Some Strings Attached
by catsandcherries

Summary

One night stands should be just that—one night stands. It shouldn't be something more, not even when the guy turned out to be your daughter's smoking hot mathematics teacher.

Notes

A fic based on tumblr's kageyeema's au which was graciously submitted to gaylawyerhell (who drew art!!) where phoenix and miles had a one-night stand and did not meet again until later on in what is arguably the most awkward situation possible, in a classroom as doting parent and concerned teacher with the presence of a six-year old.

Also. Since this is an AU DL-6 never happened and Gregory's still here! Though Ray sometimes makes him question his will to live.

Anyway, this is, um, my first ever fic, so any criticism would be greatly appreciated! I hope
you enjoy. :)

Chapter 1

The first thing Miles saw when he woke up was the man sleeping peacefully next to him. His tanned skin contrasted against the crisp white sheets, chest rising and falling rhythmically with soft inhales and exhales. Curiously enough his hair were still spiky—a bit limp, sure, its ends not quite as perky as it was last night, but still spiky bed hair nonetheless. He noted with…well, he wasn’t sure what to feel, to know the man had slept facing him.

He’d thought about asking his name a few times since last night, the curiosity like an itch asking to be scratched. He’d even been tempted to leave his name and number on the nightstand after the man had fallen asleep. But they had agreed this was a mutual one-night thing, no strings attached sort of arrangement. He’d wholeheartedly agreed at first, too, but as they conversed into the night, all casual banter and witty comebacks—he was aware of the fact that they’d formed a sort of…no, he isn’t sentimental enough to say…connection. More like a possible future prospect. The man was—well, yes, he was handsome, with that strong jaw and wide shoulders (though he had the oddest eyebrows he’d ever seen). But what drew Miles in, what made it a possible future prospect was the clever way he weaved his words, the devious mind behind it, the life in his big round eyes, and his grin, his stupid, damnable grin, all crushed eyes and cheek and pearly whites.

He grabbed his cellphone on his bedside table, willing himself to reality and lit the screen: it was 06.13 AM, with a message from Lana Skye: ‘Grade assessment meeting at 8. Don’t forget.’ Though it was still early, and although he would only need twenty minutes to wash up and get dressed, and just another twenty minutes to drive to school from the hotel, and he wasn’t supposed to be at school until eight…he willed himself off the bed. It’d be best to start this long day early. It’d also be easier to deal with this when the man’s asleep, as opposed to when he’s awake—not to mention the awkward morning after conversations…

And so fifteen minutes later he emerged from the bathroom all dry and clean, hair neatly styled. He glanced over to the bed to find the man still asleep. Feeling an odd mix of relief and apprehension, he opened his briefcase to retrieve the crisp white shirt and magenta vest he’d packed in there for emergency situations—ink splotches, surprise rains, the horrifying possibility of being in the school cafeteria in the midst of a food fight, and—well. This, he supposed. He gave the contents of his briefcase a careful once-over to make sure he didn’t leave anything behind and had everything he’d need for today’s meeting. From Apollo to Clay to Machi to Trucy—yep, he’d had the whole class’ grade report.

He clasped his briefcase closed and was ready to leave, until he saw the lone blue cellphone on the desk, next to the leather jacket hung on the chair. As he stared at it its screen suddenly came to life, showing a shortened message from one Larry Butz that read: ‘i got ur paint. u owe me …’. The battery icon was flashing red, almost at its life’s end. Miles stood there for a while, wondering…so he’s…some sort of painter. Was he painting for a living, or for fun? If it was merely his hobby, what did he do for a living? Was this Larry his friend, or his brother, maybe? What kind of guy was he really like when you knew him for more than one night? And then the itch returned, itchier than ever, asking, pleading, begging to be scratched, and before he knew it he had the phone in his hand, thinking that maybe he could leave his name and number, it can’t hurt, surely, just a simple swipe of the screen and innocent typing—

He quickly plugged the phone to the complimentary hotel charger.

He can’t. The man made it sure it was a one-night thing. He clearly wasn’t interested, he reminded himself, and that would only make things messy and awkward later on. It really wasn’t like him to be
so sentimental, especially about affairs like this.

Moments later he abruptly straightened himself, and with a private, firm resolve he grabbed his briefcase, opened the door and left the room, making sure to do so quietly. The two stories down to the parking lot did not relieve his mild unease and instead left him slightly breathless.

He'd just slipped into the driver seat when his phone vibrated inside his auburn trousers. 07.02 AM.

"Miles Edgeworth speaking."

"Miles! Miles," a thud, a clatter, a few more thuds. "Miles, I need you to tell Ms. Skye I'll be late for this morning's grade assessment meeting. Ray came over last night, drunk babbling and laughing and I had to take care of him all night since he was so noisy and such a baby and now he’s having a morning hangover and I just couldn’t leave him and the house alone—" there was a toilet flush followed by a long-suffering groan. Miles stifled a chuckle—uncle Ray was always very unnecessarily dramatic…and troublesome.

"Ms. Skye will be furious. I heard specifically state today was a very busy day for her and she will not appreciate any form of delay whatsoever." Another groan on the other end.

"Besides," he added with a smirk, "the well-respected infamous Gregory Edgeworth, principal of one of the best elementary schools of Los Angeles, late to a meeting? You should set a better example for us all, sir."

"Well then, Miles," he said, all soft and fond, and Miles could almost see the grin on his face, the crinkle in the corner of his glasses-framed eyes, "I guess it’s up to you to redeem our name, then."

He started the ignition. He made sure to sigh first before answering, with a smile he was sure could be heard, "Sadly so, apparently. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

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The first thing Phoenix saw when he woke up was the empty space next to him, all neatly made up. His heart sank at that. He looked around the room and heard for any sound, anything, a sign that he wasn’t alone, that the guy hadn’t leave—but there was nothing but the sound of chirping birds and whirring engines outside. He closed his eyes to try and envision the gorgeous man he’d met yesterday. Silver hair, pale skin, long lashes. But already his mind failed him, the mental image blurry all over. He heaved out a long, long sigh, grabbed the neatly placed pillow and inhaled. The smell of generic detergent was strong, but he could sniff out the faint remains of the expensive-smelling cologne the man had worn last night.

He’d been gathering up the courage to ask the other man's name all night—from when they’d chatted at the bar, when they’d exchanged coy glances, when the casual banter turned inviting, when he’d (finally!) slammed Phoenix against the door as he kissed him—all the time the words were are at the tips of his tongue, ready roll out any moment—and as he closed his eyes in the warm afterglow to gather courage, his brain betrayed him by stopping to think altogether and chose that time to finally catch some Z’s he hadn’t had for three days. Granted, he was in a bit of a funk—he’d been painting nonstop, trying to finish his Phoenix painting series before the deadline for the collaborative art show of him and Larry next week. All the while rehearsing four hours a day for the upcoming Chicago at the community theatre as Billy Flynn, lawyer extraordinaire. He remembered laughing when he was assigned the part, thinking in what right mind would the universe let him be a lawyer, of all things. But still. He cursed his brain. Why.

He’d come looking for a little fun, a little time to unwind, a little release from everything. Just…not
think about color schemes and water paint ratio and scripts and stage lights for one night. After he’d picked Trucy up from Wonder bar and tucked her to bed, he gelled his hair and donned his overused navy blue leather jacket and headed to the bar. He’d opted to go alone, since seeing Larry would only remind him of the upcoming deadline and the things he’d have to finish, no matter how fun and seemingly devoid of responsibility he can be, so he only planned to have a few drinks and enjoy the live music and maybe have a few light chats. So he ordered a pint of beer and sat at the only empty seat at the bar, since the whole place was packed. While waiting for his drink he turned to his neighbor for a friendly chat, and so he asked the grey haired man how he was doing.

He honestly wasn’t prepared for anything when the grey haired man turned around and turned out to be a drop-dead gorgeous, marble-statue-come-to-life kind of guy.

And the guy was funny. Dry-humor funny. He came across as suave, but Phoenix thought he was actually kinda nerdy, what with the bookish way he spoke. Which was cute as hell. Though the word cute no longer applied when the guy smirked—a one-sided quirk of the lip, half lidded eyes kinda smirk, and at that one moment Phoenix lost all self-control and flat out flirted with the guy. Of course, they inevitably ended up in Gatewater Hotel.

