Inheritance of Cards

by Love_Psycho

Summary

Okumura Rin is twelve years old when he meets Keroberos and the Cards.

Magical cards sound like something out of a fantasy story, but that's what Rin has to deal with. Worse, an accident has him having to chase down all of them himself, as the only one capable of doing it. At least with Kero on his side Rin stands a chance. But can he juggle Cardcaptor work, school, and keeping all of this from his family?

Notes

This is my big, massive project I've been working on (and am still working on) for over a year and a half.

It started as a weird thought when I rewatched CCS at one point and it has turned into this. It's only my first crossover idea (since CCS is awesome and throwing that at Aoex is bound to be fun in many ways) but it's the one that will be finished first.

I hope you enjoy!

New notice 2016/01/10: For all the new readers welcome! You don't have to worry about comments for all the chapters, just the most recent one. Unless you got a big, massive juicy one that really looks at the chapter and gushes over it slash analyses it. Aside from that, only comments on the most recent chapter "count" for the next chapter. I have at this point finished all planned three arcs for this series and am working on the side stories that are tied
into this.

Before you go and comment, best to check the other comments for questions and the like you might be wondering about! Good chance I already was asked and I answered it!

But most importantly, I hope that you enjoy this story of mine. Thank you for visiting!
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It is a large, heavy chest. A fancy, decorated one at that. Made of strong wood, steel, and inlays of precious metals and stones, it is truly something of a work of art. Most of the chest is made of white oak, with ebony trim and steel to strengthen it. Decorative designs are made of silver, gold, brass, and even various semi-precious and precious stones such as jade, sapphire, ruby, and onyx. It is truly a wondrous chest – especially considering the fact it is full sized and not a miniature – except for one thing:

No matter what, no one can unlock it. Arguably this increases its worth, as it makes people believe that there is truly something precious hidden within it.

As it travelled across the world, starting in Hong Kong (where it was found buried underground by some farmers) then going to Britain in the 19th century, then France, Italy, back to China after a brief stay in India, then finally, old and mostly forgotten, it ends up in Japan in a small monastery. A young, new member with the name of Fujimoto Shirō is then tasked to bring it down to the basement as there is nothing more they can do about it; it is a donation from a rich benefactor after they died of old age, and a rather useless one for them at that.

The young exorcist eyes it. Slightly dirty from the trip through the ages, the designs on it are still quite wonderful to behold. On one side, there is a brilliant sun done in gold with rubies added for an extra touch. The other has a moon done in much the same style, except with silver and sapphires instead. On top, there is a large star done in brass; or rather, it is outlined in brass with jade filling in the centre. Other, smaller designs made of brass and onyx edge the chest as well, looking like odd magical symbols.

Shirō sighs, as it is going to be a very heavy thing to move and the other, older members have already left him alone. Rolling up his sleeves, he sets to moving it to the trolley he was given. It takes a while, but finally he finishes getting it in place and rolls over to the stairs lead down to the basement. Moving carefully, he gets it down most of the steps with no trouble.

At least until he is almost at the bottom, at which point a wonky step results in the wheels catching and the chest being flung out to hit the bottom with a heavy sound. Shirō reflectively winces at that, then stares.

The chest landed on its front before bouncing upright, the clasps unsnapped, and the lock...the lock is broken. Shirō can't believe it and rushes down to see it. After almost two centuries of existence, the chest has finally been unlocked. Hesitating briefly, the young man then opens the chest.

He stares, then slumps. “Ah man...you have to be kidding me...”

The ancient chest, the mysterious expensive chest that has all a flutter over its contents...

...is completely empty.

“Well...that's a let down.” After a moment, Shirō closes it and snaps the clasps shut. He was told to put it in the basement in the back after all. He doesn't have to say anything about it being open and disappointingly empty to his superiors. It isn't really that important after all.
After he has stuck it in the back, he turns and exits the basement, going up the stairs quickly. It is almost supper time and he is hungry.

He moves so fast, that he completely misses the magic circle that appears under the chest and envelops the chest in brilliant light. A soft voice, a sweet voice, speaks then, seemingly coming from the light that surrounds the chest.

“Ah...it is almost time.”

Chapter 1: Birth Of A New Cardcaptor

The large crashing sound and the resulting cloud of dust that hits his face and makes him cough is totally his fault. In various ways.

First of all, he shouldn’t have recklessly just grabbed something to move without checking to see if it is safe to do so. Which is where the crash comes in.

Second, he should have thought to bring some kind of face mask for the amount of dust and grime down in the basement. Which is why he is having a serious coughing fit.

And finally, he shouldn't have lost his temper and caused such a fuss on his first day at Junior High, resulting in his adoptive father punishing him by making him clean out the old basement.

Waving away the dust and still coughing, Okumura Rin has to wonder how long this place has been untouched. Maybe for decades given the density of the grime. Rin shivers at the sight of the cobwebs; he doesn't really like the idea of bugs and other stuff crawling around in the dark where he can't see them. It is too gross.

Sighing, Rin stands up, grabbing the discarded flashlight he brought down with him. There is no way out of it; he is to at least attempt to clean the place until Father Fujimoto says he is allowed to stop and come up.

Rin hopes it will be in time for dinner, but he isn't holding his breath too much in that regard. Going without a proper dinner is something of a default punishment at the monastery. And Rin caused enough of an incident that it probably comes attached to his current punishment.

Shaking his head, Rin begins to look around again at the place. He should be more careful in here; he doubts the old man would have sent in the twelve-year-old if it is truly dangerous, but that doesn't mean he can't accidentally hurt himself if he isn't careful.

A small light in the back makes him pause in the middle of trying to straighten the mess he made, and he tries to figure out what it is, peering into the hushed darkness. That's when he realizes something. Staying very quiet, Rin realizes he can hear some kind of growling/groaning sound. The hair on the back of his neck raises at that, and he starts to consider screwing his punishment and getting out of here. That sound is freaky. Then he sees the flash of light again and whirls around to follow it with his eyes. It looks like some kind of small ball of light, bobbing around the place. Despite the eerie look of it and the growling/groaning sound, Rin can't help but be curious. He only hesitates for a moment before sneakily stepping behind the light ball that is dancing nearby, above an old lamp with a noxious pink flower pattern that is probably supposed to be of sakura but looks more like toxic blobs.

The ball continues to dance in place, before starting to bob around, weaving and wobbling like it's drunk or something. Eventually it settles down in the very back, bobbing up and down in place. Rin blinks. As strange as it is, it seems like it is telling him to come over there. Slowly, carefully, Rin
walks over to it. The light hovers in place, illuminating the area. Rin glances down as it begins to sink and sees the old chest below it. The light sinks into the chest and vanishes from sight.

Curiosity fully roused at this point, Rin approaches the chest and sets down his flashlight. He kneels in front of it and carefully brushes the top. Rin can feel impressions on it, some kind of design underneath all the dust and grime. It is too dark to really see it though, even with his flashlight. Groping around for a bit, Rin finally finds the clasps and undoes them. There was a lock at some point, but it is broken, allowing Rin to easily open the chest. After the dust settles, Rin picks up the flashlight and peers into it.

To his surprise, everything within it looks brand new, with only a light coating of dust from the recently disturbed outside. There are various tech devices in there, most of them looking like some kind of battery pack. There is also old clothing which, when Rin pulls out one, is sized and designed for a young girl. It is rather pretty and even cute Rin has to admit. Setting aside the outfit, Rin's eyes catch on the one thing in the chest that isn't clothing or a tech device. It looks like a book; a rather pink one at that. Curious, Rin picks it up and shines the flashlight on it.

Despite the pink, there is a rather awesome looking winged lion thing on the cover, with some kind of chain and sun pendant inlaid on top. Rin wonders if it is real gold and turns the book around, blinking at the other design: it has what can be called a “magic circle” in the middle, with a winged sun over top and a winged crescent moon on the bottom, with a banner beneath it. He turns back to the front, and looks up at the top, where he can see a very similar banner.

Frowning, he slowly sounds out the word written there. “Sa...ku...ra. Sakura.” He tilts the book back and forth, then looks back at the chest. “Did all this once belong to this Sakura girl? Uh.”

He notices the clasp on the book has a lock and sets aside the flashlight, though he makes sure he can still see. “Aah...it's probably...” Rin winces, as something like static electricity races up his fingers when he touches the book's lock. It snaps open, startling him.

“Uh. That's odd.” Rin carefully opens the book and is surprised. “Cards? Well, I guess if you wanted to hide them or something...” He lifts up the first one. He frowns, not wanting to put aside the book but unable to read the card without picking up the flashlight. Placing the card back in the book, he looks around. “There has to be a light switch around here somewhere...I'm sure Tou-san mentioned it...”

It takes awhile, but eventually Rin tracks down the light switch. He is also lucky enough to find one of the lights that are scattered through the place right above the chest, allowing him to set aside and turn off his flashlight.

Now fully distracted from his original task, Rin picks up the book and the card again. The card is as pink as the book, but still rather neat to look at. It has a large half-star shape in gold on top, with a smaller complete star on the bottom. Half of a sun symbol is on the left, while there is a crescent moon on the other side. In the middle is a picture of a lady. She has long hair dressed high and falling forward into two long strands, reminding Rin of wings. Wing-like shapes are also on her head and she seems to have insect or rather fairy-like wings, though Rin can't see any feet; in fact, he can only see her torso really. There is a caption on the bottom in a banner like thing and Rin focuses on that.

“Hm...” Rin begins to walk back and forth, almost unconsciously. Still holding both the book and the card, Rin struggles to read the word. It is in English, he thinks. “Um...Wi...Win...”

Unnoticed to him, a strange design made out of light begins to slowly appear below him, flickering like it is being turned on and off.
Rin grins as he finally figures it out, stopping his pacing as he does so. “Windy!”

He then flinches back, shocked as a great wind suddenly appears and a light below him erupts. Covering his face and clutching both the book and card, Rin doesn't notice as all the other cards within the book are whisked out by the wind and into the air. They seem to hover for a moment, before they all suddenly start scattering, somehow going through the walls and out of the monastery.

There is a pause as the wind slowly dies down. Rin lifts his face, wondering what the hell happened and looks at the card. Then glances at the book; the now very empty book.

“Uh...oops?” Rin isn't sure what happened, but it is probably his fault...again.

“A...and now it begins again...” A voice softly whispers, before the light orb that had brought Rin to the chest finally disappears with a burst, leaving only some kind of glitter that hovers there before slowly drifting to Rin and sinking into his skin.

The long, awkward moment made of Rin staring alternatively at the Windy card and the book ends when the young boy decides to give up and sit on the ground.

Sitting cross-legged, Rin sets aside the book so he can just stare at the card. “That...did that really happen?”

A sudden strange glow makes Rin turn, stunned as the book starts glowing. It flips over to stand upright and a figure slowly rises out of it. Rin stared. It looks like some kind of yellow-orange stuffed animal, with big ears and wings on its back.

Small black eyes focus on Rin. “Yo!”

Rin lets out a yelp of shock and half-crawls away. “You...you...”

The thing tilts its head, looking confused. “Oi, is there somethin' the matter?”

“You're talking!” Rin blurs out, staring with wide, scared blue eyes at the strange creature that appeared in front of him. 'And in Osaka dialect to boot!'

The stuffed animal thing frowns at that. “Ohcourse Ah talk! Is there a problem with that?”

“Ahh...but you are...a...” Rin pauses, blinks. “What are you?”

“Ah'm not a what, Ah'm a who. Ah'm Kerberos, Beast of the Seal and Guardian of the Cards!” The thing – he, Rin figures from the manner of speech – puffs himself up.

“Uh...” A word sticks in Rin's mind, that of “cards”. “U...what cards?”

Kerberos smirks. “Why, only the greatest Cards themselves! The great magic Cards originally crafted by Clow Reed, mastered and expanded by Kinomoto Sakura! These very Cards themselves!” He gestures behind him at the empty book. There is a pause, a very uncomfortable pause for Rin.

“You...mean...cards like this one?” Rin offers the Windy to Kerberos.

The winged being flutters up to see and grins. “Yes, just like this one!” He pats the top of it. He then pauses and looks down. “Windy?” There is a moment of silence as Rin can see something like dread cross the small creature's face. “Oh no.”

He turns around and looks at the book.
“NOOO!!” He cries upon seeing the very empty book, rushing to it and staring at the empty compartment as if he stares hard and long enough the cards will magically reappear. He then slumps down onto the ground. “Oh, Keroberos. You never learn do you? You should know by now; when on guard duty takin' a nap is a recipe for disaster! ...Yue's gonna kill me when he wakes up.”

Rin gives a nervous smile. “Um...I'm sorry. I think it is my fault. I was just reading the name of this card and a great wind came up and...”

“...blew all the cards away.” Keroberos finishes. His head lifts up and he looks off into the distance. “Could it be?” He whirls on Rin.

“Oi! How exactly did you find this Book!?” He demands, floating up to Rin's face.

Rin pulls his head back, a little startled by the sudden close proximity. “Uh...I found it...” Rin thinks back. “There was this strange light thing that I followed...and I saw it go into the chest.” Rin gestures behind Keroberos at said chest. Rin hesitates then, as there is something intent in Keroberos's gaze.

“Go on. Tell me more.”

“Um...” Rin's eyes dart around for a bit then finally settle on Keroberos once more. He figures he isn't getting away from here. He doesn't know anything about what a Guardian Beast is or who Keroberos is, aside from looking like a stuffed animal and using an Osaka dialect. “Well, I saw it, the book, in the chest and picked it up. When I touched the lock it just snapped open...”

“That lock. Has a magic seal on it. You shouldn't have been able to open it, much less have it open just by comin' in contact with you.” Keroberos tells him slowly. He then smirks. “Plus this? Activatin' Windy and scatterin' the cards...heh, it's like the first time Ah met Sakura.”

“What are you talking about?” Rin is confused. He has every right to be. Magic cards, talking stuffed animals, and vague comments....it is something out of a fantasy manga.

“To have used Windy, you would have needed to have natural magical talent. To have seen that light you mentioned and have the book unlock for you...” Keroberos suddenly grins. “You must be the candidate Ah was waitin' for.”

“Ca...candidate?” That is all Rin manages to get out before Keroberos is on him again.

“What's yer name?”

“Uh...my name is...Okumura Rin.” Rin says finally.

Keroberos blinks. “Rin? That's a girly name.”

Rin scowls at that. “Oi, as if you have any right to talk! You look like a stuffed animal and have a name that doesn't fit you at all!”

Keroberos rolls his eyes. “This is only mah sealed form. The form Ah take to remain under the radar and to conserve energy. Right now Ah cannot take mah awesome true form.” There is a pause, then he speaks again, a little quieter, “You can call me Kero when Ah'm like this then, if that's easier for you.”

Rin blinks. There is a strange cast to Kero's face then. “Kero...is something the matter?”

The little guy shakes his head and suddenly grins. “Nope. Nothin' to burden you with. After all, you already have a great burden.”
Rin stares. “I do?”

“Yup.” Kero flutters over to stand on top of the book. “As of today, yer duty is to track down and capture all the escaped Cards!”

There is a moment of silence. Then...

“What?!” Rin charges at Kero, grabbing a hold of him and making him yelp in shock before shaking him furiously. “What do you mean my duty? Isn’t it your job to guard the cards or something!?”

Kero can’t respond immediately, Rin squeezing him too hard for that. Rin notices this though and quickly lets go of Kero with a muttered “sorry”. Kero gasps and manages to flutter his wings, allowing him to float in the air. “Damn, Ah thought Ah was gonna die...you are a strong kid.” He shakes his head. “Look, mah job is two fold; first, guard the Cards. Second, choose the new Heir for the Cards.”

“What happened today leads me to believe you are to be the next Master of these Cards.”

Rin stares at him. “M...Me? I...I'm not suited for that kind of thing. I...I can't even last an entire day at school without getting into a fight. I destroy stuff and suck at school work. The only thing I'm good at is cooking! Uh, uh. You got the wrong guy.”

Kero listens to this with an attentive tilt to his head. “So you will allow the Cards to run rampant, cause chaos in the world, and even danger to others?”

Rin freezes at that. That...doesn't sound good.

Kero sighs and sits back down on top of the book. “Right now, the Cards are scattered throughout the city. They are masterless and probably confused, lost even. They will be nothin' but trouble to the inhabitants of this world, even the ones that are gentle by nature. The Cards will tear apart this world. They can't help it; they are in the end magical constructs, and ones not as independent in nature as mahself which means they are bound by their natures. They need a master. Whatever it is that caused you to stumble across the book and unleash the Cards does not matter, what matters now is that you are the one who is not only responsible for this mess...” Kero stares resolutely into Rin's blue eyes. “But are also the only one capable of fixin' it.”

There is a long, quiet moment as this sinks into Rin. He is only twelve years old for crying out loud! He is in no way ready to do anything like be some kind of magical hero or even do something as big as “save the world”! But...can he really just stand by when something dangerous like that is going on?

Another glow attracts his attention. Kero is glowing brightly, a rich gold colour. A circle made of the same glow suddenly appears under him, before shifting in front of him and growing in size slightly. Something twists in the air above the circle before, with a loud “popping” sound, a key is suddenly there. It doesn't look like anything special but there is a loud humming sound ringing in Rin's ears nonetheless.

Kero focuses on the key and the circle begins to spin, the key growing and changing shape until it looks like a wand of a sort. A strange fierce wind is suddenly there and the circle begins to glow brighter, giving off trails of energy. Rin flinches back from the force of it. And then Kero speaks, dropping the Osaka dialect briefly as he does so.

“Key of the seal,” He begins, “this boy will carry out the sacred promise. His name is Okumura Rin.
I command you to bestow him with the rights and duties carried out by your contract.” He suddenly switches to shouting. “Rin take the staff!”

The voice of command in there makes Rin approach the circle, fighting against the force pushing back against him. His hand lands on the handle of the staff, which begins to glow.

“I, Keroberos, name Rin Cardcaptor!” Kero proclaims and the glow turns into bright light, causing Rin to reflectively shut his eyes.

When the light died down, Rin cautiously opens his eyes. And is surprised. Before hand, the staff was plain and boring in appearance. But now, it is a deep blue, capped with a red crystal star surrounded by a pair of curved white wings that jut above it.

“Congratulations.” Kero says, grinning proudly at Rin. “You are now a Cardcaptor.”

“Yes!” Rin pumps his fist in the air. Then he pauses. “...wait a minute...YOU TRICKED ME YOU BLASTED STUFFED ANIMAL!!”

Kero laughs despite the glare Rin is blasting him with, rolling in the air from the strength of his mirth. “Ahh kids...so easy...you are as gullible as Sakura was!”

Rin fumes silently, but unfortunately he knows enough that he has been fully caught. The entire thing reeks of a “magical contract” and if manga has taught him anything, those kinds of things shouldn't be messed with.

He is a “Cardcaptor” which means his job is to catch all those Cards that went missing.

Joy.

Ultimately, Rin isn't going card hunting immediately. Instead, he has to sneak the chest and its contents upstairs to his room without getting caught.

He manages well enough, until he gets to his room. The room that he shares with his younger brother; who, of course, is there just when Rin doesn't want him to be there.

“Nii-san...what is that?” Yukio blinks at his elder brother who just entered the room. He isn't surprised that Rin is capable of carrying such a heavy chest – his brother has been super strong since they are little kids – however, he is surprised he has one.

“Oh...this?” Rin hesitates for a bit. “It's a nice chest I found in the basement. It's still in pretty good condition and I thought I could fix it up and put things in it.”

“Why in the chest?” Yukio narrows his eyes. “Aren't you supposed to be cleaning the basement Nii-san, not taking stuff from it?”

Rin gives a nervous grin. “Ah, come on Yukio. It's just an old chest. I just like it...you aren't going to tell Tou-san that I've abandoned my punishment, are you?” He puts on his best pleading face and widens his big blue eyes.

Yukio, as usual, falls for it. ‘One day I'm going to have to build an immunity to that face...’ “Alright Nii-san. I won't tell Tou-san. But you can only keep the chest if you can find a spot for it on your side of our room.”

Rin beams despite the conditions Yukio attached. “Thanks! You're the greatest little brother Yukio!”
Rin then begins looking around the room, mentally reorganizing his side for the chest to fit.

Yukio shakes his head and adjusts his glasses. “I’m your only little brother...” He mutters to himself softly. Despite that, he is smiling.

“So, why do I need the chest as well?” Rin asks Kero, his arms crossed over the backboard of his bed and looking down at said chest which Kero is currently going through. True to Rin’s prediction, he is forbidden from supper though Yukio was nice enough to sneak him a small snack.

Rin picks up the apple that is part of his small “meal” and bites into it as Kero begins to explain.

“The devices in here are special magical devices created by the previous master. See, Sakura worked on combinin’ magic and technology. The results are pretty effective as well. Might come in handy thus.” Kero then dusts off his paws and flies out of the chest. “Good, everythin’ is in order. Just one more thang to do...”

He shuts the chest and goes over to the broken lock. The small lion-like being produces a spark on one of his paws and it drifts over to touch the lock. A flash of light and suddenly it is in brand new condition. That, combined with the cleaning Rin did previously, makes the chest look like he recently bought it, instead of dragging it up from the basement after who knows how long it has been there. Not to mention shows the stunned young boy that it is rather fancy and expensive looking. That can’t be *real* gold...right?

“Woah.” Then Rin realizes something. “Hey, how am I supposed to unlock it now?”

Kero smiles at that. “You already have the key, silly!”

Rin pauses and fishes out the chain that is now around his neck. The Key the staff turned into is attached to it. It hadn't taken long for Rin's clever hands to fashion a simple necklace out of it. The Key looks rather pretty even; what with it looking much the same as the full sized staff except for the “key” part which is silver in colour. “Oh. Sorry.”

“That's okay.” Kero flies up and sits down on the backboard. He glances at the small collection of (healthy) snack food. “...can Ah have some?”

Rin smiles at the rather cute pleading and hungry face Kero has on. As a cook himself, Rin can't resist making sure Kero got some food; especially since the onigiri on the plate was made by him. “Sure, just leave some for me.”

“Yay!” Kero dives and snatches up an onigiri, chowing down on it almost immediately. Swallowing, he fills the space of their meal with more talk. “Okay, first thangs first. Ah need you to write yer name on Windy.”

Rin blinks, and picks up the card from where it lay beside him. “I do?”

“Yup!” Kero pauses to swallow a slice of orange whole. “You need to lay claim to that Card. In fact, if you by chance come across *any* Card that is still in Card form, *immediately* put yer name on it. Even if the Card hasn't activated by then, there's still a chance it might. And you wouldn't like the consequences of such.”

“I wouldn't?” Rin asks him, as he searches for a good pen in his desk; which is, by nature, a difficult task as Rin's desk is a total mess.

“Let's just say the one time the previous Cardcaptor forgot that, her entire house was nearly
destroyed.” Is Kero's response after a pause.

Rin shudders at the thought of his home being torn apart. “Got it.” Rin finally finds an useable pen and returns back to Windy. “Um...where do I put it?” He stares at the card.

Kero paused in his meal and flies over to Rin. “At the bottom. Has to be in English too.”

“English?!” Rin exclaims, turning to stare with horror at the magical being. Kero laughs and flies over to one of the desks, ripping a paper for a small piece before returning. Rin winces a bit at that, since it came from Yukio's desk. ‘Hope he doesn't get angry...’

“Hand me the pen, will you?” Rin does so and watches as Kero carefully shows him how to write his name. “It's easy as you can tell. Only three letters. Like romaji really.”

Rin peers at the paper for a bit, then nods and turns to Windy, getting the pen back from Kero along the way. It isn't long before RIN is scrawled on the bottom in neat print. “Why does it have to be English?” Rin asks when he is done.

“It can be in Chinese as well.” Kero acknowledges. “Ah figured English would be easier for you; Chinese and Japanese script is very similar after all and you have to think of it as Chinese when you write it. And it's because of the original creator of the Cards, Clow Reed. He was half British and half Chinese. Clow created these Cards by combinin' Western Magic with Eastern Magic.”

“There's a difference between them?” Rin asks, setting aside the card with the pen for now.

“Yeah. Has to do with beliefs and such. Not really important to know the difference right now, but you should know that the difference is great enough that Clow Reed's achievement is truly a feat of great magic.” Kero explains. “That's why the Cards are so dangerous. Only those chosen or with the proper knowledge can have any hope of containin' them much less masterin' them.”

“Uh...” Rin finishes his apple and sets the core on the plate, grabbing an onigiri as he does so. “So this Clow Reed guy was impressive...what about Sakura?”

“She was the second master of the Cards and Clow Reed's chosen heir.” Kero tells Rin, a fond smile crossing his face. “Her achievements lied in being a worthy successor, and combining Magic and Technology, as those devices she left behind prove.”

“Her being the previous master is why the Cards look as they do now. Previously, they were known as the Clow Cards. Currently though, they are the Sakura Cards.”

“Is that why they are pink?” Rin wonders.

“Well...pink was one of her favourite colours after all...” Kero sweats a bit, recalling certain actions and phrases of his previous master. “Anyways, right now Ah need to teach you the two chants you need.”

“Chants?” Rin blinks.

“Magic chants. The first is for releasin' the wand, which you will need, and the second is for sealin' the Cards, which you will also need.”

Rin sits up at that. Sounds important. “Alright. Tell me.”

Rin's eyes snap open despite the late hour. He wonders why he is awake and why he feels like
something is humming around him, then his eyes focus on what is above.

Kero's face. Really, really close to his.

“Gah!” Rin sits up, knocking back Kero as he does so. That was a freaky sight to wake up to. He shakes his head and glances warily over at Yukio; but it seems like his little brother hadn't been woken up. Lucky him.

“Wah...that hurt...” Kero complains quietly, then flutters over to Rin. “Oh good, you're up. That makes thangs easier; you have to get out of bed, now!”

“Uh? But it's...” Rin glances at the clock and yawns. “It's one in the morning.”

“Sh.” Kero puts his paw to his lips then gestures to his ears. Rin pauses and listens.

There is something heavy thumping outside. No, not thumping; it is like a giant sheet being shook. The window is rattling, and Rin jumps out of bed and pads over to the window. There is something like a great wind stirring up the night, and Rin flinches back as the wind increased, the window making even more sound.

“What is it?” Rin asks Kero quietly, Kero going to respond but is quickly interrupted.

Rin yelps as something big and white whisked by the window, making the entire monastery shudder and groan. “What is that?!”

“A Sakura Card. It's the Fly Card.” Kero tells him. “We have to catch it!”

Stopping only to grab a jacket, a pen, the Windy card, and check that the Key is still around his neck, Rin carefully works open the window. A great gust of wind blows into the room, but Rin fights through it and gets outside, managing to work the window close as well. It is difficult to make his way down to the ground with the great wind battering him, but Rin grits his teeth and digs his feet and fingers in.

Making it to the ground in one piece, Rin takes off running, ignoring the pavement and grit on his bare feet. Kero somehow manages to keep pace beside him in flight, despite the great wind. “Why hasn't anyone woken up at the racket?!"

“Ah don't know!” Kero admits. “But if you don't hurry...look out!”

Fly turns around and Rin is stunned at the sight of it. It looks like a great big white bird, with a long neck and a short beak. And it is charging straight at him.

“Oh shit!” Rin turns and bursts into a run, doing his best to get away from the suddenly aggressive card. Claws rake the ground where he had been and Rin jumps away from its beak, the wind from Fly's beating wings pushing him up into the air.

Screaming, Rin manages to grab hold of a nearby tree branch and clings to it monkey style. “Oh man...” Fly turns away, leaving Rin in the clear for now. Then he remembers, “Kero!”

Rin looks around, worried for the little guy.

“Ah'm here.” Kero pops out from under Rin's shirt, looking rather ruffled. “Yikes. Looks like bein' woken from its nap made it grumpy.”

“If this keeps up, it'll tear apart the neighbourhood.” Rin gulps at that thought. “How do I stop it?”
“Use Windy.” Kero advises. “She's a gentle Card, but she is one of the four high elemental Cards as well. She's strong and is capable of bindin' most Cards. You just have to tell her what you want and she'll do it.”

Rin stares at Kero for a long moment, Kero noticing the fear in the young boy's gaze. His features soften. “You can do it kid. Don't worry; like Ah said, Windy is a gentle one.”

Rin swallows again, but slowly nods. He turns and pales a bit at the sight that greets him. The great white bird form of Fly, charging straight at him with a mean look in its eyes.

“It's comin' back! Rin, move!” Rin makes to follow Kero's order, but pauses. His expression becomes focused and he pulls himself up on the branch he is clinging to.

Bracing himself, as Fly returns with an angry screech he jumps, grabbing onto one of its legs as it dives down to attack him. Fly lets out an annoyed squawk at that and begins flying more aggressively, twisting and turning in the air. Rin keeps clinging to the leg though and once Fly has stopped the more dangerous moves, begins to work his way upwards.

Finally reaching the top, Rin claws his way forwards until he is near the head. Then he grabs hold of the key whirling around his neck, digging his free hand and feet deep into the feathers in a bid to not be knocked off, not only by the movements of the Card spirit, but by the strong wind that rushes over it as it moves.

'I hope I remember the chant right.' He briefly prays, then begins to speak, a magic circle appearing under him as he does so.

“Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!”

The key expands with a burst of light and Rin grabs it. Managing to pull out the Windy Card without being thrown off he readies himself, tossing the Card forward and hitting it with the staff as it returns.

“Wind! Be a binding rope! Windy, RELEASE!” The card bursts into light, turning into the form of a pale yellow fairy woman with green wing-like things on her forehead and surrounded by a cloak of wind in greens and yellows. Fly cries out as Windy wraps around it, binding it and dragging the spirit to the ground.

‘Woah!’ Rin cries, as the shaking and crash causes him to fall off as Fly hits the ground with a resounding bang. He skids across the ground for a good length before finally stopping. Shaking his head, he sits up and realized he landed in the nearby park, looking quite different at night. Turning his head, he sees Fly struggling against the wind bindings and scrambles to his feet. Rushing to the card, he readies the wand once more and recalls the second chant Kero taught him.

“Fly, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” Slamming the wand down on top of Fly, the wings on the wand expand and spread out, as Fly keens and dissolves into strands of light that slowly form into a card in front of him.

Soon it is done and Rin collapses, accepting the card as it floats gently to him. He stares at the card in his hand, which pictures the image of the card's spirit. “I...I did it.” He whispers, shock on his face. ‘I...didn't mess up.’

Kero flies up to him, having been left behind during the capture. “Rin! You okay?”

Rin looks up, eyes shining and slightly wet. “I...I DID IT KERO!” He leaps to his feet and begins dancing around, even hugging Kero in his joy. “I actually did it!”
Kero laughs at the joy infecting Rin and the air around him. “Great job kiddo. Told you can do it.”

Rin wipes the back of his arm against his somewhat teary eyes. “Yeah.” He looks down at Fly. “Oh, I better put my name on it.”

Once that is done, an idea hit Kero. ‘It worked in Sakura's case so...’ “Hey, Rin you should use it!”

Rin snaps his head back at Kero. “R-really? That's okay?”

Kero grins. “You are the new master of this Card after all. Go on, try it.”

Rin hesitates for a moment, before a smile breaks across his face. “Sure!”

“WHOOHOOO!” Rin whoops, as he soars through the sky. The wand had grown in length, and the wings on the end have expanded and are flapping gently behind him, allowing him to ride it in the sky. “This. Is. So. COOL!”

Kero, flying beside him, laughs at the cheerful energy that practically illuminates Rin. “Yup. Not much beats flyin' by yer own power, right?”

Rin nods, a giddy grin on his face. “You know...this might not be so bad. Being a Cardcaptor.” He admits.

“Oh there will be trials ahead of you.” Kero tells him, though his voice is still light in tone. “But the rewards are worthwhile. Nothin' is better than usin' the power you are born with. It feels right, after all.”

“Definitely!” Rin laughs and swoops over to face where the monastery is. “Better head home though. Don't want Tou-san to yell at me for going out at night by myself. Can't really tell him the truth.”

“True. Come on, Ah'll race you!” Kero shoots off, Rin chasing after him with a cry of half complaint and half joy.

Kero smiles as Rin passes him by, taunting him the while; not knowing that Kero let him have the lead. 'So this is the new heir. What a great kid. Don't worry Sakura; Ah won't let you or him down.'

The newest Cardcaptor's trials have only just begun, after all.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading.

COMMENT. I am SERIOUS. Please comment on every chapter. Comments make me want to post, prove that there’s a good reason to post, and without them there will be no reason for me to post. Kudos mean nothing. I will be posting every Monday and Friday my time if you keep up the comments, but I'll give you a break up to ch4. Then all chapters will rely on you guys giving me comments for me to post.
I'm asking for at most five minutes of your time. I spent almost two years on this. It's not asking much in comparison.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Shout-out to all the lovely people who commented, you make my day every time! Please keep it up!

My schedule for posting is Mondays and Fridays so give as many comments as you can today and over the weekend if you would like another chapter please! Not as urgent as it will be later (after ch4 it's a "comments or no chapter" rule of a sort) but get into that good habit! Knowing people want to read my fic is the best thing ever for any writer!

And shout-out to a friend of mine who, once upon a time, helped me with describing something here. I haven't forgotten that!

I hope you all enjoy chapter 2.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rin has never been the most normal kid. Aside from being raised as the adoptive son of a Priest in a monastery, there is the fact he is a twin. Fraternal twin, but still a twin enough that plenty of adults have cooed and pinched both his and Yukio's cheeks over it when they were very little. Not to mention the fact he is abnormally strong, capable of great damage even when six years old. And at the age of twelve he is already the terror of most street punks.

Now he can add budding mage and Cardcaptor to that list...

...if he doesn't get suffocated by a ridiculous amount of bubbles first!

"Waahhh!" Rin struggles to straighten himself, as he is blown over by a rush of big pink bubbles. It doesn't help that they make the area slippery and slick, causing him to fall down. "Dammit!"

"Oi, Rin! You alright!?" Kero calls from high above him.

Rin curses a little more – a particularly vile one he got from a gang leader when he broke his kneecap – then manages to stand up again, getting out of range of the bubbles. "Yeah. Where's that Card!?"

Kero peers through the bubbles. The amount of magic the Card is putting off is making it hard to pinpoint. The only option is for Kero to find it by sight.

"Aaha!" Kero finally spots it; on the other side of the parking lot where this “battle” is taking place. "It's straight ahead of you!"

"Fly!" Rin calls up that Card to allow him to get above the bubbles himself, allowing him to swoop over to the Card spirit.

She is hovering just above the ground, almost dancing in fact, spewing bubbles all over the place. She looks like a mermaid almost, what with her fish tail bottom, with a lot of hair on her head that curled and even kinda resembled bubbles. She is also very pink in colour, aside from her necklace which is made of blue pearls and has a red gem hanging from it. She glances up just in time for Rin to hit her with the staff, having released Fly to allow him to drop down on her.
“Bubbles, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” The spirit whirls into light and forms a card, which Rin catches as he finally lands on the ground.

Rin sighs in relief as not only does he have the Card, all the dratted bubbles are gone. Pulling out a pen he quickly writes RIN on the bottom, claiming the Card before it can potentially cause more trouble.

Kero floats down to him. “Great job Rin!”

Rin shakes his head, still feeling like he is covered in the bubbles. “Man, that was annoying. What is this Card for, anyways?”

“Cleanin' stuff.” Kero admits with a shrug. “Mah true form, the dishes, the hallways...anythin' really. Clow Reed made it for that very purpose.”

Rin sweats nervously at that. “That seems...almost lazy.”

“Well, Clow Reed did have a big house after all. Guess it's easier to have help in that regard and if you are a great mage like him...” Kero trails off, but Rin understands. The Bubbles is made to aid Clow in regards to simple stuff. Allowing him more free time.

Something strikes Rin at that. “You lived in a big house? Like...a mansion?”

Kero nods. “When Ah was with Clow yes. It was real nice and big...was destroyed eventually. Nothin' lasts of course, but Ah still kinda miss it. Ah lived in a more normal house with Sakura though. She didn't really want a big place and was fine with just a small two-story house. It was fun. Rather cozy too.” Kero admits.

“Uh...” Rin eyes Kero as the small lion floats beside him, eyes distant. ‘Now that I think about it...'

“Hmm? Is somethin' the matter Rin?”

Rin yanks his head away from the suddenly close Kero and shakes his head quickly. “Oh, nothing! We just better get home, that's all. It's long past my curfew.”

Kero stares at him for a moment, before smiling. “Right!” He darts up into the sky.

With a quick cry of “Fly!” Rin follows him. It is faster this way after all, what with the parking lot almost being across town from the monastery.

Rin quickly catches up to his new friend, eyeing him again. ‘I don't really know much about Kero. I mean...I've been living with him for awhile now...I should take the next opportunity I have to ask him about himself. Maybe there is something I can do to make him feel more at home.’

With that decided, Rin swoops down from the sky to the monastery, intent on getting what sleep he can.

Chapter 2: Big Time Baking

Tapping on the door, Rin peers into the bedroom and grins. Yukio hasn't come back to the room yet. Great.

Opening the door further, Rin enters and shuts it behind him. “Oi, Kero! Got you some dinner!”

“Yatta!” Kero appears from somewhere around Rin's bed and flies over to Rin. “What did you make today?”
“Beef croquettes.” Rin informs him, offering the platter of such to Kero. Kero claps his paws together and follows Rin to his desk, diving onto the platter as soon as it is set on the desk.

Rin smiles at the happy expressions and noises Kero makes as he dives into the pile of croquettes the young boy made for the miniature guardian. According to Kero, he doesn't actually truly need to eat by his nature. He just enjoys it. Rin doesn't mind making extra stuff for him; the more people who like his food the better in his opinion.

Watching Kero brings up the previous thought he had; that he doesn't really know Kero that well. “Um...”

Kero pauses. “What is it?”

“Well, so far you've been just accepting whatever food I give you...” Rin scratches his cheek, feeling a little embarrassed. “And well, if you have any requests...what is your favourite food, anyways?”

Kero pauses and folds his arms, tilting his head. “Well...actually Ah find Ah like sweets the best. But you've never baked before, have you?”

Rin slowly nods, a disgruntled look on his face. Rin never baked; no one in the monastery could bake in fact. The twins' Christmas slash birthday cakes were bought from a nearby bakery as a special holiday treat.

“It's okay if you don't make it.” Kero grins. “Yer normal cookin' is wow enough already. And Ah've had magically created food before. Yer cookin' is on that level! That's how good you are!”

Rin blushes and rubs the back of his head, not used to compliments. “Ah thanks...still...”

The door to the bedroom opens at that, Kero immediately freezing and pretending to be a stuffed animal.

“Nii-san...what are you doing?” Yukio asks, as he walks into the room and drops the homework he has on his desk. Not to mention putting Rin's homework on his desk, which causes the noiret to make a face.

“Nothing much.” Rin drawls, trying to deflect Yukio's attention from both Kero and the croquettes on Rin's desk. “Jeez Yukio, how much homework do we have?”

“I don't have that much. But since you've been delaying your work, you've got a lot to get done if you want to get it in on time.” Yukio pauses as he notices the plate of croquettes. And the “stuffed animal” near it. “Nii-san, what's that?”

Rin blinks and glances between Yukio and Kero. A bit of nervous sweat begins to bead on the magical being under the intent gaze of Yukio. “Um...a s-stuffed animal?” Rin stammers, trying to act as if it is the most obvious thing out there.

“Nii-san, why do you have a stuffed animal? Where did you get it?” Yukio adds on the end, a little confused by his older brother suddenly having a cute stuffed animal.

“Well...” Rin scratches his cheek, trying to think of something. “I just found it...on the street. A little battered and stuff. Looked...looked kinda lonely ya know. So I took it home, fixed it, and cleaned it. It's kinda cute, isn't it?”

Yukio stares at Kero a little longer, before sighing and smiling. “Nii-san...you are way too nice for your own good.”
“Oi, what's that supposed to mean?” Rin gives a suspicious look at Yukio.

Yukio chuckles and grabs the plate of croquettes and takes it with him causing Kero to briefly look distressed as it passes out of his reach. “Nothing really. Get to work Nii-san. I have that...cram school Tou-san signed me up for to go to. I better come back to see at least most of your work done.”

“Well, yeah...” Rin waves Yukio away. The door shuts behind the glasses wearing Okumura brother.

“Awwww....mah croquettes...” Kero looks at the now plate-less spot, tail twitching slowly in dejection and a cloud of gloom around him. Rin pats his head in condolence. The door opens again at that and Yukio sticks his head back in. Both of the two inhabitants freeze and start praying Yukio won't notice anything odd.

“Oh, by the way. Tou-san and the others would like to thank you for the croquettes. As would I. Is there anything you can't make in the kitchen Nii-san?” And then he is truly gone. Both Rin and Kero let out relieved sighs, grateful that Yukio didn't catch them.

Rin pauses at a sudden thought. ’Anything I can't make in the kitchen?’ A sly grin crosses his face, as Kero decides to get Rin working on his homework to distract himself from the lost croquettes. ’Well, why don't we see about that?'

“Ingredients for baking?” Fujimoto Shirō looks at his eldest son with a raised eyebrow.

Rin nods. “I was just thinking that I wouldn't mind learning how to do it...but I would need the ingredients and such for it so...”

Shirō considers this. Rin has always been eager to learn in the kitchen and in fact is quite talented at it. Almost supernaturally so. Opposite of his brother who, though he can excel in book work and the like, has a...talent for creating disasters in the kitchen.

Which is why everyone keeps the glasses-wearing twin as far as possible from the kitchen when it comes time to cook. And never give him cooking any meal as part of his chore list.

But he is getting off topic. Rin has always been interested in cooking. But baking? Shirō has to wonder what brought this on.

Rin shifts nervously under his adoptive father's gaze. Would he say yes or no? Rin isn't sure and it depends on how good the budget is right now.

Shirō grins. “Why not? It's an interesting skill to have and being able to make your own sweets is a good thing.”

Rin brightens immediately and only doesn't tackle Shirō in a hug because the priest holds up a hand to stop him.

“There are some conditions of course. You better have all your homework done by the time I have all the ingredients. And, you also must promise that you will clean up after you are done, alright?”

Rin considers this and nods eagerly. The homework thing is fair; he won't be able to figure out how to bake and do his homework at the same time. And it is normal for him to clean up after cooking so it should be the same for baking. “I promise.”

“Then I'll start getting things ready.”
And that is when his hyper and abnormally strong son tackles him in a joyful hug. Shirō “oofs” a bit at that, but still returns it gladly. It is getting close to the time when both his sons won't want hugs anymore and he is going to treasure what he can get.

“ARGH! THIS STUPID, CRAPPY DONKEY HUMPING RECIPE BOOK!!!” Rin growls and bangs his head on the counter. The counter that is covered in flour and other stuff from previous failed attempts. Rin sighs and rubs his face, looking around for a clean cloth to wipe it with. He barely manages to find one.

Baking is tough. Unlike cooking, there is a lot of detail involved. And even the slightest difference from the written recipe can result in an utter disaster. Which is why Rin not only turned the kitchen into a disaster zone, he used most of the ingredients as well.

However, Rin is certain he followed all the instructions in the book. Which means that said book must be the problem.

Scowling, he focuses back on the recipe. It is for chocolate cake, which shouldn't be too hard to pull off. However, Rin is finding it rather frustrating and none of his previous attempts panned out.

“You should take a breath Rin.” Kero, who is hovering next to Rin's shoulder, suggests. “Ah'm pretty sure you didn't get cookin' like,” He snaps his paw (somehow), “that in the beginnin', right?”

Rin takes a breath...and slowly lets it out. “Yeah. It's just...I guess I've gotten used to pretty much getting a recipe on the first go.”

“Try going through the steps slowly. And, here's the essential ingredient for bakin' that Ah've learned through watchin' others.” Rin turns to look at Kero.

“What is it?”

“Patience.” Kero says simply. “There's no way to rush a cake, not without ruinin' it.”

A noise outside makes him flinch. “Um...Ah better head back to yer room. Rather not get caught when the others come back inside.” *That, and there's those nice gag manga of Yukio's to read...’*

“Okay. Don't worry Kero, you'll get your piece of chocolate cake.” Rin assures the flying guardian, who stops briefly at the door.

“Thanks Rin. Ah know how hard this is for you and you're learnin' this for me, aren't you?”

Rin blushes deeply. “Well...this is the kind of thing friends do, right? Random...helpful things. Kind things.”

Kero nods, a strange look in his eyes. “Yeah. That they do.” His voice seems almost hoarse for a moment then he smiles, returning to his normal cheery voice again. “But don't rush yerself! You have plenty of time; Ah ain't gonna leave any time soon!”

And then he is gone.

Rin smiles at the now empty doorway for a moment longer, then turns back to the cake book. “Let's see...”

Outside, he can hear the sound of the priests and Yukio cleaning up the courtyard, the church, and the rest of the monastery where they live. He is hoping to have the cake ready in time so not only
will Kero get a slice, the others will too.

On a nearby street, a tiny orb of light – barely visible despite its great glow under the sunlight – bounces its way down the street. It bounces randomly as it moves up the street, a high pitched giggling following in its wake.

A growling sound is heard, causing it to pause and bounce gently in place. A dog, one with a rather mean and viscous temperament, spotted the speck of light. Approaching the light, which suddenly stops, it snarls and prepares to attack.

The light moves first. With a shriek of glee it bounces towards the dog and hits it. And in a flash of brilliant light, the dog is suddenly gone, the speck of light bouncing to land on a nearby fence.

The light bounces in place for a bit, then bounds off again, still giggling.

On that very street all is quiet with the dog and the speck of light gone. However, if anyone was there to hear they would have thought they heard a soft “woof” from a dog that isn't there anymore...

“All done!” Rin shuts the oven door and stands up afterwards, discarding his oven mitts and grabbing the nearby timer. Double checking with the recipe, Rin sets the timer for 40 minutes. He then looks around the kitchen and makes a face.

“I better start the clean up right now. That's the only way I'm gonna get this done in time...” Rin sweats as he looks at the utter disaster that is the kitchen. 'How did that get on the ceiling?' He silently wonders before rolling up his sleeves and getting to work.

At least, that is the plan. It is immediately interrupted by a sudden feeling. The humming almost electric feeling that always comes at the presence of a Sakura Card.

“You noticed it immediately, uh?” Kero crosses his arms and thinks a bit on it. “You must have a knack for sensin' magic and the like. Right now, it's pretty low level all thangs considered. But you are already better than Sakura was at the beginnin'.”

“R-really?” Rin asks, glancing down at Fly. It is the day after the capture and Rin asked Kero about the strange feeling that was bubbling in him the entire time until he finally sealed the Card.

“Well, that's what you said woke you up, and since it's yer magic you probably have it right.” Kero tells him cheerfully. “It will come in handy for sure.”

Rin glances warily around. He can't quite pin-point the Card, but it is very close and most likely already in the main house. Checking outside the window, he sighs in relief; they will probably be outside a little longer, long enough that he can probably capture the Card under the radar.

With that in mind, he pulls out the key. “Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!”

Grabbing the wand, Rin takes on something of a battle stance, eyes alert for any movement. A flash of light catches his gaze and he whirls around. He pauses and blinks.

“A...speck of light?” Peering at the bouncing light, he can feel that it is a Sakura Card. But it is so small...

Cautiously he approaches it, the light's bouncing slowing down as he comes close. Then it jumps
right up to Rin's face and hovers there.

Rin blinks. 'What's it doing?'

Then it leaps and hits his nose.

Rin yelps as light fills his vision before he blacks out, falling back from the force of the surprisingly strong blow.

Yukio pauses in the midst of his sweeping and glances across the courtyard to the kitchen window. 'I wonder how Nii-san is doing?'

“Worried about your brother?” A teasing voice behind him makes him jump a little and he turns to see his foster father grinning down at him.

“Not really. The swearing has stopped after all.” Yukio sweats at that thought. He doesn't want to consider how exactly Rin picked up all those interesting curses.

“Haha, it has, hasn't it?” Shirō grins. “You can take a break and check on him if you like. Won't effect the clean up too much.”

Yukio shoots a grateful look at his father, then presses the broom into his arms before taking off.

“Remind Rin to clean up after himself!” Shirō yells after him. He then snorts, taking over the sweeping from Yukio. “Kids, really.”

The ceiling slowly comes into focus, Rin groaning as he feels like he was hit with a bag of bricks. “What...happened?” He slowly sits up and looks around.

Blue eyes blink and Rin rubs them before looking again. But it hasn't changed.

“WHEN DID EVERYTHING GET SO BIG?” Rin stands up and looked around. To his surprise, he sees the key next to him. “Why is it like that? It was in staff form a few seconds ago...” 'And why is it big?'

Something that feels like an earthquake to him causes him to dart to the nearby table and hide behind one of the legs. Peering out, he can see something like a pair of uwabaki. A giant pair. Following it up, Rin gapes.

He is wrong. Nothing got big; he just got really small, as the sight of his full sized brother greets him.

Yukio looks around the kitchen, puzzled by the lack of his brother's presence. “Where is Nii-san?”

Meanwhile, said older brother crouches down and holds his hands over his ears. Yukio's voice is so deep and loud like this it is practically painful for him to hear.

Yukio spots not only the cake in the oven but the timer set on the counter nearby, ticking away. “He can't have gone far...probably went to get something. Nii-san wouldn't leave the cake baking alone for too long.” Yukio makes a face. “Man this place is messy...” He looks up. 'How did that get on the ceiling?'

He then turns to exit the kitchen, but stops as his foot hits something and makes it skitter forwards.

Rin gulps as Yukio looks down and spots the Key. 'Shit.'
Yukio bends down and picks up the Key, staring at it in curiosity. “This...belongs to Nii-san, right?” Rin winces, wishing Yukio wouldn't think out loud; ouch that hurts his ears.

Yukio then turns, exiting the kitchen and making Rin cling to the table leg under the shaking his footsteps caused. “Argh! Dammit Yukio!”

Yukio pauses for a moment, looking back in the kitchen. ‘I could have sworn I heard Nii-san's voice...’ He then shrugs and heads out. ‘He's probably in his room.’

Rin drops to the ground, already overwhelmed by it all. “This...must be the fault of that damn Sakura Card.” He looks around. “Where is that blasted thing?”

A high pitched giggle makes Rin turn his head to see where it is coming from. And glare upon seeing a small figure, even smaller than he is right now, standing not too far from where he is.

It looks like a pale yellow girl in a matching jester-like outfit. Gold eyes look at Rin, amusement visible within them.

“You fucking troublemaker! You think this is funny, don't you!” Rin shakes his fist at the Card spirit. Said spirit laughs and bounces away out of the kitchen. “Oi, you aren't getting away from me!”

Rin leaps to his feet and chases after the Card. “Dammit, I need to get the cake out of the oven in time... STOP RUNNING YOU LITTLE CHICKEN SHIT!”

Rin halts, leaning against a nearby wall and panting. “Damn...that thing...is really...irritatingly...fast.” He slumps down to sit against the wall, needing to catch his breath.

The blue-eyed boy then raises his head. “Uh...where am I exactly?”

From his current size, the entire monastery looks different. It takes a long moment for Rin to realize he is in the hallway that leads to the church section. “Ugh. This is ridiculous. I'm getting lost in my own home...”

Rin, having now recovered enough, stands up and brushes off the dust on his clothes. Looking around, he hears a distinctive giggle in the distance. And it is coming from beyond the door that leads into the church.

“Right. You stay right there you little shithead...” Rin growls, practically stomping over to the door which is luckily open enough that he can slip through. “I'm gonna punch your face in!”

However, that idea is quickly shot dead as Rin is abruptly reminded that everyone else is cleaning.

“Uwa!” Rin yelps then begins to cough. All the dust that they are stirring up is akin to a sandstorm at his size. Squinting his eyes, he tries to see what is going on, clinging to the wall so he won't get accidentally blown away.

Then the broom heads his way. “Fuck!”

Swept up with the rest of the debris into a dustpan, Rin curses and swears as loudly as he can. That is apparently loud enough as the one cleaning, Kyōdō, jumps and drops the dustpan at that, allowing Rin to roll free.

“Ew...as if I'm not dirty enough.” After getting out of the way, Rin starts trying to get the dirt off of him. Above him, making him wince, Kyōdō is trying to explain to another priest what caused him to
drop the pan and make them have to clean up all over again.

“*You heard Rin. Oh don't be silly, he's in the kitchen right now.*”

Rin then does his best to crawl out of the way, not wanting to get caught up in the dust storm again. Once is *more* than enough.

“Uh...” He glances up. “Well...that should be safer than the ground.”

Lucky for him, when it comes to climbing the walls his size makes the tiny grooves in the wood rather convenient handholds.

Once he figures he is high enough he begins to move carefully across the church, eyes alert for that annoying Card spirit. It has to be here. It *has* to. Rin doesn't know how much more he can take. Being this small is not only annoying but *dangerous*.

Rin then finds out just *how* dangerous it is, when his arm catches on something sticky. Trying to remove it, he turns to see a spider web. Cursing, he starts yanking at it, trying to break free. Unfortunately for the currently miniature boy this sends vibrations through the web, summoning the spider who built it.

The arachnid's long, thin legs jut out grotesquely from its bulbous, segmented body. The barbed ends jerkily pick their way across the strands of spider silk, the disproportionately large form closing in menacingly until he can see its drooling, clicking pincers grabbing for him, the spider's black, gaping maw yearning to suck its struggling prey dry. In its misshapen head, eight black eyes gleam with a terrible, uncaring hunger.

Just the *sight* of the spider is enough to freak Rin out, making him scramble to get free. That just makes things worse though, tangling him up further, til he is pretty much trapped. And the spider is approaching fast, clicking its fangs.

“Fucking hell!” Rin manages to free an arm and punches the spider as it gets close enough. Right in the face, Rin shrieking in pain as the spider's mouth reflectively closes briefly on his fist. A leg is the next thing free and he kicks at the spider, sending it flying. He then manages to finally free himself of the web and scramble away from it.

But his luck still isn't good, so he falls from the ceiling at that point.

“WAAAAAAAAHHHH!”

**SPLASH**

Rin chokes and manages to swim up, treading water and shivering a bit at the cold temperature. It takes a moment, but he realized he is in a metal bowl of soapy water. *The water for the dusting.*' He realizes.

He swims to the edge and curses as the sides are too sleek and slippery to allow him to get out of the bowl. Which meant he is currently trapped, dammit. Then he hears something that makes him *almost* freeze in shock.

“*Oh, Yukio. How's Rin?*” That is one of the priests.

“*Not sure. Isn't in the kitchen or his room. Probably will be back in the kitchen soon though; seems he finally has a cake in the oven.*”
“Oh, that sounds good. Wonder if it will taste good?” Another priest pips up, sounding like he is already hungry.

“What with all the work Nii-san's been putting into it?” Yukio chuckles. “Anyways, anything I can do to help here?”

There is a pause, as the priests think about it, before one of them finally speaks.

“You can empty the bowl of soapy water. Don't need it anymore after all and it's gotten cold.”

“No problem.”

'Well...fuck.' Is Rin's only thought, before the bowl is picked up by his spotty four-eyed brother and he has to struggle to keep his head above the water as it moves and swishes as Yukio carries it away.

'If I get out of this, I'm killing my brother.' Rin thinks venomously. Even though, logically, Yukio has no idea that he is currently endangering his elder brother's life.

The slopping of the water finally stops as Yukio halts, before the entire bowl tilts. Rin would have cursed again, but he is too busy being swept away by the water and scrambling to grab hold of something. He manages to grab hold of the lip of the bowl and has to grit his teeth and hang on, despite all the water falling on and past him.

It finally ceases, Rin left gasping and hanging from the edge of the metal bowl, just above the sink in the nearby toilet. The soap is making his grip slippery though and Rin can feel himself losing his hold.

'Oh shit. No. No. No.' Lucky for him a voice from outside the washroom makes Yukio stop what he is doing.

“Hey guys, how's the cleaning going here? Where's Yukio?”

“Over here Tou-san!” Yukio calls, turning away from the washroom and setting the now empty bowl on the counter where the sink is. Rin lets himself drop to the counter's surface with something like a prayer of thanks.

He looks around, feeling utterly miserable and soaking wet on top of that. 'At least I'm not dirty anymore.' He spots the towel hanging on the rack above the counter. It doesn't take much for Rin to jump up and pull it down. Some snuggling in it later and Rin emerges from it mostly dry.

“That's done. Now...” He glances down the edge of the counter. “I need to get down.”

At the same time Rin is discovering the perils of being miniature...

“Oh hahahaha!!!” Kero is practically bursting a gut, having borrowed one of Yukio's gag manga to entertain himself while waiting for the baking to be done. “Oh, oh...that hurts. Too funny...”

One-hundred percent comfortable on Rin's bed, Kero is certainly enjoying himself. Rin might not have video games like Sakura had, but his brother has these great gag manga that give him something to read when he is alone. His tail wagging behind him, the small lion turns the page to see the next joke. However, he doesn't get to read it as the door suddenly clicks open and Kero freezes, immediately taking the appearance of a non-sentient stuffed animal. Good thing too, as it is Yukio who enters the twins' shared bedroom.
Yukio looks around the room and sighs. “He's not here.” Walking to the two study desks, he sets the key he found on Rin's desk. Turning to leave, he then pauses and sighs.

“What, again?” He walks over to Rin's bed and grabs the gag manga. “When did Nii-san get so into these gag manga? I know he likes them, but he didn't use to steal them from me...” He pauses again, wondering why that stuffed animal of Rin's is there, rather like he was reading the manga. “Or when he got attached to that weird thing...”

Placing the gag manga back on the bookshelf on his side of the room, Yukio then leaves the room. “Where is Nii-san?” He wonders before he shut the door.

Kero immediately bursts into movement, flying over to the desk. “Oh dear...” Kero resists the urge to borrow one of the more interesting curse words Rin knows. “The Key...”

Now no longer distracted by the gag manga, Kero can sense the presence of a Sakura Card. “Hmmm...no Rin...but there's the Key...and no one has noticed anythin' strange...” Kero is pretty sure things would have gotten rather crazy if they had, especially considering what he learned about the family of Rin's. “It's Little, most likely.” Kero decides, picking up the Key and slinging the chain over his neck. “Aw man, this is gonna be hard...gotta find Rin. He's probably in danger.”

Kero flies over to the door, said door opening at his magical prompting and allowing him to slip out. 'Hold on Rin, Ah'm comin'...'

“AHHHHHHHH!!! FUCK FUCK FUCK!!” Rin is most certainly in danger, being chased by something that looks a lot like a mouse, but is most likely a shrew of a sort. Not that Rin notices the difference or cares, except for the fact shrews are extreme omnivores...

...thus the fact it is chasing Rin right now.

“DAMMIT! I'm not food!” Rin darts away from another pounce. He had easily managed to get his way off the counter – putting the nearby toilet paper roll to good use – and even tracked down the blasted Card spirit. However, not only had it gotten away, again, he encountered this rather hungry and persistent shrew.

“BAD DAY!” Rin declares as he notices the shrew is still chasing him. “THIS IS A REALLY FUCKING BAD DAY!!”

Rin then “oofs” as he runs into something big and furry. Looking up, Rin's eyes widen. “Kero?”

Kero growls, the sound rather loud and deep at this size, sending the shrew running for cover. Kero then looks down and grins. “Hey Rin. Glad Ah got here in time.”

After staring up at his rescuer for a long moment, Rin burst into tears and hugs Kero tightly, making him squawk a bit as Rin's strength is still abnormal for his size. “Oh thank you, thank you! I was so, so scared...I think I nearly died like five times now...”

Kero nuzzles the top of Rin's head. “There, there. Ah'm here. Seems you've had a bad encounter with Little.”

Sniffing a little, Rin pulls back from Kero's soft fur and looks up, wiping his tears. “Little?”

“A Card capable of shrinkin' anythin' it comes in contact with.” Kero explains.

“Then why didn't the staff shrink with me?” Rin asks, noticing the Key is now around Kero's neck.
Kero shakes off the chain as he explains, “It also shrinks yer power at the same time. Thus, you can’t use the staff.”

“Then how do I catch the Card?” Rin asks, picking up the Key. It is pretty big like this, but Rin can easily carry it nonetheless.

“By comin’ in contact with it again.” Kero kneels down next to Rin. “Get on. Ah'll take you to the Little. Can you sense it?”

Rin pauses and takes a deep breath, shutting his eyes as he does so. All the panic and terror of his situation made him forget about his sensing ability. It takes but a moment, his eyes snapping open. “It's back in the kitchen!”

Climbing on Kero’s back, the winged lion takes off, shooting down the hallway to the kitchen. They enter the kitchen and notice Little bouncing up and down in front of the oven. “There you are!”

Little turns, just in time for it to see Rin before he jumps and catches the nuisance, instantly making himself return to normal size.

“Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!” The staff grows in size and Rin immediately hits Little with it before the Card spirit can get away again. “Little, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Little glows and streams back into card form. Rin quickly pulls out the pen he has on him and clicks it open. One moment later and RIN is written on it. Rin grins and clicks the pen shut again. “There. That handles you, you troublemaker.”

A groan makes him look down...and freak at the sight of him squashing Kero.

“Aah!” Rin quickly gets off and lifts the small being up, almost cuddling him, turning the staff back into Key form along the way. “I'm so sorry! You okay, Kero?”

Kero shakes his head, then leaps from Rin's arms to hover in the air, slanting slightly. “Ah'm fine. Wooo...a little dizzy, but that's okay.” That always has to happen with that Card, doesn’t it? He silently bemoans.

Then Rin realizes something. There is a loud sound ringing in the background the entire time. An obnoxious sound that can only belong to the timer the young boy set...

“Oh NO! The cake!” Rin whisks the Key back over his neck and rushes to grab the oven mitts, slamming open the oven and pulling out the cake. Setting it carefully on the counter, Rin shuts off the timer along the way of grabbing a toothpick, causing the container to spill and scatter on the counter.

Kero hovers by his shoulder, watching as Rin tests the cake. He gives a sigh of relief; the toothpick not only came clean, but the cake isn’t burnt or anything as well. “Phew.”

The sound of footsteps approaching the kitchen snaps Rin and Kero out of their daze. Rin looks at Kero, panic on his face, then grabs the “stuffed animal” and shoves him in one of his apron's pockets, along with the new Card and the pen.

Thus, Yukio comes into the kitchen to the sight of his brother fussing over his first real cake, without a flying, living stuffed animal involved at all.

“Oh, you're back.” Yukio notes, walking into the kitchen and peering over his brother's shoulder.
“The cake done?”

Rin shoos away his younger brother, wielding the wooden spoon he picked up like a weapon of a sort. “Not quite yet. I have to make the icing and decorate it first. Shoo, I'm still working. I'd rather not mess up again.”

Yukio backs away, holding his hands up in the traditional “harmless” position. Rin has that look on his face; the one that comes up whenever Yukio enters the kitchen while he is cooking. The one that says he suspects his very presence will cause his food to mutate spontaneously. “Okay, okay. I better get back to cleaning anyways. I'll leave this to you, Nii-san.” And with that, he leaves the kitchen.

Rin sighs in relief, then turns to grab the final ingredients, checking the recipe book. “Okay...how do I do this?”

Kero pokes his head out of Rin's apron pocket, watching in interest as the blue-eyed mage sets to finishing off his first successful cake. At the same time though, he thinks back to Rin's sensing of Little. Kero had only asked him that on a gut instinct but...

‘He really does have a knack for that kind of magic.’ Kero realizes. ‘Even with his power reduced to the point that he can't use the staff, Rin can still find a Sakura Card's location.’

He grins, as something suddenly occurs to him. ‘Heh. It must be his “speciality” that kind of thang. Ah wonder how far it will go?’

“Woah!” Shirō, Yukio, and the priests stare in awe at the chocolate cake that Rin made. Rin decorated it to perfection, even making some red & green icing to create a rose & vine border around the cake, along with a giant rose in the centre, on top of the standard chocolate icing. Rin scratches the back of his head in embarrassment before carefully serving the first piece to his foster father.

Then he watches, nervous like he hasn't been since his first real meal, as Shirō takes a bite.

There is a long moment of silence, the entire group staring at him, waiting for his verdict.

Shirō turns and grins, eyes sparkling. “This...is amazing Rin. Great job!”

With that, everyone else digs in, happy faces spreading to the rest of the group. Rin also smiles, happy to have made a really good cake. As hard as it was, Rin finally succeeded.

‘Gonna have to sneak a piece over to Kero.’ Rin thinks, pausing on a mouthful of cake. ‘I did kinda make it for him...though it's great to have others enjoy it too!’

“Oh right, Rin. You cleaned up after yourself, right?”

Rin nearly drops his plate at that casual comment from Shirō. “Uh...yeah.”

Shirō raises an eyebrow; and so does Yukio, who had actually seen the kitchen's condition. “Oh? Then you don't mind me taking a look now...”

Rin sets aside his plate with a rather loud clink to his ears. “Uh...sure...let me...just do one more quick check!” He then whirls out of the room, Shirō watching him go with amusement while Yukio covers his face with a hand.

‘Fuck! After all that chaos, I forgot to clean up! Dammit, I can't clean it up in time...’ Rin sweats nervously as he gets a good look at the condition of the kitchen. ‘Shit...this will take all night for me...’
to clean up...' He pauses, an idea striking him. '...but only if I did it the normal way...'

Back in the dining room, Shirō stands up. “Well, that should be long enough. I'll see how clean the kitchen really is now.” He walks to the door, calling over his shoulder, “You coming Yukio?”

Yukio sighs and follows Shirō. 'Oh dear...Nii-san's going to be up all night, if I recall right...'

The door to the kitchen opens. “Ah, Rin let me see...” Shirō pauses. Blinks.

Rin stands in the middle of the kitchen, hands behind his back and grinning sheepishly. Shirō gapes, and Yukio does the same once he shows up.

The entire kitchen is sparkling. Even the ceiling is sparkling. There isn't even a hint of dirt in the room. The kitchen looks like it was scrubbed thoroughly, top to bottom.

“Wow...you've gotten better at cleaning...” Shirō tries to figure out how his eldest son pulled it off, but comes up blank. “Aha! You just faked your panic, wanting to see your father's face when you reveal the kitchen is truly clean! Good one Rin!”

Rin scratches the back of his head. “Uh...yeah...that's it! I thought it would be a good joke.”

Behind his back, the sealing staff and Bubbles's Card rest in his left hand, the true reason why the kitchen is sparkling clean.

Yukio has to smile as well. “You got me too Nii-san...I can't believe you managed to not only finish the cake, but clean up at the same time.”

“Now that's out of the way, back to the cake!” Shirō turns and quickly leaves, intent on eating his slice of delicious cake, leaving only Yukio and Rin in the kitchen.

Rin fidgets under his younger brother's gaze. “What?”

Yukio shakes his head, still smiling. “Oh, nothing Nii-san. Just...you really are one of a kind, aren't you?”

“Uh?” Rin stares after his brother as he leaves the kitchen and heads back the dining room. “Wha...what does that mean!? Oi, Yukio!”

Rin chases after his brother, only to freeze at a conversation he hears between the monks.

“Ah, we have one extra slice left...” That is Shirō.

“Hmmm...true, what should we do with that?” One of the priests ponders.

“Well, as the head of this household, I'm calling it!” Shirō declares, sounding annoyedly cheerful about it, despite the cries of “unfair” and the like being heard, Yukio most likely rolling his eyes at his foster father's goofiness.

'Crap! That's Kero's slice!' Rin rushes to the dining room, hoping to salvage the situation...

Kero stares in horrified shock at the very small piece that Rin managed to salvage from the hungry jaws of the priests and Yukio. Rin has an apologetic look on his face. “Sorry Kero...yeesh, Tou-san can be such a pig...”

“It's...okay...” The tears streaming down his face speaks otherwise. Then he suddenly brightens.
“Wait, Ah know!”

The next moment has Rin using Little, followed by a now miniature Kero diving into the cake with a loud cry of glee. Rin smiles at that sight. “That's some kind of cake paradise...”

“Yummy! Rin, you make magic cakes too!” Kero continues to slowly make his way through the now giant piece to him. “This is the best!”

Rin laughs, just enjoying the fact Kero enjoys the cake much like the rest. At the same time though, he makes a mental note to be more careful when he baked again. 'Rather not have to wrestle everyone for even a tiny piece to give to Kero again...'

...even if it is rather one-sided thanks to his strength.

Chapter End Notes

Tips for writing comments:

Say what you like (you can even copy-paste lines you love and then explain why you love it) in as much detail as you can!

Ask questions or make observations, I can confirm or joss them (unless they are spoilers then I have to just admit the answer would be a spoiler) but I can only do that if you ask!

Point out grammatical errors or spelling errors I'm not perfect and I'll do my best to correct it!

Above all, be positive in manner! There is a human being on this end!
As promised my third chapter has arrived! Thank you so much for the comments, they are wonderful and very encouraging. Please keep them up!

As an aside, I'm pretty sure I suck at fight scenes...

I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Rin lets out a very dramatic groan and lays his head on top of the papers and study book for one of his classes. “Argh! I give up!”

Yukio rolls his eyes at his elder brother's over-dramatics. “Nii-san...really. You've barely begun working on your homework. You can't already give up on it.”

“But this is ridiculous!” Rin's head shoots up and he gestures at his work. “What, exactly, are my chances of needing...” Rin pauses and stares at the strange calculations he is supposed to figure out. “Algebra in my life-time?”

“Whether you need it or not doesn't matter right now, Nii-san. The teacher needs you to complete your homework, otherwise you are never going to finish your first year much less all of Junior High.” Yukio lectures him.

Rin rolls his eyes at the off-repeated speech. “I know Yukio, I know...this is just hard for me...”

“That's why we are working on our homework together, Nii-san.” Yukio tells him, a soft smile appearing on his face. “I know this isn't your strong suit, but all you really need to do is get a passing grade right now.”

Rin returns Yukio's smile. “Aah...alright. Now, how do I do this aga...” Rin suddenly pauses, causing Yukio, curious at the sudden halt in his brother's speech, to turn to look at him.

Yukio barely holds back a sigh at the death glare the elder Okumura brother is sending at a nearby innocent spider. He sighs anyways when Rin pulls out one of the fly swatters that he bought for this very thing, instantly killing the spider.

“Hah!” Rin has a triumphant grin on his face. “That takes care of you, you little monster...” Rin then notices that Yukio is staring at him. “Uh...”

Yukio adjusts his glasses and pinches the bridge of his nose in exasperation. “Nii-san...when did you get such an illogical grudge against spiders?”

“I-it's not illogical!” Rin protests, waving his hands. “I have very good reasons to hate them!”

“...Does it have anything to do with that giant spider bite I treated you for awhile back?” Yukio narrows his eyes, as Rin's right hand reflectively twitches in memory.
Yukio recalls seeing Rin's injured hand while he was trying to keep their foster father from eating the last slice of his first cake and pulling him away to get it treated. Yukio can't figure it out though; despite its size, it is a normal spider bite. Not anything else.

“...look, are we gonna get our homework done or not?” Rin finally asks Yukio. Yukio stares at him a little longer, then lets it slide. Rin obviously isn't going to tell him and it isn't like Yukio can point fingers in the regard of keeping secrets.

“Sure...okay, what exactly are you confused about?” Yukio scoots his chair closer to his brother's and listens as Rin tries to explain the exact problem he is having with his algebra homework.

**Chapter 3: The Shadow In The School**

The sound of a book slamming on someone's head attracts the class's attention. Only for them to roll their eyes and go straight back to paying attention to the teacher. After all, it is just Okumura Rin again.

Rubbing his head Rin gives an apologetic grin to Yukio, who is sitting next to him, doing his best to ignore the teacher who has already resumed lecturing the class. Yukio sighs and shoots him a look before returning his attention back to the teacher as well.

Rin winces at Yukio's look and does his best to focus on the teacher's lecture. He really is trying, but he is having trouble today. And not just because he is finding it boring. No, it is actually because Rin is getting that humming electrical feeling again that says there is a Sakura Card around. However, Rin isn't able to truly feel like it is a Sakura Card or even pin it down. There is something like static overlaying it. Static that moves and changes, making it difficult to get through it.

Rin finds his mind going back to the strange feeling again and he pokes at it, straining at the almost cotton like “texture” of the static. He needs to know if there is a Card or not...

“Nii-san.” Rin snaps back to the present and towards Yukio, who is giving his disapproving look at him again. Looking around, he realizes that class ended and it is now lunch time.

Yukio sighs at the flat out of dazed look on his elder brother's face. “What's wrong Nii-san? You are more out of it than normal.”

“Uh...sorry Yukio I'm just...” Rin can't tell his brother that he is sensing a magic Card or that there is something blocking his magical sense; making it hard to tell if it is really a Card or even where it is. Like he would believe him. “...sorry, I'm not sure. Just...”

Yukio bites his lip. Rin doesn't look that good in fact. Rather tired in fact. Is he not getting enough sleep? “Come on, it's lunch time. Let's go out back and eat alright? Maybe that would help.”

Rin has to smile at that. *There goes Yukio again, worrying over me...yeesh, I'm the older brother not him.* “Sure.” Standing up, he collects himself, pausing only briefly while carefully packing things in his bag.

The reason he is being careful is because he knows that Kero is hidden within his bag today; sleeping as a matter of fact right now (like Rin, Kero finds the human education system boring). That knowledge gives Rin an idea for how to solve his current problem.

*'If I hurry, I should be able to ask him quickly about it before class starts... ' Rin glances at Yukio who is ahead of him and leading him outside, where they can sit under a tree or something and enjoy the bento that Rin made today. 'Just have to shake off Yukio. Easy enough.'*
“...so, what do you think?” Rin finishes off his rather awkward and stumbling explanation of what he is sensing magic wise. It took some time for Rin to discover the correct words and often had to backtrack a bit in that regard.

Kero hums and crosses his arms, tilting his head and closing his eyes as well as he thinks over Rin's explanation and sorts it out in his head. The two of them are currently hidden within a stall in the boys' washroom, allowing them to talk in private.

“Well, you do have a knack for sensin' thangs...let me check.” Dropping his arms to his side, Kero begins to glow. Rin watches anxiously as Kero does his own sweep of the school, using what power he has access to right now. The glow finally stops and Kero opens his eyes.

“Well, Ah'm gonna have to trust you on the Sakura Card bit. This school is built on a leyline, so Ah can't get a good read. In fact, Ah can't tell that there is anythin' there...” Kero frowns at that.

Rin blinks. “Leyline?”

Kero opens his mouth, then closes it for a bit, wondering how to describe it. “Hmmm...think of rivers. They are spread out all across the world on land, right?” Rin nods, wondering where he is going with this. “Well, the entire earth has 'rivers of magic' that do the same thang. This school is built right on top of one of those 'rivers', which are called Leylines. That's what is not only blockin' me from gettin' a read, but is obscurin' yer sensin'.”

“Oooh...” Rin considers this. “Is there a flow or something in the magic? Going in one direction but in random patterns...”

Kero blinks. “Yes there is. What makes you say that?”

Rin scratches the back of his head, feeling a little embarrassed. “Well...aside from that's what rivers do, I can kinda feel that...it's what's making it difficult for me to pinpoint the Card.” Rin furrows his brow. “Can't make my way through all the random twists and turns of the magic...” He then looks up at Kero, wondering why he is so quiet. “Uh...Kero?” Rin pokes at the small guardian, who is floating there in a daze.

Kero forces his mouth shut upon Rin knocking him out of his stunned shock. 'Holy shit.' Is his thought. “Rin...that's really impressive. Ah have never met anyone who can do that, at least not without a lot of study.”

Rin stutters at that, trying to brush it aside and trying to claim that Kero is joking about it. But he isn't.

'How did he do that?' Kero has to wonder. 'Perhaps it's a heritage thang...' There is no way Kero wouldn't have been able to notice Rin's abnormal strength and vitality, traits that can only come from a non-human relative. And considering what he knows now of this world, of Assiah and Gehenna, it is very likely Rin has a demon in his family tree; and that the young boy had the ‘luck’ to be something of a throwback. 'Though Ah have to wonder what kind of demon has this kind of ability...Ah'll have to borrow some of those texts hidden in the church. Maybe those would have the answer.'

“So, Kero...what do we do about the Card?” Rin asks finally.

Kero shakes himself out of his musings. “Ah'm not entirely certain. For all we know, the Card could be dormant. For now, let's just play it safe and wait to see if it makes a move. We will step in then and only then, got it Rin?” Kero fixes a look on Rin, waiting for his response.
Rin nods. “Right.” Kero is correct in this regard; until something happens, Rin won't be able to do anything about the Card. Then he hears the bell.

“Ah shit...” He stands up, Kero quickly dropping back into his bag. “I'm gonna be late for class again!”

And with that said, Rin is off, heading to the classroom. However, he jolts to a stop as he feels something, and glances around. “What...?” He shakes his head. “Later Rin! Class first!”

As he races down the hallway he doesn't notice the strange shadow next to the wall, close to the bathroom, slither off as if it has a life of its own...

That night, the school is far from quiet. Various crashing sounds and odd noises filled the air around it. There is most certainly something going on there and it is far from an ordinary thing.

Not too far from the school, across the street from the main entrance in fact, a figure watches the school and listens to the going ons.

“This will be interesting.” Is the figure's only comment before, after a final glance with purple eyes, the figure walks away from the school and disappears into the darkness.

The next day at school has the entire school body gathered in the front courtyard, staring at and chatting about the very strange sight that greets them today.

Rin carefully examines the pile of sheer stuff that appeared there. There are desks, chairs, lamps, gym equipment, and other odds and ends. Basically everything that is in the school that hadn't been nailed down is here, piled haphazardly in the middle of the courtyard.

“...I'm gonna go out on a limb and say it's the Card's fault...” Rin whispers dryly to Kero, who is tucked by his ear right now, hidden in the green hoodie Rin flung over his school uniform to protect himself from the chill that is in the air today, despite it being early May. Rin stoutly ignored his brother's rant on his “inappropriate” attire; it is a plain green hoodie after all. Not to mention much more comfortable than the standard school jacket.

Rin can feel Kero nod. “Yeah. You can sense the leftovers of the Card movin' them, can't you?”

Rin hums and eyes the pile again. A sudden voice makes him jump.

“Nii-san, the teachers are calling all the students together.”

Rin turns to see his brother, surprised he managed to sneak up on him. “Oh, okay Yukio, I'll be right there...”

Rin makes to move, then halts as his eyes trail downwards and widen in shock.

“Nii-san...” There is an edge of warning in Yukio's voice, probably brought on by the fact Rin is already not following the rules “correctly” today.

“Oi, I'm coming!” Rin follows Yukio, not in the mood to deal with his younger brother's disapproval. However, his eyes dart around on the ground and notice something very odd indeed.

“Kero...a lot of the students, even Yukio, are missing their shadows.” He hisses, shocked by this.

“Shadow,” is Kero's response, “it has to be that one. It must of stolen all of them so it could do this.”
As the teachers begin informing the students of the fact they would be helping with the clean up today – not that surprising really – Rin discusses the Card with Kero.

“We're gonna have to do it tonight, aren't we?” Rin notes. “If we don't...”

“The exorcists would get involved. You remember what Ah told you about them, right?”

“Right.” And Rin can also see the blasted demons now, thanks to his awakened magic. There isn't that many in the town that he can see right now, for which he is grateful for. They have a different feel to them than the Cards did, one that is like something spiky skittering up and down his spine almost. They aren't natives of Assiah or created by a human like the Cards, so they feel off to him.

“They don't have the ability or equipment needed to handle the Cards.” Kero reminds him. “And that could result in...”

Rin lowers his eyes. Kero told him that his foster father and the other priests are exorcists, real exorcists, unknown to him or Yukio.

“Why...why are they keeping it from us?” Rin asks, eyes wide with shock and a little pain at the information Kero has shared with him. The existence of Gehenna, Demons...and Exorcists.

Kero sighs. “Maybe they want you guys to have a normal life. It's possible that Fujimoto adopted you and Yukio after a bad demonic attack even. That you managed to survive by sheer luck. Ah don't know though; they don't have records like that here. Either way, Ah think he wants you two to be happy and figures that havin' to deal with demons would make you unhappy.”

Rin slowly nods. “Yeah...that sounds like Tou-san alright...he would only bring us in if he felt he had no choice...and he definitely does.”

“Tou-san is posted here.” Rin doesn't need to say anything else; Shirō and the other priests might very well get called in to deal with the “demon” or even volunteer, considering said “demon” is at his adoptive sons' school.

“Tonight then.” Kero says after a long pause.

“Tonight.” Rin agrees, before starting to tackle the large pile that the Shadow created over night.

“So, you ultimately didn't have school today?” Is how Shirō sums up Yukio's explanation of how his and his brother's day went.

“Pretty much.” Yukio agrees. “That mess is so big it took everyone all day to clean up.” He then glances at Rin and sighs. “Though it would have taken longer if Nii-san hadn't, uh, helped.”

Rin looks up from his plate upon hearing Yukio mention him, a little lost in thought. “Hm? What is it Yukio?”

The entire table sweats nervously, figuring that Rin must have used his abnormal strength to help the process. Which probably freaked out both the students and staff.

“Never mind Nii-san.” Yukio eventually says after a long moment.

Rin eyes his brother for a bit, before shrugging and finishing his supper. “I'm done. Can I go now?” He gives a yawn. “Feeling sleepy...”
Shirō nods and Rin stands up, quickly leaving the table and heading to the kitchen. There is the sound of him putting some dishes away – and secretly creating a small plate for Kero – then the sound of footsteps as he heads up to his room. Once that fades away, Yukio focuses his gaze on Shirō.

“Tou-san?”

Shirō crosses his arms and hums. “Well, it certainly isn't something a normal human can do. Not unless a large group of people were involved and I highly doubt that is so.”

“So a demon is responsible.” Yukio sums it up as. “Is anything going to be done about it?”

“Well, though inconvenient for the school, the actions are hardly violent. It will probably not be a priority if a mission is called. If things get dangerous, it will be bumped up.” Shirō explains. “Also, this could be a one-time thing. Demons can be odd that way. One day they are being a nuisance and the next they are gone.”

“So for now, you are going to wait?” Yukio isn't really complaining though. Even if there is a demon in his school, it appears to be merely mischievous. Not truly dangerous.

“Yeah, that's pretty much what I will do. Though...I think I'll arrange for a low level Exorcist to take a quick look early in the morning tomorrow. Just to be safe.” Shirō decides. It is his sons' school after all. He rather be safe than sorry, especially in regards to Rin as he is still ignorant of anything to do with demons.

“Early in the morning?” Yukio is surprised by the timing.

Shirō chuckles. “Remember, most demons are stronger at night, not during the day. If the Exorcist checks it out then, he won't be in as much danger as it would be earlier, when things are darker. But it would be early enough the demon should be still around and somewhat active, so he'll be able to identify it.”

Yukio nods, it makes sense after all. “Then, I guess I can put that worry aside. And Nii-san won't be going there either, he's already tired after all.”

However, unknown to the two of them, Rin is already out of the monastery, having sneaked out the window after leaving his blankets arranged so that Yukio will probably pass over it when he goes to bed himself.

He has a Card to capture, after all.

The gate to the school creaks open, sounding very loud in the hushed darkness. Rin winces and slips through it. “I hope that nothing bad comes from breaking the lock...”

Behind him and Kero are the remains of what is the steel lock to the school's gate, said lock having been basically destroyed by Rin's strength. Rin was warned that flying into the school would have been too dangerous, what with the Shadow there. If breaking the lock can grant them a chance to get the jump on the Card, Rin is going to take it.

Looking around the courtyard, Rin can't help but shiver a bit. The school looks rather creepy at night. “Damn...” Lifting up the sealing staff in his hand, Rin glances warily around. “Hey, Kero, what can Shadow do, exactly?”

“Hmmm...” Kero thinks back to what he knows of Shadow. “Well, like its name says, it is a Card
that can manipulate shadows. This means it's a Card that can touch us, but we can't touch it. A bit like an ordinary shadow. That makes it a tricky Card to catch normally..."

“I sense a but attached there.” Rin notes, making sure to not only pay attention to Kero but to his surroundings. He doesn't want to be caught off guard.

“There are two bits that will make it more difficult in this case. First, in the fact it has been stealin' shadows from the students here, which increase its power. Those extra shadows can be easily dealt with using bright light though.”

“Alright...Kero, think you can find the electrical room?” Rin asks his companion, thinking of all the various lights the school has. If they are all turned on, they would definitely get rid of the extra shadows.

“Heh, who do you think you are talkin' to? The great Keroberos can easily find and use a mere electrical room.” Kero puffs himself up, getting the laugh he is working for, and allowing Rin to relax a bit.

“Right, what was I thinking...” Rin trails off. “What's the other thing that is troublesome about this?”

“Well there's...”

Rin cuts off Kero with a cry of shock, drawing the little lion's attention to a mass of shadows that have sprung up around Rin. “Rin!”

Kero rushes towards the pillar of shadows that have surrounded Rin, but is pushed back by a tentacle like bit.

“Windy, RELEASE!” A wind springs up, scattering the shadows and allowing Rin to breath. “Dammit...Kero, get the lights!”

“Right!” Kero shoots off towards the school, only to cry out himself as the shadows move to attack him. Another burst of wind hits them, allowing Kero to slip through, though quite a few pursue him despite Windy continually attacking the mass of shadows.

“Fuck this...Windy! Keep it up!” Rin calls in encouragement, then pulls out another Card. “FLY!”

Wings sprout on the now lengthened wand, and Rin kicks off the ground, taunting the shadows all the while. “Nya, Nya! Can't catch me!”

Childish, but effective, as the mass bunches up and shoots up into the sky after Rin, causing him to give a “woah” and have to dodge them. Windy is still busy spinning around the courtyard, interrupting the shadows whenever they get too close.

Meanwhile, in the school, Kero is taking advantage of the “lessons” Rin has been giving in curses to express his displeasure. “Shit!” The shadows are persistent and refusing to let up on chasing him. ‘Dammit, this is what Ah is trying to warn Rin about. Because this school is based on a leyline, while free Shadow can tap directly into it, abet in a limited amount. That's more than enough to make it dangerous even without the blasted shadows it borrowed!’

“Aah, fuck!” Is all Kero gets out, before the pursuing shadows finally catch up and swallow him. ‘Oh no...Rin!’

Rin cries out himself, as the shadows catch a hold of the wand and pull him back towards the
Ahhhhh....” The shadows leap up and surround him, diving towards him.

And a pale hand activates the main switch, turning on all the lights within the school, dispersing every stolen shadow.

Kero lifts his head from on the ground, looking puzzled. “What...how did that happen?”

Rin spins out of control, due to the sudden release of the staff, then manages to straighten his path. Grinning, he turns to the fully revealed Shadow...

“...Fuck. WHY IS IT SO BIG?!!”

Big is the most basic and effective way to put it, as Shadow is much bigger than it should be. Kero exits the school and flies up to Rin. “That's what Ah was trying to warn you about before. With the leyline under the school, it can tap into it enough to increase its powers. Even with the other shadows gone...this isn't gonna be easy.”

“No kidding...” Rin lands on top of the roof of the school, releasing Fly and calling back Windy. Rin can feel the Shadow gathering energy, but can also tell it will take some time for it to be ready enough to use said energy; allowing him a few precious moments to prevent a further attack. “How am I...” Rin pauses, recalling something.

“It also shrinks yer power at the same time....”

“Shrinks your power...” Rin murmurs, then grins. “That's it.” He pulls out the Little. “Make Shadow's power weaker! Little, Release!” The Card activates and gives off a burst of cheerful laughter as the Card turns into a whirlwind of sparkling glitter that surround Shadow. Before Shadow can make a move, it shrinks to a more manageable size, Little having gleefully reduced its power to its normal level.

“Wind! Be a binding rope! Windy, Release!” Windy springs to life again, wrapping around Shadow and dragging it towards Rin.

“Shadow, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” Slamming his wand on the Card spirit, Shadow streams back into its card form despite its struggles against it.

Accepting the Card gratefully, Rin also catches the returning Windy and Little. “Thanks guys.” He tells them, smiling at the Cards. “Couldn't have done it without you. Or you, Kero!” Rin turns to the small lion. “Thanks for getting the lights! I would have been done for if you hadn't!”

“Aah...about that...” Kero begins, looking awkward.

Rin blinks. “Hm? Kero?”

Kero then violently shakes his head. “Aah, never mind. You're welcome and glad to help.”

“Hm!” Rin looks out across the school. “First, I should shut off the lights...then I should head home, before anyone notices I'm gone.”

As Rin activates the Fly to get down, Kero pauses for a moment, looking towards the electrical room.

'Who turned on the lights?' He has to wonder, then he sighs and shrugs. 'Ah have a feelin' the answer will come eventually...until then, Ah should be grateful to whoever they are. They saved Rin and Ah after all.'
Not too far away, a lithe figure darts out the school gate unnoticed by either of the other two there, pausing only briefly to smile at the sight of Rin running into the school intent on shutting the lights off. 'Good job...Cardcaptor.'

The following day of school has the entire student body gossiping about the previous day's incident. Most are pretty sure it is a massive prank and everyone is wondering who pulled it off and how.

'If only they knew...' Rin thinks as he sits at his desk. Yukio takes his seat beside him as well, thinking much the same.

'According to Tou-san, the Exorcist didn't find any evidence of demonic activity. Except for the main gate's lock being broken.' Yukio frowns at that. 'However, the pile that was in the courtyard yesterday definitely didn't seem like something a human or even group of humans could do. Seems like the demon did leave pretty quickly and probably only did that for a quick laugh.'

“Okay! Listen up students!” The chatter in the classroom dies down as the teacher gets their attention. “Now, as you were told at the beginning of the year, I'm only your temporary homeroom teacher. Today, I tell you that your real homeroom teacher has arrived. A family emergency delayed her, but now she's here and willing to do her work.”

Rin sits straighter at that, interested in what kind of teacher is going to be their homeroom teacher now. 'Probably some old, sour lady...' He laments. 'Yet another person willing to hate me at first sight...or first gossip.'

The door slides open at that and the male teacher turns with a smile. “Ah, welcome! Class, let me introduce you to Tsukishiro Sekki, your new homeroom teacher and the new history teacher of Southern Cross Junior High.”

The entire class is staring in awe and even chattering a little at the sight of the new teacher. Tsukishiro Sekki is a beautiful woman in her early twenties, with long, lithe limbs, smooth fair skin, and lush, lightly curled black hair falling down her back in waves. She is wearing a black buttoned long sleeved jacket over top a pale blue shirt, with a matching black pencil skirt that shows off her long, smooth legs. Black pumps cover her feet, and she has a bit of lip gloss and make-up on her face; make-up that enhances her natural beauty and makes her purple eyes stand out. A soft smile is on her face and she looks around the classroom with a gentle light in her exotic eyes.

Approaching the desk, the male teacher – blushing slightly – makes way for her and allows her to place her folder and books on the teacher's desk. “Nice to meet you all. I am Tsukishiro Sekki, the new homeroom teacher for 1-B. I hope to get along with all of you and to help you succeed in your schoolwork.”

Rin's blue eyes are wide as he takes in the form of the new teacher. Yukio notices that he is even blushing a little and looks slightly daze. 'Oh boy...' Yukio isn't as affected as the rest of the class by the hot new teacher. He wouldn't be, as he had been forced to spend time with the more scantily clad and stacked Shura thanks to his exorcist lessons. His brother on the other hand...

Yukio sighs. 'Wonderful...my brother has just discovered girls, hasn't he?'

Rin however, is struggling to pin down the strange feeling bubbling up in him. It is like everything has gotten rather sparkly, just because Tsukishiro is in the room.

Purple eyes briefly land on the form of Okumura Rin and a slow smile spreads across pale pink lips. 'Show me what you can do Okumura Rin...Cardcaptor and potential Master of the Cards.'
Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Should I keep putting tips for writing comments below as an aid or did the one time on ch2 work?
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

My apologies for the delay! I had a doctor's appointment and I make a point of doing last minute edits to see if I can catch anything that needs fixing up!

With that out of the way, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Uwaaaa!” Rin stumbles and manages to roll out of the way of the ridiculous amount of toys attacking him. “Oh, you got to be kidding me...” He groans and stands up, breaking back into a run.

This, is Rin's life right now. Aside from dealing with normal school work, he has extracurricular activities that involve getting attacked by a bunch of animated toys late at night.

“Kero, where is the main shitting body!?” Rin yells, still running from the damn toys. This is all the fault of Jump, which Rin hunted down earlier tonight. Unfortunately, Jump is a rather aggressive bugger and animated all the toys within the toy shop it was hiding in. Rin, not wanting to destroy the toys, is stuck running from them. He can't bring out Fly as he needs his wand free to use the other Cards. Besides, he can easily run ahead of a bunch of magically animated toys.

...unless they somehow manage to ambush him. “FUCKING HELL KERO!! I thought Jump was stupid!?” Rin ends up kicking all the blasted toys away, wincing at a few crashes and the sounds of stuff breaking.

“...Uh...” Kero doesn't really have a response to that, except to stare at the cursing and rather violent acting twelve year old who is currently being attacked by a bunch of toys.

Rin then whirls around and grabs one of the toys attacking him. “There you are, you little fucker!” Rin glares murder at Jump, which he is holding by its ears. Jump appears to be terrified and even panics for a bit, before Rin slams the wand on it.

Without trying to seal the Card, thus the small pink rabbit-like being is knocked unconscious, releasing the hold it has on the toys and making them drop all over the place. Kero sweats at that sight. 'Seems like Rin's in a foul mood tonight...'

“Jump, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” A whirl of light has Rin receiving the Card, the young boy grumbling the while. Then he yawns. “Dammit...hunting for the Cards is getting in the way of my sleep...”

“Then perhaps we should take a break.” Kero flies carefully over to Rin.

Rin looks at him in surprise. “But the Cards...”

“We can wait a few days. If this keeps up, not only will you be in an even fouler mood, you will start makin' mistakes. And that can be fatal in certain Cards' cases.” Kero explains.

Rin fails to stifle another yawn. “Right...three days or so of proper sleep would fix that...”
Kero has to grin. “Come on Rin, let's get home.” He stares at the mess left behind by Jump and sighs. “Other people can handle the clean up.”

**Chapter 4: One Very Strange Day At School**

“Who's a good boy!? Yes, yes you are!” Rin cheerfully laughs and pets the large dog that is wagging his tail and greatly enjoying the attention. Yukio sighs at the sight of his brother totally taken in by the dog and firmly distracted from his real task.

“Nii-san...if you don't hurry we will be late for school...” Despite this Yukio has to smile at his brother being adored by and babying a dog. *If only the other students could see this...they wouldn't be so wary of him then.* ‘Not to mention it proves that Rin is now as energetic as he is supposed to be; no longer looking abnormally sleepy all the time. Then something hits Yukio, and he frowns, puzzled. “Hey, wasn't that dog vicious before?”

Rin, in the middle of rubbing the big friendly dog's belly, looks up at Yukio. “Uh...you're right. Wonder what happened...” Rin looks concerned about what could have changed the dog's temperament, but is quickly distracted by the dog whining for attention. “Oooh...what a sweet dog you are now!”

Yukio sweats a bit at how his brother is acting. “Nii-san...” Then an idea strikes him and a devious look crosses his face. “Nii-san, if you don't get to school on time, Tsukishiro-sensei will be disappointed...”

*That* gets Rin's attention. “Gawk! Sorry boy! Don't want to disappoint Tsukishiro-sensei. I'll visit you on the way back home, okay?” Rin gives the dog one last pat on the head, the dog woofing as if he understands him, then darts up the street to where Yukio is.

Yukio barely smothers his laughter. *Weaponizing my brother's first crush? First use a total success.*

However, Yukio has to wonder why Rin is so taken by Tsukishiro. Sure, everyone else at the school is rather impressed by her as well. She is beautiful, kind, intelligent, patient, and very accomplished. She is also the one teacher who never just treats his elder brother like dirt or an automatic failure thanks to his bad reputation; not to mention is the only teacher who encourages Rin to succeed in school. Yukio finds himself liking her just for that.

However, Rin has a tendency to *immediately* look rather dazed and happy around her, even when he is obviously paying close attention to her and her lectures. And he's been doing that ever since she first entered the classroom. Yukio could consider it a “love at first sight” thing, but he doesn't believe in that...no matter what Tou-san said about Shiemi-san. That is a complete fabrication and he knows it!

Yukio awkwardly coughs to get Rin's attention. Rin turns to him, looking a little confused. “What is it Yukio?” Rin frowns. “Is something going on? You only get that look when you are wondering how to bring something up.” A fierce, protective look crosses the noiret's face. “If anyone is bullying you...”

“No, no!” Yukio waves his hands in front of him, halting Rin before he goes charging off to beat up anyone he thinks is a threat to his younger brother. “I was...just wondering what exactly you thought of Tsukishiro-sensei, that's all.”

Rin relaxes at that. “Oh, that's a relief...but why are you asking?”

“Just...just curious...” Yukio stutters, blushing a bit. *Like I can say anything about the obvious crush*
“Hmmm...” Rin considers that, lifting his arms, and also his bag by default, behind his head as he thinks about it. “Well, she's very nice. Smart too. Doesn't talk down to anyone and is the only teacher that doesn't hate me!” Rin chirps, not noticing the not-so-happy expression that crosses the glasses-wearing twin at those words. “I think everyone likes her though, don't you Yukio?” Rin turns inquisitive blue eyes on his brother, who shakes himself out of his dark thoughts and smiles at his brother.

“Yeah. She's a wonderful teacher.”

“Yup!” Rin brings his arms down and grins at Yukio. “Plus, she makes everything sparkly!”

“...Sparkly?” Yukio is confused by that.

“Well...ya know...that's what I always feel around her...” Rin blushes a bit. “Sparkly. It's a nice feeling.”

'...that's an odd way to describe attraction...' Yukio mused. 'Normally it's more like butterflies or something.'

“Yukio?”

Yukio stumbles back a bit at the sight of his brother's face suddenly so close to him. “Uh? What is it Nii-san?”

“...We're at school.” Yukio blinks and realizes that his brother is right, as the two Okumura brothers have finally reached the school. “Oh, right. Sorry about that.”

“That's okay!” Rin smiles. “Come on, let's get to class on time! We have Tsukishiro-sensei first thing today!”

Yukio nods and follows after his rather hyper brother, chuckling a bit. 'So Nii-san hasn't figured it out yet...figures. Aah well, it wouldn't be Nii-san if he had.'

Rin stifles at yawn, already feeling the boredom induced sleepiness that comes during assemblies. Especially ones where the teacher drones on and on and on and...

A poke to his cheek makes him turn slightly and blush a bit at the sight of Tsukishiro. The young teacher raises an eyebrow at how tired he is. “Is something the matter, Rin-kun?”

Rin shakes his head, feeling that daze that comes around as a side effect of the sparkly. “N-no...just...”

“Hang in there, okay?” Tsukishiro smiles gently at him. “I know it's boring but this is important. It's about the new procedures for an emergency like fire. Good thing for you to know.”

“Uh...y-yeah...” Rin turns back to the stage and speaker, still blushing. Yukio, who is sitting next to him, can only sigh at that...then pauses as Tsukishiro gives a look at him, a grin on her face and a strange look in her eyes. She glances at Rin then back at him, a question in her eyes. She then mouths something to him.

Yukio finds himself joining his brother in his blushing, though for different reasons. 'I do not have a brother complex...' He makes a point of focusing on the speaker himself, doing his best to ignore the
nice, though slightly crazy teacher of his.

Tsukishiro stifles a laugh at that, and turns to the speaker herself. The Okumura brothers are quite the pair.

“...the fire alarm now sets off the new sprinkler system as well. The system is on a timer though; it will take approximately three minutes for them to turn on, allowing the students and staff to exit the building and avoid getting wet. This system is installed as an extra precaution to reduce risk to not only the building but the students themselves...”

Rin yawns again, drawing a sigh from his brother and a quickly stifled giggle from Tsukishiro. Oi, it isn't his fault the teacher speaking can make a rock fall asleep, he has such a goddamn boring voice!

The soft, almost musical tones of the last bell ring out, the cue for the students to pack up and head home, their school day finally finished.

The chatter of students as they leave the building, all grouped together or alone in certain cases. All full of cheer and relief at the end of the day.

A small figure sits on the roof of the school, watching the going ons with bright red eyes. The place seems so happy and joyful but...

“...there is still sadness.” The figure notes. They then decide to deal with said sadness, as soon as they can.

In one of the classrooms, Tsukishiro pauses in packing up her stuff. She then sighs. “Aah, looks like tomorrow is going to be a rather troublesome day...”

'Wonder how you are going to handle this Card, Okumura Rin?'

“Ta da!” Kero presents the item in his paw to Rin. “Finally have one of the devices ready for use!”

Rin carefully picks up the item. It is rather small and almost looks like some kind of earring, abet one that wraps around the shell of one's ear. “What is it?”

“A communication device.” Kero points at his own ear, where there is now a similar “earring” there. “See this allows us to talk to each other, even if we are across town. It's powered by magic too, so no worries about the battery runnin' low, as it will only need a small amount from you.”

“Ah...” After a pause, Rin places it on his left ear, tapping on it to make sure it is secure. “Why wasn't it useable before?”

Kero sighs and droops a bit. “It has been a long time since it has been used, so all of its power was gone. And it's a bit finicky to start up in the beginnin'... Sakura-chan never got around to figurin' out how to fix that problem. Ah swear, all of her devices are like that...”

Rin sweats at that. “Aah...I see...” What kind of person was this Sakura anyways?’ “Oh, right. How do I use it?”

“Just send out a small drop of magic to activate it, then a small pulse to turn it off. A bit like yer wand, just doesn't need a chant to make sure it works. After all, it's a magitek device not a pure magical artifact like the wand. Alternatively, you can tap on it once to turn it on and twice to shut off.” Kero explains.
Rin closes his eyes and sends off a small drop of magic, feeling the device suddenly spring to “life”. And then winces and gives a cry of pain as something like a mix of static, screaming and just plain noise assaults his ears. Kero also is crying in pain, and tells him to “TURN IT OFF!”

Rin manages to finally work through the pain and shuts off the device.

There is a long moment of silence.


Kero sweats under the fierce glare Rin is giving him. “Oh...right. Forgot to warn you...you shouldn't activate it when within five metres of another communication device...the feedback, as you just saw, is pretty...” Kero pauses and gulps. “Harsh?”

Rin grabs Kero's face and starts pulling on it, ignoring his panicked flailing and mangled cries. “You forgot to warn me. Kero! I outta...”

Downstairs, the other residence of Southern Cross Monastery stare nervously up at the ceiling and listen to the great racket going on upstairs. 'What is Rin doing up there?' Is their simultaneous thought.

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The next day...

Something....isn't right.

What exactly is wrong, well, Rin can't answer that but he just knows something isn't right. The boy scans the school yard as he walks into it with Yukio next to him. The students are acting normal, with a few girls laughing about something near the trees and a couple of other students talking near the entrance. Nothing seems out of place for the moment. Rin briefly wonders if it is a Card but a quick scan says otherwise. Not that he can be 100% certain thanks to that damn leyline, but at the very least, Rin is certain he would be able to sense a Card's presence, if more muted or muddled than he normally senses them.

“Nii-san is everything alright?”

Rin jumps at Yukio's voice, pulling him out of his stupor. His younger brother somehow led them both to their classroom and is setting his things down on his desk. Rin had spent the entire time just staring off into space, using his sensor skills to try to find what is making him freak out so much.

“Well, yeah everything's fine.” Rin shakes the odd feeling off with a smile. “I wonder what Tsukishiro-sensei will be teaching today.”

Yukio nods his head in agreement, focusing on getting his books and pencils set up. Rin does the same quickly, hanging his bag on the side of his desk before sitting down. It doesn't take long for the last students to file in and find their seats. Rin twirls a pencil between his fingers, watching the door avidly. He is really starting to enjoy Tsukishiro's lessons more than ever now. She makes things simple and explains everything clearly. It is nice to actually have a teacher try to help him.

When the classroom door opens Rin sits up straight in his seat, a big smile on his face. Of course it drops the minute the old substitute teacher steps in. Rin slouches down into his seat, watching the older man with a slight glare which is quickly dropped in favour for a worried glance at the door. Tsukishiro is always in the classroom on time. Hell, there are days when she is already there before the students! Did something happen?
“So your normal sensei isn’t in today.” Rin’s eyes snaps back to the teacher as he speaks. He feels a chill run down his spine which makes him sit up straight again. “But that doesn’t really matter. I mean it’s still a nice day after all. Let's look at the planner and see what she has planned today.”

The smile on the man's face is clearly not natural. While to some it would look like a normal smile, Rin can't help but notice that it looks wrong. Like it is forced but at the same time completely natural. His eyes look blank and cold as if there isn't really any happiness at all despite the smile. Something like that is just wrong.

“Well, it looks as if there's nothing planned for history today.” The man looks up from the planner flashing the class that frighteningly happy smile at them. It makes Rin sink down into his chair, trying to hide from the dead stare the teacher is giving the class. “But that is fine. There's nothing wrong with that, right?”

There is some chatter between the students over this. Most are either wondering if the teacher is ill or if this is some kind of prank by the teacher (never mind he had never shown a sense of humour before), a few even not really caring and just deciding to take it as it comes.

“Yukio...” Rin looks over at his younger brother, hoping he might be able to tell him something. Only to have his eyes widen in worry and rest a hand on Yukio's shoulder in concern as he notices that Yukio is furrowing his brow and sweating a little, his hand on his head. “Yukio, are you alright?”

Yukio looks up at him, looking a little dazed. “Uh...yeah...just...” He winces. “I just got a headache...”

“Should I take you to the nurse's office?” Rin asks him, ignoring the fact the rest of the class has mostly accepted the “free period” and are using it as hang out time.

Yukio slowly shakes his head. “No...it's fine...I should be alright in a bit.”

“Well...if you say so. But if you get worse, I'm carrying you out of here, got it?”

Yukio chuckles at that, knowing very well that his brother is capable of pulling off that “threat”. “Yes Nii-san.”

Rin nods and glances around the class room. He freezes as he notices a lot of the other students seem to be wincing and rubbing their heads like they have headaches, in the exact same manner as Yukio.

“What's going on...?” Rin's attention is drawn back to the teacher, who is sitting down at the chair behind the teacher's desk, humming and flipping through a book, though obviously not reading it. Rin shivers at his almost blank eyes.

'This isn't right. It isn't at all right.'

Rin looks over the visage of the school and its grounds that he can see from the rooftop. Looking around the place, he can see more and more students becoming what he calls “creepy happy”. They are happy, in a fashion, but also empty because of that. The laughter is getting grating and a lot of them are just staring off into space a “blissful” look adoring their features.

Rin glances beside him to Yukio, who is sitting slumped to the ground, a cold can of juice pressed to his forehead. His face is rather red and shiny with sweat, the glasses-wearing twin even rubbing his eyes at times. Rin is pretty certain that Yukio is actually fighting off whatever is effecting the rest of the school, but judging by his worsening condition it is only a matter of time before even he is
brought low.

Rin grits his teeth. Rin **hates** this; someone is attacking the school, attacking his **brother** and he is currently helpless and clueless. The only relief he has (after a fashion) is that he isn't feeling the effects. Perhaps it has to do with his status as a Cardcaptor, with his awakened magic.

_Yukio's my brother. My **twin** brother._' Rin thinks. _Maybe he also has some magic in him; enough that he can fight off the...whatever this is. But since he can't actually **use** it, he still gets effected._'

Making up his mind, Rin gives a quick look to Yukio then sends a magic pulse to the “earring” on his left ear.

Back at the monastery, Kero pauses in his reading another of Yukio's gag manga at a pulse from his ear. Setting aside the gag manga, he answers it.

“Yo! What is it Rin? Somethin' come up?”

“**Yeah...**” There is a pause, Rin keeping an eye on Yukio and his voice low as he speaks again. “**Everyone is acting weird at school.**”

“**Weird?**” Kero blinks at that. “**How so?**”

“...well, everyone is so happy suddenly and Yukio's acting really sick. It's actually rather creepy; they are happy but...it's not real. And there's this...**feeling** around the place. I can't trace it though or even figure out what it is. Not to mention Yukio's getting **worse.** I think he's trying to fight it off, I see a few others with 'headaches' from this, but he's suffering more and getting weaker...” Rin's voice trails off at the end and he swallows audibly. “**Kero...do you have any idea what this is?**”

Kero hums and thinks on it, holding his chin in a paw. “Hmmm...the creepy happy...headaches...that does sound familiar. Can't quite recall but...Ah'm pretty sure it's a Card. One that is good at hidin' its presence.” An eyebrow twitches. “Damn. Ah'm gonna have to think on it for a bit. It's eludin' my memory...”

Kero suddenly sits up at that, but a cry from Rin's end stops him from telling him what he just recalled. **“YUKIO!”**

And the line goes dead.

---

Rin sits by the bedside, nervous like he has never been before. The nurse was no help, also under that creepy happy thing, as she just cheerfully said it is alright and nothing bad is going to happen.

Staring at his comatose and obviously suffering younger brother in bed, Rin has to disagree. In fact, he probably disagreed too violently, as the nurse is currently knocked out and in another bed. No way Rin is going to be able to withstand sharing the place with that creepy lady.

Rin sighs and puts his head in his hands. “It's a Card. What kind of Card would cause this?”

A pulse at his ear makes him sit up. Touching the earring-like device, he is suddenly bombarded by Kero's voice.

“**Rin! Is everything alright?**”

“No...nothing is alright.” Rin chokes a bit, feeling a bit of tears gathering in the back of his eyes. He wipes his eyes. **“Yukio's unconscious...”**
"Damn. He's probably asleep so his inherent power can fight off the effects better. Means he's reachin' his limit. Look, Ah know what Card it is. It's Memory."

"Memory?" Confused blue eyes blinks. "How did this Card do all this?"

"By removin' all the 'unhappy' memories. See, this Card hates unhappy thangs. So when out of control, it tends to erase any kind of memory that can be considered 'sad'."

"Why does such a Card exist?" Rin wonders. Sounds like this Card is more trouble than it is worth.

"Sakura made it to help cover up magical activities. Sometimes, no matter what, there's a chance for someone who shouldn't find out to find out despite all everythin' done against that. The world wasn't really ready for magic to be well known at that point either, so Memory was created. It's actually rather useful when controlled properly, but when it doesn't have a master, it does this kind of thang."

"So...how do I catch it?" Rin asks, a look of determination crossing his gaze.

"...uh...that will be tricky. It's probably hidin' somewhere in the school, but it's really good at concealin' its presence..." There is a pause. "Ah believe there's somethang else it hates that can drag it out, but it's slippin' my mind..."

"Well, try to remember!" Rin snaps. "Yukio's in danger here!"

"Ah'm tryin', Ah'm tryin'..." Kero honestly sounds like he is trying. "And don't snap at me kid! Ah know you are stressin' over this, but take a deep breath! Panickin' won't help!"

Rin winces at that, and glances again at Yukio. "Sorry Kero...it's just..."

"Yer brother is a victim here." Kero's voice takes a more soothing tone, almost empathetic. "Yeah, that's very stressful. But you can't save him if you don't calm down enough to think thangs through properly."

Rin takes a deep breath...

...only to pause at a strange sound behind him. It sounds like a large person had fallen to the floor. He stands up from his seat next to Yukio's bed, moving to look at the bed next to him. The curtain was set up by Rin to give the twins some privacy, making it hard to see the rest of the infirmary. Licking his lips, the young mage reaches out and grabs the curtain. Closing his eyes, he yanks the curtain open. When nothing happens after a beat, Rin opens one eye and looks to see no one is there; but the bed beside them is a mess and looks as if someone fell out of it.

Rin walks to the messed up bed, looking around for the nurse who he knows was “sleeping” there. He crouches down, looking under the bed, wondering if she'd rolled under there, but when he lifts the sheets there is nothing there. Rin swallows thickly as he stands up and glances around the place looking for the nurse. It is as if she just disappeared.

The boy backs away from the bed, eyes darting from left to right until his back hits something solid. Rin yelps when strong hands land on his shoulders and force him to turn around. The nurse, with a dead wide smile, stares blankly down at him.

"Why aren't you happy?"

Her voice makes a chill run down his spin. "Wh-what are you talking about?"
She leans in closer to his face, tilting her head a tiny bit. “Why aren’t you happy?”

Rin feels his blood run cold as he stares her right in the eyes. They look dead and hollow as if she isn’t there. The creepy smile that is plastered her on her face doesn’t help either. Rin places his hands on hers, shivering at the clammy feel of her skin.

“P-please let me go.” He winces, feeling her grip get tighter.

She leans in even closer, making Rin wonder how that is possible. “Why aren’t you happy?”

“Let go!” Rin yells this time. “You’re freaking me out! Let go!!”

Rin rips her arms off of his shoulders, doing his best not to hurt her but she is being so creepy. She doesn’t even wince as she falls to the floor. Rin takes a few steps back away from her, his eyes looking to Yukio’s sleeping figure then back to the woman as she stands up. Her head snaps up and her dead eyes lock onto him. Worse that creepy smile is still on her face. Rin looks at Yukio once more before swearing and running to the door, throwing it open.

“S-sorry Yukio!” He calls as he exits the nurse’s office.

He bites his lip as he slams the door close and falls back when the nurse hits the door roughly. Rin has to bite his lip to keep himself from screaming since he hadn't realized she charged at him. He scrambles to his feet when he sees her start to open the door, wondering what the hell is going on. Everyone who is “happy” are mellow and their default action is staring off into space. The nurse is the first to be actually violent.

“Okumura-san, why aren’t you happy?”

Rin's attention snaps to where he'd heard the other voice. Just as the nurse closes the door, various students and teachers come down the hall from his right, making it impossible for him to go that way. They stop next to the nurse, all watching him with that freaky blank stare and that terrifying smile. Rin gulps, taking a step back.

“Why aren’t you happy?”

Every smiling person asks him that in creepy unison, Rin making a weird whining noise in his throat in reaction. The next few moments are a blur as the others set upon him, determined to “make him happy”, to the point they are actually hurting him. Once Rin manages to break free of their grasp – feeling the bite of bruises and a few cuts on his body – he turns and runs away from them blindly, not caring of where he went as long as he gets away. The thunder of footsteps behind him signal to him that practically everyone is chasing after him now, like they are some messed up zombies! Rin swears under his breath trying to think of a way out of this, and also glad that their focus is only on him and not his brother.

The boy rounds the corner only to slide to a stop, seeing another large group of smiling “zombies”. They all notice him and turn their smiling faces towards him. Rin scrambles away, pushing the nearby gymnasium door open. He pulls out his Key, knowing it is time to start using magic.

“Sh-shit! K-key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!” Rin grabs the staff as it grows and pulls out the Jump Card. “Jump!”

A flash of light and small wings appear on Rin's shoes (which he totally forgot to remove in his rush to get Yukio the nurse’s office). The boy jumps up into the air with a yelp, just barely missing the grabbing hands of the smiling “zombies” below. Rin latches onto one of the large beams in the gym's
ceiling. He scrambles up to the top of the beam, sitting down on it and panting in exertion.

Rin stares down at the scene before him. The “zombies” seem to not notice he is gone and start to wander aimlessly, sometimes bumping into each other and falling as a result. They don't seem to care though, and just stand up and wandered around again. The sight is enough to send a chill down his spine, as it shows just how out of it the other people are.

“Now what do I do?” Rin sighs.

“Rin! Ah figured out how to draw Memory out!”

The boy screams at the sudden yell, having forgotten the communication device in his ear. Luckily he is gripping tightly onto the beam, so he doesn't fall down. Rin sits up and clutches his chest, doing his best not to yell at Kero as he doesn't know this weird shit is going on.

“Y-you did? Great!” Rin gasps out. “The smiling people started to attack me like zombies! It's really freaky!”

“Z-zombies!? Oh man that must mean Memory knows you can't be affected.” Kero sighs. “It probably hates that.”

“How can I draw the Card out then?” Rin asks, fidgeting on the beam. “Because Yukio's by himself right now! I don't want to leave him alone for too long.”

“Water. Memory hates gettin' wet. If you can somehow get water on it, it will come right out!” Kero explains.

“How the hell am I gonna do that?!” Rin wonders. “I can't sense its location at all.”

“You're on yer own in that case Rin. You know the school better than Ah do right now and Ah can't get to you in time.” Kero sounds very regimental at that.

Rin bites his lip. “Oh...okay. I'll...figure something out...” He smiles, even though he knew Kero can't see him. “Don't worry; I'll be fine...Though I need to check on Yukio....”

“...Alright Rin. Just be careful please.” Kero requests softly.

“I will.” Rin looks down at the gym below him, sighing in relief as he notes all the effected students and staff are now gone, having wandered off. “Wish me luck!”

“Good luck Rin!” The communication cuts at that and Rin is alone for real.

With that the boy jumps down to the floor, landing gently thanks to the Card he equipped. After dismissing Jump, he pauses and listens. Not hearing anything, he heads out of the gym and back towards the nurse office to check on Yukio.

His shoes make squeaking noises as he moved down the halls, making him wince at that partly for the noise and partly because he knows that, once the teachers are back in proper condition, they will rant at him for leaving streaks on the floors. He turns the corner and approaches the nurse's office, slowing down when he sees a figure standing in front of it. Rin notices it is Yukio right away. No way he can ever mistake his brother for another. The boy grabs his younger brother's arm gently and looks back down the hall carefully.

“Yukio! I'm so glad you're okay! Listen we have to...Yukio?” Rin turns his attention back to his brother who is still staring down the opposite way. He shakes his arm gently, feeling the fear slowly
build up in his stomach. “Y-Yukio...?”

Slowly Yukio turns to look at his brother. Rin lets his arm go and backs away slowly, only to have his own arm grabbed by his brother.

“Why aren't you happy Nii-san?”

Outside the school, in the nearby park section, Tsukishiro Sekki stares at the school with worry furrowing her brows. “Rin-kun is taking quite a long time...”

Below her feet a magic circle glows, protecting her from being sensed by Rin or targeted by Memory. She visibly hesitant for a moment, then sighs, resignation now on her face. “I can give him a little longer to capture this Card. But if this goes on any longer, even he will be in danger of having his memories erased.”

If there is anything that can be considered Rin's greatest fear, it is for something terrible to happen to Yukio. Yukio is Rin's precious little brother, the one person Rin has always had throughout his life from birth. The most important person he has period, the one he will protect until every drop of his blood is gone. Until he takes his last breath. Anyone who hurts Yukio, even the slightest bit, is due the same amount of pain.

And now, Rin's worse fear is true. Caught in the grip of his brainwashed, eerily smiling little brother, Rin is torn. He should break Yukio's grasp and run away. Maybe even knock him out for safety sake. But the thought of hurting Yukio even just a little bit makes him feel sick. There is nothing he can do to remove Yukio's hand on him without hurting him the slightest bit.

The sound of other footsteps breaks Rin out of his daze, and Rin pales at the sight of the smiling zombies the school is now populated with coming towards him. Some of them even have “weapons” of a sort now, carrying stuff like baseball bats and lacross sticks; the members of sports teams. Eyes darting around, Rin looks for a way out. A flash of red makes him pause and Rin stares at the nearby fire alarm. Something about that is niggling at the back of his head.

“Why aren't you happy, Okumura-san?” The “zombies” chant together.

“Why aren't you happy, Nii-san?” Yukio echoes, blank eyes staring at his brother. Rin forces himself to ignore them, even as the crowd gets closer to him.

“...the fire alarm now sets off the new sprinkler system as well....”

Rin's eyes widen, finally recalling the assembly from yesterday. “The fire alarm!” He cries. Before he can have a second thought, Rin removes his arm from Yukio’s grasp – to his relief, he hadn’t been holding on that tightly – and sprints to the fire alarm. One strong yank later, and the school is suddenly filled with the wailing of the alarm. The sound makes all the “zombies” wince and back away, allowing Rin to run past most of them, knocking a few off balance as he barrels on by. A few of them manage to grab him and he has to struggle free, one of them even managing to get a lucky shot with a baseball bat to his back, making him scream in pain before he finally is free and running down the hallway.

'Why the hell haven't the sprinklers kicked in...' Rin swears as he recalls the fact the sprinklers are on a timer. He can hear footsteps behind him, getting faster even. 'Got to shake them off..' Yukio is among the “zombies” though, and he doesn't want to hurt him too much. An idea hits him then, and he pulls out Bubbles.
“Make the floors slick and slippery! Bubbles, release!” A flash of light and a stream of pink light shoots past him. Pink bubbles suddenly fill the air and land on the ground, popping into puddles of soap behind Rin as he continues to race down the hallway.

The sound of bodies crashing to the floor and yelps prove how effective Rin's impromptu “oil slick” is, and he grabs the Card as it returns to him at his prompting. He puts on a burst of speed and rushes through the school, looking for a place to hide until the blasted sprinklers come on.

A nearby closet is the best he can get and he ducks inside. Covering his mouth with his hand to reduce sound, he waits in the dark closet. The sound of footsteps going past him make him stiffen, then finally relax when they continued past him without stopping.

Then he is suddenly drenched in water. He hears cries from outside, mostly of surprise and joy – creepy joy of course – as everyone and all the school is suddenly treated to the water from the sprinklers. The fire alarm continue to blare, but Rin can't help the grin that crosses his face.

He can sense Memory and he knows exactly where the little fucker is.

Across the city, back at the monastery, Fujimoto Shirō pauses in the middle of sweeping up the church and looks around.

There is no reason for it but, he can't shake the feeling he is having. The feeling of something wrong, a bad premonition.

Looking up, Shirō ponders the strange feeling. And wonders...

“Why do I think Rin's involved...?”

“Smile! Smile! Smile!” Rin grunts and winces in pain as, in an attempt to block the nurse's attack, his hand is stabbed by her pair of weird looking medical scissors. Her smile is more maniac than the others now and Rin knows very well why.

The reason he wasn't attacked until he took Yukio to the nurse's office and she woke up is because that is where the Card spirit has been hiding. Still is in fact, he can hear cries of complaint as it is drenched in the water. However, Rin has to get past the last guard Memory has; that of the nurse herself, who is now wielding one of her medical tools like some kind of weapon.

Rin screams as the nurse manages to cut his cheek, a rather deep cut in fact. Having enough of all of this, Rin slams his head into the nurse's causing her to halt, dazed by the blow, then kicks her off of him. The force of the kick sends her flying into her office and Rin stands, cursing a bit at the blood dripping off his face.

He then steps into the room and finally comes face to face with the Card spirit.

Standing on the one bed still upright, the Card spirit looks like a very young boy wearing a blue and gold children's yukata. His blond hair is soaking wet, plastered to his face and head, and big red eyes stare at Rin in fear from above freckled and tear stained cheeks.

That sight is enough to make Rin to sigh, scratch the back of his head and approach the spirit with a much calmer and less rage filled stance. The spirit winces at Rin's look, as he is still angry enough to glare at the small spirit.

“Why did you do it?” Rin asks after a long pause. “Why did you erase everyone's memories? Why
did you hurt Yukio? Why did you try to hurt me?”

The spirit flinches. “I...I just wanted them to be happy!” He wails. “So...so I got rid of the bad memories. Made them...them forget them and be happy!”

“Does that look happy to you?” Rin demands, pointing at the nurse. The spirit stares at the nurse, who has the twisted smile on her face and is slowly standing up, still chanting “Smile! Smile!” Her entire movements and appearance made her look like a broken automation. The spirit sniffs and slowly shakes his head.

“Exactly.” Rin's voice softens and he crouches slightly to be eye to eye to the little boy. “I know you wanted to help. But what you are doing right now is wrong.” Rin smiles softly. “You have to let me seal you, so you don't cause any more trouble.”

Memory sniffs. “But...but then...then...it will be lonely, won't it?”

Rin blinks at that. “Lonely?”

“Like before, when we are all sealed after Sakura-neechan died. Alone and in darkness...nothing but that.” The little boy sniffs and rubs his eyes. “I don't want to be like that again.”

Rin laughs. “Oh, silly.” Giving a slight prompting, all six of the current Cards he has currently float up and around him and Memory. “I'm the Cardcaptor. I'm supposed to look after you guys now. I promise that I won't leave you guys alone and I'll take care of you.”

Memory stares at him and his Card siblings. “R-really?”

Rin holds out a hand and extends his pinky. “Really. I promise.”

Memory hesitates for a moment, then extends his own hand, linking his pinky with Rin's. “Promise!” He smiles brilliantly before unlinking the pinkies. “Alright. Seal me.”

Rin then stands up and brings up the sealing staff. “Memory, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Memory lights up, turning into streams of light that form his Card. Rin catches it and smiles at the revealed picture. The small boy is there, his eyes closed and a happy smile on his face, holding a stuffed rabbit to his chest of all things.

“Don't worry. I keep my promises.” Rin reassures the Card.

Yukio blinks, wondering what is going on and why he is in the school gym. Not to mention why he is wet. Looking around him, he can see other students and even teachers doing the same. Looking up, he can see the sprinklers slowly stop drenching people in water as they shut off.

“What...what happened?” Yukio wonders. The last thing he recalls is feeling very sick and Rin warning him that if he got worse, he would drag him to the nurse's office.

Murmurs and chatter started up, the entire school wondering much the same thing. Listening to this, Yukio is terrified to realize that no one else knows what is going on and frankly has no full memory of the day's events.

The sound of fire sirens outside reveal that the firetrucks have arrived as per the fire alarms prompting.
Yukio then realizes something. Despite what seemed like the entire school here, he can't see Rin. *Oh no, don't tell me...*

He races off, hoping to find his brother before anyone else does. He then slips and falls without warning. Yelping at that, he slowly props himself up and blinks. An entire hallway's floor has been coated in soap, with bubbles having formed from having water introduced to the mix. Slowly standing, Yukio carefully picks his way across the floor until he reached the nurse's office.

Peering inside, Yukio is treated to the sight of the room trashed and the nurse unconscious in the corner, looking rather battered. Slowly walking in, a grumbling sound directs him to the medical cabinets.

“Nii-san?” Yukio gets out, seeing Rin looking through the cabinets for something. Apparently hearing him, Rin whirls to face him. Yukio is shocked to see his condition, as he looks bruised and battered like he was in a fight, blood dripping from a serious cut on his face. Despite that, Rin bursts into a smile and approaches him looking...relieved?

“Yukio! You're alright!” He gives his brother a tight hug then pulls back, looking his brother up and down. Yukio does the same, realizing that Rin is even worse off then he thought; his uniform looking tattered and torn, along with blood dripping from a puncture wound in his hand.

Rin's smile then fades and he looks behind Yukio, dread and resignation on his face. Yukio turns and is presented with the sight of all the teachers – except for Tsukishiro he notes absently – standing in the doorway, staring in horror at the hurt nurse and her trashed office...

...and with accusation and blame at Rin.

“...Nii-san.” Yukio says softly, pleading in his blue eyes behind his glasses. “Nii-san...what happened?”

Rin doesn't say anything.

**Chapter End Notes**

Well, what do you think?

Now, I really need comments. From this point on, getting comments is the only way I will post a new chapter according to the schedule. And the schedule is only Mondays and Fridays. So once I have enough comments I'll post at either date there. That's the definite rule and you guys have been so nice before so I'm sure you guys can keep it up! I'll reply and show appreciation personally to each comment.
Wow, all the comments are making me feel good. Thank you!

If there are questions and such, I'm planning on trying to organize them a bit. So go here (http://writerscornergbp.tumblr.com/) to message me about ICD! Or just general stuff. I won't bite. Just will put off spoiler answers until they aren't spoilers!

It's this chapter that revealed to me just how much Sekki prefers to remain out of the spotlight...on the other hand, Shiro gets to say his piece.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shirō sighs and stares down at the bed in front of him. He is currently in his sons' bedroom, with the only other person there hidden under the covers of his bed and refusing to respond even the slightest to his presence.

“Rin.” Shirō closes his eyes and pinches the bridge of his nose. “Rin, why won't you tell anyone what happened today?”

There is no response and that hurts. Rin had never hidden things from his foster father before, after all.

Shirō can recall being called into the school, and presented with a horrid situation: the school's fire alarms had been set off, thus triggering the sprinklers and causing the entire school body to be drenched. A hallway had been coated in soap, making it hazardous to walk there. The school's nurse is battered and her office is a mess. And the one responsible is his eldest son, Rin.

The faculty was in an uproar, all of them demanding punishment for his son and most wanting him expelled from the school. Luckily for Shirō and especially for Rin, there was one cool headed and rational teacher there.

The new teacher at that, the attractive and ruthlessly logical Tsukishiro Sekki. Shirō was impressed by her and not just because she is one of the most beautiful women he has ever seen. No, he is also impressed by her calm, methodical but always polite way of cutting down the other teachers' complaints and the fact she is standing up for his often misunderstood son.

Tsukishiro noticed that no one has a clear memory of the events of the day and that Rin is the one in the worse condition, as if he had to fight off attackers. She pointed out that no one knows exactly what transpired and only has vague “proof” that Rin is the culprit. She acknowledged that Rin is probably responsible for the mess of the nurse's office and even the nurse herself but also pointed out – and the nurse even agreed, abet quietly – that compared to Rin, she isn't in the worse condition. Rin has cuts on him, cuts that – judging by the bloody trauma shears the nurse had been horrified to find in her hands – the nurse probably inflicted on him.

Thanks to Tsukishiro, Rin isn't going to be expelled and in fact is only going to serve detention for trashing the nurse's office and soaping the hallway. The rest is agreed to be brushed aside, the nurse's condition for the fact he obviously had to fight her off for some reason, and the fire alarm and
resulting sprinklers because no one can prove it is him who set them off.

However, that is also because Rin isn't talking. At all.

All Shirō has is second hand information and the fact that Yukio told him how relieved Rin was to see him when he first found him in the nurse’s office. All this tells Shirō that it is entirely possible the school was under a demonic attack of a sort and only Rin remained unaffected, most likely thanks to his strong demonic heritage. The fact Yukio recalled feeling sick – suggesting he subconsciously had been fighting off whatever it had been – collaborates with that theory.

But the rest of the puzzle pieces don't fit. Including the fact that, despite all of this, when Shirō checked the seal on Kurikara is still strong. And the Exorcist can't figure out the sprinklers; how had they gotten involved? What purpose did they serve?

For the first time in his life, Shirō is confronted with something he is truly helpless against in the case of his sons. And he hates the feeling.

“Thanks to Tsukishiro-sensei you won't be expelled. Instead, you are expected to spend seven school days working in the library at lunch and before going home. The library is rather messy due to the sprinklers and being trashed a bit somehow today, so you will have a lot of work ahead of you.” Shirō droops a bit at the fact even the mention of Rin's punishment or his favourite teacher doesn't cause him to move.

Sighing, Shirō then heads to the door, pausing at the threshold briefly. “Rin...if you are ever ready to tell me, I'm willing to listen. I promise, no matter how strange your tale sounds, I will believe it. I know you Rin; you want to do good. You wouldn't have caused all that trouble unless you believed it was the right path to take.”

Again there is no response. Shirō looks at the lump hidden in the bed with a sad, pained look, then exits the room. Closing the door behind him, he stands still for a moment, before leaning against the door and rubbing his eyes.

They feel suspiciously wet under his fingers and even hurt a bit. “Dammit Rin...” Shirō opens his eyes. 'When did you start keeping secrets from me?'

Chapter 5: Keep Quiet In The Library, Please

Once Kero hears that Shirō is truly gone – and can even hear the distant chatter from the other residents, asking what he knows and how Rin is doing – Kero lifts himself from Rin's desk and settles down on the pillow next to him.

There is a moment of silence, then Rin turns and pokes his head out of his bundle of blankets, blue eyes full of hurt.

“You didn't say anythin'.” Kero notes. “Why?”

Rin stares at him for a moment, before finally speaking. “Because...because I can't lie to him.” Rin swallows. “But...but I can't tell him the truth...I...”

Kero jolts a bit then floats over to rest right next to Rin's head, stroking a paw over his face as tears begin to fall. “I...I hate this. Why...did this have to happen to me? Why...why am I such a freak!? And why did I end up as the Cardcaptor...when all I do is fuck up.”

“Ah don't know.” Kero admits. “However...There is no coincidence in this world – there is only inevitability.” He quotes to Rin. “All of this happens for a reason. You see, Sakura arranged for the
Cards to go to a candidate that fits certain attributes. Rin, you **definitely** fit them. Ah've known you long enough to know that.” He pauses and pats Rin's cheek, directing the boy's gaze back to him. He smiles at him. “You *are* worthy of being Cardcaptor. And all this...this will pass. I'm sure you will find yer place in this world one day.”

Rin manages a smile and gently wraps a hand around Kero's small form in lieu of a normal hug. “Thanks Kero.”

After a pause, Rin pulls out Memory from under his pillow, where he hid it for now. Staring for a moment at the Card that caused all of his current problems – and, in a fashion, represents all the troubles all of the Cards will give him – Rin then turns to Kero, deciding to ask him a question that has been bothering him before he forgets it. “Oi, Kero...what's with the stuffed rabbit?”

Kero chuckles a bit at that. “Oh, that was Sakura's idea. See, Memory is one of the earliest of the Cards Sakura made. The point where she started makin' Cards of her own is when she had become a mother. Her eldest son was already showin' signs of magical talent, but unfortunately had some control problems. His magic caused trouble for him at school, that's fer sure. Memory was made for him basically; thus the fact the spirit looks so young.”

“Aah...and the rabbit?” Rin has to give a soft smile at the thought of Sakura making a Card just because her son is having trouble at school. *'She must have been a great mom.*’

“Since Memory is one of her first Cards, there was an incident where he got out of her control. Much like you experienced in fact. Sakura calmed Memory down and gave him that stuffed rabbit as proof of her promise to him.” Kero has a smile made of memories at that. “That was Sakura after all. A very kind person. But also strong.”

“Aah...” Rin can feel his eyes drooping and even yawns. “I wonder...can I ever be like that?”

Kero smiles as Rin finally falls asleep, exhaustion and the stress of his day finally taking its toll. Lifting Memory from Rin's grasp with magic, Kero goes over to the chest and opens it. The Sakura Book floats upwards and opens, allowing Kero to place Memory with the rest of his friends. Closing everything and placing it back, Kero returns to rest on Rin's pillow, feeling rather sleepy himself. He keeps his gaze on the softly sleeping boy for a long moment, before giving a soft snort and rolling into a comfortable position.

“Heh. You already are like that kiddo.”

---

*The next day...*

Keeping his head down and doing his best to ignore the sudden silence that hits when he first walks through the gate, Rin is starting to really *hate* school. The only reason he went today is because of Yukio and because Kero encouraged him in that regard; telling him that he can't avoid the outside world forever. And that it would be better to just “rip that bandage off” in this regard.

Whispers start up, the students not realizing just how loud they are to Rin's ears.

“...did you hear? He set off the fire alarm yesterday...”

“I heard he nearly *killed* the school nurse!”

“Why didn't the school expel him? He caused so much trouble yesterday!”

“...he's scary...”
"I heard that he was a demon in elementary; always causing trouble..."

"I heard he broke a grown man's knee cap when he was eight!" "No way! How strong is he?"
"What a monster!"

Yukio sees Rin grit his teeth and his eyes darken in worried. Even Yukio can catch snatches of the gossip Rin's presence causes. More importantly, he can see the looks the other students are giving his elder brother; that of fear, disgust, and even a few flashes of hatred. Before yesterday, though Rin certainly hadn't any friends, he wasn't really treated any different from the other students; he was just that weird slacker of a loner who doesn't match up to his twin brother in scholastic achievements and tends to sleep in class.

But now, it is obvious he is the school's pariah. Rumours and yesterday's incident have taken its toll, resulting in the entire student body now shunning him. The teachers aren't going to be much better; according to Tou-san the only reason Rin hadn't been expelled is because Tsukishiro was the only one willing to support Rin and ruthlessly cut down on arguments that Rin is just an "evil kid".

Rin pauses in front of the door to his classroom, then slides it open quietly. But not quietly enough, as all the other students that are already there turn to stare at him. Feeling their gazes on him like pinpricks that run over every inch of his skin, Rin keeps his face carefully blank and walks over to his desk. Sitting down and setting things up for class, he hears chatter pick up behind him, all the students shooting nervous glances at him.

He does his best to ignore it, though he snaps his pencil at one point, causing all of the students to flinch and stare at him as if he is going to suddenly massacre them all.

"Nii-san?" The worried voice of his brother makes Rin turn and look at Yukio. He forces a smile on his face. "It's okay Yukio. I'll be okay."

Yukio stares at him for a long moment, before slowly turning to set up his own desk.

Rin's smile drops and he glares out at the view the window on his other side grants him. Recalling too well the conversation between three girls clustered not too far away from the two brothers.

"Poor Yukio-kun...it must be hard to have a monster for a brother..."

"Yeah...how does he manage to live in the same house? They are so different from each other!"

"I'm surprised he hasn't been killed yet! His brother is just a beast in human skin after all!"

Rin gives a silent snarl. 'Hurt...Yukio? They actually think I would hurt my own brother!'

Rin glances at the book in his hands, then places it on the shelf in front of him. It is hard not to growl at the quiet chatter that is behind him, though reduced since this is the library. Not that many students spent their lunch period here. The librarian scowled at him when he first showed up, but after a moment had put him to work; his job being to find and reorganize all the messed up and misplaced books. Considering what happened yesterday, the librarian probably was the major person at fault under the influence of Memory. Other students that spend their time – like the ones gossiping behind him – in the library had also probably contributed to the mess.

Rin pauses at the next book he picks out of the cart and frowns. 'Where does this one go...?'
Checking the book over, he wanders away from the current section he is in – the fiction section, sci-fi in precise – and looks through the other shelves until he finds the non-fiction section for science. Looking up and down the aisle, Rin finally stops when he finds the other books like this one.
Counting through the books, he finally locates the right spot and slides the book in place. Pausing for a moment he goes to walk back to the cart, but stops when he feels a distinctive zing that comes at the presence of a Card. Slowly turning around, he stares at the nearby door. He approaches it and looks it up and down, noting the sign that states that it contains books that can only be removed by a teacher's authority. Reaching for the doorknob, he is halted by a hand on his shoulder.

“Yo, Okumura.” Rin turns his head to see a group of four older boys, probably in third year. None of them look like the kind most would mess with, their entire attire and expressions spelling out that they are delinquents.

Sighing, the younger boy turns to face them. Staring up at him, he doesn't make a sound, until the leader of the group twitched in anger at that. “What's the matter, Okumura? Not gonna respond?”

When Rin refuses to fall for his obvious provoking, the guy pushes at him, sending him back into the door behind him. Rin winces as the doorknob digs into a deep bruise he still has from yesterday. The older student chuckles at that. “Man, come on Okumura. Thought you are supposed to be some tough guy. What, you can only hurt defenceless nurses and the like?”

'She was hardly defenceless...' Rin mentally snarks, before glaring up at the elder boys. “Not in the mood for your stupid shit.” The blue eyed boy snaps at the delinquents. “Just leave me alone, already in enough trouble.”

He pushes past the stunned delinquents, only to be halted by a hand grabbing his wrist. “Oi, the fuck that mean, Okumura?”

Rin freezes, then slowly turns his head to look at the guy. He visibly swallows under Rin's angry look. ‘Fuck off before you start something you will regret.”

The elder student flat out bristles at that. “Why you--”

“What's going on here!?” All the student's gazes snap to the librarian, who is scowling at them. The delinquent leader releases Rin's wrist as she approaches. Hard eyes look at the group, then down at Rin in particular. “Okumura-kun what are you doing now?”

“I...” Rin looks away, knowing he can't say anything in his defence.

The librarian purses her lips. “Get back to work.” She orders, then fixes her gaze at the older students. “As for you guys....get out of the library. Don't try to fool me; you guys are hardly innocent yourselves.”

“Yamaguchi-sensei!” The leader mimics being hurt. “You wound me. Was just trying to stop Okumura from causing trouble, that's all.”

“Or are you trying to cause trouble yourself?” The librarian narrows her eyes. “I believe I told you before that neither you nor your ‘underlings’ are allowed here after that last time.”

The leader snarls at that. “Listen you old hag...”

Rin begins to slide away as it devolves into a verbal fight, only to freeze as the he feels the Card build up energy. Turning to the door, he can practically see the wave of energy billow out from it.

As it hits the group there, Rin winces as the energy thrummed through his body. Slowly opening his eyes, he stares. The argument is still going, but it is like a TV on mute, angry gestures and the like but no sound to go with them. Rin stares with wide blue eyes at the suddenly silent scene in front of him, then looks over at the door.
The Card pulses, hidden behind the door. The power it gives off is like a message, a command.

One that says: **Be quiet.**

---

Yukio pauses as he is about to exit the main building of the school, turning his head to look behind him. Rin is already out of sight, having headed to the library for his detention. Yukio hesitates for a moment, being jolted slightly by a passing student, then turns back inside.

No one told him he can’t help clean up the library, after all.

However, he halts and sighs at the sight that greets him not too far from where the library is.

‘Okay. The rumours label Nii-san as a great troublemaker and an incredibly violent and dangerous person. And these guys’ reaction is to...provoke him.’ Yukio gives an exasperated look at the group of older, delinquent students taunting his brother. His brother is clenching his fists, obviously not wanting to cause more trouble judging by his angry but also frustrated look. *Is there a help line or something that will help them locate their missing brains?*

Yukio takes a moment to consider what he can do, then decides to just approach them, counting on Rin wanting to get out of there once he is around. “Nii-san!”

They all turn to see him, the delinquents looking surprised by the fact he just walks right past them like they are nothing. Rin also gives him an odd look. “What are you doing here?”

Yukio gives a small smile. “Thought I would help the library with the reorganization.”

“...I don't think you're supposed to help me with my detention...” Rin notes, as they walk past the still staring bullies and into the library.

“Did I say I was going to help my Nii-san?” Yukio adjusts his glasses, which glint as they reflect the ceiling’s lights briefly. “No, I believe I said I am going to help the library.”

Rin stares at him, stunned, then starts laughing, bending over from the force of his laughter. “Ahahaaha...man Yukio...tricky thinking much.” Still grinning, he leads Yukio towards one of the many carts of books. “You can grab whichever one you like; it won't make a difference.”

Yukio smiles, happy to finally see Rin looking actually happy today. He hates when people got on his brother's case for no good reason and get him depressed as a result.

On Rin's end, though he is cheered by Yukio's presence, his attention is also drawn briefly to the door in the back; where the presence of a Sakura Card rests. *I should deal with that quickly. Rather not have it become too much trouble, like Memory was.*

---

That night, Rin finds himself once again sneaking into the school, though this time he uses Fly to get over the gate. The Card he is after is Silent according to Kero; it is safe to do so, unlike with Shadow.

Landing softly on the ground in front of one of the school's doors, he dispels Fly from his wand. Rin carefully opens the door, follows by just as carefully entering and running down the hallways towards the doors of the library. He then curses upon finding that door is locked.

“Okay, so the school doesn’t lock the outside doors...but the library doors are locked?” Kero, floating beside Rin, has to wonder at that.
Looking around, using the flashlight he brought with him, Rin grins when he sees the small window above the door, slightly cracked open probably for better air flow. “Hey, Kero...”

The next moment finds Kero grumbling as he squirms his way through the slightly open window. “Argh...pain, pain, pain...”

“Maybe you shouldn't have had that extra serving of yakisoba...and that pan of cookies...” Rin notes, a scowl crossing his face as he is reminded of the entire pan of cookies he painstakingly made for everyone having been devoured almost straight out of the oven by his over enthusiastic and garbage disposal like friend. Luckily he made extra batter, but still...

“Ah said Ah was sorry!” Kero whines, before finally popping through the window. Heaving a sigh of relief, he then floats down to the door and unlocks it. Rin carefully opens the door, and smiles at Kero when he flies up to his shoulder.

“I know, and you mean it too. Seriously Kero, I made plenty of cookies. You were going to get some anyways.”

Kero gives an awkward laugh. “Ah'll keep that in mind...just yer cookin' and bakin' are so good...”

“Well, that was part of me apologizing for yesterday...” Rin admits. “Making good food and stuffing them with sweets certainly put everyone in a better mood.”

“That is because you cookin' showed that you are in a better mood.' Kero notes. They had been more worried for you, than upset with you after all.'

Stepping into the library, Rin keeps all his senses open. “Silent isn't a really troublesome Card, is it?”

Kero shakes his head. “Nope. Just doesn't like loud stuff. Probably why it's in a library.”

“Yeah...but why my school's library?” Rin grumbles.

Kero considers this for a moment. “Hmmm...it must be because of the leyline.”

“Oh?” Rin halts by the study section and stares at Kero.

Kero nods slowly and crosses his arms, looking thoughtful. “They are masterless right now, so it makes sense that they would be drawn to places of power. Not to mention, aside from the leyline, you go here often enough to leave a mark. As a mage, you leave traces of yer aura behind you. Especially since you are still in trainin'. So this place...eh.” He gives a small chuckle. “It's tasty Ah guess you can call it.”

Rin has to admit that sounds right. First Shadow, then Memory...and now Silent. Three times is something or another that means it isn't a coincidence. 'And there are no coincidences anyways...' Rin thinks, recalling what Kero had told him before.

Rin opens his mouth to ask if there is anything else he needs to know about Silent, when the sound of strange footsteps catches his attention. Rin immediately looks around for a good place to hide and ducks into an alcove that has a bunch of textbooks on shelves hiding it, shutting his flashlight off for a good measure.

The sound of rather distinctive voices makes Rin scowl. 'What are those punks doing here?’

“Oi, Kaido. You sure about this?” One of the punks ask the leader.
“What, you chickening out?” Kaido sneers at the one who spoke, making him flinch. “We ain't gonna get in trouble. After all, it's easy enough to frame Okumura for this.”

“Man...but what if he figures it out...” Another punk wonders. “I heard from a sempai that he totalled his gang when he was still in grade school...they still haven't recovered from that.”

“Oh...this is bad...” Kero whispers to Rin, floating down from where he was peering over the bookshelves to hover in front of Rin's face. “Not only are they plannin' on gettin' you into trouble and trashin' the library, we can't get to the Card while they are here.”

“Yeah...” Rin looks down, his eyes having adjusted to the near darkness – the only light from the flashlights of the nearby punks – and considers what he can do. The first thing he see is his own flashlight. The second is Kero's face, which as usual looks a bit creepy when he is that close.

A slow grin crosses his face at that. “I think I have an idea.”

Kaido chuckles as he grabs a book from the top shelf, finding himself perhaps a bit too happy to be doing this. After all that brat Okumura needs to be taught a lesson after all. For some big fighter he seems to be more talk than anything else and just maybe this can get his smug butt expelled from school. He tosses the book over his shoulder, smirking at that thought.

The delinquent reaches up to take another book, only to have something large hit his head. Kaido yelps and holds his head with his free hand, whirling around and shining his flashlight on the thing that hit him. It is the very book he just tossed to the ground...

“What the...Alright who's the smart ass!??” Kaido steps out from the aisle of books to yell at the guys who are with him. One of them has to be the jerk who threw it, after all they are the only ones in the library...right?

“Kaido what the hell are you talking about?” Hayashi asks, coming around the corner. He flashes his flashlight on Kaido who is still rubbing his head.

“Kaido what the hell are you talking about?” Hayashi asks, coming around the corner. He flashes his flashlight on Kaido who is still rubbing his head.

“Who's the smart ass who threw the book at my head?” Kaido demands.

The boys look at each other, a worried expression making its home on each of their faces.

“Dude, no one is near you. Stop faking that shit it's freaky.” Hayashi says, gulping a little. “I mean seriously weird shit has been happening at this school. Don't joke like that!”

“I ain't joking!” Kaido snaps at the two. “A book really did hit me in the back of the head! And if it isn't any of you guys...”

A nasty low growl catches the group of boys' attention. Each one gulps and moves closer together, trying to figure out where the noise is coming from. Every time they shine their flashlights in the spot they thought it is coming from it moves and seems to be getting closer. It is such a freaky growl too, like a mix between some sort of dog and a...

“It's so freaky!” Hayashi squeaks out. “It-it-it s-sounds like a demon!”

“Sh-shut up Hayashi! It's j-just someone messing with us!” Kaido takes a brave step forward.
“C’mon out you c-coward! Show yourself!”

The growling stops. Out of nowhere a book hits Kaido again while another floats by. Books from all over the place start to float by them, with no one holding them. The other boys scream as Kaido takes a frightened step back.

“Wh-what the fuck is going on!?” The teenaged punk demands.

“Oh man I told you we shouldn't have done this!!” Hayashi cries out, ducking as another few books are tossed their way, seemingly from everywhere. “I told you this school is haunted!”

“It-it's not haunted!” Kaido yells. “Stop freaking out like a baby and think! This has to be someone screwing around with us!”

The boy takes a step forward once again. “Come on out you coward!”

A light shines in the group of boys’ eyes, blinding them for a moment. Then it moves down, illuminating a large shadow. All the boys gasp in fright at the sight now before them. It is large and almost demonic looking with what looks like skeletal wings and horns on its head. The growl returns but slowly turns into a laugh; a crazy type laugh. Kaido stumbles back into his friends, shaking in fright and trying not to scream. The laugh stops suddenly as the Shadow seems to move to look right at them.

“GET OUT!” It sounds like it comes straight from hell, with a strange double echo to it.

The boys scream and stumble over each other, trying to get out of the library as fast as possible. They make it out in one piece, slamming the door in their wake and thus missing the delighted laughter that follows the sharp yell as they are too focused on getting out of there.

Rin is nearly doubled over in his hilarity, clutching a nearby bookshelf for support. Around him, the books already floating slowly return to their proper spots, illuminated by Kero's magic to Rin's sight as he levitates them back into place. Kero flies over to him, also chuckling and pausing briefly to focus on the books on the ground and float them also back into place.

Rin finally gets his laughter under control and picks up the first book he personally tossed, as it rests right at his feet. It is the work of a moment to slot it back into place. There is a moment of silence, then Rin and Kero's gazes meet...

...which sets off another laughing fit.

“Hehe...aha...did you see their faces...?” Rin snorts. “And all I did is growl, throw some books, and shine the flashlight on you Kero!”

“Aahahahaha! And all Ah did is move some books around and laugh at them....” Kero snickered. “And we both...”

They look at each other and in unison repeated the line that sent the punks flying away in sheer terror.

“Get out!”

They have to laugh even more at that. “Seriously.” Rin wipes his face of the tears the laughter produced. “We barely used any magic between the two of us and they...snk...I doubt they will be trying that again.”
“Definitely.” Kero agrees. They pause and turn as they both feel the soft pulse from where Silent is hidden. “That racket must have woken it up.” Kero notes quietly.

Rin nods and, gripping his wand tightly, walks carefully over to the door. He pulls out a key he found behind the librarian’s desk during the “scare fest”, and carefully uses it to unlock the door. He then takes a breath and quickly opens the door.

It is a matter of moments to flick the light switch on, as Rin knows he is gonna need it. The sight it reveals to him confirms it. For a relatively small room, it is packed full of bookshelves aside from the window opposite of the door. And the bookshelves are also packed with books, all piled somewhat haphazardly on the shelf at points.

Rin groans when he realizes that he is going to have to search by hand, the room too full of the Card’s diffused presence that there is no way of pinpointing the exact book that it is hidden in any other way. Sighing, Rin rolls his sleeves up and steps into the room, Kero floating close by his head.

“So...which side do you want to take?” Rin asks.

Kero considers it. “Ah think Ah'll...”

He is cut off by a sudden pulse of magic. Light flares, causing them to be temporarily blinded. When Rin opens his eyes, he is shocked.

He is standing right outside the window of that small room, as proved by the view of its insides he sees looking through the glass. Rin stares for a moment, then turns to Kero. “Kero. What was that?”

Kero has his head in his paws. “Uh...sorry about that...fergot it can do that...”

“Do what, exactly?” Rin’s eye twitches.

“Silent can move away anythin’ that is makin' noise, though with a limit. The Card must have used the window to bridge the gap between the inside and outside of the buildin'...” Kero tells him, drooping and sighing.

“Seriously?” Rin stares at the room where the Silent is hidden. “You're saying that not only do we have to find where the blasted Card is hidden, we have to be very quiet while doing so as well?”

“...pretty much.”

“Fucking hell!” Rin declares, before marching for the nearest door inside. “Come on Kero, let's get this over with. If I stay out too late, Yukio is definitely gonna notice I'm not around.”

Take 1:

Rin rushes back to the room in the back of the library, though is careful to be quiet about it. As he approaches the door his foot catches on something and he falls with a hard crash into the room.

“OW, SHIT!” Rin groans, lifting himself up. Then he realizes what he had done and groans, along with Kero. The next thing Rin knows, he is lying outside on the grass. Cursing, Rin stands up and brushes himself off.

“Ah man...” He looks into the room and sweats. 'Did I really just trip on the carpet?’ Rin sighs. 'Wonderful...'

“Oh you got to me kidding me...” He then says, noticing the staff had been left behind in the room
due to having left his grasp during the fall.

“Come on Rin, let's get back.” Kero nudges Rin's hand. “Not goin' to find it in time if we wait too long...”

“Right, right...” Rin follows Kero back to the library, this time planning on being more careful...

Take 2:

Rin peaks into the room where the Silent hid and spots his wand is on the ground right in the middle of the room. He glances up at Kero, who nods his head in quiet agreement.

Kero floats in first, his eyes scanning the room before the boy quietly steps in behind the “stuffed animal”. He is careful this time not to trip on the rug and makes it to his wand. He scoops it up happily, silently cheering to himself and Kero until his wand hits the nearby bookshelf in his silent cheering.

The loud thunk rings throughout the room and in another flash of bright light Rin is outside with Kero once more.

“Son of a bitch!”

Take 3:

Floating carefully through the shelving, Kero carefully lifts a book magically one at a time, checking to see if Silent is attached to it. He isn't having much luck in that regard, but Rin doesn't seem to be either. Both of them are being extra quiet, not wanting to disturb the Card.

Unfortunately for them both, Kero's section is rather dusty.

