, I’m rather allergic to law-enforcement."
"That’s such a lie," Shinichi says. "You hang out with police officers for fun."

"Well, you can’t choose your family," KID replies, lightly. "Especially when it’s your second shot at it." Only the slightest tensing of KID’s shoulders. His face is pale, but he wears a casual smirk like an accessory, false and ugly and completely unreadable.

KID, Shinichi realizes, doesn’t do that when it’s just Shinichi. Even on heists back when they’d been barely more than grudging acquaintances, when they had been alone, in the communication hub of a ship or in the pilot’s cockpit of a plane or in the restroom at a museum, KID’s eyes would spark with genuine things. Sometimes it was frustration, and other times amusement, and the gamut of things between, but this face KID shows now is the face he offers up when the situation is dangerous and there are enemies to take down.

Shinichi wonders how long KID has been trying to show Shinichi his true self, while Shinichi belligerently failed to notice.

"We’ll need to be careful, yeah, but even if my old man notices we’re withholding information, he’ll assume it’s for a good reason. It’s Kazuha’s pops we have to worry about. He doesn’t have the tact." Heiji snorts. "Kind of like Kazuha."

"Should I tell her you said that?" Shinichi asks, and Heiji glares at him.

"Not on your life, Kudou," he replies, before he returns his gaze to KID. "You up for this? We’re not going back to Groves’s room at all."

"It won’t be a problem," says KID, with a practiced flippancy.

At Heiji’s doubtful look, KID rolls his eyes. Then, he changes his posture, and winds a piece of hair around his finger, his eyes widening and his mouth falling into a pout. "I’m sorry for panicking, before. It was just so loud, and I just didn’t know what to do!" He sounds a bit winded, and Heiji whistles low, impressed.

"So not just good at imitation? You’re kind of scary."

"It’s a form of impersonation," KID explains, walking over to the door. With his back to them, Shinichi has to watch even more carefully for clues about what KID is thinking. Of course, that also means he’s staring at KID, and he can’t help but continue to dwell on the epiphany he’s waiting until later to have. Later, when he’s alone and he can think it all the way through, and figure out how much of it is real. "This character is just a mix of real people I know, little parts of them that won’t stand out too much. You could say I’m impersonating five people at once, and it makes them individually unrecognizable." He looks back. "Sorry to have held us up. Shall we go?"

Heiji nods, strolling past KID and pushing the door open to the hallway and turning the opposite direction from the elevators, toward the stairs. "We’ll take them one flight down," he says, self-consciously, and Shinichi, a few steps behind him, next to KID, sees a slight softening in KID’s expression as he considers the Detective of the West.

Shinichi is not surprised. After all, KID and Heiji are both kind, in their own ways, and he thinks, maybe, that they’ve both started to recognize the trait in each other the same way he had.

They watch security footage first, heading to the first floor where Heiji used sheer belligerence to commandeer the entire security room and its staff.
First they check out their hallway. There’s nothing there they hadn’t already pieced together from their previous stakeout, including KID’s flirtation with Groves.

"What about Mercier?" Heiji asks.

"Nothing at all suspicious," says a hotel security guard with a uniform so well-pressed it must be new. "She went to the pool after breakfast, and had a masseuse come by upon her return. Then she had room service delivered, and…" He pulls up the footage of Groves’s room and Mercier’s room on side-by-side screens. "It was still being brought into her room when it went off."

"Meaning she had, what, at most ten minutes to herself?" Shinichi looks at KID. "How long would it take to get up to Groves’s room and back down to Mercier’s via the balcony?"

"It would take me about twenty seconds, max," KID replies under his breath. "Remember? I scaled a thirty-story building with ‘teleportation’. Anyone else, with just a rope? Probably the whole ten, and there would be no time to plant a bomb or spray down everything he ever loved with something flammable."

"Mercier does her own action stunts, and she does have a history in gymnastics, but nothing major, so I’m inclined to agree with…” A pause. "Katsumi-san." Heiji says, leaning on the desk, his weight held on both hands. "And no one else went to Groves’s room?"

"Just hospitality," the security guard says. "Early, while he was at breakfast. I can pull that up for you." He starts rewinding the footage. "Here."

The man is tall, and graceful, with long hair in a low ponytail. Shinichi feels a pang of recognition. "I know him."

Heiji blinks. "Really? How?"

"I don’t know," Shinichi says. "I recognize him, though."

"Meitantei is good about remembering details," KID says. "These time stamps are genuine. They look different, when they’ve been doctored."

"You’d know all about that, wouldn’t you, nee-chan?" Shinichi mutters, thinking of several times KID has intercepted surveillance feeds and overwritten time stamps. "Can we get a closer view?"

"I’ll have Otaki-han send it to tech-forensics for a frame-by-frame," says Heiji, watching the man in the video push a cart out of Cifford Groves’s suite fifteen minutes after he went in. He nudges the guard out of his seat, and takes it himself, copying the footage onto a flashdrive hanging from his keychain shaped like a baseball bat that he’d probably bought at this year’s Koushien. When it’s finished copying, he sticks the USB into his tablet.

"Couldn’t you have done that over the cloud?" KID asks, and Shinichi can imagine Haibara’s disgust.

"Too dangerous," Heiji says absently, dragging his fingers across his screen as the security guard looks between the three of them, lost.

"How long will that take?" Shinichi asks. It feels urgent. He knows that man, and he thinks KID does too, with that particular tilt of dissatisfaction at the corner of his mouth.

"Less than an hour," Heiji says, shoving his tablet back into his thin messenger bag and moving immediately for the door. "We’re short on time." Shinichi follows Heiji and KID back out into the
hall to catch the elevator up to Mercier’s room.

"We should have just enough to check in on our French actress," KID says. "Aren’t you extra glad you didn’t let me bleed to death now? Everything is coming up French."

"Let you bleed to death?" Heiji asks, incredulous, looking between them. "Kudou?"

"Don’t worry about it," Shinichi says. "Someone here let himself get shot—"

"Your choice of the word ‘let’ is really inappropriate, little detective—"

"What kind of idiot doesn’t wear a bulletproof vest when he’s expecting people with guns—"

Heiji shakes his head and jams the elevator button again, impatiently.

"I learned my lesson, I did, I did," KID says, and he laughs, all the tension in his body he’s been carrying around since they left their own hotel room flowing out of him with the sound, and impulsively, Shinichi grabs KID’s wrist as tightly as he can with fingers that can barely wrap around the whole thing. "Tantei-kun?"

KID’s pulse is steady, but it seems to quicken as Shinichi stares up at him. "You’d better have."

KID gives him a long look, then carefully pulls his wrist free, letting the hair of his wig fall forward to obscure his face. "Don’t look at me like that, Meitantei. It’s unbearably cute."

Flushing, Shinichi scowls at him. The elevator dings, and Heiji clears his throat. "C’mon, let’s go meet this actress."

"Yeah," KID says. "The sooner the better."

*

The fifth floor of the hotel is crawling with busybodies holding their phones up hoping to catch photos. They’d clearly followed the security guards up from the front lobby, because apparently Mercier’s location has leaked, but they part like the Red Sea for Heiji as he makes his way to Mercier’s door. "This room is directly under Clifford Groves’s room," Heiji tells them. "It would be easy to find rope long enough stretch comfortably between the two."

Shinichi frowns. "But if she’d really killed him, would she have left the rope in plain sight? I wouldn’t have."

Heiji acknowledges the point. "We’ll just have to ask her." He raps his knuckles on the door.

"No press! I’m not opening unless you’re a police officer!" Shrill, and angry. Shinichi cringes.

"What should we do?" he asks Heiji, and Heiji shrugs.

"I dunno. Maybe we should—"

KID clears his throat, and begins speaking in French. The words, whatever they are, roll easily off his tongue, and Shinichi is confused and startled by the way they drip down his chest like lava to settle molten in his gut. KID sounds…

He forces himself to abandon the thought as the door opens. Mercier, dressed all in black, her make-up impeccable, cracks open the door. "Come in," she says, furious and desperate all at once. "Quickly, before I change my mind."
The living room area of the extensive suite is done in softer colors than the one they'd been in all
day, gorgeous pale pinks and yellows. Mercier looks striking and dangerous as she stiffly sits on the
edge of the loveseat cushion, with her dark skin and hair, red high heels, and equally red lips.

"You said you would trade," she says to KID. "What could three children possibly have to trade
with me?" Her Japanese is good but sharp, blunter than Shinichi is used to in tone if not in grammar.

KID smirks, and in the space of a single exhale, Katsumi is gone, replaced by KID in his white suit.
It defies logic, and reason, that he can change so quickly, that he’s even been carrying one of his
suits, and every time Shinichi sees it, he’s… impressed, not that he’d ever admit it. That would ruin
the game. If KID knew how often he impressed Shinichi, maybe it wouldn’t be as important to him
to keep trying, and Shinichi would… He would hate that, since the game has always been a bright
spot of fantasy in the dim reality of his life. "I might," KID says, "know more than you think."

Mercier blinks and casts her gaze down to Shinichi, then back up to Heiji, before murmuring
something in French. She crosses her legs and pulls out a cigarette, and then arches an eyebrow at
KID, who sweeps his cape behind him and gets down on one knee in front of her, snapping his
fingers and igniting a small flame between them that doesn’t seem to singe his gloves.

"My lady," he says, lighting the end of her cigarette, and her eyes, which had been watching him so
carefully, grow distant, as though she’s remembering something else altogether.

"You don’t know me," she says, finally. "You’re not the same Kaitou KID."

"How’d you know that?" Heiji asks, his hackles visibly rising, but KID… KID’s grin doesn’t falter,
but his muscles bunch and then loosen like a coiled snake unsure if it should strike.

"His son," KID replies, thickly. "You… knew my father?"

"Oh yes," Mercier says. "Is he the one who taught you French?"

"No." KID rises back to his feet. "My father died while he was still teaching me Latin and sleight-of-
hand."

"I see," Mercier says, and then, once more in French, she says something that sounds like it might be
a condolence.

"How did you know my father?" KID’s hat tilts down to obscure his face.

Mercier’s hand comes up to her neck to clutch at her necklace. Groves’s ring hangs there, alongside
a pendant covered by Mercier’s hand. "We worked together once." She blows smoke from her
mouth. "Many years ago, in Paris."

Some of the smoke reaches Shinichi and he coughs. After all the smoke in Groves’s room, Shinichi’s
chest is sore, and every inhale burns. He’s also, he notes with surprise, sore everywhere else, and
with a grimace, he realizes it’ll be worse later, when he stops running on pure adrenaline.

Right now though, Mercier is in front of them, with unknown motives, and Shinichi shouldn’t let
down his guard. It won’t hurt, though, to get some air.

Shinichi takes out his handkerchief and opens the balcony doors. When he pushes it open, he hears
the click of an automatic lock as fresh autumn air wafts into the room, dispelling the suffocating smell
of imported cigarettes and expensive perfume. Automatic lock? Examining it more closely, he tests
the outside handle, and narrows his eyes when it doesn’t move under his touch. Looking down, he
sees a potted plant that’s recently been moved, and the coiled rope Heiji had mentioned, which had
been noted by security as possible evidence of guilt.

"What is it, Kudou?" Heiji asks.

Shinichi looks over at KID, who is watching Mercier with his arms crossed, some distance between them as he leans against the wall. Then he shifts his attention back to Heiji.

"This door locks automatically," Shinichi says. "And so did the balcony upstairs."

Heiji pushes lightly on the outside door handle, like Shinichi had, using the long sleeve of his sweatshirt to prevent leaving fingerprints. "So someone has to be let in," he says, and Shinichi nods, looking back over at Mercier.

She’s not paying them any mind, her gaze riveted on KID.

"Mercier-san," he says, and the woman cranes her long neck to look at them. "Did you, by any chance, cancel a dinner invitation with the director for tonight?"

Mercier blinks, clearly startled, and lowers the hand holding her cigarette. "I… yes, we’re often romantically linked by the media, and it’s been causing me a few problems professionally, given his… reputation."

"So you weren’t dating him?" Heiji wanders away from Shinichi, and Shinichi, almost against his will, drifts back toward KID.

"Never," Mercier says. "I was fond of him, but not in that manner…"

"Then why," Shinichi asks, "were you sneaking into his room via the balcony." He tilts his head innocently. "And since the doors can only be opened from the inside, why was he letting you in?"

Heiji, who is now picking over the remains of Mercier’s lunch, raises his eyebrows at two colored stripe cards half hidden under the plate, finally conceding to pull on a plastic glove so he can pick them up.

They’re CA-61 cards. Shinichi meets Heiji’s eyes. They both know what that means. She ran a test for cyanide poisoning on her lunch. She’s scared, just like Groves was. Shinichi pushes his hair out of his face. It’s damp with sweat, and his skin is hot to the touch. Is he getting a fever? It’s too soon for the medicine to wear off. He’s not supposed to take it again until seven tonight.

"Seems like an odd way to pay an innocent visit," Heiji says, setting the cards back down.

Mercier’s eyes flash. "Didn’t I just mention problems with the paparazzi?" As she speaks, she reaches up to touch her chest again. The ring.

"Was it to get that ring?" Shinichi asks, quietly, and Mercier smooths her thumb over it. "You’re going to take it back to France with you, tomorrow."

"It’s quite valuable," KID says. "Red beryl." KID leans his head back against the wall, tilting his hat even further forward. "It’s only been found two places in the entire world. Utah and New Mexico, in the United States. Sells for nearly six thousand American dollars per carat, and that ring has no small number of carats."

"He told me to look after it," says Mercier. "The Ascendant Phoenix is priceless family heirloom, after all."
"How can that be?" KID asks lightly. "When he has no family?"

Shinichi approaches Mercier. She smells like something sweet, up close, under the cigarettes. Sugar and Chanel No.5. "May I see it?"

"See what?" She uncrosses her legs, so she can stare more closely at Shinichi. "The ring?"

"No," Shinichi replies. He’s seen the ring, and while it might be worth examining up close, he’s far more interested in what Mercier keeps covered with her hand. "Your necklace. The one that’s like Groves-san’s ring, that you have to protect."

Mercier’s sighs, and shifts forward, letting the necklace fall into the reach of his hand. Her breath stinks of brandy. Shinichi hadn’t noticed that she’d been drinking before they came, but now he sees the half-empty snifter by her half-eaten lunch. She’d probably forgone the latter for the former.

The pendant is shaped like a scarab, dull blue and sparkling green stones in a gilt golden setting to make the sacred beetle shape. "What’s it called?"

"The Queen of the Nile," Mercier says. "It’s been in my family for many, many years."

Lady Red, Cardinal, Ascendant Phoenix, Queen of the Nile. The names are ridiculous. KID probably approves.

"Lapis lazuli and emeralds," says KID. He leans forward, over Shinichi’s shoulder, for a closer look, and the smell of ash and jasmine overwhelms the liquor and the perfume as KID’s breath burns hot on his neck. "A fitting name."

Shinichi snorts at how he’d guessed that, but it cuts off as KID’s cheek brushes his own.

Mercier sits back, and the scarab pulls free of Shinichi’s loose hold. "I didn’t kill Cliff," she says, looking at KID. "I couldn’t have. Kaitou KID should believe me. He was always—" She stops herself.

KID doesn’t reply. He does, however, move her ashtray closer when he realizes several centimeters of her cigarette have gone to ash.

Noise outside, and Touyama’s impatient growl cuts through the low hum of noise that has been a steady presence since Mercier had admitted them to her room.

"The police are here," Shinichi says, and Heiji frowns. "That’s Touyama, which means your father isn’t far behind."

"I can buy you five minutes, but probably not more than that," replies Heiji. "Aw man, this is gonna be a pain."

"Thank you," KID says, and Heiji seems surprised by the seriousness.

"Yeah, yeah, don’t think I’m gonna make it into a pattern or something, helping thieves."

"I can see why you and Tantei-kun are friends," KID teases, and Heiji half-smirks half-scowls, contorting his face, and pushes open the door to step out into the hall, then closes it behind him.

"So you’re Sharon’s Silver Bullet," Mercier says, as soon as she hears the click, and Shinichi’s head whips around so fast that it makes his own head start to spin, his gaze blurring. Not now, he thinks, as KID, without Shinichi saying anything at all, rests a gloved hand between his shoulderblades to
"Tantei-kun?"

"No," Shinichi says. "I'm fine." He tries to focus his eyes, and with enough effort, he manages it. "You're not... one of them, are you?" He licks his lips. "Like Vermouth is?"

Shinichi has learned that anyone can be one of them. Newcasters, police officers, private detectives cum baristas with kind smiles who help children solve missing kitten cases. Mercier, in her locked room with her all black clothing and her cigarettes... Wouldn't be the most unlikely of candidates, would she?

Shinichi swallows, suddenly feeling trapped.

"No," says Mercier, shifting her gaze up toward the ceiling and taking a deep drag on her cigarette. "No. Only Sharon wanted to make that sacrifice, and she had an in that the rest of us didn't."

"An... in...?" Shinichi tries desperately to compute what he's hearing. Vermouth, cold, cruel Vermouth, who has a soft spot for Ran and inexplicable motives, had... 'made that sacrifice'? Joined the Black Org in order to... in order to what?

"Disguise," Mercier says. "Her ability made her a catch." Her gaze slides to KID's, and they engage in a staring contest that Shinichi doesn't quite understand. "That she learned it from Kaitou KID..."

Mercier's cigarette has burned down to the butt. "At the time, Sharon thought she was too old to be learning new tricks."

"How old are you?" Shinichi asks her, still reeling, confused and somehow aware that there are answers, and she raises one elegant eyebrow. "How old are all of you?"

"Don't you know it's impolite to ask a lady her age, Edogawa-san?" She stands, walking toward the window. "However, I find myself wondering the same thing about you." She eyes KID over her shoulder. "Both of you."

"Phantom thieves are ageless," KID says, tipping his hat at her. He says something to her in French, and she smirks at him.

"Flattery will get you nowhere with me, child."

"I never assumed it would," KID replies. "Just offering my congratulations."

Her smirk spreads, and Shinichi is struck by how evil she doesn't look. Her hair has fallen loose from its intricate design, and her eyes are tired. "We want to catch the person who is killing the people with those gems and threatening KID," Shinichi says. "I want to bring down those guys in black, too, if I can. I want..." He bites his lip, and KID's hand at his back slides up to press at his arm. "We could protect you, if we knew what we were protecting you from."

She drops her eyes to him, to study him, and he stares straight back at her. "You can't protect me," she says, eventually, waving her hand at him. "Did you know that Pandora was molded by Hephaestus from the earth as punishment for mankind, after Prometheus gave them fire?" She tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. "She was to be a torment to them, beauty and evil all at once, as were her descendants."

KID mouths the word Pandora, and Shinichi steps closer to him, enough that KID can rest a gloved hand on Shinichi's shoulder.
"Perhaps," Mercier says, turning away from them to look out at the busy street below, "like Pandora, I couldn’t resist."

"Pandora isn’t a stone, is it?" Shinichi asks, and Mercier’s hand shakes as she uses two fingers to push at the sheer gold curtain at the edge of the balcony doors, and catch it on the metal hook. "It has nothing to do with comets or the moonlight at all."

"No," she says faintly, "you’re wrong. Pandora does turn red in the moonlight." She fingers the Ascendant Phoenix, rubbing her thumb-nail along the edge of the gold setting, white nails bright against the red beryl bird.

Touyama yells at Heiji outside the door, about respecting his daughter or something like that, and Heiji yells back that Kazuha would have to start respecting him first, and it’s all bluster at this point. They’re out of time.

"The jewels are keys," Shinichi says. "Tell me how they’re keys. Keys to what?"

"Eternity," Mercier says. "Of course, to eternity. You need all five, and someone who knows what they open, and where." She drops her cigarette to the lush rose carpet and puts it out with the toe of her red heel, burning a black spot that KID fixates on when she moves her shoe to reveal it. "Sharon joined to stay one step ahead, but somehow…” She laughs. It’s sad, and angry. "They’re ruthless."

"What about Arbogast?" Shinichi says, and Mercier shrugs.

"He’s very much like his mother. Cunning. Cold." She pushes a strand of hair behind her ear. "His grandfather is very proud that he’s following in the family’s tradition."

"Meitantei," says KID, the words in his ear as if KID had leaned down to whisper them, but without the warmth of KID’s lips hovering just there, "our questioning time is over."

"Right," Shinichi says, and he’s unsurprised when a soft gust of air has KID disappearing and Katsumi reappearing in his stead, not a hair out of place and smile serene.

Mercier returns to her loveseat, and collapses gracefully into a casual lean, recrossing her legs and pulling out another cigarette. She doesn’t light it. "Did you know Kuroba-sensei kept a flat in Paris?" she asks, suddenly, and KID tenses, his eyes glimmering. "He held parties there occasionally, before he got married."

"In Paris?"

"Yes," Mercier says. "When you go to find it, you should come and visit me." She has more to tell them, Shinichi hopes. Maybe all the things she’s talked around.

KID breathes out as the door slams open, to reveal a flustered Heiji and an apoplectic Touyama, Otaki hot on his heels with a folder in hand.

"What are you kids doing in here?" Touyama says, before turning to Mercier. "Heiji’s already told me you didn’t do it, and how you were exonerated. What I need from you is an extensive list of people who might actually have done it." He turns to Heiji. "Your father will be here within the hour. If you don’t want Otaki to get in trouble, take your friends and go home."

"Yeah, fine," Heiji says, laughing nervously as Touyama stares him down. Shinichi would normally laugh at how terrifying Touyama is going to be when he becomes Heiji’s father-in-law, but his thoughts are elsewhere, caught up in what he’s learned, about Vermouth, about the old Kaitou KID, and about the five gems that serve as the key to what Mercier had described as eternity.
He lets KID tow him out into the hall as he thinks, like Ran has done for him countless times as both a child and as an adult, but unlike Ran, KID doesn’t try to snap him out of it, or grow concerned. And that, Shinichi realizes, coming out of his concentration, is yet another thing he will set aside and not consider.

"By the way," Otaki says, as he escorts them to the elevator, "your pictures."

Heiji takes them, flipping quickly through them before passing them down to Shinichi. Shinichi’s breath comes harshly, not with shock, but with resignation.

"The man on the tape is not an employee here. No one recognizes him. Do you, Conan-kun?" Otaki asks.

The man’s face, which had sparked vague recognition earlier, now has Shinichi running fingers over the photograph with a shaking hand. He’s dizzy.

"That’s…" KID is bending down, pulling his hand free of Shinichi’s and leaning forward. "That’s Louis Redhouse."

"The main suspect in the Scarlette Shinamoto case?" Heiji asks, taking the photo and staring at it more closely.

"Or, it looks like him, at least. Wouldn’t be the first time," KID says, as Shinichi struggles in vain to slow his pulse. "Well, Conan-kun looks tired. We should get him home."

"We’ll have to get your statements about the bomb first," Otaki apologizes, and Shinichi closes his eyes and collects himself.

"Only Heiji-nii-chan and I saw anything," Shinichi replies. "Katsumi-nee-chan can go get the front desk to call us a cab while we give you our statements, right?" He offers up a childish grin, and Otaki smiles back.

"Of course," he says, and the slow caress of KID’s fingers on his neck spells his gratitude out with cool fingertips against hot skin.

*

Shinichi doesn’t realize just how terrible he feels until he’s ensconced in the back seat of a taxi and plummeting unexpectedly from the comfortable ease he’d had for most of the day into the stark pain that had woken him this morning. He tries to hide it, burying his face in KID’s arm and turning away from Heiji, who is in the middle of a long conversation with Kazuha on the phone, about how he has plans for dinner.

Heiji’s mom had left the house before they had, this morning, with a sword on her back and an enigmatic smile, and apparently Kazuha had decided that since no one would be home Heiji should bring his guests over for dinner to her place.

Shinichi doesn’t think he’ll manage. Heiji doesn’t seem keen on the idea at all, anyway, stealing critical looks at KID out of the corner of his eye whenever Shinichi glances over at him. Shinichi huffs a tired laugh into KID’s side as KID squirms, because even through the haze of pain, Shinichi can tell that the frown Heiji’s sporting is a concerned one that he’s trying, unsuccessfully, to play off as irritated.

"Did I do something to upset the Detective of the West?" Shinichi can feel KID’s nervous hum against his cheek. "I didn’t even flirt with the lovely Miss Touyama this morning." The soft material
of KID’s jacket gives Shinichi something to focus on besides the nausea. "And trust me, it was so hard to resist such an easy target."

"You’re as tasteless as your suit." When KID laughs, his body vibrates like a purring kitten. It’s soothing, even when Shinichi’s head and throat ache worse than anything.

"The suit is vintage," KID replies. "Why is Hattori the younger upset with me?"

"He’s worried about you," Shinichi says, pushing the words out despite how much air they’ll take, when he hasn’t got enough. "He knows you were freaking out back at the hotel and he doesn’t want you to have to worry about playing nice with Kazuha or her parents. Although her father is probably with Superintendent Hattori at the hotel for the time being."

"That’s… thoughtful," KID admits. "You have such interesting taste in friends."

"You’re one to talk. Aren’t you the least—" Shinichi is hit with another wave of nausea, and presses a cupped hand over his mouth.

"Tantei-kun?" Motion beside him, and then he’s up tighter against KID’s chest, sublimating the movement of the car.

"What’s wrong with him?" Heiji demands in a low-pitched whisper that somehow manages to have the force of a shout. "He’s pale, and shaking."

"I think our little-big detective’s flu is making a reappearance." KID’s tone is flippant, but his hand, splayed across Shinichi’s side, trembles enough for Shinichi to notice. "He brought along his meds, and he’ll be fine after a nap."

"You sure?" Heiji, when Shinichi opens his eyes just enough to sneak a peek, is staring at Shinichi with ill-concealed panic. "He doesn’t look all right at all. He looks like he’s about to keel over or something!"

"I’m not," says Shinichi, as calmly as he can. "Relax, Hattori. I’ve just been a little sick this week, and with all the running around and the bomb I overdid it."

"If you say so," Heiji says, and then Shinichi, unhelpfully, is passing out, KID frantically whispering his name as the world fades to black.

The next twenty minutes come to him in fragments of lucidity, in between bouts of crushing pain. His insides are turning to ash, and agony is a thousand long needles poking through into his brain and out the other side.

Heiji’s angry yells and KID’s soothing murmurs, interspersed with alternating hot and cold flashes that have him sweating and then shivering.

Finally, when the world shifts back into hazy focus, he’s sitting in his underwear on one of the futons pulled out haphazardly, between KID’s legs as KID rubs at his side with a cotton swab soaked with peroxide. "You injected me?"

"Right here," KID replies. "Fastest results if I put it here." He laughs, lightly, and a bare chest brushes against Shinichi. "Like with insulin."

"You…" Shinichi’s eyes flutter open. KID’s arm is a soft tan against the white skin of Shinichi’s stomach. "Know how to give insulin injections?"
"My mother has diabetes."

"That’s thought to be partially genetic," Shinichi mumbles around his swollen-feeling tongue. "Are you trying to stave it off by putting five sugar packets into already sweetened coffee? Because let me tell you, that’s not effective, and you’ll probably get cavities."

"Are you honestly lecturing me about my diet while you wilt in my arms, Meitantei?"

"I don’t care what you eat."

"But you care about how I like my coffee?" KID’s voice is soft, and warm, and Shinichi blushes, not having wanted it to come out like that, and not really wanting KID to know that Shinichi watches his fingers as he rips sugar packets, or that he still ponders the sleight-of-hand trick with five of them that he hasn’t completely figured out yet.

"I remember everything, and that was particularly gross so I—"

KID’s lips on his neck interrupt him. It’s a soft kiss, to the skin, but then KID’s lips part, and it’s open-mouthed heat instead, KID’s tongue drawing slow circles where Shinichi’s neck curves into his shoulder. Sucking lightly, KID’s thumb at his side mimics the movement of his mouth, and Shinichi’s brain is confused by the signals, still sensitive from the pain and unsure what to make of this in its place.

Teasing higher up his neck, KID licks at a spot just behind Shinichi’s ear that has something flaring to life in his lower gut, and then skims it with his teeth, and Shinichi swallows down a whimper that threatens to escape as KID laughs into his hair.

"Shh," KID whispers against wet skin that continues to tingle. "Don’t lecture me, Meitantei. I like sweet things."

"You…" Shinichi blinks eyes that have come, suddenly, sharply into focus. "Why are you—"

"Hmm," KID replies, pulling Shinichi closer with the hand at his waist, the other crossing around Shinichi’s chest. "You might have bitter blood running through your veins, Tantei-kun, but I like the taste of you, anyway."

"I’m not," Shinichi says, as KID presses his chin against the top of Shinichi’s head. "KID, I don’t…” He doesn’t know how to finish that sentence, not when KID is so close, stealing every brain cell Shinichi needs with all the casual ease of a practiced thief. "What happened? Where’s Hattori?"

KID sighs, and something in Shinichi uncoils as the tension lowers, KID pulling them out of the moment as quickly and unexpectedly as he’d pulled them into it. "You passed out in the back of the taxi."

"Our clothes?"

"You sweated through them, and I was damp, too, and with the chill in the air I thought you’d be warmer without them when your fever broke."

"Probably." Shinichi tries to process the answers to his questions as the memory of KID’s lips at his neck continues to distract him.

"I brought you inside as Hattori paid the driver, and then he took your phone and went to call your Haibara-san, who gave him a list of foods you can eat tonight. He’ll be back soon I imagine."
"Hattori took my phone?"

"The one with the soccer ball charm," KID says. "Not the other."

"You have that one, don’t you?"

"You weren’t awake," KID says. "I didn’t know if it was all right for Tantei-han to have it."

Shinichi exhales. KID’s heart is a steady beat against his back. "So I get almost eleven hours before it gets bad, then." He tilts his head forward, dislodging KID’s chin from where it digs in.

"Meitantei, I don’t know if you’re ever going to be able to give yourself these shots," KID says, into the sweat-slicked skin of his neck. "If you can only take them twelve hours apart, you’re not going to administer them on your own. You’ll need to have Miss Mouri—"

"No!" Shinichi says, hoarse. "Absolutely not." His head is fuzzy, but it’s obvious enough what he’ll have to do. He’s known it would have to happen since Haibara had told him what was happening to him. He’ll have to leave the agency. He’ll have to leave Ran.

"Then you could switch back to those blue pills?" KID shifts his weight, suddenly, and pulls Shinichi completely into his lap, and Shinichi doesn’t protest, not when KID’s steady presence calms his shivers.

"Can’t," Shinichi says. "Haven’t felt this much like myself in months, anyway." He opens his eyes, and the room is blurry, but the shot is kicking in. "Today I was able to do everything I used to. If this shot can give me that…"

"Shinichi…"

"It’s not just that," Shinichi continues. "Those blue pills… They weren’t designed for long-term use."

KID exhales, and his arms around Shinichi tighten. "Well," he says, "I have a house in Ekoda that currently only has one occupant." His nose presses into the hair at Shinichi’s crown that never behaves. "It comes equipped with a convenient roommate who knows how to give you your shots, and a low likelihood of running into Beika residents if you play your cards right."

"You’re going to let a detective into your home?"

"Only a very special one," KID says, and he links his fingers together on Shinichi’s stomach. They’re warm—hot even—and Shinichi can feel KID’s bare chest against his back, and his muscular arms like a wall between Shinichi and the cool evening air. "After that, I suppose we’ll go to Paris."

KID nuzzles him. "I want to find out what Mercier knows about my father. I want to see that Paris flat my father bought."

"I want to know about Vermouth," Shinichi replies. "I want to know why she… why she’s like this. And I want to find this killer before they get their hands on you or extended life."

"Plus we should venture out to the mountains and find out if Claude Arbogast is truly still alive, right?"

Shinichi takes a breath, and thanks to the medicine kicking in, it comes easily. His head is clear, and the throbbing in his temples has subsided, along with the nausea. That leaves him nothing to focus on but the shift and bunch of KID’s thighs under him, and the softness of KID’s pretty, normal voice, and the rapid beat of his own heart that has everything to do with the intimacy of this closeness and
the stickiness of KID’s saliva on his neck. "KID…"

He wriggles in KID’s arms, not trying to get free, but trying to turn enough to see KID’s face. KID loosens his hold enough to allow it, and Shinichi, when he tilts his head back slightly, is close enough to KID that there is nothing in his field of vision beyond KID’s eyes. "Yes, Meitantei?"

Mint. Jasmine. Shinichi takes a shuddering gasp of air. "Why…” He swallows. "Why would you even think I would want to stay with you?"

The corners of KID’s eyes crinkle. "Because I’m so charming," he says. "And because I have at least a hundred coin tricks I haven’t shown you yet, and you can’t resist trying to figure them out, because you’re a high-order cynic."

"That’s how my brain works," Shinichi says, averting his eyes. "That’s not something about me that will ever change."

"I know." KID falls back onto the futons, his body crossing them both, and at the absence of his arms, Shinichi falls too, sprawling half on KID, half on the still folded blankets, with a huff. "It means I have to work extra hard keep one step ahead of you, that’s all."

There’s something mixed with the whimsy of his words, something Shinichi has heard before in KID’s voice but has never exactly managed to pin down.

Shifting carefully, so as not to touch KID’s injury, Shinichi rests his cheek against KID’s belly and looks up at him. KID is staring at him, eyes half-lidded, lower lip caught in his teeth. His lashes are so thick and dark, and Shinichi is so aware of the soft heat of KID’s skin, the subtle clench of his firm abdominal muscles.

"It’s never more than half a step, really," Shinichi says, and KID shivers.

"That means you’re more likely to catch up to me," KID murmurs, and there’s something… His voice, that teasing lilt, is so full of promises that Shinichi only partially understands. "What would you do, if you caught up to me, Shinichi?"

Shinichi closes his eyes. "I don’t know," he admits, and then KID’s fingers are sliding into his hair, tugging lightly on the strands and Shinichi tries to calm himself. His whole body is hot, and his heart is beating too fast; so fast it hurts. He makes himself sit up, and KID easily drops his hand, like Shinichi won’t still feel his touch for minutes more, like Shinichi’s pulse will slow in the absence of that point of contact. "What should I tell Ran? The kids?"

"That it’s time for Edogawa Conan to leave."

"I always thought that when I told anyone that, it would mean it was time for Kudou Shinichi to come home," Shinichi replies, wistful.

"You need to tell Hattori-kun what’s going on, too." KID gives him a serious look. "You terrified him, and he’s too smart to buy anything about the flu."

"I…” He shakes his head. "I just want to spend the last time I have with them without that cloud hanging over me." KID’s lips curl up, not in a smirk but in understanding. "You’re enough."

"I’m enough?" KID’s eyelashes flutter in surprise.

"It’s not… as lonely anymore," Shinichi replies, and he holds KID’s gaze.
And then Heiji is yelling out "I'm home!" and stomping down the hall, so Shinichi looks away, but he doesn't think KID does, at all, not until Shinichi pulls on another sweater and leaves him alone in the room to go speak with Heiji.

*

On the train back to Tokyo the next day, KID sleeps, his head again pillowed on Shinichi’s thighs as Shinichi tries to forget the suspicious, skeptical look Heiji had given him, when he’d explained his flu.

He’s never been a natural storyteller, not like KID, who’d sat next to him at the low table in the center room of Heiji’s house, once again disguised, with one hand on Shinichi’s upper thigh as the other cupped his cheek, his elbow resting on the table.

"Never seen a flu that acts like that, Kudou," Heiji’d said, finally, and Shinichi had offered him a slow, sad smile that had Heiji’s eyes widening.

"Have you ever seen a body that acts like mine?"

"Guess not," was Heiji’s slow reply, and he hadn’t asked any more about it, but this morning, when it had been time to go, he’d grabbed Shinichi’s arm, right at the bicep, and pulled him into a hug.

"Hattori, what are you doing?"

"Take care of yourself, Kudou," he’d said, and then pulled off his hat, setting it on Shinichi’s head. "Kazuha’s not here, so I’ll give you one of my good luck charms." His crooked, worried grin had cut into Shinichi like shards of glass. "If you’d asked me two years ago if we’d be best buds, couldn’t have predicted I’d say yes."

"That’s because you’re rash," Shinichi had replied, making himself keep looking into Heiji’s eyes. "You were jumping to conclusions before you saw all the evidence."

Heiji had laughed, and Shinichi had watched him grow smaller out the back window of the taxi taking them to the train station.

"You’re deep in thought," KID offers, and Shinichi blinks, returning to now. KID is gazing up at him, intently, and Shinichi’s hand involuntarily rises up to the dark red and purple bruises on his neck he’d discovered this morning after KID had helped him with his shot.

KID had looked so pleased, and had run his index finger lightly across the marks before leaving Shinichi alone to finish his morning routine.

"It’s fine," Shinichi says, and he should look out the window, away from the curve of KID’s mouth, but instead, he watches carefully as KID reaches up and pulls a 5 yen coin from behind his ear.

"Go-en for your thoughts, Meitantei?" He spins the coin between his index finger and thumb, and it takes a moment for Shinichi to realize that it’s his own, the one KID gave him a long time ago, that he carries around in his pocket.

Hiding the inescapable red in his cheeks with a scowl, he plucks the coin out of KID’s grasp and pushes it into his palm. "Are you making fun of me?"

"Your embarrassed face is a major improvement on your sad face," is KID’s reply, and Shinichi licks dry lips, and then, with his free hand, pulls on the brim of the baseball cap Heiji had given him, to hide his eyes.
"I was thinking about how I could never see Hattori again. This might’ve been the last time." He licks his lips again. "I don’t want it to have been."

"How dark, Tantei-kun." KID’s voice is light, but when Shinichi hurries to meet his eyes, there is nothing there but serious contemplation. "There’s no guarantee you’re going to die."

"Wishful thinking won’t change reality," is Shinichi’s short reply. "My name is a homophone for one truth." His lips twitch. "That might be why I’m such a mediocre liar, when it comes to making things up. I know there’s only one truth. It’s hard for me to see anything else."

"That’s the problem with detectives," says KID, his dark lashes made darker with mascara that clumps at the base of them and bleeds along his waterline. "You see one truth, and I see a thousand possibilities."

"A thousand?" Shinichi laughs quietly. "That’s optimistic."

"Every day that you’re alive is full of infinite possibility, good and bad."

"How Aristotelian of you."

"Au contraire. It’s because I’m an illusionist. Seeing possibilities is part of the job description." KID snaps his fingers, and in a puff of smoke, he has Shinichi’s 5 yen coin again, only this time it’s hanging from a thin chain. "If there are people over a hundred years old walking around looking thirty-five, then perhaps there’s a way an eight-year-old detective can live a little longer, too."

Shinichi takes the necklace from KID’s long, thin fingers, and lets the chain tangle around his own. "A necklace?"

"It’s for luck." KID closes his eyes. "I also rather like the idea of something I gave you hanging right in front of your heart."

That’s… Shinichi swallows, and leans back against his seat, closing his eyes. "You know that I can’t… Getting so attached to me is useless. So don’t."

"That’s not your decision." KID reaches up and cups Shinichi’s cheek. His hands are so strong and capable, Shinichi thinks. Hands that pick locks and open safes and make things appear and disappear at will. Hands that help climb sheer buildings and snag jewels and won’t be restrained by handcuffs or rope. "You don’t want me to think of you as a child. I don’t. I only ask the same of you."

"Why would I…" Shinichi sharply looks down at KID, and KID drops his hand but doesn’t avert his eyes.

"I don’t mind if you try to protect me," KID continues. "But like you, I’ve been making decisions for myself for a very long time. I don’t like being told what to do." He wags one finger at him. "I’ve never had any fondness for rules, Meitantei."

"Idiot thief," Shinichi mumbles.

"I’m your favorite idiot thief," KID replies, confidently, eyes like stained glass.

Shinichi’s heart stops in his chest, before starting again twice as fast as usual, and whatever this is, between the two of them, it’s twisted up inside him, and he can’t help but hate how unfair it is, that KID is a mystery he’ll never really get to solve. He thinks, as he hangs his 5 yen coin around his neck, that he could spend the whole lifetime he’ll never have trying.
It only takes three days to complete the paperwork to withdraw from school. Shinichi’s mother is confused, but obliging, and their teacher, Murakato-sensei, throws a small goodbye party for him that final Friday, and Ayumi cries, pressing her face into Shinichi’s neck as Mitsuhiko and Genta disguise their sniffles as coughs.

"Are you sure it’s all right to leave it like this?" Haibara asks. She watches Ayumi, whose hand is clasped in her mother’s, tearfully wave goodbye to Shinichi. "What happens if you stop writing to them?"

Shinichi swallows. "Will you?"

"Will I what?" Haibara kicks at a stray rock, her face in a tight frown.

"Write to them for me," Shinichi replies. "Just for a while, until they forget."

"They’re not going to forget," Haibara says frankly. "You came into their lives and turned them upside down. You’ve taught them things, and saved them from danger and taken them on adventures most people never get to go on in a lifetime." She tugs at her backpack straps. "Do you honestly think they’ll forget you?"

"I’d hoped." Shinichi looks ahead, to where the professor’s house is coming into view. Shinichi has managed to be with Haibara at around seven in the morning and evening every day this week, leaving the agency at five in the morning and returning at night just before dinner, to sit across from Ran and her sad eyes and feel his own heart breaking. There have been no visits from Hondou Eisuke, this week. "So will you write them, when—"

"If," interrupts Haibara, "if there’s no one else, I will." She scowls, and pulls out the keys. "It’s not like I can’t guess your e-mail password."

Shinichi shrugs. "Never really got into e-mail," he replies. "Nothing to hide in there."

"If you told Ran, and Professor Agasa, you wouldn’t have to leave."

"There’s a lot I have to do, and I can’t do it while I’m attending elementary school and dodging Black Org and lying to everyone I know. I need…" Shinichi walks toward the door. "I also… want to spend the last time I have as Kudou Shinichi, not Edogawa Conan."

Haibara pauses, and looks at him. "I understand. Are you still planning to go to Europe?"

"Soon," Shinichi answers. "There are secrets waiting there. About the Black Org, and Vermouth, and KID’s father."

"Don’t overdo it," Haibara says, opening the door. "You should be sure to come back, in case I’ve come up with an improvement on your medication."

Agasa is in the living room, his mustache singed and his lab coat covered in soot. "Ah, Ai-chan, Shinichi, you’re back!"

"I suppose it didn’t work out, then?" Haibara asks dryly. "Your new invention?"

"Don’t be cruel, Ai-chan, it’s just a temporary setback!" Another ambiguous puff of smoke rises up from where the professor’s ruined… miniature helicopter? Has fallen to pieces. "I’ll get it right, next time, and then Mitsuhiko and I can trace the stag beetle migration patterns this summer."
Haibara laughs, genuine and amused, and brushes some soot from the professor’s lab coat. Agasa joins her. Shinichi watches them, laughing, a smile pulling at his own lips. He’ll miss this, and the Detective Boys. He’d always known that this second life wouldn’t last forever, but…

"Shinichi? Are you all right?" Agasa is peering at him now, worried wrinkles in his forehead.

"Just fine," Shinichi replies, with a smile he mostly means.

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Ran makes beef stew for dinner.

"It’s your favorite," she says, smiling at him with wet eyes. "I wanted to make it for you one last time, Conan-kun."

Mouri snorts, shoveling a bite into his wide-open mouth. "It’s not like the kid is going off to die," he says, as Shinichi pushes large chunks of carrot around in the stew broth. His stomach aches. He takes another bite anyway. "I’m sure the freeloader will be back to annoy us every once in a while."

"But America is so far away!" Ran says, slamming her hands on the table hard enough to rattle the bowls and cutlery. "It’s not like he’s moving down the street, Dad!"

"Whatever," Mouri says, sticking his index finger into the ear closest to Ran and taking a sip of beer. "At least he won’t be getting underfoot during cases anymore."

"Dad!"

Mouri’s eyes cut to Shinichi speculatively. "I suppose I’ll miss you a little bit, you damn brat."

Shinichi can’t help but smile at Mouri’s grudging admission. "Me too, Uncle!"

He sets down his spoon, and Ran leans forward anxiously. "Is it not good, Conan-kun?"

"No," Shinichi says, the taste of the stew lingering in his mouth. "It’s really good, Ran-nee-chan. It always is." He tilts his head and smiles at her, remembering when she’d learned to make beef stew, back when they were first years in middle school, from a Nichiuri television broadcast. Even that first time, it had been delicious. "Thank you."

"Well," she says, wiping at her eyes with her arm, "any time you want me to make it for you again, you just come visit, okay?"

Don’t cry, Shinichi thinks, as Ran gets up and starts to clear the dishes. I’m always making you cry.

Shinichi collects Mouri’s empty beer cans and follows Ran into the kitchen, dumping them into the recycling bin and then turning to look at Ran’s back. Her shoulders are hunched as she runs hot water into the left side of the sink. "Can I help?"

"Are you all packed? Shinichi’s mom is coming to get you tonight, remember?" Her voice is choked.

Shinichi doesn’t want to leave her like this. He knows it’s better, that he does. That Ran will think Conan is safe and happily living with his parents in another country, and not… He knows that, and he knows that no matter how this all plays out, she’ll be sad, but even so, he hates the face Ran makes when she needs to cry but doesn’t want to.

"I remember," Shinichi replies, softly. "I’m almost done."
Ran dries her hands on a towel. "Let’s go finish, then." Her hands are still damp on his shoulders as she pushes him towards Mouri’s room, and Shinichi doesn’t protest.

Mouri’s room has been stripped bare of his things, and the desk he’s used since Ran had lugged it up here for him with Sera’s help last summer has been cleared of trinkets and model cars and Shinichi’s 5B pencils.

"Looks like you’ve got most of it taken care of."

"I packed a couple of days ago," Shinichi replies. He smiles weakly at Ran, and whatever she sees in that smile has her falling to her knees atop Shinichi’s folded up futon, her eyes once again filled with unshed tears.

"I’ve never been alone before," Ran says, as Shinichi zips his bag. There are only two of them. It’s strange that the last two years of his life can fit into two small suitcases. "I’ve always had Shinichi, and when he left, I had you. Now, I’ll just have...."

"Ran-nee-chan…"

"I know you’ve only been here a couple of years, Conan, but it feels like I’ve known you so much longer than that." She reaches out for him, and he lets her pull him into a hug. He’s overwhelmed by her warmth, by her fruity shampoo, and by the ferocity of her embrace. "With you here, it was easier not to miss Shinichi so much, too."

His arms are barely long enough to wrap around her shoulders, but he does his best. "You won’t be alone. We’ve made a lot of friends, haven’t we?" He presses his face into Ran’s hair. "You still have Sonoko-nee-chan, and now we know Sera-nee-chan, too, and Heiji-nii-chan and Kazuha-nee-chan. Makoto-san, and Eisuke-nii-chan. Haibara and Ayumi and Mitsuhioko and Genta. Detectives Takagi and Satou. Officer Yumi and Detective Chiba, too, and Jodie-sensei." She nods, and he can feel her tears on his neck. "You won’t be alone, Ran-nee-chan. You have lots of friends now, so it’ll be okay."

Ran sniffles, and Shinichi lets himself, just this once, run his fingers through her long, soft hair, and for a moment, pretends life had gone the way he’d always thought it would, and that he could stay with Ran, have a family with Ran, be happy with Ran. When the moment ends, he pulls away.

"It doesn’t make sense," Ran says, staring into his eyes. "I know you’re just going back to your parents, but for some reason, it feels like I’m never going to see you again."

"Don’t be ridiculous," Shinichi replies, with as much of a grin as he can muster.

"I know," she says, laughing self-deprecatingly, and Shinichi feels like he’s been punched in the stomach, winded and doubled over from how much he doesn’t want to leave her. "I’m just being melodramatic."

Ran has constantly been his anchor, since they were small enough that skinned knees were a crisis and doorknobs were out of reach.

"I’ll miss you," Shinichi says. The words aren’t big enough, he thinks, to encompass what he means, but Ran will understand. She’s always understood, when it really matters.

The doorbell rings, and Ran stands up, rubbing at her wet eyes one last time, before she promptly grabs both of Shinichi’s bags, leaving just his backpack for him to carry himself.

"That’s probably Yukiko-san, now," she says. "I guess this is it."
"Yeah," Shinichi says, as Ran exits the room, leaving Shinichi to stand there alone, the weight of his backpack heavier than it should be. "I guess this is it."

He walks out into the living room, past Mouri’s loudly snoring form on the sofa with a crumpled beer can in hand, to stand just behind Ran.

Shinichi’s mom is still rumpled, clearly just off the plane from Los Angeles, her hair escaping from her ponytail despite the freshness of her lipstick. "Ran-chan!" She squats down. "And Conan-kun! All ready to go, little man?"

"Yup!" Shinichi nods fervently, and Yukiko smiles down at him, her face unreadable, as Ran reaches for his hand and clutches it.

"I’m sure Conan’s family missed him a lot," Ran says, and Yukiko reaches out and cups her face with one hand.

"They knew he was in good hands with you." His mother’s eyes are soft.

Then she’s grabbing his bags, and Ran is hiding her face, and the door is shutting between them. It’s like, he thinks, the end of a novel, but so many plot threads are left untied, and Ran is alone on the other side of the door.

They walk down the stairs, and his mom stops in front of the locked detective agency door and turns on him, eyes narrowing and mouth tight.

"Why are you leaving the Mouris, Shin-chan?" His mother has the rare stern look on her face. "A call out of nowhere to pull you out of school, and now you’re leaving Ran-chan? What’s going on?"

"KID’s in a lot of danger," Shinichi says. "And we can trace it back, at least partially, to the Black Organization." He runs a hand through his hair. "Plus several of the crows are interested in me as Edogawa Conan, now, which means being here is putting Ran and everyone else in too much danger."

"I’m not your father," says his mother, after a long pause, "so I don’t always know why you’re lying." She sighs. "But as your mother, I definitely know when you’re lying."

"I’m not lying," says Shinichi. "I’m just not telling you everything. I’m sorry."

"Whatever you’re up to…" The bustling noise of Poirot on a Friday night in autumn makes it harder to hear her. The smells of various coffees and hot teas fill Shinichi’s nose, and he licks his lips. "Do you think it’ll make you safer?"

"I don’t know. I hope it’ll make everyone safer. And Dad told me to look after Kaito."

"I owe Toichi-sensei my life a few times over." His mother grins. "You should both come to LA and stay with me for a while~"

"Did you bring my passport?"

"It’s back at the house, Shin-chan." She pushes on the door that leads out to the sidewalk. "I set it on the kitchen counter when I unpacked it, and Subaru-san seemed very surprised that you had one."

"Probably because he knows it’s not my real name," Shinichi says, and his mother looks at him in shock. "Subaru-san is very smart. I haven’t told him my identity, but I’m sure he’s either figured it out or suspects."
His mother’s phone rings, and she immediately answers it, switching to English and walking slightly ahead.

"Conan-kun!" Shinichi spins around. Standing in the doorway of Poirot, Amuro-san… Bourbon, is standing there, one hand on his hip and the other pushing open the door. His breath is visible in the night air, and his blond hair falls in every direction across his forehead. Behind him, noise pours out of the café, and he can see Azusa trying to get his attention to help a customer in the back. Bourbon, though, only has eyes for Shinichi and his mother.

"A-amuro-san," Shinichi stutters, watching the calculation in Bourbon’s eyes. "I’d been meaning to say goodbye."

"I heard from Mouri-san that you were headed back to the United States." Bourbon’s lips twitch.

"Yes," Shinichi says. "I said goodbye to all the police officers last night." There had been an almost negligible attempted murder at the bus lot near where Mouri plays pachinko with some old police academy friends, and Shinichi had taken the opportunity to thank each of the officers he knows for looking after him both on and outside of casework.

Takagi had given him a long, considering look, and told him to be careful, and Shinichi will write Takagi a long letter, eventually, because he’d told Takagi that he’d tell him his real identity in the afterlife.

Bourbon steps further out into the cold autumn air, and closer to Shinichi. He involuntarily takes a step back. "Make sure you stay there, Edogawa-kun. Go there and don’t come back."

"Why?" Ran is only up two flights of stairs, and he won’t be here to look after her. Bourbon knows the kids, too, and they trust him, even if Haibara herself knows better. It would be too easy for Bourbon to…

"I like you," says Bourbon. "You’re clever, interesting, and tenacious. But you’re also her weakness, and I need her alive."

"Her?" Vermouth. He can only mean Vermouth, and Shinichi’s heart is in his throat. He’d known Bourbon works with Vermouth more than anyone else, and figured he has his reasons.

Squatting down so that he and Shinichi are eye-to-eye, Bourbon smiles grimly. "Don’t pretend like you don’t know anything. You have bad lying technique. Perhaps you should take lessons from your current companion?"

Shinichi feels a thrill of alarm at the fact that Bourbon recognizes his mother, but Chianti’s not here, so he stifles it. Bourbon is still pinning him with a surprisingly intense gaze, barely sparing his mother a glance. "What are you telling me, exactly?"

"If you go disappear, they’ll have no way to get at her, and that’s nothing but a good thing."

"They… which they?" Shinichi asks, as Bourbon frowns at him. Could that woman be after Vermouth, and Edogawa Conan is just a means to an end? And why, Shinichi considers, is Bourbon trying to protect her?

"It doesn’t matter if you’re truly leaving, does it, Conan-kun?" Shinichi shivers at how friendly Bourbon’s voice is, the warning layered into it. "Things aren’t as they seem. Let experts handle things. Stay out of the way."
Who wants to use me to catch that woman? Shinichi wants to ask. Why would I be Vermouth’s weakness?

His mother clears her throat. "Conan-kun, we have to go," she says, and Bourbon stands and steps back toward the crowded café.

"Goodbye, Conan-kun," he says. "And good luck."

Shinichi watches him head back into the café, and swallows. His mother has hung up the phone, now, and she’s curiously peering at him. "Are you all right? Who was that man?"

"He’s the new full-timer at Poirot," Shinichi replies. "And Mouri’s ‘apprentice’ of sorts."

"Hopefully he’s a better detective than Mouri is," his mother teases, and Shinichi makes himself laugh.

"Much," he replies, and then fixes his eyes ahead of them, in the direction of his childhood home.

* 

With his mother and Subaru-san together in the kitchen, talking about old movies that came out before Shinichi was born, Shinichi is able to look on his own through the library. He’ll only be here tonight, after all, before he’s moving to KID’s place in Ekoda. Edogawa Conan has to disappear, after all. He can’t keep coming back here, or he’ll get caught.

The Kudou library is a real treasure. Kudou Yuusaku is exceptionally pedantic in his organization, and everything in the library is cross-referencable in multiple ways. It isn’t the novels or the non-fiction textbooks that Shinichi is after, right now, though. It’s his father’s copious case-notes.

His dad has always been the sort of person to take extensive notes, even when he’s only peripherally involved in a case. Shinichi had asked him, once, why he bothered, and his father had replied that part of being a good detective was learning from past mysteries. Shinichi wishes he’d listened more, when his father tried to teach him things.

"What are you looking for?"

Shinichi, caught by surprise, almost falls from the ladder. Catching himself, he glares down at KID. "When did you get here?"

KID, in a soft, comfortable pair of jeans and a warm looking sweatshirt with Masked Yaiba on it, grins up at him, his brown hair a ruffled mess. "Oh, about three minutes ago."

"And no one said anything?" Shinichi pulls out a folder and adds it to a stack with four others he has balanced precariously on the edge of the shelf. "I thought you weren’t coming to get me until tomorrow."

"I might have broken in through your bedroom," KID says, and Shinichi whips his head around to glare at him. "Hey now, Meitantei, I’m already ignoring Suzuki’s wonderful taunt in the paper this week offering up those pearl earrings. You have to let me have a little fun." He winks, and Shinichi, despite everything, laughs. "Besides, I was bored."

"How could you be bored?" He’s in the late 1990s now. The first KID had done mostly heists in Japan after 1997, but there should be a few more. "What about those ‘friends’ you mentioned? Like Nakamori-chan."
"Didn’t I say it was easiest to talk to you?" KID tugs at the neck of his sweatshirt. "Besides, I like your grumpy face even better than I like Aoko’s."

"You’re such a menace." Grabbing one last folder, he slowly climbs down the wall-ladder, carefully holding all five folders to his chest.

"What do you have here?" Plucking the top folder out of Shinichi’s hands, he ignores Shinichi’s squawk and flips it open. "Paris, 1989, double homicide? Grim stuff, Tantei-kun."

"My father and KID were rivals," Shinichi says. "Like you and I are."

"Well," KID says, looking over the folder to meet Shinichi’s gaze, eyes glittering, "not exactly like you and I are, I should think."

Shinichi’s whole body flashes hot. "What I mean is, he went to a lot of KID’s heists and followed him to a lot of his international ones. So I pulled every case my father was involved in in France between 1985 and 1999, when KID…” He breaks their locked gazes in order to look down at the folders again, trying to slow the hammering of his heart in his chest. "I mean, I thought there might be clues in here that would help us find your father’s flat." He licks his lips, and when he looks up again, KID’s eyes are on his mouth. "KID?"

"I contacted my mother, and she was unaware of any other property my dad might have owned under his own name. So I asked Jii, and he said that my father did keep a separate account in London, and he didn’t know what was in it, only that it had a large amount of money in it that Dad never touched." KID snaps, and a checking book appears. "Look at this."

"Jii-san had that?"

"Yeah," says KID. "More interestingly, there are continuous deposits made into this account, and out of it."

"But your mother isn’t doing that." Shinichi flicks through the folders he has left, and accidentally slices his finger. It stings, but not enough to bother with.

"No," KID frowns. "Actually, she has trouble even accessing the Japanese accounts from the U.S. She lives in Las Vegas, and she has American accounts set up in her own name. Usually I take care of utilities and the like using money she wires into our family account."