It was one of the best ones he’d ever had, really. The sex, yeah…but he also genuinely enjoyed the guy’s company. Just spending time and talking with the guy coaxed him into a state of relaxation he hadn’t felt in weeks. He’d daresay he felt a sort of…connection. A little click, of sorts, a feeling of compatibility. And that train of thought depressingly brings him back to square one: he’s really pissed he didn’t even get the guy’s name.

Still, he was the one who made sure, insisted, even, from the very beginning that this was a one-night thing…

Because. Seeing Larry’s come-and-go girlfriends and the whole business between Zak and Thalassa that ended with a wailing-for-months and possibly scarred Trucy—he pretty much gave up on the idea of any kind of romance. He wasn’t going to let her go through that again if things didn’t go smooth. He can, and he will deal with his needs on his own.

And that was that, he supposed. No reason to lay in annoyance in this lonely hotel room. Besides, he had to hurry up and go home before Trucy woke. So he stood and made gingerly made his way to the bathroom. He needed a cold shower, to wash these stupid thoughts away. He absent-mindedly rinsed and scrubbed himself with soap, then proceeded to stop and stare at the soap suds on his hands. He must’ve smelled like this when he left earlier…

Arghhhhhhh. No. Shut up, brain!

Stepping out of the shower and feeling slightly better clean and dressed, he proceeded to grab his stuff. As he went to grab his phone he noticed it was plugged in the complimentary hotel charger. Great. So he’s kinda considerate. Another reason to be unreasonably infatuated with the guy.

He grabbed his leather jacket and phone and proceeded to the bus stop across the street. He spent the ride home covering his mouth with his hand, inhaling the soft, clean, probably expensive hotel soap thinking of smooth pale skin and soft grey hair.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Chapter 2!! Hope you all enjoy! As always any comment or feedback would be appreciated!

It was 07.02 when he’d arrived, the modest red-bricked school still uncharacteristically empty and quiet. He looked around the parking lot, and spotted only two other cars: the haphazardly parked slightly beat-down, mud-stained car that could only be Gumshoe’s, and the sleek sedan that glinted in the morning light, parked symmetrically between the parking spot lines that was vice principal Lana’s.

He entered the teacher’s room, slightly taken aback to find it empty—Gumshoe often came early to prepare the gym or field for any P.E. activity that day, so he didn’t really expect him here, but he was wondering where Lana was, since he’d thought it’d be better to relay his father’s message early on before the meeting starts.

Not quite sure what to do, he took out the report cards, flicking through them, again making sure each and every children’s score marks were there and accounted for. On the top of the alphabetical stack was Apollo Justice. Apollo was a quiet, serious kid, who sat at the front row at class, glaring stern faced and wide-eyed at teachers, sometimes asking questions with a very loud, booming voice, that was really more screaming than asking. It was his way of paying attention, and the whole teacher room had a good laugh when Gumshoe told them all during the first P.E. period with the class, he actually yelped and jumped when he hear Apollo bellow out “MR. GUMSHOE”, glare at him, asking him to repeat that day’s lessons. And right under Apollo was Clay Terran. Clay was slightly more…problematic. He was more of a troublemaker in class, often found either dozing off or talking to neighboring table’s students. Though funny enough, although they didn’t quite click at first, now he seemed to get along best with Apollo Justice. It was from that fateful day, approximately three months earlier, when Gumshoe told the story of how during P.E. one day the class was playing soccer, and Clay was the goalkeeper. He was talking to left side defender Wocky Kitaki about what a wonderful planet Pluto was, when Wocky said, loudly, the way he always does, “Pluto ain’ no planet, yo! Tha’s whack!”

Clay looked like he had heard of nothing so absurd in life, eyes wide, jaw and shoulder slack with shock, when right side defender Apollo then turned around and explained to Wocky, so very seriously, how NASA had actually confirmed that Pluto was in fact the largest dwarf planet, a constant source of scientific surprises, and a geological mystery that future research could turn the science world upside down. Clay then looked at Apollo as if he was Pluto himself, and later was scolded by his soccer team for neglecting his post to talk Pluto with Apollo (who tried to remind Clay the ball THE BALL IS COMING) and let the opposing team score. They have been good friends ever since, Clay always sitting just behind Apollo in the second row, often teasing him with finger jabs, hair tugs and/or random puns about anything that came to his mind. Apollo kept a straight face, but sometimes the corners of his mouth could be seen twitching. Since then Apollo talked more, and his booming volume turned down a notch (though he still liked to raise his voice when he’s excited and to glare his eyeballs out). And Clay’s barely-there grades have been constantly improving.
They were an...interesting pair. All of his students are interesting, really, a big mixing pot of traits and quirks. He flicked through the report cards, mentally nodding at students with exemplary scores and frowning at those who are teetering on the edge. And then he arrived at Machi. Machi Tobaye. Machi was quiet boy with good grades. Though he had an air about him...as if an invisible cocoon was around him, a barrier between him and the world. Maybe that was why he was often seen looking for—

The door suddenly burst open, and in strode Maya Fey, one half of the Fey counselor duo extraordinaire. Her older sister, Mia, was the other half, who was assigned to counsel fourth to sixth graders, while younger sister Maya was assigned younger first grade to third grade elementary students. She was grinned from ear to ear, raised a hand in the air and yelled at the top of her lungs, “Good morning, Mr. Edgeworth!”

His eardrums vibrated in protest, but he smiled. Maya’s cheerfulness was always refreshing, for teachers and students alike. During lunch hours her office could be seen crammed with students, who sought her out for enjoyable company and good laughs, or a supportive listening ear. “Good morning, Ms. Fey. I trust you’re doing well. Where is your sister?”

She sat next to him and put a hand on her chin. “Mia said she wanted to get something for breakfast at the school cafeteria from Mrs. Oldbag, I didn’t go with her since I had to prepare for today’s lesson.” Maya was thankfully looking upwards at the ceiling and therefore did not notice Edgeworth’s full-body shudder at the mention of the cafeteria lady. “She’s really taking her time, though. She’s supposed to be here by now.”

Edgeworth noted Lana’s similar absence...

He coughed into his fist. “I’m sure she’ll be here soon.” He returned his attention to his report cards.

“Oh hey! Are you going through report cards? Who’re you looking at? Machi...he’s going through a lot of family problems.” She brought her hand to her mouth, and uncharacteristically frowned.

Edgeworth frowned, too, not quite sure what to say, when Maya lit up and said, again, cheerfully, “Don’t worry, he’ll be fine. I’ll make sure of it.”

He smiled. “I have no doubt you will, Miss Fey.”

“Also, if I don’t, Wocky probably will,” Maya said, laughing. “Wocky’s always making him laugh. They fit each other peanut butter and jelly. Machi would never admit it, though. He just scowls whenever I bring him up.”

Edgeworth chuckled. “To be fair, Wocky does indeed have that effect on people.” There is a reason Edgeworth never picked him to answer questions in class. “Not to mention, his handwriting is horrendous. And I can’t even imagine the headaches he gives Ms. Byrde in English with his atrocious vocabulary and penmanship.” He remembered Ms. (soon to be Mrs., if Gumshoe’s plans go accordingly) Byrde complaining Wocky actually using the word *whack* to express disbelief in his test paper.

Maya laughed. “Don’t tell me he’s the reason for your new glasses!”

“To be quite honest, he very well may be.” During his grading of Machi’s test paper, he couldn't differentiate Machi's writing of 4 and 6 and 9, and as he scoured the page the muscles around his eyes tensed so, his brows furrowed so tightly together they almost touched, and he looked like, well, as his father put it: “Son, you look like you’re going to pop your eyes out.”

They chatted about student after student—Klavier, Olga, Robin, Vera—occasionally Maya laughing
and Edgeworth scowling at each students’ odd quirks and stories (Klavier’s air-guitaring before answering questions, Olga turning her head around at whoever said oh really, Robin and Vera’s free period manicure sessions), until they had reached Trucy Wright’s report card. He brought his hand to his temple, massaging it. “Trucy…”

Maya’s eyes widened. “What’s up with Trucy? Why do you look like you have a headache all of a sudden…oh. Oh. I didn’t know her grades were…this low.” Trucy’s report card was concerning, all subjects just below the score limit except P.E., English, History, and Music.

“I know. She’s a remarkable student. Undoubtedly bright. But she’s a bit unorthodox…school and conventional learning’s rigid nature is not well suited for her.”

“Like trying to force a square peg into a round hole.” Maya agreed. “Actually, it’s more like trying to force a round peg into a square hole.”