“AH...choo!” Kero sneezes, then covers his mouth with his paws. Rin only has a moment to whirl around and *shh* him before Silent's magic kicks in and they are outside once again.

Kero rubs his nose and turns to look at Rin. He pales and sweats at the sight of Rin's very angry expression. “Did you have to sneeze!?” He snarls, grabbing Kero's face and pulling at it. Kero flails about and cries out at that, though honestly it's only a sting of pain. “You damn stuffed animal! You saw the dust you idiot!!!”

Take 4:

Rin quietly moves around the room, picking up books then placing them back when he doesn't find Silent. Kero is floating the books around once more, this time being careful about the dust. The boy crouches down closer to the floor upon glimpsing a few older books hidden underneath a bookshelf. He quietly takes hold of one and pulls it out, causing dust to kick up. Rin does his best not to breathe it in, but it is too late.

He covers his mouth and pinches his nose trying to ignore that tickling, itching feeling inside his nose as his body screams for him to sneeze.

Kero sees the boy shaking in a crouched position and floats over to see what is the matter. A tear leaks out of Rin's eye as his face turns a slight red signalling to Kero he is trying not to sneeze. The magical creature nervously watches him, praying it will pass.

Rin lets out a breath when he feels his nose finally calm down. He lets go of his nose and uncovers his mouth and leans his head against the bookshelf, thanking god he hadn't sneezed...until he does.
“AH-CHOO!” It is loud, obnoxious, and results in Silent flinging them outside once again.

Kero growls and glares at Rin, the small lion would have even flown right in the Cardcaptor's face if Rin hadn't been having a sneezing fit. Then he smirks, realizing something.

“And you complained about me sneezin’...” Kero notes, which obviously annoys Rin.

“Sh-shut up!” Rin whines, before erupting into another series of sneezes. 'Blasted dust...'

Take 5:

Things are actually going well this time. Rin and Kero have both divided up the room between each other. Both are focused on looking through the books quietly and doing a good job of it.

Then Kero notices Rin is sort of slamming the books down onto the shelf. The creature stops with one book floating in the air and glares at Rin from across the room. He presses his paw to his lips and hissed a soft shh at the boy.

Rin glares back at Kero and puts the newest book down just as hard as he has been doing; as if to say he is doing just fine. Kero does his best not to growl but the kid is being a jerk with each slam of a book. The creature opens his mouth to whisper a warning to Rin, which causes him to lose focus on the floating book. Both watch the book fall to the floor in slow-mo and the thump it causes is ten times louder than the “slamming” Rin had been doing. The bright flash of light blinds them and both are back outside.

“What the hell Kero!? We were doing fine until you decided to mess up!” Rin snaps.

“Me?! You were the one slammin' the books down too hard!” Kero argues back.

“Yeah but it isn't my fault we got kicked out, is it?!” Rin grabs Kero and proceeds to stretch his face out despite the little guy's complaints.

Take 6:

Looking through the shelves, Rin pauses and wonders if he is missing anything. Stepping back a bit and standing on his toes, he notices a stack of books on top of the bookshelf in front of him. Eyeing the shelf carefully, Rin carefully uses the lower shelves as a step stool, lifting himself up until he can check the books. Grabbing the first book, Rin hears a small, but ominous creak. Freezing, Rin waits for something to give.

After a long moment, nothing does and he gives a quiet sigh of relief, checking the book he has. Then his foot slips.

“Woah!” Rin falls down off the bookshelf, attracting Kero's attention. But that apparently isn't disastrous enough as the books on the shelf follow after him, burying him in them. “OH SHIT!”

Rin then finds himself not covered in heavy books, but instead outside on the grass. Again.

“YOU'RE STARTING TO PISS ME OFF YOU FUCKING CARD!” Rin screams at the heavens, looking so pissed off Kero avoids him with a nervous look on his face.

Take 12:

As Rin reaches the back of the room, a zing tingles up from his hand as he brushes across a random book's spine. Pulling the book out quickly, he grins. Pictured on the cover – which, like the rest of
the books, is supposed to be blank – is the image of a woman. Tall and slender, her eyes are closed and she is wearing a long blue-black dress and wrapped in a dark cape with a high collar that hides the lower part of her face. Her hair is long, straight and blue, and a blue jewel with bat wings is on her forehead.

“Yesss....Kero I found it!” Rin then realizes what he just did and can only watch in horror as the woman's eyes open – showing dark blue eyes – and raises her hand to her lips in the universal “shh!” sign.

“Awww...man...” Is all Rin manages to get out before he and Kero are now back outside.

“Well...at least we know where Silent is now.” Rin glances through the window to the book that is now on the floor. “Now to seal it.”

Take 13:

Rin enters the room soft footed, carefully heading to the book that is on the ground. Staring down at it, Rin lifts his staff and takes a deep breath to calm his nerves. Kero watches carefully, also feeling the tension. One little mistake and the Silent will toss them outside. Again.

“Silent, I command...” The Card spirit's eyes snaps open and Rin freezes. Kero and Rin can only groan as the Card put its finger to its lips, causing the room to disappear in a flash. The two magic users find themselves outside once again, to their frustration.

Rin kicks the nearby wall. “Dammit! Okay, I'll be even quieter about it next time!”

Take 14:

The two enter the room just as quietly as before and makes it to the book just like last time. Kero floats close to the Cardcaptor, peaking over his shoulder. Rin takes a deep breath, and lets it out slowly and quietly as he can, just like last time. Kero floats up higher above Rin's head to make sure he can keep an eye on the book.

“Silent, I command you...” Rin whispers softly. He raises his wand quickly above his head, bumping Kero in the head by accident.

“Ye-ouch!” Kero cries out, rubbing his forehead. “...Uh-oh...”

The flash of bright light comes back and once again they are outside. Rin holds his wand still above his head, gripping it with a tight fist. Kero nervously floats around to talk to Rin, laughing nervously.

“Sorry Rin Ah didn't...Gah!” Kero dodges the swing from Rin's wand. He then sweats as he sees the truly, and utterly, pissed off look on Rin's face. “Now, now...oh shit...aaaahhhhh!”

The next few moments are filled with Rin chasing Kero around the yard yelling obscenities at the small creature while trying to hit him with his wand.

Take 25:

Rin immediately erupts into swears when the moving ends, glaring viciously at the book on the ground of the room, easily visible from the window. Kero floats beside him, sweating heavily. ‘Where does a twelve-year-old pick up such language?’ He has to wonder.

“...COW SHIT EATING DOG-FUCKER!” Rin finishes, huffing in his rage. “Argh! I can't even seal the damn thing like this! Every time I start the incantation the cursed Card moves us.” He slides
down and sits with his back to the window. The light from the room behind him hits his back and throws out his shadow. “Damn. How am I gonna get this Card sealed tonight? It's already heading towards the morning hours…”

Kero sits on his shoulder. “Calm down Rin. Ah’m sure you'll figure somethin' out.”

Rin slowly nods. *There has to be a way to catch it. Sakura did it right? So there has to be a way...’ Rin's thoughts trail off as he notices something. His shadow, thanks to the light inside the building, is much bigger than he is.

“Shadows...” Rin furrows his brow, thinking. “They are bigger than the object they belong to...and they touch but can't be touched!” He sits straight up at that, causing Kero to fall off in shock. “That's it!”

He pulls out the Card he needs “Extend my reach! Shadow, release!”

The Card bursts forth and attaches itself to Rin's shadow. Under Rin's command, it slinks into the room and “stands” beside the book. Silent, attached to said book's cover, opens its eyes and glances at it. Holding his staff aloof, Rin smirks at the sight of his shadow doing the same.

“Silent, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Silent erupts into light and streams out of the window, forming into a Card in front of Rin. Catching it with a wide grin, Rin jumps up and down in triumphant glee. “Yes!”

He then runs back to the library one last time. He needs to clean up before heading home, after all. Best to not leave any trace of him having been here this night. No need to tempt fate – or the teachers – in that regard.

Yukio glances worriedly at his brother. He is tired again today; really, really tired as it is taking the noiret everything he has to not just fall asleep in class. And if that isn't bad enough, the students are still talking about Rin behind his back.

Yukio stops in his note taking, feeling a strange itch in the back of his mind. He manages to wrench his mind back to class, but the feeling grows nonetheless. As the current teacher leaves – shooting a vile look at his brother before he goes – the itch turns into a spiky ball. And when Tsukishiro enters the classroom, and frowns upon seeing none of the other students notice her, too busy gossiping about Rin to pay attention, said ball gets bigger.

With the snap of his pencil, Okumura Yukio gets mad.

“SHUT THE HELL UP!”

Rin nearly falls out of his seat as Yukio suddenly stands up and yells. Staring at his brother in horror, Rin gives a quiet “oh shit” at the sight of his truly pissed off brother. It is rare, but once in a while his little brother totally loses it. The only relief Rin has is that it isn't directed towards him.

No, it is directed towards all the other students in the class.

“SHUT UP! I'm fucking tired with all this stupid ass gossip. My brother is not a monster! You don't even know what happened that day anyways! Grow up already! It doesn't really matter does it!? My brother isn't gonna be expelled, he is being punished for what they can actually blame him for, and he isn't gonna snap and kill all of you!” Yukio is ranting at the top of his lungs, scaring all the other students shitless. They hadn't known that Yukio actually has a temper. Truth is, he is just better at
controlling and hiding it than most. “But if you don't shut up right now I...”

Yukio is halted by the feeling of Rin grabbing his nearby arm. Rin smiles up at his brother. “It's alright Yukio. Really. It's okay.” He carefully leads Yukio back into his chair, who stares at Rin in shock.

“Ni...Nii-san...”

“Thanks though.” Rin tells him, still smiling. “For standing up for me.”

“I believe Yukio-kun has a point.” All the students are suddenly alerted to the fact Tsukishiro is here and has been for awhile. She gives a rather cold smile as she looks over the class. “Gossip such as this doesn't serve any purpose and is distracting you from your studies. What happened that day is long past and I believe it will remain a mystery. Speculation won't reveal the truth.”

Her smile then returns to her normal, gentle one. “Now, as it is history now, I would like you all to get out your history books and focus on the lesson...”

Rin pulls out his history book and sets it up. He pauses for a moment to glance at Yukio and chuckles at the fact his face is tomato red. Yukio is still rather shy at heart so the fact he'd had a public blow up has finally caught up to him and leaves him stewing in his embarrassment.

Rin reaches between the small gap between their desks and squeezes Yukio's hand. Yukio's head shoots up and he stares at his brother. He slowly returns his brother's smile, before turning back to his classwork, briefly returning the squeeze before the hands separate.

'Thanks, Yukio.'

'No need, Nii-san.'

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and, again, comment please! In fact, if you want to read another good fic, go check out my BFF's fic "Chance". Mostly gen, with lots of subtext for Rin/Izumo. Seriously, it's good and she deserves wonderful comments too!

Also, question for you guys: should I add Tsukishiro Sekki to the character list?
Wow! All those comments I get are certainly wonderful things. Seriously, if they were cookies I would be gaining weight...again.

Thank you to all the commentors, here's the next chapter as promised!

I should note this is the DAMN CHAPTER to me. I don't hate it, but it's the major reason this entire fic took so long to write up. I got stuck on this for SO DAMN LONG. So the writing style might seem different midway through. And next chapter might be weird I dunno. I'm a terrible person for actually picking up things that way for my own writing.

Also, yet another new Card makes its debut here, tell me what you think! Which reminds me, on here (http://writerscornergblp.tumblr.com/) there will now be posting of bonus material in regards to ICD. Not sure exactly what to do, so ideas are welcome!

Yukio quietly opens the door to the bedroom he shares with his brother. He pokes his head around the corner to make sure Rin is asleep before stepping in and shutting the door behind him. Sighing in relief, grateful that his brother is a heavy sleeper, he works on taking off his clothes and changing into his sleepwear.

He freezes for a bit when he hears Rin move and mumble something, then has to smile when he turns and sees that most of his brother's blankets were kicked off due to his movements and his sleep shirt is riding up, as well as some drool tricking out of his mouth. The picture of uncaring sleep. He has to stare at the strange stuffed winged lion cub that Rin got attached to recently, as it is in the bed with Rin; to be precise on the pillow.

'I didn't know it was anything but stiff...' He thinks, eyeing the strange position it is in, like it is sleeping too. He shrugs it aside though. That his brother has a stuffed animal isn't really a problem, though it doesn't help with Rin coming across as rather childish.

'Not that I want him to really change in that regard.' Yukio silently admits, sitting down on his bed and staring across at his elder brother. The idea of Rin losing his childish innocence, something Yukio was forced to give up early on thanks to the Mashō he was born with, is something that hurts.

Yukio entered the exorcist school at an early age for various reasons. The first is because of his Mashō of course. The second is because Fujimoto Shirō thought that teaching Yukio how to defend himself from demons is the best solution to Yukio's problems, gained mostly because of the first reason. The third though, is because Yukio wants to be able to protect Rin. His brother always protected him and Yukio always watched in awe as Rin tore apart the obstacles and bullies that got in his little brother's way.

Rin always supports Yukio, always so happy to cheer him on in his goal to become a doctor. Rin is never jealous of his younger brother, even though Yukio is the one who does well in school and is much smarter than Rin. Because Rin always supports Yukio, Yukio wants to support Rin. Protecting
him from demons and the truth of their heritage is what he was told he can do by their foster father. Yukio is good at it too: a child prodigy in regards to exorcism. Even though he has, of course, been slow and careful about it due to his age. Which is the reason he had been stuck as an exwire until this year. Shirō didn't want Yukio to be in too much danger, and did his best to minimize it; though of course he can't protect Yukio from everything. But he had done enough to help Yukio. Now the young exorcist is ready to fully step into battle and not just act as support or wait until afterwards to patch people up.

However...

Yukio looks at his brother, feeling an ache in his chest. The consequence of his choices is that of secrets and a growing gap between the twins. Yukio can feel the distance growing and he knows Rin feels it too; and that he dismisses it as something that just happens as they – as brothers, twins – grow up. But Yukio is also painfully aware of why they have to keep all of this a secret from Rin; the less he knows, the less danger he is in. As long as the seal is on Kurikara, and Rin's heritage is kept back, Rin doesn't have to be the Son of Satan or a threat to the True Cross Order.

Yukio grits his teeth. He wants to shake all the people who hear the rumours of the existence of the Son of Satan and immediately assume he is completely evil if he truly exists.

“What part of my brother is evil!” He wants to demand of them. Because his elder brother...he is kind, strong, a good cook (and recently baker), always tries to do that right thing, and the thought of hurting an innocent is such a foreign thing to him that he is horrified to find others doing the same. He might have a temper worthy of a demon's son, but that temper comes out from seeing others hurting other, weaker people and animals. Rin is a sucker for cute things – when little he kept bringing in hurt strays as “pets” to care for – and though he isn't good at book work, his heart is the biggest thing he has.

Nothing about Rin is evil, unlike the dark thoughts that sometimes cross Yukio's mind no matter how hard he tries to keep them at bay.

Jealous thoughts, on how his brother gets to be normal. How Rin might very well be the favourite of their foster father – they are very much alike after all, unlike Yukio who is so different – and how brave he is compared to Yukio. How much stronger he is, both physically and otherwise. Rin does things so easily: maybe he messes up, but he doesn't take it badly for long. Not like Yukio, who has to struggle to overcome his failings all the time. Rin just dances through life, compared to the careful, methodical steps of his little brother.

Yukio finds that he hates that part of his brother, as much as he loves it.

In the end though, Yukio...Yukio will protect his brother. Will be there for his brother, as long as he can; as much as he can. He doesn't want to abandon his brother. Even if his brother becomes a demon...

...Yukio wants to be the one person who will stand beside him, even if the whole world turns against him. Just because Rin is his brother.

But most of all, Yukio thinks as he removes his glasses and finally pulls the bedsheets over his body, he wants Rin to keep the normal, idyllic life he gained thanks to the hard work of Shirō, the other priests, and Yukio. Even if the price is of a wall built of secrets that keeps on growing taller and stronger as the years past. Secrets that fill up the entirety of the only home they have.

After all...the people closest to you keep the most secrets.
Chapter 6: If I Was As Strong As A Mountain...

Once again in the library, Rin's only comfort comes from the fact he only has today and tomorrow left. His punishment will be over then; not to mention the library will be finally back in proper condition. Even with the few times Yukio was able to help – his special cram school got in the way a lot – there's still is a lot of work for the young mage.

Placing a book on a shelf, Rin rolls his eyes and can't help but sigh at the loud sounds behind him. The racket behind him makes him turn to see Kaido and his group clustered around another student, one who is in Rin's grade, though not one of his classmates. The rather fragile looking student clutches his chosen books to his chest and his eyes dart around, as if he is seeking escape. The librarian had to step out for some reason or another, allowing Kaido and co to enjoy their favourite pastime: picking on those weaker than them.

If Rin was like his brother Yukio, he would have weighted the pros and cons before acting. But Rin isn't anything like Yukio, so he just abandons his punishment in favour of dealing with the bullies. However, he is smart enough to not just jump in and punch Kaido – no matter how much he asks for it – and so merely just taps his shoulder and stares up at the taller student when he turns to look at him.

Kaido sneers when he sees Rin, but Rin can see the hidden fear in his gaze. Kaido might hate Rin and want to take him down a peg, but like the rest of his group – who are a little more obvious in their fear, considering the fact they have made a point of placing themselves behind Kaido – he heard all the stories. Which Rin would, if they give him a good reason to, be happy to show are not all made up. In fact, they are generally based on fact.

'Exaggerated is the word.' That crosses Rin's mind as he opens his mouth, “Oi, library is for quiet shit, not stupid shit. So fuck off and go find someplace else to do your stupid shit, Kaido.” Rin glares at him.

Kaido sneers. “And what will you do if I don't want to find another place?”

“There are many possibilities,” Rin tells him, internally crowing at getting the word right, “like you having to limp out or be carried out.” Then a wicked grin crosses Rin's face. “Or maybe that ghost you met here will take care of you.”

Kaido goes white then red, as he is reminded of that incident not too long ago. The one that was spread around due to some of his “underlings” having loose lips. Needless to say, his “reputation” took a good beating, which is why he is reduced to going after people like the guy they were picking on recently.

That just pisses Rin off though; the other first year guy is reminding Rin too much of what Yukio was like when younger and if Kaido doesn't fuck off sooner rather than later, Rin is gonna end up in a brawl. Fuck the fact it will get him in trouble again.

Lucky for everyone, the librarian comes in at that point and starts kicking up a fuss, making Kaido and his crew slink away with their tails between their legs.

Rin turns to the shy kid once they are gone. With his messy hair, big glasses, and short stature, the guy definitely screams “nerd” and “coward” to the world. Rin pauses and wonders what to do. The guy seems to be stuck in place, not going to do anything or even say anything.

Rin takes a soft deep breath, then says, “Y-you okay?”
The kid jumps, and adjusts his glasses, shocked out of his stunned state. “Ah...um...yes...I’m...o-okay...” He looks horrified to be addressed by Rin, and is even beet red in embarrassment.

Rin ignores it. “You sure?” Rin then adds, realizing he forgot something, “What’s your name?”

The guy gives a wide eyed look at Rin, obviously surprised at the question. “It...it’s...i-t’s Chi-Chika-Chikafuji Ma...Mana...Manabu.” He manages to stutter out.

‘Okay, he's worse than Yukio ever was.’ Rin notes, then realizes the conversation is stalling. “Uh...” He looks down at the books in Manabu’s arms and frowns as he puzzles out what they say. One good thing about all the time he has spent in the library is that his problem with difficult kanji has greatly reduced.

“History of Religion.” He raises an eyebrow at the first book. “And...” He blinks at the other two books. “Is that book about...European Witchcraft? Even one on...okay, what’s Quantum Physics? I don’t think that is in any way like the others.”

Another book is on the table nearby and Rin picks it up, ignoring the squeak that Manabu gives in protest. “A book on...snakes...?”

Rin turns to Manabu, handing the snake book over to him at the same time with a smile. “Wow. You read a lot don’t you?”

Manabu ducks his head, blushing fiercely and nearly wrenching the snake book out of Rin’s hands before clutching it to his chest with the other books like a shield. “I...I just like...kn-knowing...stuff... and...b-books.”

Rin isn’t really surprised by the various books that all bear the marking of belonging to the school's library. All the time he spent in the library revealed to him just how many books of various kinds are in this place. Apparently someone makes a very large donation each year in regards to this kind of thing, along with anything that is cultural or pop cultural like. To all the schools of Tōkyō at that. Rin has to wonder why and what kind of person does that. They have to be super rich though to do this with all the schools and every year.

“That's cool.” Manabu's head shoots up, the guy looking flabbergasted at the rather casual way Rin said that.

Rin grins. “That means you're like my brother. Though he tends to stick to stuff that are currently being covered in class or have to do with doctor stuff. He wants to be a doctor.” Rin adds, rather proudly.

“I...j-just like knowing th-things. Don't...don't re-really have a go-goal other than th-that...” Manabu looks rather ashamed about that.

Rin brushes it aside. “So? Yeesh, still in Junior High after all. Got time to make up your mind.”

There is a pause after that, then Rin sighs. “I better get back to work...but if you need anything you can ask me. Been spending so much time here I know where most of the books are kept. Oh, right.” He holds out a hand, Manabu practically jumping back at that. “Okumura Rin.”

“I...I kn-know you...” He eyes Rin's hand like most would eye a snake, checking to see if it is venomous, and slowly reaches out with his own.

“You've heard of me.” Rin corrects, grabbing Manabu's hand in a quick shake. “Now you've met me, so you can actually know me.”
Manabu looks rather stunned, but a slow smile crosses his face. “Uh...th-that makes...se-sense.”

Rin grins back at him, then turns to head back to work. Manabu stares after him for a long moment, visibly stunned by Rin's actions and attitude.

'Wow...he's so confident...and strong...I wonder...wonder how he can be like that.' His gaze drops and a melancholic look crosses his face. 'It's impossible for me to be like him, isn't it?'

“So, what made you try mixing ginger into those chocolate cookies?” Yukio walks next to his brother as they head down the hall to the school's courtyard, both carrying a bento. Bento made by Rin in fact.

It is lunch time and for the first time in days Rin doesn't have to be at the library. He hasn't eaten lunch with his brother in so long, and he is honestly looking forwards to it. Lunch time is one of the few times he gets to be with Yukio on a regular schedule after all. The younger twin is also happy about this and excited for the new cookies Rin baked the other day, as Rin told him he put some in each of their bento.

“Dunno, thought it'd be an interesting taste and...stuff.” Rin responds shrugging. He looks at his younger brother nervously. “They're good right?”

“Of course they are good.” Yukio gives a little quirk of his lips, looking faintly amused. “I don't think you can cook something bad, Nii-san. Goes against a law of nature or something.”

“I'm not that good Yukio.” Rin blushes at the compliment.

As they pass the stairway that leads upwards to the second floor, Rin stops when he hears voices. Walking over to get a better view he sees a group of students talking to another. Three boys with second year ties are gathered around another boy who he quickly recognizes as Manabu. Yukio, having followed his elder brother, wonders why this caught Rin's attention.

“Nii-san?” Yukio asks. Rin holds up a hand, quieting his little brother as he listens and watches, his expression darkening over what he hears.

“You're our friend aren't you Manabu-kun?” The tallest boy leans close to the smaller one, who looks at his feet. “I mean I consider you a close friend of mine, don't you feel the same about me?”

“Um...w-well...um...I-I guess...Fujisaka-san...but...” Manabu lifts his eyes then drops them again, clearly feeling ashamed.

“That's what I like to hear. Now since we're friends we do stuff for one another right?” Fujisaka tilts his head, watching the shorter guy's reaction with malicious interest.

“I-I guess...” Manabu repeats, looking like he wants to run, but also has that deer in headlights expression that suggests he knows very well it won't be possible.

“Good, then can you do me a favour and do my homework this week? I've got a...family thing this weekend and I don't want to be held down by all that crap and worry you know?” The older student's smile is rather cruel and even smarmy. The two other guys with him give nasty sniggers at his words.

“B-but last we-week you sa-said it w-would be t-the l-last time that you--” Manabu seems distressed as he attempts to explain things.
“I thought you don't mind doing stuff like this?” Fujisaka frowns. “That's what you told us last week.”

“I-I really don't mi-mind doing it b-but if I keep do-doing this I'll get be-behind on my ho-homework and--”

“So you're saying we're not friends then?” The leader puts on a hurt expression, but it is obvious there is some other, more dangerous emotion in his eyes.

“N-no th-that's not wh-what I--”

“Hey that's enough!” Rin yells, heading over to them and pushing through the bullies until he is standing protectively in front of Manabu.

Manabu opens and closes his mouth, looking shocked. “Oku...mura-kun?”

The reaction of the other students is immediate. Fujisaka and his cronies immediately pale and back up a step, scared of Rin's mere presence.

“Okumura....” One of them whispers, looking a few seconds away from pissing himself.

Rin glares at them. “Leave. Now. If I ever see you around Manabu again...” Rin cracks his knuckles for a good measure, making certain they get the message.

The three boys nod quickly and scamper off, too scared of Rin's reputation to even consider trying to fight back. Rin sighs and rubs his head. “Idiots...oi, Manabu you okay?”

The other student slowly shakes his head, eyes still wide. “Ah...um...t-th-thank you...Oku-Okumura-kun...”

Rin eyes him, while Yukio sighs in the background – typical of his brother, though at least this time no one is walking away with wounds on them – then approaches the pair. “Are you alright...” Yukio frowns, realizing he doesn't know this guy.

“Oh right. This is Chikafuji Manabu Yukio. Manabu, this is Yukio my younger brother.” Rin casually introduces the two glasses wearing students to each other. Yukio gives a small smile to Manabu.

“Nice to meet you Chikafuji-kun.” He then turns to Rin and eyes him. “Where did you meet him?”

“At the library. He had a lot of books!” Rin replies, sounding surprised even though he was in a library. “I mean, I think this guy reads more than you Yukio and he reads various things too. It's amazing really.” Manabu blushes as it is obvious that Rin is, in his clumsy way, complimenting him.

Yukio chuckles a bit, then turns to Manabu. “Why don't you have lunch with us? Just in case those...other students decide to come back.”

Rin has to snigger at the pause; that means that Yukio just barely managed to avoid swearing. 'He's always doing his best to be proper, that silly spotty-four-eyes.' “That's a good idea!” Rin agrees, before turning to Manabu. “Where's your bento?”

“Ah...I u-usu-usually just get s-something from an n-near-nearby con-convenience store...” Manabu shuffles his feet a bit, Rin's eyes trailing down to see the yen bills clutched in the smaller boy's hand.

Rin sighs and shrugs. “Okay, how about I go get something then? Yukio...”
“I’ll take him to the usual spot.” Yukio assures with a smile. Rin grins at him, then darts off after taking the offered money from Manabu and giving his bento to Yukio.

‘Convenience store food...damn, that sucks....’ Rin groans at the thought of how crappy said food tends to be – at least in comparison to his own cooking – not to mention how unhealthy with all the crap that gets shoved into them. Then Rin has a thought. ‘Well, there’s an easy solution to this...’

Manabu is rather overwhelmed by things. The Okumura brothers swept him into their tide without a word from him. Not that Manabu is complaining; it is a nice kind of tide. But just when he thought he regained his balance, he is thrown off again.

Which is why he is staring at the bento in his hands. And it isn’t a convenience store bento. No, this was Rin's bento until said teen shoved it into his hands. Instead, Rin is unwrapping the convenience store bento he bought with Manabu's money.

“Uh...wh-what...I...”

Yukio chuckles. “Sorry, should have warned you about Nii-san's closet health nut tendencies.”

“Hey!” Rin protests. “I'm not a health nut! I'm just concerned about the...the quality of his food.” He takes a chunk of rice out of the bento and shoved in his mouth. He then makes a face. “Holy crap, how much salt is in this...can't be good for you...” He glares at the bento, as Yukio covers his mouth to contain his laughter. Manabu looks between the two of them, then opens the bento-bako he has now.

His jaw drops.

The main dish appears to be croquettes, fried to golden brown perfection. Beside that are onigiri, star-shaped ones wrapped in nori and flavoured with furikake. Tamagoyaki rests in one corner, with octopus-shaped mini-hotdogs set on top bunny-cut apple slices and broccoli beside it. Above that is a set of three chocolate cookies, obviously homemade ones. Every single dish looks delicious and made with lots of care and skill.

“I...I c-can't ex-except this...” Manabu swallows. “It...it looks...li-like a lot of c-care w-went into it...I...”

“Well, I say you can have it. And as the one to make the bento, I hold the right to say you eat!” Rin proclaims, pointing his chopsticks at Manabu and ignoring Yukio's grumbling about that being rude.

Manabu blinks. “Y-you...made this?” He looks back at the bento. “I th-thought your mo-mother had ma-made this or so-something...”

“We don't have a mother.” Yukio informs him, not unkindly. “Well, we obviously had one, but...” He looks away for a moment. “We are adopted after all...”

“Well, I say you can have it. And as the one to make the bento, I hold the right to say you eat!” Rin proclaims, pointing his chopsticks at Manabu and ignoring Yukio’s grumbling about that being rude.

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“We don't have a mother.” Yukio informs him, not unkindly. “Well, we obviously had one, but...” He looks away for a moment. “We are adopted after all...”

“Yeah and Tou-san doesn't like talking about our birth parents...” Rin pauses, tapping his chopsticks on the edge of his bento as he thinks. “He got a...weird look on his face when we asked about our father...” Rin doesn't notice the fact Yukio nearly chokes on his bite of food at that. “And as for our mother...he kinda looked sad. I think he knew her.” Rin shrugs. “So we don't ask anymore. Especially after that weird watermelon thing...”

“...water...watermelon?” Manabu doesn't really want to know about that, yet at the same time...

“Claimed have chopped a watermelon open and hey! there we were!” Rin waves his chopsticks in
the air, then snorts. “Crazy old man...”

Rin then pauses, as something just catches up to him. “Wait...you thought...our mother had made the bento...” He has a strange look on his face. “That...I'm not a girl dammit! Is there anything about me that makes me look like a girl?!?” He demands, Manabu immediately shaking his head no.

‘Though actually...he kinda seems girly on second glance...’

“I don't know about that Nii-san...” Yukio begins softly, a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. “There was that one time...”

“That was a long time ago! He apologized even!” Rin growls, stabbing at his younger brother with his chopsticks.

Yukio jerks back and thanks the fact he has glasses, raising his hands in a harmless position despite his grin. “Still...you have to admit that was...”

“Say anything else, I will take it to mean I can talk about the Pipe Incident, Yukio!” Rin snaps, halting Yukio in his tracks and making his face turn brilliant red.

“NII-SAN! You promised you would never speak of that!” Yukio looks traumatized at the thought of Manabu hearing of whatever a “Pipe Incident” is.

“Yeah, well, you promised to not talk about that incident either...”

Manabu looks between the two bickering brothers, and a small laugh slips out of his mouth, halting the two brothers. He immediately turns red as they turn to look at him.

Rin is grinning though. “Ha! You laughed! Good, that's a good thing!”

Manabu looks down, not sure how to respond, and starts on his bento. The first bite makes him freeze. It's like fireworks are going off in his mouth and for a moment he can't do anything but give happy sounds as he eats. Then he remember his manners and swallows, turning to Rin to say, “This...this is really good Oku-Okumura-kun...”

“You can call me Rin, seriously...It's confusing what with Yukio being here. Yeesh, even Tsukishiro-sensei uses our names...”

“It is easier...” Yukio notes. ‘At least when we are going to the same place.’ “So you can use our first names, Chikafuji-kun.”

“Uh...Rin-san...and Yukio-san...then?” Manabu looks hesitant over it.

Rin makes a face over the “-san” part but nods anyways. “Sure, if that's what you want to use.”

“O-okay...” He pauses, then gave a small smile. “Th-thank you.”

“For what?” Rin tilts his head in curiosity. Manabu makes a small sound, then dives back into his bento. Rin looks over at Yukio, hoping for some kind of answer...

“Hey, why are you laughing!? Seriously, what's so funny?”

Yukio keeps on laughing, causing Rin to growl. “Fine. Here, Manabu! You can have Yukio's share of cookies too!” He grabs and moves said cookies over to Manabu's bento, causing Yukio to stop laughing and double take, while Manabu freezes and stares at the extra cookies that are now “magically” in his bento.
The walk back home is filled with the scent of flowers and the sound of birdsong. The air is rather warm now, as they are approaching the start of summer.

Manabu sighs, dragging his feet a bit as a thought crosses his mind. Though he was rather impressed and even grateful to the Okumura brothers he can't help but feel...unworthy of their attentions.

‘All I do is read books and do my homework.’ He thinks sadly. ‘I have this horrible stutter too. I'm...a coward. A horrible coward.’

Manabu pretty much resigned himself to his fate. He will just go on with his life, his dull boring life. He won't do anything special or catch anyone's eye in that special way. He will just continue to exist until he dies, just another dull, boring cowardly guy.

As much as he finds Rin a surprisingly great guy, totally different than what his reputation says, he also feels rather overwhelmed by him. Manabu can see very well that Rin can get somewhere; he isn't sure as what – perhaps as a chef considering how good his cooking is – but he definitely can. While Yukio is also definitely going somewhere; he is going to be a successful doctor and, unlike his brother, is also somewhat popular with the other students.

Totally unlike Manabu.

‘If only...if only I has even a little courage.’ He silently wishes. ‘Just even a tiny amount...some kind of armour to protect myself. I can then be something.’

A strange sound as he steps on something makes him pause, and he steps back to see that he stepped on a card. “Uh?”

Picking it up – noticing the very pinkness of the card and the strange “magic circle” design on the back – he turns it over to see the image on its front. It looks like a set of ancient samurai armour, helmet included, with its arms crossed in front of it, and chains wrapped around it.

Manabu blinks, then trails his eyes down to see the banner beneath it. “Th-the...Armour?”

The Card glows.

The day at school is filled with gossip, a lot of people talking excitedly to each other. To Rin's surprise, it isn't about him though he doesn't know what the topic is. So he just waits a bit by the tree that has become the standard eating-lunch-place for him and Yukio, until Yukio arrives. Handing over his bento, Rin waits a bit, letting Yukio eat some before he asks him the question that has been bubbling in him the entire day.

“So, what's the gossip about?”

Yukio pauses, noodles dangling from his mouth, then he finishes slurping them up before speaking. “Remember those guys we saw picking on Chikafuji-kun yesterday?” Rin nods, scowling at the memory. “Well, they were found in a park early this morning beaten up. Badly at that, they had to be rushed to the hospital. Hearsay claims that they will live of course, but...”

Rin's jaw drops. “R-really? Wow...I wonder who did that?” Rin frowns and tries to remember what he knows about Fujisaka. “He's not really part of the delinquents, Fujisaka that is. I can't really think of a reason in that way for a beatdown to happen...” Rin reconsiders that after a thought crosses his
mind. “Ah, well if he had been unknowingly getting in another's territory...that would cause this to happen.”

“Nii-san...” Yukio stares at his elder brother with a strange look. “It's kinda scary how much you know about the yanki around here...”

Rin shrugs. “They keep picking fights with me and all...it's a good idea to know what's going on so I have an idea when the next group of morons will come around for their punishment.”

Yukio sweats as Rin returns to his meal and happily chows down, despite the statement he made previously. “Nii-san...”

His status as a loser just seems to get bigger and bigger the more time passes Manabu thinks.

“Something wrong, Chikafuji?” Ito Satoshi sniggers, sneering down at the smaller student. His followers mimic him like a group of demented parrots.

Manabu doesn't say anything from where he is on the ground. Satoshi had deliberately pushed him down, sending his stack of paper and books all over the place. Instead of speaking, Manabu focuses on collecting all of his things.

Satoshi doesn't like this and proves it by kicking Manabu, sending him back quite a bit. His cronies kick away some of Manabu's books, laughing, as Manabu scrambles to collect them all as soon as possible.

“What is going on here?” A male teacher approaches the group, frowning at whatever he sees.

“Chikafuji tripped.” Satoshi tells him glibly, not even batting an eye. “We were just trying to help him pick up his things. Right guys?” He turns to his cronies, who readily agreed with him.

“Oh, is that all?” The teacher doesn't leave but it is obvious that he has accepted Satoshi's words at face value. And all this despite him having a strong reputation as a low-end gang leader.

Thanks to the teacher's presence, Manabu actually gets help with picking up his papers and books. After all, if they don't want to get in trouble Satoshi and his gang have to stick with their story. But Manabu would have preferred it otherwise in some part, thanks to the whispers from Satoshi – all threats – and the pokes and pinches his cronies deliver to him secretly.

Eyes burning with unshed tears, Manabu leaves as fast as he can, with his books and papers in a tight grip. Unknown to him, the Card he is using as a bookmark glows.

The next day the school is buzzing again. Like the day before, a group of punks have been found beaten up near to death in a nearby park.

“Maybe it's Okumura.” A male student confides in another. There is no question which Okumura he is talking about.

“Why would he do that?” The other wonders.

“Maybe 'cause he's looking for a challenge. See, I heard Ito got called up by someone and left to meet them. That was last night and we all know how he was found.”

The second boy drinks this in with wide eyes. “Oh man. So you think Okumura called him and his
gang up for a fight?”

“Sounds right.” The first comments. “Ito's got a damn good, or rather bad, reputation in that regard so Okumura thought that maybe he could give him a good work out.”

“And he nearly killed him in the process...” The second shivers. “Oh man, I never want to get his attention. Never!”

Above and nearby, Rin shrugs as Yukio gives him a curious look. “No I still don't know what's going on. Though it's true Ito got called out. Probably just by some rival gang. It just didn't end well in his favour.”

“You sure about that?” Yukio questions. “I mean last time...”

“Ito is definitely a gang leader, not like Fujisaka. Doubt it's more than chance both groups got their asses kicked within the same week.”

Yukio doesn't say anything, though he looks relieved, instead turning back to his bento. Rin does the same, still smiling. It is probably just random coincidence all of this and soon enough things will die down.

Hopefully his name being attached to this won't last long either.

The third day, Rin is starting to get confused and the school gossip has reached a higher level than usual.

During day four, Rin has a worried look on his face and the gossip is starting to be talked about in quieter voices than usual.

On day five, Yukio confronts Rin to make certain he isn't involved. Once he is assured of that, both brothers are left wondering who is responsible for all of the bullies getting beaten near to death.

By the sixth day, Rin is pissed. And more than ready to do some real investigation of his own.

“But where do I start?” Rin asks himself quietly. He then sighs as he realizes there is no answer. The truth is aside from how the guys are taken down, there is nothing similar between the beatings. Even the locations are different; sure they are all parks, but none are the same parks.

'As hard as I think, I'm not getting anywhere...' Rin sighs, stuffing his hands in his pockets. 'And Yukio's not around either...too busy with his dratted cram class...'

“Oops. Better watch where you are going.” That sniggering voice makes Rin turn.

And scowl at the sight of Kaido and his gang, surrounding Manabu in a semi-circle. The boy was knocked on his ass by Kaido and stares up at Kaido with wide eyes. His books and notebooks are scattered on the ground. One of the gangs members make a point of stepping on one of Manabu's books when he makes to reach for it.

“OI!” Rin yells at them, making Kaido turn and pale at the sight of Rin glaring murder at him. He and his gang exchange looks then, after a few final insults spat at Manabu and a threat to come back later, they leave with their tails between their legs.

“You okay Manabu?” Rin asks, crouching down and picking up the nearest book. He scowls at the
footprint left on the cover and wipes it off with his school shirt. The library had instilled some respect for books in him.

“I'm...I'm fi-fine.” Manabu stutters out, accepting the book back from Rin and starting to gather the rest of his stuff.

Rin gives him a sceptical look, but decides to look past it in favour of helping gather up Manabu's stuff.

As he hands over a book back to Manabu, he feels a distinctive zing. Blinking, Rin glances down at the book to see a pink edge sticking out from between the pages. “Hey, what's--”

Manabu snatches the book back from Rin. “Ju-just a bookmark!” He yells out, frantic. “Do-Doesn't matter wha-what its colour right?”

“Oh...I'm not picking on the colour just want to see--” Rin tries to get out, only for Manabu to stand up.

“Tha-thanks for the help but I...I have to get home now.” Manabu tells Rin, shifting and looking worried.

Rin slowly stands up, staring at Manabu. Now that he gets a good look at him, he looks exhausted, like he isn't getting enough sleep, big bags under his eyes and skin pasty with exhaustion. “Manabu...are you okay?”

“I'm fine!” Manabu steps back. “Just fine. I just...I re-really needed to get ho-home that's all.”

He turns and scurries off before Rin can do more than lift his hand and open his mouth.

Rin stares after the retreating back of Manabu and feels a bad feeling settle into a lump in his stomach.

'That...that is a Card. An active Card with Manabu...' Rin swallows...

...then quickly turns on his heel, rushing off himself. He needs to get confirmation of his suspicion before he did anything.

As the school “rat” Abe Eiji got used to dealing with bitchy girls, tough punks, angry people, and various other “scary” things in his part-time “job” of collecting information and gossip.

But nothing prepared him for an angry Okumura Rin grabbing his collar and demanding information.

Eiji can feel sweat collecting on the back of his neck and he can barely move. The best he can get out is a quick, squeaky “yes!” in response to Rin's demands. No way is he going to charge this demon anything. The payment he is getting is his life and his body still in one piece.

“So...so you want to know who those guys who got sent to the hospital are picking on?” He gasps out once Rin let him go. Straightening his collar then his glasses, Eiji raises an eyebrow. “Why?”

Rin glares at him. “Just answer the damn question!”

Eiji flinches. “Ah, okay!”

He pulls out his smartphone and starts scrolling through his information collected until he finds the right folder. “Let's see...”
Rin listens intently as Eiji lists out the names and grades of the people targeted by the school bullies, as well as the dates they are targeted, face darkening as his worse fears are confirmed.

Every person who picked on Manabu for the past week were found beaten up in a park the next day.

'Shit.' Rin swears silently, turning around to head off. 'Manabu has a Card and it's beating up people. Dammit!'

Eiji watches him go, holding his breath until he is out of sight. Once Rin is, he lets it out in a big gasp, collapsing on the ground.

'Oh please, don't let me have to go through that again!' He prays to whoever might be listening.

Running through a narrow hall is a recipe for disaster, as Rin finds out all too soon.

“Oh my!”

Papers fly into the air, scattering around and slowly falling to the ground. Rin looks up once he stops wincing and blushes.

_Sparkly._

“Ah! Tsukishiro-sensei! I'm..I didn't...”

The teacher smiles. “Rin-kun, there is a good reason why running in the hallways is forbidden.”

Rin swallows and ducks his head. “Sorry sensei.”

“What has you in such a rush?” Tsukishiro asks, as she starts gathering up the papers. Rin jolts at the question, then turns to help Tsukishiro.

Tsukishiro watches Rin with sharp eyes, seeing how he avoids her gaze and looks nervous about something. 'Curious. Does that mean...’ “Rin-kun, would you like some tea?”

Rin looks up, surprised. “S-sensei? I...I'm kinda in a rush so...”

Rin trails off when Tsukishiro places a hand on Rin's wrist, blushing deeply at how close his beautiful teacher is to him. “Rin-kun. It seems like something is on your mind. Please, as your sensei I would like to help.”

Rin swallows, then stands carefully with the papers he's collected. Tsukishiro stands soon afterwards and waits patiently as thoughts visibly march across Rin's face.

“Alright.” Rin decides, realizing he's not going to get away from Tsukishiro. And neither does he really want to.

The teacher smiles gently. “Thank you. This way Rin-kun.”

Rin follows Tsukishiro to the teachers' office, dropping off the papers on Tsukishiro's desk. Then the teacher directs him to a side door and leads Rin into what looks like a kitchen and lounge area.

It's a comfortable, small room and obviously used by the teachers for small meetings and the like. Rin doesn't get to dwell on that long since Tsukishiro asks if he would like any tea.

“Uh...” Rin blushes and looks between Tsukishiro and the kettle in her hands. “If you don't mind...?”
“Not at all.” Tsukishiro says sweetly, filling the kettle and setting it on the hot plate and turning it on. “I was thinking of making myself some tea too. Green tea good?”

“Yes, that's fine.” Rin stands awkwardly in the centre of the room, as Tsukishiro gracelessly seats herself on the couch. She pats the cushion beside her after Rin stands there a little longer.

“Come. Take a seat.”

Rin slowly sits down next to Tsukishiro, conscious of making sure there is an appropriate distance between them. Tsukishiro smiles at him and waits for him to calm down a bit.

“Now, what's got you all in a rush today? Did something happen?”

Rin's smile drops and he glances down at his lap, twisting his hands together. “Um...I'm not...” Rin droops a bit, feeling guilty for not being able to explain things to his favourite teacher.

‘But it's not like she could understand m-magic and the like...or believe it...'  

Tsukishiro watches this with a calm expression on her face. “Does it have to do with all the poor boys being sent to the hospital lately?”

The boy's head shoots straight up so fast Tsukishiro is almost surprised it doesn't go flying off. “Huah? I...um...yeah?”

“I figured as such. All the boys are at this school after all and everyone is blaming you for it...but you wouldn't do that, would you?” Tsukishiro asks gently.

Rin shakes his head, feeling a high flush on his face. “No. I wouldn't.”

“So that means...” Tsukishiro pauses as the kettle whistles. “Just a second.” She stands, as graceful as ever, and goes to the kettle, shutting off the hot plate. She pulls down two mugs for the two of them.

“We only have tea bags, I hope you don't mind.” Tsukishiro says sweetly, dropping said bags into the mugs and pouring hot water over them. After a moment, she comes over with the mugs and passes one over to Rin.

Rin accepts the cat patterned mug with a quiet thank you.

For a moment, they just sit there, Rin staring into the mug as if it holds all the answers.

“If I was you, I'd want to clear my name.” Tsukishiro says suddenly, drawing Rin's attention. “So you must have found something out that tells you who is doing it. The question is, how will you stop them?”

Rin opens his mouth, then pauses. How is he going to stop Manabu? He had only thought of how the Card must be influencing him, but what if Manabu, just possibly, has enough magical talent to use the Card himself?

“I'm not sure...I mean...I think I know why they are doing it...” Rin warms his hand on the mug and takes a sip, enjoying the green and refreshing taste of the tea. “But I'm not sure...”

“Well, for starters, do you know where and when the next attack will happen?” Tsukishiro asks him, raising her eyebrows at Rin's shocked look. “If you want to do an intervention, you should do it at the right moment. Which also goes with stopping this person from hurting others. After all...at this rate, can you be certain no one won't die this time?”
Rin freezes at that. He hadn't considered actual death a possibility but...with how much damage Manabu and the Card are dealing out, it is a possibility isn't it? Especially if, for once, no one stumbles across the delinquents in time to get them to the hospital.

“You are right...” Rin looks down. “But I can't figure out where it would be...all the parks are different after all.”

“Something I've learned about things, is that all natural creatures tend towards patterns.” Tsukishiro tells Rin, gently rubbing his back and getting him to calm down. “Strange but true. So that means the choice of the parks has a pattern of a sort. I doubt they are being picked by throwing darts at a map.”

Rin considers that, taking another sip of his tea. Manabu is smart and if he's at least somewhat aware of what's going on...he would be the one making the smart choices. Like calling the victims up and picking the location.

And yes, they are victims. Rin might not like any of those people, being bullies and low lifes, but Rin never actively hunts them down. It's too cruel, especially with his strength. If he sees them doing something bad, he will step in and stop them if he can. But hunt them down? No, that's not what Rin likes at all.

Rin smiles, realizing he does have the information he needs. “Thank you Tsukishiro-sensei!” Rin says cheerfully, then quickly finishes his tea. Handing the mug back to the serenely smiling Tsukishiro, he quickly stands and bows. “Thank you so much for the help. I need to go now!”

“No running in the halls remember!” Tsukishiro calls, laughing at Rin's half curse half confirmation he sends back. Her smile is still on her face but takes on a more mysterious edge to it once Rin is out of sight and hearing. “And good luck, Cardcaptor.”

Abe nearly passes out in fright as Rin – the demon is back! – reappears before him and grins wickedly at him.

“Abe. I need to know the locations of the parks the beatings took place.” He steps closer to the boy, eyes intense. “Now. I'm on a time limit.”

Abe nods quickly and rushes to pull out his smartphone and pad of paper. “R-right away Okumura-san!” He stutters out, quickly looking for the information needed and scribbling it out. And then writing it again when Rin complains about shaky handwriting.

When Rin leaves after thanking Abe, eyes glued to the paper and muttering to himself, Abe realizes that he's doomed.

’He's going to come back again and again!’ He realizes in a panic.

After all, Abe just proved himself useful to the most feared guy in school.

Abe then blinks as a thought crosses his mind. 'Well...he does have an odd sense of fairness...if I'm helping him, he won't take kindly to anyone hurting me...'

That thought helps him calm down enough to pack up his “office” and head home for the day.

Not knowing of the new information he will gain tomorrow that will have the entire school buzzing...
“And...this one.” Rin points out finally, Kero setting the pin in the right location. “And that's all the parks that the fights happened in.”

Kero flies up to hover at Rin's shoulder, using the location to look at the map the boy laid out. Yukio's at his cram school again so they have the boys' room for themselves.

“Hmm...Ah'm afraid I can't see anythin' of a pattern.” Kero shrugs.

Rin ignores him, frowning and following the parks in order of appears with his finger. “It's moving clockwise...” Rin murmurs to himself. It's rough, and not really a circle, but it's evident enough when Rin follows the positions with his eyes.

With that in mind, Rin looks for a nearby park. He finally lands on a likely candidate in Flower Park. And also in Tora Park.

“Dammit.” Rin slams his fist into the ground, making the floor rattle and Kero eye him warily. “Two options dammit...which one...”

“Rin...” Kero takes a deep breath. “Close yer eyes and breathe in and out. Focus on yer question and search with yer magic...”

Rin looks at Kero for a moment, then does as he says. Slowly, but surely, a calm aura starts to emanate from him as he gets in tune with his power.

“Now pick!”

Rin's hand slams down and he opens his eyes to look at what park his magic and gut instinct is screaming is the right one.

The park is a small place. Nothing special, just some flowerbeds, benches, and a single fountain with a tiger ornament at the centre.

Kaido still approaches it cautiously. He's not stupid, which is why he brought some reassurance as much as the rest of his gang. The illegal nature of what he's bringing makes a chill run up and down his spine, but he dismisses it.

Parks like this have been the site of people like him getting their asses whooped so hard they end up in the hospital recently after all.

“Kaido, are you sure?”

This hesitate question comes from Hayashi, the more cautious member of the group – and thus often the voice of, unheard, reason – looking around with a nervous air.

Kaido nods shortly, not bothering to speak. He's not sure he can with his dry throat.

As they walk deeper into the park, they notice a shadow by the fountain. Freezing for a moment, Kaido forces his legs to move and he approaches the shadow, his friends right behind him though they are obviously scared.

The shadow steps forward, revealing himself to the light.

Kaido immediately relaxes and chuckles. “Oh. Chikafuji. Didn't expect you. What are you doing here?”
If Kaido had been paying attention to more than the fact it isn't something he's scared of – like Rin – or had some magical talent of his own, he might have noticed that Manabu's face is a little more wooden than usual and his eyes carry a strange glow in them.

As is, Kaido only smirks and wonders what Chikafuji is here for. Maybe to beg for a reprieve of his torment in exchange for a favour?

“Kaido. You have one chance to stop your ways.” Manabu says slowly. “Stop bother me or else.”

Kaido feels the hair rise on the back of his neck, but ignores it. “What? Are you serious? Are you threatening me?”

Manabu merely nods in answer.

Kaido gapes. And then laughs. Long and hard.

“Hehehe...funny that!” Kaido cracks his knuckles. “Well, perhaps I'll teach you a lesson. A better one than the others you've gotten.”

The rest of his group falls in behind, snickering and ready to give the pounding to Manabu. All except Hayashi, who hangs back. He's picked up on the fact something isn't quite right and he hesitates thus, stepping back instead of forwards.

This proves to be the right choice when Manabu holds up a glowing Card. For a moment Kaido boggles at the pink thing and then goes to laugh again.

But the laughter dies as the glow changes to flow over Manabu. The sound of clanking steel is heard as metal covers Manabu's entire body and soon a helmet, a samurai helmet, is over top of his head.

The delinquents gap at what they see, and Kaido steps instinctively back as Manabu takes a single step forward, the metal loud on the concrete.

“What...what the fuck is this?” Kaido yells, taking another step back. His hand goes to the object on him, and he hesitates at the touch of metal.

Manabu says nothing. What he does is throw a punch at Kaido.

“Look out!” One of the others yells and pushes the frozen Kaido out of the way. He falls down with the other on top him, the one on top letting out a pained yell that is drowned by Kaido's shocked cry, as Manabu's punch grazed him enough to hurt him.

The sound of metal footsteps has them scramble back up, and start backing up with the rest. Kaido can feel sweat beading on his face. This isn't like most normal fights. Aside from the armour on him, there's something eerie and wrong about Manabu right now. And it's not like Kaido has ever fought anyone in armour.

The cold steel on him is tempting enough now and Kaido doesn't hesitate to pull it out.

Everything freezes, even Manabu, at the sight of the pistol in Kaido's hands.

Kaido sneers, despite the fact his hand is shaking, at Manabu. “Yeah, go ahead. Take another step and I'll shoot.”

Hayashi gasps behind him. “Kaido...you don't...where did you get that?”

Kaido snorts. “Wouldn't believe I got a cousin in the force would you? Borrowed it from him.” He
turns back to Manabu and removes the safety on the gun. “Now back off before someone really gets hurt. Namely, you.”

Manabu doesn't move for a moment. It's quiet, except for the wind blowing through the park. Kaido trembles, because for all his bluster he's still using a gun and he's not ever considered it before, much less what it entails.

Manabu moves. Just enough for Kaido to flinch and instinctively pull the trigger.

A sharp bang echoes in the air and Kaido gasps, stumbling back into Hayashi who steadies him. They both gape when they turn to see Manabu.

His arm is up and took the bullet, which, with a ting, falls down to the ground as the armour seems to heal itself.

The arm goes down and Manabu steps forward. The group is paralysed in fear; both from Manabu, strange, terrifying Manabu, and Kaido's shooting him with a gun.

Manabu's arm come down. Hayashi closes his eyes, not wanting to see his doom coming.

It doesn't come and Hayashi opens his eyes after a long pause. And gasps.

Straining against the pressure of Manabu's blow, with his teeth bared and eyes narrowed, is one Okumura Rin.

Kaido stares up at Okumura, stunned at the first year who's standing between him and a potentially fatal beating. A part of him notices the strange rod that Rin is using to block the blow, but it's a fleeting thought that is replaced by something else.

“What...Okumura?”

Rin glances back at Kaido and his gaze seems to soften for a moment after he looks over the entire gang. “Good, you aren't hurt. Now get out!” He orders. “It's too dangerous for you guys.”

'Too dangerous is right.' Kaido thinks absently, slowly standing up and putting the safety back on the gun before putting it back on him. With Manabu's strange armour, no way he can handle it. *But Demon Okumura can.*

There's just one question that prevents Kaido from leaving.

“You don't even *like* us. Why the hell are you saving us?” Kaido demands, shaking off Hayashi's hands.

Rin scowls at him, looking a bit confused. “What the hell does that have to do with anything? You don't have to *like* someone to save them!”

Kaido's eyes widen, hit with the full force of those words. Manabu seems to be staggered as well, as he slowly steps back from Rin and stops trying to break through his guard in a single-minded fashion.

Rin doesn't notice any of that, focusing again on the “possessed” Manabu. “Get out now!” He orders again. And this time they leave.

As Kaido and his gang run off in the distance, Rin keeps his gaze on Manabu. After a moment, he sighs and looks sadly at Manabu.
“Manabu. Why?”

Manabu jolts at that. “Why?”

“Yes, why!” Rin snaps. “Why are you hunting down and hurting all your bullies so badly? What the hell is putting them in the hospital going to do for them?!”

Manabu’s eyes narrow. “What do you know of anything? You’ve never been picked on or hurt by others! You don’t know what it’s like to be so weak!”

Rin flinches and lowers his wand. “Manabu...”

“So I can finally do something. I have strength and I'm going to use it! I'm going to be strong!” Manabu declares. As he speaks, his face starts getting less wooden. Manabu himself is becoming more aware. And he is agreeing with Armour.

“Manabu...you are wrong.” Rin says softly. He glances over to see Kero waiting in the wings, obviously upset and torn. But the Guardian is currently useless at the moment and curses his helpless nature.

“Wrong? How am I wrong? You are strong and you can deal with any kind of torment!”

“No I can't!” Rin snaps, glaring at Manabu. “I can't do anything when it comes to Yukio being sick. Or when it comes to someone crying. Or anything to do with people talking about him behind their backs. Strength isn't enough! If it was...” Rin pauses and shakes his head, tears collecting on his eyelashes. “If it is, why the hell don't I have any friends?”

Manabu halts, staring at Rin. “F-friends?”

“Yes!” Rin shudders and wipes at his eyes with his arm. “I don't have anyone but Yukio and Tou-san. Maybe the monks at the monastery. I'm just a freak. And now I'm a freak who knows terrible things and has to protect people from them. I can't...I don't know how to have friends. I don't know what you are supposed to do. If strength was enough, I would be fine and happy with just that right!?” Rin chokes. “But I'm not. And neither are you! You are tired and hurting yourself like this! This isn't you Manabu. It's not and it never will be!”

Kero watches Rin with his paws over his mouth. ‘Oh Rin...Ah'm so sorry...’ Kero wants to cry, but controls himself. 'Later...later Ah can and maybe Ah can help Rin too...even a little.'

“Then what is enough!” Manabu demands. “What's enough...I can't...I'm useless as is and what...”

“I don't know! I don't...I don't think anyone knows!” Rin yells. “But just what you are doing is not you and useless?! I bet you know way more than I do, or anyone else. You know about snakes and physics and probably have a whole library in your head. You will find what to do with all that. You will and you'll do way better than I ever could!”

Manabu stares at Rin. Armour is making groaning sounds and starting to glow in patches. The sync between them is fading. “Rin...san...what...what am I doing...?”

“Something bad. But you can change and move on from it.” Rin offers his hand, smiling at Manabu through his tears. “Be more than the guy with all the books. Just like I'm more than just a demon.”

Manabu stares and slowly, hesitatingly, reaches out. Armour flicks and shimmers and he pauses. “Rin-san...”
“It's alright. I'll catch you.” Rin says softly.

Manabu smiles and Armour disappears from his outstretched hand as he finally takes Rin's hand.

All is silent for a moment, then a violent surge has the Armour erupting from Manabu and ripping itself from him. The sudden disappearance makes Manabu collapse to the ground, Rin gently catching the suddenly exhausted boy. After checking he's okay, Rin turns his gaze to the floating Armour. Still in Armour form, but without Manabu to give it a purpose.

“You...will be sealed.” Rin says softly, slowly standing up. “And you won't be causing trouble again like that. You did a bad thing too.”

Armour is still for a moment, then crosses its arms and bows to Rin. Rin stares for a moment, then smiles.

“Armour, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” Bringing the wand down, Armour erupts into light once more and flows into the shape of a card. Rin gracefully accepts it when it's done and pulls out a pen, tucking his wand underneath his elbow. A quick scribble, and his name is written on the Card.

Smiling softly, Rin tucks the Card into the holster he has the rest of the Cards in. After a moment, he pulls out another Card.

Turning back to Manabu, he sees the boy looking up at him.

“I...I'm sorry Rin-san...” Manabu shamefully looks down.

“It's okay. I understand...I think.” Rin gives a rueful grin and kneels down next to Manabu. “But it would be better if you forgot.”

“Forgot? But...” Manabu looks at Rin. “I don't want to forget you.”

Rin blinks, surprised. Then he slowly shakes his head, smiling. “No. You won't forget me. Just the Card...and the magic.”

Manabu stares and slowly nods. “I understand.”

Rin looks at the Card in his hand. “Memory...take away the magic.”

A soft light covers Manabu and he slowly wavers and then collapses, Rin catching him just in time.

Kero floats over to Rin at that.

“Good job Rin.” He says softly.

Rin looks over at Kero and smiles. “Thanks.” He looks back at Manabu. “We better get him home. Would be bad if he stays out here.”

He then pauses. “Uh...where does Manabu live?”

A long, awkward silence is his answer.

A bone creaking yawn from Rin is barely muffled by his hand as he walks into school. Yukio eyes him worriedly.
“Did you not get enough sleep?” Yukio wonders, eyeing Rin's tired state.

Rin blinks sleepy and gives a half-shrug as a response. ‘Dammit...from dealing with Armour to having to look up Manabu's address and get him back home before he woke up...man that was too much work...’

Yukio eyes Rin a moment longer then decides to let it go for now.

Rin yawns again, then notices someone approaching the twins. He slows down and comes to a halt, a puzzled Yukio doing much the same. Upon seeing who's approaching them, Yukio's eyes narrow.

Around them, the rest of the students halt and watch with wide eyes and whispers as Kaido approaches Rin, looking very serious faced.

On Rin's side, he merely watching Kaido with a relaxed air, somehow getting the feeling that Kaido doesn't mean to attack him this time. In fact, as Rin glances to look at Hayashi behind him, he feels like this is rather peaceful in intent.

It's silent for a moment longer, then Rin shifts his bag's position and speaks. “What's up Kaido?”

Kaido is quiet for a moment longer, then sighs, shoving his hands in his pockets. “I still don't like you.”

Rin blinks. “Yeah. Same here.”

Kaido scowls at Rin's causal air, then subsides after a moment. “But I owe you for last night. Probably...” He looks away. “Might have died. And you didn't have to do that.”

Rin frowns. “Maybe. But I did it anyways.”

“So I guess I owe you.” Kaido looks annoyed at that and rubs his forehead for a moment before dropping his hand. “What do you want?”

Rin blinks at Kaido, looking him up and down. Then he grins. “Shape up. Don't go doing stuff like that again.”

Kaido stares at him for a moment. Then, surprisingly, he grins. “Fine. Won't make any promises though.”

“Didn't expect any.” Rin shrugs and steps around Kaido. “See you later maybe?”

Kaido shrugs. “Yeah. Maybe.”

He then turns around and walks away. Hayashi stays behind a moment and gives Rin a slow nod before turning and following his friend back.

Yukio stares at Rin. “What...what was that about Nii-san?”

Rin flushes. “I guess so...”
Yukio sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose. “Nii-san...please don't do dangerous stuff like that...”

Rin laughs. “I'll do my best Yukio.” He looks away from his brother, a troubled expression crossing his face momentarily. “Always do my best.”

Yukio is puzzled by this, but the sound of the bell ringing stops any chance of them talking over it more as the two brothers race inside, neither wishing to be late.

The library isn't a busy place per usual, despite it being lunch period, but one table in particular is suddenly packed.

At the centre of it is one Chikafuji Manabu, who's talking to another student about their current project in school. “S-see, snakes have very sensitive skin to vibrations in the ground so though they can't hear the music, they can feel it.” He is explaining to them. The other student frowns and nods, scratching out the note he made and replacing it with a new one.

Manabu is then drawn to look at another student's work and he carefully looks it over before making a few suggestions.

It's only been two days since he was freed from Armour, and yet Manabu has found his new lease on life.

'I'm more than just the guy with the books. I'm the guy who reads and understands so much he can help others understand as well.’ Manabu affirms himself repeatedly, especially when his stutter looks to be returning in full force.

Standing in the doorway of the library is Rin, who can't help but smile at the sight of Manabu starting to reach out and thrive in life.

Manabu looks up on impulse but only sees some other female students enter and not Rin.

On Rin's part, he carefully and quietly untangles himself from Manabu's life and walks away.

There are more Cards out there. More challenges.

More dangers.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and please comment! That's the deal darlings: you comment and I post the next chapter.

I love each and every comment and I will make a point to replying to each to show I heard, even if it's just a "thank you".

The fact you show you are engaged and looking forward to more is like a great jolt, thank you very much.
The sound of quiet chopping fills the kitchen. It's starting to get hotter and hotter lately, so Rin's making light, cool bento for tomorrow.

It's just him in the kitchen, outside of Kero who's watching Rin cook. Well, actually he's reading another of Yukio's gag manga, but at times he looks up and watches Rin.

Yukio and Shirō have something to do, while the rest of the monks are being lazy this Sunday. This allows Kero to roam the monastery with Rin with minimal risks to being discovered for once.

After finishing the gag manga, Kero sits up and stretches out all eight limbs of his, his wings fluttering for a moment. He then turns to Rin.

Rin's been acting weird since the incident with Manabu and Armour. More weird in fact. It's not completely obvious, but for Rin to avoid Manabu after starting what might have been a friendship, it's not normal at all.

“Rin.” Kero's calling of the boy makes him blink and look over at Kero. He's in the process of making some light spring rolls for the bento, lightly flavoured and tasting fresh.

“What is it Kero?” Rin asks after a moment, seeing that Kero looks deep in thought. A worried look crosses Rin's face. “Is it about the Cards--”

“No.” Kero quickly interrupts that line of that. “No it doesn't have to do with that.” He watches as Rin relaxes, then sighs himself. This is harder than Ah thought it would be... “Look, Rin? You do know Ah'm a friend right?”

Rin freezes at that. “Wha...Kero, what are you...?”

Kero smiles and flies up to touch Rin's cheek. “Ah'm here for you, okay? If you ever need me Ah'm here so don't just bottle up your feelin's. It's not good for you.”

Rin stares at Kero for a moment, then a soft smile slowly spreads on his face. “Yeah. Thanks Kero. Just...” Rin looks down at his chopping. “Not sure how to speak of...stuff.”

“Ah'll wait then.” Kero says softly, nudging his nose against Rin's cheek for a moment.
Rin smiles. “Thanks.”

Kero returns the smile gratefully and, feeling a bit better, Rin turns back to his cooking in a more positive mood.

Rin hums as he cooks now, carefully wrapping the vegetables and chicken in the rice paper.

It’s to be the centrepiece in tomorrow’s lunch for him and Yukio.

After all, tomorrow is very a busy day with the school doing a big cleaning day. Covering the whole school and even the storage rooms in fact.

**Chapter 7: There Is No Other Way, Is There?**

The entire thing starts with someone deciding to check the storage rooms for the supplies for the upcoming festival. The festival might be in the future, but a discussion by the student council had them making sure they had the supplies.

They weren't able to confirm they do, since they couldn't find anything. Not in any storage room.

Turns out the storage rooms have been slowly turning into disaster zones, being incredibly messy and jumbled together.

Both the student council and the teachers and staff of the school had gotten together and decided on doing something unusual: taking a day off normal school work in favour of doing a great big clean up focusing not only on the storage rooms, but the whole school. Anyone who wants to come and help is to show up that day at school.

And, thanks the way the system is in Japan, nearly everyone does. Only a few who are sick don't show up.

Among the group is Rin, who is looking for a good place to start helping out in.

Easier said than done.

Rin sulks and kicks at the grass as he turns away from a group of people who watch him go with fear oozing from every pore of their body. Rin's not going to do anything to them like they fear, but the fear just makes things worse for Rin.

Rin had shown up to help with the big clean up like everyone else, but right now the boy is considering that he might have done better to just stay at home. Maybe Shirō could have actually given him something to do.

Rin sighs. 'Not that I can do anything...' Somehow the fact Rin was the one to deal with the vigilante made things worse rather than better. The fact that Kaido has an odd...respect for Rin now doesn't help either.

'Somehow they think I'm building a gang or something...' Rin sighs again. 'What the hell...maybe I'll go find Yukio. Maybe he can figure something out. Not good at this thinking shit.'

That decided, Rin turns a corner.

And runs into someone else, who gasps and is sent almost flying back from the impact, the bundle in their arms going flying up into the air.
“Woah, are you okay?!” Rin grabs the person before they end up hurting themselves. As is, all the things they were carrying still ends up on the ground with a dreadful crunching sound.

The girl he caught stares at him, bug-eyed and pale faced. She looks sweet-faced, with a second year ribbon, and her long, slightly curly brown hair pulled back from her face with a headband.

“Hiromi-chan!” Another girl runs up and grabs the first, dragging the first away from Rin. “Are you okay?” This one has short, boyish cut blue-black hair held back from her face with a hairclip, the same year ribbon, and a more angular look to her.

Hiromi nods slowly, eyeing Rin nervously. Her friend sighs in relief.

And then notices the crushed package. “What?”

Rin swallows. “I'm sorry I couldn't--”

The girl jumps at Rin's voice, and then, picking up the package, marches over to Hiromi and drags her away, tight-lipped and stiff.

Rin watches them go, seeing Hiromi glance behind at him once, shame faced and feeling even more horrible than before.

Once they are out of sight, Rin shoves his hands in his pockets and walks off himself. In an opposite direction at a much slower pace.

Rin grits his teeth. ‘Dammit.’

“No you idiot!” Kaido groans and wonders again why he's here. Then again, he did say he would try to be more upstanding citizen...

Here, is a storage room where Kaido somehow ended up in charge of the unpacking and reorganization. He really would like to know exactly how it happened that he's the only one willing to stand up and take charge.

At least Hayashi is listening to him.

“Look, we decided that those boxes would go over there.” Kaido gestures with his hands and glares at the idiot in front of him who is glowering up at him. “That way when it comes to actually fully sorting things we have already a system in place.”

The guy snorts. Some jock guy, apparently on the soccer team if Kaido remembers right. Not that he cares.

“It's a stupid system. We go put these boxes over by size and it's much easier to sort out.”

“It's the fucking contents we're sorting, dumbass!” Kaido shouts, getting up in the guy's face. “So the label says old gym stuff yes? Put it with the old gym stuff!”

“Heh...that supposed to scare me?” The jock sneers at Kaido.


Hayashi lets out a soft oh crap at that, knowing what the lowering of Kaido's voice means. As does the fact he suddenly seems calm.
“Tch. Anyone who's scared witless of a stupid first year who can't even manage to pass the first test to get into a sports club—”

The jock is cut off by Kaido grabbing him by his shirt collar and lifting him up. “That first year you mentioned happens to have failed those tests because he broke all the equipment and the timer the teacher was using.” Kaido says sweetly. “And he's not your problem anyways, I am.” He snarls at the end, glaring at the jock.

“So fucking listen to me or I'll have to smash your elbow to stop you from causing trouble!”

The entire storage room is quiet, everyone waiting and watching with baited breath the outcome of this confrontation.

The jock looks pale now and slowly nods. “O-okay. Sure. That's...good.”

“You listening then?” Kaido smiles sickeningly sweet. The jock gives a frantic nod as a response. “Good that.” Kaido pats his cheek and sets him down.

The jock scurries away as Kaido mentally congratulates himself on handling the idiot. Then he notices the rest are staring at him.

“The hell you looking at? Get back to work!”

They all jump and hop back to reorganizing things, Kaido grinning widely as he returns to work himself.

'Yup, still got it!' He thinks gleefully.

“Okumura-kun where should these go?”

Yukio twists around slightly, carrying a box himself, and sees two boys looking at him for direction carrying boxes of their own.

Yukio doesn't sigh, though he feels like letting one loose, and instead just carefully steps over and cranes his neck to see what they are carrying. The labels say fire on them from what he can see. “Hmm...the old fireworks are at the east corner, along with the campfire equipment.”

“What about fire safety stuff?” One asks.

Yukio blinks and smiles. “Same as the rest.”

“Thanks Okumura-kun!” The other says, and heads off cheerfully to add his box to the pile. The other scrambles after him a moment after.

Yukio glances down at his box and turns to head to the west. His current box is full of decorations for the festival, so they go there.

As he reaches the west corner of the courtyard, Yukio starts to hear the sounds of yelling and arguing. Picking up speed, he comes across an interesting sight.

The teacher monitoring this section looks flummoxed and even overwhelmed by the girl yelling up at him, brushing off the other girl who's trying to calm her down.

“What the hell is that beast doing here? We are here to fix up and clean up the place, not smash things. He's already left a bunch of people scared of their wits and he broke the special ornament that
Hiromi-chan found!” She steps forward and points at a wrecked looking package.

“Sayaka-chan...please. You are making things worse than are!” The other girl tugs at Sayaka's sleeve again.

Sayaka whirls on her friend, a deep, angry frown on her face. “Like hell I am Hiromi-chan! That Okumura left bruises on you!”

Hiromi tugs at her sleeves, but since it's summer they are too short to hide the handprint-shaped bruise on her wrist. “It was an accident!” She protests.

“Like hell! That monster--”

“Is my brother and I would prefer if you wouldn't say such rude things about him, Oota-san.” Yukio says clearly once he's in hearing range.

Sayaka flinches and turns to look at Yukio. “But...but he hurt Hiromi-chan!”

“He didn't!” Hiromi yells, then blushes at the attention she gets from it. “He just...I was moving too fast and not looking where I was going. I ran into him, dropped the package, and he caught me. That's it! He even asked if I was okay!”

“That sounds much more plausible than Oota-san's scenario.” Yukio comments to both Sayaka and the teacher, who is looking relieved at Yukio “rescuing” him. “Nii-san isn't the type to cruelly ruin something so important.”

Sayaka rocks back and forth and looks around widely. “But! The bruises...”

“May I see Minami-san?” Yukio offers a hand and waits as Hiromi blinks in surprise.

She recovers quickly and holds out her arm so Yukio can see. Taking it gently in his hands, Yukio carefully examines the bruising. “It looks like she was grabbed here, yes. There's a bit of a rash too, like road burn. He must have caught you very fast.”

Hiromi nods, cheeks pinking a bit in embarrassment. “It would have hurt more if I had fallen down on the ground.”


She bristles even more at that statement, but as she opens her mouth she's interrupted.

“Aah! There you are Yukio!” Rin skips over to Yukio. “Was hoping you could give me something to do! No one will let me help out...oh.” Rin blinks as he notices the two girls. “Um...are you okay?” He asks Hiromi, looking her up and down. “I grabbed you rather hard I'm sorry...was a bit surprised by that.”

Hiromi stares up at him, blinking wide-eyes. “Um...I'm fine. Thanks.”

Rin smiles. “That's good.” He then turns to Yukio. “Seriously Yukio I'm so bored...” He whines.

Yukio sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose, pushing up his glasses. “Nii-san...” His gaze trails over to look at the battered package of the ornament. “Why don't you see if there's any way to fix the ornament there.”

Rin glances over at the package and double-takes, obviously recognizing it. “Aaaah...sure! My fault
anyways.” He cheerfully slips over and grabs it, cradling it carefully. “Where's a good work space?”

“Our classroom is empty last I checked. Already was cleaned.” Yukio suggest.

Rin beams. “That sounds good. I'll come meet up with you here later then!”

“I might not be here Nii-san!” Yukio calls at Rin, but he's already rushing away. Yukio shakes his head, a fond smile on his face, then turns to the teacher.

“Sensei, is there anything else you need?”

The teacher says nothing, too confused by all the recent events to respond.

Abe Eiji jumps as a loud shout of “ah-ha!” reaches him. Looking up warily from the corner of the building he's hiding in, he groans as he sees the girl in looking down at him from the nearby path.

“Abe-san!” She sings, and quickly skips over to find her way down, eyes darting around gleefully.

“Watanabe-san.” Eiji sighs.

The girl giggles. “You can call me Naoko-san you know!” Settling before him, she slings her arms behind her back and clasps them. “What are you doing here Abe-san?”

Eiji looks at his smartphone, then up at Naoko. “I'm working through new facts and rumours I've gained today.”

“So you're not helping with the sorting and cleaning?” Naoko tilts her head to the side. “That sounds very unsportsmanlike...” She insinuates with a sing-song voice.

Eiji twitches at that. “Why are you here Watanabe-san?”

“I'm here to see if you've gotten anything new on that topic I asked you about!” Naoko steps forward and stares at him with super wide eyes.

Eiji grinds his teeth. “Nothing since yesterday or this morning.” He barely contains the eye roll at Naoko's enthusiasm for this topic.

The hyper girl instantly deflates at that. Then she quickly brightens. “Aaaah then I guess I can ask tomorrow! But for now!” She grabs Eiji by the arm, making him yelp and nearly drop his smartphone. “Back to cleaning!”

Eiji groans loudly, but doesn't resist Naoko. She's much stronger than she seems as much as super energetic.

Rin finally settles down in the classroom with the broken ornament in front of him. It had taken longer than he thought, mostly because once Rin had removed the ornament carefully from the box, he realized he is going to need certain tools to repair it.

So the half-hour or so was filled of Rin running around the school searching for said tools and items to allow for the repair.

Now Rin's got the glue, tweezers, paintbrush, and other items he needed.

'That was amazingly easy to get.' Rin thinks happily. His smile drops a bit as he realizes why that
was. ‘I just barged in on places and asked for the stuff. They were so scared they gave them to me so I would leave...’

Rin sulks for a moment on his still demonic reputation then gives himself a slap to his cheeks. “That's enough!” He declares.

Rin turns back to the ornament and, taking on a serious look, begins to carefully piece it together like a ginormous 3-D puzzle. Though with mostly bigger pieces than the usual kind.

'I'll prove to Yukio and everyone I'm able to help!' Rin affirms to himself.

The library is as busy as the rest of the school, with students helping to fully organize the place. Not as hard as the storage rooms, since things had already been reorganized some.

'And that was thanks to Rin-san. Something everyone forgets.' Manabu sighs at that. Where he's working is a very quiet place and only he and two others were given permission to sort through.

The librarian Yamaguchi-san is with them, helping sorting as much as keeping an eye on them. These books are special and can only be taken out with express permission from Yamaguchi after all.

“Thank you for the help, Chikafuji-kun.” She says suddenly to Manabu as they are both working on the same bookshelf.

Manabu blinks, looking up from frowning at a severely misplaced book, “A-aa...I'm...th-that is. I'm n-not doing what any-anyone else is not doing.”

Mentally he curses at his returning stutter, whenever he gets stressed it always happens. Yamaguchi smiles softly down at him.

“I was talking about how you've managed to make the library more lively than it was before.” She informs him softly. “It's become quite the place for the students, for which I'm grateful.”

Manabu blinks. “I th-thought you liked the place quiet?”

“Quiet, not empty.” Yamaguchi snorts. “I was feeling like my job wasn't completely needed, but you've almost single-handedly made all the other students realize how good a place it is. You have my thanks for that, despite the more work it means for me and my volunteers.”

Manabu glances down for a moment, then smiles. “You're welcome but it wasn't just me.”

“Oh? Who else?”

Manabu looks away for a moment, staring at the book in his hand. Something lingers on it that makes his memory tingle.

“Okumura Rin helped too.” He says softly, before putting the book away and returning back to sorting the books.

He misses the surprised – and thoughtful – look that crosses Yamaguchi's face at his words.

Yukio lets out a big breath, wiping the sweat from his brow and looking around at the pile of boxes around him. He's not the only one here, but at the same time Yukio feels like he's the only one doing the work considering how many boxes he's moved.
He winces and peers up through his hand at the sky. It's about noon at this point and the sun is heavy as a hammer on his head.

“You okay Okumura-kun?” One of his fellow helpers asks, looking worriedly at the sweating teen.

“I'm fine.” Yukio smiles quickly and emptily at the other. “Just a little more work to do and we can all take a nice break for lunch.”

A great sigh of relief comes up at that, and a few fall to chattering about what lunches their mothers packed for them or they even made themselves in certain rare cases.

On Yukio's part, he finds himself thinking longingly at the bento Rin put a lot of work into making. Cool and fresh tasting he's assured of since Rin tossed it in the freezer the day before and it's been defrosting all this time. He also finds himself desiring some iced coffee and makes plans to go to the convenience store to get that as much as some iced tea for Rin.

That decided Yukio looks at the rest. “Let's get back to work now. Sooner we get things done the better.”

A chorus of agreement goes up and they all dive back into the storage rooms or pick up boxes to do some sorting through.

Yukio shakes his head a bit, spraying a bit of sweat around – and not noticing some squees from some girls nearby – before heading back to work himself.

Rin stretches out, letting out a satisfied sound and beaming at the repaired ornament. “Finally, I'm done!”

Rin glances at the classroom clock then and grins at the time. “And just in time for lunch. I'll just put this where it's supposed to go and I'll go find Yukio!” Rin stands up, carefully putting all the tools he used into a plastic bag and making a mental reminder to all return them to their proper place. Luckily all are labelled with the appropriate class or room he got them from.

Once that's done, Rin turns to the ornament and frowns. “It looks a bit...weird.” Rin settles on finally, looking it over critically now that he's finished repairing it.

In truth it's a bit tacky and overdone, but obviously was made with love. Rin repaired it with a lot of effort and attention to detail, to the point it doesn't look like it was ever broken.

Rin shrugs off the look of the ornament, and sets to carefully packing it away again. He had gotten some bubble wrap as well by chance, as much as a new box, and he carefully sets it to be cradled in the middle of that. A little extra work and double checking and Rin closes the box and seals it for tape. A permanent marker is used to re-write the label the old box had on.

Or at least that's Rin's intent but his messy handwriting doesn't make it that clear.

“That's done! Now...” Rin pauses. “Uh...crap.” 'I forgot where it's supposed to be!' Rin bemoans. He had been so distracted by getting the tools and then repairing the ornament that he totally forgot where it goes.

“Dammit...what am I to do then...” Rin wanders over to the windows and stares out in the courtyard, trying to see where it's to go. All he sees is a sea of people and boxes, which does not help at all.

Dropping his gaze, Rin perks up at what he sees. Or rather who.
“Tsukishiro-sensei?” Rin presses his face to the glass and looks down at his favourite teacher, who is talking to a few other students.

She's got a happy smile on her face and a box under her arm. After a bit, the students obviously say goodbye and run off, Tsukishiro waving at them as they leave.

She then turns and heads towards the entrance to the school.

Rin perks up as an idea hits him. “That's it! I'll go find Tsukishiro-sensei and ask her!”

That decided, Rin collects his things. Throwing one last look at the clock, Rin then carefully exits the classroom and closes the door behind him, before walking off down the hall.

‘Let's see...Tsukishiro-sensei is that way!’ Rin thinks cheerfully, turning down the right hallway and down a flight of stairs.

Not noticing exactly what is guiding him towards Tsukishiro Sekki...

Deep in the back of a storage room, something glows.

In the midst of picking up another box, Yukio notices it. Blinking, he lets the box drop and slowly wanders over to the glow.

Pushing aside from cobwebs and moving past a rack of tools, Yukio is surprised by what he finds on the ground.

“A sword?” Yukio looks at the sword. It looks genuine enough, but also so fancy and slender it can't be anything but a prop sword.

Reaching down, Yukio goes to pick it up.

Not noticing the menacing light that shines for a moment from the gem at the hilt.

Tsukishiro is just turning down the hallway that leads ultimately to the teachers' office when she hears a happy cry and turns around.

“Tsukishiro-sensei!” Rin looks like he would like to wave, but his hands are filled with a big box.

“Rin-kun.” Tsukishiro smiles at the sight of the young boy, who flushes at the sight of her and slowly walks over to her, careful not to jostle his package. “How are you today?”

Rin gives a one-sided shrug. “Okay? I fixed up an ornament for the festival.” He raises the box to prove his point.

Tsukishiro can't help the small laugh that slips from her at Rin's super proud voice. “I'm sure you did. You are quite clever in that regard. Do you know where it goes?”

Rin shakes his head, deflating slightly. “No. Was hoping maybe you could help?”

“Hmmm...” Tsukishiro eyes the package. “How about you come with me and leave it at the teachers' office? That way it can get sorted later no problem. I can't be certain where it goes. I'm still the new teacher after all.”

“Oh, that's right...” Rin looks thoughtful at that. “How's that been?”
Tsukishiro tilts her head from side to side. “So-so. At times it's a good thing, other times it's a bit of a pain. But I'm managing well and I have a good relationship with the rest of the teachers...” ‘Well, mostly.’ She adds privately, a small frown tugging at her lips. ‘No one ever agrees with me in regards to Rin-kun after all.’

“Tsukishiro-sensei?” Rin peers up at her, confused by her going suddenly quiet.

Tsukishiro quickly banishes her dark thoughts and turns back to Rin. “C’mon Rin. Let's put these away and then have lunch.”

“Oh yes!” Rin cheers up at the thought of that. “I made a super nice bento for me and Yukio today. Since it's so hot we need to have fresh and cool food!”

“Really? What did you make?” Tsukishiro listens happily to Rin's blather about his bento, which dives into exactly how he cooked and prepared everything as he gets more and more enthusiastic about the subject.

They enter the teachers' office with Rin still blathering happily. Which means he’s ignorant to the shocked looks both he and Tsukishiro are getting from the few teachers here – some already having a simple lunch – at his attitude and Tsukishiro's serene yet somehow pointed smile.

Rin had just set the package on top of Tsukishiro's desk when it happens.

Hot, boiling fear and something grasping on to a soul and covering it in darkness and violence.

“Rin-kun?” Tsukishiro peers at Rin worriedly, seeing how he's suddenly pale.

Rin doesn't hear or notice her, focuses too much on the bad feeling spreading from...

“Yukio!” Rin shouts and then runs out, a sharp wind left in his wake and confused and concerned teachers behind him.

The courtyard is in chaos, students trying to run or see what's going on, teachers trying to figure out what's going on and stop the students from running around.

And at the centre, loud frightful screams are heard.

The source of it is one Okumura Yukio, though it doesn't seem at all like the usual one. In his hands he holds a strange sword, looking like a European rapier with a wing-shaped hilt. His eyes look dead and he raises the sword and slashes out at it. It destroys a nearby statue, bisecting it right in half and causing more screams.

The screams mostly come from Hiromi and Sayaka, who are currently being pursued by the possessed Yukio. The statue is the result of them managing to duck away from the swing just in time. But as the courtyard clears and they get further in, the less chance they have of avoiding the swings.

“What is going on?! Okumura-kun?” Sayaka looks pale and blotchy in turns, obviously stressed and terrified out of her wits.

Hiromi whimper to herself, but stands in front of Sayaka all the same. A teacher finally gets close to them and gapes at the sight before him of a star pupil about to kill two girls with a sword.

“YUKIO!”

That shout has everyone look up, except for Yukio who merely halts in his swing. His arm trembles
with the effort to keep the sword up in the air.

On the second floor, poking out of an open window, is Okumura Rin who stares at Yukio in horror.

‘A Card!’ Rin realizes in horror, staring at Sword and feeling the power pulse. His eyes then narrow and he *growls*, as the fact that it's attached to his brother and hurting him sinks in fully.

“Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!” Rin calls out, not caring of witnesses. His brother is more important after all.

With the wand in his hand, Rin jumps from the second floor, causing cries of shock to ring out at the leap, and rolls out into the courtyard.

At this point, Yukio has recovered, so to speak, from the first shout and has raised the Sword up again.

Sayaka screams.

And Rin takes the blow, managing to push the Sword up and away despite its power with the wand and snarl up at it and the possessed Yukio.

“Yukio!”

Yukio blinks, face softening and a confused look making its way onto it. “Nii...san?”

His grip loosens on Sword and Rin grasps the opportunity instinctively, sending the wand down on Yukio's wrist and making him drop Sword.

Yukio falls forward at that, Rin catching him and looking at him worriedly. He breathes a sigh of relief at how he's just fainted, then turns on Sword with a growl.

“Sword, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

With a whirl of light Sword turns back into a Card, and Rin catches it.

“What...Okumura...what is...” The teacher stares at Rin. He's not the only one, plenty of students having been in sight aside from Hiromi and Sayaka, and now wondering what they just saw Okumura Rin do. It couldn't have been real, could it?

Rin curses and pulls out Memory. “Change what they saw into something simpler!” He orders, thinking desperately, ‘Yukio fainted from heatstroke! He used to do that a lot when younger.’

Memory appears in front of Rin and with a cry he lets out a big light that reaches out to touch everyone who can possibly see him, and thus could have seen Rin.

No one notices Tsukishiro at the very same window Rin jumped out of pull up a magical shield just in time and block the spell, wincing at the power behind it. ‘He's got serious talent if he can give me trouble!’ Tsukishiro thinks in shock.

The light fades to reveal everyone blinking in confusion and Rin shaking Yukio lightly, wand now gone as much as the two Cards.

“Yukio! Yukio, are you okay? Yukio!”

Everyone stares at the twins, shocked at what they remember now. No one notices the fact the broken statue was miraculously fixed. Except for Tsukishiro who is stunned by that; that was not the
Card, but an effect of Rin's panic and own magical power. But she is the only one.

For though Memory got rid of the memory of magic, they still remember Rin jumping out of the second window.

They also remember him now being there in time to catch Yukio as he fainted from heatstroke.

Both things which are amazing to them still.

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Rin looks worriedly at Yukio, lying flushed and still in the bed in the nurse's office. Beside him, the nurse examines Yukio and waits for his temperature to be taken by the thermometer. After a long moment that stretches, the electronic device beeps and she carefully removes it from under his tongue.

She gives a sigh of relief at what she sees and looks over at Rin. “He's fine. Just passed out from heatstroke. Once he wakes up he should be given a lot of water but other than that he should recover just fine.”

Rin lets out a gusty sigh at that and relaxes in relief. “That's good...”

The nurse watches Rin, looking at how he looks at Yukio. He looks lost and angry in a strange fashion. But she doesn't know what to say to him.

“I...really hate it when Yukio is hurt.” Rin says softly. “I get just so...angry...” He clenches his hand in his shirt, bunching it up amongst the chest. “It hurts. And it's worse when it's a someone who hurts him...I can never forgive that...or them...”

Rin droops. “I should though.”

“No.” The nurse says softly, Rin snapping up his head to look at her shocked. She pauses for a moment, surprised by the intense and even perhaps hopeful gaze turned on her. “Emotions aren't that simple. If you are angry at someone, you are angry at them. It's only age and, hopefully, some wisdom that makes it easier for you to control those emotions. Never kill them or deny them though. That's...” She sighs. “Well, I supposed you don't really understand yet.”

Rin shakes his head. “Mmmm...sorry.”

“Don't be.” She looks at Rin's cheek, which has a still fading scar on it and feels regret despite knowing she definitely wasn't herself back then. “You can't help it. Besides, from what I heard you were amazing.”

“I was?” Rin looks at her, puzzled by her words and tone. “How so? 'Please don't tell me Memory missed someone...’

“You jumped out of a two story window for your brother. And you somehow knew he was in danger...eh, I thought only identical twins had that ability.” She shakes her head and turns back to Rin. “Have such a powerful connection to each other they can tell when their other half is in danger or scare or whatever.”

Rin looks over at the sleeping peacefully Yukio again. “...It's not the first time. But it's...the first time it's been so intense...”

‘Was it because of the magic?’ Rin wonders. ‘Because I have magic...and Yukio does too as well...’ He remembers, thinking back to the last time he was like this with Yukio. 'It's just not active so can't
“That's interesting. Now, do you have a lunch?” The nurse asks him. Rin looks up at her, a little surprised at the mention of food. “You can go and get yours and your brother's. I don't think he'll be waking up any time soon. And you can wait here until he does and is feeling better too.” She offers after a thought. “I don't mind and the office has room luckily today.”

Rin perks up at that. “Thanks! I'll go get our bento right now.” He stands up and hesitates, glancing at Yukio and then the door.

The nurse laughs. “I'll stay here and watch him while you are gone.”

“Thank you! Um...I'm sorry, but what is your name?” Rin asks, looking sheepish.

The nurse stares at him for a moment and then a slow smile spreads across her face. “So that's what Tsukishiro-san means...” She murmurs softly, then louder, “It's Sagisawa Sayori.”

“Thanks Sagisawa-sensei!” Rin says cheerfully, then leaves the room.

As he does, his face falls. 'First the entire school, then Manabu, and now Yukio...' Rin pauses and looks out the window at the sky.

'The Cards are dangerous and I have to keep people away from them. I need to keep them out of danger.' Rin's face firms. “There is no other way, is there?” He says softly to himself.

'Which means no one, especially Yukio, can get involved with this.' Rin decides. 'It's just too dangerous.'

That decided, Rin heads to get the bento he made, forcing himself to think of more positive things.

Not noticing Tsukishiro on a nearby staircase watching him with a sad look on her face.

But one that is also thoughtful.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please comment it makes me happy and it will make me post the next chapter!

Also, the writer's blog I mentioned above will eventually have a FAQ page for ICD. I would like input for what you would like to know or questions answered there so please go there and send me a message!
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Yet another chapter and yet ANOTHER reminder that I have a writer's blog (shared with my bestie which means other goodies are there) that's just for questions. I would REALLY like questions there as much as comments here as the questions will be posted no matter what and anyone can rely on them if they are wondering.

Go here: http://writerscomergblp.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There's a generally hot, lazy air in the city these days. It seeps through from the sun and slowly touches and effects everything else that it touches, warming everyone to a lazy state.

Not to mention makes more than a few feel like their brains are frying.

“Aaaaah...it's so hoooooot...” Kero whines, lying flat in front of the fan blowing cool air in the kitchen.

“Sorry Kero but I can't do anything today...” Rin sighs, fanning himself. He gave up awhile back and removed his shirt. If anyone complains he'll throw it back in their teeth. Between his bare chest and his shorts he's feeling better, even if he still has uwabaki on. He's not gone far enough to remove those.

They are currently in the kitchen, Rin working on a cool dinner today as well as a dessert for tomorrow. Ice cold dessert for tomorrow in fact.

Not wanting anything really fancy, and wanting to avoid the heat, Rin focuses on making for everyone some Cold Tanuki Udon. The most heat involved comes from boiling the water for the udon, something that is bearable compared to other options this day. No one else is any condition to cook, so Rin decided to handle things all on his own. He's more than skilled enough for such a simple meal.

While he waits for the udon to cook, Rin turns his attention to the bananas and other ingredients he had set up. He found a nice recipe recently for a cold dessert that he finds he likes. Healthy as much as quick and easy to make. Not to mention won't take him buying new equipment to make.

It's a tasty chocolate covered frozen banana recipe, and since he just needs to use the microwave to melt the chocolate, it's again something that won't torture him and Kero with heat.

“What are you making for dinner Rin?” Shirō enters the kitchen, looking a bit wilted in his priest uniform. He pauses when he sees how under-dressed Rin is and sighs. “Rin...”

“What?” Rin demands, putting his hands on his hips. “It's too hot Oyaji! If you could, I know you would be the same you stupid priest.”

Shirō's eyebrows twitch, particularly at the sudden change to being “Oyaji”, but he lets Rin's words go. It really is too hot for anything. He instead settles in the chair closest to the fan and let out a groan.
“The church was terrible.” Shirō grouches, undoing the collar of his uniform. “I really wish it could have been better, but damn...the A/C decided to give up on us at a terrible time.”

“Will it be fixed soon?” Rin asks, a little worriedly. He glances over at Kero and nearly bursts out laughing. Kero is so worn out by the heat that he didn't even bother moving to look more like a normal stuffed animal like usual, just letting the fan's air blow over him. Somehow Shirō doesn't notice, or at least doesn't think anything of it.

“Hopefully. I managed to get in contact with a service guy with reasonable prices, but apparently it's a summer where A/C giving up is a common thing. Will probably take a little longer before the A/C can be fixed.”

Rin lets out a soft curse, turning back to his frozen dessert and checking the melted chocolate before starting to dip the halved bananas into it before sprinkling ground almond on them. He stops halfway to turn off the stove and get the now cooked udon out and into the ice bath he quickly sets up.

“Well, supper should be ready soon. It's cold tanuki udon.” Rin declares, getting something of an enthusiastic response from Shirō, considering the heat induced exhaustion. Which translates as a soft “yay” that sounds almost sarcastic due to how tired his foster father is.

Rin laughs and turns back to finish off the bananas, put them on a tray, and shove them in the fridge. They will be ready in time for after dinner in fact, which is why Rin is making extra. Just in case someone wants them after dinner.

But, looking at Shirō, Rin has the feeling everyone will be too tired to do anything more than force the cold tanuki udon down their gullets.

Chapter 8: For Summer The Pool Is Called For

The bus rolls through the streets, up and down a few hills, the chatter and glee of the people within loud and attention grabbing to the few people out and about.

“Settle down, settle down!” Hisakawa Masato attempts to get everyone to calm down and pay attention. “Please, settle down.” He tries a bit louder, but it's an ill-timed attempt as the chatter gets louder in the back.

A sharp piercing whistle breaks through the noise, making everyone look up and stare at the originator. Tsukishiro removes her fingers from her lips and smiles. “Now, everyone please pay attention. Hisakawa-sensei has some important information to share with you all.”

Everyone grumbles, but are ultimately subdued and turn to pay attention to Hisakawa.

The older man coughs. “Thank you Tsukishiro-sensei. Now, as you all know we got permission to use the Koyomi Pool and Recreation Centre for these special extra-curricular swimming lessons. All of you have signed up and been accepted into this special class so you are all to behave as if you truly deserve to be here.”

At that point Hisakawa narrows his gaze accusingly at Rin, who glowers at the look.

“So, the rules are thus...” He begins listing off all the rules he has, most of which are from common sense.

Rin sighs, sinking down into his seat, only to get elbowed by Yukio. He glances over at his brother and, with a groan, sits up again and makes at least a show of paying attention to the rules.
Yukio smiles at his brother, then turns to pay attention himself. Best not to cause any trouble after all and that means knowing the rules.

Koyomi Pool and Recreation Centre is a big building mostly made of glass. Inside is the prominent pool – or rather pools – and jungle gyms, as well as some various indoor sport courts. The group of students and teachers are greeted by an employee of the place, who smiles and greets not only the teachers, but the students cheerfully.

“My name is Miyamoto Maiko and I'll not only be your guide here, but your swim instructor.” Hearing a few complaints about them already knowing how to swim, her grin widens. “To be precise, I'll be mostly teaching you tips and tricks on how to swim better while helping monitor your actions during swim time. That said, this is a lesson and so you are to address me as Miyamoto-sensei during it and at least act as if you are learning something.”

A bit of laughter comes from that and the crowd of students settles down. Within it, Rin notices Abe Eiji and is surprised to see him here. Being in a swim class sounds like more work than he would normally be involved in, physical work at that.

As Maiko explains things further to the group, Rin inches over to Eiji. “What are you doing here?”

Eiji jumps, having been alternating his focus between Maiko's lecture and his smartphone, and then pales at seeing Rin. “Oh. You. Yes, you were on the list of the accepted though I'm surprised you could make it...” He mutters the last to himself.

Rin scowls. “I so can. What are you doing here? Doesn't seem like your thing.”

Eiji eyes Rin warily, made nervous by the fact he heard him say something rude to him. “Th-that's a very astute observation.” Rin frowns, confused by those fancy words, but Eiji takes it wrong. “Errr...that's a compliment. And yes, I prefer to do the minimal amount of physical work to stay in shape and for daily needs.”

“Then why are you here?” Rin asks after puzzling through the rest of his words.

“I also happen to like information and I never had a reason to visit the Koyomi Pool and Recreation Centre before. This way I can get first hand knowledge of the place.” Eiji adjusts his glasses, smirking a bit. “Might come in handy.”

“But we are in lessons the whole time.” Rin observes. “How are you going to explore?”

Eiji looks over at Rin. ‘He's surprisingly civil for a guy known as a demon.’ “There's a free swim period during the end of the lesson. Not that much, but since we are coming here for two weeks it adds up to plenty of time with a little work for exploring the place and getting more facts on it.”

“Aaaah...that's pretty cool!” Rin says cheerfully, then heads back over to Yukio, noticing his brother is wondering where he is.

Eiji watches him go with wide eyes. 'Did that...' He frowns. 'My information about Okumura Rin seems to be very...lacking...' He settles on as he watches Rin talk to his brother in a cheerful manner that makes Yukio shake his head.

'Perhaps, after Koyomi, I should investigate him.' Eiji considers, closing his smartphone and starting to follow the rest of the group to their assigned pool.

Rin is certainly proving to be quite an interesting person.
The locker room is hardly half-full considering this is a public building, but somehow just the boys' half of the class – a mere 10 or so – makes it feel packed and crowded.

“Dammit, give me that back!”

“Woah, Takasu where do you get all those muscles?”

“That hurt! Watch where you are flailing those arms!”

'Then again...' Yukio eyes the group warily. 'It's probably because of how...enthusiastic people are being.'

“This is so cool!” Rin burbles beside Yukio. Yukio looks over his way and snorts at the sight of his brother stuck halfway in removing his shirt. Rin disentangles himself a moment later and shakes his head a bit, then grins at Yukio. “And it's going to be cool too, in the pool.”

Yukio blinks for a moment, then realizes what Rin is getting at. “Yes. That is why you jumped at the chance.”

“Ugh. I swear this summer is hotter than last one...” Rin bemoans, dropping his pants without care and going for his swim trunks. School swim trunks of course, since this is a school event despite being a bus trip away from their school.

Yukio smiles and turns to undress. And hesitates.

Rin, still grumbling to himself about the hot and humid weather, notices as he finally finishes dressing. “Yukio? Are you okay?”

Yukio flushes. “Ah...yes I'm...”

Rin blinks and looks down at Yukio's hands, frozen at the bottom of his shirt. And it clicks. “Oh. Right. Yukio no one's going to tease you about your moles here.” Rin says, dropping his voice for Yukio's sake. “If they do, tell me and I'll straighten them up.”

Yukio looks at Rin's flashing grin and finds himself relaxing. “Aaah...yeah...”

“Besides, you've come all this way and signed up too. Can't avoid it now.” Rin grins at Yukio and gives his hair a ruffle.

Yukio scowls at Rin or tries to, too busy trying not to grin at Rin instead. 'Nii-san...this entire thing is your fault and you know it.'

Then again, being at the pool with Rin sounds like a lot of fun, no matter the occasion. It's been years since they've been to visit a public pool for some fun and it was nothing like this place.

The students spill out into the pool area in an excited swarm, even the more subdued members like Eiji and Yukio getting caught up in the rush. In Eiji's case, he ends up nearly falling down and hurting himself.

Yukio gets caught by Rin and pulled up to a safe zone around him, as Rin glares at the person who nearly knocked down his brother.

“Calm down Nii-san...” Yukio sighs and cranes his neck to see Maiko attempting to get everyone's attention. Unfortunately the pool looks very interesting to them all and there are loud debates on
whether or not to just jump in already.

Rin blinks and looks down at Yukio, stepping back to give him some space when he realizes he's okay. Looking around, Rin finds a wide grin come on his face. “Oh, Tsukishiro-sensei's going to be swimming too!”

Yukio blinks and tries to see said teacher through the crowd, but people move at the wrong time and block his view. Yukio frowns and wonders if he'll be able to actually see Tsukishiro.

A sharp whistle is the answer to that and soon everyone turns back to Maiko who looks relieved at the fact Tsukishiro got everyone's attention.

“Now, everyone, this is class time and you are to respect Miyamoto-san like you would me or anyone else at the school.” Tsukishiro eyes the group. “Am I clear?”

Dead silence is her answer and she raises an eyebrow. “Is everyone alright?”

Yukio makes a strangled sound deep in his throat. Tsukishiro is currently wearing a nice one-piece swimsuit, a white one with a purple flower design on one hip and crawling up to her chest on the opposite side. It hugs her figure nicely and sends all the hormonal teenagers into a mental loop.

Yukio wrangles down his hormones – oh god she's got her hair tied back in a neat, tight bun that exposes her neck and shoulders – and glances over at Rin, who he figures must be feeling the shock more than him.

To his surprise, Rin seems to not be effected by the swimsuit, instead happily smiling at Tsukishiro and, as Maiko recovers herself and starts speaking – drawing everyone else's attention to her – he also turns and listens.

Yukio stares. “Uh...Nii-san are you alright?”

Rin turns to look at Yukio, a faint hint of confusion popping up in his eyes. “What do you mean Yukio?”

Yukio pauses. 'Should I ask?' Looking up at Rin, Yukio decides this is too puzzling to be brushed aside. “What do you think of Tsukishiro-sensei?”

Rin stares at Yukio, nonplussed. “What I think...oh! The swimsuit. It looks nice, pretty colours on her.”

Rin is left staring at a slack-jawed Yukio in utter confusion. “Yukio...?”

'What...but...but Nii-san has a crush on her! Doesn't he?'

It takes a long time for Yukio to get his feet back under him and by that point it's time for the “lesson”.

The swim “class” goes by amazingly quick. Then again, Maiko has definitely been in training for teaching – and in fact mentions she's part of a program here that offers swim lessons to kids – and also is very enthusiastic about her job. That enthusiasm is quite contagious, especially as many students find their skills at swimming jumping up to much better levels as she teaches them different strokes and tips for holding their breath, adjusting their swim style to account for their body types, and fixing minor errors they keep making.
The only problem comes from various people at times getting distracted by Tsukishiro, who is helping out with the lesson along with Hisakawa. But unlike Hisakawa, she's young and beautiful, which makes her impossible to ignore.

Unless you are one Okumura Rin who is now seriously confusing Yukio.

'I thought he had a crush on her...' Yukio frowns and watches Rin talk to Tsukishiro about something, most definitely about swimming, making big arm motions to express himself. 'Sure he's very bright and active around her, still blushing, but he's the only one who's not so taken by her swimsuit.'

Yukio himself is ashamed that Tsukishiro's swimsuit is an attention grabber for him as well. Most likely because it's too easy to notice she's got an attractive, womanly figure. At times Yukio finds himself mentally replacing her looks with blonde hair and green eyes and really what the hell is wrong with him?

Yukio frowns, leaning against the edge of the pool, and considering what this means. 'Does Rin just not find her attractive in that regard? Maybe he's just attracted to something else...maybe it has to do more with how she's the only teacher who's 100% nice and willing to listen to him.'

Glancing over, Yukio catches Hisakawa looking over darkly at Rin, obviously still suspicious of the “demon” amongst the class. Yukio scowls at that briefly before smoothing his expression.

'So it's not that he has a crush...or rather, it's not a romantic crush.' Yukio blinks and considers that. 'He's crushing because he admires her and her treatment of him makes him want to do better around her too. It's not like many adults outside the monastery have treated Nii-san in a good way.'

"Oi, Yukio what are you doing over there?" Yukio is pulled from his thoughts by that shout from Rin. Rin waves and grins at his brother, something that Yukio returns in a softer manner.

"Free time is in a few minutes so get over here!" Rin says excitedly.

Yukio chuckles and dives into the pool again, swimming expertly over to Rin and shooting up to the surface in a fashion to splash Rin.

Rin splutters and splashes Yukio back, making him splutter and swim back a bit. With his prescription goggles Yukio can see clearly, but he rather not have any chlorine in his eyes. He's too allergic to it.

In fact, looking at Rin's red eyes, Yukio sighs. “You should have used your goggles. You're eyes look super red.”

Rin frowns and rubs at his eyes. “Yeah, yeah I know. But they never stay on and they hurt if I tighten them too much. I can handle this better than you anyways.”

Yukio sighs but lets it slide. Behind them, Tsukishiro swims to the edge and pulls herself up, nearly causing a nearby Hisakawa to drown in shock, settling herself on the edge with just her legs in the water.

A whistle, this one from a sport's whistle, gets the students' attentions and Maiko smiles at them immediately turning to her. “Okay, it's time for the free swim! You got ten minutes to play around!”

A great cheer goes up, nearly drowning out Maiko's warnings to play safe.

At the back of the pool, Eiji pulls himself up and sneaks away to the locker room. If he manages his
time well he should be able to get at least one section of the Koyomi Centre mapped out and information gathered on.

Unnoticed to the group, a dark spot in the water starts to grow and shift. And, for a moment, there’s a hissing sound and the sight of two eyes glowing in the water as something wakes up.

Eiji exits the locker room with a sigh of relief. No one stopped him and at this point he’s basically home free. Checking to see that his visitor’s pass is pinned firmly to his shirt, he pulls out his smartphone and checks the list of locations.

“Hmmm...the food court. That would be something people would be interested in, if only because everyone eats.” Eiji thinks aloud, before putting the smartphone away and heading to the nearby Centre map to look it over.

Looking at the map carefully, he quickly sees a “short-cut” of a sort to get to the food court. “Excellent. I can get that entire place figured out and have a little extra time to head back to the locker room before I get caught.”

Whistling happily to himself, Eiji walks quickly to his chosen destination, mind turned to information gathering once again.

“Oh look...it's Okumura Yukio, Mr. high and mighty.”

Yukio turns his head to look at a group of three other students. Judging from their size, they are actually third years. Which makes sense since this special class is open to all grades. However, looking at their sneering faces, Yukio gets the feeling they shouldn't have been allowed in.

Yukio glances over to where Rin is, currently having somehow managed to start a splash war – of which he is winning with those scary finger flick splashes of doom he learned to pull off when they were kids – and thus ignorant to Yukio's plight currently.

“What do you want?” Yukio asks, sighing at the macho posturing.

One of the trio scowls and swims forward a bit. The other two stick close to him, but also behind him. “I was thinking about your arrogance to think you got any rights to steal something that ain't yours.”

Yukio blinks. “What are you talking about?”

The leader snarls and pushes Yukio. “I'm talking about Midori-chan. Remember her?”

Yukio stares and then slowly starts to remember that particular girl. Nakano Midori would be a second year student that has been trying to get Yukio's attention for some time. The boy was too embarrassed to even look at her some days, since she's been quite persistent.

‘I'm still twelve after all...’ Yukio sighs internally at that. Damn December birthday...

“Look I don't know what--”

“You don't know?” The leader growls this time and pushes Yukio harder, making him sink down briefly. “Midori-chan is mine. Stay the fuck away from her!”

Yukio attempts to swim away at that point. No way is he getting into a fight here, especially in water.
He doesn't know how to fight like that after all and it's way too risky even if he did.

The leader grabs him by the arm though and pulls him back. “Why you--”

“HEY!” Rin charges over, slamming into the guy and grabbing his arm, practically ripping it off of Yukio. “What the fuck are you doing?!”

There's dead quiet at that, as Rin stares down the third year with teeth bared and a growl working his way up his throat.

The third year, pale, attempts to brush it aside, pulling his arm from Rin and backing away. “Nothing.” His trembling and wide-eyes belays the truth, as Rin watches him go with intense eyes.

Eventually Rin sighs and turns back to Yukio. “You okay Yukio?”

Yukio swallows, a bit shocked by what happened, but nods. “Yeah. Just came out of nowhere that's all.”

Rin smiles. “That's good.”

Around them, Yukio can hear a few whispers.

“What the hell was Nakamoto thinking?” A girl whispers to another.

“Yeah...everyone knows that Okumura will kill anyone who touches his brother!” She whispers back.

Yukio flushes at that, and purses his lips. “It's okay Nii-san. Let's go over here.”

Rin follows Yukio, a bit puzzled and then realizes it. 'Whoops. I think I hurt Yukio's feelings again...'

Yukio is in fact nursing a sore point within him. 'Great...I'm off limits thanks to my brother. Dammit. I need to get stronger.' With that in mind, he mentally considers another talk with his foster father about upping his training a bit. With more mundane attackers in mind, bully prevention more than demon hunting.

Rin is ignorant to exactly where Yukio's mind is, but lets him calm down and swims over to an edge to rest against. The splash war had died with Rin jumping to Yukio's defence, the students just floating over to form groups and talking.

The free time is almost over anyways, so probably that's a good thing. Maiko looks relieved at how the group isn't making such a ruckus anymore.

It's at that moment that Rin feels it. It hits him so fast he loses his balance and drops briefly underwater before pulling himself up again. Yukio, noticing that, looks wonderingly over at Rin. Then dismisses it as just another quirk of his brother's and goes back to practising holding his breath underwater. Never know when it might come in handy.

Rin, meanwhile, looks around frantically, trying to pin point the Card he is sensing. 'Dammit, where is it?'

On the other side of the pool, Nakamoto is scowling and thinking vile thoughts at Okumura Rin. Once again the demon has proven to be a thorn in his side. He can't do anything with that demon there and now that he knows he's after his brother, his chances of driving Yukio away from Midori have dropped.
Of course, Nakamoto doesn't consider that a) Midori is her own person and has her own feelings and b) obviously Yukio isn't returning those feelings. But that's hardly unusual for people like him.

He's so focused on his plotting that he doesn't notice the strange tendril wraps around his foot until it's too late.

A great cry goes up as he's suddenly pulled into the water out of his control. This quickly gets everyone's attention and they turn to see the water rippling and Nakamoto's two cronies trying to figure out what happened.

Rin, however, realizes exactly what happened and dives back into the water. Swimming as fast as he can, Rin reaches the other side of the pool in record time, not noticing the wake he leaves that sends people floating off in shock or that Yukio is staring at him in surprise.

Underneath the water, Nakamoto is struggling to get free, clueless to what's got a hold of him. He does see Rin and freaks at the sight of him, wondering if the demon is going to drown him for going after his brother. He doesn't notice how shocked and worried Rin looks, as he looks at Nakamoto's foot and sees the strange light – to his eye – that is wrapped around him and dragging him down.

Pulling up his determination, Rin dives down further and goes for that circles. Grasping hold of it, Rin strains against the pressure of it. Scowling at how it doesn't move, Rin focuses on his magic and pushes out with it. The ring snaps under that pressure and another wave pops to the surface, startling those up there.

Rin grabs Nakamoto at that and pulls him up, reaching the surface just in time for the both of them to gasp for air.

“What...what the fuck was that?!” Nakamoto clings to Rin for a moment before realizing what he's doing. Rin ignores it in favour of passing Nakamoto off to his friends who receive him gratefully and help get him out of the water.

Rin is still alert however, as he feels the Card is still active and looking. 'For me maybe?' Rin considers that and carefully starts swimming over to the nearest ladder.

Instead, he swims into Yukio.

“Nii-san! What was that?” Yukio looks his brother over worriedly. Then looks out into the pool. The teachers are now doing their best to get the students out of the pool, but too many are scared or still not sure what happened to listen.

Rin gazes up at Yukio and wonders what to say. 'Dammit, I can't tell him the truth...' Rin looks around the pool, sensing the Card stirring. 'What's it going to do...'

At that Rin realizes the Card is heading straight to Yukio. “Yukio, move!” Rin cries, pushing Yukio back and making him fall into the water briefly.

“Nii-san!” Yukio stares at his brother. Or rather where his brother was. “Nii-san!”

Nothing but ripples on the water and Yukio finds himself panicking. 'Oh no, don't tell me...'

Underneath the surface of the pool, obscured by dark, magical water, Rin stares up in horror at the Card before him. It has large ears that look like flippers almost and big, long “hair” that floats around it. But more important is the angry eyes and the sharp fangs revealed to Rin.

This Card is hostile and plans on killing him, a point proven by it wrapping its hands around Rin's
throat and starting choke him. Rin struggles but he can feel the black creeping around the edges of his vision...

Up on the surface is pandemonium, as everyone freaks as this time everyone saw what happened. They saw a strange dark wave go up and take down Rin exactly where Yukio once was.

Yukio is about ready to dive into the water, only for Hisakawa to stop him and drag him out of the water. “What...no wait! Nii-san!” Yukio is frantic and struggles to get free. “Nii-san!”

But nothing on the surface is seen, except for how dark the pool suddenly looks.

Then a shocked cry goes up and Yukio whirls around to see Tsukishiro do a running, elegant dive straight into the pool. He stares in awe as she dives deep into the water, losing visibility of her quickly, and straight at the exact spot where Rin went under.

It's silent for a long moment, everyone holding their breath in fear and tension.

Then the surface breaks and Tsukishiro gasps. In her arms is Rin, who is unconscious and limp in her arms. Yukio gasps at that and breaks away from the shocked Hisakawa. “Nii-san!”

Tsukishiro pulls Rin up to solid ground and then heaves herself up. She carefully turns Rin over and rubs his back, saying something softly under her breath.

Yukio stares, for a moment seeing something strange – a light – going from Tsukishiro to Rin. But that is dismissed as Rin coughs and hurls up pool water, opening his eyes and gasping for breath as he pushes himself up to his hands and knees.

“Nii-san!” Yukio drops beside his brother, feeling tears prick at his eyes in relief.

Rin takes a two big gulps of air then looks over at Yukio, smiling. “Yukio. You're safe.”

“Dammit Nii-san!” Yukio throws his caution to the wind and hugs his brother. Rin is startled still for a moment, then gratefully returns it, taking in a deep breath of Yukio's scent.

Beside them, Tsukishiro sighs and smiles in relief. She then turns to look at the pool, which has lost its strange darkness and now look as ordinary as it did before.

She turns to Maiko, who looks worried but not as shocked as she should be, with a serious look. “Now what, exactly, was that?”

Maiko pales at those words and licks her lips, looking worriedly between Tsukishiro and Rin. “Um...”

At the other end, directly across from Tsukishiro and Maiko's stare down, is Eiji, who has his face in his hands. “Of course...” He mutters to himself. “Of course I miss getting a first hand account of something going down here...”

He then straightens up, adjusts his glasses, and goes to the first likely witnesses, a trio of girls who look like they have been run over by the events. Best to start collecting what information he can while it's still fresh in everyone's heads.

Once everyone is outside the pool and back at the front hall, the explanation finally comes for what's going on from the owner of the Centre, one Taniguchi Takeshi who looks faint at the sight of the
terrified students and one very angry Tsukishiro.

“What is going on here?” Tsukishiro demands. “I want answers and I want them now.”

Taniguchi twitches under that and looks down at his wringing hands. “W-well...it...wasn't that bad until today.”

This gets some attention, including from Rin and Yukio who are sitting on the steps nearby.

“Not that bad?” Tsukishiro questions. Taniguchi flinches as she somehow makes her calm, reasonable voice quite the threat. “What do you mean?”

“Really, what was that?” Hisakawa asks, wiping nervous sweat from his brow. “What happened there?”

“That's what I would like to know too.”

That voice has Rin and Yukio whipping their heads up and around. “Tou-san!” “Oyaji!”

Fujimoto Shirō raises an eyebrow at Taniguchi, then turns to his sons. “Rin, are you okay?” He asks, dropping down on the steps beside him. “I got here as fast as I could once Tsukishiro contacted me.”

Hisakawa blinks and turns to Tsukishiro. “You contacted him?”

Tsukishiro looks at him blandly. “Yes. As well as Nakamoto-kun's mother. They are the two who were greatly hurt by the incident so they deserve to know.”

Taniguchi is not paying attention to this, too busy looking at Shirō's exorcist pin with something like desperate hope.

Rin slowly nods at Shirō's question. “I'm fine.” His voice is harsh and makes Shirō frown so Rin assures him again, “I'm alive and I just think I swallowed too much chlorine water so I feel a bit sick there.”

Shirō smiles in relief. “Well, that's good. You okay too Yukio?”

Yukio nods, tight lipped.

Shirō gives him a quick ruffle on his head and then stands. “So mind telling me how my son nearly drowned in your pool?”

Unnoticed, Eiji inches closer to the adults, smartphone at the ready and a flush of excitement on his face. ‘This is seriously incredible information!’

Taniguchi looks up finally from Shirō's exorcist pin. He starts as he realizes Shirō noticed that and now has a thoughtful expression on his face; and also an angry one.

“W-well it didn't start that much. Just little things. Water showing up away from the pool, like really far away.” He begins, stumbling over his words at times. “As if someone had purposely carried it there and then dumped a tubful of it all over. But nothing on our security cameras. Then there was the tugs and weird sensations some of our customers reported while in the pool. And, sometimes, a pool would turn very dark, murky almost. You can't see anything in there, much less the bottom. But no one was hurt or actually attacked before!” He protests, wringing his hands again.

Shirō looks thoughtful in this regard. He also looks thoughtfully over at Tsukishiro, the only one who seems to have any clue what that means, judging by her expressions.
“I see...” Shirō steps forward and carefully hands over a business card to the trembling Taniguchi who accepts it gratefully.

“We're going to have to cancel the classes until this is cleared up.” Hisakawa sighs at that. “No one's going to be happy about that.”

“That's true, but better they be unhappy than harmed.” Tsukishiro points out, ever the source of logic.

“Excuse me? Fujimoto-san?”

Shirō turns around to see an elder woman, one who has Nakamoto in firm hand. “Yes...?”

“Nakamoto Nobuko.” She introduces herself as. “My ill-mannered son was rescued by your son, Rin-kun was it? I have to extend thanks to that. Whatever you taught him as he grew up worked out. Would like to know what you did there. Might help shape up my own son.”

“Kaa-san...” Nakamoto whines.

She shakes him. “Don't Kaa-san me Masaru. Now go and thank the boy who rescued you.”

Nakamoto looks horrified at that thought, but, looking between his mother and the curious looking Rin, he slinks over to Rin.

Shirō chuckles. “I'm afraid I'm not certain what exactly I did for my boys to turn out well.”

“Well, I suppose most parents spend half the time not sure what they are doing.” Nobuko snorts at that. “But with the danger of the pool yeesh...Masaru was looking forward to it, what with the weather being horrible.”

“So were my sons.” Shirō sighs and glances over at the trio of boys, Nakamoto looking faintly horrified at Rin's happy babble that is being shoved into his ear while Yukio looks very amused and even vindicated.

“This isn't good...” Nobuko eyes Shirō warily. “You going to do something about it?”

Shirō starts and then notices she also seems to recognize his pin. “Well...if the help desk gets the request, I will, of course, take the request.”

Nobuko looks both happy and relieved by that. “That's good. Never cared if it was real or not before, but if what happened is true...doesn't matter what I think does it?”

Shirō considers that for a moment, then slowly nods. “No...no it doesn't.”

He looks back at the boys and tightens his lips. *They both nearly died. Rin nearly died. I'm not standing back for that at all.*

After all, he's the Paladin. What use is all the power if you can't pull some strings to make sure a water demon is put down properly?

That night, Rin hides himself away in his room with Kero, serious faced and worried from what he overheard back at Koyomi Centre.

Kero, who Rin had just finished telling him of the events there, is just as serious faced. “This ain't good news. Not good at all.”
“No.” Rin sighs. “Oyaji's going to be called in soon I just know it. That nervous guy is bound to give in and contact the Order for help. He’ll pay any fee to solve the problem.”

“And since it you and yer brother who got hurt...” Kero flutters his wings briefly. “Yer old man's going to make sure he gets that mission no matter what.”

“Which means...Watery you said, right?” Rin droops as Kero nods. “Watery is going to kill him and the rest of his team.”

It is dead silent for a long time.

“But ya can't do much either Rin.” Kero says sadly. “Watery's a high tier Card and very aggressive. You can't take her down with Windy. Maybe Sword can help but Watery is fast and viscous. Powerful too. I don't think it would help that much.”

Rin groans and rubs his face. “Then what do I do? I can't just stand back!”

“You'll think of somethin'.” Kero assures Rin. “You got like a day to figure thangs out at least.”

Rin nods, still looking a bit down, but really there is nothing else Rin can do right now.

The next day, the entire school is buzzing about rumours and talk about what happened yesterday at Koyomi Centre.

In fact, the news got out so fast even Yukio is stumped. “How did everyone find out so much so fast?” Yukio asks as he opens his bento and digs into his lunch with relish. Rin might have not been able to help make dinner last night, but he still got things ready for the boys’ bento.

Rin hums in thought himself, thinking back. “Oh...I think I know...just a sec Yukio!” Rin shoves his bento into Yukio’s arms, much to his confusion, and races off.

It doesn't take long to track down Eiji, who jumps when Rin shows up in front of him.

“Wha-what is it Okumura?” He stutters out, stepping back from Rin.

“You were listening and watching things yesterday weren't you?” Rin asks.

Eiji sighs. “Of course.” He pulls out his smartphone and pulls up the right file. “I'm all for information...of course, I didn't see the events in question so can't be sure it was all real. Was at the Food Court when it happened. Got too much there, mostly about the old big freezer they have than anything.”

“Old big freezer?” Rin blinks at that. “What do you mean by that?”

Eiji hesitates and then holds out his hand. “100 yen please.”

Rin blinks and scowls, making Eiji think momentarily that he made the wrong move. But Rin digs out a 100 yen coin from his pocket and hands it over to Eiji.

“Nothing much there,” Eiji says as he pockets the yen and feels a bit of elation, “except briefly they tried for an aquarium to be added to the place but it fell through. The big industrial sized freezer that was to be used there is still in use, except by the Food Court. Lots of complaints there, mostly due to how they all have to share it and how easy it is for things to get forgotten in that big place.”

“Aaaah...that makes sense. So you've been selling what happened at the pool...what else have you
been saying there though?” Rin narrows his eyes at Eiji who sweats.

“Nothing else!” Eiji quickly declares. “No one has asked for anything more than what happened at the pool. No one has been interested in the aftermath...” He pauses as he realizes what Rin might be concerned about. “Or your foster father.”

“Good. Keep it that way.” Rin growls at him. “I don't care about it, but it would make things difficult for Yukio if that got out.”


“Good.” Rin smiles at that and turns away.

Eiji almost lets him go, but his curiosity gets the better of him. “Okumura.” He pauses as Rin stops and turns his head slightly to look back at him. “Do you believe in demons?”

Rin blinks and snorts. “Why bother believing in something that's real?”

He leaves at that, Eiji left stunned by that. He does, however feel his pocket where Rin gave him that 100 yen and feel a bit of relief.

He can, in fact, get some money from Rin.

'Though, I'm not going to be stupid and ask for more than 500 yen, no matter what information he asks.' Eiji thinks in fear of how strong Rin is. 'Yeah, definitely not doing that...'

He then eyes where Rin was. “However, I'm going to definitely have to investigate him at some point...”

That decided, Eiji decides to head to another location to sell his “goods” to the students of Southern Cross Junior High.

Groaning, Rin slinks into the kitchen after school. Shirō looks up from a big sheet of paper spread out on the kitchen table and chuckles. “Bad day?”

“No...just so hooooooot.” Rin whines. He perks up as an idea hits him and he goes to the freezer, pulling out the tray of frozen bananas. Grabbing two, he heads out of the kitchen and back to his room.

Upon entering it, he smiles at the sight of Kero splayed in front of the fan in his room. “You okay Kero?”

“Toooohoot...Ah'm melting...” He moans. He perks up when Rin shows a frozen banana to him. “Oh yay!” Grabbing for it, he happily takes a bite and lets out a happy sound at the cool, tasty chocolate, almond, and banana flavour that hits his tongue. “Aaaaah that makes thangs much better...”

“Heh. I'm glad of that.” Rin takes a bite out of his banana, not even wincing at the ice cold that bursts into his mouth.

“Ah love these...” Kero is already halfway done his own banana, which makes Rin giggle. “But maybe you can make somethin' else next time?”

“Like what?” Rin asks Kero, looking at him.
“Hmm...Kakigori!” Kero cheers at the thought. “You can have strawberry, green tea, ooh blueberry...Ah love all of them!”

Rin shakes his head. ‘I'll have to get an ice shaver Kero...” He trails off as he looks at his frozen banana and thinks of what he saw Shirō pouring over. *Tou-san is going to go after the demon tonight I think...’

“A manual one ain't gonna be that expensive!” Kero exclaims, waving his hands in the air. “It is so affordable you can have one by the weekend all ready to do!”

Rin chuckles at that, then freezes. 'Ice...is frozen water...' His mind whirls rapidly, thinking of kakigori and the Watery...and the industrial sized freezer he knows Koyomi Centre has. “That's it!”

Kero blinks and falls back, shocked by Rin's sudden shout. “What's it?”

“Ice!” Rin says cheerfully. “I know how to deal with Watery!” Rin then pauses. “And I gotta find Abe's home now too. I need to know where that damn freezer is...”

Kero perks up at that. *You did it Rin! That's exactly it!* “That's good!”

“Yeah...cause I think Oyaji is going after it tonight so we gotta get moving.” Rin says, pulling out the Card holster and strapping it on, as well as getting a small bag and filling it with some handy odds and ends. “Don't got much time.”

Rin holds out the bag for Kero and the little winged lion dives into it. Once Rin's assured he's secured, he rushes out of his room, shoving the last of the banana down his throat and calling out about going out.

Shirō pokes his head of the kitchen and stares at the hallway that leads to the genkan, surprised at how fast Rin left. *What was...aah, well. Easier to plan the exorcism without Rin here...’ Shirō checks the time. *The rest of the team should be showing up soon after all.*

That decided, Shirō pops back into the kitchen to look at the blueprint of the building acquired for the mission and sets to memorizing it.

The last thing Eiji expected was for knocking to come from his bedroom window. Staring at it, since it's at the second floor, he cautiously approaches it and opens the curtain.

He falls back with an oath as he sees Okumura Rin hanging on the outside of it. He then sits down on the ground and covers his face with his hands, hoping he just imagined it.

More knocking has him getting up with a groan. Apparently it's all too real and, carefully, Eiji opens the window.

“What are you doing here?”

“You know where the industrial freezer is right?” Rin blurs out.

Eiji stares at him, having no clue what he's talking about. “What?”

Rin rolls his eyes. Actually rolls them. “For Koyomi Centre. You know where they are located right?”

“Uuh...yes.” Eiji eyes Rin for a moment, wondering if he should get him to pay him for the disturbance at the least. He finally sighs. “Just a moment.”
He goes to his smartphone, plugged in for the evening, and pulls up the facts quickly. Getting out a notepad, he carefully writes down clear directions to how to get to the freezer. Anyone should be able to follow them, even from any location in the building, as he adds a few extra tips to the directions. Ripping out the paper, he goes back to the window.

“Why are you at my window for this though?” Eiji asks him, as Rin happily accepts the paper and somehow gets it into his bag without falling.

“Don’t got a cellphone.” Rin says cheerfully, then tosses something at Eiji, who catches it more by luck than any skill. “Thanks!” He slides down the wall and to the ground, waving at Eiji and then taking off into the streets.

Eiji shakes his head and looks down at what’s in his hand. He blinks as he realizes Rin gave him 100 yen.

’Wonderful...is that my going rate for you?’ Strangely though, Eiji doesn’t find himself annoyed.

It’s not the first mission Kita Eisuke has been on. That’s impossible, since even Exwires get dragged along on big missions. Though more as bag carriers and errand runners.

It is the first mission Eisuke has been on that has such a powerful person in charge. The Paladin himself is heading this mission. Though, if hearsay is true, his foster sons were nearly killed by the demon inside here so perhaps that makes sense.

‘Especially with how angry he almost seems...’ Eisuke notes, looking at the serious faced older man. He’s currently cleaning his shotgun and double checking he’s got his ammunition. Eisuke, on his part, is an Aria and thus doesn’t have any weapons to check. All he can do is make sure he knows all the possible Fatal Verse for water demons that he can, and that he has all other useful arias in mind.

“So, you all know why you are here?” Shirō speaks finally, drawing the team's attention. It’s just a five man team, but with the Paladin in charge it’s more than enough.

Eisuke looks over the team. Carol Lancaster is the Dragoon assigned to the team, while Jois Luis Arreola and Jean Delacroix are the Knights of the team. He and the Paladin, who has all five Meister from what he’s heard, round up the team.

’And, of course, we’re the only native Japanese in this team.’ Eisuke notes, amused by the thought of having anything in common with Fujimoto Shirō.

Shirō continues to speak once he’s sure he has all their attention. “Unfortunately there is nothing to tell us of exactly what kind of water demon we are dealing with. The best we have is that it must be at least Middle First Class in level. However, I get the feeling that it is probably Upper Class.”

There are some murmurs from that and Eisuke, being only Middle First Class himself recently, gulps at the thought of such a dangerous demon.

Shirō grins though. “I’m sure between us all we can defeat it, as long as we don’t do anything particularly stupid.”

A nervous laugh goes up at that, more because of how tense they are than actual humour. It still does the trick and helps relax the entire team.

Shirō takes one more look at them and nods. “Good. Now, here’s the plan...”
As the exorcist team is setting things up, Rin is sneaking in via the back with Kero, cursing at how long it took for him to get here.

'Stupid traffic.' Rin grumbles, then looks around carefully. The pool isn't that far from him, at least in regards to being able to see it since a glass wall is in between. Just with a glance Rin can tell Watery is still in there. He also can tell she can sense not only him but the others that are here.

“Dammit...how do I do this Kero?” Rin asks as he starts moving into position, getting the guardian's attention. “I need to get Watery to the freezer...”

“Hmm...” Kero considers this. “Ah have an idea, but ya might not like it...”

“What idea?” Rin eyes Kero warily.

Kero sighs. “Yer going to have to use the exorcists as bait.”

“What?!” Rin hisses at Kero. “I can't risk them!”

“Yeah, but can you get the freezer door open and lure Watery into it by yerself?” Kero asks.

Rin deflates at that, knowing his friend is right. “I hate that...but hmm...” Rin pauses as he notices movement and sees an exorcist making his way away from the pool. Eyeing the corridor he's taking, Rin sees that he's heading in the direction of the food court.

And, checking the “map” Eiji gave him, Rin can see that he's in the perfect position for getting to the freezer.

Rin grins. “Kero. I need your help.” Rin digs into his bag and, after some work, pulls out a spare notepad and a pen.

Kero hovers close to Rin, watching as Rin uncaps the pen and then hands it over to him. “Uh? Me?”

“Well, duh! Oyaji would recognize my handwriting after all.” Rin says, as if it's obvious.

As Kero stares at Rin, Rin slowly grins mischievously. “I have an idea and that exorcist is going to help us. And I'm going to be able to lure Watery in without risking anyone else.”

Kero stares for a moment, then the lightbulb goes off in his head. “Oh! That makes sense. So what am Ah writin' here?”

The two bend over the notepad, Rin talking quickly and softly to Kero. They are running out of time after all.

Eisuke settles down in the hallway he was assigned. He and Carol are the ones to blocking the two major escape routes for the Water Demon, making sure it can't get away from the rest. Privately, Eisuke hopes that he won't have to deal with the Water Demon, but doesn't bother holding his breath in hope.

As he's mentally going over his best shielding arias for water attacks, a flutter of wings is heard and he looks up. Eisuke only sees a piece of paper floating down and, hesitantly, he catches it.

It's folded carefully and unfolding it he finds a message within. Eisuke's jaw drops as he slowly reads what's written on what looks like a bit of notepaper.

Hello!
I'm sorry for bothering you and I'm sure this will get you in trouble. But you aren't dealing with what you think so I need to step in and help.

I have a plan for dealing with it with little harm but I can't do it alone. Sorry but I need your help since you are the one in the best place for that.

The food court has an industrial sized freezer. I need you to go and there and get ready to open the doors when it comes your way.

Sorry for how this doesn't seem safe or trustworthy, but please? I got someone important in danger here too.

Thank you.

Eisuke considers the note for a moment, then looks up and almost thinks he sees someone up there.

He then sighs. “I'm so going to be killed by Fujimoto-san...alright you got my aid!”

Eisuke blinks as he swears he hears cheering at that, but dismisses it in favour of heading to the freezer.

It does seem silly, but somehow nothing about that note seems like a lie. And Eisuke's been having a bad feeling about this mission the entire time.

Until the note came down and gave him another option, suddenly lifting a weight from his shoulders.

Shirō approaches the pool. Alone, despite what the two Knights behind him protested. However, he's got a point in that the demon might not come up if there are too many around.

Shirō stops a little from the edge and looks into the water. It's a dark colour, murky, and he can't see the bottom. Since they turned on enough lights to see here, it's obviously not just because it's night out as even the closest light doesn't penetrate the water.

Shirō takes a deep breath and lets out, slowly loosening the tension in his shoulders. If he's too tense he's going to make mistakes.

“Are you scared?” Shirō asks conversationally. “Is that why you only recently starting hurting people? Is that why you aren't coming up when I know you are there?”

The water starts to move, flowing back and forth and then slowly starting to spin. Shirō remains calm and raises a hand to remind the two Knights in the back to do the same, as he hears the sound of metal clinking at their go for their weapons.

“Well? Is that all that have?” Shirō asks, sliding his hand up to the trigger of his shotgun.

The pool explodes, swirling and forming a “solid” form. It looks like a woman almost, with long flowing hair and big ears. However her eyes are alien and she bares fangs at Shirō.

Shirō steps back to avoid the dangerous water drops, brings up his shotgun, and fires, all in one smooth motion. The shotgun pellets, specially treated for demons, goes straight through this one. As if he just shot water.

'Which, I suppose I did.' Shirō thinks calmly, going for his belt where there is a collection of holy water grenades attached. Unhooking one, he preps it and tosses it at the demon.
The demon shoots at him in a roar of water, growling wordlessly at him. Shirō manages to dodge just in time and he hears shouts as the others are attacked and just barely block and deflect the flow of heavy water. Shirō wonders if the holy water grenade went off.

At that point, a loud whistle is heard and a shout – in Osaka dialect at that – is heard. “Over here! Ah'm up here!”

The water demon pauses and turns to look up, looking angry at what it sees. Shirō follows its gaze and spots, barely, a figure up in the rafters. The water demon howls and flies to the person, water spraying all over the place and sending Shirō sliding away so he doesn't get drag into the undertow, smashing into the ceiling.

It then turns, as a wind rushes past Shirō. Shirō gets a brief glimpse of a staff, a leg, and a flutter of wings and then the water demon is going past him, straight on the heels of whoever that was.

For a moment all they can do is stay down, shocked, then Shirō stands. “After that demon!” He snaps out, making the two Knights jump and quickly hurry after the demon.

Shirō moves to follow and hits something with his leg. Looking down, he sees the holy water grenade and picks it up. His eyes widen as he sees it's empty and he looks up, at where the water demon disappears and wonders.

'That high of grade of holy water and nothing?' Shirō curses and takes off, the holy water grenade still in his hands.

This is turning into a much more dangerous mission than he thought.

“Wooaoaaahhh...” Rin shrieks as he nearly hits the wall, having to slow down to take another corner. “Fuck, Kero, how much further to the freezer?”

Kero is clinging tightly to Rin's shoulder and opens his eyes, thinking back to the directions. “Almost there...woah watch out!”

Rin pulls Fly up, just missing the big drill of water that shot past him, and risks looking back. 'Oh man Watery looks pissed.' Rin yells, making Eisuke jump and quickly pull on the heavy metal door. Rin flies into it and waits a moment, letting Watery catch up just enough. Once it has, Rin shoots out of the freezer just in time for Watery to go past him in shock.

Rin sets down on the ground, Fly dispelling from his staff, and pulls out Windy. “Windy, be a whirlwind!” He commands, setting off the Card who flies into the freezer. “Quick, close the door!” Rin snaps at Eisuke, who is staring at Rin in shock.

“Oh. Right!” Eisuke slams the door shut behind Windy and then turns back to Rin, slack-jawed. “You...you are the one...”

Rin ignores him, listening carefully to what's going on behind the freezer door. He gives a firm nod to himself, then walks up and grabs the door, yanking it open.
Eisuke peers behind Rin when he relaxes at what's within the freezer and stares. The water demon is frozen solid, looking angry and also shocked. Harmless right there and then.

“Right.” Rin cracks his knuckles and then picks up the wand again. “Watery, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Bright light emanates from the demon(?) turned ice sculpture, as it shatters and fragments, turning into the shape of a card.

“What...what the hell is going on?!” Eisuke demands. He pauses when Rin turns to look at him, along with a flying stuffed animal that also seems to be sentient.

“Sorry, you won't get any answers. In fact...” Rin pulls out a Card and gives a sad smile. “I can't have you even tell this much. Memory, remove me and the exact nature of the demon.”

The Card flares and Eisuke steps back, wincing at the bright light.

When he opens his eyes, he's alone.

And even more confused than before. He shoves his hand into his pocket and pulls out the note, seeing it as exactly as it was before.

“What happened?” Eisuke asks the darkness.

There is no answer.

The next day at school has Rin yawning a bit, but happy. He prevented Shirō from being killed by Watery, along with the other exorcists with him. Not to mention has another, high tier Card in his possession.

'Good work that then.' Rin thinks happily. He even managed to cover his tracks just enough that there is nothing for Shirō or the rest to go on in regards to the mysterious helper. Eisuke doesn't even remember seeing Rin; judging by the conversation Kero listened to, Eisuke just remembers a “person” with no actual appearance attached having him help stop the “demon”. Much to his frustration.

Shirō is obviously worried and curious about those events, but Rin thinks he'll be able to keep the truth from him longer.

'Maybe...maybe one day I'll have to tell my family.' Rin thinks. 'But not any time soon.'

A bell sound rings out in the school, making Rin and the rest of his class raise their head from their work. The intercom gives off static for a moment, and then a voice speaks,

“Attention students and staff. The Koyomi Pool and Recreation Centre is now cleared for business. The extra-curricular swimming lessons will resume tomorrow and there are plans for making up the missed two days on the weekend if enough demand comes through. I repeat, the Koyomi Pool and Recreation Centre...”

A cheer is heard amongst the class and around the school at that news, Yukio even looking happy about it.

Yukio does, however, wonder exactly how last night's mission had gone and privately makes a note to ask his father. Since he already had a mission yesterday, he couldn't go on that mission.
Yukio's curiosity is more to do with what kind of demon attacked him and his brother, since no one was able to identify said demon before.

Unknown to him, secrets are gathering force and one day they will truly become deadly.

But as Rin knows, it is not any time soon.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and please leave comments below! I need enough for posting and last time you squeaked by.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Thank you once again for all the comments! They are awesome and keep it up!

Now, here's a week ahead warning. Though ICD will continue as scheduled, me and Gloomiebunny have plans for an entire week of one-shots that are Halloween themed starting on the 25th. If I can get my final fic out (it's been driving me out of my mind!) and so can GB, you can look forward to seeing those. If you do, go comment on both of our fics please!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The warm summer night is filled with the scent of flowers and grass, as much as the standard city fumes that waft over to this park.

In the darkness a cry is heard,

“Illusion, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Bright light flares, as Rin slams his staff on top of the Card's form and it flows into a Card shape. Rin sighs and wipes his brow, grinning as he accepts the Card.

“That was good work Rin!” Kero says cheerfully, floating beside Rin. “Ah I couldn't have done better myself!” He declares, crossing his arms over his chest.

Rin snorts at that. “You couldn't have done it anyways.” As Kero splutters Rin stretches and lets out a soft groan. “That's it, time for bed. Now that this isn't going to be causing trouble I can rest easier at night.”

Kero agrees with that. “Illusion is a tricky and nasty Card at times. Good to have it under your control.”

“Oh, that's right.” Rin pulls out a pen and clicks it open, quickly writing down his name on the Card. “Done. Now let's get home before I'm noticed to be gone. Don't want Yukio lecturing me again...”

Kero shudders at that along with Rin. Yukio's lectures are certainly something to be feared.

As the two head back home, neither of them notice the girl hiding in the shadows who is watching them leave.

“That...” The girl's eyes sparkle and she holds up her clasped hands to her cheek excitedly. “That was AMAZING!”

Chapter 9: Who Do You Call About A Ghost In School?

Rin stifles a yawn as he exchanges his shoes for his uwabaki. Between looking for Sakura Cards and swim lessons, Rin's found himself running ragged.

'At least the A/C is getting fixed today.' Rin thinks happily. That will start making things bearable
again and thus stop Rin from tiring out so much.

The reason Rin has returned to his old routine of going out at night to look for Cards is because of the more recent incidents involved Sword and Watery. Both of which directly affected Yukio.

And anything that hurts Yukio must be stopped.

'Doesn't help there's an actual reason why Cards might be drawn to him...' Rin scowls at the thought, thinking back to his conversation with Kero a little after Watery was dealt with.

"You know, I'm pretty sure Watery was after me." Rin explains to Kero, looking at said Card as he speaks. "It went after Nakamoto first only because I left enough of my magic on him in anger. But that doesn't really explain Yukio."

Kero looks torn for a moment, then settles down to sit next to Rin. "Ah'm afear'd it's because you're twins."

"Twins...is it like the thing that made me realize Yukio had been possessed by Sword?" Rin asks, looking at Kero curiously. He feels something hard and nauseating settle in his stomach at the look on Kero's face.

"Thang is, Ah'm pretty certain that you and yer brother get your magic mostly from your mother. Which means you both would have been nourished by her magic as much as everythin' else while in the womb. As twins, you might be fraternal, but takin' into account you sharing the womb and with how magic tends to complicate thangs..." Kero trails off and waves his paws in the air. "You have the exact same magical signature. It's impossible to tell apart, even I get confused!"

Rin's eyes widen. "You are saying...!"

"Any Card after you might get you muddled with yer brother." Kero sums up sadly.

Rin shuts his shoe locker with that in mind, so his serious face is noted by Yukio who is right beside him.

"Nii-san...are you okay?" Yukio looks worriedly at his brother. He's been looking and acting tired again lately. Something which has Yukio wondering what he's up to.

Sure, Yukio's caught him twice coming home after sneaking out at night, but Yukio still doesn't know what he was doing out so late. He never comes back looking like he was in a fight at least.

Rin blinks out of his thought and pastes a smile on his face. "Sorry, I really should be getting more sleep but damn the heat makes me restless."

Yukio manages to return the smile, but it's obvious he doesn't really buy Rin's off-handed explanation.

To Rin's relief though, Yukio doesn't push him.

The elder is pretty sure if Yukio did push, he would break in no time.

As the lunch bell rings, so does Yukio's cellphone. Rin shoots a glare at it and Yukio looks bashful as he answers it, looking at the text message on it. Yukio sighs and starts packing up his things.

“I'm sorry Nii-san but...” Yukio begins, eyeing Rin like he's a bomb.
Rin realizes he has been getting more and more upset. Apparently Yukio volunteered for some kind of super special event that his cram school offered. The result is that his cellphone calls him away for lunch more often than not.

But Yukio didn't pry today so Rin decides he deserves a break. “It's okay. Just don't forget to have your lunch.” Rin smiles up at Yukio, feeling better as Yukio's surprised look morphs into a relieved and happy one.

“Thanks Nii-san, and I will.” Yukio assures his brother.

Rin waves as Yukio leaves the room after leaving a quick message to their teacher, who nods and says something about telling the next teacher in case Yukio runs late.

Rin sighs once Yukio is gone, pulling out his lunch box. The rest of the class is exiting, probably unable to get out as fast as possible away from the demon, leaving Rin alone in the class.

Rin dismisses the thought and focuses on enjoying his lunch.

“Ho! You are Okumura Rin yes?”

Rin yelps and ends up falling backwards with his chair at the person who just popped up and shoved her face into his space.

She blinks down at him, looking a little surprised to see him on the ground. “What are you doing there?”

“What the hell!” Rin snaps, scrambling up and setting the chair upright, before turning back to the girl. She has reddish-brown hair, mostly hanging free except for two small ponytails in the back. The school ribbon she has on says she’s in the same year as him by the colour. She also has big, red-rimmed glasses on her face.

Once Rin is done looking her over, he still is confused. “Who are you?”

“Oh right!” She beams, something that disturbs Rin. It takes a moment to realize that it's because smiles aren't what he's used to from others outside of his family and Tsukishiro. “I'm Watanabe Naoko. And I saw you in the park last night!”

Rin couldn't have been effected if she had slammed a boulder on his head. “Wha...what?” Rin backs away, terrified. “That was...I...”

‘Oh shit. Oh shit. I got seen! What do I do? Fuck, I didn't bring my Cards today...’ Rin finds his thoughts going round and round in circles, making him almost dizzy.

“I was impressed!” Naoko continues cheerfully, Rin's attention snapping back to her. “When I heard of Okumura Rin being a demon and such I was prepared for so much but really?!”

“Uh...that...you must have been...” Rin tries to back away, his hands up in front of him in a futile attempt to protect himself from the energetic girl.

“That was just so amazing!” She sparkles, actually sparkles and grabs Rin's hands. Rin twitches and looks at her horrified. “The way you handled that ghost so expertly! You must be a veteran ghostbuster!”

Silence. Absolute silence is the result of that.
Rin stares. Blinks. Naoko still doesn't disappear, still sparkling up at him and holding his hands in a tight grip.

“Huah?”

It's the last period of the day and Rin still finds he can't firmly dislodge the crazy that is Naoko from his head. The fact it's Tsukishiro's class helps him concentrate, as much as Yukio poking him at odd moments.

Yukio seems to realize something must have happened during lunch period since he doesn't bother Rin about it and instead just helps. Though he also looks worried about Rin's condition.

'First being so tired all the time and now he looks like he's anywhere but here even in Tsukishiro-sensei's class...' Yukio frowns. 'I hope it's nothing serious...'

On Rin's part, he finds his mind turning back to what happened after Naoko dropped that bomb.

“Gho-ghostbuster?” Rin stutters out, not sure how to take that term.

Naoko nods early. “Yes! Though, I suppose that was more of an exorcism than a busting...you managed to set that poor ghost to rest and with such a happy smile!”

'Uh...what did she see last night?' Rin sweats, realizing that Naoko somehow saw – or thinks she saw – something very different than what happened.

“It was simply superb!” Naoko says again. “Which is why I've come for your help!”

“My help? What can I do?” Rin blinks at her and finally manages to disentangle their hands.

“There's a ghost in this school and I would like your help to find it and setting it to rest!” Naoko says happily.

Rin wants to pass out at that point, but settles for taking his seat again and turning to his bento.

Unfortunately Naoko brought her own bento and spends the lunch period blabbering at Rin about ghostbusting and other strange topics.

Rin sighs and covers his face with his hand in the present. Slowly removing it, he realizes he's going to have to deal with Naoko somehow.

'I'll talk to Kero. Maybe he has some ideas...not sure if Memory would work at this point considering she already has weird memories...' Rin sighs again, then turns back to the front.

And frowns.

Rin might be out of it, but it's not so out of it that once he pays attention he notices something off with Tsukishiro.

It's not completely obvious, but the elegant teacher seems a bit off today. Not approaching her subject with as much enthusiasm as before and at times she doesn't notice when someone is having trouble like she usually does, allowing her to “magically” appear and give aid at an opportune time.

As soon as the bell rings, instead of heading out as fast as he can, Rin slows down. Yukio looks at him oddly at that.
“Nii-san?”

Rin smiles. “It's nothing, just want to ask Tsukishiro-sensei something.”

Yukio blinks and looks between Rin and Tsukishiro. She's not packing up herself, instead settling down in her seat behind the desk and looking a bit tired.

“Tsukishiro-sensei?” Rin asks softly as he approaches the desk. “Are you alright?”

Tsukishiro looks up, blinking in surprise. A soft smile slowly blossoms on her face, but it's a more tired one than the usual. “Yes...oh, alright.” She sighs at Rin's look. “Just tired. Dealing with some personal issues. I thought I was hiding it well but you are very observant aren't you Rin-kun?”

Rin frowns. “Personal stuff? You're not sick are you?” Uncaring of how inappropriate it is, and Yukio's facepalming in the background, Rin leans in close, pushing back Tsukishiro's hair along the way, and puts his forehead against hers, frowning thoughtfully.

Tsukishiro stares at Rin with wide, curious eyes, though a smile also appears on her face as she realizes what he's doing. Rin backs away, looking thoughtful still.

“You seem a bit hot. Maybe you should rest when you get home.” Rin suggests.

“I will do that. I really should take care of my health better.” Tsukishiro agrees. “Thank you Rin-kun. Now, you need to go. The special class's bus will take off soon.”

Rin jumps at that and leaves quickly after saying goodbye to Tsukishiro, Yukio following carefully behind him.

As they reach the front hall, they detour to the shoe lockers. As they are switching their footwear, Rin suddenly asks Yukio,

“Hey do you know anything about a Watanabe Naoko?”

Yukio stops and turns to look at Rin, a quizzical look on his face. “Pardon?”

Students pile reluctantly into the bus, a change over from when they first entered the bus. Then again, they are now leaving the pool instead of heading towards it. Among them is Rin and Yukio, who settle into the front as the last one's in due to Rin being tired and moving slowly.

*I'm not doing patrol tonight at all...' Rin realizes reluctantly. He's way too tired from not only school and the swim class, but Naoko.

Yukio watches Rin worriedly and then fondly as Rin conks out and goes to sleep on his shoulder. He then thinks back to what Rin asked him before they headed to the pool.

Of course, Yukio being more well-liked by the school means he knows more about various people. Mostly due to so many thinking he actually cares a lot about what they are telling him. Yukio finds he's grateful to that at times, since it means he can help Rin a few times when he's lost to what's going on in school.

Watanabe Naoko is well-known, mostly because she's considered eccentric. When it comes to anything “creepy” or “scary” she's on it in a hot minute, enthusiasm included. *Lots* of enthusiasm.

And apparently she approached Rin during lunch break while Yukio was gone.
'Nii-san won't tell me the exact details but I can guess...' Yukio sighs. 'No wonder he's so tired. He hates being called a demon.'

The worst part, Yukio thinks, looking at Rin, is that it's not completely incorrect to call his brother a demon. Even if he's sealed, Rin is the Son of Satan and you can't get more demonic than that.

'Though his personality is nothing like anyone would expect from that.' Yukio thinks, finding that almost hilarious. 'Nii-san is just too kind to fit it.'

Not like Rin can't be terrifying and demonic when his temper is up.

Yukio sighs and shifts slightly to get more comfortable. He squeaks as that dislodges Rin and has him fall into Yukio's lap. Flushing in embarrassment, Yukio looks around quickly but everyone is too concerned with their own conversations or thoughts to notice.

Reluctantly, Yukio settles back and lets Rin sleep there. It's definitely more comfortable than his shoulder after all.

Back at the monastery, it's Rin's turn to be red from embarrassment, as Shirō laughs uproariously at Yukio's story of how Rin ended up so zoned out he ended up accidentally swimming straight into a third year girl's cleavage. And the resulting screaming that had everyone thinking that someone was seriously hurt.

"It's not that funny..." Rin grumbles to himself, poking at his plate.

Shirō shakes his head, cradling it in his hands. "Oh no...it definitely is. Poor Rin...your luck is so very strange isn't it?"

"Tell me about it...that weird girl at lunch is another..." Rin mutters to himself.

Shirō perks up at the mention of a girl once again. "Another girl hm? Is Rin becoming a ladies man?"

Rin flushes. "No...she's just interested in creepy or scary stuff that's all and well..." Rin doesn't bother finishing his sentence, letting everyone draw their own conclusions.

Shirō gives a sympathetic smile at that. "I see. Is she a bad person?"

Rin blinks, hadn't considered it in that light. "A bad person...no. Just...enthusiastic about it."