"So all of your KID tools and gadgets…”

"Along with travel fees and the like, that all comes out of a separate account my Dad set up years ago." He flops into Shinichi’s favorite chair in the library. "Also bulk purchase of flowers from greenhouses in southern China."

"Nakamori still sore about that?" Shinichi, like a moth to the flame, wanders closer to KID, around the chair until he’s in front of him.

"Extremely so," KID answers, and then he reaches out and hooks an arm around Shinichi’s waist, pulling him in closer, until Shinichi is sitting on the fronts of KID’s thighs, clinging to the arms of the chair to keep his balance. KID is hot under him, in front of him, and Shinichi can’t seem to catch his breath. The files are spread between them. "The temper tantrum he had after every dead end lead was a joy to witness."

"Sera was pretty pissed about it, too." Shinichi tries to focus. "I’m sure you’ve looked into where that money is coming from and going to."
"Naturally." KID grins, and up close, the unevenness of his upper lip is more noticeable. Shinichi reaches up to touch it. "What’s wrong?"

"When you wear make-up, you cover this up." He drags his index finger along the edge of the bow. "With lipstick."

"Lipliner," KID corrects. "It’s identifiable. Like my freckles." He smiles, his lips pulling under Shinichi’s roving fingers. "You noticed something like that?"

"I notice a lot of things. That’s why I’m a great detective. Outside of murder investigations, though, I’m not always sure what to do with the things I notice."

KID reaches up and grabs Shinichi’s hand. "You’ve given yourself a papercut."

"And you say you aren’t a detective," Shinichi says, trying for dry but ending up sounding like he’s just run a race.

KID’s expression changes, that grin melting away to reveal… something else, and the bottom falls out of Shinichi’s stomach. It’s that sensation of floating and drowning all at once, and Shinichi only realizes he’s stopped breathing when he takes a quick, forced inhale at KID’s tongue coming out to catch Shinichi’s index finger, sucking it into his mouth. He never once looks away, and Shinichi doesn’t jerk back, either, letting KID’s tongue lick up to the webbing between his fingers.

"This is a bit far for flirting," Shinichi manages, when KID lets his finger go, cold air on the skin making him curl his hand into a fist around KID’s thumb, which presses into his palm. "It has been for a while." The marks on Shinichi’s neck have barely faded, and right now, his finger wet from KID’s tongue, and the smell of freshly washed man, jasmine and mint and soap, surrounding him, Shinichi’s thoughts are all on KID. "What is it that you’re trying to do?"

"This isn’t just flirting," KID says, his thigh muscles flexing under Shinichi as he leans forward to press a kiss to Shinichi’s forehead, and then to the bridge of his nose, his cheek leaving a print on the lens of Shinichi’s glasses. Shinichi doesn’t know whether to lean in or pull back. "I’ve been ‘just flirting’ with you for two years."

"Those were heists!" Shinichi’s eyebrows furrow, and he shifts, sending two files spilling onto the floor, the other three still caught between their stomachs. "I was trying to catch you and put you in prison!"

"You’ve always been more likely to let me go than to put me behind bars."

"Only if I owe you a favor." Shinichi scowls. "It was more important to put murderers behind bars."

"And now?" KID laughs when Shinichi’s scowl deepens. "We make a good team, don’t we, Clyde?"

They do, Shinichi thinks. Because KID understands him without Shinichi explaining himself, and follows his deductions as well as Heiji does. He knows all sorts of things that Shinichi doesn’t know, and taunts and teases but never crosses the line. "That doesn’t make your heists some act of flirtation."

"Still, I got to know you, Shinichi. To see that phenomenal mind of yours at work." He brushes Shinichi’s hair out of his face. "When I gave you my real identity, that was the end of ‘just flirting’."

"What do you call this, then?" Shinichi asks; KID’s eyes darken, and Shinichi doesn’t think he could look away even if he wanted to.
"I’m declaring my intentions toward you," KID says, "so that you can’t ignore them even if you want to." He tilts his head, and with his other hand, pulls out the chain with the 5 yen coin hanging from it, skin-warmed from resting against Shinichi’s chest under his shirt. "I don’t think you want to, though. Do you?"

"KID…” KID’s pulse is racing too, because of Shinichi, the same way Shinichi’s is racing because of KID.

Shinichi is sick, or dying, and stuck in this body, and he doesn’t even know if he likes men, because until now, he’s only ever liked Ran. But KID is an undeniable force, like gravity or electromagnetism, and though he’s tried to rationalize it to himself, and play it off as impossible, or anything other than this, because Shinichi’s not… He’s never, ever wanted… Now he wants, he wants KID’s devious smiles and his free spirit and his wise words hidden in gentle teasing. He wants the fun and the whisper of melancholy that clings in the folds of his cape. He wants those clever fingers that are never still and the uneven shape of his upper lip and the way his laugh rings through empty rooms and bounces around in Shinichi’s ribcage like a rubber ball.

Shinichi likes KID, wants KID, despite all the reasons he shouldn’t.

And KID sees Shinichi for who he really is, wants Shinichi back, and with all the things gone so terribly wrong in Shinichi’s life, KID has been the one good, and Shinichi didn’t even know he’d needed someone like KID around until KID was here.

"If I’ve misread things," KID says, into the silence, "You should tell me now, Meitantei."

It’s selfish, and in the end, it will only hurt KID, when Shinichi… But Shinichi trusts KID to know what he’s doing, and ultimately, maybe it’s that trust, the same trust that had made Shinichi offer up his secrets on the rooftop three months ago, that lets Shinichi lean forward, manila file folders digging into his gut, and kiss KID lightly on the lips. It’s the slightest brush of skin, but Shinichi can feel it rush through every centimeter of him, like he’s coming up from the ocean depths and breaking through the surface to meet the sun of KID’s mouth.

One beat of Shinichi’s heart, then two, and then KID is kissing him back, gently tilting his head so that their mouths fit together a little easier, and Shinichi’s only other kiss had been a sharing of air in a desperate situation, a brush of mouths, but somehow, he knows that kisses must rarely feel like this. KID’s mouth is warm and sure, chapped lips so soft against Shinichi’s own as they breathe into each other.

When Shinichi pulls away, KID’s lips are parted, and his cheeks are flushed. "Declaring my intentions," Shinichi says, raspily, and the smile KID gives him in reply is the loveliest one Shinichi’s ever seen on him, crooked and genuine and reaching all the way to his eyes. It’s… flustering, and Shinichi has to look away from it. "Now help me search for Kaitou 1412 in these files."

"Conan-kun?" His mother’s voice calls through the hall, and Shinichi scrambles backwards on KID’s lap until he stumbles down to the floor, letting himself fall to his knees so he can pick up the spilled files. "Oh, we have company?"

KID is up on his feet and bowing to Shinichi’s mom as Shinichi stands with the folders clutched in his arms. He feels like his embarrassment must be written all over his face, but KID is perfectly calm, producing a rose out of nowhere and handing it to her as she comes deeper into the library. "Kuroba Kaito," he says, and she smiles, shoulders relaxing.

"You haven’t changed at all," she replies, and that has KID blinking.
"Excuse me?"

"We met several times when I was still your father’s student," his mother says. "You gave me a rose just like this." She looks away from him to find Shinichi. "Shin-chan, you’re so red! Did I interrupt something?"

"No," he answers. "Just looking through some of Dad’s old case files." He flicks his eyes at KID. "He knows who I am."

"Anything your young, beautiful mother can help you look for, then?" She tosses her hair, and KID laughs. Shinichi rolls his eyes, because of course KID and his mother are birds of a feather. Probably a peacock.

"We’re good," Shinichi says. "Is there something caffeinated?"

"Subaru-san just put some coffee on," she says. "I’m going to sleep, Shin-chan. I’m still jet-lagged."

"How long are you staying in Japan?"

"Four days," she says. "I have a few errands to run for your father, but then I’m headed back to LA again." She puts her hands on her hips. "You always choose the busiest times to uproot your life or need a permanent master of disguise on call."

"Sorry about that, Mom." He walks over to her and hugs her, lightly, just enough to get his intentions across, and then steps out of range before she can cling to him and call him cute. "Thanks for coming."

"I’ll always come if you need me, Shin-chan." She tilts her head. "It’s not often that you actually need me, so a mom has got to take advantage."

She pinches KID’s cheeks, much to his amusement, and then leaves them alone again in the library.

"I do remember her," KID says, when they’ve settled down on the floor with the files between them, where the center light is the brightest. "She got mad at me for calling her Auntie."

"According to Haibara, I got a lot of my personality from her," Shinichi mumbles. "I don’t see it."

"I do," KID replies, and he chuckles at Shinichi’s huff, stretching out carefully to avoid aggravating his healing wound. "I’m a lot like my mom, too. Aoko is always calling her for advice about me when we fight and she doesn’t understand me." He grins at whatever incident that calls to mind.

"Who should I call?" Shinichi asks, and KID raises both eyebrows. "For advice about you, when we fight because I don’t understand you?" It’s as close as he can get to acknowledging what happened a few minutes ago, but KID understands. Of course he does, and the look he gives Shinichi is so…

"I suspect you won’t have to call anyone," says KID, softly. "You’re better at reading me in a few months than some people are after years." KID shows him all teeth when he beams. "I might not be able to hide anything from you, eventually."

"You don’t look too bothered about that."

"I’m not," KID agrees, and opens up the file closest to him, which prompts Shinichi to do the same. Resting on his stomach, Shinichi looks across at KID from under the fall of his bangs. KID is all long, thin limbs and narrow shoulders and casual grace. Shinichi wonders if KID will still have that
taunt in his resting smile when he’s older. Whether a thirty-year old KID and a thirty-year-old Shinichi would still have looked alike, or whether adulthood would have changed the lines in their faces enough that no one would ever again mistake one for the other.

He drops his eyes to the case, and swallows down his sadness at the fact that he’ll never find out.

The 1989 case offers nothing in the way of Kaitou 1412: instead, it’s a kidnapping attempt his father had managed to thwart before it even hit the afternoon news. The 1991 case, as well, has nothing to do with the previous KID, even though it is a theft case.

The 1987 case, though, is definitely a heist. He spreads the files out on the floor, and when he sees a picture of the gem that Kaitou KID had targeted, he does a doubletake.

"KID," he says, urgently, "look at this gem." He pushes the file toward KID. "Isn’t that…"

"Different setting," KID remarks, "but that’s definitely Groves’s red beryl Ascendant Phoenix. I’d recognize that tacky gemcutting anywhere."

"Could the Ascendant Phoenix have been cut to look like this stone, or vice versa?"

"Possibly." KID cracks his fingers and reaches over the file to snag Shinichi’s glasses. "How do I access zoom on these again?"

"Right arm," Shinichi replies. Fiddling with them, KID frowns, and Shinichi sighs impatiently. "Come here." KID shifts closer to him, and Shinichi sets the glasses on KID’s nose before activating the zoom. "Twist the arm to go in and out."

KID pats Shinichi’s thigh in thanks as he curls over the picture of the stone. "Ah, but look, it’s clear. This is a very rare stone, even if red beryl is only considered semi-precious. I remember looking at the Ascendant Phoenix in person, and it was a natural stone—no heat treatments or chemical interference, and super high-clarity. The possibility of finding another with the same measurements for all four C’s—"

Shinichi leans in closer. "Color, carat, clarity, and cut?" he offers, in clear English, and KID glances briefly at him in pleased surprise.

"Exactly." He hums. "Even at a glance, I can tell this is the same stone. It’s too rare to have a pretender. I suspect that whatever gem is hiding inside Scarlette Shinamoto’s Lady Red is also a pretty rare stone, actually, only she had the sense to hide it."

"And Takizawa put his inside a pocketwatch," Shinichi muses. "Mercier’s was also pretty ostentatious, though."

"We don’t know what your old acquaintance Vermouth has," KID points out. "Regardless, the stone my father tried to steal in this 1987 Paris heist was the Ascendant Phoenix. That’s a connection between my dad and this case."

"We already knew there was a connection," Shinichi replies, reading through the details.

"My Meitantei knows how to test gem quality. Are you sure you don’t want to be the Clyde to my Bonnie? I’ll even let you drive the getaway car."

"I’m not tall enough to reach the pedals." Shinichi’s father has cramped handwriting, even on the best of days, and the small, precise kanji have Shinichi squinting to speedread. Heist in the night on private property, a bed of rose petals, a merry chase through the streets and an eventual standoff in
front of the Eiffel Tower. "I recognize this case."

"What?"

"My father wrote about it." Shinchi looks up to the shelves, not really searching for a title but trying to recall which novel it had been… "Murder by the Seine. It’s one of the Night Baron novels." He exhales. "Have you read it?"

"I don’t think so." KID scratches his cheek. "Are you sure it’s related?"

"The Night Baron stole a crown that was going to be used for an ancient ritual. It took me the whole book to figure out that though the Night Baron was being his usual dastardly self, it was the owner of the crown that had the truly evil intentions. In the end, it turns out he’d killed several people to get that crown, and one of them had been a person that the Night Baron had owed a favor."

"An ancient ritual, huh?" KID immediately gets to his feet. "Dewey Decimal?"

"Of course," Shinichi replies, continuing to skim. "What else?"

"Nerd," KID says fondly, as he pushes the wall ladder around to the other side of the room. Shinichi turns the page, reading about the return of the gem inside a bouquet of roses to the unnamed owner, and clippings from the newspaper that Shinichi can’t read are paperclipped together.

On the last page of the notes in the file, Shinichi’s father had written a P.O. box address, in Paris. Send one copy is printed in all caps English underneath it. Shinichi commits it to memory, and is about to close the file when he feels something bulky behind it. Lifting the last page of notes, he finds a map.

Quickly, he begins to unfold it, and finds it’s a map of Paris in the 1980s. It’s huge, large enough to cover the center of the floor and to show buildings in detail, and it has been marked with small stars in a thick black pen in several places.

"Got it!" KID says cheerfully, as Shinichi continues to unfold the map, standing up to facilitate spreading it out. "What did you find, Tantei-kun?"

"Are the stars places from the novel or from the actual heist?" Shinichi mumbles to himself, smoothing his hand along the folds to straighten them out, stretching his body across to the right bank of the Seine. "What’s this map for, Dad?"

KID returns to his side and offers him the book. "You probably remember this in detail."

"My memory… doesn’t work like that," Shinichi replies. "I remember details that are plot relevant from novels."

"I tend to remember, well, everything," says KID. "It’s useful for scholastic enterprises, I suppose, although it does lower reread value." He runs a thumb across the embossed letters on the cover. "My father left a copy of this book in the secret room." At Shinichi’s look, KID gives him a devious grin. "Well, we can’t just leave the tools of the trade on the kitchen table when an inspector lives next door, can we? Anyway, this handwriting…” KID narrows his eyes. "This handwriting was on the package envelope it must have shipped in. My dad saved it."

"Did he?" Shinichi looks again at the last page of notes. "Maybe that’s what my father sent to this P.O. box address, then."

"12 Rue Castex, 75004 Paris, France," KID reads the street address over his shoulder, before
returning to the map, hunching over it as he scans the roads, dragging his pinky along intersections. Just up the Rue de Lyon, past the Opera Bastille, he pauses. "Here. There’s a star. It’s in a different colored ink." He pulls out his phone. "It’s a post office address. PTT Paris Bastille."

"So a real location, then. Possibly your father’s Paris mailing address?" Shinichi recalls, then, a game he’d once played in the place of his father, a series of clues left all around Beika that had been meant to lead his Dad to the leather wallet in the library. "The stars… I think they’re from a game your father was playing with mine."

"What do you mean?"

"Your heist notes are puzzles for the police to solve," Shinichi says. "Your father used to play a similar, but more complicated, game of treasure hunting with mine. I’ll bet these are my dad’s notes on one of those."

"Each star was where a clue was left?" KID taps his chin. "That sounds like fun, Meitantei~"

"Don’t get any ideas," Shinichi quickly retorts at seeing the twinkle in KID’s eye.

"And the prize was the mailing address?" KID sighs. "So your father sent the completed book to acknowledge that he’d followed all the clues?"

"That’s my guess about this map," Shinichi replies. "Which makes the stars useless."

"No hints about the apartment location, then." KID pushes a hand through his hair. "The P.O. box is a dead end."

"Not necessarily," Subaru stands in the doorway of the library, holding a tray with two cups of coffee. He walks over to the low table next to one of the reading tables and sets it down. Then he comes over to squat down on the opposite side of the map, pushing his glasses up. "You’re trying to find an apartment?"

"Right," Shinichi says, and without hesitation, he hands his father’s notes over to Subaru, who takes them and immediately starts to shuffle through them. "Any ideas?"

"Hmm," Subaru says, pushing up his glasses. "Two things. One, there was a limited amount of time between the announcement of this heist and the execution."

"Three days," Shinichi agrees. "Not a lot of warning."

"That means time was probably a factor." Subaru’s hair is growing out at the roots, Shinichi notices, fine black hair leading out to the frizzy bleached blond. "That explains the stars."

Shinichi blinks at Subaru, then looks down at the map again. "They’re all clustered in one section of the city."

"No time to travel across the whole thing leaving clues," KID adds thoughtfully. "So we’re looking for something within this area." He draws a circle around the outside of the area with pen-drawn stars. It’s still a two-mile radius, but if they use a modern map, they should be able to find which of the areas are residential.

"What’s the second thing?"

"P.O. boxes are not rented to foreigners at post offices in France unless they have a permanent address or proof of French residence. Usually, if one is visiting, you have your mail delivered Poste
"General Delivery Service," KID says, shifting forward until he’s on his knees. "So for Kaitou KID to have rented a P.O. box…"

Subaru smiles. "He would have needed to have an address on file. Naturally, that information would be closed to the public, and it’s probably not digitized, since it’s from the 1980s, but I’m sure you have some way of accessing it?"

KID smirks. "Accessing information is a specialty of mine."

"How many specialties do you have?" Shinichi says, and KID turns to him with a wicked gleam in his eye.

"A few you’ve yet to encounter," he says, teasingly, and Shinichi flushes and returns his gaze to the map.

"There’s the chance he used someone else’s name and address to register for this P.O. box, though," Shinichi says, when he’s sure his voice won’t crack.

"Knowing Kaitou KID, that’s a pretty fair assumption," says KID, chewing on his lower lip. "That’s what I would do, at least. Never can be too safe."

"Yes, we wouldn’t want it to be easy to track peony purchases from Guiyang, would we?" Shinichi takes his glasses away from KID when he starts to change them into different objects, absently doing tricks as he memorizes the map. He’ll be able to recreate it perfectly later in his mind, which Shinichi thinks is another of KID’s enviable skills.

Subaru pushes his glasses up again, surveying the map. "If it were me," he says carefully, gaze steadfastly pinned on the map, "I’d figure out high density residential areas within the circle you’ve picked out, and then see if the address and name you find for who rented that P.O. box in 1987 shows up in the right place. If it does, you have a higher chance of it being a good address. If it doesn’t, you know you can probably toss that piece of information."

It’s good advice. Subaru’s advice is always good advice. Shinichi stares at him, consideringly, before he goes and retrieves one of the mugs of coffee from the side table, letting the warmth of it sink into his surprisingly cold hands. "Well, considering that my…" he catches himself, "that Kudou Yuusaku knew Kaitou 1412’s real identity and never did anything about it, there’s a pretty good possibility that some checking in to that P.O. box will lead us to the correct address, even if it is under a false name."

He takes a sip of coffee as KID dramatically falls backwards, covering his eyes with one arm. "Being a detective is so much work," he complains, and Shinichi laughs, almost choking on his coffee. "It’s much more fun to orchestrate the mystery than to solve it."

"Not so," Subaru says. "There’s a sense of accomplishment on both ends of the spectrum. Sometimes, too, the best mysteries are the ones created by those most skilled at being the solver."

Shinichi’s eyes gravitate toward his father’s book as KID groans. "There might not even be anything there."

"There must be something," Shinichi replies quietly. "She sent us there for a reason. Mercier wanted us to find that flat."

"I agree," KID says, turning his head so that he can look at Shinichi. "She mentioned it too."
"You noticed that too, then," Shinichi muses, taking another sip of hot coffee. KID glances disinterestedly at the other cup, looking nothing like tired as he crosses his arms behind his head.

"Marie Mercier?" Subaru asks, ripping his gaze up from the map to pin Shinichi with a glare. "You're looking in to the Clifford Groves case, then. This is connected?"

"Scarlette Shinamoto, Takizawa Morisuke, and Clifford Groves were all, theoretically, killed by the same person or organization," Shinichi answers, putting weight on the word 'organization' and noting the slight downward curl of Subaru's mouth. "The targets have been special jewels in the possession of each victim, and a threat or message to Kaitou KID has been left at each murder scene." Shinichi hesitates. "Mercier is one of the two possible candidates for the next victim. The other is Chris Vineyard."

Subaru slowly sits back on his heels. "This isn’t too dangerous for you by yourself, Conan?"

"No choice," Shinichi replies. "I’d welcome help, eventually, but right now we—" He gestures to KID—"have to do what we can to stop one person from having all those pieces of jewelry, and we have to find the person responsible for these murders."

KID’s eyes bounce between Subaru and Shinichi, like he’s watching a tennis match, and Shinichi doesn’t blame him. It’s a fine line he and Subaru both walk, with regards to plausible deniability about each other’s true identities, and Shinichi knows this conversation is causing them to wobble more than it should.

"A bright boy like you is sure not to go unnoticed by an organization of any intelligence," Subaru says finally. "You might want to be exceedingly cautious."

"I’ve been given a warning to that effect by someone else," Shinichi replies, and Subaru nods.

"Have you looked into the body armor?"

"I will get to it this weekend," Shinichi promises, and Subaru nods, standing up and rubbing his hands on his comfortable khaki trousers, smoothing wrinkles.

"I hope you have luck with the apartment," Subaru says, pausing in the doorway. "And catching your killer."

Shinichi smiles. "I’ll make sure that any other important information ends up in the right place."

"And where is the right place?" KID asks, when they’re alone again. He’s picked up the Night Baron book, and opened it to the first chapter.

"With the FBI," replies Shinichi. "They’ve been trying to bring down that syndicate for a long time."

KID sets the open book on his chest, creasing the spine, and even lying down, he seems to be curving toward Shinichi without moving much at all. "The FBI. Your best friends."

"Reliable allies," Shinichi replies. "Jodie has been pursuing Vermouth for almost twenty years."

"But you have a truce of some kind with Vermouth?" KID’s eyebrows are raised, not with judgement, but with interest. Shinichi licks his lips, and thinks of Bourbon’s warning. You’re one of her weaknesses.
"I wouldn’t call it a truce." Shinichi drops his eyes back to the map, following the line of the Seine from the Orsay Museum to Notre Dame, and noticing the way his father never completely closes the edges of his stars. "More like an understanding."

"Watching the lines you walk with people, how much of yourself you allow to seep out in different conversations…" KID chuckles, lowly, and it sends a shiver down Shinichi’s spine. "You have no idea how fascinating you are."

"Not really," Shinichi says, stealing a look at KID, and then wishing he hadn’t, because the heat in KID’s eyes makes his skin prickle.

"You’re like a magic trick that never turns out the same way twice," KID replies. He holds up his hand and wiggles in the air, producing a freesia in full bloom in his open palm, yellow petals folding outward around his fingers. "Do you know hanakotoba?"


KID just gives him a lazy grin, and closes his hand, and when he opens it, the flower has changed. A bright orange zinnia, this time, with a fat, stamen-filled center. "Loyalty." A twist of KID’s wrist, and the zinnia transforms before his eyes. It’s on the tip of his tongue to ask how a zinnia can become a morning glory, but instead he says "a willful desire to keep a promise."

Crushing the morning glory’s blue petals, edelweiss fall from between KID’s fingers to his chest.


"All different sides of my favorite Meitantei," KID says. "The same magic trick, and always a different result."

Unsafe how to reply to that, Shinichi scoots closer to KID, picking up one of the fallen edelweiss blossoms, brushing the furry white petal. "At least you finally came up with one that actually grows in the cold. Did you know that the fuzz protects it from aridity and ultraviolet radiation?"

Shinichi is conscious of the small amount of space between them, and the interrupted moment earlier. So, it seems, is KID, who curls a hand around Shinichi’s neck to pull him in closer. "Edelweiss can also be called Chatzen-Talpen in some Alemannic dialects."

"Cat’s paw," Shinichi replies, eyelashes fluttering at the tickle of KID’s breath. "Do you speak German?"

"That’s for me to know and you to find out," KID answers, dragging his hand up into Shinichi’s hair, nails scratching lightly at his scalp. "You look tired, Shinichi."

"It’s been a long day," admits Shinichi. The Detective Boys. Ran. Shinichi has never been good at expressing his emotions, always preferring to let them bubble and fizz inside of him like a shaken soda. Not spilling over when there’s so much left to say that he might never get the chance to has made him want to close his eyes until the pressure of it all eases.

"Painful though parting may be, I bow as I see you off to distant clouds." At Shinichi’s sleepy blink, KID elaborates. "A poem by Saga-tennou. Did you know he might have been the first Japanese emperor to drink tea?"

Poetry. KID likes that. "Why would anyone drink tea instead of coffee?"

"Are you really Japanese?" KID’s hand, still in his hair, pulls down, and Shinichi lets himself be
coaxed down until his head is pillowed in the soft spot between KID’s chest and shoulder.

"Of course I am," Shinichi replies. "I’m just…"

"Sleepy," KID finishes, amused. "Go to sleep, little detective."

"I have a bed," Shinichi says, or means to say, but KID’s hand in his hair is soothing, and sleep promises Shinichi fewer thoughts of Ran amongst the now-familiar smell of jasmine Shinichi associates with KID.

He falls asleep to the sound of KID rapidly turning the pages of ‘Murder by the Seine’, humming delightedly into Shinichi’s hair.

*

The medicine takes longer to work, when Shinichi finds himself in a cold sweat, held tightly to KID’s chest in one of the downstairs bathrooms, the taste of bile in the back of his throat.

Shinichi sluggishly drinks the cup of the water KID pushes into his hand, and he blearily lets KID carry him back to the library, KID sitting down in one of the overstuffed armchairs with Shinichi curled into his side, too drained to contemplate how unusual this doesn’t feel.

He dozes, slipping in and out of consciousness, KID’s voice reading parts of ‘Murder by the Seine’ aloud as Shinichi shifts between reality and hallucination.

Shinichi wakes up to his mother’s face unreasonably close to his own, alone in the armchair, feeling gross and sweaty.

"Nightmare, Shin-chan?" his mother asks lightly, brushing his hair back from his forehead. She pauses, and then plucks something from behind his ear. It’s a carnation, a deep pink with bright white edges. A perfect bloom.

"Fascination," he says, thoughtfully, and his mother gives him a long look.

"Did Kaito-kun give you this?"

Shinichi can barely feel any warmth from KID next to him on the soft leather, which means Shinichi has been alone for longer than ten minutes, but less than twenty. The flower his mother is holding is fresh, and in the moderate temperature of the library, it hasn’t wilted at all, which would be impossible if it had been next to Shinichi’s still slightly feverish skin for an extended length of time.

"Probably," he says, absently, and when his mother raises both eyebrows, he adds: "He was goofing around with flowers last night," willing down his automatic blush. Sometimes Shinichi is sure his mother can see right through him, but right now, he sincerely hopes she can’t.

"Fascination isn’t the only meaning of the carnation in hanakotoba, Shin-chan." She ruffles his hair. "I like him."

"Okay," Shinichi says, bewildered, as she pushes a piece of toast into her mouth."That’s nice?" He blinks, and then notices ‘Murder by the Seine’ sits closed on the side table, between a full cup of cold coffee and an empty one. "Did he stay up all night reading?"

"That would explain the dark circles under his eyes." She laughs. "I made breakfast."

"Is it the apocalypse?" Shinichi tentatively sniffs the air. "I don’t smell anything burning…"
"Haha, so funny," she replies, her hands on her hips. "Where did you inherit your sense of humor from?" She gets into his face again. "Or lack of one, I should say."

"Meitantei’s sense of humor is secretly very sharp," says KID from the doorway, and Shinichi looks away from his mom to see KID dressed in those same worn jeans from yesterday, but one of Shinichi’s white button-downs, untucked with only half the buttons done up. Droplets of water trace the line of his muscles down his neck and chest, and his hair, even soaking wet, is unruly and wild, going in every direction. "He just hides it under that perpetually pissed-off face."

"Have you ever considered that you make me pissed off?"

"No," KID says, with a deep bow reminiscent of a magician on the stage. "I’m an absolute delight. Now come on, let’s eat breakfast, detective."

Shinichi’s mom fills the kitchen with chatter over breakfast, as KID yawns over his miso, and Shinichi pushes rice around in the bowl and contemplates drinking his orange juice.

"I finished the Night Baron novel," KID says. "A taste for gentleman thieves runs in the family?"

"Hardly," Shinichi says, poking at the slightly charred rolled egg in his rice. "Night Baron is not a gentleman. He’s smart, sure, but he’s also ruthless and values his job more than human life."

"Are you finally admitting I am a gentleman, then?"

"No one has named a vicious, destructive computer virus after you yet."

"I’m sure it’s only a matter of time," KID muses, looking completely awake at the idea of having some piece of malware bear his name. He sets down his chopsticks. "We should go soon. I have to drop by Aoko’s and give her my notes sometime this morning."

"Your notes?"

"She was out sick yesterday," KID explains. "Apparently her first flu of the season." He narrows his eyes, giving Shinichi a once-over.

Shinichi knows he’s still pale. A brief trip to the bathroom to wash his face and rinse the taste of bile from his throat had revealed a disheveled, sickly appearance in the mirror, and Shinichi is fortunate his mother passed it off as a nightmare, like the ones he used to get when he was actually this age and he wasn’t already used to all of the terrible ways a human being can die.

"I’ll be careful not to pick up any germs." KID’s eyes are serious despite his playful smirk.

"I wasn’t worried about it."

KID shakes his head. "Little detectives get sick easier than the big ones," he replies. "The second time I met you, you were passed out with a fever wearing one of Miss Mouri’s oversized sweaters. With how yellow it was, and how much you were sweating, I briefly thought you might turn into the sun."

"Shut up," Shinichi grumbles. He knows his immune system has been shit since he turned little. It’s not like he needs a reminder about his tentative health when even holding his chopsticks this morning is proving to be a battle, despite KID having given him his medicine on time. Giving up on breakfast and on a retort, Shinichi pushes his rice away from him. "Let’s go, then."

"Oh," his mother says, "by the way, you got a letter in the mail."
"Eh?" Shinichi’s head jerks up. "A letter?"

She gets up from the table and walks out into the hall, returning moments later with a padded envelope. "Addressed to Kudou Shinichi."

The envelope is taped along the edge, and Shinichi takes in the sender with trepidation.

M.H.

"Another?"

In seconds, KID has moved to stand behind him. "M.H.? You asked me before, if I knew someone named M.H."

"This is the second envelope," Shinichi says, using his nail to peel the tape and then pulling his white handkerchief out of his pocket to reach inside. Inside is another note, and this time, the photos are printed. Three of them.

"Who is she?" Shinichi’s mother asks, as Shinichi takes off the fake glasses to look more closely at the photo on top.

It’s the woman from the previous photos, with Bourbon and Chianti, leaning against a white Chevrolet. That same Burberry coat, and expensive handbag. This time, her face is in profile, and Shinichi’s eyes widen as recognition sets in. "Kanami-san," he says. "That’s Takeuchi’s maid and personal assistant, Kanami Reika."

KID reaches for the note, on thin pink paper, and picks it up. "It says Little detective, look out for your friends."

"My friends?" Shinichi flips to the next picture, and scans it. It’s near the police headquarters, where Snake’s body had been found, according to Shiratori. This time, he can’t see Kanami’s face, but he can tell she’s watching something. He picks up his glasses and puts them back on, activating zoom. "Detective… Takagi?"

"She’s tracking him," KID says. "Does she have some reason to track him?"

"Takagi and I were the ones to find the real crime scene," Shinichi says. "And Takagi is the one who let me watch the interview with Ueda. She probably thinks he knows something about me."

"You think he’s in danger?" KID wiggles the paper in his hand. "You should call and warn him. Did you tell the police that you suspected Kanami-san?"

"I can’t," Shinichi replies. "If she’s really connected with the Black Org, if Takagi gets close to anything, he’ll be killed."

"Like this, he’s in danger of being killed anyway," KID says. "This is the second envelope you’ve gotten from M.H.?"

Shinichi nods, and pulls out his phone. He scrolls through his contacts, and hovers over Takagi’s name. "The first was a USB with pictures of Bourbon and Chianti receiving a headshot of me from Kanami, but in those photos, I couldn’t see her face. I didn’t know it was her."

"With the way she tricked the police into bringing Ueda out of jail for Snake to slaughter, she’s definitely dangerous."
"But if I don’t contact him for a long time, maybe she’ll realize he’s uninvolved with my investigation."

Shinichi’s mom taps the table. "If you were worried about me, but you didn’t want anyone to know you were watching me, what would you do?"

"Call Dad," Shinichi immediately responds, then he blinks. "I should… call Satou?"

"Pin-pon~" she says, tapping her lips. "After all, you’ve always said Detective Satou was extremely capable."

"Good idea," KID says. "They probably aren’t watching her yet. Not that they’re particularly discreet, those two agents of yours, but if you call her now, and Kanami Reika finds out they’re dating later, it’ll be after you made contact, won’t it?"

"I always wanted to ask Detective Takagi for help on the Black Org case," Shinichi says. "But Haibara told me it was too dangerous to involve him." He swallows, then scrolls up in his contacts, to sa. Satou Miwako’s name is first.

KID snatches the phone out of his hand, and replaces it immediately with a burner phone. "Don’t leave tracks when you want to be sneaky," he says, and then shows Shinichi the screen of his own phone so he can dial the number.

The phone rings four times. "Hello, this is Detective Satou."

"Detective Satou, it’s Edogawa Conan."

He can hear the flurry of daily operations at headquarters in the background, and Megure’s gruff demanding voice from the other side of the room, where his desk is, near the window. "What? C-"

"Don’t say my name," Shinichi quickly interrupts. "I know I’m supposed to be in America. I’m not. Please listen carefully, Detective Satou."

She gasps, maybe at the seriousness of his voice, or maybe just in general surprise, and he hears her standing up and walking out into the hallway.

"I’m listening."

"Detective Takagi is being watched by members of a large crime syndicate that specializes in arms deals and drug sales."

"What?" Satou whispers harshly into the phone. "Where are you getting this information?"

"That’s not important," Shinichi replies. "Remember Detective Date Wataru’s investigation? It’s in connection with his arrest of Ueda." Hesitating, he leans back in the kitchen chair, and KID’s hands drop to his shoulders, fingertips warm against Shinichi’s clavicles through his shirt. "We have reason to believe Kanami Reika is a member of the organization."

"Who is we?" He can hear her confusion and frustration, and Shinichi sighs.

"I wish I could tell you," he says. "One day, I hope to. Until then, can I ask for your trust?"

A measured beat of silence. "Yes," she says firmly. "You’re sure it’s him they’re…" Trailing off, instead of saying his name. Satou always did catch on quickly.

"I’m sure," Shinichi says. "Whatever you do, Detective Satou, I need you not to go after Kanami-
san. It’s too dangerous at this point, and we aren’t sure…”

"Who else is involved, and what other information you can get from her," Satou says. "Regardless, for now, she’s out of our jurisdiction."

"Where?" Shinichi asks, and Satou lowers her voice enough that Shinichi can barely hear her response.

"We’ve had a protective detail on Kanami and Takeuchi for over a month now, but yesterday, they left the country."

"Left the country?" KID’s fingers tighten slightly. Shinichi’s mother, who is looking at the pictures from the envelope, carefully holding them with Shinichi’s handkerchief, looks up in surprise.

"They took a plane from Narita to Heathrow," Satou says. "I’ll… look out for him."

"I know," Shinichi says. "And… I’m sorry." He hangs up before she can respond, and drops the phone down to the table. KID’s fingers slide in, then up Shinichi’s neck, before he withdraws the touch. "I should burn this."

"I’ll put it in the safe," his mother says. "It’ll be fine there."

"In my summer clothes, there’s a USB. Put that there too?"

"Sure," his mother says. "Your father keeps sensitive information in there, too. I’m sure it will be fine. Most of that organization is no longer interested in the Kudou family, right?"

"They think I’m dead, save for Vermouth."

"Then they won’t be looking for anything here," she says. "Go shower and change, and I’ll take care of that."

"Right," he says, and it’s KID who ushers him up the stairs, toward the bathroom across from his bedroom, pushing him in with gentle efficiency. "What, are you planning on washing my back for me?"

"Would you like me to?" KID leers at him, and Shinichi, flushing hot from head to toe, slams the door in his face.

It’s not until he’s under the stream of the warm shower that he realizes KID had, that easily, distracted him from his melancholy about Takagi.

Unfortunately, now, he’s remembering sitting in the shower with the silk of KID’s nightshirt sticking to his back, and the feel of KID’s lips on his neck, and… He hugs himself, with arms that are too short and a body that is too small, and young, and frail. There are bruises all along his skin, from soft touches and hugs, the result of the deteriorating condition of his liver and the daily injections, according to Haibara.

He closes his eyes, and scrubs his skin clean.

He repacks his bags, sorting them into one for things he needs and one for things he doesn’t. Most of the stuff from his desk can stay, but he’ll take all of his gadgets. He hesitates over the folded origami plover that KID had made for him, and in the end, tucks it into the front cover of his father’s latest book, flattening it along the center seam. KID can fix it for him later, if Shinichi can bring himself to tell him that he’s kept it.
He manages to fit everything he needs into one bag, and by the time he’s finished, his hair is no longer so wet it drips, and he’s finally warmed up again from the sweater he pulled on. Ran made it for him, only last winter.

KID and his mother are talking when Shinichi starts down the stairs, and KID stops immediately, hearing him coming despite the effort Shinichi made to quiet his steps. "Squeaky clean now?"

"Yes," he says, rubbing at his watch band. It’s irritating his wrist, lately, but he won’t go without it. He won’t be defenseless.

He drops his bag on the floor by the front entryway, and Heiji’s baseball cap on top of it.

Shinichi’s mom hugs him at the door as he weakly tries to squirm out of her grip. "Are you sure you don’t need the rest of your things, Shin-chan?"

"Just my winter stuff is fine," he mumbles, "and I’m not going back to elementary school."

"I have anything else he might need," KID adds. "My mother’s a bit of a pack-rat."

Shinichi bites down on a comment about kleptomania running in KID’s family, and instead frees himself from his mother and pushes his arms into the coat KID obligingly holds out for him.

Then he looks up at his mother and frowns. Yesterday, Bourbon had recognized her. She’s still a famous face, even retired from acting in Japan. "Be careful," he says. "Don’t talk about me to anyone. Either ‘me’."

She nods, then studies his face, like there will be a test later or something. "You be careful, too, Shin-chan." She squats down and kisses his cheek. "Don’t hesitate to call me and your father if you need us." She zips it up, and then pushes Heiji’s baseball cap, that he’d set on top of his bag, down on his head, brim turned sideways.

"I know, I know," he replies, before turning his attention to KID, who has put on his own puffy coat, with a silly fur hood bunched around his neck. Just behind him, Subaru is standing at the foot of the stairs.

"Leaving, Conan-kun?" Sunlight reflecting from the lenses of his glasses obscures his eyes.

Shinichi tugs on the brim of the baseball cap. "Yes." He licks at the corners of his lips, and tastes miso. "Could you…"

"I’ll keep an eye on your professor next door," Subaru says, and in it, Shinichi can hear an assurance that he’ll be on alert where Shinichi’s friends are concerned. He has his own interest in looking after Haibara.

Akai Shuuichi and Kudou Shinichi might have become even better friends, Shinichi thinks, if they had ever gotten the chance to get to know each other as themselves, without all the mysteries and runarounds.

"Off we go," KID says, a hand on Shinichi’s neck pushing gently.

"Right," Shinichi says, and when they walk out of the house, he doesn’t look back.

They take the train to Ekoda. It’s crowded enough that they have to stand, and so KID holds Shinichi’s bag with one hand and Shinichi’s shoulders with the other, pulling him into his hip and smashing Shinichi’s face into the soft plastic of his coat.
The motion of the train makes him dizzy. It’s nothing too alarming, but it’s more than he’s felt since he’d started the new injections. A week of feeling like himself for most of the day, and Shinichi had gotten used to living without the limitations. How silly.

Fresh air outside the station helps to clear his head, and KID, without Shinichi asking, slows his pace, long legs taking shorter steps. "The heist notes the Night Baron leaves are modeled after the ones my father used to write."

"The first time I read one of yours, I thought so too." Shinichi shivers at a gust of wind, and KID takes his scarf, a long green wool one, and unwinds it from his neck.

"Does your father speak French?" KID asks, as he wraps his scarf around Shinichi, covering the small gap between his coat collar and his jaw.

"I don’t know," Shinichi replies, then frowns with irritation. "He’s always coming up with some new ability out of the blue." Tugging lightly on the scarf to loosen it around his mouth, he follows KID to a crosswalk. Across the street is a residential district, filled with older style houses, close enough to each other for conversations through the windows. "Why?"

"It might be nothing," KID says, "but in each of the six heist notes in the novel, there was only one word in French."

"It is definitely a code," Shinichi replies automatically, and KID laughs.

"You really love codes, don’t you, Meitantei?" He grabs Shinichi by the hand, pulling him across the street. An old woman smiles at them, and Shinichi wonders what she sees. A child and his older brother? A babysitter and his charge? "But I agree. I figured we could tackle that tonight."

"What about this afternoon?" Shinichi asks, and KID leads him down a narrow street, past a row of short houses painted in various shades of white and tan.

"I have to drop off Aoko’s homework and my notes~," KID replies. "And I should probably spend some time with her, too. I haven’t been doing that lately."

"Because you’ve been with me," Shinichi finishes, and KID wiggles his eyebrows.

"Don’t say it like that," KID tells him, turning sharply down another street. There are two stray cats, and both of them come up to KID, curling around his legs. He chuckles, and claps his hands, and a tin of catfood appears on his left palm. He tugs the opening tab with his right index finger, and the cats mewl excitedly. "We’re on a case, as you detectives say." He tickles the chin of one of the cats after he sets the tin down. "Plus, I like spending time with you. I just need to spend a little time with Aoko today, before…"

"Before we leave the country, since we might not come back?"

"Do you always have to be so grim, Meitantei?"

"I’ve seen over a thousand dead bodies over the course of my life," Shinichi replies, as they come off the side street and onto another main one. KID is watching Shinichi and not the way he’s walking, but he artfully dodges a recycle bin by the edge of the road. "And my organs are slowly deteriorating. And our enemy might be…” Shinichi sighs. "My luck has never been any good, KID."

KID stops in front of a house that looks none too different from the others along the street, and walks up the driveway. "My last name is Kuroba," he says. "Similar to the English word clover, remember?"
"How could I forget something as tacky as the charm that hangs from your monocle? What’s that got to do anything?"

"Well," KID says, pulling a key ring out of his pocket, four brass keys jingling on the ring, "Four leaf clovers are very lucky." He unlocks the deadbolt, and then the lower lock with two separate keys. Shinichi vaguely considers what the others might be for. "And just think, Meitantei, now you have your own." He grins down at Shinichi and gestures at himself with an extended thumb. "I think your luck’s improving!" He winks. "Between you and me, I’m a great catch~"

Shinichi’s heart clenches in his chest, and unconsciously, he reaches up to press his hand over it, to make it stop. It doesn’t. "How can you say gross things like that with a straight face?"

"It’s a gift," says KID, before opening the door. "Besides, Tantei-kun, didn’t you declare your intentions toward me?"

"I…” Shinichi swallows as KID sets his bag down in the genkan. Shinichi looks around this ordinary home, and wonders how it can belong to someone as extraordinary as KID. There are family photos on the walls, of KID and his parents, and then newer ones, of just KID and his mom. There are worn out school uniform loafers carelessly left on the floor, and a uniform jacket and tie hanging from the bannister. There are instant noodle packages spilling out of the non-recyclable trash, and a mess of unopened letters addressed to Kuroba Chikage on the side table.

It’s… homey, even if KID lives here all by himself. He shouldn’t be surprised that KID is the type of person who can fill a space with himself no matter how big it is.

"You…?" KID prompts, shucking his shoes and coat without bothering to hang them up. Then he turns to Shinichi to grab his cap, setting it on top of the shoe-closet, and then his scarf.

"I don’t know what that entails, exactly." He unzips his coat, staring at the floor because he can feel KID’s eyes on him. He slips free of his coat, and looks for a place to hang it, and when he doesn’t find one, clutches it in his hands. "I don’t see what you could possibly…” Shinichi jerks his gaze up to meet KID’s when KID peels Shinichi’s fingers away from their death grip on his coat.

KID’s eyes are bright, and his smile is lopsided. "You don’t?" KID’s phone rings, and he blinks, giving Shinichi the opportunity to break away from that intense gaze. KID extends his arm and his phone slips out into his hand. "Ah, it’s Aoko."

"Then you should take it," Shinichi says, watching KID accept the call, pressing the speaker button and setting the phone next to Heiji’s cap he hangs Shinichi’s coat in the closet.

"What do you want, you hag?" KID whines, and a mask visibly falls into place over his features. Shinichi is strangely gratified not to have seen it very often before.

"Kaito," he hears Nakamori Aoko yell, and KID winces at the volume, "you promised to come over! Get out of bed and get over here!"

"I’ll be over in less than ten," KID replies. "Geez, no need to blow out my eardrums, Aoko! Although if you did, I’d never have to listen to your foghorn voice anymore~"

"Come over so I can strangle you!"

"Only if you wear those cute cotton blue and pink heart panties I like!"

"They’re covered in barracudas, you perv!" Aoko shouts, and then the phone line goes dead.
"How long have you been riling her up like that?"

"Years," KID replies, looking down at his shirt, at Shinichi’s shirt, and unbuttoning it. "I met her when we were both small. I gave her a red rose."

"A huge flirt, even then?" Shinichi asks. KID’s bullet wound is covered by a large patch bandage instead of the full torso bandage, now. Nothing he’d need help applying. "It’s getting better?"

"Got the stitches out on Monday." He smooths his hand over the bandage lightly. "Might even be able to do flips again soon."

"Did you dress up as me and go back to the hospital?" He follows KID into the living room, where a pile of clean, folded Henleys sit on the table. "You don’t put your laundry away?"

When KID bends forward, Shinichi gets a glimpse of his underwear. Purple lace at the waist. Shinichi hadn’t known the underwear thing wasn’t part of the disguise. It looks pretty, against KID’s skin.

KID shrugs on the blue one from the top of the pile, the muscles in his back rippling with the movement, and looks over his shoulder at Shinichi. "I will now that you’re here. There wasn’t any point, before."

"I… don’t mind either way," Shinichi says, hating the way his stomach is churning right now, that thin lace and KID’s smooth skin imprinted in his mind.

"Hmmm," KID says, grabbing his school backpack from where it had apparently been haphazardly tossed on the couch. "We’ll talk later, Meitantei. I should head next door before Aoko comes over here to look for me and finds out I have a houseguest."

"Right," Shinichi says, looking around the living room, eyes landing on the windowsill where four vases filled to the brim with full bloom red roses sit.

"Feel free to look around. Fais comme chez toi."

"I don’t speak French."

"I know," KID says. "But my house is your house. Don’t get into too much trouble while I’m gone."

"I’m not you," Shinichi says, but the front door is already closing, KID having left him alone in the house. "Okay then." He sits down on the sofa, next to the folded shirts, and puts his face in his hands. "Why am I so distracted?"

The rest of the house proves to be as mundane as the front and the entryway, save for the ludicrous amounts of flowers KID has growing in every available window. He barely searches any of the rooms until he finds KID’s, a rectangular room with light pink-cream walls and a green ceiling. The sliding windows stretch the entire length of the desk, and Shinichi can see straight across to a girl’s bedroom. Nakamori Aoko’s?

There’s a big framed poster of Kuroba Toichi doing a trick involving doves on the wall, and a long desk, with work spread out messily, the chicken scratch Shinichi has come to know as KID’s handwriting filling in the blanks on worksheets, clearly written with a blunt tipped pencil. There are also origami cranes everywhere, folded out of squares of newspaper, the articles about KID clipped and preserved in plastic binder sheets on the low sitting table next to the bed.

Beneath the clutter, though, which all seems recent, Shinichi can see a complicated organizational
system, complete with a small shelf for textbooks and a filing cabinet for returned assignments. A universal remote for a non-existent television, and a spinning chair that, when Shinichi spins in it, turns to face the poster of Kuroba Toichi and the empty reinforced metal shelf on the wall.

The bed, with a bookcase at the head of it filled with books in every language but Japanese, is unmade, pillows thrown here and there, and a blue laptop left open at the foot of it, on a site for streaming Nachi Shingo romance movies. Shinichi pulls himself up onto the bed, grabbing one of KID’s pillows and holding it to his chest, staring at the screen.

"Thought it would be, like, Cannes Film Festival movies, or something," he mutters, twisting the lavender comforter around himself, but then he pauses. *He probably likes that kind of thing, too.*

Shinichi takes a deep breath. The pillow smells like KID. He flops back, taking the pillow with him, and closes his eyes.

The next time he opens them, sunlight is streaming in too bright through the window, and KID is beside him, stretched out along the bed, head propped up on his hand and a lazy smile on his lips.

"What time?"

"A little after three," KID says. "I thought you’d be knee deep in my closet, not sleeping in my bed." He laughs, and it’s like warm honey down Shinichi’s sleep-fogged mind. "Not that I mind you being in my bed."

"I didn’t even realize I was tired." Shinichi blinks the sleep out of his eyes. The sun is catching in KID’s eyes, and making them glitter, light on the surface of a clear ocean. "I was… You like to watch romance movies?"

"Not a fan of Nachi Shingo flicks?"

"No opinion," Shinichi replies. "I like Gomera, though, so I wouldn’t call my taste high brow."

"Nachi has a few good lines, sometimes," KID says, taking his free hand and brushing Shinichi’s hair away from his eyes.

"Is that where you get them?"

"How could you accuse me of stealing my lines, detective? Don’t you know me better than that?" His hand lingers, tickling Shinichi’s temple before dragging down, exploring the shape of his face. "Our conversation earlier got interrupted. Sorry about that."

"Shouldn’t we focus on figuring out the code in ‘Murder on the Seine’?"

"Yes," KID says, "but first, I’d like to clear something up." The hand on his face drags down his neck, and onto his chest. KID’s hand stops, pressing down on Shinichi’s chest, right above where Shinichi’s heart is beating wildly against his sternum, with a heady mix of fear and anticipation. "I know you love Miss Mouri, the same way I used to love Aoko. I don’t want to pull her out of your heart, I just want to put myself in."

Shinichi exhales, and lifts one hand, setting it on top of KID’s. Then he glares at him irritably. "Aren’t you an international jewel thief? Shouldn’t you be good at getting into places, even when they try their best to keep you out?"

KID’s eyelids lower, and his smile grows a little sharper. That’s the face, Shinichi thinks, that KID makes when he’s about to do something utterly batshit, like leap from the top of a tower onto a
moving train, or careen head first into a building about to explode. It’s smug and dangerous and Shinichi knows that face means he has to watch KID carefully, because the moment KID’s smile twists like that, he becomes completely unpredictable.

"Do you want to be kissed, Shinichi?"

"Do you want to kiss me?" Shinichi replies, tongue thick and throat tight, palms sweaty as he feels his face get so hot it threatens to burst into flames. "Would you even—"

KID has always moved faster than Shinichi can see, when he really wants to, and Shinichi has a warm mouth pressed against his own before he can even register that KID is above him, a hand on either side of Shinichi’s head and knees on either side of Shinichi’s thighs.

The smell of him clings, and Shinichi is drowning again, drowning in KID, as KID tilts his head and licks at Shinichi’s lips, until Shinichi parts them so that KID can come in closer, come in deeper, his tongue slipping into Shinichi’s mouth, brushing Shinichi’s own. All Shinichi can do in response is clutch at handfuls of KID’s soft blue Henley and hold on as he breathes in jasmine-scented skin and tastes rice crackers and lychee on the insides of KID’s cheeks.

Eyes closed, Shinichi is left with no choice but to focus on but the whisper of KID’s eyelashes on his cheek, and the slickness of their mouths moving together. A part of Shinichi’s brain that he can’t turn off notes that KID’s lips are still chapped, that kisses are wetter than he’d thought they’d be, that KID’s arms are trembling and that Shinichi’s heart is beating so fast it might just fly out of his chest. The rest of him, though, is lost in the press of KID’s chest against his own, and the way KID gasps into his mouth, when Shinichi sucks on that infuriatingly uneven upper lip, and all the other things that Shinichi finds impossible to categorize or name. As he sinks further into KID’s demanding touches, Shinichi is too small to fight the emotions dragging him down into the depths, too small for everything KID is pouring into him with his mouth and eyes and heart.

"KID," Shinichi mumurs, against spit-slick lips, and KID’s breathing is harsh against Shinichi’s cheek. "You really…?” He holds up a small hand between them, emphasizing the size of it, and KID shifts his weight so he can lift one of his own hands to grab it.

"No one else has ever come close to outwitting me, Meitantei," KID says, voice low and husky. "You didn’t choose to get smaller instead of bigger. You’re still you."

Shinichi opens his eyes. KID’s are dark, looking into him, seeing him. "It’s that simple?"

"What if I put on make-up and a dress and heels?" KID says. "Will you still want me to kiss you?"

"I like the pink," Shinichi says, before he can stop himself, and then turns his head to the side as KID chuckles.

How about…” He nuzzles Shinichi’s now-exposed neck, just above the chain of his necklace, then nips at the skin, scratching his teeth lightly along the vein. "How about if I wear my disguise from when we caught those Ryouma counterfeiters?" He sucks lightly at the curve of Shinichi’s jaw, and Shinichi shivers, not sure what to make of the heat pooling in his gut at every touch. His hands are still holding on to KID’s shirt, stretching it out of shape. "Or my granny disguise from the Kichiemon trap house?"

"Those are disguises." Shinichi lets go of KID’s shirt to wrap one hand around the back of his neck, tangling his fingers in KID’s soft, wild hair at the nape. "Not… you."

"It’s the same for me," KID says, kissing Shinichi’s chin and then the corners of his mouth. "Do you
see? I know what’s under the disguise, so it doesn’t bother me—"

Shinichi pulls down, cutting KID off with his lips, and this time, he lets himself melt into it completely, lets himself get lost in KID’s teasing of his lower lip and mapping of the backs of his teeth, lets himself forget that he’s sick, that KID is a man, that there are a million things he should be doing. He lets himself, because right now, under KID, Shinichi feels the most like himself that he’s felt in what must be forever, and so the seconds spill into minutes under the crashing waves of KID’s hand running up and down his side, KID’s teeth nibbling at his mouth, KID stealing the breath right out of him as sunlight pours into KID’s nondescript bedroom, on KID’s ordinary twin bed, the two of them tangled together as themselves and not as anyone they’re supposed to be.

And KID, Shinichi thinks, as KID’s kisses slow, moving to the corners of his lips and his nose and his cheeks, doesn’t need to put himself in to Shinichi’s heart, does he? Not when Shinichi has already put KID there himself.

Shinichi’s phone rings, in his back pocket.

"Which one is that?" KID asks, pulling away from Shinichi just enough for them both to catch their breath. "Conan-kun or Shinichi-kun?"

"Conan," he replies. "Shinichi phone has no ringtone."

"That’s not true~" KID says, and then Shinichi feels his phone disappear from his back pocket and reappear in front of him, soccer charm suspended by KID’s index finger and thumb.

"What have you done?" Shinichi’s voice cracks, lessening the grumpiness of it. His mouth tingles, and his blood is boiling, and KID looks positively debauched above him, red mouth and flushed cheeks, shirt stretched and pulled to reveal the sweep of his collarbones.

Shinichi swallows and answers the phone.

"Cool kid?"

"Jodie-sensei?"

KID raises both eyebrows. "Miss FBI?" he mouths, and Shinichi nods sharply.

"I bumped into Ran-chan and Sonoko-chan yesterday at the mall, and she said you’d gone back to America."

Shinichi stares up at the ceiling. KID has (recently, judging by the slickness of the Scotch tape, and the strong hold of it) taped a huge map of Tokyo there, above the bed, a tourist map, with landmarks drawn in a cartoonish style and glossy photos of Mt. Fuji. "I told her that, yes."

"What’s up with that?" Jodie asks. "Everything all right?"

"It’s safer for her," Shinichi replies. "And Haibara."

"Does this have something to do with them?" Jodie asks, all business. "Do you have a lead?"

"What have you heard about Scarlette Shinamoto?"

"The model? Saw the case on the news. I think Andre cried a little."

"She was like Vermouth." Shinichi focuses in on Touto Tower on the map. "She didn’t… get older."
Jodie hisses into the phone, and KID stretches over Shinichi, blocking his view of the map with his own face. "Damn," Jodie says. "Did she know Vermouth?"

"Undoubtedly. As did Takizawa Morisuke and Clifford Groves." Shinichi watches the tilt of KID’s head, inquisitive, and sighs, putting the phone on speaker. "You’re on speaker now."

"Who’s with you?"

"Kaitou KID," Shinichi says. "The killer has left a message for him at every murder, after all."

"You think it’s all down to our guys in black."

KID wets his lips, and slips into his KID voice, something more taunting and cold than what Shinichi usually hears. "We can at least be sure there are connections to Bourbon, Chianti and Vermouth, Miss FBI. And the man whose head was found on a stake outside the police department has been after Kaitou KID for more than ten years, and Tantei-kun is fairly certain that was Black Org work."