“Yes. And she’s especially lacking at mathematics.” Everytime he teaches, he makes sure to make eye each and every one of his students, to make sure they were paying attention, very unlike Mr. Payne, who teaches history and just stares at one point on the wall at the back of the class. When he sees Trucy, she always has the same expression: brows furrowed in confusion and downturned in worry, eyes wide and hard at the board, lips bitten in anxiety. She always looks so absolutely dejected and confused, and Edgeworth has to make sure to stop by her desk as he circles the class during schoolwork time, asking her if she is having any difficulties, to which she always replies with a yes, in which Edgeworth would try and explain the lessons again in different words. “She understands when I explain methods in analogies and stories, but I can’t very well explain like that to the whole class. It’s frustrating. You can clearly see she has so much potential.”

Again Maya brought her hand to her chin. “Hmm. True.” She thought for a while as they both sat in silence, then, very suddenly, Maya clapped her hands, “Hey! How about you call her parents, ask them to come over? Maybe they can help. You can talk with them and ask them to help teach Trucy at home, too! I mean, they are their parents!”

Edgeworth thought about that for a moment. “You’re right. That is indeed a possible solution. I may take you up on that. I would need her student profile for her parent’s name to address in my letter—”

“I have it in my office!”

“Would you mind if we went and looked at them right no, Miss Fey? Since the meeting hasn’t started yet.” He stacked the report cards and placed them back neatly inside his briefcase.

Maya stood up. “No problemo! Come on! Maybe we can see where my sister is, too!”

“Erhm. Yes, maybe. But I must ask that we go to your office through the left wing, not through the cafeteria.”

Maya blinked, confused for a moment, then doubled over, holding her stomach and laughing out loud. “Oh my God. Is it because two weeks ago Old Oldbag—“

He folded his arms and tapped his right finger on his left arm. “You knew very well what happened, Miss Fey, and I wish to not speak of it if possible.”

“Oh, alright. Okay. Let’s go.” She wiped the tears that formed, still chuckling. “You know you can’t avoid her forever, though.”

“I can at least choose my navigation route carefully.” Edgeworth grabbed his briefcase and stood, ready to leave, and they both walked through the school corridors to her office.
“Oh, right! You could call Wocky’s parents, too! His grades are horrible, too. I told him to ask Machi to teach him sometime, but he’s not swallowing his pride.”

He’d admittedly forgotten about Wocky. “You’re right. I suppose we should see his student profile, too.”

Maya nudged him with her elbow. “So you’re all concerned about Trucy, but not about Wocky?”

“Oh course not! Erhm, of course—of course I am just as concerned for Wocky! It just so happens that Wocky’s grades, though horrendous, are still enough to pass him to the next grade. Trucy’s are more concerning, that’s all.” He’d never admit to Maya he’d maybe taken a liking to Trucy, the cheerful, determined way of her study (and for math, the less cheerful, but still as determined way of her study). He still hasn’t even admitted it to himself.

Edgeworth made sure to step extra loudly as they approached her office, just in case certain scarved teachers were inside—

Maya unlocked her office, the room dark and empty. “Sis isn’t here too, I guess. Where could she be?” she turned on the computer. ”I wonder if she’s going through tonight’s plans with Lana.”

Ah. So that’s why Lana had very clearly stated she did not tolerate any delay today...

The sharp clicks of the computer mouse filled the room as Maya searched through the student data. “Here it is!” she double clicked both Wocky and Trucy’s profile. For Wocky, under the title Parents, was written:

Father: Winfred “Big Wins” Kitaki                    Mother: Plum Kitaki

For Trucy, under the title Parents, was written:

Father: Phoenix Wright                           Mother: -

Edgeworth frowned. “I...I never knew Trucy was raised by a single parent.”

“Yeah. Trucy’s raised by a single dad. Trucy always calls him daddy when she talks about him, so I didn’t know his name until we opened this just now, but you can tell she loves him a lot. She practically sparkles when she talks about him.”

“I see.” Trucy’s bright smile flashed momentarily in his mind. It must have flashed by in Maya’s mind, too, because she said, “Seeing Trucy, he must be a wonderful parent.”

Edgeworth nodded. “With a name like Phoenix, let’s hope he is.”

Phoenix got off the bus stop at 07.26 AM. He winced. Trucy should be awake now, getting ready for school. As he rode the lift up, he thought of something he could make up. He could say he went to the supermarket down the street since they’d run out of milk, but there was still a jug full of it in the fridge, and nothing else warranted such an early trip out to the supermarket. He sighed. He’d have to pull off the ‘I almost forgot to pay the rent again’ excuse. When he said that, for the next month, Trucy would actually ask him every morning whether or not there was something to be paid
or something he forgot, which made him feel incredibly awful, both for lying to Trucy and for being (appearing like) an unreliable parent (he did always pay his rents, though they are sometimes a bit too close to the deadline for Trucy’s liking if she knew). He entered his apartment, which was kinda lacking in furniture, just a moderate kitchen in the corner and a sofa and TV in the other—but it still gave off a clattered sort of feel, with all the canvases leaning against walls, the smell of paint wafting in the air, still dark with unopened curtains. On the kitchen counter, the blue lunchbox still stood lonesome. Trucy hasn’t woke up yet. Thank God. He closed his eyes in relief, knowing that he wouldn’t have to lie anything to her (because more than anything in the world, more than he loved his late night trips, he hated lying to his baby girl), and just as quickly he frowned, realizing it’s almost time for school and she wasn’t even up. Yesterday was especially packed at the Wonder Bar —people kept asking for encores until Phoenix himself had to talk to the manager for her to step up and excuse his daughter. They arrived home at 10, Trucy changing into pyjamas and practically collapsed onto the bed, immediately shutting her eyes and sleeping the night away.

He went to his room and quickly changed into his old T-shirt and sweatpants, and proceeded to knock on Trucy’s door, three gentle knocks. When there was no response, he knocked again, harder, with an added “Truce? It’s time to get up. You’ll be late for school.”

There was a rustle of sheets. “Nnhh…daddy…just five more minutes…”

“Truce, it’s seven-thirty.”

A thud, a loud rustle, a few more muffled rustles, and a wild haired, pink pyjamaed Trucy Wright opened the door. “Daddy! Why didn’t you wake me!”

He grinned sheepishly and rubbed his neck. “You were exhausted. I didn’t want to wake you too early…” Which was true. But also not really.

She rushed past him and made way to the bathroom. “Nooooo I’m going to be so late! And the first period is Mr. Edgeworth’s, too!”

“Just tell him you were late-night studying for his subject for his upcoming test or something and he’ll forgive you. Teachers love diligent students.”

“Dahd, hyou obviously donth know misteh Egheworth,” she said, through a mouthful of toothpaste suds. “He’s supeh strict and neveh thakes excusesh! And he teachesh math, whish ish weally hardh!”

“He must be like those strict teacher in kid movies that’s like fifty years old and wears chained glasses and wrinkled all over.”

Trucy spat the toothpaste out. “Oh no, on the contrary, he’s kinda really handsome, daddy!” She rushed into her room again.

Again, silver hair, pale skin, grey eyes. He realizes he now has a default image for the word handsome. Damnit Phoenix—

The door opened with a loud bang, and a light blue blur rushed to the door. “I’m off now, okay! Bye Daddy!”

“Truce, your lunch!” Phoenix hollered back, walking towards the kitchen.

She screeched to a halt at the front door. “Oh, right!” She rushed to the kitchen, grabbing the blue lunchbox he’d prepared the last night on the counter. Phoenix stood next to her. “I made PB&J for today. Oh, before you’re off, a little something else,” she looked up at him, panicked and expectant, and Phoenix ruffles and kisses her hair. “Have a great day, honey.”
Trucy grinned, her first of the day. “Thanks, daddy! Bye now!”

The door slammed shut, and, not the first for the day, Phoenix was left alone.

Wait. No he wasn’t.

He went back to his room, eyeing the blanket covered lump on the bed for a good few seconds he didn’t notice before in his haste, incredulous, then proceeded to yank the blanket off said lump. Larry Butz was sleeping curled in a fetal position, hair flat, drooling and snoring like a real baby.

“Larry.”

“Larry.”

An mmph.

“LARRY.”

Larry blinked one eye open. “..........Nick?”

“Larry.”

“Ngh...give me five more minutes, Nick...”