"Said girl is named Watanabe Naoko. She is a bit...infamous in school for her eccentric nature in that regard." Yukio sighs, adjusting his glasses.

"That's interesting." Shirō hums in thought for a moment. "Maybe you can make a friend in her."

Rin gives a disbelieving look at Shirō. "Yeah right old man." Rin snorts. "She just is interested for now, but will move on."

Shirō exchanges a worried look with Nagatomo, then turns back to Rin. "Don't be so pessimistic. Who knows, it might be a good thing."

Rin gives a small smile at that then turns back to his meal. "Maybe."

'But I'm not a friends person. Especially with all the Cards going on lately...I'm dangerous. Too dangerous to be friends with.'
“Someone saw us!?” Kero shrieks. It's the day after the incident with Naoko – Rin having pretty much fallen into bed after dinner – and Rin winces at that loud sound.

It's the weekend again, so Rin is on his own in the brothers' room. Yukio has another thing going on with cram school so headed out while Rin was still sleeping.

Rin only knows that thanks to a note Yukio left.

Rin shushes Kero, reminding him that though they are alone in the room, the monastery is certainly packed with people.

Kero covers his mouth with his paws and waits a moment. Once it's clear that no one is coming to investigate, he uncovers it.

“But really, someone noticed? Dammit, Ah thought we were bein' careful about it.”

“So did I.” Rin admits ruefully. “But the really weird thing is what she saw.”

“She saw you sealin' the Card, right?” Kero looks up at Rin and is puzzled by the red spots that appear on his cheeks. “Rin?”

“Well...she said she saw me do an exorcism for a ghost...”

“Say what.” Kero looks poleaxed by that, to the point he can't put any inflection in his voice.

“Yeah...the really weird bit is that now she thinks I'm a ghostbuster and wants me to help her with a ghost at the school.” Rin sighs. “What do I do Kero?”

Kero is silent for a long time. Then he snickers. Rin drops his gaze to Kero, confused. “Kero?”

And that's it, as Kero goes off laughing. “Oh man, oh man...hahahaaaaahhaahaaaah...”

Rin stares at the stuffed animal that is rolling around on the floor and laughing up a storm.

“Kero...how is this funny?”

“Ah'm...Ah'm sorry!” Kero snorts out and slowly sits up again. “Just...that's perfect! Of course, we were goin' after Illusion that night!”

“Illusion...” Rin blinks and he sits up. “Oh that's right! It shows to people what they expect when it's running wild like that!”

“Yup! And that's why this Naoko saw you do some ghostbustin'. She must have heard the rumours about the ghost in that park and went to look at it. Bad timin' that, but Illusion covered fer us.” Kero is gleeful about that. He then subdues at another thought. “O'course, now we still have her wantin' you to show off your ghostbustin' skills.”

“Yeah...what do I do there?” Rin sighs. “I suppose I could use Memory, but I'm not sure that's a good idea. Plenty of people saw me with her and what if she's been talking to her friends about what she saw?”

“Naoko is an eccentric person accordin' to yer brother so if she is it's not like they would believe her.” Kero adds. “But if her story suddenly changed, it wouldn't be good.”

It's silent for a long moment as the two think on it.

“By the way, what kind of ghost does she want you to investigate?” Kero asks suddenly, as the
thought occurs to him.

Rin groans. “A singing one.”

Kero stares. “Say what?!"

Come Monday, Rin finds himself waiting in class once the lunch bell rings for Naoko to show up. Yukio eyes him as he sees him tense there, looking between him and the door where Rin is watching like a hawk.

“Is something the matter?” Yukio asks.

Rin jumps then laughs awkwardly. “Well...no but umm...” Rin hesitates. “Do you mind eating your lunch elsewhere? I’m pretty sure that she is going to come and well...”

Yukio's face lightens in realization. “Aah. I see. Good luck Nii-san.” Yukio stands and makes for the door, then pauses. “You sure you don't want me here?”

“Positive.” Rin says, smiling and waving off Yukio.

Yukio smiles back and heads out, nearly running into Naoko along the way. “Oh, pardon me Watanabe-san.”

Behind Yukio, Rin twitches and shrinks in his seat. A soft whisper carries to him, “Rin don't back out now!” making him look down at his bag and then slowly sit up straight once more.

“Oh, Okumura-kun!” Naoko beams at Yukio. “I'm just going to talk to your brother, mind me stealing him for lunch?”

Yukio looks her over and, then looks back at Rin. Rin smiles and, though he looks a bit nervous, he nods his head ultimately at Yukio's silent question.

“It's fine. He's been waiting for you in fact.”

Naoko beams. “That's wonderful!” She charges past Yukio, who stares at her and sighs as she settles in front of Rin by grabbing the chair in front of Rin's desk and turning it around so she can sit with him.

As Yukio walks away, he is puzzled by what he hears from Naoko.

“Now, about that ghost...!”

“Thank you so much for your help Rin-kun.” Tsukishiro smiles down at Rin, who blushes at her attention.

’So sparkly... ’ Rin shakes himself out of his daze. “It's no problem.” Rin says cheerfully, adjusting his burden with ease.

“Shame about the swimming lessons having to be cancelled again.” Tsukishiro says softly. Rin blinks and considers that, then shrugs.

“Couldn't help it. When bugs settle into a place you need to get them out as soon as possible.” Rin is rather relaxed about it, mostly because nothing bug related is involved with the Cards. Neither is it demon bugs, but rather normal bugs that infested the lockers of the pool.
“That is true.” Tsukishiro chuckles at that, then turns down the hall. “This should be the last stop.”

Together they approach a door with the label Music Room above it. As they do, Tsukishiro frowns thoughtfully as some sound leaks out from the room.

“Oh dear, the choir is in session today.” Tsukishiro sighs. “We are to be very quiet and very fast about this, yes?”

Rin nods quickly, gaining a look of approval from Tsukishiro before she opens the door.

The sound of singing is very loud now, as Rin looks inside to see a group of girls and boys in all the years carefully practising under the direction of another teacher.

He blinks, surprised when he recognizes one of them as Naoko. Even more surprise is to come as the rest of the choir falls silent as Naoko steps forward.

There's a pause, then she takes a deep breath and begins to sing.

Rin nearly drops his package in shock. Naoko's voice is incredibly sweet and full of emotions, crafting a sound that's very pleasant if not heavenly to the ear.

He has to be nudged by Tsukishiro to get moving and set his package down where she tells him, tip toeing around the choir. Luckily everyone is focused on Naoko so doesn't notice either of them.

Her voice suddenly falls silent, drawing Rin's attention over again.

“No no no. Watanabe-kun, you missed the note again. Please try again.” The teacher sighs.

Naoko nods, looking serious faced and remarkably calm. “Yes sir.”

She returns to her solo, practising once again and trying for the correct note. Rin, meanwhile, is herded by an amused Tsukishiro out of the room.

Rin's last sight and sound of the Music Room is of her song stopping and the teacher scolding Naoko again for not quite getting it right again.

Rin is just about to sneak out the window when the bedside lamp turns on. Freezing, Rin turns to look at Yukio as Kero dives back into his bag.

“Errr...” Rin stares at Yukio who is looking very displeased with him sneaking out. Again.

Yukio then sighs. “Does it have anything to do with Watanabe-san?”

Rin flinches and then nods. Lunch break had been of them – or rather Naoko – making plans to hunt down the singing ghost. And the reason why Rin can't just avoid it?

Because Kero revealed that a “singing ghost” sounds very similar to a Card called Song. Apparently it isn't the first time it's given the impression of a ghost and Rin can't just dismiss it. Not with his school also a magnet for Cards on top of everything.

Yukio waves off Rin at that. “Fine. I'll look the other way for once. Don't stay out too late, you got school tomorrow.”

Rin stares at Yukio for a moment, then grins. “Thanks Yukio I owe you one!”
With that Rin scrambles out of the window and out of the house, Yukio shaking his head at Rin actions, wincing as he hears a crash outside.

'A ghost hunt uh? It's nothing but a rumour but if it will get Watanabe off Nii-san's back even a little...' Yukio settles back down, planning on getting proper sleep himself. Not only does he have school as well, but another mission after all.

Even though this is not the first time Rin has sneaked into the school, he finds he's more nervous. Even if now he's got an “ally” helping him out there.

'It's the ally I'm worried about...' Rin sighs. If there is a Card here, how is he to conceal what he's really doing? Would it be better to have Naoko be disappointed by no ghost or to have her have her moment of success?

'I'm not good at this kind of thing...' Rin mentally bemoans.

“Ah, Okumura-kun!” Naoko waves at him from next to the school gate. “I'm glad you got here with no trouble!”

“Aah...yeah, didn't have any problems.” Rin shrugs and turns to the gate. “So um...how are we getting over this?”

Naoko looks at him eagerly. “I've heard you're super strong and athletic. Is that true?”

Rin blinks, looks at Naoko, then at the gate, judging the distance. Even without Jump, Rin's pretty sure he can get over it with even a burden like Naoko.

Not thinking things through, though that's hardly unusual, Rin grabs Naoko and holds her to his side. Squeaking, Naoko stares at his face as he concentrates on the gate.

And then Rin jumps.

Naoko lets out a soft cry, then giggles as they clear the gate and land safely on the other side. Rin lets her go and waits as she gets her feet under her, suddenly realizing what he did and blushing a bit.

“That was amazing!” Naoko chirps. She then looks around the courtyard. “We need to find an out of the way place to wait...”

“Wait?” Rin blinks, a little confused.

Naoko turns to him and grins. “Of course! This ghost is supposed to be shy so we should give it some time to come out before we go looking for it! You brought some snacks to share yes?”

Rin stares at Naoko and nods slowly. 'So that's why that was on the necessary items list...' “So, where should we go...”

“Hmm...normally I'd go for the Music Room, but that's the ghost's favourite spot...” Naoko walks back and forth, thinking. She then snaps her fingers. “I know! The nurse's office! That's out of the way definitely!”

Rin gives a nervous laugh at that. 'I'm not sure I want to be there at night...' Despite his misgivings, Rin finds himself getting pulled along by the excited girl.

The nurse office isn't as bad as Rin feared, mostly because Naoko decided it's not problematic to turn
the lights on while they are there.

“Only thing we need to worry about is getting used to the dark again!” She had chirped cheerfully as she switched on the light.

Rin is very relieved by that. More to do with not having many nice memories attached to this place. It being dark wouldn't have made things easy for Rin at all.

Naoko settles on one of the beds, bouncing a bit and making the hinges squeak, and pats the place beside her. “C'mon sit down! Can't just be standing and looming the entire time we wait.”

Rin rubs the back of his neck, realizing she's right, and carefully takes a seat next to her. Just as carefully, he makes sure there's a small distance between the two of them.

Naoko ignores Rin's attempts in that regard and quickly gets back into his personal space. “So, what did you bring for snacks?” She asks cheerfully, opening up her own bag as she speaks, “I brought homemade takoyaki and two thermoses. Do you like tea or coffee?”

Rin blinks. “Uh...tea.”

Naoko beams and hands over the red thermos to Rin. “Here you go then! Good, don't have to worry about not having enough tea or coffee if we both just take one.” She unscrews the lid on the green thermos she has and, after turning the lid upside down, pours some hot coffee into it. Blowing on it, she takes a sip and lets out a happy sound.

Rin eyes her for a moment, then follows her in regards to the red thermos. He blinks in surprise at the first sip. “This is very good tea.”

“It is, isn't it? So's the coffee. My mom works at a nice café and sometimes she can bring back tea and coffee from their supplies.” Naoko says cheerfully, handing out the green lid to Rin. “Hold this for a second please, I don't want to drop it.”

“Oh, sure.” Rin accepts it and watches as Naoko digs back into her bag, this time pulling out some tupperware.

“The takoyaki probably is cooled a bit by now, but it should be tasty. I helped my mom make it just this afternoon.” Naoko says cheerfully, standing and pulling over a chair which she places the now open container on top of. Gracefully accepting her coffee back from Rin, she then uses one of the toothpicks in the container to pick up a takoyaki ball.

Rin watches as she munches on her takoyaki for a bit, then sets his tea on the chair, and goes for his own bag. “I brought sesame cookies.” Rin offers his own tin a bit shyly.

Naoko perks up at that. “Ooh, I love sesame!”

Rin gives a hesitant smile and offers a taste of a cookie to her. Naoko takes one bite and freezes. “This...this is amazing! Heavenly even! Where did you get these?”

“Uh...” Rin blushes. “Um, I made them myself.”

Naoko stares at Rin. She stares at him so intensely and for such a long time, Rin turns to the takoyaki in refuge, trying a ball and slowly chewing and tasting it.

“Th-this is pretty good too.” Rin says, refusing to meet Naoko's gaze. “But hmm...you mixed the batter?”
Naoko blinks out of her daze. “Uh? Oh, yeah! I did.”

“You mixed it a little too much and too strongly...” Rin tells her, finally looking back at her.

“Wow. You can tell that just by tasting it?” Naoko goes for another takoyaki ball and attempts to taste it herself. “Aaaaah...I can't tell. But if you say so...hmm...I might have been a bit too enthusiastic in cooking today.”

“When aren't you enthusiastic...” Rin murmurs to himself, but he's smiling despite it.

As the smell of food, delicious food, wafts in the air, Kero starts getting more and more frustrated. ‘Argh...you are tormenting me on purpose!’

“By the way,” Naoko suddenly says, “where is your familiar?”

Rin nearly drops his tea at that. “Wh-what?”

“Your familiar! I saw the cutest little creature with you when you dealt with that ghost!” Naoko is back in Rin's personal space, sparkling up at him. “It must be with you!”

“Of course Ah am and Ah'm hungry!” Kero leaps up. “And familiar! It's guardian beast dammit!”

Rin covers his face in his hands. “Kero...”

To his credit, Kero quickly realizes his mistake and droops. “Sorry Rin...” He then flinches as suddenly Naoko is in his space.

“Oh wow, you are even cuter up close!” She grabs Kero and brings in him for a hug, while the poor guardian flails around.

Rin tries not to laugh, honestly, but a chuckle slips out anyways. “You are squeezing him too tightly...”

“Oh, oops. Sorry...Kero-chan was it? That's an adorable name.” Naoko lets Kero fly free and he gasps for air. “Now...you said you were hungry right? Well, why not have some takoyaki. I made sure there was plenty enough for three.”

Rin blinks and glances at the tupperware, realizing that's true. There is a little more takoyaki than if for two people.

“Really!?” Kero brightens up immediately at the mention of food.

“Yes. Though I wasn't sure if familiars eat...” Naoko says thoughtfully, putting a finger on her chin and tilting her head. She then smiles and claps her hands together. “But I'm glad I was right.”

Kero lets out a muffled cheer, already diving into the takoyaki.

“Hey, Kero, save some for us.” Rin grabs his greedy-guts of a friend who already has devoured five takoyaki. Seeing Kero pouting, Rin sighs and offers him a sesame cookie which has Kero cheering up again.

Naoko watches the by-play with great interest. “I see you guys are very used to one another. Must have been together for awhile now.”

Rin blinks and looks down at Kero, who is looking up at him, looking equally surprise. Rin lets a grin slip and rubs the back of his head. “You know...you're right. I met him...”
A sudden strange glow makes Rin turn, stunned as the book starts glowing. It flips over to stand upright and a figure slowly rises out of it. Rin stared. It looks like some kind of yellow-orange stuffed animal, with big ears and wings on its back.

Small black eyes focus on Rin. “Yo!”

Rin’s grin softens into a nostalgic smile. “I met him the day school started.”

“Aaah...must be difficult being a ghostbuster but it must also be fun too!” Naoko says cheerfully, ignorant to how that makes the two magic users sweat nervously.

“How so?” Rin asks, dropping his gaze to the takoyaki and going for another. Maybe he can buy time in a reply that way.

“Well, I mean you got superpowers out of it, yes? And you get to go on adventures. Sure, it can’t be all roses, but it must have its perks!” Naoko declares cheerfully.

Rin blinks. ‘I haven't thought about it that way in so long but...' Rin thinks back to his first flight with Fly and a smile creeps back onto his face, a truly joyous one. ‘That's right. Even if it's hard at times, it's still fun too and there's plenty of good to go with the bad.’

Rin then turns back to Naoko as she adds, “I'm kinda jealous honestly. Superpowers and adventures sounds awesome.”

“But you got a superpower too don’t you?” Rin blushes at how cheesy that sounds. “I mean...you have an amazing singing voice.”

Naoko actually blushes at that. “Oh? You heard me...”

“Yeah...just today. I was helping Tsukishiro-sensei with something and we were very quiet delivering a package so you probably didn't notice.” Rin offers as way of explanation.

Naoko lifts up her legs, wrapping her arms around them as she brings them up, and smiles. “Aah, those must be the uniforms for the summer festival. The choir is going to perform there.” She sighs then. “But I just can't get my solo part right. There's this note I always miss...”

“I didn't really notice that but I don't know much about music anyways.” Rin observes. He then looks down as Kero tugs at him. As Naoko is lost in thought – and humming her solo part – Rin bends down.

“This sounds rather like how Sakura found Song.” Kero whispers to him. “If Naoko has been practisin' hard and not being confident about it, Song would pick it up. If Song likes a song from a singer, they will sing it over and over again, but even more so if the singer they got it from isn’t certain about their skill there.”

Rin blinks and considers that. “That sounds a bit like a recording or something...”

Kero shrugs. “Ah suppose that was what Song was made for actually. Things like CDs and mp3 players weren't around when Clow Reed was makin' the Cards. If you wanted to hear a performance you like again, Song is perfect for that.”

“Right!” Naoko claps her hands together, startling the two. “That should be long enough. Time to go ghost hunting!”

Rin and Kero sigh, but help pack up everything nonetheless.
Their way only illuminated by flashlights, Rin and Kero follow Naoko to the Music Room. All three of them are very quiet, not wanting to scare off the “ghost” they are after.

As they get closer to the Music Room they start to hear something. Pausing for a moment, Rin strains to hear. *That sounds...’*

Naoko perks up at that and starts walking quicker, making Rin have to speed up along with Kero. The sound becomes clearer as they reach the Music Room, just enough for Rin to widen in realization. The fact he can now pick up the energy of a Card helps greatly.

Rin then realizes Naoko has her hand on the door.

“Wait!” Rin goes to stop her, but too late as Naoko whisks the door open.

In a great rush of air and sudden silence Song disappears.

Naoko sulks. “Awwww...was hoping to see even a little of it...”

Rin sighs and covers his face in his hand. *This is going to be tricky...’*

An hour of troup ing around the school brings no result, much to Naoko's disappointment and Rin's frustration. *'Dammit going to have to come back tomorrow at this rate...’* Rin thinks worriedly.

Naoko sighs and sits down in a nearby chair. They are currently on the third flood and have shut themselves in a random classroom, Naoko hoping it might draw “the ghost” out.

Rin sits down next to Naoko. After a moment of silence, Rin glances over at Naoko and asks the question that's been bothering him.

“So...why do you really want to see this ghost?”

Naoko stiffens at that, and looks over at Rin. Surprise colours her face, but slowly it fades into a more embarrassed look. “Oh. You realized it uh?”

She's quiet for awhile, looking down at the desk and tracing abstract patterns on its surface with her finger. “I was thinking that maybe a singing ghost is just what I need to get back my block for my solo. If I could listen to that, maybe record it...” She pulls out a small device that is some kind of electronic recorder and places it on the desk.

Rin gives a sympathetic look. It reminds him vaguely of how he was so desperate when he first started baking. Sure now he's much better, but even with his cooking Rin still strives to get better and better. If there was a cooking ghost, maybe Rin would be interested in that if he didn't know anything about such things.

Or at least not the *truth* about such things.

Rin then pauses, thinking back to what he heard. *'Song was definitely singing with Naoko's voice...does that mean...’*

“I think I have an idea.” Rin says slowly, getting Naoko's attention. “But you gotta be confident here for it to work.”

Naoko looks at him curiously and then with dawning realization as Rin slowly outlines his plan, Kero watching with proud eyes.
A few minutes later has them at the top of the stairs that lead to the roof.

“I’ll go first then.” Naoko says cheerfully, walking up the final steps and opening the door. “When you are ready, you can come out too.”

The door shuts behind her and Rin can hear her stepping further on to the roof.

Rin glances at Kero and grins. “Think this will work?”

Kero grins back. “Ask me again once it's over.”

Rin laughs, and then pulls out the Key. “Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!”

He grasps the staff and then pulls out the Illusion Card. “Illusion, you know what to do! Hide the truth and show Naoko was she expects to see.”

Illusion flares and covers both Rin and Kero in a filmy covering. It doesn't block their sight, though it feels a bit like jello to Rin.

Smiling, Rin steps out into the roof.

Naoko is already doing warm-ups for her voice and finishes off her last exercise before she turns around. She sparkles at the sight of Rin.

“Oh wow so cool!” Her glee makes Rin wonder what exactly she's seeing here.

“You ready Naoko?” Rin asks her quickly, before she can start squeeing over him and thus distracted by the real goal.

Naoko blinks and snaps out of her daze. “Oh yes!”

Rin carefully skirts around Naoko as she turns around and takes a deep breath. For a moment she looks unsure, then she smiles and opens her mouth.

And sings.

For a moment, it's only Naoko who is singing, but then a strange echo appears as well as a swirling light. Illusion flows to cover Song as it bursts into appearance, singing joyfully with Naoko.

Rin actually pauses at that, looking like he was conked on his head. Kero is no better, looking rather slack-jawed. Together, the two create an amazing and haunting song, even better than before. In fact, Rin gets the feeling Naoko just nailed the song judging by the brilliant look on her face past a certain point.

As Naoko's song slowly reaches the end, Rin steps forward and holds up the staff. As she hits the last note and Song's voice starts to fade, Rin calls out,

“Song, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

He brings the staff down and Song brightens, flowing rapidly into the shape of a Card that Rin catches. Quickly, Rin writes down his name on Song and then calls back Illusion, the staff returning to Key form at the same time.

He turns around and is surprised to see Naoko crying. “Naoko?”
She shakes her head, and smiles. “That...that was so beautiful...” She bends down and picks up her recording device, shutting it off. She then steps forward to Rin and grabs his hands. “Thank you. Thank you so much!”

Rin flushes but returns her smile. “Glad to help.”

“Well, that's over.” Rin says cheerfully as he and Kero head back home. “I'm glad. I don't think the next one will be friendly as Song.”

Kero nods. “Yeah...that's always a risk. Hell, her gettin' so close to Illusion the first time 'round wasn't that good.”

Rin swings his arms into the air and then settles back down, starting to pick up speed as he notices the time is getting really late. “But with that done she shouldn't bother us again, yes?”

The next day at school Rin's lunch period is interrupted by Naoko. “Okumura-kun you have to hear this!”

Yukio is left staring at his groaning, horrified Rin and the very excited girl.

‘What happened on that ghost hunt?’ Yukio is left wondering, inching away from the super excited Naoko as she gets up in Rin's space and starts blabbing.

Rin, meanwhile, wonders how it's going to be possible to drive the energetic Naoko away.

‘This is going to get dangerous!’ He bemoans.

Naoko though, is just too happy to notice how both Okumura brothers are distressed in various ways by her presence.

‘I now have a ghostbuster and I'm not letting him run off!’ She declares to herself.

Something that would definitely drive Rin into slamming his head through his desk if he knew.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment before you head out into the world once again!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Quickly: Yes, thank you for all the comments! However, if you are just starting this fic, please you only need to comment on the most recent chapter. All comments end up in my inbox and I do my best to reply to them but there is a limit to how much I can say when it's not the most recent chapter.

Also, please remember this (http://writerscornergblp.tumblr.com/) is where you go for questions. I would love people to help me build a FAQ page and there will be details on the bottom note in that regard.

Another thing to note is EVERYTHING IS ALREADY WRITTEN UP. You guys sometimes have lovely ideas, but everything is all written up and has been for a few months so nothing will come of it unfortunately. You'll just have to see what's next yourself (though I'm keeping in mind some ideas).

Finally! Me and Gloomiebunny have collaborated on a Halloween Week Series. Starting on the 25th we will start posting there, so go and comment on both of our fics in that regard!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The rain that comes down this night is relatively warm and even refreshing. Then again, with how hot things get, this rain seems to be the kind that helps break the humidity, if only for a bit, granting a bit of relief the next day.

It's in this that Rin is raising Sword high, attached to his staff, and bringing it down on a bright spherical dome that is blocking the entrance of a little private garden. The light breaks under the assaults, taking the form of a strange winged shield.

“Shield, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” Rin quickly brings the staff down and transforms Shield back into its Card form.

“Aaaah...what a relief...” Rin shakes his head, splattering water droplets all over. Doesn't help at all, since he's already quite soaked.

“Ah guess Naoko is useful...” Kero says with a sigh. “We wouldn't have heard it about it if it wasn't for her enthusiasm for such thangs.”

Rin agrees. “At least I managed to convince her that following me on...ugh...missions isn't always safe.”

*Naoko frowns at what Rin is telling her, making him nervous. But it's a thoughtful frown and she slowly nods.*

“I believe I understand. But, if I hear anything I'll tell you so you can check it out okay? And you have to tell me about the adventure too!” Naoko says excitedly.

*Rin scratches his cheek and looks away, a bit awkward. “I'll...do my best.”*
“That’s wonderful!” Naoko claps her hands together.

Rin sighs in relief, glad to have gotten through to her.

“By the way, have you heard about the locked garden?” Naoko asks suddenly.

And it was that particular rumour that lead both Rin and Kero to this location.

“I wish it wasn’t raining.” Rin sighs, then starts walking to a clear space. “It's going to be cold and I'm going to get yelled at by Yukio.”

“Oh yeah…” Kero sighs. ‘And Ah’ll have to hide until Yukio’s temper blows over. Yay.’

Rin calls Fly to his aid, not wanting to spend too much time out in the wet and figures even up in the air where it’s cooler is better than being out even later.

Unnoticed to both Rin and Kero, a strange energy crackles behind them and briefly takes a strange form as it looks at them. It then leaps into the air, and disappears.

Chapter 10: Summer Rain Is One Thing...

“It looks like rain.” Shirō notes, peering out the window. “Those clouds are hanging very heavy.”

“Again?” Nagatomo looks up from his newspaper. “Didn't we have rain last night?” Beside him, Yukio looks up from his book, blank faced but obviously interested.

“Hmmm…” Shirō nods at that and looks down at the stove. Since one of their usual cooks is sleeping in, Shirō took over the breakfast cooking. He is one of the few capable of cooking more than a few dishes after all.

A loud yell from upstairs has Yukio sighing and setting aside his book, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Loud footsteps are soon heard and Rin bursts into the kitchen. “Crap, I over slept!”

“We know!” Shirō half-laughs, as Rin rushes around, putting his bag down and getting his apron on. He sighs as Rin frowns at him and starts chivvying him away from the stove. “Alright, alright. You can take over. By the way, you’re grounded.”


“No buts.” Shirō looks down at Rin, serious faced. “You came home very late last night young man and soaked to the bone. I don't care what you were doing out there, but since you apparently don’t understand how that worries others, you are grounded for a week.”

“But! Oyaji, I…” Rin trails off, his mouth drying and tongue feeling heavy. ‘I can't tell him the truth. I can't. Even with the demons and such, he wouldn't understand.’

“I told you there will be no protests.” Shirō then smiles and ruffles Rin's hair, grinning at how that makes him scowl. “It's just a week and it will be over with before you know it. Besides, I know the swim classes are over so I want you to come straight home after school. No detours from you.”

Rin sighs but slowly nods, scuffing the floor with his toes. “Alright. I'll listen.”

‘Dammit...’ Rin turns back to the food and turns off the element since the eggs are ready. A thought
has him turn to the fridge and pull out the pickled cucumber he made recently.

'At least I can make a good breakfast...' Rin sighs and looks around at the kitchen, which is starting to get full of the rest of the monks entering.

'And I sure hope no Cards show up during this.' Rin shudders a bit at that thought. He doesn't want to disappoint or worse anger his father if that happens.

Because Rin will have to deal with that Card. There is no other option there.

The walk to school is quieter than usual. And it's not just Rin and Yukio that are quiet.

People getting on buses are quiet, looking up worriedly at the dark sky. People at the train station are hurrying just as fast, but keep their voices down, as if to speak up is to call the storm upon them.

Yukio even finds himself craning his neck up more than once to look worriedly at those clouds.

He then turns to look at Rin and notices that his brother is distracted, not drawn to the clouds like the rest.

“Nii-san, is something wrong?” Yukio asks quietly.

Rin jolts as if Yukio hit him and turns to look at his brother, looking confused. “Um...sorry, Yukio didn't hear what you said...”

Yukio frowns in worry. “I asked if anything is wrong and now I'm sure something is.”

Rin doesn't respond, instead looking chagrined at Yukio's words. This just makes Yukio's frown deepen and a bit of worry pool in his stomach.

“What is it Nii-san?”

Rin looks at Yukio, opens his mouth...then closes it and shakes it head. “Sorry. Nothing you can help with.”

Rin looks up at the school they are approaching and sighs. “Just...not looking forward to today...”

Yukio looks between Rin and the school. And then looks down at the student body that is talking quietly in the courtyard. Yukio notices they keep shooting worried looks at Rin and realizes that the weather today is making them think of more negative subject matters.

Which means rumours are going around about Rin again.

Yukio sighs and bumps Rin's shoulder, making his elder brother look at him startled. His face then softens into a smile and he returns the bump before holding his head high and walking straight through the front gates.

Smiling, Yukio follows Rin.

The heavy storm that still hasn't broken hangs over everyone even in class. Tsukishiro does her best to keep everyone distracted, but even she looks out worriedly at the clouds at times.

Rin wonders at those looks, since something about them seems off and different from everyone else's. But he can't dwell on it long, rubbing his forehead and turning back to his work. He's got a
massive headache that's been growing this entire day and it's not helping him stay in a good mood.

Yukio eyes Rin as he furrows his brow and looks to be in pain, then looks over at the front where Tsukishiro seems to be nursing a headache as well.

'Is the pressure getting to Nii-san?' Yukio wonders, thinking of how the air pressure changes can give people headaches. Certainly Rin is actually a half-demon and shouldn't be suffering such things, but with him sealed that might give a bit of leeway for such things.

'Either way, I feel like there's a headache growing in my head too...' Yukio barely resists the urge to wince and even groan at the sensation of something small digging at the back of his head.

“Okay, time's up!” Tsukishiro says, drawing everyone's attention from their quizzes. “Please hand all your tests to the person in front of you and those at the front hand them all in. Don't forget to put your name on your test, right Mihara-kun?”

The boy called out blushes and glances at his test. “Yes Tsukishiro-sensei…”

A rustling of paper starts up, the sound making Rin wince as it doesn't seem to help his headache. He still soldiers on and hands in his own paper, ignoring how that freaks out the person in front of him to have to have any contact with the resident “demon”.

Tsukishiro cheerfully accepts the papers and sets them down on her desk. “We have five minutes before lunch bell rings so how about all of you just do a bit of a review or rest a moment.”

There is a ragged cheer at that, most of the students going to have conversations with the nearest classmate, though softly in deference to Tsukishiro's kind but sharp gaze, but a few – including Yukio – pull out their books or notes and try to guess how they did on their quiz.

Rin lays his head down and closes his eyes, praying for some relief from his headache.

Naoko pauses in the middle of the hallway, drawn to the nearby window to look out at the looming clouds.

“Naoko-chan?” Miho, one of her friends, asks her, walking quietly over to her friend. They were heading to a quite spot to have lunch, not wanting to go outside in such a weather.

“Those don't really seem to be normal clouds, do they?” Naoko declares, turning her head to look at her friend. The lights briefly glint off of her glasses before it fades. “I don't like them at all.”

Miho looks out at the clouds herself and, despite not believing in supernatural things like her friend, finds she agrees, shuddering as she looks out at the clouds.

Beside them, Eiji is on his smartphone, tapping out a text message. He closes the smartphone after it's sent and finds himself frowning up at the clouds himself.

Though he's not sure why, he finds himself thinking back to those puzzling words Rin gave him almost two weeks ago.

'Why bother believing in something that you know is real, uh?' Eiji frowns and mentally makes plans to go home early instead of hanging back like usual. He's not liking the weather today at all, with the clouds looming over all and a strange buzzing going up and down everyone's spines. And even a few headaches seem to be common among people in the school. Eiji would bet his smartphone that it's also popping up all over the city as well.
Eiji isn't the kind to take risks, and somehow everything about those clouds seems risky.

Yukio doesn't bother moving when the bell goes off for lunch, aside from getting his bento. After a glance at Rin, he nudges his brother.

With a groan Rin opens his eyes, looking vaguely in Yukio's direction. “Yukio?”

“It's lunch time. You better eat. That might help with your headache.” Yukio offers, giving his voice down.

Rin lets out a gabbled reply and slowly sits up, wincing all the while. Yukio eyes him and bends down for him to get his lunch, handing it over to him.

“Thanks.” Rin manages softly, opening the lid and pulling out the chopsticks slowly. The way he's moving is as if he's drained of all energy, something that makes Yukio even more worried than before.

Unlike most days, a good chunk of the class is staying in the classroom to have lunch. All of which are quiet and focus more on eating than talking ultimately. The clouds seem to be thicker than before and even more menacing.

'I doubt I'm the only one hoping for the day to end already...' Yukio thinks, turning back to his bento. It's strange to think just this morning he wasn't worried at all and, despite the clouds, expected a normal day. At this point though, Yukio's wondering if this is a demonic attack of a sort.

'Which is silly. Wouldn't have such a big demon incident here. Southern Cross is close to True Cross Campus Town and that's his territory. Tou-san assures me that it grants just enough protection to the area that big demons aren't a concern and makes this place at least somewhat peaceful in regards to demonic incidents.' Yukio reminds himself.

Beside him, Rin is forcing himself to eat. He knows that he should eating, good food is good for him after all and he's always conscious in regards to what he makes for the bento. But the headache is making him queasy and the pounding going on his head does not help matters at all.

'I can barely think...' Rin winces again, bringing his hand up to his eye as a bad pulse of pain seems to radiate from there. 'What...'

“I don't know about you, but I'm going to skip soccer practise today.” Miharu tells one of his friends. “I don't like those clouds at all and if it does storm it's going to suck.”

“You got a point.” His friend notes with a sigh. “I'm hoping to get home as fast as possible. Maybe we need a storm shelter or something...”

A loud scream makes them jump and they whirl around. Their eyes widen at what they see.

Yukio is also freaking, standing up and flailing his hands around as Rin screams like he's being stabbed with a hot poker. “Nii-san!”

Rin looks over at Yukio, scream finally dying away. And collapses to the ground, Yukio just missing him as he falls.

“Nii-san!” Yukio drops to his knees beside his brother.

Miharu looks at his friend and then moves to the door. “I'll go get the nurse!” He stutters out and
quickly flees the room, heading to the nurse's office as fast as possible.

'What the fuck was that?' Miharu wonders, unknowingly echoing a very worried Yukio back in the classroom.

His head is still pulsing as Rin slowly swims back to consciousness, but it's no longer feeling like it might kill him in any moment.

It's still a rotten feeling and Rin remains still for a very long time instead of opening his eyes and finding out where he is.

Rin has a good idea of where he is anyways; he can smell the faint traces of medicine, the bed he's on is soft but a bit scratchy, and he can hear a soft, recognizable voice talking to another.

'The nurse's office...this is new.' Rin thinks. 'Usually it's Yukio in this spot.'

Finally feeling a bit better, Rin slowly opens his eyes. Turning his head slowly, he blinks at who he sees.

“Tsukishiro-sensei?”

The woman smiles down at Rin, brushing his bangs away from his forehead. “Feeling better?”

“A little.” Rin admits. He sighs in pleasure as Tsukishiro's hand is pleasantly cool to his skin. “Still tired.”

“You fainted during lunch period.” Tsukishiro explains before Rin can ask. “It was apparently very terrifying, considering you spent a minute just screaming before you finally collapsed.”

Rin looks worried at that. “I don't know what happened...stupid headache...” Rin then realizes something and tries to sit up. “Where's Yukio?”

Tsukishiro gently pushes him back down. “He went home already. You slept through the rest of the day and your father figured your brother should head back at the least.”

“Tou-san?” Rin wonders softly, slipping back to the more fond address briefly. “He's here?”

“Currently he's talking to Sagisawa-sensei about what happened.” Tsukishiro tells him gently. “He's been worried for quite some time. Apparently something came up so he only was able to show up after classes ended and he's not that happy about it.”

“Oh...” Rin blinks, still feeling tired. He winces as his head pulses again. “Ugh...”

“It would be easier for you to manage if you could shield yourself.” Tsukishiro observes. “The energy is at a high enough level that even those with nothing can sense it and you are particularly sensitive after all.”

Rin looks over at Tsukishiro, puzzled by her words. “Sensei?”

“Rin.” Rin turns at that and brightens slightly at the sight of his foster father.

“Tou-san...”

“This is something out of my experience.” Shirō sighs, smiling slightly and taking a seat beside Tsukishiro. “Normally it's Yukio who's sick, not you.”
“Sorry for making you worry...” Rin murmurs. He misses the sharp look Shirō gives for that, too busy trying to deal with his pain.

“Well, since you are awake now, it should be possible to get you home. Somehow. My back isn’t what it used to be.” Shirō teases.

Rin stiffens at that suggestion and manages a plausible glare despite his exhaustion. “No way. I can walk, I swear.”

“Yes, I'm sure you can.” Shirō stands and helps Rin slowly sit up. “But we'll take it slow, okay?”

Rin wants to deny that, but he feels almost like his legs are made of lead, so doesn't bother. It's true that slow is the only way to get home.

“You might want to grab a bus Fujimoto-san.” Tsukishiro suggests softly.

Shirō nods. “Yeah. Not planning on walking further than the bus stop near the school. There should be a bus going by our monastery by the time we get there.”

Tsukishiro smiles, relieved by that. “That's good. Rin needs all the help he can get.”

Rin looks curiously between the adults and scowls. “I'm right here!”

The two adults turn to look at Rin and smile (or grin widely in Shirō's case). “We know.” Shirō snickers. “Don't worry didn't forget you.” Shirō gives Rin a hair ruffling, grinning despite how Rin scowls.

Rin's scowl drops in favour of a wince as his headache pulses again.

Shirō looks once again at Tsukishiro then speaks to Rin. “C'mon. The sooner we get home the better for your headache.”

Rin crawls into bed as soon as he gets back home, Yukio vacating the room to give him the space he needs to recover. Even with the lights off and the painkillers Rin took, the headache still pulses at him.

“Rin, are you okay?” Kero asks, brushing Rin's forehead with a paw and frowning. “The air here feels so pumped full o’magic Ah'm surprised you are still up and about.”

Rin blinks at that, staring at Kero. “Magic...” Rin then winces, curling up and yelling as it increases again.

Kero also screams, as a loud boom goes off in their ear after bright light flashes around the house.

Rin slowly uncurls himself. “What...” He rolls out of his bed and crawls over to the nearby chest. Touching the lock, he pops it open without needing the Key, something that Kero watches with surprise, and pulls out a strange device.

It looks like something you use to measure radiation or such, but it actually registers magic. Tapping it to activate it, Rin winces as it shrieks and peers at the numbers.

In bright orange colours it declares the air is saturated to 67%. It then increases to 73% after another flash. “Fuck, what's...” Rin looks out and realizes the clouds must be at fault. “But how do I...”

Rin trails off, remembering something Tsukishiro said. “Shield...”
Struggling to stand, Rin grabs a hold of the chest and pushes himself up. He nearly falls over and has to grab his desk next. He lifts his hand and, taking a deep breath, fights against the pain in his head.

"Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!" The Key expands in his hands and Rin scrambles for his Card deck, calling Shield to his hand. "Shield, protect this house!"

Bright light spreads out and Rin finally finds he can breathe. Kneeling down, he picks up the device and the magic level has dropped to a more demure 10%, something that is normal with Rin and Kero in residence.

Rin takes a deep breath and looks out at what's outside. "Dammit...what's doing this Kero?"

Kero slowly gets up from the ground. He had been able to withstand things better than Rin, being a being of pure magic himself, but the last two hits took a lot out of him. Floating woozily over to Rin, Kero looks out at the clouds.

"Thunder. That's the Card that's causin' all of this." Kero realizes. "Amahzing really. Ah didn't know it could do this on its own. It's been usin' its power to fill up the air with so much magical power you can't hear it through the static. But it's too aggressive to just stick with that."

"So I have to deal with that uh? But I can't move the Shield..." Rin then blinks and pulls out another Card. "Hey, Kero would Armour work?"

Kero flutters over to look at said Card and nods shortly. "Yeah. It won't work if you get hit directly, but it should block out the...static."

"That's all I need." Rin says firmly and looks out at the clouds angry. "I just need to be able to fight."

Rin races downstairs, an excuse on his lips for going outside briefly, but it fades away when he sees everyone sprawled out unconscious. "What happened?!" Rin demands of Kero, dropping down beside Yukio and looking worriedly at his brother.

"The last two hits must of knocked them out." Kero admits. "They are exorcists and there's Yukio as yer brother too. They have to be at least somewhat sensitive to magic."

"Will they be okay?" Rin looks worriedly up at Kero, shifting Yukio to a more comfortable position and then moving to Shirō. Rin droops as he sees just how tired his foster father seems, feeling a bit of guilt spring up at how much stress he must be giving him.

"They shouldn't be unconscious more than an hour with the Shield protectin' them now." Kero assures Rin.

Rin takes a deep breath at that, and steps carefully away from Shirō. "So I got a deadline for defeating Thunder then. Good."

Kero looks at Rin and trembles a bit at the angry expression on his face. 'Oh, Ah gotta feelin' that Thunder's in for a whole lotta pain...'

Rin makes a point of getting as high he can in this situation, which means climbing the monastery's church to get to the highest point on the roof. Best he can do in this situation and considering things, not a terrible thing to do.
'Not like I'm going to wreck anything up here...' Rin muses. He then pauses. 'Well, it's not on purpose and that has to count for something!' He's currently wearing Armour on him and he feels a bit foolish considering it does look like samurai armour. Though at least he doesn't have to wear the stupid helmet for the effects to work on him. The good news is that since it's magical armour, it's like he's wearing nothing more than a feather extra on top of his clothing.

Good for being able to run and jump about, which Kero fears is on the menu tonight. Thunder is an aggressive Card with power over lightning and considering the last two hits that hit the monastery (and remarkably didn't reduce everything to ash) Kero has good reason to worry.

Rin takes a deep breath and looks up at the clouds. Cupping his hands over his mouth Rin shouts, “Oi! Thunder! Get over here you big stinking coward!”

A roar is his response and Rin nearly steps back but holds firm by drawing on his anger at what Thunder has done to his family. Lightning flashes across the sky.

And as the boom of thunder hits, so does Thunder. It clings to the church's lightning rod slash cross, roaring down at Rin and making him blink in shock. Of all the things Rin expected, he didn't see Thunder looking like a Raijū.

'Then again, it does fit it...' Rin eyes the electric wolf that leaps down to be in front of him. It's very large and intimidating, but Rin firms up. He's faced a more powerful Card than this and come out the winner.

Thunder takes a step forward, sparks leaving up where it steps and roars. And with its roar comes lighting, which Rin roll away from just in time, feeling the heat fly past him. “Sword!” Rin cries, turning the staff into a rapier and charging at Thunder. He dodges and slashes at the lightning coming at him, before finally managing to hit Thunder itself. It howls and backs away, snarling at Rin and drawing up more lightning to strike him with.

Rin scowls, dismisses Sword, and calls up the Card he talked over with Kero, though he still has his doubts. “Shadow! Capture Thunder!”

Shadow springs to life and slides eagerly over to Thunder, and despite its attempt to get away the shadows spring up and forms a cage. Rin blinks, a little surprised, then remembers that Shadow is untouchable to most things. Of course it works perfectly.

Not satisfied with that, Rin calls up Sword once again.

Kero gapes as Rin charges at the cage and stabs Thunder, making it howl in pain as he twists the sword in it. “That's for hurting my family you asshole!” Rin snarls, then pulls away Sword and raises his staff.

“Thunder, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Thunder howls as it is forced to transform back into Card shape. Rin gracefully catches both Thunder and Shadow as they float to his hand. Rin smirks down at Thunder.

“That should teach you a lesson.”

'Rin...you are one scary kid...' Kero pales at the thought of how much damage Rin can do when mad. 'Very scary indeed.'
Rin then turns to Kero, Armour vanishing from him and the clouds dispersing to let the remaining sunlight shine on him. “Well...let's get back inside before everyone wakes up!”

Yukio groans, feeling a pain in his neck that doesn't quite make sense. 'Ugh what's...' He sits up straight as he remembers...nothing except a sudden pain before he fell abruptly into unconsciousness.

Looking worriedly around the kitchen, he's surprise to see Rin at the stove. “Nii-san?”

Rin turns around and smiles at Yukio. “Glad to see you up again sleepy-head.”

“Pardon? I...” Yukio looks over to see Shirō also sleeping at the same table. “Nii-san, what happened?”

Yukio doesn't notice the brief flicker in Rin's eyes as he shrugs and turns back to the stove. “Not sure. I came down once I was feeling better and it looks like you all were having a nap randomly.”

Yukio finds that very terrifying and carefully stands up and decides to look around the monastery. Just in case something dangerous got in.

“I'm making Tsukemen today.” Rin tells Yukio as he stands. “It should be ready in half an hour. You should find the rest and make sure they are awake.”

“What about Tou-san?” Yukio asks, glancing at their father.

Rin looks back as well and his face softens. “He's been working a lot lately so let him sleep. It doesn't take much to reheat the soup if necessary after all.”

Yukio hums in agreement and, after adjusting the blanket on Shirō, turns and leaves the kitchen to look for the rest.

Behind him, Rin sighs in relief at Yukio having bought his lie and turns back to his cooking. He smiles privately, happy to have handled Thunder with minimal fuss.

He then frowns.

'Tsukishiro-sensei...sounded like she knew...or did she?’ Rin looks up as he thinks on that, puzzled by his teacher's words.

Far from Rin, water in a bowl ripples and the image on it ends. Tsukishiro sighs in relief, setting the scrying bowl aside and settling back in her chair.

She picks up a cup of tea and takes a sip from it. She then stares into the cup for a moment, then sets it aside.

“Not time yet for you to know Rin-kun.” She says softly.

“Not yet time.” She smiles softly and stands, planning on making something simple and quick for her own dinner.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you for reading and, again, comments on THIS CHAPTER will get the next chapter up. Comments on previous chapters don't count (unless they are super comments like what DracoNocte did; shout out to you sweetie!) but the most recent chapter comments do. Volume of comments as much as quality of them counts lots people!

Also, I would like to build a FAQ page for ICD. With that in mind, I would like you all to send in some common questions you guys have. Some I can't add to the page yet since spoilers, but ask some nice, smart questions of the verse I have here. How I see magic working, some backstory elements, that sort of thing. Go here (http://writerscornergblp.tumblr.com/) to send them in, anon or not. I have some plans there myself, but anything you can add is wonderful!
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Thank you yet again for the comments everyone! Please keep leaving them, it keeps the schedule going and I really appreciate each and every one of them (when I'm not tired).

Another quick reminder that me and GB are doing a Halloween Week series. She posted her first one yesterday and I just posted my first one today.

Go comment on GB's. Mine sucks.

I hope you enjoy this chapter. The long awaited festival has arrived!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The school is filled with the sound of excited, happy chatter and so many people moving around in multiple directions one could almost get dizzy.

“The bunting does not...no! Not like that I told you. The left, the left!”

“Hey, where does this go?”

“Careful with that bonfire wood, you are going to knock it over if you aren't careful!”

“Hey, watch where you are swinging that hammer!”

A few shrieks are heard as one part of the stage starts to collapse, only for Rin to show up and act as a human brace. “Oi, watch it and be careful!” Rin snaps at the person who knocked the brace out of the way.

The other boy pales and nods quickly, scrambling to fix things.

Rin sighs and shifts his position slightly to get more comfortable, holding it for a minute longer than necessary to be certain before stepping back. He turns around and sighs at how scared the girls nearby look. “You're welcome.” He snarks, before marching off and looking to see if there is anything else to do.

But even that incident can't keep Rin's spirits down for long. The school festival preparations are in full swing and Rin can't help but be cheered by the energy in the air. Especially since his grounding is officially over today. Dodging a big decoration – a paper mache dragon for the summer school play that's to be shown during the festival – Rin heads over to where he thinks he saw Yukio last.

He perks up visibly when he sees he's correct and waves, yelling out at Yukio.

Yukio turns at Rin's yell and can't help the smile that crosses his face. “Nii-san. Found anything to do?”

Rin shrugs. “Aside from stopping a bit of the stage from crushing some girls? Not much.”

“Well, it should be all set up soon anyways so that's not surprising.” Yukio soothes his brother's hurt
ego there.

Rin bounces at that. “Oh yes! And it should be fun! We can hang out during it yes?”

“I volunteered to help with a stall, but after that I should be free.” Yukio reminds Rin.

Rin cheers at that. “Alright! This is going to be fun!”

Yukio, smiling, can't help but agree. He does have the day free, and is on a temporary “no call” list for exorcisms. As is their father, but Yukio decides it's best to have Shirō surprise Rin the day of the festival.

'It should be a nice, bright day.' Yukio thinks positively himself, letting Rin's chatter soothe his ears and whisk what little stress he has away.

It's just the school festival after all.

**Chapter 11: Silly Masks, Scary Masks**

If it's one thing that puts most people into a good mood, it's festivals. Even Kaido finds himself thinking good thoughts during this. Helps that set up went up mostly without a hitch and he only had to yell at one idiot.

Followed by the ever present Hayashi, Kaido wanders the festival grounds. Southern Cross Junior High has a pretty impressive festival every summer. Equal to the Senior High counterpart, but less impressive than True Cross's insane thing that shows up during September in their case. Then again, True Cross is packed with so many rich people it's not surprising.

The smell of food draws him to an okonomiyaki stand that one class had set up.

“What would it be?” The boy manning the front asks, looking over Kaido briefly but not stuttering and freaking at the sight of him. A part of Kaido is slightly peeved by that but he pushes it aside.

“Heh. Just a standard okonomiyaki for me.” Kaido glances back at Hayashi, who starts, then steps forward.

“I'd like a pork okonomiyaki.” Hayashi requests. The boy nods and writes down both of their orders. He then tears the papers in half and hands them half. The halves they get have 21 and 22 written on them.

“When it's ready they'll call your number.” Counter boy explains, passing the orders on to the “chefs” who are busy making up okonomiyaki already for a crowd.

Kaido grins at that and wanders over to stand with the crowd. He's briefly disappointed that no one is horrified or scared at his presence, but he finds that he actually prefers it this way.

'I can pull on the scary when needed.' He reminds himself. 'And it's easier to get shit done when everyone's not too busy being scared to think straight.'

For a moment, he thinks he sees Rin on the other side of the crowd, but if it is him, he quickly disappears from Kaido's view. Either way, Kaido can't help the snort and smile on his face at the thought of that guy.

With a sigh, he settles down to wait for his okonomiyaki to be done.
“Sayaka-chan!” Hiromi nearly wails, watching her friend in horror as she climbs a tree. “Please, can’t you wait until someone else comes with a ladder?”

“Nope!” Sayaka disagrees, working her way carefully up to a branch where a colourful balloon is stuck on.

Hiromi watches, hands clasped to her chest and heart in her throat, along with a small kid who finally stopped crying over his lost balloon in favour of watching Sayaka climb up to it.

“Aha!” Sayaka exclaims triumphantly, finally getting a good hold of the balloon. Carefully wrapping the string in her hand and closing it in a fist, she looks down and estimates just how far it is.

'Too far to jump. Okay, climbing back down.' Sayaka focuses on her footing, inching her way back from the branch. She's just got to the tree trunk when her foot slips at a bad time and, with only one hand truly free, she finds herself falling.

“Waaaaaaaahhh!” Sayaka screams, something echoed by Hiromi as she watches her friend fall.

“Watch it!” The male voice there is heard just a moment before Sayaka oofs as she's caught by someone. A male someone at that.

Sayaka blinks and stares at Hiromi who is staring in shock at that opportune rescue. She then looks up.

A scowl immediately shows up on her face. “Let me go!” She yells at Rin, flailing and struggling to get him to let her go.

Shocked, Rin does and Sayaka falls on her butt, letting out a yelp at the hard fall.

“What's your problem?!” Rin demands. “You almost lost the balloon you risked your neck for.” Rin has said balloon his hands, a contributing factor in him dropping the now grumbling Sayaka.

Rin sighs as Sayaka snarls at him. Rin then turns to the kid with a smile on his face and crouches down. “You should be more careful if you want to not lose it.”

The boy nods, looking wide eyed at Rin, and slowly accepts the balloon. “But...but how can I?”

“Hmm...let's see...I know!” Rin takes the string and carefully ties it around the boy's wrist. “There. Should be much harder to lose now. Can get your father or mother to take it off at the end of the day.”

“Nii-san what...oh.” Yukio's voice trails off as he finally catches up to his brother and sees the scene of the happy boy, Rin in front of him, and Sayaka grouching to herself while Hiromi tries to calm her down. “Oota-san. Minami-san. Good day to you.”

“Good day Okumura-kun.” Hiromi says cheerfully. She then turns to Rin and gives a small bow. “Thank you for rescuing Sayaka-chan.”

Rin pinks and steps back. “Aaah...just happened to be there at the right time...”

Yukio raises an eyebrow. 'As if. You ran like a madman to get here in time to catch Oota-san.'

As if reading his mind, Rin blushes even more once he makes eye contact with his brother. “W-well, have a nice day.”

Sayaka snorts at that and looks away, but Hiromi smiles and waves to them, along with the little boy,
as the two brothers walk off to another area of the festival.

Eiji is in his element. Between texting and actually talking to people, he's become a hub of information and bets. And thus the yen keeps pouring in.

"Yes, the results for the food stand profits bet has come in." He tells to the person in front of him, checking the information. "My apologizes. It's an Ueda-san who won."

"What seriously!!" The student in front of him peers over to look and groans. "Crap. I guess I pay up now..."

Eiji easily accepts the money from him and notes it down in his smartphone. He's not supposed to keep all the money – just keeps a 5% to be super nice – so best to know what each person gives to make sure it stacks well.

Another person appears in front of him. To Eiji's surprise, it's an adult.

"I'm sorry for bother you." The woman smiles, looking a bit distracted. "But I was told when it comes to information I'm better asking you."

"That is no problem. What do you want to know...?" Eiji quickly gets his head back on straight and considers what he should ask for in exchange for the information, depending on what she's asking. 'If my guess is right...'

"Matsuda Hiyori. I'm looking for my son, Kunio. Somehow we got separated. He's six-years-old and wearing a green hoodie with the word Ninja on it. Oh, and he should have a red and pink balloon on him as well."

Eiji quickly types in the key words and looks through his collected information on the going ons of the festival. To his surprise he gets a hit instantly. Narrowing his eyes, perhaps he shouldn't be surprised as he sees the name Okumura Rin attached to the incident. It only takes a little longer to find the most recent report.

"He was last seen with Minami Hiromi and Oota Sayaka at the takoyaki stand. They could not have gotten very far from there and are probably looking for you too." Eiji informs her, seeing her relax and smile at the fact he's definitely safe.

"Thank you! So, what's your going rate here?" Matsuda asks, reaching for her purse.

Eiji blinks, looks down at his smartphone, and pauses, lingering on the name Okumura Rin. "In this case, 100 yen."

Matsuda blinks at that, then chuckles, and hands over the 100 yen easily. "Thank you for the help again."

Eiji stares at the 100 yen and then at his smartphone again. 'I really do need to investigate Okumura Rin...’ He notes to himself as he pockets that bit of money. 'Will have to be after summer though.' He admits, turning to his next customer.

After all, the festival has taken up his time right now and he won't be able to get in contact with Rin or gather incidents he's involved in very easily when he's out of school.

"Argh this is so boring...” Imai Yoshio sighs and checks his watch, wondering when his shift will
end. His class had decided for whatever reason to sell masks at the festival, but unfortunately it doesn't seem like anyone is going to be buying one.

'At least not my shift ugh. This would be more bearable if someone bought something...' Yoshio finds himself giving a very big jaw creaking yawn at that. ‘Damn.’

He turns to look at the collection of masks. None of them look bad to him, but well apparently he's got it wrong. ‘Maybe I should pull out some other ones.”

Standing up, he moves around to the other side of the stall. Deciding to be quick about it, just pulls out the first box of extra masks, planning on looking through them to find new and “shinier” masks to sell.

Yoshio blinks in surprise when a mask suddenly falls down on top from somewhere. “What the...”

It's a very plain mask, almost entirely white except for the design of wings in its cheeks and a bright red, smiling mouth.

Yoshio looks it over, frowning in confusion. “Who made this?” Yoshio then sighs, realizing the amount of masks made by his classmates makes it impossible to tell. “Aah well. It's so simple it might get a good amount of attention.”

That decided, Yoshio dives back into the box and starts creating a pile of more “interesting” masks.

Unseen to him, the mask he found subtly glows for a brief moment.

The space in front of the stage is slowly filling with many people. There's not enough seats so a good chunk are forced to stand.

Yukio and Rin aren't among that number, mostly because Rin insisted that they get here early and be ready for this performance.

“Why are you so eager to see this?” Yukio asks, half laughing at Rin's enthusiasm. Rin has a collection of various festival foods that he is sharing between Yukio and Shirō who showed up to Rin's surprise a while back. Though Shirō got lost in the crowd, he's sure to show up soon.

So far, the festival foods they are enjoying includes takoyaki, taiyaki, cotton candy, and a carton of yakisoba. And that's not counting the drinks for all three of them. Yukio also vaguely remembers seeing Shirō last at the okonomiyaki place and resigns himself to Shirō bringing a big one to share between the three of them.

“Naoko put a lot into getting ready for her solo here.” Rin explains. “I want to hear it.”

Rin makes a point of grabbing a third seat for Shirō as they get a spot. It's not hard; between Rin sprawling out to cover it and various people recognizing Rin as the “demon” the seat is still free when Shirō shows up grinning and with the promised okonomiyaki.

Yukio sighs and mentally puts down a reminder to do extra exercise to make up for all the pounds he’s gaining here. There’s a surprisingly large amount of food stands this festival, but it honestly just serves to make it extra fun.

“So, what's going on here?” Shirō asks after a moment, as the crowd slowly settles down.

“The choir is performing next.” Yukio explains to Shirō, sighing as he playfully fights with Rin over
the last takoyaki ball. Yukio ends the “fight” by stealing the takoyaki ball himself and getting grumbling from the both of them.

“Choir uh...hey, doesn't that one girl belong to the school choir?” Shirō asks.

Rin nods, then swallows his mouthful of okonomiyaki. “Yeah. She's got a solo and everything.” Rin licks at his fingers before wiping them with the napkin Yukio offers. “It's very pretty so I'm wondering what it's like in the full show.”

Shirō seems to find this amusing and leans back with a wicked grin on his face. Before he can speak though, Yukio elbows him and gets his attention.

“Nii-san is just thinking of her as a friend, if anything at all.” Yukio frowns as he remembers how he had expected Naoko to show up repeatedly at lunch, but after the first time she barged in somehow she stopped. At times he sees her poke her head in, but Naoko only talks to Rin in private now and there's a bit of strange tension there. It's like Rin is trying to wall her out while Naoko is looking for footholds to climb over the wall with.

Shirō raises an eyebrow at that and looks over at Rin worriedly. “That's strange...you don't think he's gay do you Yukio?”

Yukio chokes and nearly spits out his mouthful of his drink, glaring at Shirō for that ill-timed comment. “No! At least nothing there either.” Yukio thinks back to Manabu and then dismisses it.

“Hey, shush you two!” Rin glares at the two of them. “Show's about to start.”

“Sorry Rin.” “Sorry Nii-san.”

With that done, all settle down to enjoy the choir's performance.

And Rin is right; it is amazing, especially Naoko's solo which shows off the impressive range she's in possession of.

The really fun part, at least to Shirō, is when Naoko notices Rin is watching and waves excitedly at him, briefly sending the performance off schedule as Rin sinks down in embarrassment as everyone turns to look at who the soloist is waving at.

'Rin might not be interested, but I think this Watanabe might be.' Shirō thinks, amused at the thought. He looks over at his still blushing son as the show resumes and chuckles again over the idea of Rin finally getting attention from the ladies.

“Thank you for your patronage!” Yoshio beams as another customer leaves with a mask in hand. 'Yes, yes! This is all good.'

Ever since he decided to switch up the masks shown, actual customers have been coming around.

'Could be because everyone's pretty much stuffed themselves first.' Yoshio admits, adding the cash he has to the cash box.

Either way, Yoshio is very happy to have the customers filling up his time and keeping him from getting dreadfully bored once again.

He glances over at the strange mask he found and tilts his head in consideration. “Hmm...maybe I'll buy that one...” He thinks. To Yoshio, it's probably the best one yet.
“Yeah, if it's still around, I'll buy it.” Yoshio certainly has the money for it and he swears the mask is almost a good luck charm. Even if no one is buying it, it's the first thing people see and draws them to the stand.

“Excuse me, but what's the price of that mask.” Another customer shows up, pointing at one that has a lot of feathers on it.

“Aah, that one is...” As Yoshio cheerfully handles another transaction, he doesn't notice how the mask's eyes flash.

And there's no way he could hear the strange “laughter” that briefly seems to come from the mask.

As Rin is gathering his things and standing, ready to head to another part of the school festival, he pauses. His head lifts up without him knowing and he stares out at the festival arrayed before him.

'That's...that's a Sakura Card!' Rin's eyes widen as he registers that to his senses. One that just activated and it's definitely here.

Rin looks between his family and where he senses the Card. 'Damn Card, I wanted to enjoy this festival...'

“Is everything okay Nii-san?” Yukio finally notices that Rin looks distracted.

Rin jumps and rubs the back of his head once he turns around to face Yukio.

“Aaah...oh! I'm sorry but I can't stay.”

Manabu stares up at Rin behind his glasses and smiles. “He-hello Rin-san. You seem to be in a rush.”

Rin is surprised to have his hand accepted and pulls up Manabu on automatic. “Aaah...oh! I'm sorry but I can't stay.”

“I fi-figured that.” Manabu actually smiles and waves as Rin starts leaving. Only for Rin to pause and look at the mask in Manabu's hands.

“What's that?”

Manabu blinks and holds up the mask. It looks rather Kabuki like with the red designs on it as much as obviously homemade. “Oh this? It's a ma-mask I got from 1-C. They de-ecided to do a mask stall for the festival for some reason. It's been popular lately.”
Rin stares at the mask for a moment, then runs off, yelling behind him, “Do yourself a favour and don't put it on until after the festival.”

Manabu stares after Rin. “What?”

As Rin races through the crowd, his hand goes to his special “earring” and sends a quick pulse to it.

Back at the monastery, Kero is in the kitchen, happily going after leftovers and snack food while everyone else is either out of the entire place or in the church. It's only this, as well as Rin's promise to bring back some festival food to him, that stopped him from power-sulking when Rin left for the festival.

Kero pauses in the middle of manipulating the manual ice shaver Rin got, eager to make himself some nice strawberry milk kakigori to enjoy, as he feels the pulse from his earring.

A tap at it has it operational. “Yo, Rin! Somethin' come up?”

“Yeah...wish it hadn't.” Rin grumbles to him, jogging up to a tree that's mostly empty of people and settling down out of the way for the moment. “There's a Sakura Card at the festival and it's wide awake. Hasn't done anything but...”

“It's goin' to ain't it?” Kero sighs, settling down beside the ice shaver. “So got any clues?”

“Hmm...Manabu had a mask that looked like it was...touched by the Card.” Rin recalls. He blinks as Kero lets out a loud groan and even adds a curse to it. “What is it?”

Kero bangs his head against the nearby ice shaver once, twice, before finally answering. “That would be Mask. That damn Card got a terrible sense o'humour.”

Kero settles down on the counter and takes a deep breath. “Basically, Mask was made for emergencies where Sakura couldn't be seen as herself. Problem is that you gotta be firm with the damn thang or it makes up a joke form for you.”

Rin tries to consider what kind of joke form would upset Kero – who loves gag manga as much as his brother – and covers his face with his hand as he realizes it can't be good. “Great. And it touching a more normal mask?”

“It can use its powers on other masks, ones that are normal. Sakura put that in since it's useful but ugh...” Kero shudders. “I don't really like that Card.”

“...it's a bad thing that a class did a mask stall...” Rin realizes. Kero lets out an oath at that and Rin continues, “It's apparently popular too so...”

“Great. Well, best get to that stall quick and see about buyin' Mask if you can. It looks pretty simple. Basic white mask with wings painted on the cheeks and a red smile on its stupid face. If you get to it before someone puts it on, it won't do anythin'.”

Rin nods in understanding. “Thanks Kero. And what if I can't get to it in time?”

“You'll goin' to have to track it through the festival and with all the other masks in the way.” Kero rubs his forehead at the thought. “And also deal with people freakin' out at all the strange...thangs now attendin' the festival.”

Rin winces at that thought himself, then sighs. “Thanks Kero. Talk to you later.”
“Oh and one more thing.”

“Hm? You remember something else?” Rin tilts his head in curiosity.

Kero voice switches to a whine. “You *are* bringin' back treats from the festival for me right?”

Rin gives a startled laugh. “Yes Kero. I haven't forgotten you. Just don't eat too much kakigori before I get back.”

With that said, and Kero squawking in surprise at that comment (protesting that is what he is doing), Rin “hangs up” the connection and stretches a bit. A smile is on his lips and, feeling more positive, he takes off to find the mask stall and stop Mask as quickly as possible.

Yukio easily pays for a handful of yakitori sticks, receiving them with a smile and then walking away from the stand a little nervously as the girl working the stand is staring after him with bright eyes.

It's only a few steps to the bench he took over with Shirō and once he reaches it, he sighs at what he sees.

“Tou-san...” Yukio shakes his head, amazed at how good his foster father is at falling asleep at the drop of a hat. Shirō's glasses are already askew on his nose and he breaths deeply and easily, despite the awkward position he is in. Falling asleep sitting up and with your head back on a bench cannot be that comfortable.

'Judging by things, he's going to be asleep for quite some time.' Yukio looks around and, sighing, takes a seat next to Shirō. Not much else to do but wait. Shirō could sleep through a thunder storm in this state. 'Probably because he's been on multiple missions back to back to earn the time off to come to the festival.' Yukio muses. 'That plus he was up late filling out a lot of paperwork last night.'

A moment more and Yukio decides to have some of the yakitori. He is hungry again after all and best not let the food get wasted completely.

At the mask stall, Rin is craning his neck around and trying to locate Mask, at the same time scaring the crap out of the guy who is monitoring the stand.

“Oi, I heard you got a mask that's got wings on its cheeks and a red painted smile?” Rin finally asks him, turning to look at the poor guy.

The guy jumps and gulps at Rin, obviously terrified of him. Normally Rin would leave at someone being so distressed, but he's on a mission here.

“Um...th-that mask was bou-bought by Imai-kun when he finished wat-watching the stall...” He gulps as Rin narrows his eyes and curses. “If...if you wa-want I can t-t-t-tell you where he went!?” He squeaks.

Rin perks up a bit at that. 'Still got a chance.' “Where is this Imai?”

“He went to the haunted house that 2-B set up. Takes up the whole third floor.” The nervous guy explains quickly. He nearly faints when Rin grins and thanks him before taking off.

'I survived my first real experience with the demon...' Still pale and shaking he stumbles over to the chair set up nearby and collapses into it.
Rin, meanwhile, races to find this Imai and get Mask off him before its too late.

Yoshio sighs as yet another attempt to scare him falls flat in the haunted house. 'Damn I was hoping for something actually scary...'

Unfortunately, Yoshio is not effected by the “haunted house” that this class made, instead finding it almost boring.

Probably doesn't help that a good chunk of the covering on the windows got loose, letting light in and showing how cheaply made everything is. If it was darker, maybe Yoshio wouldn't be as bored and it would be passing much better as a haunted house.

Yoshio fiddles with the mask in his hands, looking down at it and sighing again. “Yeesh I swear I could be more scary with this mask on then they are...”

With that thought in mind, he brings the mask up to his face and puts it on. He doesn't notice the ripple of magic that covers him, merely turns to face the next scarer...

Who promptly starts screaming himself at what he sees instead of Yoshio.

The sound of screams goes unnoticed, only a few looking up and then dismissing it.

'Of course it's from the haunted house...' Rin groans, having felt Mask activating and knowing that he's definitely on a time limit.

At least it buys him time to race upstairs and to the haunted house, which is supposed to be scary, and hopefully deal with the mask quickly and efficiently without getting seen.

Unfortunately, luck is not on Rin's side.

First, people are starting to realize that the screams coming from the haunted house aren't normal.

And second, the many masks being carried by the festival participants are now primed and ready to transform their wearer according to Mask's whims.

“Is it a cute mask isn't it?” Hiromi cheers over her recent purchase.

Sayaka smiles a bit and nods. “It is.”

With glitter and blue paint on it, it's quite charming. Not to mention very affordable compared to most festival masks. It was homemade by one of the students in the class behind the masks stall, so the price was made up for in regards to the fact it's not “professional” work.

Hiromi's smile then drops a bit as she remembers seeing Rin by the stall and how Sayaka had pulled her away until he was gone.

“Sayaka-chan...why do you hate Okumura-kun?” Hiromi asks softly.

Sayaka blinks and stares at her friend. “Why do I hate...but I don't...oh.” She frowns. “You mean that demon.”

“But he's not a demon!” Hiromi protests. “He was nice to me when I ran into him, he even fixed that ornament for the festival! And today, he saved you and was super nice to that boy.”
Sayaka looks away from Hiromi, muttering something to herself. Hiromi refuses to let that stop her and grabs her friend, forcing her to turn and face her.

“Sayaka-chan!”

“I just don't like him, okay?” Sayaka shakes off her friend's hand. “He's got so many bad rumours about him that at least some of them have to be true!”

Hiromi stares up at Sayaka and shakes her head sadly at her friend. “I would have thought you at least would be more willing to let Okumura-kun speak for himself.”

Sayaka stiffens and whirls to yell at Hiromi. Only to freeze and shut her mouth, lifting her head to her short hair and running it through it. “Look. I don't like him, so drop it already.”

Hiromi's head drops and she looks sadly at the ground. She blinks as she realizes her mask was dropped to the ground during the argument and picks it up.

She freezes as a strange glow seems to come from the mask.

Sayaka notices that Hiromi is being very quiet and turns to apologize only to freeze as Hiromi, dull eyed, lifts up the mask and puts it on her face.

Time freezes as Sayaka watches Hiromi's appearance twist and change into a strange monster, a chimera of a beast. A beast with a great dragonic head and a large body the size of an elephant, but the shape of a lion, and the tail of a scorpion. It also has strange tentacles that spray around and when it opens its mouth, Sayaka can see the sharp teeth it has look like they are made of obsidian.

“Hi-Hiromi-chan?” Sayaka squeaks out. She then rubs her eyes.

The beast is still there.

“AAAAAAAAAAH!”

Screams start going up all over the festival grounds as all the mask stall's customers place their masks on, either forced to by Mask or willingly as a joke.

Rin doesn't notice this, too busy traversing the haunted house, until after he nearly rams into what looks like a horrible monster but he can hear someone expressing confusion and frustration.

“Dammit, why can't I get this mask off!” The “monster” cries out.

For a moment Rin sees double and squints, seeing what looks like a normal guy trying to yank off a mask. The mask Rin is looking for. When he steps back and looks again, all he sees is some strange monster – scary, scaly, and with razor sharp teeth – that is apparently attacking everyone in range.

At this point Rin feels the echo of Mask that is springing up all over the festival grounds and curses. “Oi! You bastard, over here!”

The “monster” turns to look at him. A top the monster's head is Mask, letting out high pitched giggles, just resting above the fanged monstrous head. It reminds Rin of something he's seen in a manga.

The monster opens its great mouth and dives, attacking Rin. Rin curses and rolls out of the way, ducking the splinters and hearing even more screams from all the people running away.
'Great...it's real enough to do damage.' Rin pulls out his Key and with a quick chant has his staff in hand.

Standing back up, Rin holds the staff at hand and considers what the best Card to use here is. 'I can't have the guy hurt after all...'

“Windy catch that Card!” Rin yells, summoning his first Card in a rush of wind, Windy reaching out with her hands and hair to grasp the monster and pin it down. Rin pumps his fist as he succeeds in wrapping up the monster, pinning down Mask in the process.

“Mask, I command you to--” Rin's chant is cut off as the Mask detaches itself from Imai and floats away from him.

“What the--!” Rin snarls and goes to order Windy after it.

Only for Mask to laugh and vanish from his sight.

Rin stares at where the Card was, Windy flowing back to him and wrapping around him in a gentle, cool embrace as he trembles with rage.

“Donkey-ball sucking piece of shit, get back here!” Rin yells, racing out of the haunted house and leaving one confused Yoshio behind and stumbling in the trail off from Windy as Rin exits and searches for where Mask fled to.

Yukio is immediately on the alert as screams start going up around the festival. Glancing at his father, both amused and concerned over the fact he's still asleep, Yukio then turns and looks for the source of the screams.

He takes off running towards the closest scream he can hear and skids to a halt at what he sees. It looks like some kind of giant, aquatic monster – a spawn of a Kraken and a leviathan with some crab claws stuck on it in fact – is rampaging around the festival.

'Amazing how not much is being damaged...' Yukio thinks absently for a moment, then curses as he goes for his guns and remembers too late that of course he didn't bring them to the festival.

Yukio then blinks and looks around, realizing that everyone can see the monster. Which...shouldn't be possible unless they all suddenly were inflicted with mashō.

'What...what is going on?' Yukio wonders frantically.

He then firms up and grabs a hold of someone and starts talking quickly. The least he can do is get people to a safe place until proper help can come and deal with this monster.

A loud boom makes Yukio twist and gape at yet another monster in the distance. That one looks rather lizard-like, but with strange insect-like parts added like a huge pair of dragonfly-like wings and multiple limbs attached.

'Where are they coming from?' Yukio screams inside his head, though outside he projects an appearance and feeling of calm as he organizes people to get to safety.

Sayaka has no breath to spare for screaming as she runs as fast as she can away from the monster that appeared in place of her best friend.
The problem is that the monster moves incredibly fast for its bulk and is still coming after her.

And it's using Hiromi's voice to try and trick her!

“Wait, Sayaka-chan please!” It cries out again, making Sayaka shudder. She's gulping for breath and if she wasn't on the track team she would have already given up at this point.

Of course, just as she puts on a burst of speed and the monster finally seems to be lagging, she runs smack into someone.

The force in which she runs into him – she can tell he's a guy – sends the two of them rolling for a good stretch before they finally stop. Sayaka is surprised to find the guy caught her and actually shielded her as they rolled, stopping with her on top in fact and in less bad shape than the groaning guy beneath her.

Dazed, Sayaka lifts her head and half stares in shock and half in annoyance as she sees who it is.

“Oh what are you doing here?”

Rin groans underneath her, then returns her look with a frown of his own. “Yes, you're welcome again, now can you get off me already?”

Sayaka gets up so fast Rin oofs at how she bounces briefly on him. Sayaka then turns and looks horrified at the monster trudging towards them, still sounding like Hiromi.

Rin looks up and curses at what he sees. Yet another person struggling to take off the mask is hidden within the monstrous form. Rin then pauses as he stares at Hiromi within the monster. He glances down at his hands and takes in a deep breath, putting the staff in his belt to hold it for a moment, then approaches the monster. His hands begin to glow as he focuses his magic on them, coating them thickly in it and biting his lip in concentration.

Sayaka stares as the resident demon approaches the giant monster, gulping and stepping back. She's torn between staying or running like hell away from what's going to be a very violent scene.

But that's not what happens. What does happen is that it looks like Rin sticks his arms into the monster, but there's not blood or gore or anything. It ripples and looks rather like he just stuck his hand into a bowl of jello, moving around inside and then getting a satisfied look on his face as he grabs something and rips it out.

The monster disappears in a shower of light and sparks, leaving a dazed Hiromi behind and Rin holding the mask she bought in his hands.

Sayaka stares and then stumbles over to her friend, grabbing her in a big hug and wailing in relief at her friend being returned to her. Hiromi freezes in surprise, looking down at Sayaka.

“Saya-Sayaka-chan?” Hiromi stutters, then she looks over at Rin.

He's frowning and examining her mask, then suddenly grins. “Sorry, but I need to borrow this.” Rin says cheerfully, shoving the mask into his belt alongside a strange wand that's already there. “I'll bring it back later.”

He takes off before Hiromi can do more than raise her hand and call his name, leaving her behind even more confused than before, with Sayaka still clinging to her and sobbing into her chest.

Pulling the mask he has out after he gets away from Hiromi and Sayaka and finds a, relatively,
peaceful spot, Rin focuses on the traces of magic still in the mask.

Mask obviously doesn't know he has gotten to it yet, so Rin is able to dive into the mask and “taste” the exact signature left behind.

Shaking himself out of that daze, Rin turns and focuses on the entire festival grounds. Eventually, he gets a ping back of something that doesn't match the exact signature and a wicked grin appears on his face.

Shoving the mask into his belt again, Rin pulls out his staff and races over to a certain monster that's not from a spare mask, but Mask itself.

'Clever but not clever enough!' Rin crows triumphantly, as he swings around to find a monster there with the correct mask on top. He freezes as he sees the one person left around aside from the poor person who's struggling against the mask within the monstrous form.

“Oyaji!” Rin stares at his foster father and feels a bit of sweat gather, not just from stress but exasperation as he realizes his father is still asleep. Considering how he's still sleeping – and even snoring – it's obvious that he's in one of those rare super deep sleeps that makes it impossible to wake him no matter what.

Which puts him at risk of getting hurt if things stay as they are.

Rin makes a split second choice and whistles, drawing Mask's attention with that sharp piercing sound.

“Oi over here donkey-brain!” Rin calls out, waving his arms and generally making a nuisance of himself.

Mask lets out another of those high-pitched giggles that really are starting to irritate Rin, and turns on the Cardcaptor with one of its many tentacles in this form.

Rin leaps away from one and calls up Jump in that instant. Leaping up in the air, Rin rolls over the monster and back down on the other side. Skidding a bit, Rin turns and makes a face at Mask as it slowly turns. “Nah, nah, too slow!”

This seems to irritate Mask as its attacks come faster and harder, as Rin keeps moving backwards and dodging, leading it away from his father.

Once he judging they are both at a safe distance, Rin calls out Windy again.

She swirls around Rin and then charges at Mask, wrapping around the monster form. Rin is right behind her, already ready to seal Mask as he brings the staff down.

“Mask, I command you to return to-- Fucking hell!” Rin curses as Mask disappears again, leaving one dazed and confused person behind who collapses to the ground in a faint.

Mask sticks a tongue out at Rin and giggles again. It then turns around and stares back at where Rin was trying to drag him away from. In fact, it stares directly at Shirō before letting out a piercing laugh.

“Oh no you--!” Rin swears as Mask disappears and reappears directly over Shirō. It lets out a particularly screechy laugh and places itself over Shirō.

The monster that forms is smaller than the rest, almost the exact same size as a normal human of
Shirō's size. It looks rather like a guy in a suit, except more real and with dangerous looking teeth and claws involved in the make-up of the lion-like monster (and no Rin doesn't in find the appearance funny when combined with his foster father's name). Mask is gleeful, taunting Rin and giggling like a maniac at having a “hostage”. It had seen how Rin wanted it anywhere than in the same place as Shirō and jumps at the chance to get away.

Its perpetual smile drops then, as it sees the expression on Rin's face, the sheer rage there. In that instant, it realizes it made a very big mistake.

“Thunder!” Rin howls, pulling out the offensive Card in a swift move that is only beaten just by Thunder itself as it strikes Mask, and Mask alone, sending it off of Shirō and straight into Rin, who moved just behind the blow after sending Thunder. Allowing him to be able to “greet” Mask as it comes hurtling towards him.

“Mask, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

With a wail Mask transforms back into Card state and Rin quickly catches it, landing back on the ground and then accepting back Thunder as it comes back to him.

“Thanks for the help.” Rin says softly. “And sorry for how I caught you.”

Thunder glows softly, almost happily, then subdued. Rin quickly puts Thunder back in the pouch and writes down his name on Mask before shoving the Card in the pouch as well and putting the staff back in Key form.

Rin sighs and turns back to Shirō.

And sweats as he sees he's still asleep.

“You got to be kidding me...” Rin drags a hand over his face, then walks over to carry Shirō back over to the bench.

All around the festival, monsters suddenly disappear, leaving confused and tired people who take the masks off of themselves and a lot of unanswered questions to what happened. The most surprising thing is that all the damage disappears in a soft sigh of light when everyone looks away briefly, making it seem almost as if nothing happened.

Above the festival, Tsukishiro smiles. “Consider that a small gift, Rin-kun.”

Shirō lets out a mumble and stretches out. Opening his eyes, he blinks as he sees the sun setting.

“What? Oh man don't tell me that I slept away the festival...”

“Almost.” Rin looks amused and is snacking on yakitori. “There's still the bonfire and dance at the end but it's going to be over soon.”

Shirō groans and sits up, stretching out again and rolling his shoulders to work out the kinks. “Sorry about that...”

“You should be...” Yukio mutters, getting an odd look from Shirō. “I'll tell you later but you missed quite an event...”

“You mean all those weird monsters right?” Rin recalls, peering around Shirō to look at Yukio. He pretends to not notice how stiff Shirō gets and is ignorant to Yukio doing the same. “That was super weird. Some kind of special secret event or something? They didn't really do anything but look
scary.”

Shirō exchanges a look with Yukio, reading the fact he'll explain later on his face. As is, Shirō groans dramatically. “Seriously? I missed such an interesting thing? Of all the luck...”

“It's not the worst thing to miss, though really how deep of a sleep were you in?” Yukio shakes his head at that, as Shirō protests he was working until really late last night to be able to go to the festival.

Rin looks between his brother and father and gives a sigh of relief. He also glances at the bag filled with a few cartons of food he got for Kero and grins.

The crazy aside, the festival was a blast.

Rin stands up suddenly, surprising both Shirō and Yukio. “Let's go! I wanna see them light the bonfire before we go!”

Shirō laughs at Rin's enthusiasm and stands as well, pretending to grouch as Rin pulls at his hand excitedly.

Yukio also smiles and the trio quickly head off in high spirits to see the bonfire before it's time to leave and head back home.

Speaking of home, Nagatome is left staring in confusion at the array of dirty dishes in the sink, piled extremely high and even haphazard in front of him.

“What happened here?” He looks suspiciously at another monk, who shakes his head and is just as mystified.

Sighing, Nagatome sets to cleaning them all up before Shirō and the boys return home, not wanting to have to explain something he has no chance to be able to explain.

Hidden underneath the table, Kero is sleeping off his gorging on treats.

“Mmmff...takoyaki...cotton candy...hmmm...yummy...” He mumbles to himself, turning in his sleep with a wide smile on his face in anticipation of more food to come.

And in ignorance of the yelling he's going to face first from Rin at nearly exposing himself in his gorging...

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed that!

Again, I will remind you that comments gets you the next chapter on Friday so please leave some! Also, I'm hoping to build a FAQ page so please go here (http://writerscornergblp.tumblr.com/) to give me ideas of what you are most curious about.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Yet another chapter is posted thanks to all the lovely comments that tell me people want more!

I hope you enjoy this one too, we have a "new" character showing up during it.

And once again, please go to my writer's blog (http://writerscornergblp.tumblr.com) for questions. Also, I do mean it about the FAQ page. Without enough feedback there, it won't show up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The office that Shirō is in is coloured very brightly and even eccentrically, with various decorations from around the world and from different shows that the occupant enjoys. The massive desk is covered in paperwork, which has the man behind the desk scowling.

“Good morning Sir Pheles.” Shirō chuckles as Mephisto shoots a dark look at him before turning on the paperwork again. “Where did all this paperwork come from?”

“It's summer. Which means no students aside from the cram school.” Mephisto groans and pushes a pile of finally finishes paperwork away. “Which means the Order finally gets around to making sure I get all the paperwork they need done.”

Shirō shakes his head. “I feel you there. Sometimes I feel like I'm more of a desk jockey than the Paladin considering how much paperwork I end up doing. More than missions sometimes.”

“What is with you humans and paperwork honestly…” Mephisto pulls another stack of paperwork forward. “But it's not to complain about paperwork that I called you today.” He eyes Shirō over his glasses – an affection of the demon's – and raises an eyebrow. “How are my little brothers lately?”

“You mean Rin.” Shirō notes sourly, settling in the chair in front of Mephisto's desk. “You know how Yukio is, since he works for the Order in your branch.”

“True that. So how is Rin-kun lately?” Mephisto presses again, flipping through a particularly thick file with revulsion.

“Surprisingly good. He's been settling better than I thought considering how he started Junior High. There's plenty of rumours and such that make it so he's got problems. Not to mention there's only one teacher that really likes him.” Shirō shakes his head as Mephisto perks up.

“Aah yes...and who's this teacher? I don't believe you've mentioned the name.”

Shirō blinks and thinks back to their conversations. A rueful smile crosses his face as he realizes Mephisto is correct. “Tsukishiro Sekki. She's a new teacher, just got her licence recently, but she's very good at her job. Quite attractive too.”

“Hmm…” Mephisto makes a mental note to look up this teacher and see what effects she can have on Rin. “And anything else?”
“Well, strangely Rin’s stopped trying to make friends. Instead, he's been trying to push people away.” Shirō shakes his head, having noticed the wall around Rin a few times directed at him in fact. ‘Why the hell am I suddenly Oyaji?’ “Not sure what's going through his mind there. But at least a few seem determined to get through.” Shirō snickers as he recalls something.

“Reminds me,” Shirō gets Mephisto's attention by the odd tone in his voice, “Rin actually got a chance for a part-time job. This girl who’s determined to get through to Rin volunteered him to her mother who works at a café for a summer job. Rin accepted it strangely too.”

“Or perhaps not. If Rin's getting distance from others, he might want to become more self-sufficient and that includes a job.” Mephisto offers.

Shirō hums and turns that thought over in his mind. “You might be right. Course, it could also be because of how persistent said girl was at getting to Rin.”

Mephisto stares at Shirō as he chuckles in memory, then dismisses it in favour of tackling today's paperwork. He does not want more to deal with tomorrow after all.

He pauses only briefly when Shirō speaks up again.

“His job starts tomorrow so I should get back soon to make sure Rin's got everything ready for that challenge.” Shirō says cheerfully, a twinkle in his eye proving he's thinking more of teasing his son.

Mephisto grins at that himself. “Oh yes, do so.” Mephisto waves him off. “I'm terrible company right now with all this paperwork.”

“You're terrible company all the time.” Shirō snarks back at him, walking out of the office casually.

Mephisto rolls his eyes and turns back to the paperwork. ‘And yet you still visit...’

Then again, if Shirō didn't visit he would get dragged over. Mephisto might have promised to keep out of the way until Rin is 15, but he still would like a few updates to keep a vague handle on his youngest brother.

Chapter 12: Rather Like Deja Vu (But Worse)

The alarm that blares in his ears is enough to move Rin from deep sleep to wide awake and murderous. But as soon as Rin leaps up, he sees Yukio staring over him, looking just as upset as him and with the evil alarm clock in his hands.

“Nii-san...if I have to listen to this a second time I will smother you with your own pillow.” Yukio glares at Rin. “Get up and get ready, you got work today.”

Rin blinks then sits up in full. “Aaah! You are right.”

Stumbling out of bed, Rin scrambles to get his stuff ready and collects his clothes. Yukio sighs and sets the now silent alarm clock down on the side table as Rin rushes out to get to the bathroom and cleaned up for the day.

To say Yukio was surprised that Rin passed the interview for the part-time job that Watanabe offered him from her mother is an understatement. At the same time, Yukio is proud of his brother and happy to have him be able to get a job. It's an improvement and Yukio is looking at it as an omen of a good future.

‘After all, a job at a café is straight up Rin's alley.’ Yukio muses, collecting his own things so he can
have his own bath after Rin. 'It's mostly working in the back this job, with some waiting of tables at times too.'

Between Rin's cooking and baking skills, as well as Yukio's brother having calmed down a bit since elementary – despite it only having been a few months since – Yukio would like to be optimistic for once about Rin's chances.

When he hears Rin curse, Yukio sweats and wonders if a trip to a shrine on his way to his job would be a bad idea or not. A little extra luck might be needed after all.

Rin is sweating in his palms once he gets to the café and wipes his hands on his pants. The café sign declares this place to be called Lavender – most probably for the flower considering the design on it – and, gulping, Rin looks at the directions he was given and wrote down last night, turning from the front to head to the back.

Hesitating, Rin cautiously knocks the door.

He's nearly blown back as the door opens on him, nearly hitting him in the face if he hadn't jumped back in time, with Watanabe Kaede in front of him. It takes a moment for her to register him, then she beams.

“Good, you are here on time! Come in, come in. We need to get you in your uniform quickly so you can get oriented before the café opens.”

Rin slinks in behind her, wide-eyed and lets out a small yelp as Watanabe grabs his arm and starts dragging him behind her to the change room. His uniform is tossed at him and he's forced inside with the door shutting behind him.

Rin swallows and looks down at the clothing in his hands, brand new and freshly pressed, then sets them on the bench and quickly undresses. He then pulls out the uniform. Luckily it is nothing fancy, just black slacks and a matching button up shirt along with simple black shoes and a purple apron with big pockets on top.

After putting his own clothing away in a locker labelled for the “part-timer”, Rin adjusts his collar and heads out.

Watanabe is waiting for him and looks him up and down, before nodding and adjusting Rin's clothing slightly. “That looks good on you. C'mon, Okumura-kun, this way. I'm going to show you where everything is and teach you the rules as quickly as possible.”

Rin manages to squeak out an okay and follows Watanabe and listens as best he can, though his nerves are back and he finds himself trembling a bit.

'Oh man please let me keep this job...’ Being allowed to work here despite his age – damn December birthday – is major risk they are taking and Rin really, really wants to live up to expectations.

Back at the monastery, Kero wonders how Rin is doing. He had been woken up by the evil alarm clock too, but unlike Rin he could go back to sleep.

'The café should be opening about now.' Kero thinks, looking at the clock. 'So Rin should be starting work.'

At this point Kero has to freeze and turn back into “stuffed animal” mode as Yukio re-enters the
room, carrying a manga in his hands.

“Of course I get the new volume today just in time for things to get crazy...” Yukio grumbles to himself, setting his gag manga on his desk. He sighs. 'Well, it will be here when I get back at least.'

Grabbing his medkit from underneath his desk, which takes some time as he has to dig it out from behind all the items he uses to disguise the fact it is there, Yukio packs up quickly and leaves, calling to his foster father that he's on his way.

Kero doesn't notice this since he ended up facing the wall in the process of looking “stuffed”. But as soon as Yukio is gone, he bursts into movement and goes over to Yukio's desk.

He crows at the sight of the new gag manga and settles down to read it today to pass the time.

'This is great!' Kero thinks happily and carefully opens up the volume to enjoy. With him on his own, he's got plenty of time to enjoy this special treat. Normally he has to wait until Yukio is done before he can read it for understandable reasons.

The current stack of paperwork seems to loom in front of the demon. The fact his secretary slash assistant is bringing in even more paper work as he works on it doesn't help Mephisto's mood at all.

Briefly, Mephisto bemoans that, even though he's the King of Time, he would still have to spend the same amount of time on the paperwork since he has to look through everything carefully before signing.

'Well, I'm assured that I'm not the only one suffering.' He thinks gleefully of the other Chancellors like him who run the other Branches around the world and also have to suffer through summer paperwork themselves. 'And I can at least arrange for myself to have free time at the end of the day when all the paperwork stops!' That cheery thought makes him click out his pen and start working on the first batch of the day with at least some enthusiasm.

Rin finds himself stationed at the kitchen first as the café opens. It's not busy enough to justify him working the front, which Rin finds to be good for calming him down again.

“Of course, around lunch you will be probably put on wait duty for a little while at least.” Watanabe tells him as she finishes explaining where all of Rin's tools are.

“Now, remember to read the instructions carefully. If you mix up orders or don't pay attention to any needed changes, for allergy sake mostly, you can cause an incident.” Watanabe warns Rin, making him gulp but nod quickly.

Watanabe smiles. “I'll be working right alongside you, so if you get confused just ask me okay?”

Rin swallows, trying to wet his throat. “Okay.”

Watanabe gives him a sympathetic looks. “It's alright. Breathe. You don't have to stress out too much. You can cook yes? So no problem there.”

Rin nods and then looks up as the first order of the day shows up to make up. Watanabe hands the paper over to him and Rin looks at it, puzzling through the kanji, then nods. “One omurice coming up.”

Watanabe smiles as Rin goes for the needed ingredients quickly, watching him carefully as he sets
things up. And is pleasantly surprise.

‘He works as if he's got decades of practise and training.’ She notes in surprise, then is called away to handle the second order of the day.

And so does Rin’s day start.

“Two cheesecake slices! One with blueberry sauce, one with strawberry sauce.”

“An apple pie with matcha ice cream on the side.”

“Yakisoba and curry rice.”

“Hot earl tea and two iced teas.”

Rin is left running around, though at least he's not alone as soon a third person joins him in the kitchen with Watanabe. And most dishes are in a set or just need to be cut and set up in a nice presentation. That gives Rin enough time to catch his breath at times.

Rin hadn’t expected just how popular Lavender is, and brings it up to Watanabe.

She chuckles at that. “It’s only really during summer that it gets this busy. Have people passing by to go play tourist at True Cross Campus town, plenty of students out for the summer who want a nice treat, and families that come out for a treat during this summer. That’s why we need a part-time worker to help keep up with the rush.”

Rin nods, reaching up to tie his kerchief on his head tighter, making sure sweat doesn't drip into his eyes or worse into the food.

At that, someone pokes their head into the kitchen. “Okumura! Go wash up and change your apron for the waitstaff one! We need you outside.”

Rin freezes, then quickly nods and sets down his tools, looking quickly at Watanabe. He then jerkily walks out of the kitchen and over to the washroom, quickly washing his face and freshening up. Dropping by the locker room, he switches the big purple apron for a smaller one and pulls out the notebook he was required to get to help with orders.

Gulping down his nerves, he shuts the locker door and walks out to handle the customers outside.

At first, there is no particular problem, aside from getting called out on some messy handwriting for the first few orders. Rin nods quickly to those scoldings and is quick to adapt to how they want him to write. Using katakana instead of kanji is acceptable luckily, since Rin can make that neater easier when he has to be quick.

The first few customers are a trio of older women who coo over Rin and spend some time squeezing his cheeks. Watanabe doesn't bother explaining, too busy laughing over that.

The next customers are harder, being a small family with a little child. The child throws a tantrum about not liking what her parents ordered her and Rin ended up cleaning up after that while someone else handled the parents and child.

The third is this quiet man who just wants coffee and a small sweet, and doesn't say much at all. Rin finds him an easy customer since he makes no demands and his order is very easy to remember.
The fourth is a problem, seeing as it is a strict business woman. She's snappish to Rin, leaving him nearly in tears at the end of it since she decided he's some worthless delinquent. Rin has to bite down hard on his temper at a few points in that, and ends up spending his first break calming down after that incident.

The fifth almost seems to make up for it, being a couple on a first date. The guy is visibly a nervous wreck, saying one thing and then another for an order, obviously worried about impressing the girl. On her part, she ends up smiling and calming him down, resulting in them sharing a dessert at the end – one that Rin decides to quietly recommend when asked – and leaving happily together despite the bad start.

But then comes the sixth and that is a complete nightmare.

The first sign of an incoming disaster is how the man walks in. He's middle aged and looks like he never smiles. He is snappish with the hostess who tells him to wait for a free table, and constantly checks his watch as he waits.

When he finally can be seated, he has to be stopped so there is time to properly finish cleaning the table. Rin ends up blessing the fact it's normal for people to clean up after themselves in Japan, since that makes it a quick and simple task.

The first thing the man does is frown at the menu offered to him. “Is this all that is offered here?”

Rin manages to keep a polite smile on his face. “Yes. Is there anything in particular you wanted?”

“I was told about the parfait but I don't see it here.” He glares up at Rin.

Rin keeps an empty smile on his face while his mind races. Parfait, parfait, that does sound familiar. But Rin can't remember it.

“Would you like anything to drink?” He offers instead.


Rin's smile starts to crack at that, but he keeps it up and the pleasant tone he was told was appropriate, making a show of writing down the request before walking away.

At the kitchen, Watanabe is the one to accept the order and Rin hisses over at her. “The guy said something about a parfait and how it's not on the menu. What's that mean?”

Watanabe blinks for a moment, then realization shows up on her. “Oh! He probably means the parfait special. It's on the special menu. Did you give him that?”

Rin stares and groans. He had been so flustered by the man that he had forgotten to include the special menu.

Watanabe gives him a sympathetic smile. “Go and give it to him. Apologize for the mix up and keep that smile up. He should be understanding at least that much.”

Rin gives a disbelieving look at her, but does as she says. Picking up the special menu he returns to the man and apologizes with a smile.

The man – who Rin is tempted to call Jerk Customer – glowers up at Rin as he looks through the special menu. “There. The deluxe parfait here. I want a regular sized one. The nerve of you
people...” He mutters to himself, going on about useless youth and how the parfait better be as good as advertised.

Rin waits a bit to see if he's going to add anything then asks him, “Anything else?”

“No.” Jerk Customer – fuck it Rin's calling it as it is – snaps up at Rin. “Just the parfait.”

Rin accepts the menus back with a tight smile, then goes back to Watanabe. “He's such a...arrgh.” Rin closes his mouth on the rude words he wants to say, knowing he shouldn't say anything bad about customers on shift.

Watanabe gives him a smile. “Don't worry. The rush should be over soon and your replacement will be in. Your shift shouldn't be much longer.”

“Please.” Rin whines almost there, accepting the hot coffee for Jerk Customer and returning his table. He's as rude as ever, impatient with the time it took for his coffee to be made. Rin feels another crack grow in his calm and he has to gracefully back out before he ends up dumping the hot coffee on the asshole's head.

As the parfait is being made, Rin tours around the rest of the café, making sure all the other customers are alright. A few customers have obviously seen the fact Rin's gotten a nasty customer and some of those customers make a point of asking Rin is okay.

By the time the parfait is ready for Jerk Customer, Rin has regain a good mood from the other customers, and it's with a more genuine smile Rin returns.

“Finally!” Jerk Customer almost grabs the parfait out of Rin's hands. “What did you guys have to do, milk the cow yourself?”

Rin's words catch in his throat and a weird growling sound forms there. He barely keeps his smile, thanking him for his patronage and quickly moving away to serve another customer.

A few minutes later, a great shout comes from Jerk Customer, and he stands, yelling something about the parfait.

Rin groans and rushes over to him. “Is there something wrong sir?”

“Strawberry!” He shrieks in Rin's face, making him step back. “There's strawberry in this parfait!”

Rin blinks, staring at the man. “Uh...yes...that's what it says on the menu?”

“I can't have strawberries! I told you that!” He snarls at him.

Rin shakes his head, feeling a spiky ball starting to form in his chest. “You didn't. You just requested the parfait--”

“I sure did! You are trying to kill me you brat. Rotten no-good delinquent, can't even handle a simple task. Your parents should be ashamed of how they raised you--”

“And I'm sure your parents would be incredibly impressed by how you are acting!” Rin retorts before he can't think better of it.

Jerk Customer opens his mouth to scream. But he freezes, slowly turning red and wobbling. He turns, grabs the edge of the table, and then falls down taking the table, coffee, and parfait with him.

Rin is left staring in shock.
And then the screaming starts.

Rin is frozen in shock. Watanabe has to usher him away as the ambulance arrives. Apparently aside from being allergic to strawberries – of which he got just enough of – Jerk Customer just had a heart attack from the stress.

“Rin, go in the back.” Watanabe says softly.

Rin looks up at her and slowly does, drooping as he slinks off to the back. He finds a seat and settles in it, not wanting to just stand there while he waits. He already knows exactly what he's going to be told.

'Damn. Lost the job.' Rin bites his lips and barely keeps himself from crying at his day and bad luck.

That night, dinner is very quiet. No one knows what to say or do in regards to the sad Rin. He had been so looking forward to a summer job and he lost it on the first day due to events out of his control.

But such a thing connected to the café is not a good thing, so unfortunately he had to be fired immediately for appearance sake.

Rin pokes at his food and has to be reminded to head back upstairs for bed.

He falls asleep, with the wish that he could re-do his day the last thing in his thoughts.

Somewhere else, in an old abandoned church, at exactly midnight...

The old, giant bell within the belltower begins to ring.

The alarm is a killer and Rin is even more unhappy to hear it today, so groans and covers his head with his pillow. Cursing the fact he forgot to turn it off yesterday.

He yelps as Yukio rips his pillow off his head and he turns to look at him.

“Nii-san...if I have to listen to this a second time I will smother you with your own pillow.” Yukio glares down at Rin, holding his pillow in threat. “Get up and get ready, you got work today.”

“Huah?” Rin blinks, hearing an echo of yesterday. “But that was yesterday? And I lost it...”

Yukio looks at him in confusion. “No, it's today Nii-san. You must have had a nightmare. Get up. You don't have much time to get ready and get to the train in time.”

Rin looks at the clock, cursing and rushes out to get ready.

By the time Rin gets to the train, he's very confused. Shirō had asked about his job and teased him the exact same way as the “dream”, leaving out how Rin responded differently and thus changed things.

And even on the train, Rin can see the same people as yesterday on the early ride. There's that business man with a newspaper, a punk who is listening to his music on his headphones, and a woman who is glued to her cellphone and playing a mobile game on it.
When Rin reaches the café, he goes around the back like in the “dream”.

Watanabe opens the door in such a rush that Rin nearly gets hit, looking at Rin eagerly.

“Good, you are here on time! Come in, come in. We need to get you in your uniform quickly so you can get oriented before the café opens.”

She doesn't notice how Rin gapes and accepts the uniform with a dazed look on his face. Or that he seems to already know what she's telling him, as Rin finds the exact same information as yesterday is being given to him.

‘What...what's going on?’

Mephisto had opened his eyes with cheer and the idea of finishing the video game he started last night on his mind.

Seeing the paperwork in front of him breaks that good mood and he's left scowling and wondering what happened for the paperwork to build up so quickly.

When he notices he's filling out the exact same forms as yesterday, he snaps his pen. “I did this yesterday!”

Belial blinks and shakes his head. “No sir. This is new paperwork that just came in this morning.”

Mephisto stares at the other demon, then back at the paperwork. ‘What is going on here?’

Kero had slept past the alarm again, cursing how Rin didn't turn it off, but wakes up confused at how Rin isn't in.

'Did he go off to sulk on his own or somethin'?' Kero wonders. He then freezes as Yukio comes into the room.

“Of course I get the new volume today just in time for things to get crazy...” Yukio grumbles to himself, setting his gag manga on his desk. He sighs. 'Well, it will be here when I get back at least.'

Kero waits until Yukio is gone, and then floats over to the table. 'A new volume? Didn't he get one...’ His thought derails and he stares as he sees the gag manga on the desk.

“Hey, this is the one from yesterday!”

Rin is feeling very strongly a lot of deja vu. Not only is the first order the exact same as “yesterday” but the order after that, and the order after that.

It gets even more deranged when Rin goes to handle a wait shift and finds himself dealing with the exact same customers as he remembers, with the exact same problems.

But it's when Jerk Customer walks in that Rin nearly faints.

'What the hell is going on here?’

Rin hangs up his apron after his shift, mind whirling. His day had gone almost exactly the same as he “dreamed” it, with the exception of him avoiding the strawberry in the parfait and, though the Jerk
Customer was still a jerk, he didn’t have an allergic reaction and then a freaking heart attack. Instead, he just left still in a foul mood.

“So, what did you think of your first day of work?” Watanabe asks cheerfully.

Rin stares up at her, blinking and considering what he just went through. “It was...interesting.” He settles on.

“You don’t know the half of it...’ Rin muses as she teases him for surviving day one of summer “hell”, considering how strange his “dream” and day have been.

Dinner that night is an impromptu celebration of a sort, Shirō splurging a bit on ingredients to celebrate how Rin managed to get his first job and handled day one.

“The first day is always the worse.” Shirō tells him as Rin prepares the dinner. “Always. After that things tend to get better.”

Rin looks up at Shirō, hoping he’s right. But also feeling very weird at how he apparently already lived this day.

“Is the yakiniku ready?” Maruta asks, poking his head in.

“Yes it is!” Rin declares, having finished slicing up the meat and vegetables for grilling. “Go get everyone else ready!”

Maruta cheers, always eager for Rin's cooking, and rushes off to get everyone alerted to the yakiniku.

That night, Rin ends up staying up late, feeling weird about what happened today. He would have just dismissed it, except Kero complained about how he ended up with another copy of a gag manga he already read. But when he looked, he couldn't even find the first one.

Rin watches the clock move closer and closer to midnight. If what Kero suggested is true...

It hits midnight. Rin shivers, as waves of power spread out and cover all of Southern Cross and even True Cross Campus town.

“That's...” Rin swallows.

Kero nods, serious faced. “Yeah. Time. It's active and rewinding this day.”

“And if we don't stop it...” Rin winces at the thought of reliving a day for eternity. “Okay, we are going tonight.”

“By which you mean before next midnight.” Kero notes idly. “Don’t have a chance of getting to it until before midnight. Which doesn’t give us a big window.”

Rin groans at that, but crawls back into bed and gets ready for sleep. He still has an early morning of his first day at work. Again.

Rin ends up waking up just as the alarm goes off, racing past a confused Yukio who was sure he was going to have to needle Rin at least a little to get up.
The bad thing about that is that Rin ends up having to actually wait for the train, something which he finds boring. But better than having Yukio say the exact same thing every day that's for certain.

In regards to his job, Rin almost moves on automatic. He's pretty much figured out what's going on in the café thanks to having actually two first days already, and the only difference ultimately from yesterday is that Rin is much calmer and manages things with better ease.

It gets him some extra praise from Watanabe, something that embarrasses him.

And that night it's yakiniku again in celebration. But once that's done, Rin ends up sneaking out at night to find Time. It's the sound of the bells that helped him clue in to a location.

It can't possibly be the monastery's church bells that went off, so Rin borrows Yukio's tablet and looks up where another church might be.

Rin is very surprised by what he does find once he reaches there, having flown there for speed's sake.

“Wow...what a wreck...why hasn't it been cleaned up yet though?” Rin asks, looking at the fire damaged ruin in front of him. The place that is looking in the best condition is, luckily the church.

Looking at what he sees, Rin thinks this might have been another monastery. Or maybe an abbey since Rin sees the skeleton of two dormitories. Both deliberately separated by the church which looks pretty old. More stone than wood, which is probably what saved it from the fire.

“Ah don't know.” Kero frowns as he looks up at the old abbey. His fur ripples and he shudders. “But Ah can feel old power here. Lots of power.”

Rin nods, feeling much the same. A puzzled expression makes its way onto Rin's face the longer he looks at the abbey. “Somehow...” Rin says softly, drawing Kero's attention unknowingly, “Somehow, I find this place...familiar.”

“That's interestin'...” Kero hums over that. “Though Ah can tell how Time is pullin' it off now. Normally it would tie itself to a clock but there's no real big one nearby. Instead it is using the belltower here. And that's cause this place is standin' right on top of a fountain.”

“A fountain?” Rin stares blankly at Kero, picturing something like he sees in malls and parks.

“Not that kind.” Kero hastily clarifies. “A magic one. Used to be just a leyline went underneath here but somethin' happened and it became a fountain. Fountains are natural, though they need some outside influence to become what they are.”

Rin frowns at the old building taking in the fire damage and the crumbling of age as Kero adds, “Ah'd say it happened a little before this abbey was abandoned.”

“You mean the fire caused the fountain?” Rin questions, looking at the fire damage in a new light. "What kind of fire would cause that?"

Kero shakes his head. “Nah. It's never a destructive thang that causes a fountain to spring. Don't ask me why, no one's figured it out yet. But the fire must've happened after.”

Rin stares at the nearest scorched place, shuddering as he feels traces of something bad in the ashes. Rin then shakes his head, ditching his thoughts. “We need to hurry up there and get to Time before it resets things again.”
Still having Fly active, Rin straddles the staff and kicks off, going straight towards the belltower despite Kero's protest.

Rin realizes what a mistake that was when he ends up back on the ground as if he never moved.

In another place, high a top the True Cross Academy's biggest building, Mephisto stares out into the night, glowering at an invisible enemy.

Truly invisible, even to him, as for some reason all attempts at scrying out who the troublemaker that is resetting the day for a lark is turns up nothing.

As he waits, midnight hits and the magic whirls out to cover the entire place. This time Mephisto is ready and is able to read the magic much better.

He curses and crushes the wood underneath his hand as he realizes what he's sensing.

'Human magic?! Of course it has to be human magic...' Mephisto glowers even deeper at that, not happy at not only having to live through the paperwork again, but redo his entire video game from the beginning.

“Human magic…” He slowly realize what that means and stares out. “Who is powerful enough for this?” He wonders. Time magic is one of the greatest magics – he should know, he's not second in Gehenna for no reason – and for a human to be able to pull it off...

A strange grin pulls at his lips, revealing his fangs. “Well...that is interesting...perhaps I should look for that mage tomorrow...or rather today?” He chuckles at that and Mephisto turns to head for a one hour nap before seeing about finding something else to fill up his time. Perhaps re-watch the first season of Honey-Honey Sisters?

Rin's day ends up repeating a few more times, before Rin finally ends up screaming as the time rewinds once more and swearing at the top of his lungs.

He might have been consoled if he found out he's hardly the only one suffering from this.

Mephisto had attempted to find something, anything about the human behind this. Though he can't do anything about the spell directly – human and demon magic do not mix and if he did do anything he'd have to deal with the smoking hole that was once Southern Cross District and True Cross Campus Town, hell the entire Cross City for that matter – he should be able to find the mage behind it and go and talk to them.

Instead, all attempts turn up nothing but blackness.

Mephisto destroys multiple things in his rage before he finally cools down and realizes just what that means.

'Someone...some human...is stronger than me?!

Rin sighs as Jerk Customer enters the café once again. This routine is getting way too routine and Rin still hasn't quite figured out how to stop Time from rewinding time. All he's had is multiple failures and it just makes him more and more frustrated. Watanabe had even noticed the bags under his eyes and expressed concern more than once today.
Rin pauses as Jerk Customer finally gets his table and Rin goes to serve him like usual. For the first time, Rin notices that he seems stressed about something.

'*Is he having a bad day?*’ Rin wonders, as he offers both the menu and special menu to him and gets the usual order of the deluxe parfait – Rin mentally adding “with no strawberries” to his notes – and finally notices the strain around his eyes and mouth.

Rin considers that for a moment, then goes to Watanabe. “Could I get a black coffee for him?” Rin requests, thinking back to his *first* first day.

Watanabe blinks and looks surprised at that. “Okumura-kun?”

“I'll pay the difference myself.” Rin says softly, glancing back on Jerk Customer. *It's not expensive after all.*

Watanabe looks dubious, but prepares the hot coffee quickly and Rin accepts it with a smile.

Rin sets the coffee on the table before Jerk Customer, who looks up in surprise.

“I didn't order this.” He protests, frowning up at Rin.

Rin smiles. “I know. It's on the house.”

The man stares at Rin in shock. “Wh-what?”

“You...seem to be having a bad day.” Rin shrugs. “Thought this might help, a little.”

Jerk Customer – who's not acting that much like a jerk anymore – looks down at the coffee. And to Rin’s surprise, he smiles. “Thank you. I haven't been having a good day at all. I came here because a friend has been swearing that the deluxe parfait they sell is like happiness in a glass.”

Rin smiles. “Well, I'm not sure about happiness in a glass, but it is very good.”

The business man chuckles. “You have a point there.” He takes a sip of the coffee and shudders in pleasure. “This is very good too. Like lightning, it shocks and restarts my system.”

Rin stares at him for a moment, then brightens. ‘That’s it!’

“Then I hope the rest of your day is good!”

For the first, when “Jerk Customer” leaves, he is smiling and in a much better mood. As well as lots of praise from Watanabe for noticing and handling that situation with such flair.

For the first time since his second first day, Rin feels like he truly earned the yakiniku that night.

That night, Rin pauses a little away from the old burnt abbey, and calls up Thunder. A quick talk with that Card has it rubbing its head against Rin and then disappearing off into the night.

“What was that for?” Kero asks Rin.


Rin head to the abbey, taking the stairs up to the belltower. It's dangerous, but the multiple times he's done it pays off in Rin being able to do it with minimal risk. Rin has a Card ready and makes a point of pulling out another one as well.

“Windy, Release!” Rin cries and then, “Shield, Release!”
When Time attempts to send Rin back, the power is blocked by Shield, Rin holding the magic steady. Windy roars behind him, sending Time fleeing the tower so that it doesn't get caught by the fierce but gentle wind.

And rams straight into the trap that Thunder laid around the tower, shocking Time and revealing itself to Rin as it falls down and is paralysed by the attack.

Rin grins. “Time, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

A whirl of light and Rin’s endless day is finally over!

The alarm is loud and obnoxious enough for murder. Something that is almost on Rin's mind considering how tired he is.

“Nii-san! You have to go to your job!” Rin whines and rolls over to look at Yukio, about ready to tell him to stuff it. Then remembers that it's finally the second day.

“Oh shit!” Rin scrambles and falls out of bed, curling up in pain for a moment before taking off towards the bathroom. “I don't want to be late!”

Yukio sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose, and hopes that this isn't going to be a regular occurrence. 'It would be like repeating a day over and over again!' He bemoans.

In the bathroom Rin suddenly sneezes, then rubs his nose in shock, wondering where that came from. And why he has the sudden urge to hit his brother.

Back in True Cross Academy, Mephisto is both very pleased and very annoyed.

He's very pleased because the repeating day is over.

He's very annoyed because he still doesn't know what caused it.

'One day...' He privately swear. 'One day I will go and get a hold of whoever was behind that and shake them silly.'

At the same time, he frowns and wonders how he missed the appearance of such a powerful mage...

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the chapter! If you did, comment below for another one on Monday!

Also, why isn't anyone commenting on me and GB’s Halloween Week? You are giving the impression you don't want ANYTHING from any of us. So that means all fics in that regard will stop. Seriously, comments also mean for oneshots that you guys actually want stuff from an author. If you keep that up, I'll have to consider stopping my posting. Even for ICD. I'm seriously, I put just as much effort into that (possibly more since I edit both mine and GBs work during such things) and the lack of comments is actually quite rude.
Hey new chapter!

Now, last time I did a thing about comments and my Halloween Week and it appears you guys might have been confused so let me clarify:

I was mostly describing how I, myself, feels seeing the hit count on both mine and my best friend's fics (fics that have nothing to do with ICD but still had a lot of work put into them) and yet not comments. Even now there are barely even comments. So that's what it was about. It was me venting and hoping that some of my readers of ICD would find some of those fics worthwhile reading and thus commenting on.

Because if you guys want good fics from an author, you have to tell them what you feel. That's why I'm very intent on comments for ICD. I poured a lot of work into this, and I'm still working on it (3rd arc and my side stories are currently incomplete) so if you enjoy something, take some time to say you enjoyed it. Kudos don't say anything except "like" and it's super vague. Plus, Kudos are a one time deal and if we are talking a multi-chapter things, it's not enough.

I'm still serious about my other works being worth just as many comments as I get here. Who knows? I have some ideas that aren't working right now, but with some comments to make me feel better I might get the muse going again. Or if you like a oneshot and thus a pairing within, I know thus that people want more of it and I'll see about writing more ideas there.

But no comments? No story. A rare pairing will become a nonexistent pairing fic wise if there is no positive feedback for it. If you like something an author did, you HAVE to tell them. We can't read minds. That comment box is your line to us and our muses. Use it. It's got some power in there, you got POWER in comments, so use it wisely.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It's very late out and the moon is a sliver in the sky. Streetlamps light his path, allowing him to see where he is going, but at the same time they are few and far between.

Which isn't bad since it allows Kero to go around and hide easily in the shadows when the rare late drunk or party of people go by. He really rather not deal with such people at all.

Since summer vacation's start – and Rin's job as well – Kero has been making a point of going
around and looking for Cards for Rin's sake. After the debacle with Time, Kero rather avoid stuff like that again.

He's already located two Cards in this way, proving its worth.

Kero then sighs, privately admitting to another reason why he does this; **boredom**. There is only so many gag manga and other manga he can read. Especially since there is a limited supply of them. Even with the magazines the two brothers subscribe to, there is only so much Kero can get into. Some manga are long runners after all and make no sense when you jump into the middle.

As for TV, forget about it. The only TV is in the living room and generally in use by one of the monks. Rare it is for Rin or Yukio to use it, and even then Rin tends to stick to the cooking channel with only rarely watching anime or more special shows. Sometimes Rin tunes into the music channel and has it playing while he's cooking.

Yukio is even worse, only watching documentaries and the news. So boring that Kero ended up in tears the one time he tried to sneak a show with Yukio.

As Kero passes a very fancy looking house, he hears yells and complains. Ones that get louder until the front door slams open. Kero quickly darts behind a nearby post and watches as a beleaguered looking man comes out carrying a big bag and a pile of boxes as well.

Behind him, he can hear some shouts that he can understand when he listens just a little harder.

"We finally have a PS3 so why the fuck would we need the old shit! It can all go away! Including those old stupid games that no one plays anymore!"

"Dear, the games are still useable you can sell them at the least--"

"Like hell! Wouldn't be worth it. If it was worth it I might try that but they aren't worth the effort!"

Kero stares as the man returns inside, minus his burden which he took over to the neighbourhood garbage drop off point. Kero looks around and remembers that in two days it will be garbage night for this section.

And an idea comes to mind, especially when he looks and sees even a still operating TV among the things.

'Ah got it! The perfect boredom buster!' Kero does a loop-d-loop and then takes off, planning on heading home and getting some sleep first before he has to talk Rin into helping him with the plan.

Chapter 13: Kero's Super Awesome Cure For Boredom!

"Uh? You want me to join you in patrol tonight?" Rin looks over at Kero, hands in his hair as he scrubs at it. Rin had been surprised to have Kero join him for his early morning bath – especially since it's super early for the sake of his job – but now that he hears Kero's request, Rin can't help but think he understands.

'Well, I don't have work tomorrow...' Rin thinks and says as much. "So I guess it should be okay."

Kero cheers at that. ‘It's goin' to be great, you'll see!'" Rin ducks his head under the shower to rinse off the soap thoroughly. After he shuts that off, he pads over to sink into the hot bath. "Why are you so enthusiastic about it?" Rin looks suspiciously at Kero, wondering if he's up to something other than patrolling for Cards.
Kero freezes but it saved from having to answer by a knock on the door. “Do you mind if I come in Nii-san?”

Kero quickly does his best to turn into a stuffed animal as Rin calls out that it's fine.

Yukio enters, already undressed in the small room between, and sets his towel in the hamper before settling on the stool. “Thanks Nii-san.”

“Got something come up that makes you rush?” Rin wonders, leaning on the side of the bath.

Yukio glances down and raises an eyebrow at the “stuffed animal” that's next to him. “Yeah. Cram School has a special event I have to go to. It will help with me getting into True Cross Academy.” He says as way of explanation. He then looks back over at Kero. “Why is that stuffed animal in here?”

Rin shrugs. “I figured it needed to be cleaned and this is better than just tossing it into the washer. Don't think it would be good. Too delicate.”

’No kiddin’! ’ Kero mentally thinks, whimpering slightly at the thought of being tossed into a clothes-washer. ‘Ah might even die!’ And that one time back with Sakura was bad enough...

Yukio rolls his eyes and rinses himself off, before joining Rin in the tub. “You can be weirdly smart Nii-san.”

“What does that mean?” Rin asks suspiciously.

As the two brothers banter and bicker, Kero focuses once again on his Great Plan and can't but look forward to tonight.

'It's goin' to be definitely worth it!'  

Rin says a cheerful goodbye to a group of customers, then sighs. ’Please don’t come again.’ He mentally prays, thinking of how crazy that group was.

A chuckle behind him has him turning and brightening. Godaiin Daisuke – previously known as Jerk Customer and now considered Rin's favourite customer – is waiting to be seated and looks amused at Rin, as if he knows exactly what he's thinking.

“Hard day?” He asks, as Rin sets him down in a free table and sets the menus in front of him.

Rin sighs. “I guess you could say that. My feet are killing me.”

Daisuke laughs again at that. “Well, I hope you get a chance to rest them before they really do kill you. Now, what do you recommend today?”

Rin hums in thought and looks over the menu. “For the dessert, the ujikintoki is best. The shiratama dango today is especially fresh and tasty. If you want anything else, I'd go for the daily pasta. It's Ume Shiso today and it's quite good.” Rin says cheerfully.

Daisuke smiles at that. “I think I'll have both and--”

“One coffee. Hot. Black.” Rin finishes cheerfully. This makes Daisuke grin wider and Rin walks off in a cheerful mood once more.

It's amazing what a cup of coffee did for Daisuke, turning him from a terrible customer who only
came here one off, to a recurring costumer that all the waitstaff are happy to deal with.

'Sometimes...people just need a little extra. Something thoughtful and nice.' Rin thinks positively. It worked here so it should work in most other situations as well.

Back at the monastery, Kero is stuck in the TV room. Which means he's stuck watching some stupid game show along with Kyōdō who is enjoying it too much for Kero's taste.

'This is just so weird...' Kero sighs. He might be used to Japan, and even quite fond of the country, but some things about the culture that never quite makes sense for him. Their game shows are just one example.

“What are you watching?” That comes from Shirō, who is peering over to look at the TV. He makes a face at what Kyōdō is watching. “Oh you got to be kidding me...really?”

“It's entertainment!” Kyōdō protests.

Shirō rolls his eyes and takes a seat next to Kyōdō, stealing the remote from him and switching the channel to something else. “It's stupid. This is entertainment.”

'Ah'm not sure Ah want to watch this either...' Kero sweats at the very strange beauty pageant that is now on the screen. Kyōdō seems to agree with him and soon it dissolves into a big argument over the remote and what to watch.

Seeing that they are distracted, Kero takes this as his chance to sneak away without being noticed, dropping to the floor and crawling away.

'Ah think Ah'll re-read a gag manga again...' Kero sighs. 'Better than dealin' with that.'

He hears more yelling as Izumi joins the fight – him wanting to watch some live action drama or some such – and whimpers. 'Oh yes, much better indeed.'

That night at dinner – which is cold somen with shredded egg, ham, and cucumbers – Rin gets an interesting question.

“Hey, what are you going to do on your first day off?” Shirō asks Rin.

Rin pauses in slurping up some noodles. “I...don't know.” Rin admits, not having had to think of it before. 'Man, how fast did I get used to working?' Probably didn't help he had like a week's worth of first days to ease him in.

“You could work on your homework Nii-san.” Yukio suggests.

Rin makes a face at that, which has the rest of the table burst out laughing except for Yukio.

“I'm serious!” Yukio frowns at Rin and glares at the rest. “You really do need to make sure you get your homework done!”

Rin sighs. “Yeah you are right...I'll see about doing a little of that...” Rin mutters the rest to himself.

Yukio, luckily, appears to be satisfied enough by that, and turns back to his own somen.

Rin sighs in relief at that, making Shirō chuckle.
“I'm sure you'll think of something tomorrow. Even if it's just catching up on your beauty sleep.” Shirō suggests with a wink.

Rin can't help the laugh and turns back to his own meal with a smile.

Rin creeps out of his room along with Kero. Yukio had stayed up late working and only recently got to sleep, so Rin decided it's smarter to go out the opposite room's window to sneak out. It's free – obviously – since the monastery has a very small staff. Which means it's perfect for Rin and Kero's needs.

Kero pauses a moment to look around at the room, getting a vague feeling of an idea.

“Kero!” Rin's hushed cry gets him to come over to the window.

A few moments later has Rin touching the ground and following after Kero as he takes off. “You are very excited...what's going on?”

“Uh...” Kero glances up at the sky. “Best get Fly out! It will make thangs much faster and easier!”

Rin stares at Kero, but does as he says, pulling out his Key and activating it and then Fly. Kicking off into the air, Rin follows Kero.

After a time of just following the small figure, Rin pushes Fly ahead so as to fly along with Kero. “Okay, spill. What's really going on?”

Kero stares at Rin and gulps. Then explains.

A big “WHAT?” echoes out into the night, luckily not waking anyone up.

A few moments later Rin touches down in the right neighbourhood, shaking his head. “Seriously Kero...”

“Oh come on! I'm really, really bored whenever you aren't home! And if Ah keep the volume low, they will never know the games are bein' played!” Kero protests. “What with everyone out and about even in summer, it's not like Ah have to hide quite as much as you think!”

Rin sighs, looking down at the ground in thought. He then looks up, smiling. “Alright. Where's the neighbourhood garbage being put?”

Kero cheers and darts off, leading Rin to the neighbourhood garbage drop-off point. “Here!” He gestures proudly at his find.

Rin stares. “Kero.”

“Yes?” Kero asks, cheerfully.

“There's nothing there.”

Kero turns around and gapes. “B-but...the garbage truck hasn't come yet!”

At that moment, they both notice a faint magical signature and hear something like a giggle. Looking at each other, they then look around, trying to find out where it's coming from.

Rin hears a rustling sound from above and closes his eyes a moment, praying. Then looks up.
“What the fuck.”

A bunch of garbage bags, boxes, and miscellaneous things are floating over head, glowing faintly with magic.

Kero groans. “Oh no. Float.”

Rin twitches. And twitches again. “Float?”

“It's harmless.” Kero sighs. “But it's...mischievous.”

“Of course it is.” Rin says almost conversationally. “So...where's the main body?”

“Ah don't see it—woah!” Kero ducks as the items in the air start to move around and at a remarkable speed. “It's not supposed to be able to do that!”

“Oh this is just great!” Rin growls and calls up Fly. Jumping on the staff Rin takes up into the air...and is followed by the garbage of the entire neighbourhood.

“Oh shit.” Kero flies up and lands on Rin's shoulder, staring behind at the garbage bags swarming after them. “Let's get out of here!”

Rin agrees and pulls around to head to a park. He's going to need the free space after all. Racing through the summer night air, Rin ends up not being able to break in time to avoid a garbage bag that suddenly appears in front of them.

With a great tearing sound, Rin goes straight through it, breaking it and spreading the contents around. “Oh gross!” Rin shudders at that. “I think I'm going to vomit!”

“Please don't.” Kero doesn't look much better, mess sticking in his fur. “Let's get back down and find Float!”

Rin agrees with that and lands down on the ground. He looks up and sees all the garbage floating around. Kero lets out a cry and points at a specific pile. “That's the game stuff!”

Rin looks and sees the bulky bag and boxes that are hovering around. He then blinks. “Oi. Is that--”

“Float!” Kero confirms, in regards to the pink balloon thing that's holding up said objects.

Rin grins viciously at that and kicks off the ground as fast as possible, dropping Fly as quickly as possible. “Float, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

It does as command and Rin starts falling, as does everything else to Kero's horror. “Oh watch it!”

Rin grabs the correct bag and boxes and braces himself for the heavy fall, unable to do anything else.

Luckily for him, Kero has just enough magic to pull up a quick “safety net” type barrier that catches Rin, making him blink as he slows down and ends up on the ground.

“I didn't know you could do that?” Rin turns to look at Kero, puzzled.

“It's not somethin' Ah can do a lot in my condition...” Kero admits, panting. 'Don't even have one of my elemental Cards...'

“Aaah...” Rin turns to look at the box in his hands and sets it down alongside the bag. “First things
first. Bubble!"

The Card springs to life and covers Rin, removing all the filth from him. Rin then turns to look at Kero, who is attempting to inch away.

“Oh no! You are dirty too! Get him Bubble!”

The Card squeals excitedly at that and chases after Kero, who fails to escape Bubble's grasp. “Ugh, Ah hate this!”

“Well, I need to get us both clean before we go home...speaking of clean...what should we do?” Rin looks around at the garbage covered park in horror.

Kero sweats and sighs, waving it off. “Let others handle it. We better get home soon with our spoils!”

“Your spoils.” Rin corrects, but goes to collect the games and other supplies that Kero wants anyways.

As soon as they get back to the monastery – which takes a long time since Rin can't carry the stuff and use Fly at the same time – Rin realizes they have a problem.

Multiple problems in fact.

Rin glowers at the bag and the boxes now at his feet. Kero hovers next to him, not saying anything as Rin looks between the stuff Kero wants and the window. The second story window that Rin can't climb up even carrying just one thing.

“Kero...” Rin growls, making Kero break out in a heavy sweat in sheer terror.

“Um...oh!” Kero grins and turns to Rin. “Use Float! It should bring thangs up nicely and then you can climb in and pull them all in one at a time.”

Rin blinks and breathes, calming down as he realizes it is a good idea. “Thanks Kero.”

In a better mood, Rin pulls out his staff and then Float. “Float, lift those things to the second story window!” Rin commands, sending Float out to gather underneath the bag and boxes and gently raise them up to the right level.

Tucking his staff in his belt, Rin grabs the old trellis he used to climb down and starts climbing up. There's a moment of terror when the trellis creaks in a scary fashion, but soon Rin gets back up to the window and clammers in.

Kero is already waiting for him and looks a little impatient. “Hurry, hurry! Don't want anyone seein' that!”

Rin sighs, but he's got a point, so he turns and grabs the first box. Within a few minutes Rin has everything in the room and he dismisses Float.

“Wait...what do I do with these?” Rin realizes as he remembers that he really can't bring these into his shared room with Yukio.

“Leave 'em here o'course!” Kero exclaims. “We can even set thangs up here. It's a good place, not in use, and is thus perfect for a gamin' room!”
Rin sighs at Kero's returned enthusiasm, but admits he's right. Rin wrinkles his nose at how dusty the place is and decides that first thing he's doing tomorrow is cleaning the room.

“C'mon, let's get to bed.” Rin yawns, then coughs as a bit of dust gets in his mouth. “It's too late to set things up.”

Kero reluctantly agrees and follows Rin out of the room and back to the twins' room.

Rin quickly undresses and slips into his pyjamas, sliding into bed in record time with Kero joining him and resting on Rin's pillow.

“Hey, Rin?” Kero says after a moment.

“Hmm...what is it Kero?” Rin peers over at the little guardian, already submitting to sleep's embrace.

“Thanks. For everythin'.”

Rin smiles and closes his eyes. “You're welcome. And thanks too.”

Kero blinks. “For what?”

But Rin is already fast asleep. Chuckling, Kero curls up and goes to join him in the land of bliss.

Kero is not happy that Rin ignores the boxes and bag in favour of getting out a mop, dust cloth, and handkerchief for his mouth to clean up the room.

He's so not happy he goes and hides in Rin and Yukio's room to sulk while Rin unleashes his inner clean freak to fix up the old room. It is only really cleaned out during the spring cleaning since it was never in use, so no wonder it's nasty.

“Well, I didn't quite expect this to be what you'd choose to do.”

Rin turns around, in the middle of finishing up the cleaning, to see Shirō standing in the doorway. “Errr...um...I was...”

“You sneaked out last night.” Shirō notes conversationally, making Rin flinch. “And I see you got some things there. What did you get?”

Rin gestures at the bag and boxes in the corner and watches with baited breath as Shirō looks through them. Soon enough Shirō is laughing. “Oh this is priceless. Where did you get these?”

Rin shrugs and looks away, scratching the back of his head. “I found it by chance. Someone rich and snobby decided to throw it all away as useless and well...”

“That's pretty clever.” Shirō hums as he looks at one game, raising an eyebrow at what he sees. “Never been able to really get a game system before, never thought we needed one outside of handhelds. Both you and Yukio were fine with what we gave you after all. Helps that both were quite happy to either read or run around.”

“Yeah but hmm...was thinking it could be fun?” Rin offers.

“Oh, these games should be fun.” Shirō cheerfully agrees. “Let me guess, this is our new game room? I like it.”

Rin beams at that, happy to have Shirō not upset about things.
“And I'm not going to ground you for going out, but next time tell me what you are planning.” Shirō cautions. 'Rather you not run into a demon or something and then everything is going to get messy and fast.' He thinks to himself.

Rin nods, quickly agreeing with that and privately making plans to be even more careful if need be.

'Aafter all...can't explain everything...' Rin thinks, unknowingly echoing Shirō's thoughts as he looks at his eldest son and considers his true heritage.

Rin is just finishing plugging in all the wires for the PS2 (the last system they found) when a knock on the frame of the open door makes Rin twist around to see Yukio. At the same time, Kero mentally curses and, instead of acting like a stuffed animal, decides to crawl away to be out of Yukio's sight.

“Oh, Yukio! Sorry, didn't want to wake you this morning.” Rin says in explanation for how he never even spoke to Yukio in the morning.

Yukio smiles softly at that. “I figured that.” Leaning against the door frame, he looks at what Rin is doing. “What are you working on there Nii-san?”

“Didn't Oyaji tell you?” Rin grins and gestures dramatically at the crazy set up he has, with the TV, all the game systems, and a quintet of old, small speakers that are spread out. “I'm making up our new game system!”

Yukio looks over the set up, raising his eyebrows doubtfully. “I...see.”

Rin eyes Yukio for a moment. And frowns. 'Something's wrong.' Rin isn't that good at dealing with other people, but his brother? Rin grew up with him and Rin knows every cue and giveaway. He can tell that something is bothering Yukio.

But if Yukio doesn't want to share, there's nothing Rin can do.

Instead, Rin sticks to the topic of the game systems. “Why don't you come and test it out with me? I already got everything on and it looks like the systems work.”

“Then what's to test?” Yukio asks, not moving from the door frame to Rin's irritation.

“To see if you can play with it!” Rin declares. “There's this nice game that's a two-player for the PS2, so why don't we try that out?”

Yukio hesitates and Rin's stomach drops. He's going to refuse, Rin just knows it. But just as Yukio opens his mouth...

“Oi! Yukio when I come up there I better see you playing with your brother!” Shirō's voice is loud and penetrates up to the second floor with ease. “I'm going to be up in five minutes so I better see that game console active and you with a remote you are actually using!”

Rin stares at Yukio, who is now beet red in embarrassment, and bursts out laughing. “Well, you heard Oyaji. C'mon Yukio. It'll be fun.”

“If you say so...” Yukio finally enters the room, and, after a pause, settles down beside Rin on the ground. “So what game is it?”

“Some kind of fighting game.” Rin shrugs and puts the disc in the system, closing the lid and settling back to see the screen move from the menu to the opening credits to the game. “Here. We can figure
out the controls together.”

Yukio sighs, but accepts the game and watches with doubt as the opening visuals start.

Ten minutes later, Shirō pokes his head in and grins at seeing the two boys yelling playfully at each other and obviously enjoying the game together.

'Good. Yukio needs the break.' He then eyes Rin and a small smile creeps onto his face. 'And Rin needs his brother.'

Shirō then cheerfully walks away, whistling to himself. He definitely can consider that a great success and the main reason why he's not punishing Rin this time.

The game systems are perfect for helping repairing the slowly breaking bond of the brothers. They desperately needed something in common again to do together.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and I hope you enjoyed it! Please leave comments below to tell me what you think and to assure the next chapter is posted!
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Thank you once again for all the lovely comments! They mean a lot people and keep me posting!

Now, fair warning for this chapter: have tissues handy. According to my bestie, this made her sob. On the other hand, my dad thinks this is the best chapter of the arc. Read on and tell me what you think at the end!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In Rin's opinion, not much is creepier than a hospital at night. He's been stuck in one a few times, the few times Yukio needed an overnight stay to get better, and he never liked it at all. Considering how big and empty it is – and how many sick people do and don't get better there – it always feels wrong to him. The few people left over at night don't help.

So of course, the recent Card Kero managed to track down is hidden in Southern Cross Hospital.

Rin groans as he manages to finally sneak inside the hospital from the back door. “So where is the Card? And what Card is interested in this place?”

“Further in. And it's Heal. She of course would be drawn to this place. Probably helping, but at some point someone's going to see a ghost and call the exorcists on her.” Kero sighs. “And that would be just messy. Very messy.” Rin quietly agrees with that assessment, and walks carefully through the hallways.

At one point they have to hide from a night shift nurse, but other than that it's amazingly easy to sneak inside. Though having magic does help. Amazing what one can do with Silent and Shadow...

Rin winces as he sees the ward they are entering. It's the children's ward, and not just for anyone. The one for those very sick, the ones that probably won't make it ever.

The thought of that brings back memories of Yukio in the hospital and that old fear of how it might be the last time Rin gets to see his baby brother.

Brushing aside his dark thoughts like cobwebs, Rin steps carefully towards a private ward where a soft glow is coming from under the door. A brief moment, where he exchanges a look with Kero, and Rin opens the door.

Heal is easy to spot. For starters, she's glowing softly. The next reason is because her outfit is something that definitely stands out, being of a white robe that covers her completely, with a hood attached. Red triangles decorate the bottom edge of the robe, as well as her sleeve ends and the hood. More impressively, she has immense white wings springing from her back, giving the appearance of an angel.

“There you are.” Rin's voice is soft, and he steps forward.

Heal steps back. “Wait.”
Rin stops, surprised. It hasn't been since Memory that Rin has met a Card that actually speaks to him.

“Please.” Heal's big purple-blue eyes are pleading with him. “Just...give me time?”

“What for...?” Rin steps forward carefully again, getting closer to Heal. She steps back until she hits the wall, and looks trapped. Rin realizes that she's rather solid right now and wonders at it. 'Shouldn't she be more transparent?'

Behind Rin, Kero watches Heal, trying to figure out what is making the gentle and kind Card refuse to be captured – abet in a gentle manner – when normally she would willingly return to Card form just at the sight of Rin.

“There is only a little time left and I want to be here for her.” Heal explains.

This does nothing to explain anything to Rin. “For who?” Rin raises his staff, ready to call out the chant.

And at that point a new light appears in the room with a click. Rin whirls around and stares. In the bed is a small child, the gender not certain thanks to the bald head and thin body, who looks at Rin with wide eyes.

“Are you another angel?” The girl – the voice is definitely female – stares wide-eyed at Rin with a special kind of wonder. “Are you a friend of my angel?”

Rin stares and lowers the staff and then looks over at Heal. Then back at the cheerfully smiling girl who is looking eagerly at him.

“Ummm...” Is Rin's ever so eloquent response.

Behind him, Kero covers his face with his paws.

Chapter 14: Summer's Child

After his rather confusing night, Rin would like to return to a normal day.

Unfortunately, normal for him is very misleading.

“Oi, get off.” Rin hisses at the hobgoblin that is clinging to the cart that is holding a bunch of sweets. The way it is looking at the sweets does not give Rin a good feeling at all.

Rin quickly glances around, then pulls out the Key. The hobgoblin only has a moment to be surprised, before Windy swirls around it and whisks it out of the kitchen and all the way outside.

Rin sighs, relieved at avoiding that disaster, and catching Windy back with a smile. His smile slowly fades as he thinks back to what he dealt with at the hospital.

'Heal...is very attached to that girl...' Rin thinks sadly. And he knows why thanks to Kero explaining it to him last night.

“What do you mean she's dying?” Rin looks stricken at Kero and frankly, the guardian doesn't blame him.

“Exactly what Ah said.” Kero looks sad. “That's the only reason Ah can think that would have Heal not return to you willingly. She must want to at least ease her pain before...”

Rin looks down at his hands. “So...how much time does she got?”
Kero shakes his head. “Ah'm sure Heal knows though.” He speculates. “It's somethin' she would be able to tell.”

“Hey, isn't Heal some magical being? Powerful too?” Rin brings up, looking back up at Kero. “Why can't she...”

“If it doesn't exist in normal healin', Heal can't do it.” Kero sighs. “She's dependant on knowledge supplied either from her master or from around her in this case. If the cure doesn't exist in any fashion...”

Rin says nothing after that. A heavy silence is all that covers them as they consider such a cruel fate.

“Okumura-kun where are those new sweets?” Watanabe pokes her head in and stares at Rin. “There you are. And there they are. What's the hold up?”

Rin blinks and manages a smile. “Sorry. Was lost in thought.”

“Well hurry up. Godaiin-san is asking for his favourite waiter...” Watanabe teases before leaving.

Rin blushes and quickly pushes the cart out and sorts all the sweets into the appropriate section for the cooks. Once that's handled, Rin quickly heads out of the kitchen and to the café part.

Daisuke raises an eyebrow at Rin. “Did something come up? You look a bit stressed.”

Rin smiles. “Yeah, but it's nothing much. Just need...time to think on it. So, what will it be today?”

Daisuke eyes him for a moment, then smiles. “Well, I've been told that the cheesecakes are divine...”

He begins teasingly.

Rin happily notes down his order, only pausing a bit when that little girl crosses his mind again. This time, he lets it linger for a moment and realizes what he has to do.

He needs to sneak into the hospital again and actually talk to her.

“This is not a good idea Kero...” Rin grumbles at the little guardian, fiddling with the bag in his hands. It's a day after he decided to come visit, since he needed to prepare, and now he's having second thoughts.

“Well, you can't go back in at night.” Kero notes, poking his head out of the bag. “Not a good idea considering thangs. Probably freak out Heal. But in the day time it's easier to actually talk to both her and the little girl.”

Rin doesn't really believe that. You can't really sneak into a busy hospital during the day. But Rin, looking at the front door, is at least willing to try.

Taking in a deep breath and holding his head high, Rin walks into the hospital.

The first part is easy, considering all the other visitors gathering in the waiting room. The problem comes from the fact Rin doesn't know the name of the little girl – though he knows her room number at least – and on top of that is a stranger ultimately. No way he'll be able to sign in and walk in like any other visitor.

Rin hesitates for a moment, then notices a small commotion on one end of the waiting room. Not bothering to see what it is, Rin just takes advantage of everyone else looking that way and quickly walks past the waiting room towards the elevator.
Previously last night Rin took the stairs, which means he knows the exact floor button to press. The extra walking – with Kero complaining about how long it takes, especially with Rin needing to be quiet – dug into Rin's brain the fact the children's ward is on the third floor.

Arriving upstairs, Rin quickly jumps out of the elevator and lets some nurses go by, ducking his head so they can't really see his face. A moment's confusion – it does look different in the daylight – and Rin turns to the left, heading towards the private wards.

Room 309 looms in front of Rin, and he pauses for a moment in front of it. He pauses long enough that Kero pokes his head out of the bag again.

“Rin.” Rin looks down and sees the soft gaze of Kero's. Managing a smile, Rin gives a soft knock on the door and slowly opens it when a soft, confused sound carries outside.

The girl inside perks up when she sees him. “You're that angel from last night!”

Rin shakes his head. “I'm...not an angel.”

“Really?” She tilts her head. She has a rather cute fuzzy hat – with cat ears – on her head and honestly despite how thin and withered she looks Rin finds she really is an adorable girl. “Then what are you?”

Rin opens his mouth to explain that he's normal...then reconsidered and says instead, “I'm a mage.”

The girl stares at Rin with amazement colouring her face. “Really?”

“Hm.” Rin pulls out the Key and whispers the release chant, turning it into a staff to her excited clapping. “My name is Rin. What's yours?”

“Natsuko.” She says cheerfully. “My name is Natsuko!”

“Nice to meet you Natsuko-chan.” Rin replies, smiling and sitting down on the chair nearby her bed.

“Oi, aren't you forgetting someone?” Kero whines, flying up from the bag. Natsuko squeals at the sight of him.

“Who are you?”

“I'm Kerberos, the Guardian Beast of the Seal!” Kero declares proudly.

Noticing Natsuko's confused blinking, Rin smiles and explains, “He's my familiar. You can call him Kero.”

“Kero-chan...you are very cute.” Natsuko reaches out and gives Kero a soft pet on his head, making him look torn about things for a moment before he settles down on the bed beside her.

“Why are you here Onii-chan?” Natsuko asks, tilting her head.

“Your angel...is a friend of mine. I'm here to help her.” Rin says softly.

Natsuko brightens at that. “My angel says she's helping with the pain. Are you doing the same?”

“Yes...the pain of boredom in this case.” Rin says cheerfully, pulling out something from the bag that makes Natsuko smile brightly.

It is, after all, a very lovely and beautiful stuffed toy, looking very much so like her angel.
“Where did you get this?!” Natsuko exclaims. “It's just like my angel.”

“I made it. You like it?” Rin scratches his cheek as Natsuko nods eagerly. “Then it's yours.”

“Thank you Onii-chan!” Natsuko then peers down at his bag. “What else do you have in your bag?”

Smiling, Rin pulls out a colouring book and crayons, which makes Natsuko happy. She is quick to explain she already finished all the colouring books the nurses supplied for her. This means she's more than eager to accept Rin's offering and quickly flips over to a page and, with Rin leaning next to her and handing over the requested crayon colours, gets to work.

Of course, this doesn't last. As soon as a nurse comes in to deliver some food for Natsuko's dinner, things end.

There's a moment where both Rin and the nurse freezes in shock – though Natsuko is oblivious – then she quickly turns on her heels and walks right out again.

'Well, that's my cue to leave...' Rin thinks worriedly. “Sorry, but my time is up. I need to leave.”

Natsuko whines at that and grabs Rin's hand after watching him start packing up and Kero fly over to the bag and hide in there. “Don't go! Please?”

“I'll...I'll be back tomorrow.” Rin says. 'Even if I have to use magic to come back I'm definitely coming back.' Rin affirms to himself. It quickly became obvious just how lonely Natsuko is and Rin despises that. Such a sweet girl who's going through so much and...

Well, honestly, no one should be alone.

The door slams open at that and Rin jumps. The nurse is back, but this time with two rather burly looking guys wearing security uniforms.

“See!” She gestures to Rin and glares up at the two security men. “I told you.”

Rin just barely manages to get out of the way of Natsuko before the two guards are on him. “Hey!”

“No!” Natsuko wails. “Please don't...don't...” She looks pathetically sad and even tries to push away the nurse who comes over to comfort her. “NO! Onii-chan, Onii--” She breaks off and starts coughing, turning away from the nurse and sounding to be in great pain.

That, plus her crying, pisses off Rin. The guard that has a hold of him is suddenly flipped over Rin's shoulder and on to the ground. The other guard soon is on the ground too, holding his stomach in pain, as Rin rushes over to Natsuko.

“Shh...shhh...it's okay. Breathe.” Rin's voice is soft and he carefully rubs her back. “I'm right here, it's okay, no need to panic.”

Natsuko slowly takes in a deep breath, coughing a bit, but slowly calms down from her panic. Rin is the only one to notice the soft glow that illuminates her; Heal is still here and is giving what aid she can do on the low.

“What is going on here?” That voice makes everyone turn, including the still in pain security guards. The person in the door is obviously a doctor, wearing a labcoat and with her dark hair tied up in a tight bun. Her dark eyes look over the room and everyone but Natsuko are immediately made nervous.
The nurse looks particularly fluster. “Nomura-sensei! This...this boy...he's not a visitor and he's...”

Nomura raises her hand. She's looking at Rin who turned back to Natsuko and is talking softly to her. Natsuko's panic is fading and she's smiling up at Rin as he speaks, nodding slowly in understanding.

“You. What is your name?” Rin blinks at that question.

“Um...Okumura Rin...?” Rin offers hesitantly.

Nomura considers Rin for a moment, then gives a slow nod. “Allow him to visit.”

The nurse's jaw drops. “B-but! Protocol--”

“This is the first time in a long time Natsuko has smiled like that.” Nomura explains to her, making the nurse shut her mouth and look like she's considering it too. “As long as he doesn't sneak up again, it should be fine.”

Nomura whirls on her heels and quickly leaves. Only Rin notices how Natsuko looks briefly sad at her leaving before turning back to him and asking quick, cheery questions about magic.

The adults look confused, but slowly they all leave – both security guards wincing from their bruises – with the nurse leaving Natsuko's food behind and, after a moment, explaining to Rin what to do there.

She looks pleasantly surprised to find Rin knows exactly how to handle getting Natsuko to eat.

So it is a much more thoughtful nurse who leaves the room this time.

This sets a trend for Rin, Natsuko, and even the hospital staff.

Every day after Rin's job, Rin visits Natsuko and brings over toys and books for her to play with, not to mention bringing stories to tell. He leaves only after Natsuko has had her dinner, so as to get back home in time.

Natsuko is very interested in magic, so Rin ends up telling her stories – slightly exaggerated and changed for his audience – of his own exploits. Even Kero pops in with stories at times of Sakura.

“Sakura-neechan is amazing too...” Natsuko looks amazed. “And so many pretty outfits.”

The reason she can even see those outfits is because Illusion has become a favourite of Rin's during his visits to help expand on the stories. Just has to watch the clock and lock the door so no one else can see Rin's display of magic.

'I think Illusion likes it too.' Rin thinks, considering how Illusion glows and even seems to hum to Rin whenever it comes time to visit Natsuko. 'Perhaps its finding it likes it better than tricking people.'

“I would like to be a mage too...” Natsuko sighs. “But I can't. I'm too sick.”

Rin exchanges a look with Kero at that, then quickly changes the topic to keep Natsuko's spirits up.

That night, since tomorrow is Rin's day off, Rin opens up the chest and sorts through the old outfits included in there.
I have to wonder why they were included...’ Rin admits, picking up one of them and looking it over. ‘Doesn't seem to make much sense.’

But Rin is happy to have them there anyways.

Yukio enters at that point, and is puzzled by Rin putting some strange clothing into a big bag. 'What is he doing?'

“Nii-san, what are you doing?” Yukio asks with a sigh.

Rin jumps a bit, having been caught up in his thoughts so much he didn't notice Yukio enter, then gives a smile. “Just...got something to do tomorrow that's all. Getting ready.”

Yukio stares and wonders what Rin is doing exactly that requires such small and cute looking outfits. 'Not to mention, where did Nii-san get them?' Yukio has to wonder, not knowing the truth about the chest of Rin's.

Suzuki Haruka has finally gotten used to Rin. At first she was actually quite wary around him despite Nomura-sensei’s confident in him and how happy Natsuko-chan is to see him.

But at this point, the nurse sees him as a genuinely kind boy and can only be happy that Rin shows up to brighten Natsuko's day.

'And not just hers.' Haruka admits as she moves through the hallways. 'He's managed to cheer up this entire ward.' After all, Rin at times pops over to help with the other children and is immediately a hit with them. 'He's so good with them it's adorable...'

And all with actually not that much older than most kids here, Rin is managing to firmly place himself as their “Onii-chan” that they adore.

Opening the door to Natsuko's room, Haruka ends up pausing at what she sees.

“Hold still just a moment longer Natsuko-chan...there.” Rin smiles and leans back. “That should do it.”

Natsuko twirls around, the pink cape around her nearly getting Rin in the face, but he's laughing too much to complain.

Natsuko is the first to notice her and bounds up to her. Just her bounding puts a great smile on Haruka's face as normally she doesn't have that much energy. 'It's a good day for her.'

“What do you think Haruka-neechan? Isn't it lovely!?” Natsuko beams up at her.

“Oh yes. It's amazing...” She turns to look at Rin and smiles. “You did a wonderful job here.”

Rin blushes and mutters something about not doing that much, but Haruka doesn't pay attention. “So, what kind of outfit is this?”

“It's my mage outfit!” Natsuko declares cheerfully. Then starts blabbing about what mages are and do, filling Haruka's ears with it to overflowing.

Haruka smiles and happily plays along with Natsuko, not noticing Rin's embarrassed look on his face as Natsuko praises him more than once.

Rin, however, notices that Nomura-sensei is looking inside at Natsuko again and frowns a bit at how
she never properly visits.

“I'm sorry I couldn't visit yesterday.” Rin says soon after arriving at Natsuko's room.

Natsuko shakes her head, setting aside her book. “It's okay! I had fun anyways with what you left and I had to go and get examined too.”

“Well, to make up for it...” Rin pulls out Illusion. “Illusion...let's bring the festival here.”

Natsuko squeals in joy as her room seems to transform into this year's summer festival and watches happily as Rin talks about the festival while showing all the happy things that go on there.

Outside Natsuko's room, Nomura slows down and pauses as she hears how happy the girl sounds. A brief look of regret crosses her face before she moves on, firming up her expression and focusing on her goal.

Yesterday's examination revealed that she's running out of time. And Nomura needs to have every minute count.

A knock on her office door has Nomura look up from filling out paperwork. “Come in.”

She's surprised to see Rin enter, since normally at this time he's with Natsuko. “Why are you here?”

Rin is frowning and refuses to take a seat when Nomura offers one. “Why don't you ever visit Natsuko-chan?”

Nomura stiffens at that and looks away from Rin. “What are you talking about? Shouldn't you be visiting her?”

“She's very tired today so she's taking a nap right now.” Rin explains, then narrows his eyes. “Again, why aren't you visiting her?”

“It is none of your--”

“Like hell it isn't!” Rin slams his hands down on Nomura's desk, making everything rattle on it, including the name plate that declares her as Dr Nomura Shizuko. “She's your daughter.”

Nomura flinches at that. “I--”

“Look...I know you are in the research department and I can guess what you are looking into.” Rin sighs, running his hands through his hair. “Don't ask me how I know, but it won't work. Please don't regret not spending time with your daughter.”

Nomura looks up at Rin, surprise colouring her face, and stares at the strange look on his face. “What are you saying?”

Rin gives a sad smile. “Please? She's been wondering why you haven't visited more and more lately.”

Rin then turns and walks out, not seeing the stricken look on Nomura's face. Or that she turns and looks at an old photo on her desk of a happier time, when Natsuko was healthy and happy and she had more time for her daughter.
Rin doesn't really expect Nomura to listen to him, so the next day he comes prepared as usual to entertain Natsuko alone.

When he opens the door though, he's surprised to hear voices talking and pauses in the doorway to watch in surprise and also happiness as Nomura reads a book to her daughter.