"What can we do?" Jodie asks.

"KID and I are still trying to figure things out. There’s nothing to move on, yet. As soon as there is, I’ll let you know. I promised."

"You… promised?"

KID’s gaze sharpens, and Shinichi holds up a finger to his lips. KID smirks, as if to ask him who he thinks he’s talking to. "Actually, Jodie-sensei, is there any way we could get specially fitted bulletproof vests? A… mutual friend recommended we ask you." Only one person that could be.

"If I told consignment it was for someone in witness protection…” Jodie trails off thoughtfully. "Yes, I could make it happen. I need your measurements."

KID pulls out his burner phone, and, with a quick glance at Shinichi’s phone, types a rapid text. "I’ve sent our measurements to your phone, Miss FBI."

"How do you—" Shinichi starts to ask, but then thinks better of it, his gaze falling to the curved corner of KID’s mouth. "Ah, Jodie-sensei, did you get them?"

"Got them, Cool Kid. Although," she pauses, "It’s weird to call you that when you’re next to Kaitou KID."

"You can call him pervert," Shinichi mumbles, and KID cackles, collapsing on top of Shinichi and knocking the breath out of him.

"What was that?"

"We’ll be in touch," Shinichi says. "This number… will be disconnected after today."

"All right," Jodie says. "I’ll have the vests done in two days, Conan-kun."

"Thank you," Shinichi says, and then ends the call. "Get off me."

"Shouldn’t it be ’get me off’?" KID says, right into the sensitive skin behind his ear. Shinichi makes a mortified noise and squirms out from under KID, and KID laughingly rolls to the side to free him completely. "So cute when you’re embarrassed, detective."
"Don’t we have a code to solve?" Shinichi asks, and KID nods.

"Shall I show you my secret lair?" He sits up, and Shinichi, dizzy, still tired, follows suit. KID’s hair is more of a mess than usual, and he looks so... Shinichi had never thought he’d be attracted to a man, but maybe he’d just never considered it.

Physical attractiveness, after all, is all just hormones and pheromones in good combination, and maybe a few cosmic facts about facial symmetry or height or proportion that Shinichi had previously not put much stock in. He’s always been able to ignore that sort of thing in people he doesn’t know, and besides, he’d always loved Ran—Ran’s spirit, Ran’s fire. Perhaps it’s the same with KID. Maybe Shinichi finds him so alluring because he knows the intellect and the charm and sheer charisma hiding behind those ever-changing expressions.

"How old are you again?" Shinichi replies dryly, tucking those thoughts away despite the bruised feeling of his lips and the memory of KID’s mouth at his neck. "Four? Your secret lair?"

"Come along, Clyde," KID says, none-too-bothered. "Let me show you where we hide out after we knock over that bank in Texas."

"I’m not a criminal," Shinichi says, handing KID his Conan phone. "Can you get rid of this for me?"

"I can," KID says, taking it. After a moment’s deliberation, he takes out the sim card, pockets it, and then crushes the phone underfoot. The soccer ball rolls across the hardwood floor to a stop at the edge of KID’s desk. "But I’ll keep this just in case."

"In case of what?" Shinichi asks, and KID shrugs.

"Never know when it’ll come in handy."

"Don’t lose it."

"Now Tantei-kun, do I seem like a man who loses things?" KID rubs at the back of his neck. "Although once, I accidentally dropped a heist jewel down the mouth of a fish."

"What!"

"Hmmm, maybe I’ll tell you the whooooooole story if you come into my secret lair." He picks up the big pieces of Shinichi’s phone and tosses them into the trash, and then comes to stand in front of Shinichi, holding out his hand. "Coming?"

Shinichi takes it. "Whatever." He slips down to the floor. "I don’t know why, but I never thought you would be messy."

"I’m usually not," KID says. "My thoughts have been... elsewhere, lately." He scratches his neck. "You know, with tracking down immortals and dodging bullets and trips to Osaka while my life is repeatedly threatened." He walks up to the picture of his father, and cuts a grin over his shoulder. "Apparently, your average day."

"The immortals only come up around once a month," Shinichi replies, dryly. "Most of the time, it’s just average murder and travel."

"Average," KID echoes, and then he picks Shinichi up. "Hold on tight, Tantei-kun."

"Put me down immediately—" Shinichi starts, furious, but then KID is pushing on the framed picture, sending it spinning, and he has no choice but to wrap his arms around KID’s neck as they
fall into the darkness.

He lands roughly in KID’s arms, feet and one elbow pressing into the plush arms of a red velvet chair. A series of lights come on, revealing a room that looks like a cross between a 1960s American diner and a garage. The clock on the wall directly in front of them is made of suspended gears, and a vinyl jukebox comes to life, playing jazz.

"There’s a jukebox just like that at the Blue Parrot," Shinichi says, as his eyes peruse the worktable, where KID’s cardgun is in pieces, a stack of the sharp, metal-edged cards next to the parts. "You sent me a sushi menu from the restaurant next door as an encryption key."

"Jii runs the Blue Parrot," KID says, standing up and setting Shinichi onto his feet. "I’ve got my father’s copy of ‘Murder by the Seine’ down here somewhere." He walks over to a shelf, and starts to look.

Shinichi takes the opportunity to look around. There are cards everywhere, in various sizes and shapes, with different backs. "You don’t do card tricks for me," he says, and KID looks over at him in surprise.

"You like card tricks?"

"Sometimes." Shinichi picks up a deck of cards. "I have a memory, from when I was small, of my mom trying out card tricks she had learned from her ‘sensei’. Even when I was actually seven, I could see through them, but I never knew if it was because she wasn’t very good at them, or if it was because card tricks are something I can easily see through."

"I could probably fool you once," KID says. "And that’s all I would try to do. Thurston’s law and all."

"So you won’t show me your card tricks over and over again, then." Shinichi feels a prickle of anticipation. "Sounds fun."

"You always have liked a challenge." KID pulls a book out from under a stack of what looks like engineering texts and waves it triumphantly. "One of your best qualities."

"You know I brought along my father’s copy, right?"

"Yeah," KID replies, walking over to the computer in the back of the room. There’s a desk there, and a single chair, and as soon as Shinichi is close enough he lifts him up and sets him on his lap. "But there’s something different about my dad’s copy."

"Like what?"

"The cover," KID says. "I noticed it before, actually. Look at the Night Baron." He leans forward, until his cheek is next to Shinichi’s. "Look at his mask."

Shinichi narrows his eyes, and when he sees it, his eyes widen. "Is that clover?"

"I’d always noticed it," KID continues. "When yours didn’t have it, I thought there could be some difference between the two volumes."

He opens the book, skimming quickly to the first heist note.

"You memorized the page numbers?"
"How do you think I manage being a part time professional thief and a full time student with a social life?" He chuckles right into Shinichi’s ear, and Shinichi isn’t sure whether his ears have always been sensitive, or whether he’s just sensitive to KID. "I remember what’s necessary."

"I know your memory is good. I also know you stayed up all night reading, and that the human capacity for memorizing declines with sleep deprivation."

"Amateurs," KID says, pointing out the heist note. "It’s different."

"The words?"

"No, it’s the structure. In the copy I read last night, the heist notes were in blocks of texts, but here, it’s separated at seemingly random points into lines."

"Are the French words the same?" Shinichi asks, and KID looks for the next note, and then the next.

"So far, yes. With the text moving like this, though…"

"What is it?"

"Check this out." KID pulls over a sheet of scrap paper, and scrawls the word and a number next to each one. "The first word is on the seventh line. The second one is on the fourth. The third is a question word, and it’s on…"

"The first line, right?" He says it before KID can flip to the page.

KID frowns.

"The line is the order, I think." Shinichi adds immediately. "Probably."

"Seems too easy." KID winces. "Especially with everything else in kana, and just a few words sticking out like sore thumbs in French."

"Then maybe it’s got nothing to do with French at all." Shinichi sucks on his lower lip thoughtfully, staring down at the list KID is making. With his left hand. Ambidextrous, then. How had Shinichi never noticed? How many surprises does KID have for him? He turns his thoughts back to the task at hand. "You’re right about it being odd. Those words should be…" He blinks. "Ah!"

"An idea?" KID asks, getting to the last of the heist notes, one Shinichi remembers not being able to solve at all when his father had first given him this one to read. Shinichi pulls the paper closer when KID finishes.

"KID, how do you pronounce these? Using the Japanese syllabary?"

"The French is actually Japanese, then, just a homophonic substitution made to fit the theme of the novel." KID sighs, and it tickles Shinichi’s ear. "Brilliant."

"Me or my dad?"

"Both," KID says. "Specifically you, right now."

"Codes are one of my specialties," Shinichi replies, knowing KID will hear the smirk in his voice.

"Oh?" KID says, lightly, lips tickling Shinichi’s. "Let’s see the expert at work, then." He scrawls the katakana next to each word, and then hands Shinichi the pen.
Shinichi takes each set of katakana and puts them in line order, as one continuous string, not knowing where the spaces might end up.

"Hattori and I like to compete over puzzles like these," he says, absently, tapping the end of the pen against his mouth. Gibberish, isn’t it? Just a bunch of sounds that can form a countless number of words, but no sentences that make sense. Maybe Shinichi is on the wrong track. "Or work on them together."

"How delightfully nerdy," KID says. "I like to pick locks. And build robots of myself."

Shinichi’s eyes dart from the paper to KID, and then back down to the katakana. Should he have switched it to a different language? No, it must be Japanese, in the context of all the rest of the heist note being in Japanese. That had been the clue, Shinichi’s sure. "Robots… of yourself?"

"I should introduce you to RoboKaito," KID continues blithely, the arm around Shinichi’s stomach tightening. "Aoko hates him. I recently programmed him to only speak English, so if you ask him questions in Japanese, he approximates the meaning by breaking down the sounds, like Siri on the iPhone. Pretty complicated bit of programming, but I admit I was able to cobble most of the code together from various sources, and make it work with some tinkering."

Shinichi looks up again, staring blankly at KID, almost nose to nose with him. "In what imaginary free time did you manage to create a robot of yourself for the sole purpose of bothering your friends, and then on top of that program it with a voice recognition algorithm that figures out possible syntax inputs from a completely different—" Shinichi stops, and KID bumps his forehead against Shinichi’s lightly.

"Hello? Meitantei?" KID grins at him. "That’s another cute face of yours I’ve always liked. You’ve figured something out?"

"This katakana isn’t representing any Japanese words. It’s representing English," Shinichi says, as KID extends his outside arm to pick up the book and the paper. "We want this to be English. The katakana is a homophonic substitution for English words, and it was put in French purposefully to make the words stand out." Shinichi looks back down at the string of katakana. "If I read this aloud, it’s very close to the English sentence What's the first rule of being a magician?"

KID startles, and with the sharp movement, hits the special copy of Murder by the Seine with his elbow, knocking it to the floor. A piece of paper, yellowed at the edges, slides out from the back of the book and stops at the wheeled stand of the chair he and Shinichi are sharing. "The first rule…"

"Do you know it?" KID returns the book to the tabletop, adjusting Shinichi so that his weight is further back on his thighs, his chest again hot against Shinichi’s back as he stretches to grab the paper as well. "What’s that?" Shinichi asks.

KID’s sharp inhale has Shinichi turning, resting one hand on KID’s shoulder for balance as he studies KID’s surprised face. KID returns his gaze, and waves the yellowed piece of paper. It’s the paper, Shinichi realizes, that KID’s heist notes used to use. His father had several preserved in plastic in his case notes.

"Kaito: the answer will open the door." KID smiles. "That’s what my dad left in the book."

"This book was written before we were born," Shinichi replies. "He must have left the note for you much later."

"The first rule of being a magician, according to Dad, is having an excellent poker face," KID says,
quietly. "That’s the answer. Poker face."

"Then what we need," Shinichi keeps his voice just as quiet, "is to figure out the door."

"It’s probably…" KID’s fingers are fiddling with the hem of Shinichi’s shirt, occasionally glancing along the skin underneath, and Shinichi doubts KID even notices, the way his eyes are swimming with half-formed thoughts.

"The Paris flat," Shinichi finishes. "He must have said something cryptic to my Dad, and my Dad replied using Murder by the Seine. Another of their games." He remembers the entire chase the old Kaitou KID had accidentally led Shinichi on back when he was a child.

"So my father used Kudou Yuusaku’s book to leave a clue for me, as well, knowing it was something between us that no one else would be able to answer, even if they figured the code out."

"All that’s left is to find that flat and Mercier," Shinichi says, skating his hand along KID’s shoulder and then up to the side of his neck, his hand sitting on KID’s pulse. "From there we can get to the bottom of what the murderer wants from Kaitou KID, and stop them getting their hands on whatever Pandora is, just like your father wanted to."

"Yeah," KID agrees, and Shinichi feels the words with his palm. "And hopefully, we’ll bring down a few of your crows in the process."

"Hopefully," Shinichi replies, grim and focused and angry, because this might be his last chance, after all, to take a crack at them. "If we get lucky."

KID rests his hand over Shinichi’s. "Don’t forget, Meitantei," he says, swallowing Shinichi alive with the endless blue of his eyes. "I’m very lucky."

*

Shinichi had known the medicine was nothing more than a stop-gap, but that doesn’t make it suck less when the decrease in effectiveness is steady and obvious in long naps, shaking hands, and the loss of appetite that accompanies constant nausea.

As KID finishes up his last two weeks of classes before winter vacation, peppering his phone conversations with Nakamori Aoko and someone named Akako with mentions of going to visit his mother in Vegas over the winter break, Shinichi starts to make extensive written notes on the Black Organization. It’s everything he knows and speculates, so that the work he has done on the case over the past couple of years won’t be lost, and he saves them all onto a flashdrive that he never backs up and never leaves plugged into his laptop when it’s connected to wi-fi.

He knows KID thinks it’s morbid. He can see it in KID’s eyes when he thinks Shinichi is too focused on writing, and he can taste it on KID’s lips along with red-velvet cake when KID gets home from an afternoon out with Nakamori.

"Have you talked to the little miss?" KID asks one evening, his careful fingers running through sequential coin tricks as Shinichi pokes at udon KID had brought home with him from a local shop. KID’s bowl is long empty, and though he’s not looking at Shinichi, Shinichi is well aware that KID is watching how much he eats. "She might have something to help."

"It’s only been two weeks since we last talked," Shinichi replies. "It took her months to come up with this, and months before that to come up with the pills. Science doesn’t work like that."

"I wasn’t aware of science being able to do half the things it does," KID replies, flipping three coins
up from his palm and turning them into confetti mid-toss. Some of it lands in Shinichi’s hair, and he pulls the pieces in his bangs free and lets the rest of it remain. "For example, turning back time." He rests his hands in both palms, elbows to the kitchen table.

He looks soft, and tired. It’s been quiet, in terms of their investigation, but KID has been going out to Beika every few days to subtly check on Shinichi’s police friends and the kids, even though Shinichi had told him it wasn’t necessary, and between that and the heavy workload for the university entrance exams in February being piled up on him, KID hasn’t been sleeping much.

Shinichi sleeps all the time, in contrast, the stretches of being awake punctuated with pain and dizziness and a sense of helplessness that he fights with his project. He carefully doesn’t react when KID shows him a picture of Mouri, Ran, and Hondou Eisuke having dinner together with some television exec who wants to make a detective show, Hondou’s hand on top of Ran’s, and instead commits himself fully to purchasing tickets to Paris for when KID gets released from classes for winter vacation, and having James Black procure Mercier’s address in Paris for him using FBI resources. He refuses to think about how fast Haibara might have found that same information out for him, or Takagi with his slow internet connection but unexpectedly deft hand at police research.

Shinichi had never thought he’d miss being Edogawa Conan, and in all honesty, he doesn’t. He does miss the connections he’d made as Edogawa Conan though—all the relationships he hadn’t been able to build as arrogant, rich, famous, and untouchable Kudou Shinichi. Before his transformation, Shinichi had never thought he was lonely. After, when he’d seen what it was like to let himself trust others, to reach out… Then he’d been faced with a different kind of isolation, even when the other loneliness had finally been remedied in the companionship of people like Heiji and Haibara, who knew who he was, and everyone else who didn’t.

At the same time, being with KID in this new place is a relief that is almost immeasurable. Being Shinichi again, even if his body is still Conan’s, is like putting away his heavy jacket at the coming of spring, despite the bitter chill of the air outside KID’s childhood home that reminds him frequently that it’s the beginning of winter.

With KID, Shinichi can hide nothing, so he doesn’t try, allowing KID to see him without masks or subterfuge. KID knows that Shinichi is sick, but doesn’t push him, or tell him what he should do or how he should act. Perhaps it’s because both of them have always balked at being told what to do that they understand each other so well. KID somehow manages to simultaneously give Shinichi his space while never being out of reach, and Shinichi marvels at it, wishing, in moments that slip past his iron willpower not to consider later, that he had the years and years more to learn to read KID half as well as KID reads him.

Curled up together in KID’s twin bed at night, Shinichi on the edge of consciousness and KID wide awake, KID talks him to sleep with theories about Korean engineering during the Joseon period, or the influence of the Silk Road on European design aesthetics, and Shinichi, as he replies with murmured corrections or rejoinders or requests for elaborations, constantly wonders how he got to this point with KID, his rival and sometimes friend turned something else entirely.

He wonders, also, if KID ever does the same.

"You look like you’re thinking too hard about something," KID tells him, one morning over breakfast, at the beginning of Shinichi’s second week of staying with him. "It’s just orange juice, not the meaning of life."

"I was just thinking that I…” Shinichi looks down at the table, studying the grain of the wood, writing preterite conjugations for regular French verbs along the path his eyes take. "That I like living with you."
"Oh," KID says, and he smiles, brilliantly, enough to illuminate the whole kitchen on an otherwise dreary and overcast morning that threatens snow or sleet. "I like living with you, too, Meitantei. This house was too quiet, with just me."

"You're never quiet," Shinichi replies, because it's true: KID is forever humming or tapping his fingers or playing with something noisy.

"Because I'm used to filling up silence," KID says, smile not dimming in the slightest, his eyes fixed on Shinichi and filled up with something that captures Shinichi in that head-below-water feeling again. "So, can I talk you into going on a road trip with me yet, Clyde?"

"Isn't Paris enough?" Shinichi says, picking up his orange juice and taking several gulps, setting it down, pleased, when his stomach doesn't reject it. "I'm already going to be trapped with you on a plane for twelve and a half hours."

"Trapped makes it sound like it won't be any fun," KID says, bare toes cold as they tickle Shinichi's calf under the table, and their arms brush. "I'm nothing but fun when I'm bored."

"Is fun the same as dangerous, these days?" Shinichi raises his eyebrow, and KID's grin stretches into something bordering on manic.

"There's always been a significant overlap for both of us, in that regard," KID replies, and Shinichi hides a smile in another sip of juice as KID slips an arm around his waist and drags him closer.

The last day of KID's classes before winter break, Shinichi waits for him to come home in the living room. Both of them have their bags packed for a two-week trip, and Shinichi has already checked them in for their flight ahead of time. He'd purposefully spelled his name wrong when he'd bought the ticket, transposing the first 'a' and 'w' in Edogawa on his ticket in case of a casual search run by Chianti, Kanami or someone affiliated with either of them. KID's he'd left alone, and when they get to the airport together, passports in hand, it'll be easy enough to pass the misspelling off as a computer error instead of an intentional misdirection. The fact that he's in a child's body will help.

Their new body armor has already been shipped to their hotel in Paris, reserved under KID's name. KID and Shinichi had deliberated about it for days, but in the end, logic had won out. Airport scanners would pick up the armor if they wore it, and in their luggage.

All packed. Ready to go.

He watches TV, then, a documentary about cranes that has him recalling the curve of KID's lips as Shinichi attempted to decipher his heist note, and then a bit of the news. To his surprise, Takeuchi Makoto is on the afternoon broadcast, getting hammered with questions about his late girlfriend Scarlette at an event to announce the ground-breaking of his new hospital in her honor. His face looks sharper, under the camera lights. Much sharper than it had looked in his study, when grief had been softening the pull of his lips and tightening the corners of his eyes. At least, Shinichi thinks, something good has come of her death.

He hears KID long before he comes up to the door, and he's surprised to hear Nakamori too. Even more surprising is that they're arguing. Not the playful squabbles that seem to comprise their everyday interactions and the majority of their phone calls, as far as Shinichi's seen, but a genuine argument, as they stand out on the front step.

KID's voice is laconic, but there's an edge to it, and Aoko's is thoroughly shrill. "You should be studying for the Center Exam, Kaito! It's in February, and if you don't get a high enough score, you won't get into the school you want—"
"I’m sorry," KID replies, "I was under the impression that I already had a mother, Aoko~" He drags out her name, but there’s a hint of warning in it that Shinichi hears immediately.

Nakamori seems to miss it, though, thumping an angry fist against the door. "You never have time anymore! For studying, for hanging out! You’re always saying I’m busy or I have to go and you don’t come over for dinner and you don’t play as many tricks in class and you don’t even look up my—" She stops, and then thumps the door again. "Do you have a girlfriend or something, Kaito?"

KID snorts. "I don’t have a girlfriend," he replies. "I am busy, and I do have to go. How do you know I haven’t been studying on my own?"

"Well you won’t be studying over winter break! Your mom never makes you do anything!" She growls. "You’ll just spend the whole vacation playing around instead of—"

"What is this actually about?" KID asks, interrupting her, and Shinichi can easily imagine the look on his face. That calm, unreadable smile that makes his eyes reflect the light instead of swallowing it. "Because I have things to do, and listening to a harpy yell at me about what I do with my own free time isn’t on the list."

The key pushes into the lock, and Shinichi waits for it to turn, but then Nakamori speaks again. "Kaito, stop it!"

"Stop what?" More of the irritation bleeds through.

"Being a clown!" She sounds so angry, and Shinichi swallows, looking down at their two packed bags and feeling, horribly, terribly, like he’s the thief between the two of them, stealing KID away from his friends, his life, his open future to tag along on an investigation that Shinichi should force himself to do alone. "I’m trying to talk to you about something serious!"

"You’ve been calling me a clown for years," KID replies, turning the key. "Shouldn’t you be used to it now, Aoko?"

"Kaito!"

"What?"

"You’ve basically disappeared over the past few months! It’s like you’re… pulling away from me, and I hate it!" Now her voice is trembling, and it makes Shinichi think of Ran. He should go upstairs, now, and give KID his privacy, but he finds himself rooted to where he stands, unable to stop listening. "What are you doing? Why won’t you tell me about it?"

"Do I have to give a report on my whereabouts or something?" KID snaps, and Shinichi hears Nakamori take a step back. "I haven’t been skipping classes or anything, so what is it to you?"

"We used to do everything together!" A long pause, and then, voice clearly agonized, "But these days, it’s like there’s this huge wall between us. Like I’m only allowed to see a little of you, now. Why?"

Ran. It’s just like Ran. Shinichi and Kaito have left two broken hearts behind them, even as they break their own at the same time.

"Aoko," KID says, and his voice softens. "I’m not your only friend. I’m not even the best one you have, since I’m insensitive and careless, right?"

"You’ve always been my—"
"I might be going abroad for university," says KID, cutting her off. "It’s not going to be the same as it was when we were little forever, you know that, right?"

Nakamori murmurs something else, that Shinichi can’t hear, and KID chuckles, dryly, sadly.

"You only think that you do," he replies, sure and steady, loud enough for Shinichi to hear. "Because you think of me like you always have, even though I’m not really like that anymore." He laughs, then, and it’s sad, and Shinichi clutches at his chest. "I like that you think of me like I used to be, though."

Another something murmured, and then Nakamori’s footfall as she runs away, leaving KID to push into the living room and look over to meet Shinichi’s eyes. He smiles, brittle, and shrugs.

"You overheard?" He’s not obviously upset about it, and Shinichi licks his lips.

"Not everything. I don’t know what Nakamori said."

"She said she was in love with me." Now, as KID pushes a hand through his hair and unzips his coat, Shinichi can see that his hands are shaking. "I…"

The bottom drops out of Shinichi’s stomach, and he staunchly refuses to acknowledge it. "Don’t you —"

"Nothing has changed from when I told you about her," KID says, quickly, harshly, dropping his bag to the ground without care. "The only difference is that now you know who she is."

Shinichi hugs himself, rubbing his hands on the warm wool of his sweater as KID kicks his shoes off and steps up onto the hardwood floor. He doesn’t say anything when KID’s uniform jacket joins his coat on the floor.

"Three years ago, Aoko being in love with me was something I wanted." KID peels off his socks, and rolls them together. Now barefoot, he stands there, at a loss, and Shinichi waits. "I realized I was in love with her when we were second years in middle school, you know? I didn’t know how to deal with it, so I flipped her skirt all the time, and flirted with other girls so she wouldn’t know I thought she was special."

"I teased Ran a lot," Shinichi says. "Boys are pretty stupid, right?"

"Even the really smart ones like us," agrees KID. "Last year, she started to like me back, and that’s when I realized that it wouldn’t work." He rubs at his winter-flushed face with both hands. "It’s worse, actually, because she sounded so…" He walks over to Shinichi, then, and drops down to his knees so that he can hug him, setting his cheek on Shinichi’s shoulder, burying his face into Shinichi’s neck. "I’ve been lying to her for so long it’s second-nature."

He remembers sitting next to KID in the park, side-by-side as KID stroked his hair, listening to KID tell him about all the lies between him and the girl he loved. All of the complications. The way they’d both had to choose. "I understand."

"I know. You and I, Tantei-kun, are two sides of the same coin." Shinichi’s arms are trapped between them, and his forearm is pressed to KID’s sternum. He can feel the furious beating of his heart. "She only knows a facet of me, loves a facet of me, not the whole thing," KID says, into Shinichi’s neck, breath hot and sticky even though his nose is still cold from the winter afternoon. "Didn’t you say it yourself? I am KID. Kaito is a part of me, but if I have to be just Kaito… I don’t know that I’d ever feel like I wasn’t just pretending to be the boy she knew. Besides, I still have a mission, and…"
"And?" Shinichi asks, as KID’s fingers dig into the weave of his sweater, and he bends under the exerted pressure of KID’s embrace, resting his cheek against KID’s floppy, wild hair.

"I have you," KID says. His eyes are clear and dark. "It’s enough."

What about later? Shinichi wants to ask, When I leave you alone? but he knows better, and so he just twists both of his arms free from between them and uses them to stretch along the lines of KID’s jaw, lift his head, and kiss him firmly, fitting their mouths together in a way that has become as familiar as KID’s laugh or the skim of his fingers up Shinichi’s side, or the smell of jasmine and smoke clinging to KID’s skin. He kisses him again and again until the tension disappears and KID falls into him, urgently parting his lips to lick at the seam of Shinichi’s, teasing Shinichi’s mouth open and then chuckling as Shinichi stifles a gasp.

When he pulls back, it’s with a cocky grin. "I’ve heard Paris is beautiful in December," KID says, his lips brushing Shinichi’s with every word.

"I bet it’s just cold." Shinichi pushes his fingers back until they can tangle in KID’s hair.

"I’ll keep you warm, little detective," replies KID, and then he kisses Shinichi again.

* *

Their first afternoon in Paris, Shinichi is too sick to do much more than lie in bed after KID gives him his medicine, the injection site throbbing as KID runs a gentle hand up and down his spine.

He’d been fine for the first half of the trip, watching from the window seat as snowy Tokyo disappeared beneath them, heavy December clouds filling the sky and KID curled into his side, one arm across Shinichi’s belly and his head lolling toward Shinichi’s neck.

Sometime after that, the world had gone fuzzy, and Shinichi had seen the city of Paris, decked in freshly fallen snow and Christmas lights, through a crushing haze, gasping for breath as KID soothed him with constant touch, pain rendering him insensible, ideas and thoughts tripping and stumbling in between bouts of unignorable agony. Unfamiliar words had washed over them as KID negotiated them into a taxi and then checked them into their hotel room, all the while carrying Shinichi and both their bags.

"Do you think the plane trip made it worse?" he hears KID murmuring into the phone at one point, but it’s all a haze, lost in between hallucinations that are half-memory and half-fever dream, everything fading into and out of black.

At one point, when KID bends over him to check his fever and change the cool cloth on his forehead, Shinichi sees, vividly, KID wearing his monocle and dark wig and top hat. His brain layers Takizawa Morisuke’s shotgun wound on top of it, and that blood is streaming down KID’s face, and Shinichi bites on his own hand to muffle his screams as KID whispers soothing incomprehensible things into his ear.

The next time his mind is completely clear, he is awakening to KID squatting over Shinichi’s father’s map in his white suit, monocle gleaming in the early sunlight, top hat discarded on the narrow desk in front of the mirror. Is that why he’d imagined KID in his suit last night?

"Did you steal that case file from the library?" Shinichi asks, voice scratchy, and KID grins.

"Welcome back, Meitantei." He stands up and walks over to the bed, cape elegantly swishing behind him, and then lounges gracefully on the edge of the bed. "I thought we might need it. I promise to give it back. My record is pretty good on that front, I should think."
"Why are you wearing…" Shinichi’s throat is raw, and he can taste bile. "That."

"I went out and stole something else, of course," KID says. "Broke into that Paris Bastille post office and went searching for the information we needed. Got an address, too." He leans toward the nightstand, and Shinichi follows the movement with his eyes. He swallows when KID picks up a water glass and hands it to him. "Drink slow, you were sick all night."

After a few careful sips, KID supporting the bottom of the glass with two gloved fingers, Shinichi tests his voice again.

"Where is it?"

"The address listed is also in the 11th arrondissement, Bastille." KID sucks his teeth. "It was my father’s handwriting on the form."

"Right in the neighborhood of the post office, then." Shinichi hands the glass back to KID. "Any other acts of lawbreaking I should know about?"

"Nothing of note," KID replies. "I tested out the new body armor. Fits great. Didn’t irritate my bullet wound, either."

"Did you…” Shinichi licks his lips. "Did you call Haibara last night?"

"I was worried," KID says. "You were hallucinating. You bit your own tongue, and…” He grabs Shinichi’s hand, and the suede of his gloves tickles at his knuckles. He turns it palm up, and Shinichi can see the deep crescent shaped cuts from his own nails in the fleshy center. "She told me to break your fever, but she didn’t know what else to do."

"You shouldn’t call her," Shinichi says, pulling his hand free and dragging it through his sticky hair. "Why not?" KID is suddenly in soft pajamas, black cotton and a low V-neck that shows far too much collarbone. Shinichi hadn’t even noticed him changing, but maybe that’s not such a surprise. "She gave me her number, and it’s the medicine she created, if I’m not mistaken?"

"She also invented the poison that did this to me," Shinichi replies, and KID takes a startled breath. "If you tell her the medicine has stopped working, she’ll think it’s her fault." He pushes the covers aside, and slips down to the floor on wobbly legs. "It’s not. I don’t know what she was making APTX 4869 for, but it wasn’t this." He approaches the map, and sinks down to his knees on the plush hotel carpet. It takes a minute for his eyes to focus, but when they do, he can see that KID had set a 10 yen coin on the address he’d found. It does look like a residential district. "Plus she feels guilty that it’s killing me, and not her."

"Ah," KID replies, folding his suit and laying the pieces over the back of the chair, the orange tie and blue shirt peeking out of the folds and folds of white cape. The lining, in pale blue silk, looks like it’s rippling under the light peeking through the mostly closed curtain. "Did she have a code name?"

"Sherry. Everyone but Vermouth thinks she’s dead."

KID rests his hands on Shinichi’s shoulders, leaning over him. "You up to going on an adventure today?"

Shinichi closes his eyes and wiggles his toes and fingers. His headache is gone, and he’s a little dizzy, but after a small breakfast he should be steady enough. "Yes. We going to find this flat?"

"I think this is the real address," KID says. "It’s just a hunch, nothing more than gut instinct, but I
don’t think my dad would have minded if yours had found his Paris apartment.” He kisses Shinichi’s cheek and then pulls away again, turning on the television. "It was cold early this morning, but it should be warmer during the day."

The TV flickers to life, the temperature in the top right corner of the screen as the morning news plays. The French is rapid and overwhelming, and Shinichi instead makes himself get up and shuffle toward the bathroom, intent on brushing his teeth. He makes it halfway to the bathroom before he stops in his tracks.

Chris Vineyard arrived in Paris today, the reporter says, and Shinichi's eyes widen.

"Well," KID says, "We might want to find Mercier sooner rather than later."

"Two stops today, then," Shinichi says, eyes fixed on the screen as Vermouth smiles, looking directly into the camera like she knows Shinichi is watching.

*

The address leads them to a 20th century style walk-up, grim white and gray with vines growing up the sides of the building. The garden is wilted for winter, but Shinichi can see the remains of summer and autumn herbs.

"Built in the early eighties," KID says, as they stare at it from across the street. "Five floors, no basement." Shinichi looks up at him, taking in the keen concentration in KID’s eyes as he examines the building. "Minimal but effective security. Nothing showy or high profile about this place, but judging by the cars around, the inside’s a lot nicer than the outside. Well paid artist types, if I had to guess."

Shinichi nods. "I agree. Did you notice the glass in the windows?"

"Naturally," KID says. "Bulletproof."

"An expensive choice. The nondescript look of the outside is probably a stylistic choice."

"It was also a popular, utilitarian approach to residential apartment building in ‘80s Bastille," KID says, grabbing Shinichi’s hand and leading him across the street to the front of the building. The doors are fading white, paint peeling at the edges. A security keypad with soft black number keys stops their entry. "This area of Paris was apparently run-down and unpopular until an early ‘90s resurgence sparked by the new opera house on the Place de Bastille."

KID pulls a small compact out of the pocket of his jeans, clicking it open to reveal a container of thin white powder. He bends forward and blows lightly across the surface, sending white powder at the keypad. It settles onto the keypad unevenly, and Shinichi lifts both eyebrows when the powder sticks to four of the keys more than the others. The oil from fingertips. Still, that they’d be so prominent in winter must be some of KID’s famed luck. Or, he reconsiders, seeing all the discarded, half-smoked cigarettes, the product of the difficulty of lighting a cigarette with gloves on.

"How could people not want to live right around the corner from the old prison cell of the Marquis de Sade?" Shinichi asks caustically, as KID puts the compact away, leaning further forward to study the keys. "How do you figure out the order to push the keys?"

"Now now, detective, not just the Marquis de Sade," KID says, looking up from his study to wag a gloved finger at Shinichi. "My beloved Voltaire was imprisoned there, too. One convict who liked to tie people up and one in favor of legally untying them." He taps Shinichi’s nose. "And as to the order of the keys, well, it’s all about human nature."
"How so?"

"Tantei-kun, are you my apprentice today? I knew you’d come around eventually."

"Ass," Shinichi says, recalling instantly the conversation in Kinza months ago, KID looming over him in those pink high heels as Shinichi tried to narrow down pay phones of interest. "Just teach me."

KID grins, then gestures to the ‘3’ key. "This one held on to the most powder," he says. "That means it’s first. You see, when people are in a hurry, they tend to press the first key very deliberately. It’s a memory trigger. After they press the first key, they cycle faster through the others."

Shinichi kicks at a cigarette butt, eyes on KID as he continues to examine the keypad. It’s cold; his coat is warm but his sneakers aren’t fairing well against the snow, and wind keeps creeping in through the ankles of his jeans and down the back of his neck when he bends his head forward. "So ‘3’, and then what?"

KID’s face is full of concentration, and Shinichi thinks this might have been the expression on KID’s face that first captured his attention in a positive way. The gleam of triumph that is so similar to the thrill Shinichi himself feels when he solves a case. When KID turns to Shinichi again, Shinichi can’t help but let his eyes drop to the wicked curl of KID’s lips.

"Then," KID says, reaching out and pulling Shinichi in front of him, hands on Shinichi’s shoulders, "we see the direction of the drag."

The drag? Shinichi narrows his eyes at the keypad, and notices that, indeed, the powder seems to be dragging directly leftward on the key. "People don’t lift their fingers completely when they’re in a hurry to input the next key."

"Exactly," says KID. "So the next number is the ‘1’." He lifts his right hand from Shinichi’s shoulder. "What else do you notice?"

Shinichi rakes his eyes over the keypad once more. "The ‘5’ is darker than the unused numbers, but a lot lighter than the others. It’s last, then?" He tilts his head back to gaze at KID, and the look KID is giving him, something besotted and warm, has Shinichi forgetting about how cold he is entirely.

"Very good, Meitantei," he whispers. "I’ll have you breaking and entering yet."

Shinichi drops his head to escape KID’s eyes, flushed and startled by the intensity. "3175 will get us into the building," he grumbles, licking at his lips and regretting it when the wind makes them sting.

"Mmmhmm," KID agrees, and then he punches it in. The light above the keypad turns green, and the door lets out a long beep as it unlocks. "Shall we?"

The flat is on the second floor of the building. It has a single lock, requiring a key, and Shinichi frowns. "No keypad," he says, and KID looks left and right down the hallway before dropping to his knees to peer into the lock.

"No traps, either. This is a straightforward key-lock."

"Then what was the ‘key’ your father left us for?"

"We’ll have to figure that out, I’m sure." KID knocks lightly on the door, and when there’s no answer, he pulls out his lockpicking kit. It’s moments before he’s opening the door, and Shinichi immediately starts to cough, choking on dust. KID puts a light blue handkerchief over Shinichi’s
mouth and nose. "Easy, Shinichi," he murmurs, and Shinichi curls his own hands over the
handkerchief so that KID can wander deeper inside and open the windows.

There are dustcovers over the furniture, rich honey-colored floors beneath their feet, and rugs rolled
up in the corner. Shinichi takes off his glasses and hangs them from the front of his shirt, and then,
with watery eyes, walks toward KID.

"This isn’t ten years’ worth of dust," KID says, already walking over to the sink and checking the
faucet. The water is on, and it comes gushing out at a steady even pressure. "Tap is clear. Someone’s
been here."

Shinichi, still holding KID’s handkerchief to his mouth and breathing through the burning in his
lungs, surveys the dust on the main kitchen counter. "Less than a year ago, I suspect." He walks over
to the far wall, where the rugs are propped up. There’s a plastic sheet suspended from the ceiling,
covering what looks like artwork, and Shinichi, curious, tugs at it until it falls, sending up a cloud of
dust that has him falling back in another coughing fit, body armor pinching his ribs.

KID is behind him, suddenly, replacing the dry handkerchief with a wet one in pale lavender, and
rubbing at Shinichi’s back.

"There’s no doubt this is the place, then," KID says, and Shinichi, rubbing at his chest with a balled
up fist, looks up to find a portrait of Kuroba Toichi staring back at him, a perfect match for the one in
KID’s bedroom.

"Wow," Shinichi says, wincing at the rasp in his throat, "narcissism sure does run in the family."

"Jealous, Meitantei? Want a portrait of your own?" KID walks over to the portrait, looking up at it.

"I’ll pass." Shinichi watches KID rap his knuckles against the wall around the framed portrait.
"Hollow?"

"Hollow," KID confirms. "Something’s behind it, but it could just be the next apartment over." He
rests his hand lightly on the frame and pushes in. Nothing happens. "Not a revolving door like at
home, then."

Shinichi, still clutching at the wet cotton, goes to the other side of the portrait, using his index finger
on his left hand to lift the portrait away from the wall. At his eye level, he sees nothing, but lifting his
eyes up, he finds a narrow metal panel. "Wall panel," he says. "Less than half a meter high or across.
Let’s take the portrait down."

KID carefully removes the portrait from the wall. The peach colored paint is darker where the framed
photograph has protected the wall from the sun, and the small panel gleams, recently cleaned.
"Numeric, maybe," he says, after leaning the portrait against the wall and examining the panel. "A
set of switches, that can be flipped to 1 or 0, six switches total."

"So we’re looking for a six-digit passcode?" Shinichi smiles, hidden behind the handkerchief. "We
already know where to start."

"P O K E R F A C E." KID taps his fingers rhythmically against the wall. "That’s nine letters. So it’s
not just a password. Something ciphered. Two options to represent each part of the passcode. Binary
is too big to represent words in six digits. ‘P’ alone is 01110000, meaning the basic 0s and 1s system
is ruled out, so what’s the conversion?" KID’s brow wrinkles. "Any ideas, expert?"

"Are there any specific card tricks associated with poker face?" Shinichi asks. "The note said ‘the
answer is the key’, which means it would be—"
"Something like a cipher key," KID says, immediately. "Poker face is the key to figuring out the password, not the password itself." He bite down on his lower lip. "There is a trick that James Hopper called poker face. It’s a pretty simple beginners trick, and only uses basic sleight-of-hand and the Elmsley Count. I learned it when I was four. It uses…” KID gives him a lopsided smile. "That’s my Meitantei. It uses ten cards, five red, five black."

"What’s the most important part of the trick?"

"The ace. Specifically, four aces and three face cards in each color, regardless of suit." He links his gloved hands together and stretches them overhead. "The core card, the King, Queen, or Jack, is placed face up, and the three aces are left face down, so that the audience doesn’t know you even had aces available until you show them your poker hand."

"So we’re looking for a six-digit code that can be spelled out with ten cards." Shinichi pulls up a mental image of the cards. "Assuming standard numerical value, each face-down ace would be a ‘1’, but the face up card…"

"It’ll be a ten, regardless." KID smiles. "Blackjack rules. All face cards are worth ten. My dad would always, always have the King of Clubs as his face card, though. Clovers. You know how we are about puns in my family."

"10-1-1-1-1 would be your hand, then," Shinichi says. "One King face up, and four aces."

"Six digits that are 0 or 1." KID turns to the switches. They’re all in a neutral, unmarked position, and he very deliberately flicks the first one down, the second up, and the rest down. As he flicks the last of them, there’s a slow, whirring noise and the sound of a latch, and a panel pushes out of the wall. "It’s the door of a safe?"

Lifting it, KID looks inside. "Not very deep, either." He reaches in, and pulls out a thick roll of paper. "This looks like…"

"Blueprints," Shinichi finishes. "Why would he have blueprints?"

"He was a jewel thief," KID says, setting them down on the floor, stirring up dust and getting it all over his black coat and jeans. Shinichi gives him an evil eye but settles gingerly down next to him, making sure to re-cover his face. "We tend to use blueprints."

"Why all the cloak and dagger for a very particular set of them, though?" Shinichi impatiently pulls on the rubber band holding them rolled, and under the slight pull, it snaps.

"You have to be careful with old rubber," KID says, laughing as Shinichi scowls at his hand. "You know that oxygen is one of the primary degrading agents of elastomers." Shinichi deliberately digs his elbow into KID’s thigh, and KID laughs at him. "All right, all right, let’s see what we’ve got."

The blueprints are expansive, the first sheet covering what appears to be a castle, while other sheets show specific wings in detail.

"These are hand-drawn," KID remarks, carefully fingering the paper. "I wouldn’t be surprised if they were one of a kind."

"Hmm," Shinichi says, taking in the lines and the layout. He doesn’t have a lot of experience reading blueprints, especially old ones from what must be the pre-1900s, part functional layout and part art, but even he can tell that this castle is huge. "What do you think it looked like?"

"It’s very similar what sketches of the Château de la Tournelle looked like,” KID muses. "But you
can see 19th century Greek Revival neoclassicism in the arch-work, here." He shakes his head. "And the inside is a mess. It would have been a nightmare to navigate this place."

"There’s something familiar about the style of these blueprints," Shinichi says, taking in the elegant sweep of the lines. "These narrow, twisting halls remind me of the reconstruction done on Takeuchi’s mansion."

KID blinks. "You’re right," he says, excited. "You’re absolutely right! I never saw those blueprints, but I scoped out that building."

"Takeuchi said his grandfather had built the mansion around the old Kichiemon house." Shinichi leans over the map. The dust in the air is making him lightheaded, but he forces himself to focus. "What if this is the French castle that inspired him?"

KID is carefully but quickly shuffling through the aged sheets of paper now, looking for something. "Kanami-san might have even gone to work for Grandpa Takeuchi thinking that he used these blueprints to help design his."

"Then why did she stay?" Shinichi shakes his head. "Either way, the similarity is much too large for coincidence."

"No," KID says, stopping on a sheet of the grounds that depicts the front of the castle. Handwritten at the upper left corner of the yellowed sheet, in beautiful cursive, is ‘Castle Arbogast’ in French, the curved ends of the circumflex over the ‘a’ in Château gorgeously stylized. "Not coincidence at all."

Under the title is written ‘Department of Lozère’. "This is where those packages were sent to Takizawa from, isn’t it?" Shinichi smiles grimly. "They’ve been wanting to lure KID out for this. They want these blueprints."

"Why?" KID asks. "What do these blueprints say, besides that the architect of this castle really liked mazes?"

Shinichi bends forward and shuffles back to the first page of the blueprints. His hands aren’t steady, but KID doesn’t say anything. Shinichi feels a swell of gratitude, that it’s KID he’s with right now, but he shoves it down, letting the clues percolate as he looks up at his companion. KID is waiting for a deduction, but Shinichi doesn’t have one yet. "I don’t know," he replies. "So let’s put these back in the safe, and go ask Mercier."

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It starts to snow again as they ride across the city, passing several small skating rinks filled with laughing children slipping and sliding with pink cheeks and outstretched arms. Garlands strung between lamp posts sparkle, gold flecks bouncing off the white accumulating snow.

KID chats easily with their driver, and Shinichi loves the way his voice sounds, caressing sounds that Shinichi doesn’t know as KID casually holds his hand, and despite how hard it is to breathe, and how much his stomach aches, Shinichi is content to rest his head on KID’s shoulder and watch the beauty of Paris out the window.

Mercier’s home is on the other side of Paris from KID’s secret flat, in the 16th arrondissement, according to James Black’s intel. A basic canvass of celebrity paparazzi photos had seemed to support that she lived in the area, at least, and Shinichi figured they had a good shot.

When he’d given KID the address, he’d grimaced, and asked the driver to drop them off near the Arc de Triomphe. Now, as they pull up to it, KID paying the driver as Shinichi steps out into the snowy
winter afternoon, Shinichi takes a deep breath of air that smells like nicotine and ice, and smiles.

"What’s that look?" KID asks, claiming his hand again as they walk away from the large architectural monument and toward the Opéra National de Paris, at Palais Garnier.

"Even if it’s only because we’re on a case, I’m glad I get to see some of Paris. This is my mom’s favorite city."

"And she never brought you?" KID asks, eyeing the crowd in front of the opera house.

"I never let her. I had a lot of opportunities to travel, and I never took them. I don’t know why. Ran always thought I should go, but… There was always school, or something else I wanted to do, and it always felt like my parents were being irresponsible, wanting me to drop everything on a whim and go." He looks up at KID and laughs. "I thought I was so grown up."

"You sound pretty grown up now," KID replies, looking back at him. His face is pink from the wind, and flakes of snow have caught in his eyelashes. He’s beautiful, Shinichi thinks, against the backdrop of the cream stone opera house, with its green and gold detailed roof, his hair blowing about his cheeks, too shaggy and wild.

"I would go now, if they asked. Time is too short to always be practical."

"What if I asked?" KID teases, tugging Shinichi toward the main entrance. "Would you go somewhere with me on a whim, Clyde?"

"Only if you don’t suggest a crime spree down Route 66."

KID cackles. "One day, Meitantei, I’ll get you to agree to go on a road trip with me."

"Don’t hold your breath. Why are we going into the opera house?"

"I need to change," KID says, "and here, a place with a lot of people going in and out, is a good place to do that." He scratches his cheek. "A well-dressed woman will fit in much better than a teenage boy where we’re going. You’ll be fine as is, but I have to switch into something else."

Shinichi eyes KID’s small shoulder bag. "You have multiple outfits in there?"

"Well, yeah," KID says. His black wool coat still has some dust on the sleeve, and Shinichi plucks at it with his free hand. "And with a thick scarf and heeled boots, my coat will be fine."

"You don’t have to convince me that you make a believable woman in her mid-twenties."

KID wiggles his eyebrows. "Oh?"

Shinichi blushes. "We need to go, KID."

Shinichi allows KID to drag him into the opera house, paying 16 Euro for the both of them to tour the building unaccompanied, and Shinichi can’t help but gape at what they find inside. Wide marble stairs forking in two directions, huge mounted chandelier lights under high arching ceilings.

"Beautiful, isn’t it?" KID asks, and Shinichi nods. "I think the first time I saw this, I was seven. It’s still one of the most impressive interiors I’ve ever seen. Chagall painted the ceiling after Napoleon III began the reconstruction of Paris." Shinichi nods again, a smile pulling at his mouth as KID’s whole face lights up. "Really, that’s what Napoleon III’s known best for, besides his coup d’état to transform himself from president to emperor, along with the censorship exile of over six thousand"
people, including Victor Hugo—Why are you grinning at me like that, Meitantei?"

"Nerd," Shinichi replies, with great satisfaction, and KID squeezes his hand, flashing white teeth as his hair falls into his eyes.

"You love it," KID replies, and then continues to explain, in a low, awed voice, the history of the opera house as he leads Shinichi through it, about the architect and the era it was built, and as he speaks, he leads Shinichi toward a set of restrooms to the rear of the main horseshoe auditorium.

He leads Shinichi into the women’s restroom, and Shinichi resists. "I’ll wait out here," he says, and KID shakes his head.

"Not alone," he replies. "It’s not safe."

"I’m wearing my shoes and my watch," Shinichi says sharply. "I can take care of myself."

"But you don’t have to right now. Just come with me. There’s a show in progress, and people only generally come to the restrooms during intermission. People doing tours don’t linger back here for long. Come on and zip up my dress for me."

"Fine," Shinichi says. KID tugs him into the white, clean restroom, and into the far stall. Shinichi awkwardly sits down on the toilet seat as KID strips in front of him, hanging his coat and bag on the hook on the back of the door, and then pulling his sweater over his head.

The body armor Jodie had sent them is tightly fitted and thin enough that it’s unnoticeable under their warm weather clothes. KID’s looks dark against his skin, and with his arms stretched overhead, the bottom of it follows the slope of his pelvic bones, highlighted by the lace of his underwear.

When KID moves to put his folded sweater into his bag and pull out his dress, without thinking, Shinichi leans forward and rubs his fingers across the green lace at KID’s hip. "You like this kind of thing?"

KID, holding the slinky black fabric in his hands, meets Shinichi’s eyes frankly. "I like pretty things. And these are more flexible, for me. I don’t like lines under my dresses."

KID’s eyes dare him to say something at the same time they’re begging him not to, but Shinichi doesn’t know what that something is. He’s too interested in how nice the underwear fits along KID’s hips, and remembering how it’d cut across the smooth skin of KID’s thighs with lace on the legs, too, when he’d seen KID in it at Heiji’s. That one had been black, and he’s seen purple and now green, but…

"Do you have any blue ones?" Shinichi covers his mouth and averts his eyes, but they flit back when KID pulls the dress overhead, the heavy jersey falling down loose over his body to mid-thigh.

"Why?" KID pushes down his jeans, letting them pool at his ankles, but doesn’t stop staring at Shinichi.

"Blue looks good on you," Shinichi says, quietly, and KID’s hands, pulling out his black heeled boots and leggings, stops and stares. "I mean, against your skin, it’s—Whatever."

KID exhales, slowly, packing up his sneakers and his jeans methodically, before turning to look at Shinichi with a gentle smile. "Never change, Meitantei."

After KID has switched clothes completely, and put on a dark, long wig, he goes back out to the sinks, setting a slim cosmetics bag in front of the mirror.
Shinichi looks up at him. "You’re too tall in those shoes," he grumbles, and KID puts his hands on his hips.

"Then get up here," he says, bending down and hoisting Shinichi up to sit on the edge of the sink.

"If you don’t stop lifting me up as you please—"

"Guess I just can’t keep my hands off you," is KID’s flippant response, already unzipping the bag and pulling out various make-up products.

"Shameless."

"Entirely." KID opens a contact container, popping in brown lenses that hide the startling blue of his eyes. Then he applies a sheer foundation to his face, followed by powder and blush, and then eyeliner and mascara, and somehow, in the midst of it all, KID’s familiar face disappears, and an unfamiliar woman takes his place.

But when KID pulls out a pink-red pencil and lifts it to his lips, Shinichi watches the uneven bow of his lip disappear, turning into something perfect and ordinary, and then swallows as KID applies his shimmery pink gloss over it.

It’s the one Shinichi had said he liked.

"Do you recognize me?" KID teases him, capping the tube of gloss and zipping the cosmetics bag.

"I always recognize you," Shinichi replies, because he does. It’s in the little things, like the lift of KID’s eyebrows or the twitch of his lips when he’s not borrowing someone else’s smile. "Even before we were…" He doesn’t know what words to use. "Even before, I always knew it was you."

"You did," KID muses, leaning on the counter to contemplate Shinichi, a bemused grin on his lips. "Why is that, Shinichi?"

"You said you see me, through all of this." He gestures to himself. "I see you, too."

KID’s gaze narrows, and Shinichi knows that beneath the contacts, KID’s eyes have gone the stormy blue of a windy ocean at night, and it pulls at him, tugs him out far enough on the open water for KID to kiss with gloss-sticky lips that taste of candy and make-up and, when the lips pressing in on him part, of mints stolen from the hotel lobby, stale peppermint mixed with breakfast tea. KID’s wig hair tickles him, and KID’s chin rubs unnaturally smooth just to the right of Shinichi’s mouth.

He grips the lapels of KID’s thick wool coat, and it scratches at his knuckles. His frantic heartbeat is louder in his ears than the faint strains of the orchestra playing for the opera, and one of KID’s strong hands grips Shinichi’s thigh for balance, hot through Shinichi’s jeans. He’s hyperaware of every point of contact as KID sucks on his tongue, and he gasps when KID’s other hand cups the back of Shinichi’s neck, the only place other than their mouths where it’s skin to skin.

The sound of voices outside the door has KID pulling back, face dark red even through his make-up, and he brings his thumb up to wipe at Shinichi’s mouth. It comes away shiny, and Shinichi sputters, twisting his body to look in the mirror. He looks disheveled, flushed, and his mouth is swollen, lingering pink smudged around his lips. Rapidly, he turns on the faucet, splashing his face as KID efficiently reapplies his lipstick.

Still pink in the cheeks but free of gloss, he hops down from the counter, his legs wobbling a little as he clutches at the sleeve of KID’s coat for balance.
"Steady there, Tantei-kun," KID whispers, and he grabs Shinichi’s hand, leading him out past the two older women who are just walking in.

The two women smile at them indulgently, like KID is his big sister or his aunt or something like that, and not like KID just kissed him breathless with a peppermint tongue and sticky lips. Maybe Shinichi will be a permanent strawberry color for the next hour, since he can still taste KID on the backs of his teeth.

The afternoon doesn’t feel as cold when they exit the opera house, walking a couple of blocks to catch another taxi. The driver, an older, playful man in his sixties, flirts outrageously with KID, who has settled a pair of sunglasses over his eyes and responds with amused laughter and smooth, sophisticated-sounding French.

Shinichi closes his eyes this time as they ride, taking stock of himself. He’s tired, yes, and his body aches, but it’s not unbearable. He doesn’t need to lie down yet, and he doesn’t feel as though he’s going to be sick, either. It’s more than he’d expected, considering how he felt yesterday. It was probably fortunate that sickness had pushed him past jetlag.

The driver stops in front of a gorgeous white townhouse, letting them out with a wave, and staying to take a long look at the property before driving away. There’s a gate in front, closed, and KID frowns. "Do you want to ask nicely, or should I…" 

"She invited us to come see her in her own way," Shinichi replies, quickly, and then he blinks, deadpan, when KID sticks out his lower lip. "You’ve already gotten to break into two places today, so don’t pout. I think you can just see if she’s home."

"Spoilsport," says KID, and then he presses the buzzer.

"Hello?" comes Mercier’s voice over the line. It’s oddly hushed, and she sounds nervous; anxious, maybe. "Who is it?" Shinichi’s proud to pick up that much of the French.

"Oh, sorry," is all he catches of KID’s, as KID uses a new voice, or at least one Shinichi’s never heard before, to speak into the intercom.

Moments later, the gate opens, and Shinichi follows KID up the snow-covered sidewalk to the door. Mercier herself opens it, dressed in a chic white pantsuit, big gold earrings standing out against the dark fall of her hair. The view he has into her home reveals bright colors and greenhouse flowers confused at the season.

He’d thought she’d be wearing all black again.

"You came," she says, in English, looking KID over. "Your father taught you well. You’re as talented as Sharon with disguises."

"I did have an excellent teacher," KID says. "We have questions."

"Come in," Mercier opens the door a little wider, but keeps herself behind it, like she’s hiding from the outside world. "I’ll answer some of them, if only because what use are the secrets of dead men."

"You’re alive," KID points out, and Mercier’s answering grin is dark, no mirth to be found.

"Do you know what it is to live knowing that any day now could be your last?" Mercier tosses her hair over her shoulder, and slams her front door closed. "Let me tell you, child, it’s worse when one has learned what it’s like to be young forever."
"Is that what Pandora does?" Shinichi asks. "Make you forever young? You said it was eternity, when we were in Osaka. What does that mean?"

"Pandora does not make you forever young," Mercier says, guiding them toward a bright, ceiling-light lit kitchen with herbs growing over by the windows. "It only does that if you keep drinking it."

"Drinking it?" Shinichi files that away. "So Pandora isn’t a stone?"

"Of course it isn’t a stone." Mercier sits gingerly down on a high, raised stool in front of her bar counter. She turns her attention to KID. "A stone cannot make you young. That’s the legend of Pandora, foolishly spread by people who saw Genevieve with a stone. Pandora is… Pandora is not magic." She shivers, and looks around. In all white, the shadows of sleeplessness under her eyes are exaggerated. "Did you find Toichi-sensei’s flat?"