Everyone was intent on sleeping in today, apparently. He himself often did, too, but he wished he had woken up earlier today.

“You’re unbelievable. It’s 7.35! You were supposed to wake Trucy up at 7 for school, remember?”

“Trucy!” He leapt up, nearly hitting Phoenix’s chin with his head. “Oh man, she’s gonna be late!” He tossed the blanket aside and wiped the edge of his mouth with the back of his hand.

“She already left, no thanks to you.”

“Aw, man. Sorry Nick!” He scratched the back of his head. “You know how bad I am with schedules.”

“Yeah, I know, and so does your last art show coordinator, who still likes to remind me of it every time I meet her at the museum.”

Larry just grinned.

Larry accompanied them all throughout the show last night and the walk home, and conveniently complained, in front of Trucy, how late and dark and dangerous it is in this late Los Angeles night, and Phoenix, too, conveniently offered Uncle Larry to stay the night. As much as Phoenix loved his late night excursions, he’d never leave Trucy alone.

And despite how unreliable sometimes Larry is, he’s actually the only one Phoenix would trust with Trucy. He’s haphazard, brazen, sloppy, but he’s a good guy, has always been since Phoenix first met him in elementary school.
“But thank you, though, for staying in.”

“‘S fine. You owe me one, though.” He blinked. ”Two, actually. I got you your paint yesterday, stopped by the shop before I went to the show. Forgot to tell you last night.”

“You did?”

“Yeah, I texted you. You owe me ten bucks. Didn’t you get it?”

Phoenix checked his phone. “Oh, right...thanks, Larry. Hold on, let me get some change.” Phoenix reached for his wallet.

“Too busy last night to text back?” Larry asked with, a sleazy grin.

“Oh God, Larry,” he said, with an exhale, as he handed Larry a crumpled ten dollar bill, ”the guy was perfect. He was handsome—scratch that, gorgeous. He had silver hair—“

“Yeesh, Nick, I think I’d rather you stop right now. Just how old was the guy?”

“What? NO! God no. No! Not old silver hair. Natural silver hair! I think? Can someone have natural silver hair? I’m not sure. But natural or not it I swear it sparkled. And his eyes, it was, like, melted silver, liquid, I could swim in it all night—“

“Nick, your inner poet and gay are showing all at once.”

”—and then he was charming and funny, and wow, Larry, I don’t think I’ve ever enjoyed getting to know a guy so much, and he’s really great, that was, like, the best I had since I can’t even remember and he was even considerate—“ Phoenix buried his face into his hands. “Oh God. I’m rambling like a teenager on a crush.”

Larry raised one eyebrow. “Aren’t you?”

Phoenix looked at him, kooky eyebrows falling. “I...you know I can’t. What if it doesn’t work out? I’d just be putting more stuff on Trucy’s plate more than she can chew. Putting more rabbits in her hat than she can pull out.”

“You could at least date first without Trucy knowing, see where it goes. If it goes okay, great! You’d introduce Trucy. If it doesn’t, you could just call it off without her knowing.” Larry offered, standing up, stretching, and heading for Phoenix’s drawer, probably to search for a shirt to change into.

Phoenix brought a hand to the back of his neck and looked at his feet. “I...it’s too late. Nothing could be done now.”

Larry raised an eyebrow at him. You didn’t get his name, number, anything?” He rummaged the bottom most drawer and pulled out Phoenix’s old pink sweater, its seams threading, the once vibrant pink now looked sad and lifeless. “God, I can’t believe you still have this.”

“No. He left before I woke. I guess he wasn’t interested.”

“Even if he was, he’d lose it when he sees this sweater. Seriously, throw it already, Nick. It’s like. What? Thirteen years now?” Larry said, folding the thing back down anyway, rummaging again through his drawer.

Phoenix rolled his eyes. “Says the guy who also wears pink ribbon sweaters.”

“Nick, that was, like, 10 years ago. I was a wandering, confused artist back then, finding myself,
guided on a spiritual artistic journey by the amazingly talented, and beautiful, Elise Deauxnim.” Larry worked with the famous children illustrator for a few years right after he graduated, before she decided to retire and move to a small village outside of town and learn the spiritual ways of the village. He still meets with her now and then. One time, Larry asked Phoenix to join, and Phoenix was kinda nervous meeting one of the finest illustrators of the country, but he was immediately mesmerized by her, with the way she brought herself, all mature elegance and grace, like fine-aged wine. She was lovely, smiling pleasantly throughout their conversation, and Phoenix saw the way her eyes lit up when she talked about her love for her job, her passion in bringing children joy and wonder, and the way her eyes lit even brighter at her mention of her two daughters in the city. “They’re teachers,” Larry told him.

She asked them to come again sometime. Phoenix nodded, finding he actually looks forward to.

“How’s Mrs. Deauxnim?”

“She’s doing great! She’s gotten to the part of her training where she has to sit under a waterfall, and she asked us to join! Says it’s relaxing and inspirational.”

Phoenix remembered the last time he’d been in a body of water that wasn’t a bathtub or a pool. “I’ll go, but I’ll pass the waterfall thing.”

Larry finally pulled out an orange Steel Samurai T-shirt Phoenix forgot where he’d gotten. “Yo, Nick. Seriously though? Not even his name? I can ask a few friends if you at least got a name.”

Phoenix sighed, chest tight. “I’ll live. It’s just a crush. I’ll get over it.” He swallowed. “For me and Trucy’s sake.”

Larry started to walk towards the door, clothes in hand, before stopping and giving Phoenix’s shoulder a squeeze. “Nick, when you find something worth chasing, you just gotta go and chase it, ya know?”

Phoenix bit back the like you? that almost stumbled out.

“I know it isn’t always happily ever after,” Oh, Larry would know, “But at least you won’t regret anything that way.” He gave Phoenix one final squeeze, for emphasis, and proceeded to walk towards the bathroom. Phoenix sat at the edge of the bed, eyeing the ceiling, then the drawer. Larry started the shower, the sound of rushing water white noise in the empty room. There’s a good reason I haven’t thrown that sweater. I cling too much. He’s been doing it since he was ten, when his mother left, since fifteen, since his dog Tramp died, falling into the river near their house, Phoenix desperately trying to save him but ended up almost dead himself, and all through twenty-one, when the girl he loved betrayed him and left and there was nothing except for the painful memories and the tear-soaked pink hand-knitted sweater she knitted for him. And he’s doing it again now, fifteen years later, like he’s learned nothing at all, seeing the slightest bit of hope and just wanting to chase it silly and hope that maybe this time it’ll turn out great and everything, no more lying to Trucy about late night inspiration walks, no more silent nights spent drinking beer, watching, longing at the horribly written romcoms they show on TV these days, no more immersing himself in so much painting projects and theatre plays just because he’s gotta fill the empty space somehow, no more seeing the empty half of his bed wishing for a warm body to hold and soft lips to meet his.


He laid back on the bed, legs dangling off the edge, closing his eyes, chest rising and falling high and low, overwhelmed and aching but damnably, still hopeful. He wasn’t sure how long he laid like that, just breathing in and out, in and out, when Larry came back into the room.
He sat up. “Larry, what colors did you get me?”

“Huh? Oh. Some reds and yellows, for your phoenix, and some blues for your other phoenix. Nick, I still can’t believe you’re planning a Phoenix by Phoenix Wright art show.”

Phoenix grinned. “Hey, I like ‘em. Standing back tall and proud after every beating. Figured it’s time someone gives the bird spotlight.” He stood and leaned at the doorway, waiting for Larry to collect his stuff. When Larry finally collected all of them, they both walked towards the apartment door. Larry opened his arms wide, ready to give him a bro-hug, he called it, but was surprised to see Phoenix stepping out in front of him. “You’re going out?”

“Yeah,” Phoenix said, locking the door. “Gonna go get some grey paint.”

If he’s gonna chase something, he might as well do it silly.

Trucy ran through the school hallway, her boot steps echoing off the walls. She wasn’t quite sure what time it was, but she did note the fact that the hallway was empty, meaning class has already started, and she can’t do this, she can’t be late, not really, not with the way her grades are—

She opened the classroom door and saw chattering students all over, Mr. Edgeworth nowhere to be seen.

Exhaling both fatigue and relief, she put her bag down at her seat, the second from the window at the front row, right next to Apollo Justice. He glanced up at her from Clay, noticing her arrival, and raised an eyebrow. “Late, Trucy?”