She glances up and smiles. “Ah, Okumura-kun. Come in. We are just getting the best part according to this little ball of sunshine.”

Natsuko giggles at that and tugs at a page. “Quick turn the page, I want to see what happens next!”

Rin settles down on the other chair and soon gets drawn into reading out-loud to Natsuko along with her mother.

Shirō walks into the kitchen and blinks. When did it turn into winter in here?

After a moment, he realizes that it's just flour and sugar, which brings him to another question.

“What are you doing Rin?” Shirō eyes a nearby corner and puts his finger through. It's almost disgustingly thick. “Aside from making a mess.”

Rin blushes and glances down at the cookbook open in front of him. "Oh there was just...an accident there. Trying to make a very nice birthday cake.”

Shirō raises an eyebrow. “For who?” No one in the monastery has a birthday in August.

Rin freezes and Shirō is shocked by how sad he seems. “It's...well...I guess you can say I've been volunteering at the hospital lately…”

“The hospital? So that's where you've been going on this time. Why didn't you tell me?” Shirō asks, softly approaching Rin and laying a hand on his flour covered shoulder.

Rin droops. “I dunno. Maybe because...because the girl who this is for is...probably not going to last much past her birthday.” ‘Though I already told Yukio...’ Rin recalls, thinking of the summer festival.

Shirō stares at Rin in shock, then impulsively draws him into a hug. “Such a kind boy...so what kind of cake are you making for her?”

Rin pulls himself out of the hug enough to look up at Shirō. “A very special one. Has to be the kind she's allowed to eat but taste super good anyways.”

“Well, why don't you see about letting me help? I can at least taste test and hand over what you need.” Shirō offers, rolling up his sleeves.

Rin immediately smiles up at Shirō and turns back to the kitchen. “Well, first I need…”

“Can I open my eyes yet Kaa-san?” Natsuko whines, her hands cover her eyes.

Nomura chuckles. “No. No not yet sweetie.” She’s currently pushing her daughter in a wheelchair out of her room and into a bigger, gathering room.

There's some hushed sounds from behind the door, which makes her grin, then Nomura knocks on the door. Everything gets super quiet then, which has Natsuko wanting to peek.
“No.” Nomura laughs a bit at Natsuko's pout. “It's just a little more.”

Nomura opens the door and wheels Natsuko in. “Okay, you can open them.”

Natsuko quickly removes her eyes and stares at everyone there shouts “Happy birthday!” and even some poppers go off.

“Oh wow. It's like the whole world showed up!” She says excitedly.

It's not really the whole world, but everyone at the children's ward – from patients to staff – have shown up for this special party. Rin is there too and is the first to approach Natsuko, cheerfully placing a party crown on her head.

“Let's go enjoy ourselves princess.” Rin suggests cheerfully. “We got plenty of party games and even cake for you.”

Natsuko squeals at that and Nomura wheels her in further. All the games were chosen or even adapted to make up for the fact Natsuko has been recently forced to stay in bed or in a wheelchair.

“So that's why I got the special mage outfit!” Natsuko cheers at that. She's wearing a pink dress that splits at the front to reveal black shorts. It's simple but very pretty and though the hat wasn't included – so as to be able to wear the party crown – it's perfect still.

The entire party is absolutely perfect to a girl who hasn't had much for so long.

“...and that's how I captured the Erase.” Rin finishes his story with a flourish and bow.

Natsuko claps, but slowly, and yawns at the end. “That was such a funny story.”

“Well, can't blame everyone for reacting like that.” Rin spins the Illusion card on his finger for a moment after it returns before putting it away. “It's not like everyone knows or even believes in magic.”

“Hmmm...but you do. And so do I...” Natsuko turns and looks up at Heal. More recently Heal has been actually showing up during Rin's visits, her soft glow illuminating Natsuko over and over.

Rin looks up at Heal and sees her shake her head. Rin's heart drops and he turns to Natsuko. “Do you want another story?”

“Hmm...I'm sleepy...” Natsuko says instead, yawning. “Strange. I'm getting sleepier and sleepier no matter how exciting things are.”

Rin can feel tears prick at his eyes. “Yeah. It is strange.”

“You'll be here tomorrow?” Natsuko gets out, eyes slowly closing.

Rin grasps her hand and manages to smile through the tears. “Yes. Yes I will be.”

“The reason she's been getting more and more tired is because of Heal shielding her from the pain. All that magic in her is tiring her on purpose to help her.” Kero explains softly that night.

“But she's been getting more and more tired I think...” Rin swallows. “She's—”

Rin is interrupted by Heal suddenly appearing in his room, startling him and making him curse and
then bless the fact Yukio's downstairs. He then looks up at Heal.

“It's time.” Heal says, closing her eyes and crying. “I can't stop it anymore.”

Rin freezes, then leaps up and grabs his jacket, racing downstairs with Kero quickly diving to grab Rin's shoulder so he won't be left behind. He ignores the rest's cry of confusion and shock and shoves his feet into his shoes. He's out and racing far away, pulling out the Key and Fly.

“Fly!” He cries as soon as he has the staff and leaps onto it as the wings sprout on the back. “Is Nomura-sensei there?”

Heal, flying alongside him, nods. “Yes. She's working late tonight.”

“Go see if you can draw her to Natsuko's room.” Rin orders her. Heal blinks and then nods, disappearing off into the night.

*I won't let her go alone.* Rin grits his teeth and bends over, willing Fly to move faster.

Rin nearly bursts into Natsuko's room, and is surprised to see Nomura already there and holding her daughter's hand. But even more surprised to see Heal fully revealed and hovering over them both.

“You...” Nomura's face softens. “You came.”

“Of course.” Rin hurries over to Natsuko's side and grabs her hand too. “Natsuko. You there?”

“Hm...my angel says I'm not going to last much longer...but it shouldn't hurt.” Natsuko looks at the people there, even Kero ditching his usual hiding method to join the group holding vigil. “But why would it hurt? Everyone I love is here.”

Rin can't help the tears and neither can Nomura. Even Kero is bawling as they all hold the young girl who has had a too short life.

“I wish...I wish there was something we could have done.” Rin sobs out. Nomura grabs his shoulder and pulls him into a hug there. “I wish...”

“It's alright.” Nomura says, soothing Rin despite her own tears. “We are all here for her. That's enough.”

“Yes.” Natsuko smiles up at them again and reaches out to touch her mother's face. “Be happy, okay? You still got life.”

Nomura's face is heartbreaking, but she manages a smile and nods her head slowly. “Okay.”

Natsuko's eyes widen. “What's...”

And for a moment, just a moment, everyone sees light. Or rather, something that's best described as light. Something glorious and bright and so gentle.

And then Natsuko is gone. Nomura, Rin, and Kero are left shaking in the aftermath.

“That...” Rin looks up at Heal, who shakes her head. He slowly smiles. “It's okay.” He chokes out, tears pouring from his eyes as he closes Natsuko's eyes gently. “It's all okay...”

It's a long time before anyone can move though, too many tears and the shock of what they experienced leaving them stuck there until a nurse comes running, having heard the warning bell go
Shirō pauses in the doorway of the boys' room. Yukio has been avoiding it all day, as Rin came home early this morning soaked from a summer shower and looking utterly depressed. Shirō didn't need Rin's words of explanation to know that the girl he had befriended and looked after had died. Rin has been lying in his bed the entire time since.

Sighing, Shirō finally knocks on the door frame, making Rin stir slightly. “There's a woman to see you at the church.”

Rin blinks and slowly sits up. “Me?”

“Yes. I think you know her. A Nomura Satsuko.” Shirō watches as Rin's eyes widen in realization, then he scrubs his face and slowly stands up.

“Take your time.” Shirō suggests. “Go clean up first. She's not going to be leaving any time soon.”

Rin slowly nods and wanders to get a change of clothing and then ducks over to the washroom. Shirō sighs and walks back downstairs. He is halted by Nagatomo, who looks at Shirō concerned about Rin.

“It's alright. But give him and that Nomura-san space for now. No eavesdropping.” Shirō gives them all a warning look and even the most curious of them nod and agree to it.

Some time later, Rin enters the church and is surprised to see Nomura kneeling at the altar and praying.

“I didn't think you were religious like this.” Rin says softly.

Nomura slowly raises her head and turns to look at Rin. “Not particularly. But that...that light...” She looks up at the stained-glass behind the altar, a colourful depiction of angels and saints. “It makes you believe there is something. Besides, I figure it is good manners to greet the spirits and gods of a place.”

“Hm.” Rin walks up to stand beside her.

“I was convinced awhile back to take out a life insurance for Natsuko.” Nomura says suddenly. “Hated it. Felt terrible about it but I still let them make me sign the deal. I think I'll turn that money into making a non-profit organization. Before you showed up, despite everyone's best attempts, the children's ward was always rather quiet and lonely. And...it was thought Natsuko wouldn't even live to see her birthday. I like to think that you helped there.”

Nomura finally turns to face Rin. “And you helped me. I...had a terrible divorce with my husband because I always put my work first. But now...now I need to find more balance. At some point, I need to go and live my life. I promised Natsuko after all.”

Rin smiles at Nomura. “That sounds wonderful. Both things. I'll sign up for that organization of yours myself once you got it all set up.”

“I was hoping you would.” Nomura sighs, then holds out her hand to Rin. “Thank you. For everything.”

Rin looks down at her hand and slowly takes it. “You're welcome.”
Nomura smiles and gently disentangles their hands. “Natsuko said you are a mage. Are you?”

“In training.” Rin admits after a moment. No need to lie here.

“I see...I suppose even death is beyond magic.” Nomura stares back up at the stained-glass window. “Somethings you just can't fight.”

“No. But you can still struggle.” Rin says after a moment.

Nomura smiles again, and tears streak down her cheeks. “Thank you. I would have missed my daughter so much more if you hadn't helped repair that gap between us. I'll never be able to repay you.”

“Then don't.” Rin says softly. “Natsuko wouldn't like it.”

Nomura shakes her head slowly and manages a small laugh. “No. No she wouldn't.”

A few days later, Yukio comes home late. Tired and sore from the last mission, he glances over at Rin's bed.

And frowns.

The bedside lamp is still on beside Rin's bed, despite him now being asleep, and Yukio can see the pile of books around him.

Books that belong to Yukio. He knows that for certain, as Rin never went out and bought any medical books like Yukio.

Rin even has a book that is open and he's curled up with, sleeping deeply in fact.

Yukio sighs and bends down, gently removing the book and, after a moment, taking a bookmark from his desk and placing it in the book before closing it and setting it on Rin's bedside desk.

Yukio wonders if the experience at the hospital made Rin get interested in medicine, but strangely doesn't think that's so.

'Maybe...maybe Rin just wants to know this stuff better.' Yukio thinks. 'I don't think even that would make Rin want to be a doctor.'

And Yukio is right. After all...

Heal is bound by the knowledge of her master. And Rin does not want to have her be limited to the point she cannot help at all.

Chapter End Notes

-passes out tissues to those who need it- Thank you for reading and comment below please. It will get the next chapter up on Monday!
Thank you ever so much for all the good, lovely comments! Such comments make my day every time and I always mean it when I say "Thank you for the comment!".

This chapter is a nice interlude. Chronologically, it takes place at the same time as the previous chapter, but what it covers deserves a chapter of its own. I hope you enjoy!

Shirō is in the kitchen despite the late hour. Sipping at the hot cocoa he made, he waits patiently as time ticks on.

It's just as the hour hand moves an inch that Shirō hears footsteps on the staircase. Soft ones, but they are there.

A moment later and Yukio enters the kitchen, curled in on himself and looking at Shirō with suspicious eyes.

Shirō smiles softly. “Would you like some hot cocoa?” He offers, ignoring how big the bags are under Yukio's eyes and how he flinches at every shadow.

Yukio stares at him for a moment, then slowly nods.

Shirō barely keeps the sigh of relief back. Finally some progress this week.

Shirō stands and goes to the stove, setting up the kettle and pulling down a mug. Yukio huddles at the kitchen chair, wrapped up in a thick blanket from his bed. Despite the warm summer night, Yukio is shivering.

Shirō glances back at Yukio while waiting for the water to boil and realizes that he can't keep it up any longer. Yukio needs to relax and move past his experience but Shirō can't get him to talk.

A thought has Shirō pulling out a tin of cookies Rin made recently, simple butter cookies that Yukio has been fond of. Yukio only looks up when Shirō puts the plate in front of him.

“Thank you.” Yukio's voice is soft and hoarse, like he's been screaming.

Shirō's frown deepens at that, wondering how Rin isn't waking up with Yukio. Yukio's nightmares should be enough to wake his elder brother. But perhaps Rin has been so busy lately he just conks to sleep every night and nothing wakes him except the dreaded alarm clock for getting to work on time.

As Shirō carefully prepares the hot cocoa, he thinks of Rin and comes to a decision.

'If that's the only way to get to Yukio, I'll take it.' Shirō decides.

After all, Yukio might be an exorcist, but he's a boy first. It's past time he was reminded of that.

Chapter 15: A Festival for Brothers
The exorcist consultant office is as busy as it ever is. Which is to say not that busy at all. Which means everyone hears the great exclamation that comes from one specific corner.

“What...what do you mean go home?!” Yukio stares up at his foster father in shock. Not noticing or caring that he's drawing a lot of attention. “But I just finally got here.”

“And that's after I told you you have the day off.” Shirō gives a disappointed look down at Yukio. “So head back home immediately.”

“But—I don't have anything else to do!” Yukio yells, then flinches.

Shirō gives a slow blink as he realizes that Yukio just let something important slip. Sighing, he pats Yukio on the shoulder. “You have been trying to distract yourself uh?”

Yukio, face burning, slowly nods, refusing to meet his gaze.

“That's not bad, but you really shouldn't overwork yourself. And as for things to do, if you hadn't sneaked behind my back to get here, you would have noticed the note that was left to you along with the yukata.”

Yukio's head whips up at that, and he gapes at his father. “What?”

“Hurry up and get back home. You don't have much time to get there and changed for the festival.” Shirō claps Yukio on the back and starts to move away, calling back, “Your brother is probably getting impatient waiting for you.”

Yukio pales at those words, then starts scrambling to pack up and leave, not wanting to deal with a grumpy Rin.

A few amused chuckles let slip as soon as Yukio is gone, then everyone turns back to do their jobs, happy for their youngest member to be finally getting a day off.

Rin checks his watch, foot tapping in impatience. He's currently wearing geta, so the tapping sound has a clattering element to it. On top of the geta, Rin has a simple blue yukata on with a red obi wrapped around it. He's swinging his kinchaku in his free hand, which makes the contents rattle around a bit.

“He's late.” Rin growls to himself. He took a day off work for this and Yukio is late.

A quick look of his surroundings confirms that no, his spotty-four-eyed brother is not visible.

Rin's currently waiting on the edge of the summer festival being held near the river, with the sounds of merriment very close by as much as the scent of food. The latter makes Rin's stomach growl and he scowls again, wishing he had a cellphone like Yukio.

Then again, they can't afford a cellphone for Rin yet so Rin has to deal without for now.

Rin checks his watch again and decides that if Yukio doesn't show up in five minutes, he's going to go enjoy the festival by himself.

“Aah, sorry Nii-san!”

As if on cue, Yukio finally shows up, panting from exertion and leaning over his hands on his knees. Rin brightens immediately at the sight of his brother, but quickly covers it up with a scowl.
“You're late Yukio! Where were you?” Rin frowns at Yukio. “I know you had to run a quick errand for your cram school, but Oyaji told me it shouldn't take too long.”

Rin then looks Yukio up and down and sighs. “And you didn't even change into your yukata.”

Yukio has the grace to look embarrassed. But he didn't really have a choice or time to change into his yukata, having to rely on a pair of jeans and a shirt with jacket combo instead for his casual wear. Having to get out of the complex exorcist uniform and then into an almost as tricky – from Yukio's viewpoint – to wear yukata would have taken even more time. Time he didn't have to spare.

“Oh, alright.” Rin lets out a dramatic sigh. “I will forgive you...but you are paying for a good chunk of the festival games and food!” Rin gives Yukio a flick to the forehead, and whirls around, geta clattering as he walks.

Yukio sighs but smiles and follows after his marching brother to the first festival stall.

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“Yum!” Rin cheers over his kakigori, yet another item Yukio was made to pay for. Rin has already had takoyaki, yakitori, dango, and a big serving of yakisoba and doesn't show a sign of stopping.

*Then again, he's sharing with me.*' Yukio makes a show of protesting before giving in and accepting the spoon of kakigori Rin is offering him.

Rin grins at him, going for another spoonful for himself after that before offering another serving to Yukio.

The two are currently walking around the festival. So far only the food stands have been visited by Rin for purchases, though Yukio can see him looking interested in a stall that is selling masks. Then he makes a face and moves a bit quicker through the crowd.

The sun is still up, meaning it's not as crowded as it will get as the sun fades and festival fully goes into swing. Yukio is grateful to that, not wanting to lose his brother in a crowd. It's almost a tradition for festivals.

*Though, this the first time we've been allowed to go on our own.*' Yukio muses, as Rin asks Yukio what he wants to get as food this time.

“Hmm...let's see...” Yukio looks around and finally spots a stand he likes. “Ikayaki.”

“Awesome!” Rin grabs Yukio's hand and drags him over. “I'll pay this time.”

Yukio shakes his head, but happily accepts his own ikayaki stick while Rin bites into his with a happy expression. *Well, we both are in Junior High now. And though I'm not sure about Nii-san, we are probably both considered mature enough for it.*'

“Now...” Rin stretches and looks up at the now slowly setting sun. “Time for the games!”

Yukio chuckles and follows his excited bouncing brother towards where the game stalls are located.

He doesn't notice that the shadow that has been following him for so long is now gone. Vanquished by his brother's energy and cheerful antics.

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Ultimately the first game stall to draw Rin's attention, once he's stopped being distracted by other things and the sun has set, is the goldfish scoop game. There is already a large group of children with
their parents looking serious as they attempt to get a goldfish out of the pool.

Rin grabs at Yukio's arm at that and starts tugging him over, bouncing in place as he waits for a space to clear so he can have a chance at the goldfish.

As one kid starts crying loudly about not being able to ever get a goldfish, Rin slides into place and then glances back at Yukio.

Yukio rolls his eyes, but hands over the required cash for three scoops which Rin cheerfully accepts from the stall owner. A moment later, Yukio crouches down next to Rin as he watches the goldfish with sharp eyes.

“How many are you going for this time?” Yukio asks, sotto voce.

“How...thinking of breaking last year's record. What do you think my chances are?” Rin's eyes glint with amusement as Yukio puts on a show of considering it.

“Pretty good.” Yukio decides, then glances over at the stall owner with a smile that makes him nervous. “Just don't know if he has enough goldfish to spare.”

Rin finally lifts up his first scoop. A pause, as he waits.

And then he moves. One, two, three, four, five, six...the count of goldfish quickly is lost in Rin's blur of motion. The only thing that stops him is the scoop breaking, and since he got three scoops he just switches to the next one.

The crowd of parents and their children watch in awe as the pool is slowly emptied by one person also known as Rin.

Rin curses when his final scoop is broken. “Dammit. I think I just missed breaking the record.”

Yukio looks in Rin's tubs – needing multiple ones to hold all the goldfish – and quickly counts them all. He then smiles. “No, you just made it. Got fifty-one goldfish compared to last time.”

The number has a loud shock cry go up as everyone stares at what Rin had managed to pull off.

Yukio adjusts his glasses and smirks. ‘Of course Nii-san can do this.' It's not unusual, since Rin spent his time since childhood learning a special kind of restraint in regards to his super strength. That plus Rin's clever hands makes it easier for him to master the goldfish scooping game.

“So, who wants goldfish?” Rin asks the children. He's immediately swarmed by cheering kids and, with a little help from the reluctant stall owner, doles out the goldfish to everyone. There's still plenty leftover, which Rin returns to the pool.

“Was more interested in breaking my record than actually getting a goldfish.” He laughs in response to the stall owner's confusion. “And man...haven't kept even one since we were...”

“Six.” Yukio adds, smiling at his brother. “That was the first time you did the goldfish game and managed to get ten.”

“Oh yes! I remember that.” Rin stretches out with a happy sound, then turns back to Yukio. “So, what game should we play next?”

Yukio takes over in leading the brothers, taking Rin over to a stall that has him groaning.
“Seriously? The shooting game...dammit you know I suck at it.” Rin grumbles as Yukio pays for himself and then sighs and pays for his own corkgun.

“I know. That's why I'm going here. Don't want your ego to be too big.” Yukio teases.

“What about your ego?” Rin snarks back, watching as Yukio sights along the gun.

A sharp “bang” and Yukio's hit exactly what he aimed for, being a small toy that looks like a frog. It falls over and the stall worker hands it over to Yukio. Who still has five shots to use.

Rin groans and turns to see about finding something to try for himself. He eventually lands on what looks like a stuffed black cat. Peering at it, he fires.

And misses not only the black cat, but the objects to the left, right, as well as above and below. Rin groans, as Yukio goes for something else and knocks down a toy soldier next, and tries again.

“Dammit!” Rin swears as he misses again.

Yukio decides to tease Rin some more. “Do you want me to get that for you?”

Rin shoots a glare at his brother. “No. I'll get it myself!”

Yukio chuckles and aims for a stuffed penguin next, getting it once again on the first go.

Meanwhile, Rin is left swearing at his last “bullet”. He grins when he finally hits the stuffed cat, then droops when it doesn't go over.

“Want me to get it for you Nii-san?” Yukio asks again. Rin grumbles and moves aside so Yukio can go for it.

It takes two rapid bullets but the cat is knocked over and the stall worker hands it over along with the rest of Yukio's spoils.

“Okay, I'm picking the next game!” Rin declares, though he hugs the cat toy happily first.

Yukio smiles and lets himself be lead away off into the crowd once more.

They are in the middle of trying a lottery game – getting numbers that make Rin laugh as Yukio gets a pair of goofy glasses while Rin gets an apron with a Honey-Honey Sisters print on it – when they hear a familiar voice.

“Rin-kun, Yukio-kun. Is that you?”

They turn and Rin immediately brightens. “Tsukishiro-sensei!”

Tsukishiro Sekki smiles at the two boys. She's currently wearing a floral print yukata with a bright pink obi and rather pretty flower decorations in her hair. She's holding two crepes in her hands and looks amused at the “prizes” the two boys got.

“Good evening. How are you two doing this festival?”

Rin beams. “Great! Sure, Yukio was late but that wasn't bad; festival wasn't really in full-swing for a time even after he arrived.”

Yukio chuckles at that. “That is true. How are you Tsukishiro-sensei? Are you with anyone?”
“No. I just decided to check out the summer festival here.” Tsukishiro looks happily around at the stall and people enjoying themselves. “I only moved to Southern Cross recently so I'm curious if there are any differences.”

“You moved here?” Yukio is surprised. Somehow he thought she had always lived here. “Where are you from?”

“The Juuban district.” Tsukishiro explains with a shrug.

This makes Rin perk up. “Hey, that's Sailor Moon's district! Does the manga get it right?”

Tsukishiro blinks at that. “Hmm..I'm not certain. Haven't read Sailor Moon recently so I can't recall.”

“Yukio, do you remember how it was drawn?” Rin asks his brother.

Yukio blushes at how Rin focuses on him. “Nii-san how could I? And even if I did, I couldn't describe it enough for Tsukishiro-sensei!”

Rin pouts. “But you've read Sailor Moon way more than me!”

“Is that true?” Tsukishiro looks amused, especially as Yukio turns red and Rin happily explains how Yukio had a massive crush on the titular character despite his protests at trying to get Rin to tone it down.

Tsukishiro laughs and something inside her slots into place and fills a hole that has been bothering her for awhile.

Back at the monastery, Kero cheers himself on through a winning streak in the video game he's playing.

“Yes, yes yes!” Kero cheers and jumps up and down a few times as well as he finally hits the score he was going for. “New record!” Quickly, he goes to the save game option and hits it, waiting for it to save his score.

He then freezes as the door opens, one of the monks peering in. He sighs when he sees the game system still on and steps in to turn it off.

Kero stares in horror as he shuts it all off and then leaves him alone.

Quickly, Kero turns it on, watching with baited breath as it turns back on and he can start up the game again.

It's with a huge sigh of relief that he sees the save did go through before it was shut down. Though it obviously was a very close call.

Kero then starts to play another level, this time making sure to keep the volume down in regards to himself as much as the game console. He doesn't want another incident like that after all.

Now with Tsukishiro following a respectful distance behind, Rin and Yukio go to other game stalls. Some they are excellent at, some only one can handle, and others they are both overwhelmed.

Eventually they run out of stalls they want to try, and end up following Tsukishiro's suggestion.

“The crepe stand is...ah, there it is.” She smiles at the sight of the pink stall with cute designs on it.
Rin tugs Yukio over there and waits excitedly in line for their turn.

“The crepes are good here?” Yukio asks Tsukishiro as Rin bounces in place, still holding Yukio’s hand all the while. ‘As if I’m going to run away or something...’ Yukio thinks with fond exasperation.

“Well, I certainly enjoyed mine.” Tsukishiro demurs. “So I suppose they are good crepes.”

“Yukio, what crepe are you going to get?” Rin asks excitedly.

Yukio considers it, craning his next up to see the menu. “Let’s see...I'll go with a chocolate banana crepe I think.”

“I’m going for matcha ice cream and azuki.” Rin says cheerfully, swinging their hands together. “I want something more traditional.”

Yukio smiles. “Crepes are not traditional, but that's a certainly more traditional in taste.”

Rin sticks his tongue out at Yukio, then turns to order up finally, cheerfully giving his order. As he goes to his kinchaku to dig out the cash for it and Yukio's, he's beaten to the punch by Tsukishiro who reaches over and pays for them.

Tsukishiro giggles at their shocked looks. “Oh, let me treat you two. You've been spending a lot of money this festival.”

Rin smiles. “Well...I do want a lot to talk about...” He murmurs to himself, making Yukio look over at him in curiosity. Rin then shakes his head. “Thanks Tsukishiro-sensei.”

“You are very welcome.” Tsukishiro steps out of the way of the line, with Rin and Yukio following and waiting for their crepes to be called out.

Yukio eyes Rin, and decides to ask him when they back to being by themselves. Somehow, he thinks even Tsukishiro being around is making Rin tight-lipped.

Still savouring their crepes, the boys wave goodbye to Tsukishiro as they split up to find good spots for the upcoming fireworks show.

As Rin and Yukio walk along the riverbank, looking for a free spot, Yukio brings up the question on his mind.

“You mentioned something about wanting a lot of things to talk about. Who to?”

Rin looks at Yukio for a moment, then a sad look crosses his face. “Well...I guess you can say I've been volunteering at a hospital recently. There's a girl there that wishes she could see a summer festival. I'm getting as many memories as possible so as to tell her all about it.”

Yukio looks at Rin, both surprise but also finds it not surprising. His brother has always been more thoughtful and observant than most give him credit for.

“That's a wonderful thing to do.” Yukio says simply.

Rin grins at that, then turns to look up at the sky, waiting for the fireworks.

“Do you think I can have a bite of your crepe?” Rin requests after a moment.

Laughing, Yukio holds out what is left of his crepe. “You can have what's left if you give me yours.”
Rin returns the laugh and cheerfully switches crepes with his brother.

“T’m glad you are feeling better.” Rin remarks, drawing Yukio’s attention. At his look, Rin gives a shrug. “I noticed you were feeling down for quite some time. Tired even. Figured something bad happened but you didn’t offer anything for it.”

Yukio looks down at the matcha ice cream and azuki crepe in his hands. Taking a bite to prolong his response, Yukio thinks it over.

“Yeah. Something...was bothering me.” He lies, not wanting to fully explain the ins and outs of actual exorcism. Not to mention he still cannot tell Rin the truth of what’s really going on. “But...this helped. A lot.”

Rin grins. “I'm glad. I guess Oyaji still has brains in there uh?”

Yukio chokes a bit on his next bite, then laughs. “Nii-san!”

The two brothers exchange grins as the fireworks go off, turning as one to watch it.

Unconsciously, Yukio reaches out his hand and touches Rin’s. Without thinking as well, Rin twines his fingers with his brother's.

A wonderful late summer festival comes to a close, with the two brothers both in much better moods than at the start.

Something that delights their father, who is hiding in a nearby thicket and taking pictures while giggling. This is definitely going in the photo book!

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and please comment below for another new chapter please!
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Again, thank you SO MUCH for your lovely comments. They give me an energy boost and they make me want to post more chapters!

Yet another new Card shows up...plot just worked out that another would come this chapter. Also, there is a Shout Out in here: can you spot it?

I hope you enjoy!

It's a particularly hot day, which means everyone is feeling just a bit lazy and wanting to take it easier.

So having someone enter the café looking stressed and rushed is alarm raising to Rin.

The man who enters like that looks like he's probably in college, with a clean shaven face and soft brown hair with bright blue streaks painted into the locks of hair that frame his face. He's wearing a simple button-up green shirt, blue jeans, and sneakers with a bag slung over his shoulders. He's carrying a tablet in his hands and keeps glancing behind him as if he thinks something is following him.

Rin frowns at that, and accepts the menu from another of his co-workers before approaching the man with a smile on his face.

“Good day. Do you want anything to drink?” Rin asks cheerfully. He is a bit disturbed by how the man jumps, as if he didn't see him coming.

“Oh. Yes. Some iced tea would be lovely.” The man looks outside again, looking almost terrified.

Rin frowns at that. “Is...something the matter?”

'I don't think anyone would like it if it was yakuza after this guy or something...' Rin considers that and thinks that even if he can handle yakuza, the act of that would make him lose his job. 'Rather not have that...my time is almost up and I want to be called over again for next summer.'

“Aaah...well...um...” The man looks up at Rin and something seems to click in his head. “Well...my name is Hanamura Hibiki and I...I think...no I know I'm being stalked.”

Rin stares. “What?”

Chapter 16: Stalking Is Not A Good Way To Make Friends

Rin had no clue what to say in response to that revelation. Luckily Hibiki didn't want an immediate response, instead devouring a large amount of sweets before leaving the café.

But not before asking Rin if he would like to talk to him for a bit. Specifically about his strange stalker announcement that still has Rin wheeling over.
Since Rin's shift is about to end for the day, Rin is easily able to accept and gets an address to go to.

Rin is slightly surprised to find it belongs to an internet café, but luckily mentioning Hibiki makes it easy for him to find the guy.

Rin pauses in the doorway of the private room Hibiki took and stares as he sees him bent over on his tablet. He looks up at times at something on the computer screen, but mostly focuses on the tablet.

Clearing his throat, Rin knocks on the door frame, making Hibiki jump and then relax at seeing Rin. “Oh it's you. Come in.”

Rin steps in carefully, not wanting to bang into anything. Settling on the couch/bed behind the chair Hibiki is in, Rin curls up so as to take as little space as possible. Hibiki sets aside the tablet for now and turns the chair around to face Rin.

“So...I guess you are wondering why I told you that and asked you to come over here...” Hibiki laughs awkwardly. “First of all, no I'm not some creep. I just...something about you seems right for telling this.”

“Seems right?” Rin tilts his head at that. “What does that mean?”

Hibiki scratches the back of his head. “Afraid I can't really explain. At times I just Know things and I can't make heads or tails of it. But if I follow it, things work out.”

“Ooookay.” Rin blinks slowly, processing that. “So, you mentioned something about a stalker.”

“Yeah. And a very weird one.” Hibiki bends over and pulls up his bag from underneath a recessed section. Rummaging through it, he pulls out a collection of discs.

Rin sits up straight as they are revealed, all the discs humming to his senses very much like a Sakura Card and also looking a bit crystal in design. Like they are made from crystals though a mere touch proves otherwise.

“These...are all videos of me. Innocent enough, but the way they are filming...it's all very strange.” Hibiki shakes his head and pulls out one more. That one is wrapped in plastic. “I haven’t looked at this one yet, too scared to. They just show up in my mailbox all the time. Why I'm hiding in internet cafés right now. But they still managed to find me.”

Rin holds out a hand and accepts one of the discs. Looking it over, Rin frowns. ‘Definitely magic...’ Rin peers at it, examining it in the light. 'But this is weird looking...'

“You can play these?” Rin asks, looking back up at Hibiki.

“Yeah...as long as I have a disc reader it can handle it.” Hibiki rubs a hand over his face. “Which is half the problem. I don't know why I keep watching them, maybe I've been looking for clues or something. But I can't deal with this anymore and if another one shows up...”

“It's been stressful.” Rin realizes.

Hibiki nods, looking glum. “It doesn't feel dangerous. Not at all. But the stress of having a stalker is not going to go away any time soon. And I've got a deadline to meet too.”

“For what?” Rin questions, interest peaked at that.

Hibiki manages a smile at that. “I'm trying to enter a contest for future manga-ka. I've always wanted
to be one, and though I've been mostly doing designs for company's for advertisements and mascots
to pay for my college education, I would really like to pursue my dream job. The contest has a good
rep and the winners or even runner-ups tend to do well after it.”


“Yeah,” Hibiki's smile drops as he speaks, “but between the stress and all my ideas just not feeling
right…” He sighs, then focuses fully on Rin again.

“So…I think you are the one who can help me. Do you think you can figure things out with these
discs and find and stop my stalker?”

Rin looks at the discs arrayed out in front of him. Then gives a grin to Hibiki and holds out his hand.

“You got good instincts. Yeah, I can help you.” Rin's grins widens. “And I’m glad to.”

Hibiki looks relieved and takes Rin's hand, who flushes slightly at the contact. “Good. Do you have
a cellphone?”

At Rin's head-shake, Hibiki shrugs. “That's fine.” Hibiki pulls a notebook out of his bag and rips a
paper out, scribbling on it with a pen. “You can still get in contact me with my number.”

“That's true.” Rin looks at all the discs and sweats. “Do you have a plastic bag by chance? I think I'm
going to need one…”

Hibiki laughs and pulls a spare plastic bag out from somewhere. Rin quickly collects the discs in it
then waves a goodbye to Hibiki, quickly heading outside and jogging as soon as he hits the street.

Reaching up to his ear, he turns on the “earring”. A moment later has Kero pick up.

“Oi, Kero, I just found signs of another Card. I need your help. Is there a Card that can create videos
or something?” Rin quickly asks as soon as he knows Kero is paying attention.

The groan and thunk on the other end of the line makes Rin raise his eyebrows. “Kero?”

“Oh yes...yes there is...” Kero sounds exasperated. “Oh hello headache…”

Rin wonders what exactly he's getting into.

And what exact trouble poor Hibiki is in.

“So the Card's Record...what's so bad about that one? From you said about the powers, it just is able
to play super cameraman.” Rin points out to Kero as he sets up the system. While they have time –
and everyone is busy elsewhere – they are planning on quickly going through all the discs Rin got
from Hibiki for clues on how to catch Record.

Kero rubs his face with his hands. “You have no idea...the problem is that Sakura based Record off
of her best friend Daidōji Tomoyo. She...always had a camera if she could to video Sakura's exploits
or even daily activities. That's what inspired Sakura to make a Card like her.”

“That doesn't sound that bad.” Rin observes. “Good way to make memories.”

Kero sighs. “That's true...if Tomoyo wasn't basically a stalker in disguise in regards to her video
makin'...her influence is too strong there and so when free Record tends to follow around people they
find interestin'. And make movies of their lives. And just be a nuisance…”
Rin sweats. *So that's why Hibiki has to deal with the stalker antics.* “Well, it should be fine yes?” Rin mentions cheerfully and hopefully. “Just have a bunch of daily life footage to go through to get a clue to where Record is hiding.”

Rin then looks at the pile of discs and sweats. “Make that hours and hours of it...”

“We'll skim. Otherwise it will just get borin' and we'll miss anythin' important.” Kero says firmly, settling down as Rin closes the lid on the PS2 and settles back to watch the first disc of many.

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Rin groans as they finally finish another disc. At first it was somewhat interesting, seeing as he actually ended up learning quite a bit about Hibiki and saw how things took its toll on him – making Rin more determined to stop Record before they do more damage – but as time goes on, there's only so much of daily life he can take.

‘This is why shows and stories skip ahead to the interesting bits...’ Rin groans in realization. *It's too painful otherwise.*

Picking up the last disc, Rin is briefly delayed as he has to unwrap it from the plastic covering first. Once he's managed to get past the wrapping – which includes some curse words – he finally is able to put the final disc in.

“We still don't have any clues...” Rin whines as the disc boots up.

“Well, if we get nothin' here, we'll have to re-watch them again...” Kero groans. “Record is way too good at hidin'...”

Rin lets out a tired moan as agreement. Aside from the discs, Record doesn't leave magical traces. With Rin still being young and in training, not to mention not Record's master, no way he can find the Card outside of logic and mundane looking.

As they tiredly watch Hibiki go through his morning routine, Rin blinks as he realizes that the “camera” isn't going off as usual when it comes time for him to have a bath.

Rin doesn't quite realize what that means until Hibiki is naked and soaping up. It hits him as the “camera” zooms in on the naked flesh and Rin ends up squeaking and covering his face with his eyes.

“Oh. Well. That's new.” Kero notes wryly, a twitch forming above his eye as he realizes just how far Record has gotten in regards to stalking Hibiki.

“But...wuah? Aaaa...” Rin can't even form a sentence, slowly turning a shade of red that would give tomatoes bouts of jealousy as he can't quite take his eyes from the close up on the fact that, yes, Hibiki apparently works out and has muscles underneath his simple clothing.

“...aren't you goin' to turn it off?” Kero looks up at Rin, laughter gathering behind his eyes.

“Guah!” Rin rushes to shut off the system, still beet red. “That...it's good that Hibiki didn't see that.”

“You okay Rin?” Kero wonders, tilting his head.

“I'm...fine.” Rin's voice cracks at the last. “So...any idea where Record might be?”

Kero looks at Rin for a long moment, seeing how desperate he is for a topic change, then sighs. “Well...Ah think Ah know now that Record can't be too far from that Hibiki guy. Aside
from...that...” Rin goes red again at the thought and covers his face in his hands, “there's the fact Record didn't have any time findin' Hibiki again after he started hoppin' from place to place.”

“Yeah...” Rin takes a deep breath and slowly calms down. “So, Record's got to be hiding somewhere near Hibiki. But how do we get them out?”

Kero eyes Rin for a moment. “Ah have a plan but you aren't goin' to like it...”

Rin stares at Kero. And realization hits.

“You don't mean--?”

“Yeah. Gonna have to play stalker ourselves.” Kero deflates at his own words, knowing just how bad it sounds and actually is.

Rin covers his face in his hands again and bemoans the life he leads.

Since stalking has never been on the list of activities Rin ever thought or even considered doing, it's not like he can jump right into it.

Besides, he's got one more day of work at the café to pull.

So instead of immediately going off, Rin ends up assigning day one of the “I-don't-want-to-stalk-but-kinda-have-to” plan to Kero.

Much to the miniature guardian's distress.

'I think it was more because he wanted to play more games...' Rin can't help but be exasperated with that aspect of Kero. So easy for him to get distracted by gag manga or video games.

'Please don't get distracted in following Hibiki...

“Oh, Okumura-kun!” Rin leaps out of his thoughts and looks over at Watanabe.

“Need you back in the kitchen surprisingly.” Watanabe tells him. “The other cook called in sick.”

“Aah...” Rin glances around, then nods. “Sure. I don't mind.”

“Heh. Figured you won't. You do seem to like working in the back more than the front.” Watanabe observes cheerfully.

Rin laughs. “W-well, I do know more about cooking than dealing with people...”

“Awww, but you are amazing really.” Watanabe gives his hair a ruffle, then pushes him forward. “Go on. Get to work. I need to go supervise a delivery that just came in.”

“Right, right.” Rin quickly switches the smaller waitstaff apron for the bigger kitchen staff one, and settles in front of his normal section. The first order to handle comes in quickly and Rin immediately starts grabbing the ingredients and fixing it up.

Whistling as he goes, Rin makes a point of thinking happy, positive thoughts as he cooks. It always seems to help with the flavour.

As Rin is back in the kitchen for his last day, Kero is groaning. Wearing a pair of sunglasses, the
little flying guardian settles in a high window and looks through to locate Hibiki in his class.

It's with a sigh of relief that Kero sees him.

'Yay! Ah've been lookin' fer him fer like ever...' Kero settles down to watch Hibiki through the window, as the budding manga-ka pays attention to the lecture and writes down notes.

Of course, if Kero hadn't been distracted by the bakery on campus – and doing his best to flinch as many sweets as possible without getting caught – he wouldn't have lost Hibiki in the crowd.

Kero yawns. Even the little bit of the lecture that he can hear sounds super boring. Kero then pinches his cheek hard.

“Uh uh. No way. Rin will stomp on me if Ah fall asleep!” Kero thinks back to how Rin had laid out everything he is and isn’t to do today.

“And no falling asleep!” is the last instruction he was given, with Rin glaring at him for extra effect. “If you fall asleep, you are going to lose him and we'll have nothing.”

Kero sighs, slaps his cheek, and focuses once again on Hibiki.

Kero frowns as he sees something flash in the lecture hall. Lifting the sunglasses up, he presses his face up to the window and stares extra hard inside.

But if there was something there, it's gone now.

It's a tired Rin who plods home, heading for the train station and yawning. He had to stay an extra hour by ill luck.

'I hope Watanabe-san grills that idiot hard.' Rin grumbles. 'Of all the things to do, you are supposed to call in when you can't come in.' Even Rin knows that and it's his first job.

'Well...got paid and so ends my last day.' Rin grins at the envelope in his hands before stuffing it into his bag for safe keeping. 'Even got a request to come in again next summer!'

Rin swings his bag briefly before settling down and walking quickly into the train station. He curses as he misses the first train, and double checks the schedule before settling in for a ten minute wait for the next one that leads to his neighbourhood.

A conversation beside him peeks his interest, and he turns slightly to listen in to the two women who are gossiping together.

“Hamada's shop is finally closing down.” The first one brings up.

The second gives a huff. “Well, about time. Hamada has been trying out to outrun those debts for so long I'm not surprised he is closing down.”

“Funny thing, someone already bought the old store before he closed down. Hamada was delaying for a month already by the time they finally came and got him to start closing down.”

“Really? That does sound like him.” The second adjusts her blouse and then looks back up. “The question is what kind of shop will be replacing that?”

“I don't know. For now, a lot of renovations are going to happen to get that old place back up to standards.”
“Oh it's going to be nice to have something that won't fall down in the neighbourhood...”

Rin turns his attention away at that point as they dive into talking about actual people in the neighbourhood, and because his train has finally arrived. Squeezing on in the rush of people, Rin yelps a bit as he gets staggered momentarily by the crowd, which includes the two women he overheard talking to his ire.

And then he's safe and the train is moving.

“Hey Rin, welcome back!” Shirō goes to ruffle Rin's head, only for him to dodge it. Pouting for a moment, the priest then grins. “How did your day go?”

Rin rolls his eyes. “Pretty good. Except for having to stay longer than I should have.”

“So that's why you are late. Thought you might have dropped by an ice cream shop or something for a treat.” Shirō follows Rin as he wanders inside, heading to the kitchen on automatic.

“Nah. Some idiot forgot to call in about how he couldn't come in.” Rin waves that off and opens the freezer to get at the frozen choco-bananas in there, having made a new batch recently since they were a hit last time.

“That sounds bad.” Shirō muses, then turns to eye Rin as he bites into the banana. “So, what are you going to do with the last of your summer vacation?”

Rin blinks slowly and swallows his mouthful of banana. “Well...’ Well I need to actually stalk someone to find a Card but don't have any other ideas...’

“You can finish off your homework.” Shirō suggests, enjoying how Rin shudders at that.

One bad thing about the gaming Rin and Yukio are doing together; it puts Yukio in the same place as Rin during his free time and they always end up stopping halfway through to do some of Rin's homework.

'I really would like to know how Yukio's already done the ass. He's just as busy as me with his own job and cram school.' Rin grumbles to himself. ‘Maybe.’ He says finally. “I think I'll just go outside and enjoy the sun or something. Walks sound nice and fill up the time.”

Shirō chuckles. “That's true. Just finish off the last of your homework first.”

“Fine!” Rin throws his hands up in the air. “I'll do some of it right now.”

Shirō covers his face in his hands, overcome with laughter, as Rin storms upstairs to handle the remainder of his homework.

Unseen to Shirō, Rin can't help a small smile at how he actually is almost done his homework for once. Generally he spends the last two days of summer running around screaming and trying to finish things on time.

'Glad to be getting better there...' Rin's grin widens. 'And somehow Yukio makes more sense after a few rounds of games to relax him.'

That cheerful thought in mind, Rin decides to tackle the last of his homework as best he can without Yukio. Might put his brother in a good frame of mind when he has to double check Rin's work.
Rin is frowning down at a math problem when a tap at the window makes Rin look up. “Kero!”

Standing up, Rin reaches over and unlatches the window, opening it enough to let Kero in. The small mascot-like guardian settles on the desk with a sigh of relief.

“So how did it go?” Rin asks as he re-latches the window and turns back to Kero, double-taking at the sunglasses on him.

“Fine. Didn't learn anythin' though, except confirm what Hibiki does during the day.” Kero sighs, removing the sunglasses and wiping his brow. “Thought Ah might've seen somethin' but not sure.”

Rin sighs. “I guess it would be too much to hope it could get done in one day...well, I'll be joining tomorrow, so I guess I need more details.”

Kero nods. “Yeah and Ah'll give em to you. But first...” Rin blinks as Kero grabs onto Rin's sleeve. “Can Ah have something sweet and cold? Ah'm tired and hot...”

Rin laughs despite himself, and stands, picking up Kero along the way and settling him on his shoulder. “Fine, fine. I'll go downstairs and make us some snacks. I need brain food anyways.” Rin tosses a scowl at his math homework before exiting his shared room.

As he goes down the stairs, he passes by Yukio. “Oh, hey Yukio!”

The younger brother slows down and smiles at Rin. “Nii-san. What are you doing?”

“Getting a snack. Been trying to handle math.” Rin makes a disgusted face at that, which makes Yukio's smile shift and widen to a more amused one.

“That's wonderful Nii-san. You are actually working on your homework. Might even get things done before the end of vacation.” Yukio teases him.

Rin waves him off. “Whatever. You want something too?”

“That would be nice.” Yukio considers his last mission with a frown and finds himself thankful for summer almost being over. Since he's not going to True Cross Academy, the chances of him being put on a mission while school is in session drops. And even if he does get missions, they aren't as intense as the ones he deals with during break.

“Anything in particular?” Rin asks, ignorant to Yukio's thoughts.

“Anything is fine.” Yukio assures his brother, then starts climbing the stairs again.

“Sorry Kero.” Rin whispers to the mascot as they read the end of the stairs and Rin turns towards the kitchen. “Going to have to wait until night for us to finish our talk.”

“That's fine, as long as you can still feed me!” Kero hisses back, making a giggle escape from Rin at his whine.

The next day has Rin back to feeling like the worst. The sunglasses Kero forced on his face do not help at all with the feeling as he tries to casually watch Hibiki as he walks from his current internet café to the train station.

The ice pop he's sharing with Kero is only so good at keeping Rin's spirits up, as he reluctantly pushes away from the wall and walks after Hibiki, trying to not give the impression of a stalker and tossing the remains of his ice pop into a nearby garbage can.
“I hate you so much right now.” Rin hisses at Kero, who’s pointedly ignoring him in favour of watching Hibiki behind his own sunglasses like a hawk.

“Shhh...quick, don't want to miss the train!” Kero taps Rin's cheek and Rin sighs and speeds up, getting to the train in time to slip on.

“Which stop it is that he gets off?” Rin whispers to Kero.

“The third one from where we got on.” Kero raises himself slightly to look around the train cabin they are in. Pressed in tight almost like sardines, the heat of the train is almost unbearable for Rin who is wishing for the trip to be shorter.

Eventually the right stop comes and Rin pours out with the rest, racing to not only get in the clear but to get a good spot to look for Hibiki.

“Come on, come on...there!” Rin finally spots his target and takes off, at least a little relieved that Hibiki should be at the college for quite some time.

Rin is, however, blocked in regards to getting on campus and ends up grumbling away from the security check point, before pulling out his Cards.

“Illusion to hide me and Fly to get in position.” Rin mutters to himself, activating both Cards and taking off to the sky with Kero beside him. It takes a moment to spot Hibiki again, and then Rin has to loop around for a clear space to land. Landing in a small garden, he deactivates both Fly and Illusion.

“Illusion won't work here...would run into people after all and that gets noticed.” Rin mutters to himself and looks through the Cards he has. Eventually he lights upon Mask. “This should work. Mask, make me look like another college student!”

The Card activates in a flash of light and Mask's physical form lands in Rin's outstretched hands. Giving a firm expression at the Mask, Rin carefully places it on.

It fill weird, almost like he's wearing a suit as much as shifting over to the form. Rin can sorta feel Mask on him, but also knows he's stretching out and making a face with different facial features.

That done, Rin looks around and then sneaks out of the garden and, with Kero hiding in his bag, goes off to find the right classroom.

'Maybe I'll be able to sneak into the lecture hall.' Rin considers, frowning as he remembers he doesn’t really know how college works. He shrugs and decides to trust to luck and his Cards to get him out of any impromptu messes.

And thus does Rin's day as a stalker begin.

There's no lunch bell in college, but it's obvious that it is time for that despite that. The last lecture of the morning ends before noon and there's a break period during that from what Rin is hearing from the others.

Rin breaths out a sigh of relief. Staying awake during each lecture was painful, literally so as Kero had to hit Rin more than once so he wouldn't fall asleep. Aside from making it so Rin would miss Hibiki, even though Mask hides who he really looks like a “student” falling asleep in class isn't a good idea at all.
But with the lectures over for the morning – and according to Kero the end of the lectures Hibiki attends – Rin is able to clear out and follow Hibiki out of the lecture hall.

Half expecting Hibiki to go to the campus food centre to get food, Rin is thrown off balance as Hibiki suddenly changes direction to exit the campus.

“Oh you got to be kidding me.” Rin speeds up and just manages to catch up to Hibiki in time to follow him through the security gate and see him turn right on the street.

“Why did he pick today to go somewhere else?” Rin groans, looking around for a moment, before taking off after Hibiki. He curses as it's crowded on the street and cranes his neck, trying to spot Hibiki in the crowd.

While he's doing that, he doesn't notice someone talking to some friends and not looking to where he is going, until it's too late and he sends Rin sprawling into the street.

Mask falls with a clatter off of Rin, before turning into light flecks and back into a Card that floats back to Rin's hand.

Rubbing his head, Rin groans and looks around. He spots Kero on the sidewalk still, having been knocked off by Rin's sprawl, but is still dazed by the sudden movement so that Rin doesn't quite register where he is.

“Look out!”

That panicked cry has Rin whirling around and seeing the truck coming his way. Freezing, Rin lifts his hand, about to show off his strength to survive the incoming vehicle, only for someone to grab him and roll off the street with him just in time.

Rin lies stunned underneath the man for a moment, gasping as what almost happened registers to him. The crosswalk sign changes at that point and, hidden amongst the crowd, Kero races over and cuddles up to Rin.

“What a relief...” The man lifts off Rin and blinks.

Rin stares back and mentally groans, face flushing at who is above him and even saved him from dealing with a car accident.

“Okumura-kun?” Hibiki looks down at the Junior High student beneath him in shock. “What are you doing here?”

Rin lets his head fall back to the pavement with a heavy thunk.

Not too long after that embarrassing incident, Rin finds himself sharing a small booth with Hibiki at a nearby restaurant. A family restaurant at that, one that's apparently popular considering how packed the place is.

Rin refuses to look at Hibiki, instead focusing on the menu he was given and wondering what he can afford.

“Don't worry. I'll be paying for it.” Rin looks up, surprised and Hibiki laughs at his look. “No I didn't read your mind. Just your face. It's pretty open.”

Rin ducks his head and blushes. He then focuses on the menu again, this time considering what he
can ask for Hibiki to buy him. This actually drops the price range for him due to Rin worrying over what Hibiki can afford and Rin considers that he might just get a super small dessert item to sneak to Kero so he doesn't complain too much.

“Decided?” Hibiki asks, setting aside his own menu and looking at Rin.

Rin starts and nods. “Um...I think I'll have pizza. Um...the number 3 set. And a chocolate milkshake.”

Hibiki smiles. “That's perfectly okay.” He turns and calls out to a waitress, who arrives and quickly takes Rin's order then turns to Hibiki.

“Teriyaki burger set for me with cold oolong tea.” Is all Hibiki asks for.

Once the waitress is gone, Hibiki turns back to Rin with a curious expression on his face.

“So, what were you doing there?” Hibiki asks casually.

Rin gulps and looks down. Kero looks up at him and shrugs. He has no clue how to handle this himself. Rin sighs and looks up, deciding to try a bit of the truth.

“Looking...like you requested...for your stalker...”

Hibiki stares at his red face. And ends up laughing as it clicks for him. “Oh...aahahaa...you must have felt terrible. Like a stalker yourself. It's alright, really. Did you find anything?”

Rin shakes his head, looking guilty there. “No. Sorry. I've been trying but nothing has shown up yet...”

Hibiki hums and pulls out his tablet, as if he's not thinking about it, and powers it on. “Thanks for your efforts anyways. I'm going to be returning home tonight since the internet cafés aren't helping.”

Rin slowly nods, looking curiously at Hibiki's tablet. “What's that for anyways?”

“This? It's my artist tablet.” Hibiki begins, showing an in-process set of panels to Rin after a bit of fiddling. He's careful to keep it out of direct reach of Rin though. “I only use it for this and it's very handy. Don't go through ink and paper like mad, portable, and has a very nice artist system installed just for this.”

“That's super cool.” Rin stares at the tablet and for a moment sees a strange flash of light. Blinking, Rin is about to investigate that, but their meals arrive then.

Rin settles back with his two slices of teriyaki chicken, mayo, and corn pizza and the salad on the side. The milkshake is pushed down a bit, hopefully enough out of sight for Kero to get at it while Hibiki enjoys his burger and fries.

For a long time, they are just too immersed in the food to speak. Then, swallowing, Rin brings up a question, “Do you ever let anyone near your tablet?”

Hibiki looks up at that and shakes his head. “No. Bit paranoid about it but well...before I got the tablet, I used to get my art stuff trashed at times by people. So I've gotten into the habit of not only having it always on me but making sure no one but me touches it.”

Rin looks over at the tablet, suddenly realizing what he was sensing. 'Of course! If Record wants to be around him and not be shook off they would pick something that allows them to always be there.'
Hibiki doesn't notice that, instead staring at the chocolate milkshake. Or rather where there was a chocolate milkshake, the tall glass now empty. “Wow. I didn't even see you finish that...”

Rin sweats and looks down at Kero, who is lying on his lap with an engorged stomach and chocolate and whipped cream on his face, making happy sounds.

“Err...yeah...” Rin returns to his salad and probably stabs it a little too hard with his fork to get another bite.

Hibiki looks confused for a moment, then shrugs it off. If Rin is embarrassed by his appetite that's fine with him. A healthy appetite is always good.

“So the Record is hiding in Hibiki's tablet?” Kero looks thoughtful on that. “That actually makes sense.”

“The problem is I need to get Record without him seeing that...and he said he's going back home sooo...” Rin droops at that. “And it's not like he's a student at my school...can't ask Tsukishiro-sensei for his address...”

Kero agrees silently with that, though he briefly frowns at the mention of the name Tsukishiro. “So is there any way you can find him?”

Rin considers it and goes to look at the discs that are bad in the plastic bag. Then remembers something, and scrambles to find the piece of paper with Hibiki’s number on it.

“I can ask him! If I want to return the discs at the right time, he'll have to give directions to his house!” Rin cheers at that, waving the piece of paper around victoriously. Standing, he heads downstairs, looking around nervously to see if anyone is going to be near the home phone.

“What are you up to Rin?” Shirō waits as Rin jumps about a foot in the air from shock.

“Um...ah...I need to borrow the phone.” Rin sweats a bit as Shirō stares at him.

“What for?” Shirō asks, raising an eyebrow as Rin begins to look nervous.

“Well...I borrowed something from someone and I need to return it....but well um...I forgot to get their home address?” Rin offers, looking more and more nervous.

Shirō stares at Rin for a moment. Then grins. “Aha. I see. Very well. Go get to the phone and call your friend.”

Shirō snickers as he leaves. 'Rin's already at that age hm? Hehe, he grows fast.'

Rin blinks, wondering what Shirō is thinking and not understanding it at all. He snaps out of his daze quickly and goes to get the phone before someone else needs it.

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“Hello? Um. It's Okumura Rin.”

“Ah. Okumura-kun? What is it?”

“Well...” Rin squirms, not liking the half lie he's giving. ‘Though it's true from a certain angle.’ “I need to return those discs...I mean...if my family finds them...”

“Oh. Right, that wouldn't be good.” Rin can hear Hibiki using something electronic – his tablet again – and then he finally answers. “So where should I come to pick it up?”
“Um...would it be okay if I visit your house? To um...” Rin scuffs his shoe against the floor. “I don't think I can...my day is rather busy and um...”

“Okay.” Hibiki sounds amused. “I'm fine with that. Got a spare piece of paper handy?”

Rin looks down at the paper in his hands and flips it over. He then stretches and grabs a pen from a nearby container. “Yeah.”

Hibiki carefully lists off his address, Rin checking twice to make sure he has the address right. Rin squints at the paper and reads it aloud, getting a yes from Hibiki in regards to it being right.

“Um. Thank you! So...when should I come over?”

“Around four in the afternoon sounds good.” Hibiki says after some thought. “I got morning class and I need to do my homework after that, on top of the commute, so that is probably the best time.”

“Got it! Thanks, see you tomorrow!” After Hibiki says goodbye, Rin sighs in relief and looks down at the address, feeling a quite a bit guilty over deceiving Hibiki.

'Sorry Hibiki...I'm going to have to visit you secretly tonight.'

Rin shakes off his melancholy, reminding himself it's for a good cause, and returns upstairs. He should have a nap first so he'll be wide awake when it comes time to sneak out to get Record finally.

The night breeze is starting to cool just enough to be comfortable, instead of the hot and humid day of before the sun set.

'Well...being high up in the sky probably helps.' Rin muses, shifting slightly on his winged staff and pulling out the address and a map from the small bag he brought with him. Kero floats beside him, watching as Rin frowns and turns around the map quite a bit.

“Damn.” Rin looks down for a moment, then angles Fly up a bit more and pushing it up higher into the sky. Kero follows after a moment's pause, looking at Rin confused.

The answer comes quickly, as Rin is looking between the map and the illuminated streets below. The height makes it look much more like the map that is illuminated by Glow so Rin can see it.

“Got it!” Rin flashes a quick grin and shoves the map and address back into the bag, gripping Fly tightly. “Here we go!”

Kero only has a moment to grab onto Rin, before the staff falls from the sky, the miniature guardian wailing in fright as they drop down to the right neighbourhood at street level, slowing down and stopping the fall just in time.

“That was fun!”

“Buah.” Is Kero's response to that, looking rather sick and pale.

Rin gently steps off his staff and dismisses Fly back to Card shape. Glow follows soon after, Rin thanking the card before turning back to look at the streets. Except for the streetlights, it's very dark in this suburban area, giving Rin some shadows to duck into at times as he makes his way towards Hibiki's house.

Or rather his parents' house. Hibiki hasn't gotten around to buying his own apartment yet and probably won't until he's finished with college and thus has extra time to get a job or something to
Rin hesitates a moment, looking around the house and trying to figure out which upper-story window belongs to the right person. Rin doesn't really know much about Hibiki in the end – neither does Hibiki know much about him – which brings into sharp contrast what Rin has been entrusted with handling. After a moment, Rin calls up Fly again so he can fly around the house and peer into the windows as best he can.

The first room he looks into obviously belongs to Hibiki's parents and Rin quickly moves along. The next window is to a guest room, and the final one has curtains over the window, blocking the view.

Rin hesitates for a moment, then steels himself. Waving to Kero, he comes up just as Rin pulls out two Cards. Kero looks impressed with Rin's choice – Through to get through the window and Silent to mask his sounds – as Rin quietly activates the Cards and they settle over him and Kero. Shivering at the strange sensation of Through, Rin enters through the window as if it is Jello, the window rippling as he enters.

And there is Hibiki, sleeping quite demurely in his bed. Rin mouths a curse word as he notices that Hibiki's tablet is plugged in beside Hibiki.

Glancing down, Rin picks his way through the messy room of Hibiki's, making a face at the mess. 'Yeesh, I'm cleaner than him and Yukio complains all the time about my desk.'

Finally, Rin reaches the bed, and, peering at Hibiki and feeling embarrassed for intruding, he bends down and carefully unplugs the tablet.

He did not expect some kind of alarm to wail, falling back at that in shock.

“Hmph?” More terrifying, Hibiki is waking up and sits up in bed rubbing his eyes. “What...”

Rin panics. Which means he lashes out without thinking.

In this case, he lashes out with his magic, making Kero curse and nearly fall down as Rin's magic spreads out and hits everything in its way. Hibiki only has a moment to look at Rin, not truly registering who it is, and then he's sent flying back with a loud thump.

Rin is frozen for a moment, then scrambles over and looks over Hibiki. He sighs in relief as he finds he's okay, just unconscious, and then turns to the troublesome tablet.

And is surprised.

There's a strange girl floating in the air above it, with a camera glued to her eyes. Rin takes in the blue Chinese dress she is wearing, as well as the long loose purple hair that hangs around her shoulder, except for two pieces of hair that are bundled up into sharp points, rather like rabbit ears. She removes her bright pink eyes from the camera and beams at Rin.

“Oh that was simply so cute and marvellous!” She says happily.

Kero groans behind Rin as Rin stares at her. “Uh?”

“Aah. Kerberos-san!” She's immediately distracted by Kero and greets him pleasantly. “You look handsome as usual.”

Kero is immediately distracted by that and puffs out at that. “Well, yes. Can't beat perfection!”
“Um...excuse me?” Rin interrupts Kero's laughter and Record's taping of his antics. “You are...Record yes?”

“Why of course!” She brings a hand up to her cheek. “And you must be the Cardcaptor...you are much cuter than I even envisioned and I thought you would be super cute!”

Rin goes bright red at that. ‘Cute? Me!’

“Huah...Record, why are you stalking this guy?”

Record blinks and turns to look at Hibiki. “Stalking? Oh no! I just wanted him to know how wonderful he is!”

Rin stares. “What do you mean?”

“Well, he's such a hard worker. And though he's really picky about his art, he's very talented. He has so many lovely ideas and I'm certain he'll even win that contest he's going for. I wanted him to see what a wonderful person he is!”

“That's why you sent him those discs...” Rin realizes. “You wanted to show him...well, himself.”

“Of course.” Record's smile is demure there. “He's going to be amazing, just needs confidence!”

“But...doing it that way is not good.” Rin says, shaking his head. “You are scaring him like that.”

Record looks dismayed at that. “Oh no...I didn't mean...”

Rin grins. “I can tell that. How about I tell him what you meant? I think he'll buy it from me.”

“Which means you are going to seal me.” Record looks over at Hibiki and smiles. “He's going to shine. He has just enough of a magical gift that it shows.”

“Ah thought Ah felt some magic from him.” Kero says, looking over at Hibiki himself. “That's probably why he's able to Know stuff.”

Rin can't help the smile at that. “Really?” He then turns back to Record. “Well? You ready?”

Record sighs and the camera disappears. “Yes.”

She then smiles. “I'm looking forward to seeing more of your adventures! I'll have to ask Memory-kun for what happened before though!”

Rin sweats at that, then raises his staff. “Record, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

In a whirl of light, a new Card is in Rin's possession. Rin can't help but be happy to have it finally handled, and, pausing only a moment to plug in the tablet again, Rin activates Through to get out once more and leave the house.

Behind him, Hibiki opens his eyes and wonders at the strange dream he had...

Rin is nearly dancing with impatience after he rings the doorbell at Hibiki's place. Having to deal with homework first thing in the morning hadn't helped with Rin being in a good mood, though getting to play a game alongside Yukio afterwards had at least improved Rin's mood a bit. But a lot of his time had been made up of watching the clock in worry.

'Want to at least be somewhat honest...' Rin sighs, looking down at the bag in his hand. 'Besides,
The door finally opens and Rin looks up brightly. Only to falter when he sees the older woman there, looking disapprovingly down at Rin.

“What mischief are you up to?” She narrows her gaze, taking in Rin's rumpled and a bit tattered attire.

Rin stammers. “I-I...uh..th-that is...um...”

“I told you it's for me Kaa-san!” Hibiki manages to push past his mother and smiles at Rin. “There you are Okumura-kun!”

“Uh. Hi! I hope I'm not disturbing anyone?” Rin glances uneasily at the still frowning Mrs. Hanamura.

Hibiki sighs and looks over at his mother. “It's fine Kaa-san. Okumura-kun here is just bringing something back he borrowed from me.”

Mrs. Hanamura humphs. “Very well.” She walks away, muttering something about degenerate youth and how her son has been avoiding her too much.

Hibiki turns back to Rin, looking a bit embarrassed. “Sorry about that.”

“That's fine.” Rin stands there awkwardly for a moment, flushing, then holds out the bag. “Here. All the discs you gave me.”

‘Well, except for the last one...' Rin shudders at that thought, as Hibiki takes the bag back. “Oh and I finally got rid of your stalker.”

Hibiki stares at Rin. “You did? You did!” He adds, after looking at Rin for a moment. “Amazing. What did you do?”

“Talked to them. They...didn't mean to scare you. They...think you are amazing and going to go places. That you are a hard worker and very talented. Just wanted to show you that...” Rin scratches the back of his head and mentally groans. 'Ugh, that sounds so stupid.'

Hibiki is looking at Rin with a bit of amazement and slowly smiles. “I see...you know, that sounds right strangely enough. Thank you.” He glances down at the bag and grins. “I got so much to encourage me that I don't need any more.”

Rin beams. “That's great! Well, bye! I need to catch the train back before I get complaints about being out too late or something.” Rin turns at that and bounds over to the walkway, starting to head away from Hibiki.

“Wait.” Hibiki's voice makes Rin stops and turn back to look at him. “Can I ask just one more question?”

“Shoot.” Rin says, grinning nervously. ‘Please don't tell me he remembers last night...' 

“What do you think is the most important part of a story?” Hibiki questions Rin, serious faced.

Rin blinks, face taking on a thoughtful expression. “Well...the characters! That's the important part right? Since it's their story, they need to be good and...stuff.” Rin shrugs at the end. “Not sure how to put it.”
Hibiki seems to be considering that. “You know, that's perfect. Thanks Okumura-kun. Goodbye...and good luck.”

Rin tilts his head at that. “Good luck to you too!”

Rin quickly leaves the house and neighbourhood behind after that, racing and jumping over obstacles in a much better mood.

“You are just so cute!” Record squeals, nearly making Rin fall over. “Such a kind and thoughtful thing, helping Hanamura-san like that! Rin-kun, you just helped inspire a story!”

“Wha...what are you doing out here?” Rin hisses at her, looking around wildly.

Record smiles. “Don't worry. Only though with enough magical talent can see me!”

“Never mind that, turn back into Card form!” Rin sighs as Record pouts and does as she's told, Rin catching her and placing her back in the card holster. 'Dammit Kero you could have warned me she can do that...'

Behind Rin, Hibiki rushes upstairs and is working fiercely on his tablet. A dream and Rin's words apparently were the missing ingredients to finally figuring out a story concept that he can fully embrace and dive into.

Back at the house, Rin settles down for a session of gaming with Yukio.

“So what game are we to play?” Yukio wonders as he looks through the games. Rin freezes for a moment as he nearly picks out a certain case, but sighs in relief as he goes past it.

“This looks interesting...” Yukio holds up the game but frowns. “Only one player though.”

“We can switch.” Rin offers, taking the case from Yukio. 'Okami uh?' “Besides, this looks really interesting.”

“That sounds fair.” Yukio settles beside Rin after he's finished putting the disc in and watches as the credits roll and the introduction scene plays, making him raise his eyebrow in surprise.

Rin, on the other hand, is hooked immediately and completely forgets about how close Yukio came to finding the last disc of Record's.

It's not like Rin can destroy the magical artifact, so he's stuck hiding it until further notice.

With all the games it is surrounded by, the chances of it being found are quite low.

If Rin is careful enough.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please leave a comment below for the next chapter.

Now, something important: If any of you like Rizumo(Rin/Izumo) as a pairing (or
hinted pairing in this case), an interesting take on teen pregnancy, and loads of drama and secrets and secret plotting, please check out my best friend Gloomiebunny's "Chance". The plot is that drunk stupidity results in Rin and Izumo having unprotected sex before both enter True Cross Academy, said drunk stupidity means they don't remember and shame keeps Izumo from looking at her bed partner as she scampers out early. And then she turns out to be pregnant at school and all the drama of her dealing with that...while coincidence results in Rin meeting Izumo for "the first time" and helping her out with her pregnancy as best he can (usually by feeding her). And then things get complicated.

She has been dealing with some awful, awful comments there. She went on Hiatus since a) she was working on our Halloween Week so couldn't put some time into that much and b) she wasn't getting any good comments (or many comments at all) on her fic so she didn't believe anyone wanted it. She's been working with the same policy as me in fact, that comments will get new chapters posted.

Now, let's be honest, I am SUPER lucky to have all my commentors. I sincerely mean it every time when I saw "Thank you for the comment" because I am THANKFUL for that. More importantly, I have nice people commenting on my fics. GB isn't getting that and it HURTS. She knows there are people who like Rizumo, but even if they are reading it they aren't commenting and it HURTS to know that and see the lack there. Nice comments are wonderful; they say "hey, we hear you and we like this". No one posts in a vacuum. A writer will write, but lack of comments means they won't post any of it. That is the scary thing for writers (fic writers in particular); no comments/reviews. And it's why so many fics don't beyond being written up.

So, back to the start, if you like the idea of "Chance" and the pairing, please go check it out. She's going to attempt resuming posting tomorrow and she needs some love and support. If you don't like it, but know someone who might like it, go recommend it to them please! If you like it, go do some nice comments on things so she can feel less shitty about how things are going.

Thank you for listening to me.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Ever had a day where you wake up and there is this awful, ugly, horrible message to you in your inbox? Yeah, that's me and my best friend these days.

No, not any of you guys, you guys are flat out wonderful! Seriously appreciate each and every one of you and I remember you guys too. I always get a smile when I notice a repeating commentor and recognize them as so-and-so. It's very nice. And if I'm cranky at times to you, I am at times a cranky person and I'm working on it. But I'm stressed out from a) struggling to finally get a job b) trying to finish the 3rd arc by my personal deadline and c) the crazy that is going on with my best friend and how she seems to be a magnet for rude people right now. Is it because she's basically the only Rizumo fic writer right now?

None of this excuses me for being rude to any of you and I give out a blanket apology for that. Sorry for each and every time my words hurt you guys. I really need to work on my temper some more.

Anyways, here is another chapter written to recover from ch14! That chapter REALLY drained me. Also, yet another new Card! Somehow plot worked out that way.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Okumura Rin is a young mage in training, one with amazing power and potential blooming within him. He's also a good cook, amazing baker, and a wonderful brother and son, though dealing with issues like hiding his own magical talents from his family means things get awkward at times.

Rin's even managed a part-time job for the first time ever, with a request to come back next summer for him. Between that and the now twenty-eight Sakura Cards he has collected, Rin is on cloud nine.

But none of that helps when it comes to waking up on time.

"AAAAH! I'M GOING TO BE LATE!" That particular shout echos throughout the monastery and potentially through the neighbourhood, as Rin crashes out of bed and starts running around frantically.

Down below in the kitchen, Shirō doesn't bother muffling his laughter. "Man...he got used to sleeping in once the alarm was turned off fast."

Yukio sighs, glancing down at his bowl of miso soup – prepared by another of the monks since Rin was sleeping – then back up at the ceiling. 'Honestly Nii-san...I swear I woke you up...must have gone back to sleep...'

With a rumbling like a herd of cattle preceding him, Rin comes roaring down the stairs. "Aaah. I'm gonna be late."

"Your breakfast is ready here." Shirō calls, making Rin detour and sit at the table.

Putting his hands together, Rin gives a quick Itadakimasu before diving into the traditional breakfast
that was prepared as half treat and half energy boost for the first day of school after break.

“Second term of school.” Shirō grins. “Best keep up the good work you did last term. You managed
to not get any red marks and passed all your classes.”

Rin doesn’t reply, too busy chewing, but nods to show he understands.

“You got your summer homework in your bag Nii-san?” Yukio asks, setting down his meal and
giving a soft Gochisōsama.

“Yeah of course.” Rin glares at Yukio. “I made sure I was all packed last night, jeez. You even
supervised...”

Shirō chuckles at Rin's grumblings. “That's good. Well, best hurry. At this rate even Yukio is going
to be late.”

Both boys freeze and check the clock at those words.

“Oh fuck!” Rin slams his chopsticks on the table and swallows his final mouthful. “Gochisōsama!
Thanks for breakfast, gotta go!” Rin cries as he accepts the bento-bako he made last night from Shirō
before sprinting out of the kitchen.

Yukio is already at the door, putting his shoes on. Rin joins him just as quickly, slipping on his boots
and then going for the door. The scent of autumn is starting to sneak into the air, cooling the air
down enough that Rin makes sure he has his school jacket – and double checks that Yukio is the
same.

“C'mon Yukio!” Rin is somehow the one first out the door, much to Yukio's exasperation.

Sighing, Yukio follows after his brother, who is almost jogging as he leaves. “You don't have to rush
that much. We live in walking distance after...all...”

Yukio's words trail off as the boys stop, stunned by what they see.

Their usual path to school has been blocked off by construction equipment and signs. It completely
blocks the route they use, creating a barrier of holes, equipment, construction pylons, and workers.

“What is this?” Rin demands, glowering at the obstacles in their path.

Walking forward, Yukio notices that the street has been torn up and sighs. “Looks like we are going
to have to go around.”

Rin mutters something uncomplimentary about construction and construction workers, then looks
over at what they are doing. “They aren't even doing anything.”

He's telling the truth, as the forklift they are using to pry up the pieces of pavement is sitting idly
while the workers talk a little to the side of it.

Yukio frowns. “I'm sure they are just discussing what to do next Nii-san.”

“Oh it's broken.” Rin says loudly, annoyance colouring his voice.

He stands up straighter as the feeling of a Sakura Card hits him, startling him. Looking widely
around, he finally notices a figure next to the forklift.

It looks child sized, with fairy wings and a bright green robe with white stars on the bottom. The
hood is pulled back to show off a horned hairdo that is startlingly green in colour. The fairy – definitely a Sakura Card – taps her wand on the forklift. And vanishes.

Rin stares at where the Card was, wondering what that was. Then the sound of an engine running goes off and the forklift suddenly turns on. The workers whirl around, and stare stunned as the forklift starts up and, engine roaring, charges straight at them.

“Oh no...” Rin and Yukio can only watch in horror as the forklift charges at where the workers are, the workers scattering in its wake and screaming, straight through to a building nearby. Lucky for all, the building is empty as the forklift slams straight into it.

The tingling feeling of magic makes Rin's hair raise on the back of his neck, especially as the forklift starts to roar and attempt to back up. “No...stop!”

A ripple goes off, Rin's magic activating under his stress. To everyone's surprise, the forklift subsides, the engine shutting off and the strange feeling of magic in the air slowly dying as Rin's own magic fades.

“Nii-san...” Yukio stares at his brother. *That was amazing...an amazing coincidence at that.*

“Nii-san...” Yukio says again, Rin snapping his head over and looking panicked, strangely so to Yukio's eyes. “We are going to be late.”

Rin swallows. “Oh...right. Late. Bad.” Glancing back at the forklift which is now surrounded by puzzled construction workers, Rin then follows after Yukio to school.

With one troublesome Card firmly on his mind.

Chapter 17: If It Ain't Broke...

Rin finally settles into his seat with a sigh. After coming in late, both Rin and Yukio got delayed by a scolding right in front of the entire class.

*Well, Yukio could have avoided it but he stayed.* ‘Rin looks over with a smile at his brother who is sitting down beside him. *He didn't have to either.*’

Yukio spares a glare at the teacher, who used his illogical grudge against his brother as an excuse to berate him in front of the entire class for being late, then turns back to his work as class starts.

A poke from his brother has him looking at Rin and grinning as Rin sparkles up at him and mouths a thank you at him.

That puts Yukio in a better mood and so with a lighter heart he dives into his work.

Rin, however, frowns as he thinks back to the Card he saw that morning. With Kero back home and classes demanding his attention, Rin can't find out what Card it is.

*It did something to that bulldozer though.*’ Rin thinks, tapping his pen to his lips thoughtfully. He then pulls his brain back to the present as the teacher starts talking.

Rin glowers at said teacher, then smirks. Said teacher notices it and twitches and stumbles in a sentence. Rin finds that plenty amusing, but seeing Yukio's exasperation at Rin about to torment the teacher again, Rin sighs and swallows down that impulse.

The teacher seems relieved by that when he notices Rin is back to paying attention like a normal
student. Or as normal as Rin can be.

“Now, let's start with pg 65. Aaah...Mihara-kun. You start.”

The jock sighs and stands up, flipping through his book and starting to read unenthusiastically from it.

Yukio rolls his eyes at his deadpan tone, but pays attention either way. School is very important after all and since he arrived late, Yukio would like to make up for it in spades.

Rin, meanwhile, yawns and is half tempted to go to sleep. It's only thinking of what Tsukishiro will think and Yukio's annoyance at him that will spoil a good mood that makes him sit up and pay attention.

At the sound of the lunch bell, Rin stands up quickly, all ready for lunch and eager in fact.

“Rin-kun, could I speak to you please?” This, from Tsukishiro, has Rin stop and glance over at Yukio. Yukio merely smiles in response.

“Go on. I'll wait for you by the usual spot.” Yukio stands, gathering his own things and heads out of the class with the rest of the students.

A few delay as best they can, curious as to why Tsukishiro called Rin, but Tsukishiro's look directed their way makes them reconsider and head out.

Once all the rest are gone, Rin walks over to Tsukishiro's desk, a little nervous.

“What do you want to talk about?” Rin shifts nervously in front of Tsukishiro. Something about this feels serious, but Rin can't think of anything that would deserve it.

Still with a serious expression on her face, Tsukishiro asks Rin, “How are you?”

“Uh? Um...I'm fine. Pretty good in fact.” Rin grins at that. “Why do you ask?”

“I'm asking because I know you've had a very busy summer. How you holding out from there?”

Rin considers the question. Thinking back to all the Cards he got that summer, Natsuko, and the work at the café. “I'm good.” Rin then blinks. “What but--?” Rin suddenly realizes that how Tsukishiro mentioned it is super weird and is rather like she knows...

“Yes.” Tsukishiro finally smiles at that, a mysterious one. “I know you are a Cardcaptor.”

Rin steps back and stares at Tsukishiro. “But that...um...”

“I originally came here for you in fact.” Tsukishiro explains, standing up and moving from behind the desk. Crouching in front of Rin, she cups his face in her hands. “As the monitor for your trials.”

“Monitor?” Rin blinks up at Tsukishiro, shocked at this.

“I originally came here for you in fact.” Tsukishiro explains, standing up and moving from behind the desk. Crouching in front of Rin, she cups his face in her hands. “As the monitor for your trials.”

“Monitor?” Rin blinks up at Tsukishiro, shocked at this.

“Yes. In case things get beyond you, I am allowed to step in. But most of the time, I am to merely watch.” Tsukishiro brushes a few hairs from Rin's face. “I figured you deserved to know that much.”

“I...see...” Rin steps away from Tsukishiro. “Is that why you were nice to me?”

Tsukishiro looks down at Rin, startled by his hurt expression. “No! I found I liked you soon after I
met you. I'm not going to stop being nice any time soon.”

“Oh.” Rin then realizes something. “Does that mean you are also--”

“Yes. I'm a mage of magic, that of the Moon in fact.” Tsukishiro explains. “It's what allows me to monitor you as much as aid you if you desperately need it. Remember Shadow?” Rin is initially confused by that apparent non-sequencer, but nods after a moment.

“It was not Kerberos who got to the lights during that trial. He had been overwhelmed by the shadows, so I stepped in to give you the little aid you needed.” Tsukishiro's smile widens at Rin's shocked look. “Most of the time, I haven't had to step in. Even with Memory, you managed remarkably well.”

“So...because these are my trials...you can't really interfere...” Rin looks down. “Then I won't get mad at how Yukio gets hurt during them.”

“I do wish I could do more.” Tsukishiro tells him sincerely. “But it is your results that matter here and I'm telling you here and now: you are a wonderful, talented mage and a joy to see grow in power. When you are ready, when you have captured all the Cards, I will be here ready to give you your first true magic lessons.”

Rin perks up at that. Most of his “lessons” have been on the fly and only relevant to the current situation. The idea of a proper lesson – by his favourite teacher no less – immediately puts Rin in a better mood.

“Thank you Tsukishiro-sensei.” Rin beams up at her. He then frowns. “Um. Can I ask a quick question?”

Tsukishiro nods. “You may.”

“Do you know of a Card that...” Rin quickly outlines the Card he saw that morning and waits for Tsukishiro's response.

Tsukishiro taps her chin for a moment. “Yes. That would be Repair. Most unfortunate that it decided to effect a machine. All machines touched by it turn into deadly magic powered devices. Hostile and aggressive ones too.”

“That doesn't sound good...” Rin groans at that, running his hands through his hair. “But thanks for telling me.” He chirps. “It gives me more time to figure out how to handle it.”

“I'm sure you will. Now, you've kept your brother waiting long enough. Best go to him.” Tsukishiro advises.

“I will!” Rin turns to the door, and pauses, turning back to Tsukishiro. “You know, I'm glad it's you who is monitoring the trials. Somehow, it's comforting.”

Tsukishiro stares at Rin in shock, not moving for a moment, frozen by Rin's words. She then slowly smiles, and shakes her head.

“Oh, you are truly a treasure Rin...a definite treasure.” Her smile then fades and she looks outside. A tree is nearby, one that will soon turn into an array of colours under the autumn chill. “But will you be able to forgive what I can't tell you?”

There is no answer, just the sound of the wind rustling the leaves.
Lunch is a quiet affair for some time, Yukio not asking questions and merely letting Rin catch up to him and eat more of his bento. Though Rin can tell Yukio is curious, he's nice enough to give Rin some space before he finally asks him anything.

So ultimately it's Rin who breaks the silence, after not being able to stand it anymore.

“Alright already. Go ahead and ask.” Rin sighs and puts down his bento and chopsticks for a moment. Yukio stares at him for a moment, surprised, as he picks some rice off his cheek and eats it.

“Oh. I just would like to ask why Tsukishiro-sensei kept you back on the first day. Was it about being late?”

Rin makes a face at that. “No...she wanted to know how my summer went that's all.”

Yukio blinks. “That's all?” An amused look crosses Yukio's face at a thought. “Does it have to do with making sure you did all your summer homework?”

“No!” Rin immediately protests, then closes his mouth and looks down. Yukio can't see his expression with his bangs in the way, so he doesn’t see Rin's thoughtful and torn look. When Rin looks back up, he looks resigned. “Okay, maybe a little.”

“Heh. Good thing you managed to get everything done.” Yukio says cheerfully.

“Yeah, yeah.” Rin rolls his eyes.

Yukio bumps his shoulder, making Rin looks at him surprise. “It's a good thing Nii-san. I'm proud.”

Rin blushed a bit and looks over at the school. Thinking of what he found out about Tsukishiro-sensei and what she said. “Um...yeah...she said something similar...”

Yukio's smile grows at that. “Really? That's good.”

'Very good...anything that helps Nii-san stay in school and be normal is good.' Yukio thinks, thinking back to what he knows about demons and the seal on Rin. The more upbeat he is, the stronger the seal.'

And normal is very much so what Yukio wants for his brother.

Kero goes from hovering in the air to falling flat on his face with a thump, indenting Rin's bed. “Say what?!!”

Rin shrugs. “Exactly what I said.”

Kero pulls himself up and settles down in a sitting position. “But she actually revealed it to you?”

“Yeah...actually, it kinda makes me feel better. I mean, she won't do much but...” Rin looks down at the platter of nikuman in his hands and picks up one to bite into. “At least I know that if I can't handle it she can.”

Kero is frowning. This is very odd...did Ah forget something? Nah, with that name can't be anythin' but...'

“Kero?” Rin waves his hand in front of the small lion. “You okay?”

Kero shakes his head. “Nah, Ah'm fine. Just thinkin'. So, Repair showed up this morning.” He
quickly changes the subject.

To his relief, Rin doesn't notice the sudden topic change, instead handing over a nikuman to Kero and looking thoughtful. “Yeah...I think it only did something when I said something?”

“You said the machine was broken right?” Kero swallows a large bite of nikuman. “Repair’s a helpful sort. Probably was thinkin' they were helpin' you.”

“But machines aren't good for Repair to work with.” Rin points out. “That's what Tsukishiro-sensei said.”

Kero sighs. “Oh yes...never could figure out why, but though Repair can fix up anythin' up as it was before, machines and electronics in particular should never get touched by them. And everythin' got electronics these days.”

Rin groans at that. “So, Repair's probably still around there, right?”

Kero nods, looking a bit glum himself. “It's your fault too. You said it was broken and Repair decided to help.”

Rin stuffs Kero's mouth with another nikuman and rubs his forehead, ignoring Kero's muffled cries, trying to think of a way to handle this new Card.

Rin is not in a good mood in the morning. Not only because he wasn't able to figure something out for Repair, but because his stupid father burst in and dragged him off for “father-son bonding” that night, making it impossible for Rin to head out to get Repair.

'If only because I was real tired by the end...' Rin yawns even now, as he trudges to school. Yukio is not going to accept Rin going the “normal” route since it's closed up.

'Shitty four-eyes hates being late.' Rin groans again at that, drawing Yukio's attention.

“Nii-san, all the dramatics aren't necessary.” Yukio scolds Rin.

Rin looks over at him, eye twitching. “Oh, it definitely is.”

Yukio sighs and decides to drop the topic as they finally reach school. The students are in a cheery mood, still talking about their summer vacations with each other. Others are griping about how they did for summer homework, while still more are already gossiping about current events around the school.

Rin straightens as he heads into the building, ignoring how a few people squeak at his passing. He's gotten too much practise at that after all. Switching his shoes for his uwabaki, Rin follows Yukio to the classroom.

Rin perks up when he sees Tsukishiro waiting in the classroom and setting things up for class.

“Good morning Tsukishiro-sensei.” Rin says cheerfully, getting an amused look from Yukio and a soft smile from Tsukishiro.

“Good morning. I'm glad to see you arrived on time today.”

Rin winces at the reminder of yesterday's incident, but brushes it aside in favour of asking Tsukishiro a few questions about classwork, making sure he understands the lesson.
Yukio slips around his brother to settle in his seat, happy to have his brother taking school somewhat seriously.

'Though that's only because it's Tsukishiro-sensei.' Yukio sighs at that, knowing too well that all other classes are merely tolerated. 'At least he's passing.'

Before Tsukishiro-sensei's arrival, Yukio wasn't certain Rin was going to fit into Junior High.

'But luckily he has.' Yukio smiles again and stands to let Rin slip past him to his own seat, watching as his brother happily gets things ready for today's history class.

Rin is ignorant to Yukio's thoughts, instead turning back to think of Repair. He's definitely going to need to track down that Card.

'Maybe if I start with where I saw it last I can track it...' Rin nibbles on his pen for a moment, considering that. 'I've gotten better at sensing according to Kero so I might just be able to find it...'

That positive thought is enough for Rin to turn to the front as soon the school bell goes off and all the students scramble for their seats, back to an upbeat mood.

Yukio is shocked when Rin turns away from him at the school's entrance after school. “Nii-san, where are you going?”

Rin pauses, one foot in the air, then turns around, scratching the back of his head. “Aaah...wanted to see if I can find out how long until the constructions gonna be done.” Rin shrugs and smiles nervously. “Want to know when we can use that route again.”

Yukio seems to consider it for a moment, then waves Rin off. “Sure. Just don't stay out too late.”

Rin grins and turns around with a spring in his step. “I'll do my best!”

As Rin races off, ignorant to Yukio's sigh, he taps the earring he has and waits for Kero to pick up. “Hey, I'm heading to see if I can find Repair. Can you meet me at where South Cross meets Hibiscus Street?”

Kero groans at that, and hearing the sound of a video game in the background, Rin rolls his eyes. “Awwww...alright. Just give me a bit, need to get to a save point...”

“Don't take too long.” Rin warns Kero, then shuts down the call after he gets a resigned yes from Kero.

Rin halts as the light changes, bouncing in place until it finally changes back and Rin quickly bolts to get to the construction site.

He skids to a halt as soon as it comes in view, shocked and eyes widening.

'Oh.' Rin stares and realizes he really should have considered this.

The forklift is already gone and the construction workers look like they will be finished by tomorrow at the rate they are going.

'Crap. Now what?' Rin mentally groans and decides to wait for Kero, wandering over to the side and leaning against a tree. Not much else to do but wait after all.

And hope Kero can give Rin an idea of what to do next.
“What now?” Is what Rin asks as soon as Kero arrives. The little lion looks as annoyed as Rin at the inconvenience of having competent construction workers.

“Let's see...” Kero looks over the situation from his hiding spot; which is to say, on Rin's shoulder and obscured in shadow. “Well, you can sense where Repair was still yes?”

Rin nods, focusing on the faint “trail” he's picking up magically speaking. “So I just got to follow it uh?”

“Yeah...and quick. It's already startin' to fade with all the people in the city gettin' in the way.” Kero has a major point there, so Rin ends up having to sneak around the construction as best he can. Luckily no one is paying attention to him and he quickly gets past that obstacle.

The next obstacle is the afternoon crowds, as Rin follows the trail through busy streets, past even more busy train stations, and onwards. The sun slowly sinking in the sky as Rin gets lost and mixed up at times, having to back track and look around for the traces of magic all over again, does not help and Rin winces as he thinks about what the reaction will be of his family when he comes home late.

'Very late.' Rin mentally amends as he finally reaches the end of the trail as the sun starts to truly set. And he also groans at what's before him.

“Oh great...this is where they keep their bulldozers and things...” Rin groans at the warehouse and cleared area in front of him, like a modified parking lot. And there are plenty construction vehicles and equipment all around, filling Rin with dread.

Especially with the pulse of Repair now being strong and bright. Active and wandering around the entire area and looking for things that are broken and need to be fixed.

Rin covers his face in his hands, takes a deep breath, then looks up.

“Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!” Rin grasps the staff, and then takes down the slope that's between him and the fence around the area. “C'mon Kero, we are running out of time!”

Kero follows him quickly, looking in shock at how Rin skids down the hill and stops perfectly without unbalancing.

A cry of “Jump, Release!” has Rin being able to clear the fence with no problem and land in the parking area. Standing up from his crouch, Rin looks forward and scowls. “Right, let's find that Card before they decided to fix anything else!”

Tsukishiro sighs in relief as she finally spots Rin arriving in the correct location. “I suppose the sudden location change threw him off...” She muses aloud to herself.

Settling down on the roof of the warehouse, she sets to observing Rin's next capture.

A light beside her makes her turn and blink in surprise at the purple-haired girl that is standing next to her. “...how did you get out?”

Record merely beams then brings her camera up to her face, her magic activating as she sets to recording Rin's experience.

Tsukishiro chuckles, then turns back to look at Rin. After a moment, she can't help but mention,
“That school uniform is way too ordinary for such a task...” A thoughtful look crosses Tsukishiro's face as she starts to consider that. “Perhaps he needs a proper uniform for all of this...”

For a long time, Rin only has darkness and machines. No sign of the Repair despite their signature being spread all over.

Then he hears something that makes him gulp.

The sound of an engine turning on and starting to roar. Which is then echoed by other ones.

Slowly, like he's in a horror movie, Rin turns around and stares in horror at the array of construction machines that are now circling him and moving menacing at him.

Kero lets out a whimpering sound.

Rin swallows around his dry throat.

“Oh crap.” He says in a surprising calm voice, before the machines charge.

The loud yelling from the parking lot normally would have sent many people running to investigate. But Tsukishiro's barrier keeps people from noticing the events so thus no one is around to witness the particular sight of a junior high boy running at a pelt-mad pace away from an array of construction machines.

Shame, since it's probably one of the more interesting sights one can see.

Rin is half screaming and swearing as he does his best to keep out of the way of the machines. Not easy since they keep surrounding him and it's only thanks to the fact Rin's much smaller that he's able to dodge and get away before they crush him. Even so, Rin's fallen flat on his face and gone for a few tumbles as he's been running, leaving him looking rather battered and dirty despite it only being superficial.

“WHERE THE HELL IS REPAIR?” Rin yells up at Kero, the miniature guardian taking full advantage of his flight capabilities and the fact the machines are focusing on Rin to get up high in the air away from the crazy.

Kero can't reply, mostly because Rin is quickly distracted by running for his life from the machines. Sighing and sweating, Kero calls down to Rin. “You're a mage, use your magic!”

Rin halts, looks sheepish, then pulls out a Card. “Wind, be a binding chain! Windy, release!”

Windy soars out and, despite the machines best efforts, binds them all up in a secure embrace. The sound of creaking and straining and more engine roars suggests that they might be able to break free, something Rin keeps in mind as he sets to finding Repair with his magic sense.

A sound of an engine rumbling breaks him out of it and he turns.

There is nothing particularly special about the forklift that rumbles up towards Rin. It looks battered though and somehow, Rin gets the impression it's angry at him. A moment later it clicks and Rin lets slip a groan.

“Ah shit, not that bulldozer again.” And Rin's off and running again, the forklift rumbling and blaring its horn as it chases after him.
Kero watches this with wide-eyes. He's so intent on it, he doesn't notice the crane set up nearby starting to move until it's almost too late.

“WAH!” Kero yelps, having to dive down to Rin's level as the crane flails its arm about in the air, making it impossible to stay up without risking serious damage. “What the hell is going on?”

“This isn't normal?” Rin shoots back, as he heads towards the warehouse and, smashing the lock on it, slams the big door open and heads in. To his relief, there's nothing inside that looks like machinery, instead being various building and construction supplies. As Rin hears the roar of the forklift, he curses as it bursts through the wall next to the door. “Fucking hell, there was a door ya dumb bulldozer!”

Kero stares at Rin. “It's a forklift.”

Rin ignores him, instead having to race out of the way and then dodging to the left to get out of sight, ducking behind a big pile of cement bags to hide.

“Where the hell is that piss-drinking cocksucker Card?” Rin growls, trying to sense Repair. Not easy with the forklift's movements and engine breaking his concentration. “Fucking bulldozer, shut up.” Rin mutters to himself.

“It's a forklift.” Kero repeats, sounding annoyed.

Rin glares at him and goes to try to sense Repair. “Dammit, dammit. Between the bulldozer and all the other magic I can't pick it out...”

“Ah told you, it's a forklift.” Kero corrects again, starting to get exasperated by Rin getting it wrong. “You're doin' it on purpose ain't you?!”

“SHUT UP!” Rin screams at Kero. “Who gives a shit if it's a bulldozer or not?!”

There's a moment of silence, as the echo fades, then Rin and Kero slowly look up at the sound of an engine.

“Oh shi--!” Rin dives out of the way just in time as the forklift sends it's lift section down at where Rin and Kero was.

Rin scrambles away from the dust and debris, grabbing Kero, and calling out for a Card. “Watery, Release!”

“You got to be kiddin' me!” Kero wails as Watery materializes and springs up into the air, covering the warehouse and starting to rain water on the place, as if tubs of it are being dumped down. The entire place gets flooded in that manner, removing the traction for the forklift but also sweeping Rin and Kero away and out of the warehouse.

Windy turns and watches, still containing the other machines, looking actually surprised as Rin falls down on to the parking lot ground looking dazed and soaking wet.

“Ugh...okay, that wasn't very well thought out...” Rin slowly sits up and looks around, lifting his head to the sky after shaking water out of his ears.

And stares.

There, standing on top of the crane, is the blasted Card they were looking for. Repair looks shocked at the going ons, and even confused.
“Fly, Release.” Rin deadpans, kicking off and flying into the air on the staff. He has to dodge and twirl through the air to avoid the still active and hostile crane, but as soon as he manages to get on top of it, he immediately pulls out another Card.

“Thunder, Release!” Rin cries, the electricity running down the crane and shorting it out, making it stop trying to shake Rin off.

Rin, now grumbling, walks up Repair, and glowers down at them. The fairy merely tilts her hair, obviously not understanding what happened.

“Repair, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” With a whirl of light, Repair is in his hands.

Of course, the entire area looks like a wreck still, leaving Rin – once he gets down on the ground – looking around guiltily.

“Crap. It's not like Repair's going to help.” Rin grumbles to himself, still not happy about being wet and sore from his experience, as he pulls out his miraculously still intact pen out and writes his name on said Card.

“No, but I can.”

Rin jumps and swears in shock, then blushes when he sees Tsukishiro. “Tsukishiro-sensei!” Rin cries, blushing madly at her presence. “You...oh...” Rin remembers and wilts. “You were watching weren't you.”

“Not just me...” Tsukishiro looks over to the side and Rin scowls as he sees Record sparkling at him.

“Rin-kun is just marvellous!” She says as way of explanation, refusing to let Rin scare her. “And cute too. Like a kitten who's just been soaked...”

Rin twitches at that. The fact Kero is laughing doesn't help. “I didn't need that.”

“Here.” Tsukishiro gently approaches him with gently glowing hands and waves them over Rin's body. The water evaporates, Rin's clothing fixes itself, and his bruises and scrapes fade to nothing.

Rin looks down at himself surprised, then back at Tsukishiro. She merely smiles. “It's not that fancy. But if you are wondering about this location, if you will follow me...”

Tsukishiro turns and, looking briefly at Kero, Rin follows her. Record follows behind, happy as a clam, still recording the events.

As soon as Rin steps over the perimeter of the trashed area, he feels a ripple of magic and whirls around to see a barrier close in on the place. As it sweeps over the pavement and wreckage, everything slowly returns to how it was before, miraculously fixing itself.

Rin gapes. Then turns to look at Tsukishiro who merely smiles and gives a small bow in response.

“You have got to teach me that.” Rin says in awe.

“Perhaps later. For now, you are out very late and need to get home before your family panics.” Tsukishiro gently reminds him.

Rin nods at that, turns to Record who sighs and returns to him as a Card, then waves to Tsukishiro and leaves, cursing at the time on his watch.
'Oyaji is going to kill me!' Rin wails as he brings up Fly and takes off into the sky.

While Fujimoto Shirō is not at murder levels of angry at Rin, he's still plenty angry.

“Ow, ow lemmego!” Rin whines, failing ineffectively at Shirō. Something that seems odd when paired with his super strength. Or perhaps makes sense once Rin's caring gets added to the mix.

Shirō refuses to let go, still holding Rin in a tight headlock and giving him a vicious noogie. “Nope. Not until you repent!”

“Fuck you this isn't the confessional!” Rin yells, then wails again as Shirō tightens his gripe and makes it so Rin can't squirm free. “Yuuukkiooooo...”

Yukio shakes his head and adjusts his glasses. “You brought it on yourself Nii-san...”

On the nearby counter, pretending to be a doll as hard as he can, Kero sweats. 'Oh dear...how long will this go?'

Considering how stubborn both Rin and Shirō are, Kero mentally whimpers at the very long wait he has ahead of him.

And so is Rin's life.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Comment below for the next chapter and thank you so much for the previous lovely comments! Please go to my writer's blog, which I share with GB, if you have any questions and to help me build up my ICD FAQ page! Found here: http://writerscornergb.tumblr.com/

Also, here is the list of all the Cards Rin currently has:
The Windy
The Fly
The Bubbles
The Little
The Shadow
The Jump
The Memory
The Silent
The Armour
The Sword
The Watery
The Illusion
The Song
The Shield
The Thunder
The Mask
The Time
The Glow
The Libra
The Float
The Through
The Wave
The Heal
The Loop
The Change
The Create
The Erase
The Record
The Repair
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for all the comments! And, more importantly, I have fanart now! Yay! I'm counting fanart as worth two or three comments. Seriously, if you have fanart, tag it ICD and shout out to me as lovespychothefirst on tumblr! Message me in fact about it! I'll love it no matter what!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The night air is soft and sweet this night. There's only murmurs of late night parties and wildlife, the wind dancing through trees, grass, and plants. Flowers spread their scents out into the night.

The silence is broken by the sound of a sweet singing voice, calling out into the night like a lure to a particular Card.

Hidden in the bushes nearby, Rin watches carefully with Windy in his hands. Soon enough Voice appears, the small strange looking girl looking around curiously, trying to spot the one who mysteriously seems to have the beautiful voice she had already stolen.

"Wind, trap her. Windy, Release!" Rin cries, before Voice can realize the trap.

Attempting to flee, Voice ends up wrapped in a bubble of wind, continuously circling and keeping her trapped.

Pumping his fist in happiness at the success, Rin stumbles out from the bushes, grinning cheerfully. "Yes, it worked!"

Beside him, Kero shakes his head and smiles. 'Figured that out faster than Sakura...then again, she was overwhelmed by a friend's plight there. Rin's got a bit of a distance here.'

A cry of, "Voice, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!" and not only does Voice return to card form, but a glowing light that is Watanabe Naoko's voice floats off into the air to return to the singer.

"Phew. Glad that wasn't so bad." Rin runs his hand through his hair, frowning as he catches his fingers on some twigs and leaves caught in his hair.

"That is always a good thang." Kero says cheerfully, floating over to Rin. "Means you can get back home and back to bed before you get caught."

Rin smiles at that, though winces in memory of last time. Having Shirō angry at him is one thing. Him being angry because he was scared for Rin? Entirely different thing and so much worse.

"Right. And since it's not that far we can even walk." Rin puts away the staff with that mind, placing the sealed Voice into the pouch with the other Cards. He turns and walks out of the park, cheerful about his work and progress.

"So, Kero, how many more Cards do I have left?" Rin asks, looking over at Kero as he walks casually back home. Taking advantage of what down time he has.
Kero snorts. “You may have thirty of them now, but there's still over thirty more to go.”

Rin winces at that. “Really? Damn, why are there so many Cards?”

Kero shrugs. “Most are from Clow to be honest. Sakura only made a few Cards but Clow made over fifty of them for the first go. It adds up to a lot.” Kero then grins at Rin. “You're doin' fine. In fact, considerin' you got more Cards to collect than Sakura, you are doing wonderful. Ah'm sure you'll get them all in time.”

“Hmmm...but how long will it take?” Rin has to wonder. “Argh, I wish I could hurry up to the end!”

Kero slows down at that, but Rin doesn't notice, too busy grumbling to himself. Kero, meanwhile, considers what “the end” is here.

'Can you do it?' Kero asks quietly to Rin's presence ahead of him. 'Can you pass this Final Judgement?' Kero seriously wants to believe Rin can do it, but it's not like last time.

This time, Keroberos is not entirely certain what the Judge is looking for in the new Master.

Chapter 18: Demons of the Wind

Autumn is the season of colourful leaves and food. As autumn slowly makes its way across Southern Cross District, so does gossip and the slow bringing out of the kotetsu. Some old, broken ones make their way to the streets to be picked up with the rest of the oversized garbage.

And, for one Abe Eiji, it's a time for money making. It's amazing how many things get brought up during autumn for rumours, gossip, and bets. Information is becoming prized in certain areas in regards to where the best deals are as people start preparing not only for the upcoming winter, but the upcoming undōkai or sports day.

'This is what it's like to be on top of the heap.' Eiji sneers as he manages to scam another person in regards to how much his information is worth. 'Amazing how dense people can be.'

Eiji flat out doesn't care about people's reasoning for information. If it exists, he will do his best to provide. Being honest no matter what is what gave him his reputation so Eiji already has a good amount of money he's starting to set aside for college.

'And that man said I'd get nowhere in life.' Eiji smirks at the very thought. A thought though has him looking down at his smartphone and finding something he had written as a priority one memo:

Find information on Okumura Rin.

Eiji frowns, considering the strange “demon” he's dealt with. Eiji is not entirely certain how to handle Rin, the fact he can never work up the nerve to ask for anything more than 100 yen as payment not helping, and the fact Rin never seems to really fit his profile that Eiji compiled early on when he first entered Southern Cross Junior High – before the incident that made that information Eiji gathered a great investment indeed – despite at the same time Eiji knowing it's all true facts.

'Not my fault if people take my information and distort it.' Eiji scowls, thinking of a few rumours he's heard about Rin. Eiji might be many things, but “truth” is something he prizes dearly.

The problem is, he actually doesn't know what Rin's truth is.

“Just answer the damn question!”
“Abe. I need to know the locations of the parks the beatings took place.” He steps closer to the boy, eyes intense. “Now. I'm on a time limit.”

“What are you doing here? Doesn't seem like your thing.”

“Aaaah...that's pretty cool!”

“Good. Keep it that way.” Rin growls at him. “I don't care about it, but it would make things difficult for Yukio if that got out.”

“Why bother believing in something that's real?”

Eiji frowns and closes his smartphone, stuffing it into his pocket.

“Well...I did say I was going to do it after summer break...” He muses out loud.

A determined expression on his face, Eiji sets out to finally do some proper investigation of Okumura Rin.

He's going to get to the bottom of Rin's mysteries no matter what.

Easily said than done, of course, since even when he's on school grounds and going to classes, Rin manages to still be amazingly (annoyingly) illusive.

It probably doesn't help that most people are still terrified of Rin despite all the time that has passed since the major incident that made Rin into the “demon” he's known as in school. This leaves Eiji with no one to start with...

'Wait...that's not quite right...' Eiji frowns and recalls one Watanabe Naoko. The first year student with the affinity for things creepy and out of the ordinary has been spotted talking to Rin more than once. And it was him that she went to immediately after losing her voice, waving her hands and obviously trying to get something across.

'And according to eyewitness reports, somehow Okumura understood what she was getting at.' Eiji frowns in thought. 'But just eyewitnesses aren't good enough here, even if Watanabe-san is the kind to get plenty of people watching her antics.'

With a groan, Eiji turns and starts making his way to Watanabe's usual spot for lunch. She's his first real lead he can get his hands on. Much to his annoyance considering how much pestering she does for the more unusual rumours.

It's easy enough to find Watanabe, especially with how noisy she is being again. She regained her voice in record time and is making up for the day everyone was blessed with silence from her with great vigour.

“So then we ended up arguing over whether it counted more as a ghost or a zombie or whatever since it looked more like a--” Watanabe cuts out her talk, noticing Eiji and sparkles up at him. “Oh, Abe-kun! Did you find out something for my last request?”

It takes a moment for Eiji to recall her last request – groaning mentally at it – then he shakes his head. “No. I wish to ask you about Okumura Rin.”

Silence from her friends, who exchange glances, Watanabe's best friend Yoshida Miho in particular looking resigned.
Eiji realizes exactly what that means as Watanabe's expression abruptly shifts over to something more thoughtful and she actually calms down for once. “Why do you want that?”

“Because I have noticed my databases on him are almost wholly inaccurate and was hoping you could correct that.” Eiji explains.

Watanabe actually smiles at that. Not a bright cheerful one, but a softer one. “Okay! Shall we talk elsewhere?”

Eiji raises his eyebrow at how she doesn't want to talk with her friends there – but considering how they are acting, looking down at their lunches and appearing to be nervous – perhaps it's for the good. “This way please.”

Eiji leads Watanabe over to out in the field away from the tree she was hanging out under with her friends. Once they are judged far enough away by Eiji’s estimate, he turns back to Watanabe.

“Now, could you start with why you approached Okumura Rin?” Eiji asks, pulling out his smartphone and getting ready to input whatever Watanabe tells him into the file labelled “Okumura Rin”.

Watanabe beams. “Oh that's easy. It's when I found out he's a ghostbuster!”

‘...say what?’ Eiji stares at her in shock, nearly forgetting to write down things as she starts babbling about the incident she witnessed that lead to everything.

Somewhere else, Rin is in the middle of his own lunch when he's interrupted by a powerful sneeze.

“Are you okay Nii-san?” Yukio asks, looking concerned at how Rin is sniffling now.

“I'm fine.” Rin rubs his nose. “Just itched suddenly.”

“Maybe someone's talking about you.” Yukio teases.

Rin blushes. “As if! If that was true, I'd be always sneezing.”

Yukio's smile fades as Rin dives back into his bento. *That is true...* 'Yukio's lips twist as he considers how many rumours are still going around about his brother. *You'd think they would have gotten tired of it by now.*'

“Oi, Yukio eat your bento.” Rin eyes Yukio warningly. “You need all the energy you can get.”

Yukio winces and turns back to his bento and picking out a bit of ikayaki from it with his chopsticks. Somehow, despite Yukio's best efforts, Rin has been noticing how Yukio isn't sleeping as much as he should. Which is obviously confusing his brother as much as worrying him.

*Sorry Nii-san, but I can't tell you the truth.* Yukio sighs at that. He then notices Rin looking up at the sky, a deep frown on his face. Curious, Yukio follows his gaze.

And just barely bites back a curse that wants to come out. “A storm.”

The dark heavy clouds that are rolling in can be nothing but. Rin looks rarely serious, packing things up. “C'mon Yukio, we need to get inside before it gets worse.”

Yukio is quick to agree and follows his brother as he rushes back inside the building. Around them, others are starting to notice and do the same, a few very annoyed by that – including some of the
sports clubs – but still quick to get inside with such threatening clouds.

The majority manage to just barely make it inside before the clouds break and a violent downpour suddenly crashes down on the entire city.

Eiji's head is in a whirl at all he heard from Watanabe. Of course, her accounts can't be 100% accurate – since she has a tendency to embellish for even normal stories – but Eiji can't help but wondering how much of it is actual fact.

'It sounds so insane but...' Eiji frowns, looking down at the notes he took from that conversation. He was lucky to have it end in time to rush into the school. Glancing out the window, Eiji shudders at the downpour that shows no sign of stopping. 'And there was nothing in the weather reports to suggest such a storm either.'

Eiji looks through what he has on Rin's associates. Outside of his brother – who Eiji immediately puts down as not a proper source of information considering the blood ties – Eiji still has a few others that he can rely on for information.

'Chikafuji Manabu sounds like a good next source.' Eiji considers that, then nods and, after double checking where Manabu is generally found, puts his smartphone in his pocket and starts heading to the library.

Instead he nearly runs into someone else, and steps back just in time to avoid a collision.

Eiji looks up at the third-years in front of him, mentally cataloguing them as Kaido Katashi and Hayashi Isamu. He blinks and smiles up at them, unwittingly disturbing Kaido.

"What the hell?" Kaido stares as Eiji pulls out his smartphone. 'Oh no...'

"Just would like to ask you some questions." Eiji says sweetly, glancing at his file on Kaido. "Just want the facts and only the facts."

"What do I get out of it?" Kaido glares at Eiji, and his hand clenches into a fist.

"Well, there's some awkward information I could delete perhaps...the thing about chickens..."

Kaido goes pale then makes a face. "Tch. Fine. What do you wanna know?"

"Your interactions with Okumura Rin." Eiji looks sharply up at Kaido and adjusts his glasses. "What happened in full."

Kaido twitches at that, then sighs. "Fine. Where do you wanna start?"

"How about your first major encounter in the library?" Eiji suggests calmly.

Behind Kaido, Hayashi looks a bit constipated as he considers just how awkward this conversation is going to get.

Rin is currently hiding in a bathroom stall, with the earring active and talking softly to Kero.

"So definitely Storm..." Rin sighs and runs his hand through his hair. "That's going to be hard to deal with."

"The eye of the storm is very weak to any attack but yeah..." Kero sighs. "Such a big thing will be
“But Storm's a dangerous Card so can't leave it.” Rin points out. “Going to have to risk it.”

At Kero's confirmation, Rin ends the conversation and carefully exits the stall. Luckily no one came in, so after washing his hands, Rin leaves the bathroom without anyone the wiser.

On his way to the classroom, he nearly bumps into Tsukishiro. “Oh! Tsukishiro-sensei.”

“Hello Rin-kun.” Tsukishiro smiles at him, then looks out at the storm outside. “You know, I have this situation I need help with.” She says casually, making Rin blink. Turning back to him she winks. “I might just need a student to stay behind after school and help me.”

Rin perks up as he gets it. “Aah, then I'll help Tsukishiro-sensei!”

“That would be marvellous.” Tsukishiro says, then adjusts her stack of paper and starts walking past Rin. “I'll see you after school then.”

“Yup!” Rin waves at her, then heads back to the classroom, a spring in his step.

He doesn't notice that Eiji, head whirling from more information he got from Kaido, was watching the exchange and still watches as Rin heads back to class.

Glancing back at his notes on his smartphone, he types out:

*Staying after school today.*

Tsukishiro Sekki-sensei knows something?

Since the teacher is not in today, the students are entrusted to handle their assignments themselves. After Eiji is done with his own, he pulls out his smartphone and scrolls through it, shaking his head at how confusing and out-of-this-world all the information he gets is.

*The more I know the more confusing it gets...’* Lifting his head, Eiji looks around the classroom and pauses as he spots two particular girls in his class who are also done with their schoolwork.

Oota Sayaka and Minami Hiromi haven't had as much interaction as Kaido and Watanabe, but at the very least they have had some interactions and might be able to provide a few more clues.

Standing with that in mind, he approaches the two girls who are talking and giggling with each other. After a moment, they finally notice he's there and turn to look at him.

Oota frowns at the sight of Eiji. “What do you want?”

Eiji pulls out the chair in front of Oota's desk and sits down on it after turning it around to face her. “I'm collecting information on a certain individual and I would like to request your help in regards to it.”

Oota looks over at Minami, then turns back to him. “Fine. Who is it?”

“Okumura Rin.”

The reaction is immediately. Oota scowls at the very mention of his name, while Minami merely looks interested and also exasperated with her friend when she notices how she's reacting.
Eiji, however, notices there's a strange tension to Oota in regards to Rin.

“What do you want? We've barely talked with him.” Oota snarls.

“Any information you can supply is good.” Is Eiji's calm response.

“He's...different. Especially from what people say.” Minami offers softly. “Everyone says he's a demon, but he's very nice and helpful.”

“He's still a demon.” Oota interjects. “Just...subtle at it that's all.”

Minami sighs. “What did I tell you Sayaka-chan? Please, give Okumura-kun at least some chance to prove otherwise.”

Oota's frown deepens and she refuses to respond to Minami. After a moment, she stands and looks down at Eiji. “Can I talk to you alone?”

Eiji raises an eyebrow and nods. For a moment they are delayed as Minami protests, but eventually she calms down and only gives her friend a warning to be “civil”.

Exiting the classroom, Eiji leans against the wall as Oota paces back and forth. Eventually she stops and whirls on him, point at him. “You are not going to spread this around, here me? It's completely insane but...” Oota frowns and sighs. “But I swear it happened.”

“At this point, I think I can buy anything...” Eiji mutters to himself, then pulls out his smartphone and listens to Oota explaining a very strange incident during the summer festival.

As soon as the last bell rings, Eiji is out the door. His classmates barely note this, either too worried by the storm still pouring down or don't think much of it. After all, Eiji is known for his information gathering.

Eiji checks the information he has, and puts on some speed. Getting from one location to another in this school is not as easy as it looks, especially when on a time limit. But lucky for Eiji he manages it and calls out to Chikafuji just as he exits his classroom.

Blinking in surprise, the boy carrying books turns to look at Eiji, adjusting his glasses. “Y-yes?”

“I just would like to speak with you briefly.” Eiji says, soothing the younger boy's nerves.

“Aah...alright. What do you want to ask about?”

“Okumura Rin.” Eiji says promptly, looking down at Chikafuji as he jumps at that. “Do you mind telling me of your experiences with him?”

At the teacher's lounge, Rin pokes his head out of the door once the sound of the teachers working have faded. Looking carefully around, Rin perks up when he sees Tsukishiro approaching him.

“Thanks.” Rin says, looking a bit sheepish. Behind him, Kero pokes his head around Rin's shoulder, looking curiously at Tsukishiro. Kero looks a bit bedraggled from the travel through the storm, but he's dry and warm now thanks to Rin's efforts with a towel.

“It was no trouble.” Tsukishiro claims. “Besides, I didn't fancy travelling through this storm myself.”

“Right.” Rin steps forward, staff already out and ready to take on Storm. Only for Tsukishiro to stop
“What is it?” Rin looks curiously up at Tsukishiro. He then looks down in her arms at a bundle there.
“What’s that?”

“It’s for you.” Tsukishiro offers it to Rin. “I figured it would help.”

“Help?” Rin eyes the bundle. “What is it?”

Tsukishiro beams. “Your Cardcaptor uniform of course.”

Rin stares up at Tsukishiro. “Huah?”

Behind him, Kero can’t help the fond grin that crosses his face at that.

Thunder booms outside, making Eiji jump and then curse. He’s currently hiding in a deep part of the library, watching the time on his watch at odd moments. He checks again and sighs, finally standing up and wincing as he stretches out. His left foot in particular apparently decided to fall asleep and it’s with wincing steps at first that he carefully leaves the library.

‘Between what Kaido gave me and what Chikafuji told me...’ Eiji frowns. ‘Strangely, I think Kaido’s is the one that rings true. Chikafuji’s actually has some holes in it, not that he noticed.’

Eiji sighs and runs his hand through his hair, walking softly down the hallway to the teachers’ office. Just one day and Eiji’s running in circles mentally. ‘I’m amazed no one else hasn’t noticed just how strange Okumura Rin really is.’ Eiji muses.

Then again, people are dense and tend to stick to first impressions or what they heard in rumours.

‘The fact this is unbelievable to even my witnesses...’ Eiji then pauses there and reconsidered. ‘Well, everyone but Watanabe-san.’

Eiji pulls out his smartphone and looks through the file he has on Rin. “Ghostbusting, stopping a strange samurai armour clad guy who looked like Chikafuji from smashing Kaido and his group, reaching into one of those monsters of the festival and removing a mask to reveal Minami-san, Chikafuji not remembering anything about the samurai armour. And then there is that incident which even I don’t recall in any fashion and all my notes of that day make absolutely no sense.” Eiji sighs, then bites his lip in thought.

‘All this and at this point I wouldn’t be surprised to find out Okumura’s actually some alien prince from another dimension or something...’ Eiji groans. Then halts, as the door suddenly opens for the teachers’ office. Thinking quickly, Eiji dives into the nearest classroom and hides behind the door.

As footsteps go past, Eiji peers out and blinks in surprise. He can see Tsukishiro-sensei and Rin, along with a strange floating stuffed animal.

‘The familiar Watanabe-san mentioned?’ Eiji peers at the procession with interest, blinking at the strange outfit Rin is wearing. After a moment, Eiji steps out and, carefully and quietly, follows the strange trio, still wielding his smartphone.

At this point, there is not turning back for Eiji.

Rin tugs at the collar around his neck and whines, turning to Tsukishiro. “Do I have to wear this?”
This, would be the outfit Tsukishiro enthusiastically shoved at him, insisting that he wears it for his Cardcaptor duties. The fact Kero agrees doesn't help.

To be fair, it's a tasteful outfit. Starting with a pair of black jean shorts with leather details and a matching black tank-top with a dark blue heart design on top, a leather jacket thrown on top – one that Rin distinctly recalls has a white wing design on the back of – with a feather detail on the sleeves picked out in red threads, and ending with a pair of knee-high black boots with a slight heel to them that Rin is surprised he's able to walk in. Even a small heel is a bit off-putting. For extra effect, Rin's got three belts wrapped around his waist and a simple black collar around his neck. And it's all waterproof to some extent according to Tsukishiro.

The fact that Tsukishiro made this is the real head-blower. As well as a miniature black jacket for Kero that he's ever so happy to have and insists looks cool.

“Yes.” Is Tsukishiro's blunt response.

“You look so cool Rin!” Record gushes, ignoring the fact that makes Rin torn between yelling at her and blushing in embarrassment again.

Rin settles for blushing, since in truth he finds the outfit quite nice and secretly enjoys wearing it, the awkward mainly coming from Tsukishiro giving it to him. Something given to him, so nicely and made with lots of thought. He then looks outside at the storm still raging outside. Even in the entrance hall he can feel the pressure from the wind moving and the windows and doors are rattling under the force.

Taking a deep breath, Rin opens a door, and, squinting into the storm, steps out.

He nearly gets blown back, having to dig his feet into the ground. Something that the heels surprisingly help with, though Rin ends up on one knee under the strain. “Ah shit...Shield, Release!” Rin calls out quickly, managing to keep a hold of the Card long enough to hit it with the staff and activate it.

Rin sighs with relief as Shield protects him from the worst of the storm. He then looks up to see the clouds to start to swirl. “That doesn't look good.”

It isn't, as the clouds slowly twist and speed up until there's a tornado roaring in the middle of the school courtyard, tearing up the place and causing damage as it comes ever closer to Rin.

“Shit...” Rin makes a split second decision and sends Shield over to protect Kero and Tsukishiro. The wind is howling, but Rin doesn't have time to even think it through too much. “Fly, Release!”

Rin nearly ends up flying out of the school zone with the first gust, but bends over and grits his teeth. “C'mon Fly, you can do it.” The wings on the back of the staff glow, responding to Rin's need and out-pouring of magic, pushing further into it and bringing Rin closer to the tornado.

“Good job!” Rin praises, then looks up at the tornado, peering at it and trying to locate the eye. It takes some flying around and avoiding the tornado, Rin yelping and cursing a few times, before he finally spots it.

“There!” Rin pulls out Thunder. “Your chance to shine boy. Thunder, hit the centre! Release!”

Thunder comes out with a roar, jumping from Rin to the centre of the storm, and slamming into it. A big bang echoes out, and the tornado dissipates and Storm appears, falling down for a moment before righting.
Storm turns just in time to see Rin falling towards her, staff raised. “Storm, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Hitting Storm, she bursts into light and starts to form a card. Rin, falling, grabs for Windy. “Windy, Release!”

The high tier Card appears and cushions Rin's landing, allowing him to slowly set his feet on the ground and receive Storm's Card. He then turns to the front doors and waves at Tsukishiro and Kero.

“I did it!”

Tsukishiro laughs and claps. “Such a reckless young boy.” She comments to Kero.

“Yeah...Ah think my heart stopped for a moment...” Kero lets out a sigh of relief.

“I thought it was amazing.” Record says cheerfully. “Perfect timing and very action hero!”

Kero eyes her from the side, then turns to greet Rin as he happily approaches the two and excitedly talks about his capture of Storm. The young boy glows as Tsukishiro and Kero praise him – even Record's odd compliments make him shine – the words soothing some injured part of him and helping him continue to heal.

Sitting in another room that overlooks the courtyard, Eiji is unable to move. It's after he watches Tsukishiro and Rin part that he finally finds he can stand. He hobbles over to the door and to the front entrance, where he switches his uwabaki finally for sneakers and trudges out of the school, mind still whirling.

Looking down at his smartphone, Eiji presses play for the shaky footage he got of Rin flying and fighting the storm. And winning.

‘That...was not ghostbusting...’ Eiji swallows against a very dry throat and considers what that exactly means. 'Is the alien prince thing too far out still?'

Eiji shakes his head and looks through it logically, barring his emotions briefly from everything.

First, Rin is super strong and crazy athletic.

Second, Rin according to Watanabe-san and what Eiji himself saw, Rin has some kind of supernatural ability.

Third, Tsukishiro-sensei knows the truth, the whole truth most likely.

Eiji shakes his head, not finding it helping at all. He lifts his head and looks up at the night sky, trying to find a visible star. He thinks he sees one, but can't be certain.

He looks down at the file he has on Rin. Eiji stares for a moment, considering things.

He then closes his eyes and presses the delete button.

A prompt comes up to ask if he's certain.

Eiji looks out at the streets and then down at his smartphone.

And makes a decision.
Thank you for reading! I hope you enjoyed it! Please leave comments below for the next chapter on Monday! Also, fanart would be lovely too! Go to my writer's blog to ask any questions if you have them! (http://writerscornergbblp.tumblr.com/)
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

And yet another chapter today! I hope you enjoy it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There's a certain satisfaction in all forms of cooking. At least to Rin. And he's never been more proud of his cooking skills until today. Though baking is more accurate, looking at the lovely banana bread he just pulled out of the oven.

Setting it carefully on the stovetop, Rin grins down at the result, taking off the oven mitts after closing the oven. At times Rin has to admit the huge oven the monastery has – a result of it being half built by westerners when it was established – is a boon, though most of the time it's something everyone doesn't use.

'You can do plenty in a toaster oven...why do Americans need such a big oven anyways...?' Rin wonders, not for the first time. He then shrugs, happy since it makes his baking easier for him. He is able to make multiple batches of banana bread at once, which is a very good thing.

'Everyone is a pig.' Rin is not upset about it at all though. He adores being able to contribute and having praise for even one skill he can do is always a good thing.

Rin then frowns as a thought crosses his mind. He's been running out of baking recipes to try. Even with the baking book he has, there is only so much he's able to pull off. Rin needs to have affordable recipes after all and some things, though they look super tasty, aren't easy for him to pull off on a budget.

'I wonder where I can get more recipes...' Rin considers splurging on another baking book then shudders at the potential cost. He's been trying to save his money from his summer job. It was only a part-time job so he only got so much money from it.

“And the money can be put to better use...” Rin mutters to himself as he pulls out the final and now fully cooked batch of banana bread from the oven.

Like Rin's very precarious future.

Chapter 19: Sweet Tooths Are Fine But Watch Your Sugar

It's a surprisingly sunny day for Autumn. The sun seems to put everyone in a good mood, with children laughing and playing on the street, and the neighbours in good spirits.

Rin himself is enjoying the day. Being a day off – though for bad reasons – Rin decided to enjoy the good weather and deal with upset Yukio later. After all, as winter approaches such days will become rarer and rarer.

'If Yukio can't see that, his loss.' Rin decides cheerfully.

As Rin takes a turn on a random street, he slows down as he notices something odd.
A woman, dressed demurely in a green dress with an apron over top, is setting up a sign on the sidewalk. That isn't the shocking part. The part that draws Rin's gaze is her bright blonde hair and the height she has, especially as she stands up.

'Woah. Tall woman...' Rin realizes he's staring as the woman turns and meets his gaze with curious brown eyes. Rin blushes at that, then, looking around, approaches the woman.

“Um...hello?” 'Can she understand Japanese?’ Rin wonders. She looks rather foreign to his eyes after all.

“Hello.” She replies back, smiling down at him. “You live around here?”

Rin relaxes at the fact she has no accent and speaks like a native. “Um. Yes. At the monastery.” Rin glances over and blinks at what he sees.

The sign is obviously for the small bakery, with a sign saying “Sugar Bell” over head, that is now having an opening sale. Or should Rin say patisserie considering the amount of pastries and other sweet items on display. All of them look ridiculously good, making Rin's mouth water at the mere sight of them.

“Do you want to try some?” The lady asks, noticing with a smile how Rin looks close to drooling. “I have some free samples as part of the opening.”

“Um...that would be great!” Rin blurts out. He blushes again when the lady smiles down at him and he follows her like a lost puppy as she heads over to the patisserie's door. “Um...what's your name?”

“Samurakami Hikari.” Hikari is quick to notice Rin's startled expression and laughs, fiddling with a lock of her hair. “I always took after my mother more than my father. Bit of a problem when younger...”

Rin doesn't know what to say to that, and instead pauses to take in the ambiance of the patisserie as he enters it. It's a rather humble place, with a very homey feel to it. The floor is made of warm wooden panelling and the walls are painted a soothing green that contrasts nicely with the floor. The furniture is also wooden, small tables and chairs scattered around for visitors. At the back and to Rin's right are display cases for the baked goods and sweets available for perusal. A cash register is set in the back as well, with a counter that has a tray of small samples also there.

It is that which Hikari leads him to. The cash is currently being manned by an indifferent teenaged girl with hair dyed a deep blue, though she straightens up when she sees her boss coming.

“Samurakami-san, how much longer until a proper customer comes...” She whines.

Hikari raises an eyebrow. “I just set up the sign. Now, be nice and professional Rio-kun. We technically already have a customer.”

Rin looks down at Rin. “He's just a kid.”

Rin bristles at that and is going to open his mouth to yell at her, but is stopped by Hikari laying a hand on his shoulder. Rin blushes again at that.

“Now, now. Rio-kun what did I say?”

She sighs and flicks one of her blue bangs away. “Always treat others as you wish to be treated.”

Rin is confused by her attitude, though she looks Rin over in a more positive manner before smiling.

“Sorry squirt. Anyways, what would you like to try?”
Rin peers at the sample tray, startled at all the options available. Hesitantly, he picks out three of the small pieces.

At this point, Rio makes up for her attitude by serving him up swiftly and with style, setting up a very pretty platter of the small pieces of apricot tart, chocolate dipped matcha donut, and something called a “cheesecake cupcake”. Rin thanks her, getting a blink as a response, before letting Hikari lead him over to a table to enjoy his samples.

“Don't mind Rio-kun. She might be fluent in Japanese, but she was raised in America for most of her life.” Hikari shakes her head. “She's worked part-time there before, and the manners are different than here. She'll adapt I'm certain.”

Rin stares up at her, then ducks his head, blushing again. “Th-that's okay.”

'At least she hasn't heard any rumours about me being a demon...'

Glancing shyly at Hikari as he settles to enjoy his first bite of the apricot tart, Rin finds himself hoping she doesn't hear the rumours either.

Then he's distracted as the taste of the pastry explodes in his mouth.

Rin is frozen for a long time, then whirls on Hikari with bright eyes. “This is amazing! Did you make this?”

Hikari chuckles. “Well...yes.”

Rin stares up at her with starry eyes. “You...are amazing...”

At the counter, Rio snorts at Rin's reaction, then pauses and borrows a free sample for her own while Rin starts peppering Hikari with questions about how she made it and other questions that confuse Rio since it gets rather technical in details. Humming happily over her bite, she looks up as the doorbell rings and she sees a middle-aged man enter.

Plastering a smile on her face, Rio looks down at the list Hikari made for her before greeting the customer.

Shirō pokes his head into the kitchen, having heard the oddest sound.

What he sees inside confirms it. Normally Rin would at most hum as he cooks. But today he's actually outright singing, abet softly, to himself. A cheerful, preppy song at that.

'Now that's what I call a good mood.' Shirō wonders at what caused it and gently taps the door frame to get Rin's attention.

Rin jumps into the air at that, turning around and blushing like mad over how Shirō caught him singing. “Oyaji! What are you doing here?”

“Was wondering what that sound was.” Shirō grins as he enters the kitchen. “So what's made you so happy Rin?”

Rin looks away from Shirō, but Shirō still notices the blush rising in his cheeks. “J-just...stuff. Good day outside. Weather is nice. There's a new patisserie opened not too far from here.”

Shirō raises his eyebrows at the last. “Hmm...? That is interesting. Are the pastries any good there?”

Rin brightens at that. “They are amazing!” He declares, waving his hands in the air. “And
Samurakami-san is super smart and nice too!"

'Aha!' Shirō finally realizes exactly what is making Rin so happy as he continues to sing Samurakami's praise. 'A pretty lady uh? Bout time.' ‘Really? I'll have to visit then.’

Rin halts mid-sentence and nods, looking embarrassed again. ‘Uh. Yeah. Though I bought some of their pastries for dinner tonight...already out of banana bread and I thought a treat would be good...’

Shirō grins and ruffles Rin's hair, ignoring his complaints there. ‘That's perfect. I'm looking forward to the special treat.’

Rin beams at that and turns back to cook.

Shirō, leaving, can't help but give a parting shot of, “And of course, can't wait to meet the wonderful and lovely Samurakami-san!”

Rin nearly trips over thin air at that, and whirls around at Shirō, yelling at him. His bright red face doesn't inspired any confidence at hiding how he's been effected by Hikari though and Shirō escapes as Rin doesn't dare leave the kitchen while cooking.

Somewhere else, in the deep night, the smell of delicious sweets draws a small figure towards where it comes from. There, they light upon the roof and stare down at the humans gathered below.

A smile spreads across a tiny face and with a happy sound, they dive into the building below them.

Yukio allows himself to be dragged by his brother, despite how tired he feels. Aside from homework, Yukio ended up doing a few back-to-back missions yesterday.

'Of course I get an extra day off from school...' Yukio groans at the thought. 'Stupid pipes.'

Rin is ignorant to Yukio's plight. Shirō isn't, but that man is apparently enjoying this way too much and in no way is going to help Yukio disentangle himself from his brother and flee back home so he can get some proper rest.

However, Yukio has to admit some curiosity for where the apricot tarts Rin had for dessert last night came from. Not to mention why Shirō is grinning so much lately.

He gets his answer to the last question quite quickly, as they enter the new patisserie and are greeted by a tall, foreign looking woman who Rin immediately lights up about.

Finally getting his arm free, Yukio looks up at the woman who introduces herself as Samurakami Hikari. “It is nice to meet you.”

Hikari smiles and holds out her hand. “What a polite young man. And you are sir?”

“Fujimoto Shirō.” Shirō doesn't even blink at the offered hand and accepts it. “I'm these two rascals' foster father.”

“Who are you calling a rascal?” Yukio mutters to himself, following after Rin to check out what's available and affordable for them. Yukio is vaguely surprised by how cheap the prices of the pastries look to his, admittedly untrained, eye. Then again, it's the opening sale.

“Amazing aren't they?” Rin is positively glowing as he looks through what are on display. However, at times he glances over at the adults and in particular Hikari. Especially when Shirō somehow
makes her laugh, that has Rin staring for a good long time before he finally realizes it.

‘Oh dear...’ Yukio sighs and, eyeing Rin carefully, decides that this is a true crush from Rin. It's not like how it was with Tsukishiro-sensei. Obviously he had found her pretty, but the feeling faded fast in favour of something more platonic in nature.

Hikari looks to be something else, with how Rin keeps getting distracted by her.

'Never got distracted by Tsukishiro-sensei so to speak.' Yukio considers, turning his attention to picking out a pastry he would like to try.

“Just one!” Shirō calls at that moment, making Rin groan and Yukio shake his head. “Only one pastry for each of you.”

Rin mutters under his breath about so many choices, which Yukio ignores in favour of picking out something. A cherry and strawberry tart ends up drawing his eye, particularly with the dark chocolate drizzle on top, and he picks that one out after some thought.

Rin meanwhile, decides to stretch the meaning of one pastry and asks for a slice of a big, decadent chocolate cake. Shirō seems to find it funny and thus doesn't yell at Rin for it. Instead, he goes and picks out a donut for himself to enjoy, a ginger and lemon flavoured one.

They aren't the only customers at this point, a few others having arrived from around the neighbourhood. Even a trio of high school girls have settled down to eat the sweets offered here.

Yukio notices some customers flagging down Hikari, but dismisses it as important as he goes for a bite of his tart.

The reaction is instant, as Yukio shudders and has to struggle to swallow his mouthful.

“What's...what's this?”

Rin looks at Yukio confused. Then has the same reaction to his cake, except with bigger eyes.

“What...this is...”

Shirō is frowning at his donut and looking around it seems everyone else is complaining about the same thing.

“Did something go wrong with the sugar...” Yukio wonders, then looking around at all the complaining customers, can hardly believe it. After all, so many separate orders have apparently been tampered with.

Rin looks at Hikari with worry, then down at the cake on his plate that doesn't just taste way too sweet, but tastes like magic to him. And, as the complaints get louder and Shirō stands up to go and help Hikari out with the fuss, Rin frowns and then takes on a serious expression.

‘There's definitely a Card here...and I need to catch it soon.’ Rin looks at the patisserie that is in chaos and thinks back to what it was like yesterday. 'And Samurakami-san doesn't deserve so much being piled on her.'

After the fuss dies down, Shirō takes a seat next to Hikari and keeps her company as she starts crying from all that happened today. The patisserie ended up having to close down early and, in the back, Rio is making up some coffee for her boss, glancing worriedly outside at times.

“I'm sorry.” Hikari says once she's done, wiping her tears with a handkerchief. “It just seemed to...”
“It's alright.” Shirō soothes her. “It's been a stressful day, that's all.”

Rio quietly approaches with the tray of drinks – coffee for everyone except Rin – and Hikari accepts her mug with a smile and a soft thanks.

Settled together at one of the patisserie’s table, Rin looks from his tea to Hikari. “Are you okay?”

“I’ll be fine.” Hikari soothes him, taking a sip from her coffee. “Just...I don’t understand how that happened. Rio-kun?”

Rio shakes her head. “Looks like we have to dump everything. Somehow every single pastry and treat got too much sugar into it.”

Hikari looks exhausted just thinking about all the work she has to do, then takes on a more firm expression. “Well, I know I'm going to be working late. Rio-kun, you don't have to stay. You need to get home and do your homework after all.”

Rio bites her lip at that. “But...the kitchen help won't be here until the morning. Can you really handle it all on your own?”

Hikari smiles at that and pinches Rio's nose, making her squawk and step back. “Yes, I'm sure I can. I've been doing this for longer than you've been alive Rio-kun.”

Rio doesn't look quite convinced but lets it lie after Hikari says, teasingly, “Besides, baking isn't your strong suit.”

Rio blushes but nods nonetheless.

“Do you need help?” Rin asks, looking shyly up at Hikari.

Hikari shakes her head. “No, I should be fine.”

“You're lying.” Rio drawls, finally sitting down herself and taking a sip from her own mug of coffee. Yukio eyes her for a moment, since she sat right next to him, then ignores her in favour of turning back to watch Hikari. “There's so much work. We won't have as big a selection as today or even yesterday.”

“I could help?” Rin offers, making Hikari look at him and Rin to blush in response. “Well, I mean um...”

Shirō chuckles. “That's actually a good idea. Rin doesn't have anything fancy, but he's been baking for months now and every single treat he's made has been delicious.”

“Are you sure?” Hikari looks between Shirō and Rin, both who nod. “Well...a little help would be nice to be honest.”

“I can help!” Rin then ducks his head. “Well, um, you'll have to show me the recipes and such but I can do it.”

“Nii-san...he is very good.” Yukio adds, making Rin perk up. “Cooking and baking are talents of his.”

Hikari smiles then. “Very well. I'll accept the help.”

Rin cheers at that and suddenly the dower mood is lifted as Shirō chuckles at how embarrassed and yet eager Rin is to be with Hikari and Rin talks to Hikari about what she's planning on making.
Since Hikari isn't going to be baking immediately – she needs to make sure she has all the ingredients first – Rin gets dragged away by Shirō home, being told to have a nice bath and relax for a little bit before he goes and helps Hikari.

Rin pouts at bit at that, but takes the opportunity to not only have a bath, but bring Kero with him so he can talk about the Card.

“Sweet.” Kero says immediately, shaking his head to get the last of the suds off himself. Rin looks over at Kero, who ducks into the shower spray after that, watching as he basically dances in the spray.

“Sweet? You mean...oh, pastries and sugar stuff uh...” Rin considers it. “So Sweet made everything too sweet.”

“That's what Sweet does. All she can do is make things sweet or turn things into sweets.” Kero shakes off the water after his shower.

“That...who makes a Card like that...?” Rin stares, trying to comprehend when such a Card would be useful.

“Clow Reed.” Is Kero's response, as he settles down on the bench, watching Rin move to the bath and settle in with a sigh. “He was a very strange man.”

“...well, same guy made Change so I can buy it...” Rin shudders, thinking of how close things were to getting messed up real bad when he was capturing that particular Card.

“Oh yes...” Kero shakes his head. “So, any plan for how to get Sweet?”

Rin considers it, tilting his head in thought. “Well if she likes sweets...” A wicked grin spreads across his face as he considers what is the opposite of sweet.

“Thank you so much Okumura-kun.” Hikari smiles down at Rin, who flushes again and looks down awkwardly at the bowl he is stirring up.

“N-no problem.” Rin has to focus to keep from speeding up his mixing too much, not wanting to mess up the recipe.

Between Hikari and Rin, they have managed to salvage things enough for tomorrow. Though Hikari says she'll be baking again in the morning and hopes that, and handling things over the day, will make up for today's disaster.

'She never stays down.' Rin considers, watching as she carefully decorates some of the complete pastries before storing them away for tomorrow in the giant fridge.

It's something very admirable, that she's able to stand up and keep going despite everything.

“Um...Samurakami-san...” Rin eyes Hikari sidelong, watching as she pauses and turns to look at him. “Um...” Rin swallows, then blurs out, “Why did you become a patissier?”

Hikari looks at Rin for a long moment, brown eyes considering it. “Well, it's just something I've always liked. Baking I mean. Over time, I just kept on learning and practising. Until I just ended up falling into my job.” Hikari smiles, winking at Rin. “I went travelling the world for a bit, looking for more recipes. Started in France and ended up in America somehow. But that worked out okay,
considering I met Rio-kun.”

“Hmmm...who is she anyways to you?” Rin asks, getting Hikari's attention. “You're...really casual with her.”

“Rio-kun is my ward.” Hikari explains softly. “It was quite a struggle to get custody of her, what with me being only a visitor to her country. But after a year of struggle and legal work, I managed to gain custody.” Hikari shrugs at Rin's surprised look. “There were...many reasons why I decided that it would be best to take in Rio-kun myself.”

“I...” Rin smiles. “You are very nice Samurakami-san.” Rin says finally. He then glances guiltily outside at Kero and nods once sharply. The little mascot flies off to the front and Rin waits, wincing.

“Oi, who put this blasted buildin' in my way!”

Hikari nearly drops her bowl at that, startled. “What is...” She listens as someone appears to be cursing out her building and causing a racket. “Pardon me Okumura-kun, but it seems I need to go deal with that.”

“Y-yeah...” Rin watches as she goes and calls out, “I'll start clean up while you are gone!”

Hikari turns back to Rin and beams. “Thank you so much. That's so sweet of you.”

She leaves before she notices Rin's guilty expression. 'Sorry Samurakami-san...and sorry Kero...'

Rin thinks of Kero, currently using Mask to pose as a random drunk, and how he has to keep Hikari occupied for long enough that Rin can lure out Sweet and handle her. Not an easy task for the guardian.

Sighing, Rin reaches into his shirt and pulls out the Key.

“Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!” Grasping the staff, Rin looks around the patisserie's kitchen. Rin then considers something and decides to put the last batch in the oven, carefully sorting the liquid contents into the right trays and puts them in, while waiting for Sweet.

With that done, Rin looks around the kitchen, picks up a certain item, then goes to the front. Ducking behind the counter and away from the door, Rin waits, holding the staff and listening for the sign of Sweet.

Rin winces as first he hears muffled shouts and Hikari attempting to “sooth” the drunk. Then he sits up straight as he finally picks up the feeling of a Sakura Card. Peering carefully into the kitchen, Rin immediately spots her.

With yellow afro hair and a big puffy dress, Sweet is making happy sounds as she flies around the kitchen, waving her wand and sprinkling sugar on top of all the desserts. Rin scowls at that, thinking back to how this made Hikari cry, and stands up, quietly entering the kitchen.

Sweet spots him and goes to flee, forcing Rin to run after her. She knocks over some bags and cans, making Rin slips and fall. Laughing, she goes to finally get away only for Rin to toss something at her. It barely hits but it's enough for the bag to break and cover her in salt. She lets out a cry of disgust and shakes, trying to get it off.

It stalls her just long enough for Rin to run over and get in the proper position. Sweet only has a moment to look up at Rin, looking chagrined, as he raises the staff.
“Sweet, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Rin cheers quietly as the Card is successfully captured. He then quickly looks around and pulls out another Card. “Bubbles, Release!”

A wave of pink bubbles covers the entire kitchen, passing over everything and when it’s gone everything is sparkling clean.

“Thanks.” Rin says softly to the Card when it returns to him, then quickly writes down his name on Sweet before pocketing it and putting his staff away. He blinks as Mask suddenly appears in front of him.

“Well, that's a relief...” Hikari enters the kitchen, looking half annoyed and half amused. “That drunk never seemed to want to go and then when I turn around he is gone.”

She then takes in the kitchen with wide eyes, surprised at how clean it is. “Why...I wasn't gone that long was I?” She asks, laughing a bit at the thought.

Rin shakes his head. “Um...no. Just good at cleaning I guess.”

“Cooking, cleaning, and a good, sweet boy...such a charmer you are going to be when you grow up.” Hikari teases Rin, who blushes again. “Now...let's see...would you like some hot chocolate while we wait for the last cakes to be ready?”

Rin nods, smiling at the thought. “Yes, that sounds great!”

Laughing, Hikari goes to the nearest cupboard and starts looking for the hot chocolate mix, mentioning it's homemade to Rin as she searches for it.

Outside, sitting on the window sill, Kero sulks at missing out on all the sweets.

‘This is pure torture!' He mentally wails, not noticing Rin's thoughtful look when he tastes the hot chocolate and asks if he can have the recipe.

“C'mon, c'mon!” Kero curses at his video character as he loses the last of his health points. “Oh come on!” Growling, Kero sets aside the remote for a moment, not wanting to replay that level over again quite yet.

A knock on the door has Kero sit up and turn to see Rin entering. He's got a tray that has two steaming mugs and a platter of cookies and pastries. “Hard game?”

“You have no idea.” Kero whines. “It's like a puzzle and fight in one.”

Rin chuckles a bit at that and sets down the tray on the nearby low table. “Here, have some hot chocolate and sweets.”

Kero perks up and flies over. He then stares at the sweets. “Are these from Sugar Bell?”

“Sorta.” Rin settles down to kneel in front of the table and picks up a pastry. “Samurakami-san is teaching me how to make fancier baked goods. She said she doesn't mind teaching me, especially since I'm good enough already that she can sell the majority of the batch while I take only a small amount home.”

Kero perks up at that. “She doesn't mind the cost?”
“Sugar Bell already has made up profits in a week.” Rin declares, sounding proud of Hikari and blushing a bit at how she had cheerfully done a dance afterwards with him and Rio. “Became the local neighbourhood hangout too for everyone.”

Rin then shrugs, watching as Kero sips at the hot chocolate, blushing and making happy sounds in pleasure. “Plus, apparently she thinks she should repay me for the help and she figures lessons work wonderfully. I've got so many tips and tricks whirling up here.” Rin taps his head at that, then laughs. “I'm really liking it.”

“And the very pretty and stacked teacher has nothin' to say there?” Kero slyly suggests, enjoying Rin's blushing and stuttering in response. “Ah'm not complainin'! Ah get more treats!”

Rin, still blushing and trying to deny his attraction to the patissier, doesn't notice as Kero snags the nearest sweet in joy, until it's too late.

“Hey! You are supposed to leave some for me!” Rin scolds Kero and picks him up briefly so he can get a taste of one of the pastries. “There's only so many here, yeesh slow down.”

A muffled “sorry” comes from Kero, who's face is stuffed, which makes Rin smile and set Kero down again.

“So, want to tag team another game?” Rin offers.

Kero perks up and cheers at that. With Yukio out and about, as well as Shirō, and the monks busy, Rin and Kero are set for a day to themselves.

Something Kero finds he enjoys greatly, since more often than not Rin's unfortunately too busy or the monastery itself is busy, making it very difficult for the two to play together.

The sound of merriment carries downstairs, but the monks shrug it off as Rin playing a game. A true enough fact at the least.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and please comment below for another chapter on Friday!

(also, if i don't reply to you don't worry; i'm not feeling so good today, in fact am sick so don't got the energy to do much)
Yet another chapter yay! I'm so, so thankful for all the comments and the fanart!!! Keep it up people. Go spread around ICD love in any way you can, that is so wonderful and appreciated!

This chapter is one I wrote up as a bit of a focus on things. I've been showing Rin in his element most of the time, so I'm going to show how outside of his magic Rin is still very much lost there...and not accepted. Also, it allows me to hint at a few future things and present things. And do a Sports Day chapter - it's a big thing in Japan, google it if you are curious!

With autumn fully sweeping across Southern Cross, Rin is currently nursing a hot cup of tea and a piece of hot blueberry pie at Sugar Bell, a treat as thanks for him helping cover for a missing employee.

“That jerk. I'm going to give it to Kurosawa later.” Rio gripes across from Rin, looking exhausted. It's at the end of the day so Rio sees no problem settling down for a five minute break before she goes and finishes cleaning up.

“Not telling you guys was pretty bad...” Rin pauses as he takes a forkful of pie. “That happened at my last job and sucked.”

“Euh? You've already done work?” Rio peers at Rin. “No wonder you managed well covering for Kurosawa...sorry about dragging you into that by the way.”

“It's not problem!” Rin says cheerfully. “I even get free pie out of it!”

Rio chuckles and pulls out her phone, scrolling through her contacts list and frowning at a message. “This undōkai thing...it's important right?”

Rin pauses, a bit confused by the question then remembers Rio's originally from America. “Uh huh. Your school is having it tomorrow too isn't it?”

“Yeah...ugh, what a pain. Since I moved only recently I didn't get much practise in...” Rio sighs and closes her phone. “Aah well, do my best. How about you squirt?”

Rin scowls automatically at the squirt comment. “I'm not a squirt. And I dunno...” Rin glances down at his pie. “I'm not sure anyone wants me to do anything...”

“But you have to participate yeah?” Rio looks confused as Rin shakes his head. She then shrugs. She's gotten used to how this boy switches from happy-go-lucky to a dour mood at the drop of a hat. Not her problem really.

“Anyways, finish up your pie quick. You help me with final clean up and you'll get some of the stuff we would have normally tossed to take home.” Rio stretches and grins as Rin immediately perks up and is quick to agree to the deal.
'I do like Japan for this...' Rio thinks cheerfully. 'That and the fact everyone cleans up their table when they leave. Much better than America that.'

With cheerful thoughts in mind, Rio rolls up her sleeves and gets to work.

**Chapter 20: Sports Day Activities**

The sports day dawns bright and clear, with good weather reports to support a sunny, warm day with a pleasant cool breeze for the festival. This immediately cheers up all the students – from elementary to senior high – who are to participate in the festival.

Even Rin, who's already half-certain he's going to be pushed away from most activities, is in high spirits as he enters the school grounds with Yukio in tow.

“Slow down Nii-san!” Yukio laughs, finally pulling his hand free. “You don't have to rush.”

Rin shifts from one foot and the other as Yukio puts his shoes away for his uwabaki. “C'mon Yukio, let's go!”

“Yes, yes.” Yukio allows Rin to drag him off again so they can get their gym uniforms on. The locker room is very busy today, for understandable reasons, even at this hour, so perhaps Rin is right to rush them as since things aren't too crowded and crazy yet.

Once they are changed, the two boys head out, Rin excited about the upcoming events and chattering to Rin.

“Oi, Rin, Yukio!”

That voice makes them turn and both boys can't help the smiles that come across their faces as they see Shirō and Nagatomo, dressed casually and Shirō with a camera, obviously here to watch the sports event. Hardly the only adults – and parents – to show up to enjoy the event.

Rin whisks away his worries with that and drags Yukio over to where their class is gathering in front of Tsukishiro for a pre-festival speech before the opening ceremony.

'Perhaps this will go well!' Rin thinks positively, especially as Tsukishiro smiles at him and bestows the feeling of sparkles on him.

The first event of the day is the 100 metres dash, divided into male and female sections.

Which means it's Oota Sayaka's turn to shine for her class. Having been chosen as her class's representative for this contest, she prepares herself for the run.

The other competition eyes Sayaka warily; for good reason to as Sayaka is well known on the track team and such an athletic feat is definitely within her purview.

“Go, Sayaka-chan!” Hiromi cheers, just as the signal goes off and Sayaka takes off, quickly putting herself in the lead. Though there are plenty of other athletic girls, it is ultimately Sayaka who makes it to the end first.

But, somehow, Hiromi is there to greet her at the end before Sayaka makes it. Not that Sayaka cares about the details, happily embracing Hiromi and jumping up and down in joy together with her.
The next event is to be the three-legged race. No one in 1-B is looking forward to the contest and there are plenty of arguments on who to put for each race – one male and one female – as no one can agree on anything except “not me”. Or, in a certain case, “not Rin” much to his dismay.

“Well then, Okumura Yukio and Miharu Ken will be in the three-legged race then. Yeesh, you guys should already have it all figured out!” That announcement has the two boys staring at the other classmate. A girl in this case, the girls obviously tired of the guys taking forever to decide.

“What?!” Miharu is echoed by Yukio, who looks horrified at the thought of it.

The glare they get quiets Yukio, though Miharu still grumbles to himself. “Well, you both are athletic enough for it. I don't see the problem at all.”

“But I don't want to...ugh, three-legged races are so childish!” Miharu gripes. This dissolves into an argument, a rather ugly one that doesn't look like it will ever stop.

Standing by the side, Rin goes up to Yukio and pulls his sleeve, making him look at his brother in confusion. “What is it Nii-san?”

“The race is going to start soon.” Rin points out. Yukio glances over and sweats. The race is truly about to start and, glancing back at the argument still on-going, there's no chance Miharu is going to be convinced to join in time.

“Nii-san...” Yukio looks at his brother who grins and tugs at him, dragging him over to the race.

The sound of the signal going off for the race is what gets the class's attention and they turn in horror. Which quickly turns into a combo of confusion and shock as they see that Rin and Yukio are currently in the race and in fact winning it.

The rest are left stunned, while Rin and Yukio glance over at Shirō's location and sigh.

“No luck with destroying the pictures?” Rin asks Yukio as Shirō is still wielding his camera and cheering about his boys having won the race.

“Never had luck before Nii-san.” Yukio points out.

They both sigh, then carefully remove the ties keeping them together at the legs.

Back with the class, Miharu speaks up hesitantly, “W-well...they are twins...after all...”

A soft agreement goes up, but everyone still eyes Rin warily and privately vow to keep him away from the other competitions.

A three-legged race is one thing, but other things could turn dangerous around him.

The most effective way of keeping Rin from an event proves to be just telling him to not join in. As bluntly and rudely as possible so there are no mistakes. So while the rest of his classmates do the ball toss event against 1-C, Rin sits down to the side and watching as the baskets for each team are slowly filled, sulking slightly at being kicked out.

“Are you okay Rin-kun?” That soft question from Tsukishiro, who settles down beside him, makes Rin look up.