"We did." KID doesn’t sit next to her, even when she pats the adjacent stool, manicured fingers catching on the pink silk. He stands next to Shinichi instead. "We found it. So can you explain the importance of a castle in Cévennes?"

"What do you need keys for, if you have nothing to open?" She pulls the necklace out from under her clothes, and hanging from the gilded chain is the Queen of the Nile alongside the Ascendant Phoenix. "Sensei stole the plans to protect them, since around that time, a few truly despicable people found out about our secret."

Shinichi rubs at his temples in thought, swallowing down a sudden wave of nausea. Now isn’t the time, he thinks, to feel sick. "Somewhere in that castle is what you need the keys for, then, but because the castle is a maze…"

"You need the blueprints. The keys are useless without them." KID twists a piece of hair around his finger. "It’s Arbogast’s castle, isn’t it? Why couldn’t they use him, if the blueprints were gone?"

"No one has seen Claude Arbogast in years," Mercier explains. "And Marc doesn’t know the secrets of the castle. He isn’t like us. He’s… normal. Mundane. He has an obsession with jewels and gemstones, and thinks that one day, Claude will allow him closer, will let him in on everything. As if Claude would put himself in the position to be expendable."

"Why are you helping us?"

"When Pandora was first found, it was a miracle." She slants her head left, and reaches for an espresso cup that has probably long gone cool. She curls her fingers around it, and the Queen of the Nile, along with the Ascendant Phoenix, swings low between her breasts. "In the hands of monsters, though, it could be…"

"Catastrophic," Shinichi says. He tries to imagine what the Black Org would do with eternal youth. Would they sell it? Would they use it to advance their underground crime syndicate into every corner of the world? Time, he knows, allows the opportunity to build wealth, to build influence. What would the Black Org, powerful and pervasive enough already, do with members who might never die? Shinichi shudders.

He looks up to see Mercier watching him with dark, empty, unreadable eyes. She resembles a shadow more than a woman as he stares up at her, thoughts still racing.

"Pandora isn’t all bad," she says. "I’ve had the pleasure of living several lives, and I’ve never killed anyone or taken what I didn’t earn." She takes a sip of her coffee, and grimaces. "Once you know
what it’s like, to never age, you don’t want to suddenly start watching the years slip away. There’s an allure in returning to your youth."

"I have the opposite problem," Shinichi says, and Mercier’s eyes flash, then widen, looking at him carefully.

KID, though, is staring at the herbs and flowers along the windows, face lost. "Why did my father help you?"

"He found out about Pandora when he was approached about stealing it, after he’d already made his reputation as an uncatchable gem thief. There has always been a misconception about Pandora—that it was a doublet, a legendary jewel."

"Every ten thousand years, under the Volley Comet," KID says, like it’s a lesson learned in school by rote. "What bullshit."

"Kuroba Toichi knew Pandora would never be safe in the hands of those willing to threaten his life to make him obtain it for them." She smiles, brittle. "He was an honorable man, as thieves go. He instead decided to make it unfindable to anyone but Claude."

Shinichi grasps KID’s hand, and holds on to it, wishing that were enough to ease the tension drawing KID as tight as a trapeze wire.

"Why now?" Shinichi asks. "Why are they killing you now?"

"Because it’s almost time," Mercier replies, listlessly looking out the window.

"Time for what?" Shinichi asks. His body is hot. The fever is setting in, and he’s not ready for that. They’re not done here, and he needs all of his wits to follow Mercier’s skipping tangents, and to memorize the cadence of her voice.

"To open Pandora’s Box," Mercier replies, and as she speaks, the lights flicker and die. The only light now streams in from the windows, and from behind them, there’s the shattering of glass.

KID moves, faster than Shinichi can see, pulling out his card gun and firing in the direction of the crackling glass, and Mercier screams.

In front of them, when Shinichi turns toward the noise, his aching, hot body finally obeying his commands, stands Louis Maisonrouge, long hair loose around his face, almost hiding plastic surgery scars along his hairline and fading on his neck.

"You’re not the real one, either," he says, and the man looks at him, a cruel smile on his mouth.

"There hasn’t been a real one in fifty years," he says. "Scared the shit out of Scarlette Shinamoto, though, to see him back from the dead after she left him to rot in prison. She screamed her brother’s name as I stabbed her." He levels his shotgun at Shinichi, before jerking his arm up and firing point blank at something behind him.

Shinichi spins to follow the bullet, as KID bursts into motion, firing the card gun at Maisonrouge’s hand and knocking the shotgun loose. Maisonrouge snarls and lunges for it as Shinichi turns his attention to Mercier, who stares at the ceiling, lifeless, blood oozing out of the gaping hole in her chest, soaking the two extraordinary gems hanging from her neck and marring the pristine seashell pink of the tile floor.

"You’re KID!" Maisonrouge yells, as KID continues to fire at him, making him move further from
the gun instead of closer, the metal edges of the fired cards scoring the man’s cheeks.

Still in shock, Shinichi just stares for a moment, but then he bends down and powers up his shoe as KID watches Maisonrouge warily, card gun in hand as he surreptitiously plots their escape.

While they’re both distracted with each other, Shinichi releases a soccer ball from his belt and punts it right at Maisonrouge. It cracks into his jaw, and blood trickles out from his mouth.

The stress of the kick, though, is too much for Shinichi, and he falls to the floor on his butt, the world spinning as his thigh burns. He puts his head between his knees for a moment, and KID is there, whispering frantic questions into his ear that he can’t quite make out.

"Grab the necklace," Shinichi mumbles, and KID’s warm, looming presence moves away from him after a quick sound of assent. Shinichi turn to watch KID carefully approach Mercier’s body. The white of her suit is stained dark wine, her face is frozen in a rictus of fear, and it makes Shinichi’s stomach lurch. KID doesn’t seem to be faring better, pale beneath his make-up and hands trembling as he squats down, boots displacing blood as he reaches for the Queen of the Nile’s chain.

But there’s movement behind them, and in a split-second, Shinichi realizes it’s Maisonrouge, clutching at his jaw as he singlemindedly reaches for the shotgun.

Maisonrouge picks up the gun as KID claims the necklace, and Shinichi sees that he’s aiming for KID’s head with the other shot in his double-barrel.

Shinichi doesn’t think he can kick another ball, too weak to even imagine it. Maisonrouge is out of range of his dart gun, and Shinichi would never be able to push KID out of the way in time.

The only thing he can do, he realizes, is block the shot and hope it hits body armor. There’s a moment of misery that accompanies that, a feeling of failure as acute as the pain in his insides, but… Even as he’s already moving, he knows he’s doing the right thing. KID has so many tomorrows that Shinichi doesn’t have, and he’d thought, when he’d first found out he was dying, that he wanted it to mean something when it happened.

A flash, in his mind, of his parents, Haibara, the professor, the kids. Ran. KID.

The shotgun fires, and he hears KID make a horrified noise from behind him, and time seems to slow, the agony of moving so fast when he feels so sick nothing in the face of the grim resignation he feels when the shot hits him in the throat.

One second, two seconds, pain blossoming along every nerve ending in his body.

Three seconds, Maisonrouge yelling in thwarted fury, and KID’s face, eyes wide and miserable and agonized hovering above him. Jasmine.

Four seconds, and the world goes gray at the edges. He doesn’t try to speak around the blood in the back of his mouth. He can hear nothing, just a steady buzz, like a television that’s lost its signal. Water, tears? Fall on his cheeks. KID. A glint of silver. The card gun? Or…?

Five seconds, blood sticky on his lips like KID’s gloss, and then there’s nothing.

*
Kaito grips the necklace so hard in his hand that he can feel the chain digging into his palm through his thin leather gloves. Shinichi is looking up at him with empty, glassy eyes, a hole in his throat the size of a 5 yen coin—and aren’t 5 yen coins supposed to be lucky? Hadn’t Kaito promised Shinichi luck?

Only, Shinichi’s dying in Kaito’s arms, not in the abstract sense that he has been since Kaito had circled in closer to him, a dove coming back to roost, but rapidly, completely, the glowing, sparkling intelligence and short tempered glares and laugh lines fading from his child-face.

Not-Maisonrouge, jaw broken and eyes wild, struggles to reload his shotgun, and Kaito squares his card gun at the spot between the man’s eyes.

A real gun fires, and Not-Maisonrouge’s eyes go blank, a bullet passing through his head and splattering the wall behind him, and Kaito, shaking, unable to process anything but Shinichi, still warm in his arms but not breathing, not breathing, looks up to see Chris Vineyard—Sharon Vineyard?—furious and deadly, staring at Not-Maisonrouge’s corpse with disgust.

"Vermouth?" Kaito asks, testing it, and his voice sounds strange, like it’s coming from far away, wispy and weak.

Shinichi doesn’t move. Shinichi’s not moving. Shinichi: bright, lively, cunning, brave, wild. Not still. Never still. Kaito spreads his hand over Shinichi’s chest, but through the body armor, he can’t tell if his heart is beating, beating like it beat against Kaito’s own, like a thousand tiny captured singing plovers, chidori, every time Kaito stole a kiss from soft thin lips.

He blinks, and then Vermouth is there, next to him, wiping away blood from Shinichi’s neck and pressing against the artery. "Cool Guy is alive," she says. The tips of her long blond hair lick at the pooling blood, and when it drags against the black leather of her motorcycle suit, it leaves a wet shine behind. She stares into his eyes. "I owe him one. Your father, too."

"I don’t…" Kaito’s words catch in his throat, like there’s a matching bullet in his, blocking anything from getting past. His own heartbeat has gone missing, lost in the fog of disbelief and shock. Shinichi’s parted lips are gray, the color at the tips of his trained birds’ wings, the color of ashes, the color of— "Please…” He grasps for what he wants to say. It’s not something he’s ever struggled with before. "Please don’t let him die."

Vermouth’s hand, at Shinichi’s throat, twitches, just slightly.

Kaito takes a shuddering breath.

When Shinichi had told Kaito he was dying, in Hattori Heiji’s bathroom, skin like chalk on vellum as he emptied blood and bile into the toilet with a hunched back, Kaito had weighed his heart against reason on tipping scales and chosen his heart. Kaito has never been been practical, has never been good at saying no to things he wants when everything but his brain says yes, and Shinichi had been, is, is, one of those things. Kaito’s equal, trapped in a body that is more like a cage, and in a lonely reality that echoes Kaito’s own.

He’s watched Shinichi get sicker, and stroked fingers over the purpling bruises left behind by his
medication, and yet it had still felt like there was time. Time to commit every single one of Shinichi’s brilliant deductions and endearingly arrogant smiles and determined huffs to memory, an archive he’d be able to turn to if... when... Shinichi inevitably left him alone again.

But even if Kaito has perfect recall, there are so many parts of Shinichi he hasn’t gotten to see yet, so many things he wants to learn more of. The glint in Shinichi’s eyes when he sees something about Kaito he likes, the urgent press of Shinichi’s mouth when Kaito teases him too much. There’s so much, and Shinichi isn’t breathing, Shinichi isn’t moving, and he can’t feel Shinichi’s heart against his palm.

"Please don’t let him die," he repeats, and Vermouth’s eyes, pale ice chips in her face, are unreadable, empty as she studies Shinichi.

"We can’t kill a beast without a silver bullet," she says, and pulls a knife out of a strap on her thigh. She lifts it up, and holds out her already bloody hand.

Efficiently, she slices across her palm, and her blood is the same color as her nailpolish, the same shade of a Burgundy wine as it drips onto Shinichi’s lifeless face, splattering on his cheek. She drops the knife into her lap and opens his mouth with two fingers, letting the blood drip in, watching it coat his teeth and tongue as Kaito watches, stunned and horrified.

"What are you doing?" He watches the blood smear on Shinichi’s lips, smear like Kaito’s lipgloss had, only not nearly as pretty, and Shinichi doesn’t look debauched and flushed and Kaito’s. He looks even more dead, with that scar of red along his cheek, a Shinsui poem left for Kaito to remember in his nightmares.

"It’s my blood, indirectly, that changed him," she says, cold, cool, collected, but eyes a little wide. In Kaito’s arms, Shinichi’s body twitches, then begins to writhe, color flooding his face and skin burning hot enough that Kaito can feel it through both of their coats. "It only makes sense that my blood would also change him back."

Shinichi’s face is contorted in pain, and covered in sweat, and the body in Kaito’s hold is surging up, rippling. Kaito, aghast, pulls at the zipper of Shinichi’s coat, pulling it off him, and Vermouth tucks her knife away and simply watches as Shinichi groans, long and low, in a voice that sounds all wrong for all his body but signals that Shinichi is alive.

"What’s happening?" Kaito asks, as Shinichi’s hands come up to rip at his clothes. "What’s happening to him?"

Vermouth bends forward and presses her hand to Shinichi’s forehead. "Very good, Cool Guy," she says, and then she looks up at KID. "I would get rid of his clothes. They won’t fit him for much longer." She plucks the necklace with the Queen of the Nile and the Ascendant Phoenix up from the tiled floor where Kaito had dropped it, then tucks them away, pulling out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. She lights one cigarette from the pack and the others disappear again, sleight-of-hand almost as fast as Kaito himself can do it, probably. "Catch you later, junior."

"Wait!"

"You have about five minutes before the police get here. I can’t be seen." She smiles, and it is not kind, nor is it comforting. "I’m counting on you both." She holds the two jewels up to the light, the way Kaito does to check a gem under the moonlight, and she sighs. "It’s endgame. In three days, it’s a full moon. I’ll see you then, junior."

She walks out of the room, and Kaito doesn’t watch her go, instead focusing on Shinichi still
convulsing in his arms. He can hear the faint sound of sirens in the background, approaching. "Take off his clothes," Kaito murmurs, and then he’s pulling a pocket knife out of his boot and slicing up and down all the seams of Shinichi’s clothes, of the utterly useless bulletproof vest and the feathers of his tiny down coat. Shinichi gasps at the shock of cool air. Winter, after all, has filled the room, creeping in through the broken windows and blowing in gusts of snow that melt in the air and leave wetness on Shinichi’s skin.

The wound in Shinichi’s throat, as Kaito watches, begins to close, disappearing almost completely within a minute, and as the sirens outside echo louder, Shinichi screams and screams.

"Shinichi," Kaito says, kissing Shinichi’s forehead and nose and cheeks, holding the naked body to his own cooler one. Shinichi’s skin is so hot it burns Kaito’s lips, but he doesn’t care. "I’m here, Shinichi, please be okay, Shinichi. Shinichi. Shinichi."

And then, suddenly, Shinichi’s face is changing, distorting, and something like the sound of bones cracking rings throughout the kitchen. Shinichi’s screams go quiet, and in his arms, Shinichi starts to grow.

It’s terrifying, to see Shinichi’s limbs become longer and thicker, to see hair grow out on his arms and his jaw shift from childlike to something masculine and prominent. His broadening shoulders dig into Kaito’s gut, and the muscles of an athlete, a soccer player, shift and pulse along his thighs.

The 5 yen coin, now, is nestled at the dip between his clavicles, stained with blood but still shining along the edge where Shinichi’s thumb has rubbed it smooth.

Finally, after what is only a couple of minutes but feels like forever, Shinichi stills again, breath coming in pants and skin cooling to the touch. Kaito rubs at his wet eyes with the back of his hand, and gULPS for air of his own, amazed and scared and stomach in knots, the twisted complicated ones he ties when he wants to hang from skyscrapers, better off cut than undone.

And then, as the sound of police cars coming to a stop outside the house fills the cold empty kitchen, two messy corpses around them and Shinichi and Kaito covered in the remains of Shinichi’s blood, Shinichi opens his eyes.

"KID?" Shinichi asks, and he seems startled at his own voice. He holds up a hand to his face, eyes widening at the size of it, and then looks at his arm. He reaches up to touch Kaito’s face, and drags a finger along his cheek. "Are you Kaitou KID?"

"I am," Kaito says. "And you’re Kudou Shinichi, remember?"

"I’m… I’m?"

"Big," Kaito says, lightheaded with relief, amazed at his Meitantei awake and alive and alight with curiosity, though the haze across his eyes is worrying. "Bigger than I am, possibly, so I don’t think I can carry you out of here before the police come in."

"The police?" Shinichi sits up, fingers falling from Kaito’s cheek, and then gasps, clutching at his stomach. "My organs just fell into place." He looks around the room, eyes calculating, cataloguing the crime scene. "What happened? Why are you here—" He stops, and just looks at Kaito, and Kaito can see the exact moment he remembers, his hand coming up to touch his throat. Then it skates down to settle on the coin. "KID."

"Shinichi." Kaito reaches up and brushes Shinichi’s hair from his eyes, and cups a cheek that feels distinctly different against his hand, even through his glove. "You scared the shit out of me."
Shinichi’s boyish grin is something unexpectedly handsome, and Kaito’s taken aback. He’d been prepared to wait years to see that smile, or maybe to never see it at all, and that… would have been a shame, he decides, warmth blooming inside him and stretching out like a baby bird preparing to fly for the first time.

"Maybe you are a little lucky," Shinichi says, utter disbelief splashed in lurid color across his face, an absolutely charming expression that Kaito hopes to replicate, if he gets the chance. "I thought I was dead, but I’m not. And this is me? Sixteen-year-old me? Am I dreaming?"

"Am I in your dreams, Meitantei?" Kaito asks, at a whisper, and Shinichi’s mouth twitches with annoyance.

"Sometimes," he says, seriously, and Kaito breathes out in a rush.

"Are they good dreams?" He leans forward to brush a simple kiss across the corner of Shinichi’s mouth.

"You’re so sketchy," Shinichi says, running a hand down his own chest, and Kaito’s eyes follow.

"And you’re so naked," he says wickedly, happiness and hope and all sorts of other things that sound like fairy tales welling up in him. He has to… he has to pull a magic trick, or something, just to give all this energy somewhere to go.

"Pervert!" Shinichi blushes with his whole body, and lunges at Kaito’s bag, still slung across his torso, pulling out the jeans Kaito had been wearing and scrambling to his feet to shuffle into them, wobbling and needing Kaito’s help to balance himself as he pulls them up his thighs.

They’re too tight for Shinichi when he buttons them, thighs pulling at the seams, and Kaito licks his lips, unsure what to do with how attractive Shinichi is like this, in a body that fits him and fits against Kaito, too. "Well, Shinichi, those are a little snug on—"

"Don’t say another word," Shinichi interrupts, that grumpy scowl the same on his teenage face as it had been on his child one, and Kaito can’t stop himself from laughing, like a balloon has been popped, the pressure released. "How are we getting out of here, Mr. Escape Artist?"

"Hmm," Kaito says. "How do you feel about the roof?" He looks over at Shinichi, who stands at a similar height to him now, just a little shorter, and thoroughly evaluates his status as the police finally get through the front gate.

Shinichi is stretching his arms and legs, brows furrowed. "Surprisingly okay," he replies. "I’m not used to…" He shakes his foot. "It’s been a long time since my reach was this far, though, so hopefully not too much coordination required."

That grin again. Kaito thinks he’ll probably give Shinichi anything he wants under the threat of that grin. He’d only wanted to make a friend, after Shinichi had first spilled the truth of his identity and offered to protect him. He’d only flirted to get a rise out of Shinichi, to watch that too-serious, sad little face glow red with embarrassment, and maybe drag the both of them out of their loneliness with a different sort of duel. He hadn’t expected…

Well, his detective has always surprised him.

"I’ll be coordinated enough for the both of us," Kaito replies, and even though it’s the middle of winter, when Shinichi lowers dark lashes onto sharp cheekbones, something in Kaito opens like a thousand March peonies opening blooming under the spring sun.
Shinichi folds himself up in the armchair, laptop open on the small side table as he logs onto the hotel wi-fi. As the wireless airport signal flickers between one bar and four, searching for a connection, Shinichi works a towel through his wet hair, still sopping from the shower he’d taken to clean himself of the dried blood.

His own blood. Shinichi had taken a bullet, right to the throat, and somehow, minutes later, he’d woken up in his real body, KID’s worried face looming over him as the other man held him close. KID had been crying. Shinichi doesn’t know why, but it had surprised him, to see KID’s face streaked with tears, eyeliner and mascara sketching spiderwebs down his cheeks.

Just thinking about it now makes his heart do something strange in his chest.

KID is in the shower now. He’s humming to himself, something annoying and intentionally off-pitch. Shinichi rolls his eyes, and puts his earphones on, smiling a little since KID isn’t here to see it, before he purses his lips in indecision.

His laptop looks so small, sitting there on the table. Shinichi had gotten it after he’d become Conan, and he’d thought it was big enough, then. Now, though, it looks like everything he’d brought with him is in miniature. He doesn’t have any clothes. He doesn’t have…

His hands are shaking. He fists them until they stop, taking deep, calming breaths. He’ll be fine. He’s almost died before. He’s…

He uncurls his fists, and then turns his mind to putting the last few hours together into a cohesive picture.

First, there’s what Shinichi knows. He isn’t small anymore, and somehow, more importantly, he doesn’t feel sick, and he doesn’t know how long this will last but he can’t help but hope it’s forever.

He stares at his hand, his normal, grown up hand, at skin that’s a little dry at the knuckles and a palm that had been large enough to wrap all the way around the styrofoam cup of packet-mix hot chocolate he’d made after emerging from the shower.

Shinichi had been able to brush his teeth without a stool. He’d had to lean down to rinse his mouth. He didn’t look at himself in the mirror, in case it was all a dream and when he caught his reflection, Edogawa Conan would be staring back.

He hasn’t had time to think or panic about it, not when he and KID had been climbing out of Mercier’s bedroom window to the roof, KID handing Shinichi his sweater and scarf to wear as he buttoned up his coat to hide the blood. He also hadn’t had time to think as KID insisted on hiding out in a co-ed Sanisette for the two hours until twilight, shoving them both into one stall. In between the comings and goings of pedestrians, KID had used his still dusty handkerchief to scrub the streaks of blood that had been mostly hidden by the scarf off Shinichi’s chin and neck, and vainly attempted to rinse the blood out of his own dress and dry it under the air hand dryers.
Shinichi had been forced, then, to stay exactly in the moment, because KID, once they’d successfully escaped, had been panicking enough for the both of them, babbling continuously in a high pitched voice about Mercier and Maisonrouge and Vermouth, and Shinichi had spent most of that time running his hand gingerly up and down KID’s back and pulling the details out one by one to put together what had happened in those five vital minutes he had missed.

But now, staring at his laptop, Haibara’s contact information highlighted in his open Skype application, Shinichi can feel relief and worry and fear all mixing together in his stomach. There’s a slight disconnect, when he reaches out to click the trackpad in order to make the call—it takes less effort to cross the distance between himself and the small table than it would have yesterday. He doesn’t have to lean. He almost overshoots it.

Will he do the same with a goal-kick? How long will it take him to relearn the body he should have had all along?

It’ll be early, for Haibara. Nine at night in Paris is only four in the morning in Japan, and Haibara doesn’t usually wake up for school until five-thirty. Still, if Shinichi waits too long, she won’t have time to talk, and he has so many questions.

The call rings seven times before Haibara answers. She picks up the video feed, and her hair is a mess, displaced from sleep as she straightens the neck of her flannel pajamas with one hand as she holds her tablet with the other. Her eyes are still half closed.

"Is Kudou all right?" are the first words out of her mouth, and then she’s hiding a yawn behind her hand and opening her eyes all the way. "I was up late working on a new medication but I’m not sure —" She stops, processing what she’s seeing. "Are you Kudou, or are you KID dressed as Kudou?"

"It’s me," Shinichi says. "I mean, I’m Shinichi. This… This is the body I had when I was sixteen." His voice cracks, and Haibara’s eyes widen. "I did something reckless again."

She just looks at him, her eyes scanning his face in disbelief. "Paikuru doesn’t work anymore. You didn’t have any of the temps. The medication I had you on was supposed to preclude even the possibility—"

"I died," Shinichi says, interrupting her, and Haibara freezes, staring at Shinichi in horror. "KID was about to get shot in the head, and I…" He laughs, and he doesn’t realize his hands are shaking again until he tries to push his hair out of his eyes and accidentally scratches his forehead. "It was easy to calculate that his life was worth more than mine, given the circumstances."

"You died," Haibara repeats, unimpressed. "Meitantei, did I not specifically tell you that you were not to do that?" She sounds irritated, like Shinichi has said something mildly inconvenient, but her face is pale, and she’s leaning into the screen like it will give her a better view of Shinichi’s face.

He wraps his arms around his knees, pulling his legs further up into the chair, and he lolls his head back. Staring at the ceiling, he continues to talk. "I got shot in the throat. I remember the pain, and thinking about shotguns only having two barrels, and—" He cuts off, because he doesn’t want to talk to Haibara about… KID, and all that entails now. Not yet, anyway. "The next thing I knew, KID was saying my name, and everything hurt, like when I take the temporary antidote, as though my bones were melting and I was going to burn alive. And then I opened my eyes, and I was Shinichi again."

"But how?" Haibara whispers, and Shinichi looks back at the screen. She still looks stricken, and there are lines around a mouth too young to have lines.
"KID says…" Wrinkling his nose, Shinichi lowers his voice. "KID says Vermouth slashed open her hand and dripped some of her blood into my mouth."

"She was there!" Haibara’s voice is sharp, too loud in the hotel room and for the professor’s house. "Why was she there?"

"I don’t know. Neither does KID. She killed the man who shot me, then did the thing with the blood, took Mercier’s necklace and left. She was gone before I opened my eyes." Shinichi rubs at his temples. "Whatever she did, though, by… feeding me her blood or whatever, it saved my life, I think. KID mentioned that she’d said that since it was her blood that made me like this, it only… made sense? That her blood would change me back."

Haibara’s brow furrows, and then she gapes. "It can’t possibly…"

"What?" Shinichi’s eyes dart back to the screen. "What do you know?"

"The Manhattan compound," Haibara says, slowly. "It was a significant part of the apoptoxin formula, one that I never figured out how to emulate. I was simply given a certain amount of it to work with every few months, and it performed a key part of the stabilizing process according to the notes my mother left on the project. I never…" She swallows. "I never considered it could have, at one point, been human blood, but…"

Shinichi closes his eyes. "A Manhattan cocktail. One part vermouth, two parts whiskey, served ice-cold with a dash of bitters." He exhales. "The apoptoxin was an attempt to recreate the effect of Pandora, using Vermouth’s blood."

"I knew we were working toward preventing some of the negative effects of aging," Haibara says. "My mother dreamed of being able to turn the clock backwards on things like Alzheimer’s and type 2 diabetes, according to the tapes she left me. I think she also knew that the crows would use it for other things, and that’s why she never left the entire product of her research for anyone to follow."

"So how did her blood age me?"

"It didn’t," Haibara says. "It put you back to your correct age, probably based on what it read in your organ tissue." She laughs, brittlely. "Sounds more like magic than science, though, Kudou."

"Does that mean…" He swallows. "Does that mean I won’t change back?"

"I don’t know," Haibara replies. "The apoptoxin was, for all intents, a permanent change on the cellular level. If Vermouth’s blood is the basis, then… I’d need a sample to know for sure, but… Kudou-kun, I think it probably is."

Shinichi stares at Haibara, and then reaches up to touch his face. There’s stubble under his fingertips, just a hint of it, and no baby fat gives under a gentle press. It’s Shinichi’s face.

"I’ve lost two years," he says, faintly, and Haibara gives him one of her rare smiles. "But you’ve gained so many," she chides him, her eyes bright, "that you didn’t think you would have."

Years, Shinichi thinks. A future that, just last night, confined to bed, dizzy and feverish, had seemed to be measured in weeks, is now measured in years, and that means a lot. That so many of the goodbyes he’s said weren’t forever.

Suddenly, Shinichi wants, more than anything, to talk to Ran. He looks over his shoulder, toward the
closed bathroom door. KID is still singing in the shower, and it’s a pleasant addition to the buzzing in
his head. "I… have another call to make," he says, and Haibara nods. "I’ll call to update you about
anything else we can find. If you could find out everything you can on Claude Arbogast, that would
be a help."

"I’ll get right on it after school." She frowns. "Detective Satou and Detective Takagi are on leave,
according to Detective Chiba. Apparently Detective Satou asked for a vacation for both of them the
day after you left, and they went to Hokkaido for two weeks. Did you have anything to do with
that?"

"Yes," Shinichi says. "Kanami was shadowing Takagi. I got another letter, from M.H., along with
photos, and the woman in the pictures was Kanami. That’s who was meeting with Bourbon and
Chianti. So I wanted to make sure nothing happened to Takagi, and called Satou to warn her.
Conan’s last act, I guess."

"Should I look into where Kanami is now, along with any details I can dig up about Arbogast?"

"Yes," Shinichi says. "I’ll contact you tomorrow?"

"Try not to do it before five next time." Shinichi laughs, and Haibara hesitates. "And Kudou?"

"Yeah?"

"Congratulations." She looks, to Shinichi, like a weight has been lifted from her shoulders. He
supposes one has. Shinichi isn’t going to die from the drug she helped create.

"Thanks," he says, hugging his knees again, resting his chin on them, grinning at her crookedly, and
at that, she quickly ends the call, a light flush on her face and eyes averted.

He scrolls down his contacts. Ha, Ma, Ya, Ra., until he gets to Ran.

4:26. It’s early, but Ran will be awake. Leaning over the stove, probably, cooking for a still loudly
snoring Mouri before getting ready to head to school for her morning karate class, her long hair
hanging over her shoulder and steam from the soup pot lending pink to her cheeks.

As Conan, he’d spent a lot of mornings sitting at the table watching her, telling her stories about the
Detective Boys and talking with her about her schoolwork and Sonoko and Shinichi himself.

"Shinichi?" It’s only one ring before she answers.

"What have I told you about keeping your phone in the chest pocket of your apron?" Shinichi says
immediately, and Ran huffs.

"A guy that hasn’t called me in five months doesn’t have any right to chastise me about my personal
habits!"

"It’s good to hear your voice," Shinichi says, laughing at how Ran that reply was. "I’ve missed you."

"You’ve been really busy on that case, I guess," she says, after a long pause. "If you couldn’t even
call."

"I have been." Shinichi clears his throat, thankful that this isn’t a video call. "I get homesick, when I
talk to you. It makes me wish I were there," he admits, quietly. "I wasn’t sure if I’d ever be able to be
there again, since what I’m doing is so dangerous."
The water in the bathroom stops, along with the humming.

"And now?" Ran asks. "How is your case going?"

"I have new leads," he says. "I'll be in Japan again soon. I'll come and see you."

Ran makes a sharp inhale. "Oh, Shinichi, I need to tell you something."

"If it's about Conan moving back home, I already heard," Shinichi says. "The kid called me to tell me he wasn't going to be able to look after you for me anymore."

"Not that," Ran says, sounding unsure. The faucet turns on in the bathroom, and then off again. KID, brushing his teeth. "Something else."

"What is it?" Shinichi chuckles. "Did you plan another date for your parents?"

"I'm dating Eisuke-kun. Hondou Eisuke," she says. "You said you weren't coming back and we never actually made anything official and I..."

"Ran," Shinichi says, a hundred emotions welling up inside him all at once, impossible to distinguish from each other. Not that he's ever been good at it anyway, despite priding himself on never missing the obvious. "Ran, it's... I already knew."

"Oh," Ran says, and then she's giggling in relief and a little hysteria. "Of course you already knew. You always know everything going on around me, even if I have no idea what's going on with you."

"You wouldn't want to," Shinichi replies. "Don't you remember? Nothing good ever happens around me."

She had yelled that at him, on their second to last date before he became Conan. He hadn't realized how right she was, then, face flushed with anger and sadness as they stood outside the aquarium.

"That's not true," Ran says. "I didn't mean it, Shinichi. I have a lot of good memories of you, too."

"Of trying to karate kick me through walls, you mean," he jokes, and Ran laughs, another tense moment broken.

"And listening to you wax poetic about Sherlock Holmes when I just wanted to ride a roller coaster!" Ran huffs. "How obtuse can you be, nerd?"

"You can't separate the Heisei Holmes from his inspiration, Ran. Talk about a really impossible—"

Behind him, the bathroom door opens, and Shinichi shifts in the chair, turning to look over his shoulder at KID. KID is leaning against the bathroom door, toweling his hair dry as droplets run down his chest, down to...

His underwear is blue. Shinichi's mouth goes dry as he watches KID cross the hotel room to his side of the bed and sit down on the edge. He leans over to rifle through his bag, and the muscles in his thighs flex as he wiggles damp toes.

"Shinichi? Geez, spacing out that quick? Honestly!" Ran says, and KID looks up in surprise as the voice registers, and he searches out the laptop with his eyes. Something else flickers in his expression, but it's gone before Shinichi can register it.

He turns his attention back to the laptop. "Sorry, Ran. Hey, I need to go, actually. I'll give you
another call soon, okay?"

"Do you mean that?" Ran asks. "Or are you just saying it?"

"I mean it," Shinichi says, and then he laughs. "Really. Don’t be late for school."

"It was… nice to hear from you again, after last time." She goes really quiet. "I missed you, too."

The call ends, and Shinichi smiles fondly at the laptop before closing it.

Then he slides his feet out of the chair, so that he can lean forward on his elbows. KID has pulled a soft-looking T-shirt out of his bag, now, and he's holding it in his hands too tightly.

"How is Miss Mouri?" KID asks, flippantly, even as he nervously stretches the shirt. "You were on the phone with her the whole time I was in the shower?"

Shinichi blinks. KID’s face is completely blank, a stark contrast to how he’s used to seeing him, face full of all sorts of complex things that make it fascinating to keep looking at him. "Ah," he says. "No, I called Haibara first, to tell her about what happened to Vermouth, and to get some information. I called Ran afterwards to check in on her."

"Oh," KID says. "Did the little miss have anything interesting to say?"

"Satou and Takagi are in Hokkaido, out from under Kanami’s watchful eye. And she’s looking deeper into Claude Arbogast’s history." KID nods distractedly, and Shinichi reaches up to finger his 5 yen necklace as he studies him. "Is something wrong, KID?"

"Why would you think that?" KID shoots him a grin, and it's not fake but it's not real, either, and Shinichi doesn't even think about it before he's up from his chair and walking toward KID.

He drops down to his knees on the opposite side of the bed and flops down onto his stomach, at a good angle to rest his head against the comforter and look up at KID. From this angle, even with his head bowed, KID can’t hide his face from Shinichi. "That’s simple," Shinichi says softly. "I’m a detective. You have to give me more credit."

"Aren’t you sleepy, Meitantei? After all, we did break into an apartment, crack a safe, visit an opera, and escape being the triple and quadruple in a double homicide by the skin of our teeth today." The lilt to his voice is soothing, but normally, KID would touch him as he said something like that, dragging his fingers down Shinichi’s spine bump by bump, or slipping fingers into his hair. The lack of touch is actually unnerving, now, and Shinichi will berate himself later for becoming dependent on it.

"I died," Shinichi says. "I think I’ll keep my eyes open a little longer, if it’s all the same to you."

KID laughs, and the muscles in his stomach clench and release. The shirt is balled up into a wrinkled mess in his lap.

Shinichi reaches out and takes the shirt with one hand, and KID lets him. "What’s wrong?"

"It’s not that something’s wrong," KID replies. "I was just thinking about how things have changed, what with my little detective becoming a big one."

Shinichi rolls onto his side, propping his head up with one hand, elbow digging into a too-soft mattress. "For one thing, you can’t pick me up anymore," he says, teasing. "To toss me down into secret lairs or set me on sink counters."
"Too bad," KID replies, smile playing at his lips. "That was kinda fun." He falls back, bouncing slightly as his shoulders hit the mattress, and like this, Shinichi has a better view of KID in the blue. The color, he thinks, really does suit him. Did KID wear the blue underwear because of Shinichi, or had it been random? Was anything KID did ever really random?

KID closes his eyes, and Shinichi licks his lips, settling his gaze on the neutral upward curve of KID’s mouth. His resting expression. But why… Shinichi takes a deep breath, and thinks.

KID has been keyed up since they came back to the hotel. He’d demanded Shinichi take a shower first, despite the fact that he’d immediately stripped out of most of his clothes the moment the room door closed, wig and bloody dress in a pile by the bathroom. When Shinichi had emerged, steam rushing out into the room along with him, KID had gone in.

Is KID still panicking from having seen those brutal corpses? Shinichi discards that. KID had been fine in the shower, humming off-tune and choosing underwear that he… That he knew Shinichi would like, probably to elicit blushes or to poke at him. Then he’d come out of the bathroom, wet and warm and pretty, and walked over to the bed, and then…

Noticed Shinichi was talking to Ran. "Are you… Is this because I was talking to Ran?" The tiniest wince is the only hint that Shinichi gets that he’s on the right track, but it’s enough. He sits up so that he can now look down at KID. "Explain."

"It’s not… Miss Mouri," KID says. "Not exactly." He cracks open his eyes to observe Shinichi from under the cover of those sinfully long eyelashes. Still, Shinichi can see his eyes, and they’re glimmering strangely, like the sea under a searchlight. "I was just reminding myself that you have a whole life you can go back to now that you’re big again."

"Hmm," Shinichi says. "Like what?"

"Like school, your own house, your gorgeous best friend that you’re not pretending to be someone else in front of anymore… Things like that."

"Oh, Shinichi thinks. "Parts of that are true," he says. "But it’s obvious you’re not a detective."

"Wouldn’t want to be. Detectives don’t even want to go on crime sprees for fun, and some of them even love following rules. What would be the point in my day to day existence?"

"Most people don’t want to go on crime sprees for fun, thief. That’s not a detective exclusive." Shinichi reaches out for KID, and slides his hand up the inside of KID’s forearm, tracing the vein up to the elbow before lightly grazing the skin as he continues up to the shoulder. KID shivers under his touch. Outside, it’s snowing, but in here, it’s warm. KID is shivering because of Shinichi. "So since you’re not a detective, let me complete the deduction."

KID takes a shaky breath. "Okay," he says. "Finish it, then."

"School is ending in three months for my cohort. There’s nothing waiting there for me besides exams I don’t want to take. It would be easier for me to hire a few personal tutors to catch me up with the material for the university exams in February, and then just get a GED from the United States to satisfy my diploma requirement. Furthermore, I could skip the Center Test entirely, and just apply for school in the U.S., like you’re planning to do."

"How did you—"

"Your English has improved a lot," Shinichi says, scooting closer, until his knee brushes KID’s hip, "and your mother lives in Las Vegas, meaning no matter where you ended up, you’d be closer to her
than you are now. You also had an SAT booklet in your room on your desk, and the SATs aren’t
required for school in Japan. You also mentioned to Nakamori-chan that you might study abroad for
university, and while you do speak French, and probably a few other languages I am currently
unaware of—perhaps Russian, I’m not certain—I’m pretty sure your English is going to be your best
bet as far as academia goes."

"My, my, Tantei-kun, you’re always so sharp." KID’s smile is a bit more genuine as it pulls up at the
corner of his uneven lips. "What else?"

"My house." Shinichi pushes his fingers up along the side of KID’s neck, up to his jaw, and then to
his ear. KID’s skin is still warm and damp from the shower, and his hair clings to Shinichi’s fingers
as he cradles KID’s cheek. "Even if we catch this arm of the Black Org, there are others. Gin and
Vodka, to whom I’m of personal interest, are still on the loose, and still very much a danger to me
and my family and friends. I’m not going to go back to Japan just to live in that empty house and
wait for them to start killing my acquaintances."

Shinichi glances his thumb right under KID’s eye, and KID’s eyelashes flutter.

"And as for the pretty girl… She’s no more aware of who I really am now than she was yesterday.
Not much has changed, really, except I don’t need a bowtie to sound like her best friend." He
chuckles. "Plus, considering she has a new boyfriend, the last thing I’d want to do is go home and
cause problems for them, not when…"

"Not when what?" KID asks, opening his eyes completely and meeting Shinichi’s gaze straight on.

"Not when I’m hoping she’ll find someone to be to her what you are to me," Shinichi finishes.
"Someone that she can see all of, and can see all of her."

KID visibly swallows. "You’ve got a lot more time on the clock now than you thought you did,
Meitantei."

"I do," Shinichi says, dragging his thumb across KID’s lips.

"Am I still enough?" It’s a plainly asked question, but there are so many other questions tangled up
in it. Shinichi would tease them apart, but there’s no point, is there? Not when the answer to all of
them is—

His love for Ran has always been a slow, steady campfire that keeps him warm on cold nights, ever
there, ever burning, but never too hot, never too strong. The way he feels about KID is like
drowning, instead, emotions constantly dragging him down in the undertow, carrying him away
before he can tell himself it’s not wise, not practical. The way he feels about KID is the soothing
sound of waves hitting the beach at the same time as it’s the tidal waves overturning ships in the
night, and Shinichi has never been someone built for the everyday sort of thing. He has never been
the sort of person happiest in the boring, in the normal, in the parts of living that are between the
adventures. He’d rather dive straight into the darkest depths of an unpredictable ocean than watch
calmly from the shore.

Besides, hadn’t his last thought been KID, as he’d closed his eyes? Shinichi has never been a
romantic, but in the end, KID has taken up permanent residence in his mind and in his heart, thrilling
him with the challenge and kissing away doubts in alternating moments, and if that isn’t enough,
what would be?

"Idiot," Shinichi says, far too soft to pack any punch at all. He leans down over KID, closer and
closer until their noses brush, and KID’s wet hair sticks to Shinichi’s forehead and the bridge of his
nose. "What do you think?" He presses his lips to KID’s, gently, lightly, feeling almost shy now that he’s in this body. A first kiss all over again. He blushes at that idea, and KID sighs against his lips.

"Shinichi, you’re…"

"I’m declaring my intentions," Shinichi says, heartbeat loud in his ears. KID’s tiny laugh, right against his lower lip, is followed by KID lifting his head up from the bed to seal his mouth against Shinichi’s, and this kiss isn’t chaste at all. It’s wet heat, and KID’s tongue at the roof of his mouth, and KID’s hands in his hair, dragging him down, dragging him in. It’s the smell of jasmine, and nails digging into his scalp, and KID’s bare chest hot even through the fabric of the borrowed flannel top he’s wearing, and a moan that gets lost somewhere between KID biting into Shinichi’s lower lip and Shinichi sucking on KID’s uneven upper one.

Then Shinichi’s being shoved down and straddled, KID’s weight on top of him pinning him to the bed, hands on either side of Shinichi’s head and lean thighs warm on either side of Shinichi’s hips. KID is grinning down at him, hair wet and unruly, wispy in every direction and as unpredictable as KID himself. His cheeks are red from exertion and it only makes his eyes more blue.

"Well, then, Meitantei," KID says, raspy, "how should I declare mine?" His lips are so pink, and Shinichi wants to be kissed again.

With one hand, he glides down the impossibly smooth skin of KID’s side, thumb grazing the slight pucker of his healing gunshot wound, and then stops at KID’s hip, where thin elastic and silk greet his fingertips. "I think you already did."

"Oh?" KID asks, and Shinichi is pleased that it comes out a little unsteady, and that KID’s Adam’s apple bobs as Shinichi scrapes a nail along the line where panties meet skin.

"They’re blue," Shinichi says. "The same color as your eyes." He smiles. "I knew this color would look good on you."

"And I knew you were flirting with me all along, detective," KID murmurs, and then he’s kissing Shinichi again, the smell of jasmine heavy in the air as KID presses into him, chest to chest as Shinichi buries his hands in KID’s messy damp hair.

"I definitely wasn’t," Shinichi says, frankly. "I’m not romantic. I’m not… That’s not who I am." He tugs. "I don’t flirt."

The soft skin of KID’s inner thighs tickles at Shinichi’s hairy ones, and KID’s hands are pushing up on Shinichi’s borrowed shirt to slide across his stomach. Shinichi gasps at the brush of a thumb across his nipple, and KID laughs.

"Sure you don’t," KID says. "You deduce." He scratches along Shinichi’s clavicles. "What do you deduce right now?"

Shinichi’s a bit lightheaded at the intimate whisper, and his eyes flutter as he attempts to keep his gaze fixed on KID. KID’s face is flushed, and he’s lightly shaking. His eyes glimmer. "I… You’re turned on." Shinichi’s never seen this sort of look directed at him before, not even from KID. It makes his throat go dry. "By… me."

"Yes," KID confirms, without modesty. "I am."

"Okay," Shinichi can solve murders and face down criminals without hesitation, without second-guessing, but this… His heart is beating quickly, and a slow, warm heat is spreading in his lower belly. He wonders if he’s the same as KID. If, to KID, he looks just as flushed and glassy-eyed and
hungry. He doesn’t know. Being this close to someone, being interested in the way they press against him— "I’ve never..."

"You’ve never...?"

"Thought about it, really." KID tilts his head curiously, and Shinichi’s eyes flick down to where KID is straddling him before flicking back up, and KID is smiling at him, bemused and suddenly more hesitant. "Or think about it, present tense, I guess. Low priority."

"You’ve never been turned on?" KID’s fingers are splayed across his ribs, and they still. It tickles, and Shinichi resists the urge to squirm. "Or wanted…"

"I have. It’s just that what I’m attracted to isn’t specific bodies, at least not at first," Shinichi says, meeting KID’s gaze evenly. "And I’m not attracted to them with my body first."

"I am a mind," says KID, eyes fathomless and bright as his palm slides up and settles flat on top of Shinichi’s necklace. "How Sherlockian of you. A lifetime of ingesting sugarless battery acid and experiencing a very limited number of unexpected erections."

"Coffee isn’t battery acid," Shinichi says, as he rests his own hands on KID’s thighs. They’re smooth. Hairless. They feel different, with his larger hands. He can feel more of KID’s acrobat toning shifting beneath the skin at once. KID is all lean muscle, and competence, and talent. KID can use these muscles to scale walls and sprint across rooftops. Shinichi thinks it might be faster to list things that KID can’t physically do than the things he can, and that’s... the warmth in Shinichi’s belly, at that realization, becomes lava. "And besides, I was… the body was wrong, you know, for feeling or wanting things like that, and it was easier not to think about it."

"What would you do with an inconvenient boner on a murder case thanks to a hot witness, anyway?" KID plays with the coin, twisting it on its chain. "Still, you’re missing out, Meitantei. The awkward hard-on is a rite of passage in teenage embarrassment."

"Clearly it isn’t, since I’m still an embarrassed teenager without it." More of his skin slides against Shinichi’s, and Shinichi tingles everywhere they touch. Wants to touch KID even more. This is something new. Not to notice attractiveness, or beauty, but to want to do something with those feelings; to find the gain to be worth the distraction of them. KID has always been, will always be, Shinichi assumes, someone that captures more of Shinichi’s attention than he’s offered up for the taking.

"Touching you like this isn’t some… requirement, if it makes you uncomfortable." KID’s lips curl up at the corners, but his hands aren’t moving anymore. "You know that, don’t you?" He’s staring down at Shinichi with a slightly furrowed brow, and Shinichi reaches up and smooths it away, wishing he were better at this whole feelings thing.

"It’s not that I don’t..." Shinichi grapples for what he wants to say. "I just have to like the mind first, before my body catches up with the physical part. I think you’re..." His heart stutters in his chest as understanding flits through KID’s expression, even with Shinichi’s hackneyed explanation. "Your body is..."

Strong and capable, just like KID’s brain, and now that Shinichi knows what KID is to him, he can recognize that he’s always liked certain things about him, like his lips and eyes and thin, dexterous hands. He’ll have to add the way KID’s eyebrows tilt to the list, he thinks.

"My body is?" KID asks, eyes half-lidded as he watches Shinichi carefully, still curious and amused and interested.
"It’s..." Shinichi wonders, if he curls up, he’ll be able to kiss KID, and get lost in the give and take of KID’s mouth instead of saying all these embarrassing things. "I like it." He averts his gaze, and then mumbles, "I’m a little impressed. Don’t let it go to your head."

KID starts, like he hadn’t been expecting that. Maybe he hadn’t, given Shinichi’s lead up, but then his whole frame relaxes, making him heavier atop Shinichi, and when Shinichi steals a look up at him again, he’s overwhelmed by how pleased KID looks, pink and grinning, wild damp hair clinging to his cheeks as he stares unwaveringly at Shinichi.

"Which head?" KID teases, and as Shinichi huffs, nervous and feeling strangely naked, KID’s eyes darken. "Because honestly, Meitantei, it’s working for both."

"Pervert." Shinichi bites his lip as KID skims one hand down to circle his belly button.

"Maybe," says KID. "I was okay with your little kid disguise, but the real Shinichi is a lot more dangerous for my self-control." He smirks. "Much preferred, though."

"You won’t find any disagreement from me on that," Shinichi replies, breath hitching.

"There’s a first time for everything, then," murmurs KID, grabbing a handful of flannel shirt to pull Shinichi up. "Me agreeing with a detective. A detective agreeing with me."

"Don’t get used to it." KID’s hand is shaking slightly, now, and Shinichi’s brow furrows. "What’s wrong?"

"You know, Meitantei, I thought I’d lost you for a couple of minutes there." KID swallows, and then he licks his lips. "I don’t think I realized..." His eyelids fall, and Shinichi’s heart stops at the downward curve of his lips and the pallor under his tan. "I thought I was prepared to let you go, but I wasn’t."

"You—"

Before Shinichi can finish his reply, KID has captured Shinichi’s upper lip in his, sucking it into his mouth as his fingers splay again across Shinichi’s ribs. "You’re still here, though, and you’re okay, and I’m..." He exhales. "I’m going to kiss you again."

He does, again and again, until Shinichi can’t seem to tell the difference between up and down.

"So what about now?" KID asks, lips still brushing Shinichi’s chin, and Shinichi has to rapidly reach out and gather the tattered remains of his thoughts.

"What are you asking?" He gasps it, as KID licks and sucks at the sensitive skin just under his jaw.

"Are you turned on now, detective?"

Shinichi finally closes his eyes, and fights another blush, letting his hands find their way up to the thin lace of KID’s underwear. "Yeah," he answers, and the way KID looks at him, like Shinichi is the whole world and everything else has disappeared—

"Good," KID says, interrupting his thoughts, and presses against him, and when their hips meet, Shinichi groans, the warmth and weight of KID both shocking and comforting.

A part of Shinichi wants to take these new desires apart piece by piece to find the root of them. It’s the part of him that won’t let a mystery slip through his fingers, and insists on butting his way into every murder case he stumbles across. The rest of Shinichi, though, the part of him that has jumped
off a building with an untested parachute to chase a phantom thief across the Tokyo skyline, only
wants to follow KID into the heat created between them by KID’s adventurous tongue licking down
the column of his throat and KID’s hands pushing up more at Shinichi’s borrowed shirt to get them
skin to skin.

Shinichi’s reckless side has always been hard for him to ignore, and has gotten him into trouble more
often than not, but it has, after all, led him here, and despite everything, he’s really glad about that.

KID’s nimble fingers find places along Shinichi’s ribs and stomach he hadn’t even known were
sensitive, and when Shinichi groans, KID chuckles, breath hot and wet against Shinichi’s cheek. Not
wanting to be left behind, Shinichi explores the muscled plane of KID’s back, memorizing the dips
and grooves as his hands trail lower, back toward the soft silk and lace of KID’s underwear. Shinichi
stops there, one hand lingering at the small of KID’s back, and KID lifts himself onto his elbows to
look down at Shinichi.

"You can touch me," he says. "If you want to. Anywhere you want to."

Shinichi scowls, face flushing at the amused tilt of KID’s mouth. His lips are swollen and slick, and
Shinichi does want to touch him, in a way he’s never wanted to touch anyone else. KID is noisy
even when he’s calm, and Shinichi wonders what sort of noises he’ll make if Shinichi’s hands
venture a little lower.

Shinichi isn’t used to wondering about things like that.

KID leans down to kiss Shinichi again, more thoroughly, like he had that first time on KID’s bed a
scant few weeks ago, and the smell of jasmine and hotel shampoo wash over him, making him
nuzzle his face into KID’s hair as KID’s groin presses against his own.

"Definitely turned on now," KID says, raspy, choked, and Shinichi’s hips buck up at the sound of it.

He’s fully hard, something that has only happened before when he was asleep and therefore unable
to avoid it, even when he was Conan, with all his teenage hormones trapped in a body too small for
them. Now, with KID surrounding him, sitting on him, backside dangerously close to where half the
blood in Shinichi’s entire body is collecting, he finally gets what all the fuss is about.

KID is hard too, his hips pushing back against Shinichi’s, the weight of his interest pressing against
Shinichi’s jean-clad thigh. Everything is new, and noteworthy, and even with something like this,
KID is challenging him to keep up, to not let him out of his sight. Daring Shinichi not to let him get
more than that half-step ahead of him.

"KID. When did you—" Shinichi blinks, finding himself suddenly minus a shirt. "How did you do
that?"

"Magic," KID says, now with a full grin. "While it’s useful to be able to quick-change my disguise
in a pinch, it’s also good to be able to do it to others." Shinichi remembers tied-up detectives
disguised as other detectives in closets, and files that away. "When did I what?"

His hands are idly drawing patterns on the skin of Shinichi’s arms, and Shinichi’s hands are holding
on to KID’s hips again. KID chooses that moment to grind down, and Shinichi bites down hard on
his lip to keep his eyes from rolling back in his head.

"Never mind," Shinichi manages, and KID, those pretty eyes of his sparkling triumphantly, captures
his mouth again, with a singleminded focus Shinichi had thought was reserved for only for safes or
gemstones in bulletproof glass cases. "Can’t think with you like this."
"Do you want to think?" KID asks him, breath hot against Shinichi’s lips, and those wicked fingers flic
at Shinichi’s nipples, skim his ribs, flick at the button of the jeans he’s wearing that are just a bit snug on his thighs. "Hmm, Shinichi? I could do the thinking for both of us."

"Is there enough room for both of our egos in this room?" Shinichi says, or means to say, only KID’s hands have slipped down lower, pushing down the jeans, and Shinichi didn’t have any underwear that isn’t for an eight year old while he was getting dressed, so KID’s palms slide along bare hips, making Shinichi jolt in surprise. "KID?"

"Is this okay?" KID’s hair tickles Shinichi’s forehead. He’s close enough for Shinichi to see the lightly freckled skin of his nose if he crosses his eyes, or to drown in the endless blue of KID’s gaze, or to taste KID’s every exhale. KID’s hands are between them, stopped from undressing Shinichi completely by his own thighs on either side of Shinichi’s. Shinichi’s thumbs still toy with the waistline of KID’s underwear.

"I’m used to your flagrant disrespect for boundaries," Shinichi mumbles, blushing, and he can’t see KID’s smile but he can feel it. "Don’t you just take things when you want them?"

"You’re not something to steal," KID says, dragging his lips across Shinichi’s cheek until his words fall directly into Shinichi’s ear. "I won’t take without permission."

"Oh?" Shinichi asks, dragging one hand up KID’s back, making sure to dip his fingers between every vertebrae— lumbar, thoracic, cervical—before cupping KID’s neck and catching a few wayward strands of wet hair between his his fingers. KID’s hips shift restlessly, and Shinichi can’t help but lift his own, seeking more of that friction.

Shinichi is out of his depth, completely, conscious of how little there is keeping them from being skin to skin, of how much he wants KID’s touch, of how he’s always wanted to catch KID, but had never thought it would be like this.

"I want…" KID sucks Shinichi’s earlobe into his mouth, and does something with his teeth that has Shinichi moaning, a low embarrassing sound he wishes he could take back. But then he doesn’t, because something about it has KID shuddering above him, and pushing his hips down again, and it’s worth the blush to make KID shiver in his arms. "I want to make sure all of you is still here, Meitantei."

Shinichi closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, and then blows it out all at once, because this is KID, who Shinichi has trusted with his life, and, if he’s honest, maybe with his heart. Shinichi will give this a shot, too. "Then what are you waiting for? I’m not getting any younger."

"And we’re all more than pleased about that," replies KID, and Shinichi laughs, using his hold on KID’s neck to pull him into another kiss, licking desperately against straight white teeth, distracting himself as KID somehow takes off the jeans without ever lifting his weight from Shinichi, leaving him naked underneath a KID who’d never had much on to start with.

"Meitantei," KID says, between wet kisses that leave Shinichi dizzy and breathless, and the rub of silk and lace against his bare erection, "I…" He drops wet open-mouthed kisses down the column of Shinichi’s throat, and stops just above the 5 yen coin, sucking at the skin hard enough to leave a mark, right where Shinichi had taken a bullet.

"Are you…?"

"I’ve also always been more into the thrill of the chase than what was waiting at the end if I won." KID nuzzles at the new bruise. "But not with you. Never with you." Then KID looks up at him, and
Shinichi is reminded again of that time in the bathroom, when he’d thought KID’s every movement was its own painting, and it’s true enough when KID looks like this.

His heart feels so full in his chest that it’s weighing him down to the bed. "Utterly shameless," he gripes, and KID laughs into the curve of his neck before he leans up and kisses Shinichi again.

"Utterly," KID says, wrapping one hand around Shinichi’s cock. Shinichi gasps, and KID swallows that eagerly, his tongue sliding across Shinichi’s palate, tasting the back of his teeth.

Shinichi finally slides a hand down into KID’s panties, grabbing at his backside, and KID groans, thrusting down, blue lace and silk teasing the head of Shinichi’s cock as KID’s hand holds the base of it.

And KID is loud, when Shinichi tentatively touches him, and it’s easy for Shinichi to lose himself in KID, in touches that become more certain, and in the smell of jasmine and KID’s tiny arrogant laugh every time he steals Shinichi’s breath away.