“Hi Polly,” she grinned, wiping the sweat off her brows. “Yeah, overslept a little this morning. Where’s Mr. Edgeworth?”

“You’re really lucky, Truce!” Clay piped up from behind Apollo, “The teachers have a meeting this morning, so classes won’t start until 9.”

“Thank goodness,” Trucy said, slumping sideways on the table facing them. “I thought I was late. And at Mr. Edgeworth’s class, too. I would’ve been so dead.”

Clay nodded. “As dead as Pluto is to Wocky.”

Apollo rolled his eyes. “It’s been three months, Clay.”

Clay put his hand to his chest, face in mock hurt. “He hurt my heart like he did Pluto’s. Seriously, Pluto has a heart.”

“A heart-shaped patch, Clay. Not an actual heart.”

Clay folded his arms. “I see it’s at least bigger than yours, Apollo.”

Trucy laughed. Apollo rolled his eyes again, he was afraid one day it may get stuck in the back being rolled so many times, thanks to Clay.
“Always space stuff, Clay. Are you really thinking of becoming an astronaut?”

Clay’s eyes lit up as Apollo stared at Trucy in horror. Apollo learned the hard way that when Clay found someone who’d listen to him talk about space, he may never stop. “Of course! Like. You ever feel like you’re destined to do something, like it’s calling you, like you can’t ever imagine living your life without doing it?”

Trucy remembered last night—red curtains, rainbow confettis, shouted encores, mouths open wide in shock slowly curling into grins—“Yeah, I know.” She smiled. “I know perfectly well.”

“It’s something you just can’t ignore, you know? Like you’re betraying yourself if you tell yourself you’re not. That’s why I’m gonna do whatever it takes. I’m gonna study hard, get good grades, get into a good junior high school, get into a good high school, get into the BEST university, and be the BEST astronaut the world’s ever seen,” he finished, breathless, “the next Neil Armstrong.” As fast as he’d smiled and widened his eyes and raise his brows, he let them all drop downwards, looking absolutely dejected. “But my grades are horrendous...”

Trucy bit her lip. She knew Clay’s grades. They were not horrendous. Hovering on the edge, yeah, but not horrendous. At least, not like hers...”

“Clay, consider how you actually pay little to no attention in class.”

“Hey, I have a short attention span.” He said, rolling his pencil back and forth on the table. “Also your hair obscures my view.”

Apollo scowled. “My hair is fine. And your grades will be fine too. Today we’re supposed to be learning about additions, we can study first so you’ll understand it better when Mr. Edgeworth explains it.”

Trucy walked next to Clay’s table, brows furrowed. “Teach me too, Polly!”

Apollo nodded. “Sure, Trucy.”

Clay grinned, “Of course, Trucy! Additions are always welcome.”

Apollo pretended he didn’t hear that and opened his book. Some sentences were already underlined in red ink. “So we’ve all got our numbers down pat, right. One to ten, ten to one-hundred?”

“Right!” Clay exclaimed. Trucy nodded. It wasn’t easy for her, but counting rabbits in her head every night before she slept helped her through it.

“So now, addition is, as this book said, the action or process of adding something to something else. In our case, adding numbers to numbers. Let’s say, Clay, Wocky said to you there were only eight planets.” Clay opened his mouth, but Apollo raised his hand. “And you of course refuse to believe so. There is one more planet Wocky hadn’t accounted. Pluto. So how many planets would there be —”

“NINE!”

“Did you shout nine because you added eight and one or because you read it that many times in those space forums you go to.”

Clay grinned.

Trucy frowned. “Um...how did Clay get nine again?”
Apollo brought both his hands up and raised eight fingers. “So there’s eight planets, right? And Clay wants to add Pluto, only one.” Here Clay raised one finger up, and brought his hand next to Apollo’s. “So you’ve got to add one to the eight. Count one number after eight...seven, eight, nine.” At nine, Clay brought his hand behind Apollo’s and tucked his finger in as Apollo raised one more finger to display a nine. “Get it?”

“Oh! So you have to count twice!” Trucy said excitedly, both her hands in fists under her chin.

“Exactly.” Apollo folded his arms.

“All right! I understand!” she laughed. Math was always hard for Trucy, since it was all these concepts and numbers. It wasn’t something that was easily explained in words. And it wasn’t like English, where if you can’t do grammar, you can still get good scores if you have good vocabulary. In math, you have to understand one concept to understand the next concept. In short, you have to understand everything, and it’s becoming quite a struggle. Just when she got one concept down pat, Mr. Edgeworth would introduce a new material and she’d have to try everything over again. But now, she understood the concept even before it was introduced! “I understand!” she said again.

“Truce, we’re so going to ace this test!” Clay said, tipping his hat.

Trucy again thought of red confettis and shouted encores, and her father’s proud face. She balled her hands into fists. “We so will!”
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

I have no excuse. I'm so sorry this is one and a half years late ;____; Not a day (okay, that's an exaggeration) not a week goes by without me thinking of this story at least once. It always comes up in my brain when I daydream. I just keep stewing over the tiny little details, which feels very rough and unpolished, as I'm sure you'll notice when you read the chapter through. But it's 1.30 AM over here, and I keep thinking if I don't publish it now I probably never will.

So!

Feel very very free to write your thoughts and suggestions out in the comments section, as usual! I'm always very happy to talk Ace Attorney with you guys, and improve in my writing the best I can.

I hope you guys enjoy this (and the next!) chapter!

Miles Edgeworth is naturally a very organized man. For each and every module that was required for his subject, he scheduled out a neat plan: since there was only three math classes a week for the second graders, the first two meetings were always teaching classes—new materials, worksheets, questions and answers, and the third and final class of every week was scoring and review day: quizzes, homeworks, and tests; topped off with discussing the question’s answer and reviewing the taught materials. The third meeting was always the busiest: preparing question sheets and double-checking answers, preparing the discussion materials, and grading the student’s answers in just 15 minutes, if he wants to have time to discuss the answers. But Edgeworth liked to keep to schedule and he liked being busy, so he manages to squeeze everything into the tight schedule. Today was the third meeting of the week, the busiest.

As soon as he was done, he stood from his chair. The second he did so the whole class fell into silence. It was odd, he never was exceptionally stern (well, he was, but not so much. Not as much as Lana, at least) but he realize he did cultivate quite the stereotypical grumpy math teacher image in the eyes of the children. He summoned each child by name and handed them their question sheets back.

Justice and Terran did great, as always. But Terran had one number unmarked, because Edgeworth couldn’t tell whether the answer he wrote was an 8 or a 3. He made a mental note to reprimand Terran for his scrawny handwriting...again.

Gavin and Misham, Tobaye, and most of the class, really, did pretty much okay. They got a few questions wrong, but that’s understandable. O’Conner got a 6 out of a 10, but that score is still acceptable, he supposes. Well, no, not really. One more question wrong and he’d have failed.

Trucy and Kitaki, though…

Kitaki was as nonchalant as always. The scrawny child smugly walked up to him as he called his name, and just as smugly walked back to his desk after seeing his paper, which he only got 2 questions out of 10 right. He only answered 5 questions, actually, and the rest were left empty.
When he called Trucy up front to hand her her paper, though, she had her hands behind her back, and her posture was stiff.

Maya Fey had told him quite a few times that he was not the most observant in seeing emotions in others, but even he could tell that Trucy Wright was incredibly nervous.

Edgeworth coolly handed Trucy her paper. Comforting her in front of the whole class would embarrass her more than help. She got 7 answers out of 10 wrong…which was improvement, actually. She usually only managed to get the first question right.

Still, he didn’t miss her growing frown as she looked at her paper. And the slumped shoulders all the way back to her seat.

It’s nearly time for midterm exams, and saying these two are underperforming would be an understatement. They face very real possibilities of failing the grade.

Well, it’s not like one failed subject means they’d immediately fail the grade. There were other subjects to consider. And Edgeworth admits, as easy and natural as mathematics came to him, it’s certainly not for everyone. Still…

Both of their report cards are dominated in red…while Trucy did pass art, history, P.E., language, and music, and Kitaki, too, did surprisingly well on art and history (though flunking language, which surprises no one, considering the way he talks). The subjects are only going to be harder from here on out. And while Miles had had, over tea, a long discussion with his father on whether or not primary education really is necessary to life, and while Father is more open minded, telling him of a woman in a foreign country who didn’t even graduate high school but managed to become minister and have a personal airline to boot, Miles believes that, if possible, one should have at least a high school degree, realistically.