“Not really...” Rin admits after a moment.
“You can join in.” Tsukishiro points out gently. “Just because they told you to sit out doesn’t mean you should.”

Rin gives a small, sad smile and shakes his head. “Nah, it's fine. It's better this way. They would just be upset and sad and...well, I would hate to trouble them.”

A cheer goes up; 1-C is the winner this time and Rin watches as said class celebrates. Tsukishiro watches as well and considers that Rin might be too thoughtful.

‘He needs to get better at being selfish.’ She sighs, thinking of how strange that sounds.

Yukio calling for Rin has him stand, send a smile to Tsukishiro, then head over to his brother with the smile still glued to his face.

After that event, it's time for the ball roll. The giant balls involved in this race make a few students giggle like mad, though the reason flies right past Rin's head while Yukio sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose.

Rin again stands to the side as the teams are sent out in the field, this time both boys and girls at once. It's a bit of wonderful chaos, as shown by Rin seeing Kaido cursing out his partner and yelling at them for not even trying in the event.

Rin also happens to spot Naoko on the other side of the field, as part of the upcoming cheerleading competition. She looks as energetic as usual and Rin scoots away before she can spot him and head over at him. Rin has no desire to deal with her energy at this time.

Edging around the field, Rin spots Eiji sorting through his smartphone or possible something else with it. “Hey!”

Eiji looks up, and looks surprised for a moment to see Rin “Oh. What are you doing here?”

Rin shrugs. “Everyone outside of Yukio doesn't want me involved so I'm staying back for now.”

The look Eiji gives him Rin doesn't understand, but the other boy swiftly turns to back to his phone. “Do you want to place a bet for who will win in certain competitions and even overall?”

Rin peers over Eiji's shoulder at that and sees he's looking at a bunch of bets that people have apparently laid with him. “Hmm...what's the rate?”

“Whatever you are willing to pay.” Eiji says, then freezes. 'What the hell is up with that? The base fee is 1000 yen.'

“Oh...then 100 yen each on my class winning the relay race, kibasen, scavenger hunt, and tug-o-war. Oh and of course the entire event.” Rin offers.

“Why those competition in particular?” Eiji asks, sighing and accepting the 500 yen Rin gives him.

Rin shrugs. “Nothing really. Just popped into my head.”

Eiji looks at Rin for a moment, then turns back to his smartphone. “You are a very strange person Okumura-kun.”

Rin blinks slowly at that. “I am?”

“Yes.” Eiji pauses in his typing. “But that isn't automatically a bad thing.”
Rin stares at Eiji, attempting to figure out what that means. He's about to ask when Eiji shoves his smartphone in his pocket. “Best head back before the teachers notice us gone.”

Rin slowly nods and follows after Eiji until it comes time to split and head to their respective classes. The cheerleading contest is up next and Rin can see Tsukishiro gathering the class.

He jogs quickly over and settles beside Yukio, who smiles at seeing his brother back.

‘I half thought he left school grounds.’ Yukio gives a wry grin at that thought, then focuses on what Tsukishiro is saying to those who have volunteered to be part of the cheerleading contest.

After cheerleading from the girls and gymnastics from the boys, it's time to break for lunch. The students scatter, happily chattering about this and that, Rin and Yukio among them.

“Oi, over here!” Shirō waves to get their attention and, laughing, Rin comes over to enjoy the spread that they brought. Instead of making the food, Shirō decided to make it a special treat and order out for the food. Nothing spectacularly fancy, but a rare treat indeed especially when added to Sugar Bell's sweets that he brought. The big spread is enough for a large group, though it's really just four people eating.

Make that five, as Tsukishiro approaches them. “Do you mind if I join you?”

Rin sparkles up at her and eagerly scoots over to allow his favourite teacher to join them. Tsukishiro and Shirō exchange looks and greetings, Tsukishiro setting down a three tiered bento of hers that shocks the group.

“Is that all for you?” Yukio stares in stunned amazement at the fancy and large bento.

Tsukishiro chuckles. “Yes. I have an amazingly large appetite, or so I'm constantly told. I tend to get those exact same looks every time I first reveal it.” She teases Yukio.

Rin in particular looks stunned. Even with Tsukishiro offering to share some of her bento's contents, between the majority of that and what she also gets from the spread Shirō brought, the impression is rather like a bottomless pit.

Which strangely makes Rin happy. 'Good, I can treat her at times!' Rin thinks, considering about how Tsukishiro was there to silently support him during both Repair and Storm's capture. Personally still confused by the outfit she gave him, but he has to admit it's very durable and comfortable to wear. Not to mention looks quite good.

Either way, Rin wants to repay Tsukishiro for her efforts and the support she gives him.

With such cheery thoughts in mind, Rin finishes lunch in a good mood, talking happily with his family and Tsukishiro-sensei.

After lunch, the next competition is kibasen. The goal is for four people – three acting as a “horse” and the last acting as the “rider” – to do a “battle” in which the goal is to knock off the headgear of the opponent's “rider” without getting theirs knocked off. Having the “rider” touch the ground is also grounds for losing. Each “battle” is done between two teams of four, progressing through the entire school with everyone getting a turn for a match with every other class.

Rin avoids it. Even if he was allowed, the kibasen game always makes Rin nervous in various ways. It's a bit too rough, especially for someone with super strength.
Instead, Rin is happily on the sidelines cheering on his class's team despite the odd looks that gains him.

He recognizes Hiromi briefly “battling” as the rider of her class, the sweet girl being surprisingly viscous and swift in defeating her current opponent. He can't help but be impressed by that, including how she seems to truly be in charge of her formation.

'I was starting to wonder about her friendship with Sayaka...' But looking now, with Hiromi off the “horse” and talking to her friend, Rin relaxes at seeing she's definitely not a pushover and not getting bullied either on purpose or by accident.

Rin sighs in relief, which gets Yukio's attention. “What is it Nii-san?”

Rin waves off Yukio. “Nothing. Oh, look we're up again!” Rin lets out another cheer, making the team twitch and, unknown to him, vow to not lose.

'The demon will kill us if we lose!' Is the hysterical thought.

Rin doesn't know that. Only sees the fact their team manages to crush their opponent in time with Rin clapping and cheering at how impressive their teamwork is.

His cheers get louder when it's announced their team won the entire competition at the end, the team collapsing into a pile of nervous wrecks and eagerly accepting the water offered to them.

'We'll live!' Is their thought, eyeing Rin worriedly who's talking Yukio's ear off on how amazing the team was.

Yukio is not amused with how he got guilt-tripped into doing the scavenger hunt for their group. Personally speaking, he rather be doing the obstacle course that's going on at the other end at the same time, despite the fact it involves shoving one's face into a tin of flour to find a piece of candy. Mostly because all the options tend to involve going up to someone and asking for some item or another. Yukio really is not good at that.

But, sighing, he races to the start line and takes a random piece of paper with the item he needs to get on it. As he keeps running, Yukio opens the paper to read what he needs to get.

The young exorcist ends up skidding to a halt and staring at what he has. 'Is this for real?’ Blinking and looking again, Yukio realizes that in fact it is very real.

Groaning, he turns around and goes to the teachers handling this particular competition. They look at him puzzled as he hands over his sheet.

The teacher then ends up snorting and shaking his head. “What are the odds...well, looks like your class is the winner.”

Yukio grits his teeth, pretty sure he's going bright red as the story gets passed around by the teachers and soon they are all laughing.

Then again, what are the odds of Yukio picking the sheet of paper that has “Glasses” as the item needed?

After the scavenger hunt and the obstacle course, there are only two events left. The first up, is the tug-o-war contest.
Lots are drawn to decide which classes are pitted against each other. Something that causes a cry of dismay as 1-B discovers they are to be dealing with 3-D.

“Third years...it has to be third years...” Miharu moans. He's got a point, as the third years have all gone through growth spurts and compared to the much smaller first years they are an obvious winner. 3-D in particular looks intimidating with all the muscular guys in it.

Rin hangs back, wanting to help but not entirely certain of it. Instead he ends up holding the end of the rope as the match is set up.

On the sideline, Shirō watches as the tug-o-war begins for his boys' class, taking pictures and finding himself amused at how, though the class isn't winning any time soon, they are prevented from losing due to the hold Rin has on the end of the rope.

“Go ahead and pull Rin!” Shirō yells at Rin. “It will be fun!”

Rin turns to glare at Shirō and opens his mouth to yell back at him. He's drowned out by a loud cry coming from the tug-o-war groups, as Rin accidentally pulls on the rope at the same time, pulling everyone down and 3-D's team over the line in the process.

There's a long silence before a teacher blows the whistle. “Cl-class 1-B is the winner!” He declares, as the students get up groaning and glancing warily at Rin while the boy turns beet red at the attention and murmurs from those watching.

“You know what...maybe we could have just have him be the team...” Miharu suggests, getting a roll of eyes from his friend followed by a smack to the head.

Shirō cackles to himself, happy to have gotten plenty of pictures of the event and chaos that Rin accidentally caused. All for a good cause.

The final event – held between all classes as one – arrives and there is a bit of chaos for Rin's class as they try to get a replacement for someone who had their ankle twisted by the tug-o-war incident and thus can't do the relay.

Rin sulks in the background for a bit, then slowly steps up and volunteers to take their place. The result in a very silent class as they stare at Rin.

Finally, Miharu sighs. “Sure.”

He gets a lot of shocked responses at that which makes him sigh. “Look, he's plenty athletic and would work perfect as the anchor for the race. Besides, if it's his fault we're missing one, he can damn well replace them.”

There's some grumbling still, but eventually it's all settled.

Rin soon finds himself waiting at the final relay point, given a suspiciously clear space around him as everyone eyes him. Rin can even see some parents talking about him and it just makes him more depressed. It's not his fault at all he's who he is! Not like his super strength and everything else was asked for.

'I really would like to know why I'm so blasted strong...' Rin grumbles to himself, then looks up as he hears the whistle go off.

He can just see the runners in the distance and slowly gets ready to receive the baton that is to be
given to him.

As soon as he sees the person approaching him, Rin realizes there is a big problem. The guy doing
the running pales at the sight of him and slows down just enough to let others pass him. Rin's face
doesn't change but the slump of his shoulders says it all.

Rin then gives himself a good shake and grabs the baton out of the guy's hand as soon as he comes
in reach. He then takes off, running fast and without consideration of others, aside from idly getting
out of the way whenever it looks like he might actually run them over as they aren't getting out of the
way.

He doesn't notice until long after it's over that his class not only won the relay race, but has won the
entire sports festival.

Rin finds he doesn't care, slipping away and deciding to go to a private spot. Crouching down on the
ground, Rin thinks back to the day's events.

And, sniffling a bit, he finally lets go and allows himself to cry. Half frustration and half sorrow, with
some hurt within.

Rin cries alone, not noticed by anyone.

After detouring to the washroom to clean up and remove the traces of the tears, Rin quickly slips out
of his gym uniform and back into his normal school uniform. He missed the closing ceremony for the
sports festival but frankly can't work up the urge to care.

As he's heading to the front gate, thinking of hopefully meeting up with Shirō and the rest there, he
nearly runs into Eiji. Eiji actually seems to strangely perk up when he sees him. “There you are. I've
been looking for you. Here.”

The second year looks strangely serious as he holds something out for Rin to take. Rin stares for a
moment then holds out his own hands.

Rin glances down and is surprised by all the money he suddenly has. “Wait...what?”

“It's from winning the bets you placed.” Eiji explains, adjusting his glasses. “Even taking account my
percentage, it's quite a lot of money you managed to make for yourself. Mostly because people
started changing their bets in certain events.”

“Aah...I see...” Rin looks down at the cash in hands, still not quite believing they are real.

Eiji hesitates, then manages a smile. “Good job today.”

Rin looks up just in time Eiji walking away, rather quickly in fact, and thus can't ask Eiji any
questions. Looking back down at the money, he quickly stuffs it into his bag for later, walking
quickly towards the gate.

At the gate is his family, Shirō talking with Tsukishiro. His father turns just in time to spot Rin and
smiles. “Good job today. You helped your class win.”

Rin slowly nods, not sure how to respond to that. Shirō frowns slightly at it and looks over at Yukio.
Yukio glances up after getting a nudge to his side, and quickly recognizes the message in there.

“This way Nii-san. The monks are thinking of having ramen for dinner, what do you think?” Yukio
gently asking Rin and surprising him by taking his hand.

Rin looks up at Yukio and, slowly, relaxes and smiles a bit more genuinely. “Ramen sounds good. What kind?”

As the boys discuss meal options, Shirō looks over at Tsukishiro.

“I haven't thanked you recently for what you've done for my son.” He begins, drawing her attention from watching the two boys fondly. “Rin's always been having it hard with school and I honestly thought he might give up on Junior High. Whatever you've been doing, it's very good and I hope you can keep it up.”

Tsukishiro shrugs. “The thing is I'm not doing anything particularly special. All I do is treat him with kindness and listen to him.”

Shirō chuckles. “But that's exactly what he needs, hm? I can't always be there for him so I thank you again.” He bows to the teacher, startling her. “Rin needs all the support he can get.”

Tsukishiro stares at him for a long moment, then gives a soft smile. “I can see where Rin has learned kindness and all that is good within him. You have two fine sons.”

“I try my best.” Shirō tells her, then says goodbye and chases after his sons.

Tsukishiro looks at his back as he catches up to his foster sons and gives them both big hair ruffles before grabbing them both in a hug, making them squawk and protest the treatment in unison. Contemplation is spread across Tsukishiro's face as she thinks over what she knows and suspects. Considering some things and what they just might mean for Rin and his future.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! I hope you enjoyed and if you did, please comment below! Comments get the next chapter!

Thank you guys so much for all the support and love you have been giving me, don't ever let the world get you down you are all super awesome!
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so ever much for all the lovely comments! They encourage me so much!

Yet another chapter today thanks to those comments! I hope you enjoy! This one got a bit intense...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There's a certain aspect of being a Cardcaptor that often gets dismissed or overlooked. Perhaps because of the "cool" factor or other things that happen at the same time.

That fact is that it's very dangerous.

Something Rin is all too aware of as he huddles behind Shield as Shot repeatedly keeps hitting at it, flashing of light and a banging sound being the result each and every time.

"Shield's not goin' to last much longer." Kero warns him. "Shot's got more energy."

Rin curses at that, looking out at the flashing streak of light that whirling around out there. "And it's fast too..."

"Like lightnin'." Kero agrees. "Not easy to capture at all."

Rin grits his teeth and pulls out the Cards he has. Armour won't work since Shot will smash through its protection. Watery, though powerful, isn't suited for this. Neither is Windy. Thunder could work, but Shot's actually faster than it.

'It's speed that's the problem...' Rin pauses as he sees a certain Card. Time.

Rin hasn't used Time, mostly because, as Kero had repeatedly warned him, Time's incredibly powerful and draining. Using it brings a risk of passing out and that's not a good thing.

'But Tsukishiro-sensei is here.' Rin realizes. She had briefly shown up to distract Shot long enough for Rin to be able to call up Shield, retreating soon after as Shot had gotten through her own shields. 'If I pass out, she can get me home.'

That decided, Rin finally stands up and lifts Time in the air. Kero looks at the Card he's about to use and curses. 'He won't have enough magic to pull out another Card!'

But it's too late for Kero to stop Rin as he takes a deep breath. "Time, freeze everything but me for a minute! Release!"

The staff releases the Card, sending a powerful surge of magic that spreads out around Rin, tinting the entire area in a strange yellow as everything but him freezes.

Rin wavers, taking in huge gulps of air as he feels the great strain from casting Time. Shaking it off, Rin shakily forces himself to move and looks for Shot. He sees her, frozen in the midst of another strike at Shield.
"Thunder...take down Shot...Release!" Rin lets loose that Card and it speeds toward Shot, hitting it just as Time's spell finishes. Shot has a moment to let out a cry of surprise, then falls down to the ground, wincing and shuddering at the lightning speeding over it.

"Shot, I c-command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!" Rin manages, wavering as he does so. The Card transforms back, allowing Rin to catch it.

And immediately pass out right afterwards, Kero yelling and giving a cry of Rin's name as he does. From behind another building, Tsukishiro also cries out and rushes over to Rin, settling down beside him and lifting him up a bit so she can look him over.

She breathes a sigh of relief. "He's just exhausted. Shot didn't get to him...what was he thinking?" Tsukishiro shakes her head. "Time and then another Card? Of course it will exhaust him to this point."

"He also used Fly to get here and then with Shield..." Kero counts up how much magic he potentially used today and winces. "He's powerful but not that powerful!"

"Right." Tsukishiro carefully stands, manoeuvring Rin to rest on her back. "The train station's not that far." She pulls out her phone, juggling Rin a bit, and scrolls through her contacts list before finding Fujimoto.

The phone rings for quite some time before Shirō finally answers. "Tsukishiro-sensei! What has you calling me out this time?"

"I just found Rin-kun passed out on the street. No, just him. No, he's fine, just exhausted himself somehow."

Kero watches as Tsukishiro soothes the frantic father, feeling incredibly guilty for Rin's condition. 'Not like Ah considered it before...last time that punk was the one with the Card for so long it kept the magic drain to him while Sakura could do another Card or two to handle the problem.'

At the same time, Kero thinks about how strong Rin is getting here. Being able to pull off Time followed by another Card, even if he's exhausted soon after, proves that he's truly a powerful mage.

Tsukishiro ends the call at that point. "We're going to meet Fujimoto-san at Southern Cross station. Kero, if you please?"

Kero looks up and sees that Tsukishiro's purse is open and waiting. Chuckling, he dives into it, knowing fully well it's for the best he's not seen.

Tsukishiro walks off, hefting her burden and adjusting it so Rin won't fall off, she doesn't notice the blue eyes that follow them from the other side of the street, just hidden by shadow.

Or the frown on a familiar face who looks upset at how the confrontation turned out.

Chapter 21: Doppelganger

Breakfast that morning is loud and energetic, as if Rin is doing his best to make up for the scare he gave everyone last night and assure them of his good condition.

'Which is probably true...' Shirō sighs as he watches his eldest son rush around the kitchen, scolding and bullying the monks that are helping in the kitchen today.

He thought his heart would stop when he finally saw Tsukishiro at the station, carrying his son who
looked even more pale than usual and was breathing shallowly. There had been a part of him that wanted to rush Rin to the hospital, despite knowing there's nothing they could do for him, and he had to firmly squash it down and somehow managed to keep calm when receiving his son from Tsukishiro.

The sympathetic look Shirō got from her proves he wasn't that successful.

'Though Yukio was no help.' The younger brother had been near hysterics when he found out what happened to Rin and as soon as Rin woke up, though still tired and unable to leave his bed, Yukio had returned all the care Rin had done for him over the years when he was sickly three-fold. The fact Rin hadn't been able to protest had made Shirō's worry spike.

Looking at Rin now though, it's obvious he's still tired. He moves with a bit more extra care despite being loud as possible to mask it.

'Obviously whatever happened is not going to just go away.' Shirō frowns at the thought, trying to figure out what exactly had tired Rin so much. There was no trace of a fever or wounds outside of a few scrapes and bruise to explain it. And when Shirō asked, Rin shut his mouth and looked scared. So scared Shirō decided to leave it be.

Now though, he's questioning the wisdom of that. And even more so, questioning the wisdom of keeping secrets from Rin. Even if it's the best way to keep the seal intact, Shirō finds himself considering for the first time how exactly Rin might react to the truth.

“Oi!” That sound and Rin's face to him makes Shirō blink and pull out of his thought. Rin is scowling. “I was asking a question.”

“My apologizes, wasn't paying attention.” Shirō says quickly, then grins. “And it can't be that important anyways Rin. You want to ask about breakfast?”

“No.” Rin rolls his eyes. “Samurakami-san offered another baking lesson tomorrow. Are you going to let me go?”

Shirō considers it. “Well, if by tomorrow you are fully back in shape, don't lie to me I can see you are still tired, I don’t see the problem.”

Rin beams at that. “Great!” Rin then goes back over to the phone – now how did Shirō not notice that going off? – and picks it up again, chirping cheerfully to Samurakami Hikari that the baking lesson is still on.

Shirō chuckles and glances at the breakfast that's being prepared. Waffles are among it, Rin having gotten a second hand waffle maker from Hikari awhile back that made him glow.

Rin finally returns after the phone call and calls out, “Breakfast is ready. Go wash your hands and then sit down. You too Oyaji!”

Shirō slowly stands up, fake groaning at the effort, and heads to the washroom, avoiding the line-up at the kitchen sink through ease of practise.

The school bell ringing for the final time has the entire class letting out sighs of relief and small cheers, standing up and packing up to head home. Sayaka takes a long moment to just stretch in relief at the end of the day that seemed to drag to her.

Sayaka is in the middle of packing up when Hiromi approaches her. “Sayaka-chan, you don't have
track club today right?”

Sayaka nods, putting away one of her textbooks. “Yeah. Club got cancelled because the rain that happened during the day wrecked the track and it's not safe to go out and practise on it. And since the gym's already booked...”

Hiromi claps her hands together. “Well, would you like to go out with me instead? There's this new ramen place that's supposed to be very nice!”

Sayaka perks up at the mention of food. “Sure! I would love to go there with you.”

Hiromi beams and claps her hands together, rocking back and forth, as Sayaka finishes packing before following her out the door, chatting cheerfully about random things like the new music CD that is to come out, what they are planning for winter break, and general things that cross their mind.

This keeps up until they reach the train station, falling silent for a bit as they get on the train and manage to snag some seats. Sitting close together, they enjoy the short relaxing ride until their stop is announced and they exit, Sayaka pushing through the crowd to clear a path for Hiromi.

Breathing a sigh of relief once they get away from the train station crowd, they exchange looks at their moment completely in-sync and giggle at it. Sayaka grabs Hiromi's hand.

“So, where's this ramen place?” She asks cheerfully, Hiromi laughing and tugging her over to turn in the right direction instead of where she was heading before.

“This way.” Hiromi squeezes Sayaka's hand a moment before facing forward.

The ramen place is packed and there is already a long line up. Sayaka and Hiromi settle in for the wait, seeing the line as a good sign in fact for tasty ramen to lie within.

“Oh, Senpai!” That voice makes them turn. Sayaka briefly winces at the sight of Watanabe Naoko, getting a squeeze of the hand and look from Hiromi. With Naoko is her best friend Miho, who is smiling more demurely compared to Naoko's glee.

Naoko briefly looks at their entwined hands then looks up with a smile. “Here to enjoy the ramen too?”

“Yeah.” Sayaka hopes the burning sensation on her face isn't visible. “Hiromi-chan recommended it.”

“I heard of it from Hiromi-senpai too.” Miho says gracefully. “And this line seems promising.”

“Yup!” Naoko cheers over it. “Lots of tasty ramen must lie within.”

A loud commotion in front has all four girls peering around and trying to see what's going on. Not easy since everyone else has the same idea. They manage somehow to see the bulge at the front of the line that turns into what almost looks like a combo fight and chase, with one of the employees chasing after someone.

As that person breaks away, carrying something with them, he turns to look at them as he passes them by.

The four girls are stunned.

“Oku...mura-kun?” Naoko asks softly, not quite believing the sight of Okumura Rin apparently
turned thief, as the employee is screaming at him.

It takes some time for things to calm down, so by the time the girls get their ramen, it's only because some people left instead of staying after all the fuss and screaming that happened.

The ramen is as tasty as advertised, but none of the girls can quite focus, lost in thought at what they witnessed previously.

Eventually Sayaka slaps her hand on the table and turns to Hiromi. “See! I told you he's nothing but trouble!”

Hiromi frowns. “Now, now, Sayaka-chan there has to be a normal explanation for this...it's probably just someone who looks a lot like Okumura-kun. It was only for a moment we saw him in full.”

“No, it was Okumura-kun.” Miho interjects. “He definitely was Okumura Rin. The resemblance was too much for anyone else.”

“But Okumura-kun wouldn't do that...” Hiromi insists, getting strange looks from Sayaka and Miho. She pouts. “I'm serious.”

“She's right.” Naoko finally says. “It can't be Okumura Rin...after all, he wasn't heading to the train station at all when I saw him last.”

The three turn to look at him, baffled at that. Then Miho realizes something. “That's right. You were watching as he and his brother left school...”

“While we on cleaning duty, I looked outside and saw him being taken home with his brother.” Naoko reveals. “He didn't look happy but he also was pretty tired...” Naoko frowns. “In fact, he's been tired the whole day...”

“He was?” Miho turns to look at Naoko and then sighs. “Don't tell me during lunch...”

“Yup!” Naoko beams at her friend. “I went to visit him and his brother during lunch period. He was sleeping when I got there and Okumura-kun, his brother, mentioned something about him sleeping in class.”

“So he couldn't have been there since he's too tired to do anything much today but it couldn't have been anyone but Okumura Rin we saw...” Miho groans. “That makes no sense.”

“Yeah, it was definitely Okumura.” Sayaka insists, then winces as Hiromi stomps on her foot.

“Stop being so cruel to Okumura-kun!” She snaps at her friend, making Sayaka flinch.

“But there's no other explanation!” Sayaka protests.

“Unless it was a spirit!” Naoko suggests excitedly. She pouts at the disbelieving looks she gets. “No, I'm serious! It's like his evil twin or something!”

“I thought he was the evil twin.” Sayaka mutters under her breath, grunting as Hiromi elbows her.

“It might be some kind of ghost or shapeshifter!” Naoko declares, not noticing how Miho is groaning. “It's just being mischievous and causing trouble cause he's a ghostbuster!”

Hiromi mouths “ghostbuster” to herself, obviously confused, while Naoko goes on to detail all the possible creatures that could actually be behind the incident instead of Okumura Rin.
In the end, they finished their ramen in between Naoko's babble, and paid the bill after roughly figuring out how to split the cost between them all.

“Well...whatever that is, we shouldn't spread it around.” Hiromi looks narrowly at Sayaka who is surprised.

“What do you mean?”

“Sayaka-chan, rumours are bad for everyone. And if it was just a mistake...” Hiromi raises her eyebrows and waits as realization dawns on Sayaka's face.

“Alright.” Sayaka grabs Hiromi's hand again and smiles at her. “I'll keep quiet.”

“We will too.” Naoko promises, then drags off the protesting Miho with a quick bye tossed in their direction.

“Sorry...” Sayaka says after a bit, as they are walking home. Hiromi looks up at her, puzzled. “I know you don't like that I don't like Okumura but...” She then smiles. “I'll start trying to censor, actually censor my thoughts on him. For you.”

Hiromi beams up at her and gives her a quick kiss to the cheek. “Thank you so much Sayaka-chan.”

Now definitely red, Sayaka listens to Hiromi switch the topic to a new game she got, a soft smile on her face.

Ignorant to the goings on across the city, Rin is currently sulking in his room. In a startling turn of events, Rin was barred from the kitchen when he came home, Shirō taking one look at his tired visage and ordering him upstairs to rest.

Rin protests, of course, but the main problem lies in the fact Shirō is correct.

“You really should still be restin'...hell, you probably shouldn't of gone to school.” Kero adds settling on the bed beside Rin. He's got a gag manga with him and is reading it in between snacking on roasted chestnuts that were brought up for Rin.

“Yeah...but I didn't want them to worry...” Rin mumbles half into his pillow.

Kero looks at a chestnut and offers it to Rin. With a small smile, Rin takes it. Eating in bed isn't generally a good idea, but Rin knows where the vacuum is and the sheets are going to be cleaned tomorrow anyways.

“But really Rin, ya should rest. In fact, try to avoid doing any magic if you can.” Kero warns him. “You really over-strained yerself yesterday and that ain't good for you.”

“Hmm...I realize that.” Rin sighs and goes for another chestnut. “But I shouldn't be so tired tomorrow right?”

“Right.” Kero agrees, nodding his head. “You could do magic, but you should avoid it ya can. Only if an emergency shows up and Ah hope it doesn't.”

Rin chuckles at that. “Don't say that, you'll jinx things.”

“Ah won't!” Kero protests, looking flustered. “Just don't do much tomorrow before ya go to Sugar Bell. The less you do the easier it is for your magic to restore.”
“I got it...” Rin gives Kero a pat on the head and rolls over. “Now quiet please. I'm gonna see about a nap before dinner.”

Kero grins at that and lifts up both the manga and the bag of chestnuts, flying over to Rin's recently cleared desk to enjoy them there.

Rin closes his eyes and does his best to even his breathing. In no time at all, he drops into sleep.

The next day, Rin feels like he's back to normal and energetic as usual. The only sign that he's still recovering his energy is his extra large appetite, Rin needing multiple servings at breakfast before he's finally satisfied.

Shirō shakes his head, amazed at how Rin is packing the food away. “Where did that all go?”

Rin shrugs, picking some rice from his cheek and eating it. “I'm just hungry.”

“Maybe he's having a growth spurt.” Izumo snickers. “About time, your brother is already growing.”

Rin shoots a look at his brother, who is sitting across the table, and Yukio ducks his head, blushing a bit. “Only by an inch...” Yukio mumbles to himself.

Rin makes a point of ignoring it, instead turning to Shirō. “So what's on my chore list today?”

Shirō considers it, lifting his hands and ticking it off with his fingers, “Breakfast dishes, cleaning your half of your bedroom, making lunch...”

“That's not a chore.” Rin points out dryly.

Shirō continues as if he hasn't said anything, “…dusting, and...” Shirō considers it, then spreads his hands grinning. “That's it.”

Rin blinks. “That's it?”

“Well, you are going to visit Samurakami-san and you are still recovering from your exhaustion. No straining yourself too much.” Shirō points out.

Rin considers this and nods. “Okay.” He stands and picks up his dirty dishes. “I'll start now.”

Shirō grins as Rin collects the plates, wincing a bit at the tower of dirty dishes he ends up with and hoping Rin doesn't trip as he heads to the kitchen to start the dishes.

“What about me Tou-san?” Yukio asks as soon as his brother is gone. Normally Shirō would cover both of the brothers' weekend chores at once.

Shirō looks over at Yukio, raising an eyebrow. “You've got cram school, remember?”

Yukio blushes a bit, embarrassed at having forgotten his mission. “Oh right. Will you guys be okay?”

“Heh. I'm sure we can handle things while you are gone and with Rin only doing a little today.” Shirō assures him, standing from the table. “Go upstairs and get ready, I'll meet you downstairs and give you the key for the place at the door.”

Yukio nods and turns to leave, pausing when he hears Rin complaining about Izumi poking his head into his chore. A smile quirks his lips at that and he goes to get ready upstairs. With any luck, he'll be
As everyone is beginning the cleaning spree, Kero finally moves. Having hid from Yukio previously, he pokes his head out and cocks his head to the side, listening. No one is upstairs at the moment, something that makes Kero gleeful and fly to the door. Opening it with his magic, the little lion pokes his head out briefly to look around before darting across the hall to the game room.

Kero cheers and settles in front of the game system in joy. Rin had confirmed previously that no one was going to touch this room, not today at least. While every other constantly and regularly used room will be dusted, vacuumed, and washed, the game room is set aside since an incident with spilled soda resulted in Rin and Yukio cleaning the entire place up.

That cheery thought has Kero booting up the system, checking the volume, then pulling out a game he's doing his best to master.

Settling in as the opening credits roll, Kero sets himself up for a relaxing, game filled day.

And with roasted chestnuts having been swiped from the kitchen, as well as a Kero knowing that, soon enough, he'll be able to swipe more in between meals, the little guardian settles down for a relaxing day of gaming and goofing off.

Lunch ends up being a casual thing in the end, except for when Rin notices a scrape on Yukio and fusses over it. Yukio barely manages to soothe Rin down, glancing worriedly at Shirō during it. He's lucky Rin hasn't really noticed that he's wincing a bit, nursing a sore rib.

'Then again, Rin might have noticed...' Yukio has to admit, as Rin makes certain Yukio is getting his food and shooing some of the other monks who go for things without his permission.

Aside from ubiquitous rice and miso soup, Rin made up four other dishes along with the rest assigned to do lunch; sweet and sour chicken, broccolini gomaae, kobacha salad, and sanma teriyaki. Along with tsukumono on the side, all the food is needed due to the large amount of people eating lunch today. It's only on weekends like this, when not only are Yukio and Shirō not busy but all the monks are also not out on missions.

Such days tend to be also quick cleaning days to keep the monastery in good shape in between the big spring and New Year's Eve cleanings.

'If anything this proves Rin has recovered...' Yukio thinks, as a great “Itadakimasu!” goes up among the diners and everyone dives into their meal. 'He wouldn't have been able to make all of this up otherwise.'

With that, Yukio resigned himself to Rin bugging him over the meal. Rin just is worried for him and to be fair, Rin is handling his worry for his brother much better than Yukio did previously this week.

A soft knocking sound on the door has Kero slowly emerge from his game induced coma. Looking up, he turns to the door. The knocking that comes again has him pause his game and float up to it, opening the door.

He perks up when he sees Rin bringing in a tray of food, a complete meal made up of the leftovers of lunch just for Kero, along with a slice of apple pie.

“Oh yay! Thanks Rin!” Kero settles down on the table as Rin puts the tray down, turning slightly to
shut the door with his foot first.

“You're welcome.” Rin cheerfully finishes setting up the tray and settles down beside Kero. One specific item – a small plate with another slice of pie on it – is plucked from the tray and Rin settles down to eat that while Kero enjoys his big meal. “I've got a little time before I'm going to have to go down and finish off the laundry.”

“That's good. Ah wanted to take a look at your magic levels.” Kero reveals, setting aside his meal for a moment to float in front of Rin. “Ya don't have to do anything just wait.” He tells Rin as he's about to ask that very question.

Grinning sheepishly, Rin watches as Kero closes his eyes and starts to glow. To Rin's surprise, the Cards in the pouch Rin has glow as well and then sweep up to circle around the two of them. Rin watches this with awe and curiosity, then holds out his hand and accepts the Cards as they float into his grasp. Smiling at them, Rin carefully puts them away and then turns back to Kero.

“Well?” Rin asks.

Kero shakes himself and looks at Rin. “You're doing fine. Shouldn't try to strain yourself the rest of the weekend, but by Monday you should be fine.”

“But what if an emergency happens?” Rin asks.

Kero shrugs. “At this stage it won't do permanent damage, but avoid using cards like Watery, Windy, and especially Time. Strong cards will drain you more than usual right now. And it will make your recovery period longer too.”

Rin slowly nods, considering that. “Okay. I can do that.”

“That's good.” Kero cheerfully works on the last of his meal before turning to the apple pie.

Rin hums and settles back, taking another bite from his pie and considering things.

'I can't use Time easily at all.' Rin considers how bad it got and, considering how dangerous some Cards can be, the risk of it not working is too high. 'Best save it for major emergencies. Really major ones.'

That decided, and his pie polished off along with the rest of Kero's meal, Rin stands and collects the dishes and waves goodbye to Kero. Who is already distracted once again by his game.

Yukio's not particularly happy to be shooed away from helping with the clean up, but at the same time admits to it being a good idea. Not only does he have a lot of homework to catch up on, so does Rin who is forced to pull out his books and work until it comes time to head to Sugar Bell for his next baking lesson.

Yukio glances at his pouting brother. “Nii-san, just sulking isn't going to make the work go away.” Rin sighs. “I know... just don't really want to do it...”

“Well, that won't change things.” Yukio points out, ever logical. “Starting your work will.”

Rin groans, but concedes to Yukio’s point and picks up his pen and frowns down at his first problem. For a moment, the entire room is filled only with the sound of breathing, pens scratching paper, and Rin muttering under his breath.
“Suramakami-san is going to teach me how to make donuts today. Found a spare tray she can give to me.” Rin mentions, glancing over at Yukio. “Any particular flavour you want?”

Yukio considers that. “Matcha.” He says after a moment.

Rin grins at that. “Okay. I can make matcha no problem.”

That settled, Rin frowns as he turns back to his homework. Yukio sighs as the mutters start up again, but still smiles as he returns to his own homework.

There’s a certain natural element to humans that makes people not notice things at times, even when they are right in front of them.

It is such that has the monks not even question why Rin is back after already heading off to see Samurakami Hikari, just assuming that he forgot something and needs to pop back to get it.

It is such that means Kero, absorbed into his game, doesn't question the Konpeitō bag that's given to him by Rin as a treat, before Rin leaves once more; not even considering the fact Rin doesn't like Konpeitō and thus the chances of him buying it are low.

Amazing how such a simple thing can be a build up to a disaster.

As the oven door is closed, Rin sighs and steps back, removing the oven mitts and turning to Hikari. “So, what do we do while we wait?” He asks.

Hikari smiles. “I think some tea sounds like a good idea. And...a small snack.”

Rin perks up at that. He then looks around and makes a face. “Clean up first though.”

Hikari laughs. “Yes, of course.”

Rolling up her sleeves a bit, Hikari settles in to help clean up the counters and dishes they dirtied in the process of Rin making his first donuts. Only two dozen today, but all of it he's allowed to take home to his surprise.

Hikari had merely explained, “I make plenty of donuts and really we are using up the last of the old ingredients before they go bad and I have to buy more.”

Rin had accepted that – he had been careful for all his lessons and checking every time to make sure he's not going to make things hard on Hikari – and happily worked on getting every last dreg out of the ingredients so as to make as many donuts as possible.

Once the clean up is done – which includes some goofing off and Rin somehow almost setting something on fire – Rin follows Hikari to the small breakroom she has for herself and the employees, since the patisserie is officially closed at this hour.

The tea is a nice green tea, gently and professionally brewed by Hikari, and she brings out some nice mochi she bought recently as the sweet. Both are enjoyed by the both of them and they pass the time in gentle talk, though Rin at times loses his train of thought and gets distracted by Hikari’s smile.

Eventually the timer Rin set off goes off and they travel back to collect the donuts, removing them from the two trays and setting them to cool. Once cooled enough for consumption, the extra 25th donut is split between them in a taste test.
“Hmmm!” Hikari wipes her mouth with a napkin and turns to Rin. “This came out marvellously. The matcha choice was perfect too.”

“That's great.” Rin, red from the compliment, pokes at his own piece before taking a bite and considering it. “Oh yum. Yukio's going to love these.”

“I'm going to get a box for you to pack them up in.” Hikari announces, standing up. “I'll be back in a bit, don't go anywhere.” She winks at Rin, who blushes.

Rin follows Hikari's walk as she heads to the storeroom in an almost hypnotic daze, then shakes himself out of it. Standing, Rin gathers up their dishes – two plates and forks for the donut sample – and goes to the sink, cleaning them up quickly and putting them back into the right cupboards and drawers. He then turns to the donut trays.

Rin is just finishing cleaning them when he senses it.

Rin turns slowly, setting down the last donut tray in the wash rack to dry, sensing a Sakura Card. Hesitating for a moment, he checks the time and decides he's got enough time to at least track down the Card and make sure it's not up to anything bad.

Opening the back door, Rin looks around the hallway and sighs in relief at not seeing Hikari. Stepping down it gently, Rin listens for the Card. He turns the corner, just in front of the freezer, and stops, shocked.

It's like looking into a mirror, or rather a photograph, and Rin can only stutter out, “Wh-what?” before all he gets is pain and falling to the ground as black swallows him.

Above him, another Rin stands, holding a heavy looking stick in his hands. The other Rin turns to the freezer and pries it open, then drags the unconscious Rin into. Looking around, he pulls the real Rin into the very back before exiting and closing the door as quietly as possible. He then pulls out a Card and presses it against the door's lock, where it glows and then disappears.

That done, “Rin” turns and walks back to the kitchen. Grabbing a notepad and missing the donuts on the rack, he scratches out a message for Hikari before leaving.

It is thus to an empty kitchen that Hikari returns to, surprised and lost in that regard. “Where did Rin-kun go?” She wonders, setting the nice box she found on the counter. She spies the note left at that moment and picks it up.

All it says is that something came up and that Rin had to return home already. Sighing, Hikari shakes her head at this. “At least you could have waited until I packed the donuts for you...well, they will keep for Monday.”

That decides, she carefully packs the donuts in the box and puts them in the small kitchen fridge. Looking at the clock, Hikari smiles and goes to pack up and lock up the patisserie.

All unknowing of what just happened and what lies hidden in the back of her walk-in freezer.

Yukio looks up as Rin enters the kitchen. Having found it a bit too unbearable to be upstairs by himself, Yukio had moved down to the kitchen to continue with his homework.

“Welcome back Nii-san.” Yukio frowns slightly as Rin jumps. “Is everything okay?”

“Oh. It's just you Yukio.” Rin slips on a smile and rubs the back of his head. “Sorry, was thinking.”
“About what?” Yukio asks, as Rin goes to the fridge and opens the freezer, pulling out one of the fruit pops he made recently.

“Stuff.” Rin waves it off. “Anyways, what are you working on?”

“Homework.” Yukio answers, expecting Rin to make a face.

Instead Rin peers over his shoulder at it with a faint interest on his face. “Really?”

“...since when are you interested in homework?” Yukio looks suspiciously at Rin.

For a moment he sees something flash across his brother's face, then it's gone. “Nothing. Just asking. Maybe your smarts will finally rub off on me.”

Yukio eyes Rin for a long moment, then shrugs. “Fine.”

Yukio bends down to his homework as Rin sits next to him and seems to relax slightly, finally sucking in the fruit pop and obviously enjoying it. The action makes Yukio frown slightly but he dismisses it.

Rin might just want to savour the ice pop for once, instead of chowing down like he has a mouth and teeth insensitive to cold.

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Rin slowly wakes up, shivering and wondering what happened. Groaning, he slowly sits up and looks around, blinking weary eyes.

He jolts up and stands as memory returns. Or at least tries to, nearly falling down due to his legs not responding. Gritting his teeth, Rin beats on them to get the blood circulating again and slowly stands, shuddering.

“Th-the door...” Rin turns to the door, reaching out a shaking hand to escape the freezer that is slowly killing him. Stumbling over to the door, he manages to reach it, somehow, and goes to open it. He senses the Card too late, as a burst of energy flings him back.

“Ow.” Rin shudders and stands again, stomping his feet and tucking his hands underneath his arms, shivering still. “What...that Card...it looked like me...”

Rin looks around and gets a terrible feeling in the pit of his stomach. Sugar Bell is closed on Sundays, which means no one will be coming in tomorrow. And he's locked in by a Card obviously set on purpose.

“Trying kill me...and...replace?” Rin shakes his head and goes for his Cards, then stops in horror as he realizes he hadn't brought them with him today. He had them this morning but after talking to Kero he returned them to the Book. “Dammit...” Rin looks around again and tries to think. There has to be a way out. First...

“What Card is this?” Rin steps forward again and reaches out with his senses, trying to focus through the cold and pain to pick out any clues to what's keeping him locked in.

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Kero has a moment of confusion as he stares up at the ceiling. “Ow.”

Sitting up, Kero wonders why he's sleeping on the ground. Looking at the screen in front of him, he stares in horror at the GAME OVER message flashing on it. “What?”
Scrambling up, Kero sends the bag of Konpeitō flying and stops, staring at them. Reaching out, he picks one up and frowns. “Someone...put some dust on it...Sleep dust at that...” Kero looks around and for a moment blesses that, for once, he was so absorbed into his game he didn't eat more than a few Konpeitō.

He then flies up and looks out with his senses. To his surprise, he feels a Card. One right downstairs and active.

Pausing, Kero slowly and silently floats downstairs, peering out and sneaking his way to just outside the living room where he can hear laughter and voices.

Peering in, Kero stares. It looks like Rin is there, and completely fine, talking to the rest and pouting at a few comments. He might look a little unusually happy at being surrounded by everyone, despite the teasing going on, but nothing that raises red flags with everyone else.

But Kero doesn't sense Rin. He senses a Card and it's like a gut punch.

Quickly, before he is spotted awake by the Card, Kero flies back upstairs and to the boys' room. A quick stop for the holster and calling the Cards out of the Book into it and Kero then opens up the window to outside, flying out and searching with his magic for Rin.

Rin is at a loss, settling down near to the door. He is too cold to think and he feels like he's stopped shivering.

'Read something about that being bad.' Rin thinks, swallowing. 'Very bad.'

“Rin!”

Rin blinks and slowly stands up, wavering. “Kero?”

“Rin!”

It is Kero. “Kero!” Rin shouts, going up to the door and banging on it. As long as he doesn't try to open it, the Card doesn't react. “I'm in here!”

“Rin! You're okay!” Rin can hear the relief in Kero's voice.

“Yeah...b-but not sure how long.” Rin blows on his hands. “It's freezing in here.”

“Crap...there's a Card here...Rin, it's Lock!” Kero shout. “C'mon, get movin' and do somethin' about it.”

“I...dunno how. Don't have my Cards...”

“You don't need them for this Card, c'mon Rin think! Ah can't help you here and Ah wish Ah could.” Kero sounds sad and even angry about that.

“Don't need it...” Rin shudders and looks down at his hands. “Crap...I can't...locks...something about locks and...” Rin lifts his hand rubbing his throat and catches it on the chain around his neck which gives him pause.

“Keys...” Rin carefully pulls out the Key, and glances at the lock on the freezer door. He then takes a deep breath and, holding it, looks through bleary eyes and forces it into the lock.

The effect is immediately, Rin getting blown back again and a strange padlock looking form appears,
green with wings on it. Rin sees it wavering around and quickly gets between it and the door, working on instinct. The Card pauses at that.

“Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!” Rin grasps the staff and whirls it on Lock. “Lock, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

With a bright light Rin is granted a new Card. That done, Rin turns to the door which is now open and stumbles out. Kero floats over to him, the boy on his knees and panting, trying to get circulation moving in his body. “C’mon Rin. There’s a Card back home lookin’ like you and with yer family.”

Rin looks up, nods and takes the offered card holster, and stands. “Right. Let's run.”

Rin does that, though after a moment takes a detour and manages to locate the donuts he made. He did a lot of work on them and he's not forgetting them.

Rin uses Jump to get to his window, not in the mood to bother climbing up. Entering the room, Rin sets the donuts on his bed and then continues on, keeping his footsteps as soft as possible. Creeping down the stairs, Rin notices everyone has moved to the kitchen. And so has his copy, the Card pretending to be him and irking Rin when he sees how close they are to Yukio.

Pulling out a Card, Rin looks over at Kero. Kero sighs but nods. Rin's plan has the advantage of surprise and shock, which should make the Card panic and flee.

“Oi!” Rin charges into the kitchen and gets everyone's attention, pointing straight his imposter. “Get out!”

The other Rin flinches, while everyone else stares. Then the other Rin turns and runs, Rin chasing after them and tossing his Card out along the way. “Memory, make it simple! Release!”

The flash of light dies down and everyone in the kitchen blinks, shaking their heads as the new memory settles firmly into place in their minds.

Yukio sighs. He had been worried about Rin before but now...

“Definitely Nii-san if he forgot the donuts he worked so hard on...” Yukio half laughs at that, before turning back to his homework once more.

Meanwhile, Rin is chasing the imposter down the streets, annoyed with how fast it is able to move. ‘Dammit, it's as tough as me...did it copy that too?’ Rin wonders, then calls up a Card. “Jump!”

The wings spring up on his shoes and he uses that to push forward, landing in front of the Card who steps back. Rin reflects on how strange it is to face off against someone who looks exactly like him.

It gets even weirder when the Card pulls out...another Card?!

Rin only has a moment to swear before that Card activates and a strange glowing woman appears. Lifting her hand, she materializes an arrow.

“Oh shit, Arrow...run Rin!” Kero cries and Rin quickly does so, calling up Fly along the way and speeding off as a volley of magical arrows chases after him.

Rin notices the copy is about to get away and glowers, turning around and flying directly at his
imposter despite Arrow being in the way, dodging the second volley. The sight of that makes the Card flee; and not towards the monastery, but deeper in, towards a nearby park.

Rin curses as Arrow chases after him, glancing back to see yet another volley coming his way. “Dammit, I need to get rid of Arrow first!”

Slowly down, Rin calls up another Card. “Shield!”

Arrow appears startled when her volley just bounces off of Shield, giving Rin enough time to call up Jump. Taking a leap up, he's immediately right in front of the Card.

“Arrow, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” Rin slams the staff down and watches as a card forms in front of it, Arrow being whisked into it. Grabbing the Card, Rin lands back down and quickly pulls out his pen. Taking a moment to not only label Arrow but the previously caught Lock, Rin then turns towards the park. “Fly!” He calls, summoning up that Card and taking to the skies once more, looking out with his senses for that imposter Card.

Kero follows behind him, starting to get worried about Rin's reckless use of the Cards. Not like he has that much choice in this situation, but Kero hopes that the need for a higher tier Card doesn't come up.

The impostor turns around as Rin approaches “him” from the sky, looking at Rin in terror as he approaches the Card.

Kero hangs back, not only because he's not sure he should get involved but also knowing on some level he shouldn't. *This is another trial for Rin as a Cardcaptor.*

Rin stops just in front of his imposter. “Why?”

“Rin” flinches and looks away from him.

“Why...why did you...” Rin shakes his head. “What the hell. Why the fuck kill me and replace me? At some point Yukio's going to notice. We're twins after all. Hell, you couldn't keep Kero away!”

“Rin” looks down. “Why you?” Is what they asks and Rin has a moment where he wonders if that's how he sounds. “Why you and not Sakura!?”

Rin steps back and looks at his imposter.

“Why can't Sakura stay? She...she could have...done so...why did they all have to leave?” The Card demands, tears springing up in their (borrowed) eyes.

“...I dunno.” Rin looks at the Card. “Do you hate me?”

The impostor steps back, surprised. “Um...no...I don't...I don't know you. How can you...how can you replace them?”

“I'm not.” Rin says softly. “Not going to replace them.” He smiles. “I can't. I'm just me.”

The Card says nothing for a long moment. “I'm scared.” He admits quietly.

“I'm scared too.” Rin confides as well. “But...I'm going to try. You can get to know me and...I forgive you. You are just scared aren't you? And lonely. You're definitely lonely.” Rin realizes as he speaks, thinking back to how happy the imposter was around his family.
The imposter nods. “Okay. Then...can you seal me?”

Rin looks the imposter up and down. He feels like that is a trick question and considers it. *What am I missing...*

Rin is slow to tie it all together, but he does and looks up at the Card. “I need your name first so I can seal you.”

The imposter grins. “Yes.” Then tilts “his” head. “Do you know me?”

Rin laughs. “Of course. You look just like me. But you aren't. Just...a...” Rin pauses, looking for the right word. “Mrr...Mirror.”

A flare of light has the copy transform into a beautiful woman. Floating in the air, with long sea-green hair flying around – some of which is tied up in two neat green ribbons – and carrying a mirror. On her forehead are three triangles and her green eyes look into Rin's. A bit of sorrow is there, but hope is too.

Rin smiles up at Mirror and raises his staff. “Mirror, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Yukio raises his eyebrows at the sight of Rin sneaking back inside. “What took you so long to get the donuts? You know Tou-san is going to be upset with you when he finds out.”

Rin flinches and glances at the dining room just outside. “Why aren't you there?”

“I was getting myself a drink.” Yukio explains, holding up the glass of juice. “So, where are those donuts?”

Rin blesses the fact he sneaked upstairs first to grab the donuts before entering on the ground floor since he's able to reveal the box of donuts to Yukio.

“Those look wonderful.” Yukio then sets the box on the counter and grabs Rin, dragging him to the table. “Tou-san, Nii-san's home!”

“About time! We ended up making supper without you!” Shirō looks over Rin from behind his glasses. “What took you so long?”

Rin winces and rubs the back of his head. “Sorry, forgot Samurakami-san had already locked up...I had to find the spare key she told me about.” *And she does, in fact, have a spare key.* ‘Rin thinks happily. With any luck, Memory won't be needed to smooth over some of the bumps between what happened and what people should remember happened.

“Oh? Well, now that you are back eat! You need the food!”

Rin rolls his eyes but takes his seat and goes for the food. He has to stifle a yawn for a moment, but otherwise he makes it through dinner easily. The matcha donuts are well received once Rin goes and fetches them, everyone getting one and there are still plenty extra for later.

But Rin finds himself nodding off at that point. Shirō calls him out on it so Rin excuses himself before he gets too many people hovering over him.

'*Not my fault I had to use the Cards...'* Rin yawns as he walks up the stairs, thinking back to the events that happened not too long ago. *'At least I managed to avoid high tier Cards...'*
From what Kero said he'll sleep extra deep tonight but he should otherwise be fine.

’Exactly what I need.’ Rin yawns again and forces himself to change into his pyjamas.

He's almost asleep before his head hits the pillow. But he smiles as he sleeps and the pack of Cards glows in a comforting manner as his new Cards communicate with the rest and settle down to their new life.

Chapter End Notes

Well, what did you think? Comment below and tell me please! Comments are happiness and assure you all of another chapter this Friday!
Thank you guys so much for the comments! Especially since I've been sick all week...and still am. Damn bronchitis...and the antibiotics leave a bad taste in my mouth even as they work.

But there is good news too! The 3rd arc, as of November 30th, is COMPLETE. It is done, it is over...except for a ton of edits. I just have my side stories to write which...somehow turned into sixteen how the fuck...? Anyways, you are assured that ICD IS practically complete. Just keep up the comments and love and you have no fear of seeing more of it!

Anyways, yet another new Card folks! This Card was more of a...why not Card when Sakura made it. She needed practise after all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It is officially winter at this point, though there is no sign of snow. But bare trees stretch out to the sky and the cold seems to chill people no matter how many layers are on. Only electric heaters and kotatsu can fully keep one warm.

The former is currently blaring in the art room as Rin's class has a special art class in preparation for the upcoming Winter Festival.

'Weirdly never thought of it, but I wonder when it became usual to have the main festivals be summer and winter...' Rin considers for a moment, tossing the clay in his hands back and forth a bit before starting to shape it.

He happens to glance over at Yukio and stifles a snort. "What's that supposed to be?"

Yukio glowers down at the misshaped result he has. "A bird."

Rin squints and tilts his head. "Well, if I look at it carefully it *kinda* looks like a penguin."

Yukio scowls and squashes the "bird", restarting from the beginning. Rin giggles and turns back to his clay which is slowly starting to form into the shape of a lion-like creature with wings. Compared to Yukio's, Rin's actually looks like what he intends and quite pretty in fact.

"It's okay Yukio." Rin says after Yukio makes a frustrated noise and starts again. "You're not the only one not doing good here."

Rin gestures over to Mihauru and another girl, who seem to be making either the worse fish ever or very strange looking pancakes. Yukio sighs at that and turns back to focus on his bird.

Rin sighs. 'Great, he's in an I-can't-lose mood.' "It's not a competition. Just making decorations to be strung up for the Winter Festival. No one is really expecting masterpieces."

Yukio eyes Rin's result, which rather looks like a masterpiece, and turns back to his misshapen bird with a new look of resolve.
Rin sighs again at that, but decides to drop it. Getting a toothpick, Rin starts slowly working on the details of the winged lion. Rushing won’t get him anywhere and they are only making the clay creatures today.

Tomorrow they will have dried out and be solid enough that no more manipulation of their appearance will work. Which is necessary if they are to paint them.

Chapter 22: Paint Splatter

Yukio sulks as he exits the art classroom, Rin following him with a nervous smile on his face. “Oh, come on Yukio it isn't that bad.”

“I was trying for a swan.” Yukio grumbles.

Rin sweats. *Well...the teacher's right and it does look like a penguin...'*

“W-well, you at least ended up with something that looks like an animal.” Rin points out.

Yukio sighs and Rin decides to leave the topic behind, grabbing at Yukio’s collar and dragging him away.

“Hey!”

Rin rolls his eyes. “It's lunch time, let's go to the convenience store and get a hot drink to stay warm.”

“Then let me go!” Yukio disentangles himself from his brother, straightening his shirt out and then settling to walk beside his brother, looking irritated.

Rin carefully turns his head so Yukio won’t see his grin. Exiting the building, and shivering at the cold, the two slip off campus to the nearby convenience store. Apparently they aren’t the only ones to think of a hot drink, as Rin notices that the store is packed with other students.

Eventually they manage to get to the counter and Yukio orders a coffee for himself and a milk tea for Rin. Rin pushes the cash for the milk tea to Yukio before he can protest, and happily accepts their drinks while Yukio is paying.

Yukio looks over at Rin and grabs for his coffee, Rin handing it to him before anything spills.

At seeing Yukio take a drink Rin makes a face. “Yuck. How can you handle that? Especially with no sweetener.”

“It's an adult taste Nii-san.” Is Yukio's dry comment, making Rin pout and turn to his hot milk tea and pretend to ignore his brother.

He catches Yukio's smile before he can hides it and has to hide a grin himself.

'Good. Back in a good mood. That's always good.'

Afternoon classes are back to the regular schedule, 1-B not needing to return to the art classroom until tomorrow.

In fact, no one needs that specific art classroom today, leaving the room alone and locking it up after 1-B is done with clean-up.

With that said, it's thus not unusual that no one notices the light that shines from under the door and
the sound of giggling that emanates from within, along with a strange zapping noise that sounds also almost like paint being splattered around.

To be fair, Shirō is doing his best to contain his laughter.

“Pfftt...so that's how it ended up?” Shirō shakes his head. “Oh calm down Yukio, it's not that big of a deal. Can't be good at everything.”

“Yeah.” Izumi grins, looking up from whatever he's working on. Rin can't quite see it but suspects he's fixing a tear in his cassock. “Besides, penguins suit you better.”

Yukio looks over at him suspicious. “What does that mean?”

“Well--”

“Oh I know!” Rin chimes in, grinning widely. “Because of Yuki!”

There's a moment where Yukio just stares at Rin in utter silence, then he smacks his brother on the head.

“Ow! Hey, what gives!?” Rin pouts, rubbing his head. The fact everyone is laughing now at both the twins doesn't help.

Yukio rolls his eyes and stands, going upstairs to work on his homework and avoid the group as Rin and Izumi start bickering and Shirō loudly wonders whose turn it is to handle supper.

“Isn't it yours Oyaji!!”

The first class of the day is the special art class, something Yukio is hoping to get over as quickly as possible. Though, to be honest so is Rin for a slightly different reason, that is he doesn't like how grumpy the class makes Yukio as much as not looking forward to painting.

*I'm not that good there...’ Rin's never done painting on sculptures before but considering that Rin's never been able to really focus or whatever in regards to most art skills, outside of sculpting, his chances are basically though the sculpture looks nice the painting done on it will make it look stupid.

Of course, that's tossed to the side when they first thing they hear when they enter the classroom is the art teacher ranting.

For a moment, they stare at the older man who is ranting and screaming at one of the maintenance workers, then Yukio notices what is going on.

“What the...” Yukio blinks and barely resists the urge to rub his eyes, shocked and confused by what he sees. Rin lets out a low whistle, looking over the art room.

All the sculptures have been painted. And very nicely in fact. In fact, Rin notices that all the sculptures look nice, very good quality in fact, including some of the worst stuff like Miharu's fish. Yukio's sculpture still looks like a penguin, but it's a better looking penguin.

“This is super weird.” Rin steps back to allow more students inside to see what the fuss is, settling in the back and looking over the sculptures. Listening in, he can hear confusion but also happiness at what they found.

“Much better for the festival.” One girl declares loudly, getting sounds and nods of agreement at that.
“We can use these as special decoration with no shame.”

Unfortunately the teacher doesn't agree. Apparently he expects them all to not cheat and is accusing them of being lazy.

'Oi, oi, oi!' Rin frowns at that, looking at the teacher and students who are now arguing with each other. 'We all did hard work...sure no one painted anything and everything got touched up afterwards, but that isn't so bad.'

Still, the entire thing is very confusing and Rin just barely rescues his lion and Yukio's penguin as all the sculptures are being tossed in favour of doing everything again, the teacher refusing to budge on the issue.

Tsukishiro raises her eyebrows as her class comes in after the art class, looking very annoyed. “Oh dear. What happened?”

“Stupid teacher made us redo all the sculptures...” Rin grumbles in answer, surprisingly getting the rest of the class – for once – to agree with him.

“Yeah, and it all looked very nice.” Another classmate, a girl named Harada Rika who is also the class representative, loudly exclaims, getting more sounds of agreement from the rest.

“Really? What happened?” Tsukishiro asks, as she opens her book and looks for today's lesson.

“No idea.” Rika admits, shrugging. “But when we came in the all the sculptures weren't just fixed up but painted all nicely. Looks like someone decided to help out but no clue who. Must have done it yesterday.”

“Yeah, for fixing the sculptures yesterday sounds right. But the painting couldn't be done until after school was closed.” Miharu points out, getting murmurs of agreement.

Rika considers it. “Maybe a two-person team?”

As the class discusses this entire event, trying to figure out the mystery behind everything, Tsukishiro looks over at the thoughtful Rin and smiles.

'It seems you already have a good idea of what is really behind this...' Tsukishiro then claps her hands and gets the class’s attention. “Leave the speculation for later. This is history class right now so let's focus on that instead.”

A chorus of “yeses” are her response and everyone quickly settles into their seat and gets ready for class time again, though Tsukishiro spots a few still talking in the back. She gracefully interrupts them by reminding them all of today’s pop quiz, getting looks of horror as everyone is reminded along with them.

Tsukishiro keeps her serene smile on and wonders how tomorrow will go.

The school buzzes over lunch over the tale of what happened in the special art classes. Rumour abound, people trying to figure out who could have done it.

Most assume that one or more of the art club members were involved, despite their protests otherwise.
Abe Eiji, however, looks at the information he's gathered and frowns in thought. 'Before all of this I wouldn't have considered it but...'

Eiji sighs and looks over at where he can see Naoko talking with her friends, just through her classroom door. Technically she paid for him to confirm anything that is “supernatural” in origin. However, Eiji has a funny feeling that makes him hesitate.

Stepping away, Eiji wanders off, not really thinking of where he is going until he found his footsteps lead him to a specific class. Peering in, he sees Rin talking with his brother, giving great arm movements, in between eating his own bento.

Eiji looks down to see the strange holster, slightly hidden by Rin's uniform, that he knows contains very strange and probably magical cards.

“I can't believe it...all that hard work down the drain...” Eiji turns to see Miharu whining and collapsing onto his desk dramatically. “Ugh, I think my new one is even worse than last time.”

“Tell me about it...ugh, it's so hard to do things over when it was all nice before...” His friend agrees.

Eiji looks back over at Rin and spots the penguin he is handing over to his brother – who looks embarrassed and is trying to avoid taking it – obviously from the sculptures that were “tampered with” considering the design and paint job.

Eiji then steps back from the door and wanders away, looking through his smartphone for other ways to get money out of the students at this school.

Shirō looks up from admiring the two sculptures his sons made to stare at them, shocked by what he was just told. “That is probably the weirdest thing I've heard yet and I tell you have heard plenty weird things.”

Rin expresses disbelief at that, claiming that “you're just a boring old man Oyaji!” and getting caught in a headlock by Shirō, with wild flailing and yells the result. Yukio just sighs and settles back, glancing at the sculptures Rin “rescued” and wondering about the incident.

'Honestly, there isn't any kind of demon that would do that.' Yukio runs through his head a mental list of all the “helpful” demons he knows as, as Rin escapes from Shirō's grip and it turns into an impromptu wrestling match that has the other monks scrambling out of the way. 'No. Most of the demons that could be helpful don't perform that kind of assistance. It's more cleaning or cooking. Helping with household chores.'

Absently, Yukio dodges the rolling pile that's his brother and foster father, heading over to a more clear spot.

“So...feel like laying bets?” Nagatomo offers, grinning.

Yukio sighs and rolls his eyes. “...Nii-san's going to win.”

Some grins come from that and the bets are laid, not money but chores and favours, and Yukio settles down watching as Rin and Shirō “battle” it out.

The cries of dismay as Rin gets Shirō to give up and Yukio to turn to collect his “winnings” makes the young exorcist grin.

On Rin and Shirō's part, they exchange confused looks. Then Rin checks the time. “Aaaa...shit.
Better get started on dinner or we'll be having shitty instant noodles.”

That gets the entire group moving, discussion of who has dinner chores this time being brought up and Rin confused by how Izumi is suddenly the one helping him. Wasn't it Kyōdō today?

Kero looks up through playing through a game. Unlike the other times, it's a handheld device he's using and he seems quite happy with it, despite it being a less action-oriented game.

“So someone came and did all this for you...” Kero examines the winged-lion and shakes his head. “Ah'm afraid Ah can't pick up any magic. It must have had plenty of time to fade and with the leyline yer school's on top of...”

“I figured that.” Rin sighs and sets the sculpture on the nearby table. “So I'll wait for tomorrow to see if it happens again.”

“You think it might?” Kero asks, glancing down at his game and frowning at the choices offered. 'Let's see...is accusing the Judge a good idea or not...'

Rin shrugs and turns on the other handheld he has. It's the older one that he and Yukio were sharing before and he figures Yukio won't complain about him using it even though they got an extra during summer.

Grinning, Rin settles down for a quiet gaming night.

Though when Kero starts cursing and swearing at his game, and even bursts into laughter at one point, Rin reconsiders the “quiet” part of his night plans.

Back at the school, with night covering the entire campus in a gentle embrace, it is all quiet. Except for one room.

In the art room, a loud racket is going on just as it did the day before. But it is not like last time. The noise seems hostile almost, buzzing instead of giggles, and the light is too harsh, bright enough to hurt. The zapping sound is accompanied by the sound of things breaking and being smashed.

And it goes on all night.

“Kero, I don't think this is a good idea.” Rin looks between the “stuffed animal” and Yukio who's over at the front door, talking to Shirō.

Kero pokes his head out of Rin's bag. “Maybe. But Ah got a feelin' about this so Ah'm comin' too.”

Rin groans. “Try not to snore...last time you came with me you were loud and I can't believe I managed to avoid a major problem...” 'Then again, it was Tsukishiro-sensei's class during it...' Rin considers. He hadn't know back then, but she must have known it was Kero and so brushed it off.

“Nii-san?” Rin jumps and grins widely at Yukio.

“Hi-hey Yukio! Let's go already!” Rin starts marching off, Yukio following him while looking a bit suspicious of Rin's antics.

But Yukio slowly relaxes as Rin seems to slide back into his normal attitude, figuring it was just a one off.
“...so basically it's a stupid thing, using that much garlic despite what the recipe says and that's why we were arguing.” Rin is just finishing explaining as he puts his sneakers in the locker and pulls out his uwabaki. Slipping them on, Rin's about to add something else when he's interrupted.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHH!”

That scream, echoes through the school and makes everyone jump. Rin ends up jumping in the direction of the voice and, before Yukio can get out more than “Nii-san!” in protest, takes off towards where it came from.

Rin skids around the corner, his bag flying behind him and Kero making sounds of complaints of the rough movements, and realizes the scream came from the art room he was in yesterday. The door is wide open still and Rin, slowing down finally, can hear even more screaming.

But it sounds more angry than scared.

“Nii-san!” Yukio finally catches up to his brother and halts next to him, his uwabaki tapping a bit as he comes to a halt.

“Yukio?” Rin glances back at his brother. “Why did you follow me?”

Yukio doesn't bother answering, as other students start to gather around. Looking around, Rin sighs and steps forward to looks inside the art room. And stares, stunned.

The place looks like a disaster struck it. Paint is over every wall, dripping into each other and looking rather like someone threw up paint around the place. The worktables have been overturned and the chairs look broken in certain cases. All the art supplies have been scattered around the place, some things like paint brushes broken into pieces or even smashed into pieces.

This includes the sculptures 1-B made yesterday.

“Out of the way.” Another teacher pushes through the crowd of students, Rin and Yukio backing away so he can see what's going on. “Tanaka-sensei what's...oh my lord.” He stares in horror at the state of not only the class, but the angry and still yelling Tanaka.

Shaking off his shock, he turns to the students. “Get to class! This instant, unless you would all like to stay after school for being late?”

That gets the students to scatter, Rin being the slowest to leave. As stealthily as possible, Rin lifts up his bag and whispers to Kero. “That...”

“A Card.” Kero confirms, poking his head out just a bit from the bag so Rin can hear him. “Artist in fact. Must've wanted to help but well...” Kero sighs. “She hates it when people hate her work or do anythin' to change it. So...”

“Lost her temper.” Rin realizes, then sighs. “I'll have to come back tonight and see about fixing this...”

“Yeah...at this rate, it's only goin' to escalate...” Kero mutters as Rin heads into his class and he slides back down to hide in Rin's bag. The bell goes off at that point and Rin has no choice but to focus on classwork, despite being worried for the Card that is currently within the school.

Rin is right to worry. Over the day, various graffiti appear all over the school, along with some things being broken. Things like art projects and the art club's room get trashed and Rin can't help but
wince every time. There's no way he can do it during the day, so Rin has to suck it up and wait for tonight.

“I hate this.” Rin groans and lies back down. He's currently on the school roof, something everyone else is avoiding. Yukio got called suddenly by his cram school for an emergency of some kind – for what Rin doesn't care – leaving Rin alone for lunch.

’He didn't even take his bento with him.’ Rin grumbles to himself.

Wanting to get away from the talk and general freaking out that's going on, Rin decided that retreat is for the best. The fact Kero can fly around – and get treated to what would have been Yukio's bento – is a bonus since Rin really does need to talk to the guardian.

’But aah...how do I start?’ Rin looks over at Kero, who's happily chowing down on the offered food, and remembers those times he's been scared or worried over Rin. Rin doesn't like making others worry but this question he has might do that.

Kero notices that Rin is wanting to talk to him and has a very good idea as to what question he wants to ask. The guardian isn't sure how he's supposed to answer Rin's question so he just focuses on the here and now and the lovely bento.

Before long, the time for talk passes as the lunch bell rings, Rin packing up and Kero hiding back in Rin's bag.

But the question hovers over them nonetheless.

What is so important about all of this that I must do it alone?

That night, Rin flies over to the school feeling a bit nostalgic. Been awhile since he's done that and he settles in the courtyard quietly. He brought not only the Cards and Kero, but something else he hopes might be able to calm down Artist long enough for him to be able to seal the Card.

As usual, the school is quiet when Rin steps inside. Hesitating, Rin switches his shoes for his uwabaki like he does on a normal day. He has a feeling that he won't be needing to go outside except after he's done.

Kero watches, silently, then glances back outside where he can just spot Tsukishiro standing in the courtyard. He then turns back and follows Rin as he quietly starts walking down the hallway to the art room.

The light shining from underneath the door is the only sign Rin needs, and he flings it open and immediately spots Artist.

The first thought is of a fairy, reminding Rin of Repair and Sweet, though this one is wearing a rainbow coloured dress. The wings are like a butterflies, coloured mostly black with red spots and streaks on them that glow. Artist is, of course, wielding a paintbrush, a full sized one that looks awkward compared to her size.

She glowers at Rin and gives off an angry buzzing sound and lashes out with her paintbrush. Rin ducks just in time to avoid getting a face covered in paint, though Kero isn't that lucky.

“Woah! Calm down!” Rin calls out to the Card, ducking down to avoid more paint and is that glitter? Yup, glitter.
Rin looks behind him and ends up laughing over how Kero looks, covered in pink, green, and orange paint with very sparkly glitter on top.

At that point Rin gets covered in blue paint, which halts his laughter. The fact it's followed by bright red glitter doesn't help and soon Kero's laughing too.

Rin doesn't do anything for a long moment, then stands up. “That's it.”

“Bubbles...clean up this mess!” Rin brings down his staff and the Card erupts into light, Artist having only a moment to realize what's about to happen when she gets swarmed by pink bubbles.

Artist shoots out from the bubbles, gasping, only to run straight into Rin, who quickly catches her with his hands. “Ha!” Rin looks down at the troublesome Card, clean of all the messy paint that was sticky and uncomfortable, and shakes his head. “Yeesh, can't you calm down for a moment?”

Artist continues to struggle, still making that angry buzzing sound. Rin sighs, unable to let her go without having to chase her again, and turns to Kero. “Hey, bring those things I brought over!”

Kero says something about not being an errand runner – obviously not happy about Bubbles himself – but Rin ignores him, settling down to sit against the wall and wait. “Shhh...” Rin tries to soothe the Card, who's still struggling against him. Rin gives a soft smile at her, adjusting his grip to still be firm but hopefully gentler on her.

“This want you wanted Rin?” Kero sets up the two sculptures – the penguin and winged lion – and looks over at Rin.

Artist had turned at the sound of Kero's voice and is now staring. Rin's smile widens. “See. It's okay. I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one who kept them either. Saw plenty of others rescue all your hard work.”

Rin watches as Artist's black and red wings slowly change colour, taking on a more calming yellow and blue colouration. Rin takes that as a good sign and releases her. Artist floats over to the sculptures and circles them, smiling happily at the sight of them.

“See...much better.” Rin slowly stands and Artist shoots up to hover in front of him. She gives a bow towards him and Rin laughs.

“Alright. Artist, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Rin catches Artist's Card with no problems then grin at Kero. “See. Easy.”

“Yeah yeah...though did you have to use Bubbles?” Kero whines. Rin laughs again and bends down to pick up the sculptures and frowns in thought.

'Wonder what we are going to do about the festival...'

The next day, Takada-sensei – aka the art teacher – is in despair over the festival preparations. 1-B can't book the art room anymore and the sculptures aren't ready to be displayed either.

“You know, this entire thing could be avoided if you just let us use the first round of sculptures.” Rika points out, looking very annoyed. She's holding a big bag in her hands and looks at the teacher patiently, waiting for his decision.

“...you're right.” Takada sighs. “But with them all gone, it's no use.”
Rika takes that as her cue to not only place the bag on his desk, but spill the contents out.

Takada's jaw drops. Every single first sculpture is there and he looks up at a smug looking Rika.

“"I collected almost every one of them when you went to throw them out." Rika declares smugly. “The rest I got from those who rescued their sculptures before me.”

Takada stares for a moment then sighs and puts the sculpture in his hands – that of a tanuki – back in the bag and sweeps them all back inside it. “Very well. We'll use these.”

Rika beams, accepts the bag back with a bow, and then darts out of the teacher's office.

As soon as she's out, she's greeted by the entire class, who are waiting to hear the news.

“So, what did he say?” Miharu asks.

Rika grins. “It's all green!”

Cheers erupt from the class and, within the teacher's office, Tsukishiro stifles a giggle as Takada turns red from embarrassment.

'I'm glad it all worked out.' She thinks, turning back to the papers she needs to grade.

Outside, Rin is also smiling and thinking happily about the upcoming festival. “Yay! It worked out.”

Yukio adjusts his glasses. “It was your idea Nii-san...why didn't you do it and had me tell Harada-san?”

Rin gives a half-shrug. “It's me of course. No one would have accepted it if it came from me. And Harada's the class rep anyways, she should be the one doing it.”

Yukio accepts the reasoning, though it hurts a little to think that Rin is still feared by his classmates.

Rin dismisses it in favour of getting his winged-lion and Yukio's penguin as the sculptures are passed back out among the class.

It doesn't help Rin's reputation if he dwells on it, so Rin decides he won't bother.

He has more important things to deal with after all.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and please comment! Send messages if you have fanart and link me to it, either here or on my writer's blog!
Thank you so much for the comments! I'm feeling much better and took my last dose of antibiotics. Just a bit congested, but I can handle that. I should be all better soon!

This chapter is something of a fun one. And yet another one that directly refers to the original CCS. I need to have SOME resemblance at times.

I hope you enjoy!

Also, fair warning; the Christmas and New Year chapters will be coming out this month. Just uh...not exactly the right time whoops. Guess I should have started posting later than I did? Aaah, well, better than what the 2nd arc is going to be. At least it's the right month!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It's a very unusual day for Rin. Not because of him chasing down a Card, but because he's doing it in broad daylight. At best, Rin tends to handle things in the evening when there isn't many witnesses.

Then again, it is the Sleep Rin is currently chasing after so that might be why it's a day time thing.

“There!” Kero points, Rin looking over from the pile of sleeping people he's flying over to spot the mischievous fairy-like Card that is going around putting everyone on the festival grounds to sleep. The small fairy looks up and spots Rin, fleeing back outside to escape him.

Rin won't allow it. “Wind, be a binding chain! Windy, Release!” Dropping Fly in favour of the higher tier Card, the beautiful woman that is Windy flows out and whirls out after Sleep.

Rin doesn't stop either, running in the opposite direction and circling around to where he's hoping Windy will chase Sleep.

Rin beams when he's right and uses Fly once more to get to a nearby roof. Sleep has a moment to spot him and instinctively slows down. More than enough for Windy to catch her and wrap her up.

“Sleep, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” The Card is quickly captured and Rin, still on the rooftop, catches the Card with ease. “That's a relief.”

“Tell me about it.” Kero sighs and looks out over the grounds, where people are slowly waking up confused. “That nearly killed the festival preparations.”

“Oh yeah...” Rin finishes labelling Sleep as his and slides it into the pouch. “I best get down and you, Kero, should head back to the classroom and hide again.”

Kero shakes his head. “No! With all the people runnin' around, Ah can't get back without bein' caught. Ah'm goin' to have to stick with you.”

Rin groans at that, but concedes the point. “Stay quiet then and try not to get found out.” Rin opens his school jacket. “This should be good enough.”
Kero dives into there and settles into a comfortable position, Rin laughing a bit at how it tickles briefly. Zipping the jacket back up, but keeping the top open just a bit more than he usually has it, Rin looks out on the festive decorations he can see and considers the upcoming festival.

He then turns and heads down the stairs, hoping to have a chance to help out if he can.

Chapter 23: The Burning Hot Threat

“Aaah...it's cold.” Rin blows on his gloved hands and rubs them, then looks around. Despite the cold, the Winter Festival is in full swing, with braziers placed carefully around to heat up the place and keep things from getting too cold.

Plenty of families have come, along with kids of all ages. But Rin's not really surprised. Unlike the Summer Festival, which is held separated by school, all of the Southern Cross schools' Winter Festivals, from Elementary to Senior High, are held together as one. Rin's not quite sure why the Summer Festivals are still separate considering things, but somehow the Winter Festival is the big event of the Southern Cross schools.

'Well, I'm not complaining.' Rin thinks cheerfully, looking for something to eat. He split with Yukio due to him working in the café right now that 1-B is holding, but Rin doesn't mind it.

'Kinda sad Oyaji can't come.' Rin considers, walking around and finally spotting a good stall selling freshly prepared nikuman and lining up for it. 'But can't fight a bad cold like that.'

Since Shirō is sick, he gave a bunch of cash to both boys and told them to have fun for his sake. Rin personally doesn't mind that much. After all, easier to hide Kero – who's currently poking his head out of Rin's jacket and only slightly concealed by his hood – when he's on his own after all.

Rin finally reaches the front of the line and buys enough nikuman for three, knowing Kero's appetite well, and goes over to find a semi-secluded place to rest. Along the way, he's lured in by the smell of other food stalls and also Kero's insistence. Food is always a big thing during these festivals and Rin collects things from grilled corn to jaga bata to even some sweets like taiyaki and dango. Rin even gets himself some hot chocolate along the way. Rin is a little overwhelmed by what he's carrying, more for how awkward it is to walk with them obscuring his view, but eventually finds a spot to sit out of the way and settles down with all of his trays.

This amazing array of food is no match to both Rin and Kero's appetite, the two deciding to eat early and then go off and get more at the end after they are done exploring.

“Aaaah...festival food is the greatest!” Kero declares, licking up the last of the potato and butter from the jaga bata. He pats his encouraged belly for added effect after, belching somewhat in response.

Rin chuckles and agrees, finishing off the last nikuman with one big gulp. “Oh yes. Easy to eat and tastes so good. Though hardly healthy.”

“Meh, it's a festival. Supposed to be a bit unhealthy.” Kero points out.

“Yeah...heh, food's a big thing here for both festivals apparently.” Rin thinks back to what he got from Eiji. “There's a lot of competition to see who has the best stall and Abe says that he gets lots of money on bets and wagers on the stalls.”

“Hehehe...all the food is great to me!” Kero declares, polishing off a taiyaki in a few big bites and gulps.

Rin shakes his head and looks out at the festival grounds, smiling as he thinks of the other things
going on. “The Southern Cross Senior High apparently did a big haunted house, want to go see?”

“Sure!” Kero flies up to Rin and burrows into his jacket. Rin carefully picks up their garbage and finds a garbage can before heading off to where he heard there’s supposed to be some super awesome haunted house.

“Thank you for your custom.” Yukio says cheerfully, a wide and fake smile on his face as he sees off another set of girls who are giggling too much.

Behind him, some of the other girls and even boys in the class talk excitedly about Yukio. “He’s definitely the best choice for this!” One boy declares, getting plenty of nods in agreement.

“Okumura-kun is so polite and gentlemanly...not to mention looks good.” This girl giggles at the thought. “He's perfect for dealing with customers and even bringing more in.”

“He never loses his temper no matter what either.” Another agrees. “So refined...so unlike...well...you know.”

As they are praising him, Yukio twitches slightly. *Dammit this is hell!*

Yukio is honestly not good at customer service. It exhausts him very quickly and the only reason he's any “good” at it is because of how good he is at masking his true emotions and making people see what they wish to see in him.

Even handling the consultation desks for the Order can be a pain for Yukio, something Shirō knows well and at times assigns him as a form of punishment when Yukio does something reckless that either jeopardizes the mission or Yukio's own safety.

*Nii-san would be much better suited...but try telling everyone that.* Yukio sighs slightly then smiles again as new customers enter. “Welcome--”

“Awww...I thought it would be your brother here!” Naoko pouts. “He's better for it after all.”

“I'm...not sure sure about it...” Miho looks embarrassed at her friend's antics.

“But he is! He worked very hard at Kaa-san's café and got invited back for next summer!” Naoko insists.

“That is true.” Yukio brings up, getting lots of shock at such a thing being confirmed by Yukio of all people. “Nii-san also enjoyed working there.”

“Oh yeah...he managed to tame terrible customers too!” Naoko exclaims. She then peers at Yukio and whispers to him. “You don't look like you are handling this well...want me to spring ya?”

Yukio blinks, surprised at how perceptive Naoko is. Looking at her gaze, Yukio slowly shakes his head. “Thanks but my shift should be over soon.”

“Okay. Anyways, I heard there is good donburi here! What do you have?” Naoko smiles at Yukio and he finds he can return it, feeling a bit of his stress leech away despite everyone still trying to process the idea of Rin being a good worker.

“Let's see...I'd recommend the katsudon, that came out quite well.” Yukio advises as he leads both Naoko and Miho to their table.

This cheers up Naoko greatly and she immediately orders it, with Miho asking for Gyudon to
On the other side of the festival grounds, Eiji is enjoying a brisk business as is usual for festivals. "That will be 1000 yen."

The person grumbles a bit at the cost, but still pays up. Eiji smiles at the cash and pockets it before revealing the information they desire.

'Oh yes...this is good...' Eiji is more than happy with the money he's getting this festival.

"Oi. Abe." Eiji looks up and frowns at the punks in front of him. "I need some special information."

"Is that so? Very well." Eiji recognizes the group's lead as Ito Satoshi and frowns internally at having to deal with him. "But the cost depends on what you want."

"Heh. I can pay." Satoshi snickers at that. "I need to know about Okumura Rin. You got plenty on him right? I need weaknesses especially."

Eiji goes cold then hot, and closes his smartphone, putting it away. "I'm afraid that information is not for sale."

Satoshi starts at that and then glares. "What did you say?" He grabs Eiji by his collar and drags him back. "All your information is for sale!"

"No. It's not." Eiji kicks at Satoshi's knee, bringing him down, then disentangles himself and heads off into the festival, planning on losing the group in the crowd.

Instead, he runs into Rin, who steadies him before he falls. "Woah. You okay?"

A loud shout has Rin's head snap up and he glares as Satoshi and his group approaches. The entire gang pales and slows down, halting just before the two boys. Rin growls and pushes Eiji behind him. "What the hell you up to?"

Satoshi sneers. "Not your business."

"Like hell it isn't!" Rin snaps back grabbing Satoshi's hand as he reaches for Eiji and squeezing it. Satoshi flinches and swallows as his bones creak under that powerful grip. "Going after Eiji is my business. So back off."

Satoshi's nostrils flare and for a moment it looks like he's going to start a fight. Then he snorts and backs off, trying to regain the tatters of his pride and looking around angrily at all the festival goers staring at the confrontation. "Whatever."

He glares once more at Eiji only to have Rin get in the way and glare back. After that, he turns and leaves, doing his best to not look like he's scurrying away with his tail between his legs.

Rin lets out a deep breath and turns to Eiji. "You okay?"

Eiji swallows, feeling his face burning under Rin's gaze. "I'm fine. Didn't...didn't get to do anything before you showed up."

"I'm glad." Rin gives a relieved look at Eiji then awkwardly rubs the back of his neck. "Look if anyone bugs you tell me okay?"

Eiji gives a slow blink then nods, 100% certain he's blushing now. "I will. Thank you."
Rin watches him go with a surprised look on his face that turns into a smile. Then, whistling, Rin turns to find something else in the festival to pass the time with.

“AHA!” Sayaka cheers as she manages to knock down the target she was aiming for.

Grinning widely, she accepts the big giant stuffed animal – a golden coloured teddy bear – and hands it over to Hiromi who accepts it with a smile.

“Thanks Sayaka-chan.”

“No problem.” Sayaka blushes a bit then looks around, tugging Hiromi away from the stand. Looking around for another option she asks Hiromi, “What do you want?”

“Hmm...Just some hot chocolate.” Hiromi replies, still clutching the teddy bear happily to her chest.

“Right.” Sayaka looks around and frowns when she sees one Okumura Rin by the hot chocolate stand. Hesitating, she then steps forward and reminds herself to be polite.

Rin is just accepting his hot chocolate when they arrive and turns at the sound of familiar voices ordering hot chocolate. “Oh. Hi.”

Hiromi smiles and waves at Rin. “Hello Okumura-kun.”

“How has your day been so far?” Hiromi asks Rin, smiling sweetly.

Rin stares at her for a moment. “Um...pretty good. Been enjoying some games and the food here. Planning on meeting up with Yukio next.”

“Aah. He's working at your class's café, right? From what I've heard, he's doing a wonderful job.” Hiromi tells Rin brightly.

Rin snorts. “Which means he's actually a nervous wreck...”

Sayaka eyes Rin oddly for that comment but ultimately decides not to comment on it. Not her business after all.

“I'm glad it's going well for you Okumura-kun.” Hiromi's voice is bright and happy and Rin looks a bit flustered at that.

“Uh...thanks.” Rin looks over at Sayaka. “You are acting strange, is everything alright?”

Sayaka narrows her eyes. “What do you mean by that?”

Rin shrugs. “Normally you would have picked a fight with me by now. You in a good mood?”

“...” Sayaka doesn't respond for a moment, then says, “Maybe.”

“That's good. Hope you keep up with the happy day.” Rin chuckles and hands over the teddy bear to
Sayaka as she's done with her hot chocolate and silently demanding it.

Rin then rushes off, checking his watch and then looking around before darting in a direction that most likely leads him to his brother.

Hiromi tip-toes over to Sayaka and gives her a kiss on the cheek. “Thank you Sayaka-chan. I know how hard it is.”

“Yeah...” Sayaka smiles and allows Hiromi to take her teddy bear back. “So, where to next?”

_________________________

Kaido curses as though he hits his target, it merely wobbles and doesn't fall down. “Oi, you are rigging this aren't you?”

The high school student manning the stall – in a lose definition of the term – looks up from her cellphone looking incredibly bored. “No. You just didn't knock it over. Want to try again?”

“Of course I do!” Kaido snaps, glowering at the rude teenager and slamming more cash on the ground for three more shots.

Beside Kaido, a little kid starts crying as they fail to get the toy they want, their mother consoling them and glaring murder at the indifferent teenager before marching away saying something about reporting this to the supervisors.

Kaido glares at the target – a game for a handheld console that Kaido wants – and lines up his shot. He lets fly the ball and it makes the target wobble but not fall. Kaido growls.

“What do you want me to try?” Hayashi offers, not expecting it to be accepted. But to his surprise Kaido passes over one of the balls.

Stepping forward, Hayashi's aim is just as good at Kaido's. But the game still only wobbles instead of falling down. Frustrating since it's been hit so many times and just confirms in their minds that the game is rigged.

Kaido hates losing so he looks around for another option. And spots Rin, a wide grinning coming over his face as he has an idea.

“Oi, Okumura!”

Rin looks up and so does Yukio. Frowning at the sight of Kaido, Rin then shrugs and walks over despite Yukio protesting. “What do you want Kaido?”

“Need you to get that game. Pretty sure it's rigged so thinking that your strength should be enough to finally knock it off.” Kaido offers the final ball to Rin.

Rin looks over the stall and at the teenager, frowning at what he sees. “Sure. I don't see a problem there.”

Yukio covers his face in his hand, already seeing something about to go wrong.

He's not wrong either, as Rin lines up to take the shot. Just as he's about to throw it, Kaido nudges him just enough that Rin not only throws it harder than he planned but the ball misses the target...

...and hits the main pillar for the stand, going straight through it with a horrific crack and then the entire stall falls down, the girl supposedly watching the stall cursing and stepping back in horror as the entire thing goes down.
Rin looks horrified at the result, but Kaido claps his back, grinning gleefully, and steps forward to claim his prize from the wreckage.

“What? It was knocked over.” Kaido sneers at the now stuttering and shocked out of her wits stall worker. “Besides...” Kaido bends down and ends up having to pull out a switchblade – which makes the teenage girl whimper – to remove the glue holding the game he wants down.

Yukio frowns as he sees that and steps forward to examine the other prizes. Just a small look through reveals that everything has been glued down and Yukio turns to glare at her. “It might be common to do such a thing for big prizes in official stands, but nothing here truly counts as that.”

The girl goes red and then white, snapping back at Yukio in a rude fashion to declare she didn't know; an obvious lie.

Kaido whistles as Yukio explodes at her, impressed by the show he's giving. 'Apparently that ability is a family thing.' He thinks, considering how good Rin is at looking utterly demonic when sufficiently pissed and how Yukio is pulling it off as well. Kaido turns back to the wreckage and spots something that makes him grin.

Kaido then gives Rin a pat on the head, bringing Rin out of his shock. “Thanks for the help.” He places what he pulled from the wreckage on top of Rin's head. “Here's your reward.”

Still caring his game, Kaido walks off, just as the adults get there – noticing that the mother and child who had previously been scammed as well with them – and start demanding answers.

Rin takes off the item on his head and boggles.

“Keep it Rin!” Kero insists from where he's poked his head out from Rin's jacket, looking hungrily at the brand new handheld console game in Rin's hands. “I've been wanting to play that for ages!”

Rin numbly nods and tucks the game into the bag he has, before being drawn over into the big fuss as he sees how stressed Yukio is looking.

The festival is going so well to Rin, that perhaps he shouldn't be surprised when the feeling of a Sakura Card hits him upside the head and makes him stumble in the middle of a sentence.

“Nii-san, are you okay?” Yukio peers at his brother, wondering why Rin just stopped in the middle of his conversation. Looking up, Yukio tried to see what Rin was looking for. And freezes, staring.

A piece of the bunting set up is on fire.

Yukio only has a moment to register that before a scream goes up. Looking wildly around, both Yukio and Rin can see the entire festival starting to slowly go up in flames, screams of fear and shock rising into the air as much as loud questions and yelling at people to run goes up.

Yukio immediately grabs Rin and drags him away, despite Rin's protests. “No complaining, this is dangerous!”

Rin mentally bewails Yukio's actions here. 'Dammit I know! That's why I have to deal with it!

“It's Firey!” Kero yells up at Rin. “He's another high tier elemental card and is aggressive.”

Rin curses. As if the fact the Card is setting the entire festival on first isn't a good indication there! Rin looks at Yukio and looks torn for a moment.
“I'm sorry.” Rin says softly, and lets the crowd “dislodge” his hand in Yukio’s, disappearing into the crowd despite the cries from his brother at the loss of him. Biting his lip, Rin takes off and tries to think of a way to handle this.

“If I use Sleep, everyone will definitely be out of the way but...” Rin curses. “I can't use it in this situation, it won't be enough! Don't have enough time...”

Kero pops out of Rin's jacket as they enter a cleared area and looks horrified as Rin pulls out two cards: Sleep and Time. “Oh no Rin! You can't do that! Even if it works, you'll be too tired to deal with Firey and he'll just burn everyone to death!”

Rin swallows. “I know but--”

“Perhaps I can be of assistance?” Tsukishiro offers, looking a bit out of breath and smiles at Rin. “I got here as fast as I could.”

“You can help?” Rin stares at Tsukishiro, wondering how she's going to pull that off.

The Moon Mage smiles. “Yes. You can lend Time to me. I can cast the spell for you and thus free you to have enough energy to not only use Sleep but all the other Cards you will need to defeat Firey.”

Rin stares. “Is that possible?”

“It is. Keroberos, what do you think?” Tsukishiro turns to the floating little lion who starts.

Kero looks at Tsukishiro for a long moment then it clicks. 'Of course.' “Yeah. For you, you can do it but ya need permission from Rin.”

Rin takes a deep breath and passes Time over quickly, knowing they are running out of time. “Then do so! I give my permission for you to use Time.”

Tsukishiro smiles and a glowing circle springs up beneath her feet. “Time, stop everything but us in its tracks. Release.”

A whirl of light and Time swirls into action, leaving a strange yellow tinge to everything and making everything silent. Rin doesn't hesitate and pulls out his Key.

“Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!” Rin grabs the staff and readies Sleep. “Put everyone to sleep until the fire is out! Sleep, Release!”

The Card whirls into being, the small fairy shooting into the air and spreading her dust all around. She returns to Rin as Time fades and all at once everyone falls asleep, startling Rin even though he knew it was coming.

A moan makes Rin turn to see Tsukishiro collapsing to the ground. “Tsukishiro-sensei!”

“It's alright.” She pants and smiles up at Rin. “I'm just tired. I'll recover later.” She hands back Time to Rin. “You have a Card to catch, Cardcaptor.”

Rin stares at her then nods. “Right.” Turning, he reaches out with his senses and finds Firey. “Let's go Kero!”

Kero follows after Rin, pausing only to give a nod towards Tsukishiro – one that she returns with a
serious expression – before speeding after Rin.

When Rin reaches the location where the Firey is supposed to be, for a moment he doesn't spot it. Then he looks up and gasps.

Looking like a teenaged male with flaming hair and orange wings, with large ears and a pillar of fire covering his lower half, Firey grins at Rin and snaps his fingers.

Rin ends up dodging out of the way of the fire sent at him. “Crap!” Rin reaches for the first Card he can think of that would work. “Watery!”

Watery flows out and charges at Firey. However, the heat from Firey flares and she ends up driven back, floating back down in Card form for Rin to catch.

“What...but water defeats fire!” Rin protests, then has to dodge again. Seeing that he's getting close to unconscious people, Rin curses and pulls out Shield. “Release!”

Shield rises up and protects Rin from the fire, making Firey look upset and pause for a moment.

“Watery won't work on her own.” Kero admits, sighing. “That's cause Ah'm here. Can't help it and Firey is much stronger than Watery because of it.”

“So what do I do?” Rin demands, a bit of panic sneaking into his voice.

“You're goin' to have to use two Cards. And not just one after the other, but at once. And there's only two Cards that can work.” Kero reaches out with his magic and makes said Cards float over to Rin.

Rin accepts them with wide eyes and stares at the two high elemental Cards that he is in possession of. “It will work?”

“With Windy supportin' Watery, that should give just the right boost to take down Firey.” Kero glances at Firey then and curses. “Rin, look out!”

Rin sees the incoming powerful fireball coming his way and reacts on instinct, going for another Card. “Sword!”

Sword wraps around his staff, and Rin gets in the way of the fireball, bisecting it just barely with Sword in time, dissipating the fire and shocking Firey again.

“Dammit.” Rin dismisses Sword and pulls out the two elemental Cards. For a moment, Rin just holds them and prays. “Please.”

He then tosses them into the air, setting them spinning as Rin draws back the staff. “Wind and Water, take down Fire! Windy, Watery, Release!”

A great light is the result and the two spirits burst forth from it, swirling around each other and charging straight at Firey. Firey immediately responds with a wave of fire but the two female Cards burst through it, making him recoil. But it's too late as they both wrap around Firey and pin him, making him cry out as the pillar of flame on his lower body goes out, revealing his legs.

“Oi!” Firey's head snaps up in time to see Rin, propelled by Jump, lift up to be in front of him. “Firey, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Firey looks dismayed for a second, before it is absorbed into the Card, Rin catching it and the other
two high elemental Cards as they return to him. All the fires also disappear, the fire damage as well being restored for a good measure.

“Awesome!” Rin pulls out his pen and quickly writes his name on it. A glow in front of him makes him look up. “Kero?”

The little lion is smiling as the glow covers him and slowly fades. “Alright! Got some of my real power back.” Kero says cheerfully. To prove his point, he produces some tiny little fireballs.

“Woah. You can do that?” Rin stares in awe, which makes Kero grin smugly.

“Yup. Ah'm the one with power over Cards like Firey and those under em. And since you now got Firey, Ah got a little of my great power back.”

“That's cool!” Rin then looks around at the festival grounds and winces. “This...is impossible to explain.”

“Maybe.” Kero hums to himself as Rin heads back to where Tsukishiro was left behind.

Upon reaching the spot, Rin finds Tsukishiro resting under a nearby tree. She smiles as Rin approaches. “Good job. And congratulations Keroberos on regaining some of your might.”

Kero puffs up in pride at that while Rin sighs in relief at finding that Tsukishiro is alright.

“But...what do I do about the festival?” Rin looks around and knows that soon enough people will be waking up and questioning things.

Tsukishiro laughs. “Rin-kun...remember your Cards.”

Rin blinks, then gives a sheepish expression. “Oh. Right. Memory.” Rin pulls out that Card and glances at Tsukishiro. “Will you be alright?”

Tsukishiro blinks at that. “Yes. Just make a point to exclude me when you cast.”

Rin smiles and turns back to the Card. “Memory...let's get rid of the fire incidents and make sure the wake up isn't bad or weird. Release!”

To everyone else, it's like the festival didn't stop. Yukio doesn't bring up how Rin must have scared him and though Rin feels guilty for meddling with his memory, he also knows it's for the best.

‘Yukio deserves normal.’ Rin thinks, nursing yet another hot chocolate. The looks Yukio is giving him for that would normally start an argument, but Rin is too busy being happy with having gotten yet another super powerful Card.

“Nii-san...” Yukio sighs but doesn't say anything else, instead focusing on his own hot chocolate. He then notices an orange glow and looks up at the night sky, startled at what he sees.

He's not the only one, as strange glowing lights – fires – appear in the sky and light up the entire place, looking beautiful and provoking cries of delight and amazement.

Only Rin looks up and smiles, knowing exactly what's going on.

High up above, Kero whoops and creates off more golden sparklesto dazzle everyone. “Yessss! Consider this a special treat in return for my powers comin' back!” Kero does a loop-d-loop and then drops down to the ground. Landing there, he sneaks up on Rin while everyone is distracted and
burrows into Rin's jacket.

Rin chuckles and takes another sip of his hot chocolate, enjoying the beautiful night before it comes time to head back home.

And, for the first time, Rin is perfectly warm.

But that probably has to do with the fact that Kero is suddenly giving off a lot of heat.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and PLEASE leave a comment below. You guys have been squeaking by lately; I DO have a minimum amount of comments, since that says I have so-and-so amount of people who want more. Please comment if you like this! I don't bite; in fact, it makes me more apt to wish to hug you!
Chapter Notes

Yay! Everyone, thank you SO MUCH for all the wonderful comments. Keep it up!

And oh, I said that the Christmas episode was this month...I somewhat lied. It's TODAY actually. Whoops. I hope you guys don't mind the slightly sped up schedule. I'm sure you guys would have preferred if the schedule allowed for it to be posted on Christmas day (which is possible with my schedule and how the dates work this year/month) but that's how it works out anyways. The only way to fix things would have been to take a hiatus for two weeks and I'm sure you guys would have HATED that.

Anyways, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A few fat snowflakes drift from the cloudy sky, softly landing on the concrete, dead grass, and sleeping trees that cover Southern Cross District and True Cross Campus Town. They are so few that one can only see them in the air, the snowflakes swiftly fading once they reach the ground.

Inside Southern Cross Monastery, Rin sits at the kotatsu, hands moving and the sound of soft clacking echoing in the room as he works on something. Kero is also there, though he's more curled up underneath the kotatsu and sleeping peacefully.

The interesting thing about Rin and Yukio, and their family, for Japan is that they genuinely celebrate Christmas. Perhaps not exactly like the western world, but the influence is there more than the usual Christmas Eve celebrations. At least partially because all the adults are set to be single for life at this point while both Rin and Yukio are too young at this point to consider a romantic Christmas Eve.

This means a proper exchange of presents is the norm for all of them. It is that that has Rin making up something special for a present for his foster father.

Of course, as soon as Rin hears the sound of footsteps he freaks and hides what he's working on underneath the kotatsu.

“Oh, Nii-san...what are you doing?” Yukio looks suspiciously at Rin who appears to be reading a book. Not impossible, but considering it's one of his textbooks it is very unlikely Rin is actually reading.

“Reading.” Is still the answer Rin gives, looking nervous and grinning widely.

Yukio considers things for a moment then sighs. “The oden made yesterday is going to be our dinner. Just wanted to inform you of that. Go back to...whatever you are doing.”

Rin watches Yukio go, Kero himself also poking his head out to watch him leave.

“Why did you hide that from Yukio? It's not for him.” Kero points out, as Rin retrieves his work and frowns down at the tangle that was caused by the sudden movement.
“Yeah...but Yukio will probably tease me...” Rin mumbles to himself.

Kero doesn’t believe that, but lets it slide in favour of crawling back under the kotatsu to resume his nap. If Rin is embarrassed about his knitting he can be embarrassed all he likes as long as he doesn’t disturb his nap.

Chapter 24: Super Snowy Christmas

The school is buzzing with cheer as Christmas gets ever closer and so does winter break. Most students are just looking forward to their gifts they will get from their parents, not many considering a romantic Christmas Eve outside of a few daydreams and squealing over the concept from some of the girls.

Rin is on the roof again today, protected from the heat by bundling up and having Kero resting in his jacket to keep him warm. His hands feel cold at times, but luckily Rin doesn't shiver as he manipulates the knitting needles, sticking his tongue out as he carefully works on the scarf he is currently making.

Rin grins in triumph as he finally finishes the scarf. “Yes!”

Kero pops his head out to watch as Rin carefully casts off his stitches and, using a crotchet hook, weaves the loose string at the end into the scarf. “That looks good.” Kero remarks.

It certainly does. Not only did Rin use multiple colours, the colours he used – alternating different shades of blue – are vibrant and the weaving style of the scarf makes it almost look professional.

“Thanks.” Rin carefully puts the scarf into the bag and, checking the time on his watch, settles back down to just wait until the bell rings.

“Why are you makin' yer foster father a scarf anyways?” Kero has to ask. “Is that a normal gift?”

“No...generally I make something else.” Rin admits, shrugging. “But he's been getting so many colds this winter I figure maybe that a scarf, mitts, and hat would be good.”

Kero stares at Rin. “You aren't done yet?”

“Nah...I got to make the mitts and hat still...probably do the hat next...” Rin mutters to himself, as Kero shakes his head in disbelief.

But he's smiling at it and can't help but considering just how thoughtful Rin is with a lot of warm fondness. 'Just like Sakura that.'

Yukio gives his hands a soft blow and stamps his feet, looking out at the school grounds in front of him. Snow is starting to finally fall around the city and the temperature dropped in accordance to that.

'Where is Nii-san?' Yukio wonders. Rin had darted back inside to get something he forgot and Yukio, not wanting to head home without him, decided to wait at the gate for him.

Yukio sighs and rubs his hands together as another group of students leaves ahead of him, this time made up of girls who are watching him with interest and giggling a bit.

“Does he have a date?” Is one question Yukio hears clearly and that makes him sigh once again.

'I'm not interested...’ Yukio frowns, considering what Shirō has been teasing about lately.
“See if you can visit Shiemi-chan this Eve!” Shirō had laughed over that. “I'm sure she'll appreciate it.”

Yukio burns at the thought but for a moment considers it. Not Christmas Eve, no that would give the wrong message, but at some point during the winter break he should find a reason to go out and visit her. Shiemi doesn't have any friends outside of him due to how shy she is and how sickly she previously was, so spending a little time with her wouldn't be bad.

'Shame I can't introduced Nii-san to her...' Yukio thinks that's one of the bad part of all the secrets. Just by knowing Shiemi, he knows Nii-san would be able to make friends with her and give Shiemi someone else to be with on a friendly basis.

Yukio ignores the whisper at how he actually doesn't want that, since it means he gets to keep Shiemi to himself.

“Oi! Yukio.” Rin finally runs up to his brother. “You didn't have to wait for me!”

“It's alright Nii-san...why did you take so long?”

Rin shrugs. “Tsukishiro wanted to talk to me for a bit.” 'About Cardcaptor stuff...' Rin considers how Tsukishiro had talked to him over how reckless he gets over using the cards. Though it was a scolding, Rin is actually secretly happy about it. Scoldings are one of the way people can show they care after all.

“Was it about the exams?” Yukio asks.

Rin makes a face. “Ugh, don't remind me.” Rin hadn't done spectacularly in a few subjects and actually got one red mark and had to retake the test. The meeting between Rin, Shirō, and Tsukishiro about that had been awkward.

Yukio chuckles. “You still did very good Nii-san. Only one red mark and it's only the second time we've both had final exams to worry about this year.”

Rin smiles at that. “Point. Though your cram school must have helped a lot...” Rin stretches and brings his hands up to behind his head. “Not jealous though. All that extra work? No thanks!”

Yukio gives a hesitant smile at that, feeling a strange sort of guilt before he changes the topic to something else.

The monastery is busy and in high spirits as they decorate the monastery for the season. The outside might be modest – merely hanging festive lights around the windows, doors, and lining the roof edge – but inside everyone is busy laughing and joking as they set up the rest of the decorations inside.

Fake snow, wreathes and other greenery, more lights, bells, and even the tree itself is being handled in the main living area, though the rest of the decorations are scattered around downstairs as well.

“Oi, Yukio you are supposed to be helping decorate.” Rin stands in front of his brother with his hands on his hips and stares down.

Yukio looks up from his book. “I need to finish this. It is important--”

“Winter break is coming, you'll have plenty of time to handle things.” Rin cuts in, narrowing his eyes and grabbing Yukio's hand, dragging him away. Yukio only has a moment to shove a hastily chosen bookmark into the book as he gets lead over to the Christmas tree. The other monks chuckle as
Yukio is given a supply of decorations and forced to work by Rin who watches Yukio closely.

Shirō sniggers at that, turning to handling some of the greenery being placed around the room. Unfortunately there was a bit of dust he missed on it and when it gets into his nose...

“Achoo.” Shirō rubs his nose and only has a moment to realize what's going to happen before Rin shows up right beside him in a fashion that makes Shirō wonder if he can teleport.

“Oyaji, are you getting sick again?” Rin frowns up at Shirō, who ducks to avoid the hand going to check his forehead.

“I'm fine! Just some dust that's all.” Shirō awkwardly laughs and Rin's frown deepens.

“You sure?” Rin steps forward and Shirō steps back, raising his hands in a defensive position. He glances to the side and notices the rest of the group watching the interaction with great amusement. ‘Traitors.’

Soon enough Shirō's backed up enough that he'll have to go around Rin, being pinned to the wall. Something that's not easy when Rin has that particular expression on his face. Shirō suffers through the temperature check, Rin with a serious expression on his face.

Rin steps back, looking subdued. For now. “Well, doesn't seem anything but...hmm...how does udon sound for dinner tonight?” He turns to the rest.

Shirō mentally curses out the rest as they all agree to the udon, knowing exactly what kind of udon Rin is thinking and why he's thinking of it. Udon is the good health and post-sickness meal for the monastery, has been since Yukio and Rin have been young.

Shirō grumbles something about him being okay as he returns to decorating the room.

And sneezes again.

“Lots of udon.” Rin adds almost absently to his talk with the monks, not noticing how Shirō twitches at that.

“That will be 2940 yen please.” Hikari requests, ringing up Shirō's purchases. Shirō hands over the requested cash, getting a small look for how easily he did that.

“Well, I get a seasonal bonus from who I work with.” Shirō admits.

Hikari eyes the exorcist pin on his label and smiles but otherwise raises no fuss. “I'm surprised to end up near a family that celebrates Christmas rather like Americans do.”

Shirō chuckles, accepting the box of treats from Rio who is humming some kind of Christmas tune under her breath. “Well, we are Christian. Though not proper all the way through.” Shirō admits glibly.

Hikari laughs at that. “So, will you be coming over to get your Christmas cake here?”

“Yes. But...it's more special than that.” Shirō admits, settling down to relax for a chat. The store is mostly empty at this late hour, only with a small group of teens enjoying cookies and hot chocolate. The store doesn't attract attention for the Christmas lights – being a normal thing for Japan – but it certain does get some attention for how many decorations are added to it and the different, more American Christmas music it plays along with the usual favourites such as “Christmas Eve” by
Yamashita Tatsurō and “Last Christmas” by WHAM!.

“Since we generally don’t get that much money, it’s economical for us to celebrate the boys’ birthday during the Christmas celebration.” Shirō tells Hikari, also getting Rio’s attention.

“Oh? When is their birthday then?” Hikari asks, as she starts packing things away for the night.

“The 27th.” Shirō admits. “But we celebrate it during the 25th. The boys tend to take the 27th as a more personal day where they just spend time together. But the monastery celebrates during the 25th and I was wondering if you wouldn’t mind coming over as well and joining in. Rio-kun is invited as well.”

Hikari smiles widely at that. “I’d love to. And you don’t have to pay me for the Christmas cake; I’ll put that as my gift to the boys, for their birthday.” She winks at that, startling a laugh out of Shirō.

“That’s good. Rin’s going to be especially happy about that.” Shirō muses.

“Because of his crush on me?” Hikari observes, then chuckles at Shirō’s surprised look. “Oh don’t be like that Fujimoto-kun. I’ve been that age myself and I remember my first real crush was similar.” She seems a bit nostalgic for a moment. “Rin-kun is a good boy and growing. Crushes are part of that.”

Shirō rubs the back of his head. “Now that you bring it up I remember being foolish too...heh, never really planned on ever having kids so sometimes I forget such things.”

“I think you are doing a marvellous job Fujimoto-kun,” Hikari assures him. “You have two very good boys and I can tell where they learned it.”

Shirō laughs. “I sure hope so.” He picks up his box and gives a grin to Hikari. “Goodbye and goodnight. I’ll see you soon.”

Hikari waves goodbye as Shirō leaves her shop, then turns to help Rio with the clean-up with a happy song in her heart.

After the last bell rings, Rin is the first out of the door, though not for the normal reasons. Instead, Rin tears out of the door to head to the teachers’ office so he can ask a question of Tsukishiro. Rin ends up halting at in the doorway as he sees another teacher – the gym teacher he thinks – standing in front of Tsukishiro and talking to her.

“Christmas Eve?” Tsukishiro looks puzzled while Rin deflates. Of course, he forgot all about that.

“Yes. If...it would be not so pertinent would you like to accompany me on a dinner date?” The gym teacher smiles down at Tsukishiro.

On her part she looks thoughtful then slides her gaze away before returning with a smile. “I’m afraid I’m already booked for that evening.” She says sweetly, making the gym teacher deflate and Rin flinch as well. Tsukishiro then glances outside and adds, softly, “Besides, it’s not going to be a Christmas Eve good for dates...”

The gym teacher is confused by that but Tsukishiro gently reminds him of some work he needs to do and he thus walks away, looking still dejected.

Tsukishiro then notices Rin and smiles. “Rin-kun. Is there something you wish to ask me?”
Rin jumps at that and blushes. “Well...um...”

Tsukishiro reads something on his face that makes her stand and walk over to him. “A little more privacy?” She offers, leading Rin away from the teachers' office and to a deserted classroom. She doesn't notice how the gym teacher, now looking angry with how things played out, follows them with his gaze until they are out of sight.

“What is it Rin-kun?” Tsukishiro asks gently.

Rin looks down and sees himself playing with his uniform shirt. Removing his hands he tries to smooth the wrinkles. “W-well I...was going to ask you about your plans for Christmas?”

“Christmas?” Tsukishiro blinks innocently at that. “Rin-kun, explain please?”

“I was...going to ask you to visit the monastery on Christmas because we always celebrate it and thought you...” Rin trails off, getting even more indecipherable.

It takes a moment for Tsukishiro to realize what he said. “Oh! Well. There has been talk...of a teachers' meeting the 25th so I might not be able to come then. If I have the time, I’ll see about dropping in.”

Rin perks up at that. “Really?!”

Tsukishiro laughs. “Yes...now, I'm supposed to give you a present yes? What would you like?”

“Um...no. It's fine. Just show up...I mean, going to get a lot of presents since it's kinda my birthday as well so um...just would like you to show up that's good enough!” Rin is blushing again but smiling nonetheless.

Tsukishiro raises an eyebrow. “Oh? I see. Well, if I can't make it the 25th I'm certain I can make it the 27th with a gift in tow as an apology. One for Yukio-kun too.” She offers.

Rin blushes. “Um...you don't have to...” 'Besides, that's kinda mine and Yukio's day.' Looking up at his favourite teacher though, he can't see that as a bad thing.

“I would like to.” Tsukishiro says softly. “Now, since that's handled why don't you head home and I head back to work.”

Rin nods then pauses. “Um...Tsukishiro-sensei? What did you mean about Christmas Eve not being good for dates this year?”

Tsukishiro pauses in the doorway. Rin can't see her face but Rin gets the feeling she's actually making a serious one. Then she turns and smiles cheerily at Rin.

“Oh...just a touch of foresight.”

And then she's gone, leaving Rin to frown and turn to look at the clouds outside, wondering if something is going to happen soon.

Rin cheers as he finally finishes the last part of his gift for Shirō. Getting everyone else's things ready was easy compared to this. Mostly because how does he measure Shirō's hands for the mitts?

'That took a lot of work but it's all good now.' Rin thinks cheerily then goes for the wrapping paper and small box he found to put all the pieces of the gift inside. Shirō's the only one getting a complete
set, as everyone also got a scarf from Rin along with something else that's uniquely theirs.

The last part of the gift is something Rin decided to buy since he can't make it personally himself. If he could he would have, but as is it's luckily not too expensive and Rin managed to grab it on sale to boot. Besides, it's not too different from the rest's gifts; the only difference is that Shirō gets two more handmade items along with the store bought one.

“Right.” Rin finishes wrapping the gift and is just about to hide it under his bed when, of all the ill luck, Shirō walks in. Panicking, Rin tosses his knitting supplies under the bed and the wrapped present ends up in his nearby bag – the one he tends to use when out catching the Cards – due to his fluster.

Shirō raises his eyebrows at Rin's panic but doesn't comment. “Remember how you said you wanted to make the fried chicken for dinner yourself?”

“Uh...yes?” Rin wonders where Shirō is getting with this.

Shirō grins. “C'mon. I got enough money for us both to get shopping for almost all of the ingredients we'll need soon. There's a sale going on at the grocery store we just can't miss.”

Rin perks up with that and rushes to get ready, forgetting all about the present in the bag in his eagerness to finally be able to make the Christmas fried chicken instead of the monastery ordering out.

It starts small, with just the snow fall slowly increasing to the point you can see actual snow on the ground.

Then, ever so slowly, it escalates over the day, making people get worried as it increases. Shirō, out shopping for the last of the Christmas celebration food, quickly contacts the rest and finishes shopping as quickly as he can as the snow continues to fall down.

By the evening, the snow is starting to clog the roads and many couples ended up having to cancel their plans all across not only Southern Cross but True Cross Campus Town.

In the morning, the city is almost entirely shut down with everything grinding to a halt as the major amount of snow makes passage very difficult at best and all but impossible otherwise. Even the trains stuffer.

In the monastery, Rin stares out at this and knows the exact reason behind all of this.

A Sakura Card.

Shirō looks out with a frown at the snow outside. He then closes the curtain and turns to the group behind him. All are currently in the living room, waiting for a response from Shirō.

Shirō sighs. “No one is going outside in this weather. Not until it dies down. So!” Shirō claps his hands together. “We will extend the festivities. I'm going to go call Samurakami-san and see how she's doing. She's not too far and might just be able to make it.”

Everyone stares for a moment, making Shirō roll his eyes. “Get moving!”

Everyone jumps and gets up at once, running out to various other rooms to get things ready, Shirō shaking his head and sighing.
He goes to leave himself, but pauses when he sees Rin has moved over to the window and is staring outside. Shirō considers it for a moment, then stands behind Rin. “What is it?”

“Aah!” Rin jumps a bit and looks up. “Oh, just...thinking.”

“Well, don't hurt your brain.” Shirō sniggers as Rin looks affronted by that. “C'mon, let's go get started on making the meal. We got not just one big meal but three today!”

Rin manages a smile at that and lets Shirō lead him away to the kitchen. Rin, however, glances back at the snow outside and considers just how much more dangerous things are bound to get.

“Snow, right?” Rin checks with Kero, having managed to retreat upstairs for a brief period of time as Shirō greets both Hikari and Rio at the door. Rin's a bit upset at missing Hikari but he can't do anything else since it's the only chance he has.

“Yeah. You're going to have to stop it before Snow covers the whole area and traps everyone.” Kero sighs, rubbing a paw over his face. 'Man, a quiet Christmas is too much to ask for eh?'

“But I can't leave the house!” Rin explodes, falling back onto his bed melodramatically. “I need to stay and help with all the meals and such.”

“...who said it had to actually be you Rin?” Kero points out.

It takes a moment, then Rin sits up in realization. “Mirror! She can take my place right?”

“Yeah. Easy enough too.” Kero watches as Rin pulls out his Key and then Mirror.

Looking down at the serene Card, Rin tosses it into the air. “Mirror, I need you to be my double today. Release!”

A giant mirror appears in Rin's room, with Mirror behind it. She steps forward and opens Rin's eyes. Rin grins at the sight of her. “Hello Mirror. How have you been?”

Mirror smiles back at her master. “Quite well. You have need for me?”

“Yeah...need you to cover for me while I handle Snow. Can you do that?” Rin then blinks. “Oh, can you cook?”

“You can cook.” Is Mirror's response, which makes Rin blink and Kero sigh.

“She gets some basic skills and such from copyin' you.” Kero explains. ‘That includes cookin'. Not goin' to be quite as good as you, but it should do cause Ah don't see anyone noticin' much.’

Rin slowly nods. “That's good.” He smiles at Mirror who returns it shyly. “Then I got nothing to worry about. Just hope I can get back in time to make the fried chicken...” He mumbles the last, though Mirror hears and makes note of it.

Rin goes to the window and, after snagging his Cardcaptor bag and pulling on all the winter wear he sneaked upstairs last night when he started to realize what was going on, opens it. Flinching back at the wind and cold, he turns to see Kero whispering something to Mirror that makes her nod.

Kero then flies over to Rin and quickly dives into his jacket, producing heat for Rin to be warm as much as himself.

“Fly!” Rin cries and leaps out of the window into the blizzard that is starting to rage in full. “Oi,
Kero what did you tell her?"

“Nothin' much.” Kero says glibly. *Just to remember that you got a crush on Samurakami Hikari among other things.*

Rin looks at Kero suspiciously then looks back up. Has more important things to do after all.

Mirror goes down the stairs and into what appears to be chaos. Looking around, she finally spots Shirō in the middle and slips through the crowd.

“What's going on Oyaji?”

Shirō looks down at Mirror and shakes his head. “Just some discussion on things. Oi, stop it the cook's here! Out unless you are helping! If you stay, no food for you!”

That gets everyone but Shirō, Hikari, and Mirror who blinks at how fast everyone left. Hikari smiles at it and turns to Mirror. “So, shall we work on feeding the hungry hoard?”

Mirror raises a blush to “Rin's” cheeks and nods, then follows happily as they set to working on the late breakfast that's more of a brunch at this point.

Rin is starting to learn to hate the cold. And snow, definitely snow. Despite knowing there are other things out there, it's very hard to spot them in the great blizzard sweeping the city. Rin more than once has had to dodge a tall building or more to avoid getting crushed. And he still hasn't found Snow's true location.

The freezing temperatures and snow in his face doesn't help his case, making it hard to focus. With that in mind, Rin starts looking for a place to land. A tricky task in this situation but one he must complete to have any chance of finding Snow.

A particular fierce wind hits at that and sends Rin spiralling away and nearly into a building. Barely controlling his flight, Rin yanks the staff up and manages to land on top of the roof instead, though he falls with a crash.

Rin scrambles up, glancing down to see Kero looking a little battered but still safe in his jacket. Then Rin realizes his bag is gone and tries to find it. But all he sees is the snow.

Rin at first doesn't realizes what that means. Then he remembers.

Kero looks up at Rin, feeling something wrong and wondering at Rin's hidden expression. “Rin?” Kero flies out of Rin's jacket, wincing at the wind and using his regained power to stay both in one place and warm.

“...Oyaji's present was in that bag.” Rin says softly.

Kero gulps as Rin lifts his head and reveals his eyes. *That...those aren't his normal eyes!*

Instead of normal blue, Kero is seeing strange, demonic looking eyes. Mostly blue, but the pupil has not only turned jagged in appearance but bright red with another jagged circle around it. It is with those eyes that Rin stumbles forward and, snarling, brings out a Card.

“Firey, BURN SNOW!” Rin commands, the circle beneath him flaring brighter than usual as he activates the Card and the spirit flares up into the sky, large amounts of fire being brought up with it,
fire that expands until it covers the whole sky.

Fire spreads out, lowering all the snow on the ground to a more acceptable level and bursting through the clouds until there is nothing there, warming the air just enough in the process that Kero shudders at the blast of what feels like hot air briefly to him after being cold for so long.

Above, the revealed form of Snow – looking rather like a Yuki-Onna – is seen, fleeing from Firey and being herded towards Rin and Kero. Snow only has a moment to realize it is trapped before Rin lifts his staff.

“Snow, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” Bright light has the Card successfully captured and the disaster averted, Rin catching both Snow and Firey as they return to him.

Kero watches Rin as he summons Fly and gets down off the tall building, landing on the ground. “Rin?” He questions, floating closer to the boy.

Rin sniffs and rubs his eyes, a few tears leaking loose. “I w-worked so hard and that razor took the last of my part-time job m-money and...”

Kero can't say anything, knowing nothing would really help in this situation. Not unless they can track down the missing bag.

“Rin-kun.”

That voice makes Rin raise his head and blink at the sight of Tsukishiro. Then he realizes that of course she would have to be here, to monitor him. He wipes his eyes. “What is it?”

Tsukishiro holds out something to him and Rin looks down. He gasps. “My bag!” He rushes over and grabs it, opening it and checking the contents. Sighing in relief he looks curiously at Tsukishiro.

“How did you find it?” Rin has to ask.

Tsukishiro smiles. “I have a bit of foresight.” Is her fashion of explanation, which confuses Rin. “I'm glad to help you.” She glances at her watch. “But I'm afraid I must go.”

“Why not? Can't...um...couldn't you come to the party?” Rin offers.

Tsukishiro looks surprised at that, then slowly shakes her head. “With the roads as they are, it couldn't be possible.”

“But you got here and um...oh I could take you on Fly!” Rin cheers at that thought.

“Yes, but how could you explain it to your family?” Tsukishiro questions.

Rin snaps his mouth shut at that and realizes she's right. No way could Rin explain it and neither could Tsukishiro.

“Don't be sad. You have a great party going on back home and I'll be there the 27th I promise.”

Tsukishiro gives his nose a small bop and gets a smile back in return.

“Then...Merry Christmas.” Rin says, getting a bright smile from Tsukishiro at that.

With that said, the group splits, Kero and Rin taking to the skies while Tsukishiro walks off in the other direction.
Mirror looks up as she senses the return of Rin, notices him land in the front yard and then run around to the back. Luckily no one else seems to notice, too distracted by various conversations and even a few happy remarks about how the snow has finally stopped.

Mirror makes a quick excuse, then rushes upstairs to meet up with Rin. Opening the door, she sees Rin flinch and Kero go to hide and then relax when they realize it’s just her.

“How did things go?” Rin asks her, smiling at her.

Mirror smiles back. “Good. No one noticed and they haven’t even started brunch yet due to getting distracted by the end of the snowstorm.”

Rin grins at that and accepts Mirror as she returns to Card form. “Thank you for the hard work.”

Rin then rushes down, promising to bring some food up to Kero later, swinging by the living room to place his final present finally under the tree. He enters the kitchen and gives everyone a look. “Why aren’t you eating? The food’s getting cold!”

That gets everyone scrambling to sink down and get their food on their plates and for awhile it’s only about eating.

“You know, Rin, are you getting sick or something?” Shirō asks, sounding a bit like he’s teasing.

“Huah?” Rin looks up at Shirō, confused by what he’s saying.

“You turned into a klutz while cooking.” Shirō shakes his head. “So many dishes and messes that needed to be cleaned up. We were going to make the fried chicken after making brunch but you messed up our schedule with that.”

Rin doesn’t say anything, trying to figure out what Mirror was thinking. Then he recalls mentioning how much he wants to make the fried chicken and smiles. *That's super sweet of her...’*

Shirō raises an eyebrow at Rin’s goofy grin. “Hmm...or perhaps you were distracted by the lovely Samura--” He’s interrupted by Rin smacking him in the face.

For a moment brunch halts as Rin and Shirō argue and fight a bit, before finally settling down back to their meal in good cheer.

*I really do wonder at that...’* Yukio sighs, realizing that some aspects of how his brother treats their foster father will never be fully understood even by him, and returns to his rice bowl. The super nice breakfast and lunch combo is very enjoyable he has to admit.

Though he feels like there’s something slightly off about the food...

The fried chicken is as fun to make as Rin hoped for, and also extremely tasty. Much cheaper as well compared to ordering out as well and Rin mentally sets it aside as something to be repeated.

Dinner is as cheery and energetic as expected, with Rio regaling Izumi about how Americans celebrate Christmas to the young monk’s puzzlement, Yukio talking to Maruta about something, Shirō and Nagatomo having a fight over the last fried chicken piece – which Rin steals under their noses without them noticing for a long time, to be set aside for Kero – and Hikari discussing with Rin cooking and baking.

Once dinner is finished and the clean up is done, everyone moves into the living room. After some
time the Christmas cake is brought out. As usual, birthday candles are included and the most embarrassing song is sung by the monks and co – only Rio refusing to sing – while Rin and Yukio bear until they are done and they can blow out the candles together.

The cake is cut and passed out to the group, and after some enjoyment of that attention switches to the presents.

The first presents opened belong to the guests, as in Rio and Hikari's gifts to the monastery and the boys are chosen first.

Rio's choice of some very nice quality coffee is cheered by the group, as everyone but Rin tends to survive on that elixir. Rin scowls at it briefly, but is quickly distracted by the two separate presents that are handed to the twins. Rin's gift makes up for the coffee with fine quality tea just for him and Rio telling him cheerfully that he's allowed to do terrible things to people who steal his tea. The widening grin on his face does not console everyone else and they all mentally make a memo to never take Rin's tea. Yukio got a very nice daily planner from her, Rio commenting on how he's always so busy he should keep better track of things.

Hikari gives the monastery a gift certificate for Sugar Bell and refuses to take it back even once they find out how much it is for. Rin and Yukio get small bags of gingerbread to enjoy and jars of hot chocolate mix that make Rin and Yukio thank her sincerely.

The monks had pooled together to get Rin some new kitchen equipment, including a good quality chiffon cake pan that Rin exclaims over happily. Yukio gets some books, including manga he likes, and a soft promise that there are more secret presents that they can't give in front of Rin.

Before Shirō can give his presents, Rin stands up. “You first!” He exclaims, dragging out the presents for Shirō and piling them at him.

Shirō chuckles at that, and looks down at the first gift. It's from Yukio and opening it reveals a hand-painted coffee mug. Shirō eyes Yukio. “This must have taken a long time to finish.”

Yukio's ears turn red, which gets worse when Rin adds, “Oh yeah...he actually bought a set because he kept throwing out the ones he didn't like.”

After the laughter for that dies down, Shirō opens the gift from the monks. Aside from a note about another secret gift, Shirō gets a picture of an office chair with a caption that declares it's to be found in his office. “Now how did you know I wanted that?”

Nagatomo mutters something about him mentioning it constantly, which gets a laugh, then Shirō turns to the last present which is from Rin.

Rin watches, holding his breath as Shirō removes the knitted scarf. This is followed by the mittens and hat. The hat gets a snort from Izumi as he sees the ear flaps on it.

“The well you've been getting sick a lot...best to take better care of yourself old man.” Rin stutters, trying to avoid Shirō's gaze.

Shirō laughs. “It's perfect.” And to prove it he shoves the hat on his head. In the background, Izumi nearly collapses from his laughter, a few words like “Pala--” and “ridiculous” escaping from him.

Shirō then pulls out the final present, surprised at the nice new electronic razor. “Rin...how did you afford this?”

“My part-time job, winning at a bet during the Sports Festival...and it was on sale anyways.” Rin
pouts at Shirō's look. “Yeesh, you are acting like I stole it or something.”

Shirō blinks and shakes his head. “No, that's not it. Just surprised you'd go that far.”

“W-well...you might not have liked the scarf and hat and mitts so I figured I'd get you something you'd like.” Rin looks away again.

Shirō smiles, stands and pulls both Rin and Yukio into a hug. “They are perfect. Thank you.” Shirō gives Yukio a look and he looks down, a bit embarrassed at Shirō figuring that he secretly gave Rin the last amount of money he needed to get the razor.

“No...back to the birthday boys!” Shirō gets a cheer from that and watches as Rin and Yukio exchange the gifts they got for each other.

More laughter and comments fly across the room as Yukio discovers Rin got him a joke present and, snickering, Rin pulls out his real present for Yukio.

Outside, snow gently drifts down, a natural occurrence compared to last time. And, in the doorway, Kero peers in and grins at the cheer that spreads out from within the living room.

Then sneaks off to get the leftover goodies before someone gets in their head to eat everything before him.

Chapter End Notes

Did you like it? If you did, tell me in the comments below! I LOVE LOVE comments and they are what will have Monday have another update! Who's up for a chapter about Rin and Yukio's birthday? Not to mention has a VERY special guest star...

Also, if you guys like you can head over to my shared writer's blog (http://writerscornergblp.tumblr.com/) and drop me some questions about the OCs of ICD. Even ones that only show up in one chapter. You can ask for a specific question or just pick a character and I'll drop a random fact about them out.
 Okay, thank you to all who commented. But before I get into the fic, here's an issue I have to address:

What is with you guys and weekends?!! Comments drop down so you squeak by EVERY SINGLE TIME. I don't like that at all. It makes me feel like my Friday chapters aren't loved and if you guys don't figure out a way to get those five minutes to write a comment during the weekend, I might end up only posting on Fridays as you guys don't reach the minimum.

Please, please, please. When I say you guys are squeaking by or not giving the right amount of comments that means sit up and pay attention for EVERY chapter. All comments matter, especially since I only count the comments on the most recent chapter when it comes to posting. You guys do great for getting Fridays' chapters, but you guys are falling behind when it comes to Mondays. I want to wake up to an inbox filled with comments. I did NOT get any comments over the weekend aside from one. Please everyone, do what you can to figure things out there.

As is, I'll post today since you guys JUST made it thanks to two anons who commented late Sunday and today. I'm going to give you a pass today, but if you fail again next weekend, you guys won't get a Monday chapter. I'm sorry, but that's how it goes. I need to have comments to make posting worthwhile. I have ultimately have 1,404 pages of work in Libre office for this entire series (and that's discounting the in-progress side stories). And who knows how much word count that adds up to. My lowest word count for an arc is 142,530 words approximately.

If you want to see those pages and words, please comment. If I don't know for certain I have an audience, I can't see the point in posting. Kudos are meaningless. They just say "i like it" and that is a one time deal on top of being very, very vague and generalized. WHY do you like it is what I want to know.

As is, please enjoy this very special chapter.

Yukio is not sure what time it is, but as Rin pokes at him excitedly and keeps saying “hey, hey, hey” to get him up, he's pretty sure it's way too early.

“Go back to sleep Nii-san.” Yukio moans, rolling over and trying to hide from his brother. No such luck as Rin follows him and actually sits on him. “Nii-san!”

“But it's our birthday!” Rin half-cheers and half-whispers. “C'mon get up! Let's get the awesome day started already.”

“Why is it you can barely get up in time for school even with an alarm and yet every year you're wide awake way too early on this same day.” Yukio grumbles, managing to dislodge Rin who falls down with a yelp and thump. Reaching out with his hands, Yukio manages to find his glasses case
and fumble it open, pulling out and on his glasses.

Now able to see, minus the darkness obscuring things, Yukio groans at the time on the clock, and turns on Rin who's sitting up and grinning widely at him.

“Yay, you're up!” Rin cheers. Yukio pushes Rin back down and, annoyed, gets up and stumbles over to the door. He is going to need a long bath to wake up and a big pot of coffee.

The last he announces to Rin who makes a face but promises to make one. “Besides, Tsukishiro-sensei is going to visit and sometimes she likes coffee.”

Yukio pauses and turns back to his brother. “What did you say?”

Rin blinks innocently up at him, not realizes the extra headache he just gave his younger brother.

Chapter 25: It's Our Birthday

Yukio stomps down the stairs after his long bath – that got even longer when Rin joined in – his elder brother following after him with a confused look on his face.

“What is it Yukio?” Rin asks, not understanding.

“You said Tsukishiro-sensei is coming over.” Yukio finally hisses at him at the bottom of the stairs. “You didn't even think to warn me?”

Rin blinks and looks chagrined. “Oh. Sorry...I told Oyaji so...yeah, forgot.”

Yukio grits his teeth then wonders why he's so irritated by the news of Tsukishiro showing up. It's probably only a small visit and honestly he does like Tsukishiro-sensei. But something about it all irks him.

Rin slips past Yukio who is still thinking things over and into the kitchen. The pot of coffee is almost done and Rin sets to working on the next stage of the boy's “perfect birthday” by starting up a decadent pancake breakfast for just the two of them. Yukio slides in behind him after a moment, settling at the kitchen table.

As time slowly passes, the rest of the monastery wakes up and trudges down to get a simpler breakfast, Nagatomo nudging Rin to the side so he can prep their more simple breakfast. Izumi of course whines about not getting pancakes then yelps and ends up nursing a small bruise on his leg from Rin kicking him a little too hard in irritation.

The doorbell going off has Shirō set aside his coffee and glance at Yukio who glares at his own mug. Sighing at his attitude, Shirō stands and heads over to the front. He's slightly surprised that Rin isn't coming with him, then again he's awfully focused on making the perfect pancakes for Yukio.

The door opens to reveal the heralded guest, Tsukishiro smiling sweetly as she sees Shirō and Shirō having to pause at her outfit. A very lovely white faux fur hat keeps her head warm, while pale blue gloves cover her hands. Her coat looks lovely, patterned in purple and blue, and she's holding in her hands a few small packages, two that are neatly wrapped. Her purple eyes sparkle and Shirō has to deal with the fact that yes, Tsukishiro might be the most beautiful woman he's ever seen once again before he gets his feet back under him mentally.

“Welcome Tsukishiro-san.” Shirō steps back to allow Tsukishiro inside, the woman tapping off the snow on her lavender boots before stepping inside the genkan. Shirō glances back and is relieved to find he did, in fact, remember to set out the guest uwabaki last night.
Entering the kitchen, Tsukishiro is greeted with happiness. Happiness that gets more vocal when it turns out one of the packages she brought is a bunch of pastries – not from Sugar Bell though she expresses interest in that place, but one closer to her own home – for everyone to share.

“Happy birthday Rin-kun, Yukio-kun.” Tsukishiro settles down beside Yukio and he can’t help but smile and relax. He then carefully accepts the present Tsukishiro bought him, eyeing the slim package and realizing quickly it’s definitely a book.

Rin plops Yukio's plate of pancakes in front of him and Tsukishiro is offered a cup of coffee which she accepts.

“I do find a cup of coffee in the morning is always needed.” She muses and sips at it, staring in surprise at the taste. “This is very good coffee.”

“Christmas gift from Samurakami-san's ward.” Shirō explains, enjoying his own cup of coffee.

Beside Yukio, Rin settles down with his own plate and early digs in. Their gifts are set to the side as the adults talk quietly and the two boys eat and finally have a little bit of conversation themselves, quietly discussing their plans for the day.

When they are done their breakfast, Rin dives immediately for the gift Tsukishiro brought him with a cry of glee while Yukio starts unwrapping his in a more demure manner.

He ends up staring. “This...this is...” He looks wide-eyed at Tsukishiro, clutching the precious book to his chest.

“Yes. I know.” Tsukishiro smiles down at him and ruffles his hair. “And I know it's the kind of thing you'd like so no complaints about the cost. I wanted to to it okay?”

Yukio nods and opens the book on the progress of medicine and health care, a special book that also analyzes if something could work or not like claimed in the past.

Rin makes a large squealing sound, drawing attention. Like Yukio, he got a book but his book is on affordable cooking, with recipes from all over the world that Rin is hugging gleefully to his chest.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you!” Rin exclaims as he tackles Tsukishiro into a hug. Tsukishiro lets out an “oof”, then laughs and returns the hug.

“I'm glad you like it.” She says softly, then disentangles herself from Rin. “Now, what are you two planning to do today?”

The two boys exchange looks and then Rin begins explaining, talking eagerly and waving his hands to elaborate at times, Yukio pipping in with some clarification or correction at times.

“Oooh that looks good let's go there next!” Rin drags Yukio by his arm to another interesting location, this time a yatai that is selling curry. Yukio sighs, but still smiles at his brother's antics.

His smile drops when he looks behind himself and sees Tsukishiro still following after them. He's still not happy with the arrangement made.

“What do you mean we can't go out?” Rin whines, staring up at Shirō with big eyes.

Shirō sighs. “I'm afraid things are little too busy at the monastery today, something came up, that we can't really monitor you guys as you go out.”
“We're thirteen now, we can handle ourselves!” Rin protests. “You let us go out alone at the summer festival.”

“Well...not exactly...” Shirō murmurs to himself, then louder, “I'm afraid it's just not possible.”

“Perhaps I can help?” Tsukishiro offers. “My day isn't that busy and what I do need to do can be easily set aside for the evening after they head home.”

Rin turns big blue eyes on Shirō at that and silently begs him to say yes as Shirō thinks on it.

‘Why did he have to say yes?’ Yukio would have been fine with the two of them inside, just reading and playing games together, but no. Tsukishiro is ever presently there – though at a discreet distance so the twins can have their birthday to themselves – and something about it makes Yukio itch in annoyance.

Perhaps the fact she “borrowed” Rin's plush toy lion for whatever reason and somehow managed to get it to perch on her shoulder has something to say with it. Her casual air about it hadn't helped, or the fact Rin had no problem with Tsukishiro borrowing the plush toy. Yukio is not allowed to touch that plush toy.

Rin snickers at the look on his face as he accepts the big plate of curry and two spoons from the yatai worker. “You are acting like she's some kind of third wheel on a date...”

Yukio flushes at that. “Nii-san!” He tries not to sound whiny, but his voice decides this is a good time to crack and Rin ends up laughing. Yukio pouts as he takes a seat on a nearby bench, Rin sitting down next to him and offering the other spoon to him.

Yukio accepts it after a moment and the twins dig into the curry. Across from them Tsukishiro treats herself to some curry as well, looking curiously as the twins share a plate.

‘I suppose that's one way to make sure you have enough money for the entire day.’ She thinks amused, considering how Rin and Yukio are starting to talk and relax around each other again. The extra spoon she has is swiped by Kero once he's sure no one is looking and he enjoys the second plate of curry that Tsukishiro bought. The third one – of katsu curry – is polished off by Tsukishiro before Rin and Yukio are finished, allowing her to follow them after a pause.

Rin and Yukio move through the streets once more, Yukio ignoring Tsukishiro while Rin grins at his face in that regard, stopping as they come to a convenience store to get coffee for Yukio and hot chocolate for Rin. After that, they decide to head to a nearby park, one where a small ice sculpture contest is being held.

“Oh, I like this one.” Rin looks at the carefully sculpted lion with an angel that seems to be taming it. Or perhaps is just with the lion as a friend.

“Hmm..” Yukio quietly agrees then looks over at another one. This one is more abstract and a bit dizzy to look at but Yukio finds he likes it. Rin loudly wonders what it's supposed to be before wandering off to find another sculpture to look at.

Of course, before that he got Tsukishiro to come over and take pictures of both of them in front of the two ice sculptures the boys like, which has Yukio forcing a smile to his face.

“Why do you suddenly not like Tsukishiro-sensei?” Rin asks Yukio as they pause at a sculpture of ice flowers.

Yukio jumps a bit at that and looks sheepish. “Um...it's not that I don't like her just...” Yukio looks
over at Tsukishiro, who is standing in front of the lion and angel sculpture. Her lips are moving, suggesting she's talking but there's no one else there.

Yukio sighs. “I'm sorry. Her showing up without you warning me must have just...” Yukio waves his hand idly.

Rin smiles softly at Yukio, grabbing his hand and giving it a squeeze. “It's alright. Sorry, shouldn't have done that to you.”

“Hm...so where to next?” Yukio asks, as the boys carefully travel out of the park.

Rin looks thoughtful and opens his mouth to reply. That is until he feels the presence of a Card, making him stumble and look around.

“Nii-san?” Yukio asks curiously, wondering what just came over his brother.

And that's when they both hear screaming.

The screaming is coming from the ice sculpture park and it's a testament of who the twins are that they immediately turn around and run straight back towards the terrified screaming.

Masses of people are attempting to run from the park, but between others trying to get a good look and even more panicking at what's going on, they end up trampling on each other and just getting packed in tight without really going anywhere.

Then a sudden drop in temperatures has them frozen right before Rin and Yukio's terrified eyes.

“What...” Yukio stares in horror at all the people covered in ice, and then shivers as he feels the temperature creeping up on him as well.

Rin curses and looks over at Yukio in worry. ‘I can't do anything while he's here!' Another part of him is really irritated with the Card's timing. 'Dammit it's our birthday!'

A sudden feeling has Yukio grabbing Rin and pulling him away, just as he sees something swimming underneath the ice coating that's slowly covering the area. It's spreading out fast and more and more people are getting frozen solid.

'A demon?!' Yukio thinks frantically, looking around. 'But such a blatant attack...what's going on?'

“Yukio-kun, Rin-kun.” Tsukishiro appears, looking worried and passing the plush toy back to Rin who accepts it back with wide eyes. “We need to get out of here and now.”

Yukio doesn't have time to protest as Tsukishiro chivies both of them out of the way, though more Yukio than Rin who is trailing behind and seems to be saying something. Yukio sees a flash of light that comes from behind him and turns around in surprise.

Only to pass out as Sleep's dust hits him and Rin catches him with a murmured, “I'm sorry.”

Rin sighs at his now sleeping brother, but knows it's for the best. “Memory, make him forget when he wakes.” The soft glow that covers Yukio makes his tense features relax, and Rin lifts him up and, after a quick look, spots a clear bench to set Yukio upon.

With that done, Rin looks around at the slowly freezing city in anger. “C'mon. Let's get going.”

Kero nods, now flying next to him, and takes off after Rin in pursuit of the Card. Tsukishiro follows
after a moment, glancing back at Yukio with a question on her face that gets dismissed in favour of the dangerous situation.

Freeze is very fast and even attempts to use Firey against it aren't that effective while it's under the icy surface it has summoned and it's moving fast enough that each strike misses.

Rin curses at that, and nearly falls down on the ice once more. Running on ice is not advised, but Rin doesn't really have any options. Not like he brought ice skates with him today and even if he did he wouldn't know how to use them, having never skated before.

Even Tsukishiro struggles at times, and ends up a little behind Rin as he turns a corner and senses Freeze turning into an abandoned lot.

Rin only has a moment to gape up at the old abbey, surprised at being led back here again, then charges in again. “Firey, a shield to trap!” Rin calls, and the elemental rises up and covers the entire abbey in a flaming shield after both Rin and Tsukishiro have entered the grounds. The ice hisses and melts under the fire, making it so Freeze has no place to go and trapping it within the abbey. A quick search with his senses has Rin charge up the steps to the stone church that's the centre of the abbey, neither him or Kero noticing Tsukishiro suddenly shout after them to wait.

Rin enters the church and looks around. Covered in dust and wreckage spread about, all of which is covered in a coating of ice that gets thicker and thicker as time passes. Rin grips his staff and looks for something like a trail.

The sound of something falling with a crash has him whirling, to see the stone staircase that leads up to the belltower. Rin blinks at that, then races over to it and curses at the slippery steps. He ends up half crawling up the stairs in places, due to the staircases being too old for Kero to risk fully using his fire powers to de-ice them.

“Fuck.” Rin curses as he finally reaches the top and, standing up and brushes off his clothes, he approaches the door. Peering through the creaky old door, Rin sees that Freeze is still under ice and swimming within it. It goes back and forth, not leaving the room and Rin gets the feeling that it's waiting for him.

“Kero...I need your fire...” Rin looks over at the flying lion “plush” who nods, serious faced. “I'm going to see about luring it out but I need help.”

“Alright. Be careful Rin.” Kero agrees and follows Rin as he bursts into the room. Freeze creates a pillar of ice right in front of Rin, just barely missing his nose. Kero takes in a deep breath and breaths out his fire breath, weaker than when at full strength but powerful enough to melt the ice. This appears to infuriate the Card and Kero ends up having to dodge ice that goes after him.

Meanwhile, Rin does his best to get behind Freeze as it is chasing Kero. Thinking through all the Cards he has, Rin tries to think of one that might help in this situation.

‘Watery definitely won't work...neither will Snow...too alike in power...’ Rin thinks back. ‘Already have Fiery keeping Freeze from escaping...oh!’

A thought has Rin pull out Illusion and the Card activates, creating the image of Kero that doubles and triples, brings Freeze to a halt as it tries to identify which one is the real one. Rin seizes his chance.

“HIIIYA!” Rin cries, his staff equipped with Sword and stabs right through the ice, striking Freeze. A loud shriek is the result and Rin is sent flying, Sword returning to Card form, along with many ice
shards. One of the shards cuts the straps on Rin's card holster, making it drop down and slide away. Rin groans and stands up, seeing that Freeze is up and being hampered by Kero's fire to retreat back into the ice.

“Freeze, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” Rin activates the staff and to his surprise Freeze shatters before forming the Card out of ice shards. Rin sighs as it floats over to him and smiles at it.

“Got it!” Rin cheers, waving his hand and hitting the bell behind him and making it ring out slowly.

“Rin-kun, look out!” Tsukishiro cries, having finally reached the top thanks to the ice disappearing. Rin turns at the feeling of great power and drops Freeze's Card in shock as he sees the swirling black mist that is seeping from the now ringing bell. Rin has no chance to flee as the black mist wraps around him and drags him into it.

“Help!” Rin cries and then he is gone, leaving behind a shocked Kero and Tsukishiro.

“Oh no...” Kero stares in horror. “Return...” Tsukishiro looks terrified, then firms up and walks over to the discarded Card holster and riffles through it, hoping to find the right Card and for her desperate scheme to work.

Rin groans as he wakes up, rubbing his head and slowly sitting up, finding he's still in the belltower. “What happened...” Rin blinks, finally truly looking at the belltower.

It doesn't look like the belltower he was last in. This one looks clean and in use, not abandoned and covered in dust. Rin slowly stands up and leans on the bell. A little too much as the bell ends up ringing and Rin jumps.

“What was that?” That voice makes Rin freak and look around for a spot to hide as he hears footsteps on the stairs. The best he can do is hide behind the bell and he curses that as he's bound to be discovered.

The person who comes up looks like a monk, though the uniform looks different than the ones at Rin's monastery even though he wears the same pin that Shirō and the rest do. He frowns as he looks around, and looks behind the bell before Rin can hide. To Rin's surprise though, he just shrugs and turns away, muttering about being paranoid due to their special guest.

Rin stares after him and looks down at himself. He doesn't look any different to his eyes but when he pauses and looks a bit differently, he spots a magical aura around him.

'So the Card is protecting me...somehow...' Rin glances out at the abbey and sees it's a spring day to his shock. Not only that, but the abbey is in perfect condition and busy with both monks and nuns wandering around. All of them have the same uniforms, even the nuns though there are concessions to their sex in the form of wimples and skirts.

Rin looks out at what's in front of him then turns to the stairs. Gulping, Rin realizes the only way to figure things out is to do exploring.

'And hope that no one can spot me in truth...' Rin thinks, as he carefully steps down the stairs, making sure it doesn't creak as he goes.
Rin doesn't learn anything new from his secret wanderings around the abbey, aside from the fact he definitely can't be spotted by people and that this abbey is definitely an exorcist base from what he overhears and the wards he can see at times. He's surprised at how active the wards are; even the ones at his home aren't as active as here and there's a nervous buzz to the air.

And everyone always mentions a special guest in a fashion that suggests that actually saying their name will cause the sky to fall.

Rin bites his lip and wonders how he's supposed to get back. Not to mention where he is. It looks like the abbey, but this isn't a burned out wreck and is in fact thriving. There's a nagging in the back of his mind about what that means, but Rin can't focus on it.

A shout at the entrance makes Rin turn. His heart stutters.

“O...oyaji?” Rin stares as at Fujimoto Shirō who is glowering at the poor doorman who obviously doesn't want to let him in but knows they can't avoid it. “Oyaji!”

But he doesn't notice Rin, and Rin realizes that no one can. In fact, when he takes in the appearance of Shirō he is surprised.

Shirō is wearing an exorcist uniform and has a cigarette on his lips, a lit one that makes Rin shocked. He's never seen his father smoke though heard that he once did. The sword on his shoulder and the disgruntled look on his face is also new. And, looking at him, Rin gets the impression he's younger than what he is used to even with the white hair.

“I don't care what Sir Egin said.” Shirō glowers down at the doorman. “These are orders straight from the Vatican and you can't stop me.”

The doorman pales and steps back from Shirō, watching as he heads deep into the abbey. Rin watches for a moment, then scrambles after Shirō. Partially out of curiosity and partially at the sense of the familiar that, though almost a stranger like this, Shirō exudes.

Shirō's path leads deep into the abbey, scattering monks and nuns in his wake, some watching and whispering as he goes past. He finally reaches an out of the way garden and opens the gate. Rin darts behind him before the gate slams shut.

The garden looks luxurious and beautiful, and Rin has to stop for a moment and stare stunned at all the flowers and plants blooming here. A small artificial stream wanders through the garden, stopping at a pond filled with koi fish. Not too far from the pond, a woman kneels in the ground, digging into the dirt and moving potted plants to the garden bed that was prepared, despite a nun's protests in regard to her condition.

The sound of Shirō breaking a twig makes the nun jump and she stares in fear at him. “Y-you!”

Rin wonders why she looks scared of his father and turns to look at him. Rin ends up gulping at the serious and emotionless look on his face. The fact he's drawing the sword as he stands there doesn't help matter.

The woman gardening sighs. “You couldn't have waited until I planted all the lilies could you.” She takes off the gardening gloves but doesn't stand for a moment, instead putting all her tools away and setting the still potted lilies to the side. She then slowly stands, the nun getting distracted by that and helping her up despite protests otherwise.

“I'm not that far along.” She sounds amused and turns to face Shirō. “Fujimoto Shirō. I see the Vatican has come to a decision.”
“You don't seem surprised. Or scared.” Shirō narrows his eyes. “What are you up to?”

“Using you even though you know my name Fujimoto-kun?” The woman shakes her head. “And no. I'm not scared.”

“Humph.” Shirō raises the sword and sets it beside her neck. “For your crimes, you are to be executed Yuri Egin.”

“My crimes...I see how everyone is very mature and partaking in victim blaming per usual.” Yuri Egin's voice is dry.

Rin stares in horror at the stand-off. 'What...he wouldn't!' Rin can't believe that his father would kill anyone, especially someone who's obviously unarmed and not a threat.

Peering around one of the garden trees, Rin examines the woman. He thinks she might be pretty; her black hair is rich and flowing, with it held back from her face by a simple flower decorated hairpin. Her face seems to be familiar almost, making something itch in the back of his mind, with her eyes a bright green and a mole beside her full-lipped mouth.

Shirō raises back the sword and goes for a clean blow.

Instead he's blown back himself by a strange blue barrier that springs up around Yuri, one that makes Rin chill and shudder at the sensation. Demonic in origin it is and extremely powerful.

There's a faint smell of brimstone and rotten bones in the area. Yuri is perfectly calm, but the nun is backing away in fear while Shirō sits up in horror.

“What...was that you?” He demands.

Yuri shakes her head. “No. That was...him.”

“He's...protecting you?” Shirō doesn't seem to comprehend it at all and stands up slowly, going for the sword – miraculously unharmed – along the way.

“No. He's protecting an investment.” She spits out the last word. “My children are not things.”

Shirō narrows his eyes in a fashion that Rin knows he's thinking something through. He then goes for his belt and pulls out a container that is filled with a strange liquid that makes Rin wince at the bright energy within. “Then I'll have to bring the barrier down first.”

Yuri's eyes widen at that and she cries out a strange word. Rin shivers as magic, pure human magic, spills out from her and Shirō drops the container as the grass at his feet suddenly grows into thick vines, wrapping around him and pinning him tight and making him drop his sword.

“What are you doing?!” He thunders at Yuri, then struggles against the vines, cursing as it proves ineffective.

Yuri doesn't flinch, instead bending down and picking up the sword. She pauses as she looks at her reflection in the sword, though Rin gets the feeling's not actually seeing herself there, then sighs and retrieves the sheath.

“I am protecting you.” Yuri says, making the cursing Shirō shut up and stare in shock at her. “I do not wish anyone to die.”

“What do you mean?” Shirō's voice is soft as he realizes she's not lying.
“If a passive method does not work, he will switch to an active one.” Yuri steps forward and looks up at Shirō. “I do not wish such a fate on anyone.”

Shirō swallows. “I see...so they will have to be born first before anything can be done.”