It’s easy for Shinichi to roll them over, to kiss at the mole on KID’s neck he’d noticed on the train to Osaka, to slide his hands down muscles earned over fifteen years of gymnastics. To make KID’s voice drop down into that lower register that feels like it’s always been reserved for Shinichi, and to feel his thoughts go hazy as KID’s mouth goes places no one else has even touched before.

Then Shinichi is on his back again, KID’s face suddenly so serious, his gaze sharp and bright, a mix of desire and panic and all sorts of emotions that KID is letting Shinichi see, without that smirking countenance that Shinichi had associated with him for years.

"Don’t die on me ever again," KID says to him, lips tickling Shinichi’s abdomen as Shinichi pulls at his hair, soft and silky and damp now with sweat instead of the shower. Shinichi can hear so many things in KID’s statement, and all of them are as crystal clear as the oceans in Hawaii, where Shinichi had learned about so many things but never about this. "Am I clear, Meitantei, or should I tap it out in Morse with the tip of my tongue on your inner thigh?"

"Ridiculous," Shinichi replies, tugging harder at KID’s mane, but KID just grins up at him and does it anyway, and…

Like this, there are no facades, no disguises, no secrets, just… Shinichi and KID, without anything between them but sweat and friction and kisses that make Shinichi feel like he’s drowning, and… For a few moments, KID is everything, and Shinichi is coming, squirting against him three, four more times, before he finds his climax, too, shuddering against Shinichi before collapsing on top of him like dead weight, lazily squirming up just enough to meet Shinichi’s mouth again for more kisses.

"Am I all here?" Shinichi asks, breathless, sleepy, big enough to wrap KID up in his arms. Not sick. Not small. Not alone.

"Seems like it," KID replies, licking at the corner of Shinichi’s mouth.

"So are you," says Shinichi, turning his face just slightly so that he can catch KID’s tongue with his lips.

"When did I what?" KID says, a little while later, and Shinichi wrinkles his nose.

"Huh?"

"Earlier, you were going to ask me something."
"Ah," Shinichi says, and turns onto his side. KID slides a thigh between Shinichi's, and it's cold in the hotel room, but how can he be cold with KID so close, so warm. "When did you realize that what you wanted from me was... this?"

KID snickers. "Well I didn’t want this until about five hours ago." He drags a hand through Shinichi’s hair. "But I’ve known I wanted you, my Tantei-kun, for a long time." He kisses Shinichi’s forehead, an echo of what happened in their Osaka hotel room. "After all, I’d be terribly bored without you."

Shinichi grabs KID’s hand and laces their fingers together. "Is running circles around Suzuki and Nakamori not entertaining enough?"

"Not by a longshot," KID says, and Shinichi laughs, letting the waves of KID’s presence wash over him gently.

They fall asleep like that, sticky and gross and curled together turned sideways on the hotel bed on top of the blankets, and Shinichi’s sleep is easier than it should be, considering the day he’s had. But KID is warm and comfortable, and Shinichi’s limbs are loose, and, when he closes his eyes, the world easily fades away.

* 

Shinichi awakes to the frantic ring of the hotel phone and the bright morning sun. He reaches for it groggily. "Hello?" he answers in English, voice hoarse.

"Kudou, get online," Haibara says, and the call promptly ends, leaving Shinichi to scrub at his face.

"Sadist," he mumbles, stretching, and at the shift of KID next to him, naked and still sleeping, dark eyelashes and sinuous grace, last night, all of it, comes back to him. He looks at his hands, his normal, sixteen-year-old hands, and then down at KID, and he allows himself to grin.

Climbing out of bed, he checks the child-sized watch on the nightstand for the time. A little after six means they’d slept at least eight hours. His skin is sticky from sleep and... other things, he realizes, and he can’t talk to Haibara like this.

He hurries to the shower, reveling in how he doesn’t feel dizzy, or nauseated. Turning the water up to high heat, he takes a three-minute shower, soaping up and rinsing in record time, before toweling off and grabbing one of the unused terrycloth robes the hotel provided hanging by the vanity mirror.

Shinichi sits down in yesterday’s armchair and connects to wi-fi, and as soon as his laptop alerts him to success he gets an incoming call from Haibara on Skype.

"I've maybe got an address for you," Haibara says, and then she’s shoved sideways to make room for Heiji’s face on the camera.

"We’ve got an address, she means," he corrects, and Haibara’s lips twitch even as she sighs. Heiji grins triumphantly, but then his jaw goes slack. "Kudou? You’re big!"

"I'm big," Shinichi confirms, absently lowering the volume and sneaking a look over at KID. He remains asleep, only now he’s twisted into the fetal position, and he looks a little cold. "It's a long story, Hattori, and maybe Haibara can fill you in on some of it later?"

"She didn’t mention it before," Heiji grumbles. "How long you been big?"

"Only since last night," Shinichi says. "When did you get to Tokyo?"
"Only since last night," Heiji says back, scowling at him. "You didn’t do anything stupid, did you?"

"Of course he did," Haibara interjects before Shinichi can reply.

"Why didn’t you warn me?" Heiji asks her, and Haibara smirks.

"I wanted to surprise you," she answers, in a voice so deviously innocent that Shinichi has to fight a visible shudder. "Regardless, Kudou-kun, we have an address."

"For Claude Arbogast?" Shinichi asks. "I thought his mansion was off the grid?"

"C’mon, Kudou, have a little faith. Me and Haibara joined forces to get you and KID better information with my superior detective skills."

"We tried to track on utilities, but it looks like the mansion runs on generators and well-water," Haibara says. "But Hattori thought we should look for shipments of things you can’t stockpile or get from nature."

"So certain import foods?" Shinichi muses aloud, and KID whimpers, shifting in bed. "Clothes, hygiene necessities... Something like that?"

"Cologne," Haibara says.

Heiji nods. "The guy likes his expensive colognes. Old rich guy with a weird collection, surprise, surprise."

"So what, he gets them delivered?"

"Sort of," Heiji replies. "Turns out he gets them delivered to a university buddy of Takizawa that’s relocated himself to Lozère, someone by the name of Durand."

"Hattori-kun is the one who suggested we see if there was anyone connected to the case currently living in the area. It turns out that directly prior to his arrest, Takizawa had made several calls to the area, and it was easy to track down that number with Jodie-san’s help."

Shinichi closes his eyes, and calls up the mental image he has of those blueprints they’d found at the Bastille apartment. Château Arbogast, Department of Lozère. "That’s how we found the P.O. box. Through Takizawa. It still won’t help us narrow down the address."

"Don’t underestimate us, Kudou," Heiji says, running a hand through his hair. "After that, we went through the land permits registered online, and naturally, Arbogast came up with nothing. The Durands, on the other hand... Turns out they were given a huge chunk of land in the area back in 1999, by—"

"Claude Arbogast," Shinichi finishes. "Clever. You have coordinates?"

"Sure do." Heiji grins. "I think I win this round, Kudou."

"We weren’t even working on the same thing, Hattori," Shinichi replies. "I was out trying to get information from Mercier—"

"Don’t be a sore loser. You can admit I’m awesome."

Haibara clears her throat imperiously, getting Shinichi’s attention. "How is your health today, Kudou-kun?" At Shinichi’s surprise, she narrows her eyes. "Respiratory performance good? Limited nausea? Physical ability as expected?"
Shinichi flushes, and his eyes shift back to the bed. "Everything seems to be working," he says, willing himself not to blush and tell Haibara too much. He suspects she knows anyway—Shinichi’s friends are many things, but he’d never claim unobservant as one of them.

Haibara lifts a single eyebrow. "Everything?" Her lips twitch. "I see."

Shinichi gulps and refocuses. "Send me the coordinates," he says, fixing his gaze on Heiji. "KID and I will rent a car under his name, or under my dad’s name, and we’ll drive out there to find the mansion. It’s about time we got to the bottom of this."

"Did you figure out why they wanted KID?" Hattori is leaning back in his chair, studying Shinichi speculatively. "Why they were trying to lure him in?"

"The original KID was entrusted with something," Shinichi says. "Without it, the keys they’ve taken will be useless if Claude Arbogast isn’t on their side."

"And you assume he isn’t."

"If he were, they wouldn’t need KID." Shinichi rubs at his eyes.

"They don’t have all of the keys, though," Haibara says. "Vermouth has some of them."

Shinichi nods. "Right. three. But I think…" He calls up his conversation with KID. "I think she’s headed out to see Arbogast as well. When is the full moon?"

Haibara types rapidly on the computer. "In Paris? Tomorrow night."

"Got a deadline, Kudou?" Heiji scratches at the side of his face. "Don’t get too caught up in Vermouth’s games. She’s still one of them crows."

"I won’t," Shinichi promises. "Vermouth did save my life and turn me back into myself, though."

"What?" Heiji asks, but Haibara is leaning forward into the screen, face grim.

"Kudou-kun, be careful. We don’t know who is behind this, and whoever it is has got one of the top Black Org agents on the ropes, and enough intel that Bourbon is working with them. Plus, you still don’t know who it was sending you those packages."

"I know, Haibara. E-mail me the GPS coordinates, and I’ll contact you as soon as I can."

"Good," she says, ending the call as Heiji continues to squawk about Vermouth turning Shinichi back into a teenager.

Shinichi sighs, disconnecting from the internet and leaning back in the armchair, closing his eyes. Too many loose threads, he thinks.

The photos. Vermouth. Kanami and who she’s working for, if she’s communicating with Bourbon and Chianti, but actively trying to bring down Vermouth. And how, exactly, someone can live forever. "What is Pandora?" he mumbles, pulling his feet up into the chair and steepling his fingers.

"Probably not a gem offering up immortality," KID replies, stretching out naked across the bed, before rolling onto his stomach and looking over at Shinichi, who has opened his eyes to regard his companion. "And something hidden in that maze castle that is going to take five keys to open."

"Probably not a gem offering up immortality," KID replies, stretching out naked across the bed, before rolling onto his stomach and looking over at Shinichi, who has opened his eyes to regard his companion. "And something hidden in that maze castle that is going to take five keys to open."

"Something Vermouth carries in her blood." Shinichi drops his hands into his lap. "Something used to make the apoptoxin that almost killed me."
"A lot of people were killed over Pandora," KID says, looking at Shinichi through his fringe. "Real magic is dangerous."

"You believe in real magic?"

KID bites his lower lip. "I’ve… seen it. I’ve met a witch, too." He smiles mischievously. "Someone else to worry about in my high school classes."

"You really like to live dangerously."

"It’s why I’ve taken up with a rash detective," agrees KID. "Life wasn’t complicated enough before."

Shinichi stares at KID until he flutters his eyelashes in a mockery of seduction, and then shakes his head resignedly.

"We’ll have to go back to your father’s apartment and get those blueprints."

"We can go now."

"After we rent a car," Shinichi says. "That way they’ll never be out of sight. We can’t take chances. Not now."

"Good thinking," KID replies, sitting up, unabashedly stretching his arms up above his head, making his muscles flex. Shinichi loses track of his thoughts as the sunlight streams in through the window, catching in the shinier strands of KID’s brown hair and casting a shadow of him down along the comforter. "And then we’ll… Meitantei?"

Shinichi, embarrassed at having been caught staring, looks down at the floor instead, finding discarded jeans and blue underwear, and it does nothing to help the tightness in his gut. "Clothes," he says, absently, as he shifts his gaze to watch KID put his feet on the floor and walk over to him.

"What?"

"I need clothes," he clarifies, as KID walks past him, only to stop behind him and lean down, arms falling down over Shinichi’s shoulders and his face coming to rest cheek to cheek with Shinichi’s.

"You look good in my clothes," KID says. Shinichi smells jasmine, but this time, it’s mixed with the smell of sex instead of shampoo. "Especially the jeans."

"They’re too small." Shinichi licks his lips, ignoring the increase in his heart rate that KID seems to create with every touch.

"Exactly." KID kisses his jaw.

"I should probably pick up underwear and a few more shirts when we head out to get the rental car."

Shinichi purses his lips. "And maybe a suit, but the underwear is top on the list."

"You don’t want to wear mine?" KID asks, fingers coming up to play with the 5 yen coin. "After all, it’s not like you haven’t been up close and personal with my-"

"No thanks," Shinichi deadpans, before KID can finish his thought. "I’ll be sticking with something loose and cotton if it’s all the same to you."

KID’s chuckle is warm against his neck, and the intimacy of all of this, how easy it is, isn’t lost on Shinichi. Not much is. "Whatever you say, Meitantei."
"I sincerely doubt that," Shinichi replies, and KID laughs again, and Shinichi eases into the partial embrace, because this is… it’s familiar, isn’t it? Only now, Shinichi feels a little less unsure turning his face to find KID’s lips, and then using a hand to cup the other man’s jaw so he can keep them.

"I’m going to drive tomorrow, by the way," KID says, as he pulls away, straightening up and leaving Shinichi dazed and flustered. "I’m just warning you now since I know you’re a car otaku."

"I’m not an otaku," Shinichi replies, as KID cackles and shuts the door. He releases a heavy breath as the shower turns on again.

Shinichi stares at the door for a solid minute after KID is gone, and wonders if KID is always going to be able to make his pulse race just like this.

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They spend forty-five minutes debating over the kind of car they should rent, settling for a Renault Clio IV after KID points out that they’ve seen a million of them on the streets, and the goal isn’t to stand out.

"My mother will kill me for renting a hatchback mini," Shinichi informs him as he gets dressed in KID’s jeans and a gray longsleeved shirt with a black feather that KID’s tossed him. "We Kudous only drive sports cars."

KID just grins and overrules him, reminding him sweetly that a Kudou won’t be driving, and Shinichi glares at him as he digs through his luggage for his real passport, and prepares all of the child things he brought along to be dumped. It leaves behind an empty suitcase, and Shinichi had never thought he’d be so happy to be under-prepared.

The first thing they do is buy Shinichi a coat at the hotel gift shop, something plain and black that Shinichi buys with cash he’d exchanged at Narita airport with Edogawa Conan’s passport, along with five pairs of boxers in extremely unexciting colors.

"Only cash purchases? You’re not bad at going undercover," KID tells him, as they walk out onto the street. "I never thought the showy Kudou Shinichi would be any good at going under the radar."

"Fear is a good motivator for unlearning bad habits," Shinichi replies, and KID smiles, linking their arms together, and using his free hand to hail a taxi.

They buy Shinichi a new suit in navy blue at one of the boutiques on the way to the car rental agency near the Japanese Embassy. KID tells him he’s boring when he doesn’t want to try it on, and Shinichi just smiles and promises KID they can go shopping for real when they have more time.

His next stop is to pick up a pair of shoes, since KID’s spare sneakers are just a little too big for him, and he wears those out of the store allowing KID to take the extras and shove them into his bag, still slightly damp from being washed clean of blood. "I’ve got extra room in here now," KID says, "since I don’t need to carry your medication."

And then he grabs Shinichi’s bare hand in his own gloved one, and holds on as they look out for a place to grab lunch.

"We could get something to go," Shinichi says, eyeing a bakery, and KID shakes his head.

"We have to have one meal in Paris, Shinichi. It’s the rule." He winks. "An acquaintance of mine recommended a small bistro around here."
"We’re trying to solve a mystery," Shinichi rebukes, but he doesn’t protest much as KID drags him to a crosswalk, across from a café on the other side of the street that reminds Shinichi of Takizawa Morisuke’s favored coffee shop in Kinza, complete with an elderly couple in the table in front of the window.

"The full moon is tomorrow night. We’re not in a hurry, today."

"I’d like more time to look through your father’s apartment. I wasn’t at my best, and there might be more there."

"Fair," KID says. "But you know, it’ll still be there in an hour." He offers Shinichi a crooked grin. "I think Vermouth can take care of herself until then."

Shinichi smiles, and follows KID’s lead. There are a lot of tourists, today, because even though it’s a Monday it’s getting closer to the winter holidays taken around the world. The Christmas lights are prettier when Shinichi can smell the baking bread and cigarette smoke and pine trees in the air.

"We’ll have to come back here sometime," Shinichi says. "For a real vacation." KID is staring at him. "Not soon," he clarifies, and KID’s expression doesn’t clear up. "Maybe in a couple of years, we’ll be free to travel for fun, and we can come to Paris. You can show me all the architecture you want."

"A couple of years?" KID continues to walk, but he’s paying more attention to Shinichi than anything ahead of him. He doesn’t bump into anything, so Shinichi won’t worry about it. "That sounds nice."

"Is there something on my face?" Shinichi asks dryly, and KID’s whole face lights up.

"Just me~" KID leans toward him, like he’s going to peck Shinichi’s cheek, and Shinichi leans in the opposite direction in amusement.

"That’s—"

"Kuroba?"

KID’s freezes, and he offers Shinichi a startled, incredulous look before he turns around to see Hakuba Saguru, high school detective, with two white shopping bags in hand as he stands on the sidewalk in front of a specialty tea shop they’ve just walked past, his eyes narrowed as he examines Shinichi.

"What did I do to deserve this?" KID says, loud enough for Hakuba to hear but quiet enough that he could easily pretend he hadn’t meant for him to. He also, Shinichi notes, drops his grip on Shinichi’s hand, and adds a few more centimeters between them.

"I thought I heard you," Hakuba says, when they step out of the flow of sidewalk traffic to stand to the side of the tea shop. "I haven’t been hearing much Japanese today, and your voice is pretty distinctive."

"So is yours," KID grumbles, crossing his arms. "I’ve been blessedly free of you for almost a year and you have to show up here of all places?"

Hakuba frowns, turning his gaze back onto Shinichi. "You’re… You’re Kudou Shinichi?" His face is flush from the winter air, but Shinichi can read the incredulity alongside that. "You know Kuroba?" He holds out a hand, and Shinichi, after only a moment’s hesitation, shakes it. "I’m Hakuba Saguru, the son of Superintendent Hakuba. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you, even if it is
in… unexpected company.”

He shoots KID a suspicious look, and then Shinichi remembers that Hakuba Saguru went to high school with KID for an entire year, and was in the same class as KID and Nakamori Aoko.

"Finally?" Shinichi asks, faintly, and Hakuba nods.

"I thought I would make your acquaintance at the Detective Koushien, but it seems it was for the best that you didn’t attend, since the whole thing turned out to be something of a hoax."

"Oh, yeah, Hattori told me about that," Shinichi replies, and Hakuba’s mouth twitches in displeasure at the mention of Heiji.

"I’m sure," Hakuba replies, before turning his attention to KID, whose arms are still crossed, wearing a petulant expression that makes Shinichi want to laugh. Kuroba Kaito, he reminds himself, sliding his gaze back to Hakuba, isn’t KID. Just a facet of him, with all the interesting parts hidden in the shadows. "We were able to figure things out in the end."

"I heard that too." Shinichi shifts his weight from foot to foot.

"Why are you two here? Together?"

"Can’t I take a vacation?" KID asks noncommittally, and Hakuba lifts a supercilious eyebrow.

"I heard from Nakamori-chan that you were going to be in Las Vegas with your mother."

KID smiles. "That was the original plan, but then Kudou-kun asked me to tag along with him as translator."

"His only use," Shinichi says, letting KID have control of their lie, "is speaking French."

"So here I am in Paris instead!" KID’s fake smile gets wider. "And now we’re headed for a restaurant a friend recommended to me for lunch. So we’ll just—"

"I’m here from London looking into the arrest of Marc Arbogast," Hakuba says, cutting KID off. "In connection to the Kaitou KID killings."

Shinichi zeroes in. "Marc Arbogast was arrested?"

"You know him," Hakuba says, like a shark that smells blood in the water. "That’s why you’re here, isn’t it?"

"No, it isn’t," KID says. "Shini—Kudou-kun’s mother is a famous actress. She mentioned Arbogast when we saw her a couple of weeks ago."

"They have a mutual friend," Shinichi corroborates. "Chris Vineyard."

"I see," Hakuba drawls. "So your presence here has nothing at all to do with the Kaitou KID murders."

"Don’t call them that," KID wails, garnering the attention of several dubious passersby. "KID is being framed, I tell you!"

"Why did they connect Marc Arbogast to the murders?" Shinichi asks, aiming for casual interest.

"He’s close to all three of the previous victims." Hakuba adjusts the collar of his trench cut winter
coat. "And he was found in Mercier’s home, searching through her belongings by the police."

He would have had mere minutes, between Shinichi and KID’s escape and the police getting through the security. How had he…

"Interesting," Shinichi says, and KID sighs exaggeratedly.

"Even on vacation, you’re going to talk about murders?"

"I am a homicide detective," Shinichi replies, bumping KID with his shoulder. Hakuba watches with interest, and then his gaze drops to Shinichi’s shirt, visible with Shinichi’s coat unzipped, since it was so hot in the shoe store.

"That’s Kuroba’s shirt," Hakuba says.

Shinichi flushes, and KID laughs. "Well—"

"There was an incident with his," KID says. "Couldn’t be helped. That pink paint was meant to be used, but unfortunately that shirt paid the price."

Hakuba winces. "I’m sorry for your loss, Kudou-kun."

"It’s nothing," Shinichi says, self-consciously zipping the coat. "So Arbogast was arrested last night?"

"You didn’t see it on the news?" Hakuba frowns. "Yes, just last night. I was planning on meeting him on Thursday in London, but with his arrest here, I flew in early this morning." He looks down at his watch. "I got in at seven minutes after eight. My uncle works for the police here, so I was able to look at the crime scene this morning. It didn’t add up." Then Hakuba smirks at KID. "Kudou-kun, I could tell you all about it over lunch."

"Who wants to eat with you?" KID mutters, but he still grabs at Shinichi’s sleeve, pulling him back out onto the sidewalk, and looks impatiently over his shoulder at Hakuba, who takes it as the invitation it is.

"You don’t like Hakuba, then?" Shinichi whispers, and KID shrugs.

"He’s all right," he whispers back. It doesn’t even look like his lips are moving. "He’s obsessed with proving I’m KID. Do whatever you can to throw him off."

"He might have important information," Shinichi says apologetically, and KID gives him an understanding look with his eyes before ending the conversation by stepping ahead. Shinichi takes in the shift in KID’s manners, and his heart flutters in his chest at the realization that KID doesn’t pretend, with him. Doesn’t put on any kind of act.

The bistro KID leads them to has a nice interior, soft creams and yellows, and KID speaks in easy, beautiful French to the host, who looks pleased at KID’s flawless accent and gives them a good table near the back, where there are fewer patrons.

Hakuba watches KID like a hungry jungle cat, and Shinichi watches Hakuba. Sitting across from the other detective, Shinichi takes in the way he ignores the menu, focusing instead on KID’s every movement.

Shinichi points out his order to KID, who then issues both their choices to the waiter, and Hakuba orders his own. When the menus are cleared away, Hakuba clears his throat.
"Nakamori-chan said you were considering university overseas," he says to KID, and KID blinks in surprise.

"You talk to her a lot?"

"At least once a month," Hakuba says. "But she mentioned Vegas and university in our last conversation, a few days ago."

"I'm still trying to decide," KID says shortly. "But I want to be closer to my mother."

"And if Kaitou KID starts having heists elsewhere in the world again, that'll be coincidence, I assume?"

"Get off it, Hakuba," KID says, plucking a packet of sugar from the white porcelain tray filled with them and ripping it open. He pours the contents into his mouth, and Shinichi grins.

"When your teeth all fall out, don't come crying to me," he teases, and KID grins.

"But just think of all the fun things I could do with no teeth," KID purrs in response, and Shinichi scowls, mortified, sneaking a look at Hakuba, who is still staring disgustedly at the sugar.

Leaning back in his chair, he directs a question to Hakuba. "Hakuba-san, what did you want to talk to Arbogast about?"

Unfolding his napkin and spreading it on his lap, he checks his watch before sighing. "I wished to speak about him with regards to his relationship with the victims, and to ascertain if he, too, would be a target. I also wanted to see if I could figure out what it had to do with Kaitou KID."

"You work a lot of KID heists, don't you?" Shinichi says, as though it's information he barely knows. "You probably met my cousin, then."


"Explains what?" KID asks, suddenly interested in Hakuba again.

"That child is preternaturally intelligent," Hakuba answers. "And the resemblance is uncanny."

"Conan-kun is smarter at eight than I was at eight," Shinichi says, taking a sip of water to disguise his smile.

"I'm going to speak to Arbogast after lunch down at the station near Mercier's home. He's been under constant watch, and he's being officially charged later today."

"You said something seemed off about the crime scene?"

"There's a missing shotgun bullet, and a missing revolver," Hakuba says immediately. "Both rounds were fired from the double barrel, and both shell casings we located, but only one of the bullets was lodged in Mercier's corpse." He pauses. "There were two victims. Mercier and another, unidentified man who bears a striking resemblance to the man stabbed at Tokyo Met Headquarters last month."

"Ueda Junichiro," Shinichi says, and then winces when Hakuba's eyebrows lift. "It was all over the news, and Hattori was interested."

"You keep very abreast of Japanese news for someone rumored to be spending so much time in the New World."
"Hawaii," KID supplies, and Shinichi scratches his neck, grateful for the waiter approaching with their lunches.

"So the John Doe was shot by a revolver?"

"Yes, and that bullet has no gun." Hakuba shakes blond hair out of his face as he picks up his fork. "Obviously, there was someone else there, and they took a bullet before or as they shot the John Doe. It would also explain the B- blood found at the scene, when both victims were A+, and the scraps of clothing that don’t match anything else left at the scene."

"So you think Arbogast is innocent?"

"Or he has an accomplice," Hakuba says. "According to my uncle, he’s refused to speak about why he was in the house, and he made a phone call to Japan last night when offered the opportunity to make a single call."

"It does sound suspicious," Shinichi says, as KID steals a piece of asparagus in butter from his plate. "I’d look into the John Doe a little further. A few of the detectives at Tokyo Metropolitan noticed that Ueda Junichiro had plastic surgery done to look like that."

"We’re checking into his dental records." Hakuba cuts a piece of his open faced sandwich and takes a small bite.

"Let’s hope he doesn’t like sugar as much as I do," KID singsongs, stealing another piece of Shinichi’s asparagus, to Hakuba’s confusion, which he promptly shakes off.

"What will you be doing with the rest of your time in Paris?"

"We’re leaving Paris tomorrow. We’re going to rent a car," Shinichi says. "Drive out into the countryside."

"I’m driving," KID corrects. "This guy is in charge of navigation."

"I wouldn’t be caught dead driving a hatchback anyway," Shinichi replies, and KID chuckles.

"It’s better to leave you free to get caught up in whatever epiphany you have, since you always get spacey when you’re trying to figure something out."

"No sleight-of-hand when you’re behind the wheel, then."

"Does Kuroba often do magic around you?" Hakuba asks, leaning forward.

"His father was a magician," Shinichi says. "He’ll eventually be one professionally, too. I don’t know why that’s worth mentioning."

"Kaitou KID is also a magician."

"And with that, I’m going to the restroom," KID says, rolling his eyes. "Try not to drown Kudou-kun in your conspiracy theories."

"They’re not theories if they’re true."

"They’re not true," KID says, standing up and walking across the restaurant, leaving Shinichi and Hakuba facing each other.

"You know too much about this case for it to be coincidence that you’re here," he says, when KID is
"Detective to detective, Kudou-san, what are you doing with Kaitou KID in Paris? Are you on this case?"

"I had some interest in the case since Conan was caught up in it," Shinichi says. "That’s why I know about what’s happening with it in Japan."

"And you came to Paris as the case moved here with no intent to pursue it on Kuroba’s behalf?"

"Kaito wanted—" Hakuba’s eyebrows rise, and Shinichi wonders if maybe that’s too informal. He doesn’t know. To him, KID is KID, but who knows what anyone besides Nakamori Aoko calls him. "Or, ah, Kuroba-kun wanted to brag about his French."

Hakuba’s gaze changes, into something that borders on triumphant. "You don’t usually call him by his name. That’s why you stumbled over it." Hakuba leans back in his chair. "You’re aware that he’s Kaitou KID, then, and you only recently learned his everyday identity."

"You’re mistaken." Shinichi takes a sip of his water, keeping his eyes on Hakuba. The aggressive detective is parts wrong and parts right, but Shinichi won’t admit that. He notices out of the corner of his eye that KID is on his way back to their table. "You’re approaching this from the wrong angle."

At that, he shifts his attention back to Hakuba. "Because you’ve already made your decisions about the outcome of the case, you’re ignoring the rest of the evidence."

Hakuba’s brow furrows. "Kudou-san, I’m not sure I follow."

Shinichi looks down at his plate, at half-eaten asparagus and pooling butter sauce. "You ran into Kaito and I walking to lunch together, and we mentioned plans to rent a car. We’re clearly comfortable in each other’s presence, and are familiar with each other’s eating habits, clothing preferences, behaviors. There are four seats at this table, and Kaito chose to sit next to me, so that he would be able to take things off my plate. I’m wearing Kaito’s shirt right now, and you recognized it."

Everything Shinichi has said is true. That’s what makes it, Shinichi thinks, so easy to pull Hakuba along. KID, he thinks, will be impressed by his improvement in the lying department. He smiles at that, and some of his fondness must be clearly visible because when he returns his gaze to Hakuba the other man is looking at him with wide eyes. "All of that evidence, and your conclusion is that my unfamiliarity with calling him by his last name means he must be Kaitou KID?"

Hakuba’s mouth opens and closes as Shinichi picks up his water glass and takes another sip, hoping it’ll cool his blush. KID slides back into his seat, his arm immediately pushing into Shinichi’s as he sits a little too close, and this time, Hakuba notices, and his eyes flit from Shinichi to KID to Shinichi again.

"Uh oh," KID says, immediately picking up his fork and stabbing another one of Shinichi’s uneaten asparagus spears. "What did I miss?"

"I was unaware that you and Kudou-san are…” He trails off, and KID stiffens, minutely, enough for Shinichi to notice. "Childhood friends, perhaps?"

"Hmm," KID is smiling without his eyes, a harmless, affable expression on his face that has Shinichi stealthily grabbing KID’s hand, and lacing their fingers together under the table. KID looks at him out of the corner of his eye, no surprise visible on his face, but felt in the twitch of his hand in Shinichi’s grip. "Not exactly."

Shinichi expects him to continue, and when he doesn’t, letting an awkward silence fall across the
table, Shinichi runs his tongue along his teeth.

KID is, has always seemed to be, at least, to Shinichi, comfortable with himself. Comfortable in the way he dresses and the way he acts and in his own skills. Comfortable in his own skin. Shinichi has never questioned KID’s attraction to him, assuming that it is along the lines of his own for KID—born of a love of mysteries and challenges and finding an equal that is unbelievably compatible in almost every way.

Shinichi also knows that the fact that they’re both males will be a problem for some, but it’s something that he’s factored into his decisions from the get-go, because he has to, and KID, the way KID makes Shinichi feel, is more important than the opinions of people who don’t matter, because the people who do matter won’t care.

Hakuba… Hakuba might matter to KID. He hadn’t thought so at first, since KID’s irritation with the detective had been unfeigned, but the sweat on KID’s palm now has Shinichi reevaluating his initial assumptions.

"Not exactly?" Hakuba’s eyes flash with frustration. "Kuroba, must you be infuriating at every possible moment?"

"I don’t think he can help it," Shinichi replies, earning Hakuba’s irate gaze. "Kaito likes pushing buttons."

Shinichi runs his thumb along the outside of KID’s thumb, and KID relaxes into him, slightly. The movement doesn’t go unnoticed, and Hakuba is a good detective, Shinichi remembers. He’s observant, and he knows KID, even if he doesn’t know Shinichi.

Still, for the first time since they sat down for lunch, Hakuba Saguru looks like he’s doubting himself. "You’re… romantically involved," he ventures, and KID’s muscles clench up again, like he’s bracing himself, for… For what, Shinichi isn’t sure.

"Is that a problem?" KID asks lightly, after giving the statement a few moments to settle between them.

"I just didn’t know you were…"

"You’ve always just assumed my secrets had to do with Kaitou KID." KID sets down his fork. "That when I did my best to avoid dates and Akako-san and Aoko it had to do with my second identity as a criminal, even though Kaitou KID and I have been in the same place multiple times in front of you." KID licks his lips, cleaning away the shine of the butter. "Didn’t it occur to you that there were other explanations?"

"I… not this," Hakuba sputters, and Shinichi takes another sip of his water. "I thought you liked Nakamori-chan romantically."

"When I was sixteen," KID replies, "I did. And now, I like Shinichi."

Incredulous, Hakuba looks back and forth between them. "Paris is a popular spot for couples at Christmas," he says.

"Yeah," KID says bluntly. "And nobody is going to stare at me holding Shinichi’s hand."

Hakuba is silent for a long, painful moment, and then his shoulders hunch. "I’m guessing no one knows about this?"
"Not really," Shinichi confirms. "But that’s not because it’s top secret."

"I’d prefer to tell Aoko myself at some point, for the record," KID adds. "Otherwise I might die by mop."

Discomfitted, Hakuba seems at a loss for what to say. "Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I saw how intense you were getting, and I didn’t want you to follow us around the French countryside in the hopes of catching Kaitou KID," says Shinichi, "and end up interfering with all of our time together."

"Like I did with lunch," says Hakuba, frowning. "I… was unaware that I was—"

"It’s fine," KID says. "Shinichi wanted to talk with you, since he has been interested in those murders." He sighs melodramatically, slouching in his seat. "Playing second fiddle to corpses again, I see." His eyes are twinkling with delight as he looks up at Shinichi through his lashes. "Now he’ll be thinking about those cases all afternoon."

"I’m sure you’ll be able to entertain yourself."

"There’s always origami," says KID, wicked grin tinged with warmth. "Me folding cranes while you talk to yourself about the clues…" KID leaves ‘B A I T’ in common English tap code against Shinichi’s thumb, 1-1, 1-2, 2-4, 4-4, and Shinichi hums.

"I am curious," Shinichi admits. "Arbogast is a jewel appraiser, and each of the victims had a jewel stolen from them, which is an obvious connection."

"I hadn’t heard about that," Hakuba says. "Is that classified information?"

"Just what I’ve heard from my sources. But it does sound like the cases are connected, whether Arbogast is the culprit or not."

"Is that so?" Hakuba hesitates. "Actually, your familiarity with the cases in Japan might come in handy. Did you want to go with me to talk to Arbogast?"

KID pretends to pout, radiating amusement to Shinichi, and Shinichi nods slowly. "Sounds interesting," he agrees, so thankful to be in a body old enough not to beg and pout and need a chaperone. "As long as you don’t mind another detective."

"I only mind thieves," Hakuba says, but the look he gives KID is a considering one, and KID’s eyes are glittering, in Shinichi’s opinion, with absolute victory.

*  

Marc Arbogast is still wearing yesterday’s clothes—an expensive pastel green dress shirt and dark brown trousers made of wool, a matching wool jacket next to him on the bench. There’s blood on the hems, and on his knees, and the dark circles under his eyes look like weeks of lost sleep, not a single day.

KID lingers by the door, chatting up the guards with a smile that makes Shinichi want to linger too, but instead he follows Hakuba deeper into the room, toward the man curling into himself behind bars, with mussed hair and an empty gaze.

"Mr. Arbogast?" Hakuba asks, in perfect RP English. "I’m Saguru Hakuba, a detective, and this is a… colleague of mine, Shinichi Kudou."
"A little young, aren’t you?" He straightens, leaning back so he can rest against the wall. "Too young to have cigarettes, I’m assuming."

"One person dies approximately every fifteen minutes from lung cancer in Great Britain," Hakuba replies. "I don’t intend to be one of them if I can help it, regardless of age."

"You’re British?" Marc Arbogast sneers. "Thought you and your friend were Japanese law enforcement."

"My uncle is an Inspector with the Paris police," Hakuba says, "And Mr. Kudou is briefed on the Japanese cases we’re trying to tie you to."

"For clarification," Shinichi adds, his own English suddenly feeling very American, "that’s Clifford Groves, Morris Takizawa, and Scarlett Shinamoto. He tilts his head. "You might know her as Genevieve."

Arbogast stiffens, all the lethargy abandoning him as he stares at Shinichi. "You know more than you’re saying."

"Not at all," Shinichi says. "I’m not even on this case. I’m accompanying Mr. Hakuba out of personal curiosity."

Arbogast narrows his eyes. "I didn’t kill anyone, and I’ve got nothing else to say until my lawyer gets here."

"Are you sure?" Hakuba crosses his arms. "I don’t think you’re the murderer, at least not of Marie Mercier and the John Doe. It doesn’t match up."

Startled, Arbogast tugs at the collar of his shirt. There’s blood under his nails. "You… don’t?"

"Missing gun and missing bullet, both implying there was someone else there."

"I was asleep upstairs," Arbogast says. "Marie drugged me, and when the police came I was still in a haze. I was looking—" He cuts himself off.

"Drugs?" Hakuba’s eyebrows come together. "Did you tell the arresting officer? Did they do a blood test?"

"I…” He blinks. "They did take blood, to determine my blood type, and for something else." He smirks. "My family is from France, but my French isn’t very good. My mother was English, and never made it a priority for me to learn."

Hakuba looks at Shinichi and sighs. "I’m going to go ask for a drug test to be run on the blood they took last night to verify his claims. If it’s true, then he wouldn’t have been able to overpower two healthy and armed victims; not with that kind of handicap."

"I’ll see if I can get anything else about that night out of him," Shinichi says, and Hakuba nods, walking out, past KID distracting the guard, to disappear around the corner.

"So," Marc Arbogast says, when they’re alone, "who do you work for? Rum?"

Shinichi’s heart skips a beat. "I don’t work for anyone," Shinichi informs him. "I’m just trying to keep someone important to me alive, and stay alive myself. To do that, I need as much information as I can get about the victims, and their killer."
"You can find out all you want about them from the internet. What kind of morons try to stay off the radar by becoming famous?"

"Access," Shinichi replies, leaning against the bars and watching Arbogast carefully. "Being famous means you can go places other people can’t."

"It’s also exposure," Arbogast scoffs. "Once their identities were known to the right parties, it was a matter of a Glegle search to find out where any of them but Morris—Takizawa Morisuke—would be at any given moment."

"Who are the right parties?"

"No one you want to mess with. I regret messing with them myself. The woman, Kanami, she seemed harmless at first, wanting information about my great-grandfather, but she’s as dangerous as Chrissy."

"You mean Sharon Vineyard," Shinichi asks, wanting to clarify, and Marc raises both eyebrows.

"You did your research, then."

"She saved my life, once," he quietly replies; something in Arbogast’s shoulders loosens, and he buries his face in his hands. "You had to know giving out information on someone like Vermouth would be dangerous."

"All I wanted was to become the keeper," Arbogast says, looking up, eyes wild. "I wanted to replace the old man and become the keeper. That’s why I told him who they were."

"Who is ‘him’?" Shinichi asks, and Arbogast crumbles, hunching into himself.

"I didn’t know he was going to kill them, but it’s not like I was able to say anything after it started. I didn’t even want to. These were the people who had everything I wanted, and reminded me I’d never be involved every time I got a new gray hair or—"

"So you gave up their current identities to an outside party," Shinichi says, "and then watched as Scarlette Shinamoto, Takizawa Morisuke, and Clifford Groves were killed one by one."

"I wanted to warn Marie," Arbogast says. "I wanted to take The Queen of the Nile from her and give it to him before he went after her, and tell him she didn’t know what it was."

"Who is him?" Shinichi prods. "You keep saying ‘him’ but I need a name."

"I don’t have one for you," Arbogast says. "The man in charge, he was worried about someone named Rum, same as that Japanese police officer Marie was friends with was. He would call, but he always sent Kanami to meet with me, and never came himself."

"Worried about Rum?" Shinichi runs his tongue along his front teeth. A past affiliation? Are they dealing with a former member of the Black Org? Shinichi is well-aware there isn’t a real retirement plan. And a Japanese police officer… "Do you mean Date Wataru? The officer?"

"I don’t know his name," Arbogast scrubs again at his face. "It’s all more dangerous than I thought. You should stay clear of all of this, or you’ll get killed, like they were. Like I’m going to be."

"I can’t." Shinichi wraps his hands around the bars. "I have to bring these people to justice, before more people get killed. That’s what homicide detectives do." He reaches absently to push up glasses he doesn’t wear anymore, and drops his hand when he only finds the bridge of his nose. "If in the
end, that leads me closer to Rum, all the better."

Arbogast looks taken aback by the calm resolve, and pulls again at his collar. "There are two more out there," he says. "That look like Genny’s brother."

"Two?"

"They’re Kanami’s. Twisted lady, she knew it would scare Genny, and she knew Genny had to be the first to die. It also made it impossible for a physical description to stick in the news. Alibi’d the killer out every time."

"They each owed her something?"

"Yes," Arbogast says. "They owed her a lot."

"Why are you telling me this?" Tapping from KID catches a sliver of his attention, another tap code, spelling out ‘H A K U B A’, that he’s passing off as nervous fidgeting.

"I’m hoping you’ll stop them." Marc Arbogast, drained, scrubs at his cheeks. "If you don’t, when I’m let out of here, I’ll die. I didn’t realize they wouldn’t need to keep me alive until it was too late." He closes his eyes. "They might not be able to find it, anyway. That old selfish miser won’t tell them anything, even at the threat of death."

"You mean Claude Arobgast, your great-grandfather?"

"Great-grandfather?" Marc Arbogast smirks. "No, he’s my father. It gets confusing when people start living hundreds of years, doesn’t it?" He opens his eyes again. "He was going to watch me age and die, and just keep on living. He’s probably planning on having another kid and making me pretend to be the father. Then again, to do that, he’d have to talk to me for the first time in ten years."

"You haven’t heard from him in ten years?"

"No one has, save for maybe this Durand character." Arbogast snorts. "What’s the point in living forever if you’re going to lock yourself off from the modern world in an old castle? What a waste."

"Do you know how to navigate the castle?" Shinichi asks, hearing Hakuba’s steady footsteps coming down the hall. KID taps another warning. "Or is that also reserved for your father?"

"Two people know how to navigate that castle," Arbogast replies. "Claude Arbogast, and the thief that stole the floorplans from him almost twenty years ago on a heist. The Phantom Thief 1412."

"Also known as Kaitou KID," says Shinichi, grimly, as Arbogast looks up with wide eyes. "You told Kanami about the Phantom Thief, didn’t you? And that’s how he got connected to this."

"You’re…"

"Someone very invested in making sure Pandora doesn’t fall into the wrong hands," says Shinichi. "Not Kanami’s group, or Rum’s."

Before Arbogast can reply, Hakuba comes back into the room. "They’re running the blood test now, Mr. Arbogast. If it checks out, you’ll be released within the hour."

"I’d have the police assign him a personal guard," Shinichi tells Hakuba, who looks at him in surprise. "I have a feeling that whoever killed Mercier and your John Doe might want to finish the job."
KID coughs, to get both of their attention. "Shinichi, we only have an hour left to pick up the car in our window."

"Right," Shinichi says. "Hakuba, Arbogast refuses to divulge anything without his lawyer, but he did tell me that he got the blood on his hands and clothes trying to resuscitate Mercier." He switches to Japanese. "I don’t think he killed her. I think your best bet is to milk him for potential shooters, and guard him around the clock." He shrugs. "But it’s your case."

"I’ll solve it," Hakuba replies. "Leave things in my very capable hands."

KID snorts. "Stuck-up detectives," he says. "Always assuming there’s no one smarter than them."

"Usually," Shinichi points out, "there isn’t." He turns to Hakuba. "We do have to go. I appreciate you bringing me along, and I wish we could stay longer, but…"

"Although I’m sure you remember the layout of the station," Hakuba says, "I’ll walk you out."

It’s a silent walk through the halls to the front lobby of the station, where police officers in and out of uniform sit at their desks.

"I’m going to pop into the restroom really quick," KID says, fingertips grazing the skin at Shinichi’s wrist, and Shinichi, still caught up in thoughts of Rum, the blueprints back at the Paris flat, and the eerie wildness around the edges of Marc Arbogast’s eyes, follows after, instinctively reaches for his hand, catches it, and squeezes before letting go.

Realizing what he’s done, he shoves both hands into the pockets of his coat and stares up at the ceiling until the red in his cheeks that KID had called forth with his pleased, surprised hum and answering squeeze fades.

Then he looks at Hakuba, who is staring down at his shoes. "How did you end up with Kuroba?" he asks, and Shinichi blinks in shock.

"What?"

"I heard about you, you know. On the news, from police officers. They said you were an amazing detective, but that you were also unapproachable, arrogant, sometimes hard to work with. Then you disappeared." He buttons and unbuttons the waist of his coat. "That I meet you for the first time in Paris on a romantic vacation with Kuroba Kaito, my former classmate, is preposterous, Kudou-san."

"It all tends to be a little preposterous when it comes to that idiot," Shinichi says, and unconsciously, he reaches for the coin hanging just at the dip of his collarbones. "He never can do anything by half."

"Once he covered our second-year classroom in confetti so deep we had to swim out of the classroom. It took two days to clean up."

"Sounds like him," Shinichi says, trying to imagine KID sitting at a desk in school, uniform undone at the top two buttons and lounged sloppily at his seat, legs in the aisle. KID is probably bored to death at school, the same way Shinichi is. KID doesn’t belong in a school. He belongs on a stage, or in a pretty dress on the train to Osaka, or in comfortable black sweats sprawled out next to Shinichi on the grass at Beika Park, or in the main lobby of the Paris Opera House, grin wide as he stares up at ornate ceilings. "Ham."

"Shinichi, are you talking about me behind my back?" KID slides one arm around his shoulders, pulling him in. "To Hakuba?"
"I was just attempting to find out how he got saddled with you," says Hakuba. "Kudou-san is a detective of some repute, and you’re…"

"A menace?" KID grins. "That’s what Shinichi calls me."

"Because it’s true," says Shinichi dryly. "Good luck with your case, Hakuba-san. If you end up needing help, you can always call Hattori."

"Over my dead body," Hakuba replies immediately. "That hothead will only get in the way of true detective work."

"I don’t know," KID says, "he does roll pretty well with the punches."

"You know Hattori Heiji too, Kuroba?" Hakuba asks, as they walk through the metal detectors and out back into the cold December afternoon, letting the door close on Hakuba’s sputtering protests after KID informs him that he likes Heiji better.

"I didn’t know you had it in you, Meitantei," KID says, nudging Shinichi with his arm. "Lying to fellow detectives, interrogating British criminals." He puts one arm up to his forehead in a facsimile of a swoon. "I’ll have you robbing banks in no time."

"Don’t hold your breath," Shinichi replies. "I’ve met Hakuba before. As Conan, I mean. It’s strange, to meet people as Shinichi that I’ve met more than once as Edogawa Conan. I don’t know what I’m going to do about the kids."

"You mean the Detective Boys."

"With Ran, I’m coming back to an already established friendship. With the kids? I’m a stranger, and their friend Conan is gone, and never coming back. Same with Jodie, and several of the officers in Division One."

"It’ll be—" He stops, and then reaches for Shinichi’s hand, twining their fingers together casually. We’re being followed, he taps against the outside of Shinichi’s thumb, the leather of his glove cool on Shinichi’s skin.

"Fine, I know," Shinichi says. "I can’t help but worry about school, too." How many?

Just one. "You shouldn’t even bother with it," replies KID aloud, tugging on Shinichi’s hand to pull him off onto a side street. He pushes Shinichi into the wall, then, and pulls out his card gun, waiting three seconds for their stalker to turn the corner before firing three quick shots, one at each hand, the other directly to the man’s forehead, just below the fold of his wool cap, rendering him unconscious and collapsing to the ground.

KID releases his hold on Shinichi and drops to a squat next to the fallen man, immediately picking up the fired cards and pulling off the wool cap to reveal long hair and a now familiar face. "Louis Maisonrouge number three!"

"How did they know to tail us?" Shinichi squats down on the opposite side of their unconscious assailant. "No one should even know I’m in the country."

"Could be he was trailing Hakuba," KID muses, "and saw us go into the station with him, and rightfully assumed we were going to talk to Arbogast."

"He did seem pretty certain they’d kill him when he got out."
KID clicks the safety back on his card gun, and Shinichi licks his lips at the easy, confident grip KID has on the weapon. KID looks dangerously competent, and that’s… He drops his gaze to the card gun, and focuses in on that instead of how KID’s eyes are bright with concentration.

"I’d love to know how that thing fires," Shinichi says, taking a breath. "The muzzle is round, but the cards are razor sharp with metal. Do they come out curled, and if so, how do you compensate for that when you aim?"

"Maybe if you ask me really nicely, detective, I’ll take it apart for you and then put it back together."

KID’s smirk is wicked. When Shinichi licks his lips again after catching sight of it, KID raises one perfect eyebrow. "Oh, Meitantei, kinky."

"Says the thief who wants to be handcuffed," he blusters, rubbing cold hands on the outsides of his thighs.

"Only by you~" KID says, before turning back to the man on the ground. "What should we do with him?"

"We should tie him up and call the police anonymously."

KID produces a length of zipcord right from his sleeve, and in a few moments, he has the man thoroughly bound, without even bothering to lift him or touch him at all. "I saw a payphone on the way to the station, up three streets."

"Do you still have that telecarte you bought at the airport with cash?"

"Kept it in my wallet," KID confirms. "We’ll call directly to the station and they won’t be able to trace the call."

"Perfect," Shinichi says. "Do you think we’ll have time to interrogate him?" He checks his watch. "He’s only been out two minutes." The cut on the man’s forehead is bleeding, but it doesn’t look too serious. "A point blank shot like that was enough to put him down, but it shouldn’t have been enough to keep him out completely."

As if on cue, the man groans, opening his eyes and stiffening as soon as he realizes he’s bound.

"Why were you following us, Mister Not-Maisonrouge?" KID asks, poking the man’s nose with his index finger. He snarls, and KID waggles his finger in reprimand. "Now, now, you followed us. It’s not our fault you were sloppy and got caught."

Shinichi smiles at KID, before giving the man their full attention. "Were you interested in us, or in Marc Arbogast?" The man’s eyes widen slightly. "Ah, Arbogast, then."

"I didn’t say anything," the man spits, and Shinichi nods.

"You didn’t, but your body did." He runs a hand through his hair. "Did you know there are at least seventy-six common micro-expressions in the face alone that are used to identify simple answers to questions asked to hesitant witnesses?"

The man quickly shuts his eyes and steels his face. "I’m not going to tell you anything."

"Does Rum know you guys are here?" Shinichi asks, and the man flinches with his whole body, the wire rubbing together to make a noise not unlike crickets. "Or has Kanami-san completely forsaken that relationship, despite making use of Bourbon and Chianti?"
Eyelashes flutter, and Shinichi can feel KID’s eyes on him as he leans forward to look more carefully at the man’s face.

"You didn’t know Kanami was in contact with Bourbon and Chianti. I see." Shinichi steeplets his fingers and presses them to his forehead. "Was your mission to kill Arbogast?" A mouth twitch. "Ah, it was. Well, you won’t be able to now, sorry about that. The cell next to his was empty."

When the man doesn’t react to that, Shinichi nods, dropping his hands. "No reaction, meaning you’re no stranger to jail. That means your fingerprints will be on file somewhere, and Hakuba will find them. Good luck to you, then. I hope you don’t end up like Ueda Junichiro."

The man’s eyes fly open. "Ueda was—" He clenches his teeth.

"Killed by Snake," KID interjects. "Probably on your boss’s orders. Then, when Snake messed up, he was beheaded. Not my kind of job security, especially with the apparent uniform clause." He flicks at the man’s hair. "Seriously, what did Kanami have on you, to get you to go under the knife to creep out one woman?"

He looks to Shinichi, and Shinichi nods. KID hums and pulls out a spray can, putting it right into the man’s face and pressing down to emit a cloud of lavender compressed knock-out gas. "That’s the only sample of this I was able to bring with me."

"How long?"

"About an hour," KID replies, tucking the gun and the spray-can away, and straightening the line of his jacket. "Have I ever told you how attractive you are when you’re ruthlessly interrogating people?"

"KID, I worry about you."

"Are there really seventy-six micro-expressions in the face that give away lies?" KID stands, and offers Shinichi a hand.

"At least seventy-six," Shinichi replies, and KID drops Shinichi’s hand, only to grab a handful of his coat and pull him in for a kiss, short but openmouthed, KID tasting of butter and marinated chicken from lunch. In the harsh winter weather, KID is nothing but heat, and Shinichi has never been able to forget where he is and what he’s doing quite like he does when KID kisses him. "KID?"

"Time to make a phone call!" KID casts one last look at the unconscious man. "And pick up our Renault Clio IV, of course."

"Of course," echoes Shinichi, weakly, and then he walks with KID back out onto the main sidewalk, both of them pretending they’d never encountered anyone at all.

*  

KID parallel parks the rental car in front of the white and gray building. This part of Bastille looks different at twilight, the light poles casting long shadows along the streets and the ivy growing up the buildings glowing a golden brown instead of the dull green it had been in the afternoon.

KID remembers the password to enter the building, and once again easily picks the lock, allowing them entrance. It’s just as dusty, but this time, instead of bursting into a coughing fit, Shinichi just sneezes.

"We have to clean up in here someday," he says, pulling on a newly purchased pair of gloves, and
KID shoots him an amused look.

"It would be nice to have a flat in Paris." He drags his finger along a table, writing the kanji for vacation in the dust. "But Shinichi, aren't you wealthy? We could hire someone to clean it."

"Do you really," Shinichi asks slowly, "want to allow someone into a flat used by your dad to plan heists? Who knows what's hiding around this place."

"True." KID taps his lips with a gloved finger. "Let's just hope we don't find any literal skeletons about the premises." He smirks. "Like in that Kichiemon mystery house."

Rolling his eyes, Shinichi immediately walks back to the rear of the flat, opening the bedroom door. The large bed is stripped, and the mattress is covered in plastic, as is all the rest of the furniture. He pulls the plastic off a nightstand and starts going through the drawers. The top one yields a television guide from June 1998, and a couple of takeout menus. "This place is well furnished for a hideout."

"I think he must have used this place for more than just KID things."

Shinichi looks over his shoulder to see KID leaning up against the door. He's scanning the seams of the walls, looking for irregularities. "I mean, we know Mercier has been here, and we can assume Vermouth knows where this place is too." He opens the second drawer. It looks empty, but narrowing his eyes, Shinichi raps his knuckles against the bottom of the drawer, and smiles triumphantly when it makes a hollow sound.

KID hums. "She wouldn't have known about the safe, though, right?" He walks up behind Shinichi and hands him a nail file. "Use this."

"Probably not," Shinichi agrees, accepting the file. He jams it into the edge of the drawer bottom, and saws along until there's a visible gap along the edge. "I can't imagine he'd tell someone where those blueprints were."

"So," KID says, "that left me thinking. Why did Mercier want us to come here? What did she know about at this place that we were supposed to find?"

"Good question." Pushing down on the handle of the file, he pries open the floor of the drawer, revealing a leather-bound notebook. "But maybe..." He lifts the notebook up, and then it falls open. "A photo album?"

He hands it to KID, who blows the dust off it carefully.

"These photos are in black and white," says KID. "Definitely old, too, not just that way for style."

"Why would someone make them black and white for style?" Shinichi mumbles, as he looks back into the drawer. There are three yellowed business cards, face down. He picks them up. The first is for Morris Takizawa. Clocks and Antiquities, in neat English letters. Shinichi barely feels surprised at the second one, with Date Wataru’s name on it. He used to have Takagi’s desk number, Shinichi notes absently, shuffling to the next one. The third card, though, gives him real pause. Shinichi flips it over. He doesn't recognize the name. "Vignes?"

"A lot of people think that color can distract from structure or shade," answers KID, and Shinichi looks up to find KID staring at him with amusement. "Or they want to focus on a different set of details than the ones offered by a color image. For example, shadow, or texture." He turns the page in the photo album, and narrows his eyes. "Vignes, you said?"

"Julien Vignes. Acquistions." Shinichi runs his thumbs along the letters. "What in the world is
acquisitions?"

"I can't answer that," KID says, nudging Shinichi's shoulder with his own to gain his attention, "but I can tell you who he might be."

Shinichi follows KID's pointing index finger to a photo of a man and a little girl. They're dressed in the style of the wealthy from the early 1900s, like something out of a Sherlock Holmes movie, and Shinichi's eyes drop down to the sticky label. "Julien and Sharon Vignes."

"That's my dad's handwriting," KID says. "It's on all the pickled stuff in the basement at home."

"Sharon," Shinichi whispers, focusing in on the little girl's face. Her eyes, even without color, are cold as ice, and Shinichi would know them anywhere. "Vermouth."

"Vignes means 'vines' in French," says KID. "It used to be a metonymic occupational name for..."


Sharon Vineyard.

"Right." KID taps the picture. "There are lots of children in these photos, Shinichi. A lot of unlabeled photos. I'm willing to bet that they're all our key holders." He tilts his head. "Mercier could have been talking about this, when she sent us here. All of them... they trusted my dad with these photos."

"Why was he helping them?" Shinichi asks, returning his attention to Julien Vignes's business card. "Why would he help people like that?"

"Aside from Vermouth, none of them seem to have been involved in any sort of criminal organizations." KID turns the page again. "It's not like they've done anything but live extremely long lives. We don't even know if they had any choice about it." He snorts. "It should be a crime how much black this family wears, though."

"What?" Shinichi looks back over at the album KID is holding.

KID gestures to a page full of photos, at the man identified as Julien. "He looks like he's constantly going to a funeral." He turns the page. "All black, and everyone around him is always wearing black, too. See? When he's not in the picture, our little Sharon doesn't wear black, but as soon as he's there, it's back to the Grim Reaper aesthetic."

Shinichi zooms in on a photo at the bottom of the page, with Julien and a man even taller than him. His hair is long and white, tied back, and he has a thick mustache and strong jaw. "This man..."