He is their homeroom teacher, though. He bears part responsibility for their scores…

He should call their parents over for a brief meeting, if only to inform them of their child’s progress (or, sadly, the slight lack thereof) and find with them a solution, whether it be them helping children more at home in doing their homework to let them gain more understanding on the numeric subject, or a few extra hours teaching the kids after school hours, a private tuition session.

He tells himself he does this because he’s a responsible, trustworthy homeroom teacher, certainly not because he keeps seeing Trucy’s forlorn walk back to her desk.

***

It’s 12:19, almost halfway into break time. Some of the teachers were in the cafeteria, the rest were at their desks either eating homemade lunch or hunched over papers. Gumshoe looked especially busy, this year he was chosen to coordinate the 2nd grade annual weekend-long field trip taking place in three weeks, just a little bit after mid terms.

“I’m going to call Mr. Phoenix Wright over.” Miles says, opening his lunchbox. Maya Fey sits in front of him.

Maya looks up from her lunch. Caesar salad…it seems Mia is starting to take notice in her sister’s diet. “She failed the test again, didn’t she?” Maya says through a mouthful of lettuce. “I met her in
the hall and asked her how she was doing, and then she started fidgeting.”

Miles frowned as he opened his sandwich wrapper. “She’s taking this quite hard. Kitaki, on the other hand, shrugged it off as always. When I approached his desk to ask him if there’s anything he didn’t understand, he’d already folded his test paper into a paper airplane. That at least explains him passing origami class in art. He apparently has a lot of practice, with my test papers.”

Maya grinned at that. “Bet he threw it to Machi. Machi says he bugs him in class a lot.”

“He should pay more attention to the whiteboard than bothering Machi. Why does he always bother him so much, anyway.”

Maya set aside the forked lettuce she was halfway shoving to her gaping mouth, which was still open as she turned to take a good look at him. “Edgeworth! Are you serious?!?”

“What do you mean?”

“You seriously don’t know why Lil’ Kitaki keeps bothering Machi?!” she whisper-shouted.

“You make him sound like a gangster,” Miles says, scrunching his nose. He lowers his sandwich to fully think for a while. “I haven’t got a clue. Machi seems like the calm type that hardly seemed to be the type to anger Kitaki.”

“Oh my God, Edgeworth! It’s so obvious, Wocky likes Machi!”

“What?! That’s preposterous! The boy keeps bothering him!”

“Oh, Edgeworth, come on!” she was talking in her normal volume now. “I guess I’d understand if it were you, you’d never throw paper balls at your crush, so you don’t see it his way—“

“That’s true, but—“

“You’re like, a total melancholic, if you like someone you’d probably act all cool and broody, being all reserved and guarding your emotions and deeming your feelings unnecessary or whatever—“

“I beg your pardon—“

“But Lil’ Kitaki’s a total sanguine, Keirsey temperament-wise, loud as can be, but Machi isn’t affected by that. He doesn’t laugh when Wocky tells jokes in class, so he starts trying a different approach.”

“So he resorts to harassing him?” Miles asks flatly.

“Less like harassing and more like not knowing how to get his attention. I think he saw Apollo and Clay exchanging notes in class, so he figured he’d try it with Machi, too. He actually writes things inside the planes, you know.”

He raises a single eyebrow. “He does?”

“I took a peek at the paper plane yesterday… it was after the bell rang and the whole class went home and Machi was sitting at the front that day because he was late and he left the paper plane at his desk so— anyway, he actually writes, ‘Boring class, ain’t it?’ But Machi never opens the planes, probably because he didn’t think Wocky would actually write anything in them, just teasing him like the class clown he is.”

“This sounds suspiciously like those high school dramas Ms. Byrde likes to watch.”
Maya seems to have missed his cynical note of his reply. “Exactly! It’s like, so obvious, I can’t believe you didn’t see it!”

Miles just sighed, picking up his sandwich again. “If only he’d use that line of thinking in class as well. He’s in danger of failing as well, and I have to call his parents as well.”

“You don’t sound very excited about calling Wocky over,” Maya says, smiling at him with her chin in hand. Miles knows that smile. She’s teasing him.

“I’m calling his parents too, aren’t I?” he shoots back, annoyed.

“Yeah, sure. What’s Wocky’s parents names again?”

Miles took the whole sandwich in, chewing it silently. He stared at the teacher’s office clock as if it knew, what Wocky’s parents’ name were.

The longer the silence, the wider Maya’s smile grew.

Miles cleared his throat. “Phoenix is an easy name to remember.”

“Mnhmm. So is Plum Kitaki, by the way.”

“Nghrk.”

Maya laughs out loud as she hears his nghrk—it was the reaction she always waits for when she teased him.

Which was often enough.

Though if he were honest with himself, he rather likes her because of it—some of the old teachers who’d taught here always treated him a bit differently—too formal, too respecting. He is the principal’s son, he supposes, but he had hoped they wouldn’t treat him differently. Familial relations aside, he really was treated no different from others by the principal. The younger teachers, though, were far worse—they sweet-talked him a lot, trying to get into his, and in turn, his father’s good graces. Maya being so open and honest with him made him feel like he was on equal grounds with everyone else.

“Winfred and Plum Kitaki, Edgeworth. Good thing you haven’t called them over yet—what’d you do if they came and you forgot their names—“

“I’d would have checked the student database again, as I would have written a letter—“

“Edgeworth.” Maya says, wide-eyed. “No! Don’t. You’re going to write them letters and ask the students to give it to their parents, aren’t you? Wocky’ll be fine, he’ll just pass the letter to his dad without a second thought, but Trucy! Trucy’ll be devastated if you do. She’s really not taking this well.”

She had a point. “I…didn’t think of that. You’re right. I didn’t give her special attention in class, as it certainly would make her more uncomfortable…of course had I called her parent over, she’d be incredibly distressed…I should’ve thought more about the this.”

Maya put her chin in her hand again. “But it is kind of a tricky situation…I mean, you could ask him to come by by telephone or e-mail, but. Trucy’s bound to find out and get all bummed out anyway.”

“Mmm.” Miles closes the lid of his lunchbox, tucks it neatly inside his briefcase. In front of him,
Maya’s half-eaten salad seems forgotten. Gumshoe enters the room, carrying a pile of papers. Was carrying, before bumping into Ms. Byrde and having it flying across the room. Gumshoe and Ms. Byrde are now crouching on the floor with papers underneath them, chancing flustered apologies to each other.

Wait.

“Miss Fey.” He says calmly, “Has a parent volunteered to accompany us on our school trip?”

“Hmm? Well, yeah, one from each class, but we haven’t had one from yours! Apollo and Clay’s foster parents say they’re busy, Machi says his parents’ English aren’t very good as they’ve only recently moved here from Borgia—did you know he’s apparently from Borgia? Oh, and also, Gavin says his parents are off to send his brother to Germany, he says their brother’s been accepted to a high school over there—”

“They told you this during their impromptu visits, I assume?” the children liked visiting Miss Fey’s office from time to time, either alone to tell her of their troubles, or in groups to gossip, or, as Maya insists, to hold a social discussion.

“Yes. Last Wednesday. That’s when I found out Wocky’s been bothering him, by the way. He’s annoyed and confused by it all.”

“Have you asked the other children’s parents whether or not they’re available?”

“I told them the news last Thursday, so I did ask them for answers yesterday. I covered most of the class, though it was really rowdy yesterday I haven’t asked a few kids.”

“Did you ask Trucy and Kitaki?”

“I didn’t, I was busy telling Wocky to don’t play origami in class! and Trucy was sitting at the back, so I didn’t manage to ask her. Along with Vera, and O’Connor, and…yep. Those four are the only ones I haven’t asked. But—oh. Oh.” Her eyes widened in realization. “We could—“ If

“Call Mr. Wright and Ms. Kitaki over in the guise of asking either one of them to accompany the trip, exactly. Though it depends solely on their willingness to do so. If that doesn’t work, though, I’m afraid we may have to revert to our traditional letter sending method, as much as it’d break Trucy’s heart.” Better to rip off the band aid early, he solemnly thinks.

“But if it works, it’d be a great idea! And while you’re talking things out with Trucy’s dad, I can come by and distract Trucy—Wow, good thing I haven’t asked them yesterday at class. And if all goes well, I can even get a representative from your class—all right, I’m going to write the letter now—and I can give it to them when the last class ends! Trucy won’t think anything of it when I’m the one giving to her.”