A strange look flashes in Yuri’s gaze but Rin doesn't have time to dwell on that. A sudden dizziness hits and Rin feels the garden waver in front of him, changing.

But Rin knows where he is now. Or rather when.

The past.

The garden solidifies in front of Rin again and he knows that time has passed. He's not sure how much, until he notices that Yuri's stomach is protruding more and is now visibly pregnant. She's working in the garden again, and the nun from before is obviously worried over her state.

“Sasaki-san, I'm fine.” Yuri tells her softly. The sound of footsteps has her turn her head to see Shirō has returned. He hasn't brought the sword and merely waits as Yuri is helped up by Sasaki.

“What brings you here Fujimoto-kun?” Yuri asks him, looking at him with a serious look on her face.

Shirō sighs and runs his hand through his hair. “The Vatican has decided the wisest course is to wait. For now.” He glances down at her pregnant belly. “Why are you insisting on having those--”

“I told you before. I do not wish anyone to die.” Yuri replies calmly, interrupting Shirō's words. “Especially not my sons.”

Shirō catches on that. “Sons? What do you mean by that?”

“I went in for an ultrasound.” Yuri looks amused. “You do know what that is? It's a special thing that allows pregnant women to look at their unborn babies. They checked and discovered I'm having twin boys.”

Shirō looks almost constipated at the thought. “Two boys...with his power...”

“No.” Yuri gently corrects him. “Only one.”

“How do you know?” Shirō asks then snorts. “Don't tell me; the ultrasound told you.”

“Hardly.” Yuri giggles at that thought. “But I am a mage and I can sense the power within. One seems to be sickly and thus has not the strength to hold such power.”

“Which means it will probably die.” Shirō looks relieved almost at that and Rin feels a strange stabbing pain at that.

“No. He will live.” Yuri stares off into the distance. “Both Rin and Yukio will live.”

Rin takes in a breath, feeling like he got punched. And looks at Yuri again. Yes, that's why she's so familiar; her facial structure is very similar to both Yukio and Rin in a fashion, though ultimately their cheekbones are different from hers. The mole at the corner of her lip suggests Yukio's moles on his face and the moles Rin has elsewhere.

‘That's...that's my mother?’ Rin can feel tears pricking at his eyes and shakes his head, focusing once again on the conversation.
“Rin and Yukio...you've named them?” Shirō looks shocked at that. “You know very well--”

“Do not presume.” Yuri's voice is soft and she turns to look at Shirō. She then smiles, melancholic in appearance. “You are not one to kill children.”

Shirō snorts and shoves a hand into a pocket, pulling out a cigarette. “You're the second person to tell me that.”

He starts as Yuri snatches the cigarette from him and grins up at him. “No smoking in front of the pregnant woman~.”

Shirō scowls at that but doesn't reach for a cigarette again. “Why Yukio and Rin?”

“The names have meaning.” Yuri sings mysteriously. “So much meaning and yet are meaningless...just choices.”

Shirō appears baffled from by this and opens his mouth to ask further in that regard. Rin doesn't hear it as the garden swirls once more, taking Rin to another time in the past.

The garden is in full bloom still, but this time Yuri is already in conversation with someone. A man, a muscular one with a neatly trimmed moustache and pale blond hair that contrasts with his weathered and tanned skin.

“And what does that have to do with anything?” Yuri is asking, cupping her stomach almost protectively and staring – almost glaring – up at the man.

The man shakes his head. “Nothing much, if things go as planned. Such a shame that Fujimoto-kun cannot kill the child. They are too dangerous to live.”

“A child is a child.” Yuri narrows her eyes. “Heritage means nothing.”

“If you say so.” The man looks her over, and Rin bristles at how he is looking at her. “Good day, Miss Egin.” He bows and walks away, Yuri watching him go with narrow eyes. And rather pointedly not saying goodbye to him.

Rin finds himself wondering once again who exactly this man is, especially with the chill he gets at how he speaks of the unborn Rin and Yukio. It is almost personal there, something strange about it. The fact he can sense how powerful the man is adds to this.

But Rin can't dwell too long on all of this, as the world around him shifts and changes under the Card's power, taking him away to another time once more.

The next time it clears the garden is empty and it's not hard to see why. Leaves are falling and flowers are dying, as a cold wind blows past. It is autumn now and Rin steps out on the yellow grass and looks around the garden, wondering what to do now.

“I thought there was someone special here.”

Rin whirls around and stares at Yuri who is smiling sweetly at him. “Where are you from? Is this a scrying lesson gone wrong?” She glances down at the staff in Rin's hand meaningfully.

“I...” Rin swallows, and Yuri frowns, stepping forward. Her pregnant girth makes it more of a waddle but she still stands in front of Rin. Rin's only a head shorter than her and she lifts his head by
the chin to look at his eyes.

“Oh my.” She steps back slightly. “This isn't your time is it?”

Rin slowly shakes his head.

“Such a powerful thing this spell...took me some time to figure out how to pierce through it to see you...” Yuri muses to herself. “How did this happen?”

“I was...chasing...an artifact.” Rin says, substituting Card for that. “There was another one and I got caught in it. I don't know...how to return.”

“I see...” Yuri looks thoughtful. “What is your name?”

Rin can't speak for a moment, his mouth going dry. “...Rin.”

Yuri's eyes widen and she stares at him some more, looking him over and tilting his head a bit to get a better look. She then smiles, mouth trembling a bit and a few tears leak out of her eyes. “You are, aren't you?”

“Yes.” Rin swallows and feels prick at his eyes. “What's...what's going on? I don't...I don't understand anything this...I don't know you, not even a name before...and...Oyaji...he...he wouldn't kill why would he?”

Yuri absorbs this calmly. “Oyaji...aah...Fujimoto-kun...” She gets a thoughtful look on her face and pulls Rin into a hug briefly, letting him cry for a bit before stepping back. “I'm afraid I can't answer that. If you don't know already, it means it's not time for you to know.”

Rin purses his lip at that, but doesn't say anything. Despite part of him screaming about all the questions he has, the majority of him is too scared to really ask.

Yuri then smiles. “You have grown up very well, haven't you?”

Rin blushes and nods. “I'm...I'm training to be a mage. I don't know how good I am but—but Tsukishiro-sensei and Kero say I'm amazing but reckless and, and...I'm trying I really am. And...and everyone says my cooking and baking is amazing so I got one normal thing too.”

Rin blurts out next, “And Yukio’s going to be a doctor. He's really smart and studies a lot but...but he doesn't know about the magic and I can't bring him in and um...I wish I could but he wants to be a doctor so much that I can't take away his life...”

Yuri looks at Rin with a strange look in her eyes then smiles. “Thank you. You are a fine boy. I'm proud...of you and Yukio...” She cups her hands over her stomach and looks down, then back up. “I will always be proud.”

Rin wants to ask or say something, tell her more coherently about his life, but another voice interrupts him.

“My oh my Egin-san! Shouldn't you be inside! This can't be good for your frail health.”

Rin stares at the speaker and can't think of anyone ever looking so ridiculous before. The poofy shorts, stripped tights, poofy clothing, lots of pink, and a top hat on top. The fact he has big ears, sharp looking teeth, and eyes that all declare he's a demon does not help.

“Sir Pheles.” Yuri turns to face him and raises an eyebrow. “Are you here on official business? No,
wait. Not possible since the Vatican wishes to keep your involvement in this crisis as minimal as possible.”

Sir Pheles doesn’t break his smile. “Actually they have been consulting me on a few special measures to take for a certain ceremony they wish to do.”

Yuri eyes him then looks over at the rather distressed looking Sasaki who is right next to him. “It is alright Chihiro-chan. There’s no way you could have prevented him from meeting up with me.”

Yuri steps back and stands beside Rin as Sir Pheles approaches while Sasaki Chihiro bows and steps back a bit, looking nervous about the powerful demon that is involved.

“Who were you talking to Egin-san?” Sir Pheles asks, stepping quite close to Yuri and making Rin step back.

Yuri looks over at Rin and then back at Sir Pheles, grinning. “Just the future.”

Sir Pheles looks nonplussed by that. “If you say so. Come, time to head back inside Egin-san. I have some questions to ask and I rather not risk your health.”

“Mine hmm...I suppose as a demon you have no concept of family.” Yuri glances back at Rin and winks at him before turning back to Sir Pheles who looks confused by her words.

“What does that mean?” He narrows his eyes down at the human before him and Rin for a moment feels rather like Yuri poked a tiger's tail.

She keeps her smile on her face and trails her hands deliberately to cup her stomach. “Well, the children in me are your brothers after all. I suppose you just don't understand that like a human does...” She then tilts her head and eyes him, seeing something in his expression. “Or perhaps you can. If you can, I wonder what you will choose in the future.”

With that said she starts walking away and calls over her shoulder, “You always go back to the beginning of a journey.” Yuri looks right at Rin when she says that, confusing Sir Pheles.

Sir Pheles glances at Rin but obviously can't see him or even sense him so dismisses it and walks quickly to catch up to Yuri.

Rin doesn’t have much time to consider this among the other revelations before he is whisked through time again.

This time snow crunches softly underfoot and Rin's breath fogs in the air. He's not alone in the garden, but Yuri is not in sight. Instead, he sees Shirō and that strange Sir Pheles guy.

Shirō is pacing back and forth, looking worried. Discarded cigarettes cover the ground and Shirō's lighting up yet another one.

“You do know that isn't good for your health.” Sir Pheles notes.

“Shut up Mephisto.” Shirō snaps back. “I'll handle my stress my own way and it's not like you care.”

“I happen to consider you interesting so I rather you not work yourself up to lung cancer so quickly.” Sir Pheles retorts, suddenly holding not only Shirō’s pack of cigarettes but the one he lit up. Shirō curses him out at that, but settles down to merely rocking back and forth on his heels.

“How long does it take for a baby to be born?” Shirō demands.
“It varies and this is a complicated birth after all.” Sir Pheles says. He glances over at the abbey and looks strangely worried for a moment. “We are talking rather special children and twins as well.”

Rin chokes at that, realizing what's going on and crouches down, staring at the ground. Rin is refusing to admit to what he's starting to realize, not wanting to face the truth.

“You don't have to do that yet. It's okay.”

Rin looks up at that strange voice but doesn't see anyone who could have said that. Instead, he stands and, biting his lip, starts running out of the garden.

The start of the journey...the belltower...’ Rin realizes and bursts out of the gate. Then he falls over as a surge of great power lifts up around him and he can hear the sound of exclamations coming from Sir Pheles as well from the garden, along with a bit of colourful sounding German.

“What is it Mephisto?” He can hear Shirō demand and Rin turns to watch as Shirō actually looks a little concerned at how the demon fell over.

“Oh dear...” Sir Pheles slowly stands and looks a bit wobbly. “A fountain just erupted here...”

Rin widens his eyes, realizing he's right. All this time here he couldn't feel the fountain that's in the present, but quite suddenly it's there.

Rin shakes himself and stands up, breaking back into a run. He needs to get to the belltower as quickly as possible. Before his route home disappears.

As he reaches the church, Rin curses as the landscapes wavers and changes again. When it settles, it's still winter but Rin can see the snow melting now. And there is a large crowd of people in front of the church doors. Silent and Rin only knows they are alive thanks to some shifting and a few whispers that spring up.

Rin looks around, trying to find another way inside and to the belltower. Rin cranes his neck and realizes he only has one option and that is to climb.

“Dammit...” Rin quickly walks around to the other side of the church, shoving the staff into his belt, and, using the decorations and brick that makes up the church, starts climbing as best he can. He moves fast and efficiently, not considering what might happen if he slipped and fell.

It's hard work and Rin starts hearing chants going on in the church and a cry of protest from a woman's throat, soon echoed by a man. He can't quite hear the words as an argument seems to break out briefly before the chants resume. Rin does feel the ripple of power that spreads upwards and Rin shudders as something about it seems very wrong and Rin is starting to get a very bad feeling about all of this.

Finally reaching the belltower, Rin clambers up and rushes over to the bell. Touching it provokes nothing and Rin hitting it does nothing but making the bell start to swing and ring out.

A sudden whump makes Rin turn, as does the feeling of heat. Rin gasps at what he sees.

Below him, all the humans are slowly going up in flame, terrible blue flames that smell of brimstone and rotten bones, that reach up to the sky and start eating away at the church as much as possible. More cries has Rin whirl around and see the dormitories starting to go up in flames and more screams of panic and fear. Monks and nuns are spilling out and attempting to flee.

“What...what the hell is going on?” Rin looks around and a flicker in the corner of his eye makes him
turn and see more bright blue flames in the distance, coming from True Cross Campus Town and
looking further Rin thinks he can spot other blue flames popping up.

Rin then sees the flames are reaching up to him and Rin curses. Desperate, Rin focuses on his magic
and lifts the staff. “Dammit, I need to get back now. Take me back home!” He demands, slamming
the staff into the bell and giving off a powerful ring that briefly drives back the flames.

It's enough as a whirlwind suddenly swirls around him, a black one, and Rin finds himself taken
away just in time to avoid the dangerous blue flames that seem hungry for him.

Rin falls flat on his face, feeling rotten wood on his face and the cool of remnant of ice. He's back,
which is confirmed as Kero appears in front of him.

“You okay Rin?” He asks.

Rin slowly nods, but Kero obviously doesn't buy it. It's probably due to the look on Rin's face.

Rin then notices Tsukishiro, who collapses with a groan. “Tsukishiro-sensei!”

“I'm fine...” She pants, Time's magic ending. “Quickly, seal Return before it takes you away again!”

Rin turns around to see the swirling black mist that is the Card. Gritting his teeth, Rin raises the staff.

“Return, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

The bright light from that flows into the shape of a Card and Rin catches it, falling to the ground.
Looking to the side, Rin spots Freeze as well and picks that Card up as well. For a moment, all is
quiet as Rin makes sure to write his name on both Cards, then he stands and goes over to Tsukishiro.

“Are you alright Tsukishiro-sensei?” Rin asks, taking Time gently from her hands and also retrieving
the holster which he puts into his jacket's pockets along with Freeze and Return added to it. He then
frowns. “How did you manage to use Time?”

“You didn't give a time limit on the use.” Kero says quickly before Tsukishiro can reply. She smiles
at the small guardian and turns to Rin.

“That is true enough.” She slowly stands and nearly falls over, Rin catching her.

“Woah...let me help you...” Rin puts her arm over his shoulder and supports her as they walk out of
the belltower and down the stairs. “Thank you Tsukishiro-sensei. For saving me.”

Tsukishiro looks at him and smiles. “You know Rin-kun, I believe we know each other enough that,
outside of school, you can call me Sekki.”

Rin stares at Sekki for a moment. “Um...Sekki-san then?”

She laughs, a bit breathlessly. “Yes. That works.”

Rin smiles back. Behind them, Kero gives a relieved look and then flies to catch up to them as they
make their way outside the church.

Yukio lets out a soft moan as he returns to consciousness. The first thing is Rin's face who is looking
relieved. “Hey.”
“Hey.” Yukio swallows and licks his lips. “What happened?”

“Some idiot knocked you over. Hard.” Rin explains after a moment. “Was...worried but well um...didn't know who to call and Sekki-san looked you over and well...”

Yukio slowly sits up and realizes that an hour or so must have gone past. “I see...wait, Sekki-san?”

“I decided that my first name is perfectly acceptable outside of school.” Sekki appears in his view then and smiles at Yukio.

“Are you okay?” Is what comes out of Yukio's mouth instead of a sharp comment about letting Rin use her first name – jeez someone could take that the wrong way – due to how tired Sekki looks.

She smiles at him. “I'm alright. Just tired. I think some food will fix that up nicely.”

“Oh yes. Sekki-san knows of a good and not too expensive place that serves good food, want to try it Yukio?” Rin asks.

Yukio stretches and stands, looking around at the ice sculptures. For a moment he feels like he's missing something, then he dismisses it. Instead, he smiles. “Sure. That sounds lovely.”

Rin beams and jumps up, grabbing Yukio's hand and dragging him off. Yukio notices that he's not going fast, keeping a more sedate pace for the tired Sekki.

“Welcome back!” Shirō says cheerfully, greeting the group at the door. “Will you be staying for supper Tsukishiro-san?”

Sekki shakes her head. “I need get back home and work on some papers. Thank you for the offer though.”

With a few quick goodbyes, Sekki leaves the group and heads home, Shirō frowning at how tired she seems. His frown disappears when he looks at his sons.

“Well, come on in! Everyone has sukiyaki and we even got some sashimi for just Yukio to have.” Yukio perks up at the mention of sashimi much like Rin in regards to sukiyaki.

But when Shirō reaches out to ruffle Rin's air, for a moment all Rin sees is the Shirō of the past and he flinches back. Shirō stops and stares at Rin. “Rin?”

Rin gives himself a mental shake and grins. “Yay, sukiyaki! C'mon Yukio, let's get inside and enjoy the meal!”

“Oi, Nii-san don't forget your boots!” Yukio yells at his brother, while Shirō watches them go, barely taking off their boots and replacing them with uwabaki in time.

That night, while Rin is washing his face, he pauses and looks in the mirror.

‘Yuri...Egin...uh?’ Rin then shakes himself again and finishes off with brushing his teeth, following by exiting the bathroom. Yukio is already asleep at this point, having nodded off despite his best attempts to stay awake a little longer. Rin chuckles at the book Yukio is clutching and carefully removes it, putting it on his side table with a bookmark in it so he won't lose his page.

Rin turns to his bed and settles on it. Kero floats up from where he was hiding and settles on Rin's shoulder.
“What did Return show you?” He asks softly.

Rin lets out a shaky breath. “My mother.”

Kero can't say anything for that. It is a long night ahead of them, as Rin tosses and turns for a long time, hiding from a terrible truth while at the same time blessing having gotten to know his mother, abet only briefly.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! I hope you enjoy and PLEASE COMMENT BELOW ONCE YOU HAVE FINISHED READING. Give me some good, positive feedback and you'll get the next chapter. If you aren't in the position to comment yet, save the page somehow and give yourself a reminder to come back later.

As you can see here, this is when the planned AU backstory of mine kicks in. If you want to know some spoiler-free facts about this verse's Yuri Egin, I require at least five requests/asks on my writer's blog (http://writerscornergblp.tumblr.com/) about it to do a nice informative post. And I was serious last time about you guys asking me questions; don't be shy! You can do it on anon and it makes me super happy. Especially since it allows me to give you guys information about stuff that just can't make it into the main story.

For fanart, when I said to everyone "tag as ICD" I did NOT say tag ONLY as ICD. That just should be a tag. Tag things like "my art", "blue exorcist" and "cardcaptor sakura" since it all falls under that. Also, definitely message me about any fanart. My dash on tumblr gets super busy and I'M super busy (Christmas means writing my dad an original short story for his birthday this year and I'm freaking out over my finances this year as well) in real life. Message me here in the comments or via my writer's blog or even with the instant messenger system tumblr has on my main blog (http://lovepsychothefirst.tumblr.com/) if you are up to it.

Also, before you ask, Rin repressed pretty much all memories of this incident aside from the fact he met his birth mother. He is refusing to look at the fact he has a demonic heritage and a full blooded demon half-brother. Rin has issues okay? So no, he doesn't know the truth mostly because he's scared of it. And even if he did allow himself to know, all he would know at this stage is that he's actually a half-demon who for some reason is sealed. Not the fact he's the Son of Satan. He's not looking into demon stuff quite yet, too focused on handling the Cards to really get any research done in that regard. He has only basic, entry level (civilian with a masho) knowledge there.
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

I need to set an alarm, I get distracted too easily...

Anyways, thank you all SO MUCH for the comments. You guys shot past my minimum before the end of Monday my time! That was super awesome, thank you! Keep it up and PLEASE, PLEASE comment over the weekend when you get the chance. If that doesn't work, I might try switching the schedule slightly to posting on Tuesdays and Fridays to make things easier on you guys. If you don't like that, please comment!

Good news is that I WILL be doing Yuri Egin's spoiler-free page since I got enough requests. Bad news is my bff is busy with her new job so it will take some time before I can ask her to help out with getting the screenshots of the asks and photoshopping them so I can start the post with them. That, and I'll need to make sure my page on Yuri is coherent. I'll try to, at the latest, get it up before the end of the month. I'm slightly overworked due to the season (anyone who read my note on the cancelling of Sensitivity know why).

Once again, time moves faster in ICD than here. It's already past the New Year and time for the Hatsumode aka the first shrine visit of the year. If you want some explanation of New Years in Japan try Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_New_Year) for the basics. You can google and try tvtropes (I think they have something there too) as well

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With January comes the New Year and with the New Year comes the first shrine visit of the year. Of course, before that everyone must get ready and dressed for the occasion.

Which would be easier if Yukio wasn't protesting the kimono he's being shoved into. Yukio scowls at the fabric being handed to him and the fact Rin already is dressed up for the occasion.

“I'm thirteen I'm too old for this!” Yukio protests. A futile protest since everyone is ganging up on him and Shirō is waving the camera around.

Rin pouts at Yukio. “You're just being a spoil-sport.”

“Wha—I'm not!” Yukio can't believe how his brother is pouting at him. “We really shouldn't need to dress up special anymore!”

“Maybe. But c'mon Yukio it's fun!” Rin whines, putting his hands in front of him and begging. “Just stop making such a fuss and it won't seem so bad.”

Yukio gives one more grumble and protest, but they are half-hearted at best and so he submits to the kimono he's being wrapped in. At least it will be comfortable and this is hardly the most embarrassing thing he's worn.
Shirō seems to be thinking along the same lines, wishing he could have gotten some photos of what happened last mission before New Years. That was just too precious...shame I'm never going to get another shot at that...'

As Yukio adjusts his obi and Rin cheerfully hands him his kinchaku, Shirō wonders just how many photos he might be able to sneak out of this year's visit.

Chapter 26: Hatsumode Of Light And Dark

To those in another country, the idea of Christians participating in what's ultimately a Shinto ritual would seem odd. But in Japan, this is far from unusual as their views on religion differ in that only having one religion, and one alone, is the unusual.

With that said, the entire monastery heads to the nearby shrine. The entire place is packed per usual and they were only able to come late on the second day of Hatsumode due to some paperwork that they were waiting to be confirmed finished.

'I hate doing paperwork on New Year.' Shirō gripes, but the Order needed that paperwork. At least he got them done before New Year's Eve and thus was busy cleaning up the monastery with the rest during that day. 'I feel sorry for the poor sap that had to handle the paperwork after me...'

Dismissing that from his mind, Shirō looks out over the big crowd and line of people. He already popped by the nearby stand to get Amazake for the group, even Rin and Yukio sipping at the sweet, hot drink. The entire group is quiet, but that's hardly unusual as silence is normal for Hatsumode.

As they approach the haiden of this shrine, Shirō notices the small plush toy Rin brought with him. Not only does he notice it for being unusual, but because he's been seeing it around for quite some time. Ever since the start of the school year Shirō's seen that little stuffed doll around and frankly it's a confusing thing.

'One would think he would move away from toys not towards them.' Shirō considers, then decides to shrug it off. If Rin's happy with it, he's not going to judge.

Meanwhile, Rin and Yukio are having a soft voiced conversation on what they are thinking of wishing for this year. It's made up of them swearing they won't tell each other and then turns into a discussion on Omikuji.

"I hope for a great blessing." Rin says, getting a grin from Yukio.

"You always do." He points out.

Rin pouts at that and, unseen to Yukio, offers a sip of Amazake to Kero who cheerfully and amazingly demurely enjoys the taste of the drink. "Yeah, well it's a good thing to hope for right?"

"True enough." Yukio adjusts his glasses and then fiddles with his obi, making Rin sigh.

"Why are you so uncomfortable with it?" Rin asks, setting aside his now empty Amazake cup and helping fix up Yukio's obi. "You were fine last year."

Yukio shrugs and doesn't bother answering. Yukio has been feeling off lately, ever since their birthday, and he just can't pin it down at all. It's a strange restless feeling and one that Yukio wishes he could shake.

The line they are in moves forward and they get ever closer to the haiden.
The massive line means the sun is starting to go down by the time Rin and Yukio make their prayer and donation to the shrine. As they leave, heading to a relatively clear area, the monks behind them have their turn.

“Omikuji?” Rin is cheerful as Yukio agrees and they head over to that stand. Yukio pays and goes first, shaking the box and pulling out the stick to read the number. Once Yukio has found the right drawer he puts the box back and it's Rin's turn.

“What did you get?” Is the first thing out of Rin's mouth, even while he's looking for his fortune.

Yukio rolls his eyes but looks at what he has. “Small Blessing.”

“Oooh that's good!” Rin peers to look at Yukio's fortune briefly then finally opens up his one. “Oh.”

Staring at the fortune he got, it takes all Rin has to not show it on his face, struggling to keep calm and not jinx it. Yukio notices and peers over to look at what Rin got. His eyebrows raise.

“Great Blessing...looks like you got your wish there.” Yukio smiles and nudges Rin, who smiles back.

Both boys tuck their omikuji into their kinchaku before wandering away from the stall and looking for a place to wait for the rest. As they are looking, Rin spots someone familiar.

“Sekki-san...” Rin grins at the sight of the teacher and Yukio resigns himself as Rin drags Yukio over in the teacher's direction.

Sekki is currently resting on a bench set to the side, surprisingly the only one there. She looks up and spots Rin and Yukio. A smile blossoms on her face at that.

“Rin-kun, Yukio-kun. Happy New Year.” She greets them.

Rin smiles back. “Happy New Year Sekki-san.”

Yukio murmurs something similar. Sekki eyes him for a moment, then smiles. “You two look quite handsome like this.”

“Thanks.” Rin can feel heat rise in his cheeks. “You look good too.”

Sekki is currently wearing a furisode, one with a purple base and brightly coloured flower patterns on top. Her hair decorations are just as lovely and the light touch of make-up she has on completes the picture.

“That's sweet of you.” Sekki raises a hand to rub her eyes but stops in the face of her make-up. “How has the new year been treating you so far?”

“Very good. We both got good omikuji and it's been quite fun.” Rin informs her cheerily, ignoring Yukio who mutters something about not wanting to wear kimono.

Sekki giggles. “I'm glad.” Her eyes trail down to the “plush toy” in Rin's obi and Kero looks back. His eyes widen in realization and he nudges Rin who glances down as Sekki draws Yukio into a conversation, nicely distracting him.

“Sekki wants to talk to me, you mind?” Kero asks.

Rin blinks then shakes his head. “No.” As Kero floats out of Rin's obi, Rin pounces on Yukio. “C'mon, let's go find the others! I think Oyaji said something about getting us Hamaya for the year
again.”

Yukio rolls his eyes. “Nii-san, I don’t think that’s what he said...”

Rin cheerfully ignores that in favour of tugging Yukio away. Behind the two brothers, both Sekki and Kero watch with amusement, before turning to face each other.

Sekki tilts her head and smiles. Kero sighs. “Ah’m guessin’ my guess is true here uh?”

“Yes.” Sekki’s voice is soft and she looks almost sad for a moment.

All around them, the crowd for New Year’s swirls and flows, quiet chatter and the sound of clapping and the ringing of the shrine bell the only sound outside of the wind and crackle of the bonfire in the distance.

“Then Ah guess Ah understand what you wish to talk about.” Kero settles down on the bench beside Sekki, on the back of the bench in fact so he’s almost at eye level. “So tell me...when did you find out?”

Looking over the crowd, Shirō grins as he spots Rin and Yukio finally. “There you boys are!”

Stopping in front of him, the twins look up at him, different expressions on their faces. Rin looks cheerful and a bit eager, while Yukio is eyeing him almost suspiciously.

Shirō chuckles. “C’mon, let’s pick out the Hamaya for the year. We can then go and get rid of last year’s at the bonfire.”

Nagatomo lifts up a wrapped bundle in demonstration. Rin is the first to go over and look at the selection of Hamaya, obviously wanting something “cool” to have for the next year. Yukio is slower and glances over at Shirō.

“Is there something you want to ask?” Shirō waits as Yukio pauses and looks torn for a moment.

“Yeah just...nothing concrete but...” Yukio rubs his hands together. “Been feeling off for awhile now...now just why but...”

Shirō frowns and kneels in front of Yukio, looking him over. He pauses when he sees his eyes, then forces a grin on his face. “It’s alright Yukio. Just probably been working too hard. I’ll see about extending your break a bit longer. Bad enough you ended up getting called in during it.”

“I was the only one available nearby who not only had the skills necessary but...” Yukio snaps his mouth shut on the last, turning red as he thinks of the other reason why he was picked for the mission.

Shirō laughs and gives Yukio’s head a ruffle. “It’s alright. Now, go to your brother and pick out the Hamaya you want.”

Yukio smiles up at him then darts off to Rin, who’s calling for his brother already. Shirō keeps smiling as he watches him go, then it drops as Nagatomo comes up beside him.

“What is Fujimoto-san?” Nagatomo asks, looking worriedly at his boss.

Shirō sighs. “It’s probably nothing but...there’s a red fleck in Yukio’s eyes now.”

Nagatomo hisses in a breath. “Shit. So he...?”
Shirō shakes his head. “Not that I'm surprised. He's still of that bloodline and well...” Shirō thinks back to a conversation he had a little over thirteen years ago. “He just couldn't sustain the power before. But Yukio's getting healthier and stronger every day.”

“He might be able to...” Nagatomo frowns in worry. “What do we do?”

“Nothing.” Shirō rubs the back of his neck. “There's nothing we can do. Despite what most might think, it's not an unnatural thing. It's very natural for one with his bloodline.”

Nagatomo slowly nods, looking hesitant but also obviously trusts Shirō. Shirō, meanwhile, just hopes he's not making a mistake. The last thing he needs is for such a choice to impact Yukio's life in a negative fashion.

‘But I can't talk to him about that.’ Shirō also realizes as he smiles and goes over to where Rin is calling him over, to see what Hamaya the twins picked. ‘Yukio's already starting to see things a little too black and white in regards to humans and demons. And there's only so much I can do to shield him.’

Institutionalized racism is a menace and Shirō desperately wishes there was more he could do to shield Yukio from the Order's views in that regard.

The group is heading down the stairs of the shrine when Shirō notices something while Rin is waving around his Hamaya happily.

“Rin...where is your toy?”

Rin blinks, wondering what Shirō is talking about, then glances down at where he's looking and pales. ‘Oh!’ ‘Crap forgot Kero.’ ‘I must have dropped him...’

Shirō sighs and shakes his head. “Well, if you want to go find him best go now. We'll wait for you at the base. Don't take too long, we got Osechi-ryōri jūbako waiting for us at home.” Most people had them during New Year itself, but it was easier for the Monastery to get the last of them when they all went on sale just a little after it. Cheaper and it had been done since before Rin and Yukio were born so it wasn't considered odd by them. As far as they were concerned, as long as they did it during the right time period it works and there is no reason for anyone to make a fuss.

“Right!” Rin turns on his heels and darts up the stairs, still carrying his Hamaya and with his kinchaku flying behind him. 'Now...where is Sekki-san?' Rin wonders as he reaches the top. 'I should be able to sense either her or Kero if I focus...'

With that in mind, Rin reaches out with his senses. Behind him, Yukio glances up at him, looking puzzled at a strange buzzing he's feeling, then shrugs and turns back around to follow the calling Shirō to the base. His brother will catch up soon.

On Rin's end, he's looking through the shrine and trying to spot Sekki in the crowd. For a moment he stops by the omikuji stand, wondering if Sekki is getting one, but doesn't spot her.

Turning away, Rin wanders over to a nearby brazier, pausing to enjoy the warmth as he tries to pick up Sekki's power. Easier said than done and Rin realizes that both Sekki and Kero tend to shield their power. Rin does the same thing, now that he recalls, ever since Kero taught him so he wouldn't be screaming out to the entire town that he's here.

'So how am I to find them?' Rin silently wonders. He doesn't get long to consider that.
Because instead of sensing Kero or Sekki, Rin picks up on a Sakura Card and whirls around, trying to spot it in vain.

Instead, Rin watches as the entire shrine is slowly covered in darkness, everyone around him vanishing and disappearing as they are swallowed by the dark in front of Rin’s horrified eyes.

At the bottom of the shrine, Yukio is pacing back and forth. He suddenly stops and shivers, looking up at the shrine. Squinting, he feels like something is there and suddenly feels his mouth dry.

’What...what is this feeling?’ Yukio wonders, trembling as he tries to think of what is causing this strange fear and sensation to wash over him. It does not feel like a demon but something else, something much stranger.

The adults, busy talking over to the side about other things, fail to notice Yukio’s condition and growing panic at the unknown.

Rin shivers in the darkness, alone and trapped. Walking doesn’t seem to get him anywhere no matter what and the longer time passes, the more freaked out he gets.

“Kero? Sekki-san?” Rin calls out, then shudders as the darkness seems to swallow his words.

Far away and yet close, Kero and Sekki glow in the darkness, Kero floating beside the now standing Sekki.

“We cannot.” Kero says to Sekki, who looks hurt at the thought of Rin all alone. “It is his trial, not ours.”

“I know.” Sekki swallows and looks out to where she knows Rin is. “But I don’t like it.”

“Neither do Ah.” Kero admits, grinding his teeth. “If Ah could Ah would but--”

“It wouldn’t be good. This is a challenge he must face by himself.” Sekki sighs. Then she smiles, looking at the angry and frustrated Kero. “You are very much alike. Definitely brothers.”

Kero snorts at that and slowly relaxes. “Yeah...” He then looks out again. ‘C’mon Rin...Ah know you can do this!’

Out in the darkness, Rin is pressing his hands to his chest. “Calm. Calm...you can't do anything if you aren't calm.”

Wiping the beginnings of tears from his eyes, Rin goes for the Key. “Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!”

Rin catches the staff and gives a sigh of relief at his magic working. He then looks out in the darkness and realizes that there is nothing concrete for him to attack. There is no Card that will prove effective.

Kero widens his eyes and looks over at Sekki, stunned. “Did Rin just...?”

Sekki slowly nods. “Yes, he did...” ’If he’s able to do this...no wonder he was chosen to be the new master...’

Rin bites his lip and tries to think. A conversation he had a month ago comes to mind as he thinks, making Rin straighten.
“You did very well with Mirror Rin.” Kero sounds proud and Rin smiles at that.

“Really?” Rin glances down at his recently acquired Card.

“Yeah...did it all correctly. Some Cards like Mirror can't be captured the normal way. If you had tried Windy or another Card to capture her, it would've just passed through. Cards like that need to be identified before you can do anythin' against them.”

Rin blinks and looks down at Mirror. “Really? I just...I didn't think that a fight would have helped...”

Kero chuckles. “You got good instincts then.”

In the darkness, Rin looks out around and tries to think. Darkness is all he sees so...

“You must be...the Dark Card...” Rin realizes. The darkness shudders and swirls but doesn't disappear. Rin looks around, trying to figure out why. That's...not enough uh?'

Rin bites his lip and tries to think. He can't see anything in this darkness.

“Wait...” Rin looks down at himself. “I can see myself!”

At that point the darkness starts swirling around his legs, making Rin panic. “No, no, no!” He cries, trying to beat back the darkness with his staff but it's ineffective. The darkness increases as he panics and Rin notices.

A hard slap rings out, Rin having slapped his own cheek, knocking himself out of his panic. “It's okay...it's definitely okay, I'm going to be okay.”

Rin looks up and takes on a determined expression, eyes hardening and lifting his chin. “I can do this.”

He believes it too and suddenly light flares and Rin looks down again at his body and realizes exactly why he can see himself.

“I can see myself...because I'm glowing!” Rin cries out and on cue it flares again and the light flows out from him, sticking to his body but other, more light slowly forms in front of him in the form of a beautiful woman.

Tall and regal looking, her long white hair flows down her back and frames her face, with her elegant dress illuminated like the rest of her. Rin gapes up at her, while she returns his shocked look with a gentle smile.

“Very good Rin.” She praises him. “You have figured out the second step to defeating my sister.”

“You...” Rin stares in awe at the Card before him. “You are a Sakura Card! Where...”

“I was with you the entire time.” She says softly. “I have been sharing your heart ever since you broke the seal and scattered my comrades with Windy.”

“You were...I didn't realize it.” Rin presses a hand to his chest, right where his heart is.

“I was able to reveal myself thanks to you realizing I am here and not giving up.” She laughs, a twinkling bell. “Now, I have a question for you; what shines bright even in the darkness?”

Rin stares up at her and grins. “Light!”
Light flares and pushes back the darkness, clearing a bright area. Another form flows from the darkness and settles beside Light. Rin immediately identifies her as Dark, as not only does she look much like Light, but her black hair and outfit makes her also distinctive in that regard.

“Very well done.” Dark smiles at Rin and grasps the hands over Light. “You have come victorious in my challenge and summoned forth my sister. I congratulate you.”

Rin blushes and smiles up at them. “I...thank you.”

“You must keep your confidence in yourself.” Light advises. “Belief in oneself is the first key to unlocking all one’s power and potential. Now, I would like you to seal me with my sister.” Light winks at Rin.

Rin blinks and nods, raising the staff. “I will. And I will believe in myself.” ‘I have to...I can do this...’ Rin thinks back to all the challenges he has faced this far and how he's managed to conquer every one of them, no matter the difficulties. Heart swelling under that confidence he turns to Light and Dark.

“Light, Dark, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Light and Dark start to flow, two Cards glowing and slowly taking shape under their power.

“We dearly hope that you will become our master.” Dark says.

“The Judgement is coming.” Light adds. “And the Judge might be harsh but with good reason.”

Rin blinks. “Judgement? And Judge...who's the Judge?”

Accepting the Cards that float to his hands, Rin hears,

“They have been with you all this time.” Light whispers softly then falls silent.

The darkness suddenly disappears, startling Rin at the sudden reappearance of people and voices. Rin looks around and quickly makes the staff disappear before anyone can notice. As he's writing his name on the Cards, Sekki appears next to him.

“You did good Rin.” Sekki says softly, passing Kero back to him.

Rin accepts the guardian with a smile and nods his head slowly. “Thanks. I did, didn't I?”

Sekki cups his cheek. “Yes. You definitely did.”

For a moment, all is quiet, then Rin steps back. “I have to get back. If I take too long everyone is going to wonder what's taking me and get worried.”

“True.” Sekki waves goodbye to Rin keeping her smile on her face until he's far out of sight. It slips after and Sekki wonders if things will be truly alright. Holding her hand to her heart, she murmurs,

“And now he is at full strength...” She looks out over the shrine and hopes the future is as she believes it will be.

The monastery is filled with good cheer and happy conversations as everyone enjoys their Osechi-ryōri じゅばこの in between their conversations.

Rin is noticing that Yukio is probably a little too close as he eats through his じゅばこの but doesn't say
anything. He's finding Yukio's presence comforting as well and the fact that otherwise Yukio seems to have regained his spirits makes Rin dismiss it as a problem.

Meanwhile, Yukio wonders at the strange feeling that came over him at the shrine and why whenever he looks at Rin he gets a similar strange feeling. Not exactly the same, but it's almost like he's feeling a mirror at times; which is probably the weirdest thing he's ever considered.

Eventually it gets too late and with all the food finished Rin and Yukio are advised to pack up and go to bed. Winter break will continue tomorrow, with Yukio dragging out of Rin a promise to work on his homework with him. Rin grumbles over it but agrees nonetheless and Yukio feels a bit of tension drain from him.

After changing into his pyjamas, Yukio slips over to the bathroom, brushing his teeth and washing his face before bed like usual. Rin is still in the room, finding a place to put the Hamaya as well as putting away their kimono.

As Yukio washes his face, he happens to glance into the mirror. And freezes, then turns back to the mirror.

Yukio stares in the mirror then raises a trembling hand to an eye, touching just below it. Turning his head slightly, Yukio can't make it into a trick of the light.

Yukio lets out a shaking breath. “No...”

But it's true.

There are red pinpricks in his eyes, red pinpricks that are a sign of demonic influence.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed it and oh yes. We are getting ever closer to the Judgement. That should be interesting...or so I hope.

Please leave comments! I treasure them all and the more you comment the better for us all! Also, I've been letting it slide but ALL QUESTIONS SHOULD GO TO MY WRITER'S BLOG PLEASE. It's here: http://writerscornergblp.tumblr.com/ and it's much easier on everyone if I can just generally answer questions there as it become a resource page for you all that way. We also do other things there so definitely keep an eye on it

Also, the reblog button is not your enemy. Neither is the like button if I answered a question.
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

First, thank you all SO DAMN MUCH FOR ALL THE COMMENTS. Seriously, that was amazing. Please keep it up! Every comment counts!

Second, I should have been more clear and left a note about Yukio having those red pinpricks. They aren't going to change anything in him, they just are part and parcel of how he's going to move ever towards the canon Yukio we know and (don't) love. Having the sign of him having demon blood in his face gets to him.

Third, more tips for doing comments! Aside from how I want more questions for my writer's blog not here (since it's easier for people to find and look through them for reference sake), if MUST make a question or observation in a comment (and I won't begrudge it) unless you are the first commentor, you can take a quick look at what others did in case someone else already posed that question or observation. I reply to all comments so the answer is probably already there.

Fair warning though; due to some bullshit on AO3's end, there are no proper line breaks this chapter. I'm not pleased with this and I seriously hope they fix their problem before the end of the week. It doesn't even work in HTML (or rather, it only works once) so there's no way to do anything about it until they return that line break insert button.

Edit 2015/12/24: Support got back to me and they are working on it. Meanwhile, I found out how to properly do it in HTML for now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

At the closing of the winter break, people turn in earlier than usual. By people, one means those who are to head back to school bright and early, also known as the students of various elementary, junior high, and senior high students.

Among that number is Okumura Rin and Yukio. However, Yukio finds it hard to go to sleep, glancing over at his brother who is already fast asleep in his bed, sprawled out in complete comfort and innocence.

Yukio can only just see Rin with his poor eyesight, but it's enough to make him sigh and turn to face the ceiling above his bed. Raising his hand, he leaves it up in the air and just breathes.

There's this strange heavy feeling around him and Yukio wonders what it is. The weight of the realization be might not just be the human twin? That he might be just as demonic as his brother?

Yukio doesn't know and closes his eyes, dropping his hand, scared of his thoughts and what the future might hold. He slowly counts up from one, trying to get himself to sleep despite all that looms over him.

Outside the window, a bright blue butterfly hovers and flaps its wings. And somehow, it slips through a crack in the window and floats inside, wings gently flapping. It hovers over Yukio for a moment, before turning to Rin.
It drops down and touches his forehead, making him sigh and turn, mumbling something in his sleep.

Chapter 27: The First Dream Of The Year

Yukio shakes Rin, making him groan. “Five more minutes...”

“Nii-san! If you don't get up now you'll be late!” Yukio pulls at Rin and manages to drag him out of bed, Rin yelling and flailing as he falls to the ground.

Rin grumbles as Yukio leaves at that, rubbing his head. “Yeesh...didn't have to be like that.”

Rin then looks over at his alarm clock and curse. “Awk! I'm gonna be late!”

Yukio sighs outside as Rin rushes around and falls down as he slips on his bedsheets, cursing up a storm as he hits the ground. He then nearly gets run over as Rin races out to the bath, diving into the room and slamming the door shut.

Yukio takes a moment to listen as Rin starts up the shower and screams as he didn't wait for the water to heat up, then heads downstairs. Breakfast is already ready and Yukio wants enough time to enjoy it, unlike his brother who's going to have to shove everything down his throat to be able to get to school on time.

“Yukio you big meanie!” Rin yells, half out of breath as he finally catches up to Yukio on the walk to school. “You were supposed to wait for me!”

“But if I did I would be late.” Is Yukio's dry response. Rin fumes for a bit over that, jogging a bit to keep up with Yukio's fast pace and yawning.

“Dammit when did you get so rude...” Rin mutters. Yukio ignores that, walking a little bit faster after checking his watch and just making the streetlight. That grants him – and by default the annoyed Rin – an extra minute to get to school on time.

Yukio puts that to good use, allowing him and a still sleepy looking Rin to enter class with a few seconds to spare for getting into class. Rin sulks in his seat, obviously feeling the after break blues, spinning his pen as class starts and needing to be reminded to reply to the roll call.

Rin sighs, looking out at the courtyard instead of paying attention to the teacher. He can see the bare branches of the cherry tree that sits in the middle of the courtyard and can't help but think of how sad it is in winter.

'Odd thought that...' Rin dismisses his sad thought and tries to pay attention to the teacher. It proves futile and eventually Rin turns back to look at the tree. He gapes and stands up in shock.

The tree is now in full bloom, spreading cherry blossoms everywhere, a bright contrast to all the snow and lack of greenery elsewhere. A shock of spring in the deep of winter.

“Is there something you'd like to tell us Okumura-kun?”

Rin flinches at that and looks at the teacher. Then back at the still in bloom tree. Others look out and shrug, obviously not seeing all the cherry blossoms spreading around as a problem.

“N-nothing...” Rin sits back down, fidgeting and wondering what that was about. He looks out again at the still in bloom tree and wonders if he's just imagining it.
The strange feeling of something being wrong carries into lunch. Somehow Rin finds himself eating outside, underneath the blooming cherry tree with Yukio. Somehow Yukio doesn't notice the petals though Rin can feel them and ends up having to brush some away from his lunch. Somehow the wind never carries it to Yukio's lunch so that's maybe why but Rin doesn't feel like that's right.

Rin looks out over the courtyard and blinks. Strangely he can see Manabu among some people. He would have thought the guy would be in the library. He also sees Sayaka and Hiromi talking together, looking closer during school hours than they usually allow. He also sees Kaido and Hayashi talking to, of all people, Eiji who doesn't have his smartphone out.

"Is something the matter Nii-san?" Yukio looks concerned at this and Rin jumps, guilty at getting caught.

"Sorry...nothing's wrong."

Rin looks up at the tree and wonders why it's like that. He can't sense any magic in the school so whatever is causing that might be just in his head.

'I hope I'm not going crazy...'

Rin sighs and turns back to his bento. He blinks.

'Didn't I already finish it?'

But no, the bento is filled with only a small dent in it. Rin considers this then decides he's been so distracted that he forgot. Besides, he's very hungry since he had only enough time to get a few bites of breakfast this morning.

Rin just manages to finish the bento when the school bell goes off. Meaning it's only after Rin is heading into school that Rin realizes the contents of the bento looked different between the first time he "ate" it and the second.

Rin ends up waiting eagerly for Sekki's class. After all, she can surely clear things up for him. Tell him if he's crazy or it's just a weird magic thing.

'I sure hope it's a weird magic thing.' Rin prays, looking around at the class. There's something strange about everyone and it's not just because no one notices the tree that is covering everything with pink petals outside of him.

But Rin can't quite put his finger on it. There's nothing except things he sees in the corner of his eye.

At this point the door slides open and Rin turns eagerly to the front. Only to drop his pen and stare in shock.

Sekki is there yes, but so is Kero, so obviously flying in and very much alive considering how he's talking to Sekki.

Rin can't hear their conversation through the buzzing in his ears, just staring shocked. Then he stands up.

"Whaaaaa?! What's going on!?” Rin demands, slamming his hands on his desk. Everyone jumps and stares at Rin, then turns away. Rin doesn't notice really, too busy staring at Kero.

"Why are you out...you...you are hiding right? You can't be found!” Rin's words are garbling, not quite getting the right meaning across.
Sekki sets her papers on the desk. “Everyone pull out your workbooks.”

In unison everyone does, except for Rin who is still staring at Kero.

“What's going on Kero?” Rin's voice is soft and he feels so lost.

Kero coughs into his paw and floats over to Rin. “Simple. This is a dream Rin.”

Rin stares and slowly looks around again, before focusing on Kero. “Dream?”

Kero nods. “Yes. It's a very special dream.”

Reality

Refreshed by his morning bath and thus in a good mood, Yukio returns to his room to pick up his schoolbag and finds his good mood fading slightly as he sees his brother is still asleep.

‘Nii-san...I'm sure I made enough fuss to get you up...’ Yukio sighs. Then again it's always like this...’ Vacations seem to always bring out the lazy in his brother, generally in the morning.

Yukio goes over to his brother's side of the room nonetheless. Grabbing an exposed shoulder, Yukio gives Rin a gentle shake. “Nii-san. Wake up. School starts today!”

Yukio frowns as he doesn't get a response and shakes harder. “Nii-san!”

Yukio steps back at that point and seriously starts considering dragging Rin out of bed. Then he realizes something.

Rin isn't moving. Which wouldn't mean anything, since he's asleep, except Rin is a restless sleeper and he always complains and whines in some fashion as Yukio starts doing his best to wake him up.

“Nii-san?” Yukio is starting to feel the beginnings of panic and yanks off the covers on Rin. Still no response. “Nii-san!” Yukio shakes Rin again. Still nothing. Even giving Rin a pinch on the cheek gives no response.

“TOU-SAN!” Yukio's voice penetrates to the first floor, making Shirō jump and nearly drop something. Sighing, the priest sets aside the tray of food and heads upstairs, wondering what has gotten into Yukio.

“Yukio, what is it?” He asks, poking his head into the boys' room.

“Nii-san won't wake up!” Yukio announces, frantic sounding.

Shirō can't help it. He chuckles. “Yukio I know Rin is something of a lazy bum in the morning but that's no reason to panic.”

“It's not that!” Yukio protests and Shirō's smile drops as he notices just how freaked out Yukio is. And that Rin isn't making any movements, though Yukio's voice tends to make Rin a light-sleeper in a fashion, since he always responds in some manner to Yukio.

Stepping forward, Shirō kneels next to the bed and looks over his son. He is breathing lightly and doesn't move from his spot. Shirō pinches Rin's cheek, to no response, then peers closer. “Rin.”

Still nothing and Shirō starts feeling a cold chill in him, as he gives Rin a shake and no response happens at all.
If it wasn't for Rin's breathing, he might as well be dead.

Hidden slightly by discarded blankets, Kero watches in horror and realizes just what's going on.

'Dream...Dream got in and Rin's trapped in its power!'

The monastery might as well be a kicked over ant's nest considering the amount of running around and yelling going on. Chaos runs rampant, but it's an organized chaos as Shirō manages to keep enough of a tight hold on things to direct the group into getting what he needs after he drags Rin downstairs and sets him up on a futon on the ground, resting in the middle of the living room as seals and vials are set up so Shirō can look over his eldest son.

Kero, having sneaked downstairs, watches worried and wondering what to do.

'Ah can't reveal myself...' Kero bites his lip and mentally cursing his helplessness. If he just had one more of his Cards, the highest Cards under his dominion, he could have pulled something off. Could have been able to reach into Rin's dream. Dream might not be under his dominion, but Kero's magic as the Guardian Beast in full would have been enough to at least infiltrate the spell and help Rin untangle the web he's in.

As is, Kero is stuck between keeping his presence a secret – since he does not want to dodge bullets from the already on edge exorcists – and revealing himself despite the risk.

'Dammit Rin...please pull another rabbit out of yer hat and soon!' Kero prays, considering all that Rin has done before and will do in the future. Dream is nothing compared to forces like Time and Firey and he's managed to get past them.

The thought of Time strikes Kero and he quickly sneaks back upstairs. If he times this right, he might be able to at least get Rin his Cards.

'Sakura can change and cast magic while asleep with Dream's influence...' Kero can think of at least two separate occasions when that happened to his previous master. The circumstances were definitely different, but perhaps...

Kero will hold on to the slightest chance if it will save Rin.

Shirō sits back with a sigh, rubbing a hand over his face. He is at his limit for figuring out what's wrong with Rin. It's obviously he's just asleep, but everything he tests points to something unnatural. But he can't seem to find the cause.

'Has to be demonic in origin but...' Shirō frowns and looks around at the other monks waiting for his next words. He managed to luckily get the hysterical Yukio to school, convincing him that staying won't help his brother at all, but now he's wondering if he should have let him go.

'If this is an attack on the monastery...' Shirō considers that thought, holding it as delicately as blown glass, then carefully sets it aside. 'Whatever this is, it doesn't feel malicious.'

Shirō finally stands. “Alright. We clean up and we wait for now. If Rin doesn't wake up by the end of the day...” Shirō hesitates, then takes in a deep breath. “I'll contact Mephisto.”

The intake of breath from the others heralds shouting that Shirō halts with a raised hand. “I know! But this is beyond even me and he might know what's going on.”
Shirō glances down at Rin, a soft expression on his face. “I hope it doesn't come to it but...I won’t let my son be hurt by anything if I have a say in it.”

There is nothing the monks can say to that, except start cleaning up the set up and hope for the best.

Hidden by the blankets on the futon, Kero stares out and watches them. And joins them in their silent prayers that all shall work out.

And that the Cards Kero managed to press into Rin’s hand will help.

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**Dream**

As soon as “Kero” announce to Rin that very fact, everyone in the school vanished. Rin knows this, because of how silent everything has become. Outside the strange cherry tree is in bloom and Rin looks around the suddenly abandoned classroom and shivers.

Not wanting to stay in there any longer, Rin exits the room. He jumps as the door slams shut behind him, and turns to see if he can pry it open. No luck.

“Well...how about another door...” Rin murmurs to himself, and starts walking down the hall. It looks different than before, longer and stretchier, but it’s a dream. Rin knows that dreams tend to not make sense at all.

As Rin goes down the hallway, he thinks to himself. *Definitely a Card...* Rin looks around and he can feel the magic around him is of a Sakura Card, not of the school. *But what would the name be...*


The school wavers for a moment, making Rin a bit dizzy at the sight, before solidifying. “Great...not going to be easy...”

Rin keeps going down the hallway after that and comes to a door with the library label on top of it. Pausing for a moment, Rin then goes for the door and slides it open.

And flinches at the bright light that flows out at him, making him cover his eyes and wait until it passes. When it does, Rin slowly opens his eyes. And is stunned by what he sees.

“There's no end to it!” Deep in a strange metal place, with lots of gears and other things around, a strange person complains that, as they chop down at a demon in front of them. Rin knows it’s a demon they are facing and he can see many more.

“Why are so many demons gathered here?” This person adds, confirming Rin's suspicion. However, Rin spends some time trying to figure out if the person he sees is a man or a woman. After some time he realize it’s a guy, abet one with long blond hair and pretty features. He’s also wearing the weirdest outfit Rin has ever seen.

*I don't think that's what exorcists are supposed to wear...’* Rin considers all the white and frills and shudders. *It looks horrible and very impractical too.*

The poorly dressed man is not the only one there, Rin seeing someone chanting some bible verses that take down some demons.

Another man is examining a part of an old looking device. Rin wrinkles his nose at this guy, as even
though he can't smell him just the look of him suggests someone who doesn't bath often. He's opposite to the other guy who gleams almost despite his impractical outfit, with a hat obscuring his eyes.

“Originally this place was the test plant for the acceleration machine.” He muses.

The other guy is not amused. “Lightning, start working!”

Lightning, if that's his name, ignores him in favour of saying to himself, “Could that be..?!”

At that point a thump and the appearance of a woman on a higher balcony interrupts his musing. Rin blushes at the sight of the woman. Mostly because not only is she big breasted, but she's not wearing much. A bikini-like top and short shorts are not much, even with the exorcist coat she threw on top.

“Hey! There's something dangerous-looking over there.” She tells them and the group of men follow after her, jumping up to her balcony and following her to another place. Rin finds he's being dragged along with them and wonders what exactly is going on.

Rin freezes as he sees the black thing twisting in the air and swallows. Just looking at it makes him feel sick and he knows it's something very wrong and unnatural.

The fancy-dressed man holds his hand in front of his mouth, shocked. “This is...!”

Lightning laughs. “Awesome. It's interesting!” This gets the attention of the others and unlike him they do not look pleased, the fancy-dressed man looking shocked.

“Lightning, tell us what that is already!” He demands, starting to look angry and maybe a little scared.

“Probably this is...” Lightning stares out at the black thing. “The Gehenna Gate.”

Rin stares. ‘Gehenna Gate?’ Rin looks at it and feels like that's wrong somehow, not understanding just knowing, and shivers. Below him, everyone goes dead silent as they absorb what Lightning said.

Finally fancy-man speaks. “Gehenna Gate, you said?! Only Satan can create the Gehenna Gate. Does that mean Satan has appeared here?”

Rin swallows at that and shakes his head, not knowing why. Lightning below echoes him.

“No. This gate is artificially created.”

The cries of shock from below go up even louder at that. “That's insane...!” Fancy-man declares, looking utterly horrified.

At this point the woman points something out. “Hey...it's getting bigger isn't it?” She looks horrified at the thought and no wonder. More demons are spilling out from the Gate as they speak.

“Even though they are all small fries, the number of demons are increasing!”

“Angel, I think it's dangerous for us to stay here.” Lightning tells the fancy-man.

As they begin to leave, Angel asks, “Is it possible to close this Gate?!”

“It's absolutely impossible for us.” Lightning tells him bluntly. “The best way is to let a specialist handle this.”
Angel's eyes widen at that and he looks distinctly displeased at that prospect. “And that means Mephisto...!”

“You might not want to ask him for help, but we're--” Lightning is cut off by Angel.

“I know!” He yells then turns on the rest. “All members of the Angelic Legion, retreat!”

That gets them all running, fast as possible, away from the Gate and the danger it poses for them.

“Geez...I had a bad feeling about it!” The woman grumbles as she runs.

“Yeah, it surprised me.” Lightning adds.

"You look too happy about this..." Rin muses as Lightning speaks again,

“I never thought something like that could be created with our current technology!” His grin widens. “But on the bright side, now I know who our enemies are!”

Rin turns back to look at the gate and wonders at what he's seeing. Is this real? If it's real...

“What kind of world is this...” Rin shudders and curls up in on himself as the scene fades away as everyone runs away and turns into strange blurred lines before dissolving into nothing.

Rin is still curled up in the darkness when footsteps behind him are heard. Rin refuses to look up, somewhat scared of what he might seen.

Instead, he gets a pair of arms wrapped around him and a warm body behind him. “What's wrong Rin-chan?”

“...don't call me that...” Rin finds slipping out of his mouth. The person behind laughs, a hot puff of air on his cheek.

“Alright. But what's wrong?”

“...stuff...” Rin doesn't know how to respond to this person, even if he feels strangely safe with them.

“Hmm...okay.” A kiss is delivered to his cheek, making him raise his head in shock. “But I'm here, okay?”

Rin lifts up his hand and finds himself encountering another warm hand that holds his in a callused grip. “...thanks...”

Another chuckle and kiss to the cheek. “Anytime Rin.”

The person vanishes at that, leaving him alone in darkness again. Rin stands up despite that and takes off running. As he runs, he starts to see light and realizes there is a door. Putting on speed, Rin races through it and stumbles to a halt as he realizes he's back in the hallway he was in before.

Glancing behind him, he sees the door has shut. Rin shrugs and decides to see about another door. Perhaps the way out is through finding the correct door.

With that happy thought, Rin sets off down the hallway to find another promising looking door.

The next door Rin finds claims to be the nurse's office. Rin hesitates, not sure he's going to like
what's beyond, then opens it anyways. Wincing at the bright light, Rin opens his eyes.

This time Rin finds himself outside, with the night air flowing around him. Looking around, Rin finds multiple spotlights set up for a stage.

But everyone is asleep here and looking around Rin sees himself. Standing there, in what looks like another outfit made by Sekki. He's got the staff out and looks worried. Rin's not at a good angle to see much, but he spots Yukio lying down next to him and feels his heart leap into his throat at how vulnerable his brother looks.

A sound of bells has him turning. He sees some strange bells hanging in the air, ringing out. They look like they belong to a shrine, being suzu and on a decorative stick in fact. Rin is startled, as he doesn't see who's ringing them.

Turning away again from the strange bells, Rin spots Sekki standing to the side. She's waiting with a melancholic expression on her face and Rin wants to say something to her.

And then Rin sees eyes. Strange, silver-blue eyes that peer into Rin, making him step back. It's at that he realizes he's suddenly standing where he saw his double, with Yukio lying beside him. He feels fur underneath his hand, comforting fur, but Rin is too trapped by the eyes.

“What...no!” Rin protests, wanting to run but he's stepping forward anyways. “NO!”

A hand touches his, making him turn. He's surprised by what he sees.

The girl looks like she's around his age, maybe a little older or even a little younger. She has short brown hair that gently frames her face and kind green eyes. She's wearing a strange outfit as well; a pink dress with fuchsia traits on the chest, shoulders, neck, gloves and the second skirt. The dress is divided into two parts from the waist down: the first is the long tail coats trailing down behind the girl's legs and around the front is like a skirt, with another smaller fuchsia coloured one beneath. The neck has a pair of golden wings drawn on and the chest and shoulders are adorned with gold buttons. She also wears a pair of short pink gloves that go halfway up the arms and the suit has yellow lines and edges where the colours are separated. The boots are pink and fuchsia with folds which have drawn wings on each with yellow borders and as an accessory she has a pink hat with a prominent pink stripe and white wing in the middle of the cap. She's also carrying a pink staff with yellow five pointed star inside a circle with a small feathered wing either side on top in her other hand.

“It's alright.” She tells him, as his surroundings fade into darkness and just the girl, who floats in front of him. “You can handle what's ahead of you. Both that which is in the inheritance I gave you and in the blood you carry.”

Rin's lips slowly part. “Y-you...Sakura?”

The girl smiles. “Yes. Now, Rin-kun...you haven't forgotten your magic. You have it with you always, no matter what. You will shine brighter and brighter as time goes on, so don't give up.

Sakura laughs. “Everything will surely be alright.”

Rin returns her smile. “Yeah...” Rin raises his hand and realizes that the Key is on him. Pulling it out, he smiles down at it. “Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!”

Rin grasps the staff and pauses, really taking in the design and then looking up at Sakura and her own wand. She smiles. “You have need of a staff right now so I designed a special one just for you.”
Rin blushes a bit, then, seeing Sakura turn out to leave calls out, “Thank you! For everything!”

Sakura looks back at him and her face softens. And suddenly she's not a girl his age but a woman grown and dressed elegantly, with the staff gone but so much power around her. “No, Rin-kun. Thank you. Take care of them, will you? Even if he doesn't show it, he's really a softy once you get to know him. And as for her...I'm sure you will calm her fears.”

Rin doesn't get to ask Sakura what she means as she disappears shortly afterwards. Rin sighs, and looks down at his staff. Then stands up straight and reaches out his hand, closing his eyes and focusing as he does so.

'This is a dream...' Rin opens his eyes and sees a Card shimmering into being in front of him. He grins.

“Time! Stop this Dream!” Rin commands, activating the Card in a rush of light.

Rin opens his eyes and sees a strange woman hovering over him, her eyes obscured by a headdress. “Dream, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

A whirl of light and Rin has Dream in hand. Looking around, Rin is surprised to see he's in the living room and to see Shirō sitting nearby on the couch looking incredibly worried. It hurts to see that and Rin quickly gets back under the covers and grabs Time just as the spell ends, closing his eyes.

After a moment and hearing Shirō answer a soft question posed to him by another monk, Rin groans and sits up, rubbing his eyes. The tiredness is not faked, due to having to use Time to escape. Beside him, Rin feels Kero grab his hand and whisper how happy he is that Rin is okay.

“Rin!” Shirō's in front of Rin next and looking him over frantically. “Are you okay?”

Rin slowly nods, pulling a puzzled expression on his face. “What happened?”

“You didn't wake up. Not all day. Yukio just returned from school.” Shirō swallows and Rin turns to see his brother who collapses to his knees next to his brother, looking relieved.

“I'm...sorry...” Rin whispers.

“Don't be. It's not your fault.” Shirō grabs Rin in a hug and Rin feels him trembling. “You're safe now.”

Wide-eyed, Rin wonders just what happened while he was sleeping.

Later in his room, Rin falls down onto his bed. Despite having been asleep all day, Rin is still exhausted from all the magic that effected him. Yukio is downstairs, Rin having convinced him to give him some space, though not happy about it.

“Kero...what happened?” Rin asks after a moment, slightly muffled by his pillow.

“...everyone freaked out. They were trying all sorts of anti-demon measures on you for hours before they finally gave up and decided to wait.” Kero explains after a moment. “Your father was about ready to call someone in to help, despite not wanting to, just so you would be safe.”

Rin winces at that. “I...dammit that...”

“Yeah...I know.” Kero gives Rin a pat on the cheek. “I'm impressed. How did you manage to get
out?”

Rin is silent for a long moment. “Sakura.” He says, making Kero stiffen. “Sakura showed up and helped me. Reminded me of my magic and...”

“And?” Kero looks eager to hear what his old master said and Rin wonders for a moment. There was so much Sakura said there but only one line sticks out. “She said that everything will surely be alright.”

Kero softens at that, then starts laughing. “Yeah...that sounds like her, definitely her...”

Rin smiles back at him and thinks a little.

'I promise.' He swears to Sakura. 'I promise I will look after them all.'

For a moment, the Key on his chest glows.

Chapter End Notes

Well? Any questions, observations, or just want to squee? Go comment below please! Keep up the awesome comments folks, you are the most wonderful people ever and I want to hear from you!
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

To all celebrating Christmas, Merry Christmas! To everyone else, happy holidays and let's all look to the new year with happy, positive thoughts.

Lol, of course, Christmas and New Year has passed in IC already. And it's past New Year...but I think this chapter also suits the season.

To those who commented, thank you so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Driving late at night is both treacherous and boring in turn. When navigating the streets of a normally busy city, it gets worse.

“Yeesh...no one does sleep in Tōkyō.” One of the truck drivers, this one relaxing in the passenger seat until it's his turn to switch shifts, complains.

His partner rolls his eyes. “Don't worry, we should be out of the busy section soon.”

“I sure hope so...what kind of delivery is this...” He mumbles, glances back at the trailer behind him.

“The kind that pays well.” The driver informs him, which gets an eyeroll from the other.

It's silent inside the truck for a time, until they finally turn away from the busy roads and on to a more clear area. There is plenty of park spaces around, so that's probably why it's quiet.

“Finally!” The complainer sighs and settles back into his seat. “I can see about getting some shut eye.”

“Sasaki...” The driver growls warningly, but is ignored by Sasaki in favour of pulling his hat down and trying to sleep.

At that point, the driver spots something in his headlights and, cursing, hits on the brakes hard. This makes Sasaki yell and nearly bang his head against something.

“What was that?” He demands, as the driver opens the truck door and hops out, pulling out a flashlight along the way. Cursing, Sasaki follows, “Mori!”

“I thought I saw some animal here...” Mori informs him, clicking on his flashlight and look around the road. “I hope I didn't hit it.”

Sasaki sighs at that. “Okay, animal right...” Despite his grumblings, Sasaki still joins Mori in his search. Neither finds anything and together decide they must have actually just missed it and the animal, whatever it was, is now long gone.

The truck doors shut with a slam and the truck takes off again, heading up to True Cross Academy for a special delivery for the headmaster.
Behind them, crouching in the bushes, a low growl and pained whine is heard coming from where two bright eyes glow.

**Chapter 28: A Little Kindness**

Though Rin knows that Yukio is watching him closely, Rin pretends he's not as he stretches out. “Aaaah...nice to be out of school.”

Yukio doesn't say anything to that which, again, Rin ignores. Mostly because he doesn't know to start a conversation properly in this situation.

It's been almost two weeks since the incident with Dream and still everyone in the monastery is tense and on alert for another “attack” like that. Rin feels strangely guilty about it, a strange twisting sensation in his stomach, though he knows there's nothing he can do.

*The amount of crazy going on means I can't go looking for Cards though...* Rin ruefully admits. He's not happy about that as between high on alert exorcists, his paranoid brother, and the increased wards around the monastery, it's just not possible to go late night hunting.

*Well...Kero says I'm bound to meet up with a Card at some point.* Rin thinks positively, as he heads straight home. He wishes he could visit Sugar Bell again, but an impromptu visit will probably make Shirō worry again. He rather not make him worry.

With that thought in mind, Rin starts whistling casually, hoping to get Yukio to calm down.

“Nii-san...” Yukio growls at him.

Or at least get annoyed for him bringing up a tune he despises. Either way works.

Though the latter has Rin laughing and running after whistling louder and teasing Yukio about his silly dislike of this song.

Rin's starting to feel like he might have been grounded, what with how everyone is hovering over him and being overprotective. After one time too many with one of the monks popping in to see if he's really okay Rin loses it.

“Argh! Stop it!” Rin points at Izumi and makes him flinch. “You. Go. Tell everyone to leave me alone already I'm not going to vanish if you give me some damn time alone!”

Izumi takes one look at the angry Rin and wisely backs away and leaves the game room, allowing Rin to sigh in relief and Kero to relax from his “fake doll” position. “They are never gonna stop that are they?” Kero asks, hitting the pause button to restart his game.

Rin groans and scrubs his face with his hands. “That's it. Even if I have to break out I'm going to go outside. I'll head to the park in fact.” Rin perks up at the thought of fresh air outside of the walks to school or Sugar Bell on rare occasions.

“That sounds good. Maybe treat yerself to something as well.” Kero grunts as he works on beating through his current level as Rin stands up and packs up, turning down the volume on the TV for a good measure.

Rin gives Kero a pat on the head. “Good luck and I'll see you later!”

“See ya.” Kero waves absently then focuses once again on his game as Rin sneaks out through the
Rin hits the ground with a sigh of satisfaction. The note he left on the table should hopefully help and him having snapped at Izumi should also buy him some time.

Clapping his hands together, Rin whirls around and heads off the monastery grounds. *Hmm...a nice park with a yatai nearby sounds good.* Rin checks his wallet to see he's got just enough cash for a nice treat or two. *Yes, freedom here I come!*

---

Rin cheerfully accepts the big takoyaki tray he got for himself, happy to have something to eat today. Certainly he can make it at home now thanks to Hikari giving him a very nice takoyaki pan to replace the old one that broke, but there's something to be said about buying it hot and fresh.

*C'course, that could have to do with being out of the house.* Rin muses as he pops a ball of takoyaki in his mouth. After he finishes eating that, seriously enjoying the taste despite the heat of the batter, Rin wanders over to the edge of the park, near a wooded area.

*Just because I'm out doesn't mean I want to be dealing with others.* Rin notes to himself, eyeing a group of high school students that look like trouble to his eyes. With that done, Rin settles down on the leaf and grass that borders the miniature wood, looking eagerly at his takoyaki.

A sudden racket makes Rin look up with a takoyaki ball stuffed in his mouth. The students Rin identified as trouble are certainly causing it, bothering a group of salarymen who look far from pleased at how they are being treated by a bunch of punks.

Rin debates going over to help then sighs. *I'm going to get yelled at for sneaking out, no need to add being yelled at for fighting.*

Turning back to his takoyaki Rin blinks. “What the...” Rin frowns, counting the balls and coming up short.

A small chirring sound makes Rin turn and, lifting up a bit of branches, discover a small animal crouched nearby happily eating Rin's takoyaki. Rin smiles at the sight.

Then realizes that it's not an ordinary animal. Or even demon.

“A Card?”

Rin's voice makes the Card jump and look up at him. Its mouth peels back, revealing fangs as it growls at Rin. Rin raises his hands, then drops them and looks down at the takoyaki. “Hey, hey...I don't mean any harm...”

Rin gets another takoyaki ball and carefully offers it to the Card, rolling the ball over to nudge at its feet. The growling slowly ceases, a big ear twitching as it looks down. After a moment, it picks up the takoyaki ball and, looking at Rin, limps away from him.

Rin blinks and looks down at his remaining takoyaki. Then sighs and decides he can come back tomorrow to see about that Card. Right now, he rather not upset it again.

It looked way too scared and hurt already.

---

Rin opens the door and the first thing he sees is Shirō who is glaring at him. Rin has a moment to gulp before he gets pulled in and Shirō is on him.

Rin suddenly feels a spike of anger and knocks off Shirō’s hands. “Out at the park, yeesh!” Rin glares up at him, stepping around and away from his father. “I wanted fresh air and went out.”

“You can’t—”

“I CAN!” Rin screams back, making Shirō step back. Rin takes a deep breath and wonders when Shirō started being like this. ’No. He’s always been like this.’ Rin realizes, feeling a growl rumble in his throat at the thought. ’He’s always been poking his head into things.’

‘I’m not helpless or stupid.” Rin snarls, making Shirō step back a moment. “I’m perfectly fine at going out by myself and you are not going to lock me away!”

With that said, Rin kicks off his shoes and grabs his uwabaki, heading up the stairs before shoving them on and diving into the game room.

Kero jumps at the banging sound of the door being slammed open and then slammed shut, turning to see Rin storm in and head straight to the one bed still installed in the room, flopping down on it.

Kero pauses his game and looks over at Rin. “You wanna talk about it?”

Rin growls, then slowly shakes his head. “No.”

“Okay.” Kero turns back to his game, deciding to just let Rin be. But at times, he glances over at Rin and hopes that whatever is bothering him can be fixed.

Downstairs, Shirō slumps on one of the benches in the church, ignoring the rest of the monks as he tries to figure out what happened exactly between him and Rin. Certainly they have had fights before, but something about this one seems particularly off.

Eventually Nagatomo gets tired of Shirō’s silence and settles down beside him.

A minute more of silence then Nagatomo sighs.

“You know, we've been pushing Rin away a lot. Not just with the curfew and extra rules, but because he's barely at home anymore. And that's because we aren't around as much either.”

Shirō scrubs at his face, sitting up straight and vaguely wishing for a cigarette. Something he hasn't considered for years. “Not like we can help being out. We need to take more jobs to help pay for Rin and Yukio's education, on top of all the other stuff this monastery needs.” Shirō looks out at the church and pulls a face. “I swear this place has gotten worse money wise over the years.”

“Well, first there was paying for Yukio's cram school and the supplies he needed.” Nagatomo starts checking off his fingers all the extra stuff they had to buy. “Then there was paying for his exorcist gear. Then Junior High happens and we need to pay for that. The incident around the beginning of the year where the school got trashed also had us paying some fines. The extra mission load might get us more money, but half of that has to go for more exorcist supplies. And we recently upgraded the wards again.”

Shirō groans. “This is not working is it?”

“No. But we don't really have other options. We all know exactly how the Vatican would react if they found on the truth.” Nagatomo's voice is soft.
Shirō winces at that again. 'No one will see Rin but a monster that isn't even real...' Shirō sighs again and wonders at all the choices that have lead up to this.

“I should at least let Rin a bit more freedom...” Shirō sighs. “I wish we could arrange for some kind of guard, but I have to at least trust the kid to not get into too much trouble.”

“That sounds fair.” Nagatomo looks over at the other monks, who nod in understanding.

“But I got to talk to Rin still.” Shirō realizes. “Not about...all of that. But...still, need to talk.”

Nagatomo gives a wry grin at that. “Best of luck there.”

Shirō groans, realizing that yes, he's going to need it with an angry teenager in residence. Especially one with super strength.

Considering how angry Rin seemed when he raced upstairs and hid himself in the gaming room, Yukio had not really expected to walk into the kitchen to find Rin making up dinner.

Yukio almost says something, then looks at Rin's face and decides to let it slide, instead sitting down at the kitchen table to watch Rin cook.

Rin's apparently decided to make an as difficult to cook meal as possible, shoving multiple dishes at the monastery as a side effect. Yukio already can see a big pot of soup simmering on the stove, while Rin is making some hambagu for the side and also has something in the oven that Yukio thinks might be some kind of dessert.

'At least it's the weekend.' Yukio sighs, and considers the fact he's going to have food shoved down his throat. At least it's not just him but everyone else in the monastery.

Yukio wonders exactly how bad the fight he knows their father and Rin was. Rin is showing the usual signs of stress cooking when he's very emotional and not sure how to handle things.

'Stress cooking sounds very odd...' Yukio muses, then finally speaks to his brother, “Do you need any help?”

Rin stiffens for a moment and slowly turns to look at Yukio. Yukio waits as Rin relaxes and shakes his head. “No. Thanks Yukio.”

Yukio doesn't say anything just waits as Rin switches to checking the soup before using the extra meat from making hambagu for everyone – Yukio notices that there is only just enough for everyone to get one big piece for which he's thankful – to make up some meatballs judging by the shape. The meatballs are tossed into the freezer without being cooked, obviously saving them for later.

“How bad is it?” Yukio asks after a moment. Rin stills in the middle of making up the sauce for the hambagu.

“...I guess it's bad.” Rin stares down at the sauce mix. “I just...I'm tired of all the tip-toeing around and--” Rin cuts himself off. *The problem is the secrets but I can't. Not at all. They would either not understand or they would want to help. Dangerous either way.*

Yukio softens, considering it. “Tou-san just wants to be sure you're safe and that--”

“That was scary.” Rin turns to look at Yukio, a sad smile on his face. “I know. I wish...” Rin doesn't finish that sentence but what he was going to say is still heard loud and clear.
“So...apparently I'm no longer a walking wasteland in the kitchen.” Yukio says conversationally.

Rin snorts at it. “Yeah, but you still can't cook.”

Yukio chuckles at that, knowing it's very true.

The kitchen returns to silence except for the sound of Rin cooking dinner, but it's a more pleasant silence.

Despite the utterly delicious food – a fresh salad, a big pot of soup, and hambagu with a sweet potato and blueberry pie for dessert – dinner is very tense and awkward.

Mostly thanks to Rin and Shirō studiously avoiding each other. Nagatomo sighs at that and wonders at his boss's age again. Sometimes he can be just so immature, like refusing to talk to someone even if it's a good time for it.

‘At least we could act as mediators.’ Nagatomo pokes at the pie on his plate, glancing at Rin to see if he could get away with not finishing it. Judging by the look on Rin's face as he eats his own slice, he figures he can't.

Finally, once everyone else is done, Rin stands up and starts grabbing dishes. On automatic, Maruta goes to help only to pause at the look on Rin's face and hands the dishes over to Rin instead. It only takes Rin two trips, the second trip only brought on by the fact he wouldn't be able to see over the large stack, and soon Rin is sequestered in the kitchen cleaning all the dishes.

“Tou-san.” Yukio's voice makes Shirō flinch. “You are going to fix this, right?”

Shamefaced, Shirō slowly nods. “Yeah...just not sure where to begin...”

It's quiet except for the sound of Rin washing the dishes after that, then Nagatomo sighs and stands, poking at Izumi. “C'mon, we got work to do.”

That night, Rin grabs his things and decides to sleep in the gaming room. Yukio just watches sadly, not saying anything. His brother probably just needs some space.

Rin does, but not just because of his argument with his foster father. He needs to finally talk to Kero about the Card he encountered in the park.

Kero considers that as Rin gets the bed set up. “Definitely Dash. Sounds identical to how Ah know he looks. So what are you goin' to do?”

Rin considers it for a moment. “I'm going to visit the park again tomorrow, see if he's still there.”

“You goin' to capture 'em?” Kero asks, fluttering up to the now neatly made bed.

Rin shakes his head. “Nah. He looked hurt and Dash is fast right?” At the nod from Kero, Rin nods back. “So yeah, not going to chase him. Going to see if I can lure him out.”

Kero considers that. “That sounds like a good plan actually.” He admits. “Dash is very shy so maybe that might be the best way to handle thangs.”

Rin grins, happy to have his planned approved and turns off the light, settling into bed.

But without Yukio there, Rin finds it strangely hard to sleep. Unknown to him, Yukio is feeling the
Yukio wakes up in the morning to Rin already awake. And setting things up on his side of the room once again. Rin hears the sound of Yukio's glasses case snapping open and turns to see Yukio sitting up.

“Hey.” Rin smiles at Yukio there and Yukio can't help return it. “So...what do you want for breakfast?” Rin asks quickly.

Yukio smiles, realizing all that Rin isn't saying there. “Fish would be good.”

“Hmmmm...if we have some I'll see what I can do.” Rin says cheerfully, then walks out the door.

After a moment, Yukio stands and, gathering his things for the day, heads to the bathroom. He's already feeling better and more optimistic about things.

Rin heads to the park as soon as breakfast is over. Shirō doesn't call out to him in that regard and just watches him go with a strange look on his face. Rin feels his stomach churn under that, but pushes it aside in favour of Dash.

The park is the same as usual, though the yatai isn't open yet and there is barely anyone around. The fact it's still winter probably plays a part here. Rin heads to the same location he found Dash before, and pulls out the container of meatballs he cooked just this morning. Looking around carefully, Rin sets a meatball on the ground in the underbush.

Then he pulls out a manga he wants to read and settles down to wait.

It doesn't take much longer before Rin senses the presence of Dash and, moving slowly, turns to see Dash munching on the meatball. Rin can't help the smile that comes to his face. “Hey little guy.”

Dash stiffens and looks up. His ear twitches then he goes back to finish the meatball. He looks up when another meatball rolls in front of him. Nose twitching, he steps forward carefully and, sniffing at the meatball, goes to eat it again.

The third meatball is apparently too close to Rin as Dash growls and backs away, refusing to come close. Rin sighs and pushes the meatball closer, which makes Dash stop growling and eat the meatball. Rin then eats one of the meatballs himself, before sharing another with Dash.

And so Rin gets just a little closer to Dash.

Next day Rin has school, which Rin finds annoying since he really wants to visit the park again. He doesn't know if Dash will leave the park anytime soon, though considering the condition the Card is in perhaps he will stay.

The result is that Rin rushes out of school once the bell rings to head to that very park, not even waiting for Yukio except to give him a quick message about him going to a park today and he'll be home later.

Yukio lets him go, watching him worriedly and wondering what's been making Rin so distracted all day.

Rin reaches the park, panting and looking around the place. It's not empty today, and Rin sees plenty same way.
of people wandering around.

'I hope that hasn't scared off Dash...' Rin stands up and walks into the park, acting as if there's nothing going on as best he can. He already got odd looks for rushing into the park and doesn't need any more.

Rin finally reaches the right group of trees and gives a sigh of relief when he realizes he's the only one in this specific spot. Crouching, Rin tries to see anything in the undergrowth.

“Dash?” Rin asks softly.

A little chirring sound is the answer and, along with the feeling of a Sakura Card, the small fox-like creature that is Dash trots out. Rin holds his breath as the little guy pauses in front of Rin. After a moment, Rin holds out his hand and waits. Dash approaches slowly, sniffing at the air, then gives Rin's fingertip a lick before darting back.

Rin chuckles at that. “Hello Dash.” Rin then sits down and carefully, slowly, pulls out the tin of more meatballs Rin brought and offers one to Dash.

This time, Dash darts forward and takes it from Rin's hand, though he steps back again to eat it. Rin chuckles and settles down to watch Dash, murmuring soft words and just letting the little guy get used to him.

The next day after school, Rin finds Yukio stopping him with a hand on him. Turning to face his brother, Rin gulps.

“What is it Yukio?”

“I just want to know what you are doing at that park.” Yukio says simply.

Rin pauses, opens and closes his mouth, then shrugs. “Um...I'm taking care of a stray cat. Going to see if I can find a home for him.”

Yukio softens at that. “Do you want any help?”

“No.” Rin grins at Yukio. “You got cram school more and more lately. Besides, I can handle it. Just need to make the cat less skittish.”

Yukio sighs and lets his hand drop. “Alright Nii-san. Just be careful.”

“I will.” Rin says cheerfully and glances at Sekki once, who grants him a brilliant smile, before darting out of the class.

That day at the park, Dash finally allows Rin to gently touch him, if only briefly.

Dinner is interrupted by Shirō coughing in his fist, making everyone look up. Rin in particular looks at him, a little wary but also hopeful.

Shirō smiles at Rin. “I believe I owe you an apology.”

Rin is visibly surprised and Shirō laughs. “Yes, I do. I shouldn't have pushed you so hard there. You've must have getting restless and there was no real reason for me to freak out. So I'm sorry.”

“...I'm sorry too. I wasn't...I was rude.” Rin looks down then up with a hesitant smile on his face.
“Truce?”

Shirō chuckles. “Better than a truce. Now, I'm assuming that you still have some kind of dessert up your sleeve so bring it out and we'll all enjoy it.”

Everyone cheers at that and Rin, laughing, gets up to get the nice pie he has ready for today.

Yukio watches him go with a smile on his face and catches Shirō's eye. His father winks at him, then turns to Nagatomo to discuss something.

Rin giggles as Dash licks his face, the happy Card spirit enjoying a petting from Rin. Rin is frankly amazed at how fast Dash adapted and got used to him, but then again Dash isn't a normal wild animal but a magical spirit.

Rin glances at the wound he can see on one of Dash's legs, and carefully sets Dash in his lap. “Now...I really should do something about that...” Rin muses aloud, ruffling through his card holster and pulling out a Card.

Dash's reaction is instant, the little guy hissing and jumping away from Rin. Rin freezes, staring at Dash, then looking at the Card in his hands. It's Heal and Rin can't see it as a threat.

“Woah, wait...I just want to--” Rin flinches back as Dash attempts to bite his hand. “Okay...” Rin carefully puts Heal back away and waits, keeping his hands visible as Dash continues to growl.

As time passes, Dash slowly calms down and, ever so slowly, creeps forward to Rin. When Rin doesn't make a move again, he licks at Rin's hand – the same one he tried to bite – then headbutts it gently, until Rin starts to pet him slowly.

“Okay...no Cards. Got the message.” Rin smiles down at the guy and hopes that soon he'll be calm enough to trust Rin with a Card.

Rin spends the next few days avoiding the Cards. Whenever Rin even appears to go for it, Dash's ears go backwards and he tenses up. But as time goes by, Dash slowly relaxes whenever Rin touches his card holster, to the point Rin thinks he might have a shot.

When Rin pulls out Heal this time, Dash jumps back but doesn't growl or hiss. He just gets back and out of the way, watching Rin.

“Here.” Rin offers Heal to Dash, placing the Card on the ground in front of the little guy. He waits until Dash is sniffing the Card before speaking again. “I'm thinking we really need your wound to be seen to. It's not healing like it should at all.”

Dash looks up at Rin and gives what sounds like a questioning yip. Rin chuckles. “Yup, just going to heal you. I know enough to make that possible.”

Dash sits down and stares up at Rin, letting out a keening sound. Then he bows and nudges the Card, before sitting back up.

Rin realizes he has permission and pulls out the Key. He pauses to look around, and is grateful to see no one in sight. And this place is just out of the way enough that the chances of someone seeing something is low enough that he feels safe.

“Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under
our contract. Release!"

Rin then picks up Heal, keeping an eye on Dash's reaction, before tossing the Card in the air. “Cleanse and cure Dash. Heal, Release!”

A soft pink glow spreads out and covers Dash, making the little guy shake as if trying to remove water. Then it's gone and, looking, Rin can see that Dash is healed. Rin grins. “There you go!”

Dash looks at his now cured leg, licks it, then jumps up at Rin, giving his face a good tongue bath as Rin grins and giggles at the sensation. He then steps down and lets out a chirp before swirling into light.

Rin blinks in shock, and just barely catches the Card that floats over to him. Rin stares at Dash in Card form, then slowly smiles. “Welcome home, Dash.”

“Nii-san, did you manage to get that stray cat a home?” Yukio asks a day later. Rin blinks, a little confused at first then he remembers the excuse he gave last time.

“Oh! Yes, I did. Gave him a good home.” Rin says cheerfully, absently patting the card holster on his leg.

Yukio smiles at that. “That's wonderful. I'm glad of that.”

Rin looks at Yukio, considers his sad smile, and recalls the dog that when they were little Yukio really wanted to keep. “Maybe one day we'll be able to keep a pet.”

“Maybe.” Yukio hums and starts walking out of the class.

“Rin-kun, mind staying for a moment?” Sekki calls and, after looking at Yukio, Rin turns around to talk to Sekki.

It's only after the rest are gone that Sekki smiles at Rin and stands, packing away her things. “You did a wonderful job with Dash Rin-kun. That was something you don't see often.”

Rin shifts in one place, returning Sekki's smile. “Well, I'm glad I managed to heal him.”

“That is always good.” Sekki affirms. “Now, best hurry up before your brother gets worried or goes ahead of you.”

“Oh right!” Rin waves goodbye to Sekki and heads off, a happy song in his heart. Behind him Sekki watches him thoughtfully.

'I do believe our chances went up again...' She muses as she leaves the classroom herself.

Outside the sun shines down brightly and slowly but surely winter begins to fade.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed it! If you did, do your best to take some time to write up a nice comment! I'll give you guys a small break for the occasion. I know a lot of you have friends and family right now to be with.
And, as the new year approaches, I'd like to say thank you all so much! Every comment is a wonderful present to me and results in presents for you; new chapters and the continuing story of Rin in the verse of Inheritance of Cards and Demons! See you guys Monday!
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for the comments! I know the holidays make that hard and yet I got way more than I expected! Thank you so much! I even got new fanart yay!!!

I hope you enjoy this chapter and please keep on commenting! Next time I post it will be the New Year so that should be fun!

Also, my bff GB made me a gift fic for Christmas go check it out! She deserves comments too! If you like the fic, go comment! (link: http://archiveofourown.org/works/5533838)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's both early in the morning and in an out of the way location where there is heavy thumping going on. A children's park is abandoned at such an hour and, with the neighbourhood a good one, no one is paying attention.

The heavy stoms ring out in the morning air, making a dog nearby bark like mad. The most that results in some grumbling from the dog's owner and – after looking to see nothing wrong – a small scolding to the poor dog.

The one who did the stomping is now looking around the park, with great and cheery interest. Eventually, they notice the big play-structure that's the centrepiece of the park.

Unseen to anyone at all, a grin spreads across a face and, after clapping eagerly, they step forward to play.

Chapter 29: Strength vs Strength

“Wait...what do you mean tickets to the amusement park!?” Rin exclaims, slamming his hands on the table and leaning forward into Shirō's face.

Shirō gently pushes Rin back. “Exactly what I said. I won a contest and got free tickets to Mephyland. For three people in fact and I figured we should hang out this weekend there. That includes you Yukio!” Shirō calls to the younger twin who is trying to hide in his book.

Yukio sighs. “Fine. I'll be coming too.”

“Yay!” Rin cheers and gets up, doing a little dance of excitement. “Amusement park, amusement park...!!”

As Rin does his happy dance, Yukio closes his book and turns to Shirō. “A contest?” He remarks dryly.

Shirō winces. “Well, I can't tell him the truth.” Shirō whispers to him, as Rin realizes that they will need special bento for the day and goes off running and yelling for Maruta, who's the one assigned to groceries today. “The fact I know the owner of the park and headmaster of True Cross Academy is something I can't explain without bringing in plenty more things.”
“Can we trust the gift?” Yukio asks, wondering at Mephisto’s sudden generosity. Not that it’s too unusual, but Mephisto always has another motive.

Shirō snorts. “He wants to have an excuse to at least be in the same area as Rin despite the deal. It's not so bad really; he was concerned about Rin's coma state when I told him about it and wants to see if he can pick up on any lingering traces. In case something was planted in Rin.”

Yukio bites the inside of his cheek at that. “That...would be a good idea.”

Shirō gives a grin at that. “It's better than nothing. So, shall we figure out a particular plan of action when Rin comes back to ask more questions about the amusement park?”

Yukio shudders and it's only half-faked as he knows just how enthusiastic Rin can get. He bends his head together with Shirō's, the two figuring out what they can explain about the park without possibly raising some alarm bells in Rin's head.

Rin's cheerful mood continues on throughout the week, something that does not go unnoticed by others. Eiji in particular hears about it and, curious, decides to actually ask Rin what has improved his mood so much.

'I doubt it's what some think it is...' Eiji thinks dryly, considering some of the more...interesting rumours about Rin that are flying around.

“Okumura-kun.” That soft call has Rin, in the middle of lunch and without Yukio, look up.

“Oh, hey Eiji!” Rin grins at Eiji, making him flush a bit at the smile turned on him. Rin's ridiculously nice underneath the rumours and scary reputation. “What brings you here?”

“Just wanted to know what has you in such a good mood.” Eiji says as he settles beside Rin.

Rin blinks and then laughs. “Oh that. Oyaji managed to win free tickets to Mephyland and I'm really looking forward to it.”

Eiji looks at Rin, who's happily digging into his bento again, and has to ask, “That's it?”

“Yeah...” Rin eats one of the octopus hotdogs in the bento and, chewing slowly, seems to think. “Well, maybe others are fine but it's a big deal to me.”

“Why would that be a big deal?” Eiji eyes Rin's bento, wondering who made it. That is annoyingly something I could never find out...' Then again, he would have to ask either Rin or Yukio and Yukio is not an options. While Rin well...

Eiji doesn't want to insult Rin by accident.

“Cause I haven't been to an amusement park since I was really little.” Rin sets his chopsticks down and turns to face Eiji. “We don't have much money and I can only so much remember the first trip...I'm looking forward to it because of that.”

Eiji blinks slowly at that, then finds himself smiling. “Then that's very good news.”

Eiji stands at that and brushes off the dirt from his pants. “Well, I have to go, I have numerous customers looking for me.”

Rin laughs. “I'm sure you do. Have fun Eiji.”
With that odd comment, in Eiji's ears, Eiji waves goodbye and heads off get back to work, strangely more buoyant thanks to the small conversation he had with Rin.

Yukio settles down on his bed and watches as Rin runs around, throwing things in and out of his carry bag, debating out loud what to take.

“Definitely need that but oooh...this might be needed more...” Rin looks between two items, making Yukio sigh.

“Nii-san...” Yukio beckons his brother over and grabs his face. “Calm. You don't have to fuss so much.”

“But...but...” Rin looks a little wild around the eyes. “I want it--”

“To be awesome.” Yukio finishes, then chuckles. “If you want it to be awesome, don't take so much stuff. The bento you made are good enough. Just take some basic supplies, like sunscreen.”

“Okay...” Rin takes a deep breath and starts sorting through the things he wants to take.

Yukio, relieved at Rin finally calms down, stands and gathers up his bag and, glancing once behind him, says to Rin, “I'll be downstairs in the kitchen. Meet you there.”

“Kay.” Rin says as he adds something to the bag.

Yukio smiles and turns to leave. He then pauses and looks at the bag.

'Did I see that weird plush toy in there?' Yukio wonders, then dismisses it. Rin's not going to be bringing that to the amusement park.

“Wow...” Rin looks up, way up, at the entrance of the amusement park. “That's both amazing and tacky.”

Shirō snorts at that, turning from the ticket stand with their visitor passes. “Keep these on you. Don't want the guards to kick you out.”

“Oh no!” Rin does not like that idea and, after making a face at the design of the visitor pass, clips it to his shirt and double checks the security of it. “So, where should we go first?”

“I'd say we start small.” Yukio suggests, looking through the brochure. “Just look at one of the game stands or--”

“Ooh bumper cars!” Rin squeals, and starts dragging the helpless looking Yukio over. “C'mon, c'mon let's try it!”

Shirō laughs at Yukio's expression and follows behind at a more sedate place. As the boys get in line, he snags their bags. “I'll watch over the bags.” He chuckles at Rin's expression, but relents to the small carry bag he has, letting him keep that at least. “I might be too old for most of these...but don't worry I'll be having fun.”

Rin eyes him for a moment, then shrugs and tugs Yukio forward as the line moves. Yukio is thus the only one to see Shirō's grin as he pulls out the camera and to get a horrified look on his face.

'Oh...great...' Yukio winces, knowing that those pictures will be shown off soon at his workplace. 'Just what I don't need.'
Then they are at the entrance to the bumper cars and Rin eagerly goes for a bright red car. Yukio flinches as the first flash goes off, then sighs and picks a blue car. Might as well see if he can have fun anyways.

From bumper cars to carousel (despite Yukio's horror and protests) to the first rollercoaster, the morning goes by awfully fast.

But even as lunch approaches, Rin isn't quite ready to stop yet.

“One more!” Rin insists. “And this time Oyaji is going too!”

Shirō looks a bit pained at that. “So...where to?”

Rin eagerly grabs Shirō and drags him over, gesturing to the attraction he wants to go to next.

Shirō actually pales. “The haunted house?” ‘The one that Mephisto is way too cheery over?’

Yukio also looks pained but there's no reason they can give to avoid the house so end up being dragged over by an excited Rin who's chattering about how “scary” it's supposed to be and that it's supposed to rival other haunted houses out there.

-line break-

Rin groans, lying down on a bench and ignoring everything else in favour of mentally cursing himself out. Hidden in his bag, Kero himself is trembling and wishing he had just ran as soon as he heard the word “haunted house” being next.

Shirō and Yukio aren't in much better condition, Yukio leaning against the bench while Shirō is standing up super straight with his eye twitching.

“We are never going there again.” Rin groans and is echoed by the other two.

Finding a clear spot to be able to enjoy lunch takes some time, as even though it's still cold out plenty of people are visiting this amusement park. Then again, it's the closest one for all of True Cross Campus Town and Southern Cross. And with it also being attached to the Academy that makes for a large crowd.

Luckily they manage to find a spot, though they wish they had thought to save a spot before.

Setting on the blanket, Rin starts pulling out the bento he made. In this case, it's not just one per person, but a set of different dishes to spread out and share with everyone.

'Makes it easier to hide the fact Kero is eating as well...' Rin thinks as he sneaks Kero a croquette while Yukio and Shirō are busy picking out their food, using some paper plates to keep their choices on them.

Rin picks at his own selection, pausing to look out over the amusement park. He can see that even at lunch hour it's busy, with many rides still active and the sound of people carrying up on the wind. He then frowns, as he can also feel something in the air.

“Nii-san, what are you looking at?” Yukio asks, noticing how Rin hasn't really touched his plate.

Rin blinks and shakes himself out of his thoughts. “Nothing in particular...hey! Save some of that for me!”
As Rin gets into a little scrabble with Yukio over the food, Shirō looks out at the amusement park himself and shrugs. ‘Well, this has been quite fun...haven't seen Mephisto yet though.’ Something which makes him worried.

“Aaaah! I just remembered I didn't pack any drinks.” Rin looks through the bags and scowls. “Hmm...there's a stand nearby I can get you guy something?”

Shirō chuckles and tosses Rin some cash. “Hot coffee for me.”

Rin makes a face at that and turns on Yukio. “Just mineral water for me.” Yukio says after a moment and gauging Rin's mood in regards to drinks.

Rin smiles at that and jumps up, trotting off towards the stand which is seeing a brisk business. As he goes to line up he knocks into someone. “Oh, sorry.” He says absently, seeing the high-quality suit with a bit of confusion.

A chuckle is his response. “That is quite alright.”

Rin blinks, feeling a strange sensation and turns to see the odd man walking away through the crowd and is thus unable to get a good look at him. Rin then shrugs, figuring it's not really his problem, and turns to look at the options available for him and brainstorming a way to get a drink to Kero.

Behind him, Shirō adjusts his glasses and frowns at where Mephisto was last in view. “Excuse me Yukio...I'll be right back. I just need to make a call.”

Yukio nods, watching his foster father go with concern on his face, then turns to look at where he can see Rin jumping slightly to see around the crowd in front of the stand.

As soon as Shirō's in an out of the way and private spot, he dials up Mephisto. The phone rings for quite some time before it's picked up.

“Hello~ Fujimoto-kun.” Mephisto sounds as gleeful as always. “What occasion has you calling--”

“Cut it out.” Shirō interrupts him. “What was with that with Rin?”

“No time for small talk hm?” Mephisto gives a dramatic sigh. “Aah yes. That was necessary I am afraid. Needed actual contact with Rin-kun to be able to hmmm...scan him?”

“Really?” Shirō narrows his eyes. “The deal is--”

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“To not have anything to do with Rin-kun until the time he awakens his flames, I know.” Mephisto chuckles. “I merely bumped him, no actual contact was made outside of that and an extremely short conversation. You may check with him if you wish...and if you can.”

Shirō grinds his teeth, then sighs and forces himself to calm down. “Fine. So what did you find out?”

“Yes, if I did not know better I'd say that boy is completely normal.” Mephisto replies. “The seal is holding up remarkably well and Rin-kun doesn't have any demonic traces on him. That boy is safe, you need not worry.”

Shirō can feel the relief pass through his body and closes his eyes. “Thanks...”

“You are very welcome.” Mephisto then chuckles. “More polite than I was led to believe too...now, I believe you still have a full day. Not to mention I have a meeting to attend to at the Vatican. Auf Wiedersehen!”
Shirō waits for a moment with the dial tone in his ear, then closes his phone. He smiles, faintly, considering things.

'With that out of the way I think I can enjoy this day better...' Shirō muses, as he walks back to where Rin is waving at him, looking annoyed at him having disappeared for a time.

Packing up the bento with a song on his lips, Rin listens as Yukio and Shirō discuss the next stage of their day trip.

“Well, this ride looks good...” Shirō examines the brochure in his hands. “Rated highly in fact.”

“Which is why we won't go there. The line will be too long at this hour so we won't be able to try it.” Yukio points out, then physically points at another ride. “This one would be better.”

Shirō snorts. “That? That's a kiddy ride! You boys don't want that!”

Rin rolls his eyes, but lets them hash it out in favour of making sure everything is secure and that Kero is good. “How you feeling?”

“Good!” Kero says cheerfully, munching on a cookie in his special carry bag. “This has been quite fun!”

“Shame you can't enjoy it normally.” Rin muses as he carefully slings the carry bag over his shoulders, adjusting it so it is comfortable and on tightly. “It would be easier.”

“Meh...Ah've gotten used to it. At least like this Ah can go with ya.” Kero licks his paws clean. “Mah true form ain't good for this.”

“Hmm...” Rin considers that and opens his mouth to ask Kero what his true form looks like.

Only to be halted by the sensation of a Sakura Card. Rin turns to look over the amusement park and on cue a bunch of screams go out and he can hear crashing and smashing sounds.

“Oh no...” Rin looks over at the tense Shirō and mentally curses. This isn't good...

On one hand, obviously there is some kind of demonic attack going on at the amusement park. And with Mephisto at a meeting with the Vatican, he's definitely not going to be stepping in.

On the other, Shirō can't step in either. Otherwise he'll blow the truth out in regards to Rin. Rin has an idea of exorcists and demons, but he doesn't believe in them and shouldn't. Not as long as Shirō wants to have the seal on him last longer.

So he makes one of the hardest decisions ever. “Let's go.” He grabs the boys and starts dragging them away from the chaos. Yukio gives him a confused look, then it clicks and he lets himself get dragged away. Rin, on the other hand, seems to want to know what's going on.

“Oi! Let go Oyaji!” Rin manages to remove Shirō's hand from him, and whirls to look at him. His face twists as he considers things, then, looking between the amusement park and Shirō, makes a decision.

The scream of a child helps and Rin breaks away towards the chaos, ignoring Shirō's call to “come back here” and heading straight to the kid. Once he sees the kid, he stops and gapes.

The carousel was ripped right out of the ground and, though Rin can't see anything, appears to be
lifted up over someone's head, an invisible someone at that. The small kid is frozen in fear and, judging by the blood Rin can just see and smell, a wound on him.

Rin curses and dives in, pulling out the Key and activating it as quickly as possible. Rin pulls out a Card and prays this works.

“Sleep!” Rin calls and Sleep springs out, lifting up into the air and waiting as Rin readies another Card. “Windy! Spread the sleeping powder!”

A great roaring wind is the result and Sleep giggles as her powder is lifted by the wind and swirls around the entire amusement park in record time, everyone falling asleep and Rin catching the boy as he falls asleep.

Picking him up, Rin quickly runs over to a safe place, then turns around and flinches as the carousal is tossed his way. “Shit!” Rin doesn't have any time to think, instead reaching out and punching the carousal back, not holding back his strength in sheer fear.

The carousal is halted by Rin's blow sending it back and falls away in a clear spot with a visible dent in the base.

“Holy shit...” Kero, having freed himself from the carry bag during all this, can only stare in shock at the result of Rin unleashing his strength. 'Definitely has some demon blood in him...' Kero muses. His thoughts do not lean towards it being a bad thing though; better vitality and strength is very good for not just the present but the future as well.

Rin pants, and looks around. “Where's the Card?”

Another sound of things smashing on the other side of the amusement park has Rin whirling around and cursing. “Oh no...argh, stop running!”

Rin takes off after the sound. “What Card is this?” He yells at Kero.

“Power! It loves showing off how strong it is, but does it while invisible.” Kero explains, flapping his wings hard to keep up with Rin, who ducks under some thrown steel bars. “It will only come out if you challenge it to a contest of strength and you'll have to beat it.”

“What?!” Rin curses and draws out another Card. “Shield, protect everyone in the amusement park!”

“Wha--” Kero watches in awe as not just one shield but multiple ones are produced by Shield, covering everyone in the park without any problem, Kero sensing each one go up. 'Amazing...that's advanced magic...' Kero looks over at Rin and considers it. 'Well...he probably didn't think it through. That would help.'

Rin growls as he moves through the park, trying to think of anything. 'Strength...' Rin thinks back to competitions in the sports festival. 'Aha!'

“Power!” Rin stops and yells up. “I challenge you to tug-o-war!”

There is silence, as the echo carries around. As Power is obviously thinking it over, Rin pulls out another Card. “I need your help here little guy.” Rin whispers to the Card what he needs and gently activates it, the Card darting and hiding nearby as Rin requested.

Just in time as Power shows up. Dropping the invisibility to reveal something that looks very cute. Rin narrows his eyes and considers that the one who made this Card must have had an interesting sense of humour to make the Card that grants super strength to look that cute and small.
Rin then smiles. “Just need a rope and we can go.”

Power claps her hands and a rope unravels from a nearby wrecked storage place before dropping between them.

Kero gulps as he looks between them and starts to pray. Even if Rin is strong, he can't possibly be as strong as Power...

The rope feels coarse and strange in Rin's hands. It's a bit worn and honestly Rin wonders what it's generally used for. But that's not as important as the small girl that's picking up the other end.

Rin shifts his feet, feeling them drag slightly in the dirt, lifting the rope and pulling it towards him. He glances over at Kero as Power does the same.

Kero nods and raises his paw. It's silent for a moment, then Kero drops his paw.

The rope goes tense as both Rin and Power start straining. Power looks shocked, and frowns as she finds herself evenly matched. Kero stares, stunned, as the tug-o-war goes on and both manage to stay even.

'Then again...' Kero eyes the old rope. 'At this rate the rope will give before either wins.'

Rin sweats, wrapping the rope around his arms and pulling harder. He doesn't have much time in many ways and look at the rope he can see it's going to fray. Glancing up at Power, he realizes it's now or never.

“Now!” Rin calls and starts to glow as a strange looing sound goes up from the side.

Kero stares. 'Dash...how does Dash help...?'

He gets his answer quickly as Rin uses the increased speed he has to move faster than Power can react. Before she can grab the rope tighter and pull back, Rin unleashes his strength and yanks the rope and Power forward to fall on the ground.

Power sits up, kneeling in the ground, and looks hurt. She looks up as Rin approaches her. “I can't fix the amusement park, too many electronics, but I can definitely seal you. Power, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

A whirl of light turns into a Card and Rin sighs in relief as he accepts his new Card. He then looks around and groans. “How the hell do I hide this?!!”

“Well...demonic attack?” Kero suggest.

Rin growls, then turns to Dash who darts up to rub his head against Rin's cheek. “Good boy! Thanks for the help!”

Dash lets out a yip and turns back into a Card. Rin smiles, then sighs and quickly writes down his name on Power's Card.

“Well...let's see if I can come up with something...Memory won't work here...” Rin mutters to himself as he heads back up, hoping for inspiration on how to handle his situation.

Shirō has a moment where he wonders why his bed is so darn uncomfortable. Then he remembers and sits up quickly, looking around in horror.
‘I remember...a wind and then...’ Shirō stands, a bit shakily, and notices Yukio is stirring. So is everyone else he can see. “Yukio.”

“Tou-san...” Yukio blinks slowly, then it hits him like a train. “Nii-san!”

They can’t see Rin anywhere and, as everyone else wakes up and expresses both confusion and fear, they start looking for Rin.

They find him with a young boy, who’s slowly stopping his tears as Rin looks over his wound. “It's okay...” Rin is saying softly.

Yukio lets out a ragged breath, and rushes over to his brother. “Nii-san!”

“Yukio?” Rin looks up at him, momentarily confused, then he brightens. “You are okay!”

“What happened?” Yukio asks, then looks over at the little boy. It looks like he scraped his knees hard and Rin’s already done some cleaning with water from a water bottle, making them already look better.

“I...dunno.” Rin looks puzzled. “Just...I was just there with Hitohiro and then I got tired and I...”

Yukio breathes out. That's basically the same as what I remember...’ Yukio thinks, considering how he also fell unconscious.

“I'm glad you are safe.” Yukio says out loud and is greeted by a smile.

“So am I. Now, do you know where your parents are?” The last is directed to Hitohiro who nods, wiping a few more tears off his face, and slowly stands with Rin’s help.

“They were with the balloon man...” He begins.

Yukio looks back at Shirō, who is helping another couple of people to get their bearings, then looks around at the wrecked amusement park.

What happened here?’ Yukio wonders with a dry throat.

For a day that started with such joy and enthusiasm, the end of the day is a great let down.

All three of the group that comes back to the monastery are subdued. Not to mention late, since they spent a lot of time helping with clean up. Luckily no one was badly hurt outside of a few broken limbs and all will recover in time.

Before anyone can say hello, Rin races past them into the boys' room. Yukio doesn't follow him, instead heading to the living room.

“What happened?” Nagatomo asks Shirō.

Shirō sighs and rubs his eyes.

Upstairs, Rin hides his face in his pillow and wishes briefly for a normal life.

Or at least assurance that his secret could be accepted by his family without anything bad happening as a result.

Kero doesn't say anything, but starts to wonder if the time for secrets should end soon.
'After all...even Sakura's family all knew by the end...’ He muses.

At the same time, he knows it's not as simple as with Sakura.

The night will be a long one again.

Chapter End Notes

Did you enjoy that? Please comment below! You get new chapters thanks to that and I really, really want to know what everyone thinks!

By the way, the Haunted House thing was inspired by something that popped up in another fic. It just made sense (unlike a good chunk of that fic verse) that Mephisto would have a REAL scary Haunted House.
Happy New Year everyone! Let's make it a good one! And thank you all for all the comments people left; I got more than I expected thank you!

I hope you enjoy this chapter...quite a few of you were looking forward to it I believe...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Awww...it's raining again...” Rin looks out the window and pouts. Beside him, Yukio looks up from the homework he's working on and sees the rain falling past the window.

“Can't help that...it's not that unusual for the season.” Yukio notes, flipping a page in his notebook. “You need to finish your work. It's all due tomorrow.”

“Right...fine...” Rin sits back down and picks up his pen. He spins it instead of putting it to paper, looking back out the window. “I was hoping for sunshine. But it's been raining all week...”

“The weather report says it should break soon.” Yukio offers. “Maybe tomorrow.”

“That sounds good!” Rin cheers. “I want to be able to go in the sun and not need to worry about umbrellas.”

“Is that all?” Yukio glances at Rin and wonders if he remembers what day tomorrow is. Glancing at the calender, Yukio dismisses it.

’Nah...that isn't something he'd considered.’ Yukio muses, turning back to his homework. As Rin hums behind him, now in a good enough mood to at least attempt to do his homework, Yukio blinks and wonders why the words on the page are blurring in front of him.

A thumping sound makes Rin turn to look at Yukio. He stands up, chair screeching behind him and shouts,

“Yukio!”

Chapter 30: Sick Day

The thermometer beeps and Shirō carefully removes it from Yukio's mouth. Yukio's flushed cheeks and passing out informed Shirō of his condition, but the thermometer confirms his suspicions.

“Well...he's got a flu.” Shirō sighs and looks over at Rin who's been clinging to Yukio ever since he was placed into bed. “Shouldn't last that long, but he's not going to school.”

“Then neither am I.”

Shirō twitches at that announcement and twitches again at the glare Rin levels at him. Scratching the back of his head, Shirō lets out a breath. “Fine, fine. There should be no problem with missing a single day of school since both of you have been going regularly.”
Rin perks up slightly at the permission given, then turns to Yukio with a worried frown.

Shirō watches the twins and can't help the smile on his face. 'Even now, the two of them are still managing to be close...I'm glad of it.'

“So, I'm going to make up some kayu--”

“No!” Rin glowers at Shirō. “I'll make the kayu. You stay here and watch over Yukio.” Rin stands up and heads to the door. He pauses and sticks his head back in. “Stay!”

“I'm not a dog...” Shirō shakes his head and chuckles anyways, settling on the nearby chair.

A few moments after, he hears the rustling of the sheets and turns to see Yukio waking up. “Hey. How you feeling?”

“...terrible...” Yukio blinks and tries to look at Shirō, something very difficult without his glasses. “What happened?”

“You passed out thanks to the flu you've been holding in all this time.” Shirō lays a hand on Yukio's forehead. “You are way too sick for anything but resting right now so stay in bed.”

Yukio lets out a soft hmm of agreement. Everything is quiet for a moment.

Then,

“Um...I need to pee...” Shirō looks over at Yukio and is surprised at how Yukio managed to turn redder at that announcement.

Shirō somehow manages to keep a straight face as he helps Yukio up and escorts him to the toilet, eyeing him warily as he wobbles and stumbles a bit as he goes.

There are very few things more humiliating than being spoon-fed and yet here is Yukio having to deal with it.

Intellectually, he knows that he needs it with how weak he feels. Emotionally, he just feels ashamed of his weakness and wishes his brother wouldn't help him.

“There...” Rin smiles at Yukio, who is just sitting up and has his glasses on so he can see. “All done.” Rin sets aside the now empty bowl of kayu and leans in, pressing his forehead against Yukio's. “Still hot...but the medicine seems to be working.”

“Yeah...” Yukio glances down at his shaking hands. ’I hate it when my hands shake...’ He thinks, considering how much steady hands mean to his profession as a doctor. Not to mention when it comes to using his guns.

“But you'll going to sleep now.” Rin orders, helping Yukio lie back down. “You need to rest. That way by the end of tomorrow you'll be better!”

Yukio manages a weak chuckle at that. “Okay...do you think you can bring my homework in tomorrow?”

Rin stares at Yukio, nonplussed. “I'm not going in.”

A pause.
“What?!" Yukio tries to sit up again but is pushed in by a grumbling Rin. “But Nii-san!!"

“No buts. Besides, Oyaji says it's okay.” Rin remarks. “I'm going to take care of you tomorrow Yukio. Let your Nii-chan help you.”

Yukio sighs and grumbles a bit but knows it's no use, especially with Shirō having said yes. Instead, he does his best to go to sleep and recover as fast as possible from this flu.

The next day is odd for a weekday as there is no sounds of Rin racing around getting ready for school. Instead, Rin comes down at a more sedate pace and starts not only making up breakfast for the group but a special breakfast for Yukio.

No one says anything about that, instead having a conversation about their duties for the day. A few are even “cleverly” disguised exorcisms they need to go to, so as to not alert Rin to what they are really talking about.

Rin snorts at one particularly poor substitution, and smiles down at the kayu he is working on. 'They honestly think they have me fooled...’ Rin considers it for a moment. 'Well, if I didn't know demons are real I probably wouldn't have notice.'

Rin shrugs it off. “Oh, Oyaji, what are you doing today?”

“Hm? Oh I got a meeting in the morning but I'll be back in the afternoon.” Shirō informs Rin. “I'll help with Yukio then.”

“Thanks!” Rin is cheerful about that and turns back to the breakfast with more vigour.

“Sorry about being so busy today.” Maruta shrugs his shoulders. “If it was different you would have been able to go to school.”

“Nope.” Rin rejects that immediately. “Not while Yukio is sick.”

The monks exchange looks at that, then chuckle a bit. That is Rin after all.

Shirō settles back down in his chair and thinks it is a good thing that Rin is staying behind to watch over Yukio.

The distance between the two might not be as great as he feared.

The absence of both Rin and Yukio is noted by the students at the school and even some of the teachers. Some end up thinking the worse of their disappearance – as there are still rumours about Rin – but most just are sad when they hear it.

That would have to do with the timing of Yukio's sickness. It is Valentine's Day after all.

“But-but! I worked so hard on these...” One girl in particular wails, bursting into tears.

Eiji is nonplussed by her theatrics. She's hardly the first one to come to him to confirm something she should already know. “Yes, yes. Do you even know if Okumura-kun likes sweets?”

She bursts into tears again at that and Eiji groans and lets her now annoyed friends take her away, though only after they pay for his time.

Groaning, Eiji rubs his forehead and considers closing down for today since it's basically been the
same damn question all the time. Like no one can believe it at all.

“Ooooooh, Abe-san!”

That voice makes Eiji twitch and he turns to look at the newest people to walk in. Miho is no trouble, but it's Naoko who's there as well and looking energetic as usual.

“Watanabe-san.” Eiji greets dully.

Naoko looks him over. “Been put through the wringer by Yukio Fan Club?”

“...he has a fan club?” Is all that Eiji can think to say.

Naoko giggles. “Not officially, but considering all the girls that decide to admire him...” She has a wry look in her eyes. “Anyways came for two things! First, chocolates for you!”

Eiji is very surprised and is obviously shows since Naoko smiles at him. “The friendship kind.”

Eiji takes the chocolates hesitantly and glances at Miho who sighs. “Don't worry they are edible. I made sure she didn't get too creative there.”

Naoko pouts at that, then turns to Eiji. “Second thing; do you know why both Okumura brothers aren't here today?”

Eiji raises an eyebrow. ‘I haven't gotten that question before.’ And not just because she's asking about both, but just the general question. Everyone previously just wanted confirmation of Yukio not being in school today.

Eiji checks his smartphone and lo and behold he does in fact know, thanks to the teachers having called the monastery to make sure nothing...nasty went on. “Yeah.”

“Oh good.” This new voice makes everyone turn and see Kaido entering, with Hayashi with him. To their surprise, both boys have chocolates in their arms. “Was wondering why I wasn't seeing a bunch of girls running from the classroom at the sight of Okumura.” He looks both annoyed and amused at the thought. “Would have liked to avoid all this.”

“You don't like chocolates?” Naoko asks.

Kaido snorts. “More like I don't like all the carrying on and White Day ain't fun either since I end up turning down everyone. I hate it when people decide to like you for no damn reason.”

Eiji privately agrees. “I'll need payment from everyone for this information.”

Everyone rolls their eyes, but dig into their pockets to pay Eiji the 500 yen fee for this information.

“The short version is that Okumura Yukio has the flu.” Eiji begins.

“The flu? That would keep him home...but why would that effect his brother?” Miho asks, looking thoughtful.

“Because his foster father is missing a piece of specialized equipment for that.” Eiji remarks dryly.

“What kind of equipment?” Naoko questions, looking curious.

“A crowbar.” Eiji deadpans.
There's a moment, then Kaido is snorting. “Was that a joke I just heard from Abe?”

Naoko also ends up laughing. “But oh so true!” She giggles. “Okumura-kun won't leave his brother. They are twins after all.”

Miho shakes her head, but privately agrees. *Twins can be such strange people...but I'm glad Okumura-kun definitely isn't home alone.* She smiles at that thought.

Being home alone sick is the worst.

Yukio might argue with Miho if he knew what she was thinking. As is, Yukio merely groans and leans away from the bucket.

“Yukio...” Rin whines, actually seems to whine, as he hands over a glass of water for Yukio to rinse his mouth with. “Do you need anything else?”

Yukio feels his stomach churn again and barely manages to shake his head no before he ends up vomiting again.

Rin rubs his back soothingly, letting Yukio choke out what he ate. “Yuck. You done for now you think?”

Yukio grabs the glass and rinses out his mouth again. “...yeah...”

Rin stands, carefully taking the bucket with him. “I'll go clean this out real quick then come back.”

Yukio swallows and slowly lies back down. *Ugh...this is so gross. And Nii-san here isn't helping.*

Yukio hates needing help and having Rin dote on him like this is embarrassing to him. At the same time, logic and his fondness for his brother reminds him that he needs help and that Rin is being as nice as he ever is when Yukio is sick.

Rin is back before Yukio realizes it, too busy suffering under a pounding headache to really notice him until a cool cloth is placed on his head. Letting out a sigh of relief, Yukio just manages to open his eyes and sees Rin's worried face.

“Mnh...I'm fine.” Yukio assures him. “Just feel icky.”

“How about you rest...” Rin looks him over. “And when you are feeling a little better, I'll help you with the bath and make you feel a little less icky.”

Yukio admits that a bath sounds good. “Thanks Nii-san.”

Rin smiles. “Just glad to help.”

Rin settles beside the bed and grabs a book to read as Yukio slowly drops back into sleep.

Shirō opens the door and stomps his way in. There was plenty of mud even with the returning sunshine and privately Shirō is grateful to get back home before the new clouds that are covering the sky break.

“Aah, welcome home Fujimoto-san.” Izumi greets him, carrying a package in his hands. “You're just in time for lunch.”
“Glad to be back.” Shirō glances out the window at the threatening clouds. “So, what's for lunch anyways?”

“Nothing fancy. Rin took over and didn't want to make anything particularly nice since it would take too long to make. He made up a sandwich bar with salad and some of that soup he made for Yukio on the side.”

“That sounds good...but soup?” Shirō pauses in switching his boots for his uwabaki. “Why soup?”

“Rin's been worrying since Yukio spent a good chunk of the morning throwing up.” Izumi shakes his head and Shirō makes a face at that. “Wants to make sure he gets good food in him. But that will be later, he's currently helping Yukio in the bath.”

“Aah...” Shirō enters the monastery finally and wanders to the kitchen. There are already plenty of the monks back for the lunch hour and enjoying Rin's food before they have to go to work again. Shirō snags some bread and starts piling together a big sandwich for himself and goes for some salad on the side after some thought.

“Has Rin eaten yet?” Shirō asks.

Nagatomo chuckles. “Barely. You know what he's like when Yukio's hurt.”

Shirō sighs, knowing exactly what he means, and grabs another plate to make up a sandwich and salad for Rin. “I'll visit when I'm done my meal...he's bound to be finished caring for Yukio by then.”

There are murmurs of agreement, then everyone digs into their sandwiches. Even though Rin barely did any work, somehow these are amazing tasting sandwiches.

‘Though I know he baked the bread yesterday...’ Shirō gives a wry grin and considers that old bread machine he found at one of those Hard Off stores was a good buy. Even if it took some time to fix it all up.

Rin pauses in feeding Yukio again, eyes drifting to the clouds once more.

“Nii-san...?”

Rin blinks and turns to look at Yukio. He's starting to look better, but still feels newborn-kitten weak and needs to rest even more. The bath obviously helped as much as all the sleeping he's been doing.

“Are you alright Nii-san?” Yukio asks again.

Rin grins. “Oh, I'm fine. Just the clouds...” Rin gestures to said clouds.

Yukio manages a weak smile. “Shame they came in after the promising morning. I'm not upset though.”

“You aren't?” Rin offers another spoon of soup to Yukio and waits as he swallows it.

“Yeah...bad enough to be sick, sick on a nice day is worse.” Yukio points out.

Rin hums in agreement, as he gives the last spoon of soup to Yukio. “Good point.”

Rin finds himself turning to look at the clouds again and bites his lip. ‘Dammit a Card again...they have terrible timing...’ Rin's certain this one won't be causing trouble, aside from all the clouds
covering the place, but he still should seal it.

Rin sets the bowl aside. “I'm going to go to the washroom. Be right back.”

“Alright Nii-san.” Yukio looks amused and settles back down to rest again.

Rin smiles at Yukio then darts out of the room. But he doesn't go straight to the washroom. He goes to the gaming room, where he knows Kero is hold up in.

“Kero?” Rin pokes his head in and sees that Kero is not playing a game – Rin can see the pause screen flashing on the tv screen – but instead hovering by the window with a thoughtful expression.

“Rin.” Kero looks over at Rin. “That would be Cloud out there.”

“I'm guessing it just makes clouds...” Rin walks over to the window and peers out as well. “Doesn't look like friendly clouds.”

“Those clouds could become a thunderstorm.” Kero sighs. “Mostly just clouds and clouds alone are produced, but given time...” Kero shrugs. “It could turn into what you might call a natural storm.”

“So definitely need to get rid of it...but I can't leave Yukio!” Rin slams his fist down on the windowsill.

“Use Mirror.” Kero suggests after a moment. “She can look after yer brother for you.”

Rin raises his head and looks thoughtful. He then sighs, tension dropping from his shoulders. “You're right...alright.”

Rin pulls out the Key. “Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!”

Rin grabs the staff and gives it a twirl briefly before pulling out Mirror. “Mirror, take my place!”

The giant mirror with Mirror behind it appears before out steps a copy of Rin. “You need help?”

“Yeah...” Rin leans against the windowsill. “Yukio's sick and if I'm not there it will be noticed. Besides, hate to leave him alone. Could you look after him for me?”

Mirror smiles. “I have no problem with that. I'll look after him just like you.” She chirps at the end.

Rin gives a breathless laugh. “Good. Now you are supposed to have come back from the washroom so...”

“I understand.” Mirror's soft smile looks exactly like Rin's, understandable since it's Rin's face she is using.

“Great!” Rin opens the window and watches as Kero flies out. “I'm counting on you!”

Rin jumps out as Mirror watches. After a moment, she turns from the window.

But not before some words carry up towards her.

“Argh, this damn Card got its magic all over the place!”

Smiling, Mirror peers out of the room before sneaking back out and towards the twins' room.
A knock on the door has Mirror look up from the book she's been reading while watching Yukio, who's fast asleep again.

Shirō enters then and Mirror jumps slightly, then notices the plate in his hand. “Figured you haven’t eaten properly yet so I brought you lunch.”

Mirror looks at the food and gives a mental sigh. 'Of course he didn't eat while worried for his brother...'

“I'll eat it later. I promise.” Mirror tries, knowing she doesn't really need it but the real Rin does.

“Nope.” Shirō grins at Mirror's expression as he sets the plate on the table beside her. “I'm staying here until you eat.”

Mirror looks at the food and reluctantly puts the book aside and grabs a sandwich triangle. The first bite is like heaven and Mirror barely resists the urge to moan in delight. She might be able to copy Rin's cooking skills, but it's an imitation of his skill so never quite makes it.

“Hehe...really hungry?” Mirror pauses at that, realizing she's stuffing her face without noticing and turns red.

“Don't worry.” Shirō gives Mirror's head a ruffling, then gently lays in hand on Yukio's head. He looks thoughtful for a moment then steps back. “I think Yukio should be feeling good enough for a bigger meal soon.”

“I'll get him something when he wakes up.” Mirror replies. “He should be asleep for a little longer.”

“Yeah...probably in an hour he'll wake up.” Shirō chuckles and grabs another chair to sit in. “Thank you for all your work Rin. No one would have been able to look after Yukio if you didn't stay.”

“I wasn't going to leave.” Mirror adds a sulky tone to “his” voice as she knows that's how Rin would say it. “Yukio needs me.”

“Yeah...he needs you even when he swears he doesn't. Same with you.” Shirō gives Mirror a piercing look. “It's okay to rely on each other. In fact, it's completely normal for twins and I hope you both do that.”

Mirror glances at Yukio then back at Shirō. She smiles. “I'll make sure to tell him.”

Shirō chuckles and grabs the empty plate and bowl as he stands up. “You do that.”

As he leaves, and Mirror picks up the book again, she considers the fact that Shirō understandably misunderstood which twin she was talking about.

'But I'm sure the real Rin will tell his brother that too.' She then opens back to her last page and settles in for the good read. Both boys have good taste in books and it's been awhile since she's been able to read for herself.

Something she missed all those years in the darkness alone.

Yukio still feels weak and sick when he wakes up, but he doesn't feel that bad compared to this morning.

'I don't think I'll be vomiting again... ' Yukio thinks as he opens his eyes. The sound of a book closing is what he hears first, and then he can see Rin leaning over his head.
“Feeling better?” Rin asks, pushing his bangs from his face.

“A little.” Yukio admits, then gratefully accepts help as he sits up and is handed his glasses.

Rin smiles at him. “That's good...I'm going to go down and get you something. Soup or kayu?”

“...Kayu.” Yukio considers his state. “Maybe a little salad?” He suggests, thinking of what Rin told him he made for lunch.

“That sounds possible.” Rin hums, obviously thinking it over. “Just a little though.”

Rin stands at that and, after looking back at Yukio, heads out the door.

Yukio looks around the room and sees the book Rin was reading. A book that both boys enjoy, a rarity these days, and Yukio finds himself thinking back to when, before school and exorcists and secrets, the twins were truly inseparable.

'Maybe...’ Yukio shakes his thoughts away and looks up as the door opens. He raises his eyebrows at what Rin is bringing in. “I don't think I can handle a sandwich much less a bunch of them.”

Rin laughs. “That's for me.” He sets the other plate down away, while settles down on the bed with the bowl of kayu and small plate of salad. “Do you need help again?”

Yukio holds out his hand for the spoon and manages to eat by himself, gleeful at that even though Rin is still holding the plates for him and he has to be slow so he doesn't spill anything.

Rin smiles at that and sets the dirty dishes aside. “Do you need anything else?”

Yukio looks over at the book Rin is reading and Rin follows his gaze and looks thoughtful. “I could read it aloud?”

Yukio blinks then smiles. “That sounds good.”

Rin grins and opens the book at the beginning and begins to read. Yukio absently notices Rin has two bookmarks in the book and wonders at that. Before dismissing it in favour being soothed by Rin's voice and a good book to pass the time with.

“Cloud, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

As Cloud finally is sealed, Rin gives a sigh of relief. “That took way too long...”

“Well...Cloud was halfway across the city...” Kero sighs, and looks around. It hadn't been easy to find Cloud and so much time passed with Rin running around trying to find where it was located. Fly was attempted but not a good idea with the air pressure acting weird under Cloud's influence. And the fact Cloud is the kind to attack those after it makes flying treacherous in that regard as well.

“So annoying...I hope both Yukio and Mirror are doing okay.” Rin lets out a deep breath and finishes writing his name on Cloud. “Okay, let's get going.”

As the clouds finally start to fade away without Cloud's magic keeping them there, Rin lifts into the air with Fly active, hoping to get home as fast as possible.

Sekki watches him fly away from a nearby building and can't help the soft smile on her face before she turns around and heads down the stairs. Rin managed to locate the Cloud's source faster than she thought he would, considering all the false trails left by Cloud.
‘He is getting stronger every day.’ She muses and it makes her more and more positive that he will succeed at the end.

Mirror pauses at the end of a chapter, looking outside the window. This catches Yukio's attention.

“What is it Nii-san?” Yukio asks.

Mirror leans back to look at Yukio. “Oh, the clouds are clearing up.” Mirror idly places a new bookmark in the book, making sure it's clearly visible and sets it aside. She then stretches out and stands.

“I'll be right back.” Mirror says cheerfully. “Just going to head to the washroom real quick.”

Yukio chuckles. “Alright.”

Mirror glances back to look at Yukio and a soft look in her eyes confuses Yukio briefly. Then “Rin” is gone and Mirror is sneaking over to the gaming room.

Rin is climbing through the window as she enters and looks up startled as she enters. He lets out a sigh of relief at it being her instead of anyone else.

“Oh good it's just—waaah!” Rin fails and falls onto the ground with a thump, making Mirror wince.

“Are...are you okay?” Mirror asks, hovering out her master.

Rin pops up and laughs, scratching his head. “Yeah...silly me. How's Yukio?”

“He's feeling much better.” Mirror assures him. “I even got him to eat some kayu and he didn't throw up. His fever has gone down too.”

Rin beams at that. “I'm glad!”

“Oh and I left some sandwiches and salad for you.” Mirror eyes Rin who goes red as his stomach growls at the mention of food. “I couldn't save the food your father brought up for you before but I managed to get a big plate to make up for it.”

“Aaaa...thanks.” Behind Rin, Kero rolls his eyes as he sets up his game again. ‘Typical Rin...so worried about everyone else and their health but then goes and forgets about himself.’

“And...your father wanted me to tell you something.” Rin turns to Mirror, curious about what she's talking about.

“He said: It's okay to rely on each other. In fact, it's completely normal for twins and I hope you both do that.” Mirror smiles at Rin who looks startled at that.

Rin gets a thoughtful look on his face, then smiles. “Thanks.”

Mirror shakes her head. “No. Thank you. It was fun.”

She swirls into light and forms into her Card form again.

“By the way, I've been reading to Yukio out of that book. I left a bookmark in and it's the next chapter.”

Rin blinks at that, then grins. “Thank you.”
He turns to check on Kero and grins at him already absorbed into his game. With that confirmed, Rin exits the gaming room and heads back to his room.

Yukio turns from looking out the window and smiles at seeing Rin.

Rin grins back and, looking at the plate on the nearby desk, heads over to grab it and stuff some sandwiches in his mouth.

“Why are you so hungry?” Yukio wonders.

Rin flushes. “Well...” Rin swallows his mouthful. “Didn't really eat that much over the day...”

Yukio sighs. “Nii-san...”

Rin laughs awkwardly and settles back on the chair, picking up the book along the way. Rin notices the three bookmarks and opens it to the most prominent one while thinking that he'll have to come up with a way to let Mirror finish the book since it's obvious she's been enjoying reading it.

“Now...where were we?” Rin settles down on his bed and, in between eating his late lunch, reads to Yukio.

It's peaceful here and Rin can't help but feel completely at home.

The next day is bright and clear, and with Yukio healthy again, it can't be better.

Rin is whistling as he enters school, Yukio amused by how that seems to make a few people twitch. He mentally notes them down and decides he might ask Eiji about what happened yesterday.

“There you are!” That shout has Rin turning to see Naoko grinning madly and walking towards him. She looks over at Yukio. “Glad to see you better.”

She then shoves a package in Rin's hands, making him blink in surprise. “It's a day late but enjoy!”

Rin stares as she leaves then looks down at what's in his hands. He blinks. “Chocolate...what's this for?”

Yukio facepalms and wonders just how dense his brother is...

At the same time, he looks around at the people around him and notice a bunch of crying girls. Which leaves him puzzled and trying to figure out why.

To the side, Eiji sighs and considers that both Okumura brothers are very dense in regards to relationships.

Somehow, it just fits. They are twins after all.

Chapter End Notes

Well, what did you think? Tell me in the comments below and get next Monday's chapter!

Also, I'm serious about the college/university knowledge thing. I didn't go to university
(for various reasons) so I do need some material there. Particularly for the America style one.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Well, things have been doing great on my end! How have things been for you guys?

Here's a happy chapter for you all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Southern Cross Junior High is, as usual, a font of gossip. Sometimes Eiji thinks if there wasn't gossip the walls would cave in due to the lack of “wind” keeping them up.

'Well, anything that helps with money.' Eiji considers positively.

The current gossip is about the new big, grand mall that just opened up. It had been in construction for years and now it's finally up and ready with many stores opening and having sales.

Eiji is being run ragged looking around for all the sales and deals and stores in that new place, as nigh everyone is interested in the place. Even Rin dropped by to ask a few questions about the cooking speciality store that opened up in there.

'At least I now know who makes the bento.' Eiji thinks about how it strangely suits Rin to be a great cook. As he pauses at the cooking store information on his smartphone again, he wonders what exactly Rin is interested in buying there during the opening sales.

Eiji then sighs and moves on, cross checking again as information updates for the real sales and not just fake sales to draw in more customers to the mall's opening.

Chapter 31: Hide And Seek, Chase Me!

“Woah...” Rin looks up – way up – at the revealed mall. “This place looks huge.”

“It does...” Yukio glances down at the brochure. “Six stories of stores, restaurants, and entertainment venues. The only thing it doesn't have is a sento.”

“Well, that's not needed...” Rin peers to look at the brochure over Yukio's shoulder. Behind them, the adults are discussing what they are going to get during the opening sale. “Oooh, that looks like a good bookstore.”

“Yes.” Yukio circles that in a red pen. “Aside from the cooking store, what are you thinking of checking out?”

“Hmm...the grocers and ooh there's an exotic cuisine store too...” Rin beams at that. “That's about it.”

Yukio sighs. “Why am I not surprised that's all you want?”

“What? I'm going to the bookstore with you too.” Rin protests. “What about you, what are you interested in?”

Yukio looks at the options again. “The electronic store. I've been saving up for a new tablet.”
“Oooh...and you might be able to afford one on sale uh?” Rin watches as Yukio circles that with his pen. “But first, let's get to that bookstore! That stuff can keep the longest after all.”

Yukio chuckles and agrees, pocketing the brochure. “We're going in!” He calls to the adults.

Shirō waves him off, then turns back to argue with Izumi over some of his choices for “good stores to check out”.

Rin chuckles at what he hears and heads off, with Yukio shaking his head behind him as he follows him. The mall has something of a line-up in the front due to all the people entering it, but since it moves forward quickly and is organized with “traffic managers” involved, Yukio doesn't see it as a problem.

The bookstore is quietly crowded. The quiet part is appreciated, though Yukio and Rin have to squeeze around to find the books Yukio wants.

Rin notes that Yukio seems to be debating at every book he finds, and immediately realizes he's limiting himself to three choices. Not that Rin can point any fingers; he's limiting himself to two books to be safe.

Eventually they get to a certain section and Yukio actually groans. “Great...already sold out.”

“What is?” Rin ask, looking at the bookshelf and trying to figure out what's missing.

“It's this new medical book. It's apparently going to be the new textbook for National Defence Medical College and well...” Yukio shrugs.

Rin sniggers. “That's so like you Yukio. Always studying ahead.” Rin looks up at the shelf and blinks at something he sees up top. “Hey, what's that?”

Yukio looks up and stares. “Hey, that's the book I want!”

There are shushes that come from all corners at that and Yukio blushes at the attention while Rin ignores it. “I could climb up and get it?”

“No!” Yukio gets some attention at that shout and coughs. “Um...no. Best to get an employee to help. You stay here and I'll go get them.”

“Kay.” Rin watches Yukio leave then looks up at the book. He has a moment to feel the presence of magic and realize what's going to happen just before the book sprouts wings and suddenly disappears.

Rin stares up at that and groans. 'Oh...wonderful timing that...'

Yukio returns at that point with the employee who is rightfully confused at how the book is gone. As is Yukio, so Rin distracts him by suggesting they head to the electronics store before things get too crazy.

Yukio looks glum but agrees to it and picks another book out as his third one as they head to the counter and line up to pay for their books.

While Yukio is discussing the tablet options with an employee at the electronic store, Rin slips away briefly and finds a quiet place. Tapping the earring he has, after a moment he hears Kero pick up and
the sound of games playing in the background.

"Yo! Somethin' up Rin?" Kero makes a grunting sound as he struggles through a particularly hard boss fight.

"Yeah...there's a Card here..." Rin sighs, rubbing his forehead and not liking the choice of "victim" here.

"Really? Of all the luck...so what did it do?" Kero lets out a small curse as his health bar goes down a notch again.

"Just moved a book somewhere. Didn't see where and it had wings on it when it moved."

"That would be Move then!" Kero exclaims. "Not very powerful but tricky. Does a little teleportation but can only work on small items. The book not too big?"

"It's textbook size." Rin says after a moment of thinking.

"Then that's not too big for Move. You're goin' to have to track it down while you're there."

"Yeah, I figured that..." Rin then recalls something. "By the way, there's supposed to be a good gaming store here. Anything you want?"

Kero perks up at that. "Well...one game would be good...there's supposed to be a new game in this series Ah like and Ah think it should be affordable..."

Rin chuckles and mentally memorizes the request from Kero before hanging up and heading over to Yukio to quickly tell him where he is going.

Then he heads out not to the gaming store, but to where he can faintly still feel the aura of a Sakura Card.

Rin's back at the bookstore and prowling around, trying to spot the book that Move has possessed. It's not easy with all the people and books around. The mall being extremely busy makes the magic a bit difficult to sense, as all the noise and people's own auras get in the way.

'Not many people with magical talent but everyone has a presence...’ Rin considers that and wonders if what he's sensing counts as a “soul”.

He then dismisses that in favour of looking for the book again. He finally spots it, amongst manga and sticking out quite visibly. But as soon as he reaches out to touch it, the wings appear and it disappears.

Rin curses silently and looks around again. 'It can't go very far...’

"Is there something you need?" Rin looks up at an employee who seems to be wondering why he's looking around.

Rin plasters a smile on his face. "Nah, it's fine. I'll find it by myself."

The employee slowly nods and watches as Rin starts looking around again, sweating as he hears curse words come from the young boy's mouth and wondering what exactly he's looking for.
around the store. Shirō blinks, surprised Rin is interested in the pharmacy, and walks over to talk to him.

“Yo!” Rin jumps at that and whirls around, then relaxes.

“Oh it's just you Oyaji.” Rin gives a shaky smile, which makes Shirō look at him in confusion.

“Is something the matter?” Shirō asks, wondering why Rin looks so tense.

Rin twitches. “Just trying to find something...” He then seems to see something over Shirō and curses, barrelling pass him with a quick “sorry!” shouted at him as he goes.

Shirō watches him, completely confused, then sighs and decides to leave it for later, returning to the employee to see about getting that special deal he qualifies for.

“Oh this one is super cute too!” Hiromi hugs the stuffed cat to her chest.

Sayaka lets out a half-laugh at that. “I'm guessing your choice isn't going to be as easy as you swore?”

Hiromi gives a playful glare at Sayaka. “Oh, shush you. I'm being considerate since you said you would buy me something.” Hiromi checks the price tag and sighs, setting down the plush toy.

Sayaka settles back as Hiromi goes back to considering her choices. Slightly bored, she lets her gaze wander and blinks at who she sees.

'Okumura?' Sayaka doesn't say anything, just watches as Rin looks through the plush toys. He's obviously looking for something and is getting frustrated as he doesn't find anything.

'What is in here for him?' She wonders.

At that point Rin's eyes light up and he reaches for something...

...only to scowl in the next second and then move to another section of the store. This repeats for a few minutes before Rin charges out of the store to Sayaka's amazement.

'What was that all about?'

“Found it!” Hiromi cheers as she lifts up her chosen stuffed animal, a medium sized red panda. “You can buy me this Sayaka-chan!”

She pauses and tilts her head at Sayaka's expression. “Is something the matter Sayaka-chan?”

“Guah.” Is all Sayaka can say, still looking very confused. 'What is Okumura up to!?' She silently wonders, shaking her head and trying to focus on Hiromi again. She manages it in time before Hiromi truly starts to get concerned over her condition.

Kaido scowls at the sales representative in front of him, who doesn't even lose his smile or stumble in his words as he goes on and on about the vacuum he is showing off.

“Yeah, yeah, and I told you that's not the brand my mother wants. Where's the brand I asked for!?” Kaido nearly snarls that last thing.

Behind him, Hayashi sighs and then blinks as he notices someone in the back that he knows.
“Okumura?”

Kaido turns at that and stares as Rin tears through the store, obviously in search of something. He curses as he can't quite get to something and then lets out a shout as the shelf in front of him stares to fall, just barely dodging it.

“Hey! Be careful with that!” The sales representative goes to stop him, only to be bamboozled by Rin running off again, cursing to himself as he leaves the store. He then shrugs it off and turns to talk to Kaido.

Only to gape in horror as he's moved on to a more cooperative sales person – this one a woman who shoots a look at her coworker for his delaying – who cheerfully leads Kaido to the vacuum his mother requested.

Rin is exhausted an hour later. Even though Move hasn't left the mall, that's not saying anything considering the size of the place. At this point Rin's on the sixth floor and looking around near a balcony up high, one that luckily doesn't have anyone but him here.

'That's probably because it's all restaurants here...' The shopping is still going on below, so the restaurants aren't that busy yet.

Rin growls and tugs at a lock of hair. 'Dammit...' Rin considers what to do and sighs. “Maybe I should just try something new...”

Rin looks around. 'So just chasing it doesn't help...aaah...let's see if I can sense it even in this crowd...it's less crowded up here after all.'

Rin takes a deep breath and pulls out the Key. “Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!”

With the staff out, and checking around to make sure no one else is nearby who can see him, Rin slowly closes his eyes and focuses.

At first, it's like a buzzing sound is obscuring everything. But as Rin waits, the buzzing slowly fades to be nothing but background noise as he mentally searches for the Card.

Darkness is there in Rin's mind as he just thinks of Move. Slowly, ever so slowly, he picks up ripples. Drops of magic being used and moving around.

Rin whirls around and raises the staff. “Move, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

At the instant Rin brings the staff down, Move appears, Rin striking the book it is in. Moving quickly, Rin grabs the book and the Card. Opening his eyes, he sees he has both in his hands and cheers.

“Ha! Did it...” Rin then realizes he's standing on the balcony railing and has a moment to go “Shit!” before he teeters off.

“WAAAAAH...” Rin screams as he falls, getting some attention. ‘Shit...' ‘Windy!' Rin calls, and suddenly a fierce wind is travelling through the mall, causing screams of shock and confusion as it travels until Rin finally ends up crashing into a stand in another store on the first floor.

Rin groans and makes the staff disappear before opening his eyes.
Rin sweats as he sees an employee runs his way and prepares for a scolding.

Instead...

“Oh my gosh...are you okay!?” The employee looks frantic and Rin stares up at them.

“Oh?”

And to Rin's confusion, the employee panics even more and starts calling up their manager.

Shirō wasn't sure exactly what he expected – or rather hoped for – when the intercom went off for Okumura Rin's guardian. Well, parents, but some discussion in that regard allows Shirō to enter the room.

Shirō pauses as he takes in the meeting room. Rin's there and he doesn't look scared or sulky, so can't be in trouble. He looks a little surprised by things though. There's a store manager next to him – for some kind of novelty store Shirō thinks, judging by the uniform – and then there is someone else who's dressed like a businessman.

Shirō takes that all in at a glance, then walks in to sit next to Rin, making it so he doesn't have to crane his neck to look at him. “What is going on exactly?”

Rin looks a bit nervous then, and looks over at the people on the other side of the table.

“My apologies sir, I...I swear we put up the sign and um...” The manager looks sweaty and even more nervous than Rin. Shirō glances over at Rin and gestures him over as the manager continues blabbing.

“What exactly is going on?” He whispers to him.

Rin twitches. “Apparently there was suppose to be a wet floor sign where I...tripped and fell...”

Shirō raises an eyebrow. “And this calls for such a meeting?”

“That's enough Akiyama-san...” The businessman looks tired and Akiyama goes quite. “We just don't want anymore incidents so what we are proposing...”

Shirō ends up getting more and more confused as the meeting goes on and he's outlined in what is going on.

By the end, he ends up biting the inside of his cheek so he won't end up laughing. Wouldn't be a good idea.

'Rin...you have the oddest luck...' Shirō manages to just keep a straight face and just nods in agreement to the paranoid owner of the mall's plan.

Yukio is surprised when he feels an object come down on his head, very lightly as to not harm him but it's obviously pretty big. “What...” He turns and sees Rin grinning down at him where he is sitting on a bench. “Nii-san...what happened? You got in trouble didn't you?”

“Surprisingly no.” Rin settles down on the bench beside Yukio and passes what's in his hands to Yukio. Yukio takes it hesitantly. Then stares.

“This..."
“Is the medical book you wanted right?” Rin grins. “Managed to track it down. Somehow it ended up in another store.”

Yukio stares at Rin. “Did someone forget it?”

“Nah. It was checked and that copy hadn't been bought yet.” Rin shrugs. “Bit of a mystery. But that's not the best part.”

“What is the best part?” Yukio asks, a bit worried.

“I got it for free!” Rin exclaims.

Yukio is silent for a long time, just staring at his obviously crazy brother. “I'm sorry did I hear--”

“Yup. Free.” Rin laughs. “Apparently the mall was delayed at being completed for so long and has been getting a lot of complaints about a ghost or something. Didn't want any more problems so they wanted to bribe us out of that...Oyaji just went with it cause it's easier. Aside from the free books we got plenty of coupons that are gonna last all year and discounts on today's things.”

“Really...” Yukio shakes his head and turns to look at Shirō who is approaching with big bags of things. “Is that true?”

As Rin whines about Yukio not believing him the big meanie, Shirō chuckles, “Yes. I was rather surprised but the facts seem to line up.”

Yukio raises an eyebrow but turns to Rin. He then smiles. “Thanks then. Got this for me when you could've had something for yourself.”

“Aaah, I got something there too.” Rin pulls up a bag and reveals a box that holds a rather fancy cake stand. “Two free things and a bunch of coupons and discounts from those crazy people. Not arguing!”

Yukio sighs, then figures it will have the monastery members coming by here for a long time if the coupons lasting a year in true. Coupons that, as Shirō later explains, apply to all the stores.

Shaking his head, Yukio is amazed at Rin's luck.

Unknown to him, Rin is also rather pleased by this. Most of the time the side-effects of the Cards tend to be bad for him. For once, it's great to get good things in return.

It puts a smile on his face and everyone else's as well.

Chapter End Notes

Did you enjoy this one? Tell me what you think in the comments! Earn yourselves another chapter! We are hitting the final stretch; next month the first arc will be done.

With that in mind, don't forget to subscribe to the series and not just IC. There will be more popping up for sure!
It is long past night fall and at this hour no one is around. No one except for a few rare people, including one particular person in the park.

Said man cracks his neck and stretches out. Wide fangs are seen in the wide grin and, after stretching out a bit more, a sigh of exhilaration is released. “Aaaahahahaha! Assiah finally!”

The demons looks around, examining this world through his host's eyes. Just a low life yakuza and one that was severely frustrated with his lot in life.

“Don't have to worry about strength anymore!” The demon cackles. He begins considers what to do after arriving in Assiah.

“Don't want no stinking exorcists...” He grinds his fangs at the very thought. He's no Demon King that can crush any human in his way, just a semi-high ranked one that has been working and nudging at his current host for months so he could come and explore Assiah.

“Well...can still have fun.” He sniggers at the thought and starts wandering around the park. He considers if he should set some things on fire, just for the hell of it. Then dismisses it.

“Too eye catching and I just got here.” The demon wonders if there's any nightlife still going on he can get into. Perhaps deal with some of his host's tormentors when they come around again.

Those thoughts make the demon gleeful and he practically skips through the park, heading towards a bridge in the centre that crosses an artificial stream. Just as he reaches the bridge, the water nearby explodes.

Stepping back and cursing at the water – fire and water truly don't mix – he pauses as he sees what is revealed to him.

The figure before him looks like a blue coloured Chinese girl of about sixteen. Her eyes are hard though and face expressionless.

“What?” The demon stares at her.

She then bows towards him and takes up a fighting stance.

A wide grin spreads across the demon's face. 'That's it! A fight!'
Laughing at the frail looking girl, the demon prepares himself and then charges straight at the girl, thinking happily of the adrenaline and fun he's going to have with her.

Not knowing what kind of “fun” he is truly in for...

Chapter 32: Face Off

The rustling of the newspaper being opened fills the silence of breakfast. It's spring break and both Rin and Yukio are out of school for two weeks until their second year starts. However, things manage to be startlingly quiet despite that.

Mostly because Rin takes advantage of his free time to sleep in more while Yukio ends up going to “cram school” during this, saving up money for when school starts.

“Hmm...this is interesting...” Shirō narrows his eyes at a particular article. This has Rin look up, curious about what it is.

“Rising Count of Battered Martial Artists.” Shirō reads aloud. “Says here that Green Park has been dealing with plenty of battered martial artists. All impressive...most are either champions of some kind or at least black belts. Green Park's been something of a meeting point for quite some time, considering all the dojos in the neighbourhood, so it's not uncommon for martial artists to be found there.”

“Right...that's why it's such a safe place.” Yukio notes. “So what's going on?”

“Nothing confirmed. Apparently there is no official description of the attacker, but plenty of people are being warned away from the park. Whoever this person is they have already defeated seven different martial artists.” Shirō sets down the newspaper in favour of breakfast at that point.

Rin hums under this, thinking a bit on it. ’I wonder what's causing it? A demon seems the most likely...' Rin looks over at his foster father and decides to let him handle it this time. If a demon is the one behind it, Rin doesn't have anything to do with the situation.

That decided, he digs into breakfast himself as the adults discuss the situation and speculate on the cause. Rin assumes it's because they don't want to tip him off on how real demons are.

In reality, it's because they are stumped themselves since nothing like this matches any records of what demons do. The focus of targets is nothing like anything dealt with before.

’The impression is that the demon is challenging themselves against the martial artists but...since when are demons challenged by humans outside of exorcists?’ Shirō sighs and relegates this as an important investigation in his head. If there's a demon that's being this persistent in such a fashion, Shirō is going to have to deal with it and soon.

“I'm off!” Rin says cheerfully. “See you guys at supper!”

The door slams shut behind Rin and he takes off towards a nearby park. Not Green Park but another where he plans to meet up with Sekki.

Behind him, Shirō sighs and drops his hand. “So...anything in regards to that demon at the park?”

“Nothing yet Fujimoto-san.” Nagatomo rubs his forehead. “Getting the police reports on the incidents will take some time. They don't believe it has anything to do with demons and are planning to put some of the martial artists on the force out as bait soon.”
“You found that out?” Shirō raises his eyebrows at that.

Nagatomo chuckles. “More like it slipped out of a rookie's mouth. I swore that I wouldn't spread it around.”

“You just told me.” Shirō points out.

“But you're my boss sir. You out rank them.” Is Nagatomo's glib reply, earning a laugh from Shirō.

“Very well...so what information did you get?” Shirō asks, suddenly serious.

“It's definitely just one person. Or so they think, since the description of the attacker matches. Didn't get a proper description from them.”

“I see...” Shirō frowns in thought for a moment. “Well, no help for it. We'll going to have to see about visiting some of the victims to get anything.”

“I thought you'd say so sir, so I managed to get the files on the victims.” Nagatomo pulls out a folder and offers it to Shirō. “This one looks like the most promising for information.”

Shirō takes the offered papers and looks them over, looking thoughtful. “Then let us go. This Sakamoto Satoshi isn't that far away.”

“Uh? The reports of guys being beaten up?” Rin blinks at Sekki. “Isn't that a demon?”

Sekki gives him an amused look as he bites into his ice pop they got at the convenience store while wandering the city. “That is a possibility but it's still possible for it to be a Card.”

“She's right.” Kero points out, licking at his own ice pop and enjoying the raspberry flavour.

Rin looks thoughtful for a moment. “Well...you got a point...it does sound odd. Targeting martial artists...I probably should get more info on it though.”

“That is true.” Sekki sighs and takes another sip from her cup of tea. “But where can you get that information?”