"You know him, too?" KID pulls at the lapel of his wool coat, and then plucks the photo out of its protective plastic casing. "1966 is the date on the back."

"I don't know him." Shinichi takes the photo from KID, setting the business cards down on the nightstand so that he can hold it with both hands. Silvery hair on a young face. A widow's peak. Thin lips, and a cruel tilt to his eyebrows, just like... Recognition strikes him, then, and his heart jumps. "This man... I think he might be Gin's father."

"The same Gin who poisoned you at Tropical Land?" KID asks quietly, and Shinichi nods. "Wearing all black, and with Gin's father..."

"It's probably not a coincidence," Shinichi says grimly. "Vermouth... has always been able to get
away with more than other members of the syndicate. It only makes sense that it's because she's connected more deeply."

"These photos..." KID takes the picture back from Shinichi, sliding it back into the plastic covering. "Do you think they're worth killing over?"

Shinichi knows what KID is asking. Is this the real reason Kaitou KID was murdered?

Shinichi swallows. "The crows think a lot of things are worth killing for." He closes his eyes and pulls up the case in his mind, laying the facts out. "What's actually going on here?"

Five people with five gemstones that serve as keys to the mysterious Pandora, hidden away in a mansion in the Cévennes mountains. Four murders, Vermouth, and Claude Arbogast. Bait left for KID, in an effort to find the blueprints, and Snake, beheaded, left as a lingering message to some unknown party. Kanami, pulling the strings, and Chianti and Bourbon circling like vultures. Rum, and a search for... immortality...

"A fracture," Shinichi says, suddenly, as KID sets the photo album down on the bed to resume his search for more hidden passageways and false walls. "It's a splinter group!"

KID, both hands pressed flat to the wall, looks over his shoulder at Shinichi. "A splinter group?"

Shinichi rubs at his temples, the ideas tumbling almost too quickly to the forefront of his thoughts. "Exactly. Think of it this way— The syndicate we call the Black Organization... For at least sixty years they've been trying to synthesize a drug that causes apoptosis. Those who survive it have the clock turned back, losing years off their life. Vermouth admits one of the ingredients in the apoptoxin was... is her blood, something known to Haibara as the Manhattan compound."

"They're trying to make an immortality drug." KID's face twists up.

"Probably for profit," Shinichi agrees. "We know Atsushi and Elena Miyano were behind the current form of the project, but that doesn't mean it started with them, just as we know it didn't start with Sherry. But what if... what if one day, ten years ago or so, someone who wasn't supposed to found out about Vermouth and the others?"

"And thought that, instead of making a drug, they should find out what makes Vermouth and co. special, and go straight to the source?"

"It would have to be someone higher up in the organization," Shinichi continues. "Higher than Vermouth but lower than Rum, and they'd need to have the power and resources not to get killed immediately for defecting."

"Thus begins a new syndicate, a less disciplined, less refined one, dedicated to tracking down the source of immortality, also known as Pandora." KID sighs. "Kanami goes to work for Takeuchi's family, hoping to find leads."

"Maybe they worked under the umbrella of the Black Organization for awhile, hiding their actions and recruiting agents under different sorts of codenames."

"Like Snake." KID spits the name. "So then what?"

"Then Marc Arbogast falls into their lap and offers up Pandora on a silver platter out of jealousy, in hopes of leading his own version of a coup d'etat," says Shinichi. "So this new organization starts hunting." He remembers the mess of that old library, covered in Genevieve Maisonrouge's blood, a gloomy Pollack-inspired painting.
"Then why are Bourbon and Chianti meeting with Kanami, if they're no longer on the same team?" KID drops his hands. "These walls are all genuine."

"It's harder to hide false rooms in a flat than in a house," Shinichi says. "I don't know why Kanami was working with Bourbon and Chianti, or why the mysterious M.H. sent me those warning photos in the first place. It could be that they still think she's one of them, or that they still thought so, at one point in time. It's been a few months, and Bourbon's warning was for Edogawa Conan to stay away from Vermouth, because he was her weakness... Maybe Bourbon has known Kanami wasn't on the up and up with the crows for a while, but stayed in contact for more information."

"Everyone in your life has a secret identity or hidden agenda," says KID. "Must get confusing."

"Not really," Shinichi replies. "It's just like a Holmes novel, right?"

"You're such a nerd."

"You used the word 'metonymic' in conversation. Are you really one to talk?"

"Nerds of a feather flock together," KID says, plopping down on the plastic covered mattress. It squeaks at the rub of his jeans. "Shinichi, we can't let them get their hands on Pandora, whatever it is." He meets Shinichi's eyes. "My father died because of it." He lies backward, his hair splaying out on the plastic in glossy brown waves and curls. "You almost died because of it, too, and they're probably still looking for me."

"I always catch the killer," Shinichi says. "You ought to know that by now."

"I do," KID says. "That's why I came to you in the first place, Tantei-kun." He sits up, and stares directly at Shinichi, the brilliant blue of his eyes flashing. "Even then, I knew you were the person to talk to." He laughs. "Must have been the trustworthy glint of the light from your oversized glasses."

"You're a moron." Shinichi quirks a smile anyway.

"As dangerous as this has been, Meitantei, I'm... a little glad it gave me the chance to get to know you."

Shinichi's heart thumps violently in his chest. "Get the blueprints," he says, around a sudden lump in his throat. "We need to get back to the hotel and clear out our room."

"We should take this with us," KID says, gesturing to the photo album. "Just in case."

"You're right," Shinichi agrees. "After all, we might be able to make a deal with Vermouth."

"Hey, Clyde," KID says, when they're walking back out to the car, blueprints carefully rolled up and tucked under his arm as Shinichi carries the photo album and business cards.

"Don't call me that," Shinichi replies on reflex. "What?"

"Why do you think Vermouth saved you, back at Mercier's place?"

Shinichi frowns. "I've never been able to figure out why she does anything," he replies. "Why she calls me Silver Bullet, why she protects Ran... Why I would be her weakness. It doesn't make sense to me. I don't know her motives."

"Do you trust her?" KID asks, unlocking the car doors, and then circling the car to get around to the driver's side.
"Not even a little," says Shinichi, rubbing his thumb along the leather shell of the photo album, thinking about the piercing chill of Vermouth's gaze and the memory of a bullet lodged in his throat.

*KID drives a little like he speaks; unpredictable, fast, and constantly pushing Shinichi’s limits. He’s also wickedly cavalier with his hold on the steering wheel, and as they drive out of Paris, light snowfall making oil rise up and slick the city streets, he takes each turn as if he’s driven the route a hundred times before. This is despite only having glanced briefly at the map Shinichi pulled up on his laptop this morning, spending most of his time lying on his stomach on the bed, wearing nothing but lilac panties and his bulletproof vest, pointing out that all the rooms in the castle blueprints were based on the solar system as it was believed to be in the early nineteenth century.

"Much more interesting than the zodiac," KID had said. "Although clearly this was done before 1846. No Neptune! Or Pluto, naturally, but that was—"

"Tombaugh in 1930," Shinichi had finished, and KID had sent him a delighted look that had Shinichi’s whole body flushing as he’d turned back to the directions, trying to piece together from Haibara and Heiji’s (coded, naturally) e-mail how far they’d be able to drive before they’d need to make the rest of the journey on foot.

With KID behind the wheel, he’s almost looking forward to that part, since it seems KID drives like his mother; with exceptional precision, and even more exceptional reckless speed.

Shinichi doesn’t relax back into his seat until they pull out alone onto A10, KID following the signs to Orléans with one hand on the steering wheel and the other curling lightly around the gearshift. "No one’s following us," KID says, after a quick glimpse in the rearview mirror. "I wonder if Hakuba got to interrogate that Not-Maisonrouge."

"I’m more curious about what that man might have said about our conversation with him, and what Hakuba might glean from it."

"I think you threw Hakuba off enough for a year with lunch yesterday." KID’s gaze darts over to Shinichi. "What with telling him you’re… well…" KID’s Adam’s apple bobs as he pauses. 
"Romantically involved" with me. The verbal emphasis surprises Shinichi, and he narrows his eyes at KID. "I thought he was going to have a heart attack."

"You thought I would hide it from Hakuba." They’re alone on a long stretch of straight road, the early morning light making the ground under them gleam, long white divider lines stretching ahead of them like an arrow offering directions. The grass, beneath the thin layer of snow, peeks out green, and the landscape offers gentle hills and thin treelines, and in the distance, the crests of mountains wait for their approach. "Why?"

"Why wouldn’t you?" KID asks in reply. "I know that you… want to be with me, but it’s another thing entirely for that want to be public knowledge." KID’s gaze flicks over to him, and then back to the empty road. Light catches in his hair, turning it a burnished chestnut, and he's lovely like this, just wearing his blue jeans, a sweatshirt and a lazy smile. "Not that Hakuba is public knowledge or anything, but he is more than just you and me, and I’m not… What normal boys bring home to their parents with an omiyage, you know?"

Oi oi, Shinichi thinks, fisting his hands on his lap, and wishing he had on his father’s oversized glasses to hide behind. Emotions are difficult, even at the best of times, when Shinichi knows what all of them are. What he hears in KID’s voice, and feels the echo of in his own chest, is something new and unfathomable: a code without a key.
He takes a deep breath.

"KID, I solve murders daily, I spent the last two years undercover as an elementary-schooler, and I’m currently driving across France with a known international thief trying to discover the secret to immortality. Do I strike you as a ‘normal boy’?" Shinichi scratches his cheek. "I also don’t need my parents’ approval for anything, but my mom already knows and likes you, so I don’t know why I’d have to introduce you to her. Or my dad, really, since she’s probably told him everything about you already."

KID’s hand tightens on the steering wheel.

"Your mom likes me as your friend and as Kuroba Toichi’s son," KID’s jaw muscle works, and Shinichi picks this response apart from all angles, trying to figure out what KID actually wants to know. "Not as…"

KID lets it trail off, and Shinichi licks his teeth thoughtfully. "I’m not a very good liar," he says, finally. "Besides, I think the both of us have lied enough to the people close to us, don’t you?"

"I don’t know about that," KID says, aiming for joking, but it comes out hollow. "Inspector Nakamori is a real delight when he’s fuming, and he fumes the best when I tell him outrageous lies." His grin doesn’t reach his eyes.

Shinichi faces forward, taking in the kilometers of road lying in front of them, leading the way toward a dangerous confrontation. "Eventually, I’m going to tell Haibara and Ran and Hattori. And yeah, my parents, too," he adds, thinking of his mother’s inevitable excited reaction to Shinichi being interested in anything that isn’t Sherlock Holmes, cars, or murder. "It’s not like you aren’t going to be around for a long time in my life, and it’s easier to just…" He runs a hand through his hair. "I have a lot of secrets to keep. You don’t have to be one of them. At least not from my family."

"And what about Hakuba?" KID asks, lightly, his gloved hands obviously tight on the steering wheel. "Was it really to keep him from following us around or trying to track us?"

"In part, yes," Shinichi says. "And to throw him off track about the Kaitou KID stuff." Shinichi leans his head back. He hates the interior of this car. "Mostly, though, I didn’t like how he didn’t even consider it, despite all the evidence."

"He probably overestimates my self-preservation," jokes KID, his voice a little tight. "And underestimates your masochism."

"I also wanted to make it clear to you that you could tell anyone you wanted." He smiles at the ugly ceiling of the hatchback. "Even Hakuba, who you pretend not to like." Shinichi swallows. "Because I… you’re important. It’ll be obvious to the people who know me that you’re important."

"Shinichi," KID says, pulling off the road and onto a strip of concrete serving as a highway rest, and putting the car into park before twisting in his seat to stare at him. "Did you simultaneously give me a never-ending alibi, trick Hakuba into feeling guilty about stalking me, and publicly admit to being mine all over the course of one conversation with Hakuba Saguru?"

"Yes," Shinichi meets KID’s gaze. "I’m sorry we didn’t have time to consult about—"

"That’s so hot," says KID, reaching out to grab two handfuls of Shinichi’s shirt and drag him into a kiss.

Mouth slanting slick and hot over Shinichi’s, KID pushes in closer, all jasmine and warmth, and Shinichi licks at the soft skin just inside KID’s lips as he pushes back with equal fervor. KID’s
tongue flickers against Shinichi’s in a tease, and Shinichi groans, letting his eyes fall closed as KID’s eyelashes tickle his left cheek, barely noticing the way KID’s knuckles dig into his sternum as they press together.

Shinichi gives as good as he gets, unable to keep himself from competing, because that’s the way it is with them, taunts and tricks and curiosity neither of them can let go of. He can feel the tinge of wildness hiding behind the tangible smirk, the frayed edges of KID’s poker face peeling away with every nip of KID’s lower lip between Shinichi’s teeth and every gasp KID swallows after a sweep of his tongue against the roof of Shinichi’s mouth.

And Shinichi had always thought falling for someone was a cliche made up by movies and romance novels, more metaphorical than realistic. But here, crushed against the fabric-covered car seat, elbows knocking plastic, Shinichi can feel himself teetering on the edge of a cliff, and below him is the stormy ocean of KID’s eyes, waiting for him to let himself tumble into the waves.

It wouldn’t be so bad, Shinichi thinks, to spend more time letting KID wash into him, over him. Releasing Shinichi’s coat with one gloved hand, KID brings cool leather up to cup his cheek as their kiss gentles, lips clinging to Shinichi’s as their noses bump against each other. Shinichi tangles one hand in KID’s hair to keep him where he is, tilting right to taste him deeper, and KID moans, the sound reverberating down along Shinichi’s spine and tempting him to slide his hand down the back of KID’s neck, past the freckle behind his ear, and skate his fingers across KID’s sensitive clavicles to earn another noise.

When he allows KID to pull away from him, KID smiles against his lips, his thumb rubbing back and forth along Shinichi’s cheekbone. "Just for that, I’ll take my gun apart for you twice." His words are half mumble, half gasp, and low in his register, and Shinichi is overwhelmed by how much he likes KID’s voice like that.

"That… isn’t an innuendo, is it?" Shinichi asks breathlessly, hands falling into his lap, and KID laughs.

"What do you think?" KID teases, a satisfied cat that got the canary as he leans back into his own seat, long, agile fingers wrapping back around the gear shift before he shifts into first gear. "You ready to get back on the road?"

Outside, it’s started to snow again, but all Shinichi feels is warm.

"I think you’re a pervert." Shinichi ignores the wiggling eyebrows he gets in response, and presses one hand against his stomach, where it seems to be flopping around unnecessarily at the sun in KID’s hair and the brightness of his grin. He looks out the passenger-side window instead. "I’m not the one that pulled us off the road. We still have five hours of driving left to Lozère."

"Only five hours until we get to play with murderers and search for the secret to immortality, all while trying to keep from getting killed!" KID fiddles with the radio, and a radio DJ starts to babble on in French with a laugh track behind her.

When Shinichi returns his gaze to him, he seems inordinately cheerful despite his words, and as Shinichi watches him pull back out onto the highway, he wonders what he would do, now, if he lost KID, who has somehow, like Ran, tangled himself up into the beating of Shinichi’s heart.

"We’ll be fine," says Shinichi, memorizing the quirk of uneven lips and the laser-like focus hidden behind the mirth in KID’s expression.
"Naturally," KID replies, lips stretching into a wider smile. "Me and you? That’s a crack team."

"It is," agrees Shinichi, and turns all of his thoughts toward a castle in the mountains.

They drive for two and a half hours to a soundtrack of French rap and KID’s rambling high school prank anecdotes, passing two toll booths before merging onto the A75.

"We have to take exit 39.1," Shinichi says, checking the hotel-watermarked stickynote he’d scribbled from the directions he’d pulled up earlier. "Eventually."

"164 kilometers." KID winks at him when Shinichi gapes. "It’ll be a while, so just relax."

KID had only looked at the directions over Shinichi’s shoulder briefly. Shinichi wonders when he’ll stop being surprised by KID’s memory, which seems, to Shinichi, second only to his intelligence. "I didn’t realize you’d looked so closely at the directions."

"Have to know where I’m going. Much less difficult than memorizing the floor plan of a museum."

"I’m sure. You’d make a good detective."

"I make a better jewel thief." KID’s eyes flick up to the rearview mirror, and he shifts gears, slowing down. "I like creating new challenges, not solving ones that other people have made." He speeds up again, and then frowns.

"What’s wrong? Why are you changing speeds?"

"Check out the car behind us." When Shinichi moves to turn around and look between the seats, KID lifts his hand from the stick to stop him. "No, use the mirror."

Shinichi peeks in the side mirror. "2007 Bugatti Veyron in red and black," he says automatically, taking in the matte paint job and the custom wheels. "Now that is a car."

"You’re such a nerd." KID shifts to an even higher speed. "Pay attention."

The car behind them, one of the only other cars on the road, keeps pace with them perfectly. "How long has it been following us?"

"I noticed back on the A10, after we got back on the road, but there was more traffic so I thought it was a coincidence. After we went through that second toll, I realized we were being tailed."

"Rather inexpertly." Shinichi wraps his fingers around his seatbelt and tugs, testing the give. "Can I borrow your gun?"

"Going to blow out the tires?" Faster than Shinichi can blink, the heavy weight of KID’s card gun appears in his lap.

"Only if I have to," Shinichi replies, testing the feel of it in his hand. "Just how good a driver are you?"

KID grins deviously. "Very," he says, and Shinichi nods. "Are you telling me we’re about to get into a genuine car chase, Meitantei?"

"Can you handle it?" Shinichi asks, keeping his eyes on the Bugatti as KID veers the car left, the road ahead full of cars driving at a much slower pace.

"Are you talking to me?" KID turns off the radio. "I was born to get into car chases! I just thought
"You didn’t want to be Bonnie and Clyde."

"Are you ever going to let that go?"

"That depends. Are you ever going to change my name into something other than ‘BONNIE’ in your phone?" KID replies immediately, as he takes the first exit on his left. A sign warns for winding roads ahead, and a single lane, but he doesn’t look worried.

"Yeah, to moron." Shinichi grips the card gun tighter in his hand. "That Bugatti can accelerate from 120 kilometers per hour to 290 in ten seconds. Are you really able to outmaneuver it in a hatchback on a bumpy single lane road?"

The Bugatti has followed them down the exit ramp, and at the end of it is a narrow road with almost no traffic, with gravel pull-off points to allow traffic to flow in both directions.

"Your vendetta against our poor Clio is going to give it a complex." KID takes the turn hard, and Shinichi reaches up to grip the handle just above the window. "Besides, Kaitou KID can outmaneuver anyone. A car with that much engine is wasted on a mediocre driver."

They’re running out of straight road. "We just need to lose our tail," says Shinichi. "Don’t show off."

"Showing off is how I plan on losing our tail." KID’s smile borders on manic as they approach a wide curve in the road, and right as they round the turn, he shifts gears and floors the gas pedal, accelerating to 190 kilometers per hour before pulling out of the turn. The wheels screech as they skid across asphalt, and KID laughs. "This road is going to be perfect."

"You mean dangerous," Shinichi corrects, as KID pushes the Clio to its limits, the engine rattling as the speedometer arrow peaks just past 200 kilometers per hour. Shinichi’s palms are sweating.

"Like I said: perfect." KID doesn’t look nervous at all. Instead, his eyes are almost bright enough to be feverish, and the smile cutting across his face like a gash is predatory.

"You would be an adrenaline junkie."

"And you’re not?" KID replies, taking another turn at speeds that have gravel flying out in a spray, and grinding underneath them as they catch the shoulder. The driver of the Bugatti knows he’s been spotted, now. All attempts at subtlety are abandoned as it rockets forward, easily catching up to them with the sports car’s superior specs. "That’s right, little sports car. Come on in closer to Clio-chan."

"I don’t think it can hear you," Shinichi mutters, analyzing the road ahead. A path is paved up the mountain in slalom, treacherous even at a moderate pace. "Shouldn’t you slow down?"

As he speaks, the window rolls down on the Bugatti, and someone leans out the passenger-side window with a gun in hand. "Not unless you want to get shot," answers KID. "Both of us have been there and done that this year, don’t you think?"

Shinichi grits his teeth, and thinks. As he checks behind them again, he notices that the passenger’s long hair drags in the wind generated by the high speeds, whipping into his face. "That’s our last fake Louis Redhouse."

"If the Not-Maisonrouge is waving a gun around, who’s driving?" KID spins the steering wheel, releasing it entirely before catching it as the car starts to veer sharply left. "Let’s find out, shall we?"

They ascend the mountain at a pace that has Shinichi’s heart in his throat, the Bugatti falling behind as it brakes for the turns, not as confident or as reckless as KID, who still looks like he’s having the
time of his life racing a city-driving car up a mountain road at high speeds.

"You’re taking years off my life," Shinichi informs him as the right back wheel of the car spins over nothing but air for a few moments when they skirt the edge of a particularly wicked turn, the Clio wobbling as it accelerates forward on the other three wheels.

"It’s true that you’ve aged ten years since we’ve started hanging out," KID immediately replies, and despite everything, Shinichi laughs, high on adrenaline interspersed with spikes of fear. "Everything ahead is straight for almost a kilometer. Not much, but you should have just enough space to take a couple of shots."

Shinichi unfastens his seatbelt and rolls down the window as they start down the straight, watching the nose of the Bugatti appear around the turn and leaning half his body out the window to fire back at the Redhouse lookalike. The card hits him directly in the forehead and he slumps down, folded in half on either side of the narrow door, hair dragging as the Bugatti continues to chase them. He takes a second shot and this time catches the right front tire, and when it explodes from the impact combined with the speed pressure, the sports car skids wildly, slamming into the mountainside.

"Stop the car, KID!"

KID does, slowing down enough that Shinichi is able to exit the car without waiting for a complete stop. Sure enough, he smells gas, and that has him racing forward. He pushes the unconscious Redhouse doppleganger back through the window, and then lets the door swing upward to open. He starts dragging the man, whose forehead is bleeding from the gash left by the metal edged card, out and away from the car.

"I’ve got him," KID says, checking the man over with a cursory glance. "He was unconscious when they crashed, so I doubt he even has whiplash, lucky bastard. Worry about the driver."

Shinichi turns back to the car, the smell of diesel making him slightly nauseated as he climbs into the passenger side. There’s blood on the driver’s side door window and running down the unconscious woman’s face, and her arm is grotesquely broken, bone piercing skin at the jagged point of break.

"No time to check for spinal injuries," he says aloud, and then reaches for the woman’s seatbelt, unfastening it and letting her slump toward him. He catches her at the shoulder, preventing her falling on to her broken arm, then slides a hand under her thighs before carefully edging backward, out of the car.

When he’s pulled her completely free of the wreckage, he carries her up the hill, toward where KID has the Bugatti’s passenger bound hand and foot with silvery duct tape. The man is awake, now, but bleary-eyed, the blood dripping down the sharp jut of his nose-bridge drawing a sharp contrast to the pallor of his skin.

"Any ID on her?" KID asks, as Shinichi gently lays her down near the Clio. Behind him, he hears the Bugatti bursting into flames, and when he looks over his shoulder, he watches as the glossy red and black paint is destroyed by fire. He sighs, because it was a nice car, the kind his mother favors, and returns his attention to the driver.

She has no wallet on her, and her handbag has been consumed by the disaster behind them, but slipped into her back pocket, there is a credit card. "Aimee Durand."

"If a member of the Durand family was driving the car with someone working for Kanami’s organization…"
"Then they know where the castle is already," Shinichi replies. "They just wanted to kill us before we got there."

"How did they know we were headed there?"

"Maybe they followed us from Paris, somehow." KID lightly smacks the man’s cheek. "Hey, you, why were you following us?" KID asks in English. The man blinks at him, so KID repeats the question in Japanese.

"Supposed to kill you," the man says with a sneer, in broken Japanese, and KID rolls his eyes.

"Why?" The man doesn’t respond, and KID sighs. "It will be very painful and humiliating for you if you make this difficult for me. Especially the humiliating part.” When the man grimaces, confused and wary, KID starts to speak in French, possibly repeating what he’s just said, all the while searching the man’s pockets.

He comes away with a prepaid flip phone and hands it to Shinichi, who immediately dials the emergency number to get an ambulance for the driver. As Shinichi reports the incident, meager on truth but ample in emphasizing the injuries of the driver, KID quizzes the man, his questions obviously sharp and pointed even though Shinichi can’t understand the content of them.

"Well?"

"Yesterday’s hogtied Paris doppleganger recognized you from the Japanese news," KID says shortly. "Reported in that the famous Kudou Shinichi was in Paris, and someone higher up gave orders to take us out when he got the chance. He was supposed to get us in Paris, but our unexpected road trip threw him off. He and Durand followed us out here waiting for an opportunity to corner us, especially when they realized we might be headed out to Lozére."

"Why was a member of the Durand family with him?"

"Financial trouble that Arbogast refused to bail them out of, apparently." KID sighs. "Not sure any financial trouble is worth signing up for an evil syndicate bent on destroying a family friend, but then again, I’m a world-famous thief."

"We probably don’t have much time," Shinichi says. "We’ll make it before the moonrise, but will we make it before whoever is coming for Pandora with two keys and a target fixed on Vermouth, who has the other three all together?"

"Vermouth is gunning for them, too," KID reminds him. "Let’s return to our noble Clio, and head back toward the A75. We’re lucky there’s a shoulder to drive around. We can be in Lozère in under two hours."

"Noble Clio?"

"Your fancy sports car is in flames, Meitantei. The hatchback wins this round."

"I thought that was all to do with the driver," Shinichi says, casting one last look at the bound man with a cut on his forehead, and the injured woman still pale and unconscious on the side of the road. He hopes the two cards he fired are eaten up by the flames.

When he looks back at KID, he’s leering. "I am rather talented with a stick shift," he says, and Shinichi rolls his eyes.

"Shut up," he retorts, slumping into the car as KID circles around to the other side and gets back in.
He backs into the shoulder and carefully edges around the flaming wreck of the Bugatti. "It feels wrong to leave them, even if the ambulance will be here in twenty minutes."

"They’ll be okay," KID says. "I didn’t tape Not-Maisonrouge-Number-Four’s hands very tightly. He should be free in the next five minutes, and he can watch out for Miss Durand." Back on empty road again, KID speeds up the car. "And that means we should have ten minutes to spare getting back out onto the highway before the ambulance turns down this mountain path."

Shinichi fastens his seatbelt and resigns himself to a fast downhill trip. His thoughts, though, are elsewhere, back with the driver and with Marc Arbogast, back in Paris. "The entire plan to protect Pandora, whatever it is, was unravelled by two weak links in the chain. Only two."

"That’s why you have to be careful about who you tell your secrets to," says KID, eyes fixed on the road when Shinichi gives him his full attention. "Especially when they’re important, scary secrets."

Shinichi knows the weight of secrets, as does KID. Still, they do feel lighter when they’re together. "Your secrets are safe with me," he says.

"And yours with me," replies KID.

"I know." Shinichi smells diesel, the smell clinging to his clothes and skin, and he wishes he could move a little closer to KID, and smell jasmine instead. "Instinctively, I’ve always known that, even before I knew everything about you I know now."

"Same here." KID reaches out and turns on the radio. "Imagine that."

* * *

Old snow reaches up the rocky trails like clawing hands, giving way at the top to frozen grass and limestone. The mid-afternoon sun beams down on them, just enough to keep Shinichi from shivering. Winter is harsher out here in the countryside than it had been in Paris, nothing to protect them from the cutting wind or the biting cold.

They’d left the car some six kilometers ago, carrying only the château blueprints sticking out of KID’s backpack, two sandwiches, and the map Shinichi is holding, with the approximate GPS coordinates of Arbogast’s castle inked with a star, just like his father’s map of Paris.

"Don’t you feel a little like Indiana Jones right now?" KID asks, adjusting the neck of his coat as more wind blows, whipping flakes of frozen snow about their ankles. "Trekking into the unknown to look for an amazing ancient artifact…" He laughs. "Or whatever Pandora is. We even have a couple of bonafide treasure maps!"

"It shouldn’t be too much farther," Shinichi says, scanning the path ahead of him. "We’ll make it before sundown."

"We’d have made it much faster if we’d taken the service road," KID says. "I know we have to be wary of noise and cameras, but does it really matter if they know we’re coming?"

"Depends on who the ‘they’ is," says Shinichi grimly. "If we’ve been beaten up here by anyone connected with Kanami, a stealthy entrance will be what we have going for us."

"If only I had all of my tools," KID pushes a hand through his hair, revealing ears pink from the cold. His lips are chapped. "Especially the glider. We could have cut this track in half." He stops, curving his hand over his eyes to block out the sun. "Although it’s beautiful out here."
"A good place to build your isolated castle of immortality," Shinichi dryly replies, and KID laughs, breathless, eyes sparkling under the shade offered by his hand. Shinichi swallows heavily. "I’m just glad I’m physically capable of this."

"It’s…” KID drops his hand from his face, smile transforming into something infinitely softer, and then adjusts the weight of his backpack as he continues to meet Shinichi’s eyes. "It’s easy to forget that you were just a tiny, sick detective only a few days ago."

"Is it?" Shinichi asks, and KID snorts, turning away to start picking his way up the path again. Ragged slices of granite form almost stairs as they ascend, KID’s natural grace picking the simplest way to climb.

"No," says KID, after a while. "It’s just that the you walking up here with me is the person I always saw in that little Edogawa Conan body."

"I took off my disguise," Shinichi says. "And now I’m… only me. High School Detective Kudou Shinichi."

"I don’t think you’re only anything," says KID. "And definitely not only a detective. If you were, I wouldn’t be nearly as fond of you."

"Because detectives are merely critics following in the footsteps of artists like you?" That’s what KID had told him, the first time they met face to face, Shinichi as Edogawa Conan setting off fireworks on the roof, and KID eager to outwit Nakamori and draw out the real Black Star Opal.

"Because most of them lack imagination," KID says. "Logic will get you from A to B, but—"

"Imagination will take you everywhere." Shinichi smoothes his fingers along a crease in the map. "Einstein. It’s just a little further now, if Haibara was right."

"Is she wrong very often?" KID looks over his shoulder at Shinichi.

"No, and especially not when she and Hattori are working together."

"You’ve surrounded yourself with brilliant people."

Shinichi thinks of Ran, of Haibara, of Heiji, of the officers of Division 1. Of Akai Shuuichi, Jodie and Camel, of his parents, and even of the Detective Boys, who aren’t brilliant yet, but might be someday, when Shinichi gets to see them again. "I have," Shinichi agrees. "Maybe I’m not that unlucky, after all."

They reach a plateau, and the path levels instead of ascending. In the distance, the castle rises from the landscape, looking like it’s emerged straight from a storybook. "Definitely Greek neoclassicism," KID says. "Look at those pillars."

In contrast to the carefully preserved older French castles displayed on the tourist brochures at the petrol station where they’d stopped to refill the tank at the first small town in Lozère they’d passed, the castle before them is far more symmetrical, resembling the Arc de Triomphe more than anything else, and the giant dome-like structure rising high above the rest of the castle, green copper peeling, shimmers in the light.

"You know," KID says, as they pick their way over to the castle, abandoning the path as KID scans for egresses, "Greek neoclassicism didn’t catch on in France, as far as architecture goes, the same way it did in Italy, Russia and Germany, probably because of Napoleon III."
"The guy responsible for the Palais Garnier. The opera house." KID shoots him a pleased grin, and Shinichi flushes. "I was listening!"

"Yes, Meitantei, that guy. His Second Empire aesthetic really nipped that Greek revival in the bud. Which means this castle was the height of fashion for maybe fifteen years, max." KID reaches behind him to pat the blueprints. "He would have been better off sticking with Renaissance style architecture." Then he grins. "But it’s better for us that he didn’t."

"Why?"

"Because once we get past that gate, there are going to be hundreds of ways to get inside the castle itself, thanks to the trends." KID holds up four fingers. "Fountains, follies, grottos, and hundreds of windows."

"What about an alarm system?" The grounds inside the fence are visible, now, filled with ostentatious statues of Cupid with over-the-top gold detailing and almost grotesque gargoyles.

"I’m a professional thief," KID replies. "The gate is the real problem. We’re going to need a distraction, and it’s going to have to look natural." He scans the view in front of him, and points. "How about we blow up that car?"

"I thought you said natural?" Shinichi rubs the back of his neck. It’s cold to the touch. "And that’s a Lamborghini. A two-million-USD distraction."

"I’m just teasing you, detective. There should be somewhere more obscured to make our entrance. After all, it’s not really Arbogast we’re hiding from, it’s whoever else might be here."

Breaking into a heavily guarded castle is something KID does with a finesse that makes it look easy. Shinichi watches him twist and shimmy his way between iron bars and then carefully cut one all the way through with a handheld saw powered with a watch battery. It creates a space just large enough for them both to enter into the flowering garden, filled with winter mimosa blossoms on the menton trees that light up the entire back of the impressive castle in yellow as bright as sunlight.

As the sun sinks in the west, KID effortlessly takes apart one of the two-meter-high windows and gestures Shinichi inside, shoes too loud on the marble floors as he quietly puts the window back.

When KID walks, seeming to intuitively know where they’re going, his footsteps don’t make a sound, even if they do leave dirt behind on the floor.

KID grabs Shinichi’s arm as they approach the corner. We need to find the front entryway he taps against Shinichi’s wrist in Morse. Shinichi nods at him. Follow.

KID in his element, Shinichi thinks. He couldn’t appreciate it when they were escaping Mercier’s house, because he was too tired, too shocked, and too cold. But now, even sweaty from an almost eight kilometer hike and anxious about what they’ll find, KID, creeping around like the skilled international thief he is, is certainly something to watch. Shinichi smiles wryly to himself, and remembers other times KID’s substantial body of skills have come in handy to solve a crime. He’d never really appreciated just how useful it was to team up with a thief before.

When they reach the front, KID, somehow having an instinctive grasp of a truly perplexing layout and, Shinichi assumes, using the windows as a guide, finds his way to the front entryway. What waits for them there is blood. Enough blood that Shinichi knows someone is definitely bleeding out. He and KID exchange a look that speaks volumes, and Shinichi shifts to take point.
The blood forms a trail, and they follow it, Shinichi’s gut heavy as though filled with stones. It looks, to his trained eye, as though someone has dragged themselves from the front entrance of the castle to the room coming up in front of them, down a series of complex hallways that seem to curve and twist with no rhyme or reason. *Just like Takeuchi’s mansion*. Another hunch proven correct.

The room they finally find, door ajar and books spilled to the ground, is forbidding, filled with axe-bearing suits of medieval armor and paintings on the wall that are clearly portraits of long-deceased family members, all with the same long noses that Shinichi had noted on Marc Arbogast when they visited him in that Paris holding cell. A fire roars in the hearth to combat the wintry drafts that clung to them in the halls. Vases—Ming, Shinichi thinks—line the top of the fireplace, incongruous with the armor. Expensive, clearly old tables and chairs fill the room, books covering most of the available surfaces save for the sofa, where someone has clearly recently slept, and the table in front of it, where an ashtray sits, a half-smoked cigar propped on the lip.

And there, sprawled across a Persian rug, bleeding out from several gunshot wounds to the belly, is Claude Arbogast, in a tailored camel-colored suit turned almost completely red-brown across his torso.

Shinichi jumps into action, scanning the room until he finds the sofa, and quickly grabs the cushions. He stacks them under Arbogast’s legs, elevating them to try to slow the blood flow, and KID lifts the man’s head to rest it on another pillow stolen from one of the plush chairs.

"Still breathing, but his pulse is weak," KID murmurs around one of his gloves, bare fingers pressed to the man’s neck at the pulse point. "Monsieur Arbogast, *parlez-vous anglais*?"

"Oui," Claude Arbogast answers, opening his eyes to look at KID. "My last wife was English." He tries to laugh, but it chokes him, and his face contorts with pain. "I know your face, young man."

"You do?"

"You’re Toichi’s son." Arbogast blinks with heavy eyes. "You’ll need to protect Pandora from them."

"What is it?" Shinichi asks, and Arbogast’s gaze drifts to him. His eyes are hazy. "What is Pandora?"

"A good question," Arbogast rasps. "The answer is… complicated."

"If we’re going to protect it," KID says, "we need to know what we’re protecting."

"Do you know the legend of Pandora?" Arbogast takes a deep, shuddering breath.

KID bites his lip, two fingers still at Arbogast’s pulse, but his eyes are on the doorway behind Shinichi. The halls are quiet, too quiet.

"Pandora could not resist the temptation of opening the box, and she let all the horrors out into the world," Shinichi says. Haibara often reminds him of the story, especially in relation to phone numbers he shouldn’t call if he wanted to keep living.

"The mistranslation to ‘Pandora’s Box’ is all thanks to Erasmus of Rotterdam. The original Greek word Hesiod used was *pithos*."

"Meaning a storage jar, made of ceramic, used for storing oil or grain." KID’s tone is speculative.

"Or wine," Claude says. "And the wine we are protecting is very special."
"It’s a drink?" Shinichi asks, leaning forward. "Pandora is a drink?"

"It can stop aging," the man says. "It’s also addictive." He swallows harshly. "The more you drink of Pandora, the more you need Pandora. The physical feeling of withdrawal combined with the physical effects of your body playing catch-up…" He closes his eyes. "And once consumed, the properties of Pandora can change."

"Ver… Sharon Vineyard's blood healed me," Shinichi tells the man quietly. "I thought I was dead, but she fed me her blood, and it not only stopped me from dying from a gunshot wound, but it fixed all my other problems too."

"That is the power of Pandora." With shaking hands, Arbogast starts to unbutton his blood-soaked shirt. "Imagine being able to help any child dying of illness. Of being able to save people caught in tragic accidents. That is what Elena Miyano wanted to do."

The wounds on his stomach are healing in front of Shinichi’s eyes, the bleeding slowed dramatically and the holes closing up, pink flesh appearing where there had only been certain death spelled out with bullets.

"Elena Miyano?" KID asks.

Haibara’s mother. The *apoptoxin*. Shinichi exhales. "She wanted to make a universal panacea."

"Yes," Claude Arbogast says. He’s still pale, and Shinichi wonders if the bullets are still inside of him, or if, like Shinichi, his bullets are gone. "But the people she worked for… they wanted immortality. Not a limited resource, like Pandora, but something chemical, that they could reproduce and sell to the highest bidders."

"They used Sharon Vineyard’s blood in their formula," Shinichi tells him. "And it created a poison that causes mass cell death. Victims are completely destroyed down to the last cell, save for a few exceptions, who are aged backward."

"How interesting," Arbogast says. "The power of modern science allows for many things."

"It’s not interesting," says Shinichi. "It’s horrifying."

Arbogast’s eyes are clearer when he opens them to meet Shinichi’s gaze again. "When we found Pandora, a long time ago, we only thought of the good it would do. There were six of us on the research team, and we created a system that required us to all be together to access it, every ten years. I built this castle, isolated from the world, and devised a system to protect it that required five keys and me. Now, I’m the only original member of that discovery party left. Everyone else came one by one into the fold, bearing the key of the person who had preceded them. I have become… accustomed to immortality. Arrogant."

"Would that man did not fear death," KID says, and Arbogast smiles.

"As well read as your father, I see," he chuckles. "He was a good man." He then says something in French, and KID stares down at him in surprise, his face slightly slack.

Shinichi clenches his hands into fists. "Who shot you?" Both KID and Arbogast turn to look at him. "There’s someone else in this old castle, and they clearly wanted you to die. Did you tell them how to access Pandora?"

"No," Arbogast says to Shinichi. "I would have been shot either way, so I didn’t tell." He returns his focus to KID. "You will need to take my hand to get to Pandora."
"Take your hand?" KID’s brow furrows. "What do you mean?"

"Didn’t tell who?" Shinichi insists, interrupting. "If you——"

"Didn’t tell me," says a familiar voice behind Shinichi, where the door is, and Shinichi has only moments to curse his inattention before four shots are fired, right into Arbogast’s face. A gun presses into his temple as an arm locks around his body, and Shinichi registers the feeling of breasts pressing into his back as Takeuchi Makoto, Scarlette Shinamoto’s bereaved lover, steps into the room.

Of course, Shinichi thinks. Takeuchi, the private eye, Kanami, the hospital. The thoughts come too quickly to completely process, and his heart is racing at the feeling of cold steel against the skin of his forehead. Fire has left the room hot, and with his coat, his body has gone sticky with sweat.

Takeuchi’s gun is pointing at KID as the woman behind Shinichi clicks the safety off, the muzzle of the .45 digging into his skin. "My, my, Kudou Shinichi. I wasn’t expecting you here. You must really be related to that little pest boy Kanami was so worried about."

"We’re cousins," Shinichi says flatly, and Takeuchi raises an eyebrow as he straightens his tie.

"I see." He shifts his grip on the gun. Shinichi’s heart is hammering. "You’re not surprised to see me here, detective?"

"Hospitals can have labs, and research centers," Shinichi says, revulsion riding the coat-tails of realization. "You’re preparing to do something with Pandora. That hospital isn’t about charity at all."

"Thousands of underprivileged test subjects, unable to protest. Scarlette’s legacy. I did like her, you know? But her father was part of Arbogast’s research team, so she was a means to an end." He walks further into the room, and then looks at the woman behind Shinichi. She smells of blood and cosmetic powder, and Shinichi doesn’t know her. "If this boy moves even a millimeter…" he gestures to KID with the gun, "kill Kudou."

"Yes, sir," she says. Her voice is low and equally unfamiliar. A new element. KID’s hands are shaking, blood speckled all over the front of his clothes, and he’s looking between Arbogast and Shinichi in horror. Shinichi’s heart aches for him. KID, for all his daring, isn’t as used to death as Shinichi is. He hopes KID never will be.

Takeuchi steps over the body, skirting KID to stay out of his range, and walks over to one of the suits of armor on the wall. Thoughtfully, he runs an index finger down the handle of the metal axe, and then, tucking his gun into his belt, hefts it with both hands.

"Do you know why Arbogast built his castle here?" Takeuchi does a test swing with the slightly rusted axe. "It’s because people have always been a bit wary of this part of the Margeride Mountains. Have you ever heard of La Bête du Gévaudan?"

"The Beast of Gévaudan." KID asks, following every minute movement of Takeuchi’s bloody fingers.

"Is that a legend?" Shinichi asks, and Takeuchi looks over his shoulder and smiles. "Or…"

"It was a wolf that ate people all across the region. Almost 100 kilometers of land terrorized by a wolf that tore the throats out of its victims and ate them. Over two hundred people were attacked, which was no small number for this area. It couldn’t be killed with normal bullets, and when it was finally killed, they tore open its stomach with an axe like this and human body parts fell out." He raises an eyebrow.
KID shivers, looking slightly ill, and Shinichi licks his dry lips. Takeuchi simply looks amused.

"So building here encouraged isolation."

"Yes," Takeuchi says. "But that old man"—he points with the axe at Arbogast—"had friends. Friends like my grandfather and like Durand, who gave him up for chump-change. And that was ultimately the undoing of a three centuries-long mystery."

He turns back to KID and approaches slowly with the axe in hand. Instinctively, KID rears back, catching his weight with his hands as his butt lands on the floor. Takeuchi smiles cruelly, a mockery of the fond smile he must have been faking when he spoke of his deceased lover all those months ago, sitting across from Megure with tears in his eyes.

Swinging the axe, Takeuchi brings it down right in front of KID once, then twice, severing Arbogast’s head sloppily from his body. Blood splashes everywhere, this time onto KID’s shoes and jeans, and KID’s face is so pale.

"Heal yourself from that, old man," Takeuchi says, dropping the axe and retrieving his gun, pointing it again at KID.

"Are you one of the crows?" Shinichi asks. "The men in black?" He’s pretty sure he knows the answer, but he has to buy time. Time for KID to think of a plan like the escape artist he is.

"The crows?" Takeuchi straightens his pocket square with bloody fingers. His hair falls across his face, making him look suddenly menacing. "That’s a good name for them, in the absence of the real one. I used to be."

Keep him talking, Shinichi thinks desperately. He’s clearly an egoist, so all Shinichi has to do is ask the right questions.

"Why?" He watches as Takeuchi studies him speculatively. "Is it because of Kanami-san?"

"I found out about them through her, yes. She originally came to work for my grandfather in an effort to find out more about Claude Arbogast on a long term undercover mission." His tone is almost conversational. "Gaining me, the grandchild of the man with friend who liked planes as much as he did and just so happened to be able to recall parts of the French Revolution from living through it… Well, gaining that child for her organization was an unexpected bonus." He grins. "Some of us have to pull the strings in the upper echelons of society, and make connections."

"Like Pisco," Shinichi says, and Takeuchi’s eyes widen. "Masuyama Kenzou."

"You did do your research, at least." Takeuchi taps his chin. "You might prove useful."

"Why was Kanami-san working with Bourbon and Chianti if you’re done with those guys in black?"

Takeuchi actually gapes at him for a moment, before he laughs. "They do call you the Heisei Holmes, don’t they? Or they did, before you disappeared." He tilts his head, and the firelight reflects eerily in his eyes. "Bourbon and Chianti… it was a situation that enabled us to kill two birds with one stone. Bourbon is probably a NOC, and was willing to work with us, believing us to also be interested in the takedown of the syndicate. He fed us information and helped to keep us off the radar. In exchange, we helped Chianti track Vermouth. She’s had a vendetta against Vermouth ever since Calvados died, and Vermouth dying fit in excellently with our needs. Your young cousin, Conan-kun, thanks to Vermouth’s personal interest, would have been caught in the crossfire if he hadn’t disappeared, and that too fit into our plans, since he kept sniffing around where he wasn’t wanted."
Shinichi grimaces. "Was Snake yours?"

"What haven’t you figured out?" Takeuchi laughs, and buttons and unbuttons his suit jacket. Despite the bloodstains, he still looks neatly put together. "He was an imbecile. Shooting at KID when KID has information we need. Just as you have skills that I might need." Takeuchi pulls Lady Red out from his shirt, and lets it fall against his chest. Shinichi swallows.

"I won’t help you," Shinichi says firmly, and Takeuchi laughs.

"Everyone has a price. For the grunt in Miyano Shiho’s lab, it was half a million Euro in exchange for all the apoptoxin data so far, including Elena Miyano’s research. Unfortunately, the pesky older daughter and Vermouth ended that source of information a few years ago. And then there was Gin and Vodka. They were interested in some computer scientist who had invented a program capable of duplicating every bit of someone’s DNA, and it only took two unmentionable favors to create enough blackmail to get all the information they had on that project sent my way." He clicks the safety off his gun. "You won’t be money or blackmail. Instead, I’ll bargain with your friend’s life."

Shinichi forces himself to remain still, filing away the information on Itakura Suguru, the murdered software designer, for later contemplation and research.

"That’s your price. I’ll let him live in exchange for your help gaining access to Pandora." He smiles, cold as ice. "I never realized, when I seduced Scarlette, that immortality would so soon be in my reach."

"You won’t let him live. After I help you, you’ll just kill him anyway."

"That’s the same logic as him." He waves a hand at the headless corpse. "It’s a good thing his son isn’t as smart. He delivered Scarlette to me on a silver platter. She was so lonely. It was so easy." He frowns, and a flicker of genuine affection clouds his expression before it clears again. "Look at it this way. If you don’t help me, he dies immediately. If you do, there’s still the chance that I’ll let him live, or that he might escape while I’m distracted."

"What a great deal," Shinichi says. "We could both just die and you might never find Pandora."

"I’ll find it even if I have to tear this whole mansion apart," he says. "You will save me time, and I may reward you with your friend’s life."

Shinichi bristles, and the woman behind him, still trapping his arms by his side and digging her gun into his head, growls in warning. "Don’t move," she whispers into his ear, and Takeuchi sends her an amused look.

"Your friend here resembles you, somewhat," Takeuchi muses, interrupting Shinichi’s train of thought. "But you have no siblings." He stares at KID. "So, we have the famous detective Kudou Shinichi, and a companion. Who might you be?"

His eyes flick to KID’s backpack, where the blueprints stick out, unable to fit completely inside, and his lips part in an expression of unholy delight.

"Well, well, well, if it isn’t Kaitou KID." He turns back, briefly, to Shinichi. "So that’s why you’re here. Because of him. I had this whole thing backwards. You didn’t bring him, he brought you."

KID doesn’t flinch, but Takeuchi seems unperturbed by the lack of a reaction.

"You’re younger than I expected. An apprentice of the old Kaitou 1412? A protege? Or…" He studies KID. "A relative, perhaps?"
KID’s eyes flash, but he doesn’t speak. It’s his poker face, Shinichi thinks, and that almost makes him smile. KID is a professional, even in tough spots, horrified and afraid. Shinichi admires that about him. Maybe later, when they’ve gotten out of this, he’ll tell KID he was a little impressed.

"It doesn’t matter, really," Takeuchi says. "Let me see these famous blueprints. Don’t try anything funny, or Kudou Shinichi will die." KID’s eyes flick quickly over to Shinichi, to the gun at his temple, and then to meet his gaze. Shinichi looks back, solemn and certain, and KID’s lashes flutter in the barest hint of warning, eyes flicking to the ashtray on the table.

Shinichi almost grins, because he’s bought enough time, and now, KID has a plan.

"I don’t particularly want to give you the blueprints," KID says sweetly, dropping into the flirtatious voice that often drives Shinichi up a wall, and then he tosses the blueprints directly into the roaring fire.

It takes a moment for Takeuchi to process the action, and when he realizes what’s happened, his face twists in absolute rage. But it’s too late—KID has dropped a smoke bomb, and bright lavender smoke fills the room, just as Takeuchi fires.

The woman holding Shinichi flinches, and there’s now give for Shinichi to twist free and roll away from her, toward the table. He hears Takeuchi’s snarl of anger, but he ignores it, using his memory to locate the ashtray on the table, and hopes his shoes are thick enough that this isn’t really going to hurt.

The smoke starts to clear just as Shinichi tosses the ashtray in the air, and the woman’s face is poleaxed as Shinichi punts the heavy glass ashtray straight at her head. It’s a perfect hit, and she crumpled to the floor. Shinichi spins around to look for Takeuchi, instead seeing Takeuchi’s gun on the floor, and lunges for it. He grabs it, sliding his finger to the trigger, and points it straight at the back of Takeuchi’s head.

It doesn’t matter, though, because KID has picked up one of the vases from the fireplace and crashes it down on Takeuchi’s head, smashing it to pieces as the man falls unconscious.

"Did you just break a Ming vase?" Shinichi asks, heart racing at top speed as he struggles to catch his breath, somehow tasting the lavender smoke as KID looks at the collapsed man with smug satisfaction.

He looks up at Shinichi, pink and shivering with adrenaline, and grins that infuriating heist grin.

"Meitantei, i’m scandalized. Both that you think I, a true art connoisseur, would break a Ming vase, and that you couldn’t tell that was an amateur Ming forgery."

Shinichi rolls his eyes, dropping Takeuchi’s gun with distaste.

"So now what?" He returns his attention to KID, who is running both hands through his hair. Little flecks of blood stick to his cheeks and neck, and his eyes are fever-bright.

"Now I take us to Pandora." KID’s whole face is lit up, and Shinichi… can’t look away from him. "How much do you want to bet we’re headed toward the ‘Moon Room’?"

"You memorized the floor plans," Shinichi says, and it escapes him with such uncontrollable amounts of affection that both of KID’s eyebrows rise at his tone. But Shinichi can’t help it, because he is, as always, impressed and amazed by KID’s agile mind, his utter dependability. KID is… the perfect partner in all things, and Shinichi’s chest is tight and his heart in his throat.
Shinichi fucking *loves* KID, and the strength of that realization is enough to make his knees weak.

KID catches him. "No need to faint in awe of me, Meitantei." He winks. "Just another one of my specialties."

"Do you ever run out of those?"

"A magician never runs out of tricks." He smirks. "Especially not when they have Meitanteis to impress."

Shinichi wipes away some of the blood splatter on KID’s cheek with his thumb. KID’s skin is warm from the fire, and it takes more effort than it should for Shinichi to refocus on the case, especially considering the headless corpse at their feet and that two syndicate members who’ve been trying to capture KID for months are only going to be unconscious for so long. "There’s a ‘Moon Room’?"

"Remember when I was looking over the plans, back at the hotel this morning?"

"No Neptune," Shinichi replies, dropping his hand and stepping back. KID bites his lower lip, and then pulls out more of the long plastic cord, offering a length of it to Shinichi. "The astronomy theme."

"There’s a room, winding in toward the center of the mansion, labeled with only ‘La Lune’." He starts to tie up the woman, while Shinichi picks his way through the shattered pieces of the Ming replica to tie up Takeuchi.

"And you thought of the Pandora legend you’d been going by before?" He binds Takeuchi’s hands and feet, noting the blood beneath the manicured nails. He’ll have to figure out what to do about the police and evidence later, after they’ve found Pandora. "Something about the full moon?"

"Right," KID says. "Remember, Pandora can only be seen under the moonlight?"

"We thought it was a doublet gem, though." Shinichi stands up and wipes his hands on his jeans. "Does that hold now that we know it’s… something else?"

"I originally heard about Pandora from Snake." KID licks his teeth. "But there was corroboration on some of the records my father left me." He laughs. "Audio recorded onto old forty-fives that play whenever I go down into the workshop."

"And he said it just like that? I need to know exactly what your dad said, KID, because it was probably a puzzle."

KID closes his eyes, and Shinichi watches him intently as he runs a hand through his hair. "Pandora appears under the light of the full moon, and if the gem is held up under the Volley Comet during the full moon, it will cry tears of immortality."

"Under the light of the full moon…” Shinichi turns the words over in his head. "I agree that our best bet is your ‘Moon Room’."

KID opens his eyes and nods. He double-checks the knots in the woman’s binds, and then picks up her gun, taking out the clip and dumping the bullets out into his hand. He walks past Shinichi to Takeuchi’s discarded gun and does the same, then takes all the bullets and pockets them.

"Good idea," Shinichi says, squatting down and ripping Lady Red from Takeuchi, the chain breaking at the force and leaving a cut along the man’s neck. Digging into the inside pockets of his jacket turns up Takizawa’s Cardinal watch, as well.
Shinichi looks over his shoulder when they leave the study, his eyes lingering on Claude Arbogast’s severed head and drifting to the discarded axe. Among all the books, it reminds him of the boarded-up library where everything had started; where the model Scarlette, Genevieve Maisonrouge, had been viciously butchered.

Then he follows KID into the maze-like halls. "There might be others," KID warns.

"I doubt it. If others had come, more people would have known the secret. I don’t think he would have wanted to risk it."

"Still," says KID, "better to be careful."

"Do you know how to be careful?"

KID scoffs. "Of course I do." He tosses a grin at Shinichi as he leads them through a snake-like hall, fingers tracing a granite relief along the way that depicts Sirius, the dog star. "I just usually choose not to be."

"Reassuring." Shinichi’s lips quirk. "Which way?"

KID is staring at two sets of stairs forking in opposite directions, one twisting up left and the other twisting around the right, each leading to darkened halls with more relief carvings.

"The room itself is down," KID says. "But this mansion makes Takeuchi’s look like child’s play, and we’ll have to go up a few more times before we’ll be able to make our way down. If I recall correctly, we’ll have to go left here, and then go down when we find Orion." He reaches out and grabs Shinichi’s wrist. "And let’s be honest, of course I remember correctly."

"Cocky." Shinichi doesn’t hesitate to start up the left staircase, though, as KID chuckles and starts up just behind him.

Some of the halls are unlit and gloomy, Shinichi’s footsteps echoing in contrast to KID’s silent tread, but KID, unlike Shinichi, seems to be able to see in the dark, using the tips of his gloved hand to trace the walls, while his bare hand holds tight to Shinichi’s wrist and pulls him along.

"Wish I had my glasses," Shinichi murmurs. "They have night vision."

"Oh?" KID’s hand tightens slightly. "I knew they had a tracking ability, and that the glass was bulletproof, but I wasn’t aware you had night vision."

"And zoom," Shinichi adds, blinking to try and focus his eyes. "You’re doing all right without anything to help."

"I’m a phantom thief," KID teases, lowly. "I steal things in the dark, detective." The warmth of his fingers disappears from Shinichi’s wrist, and then, moments later, press something into Shinichi’s hand. "If I couldn’t handle crawling around with no light I wouldn’t be much of an infiltrator." His hand retreats.

In surprise, Shinichi lifts his palm to find KID had left behind Shinichi’s father’s modified glasses. They’d been a part of his everyday disguise as Conan, but he hadn’t thought to bring them as Shinichi. "You had these? When did you…?"

"I rather like them on you," KID answers. "They make you look like an even bigger nerd, and you know how much I like nerds. I didn’t know they were so useful, too, but hmmm, glad I took them, now."
Shinichi pushes them on, twisting the arm twice to activate the night vision, and suddenly he can make out the detailed moulding, and the refined reliefs that depict the stars. "Thanks," he grunts. "For bringing them."

"Thank me by wearing them just for me some other time," KID immediately replies, drawling the words out even as he continues to walk at the same steady pace. "Somewhere a little more private."

"I can’t see your face that well even with night vision," says Shinichi. "So you can stop lecherously wiggling your eyebrows."

"But you know I’m wiggling them, so my work here is done."

"Now is not the time to flirt with me." Shinichi’s gaze falls on a particular section of the night sky relief. "Orion, you said?"

"Now, Meitantei, don’t you know? It’s always time to flirt with you." His hand rests just long enough on Shinichi’s hip to fluster him before it’s gone again, and KID is reaching up to run his fingers along the relief. "Well-spotted. I think this is supposed to be Betelgeuse."

"Alpha Orionis," Shinichi agrees. "What now?"

KID drags his fingers down, toward Rigel. "Somewhere here there’s a concealed door. I remember noticing that it was demarcated differently." He hums. "Maybe we have to press something?"