She was oozing excitement, about to close her lunchbox.

“You should finish that, you know.” Miles says, eyeing it.

Maya eyes it warily as well, seeming torn.

Miles tries a little encouragement. “It’s two parts of a burger already, anyway. Lettuce and mayonnaise.”

Maya’s eyes went as wide as saucers, her jaw dropping down in disbelief before speaking, in a desperate tone Miles doesn’t hear a lot. “Edgeworth?! How could you! This is nothing like a burger!
It’s missing the soft bouncy bun, the melting cheese, the juicy, savory meat—“

“You can add crouton in place of the bun. And cheese in lieu of the salad. The beef, though—”

“How are we friends,” Maya says to the ceiling in exasperation, hands in the air, before resolutely closing her lunchbox and marching back to her desk without another word.

Miles smiles as he gets his books and quizzes ready for the next third grade class.

***

Maya wasn’t teaching any class that afternoon, so she took her time finishing the letters for Wocky and Trucy. When she’d finished that, she opened her student database and added in few various information of the students she’d found out during the week—interpersonal relationships outside a child’s family are really important to that child’s psychological growth. That’s why she always very discreetly plant anti-bullying beliefs with Steel Samurai analogies, always make sure no one in class is ever alone (Vera was super shy and didn’t have any friends until last year—when Maya called in Vera and Klavier at the same time in the office, and they discover their passion in art along with their newly bud friendship), and always, always, incredibly aware of the school’s gossips. Edgeworth scoffed when she insisted the students’ group office was for a group discussion, but it was really important for her to know what’s going on around the school. Thanks to that, she knows she’ll have to keep an eye on Wocky and Machi. Take that, Edgeworth!

For grade 2-A, the last class was Ema’s science class. She walks down the halls and sits at the hallway bench in front of class 2-A. Ema’s energetic, passionate voice drifts out from the classroom into the hall.

“So, now that we’re nearing the end of the lesson, I’d like to know if you understood today’s lesson, as usual. Okay, who can tell me why you can see the moon at night?”

It was a three second silence before Maya heard Ema’s saying “Can anyone else other than Clay give it a go?”

Maya can practically see Ema’s hands on her hips in front of the whiteboard, and Clay pouting.

“Alright, if nobody’s going to answer…Wocky. Why can you see the moon at night?”

Wocky’s voice was a bit hesitant, but it was still loudly Wocky. “The moon transfers the light from the sun to the, uh, earth. It’s like a mini sun, see.”

There was a few seconds of silence before Ema says, “close enough. Alright, now who can tell me —“

Right on time: two-thirty. “Okay kids, science class is over. Now, don’t forget to do that homework I gave you all, and submit it to me next week!”

Students were cheerfully running out of the classroom, excited to finally go home. They noticed Maya standing next to the door, and greeted her. Maya smiled at each one of them, calling their names. Vera and Hugh popped out of the classroom and Maya quickly intercepted them, asking if their parents were available to accompany them during this year’s school trip, to which the both of them said no. Hugh said his parents were busy with work again this week (Maya heard the unspoken
as always), and Vera shyly told Maya her mother and father were planning a countryside trip on that
date.

Trucy crossed her arms and tilted her head. “Mmm. I’m not sure if Daddy’d be able to make it…but
if no one else really could, I suppose I could ask Uncle Larry…”

“Who’s Uncle Larry?” Maya asked, genuinely curious.

“He’s Daddy’s friend. He sometimes looks after me when Daddy’s off working at night.”

He sounds like he’s a busy man…this isn’t good. Though it must be really tough already being a
single parent. “Hmm…think you could ask your Dad first, Trucy? We’re really need at least one
parent from your class, and no other parent seems to be able to come.”

“Well…” Trucy nodded. “OK then. I’ll try and ask Daddy first. I’ll let you know tomorrow, Miss
Maya!”

Maya smiled at her. “Great! Thanks a lot, Trucy. See you tomorrow?”

“See you tomorrow!” Trucy said, smile a bit weak at the edges, before running off home at full
speed.

***

Maya was on patrol duty that morning: patrol as in, standing near the hall entrance five minutes
before the bell rang, to prevent any late students to try and sneak into class. She didn’t like being on
patrol duty, because of the fact that when she was a student, she, too, was often late to class—though
she’d gotten much more punctual since she’d worked (also, it’s because Mia’s going to personally
counsel her when she’s late, and that’s enough of a motivation to get out of bed before 6 every day).
And so it’s known between the students if you were late when Ms. Maya was guarding the hallway,
you’ll be lucky for the whole day, because Ms. Maya always gave a five-minute compensation time
after the bell rang, shouting encouragements at the late students.

There were late students that morning too, of course. Two minutes after the bell, exactly 07.32, Clay
was running towards her, with Trucy behind him.

Maya, having just watched Forrest Gump yesterday evening with her sister, shouts, “Come on, Clay,
Trucy! Run Clay Trucy Runnnnnn!!”

They both laughed at that, and ran even faster—Clay speeding past her with a quickly spoken
“Thanks Ms. Fey—”, while Trucy stopped right beside her, hands on her knees, wheezing.

Maya pumped her fists and said, “It’s okay! Deep breaths, Trucy, come on, go go go!”

Trucy smiled up at her, her frantic wheezing slowing into more controlled pants, and said to Maya,
“Dad—*huff, huff* Daddy says he *huff* can make it.”

“No way!” Maya clapped her hands. “Really?!”

“He said—he said he’d clear the schedule, since—nobody’s able to come.”

“I’m very grateful, Trucy! Since no one seems to be able to come. You think your dad can come by
“Mmm…” she seemed to be finally getting her breath back. “How about next Tuesday? Daddy says he’s free then if he has to come to school.”

Tuesday…no afternoon meetings. She and Edgeworth should both be free then. “Tuesday’s great Truce! Ask your father to come by then. Thank you so much, Trucy! We’ll discuss the time later on. Now, hurry up! Your first class is English with Ms. Byrde, right?! Don’t be late now, go go!”

With that, Trucy flashes a quick smile and mumbles a swift goodbye and runs down the hall as fast as her still-short legs would take her.
“—and here’s the hall to my classrooms, daddy, if you turned left you’d be at the cafeteria—but I really don’t like going there. The lady there’s scary.” Trucy said, breath not once faltering in her power walk towards her class.

“Maybe it’s the bad food. Cafeteria food is bad.” Phoenix mused, looking around. The classes were mostly empty. It was 4.30 already—he was one and a half hour late to the meeting, thanks to Larry chatting up yet another newly hired museum intern. Phoenix would have gladly left him behind, but he was his ride (Larry drove a small motorcycle. It’s old and worn and it’s gaudy yellow paint is peeling all over and it spouts black smoke, but Larry loved it. Anyway it’s faster than a cab.)

“But she ALWAYS looks angry, daddy. She’s so scary. Especially if you ask for seconds. Then she really, really looks like the Grinch. Oh! But I heard Ms. Maya saying sometimes she smiles—when Mr. Edgeworth’s walks by.” They walked, and Phoenix was about to ask why she smiles every time Mr. Edgeworth walks by (he still has that scowling teacher image of him) when she sat down at a bench right next to a door of a classroom, labeled “2-A”. She patted the empty space next to her, and Phoenix sat down.

“Why?” Phoenix asked, slightly distracted. The warm golden rays of afternoon sun shone through the windows, and the cream walls…oh, it reminded him of his old elementary school. He remembered old, rickety chairs, sunny days walking home with Larry, popsicles in hand, remembers sobbing himself dry in front of the whole class and teachers. He clenches his fist, and a tell he acquired then, trying to clench the shame out of him.

*I didn’t take it, I’d never steal, I really didn’t steal that lunch money.* If there hadn’t been Dahlia and Larry then—

Dahlia...

It’s been twelve years, for God’s sake, she shouldn’t still be able to make him feel things he feels. But he supposes he was overly sentimental.

*Just like Dahlia said he was…*

And here he was pining for a handsome silver-haired man after a mutual one-night stand, even after agreeing that this was a one time thing only…

He’d headed home immediately after buying gray paint last week, propping up an empty canvas and sat in front of it. The layout? He thought he’d do like a half-body shot, the man looking downwards, eyes obscured with his grey lashes and face obscured with his grey hair, yeah, he can imagine how good that’d look. But Phoenix realized as he drew the basic circle-and-cross base for the face…

*He didn’t quite remember the man.*

He was already half-drunk when the man sat down next to him, and all he remembered wasn’t exactly the man himself, but rather Phoenix’s own thoughts about him. How he was really handsome and grudgingly witty, but he didn’t remember the features on his face that made him handsome, what he’d said to make Phoenix laugh and remember him as the standoffish-but-not-a-douche-and-really-incredibly-witty sort.