Rin looks thoughtful for a moment, in between bites of the ice pop, then after he's finished Rin sighs and stands up. “I think I have an idea of who to ask. Kero, you coming with? I don't think you can come Sekki-san?”

Sekki chuckles at Rin's apologetic looks. “That's fine. I'm guessing that you are talking about Abe Eiji-kun?”

“Yeah...I think he might be able to tell me some things there...” Rin licks his lips, removing the last of the sticky ice pop. “But I don't know how or really want to know.”

“I don't want to know even more. As a responsible adult, I'd have to report him.” Sekki comments cheerily.

Rin laughs at that and stretches out. Wandering over to a nearby garbage can, he tosses the wrapper in there. “So...do you have anything else you need to do today?”

Sekki slowly shakes her head. “If you want, we can meet up back here in say...an hour or so?”

Rin perks up at that. “I would like that! See you then Sekki-san!”
Rin takes off, Kero just catching up in time to rest on Rin's shoulder and play plush toy. Sekki chuckles and stands herself.

Tossing the empty cup into the garbage can – a perfect shot – Sekki walks away from the park with a smile on her face.

A knock on the partition has Satoshi look up from the book he's reading. “Excuse me, Sakamotosan, but there are some people to see you?”

Satoshi considers who might be visiting. His family has already visited and so have his friends so that leave...

“Let me come in.” 'It's the blasted police again...' Satoshi blinks as he realizes who he is seeing aren't police.

“You aren't police.” Is what comes out of his mouth and he winces.

Luckily the older man in front of him is more amused than insulted. “Yes. But at the same time we do have questions about what happened to you. If you are too uncomfortable...?”

Satoshi considers it and sees the exorcist pin on the priest in front of him. He weights his options. 'Well...I could just dismiss him but...dammit what I went through should be under their job description.'

“Sure you can stay.” Satoshi says, setting his book aside. “What do you want to know?”

“What your assailant looked like.” The priest then smiles. “Where are my manners? I'm Fujimoto Shirō.”

“Nice to meet you.” Satoshi replies, more out of manners than anything. “I assume you already know my name.”

“Yes. Sakamoto Satoshi-san, black belt of karate and champion of a tournament held last year.” Shirō has an amused look on his face. “Again, I would like to know what your assailant looked like.”

Satoshi groans. “I've told the police multiple times but they don't believe me. So, I hope you can.”

Shirō merely nods and waits.

“Well, looked rather like a girl. Sixteen I'd say. Pretty tall and slender looking. Wearing some kind of Chinese dress, in blue. In fact, she was entirely blue and I swear she was glowing slightly. Smashed me into pieces and I'm half surprised I lived. I didn't even want to fight but she charged at me and well...” Satoshi gives a half-shrug. “No one likes being hurt.”

“No they don't...” Shirō glances at the other man with him, who is writing down what Satoshi is saying. “Can you tell me anything else?”

Satoshi considers it for a moment then nods.

Shirō's frown deepens the longer the conversation goes, and finally he leaves after saying goodbye and thanks with a very dark look on his face.

Satoshi just hopes that means he can handle the problem.
Rin is very happy to still have Eiji's address. This time, he knocks on the front door and waits until someone answers.

To his surprise a small young girl is the one to answer. “Oh. Hello? Is Eiji in here?”

The little girl sticks her thumb in her mouth and slowly nods. Rin grins. “Can you tell him Okumura Rin is here?”

She nods again and trots away from the door. Rin only has to wait a few minutes before Eiji is heard asking loudly what is going on to “Chika” and soon enough he's in front of Rin.

“Oh.” Eiji colours at the sight of him, possibly because of the fact Chika is now being held in his arms.

Rin gives a little wave to Chika and is rewarded with a shy smile and giggle. “Yo Eiji. Wanted to ask you some things. Can I come in?”

Eiji considers it, then nods. “Sure. But um...”

“How many kids are here?” Rin asks as he takes off his shoes and accepts the guest uwabaki from Eiji.

“Four.” Eiji winces at Rin's expression. “They are my cousins.” He explains.

Rin eyes the front genkan for a bit, the messy pile of child-sized shoes. “They live here?”

Eiji sets Chika down and shoos her off, the little girl running off with a bright laugh. “Yeah. Um, my mother moved in with her sister and her husband after her divorce and we never moved out. I guess they like the free babysitters.”

Rin doesn’t comment on the divorce thing and the odd family household. His is far weirder after all. Following after Eiji, he's lead upstairs and, after a moment, Eiji offers some refreshment.

“W only really have juice and milk. Lemonade is the only special drink.” Eiji looks awkward and Rin smiles up at him.

“Lemonade is awesome.” Rin assures him.

Eiji steps back a moment then turns away, saying he'll bring something else as well.

That something else turns out to be mochi which Rin ends up cheerfully accepting. Eiji watches him oddly as he has some mochi, biting small bites because he has no desire to choke, before having a taste himself.

Rin's first sip of the lemonade makes him let out a pleased sound. “This is very good! Ginger?”

“Ah yes...it's a recipe my mom likes. Ginger syrup and lemon juice. Freshly squeezed lemon juice in fact.” Eiji glances down and has a sip of his lemonade as well. “She always makes big batches of it, but the kids love it so much it's good that she does.”

“Hmmm...I'd love to have this recipe.” Rin says after finishing off his glass. “So, about what I wanted to ask.”

Eiji blinks. “Right. What is it that you want to know?”

“I wondered if you know anything about those martial artists' attacks. The ones in Green Park.” Rin
does his best to sound casual, but Eiji can pick up the feeling of tension underneath.

Eiji recalls the event he witnessed last autumn. With that in mind, he decides to reveal something.

“I...actually can give you the police reports.” Rin looks shocked at that, watching as Eiji boots up his laptop and inserts a datastick into a port.

“Why do you have that?” Rin has to ask.

Eiji doesn't say anything for a time, too busy finding the right reports and collecting them all together before starting the printer in his room. “I have a backdoor into the system...I keep all I get on a separate datastick that's password locked. Don't want to spread things around, that would be too dangerous.”

“Is there a reason why you feel the need to have that?” Rin asks, standing and walking over to Eiji.

Eiji takes in a deep breath, then shakily releases it. “My father...well...I can't tell you all the details, but he was the kind of man that...beat both his wife and son. And he was worse than just that. The kind that gets police reports.”

Rin's eyes widen in realization and he lays a hand on Eiji's shoulder, squeezes it in a comforting manner. “I get it. So, what do you have on the incidents?”

“Every incident happened in Green Park...including some the police don't think are connected.” Eiji hands over the collections of paper. Rin settles down and Eiji sits with him, helping him sort through the papers.

Rin pauses as he looks at the other victims. A low level yakuza member, a salaryman, a mother, and strangely enough a few random high school students and yanki. All have the same MO but aside from the punks, none of them have connections to each other.

At least until Rin looks at the profiles made on them and frowns. Each one was going through a lot of stress or were rotten people like the yanki.

Rin recalls something he read about demons. About how they get into the cracks in people's hearts...

Rin chills as he realizes what all of these reports actually mean. 'All of these victims...they weren't human when attacked but demon. They were all possessed. Which would have made them...strong.'

A knock on the door shakes both Eiji and Rin out of their respective dazes. The door creaks open and a young boy pokes his head in. “It's time for lunch...”

Eiji stares for a moment, then pulls out his smartphone. He looks like he wants to curse. “Mom's supposed to be the one home for that...something must have happened at work.”

Eiji sighs and stands. “Sorry, but I need to handle lunch.”

“Let me help!” Rin offers cheerfully.

Eiji blinks and goes red. “Um...you don't have to do that?”

“Nah, it's fine.” Rin waves him off and pats the boy on the head as he heads out, Eiji scrambling to follow him. “Consider it repayment for the favour. So, where's the kitchen?”

The last is directed to the boy, who beams and grabs Rin's hand, dragging him off to the kitchen,
with Eiji following behind and wondering just what he's getting into.

Eiji lags behind the two so he ends up in the kitchen last and with Rin already looking through all the cupboards to find where everything is and to plan out the meal. Hesitantly, Eiji settles at the table and watches as Rin starts cooking up something simple but filling for everyone.

All of the kids immediately gravitate to Rin during this and Eiji can't help but find this scene quite charming as Rin handles the kids and cooking with a deft hand.

'It's like watching a housewife work.' And Eiji burns at the thought, especially as Rin goes for one of his mother's flowery aprons for cooking.

Eiji is half incoherent for the rest of the visit, something that even Rin notices but dismisses as unimportant. Kero, currently being played with by Chika (who was cautioned to be “gentle” and in fact is being gentle much to the little guardian's relief), does notice and has to shake his head in disbelief while Chika is distracted by asking a question of Rin.

Mostly at how Rin doesn't notice how Eiji tends to light up around him.

That night at the monastery, plans are laid out and the exorcists there discuss how they are going to handle this problem. As the ones to find out about this incident, they were given the mission to handle as they wish.

Upstairs, Rin is ignorant to this, too busy planning things himself and discussing the situation with Kero as quietly as possible. How he is to handle Fight, a very aggressive Card with amazing martial art skills that are made even more dangerous by the nature of the Card.

Due to the fact Rin has to wait for Yukio to go to sleep, Rin leaves an hour after Shirō and co head out.

A cry of “Fly!” and Rin heads up into the air, heading straight for Green Park.

Hoshi really wishes she could take another route home. But it's getting late enough that she's willing to risk cutting through Green Park to get to her apartment.

'Of course I work at a legal business. That's why I'm late for work, because of stinking over-time.' She mentally sneers at that and considers just how much of a coward her boss is. 'I'm going to have to do something about that at some point.'

Hoshi is not human. She's a demon but has no interest in causing trouble. She just likes living in Assiah and though her diet requires an unusual and possibly illegal job, she's otherwise harmless.

'As long as shitty exorcists stay out of the way.' Hoshi frowns as she considers a few close calls. Some people just take their morals too far and use them as excuse for exorcisms. Hell, her just being a demon is at times good enough for them.

'Lucky me, all straight men that are easily led around by their dick.' Hoshi finally steps into the park and hurries along it. She's heard through the grapevine how various demons have found themselves being kicked out of Assiah here and she is in no mood to deal with that either.

As soon as she steps on the bridge, the water erupts beside her. Stumbling back, Hoshi gapes at the blue girl in front of her. When she bows and takes a fighting stance, Hoshi gulps.
“Shit!” She cries and tries to run away.

But the strange girl follows her and Hoshi screams as the first hit comes at her.

The sound of screaming has Rin racing towards the bridge in the park. He halts just out of sight as he sees the situation.

“Dammit...” Rin goes to move in, only for Kero to stop him.

“Rin!” Kero whispers to him, making Rin turn and peer into the darkness under the trees nearby.

Rin mentally curses as he finally spots what's there; his father along with the other monks at the monastery. Rin then frowns and looks between them and the woman being attacked.

“Why aren't they helping her?” Rin demands.

“...probably because she's a demon...” Kero admits, sadly.

Rin growls at that and pulls out a Card. Looking up at the demoness being attacked, Rin firms up.

“Sleep, put my father and the rest to sleep!”

Sleep darts away and a few seconds later Rin can see them drop. Rin is moving as soon as he spots that, charging into battle and slamming into Fight, knocking her away and into the river.

The demoness stares up at Rin, shocked. “Wha...you...? Why are you...”

Rin glances back at her and snorts. “Do I LOOK like an exorcist to you? Get out!”

Hoshi can only numbly nod and, limping, heads away as fast as she can to her home. In her mind, she fixes the appearance of the strange boy who saved her. Just in case.

Meanwhile, Rin turns back to the river as Fight appears again, in another great splash as she bursts from the water and lands on the ground. Rin snarls at her, as she looks impassively at him and gives a short bow.

“You wanna fight?” Rin demands. “Then let's fight!”

Rin dodges the first punch thrown at him, turning his head as it goes past him. As it does, Rin goes to grab it and yanks hard, tossing Fight away again. She recovers fast this time, landing on her feet and charging straight back at Rin. Rin ducks down, hitting the grass and sliding slightly before he comes up again on the other side of Fight. Fight pauses to assess him for a moment, then charges again, kicking at him. Rin manages to grab the leg and, as Fight stares in shock, tosses her away. She rolls and neatly ends up on her feet, just in time for Rin to slam an elbow into her face, making her look dazed briefly upon which Rin grabs her arm and pulls, hard enough for something to be heard breaking.

Fight kicks back at Rin and he has to dodge, getting out of the way just in time as she hits hard. Fight shakes her arm and it seems to heal, making Rin frown. ‘Dammit...that's right, she's not a human or demon. She doesn't have the same limits as either do.’

Rin sighs and takes up another fighting stance, this time with the staff held at the ready. As Fight charges at him, Rin makes use of some skills he's learned in regards to staff fighting, or rather fighting with a metal pipe, adjusted for the weight and shape of the staff. The staff smacks into
Fight's stomach and then Rin ends up slamming into her torso with his free hand, sending her back again.

Fight seems to actually have a bit of respect on her face, but that doesn't comfort Rin, as Fight charges back in. And this time, she doesn't seem to be holding back, sending Rin flying down to the ground with a pained cry.

Kero watches in awe as the fight goes on, Rin managing to keep back Fight despite her amazing skill. His strength and knowledge of street fighting is coming in handy, and his almost random pattern seems to confuse Fight at times. At the same time, Rin is not getting out unscathed as Fight lands hits on him at times, sending him sprawling once or twice. But Rin gets up each and every time, wiping off the dirt and diving back into the fight.

'This...is amazing...' Kero recalls back to how it went with Sakura and finds Rin is more impressive than either the punk or punk girl. It's like a combo between their methods and Sakura's surprisingly successful method. Both raw but skilled at the same time, Rin is managing to keep Fight off balance and even unsure of how to fight him. The fact Rin seems to be copying some of Fight's techniques the longer the fight goes also helps there, making it so he's not just using normal fighting methods but is learning on the fly.

But it can't last, as even as Rin has amazing endurance, Fight has even more amazing endurance. Rin is already starting to limp and falter under his wounds.

Fight realizes it and goes on the offence, knocking Rin back.

“Rin!” Kero cries, flying his way only to be halted by Rin raising his hand and turning to Fight with a grin.

Fight pauses, obviously not sure what the response should be for that. Rin takes advantage, bringing up a Card. “Wind, be a binding chain! Windy, Release!”

Fight only has a moment to panic before Windy wraps around her. She struggles against Windy, starting to strain the high tier Card with her physical strength, only for Rin to already be prepared.

“Fight, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” In a swirl of light, Fight fades into Card form, Rin gracefully accepting the Card. “That handles you troublemaker.”

Rin looks out around the park, then falls to his knees, wincing and holding his arm. “Ow, ow, ow...”

“Rin...are you okay?” Kero hovers near Rin.

“I'm fine.” Rin gives a strained grin. “And don't worry...I can use Heal enough for this...don't want anyone to worry...”

A bright light covers him soon after that and, after pausing to check on the exorcists, Rin activates Fly and heads back home.

Just in time, as he misses some very confused exorcists waking up and wondering what happened.

Shirō is not in a good mood in the morning. Falling asleep during a mission is never good. The fact that it was probably induced by another demon doesn't make it any better.

‘And I don't know if the problem was solved...’ Shirō muses as he sits down at the table and grabs the newspaper. Scanning it, at least he doesn't see any more reports of attacks so perhaps the demon who
dosed him and the rest in some kind of sleeping dust handled it, as odd as that sounds.

At the same table, Rin pokes at his breakfast and glances up at Shirō at times.

'Last night...that was the first time I've seen him so ruthless...' Rin then recalls that no, he has seen him like that; but that was in the past. 'I didn't know he could be cruel...even if that was a demon, she didn't want to fight and obviously was trying to run away, only fighting to escape.'

Rin sighs and starts eating his breakfast. Yukio, beside him, wonders at his poor mood this morning, but can't think of any cause. Ultimately, Yukio decides it will be best to just let Rin talk about it when he's ready to. Yukio doesn't know what happened after all, so he can't help until he does.

Rin, meanwhile, truly starts to consider the relationship between demons and humans. Wondering if things are as clear cut as he thought when he first heard about them...

Chapter End Notes

Well, what did you think? Comment below and get the next chapter!

Countdown to finale: 11

Cards Remaining: 12
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

Thanks to all who commented! Keep up the good work folks, I really appreciate it all. It gives me something to go back to when I'm feeling a bit down on myself as much as it being good for the chapter when I get it.

I'm going to be busy for a bit, and I have been for awhile already, but I'll stick to my posting schedule of Mondays and Fridays.

In universe, it's been exactly a year since Rin became a Cardcaptor and a few other things were set in motion. You'll see what has changed and what has stayed the same.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Flowers in bloom, cherry blossoms in particular, are ubiquitous when it comes to the start of the school year. Beautiful pink petals falling and covering the ground and dancing in the air.

The amount of petals at Rin’s school though are extremely unusual, what with being multiple feet deep, which is why he went to investigate.

This somehow leads to him now being twirled around and around by a cheerful Card that leads him into a dance.

“Woaah! Kero!” Rin yells, trying to get free from the Card.

Kero sighs and just watches as Flower leads Rin in a dance. “As Ah was tryin’ to tell you, Flower is harmless. She just likes to have fun and celebrate.”

Dizzy, Rin finally disentangles himself from Flower. “Waah...” Rin blinks and shakes his head, then looks towards Flower.

Flower merely smiles and waits, crossing her hands in front of her. Rin blinks, then smiles back and raises the staff.

“Flower, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Bright light whisks Flower into Card form, Rin catching her gracefully. He then turns and pulls out another Card. “Erase, get rid of the flower petals!”

A bright flash and all around him, the crazy flower petals that threatened to drown the school disappear, leaving various people confused.

Rin sighs and looks out at the school. He then grins and laughs.

“What a way to start my second year!” He proclaims gleefully to Kero, spreading out his arms to encompass the whole school.

And so does Rin's second year of Junior High begin.
Chapter 33: Flowers & Sweets for Birthdays

Yukio turns around at the sound of his name and sighs, seeing Rin running towards him. “There you are Nii-san. Where were you?”

“No like I could help it with all the weird flowers...some kind of public stunt?” Rin wonders, scratching the back of his head.

“It’s publicity stunt...” Yukio then dismisses it, though he also wonders at how the flowers appeared and then disappeared. “Anyways, let's see where we are assigned for classes.”

Rin grins at that and, holding his hands on his head, follows Yukio towards the board. There's a crowd around it of course, so both boys end up having to crane their necks a bit.

“I don't see your name...” Rin frowns as he looks at the class lists. “Oh wait I see you! 2-A.”

“...you're 2-B.” Yukio says quietly.

Rin freezes. “What?”

Yukio gestures to the board and Rin looks at the names listed there. “…we...aren't in the same class...?”

Yukio bites his lip. “It appears so…”

Rin doesn’t say anything, just staring. Yukio doesn't blame him. He's also feeling off-balance by that, just better at hiding it. They have always been together in classes, except for Yukio's “cram school”, so suddenly being split this year is a great shock.

“Look, you've got Tsukishiro-sensei as a homeroom teacher.” Yukio points out gently. “So it can't all be that bad.”

Rin slowly nods. “Yeah...”

Yukio eyes his brother, worried about how he's taking the split. The sudden silence from him is actually quite disturbing, especially with how lost he seems.

’We can handle this. Nii-san can handle it...we still can spend lunch together.’ Yukio consoles himself, then winces as he recalls how he at times gets called out for missions during lunch period.

Yukio turns to Rin again, this time meeting his gaze. And realizes something.

Things will truly never be the same.

Rin stands in front of the door to his new classroom, looking up at the sign above the door. He then sighs and looks down. Absently, he looks behind him but he knows Yukio isn't coming. He had already delayed this by walking with Yukio to his classroom.

Reaching out, Rin pauses at the fact he's trembling. ‘Great...I can handle the Cards but this is scary.’ Rin takes in a deep breath and pulls at the door, opening it.

The sound of the door has all the students inside – and Rin thinks perhaps all, or almost all, of his classmates are there – turn to look at the door. Then again, it's late enough it's almost time for a teacher to come.
The aura of the class changes immediately. Before Rin walked in, they were all laughing and talking, getting to know each other cheerfully or reuniting happily with friends. But now that Okumura Rin is in view, they all freeze and watch him in horror as he stands in the doorway.

Rin sways for a moment, debating running, then steels himself and walks in. Their eyes seem to pierce him as he goes to the opposite side of the classroom, the side with the windows, and looks for a seat. Those on that side jump out of the way and back away from Rin's location as he settles down in a window seat like he prefers. The desk beside him will stay empty the rest of the year, Rin knows that too well, and it makes something twist inside him.

After a long silence, chatter slowly starts to return to the classroom. Not about Rin, they seem to be trying to ignore him instead. But nervous chatter is still nervous, even with the topics trying to be cheerful.

Rin sighs and sets his arm on the desk, leaning against his hand and staring out the window. He frowns as just that movement has people jumping and falling silent in fear once more.

And when they finally turn to talk again, this time they are talking about Rin.

“Oh man...the demon without his brother....” One guy gulps at that.

“Isn't the demon dangerous no matter what?” Another whispers back to him.

“No, no! I've heard that he's actually on a leash around his brother. Won't be dangerous if his little brother is around.”

“Scary...”

Rin bites his lip and does his best to keep his temper.

Across the room, a group of girls discuss this as well.

“The demon...in our classroom...ugh I wanted it to be Yukio-kun!” One wails.

“That would have been much better. Everyone knows he's a demon.” This girl shakes her head, long hair sweeping her shoulders. “Why do they even let him into the school?”

“And Umino-chan is going to have to deal with him...” The third shivers. “She's the class rep after all...”

“Uh? But we haven't voted for Class Rep yet.” The second points out. The first is still mumbling something about Yukio and is away from that conversation.

“But is there any doubt?” She counters back.

Rin finally has enough as he can hear others continue talking about the “demon” and he can feel his temper rising. Not wanting any incidents, Rin wrangles his temper for now and stands up. The screech of his chair makes everyone turn to look at him and pale, failing silent.

Rin does his best to ignore that and heads to the door, planning on staying away from class instead of staying. Even if Sekki is his homeroom teacher.

But as he goes to open the door, it opens instead on him. Rin gets a flash of brown eyes and pale hair, then the sound of glass breaking ringing out as they collide breaks the brief eye contact and Rin's eyes drop down.
A glass vase is on the ground, in multiple pieces and with water seeping out. Rin can see the flowers that are now scattered on the ground, looking rather limp despite still having vibrant colours.

Rin swallows and looks up, intending to apologize. Instead the girl in front of him growls. “What the fuck was that for?”

Rin blinks. “What?”

“You did that on purpose, didn’t you?” She snarls at him, stepping forward. Instinctively Rin steps back. “You...you demon! That was for Tsukishiro-sensei!”

Rin glances down at the flowers again and feels a bit of hurt. Of course someone would bring flowers for Sekki, she's the most popular teacher at this school. And she deserves them too.

But the girl isn't done and she grabs his collar. “What kind of sick and twisted person are you? I've heard everything, all the rumours, and didn't want to believe, but breaking a vase of flowers for shits and giggles?”

Rin can feel everyone stare at him and knows they are thinking the same thing. Something snaps and when the girl goes to hit Rin, Rin grabs her hand in a tight grip, making her squeak and pale in pale.

“Shut up. If that was anyone's fault, it was yours for not watching where you were going. I just happened to be here when the door opened you stupid bitch!” Rin snarls at her, giving her a shake for a good measure. Rin then snorts and, glancing down, pushes her back. “You are the one stepping on the flowers.”

Watery brown eyes look down and sees that he's speaking the truth. While ranting at Rin, she had stepped on the flowers.

Rin lets her go and pushes her aside. Stepping over the flowers, Rin heads out of the classroom, as casually as he can.

But as soon as he's out of sight, he slams his hand into the wall – careful of his strength – and feels tears pricking at his eyes.

“That was great Rin.’ He sneers at himself, wiping at his eyes with his other hand. ’Great first impression.’

Rin then pushes himself away from the wall, heading up towards the roof. Forget class, Rin already knows just how shitty things are and doesn't need to make them worse.

Lying down on the roof, Rin takes in a deep breath of the fresh spring air. Though a part of him is scolding himself (sounding remarkably like Yukio in fact) for giving up so quickly and forgetting his bag in the classroom, the vast majority is busy enjoying the weather and just letting things be.

Eventually Rin opens his closed eyes and looks up at the blue sky. There are many puffy clouds above and Rin squints up at them.

“That one looks like a flower...and that one is a tanuki...and hmm....those are glasses.’ Rin's slowly regained cheer drops at that. 'Just like Yukio's.’

Rin rolls over and stares at the fence that surrounds the roof. He wishes that he and Yukio weren't split up because then maybe that wouldn't have gone so bad.
I wonder how much work went into that bouquet...’ Rin sighs and rolls over again to face the sky.

The problem is three-fold. First is the rumours that still swirl around about Rin. He would have thought they would stop, but aside from being popular rumours there is the fact Rin at times unintentionally confirms them with his strength and even attitude.

Second is the fact Rin does not know how to make friends. In fact, he honestly doesn’t want any friends. Friends are targets and it’s bad enough he knows it’s possible for random people to get dragged into the Cardcaptor problems. The fact he knows his entire family has targets on their back for associating with him is another reason Rin rather avoid that.

Third, and finally, without Yukio to act as a strange buffer in class, Rin knows that he's going to be avoided even more than usual. He heard what they said; everyone believes Yukio is a “living shield” against Rin's demonic nature, that as long as Yukio is around everyone is safe.

’And without him... everyone assumes I'm going to do evil things.’ Rin growls at that. He then covers his eyes with an arm and wonders just exactly how he's going to survive school at this rate.

Yukio wasn't quite sure what he expected when he headed up to the roof. Well, actually he did, he just had hoped he was wrong.

Instead he is right and he can see his brother lying on the ground in front of him.

Sighing, Yukio can't find it in him to be angry with Rin. Apparently an accident plus how the rest of his classmates treated him made Rin leave the classroom. At least that's the impression Yukio got after shifting through the chuff for the truth in what all of Rin's future classmates said about him.

’And just as I was going to check on him...’ Yukio shakes his head and walks up to Rin. “Nii-san. Are you okay?”

There’s silence for a long moment.

“Not really.” Rin admits, uncovering his face and looking up at Yukio. “This sucks.”

“Yeah, it does.” Yukio agrees, sitting down next to Rin. “But running won't help.”

“...I rather run even knowing that...” Rin admits, slowly sitting up himself.

“I don't really believe that.” Yukio says softly and Rin looks away from him. “Nii-san, you can do it. At least try for the first week or so. Then...we'll see. I'd rather you keep up as you did last year.”

Rin gives a frail smile at that. “I didn't really see myself surviving the first year so well...”

“To be truthful neither did I.” Yukio laughs at Rin's disgruntled face. “Not because of academics but because well...you aren't really accepted by others. I thought you might prefer skipping instead of dealing with that.”

“I might still like that better...” Rin admits, glancing down at his hand which is trailing patterns in the concrete. “It's not fun. Any of this.”

“But you can do it Nii-san.” Yukio stands up and dusts off his pants. “Come on. Let's try again?”

Rin looks at the offered hand and smiles, letting Yukio lift him up and then following his brother back downstairs.
“Thank Yukio.” Rin says softly.

Yukio doesn't say anything back, just smiles softly. But Rin knows he was heard and is happy for that at the least. Yukio is still the first person through the door and Rin hesitates at the stairs before steeling himself and following Yukio down.

As they turn down the stairs to the right floor, they start to hear footsteps. Slowing down as to not run into them, Rin and Yukio pause as they see someone go by. A random guy, Rin not recognizing him except thinking he's seen him briefly before.

Rin shrugs it off and turns to Yukio. “See you after school.”

Yukio smiles and nods, taking the opposite hallway to Rin to get to class on time. Rin, feeling better, heads towards the classroom. The sound of more footsteps has him turn and this time he sees the girl from before. She's carrying something again, so Rin makes to move out of the way.

But she slows down as she sees him and scowls at him. “You. What the hell are you doing here?”

“Heading back to class.” Rin twitches at that.

“Hell no!” She snarls. “A brute like you shouldn't be there at all. You'll just upset Tsukishiro-sensei.”

“Excuse me? What the fuck did you say?” Rin steps forward towards her. “What gives you the right to decide anything about Sek—Tsukishiro-sensei.”

She stares up at him with wide eyes, then they narrow in suspicion. “What were you going to call her?”

Rin flinches slightly. 'Shit.' “Not your business. Anyways, Tsukishiro-sensei should be at the classroom soon so I'm going to get there before I'm written off as late. See ya.”

“Why you--” She goes to come after him again, only to trip over her feet in her rush. Rin turns, trying to catch her and what she's carrying but she snarls and twists away from him.

With a clattering sound the box breaks open and reveals a now very smashed cake. Rin stares at that, then turns back to the girl.

She's trembling in rage, but Rin can see tears in her eyes. “You...demon!”

Rin doesn't want anything to do with her so, without thinking about it, takes off and runs. Away from the classroom and the crazy girl.

Rin slows down as he realizes just what he did and ends up cursing again. 'Wonderful...though it would have been nice if that girl didn't have such a temper...' Rin sighs and looks around.

He's in the special class hallway, the one with more specific needs than just desks and a blackboard. The art room is here amongst others. And Rin didn't expect to see the light on in one or heard the sound of voices.

Curious, Rin approaches the door and looks up at the sign. It's the cooking classroom and, after a moment, Rin opens the door.

He's surprised at what he sees. Naoko and Miho are within and in the middle cleaning up the mess from making something. The sound of the door opening has them both look up and towards it and thus Rin.
“Okumura-kun?” Naoko stares at him, then bursts into a big smile. “Okumura-kun! Nice to see you!”

“Uh...yeah...” Rin looks around the room and winces as he starts to put two and two together. Or rather putting together the now smashed cake and the currently being cleaned cooking room.

“Hey, did you see my name on the board?” Naoko asks excitedly. “We are in the same class this year, isn't that awesome!”

Rin blinks slowly at that. “Uh...oh, really?” Rin puts on a smile. “What were you doing here?”

Miho, who returned to cleaning while Naoko is distracted by Rin, is the one who answers. “Making a cake for Tsukishiro-sensei. It's her--”

“Birthday.” Rin smiles and shrugs at the look he gets for it. “I asked a while back and...I even got her something.”

“Umino-chan wanted to make something of a party for her. Flowers and cake for Tsukishiro-sensei.” Naoko says cheerfully. She then notices Rin's face. “Oh dear...something happened didn't it?”

Rin scratches the back of his head. “Well...the flowers got crushed awhile back...”

“Oh no...” Miho winces, knowing what's coming next.

“And the cake just got smashed because that stupid girl wouldn't let me catch her.” Rin grumbles.

Naoko blinks. “Stupid girl...you must mean Umino Mizuki. Oh dear, she was grumbling about you when she came to pick up the cake. Umino-chan isn't a bad girl, but she's got a temper and is very stubborn too.”

“And now all our hard work is for nothing...it took a lot of work to get permission to use this room...” Miho wails.

Rin watches as Naoko comforts Miho, mind whirling. “Um...I think I can fix this but um...”

Naoko turns to look at him, as does a teary-eyed Miho. Rin shifts, and crosses his arms. “But um...I can't have you seeing it...”

Naoko stares at Rin, then something seems to almost audibly click. “Oh! Come on Miho-chan, let's go outside and wait for Rin to make things better!”

“Uh? Naoko-chan!” Miho protests as Naoko drags her friend out. “What is he going to do?”

The door shuts and Rin sighs. He looks out at the classroom and smiles. A thought has three cards whirling up out of his holster.

Rin looks at Bubbles, Sweet, and the newly obtained Flower with a bright smile. “First things first...best clean this place up.”

Rin pulls out his Key and takes a deep breath, centring himself. “Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!”

Grasping the staff, Rin focuses first on Bubbles. “Clean this place up until it sparkles! Bubbles, Release!”

Pink bubbles whirl out and cover the classroom, the sound of cheerful giggles being heard until the
bubbles disperse and reveal the room is now sparkling clean.

Rin grins and catches Bubbles. “Thanks.”

He then turns to Sweet and Flower. “I need the perfect birthday cake for Tsukishiro-sensei and wonderful bouquet and flowers for her too. Sweet, Flower, Release!”

Outside the room, Miho jumps at the lights and sounds coming from the room. “What's going on there?”

Naoko giggles and holds up a finger, pressing it to her lips. “Best to pretend we saw and heard nothing. Okumura-kun needs to keep it secret after all!”

Miho eyes Naoko, then something shifts behind her eyes. “Ghostbuster uh?”

“Hmm...thinking it's more like a Magical Boy honestly now...” Naoko muses.

Miho stares at Naoko for a little longer then sighs. She then shakes her head, turning as the door opens. She brightens at what she sees in Rin's hands and Naoko claps her hands in glee.

“Oh that's perfect! Let's get them to the classroom quick!”

Umio Mizuki washes her face in the washroom, feeling horrible despite having completely cleaned up the mess.

'My party idea...’ Mizuki wilts under the knowledge it all went crashing down.

And as much as she would like to blame the demon, she knows it's mostly her fault.

“Ugh! Stupid me and my temper and my stupid, stupid pride!” She berates herself, before sighing and staring at herself in the mirror. ‘I really need to learn how to control that...but the meditation I tried over spring break didn't really work...’

Sighing again, she leaves the washroom and resigns herself to disappointing everyone that was so looking forward to the small party.

As she's heading towards the classroom, Mizuki is not paying attention and thus bumps into someone. “Oh sorry--” Mizuki snaps her mouth shut when she meets the purple gaze of Tsukishiro Sekki.

Sekki looks her up and down and then smiles. “I believe you are one of my students...what are you doing out here?”

“Oh I was...just in the washroom...” Mizuki looks awkwardly away from Sekki, something which has the teacher blinking.

“All the way over here, hm?” Sekki chuckles. “Alright. I must apologize about the teachers' meeting that got called and threw everything off schedule. You all should have already gone home by now.”

“Oh, it's alright! I'm sure everyone is fine. More time to get to know our future classmates!” Mizuki says cheerfully.

Sekki smiles at that. “I hope you all can get along. Especially with Rin-kun...he's really a nice boy.”

Mizuki blinks at that and stares at Sekki. 'Is that for real or are you just that nice?' She wonders,
falling in step beside Sekki and walking with her to the classroom.

The closer they get to the classroom, the more Mizuki's stomach churns in nervousness. By the time they reach it, Mizuki opens her mouth to explain what she originally planned.

“Happy birthday!”

Mizuki stares, as does Sekki, at the revealed classroom. There are some streamers set up around the place and plenty of flowers scattered all around. In front of the door is Naoko, who is holding a gorgeous bouquet of flowers and offering them to Sekki.

Sekki looks surprised and a little lost, glancing at her things in her arms. Mizuki wrangles her brain and steps forward, quietly offering and getting Sekki's work books so she can accept the flowers.

“Oh these are lovely...did you all do this?” She looks around classroom in wonder.

“It was Umino-chan's idea.” Naoko chirps.

“Umino...” Sekki turns and smiles at Mizuki. “Umino-kun, thank you so much. This is very thoughtful.”

Mizuki goes red, flustered at this. “Well um...happy birthday Tsukishiro-sensei.”

“We even have cake!” One boy in the back calls. “Can you come and blow out the candles? We want to have some too Tsukishiro-sensei!”

This has ripples of laughter spring up in the classroom, while Mizuki stares. 'Cake? But...’ She halts in front of the desk, which is covered by a cake. A very large, fancy one.

Covered in white icing with purple trim and purple flowers, it also has dark chocolate writing on top spelling out “Happy Birthday, Tsukishiro Sekki” and a few candles. In front of it is Miho, who is carefully now lighting the candles with a lighter before stepping back.

“Why...this is simply amazing...” Sekki looks over the cake, beaming in happiness, while Mizuki wonders at the fact she can see three layers in that cake as much as noticing just how big and square it is.

'We don't need that much cake...do we?' Mizuki wonders.

Naoko appears at Mizuki's shoulder and whispers in her ear, “Okumura-kun made that cake for Tsukishiro-sensei. Can't tell you how but he assures me that Tsukishiro-sensei has a big appetite and with all the teenaged boys around I don't see that many leftovers!” She then giggles. “Plus, plenty of girls like me can pack away more than we look like we can!”

Mizuki stares wide eyed at Naoko, then slowly turns. Rin's in the back, staying away from the big crowd around the cake now singing happy birthday and cheering as Tsukishiro-sensei blows out the candles. He has a smile on his face and looks relaxed.

For a moment their eyes meet, then Mizuki turns away, feeling flustered. She doesn't notice the hurt expression that briefly flickers across Rin's face before he smooths it out and just sighs resignedly.

As the cake cutting begins, Mizuki wonders how much she misjudge Rin and burns with the shame of it.

'I'm going to have to make up for it...but how?' Mizuki has no clue how exactly to do that.
She does know one thing though:

Rin is no demon.

The chatter of the students leaving school fills the air as much as the flowers do. Yukio waits by the gate, trying to spot Rin in the ground.

A hand on his shoulder makes him jump. “Yo!”

Yukio turns and sighs, smiling slightly, at the sight of his brother. “Nii-san.”

“Hey Yukio. How did your day go?” Rin asks, rocking back on his heels.

“Alright. Except for the teachers' meeting throwing things off schedule.” Yukio replies, mentally adding, 'Also I got approached by too many giggling girls but you don't need to know that.' “How did yours go?”

“Not bad. We had a party.” Rin grins at Yukio's dumbfounded look. “What? Didn't I tell you that Tsukishiro-sensei's birthday is today?”

Yukio has a long moment, then groaning slaps his forehead. “Ugh. I completely forgot. And I got her something too...”

Rin sniggers. “Figure you did considering you forgot this.”

Yukio blinks and accepts the package Rin offers him, recognizing it after a moment as the small gift he got Sekki. “Oh...thank you Nii-san.”

“You're welcome!” Rin chirps. “How about you go and give it to her. I...need to wait for someone so you go on ahead. I'll catch up soon.”

Yukio eyes Rin for a moment, then slowly nods and heads toward the school. As he does, he almost bumps into a girl who looks lost in thought. Apologizing softly, he turns to see her approach Rin. Blinking, confused, Yukio decides to ask Rin about it later, focusing on getting his present to Tsukishiro-sensei.

'Only fair since she got me a gift for my birthday...'

Rin eyes Mizuki warily, wondering what she wants.

Mizuki shifts slightly, as everyone moves past and luckily doesn't stop to stare at them. Small blessings that.

“...Thank you.” She says finally. “For saving the party.”

Rin blinks, a little surprised by that, and flushes. “W-well...it was your idea. And it was for Tsukishiro-sensei.”

Mizuki eyes him out of the corner of her eye, then sighs and holds out her hand. “Truce? Not asking to be friends, but we will be classmates the entire year.”

Rin glances down at it and, after a moment, accepts the hand held out for him. “Sure.”

Mizuki steps back quickly and, after a quick nod, leaves out of the gate, with Rin watching her with
a curious look on his face.

'I wonder why she did that...' Rin shrugs then turns back to the school. He also has a present to give Sekki and he best give it before the day is over.

Sekki looks up as she senses Rin, so that she's already looking at the door just before he enters. She smiles at the sight of him and finds it returned.

“Happy birthday Tsukishiro-sensei.” Rin says softly once he reaches her desk. The teachers' office isn't that busy today, most likely because the meeting that got rescheduled to earlier for whatever reason made it so not many have a reason to stay.

“Thank you.” Sekki glances down at the lovely book Yukio gave her. “Did you see your brother?”

Rin blinks. “No. I honestly thought he might still be here.”

“He got a call from his cram school and had to leave. You must have just missed him. Told me to tell you about that.” Sekki watches as Rin's face flickers through various expressions.

“Aaah...I guess that's normal.” Rin reaches into his bag and pulls out two things; the “plush toy” that is Kero who he sets on the desk and a small package.

After Sekki and Kero give a soft greeting to each other and Kero also wishes her a happy birthday, Rin passes over the small wrapped package of his.

Sekki smiles up at him. “You didn't have to.”

“You've helped me so much.” Rin blushes under Sekki's gaze. “I...just want to give you something back.”

Sekki blushes a bit at that herself, and slowly unwraps the gift Rin gave her. “Oh...these are lovely...” She lifts up the two purple ribbons within, simple but gorgeous.

“They match your eyes.” Rin blushes, knowing how silly that sounds. “I figured they would be nice for a special occasion.”

“They are beautiful...don't tell me you made them yourself?” Sekki asks. Rin mutely nods in response. “You are very talented Rin-kun. Thank you.”

At another desk, the gym teacher watches this exchange with a deep scowl on his face, then pointedly turns away.

“So, Rin-kun...do you think your second year will be good too?” Sekki asks him gently.

Rin opens his mouth then pauses. Thinking of all that happened today. He then gives a slow smile.

“You know what? I think I can survive.”

Sekki smiles again at that and turns to look out at the window. A strange look crosses her face before her smile returns, twice as strong and beautiful. “I believe it will be the same for me.”

It truly is a wonderful day.

Chapter End Notes
Well, what do you think? This is a change-over chapter. Things aren't ever going to be the same for Rin and Yukio, and they will continue to get further away. Thoughts there? Leave comments of any, good kind and you get the next chapter!

Countdown to Finale: 10

Cards Remaining: 11
Chapter Notes

Thank you all for the comments! I really appreciate them!

This is another breather episode type chapter. Things should pick up again on Monday.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The monastery is ever cheerful as usual. School is doing well and their spring cleaning went on without fuss, allowing them all to settle down to a lovely dinner with a small cheesecake as dessert.

“Pass the stir-fry please.” One of the monks calls, eagerly accepting the plate and putting some of the food on his plate before passing it on to another monk.

“You got everything you need?” Rin asks as Yukio passes on the final dish.

Yukio smiles and nods. “Yeah, I'm fine.”

Rin eyes Yukio's plate then shrugs and gets the croquettes so he can have one on his plate. Aside from conversations and chatter about various things, dinner is very calm and peaceful today.

Rin is in a good mood, thinking back to last year's spring cleaning. Though he skipped the cleaning in favour of trying his first cake recipe, what with Little running around things got very interesting.

'This year no problem there!' Rin thinks cheerfully, happy to not have to deal with Cards today. Though plenty of chores to do, it was relaxing compared to stopping another disaster or nearly getting eaten by a shrew or worse.

As dinner finishes up, Rin and Yukio stand up to help clear the dishes. A shout from Izumi has them turning and looking confused at him.

“Oi, did Yukio grow?”

That question has the entire group staring at the boys who get increasingly uncomfortable with the scrutiny. Shirō stands up and wanders behind the boys, placing his hands on their heads. They complain at it, but Shirō ignores them in favour of bending down to eyeball their heights.

“Yup...I'd say Yukio's about an inch taller than Rin now.”

“What?” Rin looks at Yukio and does some measurement with his hands. “Hey, why did only you grow!”

Yukio looks embarrassed. “Um...well, we are fraternal twins...”

“No fair!” Rin whines. “Why are you bigger? I'm the eldest!”

Shirō chuckles as Yukio looks increasingly flustered by Rin's whining and complaining, settling back to watch the boys.

'So it begins...' Shirō's grin widens as he considers the fact this is the time when the boys are really
going to start growing up.

'Should be interesting...' Is his thought, though a small part of him worries for that. What it might mean for the boy's relationship.

“'You should at least share that height growth with me!'” Rin complains, making Shirō finally lose it and start laughing. He doesn't stop even as Rin gets increasingly annoyed and demands him to stop already.

Rin pouts and crosses his arms. “Fine. No cake for Oyaji.” Then a pause. “Or Yukio either.”

Chapter 34: Grow Big!

Yukio sweats nervously as he walks to school. The source of Yukio's nervousness comes from his brother, who is still grumbling to himself about the revelation that he is now shorter than his younger brother.

'He can't honestly have thought us to stay the same height.' Yukio has to admit that he honestly didn't see himself getting taller than Rin. As the younger, sickly brother, him being the taller one seems to come out of nowhere.

“Nii-san...” Yukio twitches as Rin turns to him, still looking irritated.

“What?” Rin snaps.

“We...are at the school now...”

Rin blinks and turns to look out at the school before them. And the vast array of students that are keeping a large space clear between them and Rin.

“Oh...” Rin shoots one more annoyed look at the minor height distance between him and Yukio, then heads inside the school, looking more casual suddenly.

Yukio sighs in relief and follows his brother inside to switch his shoes for uwabaki. He then notices Rin is scowling at a nearby fellow student and for a moment wonders why he's doing it.

Then it clicks and Yukio sighs, this time in annoyance. Rin is still thinking about height and how he's the short one now, considering how he doesn't seem to like anyone who is even slightly taller than him now.

Rin is not the only one to be thinking about height. In another section of the school, a girl measures herself against another.

“No fair Sayaka-chan...you are like a weed.” Hiromi pouts but her eyes sparkle up at her friend.

“Well...it seems to be genetic...” Sayaka rubs her head, a little embarrassed. “And it's not as cool as it seems...I feel all gangly all over again.”

“And you hit your head this morning too.” Hiromi giggles a bit, remembering at what she was told about how Sayaka woke up today. Racing out her door at her alarm going off and hitting her head on the door frame on the way to the bathroom.

Sayaka makes a rueful smile at that. “Well, once I get my balance back from this growth spurt, I'm going to have to go off and get the track team in gear. I'm the new team captain after all.”
“I'm sure you'll do wonderful Sayaka-chan.” Hiromi cheers her on, getting a blush out of her in that regard. “You deserve the position of team captain after all.”

“Hehe thanks...though I wish there wasn't so much paperwork involved.” Sayaka groans at the thought. “If I had known all about the paperwork, I would have let some other sap have the job.”

Hiromi giggles. “You are just saying that. If you really disliked it, you would have already left.”

“That's true.” Sayaka turns to look out at the court below, where all the sports fields are. “Hmm...best to get some practise in as much as brainstorm methods to get new members....”

“Hmm...and I have to help out with the music club as well.” Hiromi then laughs. “We are both going to be very busy this year, aren't we?”

“Yeah...between clubs and exams...but I'll make time for you.” Sayaka smiles down at Hiromi and, after a quick look around, presses a kiss to her cheek.

Hiromi blushes in embarrassment at that, but a happy smile is on her face nonetheless. “I'll hold you to that Sayaka-chan.”

“...it includes everything from elementary equation solving to the study of abstractions such as groups, rings, and fields. The more basic parts of algebra are called elementary algebra, the more abstract parts are called abstract algebra or modern algebra.”

Rin barely stifles a yawn as the math teacher drones on about the background of algebra, which they are currently diving into. Glancing around the class, he notices he's not the only one whose eyes are glazing over as the teacher goes on and on.

'When is he going to actually start teaching...' Rin wonders, turning his head to pay attention again and making a soft snort of disgust as he's still talking about things. Who cares where it comes from, Rin just wants to get the lesson over with.

'Will I really need this...' Rin considers, as the teacher finally moves forward and starts writing down examples on the board. Pulling out his notebook, Rin writes down the notes he has to take, annoyed but knowing it's needed.

Looking at the mere concept of algebra suggests that Rin will never honestly use it in his day to day life. This entire thing is for people who want to do more advanced jobs, like scientists or something.

Rin doesn't see that in his future and for a moment Rin has to wonder at what he can qualify for. Certainly he could see about going past Junior High to Senior High, but what's the point? After that Rin can't see any way of getting into college.

'Besides, the money will be better spent on Yukio...' Rin sighs and drags his attention back to the present lesson. The less trouble here, the easier it will be in the future.

Rin thus resigns himself to being bored silly by most of his lessons and wishes that he could have Sekki for more classes. Or at least a teacher like her.

'Why must everything be boring...' Rin sighs again and starts scratching out an attempt to solve one of the problems as ordered.

Eiji wants to rub his forehead but manages to contain the reaction, somehow answering his newest
question with a straight face. The squeals of joy from the girl in front of him just add to the headache growing and once she's gone, Eiji shuts his smartphone and decides to get out while he can.

'Maybe I can avoid having to deal with...that so-called question again.' Eiji rubs his head as he leaves his current “office”, considering what's going on today.

Of all the things to get him money, the fact that Okumura Yukio is officially going through a growth spurt and shot up 1 inch is not what he expected. Then again, Yukio is on his way to an unofficial fanclub thanks to various factors including all the first year girls who look at him with worshipful eyes whenever he turns that bland smile on them.

'Intellectually I can see the appeal but...' Eiji sighs. They are loving a shadow...

Eiji slips into an abandoned classroom, settling down on a desk and pulls out his smartphone. Scrolling through his information he settles on what he learned about Rin today. Or at least heard about him.

Apparently he's frustrated with Yukio's growth spurt since nothing major has happened with him yet in the height area. The rumours about why are hilariously inaccurate.

“The least ridiculous is how he prefers Yukio to be vulnerable...” Eiji snorts out-loud about that one. “And everyone somehow manages to keep thinking Okumura Yukio is the elder while he continuously refers to Okumura Rin as Nii-san...”

“I like the money but this is demeaning...” Eiji feels a bit dirty. Not just for the information type, but because of all the girls willing to pay 500 yen just for exactly how much Okumura Yukio grew.

They are very creepy...’ Eiji shudders again and looks up as he hears voices. He recognizes them as female voices and slips over to hide in a nearby storage locker for cleaning supplies.

When the girls burst into the room, they are surprised to find no one there. But they don't give up and start looking around for where he might have gone.

Sighing, and checking that the lock on the supply locker is secure, Eiji settles down with the volume off on his smartphone for some mindless games until the silly girls finally give up.

Sekki stretches out, letting out a sigh of relief. “Thank you so much for the assistance Umino-kun.”

Mizuki smiles. “No problem. As the new Class Rep I should be helping with some of these.” She carefully stacks the completed paperwork up and stands along with Sekki with her own pile of paperwork.

“Still, you didn't truly have to.” Sekki sparkles down at Mizuki. “You are a good person Umino-kun.”

Mizuki flushes at that, then speeds up her walking a bit to keep up with Sekki's long strides.

After a long moment, Mizuki finally asks Sekki something that has been bothering her.

“Okumura Rin...um...what exactly do you think of him?” Mizuki eyes Sekki who halts in surprise at the question.

“What I think...hmmm...I believe I already told you. He's a good and sweet boy.” Sekki explains calmly.
“Yes but um...” Mizuki looks down. “Why?”

“Why? Simply because he's kind. He might be abrasive, but Rin-kun has a very good heart and means it when he helps others.” Sekki adjusts her bundle. “I honestly think if people would just push past their misconceptions, they would find a very good friend in him.”

“I see...” Mizuki looks thoughtful about this.

There is not more conversation after that, but Sekki is happy to have some progress. Perhaps if others come at Rin for friendship, the walls he's building will come crashing down.

‘No one can live alone...’ Sekki thinks with a sigh.

Something Rin dearly needs to learn is to rely on others. Of those he relies on, there are only two he truly completely relies on. And Yukio is not among them.

It's the last that worries Sekki the most.

Back at the monastery at the end of the day, Rin is twitching. The reason he's twitching is very obvious.

“Look out short stuff! Almost didn't see you!” Izumi grins and ruffles Rin head, ignoring the deep growl coming from the teen.

“Now now...he's not that short...no wait, trick of the light.” Another monk sniggers.

“Being a shrimp isn't bad. You can get into so many interesting places!” Nagatomo decides to be “helpful” there. “Like helping with cleaning under the altar, which, I do incidentally need help with today.”

Yukio wants to slam his book – a big medical textbook – into his face. Are they trying to get themselves hurt?

After one more comment about him being “tiny”, Rin finally screams and tosses some things at them before storming upstairs.

Izumi has the gall to look innocent, even after he had to dodge various items including a few chairs, and look around. “What did we do?”

Yukio snarls and decides to go into another room to do his reading. Not upstairs, where he knows Rin is still in a bad mood, but still another room away from the idiots is a very good idea.

If only because their idiocy might be contagious.

Being in a bad mood means the last thing Rin needs is to pick up the feeling of a Card. Which he does, making him groan and roll out of bed and stumble over to the window. Scratching at his chest, Rin looks outside and fails to actually spot the Card.

“Rin...ya goin' after it?” Kero asks quietly, seeing that Rin is still upset about the teasing.

Rin sighs and nods, then glances at the door that leads back in the monastery. “I don't think anyone is going to be bothering me for an hour at least so I can just sneak out without needing Mirror.”

With that decided, Rin opens the window and clambers out, followed swiftly by Kero as he inches
his way out of the house. Rin stops by the bushes to drag out an extra pair of sneakers he hid there and switch them with his uwabaki that he took off before heading down. With the uwabaki in a plastic bag and shoved back into hiding, Rin runs out to find the Card.

The first sign of something weird comes as Rin is approaching a nearby park.

And by weird, Rin means giant cat.

For a moment all Rin can do is gape as the cat goes past, looking like a normal housecat except for size. “Tha—that is...?”

Kero sighs. “That would be Big then.”

“Big?” Rin questions, moving past the cat before it spots them, not sure if it would see him as prey at the size it is at. As he goes by, he also spots giant blades of grass and even a few enlarged petals. Rin quickly pulls out the Key and turns it into the staff at the sight of those.

“Consider it sister to Little.” Kero begins. “Like Little, it changes the size of thangs. The difference is that Big makes them well...bigger.”

“Aah...” Rin eyes another large animal warily – this time what looks like was originally a small dog – and keeps moving towards the centre of the park.

Finally reaching the centre, Rin slows down as he sees Big for the first time and has to gape up at her.

Extremely tall and very blue in colour, she looks up from turning some grass into a jungle to smile at Rin. She gets taller as she fully stands up and walks over to Rin.

“Uah...” Rin can’t really do anything for a moment as Big towers over him. ‘Okay, now I really feel small.’

This proves to be a mistake as Big taps Rin with its wand and Rin shrieks as the ground starts to vanish from his viewpoint as he grows. “Oh no!”

“Rin! Seal Big quick! Before you end up crushin’ the whole town!” Kero yells up at him as Rin continues to grow.

“Right!” Luckily for Rin the staff grows with him and with a big of wrangling and wincing as he elbows into a few trees that make disturbing cracking sounds at the blows. “Big, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

The swirl of light turns into a flash that makes Rin close his eyes. When he opens them again, Big floats into his hand and everything has gone back to normal size. Including Rin.

Rin lets out a big sigh of relief. “That...that was surprisingly easy...” Very much so, considering how most of the cards are like.

“Big's a gentle Card.” Kero offers as way of explanation. “It doesn't do violent thangs, just makes thangs big.”

Rin nods and looks up at the sky for a moment, considering things. He then groans. “Okay, time to head back home before I get noticed to be missing and they panic.”

Kero silently agrees with him and flies behind Rin as he races back home.
The next day, Yukio realizes that most of the monks here don’t learn very fast.

Exhibit A belonging to Izumi who says upon seeing Rin, “Hello shrimp! Do you need a stepladder today? Or perhaps I should lift you up to get the tools you need?”

Rin glowers at Izumi for a moment then, surprisingly, his expression changes and he grins. “Whatever. Don’t care.”

Yukio stares at Rin for a moment, a bit surprised at how mature he is acting as he ignores the teasing in favour of making breakfast up for everyone.

“Why are you so cheery?” Yukio ends up asking as they are eating breakfast.

Rin shrugs. “Meh, I'll grow eventually and it's just an inch after all. No need to make such a big fuss.”

Yukio smiles at that and exchanges a look with Shirō that shows that both are happy about this, with Shirō turning to Izumi to remind him that he's supposed to be an adult.

As Izumi whines that he was just having fun and Rin's okay with it, no one notices the almost wicked grin on Rin's face.

‘Of course I'm okay with it...if I wanted to, I could stomp on all of you!’ Rin thinks cheerfully of his new Card and even sniggers a bit at the thought of stomping on Izumi in particular. He really tends to annoy Rin and one day he's going to suffer for it.

Yukio gives his brother an odd look for that strange snigger of amusement but shrugs it off. It is just Rin being Rin again.

And so does their daily life go on.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please comment for the next chapter! Tell me what you think of this chapter!

If you are wondering, the last time Yukio grew beyond Rin, Rin quickly caught up. This time, the gap is much bigger and all signs indicated that it won't be closed any time soon. Which is true; Yukio is now heading to grow into his canon height and the height difference with Rin.

Countdown to Finale: 9

Cards Remaining: 10
Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the comments last time! Please keep it up, I enjoy all of them!

Now, on to one of my fav chapters. Not the least because my favourite new Card debuts here!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There is something all should know about running through forest. That is, it is not as easy as the movies make it out to be. Despite what popular fiction shows, the forest is full of so much debris and shadows that running through it is a risky thing that can have you hurt.

That's why Rin is using Fly to chase after the Card in this forest, as hovering above the ground makes it much easier to dodge and avoid too much things smacking him in the face or tripping and hurting himself.

The flash of pink that is his target makes him urge Fly faster, swooping in on the target. Landing on the ground, Rin releases Fly so as to call up another Card.

“Wind, be a binding chain! Windy, Release!” Rin calls, sending Windy after the pink form of the Card of the week. As she's handling that, Rin calls up Fly again and goes after the Card personally himself.

Kero jumps in at that point, having been waiting for the right moment, and gives off a spark of fire to send the Card panicking back. Straight into Rin's arms.

“Got you!” Rin declares, wrestling with the pink ferret-like creature that is this Card. About to hand it over to Windy to keep contained, Rin lets out a yelp as the Card bites him.

“Bad card!” Rin declares, handing over it to Windy to hold as he gets out the staff. “Switch, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

A whirl of light has Switch return to Card form. Rin grins at that. “Thank you Windy.” He says politely, getting a smile from her before she changes back to Card form.

“Good job Rin!” Kero declares, flying over to Rin. “You managed to catch it...without...” Kero trails off and stares at Rin, slacked jawed. Then he slams his paws over his face. “Of course...Ah was fergettin' it never goes smooth.”

Rin blinks at Kero. “What is it Kero?”

“Look down.” The flying plush toy groans.

Rin does. And gapes in shock at what he sees.

“Wha—what is this?!” He demands.

Or shouldn't that be she considering the breasts Rin can see and, as poking at proves, are both
definitely real and belong to her...

**Chapter 35: Girl Days**

There is stunned silence in the forest for a long moment.

“What...what just happened?! This can't be real!” Rin pokes at her breasts again and whimpers. A thought has her reaching down and palming her crotch. “What...nnnn...Kero!”

“Aaaa...” Kero winces. “Did Switch bite you by chance?”

Rin takes in a deep gulp of air and nods.

“Where?” Kero asks softly.

Rin holds out her hand and Kero floats over to look at it. On the ring finger there is now what looks like a tattoo of a ring, an elegant and strangely flow-y in shape one. Kero winces.

“Okay...Ah probably should have said more than just sayin' Switch is kin to Change.” Kero looks over Rin and gets a sympathetic look on his face. “You better sit down.”

Rin nods and looks around for a seat, before finally settling on a mossy boulder. “So...what's going on?”

“First of all...Switch was made for an emergency. Ah will never, ever tell you what happened there.” Kero shudders. “Ah hate even thinkin' of it. Anyways, Switch is made to do one thang and one thang alone; change your fate. To be more precise, change yer body to that it would be if you were born the opposite sex.”

Rin has a moment where she wants to hyperventilate, but instead she pinches her cheek. “Okay...so I just need to use Switch and--”

“Ah'm afraid that won't work.” Kero flinches at the look Rin gives him at that. “Ah'm serious! Switch is just too powerful of a Card there. You gotta wait seventy-two hours before you can turn back.”

Rin frowns at that, mentally doing calculations. “That's...but that's three days. Kero I can't...oh no...” Rin covers her face in her hand. “Okay...any Card that will help hide it?”

“Uh...Ah don't think so...” Kero admits, settling down beside Rin as she looks a few seconds away from a breakdown.

“Why not? Um...Mask could work right? Just make sure it looks like guy me for the three days...” Rin goes for her holster, only to be stopped by Kero's paw.

“Mask gets knocked off easily, remember? Also, you can't eat with it on.” Kero points out.

Rin deflates at that logic then perks up at another thought. “What about...Illusion? I just can't have anyone touch me during that!”

“Unfortunately Illusion is too unpredictable. Even if ya told it to make it look like normal you to others, do you know what they think looks normal on you?” Kero replies, making Rin wilt again.

“Then...how do I hide?” Rin asks, looking down at her breasts. She has the feeling these are too big for her age in a strange way.
“Gonna have to be mundane.” Kero concludes with a sigh. “That's not gonna be easy, but the only thing that will work is that. And you got Memory for mistakes.”

Rin nods slowly, looking down at her hands. Then she looks up. “So...how do I hide I'm a girl?” Rin then lets out a breathless laugh. “This is such a strange situation...how am I gonna handle this?”

“With a whole lotta work.” Kero pats her hand comfortably. “But Ah'm sure you'll be able to do it. Just gonna be tough.”

“Yeah...I'm just glad tomorrow...or rather today...” Rin looks down at her watch and winces at the time. “Yikes it's super late...anyways, tomorrow is Sunday. Got a day before...” Rin gulps. “…school.”

Kero winces at it. “Can't you stay home sick?”

“I've never been sick so they would know something is up.” Rin sighs and finally stands. “Okay, Kero do you know anything about hiding this?”

“Funnily enough Ah do.” Kero makes a face at a memory, then flies up to settle on Rin's shoulder. “Going to need to go shoppin' first.”

“Oh man...” Rin groans and wonders where she can go. She then remembers something. “The mall...aside from groceries we've barely been there and only for special stuff. I can go there with some coupons and find something for hiding these and other stuff.”

“That's the spirit.” Kero says cheerfully. “We'll be able to handle this, you'll see.”

Rin gives a small smile, then calls up Fly. “But first I gotta head home...crap I hope I can hide shit for a little while at least...” Rin mutters to herself, kicking off the ground and taking to the sky. She wiggles a bit on the staff, not used to how she sits like here.

'And there's a whole lot more coming...’ Rin groans at the thought. 'Three days...can I survive that?’

Sunday has Yukio waking up to the greatest surprise he's ever had to deal with. A note from Rin to him, about how his brother had to get up early and run off for some special deal at a store or something. Rin's messy handwriting does not help as much as how vague he's being.

Yukio sighs at that, and wanders downstairs with the note in hand.

“Aaah, good morning Yukio!” Shirō greets him cheerfully, nodding at the note in his hand as he adds, “I see you found out about your brother.”

“Yeah...did he tell anything to you?” Yukio asks, accepting some toast from an offered plate.

“Nah. Ran out awfully quick.” Shirō has an amused look on his face and Yukio wonders if Shirō has a good idea why Rin is heading out. It would explain why he's not worried at all.

Yukio dismisses that in favour of having breakfast. Nothing fancy like normal on Sunday, but then again the normal head cook is out shopping of all things.

'Shopping...right...Nii-san better not be getting into trouble...’ Yukio sighs and spreads some butter on his toast before taking a bite.

If Rin knew what Yukio was thinking at this moment, she would have complained that she doesn't
get into trouble, trouble just tends to find her.

As is, Rin is ignorant to that and is busy looking through some racks of bras in search of a certain type that Kero claims can help.

“There it is.” Kero whispers to Rin, tapping her cheek to make her turn and look at the bra. The tag claims it as a suppressor bra – the opposite of a push-up – and declares it will decrease Rin's bra size by one cup.

“Will this fit me?” Rin wonders, looking at the size. *I'm not a C-cup...am I?*

“It's in the right range.” Kero pauses as Rin stares at him. “Oh lay off. Ah spent a long time with not one, but multiple girls goin' through puberty. Ah learned this stuff as a result.”

Rin sighs and heads to the nearby change room to check if it does fit her.

Speaking of fitting her, Rin is super grateful that with only minimal adjustments an old outfit that she found amongst the storage last night fits her surprisingly well. And most of the adjustments were made to make it so it doesn't look too out-dated and thus attention getting.

Rin slips into the change room and hesitates at unbuttoning her shirt, glancing over at Kero. Kero snorts but turns around, muttering to himself how he's definitely not interested in such things thank you very much.

Rin smiles as he obliges her despite his protests and shrugs out of the shirt. The bra takes a lot of time to figure out, Rin cursing it out as she tries to figure out the proper way to put it on.

“Switch it around.” Kero suggests, glancing back once to take stock of the situation. “You can hook it in front and then turn it around to put the straps on.”

Rin blinks then follows Kero's directions, sighing in relief at how it finally works. Not to mention the bra fits. After shrugging the bar off and replacing her shirt, Rin pokes her head out and, after looking around quickly, heads to the cashier with the bra.

“Um...excuse me...” The cashier, a rather bored looking teenaged girl, looks down at Rin.

“Oh...are you okay?” She looks concerned at Rin.

She blushes. “Um...no just I...would like to buy this...” Hesitantly, Rin puts the bra on the table, along with one of the coupons she brought to make it cheaper.

The cashier looks concerned. “Shouldn't you be doing this with your mother?”

Rin looks down. “…I don't got a mother.”

Since she's looking down, Rin doesn't see the sympathy that crosses the cashier girl's face. Or the determination that comes next.

“Well, how about I help you pick out some more?” Rin looks up, panic on her face, but the cashier blithely goes on. “You can't just survive on one bra. Plus, we got a two for one sale going on and...” She picks up the coupon Rin offered and raises her eyebrows at it. “This coupon is valid even with that.”

“But um...” Rin doesn't get much of a chance to protest as the cashier grabs her by the arm and starts dragging her away.
“No buts. Must be your first one uh? Well, gotta make it special. And lacy too!” She declares with glee. “My name's Nakuru, what's yours?”

“Rin.” She blurts that out without thinking and, for once, blesses how feminine her name sounds as it doesn't even make Nakuru blink, instead has her happily say “Nice to meet you!” and then continue dragging Rin off, saying she can call her “Naku-nee-chan” if she likes.

Hiding in Rin's bag, Kero covers his face with his paws, not sure if he should laugh or groan at this development. *Is this lucky or not?* He wonders as Rin is dragged further into the laciest section of the undergarment filled part of the store.

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Rin ends up leaving the store not only with lacy unmentionables for both top and bottom, but a few other clothing articles.

Nakuru was like a storm, a living storm in the form of a way too cheerful woman, and she whisked Rin away with her very quickly. Rin ended up saying probably too much about herself, though she kept the answers to Nakuru's questions as vague as possible.

Rin didn't lie, but she definitely didn't explain everything. Certainly she is, currently, the only girl in her household, an orphan, and only briefly knew her mom. Not to mention with only guys has no one to rely on for shopping for girl things, though not for the reasons Nakuru thinks, considering she mutters something about useless men and cowards.

Nakuru also gave her half off on all her purchases and explained how the mall has a “charity customer” option. Rin, who obviously can't afford as much as she needs, is under that even with her coupon. The money that she would have paid is to be paid by one of the donors to the fund.

“Now, don't forget to go ask for Sumiko-san! Tell her Nakuru sent you and she'll understand!” Nakuru calls after her, Rin waving back at her with a strained smile.

Rin then darts off. She does need to go to the pharmacy, but frankly now she's terrified to go there. But honestly she doesn't want to disappoint Nakuru so resigns herself and upon walking in, asks for Sumiko.

Sumiko is an older lady and when she hears Nakuru's name she obviously understands completely. Which means Rin ends up learning way too much about female hygiene as much as buying a bunch of things she's pretty sure she won't need.

“I don't really need these do I?” Rin hisses at Kero, glowering at the pads in her basket.

Kero chuckles. “No. You'd have to be in girl form for a month before it becomes an option.”

Rin breaths a sigh of relief at that. “But what do I do with all of this?” Rin wonders, panicking slightly at the thought of any of this being found by one of the monks or worse Yukio.

“Hmmmm...Ah'll think on it. Anyways, don't forget the sarashi.”

Rin nods and manages to grab the sarashi she needs before she gets dragged to another section.

“Oh, here's a very important thing for all girls.” Sumiko begins, Rin staring in half awe and half horror at the make-up isle. “And that's how to make sure you feel pretty. It's the best confidence any lady can have.”

Rin ends up being talked through all the make-up options and techniques and strangely finds it
enjoyable. There's an artistic element to it and, well...Rin's never been considered really attractive before so even if it's as a girl, she has to admit it is quite charming. Rin actually files the techniques and tips away, as well accepts the instruction booklets from Sumiko, and wonders why guys can't do it either. If concealer was allowed for Yukio, he wouldn't be panicking so much over his moles and acne.

Rin draws the line at the acne products which catches Sumiko's attention. “Why don't you want any?”

Rin pauses, then gestures to her face. “Take a look.”

Sumiko peers at Rin's face and gasps. “Your skin...don't you have any acne?”

Rin shrugs. “Don't ask why but...I mean my brother gets it but I don't.” Rin has never really considered why, except in regards to feeling strangely guilty as the years pass and Yukio gets more and more fussy about his own spots.

“That is most curious.” Sumiko sets the acne supplies aside and then sighs dramatically. “I'm jealous, truly I am. That's one thing you don't have to worry about.”

Rin gives a shaky smile at that as Sumiko switches to discussing nail polish and how to apply it as neatly as possible.

Kero watches as Rin gets absorbed by the talk and chuckles a bit. But, looking at all the pretty colours, Kero doesn't blame Rin. In fact, he doesn't think it's a bad thing at all to be interested in.

After all that shopping, Rin finally gets free. Definitely happy about the discounts but there is the problem that most of these things won't be used.

“So...what do I do with these?” Rin asks quietly as she heads back via train.

“Ah dunno.” Kero admits. “Hide them for now. The clothing can go in the storage right?”

Rin worries her lip, considering that. “Yeah...there are still those boxes down there of girl clothing...” Rin wonders briefly where they came from, then remembers how the monastery gets donations at times for charity drives and auctions they take part in.

The train finally stops and Rin squeezes out along with the rest. As she exits the train station she winces. In the morning, since it had been so early, it had been so easy to slip into a public bathroom and change into some girl clothing so as to be in “disguise” during her shopping spree. But now it's incredibly crowded and Rin worries about slipping into the boy's side in her current condition.

Kero notices Rin's worry and, after a moment, realizes what it's for. “Lemme see...” Kero looks out and comes up with an idea. “Find a spot where you can do magic.”

Rin eyes Kero but does as he says, slipping past a few salarymen on break and a group of women who are walking together and laughing, heading into a small alleyway. A quick look around reveals that Rin is the only one here, and after crouching down behind some trash to hide the light, Rin quickly pulls out his staff.

“So what do I do...?” Rin asks Kero.

“In this situation, Mask could work.” Kero begins. “Since it's only temporary.”
Rin blinks and grins. “Right. Mask...I need to look like normal me, male me.” There’s a soft flash of light and then Mask is in Rin's hand. Giving the Card a pointed look, Rin carefully puts it on. Adjusting it on his face, Rin turns to Kero. “How do I look?”

“Like yer usual self.” Kero grins and flutters over to Rin's shoulder. “Now, let's get you changed and see about what we can do to hide yer condition right now.”

Rin shifts and twists her upper body for a moment, pausing in the street. “This feels weird...itches too...oi, do I really need the bra as much as sarashi?” Rin turns to Kero at that.

Thanks to the monastery being away from the inner city enough and being in a mostly housing plus a few mom & pop stores neighbourhood, Rin's the only one on the street right now, aside from Kero who's still hiding on Rin just in case.

“Yeah...unfortunately yer breasts are too big to hide with just sarashi. Not if you don't wanna be in a whole lot o'pain.” Kero explains.

Rin whines at that, going to scratch at the itch. “How do girls manage this?”

“It only itches when new.” Kero sighs. “And stop that, do yer best to ignore it.”

“I'm more worried about them catching the straps on me...” Rin mutters as she bends down to pick up her bags again. All the “girly stuff” is hidden in the bags along with more normal shopping stuff that Rin got as a cover. With just a bit of work, Rin should be able to hide exactly what she got from the mall.

And thus the sudden sex change.

‘Though really, I don't feel...weird in this body...’ Rin considers that as she heads up towards the monastery. ‘Kero said something about changing your fate...is that why I don't feel all wrong in this body?’

Rin dismisses it, getting a headache just thinking about it, and instead opens the monastery door after juggling her bags a bit. “I'm home.”

“Aaah...Rin!” Nagatomo pops his head over to look at Rin as she puts her bags down and goes to untie her shoes. “You were out a long time. It's past lunch time.”

Rin's stomach growls at that and she blushes. “Uh yeah...stuff happened...'cuse me, gonna put these away first.”

Nagatomo watches as Rin rushes upstairs with the bags in hand, but doesn't follow. Rin breaths a sigh of relief and enters her room...

Only to curse mentally and nearly stumble back when Yukio looks up from his desk and spots her. “Nii-san...where were you?”

“Shopping.” Rin scowls at him, trying to hide how much Yukio scared her. Glancing around, she inches towards her side of the room.

“Yeah, I can see that...” Yukio eyes all of Rin's bags. “What did you get?”

Rin twitches, then, after a moment, goes for one of the bags and pulls out one of the things she bought half as cover and half because she really did want to get it.
Yukio catches it and looks down at it. He sighs, seeing it is a new sewing kit. “Nii-san...”

“What? This one is good for ribbons and stuff...tiny things.” Rin shrugs and makes a show of taking some of the other supplies out. “I liked making the ribbons for Sekki-san so...”

Yukio sighs. “And you had to go there for the sale, uh?”

“It's a very good sale. Quicker I got there the better.” Rin avoids looking at Yukio, knowing it's a half lie. But Yukio doesn't question her and instead changes topic to when Rin last ate.

Rin has to embarrassingly admit to not having anything since her really early breakfast, which has Yukio sigh and grab her, dragging her downstairs to finally get something to eat.

Rin complains, but it's mostly for show as she's glad to get Yukio away from her bags. Glancing back, she sees Kero pop up and smiles at her, gesturing to the bags.

That puts a smile on her face as she knows Kero will do his best to move the more...compromising supplies away and out of sight.

'Thanks Kero.' She thinks softly, then allows Yukio to fully drag her out. She is hungry after all.

Somehow Rin manages to make it through the rest of the day without being caught. She half thinks it's because no one is going to be even thinking of such a change being possible, never mind happening to Rin. That means any odd bits can be dismissed as mistakes or something.

'At least that's what I hope.' Rin considers as she sinks into the bathtub. She made a point of waiting until Yukio was done his bath to have her own. After all, only Yukio might come in and have a bath with Rin, thus blowing everything sky high.

Rin blushes a bit as her boobs bob slightly in the water, crossing her arms over her chest and feeling rather awkward. They are quite awkward to someone definitely not used to them and Rin is vaguely horrified at the weird sensations she gets at times when she touches them.

'Way too sensitive...' Rin winces and shifts again, starkly reminded of her condition once more. She blushes as she recalls how informative Sumiko was, in fact at a certain point she shifted to what is best described as The Talk for girls...

'And here I thought Oyaji's Talk was bad...' Rin sinks down to hide her burning face in the water. If there is anything she dislikes about being a girl, it's how confusing things are now. Guys arguably are more straight forward.

'Or maybe I'm just too used to being a guy.' Rin sighs and finally leaves the bath. Since she's the last one for the day, she drains the water before doing a quick clean up of the tub.

Getting changed into her pyjamas, purposely loose ones to help hide her breasts since binding at night is a no-no according to Kero, Rin then heads to her room and hopes that even with school, tomorrow will be as “easy” as today.

In the morning, things certainly start amazingly smooth. Rin has no trouble sneaking away to get the bra and sarashi on to hide her chest, and with only slight adjustments she certainly looks the part of her normal self.

Breakfast is her job this morning along with Nagatomo and she decides on a more “sweet” flavoured
one, bringing out the spring berries and pancakes for everyone. Nothing hard to pull off – for her – and definitely appreciated by all.

With the fruit and pancakes still fresh in her mind, Rin cheerfully heads to school. Her cheerful mood is noted by Yukio, but he doesn't comment. He's happy to have Rin apparently looking forward to school.

Of course, Rin should have realized that things never go smooth...

Rin freezes, staring out at nothing in complete horror. If it wasn't for the fact the majority of the class prefers to pretend “the demon” doesn't exist, Rin would have had a lot of people looking at her in confusion.

As is, Rin is busy cursing her ill luck. Of course gym class is today and not only that but in the morning instead of afternoon. No time to prepare and thrown head first into whatdoidwhatdoido in regards to getting changed.

A few seconds later has Rin bolting, ignoring the cries of shock and confusion, racing away from the class and gym as fast as possible.

She didn't stop running even as she reaches the backdoor, bursting through it and racing through all the sports fields and confused students until she reaches an old storage shed in the back. She slows only slightly then, grabs the lock on the door and smashes it, then dives in. Shutting the door behind her with a bang, Rin half-collapses on the ground and crouches.

And screams.

Eiji didn't really know what he expected when he followed the trail of information to an old storage shed that apparently one Okumura Rin suddenly ran into.

But seeing Yukio outside and trying – without any luck – to convince his brother to come out wasn't it.

“Okumura-kun?” Eiji's voice is soft but Yukio jumps anyways.

Yukio looks sheepish, adjusting his glasses as he turns around to face him. “Abe-kun.”

Eiji looks at the shed then tilts his head. Yukio understands his message and follows him to a distance away from the shed, out of hearing range from Rin.

“What is going on?” Eiji asks.

Yukio looks suspiciously at Eiji for a moment then apparently sees something that has him relax slightly. “I'm not sure. I think...I think Nii-san just had a panic attack.”

Which honestly matches what Eiji theorized, but it doesn't make sense at all. There's no particular reason why PE would cause Rin to flip. He honestly seems to enjoy it, being one of the few classes he has no trouble excelling at.

'Though he does at times break equipment...' Eiji muses, considering one particular incident involving weight equipment that quickly ended up all over the school as the poor jock who had the equipment next to Rin's got a front row seat of him accidentally pulverizing it.
“You are not having any luck?” Eiji questions.

Yukio immediately understands and looks resigned. “Yeah. Nii-san barricaded the door too. I think...I think he's more embarrassed at this point than freaking out but...” Yukio shrugs.

Eiji considers it, then gives a sharp nod. “I'll try. You should head back before class starts up again.”

Yukio eyes Eiji for a long moment, Eiji getting nervous the longer it stretches. A flash of thought reminds him that they are brothers and twins at that, and anyone who thinks Yukio is harmless compared to his brother need to get their heads checked.

Slowly Yukio nods. “Alright. Thank you.”

Eiji watches him go away and then lets out an explosive breath. And turns to the shed, mind whirling as he considers how to get Rin out of there without making things worse.

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Rin is currently crouched on the ground, feeling awful and guilty in various amounts. Behind her, the shed door has been barricaded by whatever she could get her hands on to block out her brother and the others who tried to get her out.

'Dammit dammit that was not...' Rin presses her hands into her eyes. The panic attack she had was completely unneeded, considering she could have just slipped away to a washroom or something to get changed. But somehow the thought of being in gym freaked her out.

'Maybe it's the uniforms...' Rin thinks back and now that she isn't distracted by others she recalls consciously just how thin the gym uniforms are considering things. Her sarashi and bra have a possibility of being noticed and then what? Memory might not be enough...

Rin wilts again as she remembers just how harsh she was with Yukio but, but...well, between all the Cards, being separate from her brother in school, and all the other stressful things she's going through including being a girl currently, perhaps she has reason to be harsh.

A knock on the door makes her raise her head slightly.

“Okumura-kun?”

Rin blinks and twists around. “Eiji?” Her voice cracks at that and she winces.

There's a long moment of silence, then Eiji speaks again. “Okumura-kun, are you alright?”

Rin swallows. No, she's not alright but she can't tell him that.

A sigh is heard. “I sent your brother back to class. And I called in a favour so someone will be covering for my absence in class. I have nothing but time to listen.”

“...how much will it cost?” Rin asks, shifting slightly.

“Nothing.”

Rin raises her head more at that, uncurling from her ball. “Nothing?”

“Yes.” Eiji sounds hesitant and for a moment almost scared perhaps? “It seems you need someone outside everything to listen to you.”

Rin stares at the floor of the shed. It's covered in dust and very uncomfortable to sit on now that she's
paying attention. Rin sighs and settles into a more comfortable position.

“Everything just seems to be piling up.” Rin trails her hand in the dust, making an abstract pattern. “Yukio and me just seem to be getting further and further, my class is terrified of me, and I'm...doing stuff that I can't walk away from but it's too much sometimes. And then shit happens on the weekend and I now got a condition to deal with.” Rin winces at referring to her sudden gender change as a mere condition.

“That does sound bad.” Rin can hear the sound of grass rustling and hears as Eiji sits down outside the door. “Is the condition bad?”

“No? Just...awkward.” Rin winces again. “It should be over by Wednesday. But I just...I can't do gym and I probably freaked too much since it...”

“Got dumped on you fast.” Eiji hums. “Well, normally gym is in the afternoon scheduling wise. Do you think you would have done better if you had time to prepare?”

“Yeah. I would have just...avoided class.” Rin shrugs, feeling awkward again. Her bra is itching again and she pauses to scratch at it. “It's...not comfortable.”

Eiji doesn't say anything for a long time. And then,

“Okumura-kun...Rin-kun, you are better than you think. I assure you. And the distance you feel...it's not unusual for twins to go through that. Over time the distance will narrow again, but right now both of you need to spread your wings.”

“Spread our wings?” Rin asks, titling her head in thought.

“You cannot just rely on your brother and neither should he always rely on you. That doesn't mean you shouldn't, but you should be able to have more of a life than just being twins. You are both more than that.”

Rin looks down, considering it. “It's happening too fast.”

“Maybe.” Eiji doesn't say anything for a time, then chuckles. “Or maybe it's the right time for this. Maybe you both need some distance to be able to see clearly. Maybe what you are going through Rin-kun is part of that. Maybe...”

“There is nothing as coincidence...” Rin says softly, thinking back to what she was told last year. “...only inevitability.”

“That sounds almost fatalistic but...yes. No coincidence. Perhaps chance, but not coincidence.” Eiji assures Rin. “You will be okay. Now...how about you see about at least leaving the shed?”

Rin grins and laughs, laughs until she cries.

And then she stands and works at getting the barricade away from the door. She opens the door to be face to face with Eiji and, impulsively, she hugs the third-year.

“Thank you.” She whispers in his ear, then takes off towards her class. Even if she gets in trouble for being late, at least she will be in class and moving forward.

She doesn't notice just how red Eiji is at that hug, standing frozen and feeling rather like a computer that just crashed.
Without truly registering it, Mizuki finds her attention turning to Okumura Rin.

When she finally realizes what she's doing, she forces her attention off of him, only to be drawn back with a frown.

There's something different with Rin today and she's not entirely sure what it is. And it wasn't the freak out about gym class being moved up to the morning that caused her to clue in to it. Something about the way Rin walked in this morning seemed off to her.

Tapping her fingers on her desk, Mizuki muses on upfront asking Rin.

She then dismisses it. ‘He wouldn't answer. Not to me at all.’ Mizuki knows their first meeting went badly and then there is the fact Rin seems strangely stand-offish to others. Even between him and his brother there seems to be a wall growing, though Mizuki swears it's on both sides.

“Umino-kun, do you mind reading next?” Mizuki is shaken out of her thoughts by that and, after a moment where she has to get her bearings, she stands with the book and begins reading from the correct passage.

Rin slows down as she sees Yukio waiting for her at the gate after school. She had been kept back for a talk with the teacher, about how she skipped gym and was late for the first afternoon class.

Seeing Yukio there makes a strange feeling curl in her chest. She's both happy and a little upset about it. Happy that Yukio cares that much to stay behind and wait, upset because she wants to be alone.

“Nii-san...are you okay?” Yukio rakes his gaze over Rin and Rin can't help the smile. There's her worry-wart baby brother that she loves.

“Yeah just...do you mind going home alone? I think I'm going to take a walk. Need some time to get my head on straight.” Rin shifts nervously at that, adjusting the strap of her bag.

Yukio eyes Rin for a moment. Then he sighs. “Okay. Just...be safe?”

“I'll be fine. I'm big and tough.” Rin gives Yukio a playful punch, Yukio chuckling at that. “Tell Oyaji so he doesn't worry.”

“I will. Just be home in time for dinner.” Yukio pauses for a moment, looking like he wants to add something, then steps back and turns away.

Once Yukio is out of sight, Rin turns to glance back at the school. For a moment she considers talking to Sekki like she offered – already knowing of Rin's state somehow, most likely thanks to Kero – then, with a sad smile, walks off school grounds and turns to head into the central part of Southern Cross. She really does need to be alone with her thoughts, or as alone as one can be in a busy city.

The urban area Rin ends up in is definitely busy. It's around a shopping strip, with plenty of shops and cute cafés around. Rin slows down to do some window shopping at times, but ultimately moves on.

Inside her head, Rin wonders exactly what it means to be female. Because honestly? Except for her body, Rin doesn't feel any different. Rin is still Rin, as far as she can tell, just with different pronouns in mind.
'Of course, still using masculine pronouns when talking...' Rin considers that and recalls her shift to using “ore” during her last year of elementary. 'But that's a habit right?'

Rin doesn't consider how she talks changing the fact she is, currently at least, female. Every part of her is currently female, not just her body. It's things like that that makes her think.

There are plenty of other things she could be thinking about, things like her magic and the secrets that are slowly building a huge wall between her and the rest of her family, but for a moment she decides to consider what it would have been like to grow up as a girl in the family.

'Well...technically, if this was permanent...' Rin pauses to look at herself in a nearby window. Her eyes take in her facial structure and though she's not certain, she gets the impression that the only differences are a slight shift in that regard. Her body looks a bit more slender as well, but she's got the same height and everything else looks like normal. 'I would have to change their memories with Memory. Everyone's in fact.'

Rin wonders how they would be like there and draws a blank. She might be a girl currently, but she never grew up as one so has no clue how exactly that would change things. Would she and her brother grow up in the monastery with Rin as a girl? Rin's not entirely clear about the monastery's rules about women living there. She thinks it's not allowed, but a child might be an exception?

Rin sighs and moves on, taking a turn to a back alley as she shifts her bag on her shoulder again. It's a bit of a headache honestly. Especially when she thinks back to things she learned from Nakuru and Sumiko, girl things as some might call it. Rin never thought of differences between girls and guys before, but now she's wondering how much is self-imposed and how much is real.

'I mean...body wise definitely different.' Rin considers that and sighs as she recalls just how awkward it was in the bathroom. Though she's still definitely a girl, the physical changes were unnerving and it took a lot for her to remember what Sumiko said about hygiene and then force herself to make sure she was clean all over.

'But I'm not sure about everything else...' Rin kicks at a pebble in her path and watches as it goes far until it clatters against a wall, turning into dust from the force of the kick. She then frowns as she starts to hear the sound of shouting voices and, after a moment's thought, turns to follow the sounds. As she gets closer, the more she can here and a frown starts to form on her face.

"You wanna leave? Ha! What a fucking joke!" The sneering voice there makes Rin's skin crawl. Not in disgust, though that's there too, but in anger.

"I want better." Another voice, a softer one, replies. There's an undercurrent of fear there, but they are standing firm nonetheless. Not backing down. "I'm out."

"Hehehe. You don't get out. You stay. If you leave, it ain't with everything intact."

Rin turns a corner and sees the scene. In an abandoned lot, in front of an abandoned building that looks like a store, Rin can see the crowd of delinquents. There is about ten of them that she can count at a glance, and all are in a half-circle. Except for two; one obviously is the boss, while the second is the one confronting him. The boss has multiple piercings in his ears plus one on his nose. The one in front doesn't look quite as intimidating, except for his silver hair and how he stands; he's definitely got experience in fighting.

"I'm not running." He says calmly.

The boss cracks his knuckles and grins viciously at him. "Very well. I hope you are ready."
Silver-hair is grabbed by two others who hold him, pulling back his arms and keeping him pinned as the boss lines up for a shot.

He gets three punches in and is going for a fourth when his arm gets caught. He freezes at that and turns his head to see Rin, who has his arm now pulled all the way back.

“What the—ARGH!” He screams as Rin pulls and pushes at his arm, snapping his elbow and then letting him go. He crashes to his knees, howling in pain.

The rest of the group stares in shocked amazement at Rin, who is just stands there and looks at them. She doesn't realize just how scary she looks as she stands there with a serious and angry expression on her face. Nor exactly how she looks then, with the sun providing a backdrop for her looks.

Silver-hair's eyes widen as he looks at her, shocked by her appearance and feeling his heart do a quick double beat. 'Woah... is he glowing?'

“I don't think there will be any beating up done today. Unless it's on you.” Rin announces casually, taking a fighting stance. Not a rough one like usual either; the reason Rin let the boss get even a few hits in is because she activated her staff and called up Fight. She's currently in a proper fighting stance and with the staff tucked in her bag that she carefully set aside for now, her hands are free to unleash some martial arts style whoop-ass.

Rin knows the odds even with her enhanced strength and rather “cheat” than get her ass kicked or worse trying to save some guy who obviously wants to try something other than a delinquent lifestyle.

“That's what you think.” One of the others sneers and soon Rin is backing up slightly as the gang goes to surround her. Silver-hair watches, still held back by the two pinning him and, for some reason, doesn't doubt the strange person who just appeared to save him.

The fight does not go smooth even with assistance from Fight. It cannot, not when Rin is still outnumbered and compared to the punks before her unarmed. Pipes, bats, and chains are their main weapons of choice, but at least a few have knives of some kind to threaten her with.

Rin bares her teeth as she clotheslines one idiot who charges too close to her, before kicking him away and going after another, ducking a swipe with a pipe and then grabbing it and yanking it so she pulls him forward and over her shoulder into the startled face of another thug, sending them down hard.

The next group is much more cautious thus, making Rin draw on more of Fight's power to combat them. A group fight is very different than a one-on-one fight, and it's totally possible to win against odds that are against you. It just takes skill and a lot of strength. Even a touch of luck at times.

'Like the fact all are idiots.' Rin smirks then lets out a pained hiss as one manages to smack her with a pipe, sending her stumbling back and into the arms of another thug who grabs her arms and holds her still long enough for someone to punch her in the stomach.

Rin doubles over at that, then manages to wrangle her hand to pinch her captor under the arm, hard, feeling flesh tear and blood slip through her fingers as he screams and lets go at the great pain.

Rin rams her elbow into him next and turns to press her palm to his face, hard enough to make his nose break and more blood to spill down. He collapses to the ground and Rin whirls around just fast enough to catch the next attacker with her hand as he raises his arm high with a bat in hand. Rin kicks out at him, sending him back hard and into another one.
And that's when someone attacks her from the side, Rin dodging just enough to only get a slash through her arm. She ends up biting her lip to stifle the cry of pain that wants to come out and about to turn to face him another attacks her from the front and slices into her shirt.

The sarashi block the blow just enough, but both her shirt and the bindings are wrecked, making her breasts – as small as they are under the suppressor bra – pop out. There’s a bit of shock from the guy who wrecked her shirt at that sight, giving her enough time to slam her palm into his chin and drop him to the ground with a kick to the legs, dropping to the ground at the same time to dodge another attack.

Rin stands up after that and turns on the remaining delinquents, which includes Silver-hair and the two still holding him back. They are are staring shocked, eyes not on her face but chest. Rin finds that very annoying.

“Oi!” She calls, slamming her fist into someone's face and dropping them. “Eyes up here you dumbshits!”

“A fucking bitch?” One of them blurs out. “A fucking bitch is--” He gets the next words knocked out of him by Rin slamming into him and sending him flying.

“Yeah. And this fucking bitch is going to give out even MORE pain. Or you ya know, you can surrender and get your buddies to the hospital.” Rin sneers at them. “Your choice assholes.”

There's a moment of silence, then a bunch of scrambling happens as Silver-hair's guards drop him and the rest start running around. Good thing for them that most of the punks previously knocked out are coming back to consciousness so only a few actually need to be carried out. No way what remained could have handled everyone.

Rin snorts at them as they flee – the boss vowing vengeance while another of his cronies starts dialling up a hospital with their cellphone – and then turns to Silver-hair.

“You alright?” She asks him, looking him up and down.

Silver-hair slowly stands, rubbing his cheek and wincing and clutching his chest as he stands. “Yeah. You?” He looks worriedly at the cut on Rin's arms.

Rin looks down at the blood dripping down her arm. It does not look good and, after a moment of debate, she heads over to get her bag. Once she returns with it, she digs out the staff. Silver-hair watches, obviously looking surprised, as she wavers slightly as adrenaline fades and the blood loss starts to effect her.

Shaking her head, she pulls out Heal. “Need to get in better shape, the both of us. Heal, Release!”

Silver-hair watches in awe as the pink light spreads not only over Rin but him. Rin makes a face as the cut is still there, just reduced, and – since the sarashi is already wrecked – pulls it out from her shirt and uses half of it to wrap up her arm, before using what's left along with some safety pins she digs out from her bag to fix up the cut in her shirt so she's not exposing herself.

She then looks at Silver-hair. “You okay?”

Silver-hair slowly nods, looking still a bit shocked.

“Good. Best get out of here though.” Rin advises. “Not good to hang out here...” Rin looks around and realizes by the discarded wrappers and other things she can see that this parking lot – and most likely the old abandoned building – is probably the base for the gang that Silver-hair just quit from.
Rin waves him off, pausing only a minute to consider something. 'Should I use Memory...?' Eyeing him for a moment, Rin shrugs it off. 'He sees me as a girl and doesn't know my name. Not a problem.'

With that decided, Rin walks off whistling, forgetting to deactivate Fight as she turns her mind to what else she can do today as she shoves the staff back in her bag.

Behind her, Silver-hair looks thoughtfully around. He then grins and scratches the back of his head. "What the hell."

And follows after Rin.

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Rin keeps on wandering the streets after that. Her strange attire and beat up appearance – even with Heal helping Rin's skill isn't that good for her to completely heal everything all at once, especially with someone else to worry over – draws attention at times, but Rin ignores it and pushes in deeper.

Into a more dangerous section. And not of Southern Cross, but True Cross Campus Town. Southern Cross being so close to it that most residents half believe it should be counted as part of True Cross means that it's not the first time Rin's slipped into there. The only place she hadn't really explored before is this dangerous, more shady section. The Academy is another place she's never really been, except during that one festival when she was really little.

Rin keeps moving despite the rather shady people and dangerous looking people around her, or the smell of vomit and alcohol and perfume. Even the smell of blood and a strange musky odour that makes Rin wrinkle her nose.

Not paying attention to where she's going, she only really is shaken out of her thoughts by someone stepping deliberately in front of her. She halts just before her nose touches some guy's chest – a muscular guy, though he stinks badly of sweat and alcohol – and looks up to see a bearded man leering down at her.

"What do we have here?" He grabs her chin and tilts it up, looking her over with a leering smile. "Such a pretty little gal...what's your price?"

Rin doesn't answer, merely looking him over. She pauses when she sees his jacket. It's leather and in much better shape than the rest of him. Black leather and looks oh so fancy and expensive. Pretty too.

'I want that jacket.' Rin realizes, and considers if stealing it from this asshole is really stealing what with the obvious gang tattoos and the mess he's going to make of the jacket with how poor his hygiene is.

"Oi." The guy taps her cheek dragging her attention back to him. "I said what's your price?"

Rin looks up at him. "I don't got one."

"Oh?" A slimy grin appears on his face and his hand trails down to squeeze her breast. "So I can just shove it in uh?"

Rin hears alarm bells ringing in her head and she can feel her stomach rolling in disgust at his touch. But before she can do anything, the guy suddenly stiffens and lets out a cry of pain. Rin steps back, seeing a few sparks flying, and then to the side as he falls forward.

Rin stares at Silver-hair, who is standing right behind where the brute was and holding onto a taser
that is still sparking.

He grins. “Yo.”

Rin blinks in surprise. “What are you doing here?”

Silver-hair shrugged. “Was curious about the lady that saved my ass.” He glances down at the thug and kicks him slightly. “I know you can probably handle yourself, but creeps like this are a sore point for me so I hope you don’t mind me rescuing you there.”

Rin can’t help it. She snorts at how he describes it. “Ha! Well, thanks.”

She then turns to the guy and, after a moment, bends down next to him and lifts him up slightly. Silver-hair watches a bit confused, then realizes she’s removing the jacket.

“Why are you doing that?”

“Cause it’s a cool jacket.” Rin finally gets it off and makes a face at the minor smell on it. A glance around proves only they are there and since he’s already seen it... “Bubbles!”

Silver-hair stares and then laughs. “That’s a handy thing.” He looks her over and she shrugs the jacket on, bigger on her than on the thug but he finds it looks very good. “Miyano Riku.” He offers.

Rin stares at him. “I rather not give you my name.”

“That’s fine. How about I give you a nickname?” Riku offers.

Rin considers it, then nods. “Sure. No problem with that if it’s not shitty.”

“Okay...hmmm....” Riku looks her over and finds himself focusing on her eyes. “Sora.”

“Sora?” Rin considers that name. “It’s pretty but why that?”

“Because you got eyes like the sky.” Riku answers bluntly.

Rin feels a blush grow on her face and tries to brush it aside. “You always this charming to ladies?”

To her surprise Riku ends up blushing and scratching the back of his head at that. “Um...oh...uh...just...that's the truth. You got bright blue eyes like, like the sky sometimes...” He mumbles that at the end.

Rin can’t help it. She giggles. “Awww...thanks.” She starts walking away at that point, with Riku scrambling to keep up.

Riku is still burning, but after a moment finally speaks again. “So, I owe you for the save. And that dick doesn’t count.”

“I don’t really think you owe me anything. Decent thing to do.” Rin explains.

“I don’t meet that many decent people. So say...how about a d-date?” Riku offers. “N-not a romantic one, but one where I spoil you rotten and pay for anything you want.”

Rin gives him an odd look at that, but finds the idea tempting. “Could you afford that?”

“I’m richer than you think.” Riku gives a wry smile at that and for a moment something painful
flashes behind his eyes. “So, what do you say?”

“I'm thirteen.” Rin says suddenly.

“Heh, fifteen. Not yet out of Junior High either.” Riku waits patiently. “So what do you say?”

Rin worries at her lip for a moment, pulling on it with her teeth. “Well...” She looks at the time on her watch. “I don't got much time today so um...if tomorrow is okay and you pick a meeting place and time it's possible. Don't got a cellphone.” She adds at the end.

Riku grins. “Sure. You don't mind skipping school?”

Rin considers it, then grins. “Well...why not?”

'Last day as a girl after all...might as well have fun with it.' Rin decides, then turns to hash out some details with Riku for the meet up.

“Rin where...Rin, what is that jacket?” Shirō stares at the oversized leather jacket Rin suddenly has.

Rin shrugs. She's glad she brought the jacket even as Shirō looks at her suspiciously. Zipped up, it hides the fact of her current female body from others eyes. “Found it. Someone threw it away.”

Shirō eyes Rin suspiciously, seeing the signs of a fight on her. But eventually he sighs and steps back. “Dinner is ready. Best get changed and cleaned up first. Don't worry, we won't eat it all before you come down.”

Rin smiles at that and as she heads up, pausing for a moment, turning to look back at Shirō. “Thanks...Tou-san.” She gets out, before she darts away.

Behind her, Shirō stands still in shock, then slowly smiles. He turns away with a warm sensation in his heart, happy to have his son not quite too old for addressing him as “Father”.

Kero stares as Rin hums to herself and slowly gets ready for the day. To make sure that Yukio won't wake up too early, Rin makes a point of using Sleep to make sure he only wakes up come time to get ready for school.

“You are goin' on a date?” Kero finally squeaks out.

Rin nods. “Well...I guess you could say I wanna enjoy my time. And school was a disaster yesterday anyways.”

Kero sighs. “Ah'm goin' with you. You can add me to yer bag and Ah'll keep quiet.” He assures her.

Rin considers it, then smiles. “Okay. You can come and make sure my date isn't a big meanie.”

Kero splutters at that, but sighs and silently admits that's why he's going.

Rin adds the final item to her bag and then cheerfully swings it over her shoulder and turns to Kero. “Get in and let's go! I need to sneak down to the kitchen to get the bento ready.”

“Ah am honestly surprised no one noticed you makin' three bento yesterday...” Kero mentions before he settles into Rin's bag.

Rin giggles at that. “I know!”
Still in a cheerful mood, Rin heads downstairs, pausing only briefly to give a fond look at her brother before sneaking downstairs. She doesn't have to worry about waking anyone up but it pays to be careful.

Even if it's not just Yukio who was hit with Sleep's dust, but the entire monastery, careful is always good.

Riku checks his watch nervously. It's not the first time and honestly he should stop since it's not even time for Sora to show up.

'It's just a friend date, a repayment date.' He tells himself. Judging by his sweaty hands he wipes on his pants, he doesn't really believe it.

“Riku!”

The sound of Sora's voice has Riku's head shoot up.

He gapes. Sora is wearing a short, very cute blue dress with a belt around the waist. Stripped black and white leggings are on her legs as well as a pair of dark blue flats on her feet. She also has a white sunhat with a blue ribbon wrapped around it on her head and a brilliant smile on her face. The big bag she's carrying is very cute and simple too, with lots of pockets. Her eyes seem to sparkle up at him as she settles beside him.

“Good morning!” She chirps cheerfully.

Riku can't say anything for a long moment, then stutters out, “Cu-cute...”

Sora goes bright red at that, and ducks her head. “Really? Thank you...”

Riku swallows, then manages to pull a smile to his face and offers Sora his arm. She shyly takes it and carefully follows him as they walk away from the meeting place – a big tree standing next to a train station – and into the nearby shopping area.

“I think just a fun walk around would be nice.” Riku offers. “Nothing particularly fancy but if you see anything you really like, ask and I'll buy it for you.”

Riku doesn't explain how he will do it; with the credit card his parents gave to him awhile back. Also known as their method of “caring” for him.

“Hmm...okay, but I'll avoid super expensive things!” Sora cheers.

Riku finds himself dazed again by just how cute Sora is. ‘Heh...even her masculine speech is cute!’

Feeling in a positive mood, Riku cheerfully heads to the first store on the list.

The stores are very fun to go through, both of them laughing and enjoying themselves surprisingly. Not much about their actual selves are explained, but little things like favourite food and colours and random comments about things they dislike or like in that vein are shared.

Riku does know that “Sora” apparently is the only girl in her family and alludes to not being with her birth family. This, plus the magic he knows she has – and even decides to use to play a prank on an obnoxious store owner – makes him wonder about her being some kind of magical princess from another dimension. Silly as it sounds, it seems almost true with her magic and attitude.
Rin is much the same, though is more just accepting of Riku being a Lonely Rich Kid who did Wrong until a wonderful teacher stepped in and has been helping him get better. She doesn't consider that much more than asking who the teacher is and mentally slotting the name somewhere in her mind for later perusal.

At lunch time, they are definitely hungry and before Riku can suggest a place, Rin drags him over to a bench by a nearby fountain and digs into her bag, pulling out the two bento she made with a smile.

“You...did you make these?” Riku carefully accepts the bento-bako she hands to him.

Rin grins. “Yup. Cooking's like the only talent I got.”

“As well as your magic.” Riku gently reminds her, making her flush and wonder why she hasn't made sure he doesn't know she can do magic.

Well...he doesn't know Rin.” She decides, as they both open the bento and Riku pauses to gaze at the food before his eyes.

The main dish is sweet and sour chicken, with rice placed across from it and decorated with an umeboshi. That's just the first layer, the second layer having a potato salad and a collection of strawberries and blueberries as well as bunny cut apple slices. The final treat is a small cupcake that Riku drools just at the sight of, decorated with a very cute panda face done in frosting.

The first taste of the sweet and sour chicken has Riku moaning in sheer joy and half considering proposing to Sora on the spot. He pushes down that impulse – knowing just how crazy it is – and instead merely compliments her. Rin glows at that compliment and eats another bite of her own bento.

Their lunch is thus mostly made up of them enjoying their meal and barely any conversation. But that strangely doesn't hinder the companionship they both feel.

Kero secretly watches as Rin and Riku's “date” goes on. A part of him is irritated with Rin going out with a stranger, but the other part admits that this seems good for her. Rin is fully relaxing under such a day of not having to be anything but “Sora”. As she argues playfully over how much Riku should pay for her – in regards to a special kit that's for making plush toys that Rin is glowing over – Kero considers just how lucky Rin got here.

This is honestly good, as much as Ah hate to think of it.’ Kero knows just how much stress has been building up and snorts. ‘Apparently Switch is a blessin' in disguise.’

Kero then wonders how Rin is going to break it to Riku that she probably won't ever see him again. After all, after today, male Rin will be returning and Rin will return to his normal life.

'He might accept the magic, but not sure about Sora actually being a guy...' Kero sighs and prays for the best.

At the end of the day, Rin's smile fades and she looks at Riku rather seriously. They are standing back under the tree that they started under and it's time for Rin to head home.

“Um...thank you for this day. It was wonderful...” Rin glances down.

“I'm glad you enjoyed it.” Riku says honestly. He then looks over Rin with a bit of strange understanding in his eyes. “You aren't going to come back, are you?”
Rin looks up at him, wide-eyed, then slowly nods. “Yeah...gotta go back home...”

Rin is surprised when Riku nods. “Okay. I'd love to spend more time with you but if you can't, that's fine. I understand.”

Rin sparkles up at him after staring in amazement for a long moment. “You...you mean it? Thank you!” She grabs his hands and smiles up at him.

Unknown to Rin, Riku is thinking of the magical princess theory of his and figures that it is time for Sora to return home to her home dimension.

“Um...” Rin bites her lip and considers things as she steps back. “If I can...I'll see about contacting you when I can...if I can...return?” She looks shyly up at him. In the bag, Kero nearly falls over in shock, knowing exactly what Rin is implying there.

Riku feels a bit of a blush go across his cheeks, and pushes it down. ‘Don't go there. No making a girl a girlfriend ahead of time. Don't jump the gun.’ “That would be nice. But how are you going to contact me?”

Rin looks thoughtful for a moment, then looks carefully at Riku. She can sense the traces of magical talent on him. Nothing spectacular and probably locked up so he can't do much at all – probably not even see demons – but it's there. Rin takes a deep breath and closes her eyes. For a moment all she does is sense, memorizing the taste, scent, and feel of Riku's dormant magic.

She then opens her eyes with a bright smile. “I'll find you. I promise.”

Riku returns the smile. “I believe you.”

And so does Rin's final day as a girl end.

Of course, it's only after midnight that Rin can call on Switch. As she waits for the final minutes to tick down, she stares at her hand. The “tattoo” around her ring finger is slowly fading away into nothing, as if it's being worn down by water.

“Rin...do you think you'll miss bein' a girl?” Kero asks her after a moment.

Rin looks up at him and shrugs. “I dunno...I always just felt myself and...I guess I'll miss some thing about it...”

Rin then makes a face. “Though not having to hide things. That was a pain.”

Kero chuckles at that and nods. “Or havin' to deal with angry Fujimoto when you came home from skippin' school?”

Rin pales, recalling just how angry Shirō was at that. “Oh man...if I must do this again, I'll do it during break...maybe Golden Week...that's soon...”

“So you were serious 'bout that.” Kero notes.

Rin gives a small smile and nods. “Yeah...it was quite fun and...I got a good feeling about it. Somehow...it feels like I need it to prepare or something...”

Kero raises an eyebrow at that, the wording sounding both strange but also making sense to him. “A feelin' uh...follow that if it's the right feelin'.”
Rin blinks at that, then laughs. “Sure I can do that.”

She then checks the time and stands. “Well...it's time. Switch! Reverse the spell and return me to my male self!”

A bright light and it's over.

Rin looks down at his definitely male body and smiles. Then turns and starts heading back home. Sleep's dust won't last much longer after all and he's actually supposed to be grounded due to skipping school.

“Nii-san what are you doing?” Yukio stares as Rin enters the nurse office. “And why must I stand guard?”

“It's a secret thing!” Rin explains cheerily, as he slips inside and looks for the right drawer or cupboard. Wherever they must be. “And stay outside!”

Yukio sighs but returns to the hallway to keep watch as Rin requested. ‘Why did I agree to this?’

As Yukio bemoans that, Rin finally discovers what he was looking for with a bright “ha!” slipping free. He then pulls out the items in question and shoves them into the drawer before closing it and exiting the nurse's office.

“All done! C'mon lunch hour is slipping by!”

Yukio sighs, but follows his excited brother. “What did you do?”

“It's a secret!” Rin then adds, “But a good one!”

Yukio stares at Rin for a long moment, before sighing and deciding to brush it aside.

Rin hums happily, thinking of his newest good deed.

After all, what else do you call giving more pads to the nurse's office supply?

Chapter End Notes

What did you think? Comment below, I enjoy it all and assures the next chapter comes!

As a note for Rin's appearance as a girl, Kato did some sketches of gender flipped main characters (http://lovepsychothefirst.tumblr.com/post/125535760186/nii-chan-tamer-blue-exorcist-author-tweets) but also think Korra in body type.

Plus, an adult fem!Rin would pretty much look like this: http://lovepsychothefirst.tumblr.com/post/137527013771/mmekeeklovescarmilla-thats-the-kind-of-girl-i

Thank you for reading!

Countdown to Finale: 8

Cards Remaining: 9
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for all the comments last chapter! I'm glad you enjoyed it!

We are getting closer and closer to the end of the 1st arc. Hang in there as things race towards the climax!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As the time for Golden Week comes ever closer, the scent of spring changes to start to reflect more of summer. Not yet at any rate, but getting closer as time goes on. It makes some days hotter than others, provoking a bit of laziness from people.

And deep in a park, a strange glow begins to form as something that has been sleeping for quite some time finally starts to wake up.

But not quite yet.

Even it, it seems, is slightly effected by the haze of a hot day. Provoking it to delay it's true awakening and just rest for a little longer.

A small blessing for Southern Cross's Cardcaptor.

**Chapter 36: Golden Spring Rain**

Rin barely holds back the urge to tap his fingers in impatience, glancing up at the clock on the wall. It doesn't seem to be moving to his eyes and that almost makes him growl.

Rin turns his attention back to the teacher, who is still talking about chemistry, and wonders when it's going to end.

As Golden Week comes ever closer, Rin keeps getting distracted. Not just because of the promise she made with Riku – actually not quite a promise except in Rin's head – but because he's worried about the lack of Cards recently.

There's been something of a “drought” for the last week or so, not even a flicker of magic no matter how Rin looked. Truth be told, he should be relaxing and enjoying the small break he has, but a feeling has him up and exploring every night.

Rin yawns at that, barely stifling it. He then looks around at the class, seeing that he's not the only one bored.

"Only the morning classes and it's already starting to stretch." Rin looks up at the clock again and sighs, turning back to the teacher and, after a moment, does his best to take notes as the teacher starts adding facts and equations to the board.

It's not easy, and Rin ends up yawning again.

"Yamaguchi-kun!" The teacher calls out, making said boy jump. "Please come up here and finish the
equation.”

He pales at that but stands nonetheless, looking almost like he's going to his execution. Rin sighs at the exaggeration and hears an echo slightly. Turning, he meets the gaze of Mizuki who blinks in surprise at that.

She then gives a small smile before rolling her eyes and turning back to the board, wincing as Yamaguchi annoys the teacher as he starts writing.

Rin wonders at that, resting his head on his hand as he turns back to the board.

“No, Yamaguchi-kun. You weren't even paying attention were you?” The teacher sounds more exasperated than annoyed lucky for Yamaguchi. “The equation is for...”

Rin twirls in his pen in his hand then starts putting it to paper as Yamaguchi loudly gets confused again and the teacher ends up having to simplify the explanation.

The simple version is way easier than all the big, fancy words he was tossing around before.

The sounds of merriment and laughter float up from downstairs, all products of a good dinner and cheer as both boys are still doing good in school despite Rin skipping that one day.

Kero listens to it slightly with a smile on his face, then turns to look at the chest in front of him. His smile drops as the chest glows and opens, the Sakura Book floating up and opening. The Cards – placed inside by Rin last night – float out and start to circle Kero as he thinks, all glowing.

Just looking at the Cards, Kero can see by the amount just how far Rin has come. There is only a few more Cards missing for Rin to find and capture.

'And then...it's time for the Judgement.' Kero frowns at it. He had thought they were beyond needing it, since Kero figured by the time the Cardcaptor has caught all the Cards they would have proven their worth. 'Sure, perhaps somethin' of a final test to prove they know what they are doin’...but not that.'

Kero sighs, knowing it's all out of his hands. He is not the Judge here, merely the one to choose the candidate and give what aid they need to pass the tests on their own powers. He is not the one who is to be impartial here.

'Neither is Sekki...' Kero sighs, recalling the conversation he had with her during New Years and wishes that something else could have been done than what is to be done.

“But that's not what we can avoid.” Sekki had told him. “We are not the ones in control here and you know that well.” She gives a strange smile at that. “But...I know enough that it will work out. The future that I see there is still clear and not uncertain to me.”

Kero sighs and the Cards slowly float back into the book, which closes with a soft click before gently settling back into the chest. As the chest closes, Kero turns to the door as it clicks open.

“Hey, Kero.” Rin smiles at him and walks in, settling a plate of food on the table for him. “Here you go.”

Rin then frowns, wondering at how Kero seems to be very subdued. “Is everything okay?”

Kero shakes himself and grins. “Yeah...oooh...is that hayashi rice?” He dives eagerly towards the
plate and picks up the spoon, going for a big spoonful and letting out a cry of joy. “Hmmm...it's good!”

Rin chuckles at that and settles at his desk, pulling out a magazine and starting to read it as he waits for Kero to finish his own supper.

Kero pauses once to eye Rin, wondering if what he hopes for will truly come true, then focuses again on the super delicious food.

He won't get anywhere just thinking glum thoughts.

Shirō pauses just outside the kitchen, seeing Rin making up what's to be the monastery's lunch while the boys are at school, and leans on the doorway to watch as Rin cheerfully chops up the vegetables for the stew he's making.

'A one dish meal sounds lovely...' Shirō grins as he watches Rin work.

His smile slowly fades as he finds himself thinking of how busy Golden Week is going to be. Normally he would have the week off, but things have been getting a little tense lately with the demons around. It's like they are freaking out over things and have been for almost a year now.

'Like something powerful moved in...' Shirō sighs, especially at the fact that Yukio won't be having his Golden Week free like last year. That had been a good thing for the boys, especially with their school giving the whole week off for their students. They are doing the same this year and Shirō knows very well it's practically a tradition for Southern Cross and True Cross City as well. Every school takes all of Golden Week off, to the relief of the teachers, minus the cram school.

“Oh, Oyaji?” Rin turns to see Shirō. “Is there something you want?”

Shirō gives a tired grin. “Well...wanted to warn you about Golden Week.”

“What about it...?” Rin looks nervous at the thought, eyeing Shirō warily.

Shirō pauses for a moment before going full in. “Neither I or Yukio will be around much unfortunately. Something came up in his cram school and I got volunteered to help with a situation as well.”

Rin looks slightly pained at the thought briefly, then it's covered up with a bright grin. “It's okay! When you guys do have some time we can still...” Rin trails off and looks down.

Shirō chuckles and walks in, placing a hand on Rin's head that makes him look up. “If we have some time free, I'll make sure we can spend some time together.”

Rin's bright smile in response is more than enough for Shirō right now. Rin then starts blabbering about food options and asking him about what he has planned for meals during Golden Week, scolding him when he mentions convenience store food and insisting on making him and Yukio proper meals.

In the doorway, Yukio watches the interaction between his brother and father with a strange look on his face.

The next day is very rainy and Rin finds himself pathetically grateful for it. Not because of the rain, but because he recognizes the feeling of magic. The Card known as Rain is the culprit and Rin
eagerly prepares that evening to go out and find the Card.

“You are *real* excited about it...” Kero raises an eyebrow at how cheery Rin is being.

Rin laughs. “I guess I've been bored or something. Also...” Rin blinks and counts up how many Cards he has. He can only guess the estimate but what he recalls makes him smile. “I'm almost done right? Soon after this...I'll be able to see about learning other magic and get back to a more normal life!”

Kero for a moment looks worried, then smooths over his expression before Rin notices. “You're right. Yer Cardcaptor days will end soon.”

“Yeah...feels weird but...” Rin shrugs. “I'll get used to it right?”

Kero nods but inside he squirms, thinking of all that Rin still has to go through. But he doesn't know how to bring it up or want to spoil Rin's good mood.

With all the rain covering the city, Rin knows that finding exactly where Rain is will take time. Luckily, it doesn't end up being too much time.

Especially since Rin ends up soaking wet pretty quickly. Having to use Fly to get up high enough to where Rain is bound to be does not help and if it wasn't for Rin's natural resilience he would be suffering a cold come tomorrow.

Rain pokes her head out from a cloud and giggles at the sight of the bedraggled Rin.

“Oh shut up.” Rin switches Fly for Float as fast as possible, needing a place to “stand” to be able to get to Rain. After the small drop and rise that's the result of that – and has Kero scolding him for the risk – Rin raises his staff. “Rain, I command you to--”

And Rain suddenly turns and vanishes. Rin stops, stunned. It gets weirder as the rain fades and the clouds start to clear up.

Rin, hesitantly, reaches out with his senses and can't pick up Rain at all.

“What the fuck just happened?” Rin asks, wide-eyed and half-angry as much as confused.

Kero shrugs and wonders the same, curious about the expression Rain gave before disappearing.

Almost like she just got good news...

Just because Rain decided to be super weird doesn't mean Rin doesn't have school the next day. At least, he thinks, it's a good thing this is the last day before Golden Week kicks in.

'Might be able to ask Sekki-san if she knows why Rain might have been so weird...' Rin muses as he puts his shoes away before heading up to his classroom.

As usual, Rin finds his very presence makes his classmates tense. Rin does his best to ignore it, settling down in his seat and getting ready for the first class of the day. As time passes and Rin proves he's not going to hurt anyone – today at least – the other students relax and return to their previous conversations and activities.

“Hey, Okumura-kun!” Except for Naoko who cheerfully approaches him. “What are your plans for Golden Week?”
Rin looks at Naoko, a bit puzzled by the question. “Got some things to do...” He says vaguely, not sure how to explain his plans right now include spending the whole week as a girl and doing his best to hunt down one illusive and strange Card.

“Oh.” Naoko looks at him for a moment, opens her mouth, then closes it. A brilliant smile covers her face then. “Well, maybe I'll run into you!”

“Maybe.” Rin admits, though privately hopes not considering what condition he's going to be in.

The bell rings at that and Naoko gets dragged back to her seat by Miho, Rin turning to the front and prepared to be bored silly by most of his classes.

A knock on the door shakes Sekki out of her thoughts and she looks up from her cup of tea and smiles. “Rin-kun. I'm surprised they let you in.”

Rin shrugs and slips into the teachers' lounge. “I didn't ask, just walked in.”

Sekki chuckles at that and moves slightly so Rin can sit next to her. “That makes more sense. Now, what is it you want to ask me?”

“Rain.” Rin glances briefly at the door to make sure no one is going to come in, then turns back to Sekki. “Rain retreated when I went to capture it. Any idea why?”

“Hmm...” Sekki taps her mug as she thinks. “I can say I know for certain...the question is why Rain was merely covering the town in a small rainstorm. Rain is more mischievous than that.”

“That's what Kero said.” Rin frowns in thought. “Maybe...it was looking for something?”

“Hmm...that is entirely possible.” Sekki takes a sip of her tea then sets it aside again. “Rain would have some idea of where something is if its water touched it.”

“It must have found it. Annoying how fast it was able to get away...” Rin presses his lips together. “I don't like it.”

“No...if it found what it was looking for why hasn't anything happened yet?” Sekki observes.

Rin sighs. “So...what are your plans for Golden Week?” Rin switches topics, knowing they can't get further in the previous one.

Sekki chuckles. “I was thinking of catching up on a tv show I just got into. Perhaps also on a few books, if I have the time. What of you?”

As Rin explains his plans – Sekki not making comments on how unusual they are compared to others – neither notice the gym teacher briefly glances in at them with a frown before moving away, a dark shadow over his face.

April 23rd comes with Rin groaning his way out of bed. A glance to the side reveals Yukio’s already up and, as he gets up, Rin finds a note on the desk that says he’s already gone to cram school.

‘Dammit it's a holiday...’ Rin yawns, and wonders exactly what's up with Yukio's cram school. Then again, I've never been to a cram school so this might be normal...’

It's supposed to be a very special cram school of some kind after all. So Rin can't say if it's normal or
Rin scratches his stomach and turns to the window, wondering why he can't see the sun.

He then stares and suddenly is very much so awake as he looks out at the jungle that is growing outside.

“What the…” Rin gapes and tries to figure out what he's seeing.

Then it clicks that he's feeling the aura of a Card and he curses and whirls around. “Kero! Wake up!”

“Ueh…what?” Kero rolls over and rubs at his eyes. He yawns and flutters over to Rin, who grabs him and shoves him in front of the window.

That's enough to wake him up. “Oi, Rin--” He snaps his mouth shut and stares at what's revealed to his gaze. As they look out, the tree outside appears to grow and they can hear creaking sounds.

Kero groans. “Oh no…Wood…”

There’s something to be said for an entire district turning into a forest. The good news is it isn't on the news yet as people are still waking up and realizing just what's going on.

That's enough for Rin to call upon both Sleep and Windy to hit everyone with a deep sleep and put them out of the way of danger with a few whispered instructions to Float to ease people out of the danger zone.

Rin can barely exit the monastery with all the trees nearby, having to squeeze his way past and if it wasn't for his super strength it would have been so much harder to get through the tangled branches and trunks.

Green leaves stick to his hair, clothing, and skin, Rin shaking slightly to get them off, and having to pick at sap that is sticky on his skin.

“What happened Kero?” Rin asks once he gets to a cleared space.

“This must be what Rain was lookin' for…this is exactly the kind of fun it likes…” Kero groans. “Wood's gentle but water makes her excited and all this,” he gestures at the slowly growing forest that's covering and burying the town, “is because of that.”

Rin mutters something unpleasant under his breath then stands up straight. “Right...we have to find Rain and stop it then.” Rin eyes a tree nearby. “And quickly too...looks like this might crush everything soon…”

Finding Rain is not easy. All the power Wood is giving off makes it difficult to track down the other Card, leaving Rin cursing and struggling through foliage as he hunts down for the root of the problem.

Rin might be more amused by that pun if he wasn't so damn frustrated at the moment.

Rin kicks at a tree truck out of frustration, Kero wincing and gaping as he kicks so hard the tree breaks and starts to fall down.

“Oi look out!”
“Windy!” Rin calls out just in time, Windy catching the tree and making sure it doesn't fall on the house behind it. Rin curses again, then pauses and turns away. He has a thoughtful look on his face.

“Wait a minute...” Rin steps toward a nearby park and furrows his brow in thought. “I think...”

Rin breaks out into a big run, Kero scrambling to keep up with him as Rin dives into the park. As Kero follows him, he starts to hear the sound of water. Not fountain water, but rain water.

Kero has to slow down at a hard corner, and winces as Rin slips and falls thanks to a big, growing puddle of water. Cursing up a storm, Rin stands and then gives a wicked grin.

“Found you!” Rin declares, pointing at Rain who is currently watering some trees that are slowly sprouting up more and more.

Rain ignores him, so Rin starts to creep up behind her. Kero has a momentary bad feeling and is about to call out to Rin.

Only for what he feared to happen as suddenly the rain clouds increase and Rin screams as he's swept away by an impromptu flood.

“Shit!” Rin manages to gasp out before he's sucked under again. 'Dammit...'

Rin manages to reach for his Card holster and concentrates, pulling out Watery. 'Watery...control Rain dammit!'

A bright light flares and quite suddenly all the water is gone and Rin is able to breath. He looks up to see Kero flying over to him, hovering over him and looking concerned. Rin gently waves him aside and stands, looking up at the trail of water in the air under Watery's control.

Shaking himself, Rin follows the trail back to a pouting Rain who looks far from pleased at having her fun ruined. Rin laughs despite himself.

“You...are a menace.” He chuckles. He then lifts the staff. “Rain, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Rin catches the Card and turns to the trees. “Now about Wood...”

Kero chuckles. “Oh, you don't need to worry there.”

Rin turns a confused look on Kero but before he can ask all the trees start glowing and slowly fade into nothing. Rin is shocked as he watches this, then turns to see a small glowing figure. Looking like a small woman with green hair and vines in it and a gentle smile on her face.

Rin stares at her for a moment then smiles and holds out his hand. “Hello, Wood.”

She gently flows into Card form and lands in his hands. Rin smiles down at her, then sighs and looks around. “Well...luckily the damage was undone...best make sure no one remembers this though.”

Rin pulls out Memory and concentrates, before throwing the Card up in the air.

“Release!”

Nagatomo pokes his head into the kitchen, watching as Rin hums to himself and works on making some food up. Briefly he wonders what it's for, then decides it's definitely for whatever Rin has
planned for Golden Week.

“So...that for us or...?” Nagatomo asks anyways, sliding in and watching as Rin turns to face him. “Definitely not for you guys.” Rin turns back to preparations, carefully slicing the meat. “But I'll be making something later for you guys.”

“That's good.” Nagatomo settles in front of the kitchen table. “I'm sorry.”

“For what?” Rin asks, a little startled by his words.

Nagatomo gives a soft smile. “That you can't spend time with us or your brother this Golden Week.”

Rin shrugs. “I...well, I do have plans this week that wouldn't make it easy for me.” Rin looks thoughtful for a moment, then turns back to Nagatomo. “And I'm fine. Yukio is just at school. Heh, how smart is he anyways?”

Nagatomo forces a laugh at that, feeling a bit of a tinge for hiding the truth from Rin. “Good point. Anyways, what's your plan for supper?”

Rin starts excitedly talking about dinner, Nagatomo settling back in his chair and enjoying the little break he has.

Sure he could have gone off on his own, but Rin looks like company is needed for him.

And Nagatomo has no problem with spending some time putting a smile back on Rin's face.

---

Yukio is still not back when it gets dark. Rin would have been more upset about it if he wasn't getting something ready for a special change.

“Rin...are you sure about this? We are talkin' longer than three days here.” Kero questions Rin, wings fluttering slightly in worry.

Rin gives a soft smile to Kero and brushes his head with two fingers. “It's fine. I...I need time to just relax and not really hide. I mean, I'm sorta hiding but...”

“Not as much eh?” Kero eyes Rin for a moment, then sighs and smiles. “Then go ahead. If you are certain and you planned it well...”

“Yeah...with Yukio out a lot and the extra supplies I got I should be fine. Plus, I can go shopping a little more during the week.” Rin holds out the Card and smiles at it.

“Well...your time to shine. Switch, release!”

And so does Rin's Golden Week begin.

Chapter End Notes

What did you think? Comment below, I love to hear your impressions of things and the comments result in Monday's chapter!

Also, in regards to next chapter: no, it's not the days Rin spent with Riku over Golden
Week. That didn't fit right into the main story. Don't worry, I have the side story version of it written up and that will eventually be posted.

Countdown to Finale: 7

Cards Remaining: 7
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

I AM SO SORRY FOR THE DELAY. -grovels- I was distracted by shopping, getting sucked into a new anime, and working on something else.

You did reach your comment quota...just. Try better this week please! (Also if you hadn't and did sad faces and asking about the quota comments, that wouldn't have helped your case...)

On to the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“An exhibit that gets twisted?” Rin blinks up at Naoko, who is sitting in the desk in front of him. The girl nods excitedly in response. After his rather interesting, though soothing, Golden Week, Rin was actually hoping for a little normal afterwards. But Naoko as usual shows up to end his plans in that regard.

“Yes! That's the rumour I heard at least. For the museum we are going to, there's a special exhibit that recently got closed down temporarily. Apparently, some people managed to get lost in it. In fact, one is said to have completely disappeared!” Naoko throws her arms out in example. “And it's not supposed to be a big exhibit, just a few rooms.”

“So...think that's something you should be looking into?” Naoko bends over and peers up at Rin from level with the desk.

Rin twitches and looks down at his book. Then looks back up, almost jumping at how close Naoko is. “W-well...we are going there tomorrow so I guess I can take a look...it's probably nothing.”

“But even if it's nothing shouldn't take risks!” Naoko says cheerfully, standing up. “I'm in the group with you so I'll help you sneak off if you need it!”

“Thanks...” Rin watches her go, then sighs and returns to his book.

However, he can't shake what he was told completely off.

'An exhibit that you get lost in when you shouldn't...’ Rin frowns in thought and wonders if it is a Card at fault. He hasn't dealt with any Cards since the start of Golden Week and that ended a few days ago.

With that in mind, Rin looks again at the permission form he's to hand in today and wonders if things will get dangerous again at the museum his class is taking a trip to.

Chapter 37: Relativity

The True Cross Campus Town's Science Museum is large. Much like the majority of the place, everything seems to be oversized and ostentatious. To the point Rin wonders what crazy person is behind all the designs and lay-out of this city.
"It even creeps into Southern Cross..." Rin thinks with a sigh as his class's bus trundles up to the front door of the Science Museum. 'More and more things are getting big and weird...wonder when it's going to be just another part of Cross City?'

Rin shrugs it off as they finally reach the front and the teacher calls for their attention.

“First of all, I would like you to know what a privilege you have been given.” Begins the nasally voiced science teacher. “Generally we don’t get the opportunity to visit this wondrous museum but this year we have been lucky enough to make room for it. In that regard, you are to be on your best behaviour. That means you will...”

Rin tunes out the teacher's blabbering in favour of focusing on the entrance of the museum. Rin can see what looks like a tour guide and how he seems to look between the bus and his watch constantly. He's probably the poor sap who's to help guide them through the exhibits.

The call of the teacher telling them to line up and head outside, to form their groups once they get outside, gets Rin's attention and he stands.

Once outside, Rin looks around and spots the excitedly waving Naoko. She's standing next to Yamaguchi, who looks terrified at sharing the group with him. Rin sighs at that, but heads over anyways.

He jumps when Naoko latches on to his arm, staring at her in surprise, then turns back to the front as the poor tour guide begins to explain what they are going to do today.

As soon as Rin steps into the museum, he senses the Card. Nothing dramatic, just knows it's there. Not doing anything quite yet, but Rin knows it's there.

“Okumura-kun?” Rin turns to see Naoko, still hanging off his arm, looking up at him in worry.

Rin smiles. “I'm fine.”

“You looked like you were somewhere else...is that room really haunted?” Naoko whispers up at him, eyes shining.

Rin's smile wavers. “Um...yeah, it is.”

Naoko nods her head then gets a determined look on her face. “When the groups split up, we have to get there! Before it does any real damage, right?”

Rin stares at her for a moment, then shakes himself out of his thoughts. “Um...yeah but uh...could you let go of me please?”

“Nope!” Naoko says cheerfully, and drags him over to the rest of the class is gathering with the tour guide. “It's for protection.”

“I can't really do any protecting when you're glued to me...” Rin mutters.

“No silly!” Naoko laughs. “It's for you.”

Rin stares at Naoko. “M-me?”

“Hm, hm.” Naoko's smile softens. “Hard for people to see you as a monster when you can't even remove me. Or don't want to. No way any fights will happen.” Naoko twists her head and looks over at a particular group of people.
Rin looks over at where the class delinquents are gathering, muttering to each other. They jump when they notice Rin is looking at them, then one scowls. But no one makes a move on him, appearing confused by Naoko.

Rin turns back to Naoko. “...thanks.”

Naoko leans her head against his shoulder. “You're welcome.”

They then both turn as the nervous tour guide begins, stuttering at first, to explain the plan for their day.

Rin stretches out as Naoko finally releases him. The tour guide finally let them go after leading them through almost every room. Glancing at the packet in his hands, Rin knows he doesn't have much time since he also needs to get this done.

'Don't want to get Naoko in trouble...' Rin figures, glancing back at her. Yamaguchi twitches whenever Rin looks his way so Rin makes a point of avoiding eye contact there.

And it was only almost every room because the physics rooms are off-limit currently. Judging by the power he feels just standing in front of the so-called barricade – also known as just some tape and a sign – there's a good reason to keep it off-limits.

'Wonder if they have called in exorcists?' Rin turns that idea around then dismisses it. 'I can't really see a science museum doing that...not without more dangerous things happening.'

And so far only people get lost here, strange as it sounds. Rin glances at the map set to the side of the doorway and there are honestly only three rooms. People should not be getting lost.

Rin glances back and sees that Naoko is distracted Yamaguchi, then turns to his bag. “Hey, Kero. Wake up. It's Maze, right?”

“Ah'm already awake.” Kero grumbles, the yawn he gives off after not very convincing. “And yeah...it's probably Maze and that one is going to be painful...”

“I figured that...” Rin sighs. “Never easy...”

Rin approaches the physics room. At that point Yamaguchi notices what he's doing and freaks. “Okumura...you can't...” Yamaguchi looks like he's about to pass out from the stress.

Naoko gives him a dry look. “Don't worry, you don't have to come with.”

Naoko follows Rin as he slips over the barricade, smiling when Rin looks at her and then sighs as he realizes he's not going to shake her.

'I have to wonder if even using magic would work...' Rin turns to look at Yamaguchi. “You can just wait here and watch for teachers and stuff.”

“But--” Yamaguchi runs in place for a moment, then sighs as the two others disappear. “Oh man...please don't let me get in trouble too...”

Settling beside the barricade, Yamaguchi leans against the wall and waits, fingers tapping restlessly.

The physics room is very quiet compared to the rest of the museum, not to mention darker with only
minimal lighting. Rin blinks in surprise as Naoko pulls out a flashlight and clicks it on.

The girl grins, the light from her flashlight making her glasses glint eerily. “Never hurts to be prepared!”

Rin chuckles, and pulls out his Key. He doesn't use it quite yet, glancing at Naoko and worried about showing her his real magic and powers.

Naoko seems oblivious to his concerns, humming to herself as she examines things with her flashlight. “Pick up anything yet?”

Rin shakes himself out of his thoughts. “Um...no...” Rin frowns and reaches out with his senses. “I think it's in another room.”

“Okay.” Naoko steps back to his side and sticks close as they both head to another room.

This room is the one with hands on learning, not just display cases and articles to explain things. Naoko looks in wonder at one particular device, that the information on it claims will explain the theory of relativity.

“Neat...” Naoko murmurs, poking at the device before standing and wandering over to where Rin is staring at another display. “What is it Okumura-kun?”

Rin frowns and is about to speak when the display swirls and shifts, distorting. Rin steps back. “Oh crap, get back!”

Naoko attempts to do as he said as Rin goes for his staff but it is too late. With a great twisting sensation and a kaleidoscope of light the Card swallows them and leaves the display room empty except for the flashlight Naoko dropped.

“Are you okay?” Rin asks as soon as he gets his bearings and the place stops twisting so much.

“Yeah...I think...so...” Naoko stares, open mouthed, as she gets a good look at where they are. “What...happened?”

She sees green. Green floor and green walls. Looking up, she can barely see the sky and they appear to be stuck in some strange corridor.

“We got caught...” Rin sighs and stands up, looking around and touching a wall. “Dammit...”

“You aren't goin' to be able to capture Maze inside it...” Kero announces, flying out from Rin's bag. “You gotta get out first.” He lands on Rin's shoulder and looks as annoyed as Rin feels.

“Wonderful.” Rin kicks at a wall, then turns to look at Naoko. A worried frown crosses his face as he watches Naoko stand up and look around herself. He then marches over and grabs her arm, making her turn.

“Best not get separated.” Rin grunts out. Red creeps up onto his cheeks as Naoko adjusts his grasp and switches it to them holding hands.

“That's a good idea...” Naoko eyes the walls. “Do you think normal maze escaping methods would work here?”

Rin shrugs. “It's worth a shot.”
Naoko grins and places her free hand on a wall. “Then follow me!”

“I don’t think we are getting anywhere...” Rin sighs. Naoko nods, a little sadly.

“Normally it would work but this isn’t a normal maze...” Naoko looks around. “I’m starting to realize why people must have gotten lost...”

“Maze is like this...” Kero sighs and lifts up to hover next to the two glum teens. “It also does its best to keep others from cheatin’...though really, it cheats itself.” Kero makes a disgusted sound at that. “Not easy to get out of.”

“No...” Rin glances down at his free hand which holds his now activated staff. Naoko hadn’t said anything when he called it up, just smiled cheerfully before continuing on with her attempt to help them escape.

“Is there a way to get out then? There must be right?” Naoko asks, stepping back to give Rin some room and flexing her now free hand.

“Hmm...” Rin looks thoughtful, considering his options Card wise.

’If Maze cheats...I just need to cheat better...’ Rin considers briefly Fly then dismisses it. It's too simple and Rin's never used it with a passenger either. ‘So need to destroy what's in my way...’

“Sword!” Naoko turns to see Rin's staff transformed into a sword shape, and watches as Rin focuses and cuts the wall in front of him in half.

Rin brightens, then his smile fades as the wall seals up almost immediately. “Oi!” Focusing again, Rin this time goes after the wall even more, slicing into it multiple times to create a big hole.

It still seals up before either Rin or Naoko can move.

Rin growls and dismisses Sword. “Alright...let's try again...”

Kero watches as Rin pulls out another Card and nearly falls over when he sees what Rin brought out. “Rin wait--!”

“Firey!” Rin calls out. “Burn me a path!”

Fiery roars out and smashes into the wall, the scent of burning things making Naoko step back and cover her nose with her sleeve. She watches in awe as the walls burn down and, after a moment, she lets out a cry of joy.

“There's the exit!” She steps forward then wavers as the ground moves. “What the...”

“Aaaaah!” Rin falls down as the ground shakes and splits, walls rising and ground falling and everything cracking into pieces.

“This is what Ah was tryin' to warn you about!” Kero wails as he clings to Rin's head, Maze shifting into a very strange looking place, with stairs upside down and more twisted hallways.

Rin stares in horror and then stands up. “Naoko!”

But he can't see her at all and no response comes to his calls.
“Dammit!” Rin punches one of the walls in frustration, after spending who knows how long searching for Naoko. Crouching down, he covers his face in his hands. Kero hovers nearby, not sure what to say.

_This is all my fault stupid stupid!_ Rin berates himself, then looks up and frowns. “Kero...am I upside down?”

“Uh...” Kero looks at the staircase they are on then looks up to another hallway above them. “Sorta?”

Rin groans. “Fuck fuck...how the hell do we get out of here?”

Rin remains silent for a long time, trying to think of anything to help him escape and get Naoko out too. As he thinks, a sound slowly travels to him, making him lift up his head again.

“Is that...?” Rin's eyes widen as he recognizes it. “Naoko...she's singing...”

Slowly standing up, Rin looks down at himself and tries to orient himself by the sound of Naoko's singing. After a moment, he picks his path and jumps down to another staircase before continuing onwards.

Despite all attempts to get to Naoko – and Naoko's persistence in using her song to guide Rin – Rin ends up failing again. He knows Naoko can't be far judging by how he can hear her...

_Though who knows how sound works here...'_ Rin looks at the twisted place he's stuck in and curses.

Glancing down at his feet, Rin eyes his shadow and then pauses. Lifting his head up again he looks around carefully and notices something very strange.

There are no shadows in Maze except for Rin and Kero's.

Rin can feel a grin spread across his face, which attracts Kero's attention. “What is it Rin?”

“I have an idea!” Rin digs out Shadow and tosses the Card into the air. “Shadow, find Naoko's shadow and take me there!”

Shadow slips down to the ground and takes off, Rin and Kero chasing after it. Shadow slips and slides through Maze's absurd stairs and hallways, not even hesitating as it attempts to change things up. Rin doesn't consider it either, pushing forward until he turns a corner and can't help the smile that comes to his face.

“Naoko!”

Said girl turns, halting in her singing finally, and stands up. “Okumura-kun!”

Rin is nearly sent back by Naoko tackling him, then adjusts and returns the hug before pushing her back. “You alright?” He asks, looking over her appearance.

Naoko nods. “Yes, I am.”

“That's good...” Rin sighs in relief, then turns to Shadow. “Lead us to the exit Shadow; find us another shadow!”

Yamaguchi Seto is not in a good place. Which is to say, he's standing between possible vivisection
by a demon and getting in serious trouble with the teachers when they discover what, exactly, his group is doing.

'Which is going into a forbidden area...' Seto shudders at the thought, glancing back at the opening that leads into an honestly creepy and dark area. 'I think I heard something about mysterious disappearances.'

Seto worries a little longer, fingers picking at his clothing and wondering what exactly he's supposed to do. A glance at his watch has him groaning and mentally throwing his hands in the air.

“Fuck I'm so in trouble...” He mutters to himself as he crosses the barricade himself and enters the physics exhibit.

The place is eerily quiet, which makes the hair on the back of his neck stand up and Seto to have to pause and try to calm himself down. Poking his head into the first room, he can't see much due to the dim lights. He tiptoes past the displays, not wanting to linger as he quickly realizes that his “group mates” aren't here.

The next room he pauses at a light, and walks towards a display where a flashlight is discarded. Picking it up, Seto looks around for the others and feels a chill at not seeing anyone, even as he moves the flashlight around.

The flashlight droops in his hands as he starts freaking out more, and retreats into his mind to force himself to think more clearly, causing his shadow to spread backwards.

He just misses the sight of a strange shadow slipping towards him. Seto does, however, hear the sound of Naoko and whirls around to see her jumping straight at him.

“KYAA!” Naoko lands on top of Seto, sending him sprawling back and groaning in pain.

It takes a moment for Naoko to realize what happened and then she's off, babbling apologizes and clinging to Seto, generally being a nuisance.

For a brief moment he hears something strange and a flash of light briefly blinds him. But Seto dismisses it in disentangling Naoko from him.

He finally sits up to see Okumura Rin leaning against the display case and looking down at him with a strange look on his face.

“So...” Seto flinches. “How much time do we have to get our work done?”

Seto doesn't say anything for a long moment, brain stalled at that.

Naoko giggling beside him does not help.

“Oro?”

Seto wants to smack himself for such a nonsense sound escaping from his mouth. Instead he ends up whimpering at the sharp grin Rin gives in response.

---

Somehow, through Naoko's genius and Rin being able to drag Yamaguchi anywhere due to sheer terror, they manage to actually complete their assignment. Unlike the rest they don't have any time to just enjoy themselves and freely explore, but after Maze Rin doesn't really want to.

On the bus ride back, Rin glances at Naoko and wonders if there is any way to truly get her away
from danger.

'No... there isn't...' Rin sighs. Aside from her enthusiasm at such “freaky” things, there’s the fact that everyone around him appears to turn into a target the moment Rin drops his guard.

Rin clenches his hands and wishes for greater strength than this. At the very least, he wants to be able to protect those that are around him.

'But that’s too much to ask... isn’t it?’ Rin sighs and closes his eyes, hoping to drive away his thoughts in the soothing rhythm of the bus moving through the streets.

He doesn’t have any luck there.

Sitting back in her chair, Sekki pushes away her impromptu scrying tool – a mug of green tea – and considers just how Rin has grown from here.

'He’s also so far away... when the time comes, can he survive?’ Sekki sighs. 'I would hope so but...’

Sekki looks down at her hands and for a moment sees another’s in her place. Closing her eyes, she whisks away that vision and hopes to be asleep during that time.

She does not want to watch when the Judgement comes. Sekki does not believe she could survive that.

A small light glows in darkness and a strange clock ticks forward as the countdown truly begins.

Chapter End Notes

Again, so sorry for the delay! Tell me what you think below!

Countdown to Finale: 6

Cards Remaining: 6
Thanks you all so much for the wonderful comments! But I have even better news!

Thanks to the wonderful Ravaelt Inheritance of Cards and Demons how has a TVTROPE PAGE. You may or may not know how much that means to me, but it is definitely awesome!

Which means another way to show appreciation has popped up: go here (http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Fanfic/InheritanceOfCardsAndDemons) if you are a troper and update that page! It needs lots of love, more tropes, and a better description of the series. Becoming a troper is easy enough; you can just make an account and take your time learning what tropes to add (there are some references I know that's for sure...and trope pages to explore). What is there does need things added to it: Mythology Gag pops into my mind as needing more examples from the CCS side.

I can't really do it myself...I can do minor edits, like fixing links...but as the author I really shouldn't do that much hehe...

I'm watching it, so any changes that pop up I'll go and check it out. I'll count each good change as a comment. A trope added as two comments. ICD showing up on a main trope page as an example in the Fanfic/Fanwork folder for that trope as three comments. So if you guys aren't comfortable with commenting or aren't that confident with your fanart, you can do this instead!

Speaking of fanart, there is no real "right" or "wrong" way to draw characters and things. I tend towards brief descriptions. There are a few things there, but I've answered them a few times already in the comments, you just have to look for the answers there.

Now that's done, on to the chapter! I have two major cameos and a reference to the plot of another manga here...

The night sky is quite beautiful from on high, with the lights of the city distant enough one can see the stars, and peaceful too. With only the wind and the clouds as companions, it's amazing in fact.

Rin sighs though. “Dammit...still nothing.”

Perched on his staff with Fly flapping behind him and Kero beside him, Rin once again finds no Card while looking around the city. Even up here, tossing out his senses at random to hopefully pick something up, Rin has had no luck.

“Well...Ah guess you can't always just find one.” Kero shrugs.

“Yeah but...there's only a few more left.” Rin grinds his teeth then forces himself to relax. "But forcing it won't work...’

“Best get home. It's getting really late...and there's school tomorrow.” Rin groans at the thought, and
moves to swoop down.

He pauses as a short zing goes across his senses and turns, trying to pin point where it came from. But nothing comes and he shrugs it off as just his imagination.

As Rin heads back home finally, Kero begging him to get him some treats to make up for the late night, something stirs in a park where something important is about to happen.

Chapter 38: Orchid's Boy

The sound of running footsteps and the cry of “I'm late!” reaches the monks downstairs, making Shirō chuckle as he turns the page of his newspaper.

Rin slides into the kitchen, rushes to get some food. “Dammit late...”

“Maybe if you didn't keep sleeping in...” Shirō suggests, focusing on the news article that declares that the person who went missing at the science museum was found.

“Not my fault...” Rin grumbles, slapping a fried egg on top of a piece of buttered toast before he takes a bite out of it.

Shirō raises his eyebrows at that, but ignores that in flipping to a new page. “Hmm...uh. So that old park is going to be rezoned...surprised.”

“What old park?” Rin leans over and Shirō tilts the newspaper to show it to him. “Marigold Park...what? A bunch of ugly office buildings are going to replace it?” Rin scowls at the thought. “That's not right.”

“Not the only one thinking that. Been some protests and a petition is going around too.” Shirō notes. “Frankly I agree...that park is quite lovely.” He then glances at the clock up on the wall. “Shouldn't you be going now?”

Rin looks up and says a bad word before scrambling up, stuffing his face with the last of his breakfast. “Bye Oyaji!”

Rin races out of the kitchen, Shirō laughing slightly as he hears the door slam. He then sets his newspaper and stands, stretching out, before staring to collect the dirty dishes.

His turn to wash them after all.

The sweet smell of spring meeting summer fills the air. It makes things relaxing, but not too much everyone loses the urge to work. The scent of flowers that reaches Rin makes him take a deep breath and let out, smiling.

Though it helps that Yukio is available for lunch with him.

Yukio has not been available for lunch recently for various reasons, including something he volunteered for via his cram school and some things at their Junior High he had to do as well.

But now he's free and, settling down next Rin with his bento, Rin couldn't be happier.

Rin's cheer takes a slight beating when he realizes he can't think of anything to say to his brother. Ducking his head, Rin opens his bento and starts shoving some of his food in his mouth. At least then he has an excuse for not talking to Yukio.
Yukio eyes him from the side, picking at his own bento. “How...how has class been?”

Rin looks at him, cheeks bulging, and for a moment has to struggle to clear his mouth. “Um...okay. I mean...I don't seem to be failing any and well...” Rin looks down at his messy bento, stomach churning. *When did this get so hard?* “No one has been directly blaming me for any problems...no real problems...”

Yukio gives a soft smile. “I'm glad. Look, Nii-san...I'm sorry.” Rin turns to look at Yukio, who looks very awkward. “I'm not around much anymore and neither is Tou-san.”

Rin smiles. “It's okay, though really I expected your cram school to get crazy more in third year than second.”

“Heh well...crazy is one way to put it...” Yukio mutters to himself, picking up a piece of teriyaki tuna and eating it. “I wish we could have more time...I'll have to see about figuring something out...”

Rin watches Yukio, slowly deflating. “You got something after school again, don't you?”

“Yeah...” Yukio looks a bit pained at the thought. “Sorry...”

Rin decides that Yukio is saying sorry too much and wraps his arm around him. Ignoring the fact his brother is stiff, Rin leans into him. “It's okay. You come back right? As long as you come back to me, I'll be fine.”

Yukio slowly reaches up a hand and rests it on Rin's arm. Closing his eyes, he leans into the awkward half-embrace with a sigh. “I'll come back. Promise.”

And though they still can't think of anything to talk about, suddenly it's much more peaceful and things feel right.

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Rin pauses after watching Yukio go to whatever his cram school has planned for him, looking around the area. Quite suddenly, Rin does not want to go immediately home. After hesitating for a moment, Rin pushes aside the feeling.

*That won't help...the monks will need help since both Yukio and Oyaji aren't home.* Rin reminds himself, forcing himself to walk home.

Rin pauses by a collection of flowers, letting the colour and scent of them wash over him. After he's done admiring them, Rin forces himself to keep going home.

Even if at times it feels like it is less home and more just a place he lives in.

The next day starts the same, except that Rin is up and ready at the proper time, entering the kitchen for once not in a rush.

Rin slows down as he realizes both Shirō and Yukio aren't here. Glancing at the clock he gets a puzzled look on his face. “Hey, where's Oyaji and Yukio?”

Nagatomo looks up from making breakfast and manages a smile. “Something came up so Yukio had to head in early.”

“And Oyaji?” Rin asks, as he pushes Nagatomo aside and takes over in making breakfast. French toast and grilled fish? He's going to have to talk to the monks about what makes up a good meal
“Went in with him as well. He was called in too.” Since Rin isn't looking at him, he doesn't notice that Nagatomo looks a bit strained. “He'll be back before you get to school.”

“Aaah...I guess there's a meeting or something...” Rin mutters the last, finishing off the french toast and heading to the fridge to toss together the toppings for the french toast, which includes fresh fruit and jams.

“Yeah. That's what I got off of it.” Nagatomo exchanges a look with Kyōdō and once again wonders just how long they can keep all the secrets from Rin.

Rin doesn't notice, just finishes setting up the breakfast table and pauses at the sight of the newspaper open to a specific article. It's about Marigold Park again, but this time it's claiming that there are saboteurs who are delaying the construction project and making it so the rezoning is not going as planned.

Rin pauses at the description of how some of the machines were apparently wrecked with acid and frowns.

’I should probably check that out...’ Rin vaguely recalls being told of what Cards remain and thinks one might be able to pull that out. ’Just in case.’

Rin then turns back with a smile on his face. “Breakfast is ready! C'mon, get your food before it gets cold!”

____________________

Between an exhausting day of school and finding out Yukio left at lunch – again – Rin almost forgets about Marigold Park and would have if he hadn't heard Naoko discussing it with Miho.

Wincing a bit at her eagerness to see if it was supernatural in origin, Rin quickly slips away and heads to the train station while Miho is doing her best to stymy Naoko.

Sighing as he leans against the train wall as it heads off to the stop not too far from Marigold Park, Rin wonders at what will happen to that park. He remembers going there before and all the beautiful flowers. A very peaceful place and though not all that fancy, Rin recalls just how many people go there.

’No wonder so many people are protesting the rezoning.’ Rin lifts his head as the train finally stops and lets himself get pushed out by the rush since it's his stop. Pushing through the crowd once off the train, Rin looks around and orients himself before heading off towards Marigold Park.

As he gets close, he starts to hear a chant and can't help but be surprised.

Then again, considering the subject matter Rin finds he agrees.

“Save Marigold! Save Marigold!”

____________________

The park is packed full of people holding signs up, shouting chants, and generally making a big nuisance to the business suit clad men and the construction workers trying to figure out what is wrong with their machines.

Rin slips past a reporter calmly reporting the incident and how the protest is picking up speed. There's only so far Rin can get in before he's stuck, due to the press of the crowd.
But he gets close enough to pick up on traces up a Card and light up because of it.

'Great! Just need to figure out which one and where it is...' Rin pauses as he notices one particular protester who is getting in the face of a rather smarmy looking guy in a business suit.

Tall, leggy, and with her hair tied back in a ponytail, she looks tough in a strange fashion. Still pretty and cute, but Rin can tell she's a martial artist and judging by her slowly growing anger the businessman might just be risking a pounding.

“No you are the idiot!” She pokes the guy in the chest, making a look of disgust go across him as it leaves a dirt smear on the previously pristine suit. “Why the hell would any of us go and actively sabotage something here?”

“Because you are bunch of flower fans who will do anything to preserve your precious park.” He sneers at her, stepping back and letting two muscular guys get in the way of the angry young woman. “Don't believe me? I got a nice detective to help me find who did it and says it can't be an accident. A real famous kid too.”

The woman blinks back, confused, then turns as he calls out to a boy who is inspecting the machines.

As he wanders back over, the woman's jaw drops. “Shinichi?”

For a moment the boy tenses then his face is smoothed over with a relaxed smile. “Yo, Ran.”

There's a moment of shock, then Ran reaches over and grabs him by the collar. “What are you doing Shinichi!!?”

Shinichi winces. “Um...a job?”

“What kind of job is this? Working for that slimeball--”

Shinichi manages to disengage her hands from his collar and steps back. One of the bodyguards step forward, keeping some space between Ran and Shinichi. “Like I said, it's a job. I need the money. Just helping the police at times isn't going to get me money.”

“You don’t have need for money!” Ran shrieks. “Not with your parents paying for everything.”

Shinichi looks a bit pained for some reason. “Ran...look, it's just a job. Nothing personal.”

Ran looks like she’s torn between crying or hitting him. “Nothing personal. Ooooh, you JERK!”

She does, in fact, manage to hit him, slapping him hard against the face before turning and marching away.

Rin winces at what just witnessed, then, as Shinichi turns to the businessman to discuss something, starts to do his best to get out of this crowd. No way he's going to be able to catch any Card with this entire place being a mess.