Shinichi examines the relief, eyes automatically filling in the gaps with the lines usually shown connecting the major stars to form the portrait of Orion the Hunter. His gaze narrows in on Orion’s shield, near Pi-3, but he can’t tell if his eyes are playing tricks. "Pi-3."

KID immediately drags his bare fingers up. "Different texture," he confirms. "And a slight crack."

"Push?"

KID does. "Nothing."

Shinichi frowns. "How far down does it go?"

KID follows it down with his hand, and stops when it’s below waist level. "All the way down, I think. Good call, Meitantei." Then KID takes his shoulder and pushes harder, and the wall gives, allowing a gap. Shinichi adds his own weight after a moment, when he remembers he’s big again, big enough to help, and the opening widens enough to reveal another dark, nonlinear hallway that seems to disappear into darkness.

"Kichiemon would be proud," says Shinichi, and then lets KID take the lead again as they walk into the darkness.

They find stairs going down after another ten minutes. They’re made of stone instead of marble, and at the bottom is a circular room with no door, an archway marking the entrance.

The ceiling goes from opaque to translucent, revealing a view of the night sky through the huge glass dome. "That’s some kind of privacy glass," KID says. "From above, it’ll look like opaque flooring, but from down here, we can see right through it." He laughs. "I guess that’s how you can have a secret room right under the glass dome and have no one notice it." The moonlight floods the room, allowing Shinichi to turn off his glasses, and KID walks out into the center of the room. "La Lune."

"So what’s special about this room?" Shinichi starts to walk around it, noting, first and foremost, the
emptiness of it. The walls of the round room lack paintings and decoration, in stark contrast to everywhere else they’ve been in the castle. Nothing but clean marble in every direction, and there’s no molding or detailing down near the floor. At the very center of the room is another Persian rug, but it’s the only thing of note in the room save for the unusual ceiling. "It’s obvious why it’s called La Lune," he gestures upward, "but why…” He steeplets his hands and presses them to the bridge of his glasses.

KID starts to peruse the walls, feeling his way around to check for oddities. "Could be anything," he says, and Shinichi frowns, his eyes falling again to the carpet.

On impulse, he walks further into the room and gets down on his knees. KID looks over at him, but Shinichi pays him no mind, starting to roll the rug up, and once KID realizes what he’s doing, he gets down next to Shinichi to help.

Slowly, a strange image appears, eight circular depressions in the marble that form a circle at the center of the floor. Moonlight makes the floor shimmer, revealing that the circle furthest from them, furthest from the door, is marked with a tiny raised dot just below it. Shinichi leans down to study the depressions, eyes narrowing at the odd unevenness inside each one. "They’re not the same."

"No," KID says. "Each one seems to have individual characteristics. Almost as though something needs to go inside each one. Which means—"

"The keys," Shinichi finishes, nodding. "But I’m concerned about the fact that—"

"There are eight slots and there are only supposed to be five keys. Also—"

"The keys are each oddly shaped." Shinichi pulls out Lady Red from his pocket, letting it swing from the broken chain in front of them. "This is much bigger than this depression."

"May I?" KID asks, and Shinichi barely nods before the gem disappears from his hold and appears in front of KID, who lets the chain hang down as he examines the gem itself. "Hmmm."

"What is it?"

"I wonder if…” KID’s narrowed eyes glimmer in concentration. He quickly digs into his pocket and pulls out a tiny narrow box, which he opens with one hand to reveal a jeweler’s kit. Choosing a narrow-headed tool, he starts to swiftly and efficiently remove the setting. He allows the setting to fall onto his thighs, and holds the gem up between his index finger and thumb into the moonlight. "Thought so."

"Something special?" It’s not a doublet, as they’d both suspected all those months ago. Instead, the light seems to be absorbed by the purple stone completely, none reflecting from the dull planes of it. "It doesn’t seem to do anything in the light."

"Look," KID says, spinning the back of the gemstone away from him and toward Shinichi, and when Shinichi sees the side that had been hidden by the gold pendant setting, his eyes widen.

Carved into the circular top of the gem is an odd pattern, almost a crescent moon. "Oh," he says, and he takes it from KID, pulling the watch out of his pocket and handing it to KID in exchange. KID immediately starts examining it, looking for a good way to take it apart, as Shinichi looks between the pattern on top of Lady Red and the circles on the ground, and frowns. "I can’t tell which one it matches," he says. "It doesn’t seem to be obvious."

He smooths his thumb over the pattern, and then reaches up to twist the arm of his glasses once to activate zoom. Under magnification, he can see the pattern in the purple stone more clearly, and it
reinforces his impression of a moon crescent. He wrinkles his nose, and looks back to the circles. Eight circles, but only five keys. A crescent moon. The dot, marking what?

"The beginning," Shinichi muses aloud. "Or the end."

"What was that, Meitantei?" KID asks, the watch in pieces around him, a single red stone in his hand. His lips are quirked victoriously as he displays another circular patterned surface to Shinichi. Shinichi takes it from him, then gets up on his hands and knees, a stone in each hand and his knuckles pressing into the marble.

"Here, see this mark?" He taps one knuckle against the raised dot under the far circle. "It’s marking the end, or the beginning of the cycle."

"The cycle?"


"Moon phases?" KID licks his lips, and Shinichi eyes the flick of his tongue along the uneven bow. "Eight of them. New moon, waxing crescent, first quarter, waxing gibbous, full moon, waning gibbous, last quarter, waning crescent."

"Exactly." Shinichi opens his left hand, where he holds Lady Red. He looks again at the crescent pattern, searching for some hint to which phase it is, and smiles when he finds three lines coming from the right. "Sunlight." Satisfied, he presses Lady Red into the first slot to the left of the new moon. "Waxing crescent."

As he watches, the depression releases smoke from beneath Lady Red, and then the stone sinks down low enough that the depression can seal off, a cap sliding into place to trap the stone inside, flush with the floor. An image of a waxing crescent moon stares up at him, matte under the light of the moon.

"Guess that one was right," KID says, crawling forward to lean next to Shinichi, their shoulders pressing together. "This is one of Galileo’s ‘Moon Drawings’. 1610. Before this, people used to think the moon was smooth." He brushes a thumb over the drawing. "What’s the Cardinal?"

"Last quarter," Shinichi says, after lifting it up to look at it with the left lens of his glasses. He counts two to the right of the new moon, and then sets the gem pattern side down. Once again it’s swallowed up into the depression, another Galileo sliding over it in cover. "I think each of the five keys have to go in the right slot, and it will reveal the next step of the puzzle."

"I knew you’d solve it," says a voice from behind them, and they both turn around at the same time to confront a Takeuchi bleeding profusely from a large gash in his forehead. He’s clutching a gun in on hand, and he’s blinking the blood out of his eyes. "You’re the great Heisei Holmes after all."

KID already has his card-gun out, but before he can shoot, Takeuchi fires three times right at KID, arm trembling and staggering some at the recoil. Time slows, the sound of the shots reverberating as KID falls back with a gurgle across the moon phase puzzle, clutching at his chest. The card gun falls to the floor and skids. Takeuchi shoots again, this time at the card-gun, and it shatters into pieces of metal, metal edged cards surrounding it, all face down.

For a moment, Shinichi is frozen with disbelief, the entire world in slow motion, but then he springs into action, rolling across the empty floor until he gets to a wall, pressing himself against it so that Takeuchi has to track him with his gun and look away from KID to keep an eye on him.

"Smart move, taking the bullets out of my gun after you tied me up. Too bad for you, I had extras,
and plenty of time to reload after I used the axe to cut the plastic cord.” His eyes are unfocused.

Concussion, Shinichi thinks. KID had given him a concussion with that vase, and maybe Shinichi can take advantage of that to take him down, so he can check on KID, help KID…

KID

"How did you find us without a map or a guide?" Shinichi asks, wondering why Takeuchi isn’t shooting at him. "I thought that’s why you needed KID?"

"Followed the blood," Takeuchi says. "Or didn’t you notice both of your shoes are covered in it? Arbogast helped me out after all. Shame I had to cut off his head for him to be useful." He raises his left arm, and in his grip is a severed hand. "I brought his hand along, since he said we’d need it."

"You still don’t have the other keys," Shinichi says desperately. He doesn’t look at KID. Please be alive, he thinks, his stomach rolling and his thoughts racing. Please, KID, please. "You won’t be able to get to Pandora."

Helplessness sits like curdled milk in his stomach and leaves a sour taste in his mouth. He’s always hated this feeling, and when he’d been Conan… When he’d been Conan, he’d always thought "if I were still Shinichi, this wouldn't be happening. I wouldn’t be helpless". But here he is, in his real body, if a couple years behind, with all the athletic skill and height and strength he should have, and there’s still nothing he can do to help himself or KID.

And he tries to push that feeling aside, to focus on Takeuchi, whose grip on the .45 has steadied, but his thought processes are fractured: three bullets to KID’s chest had been enough to break his concentration to pieces. He’s suddenly back in that dark elementary school, on that first night as Conan, wanting to save a little kidnapped girl but powerless and, for the very first time, unsure how to get himself out of a mess.

He’s back in that locker in the subway station, without enough air and hands clenched into fists, as Gin searches the lockers one by one.

He’s on a ship out at sea, wondering if Ran is dead or alive in the face of an approaching storm in ocean water cold enough to freeze her to death.

Bile rises in Shinichi’s throat, and he wonders if his impression of KID’s poker face is good enough that Takeuchi won’t see how close he is to falling apart.

Balling his hands into fists, he wonders if he’ll be faster than Takeuchi, if he’ll be able to outmaneuver him despite Takeuchi’s improved grip on his gun and focusing gaze.

"Vermouth will come," Taekuchi says. "She won’t be able to stay away, not tonight. Then you’ll help me finish the puzzle."

"If Vermouth doesn’t come, you’ll never get the chance." Shinichi’s heart is in his throat, beating KID, KID, KID as he looks for a way to dispatch Takeuchi. He doesn’t have his dartwatch, and there’s nothing in this room to kick; just bare walls and a rolled up rug that’s partially trapped under KID. His muscles are tense, ready to respond to the slightest command, but with nothing to subdue Takeuchi, Shinichi can only wait.

"And your friend will die." Takeuchi’s eyes dart over to KID. KID makes no noise, and doesn’t move. "If he’s not already dead. I did shoot him three times. Then I’ll find your family. Your friends."
Shinichi digs his nails into his palms, refusing to look over at KID again. He’s afraid of what he’ll see if he does, and even the thought of KID silenced, of KID never smiling at him or teasing him or telling him some obscure tidbit about architecture leaves him hollow. He can’t breathe, for some reason, and his stomach aches.

He clenches his jaw and tries to focus. He needs to concentrate on Takeuchi. He needs to pay attention to everything, now, or KID will…

The 5 yen coin Shinichi wears like a promise burns against his skin, and it won’t end like this. Shinichi won’t let that happen, not after he’s realized that KID is…

Takeuchi takes a step toward KID and the moon puzzle. "Vermouth will definitely come, anyway. She wants to kill me, and this is her chance."

"You’re right." Crisp American English from behind Takeuchi, another gunshot, and then the light leaves Takeuchi’s eyes as he crumples dead to the ground. "I’m on a tight schedule, and I have filming tomorrow."

Vermouth stands there, arm outstretched, gun steady on Takeuchi, who has lost the back of his head to a point blank gunshot. Bits of his brain are caught in his hair, and Arbogast’s severed hand has slid along the floor, jarred from Takeuchi’s loosened grip in his fall.

Shinichi meets her gaze and swallows, and she lowers her gun, tucking it away. Then she reaches up with both hands to pull a chain from her neck, and it’s the Queen of the Nile and Ascendant Phoenix.

She flicks her gaze over at KID, and tosses the jewelry in his direction. "Are you going to keep playing dead?" The gems thump onto his stomach, and KID hisses, sitting up and rubbing at his chest.

"I don’t like getting shot at all," he gasps, and Shinichi breathes, all at once, and he hadn’t even noticed he’d been holding his breath until the sudden rush of oxygen to his brain makes him dizzy. "I really was blacked out for a few seconds there."

"KID," Shinichi says, tries to say, but all that comes out is a garbled noise. All the color in the world floods back into Shinichi’s vision, and he uncurls his hands, his palms stinging from now-broken skin. "How—" The answer occurs to him before he even finishes his question. "The vest."

"Meitantei, we’re really gonna have to thank your FBI friend for the gear." KID winces. "I don’t even remember putting it on this morning." He tries to straighten, but quickly hunches. "I think one of my ribs is cracked."

"I thought," Shinichi chokes out, eyes burning and his chest tight, painfully tight, "I thought you were dead, you asshole."

"I knew he wouldn’t kill you," KID says, looking at Shinichi with his heart in his eyes, "and once you rolled over there it was easier to stay quiet and wait for a chance. If Vermouth hadn’t come…” He shoots her a quick, intrigued look, and then raises his left hand, revealing another of his smoke bombs. "I would have given you the opportunity to take him down." Then he tosses the bomb up in his hand and catches it. "You came, though."

Vermouth tosses her long blond hair over her shoulder, and smirks at KID. "Put your toy away. If I wanted to hurt you, I would have."

"Why don’t you?" Shinichi asks, resisting the urge to move closer to KID and put a hand over his
heart, just to make sure it’s still beating. Vermouth blinks. "Why don’t you want to hurt us?" He narrows his eyes. "You said you were interested in KID, and you’ve always been interested in me. Why, when your syndicate wants to kill us?"

"Unless I have orders to kill you specifically, I won’t." She stares at Shinichi, eyes frigid. "You’re a silver bullet. I’m going to need one." She slides her gaze to KID, who has absently started taking apart the Queen of the Nile. "And I owed his father a favor." KID flinches at that, but his hands don’t stop moving.

"You have good timing when you come to the rescue."

"I’ve been keeping tabs on you," Vermouth says. "I was a little disappointed when neither of you recognized me in Kinza when you were looking for Morris." Takizawa Morisuke. KID had been dressed as a cute girl, and Shinichi had asked questions of a convenience store worker and a surprisingly helpful—

"You were the old lady in the coffee shop," Shinichi says. "Weren’t you?"

"Yes," Vermouth says, amused. "I was also the security guard at the hotel who showed you the video feed of that man with Louis’s face. I thought you would recognize me. You’re usually very good about it."

"Did you know him? Louis Maisonrouge?" Shinichi asks, and Vermouth’s face grows serious again, the playful tilt gone from her lips.

"It’s not necessary for you to know any of that," Vermouth replies quietly.

She walks over to Takeuchi, rolling him over and then going efficiently through his pocket. She takes his phone, as well as his wallet.

"You want his SIM card," Shinichi says.

"You’ve probably surmised that they’re former members," Vermouth says, looking up at him, still checking Takeuchi’s pockets. "That person… tasked me with eliminating the entire group of traitors, and I still have more of them to find."

"Like Kanami."

"Yes, our former Syrah." She smiles at him, but it’s empty of any real warmth. Most things about Vermouth are. "I came here first, because I needed to catch whoever was closer to Pandora. It was also impossible for me to get Takeuchi in Japan without endangering my cover, so there’s some luck involved in him being the one to step into Paris."

"Did you know it was Takeuchi all along?"

"No," Vermouth says. "If I had, no one would have died after Genevieve." She toes the body with her black knee-high boots. "He was never important enough in the organization for me to know him personally, and a lot of times, it’s easier to keep lower level agents more anonymous, for their benefit and ours."

"Double-blinds, eh?" Shinichi files that information away for later. "So when did you find out it was him?"

"I looked into him when I saw some of the media coverage on the hospital, and then a contact back home informed me he’d come to France yesterday." Her lips, pink and glossy, twitch. "It was only a
bonus that I got to look after my sensei’s son and a silver bullet as part of the bargain, really."

KID has rapidly finished with the two gems, freeing them from their settings and and checking the patterns. He sighs, and sets them each in a depression; both seal up, swallowed into the puzzle. Only one more key, Shinichi thinks. One more, and it’s Vermouth’s.

Shinichi’s whole body is still buzzing, and he doesn’t know what to do with the energy. "What are you going to do now?"

"Hmmm," Vermouth stares at him, her face emotionless. "As I said before, unless my orders are specific… I wasn’t given any orders about you this time. So I suppose I’ll take my leave. Until we meet again, Silver Bullet."

"But what about Pandora?"

"It won’t be safe with me. Not now." Her gaze shifts to KID, then to the floor puzzle, and then back to Shinichi. "And it won’t be safe here. We wouldn’t want Gin and Vodka to have access to something like Pandora. Or Rum. If I had it, it could easily fall into the wrong hands."

Shinichi swallows. Some things aren’t adding up, and Vermouth has saved him twice now, and asked for nothing in return. "What kind of game are you playing, Vermouth?"

"A very long one." She reaches into her pocket and pulls out a man’s ring, tossing it to Shinichi, who catches it reflexively. "I’m sure between the two of you, you can figure out what to do with it. How to protect it." She stares at Shinichi’s hand, where the ring is, a strange longing in her eyes. "Don’t disappoint me, Cool Guy."

"Won’t you need it?" KID asks, and Vermouth stiffens, looking pointedly away from the ring. "Pandora, I mean. Won’t you need it?"

"Not for a while," Vermouth says. With mostly steady hands she pulls out a cigarette, and then lights it, tucking the lighter away again. "And when I do, I will make you an offer you can’t refuse to get the location from you, so take care not to die before then."

"What’s that supposed to mean?" Shinichi feels his hackles raise, remembering Takeuchi’s assertion that everyone has a price. "What kind of offer?"

"When the time comes that I need to know where you’ve taken Pandora, I will give you a name and a place in exchange."

"A name and a place?"

Vermouth smiles, drops her cigarette, and turns on her heel. As she walks down the narrow, dark hall, she starts to hum ‘Nanatsu no Ko’.

A phone number. An end to being in hiding, and a return to Shinichi’s real life, without the cloud of fear.

The boss, Shinichi thinks, eyes wide, as Vermouth disappears up the stairs, fading, golden hair and all, into the darkness as she walks away, leaving them alone with an incomplete puzzle and a heavy task.

"Meitantei?"

"That song," Shinichi whispers.
"Seven Children?" KID shifts his weight, a whimper of pain escaping as his torso moves. Shinichi finally looks away from the open archway to look at his companion. "What's important about that song?" KID's smile is strained. "Besides being the song that plays when a train leaves from Isohara."

"It's the boss of the Black Organization's phone number." Numbly, he walks over to KID, falling to his knees beside him and holding out the ring to him. "The tune of Nanatsu no Ko is the melody made by pressing the keys."

"She promised you the leader of the Black Organization in exchange for Pandora?" He grabs the ring, releasing his injured ribs to support his weight as Shinichi gropes around for KID's jeweler's kit.

It's a matter of moments for KID to free the diamond from its setting, once Shinichi's handed him the needle file he needs to jimmy it loose, and when Shinichi lifts the bare diamond up to the moonlight, it glimmers and sparkles, catching the light and keeping it as it reveals the pattern on the flat edge.

"Full moon," says Shinichi, softly, eyes seeking out the appropriate depression in the eight-circle puzzle, and then setting the diamond in its rightful place. As with the others, the diamond sinks in, but unlike each of the other four stones, this time, all of the remaining holes seal off at once, with imageless caps. The ground beneath them rumbles, then up in front of them, directly opposite the arch, the walls begin to shake.

"Is this place falling apart?" KID asks, and Shinichi's eyes scan the room to ascertain what's happening around them, one hand immediately reaching out for KID and grabbing hold of his forearm just in case. The puzzle spins, a wide pedestal rising twenty centimeters up from the ground with three levers buried amidst a collection of stars spread out in a very realistic image of the night sky.

"It's the stars over Tokyo in the summer," KID says. He drags his finger along the milky way. "Tanabata time."

"What's this, then?" Shinichi asks, pointing to an exceptionally bright spot above the third lever, and KID leans in. His breath is hot on Shinichi's neck, and the scent of jasmine mixes with the scent of blood. Still, it's KID, and Shinichi relaxes into the touch as much as he can while he devotes his attention to the levers. "I don't recognize it."

"Neither do I," KID says. "Maybe it's not a star. Maybe this is a very particular night sky at a very particular time, and it's some kind of phenomenon..." He trails off, and it comes to Shinichi immediately.

"If the gem is held up under the Volley Comet, it will cry tears of immortality." Shinichi looks up, at the one-way glass that allows them to look out at tonight's full moon.

KID's breath hitches. "It wasn't a legend," he says. "It was instructions!"

Shinichi reaches out, grabs the third lever underneath the Volley Comet, and pulls.

The floor lurches, and then starts to move, and Shinichi shouts in warning: "The floor is sinking!" Slowly, with the sound of straining gears, the floor jerkily drops, centimeter by centimeter at first, and then faster, meter by meter, until they're down in a dark, circular pit with only the moonlight streaming down on them and illuminating the shadows.

There's dust in his eyes and in his mouth, and he coughs on it, as KID tries to repress his own coughs. "Ribs are definitely cracked," KID says. "Did we pull the right lever?"
The walls light up as he finishes speaking, and a computerized voice demands: "IDENTIFICATION REQUIRED." In front of them, directly opposite where the arch would have been, a square panel blinks blue.

"What kind of identification?" Shinichi, frustrated, practically growls, and KID chuckles darkly.

"I've got a hunch about that," he says, and he gets unsteadily to his feet, biting his lower lip hard enough it turns white around where his teeth dig, and lurches over toward Takeuchi’s body. He steps over it, purposefully avoiding glimpsing the gruesome back of the man’s head, and then looks down grimly. "Can I borrow your handkerchief?"

Shinichi pulls it out of his coat pocket and tosses it to him immediately, no questions asked, and KID snags it deftly right out of the air, before bending slowly, painfully down, to retrieve Claude Arbogast’s severed hand.

He holds it way from himself as he returns to Shinichi’s side, and Shinichi takes the handkerchief from him solemnly.

"This isn’t usually what people mean when they say they’ll need to give you a hand, is it?" KID jokes, and though it comes off flat, Shinichi laughs anyway, more to release stress than out of any kind of humor. "I hope it doesn’t have to be warm."

"So do I," Shinichi replies, taking the hand over to the glowing blue panel. Carefully, he arranges the limb so that its fingers are uncurled, palm out, presses it into the panel and holds it there. Blood seeps through his handkerchief, and Shinichi is definitely going to burn this one when they get out of here, first thing.

"AUTHENTICATION COMPLETE," the computerized voice says, and the panel fades, before swinging open to reveal a safe.

Shinichi drops the severed hand and quickly steps away, unsure what else might be waiting, and as he moves back, KID moves forward, their shoulders brushing, and Shinichi again revels in the fact that KID is still alive.

"Oooh," says KID, "a safe! My favorite!"

"This one’s on you," Shinichi says. "After Suzuki-san’s, it shouldn’t be a problem, right?"

"Don’t underestimate me, detective. There isn’t a safe in the world that can keep me out." He grins at Shinichi, and despite the dust on his face and the spattered blood dried rust brown following the line of his jaw and dotting his face alongside his freckles, he’s beautiful, his eyes gleaming in anticipation. "Shall I teach you how, Shinichi?"

"Someday," Shinichi promises, and KID just laughs, carefully, not wanting to hurt himself, and slips in front of Shinichi to press his ear against the safe.

His agile fingers spin the knobs as he measures the sounds, tongue caught between his teeth and peeking out between his lips. His coat is torn, holed in three places from three gunshots. Shinichi resists the urge to press his fingers to those gaps in the fabric, just to make sure that KID is really okay, that the holes don’t go into his body, and this isn’t a repeat of his last heist, blood spilling out too fast for Shinichi to staunch it.

And then the safe is making a final click and opening. Behind the steel safe wall lies a cylindrical vase made of stone, Greek letters running in circles around the circumference of it, worn away by time but still readable. They both stare at it for a moment and then KID sighs, reaching out with both
hands to remove it from the safe.

"So many people have died for this," he says. It’s small, only thirty centimeters long and half as many wide. "Just the right size to fit in a carry-on. All this death, for this?"

"This is a very powerful thing," Shinichi says in reply. "We’ve seen what it can do. We can’t let it fall into the hands of the Black Organization."

"We should destroy it," KID says. "I always knew I wanted to destroy Pandora, even when I thought it might be just a legend. In the wrong hands…"

"What about the right ones?" Shinichi asks quietly, and KID’s jaw is tight.

"Are there right hands, Shinichi?" Swallowing, KID’s hands tighten around the stone vase.

"There have to be," Shinichi says, looking at KID seriously. "I have to believe there are people who would use Pandora for good and not for evil. Until we find them, though, we’ll have to keep it safe."

KID meets his eyes squarely, and after a long silence, nods. "That’s—"

Whatever KID is about to say is cut off by the sudden blare of a siren, and suddenly, the walls around them are intermittently flashing red. "TIME LIMIT ELAPSED," the computerized voice says, and both Shinichi and KID look down at Pandora in KID’s hands. "INITIATING SELF-DESTRUCT."

"No stairs," Shinichi says immediately. "Four meters back to level ground."

"No idea of the blast radius," KID replies. "No idea of our time limit." He hands Shinichi Pandora and unbuttons his coat, wincing as he drops it to the ground, revealing his sweatshirt with an identical hole pattern. "We need Takeuchi’s gun."

Shinichi sprints to the other side of the area, finding the gun at the edge of the floor, and he picks it up with his left hand, Pandora tucked under his right arm. "Two bullets left," he says, and KID clicks his teeth.

"Hopefully that will be enough." He holds out his hand, and Shinichi sets the .45 into the open palm as the siren continues to wail around them. Narrowing his eyes, KID points the gun directly at the glass ceiling six meters up and fires, one after the other, the first shot breaking the glass and the second creating a hole the size of a dinner plate.

Then he pulls out a thin piece of coiled wire, and at the end hangs a piece of metal. Shinichi watches with surprise as KID unfolds it to reveal a grappling hook. He cringes as he throws it up, but once again his aim is true, and it hooks onto the edge of the broken glass. "It’s not the high-tech one, but it’ll work for this. Come here."

"Will it hold our weight?" Shinichi asks, but he doesn’t hesitate to step into KID’s reach, and when he’s close enough, KID pulls Shinichi in with one arm around his waist, flinching when Shinichi presses into his ribs. Then he seems to brace himself, and before Shinichi can blink, they’re soaring upward, the hook retracting the wire as the metal scrapes and screeches against the glass.

Out of the hole, Shinichi can see the arch, and KID hisses "Swing!" at him as they continue to zoom toward the ceiling. They both throw their weight, sending them careening toward the wall, and Shinichi uses his legs to push them off the marble wall and back toward the entryway.

There are a few seconds of weightlessness when KID lets go of the wire, but then Shinichi is
crashing to the ground just past the arch, KID on top of him, panting as his whole body quivers with pain.

Pandora is still nestled between them, the stone vase digging into his gut, and Shinichi starts to move even before he can collect his thoughts. KID is moving too, scrambling to his feet and taking the lead up the stairs, back the way they came, no hesitation in his steps. Even in the dark stone hallway, the siren is blaring, and knowing what that means, Shinichi grits his teeth and keeps running.

"The whole place is going to blow!" KID yells over his shoulder as they push out into the narrow hall with the relief of Orion. The wail of the siren is constant, now, like a bomb ticking down, and Shinichi’s heartbeat in his ears is the only thing louder. KID takes them in a new direction, and as they sprint, more and more light floods the halls. "We’re going to have bail out of a second story window!"

He takes a sharp right, opening a door to what appears to be a bedroom, and rushes immediately for the balcony, opening the doors and surveying the drop.

"Got any more grappling hooks?" Shinichi gasps, wishing he had his bungee suspenders, and KID laughs, breathlessly, his face flushed with exhilaration and the pain in his eyes overshadowed by adrenaline.

"Nope, and no glider, either. Guess we’ll have to make do with plastic cord!" He loops one end of a long piece around the balcony railing and the other around both of their waists, and then he’s urging Shinichi to climb over the rail and jump.

He slices the cord after it catches them, allowing them to drop the last meter to the frozen ground, and KID yelps at the impact. "You okay?" Shinichi asks, rolling over so that he can get up onto his knees. KID is breathing hard, and his body is shaking under Shinichi’s hands when Shinichi runs them over him to check.

"Ribs are probably more than cracked, now," is KID’s reply, and then he’s forcing himself up. Shinichi grabs his hand and starts to run again, around the castle, toward the front gate. They emerge into the front lawn of the property, and KID steps ahead of him, running toward the cars parked on the long driveway. "Do you think Arbogast will mind if we borrow his car?"

"I don’t think he’ll ever mind anything again," Shinichi says, forcing the words out, getting into the passenger seat of Arbogast’s Lamborghini.

KID puts the car in reverse, careening backwards down the driveway, circumnavigating the car Takeuchi must have driven up here, and out through the now destroyed gate. They’re just out onto the road, KID swerving into a U-Turn, when the castle explodes in a cascade, the moon dome collapsing down and then the pillars falling one by one like dominoes as the rest of the magnificent residence crumbles.

"The destruction is very metaphorical," KID says, gravel churning under the tires as the car spins. He shifts gears, and Shinichi holds Pandora tight to his chest as they speed away from the burning remains of Château Arbogast. "For the Neoclassical movement. Arbogast really should have gone Baroque with the architecture."

And there’s nothing for Shinichi to do but laugh, crumbling forward in his seat as his glasses fall off his face to his feet. Shoulders shaking, Shinichi closes his eyes, letting relief course through him as KID starts to laugh beside him, knuckles brushing Shinichi’s thigh as he shifts gear again to compensate for the hill.
When he finally stops laughing, he looks up to see KID staring straight ahead, smiling wide, manic, hands surprisingly steady on the wheel as he speeds downward, toward where they left the Clio.

"There should be fewer corpses on our next date, Meitantei," KID says, peeking at him out of the corner of his eye for a brief moment before twisting the car along an impossibly winding path with barely a skid, even going 180 kilometers per hour.

"You’re dating the wrong guy if you’ve got an aversion to corpses," Shinichi replies, leaning his head back as he drags his fingers along the carved letters of Pandora’s stone vase, Πανδώρα, knowing he'll never, ever open it to see what's inside. "I’m sort of a magnet."

"I didn’t say no corpses. I’m not looking for a miracle, here." KID licks his lips, and Shinichi’s breath catches in his throat, because this time, KID turns to look at him, and Shinichi can see the swelling ocean in his eyes. "The explosions can stay, though, even if I can honestly say I’ve never left behind millions of Euro in gemstones in a burning castle filled with priceless art."

"All in a day’s work," Shinichi says, and then he's jerking back as KID stops the car, the rear tires dovetailing. "What—"

He doesn’t finish the sentence, because KID is leaning into his space and kissing him, open-mouthed and sloppy and desperate, stealing the rest of the words right out of his mouth.

"Oh, Clyde," he mutters, against Shinichi’s wet lips, tickling them with his warm breath, "this has been a crime spree to remember."

Shinichi snorts incredulously, tangles his fingers in KID’s messy, dust and blood ruined hair, and kisses him again, just to shut him up.

*
Part VII: Many Names, and Just as Many Faces

They check into a bed and breakfast inn in Lozère for the night after driving a half an hour away from the now burned out Lamborghini in the Clio. KID calls ahead to make sure they’ve got vacancies, spinning in French what is, undoubtedly, a tall tale about having had a few misadventures hiking to the proprietor. She welcomes them sleepily when they arrive, Shinichi grabbing their overnight bags from the backseat as KID deals with all the necessary check-in procedures, flirting and joking as the forty-something-year-old woman—recently divorced, Shinichi notes, pale skin where a band used to rest—laughs at him and hands over a set of sheets.

"Check out is at noon," is what Shinichi is pretty sure she tells them, with his limited ability, and KID nods earnestly and assures her they’ll be on their way far before that, offering up a charming grin as he palms the old fashioned room key and successfully hides the pain each and every movement must be causing him when the three of them take to the stairs.

Their room, small but cozy, looks out across the quaint town they’d found it in, full of cafés and bakeries and cobblestone walkways. Shinichi keeps expecting to see fire in the distance, but there’s nothing out there but the night sky, and stars faint in the presence of the bright moon over sloped ceramic roof tiles in terra cotts and browns.

KID eases out of his torn clothes as soon as he’s dumped the set of sheets on the mattress, Shinichi carrying their bags as far as the edge of the bed before setting them down carefully and rushing to help him. Shinichi’s hands tremble as he helps to peel the custom-fitted bulletproof vest from KID’s torso. Skin mottled in dark red and purple to almost black, all ringed in green, stretches across KID’s ribs like layered handprints on the right side of his body, the edges grasping for the scar of his gunshot wound.

"KID…"

"It probably looks worse than it is," KID throws a weary smile at him, and Shinichi drops the vest to the floor and pushes down on KID’s shoulders until he’s sitting on the edge of the bed. "You don’t need to worry—" Shinichi ignores him, falling to his knees in front of him, and KID’s smile curves into something attempting naughtiness, despite the clear tension of pain at the corners of his eyes. "Feel free to stay in this position all you’d like, though. I’d never dream of stopping you..."

Shinichi, unimpressed, glares up at him through his dirty hair and lashes that feel caked with dust. "I have to see if they’re cracked, KID. It’ll hurt, but I’ll be careful."

KID bites at his lower lip as Shinichi drags his fingers along the bruised area with gentle pressure, and hisses when Shinichi finds bone. "Fuck."

"Not broken," Shinichi murmurs, letting his hand ghost inward, across the taut skin and visible abdominal muscles. "Maybe fractures in eight and nine. You lucky bastard." KID laughs, and Shinichi swallows at the sound, his hands still absorbing the heat of KID’s skin. "You’ll have to sleep upright tonight."

KID shivers, and Shinichi realizes his breath must be warm against KID’s bare belly. He blushes,
and considers moving away, but honestly, his heart hasn’t stopped thundering in his chest, and KID’s skin, bruised and battered though it is, will heal. Will heal like three bullets that had gone through might not have allowed, and KID is alive under his hands, alive in front of him, and Shinichi…

"Takeuchi was concussed, I think," KID says. "Otherwise he might have shot me the same way he shot Arbogast."

_In the head_, Shinichi thinks, but he doesn’t say anything to that effect, instead scooting slightly closer and resting a hand on either thigh. Stretching up with his neck, he presses a kiss to the center of KID’s sternum and then another to his chest, just over the skin of his heart. Underneath his lips, KID’s pulse quickens, and Shinichi smiles, knowing it’s hidden from KID at this angle.

KID drags a quavering hand through his hair. "We both need showers, Meitantei," he murmurs, but he makes no attempt to move, and Shinichi’s hands tighten their grip.

"You told me I wasn’t allowed to die," he murmurs, lips still brushing skin. "You aren’t either."

It’s the closest he’ll probably ever come to telling KID what he’d recognized, while they were in Arbogast’s castle, but that’s all right. KID is good at hints, and good at clues, and good at Shinichi, too, so he’ll probably understand.

"It’s not in my immediate plans, I assure you," KID replies, and his voice shakes, cracks, thick with understanding and reciprocation and all the things they don’t need to say. "I’ve got better things to do."

Shinichi closes his eyes, and takes a deep breath, and despite the scent of smoke and blood and shattered ceramics, it still smells like KID, too. KID, who is alive beneath his fingertips, lewd jokes on the tip of his tongue.

Sitting back on his heels, Shinichi looks up to meet KID’s gaze again. "You shower first, and I’ll get you some ice and painkillers."

KID’s gaze is soft as he returns Shinichi’s regard. "Ice and painkillers? Isn’t it a little early to start spicing things up in the bedroom enough that we need—"

"Shut up," Shinichi interrupts, but the words lose their force with the laughter he can’t stop from curling around them. "You’re incorrigible."

"I try," KID says, flicking his eyes away from Shinichi to stare at their bags. Inside Shinichi’s is Pandora, and there’s some surreality about that, Shinichi thinks, as he stands, stepping out of KID’s orbit and back onto solid ground.

He makes his way toward the door, trying to remember where the woman who’d shown them to their room had said the kitchen was, but KID’s voice, quieter than usual, stops him before he can open the door.

"We make a damn good team, don’t we, detective?"

"Yeah," Shinichi says. "We do." And then he leaves KID in the room, escaping into the hall just in time to lean back against the wall and shudder, arms wrapping around himself as the memory of those three shots firing in succession echo around in his head.

"Pull yourself together, Shinichi," he whispers aloud to an empty audience, and then he squares his shoulders, and goes to look for ice.
When he gets back to the room the shower is still running. Setting the bag of ice on the small table by the window, Shinichi digs painkillers out of KID’s open duffle, and then makes the bed, marveling again as his arms stretch far enough to pull the sheet corners down without climbing up onto the mattress.

He sits down in the center of the made bed, winding his arms around his knees, and watches the television until KID emerges from the bathroom, flushed and damp, cheeks ruddy from hot water and towel slung dangerously low on his hips.

"Do you even know what you’re watching?" KID asks lightly, as Shinichi’s eyes dip immediately back to his bruises.

"The news is the news," Shinichi says. "Language doesn’t really change the weather report, and the noise is comforting."

"You've never struck me as the type that minded silence." KID comes and sits next to him, and jasmine wraps around Shinichi like a winter quilt, another reminder that both of them are just fine.

"The Kudou mansion is always quiet," he finds himself saying, as the news flashes to a breaking story, a reporter speaking in an agitated tone. He picks up a few words: Fire, danger, castle. "My parents left me to my own devices when I was in middle school, and until I became Conan, I was alone every day unless Ran came over and made me clean, or dragged me out to do things with her and Sonoko. I got used to the quiet, living in that place all by myself."

"But…?" KID says. A hand, fingertips hot and damp, slides up under his shirt to stroke his spine, soothing and steady.

"But as Conan, there was always… something. The kids, or Mouri’s loud horse races and louder snores, Ran puttering around in the kitchen and Haibara getting excited in that understated way of hers about soap operas, and text messages from Hattori at a constant clip." He rubs at his cheek.

"Almost three years of the silence being filled up like that, and now I’m on edge when there’s no noise."

KID’s hand splays out between his shoulder blades and stills. He can probably feel Shinichi’s heartbeat the same way Shinichi had felt his earlier.

"That’s good news for me," KID says, voice purposely light, "since I’ve been told I’m allergic to the quiet."

Something inside of Shinichi that had felt knotted up since he’d seen those bruises on KID’s side for the first time, reminding him of the gray emptiness he’d felt following Takeuchi’s attempted execution, unravels all at once, and he exhales, shakily, and then smiles.

"You don’t say," he replies, and KID laughs, carefully, gingerly, and Shinichi slides his hand across KID’s knee to skate along the soft skin of his inner thigh. "You? Noisy?"

KID opens his mouth to retort, but then his eyes flit away from Shinichi to the television, where a helicopter is capturing footage of the burning castle. It’s nothing but ruins already, Shinichi realizes, most of the evidence burned to nothing and bodies reliant on dental records for identification. That, along with having burned out the Lamborghini, will eliminate anything that ties them to the scene, as long as Durand and her Louis Maisonrouge lookalike companion don’t make a good description of them.

"They think it was an accidental fire," KID says, after listening for a few moments. "Caused by
"outdated wiring."

"That will change if they ever find the Lamborghini."

"It’ll be spring before anyone goes looking for that car in the water." KID shakes his damp hair out of his eyes. "My graduation is in the spring."

"It feels weird to think about high school." Shinichi taps his thumb against KID’s knee. "To think about moving forward. Setting foot in Japan, even if it’s only briefly, as Kudou Shinichi again, with no time limit on how long." He sighs. "I need to talk to Bourbon. And to… to Subaru-san."

"One thing at a time," KID says. "The first thing you need to do is shower."

"And then?" Shinichi asks.

KID hums, retracting his hand from the bare skin of Shinichi’s back to rest it atop the hand Shinichi’s left resting on KID’s thigh. "And then," he says, deliberately, with all the wickedness of the white-suited figure, stolen gem in hand, that had issued him challenge after challenge that he’d never been able to back down from, "we figure out how Kudou Shinichi flies out from Paris when it was Edogawa Conan who flew in."

Shinichi groans, and then gets up to retrieve KID’s ice before it melts.

Outside, it starts to snow.

"That’ll put out most of the flames," KID remarks, scooting back on the bed until his back is to the headboard, tucking a pillow behind his neck before reaching out an open palm. Shinichi drops two pills into his hand, and KID swallows them dry as Shinichi presses ice to his side.

"It will," Shinichi agrees, knowing everything important has already burned to ash.

* * *

KID carries himself stiffly, ribs obviously aching enough that when Shinichi snags the keys from the nightstand the next morning, KID doesn’t pickpocket them back at any point during checkout, allowing Shinichi to drive the Clio back to Paris.

KID’s eyes are closed most of the drive, but despite that, he’s definitely awake, words slurring together as he switches from topic to topic without any sort of structure. His tales are surprisingly low and soft, though, and even if Shinichi isn’t paying attention to the words, he indulges in the tone. KID’s voice, his real one, is rich and soothing, even when he’s babbling about random things like Italian fictional novels from the nineteenth century.

They drop their things off at the hotel, Shinichi plugging in their Japanese phones to charge them as KID carefully places Pandora into the hotel room safe after taking it apart and putting it back together anew inside, effectively changing the code and rendering the hotel’s master-key useless.

Shinichi watches him work, all the while adding links to the band of a stun-gun wristwatch with one of KID’s jewelry kits. He’d brought two of the watches with him, and if he combines the links, the band will be right for his adult wrist.

KID whistles as he finishes up his minor act of vandalism, inputting the new code as 1846, and after a few seconds of consideration, Shinichi laughs.

"Neptune?" Shinichi asks, and KID winks at him, flexing his fingers to relieve the stress in them.
"Meitantei, we’re in Paris," KID says. "I could very easily be referring to the premiere of La Damnation de Faust."

"You could be, but you aren’t. You wouldn’t let the opportunity for an inside joke pass you by. I know you."

"You do," KID says, and something about the way he says it, surprised and pleased underneath the leering smugness, has Shinichi blushing. "Know me, I mean."

"You aren’t about to make a Biblical joke, are you?" Shinichi trips over his words, slightly, as KID’s eyes shimmer.

"No, detective, I wouldn’t dare." KID pushes his hair out of his face, a few soft curls falling back across his forehead as they slip through his long and pretty fingers. "For the record, though… That’s… not many people can truthfully say they know me." His eyes are half-lidded as his expression turns serious. "I think the grand total might be one, these days."

Shinichi wets his lips, and feels a now familiar warmth spreading through his chest.

"I also considered 1923," KID says, after the silence stretches out between them for a couple more seconds. "Bertolt Brech’s ‘Baal’ premiered. But Neptune’s discovery seemed more fitting, considering." He stands, and carefully stretches his arms, visibly hunching into himself as he pulls his side.

"Lassell discovered Triton that same year." Shinichi puts his watch on, fastening it easily, enough space for his index finger between band and skin. He looks up to see KID with one eyebrow raised, amused, and Shinichi shrugs. "I watched a documentary about our solar system, once, with Mitsuhioko. I think I remembered more of it than he did."

"Trying to surpass your hero, Tantei-kun?"

KID walks past Shinichi, and Shinichi follows the movement carefully. "Surpass my hero?"


"And yet here you are, Kudou Shinichi. Discovery dates for Neptune’s frozen moon and François Villon poetry collections." He leans back, catching his weight carefully with one hand. "Do you play the violin?"

"I do," Shinichi admits. "Not much of a singer, but a perfectly capable violinist."

"Swordsman?"

"Just soccer," replies Shinichi. "Do all phantom thieves read Sherlock Holmes?"

"Only when they develop a more than fleeting interest in a detective who models himself after him." KID’s hair falls into his eyes completely again, and this time, Shinichi is the one to push it back, tracing the shell of KID’s ear until KID uses his free hand to bat it away. "That nasty little watch of yours is way too close to a vein, Meitantei."

"Better than a soccer ball, though, right?"
"Only if we’re not freefalling from a building," says KID, and Shinichi laughs when he pouts. "Cruel."

"You tasered me during a blackout to steal a jewel shaped like part of a giraffe. I refuse to feel guilty."

"Oh, take it as a compliment!" KID kisses Shinichi’s palm, eyebrows wiggling in teasing. "I’ve never once had to taser any of my other detectives to make a clean getaway." He reaches for the phone.

"Hakuba?" Shinichi asks, getting up to go prepare another bag of ice as KID cringes again from his ribs.

"We should check on what happened with Marc Arbogast," KID murmurs in reply. "Hakuba’s case is the last thing we have to wrap up in Paris."

"And we need to make sure Hakuba hasn’t stumbled over anything too critical unknowingly," agrees Shinichi. "Do you feel well enough—"

"My ribs are only fractured, not broken." KID’s lip curls up on one side. "I can take a sedate walk to the police station." He shudders. "There should also be zero police stations involved in our next date."

"Aren’t you getting picky?" Shinichi asks, as he pulls ice from the mini-fridge and drops it into the ziplock bag with the already melting ice. The cool water makes it softer on the injury, he figures. "I’m not sure I’ve ever been on an actual date, unless you count Tropical Land. I don’t know how they’re supposed to work, and I don’t have much interest in it."

"I think we’ll figure something out," KID says. "Want to infiltrate a museum?"

"Absolutely not," Shinichi replies immediately, handing over the ice, and KID laughs, accepting it. "Adrenaline junkie."

"Ah, what am I going to do with all my free time, now that I’m not searching for Pandora?" KID sighs, smile fading. "I guess I’ve no excuse to pull heists anymore."

"Heists are a big waste of police department resources, time, and effort," Shinichi says, and KID’s smile dims even more. It twists in Shinichi’s gut. "But you wouldn’t be you if you weren’t wasting someone’s time. I’m sure you’ll think of some new reason to have your fun."

"And that wouldn’t bother you?" KID’s question is deliberate, and Shinichi considers it from all angles. In the end, there’s the truth of the matter: a part of KID will be forever restless without the thrill of the hunt, dressed all in white with police at his heels and fans cheering for him from below as he takes to the sky. And Shinichi would be lying if he didn’t admit that he likes that facet of KID just as much as he likes the quiet companion in the park when he’s sad or the warm teasing figure in lipgloss and a short skirt folding origami from chocolate wrappers after school.

"Didn’t I just give you a long-term alibi two days ago?" Shinichi answers lightly. "Besides, you’ve held lots of heists for things you knew weren’t Pandora. Ryouma’s treasures, for example." He swallows. "Don’t tell me Kaitou KID’s going to let people all over the world buy fake Ming vases?"

"I might," KID says, beaming at him. "You never know when you’re going to have to clock some moron waving a gun around upside the head with one, and it would be a shame if there were no forgeries just hanging around."

Shinichi opens his mouth to reply, but someone picks up the phone on the other end of the line, and
KID’s voice changes completely, to something high and feminine. He speaks quickly in French, and all Shinichi picks out of it is Hakuba’s name a few times.

KID winds a piece of hair around his finger as he chats, and he watches Shinichi as he flirts with whoever he’s on the phone with, dragging answers out with hesitant questions and faux-shyness.

"Hakuba and Arbogast are staying at the same hotel," KID says. "Other side of the city, though."

"Did you just seduce a Parisian police officer for information?" Shinichi asks, and KID leers at him unrepentantly, everything about him telling Shinichi he’s going to put on a show, and Shinichi had better take notice.

"Jealous?" His gaze shutter. "You don’t have to be. I chose you a long time ago."

Shinichi’s heart is too big for his chest. It’s a strange feeling, and anatomically impossible, considering the size of the human heart and the capacity of his chest and shared space with his lungs and all of that. But Shinichi reaches up to check, anyway, just in case. "I’ve gotten used to your perverted ways," he says, finally, and knows KID will read between the lines.

*  

"I thought you were going on a road trip," is the first thing Hakuba says when he opens his hotel room door. He moves aside quickly anyway, non-verbally inviting them in. "How did you find me?"

"Kaito found you," Shinichi says. "With magic, I assume."

"Magic also brought you back to Paris, then?" Hakuba is clearly tired, dark circles under his eyes the colors of Bordeaux red grapes too heavy for the vine. His television is on, showing footage of the burned Arbogast castle, ash colored snow covering the ruins. "I hate magic."

"A car brought us back to Paris," KID says.

"An ugly car," Shinichi mutters, and with a chuckle, KID drags Shinichi further into the room.

"But what brings you back?"

"We went hiking in the mountains," KID breezily replies, and when the hotel room door closes behind him, he looks straight at Hakuba. "I had a bit of an accident and cracked my ribs."

Hakuba’s eyes widen, and he immediately looks to Shinichi for verification, which has KID huffing and rolling his eyes. It’s as interesting as always to see him playing up his childish side for Hakuba, the same way Shinichi had played up Conan’s for Ran.

"Shouldn’t you be resting, then? No need to flaunt how tough you are, Kuroba."

"I don’t need to flaunt," KID retorts. "Just being near you puts me in my best light."

"I’d have made him go to the hospital," interrupts Shinichi, amused, "but rib-care is pretty standard." He shrugs, meeting Hakuba’s gaze evenly. "How’s your case going?"

"We have a new prisoner. Coincidentally, an exact match for police drawings of the killer accused in the Shinamoto case." His eyebrows furrow. "Kudou-kun…"

"Oh, you did get our present!" KID is grinning carelessly at Hakuba, walking around the room,
humming lightly as he examines Hakuba’s phone, fingers tapping impatiently. "He followed us from the police station and tried to attack Shinichi for information on your Marc Arbogast."

"Stop wandering around my room, Kuroba," Hakuba snaps back at him. "You’d better not leave any of your weird practical jokes around here."

"Fresh out of all the fun stuff, I’m afraid. A pity, as I always find you less unbearable when you’re a delightful shade of green."

Shinichi clears his throat following Hakuba’s impatient exhale that speaks of long-suffering. "I hope you have someone on full-time guard over Arbogast. There are people really out for him. My guess is the same people who took out the rest of his friend circle." KID catches Shinichi’s gaze and shakes his head solemnly as Hakuba rubs at his forehead. No bugs then. "He admitted to being connected. You might want to look into a woman named Durand who was checked into the hospital yesterday after being picked up just off the A75."

"Durand." Hakuba stalks over to the bed, where open files cover the mattress save for a small area in the middle where Hakuba had obviously been napping. "I saw that name earlier…"

"The families are old friends," KID says vaguely, giving up his perusal of Hakuba’s living area and coming around the bed to stand closer to Shinichi. "No one’s killed Arbogast while we were gone, then?"

"Arbogast is fine. He was released from jail two nights ago, and he checked into this hotel. We do have eyes on him." Hakuba sighs heavily. "You know a lot more than you’re telling me, Kudou-kun."

"Rumor has it," KID says lightly, garnering Hakuba’s full attention with the edge in it, "that Kudou Shinichi is dead, or has been in hiding for almost three years."

At Hakuba’s flinch, Shinichi adds: "I heard he got too close to a syndicate, and they attempted to assassinate him, and threatened his family and friends."

"Then he might have gone undercover," KID says, voice oddly thin, and Hakuba's mouth goes slightly slack. "And worked with the FBI and the CIA while attempting to eliminate that syndicate."

"It’s just a rumor, of course," Shinichi says, looking out Hakuba’s window. "But Kaito checked your room for listening devices, because most rumors have a touch of truth to them." He turns to Hakuba, who is now looking between Shinichi and KID in horror. "Do you understand?"

"You want me to stop pursuing this case," Hakuba says, pushing the horror away, mouth curling down with stubborness only tempered with stuffy politeness.

Shinichi scratches his cheek.

"No," he says, "you should do your best on this case, and it would be hypocritical of me to tell you otherwise. Just be careful, and know what you might actually be dealing with. Don’t go anywhere alone. Don’t dig too deeply unless you’ve got an out or an airtight excuse." It’s surreal to be repeating Haibara’s earlier lessons for him at someone else. "Don’t waste time trying to figure out where I’ve been to find clues."

"I see," Hakuba says, studying Shinichi carefully, perhaps re-evaluating him again. "Why are you telling me this?"

"Well…” Shinichi involuntarily darts a look over at KID. "You might get hurt, otherwise."
Hakuba notices, and his expression grows pensive with a tinge of curiosity. "I guess I have more friends than I thought."

"No one likes you, Hakuba," KID retorts automatically, stepping back as Hakuba stalks past him toward the phone.

He dials a number quickly, and after a few seconds, says: "Add another guard to the rotation on Marc Arbogast. And I need you to look for a patient, last name Durand."

KID smirks, and Shinichi takes a deep breath, turning his thoughts back to Japan. After all, that’s where Kanami, along with everyone and everything else, waits, so that’s where Shinichi has to be to close this case and make sure…

Make sure KID is safe, like Shinichi had promised him he would at the beginning of autumn.

* 

They get on a plane to Narita with a backpack each, wearing new clothes and new shoes, everything else disposed of in various airport trashcans in the hours before their flight.

KID is all nervous energy as they wait to go through security, nibbling half-heartedly on a sandwich, head on Shinichi’s shoulder as Shinichi watches planes take off and land out of the giant windows and occasionally playing with the brim of the cap he’s wearing to hide his face from Japanese passengers who might still recognize him. It’s Heiji’s cap, and it fits a lot better on his head now than it did when Heiji gave it to him. KID’s soft hair tickles his chin, and it’s almost enough to keep Shinichi’s thoughts from wandering to all the loose ends waiting for them on the other end of this plane ride.

Pandora doesn’t raise any questions they can’t answer at security. "A present for my mother," Shinichi explains to the TSA agent. "A replica." He writes down the estimated value at around 12,000 yen on his customs declaration form, and, sharing a conspiratorial grin with KID, keeps it under his seat, between his feet, at takeoff, much to the SKY JAPAN flight attendant’s consternation.

Partway through the twelve hour flight, KID puts up the armrest between their seats and lays his head down in Shinichi’s lap, injured side up. Shinichi rests his own head against the window, and winds his fingers absently into KID’s soft, messy hair.

KID sighs, and Shinichi looks down at him, taking in everything about how KID looks now; sleepy, aching, uneven lips curved into the slightest resting frown, and compares it to the train ride to Osaka, when KID had done this exact same thing, only Shinichi had been a child and KID had been a long-haired blond. Shinichi finds that he doesn’t prefer KID to be this or that, but he infinitely prefers the texture of KID’s real hair, and he likes that he’s big enough to actually qualify as a good pillow.

"Nice football thighs," KID murmurs, in English, like he can read minds, and Shinichi, still, blushes, as though KID hasn’t licked at the insides of his thighs before, and that thought just makes Shinichi blush even harder.

"I’ll shove you off," replies Shinichi. "Right into the back of the seats in front of us."

"Rude," KID says, but his lips twitch, and he nuzzles into Shinichi’s hand, like some kind of puppy. Shinichi swallows, and drags his nails along Kid’s scalp to appease the demand.

The Japanese businessman next to them in the aisle seat coughs, and Shinichi tears himself away from the slope of KID’s nose, the bump that speaks of having been broken before, and looks over at...
him.

He’s clearly uncomfortable, looking back and forth between KID and Shinichi, and involuntarily, Shinichi stiffens, confused. KID turns his head to look up at him, and he spots the businessman quickly turning away. He sucks his lower lip into his mouth, and moves to sit up, but Shinichi starts to play with his hair again, not really wanting him to go anywhere.

It’s the first time, Shinichi realizes, that the way he and KID interact with each other in public has earned disapproval. Still, KID, who looks over his shoulder and tells Shinichi he can just deal with whatever he wears, face full of bravado, doesn’t need to look so uncertain. Shinichi is not in the habit of second-guessing himself.

"Ran’s mother isn’t into public displays of affection, either," Shinichi says, choosing the words carefully. He wonders if the man next to them speaks English, too. "It’s a generational thing."

KID studies him carefully out of the corner of his eye, but stops trying to ease out of Shinichi’s space. "If I were Katsumi, he wouldn’t be giving us that look." He sighs, and Shinichi can feel his warm breath through the fabric of his suit trousers. "You already know that, though. You might be a little socially inept, but you aren’t clueless."

"You think I’m socially inept?" Shinichi runs his tongue over his teeth. "Idiot. I just don’t care."

That gives KID pause. "About what?"

"I used to like being the center of attention, because people acknowledging my talent meant better opportunities to use it. That said, there’s a reason people think Kudou Shinichi is an asshole. I don’t care about what people want or expect of me. It’s of no interest. I care about stopping murders and living my life the way I want to."

"That’s…" KID flashes teeth at him, in a mix between a grimace and a smile. "I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone who thinks the way you do."

"Except for yourself," Shinichi says. "You don’t care about too many other people’s opinions all that much either. Every time you’ve been uncomfortable, it’s because you think I’m going to mind. I’m not going to, unless it’s… you know, my family. I care about what, you know, Ran or Haibara or Hattori think. He tugs lightly at a handful of curls and smirks. "Like you care about what Hakuba thinks."

"Hakuba can fuck off," KID says, but he smiles back, and then makes a point of linking his fingers with Shinichi’s when the businessman casts them another look, and purring: "I’m very glad to know you, Meitantei~" up at him with a more familiar expression on his face.

Shinichi closes his eyes, unsure of what’s in them and definitely not wanting KID to see it. "You’re a pain in the ass."

"Only if you like it rough," KID replies, and Shinichi, very mature at all times, yanks a little too hard at KID’s hair, and ignores KID’s mocking laugh.

"I’m going to throw you off the plane." He ignores KID’s "wouldn’t be the first time" and closes his eyes to make an attempt at sleep.

When they land at Narita, Shinichi shoulders his backpack and KID’s, ignoring KID’s protests as they disembark.

"You’re injured," Shinichi says. "I didn’t protest when you carried things for me when I was sick."
"Yes, you did," KID replies, but the argument seems to work on him anyway. "Are we catching a taxi?"