The man eluded his memories more each day, and all Phoenix remembered was his grey hair and
pink cardigan.

Dahlia would’ve called him pathetic.

She would’ve been right.

“—but everyone thinks he’s handsome, really, even Polly and Clay says so too. Klavier says he is but he himself says he’s the handsomest, though, because Mr. Edgeworth can’t be the handsomest if he has grey hair. And yeah, Mr. Edgeworth’s got grey hair, but he doesn’t look old…but it looks good, I guess. It’s kinda pretty, in a way. Vera says it looks like silver sometimes. Wocky then says what’s different between silver and grey, yo?!, and then Vera gets mad and says he doesn’t understand art…Daddy. Daddy. Are you listening?”

“Of course, Truce;” Phoenix said, nodding once, almost proud of himself for bouncing back smoothly out of his mental trip-down-memory-lane. He actually didn’t hear anything apart from her asking if he’d been listening, but hey. He is a freelance theater actor. “So, what’s Mr. Edgeworth like?”

Trucy frowned. “Daddy. I just told you.”

“Oh.” Phoenix grinned sheepishly and scratched the back of his head. So much for being a good actor...

Trucy huffed and crossed her hands. “I wonder what’s taking them so long. You are already late, after all.” Ouch.

“Maybe they’re talking about a lot of things.” Phoenix supplied unhelpfully.

Trucy nodded resolutely, like this was actually a good answer. “Wocky talks a lot. When Mr. Edgeworth talks to him, his face slowly turns mad. The whole class always laughs when Wocky raises his hand to answer questions.”

Phoenix laughed, too, because hey, that reminds him of elementary school Larry—he did have a way of driving teachers—scratch that, anyone he talked to, nuts. “Like Uncle Larry in grade school.” Like Uncle Larry, even now, actually.

Hearing this, Trucy laughed, too. “Really?!”

“Yeah, he was always making teachers angry. I remember in English he sometimes can’t decide when to use me or I and jumbles them up, like, one time he asked the English teacher can me go potty? And Truce, his face, oh man, he looked like this,” here Phoenix turned to Trucy and contorted his face into the one etched into his mind from back then, all wide eyes and open mouth. Trucy laughed hard, doubling over.

“We always drove the math teacher nuts—always asks the math teachers stuff like why did Anthony buy thirty-six slices of cakes if he was going to eat only five! and oh boy, Truce, oh man. The math teacher looked like this, lemme tell you—,” Phoenix turned to her to give her another one of his silly faces, but found Trucy looking down, biting her lip, fingers fiddling with the edge of the cape she had over her dress.

That’s Trucy’s nervous, nervous tell.

“Truce? What’s wrong?” Phoenix asked, holding her hand.
Trucy thought in silence for a bit, then asked, while still looking down, “Dad—did, um, when you were at school, uh—”

Suddenly, the door clicked open, the sound loud in the quiet corridor. A figure in the form of a shadow loomed in the doorway, huge and daunting. Some words of parting could be heard, the man’s voice deep and rumbly. When he stepped out, lighting finally allowed Phoenix to be able to see him, and, well.

The man was definitely huge and tall and stocky. He was taller than Phoenix. He had full, thick, thick eyebrows, so thick you almost couldn’t see his dark beady eyes underneath. Which were looking straight at Phoenix.

Now, Phoenix was never one to judge a book by its cover, a man by his looks. He was a 30 year old man who’d met tons of people in his life, an actor, for pete’s sake, he knows how someone looks doesn’t always mirror who they really are.

Dahlia sure didn’t.

But this man, he just—he looks really daunting, holy shit, if this man were auditioning for the Mob Boss Guy part in action movies, he’d be hired the moment he stepped into the room; the director would just stand up and shout, either in relief or fear, something like “stop the audition! You’re exactly what we’re looking for, we have our man!”

*And he managed to make that impression while wearing a grimy yellow apron. With a raccoon patch sewn in the middle.*

Also he apparently smells like burnt dough and peaches and dried sweat.

Still staring at Phoenix, the man nodded to him.

Phoenix nodded back, dumbly.

A kid came running out, his chin-length brown hair swaying behind him. “Thanks, mist’ Edgeworth!” He shouted, and closed the classroom door with a little more force than necessary. He turned to the man. “He’s cool, huh dad?”

He nodded to his son mutely, and walked down the corridor together.

With that the man and the kid left.

That was…the oddest encounter Phoenix had had in a long time.

Phoenix was snapped out of his stupor by Trucy suddenly jumping herself off the little chair. “Let’s go see Mr. Edgeworth, then, Dad!”

Phoenix nodded, dumbly. “Uh yeah, let’s.” As soon as he’d said that he remembered Trucy’s sudden nervousness, and reminded himself to ask her about it later when they get home.

They walked over the short distance to the door, which Trucy kindly knocked for him. “Mr, Edgeworth? It’s us!”

“Trucy? Is that you?” some faint rustling sounds. “Please wait a moment, I’ll be right to the door.”

The first thought that flitted in Phoenix’s mind was oh wow, *that’s a nice voice.* It really was, it was heavy and low, but silky in tone, with a faint accent eminent in the way he sounds his consonants.
The second thought that flitted in Phoenix’s mind was hey, that voice sounds familiar…recently familiar. Have I heard that voice before?

“Come in.” the voice said, followed by the clicking lock of the door.

“Come in”? He’s heard these exact words said by this exact voice…when? It was just a few days ago, he’s sure…come in…a click…door…which leads to a small hotel room…

Oh.

Oh God.

No WAY…

The recurring man in his dreams, the one he’s trying hard to hold on despite his forgetful mind, the man on his canvas painted with the finest gray paint he can afford…

“I’m very sorry for the delay, Trucy. Wocky was late as well and there was a lot to talk about, and I apologize, Mist—nghrk.”

Grey eyes, silver hair—

*Is his adopted daughter’s fucking math teacher.*

________________________

Gregory Edgeworth is a well-respected man. He combs his hair and styles them sideways neatly every day, wipes his glasses clean and shaves his face stubble-free every morning. He irons his collars crisp and loops his tie into a perfect, symmetrical Windsor-knot triangle every day, puts on his double-breasted suit, double-breasted trench coat, and black hat on every day. Those who see him say that he is a spitting image of a gentleman, but he would always modestly say he truly isn’t.

He gets into his cozy black 98 Chevron Impala, not sharing his son’s taste in more modern and ostentatious cars (they’ve actually gotten into heated debates about this).

When he strolled into his office, he found Lana Skye already sitting at the chair across his desk, hands folded neatly in her lap. Her right hand thumb was a bit red in color, and Gregory was sure, if he’d taken a closer look, there’d be a tiny horizontal indentation.

Something’s wrong.

“Ms. Skye, is something the matter?”

Lana Skye was known for the impressively professional neutral mask she wore on her face, but her most transparent mask was the one worn with worry.

“It’s not officially announced yet. But…they’ve elected the new minister of the education board, and the annual inspection will commence at the usual time, which is on 4th of February…roughly another seven months.”

“That’s expected. They always come at February. We’ll just prepare for it like we always do. Only
this time we mustn’t forget to give good old Oldbag a week off, unlike last year. Having Miles accompanying minister Grossberg on his every lunch throughout the week in the cafeteria was the only way to ensure her hospitable company.” He says, aiming for a half-smile from Ms. Skye. The Oldbag almost-disaster almost-always made her almost-smile. “I’m pretty sure she was about to smack him with that ladle of hers on the first day, Mr. Grossberg and his no-care-for-time-and-place hemorrhoid talk…good thing Miles passed through and evaporated her anger right out of here, sparing Mr. Grossberg.”

Lana Skye only tensed up further, and started biting her right hand thumb again.

This can’t be good.

Chapter End Notes

AS USUAL TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK <3 I HOPE YOU ENJOYED THIS, AGAIN THANKS TO TUMBLR USER @KAGEYEEMA AND @GAYLAWYERHELL FOR THIS LOVELY SCENE

Also can anyone guess who the new education minister is ;;)

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