He's almost free when an elbow hits him and sends him flying back. Another oof and the feeling of someone's chest hitting his back reveals that he manages to ram into someone, but luckily doesn't fall down as they are nice enough to catch him.

“Woah, are you alright?” Rin looks up and sees it's Ran, who looks a few seconds away from crying.
Rin manages a smile. “Yeah...” After a pause, he hesitantly asks. “Are you okay Nee-san?”

To his surprise, Ran bursts into tears, making him step back and look frantically around. Luckily no one is paying attention so, after a moment's thought, Rin grabs Ran's hand and tugs her away from the crowd and park.

Ran follows limply as Rin considers things, then turns to head to a certain café he knows is nearby.

Café Lavender is the same as always, though quieter during this season. Meaning there are only so many people around to notice the still crying Ran as Rin drags her in.

“Okumura-kun!” One of the waitresses – Rin recalls her name is Kazue – hurries over and looks over the woman. “Is something wrong?”

Rin manages a smile. “This Nee-san just had a bad day. Do you think...?”

Kazue smiles. “No problem Okumura-kun. This way.”

Rin follows her into the back, where there are some private booths, and carefully pushes Ran to sit across from him.

“Menus?” Kazue asks sweetly.

“Yeah...and some of that special tea of Watanabe-san's if you have any?” Rin requests.

Kazue nods, shoots a worried look at Ran, then darts off, leaving the two in private.

Ran is finally calming down, sniffing and wiping her eyes. “Oh...I feel horrible...” She looks at Rin. “I'm sorry I didn't mean to...”

“It's okay.” Rin shrugs it off and hands over a handkerchief of his to her. “Here.”

“Thanks...” Ran wipes her eyes. “I'm going to go to the washroom...”

“Just to your left and down the hall.” Rin tells her promptly. Her surprise make him smile. “I worked here over the summer.”

“Aah...” Ran slowly stands and, after hesitating briefly, walks over to the washroom.

She just passes Kazue who is returning with the menus. “Here...do you know what's wrong with her?” She softly asks Rin. “Oh and your tea will be here soon.

“Thanks...and I think it has to do with Marigold Park and a friend of hers...maybe a boyfriend.” Rin admits after a moment.

“Oh dear...that mess is nasty. I'm not sure they should be even allowed to rebuild there.” Kazue frowns at that, then smiles again. “Well, if you need me or anyone else flag us down.”

“Best dessert today?” Rin quickly asks.

“We have a collection of very special fruit cheesecakes and the special today is a very special udon recipe.” Kazue tells him promptly.

“Thanks.” Rin waves her off as Ran finally returns, having washed her face and now looking much more presentable.
“Hey...” Rin smiles up at her as she slides back into her seat, then drops his gaze to the menu in front of him.

“...I'm sorry. I didn't mean to...” Ran looks down at the table.

“It's okay.” Rin shrugs it off. “I'm Okumura Rin. What's your name?”

“Mouri Ran.” Ran replies. “It's...nice to meet you?”

“Nice to meet you.” Rin agrees. “There's a lot of very good desserts here and the fruit cheesecakes today are especially good.”

Ran blinks and opens up her menu. “Well...I could use sweets.”

Rin chuckles. “Of course...”

Ran can't help smiling back before a shadow crosses her face. A determined look on her face then replaces it. “That's it...I'm getting as many sweets as I can eat.”

Rin watches, slightly both amused and in awe, as Ran flags down another waitress and starts rapidly ordering plenty of sweets before turning to Rin and demanding to know what he wants.

Rin is more conservative, but still gets himself one of the fruit cheesecakes – a cherry one in his case – as well as some udon for a meal.

‘Oh dear...what have I gotten myself into?’ Rin wonders as Ran starts grumbling to herself about stupid detective otaku.

It's official; Mouri Ran has one of the biggest appetites Rin has ever encountered.

‘Though that might just be for sweets and when upset...’ Rin admits, as he slurps up his udon noodles carefully – memorizing what spices and such went in here since it does taste lovely – watching as Ran destroys another cheesecake. She's also gone through multiple cups of Watanabe's special tea blend, and shows no sign of calming down yet.

Ran only finally slows down at the last cheesecake, looking more sad than angry. “Sorry...I shouldn't have unloaded on to you.”

Rin blinks, recalling the major rant she managed to get through at the same time as the cakes, then grins. “It's fine...so, this Shinichi is your boyfriend?”

Ran nearly spits out her tea at that. “What?! No! He's just my stupid childhood friend. He's such a jerk, can only talk about Sherlock Holmes or other detective stuff, lets the fame he has go to his head, and keeps stealing jobs from my dad!”

Rin stares at her, not really buying it as her rant continues and she switches to actually talking about the good parts of Shinichi. ‘Oh wow. A genuine real life tsundere.’

Ran is blushing by the end. “But...I kinda wish he was my boyfriend. Stupid idiot...”

Rin hides his smile there. “So...what's so important about Marigold Park to you?”

Ran sighs, looking down at her cup of tea. “It's where we first met when kids. His parents happened to take him to the park at the same time as my parents and...” Ran shrugs. “Somehow we managed to click. We've never really been apart since...well...there was that special investigation he did...”
Rin eyes Ran, seeing the shadow over her face then and decides it's best to not ask about it.  
“So...you want to keep Marigold Park because of memories?”

“And because I'm sure others have similar happy memories.” Ran declares. “And more people should have a chance to have them too in the future. Good memories and fun from that park.”

“Hmm...” Rin tilts his head and looks at his cheesecake in front of him. “I remember spending time with Yukio there when we were little...was quite fun. Made flower crowns.” Rin grins at the thought.

Ran also smiles at that thought. “Who's Yukio?”

“My little brother.” Rin stabs his cheesecake with a fork and lifts up a bite. Chewing thoughtfully, he adds after swallowing, “Though we're twins so it's not that big of a difference.”

“Twins? Oh that sounds like so much fun. Growing up with your own built in friend.” Ran's romantic notion of that makes Rin snort.

“Not exactly...” Rin looks down. “We aren't really that similar but we're fraternal after all...and we don't spend that much time together anymore. Yukio's got cram school a lot and I...” Rin sighs. “Well, we got different futures and...hobbies.” Rin winces slightly at using the term hobby to describe his Cardcaptor duties.

“That sounds sad...it sucks to get distant from anyone you were very close to...” Ran looks down at her tea again then and wraps her fingers around it. “Sometimes I feel like Shinichi is going to run far away from me...” She then looks up. “What are your plans for the future?”

“Yukio's going to be a doctor.” Rin can't keep the pride in his brother out of his voice. His mood then drops as he thinks of his own future. “As for me...I don't know. I'll probably stop school after Junior High and look for a job or something...”

“Junior High? Heh, I almost thought you were already in high school but I should have guessed by the uniform.” Ran shakes her head. “You are pretty tall for your age.”

“...Yukio is taller now...” Rin takes another bite out of his cheesecake. “Well, I might be able to get a job cooking or something...that's basically my only real talent.” 'Outside of magic but I don't think I could get a job out of that...' Rin muses.

“Cooking is always a good skill to have...” Ran sighs. “You have no idea how hard it was to teach idiot Shinichi how to do it. You'd think he'd be capable but really...and he's been living on his own for so long...”

Rin lets her grumbling wash over him as he finds himself caught in thinking of how different his and his brother's futures became. And so quickly too. If he's honest, and he is, Rin had to admit the future took a turn for their separation the moment Yukio had revealed he that wants to be a doctor when he grows up.

The sound of the bell opening and the feeling of something makes Rin turn and lean out of the booth. Rin raises his eyebrows as he sees Shinichi enter the café. A frown crosses Rin's face and he reaches out to touch the magic he has.

_Death. Unnatural, violent death. Restless ghosts and sadness and confusion and pain. Soothing balm and truth._

Rin drags himself out and stares in awe at Shinichi. _Holy crap...if he could actually use that magic..._
Rin can sense how powerful it is, but it's blocked by some kind of dam. Which is probably why it's been increasing in strength all this time.

“That's a strange focus...’ Rin realizes, considering how Death is not what most consider a centre for magic. At least, that's what Sekki and Kero told him during a recent lecture about magical centres. ‘I mean...he's got other stuff wrapped in there, mind stuff, but it's mostly about death with shadings of life.’

Rin finds himself curious but is shaken out of it as Shinichi approaches, looking a bit nervous, and stands next to Ran's seat.

“Um...can I talk to you?” Shinichi offers. “Aah...alone?”

Ran glares up at him and sniffs. “No. I won't have anything to do with you. And why are you here? Could you go away before someone drops dead and we have another murder on our hands.”

Shinichi flushes. “It's not like I actively seek out murders it just...happens around me.”

Rin believes him, looking at the energy that is leaking out of his seal and permeating the air. Raises the chances of running into or pushing someone into going through with a murder while he's around to solve the aftermath. Definitely not easy for him though considering he probably can't go anywhere without having a murder to solve.

Rin sighs, considers it, then focuses his magic. Unseen to the two bickering teenagers – except for Shinichi who briefly sees the flash but dismisses it – a magic circle glows underneath Rin as he focuses on Shinichi.

Carefully, like he's weaving something, he crafts a sieve around Shinichi, to prevent it from breaking and causing too much trouble. It's been probably increasing for a while now and Shinichi is looking exhausted and the mention of a murder made him flinch. Too much death isn't good for anyone.

Rin sighs and leans back once the shield is up, and feels a bit of pride when he tests it and finds that though it's still leaking, it has dropped to a more manageable level. At least until the dam bursts and Shinichi will have to face the fact he has magic.

The sound of Ran standing up violently and racing out the door snaps Rin out of his magic trance and he looks up at Shinichi who looks pained.

He then turns to Rin with a fragile smile. “Aaah...I'll pay for everything...” He winces at all the dessert dishes that Ran ate.

Rin doesn't know what to say to that and instead just watches as Shinichi goes to handle the bill.

‘I'm going to have to come back to the park tonight...’ Rin considers things and nods, deciding that's the best idea. ‘Can't have this go on too long...even if it is helping with keeping the park going...’

Rin now recalls exactly what Card is involved and Mist is not something that should be out much longer. Not with how dangerous it can get.

Sneaking out at night is way too easy for Rin at this point and a part of him regrets it as he pauses to glance at the deep sleep his brother is in. He knows his brother must be doing a lot of stuff at his cram school if he's sleeping this heavily without any aid.
Rin pushes that from his mind and jumps off the windowsill, landing neatly on the ground. A quick run to a more hidden place after grabbing the spare shoes he keeps hidden and Rin calls up Fly, taking to the air with Kero beside him.

“You alright Rin?” Kero asks, noticing the serious look on Rin's face.

Rin blinks. “Aaah...I'm fine...just thinking about stuff...like that Shinichi guy...”

“Shinichi...his last name's probably Kudo. Which you would know if you had to watch the news as much as me.” Kero makes a face at that, Rin giggling a bit in response. “Famous high school age detective of some kind. Everyone compares him to Sherlock Holmes.”

“Uuuuh...” Rin considers that. “And Mouri Ran?”

“Child of a successful lawyer and a talented though lazy detective. Best friends and rumour has she's datin' Shinichi.” Kero explains.

“They aren't dating yet.” Rin tells him. “Though I think they both want it.”

“So bein' stupid?” Kero snorts. “Ain't that the usual. Every genius is somethin' of an idiot.”

Rin frowns at that. “Are you calling my brother stupid?”

“Well...it can't be just luck that we haven't been caught by him yet.” Kero notes.

Rin rolls his eyes, but doesn't argue. It is very strange how good their “luck” is there.

'One day...will I have to tell Yukio the truth?' Rin wonders at the wisdom of that. Yukio deserves a normal, happy life. Rin can't give him that if he gets drawn into the Cards and other situations Rin's bound to run into as a mage. 'Yukio deserves better than me...always does. If...if I have to sacrifice something for him...I will...'

With those heavy thoughts in mind, Rin touches down on Marigold Park, partially hidden by trees and flowers, and dismisses Fly. It's time for some Card hunting...

Rin curses and ducks down as he sees a shadowy figure approach. For a moment he wonders if the company doing the rezoning set guards then a flashlight clicks on and Rin stares.

It's Shinichi and he appears to be examining something on the ground, a frown on his face.

Rin curses again; he knows enough thanks to Kero and what Ran ranted about yesterday that for all his faults, Shinichi is a very good detective. So very good that there are rumours he was at the centre of what is considered the biggest take down of a criminal organization in history.

'How the fuck do I hide from him...' Rin considers the fact he's got slowly awakening magic, another curse towards Rin, making it tricky for him to just use a Card. He might jump start Shinichi's magical awakening and that wouldn't be a good thing.

“Oi, Rin.” Kero's harsh whisper and poke makes Rin look up and he relaxes as Shinichi walks away from his hiding spot, following something on the ground. A trail perhaps?

With that handled Rin crawls away and starts sending out his magical senses to locate Mist before it goes and causes even more trouble.

The faster he gets out, the better, especially with Shinichi here.
Rin's troubles don't just end there though, as soon after Rin is groaning and hiding behind a machine as he sees Ran is exploring the place as well.

“Why is she here?” He grumbles to himself, poking his head around to watch the older teen look around the place and seem to be investigating just like Shinichi.

“Probably lookin' for proof of the sabotage.” Kero offers, looking a bit annoyed at it himself.

'Wonderful...' Rin eyes Ran carefully, then quickly darts off when she's looking the other way, nearly getting caught when he steps on a twig and she jumps and flashes her flashlight in his direction.

'This is getting more and more painful...' Rin groans and starts wondering how he's going to find Mist in all of this. 'When did this become a train station?'

Eventually Rin reaches the centre of the park, which has an old giant play-structure there. It rather looks like a castle and Rin recalls how much fun it was to play there.

'I think there might have been a dragon or two...' Rin muses, trying to remember. 'No knights except the bullies who came after us...' Rin snorts as he recalls that he was the kind of kid to put the dragon as the hero of the piece. 'Then again, with all the cries of demon well...' Hard not for Rin to chose to be a dragon over a knight.

But this time, he can see Ran on top of the castle, looking out into the night. And pointedly ignoring the detective that is trying his best to talk to her.

Rin glances down and is horrified at what he sees. Mist is creeping up on the castle and before Rin can do anything, a dangerous creak is heard and a yell comes as the section Ran is on breaks away and she starts to fall.

Shinichi catches her just in time, Ran staring up at him in horror. “Shinichi!”

Even from this distance and in the dark, Rin knows that Shinichi is under great strain. He can't possibly drag Ran up from his awkward position and worse, Mist is there making things break more and more. And if they fall...

“Shit.” Rin scrambles for his Cards running through his head what kind might work. “Shadow!” He thinks, considering how Mist's acid can't effect it.

Watching and praying, Rin gathers up Mist with Shadow and, glancing up at Ran and Shinichi to see they are too busy arguing again to notice him, darts out with his staff raised.

“Mist, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!” As Mist flows into Card form, Rin pulls out another Card as the castle gives up the ghost and starts to fully fall down, both Ran and Shinichi crying out as Shinichi loses his grip. “Float!”

He runs as fast as he can, hearing the cry of shock from Ran and a confused sound from Shinichi as they float down to the now safe ground. Behind him, he also hears the sound of crying and Shinichi softly comforting Ran.

Rin smiles a bit as he hears her call him an idiot in a fond voice and Shinichi replies with something that Rin feels his ears burn at how sappy it seems.

“But I'm your idiot.”
Rin still laughs as he realizes that it seems like both Ran and Shinichi will be fine.

The next day, Rin swings by Marigold Park after school again, curious to see how things are going. To his surprise, the first thing he sees is a bunch of police officers taking the slimeball businessman away, despite his bluster and protests on his “innocence”.

Rin wonders exactly what's going on there, turning to see Shinichi talking to the reporters gathered around him in a soft and confident voice. Listening in, Rin can't help but grin.

'Looks like the park is safe!' Rin then winces as it turns out the castle will still need to be repaired, but perks up when he hears Shinichi mention how a fund is already going up for that.

Not too far away from the reporters is Ran, who looks very happy and even proud of Shinichi.

It's only later that Rin gets the full story, when tomorrow’s newspaper comes in to announce how the famous teen detective managed to uncover the fraud case involving Marigold Park. Turns out Shinichi allowed himself to get hired to get close enough to find proof of the businessman's duplicity.

Rin can't help but think of that as a wonderful thing.

'But I think the fact that he actually calls Ran is girlfriend is the best part.' Rin thinks as he sets aside the newspaper and grabs his things for school.

The picture of Shinichi with Ran is definitely something he figures they will treasure. Despite doing their best to remain professional, Rin can tell that they are together.

Finally and truly.

Chapter End Notes

What did you think? Tell me in the comments below! And go to ICD's new tvtropes page please! It's a dream come true and deserves to be fixed up. Think you guys can get it up to date by the time the 2nd arc rolls around on the 29th of February?

Countdown to Finale: 5

Cards Remaining: 5
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

New chapter! Thank you all for the comments!

But I really would like more people to do work on ICD’S tvtropes page so!

If you guys want more background details, you need to go update the tvtropes page. I mean it! It's been like that for a week now and it's a pain. I love it so much I want to see more tropes and examples on that page! Go check it out (http://tvropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Fanfic/InheritanceOfCardsAndDemons) and update it please!

Now onwards to the current chapter: the final New Card!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When it comes to Southern Cross Junior High, there are three ways the students can handle their lunches.

The first, and most obvious one, is to bring a bento that a parent or even yourself made. This is what those like Rin and Yukio do, all thanks to Rin’s skill at cooking and persistence that, no matter what, he will always have time to make bento.

The second is to drop by the nearby convenience store and pick up a bento there, along with a drink. This is something that Manabu does often, as does Yukio whenever he forgets to bring his own bento. Something that has been getting increasingly often and annoying Rin.

The third and final method is one that Rin doesn't think about often. And that is to drop by the school's cafeteria and purchase a hot or cool meal there, eating at a table set up nearby. Neither Rin nor Yukio really go there, after elementary school and having to deal with a mandatory lunch at the cafeteria there, something which was always bland.

From what Naoko mentions, it's actually rather good but Rin still avoids it in favour of making his own food and doing his best to make sure Yukio eats his food as well.

And it is at the cafeteria's kitchen that this particular incident begins.

One of the maintenance workers is walking down the hallway nearby, testing the locks on the doors and making sure all is well. It is late, but not quite late enough that someone couldn't be here. And it is his job to make sure all is well.

As he approaches the cafeteria, he starts to hear strange sounds. Frowning, he steps towards it and opens the cafeteria door. Just the door opening makes the sounds louder, but not loud enough that it is in the cafeteria itself that the sounds come from.

Stepping further inside, he runs his flashlight around the place and settles on the door labelled “Staff Only” behind which lies the kitchen that is used by the cafeteria workers. Cautiously, he opens the door and looks inside.
The flashlight drops to the ground and the maintenance worker lets out a terrified yelp at what he sees within.

Various pots, pans, and kitchen utensils are floating around. More remarkably, it looks like someone is cooking in the kitchen by the scent and noise of all the appliances working. But there is nothing there at all to his sight but an empty kitchen except for what is working and the food that is being prepared.

Screaming at the haunting before him, he races away from the kitchen and school, refusing to stay a moment longer while there is a ghost in residence.

Behind him, a soft confused sound is hear and, unseen, someone tilts their head and wonders at such a reaction.

Chapter 39: A Helpful Haunting

The crowd around the cafeteria draws Rin's attention to it as he's heading to find a private space to eat lunch. Alone, since Yukio is unavailable. This time because of some girls bothering him, so Yukio is running around trying not to get pinned down.

'I don't think running is a good idea...' Rin cranes his neck at the crowd. It's much larger than usual, as though plenty other students go to the cafeteria to get some kind of lunch, this is way more than the usual.

Rin spots Eiji in the crowd and, after a moment, elbows his way towards him. A clear path is created for him as soon as people get a good look at him and soon enough Rin is right next to Eiji.

“What's going on?” Rin asks, handing over a 100 yen to Eiji almost absently.

Eiji sighs and pockets it. “Somehow, the cafeteria food has drastically improved overnight. The news got around quickly so now everyone is trying to get a taste.”

“Hmm...” Rin considers it for a moment, then looks at Eiji. “You want to try don't you?”

“Yes...though it's not easy in this crowd.” Eiji notes. He then blanches at the sharp grin on Rin's face.

“That's easy!” Rin holds out a hand. “I'll get you something.”

Eiji weighs his options then sighing holds out just enough money for today's major meal plus some snacks. “Very well.”

Rin cheerfully charges into the crowd, sending various people scattering at the sight of him. In no time at all he's at the front and ordering food for Eiji. As well as for himself, Eiji notes, as Rin takes out some extra cash to get a meal for himself.

Once done, Rin cheerfully returns to Eiji and grabs him, dragging him off to wherever despite Eiji's soft protests. The protests are half-hearted anyways, with Eiji more amused and even charmed by Rin's actions.

The first bite has Eiji shivering, as the entire meal is made to perfection as far as he can tell. Nothing is wrong with the Gyudon Rin ordered him or the curry bread that was also acquired by the mysterious boy.

Rin looks surprised as well, chewing thoughtfully on his mouthful of curry.
“How did they improve so fast...did they get a new staff member?” Eiji wonders after a bit.

Rin pauses to open his bento and try a bite there. He rolls the taste around in his mouth and then shakes his head. “No. They didn't do it.”

Eiji looks at him, confused by that. “What do you mean?”

“I bet you whatever amount you like that when you get the chance to ask the staff, the food was found already made by them.” Rin tells Eiji.

Eiji eyes him for a moment, thinking of a strange storm and Rin in flight. Eiji then slowly nods. “Then...50,000 yen on that.”

Rin looks surprised at that while Eiji blushes. Rin then slowly smiles, a little teasingly. “You not going to regret that?”

“No.” Eiji answers, honestly, looking down at his gyudon to hide how embarrassed he is.

“Okay...here, have some of this too. You are way too skinny.” Rin passes over some of the contents of his bento, surprising Eiji.

Eiji has a bite there and for a moment it's like the sky is sending light down on him. Shivering at that, Eiji realizes that Rin cooks as good as the mysterious new cook. Eyeing him for a moment, and how thoughtful he looks, Eiji considers that he might actually be that cook.

But, considering the strangely thoughtful look as Rin takes another bite of his curry, Eiji gets the feeling that is actually not true.

'He knows the cook though.' Eiji realizes and wonders what will happen next. And if this mysterious cook will stay.

Rin ends up cursing mentally once he gets home. Apparently Shirō wants to make up for the fact that neither he nor Yukio have been around lately and so drags Rin into an impromptu family gathering with games and a barbeque outside.

Rin sighs, but decides to let it go for now. From what he got, the Card here is harmless and he can wait on catching it. Anything that just cooks is not a problem, in fact it's kinda a boon considering how healthy and tasty the meals at the cafeteria are suddenly.

Instead of worrying about it, Rin lets Shirō drag him into a silly game or two, a smile on his face. 'I have missed this...' Rin then giggles at Yukio's face at the cards he has and wonders when his brother will ever realize just how much Shirō cheats.

The next day, the line-up for getting cafeteria food is even longer, and the kitchen staff appears to be swamped. But somehow there is more than enough food no matter what.

Rin doesn't complain that much over Yukio forgetting his bento – again and one day Rin's going to have to write on his forehead how stupid he is there – since this time he's able to get a healthy meal at the cafeteria.

'Wish he hadn't been cornered by those girls though...' Rin watches as Yukio twitches at the girls sharing the table with him, obviously too nervous of offending them to outright run.
'Maybe I should help?' Rin considers how just appearing would chase the girls away. His stomach drops at the thought and, after a moment's hesitation, leaves the cafeteria in favour of finding a quiet place to eat his own bento. 'I rather not be looked at as a monster...even for Yukio's sake I want to avoid that...'

He doesn't notice that Yukio spots him leaving and looks strangely hurt at the sight. And also very thoughtful.

“Oyaji...what is this for?” Rin twitches at the sight before him; that of the game system he so painstakingly set up upstairs now downstairs and currently being hooked up to the TV.

“Well...I thought of putting it down here, just for a bit, so we all have an excuse to be together.” Shirō says cheerfully.

Rin glances over at Yukio, getting the feeling that this is all his fault especially as he shifts awkwardly and does his best to ignore his gaze by cleaning his glasses, then sighs. “What the hell are you doing?”

He walks quickly over to the arguing monks and immediately starts taking over from the tech inept monks so they won't blow out the circuits or something.

Behind him, Shirō chuckles for a bit, before turning to Yukio and nudging him. “Thanks for telling me about your worries about your brother.”

Yukio manages a pale smile, which grows slightly as Rin finishes setting up the game system and is immediately challenged to a racing game. 'I'm happy too...’ Yukio thinks, considering how it's been so long since he properly spent time with his brother.

They really shouldn't be getting this distant, even with his secret exorcist duties.

“So, apparently there is a ghost in the cafeteria.” Naoko announces to Rin the third day of the rapid change in the cafeteria.

Rin pauses in taking a bite out of his own meal. He looks over at Miho, who looks exhausted, and then Eiji who has a strangely blank expression on his face.

“Really?” Rin finally asks. He is not quite sure how he ended up having lunch with all three of them, especially with how nervous Miho is, but he is and it's slightly annoying. Puts a strange burr in his chest.

“Yeah...apparently the first day a maintenance worker found all the kitchen tools floating around the place. Hasn't come back to the school since and is refusing to until the ghost is handled.” Naoko continues cheerfully.

Eiji sighs. “That sounds similar to what I found...apparently the staff of the cafeteria is very upset and...” Eiji pauses and digs out 50,000 yen, passing it to a confused Rin. “You won the bet. They haven't gotten a new worker and are in fact threatening to quit considering they are apparently no longer needed.”

Rin frowns at that. “That sounds...kinda mean. I mean, even if they aren't cooking or something someone needs to hand out the food...”

“It is how it is. So the teachers are discussing actually asking for an exorcist to clean up this ghost.”
Eiji shrugs.

Naoko lets out a whine. “What? But this is the best ghost ever! It makes lovely food and more people are buying things from the cafeteria. How is that bad?”

“It is bad if they are losing workers because of it.” Eiji patiently explains.

As Eiji and Naoko debate whether or not the ghost is good or bad, Rin thinks back to this morning and a strange phone call his father had gotten. He had refused to do whatever it was, but suggested a few others as good candidates.

Rin chills and groans as he realizes that a bunch of exorcist are going to be coming to his school tonight. Which is bad enough without taking into account the fact Shirō obviously plans on having more family fun tonight as well.

‘Dammit...’ Rin looks at the card holster on his side and sighing, realizes he doesn't have any choice. 'I'll have to stay behind and send Mirror in my place...only way to handle things.'

Because Rin is not naïve enough to think that this Card can't become dangerous if pushed. All the Cards have that ability in some fashion. And if it can move things around in the kitchen well, Rin can think of more than a few things that could become deadly and even life threatening to people. And he's not just thinking of knives...

Mirror enters the monastery to be greeted enthusiastically by Shirō. “Oi, Oyaji!” She complains, struggling against the hug. “Let me go!”

“Hehe...” Shirō ruffles “Rin's” hair and steps back finally. “Got plenty of fun things planned today. Including a little bit of a competition...”

Mirror blinks a bit, then sighs. “Okay...just let me drop my stuff off at my room...I'll be down in a bit...”

“Don't take too long!” Shirō calls after her. “Being late will be very risky.”

Mirror hesitates at that, wondering what crazy Rin has tossed into her lap, before smiling and heading upstairs to drop off a “bag” and to tell Kero about how Rin needs him at the school.

At the very least, it's not boring and is filled with many people to interact with.

Rin sighs in relief as the maintenance worker moves on, allowing Rin to relax and slip out of the corner he hid himself in. Kero, who is on his shoulder, also looks relieved.

“So Ah guess we have to deal with Cook fast.” Kero muses out-loud. “From what Ah heard, the exorcists should be here tonight.”

“Wonderful...” Rin lets out a breath of air. “Probably Oyaji is being paranoid.” 'He heard my school plus ghost...probably doesn't need more than that to get a mission moving.'

Rin steps forward and slips out of the classroom, looking around the hallway before turning towards the cafeteria. If he hurries enough, he should be able to get this over and done with long before the exorcists show up.

But that would take more luck than apparently fate is kind enough to spare him, as Rin freezes at the
sound of a maintenance worker greeting some people at the door and promising to show them to the cafeteria, once they prove they are who they claim to be.

Cursing again, Rin takes off as fast and as quietly as possible to the cafeteria, needing to handle this before the exorcists decide to anger the Card.

Rin slips into the kitchen and has a moment to stare stunned. Not at all the kitchen equipment floating around and crafting so much nice smelling food, but at what he sees is behind it.

Cook looks like a young woman wearing a white chef's button-up jacket with a red scarf peaking out from her collar and white pants. In front is a rather cute and frilly looking pink apron around her waist with big pockets. Simple brown boots are on her feet and on her head in a white chef hat, though one with a wing design embroidered in. Her hair is close cropped and a bright red, with only a small braid trailing down her back.

She turns at the sound of the door opening and claps her hands in glee at seeing Rin and Kero.

Rin stares, a bit stunned, and really doesn't know how to response. Cook ignores that in favour of approaching him and grabbing his hands, dragging him in.

The next thing Rin knows he has a collection of tempura being offered to him by the cheery Card. Rin stares in surprise, then his stomach growls and he cautiously accepts it. Behind him, Kero is cheering over the platter of curry buns he is being offered.

The tempura tastes wonderful, of course, and Rin hesitantly tells Cook so. Cook beams and drags him over to another dish and forces it on him. Rin accepts the yakisoba, digging in almost eagerly as he realizes just how hungry he is. But it makes sense considering he hasn't had anything to eat since lunch and waited in school all this time for the chance to deal with Cook.

It's that thought that has Rin standing and turning to the cheery Cook after he finishes the yakisoba. “Um...thank you but--”

Rin snaps his mouth shut as he hears the sound of approaching footsteps. Cook perks up and is about to go to the door to greet them. Rin panics and grabs her arm, dragging her back and behind the big counter.

Just in time, as the door opens and the exorcists stare in shock at the kitchen tools still floating around. Also, the strange plush toy that is eating the offered food with gusto.

Rin groans and covers his face, wondering how he is going to get out of this.

Kita Eisuke is not sure how to respond to the absurd sight before him. He's certainly seen many things as an exorcist, but the sight of all the floating kitchen equipment and the plush toy that's devouring everything being made is something else entirely.

"This isn't just an Ukobach..." He groans internally at that and wishes he hadn't been volunteered for this mission. Behind him, the Doctor and Dragoon that are part of his small team also stare.

Stepping inside, he's startled by a plate that whirls over to rest in front of him. It's covered in a teriyaki beef dish that makes Eisuke blink, a little surprised.
He then turns when he thinks he hears someone say, “No...don't do that!”

Stepping forward, he goes for the holy water grenade at his side. The plush toy finally notices the group and seems to be cursing to itself, wailing about being stupid.

“Shut up Kero.” The growling sound is heard from where Eisuke heard something last. Eisuke primes the holy water grenade, waits, and tosses it.

A yelp is heard as the grenade hits someone in the head and the holy water sprays around.

And then suddenly, after a tense moment, all the tools floating around stop and slowly turn on them. Eisuke has only a moment to curse before they attack.

Rin had been this close to smacking his head against the counter as Cook tries to feed the exorcists while Kero ends up revealing himself due to his gluttony.

'No wonder it's considered a sin...' Rin mentally groans.

Then he yelps as a holy water grenade hits his head. Hard, making him moan in pain and reach up to touch his head. He's surprised to see blood on his fingers and looks over at Cook as the holy water sprays around.

Cook is staring at the blood on his fingers and slowly her eternal smile fades. The look that replaces it makes Rin shudder. “C-Cook?”

Glaring now, Cook stands up.

And all hell breaks loose.

When it comes to exorcists, Rin is pretty sure they are used to weird things. Just the few times Rin's paged through an exorcist book or another confirms that demons are super weird.

But Rin's pretty sure that killer kitchen equipment is pushing that a little too far into crazy town.

Half of Rin wants to laugh because watching one guy run from a spatula, a giant pot, and a chopping board is something out of a weird slapstick routine.

The guy running from the knives and the other one fleeing from the deep fryer – with hot oil still in it – isn't so much funny though.

'Right...so how do I stop this...' Rin considers this for a moment, then pulls out Windy. The ever reliable Card should be able to help again. Rin smiles down at her. “Windy...let's stop Cook from causing harm and get these poor guys out of here. Release!”

The wind that roars out is both gentle and fierce. Fierce towards the attacking kitchen equipment. Gentle to the confused exorcists who get “escorted” out of the cafeteria.

Rin, needing extra time, calls up another Card. “Lock, seal this room!”

A ripple goes off after Lock slips into the nearby lock on the kitchen, sealing the room off. Rin breaths a sigh of relief and turns to face Cook. The angry look is off her face and she merely looks at Rin concerned.

Rin lets out a soft laugh. “I get it. You must have been worried about my wound. But see? It's
alright.” Rin bows his head slightly and lifts his hair.

Cook peers at Rin's head, looking over Rin's wound. Behind her, Kero hovers. Looking between the scene before him and the food. Rin can't help but be exasperated by that but also very amused.

Cook claps her hands in joy again, and Rin straightens up to see her standing there with a sweet smile.

Rin grins back and lifts his staff. “Cook, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

Light flares and Cook flows into Card form once more, another successful capture finished without too much fuss. Rin then looks around and sighs at the mess.

“Hey, Rin...what do we do about the food...?” Kero asks, making Rin roll his eyes at the drool evident.

“Leave it for the exorcists...in fact, they can clean up since most of this is their fault.” Rin declares. He summons back Lock and exits just as Windy returns, catching her as well.

Kero looks longingly at the food arrayed out still, but a cry of “You coming?!” from Rin has him sighing and leaving the kitchen alone.

Sneaking back into his room, Rin realizes that the festivities must be over already. Before being able to enter, he watched as Yukio leaves the bedroom to head to the bath, “Rin” calling that he will join him soon.

Rin slips inside and meets up with Mirror. “How did it go?”

Mirror winces. “I suggest using Memory to get a...copy of the events. It's way too complex to explain through mere words.”

Rin raises his eyebrows at that, but silently agrees. Kero floats over to Rin's bed, mumbling about already missing out on food even though he gorged himself like a pig, and settles down to a good sulk.

“Memory, I need to know what Mirror's been through while I was gone.” The little boy nods and holds out his hand. After a moment, a small orb is made from light travelling to him from Mirror, an orb he hands over to Rin.

Rin gently takes it and freezes as it flows into him.

Then falls to the ground and starts mumbling about his crazy family. Mirror gives him a commiserate look. “Don't forget to join Yukio in the bath.” She reminds him before returning to Card form.

Memory pats Rin's head in comfort before turning back into a Card himself.

Rin slowly uncurls himself and sighs. “Great...” Rin sighs and goes to quickly join Yukio in the bath. Between what really happened today and what happened with Mirror, he really is feeling tired.

However, Rin also has a smile on his lips. He's almost got all the Cards according to Kero.

'Just a few more and this will be done!' Rin thinks cheerfully.

Not knowing exactly what lies at the end of this journey...
Chapter End Notes

Well, what did you think? Please comment below and get the new chapter! And, more important, all those people out there, go update the tvtropes page!

Countdown to Finale: 4

Cards Remaining: 4
The park known as Cross Park is a very popular place. Between the wide acres of space for romantic walks and picnics, the benches and trees perfect for sleeping on or under, and the huge play-structure, this park is central to Southern Cross's population.

The giant sandbox also has a say, as plenty of children dive towards that place every day to enjoy themselves and play in the sand. Even at times adults have a turn in it, the sandbox being big enough for homegrown sandcastle building competitions.

This particular day, a little girl is happily packing sand into a bucket. A simple but enjoyable task as she will soon turn the sand into a lovely sand castle. Across on a nearby bench, her mother watches with a smile between reading her book.

And then the sand underneath the little girl ripples. Confused, she stops what she's doing and stares down at the sand beneath her.

There is nothing for a long moment, then with a big booming sound and a scream, the sandbox appears to explore. Screaming children flee to their parents who watch in horror at the sand that is forming a strange shape in the air and turning on them in a menacing fashion.

More screams erupt as the sand *attacks* and everyone flees the area, panic and the urge to survive and protect their children the only “thoughts” left.

It is only after all are gone that the sand relaxes and slowly fades back into a harmless state. But it is merely an illusion.

The threat still remains.

**Chapter 40: Sand Shark**

*Twenty-four hours before the incident....*
Rin stretches out, looking out at the class around him. Everyone is currently taking a history test and
to Rin's surprise as he looks around, everyone else is still working on it.

'Uh. I guess the study plan Sekki-san gave me works...' Rin looks up at said teacher who is currently
reading a book.

She looks up as if sensing Rin's gaze and smiles at him. She then looks at his test and raises her
eyebrow in a silent question. Rin grins back and gives a thumbs up.

Rin then settles back in his seat and, after a moment, goes for a manga he brought. Originally for
lunch period, which is after this, but he's certain he will be still occupied even if he manages to finish
it.

Sekki smiles as Rin cheerfully settles into his manga. She looks out at the classroom, frowning as she
notices the stunned other classmates who can't seem to take their eyes off of Rin and have frozen in
their test writing.

Sekki loudly clears her throat, getting her class's attention. “Please remember you have a limited time
to finish your tests.”

The shame and embarrassment at having been caught, and rather pointedly, sends all the disobedient
students scrambling back into their tests.

Rin chuckles at that point, by sheer coincidence. Sekki doesn't know if she should laugh or not at
how a good chunk of the class twitches at that, especially as she looks at Rin and realizes he's
reading a gag manga.

When Rin giggles and a few of the students look a few seconds from wetting their pants in fear,
Sekki ends up covering her face in her hands. Her shoulders tremble as she forces herself to not
laugh as it would be as far from professional as possible.

The only one who notices is Mizuki who frowns for a moment, looking between the teacher and Rin
curiously, before turning back to her test with a small smile on her lips.

The sound of running footsteps is the warning Shirō gets to close his current task on his computer
and turn in time to see Rin barge into his office.

“I did it!” Rin is gleefully waving around a piece of paper. “I did it!”

Shirō chuckles. “Yes, yes. That's good. Mind letting me know exactly what you did?”

Rin eagerly hands over the paper, practically vibrating in place. Shirō takes it gently and looks it
over. His eyebrows raise at what he sees and he looks up at Rin. “You...this is all on you?”

“Yup!” Rin nods eagerly at that.

Shirō laughs again and hands back the paper. “100%...just a prep test but that is amazing Rin. Much
better than expected.”

“I know!” Rin admits, not even flinching at the odd compliment. “I thought maybe 80% since
Tsukishiro-sensei was helping me so much but not this much!”

Shirō chuckles. “Well, let's take this as a good omen and have a nice dinner to celebrate. Not
sukiyaki I'm afraid, no money for it, but let's find something tasty anyways.” Shirō stands as he
speaks, ruffling Rin's hair as he whines about no sukiyaki.

But Rin is quick to bounce back and eagerly follows Shirō, babbling about food options and what could possibly good enough for this celebration.

Next to Shirō's office, Yukio watches them go. He's carrying his own collection of prep tests and glances down at the marks he has. Unlike Rin who mostly just passed everything at an average of 50%, Yukio's are always in the 90%, the high 90% in fact. A strange sensation twists in his chest at this, before Yukio sighs and brushes it aside. It's incredibly rare for Rin to get 100% while it's almost a daily event for Yukio with how he studies.

But as he enters the kitchen to Kyōdō giving congratulations to Rin as well and Rin beaming, the sensation returns and Yukio is left feeling like an outsider as the discussion moves on to what is a good celebratory dinner in this situation.

"Seein' you study is still rather strange to look at." Kero comments, shaking his head before turning back to his game.

Rin looks up from the table and laughs. “Yeah well...” Rin looks back down at the textbooks and papers set up for him. “I wouldn't be doing it without Sekki-san helping...”

Kero chuckles. “Well, don't study too hard. That actually makes you ferget thangs.”

Rin takes that as the cue it is, just finishing one last problem before standing and settling next to Kero. Kero flies up to the collection of games after saving and exiting from his game. “So, what kind of game do ya think would be fun?”

“Hm...one where we work together?” Rin offers, not in the mood to be competitive against anyone.

Kero cheerfully plucks a game with that in mind out and passes it over to Rin. Rin grins at the sight of the game and leans over to put it in the game system.

The sound of the start up menu is next and Rin turns to see Kero settling down next to him, with a big bag of chips. Rin chuckles at that and snags the bag, ignoring Kero's grumblings, and puts it where they can both get at it.

Kero's grumbles fade as the start menu pops up on the screen and both eagerly look forward to the game they are playing. It's the final game in a trilogy both have been playing recently and both are eager to find out what happens next and why it's got the option for it to be a two-player game this time.

Yukio pauses outside the gaming room – newly set up after Rin dragged on the systems upstairs again – listening to the sound of the game going and Rin saying something derisive towards a character on the screen.

Yukio looks down at the textbook in his hands and feels a strange sensation. For a moment he hangs there, torn between choices, then sighs and moves on, turning to his – their – bedroom and entering it. The door shutting behind him instantly muffles the noise and Yukio looks around the room he shares with his brother.

It's easy to see the dividing line between the boys. One side is perfectly neat, everything between the bed to the desk set up nicely. But at the same time, filled with so much stuff – textbooks and demon resource books hidden amongst them in fake covers; materials for a current project – that keeping it
clean is a challenge.

Rin's side is the opposite. It's not completely clean, considering the messy desk he has, but comes very close to it. But there is less there. Minimal amount of things out, though Yukio thinks it's because Rin has that big chest to hide things in. On Rin's desk is half school work and half other things, like an unfinished knitting project and an open cookbook with sticky notes stuck in place.

Yukio tries to remember when the dividing line between the two of them wasn't so stark and comes up blank. It's like they have always been so different it's only their blood that keeps a fraying tie from completely snapping.

Yukio sets his textbook on his desk and settles down to work. He needs to keep up his good grades in his normal classes still after all and that's something that can't be dropped even though he has plenty of exorcist missions to deal with.

His phone beeps at that point and Yukio grabs it, frowning at the new mission that is tomorrow. Yukio glances back at the door and wonders exactly what Rin is doing.

Yukio sighs. 'It doesn't matter anymore, does it?'

And types back a reply that he will be at the meeting place as scheduled.

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It's much easier to go to school when, even though the majority think you are a monster, you are starting to improve your grades. It takes a bit of weight off of Rin's shoulders.

'I never thought I'd be succeeding in school...' Rin considers that and wonders if, perhaps, he might be actually able to do high school. It would improve his chances for a good job, even if he can't get into college.

'But I'm not sure it would be good...Yukio's working at going to True Cross Academy and it's expensive. Even with the scholarships Yukio can win, he's going to need a lot of money...' Rin sighs and pushes that question aside for now.

Rin instead enters the classroom and, for once, pointedly ignores the fact everyone flinches at the sight of him. Rin settles instead at his desk quickly and still with a happy mood in mind.

This does not go unnoticed.

"What has you so happy?" Naoko asks him.

Rin looks up, a little surprised at Naoko being here already, then shrugs. "Oh...been improving my grades."

Naoko beams at that. "That's wonderful. How did you do on the prep tests anyways?"

As Naoko draws Rin into a conversation, his classmates watch in wonder and a few start to reconsider their judgement of Rin. If only a little.

'Maybe he can be normal too...and not always a demon...' Yamaguchi in particular thinks, remembering how calm he acted back in the science museum during that school trip. Not at all like a demon, more like a normal person. 'Maybe Watanabe can be a soothing presence like his brother...'

Another person who is considering this is Mizuki. In her case, though, she is realizing that Rin is not at all like his reputation says he is.
Something that makes her feel vaguely guilty for firmly believing in it.

'I do need to figure out a way to make up for it...' She sighs. At that point the bell goes off and everyone scrambles for their seats and books as the teacher walks in and calls for attendance.

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**Three hours before incident...**

“Aaah man...Yukio...” Rin glowers at Yukio who looks a little nervous. “At least take your bento this time.”

Yukio accepts the offered bento-bako with a sigh, not wanting to argue with his brother. “Sorry about this. I should have told you yesterday when I got the note.”

“Yes you should have.” Rin agrees, still grumbling to himself over this. “I would have made you an extra special bento for good luck.”

Yukio keeps his smile on his face, not wanting to give away the lie he's giving. A special test from his cram school? In a fashion, since this is going to be part of the exam leading up to Yukio moving from Lower Class to Middle Class finally.

“Don't stress too much over the test.” Rin smiles at Yukio. “You are way smarter than me so you don't have to worry as much.”

Yukio manages a better smile at that. “Thank you Nii-san.” Yukio then checks his watch and steps back. “I'll see you after school, I hope.”

“Think you might get called back after?” Rin asks, blinking in surprise.

“...Yes.” Yukio says, the lie coming out too easily. “They might have my results in early and will call me when that happens.”

“Well, good luck then.” Rin waves off Yukio as he exits school grounds – having gotten special permission, again, to do so – before turning to head back in, intent on finding a good place for him to have a quiet lunch.

Out of sight, Yukio sighs and pulls out the right key, eyeing it before going towards a nearby building with the right kind of lock for this.

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**Two hour before incident...**

The worst part about being a father, in Shirō’s opinion, is all the worrying he does over his boys. Not just Rin or Yukio, but both of them and for various reasons.

Sighing, Shirō does his best to focus on the demonology book in front of him. A new release that he needs to keep up on since he needs to be up to date with exorcism techniques and what demons are out there. Knowledge is an important part of an exorcist’s life. Just knowing certain things can save your and others lives.

“Fujimoto-san.” Shirō looks up to see Maruta hovering in the doorway. “There’s someone here who wishes to speak to you. In your office.”

Shirō raises an eyebrow at that. The nervous energy that Maruta has doesn't speak of a consultation or a mission being given. He stands and sets aside his book, walking over to Maruta. “Thanks for
telling me, I'll handle it.”

Shirō heads to his office, keeping a light smile on his face. Even as a bunch of other monks show how nervous they are about whoever is visiting.

His smile drops as he enters the office and sees who it is.

“You.” Shirō eyes the messy looking man in front of him. “What does Levin Light wish to speak to me about?”

“Aaaah...you can call me Lightning too. Everyone does.” He chirps cheerfully. “And it's simple; just need permission to access certain files. Something came up...something big.”

Shirō frowns. “What's going on?”

Lightning sighs. “You aren't going to like this...”

Shirō settles at his desk chair and offers the other to Lightning, who gratefully accepts it. Shirō eyes him, noting that he seems actually tired for once. “What is it?”

“Movement. From the Illuminati apparently.” Lightning rubs his face. “It seems to be connected to an old project...one the Order used to be invested in. I believe it was called Project...Icarus?”

“Iscariot.” Shirō pales and rubs his hand over his face as Lightning snaps his fingers.

“That's it...you are one of the few people remaining with full access...” Lightning gives him a sharp look. “What can you tell me? Any reason for the Illuminati be interested in that project?”

Shirō lets out a groan. “If we are going to talk about this, I'm going to need a drink.”

Lightning eyes him. “That bad?”

Shirō gives him a serious look, face completely blank except for his eyes, which are dark with hidden emotions. For a moment even Lightning is nervous at what he can see in the Paladin's eyes.

“Worse.” Shirō assures him, voice soft. “And that project is so classified that the Order wishes it didn't happen. If the Illuminati are interested...”

Shirō doesn't finish his sentence but he doesn't have to.

 Anything like that can only be a special kind of horror that no one should have access to.

One hour before incident...

Class is, as usual, very boring. But Rin marshals his wits to pay attention to the teacher, even though it's far from interesting. It's not Sekki after all and this particular teacher at times seems to have the ability to drone on and on.

Rin barely stifles a yawn and looks down at his notes. A few doodles have made their way there as Rin gets increasingly bored by the topic but he still manages to wrangle important notes down on the sheet enough that Rin thinks he should be able to do well come finals.

‘At least...that's my hope...’ Rin sighs and looks out at the classroom. He snorts as he realizes he's not the only one about ready to die from boredom, in fact only Mizuki is managing to stay up without any issues. Rin finds that actually quite impressive and, thinking a bit, recalls that she ranked high on
the mid-term exams. Not as high as Yukio who studied his ass off in preparation for the exams, but still very high.

'I think she was in the top five...’ Rin considers. He, was definitely not, and was somewhere in the 20s or 30s. Maybe even 40s. Either way, Rin's happy to pass as is.

Dragging his attention back as the sound of chalk meeting blackboard meets him, Rin starts copying down the notes the teacher is making on the board, adding what clarifications he can as the teacher continues to talk.

Like Sekki proved to him before, good notes are the first step to good grades.

One hour after incident...

Cross Park is in complete chaos, with plenty of tape going up and various people getting chased away. Plenty of people stop in curiosity to watch as the exorcists set up in preparation for an important and urgent exorcism.

Shirō is seen discussing the incident in question with some of the witnesses, most of whom are still rather shocked and shivering at how close they all were to death. His soothing voice helps them calm down and most will probably brush aside the incident as a delusion.

Hidden by the crowd, Rin curses at how fast the exorcists set up. He had raced out of school as soon as he felt the sudden surge of magic – coinciding at the same time he was about to leave school in a rare bit of luck – but between the crowds and the two trains he had to take, of course Rin ends up late.

'I really wish I knew how they get around so fast...would make things easier on me...' Rin grumbles to himself. He then slips through the crowd, looking for a more isolated place so he can call Kero. 'At least I know what Card this is...' Rin sighs, as the signs were very obvious. An attacking sandbox can only mean Sand is involved.

Finally finding an out of the way place that Rin can also watch what the exorcists are doing from – which means climbing a tree and blessing all the big green leaves on it – Rin taps the communicator on his ear.

"Rin! You felt that right? Know where and what Card?" Kero quickly asks.

"Yeah...Sand. There's a killer sandbox and it made a very big appearance too.” Rin sighs as Kero curses softly at that. “Worst of all, the exorcists are already here...dammit, any ideas what to do?"

"You can't put them to sleep. Too dangerous if they were...” Kero sighs and for a moment mutters to himself. Then louder, “I think Mask can help. If you hide your appearance and use a bit of Memory afterwards, it should be okay.”

"That...doesn't sound bad...” Rin considers it. 'Just make sure Mask knows how serious the situation is. ’ “It sounds like it can work...going to have to get them to safety too...”

As Rin mutters to himself, planning out what Cards are needed to keep the exorcists and civilians safe, Kero turns to the TV in the gaming room. It doesn't show a game for once, Kero having used the cable recently bought to set it up for actual TV, instead showing the current news and how a reporter is speaking of the incident and how many exorcists are around. The camera can't get a good look at all the exorcists involved, but Kero can still pick out Shirō there.
His stomach drops and Kero swallows as he suddenly gets a very bad feeling about this particular Card. He knows, deep within, that this time the toll that will be taken out in regards to this incident will be very high indeed.

Sneaking in even with Mask is very difficult as plenty of people are crowded around the taped off park and exorcists are wary to make sure no one breaks in and goes towards the dangerous location.

Rin just manages with a little help from a nicely timed distracted from an exited kid who really wants to see exorcists do work and draws plenty of attention from the guards. Rin slips under the tape and places Mask on his face, thus allowing himself to look like an exorcist long enough to get out of sight.

Once that's done, Rin removes Mask and looks down at it. “I need this...no goofing off here...” He whispers to the Card, which glows in response. Rin gives a small smile and places it back over his face, then goes for Fly.

Kicking off into the air, Rin heads to the sandbox where he can see a bunch of exorcists setting up. His stomach drops when he sees Shirō there, obviously in charge and looking warily around.

‘Dammit...even with this...’ Rin eyes the exorcists gathered there and considers how he's to keep them out of the way. Like Kero pointed out before, them asleep just makes them vulnerable to attack. But awake they are the same.

Rin mentally shuffles through what he has, trying to think of a method to keep them safe. He lands on Shield as possibly the only Card able to help in this situation, as long as they stay within.

‘Right...going to have to work quickly.’ Rin lands next to the sandbox and knows he only has a few seconds.

“Hey! What are you doing?” Shirō looks shocked at whoever he sees there and when Rin looks at him he looks puzzled at what he sees. “Who--”

A flash of light is Rin's response as Shield springs up to cover the exorcists, provoking cries of confusion. Shirō stares at Rin who looks back.

Rin swallows and focuses on disguising his voice as best he can. “Don’t.”

Shirō only has a moment to stare before Rin turns back to the sandbox. “You gonna stay there or what?” Rin asks, almost conversationally.

A hissing sound is heard and the sandbox starts to ripple and shift, Rin remaining calm and waiting patiently. And then the box explodes and Sand reveals itself, taking the form of a strange sand creature to menace Rin with.

Shirō is frozen in both shock and confusion. The strange...man?...in front of him just summoned up the demon with a quiet challenge.

Shirō can't tell who they are. Aside from the shapeless cloak that covers them, there's the mask in front of their face, blank and creepy looking, and the fact that every time he looks at the figure before him he swears the height changes. They don't speak much and their voice fluctuates as well, at first sounding rather high pitched then deep.

Shirō then turns his attention to the Sand Devil that is menacing over the strange figure and
attempting to strike him. But somehow he dodges, jumping super high in the air and moving fast whenever it goes after it. Shirō briefly recalls another flash of light similar to whatever caused this strange shield to cover everyone.

Shirō turns his attention to the shield and tests its surface. It feels rather like jello to him, and he doesn't really see how it is effective.

At least until the Sand Devil notices them and turns on them, roaring at them. Shirō has a moment to flinch and go for a weapon when the Sand Devil strikes the shield. Which holds, sending it back with a shriek of anger. A yell from the strange man from before has it turning again on him.

'So…' Shirō pushes his hand through the shield. *This only works one way…* Shirō debates this and looks at the cloaked man who just got smacked with a whip of sand.

Gritting his teeth and hefting his shotgun, he exits through the shield and lifts his gun.

And fires.

Rin curses at the sound of gunfire that draws Sand's attention. He then has a moment where he can only watch in horror as his foster father is the one doing it. And he's outside of Shield's protection.

Sand moves fast and Rin doesn't have time to catch up to it in time to prevent it from ramming into Shirō, who briefly drives it back with holy water that makes it hiss at the water making some of its sand clump. Rin's eyes widen as he sees Shirō go flying.

Silence, Rin taking in a deep breath and then, softly, “Watery.”

Watery springs to life, charging at Sand and wrapping around it, soaking its grains and making it waver. Barely, Rin recognizes that Shirō is alive according to the relieved shouts below, too focused on finally dealing with Sand.

“You…” Rin grits his teeth and calls up one more Card. “Freeze!”

Sand shrieks as the ice creeps up on it, the water that now permeates its form crystallizing under the sheer cold.

Rin raises his staff. “Sand, I command you to return to your true form…Sakura Card!” Light spreads out, making the exorcist wince. Once it fades, nothing is there except for the strange man they watch in shock as he pauses, staring at Shirō, before running off quickly. A brief flash of light again comes from Memory, muddling their exact memories of the incident.

Hidden by Mask, Rin cries frustrated and scared tears, praying that Shirō will get good treatment and soon.

Rin can't even show how worried he is. He has to smile and pretend to buy the fact Shirō just got called out for a simple thing, he'll be back soon. He can't stand it, so quickly retreats to the gaming room to hide, not even responding when Yukio knocks on his door and asks how he is.

Rin barely responds to Kero, who soothingly runs his paw through his hair as Rin lies down on the bed. “It's goin' to be okay. Rin, you gotta believe that. Don't keep thinkin' the worst.”

Rin shudders. “I don't…” Rin swallows. “He looked so *frail*…”
Kero doesn't say anything there, realizing that's the part Rin is the most scared of. That, for that moment, his father really did look mortal and capable of being harmed. Something that no child wants to consider of their parents.

Rin refuses to go down to have supper as well and he knows he's worry the rest, but he can't. He knows Shirō won't be back any time soon.

'He's in the hospital...probably the Order one...' Rin turns and shivers, wrapping his arms around himself.

He knows that Shirō must be in danger from other demons. But there's a big difference between demons, things he has plenty of training and experience in dealing with, and the Sakura Cards, which are an entirely different thing. It is that kind of thing that terrifies Rin, that his training makes him think he can handle anything.

Thoughts, dark thoughts, swirl around Rin until he finally exhausts himself and falls into a restless sleep.

Yukio feels sick. It's rare enough for Shirō to get hurt that a part of him swears he's invincible. But the last mission he was put on due to being on a time limit and needing to clear out the park before anyone actually got hurt, resulted in him being harmed.

'It's that weird person who interfered. It's their fault.' Yukio growls, thinking angrily of the person who suddenly popped in and took over the mission. He ignores the fact that said person had made sure everyone would be safe and how what normally would work on the Sand Devil didn't, suggesting whoever they were knew something no one else did.

Yukio slams his fist in the wall, glaring angrily at everyone. “That...I won't let it happen again...”

Yukio looks at the results on his desk, the assurance that he will be taking his Middle Second Class test soon, and vows to not only pass it on the first go but to get up to Middle First Class as soon as possible.

'I won't...I need to be stronger...' Yukio growls under his breath. 'Not just for Nii-san...but for Tou-san and everyone else...for me...I won't be weak.'

It is a long night for Yukio as he pulls out all his material and reviews religiously, making sure there is no chance of mistakes.

Down below, the monks of the monastery hover around, feeling incredibly awkward and not sure how to handle things.

Dinner goes on without either brother coming downstairs to eat.

Chapter End Notes

Well, what do you think? Tell me and get the next chapter!

Countdown to Finale: 3
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the comments last time!

Happy Lunar New Year! Since it's that day, I'm going to be busy in the afternoon my time...so I'll post this chapter early today so I won't forget.

Before we get to that, let me tell you what will happen once the first arc is done. First, Friday the 19th is a DAY OFF. No postings will be done there. You can use that time to comment, re-read your favourite chapter and comment again, and work on the tvtropes page.

(I strongly encourage THAT one; it Needs A Better Description for sure, and there are plenty of missing examples and tropes. You can also make up new pages than the obvious, making a Character Page, an YMMV page, and even pages for Heartwarming, Awesome, Funny, Tearjerker, Nightmare Fuel...the latter ones aren't ones you can pull off by hitting that Create New button to find the page, that takes a bit of wiggle work and doing a new tab and inserting http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Awesome/InheritanceOfCardsAndDemons for example and then doing a few other things. You can find how to do stuff on tvtropes, they have guides!)

On the 22nd and 26th, there will be TWO side stories being posted. Comments will still count towards getting the next arc, so read it and if you like it, comment!

And then finally on the 29th will be the premier of the 2nd arc. What a special day for that...

Now, with that out of the way on with the chapter!

By the way, you are going to be screaming DAMMIT RIN by the end if you are anything like me...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shirō is not happy. There are many reasons for it, including the fact he's on bed rest for the next month, if not two months, due to underestimating an opponent and not paying attention to why exactly that mysterious person had basically shoved everyone into a shield to protect them.

'That was a rookie mistake...' Shirō recalls that with a sigh. But he frowns as he recalls seeing what was summoned by that person. He recognized that water demon from last summer easily even through the pain and now he has to wonder what exactly is going on. 'Escaped demons? Is that guy some kind of researcher or something?'

Shirō groans again, getting an odd look from Nagatomo whose turn it is to babysit the restless Paladin. But aside from that stupid getting him in trouble, Yukio's taken it as a cue to get way too serious about exorcist duties all over again – he's already working towards earning his Middle First Class license when he's just gotten his Middle Second Class license – and that's put a big visible
strain in his relationship with his brother.

Who has also gotten hurt by Shirō getting so badly hurt, acting like it's all his fault and always looking at him with haunted eyes. Rin looking like that is painful, even if he tries to cover it up with cheer and mother henning.

'I got to get those two doing stuff together...' Shirō turns to Nagatomo. “Hey, I need a favour.”

Nagatomo sighs. “No, I'm not getting you porn.”

“That's not it...” Though that would be nice...' Shirō muses briefly. “Lend your ears and mind here. I need a way to get Rin and Yukio better distracted and hopefully back to normal...”

Nagatomo raises his eyebrows, but still starts hashing out some rough plans with Shirō for how to get the two boys bonding properly. He has to agree with Shirō after all.

Dinner has been getting more and more tense and he never sees either one at breakfast anymore.

Chapter 41: Ming Li, Ming Li

Rin does not know what he expects when he comes home from school. Definitely not Nagatomo grabbing him in a headlock and dragging him away despite his protests to the living room.

He's surprised to see Yukio and only has a moment to realize he hasn't actually seen his brother for quite some time outside of dinner and bedtime before he's tossed at him and the two of them go tumbling down, yells and ouches included.

The sound of a chain clinking sounds very loud, as does the snap of a lock. The cool feel of metal on his arm makes him disentangle himself from Yukio and sit up.

And stare in horror at the chain that's on his wrist, following the length to Yukio's arm with a feeling that makes his stomach twist in knots growing inside.

“What the fuck is this?” Rin demands of the assembled monks. He flinches slightly when he sees Shirō, though he's looking much better, then scowls again.

Yukio also doesn't look pleased, levelling a glare at the chain as if he wishes he could melt it with his gaze. In fact, if all was right in the world, he would have done exactly that.

“A solution. You get to have it off only when you need to change and that's only with supervision.” Shirō looks positively gleeful as the boys blanch at that. “And no need to worry about rust, it's rust proof and quite strong too.”

Rin eyes the chain for a moment, and thinks that he could actually break it with his strength. The problem is that if he does, it will end with bits of chain flying around and hurting definitely Yukio if not others. Also known as not an option.

'Besides I bet they will come up with something worse...' Rin and Yukio mentally grumble at the same time, both having come with separate ways to get free but arriving at the same conclusion.

“This is totally...” Rin begins.

“...unnecessary.” Yukio finishes.

Unfortunately this just makes everyone grin and Shirō laugh. “Oh good. You are already making progress!”
Rin glowers at that then, glancing at Yukio and looking away before Yukio turns to him. They really don't have any other options. Since it's Friday, they can fully see that this won't be coming off until the end of the weekend. And maybe not even then depending how sadistic everyone is feeling.

'This is gonna suck.' Is what the both of them think together, the twins sighing in unison.

The fact this makes everyone chuckle again does not improve their mood.

Changing for the night is humiliating, especially as Izumi makes a point of making a few teasing comments about “how big they are growing!” to them. This results in him being driven away by the combined efforts of the twins after the chain is back on them.

With that done, Rin gently kicks at the big futon in the centre of the room now. It's obviously for them to share and it does have enough room for two people. Rin is just not looking forward to it and judging by Yukio's expression he's feeling very much the same.

“We better just get to bed...” Yukio eyes the futon and the rest of the set up. “The sooner we start the easier it is to get to bed.”

Rin nods and follows Yukio in figuring out how to slide into the futon. And once that's done, they have to figure out how to arrange things to be comfortable with the chain.

“Ugh...this stinks...” Rin grumbles as they end up almost tangled up again by the chain.

Yukio rolls his eyes and twists slightly to get the chain up and out of the futon, with only a little of it between them and their respective pillows. “This better?”

“I guess...but you know I move in my sleep and you aren't much better.” Rin frowns at that while Yukio pinks at the reminder.

“Well...hopefully we should be okay.” Yukio murmurs, adjusting slightly so he gets into a more comfortable position.

Rin then chuckles. “How long has it been since we shared a bed?”

Yukio blinks at that, then smiles back. “Not since we were six at the latest.”

“Used to always do it...Oyaji says that when we were babies he didn't dare give us separate cradles since otherwise we'd be up and wailing all night.” Rin remembers.

Yukio winces. “Poor Tou-san...no wonder he's so good at taking naps...”

“What? I heard you were the big crier so what are you going on about? You'd start crying so I'd cry next because apparently you crying is the worst thing ever.” Rin snickers at Yukio's mortified face, then, after a moment, reaches out to clasp Yukio's hand. Yukio stares at that for a moment, then slowly closes his own hand over Rin's.

“Best work together right? They are probably just worried though no clue why...” Rin snorts and closes his eyes. “Good night Yukio.”

Yukio watches Rin for a long moment then softly returns, “Good night, Nii-san.”

Slowly closing his own eyes, he slows his breathing.

On Rin's normal bed, Kero watches this with a smirk on his face before curling up and going to sleep.
himself. In his opinion, this is a brilliant idea and exactly what both boys need.

Already they are having proper conversations together again.

The next morning the door slams open. “Good morning!” Izumi cheers, obviously haven't learned from last night.

Both Yukio and Rin groans and curl up further, not wanting to get up any time soon. Not with how long it took them both to fall asleep and the day with a freaking chain attached ahead of them. Waking up is the last thing they want to do, for once Yukio agreeing with Rin that mornings suck.

The sound and flash of a camera has them looking up, tired eyes barely managing to focus on Izumi. Yukio needs to scramble for his glasses case and pull it on to actually see him.

They stare at the crazy monk now has a camera in his hands and a wide grin on his face. “Perfect photo that!”

Turning slowly, Rin and Yukio turn to look at each other, confused at it. Then it slowly registers that they are cuddling with each other. Blushing in embarrassment, they work at disentangling themselves from each other and scrambled out of the futon. A task not made easy by the chain attached to them and having wrapped around them somehow during the night.

It's more than enough time for Izumi to exit and return without the camera and still with a wide grin on his face. “Well, time for breakfast. Or rather making it, you two are both on breakfast duty today!”

Yukio pales. “Hey you know...

“...Yukio can't cook!” Rin glowers at Izumi at that.

“Yeah, yeah...about time he learns then!” Izumi says cheerfully.

“I hope that you...” Yukio begins, glaring balefully at Izumi.

“...have your will written out.” Rin finishes, joining Yukio at glaring at Izumi.

Izumi pales and twitches. “Uh?”

Rin and Yukio don't even bother looking at each other as they step forward. Their minds are already one in this. Izumi squeaks and darts out of the room, with the twins hot on his tail.

The next half an hour is full of Rin and Yukio yelling angrily and Izumi attempting to flee them. Unfortunately for him, he's not that successful and after the twins have triumphantly punished the idiot, Kyōdō takes over on watching the twins while they are off their “leash”, grumbling about idiot hot-heads who don't know when to stop while they are ahead.

Despite protests otherwise, Yukio ends up being the only one “willing” to help Rin with making breakfast. Considering how much he needs to cook since everyone is home, Rin shows Yukio how to cut up the food and at least get the items he needs for cooking. Cooking is awkward with the chain in the way, but Rin manages anyways.

Mostly because both Rin and Yukio always seem to know where each other are, something that makes Shirō grin happily. Nice to have it confirmed that Rin and Yukio’s bond hasn't been destroyed
yet and probably won't any time soon.

As everyone digs into the meal, Rin and Yukio are interrupted by a piece of paper being laid in front of them. Curious, Yukio lifts it up and scowls. Rin soon follows after looking at.

About to complain, they look at the glint in Shirō's eyes and, as one, decide better of it.

'We do not need a schedule to hang out...' Rin gripes, stabbing at his eggs in irritation.

However, there's no way to convince them otherwise.

“If you behave nicely today, you can chose as you like tomorrow.” Shirō suggests cheerfully, making Yukio and Rin eye him carefully for duplicity. Finding none, they both silently agree to follow the schedule at least today.

'If it shows up tomorrow all bets off...' Yukio grumbles.

After all, no need to schedule time for an hour of Monopoly.

Also known as the game Yukio swears was thrown out when they were young due too many fights and arguments caused by it.

Surprisingly so the entire day goes well even with that crazy schedule involved. Well, except for the Monopoly bit, but what else did they expect to happen by bringing that game back into the monastery?

'They were lucky me and Yukio didn't end up strangling anyone with the chain.' Rin muses, snorting at the thought.

Yukio turns to Rin, a question on his face at the snort. Rin waves at him. “Chain. Strangulation.” Rin loses his calm and ends up laughing and soon enough Yukio joins him as he realizes exactly what Rin is talking about.

Down below, Shirō grins at the sound of the boys laughter and the chatter going on, not knowing they are currently plotting the demise of over half of the monastery in revenge for their current situation.

“That is definitely a good sound.” Shirō hums to himself, flipping through his current book. Demonology manual instead of porn to his distaste, but he does need to keep up with his reading in this regard. He pauses at the section on Sand Devils and frowns as he looks it over, tapping a finger on the book's cover as he thinks.

'Definitely didn't act like a normal Sand Devil...they aren't as blatant as that...' Shirō sighs and has to admit the demon was only classified as such because nothing else matched in regards to ability and appearance. 'But if it wasn't a Sand Devil, what was it?'

Shirō doesn't have an answer yet, but he's determined to see if he can, in fact, uncover the truth of the mysterious “demons” he has encountered. Which includes the strange water demon from last summer that didn't react to a very high grade holy water tossed into its mass.

'Of course, I need to heal first...' Shirō glowers down at his injuries, in particular the broken leg, knowing that it's going to take quite some time to heal. And that's not taking into account the physical therapy he will need for his leg after all that time in a brace and not functional.
The next day starts better, mostly because it's Maruta who wakes them and also informs them that they can do whatever they like today.

Of course, Shirō's condition that they must do things *outside* of the monastery puts a damper on the twins' good mood. It takes some time to wrangling a way to conceal the chain and even then Rin and Yukio end up having to hold hands to not get questioned on the chain on them.

*That would be awkward...* Rin sighs, knowing that's definitely an understatement. But it's also a very nice day out and spending it with Yukio sounds like a good idea. Even if they have to keep their off-hands together to keep the chain from being noticed.

Yukio doesn't say anything for a long time, just looks out on the street. “There's a crepe place by the train station that's supposed to be very good.”

Rin brightens at the thought. “Fruit crepe!” He says eagerly, tugging Yukio by his hands and walking eagerly towards that direction.

Smiling, Yukio keeps up with him easily, helped by the fact they have to hold hands. Yukio glances down at their joined hands and wonders at how smooth Rin's hands feel compared to his rough with calluses ones. Strange how it's the more athletic twin that has more “gentle” hands in that regard.

*Then again...even with the seal, Nii-san heals very well...* Yukio brushes it aside, wanting to think of happier things today. Even with the crazy that's going on, he's finding he's honestly enjoying spending time with his brother. *How long has that been, since we properly hanged out?* A minor look back into the past suggests it was last summer. During a festival Shirō forced him to with his brother. Otherwise, they tended to not spend as much together outside of class and lunch.

*And now even class isn't possible...and lunch is getting rarer.* Yukio once again drags his mind away from sad things and focuses on Rin. He frowns as he notices the fact Rin has a similar sad look on his face.

Unknown to Yukio, Rin is considering things similar to Yukio. In his case, he's putting the blame more on himself more. *If I didn't have to deal with the Cards so much, I'd have more time to be with Yukio...* Rin gripes to himself.

He then glances at the Card holster on his leg and considers the fact he's so close to getting them all. That thought puts a smile on his face – one that confuses Yukio – as he sees that as a sign he will be able to spend more time with Yukio again.

“Here we are.” Yukio declares, shaking Rin out of his thoughts and putting a smile on his face as he spots the crepe shop. It's not quite busy yet, but the crowd is already growing as the morning progresses.

This time it's Yukio's turn to tug him forward, the two boys examining the menu options and Rin picking out a very fruit filled one and urging Yukio to do the same.

With a laugh, he does. Like his brother, he does rather like fruit as part of a morning meal.

Even with the chain they have to keep hidden, and the looks they at times they get for holding hands, the Okumura brothers manage to have fun. Lots and lots of fun, ranging from going to the arcade to a karaoke box to finally a park. The sun is long set by the time they get out of their happy daze.

“Shit.” Rin eloquently puts their feelings correct, while Yukio quickly calls up and assures the monks they are okay on his cellphone. “It's really late.”
The city is slowly starting to go into a doze, not quite sleep, but enough of the people are now heading to bed that things are starting to get quiet.

“This...was very fun.” Yukio smiles. “Though it would have been better--”

“Without the chain.” Rin finishes, grinning at his brother. The smile fades and turns wistful. “I missed this. All of it.”

“I'm...sorry.” Yukio squeezes Rin's hand. “I should be...less distant than I've been and...”

“It's alright. I wasn't that good either.” Rin sighs and checks his watch. “We gotta get to the train station quick or we are going to be walking home.”

Yukio makes a face at that and quickly starts walking, as does Rin. Rin then pauses, as a ripple of magic goes over and turns to his side. Yukio blinks at feeling a similar thing and slows down as Rin does. After a moment, Yukio looks at where Rin is staring.

A pause.

“Um...why are there two lampposts?” Yukio wonders and then looks around spotting that's not the only duplicates around. He stares at the two identical – and even acting identical – stray dogs that bark at them.

“Oh shit...” Rin looks horrified. And not that surprise.

“Nii-san...” Yukio narrows his eyes. “What's going on?”

Rin twitches and looks very torn, glancing down at the chain that binds them, and then groans.

“Fuck.”

The duplication is popping up all over the city, or at least the blocks Rin and Yukio can get to. Rin does his best to ignore the stare Yukio is giving him. He's acting way too calm about this situation and he knows it.

'Dammit...what Card does this?' Rin pauses in front of an entire house that has been duplicated and somehow doesn't really change the layout of the city too much. Squeezes in without any problem. 'Stupid magic...'

“Nii-san!” Yukio's sharp yell makes Rin flinch. “What is going on?”

Rin winces and considers. 'Well...don't got much of a choice...' But as he opens his mouth to explain to Yukio, he gets interrupted.

“Oi, Rin!” Kero flies in. “Twin has been castin' all over town why haven't you deal with it?” He then pauses and blinks at Yukio who is staring slack-jawed at the talking plush toy. “Why is he still awake?”

“Because I can't do much with a sleeping guy on me?” Rin snarks, lifting his arm to show off the chain.

“Point. Anyways it's actually--”

“Wha...what is going on here? Nii-san...the plush toy is talking!” Yukio points at said “plush toy”. Kero glares at him and, after a moment, bites the finger pointing at him, making Yukio yelp.
“Kero!” Rin sighs and drags the angry Kero off of his brother, who is yelling about being called a plush toy and referring to himself as the Great Beast of the Seal and Keroberos the Selector. “Um...I guess uh...” Rin looks down. “I'm...a mage?”

“A mage.” Yukio stares in disbelief at Rin, which makes Rin sigh and pull out the Key. Staring at it, Rin takes a deep breath, feeling shaky strangely at showing this to Yukio. But he doesn't have time or options for anything else.

“Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!”

Yukio gapes at both the magic circle and then the staff now in Rin's hands. “Nii-san...”

Rin scratches the back of his neck. “Um...couldn't really tell you?”

A giggling sound makes both brothers turn and Rin glowers at the glowing forms before them while Yukio just looks at them, once again baffled.

They appear to be two yellow-coloured small children wearing costumes like those of jesters, with long sleeves, two pointed hats topped with balls, many-pointed collars ending in balls, ball buttons down their fronts, and shoes with long toe points ending in balls. One of them has a pink tuft of hair on the forehead, while the other one has a blue tuft.

Twin holds their hands and giggles at Rin and Yukio. “What are...?” Yukio asks, turning to Rin.

Rin hesitates, then takes a deep breath. “Um...try to keep up. Jump!”

Yukio only has a moment before the glowing wings now on his sneakers drag him along with Rin as he leaps at Twin, raising his staff and calling up another Card. “Wind, be a binding chain. Windy, Release!”

“Rin wait!” Kero calls as Windy wraps up Twin. “That's not--”

Rin grins and calls up his staff again. “Twin, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

But as Rin is saying this, one of the twin figures that makes up Twin – the one with the pink tuft – wiggles out of the binding and escapes before Rin finishes his chant. The result is a half Card attempting to form before blowing up in an explosion of light that sends both Rin and Yukio flying back. Kero covers his face in his paws, rubbing at his eyes in exasperation.

“Oi, Rin try listenin'.” Kero flutters over to Rin and Yukio who are sitting up looking a bit pained at being blown back. “Twin has to be caught in with two simultaneous attacks. That means you can't just get one, you gotta get both. And in unison.”

“How do I do that!?” Rin demands.

Yukio looks between Rin and Kero. “Could I at least have the abridged version of what's going on?”

“Rin accidentally released the Cards and he's tasked as Cardcaptor at findin' and sealin' all of them.” Kero explains quickly. “He's got the magic and he's actually almost got them all. But this one is a tricky one.”

“So was Watery.” Rin points out, brushing dirt from his clothing. “And Memory. Plenty are tricky and I've gotten them all before. What's the big deal with Twin?”
As I tried to tell you, havin' Yukio being awake is actually a good thang.” Kero sighs. “Though you probably want to put everyone else asleep before they wake up or notice what's going on.”

Rin makes a subtle expression that shows that he knows how bad that would be. “Right. Sleep, everyone but me, Kero, and Yukio need to take a big nap!”

Sleep springs to life and Yukio watches it go with wide eyes, especially as Windy is called up to aid the spread of the sleep dust. A part of him goes “aha” as it clears up a few incidents he recalls vaguely. Like the time at the amusement park.

“So, what were you saying?” Rin turns to Kero. “Why is it good Yukio's awake?”

“I do wonder that myself, considering all the time and effort Nii-san has obviously gone through to keep me away.” Yukio glares at Rin at that, which makes him twitch.

“First of all...Rin you didn't get me any cake.” Kero whines. “You promised cake this weekend.”

“That is not the problem here!” Rin and Yukio say in unison.

“Explain things...” Rin continues.

“...already you ahou!” Yukio ends.

Kero laughs, happy to have a strong hunch confirmed. “That is why it's a good thing. Since, simultaneous attacks with no signals or anythin'. That means the best way to handle Twin is---”

“...through the use of twins...” Yukio realizes, turning to look at Rin. “But...” Yukio frowns. “If it needs to be exactly the same...I'm not as fast or strong as Nii-san so I'll be just behind him.”

“That's...easy to fix...” Rin realizes, and two Cards float up to Yukio's eye level as Rin's way of showing how. Yukio reads what's on them, noting all the pink in amusement, seeing The Power and The Dash before him. It takes a moment, then he realizes what these Cards must do.

Kero ends up visibly unnerved by the twin grins Rin and Yukio share and for a moment feels a bit sorry for Twin. If only a bit.

---

Twin bounces in place, looking around at the duplicated city before them with glee. To them, it's just a great big joke, so they don't see any of what they wrought as being a problem.

Rin and Yukio definitely disagree. Twin get the first sign of that disagreement when a chain whips towards them and nearly smacks the both of them in the face. They dodge just in time and turn to face Rin and Yukio. The chain is hanging loose between them, but they don't act like that's there. Instead, Rin and Yukio take up rough fighting stances and both smirk at Twin. Daring them to fight instead of running.

Twin is not the brightest so eagerly they accept it and charge in.

The first sign it's not the greatest idea is the chain. What would normally be a disadvantage in a fight has been turned into an asset, both Rin and Yukio not hesitating in their movements when moving. They have no fear of tripping on it or pulling to hard on each other, knowing exactly what is next. It's also not uncommon for them to turn it into a weapon, dealing some damage to Twin more than once.

The second sign is--
Rin slams in first with the staff and as Twin moves to meet it--

Yukio hits low and grabs both part of Twin dragging them down--

To be hit with the chain wielded by Rin--

Escaping the situation, they next have to deal with both of them leaping at them and slamming their fists into their chests, sending them back heavily--

And then the chain is around them and Twin has only a moment to realize they have been beaten as Yukio sits on them while Rin lifts up the staff.

“Twin, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

With Twin's sealing, all the duplicates disappear and both Rin and Yukio sigh in relief. They then turn to look at each other and, hesitantly smile at each other.

Yukio settles down next to Rin. “So this is the secret you've been hiding.”

Rin nods slowly, hiding his face from his brother. Yukio sighs and reevaluates his brother, what he's been missing all this time slots into place and suddenly his brother is not as spoiled as he thought. He opens his mouth to apologize and offer some truth himself, only for Rin to interrupt him.

“Yukio...I'm sorry. But you deserve better.” Yukio turns to see a teary eyed Rin holding a Card in his hand.

“Memory. Please...take it away.” Rin watches as Yukio's face blanks out and quickly follows with Sleep. Rin catches his brother as he falls forward, holding his brother gently.

“What...why did you do that Rin?!” Kero demands. “You could have--”

“I can’t!” Rin yells, shuddering as he holds Yukio. He slowly lifts his head after a moment, revealing tears pouring down his face. “Yukio...Yukio deserves better than this. Than the danger. Than...than me!”

Kero watches in horror as Rin cries and cries, wounded completely by his choice. But not backing down from his decision, as horrible and painful as it is.

Because, as horrible as it is, as painful and even cruel, Rin chooses it out of love for his brother and the urge to give him happiness.

It is because of that that ultimately Kero cannot say anything against Rin's choice. Just watch sadly as Rin sobs out his heart and soul over what he must do for his dream and for Yukio's sake.

Chapter End Notes

See, what did I tell you? DAMMIT RIN!

Comment to tell me what you think please and get the next chapter! Only two more to go!

This chapter is a special one in that it got me thinking "what if". One day, I'm going to
hold a contest to find someone to write this "what if"...and other "AU" fics maybe. I can't write them (too stuck on having written everything else already!) but they are ideas that are BUGGING THE CRAP out of me. And from what lots of comments say, I know at least a few will be the kind people would love.
Rin is not in a good mood that night, curling up in his bed and feeling rotten to the core.

It had been pathetically easy to explain things to the monks when he came home late with Yukio slung over his back. His excuse of Yukio falling asleep on the train is easily accepted and is one of the reasons Rin now has the chain off.

But Rin still feels terrible. He turns and looks at Yukio, who he put to bed himself since apparently between not sleeping much lately and the magic of Sleep, Yukio is in a deep, unmoving sleep. Just the sight of his brother makes guilt fill him.

’But...it wouldn't be fair...bad enough that I have to deal with all of this but everyone else? Especially Yukio...if they can be normal...that's all that's needed...right?’ Rin closes his eyes and a few more tears slip out.

Kero watches him from beside him, but has nothing he can say. Rin's made his choice and he will have to accept it. He just hopes it's not the wrong choice to make.

**Chapter 42: Earth Dance**

Rin's dour mood continues into school, though he manages to hide it from his family and Yukio at home. But as soon as both are out of sight, Rin finds himself brooding on what he did last night.

’That was the right choice.' He manages to convince himself finally. ’Yukio can't be a doctor and succeed in school if he's too busy worrying over me.'

Rin looks up as someone raps on his desk, both surprised and not surprised to see Naoko. “Oh. Is there something you want?”

Naoko holds out two small rectangular pieces of paper. “More like if you want it. See, was going to go with Miho-chan but something came up for both of us so neither of us are going. Was thinking you can go with your brother or something”

Rin cautiously accepts the papers and looks them over. Tickets to a concert that is coming up on this weekend, this Saturday in fact, and good tickets at that from what he's seeing.

“You are just giving them to me?” Rin wonders.
Naoko giggles. “Well, I can't use them. But they would be worthless if no one used them. So I thought well, Okumura-kun, both of them, have been in bad moods recently so they need cheering up. Think it's something you and your brother can enjoy?”

Rin looks up at the earnest Naoko and then down at the tickets. He smiles as he realizes what kind of music would be playing here. The exact kind that both brothers like. “Yeah...thanks.”

Naoko beams at him. “You're welcome!” The bell goes off at that point and Naoko has to scramble into her seat, managing to do it just before the teacher walks in.

Rin carefully tucks the tickets into his bag, specifically in a small pocket he zips up, making sure he won't lose them or forget them. This might be exactly what he needs.

'Even if he doesn't know anymore, Yukio deserves an apology.' Rin brings out his pen as the teacher gets ready to explain things and he needs to take notes. 'He deserves something good for all that I put him through, even if he doesn't remember.'

The tickets keep him half distracted during the day, but somehow Rin manages to keep his focus generally directed towards school.

Eiji is almost not surprised to see Rin approaching him. Somehow, he had the feeling Rin would be showing up today though he can't say why.

“Hey, I need a little help.” Rin holds out two tickets. “Naoko gave me these.”

“...do you want me to sell them for you?” Eiji eyes them and considers that if he does, he could get a good deal off them. ‘Of course, I'd give all the money to Rin.’

“Nah. I'm planning on going.”

Eiji freezes, looking at the second ticket and half hoping and half fearing...

“Oh and taking Yukio too of course.” Rin adds, not noticing how Eiji deflates and looks a bit conflicted in emotions. ‘Just want to know more about the site and stuff.’

Eiji sighs briefly and pulls out his smartphone, looking for the right information. “It's being held at Cross Park. They are currently setting up the stage for the event and it's actually going to be a big one. Not just one band, but many of them. It's also a charity concert.”

“That's cool.” Rin then pauses, looking thoughtful. “A stage...a concert...” Rin shivers as he feels like that is something he's heard of before. He then dismisses it and smiles down at Eiji, pulling out 100 yen to give to Eiji.

Eiji accepts it with a smile. “If you are wondering, yes those are very good tickets you have there. Only a limited number of those were given out. Not only do they get you into the concert, but you get a limited amount of free food and drinks.”

Rin cheers at that. “Awesome! I owe Naoko something super nice for this.” Rin cheerfully whistles as he turns around and heads off to do whatever he does during in lunch.

Eiji shakes his head and looks down. ‘Silly me...’ ‘I'm just a friend, I think. Of course he's inviting Yukio.’

Eiji then shuts his smartphone and heads off to find another spot to set up shop. Aside from Rin, he
hadn't gotten many “customers” so he needs to find a more friendly spot in that regard.

Sekki looks up, a bit puzzled. “A concert?”

“Yes...I figured...it would be fun. Informal. The tickets I got are limited ones that also allow for free food and drink.” The gym teacher, Kojima Kunio, smiles down at Sekki.

“Well...” Sekki stares down at her mug of green tea and for a moment it ripples as if something vibrates. Sekki then looks up, a distracted smile on her face. “I don't mind. It's a very friendly thing.”

Kojima deflates slightly on the friend thing, but takes hope either way.

“What I suspected is not true of course. Sekki-san is nothing but professional.’

Sekki is ignorant to that, just keeps a smile on her face and accepts the ticket from Kojima, making a plan to meet up this Saturday. She then turns back to her work but doesn't do anything for a long time except stare out into space.

“So...it is time...” Sekki closes her eyes. ‘Promise me...I will sleep during it...I could not bear...’

A flash of light flickers in deep darkness and two silver-blue eyes open and stare out. Aware and awake in full for the first time.

Sekki trembles and opens her eyes, forcing herself to focus on her work instead of the uncertain future ahead of her.

It's dinner time when Rin first brings up the tickets to his family.

“So, what do you think?” Rin smiles, looking hopeful that Yukio will be able to come with him to a fun concert.

Yukio looks over at Shirō who grins. “What are you looking at me for?” Ruffling Yukio's hair, he turns to Rin, “I'm sure this brat would love it. Hell, they are still selling tickets I heard. Not special like yours and Yukio's, but we can still make a family thing out of it.”

Rin beams at that and while Shirō argues with Nagatomo over how he can, in fact, go to a measly concert with a broken leg, he turns to Yukio. “So?”

Yukio chuckles. “I'm out-numbered. And yes, I wouldn't mind. I'll make sure that day is clear.”

“Awesome! There's so many awesome artists. Here, I heard...”

Yukio listens with one ear as Rin talks about the musical artists that will be at the charity concert and feels some warmth suffuse his body. It's always nice to be with his brother in this regard and the concert does sound like fun.

'Perhaps I'll be able to relax a bit more there.' Yukio thinks positively. That's what Shirō's been nagging him for recently. That he needs to relax and have some fun.

'Well, I'm definitely getting there.' Yukio thinks as he double checks that a certain artist is supposed to be there is going to be there. Having that confirmed makes Yukio smile as it's one of his favourite music artists.

Shirō sees the smile and finds it makes his own smile easier. The concert would be also good for him and the rest. 'Especially me...so restless...’ He mentally grumbles, not liking the broken leg at all.
'Well, once it's off I'll be far from bored as possible.' Shirō makes a face, thinking of the physical therapy and then missions that will be dumped on him. 'Might as well have fun while I can.'

With that happy thought in mind, Shirō finally convinces Nagatomo to go out and buy all the tickets for him and the rest of the residents of the monastery.

That particular victory has everyone cheering and even Nagatomo can't stop smiling.

As soon as the plans are made and the tickets purchased, Rin can't wait for the concert to come.

Which means, of course, that the rest of the week appears to drag. With Rin getting more and more annoyed by how slow time seems to be moving and by Wednesday Rin is half tempted to use Time to even speed up things a little.

Only Kero's repeated warnings about meddling with Time, especially since he's not powerful enough to use it reliably, keeps a sulking Rin from using it.

Rin pokes at his lunch today, for once with Yukio with him who looks privately amused at how Rin is sulking over the slow procession of time.

"I'm sure it be time for the concert before you know it." Yukio assures his brother. "It is merely an illusion since you are so eager for it."

"I can't help it!" Rin throws his hands up in the air. "It's like...something big and amazing is coming. Or maybe scary? Whatever, I just can feel it coming and I wish it would get it over with already."

Yukio raises his eyebrows at that then shrugs. "I'm afraid I can't help with that. Just have to wait like everyone else Nii-san."

Rin grumbles again at that, but then sighs and goes for a bite of the teriyaki chicken included in his bento. "You're right. But...it is very tiring."

Yukio eyes Rin and then nudges him. "How about seeing about getting proper sleep tonight? That might help."

"Yeah...though I think I'm having weird dreams that aren't helping..." Rin sighs. 'And Kero got strangely quiet when I mentioned them...but didn't tell me anything ugh...'

Yukio frowns in thought. "Maybe you need to have something soothing before bed. Warm milk might help."

"I'm not sure it will but worth a shot." Rin says, digging into his rice. "Anyways, how has your days been going?"

As Yukio allows Rin to switch the topic, the wind blows some leaves past them and, for a moment, Rin thinks he hears the sound of bells.

The sound of artificial explosions, sparkly effects, and the background music flows slightly from the door of the gaming room. There is no one upstairs to hear it, so Kero goes unnoticed.

But as time goes on, Kero loses focus on his game. He doesn't even wail as his focus wavers enough that his character “dies” in the game, resulting in a Game Over screen looming menacingly in front of him.
Kero instead sighs and turns off the system, settling down to sit.

And think.

A glance to the side shows the Sakura Book is in here now. It glows and floats over to Kero who looks at it. The book turns around and shows the back, showing once again something Kero knew all along; that the moon that is supposed to be on the back is gone and has been since the beginning.

Kero sighs and rubs his face with his paws. “Too late to worry...” Kero looks out the window nearby and mentally counts the Cards. “One more...and the Judgement begins...just wish it wasn't that Card...why's it gotta be last all the darn time?”

Kero sends the Sakura Book back, and flies up to the doorway. Peeking out, Kero listens carefully as he floats down the hallway.

It's time for some cheering-up cake. Kero remembers that Rin finally got around to tackling a cheesecake recipe and he's more than willing to eat it all despite the consequences to return to a more cheerful mood.

Friday is greeted with great joy and not just by Rin. Everyone had been watching the clock for various reasons and now that they know that Saturday is to be the special day-off for them all, even Yukio can't help but privately cheer about it.

In this celebration, it calls for very special bento to be prepared for the group. Even if Rin and Yukio can have free drinks and food, Rin looked at the food being offered and figured that it's good for snack food and otherwise quite unhealthy. Since the concert is a day long event with a break for lunch, Rin figures a wonderful lunch is in order.

'Besides, I like making bento.' Rin hums cheerfully as he starts cutting up the vegetables for the first part of the meal.

Yukio looks up from his book that he's reading to watch Rin for a moment. There's a strange sort of peace that comes from actually spending time with his brother. 'I hope it lasts...' Yukio thinks, turning back to his book. Nothing serious, merely a novel he's been wanting to read for a while now.

Rin wanders over to the fridge, pulling out more ingredients. Not just for the lunch, but for a special dessert to take along with it. Thinking of dessert makes Rin recall his first cheesecake and the glutton that ate it all before anyone else could have a taste.

'Kero should be punished for it...' Rin considers it. 'I know, I'll leave behind a trap cake...one with hot sauce in it...’ Rin starts muttering to himself, working out the ingredients under his breath and actually starting to craft a cake that would taste good. If one happened to like spicy things.

Yukio glances up at Rin's muttering about a volcano cake, then shrugs it off. His brother can be strange at times and Yukio has had his entire life to get used to it.

'It would be weird if Nii-san wasn't a bit...odd.' Yukio chuckles to himself at that, turning back to his book with a smile on his face.

In the doorway of the kitchen, Shirō leans on his crutches and can't help smiling. The monastery has been very peaceful and cheery ever since Yukio and Rin made up.

“So that did work...” Shirō chuckles to himself, then limps away to see about the rest of the preparations for the concert tomorrow.
The day of the concert dawns bright and clear. Which means Rin is up and about long before anyone else. Surprisingly, he doesn't wake up Yukio but instead just goes and gets ready himself.

The reason becomes clear when Rin rushes downstairs to make up a very special breakfast. Taking advantage of fresh blueberries and the other supplies, Rin starts making up a very nice breakfast made up of blueberry pancakes, poached eggs, sausages, and green tea smoothies for everyone. At the same time, Rin works on the final ingredients and steps needed to make the bento for everyone perfect.

The first one down after Rin is Kero, who takes advantage of everyone still sleeping to wander down, rubbing an eye with a paw, drawn by the scent of breakfast.

“Oooh...these look good...” Kero dodges Rin's idle batting of him away. “Am Ah going to get anythin’?”

Rin eyes him for a moment before sighing. “Yeah. I'll make a small plate for you.”

“Yay!” Kero cheers then settles on the back of a nearby chair. “Hey, Rin Ah'm comin' with you to the concert.”

“Uh? I thought you were going to stay home and play games?” Rin looks over at Kero, a surprised look in his eyes.

Kero shrugged. “Changed my mind.” Kero doesn't say anything else for some time, as Rin turns back to the food and finishes making up the bento before heading back to make the smoothies for breakfast. “Feel like somethin' is comin'.”

Rin freezes, pausing with the cooking chopsticks in the air. There's nothing but silence and the sound of food sizzling before Rin sighs and lowers the chopsticks. “Me too.”

“I figured that.” Kero eyes Rin. “Do you remember any of yer dreams?”

Rin shakes his head. “Nothing. Except for...bells and...” Rin looks down. “And silver-blue eyes.”

Kero hisses in a breath. 'He never showed it before but...maybe he does have some bit of foretellin' in him. Not as much as Sakura, but still it's there.' Kero recalls the winged lion Rin made, the fact he was drawn to a certain ice sculpture, and other occasions. 'Or rather his foresight doesn't show up as obviously as Sakura. But it's there and he can tell when somethin' is gonna happen.'

“Kero...is...what's going to--” Rin cuts off and shuts his mouth as the sound of footsteps and groaning announces the arrival of a tired and yawning Izumi into the kitchen. Kero drops onto the kitchen table and does his best doll impression while Rin returns to cooking.

“Oooh...that looks all good!” Izumi goes to grab a sausage and gets smacked by Rin. “Ow, hey!”

“Wait til everyone else is up!” Rin grumbles to himself after that turning back to his cooking but keeping an eye on the sulking Izumi.

Kero, meanwhile, gets the feeling that the final opportunity to warn Rin has slipped away and curses himself mentally.

'He's not ready...and this is gonna hurt.' Kero wilts at that thought, then mentally begins a prayer. 'Please...don't let this fail...Sakura, Ah know you saw somethin' but what was it?!'
But there is, of course, no answer from Sakura.

Cross Park is already swarming with people by the time Rin and his family show up for the concert. With a large line-up to get in, Rin and Yukio end up having to split from the rest due to the special tickets they have. That makes them lucky enough to get in first since they get a smaller line and Rin quickly grabs the picnic basket and blue sheet from Nagatomo so they will be able to claim a prime spot for everyone.

The food stands set up quickly reveal themselves to have a deal where Rin and Yukio can use their respective tickets to get one item from them for free. If they want a second serving, Rin and Yukio would have to pay.

“Good thing I brought the bento then.” Rin says cheerfully, as he looks at the selections offered, tugging at the sleeve on his outfit. Something that Sekki made him promise to wear today. In fact she had been rather insistent. “But...hmm...between us we can get enough to share during the concert with everyone else.”

As Yukio considers that, Rin looks down at his outfit and is privately relieved it isn't too fancy. The top reminds him almost of a dark purple sleeveless hoodie, with the hood attached in the back, though it also has no big pouch in front like a normal hoodie. Instead, it has the design of a star picked out in white rhinestones, simple but effectively eye-catching. Over top that is a short-sleeved black jacket, a short one that stops above his belly button and has the design of a sun and moon embroidered on the back. Since it's summer, Rin was given shorts by Sekki, though the dark blue with black edging shorts that he has are far from normal. For added effect, Rin is given a pair of ankle sized boots in a tan brown and he has a white hat on that not only protects him slightly from the sun, but has blue embroidery shaped like flames on it. Rin has to wonder why it's the hat that got him the strange looks from his foster father, as he's pretty sure the entire outfit is worthy of odd looks.

“That sounds like a good plan.” Yukio calculates it mentally. “One goes for the morning snacks and the other for the afternoon snacks?” He offers.

“Hell yes!” Rin grins fiercely at that, as they finally find a good spot and spread out the blue sheet for everyone. All around them, they can see others doing much the same with different amounts of people. A few couples are there as much as groups of friends and families joining in on the fun. “Different stands too I think. Shouldn't have duplicates.”

As Rin and Yukio discuss what would be good snacks in the morning and in the afternoon, the crowd ends up being a blessing for Naoko as she spots Rin and Yukio before they spot her and Miho, making her backpedal and drag Miho in another direction.

“What are you doing Naoko-chan?” Miho demands, then looks and sees what she saw; Rin and Yukio setting up for the concert. She sighs. “Honestly...I really would like to know why you gave those nice tickets you won to them.”

“Because they've been not acting like proper brothers. Twins.” Naoko nods her head firmly. “Looks like it was a great idea.” Naoko glances back and smiles at the two boys who are currently laughing at something together.

Miho sighs but has to agree. “Really, why did you do it though? Because of friendship or...” Miho trails off at the look on Naoko's face.

Naoko shrugs. “I'd like to be friends with Okumura-kun,” Miho doesn't bother asking which one, knowing exactly which one she's talking about. She already knows. “...but he's...got this weird wall
around him. No matter what happens, he keeps pushing me back. Then again...he does that for everyone so it's not like I'm special or anything.”

Miho gives a sympathetic look to Naoko. She may not quite understand the attraction, but she does understand the feeling.

Naoko then shakes off her melancholy and smiles. “Well, let's find another space to enjoy the concert from! And keep an eye out for the elder Okumura in particular. He would make a fuss if he knew the truth.”

Miho smiles back and follows Naoko happily to another section of the field.

Sekki takes a sip from her green tea, cool and bottled, and looks out at the field that is slowly filling up with many people. Unconsciously, she moves away as Kojima sits too close to her personal space. Kojima's smile tightens for a moment and he wonders if Sekki is oblivious or distracted.

“Are you doing alright, Tsukishiro-san?” Kojima asks, setting the selection of stall food he got down. Some skewered fruit and yakitori are his choices for easy but tasty food for them both to enjoy.

“Hmm...oh, sorry was a bit lost in thought.” Sekki looks down at the offered food. “Is this for me? Why thank you.”

Kojima ends up surprised by how much Sekki is able to munch on and, with a sigh, stands up. “I'll go get more food. Takoyaki sound good?”

Sekki smiles up at him. “You are too kind Kojima-san. Thank you.”

Kojima brightens at her smile and cheerfully heads back to the stands. Lucky for him he brought enough money with him even with the special tickets. *I didn't know Tsukishiro-san could eat so much...* Kojima glances back to see her already starting to polish off the yakitori and moving on to the fruit.

Sekki, meanwhile, looks out over the assembled people and to the concert stage that is in the final prep stages. For a moment, she sees something else and winces, pressing a hand to her head.

‘This...is the time.’ Sekki looks out warily, “spotting” both Rin and Kero with her magic to be within the crowd. ‘I do hope it all ends well.’

Sekki takes a bite out of one of the fruit offered and makes a face, looking down to see a kiwi. Carefully she extracts it from the skewer and tosses it aside, before examining the rest of the skewers for the hidden kiwi that might be on them. “I despise kiwi...’

The concert is a blast, with loud cheering from the crowd and the music blasting from the stage.

“Thank you all for coming! There will now be an hour break before we all return to rock the stage!” The Emcee announces, provoking more cheers. “Please, enjoy yourselves at the stalls!”

As the crowd disperses slightly, since a good chunk are going to the stalls for food or need to have a washroom break, Rin settles down on the mat and starts pulling out the bento that he brought with him. Special bento that, with a quick sneaky application of magic, are reheated. Rin grins at that simple little spell he learned as part of a small training to be more precise with his magic. Changing temperature is precise but not that difficult, especially with two “hot” natured Cards paired with two “cold” natured Cards to guide him in how the magic should feel. This allows it to be easier for Rin to
keep his food good in many ways, including health wise.

’Would hate for someone to get sick because I wasn't careful enough.’ Rin muses as he spreads out all the bento and everyone settles down to enjoy them.

The theme here is obviously “summer picnic and barbeque” obviously, as everyone makes happy sounds at the roasted meats and vegetables arrayed out. There's also some sashimi kept in a separate bento with a “cold” spell on it so it wouldn't go bad. Fruit is also there, as is some potato salad, and, in a special box that Rin refuses to open until everything else is done, there is a very nice dessert Rin prepared.

With cries of *Itadakimasu* and their plates and chopsticks at the ready, everyone dives into the food with glee. Rin grins as they eat the food and compliment it, carefully sneaking bites of everything to Kero so he doesn't complain at missing out on the food.

As Rin looks out over the crowd, he blinks as he notices someone who looks like Sekki. He then shrugs and turns to look at his plate, grabbing some more of the roasted pork belly to eat.

On such a special occasion, a little splurging on the ingredients was allowed. Besides, everything was on sale when Rin went to buy the meats.

During an intermission in the afternoon half of the concert, a small break between performers, Rin ducks through the crowd towards the stalls, planning on getting the requested treats for everyone. In the case of a specific stall, Rin has some money from the rest so he can get all the needed food.

As he does so, Rin nearly bumps into Sekki who is looking at all the stalls, deep in thought. “Aah! Sekki-san!”

Sekki turns and bestows a brilliant smile on Rin. “Rin-kun. You are here too?”

“Yup. Got some tickets from a friend.” Rin bounces happily in place. “What about you?”

“Kojima-san invited me to come with him.” Sekki answers. “Very nice of him, to be such a friend.”

Rin eyes her. “Kojima...isn't that the sensei that tried to ask you out last Christmas Eve?”

Sekki blinks. “Oh. Yes that is true.” Sekki frowns at the look on Rin's face. “Is something wrong?”

“Well...” Rin scratches the back of his head and wonders how he can tell while Sekki is oblivious. “I don't think he was just thinking of being nice and friendly.”

Sekki doesn't understand for a moment, then realization blooms on her face. “Oh dear. I do believe I just accidentally led him on.” Sekki sighs. “Well, best clear it up as fast as possible...after I get some food.”

Rin laughs. “That's a good idea. Well, gotta go line up for Kakigori for everyone.” He waves off Sekki. “I hope you keep having fun still!”

“Thank you. You are as well.” Sekki calls after him. Once he disappears into the crowd, Sekki loses her smile. A thoughtful look on her face takes its place and she turns to the concert stage with a strange look in her violet eyes.

Before dismissing it for now in favour of filling up her stomach. There isn't much else she can do anyways.
As the sun slowly sets, the day long concert finally ends. A little disappointed by how fast it seemed to go after how long he seemed to wait for it, Rin still can't help but grin and happily help the monks pack up their things and collect the garbage they have.

“This was a great day.” Shirō limps up on his crutches and gives Rin's hair a ruffle, ignoring the whine he gets for the action with an easy grin. “Great job at finding out about it.”

Rin ducks his head down, blushing. 'I really do need to do something nice for Naoko...'

Rin pauses and picks up the final bag, swinging it over his shoulder carefully. If he listens carefully, he can hear the sound of a happy and full Kero within, which makes his grin widen.

The park is emptying and Rin for a moment looks toward the stage. This was a family oriented event, thus the packing up before it gets very late, and judging by all the stalls, tickets, and little prizes that got drawn for, Rin figures the charity was a success.

'Just wonder what kind of charity it's for...’ Rin blinks as he realizes he didn't check then shrugs it off. He's pretty sure it was for a good cause so no worries there.

Rin briefly considers asking Yukio what kind of charity, despite the mocking he's going to get from his brother, but when he goes to do it he freezes at a distinctive zing that flashes across his senses. Rin looks around, suddenly horrified by the crowd around and takes off, despite Yukio's cry of surprise, diving into the crowd.

Just in time as the ground suddenly shakes and screams go off as what feels like an earthquake hits. Rin grits his teeth, moving through the crowd as fast as he can as he knows that is not the truth.

'Dammit a Card...' Rin looks frantically around for a place where he can use his staff without witnesses.

“Rin-kun.” Rin turns to see Sekki, who races over to him. “You need Time.”

Rin's eyes widen in realization and he quickly digs into his holster, summoning Time to hand and passing it to Sekki. “Please!”

Sekki nods. “Of course, now hurry!”

Rin disappears into the crowd, Sekki taking a deep breath and centring herself. “Time...give us what we need...”

As Time draws from her, Sekki notices that it doesn't hurt as much as usual and realizes exactly what that means with a thumping heart.

Meanwhile, Rin ignores the freezing of time around here, pulling out his Key and shouting, “Key that hides the power of the stars, show your true form before me. I, Rin, command you under our contract. Release!”

Rin keeps moving as he grabs the staff, joined by a flying Kero. “Rin, it's Earthy! It's the final high element Card!”

Rin curses at that, and quickly pulls out two Cards. Tossing them in the air where they spin, Rin raises his staff. “Sleep! Make everyone sleep. Float, make sure they aren't in danger!”

Rin keeps moving as the two Cards spread out to do their duty, quickly getting the sleep dust on top...
of them and a glow around every person to move them. Once the Time begins to fade and everyone is safe and asleep, Rin pulls out another Card. “Fly!”

Rin leaps into the air just in time to avoid a fissure that opens at where his feet were.

Flying above the chaos, Rin can only be relieved that no one is in the danger zone. However, fissures are slowly growing and spreading across the park. The shaking is also very dangerous.

'At some point this is going to break...' Rin looks around at the park and frowns for a moment. He spots Sekki standing by a cluster of trees with his family sleeping next to her. She smiles up at him and gives a slow nod, assuring him of their safety.

Rin takes a deep breath and looks up.

Just in time to see the serpentine dragon made of rock that rises up and screeches, charging at Rin. “Woah!” Rin just manages to dodge the first attack, spinning away from it. “Oh shit.”

Rin urges Fly faster as Earthy charges at him. He nearly rams into a building just beside the park before taking a sharp turn back. Rin has a moment to register the fact he's heading right back at Earthy before Kero appears before him. Glowing brightly and summoning up a magic circle, Kero lets out a roaring breath of fire that sends Earthy back long enough for Rin to dodge and fly somewhere else.

“Thanks Kero!” Rin then looks around, wincing. Float is still active, just barely keeping everyone safe. “Dammit...” Rin looks around and finds a place to land for now, dropping Fly. “Shield!” Rin calls, sending multiple domes of light all around the park to add extra protection to all those stuck here. Rin then curses as Earthy turns on him again. “Jump!”

Leaping into the air, Rin then calls up Fly again, just in time to avoid a bite from Earthy. “Fuck.” Rin scrambles upright on his staff and looks around again.

“Dammit...what Card works here...” Rin looks out over the park and blinks. Though everything is shaking or breaking, the trees are safe. In fact, Sekki's location is completely calm for example, while other places the trees tremble slightly.

But they do not fall.

“I...I have an idea..” Kero looks up at Rin who is taking on a determined expression. “I need time can you...?”

Kero grins. “Yeah. Don't need ta ask.” Kero whirs around and whistles at Earthy. “Hey, over here!”

Rin dives down, landing on one of the safe spots on the ground as Kero darts around and distracts Earthy. “This better work.” Rin whispers, digging out Wood from his holster.

Rin takes a deep breath. “Wood, become a binding chain and an anchor...Wood, Release!”

A surge of branches and leaves erupts from the Card, flying into the air with Wood hidden amongst them in her spirit form. Earthy only has a moment to turn around to see it coming before Wood is upon it, tangling around it and making it roar. But also unable to move.

“Yes!” Rin calls up Fly once more and lifts himself up to the building next to Earthy. “Earth, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”
Light flares brilliant and amazing, the damage caused by Earthy fading away into nothing as the Card forms in front of Rin. Rin holds out his hand and gratefully accepts it. It fades into view, showing a woman with crystals on her forehead and her hair in two swirls, wearing a dress with a crystalline bodice and high collar made of crystals. Her hands are clasped demurely in front of her and she looks peaceful compared to the violence she did before.

Kero floats over to him, as Rin stares at the Card in his hands, trembling. “Rin?”

Rin looks up at him, beaming with his lips caught in his teeth. “I did it. I did it Kero! I caught all the Cards!”

For a moment, Kero says nothing. Then he grins. “Good job. You have caught them all...and restored my power.”

Rin can only blink in surprise, as Kero glows. “Kero?”

A magical circle appears below Kero's hovering form and his wings expand, covering his form as the light grows. Rin steps back and in a final flash of light the circle disappears and the wings pull back.

Rin's jaw drops.

Before him appears to be a huge, tawny maneless lion, with enormous angelic white wings and a chestplate and helmet of beaten metal, studded with a large red precious stone. Said lion settles down on his hind-legs, sitting down and looks down at his form.

“Aaaah...it is good to be back to mah true form...” The lion looks up at Rin, arrest ing him with its vibrant golden eyes, and something like a smile is on its face. “My thanks.”

“Aaaah...wait...Kero!?” Rin stares in amazement. “This...this is your awesome true form?”

Kero sighs. “Yes...why does everyone always react like this...” He mutters to himself.

Rin stares at Kero. Though Keroberos truly suits him now. “You...you are so cool.”

Kero looks a bit flustered for a moment, then puffs up his chest and stands up once more. “Ah know! Now, how about we get down.” Kero spreads his wings and crouches down next to Rin. “Best if ya let your magic rest a bit. Let me carry you.”

Rin reaches out and touches the soft fur that covers Keroberos's form. He then smiles, enjoying the feeling and giving Kero a brief pet, before carefully swinging himself over Kero's back. After a bit of wriggling around to get comfortable that Kero tolerates, Rin grins. “Let's go!”

Kero spreads his wings and, bunching up his back and leg muscles, leaps into the air, snapping his wings out and soaring through the sky. Rin lets out a whoop of joy. To him, this is just as cool as using Fly if not more so.

Sekki is waiting for them on the ground, smiling up at them. Keroberos lands gracefully in front of her and gives a slow nod to her as Rin scrambles off his back.

“It is good to see you restored to your true power, Keroberos.” Sekki says formally.

“Sekki-san!” Rin runs up to Sekki and pauses just in front of her, practically vibrating in excitement in front of her. “I did it!”
Sekki laughs. “Yes, you did. Very well done Rin-kun.”

“So with this it's all over...” Rin looks down at Earthy. He then frowns for a moment. “Hey, Sekki-san...is all you need to do is capture the cards to be the new master?”

Sekki blinks in surprise at the question. “No. There's something else.”

“Something else...” Rin thinks back, trying to recall something on the edge of his memory.

“The Judgement is coming.” Light adds. “And the Judge might be harsh but with good reason.”

“No, Rin-kun. Thank you. Take care of them, will you? Even if he doesn't show it, he's really a softy once you get to know him.”

“Judgement...who is the Judge?” Rin asks, surprising both Kero and Sekki.

Sekki is the first to recover. “When Clow Reed crafted the Cards, he also crafted guardians. The first is Keroberos. Representing the Sun and Western magic. He who governs Light, Firey, Earthy, and all those Cards that fall under him.”

Kero nods as Rin turns to look at him, then speaks, “And I am the Selector, choosing who is worthy to become the Master of the Cards.”

“And the second...” Sekki wavers for a moment. “The second is Yue. He represents the Moon and Eastern Magic. He governs Dark, Windy, Watery, and all the Cards that fall under them.”

Rin drops down to look at the Card in his hand. Float and Shield had already returned to him before he even landed, even Time as well, so unlike Earthy they rest in the holster on Rin's leg.

“A moon...when I first found the book, there was a moon on the back cover...but it hasn't been there since the Cards got free...” Rin murmurs to himself then looks up. “Sekki-san...what will happen when I sign this Card?”

Sekki doesn't answer. Keroberos gives her a sympathetic look and approaches Rin, pushing his head under his hand and making the boy turn to look at him. “Yue will appear and start the Judgement.”

Rin looks down at the Card in his hand and takes in a deep breath. “How's my magic?”

“It's good.” Keroberos assures him.

Rin takes on a determined look. “Well, I can't wait too long to sign Earthy. Might go out of control again. So...I'll do it now.” Rin digs into his pocket to pull out a pen, clicking it open.

All is silent as Rin carefully writes his name on the Card. As soon as Rin finishes writing his name, he lifts the pen and looks around for Yue.

Instead, Sekki lets out a soft sigh. “Rin-kun...I am sorry.”

Rin steps back, shock on his face and the pen dropping from his hand as the other clenches Earthy
The wings slowly pull back, revealing an entirely different form. The magic circle slowly fades as feet touch the ground. The man in front of him has long, silver hair with a violet tint that flows down his back in a loose ponytail with short bangs framing his face. He is wearing white silken robes along with dark blue armour over top. A jewelled earring is on his left ear and a long side cape hangs on his right shoulder. Distantly, Rin notes that he is very attractive and with the white wings he truly looks like an angel.

But Rin is caught by his eyes, the piercing silver-blue that has been haunting his dreams for some time now, ever since the day he was trapped by Dream. Rin's throat is dry and he swallows.

“You...you are Yue?” Rin manages to gasp out, clenching his hands in Keroberos's fur.

The man – Yue – slowly nods. “Yes. I am.”

Vertigo makes Rin nearly fall down, only braced by Keroberos as he tries and fails to comprehend just what happened in front of him.

Rin stumbles back as he struggles to comprehend what's in front of him, only managing not to fall thanks to Kero. “Wha...but...Sekki-san...where is she?!” Rin demands.

“Sekki is me.” Yue answers, making Rin step back again and clutch his staff hard. “Did you not think it strange?” He asks Rin.

Rin swallows. 'Sekki-san...but...what?'

A poke to his cheek makes him turn slightly and blush a bit at the sight of Tsukishiro-sensei. The young teacher raises an eyebrow at how tired he is. “Is something the matter, Rin-kun?”

Rin shakes his head, feeling that daze that came around as a side effect of the sparkly. “N-no...just...”

“Hang in there, okay?” Tsukishiro-sensei smiles gently at him. “I know it's boring but this is important. It's about the new procedures for an emergency like fire. Good thing for you to know.”

“Uh...y-yeah...” Rin turns back to the stage and speaker, still blushing.

“Is it not strange that you would encounter a mage?” Yue asks, voice smooth and calm. “In this world where you know very well how rare it is. Exorcists fighting demons lowered the chances of knowledge being passed on with their demon taming and the Arias that all can use with a mashō. With such a thing being common and effective, why struggle to keep the magical traditions alive?”

“Rin-kun, could I speak to you please?” This, from Tsukishiro, has Rin stop and glance over at Yukio. Yukio merely smiles in response.

“Go on. I'll wait for you by the usual spot.” Yukio stands, gathering his own things and heads out of the class with the rest of the students.

A few delay as best they can, curious as to why Tsukishiro called Rin, but Tsukishiro's look directed their way makes them reconsider and head out.

Once all the rest are gone, Rin walks over to Tsukishiro's desk, a little nervous.

“What do you want to talk about?” Rin shifts nervously in front of Tsukishiro. Something about this
feels serious, but Rin can't think of anything that would deserve it.

Still with a serious expression on her face, Tsukishiro asks Rin, “How are you?”

“Uh? Um...I'm fine. Pretty good in fact.” Rin grins at that. “Why do you ask?”

“I'm asking because I know you've had a very busy summer. How you holding out from there?”

Rin considers the question. Thinking back to all the Cards he got that summer, Natsuko, and the work at the café. “I'm good.” Rin then blinks. “What but--?” Rin suddenly realizes that how Tsukishiro mentioned it is super weird and is rather like she knows...

“Yes.” Tsukishiro finally smiles at that, a mysterious one. “I know you are a Cardcaptor.”

Rin steps back and stares at Tsukishiro. “But that...um...”

“I originally came here for you in fact.” Tsukishiro explains, standing up and moving from behind the desk. Crouching in front of Rin, she cups his face in her hands. “As the monitor for your trials.”

“Monitor?” Rin blinks up at Tsukishiro, shocked at this.

“Yes. In case things get beyond you, I am allowed to step in. But most of the time, I am to merely watch.” Tsukishiro brushes a few hairs from Rin's face. “I figured you deserved to know that much.”

“I see...” Rin steps away from Tsukishiro. “Is that why you were nice to me?”

Tsukishiro looks down at Rin, startled by his hurt expression. “No! I found I liked you soon after I met you. I'm not going to stop being nice any time soon.”

“Oh.” Rin then realizes something. “Does that mean you are also--”

“Yes. I'm a mage of the eastern magic in fact, that of the Moon.” Tsukishiro explains. “It's what allows me to monitor you as much as aid you if you desperately need it. Remember Shadow?” Rin is initially confused by that apparent non-sequencer, but nods after a moment.

“It was not Kerberos who got to the lights during that trial. He had been overwhelmed by the shadows, so I stepped in to give you the little aid you needed.” Tsukishiro's smile widens at Rin's shocked look. “Most of the time, I haven't had to step in. Even with Memory, you managed remarkably well.”

“But...Sekki-san...” Rin slowly blinks. “She's...she's...” Rin looks down.

“Her birthday should have clued you in.” Yue adds, Rin tensing at that.

“April...sixth...the same day I unsealed the Cards.” Rin shudders and remembers that incident clearly.

Rin grins as he finally figures it out, stopping his pacing as he does so. “Windy!”

He then flinches back, shocked as a great wind suddenly appears and a light below him erupts. Covering his face and clutching both the book and card, Rin doesn't notice as all the other cards within the book are whisked out by the wind and into the air. They seem to hover for a moment, before they all suddenly start scattering, somehow going through the walls and out of the monastery.

There is a pause as the wind slowly dies down. Rin lifts his face, wondering what the hell happened and looks at the card. Then glances at the book; the now very empty book.
“Yes. When you unsealed the Cards, so was I set free. As I promised Sakura, I gave form to Sekki. My castle and your guide, someone to be an extra safety net and support you.” Yue’s wings ruffle slightly before they smooth over. “I will not blame you for not knowing how impossible it should be for her to use the Cards you claimed. Names have power after all. But as she is me, she can act as a substitute caster.”

“If I use Sleep, everyone will definitely be out of the way but...” Rin curses. “I can't use it in this situation, it won't be enough! Don't have enough time...”

Kero pops out of Rin’s jacket as they enter a cleared area and looks horrified as Rin pulls out two cards: Sleep and Time. “Oh no Rin! You can’t do that! Even if it works, you’ll be too tired to deal with Firey and he’ll just burn everyone to death!”

Rin swallows. “I know but--”

“Perhaps I can be of assistance?” Tsukishiro offers, looking a bit out of breath and smiles at Rin. “I got here as fast as I could.”

“You can help?” Rin stares at Tsukishiro, wondering how she’s going to pull that off.

The Moon Mage smiles. “Yes. You can lend Time to me. I can cast the spell for you and thus free you to have enough energy to not only use Sleep but all the other Cards you will need to defeat Firey.”

Rin stares. “Is that possible?”

“It is. Keroberos, what do you think?” Tsukishiro turns to the floating little lion who starts.

Kero looks at Tsukishiro for a long moment then it clicks. “Yeah. For you, you can do it but you need permission from Rin.”

Rin takes a deep breath and passes Time over quickly, knowing they are running out of time. “Then do so! I give my permission for you to use Time.”

“Then...was it...a lie?” Rin asks, trembling. “Everything...even if she said--”

“No. She even requested to sleep instead of watch.” Yue steps forward and walks past Rin and Keroberos, stopping only in front of the nearby stage. “Keroberos, this is the one you chose?”

“Yes. Okumura Rin.” Keroberos replies. “If it was up to me, I would have him already accepted as our new master.”

Yue looks up at the sky. “...the same.” He whispers. A smile then quirks at his lips and he turns to Keroberos. “You have not changed. Still soft.”

Yue then turns to Rin, who is staring at Yue in shock. “Shall we begin then?”

Rin swallows and slowly nods. 'I...what do I do? I can't...I don't want to hurt Sekki!'

“Are you alright Tsukishiro-sensei?” Rin asks, taking Time gently from her hands and also retrieving the holster which he puts into his jacket's pockets along with Freeze and Return added to it. He then frowns. “How did you manage to use Time?”

“You didn’t give a time limit on the use.” Kero says quickly before Tsukishiro can reply. She smiles at the small guardian and turns to Rin.
“That is true enough.” She slowly stands and nearly falls over, Rin catching her.

“Woah...let me help you...” Rin puts her arm over his shoulder and supports her as they walk out of the belltower and down the stairs. “Thank you Tsukishiro-sensei. For saving me.”

Tsukishiro looks at him and smiles. “You know Rin-kun, I believe we know each other enough that, outside of school, you can call me Sekki.”

Rin stares at Sekki for a moment. “Um...Sekki-san then?”

She laughs, a bit breathlessly. “Yes. That works.”

Yue spreads his wings, and lifts up into the sky, floating almost over to the stage.

“Cards created by Clow and mastered by Sakura.” He begins, the stage beginning to glow. The area around them glows as well and Rin turns to see everyone around glow with light faintly before it fades. Rin chills, having the feeling it made sure no one would awaken during this.

“There is one wishing to become our master.” Yue continues, drawing Rin's attention back to him. “A boy chosen by Kerberos the Selector. His name is Rin. To see if he is truly worthy of being our master I, Yue the Judge, will test him in the Final Judgement.”

Light flares and Yue settles on the stage, where a shield is now up. Rin stares up at him, cold and remote and shivers. The staff vibrates in his hands and he looks down to see it glowing brightly in response to Yue's words.

'I can't...' Rin realizes, swallowing. “I don't...no...”

Kero pushes his head against Rin's chest, letting out a rumbling purr. “You must. You have taken up the challenge. Become our master Rin. Or a disaster will befall all here.”

Rin stares at Kero, horrified. “Disaster?”

Deep in the city, a bell begins to ring out, heavy tones ringing the hour as the sun slips over the horizon and the stars are revealed.

Unknown to all those but the three that stand awake and aware in Cross Park, a future defining battle is about to be begun.

Chapter End Notes

Well...you know what to do. COMMENT, COMMENT, COMMENT! And get the final chapter of Inheritance of Cards!

But don't forget! Though next Friday is off, the Monday after that has a special side story and so does the Friday then! Comment there as much as on IoC to get the 2nd arc! This story is far from over!
Chapter Notes

And so this is the final of the first Arc. Wow. Thank you all so much and once again look at that lovely count of comments.

It isn't over of course! Though this Friday is off, next Monday and Friday we will have two side stories! Go read them and if you like them, comment on them! Because if you guys do so, the 2nd arc will debut on the 29th!

Also, take the time to update the tvtropes page. Seriously, only ONE PERSON is working on that and that's just mean. Updates for the tvtropes page ties into getting proper answers and facts on various things! So go do something there after you are done here! This includes cool facts like what could have been and even some ideas for expanding things a bit more with Cardcaptor Rin outside of ICD...

High above the city, the stars shine brightly. As one gets closer to the ground, the lights of the city obscure the stars. But a few can still be seen shining down brightly, despite the light pollution, and it is one of those stars that Yue looks up at.

He then turns, facing the candidate, who looks lost and still in shock. Though he is tall for his age, Yue knows how young he is. Does not know more than that though, having left things to Sekki. But as she sleeps, she dreams and Yue knows she already cares greatly for him.

‘But now is not the time.’ Yue coolly pushes away the feelings, the soft and gentle ones, that would make him hesitate and braces himself.

“There is one wishing to become your master.” Yue continues, drawing Rin's attention back to him. “A boy chosen by Kerberos the Selector. His name is Rin. To see if he is truly worthy of being our master I, Yue the Judge, will test him in the Final Judgement.”

Rin wavers in front of him and turns to face Kerberos as he speaks of the disaster. Yue frowns deeper, realizing that once again Kerberos's soft nature had him forget to explain things once more.

“No matter.” Yue says out loud, causing Rin to turn to back to him. “This Judgement shall begin.”

Yue reaches out to Rin and watches as his eyes go dim. Rin raises the staff and a glowing Card floats beside him. “Jump.” He says numbly, the wings appearing on his boots and then bringing him up to the stage.

The barrier falls and then rises again, Rin blinking rapidly as his mind clears and he looks upon Yue.

Yue coolly returns his gaze. “You are to defeat me. Prove you have the strength to be the Master of the Cards. Prove it, or this world around you will suffer a great catastrophe.”

Rin trembles, hands on his staff, and does not move, merely gazes up at Yue with wide, sad eyes.

For a moment, Yue hesitates.
And then he brushes it all aside in favour of raising his hand and gathering energy in it. Energy that forms into a rectangular crystal shard. Yue meets the eyes of Rin, who is staring at him in shock, releasing that energy in the form of crystal shards directly at Rin.

**Chapter 43: Judgement of Hope**

Rin knows he should dodge the attack that is coming at him. But he's frozen, caught between multiple revelations and the desire to not hurt Sekki. Not one of the few kind people in his life, not a friend.

Rin screams as the crystals bite into his skin, sending him back and cutting through his clothing. Scratches his skin, merely scratches but they visibly bleed and spread down to cover his skin. Rin pants, holding one particularly deep cut with his free hand while the other still grips his staff. Slowly, Rin manages to stand and face Yue again.

“If you do not fight, you will lose.” Yue says simply, calling up the shards again.

Rin curses. “Shield!” He cries, summoning up the Card to defend against the next attack. The crystals shatter against Shield's power, sprays of light blinding Rin as a result.

Rin blinks away the light and sees Yue still standing there. But this time he manipulates his magic differently, forming a bow of blue light that he draws back, a bright arrow forming there.

Rin stares at the arrow as it sparks and powers up. He only has a moment to hit the ground before it's fired at him and smashes through Shield, creating an explosion that Rin feels, hot and powerful, on his back as he clings to the ground. Slowly, Rin looks up and catches Shield, back in Card form and flickering faintly.

Rin looks up at Yue and slowly stands. 'I can't...just defend...' Rin realizes, horrified at the thought.

He's going to have to actually attack Yue and that freezes him again. He doesn't even move as Yue pulls back his bow again and prepares an arrow once more.

This time, the arrow meets its mark and Rin screams as it stabs into him, sending him to the ground in pain as blood flows from the wound.

---

Keroberos wants to hide. He wants to avert his gaze from what is going on. But he respects and cares for Rin too much to look away and so forces himself to watch as Yue holds nothing back in regards to fighting their potential new master.

'Just as promised.' Keroberos realizes, settling down on the ground. There is no one with him during this and for a moment Keroberos only feels lonely, something exacerbated by another scream from Rin and the scent of blood reaching his nose.

“Sakura...is this what you saw?” Keroberos looks up, searching for a star in the night sky. “Sakura...this isn't what you saw. What made you choose Rin is not this. What did you see?”

He waits, wishing for an answer. He then sighs and lowers his great head, realizing there won't be any response.

“Everything will surely be alright.”

Keroberos sits up at that. “Sakura?”
And he swears he also hears the sound of bells.

Rin wants to scream and cry, but forces himself not to. Despite the great pain he's in, Rin refuses to back down. Slowly, Rin manages to stand, facing Yue again. Yue appears dispassionate, but a strange respect might be in his eyes.

‘Or maybe I'm delusional from blood loss.’ Rin shakes his head and with trembling fingers pulls out Heal. Blessing all of Yukio's books, including the weird one that talked about arrow wounds, Rin manages to send Heal into the air and just lift his staff.

“Heal!” Pink coloured energy covers Rin, soothing over his wounds and strengthening him again.

Now feeling better, Rin looks at Yue again. He pauses for a moment, considering how Yue allowed him time to heal. This guy...is he really fighting me willingly?’

Rin dismisses it, knowing it won't help, and instead brings up his staff. “If you like arrows so much... Arrow!”

The Card springs to life and Yue ends up spreading his wings and flying up as Arrow aims at him and loosens a volley of arrows at him. Yue turns as Arrow goes for another volley and calls up his crystals again.

Arrow is smashed by the crystals, but it is enough time for Rin to call up another. “Thunder, strike him!”

Yue drops down to the stage again to avoid Thunder. Frowning as it comes after him still, he shifts his wings and calls up a shield. Thunder smashes down on his shield and, despite attempts otherwise and growling, can't breakthrough the shield.

Rin freezes as Yue looks up at Thunder, blue energy gathering around him. “Enough.”

Another explosions goes off and Rin falls down, just barely remembering to catch Thunder as it comes back, making a whining sound. “It's okay. You did your best.” Rin soothes the Card, standing back up to face Yue again.

Rin grits his teeth. 'Dammit...he's toying with me.' Rin realizes, then has to dodge as Yue sends more crystals at him.

Rin then looks up in shock as Yue personally appears in front of him and grabs him. “Not fast enough.”

A scream rents the air as magic, hostile magic, flows through Rin and causes him to collapse to the ground.

Yue stands over the battered child and hurts. This is not how he would have had it gone, but until she shows up, Yue has no choice but to continue with this.

Yue wonders if he was too much there. Perhaps, he could have gotten away with staying out of close range a little longer.

A hand on his foot makes him look down, to see Rin slowly getting up, using the guardian as a ladder and glaring up at him. “I'm...not done...”
“If that is so...” Yue nudges Rin with his foot and he falls down again. “Then get up without any aid.” Yue steps back out of Rin's reach.

Rin curses him out, fluently and to the point Yue has to raise an eyebrow in surprise. Rin then manages to get to his knees and slowly, ever so slowly, manages to shakily stand, using his staff as a prop. He wavers on his feet and nearly falls back down, but Rin steps forward nonetheless and takes up a fighting stance.

“I'm...not going to let you win. I won't...” Rin blinks, sweat plastering his hair to his face and stinging his eyes.

Yue raises his hand and forms the energy bow once more.

Rin flinches at the sight of it, then firms up and pulls out a Card. “Wood!”

“Fool.” Yue whispers as the Card charges at him...and then redirects back to Rin, shocking the boy. Wood entangles him up, taking the staff from his grip and pulling his hands up high as it takes him up in the air.

Yue steps forward and stops just in front of the futilely struggling Rin. “Wood is under my domain. You cannot use that Card against me.”

Rin growls and tries to break free, only to let out a whine of pain as the branches squeezes him. “What...what kind of catastrophe am I to stop? What...what kind of fucking test is this?”

Yue says nothing for a long time. When he finally does speak, Rin's face goes pale in shock and horror.

Rin strains against Wood but can't find a way to break free. Even with his great strength, its magic and Yue's power behind it makes it impossible to break free.

Yue stares at him, as if in thought from his last question.

“You lose, and the seal of the Cards will be released once again. And the catastrophe will befall this world.” Yue says softly in response.

“Yeah, I get that part!” Rin snarls. “What's the catastrophe?!”

Yue's eyes narrow. “To forget.”

Rin stares. “Forget?”

“If the candidate chosen by Kerberos the Selector cannot pass the test of the Final Judgement, each and every person that had something to do with the Sakura Cards will lose their feelings of love towards the one person they care about the most.”

Rin chokes at that and pales. “What...that's...why would you do that?!”

“To save the Cards.” Yue says softly. “You, who have captured them and written their name upon, have become the one they care the most about. All those who have been entwined by their magic also lose such feelings because it is the only way to be assured that all the Cards will not revolt and cause damage at the loss of the one they care for.”

Rin's head drops and he shudders, swallowing. ’Forget...forget...to have a bond severed, one so important...’
Rin thinks of all those who have encountered Cards or been effected. The count rises and Rin slowly realizes that all of Southern Cross and even a good chunk of True Cross Campus Town would be effected by this. The Cards were everywhere and he had to use some of them on various people as well.

'And I...the one at the centre will...' Rin stills, the image of Yukio coming to mind. His precious baby brother... 'No. I just...it's already frayed I will not...'

“I will not let you break my bond!” Rin snarls and pulls hard on Wood, raising his head back up to face Yue, who steps back in shock at his eyes, which have changed to appear demonic with red pupils and a ragged edge around it. “I refuse to discard my ties or the Cards. I...” Rin hears the cracking of wood and reaches out for where the staff is, straining further as Yue watches in shock. “I will not abandon Yukio. I will not abandon the Cards. I made a promise and I will keep it!”

Wood shatters and breaks, freeing Rin. But he doesn't stop there. The first thing he does is punches Yue straight in the face, making him stumble back and raise a hand to his face, staring back at Rin with wide silver-blue eyes.

“I...promised to be there for the Cards. To be their master and never let them be alone.” Rin stands before Yue, refusing to back down. “I won't break their hearts and I won't abandon them! No matter how much you beat me I'll get up for them! They are my friends dammit!”

And a great light shines in between them, making Rin step back as it forms into the shape of a young girl, one with long silver hair and wings on top her head, wearing a colourful frilled dress. She has her eyes closed, but she slowly opens them and looks down at Rin. Holding a winged heart in her hands, she smiles.

“And that, is exactly what I wished to hear.”

Rin steps back, staring up in awe at the strange girl before him. Behind her, Yue stands and settles into a relaxed stance. Something glints in his eyes, something fond. And outside the barrier, Kero sighs in relief and collapses to the ground.

“You...” Rin's eyes widen. “You are a Card! But I...”

“I am the true last Card.” She begins, looking down on Rin. “And I am the true Judge.”

Rin reaches up and presses his hand to his chest, splaying his fingers. He recalls something Light said when he first met her and gives a soft smile. “Sharing my heart...you've been here all this time, so why only now do you come out?”

The girl hesitates. “I suppose...I'm just stubborn. I did not want to accept a new master. Not after all Sakura did for me.”

“What she did for you?” Rin glances down at the staff in his hand, then back up. “Sakura...was very important to you, wasn't she?”

“She still is.” The Card whispers. “She is the one to save me from my loneliness, something even Clow Reed, my maker, could not do. Once, when I was a Clow Card, I was Nothing.”

Rin swallows. Something about how she says it, Rin gets the feeling of what that means. And, looking up at her, Rin realizes that this is probably truly the strongest Card that there is.

“When Clow Reed first crafted his Cards...” The Card spreads out her arms and the Cards float up to
circle around her and Rin both. Only eight Cards split to float in the middle; Memory, Artist, Repair, Mask, Heal, Switch, Armour, and Cook. Rin stares for a moment and sighs at the fact Record must be, once again, recording these events. But it's a fond sigh.

“...he crafted them with the principle of Yin and Yang in mind.” The Card finishes, drawing Rin's attention to her once more. “So to the fifty-two cards he made, he made a fifty-third one, one as powerful as all of them but very different in nature.” The Card sighs. “That was Nothing, which is the dark yin to the others light yang. Me, in other words.”

“That...” Rin swallows. “I feel like that it wasn't quite...right.”

“Perhaps.” The Card agrees. “But it was as Clow Reed wished, to keep things in balance. And so it goes...”

“Then he died.” The girl's face loses her smile briefly. “And before that, I was sealed. No one but Clow Reed and my fellow Cards knew of my existence and he sealed me in a far away land from where he normally lived. A land that became my new master's home.”

There is silence for a moment, Rin thinking on what he was told. “You were very lonely.”

“So lonely...and when I awakened and saw that Sakura is the new master I...I did wrong. And yet, she offered friendship to me.” The Card smiles down at Rin. “And she saved me. I may still be Yin, but not negative.”

“How did she do that?” Rin asks, looking up at the Card before him in wonder. “How did she save you?”

“Skill, faith, a hand offered in friendship...and her love for her Syaoran.” The Card's smile widens. “I am Hope now. And you have passed the final test.”

Rin stares up at her, stares up at Hope, and it clicks. “You want a master you can trust. You don't want to be alone or forgotten again.”

“Yes.” Hope's smile takes on a sad tinge. “And I have been very stubborn...but I suppose it is normal for those of this magic.” She glances back at Yue, who shifts awkwardly. “He was stubborn in the case of Sakura.”

Rin can't help the chuckle that slips from his mouth. 'Kind underneath it all...so that's who she was talking about.' “I see...but I passed you said. Do you...accept me as the new master?”

Hope looks down at him and her features soften. “Yes. Yes I do. You will make a fine master.”

She floats down to his height and, after a moment, lays a kiss on his forehead. The kiss sends a tingle throughout him, a refreshing one. And, looking down, Rin sees all his wounds are gone and even his outfit has been repaired and cleaned. Looking back up, he's greeted with Hope's smile as she holds the winged heart to her chest in a happy hug.

“Now...you know what to do here.”

Rin grins, and lifts up his staff. “Hope, I command you to return to your true form...Sakura Card!”

A brilliant flare of light is his answer and Rin flinches back as the light covers him. When it fades, he's no longer on the stage.

In fact, Rin doesn't think he's even on Assiah anymore.
It's not a spectacularly strange place. Rin seems to be in the kitchen of a rather cozy home, warm and sweet. But Rin knows he's not anywhere on Assiah. A soft sound has him turn and he stares.

The woman before him he knows is Kinomoto Sakura. She's not wearing anything fancy, just a normal top and skirt with an apron over top. She's humming as she works on something on the stove, then looks up to see Rin and smiles.

“Rin-kun. Congratulations on passing Hope's test.” Sakura pours what she was working on into three mugs and walks over with two in hand. “Please, have a seat. You have time here.”

Rin hesitantly settles down at the kitchen table and gently accepts the mug Sakura offers. Hot steam rises, bringing a very sweet smell to his nose. He looks up as another chair squeaks as Sakura sits down.

Right now, the only sign of just how powerful Sakura is in her aura, something that is tightly contained in her. Otherwise, one could mistake her for a housewife. Looking up at her eyes, Rin figures she was never just a housewife, and wouldn't have been even without magic. Those green eyes of hers are filled with a fierce determination that few can match.

“Go on, have some of it. It tastes best fresh.” Sakura tells him soothingly, making Rin turn back to his mug.

After a pause, a soft blow to cool it down, Rin takes a sip. Honey and spices and chocolate hits his tongue and for a moment Rin just closes his eyes and enjoys it. Then he looks up.

“This is...”

“A place in-between. Shaped like my old home.” Sakura explains softly. “I wished to speak to you, after you passed Hope's test, so set this up.”

“I see...” Rin looks down and blinks, noticing his staff is on the kitchen table. Sakura smiles at that, then turns as footsteps enter the kitchen.

The man is tall and looks about as normal as Sakura, jeans and a button-down shirt on him, but his amber eyes and the power Rin feels within him tells the truth. As he picks up the third mug and travels over to the table, Rin watches him in awe. He might not be as strong as Sakura, but it's even harder for Rin to get a good read on him.

The man pauses and smiles down at Sakura, Sakura looking back at him. There's nothing except smiles and meeting of gazes, but Rin drops his gaze down, feeling his face burn at the intimacy they manage to get across even in such small actions.

“Syaoran.” Sakura says softly, then the man, Syaoran, takes a seat as well. “I knew you would like to meet him too.”

Syaoran chuckles and takes a sip out of his mug. “You are Okumura Rin. And...yes, I can see why it is you who inherits this power.” He looks Rin up and down, Rin shifting nervously under his gaze. “It suits you.”

“I don't...really understand this.” Rin looks down at his mug and flexes his fingers on it. Taking another sip to calm himself down, he looks back up. “Why me exactly?”

“There are many reasons, including hitsuzen.” Sakura tilts her head at that, a strange smile on her lips. “But in fact, it mostly has to do with the reasoning that you are the best successor I could find.
across the worlds. Not only are you suitable as a new master, you will need the strength in your future.” Sakura takes a sip from her mug. “Power should not be wasted.”

Rin considers this and looks over at Syaoran. Syaoran smiles. “I'm with my wife here. You will have to learn how to truly have faith in your own magic.”

Rin looks down and slowly nods. “Yeah...thank you. I...” Rin looks up. “I...strangely it's been fun.”

Sakura laughs. “I understand that well. Even with all the hardship, the Cards and the adventures they brought with them...one cannot regret that.” Sakura reaches over and clasps Syaoran's hand. “I certainly do not.”

Rin stares at their hands before yanking his gaze away, making Sakura giggle at how nervous he is, to land on the staff. After a moment, Rin reaches out and picks it up, holding it in his hands. “I think...this is yours.”

“You have good instincts.” Sakura says softly.

Rin looks down at the staff then takes a deep breath and holds it out to her. “You should take it back.”

Sakura looks over at Syaoran, then turns back to Rin. “Are you sure?”

“I have to use my own power now.” Rin glances down. “I've been using mostly yours this entire time. If I'm to be the new Master, I need to prove it.”

Sakura smiles. “That is true. My power is of the stars. Light that is distant, but shines very bright. Yours...is an ancient power. A truly rare one, of the heavens themselves.” Sakura reaches out and touches the staff. “If you truly wish to give up my power...”

“I'm not giving it up.” Rin replies, smiling up at Sakura. “I'm just giving it back.”

Sakura laughs and the staff glows, Sakura removing her hand. Rin flinches back as the light bursts and then fades, leaving a new staff in its place.

The handle is black with a strange silver script and gold kanji wrapped around it, topped with a blue crystal shaped like an ornate flame. The crystal flame is surrounded in what looks like a reversed fancy golden crown to Rin's eyes, spiky but beautiful, with the golden spikes and twists spreading outwards away from the crystal flame.

Sakura hums. “It appears you can only unlock half your power at this point. You will have to craft a key of your own to truly claim your magic. But the lock has not yet appeared and you have time yet.”

Rin looks down at the staff, then brings it back to his chest and smiles, holding it gently. “Thank you.”

“That was all you Rin-kun. You are much stronger than me and will continue to grow.” Sakura assures him. “Now, best finish your drink. Kero-chan and Yue-san are waiting for you.”

Rin smiles and reaches for his mug. For a moment he looks at the loving couple before him and wonders...

'Will I have that one day?'
Then he dismisses it in favour of finishing his sweet drink and trying to memorize the spices that went into it.

It takes a moment for Rin to realize where he is and why his back hurts. Slowly opening his eyes, he looks up into golden eyes and silver-blue ones. The silver-blue ones are gone fast, while Kero rests his great head on Rin's chest. “You're awake!”

“Yeah...” Rin slowly reaches out and pauses. He has Hope in one hand, somehow with his name written upon it, while the other holds the new staff he received in Sakura's kitchen. “What happened?”

“Looked like you passed out.” Kero says, then huffs. “More like you went somewhere though. What happened? Ah can see yer staff changed.”

“...Sakura...” Kero stiffens at that and Rin gives a smile, setting down his staff to give him a scratch on the ear, something that makes his eyes lid and a rumbling purr to start. “She talked to me. Said a few things...Syaoran was there too.”

Rin slowly sits up as Kero moves back and looks out around. “Everyone's still asleep?”

“Yes. But not for much longer.” Rin turns to look at Yue, who is standing nearby with his arms crossed.

Rin blinks slowly, then stands up. Walking over to Yue, he notices how he stiffens. But pushing that aside, Rin looks up at the Guardian. Gently, he reaches out with his free hand and tilts his head, looking at the bruise on his face. “Sorry for punching you.”

Yue gives a slow blink as a response. “It is of no matter.”

“Still...you were just doing your job.” Rin steps back with a smile as he sees Yue is uncomfortable. “Nice to meet you Yue, I'm Rin.” After a pause, Rin sticks out his hand.

Yue looks down at Rin's hand but doesn't take it. Instead his wings rustle and one reaches out, wrapping Rin gently which surprises him. Rin lifts a hand to touch the wing, then pauses, deciding better than that.

“You are our new master. Kerberos accepts you, the Cards accept you, and I accept you as such.” Yue explains. “There is no need for introductions or apologies.”

“Oh...well, I rather be friends.” Rin smiles up at Yue. “If that's okay with you.”

Yue's eyes widen, ever so slightly, then he softens. The ice around him retreats ever so slightly. “I see...so this is why...” He murmurs to himself, then he looks over to Kero.

“Kerberos, it is best for you to transform back to your false form. The spell is not going to last much longer.”

Kero groans. “Ugh...Ah just got it back...” Still muttering, he closes his eyes and his wings expand as his magic circle glows once more. When the wings retreat, his smaller form has returned and he flies over to rest on Rin's shoulder.

Rin smiles at his friend, then turns back to Yue. “About Sekki-san...”

“She is alright.” Yue assures him. “It is almost time for everyone to awaken.” Yue pauses for a
moment, then reaches out, gently bringing Rin to his side. Rin looks up at him, surprised, as his wings spread out. Holding on to Rin, Yue's wings flap and they rise into the air. Rin lets out a squeak of surprise, clinging to Yue as his feet leave the stage.

Yue glances down once, but otherwise doesn't react to that. He merely flies over to where Rin's family is and settles down there.

There's a moment of silence, then Rin realizes he's still clinging to Yue and jumps back, blushing. He looks up at Yue and manages a shy smile. “Thanks.”

Yue gives a slow blink and steps back. “I should thank you instead.”

Rin doesn't get a chance to ask him what he means before the magic circle of before returns and Yue's wings expand and cover him. When the circle fades and the wings disappear, Sekki is back.

For a moment she just stands there, looking dazed, then she looks down at Rin. A brilliant smile crosses her face. “Rin-kun.”

Rin stares at her, stiffening up. Then he darts over, dislodging Kero with his fast movement, and gives her a hug, wailing, “Sekki-san!”

Sekki stumble a bit, then laughs and returns the hug. “Rin-kun...I'm glad you are alright.” She soothes him by petting his head, smiling sweetly down at Rin as he looks up with tears in his eyes. “I thought...you might be angry...”

“I was...I thought I wouldn't see you again.” Rin manages, hiccupping a bit. “And why would I be mad? There's no reason for it...”

Sekki laughs but also feels a warm glow at Rin's last words. “Yue cannot be out all the time, if only because he's so noticeable. Right now he's resting; if there is need for him, I assure you that he will return.”

“Oh...that's good...I don't think I made a good first impression and I wanna try again...” Rin nearly mumbles the last into Sekki's stomach.

Sekki stares at him. “Why Rin-kun...don't be like that.” She lifts his head up again and grins. “You made a very good first impression. I would know. I am Yue as well after all.”

Rin stares for a moment, then a smile comes up and he wipes away the tears. “Yeah...yeah...”

They stay there for a moment longer, with Kero watching with a soft grin, then the sound of someone groaning makes them step back and turn to see the rest are slowly waking up. Rin takes in a deep breath.

“So...how are we to explain it?” Rin asks Sekki.

A twinkle in Sekki's eyes heralds what she is going to say before she says it. “Nothing. Just...claim we also fell asleep and just happened to wake up first. Say I was really the first one and went looking around and found you.”

Rin laughs a bit at that then nods, a bit more sombre. “Yeah, that works.”

Kero chuckles as well and quickly darts over to Rin before Yukio slowly wakes up, confused on what happened and where he is.
The first thing Yukio sees when he wakes up is Sekki and Rin laughing together. Dazed, Yukio wonders at it, trying to recall what happened.

When he does, he sits up and frantically looks around. Relief mixed with puzzlement fills him as he sees there is no damage and Shirō and the rest of the monks are just sleeping nearby. Kyōdō in particular is snoring, making Yukio rub his forehead before turning to look at Rin.

Rin notices that he is up at this point and brightens. “Yukio!”

Yukio is not prepared to be tackled by his brother. “Nii-san...what happened?”

Rin rubs his face against Yukio's then backs up, blinking innocently. “Well...dunno. I just fell asleep and woke up with everything like this. Well, Sekki-san was apparently awake before me and the whole park is still sleeping. Not sure what to do so we just decided to wait. Sekki-san couldn't contact anyone for some reason, her cellphone briefly stopped working and nothing just...” Rin shrugs, at loss for words. “No one is hurt, just sleeping. Some are in weird positions but it's...okay”

“That is strange.” Yukio looks around and slowly stands, heading towards Shirō. He misses the relieved and guilty look on Rin's face as he buys Rin's garbled tale.

Yukio kneels down next to his father and, after looking him over, gives him a gentle shake. “Tou-san, wake up!”

Shirō groans. “Five more minutes.”

For a moment Yukio is torn between laughter and annoyance. Laughter wins as Shirō just sounded way too much like his brother there. “Tou-san...it's important.”

Shirō groans and slowly opens his eyes, looking blearily at Yukio. “What is...”

Yukio can see realization strike him and Shirō sits up, looking frantically around then relaxing as he realizes that nothing is wrong. He turns to Yukio who shrugs.

“Everyone fell asleep and there's no damage to anyone or anything.” Yukio looks over at Rin and Sekki who are talking together again. “Tsukishiro-sensei woke up first and then Nii-san did. Nothing they could do but wait since Tsukishiro-sensei's cellphone just started working.”

Shirō sighs at that and stretches a bit. “Go wake up the rest. Best see about helping with damage control. Really, that big of an earthquake and yet no physical damage...” Shirō takes Yukio's hand to help him get up and in proper position with his crutch, a thoughtful look on his face.

Yukio smiles at that, then turns to go to the snoring Kyōdō, who he debates actually kicking awake if only because that noise is terrible.

It's very late by the time everyone gets back home. There was the police to talk to and various people who needed some assurance of what happened. Rin is grateful anyways despite the late hour and how long it took. Every thing that happened proved that no harm was ultimately done and not even the slightest bruise was on anyone.

His Key hangs around his neck again, though the appearance has changed to reflect the new look of the staff. Rin hums to himself as he makes up a late night snack for him and Yukio (and secretly Kero as well) while Yukio talks to Shirō quietly.

Rin gives him his privacy. ‘After all...secrets aren't a thing I should be getting upset about.' Rin
glances at Yukio and, though he can't read his expression, decides it's not important anyways.

“So, Rin...what did you talk about with Sekki-san while everyone was out?” Rin turns to Izumi who is grinning madly at it. Rin gives him an exasperated look, knowing exactly what he's implying.

“Just stuff. About cooking and teaching and when everyone else is going to wake up.” Rin rolls his eyes as Izumi goes “That's all?” in a smarmy voice. “Oyaji, Izumi is being an idiot again!”

“What's he doing now?” Shirō chuckles, limping over to the kitchen counter.

“What? I was just asking about Sekki-san.” Izumi says cheerfully.

“First, Sekki-san didn't give you permission to use her first name.” Rin glowers at him. “Second, she's my teacher you asshole.”

Shirō finally clues in to what Rin is implying – or rather what Izumi was implying – and slaps the monk around the head. “Don't be crude.”

“From you that doesn't mean anything.” Izumi whines, rubbing his head.

“Then listen to me.” Yukio cuts in with, glaring at Izumi. “Nii-san, what did you talk about?”

“Hmm...nothing specific. Just passed the time with light stuff.” Rin shrugs. ‘Can't say the truth that Sekki-san turned into Yue and yeah...no way.’ “Friendly stuff.”

“I for one am happy that Tsukishiro-san is kind to Rin to that degree.” Shirō settles down at the kitchen table with a groan. “Hey, Rin, are you going to hog all of that to yourself?”

Rin glances down at the collection of sweets and savouries that he's been setting up and grins. “Nah. Let me just get a little more out.”

“Awesome. A little party to relax with after stressful events is always good.” Shirō sighs in relief at that, while Rin gets out the extra plates and pulls out some more of the sweets and snacks. Soon a nice collection of various food stuff – ranging from cherry tarts to nikuman – are set out for everyone to dig into and share.

Rin is the last one sitting at the table and the reason is clear as he brings out glasses of lemonade for everyone to have, the cool sweet and sour drink being greeted with joy.

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Rin smiles and slides in to sit next to Yukio. Unseen to everyone else, the extra plate he slips some snacks on is passed under the table for Kero to enjoy.

Rin looks out at his family and smiles. He has Shirō and Yukio. The monks of Southern Cross Monastery. Kerberos. Sekki and Yue.

And he has his Cards, which he gently touches through the holster, feeling their warmth within of their magic.

‘This...I am lucky.’ Rin realizes, looking at his family and thinking of those that aren't here right now. He even considers all those he met while dealing with the Cards and how thanks to Sekki and the Cards he didn't give up on school.

‘I am one of the luckiest people in the world.’ Rin decides with a big smile. Yukio notices it but brushes it aside as Rin goes for some of the treats, just glad his brother is safe.

‘He still doesn’t know...and that is good. The seal will last.’ Yukio smiles at that and for a moment
hopes that, perhaps, Rin won’t need to break the seal. *I can’t say for certain but...it won’t last...but while it does, I'll protect my brother. I am not weak.*'

With those thoughts in mind, Yukio turns to look at Shirō and, with a single gesture, manages to get his attention and clue him in to a thought of his.

Shirō for a moment looks dismayed then he sighs and slowly nods. *I’m not going to be able to stop him from working for the next exorcist test...dammit, best make sure he will handle the rank outside of the exam.*'

As things both stay the same and slowly start to change, Rin and his family manage to focus on the happy present and the happiness that they have gained over the year and a bit since Rin started Junior High and, unknown to most, became the Cardcaptor.

The party continues downstairs late into night – it is a Saturday after all – while upstairs in the bedroom, the Sakura Book briefly glows.

“*Not yet. I can grant you but a small holiday Rin-kun.*” Sakura's soft voice fades slowly after that, as does the glow around the Book. “*After all...there are more trials ahead...*”

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To Be Continued In: *Inheritance of Magic*

Chapter End Notes

One ending is another beginning...

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See you next Monday!

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