"I was going to have Professor Agasa pick us up. I would have called ahead, but I wasn’t sure if you wanted to disguise yourself or not." At KID’s lifted eyebrow, Shinichi clarifies. "I went to France for a specific reason. He’ll bring Haibara with him, and they’ll know who I must have been traveling with."

KID purses his lips thoughtfully. "You said you were going to inform them about…” He waves his hand between them, and Shinichi adjusts KID’s bag on his shoulder.

"Yes, about myself and Kuroba Kaito, at some point. Not about myself and… anyone else. That’s your information to share, not mine."

KID breathes out, and bumps Shinichi lightly with his shoulder, careful not to jar either of them too much. "Meitantei, for someone who insists they aren’t romantic, you sure know how to sweep a guy off his feet."

Shinichi sputters, and KID grins at him, before tugging him toward the seats in front of the arrival notification boards. "I’m going to need to change."

"Do you even have anything?"

"Give me ten minutes," KID promises, snagging his duffle, and he’s gone, leaving Shinichi staring at the space he’d been standing with wide eyes and a reminder that when KID wants to, he can definitely disappear.

He settles himself into one of the seats to wait and pulls out his phone, turning it on and waiting for the menu screen to appear. He texts Agasa quickly, airport, and then starts to type out a long, rambling, Caesar-shift message to Heiji detailing what he plans to do now that he’s in Japan again. He’s not sure if Heiji’s gone back to Osaka yet, but either way, Heiji has access to information that Shinichi doesn’t. He’ll be able to ask Osaki either way—

"All alone, Kudou Shinichi? When Aimee Durand woke up, she told me that you were traveling with a friend."

Shinichi looks up to see Kanami standing in front of him, with her expensive handbag and expensive shoes. She has one hand in her coat pocket, and the material juts out just enough for Shinichi to recognize it’s a concealed gun.

He checks his cap, making sure it’s still mostly obscuring his face. "We’re in an airport."

"I have a gun, and a few friends." A quick look around and Shinichi can mark at least three of them scattered at the various shops opposite him: one at the coffee bar, one at the burger place, another standing by the money exchange booth. "So you’re going to come with me." Her eyes drop to the bookbag at his feet. "You and Pandora."

"I don’t have Pandora," Shinichi lies. "And if you think I’m unarmed, you’ve got another thing coming. I’m not coming with you."

"Oh, you’ll come with me," she says. "Otherwise, in one hour, the entire building housing the Mouri Detective Agency is going to blow up, and I have it on good authority that Mouri Ran is home." She makes an exaggerated sad face. "Poor Detective Mouri has the flu, and couldn’t make it into the office today."
Shinichi looks at her in horror. "How did you…"

"Oh, it was easy to find out from anyone I asked that she's your girlfriend, once I realized you and that nosy little Edogawa were related."

Shinichi’s hand is on his dart watch, and he could fire, but with so much back-up… "Why do I have to come with you?"

"I can still salvage my identity, as long as I don’t kill anyone in public. So you, me, and Pandora are going for a drive." Her eyes are calculating, and she looks at him in a way she’d never dared to when he was Conan. "You’ll die either way, but I’ll tell you the exact location of the bomb and the digital code to disarm it before you die. The thing most important to you in exchange for the thing most important to me."

"I still don’t have it," Shinichi says. "You don’t even have any insurance I didn’t destroy it or give it to Vermouth."

Her eyes flash. "Vermouth wouldn’t take it, not with the way Gin and Rum are always breathing down her neck. She wouldn’t have let you destroy it, either. Poor Vermouth. I hear she used to be such a nice girl."

"Kanami-san?" Takagi’s cheerful, inquisitive voice cuts through the tension, and they both turn to look for him. He’s sitting at a small two-person table at the coffee bar with Satou, both of them dressed in warm winter coats and surrounded by luggage. Hokkaido, Shinichi thinks, and then Takagi’s eyes are sliding to him, widening. "And you’re…"

All of a sudden, Shinichi remembers that he’s still wearing his glasses, Conan’s glasses, thanks to KID’s insistence, and his own eyes widen in response, because he knows that Takagi will not be able to put aside the resemblance.

But instead, Takagi’s eyes drop to the strange fall of Kanami’s coat, the gun pushing at the dark gray material, and his small gasp has Satou looking over, seeing Kanami, and reacting immediately.

"Police! Put your hands up, Kanami-san." Satou vaults over the table, pulling out her gun as their coffee cups splatter on the floor and onto Takagi, who is pulling out his own side-arm hesitantly, aware Satou is the better shot.

"Damnit," Kanami growls, and then pulls her gun on Shinichi and snaps her fingers, sending her lackeys into motion. There are four of them, Shinichi thinks. KID wouldn’t have missed him, with his situational awareness as good as it is.

KID, even with his injury, would even this fight out a little.

Satou and Takagi are held by two men each, and it’ll be impossible for them to break free on their own. Shinichi himself is being held at gunpoint for what must be the hundredth time in three days. He’d say it was getting boring, if that weren’t exactly something KID would say.

Shinichi factors in the risk, but it’s not until a sharp card slices right in front of Kanami and distracts her that Shinichi is able to move, shoving her down and viciously kicking the gun out of her hand. She cries out in pain, but Shinichi’s already moving on, cap falling to the ground as he leans to dart one of the guys holding Satou, knowing that’ll be enough for her to free herself, and then turning to dart the men holding Takagi only to find them both down for the count, razor-edged cards lying around them.

KID, dressed as Katsumi, long blond hair falling around his shoulders, has a card gun out, but it
hangs limply at his side. "Thought that was destroyed?" Shinichi queries.

KID smirks at him with bright pink lips. "One should always have a spare. Especially when hanging out with trouble magnets like you."

Satou has her gun leveled at Kanami, even as she eyeballs her with a measure of disbelieving recognition from the Takizawa murder scene. "It’s over, Kanami-san. Put your hands up, and we’ll take you in quietly."

Kanami, though, looks far from defeated, and Shinichi knows why. "Tell me where you put the bomb."

Takagi gapes. "Bomb?"

"I won’t let you kill Ran," Shinichi says, and he drops down to his knees to get into her face as KID makes a short, aborted gasp. "Tell me where the bomb is, and the code to disarm it."

"No," she sneers at him, "I don’t think so. We were going to do this the nice way, Kudou-san, but now—" Kanami stops speaking and her eyes go blank, but it isn’t until the blood starts spouting that Shinichi realizes she’s been sniped.

"Fuck!" Shinichi snarls, and it only takes him a moment to calculate the trajectory. He spots the sniper, just barely, and when he recognizes her, his stomach drops. Chianti, he thinks, and he turns to Satou and Takagi. "She put a bomb somewhere in the building of the Mouri Detective Agency. Evacuate Poirot and the Mouris, and find the bomb if you can."

He looks wildly at KID, giving him a look that he hopes conveys you’re injured, so stay!, and then tears off toward the escalator.

There’s only one going down on this side, so Shinichi outruns it, taking the steps two at a time in order to ascend past all the people riding it down a floor. There’s someone behind him, and he turns to see Takagi mostly keeping pace with him, a combination of bewilderment and determination painted on his face.

"Where are we going, Cona— Kudou-kun?" Takagi pants, as Shinichi searches for access points, locating an emergency exit and immediately heading toward it.

"The roof," Shinichi explains as they run. "The shot was fired from the sloping side."

Takagi nods, and follows Shinichi up the back stairway, both of them sparing no time for stealth. It takes approximately three minutes for them to get as high as the stairs will take them, and Shinichi, impatient, breaks the fire glass and pulls out the emergency escape ladder, lining it up with the hatch exit on the top.

"Is that safe?" Takagi asks, reaching out to stabilize the ladder anyway, and Shinichi spares him a tight grin. It’s been six minutes since Kanami offered him an hour to save Ran. That means he has fifty-four minutes left.

"As safe as entering Tokyo Tower to talk a little girl out of the elevator," Shinichi replies, and Takagi visibly startles. "Not sure this counts as the next world, though, Detective."

"You are Conan," he says, with some certainty, and then he smiles. "You know that you’ve always had the same fingerprints? Thought it was a computer error at first."

"I don’t have time to explain," Shinichi says. "We have to catch her."
"Who?" Takagi asks, as Shinichi pushes open the hatch and crawls out onto the roof. They're partially hidden by the structure, a sloping sheet of metal blocking them off from the windows.

"The sniper," Shinichi whispers, holding the ladder still from the top so Takagi can come up after him. "She’s more dangerous than you know."

When Takagi has climbed out onto the roof, the harsh wind pushing at them both, Shinichi breaks into a run again, following the line of the ridge in the roof, keeping them obscured from where he thinks Chianti is. When they run out of covering, Shinichi prepares himself to fire the dart watch, and Takagi pulls his gun back out of his pants, fumbling with the safety.

He quickly rushes around the corner only to see a second woman, dressed in a dark blue coat, with a scarf covering the part of her face not hidden by sunglasses, fire what looks like a 9mm at Chianti, shooting her in the leg. "What are you doing? Who are you!" Chianti is furious, face suffused with rage.

"I’m someone making sure you go to jail," the woman replies, and her voice is familiar, ping at Shinichi’s memory. She kicks Chianti’s sniper gear away, and it tumbles off the edge, sliding audibly down the glass windows to land somewhere below.

"Tokyo Metropolitan Police! You’re under arrest!" Takagi announces clearly, stepping out from behind Shinichi. "For first degree murder!" He’s watching Chianti carefully, but his eyes flit over to the armed woman briefly.

"You’ll never take me!" Chianti says, and Shinichi darts her before she can make another move. Chianti collapses to the ground, and Takagi moves swiftly to handcuff her, warily skirting the woman with a gun across from them.

With large movements, she clicks the safety on her gun, and puts it back into her handbag before pulling down the scarf to reveal a face that further jogs his memory. "I thought it would take you longer to get up here, Kudou-kun," she says, and when she looks at him over her sunglasses, it’s with eyes just like Haibara’s.

"M.H.," Shinichi says, dully, and then he licks dry lips. "Masumi Hirota." An alias he’s never been able to forget, after he’d watched the woman get killed in front of him. *Miyano Akemi is alive*, he realizes slowly. *Haibara’s sister is alive*. He shakes his hands in his pockets when he realizes they’re shaking. "I thought you were dead. I saw you die. Or Conan did."

"I needed everyone to think that," she says, and takes off the sunglasses to reveal her entire face to him. Her hair is short now, he notes absently, but her face is the same. Her eyes are still kind. "I need to be dead to do the things I’m doing." She smiles at him, so reminiscent of the one she gave him when he’d warned her that she wasn’t safe, that the robbery was all a set up to make sure she’d die.

"You’re working to bring them down too," Shinichi says, and Akemi spares a glance to Takagi, who is watching everything with a stricken look on his face. "Detective Takagi is safe. I’m positive of it."

Akemi examines Shinichi’s face carefully, and then nods. "Of course I am. They took everything from me. The syndicate will pay for what they’ve done to my family." She clenches her hands into fists. "To Shiho."

"She’s alive," Shinichi says. "You know that, right? That Shiho is alive?"

Akemi drops her sunglasses, and they skitter across the roof. "What?" Her eyes are bright, and she really does look just like Haibara when Haibara forgets to be tough.
"She’s like Conan," Shinichi says vaguely. "She tried to poison herself with your mother’s research, and the results were atypical."

Understanding immediately flashes across Akemi’s face. "Are you certain?"

"Of course I am," Shinichi says. "I’ve been looking after her." He scratches his neck. "Or maybe she’s been looking after me." He looks down at his watch. Fifty minutes. "Kanami rigged a bomb at the Mouri’s. I’ve got to make sure…"

"Yes," Akemi agrees. "I’ll find you eventually, even if you go into hiding." She starts to leave, and Takagi picks Chianti up in his arms to take her back down into the airport.

"There are a couple of other things you should know," Shinichi says, and Akemi pauses, listening. "Kir and Bourbon are NOC. CIA and Japanese Secret Police." Shocked, Akemi spins around. "And Rye… is not as dead as you might have been led to believe." At that, she almost drops her handbag, but she catches herself, and Shinichi, in other circumstances, might have grinned over how Haibara that expression is.

"Then I have information for you, Kudou-kun," she replies. "I’ve learned that Rum is high up in the Japanese police force, so you’ll need to watch your step." Shinichi’s hands, still in his pockets, clench.

"Thank you," he says. "For that, and for…” He looks over at Takagi. "For the other warning."

Akemi nods. "You’re welcome. And…” She hesitates. "Could you not tell Shiho about me? I can’t…”

Shinichi understands. "Right," he agrees, and then she’s gone.

"Kudou-kun…” Takagi says, into the sudden silence. "Syndicate? Poison?"

"I don’t have time to answer these questions right now, Detective Takagi," Shinichi says, pushing his glasses up on his nose. "So we’ll have to settle for another raincheck."

"I’ve got a collection now," he says, and then Shinichi’s phone rings.

He answers it immediately, and KID is on the other end. "We’ve got a problem, Meitantei," he says, still using his Katsumi voice. Not alone, then. "Turns out Kanami-san rigged the stairs heading up to the Mouri Detective Agency with a secondary and tertiary detonator. Even walking up there will send things sky high. They were able to evacuate Poirot, but no luck on getting Mouri-san and Miss Mouri out, or even getting in to look around. Bomb squad is working on deactivating the secondary and tertiary detonator now, but it’s going to take them at least another thirty minutes."

"Damnit," Shinichi says. "I’ll be right there."

More police officers have come, at least six, and they pour out onto the roof. From above, in an airplane, they probably look like ants. "I’ve got things here," Takagi says. "You go ahead, Kudou-kun."

Shinichi swallows. "Shinichi’s all right, Detective Takagi, no need to be formal with me now," he says, and then he’s leaving before Takagi can answer, sure the man will stammer out something silly in response, and despite everything, it makes him smile. But then his smile is gone as he rushes back down to KID, checking his watch again. Forty-six minutes, now, until that bomb is supposed to blow.
KID is waiting for him, standing near Satou as she directs the officers around her, but making sure he’s out of the way. He has Pandora, Shinichi sees with relief, and his own bag as well, and his mouth is tight with discomfort from the weight.

"Shinichi," KID says, when Shinichi comes into earshot, and the casual use of his first name without honorifics is enough to catch Satou’s attention. "What’s the plan?"

"We have to get Ran to find the bomb," Shinichi says, letting KID reach out and grab a handful of his coat. It calms him, slightly; even the warmth of KID through all of his layers is enough to clear a few of the jitters from his mind and crystalize his thoughts. "And we need to get to the Agency as quickly as possible." He takes his backpack from KID and settles it on his own shoulders, before slipping the shoulder-strap of the duffle across his chest. He stares into KID’s worried eyes. "We have to figure out the code to disarm it."

"You’re very good at codes," KID says, with a tiny smile, pulling Shinichi’s fallen cap from thin air and settling it back over his undoubtedly messy hair. Shinichi nods grimly.

"I’ll drive," Satou says immediately, catching both their attention. "I’ll comandeer a car, and I can turn the siren on. I’ll have you there in twenty-five minutes."

"Thank you, Detective Satou," Shinichi says, and Satou looks at him measuredly.

"I’ve heard a lot about you, Kudou Shinichi," she says, signaling several officers with short, sharp hand motions, and one scuttles over with keys that he immediately drops into her hand. "Not all of it was flattering, but it didn’t escape my notice that Takagi immediately trusted you." She sighs. "I guess you also have something to do with sending Takagi and I out of town?"

"There might have been some danger from Kanami-san," Shinichi replies, unsure whether or not to laugh at how inadequate that explanation is. It must be good enough, though, because Satou just nods, and they break out into a fast run, Satou noting the number on the key fob and searching for the matching vehicle as soon as they’re through the glass doors.

KID is right behind him, climbing into the back seat of the car as Shinichi vaults across the hood to get more quickly to the passenger side. Satou’s already started the engine by the time he’s shut the door.

"Another thing we’re not doing on our next date, Meitantei," KID says, as Shinichi pulls his phone out of his pocket, sending the half-finished message to Heiji and opening a new one to Haibara that just says change of plans. mouri agency so Agasa won’t check his mobile while he drives. "Me in the back of a cop car."

Satou’s already halfway out the exit, siren blaring as she weaves around buses on the wrong side of the road.

"Just expanding your horizons, thief," Shinichi mutters, pulling off his cap again and throwing it to the floor with KID’s duffle, and Satou shoots him an incredulous look before checking KID again in the rear view mirror.

"Kudou-kun," she says, swerving right dangerously before slipping past two airport taxi-vans to exit out onto the highway. "is that Kaitou KID in the backseat right now?" She swears, and skirts around a Honda in front of them that’s moving just below the speed limit. "Never mind. I don’t want to know why you and Conan have been hanging out with Kaitou KID."

"Solving the KID murders, of course," Shinichi replies, and Satou snorts.
"Of course," she says, and she shoots him another absolutely incredulous look before she’s snarling at another driver out her window. "Am I supposed to pretend I don’t know who you are?"

"I won’t be using this disguise again," KID says. "It’ll be very easy."

Another dangerous swerve of the police cruiser. Shinichi fastens his seatbelt, and then dials Ran.

She answers after three rings, sounding pleasantly surprised. "Shinichi? You’re in Japan? Oh, you picked a weird time to call though, since I was just about to—"

"Ran," Shinichi says, lowly, "I need you to listen to me, and not to panic."

"Shinichi?"

"Somewhere in your dad’s office, there’s a bomb," Shinichi says, with all the calmness he doesn’t feel. "I’m going to need you to find it."

"O-okay." Ran’s voice trembles, and Shinichi knows the look on her face right now, and he can sense the exact moment she gathers herself, tough Ran taking over in times of crisis. "Okay, Shinichi, tell me where to look."

"That’s my girl," Shinichi says, warmly, and Ran huffs. "You can do this. I need you to quietly leave the apartment and look down at the stairs, okay? Don’t walk anywhere."

"Why not?" Her voice wobbles, but she’s not second-guessing him, just asking for more information.

"On the stairs between the agency and Poirot, there were secondary and tertiary remote detonators," replies Shinichi. "I need you to make sure you aren’t triggering anything."

The door opens and closes, and Ran takes a shaky breath. "The steps look clear, Shinichi. Nothing unusual, and the newspapers I stacked out here to take out later haven’t moved."

"Any unusual scuff marks along the walls?"

"No." Ran swallows audibly. "I’m going down to my dad’s office now."

"All right," Shinichi says. "Go ahead."

"The door is unlocked," Ran says immediately. "I know I locked it this morning when I changed his voicemail greeting."

"Someone’s been in there," Shinichi replies. "Someone who’s been stalking Conan-kun."

"Is he hurt!" Ran’s fear transforms immediately to worry, and Shinichi runs a hand through his hair, his heart constricting in his chest with a mixture of guilt and affection. Those two things are always tangled up in every conversation he has with Ran. "Conan is always getting himself into trouble, just like you, Shinichi!"

"He’s fine," Shinichi soothes. "In witness protection overseas."

"Witness protection!" Ran’s voice goes up an octave. "Shinichi—"

"I’ll tell you all about it after we find that bomb, Ran," he interrupts. "Look around the office. Is anything out of place?"

"I don’t know," Ran says. "I’m not you, Shinichi, I don’t notice every detail!"
"Yes you do," Shinichi replies. "You just don’t know it because your brain doesn’t think it’s important, and it filters it out. But you need to remember now, Ran. Look at the old man’s desk. Has anything moved?"

"Shinichi…” She sounds lost, but he can hear her slippered feet shuffling across the floor of Mouri’s office, towards his desk. "I can hear voices downstairs."

"That’s the bomb squad disabling the other motion-sensing detonators. It’s going to take them another ten to fifteen minutes. Focus, Ran." His gaze slips down to his watch again. Thirty-three minutes.

"Someone turned off call forwarding. To keep me from coming down here?"

"You might have been forced to come down to the office by a client, or to take care of something on the work computer," says Shinichi. "Ran, can you hear anything?"

"It’s quiet," she says, and Shinichi doesn’t realize his nails are digging into his palm again until KID’s hands reach in between the seats to grab it firmly, unfurling the fingers one by one as Satou curses loudly and careens down the exit ramp toward Beika.

"ETA ten minutes, Kudou-kun!"

Ran overhears, and gasps. "Shinichi, you’re coming?"

"Yes," he confirms, letting KID tangle their fingers together briefly, then lets go before Satou notices. The last thing he needs now is for her to connect KID to Kuroba Kaito, should she ever see them together. "Now Ran, I need you to check under the desk, where your dad keeps his passwords. Are there any strange wires?"

"Nothing," she says. "Just the land-line and the Ethernet cord for the computer, since Dad still won’t use wi-fi." Exasperation, and Shinichi forces out a laugh. "I’ll check under the couches and tables."

"Shinichi, what about…” KID murmurs, and Shinichi turns in his seat, just in time to lurch forward against the seatbelt as Satou cuts a turn close. It knocks the breath out of him, but he just clutches the phone harder as KID’s face contorts with only partially concealed agony as his own seatbelt digs into his fractured ribs.

"You’ve got an idea?" Shinichi asks, to get KID’s mind off the pain.

"Hand me the phone, detective," he replies, with a feeble grin. "Or speaker." Shinichi doesn’t hesitate, putting the phone on speaker, and KID clears his throat.

"Mouri-chan," he says, his Katsumi voice cheerful and clear. "Does your father have any photos on the walls?"

"Ah, Katsumi-san…? Is that you? Why are you with…"

"That’s a long story that I’m sure you’ll hear eventually from our detective!" One arm is wrapped bracingly around his torso. "But more importantly, Mouri-chan, does your father still have those portraits on the wall?"

"You’ve been in my father’s office?"

KID smirks. "A long time ago," he says. "Conan-kun was looking after a friend of mine, and I popped by."
"Moron," Shinichi hisses, and KID winks at him. "Ran, have any of the pictures on the wall moved?"

"The one of me!" Ran fumbles with the phone, and Shinichi clenches his back teeth together, wishing they were already there. Another watch check. Twenty-four minutes. "I think… I think it’s been moved!"

"Mouri-chan, get a little closer to the painting," KID instructs, keeping his voice level. "Do you hear anything?"

"There’s… a ticking noise…” Ran inhales sharply. "Did the person stalking Conan-kun put a bomb behind the picture of me?"

"They wanted to hit him where it would hurt him the most," Shinichi says lowly. "And me."

"What should I do now, Shinichi?"

"You’re going to carefully take the photo down, Ran." He bites his lip. "It’s not the photo itself, it’s probably been put into a cut-out in the wall behind it."

"I’m going to… I’m going to put the phone down, Shinichi. Or put it on speaker."

"Good idea, Ran. You can do this." The silence stretches, and Shinichi can’t seem to get any air. "Ran?"

"The bomb is here, Shinichi. The timer…” His heart stops beating. "It says three minutes, Shinichi."

"Damnit!" Satou yells, and they’re in Beika proper now, driving past the New Beika Hotel at top speed, the park clock chiming the hour from the other side of town. "Almost there, Kudou!"

"That’s fine," Shinichi says, his world narrowing in to this connection with Ran across the phone line. Three minutes means Kanami had overestimated the amount of time she was in the airport. Had left it to an inexact estimation.

"Shinichi, what should I…?" Ran’s voice is trembling again.

KID has grabbed his hand again, and this time, Shinichi allows himself to take comfort from KID’s steady presence without worrying about Satou noticing. He can talk Ran through this, and he knows it. He’s done it before, and this is his domain. Ran’s the muscle and Shinichi’s the brain. "What kind of bomb is it, Ran? Is there a keypad?"

"Yes," Ran replies. "The keys are strange, though, Shinichi."

"Strange how? Are they letters or numbers?"

"Letters, I think. They look familiar but I can’t remember where I’ve seen them!" Ran’s voice goes higher. "Two minutes, Shinichi!"

Familiar letters, but Ran can’t remember where she’s seen them. Not English, then, or Japanese. Probably not Cyrillic, either, because Ran’s memory isn’t weak and she’d remember Cyrillic. Letters she’s seen before… "Math? Ran, have you seen them in math class?"

"Greek?" KID leans forward as Satou skids to a halt in front of the Mouri Detective Agency, behind two other cop cars and a fire-truck. Shiratori and Megure are both waiting out front, and Megure’s eyes go completely round when Shinichi climbs out of the car.

"Yes, I think so!" Ran shouts, and Shinichi takes the phone off speaker, running up to the front of Poirot only to find Bourbon squatting down next to someone dressed in a full bomb blast suit, advising on the tertiary detonator. "Shinichi, that’s it! Greek!"

He shoves past the two officers standing guard with a scattered apology, approaching in time to hear Bourbon confidently direct the expert to cut black.

Bourbon looks up at him, in complete shock, as they cut the final wire of the detonator, the head of the bomb squad yelling "Clear!"

"Kudou Shinichi?!" His expression oscillates between disbelief and triumph, and Shinichi doesn’t have time to assuage his curiosity; not now.

"There’s a timer," he says, and Bourbon nods sharply. Shinichi eases past him and up the stairs. Megure shouts behind him to be careful, but Shinichi ignores him, taking the last of the stairs two by two as he pushes into Mouri’s office without hesitating.

Ran looks up at him, with wet eyes, and Shinichi grins at her, running to her side and edging her out of the way. "Shinichi, you’re here!"

"I’m here," he replies, and then he looks at the keypad. Twenty-two seconds. "And I think I know the password."

"I’ll trade something important to you for something important to me."

Something important to Kanami. So important that she’d spent the last twenty years trying to get her hands on it.

Eighteen seconds. Πανδώρα, he types. Pandora.

Seventeen seconds, and then the timer stops, as Satou and Bourbon both run into the office, KID just behind them, carrying Shinichi’s backpack and his face pale underneath all his make-up.

Ran throws herself into his arms, and he hugs her tightly, everything inside him easing in relief. He looks toward the entrance to meet KID’s eyes as Satou calls for more officers to check the premises, and Bourbon comes closer to examine the bomb.

"Shinichi," Ran mumbles into his shoulder, and he runs a comforting hand through her hair, still not breaking away from KID, who looks a little lost standing there. "You made it."

"Just in the nick of time," he jokes, and the wet laugh into his shoulder is reassuring. Ran’s always been strong, and Shinichi’s not surprised she can bounce back this quickly.

"What’s all this noise about!" a familiar, cranky voice yells, and a clearly feverish Mouri Kogorou, dressed in pink and yellow striped pajamas and bunny slippers, stumbles into his office. "Can’t a man be sick in his own—" He looks around at all the gathered officers, at Bourbon and KID, and then at Ran and Shinichi. "Uh. Did I miss something?"

"Oh, Dad," Ran says, amusement and exasperation all twined together in her voice, and when Shinichi starts laughing, so hard that he can’t catch his breath, it feels almost like he’s crying in relief. KID’s grin, bright and irrepressible, reads the same way as Shinichi’s thoughts.
Our win.

*Bourbon corners him just inside the doors of the empty Poirot when Shiratori takes Ran aside for questioning. Shinichi doesn’t think Bourbon fails to notice that KID, still disguised as Katsumi, watches them carefully, and he doesn’t try to take him out of KID’s sight.

"Those glasses you’re wearing are familiar."

"Professor Agasa’s creation," Shinichi says. "Takeuchi and Kanami are both dead."

"And where is Conan-kun?"

"Witness protection," Shinichi replies. "Where I’ve been, since Gin and Vodka tried to kill me at Tropical Land." Bourbon blinks twice, in surprise. "You didn’t know that?"

"I knew from looking into the Kudou family that you were connected to Edogawa Conan, but it’s also listed in Organization records that you’re deceased, and no one but Mouri Ran would willingly talk about you."

"Ran doesn’t know how dangerous things are for me right now, and it’s better for her if she doesn’t." Shinichi narrows his eyes. "What do you know about Takeuchi and Kanami’s motives?"

"Not much," Bourbon admits. "I thought they were intent on bringing the organization down, and I knew they wanted Vermouth, but I wasn’t too worried about them catching her." He smiles fondly. "She’s a dragon in wolf’s clothing."

"They were interested in the same thing as your crows," says Shinichi. "Immortality. Except they were aiming to take it more directly, and they knew Vermouth was the key." Shinichi hesitates. "Or, was one of them, anyway, and they were willing to use Chianti’s grudge and you to make it happen."

"More... directly?"

"I’m making that option unavailable, and it’s for the best that I don’t tell you much else, because, honestly, I don’t trust you completely. But Kanami, at least, knew you aren’t on the up and up with your organization, and Chianti’s been taken in alive, so take this as a warning."

"You don’t trust me completely?" He furrows his brow. "You know who I am and who I represent, though."

"You almost unraveled a deep cover I’d constructed for an FBI agent, based on a personal vendetta, putting two NOCs at risk. You’re not trustworthy to me, Furuya Rei." Bourbon’s face tightens.

"You don’t know—"

"You’re right," Shinichi says. "I don’t. I won’t ask, either. Maybe you’ve been with those men in black too long if you think there’s any excuse to get other people working toward the same goal killed on purpose. Or maybe you were so consumed with finding Akai-san that you forgot who might be watching your every move, or that you might get my parents or my little cousin and his friends killed by accosting an innocent man on suspicion in my house."

Bourbon grits his teeth in frustration. "I’ve given up on that particular venture."
"But you’re still here, working at Poirot. Why?"

"I don’t trust you either, Kudou-san," answers Bourbon. "You clearly work too closely with Americans." His sneer is genuine, and echoes the way he always looks at Jodie, like she’s intruding on his case, and doesn’t have her own reasons for tracking down the Black Organization.

"Jodie’s family was killed by the people you’re infiltrating, on American soil," Shinichi says. "In front of her. That makes this case as much hers as it is yours." Bourbon’s expression falters, and Shinichi thinks he only sees emotion on the man’s face at all because he isn’t bothering to hide it. And maybe it’s easier, too, Shinichi thinks, to look directly into Bourbon’s eyes when he’s not so close to the ground.

"I’m not going to hand over information from my investigation."

"Do you know anything about Rum?" Shinichi considers the man in front of him, and adds: "I’m not asking you for information. I’m making sure you have this piece: I’m pretty sure that Date Wataru found out Rum’s identity."

"I’ve suspected as much," Bourbon says, back on solid ground. "If you look back through police files, there are too many cases involving the organization, even peripherally, that link back to him."

"Rum could be a member of the Japanese police force, so if I were in a position to see who has accessed his files, and run statistics…” Shinichi shrugs as Bourbon raises both eyebrows. "Just a suggestion. I’d better go."

"Good luck," Bourbon says. "To you and to Conan-kun."

KID rests against the hall wall, Shinichi’s backpack hanging from his left arm and his own bag resting between his feet. It’s surprisingly clear of officers. KID anticipates his question. "They’ve already been through this area with a fine-tooth comb. Nice chat with our friendly neighborhood alcoholic beverage?"

"As nice as could be expected," Shinichi replies. He takes a couple more steps forward, until he can rest his forehead against KID’s shoulder, careful of his torso. "We did it, KID."

"Just like you promised," KID says. His right hand comes up to cup Shinichi’s neck, and Shinichi feels like the next breath he takes is the most restful one he’s taken in years. "I’m safe, Ran’s safe."

"For now," Shinichi says, breathing in KID’s smell. Shinichi will forever associate jasmine with comfort, probably. It’s not a bad association. "There’s still so much—""

"Meitantei, you can’t put your life on hold anymore. We’ll figure it out." He rubs his thumb at the hair that’s grown out too much at his nape. "First, we’ll find a place for Pandora."

"Right," Shinichi agrees, but before he can say anything else, someone coughs delicately from the foot of the stairs. He turns his face to see Ran, her eyes reflecting her confusion and amazement.

"Shinichi?" She tilts her head. "I didn’t know you even knew Katsumi-san…"

Considering what to tell her, Shinichi lifts his head up to take off his glasses, tucking them into his pocket. "Well…"

KID’s thumb still rubs soothingly up and down the skin, and Shinichi meets his gaze. Amusement, and resignation, and trust.
"I'll explain it to her," KID says, using his real voice, and Ran’s never been slow, never missed the obvious.

"You’re Kaitou KID," she says, softly, after looking to make sure there’s no one behind her. "You’ve been working with Conan-kun and Shinichi to solve this case, and this is your cover."

"Just so, Miss Mouri." KID hesitates. "We’ve met before, though, when I was myself. You’ll probably… be able to figure out who I am in real life whether I tell you or not, since Meitantei is willing to keep me around."

Ran’s eyes are drawn to where KID’s hand still rests comfortably on Shinichi’s neck, and Shinichi hadn’t realized that after he’d tucked his glasses into his pocket, he’d put his hands back at KID’s waist.

"He grows on you," Shinichi says dryly, throat tight, not exactly embarrassed but tense anyway, unsure what Ran will think about the boy she almost dated getting romantically involved with another boy. He won’t change his mind, either way, but he can’t predict what her immediate reaction will be, even if he knows eventually, it’ll be fine.

"You adore me," KID teases, and Shinichi gives him one of his most unimpressed glares.

Ran laughs. "I think he does," she says, sounding as surprised as she looks. "Your identity’s safe with me… KID-san?"

"Kaito," KID corrects, and Shinichi pats his waist when he realizes KID is shaking a little. "Or Katsumi will do, for now."

"Kaito…" Her eyes grow round. "Kuroba-san? Does—"

"Aoko doesn’t know. Actually, only Meitantei here knows, so you’re only the second person save for my assistant who knows my identity."

"Why are you telling me?" Ran steps closer to them, to lessen the chance of anyone overhearing them.

"You’re Shinichi’s family," KID says. "And he’s had to keep enough secrets from you."

Ran’s eyes are glassy. "So now I’ve got two idiots to deal with instead of just one?"

Shinichi grins tiredly at Ran, his Ran, who is so beautiful, so understanding, and definitely worthy of the pedestal Shinichi’s always kept her on, even if it has driven them a little apart. One day, when it’s all over and done with, he’ll be able to tell her everything, and he looks forward to that. For now, though, this is enough.

"That’s right," Shinichi says. "Two for the price of one." KID must feel his pulse racing, but he doesn’t come closer or move away. Instead, he’s watching Ran with soft eyes, so blue that Shinichi’s sure that this is the time he’ll drown in them.

"You don’t like Sherlock Holmes, do you?" Ran’s smile is genuine. "Because really, I can’t take much more of that."

"I prefer the Night Baron," KID promises, and Shinichi is hard-pressed to take offense to that.

When they’ve wrapped up the initial investigation, Satou reluctantly leaves Shinichi and KID at the Mouri’s to make their own way home after they turn down a ride. Ran nudges Shinichi gently with
her elbow as KID snags his phone to call and tell Haibara that they’ll be at the professor’s soon. Shinichi thinks he’s just giving Shinichi and Ran a chance to talk, wandering away with the cell pressed to his ear.

"Are you going to stay in Japan, Shinichi?"

"It’s not safe yet," he replies, giving her his full attention. "I haven’t been honest with you, Ran, because the less you know about my case the better. When it’s safe, though, I promise you I’ll come home." He grins at her, the way he’s learned gets him mostly out of trouble. "Until then, I’m sure Hondou-san will keep you busy."

"Shinichi!" She blushed furiously, but she looks happy, and that, more than anything, allows the last bit of Shinichi that’s been holding on to let her go. "You’re not leaving yet, right?"

Shinichi, Pandora heavy in his backpack, shakes his head. "I have a few things to do before I disappear again. It won’t be… It won’t be as hard for you to reach me anymore, though."

"Good," Ran says. "I missed you. I missed my best friend."

"Me too," Shinichi says, and he nudges her back with his own gentle elbow. "I won’t be a stranger."

"Kaitou KID, huh? Sonoko would have a cow."

"I know," Shinichi groans, but then he looks over at KID, whose wicked grin implies that he’s probably being scolded by Haibara. "I know. We work well together, though."

"I can already tell," Ran says, and though Shinichi feels a bit like he’s standing on the platform watching a train he’d been supposed to catch speed away without him, he is not sad, and he feels like the next train might be the one that gets him where he really needs to go. "Tell him later that I still owe him a good punch for touching my butt."

Then Sera’s motorcycle comes racing down the street, stopping just outside the tape, and Hondou Eisuke is just behind her, wearing the spare helmet. He folds Ran up into a hug, whispering something in her ear, and Shinichi searches for jealousy but comes up with none.

Sera is staring at him, her own helmet in her hands, and Shinichi salutes her. She replies with a fanged grin. "Welcome home, famous Kudou Shinichi."

"I’m home," he replies, the traditional greeting saying far more than usual.

* 

Haibara does about a hundred tests on him down in her makeshift laboratory, taking enough blood samples that Shinichi feels lightheaded.

He ends up half-asleep on Agasa’s couch as KID drags out the story of what happened to them in the style of a children’s fairy tale to Haibara, Agasa and Hattori Heiji, who hasn’t left Tokyo yet. Heiji ends up sitting next to Shinichi on the sofa and poking him every once in a while, to ask if that’s “really what happened or is that idiot making shit up”.

In the end, Haibara tells Shinichi privately that he seems perfectly healthy, but that there are some irregularities in his blood that she’d like to investigate, and Shinichi groggily agrees, with Heiji and KID bickering behind him.

"So what are you going to do now?" Haibara stares at him, and he forces himself to sit up and take a
sip of the almost cold coffee Agasa had poured for him when he came up from Haibara’s lab. "You can’t stay here."

"I’m going to Los Angeles for now," Shinichi says. "Next week, I think. I need a high school diploma, so I’m going to enroll in an American high school as Shinichi Kudou. No one will notice me as long as I don’t go to any major events with my parents that make international news, at least for a while."

"The United States, huh?"

"It’ll keep me out of trouble while Bourbon tracks down Rum," Shinichi says. "Plus it’ll keep Vermouth away from you guys."

"It will be strange with you gone," Haibara says, mouth falling into a frown. "You keep things interesting."

"Keep your eyes open, Haibara," Shinichi says. "Things haven’t calmed down here in Tokyo at all. A lot of major players are still here."

She sighs. "I know. We’ll look after Ran." She points at Heiji. "He’ll take care of things over here while you figure out our next move. Try not to become a famous crime-solving high school student in California or we’ll be in real trouble."

"Someday, we’ll be able to go wherever we want—" Shinichi’s phone rings, and he pulls it out of his pocket to see Inspector Megure’s name flashing across the screen. "Inspector?"

"Ah, Shinichi-kun, I have some bad news. The prisoner you and Takagi apprehended at the airport this afternoon was found dead in her cell about ten minutes ago," Megure says, and Shinichi sighs.

"Did you learn anything from her?"

"Not really," Megure replies. "Only that someone named Jin would be coming for her."

"Gin," Shinichi repeats, with the correct pronunciation. "How did she die, Inspector?"

"Strangled." Megure clears his throat. "By someone dressed up like a guard. 165cm, blond. That’s all we’ve gotten out of everyone else on duty before they were knocked out."

Vermouth, Shinichi realizes, and he looks quickly at Haibara before fixing his gaze on his socked feet, digging into the professor’s carpet. "Thank you for the update, Inspector."

"No problem, Shinichi-kun. Don’t forget to stop by tomorrow to finish up with the reports."

"I won’t." When he hangs up, everyone is looking at him. "Chianti is dead. Strangled." He seeks KID’s eyes immediately, and nods as subtly as possible to confirm that it was Vermouth when he sees the immediate question in his eyes.

"No information from that front, then," Heiji mutters, shoving his hands in his pockets. "We’ll have our work cut out for us finding leaves while Kudou’s off staying as hidden as possible." He scrunches his face up at KID. "Are you part of the team now, or what? You gonna be digging up stuff with us on this organization or is it back to stealing?"

"A little of column A, a little of column B," KID replies. "I don’t steal for personal gain, you realize. Usually just to unmask counterfeiters, crooks, and other thieves, or mess with good old Uncle Suzuki."
"That's pretty true," Heiji muses, fussing with his hair. "In that case, I guess I'll stop bothering trying to arrest you." He tugs at his hair again, and Shinichi forces himself to get up from the sofa and walk over to KID’s bag, unzipping it and pulling out Heiji's lucky cap.

"Hey, Hattori," he says, and when Heiji looks over, he throws it at him. "Thanks for the loan." Heiji catches it in surprise. "I think it is pretty lucky."

"Maybe you should keep it then, Kudou," Heiji replies, and Shinichi unconsciously reaches for his coin.

"Oi, oi," says Shinichi. "I've got my own lucky charm, thanks." Heiji’s eyes drop to where Shinichi’s hand rests, and his eyes narrow suspiciously.

"Eh, Kudou, you wouldn’t happen to—" He cuts himself off. "Whatever. I gotta go, and catch my train back to Osaka. I have a test tomorrow, so my mom’ll throw a fit if I skip class again." He twists his cap around backwards. "Just wanted to be sure you were all right, since we’re buds and all."

Shinichi grins at him, and Heiji scoffs. "Did you even find what they were looking for?"

"It wasn’t there," KID complains. "All that work, and it was a decoy the whole time."

He sells it, Shinichi has to admit. It’s a relief, that KID can carry off what Shinichi has always found the most difficult part of any of his plans. A team, Shinichi thinks. He’s starting to get used to it.

"Well, as long as they don’t have it, it doesn’t matter," Shinichi says into the opening KID’s created.

Haibara gives him a long glance, but in the end, she says nothing.

Heiji hugs him when he leaves, and Haibara doesn’t. Still, he feels the weight of separation from them both to be equally heavy, and knows it’s for the best.

*

After they fall into KID’s secret room, KID sets Pandora down in the center of his worktable and shoots it a look of absolute disgust before he walks over to the other side of the room, where a fresh white suit hangs waiting for him to wear. "What should we do with it?" KID asks, tossing the blond hair of his Katsumi wig over his shoulder with a natural grace. The dress he’d bought at the airport hangs nicely, now that Shinichi has the chance to notice. "Where can we put it for it to possibly be safe?"

"It helps that no one but Vermouth knows we have it," Shinichi replies. "We could probably put it anywhere. You can make a puzzle to hide it this summer if you’d like."

"You’d let me be in charge?"

"Yes. You're good at making puzzles. I'm better at solving them than creating them."

KID glances back at Shinichi over his shoulder. "Do you really think Pandora will do something positive someday?"

"I hope it will," Shinichi replies. "And I'm willing to do what it takes to ensure that during my lifetime, it doesn't do any harm."

"Hmmm, that sounds fun," KID says, smoothing his hands along the lapels of the suit. "Maybe I'll stick around."

"I'll try my best not to ever be boring."
KID walks over to where he keeps a lot of his gadgets on shelves, and finds one of his card guns. "That’s good enough for me, Meitantei." He picks up the gun, and examines it at all angles, before pointing it at Shinichi. "Bang."

Shinichi lifts both brows as KID walks over to where Shinichi sits in the plush red chair, watching, and plops himself in Shinichi’s lap. "Careful," Shinichi says, bringing a hand up to hold KID’s hip until he’s steady across Shinichi’s thighs.

"Why, detective, are you implying that I’m not careful?" He straightens his back with barely a wince for his ribs, and holds the gun up between them. "Watch carefully, Meitantei."

He presses the mag release, just like Shinichi would on a Glock, and a thin square steel magazine case slides out. Shinichi lets go of KID’s hip to catch it, resting his other hand on KID’s thigh to compensate. Turning the opening to face him, Shinichi licks his lips. "The cards go in vertically?"

"Yep," KID says, index finger pushing into the slide lock as he removes the slide from the receiver. "Then they get rolled here, by this piece." He runs his thumb over a complicated gear, scuffed from the metal edges of the cards. "And when the cards are fired, the metal is straightened when it’s pushed through a shaft in the barrel, and that straightens the paperstock part of the card ammo again along with it, so even though it’s fired out of a round opening, it’s pressed straight."

It’s ingenious, and the fact that it fires so fast is a credit to its engineering, just like Shinichi had thought it would be. "You designed this?"

"This model," KID confirms, letting Shinichi take the slide from him to better examine the barrel. Just as slick, just as clever. KID is brilliant, and Shinichi’s always known it, but every time he sees something new it lights a fire inside him all over again.

"My dad’s worked a lot differently, but I knew I could make something that suited me better, and then it was just a matter of tinkering with the molds—"

Shinichi cuts him off, letting the parts of the card gun clatter to the ground as he reaches up and grabs both of KID’s cheeks with his palms to pull him down into a kiss, too rough at first, mashing their teeth together until KID tilts his face enough to ease the crush. KID whimpers into Shinichi’s mouth when Shinichi licks just behind KID’s ear until the tiny freckle there is revealed. KID shivers. "And maybe how easily you handle guns."

"Definitely kinkier than advertised," KID groans, body shifting, half-hard cock rubbing against
Shinichi’s thigh as KID’s dress rides up his thighs. "Is it just guns, or..."

"Lock-picks," Shinichi says. "Grappling hooks. Safes." Carefully, he slides his hand up KID’s skirt along the pantyhose until his fingertips brush KID’s erection. KID gives a shuddering little laugh, and Shinichi swallows down all the saliva that gathers in his mouth. "Do you think you could crack a safe while I touched you like this?"

"Fuck, Meitantei, where’d that come from?" Shinichi presses his whole palm along the line of KID’s cock. He knows that under the pantyhose, KID’s underwear is gray, and that it comes up to the spot just under the dimples in his back. "Before, you made it sound like you didn’t even think about that kind of thing outside of—"

"I don’t think about it with just anybody," Shinichi says, softly. "Only with someone I..." Someone he knows like he now knows KID. That he sees like he now sees KID.

It’s that, more than anything else, that has KID falling forward to kiss him again, thrusting his cock into Shinichi’s touch and hissing with pain as it jars his ribs. "Shin—"

"Careful, careful," Shinichi mumbles against KID’s lower lip, before he bites it, enjoying the aborted jerk of KID’s hips as Shinichi presses a little more firmly with his hand, unsure exactly what he’s doing but able to follow clues when they’re this obvious.

He smells jasmine, tastes unscented sticky pink gloss, feels heat against his palm. It’s a lot of things at once, and this isn’t slow and tender, like KID’s cautious seduction following Shinichi’s transformation back in Paris. This is something else entirely, that makes it hard for Shinichi to think at all, because KID is trembling above him and lovely and so intelligent that Shinichi has to jump through hoops to keep up, and...

"I could, you know," KID says, nails digging into Shinichi’s shoulders as he spreads his thighs further apart. Shinichi slides his other hand around to the small of KID’s back to keep him from moving too much. "Open a safe while you touched me. I can crack a safe in my sleep, so like this—"

"What about the Iron Tanuki?" Shinichi asks, and KID laughs, dark brown eyelashes fluttering over the impossible blue of his eyes, and then Shinichi’s slipping his hand up to pull down at KID’s stockings and underwear, worming his way inside to pull his cock free. "Do you think you could beat Kichiemon like this?"

"Of course I could." KID sounds like he’s run a race, and he’s so warm and hard in Shinichi’s hand. Shinichi has never touched himself much, and especially hadn’t since he’d shrunk, despite his hormones acting up to the same annoying degree, but he knows enough, had learned enough from the last time he’d held KID in his hand like this, to seek out the underside of the head, and when he drags his thumb down the slick slit to rub just along the vein, KID hisses into his ear, teeth digging in too hard to Shinichi’s neck.

Shinichi jolts at the shock of pain, and KID mumbles "sorry," into the skin as he licks it in apology, which has Shinichi’s toes curling in his socks. Hesitantly, he makes a fist around KID’s erection, and at KID’s urgent moan of approval, starts to jerk him off. Each and every noise he wrings out of KID sprawled in his lap is interesting, and Shinichi has always admired KID’s vocal talents, but he never really imagined admiring them in a situation like this.

That makes his hand tighten as his breath hitches, and KID leans back, to look at him with a flushed face and eyes open wider than Shinichi’s ever seen them. His lips are swollen and shiny, and his hair is a complete mess, but he’s smirking anyway. "What was it you liked?"
Embarrassed, Shinichi looks down at where his hand has disappeared under the soft material of KID's dress, and slides his tongue along his teeth, "tasting" KID. "I... like your voice," He curves his palm so that he can rub it in circles around the head, feeling the desperate clench of KID’s thighs and hoping KID’s not aggravating his ribs. He’s still leaning back into Shinichi’s other hand, though, so he shouldn’t be finding it hard to breathe, and he’s taller than Shinichi, but it’s all leg, so like this, they’re actually pretty level when Shinichi swoops in for another kiss.

His answer surprises KID. He can feel it in the sudden tense and release of the muscles in KID’s back, but then KID is just kissing him more fiercely, and the small thrusts into Shinichi’s hand get faster, more needy. When all of KID’s muscles tense up again, and KID spills all over his fingers, Shinichi does his best to slow down his kisses and his hand, and KID whines, his forehead to Shinichi’s. "It’ll hurt too much to collapse so you better hold me up."

"Can you breathe all right?" Shinichi asks, feeling KID’s eyelashes butterfly kiss his own. "You know fractured ribs take six weeks to heal, not six hours, right?"

"You don’t get to jerk me off then lecture me, Meitantei," KID replies after a few more heavy breaths that feel like steam on Shinichi’s cheeks. "I look forward to figuring out what else you like."

"I like you," Shinichi answers, because that’s another thing that’s obvious, and KID smiles at him, last vestiges of gloss clinging to the corners of his mouth, eyeliner smudged along his waterline, and his hair damp with sweat. He’s so distracted by the shape of KID’s lips and the devious glint in his eyes that he barely notices KID’s hands fumbling with the zipper of his slacks until warm hands pull him out.

From then on, it’s just kisses and warm tongue and a tightness in Shinichi’s belly, mixed with a want to touch more of KID and the knowledge that he needs to hold him steady and upright or he’ll hurt himself. When Shinichi comes, it’s without warning, and KID chuckles against his chin as he comes back to himself, shaking a little as he sinks into the red velvet.

"You look pretty under me, Shinichi," KID whispers, and Shinchi smiles. "I do like to come out on top when I’m dealing with detectives." His hands still tremble, as he wipes his hand on Shinichi’s thigh.

Shinichi laughs, outright, and links their sticky hands together. "You definitely can’t open a safe like this."

"One day, we’ll try it," KID replies. "I’ll prove to you that the amazing, fantastic, unbelievable Kaitou KID can crack a safe in any conditions." He pauses. "Tell me, Shinichi, have you ever wanted to visit the Louvre after hours? Maybe our test will be in Paris."

"Maybe," Shinichi says, nonplussed and resigned all at once, and it’s KID’s turn to laugh. "But not until I’ve finished with the Black Org. One group of people after me is enough."

"I thoroughly agree, Meitantei." He kisses Shinichi’s nose. "You’ll get them. You said it yourself: you never fail with a case." Then he grins. "But you should shower before you take on any syndicates."

Shinichi puts the card gun back together when KID slips off his lap, and they take the ladder back up to the main house slowly, Shinichi tailing KID to make sure he doesn’t fall until they push out through the portrait into his bedroom.

Shinichi showers first, locking KID out of the bathroom when he suggests they share after he notices KID’s uneasy breathing. He’s quick with it, scrubbing himself clean of airport and roof dust and
everything else. Turning off the shower, he gets out only to find a fresh towel and a pair of KID’s pajamas waiting for him on the sink, evidence that KID had picked the bathroom lock and let himself in.

He looks at himself in mirror, dragging his fingertips along the red marks left by KID’s lips and teeth as he takes in, again, his teenage face. Not the right face, he thinks, for someone turning nineteen, but losing two years is better than forever losing ten of them, or all of them, to the apoptoxin.

KID grins at him unrepentantly when Shinichi emerges from the bathroom with a glare, slipping past him to take his own shower and leaving Shinichi damp and warm in the hall with what must be a really silly smile on his face.

Shinichi wanders down to the living room, turning on the television to the news. There are several new stories on News Watch 9, including a feature on Kanami, and the unveiling of the new Scarlette Shinamoto hospital, but there’s nothing, he notes, about Chianti, or about Takeuchi at all. How long, he wonders sleepily, until they find his skeleton in Lozère? Or will they ever, in that collapsed secret room that used to be Pandora’s hiding place?

A furious knocking at the door has Shinichi coming immediately back to full alertness, turning on the sofa to watch in surprise as the front door of KID’s house opens to someone with a key.

"Kaito! Nijiyama-san across the street says she saw you come home!" Aoko Nakamori shouts. "I thought you were going to be gone all vacation, you liar!" She spins with narrowed eyes as Shinichi stands up from the sofa. "And you’re just sitting here wathing television instead of letting me know that you’ve—" She stops, suddenly realizing the person she’s yelling at isn’t KID at all, but someone else in his house wearing his pajamas, and she slaps a hand over her mouth in shock.

"Nakamori Aoko, I presume?" Shinichi asks, as she stutters out an apology. "I’m Kudou Shinichi."

"The famous detective?" Aoko’s hand fusses with a loose button on her sweater. "Why are you—"

"Man, Aoko, you probably woke the whole neighborhood with your steel lungs!"

"Bakaito!" Aoko shouts immediately, as KID stops at the foot of the stairs, index fingers in his ears and his face disgruntled. His pajama shirt is half-unbuttoned, revealing only the tiniest peek of yellow-bruised skin, and kiss-marks that echo Shinichi’s own peppering his neck and jaw. "Why didn’t you call me!"

"We just got back an hour ago, King Kong!" KID scowls at her, and dries his hair with one hand. His shirt spreads open more, revealing more of the bruise. "Can’t I have a moment to unwind without you hollering everywhere?"

"You’re hurt!" She rushes over to him, and he bats her hand away before she can touch him, making her recoil. "Kaito?"

"His ribs are fractured," Shinichi tells her. "He just doesn’t want you to touch them. He fell while hiking."

"Kaito never falls," Aoko says. "You were with him?" Her lower lip trembles. "Kaito never even mentioned he knew you!"

"We didn’t realize the trails would be that slippery in the mountains," KID says, drawing her attention back to them. "And then to make things worse Hakuba was in Paris and gave Shinichi the third degree over lunch about whether or not I was Kaitou KID like the obsessed creep he is!"
"Are you calling someone else a creep?" Shinichi asks. "You stole my phone and put your number in it."

"You saw Hakuba-kun?" Aoko puts her hands on her hips. "And how long…" She falters, looking even more lost. "How long have you known Kudou-san?"

KID pauses, letting the hand holding his towel drop and fixing Aoko with a considering look, then does up another button of his pajama shirt, peeking briefly at Shinichi out of the corner of his eye. "Oh, hmm, Meitantei and I are pretty well-acquainted." He can't quite hide the tiny wicked curve of his lip.

"I mean, obviously, if you're going on some romantic getaway to Paris over Christmas—" She stops, cold, mid-rant, and then looks at Shinichi again. This time, her gaze drops to his neck, and then returns to KID's. "Oh."

"Ah, well, let's do the introduction over," KID says, snagging Shinichi’s hand and holding it, the interlock of their fingers as good a confirmation as any. "Aoko, this is Kudou Shinichi, my detective. Shinichi, this is Nakamori Aoko, my best friend."


"I thought Kaito didn’t like detectives," she says, finally, a glint of the brightness that Shinichi had seen when she burst in the door.

"Sometimes you have to learn to look a little more closely at things. You might find something you like in an unexpected place," KID says, more gently than Shinichi’s heard him speak in a long time, and Aoko softens.

They’ll be all right. Aoko is KID’s Ran, after all, and in the end, Shinichi doesn’t think it’s possible to break bonds like that apart.

Shinichi rubs at his neck. "I’m really tired from the trip, so I’ll leave you two to talk."

He goes upstairs to KID’s room and lies down in KID’s bed on his back, staring up at the ceiling where KID keeps his giant map. Downstairs, he can hear KID and Aoko’s voices, at first raised and then lower, conversational tones, and he smiles. He dozes off for a while, only rousing when KID slips into bed beside him, pushing into Shinichi’s space carefully because there’s not enough room for two adult bodies, and propping himself against the headboard so that he’ll be able sleep all right. Shinichi looks up at him blearily, and then throws an arm across KID’s hips, pressing his nose into the firm line of KID’s thigh. KID sinks a hand into Shinichi’s hair.

"Hey, Kudou Shinichi," KID says, and in the dark quiet of KID’s bedroom, his voice fills the space.

"What, thief?" Shinichi replies, lips rubbing against the warm flannel of KID’s pajama pants. KID’s fingers are lulling him back to sleep.

"I haven’t been happy since I found that room and found out my dad had been murdered." Shinichi cracks an eye to look up at him. KID is staring down at him, and in the absence of light, all he can make out is the blue of KID’s eyes. "Keeping secrets, feeling isolated from my childhood friends, finding highs during heists and then having nothing but the gap of uncertainty in between them."

"Adrenaline junkie," Shinichi whispers, and KID laughs, pulling lightly at a few strands caught between his fingers.
"I’m happy now, though, and that has a lot to do with you."

Shinichi evaluates. There’s Pandora, and a devil’s deal with Vermouth. There’s the ever ominous Black Org out to kill him, and Shinichi can’t stay where he’s always lived for fear that he’ll be found by Gin or Vodka. He needs to tell Akai that his lover is still alive, and working to bring the Black Org down with them. He needs to figure out what he should do about the Detective Boys, and about his high school degree, and all the threads of a life left untended like a garden of wildflowers for several years.

But there’s also his real body, and a Ran he can talk to whenever he wants, and friends he never would have made if he hadn’t stumbled into this mess in the first place. And there’s KID, with his devious smile and clever mind and easy company, all of which Shinichi would miss like a limb if it were to disappear now, when he’s just gotten used to having it.

"Yeah," Shinichi says, letting his eyes close again, and he breathes in jasmine, and feels the warmth of a 5 yen coin just between his collarbones. "I’m happy too."

*

Chapter End Notes

wow thank you if you read this far, see you next water time

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